

Finding housing in Berlin: a handbook for refugees

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Bündnis Neukölln's AG Wohnungssuche

The **AG Wohnungssuche** of the Bündnis Neukölln has been helping refugees find accommodation in Berlin since May 2015.

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1. When can I rent my own apartment? Who will cover the costs?

Asylum seekers may rent an apartment no earlier than 6 weeks and no later than 6 months after applying for asylum, even if the asylum procedure has not yet been completed. Excluded from this are persons originating from so-called “safe countries”, who are obliged to live in an initial intake centre (*Erstaufnahmeeinrichtung*) until a decision on their asylum application has been reached. If the asylum procedure is still ongoing, the rental costs will be covered by the State Office for Refugee Affairs (*Landesamt für Flüchtlingsangelegenheiten* - LAF) up to a certain limit. As soon as the asylum procedure has ended and a positive decision has been made, responsibility falls to the Jobcenter in the district where the apartment is located (or, if you’ve already found a job, to you).

Refugees fleeing war (e.g. from Ukraine) may start looking for an apartment immediately.

2. What do I need for my apartment search?

A number of documents must be provided in order to sign a rental contract.

Therefore, the first step in searching for an apartment is to obtain, scan and copy all the necessary documents. You should not submit any of your original documents.

Scanned documents are required for an application via email. Some landlords or property managers also accept the documents directly at the apartment viewing, so we recommend taking printed documents with you to every apartment viewing.

Regardless of whether you are registered with the Jobcenter or the LAF (State Office for Refugee Affairs) you will need **scans and copies** of the following documents:

- Identification documents (passport, refugee travel document, identity card)
- Residence permit (*Aufenthaltsgestattung* / *Aufenthaltstitel* / *Aufenthaltserlaubnis*)

Asylum seekers will receive a residence permit from the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (*Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge* – BAMF). This gives you the right to stay in Germany during the asylum procedure. Once the asylum procedure is completed and if a positive decision has been made, you will receive a residence permit, usually for a certain time period.

Refugees fleeing war (e.g. from Ukraine) will receive a 2 year residence permit which will be affixed in your passport or ID document.

- SCHUFA

A SCHUFA is a document from the SCHUFA credit agency, which tracks information related to an individual’s debts and creditworthiness. When applying for an apartment, it is usually required to submit a SCHUFA no older than three months.

Tip: once a year you are entitled to a **free** SCHUFA report. Just fill out the form at this link <https://www.meineschufa.de/de/datenkopie>. It may take a few weeks for you to receive your SCHUFA with this option.

Otherwise, A SCHUFA costs 30€ (as of 05/2022). Some property search platforms offer premium accounts where a SCHUFA is included, for example Immobilienscout24 (9,99 € per month).

- Proof of income

Income of the last 3 months. See below in **bold** which document/s you need according to your situation:

Employees: **Statement of account** from your bank, **employment contract**.

Asylum seekers: During the asylum procedure you will receive benefit payments from the LAF, who will issue you with a so-called **Bescheid über die Gewährung von Leistungen nach dem Asylbewerberleistungsgesetz** (notification of the granting of benefits under the Asylum Seekers Benefits Act).

For those receiving benefits from the Jobcenter: after your asylum procedure has been completed and you are registered with the Jobcenter, you will receive a **Jobcenterbescheid**.

Refugees fleeing war (e.g. from Ukraine): Currently, a notification from the *Sozialamt* (social welfare office) called a **Leistungsbescheid** (benefits notification) must be submitted.

- *Wohnungsberechtigungsschein* (WBS) – certificate of eligibility for social housing

This document grants the holder access to social housing which is subsidized by the German state. A list of the required documents as well as information on how to apply can be found at <https://service.berlin.de/dienstleistung/120671/>.

Note: a large number of documents is required for a WBS application, therefore we recommend discussing these in our consultation. Furthermore, your identification documents (passport, travel document etc) and residence permit must be valid for at least **one year** from the date of your application. Ukrainian refugees receive a two year residence permit, and therefore can immediately apply for WBS. (see also capital 3 - *Wohnberechtigungsschein*: what is this and when do I need one?)

- *Meldebescheinigung* (Anmeldung)

A document confirming that you have registered your residential address at the *Bürgeramt*.

- *Mietschuldenfreiheitsbescheinigung*

This document confirms that you do not have any rent arrears, and should be issued by your landlord if you are already renting, or by a social worker in your accommodation. A template can be found at:

[mietschuldenfreiheitsbescheinigung.pdf \(hu-berlin.de\)](#)

- Cover letter

Your cover letter should include a brief description of your family, life, work situation and income (see Appendix 1 for a template: cover letter, e.g. for Immoscout)

If you receive financial support from the LAF (*Landesamt für Flüchtlingsangelegenheiten* - State Office for Refugee Affairs), you will also need:

- **A copy of the general agreement to rent an apartment (*allgemeinen Zustimmung zur Anmietung einer Wohnung*)**

This is a confirmation that your rental costs will be covered, within certain limits. Your caseworker at the LAF will issue the document, and it must not be older than six months when you submit an offer for accommodation to the LAF.

3. Wohnberechtigungsschein: what is this and when do I need one?

If your residence permit is still valid for at least 11 months, you can also apply for a *Wohnungsberechtigungsschein* (WBS) – a certificate of eligibility for social housing. A WBS allows you to rent social housing. In such cases, "*WBS erforderlich*" (WBS required) will appear in housing offers. These apartments are usually cheaper and can only be rented by WBS holders.

While holding a WBS is no guarantee that you will get an apartment, it does increase your chances of finding a home. You should apply for apartments requiring WBS, as well as all others.

