

Universität
Münster

Section: Arrival and Immigration Formalities

Handbook for International Researchers

Dept. for Researchers & Staff (International Office)
Version 01/2026

wissen.leben



Entry and Residence Permits



FEDERAL FOREIGN OFFICE

To ensure a smooth start for your research or university employment in Germany, the following section provides information on the necessary entry formalities and related administrative matters, such as obtaining health insurance, which you may need to arrange in preparation for your stay.

Visa and Entry Regulations

I. Visa Requirements

1. Citizens of EU Member States, Switzerland, and the European Economic Area (EEA)

Citizens of an EU member state, Switzerland, or the European Economic Area (Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway) do not need a visa to enter Germany; a national ID card is sufficient. A residence permit is also not required, but if your stay exceeds three months, you must register your address at the local registration office (see registration requirements).

2. Visa for Non-EU Countries

- Natives of certain non-EU countries may enter Germany without a visa for stays of up to 90 days. However, only in some cases, they are permitted to engage in research activities without a visa. A list of these countries, including details on which types of stays are visa-free, can be found on the website of the Federal Foreign Office. For longer stays, even citizens of these so-called 'best friend states' are required to apply for a visa, as residence permits can only be issued locally at the Office for Migration and Integration in exceptional cases. Therefore, we strongly recommend that researchers planning to stay in Germany for more than 90 days apply for a visa in advance, to avoid returning to their home-country for this procedure later and reduce bureaucratic procedures upon arrival in Germany.
- For longer stays (over 90 days) or for taking up employment, a national visa (D visa) is always required. This must be applied for in your home country or country of residence — even if you are already living within the EU.

II. Visa for Short Stays Without Employment

If you need a visa and your stay is planned for less than 90 days, a Schengen visa (C visa) is normally sufficient. Please note that the Schengen visa does not permit employment and cannot be extended.

Important: Three months are usually longer than 90 days!



We advise contacting the German Embassy in your country well in advance to clarify the visa requirements and to book a visa application appointment. In many countries, appointments may not be available for several months.

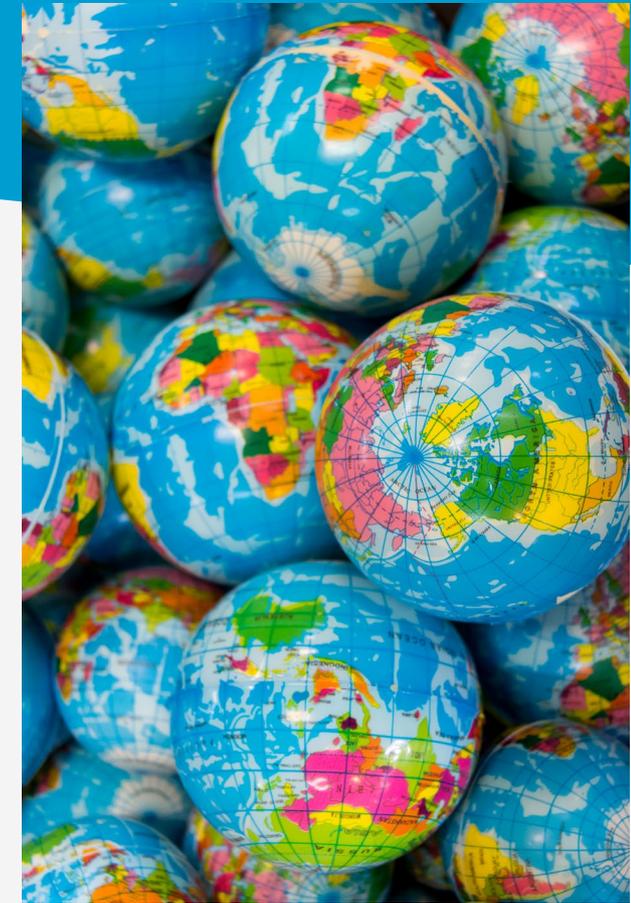
III. Visa for Long-Term Research Stays/Employment

- For stays, which are longer than 90 days and for taking up employment, you will need a national visa (D visa). This visa also allows you to travel to and stay for short periods in other Schengen countries.
- A special residence permit, the so-called Researcher Visa (§18d Residence Act), permits the pursuit of a research project either with an employment contract or a scholarship, and to a limited extent, teaching activities at the research institution specified in the hosting agreement. This hosting agreement must be completed by both you and your host institution, but it can only be signed by authorised representatives of the university (not your institute). For more information, please contact the Welcome Centre at welcome.centre@uni-muenster.de.
- Another type of residence title that can be used only for research activities with an employment contract or as an academic professional (even without a specific research project) is the so-called EU Blue Card according to §18g of the Residence Act. This requires meeting an annual minimum salary threshold. Additionally, the so-called *Erklärung zum Beschäftigungsverhältnis* (Declaration of Employment status) must be issued for you by the university. Once all requirements for the visa application are met, there is a legal entitlement (*Erteilungsanspruch*) for both of these residence titles.

