



Welcome Package For Postdocs 2.0

Prepared by the *Leibniz PostDoc Network, Work & Health* working group



Welcome Document Contributions


This welcome document for postdocs has been prepared by the *Work & Health working group* (formerly *Working Conditions and Mental Health*) of the Leibniz PostDoc Network. The first version was published on 26.11.2022. The most recent published version can be found [here](#).

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[en] On behalf of the Leibniz PostDoc Network, we welcome you to the Leibniz Association! We hope you enjoy your time at your institute and look forward to meeting you at the next Leibniz PostDoc Network meeting!

[de] Im Namen des Leibniz PostDoc Networks heißen wir Dich herzlich willkommen in der Leibniz-Gemeinschaft und wünschen Dir eine gute Zeit an Deinem Institut. Wir freuen uns darauf, Dich beim nächsten Treffen des Leibniz PostDoc Networks kennenzulernen!

[tr] Leibniz PostDoc Ağı adına, Leibniz Derneği'ne hoş geldin! Enstitüde iyi vakit geçirmenizi umuyor ve bir sonraki Leibniz Postdoc ağı toplantısında tanışmak için sabırsızlanıyoruz!

[pl] W imieniu Społeczności Postdocketów Leibniza witamy w Stowarzyszeniu Leibniza! Mamy nadzieję, że miło spędzisz czas w swoim instytucie. Czekamy na Ciebie na następnym spotkaniu naszej społeczności!

[es] En nombre de la Red PostDoc Leibniz, le damos la bienvenida a la Asociación Leibniz y esperamos que tenga una estancia agradable en su instituto. ¡Esperamos conocerle en la próxima reunión de la Red PostDoc Leibniz!

[fr] Au nom du Leibniz PostDoc Network, nous te souhaitons la bienvenue au sein de l'Association Leibniz et espérons que tu passeras un agréable moment dans ton institut. Nous avons hâte de te rencontrer lors de la prochaine réunion du réseau Leibniz PostDoc !

[nl] Namens het Leibniz PostDoc Network heten we je van harte welkom bij de Leibniz Association! We wensen je veel plezier bij jouw instituut. We kijken ernaar uit je te ontmoeten bij de volgende meeting van het Leibniz PostDoc Network!

[zh] 跨过大山大河，穿过人山人海，不知道您有没有到达您心目中的远方，但这一定是一场诗意的相逢。欢迎您加入莱布尼茨协会，祝您诗酒年华，阳光灿烂；愿您以梦为马，勇攀高峰！期待与您在 Leibniz PostDoc network 中相遇，与我们联系，祝您成功！

[pt] Em nome da Rede Leibniz PostDoc, damos-te as boas-vindas à Associação Leibniz! Esperamos que desfrutes do tempo no teu instituto e ficamos à espera de te encontrar na próxima reunião da Rede Leibniz PostDoc!

[hr] U ime Leibniz PostDoc mreže srdačno ti želimo dobrodošlicu u Leibniz zajednicu i želimo ti dobar provod u tvom institutu. Veselimo se upoznavanju s tobom na sljedećem sastanku Leibniz PostDoc mreže!

[ar] باسم شبكة رابطة بعد الدكتوراة لايبنيوز نرحب بك بسرور قلبيا ونتمنى لك أوقاتا سعيدة ومفيدة في معهدك. يسرنا ان نلتقي بك في اللقاء القادم لرابطة لايبنيوز بعد الدكتوراه لتتعرف عليك شخصيا بشكل أفضل.

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About the Leibniz Association

In Germany, scientific research is conducted not only in universities but also in colleges, companies, federal and state institutes as well as non-university research institutions. The Leibniz Association connects 96 of such non-university research institutions and is characterised by the wide range of topics of societal importance addressed by its member institutes. These topics range from natural, engineering and environmental sciences to economics, spatial and social sciences and the humanities. Thus, the Leibniz Association facilitates interdisciplinary collaboration between its member institutes to address important societal issues. Leibniz Institutes conduct basic research, provide research infrastructures and perform research-based services (liaison, consultation, transfer) for the public, policymakers, academia and for businesses. Due to the local, national and international importance of the institutions, they are funded jointly by the Federal Government and the states (“Länder”). All Leibniz Institutes are subject to an independent evaluation procedure; each institute is legally and financially independent and autonomously determines its research programme.

For more information on the research landscape in Germany:

<https://www.research-in-germany.org/en/research-landscape/research-organisations.html>

For more information on Leibniz Association:

<https://www.leibniz-gemeinschaft.de/en/>

Leibniz PostDoc Network

Founded in 2017, the Leibniz PostDoc Network provides a communication platform for all postdoctoral researchers in the Leibniz Association to give them a distinctive and united voice.

The postdoctoral researcher title comprises many different career stages and diverse academic paths. In the Leibniz PostDoc Network, we define PostDocs as researchers who have obtained their PhD and have not yet moved on to a permanent group leader or professorship position.


The main foci of the Network are:

- Facilitate networking between Leibniz Postdocs
- Support postdocs in their career development
- Advocate shared values and improve the scientific culture

The Leibniz PostDoc Network steering committee is composed of two spokespersons, a financial officer and two working group coordinators per working group. The spokespersons and the financial officer are elected to represent the Leibniz PostDoc Network during the Network’s annual meeting. Working groups are also formed based on the Leibniz PostDocs’ needs, which are discussed and defined during the annual meeting.

Working groups are open to all postdocs working in Leibniz institutes and we are always looking for new people to join in! If you want to join a working group, please contact the spokespersons and/or the working group coordinators.

For current information on activities and working groups, see <https://leibniz-postdoc.de>.



Join the community by signing up for the Leibniz PostDoc Network emailing list:

<https://www.listserv.dfn.de/sympa/info/leibnizpds>

Coming to Germany

Entry Visa

Citizens of non-EU countries usually require a visa to enter Germany. The Federal Foreign Office's Visa Navigator (<https://digital.diplo.de/navigator/en/visa>) can quickly verify whether you need a visa and, if yes, which type.