You can find the application form at the following web address:

<https://www.stadtentwicklung.berlin.de/service/formulare/de/download/wohnen/BauWohn502.pdf>

If you decide to apply for a WBS, we recommend that under point 5 you include reasons for „*besonderen Wohnbedarf*“ (a special need for housing). For example, if you are threatened with homelessness, you can give this as a reason. If you live in a collective accommodation, you are always entitled to this “special housing need”. Write the following: ‘*beengte Verhältnisse in Sammelunterkunft*’ (cramped conditions in collective shelter). If you have been living in a shelter (Heim) for at least a year, you can get a certificate stating that you have a special need for housing. Ask the management of your Heim about this.

You will need the following documents for your WBS application:

- Application form
(<https://www.stadtentwicklung.berlin.de/service/formulare/de/download/wohnen/BauWohn502.pdf>)
- Declaration of income
This needs to be completed for and signed by all household members who are 18 years or older
(<https://www.stadtentwicklung.berlin.de/service/formulare/de/download/wohnen/BauWohn504.pdf>)
- Proof of income
Your employer must complete and sign this form
(<https://www.stadtentwicklung.berlin.de/service/formulare/de/download/wohnen/BauWohn504a.pdf>)
- A copy of your *Meldebescheinigung* - document confirming that you have registered your residential address at the *Bürgeramt*.
- A copy of Identification documents (passport, refugee travel document, identity card)

- A copy of your residence permit
- If you have a child or children:
 - Birth certificate(s) in copy
 - If you are not married: where applicable an acknowledgement of paternity, declaration of shared custody
- If you are married, a copy of your marriage certificate
- If you are widowed or divorced: a copy of the death certificate or decree of divorce
- If you are disabled: copy of the front and back of your *Schwerbehindertenausweis*
- If you are pregnant: a copy of your pregnancy record (*Mutterpass*)
- If you are a student: a copy of your enrolment certificate
- If you are in a civil partnership: copy of your civil partnership certificate (*Lebenspartnerschaftsurkunde*)

4. Where can I seek advice?

There are numerous advisory services in Berlin. You can find out more about current offers and events on the respective website of the organisation.

Important: Some services are district-bound, i.e. they are aimed exclusively at people who live in a specific district or are registered with the Jobcenter / social welfare office in that district.

Berlin-wide advisory services (as of May 2022):

- Xenion (*psychosoziale Hilfen für politisch Verfolgte e.V.* - psychological support for politically persecuted)

Website: <https://www.xenion.org/angebote/wohnraumfuergeluechtete/>

What they offer: As part of the "Housing for Refugees" project, Xenion advises refugees and their voluntary supporters on finding an apartment or a room in a shared flat. The offer is aimed primarily at refugees with a special need for protection.

Contact: request an appointment by E-Mail (wohnen@xenion.org)
- *Ankommen in Spandau: Gemeinsam unter einem Dach* (Arriving in Spandau: together under one roof)

Website: <https://giz.berlin/projects/GuD.htm>

What they offer: Individual advice (by telephone or in person) for refugees looking for accommodation.

Contact: by E-Mail (gud@giz.berlin) or telephone (030 / 513 0 100 80)
- *Mobile Sozialberatung* (Spandau)

Website: <https://giz.berlin/projects/MoS.htm>

What they offer: The *Mobile Sozialberatung* (mobile social counselling) is aimed at refugees and immigrants who are affected by homelessness. The offer is independent, free of charge, confidential and mobile throughout Spandau. Contact: Sören Schöbel (030 513 0 100 80 or mos@giz.berlin)

- *Kontaktstelle Integration* (Zehlendorf) - Mittelhof e.V.

Website: <https://www.mittelhof.org/angebote/bildung-gesundheit-wohnen-arbeit-fuer-gefluechtete-und-zugewanderte-menschen/>;

Calendar with upcoming Events: <https://padlet.com/Mittelhof/o91rvvxm9uz46jpv>

What they offer: Needs-based advice and accompaniment for refugees, including on the subject of housing.

Important: Before making an individual appointment, all those seeking advice should take part in the online workshop "*Tipps und Hinweise zur Wohnungssuche*" (Tips and advice on searching for accommodation) currently on Tuesday at 4 p.m. (see online calendar). The workshop is in German, and every second week with Ukrainian/Russian translation and specifically for refugees from Ukraine.

Contact: Frau Dieckmann (dieckmann@mittelhof.org), request an appointment by E-Mail (welcome@mittelhof.org) or telephone (030 / 68 81 8308)

Advisory services for specific Berlin districts (as of May 2022):

- InteraXion

Website: <https://www.interaxion-tk.de/>

What they offer: Housing advice and a general contact point for people with an immigrant or refugee background, who currently live in Treptow-Köpenick or are under the jurisdiction of a government office in this district.

Contact: appointments can be requested by E-Mail (interaxion@offensiv91.de) or by phone/WhatsApp/Telegram/Signal (0157 73151386).

- *Wohnscouting* (Nachbarschaftshaus Urbanstraße e.V.)

Website: <http://wohnscouting.de/>

What they offer: *Wohnscouting* is aimed at people with a refugee background who currently live in Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg or receive benefits from the Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg Jobcenter. The project supports people looking for their own apartment, helps with questions or problems and offers support for the rental process.

Contact: by E-Mail (info@wohnscouting.de) or phone (030 / 690 418 64); To make an individual appointment for advice: contact Melanie Lenk (0176 758 694 42 or m.lenk@nachbarschaftshaus.de) and Mara Höfs (0174 549 159 7 or m.hoefs@nachbarschaftshaus.de).