IV. Visa Application

For your visa application, you will generally need the following documents:

- Application form (available on the website of the respective German embassy or consulate)
- Passport (valid for at least another 6–12 months, ideally for the entire duration of your stay) including a copy
- Recent biometric passport photo
- Proof of intended activity (e.g. scholarship award letter, employment contract, invitation letter and/or hosting agreement from the university)
- Hosting agreement (for §18d) and/or Declaration of Employment Relationship (for §18g)
- Proof of sufficient financial means (if not evident from the documents listed above)
- Proof of health insurance (either through a statutory German health insurance or a substitutive, i.e. equivalent private health insurance; legally required minimum coverage is EUR 30,000)
- Certified copy of your university degree, in some cases also with a translation, apostille or legalization
- Information about your planned accommodation in Germany
- For accompanying family members: marriage and birth certificates translated into German, in some cases also with apostille or legalization (please check in advance with the German embassy).



Uni MS - Shutterstock



HOSTING AGREEMENT



MAKE IT IN GERMANY

Please note that the required documents may vary depending on your country of origin and the specific German diplomatic mission. Therefore, make sure to contact the responsible visa office well in advance to find out which documents are necessary for your visa application.

With the implementation of the Skilled Workers Immigration Act reform, since 2025 the application process for national visas has been gradually transitioning to an online system via the Foreign Office's [Auslandsportal](#). This aims to make the application process more standardised and efficient.

Therefore, some categories of visa applications can be submitted online, namely for the EU Blue Card. However, at present, you can apply for researcher visas only by prior appointment — either via the embassy's website or by email. In any case, consider that the processing-time, once you submitted all necessary documents can range from 6 weeks until one year in certain countries!

V. Health Insurance

To conduct research or work in Germany, you are required to have health insurance. Depending whether you are employed or not, this can either be the German statutory health insurance or a so-called substitutive private health insurance that provides at least the same level of coverage as the statutory insurance. Proof of sufficient health insurance coverage is required by both the German diplomatic mission abroad and/or the local immigration office.

As an EU citizen, you may be eligible to receive medical treatment in Germany and have the costs reimbursed by your home-country insurance provider. Emergency treatment is always available, but for any other medical services, you should clarify coverage with your insurer before arrival. We recommend that researchers from EU countries who plan to stay in Germany for more than three months also stipulate a substitutive private health insurance, especially with family.

1. Employed international researchers

Enrollment in a statutory health insurance scheme is generally possible for every employed person. All statutory health insurance providers charge a percentage-based contribution rate of your gross salary — currently 14.6% (as of July 1, 2025) — of which the employer covers half. These contributions are deducted directly from the employee's gross salary. In addition, statutory health insurance providers may charge an individual supplementary contribution payable by the employee.



Uni MS - Freepik



EURAXESS VISA AND ENTRY



EURAXESS: EU HEALTH INSURANCE

The services offered by statutory health insurance are largely standardised, but individual providers differ in the scope of treatments offered, customer service, additional services, and optional tariffs. Some insurers may charge extra premiums for special treatments. It is advisable to clarify in advance with your insurance provider which therapies are covered. Certain treatments, such as professional teeth cleaning are generally not reimbursed and other, as new glasses, only with a very limited contribution.

If your family is accompanying you to Germany, family insurance is also required and, usually, is more convenient with the statutory health insurance. You are free to choose your statutory health insurance provider. If you are employed and do not make a personal selection, the University of Münster will automatically register you with AOK.

Always bring your insurance card with you to every doctor's appointment!

