MAX PLANCK
GESELLSCHAFT

# LIVING AND WORKING IN GERMANY

A guide for international guest researchers

Insight must precede application.

MAX PLANCK

# Welcome
## to the Max Planck Society

We are delighted that you have joined the Max Planck Society. Welcome to our community! As we want to make your arrival and stay as a guest scientist as easy and pleasurable as possible, we have compiled this brochure designed to orient you to the Max Planck world. It covers everything from tips on what to do prior to your arrival in Germany to official formalities during your stay and very practical topics, such as finding accommodation, travelling in Germany, medical care, leisure time and a kind of short regional guide to familiarize you with the cultural peculiarities of your host country. Please note that none of the information presented in this brochure is legally binding.

**AS WE WANT TO MAKE YOUR ARRIVAL AND STAY AS A GUEST SCIENTIST AS EASY AND PLEASURABLE AS POSSIBLE, WE HAVE COMPILED THIS BROCHURE DESIGNED TO ORIENT YOU TO THE MAX PLANCK WORLD**

Germany is a many facetted country that is open to ideas, cultures and people from all over the world. Innovation and high-tech are highly valued here. At the same time however, there is a strong regional awareness of tradition and culture here, and – due to the federal structure of the 16 states – there are often differences in official and educational matters.

Your research stay at a Max Planck Institute will open up some excellent research opportunities to you. The Max Planck Society is Germany's most successful scientific organization in basic research. The individual Institutes are run by world renowned researchers who choose their own research topics, enjoy the best working conditions and have a free hand in the selection of their employees. This enormous research freedom goes hand-in-hand with a substantial degree of responsibility: our core values are set out in a binding Code of Conduct (see Section 7).

The Max Planck Institutes are characterized by their international research communities: the employees see themselves as a cosmopolitan community that likes to integrate guests from home and abroad, and are opposed to any form of discrimination. Do not hesitate to inform your colleagues at your host Institute if you encounter any difficulties. Alternatively you can use the tips in this brochure to find out where and how you can get support.

And finally, please take advantage of the opportunities offered by many Institutes and contact your host Institute's International Officer or Human Resources Department with any questions or concerns you may have. Whilst they are unable to provide legally binding information, they will support you wherever possible.

We're delighted that you've decided to spend a research period at a Max Planck Institute and become part of this diverse and inspiring research community. Good luck with your research project and enjoy your stay in Germany, which we hope, will leave you with many fond memories.

# Contents


## 1

**The Max Planck Society: nationally based – internationally networked** ..... **9**

## 2

**Formalities – Finding your way through the red tape**

2.1 Your status within the Institute .. **13**

2.2 What needs to be done before you come to Germany ..... **15**

2.3 What needs to be done after you arrive in Germany ..... **22**

2.4 Do you have to pay taxes in Germany? ..... **24**

# 3

## Everyday life in Germany


3.1 How do I find somewhere to live? ..... **27**

3.2 How do I receive my money? Opening a bank account ..... **32**

3.3 Sick, what now? Healthcare..... **33**

3.4 How much do things cost? The cost of living..... **35**

3.5 Exploring Germany: Public transport..... **37**

3.6 Bringing your children with you..... **44**

3.7 Communications and media..... **48**

3.8 Waste separation / recycling..... **51**

3.9 Electricity ..... **52**

3.10 Shopping ..... **52**

3.11 Going out ..... **53**

3.12 Smoking ..... **53**

3.13 Culture ..... **53**

3.14 Occupational health management at the MPG, sports & leisure ..... **55**

3.15 Sanitary facilities ..... **55**

3.16 Religion and holidays..... **56**


# 4


## German Cultural Standards & Values ..... **59**


# 5


## Concluding words

Getting settled in Germany – between euphoria and challenge..... **65**


# 6


## International Offices and Welcome Services at the Institutes..... **67**


# 7


## Getting Help ..... **69**


# 8


## At a Glance / Map..... **71**

# The Max Planck Society

nationally based –
internationally networked

# 1

The Max Planck Society is an internationally recognized research institution. Over 85 per cent of its funding comes from public funds from the Federal Government, the individual German states (Länder) and the European Union. For more than 70 years it has stood for knowledge-oriented basic research in the life sciences, natural sciences and humanities.

About 23,800 employees work and carry out research at 38 locations in Germany as well as in Rome, Florence, Luxembourg, Nijmegen and Florida. Of these, some 14,600 are scientists, from student assistants, doctoral students, postdocs, research group leaders, guest scientists to the directors who head up the Institutes.

The more than 80 Max Planck Institutes are in demand as innovative and internationally active research units. The Max Planck Society's appeal has spread around the world: over a third (35.5 per cent) of the circa 23,800 employees come from abroad. If one considers those who are scientifically active, it is more than half (circa 52 per cent).

**THE MAX PLANCK SOCIETY IS A CREATIVE COSMOS IN WHICH INTERDISCIPLINARY AND INTERCULTURAL VIEWS AND WAYS OF THINKING BY CLEVER MINDS ARE BROUGHT TO BEAR**

Well over half of the guest scientists come from abroad, and just under two thirds (65.1 per cent) of the young researchers (doctoral students and postdocs) come from somewhere outside of Germany. China and India were certainly the main countries of origin for foreign guest and junior researchers in 2018, followed by the USA, Italy and the Russian Federation. More than one third of directors and Max Planck research group leaders hold a foreign passport. All in all, the Max Planck Society is a creative cosmos in which interdisciplinary and intercultural views and ways of thinking by clever minds are brought to bear and this is what makes it so successful.

Interdisciplinary and intercultural views and ways of thinking are essential building blocks for the the Max Planck Society's global reputation and success. This is evident, for instance, in important ranking tables: the Max

Planck Society has been among the world's top 5 in the Highly Cited Researchers Index for years. In recent years, Max Planck scientists have also repeatedly received important national awards, such as the Leibniz and Körber Prizes, as well as international awards such as the Fields Medal and the Breakthrough Prize.

The Max Planck Society has created partner groups as an instrument to ensure that the know-how acquired in Germany by our young foreign scientists is not lost: support with leading a working group that is adequately equipped by their home institutions is available for outstanding postdocs returning to their countries of origin. Our partner groups, the International Max Planck Research Schools and Max Planck Centers represent the cornerstones of our international collaborations.

## GET TO KNOW THE MAX PLANCK SOCIETY: READ THE INTRANET MAX AND MAXPLANCKRESEARCH

Discover the diversity of research at our institutes: the intranet MAX and MaxPlanckResearch are excellent starting points for anyone who wants to quickly feel at home in the Max Planck Society's world of science. They make it easier for colleagues to get in touch with each other and give them the news from around the research organisation. The Intranet MAX, is the most recent offspring. You will find a lot of useful information under the heading MY MPG, you can present yourself on the profile page – the MySite and seek an exchange with like-minded persons. To make cooperation in projects easier, you can work in a team room, share documents, discuss matters with colleagues from your MPI or any other institute and even with people who are no employees of the Max Planck Society. It is also worthwhile having a look at the English-language magazine MaxPlanckResearch: Printed four times a year, it provides information on the work done by hundreds of research groups in search of new insights and on the inside of the Max Planck community.

# Formalities –

Finding your way
through the red tape

# 2

A tour on your first working day at the institute, will give you an overview of the Institute and, where appropriate, the surrounding area. You will discuss what arrangements need to be made with your supervisor and clarify administrative issues, such as work permits, visas, health insurance, etc. with the help of your host Institute's administration team.

The regulations in Germany may be slightly more complex than you are used to: it is not for nothing that the Germans are reputed to be bureaucratic. Don't be discouraged: You'll soon clear the initial hurdles. Your contacts at the Institute will be happy to support you throughout your entire stay.

The following explanations will give you an idea of the formalities to be dealt with in preparation for your departure to Germany and shortly after your arrival.

## 2.1

## What will your status be at the institute?

Joining the MPG requires either:

- Max Planck Society employment contract
- Max Planck Society scholarship
- "Guest Residency and Use of Facilities Agreement" with external funding

It is important to know what your status will be, as different provisions, especially for social security, will apply in accordance with your status.

### EMPLOYMENT CONTRACT

If your research stay in Germany is pursuant to a contract of employment, you will generally be paid in accordance with the Collective Wage Agreement for the Civil Service (TVöD). You will be subject to German social

insurance law as of the commencement date of the contract. The Max Planck Institute at which you work will pay the employer's social insurance contribution (which covers compulsory health care, pension and unemployment insurance). The employee's contribution to be paid by you will be deducted automatically from your salary, as will your tax. In addition, you will be covered by statutory accident insurance for accidents at work and usually en route to and from your place of work.

## SCHOLARSHIP

A scholarship is financial support in the form of a „contribution to living expenses", which is not taxable in Germany per se. Different rules will apply if you receive additional income, whether from employment contracts in your home country / abroad or income from any property you may own. If your stay is funded by a scholarship, then you will not have an employment relationship with the Max Planck Society: you will work independently and without instructions. Under this arrangement there will be no obligation to participate in Institute events, nor will your presence be mandatory. Under the provisions of the German social security system, scholarship holders are not covered by employer's compulsory health care, unemployment, pension, or accident insurance; they must, however take out a private health insurance policy whilst living and working in Germany (see Section 2.2). For more information on health insurance for scholarship holders, please contact your host Institute. It may be advisable to take out a private accident and liability insurance policy in addition to the compulsory health insurance. Many insurance companies offer combined insurance packages for this purpose.

Max Planck Society scholarship holders, who either reside within the European Union or use their scholarship at the Institute are automatically covered by the Max Planck Society's group accident insurance policy.

