

Basic information: The new German ID card

The new German ID card – facts and functions at a glance

Since 1 November 2010, the new ID card has been issued in internationally standardised credit-card format. The requirements for the new ID document were defined by the Federal Ministry of the Interior. The card is produced by Bundesdruckerei who also supplies Germany's around 5,500 passport and ID card offices with hardware and software components, such as update terminals and fingerprint scanners.

This new document not only looks different, citizens can now use two additional applications that make online transactions more convenient and more secure: the online ID function and the qualified electronic signature (QES).

What the new ID card has to offer

With a six-digit access number on the front and a data field on the back for postcode and pseudonym/religious order name, the new ID card contains more information than its predecessor. The heart of the card is an integrated, contactless security chip that additionally stores in digital form all the information printed on the card:

- all the information recorded on the front of the card except for the signature, nationality, serial number and expiry date
- the data of the printed, machine-readable zone on the back of the card, as well as the address and religious order name or pseudonym, if any, and
- a digitised biometric portrait.

At the citizen's request, the data of two fingerprints and – if the card holder wishes to use the QES – the required certificate information can be additionally stored on the chip.

With these new features, the new ID card has a lot more to offer:

- The **online ID function** makes it possible for the first time to prove one's identity on the Internet. Using their six-digit PIN, citizens alone decide which information is to be disclosed during each individual transaction. In order to use the online ID function, the document holder must have the function activated and must be at least 16 years of age. Furthermore, the business partner on the Internet must explicitly offer electronic proof of identity and identify themselves as an authorised online partner.

- Using the **qualified electronic signature** (QES), Internet users can sign documents online. Legally binding contracts can be signed on the Internet, for instance, powers of attorney can be issued and applications submitted to public agencies. This requires a so-called signature certificate which citizens can acquire from accredited certification service providers (CSP), so-called trust centers.
- The **sovereign ID functions** can only be accessed by officially authorised bodies, such as the police, border control officers or customs authorities. In this case, the ID card must be physically available and their reading devices must have the corresponding authorisation certificates. The ID card holder can also opt to have two fingerprints stored on the chip. This strengthens the link between the holder and the document and thus reduces the risk of misuse.