

Best Banks for Expats in Europe (2025 Edition)

Welcome to your comprehensive guide to banking in Europe for expats, remote workers, and international families. Navigating the financial landscape in a new country can be challenging, but this resource simplifies the process with country-specific recommendations, documentation requirements, and insider tips. Whether you're relocating to Germany, France, Portugal, or any other European nation, we've researched the most expat-friendly banking options to help you establish financial stability abroad. This guide covers traditional banks and digital alternatives, highlighting institutions with English support, reasonable fees, and streamlined onboarding processes for newcomers.

Welcome & How to Use This Guide

Welcome to the definitive banking guide for expats in Europe. This resource is designed to simplify one of the most challenging aspects of relocating: establishing reliable banking services in your new country. While this guide provides comprehensive information based on extensive research and real experiences, please note that it does not constitute financial advice. Banking regulations change frequently, and individual circumstances vary widely.

This guide is specifically tailored for expats, remote workers, digital nomads, international students, and families relocating within Europe. Whether you're making a permanent move or planning a temporary stay, having access to local banking services is essential for managing daily expenses, receiving income, and establishing financial stability abroad.

For each country, we provide details on the top banking options, typical documentation requirements, special considerations for non-residents, and practical tips based on real expat experiences. We've prioritized institutions that offer:

- English-language support (online and customer service)
- Transparent fee structures with minimal hidden costs
- Strong mobile and online banking capabilities
- Expat-friendly onboarding processes
- Reasonable international transfer options

Important Note

Always verify the most current requirements directly on the bank's official website before beginning your application. Requirements frequently change, and what worked for one expat may not work for another depending on your specific circumstances, nationality, and residency status.

How This Guide Is Organized

We've structured this guide by country, making it easy to jump directly to your destination. Each country section includes:

- Top recommended banks with brief overviews
- Documentation checklist for account opening
- Country-specific considerations and challenges
- Practical tips from expats who've been through the process

When possible, we've highlighted both traditional banks and digital alternatives to give you options based on your comfort level with technology and specific banking needs.

Country Index + Fast Navigation

Use this comprehensive index to quickly navigate to your country of interest. We've organized our top banking recommendations for expats across 13 European countries, with more to be added in future updates. Each country listing includes our top picks based on expat-friendliness, English support, and overall convenience for newcomers.

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Digital-First Banks

Throughout this guide, you'll notice many digital banks like N26, Revolut, and bunq appearing across multiple countries. These **fintech institutions** often provide the smoothest onboarding experience for expats, with remote verification and minimal paperwork.



Traditional Banks

While perhaps requiring more documentation and possibly in-person visits, **established national banks** offer comprehensive services, wider ATM networks, and may be necessary for certain financial activities like mortgage applications.



Cross-Border Considerations

Remember that banks within the **European Union** are subject to similar regulations, but the implementation can vary significantly by country. The introduction of **European IBANs** has simplified banking across borders.

Banking in Germany

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Top Banks for Expats

N26

A fully digital bank headquartered in Berlin, N26 has become the go-to choice for many expats in Germany. Its standout features include:

- 100% English interface (app, website, customer service)
- Remote verification via video call (no need to visit a branch)
- Free basic account with a German IBAN
- Transparent fee structure with minimal hidden costs
- Integration with Apple Pay and Google Pay

DKB (Deutsche Kreditbank)

A more traditional German bank that has become increasingly expat-friendly:

- English website and partial English support
- Free account with no minimum income requirements
- Free Visa debit card with worldwide ATM withdrawals
- Extensive ATM network throughout Germany
- Full German banking services (investments, loans, etc.)

Documentation Requirements

To open a bank account in Germany, you'll typically need:

- **Passport or ID:** Valid government-issued identification
- **Anmeldung:** Registration certificate (address registration)
- **Proof of address:** Rental agreement or utility bill
- **Tax ID:** Some banks require your German tax identification number
- **Residence permit:** For non-EU citizens



The Anmeldung Challenge

The address registration requirement (Anmeldung) can create a catch-22 situation for newcomers. Many digital banks like N26 offer solutions for those who haven't yet completed this process, making them particularly valuable during your initial arrival period.