## GUEST RESIDENCY AND USE OF FACILITIES AGREEMENT

If you receive funding from another organization, e.g., through a scholarship or employment contract, and do not receive any income from the Max Planck Society, your stay will be subject to a so-called „guest residency and use of facilities". This will allow you to use the Institute's research facilities. Under the provisions of the German social insurance system, guests with a scholarship

or employment contract from abroad are not covered by the employer's mandatory pension insurance contributions. In addition, you will usually be exempt from tax if you hold a scholarship. However, you must take out a private health insurance policy in Germany or be adequately covered by a health insurance policy from your home country (see Section 2.2). You can get more information about health insurance costs from your host Institute's administration team. It should also be noted that, when it comes to issuing a residence permit, local immigration authorities will usually only accept foreign health insurance under certain conditions (e.g. short-term stays). It may be advisable to take out a private accident and liability insurance policy in addition to the compulsory health insurance. Many insurance companies offer combined insurance packages for this purpose.

Max Planck Society scholarship holders with a guest residency and use of facilities, who either reside within the European Union or use their scholarship at the Institute are automatically covered by the Max Planck Society's group accident insurance policy.

## 2.2

# What needs to be done before you come to Germany?

### THE VISA

In many cases, a visa will be required to gain entry to Germany, which you can get from the German embassy or Consulate General in your home country or country of residence. The application process may take about two to three months and you will need to plan for this. You should apply for visas for any accompanying family members at the same time.
The addresses of the respective German consulates, information on visa requirements for your country and more detailed information on visa regulations can all be found on the Federal Foreign Office website.

***↘ www.auswaertiges-amt.de ↘ Entry and Residence ↘ Visa regulations***

**Which nationalities are subject to special regulations?**
**Group A** ____ Citizens of European Union (EU) member states, Switzerland, Iceland, Norway and Liechtenstein do not require a visa.

**Group B** ____ Australian, Canadian, Israeli, Japanese, New Zealand, South Korean and the US American nationals also do not need a visa to enter the country, but are not allowed to work here without a visa or residence permit. Therefore, you should apply for a visa that includes a work permit before entering the country, or else consult your host Institute about how quickly you will be able to obtain a work permit at the local Immigration Office.

The visa itself only entitles the holder to enter the country and to stay for the specified period. The purpose of the visit is noted in the visa (e.g. study, research, family reunion, etc.). The visa may also include a work permit. If you are planning a longer stay or to work here, you will have to apply for a residence permit upon arrival. The same applies to Group B nationals.

There are different visas available depending on the duration and purpose of your stay in Germany.

- The **Schengen visa** („C" visa) is issued for both tourist and business purposes and covers a maximum stay of up to three months. It can neither be extended nor can the intended purpose be changed retrospectively. You must provide proof at the time of application that your stay in Germany will be financially secure. Travel health insurance is also required for all Schengen countries (with an insured sum of at least 30,000 euro). A Schengen visa also allows you travel to the other Schengen states during your stay. The Schengen visa is only recommended if your stay in Germany will definitely not exceed 3 months.

- For longer stays, the **national visa** („D" visa) can be issued for between 3 and 12 months and is tied to a specific purpose. Unlike the Schengen visa, it will contain information on the activities you will undertake in Germany. According to the intended purpose of your visit, the application must be accompanied by certain manda-

tory documents, which are listed on the German Embassy's website. You then apply for a residence permit at the local Immigration Office after entering the country for which you must produce your visa.

**Which purposes require a national visa?**
You must state the purpose for which you would like to come to Germany when applying for a visa. For the residence permit, a distinction will later be made between, among other things:

- Education (§§ 16-17 AufenthG)
- Work (§§ 18 ff. AufenthG)
- Family reunion (§§ 27-36 AufenthG)
- Special residence rights (§§ 37-38a AufenthG)

If you come to Germany as a postdoc or doctoral candidate, you can apply for a national visa for the purpose of gainful employment, more specifically for research purposes. You will find a list of the requisite documentation on the Embassy's website. Please get in touch with your MPI contact person in sufficient time for them to send you the appropriate documents.

Spouses or children travelling with you must apply for a family reunion visa.

Please contact your host Institute if you have any further questions regarding the visa application process and the required documentation.

Under certain conditions, foreign researchers who already hold a valid residence permit issued for research purposes by another EU member

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*Regardless of the type of visa you hold, always ensure that you state the reason for your trip as "for research purposes" when you register.*

state may be able to conduct research in Germany in the context of **short-term mobility** (max. 180 days) or **long-term mobility** (from 180 days to a max. of one year) agreements without first having to apply for a visa. Please ask your host Institute about the exact regulations and possible requirements for an application.

## HEALTH INSURANCE

It is a legal requirement for all persons who reside in Germany to have health insurance. As a rule, you must choose a German health insurance company as soon as you enter into a contractual relationship with the MPG. In rare cases, it may be possible for guest scientists or scholarship holders to retain their existing health insurance cover from their home countries. However, this must be clarified with the Personnel Department in advance.

## WHICH HEALTH INSURANCE IS RIGHT FOR ME?

In general, there are two types of health insurance in Germany, i.e., private and statutory health insurance. In many cases, scholarship holders will only be able to take out a private health insurance policy: Following enquiries by the statutory health insurance fund, it may be possible to obtain statutory health insurance cover if certain conditions are met.

If you have a contract of employment and a regular annual salary that exceeds the compulsory insurance limit (as of 2020: 62,550 euro, adjusted annually), you will be able to choose between statutory or private insurance. If you have a contract of employment and a regular annual salary up to this amount, you will, as a matter of course, be covered by statutory health insurance from the commencement of employment.

**Statutory health insurance**
There are various statutory health insurance schemes that you can choose between. There is a uniform contribution rate of 14.6 per cent of the salary, subject to social insurance contributions, for all statutory health insurance schemes (as of 2020). Individual health insurance providers may ask their members to pay a supplementary contribution, whereby the amounts vary (average supplementary contribution rate:

1.1 %, as of 2020). Half of all contributions will be paid by your employer and the remainder by you. The employee's share of the contribution and supplementary contribution will be deducted directly from your gross salary. You will find a list (in German) of all statutory health insurance providers with details of the current supplementary contribution rates for each year on the GKV-Spitzenverband website.
↘ ***www.gkv-spitzenverband.de*** ↘ ***English***

Statutory health insurance is the standard insurance used by most employees in Germany. The benefits are fixed and defined by law, but there are minor differences in terms of customer service, additional services and optional tariffs. You can also take out supplementary insurance to reduce the costs of special dental treatment or secure hospital treatment by senior consultants for example. Under certain conditions, your family members will also be covered by your insurance free of charge, provided their own income does not exceed a specific limit.

**Private health insurance**
Please note that costs vary considerably, especially between private providers. By contrast with statutory health insurance, contributions to private health insurance are based on age, gender, occupation, state of health and the required insurance cover rather than on your income. For example, there are great differences in respect of

- risk surcharges, exclusion from benefits for the treatment of pre-existing conditions, severe disabilities and pregnancies already existing at the time the policy is taken out, imminent birth
- and deductibles.

!

*You must, in all cases, ensure that you and any accompanying family members have comprehensive health insurance cover when you enter Germany.*

It should also be noted that private health insurance does not cover family members: each family member must be insured individually. It is generally advisable to consult an insurance broker.

**Travel health insurance**
Your host Institute will be able to give you the names of various German health insurance providers and health insurance schemes, and you will be able to take out an insurance policy from home. Should this not prove possible, we would recommend that you pay for travel health insurance

to cover you during your journey and the first few days here (especially if your arrival date will not coincide with your first day at work). Occasionally the entry visa will only be granted on condition that you hold a current (travel) health insurance policy.

*For further general information on the German health insurance system please see:*
***↘ www.euraxess.de ↘ Information & Assistance ↘ Social Security ↘ Health insurance***

## 2.3

# What needs to be done after you arrive in Germany?

### STEP 1: EINWOHNERMELDEAMT (RESIDENTS' REGISTRATION OFFICE)

You must register with the Residents' Registration Office within two weeks of your arrival in Germany, so that your new place of residence can be registered there. The person responsible at your host Institute will provide you with details and the address of the office where you will need to register. To register at the Residents' Registration Office you will need:

- your passport (with your visa)
- and usually a „Wohnungsgeberbescheinigung" (certificate of residence) signed by your landlord

You can obtain the registration form at the Residents' Registration Office itself, online via the respective town or city's website or from your host Institute. The person responsible at your host Institute will inform you about this process in advance and will accompany you if necessary. Any family members who will be accompanying you in Germany will also have to be registered. You will need the same

documentation for family members as well as the birth certificates of any children and/or your marriage certificate (you will require a certified translation in German and legalization may be required if you have no internationally recognized documents). You will receive your **registration card** at the Residents' Registration Office after completing the application process.

!

*The registration card is an important document that you will need for various official enquiries, so always keep it in a safe place.*

Following your initial registration in Germany, you will also be assigned a **tax identification number** to which your personal details, such as your name, address, gender, date of birth, religious affiliation if applicable (see church tax 2.4) and the relevant tax office, will be associated. This will be sent to you by post within 2-5 weeks. You will keep the same tax identification number for life, so you will already have one if you have previously been registered as a resident in Germany. You can request this in person at your local registration tax office, or electronically via the respective tax office's website. This number is important for the Personnel Department as well as for your bank in Germany.

If you move house during your stay in Germany, you must report this to the Residents' Registration Office, again within two weeks. You must officially cancel your registration if you leave Germany permanently, which you can do in person at the Residents' Registration Office one week before your departure or by post using the appropriate cancellation form or else by arrangement through your host Institute.

## STEP 2: RESIDENCE PERMIT

You must apply for a residence permit at the local Immigration Office within the period for which your national visa is valid if it does not cover the entire duration of your stay. Unless your host Institute has already done it for you, it would be advisable to apply for an appointment with the Immigration Office immediately following registration. The residence permit will usually be issued for the duration of your employment contract or scholarship.