As the processing of visa applications can take several weeks or even months, it is best to arrange a visa appointment as early as possible and check which documents are required for your appointment. If your partner or children intend to accompany you, it is advisable to apply for everyone's visa at the same time, even if they will be joining you in Germany at a later date. As a tourist visa cannot be modified or extended, do not travel on a tourist visa if you wish to work in Germany.

Explanations on the visa process:

<https://www.make-it-in-germany.com/en/visa-residence/procedure/entry-process>

Residence Permit/Work Visa


For longer stays (typically more than 90 days), you will additionally need a residence permit or work visa. You can apply for a residence permit at your local "*Ausländerbehörde*" (Foreigners' Office) once you have moved to Germany. Different regulations apply depending on your country of origin.

Depending on your funding, you might be eligible for EU Blue Card. EU Blue Card is a special permit for graduates from outside the EU who wish to work in Germany (or the EU). EU Blue Card owners can obtain permanent residence after 33 months in Germany (21 months if your German knowledge level is B1 or higher). The EU Blue Card helps increase mobility across Europe, as periods of residence in other EU Member States with a Blue Card will also be counted if you apply for a permanent EU residence permit. As an EU Blue Card holder, you can obtain the right of permanent residence in the EU after five years.

Further information on the "EU Blue Card" can be found on the [BAMF](#) website.

City Registration

If you are staying in Germany longer than three months, you need to get registered ("*Anmeldung*") with your city's Residents' Registration Office ("*Einwohnermeldeamt*" or "*Bürgeramt*") within the first weeks after moving to Germany. To register, you will need to bring your passport (or national ID for EU nationals), a registration form (available at the Registration Office or online from the local authorities' website) and a confirmation by the landlord ("*Wohnungsgeberbescheinigung*"). The latter should be signed by the official landlord if you are subletting. Beware that some sublets do not offer official "*Anmeldung*", so be careful when choosing your housing. When you register, you will receive a so-called



“*Meldebescheinigung*”. You will need this official proof of registration if you wish to apply for a residence permit, extend your visa or open a bank account.

When you register, you will also automatically receive your tax ID (“*steuerliche Identifikationsnummer*”). This separate document is a unique number provided to you by the Federal Central Tax Office. Your employer will need it to work out what rate of [income tax](#) you should pay. It may also be required for taking out health insurance or starting a pension.

When you register, you will also be asked to declare a religion. If you declare yourself Protestant, Catholic, or Jewish, you are liable to pay the church tax (see below).

Whenever you move within Germany (even within the same city), you need to register your new address with the respective local authorities.

If you move abroad, you will have to de-register from the German city you last lived in (“*Abmeldung des Wohnsitzes bei Wegzug ins Ausland*”). In most cities, de-registering can be done online.

Life in Germany

Apartment Rental

There is a shortage of housing in most big cities, which means that accommodation is expensive. This is particularly true for furnished or at least partly furnished accommodation that is readily available and on a short lease. In Munich in 2022, for example, the average rent per square meter was 21 euros. For a small apartment of about 50 square meters, that's about 1,050 euros. In Cologne in 2022, the rent was about 15 euros per square meter, or about 750 euros for an apartment of the same size. (for other cities on flat rates see <https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/1885/umfrage/mietpreise-in-den-groessten-staedten-deutschlands/>)¹.

There are several things to keep in mind when looking for an apartment in Germany:

- In Germany, it is normal to pay a rental deposit prior to moving in, which can be a total of three months' rent (excluding utilities). **Caution!** Beware of false advertising, and do not transfer any money for the deposit prior to signing the lease agreement and/or if you haven't seen the apartment yet.
- It is important to note whether the rent includes utility costs or not. In Germany, the rent including utilities is called “*Warmmiete*”; whereas “*Kaltmiete*” does not include utilities. Electricity and internet are not typically included in the rent.
- Most rental apartments don't come with furniture, and some don't have kitchen furniture or appliances. Make sure to check what is provided.
- There are a few more formalities before and after moving: signing the lease agreement, registering or de-registering your address with city authorities (see “City registration” above), getting connected with utilities, etc.

¹Unfortunately, this information is in German.

You might be eligible for housing benefits (“*Wohngeld*”) or rent support (“*Mietzuschuss*”), which are state subsidies to support low incomes. Read more about it [here](#)².

To rent an apartment, you will usually have to provide:

1. Proof of income (“*Einkommensnachweis*”), most commonly in the form of a salary slip (“*Gehaltsnachweis*”/“*Gehaltsabrechnung*”) and/or your work contract.
2. A “[Schufa Auskunft](#)” (credit report) to check whether you are in debt or have any unpaid bills. You can request a free “*Datenkopie nach Art. 15 DSGVO*” [here](#). This contains essentially the same information as the credit report and will suffice for renting an apartment.
3. A copy of your passport and/or residence permit.

In the competitive housing market, having a doctorate can actually be an advantage. So, consider highlighting your title (apply as Dr. Kim Smith and not as Kim Smith) in the documents you use to apply for housing.

Some Leibniz institutes have guest houses or rooms that are available for rent in the initial months. Asking colleagues via your institute’s mailing list is another way of finding short-term accommodation. AirBnB is usually not the most affordable option for short-term rentals in Germany. The following websites list both long-term rentals and short-term subleases (“*Zwischenmiete*”):

- <http://www.wg-gesucht.de/en/> (primarily flat shares and student accommodation)
- www.immobilienscout24.de
- www.immowelt.de
- www.immonet.de
- www.housinganywhere.com/de/
- www.wunderflats.com


Taxes

When working in Germany, your salary will be subject to three forms of taxes:

1. Income tax (“*Lohnsteuer*” or “*Einkommensteuer*”) : About 30% of your gross income, depending on your income and tax bracket. The tax brackets depend on the marriage status. For married couples, there are different taxation options. Detailed information on various options are available [here](#).³
2. Solidarity surcharge (“*Solidaritätszuschlag*”): Additional tax to finance the costs of German reunification. 5,5% of your income tax. Only applicable if your annual income exceeds 62,127€.
3. Church tax (“*Kirchensteuer*”): A voluntary tax collected to provide financial support of churches. 8% (Bavaria, Baden-Württemberg) or 9% (other regions) of your income tax. Only applicable if you are officially affiliated with a Christian or Jewish denomination. If you are unsure whether you are an official member of a church, check your salary slip (section “*Konfession*”).

