



## Housing and registration

Finding a new home in Germany. We show you how to successfully find an apartment or a room in Germany.

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There is a large supply of high-quality rental accommodation in Germany, but demand is also high, especially in the major cities. We give you tips and explain what you should consider before and after moving in.

## Your first accommodation

Until you find a place to live in Germany, you can stay in a furnished holiday flat, hostel, hotel or youth hostel. However, it will not normally be possible to register this address as your place of residence. Please note that you are required to register your place of residence with the relevant authorities within two weeks of your arrival in Germany. (See the “Moving in” section.)

## What types of accommodation are available?

There are many ways to feel at home in Germany. The following options are available to you:

### Rental flats

- Long-term accommodation (three months' notice)
- Not usually furnished; not always equipped with a kitchen

### Short lets

- Temporary accommodation for a fixed period
- Usually furnished

### Flatshare

- Individual and usually flexible rental periods and furnishing arrangements
- Shared accommodation with flatmates, usually cheaper than living alone
- Usually a shared kitchen and bathroom; each resident has their own private room

### Student residences (for students only)

- Usually furnished, relatively inexpensive
- A range of different options: individual apartments, single rooms with a shared kitchen and bathrooms, parent-child apartments
- Residents are usually all students, good social opportunities, sometimes leisure activities
- There are often waiting lists; it is advisable to apply early to the [student union](#) responsible for your university. The [German Academic Exchange Service \(DAAD\)](#) also offers a wide range of advice on finding accommodation.

Shared flats (called Wohngemeinschaften or WGs in German) are often a cheaper option than having a place of your own, especially in major cities. As it may take longer than expected to find the right accommodation, a holiday apartment or furnished short let may be a good option for your first few months in Germany. This will also give you time to prepare the documents you will need to find longer-term accommodation, such as payslips or proof of having opened a bank account.

In housing ads, you will often see phrases such as “2-room flat” (2-Zimmer-Wohnung). This usually means that the flat has two rooms (e.g. a bedroom and a living room) as well as a kitchen area and a separate bathroom with a toilet. An explanation of common abbreviations can be found in this [PDF file](#).



## Tips for finding a flat

Finding a place to live can take a long time, especially in major cities. You should therefore make as many enquiries as possible to increase your chances of getting a viewing. It is also important to respond quickly: housing ads are often only online for a day or two.

You could also purchase a property. Flat and house prices vary depending on the city and neighbourhood. Condominiums in Munich, for example, are more expensive than in other major German cities. If you are buying a flat or a house, you should be aware that there are additional costs to consider, such as real estate transfer tax, Land Registry fees and notary fees.

There are various government grants available to people on low incomes who are permanently resident in Germany. They can apply to the housing authority in their place of residence for a “Wohnungsberechtigungsschein (WBS)” – the certificate needed to obtain social housing. Rents for social housing are lower than for private housing. People on low incomes who rent accommodation on the private market can apply for housing benefit (Wohngeld), a government housing allowance. The amount of housing benefit is calculated on the basis of the number of household members, the rent and the annual household income. You can get all the information you need about housing benefit from your local Housing Benefit Office (Wohngeldbehörde).

## How can I find accommodation?

To find an apartment or a room, you have the following options:

- You can quickly find the most popular property search sites by typing “Wohnung + name of your city” or “WG + name of your city” into the search engine.
- Online platforms allow you to write directly to providers and share general information about yourself, increasing your chances of being invited to view an apartment. Online platforms are usually free, but you can also take out a paid subscription. In return, you may be the first to see some ads and you will receive additional services such as an application dossier or opportunity check.
- Also check with your employer – there are often peer-to-peer forums where you can share tips on where to live. Sometimes employers help to find accommodation or even act as guarantors.
- Newspapers continue to be a useful source of housing ads that do not appear online. Ideally, look for a daily newspaper in your area. Most adverts are usually published in the weekend edition.
- You can also use an estate agent to find accommodation on your behalf. However, you will have to pay for this service: the commission is usually around two to three months’ rent. But you only pay the agent if you

find a suitable property. This will be set out in writing in a brokerage contract. Please watch out for fake or fraudulent agents and scams!

