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Pfändungsschutzkonto (P-Konto) — Protection Against Account Seizure

What a P-Konto is, how to set it up, and what amount is protected from seizure.

Deutsche Begriffe: Pfändungsschutzkonto | P-Konto | Pfändung | Grundfreibetrag | Kontopfändung | Pfändungsfreigrenze

What is a Pfändungsschutzkonto?

A **Pfändungsschutzkonto** (short: **P-Konto**) is a normal checking account with special protection: a certain amount in the account **cannot be seized**. This means that even if a creditor seizes your account, you retain a basic amount to live on.

Since July 1, 2010, every account holder in Germany has the **right** to convert their checking account into a P-Konto. The bank **cannot refuse this** (§ 850k ZPO).

Who needs a P-Konto?

A P-Konto is useful if:

- You have **debts** and face seizure
- You already have a **seized account**
- You are in **consumer insolvency**
- You receive **citizen's allowance, child benefits**, or other social benefits that should be protected

Important: You can have only **one P-Konto**. The bank reports the conversion to SCHUFA to prevent misuse.

What is the Grundfreibetrag?

The **Pfändungsfreigrenze** is adjusted annually. As of July 1, 2025:

Situation	Monthly Exemption
Individual (without maintenance obligations)	€1,491.75
+ 1 dependent	+ €561.43
+ 2 dependents	+ €883.10
+ 3 dependents	+ €1,204.77

Increasing the exemption

You can **increase** the Grundfreibetrag if you:

- Receive **child benefits**
- Pay **alimony** for children or a former partner
- Receive **social benefits** (e.g., citizen's allowance, housing allowance)
- Receive one-time payments (e.g., back payments)

You need a **certificate** — from your employer, job center, debt counseling, or a lawyer. Submit the certificate to your bank.

How do I set up a P-Konto?

Step 1 — Application at the bank

Go to your bank and request the **conversion** of your checking account to a P-Konto. You need:

- Your **ID card** or passport with residence permit
- If applicable, a **certificate** of maintenance obligations (for higher exemption)

Step 2 — Conversion

The bank must convert your account **within 4 business days**. Your account number remains the same; online banking and debit card continue to work.

Step 3 — Submit certificate

If you need a **higher exemption**, submit the corresponding certificate to your bank. This typically applies for one year.

What happens during account seizure?

If a creditor seizes your account and you **don't have a P-Konto**:

1. The bank **freezes the entire balance** for 4 weeks
2. You **cannot withdraw money**, make transfers, or execute direct debits
3. After 4 weeks, the balance is paid to the creditor

With a P-Konto:

1. The Grundfreibetrag remains **protected** and available
2. Only the amount **above the exemption** is paid to the creditor
3. You can continue to pay your rent, electricity, and groceries

Important rules

Carryover to the next month

If you **don't use the full exemption** in one month, the remainder is **carried over to the next month** — but only once. Unused balance from the previous month must be spent by the end of the following month.

No overdraft and no credit card

With a P-Konto, you typically do not receive:

- **Overdraft facility** (Dispo)
- **Credit card**
- Extended overdraft limit

These are not penalties — the bank protects itself because credit risk is higher in seizure situations.

Costs

The bank **cannot charge higher fees** for a P-Konto than for a regular checking account. If your bank does this, contact the **Verbraucherzentrale**.

Debt counseling — free help

If you have debts, you should seek **debt counseling**. It helps you:

- Get an **overview** of your debts
- Agree on a **payment plan** with creditors
- Set up the P-Konto optimally

- Potentially prepare for **consumer insolvency**

Where to find debt counseling?

- **Caritas** (caritas.de) — free debt counseling
- **Diakonie** (diakonie.de) — evangelical debt counseling
- **AWO** (awo.org) — Workers' Welfare Organization
- **Verbraucherzentrale** (verbraucherzentrale.de) — affordable advice
- **Municipal debt counseling** — via your city's town hall

Tip for foreigners: Many counseling centers offer advice in multiple languages. Ask specifically or bring an interpreter.

Avoid common mistakes

- **Don't wait too long** — Set up the P-Konto before seizure occurs
- **Keep certificate current** — Renew exemption certificate annually
- **Only one P-Konto** — Multiple P-Kontos are punishable (fraud)
- **Cash deposits** — Cash paid into a P-Konto is also protected

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