² [https://www.iamexpat.de/expat-info/social-security/housing-benefit-germany-wohngeld#:~:text=Housing%20benefit%20\(Wohngeld\)%20is%20a,they%20can%20afford%20suitable%20housing](https://www.iamexpat.de/expat-info/social-security/housing-benefit-germany-wohngeld#:~:text=Housing%20benefit%20(Wohngeld)%20is%20a,they%20can%20afford%20suitable%20housing)

³ [https://www.hamburg.com/contentblob/15913954/3cbcff9f6cfa9de67ba66f6386bfc9d5/data/km1-infosheet-income-tax-lohnsteuer\).pdf](https://www.hamburg.com/contentblob/15913954/3cbcff9f6cfa9de67ba66f6386bfc9d5/data/km1-infosheet-income-tax-lohnsteuer).pdf)



All of these taxes are automatically deducted from your salary. If you only have a regular work contract in Germany (and not, for example, have multiple sources of income or are self-employed), you do not need to submit a tax declaration (“*Steuererklärung*”). It can, however, be worthwhile to do so, as most people receive at least some tax returns. It is possible to submit your tax declaration online using the [ELSTER](#) system (German only). Apps like [Taxfix](#) can help you submit your tax declaration in English (for a fee).

For a more comprehensive introduction to the German taxation system, see [here](#).⁴

In addition to taxes, any regular employment income is subject to compulsory social security contributions (“*Sozialabgaben*”), which are deducted from your salary automatically:

- Health insurance (“*Krankenversicherung*”, see below)
- Pension insurance (“*Rentenversicherung*”, see below)
- Nursing insurance for disability and old age (“*Pflegeversicherung*”)
- Unemployment insurance (“*Arbeitslosenversicherung*”)

Most postdoctoral fellowships are not subject to taxes (“*nicht steuerpflichtig*”) and social security contributions (“*nicht sozialversicherungspflichtig*”).

Pension System

The German pension system rests on three pillars: statutory pension insurance, company pensions, and private pensions.

1. Statutory Pension Insurance System (“*gesetzliche Rentenversicherung*”)

Participation is mandatory for anyone working in Germany and your contributions will be deducted automatically from your salary. Once you are enrolled in the statutory pension scheme, you will receive a social security ID (“*Sozialversicherungsausweis*”). Whenever you start a new job, you will need to provide your employer with this number, so that they can keep track of all your pension contributions to date.

2. Company Pensions (“*betriebliches Altersvorsorge*”)

Most employers in Germany additionally offer a collective pension scheme. When signing your employment contract, you will be asked whether you want to contribute to this scheme.

3. Private Pensions (“*private Altersvorsorge*”)


Private pension plans may be set up through banks and insurance companies. The federal government provides encouragement such as bonuses and tax incentives for these private plans (e.g., the so-called “*Riester-Rente*”). Inquire with your provider beforehand about which options you will have in case you move out of Germany.

Health Care

Health Insurance (“*Krankenversicherung*”)

In Germany, health insurance (“*Krankenversicherung*”) is mandatory by law, and you will need proof that you are adequately insured to obtain a residence permit.

⁴ <https://www.iamexpat.de/expat-info/taxation-germany>



There are two types of health insurance, public or private, between which you can or should choose depends on your employment situation.

- Public: If you are on a standard German employment contract and make less than 64,350€ per year, then you can only choose between the public insurance companies. Many expats choose *Techniker Krankenkasse* (TK), because of their English language offerings, but one should compare conditions and choose what is right for one's health needs.
- Private: If you make more than 64,350€ per year, you can choose to go private. Private insurance for young, healthy individuals is often much cheaper than public insurance. However, these fees tend to become much higher once you are older, and it can be difficult to switch to public insurance once you have committed to private insurance.
- With some stipends or postdoctoral fellowships, you might have a “guest contract” at your institution. As a guest researcher, you don't pay into the social security system as a regular employee would; however, health insurance is still mandatory and required for residence permit applications. In this case, you can choose whichever health insurance you want, including cheaper expat options (e.g., Mawista). It is important to consider your health needs, as these insurances often do not fully cover all expenses, and whether they are accepted by the “*Ausländerbehörde*” for residence permit requirements.

Getting Medical Assistance

The German health system has a very good reputation and has a network of hospitals and doctors throughout all regions. All medical treatment must be paid for by you or your health insurance, so please make sure to check with your insurance provider about what is covered. Medicine is sold exclusively at pharmacies, and a lot of medicine is only available on prescription (e.g., antibiotics).

In Germany, standard medical complaints are addressed by the “*Hausarzt*” (family doctor or GP), while other issues require a specialist (i.e. gynaecologist, dermatologist, orthopedist, etc). Many specialists do not require a referral from a generalist to accept you as a patient, although you should check with your health insurance provider (“*Krankenkasse*”) to determine whether you need a referral in order to get reimbursed.