You must apply for a residence permit that corresponds to the purpose of your stay. You can sometimes apply for a residence permit for any of a number of potential reasons, e.g. researcher or Blue Card. Please contact

your host Institute or the Immigration Office for further information, and to find out what is required and, if applicable, the differences between the various titles.

**Originals and copies of the following documents are usually required for residence permit applications:**

- your passport
- a biometric passport photo
- a registration card from the Residents' Registration Office (see step 1)
- proof of income
- proof that you have accommodation
- proof of health insurance cover for the entire duration of your stay
- In addition you may possibly need to provide: a job description and employment application, certificates, your last three pay slips, a matriculation certificate, a research contract.
  The Immigration Office will generally send the applicant a list of the documents required.

It is often advisable to consult your International Office or Personnel Department prior to making an appointment.

Residence permits currently cost between 45 and 150 euros, which the relevant authority will charge to you and which you must pay immediately either in cash or by card.

## 2.4

# Do you have to pay taxes in Germany?

Whether or not you will have to pay taxes while working at a Max Planck Institute will depend on various factors: as a rule, scholarship holders are exempt from tax. You may be liable to pay taxes in your home country if you have a contract of employment but remain in Germany for less than six months. However, you will automatically be subject to income tax if you have a contract of employment and remain in Germany for over half a year.

The country in which your tax duties are incurred is regulated by a double taxation agreement between Germany and a number of other countries, which is designed to ensure that you do not end up paying taxes in two countries. The same agreement also regulates potential exceptions, as these can apply to foreign scientists working in Germany, in deviation from the 6-month rule. You may, therefore, still be able to pay your taxes in your home country even if you have worked here as a guest scientist for two years. Your host institute's administration team will provide you with more information on this.

*Alternatively, you can check the Federal Ministry of Finance's website:*
***↘ www.bundesfinanzministerium.de/Content/EN/Standardartikel/Topics/Taxation/Articles/double-taxation.html***

If you are liable to pay tax in Germany, your employer will deduct the taxes and duties from your monthly salary and pay them directly to the state. The applicable tax rate will depend upon your income, marital status and the associated tax bracket. You must submit a certificate from the tax office containing this personal information to your employer at the start of any employment relationship. This data will be stored electronically by the tax authorities together with your personal tax identification number and made available directly to employers for retrieval.

You will have the opportunity to submit a tax adjustment application to the tax office at your place of residence at the end of every calendar year, which may entitle you to a refund of part of the tax you have paid. Ask your institute's administration team about the requisite forms or consult a tax advisor. The latter will charge a fee, but will help you to prepare your tax return.

**German income tax comprises the following components:**
- Wage tax
- Solidarity Surcharge
- Church tax, if you belong to a religious community which levies church taxes

*Details of the tax system can also be found under:*
***↘ www.make-it-in-germany.com/en/jobs/taxes/income/***

# Everyday life in Germany

# 3

## 3.1

## How do I find somewhere to live?

Several Max Planck Institutes have their own guest apartments or are networked with institutions that offer rented accommodation. Ask your host Institute for more details. In some cases these will only be temporary solutions, but it will allow you time to look for accommodation without too much stress.

Ask your host Institute which residential areas would be preferable, perhaps because they are well connected to the Institute or because you are looking for a particularly lively or quiet part of town.
Like much else, searching for accommodation – be it a room in a shared flat or your own flat – takes place via the Internet. Your contact persons at the MPI can help you with this.

!

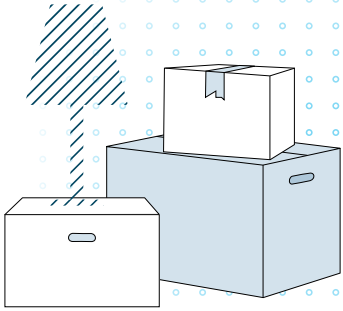
*Please refrain from making any advance payments to the landlord or estate agent!*

You should always ensure that your prospective landlord knows when you intend to move in before you sign the tenancy agreement. Your landlord must provide a form for you to register your residence (see Section 2.3).

Please note that, in Germany, the number of rooms advertised will include the living room: for example, a 1 bedroom flat with a living room would be listed as a 2 room flat: a 2 bedroom flat with a living room would be listed as a 3 room flat etc.

*Online portals and apps with offers and requests from all over Germany for short-term, furnished accommodation:*
***www.zwischenmiete.de*** ***www.wg-gesucht.de***

*For long-term, unfurnished accommodation:*
***www.immobilienscout24.de*** ***www.immonet.de***
***www.immowelt.de***



The following abbreviations are often used when advertising accommodation:

| | |
|---|---|
| **2-Zi-Whg** | 2-Zimmer-Wohnung – *2-room flat* |
| **Abstellk** | Abstellkammer – *Storeroom* |
| **Blk / Balk.** | Balkon – *Balcony* |
| **DG** | Dachgeschoss – *Attic storey* |
| **D** | Diele – *Entrance hall* |
| **DU** | Dusche – *Shower* |
| **EBK** | Einbauküche – *Fitted kitchen* |
| **EFH** | Einfamilienhaus – *Detached house* |
| **EG** | Erdgeschoss – *Ground floor* |
| **HK** | Heizkosten – *Heating costs* |
| **KM** | Kaltmiete – *Rent excluding utilities costs such as heating, cable TV, cleaning of communal areas, waste removal etc.* |
| **Kaution** | *Deposit* |
| **Keine zusätzl. Prov.** | *No additional commission* |
| **MM** | Monatsmiete – *Monthly rent* |
| **NK / NBK** | Nebenkosten – *Additional costs such as cable TV, cleaning of shared areas, waste removal, sometimes heating, etc.* |
| **NR** | Nichtraucher – *Non-smoker* |
| **OG** | Obergeschoss – *Top floor* |
| **RH** | Reihenhaus – *Terraced house* |
| **Stellpl.** | Stellplatz – *Parking space* |
| **TG** | Tiefgarage – *Underground parking* |
| **warm/WM** | Warmmiete – *Rent including all utilities costs such as heating, cable TV, cleaning of communal areas, waste removal etc.* |
| **Wfl.** | Wohnfläche – *Useable floorspace* |
| **WG** | Wohngemeinschaft – *Shared accommodation* |
| **WK** | Wohnküche – *Open-plan kitchen* |
| **ZH** | Zentralheizung – *Central heating* |

## THE RENTAL PRICE

Most flats in Germany are let unfurnished, although a kitchen may occasionally be installed. The so-called cold rental price is purely for the living space, but additional costs will also be incurred. Further details will be specified in the tenancy agreement. Fees will usually be charged for water, garbage collection, property management and often also heating, which equate to roughly 25 per cent of the cold rental price. The term "warm rental price" is used when these additional costs are already included in the rental price. Electricity costs are usually paid separately to an electricity provider of your choice, with whom you must register yourself. You would also have to conclude a contract with a supplier of your choice for certain types of heating, such as gas floor heating systems or night storage heaters. Information on local providers can be obtained from your landlord or your host Institute.

*There are also a number of comparison sites available (in German only) such as:*

***↘ www.verivox.de*** ***↘ www.check24.de***
***↘ www.finanztip.de/stromvergleich/energiemarkt/***

## THE DEPOSIT

It is usual to pay a refundable deposit (equal to between one and a maximum of three months' rent) to cover the cost of repairs or any damage to the flat caused by the tenants after they move out. This is saved in a special bank or savings account. You should either set it up together with the landlord or demand proof that such a holding account has been set up. You will receive the deposit back with interest (which may be positive or negative depending on the interest situation) when you move out, but less any repair and renovation costs, although the landlord has a 6 month grace period within which to return your deposit. Precise provisions for this should be included in the tenancy agreement, which you will be given to sign either by the estate agent or landlord.

Your host Institute will be happy to support you and help you with interpreting should you encounter any communication issues and understanding the advertisements and finally with taking possession of the flat.

HOME

## YOUR OBLIGATIONS UNDER THE TENANCY AGREEMENT

The tenancy agreement or house rules may contain certain tenant obligations such as winter road clearance or the so-called "sweeping week" (Kehrwoche). In this case you would be obliged to keep the access to the house clear in snowy weather or to sweep the staircase when it's your turn to do so. You should ask whether pets are allowed if you have any. As a general rule, noise should be kept to a minimum between 22:00 and 07:00 to avoid disturbing the neighbours. If you are having a party or have guests coming over, it is considered polite to inform your neighbours in advance that things might get a little louder on that occasion. And should you need to leave your flat unoccupied for a longer period of time, you could either ask your neighbours to empty your mailbox from time to time during your absence, or make an application to the post office to keep your mail for you to collect upon your return.

It is also advisable to inform the landlord of any prolonged absence, and who can give access to the flat in an emergency.

## MOVING IN

The landlord has a duty to complete a detailed check-in audit at the start of your tenancy to ensure that any prior damage to the property is recorded. The audit will then make it easy to establish which repairs you are responsible for, the cost of which will normally be deducted from your deposit prior to returning the remainder.

## MOVING OUT

You will again visit the flat with the landlord when you move out and compare any defects with the moving in audit. The cost of any repairs for damages for which you are responsible will usually be deducted from your deposit. Provided there are no new defects, your deposit will be returned to you in full. Please note that the landlord has a legally assured grace period of six months within which to return your deposit.

## 3.2

# How do I receive my money? Opening a bank account

If you're going to remain in Germany for a considerable period, receive a regular salary and have to pay rent, you should open a current account in Germany. The services provided by the various financial institutions are roughly the same, but there are differences in terms of service and account management fees, so you should check what best suits your needs (online banking, interest, free credit card etc.). You will need your passport and, usually, your registration certificate and tax ID to open an account.

