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Kindergarten and Kita Costs — What You Pay and How to Save

How much childcare in Germany costs, what subsidies are available, and which states offer free kindergarten.

Deutsche Begriffe: Kindergarten | Kita | Kindertagesstätte | Kitabeiträge | Kita-Gutschein | Betreuungskosten

How much does Kita cost in Germany?

Costs for a **Kindertagesstätte (Kita)** or **Kindergarten** vary **enormously** — from free to over €800/month, depending on the state, city, income, and hours of care.

Childcare in Germany is **not a unified system** — each state and municipality has its own rules for fees.

Free Kindergarten — where?

Some states have **completely or partially abolished** Kita fees:

State	Regulation
Berlin	Completely free (since 2018)
Hamburg	Basic care (5h) free
Mecklenburg-Vorpommern	Completely free (since 2020)
Lower Saxony	Kindergarten (3-6 years) free
Rhineland-Palatinate	Free from age 2
Hesse	6 hours/day free (from age 3)
Thuringia	Last Kita year free
Bremen	Basic care free

State	Regulation
North Rhine-Westphalia	Last Kita year free
Bavaria	€100/month subsidy (from age 3)

Note: "Free" usually means only the **care fee**. **Meal costs** (€60–100/month) and **materials** (€5–20/month) are typically extra.

Typical Kita fees

Where fees apply, they are often based on **parental income**:

Example: Hamburg (beyond basic care)

Family income (gross)	Kita fee (8h/day)
Up to €25,000/year	€0
€30,000/year	approx. €60/month
€40,000/year	approx. €120/month
€60,000/year	approx. €250/month
€80,000/year	approx. €380/month

Example: Munich (municipal Kita)

Care hours	Fee/month
4-5 hours	€104
6-7 hours	€149
8-9 hours	€199
9+ hours	€249

Example: North Rhine-Westphalia (income-dependent, Cologne)

Family income (gross)	Kita fee (45h/week)
Up to €25,000/year	€0
€25,001–37,000	€58/month
€37,001–50,000	€112/month

Family income (gross)	Kita fee (45h/week)
€50,001–62,000	€188/month
€62,001–75,000	€254/month
Over €75,000	€390/month

Additional costs

Beyond the care fee, additional costs typically apply:

Item	Costs (approx.)
Meal fee (lunch + snacks)	€50–100/month
Beverage fee	€5–10/month
Craft materials / Activity fund	€5–20/month
Outings	€5–20 per outing
Diapers (if provided by Kita)	€10–20/month
Extra clothes, boots	€30–50 one-time

Typical total costs (with fee): €200–500/month (without: €60–120/month for food and materials only)

Subsidies and discounts

1. Economic Youth Aid (Youth Office)

If you **cannot afford** Kita fees, the **Youth Office** covers costs (§ 90 SGB VIII):

- Application at your local Youth Office
- Income verification
- With **unemployment benefits, housing allowance, child allowance** — usually full coverage
- **Meal costs** can also be covered

2. Sibling discount

In most cities, the **second child costs less** or **nothing**:

- **First child:** full fee

- **Second child:** 50% discount or free
- **Third child and more:** usually free

3. Education and Participation (BuT)

If you receive unemployment benefits, housing allowance, or child allowance:

- **Meals** at Kita: free
- **Outings:** covered

4. Tax deductibility

Kita costs are tax-deductible as **special expenses**:

- **Two-thirds** of costs, maximum **€4,000 per child per year**
- Applies to children under 14
- Report in your **tax return** (Child Schedule)

Kita Voucher — how does it work?

Some states (Hamburg, Berlin) have the **Kita Voucher**:

- 1.** You apply for the voucher at the **Youth Office**
- 2.** The voucher confirms your **care entitlement** (hours per day)
- 3.** You find a Kita and submit the voucher there
- 4.** The Kita bills **directly** with the city
- 5.** You pay only your **share** (parental fee + meals)

Benefits

- **Free Kita choice** — you are not bound to a specific Kita
- **Transparent costs** — your fee is stated on the voucher
- **Simple handling** — no private invoices, no prepayment

Legal entitlement to a Kita place

Since 2013, **every child from age 1** has a **legal entitlement** to a care place (§ 24 SGB VIII). In practice, however, there are not enough places — especially in major cities.

What to do if no place is available?

- 1. Register early** — some cities require registration **1 year** before the desired start
- 2. Contact multiple Kitas** — not just your preferred one
- 3. Childminder** — alternative to Kita, often more flexible and faster available
- 4. Contact Youth Office** — the office must help you find a place
- 5. Legal action possible** — if your entitlement is not fulfilled, you can sue for damages covering private care costs

Types of Kita

Type	Provider	Features
Municipal Kita	City/municipality	Often affordable, income-dependent
Church Kita	Protestant/Catholic Church	Religious education, often affordable
Non-profit operator	AWO, DRK, Caritas, Diakonie	Various concepts
Parent initiative	Parent association	Small groups, parental involvement required
Private Kita	Company	Often expensive (€300–800), more flexibility
Forest kindergarten	Various	Outdoors in all weather
Montessori Kita	Various	Free learning, independence

Tips for foreign parents

- 1. Know your rights** — from age 1, your child has a legal entitlement to care
 - 2. Register early** — in major cities at least 6–12 months ahead
 - 3. Check costs** — ask about discounts and sibling rates
 - 4. Ask the Youth Office** — if you have financial difficulties, the office covers costs
 - 5. Settling-in period** — for the first 2–4 weeks you accompany your child (Berlin model)
 - 6. Kita as language learning** — Kita is the best place for your child to learn German!
- As of: March 2026. All information without warranty.
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