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# Registering a Business (Gewerbeanmeldung) in Germany — Step by Step

How to register a Gewerbeanmeldung in Germany: process, costs, required documents, and what to do after registration.

**Deutsche Begriffe:** Gewerbeanmeldung | Gewerbeamt | Gewerbeschein | Gewerbe | Handelsregister | IHK

## What is a Gewerbe?

A **Gewerbe** is any **self-employed, permitted, permanent activity** with the intention to **generate profit** — as long as it is not classified as a **free profession** (§ 1 GewO).

## Gewerbe vs. Freelancers

	Business Owner (Gewerbetreibend)	Freelancer (Freiberuflich)
<b>Examples</b>	Craftspeople, traders, restaurateurs, online shops, IT service providers	Doctor, lawyer, translator, journalist, artist, architect
<b>Gewerbeamt</b>	Registration required	Not required
<b>IHK Membership</b>	Mandatory	Not required
<b>Trade Tax</b>	Yes (from €24,500 profit)	No
<b>Commercial Register</b>	For merchants/GmbH	No
<b>Tax Office</b>	Notification required	Notification required

**Unsure?** The tax office decides whether your activity is commercial or freelance. In case of doubt: consult a tax advisor.

# Step by Step: Business Registration

## Step 1 — Check Prerequisites

- **Legal age** (18 years)
- **Residence permit** allowing self-employment (for non-EU citizens)
- **Qualifications if required** — some trades require a **master craftsman certificate** (e.g., electrician, plumber, baker) or a **professional certification exam** (e.g., insurance broker)
- **Permits if required** — some businesses need official **authorization** (e.g., restaurant license, broker license)

## Step 2 — Find the Gewerbeamt

Business registration takes place at the **Gewerbeamt** (also: Ordnungsamt, Bürgeramt) of your city or municipality:

- **Online** — available in many cities (e.g., Berlin, Hamburg, Munich)
- **In person** — by appointment at the Bürgeramt/Gewerbeamt
- **By mail** — download form, fill out, send with documents

## Step 3 — Prepare Required Documents

Document	For whom?
<b>ID card / Passport</b>	Everyone
<b>Residence permit</b> with permission for self-employment	Non-EU citizens
<b>Business registration form</b> (GewA 1)	Everyone
<b>Master craftsman certificate</b>	Craftspeople (regulated trades)
<b>Restaurant permit</b>	Restaurateurs
<b>Police clearance certificate</b>	For certain trades (e.g., security, brokerage)
<b>Commercial register extract</b>	For registered merchants / GmbH
<b>Articles of partnership</b>	For GbR, OHG, GmbH

## Step 4 — Fill Out the Form

The **GewA 1** form is standardized and asks for:

- **Personal data** (name, address, date of birth, nationality)

- **Business data** (business name, address, legal form)
- **Activity description** — detailed (e.g., "Retail trade in electronic products and online sales")
- **Start date** of activity

**Tip:** Describe your activity **as broadly as possible** — so you won't need to re-register when expanding.

## Step 5 — Submit Registration and Pay Fee

City	Fee
<b>Berlin</b>	€26
<b>Hamburg</b>	€20
<b>Munich</b>	€40
<b>Cologne</b>	€26
<b>Frankfurt</b>	€25
<b>Düsseldorf</b>	€26

**Average:** €15-60 (one-time)

## Step 6 — Receive Your Gewerbeschein

You will receive your **Gewerbeschein** (business registration certificate) — usually immediately upon in-person submission or within 1-2 weeks by mail.

## What Happens After Registration?

### Automatic Information Chain

The Gewerbeamt automatically informs **the following authorities:**

- 1. Tax Office** — you receive the "Questionnaire for Tax Registration" (must be completed within 4 weeks, online via ELSTER)
- 2. IHK** (Chamber of Commerce and Industry) — mandatory membership, fees depend on revenue (from approx. €0 for small businesses to several hundred euros)
- 3. Craft Chamber** (Handwerkskammer) — for craft trades
- 4. Occupational Association** (Berufsgenossenschaft) — statutory accident insurance (mandatory!)

## 5. Statistical State Bureau

### What You Must Do Yourself

- [ ] Set up an **ELSTER account** (elster.de) — for all tax matters
- [ ] Obtain your **tax number** (from tax office, approx. 2-6 weeks)
- [ ] Open a **business account** (recommended, not mandatory)
- [ ] Set up **bookkeeping** (software or tax advisor)
- [ ] Review **insurance** — liability insurance, possibly professional liability
- [ ] **Health insurance** — as self-employed, you are responsible (statutory or private)
- [ ] **Pension insurance** — mandatory for certain professions, otherwise voluntary

## Residence Permit and Business Registration

### For EU Citizens

- **No restrictions** — full freedom of trade
- Only **registration** with the immigration authority (freedom of movement certificate)

### For Non-EU Citizens

Your residence permit must **allow self-employment**:

- **Niederlassungserlaubnis** — unlimited freedom of trade
- **Aufenthaltserlaubnis zur selbstständigen Tätigkeit** (§ 21 AufenthG) — for business founders
- **Blue Card EU** — allows **only** the employment named in the title, not self-employment
- **Aufenthaltserlaubnis zur Beschäftigung** (§ 18 AufenthG) — only secondary employment possible (with permission)

**Important:** Clarify **before** registration with the immigration authority whether your permit allows business activities!

## Small Business vs. Merchant

### Small Business (Einzelunternehmen)

- **No commercial register requirement** (with revenue under approx. €800,000 and profit under €80,000)

- **Simple accounting** (EÜR — income-surplus statement)
- **No minimum capital**
- **Full personal liability** — you are liable with your private assets!

#### Registered Merchant (e.K.)

- Commercial register entry (voluntary or mandatory above certain size)
- **Double-entry bookkeeping** required
- Business name with "e.K." addition

#### GmbH (Limited Liability Company)

- **Minimum capital:** €25,000 (€12,500 due at incorporation)
- **Limited liability** — only with company assets
- **Commercial register entry** and notary required
- Startup costs: approx. €500-1,500

#### UG (Entrepreneurial Company, "Mini-GmbH")

- **Minimum capital:** €1 (theoretically)
- Limited liability like GmbH
- Must **reserve** 25% of profits until €25,000 is reached

## Startup Costs Overview

Item	Cost
Business registration	€15-60
IHK fees (small business, year 1)	€0-30
IHK fees (from revenue)	€50-300/year
Occupational association	depends on industry, from €50/year
Tax advisor	€100-300/month
Business account	€0-15/month
Notary (GmbH/UG only)	€500-1,500
Commercial register entry (GmbH/UG)	€150

## Tips for Foreigners

- 1. Check your residence permit** — does it allow self-employment?
- 2. Use free IHK startup consultation** — for founders!
- 3. Startup grants** — ask at the employment agency (for unemployed)
- 4. Startup assistance** — 6 + 9 months of financial support
- 5. Hire a tax advisor** — especially in the first year

--- As of: March 2026. All information provided without guarantee.