

Preparing for arrival in Berlin



**berlin graduate school
muslim cultures and societies**

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Applying for a study visa

In general, international students of non-EU/EEA countries (third-country nationals) who intend to study for more than three months need a visa to enter Germany. Make sure you apply for the right visa. If you are coming with family members who have a different nationality they may need a visa. Review the following information carefully and if you need a visa, apply for it well in advance before leaving for Germany.

Nationals of the EU and the EEA countries and Switzerland can enter Germany with a national identity card without a visa. If you intend to stay in Germany for more than three months you need to register with the local authorities ("Einwohnermeldeamt").

Nationals of Australia, Canada, Israel, Japan, New Zealand, the Republic Korea and the US can enter Germany without a visa. However, if you stay in Germany for more than three months you need to register with the local authorities ("Einwohnermeldeamt") within one week after arrival and then apply for a residence permit at the Foreigners' office.

Nationals of other non-EU countries

For information on entry requirements and residency contact the German mission of your home country.

Non-EU/EEA nationals planning to study in Germany for more than three months must apply for a National Visa for Germany (D Visa) in their own country or current country of residence. Please note that this also applies when staying in another European Union country. The visa must be issued before you can enter the country. Therefore you should apply for it in good time (at least 3 months prior to departure). National visas are usually issued for a three month period. Please note that the national visa only entitles you to stay in Germany. If you intend to travel to other Schengen States during the first three months of your stay (e.g. to attend a conference), you should state this in your visa application. In this case you may be issued a so-called hybrid visa (Category C+D Visa). Before your visa expires usually within three months after arrival you must apply for a residence permit at the Foreigners' office.

Important: If you intend to stay in Germany for more than three months do not apply for a "Tourist or Schengen Visa". This type of visa only entitles you to stay in Germany for a maximum of three months. It can neither be extended nor converted into a study visa and as a tourist you are not eligible to study in Germany. You would have to return to your own country at your own expense and apply for the right visa there. The same applies to family members.

More Information about the visa application process on the website of the German Federal Foreign Office.

Link: http://www.berlin.de/labo/auslaender/dienstleistungen/bes_staaten_en.html

Bring these important documents

Be sure to have these important documents with you when travelling to Germany. Before leaving get certified German or English translations and legalized copies of your certificates (birth, marriage, vaccination, and university degree).

Further Important Documents

- Passports or equivalent identity documents for yourself and any family members coming with you. Please note that these documents should be valid for your entire stay in Germany.
- Entry visa(s) for yourself and any family members coming with you.
- Proof of admission/ acceptance by your department/ Letter of invitation from the university or institute. This may also be your supervisor's letter of acceptance of your research project or the fellowship award letter.
- Several (biometric) passport photos
- Certified copies of your doctoral degree certificate (in German or English). For enrollment at the university you will need to present certified copies of your highschool graduation certificate and other university degree certificates, in German or English.
- Birth certificate(s) and certified translations in German or English for yourself and any family members coming with you.
- Proof of health insurance coverage in Germany.
- International vaccination certificate and certified translations in German or English.
- If applicable: Marriage certificate and certified translations in German or English.
- If applicable: International or national driver's license together with certified translation in German or English, and proof of car insurance ("Green Card").

Get admission from your department

Doctoral candidates admitted to a doctoral program need to apply for admission to the department their supervisor belongs to. To start their research project doctoral candidates must be accepted by their department ("Zulassung").

Applying for Admission to the Department

Doctoral candidates from abroad:

Please fill in the attached application form and send it back to us via scan (office@bgsmcs.fu-berlin.de). Please note that there is no need to send us the original certification of the examination in advance. Please make sure to have it with you when you will come to Germany. The Graduate School will process the application for you. The graduation office will then send the admission letter to your home address.

Doctoral candidates from Germany:

Please fill in the attached application form. The application is made to the respective department's graduation office. Candidates can also find the application form and a list of required documents on the website of the respective graduation office.

Links:

http://www.geschkult.fu-berlin.de/studium/beratung_einrichtungen/promotionsbuero/index.html

<http://www.polsoz.fu-berlin.de/studium/promotion/index.html>

<http://www.geo.fu-berlin.de/en/fb/einrichtungen/zentrale/prb/index.html>

http://fakultaeten.hu-berlin.de/philfak3/staff/2520?set_language=en&cl=en

Acceptance by the Department

A committee decides whether your qualifications suffice for admission as a doctoral candidate. The department's committee usually meets at regular intervals.