- *Wohnbrücke Berlin-Mitte* (Psychosoziale Initiative Moabit e.V.)

Website: <https://www.waldstrasse7.de/unser-angebot/wohnbr%C3%BCcke-berlin-mitte/>

What they offer: The "Wohnbrücke Berlin-Mitte" project supports refugees living in a dormitory or hostel in the Mitte district in their search for accommodation (e.g. with open consultations).

Contact: Angelika Warning (0162 957 8540 or warning-wohnbegleitung@mail.de)

- *Internationaler Bund / Bezirksamt Neukölln*

Website: <https://ib-berlin.de/standort/212139>

What they offer: Housing advice for people with a refugee background. The project is aimed at those residing in Neukölln.

Contact: No appointment necessary. Monday through Thursday: 10 - 12 and 15 -18 / Friday 14 - 17

- *Horizonte*

Website: <https://www.horizonte.biz/beratung/flucht-und-migration/>

What they offer: Housing advice for people with a refugee background. The project is aimed at those residing in Reinickendorf.

Contact: appointments can be requested by E-Mail (wohnraumberatung@horizonte.biz) or by telephone (Frau Ercan: 0176 13 88 17 58; Herr Coskun: 01590 477 17 72)

- *Projekt „Integrationslots:innen“ Tempelhof-Schöneberg (NUSZ)*

Website: <https://nusz.de/aktiv-im-stadtteil/integrationslotsinnen/>

What they offer: The "Integrationslots:innen" project supports those looking for accommodation in Tempelhof-Schöneberg, e.g. in compiling and collecting the necessary documents for their apartment search (important: unfortunately they do not offer ongoing support or accompaniment during the apartment search).

Contact: Piruze Etessami (0176 4273 6981 or integrationslotsen@nusz.de)

- *Willkommensbündnis für Flüchtlinge Steglitz – Zehlendorf*

Website: <http://www.wikobuesz.berlin/>

What they offer: Advice on finding accommodation and personal support or accompaniment for refugees who live in one of the eight emergency shelters in the Steglitz-Zehlendorf district.

Contact: appointments can be requested by E-Mail: wohnraum@wikobuesz.berlin

Contact: Frau Zaghal (0172 7933610 or zaghal@stadtteilzentrum-steglitz.org)

5. What is the maximum permitted rent for an apartment?

The rent must not exceed the maximum set by the LAF/Jobcenter/social welfare office (see Appendix 2: *Mietobergrenzen* - upper rent limits – the limits are updated periodically, so please check to see if there is a newer one than the one in the appendix). It should also be noted that the maximum permitted rent value shown is the so-called *Bruttokaltmiete*. This includes all "cold" utility costs (cold utility costs - *kalte Nebenkosten* / *Betriebskosten* in German - are fixed expenses, such as waste disposal, water, garden maintenance, etc.).

When looking for an apartment online (e.g. on Immobilienscout), the *Nettokaltmiete* (without "cold" utility costs) is often displayed first. Therefore one must take a closer look to find the *Bruttokaltmiete*: *Nettokaltmiete* + cold utility costs = *Bruttokaltmiete*.

The upper limit for the *Bruttokaltmiete* depends on the size of your household, that is the number of people (family, including spouses or partners etc) who will be moving into the apartment together.

The maximum permitted rent can be increased in the following cases:

- (Imminent) homelessness: If you are currently homeless or at risk of homelessness (this is the case, for example, if you live in a refugee shelter), the maximum permitted rent can be increased by 20%.
- WBS: If you have a *Wohnungsberechtigungsschein (WBS)* – a certificate of eligibility for social housing – and find an apartment that can only be rented by those holding a WBS, the maximum permitted rent increases by 10%.

See Chapter 3, "*Wohnberechtigungsschein*: what is this and when do I need one"? for more information on WBS. Important: If you have a WBS, but the apartment you want to rent is not intended only for those holding a WBS, the 10% increase will not be granted.

- Case of hardship (*Härtefall*): If you or one of the people in your household are a single parent, pregnant, ill, disabled, or at the end of youth welfare (*Jugendhilfe*), the maximum permitted rent increases by 10%.

According to your situation, these benefits can cumulatively result in a total increase of up to 40%:

Size of household	Maximum permitted gross cold rent (<i>Bruttokaltmiete</i>) (as of 2021)	WBS <u>or</u> <i>Härtefall</i> : 10% increase	(WBS <u>and</u> <i>Härtefall</i>) <u>or</u> homeless: 20% increase	(WBS <u>or</u> <i>Härtefall</i>) <u>and</u> homeless: 30% increase	WBS <u>and</u> <i>Härtefall</i> <u>and</u> homeless: 40% increase
1	426,00	468,60	511,20	553,80	596,40
2	500,40	550,44	600,48	650,52	700,56
2 (single parent with child)	515,45	567,00	618,54	670,09	721,63
3	634,40	697,84	761,28	824,72	888,16
4	713,70	785,07	856,44	927,81	999,18
5	857,82	943,60	1.029,38	1.115,17	1.200,95
Every additional person	100,92	111,01	121,10	131,20	141,29

Example: You are a family of three (e.g. two parents and a child) and are looking for an apartment together. The basic upper limit for the *Bruttokaltmiete* is €634,40.

- You are currently living in collective accommodation for refugees and are therefore at risk of homelessness. In this situation the maximum permitted rent increases by 20% to €761,28.