Pro Tips

- Apply for N26 before arriving if possible, as it offers the simplest setup for newcomers
- Consider initially using Wise (formerly TransferWise) alongside a German bank for international transfers at better rates
- Some employers may have banking partnerships that simplify the account opening process
- Traditional banks like Sparkasse and Commerzbank have more physical locations but typically require stronger German language skills

Banking in France

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Prepare Documentation

Gather your passport/EU ID, proof of address (utility bill, lease), and French phone number. Non-EU residents will also need a valid residence permit.



Verify Identity

Complete identity verification either via video call (digital banks) or in-person at a branch. Be prepared to answer questions about your residency status and purpose for opening the account.

Submit Application

Apply online through your chosen bank's website. Digital banks like Boursorama offer fully online processes, while traditional banks may require an initial online application followed by an in-branch appointment.

Activate Account

Once approved, you'll receive your banking details and card by mail. Follow the activation instructions and set up your online banking credentials.

Top Banks for Expats in France

Boursorama Banque

Leading online bank in France with a reputation for excellent service and competitive offers.

- Completely free account with no income requirements
- Frequent welcome bonuses for new customers
- User-friendly mobile app with some English support
- Free international ATM withdrawals (limited number per month)
- French IBAN for easy local payments and direct debits

While the application process is primarily in French, many expats report successfully opening accounts with the help of translation tools or French-speaking friends.

Hello bank!

Digital banking subsidiary of BNP Paribas, combining traditional banking stability with modern features.

- No monthly fees with regular card usage
- Backed by one of France's largest banking groups
- Strong mobile app with partial English support
- Access to BNP Paribas ATM network
- Full suite of French banking services

Hello bank! provides a good middle ground between traditional French banking and more modern digital services, though some expats report varying levels of English support depending on the representative.

✖ Important French Banking Considerations

French banks often require a **French mobile number** for security verification. Additionally, many French banking operations still rely on paper correspondence sent to your registered address. Some banks may also require a **minimum monthly income** deposited into the account to waive certain fees.

Banking in the Netherlands & Spain

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The Netherlands

Dutch banking is highly digitized, making it relatively straightforward for expats once initial documentation requirements are met. The primary challenge is obtaining a BSN (Burgerservicenummer) - the Dutch citizen service number that's required for most financial services.

bunq

An eco-conscious digital bank founded in Amsterdam with a full English interface. Popular features include:

- Possible to open before arriving in the Netherlands
- Multiple sub-accounts with different IBANs
- Excellent app with unique sustainability features
- 24/7 chat support in English

Monthly subscription fee applies (€8.99+), but many expats find the convenience worth the cost.

ING

One of the largest traditional Dutch banks with strong expat services:

- App and online banking available in English
- Extensive branch and ATM network
- Full suite of Dutch financial products
- International services for cross-border needs

Requires a BSN and address verification, typically needing an in-person visit to complete setup.

Dutch Banking Requirements

- BSN (citizen service number)
- Valid passport or EU ID card
- Proof of address (rental contract or registration)
- Residence permit (for non-EU citizens)
- Employment contract (sometimes requested)

Spain

Spanish banking combines traditional practices with increasingly digital options. The banking system is robust, but expats often face bureaucratic hurdles, especially around obtaining the crucial NIE (Número de Identidad de Extranjero) identification number.

BBVA

A major Spanish bank with strong digital capabilities and expat-friendly services:

- English mobile app and online banking
- Non-resident accounts available
- Fee-free accounts with qualification
- Wide ATM network throughout Spain

Initial application can be started online, but final verification usually requires an in-branch visit.

Revolut

While not a traditional Spanish bank, Revolut offers:

- Rapid setup without Spanish documentation
- Full English interface and support
- Multi-currency capabilities
- Local Spanish IBAN (since 2023)

Ideal for initial banking needs while sorting out permanent Spanish banking arrangements.

Spanish Banking Requirements

- NIE (foreigner identification number)
- Valid passport
- Proof of address in Spain
- Proof of income or employment (often required)
- Initial deposit (varies by bank)

Banking in Portugal & Italy

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Portugal



Portugal has become increasingly popular with expats, digital nomads, and retirees due to favorable visa programs and quality of life. The banking system has adapted to serve this influx of foreign residents, though documentation requirements remain relatively strict.