Enrollment as Doctoral Candidate

After you have been accepted by the department as a doctoral candidate, you must enroll as a doctoral student at Freie Universität. **The deadline for enrollment is 4 weeks after being accepted by the department.**

PhD candidates from Germany should ideally get enrolled before October. PhD candidates from abroad can handle the enrollment in October upon arrival in Berlin.

This is the form for enrollment:

http://www.fu-berlin.de/studium/studienorganisation/bewerbung/formulare/Antrag_Immatrikulation.pdf?1363098129 by the department.

As a doctoral student, you have to pay the compulsory administration fee. This fee covers the cost of student services and public transportation in Berlin. After enrollment, you will receive a student ID card which counts as a ticket (Semester-Ticket) on the public transportation system in the Berlin area (Zones A, B & C). Along with free transportation, enrollment brings certain advantages like reduced admission and prices at banks, cafeterias, and cinemas, for example.

Enrollment is valid for one term only. Each term you will have to re-register and pay the administration fee by a bank transfer order.

Enrollment by Mail

As a rule, the enrollment application must be submitted by regular mail.

The administration fee has to be transferred. Details can be found in the enrollment form. Doctoral students who are completing all the requirements for their doctorate abroad should please state this in writing and attach this letter to the documents sent by post.

Mandatory Documents:

Please find the list of mandatory documents at the website of the students records and registration office of Freie Universität Berlin.

Links:

<http://www.fu-berlin.de/en/studium/studienorganisation/immatrikulation/promotion.html>
<http://www.fu-berlin.de/en/studium/studienorganisation/immatrikulation/index.html>

Other Documents that May Be Required:

If you previously studied at a German university, include previous enrollment certificate with a listing of major courses and semesters attended (Immatrikulationsbescheinigung) and a leaving certificate from previous university (Exmatrikulationsbescheinigung).

Please note when filling out the form to enroll for the DRS doctoral program “Muslim Cultures and Societies” . IMPORTANT: Each DRS Doctoral Program is listed by a special code number, so make sure you get enrolled in your DRS Program. You will receive the letter of confirmation from the Graduate School. Please note: When filling out the application form use only an address in Berlin which is permanent. If you only have a temporary address please use the address of the Graduate School.

Enrollment is carried out by the central student administration office (Studierenden Verwaltung) of Freie Universität Berlin.

Address: Iltisstr. 1, 14195 Berlin

Subway line U3 Station Dahlem-Dorf

Phone: +49 (0)30 / 838-700 00 (Information Service)

Email: info-service@fu-berlin.de

Office Hours: Mon. and Tue. 09:00 a.m. – 3 p.m., Thu. 09:00 a.m. – 05:00 p.m.

Plan your travel and health insurance

Make sure to have health insurance for yourself and all accompanying family members. Get a medical and dental check-up and know your medications and prescriptions. Take out travel insurance and upon arrival in Berlin take out German health insurance. EU-researchers are covered by EU regulations and are issued a European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) by their home insurance company.

For long-term stays (longer than three months) health insurance is mandatory. The insurance must cover all costs for medical treatment in the event of serious illness and accidents in Germany.

Please note that proof of sufficient health insurance coverage is necessary when applying for a visa and a residence permit.

Health insurance from the first day in Germany

Health insurance coverage needs to be valid for you and for all family members from the very first day in Germany. Preparing for your stay, check first whether your insurance at home covers medical and hospital expenses incurred during your stay in Germany. The insurance company must confirm in writing that insurance coverage is valid in Germany. Usually, this is only the case if a Social Security Agreement ("Sozialversicherungsabkommen") between Germany and your home country has been concluded (information can be obtained from the authorities and health insurance companies in your own country). When not covered by your home insurance, you must take out health insurance in Germany.

Pre-insurance illnesses

In general, illnesses incurred in advance are not covered by insurance in Germany and patients have to pay the expenses themselves. Preparing for your stay in Germany make sure to take all necessary medication with you. Especially private health insurance companies would not normally cover pregnancy commencing during a research stay. To have these expenses reimbursed by the insurance provider in Germany, the relevant benefits must be laid down in advance in a supplementary contract. Furthermore, health insurance companies will not necessarily refund costs for medical check-ups.

Exceptions

EU and EFTA Nationals: The European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) has been introduced in all EU member and EFTA states (Norway, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Switzerland). The EU stipulations only apply to those covered by statutory health insurance. Before coming to Germany, make sure to check back with your insurance provider.

Private Insurance: If you are privately insured in your home country, this might be recognized in Germany. You need to present a letter stating that you are exempted from compulsory statutory health insurance as well as a confirmation of your insurance coverage.

Public and private health insurance

It is mandatory to have health insurance (Krankenversicherung) in Germany, either within the statutory (public) system or with a private insurance company.