- Additionally, you have a WBS and find a WBS apartment. This increases the maximum permitted rent by another 10% to €824,72 (a total increase of 30%).
- Furthermore, one of the parents is pregnant (case of hardship). This means another 10% increase of the maximum permitted rent to €888,16. (a total increase of 40%)

6. What other criteria does the apartment need to fulfil?

- The **heating costs** should also not exceed the upper limits set by the LAF/Jobcenter/social welfare office. If the *Bruttokaltmiete* is within the limits, the heating costs are usually also within the permissible limit. Together they result in the 'warm rent' (*Warmmiete*) or rent including heating for the apartment:
Bruttokaltmiete + heating costs = Warmmiete.
- The **rental period** is also very important: it must be at least six months. However, it should be noted that you will only receive money for household goods (furniture, washing machine, etc.) if the rental period is at least two years. If the rental period is less than two years and the apartment is partially furnished, you can receive a subsidy for additional furniture. However, the subsidy is not as high as the regular rate for household goods.
- The **deposit** may not exceed three months of cold rent (this is a legal requirement that applies to everyone, not just people receiving aid).
- The **apartment should be an appropriate size**. The living space per person should be 12 square meters for those older than 6 years, and 9 square meters for children up to 6 years. This means that for two adults and a small child, the apartment must be at least 33 square meters (including kitchen, bathroom, hallway). However, the case workers approving the rental have discretion here, and under certain conditions they may also agree to a smaller apartment.

Does the apartment meet these criteria? Then contact the landlord and arrange an appointment for a viewing.

Please note: The costs for hot water and heating are included in the above figures, but the costs for electricity are not. Electricity costs must be paid out of pocket.

7. Where can I find offers for apartment rentals?

Landlords almost always offer their apartments online, which means you will need access to a smartphone or computer as well as an email address for your search and application. There are several internet portals that publish offers. The same apartment is often offered on several portals. The procedure is always similar:

- Choose if you are seeking or offering an apartment.
- Choose the area for your search, for example Berlin.
- Specify the minimum size for an apartment.
- Specify the maximum rent.

In addition to rent and location, the search results often contain photos, a floor plan, additional costs, information on heating, etc. You can use this information to decide whether the apartment meets the criteria in chapters 5 “What is the maximum permitted rent for an apartment?” and 6, “What other criteria does the apartment need to fulfil?”. You should pay particular attention to the fact that the *Bruttokaltmiete*, i.e. the net rent plus utility costs without heating, is below the maximum permissible rent.

Usually, the application is started by clicking a button on the page and filling out an online form.

So that you don't have to keep re-entering the same information each time, it makes sense to create an account with portals, by registering with your personal details and choosing a password. Once you have an account you also have the advantage of being able to save searches and receive notifications for apartments that match your criteria.

It is not uncommon that landlords or agents will receive hundreds of applications for one apartment. To increase your chances at success, ensure that your application contains all necessary information, and ideally include something to make your application stand out from the many others, for example include a photo of yourself or your family. You should also react quickly, as many ads are only online for a short time. If possible, plan time every day to check adverts and send applications.

A list of some internet portals is included below:

- www.immobilienscout24.de (mobile App available)
ImmobilienScout24 – or Immoscout – is the largest portal with the most apartments. Immoscout offers a premium account for €120 (as of 05/2022). The landlord then receives an application folder when you contact them, which includes all of your documents needed for the application. A current SCHUFA credit rating document is included in the price. Our experience is that the premium account is not absolutely necessary, but that it can prove advantageous for your search.
- www.immowelt.de (mobile App available)
- www.wohnungssuche-berlin.net
- www.immobilo.de
- www.immobilien.de (mobile App available)
- www.immonet.de
- www.immopool.de

In Berlin there are six housing companies owned by the State of Berlin. They own more than 300,000 apartments and take social criteria into account when allocating apartments. Although these municipal companies also place their advertisements on the websites listed above, in our experience it increases your chances if you apply directly to them. All of the housing companies can be reached via:

- <https://inberlinwohnen.de/>

In addition to larger landlords and companies, there are also private owners and landlords. They may be more willing to rent their apartment to refugees. Below are some suggestions for website where you can find offerings from private landlords:

- www.ebay-kleinanzeigen.de/
- www.woloho.com/
- www.immobilienscout24.de („von Privat“ will be shown on the advert)
- <https://www.wg-gesucht.de/>

You can also check the Facebook groups below:

- Temporary Flat Rentals In Berlin:
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/890919300923458/>
- Berlin Housing: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/316886635183491/>
- BERLIN - Rent a House, Villa, Apartment, Flat, Condo, Studio, Room:
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/370555026719076>

If you only have limited time to look for an apartment, you should concentrate on Immoscout and on the Berlin State Housing Companies.

Beware of fraud!

It is not uncommon to come across dubious housing offers, particularly online. These often attract apartment seekers with unrealistically low rents or beautiful apartments. If you contact the provider, they may for example pretend to be abroad but will send the key to the apartment by post for a “fee”. Do not hand over any money to anyone before you've signed a rental agreement!

8. What is a *Wohngemeinschaft* (WG), and how can I find a room in such a flat?

Wohngemeinschaft or WG is the German word for a shared flat or flat share. All residents usually have their own bedroom but share common areas such as the kitchen and bathroom. There is often a friendly relationship between the residents: cooking together, but also sharing chores (cleaning, taking out the rubbish) are considered a part of life in a flat share. This type of housing arrangement is particularly popular with students and young professionals.

