

# Naturalization in Germany



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Many people who come to Germany also want to apply for German citizenship at some point. With the German citizenship it is possible to live in Germany, to vote and to run for political office. With a German passport, you can easily travel to many countries without a visa. It is also allowed to live and work in other EU countries. As a German citizen, you receive support, including financial support, in the event of illness or unemployment.

Anyone born in Germany automatically receives German citizenship. But you can also get this citizenship without being born here or having German parents. For this you must successfully complete a process called naturalization. With the naturalization in Germany, you officially become a German. That means a citizen of Germany with the same rights and duties as every other citizen.

**To make this easier, here are a few answers to the most important questions:**

## *What are the requirements for getting German citizenship?*

- You must have been working and living legally in Germany for at least eight years.
- You must have a “settlement permit” or a “residence permit” for this period. This means that the person is legally residing in Germany.
- You have to speak or learn German.
- The applicant must have passed the naturalization test or graduated from a German school.
- The applicant was never convicted of serious crimes.
- The German constitution must be recognized and you are obliged to respect it.
- The petitioner cannot have more than one spouse (no polygamy).
- The applicant has documents, such as a passport or birth certificate, which prove the provided name and certain individual information. If this is not the case, you have to prove that the country of origin refuses to issue these documents.



## *Exceptions for some requirements:*

- The applicant lost his job without fault of his own.
- The applicant cannot work, because he has to take care of children.
- The applicant does not work, because he is still learning a trade.



## *Can you be naturalized after less than eight years?*

An applicant can receive German citizenship even after being in Germany for less than eight years.

- If he has completed an integration course. In this case, you can get German citizenship after 7 years.
- If the applicant has adapted very well. For example, if he can speak German very well, he can get citizenship after just 6 years.
- You can also get citizenship after 6 years if you have been politically or socially active in Germany for many years.
- It is possible to get German citizenship faster if you have a German spouse.
- You can apply for German citizenship after 6 years, if this person is an asylum seeker, a recognized refugee or a stateless person.

## *Do the years of the asylum procedure or the time spent studying in Germany also count?*

If someone is in Germany as an asylum seeker or refugee, the months and years of the asylum procedure also count towards the years that you must have lived in Germany in order to become a citizen.

If someone lives in Germany while studying at a university, these years are also counted. This applies to all of Germany except for Bavaria. The period of study is NOT recognized here.



## *Is it necessary to pass the naturalization test?*

If the applicant has passed the exam at the end of the integration course or has a qualification from a German school, he does not have to take the naturalization test. For everyone else, passing the naturalization test is a prerequisite for naturalization. The only exceptions are people with a serious illness or disability and the elderly. In these cases, a doctor must confirm the illness or disability.

If someone has to pass the naturalization test, they can either take a naturalization course or prepare for the test on their own. In the test there are questions about German history, culture and German laws. The Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) provides information about the naturalization test and a sample test online.

## Can someone become a German citizen without a language certificate?

If someone does not have the necessary proof for a successfully completed German course, knowledge of the German language can also be proven differently. Proof of attending a German school or a German qualification is sufficient.

