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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
<b>NRW</b>	€20,420	€24,600	+€5,740
<b>Bavaria</b>	€18,000	€22,000	+€5,200
<b>Berlin</b>	€16,800	€25,200	+€5,740

Federal State	1 Person	2 Persons	Each Additional Person
<b>Hamburg</b>	€16,800	€25,200	+€5,740
<b>Baden-Württemberg</b>	€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
<b>WBS I</b>	Up to standard income limit	Cheapest
<b>WBS II</b>	Up to 40% above limit	Moderate
<b>WBS III</b>	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 m<sup>2</sup>")

## Apartment Sizes

The WBS determines how large your apartment can be:

Household Size	Max. Living Space	Max. Rooms
1 person	45-50 m <sup>2</sup>	1-2 rooms
2 persons	60-65 m <sup>2</sup>	2-3 rooms
3 persons	75-80 m <sup>2</sup>	3-4 rooms
4 persons	85-95 m <sup>2</sup>	4-5 rooms
Each additional person	+10-15 m <sup>2</sup>	+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
<b>Munich</b>	€18-22/m <sup>2</sup>	€8-12/m <sup>2</sup>	~50%
<b>Hamburg</b>	€12-16/m <sup>2</sup>	€6-9/m <sup>2</sup>	~40-50%
<b>Berlin</b>	€10-14/m <sup>2</sup>	€6-8/m <sup>2</sup>	~35-45%
<b>Cologne</b>	€11-15/m <sup>2</sup>	€6-9/m <sup>2</sup>	~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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