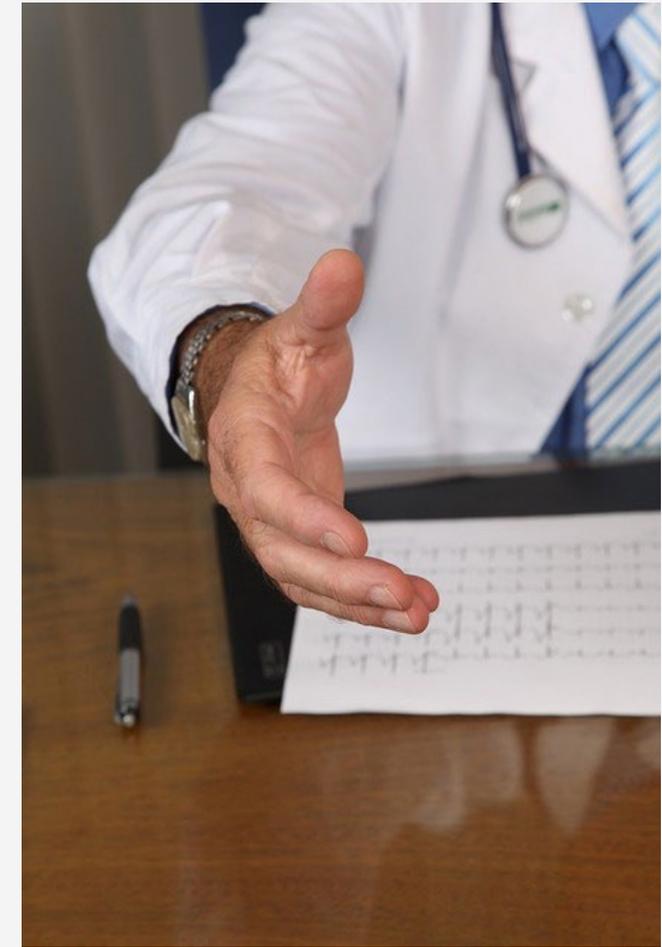
2. Non-Employed International Researchers

For international researchers without an employment contract, it is possible either to voluntarily join a statutory health insurance scheme or to stipulate a private health insurance. Which option is more suitable for you depends largely on your age, income, and whether a partner or family members will accompany you. Therefore, it is important to gather information in advance. Please note that voluntary membership in the statutory health insurance requires you to pay the entire fee yourself, as there is no employer contribution. You must have health insurance from the start of your stay, so prepare for this early!

If you choose private health insurance, you can take it out either in Germany or in your home country. It is essential that your policy provides the same level of coverage as required by German statutory health insurance. If proving this equivalence is difficult, it is recommended to choose the private health insurance directly in Germany. The Welcome Centre can provide a list of substitutive private health insurance companies, recognised by the local Office for Migration and Integration.

Applicants with serious or chronic illnesses should be aware that, sadly, private insurers may not accept applications. Similarly, insurance applications during pregnancy are often rejected.

IMPORTANT: Once you have joined a private health insurance plan, you cannot switch to statutory health insurance later — unless you start your first employment in Germany.



Uni MS - Pixabay



LIST OF STATUTORY HEALTH INSURANCE- PROVIDERS



PRIVATE HEALTH INSURANCE COMPANIES

Arrival and Transport in Münster

Whether you are traveling by plane, train, or car, Münster is well connected to Germany's transportation network.

For the following options, there are often apps available that can help you plan your journey efficiently.

By Plane

The nearest airport is Münster/Osnabrück Airport (FMO), located about 20 km north of Münster. Buses run hourly during the day from there to Münster's main train station ("Münster Hauptbahnhof").

However, the airports in Düsseldorf and Cologne are internationally better connected and also nearby. From there you can easily take a train from there to Münster.

Long-distance Buses

Whether you are coming from a neighboring country or an airport, long-distance buses often offer an affordable alternative for some travelers. You can find various offers from private bus companies online.

By Train

Airports around Münster are well connected to the national railway network operated by Deutsche Bahn and regional providers such as National Express. We recommend using the DB app to check current prices, schedules, and to book tickets, also in English.

Those who travel by train more frequently can benefit from purchasing the 'BahnCard,' which offers discounts of 25–50% on ticket prices for a fixed yearly fee.

In the City of Münster

Münster is known as a very bicycle-friendly city.

Therefore, the bicycle is the most popular means of transport. If you don't want to buy a bike right away, you can also rent one from various providers at a reasonable price.

By Bus

Most buses depart from the main train station. You can find timetables and connections from A to B either online or in the Stadtwerke Münster app. Tickets can be purchased at some bus stops from ticket machines or directly from the driver on the bus.

