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Opening a Bank Account — Girokonto for Foreigners

How to open a German bank account as a foreigner: basic account rights, required documents, online banks.

Deutsche Begriffe: Girokonto | Basiskonto | IBAN | SCHUFA | Sparkasse | Volksbank | Zahlungskontengesetz | VideoIdent | PostIdent | Girocard | BaFin | Anmeldung | Steuer-ID

Opening a Bank Account for Foreigners

Without a German **Girokonto** you can hardly get anything done: salary, rent, Rundfunkbeitrag, as well as Kindergeld or Wohngeld are paid into an account. This article covers the **opening process**; how to **choose** an account and compare fees — see Girokonto.

Basic Account — Your Right (§31 ZKG)

Since 2016, **everyone with legal residence** has the right to a **basic account (Basiskonto)** — Zahlungskontengesetz. A bank cannot reject you without good reason. Basiskonto provides transfers, Girocard, online banking and standing orders, but **no overdraft**.

Required Documents

- Valid ID (passport / Aufenthaltstitel / Duldung / arrival certificate)
- Registration certificate — first do registration (Anmeldung)
- Steuer-ID (required at some banks)

How Does Identification Work?

• **VideoIdent** — video call via smartphone with document (online banks, in minutes)

• **PostIdent** — verification at the post office with form (traditional banks)

The account is usually active in 1–3 days, the card arrives by mail in 5–7 days.

SCHUFA — As a Newcomer You Have No Entry

Schufa is a credit history registry. As a new resident **you have no entry** — for Basiskonto this doesn't matter, but online banks can be picky. If they refuse, go to Sparkasse/Volksbank and demand Basiskonto.

What to Do When a Bank Refuses

1. Submit a **written request for Basiskonto**

2. The bank must process it within the statutory period

3. If wrongfully refused, file a complaint with **BaFin** (financial regulator)

Tips

• Open an account **as soon as possible** after registration — without an IBAN you won't get work or benefits

• Traditional banks are often more helpful with language barriers

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