You can find a multitude of offers for rooms in a WG at:

- www.wg-gesucht.de
- www.wgcompany.de/

You should also register with “*Flüchtlinge Willkommen*” (refugees welcome) early on. *Flüchtlinge Willkommen* is an association that arranges shared accommodation for refugees. You can find their multilingual website at:

- <http://www.fluechtlinge-willkommen.de/>

The members of a WG will usually invite you and other potential flatmates to an appointment to view the flat and get to know each other. Take your time for this appointment, after all your future roommates will want to know who they will share their apartment with - and you will too!

The rent for a room in a WG often includes the costs for electricity, internet etc. However, the LAF / the Jobcenter/ the *Sozialamt* will only cover costs for the *Bruttokaltmiete* and heating (see Chapter 5, “What is the maximum permitted rent for an apartment?” and Chapter 6, “What other criteria does the apartment need to fulfil?”). In order for the costs to be covered at all, the rental agreement must break down and specify the different costs precisely.

For example:

<i>Nettokaltmiete</i> (rent)	255 €
<i>Kalte Nebenkosten</i> (cold utility costs)	70 €
<i>Heizkosten</i> (heating costs)	30 €
<i>Strom</i> (electricity)	40 €
Internet	5 €
<hr/>	
<i>Gesamtmiete für das WG-Zimmer</i> (total rent for the room)	400 €

The LAF / the Jobcenter/ the *Sozialamt* will cover the total of the rent, cold utility costs, and heating costs, for the example 355 € (255 € + 70 € + 30 €).

In order to have the payment of these costs approved, you will also need a copy of the rental agreement between the landlord and the main tenant, as well as a letter from the landlord confirming they give permission for the room or apartment to be sublet (see Chapter 11 “How do I apply for housing benefits?”).

This video tutorial, available in German, Arabic as well as English, explains further how to search for a room in a flatshare: [Videotutorials zur WG-Suche für Geflüchtete - YouTube](#).

9. Viewing an apartment

Take copies of all necessary documents with you to an apartment viewing (see Chapter 2, “What do I need for my apartment search?”). If possible, have a German-speaking person accompany you who can translate if necessary.

Check that the rent, number of rooms and size match what was shown in the offer. Is the apartment condition as described? Is it renovated? Do doors and windows close properly? Is there any mould visible or is there a mouldy smell? Do the electrics work? And the faucets?

If you like the apartment and the landlord offers it to you, unfortunately you can't immediately sign the rental agreement. First, you need to request that the landlord provides you with a ***Mietangebot (Exposé)*** – a written offer to rent the apartment. You must then seek approval from the LAF / Jobcenter / *Sozialamt* (see chapter 11, “Applying for housing benefits”). Once you have this approval, you may sign the rental agreement (see chapter 12 “The rental agreement: what to watch out for”)

Many landlords are familiar with this process and have their own template for this rental offer document. In case they do not, you can find a template in

Appendix 3: Template for an offer for an apartment from a landlord (*Wohnungsangebot*, which you can ask the landlord to complete.

Important: never pay any money at a viewing!

10. Deposit, agency fees, other payments

Landlords and housing companies almost always require a deposit. This provides security for the landlord in case of arrears in rent payments or damages to the apartment. The LAF / Jobcenter / *Sozialamt* will usually pay the deposit for you as a loan and reduce your benefits accordingly. However, landlords may not demand a deposit higher than three months cold rent. The tenant has the right to pay the deposit in three monthly instalments if they wish. The deposit will be returned after moving out, provided there are no damages or rent arrears.

Agency fees (commission) for brokers must by law be paid by the landlord. It is illegal to demand payment of a brokerage commission from a tenant.

Sometimes it is required that you make payments for items or facilities in the apartment which belonged to the previous tenant (*Abstandszahlungen*). In principle, such compensation payments are permitted; however, only pay them after the rental contract has been concluded and do not pay excessive sums! The amount claimed should not be disproportionate in comparison to the value of the item or facility.

11. Wie stelle ich einen Antrag auf Kostenübernahme?

If you're receiving assistance from LAF or the Jobcenter, you'll need to get approval from them in the form of a "Kostenübernahme," which you will then give to the potential landlord. You can apply for it by going to the LAF or Jobcenter with the "Mietangebot" discussed in section 9. You can apply for it by email, but because apartments are given away so quickly in Berlin, it's best to go in person and then give the approval to the landlord as quickly as possible. If you're subletting an apartment, you'll also need to bring a copy of the main tenant's rental contract as well as written permission from the landlord that the room/apartment may be sublet.

If you're getting assistance from the LAF, it's best to go early in the morning – i.e. around 6:30 – to make sure you're seen. Additionally, you'll need to bring the following documents when seeking approval to rent a particular apartment:

- Valid residency permit for all persons over 18 years of age
- Landlord's contact information (phone number / email address)
- If the landlord also owns the apartment (usually the case with private landlords): written statement that the landlord is indeed the property owner
- For sublets: Copy of the main rental contract and permission to sublet from the property manager or landlord.

Usually, the LAF worker will be able to tell you immediately whether the apartment qualifies or not. This is why it is important to have all documents ready. Otherwise, you'll have to submit them later and at that point the apartment will likely be gone.

Tip: Jobcenter/Sozialamt and LAF can sometimes make exceptions to their rigid guidelines on the apartment's size and the maximum rent. In some cases, the apartment can be slightly larger or more expensive than the guidelines dictate. This is especially true when someone needs a handicap accessible housing unit. You can likely also move into an apartment than is slightly smaller than the rules foresee if you think it's large enough.

As soon as you've received permission to rent the apartment from the LAF/Jobcenter/Sozialamt, send the permission letter to the landlord by email or bring it to them in person. Please note that just because you've received permission to rent an apartment does not necessarily mean that you will get it. The landlord makes the ultimate decision on who they rent their housing to. You can increase your chances by quickly submitting all required documents.