### EC CARD AND WITHDRAWING MONEY

An electronic cash card (EC card) for your account will be sent to you by post and, in a separate letter, a PIN, which you will need to withdraw money from an ATM. You will also be able to use the card to get account statements and even for bank transfers. Cash withdrawals from ATMs often incur a fee and these can be quite steep at ATMs operated by other banks. Transfers abroad can also be expensive, so it is best to ask the bank in your home country whether it cooperates with a particular German financial institution.

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*Should your credit or debit card be lost or even stolen you can have it blocked by calling 116 116, which is a round-the-clock toll-free hotline. You can also use +49 30 4050 4050 if you're calling from abroad.*

You can set up standing orders for regular payments such as rent. It is also possible to issue a direct debit instruction (SEPA), under which a recurring but varying amount (e.g. for insurance or telephone) will be debited automatically from your account.

Banks are usually open from Monday to Friday from the morning until 16:00, or later on certain days. Opening hours also vary between the different branches of a given bank. ATMs are accessible around the clock.

It is common in Germany to pay particularly small amounts in cash. Paying by card is not usually possible in smaller shops (e.g. bakeries, newsagents), so you should always have some cash with you as a precaution.

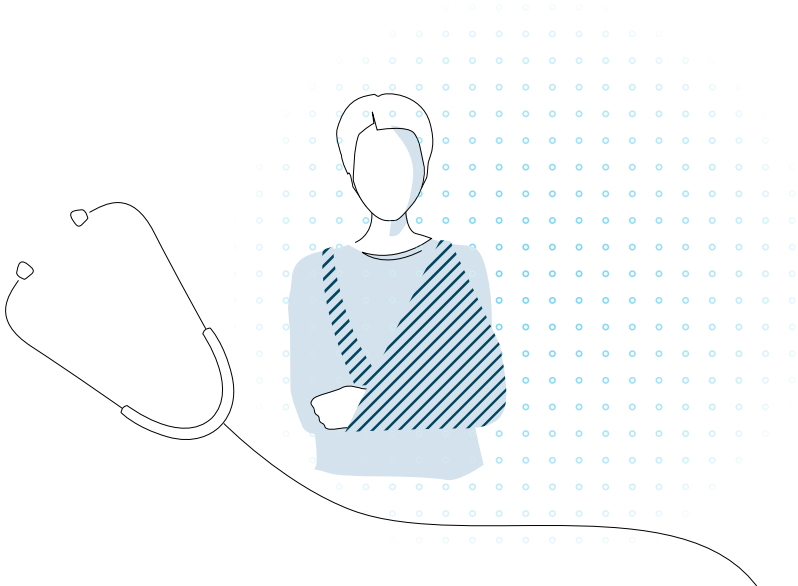
### CREDIT CARD

In addition to the EC card, you can also use your credit cards to make cashless payments in many shops. Credit cards can also be used to withdraw cash from an ATM, but this usually costs more. The Eurocard/ Mastercard and Visa card are most common in Germany. The EC card is more likely to be accepted in German shops, but this is sometimes subject to a minimum amount.

## 3.3

# Sick, what now? Healthcare

The German healthcare system has a very good reputation and encompasses an extensive network of hospitals and doctors in all regions. However, medical treatment in Germany is never free of charge! All costs, including emergency treatment, must be paid by you or your health insurance, which is why it is so important to have comprehensive health insurance. When you visit the doctor you will usually be required to present your insurance card to prove that you are covered.



## VISITING THE DOCTOR

If you need a doctor, you can check with your host Institute for the nearest practice. You can also find local doctors listed by their respective specialisms via the Internet (e.g. ↘ ***www.kbv.de/html/arztsuche.php***). You should usually consult your family doctor in the first instance, who may be a general practitioner (GP) or internist, who will then refer you to a specialist if necessary.

It is advisable to contact the practice by phone in advance and make an appointment. Be aware that you may have to wait several days for an appointment or, in the case of specialists, even several weeks. If you need urgent treatment you should make a point of saying so: practices are not permitted to turn you away in urgent cases, whether by phone or in person. Many medical practices are closed on Wednesday and Friday afternoons. Please remember to take your insurance card with you whenever you visit the doctor.

Privately insured persons will receive an invoice following their visit to the doctor. Depending on the health insurance policy they hold, they may initially be required to pay this themselves, before being reimbursed by the insurance company at a later date, or they may be able to forward it directly to their health insurance company for payment. In the case of patients with statutory health insurance, the doctor invoices the health insurance company directly.

## EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICE

You can contact the emergency medical service if you need to see a doctor outside of normal opening times, for example on weekends, public holidays or during the night. Dial the free nationwide emergency number 116 117 to be put through to a duty doctor in your area. Doctors' answering machine messages will also usually include their telephone numbers. Information can also be found in the local daily newspaper. In addition, all hospitals have an Accident & Emergency Department (A&E) that operates around the clock.

**Emergency call**
In an emergency, call an emergency doctor on **112**. This number can be dialled free of charge from all public telephones and unlocked mobile phones.

### CHEMISTS

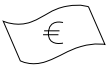
Be aware that, in Germany, you will need a doctor's prescription for many drugs that may be sold over-the-counter in your home country. Chemists are not allowed to dispense certain drugs, such as antibiotics, without a doctor's prescription.

Chemists remain open during normal business hours and the emergency chemists service operates outside these hours. The addresses of out-of-hours chemists are listed in local daily newspapers and on the Internet
↘ ***www.apotheken.de***

Simply enter your location or postal code in the search box next to "Apotheken und Notdienste finden" and all duty pharmacies in your area will be displayed.

All chemists have information signs on their doors that list the emergency service chemists: these change on a daily basis. You may have to ring the doorbell after which you will receive your medication through a secure hatch. You will also incur additional fees.

As with the doctor's bill, private health insurance holders initially pay for their medication themselves before forwarding the invoice to their health insurance provider for reimbursement; so make sure you save your receipt!



## 3.4

# How much do things cost? The cost of living

The lion's share of your monthly expenses will probably be for your home. Rental prices vary widely by region and tend to be higher in major cities, although Berlin is (still) an exception in this respect. In Munich, Frankfurt and Hamburg, for example, you can expect to pay around 20 euro per square metre. There are also additional incidental costs, which account

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for about 25 per cent of the rent. On the other hand, you're in luck if you live in the eastern federal states and in some rural areas where accommodation costs are usually lower.

Other than that, the cost of living is comparable to other western industrialized countries; food is even a bit cheaper. Public transport or going out, on the other hand, will seem more expensive. Again, the price range differs by region. In many restaurants, meals are cheaper at lunchtime than in the evening. A pizza could cost anything from 6 to 15 euro.

For cultural activities, such as the theatre or cinema, it is always worth enquiring about discounts including student discounts, family tickets or special days when visiting is cheaper. Many museums offer free admission on Sundays and many cinemas offer discounted tickets on so-called cinema days.

## 3.5

# Exploring Germany: public transport

There is a very well developed public transport network throughout Germany; you can get almost anywhere at least by train or bus. In Germany, we drive on the right, so do please bear this in mind if you come from a country where they drive on the left, particularly when it comes to crossing the road. Many people use bicycles to get to work and for leisure, and there are dedicated cycle paths in many towns and cities.

### DEUTSCHE BAHN (DB)

Deutsche Bahn provides regular fast long-distance train services (IC – Intercity or ICE – Intercity Express) between major and mid-sized German cities. Regional train services provide easy access to smaller towns. There are also regular rail links to cities in other European countries, such as Amsterdam, Paris, Zurich, Brussels, Vienna and Rome, with several scheduled departure times per day.

Deutsche Bahn offers various ticket discount schemes: regular ticket prices can be reduced by a selected percentage (i.e., by 25 or 50 per cent) for all rail journeys within one year of purchasing either the so-called BahnCard 25 or BahnCard 50 respectively. Bahncard prices can also sometimes be combined with other savings schemes. There are also Schönes-Wochenende (Happy Weekend) tickets available for small groups in addition to various regional deals (Länder tickets). Up to the age of six, children can travel free of charge; they can even travel for free until their 15th birthday if accompanied by their parents or grandparents. Please state this when buying your tickets. Even booking a ticket early can be worthwhile, as service providers often offer an early booking discount.

Normally there is no obligation to take a specific train. In case of discount tickets however, this is very often the case. You should also buy your tickets before the start of the journey, which you can do via the Internet (www.bahn.de), using an App, at the ticket machines in the train station or at the ticket offices. Buying a ticket onboard the train is only permitted in long-distance trains and even then only if you contact the conductor immediately after the train leaves the station. There will be a surcharge for ticket purchased on the train. Travelling on regional trains and public transport without a ticket will be treated as "fare dodging" (Schwarzfahrt), which could be very expensive.

To ensure that you get a seat during peak times, such as Friday or Sunday afternoons, you should make a reservation. Trains that are likely to be extremely full are marked with a symbol in the Internet timetable (three people in orange).
↘ ***www.bahn.de***

## LONG-DISTANCE COACH

There are central bus stations (ZOB) in all major German cities, from which you can catch a long-distance coach to other European countries as well as various destinations within Germany. It may be worth comparing fares and journey times with other means of transport, which you can do online or via an app for long distance coaches in Germany and Europe:
↘ ***https://www.omio.co.uk/***

## AIR TRAVEL

In addition to the long-distance rail routes, numerous airlines also operate between German and European cities. Increasing numbers of people prefer to travel by train for ecological reasons, but, under certain circumstances, some flights can be considerably cheaper than rail travel, especially if you do not have a BahnCard (railcard). When comparing travel times, you should bear in mind that many airports are located outside of the nearest cities and that you usually need to check in at least one or two hours before departure.

## BY PRIVATE CAR

All valid EU driving licences are recognized in Germany and there is no need to convert them. Driving licences issued in countries outside of the EU and EEA are only valid in Germany for a period 6 months from the date of entry. After that you will be able to exchange your previous driving licence for a German one. You may or may not need to take a driving test, depending on your country of origin.
This process can be time-consuming and will involve taxation and insurance issues, so do please contact the relevant authorities or your International Office in good time.

