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Living

Rent and rental agreement

You have found a flat. Congratulations. You are renting this flat from a person. This person is your landlord or landlady. You sign a contract with this person. The contract says that you are allowed to live in the flat. It is called a tenancy agreement. The tenancy agreement regulates the rights and obligations. You have rights and obligations. And your landlord or landlady has rights and obligations. For example, you have to pay money every month. This is the rent. Your landlord or landlady must leave the flat to you. He or she must also take care of repairs to the flat.

The tenancy agreement is an important document. It states the price of the flat. It also states whether you are allowed to smoke or do laundry in the flat. Everything is set out in writing in the contract. Don't understand something in the contract? Ask about it. It's best to do this before you sign the contract.

The rent consists of the net rent and the service charges. You also pay the service charges every month. This is how you pay running costs. These include the cleaning of the stairwell or the garden labourer. You also pay for [rubbish collection](#). These service charges are shared by all residents of the building. People with larger flats pay more.

Only you have a key to your flat. Take good care of your key. Have you lost the key? Then a locksmith will have to come. A locksmith can be expensive. Sometimes the landlord or landlady needs access to your home. Sometimes other people also need access to your home. You need to be informed about the visit. This is often done by post or telephone. This may be particularly necessary if a tradesperson needs to enter your home. They want to repair something in your home. Or the municipal utilities or your energy supplier need to read how much water or electricity you have used.

Do you want to give notice?

Germany protects tenants and landlords. You can't simply give notice overnight. You must give your landlord or landlady at least three months' notice. Always give notice of cancellation in writing. Have your cancellation confirmed. Do you need help? Then go to your [help centre](#). The tenants' association can also help. But you will have to pay money.

House Rules

In towns and cities, multiple people often live together in one building. Rules are required in order for them to live together without any problems. These rules are laid down in the House Rules (Hausordnung). Quiet times are particularly important in Germany. Check in your House Rules the time after which you need to be quiet. Often, this is the whole of Sunday. On other days, it's often after 22:00. Make sure you aren't too loud. Are there people near you being too loud? Then talk to them. Ask them to turn the music or the TV volume down.

Housing benefit

Housing benefit

If you and the people living in your household earn a small amount of money, you can apply for financial support with housing. You need an accommodation entitlement certificate to be eligible for this. Under certain conditions, you are also entitled to housing benefit. If you get money from the state for yourself and your family, you will not usually need to apply for housing benefit.

You must apply for an accommodation entitlement certificate (Wohnberechtigungsschein, WBS) in the Federal State or the town/city (municipal administration, in the Housing Office (Wohnungsamt)) where you are looking for social housing.

In principle, refugees with a letter of recognition (Anerkennungsbescheid) from the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge) can get a WBS even if they have not yet been given a residence permit.

[Einfügen: Adresse, Link zum Sozialamt oder ähnlichem, Wohnungsvermittlungen, andere Hilfen zum Thema Wohnen in der Region]

Waste separation and deposits (Pfand)

Waste separation means that different types of waste are collected and disposed of separately. In Germany, waste separation starts with the consumers themselves. That means every household must sort its own waste and dispose of it in different bins and containers. A large amount of Germany's waste is recycled and composted, which conserves resources and protects the environment. As a general rule, avoiding waste is always the easiest way to do something about the growing mountains of waste.

If you put something in the wrong bin, the staff and sorting plants at recycling centres have to sort through the waste again. If we all separate waste properly, we can avoid this additional effort, reduce costs and do something for the environment.

What goes in which bin?

The waste bins in Germany have different colours. The colours tell you which waste goes in which bin. In big cities, the waste bins are often right by people's houses. In the countryside, you might need to travel to a recycling centre to find all the bins. Or you can wait for the next collection day for certain types of waste. While you're waiting, you can store the waste in your garage or basement, for example. The "Waste calendar" (Abfallkalender) will tell you when which type of waste is collected – it will be posted to you each year, or you can pick it up from the town or city hall.

💡 Specific waste must go in specific bins!

[[Platzhalter: Farbliche Kennzeichnung der Mülltonnen hier eintragen mit Erklärung, was in welche Tonne darf, oder Bild/PDF hochladen - verlinken Sie oben den Abfallkalender]]

Do I have to separate my waste?

