

# WELCOME TO FRAUNHOFER



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**WELCOME TO FRAUNHOFER**

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**Dear sir / madam,**

On behalf of everyone here at Fraunhofer, I would like to welcome you. We are delighted that you would like to come and work for Fraunhofer and join our professional staff.

To fulfill its mission as a research organization, Fraunhofer depends on the creativity and commitment of its workforce. People of different nationalities enrich our scientific and cultural skills. One of the hallmarks of our open-minded organization culture is that we value this diversity, as it is a source of creative potential that we can use as the foundation for innovations.

As well as offering the opportunity to work on interesting projects, we also provide a friendly atmosphere that supports social contact. Getting to know new people is an important aspect of our working environment, because it enriches everyone's personal experience. Our interpersonal relationships are non-judgmental and respectful.

As you will soon discover for yourself, Fraunhofer is a research organization that combines scientific excellence with entrepreneurial thinking: We develop processes, products and systems all the way to commercial maturity. This approach to application-oriented research is unique in Germany. As a future member of Fraunhofer's workforce, you will play an important role in promoting this work. That is why it is all the more important to us that you and your family have a good start to your stay in Germany, and that you can settle down to work without any problems, and become a part of Fraunhofer. Please don't hesitate to ask colleagues at your institute for help if you should encounter any difficulties.

In this spirit, I invite you to share with us the exciting task of creating new technology, designing new products, opening up new avenues – in short: inventing the future.

We look forward to meeting you.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alexander Kurz". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Professor Alexander Kurz  
Executive Vice President Human Resources,  
Legal Affairs and IP Management

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# FRAUNHOFER – WHO WE ARE

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The Fraunhofer-Gesellschaft e.V. is Europe's leading organization for applied research. It comprises 67 institutes and research institutions, at locations throughout Germany. Every day, its 24,000 employees come up with and develop new technologies and solutions. Fraunhofer's size and importance is reflected in its annual research budget, which amounts to more than 2.1 billion euros. The Fraunhofer-Gesellschaft generates more than 1.8 billion euros of its annual revenues through contract research for industry and publicly funded research projects, which together represent more than 70 percent of its total funding. Fraunhofer has a strong international orientation, and currently generates over 20 percent of its project revenues through joint projects with partners outside Germany. This international dimension is further strengthened by cooperative ventures with top-class research partners and innovative companies around the world. These activities give Fraunhofer direct access to the regions of most importance to scientific and economic development – both those that are important today and those that will be important tomorrow.

The Fraunhofer-Gesellschaft's mission is to conduct application-oriented research as part of an international collaborative network, with a special emphasis on generating direct benefits for industry and society. In everyday terms, this means that the Fraunhofer Institutes develop new products, processes and organizational methods on behalf of their customers. In doing so, they focus particular attention on the urgent issues of our times, namely energy, mobility, security, communication, manufacturing and health. The necessary creative impulse for this research work is provided by the scientists who participate in publicly funded, pre-commercial research projects. This basic research, coupled with their contract research, enables the Fraunhofer Institutes to build up a valuable store of technological knowledge and expertise. It is this expertise that makes the Fraunhofer-Gesellschaft one of the most innovative orga-

nizations in the world. According to a study conducted by Thomson Reuters in 2015, the Fraunhofer-Gesellschaft is among the top 100 global innovators, placing it on the same level as globally operating German companies such as BASF or Boehringer. In this respect, it is unique among German research organizations.

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## Research in a competitive international environment

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The Fraunhofer-Gesellschaft is internationally recognized as a trusted research partner. The organization has a well-established network of international contacts and collaborates in many ways with outstanding partners outside Germany. Nearly 9 percent of the people who work for Fraunhofer originate from other countries. At the last count (December 31, 2015), they represented over 100 different nationalities. Fraunhofer also attracts a considerable number of foreign undergraduate and postgraduate students, who come to us not only to complete their academic studies but also to gain practical experience in the domain of applied research. An increasing number of Fraunhofer employees in Germany are taking up the opportunity to work on temporary assignments with project partners or co-operating institutions abroad. For Fraunhofer, these different forms of international cooperation create lasting added value, because they generate synergies that lead to the acquisition of new skills and knowledge.

To learn more about Fraunhofer, visit [www.fraunhofer.de](http://www.fraunhofer.de).

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# MOVING TO GERMANY

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Anyone who decides to go and live and work in another country must first deal with a number of challenges:

- What do I have to have sorted out by when to ensure my arrival in Germany goes smoothly?
- What do I need to be able to start work without any problems?
- And how can I integrate well at Fraunhofer?

We have written this brochure to provide you with answers to these questions and help solve the types of problems typically encountered by newcomers to Germany. Your new colleagues and the administrative staff of your institute will also be happy to lend a hand if you need advice on other, more day-to-day issues.



## PREPARATIONS BEFORE LEAVING YOUR HOME COUNTRY

### Visas

A **Schengen visa (tourist visa, category C)** allows the holder to stay in Germany for a maximum of three months. It cannot be extended or modified. When the three-month period expires, you must leave Germany. This type of visa does not allow you to take up work. However, it does allow you to travel to other Schengen countries – on the condition that your visa has not yet expired. The Schengen area covers all EU member states – with the exception of the United Kingdom, Ireland and Cyprus – plus Iceland, Norway, Switzerland and Liechtenstein.

A **national visa (category D)** allows the holder to stay in Germany for longer than three months. This is the type of visa you need if you intend to work in Germany. It also entitles you to spend up to three months in the other countries of the Schengen area – but it does not allow you to work anywhere outside Germany.