- Rented accommodation is also available from housing companies and housing associations. Housing associations only rent their flats to members of the association. You will usually need to apply in person to be placed on a waiting list. You can find the addresses of local housing companies and customer centres on the internet.

If you have found the ideal housing offer, contact the landlord or landlady by email or phone. If you are shortlisted, the landlord or landlady will invite you to view the property.



## The application folder for renting

Many landlords and landladies like to receive housing application documents (Bewerbungsmappe). This may include copies of your payslips and information about yourself (e.g. valid proof of identity and your residence title). Make sure you have these documents ready when you start looking for accommodation, so that you can respond at short notice. It is also a good idea to have your housing application documents with you at the viewing.

## Viewing a property

If you are invited to view a property, check the condition of the rental carefully. Does the rent, size and number of rooms match the offer? Also check for mould, connections/installations or faulty windows and doors, for example. Discuss any renovation requirements with the landlord or landlady and ask if any repairs will be carried out.

When viewing a property, it is best to ask to see the Energy Performance Certificate (*Energieausweis* – EPC). This will give you an idea of the building's energy consumption. The EPC is a document that certifies how energy efficient a property is. Landlords and landladies are required by law to show you the EPC during a viewing.

After the viewing, the landlord or landlady will choose their future tenant.

## Video: Arriving in Germany – The first 100 days

# What documents do I need to rent a flat?

Landlords and landladies will usually request recent **payslips** and your **passport** or a document showing your **residence status** (not originals, only copies). Many also want to see proof that you have no debt. In Germany, it is common to ask for a **Schufa report**. Schufa is the organisation that records all your debts and income, i.e. your creditworthiness. However, only people who have lived in Germany for some time and have a German bank account can obtain a Schufa report. For more information on Schufa reports, click [here ↗](#). If you are coming straight to Germany from abroad, you have the following voluntary alternatives: in some cases, a reference from your bank in your home country will be sufficient. If you have a relative in Germany, they may be able to issue a guarantee for you.

If you do not yet have any payslips, some landlords and landladies will ask for a copy of your employment contract. This will give them an idea of whether you will be able to pay the rent regularly. An informal letter from your employer confirming that you work for the company may also be helpful.

Many landlords and landladies additionally request the tenant to **disclose information voluntarily** (Mieterselbstauskunft). You will be asked to provide personal information such as marital status, children or occupation. However, there are some questions that are not allowed and you do not have to answer truthfully.

Before viewing the property, it is best to ask which additional documents are required.

## Rent

The rent for a property depends on the floor area, location, year of construction and condition, as well as the facilities in the building, e.g. lift, building services or garage parking space. In large cities such as Munich, Frankfurt and Berlin, rents are particularly high. You can search for “Mietspiegel” (rental table) and the name of your city on the internet to find out about current rent prices.

If you are considering a particular accommodation offer, make sure you check whether the price is for the Warmmiete (total rent) or the Kaltmiete (basic rent). For more information, refer to the “Tenancy agreement” section.



### Beware of advance payments and scams

It is not customary in Germany to pay rent or a deposit in advance. According to the law, you only have to pay the rent and the deposit after you have signed the tenancy agreement and taken possession of the flat or received the keys. It is also not permitted to charge for viewing a property! If you feel pressured to transfer money early, it is probably a scam. Sometimes

properties are advertised that do not actually exist or that have already been let. So remain vigilant!

## Tenancy agreement

In Germany, tenancy agreements must be in writing. The landlord or landlady will usually present you with a tenancy agreement. Please read this important document carefully!

The tenancy agreement will contain the following important points:

