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Wohnberechtigungsschein (WBS) — Affordable Social Housing

What a WBS is, who gets it, and how to find affordable Sozialwohnung.

Deutsche Begriffe: Wohnberechtigungsschein | WBS | Sozialwohnung | Einkommensgrenze | Sozialer Wohnungsbau

What is a Wohnberechtigungsschein?

A **Wohnberechtigungsschein** (WBS) entitles you to rent a **Sozialwohnung** (publicly subsidized housing). These apartments have **significantly lower rents** than the free market — often 30–50% below market rent.

Sozialwohnungen are built or renovated with public funds. In return, landlords may rent these apartments **only to WBS holders** and must **cap the rent**.

Who Gets a WBS?

Income Limits

The WBS is aimed at **low-income households**. Income limits vary significantly by **federal state**:

Federal State	1 Person	2 Persons	Each Additional Person
NRW	€20,420	€24,600	+€5,740
Bavaria	€18,000	€22,000	+€5,200
Berlin	€16,800	€25,200	+€5,740

Federal State	1 Person	2 Persons	Each Additional Person
Hamburg	€16,800	€25,200	+€5,740
Baden-Württemberg	€17,220	€20,760	+€5,820

(Net annual income, as of 2025/26 — figures vary, please check with your local authority)

Important: Gross ≠ Net

For the WBS, your **assessable income** counts, which is:

Gross income **minus**:

- **Acquisition costs** (standard €1,230 or actual)
- **Taxes**
- **Social insurance contributions**
- **Allowances** for children, disabled persons, single parents

Who Can Apply?

- **Germans and EU citizens** residing in the city
- **Third-country nationals** with a valid **residence permit**
- **Refugees** with residence permission
- **Students, trainees, retirees** may also be eligible

WBS I, II, and III — Levels

In some federal states (e.g., NRW), there are **different WBS levels**:

Level	Income	Rent
WBS I	Up to standard income limit	Cheapest
WBS II	Up to 40% above limit	Moderate
WBS III	Up to 60% above limit	Slightly subsidized

Advantage: Even if your income is slightly **above** the basic limit, you may qualify for WBS II or III!

How Do I Apply for a WBS?

Step 1 — Find the Responsible Authority

The WBS is applied for at the **housing promotion office** or **housing authority** of your city:

- In large cities: separate **housing office**
- In smaller municipalities: at the **citizen service office** or **district office**
- Online application: possible in some cities (e.g., Berlin, Hamburg)

Step 2 — Gather Documents

You need:

- **ID card** or passport + residence permit
- **Registration certificate** (current registration)
- **Income statements** from the last 12 months (pay slips, tax returns)
- **Bürgergeld/Wohngeld decision** (if applicable)
- **Current lease** (if you have one)
- **Child benefit decision** (if you have children)
- **Disability certificate** (if applicable)
- **Bank statements** (some authorities require this)

Step 3 — Submit Application

- Fill out the form (online or on paper)
- Attach documents
- Submit in person or send by mail

Step 4 — Receive Decision

- Processing time: **2–8 weeks** (depending on the city)
- **Validity:** Usually **1 year** (renewable)
- The WBS specifies: **household size** and **maximum apartment size** (e.g., "2 persons, up to 65 m²")

Apartment Sizes

The WBS determines how large your apartment can be:

Household Size	Max. Living Space	Max. Rooms
1 person	45–50 m²	1–2 rooms
2 persons	60–65 m²	2–3 rooms
3 persons	75–80 m²	3–4 rooms
4 persons	85–95 m²	4–5 rooms
Each additional person	+10–15 m²	+1 room

(Figures vary by federal state)

How Do I Find a Sozialwohnung?

The Problem

There are **far more WBS-eligible people than Sozialwohnungen available**. In many cities, waiting times are **months to years**. Still, the WBS is worthwhile — you have more options.

Where to Look?

1. Municipal housing companies — e.g., SAGA (Hamburg), degewo/HOWOGE (Berlin), GWG (Munich)

2. Housing cooperatives — many have Sozialwohnungen, but require a **cooperative share** (€500–3,000, refunded when you move out)

3. Online portals — Immobilienscout24, WG-Gesucht (filter: "WBS required")

4. Housing office — some offices actively mediate apartments

5. Social organizations — Caritas, Diakonie, housing aid help with the search

Search Tips

• **Prepare an application folder** — WBS, income statements, SCHUFA, ID

• **Be flexible** — consider outlying areas and less popular neighborhoods

• **Persist** — ask regularly, check new offers

• **Assert social priority** — if homeless, pregnant, disabled, or experiencing domestic violence, you have **priority**

Rental Prices of Sozialwohnungen

Sozialwohnung rents are **significantly cheaper**:

City	Market Rent (approx.)	Social Rent (approx.)	Savings
Munich	€18–22/m²	€8–12/m²	~50%
Hamburg	€12–16/m²	€6–9/m²	~40–50%
Berlin	€10–14/m²	€6–8/m²	~35–45%
Cologne	€11–15/m²	€6–9/m²	~40%

Binding Period — How Long Does It Stay Cheap?

Sozialwohnungen have a **binding period** — after which the landlord may raise the rent to market level:

• **New buildings (since 2000):** 15–30 years binding

• **Older apartments:** Binding often already expired → **Rent may increase**

Check during the apartment viewing **how long the binding period remains**.

Common Mistakes

1. Not applying — many think they earn too much → income limits are higher than expected!

2. Renewing too late — renew your WBS in time (1–2 months before expiration)

3. False information — can lead to WBS withdrawal and apartment termination

4. Using only one source — search simultaneously with housing companies, cooperatives, AND online

Tips for Foreigners

1. Bring residence permit — without a valid permit, no WBS

2. Translate income statements — if income is from abroad

3. Use consulting services — migration counseling, Caritas, Diakonie help with the application

4. Language barrier: Bring someone to translate or use counseling services

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