### Not everyone requires a visa to enter Germany.

EU citizens, holders of Icelandic, Norwegian and Liechtenstein passports (EEA citizens), and Swiss citizens are exempt from visa requirements. But they must always carry a valid travel document or identity card while on German soil.

Citizens of Australia, Israel, Japan, Canada, New Zealand, the Republic of Korea and the United States of America do not require visas to enter Germany. In these cases you can apply for the necessary residence permit **after** your arrival, by submitting a request to the nearest immigration office (“Ausländerbehörde”).

If you are not a citizen of any of the above-mentioned states, you must be in possession of a visa when you enter Germany. In other words, you must apply for a visa in your country of origin **before** traveling to Germany. Don’t forget to specify the purpose of your stay on the visa application form – this way, the visa will include the necessary work permit if you intend to work in Germany. As a general rule, entry visas issued by a consulate or embassy (including residence and work permit if applicable) are valid for a limited period. If you wish to remain in Germany beyond this period, you must obtain the necessary authorization from the local immigration office.

### Important note:

Depending on your citizenship as well as on the purpose and duration of your stay in Germany, you might have to apply for a residence and work permit at the consulate or embassy even if you don’t need an entry visa for Germany. Please check the modalities before travelling to Germany.

More details on the local immigration office are provided on page 13.

**The Federal Foreign Office website contains a list of the countries whose citizens require a visa to enter Germany, together with visa application forms in various languages and other relevant information:**

[www.auswaertiges-amt.de](http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de)

→ [Entry & Residence](#) → [Visa regulations](#)



### **Important note:**

It can take several months for the authorities to process visa applications, so please submit your application – for yourself and any accompanying family members – well in advance of your planned travel date. Applications should be addressed to the German embassy or consulate general in your home country. In most cases, the required documents are a valid passport or identity card, a letter of invitation (for the work permit) and a copy of your employment contract, if applicable. The visa fee is usually 60 euros.

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### **Residence permit and work permit**

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- Citizens of the European Union (EU) or of the European Economic Area (EEA) do not require a residence permit and can freely work in Germany.
- Swiss nationals must register with the local immigration office (“Ausländerbehörde”) if their stay in Germany exceeds three months and/or they intend to work in Germany. As a general rule, they will be issued with a freedom of movement certificate (“Freizügigkeitsbescheinigung”) under an EU-Swiss agreement. This document also serves as a work permit.
- Citizens of states not mentioned above, regardless of whether or not they need a visa to enter Germany, require a residence permit if they intend to take up residence and/or paid employment in Germany. The type of residence permit required depends on the purpose and duration of your planned stay:

- **Visa-free access and signed employment contract:** Depending on your citizenship as well as the purpose and duration of your stay (see important note on page 8), you can apply for a combined residence and work permit after your arrival in Germany by submitting a request to the local immigration office (“Ausländerbehörde”). Please note that it can take four to six weeks for your application to be processed. You are not allowed to work until you receive a valid residence permit.
- **Mandatory entrance visa and signed employment contract:** Your application for a combined residence and work permit must be addressed to the German embassy or consulate general in your country of origin. If you wish to extend the duration of this permit after you have taken up residence in Germany, please submit your request to the local immigration office at least four to six weeks before your current residence permit expires.
- **Entrance without signed employment contract** (e.g. if you are participating in an exchange program or have been engaged as a visiting scientist and hold a foreign stipend): **In this case, the rules differ depending on the planned duration of your stay in Germany and whether the competent authorities regard your activity as paid employment.** If you are a national of a country for which Germany does not require an entrance visa, the local immigration office is responsible for issuing your residence permit; if not, the German embassy or consulate general in your country of origin has this responsibility. It is therefore best if your institute contacts the competent authorities beforehand to find out whether or not you need a residence permit (combined with a work permit) for your research assignment in Germany

- **Students from Non-EU / Non-EEA countries enrolled at a non-German university** who wish, for example, to take up a study-related internship in a Fraunhofer Institute for a maximum duration of 12 months, or to work for Fraunhofer during their vacation for no more than three months per calendar year, require the approval of the International Placement Service (Zentrale Auslands- und Fachvermittlung, ZAV). The human resources department of the relevant Fraunhofer Institute is responsible for submitting this request. In some cases, you may also need a residence permit. This can be obtained from the German embassy or consulate general in your country of origin when you apply for an entrance visa (if you require a visa to enter Germany) or from the local immigration office after your arrival if you are exempt from the visa requirement.

**Note:**

No ZAV approval is required for internships that form part of an EU-funded program (e.g. Leonardo, Tacis, Erasmus, Sokrates). In this case, the embassy or local immigration office is responsible for approval.

- **Foreign students enrolled at a German university** normally already possess a valid residence permit. This also allows the holder to assist in research projects or take up a study-related internship that is required by the university.

More details of how to apply for a residence permit from the local immigration office are provided on page 13.

General information on residence and work permits can be found at:

[www.zav.de/arbeitsmarktzulassung](http://www.zav.de/arbeitsmarktzulassung) → Working in Germany → Leaflet 7 – Employment of Foreign Workers in Germany

More specific information on residence permits for researchers is available at:

[www.hrk.de/home/](http://www.hrk.de/home/)

→ HRK International → Mobility and Mutual Recognition → residence permits (Rights of Residence for researchers from Non-EU-Countries in Germany)

[www.auswaertiges-amt.de](http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de) → Entry & Residence → Studying and working

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### Health insurance

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People can fall ill unexpectedly, and accidents do happen. That is why the German authorities require all long-term visitors – and accompanying family members – to be covered by a health insurance policy throughout the duration of their stay. Proof of medical insurance coverage is required to obtain a residence permit. Please ensure you clarify the following questions before traveling to Germany: Does my existing insurance adequately cover medical costs incurred abroad, or do I require an additional insurance policy in Germany?