If you have any questions about your stay in Münster, please feel free to contact the **Welcome Centre team** at the International Office.



Uni MS – Emka Photography



[DeutscheBahn](#)



[Airport Münster/Osnabrück](#)



[BUS PLAN MÜNSTER \(DE\)](#)

Bureaucratic procedures upon arrival – Address Registration and Residence

I. Registration Requirements

In Germany, there is a registration requirement for all individuals who move into an apartment, as well as for all visitors who stay in Germany for more than three months. Within two weeks of moving in, you must register yourself and any family members who arrived with you at the Citizens' Office (*Bürgeramt*) in your district. It is easiest to book an appointment for the registration online in advance. For registration, you will need:

- Your personal ID or passport
- Proof of residence (*Wohnungsgeberbescheinigung*) from your landlord or the person with whom you are staying.
- The filled-in form "Anmeldung bei der Meldebehörde" (*Registration at the registration office*)

After registering, you will receive the registration certificate from the citizens' office (*Bürgeramt*), which is, for example, necessary for opening a bank account. In the same office, you can also apply for a police clearance certificate (required for employment in the public sector) or a resident parking permit for your car. **Important:** you will also receive your tax identification number by mail after registration.

If you change apartments during your stay in Germany, you must re-register your new address at the local *Bürgeramt* (residents' registration office) responsible for your new place of residence. This procedure is called *Ummeldung*. When you leave Germany at the end of your research stay, you must also cancel your registration. The de-registration certificate (*Abmeldebescheinigung*) is required, among other things, to cancel contracts before their expiration date.

II. Residence Permit

Non-EU citizens who wish to stay in Germany for more than 90 days must apply for a residence permit at the Office for Migration and Integration at least three months before their entry visa expires.

Citizens of countries, who can who enter Germany without a visa (e.g. Australia, Israel, Japan, Canada, New Zealand, the Republic of Korea, and the USA) and plan to stay longer should apply for a residence permit immediately after arrival.

In general, you will need to present the following documents at the Office for Migration and Integration:

- Passport
- Application form for a residence permit
- Proof of health insurance
- Employment contract, job offer, or proof of scholarship/funding



Uni MS – Emka Photography



[WOHNUNGSGEBERBESCHEINIGUNG \(GER\)](#)



[APPLICATION FORM \(RESIDENCE PERMIT\)](#)



[OFFICE FOR MIGRATION AND INTEGRATION](#)

- An invitation from the hosting institute indicating the research activity and duration of stay
- A hosting agreement and/or statement of employment (see chapter “Visa and entry” section III.)
- Biometric passport photo
- Registration certificate (*Meldebescheinigung*)
- Possible fee:
 - Up to 1 year: 100 €
 - more than 1 year: 110€

1. Residence permits with limited duration

Similar to the visa categories, depending on the purpose of stay, there are different types of residence permits, each associated with different rights (e.g. the right to take up employment). In the field of research, the following residence permits are most commonly used:

- Residence for studying, language courses, or doctoral studies (§16b)
- Skilled professional (§18b)
- Residence for research (§18d)
- EU Blue Card (§18g)

On the website of the Office for Migration and Integration of the City of Münster, you can find many more helpful resources on residence permits in 11 languages — including checklists of the required documents for each type of residence permit and the option to submit an application online.

2. Temporary permit (*Fiktionsbescheinigung*)

The issuance of the electronic residence permit usually takes 6–8 weeks. If your visa or residence permit expires during this period, you will need a temporary residence certificate (*Fiktionsbescheinigung*). This provisional permit is generally valid for three months.

There are three types of *Fiktionsbescheinigung*:

- *Duldungsfiktion* (toleration permit)
- *Erlaubnisfiktion* (permission permit)
- *Fortbestandsfiktion* (continuation permit)

If you have submitted your application for an extension on time and are waiting for the issuance of a new residence permit, you will generally receive a continuation permit (*Fortbestandsfiktion*, §81.4). This means that your current residence permit remains valid until the new document is issued. With this temporary certificate, travel is generally possible, and re-entry to Germany is allowed at any time. However, you should check with the foreign mission (embassy/consulate) of the country you plan to visit to ensure that entry and exit will be permitted without issues while you are in possession of a *Fiktionsbescheinigung*.