There are several ways to find a doctor:

- Ask other international people at your institute or in your immediate community to find English (or other languages) speaking doctors.
- Search for and book appointments on www.doctolib.de. You can use search filters to select criteria such as accepted health insurance (public or private), spoken languages, location and availability of appointments. Additionally, booking through doctolib provides reminders so you don't miss your appointments. Doctors can also upload your medical documents directly into your account (i.e., proof of vaccination, blood tests, etc.)
- If your “*Hausarzt*” requests you to see a specialist, they might recommend a suitable doctor for you.
- Some health professionals are booked through www.116117.de or by calling the 116117 hotline. This hotline is also a central number that you can call for medical assistance or advice on where to go, including weekends and nights.
- Call your “*Krankenkasse*” and ask for them to book an appointment for you with a doctor in their network. TK, for example, provides these services in English and can find an English-speaking doctor for you. You can also check the doctors and the

languages they speak on their database: <https://www.tk-aerztaerztinnen.de/TK/englische-suche.htm>

Emergency Medical Assistance

If you need urgent medical assistance or need a doctor after working hours, on the weekend, or on a holiday, please contact emergency medical services (see below for the phone numbers). Hospitals will also attend to you during the night or on weekends.

Emergency Phone Numbers:

Police: 110

Fire Services: 112

Emergency Medical Services: 112

Poison information service: +49(0)551 19240

Sick leave

In cases where an individual becomes unable to work, the standard procedure involves the employer sustaining the payment of the employee's salary for a span of six weeks.

Following this initial period, the responsibility shifts to the health insurance, which takes on the task of disbursing 70% of the regular gross wage (*“Bruttogehalt”*), but not exceeding 90% of the employee's most recent net earnings (*“Nettoentgelt”*). Additionally, it is capped at a maximum of €4.837,50 per month.

It's worth noting that this sickness benefit is subject to a restriction of 78 weeks within a three-year timeframe. This period encompasses the six weeks during which the employer continues to provide salary coverage.

Upon nearing the conclusion of the employer's salary continuation phase, the employer is required to inform the employee's health insurance of the impending cessation.

Subsequently, the health insurance company initiates an automated process that involves sending a questionnaire for the application of sick pay. This step can often be carried out online, in addition to traditional submission methods.


In any case, please make sure to get a certificate from your doctor (*“Arbeitsunfähigkeit” (AU)*) in time and send it to your health insurance within one week. For continued sickness benefits, the *AU*s need to be gapless (e.g. if an *AU* runs out on a Thursday, the next one needs to start on Friday. Exceptions might be possible for weekends and holidays).

Mental Health

In case of mental health problems different helplines, social support services and measures provided by the health care system are available.

The official helplines in urgent cases are for instance

- (1) German Suicide Hotline: 0800 181 0771
- (2) Telefonseelsorge Deutschland Suicide Prevention Hotline: 0800 1110 111 or 0800 1110 222 (This hotline is in German, but you can find international hotlines [here on their website.](#))

- 
- (3) Berliner Krisendienst, which provide help from 16:00–00:00, with service in multiple languages including English. Krisendienst has nine different numbers (listed on the [website](#)) depending on from which region of Berlin you're calling.
- (4) Krisendienst Bayern: [0800 / 655 3000](#) ([link to website](#))

Social support services for mental health needs are free and there are special offers for, among other things, addiction related problems, eating disorders, and people who have experienced violence. You can find some information as well as some helpful links her (<https://www.expatica.com/de/healthcare/healthcare-services/mental-health-in-germany-346138/>). In addition to these specific services, additional social support is often available in most cities. The social psychiatric services (SPDi) are counseling centers for people with mental health problems and their relatives.

Besides this social and free support, psychiatrists and psychologists are also available. In Germany, these mental health services can be covered through your “*Krankenkasse*” and there are also emergency services specifically if you or someone you know are having a mental health crisis. If you are on expat insurance (e.g., Mawista) or private insurance, therapy and psychiatry are often not included so check with your insurance provider whether they do or not.

Therapy

In Germany, it can be tricky to get access to therapy in English covered by your “*Krankenkasse*”. Not all therapists are covered, and they can often have long waiting lists. However, the “*Krankenkasse*” must legally provide access to therapy within a reasonable time period, or else they must cover the costs for private therapists. Therefore, there are several ways to get therapy appointments and to get them in a reasonable time frame.

- You can initially look for a suitable therapist yourself. See [this article](#) by Complicated Life for how to do the initial search.⁵
- If you can't find appointments within a reasonable timeframe, you can also go to www.116117.de. Here, you will need to request a referral code online and once you receive that code via email, you can look for appointments. They usually provide appointments within 2 weeks. Unfortunately, the website doesn't have search options for English, nor do they indicate whether the therapist speaks English so one must search the names of providers online.
- Out-of-network reimbursement. Essentially, there is a way to get your “*Krankenkasse*” to pay for private therapists. See [this article](#) (Section: Out-of-network reimbursement (“*Kostenerstattung*”)) by Complicated Life for how to get your “*Krankenkasse*” to reimburse private therapies.⁶

Psychiatry

Psychiatrists are also covered by most “*Krankenkassen*” in Germany. Like therapists, appointments can take long to get. You can also request an urgent appointment through www.116117.de or call your “*Krankenkasse*” for free appointments within their network.

⁵ The Article is also available at <https://complicated.life/blog/how-to-find-the-right-therapist/>.

⁶ The Article is also available at <https://complicated.life/blog/how-to-get-therapy-that-is-covered-by-the-german-public-health-insurance-tk/>.

Mental Health Emergencies

If you, or someone you know, is having a mental health emergency, there are further resources available:

- If the emergency is life-threatening, you should still call 112.
- The national suicide hotline: 0800 181 0771
- Local mental health crisis resources: Each area has its own hotlines and offices

Other Insurances

In Germany, there are many types of insurance. Whether you should opt for these insurances will depend on your own personal needs (i.e., dental, pet, legal). However, there are some that are highly recommended. These include liability insurance (*“Privathaftpflichtversicherung”*) and renters contents insurance (*“Hausratversicherung”*).

Liability Insurance (*“Privathaftpflichtversicherung”*)

In Germany, it is highly recommended to take liability insurance. The monthly costs are very low (between 2,5 and 10€ per month), but protect you in cases of property damage, personal injury, loss of assets and lost keys. Read more details in the links below to get a better understanding of the possible situations in which your personal liability insurance can protect you.

