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Steuererklärung — Tax Return in Germany

Learn how to file your own tax return and get back an average of €1000.
Step-by-step guide through Elster.

Deutsche Begriffe: Steuererklärung | Lohnsteuerjahresausgleich | Elster | Finanzamt | Steuerberater

Steuererklärung — Tax Return

Why is it worth it?

The average tax refund in Germany is **€1051!** Many people get €500-3000 back.

Do you HAVE to file?

YES, if:

- You have tax classes III/IV (married couple)
- You have income from abroad
- You received Arbeitslosengeld/Kurzarbeitergeld
- You have additional income over €410/year

NO, but it's worth it:

- You work as an employee with class I, IV, II
- But you'll probably get a refund!

Deadline

- **July 31st** of the following year (for 2025 → by 31.07.2026)
- If you use a Steuerberater → **February 28th** of the year after next

How to do it yourself?

Option 1: Elster (free)

elster.de — official tax office portal

1. Create an account (you need your Steuer-ID)
2. Fill out the online form
3. Submit electronically

Drawbacks: Complicated interface, no helpful hints

Option 2: Applications (€20-40)

- **WISO Steuer** — most popular
- **Taxfix** — simple, mobile
- **Smartsteuer** — online

They guide you step-by-step and suggest deductions.

Option 3: Steuerberater (€150-500)

Tax advisor. Worth it if:

- Your situation is complicated (business, real estate)
- You don't speak German
- You don't have time

What can you deduct?

☐ **Werbungskosten** (work expenses):

- Commute to work (€0.30/km, one way)
- Home office (€6/day, max €1260/year)
- Laptop, work phone
- Professional courses

☐ **Sonderausgaben** (special expenses):

- Insurance (health, pension)
- Donations

- Alimony for ex-spouse

▣ **Haushaltsnahe Dienstleistungen:**

- Cleaning
- Childcare
- Repairs (labor costs)

How much will I get back?

Calculator: smartsteuer.de/rechner

Typical examples:

- Commuting 30km to work → ~€500 refund
- Remote work 100 days → ~€600 refund
- Work laptop → ~30% price refund

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