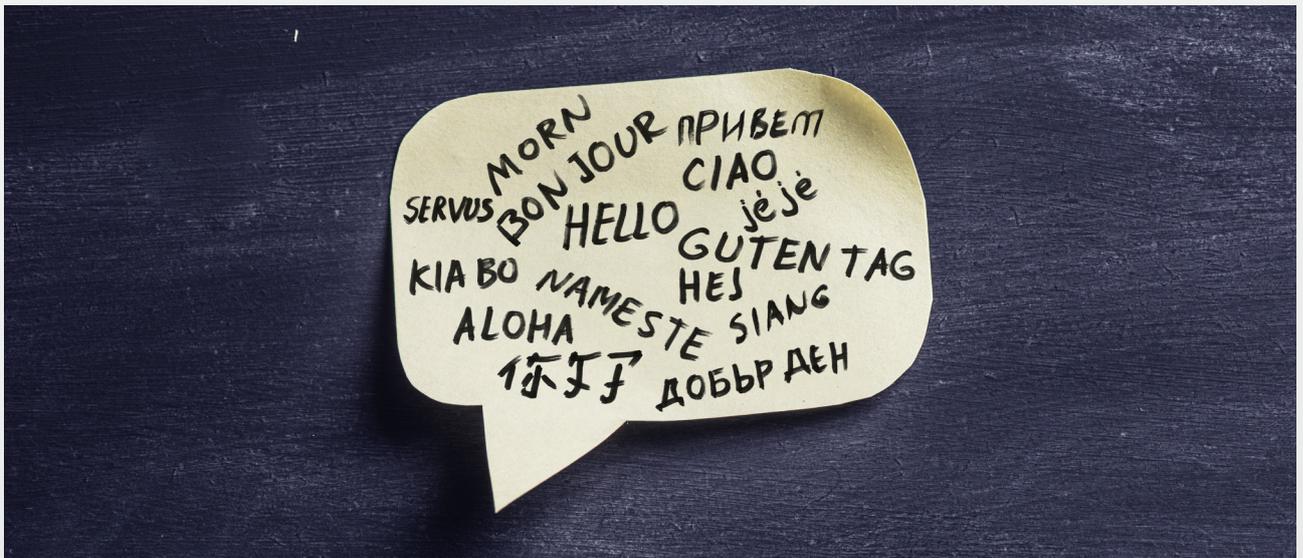
Proof of one of these points is sufficient as evidence:

- The applicant attended a German school for at least four years.
- The applicant has a degree from a secondary school.
- The applicant is now in the 10th grade, or higher grade, at a German school.
- The applicant had completed a German vocational training course.
- The applicant acquired a university degree in German.

If someone cannot prove any of these points, they have to take a language test and show the certificate. This language test can be taken at any language school.

### EXCEPTION

*If the applicant has an illness or disability or is too old, he can become a German citizen without a language test or other proof. But a doctor must confirm this point.*





## *Can someone be naturalized if they have been convicted of a crime?*

If the applicant has been convicted of a minor offense, they can still be naturalized.

Minor offenses are:

- Fines
- Disciplinary action against juvenile offenders
- Imprisonment for up to three months on probation

If someone has been convicted of a serious crime, one will not get German citizenship. If after a period of time (usually it takes years) this crime is deleted from the papers again, one can try again to become a German citizen, provided that all other requirements are met.

## *Can someone become a German citizen even if they do not meet all of the requirements?*

If the applicant does not meet the above-mentioned „naturalization entitlement“, they can apply for „discretionary naturalization“, but whether one thereby becomes a German citizen is a case decision of the authorities. In the case of “discretionary naturalization“, the naturalization office can grant the German citizenship, but does not have to. A positive decision is usually made if there is a public interest in the applicant’s naturalization. For „discretionary naturalization“, however, certain requirements must be met:

- The applicant has only one spouse.
- The applicant must reside legally in Germany.
- The applicant has an apartment or some other form of living.
- The applicant earns a living independently or has assets to support himself and his family.
- The applicant must not have been convicted of a serious criminal offense.
- The applicant has a passport or other documents that confirm their identity, or they can prove that their home country refuses to issue papers.



If one does not meet these requirements, naturalization is only possible in absolute exceptional cases, for example in the event of severe illness or disability or incapacity for work due to reasons of age. In such cases, speak to the staff at the local naturalization office.

## *Are there other rules for people who have a German spouse?*

People who are married to a German citizen can be naturalized earlier than others. For such early naturalization, one must meet the following requirements:

- The applicant must have been legally resident in Germany for at least three years.
- The applicant must have been married to a German citizen for at least two years.
- The applicant must not have been convicted of a serious criminal offense.
- The applicant must have a valid passport or passport substitute.
- The applicant must have accommodation.
- The applicant must not be entitled to benefits from the job center or the social welfare office.
- The applicant must speak German at level B1 or higher.
- The applicant must have passed the naturalization test on the German legal and social order or have a qualification from a German school.
- The applicant must declare himself to the Basic Law verbally and in writing before the naturalization office.