ActivoBank

A digital-focused subsidiary of Millennium BCP that has gained popularity among expats for its:

- No-fee basic account with no minimum balance
- English-language app and website
- English-speaking staff at dedicated branches
- Streamlined application process
- Free international transfers within the Eurozone

N26

While not a Portuguese bank, N26 provides:

- Quick setup without Portuguese address initially
- Full English support
- German IBAN (accepted throughout EU)
- Ideal solution while establishing residency

Portuguese Banking Requirements

- NIF (Número de Identificação Fiscal) - Portuguese tax ID
- Valid passport or EU identification
- Proof of address (rental contract, utility bill)
- Proof of income or employment (often required)
- Initial deposit (typically €250-500 for traditional banks)

NIF First Strategy

Consider obtaining your Portuguese NIF before arrival through a fiscal representative service. This number is essential for almost all financial and administrative processes in Portugal.

Italy



Italian banking maintains many traditional practices while gradually embracing digital innovation. Expats often find the documentation requirements extensive, and in-person visits are frequently necessary. However, several banks have developed services specifically for foreigners.

Fineco

A digital-first bank with extensive features for expats:

- Online application with some English support
- Multicurrency accounts and trading platform
- Modern app with comprehensive features
- No monthly fees with qualifying conditions

BNL (Banca Nazionale del Lavoro)

Part of the international BNP Paribas group, offering:

- Special accounts for non-residents
- Staff experienced with expatriate needs
- Wide branch network throughout Italy
- International banking connections

Italian Banking Requirements

- Codice Fiscale (Italian tax code)
- Valid passport or EU identification
- Proof of Italian address
- Residence permit for non-EU citizens
- Employment documentation or proof of income
- Initial deposit (varies by bank)

Regional Variations

Banking experiences can vary significantly between Italian regions. Major cities like Milan and Rome typically offer more expat-friendly services, while smaller towns may present language barriers.

Banking in Belgium, Sweden & Denmark

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Belgium

Belgium's multilingual environment (Dutch, French, German) extends to its banking sector, with services available in multiple languages including English in major cities and through digital channels.

Top Belgian Banks

KBC/CBC

- Full-service digital tools
- English app and website
- Expat-specific packages
- Regional focus: KBC (Flemish), CBC (French)

Keytrade

- Online-only bank
- Good English support
- Free basic accounts
- Investment-focused services

Requirements: National ID/passport, proof of Belgian residence, Belgian phone number, employment details. Some banks may ask for proof of income.

ⓘ Language preferences are important in Belgium - banks are typically split along linguistic lines (Dutch/French), so choose accordingly based on your location.

Sweden

Sweden is among the world's most cashless societies, with advanced digital banking infrastructure. However, the banking system relies heavily on the personnummer (personal ID number).

Top Swedish Banks

SEB

- English-speaking staff
- International banking expertise
- Wide ATM network
- Expat-focused services

Handelsbanken

- Decentralized approach
- Personal banking relationships
- Good expat support
- Comprehensive services

Requirements: Swedish personnummer (critical), passport/EU ID, proof of employment or study, residency documentation. The personnummer is essential for full banking access.

ⓘ The personnummer creates a significant catch-22 for newcomers. Some banks offer limited services while you await your number, but full access requires this ID.

Denmark

Danish banking is highly digitized, with NemID/MitID digital identity system being central to all financial services. Traditional banks are increasingly competing with fintech alternatives.

Top Danish Banks

Lunar

- Digital-first approach
- Modern mobile experience
- English interface
- Faster onboarding than traditional banks

Nordea

- Large Nordic presence
- International banking expertise
- Wide ATM network
- Comprehensive banking services

Requirements: CPR number (Danish ID), passport/EU ID, proof of address, employment documentation. The digital NemID/MitID system is essential for banking operations.

ⓘ Danish banks often maintain high minimum balance requirements or charge monthly fees. Digital alternatives like Lunar have emerged as popular options for expats seeking simpler banking.

Across these Northern European countries, digital identity systems play a crucial role in financial services. Belgium's approach is somewhat more traditional and multilingual, while Sweden and Denmark have embraced nearly cashless systems that rely heavily on national ID numbers and digital verification. Expats should prioritize obtaining the national identification numbers as early as possible, as these are gateways to comprehensive financial services.

Banking in Ireland, Austria, Finland & Estonia

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Ireland

1

Bank of Ireland

Ireland's oldest bank provides comprehensive services with over 200 branches nationwide. Expats appreciate:

- Strong physical presence throughout Ireland
- Full range of financial products
- Mobile and online banking options
- Established reputation and stability

Documentation needs include proof of Irish address, passport/ID, and potentially a PPS number (Irish social security number).