Household insurance (*“Hausratversicherung”*)

Renters' contents insurance is also highly recommended, as it covers all your belongings. Even if you don't think you have so many things, consider exactly how much your entire set of belongings would cost to replace in the case of an accident or break-in. Some landlords may also require you to take renters' contents insurance.

Helpful Links:

<https://www.settle-in-berlin.com/insurance-in-germany/>

<https://www.howtogermany.com/pages/insurance-really-need.html>

Language Courses

Learning a new language, especially German, can be a challenging task. Although the working language at most Leibniz institutes is English, understanding and speaking German will be a great benefit for you in everyday life. Many Leibniz institutes have measures to support employees in learning German. The specific measures, especially the financial support for German classes, may be different for each Leibniz Institute. For detailed information on support for learning German offered by your institute, get in touch with the HR office. In general, the existing language learning programs are versatile: adult education centres (*“Volkshochschulen”*) offer evening courses, usually free of charge or for a rather low contribution. If your institute collaborates with a local university or a technical college, you might be eligible to attend weekly university courses. Another option is certified language learning centres and programs e.g., at the Goethe Institute, that offer weekly classes as well as intensive German courses. On all the mentioned educational facilities, you can take examinations and gain certificates that attest to your German language skills, if needed. A selection of German courses in Germany can be found here:

<http://www.goethe.de/en/index.html>;
<https://www2.daad.de/deutschland/studienangebote/sommerkurse/en/>;
<https://www.iamexpat.de/education/language-schools/german-courses-germany>.

An alternative, less formal way to improve your German skills is tandem language learning, a method based on mutual language exchange between tandem partners, where ideally, each learner is a native speaker of the language the other person wants to learn (suitable for more advanced students). This concept is not only concerned with language comprehension and learning but equally with cultural understanding and knowledge. Several platforms and apps can help you find the right tandem partner, such as [vhs-tandem](#) or [tandem.net](#). Some universities also offer a matching service for language tandems.

It is also possible to learn German with free [online](#) classes or with free [podcasts](#).

Sorting Waste and Recycling

Sorting waste and recycling is very important in Germany, and you may often find an array of different rubbish bins in front of houses. Rubbish is separated into paper waste (blue bin, “*Papiermüll*”), compost/organic waste (brown or green bin, “*Biomüll*”), and packaging waste (yellow bin or yellow bag, “*Recyclingmüll*”). Glass is separated as well, and your house may either have a special bin for glass or there is a central glass container in your neighbourhood. The remaining waste is placed in the grey or black bin (“*Restmüll*”).

Bottles and cans are also recycled. There is a deposit on most bottles and cans, so it is worth returning these the next time you go to the supermarket. The bottles with deposit are marked with a specific sign (see Figure 1).




Figure 1: Sign for reusability

Supermarkets also have small collection boxes for used batteries because these cannot be disposed of with household waste. There are special recycling centres for old electrical equipment and larger items (“*Recyclinghof*” or “*Wertstoffhof*”).

Bank Account

If you move to Germany, you may wish to open a German bank account. You can open a current account at any bank, and this can be done either at a local branch or online. To open a bank account, you need your passport (or national ID for EU nationals), residence permit, and “*Meldebescheinigung*”. After opening your account, most banks will issue you a debit card called “*EuroCheque-Karte*” (EC card / Maestro), which will allow you to draw cash from any ATM. However, this service commonly incurs charges if the ATM is maintained by a bank or bank group other than the one where you opened your account. You can also use



your EC card to pay in shops (free of charge), as a normal bank card. Credit cards/Visa cards are still not accepted by many shops in Germany.

Transferring money abroad can be expensive. You should inquire about the conditions at your own bank at home in advance and possibly choose a bank in Germany that cooperates with your bank at home. Another option for international money transfers is Western Union or apps like Wise that allow you to pay internationally at very nominal prices.

There are multiple types of banks in Germany, including traditional German banks (e.g., Sparkasse, Volksbank, Deutsche Bank) and online or app-based bank accounts (e.g. ING-DiBa, N26, Revolut, DKB, Comdirect).

Parental leave, parental allowance, and child benefit

In Germany, parental leave is regulated by the “*Elternzeit*” (parental leave) system, which is designed to support working parents in balancing their professional and family responsibilities. In general, both parents are eligible for three years of parental leave each. However, the parent has to be employed, covered by social security and have been employed for a certain period, usually a minimum of 7 months before the expected delivery date.

Parental leave can be taken all at once or in batches until the child turns eight years old, but restrictions apply after the third birthday of the child. Between the third and the eighth birthday, a maximum of 24 months of parental leave can be taken. Despite full-time parental leave, parents have the option to take parental leave on a part-time basis (up to 32 hours per week for children born after 01.09.2021). The reduced working hours must be agreed upon with the employer.


Employees are required to inform their employer about their intention to take parental leave at least seven weeks before the planned start date (13 weeks for parental leave after the third birthday of the child). The notification should include the intended duration and schedule of the leave.

During parental leave, employees are generally protected against termination by their employer. This protection starts eight weeks before the planned start date of parental leave and continues until the end of the leave.

Depending on your contract your employment might be extended by the time of your parental leave. Please be aware, that this does not apply for most contracts based on third party funding. Check with your employer what applies to you.

You're not paid during parental leave by your employer. Instead you might be able to get a parental allowance (“*Elterngeld*”), which will be paid for 12 to 14 months. The amount of parental allowance is usually between 300 to 1.800 € and depends among others on your salary, number of children, and chosen version of parental allowance.

If you are pregnant, please also check about the “*Mutterschutz*” (protection of working mothers) and “*Mutterschaftsgeld*” (maternity benefit). You will not have to work from six weeks before the due date and are not allowed to work until at least eight weeks after the birth. If you have statutory health insurance you might be entitled to the maternity benefit, a top-up payment from your employer, and midwifery care.