- **Term of the tenancy:** There are fixed-term and open-ended tenancies. However, fixed-term tenancies are only allowed if the landlord or landlady intends to use the property for their own purposes or if major renovations are due. The reason for the fixed term must be stated in the tenancy agreement. There is also an exclusion of termination clause (Kündigungsausschluss) in some tenancy agreements. A minimum tenancy period of up to four years is allowed, during which time neither you nor your landlord or landlady can terminate the contract.
- **Period of notice:** If you have an open-ended tenancy agreement, you must give notice in writing three months before you intend to move out. Your landlord or landlady must also give you three months' notice – this increases to six or nine months if you have been living in the property for a long time. Your landlord or landlady can only give you notice to quit if there is a need for personal use (Eigenbedarf), i.e. if they need to occupy the property themselves. However, if you break the tenancy agreement (for example, by not paying the rent), you can be evicted without notice.
- **Inclusive and exclusive rent:** Rent is classified as either inclusive (Warmmiete) or exclusive (Kaltmiete). Exclusive rent refers to the monthly rent of the property. Inclusive rent includes service charges such as water, heating, waste disposal and caretaker services. The inclusive rent is paid monthly to the landlord or landlady. Service charges are usually paid for in advance or as a lump sum, as it is uncertain what your consumption will be throughout the year. At the end of the year, you will receive a bill detailing your exact consumption, resulting in either a refund or a request to pay more to cover the difference. So it pays to be economical with your usage!
- **Electricity and gas** must usually be registered separately and are not normally covered by inclusive rent. Your local default supplier will provide you with electricity and gas on a temporary basis before you decide to take out a contract with them. However, you will still need to contact them and sign a contract. Some tenancy agreements include the cost of gas in the service charge. Check with your landlord or landlady. Otherwise, as with service charges, the supplier will estimate your consumption at the beginning and send you an accurate settlement at the end of the year.
- **Deposit:** In addition, the landlord or landlady may ask you to pay a deposit (Kaution) of up to three months' exclusive rent as security when you sign the agreement. This will be refunded when you move

out, unless you have damaged the property or failed to pay the rent.

- **Graduated/indexed rent:** In addition to fixed-term and open-ended tenancy agreements, there are other specific features regarding tenancy in Germany: for example, tenancy agreements may contain a rent increase clause. In the case of graduated rent (Staffelmiete), the exact date and amount by which the rent will increase is specified. It may increase every twelve months. Indexed rent (Indexmiete), on the other hand, is not fixed in advance but is based on the **cost of living** (electricity, gas, water, food, etc.). If the cost of living rises, the landlord or landlady can also increase the net exclusive rent. The consumer price index applies and a rent increase is also possible every twelve months, with written justification. However, in the case of a tenancy agreement without an index-linked or graduated rent, the landlord or landlady can also increase the rent after giving a reason. However, there are legal restrictions: Rent increases may not exceed the local reference rent and may not be more than 15-20% over a three-year period. The first increase cannot take place until 15 months after you have moved in.
- **Handover certificate:** The handover certificate (Übergabeprotokoll) is not required by law, but is strongly recommended. It may be included in the tenancy agreement and will be signed by you and the landlord or landlady when you move in. The handover certificate records the condition of the property when you move in and whether there is any minor damage, for example. This means that you cannot be charged for such damage when you move out. It is also a good idea to take photos when you move into the property. You should also note and photograph the meter readings (electricity, water, gas) when you move in. You are not allowed to make any structural changes to the property, such as changing the flooring, without the permission of your landlord or landlady. It is often possible to make minor changes and improvements after consultation.

Do you need advice? Regional tenants' associations and the Mieterschutzbund (tenants' rights association) provide advice on tenancy rights and responsibilities, such as tenancy agreements, rent increases and notices of termination. After a free initial consultation, membership of a tenants' association or the Mieterschutzbund is required for a small fee for further legal assistance. You can also obtain inexpensive advice from the non-profit [\*\*consumer advice centre\*\*](#).

For more information, visit the [\*\*Mieterschutzbund\*\*](#) website or the [\*\*consumer advice centre\*\*](#).

## House rules and waste sorting

House rules can be part of the tenancy agreement and are designed to regulate living together in a multiple dwelling. Please respect the rules and obligations to avoid disputes in the dwelling and the risk of eviction. For example, it may be forbidden to smoke in the building, including your flat.

The house rules usually contain the following information:

- **Rest periods:** In Germany, people are required by law to keep the peace at night between 10 pm and 6 am. You should therefore avoid making too much noise during these hours. If you are planning a late night party, please let your neighbours know in advance so they can make arrangements.