If possible, ask your insurance company at home to confirm that your policy adequately covers the costs of medical treatment, hospital stays and accidental injuries incurred during your stay in Germany. If you have a European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) issued in another country, it will be sufficient for temporary assignments in Germany, but it is not suitable for longer stays.



### Essential questions to be answered before traveling to Germany:

- Does your health insurance plan cover medical costs for yourself and your family members after your arrival in Germany? Is this valid for the entire duration of your stay – and for all necessary medical interventions?
- Do you need to take out (additional) health insurance in Germany?

There are two types of health insurance providers in Germany: statutory insurance providers (GKV) and private health insurance companies (PKV). Employees whose annual income exceeds a specific level (2015: 54,900 euros) can opt out of the state insurance scheme and choose to be insured privately instead. Employees whose income lies below this level are usually insured through the statutory health insurance scheme.

If you decide to take out insurance under the statutory health care system, you can choose from a number of health care providers. All of these insurance plans guarantee a basic level of medical care, but some are more flexible than others when it comes to reimbursing the cost of alternative treatments such as holistic or homeopathic medicine. Under certain conditions, family members may be insured under the same policy free of charge. Private top-up schemes are also available to cover expenses not normally included in the basic reimbursement scheme, such as dental prostheses. Statutory health insurance contributions are fixed by law. In 2015, the applicable rate was 14.6 percent of chargeable income. One half of this amount is paid by the employer and the other half by the employee – deducted directly from their salary.

Private health insurance plans vary widely, in terms of both the benefits provided and the level of contributions. Certain preexisting or debilitating health conditions may not be covered by this type of insurance. And illnesses diagnosed prior to the insured party's arrival in Germany are not automatically covered – the same applies to pregnancy. We therefore strongly recommend that you seek competent advice before signing a contract with a private health insurer, and that you carefully read the fine print in the proposed insurance policy. Employees with private health insurance pay the contributions out of their own pocket, but are entitled to a payment from their employer to cover part of this expense, according to the prevailing legal regulations.

**More information on statutory health insurance and a list of providers is available at:**

[www.gkv-spitzenverband.de](http://www.gkv-spitzenverband.de)

→ [Krankenversicherung](#) → [Grundprinzipien](#)

→ [Die gesetzlichen Krankenkassen](#)

[www.krankenkassen.de/krankenkassen-vergleich/](http://www.krankenkassen.de/krankenkassen-vergleich/)

**Both sites are currently only available in German.**



## SETTLING IN GERMANY AFTER YOUR ARRIVAL

### Accommodation

Many people dream of owning their own home – preferably with a garden. But while it is true that home ownership is rising, the majority of people in Germany still live in rented accommodation. When you start looking for a house or apartment, the first question is finding the right location. Your new colleagues at the Fraunhofer Institute can provide helpful tips, such as which areas of town are most convenient for traveling to work, and which are the best locations in terms of safe and friendly neighborhoods and a multicultural community.

There are many sources of information on available properties. Local newspapers regularly publish special advertising sections for home hunters – usually in the Wednesday and Saturday editions. There are also many Internet sites where you can also place your own classified ad.

Links that may be of interest include:

[www.immobilienscout24.de](http://www.immobilienscout24.de), [www.immonet.de](http://www.immonet.de),  
[www.wohnungsmarkt24.de](http://www.wohnungsmarkt24.de), [www.immowelt.de](http://www.immowelt.de),  
[www.wg-gesucht.de](http://www.wg-gesucht.de)

As a general rule, rental accommodation in Germany is unfurnished, and often doesn't include a fitted kitchen. The monthly rental fee may be quoted as "Kaltmiete", i.e. the basic fee without service costs (heating, water, waste disposal and general administration), or as "Warmmiete", which can include some of the ancillary costs. In both cases, electricity and phone/Internet charges have to be paid separately. A deposit of between one and three times the monthly basic rental fee is normally required when the contract is signed. This deposit is paid into a special bank account set up by the landlord, and the tenant receives a copy of the transaction record. The precise terms of the agreement concerning repayment of the deposit must be stated in the rental contract. If there has been no damage to the property when the tenant moves out, the owner must return the deposit to the tenant plus accumulated interest.

Your new colleagues at the institute may also be able to help you with your search.

### Registering your place of residence

The first formality required after your arrival in Germany is to register your place of residence, and that of any accompanying family members, with the public authorities ("Einwohnermeldeamt"). This must be done within one week of your arrival. The address of your nearest office and the appropriate registration form can be found on the governmental website for your new place of residence.

The following documents are required for registration:

- Valid passport or identity card
- Entrance visa, if necessary
- The name of your landlord (and sometimes also the rental contract)



If you have moved to Germany with members of your family, you will also be required to present their birth certificates and your marriage certificate. Many German authorities require these documents to be in German – so it is best to have a validated translation prepared. If you encounter any problems in this respect, please don't hesitate to ask someone at your institute for help.

The registration office will issue you with proof of registration ("Meldebestätigung"), and you will also be allocated a tax identification number. Please take good care of these documents: they are important and you will need them again from time to time. You must report any change of address in Germany to the registration office, and deregister when you permanently leave Germany.

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### Local immigration office

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(This section does not apply to EU or EEA citizens, see page 9.)

