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# Housing

Besides access to jobs, vocational training or language support, finding a place of one's own is one of the biggest and most difficult tasks for people who have recently immigrated. This is because affordable housing is currently hard to find in cities like Hannover. So it may take some time until you find your own apartment or room to live. Here you will find some advice on how to proceed!

### Search for a flat

## Start looking for a flat

The first step in any househunting process is to consider:

- what exactly are you looking for (your own flat or a room in a shared flat)?
- how high may the rent be (see also <u>Rent an apartment / rental contract</u>)?
- what requirements does the flat have to meet (size, location, suitable for disabled people, etc.)?

## Search via newspaper

Many landlords still advertise their vacant flats in the local daily newspapers - as they did in the times before the internet. On Wednesdays and Saturdays, the local daily newspapers in Hannover, HAZ and MP, publish accommodation adverts. Since both newspapers are issued by the same publishing house, the advertisements are identical. So, if it comes to househunting, it doesn't matter which of the two newspapers you choose. Furthermore, it is worthwhile to take a look at the advertising journals, such as Der Heiße Draht.

## Searching via the internet

The largest commercial flat portals are 😧 immobilienscout24.de, 😧 immonet.de, 😧 wohnungsbörse.net and 🌚 immowelt.de. These platforms also allow prospective tenants to create a profile and upload an application portfolio - the landlords then use this as a basis to select applicants whom they invite to view the apartments. These platforms are mainly used by property management companies and estate agents, but also by private flat owners. Flats are also offered for rent on 🌚 ebay-Kleinanzeigen. Please note that estate agents usually charge agency fees of 2-3 months' rent.

Another online source are the websites of municipal housing companies such as nanova <u>Wohnen GmbH</u>, commercial real estate companies or property management companies that advertise their flats on their own website.

The municipal pension fund of the city of Hannover (Zusatzversorgungskasse) offers its vacant flats  $\bigcirc$  here, for example.

There are also local groups on facebook about finding a flat and there are email newsletters offering flats.

#### **Registering with housing associations**



Housing associations or cooperatives are large providers of rental housing. The purpose of these associations/cooperatives is to provide low-cost housing for their members. Therefore, you have to become a member of the association or cooperative to be able to rent a flat here. These five Hanoverian cooperatives are mentioned here as examples, there are more:

- Delimination Heimkehr eG
- Scartenheim eG
- Ostland Wohnungsgenossenschaft eG
- Selbsthilfe Linden eG
- Spar- und Bauverein eG

# Shared flats / WG (Wohngemeinschaft)

WG is short for "Wohngemeinschaft" and describes an arrangement where several people live in the same flat and split the costs for shared facilities such as kitchen and bathroom. Prices vary considerably depending on the location and the size of the flat. Online offers of rooms in shared flats can be found, for example, at O wg-gesucht.de

# Apartment viewing

Before an apartment is rented out there is often an apartment viewing. Usually several people interested in the apartment are invited to view it at the same time. Since affordable housing is rare in Hanover, many people apply for each apartment. It is therefore very important to obtain important documents such as a SCHUFA report or a tenant self-disclosuret in good time. This can increase the chances of getting an apartment.

It is advisable to compile the documents into an "application folder" and take it with you to the viewing appointment. The application folder could contain the following documents, for example:

- Covering letter (who am I/are we, what do I do for a living, how old are my children, why would I like to rent the flat).
- @Tenant self-disclosure
- Copy of your passport/residence permit (Attention: copy front and back) Proof of your income

## Rent an apartment / Rental contract

You have found an apartment. Congratulations! Now the landlord and you have to sign a rental contract. In Germany, rental contracts must be concluded in writing. The verbal agreement of the landlord does not yet count as a contract.

# When you rent an apartment, keep the following points in mind:

- You must read the rental contract carefully. If there are points you do not understand, ask a friend or an advisor.
- The rental contract is very important. Once it is signed, it cannot be cancelled so quickly!



- Check if there are any damages in the apartment. If so, they should be recorded in the contract.
- Note the meter readings for electricity, water, and gas if there is any.
- If you agree with what is in the contract, then sign it.

#### **Rental contract**

The following points must be included in a rental contract:

- Name and address of the landlord
- Address of the rented apartment/house/room
- The rented living space in sqm
- Number of rooms
- Amount of the net "cold" rent
- Amount of operating costs (additional costs)
- Total rent
- Amount of the security deposit
- Number of keys you have received.

The rental contract will state in detail which costs are part of the additional costs (Nebenkosten). Electricity and gas usually have to be registered separately with an energy company and are usually not included in the total rent (Warmmiete). You have to pay the total rent to the landlord every month. To be on the safe side, ask the landlord what else you have to pay in addition to the rent, e.g. for a TV and cable connection.

As a rule, the landlord will ask you for a security deposit. The security deposit is a payment you make to the landlord in advance. The amount of the deposit is a maximum of 3 months' rent (basic rent without operating or heating costs). You will get this amount back when you move out, unless you have damaged something in the apartment or have not paid the rent.

## **Operating costs/additional costs**

Additional costs is the colloquial term for operating costs. These are costs that are incurred in addition to the rent when using a rented apartment, such as for garbage collection and water, or possibly for heating and for a janitor.