Regardless of your income, you might also receive child benefit for children below the age of 18. This extends to the age of 21 if the child is unemployed, or 25 if it is undertaking vocational training. In 2023, the amount of child benefit is 250 € per month per child. Please check whether you are eligible for receiving child benefits [here](https://familienportal.de/familienportal/meta/languages/family-benefits) (<https://familienportal.de/familienportal/meta/languages/family-benefits>).

Helpful links:

<https://www.bmfsfj.de/resource/blob/139908/72ce4ea769417a058aa68d9151dd6fd3/elternngeld-elterngeldplus-englisch-data.pdf>

<https://familienportal.de/familienportal/meta/languages/family-benefits>

<https://familienportal.de/familienportal/familienleistungen> (in German)

[Search for an advice center on different family-related topics in your area \(in German\)](#)

[Parental leave as academic staff \(in German\)](#)

<https://www.bmfsfj.de/bmfsfj/meta/en/financial-support-for-families-and-digitalisation-of-family-benefits-223830>

Childcare (“*Kinderbetreuung*”)

In Germany, childcare for children between the age of 0 and 6 years is optional and there are a lot of different alternatives. The most common are for children aged 0-3 years, the “*Kinderkrippe*” and for children aged 3-6 years, the “*Kindergarten*” or “*Kindertagesstätte*”. From the age of 6, children in Germany are subject to compulsory schooling, i.e., they must be sent to a public or private school (homeschooling is not allowed). Public schools are free of charge. Private and international schools require a monthly fee. For more information on the German school system (e.g., the types of schools), please refer to [this overview](#).

The “*Krippe*” and “*Kindergarten*” are often run by the municipality or local churches, but there are also private parents’ initiatives (“*Elterninitiativen*”). Some universities offer childcare too. They all tend to follow different pedagogical approaches like Montessori or Fröbel, which offer a variety of educational concepts to choose from. Especially the “*Elterninitiativen*” tend to require more active parental involvement. There are also different funding schemes, as some are public and mostly covered by the state, whereas others are (partly) paid for by the parents. After-school care is mainly organised directly at primary schools and is often integrated into the school program (“*Ganztagsschule*” = all-day school), but can also be booked separately (“*Nachmittagsbetreuung*”, “*Hort*”).


Given the very heterogeneous market of early childcare in Germany, we suggest you get in touch with the HR office of your Leibniz Institute and ask for advice on the local situation.

Unfortunately, the demand for childcare is very high, and waiting lists can be long. Hence, we suggest looking for childcare as soon as possible to secure a place in your preferred day-care centre.

<https://www.bmfsfj.de/bmfsfj/meta/en/families>

Sports

If you are interested in sports or health courses, there are many ways to access them in Germany. Most universities offer sports facilities and courses (“*Hochschulsport*”) that are



open to the public. Some courses are offered in English. Some research institutions might have special arrangements with universities or other sports facilities, so do not hesitate to ask about them at your institution.

Another possibility to access sports and health courses is through the adult education centres (“*Volkshochschule*”). They offer many courses, some of them also in English, and they are usually available at a low cost. Also, health insurance companies offer health courses (“*Gesundheitskurse*”) as part of their preventive programs and cover a large part of the costs. For specific offers and regulations, check the website of your health insurance company.

Private gyms abound in major cities.

If you want to practise a specific sport more competitively, there are lots of public sports clubs (“*Sportvereine*”). In Germany, they are generally accessible and not expensive. Normally you would have to join a club to take advantage of the offers, but there are some that allow guests or offer trial lessons before you decide to join. A membership is usually for a year (renewing automatically, thus it should be cancelled in advance if you do not want to extend it).

Other popular ways of finding sports groups for activities such as jogging, hiking, yoga and others are Facebook and Meetup. There are lots of privately organised initiatives that you can find there.

Public Transportation

Germany has an excellent public transportation network. City centres are typically served by busses, trams, and subways (in larger cities). Most cities now also offer short-term bike rental services (e.g., [KVB-rad](#) (in Cologne), [VRN nextbike](#) (in Rhine-Neckar Area)) and electronic scooters (e.g., [TIER](#)). For inter-city travel, Deutsche Bahn ([DB](#)) and other providers run regular regional and high-speed train services. Companies like [Flixbus](#) operate long-distance bus services. You can now opt for the Deutschland Ticket, which is a monthly pass that allows access to all regional trains and local transport throughout Germany. Your institute might even offer the Deutschland Jobticket, which is a partially subsidised version of the Deutschland Ticket.

<https://www.iamexpat.de/expat-info/transportation/public-transportation-germany-sbahn-ubahn-tram-bus>

<https://handbookgermany.de/en/mobility>

Driving License

Your driving license might not be valid in Germany or might need to be converted to a German driving license after moving to Germany. For more information on this topic, see [the link](#).



Navigating Academic Work Life in Germany

Employee representatives

Prepared in collaboration with Susanne Auls (Leibniz-Institut für Zoo- und Wildtierforschung and 2nd Vice Chairwoman of the workers' council at the Leibniz Forschungsverbund Berlin e.V.)

At the majority of Leibniz Institutes, the workforce benefits from representation through either a workers' council (“*Betriebsrat*”) or a staff council (“*Personalrat*”). Both of these entities serve as advocates for the rights and concerns of employees within their respective work environments. The designation of whether a staff council or a workers' council is established depends on the legal structure of the employer's organization. Specifically, if the employer operates under public law, a staff council is elected; whereas if the organization is under private law, a workers' council is designated.

It is recommended to ascertain the type of representation existing within your own institute and to establish contact with them to foster mutual understanding. It's crucial to recognize that only workers' and staff councils possess the authority to exercise the rights of co-determination as stipulated by the law. This authority is not extended to individual employees, nor to the representatives of distinct occupational groups, as they lack the necessary legal foundation for participating in co-determination processes.

Workers' Council (“Betriebsrat”)

Workers' councils operate in accordance with the regulations outlined in the Works Constitution Act. This legislation defines the scope of their rights and responsibilities. An English version of this law can be accessed via the following link: https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/englisch_betrvg/.