**When driving a car in Germany there are certain rules that you should be aware of:**

- Always carry your driving licence and vehicle registration documentation with you as well as your ID card or passport.
- Drivers and all passengers must wear their seat belts at all times.
- Children up to the age of 12 or up to a height of 1.50 metres must be secured in child safety seats which conform to the relevant standard.
- Phoning whilst driving is only permitted using a hands-free system.
- The legal blood alcohol limit for driving is 0.5 ‰.
- The speed limit is 50 km/h in built-up areas and 100 km/h on A roads. Unless otherwise signposted, there is no maximum speed restriction on motorways.
- It is compulsory to keep a first aid kit, an insulating blanket, a high visibility vest and a warning triangle in your car at all times.
- A rescue lane must be kept clear in the event of traffic jams on motorways: this is signposted at intervals along all motorways. The rescue lane is formed between the left and centre lanes on three-lane roads.

Snowy winters are common in Germany, especially in the southern federal states. Although road gritting services are deployed very quickly, your vehicle must still be equipped with winter or all-season tyres if you are going to be travelling in wintery conditions with snow, frost, black ice or slush, regardless of any specific date. You can expect to be fined if you drive with summer tyres in wintery conditions. Winter tyres are also mandatory in Austria, South Tyrol (in Northern Italy) and in the Czech Republic. If you happen to be planning a ski trip to other countries, do please check in advance whether winter equipment is mandatory and whether you will need snow chains.

There are emergency telephones at two kilometre intervals along every motorway, which you can use if you are involved in an accident or break down. The white posts at the roadside are adorned with a small black arrow that points in the direction of the nearest emergency phone. You will also find number markings on the side of the road, to which you can refer to help rescuers locate you when you make an emergency call via your mobile phone. Your location will be transmitted automatically if you use one of the emergency phones. To be on the safe side, you should call the police on 110 in the event of any accident, so that it can be documented and also for insurance purposes. It is illegal to leave the scene of an accident without giving your personal details to the other parties involved in the accident; failure to do so will be regarded as a hit and run, which is a criminal offence.

Radar traps are sometimes set up in speed restricted areas. Speeding can result in severe fines and, in extreme cases, you may even have to surrender your driving licence temporarily.

To wash your car, you should use an automatic car wash, which you'll find at petrol stations or in industrial estates.

For further information on rules and regulations please contact the ADAC (Allgemeiner Deutscher Automobil-Club = General German Automobile Club) or Auto Club Europa (ACE), both of which provide additional assistance and support with various issues for members.
↘ ***www.adac.de***

*Breakdown assistance English:*
↘ ***https://www.adac.de/der-adac/pannenhilfe/pannenhilfe-online-en/eingabeseite/***
↘ ***www.ace-online.de***

Your flat may be located in a neighbourhood where parking is restricted to holders of a resident's parking permit, for which you will need to pay a fee. Contact your local city council to ask where you can get a parking permit and what documentation you will need to present.

Vehicles in many large cities must display an "emission sticker", the colour of which indicates the emission class to which the vehicle belongs. In many cases, you will only be allowed to enter major cities with a green sticker. Foreign registered cars must also display an emission sticker. You can obtain one from the relevant regulatory authorities, from technical inspection association branch offices (e.g. TÜV, Dekra) or from workshops authorized to carry out special emissions inspections (AU).

*You'll find a detailed explanation in English on the ADAC website at:*
↘ **https://www.adac.de/-/media/pdf/motorwelt/stickers_foreign_registered_vehicles.pdf?la=de-de&hash=3E5F6FE3AF24DCA4EFAAD990EB5EEE91**

## CAR SHARING

Car sharing is particularly suitable for those on short-term visits. Find out which suppliers there are in your city and where you can pick up a car, either at a fixed station or decentralized location. The shared cars can often be opened with a mobile phone app and the ignition keys and papers will be found inside. Be aware that a registration or base fee may be charged irrespective of the extent to which you have actually used the vehicle. Car sharing is usually the cheapest alternative for short periods of use, but can be more expensive than traditional rental cars if you use one for an entire

day or several days. In addition to car-sharing companies, some private car owners also offer to share their cars for a fee via various Internet sites such as Drivy or Getaround. ↘ ***www.drivy.de/getaround***

If you own a BahnCard (railcard) you will be able to use Flinkster with no additional registration fee. ↘ ***www.flinkster.de***

## PEER-TO-PEER RIDESHARING (CARPOOLING) AGENCIES

One cheap travel option is carpooling, which peer-to-peer ridesharing agencies can facilitate. There you can find out if anyone is planning to drive a given route at the desired time and could give you a lift for a comparatively low price. Alternatively, you could offer to drive some paying passengers yourself to reduce your travel costs. Simply register your details with a ride-sharing agency of your choice or log on to an online platform. The agency will give no guarantees as to who will give you a lift or whether they'll be punctual or have a pleasant driving style.
↘ ***https://www.blablacar.co.uk/*** ↘ ***https://www.drive2day.com/***

## PUBLIC TRANSPORT

The public transport system (German "ÖPNV") includes buses, subway trains, urban railways, trams and, in many places, rental bikes/scooters or car-sharing services, all of which operate services at relatively short intervals in major centres, particularly during the morning and late afternoon rush hours. Every city has its own public transport system, so tariffs and conditions will differ from place to place. In some towns and cities, tickets for public transport have to be stamped before you enter the platform (in the case of trains) or the respective public transport vehicle. The best thing to do is to ask how things are done in your own town or city when you buy your ticket.

In almost all transport networks, one-way tickets are only valid for a single trip in a given direction, but it is sometimes possible to interrupt the journey for a certain period before continuing in the same direction, after which you will have to buy a new single ticket for the return journey. On the other hand, a day ticket is valid for the whole day within the selected area, i.e. also for different routes.

Discount schemes are also available for local transport systems: the transport authority in your town or city may offer day, multiple or partner tickets. If you use public transport regularly, it may be worthwhile to buy a weekly, monthly, or even annual ticket. You'll find the relevant information on the respective transport associations' websites or at the local transport ticket sales outlets. You can buy tickets for local public transport services at signposted sales outlets and vending machines. Please note that using public transport without a ticket in Germany is a criminal offence and could earn you a hefty fine.

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*NB: The local public transport providers in many cities also operate special late night services. Cheap shared taxis may be available as an alter–native where this is not the case. Ask at your host Institute.*

The public transport associations provide information about routes and ticket purchases at vending machines, via various websites and their own apps. The "Öffi" app (Android only) provides route information for all public transport networks in Germany and some other countries.

## TAXIS

Taxis are not particularly cheap in Germany. Fares are subject to a tariff regulation and are calculated according to a basic price in addition to a surcharge for kilometres driven and the duration of the journey. The fare is displayed on the taximeter during the journey and must be paid at the end of the journey. The taxi driver will issue a receipt upon request. It is common to add a tip to round up the final fare. Certain apps will enable you to calculate the cost of a trip in advance.

## BIKES / BIKE SHARING

There are very well developed cycle paths in many German cities and you will sometimes see vast numbers of bikes parked at train stations, universities and other places. It may be worth buying a bike if you are planning on staying in Germany for a lengthy period. Many bike shops offer cheap used bikes or you can search for one in the classified ads and Internet portals. Lost property offices also auction unclaimed bikes off for low prices.
↘ ***www.ebay-kleinanzeigen.de*** ↘ ***www.kalaydo.de*** ↘ ***www.quoka.de***

There are numerous bike-sharing schemes, especially in large towns and cities, whereby bikes can either be found at fixed stations nearby or via an app e.g. ↘ ***https://www.callabike-interaktiv.de/en***

For safety reasons, children up to the age of ten are permitted to and ought to ride on the pavement. Adults must use cycle paths or, if none is available, the road. You will often see cyclists wearing protective helmets; small children in particular almost never ride without them. This is voluntary, not mandatory.

### E-SCOOTERS

Along the same lines as bike sharing schemes, you can often rent an e-scooter in larger towns and cities, although the minimum age for these is 14. E-scooters are only permitted on cycle paths or roads where there are no cycle paths. It is against the law to ride them on pavements. The speed limit is 20 km/h and the same maximum alcohol limit of 0.5 ‰ applies as for cars and bicycles.

## 3.6

# Bringing your children with you

### KINDERGARTEN / CRÈCHE

So you're coming to Germany with your life partner and one or more children and haven't yet decided whether childcare will be necessary at all? Regardless of whether or not you actually need childcare: do make use of our day care centres! Your children will meet playmates of their own age there and you'll easily get to know other parents. Kindergarten attendance is voluntary in Germany. For younger children there are so-called crèches, some of which even provide baby care services. Despite the fact that, in theory, every child in Germany has the right to a kindergarten place or childminder as of the age of 1, the waiting lists for these can sometimes be long. Ask your host Institute for assistance with finding childcare. Some MPIs even have their own nurseries or reserved places in other facilities.

Although the kindergarten year usually begins in August or September, registration often takes place in the previous December, so you should register your child(ren) as early as possible and make enquiries about local circumstances. Many kindergartens will also accept children throughout the year provided

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they have the requisite capacity to do so. Kindergarten fees are usually income-dependent and/or will depend upon the time your child spends there.

## CHILDMINDER

A childminder, who will look after your child(ren) either in your home or in his or her own home, can be found through the local youth welfare office, often via special Internet portals.