If you do not need a visa to enter Germany, and wish to work here, you must visit the local immigration office to obtain a residence permit (including work permit) after your arrival. Under certain circumstances, persons requiring a visa to enter Germany may also have to visit the local immigration office, namely if they need to renew the residence permit (including work permit) that was issued together with their entrance visa. See page 9 above.

**You are not allowed to work in Germany without a valid, correct residence permit. Please note that you may have to wait between four and six weeks for your application to be processed, so make sure you apply in good time.** If you are unsure about anything, please speak to the appropriate person at your institute.

You will need the following documents, **both the original and a validated copy**, in order to apply for a residence permit:

- Valid passport or national identity card
- Visa, if applicable, including visas for accompanying family members
- Proof of residence ("Meldebestätigung") received from the registration office – see page 12
- Employment contract
- Proof of accommodation (e.g. rental agreement for your house or apartment)
- Proof that you possess adequate health insurance cover (insurance certificate or EHIC)
- 2 biometric passport photos

The fee charged for issuing a residence permit varies between 60 and 250 euros, depending on your place of residence. It is advisable to have the biometric passport photos taken in Germany, to be sure that they comply with the official requirements.



### Opening a bank account

In Germany it is usual for employees to receive their salary in the form of monthly transfers to a bank account. Rents for accommodation, too, are usually paid by bank transfer or by direct debit. In short, if you intend to stay in Germany for a significant length of time, it is imperative that you open a local bank account. Both traditional banks and mutual savings banks ("Sparkasse") offer current accounts ("Girokonto"). Bank charges and the range of services such as interest rates and the availability of online banking can vary greatly. Opening hours also differ from bank to bank, but as a general rule their offices are normally open from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

#### The following documents are required to open a bank account:

- Your passport
- Proof of registration ("Meldebestätigung")
- Pay statement from employer (if requested)
- Residence permit (if requested)

### Debit card and cash withdrawals

As soon as you have opened a current account, the bank will issue you with a debit card ("EC-Karte") and a PIN code. These are normally sent separately to your postal address. You can use this card to pay for purchases in numerous stores and to withdraw cash or print out statements at service points (ATMs). However, there is one important detail concerning cash withdrawals: these are only free of charge when you withdraw cash at teller machines belonging to your bank, or operated by other banks that have a cash pooling agreement with your bank. Standing orders can be set up for recurring payments such as rent for accommodation. Direct debit arrangements are a convenient means of paying for insurance or telephone bills and the like: the invoiced amount is debited

automatically from your account by the beneficiary. If you want to transfer money to your home country, you should ask the bank that manages your account there for advice. Some foreign banks have cooperation agreements with specific banks in Germany, so using their services might reduce the cost of the transfer.

### Credit cards

If you already have an international credit card, you can use it to pay for purchases and withdraw cash, but you may have to pay additional charges for overseas cash withdrawals. The most commonly accepted credit cards in Europe are Eurocard, MasterCard and Visa.

If you lose your credit card, it can be blocked by calling the toll-free service number 116 116.



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## EMPLOYMENT CONTRACT, TAXES AND SOCIAL SECURITY

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### Employment contract with Fraunhofer

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Have you already signed an employment contract with Fraunhofer? If so, you will – in general – see that your pay is based on the collective wage agreement for public-service employees (Tarifvertrag für den öffentlichen Dienst, TVöD). In other words, the same conditions apply as for all public-service employees in Germany. For instance, the TVöD stipulates the number of working hours per week, the annual vacation entitlement (number of paid vacation days) and the pay-scale grades that determine how your compensation is calculated. If you have any questions concerning your terms of employment, please contact your institute's human resources department.

#### Note:

Different countries, different customs – and different professional requirements. Does the school certificate or university degree you obtained abroad correspond to the same level of training or education as in Germany? This question often needs to be resolved before an employment contract can be signed. The online database <http://anabin.kmk.org/> lists a substantial number of educational certificates and degrees issued by foreign schools and universities. If you can't find your particular qualification in this list, you can take steps to have it recognized by the appropriate body in Germany. For this you will need validated copies of your certificates together with German translations of these documents. For more information, visit the website "Recognition in Germany" at [www.anerkennung-in-deutschland.de](http://www.anerkennung-in-deutschland.de).

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### Taxes

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As a general rule, any money that you earn in Germany must be declared to the German tax authorities. Your tax liability depends on whether you are working as a salaried employee or as a freelancer. Special dispensations may apply, for example in the case of scholarships, which are generally tax-free. If your country of origin has a dual taxation agreement with Germany, the terms of this agreement are applied. In this way you avoid paying the same taxes twice. If you are not sure whether all or part of your income from Fraunhofer is taxable in Germany, your host institute's human resources department can provide assistance – in consultation with Fraunhofer headquarters.

If your income is taxable in Germany, Fraunhofer automatically deducts income tax, the solidarity surcharge and church tax, if applicable, from your pay and transfers the deducted amount to the tax authorities. Similarly, Fraunhofer pays your social security contributions for retirement benefits, health insurance, nursing care benefits and unemployment benefits and deducts them at source from your gross income. Only the remaining net income is transferred to your bank account. At the end of each year, you must fill out a tax declaration and send it to local tax office.

The officials who work there will calculate the actual amount of tax you owe according to your marital status and number of dependent children, the amount you have earned, and various other tax-relevant factors. If you need help with your tax declaration, you can call on the services of a professional tax advisor or one of the voluntary associations that provide tax assistance.