- **Airing/heating:** Many house rules state how to properly ventilate and heat the property to prevent mould.
- **Use of collective property:** The landlord or landlady may impose certain restrictions on shared laundry rooms, bicycle storage or garden areas. For example, they can specify where to hang the washing to dry or what type of outdoor furniture can be placed in the garden.
- **Pets:** No prior permission is required for the keeping of small pets (hamsters, rabbits, budgies, etc.). However, for larger animals, including cats and dogs, you will usually need permission from your landlord or landlady. Please check your tenancy agreement before bringing a pet to your home.
- **Waste sorting:** Sorting waste is compulsory in Germany and helps to protect the environment. You must dispose of your waste in the bins provided. Failure to do so may result in your landlord or landlady giving you a warning or even evicting you. This is because higher disposal costs are incurred if waste is not sorted correctly. Find out more about waste sorting in Germany in the “Useful everyday knowledge” section.

## Visitors and family reunification

If a visitor intends to stay with you for more than six weeks at a time, you should discuss this with your landlord or landlady. You must always get permission from your landlord or landlady to sublet the property. Long-term visitors can also lead to an increase in rent and service charges.

If you are planning to bring your family to Germany, you should also discuss this with your landlord or landlady. Increasing the number of people in your household can affect your service charges. In addition, the apartment must not be considered to be overcrowded. There must be between eight and ten square metres of floor area per person, and six square metres for children under the age of six.

## Moving in

- **Registration with the Residents' Registration Office:** Everyone living in Germany is required to register. You should do this at your local Residents' Registration Office (Meldebehörde) within two weeks of moving in. To do this, you will need a valid identity card. In the case of rented accommodation, you must also submit a tenancy confirmation letter (Wohnungsgeberbestätigung) that has been completed by your landlord or landlady, confirming when you moved into which address. You can usually find this form and the address of the Residents' Registration Office on the website of the town or city you are moving to. Appointments are often allocated online.
- **Registration with an energy and water company:** If electricity, hot water and heating gas are not included in the service charge, you will need to find a supplier and sign a contract with them. But do not worry, you will not be without utilities. When you move into your new home, you will automatically be supplied with electricity, water and gas by the local default supplier on their terms and conditions. You

can use one of the free comparison sites on the internet to find a supplier once you have moved in. The notice period with the default supplier is two weeks.

- **Registration of phone, internet and (cable) TV:** There are several different providers in Germany. It is worth comparing prices – online comparison sites may help. Tip: It can take several weeks to install phone, TV and internet connections. If possible, you should therefore choose a suitable provider before you move in.
- **TV and radio licence fees:** In Germany, you have to pay a fee (around €18 per month) to the public-law contribution service of ARD, ZDF and Deutschlandradio for radio, TV and the internet, known as the “GEZ fee”. All residents must register individually. The fee is charged per flat regardless of the number of occupants. So if your flatmate or partner is already paying the fee, you can enter their contribution number when you register and split the cost between you. Even if you do not use the services or do not have a TV, you still have to pay the fee. It is used to fund public service broadcasting. After you move in, you will receive a letter from the contribution service containing a declaration of registration. You will find more information on registration [here](#). The language selection can be changed in the footer of the website. Blind or hard-of-hearing people can apply for a reduction. Certain groups of people on low incomes may be [exempt from the fee](#).

## Finding support

It is not always easy to find accommodation! If you require assistance, feel free to contact an organisation such as your local [Migration Advice Service for Adult Immigrants](#) (MBE). They will also help you with other issues such as healthcare and learning German. There is also an [MBE app](#) that provides online advice.

In addition, many Germany cities operate Welcome Centres, some of which are also able to provide advice on house hunting. The Goethe-Institut also has Welcome Coaches at several locations across Germany. In collaboration with partners, they organise [events](#) on topics such as living, working and health.

## Information on the web

### Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF)

[“Welcome to Germany – Information for immigrants”](#)

## Federal Ministry for Housing, Urban Development and Building (BMWSB)

[Finding a place to live in Germany – A guide for migrants](#)

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### Handbook Germany

[Searching for a flat](#)

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### Study in Germany

[Tips on finding accommodation for young people](#)

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### Alumniportal Deutschland

[Infographic on living in Germany](#)

[Costs, trends and tips on living in Germany](#)

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### International Organization for Migration | IOM, UN Migration

[Resources for Navigating Life in Germany: Workbook & Digital Companion App](#)

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Date: 2025-12-03 19:49:34 GMT