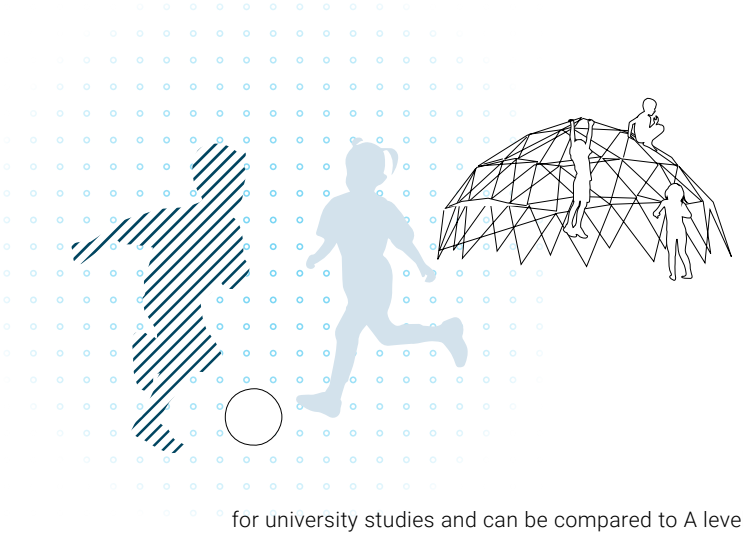
## BABYSITTER

You will most likely be able to find a suitable babysitter to mind your child(ren) for a few hours a day or in the evenings, by word of mouth through colleagues or neighbours, although some of them occasionally advertise their services in local newspapers. In addition to kindergartens, churches usually also have toddler groups where you will be able to get to know other parents and their kids. There are also foreign language play-groups in many towns and cities.

In general, care services are often difficult to obtain for short periods (up to half a year). Your International Office will either help you or direct you towards the Family Service, with which the Max Planck Society has a service contract. This service has offices in many German towns and cities, which can help you with your search for childcare services and to find the best solution for your family situation. You can consult them free of charge.

## SCHOOL

School attendance is compulsory in Germany: children have to go to school for nine years (ten in some federal states). Kids start primary school at the age of six (1st to 4th grade or higher in some federal states or school types). After that there are three different types of school to choose between: the Hauptschule up to the 9th or 10th grade (which ends with Hauptschulabschluss or school leaving certificate), the Realschule up to the 10th grade (which ends with the Mittlere Reife, which is roughly comparable with the British GCSE) and the Gymnasium up to the 12th or 13th grade. The Gymnasium ends with the Abitur, which is a prerequisite



for university studies and can be compared to A levels, the Matura or the International Baccalaureate Diploma. There are also comprehensive schools in which children receive streamed education depending upon their individual performance up to the middle school leaving certificate. The school systems and curricula differ between the individual federal states.

Attending state-funded schools is free of charge. Fees will only be charged for private and international schools. You can get information about local schools from the town authorities or their website. In general, you will not be able to choose a specific primary school: instead, your child(ren) will go to a designated school for the so-called school catchment area in which you live. Students are, however, free to choose to attend a specific secondary school, although, in some federal states, their attendance will only be approved following a satisfactory interview with the school administrators. Please make the relevant enquiries well in advance. Your host Institute will be able to help you with this.

## SCHOOL HOURS AND AFTER SCHOOL CARE

The school year begins after the summer holidays, i.e., in August or September depending on the individual federal state. Traditionally, lessons in the lower grades take place almost exclusively in the morning, usually between 08:00 and 13:00. Today however, more and more full-time schools are being established. Lessons are also delivered in the afternoons in the higher grades. Primary schools, in particular, offer lunchtime and, in some cases, after school supervision, as do municipal day nurseries close to schools, where the children are given lunch, homework supervision and have time to play.

Unless your child goes to a full-time school, there will be additional fees for lunchtime supervision and after-school care, which will usually be charged by the hour. Getting after-school care during the school year can sometimes be problematic due to the limited number of places available; timely registration before the start of the school year will increase your chances.

### MAX PLANCK SOCIETY SERVICES

The Max Planck Society offers a range of support services for balancing work and family life. You can ask the administration of your respective Institute for details. They can also give you information about the special legal provisions pertaining to laboratory work during pregnancy.

## 3.7

# Communications and media

### THE POSTAL SERVICE

Post is usually delivered once a day in the morning from Monday to Saturday, and several times a day in the case of companies. No mail is delivered on Sundays. Parcels are delivered by a separate courier service. If an item of mail does not fit through your mailbox, the postman will ring your doorbell or, in your absence, leave it with a neighbour. If no one is home, they will take it away and leave a note telling you where you can collect it (usually at the nearest post office) and by when. You'll have to identify yourself when you go to collect it.
You can also request a P.O. Box at your local post office in which your mail will be collected for you to pick up later.

If you need to post something, you will find yellow post-boxes in many places showing the black post horn, which is the Deutsche Post logo, and signs that indicate when they will be emptied. You can get a price booklet from any post offices that will tell you which stamps you will need to send items within Germany and abroad. Post offices are usually open

from Monday to Friday from 08:30 to 18:00 and to 12.30 on Saturdays. Post offices in smaller towns are also housed in supermarkets and have a stand at the entrance. ↘ ***www.deutschepost.de***

In addition to the post office, there are other mail service companies with receiving offices in lottery shops or drink wholesalers. Online traders also use different providers, who in turn cooperate with various shops in your area who take delivery of the packages. If you would like to send something yourself, it would be worth comparing the shipping costs and delivery times.

It is common to accept parcels for neighbours in most apartment blocks. If you do a lot of online shopping and don't wish to overburden your neighbours, you can register with DHL for so-called packstations. As a registered customer you will also be able to purchase and print shipping labels for your own parcels online. In this way you won't have to rely on post office or other parcel shops' opening hours. ↘ ***www.dhl.de***

## USING THE PHONE / INTERNET

There are many telecommunications providers in Germany, some of which offer a combination of landline, Internet, mobile phone and/or cable TV services. Prices can vary widely, depending on the service package you choose. You can find various comparison portals on the Internet that can help you to decide which provider to go with. If you want special international or combined Internet and phone rates, look for a provider that suits your needs. ↘ ***www.verivox.de*** ↘ ***www.check24.de***

Please note that there could be a delay between ordering an Internet connection and having it installed.

You should also compare the services and tariffs of the numerous mobile phone providers. Prepaid cards can be useful under certain circumstances, and these are also available from various discount stores. Take note of the duration (lock in period) of any service contract before signing it. Roaming charges have largely been eliminated within the EU (but be careful when travelling through Switzerland – you should set your mobile phone to flight mode there to avoid high costs for automatic updates).

However, be aware that calls abroad may be more expensive or other data volume limits may apply.

Most Germans answer the phone with their last name. If you are calling someone, it is considered polite to state your last name before asking for the person you wish to speak to.

## RADIO AND TV FEES

The state charges a licence fee for the use of TVs, radios and the Internet, which is used to pay for the public broadcasting services. This fee must be paid by every household, regardless of whether you actually use the radio service and how many people live in the household, so it only has to be paid once if you share a household with others. The "ARD ZDF Deutschlandradio Beitragsservice" will generally write to you automatically once you register your residence (cf. Section 2.3). Alternatively, you can register yourself at the website.
The fee has been € 17.50 per month since 2013, and will be debited from your account every three months (€ 52.50).
You can find details in various languages starting from the English language home page:
↘ ***https://www.rundfunkbeitrag.de/welcome/index_ger.html***

## BOOKS

You will have access to a library of specialist literature at your host Institute. You can also apply for a card that will enable you to use the university libraries. There are also municipal libraries in larger towns and cities, which are run as cultural institutions for all citizens and provide information and education. In addition to light fiction, magazines and books for children and adolescents, you can also borrow games, DVDs and CDs. You will need a library card, for which you need to show your registration certificate and your passport.

Bookstores offer a wide selection of books for sale. You will often also find anglophone literature in both bookstores and libraries. German-language books in Germany are subject to a fixed book price (FBP) agreement.

### NEWSPAPERS

One or more local daily newspapers appear in almost every sizeable town. There are also several national daily newspapers, such as Süddeutsche Zeitung (SZ), Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (FAZ), taz or Die Welt, that also publish some of their articles online free of charge. You can buy international daily newspapers in larger newsagents or at railway stations.

## 3.8

# Waste separation / recycling

Waste separation and recycling is an important issue in Germany. You may be surprised to find a whole range of different bins in front of the houses, but each has its own specific purpose. Garbage is separated into paper waste (usually a blue bin), compost/organic waste (usually a brown bin, also called an organic bin) and packaging waste (yellow bin or yellow sack). The residual waste goes in the grey or black bin. Glass and cans are also recyclable. You get a deposit back for most bottles and cans. If the glass is not from deposit bottles, you can dispose of it in glass containers in your housing zone. There are small collection boxes in supermarkets and shops for depleted batteries, as these must not be disposed of in household waste. There are special recycling centres for old electrical appliances and larger waste products.
Free plastic bags are no longer provided by shops (supermarket, clothing stores etc.) to avoid waste plastic, so it is advisable to bring your own shopping bags.

## 3.9

# Electricity

The German power grid works at 220 volts and uses two-pin plugs, so, depending on your country of origin, you may need adapters for electrical appliances you bring with you.

## 3.10

# Shopping

Shops are generally open from Monday to Saturday between 09:00 and 20:00. Major supermarkets and shopping malls may stay open even longer. However, smaller shops or shops in the suburbs close between 18:00 and 19:00 during the week and even around noon on Saturdays. All shops usually remain closed on Sundays, except for some bakers and flower shops, which often open on Sunday mornings. At nights and on the weekends you can buy food, magazines and smaller items for your "travel needs" at major train stations and airports, as well as at kiosks and petrol stations, however things are usually slightly more expensive there.

There are markets in many towns, but they are only open one or two days a week. Markets are usually located in central places in the town or in the respective districts and often sell fruit and vegetables directly from the producers. You can also find country-specific foodstuffs in specialty shops such as Asia Shops or Italian grocery stores.

Because waste separation plays such an important role in Germany (see Section 3.8), a deposit is charged for many bottles and cans.