For information on dual taxation agreements and other tax issues, see:

[www.bundesfinanzministerium.de](http://www.bundesfinanzministerium.de)

→ Issues → Taxation

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### Social security

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Sickness, unemployment, old age and infirmity can affect us all. Employees in Germany are therefore insured against the effects of such factors by a comprehensive social security system. All salaried employees are obliged by law to pay contributions to this state insurance scheme. The amounts payable depend on each person's income level. Contributions to the state health insurance and retirement benefit programs are pegged at a ceiling known as the "Beitragsbemessungsgrenze". These contributions are split 50:50 between the employee and the employer. Insurance against work-related injuries, on the other hand, is paid in full by the employer.

Websites providing other useful information include:

[www.bamf.de](http://www.bamf.de) → Welcome to Germany → Banks and Insurance Companies → Social Insurance

[http://europa.eu/youreurope/citizens/work/unemployment-and-benefits/social-security/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/youreurope/citizens/work/unemployment-and-benefits/social-security/index_en.htm)

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### Corporate pension fund

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In addition to the insurance provided by the state pension scheme, Fraunhofer also has a corporate pension fund that pays supplementary benefits to employees or their surviving dependents on reaching pensionable age or whose contracts are terminated prematurely due to disablement or death. All new employees of the Fraunhofer-Gesellschaft are registered with this voluntary pension scheme, managed by VBL ("Versorgungsanstalt des Bundes und der Länder"). Special rules apply to employees of research organizations.

More complete information can be found at: [www.vbl.de](http://www.vbl.de)

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### Other types of insurance

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The social security system covers a wide range of risks, but it is often advisable to extend your insurance coverage by other means. One of the most important of these is private third-party insurance ("Haftpflichtversicherung") that covers your civil responsibility in the event that you or one of your underage children inadvertently causes injury to another person or damages their property. If you own a car, you must also take out third-party risk insurance.

More information is provided at:

[www.bamf.de](http://www.bamf.de) → Welcome to Germany → Banks and Insurance Companies → Further Insurance schemes



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## HEALTHCARE

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### Health insurance card

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When you take out insurance with one of the statutory healthcare providers, you will be issued with an electronic European Health Insurance Card (EHIC). This entitles you to medical care in all EU member states as well as in Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland. **You must present this card every time you visit a doctor's office.**

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### Medical practitioners

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The standard of medical care in Germany is very high, and you rarely have to travel far to find a doctor. If you have a health problem, the first person to consult is normally a general practitioner. If he or she is unable to help, they will refer you to a specialist or a hospital. But how to find the nearest doctor's office? Sources of information include the website of your local community, a nationwide list of medical services [Weiße Liste \(www.weisse-liste.de\)](http://www.weisse-liste.de) or the website of the National Association of Statutory Health Insurance Physicians ([www.kbv.de](http://www.kbv.de)).

If you need medical treatment, it is usually best to make an appointment by phone beforehand to avoid sitting for hours in the waiting room. In critical cases you can explain the urgency of the situation on the phone, or go directly to the doctor's office.

**If you need a doctor outside of regular office hours, there is a special toll-free number that you can call from anywhere in Germany: 116 117.**

**In a genuine emergency – i.e. a life-threatening situation – please call the national emergency number 112.**

If you are insured with a statutory healthcare provider, you will not be billed for medical treatment: the doctor is paid directly by the insurance company. The procedure is less simple if you have private health insurance. In this case, you will receive a bill that you must pay yourself in the first instance and then forward to the insurance company for reimbursement.

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### Pharmacies

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Pharmacies are not allowed to dispense certain medications to patients without a signed prescription from a doctor. You must present the prescription when you collect the medication at the pharmacy. If you are insured with a statutory healthcare provider, you will have nothing to pay apart from a minimum, non-reimbursable charge levied on all dispensed medication. If you are privately insured, you will have to pay the full amount when you collect your medications. You must then send the receipt to your insurance company for reimbursement. Over-the-counter medicines that don't require a prescription can be bought in any pharmacy at your own expense.

Pharmacies are open during normal shopping hours (usually from 8.30 a.m. to 6.30 p.m.). An on-call service is provided on a rotating schedule outside these hours. The duty roster can be consulted on the Internet at [www.apotheken.de/notdienste](http://www.apotheken.de/notdienste) and is published in the local daily newspapers. A notice giving the address of the nearest duty pharmacy is also displayed on the door of every pharmacy. When you reach the duty pharmacy, you must press a buzzer for attention, and your medication will be delivered through a special window. You usually have to pay a supplement for this service.

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# EVERYDAY LIFE

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## MOBILITY

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### Public transportation

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Most German cities have a well-functioning public transportation network served by a combination of buses, trams, underground and above-ground rail systems. In essence this means that you won't have to walk far to the next bus or tram stop, or the nearest station on the urban rail network. In the major cities, commuter trains run every few minutes – especially during rush hour. But even during the rest of the day, buses, trams and other forms of local transportation make scheduled stops at all pickup points several times each hour.

There are ticket vending machines at many bus/tram stops and stations, and often also onboard the vehicle. Tickets can also be bought at newspaper kiosks or via smartphone apps.

The cost of a bus or rail ticket is based on the tariffs charged by the local public transportation authority. In most cases, reduced tariffs are available for specific categories of users such as children, students or people with physical handicaps. If you use public transportation on a regular basis – for example for the daily commute to and from work – it is usually cheaper to buy a monthly or annual ticket.

To find out more about public transportation networks, go to the website [www.nahverkehr.info/](http://www.nahverkehr.info/) or consult the relevant pages of the general website for the city in which you live.