The major difference between the two systems is that if you are insured by the public health system you will not be billed for a visit to the doctor, hospital, or for routine dental . For certain medical treatments (massages, physiotherapy, some dental treatments, and for medication) you have to pay 10% or a part of the costs. Within the private insurance system, you will have to pay up front for all medical services and request reimbursement (Rückerstattung) from your insurance provider. Your insurance company will issue you a health insurance card, which you have to take with you whenever you see a doctor or go into hospital. In addition to health coverage, the health insurance providers take care of registration for unemployment and pension insurance.

Health insurance for all family members

You must make sure to have health insurance for all family members. The statutory (public) health insurance premium covers you and all your non-working dependents, whereas the private medical insurance premium is generally paid for each person individually. For families it is advisable to take out statutory (public) health insurance. If you are covered through a German statutory (public) health insurance company and your partner does not generate an income above 360 € per month, he/she can also be covered by your health insurance policy. If his/her income is above 360 € per month he/she will have to take out health insurance himself/herself. Children are generally covered by the health insurance of one of the parents.

Insurance providers

Statutory (public) health insurance providers

In Germany the statutory health insurance system is administered by various insurance companies, e.g. Techniker Krankenkasse, AOK, and many more. All basic medical treatments are covered. 95% of the benefits offered by public health insurance providers are the same, the remaining 5% are additional benefits such as medical check-ups, etc. The rate for statutory (public) health insurance is 15.5% of the monthly income (eg.scholarship). Additionally, another 2.2% must be paid for Compulsory Long Term Care Insurance (gesetzliche Pflegeversicherung).

Links: <http://www.tk.de/tk/tk/english/145048>

Private<http://www.aok-on.de/studierendete> health insurance providers

Usually, private health insurance offers a wider range of benefits than the statutory (public) health insurance. Depending on the rate chosen, they may offer the option such as private hospitals, alternative therapies like acupuncture and herbal treatments, eye glasses and contact lenses.

The rate is based on your risk profile, not on your income. Older people or women generally pay higher rates than young men. Both the premium charged and the benefits provided by private health insurance companies may vary considerably, so that what initially appears to be the cheaper option is not always the best choice.

Insurance packages

Some private insurance companies like DSW Victoria, EduCare24, ISHCP-Company S.A. and Mawista offer special insurance packages for international researchers combining health insurance together with travel and liability insurance.

Links: <http://www.fu-berlin.de/en/studium/studienorganisation/immatrikulation/index.html>
<http://www.fu-berlin.de/en/studium/studienorganisation/immatrikulation/index.html>
http://www.ishcp.de/englisch/1_ueberuns.html
<http://www.mawista.com/en/>

<http://www.howtogermany.com/pages/healthinsurance2.html>

Private Liability Insurance (Private Haftpflicht-Versicherung)

In addition to the health insurance, which is mandatory, we recommend a private liability insurance. In case you damage something which you do not own (e.g. you cause an accident as a pedestrian or riding a bike), you will normally be obliged to bear the damage. Depending on the incident, this may easily amount to some thousand Euros. The liability insurance will cover all kinds of damages – provided that they were not caused on purpose. All major insurance companies offer this insurance. The fee ranges between € 40 and € 90 a year, depending on the coverage type and the insurance company.

Finding Accommodation

Finding short- term accommodation

In case you arrive in Berlin without having been able to find an apartment in advance, you should at least have made arrangements in short-term accommodations in a hostel or hotel.

Here is a link with a list with some hotels and hostels located near Freie Universität Berlin:

http://www.fu-berlin.de/en/sites/inu/early-career/media/Short-term_Accommodation_FUB.pdf?1334666116

<http://www.fu-berlin.de/en/sites/unterbringung/optionen/individuell/Hostel/index.html>

Finding the right place to live

Berlin is a very large city with twelve districts. When looking for a place to stay, check the district city map for orientation.

Freie Universität Berlin is located in Dahlem, in the southwestern district of Zehlendorf-Steglitz, quite a prestigious residential area with rooms and flats being normally more expensive than in some inner-city districts.

Rental fees in Berlin have recently been going up but are still quite reasonable. For a small one-room flat rental fees usually start around 350 euros per month; shared apartments tend to be less expensive. On signing the lease your landlord will probably expect a deposit of three months, reimbursed with interest at the end of tenancy as long as nothing has been damaged. Sometimes a commission or a compensation for furniture is requested; therefore, make sure that you bring enough money with you.