The primary role of a workers' council is to ensure adherence to Acts, statutory instruments, safety regulations, collective agreements, and company agreements that serve the interests of employees. Within this context, the council's authority in matters of co-determination is particularly robust in relation to collective rules governing workforce behaviour. Figure 2 gives an overview about those topics with co-determination rights. Beyond this, workers' councils also play a crucial role in addressing individual concerns and conflicts that arise within the workplace.

One significant responsibility of a workers' council is to prevent any form of discrimination against employees. This pertains to factors such as their origin, nationality, gender, sexual identity, religion, political affiliation, or involvement in trade union activities. Furthermore, workers' councils actively engage in fostering the integration of foreign employees and advocating for measures to combat racism within the organization. Thus, individuals facing challenges related to assimilating into the German work environment and the scientific system can seek support and assistance from their institute's workers' council.

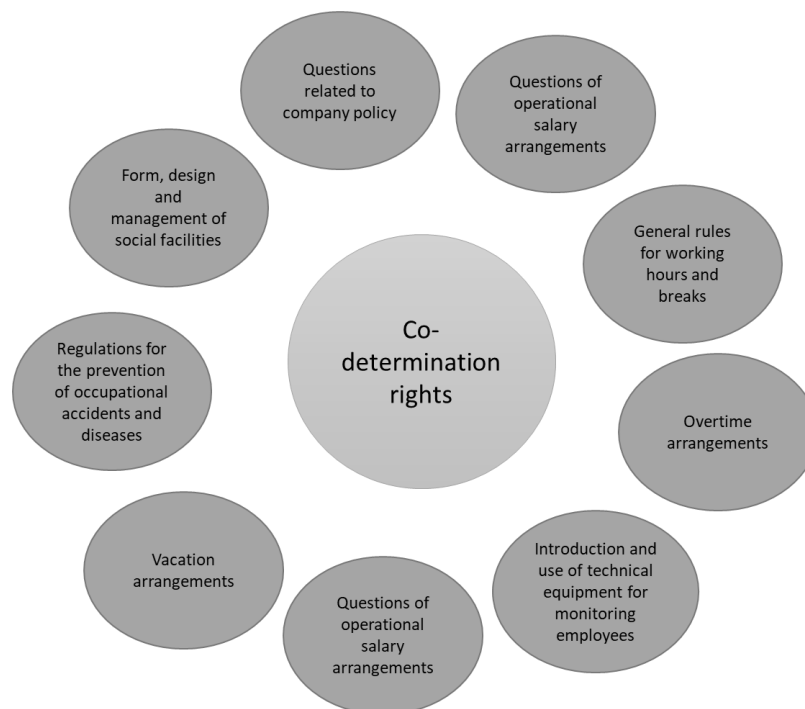



Figure 2: Co-determination rights of workers' councils

Staff Council (“Personalrat”)

The framework for conducting staff council elections and facilitating staff council activities is established through the Federal Staff Representation Act, or relevant state laws as applicable. It's important to note that the specifics of these regulations vary between different federal states. A comprehensive listing, along with corresponding links to the pertinent legal documents (provided only in German), is available [here](#).



The responsibilities of staff councils closely mirror those of workers' councils. They engage in matters related to collective regulations and offer assistance and guidance to individual employees in addressing their issues and disputes.

The extent of their co-determination authority varies depending on the jurisdiction of the federal state. If your institute is governed by a staff council, it is recommended that you engage in dialogue with them to gain a clear understanding of the areas in which they can offer their support.

Fixed-Term and Permanent Academic Positions in Germany

In Germany, non-permanent academic work contracts are subject to a specific law: the “*Wissenschaftszeitvertragsgesetz*” (“*WissZeitVG*”). Among other things, the “*WissZeitVG*” governs the amount of time you can be employed under a fixed-term contract. As a postdoc, you are only allowed to work under a fixed-term contract for 6 years if you are on institutional funding. There are many caveats to this rule, and it is important to talk to your local Leibniz Institute HR and Workers’ Council to ensure that the information below is accurate for your individual institute.

In general, if you complete your PhD in Germany, you are allowed 6 years of time to do so. Any unused time can be allocated as additional time for your postdoc (i.e., in addition to the 6 years allowed for a postdoc).

It is important to note that these rules do NOT necessarily apply to third-party funding, and you can theoretically remain a postdoc forever under third-party funding under certain conditions

If you are unsure of the extent to which you are subject to these restrictions, you may contact the Human Resources Office of your institute at any time for more information.


See information by Germany’s largest education union for more details on [fixed-term contracts in higher education and research](#).

Permanent positions below the level of full professor are comparatively rare in German academia. Many Leibniz Institutes, however, offer the possibility of applying for a permanent position (“*Entfristung*”) after a certain number of years. Please inquire with your supervisor, your HR department, or your works council about specific regulations and processes at your institute.

Income Brackets (“*Einstufung*”)

The salary for academics in Germany follows the guidelines of the salary for the public service (“*Tarifverträge der Länder für den öffentlichen Dienst*” / “*TV-L*” or “*Tarifvertrag des Bundes für den öffentlichen Dienst*” / “*TVöD-Bund*”). There are two factors that determine your gross salary: your “*Entgeltgruppe*” (pay group) and your “*Erfahrungsstufe*” (experience level). The higher your “*Entgeltgruppe*” and the higher your “*Erfahrungsstufe*”, the higher your salary.

Generally speaking, the requirements of the job and your qualifications will determine the “*Entgeltgruppe*”. The “*Entgeltgruppe*” for any particular position is typically already specified in the job advertisement. For a regular postdoc position, this is most often EG 13. Senior and group leader positions may be EG 14 or even EG 15. In addition, your professional



experience in this line of work determines the “*Erfahrungsstufe*” within the pay group that you will be placed in. There are six “*Erfahrungsstufen*”:

level 1 - no prior experience

level 2 - 1 year of prior experience

level 3 - 3 years of prior experience

level 4 - 6 years of prior experience

level 5 - 10 years of prior experience

level 6 - 15 years of prior experience

You will automatically advance to the next level after the respective number of years (e.g., after 2 years in level 2, you will reach level 3; after 3 years in level 3, you will reach level 4). If you perform well above average, you can advance more quickly to levels 4, 5 and 6 (“*beschleunigter Stufenaufstieg*”).