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### Long-distance travel by train, bus or air

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One way to travel to other places in Germany or another European country is to take the train. Train services are principally provided by Deutsche Bahn ([www.db.de](http://www.db.de)), but other operators may offer a cheaper alternative on regional routes. Deutsche Bahn tickets can be purchased at the booking counters, at automated POS machines in rail stations or online. We recommend that you buy your tickets before boarding the train because they often cost more if you buy them from the conductor/ticket inspector. Heavy fines are imposed on travelers caught without a valid ticket. There are numerous cut-price offers including budget prices for early bookers, weekend excursion tickets or the "Bahncard" that offers generous reductions for frequent travelers. Rail travel is free for children under the age of six. If they are accompanied by a parent or a grandparent, children can travel free of charge up to the age of 15. It always pays to look into the available options beforehand! If you intend to travel on a Friday or Saturday – when trains are normally full – it is best to reserve seats in advance.

Long-distance coach services are becoming increasingly popular in Germany as a low-cost alternative to rail travel. As well as providing intercity travel in Germany, they also serve many destinations in other European countries:

[www.busliniensuche.de/](http://www.busliniensuche.de/)

The quickest way to travel to a remote destination in Germany or another country is to fly. Germany is covered by a dense network of airports offering passenger services.



### Driving and driver's licenses

Germany is famous for its excellent road infrastructure. Vehicles drive on the right and overtake on the left. Unless road signs indicate other speed limits, the maximum speed in built-up areas is 50 km/h and 100 km/h on open roads. Theoretically, there is no speed limit on Germany's autobahns, but a maximum speed of 130 km/h is recommended by the road safety authorities.

Anyone driving in Germany must be in possession of their driver's license and the vehicle registration documents at all times when they are behind the wheel. Residents of other EU countries, and holders of Liechtenstein, Norwegian and Icelandic passports, can drive in Germany with the license issued in their home country. Nationals of other countries can continue to use their existing driver's license for the first six months of their stay in Germany – after that they must exchange it for a German driver's license.

More information is available at:  
[www.adac.de](http://www.adac.de) -> Info, Test und Rat → Ratgeber Verkehr → Führerschein (in German only).

Please note: When you exchange your national driver's license for a German driver's license, your national driver's license will be withdrawn. When you return to your home country after your stay in Germany, you can recover your original license by handing in your German driver's license at the offices of the local vehicle registration office ("Straßenverkehrsamt").

Important rules that drivers must remember:

- Don't drink and drive (if your blood alcohol level exceeds 0.5 ppm, you are over the legal limit)
- Always attach your safety belt (this also applies to all passengers). Child safety seats are mandatory for children under the age of 12 or measuring less than 150 centimeters in height.
- All vehicles must be equipped with a first-aid kit, warning triangle, fluorescent safety vests and emergency blankets.
- The use of telephones is only allowed with a hands-free device.
- Winter tires are necessary when driving in wintry conditions.
- Cars may only be washed in closed-cycle washing stations.

If you are involved in an accident, it is advisable to call the police (phone 112). You must not leave the scene of the accident until all parties have exchanged their names and addresses, otherwise you might be pursued in court as the perpetrator of a criminal offense.

Special parking spaces are often reserved for people with physical handicaps. They are usually located close to the entrance of supermarkets or public buildings, to facilitate access. Special areas are also often reserved for women in underground parking facilities. They are located close to the exit and surveilled by video cameras to provide additional security.

Car sharing is becoming increasingly popular in Germany. If you want to join a car sharing scheme, you must first sign up with a provider. Once you are a member, you can reserve a hire car at short notice and collect it at a pickup point (in and around major cities). [www.carsharing.de/](http://www.carsharing.de/)



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## Cycling

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For short journeys and errands, a bicycle can be just as practical as a car. Bicycling allows you to avoid the annoyance of slow-moving traffic in busy city centers, is good for the environment and beneficial for your health. Most German towns and cities have plenty of marked cycle paths or lanes and parking areas with cycle racks. If you decide to buy a bicycle, make sure that you keep it in good working order and observe the traffic rules when you are riding it because traffic rules apply to all road users – and that includes cyclists as well as motorists. There is no legal requirement to wear a helmet, but it is recommended for your safety – for adults as well as children.

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# TELEPHONE UND INTERNET

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## Landline services

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If you want a landline connection at home, you have a wide choice of telephone and Internet service providers. These days it is usual to sign a contract with a single provider for telephone and Internet access. Broadband or DSL networks are available in almost all areas of Germany, providing sufficient bandwidth for data-intensive applications such as downloading music or movies. In many cases, providers also supply the necessary DSL modem. Most offers in Germany usually include a flat rate for data services. Prices vary depending on the product and the duration of the contract, and the required or possible maximum data rate.

International calls are often cheaper if you use a VoIP service such as Skype. Another option is call-by-call services – in this case you simply dial a special prefix to obtain lower than the standard rates ([www.billiger-telefonieren.de/festnetz/](http://www.billiger-telefonieren.de/festnetz/)). We advise you to consult your chosen provider to find out what type of telephone connection they can provide and what data rates are possible in the network serving your new home. This information may help you to choose the telephone and Internet service that best meets your needs.

There are various online directories to help you find a specific address or phone number, including [www.teleauskunft.de](http://www.teleauskunft.de), [www.dasoertliche.de](http://www.dasoertliche.de), and [www.gelbeseiten.de](http://www.gelbeseiten.de) (the latter corresponds to the yellow pages listing of companies, doctors, restaurants, tradesmen, etc.).