Yes, waste separation is compulsory in Germany. Everyone must separate their waste correctly and put it in the right bins. If you don't follow the waste separation rules, you may be given a warning by your landlord or landlady. If you don't change your behaviour, you may even lose your home. And your landlord or landlady will charge you for the costs resulting from incorrect

waste separation. If you have your own home, incorrect waste separation will increase your bill for waste disposal. Incorrect waste separation is also considered an offence. If you are caught, you will have to pay a fine. If you repeatedly don't separate waste, or separate it incorrectly, this fine may be several hundred or thousand euros.

What do I need to know about "Pfand"?

In Germany, there is something called "Pfandpflicht" for certain drinks packaging. When you buy plastic bottles, glass bottles or drinks cans in a supermarket, you pay a few extra cents. If you take them back to a collection point for empty bottles and cans in a supermarket (usually a machine), you can get this money back. This is called "Pfand". There are two different types of these specific bottles:

Disposable bottles (which are recycled) have a square symbol with a can and a bottle, and an arrow wrapped around them. This is the Deutsche Pfand-System GmbH company logo. You will get 25 cents back for each bottle or can with this symbol.

Reusable bottles (which are washed and refilled) will either have no symbol at all, a "blue angel" or the word "Mehrweg(-Flasche)", "Leihflasche" or "Pfandflasche". You will get 15 cents back for each reusable bottle. You will get 8 cents back for each beer bottle.

💡 This "Pfand" system does not apply to drinks cartons.

💡 If you don't have the time to take your bottles back, or you don't want to, then you can also put them next to a bin on the pavement in a clearly visible place. There are many people in Germany who collect these bottles to earn a bit of money for themselves.

Energy and the environment

You need gas and electricity for your home. They provide power for the various devices you use. You probably use electricity or gas for cooking. Your washing machine also needs electricity. And so does your phone. Some devices use more power than others. So when you buy a new device, you should always check its energy consumption. Lots of devices use power even when in standby mode, even though they are basically switched off. The best way to stop this is a power strip that can be switched off. All you have to do is flick one switch, and multiple devices are disconnected.

Many homes are heated using gas. You will often pay your supplier for this monthly in advance. Then they recalculate your usage once a year. Sometimes you will have to pay more. Sometimes you will get some money back. If electricity and gas are expensive, it's a good idea to save money each month. That means you have enough money if you need to pay more later on.

💡 Using energy carefully will save you money. It's also good for the environment. Find out [here](#) how to heat and ventilate your home correctly and save energy.

The main place you need water is in the bathroom. But you also need it in the kitchen, for cooking and washing up. It's a very good idea to save water. It means you pay less for water, sewage and energy for heating the water.

💡 Tips for saving water: Install a low-flow showerhead. Shower rather than having a bath. Repair any leaking taps. Install a button in your toilet to stop flushing.

More tips and useful information can be found at the [Consumer Advice Centre \(Verbraucherzentrale\)](#).

Buying new devices

When buying new devices, always check the energy label. This will show how efficient the new device is. A wide range of products have an energy label. This includes lights, washing machines, TVs and heaters. Energy efficiency classes and information about product characteristics, such as power and water consumption or volume, make it simple to compare different devices. Energy-efficient devices can save you hundreds of euros a year.

💡 There is an app for the energy label. It can help you compare energy information for selected products. The app also tells you how to use the products efficiently. The app is available in German and English from the [Google Play Store](#) and the [Apple App Store](#).

Broadcast licence fees

Independent news reporting is very important. Germany has independent radio, television and online services. These are provided by ARD, ZDF and Deutschlandradio. They report in a way that is free from economic and political influences. For this, all people pay money together. This is called the broadcast licence fee (Rundfunkbeitrag).

According to the law: In Germany, a broadcast licence fee must be paid for each flat. However, only one person in each home has to pay the broadcast licence fee. It costs €18.36 per month. The money must be paid to the Fee Services department of ARD, ZDF and Deutschlandradio. See the following [information sheet](#) for more information. It is available in [simple language](#) here. Or visit the [broadcast licence fee website](#). This website is available in multiple languages.

Some people can be exempted from this payment. For example, if you receive benefits under the Asylum Seekers Benefits Act or other social benefits. An application must be submitted for exemption from the broadcast licence fee.

You can find the application for an exemption [here](#).