## 3.11

# Going out

You'll find a variety of cafés, pubs, bars and restaurants of all kinds and nationalities in every town and city. You can usually sit wherever you like, but it is sometimes advisable to reserve a table in busy restaurants, which many of them let you do online. Provided you were satisfied with the service, the waitress will be happy to accept a tip (about 10 per cent of the invoice amount).

## 3.12

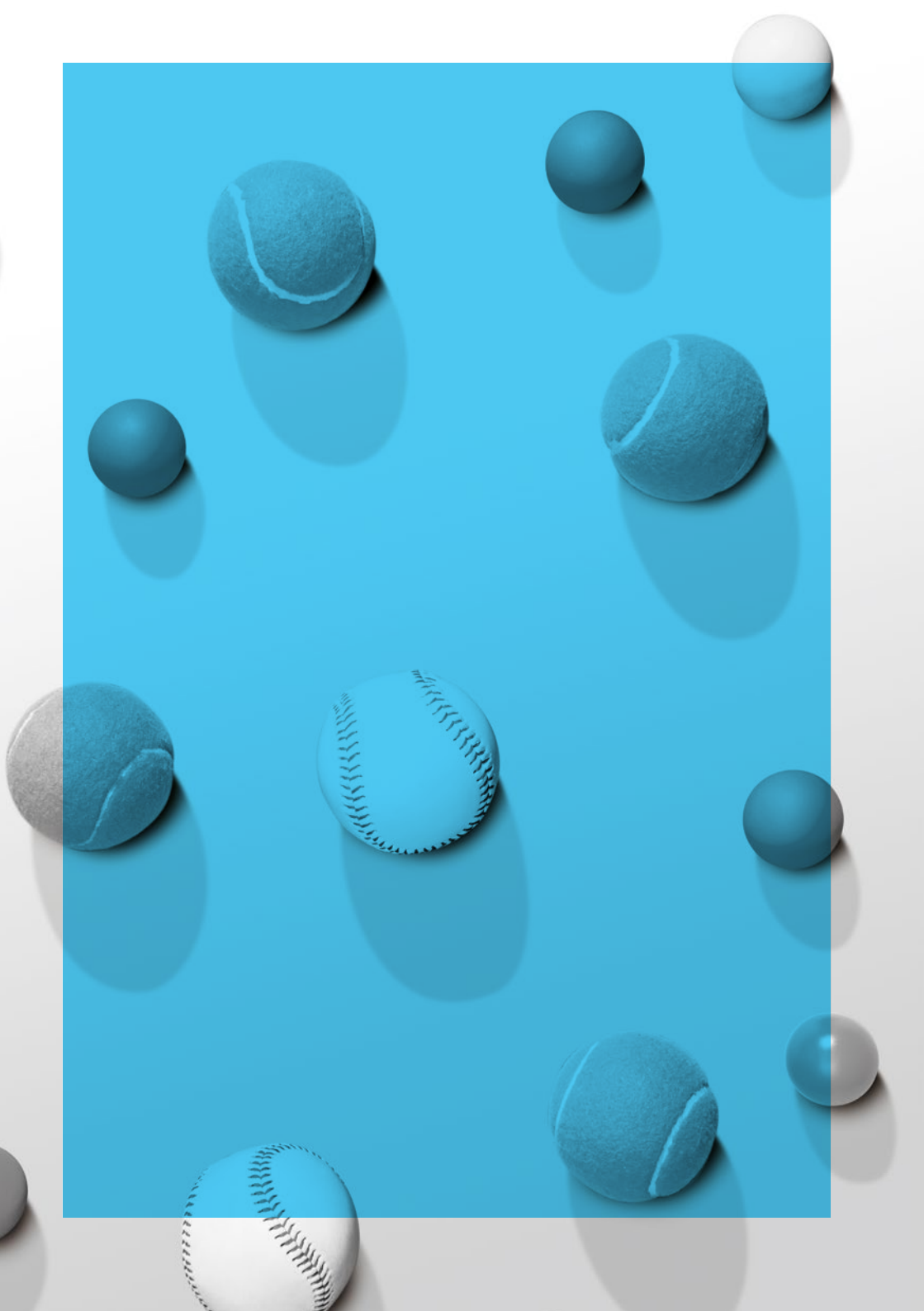
# Smoking

The rule on smoking in public catering establishments and buildings differ between the various federal states. Smoking is not allowed in public buildings and in restaurants, but is still permitted in bars in some places.

## 3.13

# Culture

Germany is home to a high concentration of theatres, opera houses, museums, galleries and cinemas. The respective programmes and schedules are listed in the local newspapers and online (ask the International Officer at your host Institute for the relevant URLs or any alternative newspapers for your area). Discounted tickets are usually available for schoolchildren, students, families and pensioners. There is also a wide range of cultural attractions, such as cinemas or international theatres, in English and other languages in the major cities.



## 3.14

# Occupational health management at the MPG, sports & leisure

The Max Planck Society offers various sports courses or information events under the occupational health management scheme. Each MPI puts together its own programme which covers various sports, advice and different activities such as health days and training courses. There should be an occupational health management representative at every MPI who will be there to help and advise you.

There are also sports clubs and gyms in every city. Adult education centres also offer various sporting activities. There may even be sporting activities, such as football, a jogging group or a yoga group, at your host Institute where you can make new friends at the same time.

## 3.15

# Sanitary facilities

Toilets are almost always separated by gender, and can be identified by the corresponding pictograms or letters on the doors (H for “Herren” (men), D for “Damen” (women)). If there is only a single toilet for both men and women – for example in trains or aeroplanes – it will generally be designated as a WC.

Because the German sewage system is very well developed, used toilet paper can be disposed of in the toilet bowl and flushed away. The rubbish bins near the toilets are for other waste.

## 3.16

# Religion and holidays

Article 4 of the German Basic Law guarantees freedom of faith. Anyone can espouse a religion, join or leave a religious community, change to another, or choose to be nondenominational. The state must remain neutral and tolerant towards all religious and ideological communities.

There is no state church in Germany, which means that no institutional links may be established between the state and any religious or ideological communities. Nevertheless, cooperation between the state and religious communities is possible; for example, religious communities are sometimes called upon to comment on social issues or to participate in commissions and committees.

Religious or ethical education is compulsory in state-funded schools in most Federal States. Members of each respective religious community generally attend the appropriate classes. However, parents have the right to withdraw

their children from religious education. It is usual to provide denomination-neutral ethics classes for pupils who do not participate in religious education classes.

The Catholic and Protestant Churches are the largest in Germany, each accounting for around 30 per cent of the population, with varying regional distributions. The percentage of Catholics is greater in Southern Germany, whilst a greater percentage of the population is affiliated with the Protestant Church in the North.

Various forms of Islam are becoming increasingly important due to immigration and over five per cent of the population is of the Muslim faith. Nearly two per cent of the population belong to the numerous other denominations represented in Germany and around 34 per cent have no denomination.

The separation between church and state is not absolute: the church taxes, which the Protestant and Catholic churches, Jewish communities and certain other small religious communities levy from their members are collected by the state tax authorities. There are also many public holidays in Germany which are based on Christian traditions.

| | |
|---|---|
| **New Year's Day** | 1 January |
| **Good Friday** | Friday before Easter |
| **Easter Sunday and Easter Monday** | End of March, beginning of April |
| **Labour Day** | 1 May |
| **Ascension Thursday** | Thursday, 10 days before Whitsun |
| **Whit Sunday and Whit Monday** | In May/June (six weeks after Easter) |
| **German Unity Day** | 3 October |
| **Christmas Eve** | 24 December (afternoon onwards) |
| **Christmas Day and Boxing Day** | 25 and 26 December |
| **New Year's Eve** | 31 December (afternoon onwards) |

There are also a number of public holidays, which only apply in certain federal states.

# German Cultural Standards & Values

# 4

## COMPLEX NATURE

Culture encompasses the shared core values of a group of people and is second nature to locals, but can often be a source of puzzlement, humour, frustration or anxiety to foreigners. These cultural values are shaped by what we absorb and learn throughout our lives from members of our communities, from family and friends, but also from the media and society as a whole, as well as through religion, traditions, laws, and history.

You will probably be struck by the difference in shared values when you leave your comfort zone of familiar surroundings. It's human nature to focus on differences rather than similarities.

However, such an outlook will only deepen the culture shock. There's often a huge chasm between the assumptions we make and real life. The similarities, or communalities between different cultures are often more important, and easier to identify, than you might expect. As a nation, Germans generally have a great deal of respect for the sciences and scientists. And with that one single trait, you have no doubt discovered the first, but crucial, shared value that will affect your life in this country as a researcher at the Max Planck Society.

!

*In short, culture is complex and complicated, yet developing an intercultural awareness of a community is crucial to settling into an unfamiliar environment.*

## A NATIONAL IDENTITY?

Typically German! Is there really any such thing? Like every other country, Germany is not entirely homogeneous and never has been.

Germany has always been a very decentralized state both politically, socially and culturally. It gradually amalgamated from a fragmented union of hundreds of small principalities and kingdoms and was only proclaimed a nation-state in 1871 when the King of Prussia, Wilhelm I, was declared Kaiser of the German Empire.

Germany currently consists of sixteen states, collectively referred to as Bundesländer: Bavaria (Bayern), Baden-Wurttemberg (Baden-Württemberg), Brandenburg, Hesse (Hessen), Lower Saxony (Niedersachsen), Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania (Mecklenburg-Vorpommern), North-Rhine Westphalia (Nordrhein-Westfalen, often referred to as NRW), Rhineland-Palatinate (Rheinland-Pfalz), Saarland, Saxony (Sachsen), Saxony-Anhalt (Sachsen-Anhalt), Schleswig-Holstein, Thuringia (Thüringen), and the city states of Berlin, Hamburg and Bremen.