12. What should I look out for when reading the rental contract?

The landlord offered you a contract to sign? Congrats! Before you sign the contract, you should carefully read it. If you don't understand something, have somebody review the contract with you. Once you sign, you become a tenant with all the rights and duties that go with it.

Rental contracts must be fixed in writing. The contract should contain the following:

- The parties to the contract. All adults moving into the apartment should be listed. The landlord's full name and address should also appear on the contract.
- An exact description of the apartment to be rented, including: the number of rooms (i.e. "three rooms, kitchen, two bathrooms, hallway, cellar space") and the location within the house (i.e. "second floor, right side").
- The amount of the monthly rent and the security deposit.
- The move-in date.
- In some cases, the problems with the apartment that the landlord promises to fix before the move-in date.

When you get the keys from the landlord, you must walk through the apartment together with the landlord or property manager and note any damage in a document called a "Wohnungsübergabeprotokoll." If you don't complete this list together with the landlord (but you really should!), then you should make a list of issues immediately after moving in and request that they be repaired. The list should also note the current reading of the electricity, gas, and water meters. The landlord and the tenant must both sign and date this document.

You should also look to see whether the contract is permanent or whether it expires after a certain period of time. Additionally, some contracts allow for the rent to be raised after a certain period of time or contain an annual percentual rent increase. If the landlord conducts renovations, they're also allowed to raise the rent. Normally, contracts require the tenant to take responsibility for minor or cosmetic repairs in the apartment up to a certain cost.

Please be careful and:

- Only sign contracts that you understand.

- Don't pay money for something without reason.
- Always make sure you get a receipt.
- Do not agree to additional special terms like buying furniture.

13. How do I apply for money for household goods?

After you've signed the rental contract, you can apply for money for household goods from the Jobcenter or LAF. This includes money for furniture, curtains, beds/mattresses, kitchen utensils, and, if the apartment doesn't already have these things, a stove/oven, kitchen sink, refrigerator, and washing machine.

Where should I apply for money for household goods?

If you receive assistance from the Jobcenter or Sozialamt, you can apply there. It usually takes them a few days to process the application. You can use the sample letter in the appendix (Appendix 5). When the Jobcenter/Sozialamt approve the application, they'll give you a specified sum of money that you can use to buy household goods. If you receive assistance from LAF, they'll automatically give you a follow-up appointment when they approve the apartment. At the follow-up appointment, the rent and deposit are transferred to the landlord. You can apply for money for household goods at this appointment.

You can find inexpensive or free used furniture and appliances at places like:

<https://www.kleinanzeigen.de>

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/142044769198672>

14. Register your new address!

After you've moved into your new apartment, you need to register yourself at your new address (Anmeldung). If you receive assistance from LAF or if you've fled from a war, you can complete the Anmeldung at the following offices (Bürgeramt):

Flüchtlingsbürgeramt in Mitte (Rathaus Tiergarten, Mathilde-Jacob-Platz 1, 10551 Berlin; responsible for people living in the districts of: Mitte, Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg, Neukölln, Tempelhof-Schöneberg, Steglitz-Zehlendorf, Pankow, Marzahn-Hellersdorf, Lichtenberg, Reinickendorf, Treptow-Köpenick)

Flüchtlingsbürgeramt in Charlottenburg-Wilmersdorf (Hohenzollerndamm 177, 10713 Berlin; responsible for people living in the districts of: Charlottenburg-Wilmersdorf, Spandau)

If you're receiving assistance from the Jobcenter or if you're working, you can do the Anmeldung at any Bürgeramt (municipal office). You need to have an appointment, which you can book online <https://service.berlin.de/dienstleistung/120686/> or by calling 115. You'll need to bring the following documents to the appointment: passport / identification card and residency permit, completed Anmeldung form, rental contract, certification from the new landlord that you're living there (a form for this is available at <https://service.berlin.de/dienstleistung/120686/> under the link "Einzugsbestätigung des Wohnungsgebers/Vermieters (Muster)").

Finally, you must inform the Sozialamt/Jobcenter, the **Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge (BAMF)** and the **Ausländerbehörde (Einwanderungsamt)** of your new address. You should also inform the following institutions of your new address: health insurance, bank, integration class, Kita / school, and, if it applies, medical care. Go to the post office and ask them to forward mail sent to your old address to your new address. If you are receiving assistance from the Jobcenter and you move into a different district (Bezirk, i.e. you move from Mitte to Lichtenberg), then you must apply for benefits at the Jobcenter of your new district. For this, you'll need to get an "Einstellungsbescheid" from your old Jobcenter.

15. To-do list after moving in

After moving in, you need to set up service with an electricity company and an internet company. In some cases, you'll also need your own gas contract.

You should always get personal liability insurance (Haftpflichtversicherung). This protects you against high costs in the case of unexpected damages, including fire, break-ins, and water damage within the apartment. The property manager is responsible for damages caused by the building's pipes, electrical wiring, or heating.

You can find many offers for liability insurance online. It usually costs around 100 euros per year. These providers have been recommended:

<https://www.hellogetsafe.com>

<https://www.cosmosdirekt.de/private-haftpflichtversicherung/haftpflichtversicherung-wohnung/>

<https://www.allianz.de/angebot/recht-und-eigentum/s/privat-haftpflichtversicherung/>

<https://www.devk.de/produkte/haftpflicht/privat/wohnungshaftpflichtversicherung.jsp>

After registering, you'll get a letter from German public radio/television (ARD, ZDF and Deutschlandradio) asking you to pay a monthly contribution called the **Rundfunkbeitrag**. If you're receiving assistance from LAF, Sozialamt or the JobCenter, you don't have to pay. However, you must inform them that you're not obligated to pay and have to send a special application found here:

https://www.rundfunkbeitrag.de/buergerinnen_und_buerger/formulare/index_ger.html.