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## Cellphone services

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To use a cellphone, you need either a prepaid card or a subscription plan. It is worth comparing different offers because the conditions can vary widely from one provider to the next. Reception quality and data rates can also be very different depending on the geographical area in which you intend to use your cellphone. We therefore recommend that you find out which providers can guarantee the best reception in your specific region before signing a contract.

## LANGUAGE

German is the most widely spoken native language in the EU, where no less than 120 million people grow up speaking German. German language skills are therefore a vital prerequisite for integration, not only in everyday life but also professionally. To make the best of your new assignment, it is essential that you acquire these language skills.

We therefore strongly recommend that you sign up for a German language course as soon as possible. The experience of many people like you has shown that the sooner you and your family members are able to understand and speak German in everyday situations, the greater your chances of advancing your career and personal integration. Your institute has people who can help you to find suitable language training courses, and may also offer special integration courses, in which you can not only improve your language skills but also learn more about German culture. Another option is the program cofinanced by the European Social Fund (ESF) and the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF), which aims to improve job-related language skills for persons with a migration background.

More information can be found via the link [www.bamf.de](http://www.bamf.de) → Welcome to Germany → Learning German

## ACCOMPANYING CHILDREN

Do you intend to move to Germany with your family? In this case, the new experience will no doubt be as challenging (and exciting) for your spouse and children as it is for you.

Different forms of daycare are available for small children, depending on their age. Compulsory schooling in Germany starts at age six.

### Day nurseries, child minders, occasional daycare

Daycare for children up to the age of six is provided by day nurseries ("Kindertagesstätten"), where they are looked after by childcare professionals. Meals or bottle-feeding are included in this service. By playing together, the children learn essential social skills that will prepare them for "real" school later. There is no obligation to send your child to a day nursery. The fees are based on your available income and on the number of hours per day spent in the daycare center. In Germany, kindergarten refers to facilities for children aged between 3 and 6; facilities for the under-threes are referred to as crèches ("Kinderkrippen").

The "school year" for day nurseries usually begins in August or September, but to obtain a place you have to submit an application several months earlier, in the spring. Places are limited in many regions, so you are strongly advised to start looking for a place for your child as early as possible.

An alternative solution is to find a registered childminder, who looks after a small group of children in his or her own home. Your local municipal council can provide you with a list.



If you need to find someone to look after your children at other times than those covered by the above arrangements – for instance if Fraunhofer sends you on an out-of-town assignment – please contact your institute’s personnel resources department. Fraunhofer has a standing agreement with an agency (pme Familienservice) that can provide occasional childcare services in such situations.

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## Schooling

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From the age of six, children in Germany are enrolled in a primary school (“Grundschule”) for the first four years of their compulsory education. The local school authorities will assign your child to a specific primary school based on the school district in which you live. The length of the school day varies from one establishment to another. Many schools have introduced all-day schooling, in which tuition continues to 4 p.m. each day. In those that apply the traditional system, classes start at 8 a.m. and finish by 1 p.m. or earlier. In this case, you may have to arrange for after-school supervision. Numerous options are available, including lunch time supervision (to 2 p.m. or 3.30 p.m.) or after-school centers (normally open until 5 p.m.). The utilization of these facilities is voluntary. Each locality and region is different in this respect, which extends to the childcare options available during school vacations.

To find out which options apply in the specific area in which you live, please contact your municipal council. As in the case of daycare facilities, the fees charged are based on your available income and the number of hours per day for which your child attends these centers.

The next level of education after primary school is divided into different categories:

- General schools (“Hauptschule”) provide secondary education up to year 9 or 10, leading to a general certification of education (“Hauptschulabschluss”).
- Middle schools (“Realschule”) provide secondary education up to year 10, leading to a middle school certificate (“Mittlere Reife”).
- High schools (“Gymnasium”) or technical schools (“Fachoberschule”) provide secondary education up to year 12 or 13, leading to a baccalaureate (“Abitur”) or equivalent technical qualification.
- Comprehensive schools (“Gesamtschule”) provide secondary education at all or most of these stages, leading to the corresponding qualifications.

Holders of a general baccalaureate (“Abitur”) are entitled to pursue further studies at any university, while the technical baccalaureate entitles holders to study at a university of applied sciences.

We recommend that you inquire about local schools by contacting the education office (“Schulamt”), consulting the Internet, or asking other parents. Education at state schools in Germany is free of charge. On the other hand, private or international schools charge (often high) tuition fees.



## LEISURE TIME AND CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

### Entertainment and eating out

Germany has a lot to offer by way of cultural activities. Opera houses, theaters and cinemas offer plenty of entertainment, while museums and historic monuments provide interesting perspectives. Other ways to spend your free time include visiting sporting events, leisure parks and local fairs and festivities. Good sources of information on programs and events are the website of your new place of residence or the cultural section of the daily newspapers.

Many cities have a wide choice of restaurants, cafés, bars and night clubs. It's best to book a table in advance if you want to eat at one of the more popular places. If you are satisfied with the service, it is customary to leave a tip – as a general rule, up to 10 percent of the bill.

Smoking is forbidden in public buildings. But the regulations may differ from one German state to another, with some regions allowing smoking in special, marked smoking areas. If in doubt, it's always best to ask whether you are allowed to smoke before lighting up.

### Media

The major national newspapers include the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ), the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (SZ) and *Die Welt*. Besides these, there are also numerous regional daily newspapers and monthly news magazines such as *Der Spiegel* and *Focus*. You can subscribe to most newspapers and magazines and have them delivered to your home.

Nowadays, nearly all newspapers and magazines are also available in electronic form.