### **ATTENTION**

*If the spouse is a citizen of another EU country, this regulation does not apply to you.*



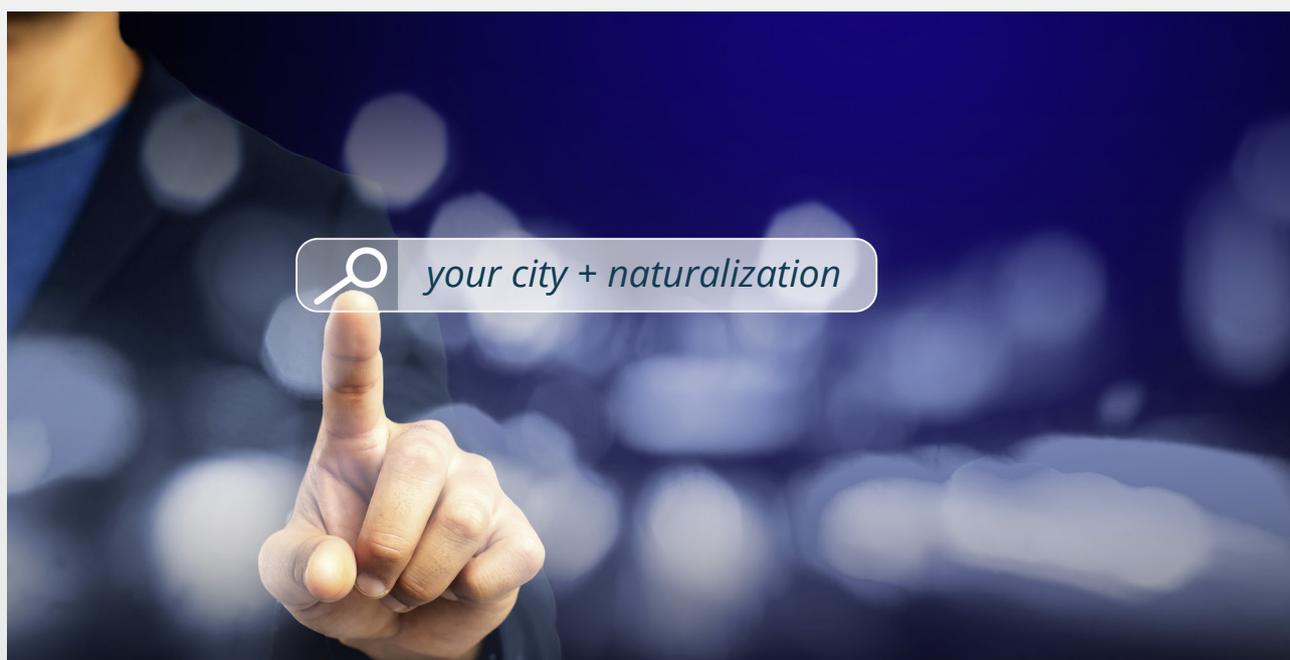
## *Where and how is the naturalization applied for?*

The body responsible for naturalization varies from state to state. To find the competent authority, one can contact the district office, the city administration or the immigration office. The migration advisory service or the youth migration service can also provide the correct address. The right office can now also be found on Google by searching for the name of the city and the term „naturalization“.

The correct application must be made. The application for naturalization can be found at the responsible naturalization office. This form is available either locally or online from the Naturalization Office's website. Before submitting the application, one should seek advice from the staff at the naturalization office. The employees can provide more detailed information on the required documents. In addition, these employees can also answer any questions.

### ATTENTION

*One can only apply if one is older than 16 years. If the applicant is under 16 years of age, a parent or legal guardian must apply on behalf of the minor.*



## *What does the application for naturalization cost?*

When applying, you must pay 255 euros per application. If the applicant also wants to submit an additional application for a child, you currently have to pay 51 euros per child. In exceptional cases this fee can be reduced. This can be the case, for example, for a family with several children or for those who do not earn a lot or have enough money.



## *Can German citizenship be revoked again?*

In principle, German citizenship can only be withdrawn (against the will of the person concerned) if its loss does not lead to statelessness. Someone can lose their German citizenship again if one of the following scenarios applies:

- The person concerned waives his or her German citizenship.
- A foreign citizen adopts the person concerned.
- The person concerned takes on another nationality from a country that does not allow a second nationality.
- The person concerned is also a citizen of another country and joins the armed forces of that country voluntarily and without the consent of the German authorities.
- The person concerned acquires another nationality and has not applied to the naturalization office to retain their German nationality.

### **ATTENTION**

*If someone has lost their German citizenship and does not have any other European citizenship, this person needs a residence permit to stay in Germany.*

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