#### Advance payment or lump sum for additional costs

Additional costs can be paid as a lump sum or as advance payments. It is important that this is specified in the rental contract. In the case of an advance payment for additional costs, if the actual costs are lower, a refund can be made after the final accounting. However, if the actual costs are higher, you will have to make an additional payment.

Neither is possible with a lump-sum payment for the additional cost, since a fixed amount has been agreed regardless of the actual costs. This means that neither the landlord can demand additional payments, nor can you as a tenant demand repayments.

#### You want to quit your tenancy?



Germany protects tenants and landlords. You cannot simply terminate your rental contract from one day to the next. You must write to your landlord at least three months in advance and announce the termination of the contract. Always give a notice of termination in writing. Have your notice of termination confirmed.

## In your own apartment

# Once you have moved into your new apartment, you should take this steps first:

- Write your name on the mailbox and doorbell of your apartment so you will receive your mail or packages.
- Register your new address with the 
   <u>Residents' Registration Office (Bürgeramt)</u>.
- Report the new address to your employer, bank, health insurance company, and all offices from which you may receive important mail.
- Find an electricity supplier and a gas supplier (if you have gas in your apartment).

# Having your own apartment also means taking responsibility for it:

- Read the house rules.
- Separate your garbage. You can find out about how to dispose different kinds of garbage <u>here</u>. Why waste separation makes sense, you can find out <u>here</u>.
- Air your apartment regularly. This will prevent the formation of dangerous mold in your apartment.
- Do not place any objects (shoes, cupboards, garbage bags) in the stairwell. In an emergency, the stairwell is your escape route! And escape routes must always be clear.

## **House rules**

Several people living together in one house requires mutual consideration and tolerance. The landlord/landlady may lay down certain rules for the coexistence of tenants in an apartment building. These rules are called the house rules (Hausordnung). Typical contents of house rules are:

- quiet times / noise prevention
- waste disposal
- use of common areas such as a garden or drying rooms
- stairwell cleaning

An example of house rules in different languages can be found here.

# **Electricity and gas**

Everyone has to pay for their own electricity. Even if you receive money from the JobCenter, you have to pay for your electricity yourself. As a rule, the landlord does not take care of the electricity and gas supply. You have to sign a contract with an electricity/gas supplier yourself.



You are free to choose your electricity or gas supplier. The best way to get an overview of providers and to compare prices is to use the independent o <u>energy consumer portal</u>. When registering with a supplier, you must provide the number of your electricity meter and the current meter reading. The same applies to gas (if there is gas in your home).

Free and independent advice on all aspects of energy is offered by the 🚱 Lower Saxony consumer center.

# Bulky waste / hazardous waste

Waste that is too large or bulky for the dustbin is "bulky waste". Waste that may not be disposed of in the dustbin, such as old batteries or used toner cartridges, is "hazardous waste". Hazardous waste and bulky waste can be handed in at the recyclables collection points (Wertstoffhöfe) of AHA.

# Internet

Everyone has to pay for their own internet connection. They are not covered by the JobCenter, for example. You are free to choose your internet provider. Please note that internet contracts usually have a minimum term of 24 months. Cancellation before the end of the 24 months is only possible in very special cases.

# Television

Every household in Germany must pay the licence fee. Some can be exempted from this obligation. You can find more information on the page "<u>licence fee (Rundfunkbeitrag)</u>".

## Support / Counseling

## housing benefit

The housing benefit (Wohngeld) is a subsidy for rent or for housing in property. You can apply for housing benefit if you earn little money. However, you must not receive JobCenter benefits.

You can apply for housing benefit in writing or <u>online</u>. The department responsible in Hannover is the Department of Social Affairs of the City of Hannover. The branch is called "Wohngeldstelle" (Housing benefit office).

Housing benefit is usually paid for 12 months.

Having savings – the money you have saved up – is not an obstacle to receiving housing benefit. However, you must declare how much money you have.

## Department of Social Affairs of the City of Hannover / Wohngeldstelle

PHamburger Allee 25, 30161 Hannover

<u>0511 168-2001</u>

@wohngeld@hannover-stadt.de



Availability by telephone:
Mon. 8:30 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.
Tues. 8:30 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.
Wed. 8:30 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.
Thurs. 8:30 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.
Fri. 8:30 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.

Personal consultation by appointment only, please call ahead for an appointment!

Please send applications and other documents by paper mail, e-mail or online.

hannover.de > > Wohngeld (German text only)

#### Support for homeless people

In Hannover homeless people receive help and support. The flyer 😧 "<u>Angebote für</u> wohnungslose <u>Menschen in Hannover</u>" (Offers for homeless people in Hannover) tells you what help is available. The flyer covers these topics:

- Counseling
- Overnight stay and accommodation for homeless people
- Emergency sleeping facilities
- Emergency measures in winter (warming rooms)
- Meeting places for homeless and unhoused people day meetings, night cafés
- Distribution of food and groceries
- Medical care
- Veterinary care

For all points you will find practical information and contact persons. The flyer is available in German, Polish, Turkish and Arabic.