The LAF, Sozialamt or JobCenter will give you a piece of paper that you can enclose with the application.

Congratulations on your new apartment!

Appendix

Appendix 1: Application letter

Appendix 2: Maximum rent paid by Jobcenter/LAF

Appendix 3: Template for the “Wohnungsangebot” (apartment offer) with all information required by Jobcenter/LAF

Appendix 4: Landlord certification of ownership

Appendix 5: Template for applying for household goods

Appendix 6: Counseling services for people looking for housing

Appendix 1: Cover letter (e.g. für Immoscout)

Examples below are for a family, a single parent, or a single person:

Family

Sehr geehrter Herr <<Ansprechpartner bei Vermieter>>,

mein Name ist <<Vorname>> <<Nachname>>. Ich bin mit meiner Frau <<Vorname>> und unseren 3 Kindern 2018 aus Syrien nach Deutschland geflohen. Im Moment wohnen wir in einem Wohnheim in 2 Zimmern und würden uns sehr freuen, wenn wir in eine eigene Wohnung ziehen könnten.

Ich habe in Syrien als Restaurantmanager gearbeitet, meine Frau ist Pädagogin. Unser ältester Sohn ist schon ausgezogen und arbeitet als Informatiker. Bis wir hier Arbeit gefunden haben, übernimmt das Landesamt für Flüchtlingsangelegenheiten unseren Unterhalt.

Wir würden uns sehr über einen Besichtigungstermin freuen!

Mit freundlichen Grüßen

<<Vorname>> <<Nachname>>

Single parent

Sehr geehrte Frau <<Ansprechpartnerin bei Vermieter>>,

mein Name ist <<Vorname>> <<Nachname>>. Ich bin im März aus der Ukraine geflohen. Ich wohne zur Zeit mit meiner achtjährigen Tochter bei Bekannten auf engstem Raum und suche deswegen dringend eine eigene Wohnung.

In Kiew war ich als Einkäuferin für ein großes Unternehmen in der Versicherungsbranche tätig. In Deutschland werde ich meine Fähigkeiten so schnell wie möglich in einer passenden Stelle einsetzen. Im Moment erhalte ich Unterstützung vom Sozialamt.

Wir würden uns sehr über einen Besichtigungstermin freuen!

Mit freundlichen Grüßen

<<Vorname>> <<Nachname>>

Single person

Sehr geehrte Damen und Herren,

mein Name ist <<Vorname>> <<Nachname>>. Ich bin 2017 aus dem Irak nach Deutschland geflohen. Im Moment wohne ich sehr beengt in einem Wohnheim zu zweit in einem Zimmer und würde mich sehr freuen, wenn ich in eine eigene Wohnung ziehen könnte.

Zur Zeit mache ich meinen mittleren Schulabschluss im zweiten Bildungsweg. Sobald ich einen Ausbildungsplatz gefunden habe, werde ich arbeiten. Derzeit übernimmt das Jobcenter meinen Unterhalt.

Ich würde mich sehr über einen Besichtigungstermin freuen!

Mit freundlichen Grüßen

<<Vorname>> <<Nachname>>

Appendix 2: maximum permitted rent to be covered by benefits

Mietobergrenzen nach AV Wohnen, 9.Juni 2021

Größe Bedarfs-Gemeinschaft	Richtwert Bruttokalt in Euro	Bruttokalt + 10% in Euro	Bruttokalt + 20% in Euro	Bruttokalt + 30% in Euro	Bruttokalt + 40% in Euro	Gebäude-Fläche in m ²	Grenzwert Heizkosten Erdöl in Euro	Grenzwert Heizkosten Erdgas in Euro	Grenzwert Heizkosten Fernwärme in Euro	Abschlag bei dezentraler Warmwasserversorgung
1 Person	426,00	468,60	511,20	553,80	596,40	100-250	75,50	71,00	94,00	
						251-500	73,50	66,00	87,50	-7,00
						501-1000	71,50	61,50	82,00	
2 Personen	500,40	550,44	600,48	650,52	700,56	100-250	90,60	85,20	112,80	
						251-500	88,20	79,20	105,00	-8,00
						501-1000	85,80	73,80	98,40	
2 Personen (Alleinerziehend mit einem Kind)	515,45	567,00	618,54	670,09	721,63	100-250	98,15	92,30	122,20	
						251-500	95,55	85,80	113,75	-9,00
						501-1000	92,95	79,95	106,60	
3 Personen	634,40	697,84	761,28	824,72	888,16	100-250	120,80	113,60	150,40	
						251-500	117,60	105,60	140,00	-11,00
						501-1000	114,40	98,40	131,20	
4 Personen	713,70	785,07	856,44	927,81	999,18	100-250	135,90	127,80	169,20	
						251-500	132,30	118,80	157,50	-12,00
						501-1000	128,70	110,70	147,60	
5 Personen	857,82	943,60	1029,38	1115,17	1200,95	100-250	125,10	105,30	141,30	
						251-500	154,02	144,84	191,76	-14,00
						501-1000	149,94	134,64	178,50	
jede weitere Person	100,92	111,01	121,10	131,20	141,29	100-250	18,12	17,04	22,56	
						251-500	17,64	15,84	21,00	-2,00
						501-1000	17,16	14,76	19,68	
						>1000	16,68	14,04	18,84	

Zuschlag +10% für Sozialwohnungen (WBS)

Zuschlag +20% für Wohnungslose oder von Wohnungslosigkeit bedrohte Menschen

Zuschlag +10% für Härtefälle (Alleinerziehende, Schwangere, Kranke, Behinderte, Ende der Jugendhilfe,...)