Uni MS – Emka Photography

3. Settlement Permit

The settlement permit (*Niederlassungserlaubnis*) is an unlimited residence permit that allows you to work in Germany. Depending on your previous type of residence permit and eventually obtained higher education degrees in Germany, it can be applied for earliest after 21 months and latest 60 months after your arrival. Key criteria include contributions to the pension system, German language skills, the integration into the German society and a positive long-term outlook for securing your livelihood. If you are considering applying, you are welcome to seek advice in advance from the Welcome Centre. Please note that, like any other residence permit, the permanent residence permit generally expires if you leave Germany for more than six months.



INTEGRATION TOOLS

III. Work Permit, Employment Contract, Appointment, and Salary

Citizens of the European Union, the European Economic Area, and Switzerland enjoy freedom of movement for workers and do not need approval to take up employment.

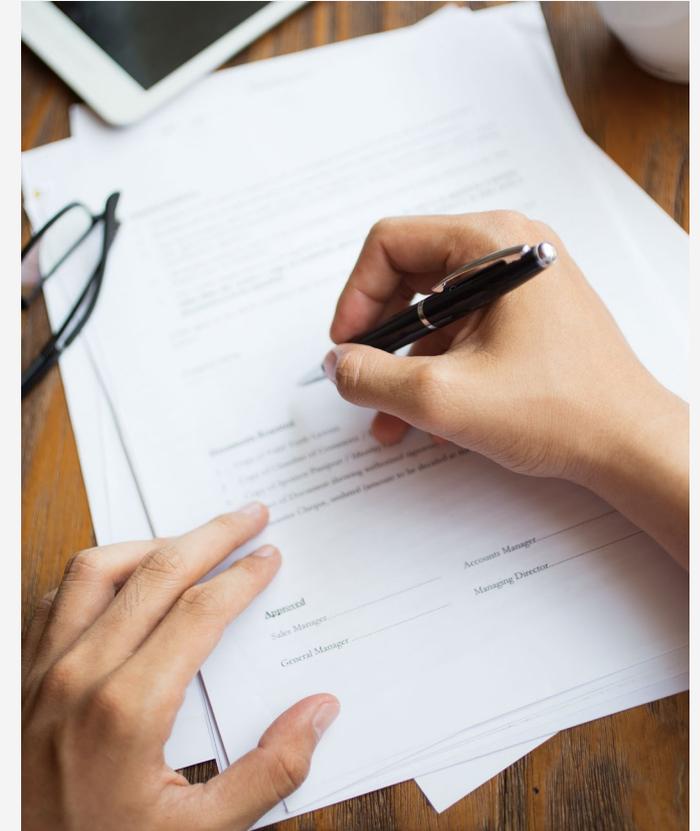
Citizens of other countries, who wish to work in Germany generally require a residence permit that allows them to engage in gainful employment. Therefore, for third-country nationals (non-EU citizens) it is usually necessary to apply in advance for a visa. Applying for a work-permit after arrival at the local immigration office (in Münster, at the Office for Migration and Integration) is generally not possible.

The working conditions for research staff are specified in an employment contract with the University of Münster. The salary is based on the appropriate pay group regulated in the collective agreement for public service, which is dependent on the region of work of Germany, in our case North Rhine-Westphalia.

By contrast, tenured professors and civil servant researchers are appointed rather than employed, so they receive a certificate of appointment instead of an employment contract. Their salary is determined according to the Federal Salary Act (*Bundesbesoldungsgesetz*) and the relevant state regulations. Non-EU citizens in these positions must also apply for a different category of residence permit. The Welcome Centre is happy to assist them.

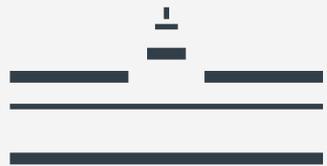


PUBLIC SERVICE SALARY CALCULATOR (GER)



Uni MS - Freepik

YOU CAN FIND INFORMATION ON DEPARTURE PROCEDURES IN OUR OFFBOARDING HANDBOOK MODULE



Universität
Münster

Impressum

Publisher:
Welcome Centre Team
Dept. Researchers and Staff in International Office
University of Münster
welcome.centre@uni-Münster.de

Maria Homeyer, Head of Department
Hüfferstr. 61
48149 Münster, Germany

Version: Sept 2024

Disclaimer:
These guidelines were created to the best of our knowledge and the content has been carefully reviewed. They do not claim to be complete, up to date or accurate. Despite a close review of the content, we do not assume any liability for the content of external links. The operators of linked pages are exclusively responsible for the content on such pages. We do not assume any liability for the accuracy of the legal information and legal terms, nor for their translation.