

Factsheet - visa and residence permit

What is the difference between visa and residence permit?

You must apply for a visa before entering Germany. The visa is issued by the German diplomatic mission of the Federal Foreign Office in your home country.

After entering Germany, you need to apply for a residence permit at the relevant immigration office in your place of residence in Germany.

FAQs regarding visa:

- **What kind of visa do I need for the aptitude test?**
Prospective student visa: If you have not yet been admitted, apply for a (national) visa for the purpose of applying to a programme. This visa allows you to take the entrance exam and is valid for a maximum period of 3 months.
- **What kind of visa do I need if I have been accepted to a programme (admission)?**
Student visa: If you have been admitted to a course of study, you will need a (national) visa to stay in the country for study purposes. The visa is usually issued for one year.
- **Do I need a visa for entering Germany?**
Whether you need a visa for Germany depends on which country you come from: <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/de/service/visa-und-aufenthalt/nationale-visa>
You do not need a visa, if you are from the European Union, the European Economic Area (EEA), Switzerland, Australia, the United Kingdom, Israel, Japan, Canada, New Zealand, South Korea, the United States, Andorra, Brazil, El Salvador, Honduras, Monaco or San Marino.
Applicants/students from all other countries do need a visa for entering Germany.
- **Where do I apply for a national visa?**
You should apply for the visa at the German diplomatic mission in your home country. You can find a list of embassies and consulates here: <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/de/reiseundsicherheit/deutsche-auslandsvertretungen/03-webseitenav>
- **Is it possible to apply online for a visa?**
Yes. You can also apply online for a visa at the online platform of the Federal Foreign Office: <https://digital.diplo.de/>
- **What documents do I need for the visa application?**
You can find information on the documents required on the website of your diplomatic mission abroad. Make sure you are well prepared for your appointment. Ensure that you have all the necessary documents. You can upload some of them when you submit your online application. You will need to bring the other documents with you to your in-person appointment at the diplomatic mission. You will also need to pay a fee at the appointment.
- **How long does it take to process a (national) visa?**
When applying for a visa entitling you to a long-term stay, you should expect the application to take several months to process, depending on the purpose of your stay and your home country.

Please note: DO NOT enter the country as a tourist on a Schengen visa! A Schengen visa cannot be converted into a student visa or a visa for the purpose of applying to study. You would then have to return to your home country again to reapply for the visa. That takes much longer.

FAQs regarding residence permit:

Once you have arrived in Germany at your place of study (Cologne, Aachen or Wuppertal), you should first register with the Residents' Registration Office. You can find the registration office responsible for you on the respective cities' websites. You will be issued with a registration certificate (Meldebestätigung). You will need this certificate to apply for a residence permit for study purposes.

- **Do I need a residence permit?**

Whether you need a residence permit for study purposes depends on your country of origin. If you are NOT from an EU country, the European Economic Area (EEA) or Switzerland, you will need a residence permit. This applies regardless of whether you entered the country with or without a visa.

- **Where do I apply for a residence permit?**

You need to apply for a residence permit for study purposes at the Immigration Office in the city where you've been registered, your place of residence.

- For example, if you are living in Cologne, you'll apply at the Bezirksausländeramt. For example Bezirksausländeramt Chorweiler: <https://www.stadt-koeln.de/service/adressen/bezirksauslaenderamt-chorweiler>
- In Aachen: StädteRegion Aachen, Amt für Aufenthaltsangelegenheiten: <https://bportal.staedteregion-aachen.de/detail/-/vr-bis-detail/dienstleistung/15000/show>
- Immigration Office in Wuppertal, Integrationsportal: <https://integration.wuppertal.de/auslaenderbehoerde/001-Auslaenderbehoerde.php>

- **Can I apply online for a residence permit?**

Yes. Most of the Immigration Offices offer an online application process for your residence permit. You'll have to fill in a form and then upload the necessary documents.

- **What documents do I need for applying for a residence permit for study purposes?**

Application form, valid passport, digital biometric photograph, valid visa (if applicable), enrolment certificate, proof that you can secure your living expenses (blocked account for example), proof of health insurance cover, copy of your tenancy agreement, (registration certificate). Please always check the Immigration Office requirements in advance.

- **When can I renew my residence permit?**

Always apply for your new residence permit in good time before your old one expires: 6 months before it expires. Please also make sure you can be contacted any time by the Immigration Office, also in the lecture-free periods.

- **What's meant by Fiktionsbescheinigung (provisional certificate)?**

The provisional certificate is temporary proof that you are permitted to stay in Germany whilst your application for a residence permit is being processed. You will receive this certificate if you submit an application for the issue or renewal of a residence permit, but the application has not yet been finalised. The provisional certificate is valid for the period during which your application is being assessed. It ceases to be valid as soon as a decision has been made on your application.

- **Are there different types of Fiktionsbescheinigungen (provisional certificates)?**

Yes. A distinction is made between two types of provisional certificates:

- According to § 81, 3 German Residence Act: You will receive this certificate if you have entered the country without a visa or if you are applying for a long-term residence permit. You are not permitted to work with this provisional certificate. You are not permitted to leave Germany or re-enter the country with it.
- According to § 81, 4 German Residence Act: You will receive this certificate if you already hold a valid residence permit (for example, a residence permit or a Category D national visa) or if you are applying to extend your residence permit or to be granted a new one.

If your current residence permit allows you to work, you may continue to do so. With this provisional certificate, you are permitted to travel – that is, to leave Germany – for as long as the certificate remains valid.

Some more information and useful links:

Study in Germany:

<https://www.study-in-germany.com/de/studium-planen/voraussetzungen/visum/>

<https://www.study-in-germany.com/de/deutschland/ankunft/aufenthaltserlaubnis/>

Blocked Account

<https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/de/service/visa-und-aufenthalt/nationale-visa/visa-schule-studium-sprachkurs/sperrkonto>

Visa

Federal Foreign Office (of Germany):

<https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/de/service/visa-und-aufenthalt/schulbesuch-studium-sprachkurs-in-deutschland-2230586?openAccordionId=item-2666740-2>

<https://digital.diplo.de/>

<https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/de/service/visa-und-aufenthalt/auslandsportal>

Residence permit:

City of Cologne/FAQs regarding residence permit: <https://www.stadt-koeln.de/artikel/73721/index.html>

Online appointment bookings: <https://www.stadt-koeln.de/leben-in-koeln/soziales/auslaenderamt/74526/index.html>

Aachen: online appointment bookings: <https://bportal.staedteregion-aachen.de/detail/-/vr-bis-detail/dienstleistung/15000/show>

City of Wuppertal, contact form: <https://integration.wuppertal.de/auslaenderbehoerde/001-Auslaenderbehoerde.php>

Please note: No responsibility is taken for the correctness of the information given.