Link: <http://berlin.barwick.de/static/images/3/31/2007/berlin-districts.png>

Finding an apartment

If you are looking for a furnished or non-furnished apartment check out the following links. Some information is only in German so the glossary of terms in this section should be helpful. You can also place an ad yourself or check the ads in the weekend editions of daily newspapers or on bulletin boards.

Furnished flats

Arwobau GmbH

http://www.arwobau.com/en/Apartments/View_and_search/

House of Nations

<http://house-of-nations.de/cms/en/home.html>

Paul-Fleischmann-Haus

http://www.paul-fleischmann-haus.de/content/index_ger.html

Wohnheim Reichsstraße GmbH (rooms in four-room shared apartments)
<http://www.wohnheim-reichsstr.de/>

Unfurnished flats and rooms

Short-Term Rent (sublets)
<http://www.zwischenmiete.de/zwischenmiete,Berlin.htm>

Home Company (English)
<http://berlin.homecompany.de/en/search-for-accommodation>

ImmobilienScout24
<http://www.immobilienscout24.de/de/finden/wohnen/index.jsp;jsessionid=F1661A1E938F3EC9932080A39E2080A1.worker1>

Immobilio
http://www.immobilo.de/mieten/wohnung/berlin-charlottenburg?price_to=550

Immonet
<http://www.immonet.de/berlin/studentenwohnung.html>

Immowelt
<http://www.immowelt.de/>

Apartment Sharing (Wohngemeinschaft, WG)

In Berlin, it is very common to share apartments as it is usually the least expensive option and the best way to meet people. Here are some online platforms where shared apartments are offered:

WG-Gesucht (English)
<http://www.wg-gesucht.de/>

WG-Börse (only in German)
<http://www.die-wg-boerse.de/>

WG-Gesucht (English)
<http://www.wg-gesucht.de/en/>

Studentenwohnungsmarkt (only in German)
<http://www.studentenwohnungsmarkt.de/>

Advertisements in Newspapers

Check the weekend property sections of the daily newspapers and property websites (eg. Der Tagesspiegel, Berliner Zeitung, Berliner Morgenpost). Read more here:

http://www.arbeitsagentur.de/nn_581112/Navigation/Dienststellen/besondere-Dst/ZAV/arbeiten-in-deutschland/EN/leben-EN/wohnungssuche-EN/wohnungssuche-nav.html

Announcements on Bulletin Boards

Bulletin boards displaying private apartment offers can be found in the main buildings of the university, e.g. faculty buildings, library, and dining halls. Mostly young people offer their furnished apartments or their rooms in shared apartments for a limited time span (called "Zwischenmiete").

Tenancy Contract

By signing a tenancy agreement, you gain some rights, but also have special responsibilities. For example:

- Payment of monthly rent (including costs for utilities)
- Period of notice when moving out (generally 3 months)
- Payment of certain repairs
- Payment of additional charges (heating, water, garbage disposal, caretaker, lift, cleaning, etc.)
- Renovation
- Refundable security deposit (can amount to up to 2 or 3 monthly rental fees)
- Renovation – document any problems upon moving in or you will be held responsible for damage upon moving out.

The monthly payment is due at the beginning of each month and consists of two parts, the rent (Kaltmiete) and the utilities (Nebenkosten). Whereas the Kaltmiete is generally fixed for the duration of the lease, utilities can vary from year to year. Nebenkosten usually include: water, heating, garbage collection, the landlord's share in property tax, insurance for the land property, chimney cleaning, etc. Be aware that there are additional payments for electricity, water, heat, etc. depending on the amount used.

Deposit and Furniture

As a security for any damage or unpaid rent, the landlord will ask for a refundable security deposit (Kautiön) amounting to two or three months' rent. After the lease ends and the property has been handed back without damages according to the protocol signed together with the lease, the deposit plus the legal interest rate for the period of the lease must be paid back.

It is common in Germany to have unfurnished flats, which also means that, especially in larger flats, you might have no kitchen equipment like a stove or a sink. If there is furniture, this will be described in the advertisement as (teil-)möbliert, i.e. (partly) furnished.

If a phone number is indicated, you can call the landlord or real estate agent directly. In case of language difficulties ask a friend or colleague or the staff at DRS to help you arrange a viewing appointment.

Make sure that you have completely understood the tenancy agreement before you sign it. Ask a German colleague or friend to read the contract.