When you start a new job at a Leibniz Institute, the initial placement into an “*Erfahrungsstufe*” is determined by your institute’s HR department and can sometimes be negotiated. Please note that, apart from placing you at a specific level (e.g., level 3), the HR department can additionally acknowledge time previously spent in this particular level (e.g., you get placed in level 3 + 1 year), effectively shortening the time you will need to reach the next level (e.g., you need only two more years until you reach level 4).

What counts as relevant prior work experience is only partly formally defined, and the HR department has some degree of freedom in deciding what counts as relevant work experience. If you did your PhD in Germany and/or had a previous contract with a German research institute, the years you spent working there usually count as prior experience. It can be more difficult to prove you have relevant prior work experience if you did your PhD abroad and/or have been on a scholarship rather than a work contract. If you have previously worked in an EU member state, the European Court of Justice (verdict [C-710/18C-710/18](#) (various languages)) and the “*Bundesarbeitsgericht*” (verdict [6 AZR 232/17](#) (German only)) ruled that your previous work experience must be acknowledged as long as you had a work contract and the tasks you carried out are similar to the tasks you are to perform now. In any case, it is advisable to get in touch with your future supervisor, the workers’ or staff council of your institute and/or your institute’s HR department ahead of time to discuss your placement. It can help to prepare a list of tasks (research, teaching, administrative duties) that were part of your PhD work and get it signed by your previous supervisor.

Please note that the assignment to the “*Entgeltgruppe*” happens before your actual start at the new position. It will be part of your recruitment process. If you have any questions related to the “*Entgeltgruppe*” you should get in touch with your future supervisor, the workers’ or staff council of your institute and/or your institute’s HR department before signing a contract. Your “*Erfahrungsstufe*” can also be assigned while you are already employed, but the process might be more difficult. Please be aware that in most cases, you get no detailed information about your “*Erfahrungsstufe*” automatically. If you have questions related to your final salary, please also contact the workers’ or staff council of your institute and/or your institute’s HR department.



Conflict Resolution

Conflicts concerning good scientific practice can occur within the work environment, and finding resources to diffuse situations is important. If such a conflict cannot be resolved between the involved parties, the ombudsperson of your Leibniz institute can be consulted. A list of decentralised ombudspersons for each institute can be found [here](#). In addition to member institutes' ombudspersons, Leibniz Association has an ombudscommittee that investigates allegations of scientific misconduct levelled against current and former employees and, where necessary, sets up a committee of inquiry in accordance with the relevant guidelines. [The Leibniz Code for Good Research Practice](#) has been adopted by all the Leibniz institutes and specifies the criteria of good scientific practice, definitions of misconduct and the role and authority of the association's central ombudscommittee.

In many institutes that are affiliated with universities, Company Social Counselling ("*Betriebliche Sozialberatung*") can provide support in conflict resolution and counselling.

Most Leibniz Institutes also have a Workers' Council ("*Betriebsrat*"), which can advise and support you with any labour-related issues, e.g. conflicts with your supervisor or questions about working hours.

For other work-related issues that require legal advice, Leibniz Association has a free conflict resolution centre that can provide counsel:

<https://www.leibniz-gemeinschaft.de/en/about-us/leibniz-integrity/guide-for-dealing-with-conflict/advice-centre-for-conflict-guidance-and-prevention.html>

Leibniz Mentoring for Female Researchers

The Leibniz Mentoring Programme supports highly qualified female postdoctoral researchers on their path to obtaining a professorship or other leadership positions. The programme supports the participants in managing their careers in a goal-driven way, expanding their subject-specific networks and taking on managerial tasks with confidence.

The core component of the 16-month Leibniz Mentoring Programme is the tandem consisting of mentor and mentee, accompanied by a range of seminars on topics such as negotiation, network analysis, career planning, academic appointment procedures, etc. A seminar on European research funding is organised in cooperation with the Europe Office of the Leibniz Association and takes place in Brussels. Additionally, the mentees have recourse to process-oriented coaching throughout the programme's duration.

The call for applications is announced annually. See for further details:


<https://www.leibniz-gemeinschaft.de/en/careers/careers-in-research/taking-on-leadership-positions/leibniz-mentoring>

Leibniz Association Funding Opportunities

The Leibniz Association offers several funding opportunities through the Leibniz Competition.

Leibniz Junior Research Groups

The program is aimed at postdoctoral researchers who are keen to take on a professorship or similar academic role. As leaders of a Leibniz Junior Research Group, they are given the opportunity to pursue their own research projects and establish themselves in their respective fields. It is important to note that your application needs to be selected by your



institute internally, before it can be sent to the general Leibniz Competition for evaluation. Additionally, your institute is required to fund your proposal partially, and how this is done varies according to the institute. We strongly encourage interested postdocs to talk to their Institute's scientific management to discuss these before starting the application process.

Leibniz Collaborative Excellence

The program funds innovative projects that require collaborative networking within and outside of the Leibniz Association in order to succeed.

The program focuses on expanding both interdisciplinary and international collaborations for solving complex challenges, as well as on the promotion of research in participative structures such as Citizen Science.

Leibniz Transfer

The program promotes the transfer of knowledge from all academic fields into society, commerce and the sphere of politics, as well as the development of teaching and transfer methods.

Programs for Women Professors

Selected candidates are promoted by means of a permanent associate or full professorship or one with a tenure track option. The program aims to support the successful recruitment of top female academics and promote initiatives that pave the way for such appointments at an early stage. It is aimed at women in all disciplines who have an outstanding international track record.

For more information on Leibniz Competition, see:

<https://www.leibniz-gemeinschaft.de/en/research/leibniz-competition>



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