2

Revolut

Since 2022, Revolut offers Irish IBANs, making it increasingly popular among expats for:

- Fast account opening without extensive documentation
- Fully digital experience with English interface
- Multi-currency capabilities
- Competitive exchange rates and transparent fees

While not a traditional bank, Revolut's Irish IBAN addresses previous limitations for local direct debits and salary deposits.

Austria

1

Erste Bank

One of Austria's largest banks with services tailored to expats:

- English-speaking staff in major cities
- Comprehensive online banking
- Extensive ATM network
- Full suite of financial products

Requires standard documentation plus the Meldezettel (residence registration) and potentially a residence permit for non-EU citizens.

2

N26

While based in Germany, N26 is popular with expats in Austria:

- Fully digital experience with English interface
- Quick setup without Austrian documentation initially
- German IBAN works seamlessly in Austria
- No monthly fees for basic accounts

An excellent option for initial banking needs while establishing residency in Austria.

Finland

1

Nordea

The largest financial group in the Nordic region offers:

- English-language services in major cities
- Comprehensive digital banking
- International banking expertise
- Wide network of branches and ATMs

Requires Finnish personal ID number, passport/ID, proof of residence, and often employment documentation.

2

OP Financial Group

Finland's largest banking group with cooperative structure:

- Strong local presence throughout Finland
- Mobile and online banking options
- Customer-owned cooperative model
- Wide range of financial services

Similar documentation requirements to Nordea, with potential regional variations in service.

Estonia

1

LHV Pank

Estonia's largest domestic bank offers innovation with tradition:

- Digital-first approach with physical branches
- English interface and support
- Remote onboarding for e-residents
- Modern banking features and investment options

Requires standard identification plus proof of connection to Estonia (residence, business, e-residency).

2

Wise (formerly TransferWise)

While not a traditional bank, Wise offers:

- Estonian IBAN for e-residents
- Multi-currency accounts
- Excellent foreign exchange rates
- Remote setup possible

A particularly good option for Estonia's e-residency program participants and digital nomads.

Comparative Analysis & Final Recommendations

After reviewing banking options across 13 European countries, several patterns emerge that can help expats make informed decisions about their banking strategy when relocating to Europe.

13

Countries Covered

Each with unique requirements and banking cultures, from Germany's structured approach to Estonia's digital innovation.

26+

Banks Evaluated

Including both traditional institutions and digital challengers, assessed for expat-friendliness and accessibility.

5+

Documentation Types

Most countries require identification, proof of address, residency status, and local registration numbers.

Key Insights for Expat Banking in Europe

Pre-Arrival Phase

Digital banks offer the fastest onboarding for newcomers. Consider opening an N26 or Revolut account before relocating to have immediate banking access upon arrival.

Established Residency

Consider supplementing digital accounts with a local traditional bank that offers services you may need long-term (mortgages, investments, business accounts).

1

2

3

Initial Settlement

Focus on obtaining critical country-specific identification numbers (NIF in Portugal, NIE in Spain, personnummer in Sweden, etc.) as these are gateways to comprehensive financial services.

Final Recommendations

Digital-First Strategy

For maximum flexibility and minimal bureaucracy, especially in your first 3-6 months:

1. **Primary Account:** N26 or Revolut (works across all EU countries)
2. **Transfer Solution:** Wise for international transfers at competitive rates
3. **Local Addition:** Country-specific digital bank where available (e.g., Boursorama in France, bunq in Netherlands)

This approach prioritizes speed and convenience, allowing you to establish banking services quickly while navigating residency requirements.

Traditional Banking Strategy

For comprehensive services and long-term integration, especially if planning to stay 2+ years:

1. **Temporary Solution:** Digital bank for immediate needs
2. **Research Phase:** Identify the best local bank for your specific needs (mortgage capability, investment options, business services)
3. **Full Integration:** Once documentation is complete, establish relationship with chosen local bank

This approach prioritizes access to the full range of financial services and potential long-term benefits of established banking relationships.

Staying Current

Banking regulations and offerings change frequently, especially as European financial institutions continue to digitize and adapt to the growing expat market. Check official bank websites for the most current requirements and offerings, and consider joining expat communities for recent first-hand experiences.

The best banking strategy for expats balances immediate accessibility with long-term needs. Digital banks provide the path of least resistance initially, while traditional institutions offer comprehensive services that may become important as you establish deeper roots in your new country.