Glossary of terms

Some of the most frequent abbreviations used in the property market:

German	English
2 Zi.Whg. (2-Zimmerwohnung)	two-room apartment
2 ZKB (2 Zimmer, Küche, Bad)	two-room apartment with kitchen and bathroom
2 ZKBB (2 Zimmer, Küche, Bad, Balk)	two-room apartment, kitchen, bathroom, balcony
Abstand	payment for an existing kitchen of the previous tenant
Blk (Balkon)	balcony
EBK (Einbauküche)	built-in kitchen
EG (Erdgeschoss)	ground floor
GEH (Gasetagenheizung)	heating by gas, mostly additional costs
MM (Monatsmiete)	monthly rent
K (Kaution)	refundable security deposit
kalt	excluding additional charges
KM or k (Kaltmiete)	rent excluding additional charges
NR (Nichtraucher)	non-smoking
OH (Ofenheizung)	heating by oven (coal), i.e. no central heating
Prov. (Provision)	commission paid to the real estate agent, must not exceed amount of 2 monthly rents plus tax (19%)
warm	including additional costs, especially heating
WM or w (Warmmiete)	all-inclusive rent
WG (Wohngemeinschaft)	shared apartment
ZH (Zentralheizung)	central heating
zzgl. NK (zuzüglich Nebenkosten)	plus additional costs (utilities, e.g. electricity, heating, etc.)

Money issues

Make sure you have enough money available (ca. 1000 EUR) during your first weeks in Berlin to cover all out of pocket expenses including start-up costs (for transportation, rent, deposit on apartment, health insurance, utilities, etc.) and the semester fee. These expenses are normally due prior to the first disbursement of funding support by a scholarship or fellowship.

Proof of finances

If you intend to enter Germany for a longer stay, be prepared to provide evidence that you have at least € 700 per month per person. This may be a stipend, a government grant, an official guarantee, or a bank account. Proof of financial means is required when extending your visa or opening a local bank account.

Take a German language course

Although English is perceived as the language of science even in Germany, the importance of German cannot be underestimated when living in Germany. If you take a German course before leaving for Germany, you will find it easier to transition to the new cultural and social environment. More information here.

It is certainly worthwhile to take an intensive language course at the beginning of your stay. The University's Language Center (Sprachenzentrum) offers German courses for proficiency levels beginning with A2.

German for Beginners

German for beginners for language proficiency levels A0 – A1

If you are pursuing your doctorate in one of the doctoral programs of Dahlem Research School (DRS) and want to learn German or to continue to work on your German skills, these are your options:

You may be able to join one of the German classes for beginners provided by the International Office. About two weeks before the term starts the International Office informs all international doctoral candidates who have enrolled at Freie Universität about their German courses and the registration procedure. Further information: Regina Rahm, Garystr. 45 Email: bastip@zedat.fu-berlin.de. Please note that if you have not finalized your enrollment yet, you may contact the Graduate School to process your application.

A number of adult education institutions in Berlin provide language courses. Besides numerous private language schools we recommend the Community Education Centre ("Volkshochschule") which offers German courses for all language levels and has branches in every district in Berlin. You can also sign up for the "Integration courses" which are available to newcomers in all branches so you may choose the one closest to your living quarters. Applicants take a short test and are then assigned to the right level.

- Integration Courses
<http://www.berlin.de/vhs/kurse/deutsch/integrationen.html>

- Further Education Institutions
A number of adult education institutions as well as private language schools in Berlin offer language courses as well as a wide range of other courses. The Community Education Centers ("Volkshochschule") provide courses for great value for money. There are branches in every district in Berlin. German for newcomers sponsored by the German government is provided through "Integration courses" available at all branches, so you may choose the closest one to your living quarters. Applicants take a short test to determine which course is right for you.

Links: <http://www.dw.de/learn-german/german-courses/s-2547>
<https://www.daad.de/deutschland/in-deutschland/studium/en/9155-improving-your-german/>

- German language proficiency level self-assessment grid
<http://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/en/resources/european-language-levels-cefr>

Improving Your German at the University's Language Center

The University's Language Center (Sprachenzentrum) provides German classes for language proficiency levels starting at the A2 level. You are required to register and take the OnDaF online placement test in order to determine which course level from A2 to C1 is right for you. Further information:

What is the OnDaF placement test?

OnDaF is the online placement test for German as a foreign language. You register online for the test, book a test date online, take the test at the Language Center at the Freie Universität Berlin under the supervision of the examination staff, and get the results directly after the test. The test takes about 60 minutes including registration and login. Detailed information at www.ondaf.de

Register for a Language Tandem

Tandem stands for enjoyable language learning and cultural exchange. A language tandem is made up of two partners who speak different native languages and learn from each other. To register for a language tandem you can sign up either at the Language Center (Sprachenzentrum) by email tandem@zedat.fu-berlin.de or at the International Club by email isap@internationalerclub.de.