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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)
Examples	Craftspeople, traders, restaurateurs, online shops, IT service providers	Doctor, lawyer, translator, journalist, artist, architect
Gewerbeamt	Registration required	Not required
IHK Membership	Mandatory	Not required
Trade Tax	Yes (from €24,500 profit)	No
Commercial Register	For merchants/GmbH	No
Tax Office	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?
ID card / Passport	Everyone
Residence permit with permission for self-employment	Non-EU citizens
Business registration form (GewA 1)	Everyone
Master craftsman certificate	Craftspeople (regulated trades)
Restaurant permit	Restaurateurs
Police clearance certificate	For certain trades (e.g., security, brokerage)
Commercial register extract	For registered merchants / GmbH
Articles of partnership	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
Berlin	€26
Hamburg	€20
Munich	€40
Cologne	€26
Frankfurt	€25
Düsseldorf	€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

Item	Cost
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

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