There are cultural and historical differences as well as different traditions in the various states – even public holidays can vary from state to state. Nevertheless, there are still a multitude of shared core values that you may encounter, which are generally more important than they might be in other countries.

## THE MENTALITY

As you read through the following insights, it might help you to settle in to a life in Germany if you compare the potential traits with the supposedly stereotypical behaviour for your own nationality or home community, as well as your personal preferences.

Developing a better intercultural awareness of your own culture and expectations can help you find an approach that will make you feel more comfortable in your new life.

## COMMUNICATION

Germany is home to a so-called “low-context” culture, which means that Germans tend to pay more attention to the literal meaning of words than to the surrounding context. Messages are conveyed more by words than nonverbal signals. If in doubt, a German will ask a follow-up question to get all of the information, even if the other person might have given an implicit hint.
We also support an open communication style within the Max-Planck Institutes.

## STICKING TO THE POINT

Because they are more focussed on facts, Germans tend to give presentations that are very specific and based on figures and background facts. Be aware, therefore, that this is what will be required in your own presentations. The tone in meetings can be rather brusque at times, which is normally due to the participants' commitment to the issue being debated or discussed. Occasionally, this might sound unfriendly or complicated yet, from a German perspective, it is simply a means to an end and has nothing to do with personal esteem. As you will discover, the tone will quickly revert to normal after the meeting. Don't take it to heart if you don't receive any positive feedback or praise for your work: as long as no one says anything to the contrary, you can assume that everything is fine.

## GREETING AND ADDRESSING PEOPLE

In Germany, it is customary to greet people by shaking hands (regardless of gender) and looking the other person directly in the eyes. The most common forms of greeting are "Guten Morgen" (up till about 10-11am) and "Guten Tag" (after 11am). You may sometimes hear the word "Mahlzeit" around lunchtime which can mean "hello" as well as "enjoy your meal". More colloquial greetings include "hallo" and "hi". After a meeting or conversation you could say "auf Wiedersehen" or, amongst friends, "tschüß". Kisses on the cheeks and hugs are becoming increasingly popular between friends, although there are no set rules in terms of etiquette.

As a basic rule, Germans address each other by surname (e.g., Frau / Herr so-and-so) and with the formal "Sie", which is the respectful way of saying "you": this formal "Sie" often continues to be the norm between close colleagues who have shared an office for many years. In general, it is the prerogative of older or more senior colleagues or acquaintances to suggest using the less formal "du".

Officially, the omission of academic titles is only permitted if specifically requested by the person being addressed. The normal form of address is always "Herr (Doktor)" or "Frau (Doktor)", followed by the surname.

Unlike English, the German language distinguishes between friends and family and everyone else. It can be quite a dilemma, and not just

for non-native speakers of German. When you talk to someone you do not know, the polite Sie (you) form of address is generally used. Younger generations have become more relaxed, but on the whole this form of address is still preferred among strangers or casual acquaintances. Moving to Du can be a minefield. Socially, it's best to wait for the older person to offer, or simply switch, to Du. Sometimes, people use first names, but still keep to Sie. Nowadays, the use of Du has become more flexible, but there can still be pitfalls.

## PUNCTUALITY

Germans place great emphasis on being correct and punctual in professional situations, which is why you should always endeavour to arrive at the agreed time for meetings and presentations. The same applies to private situations: if you are unable to keep an appointment or are likely to be late, it is advisable to give notice of this in good time, either via a colleague or by telephone.

## LANGUAGE

The lingua franca among the scientific community is English, but a knowledge of German is very helpful for feeling comfortable in public spaces and developing a social network more quickly. Like everywhere else, it will be well received if you speak a little of the national language. German courses are offered at many MPIs. Your International Office or the Institute administration team can provide you with more information on this and on various collaboration agreements with external course providers. Fluency in German is an important prerequisite for working outside science.

# Concluding words

## Getting settled in Germany – between euphoria and challenge

# 5

The first months in a new country are an exciting time: you have to process many stimulating and enriching impressions, you get to know a lot of new people and also have to cope with changes in your professional and social life. This takes energy but is still fun! It can even trigger a certain sense of euphoria and curiosity promotes openness towards the differences, which are perceived as interesting.

Yet it also presents challenges. Settling in can be experienced as stressful and cause unpleasant feelings. This is known as a culture shock and is usually experienced around two or three months after arrival, being more pronounced the more your home country differs from Germany. At that point, one's initial enthusiasm may give way to a certain sense of disorientation, either because one's usual patterns of behaviour are no longer effective or because of misunderstandings that may occur. For some people, this can lead to poor sleep, illness, stress or sadness.

Should either you or a family member be affected by this, try not to withdraw. There may be someone around who comes from your home country and is familiar with this process or a German whom you trust and who has already experienced this abroad. Consciously expand your social horizons and consolidate your language skills. Give yourself sufficient time and don't be afraid to seek support and communication. Your contacts at the Institute will also listen to you and help you to overcome this phase.

**GIVE YOURSELF SUFFICIENT TIME AND DON'T BE AFRAID TO SEEK SUPPORT AND COMMUNICATION**

Once you have become better acquainted with German customs over time, you will be able to correctly assess and accept people's reactions as well as their values and norms. You may even adopt some of them yourself in a process that experts call biculturalism: bicultural people are familiar with two different cultures, both of which they understand and live in without giving up their own identity. After the difficult settling in phase, your stay in Germany will be a lot of fun and very pleasurable and will always be associated with good memories.

*Expat networks with events in all major cities and online platform:*

***www.internations.org***

***www.toytowngermany.com***

# International Offices and Welcome Services at the Institutes

# 6

Most Max Planck Institutes have International Officers who serve as contact persons. They provide comprehensive support services, e.g. accompaniment to authorities, assistance with finding accommodation or liaising with kindergartens and schools. Many Institutes also offer various welcome services (e.g. intercultural training courses, cultural programmes, meet the expert events etc.). The Max Planck Society and its Institutes are also committed to creating the best possible working and living conditions and provide foreign scientists with a broad portfolio of integration services. You will find information on the most important questions asked by guest scientists, such as entry formalities, visa requirements, health insurance, work permits, taxes and finding accommodation, on the Max Planck website.

You can find a lot of information about the Max Planck Society on the Max Planck Intranet "MAX" which also allows you to network and exchange information with colleagues and/or people from your home country. You will have access to it as soon as you have registered on your host Institute's personnel administration system and have a mpg e-mail address.

# Getting Help

# 7

Wherever people come together, there will be conflicts and problems. Depending on personality and disposition, there are different ways of handling such issues: wordily, factually, noisily, silently, aggressively or not at all. Unresolved conflicts may have an impact on the overall working climate and may significantly affect motivation, even of staff members who are not directly involved. This is why it is important for the conflicting parties as well as their environment that conflicts are addressed and solved in a sustainable manner.

If you do find yourself in a conflict or problematic situation you need not necessarily try to resolve it yourself. There are different points of contact within the Max Planck Society, depending on whether it is a conflict with your peers, with superior or subordinate staff members, whether you feel discriminated against due to your personal situation, or if you are currently unable to perform the way you wish you could, owing to professional or private issues.

***https://www.mpg.de/12210575/conflict-management***
***https://www.mpg.de/14172230/code-of-conduct.pdf***

# At a Glance

# 8

**Useful links**

Please use the following links to learn more about research institutions, official government agencies/offices and websites where you can find more background information on Germany and living here:

- ***www.mpg.de/en***
- ***www.research-in-germany.de***
- ***www.euraxess.de***
- ***www.dfg.de***
- ***www.humboldt-foundation.de***
- ***www.daad.de***
- ***www.bmbf.de***
- ***www.auswaertiges-amt.de***
- ***www.bamf.de***
- ***www.goethe.de***
- ***www.deutschland.de***
- ***www.about-germany.org***
- ***www.make-it-in-germany.de***
- ***www.justlanded.com***

## Official emergency numbers

| | |
|---|---|
| **110** | Police |
| **112** | Fire brigade / ambulance |
| **116 117** | Nationwide medical emergency number |
| **116 116** | Account blocking |
| **115** | Authorities hotline |

**Terminology (German - English)**

| | |
|---|---|
| Apostille | *legalization of a document for international use* |
| Arbeitgeber | *employer* |
| Arzt | *doctor* |
| Aufenthaltstitel | *residence permit* |
| Bürgeramt | *citizen's office* |
| brutto | *gross (income)* |
| Einkommen | *income* |
| Einwohnermeldeamt | *Residents' Registration Office* |
| Gehalt | *salary* |
| Genehmigung | *approval* |
| Krankenhaus | *hospital* |
| Krankenversicherung | *health insurance* |
| Lohn | *salary* |
| Mülltrennung | *waste separation* |
| netto | *net (income)* |
| Notfall | *emergency* |
| ÖPNV (Öffentlicher Personen-Nahverkehr) | *local public transport system* |
| Pünktlichkeit | *punctuality* |
| Steuern | *taxes* |
| Sozialabgabe | *social security contribution* |
| Unfall | *accident* |
| Versichertenkarte | *insurance card* |
| Vertrag | *contract* |
| Visum | *visa* |
| Zuwendung | *funding* |

# Where we are

- Institute / Research center
- Subinstitute / Branch
- Other Research Institution
- Associated Research Institute
- Biology & Medicine Section
- Chemistry, Physics & Technology Section
- Human Sciences Section

**SITES ABROAD**

USA
- Florida

ITALY
- Florence
- Rome

LUXEMBOURG
- Luxembourg

NETHERLANDS
- Nijmegen

# Imprint

PUBLISHER
Max Planck Society for the Advancement of Science
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LAYOUT
Designergold – Sandra Koch, Julia Kessler

March 2020

# Image sources

**Cover:** Sven Doering | **Illustration templates:** iStock / Shutterstock / AdobeStock |
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