TV and radio still enjoy great popularity in Germany. If you have a TV, radio or computer in your home, you must register with the license-fee authorities ("Gebühreneinzugszentrale" GEZ) and pay a regular fee for the reception of public broadcasts.

More information can be found at:  
[www.rundfunkbeitrag.de](http://www.rundfunkbeitrag.de) (only available in German).

### Sports

There are a wealth of opportunities for sport and exercise in most localities, including sports clubs, fitness studios and courses held by the local evening school. A good source of information is the website of your new place of residence.

### Public holidays

Germany has a mainly Christian religious culture, and this is reflected in its public holidays. The following public holidays apply throughout Germany:

- January 1  
New Year's Day
- Friday before Easter  
Good Friday
- between mid-March and early April  
Easter Sunday and Easter Monday
- May 1  
Labor Day
- Thursday in May (10 days before Whitsun)



- Ascension
- May or June
- Whit Sunday and Monday (Pentecost)
- October 3
- Day of German Unity
- December 24 (afternoon)
- Christmas Eve
- December 25 and 26
- Christmas Day and the day after Christmas
- December 31 (afternoon)
- New Year's Eve

There are also a number of other public holidays that only apply in specific German federal states.

See [www.schulferien.org](http://www.schulferien.org) to find the calendar of public holidays in the state where you are living.

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## SHOPPING

Food and other daily necessities can be bought in supermarkets, shopping malls and specialized stores. There are laws in each federal state governing the hours at which stores are allowed to open. As a general rule, you can shop on weekdays and Saturdays from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. All stores are closed on Sundays – with the exception of bakeries and florists, which are allowed to open on Sunday mornings; gas stations as well as stores at the main train stations and airports are generally open on Sundays.

You can pay for your purchases in cash or with a debit card (e.g. an EC card, see also page 14). Many items can now also be purchased via the Internet. If you shop online, the usual safety precautions apply: Make sure that the payment method is secure and check that you are dealing with a genuine, trustworthy website.

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## RETURNABLE DEPOSITS, RECYCLING AND WASTE SORTING

When you buy bottled or canned drinks, you often have to pay a deposit. The aim of this system is to encourage people to bring empty bottles and cans back to the store so that they can be reused or recycled. If you do so, your deposit will be returned. To speed up and simplify collection, many supermarkets and liquor stores have installed reverse vending machines.

In Germany, households are required to sort their waste before it is collected. The local council usually provides separate bins for different types of waste (compostable waste, paper, plastic, non-recyclable waste). Collection points for glass and other recyclables are usually set up in convenient locations. Hazardous waste and bulky items must be brought to special waste disposal centers.

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## PRACTICAL TIPS

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## DOS AND DON'TS – TYPICAL GERMAN CUSTOMS

Some people say that Germans are heavy beer-drinkers with a strong sense of duty but no sense of humor. That isn't really true – or only partly.

It is true to say that Germans have a strong sense of duty. Loyalty to family and friends is taken very seriously, but equal importance is given to hard work and professional achievements. Punctuality is seen as a virtue by the majority of Germans – so if you expect to be late for a business appointment or even a meeting with friends, you should call to let them know that you have been delayed.

At work, it is important to remain focused and objective. The tone of discussions and meetings might occasionally appear to be harsh, but this is simply because the participants are focusing on efficiency and getting quickly to the heart of the matter, so that the discussion can move on. This leaves little time for expressing personal opinions or delivering feedback – something that is (as yet) relatively uncommon. So don't feel discouraged if your comments go unheeded.

Germans have a particularly direct manner of talking to one another, which differs from the custom in many other countries. So don't feel affronted if someone makes critical remarks without pausing to introduce themselves with a polite comment. Open criticism – expressed directly but in respectful words – tends to be considered as constructive advice in Germany. Saying "yes" when you really mean "no" can lead to misunderstandings, even if you were only being polite. So don't be afraid to say "no" if you are unable or unwilling to accept a request to do something.

Most Germans draw a clear line between their professional and private lives. Unless you know someone personally, you should address them as "Sie" rather than "du", and use their surname rather than their first name. If you are not sure which form of address is appropriate, it is better to wait for the other person to propose the more familiar form. To greet someone, you should shake their hand while looking into their eyes.

Men and women have equal rights in Germany. Many women now hold management posts, both parents share responsibility for bringing up their children and take turns earning money for the family.

[A brochure providing a comprehensive overview of living and working in Germany is available here:](#)  
[www.bamf.de](http://www.bamf.de) → Information Collection → Publications  
→ Brochure: Welcome to Germany  
Für Fachkräfte - Make it in Germany

[The following websites provide further information on research in Germany:](#)  
[www.research-in-germany.de](http://www.research-in-germany.de)  
[www.entdecke-deutschland.diplo.de/](http://www.entdecke-deutschland.diplo.de/)  
[www.justlanded.com](http://www.justlanded.com)  
[www.make-it-in-germany.com](http://www.make-it-in-germany.com)

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## CHECKLIST OF DOCUMENTS YOU WILL NEED IN GERMANY

- Visa, if required (also for accompanying family members)
- Valid passport or national ID card (also for accompanying family members)
- Birth certificate (original and validated copy) (also for accompanying family members)
- Marriage certificate (original and validated copy)
- Several biometric passport photos
- Proof of insurance coverage (e.g. health insurance, personal liability insurance, accident insurance, car insurance) and documents proving that this coverage is also valid in Germany
- Driver's license (if appropriate)
- Degree certificate, university transcripts and records (if appropriate)
- Enrollment certificate (for students, if applicable)
- Vaccination record, letter from doctor listing required medication (if appropriate)

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