Diese Zuschläge zum Richtwert der Bruttokaltmiete können je nach persönlicher Situation addiert werden.

und Überschreitung dieser Richtwerte müssen im Einzelfall beantragt werden. Heizkosten Wärmepumpen sind extra geregelt.

Klimabonus

Quelle: SenIAS zusammengestellt von Xenion AG Wohnen

Appendix 3: Template for an offer for an apartment from a landlord (Wohnungsangebot)

<u>Wohnungsangebot für:</u>	
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Allgemeine Daten zur Wohnung

Eigentümer/Anbieter der Wohnung:	
Anschrift des Anbieters:	
Adresse der Wohnung:	
Etage:	
Anzahl Zimmer:	
Fläche der Wohnung in m ² :	
Bezugsfrei ab:	
Gebäudefläche in m ² :	
Heizungsart:	
Baujahr:	
Letzte Modernisierung/Sanierung:	
Warmwasserversorgung: zentral / dezentral	
Möbliert: ja / nein	
Sozialer Wohnungsbau: ja / nein	
Befristet: ja / nein – wenn ja, von _____ bis _____	
Die Benutzung von Küche und Bad ist im Mietpreis enthalten.	

Mietzusammenhang

Grundmiete in €:	
Kalte Betriebskosten in €:	
Heizung in €:	
Monatlicher Zahlbetrag:	
Kaution:	

Berlin, den

Appendix 4: Landlord's declaration of ownership (*Eigentumserklärung des Vermieters*)

Hiermit erkläre ich,

Name, Vorname

Adresse, Telefonnummer

dass ich der Eigentümer / die Eigentümerin der Wohnung

Adresse

im _____. Stockwerk

Vorderhaus

rechts

Hinterhaus

links

Quergebäude

Mitte

Seitenflügel

bin.

Berlin, den _____

Unterschrift

Appendix 5: Template for an application for basic furniture (Erstausstattung)

Herr/Frau
 Straße Nr....
 Berlin Kd.-Nr.:
 Berlin, den

Jobcenter
straße
 1.... Berlin

Antrag auf Erstausstattung für die Wohnung in der ...straße., 1.... Berlin gemäß § 24 SGB II

Sehr geehrte Damen und Herren,

ich beantrage das unten aufgeführte Inventar, das ich als Erstausstattung für die o. g. Wohnung gemäß § 24 SGB II Absatz 3 Satz 1 Nr. 1 SGB II benötige.

Nachfolgend die Auflistung der erforderlichen Einrichtungsgegenstände:

Einrichtungsgegenstand / <i>Item</i>	Benötigte Möbel (bitte ankreuzen) <i>Furniture required (please check)</i>	Anzahl der benötigten Möbel / <i>number of items required</i>
--------------------------------------	--	---

Schlafen / *Bedroom*

Bett mit Lattenrost / <i>bed with slatted frame</i>		
Matratze (Federkern) / <i>mattress</i>		
Babybett komplett / <i>complete baby cot</i>		
Kleiderschrank / <i>wardrobe</i>		
Kopfkissen / <i>pillow</i>		
Bettdecke / <i>duvet</i>		
Lampe / <i>Lamp</i>		

Wohnen / *living room*

Schrank, Anrichte, Regal / <i>cupboard, dresser, shelves</i>		
Couch oder 2 Sessel / <i>couch or 2 armchairs</i>		
Couchtisch / <i>coffee table</i>		
Esstisch / <i>dining table</i>		
Esstisch ausziehbar- ab 5 Personen / <i>expandable dining table (for 5 or more people)</i>		
2 Polsterstühle / <i>2 upholstered chairs</i>		
Lampe / <i>Lamp</i>		

Küche / *Kitchen*

Küchenmöbel		
-------------	--	--

Spülenschrank		
E-Boiler, falls nicht Mietsache		
Siphon, falls nicht Mietsache		
Mischbatterie, falls nicht Mietsache		
Kühlschrank, falls nicht Mietsache		
Elektro- oder Gas-Herd, falls nicht Mietsache		
Anschluss Elektro- oder Gasherd, falls nicht Mietsache		
Küchentisch		
Küchenstuhl		
Lampe		

Bad/ Flur

Waschmaschine 1200 U/min, falls nicht Mietsache		
Wäscheständer		
Spiegel		
Lampe Bad/Flur		

Kinder (gilt nur für Schulkinder)

Schreibtisch		
Drehstuhl		
Schreibtischlampe		

Kleiner Hausrat/Wäsche

Staubsauger		
Reinigungsutensilien (Besen, Handkehrer, Eimer, Schrubber usw.)		
Bügeleisen		
Bügelbrett		
Gardinen/Gardinenstangen		
Bettwäsche		
Tisch-/Hand/Bade- und Geschirrhandtücher		
Kleiner Hausrat (Teller, Töpfe, Besteck etc.)		
Werkzeugset (Hammer, Zange, Schraubendreher, Nägel, Schrauben, Dübel usw.)		

Handtücher, Bettwäsche und dergleichen sind als einmalige Beihilfen für den Hausrat einzuordnen. Bei der Bewilligung von Pauschalen beachten Sie bitte, dass diese gemäß § 24 Abs. 1 SGB II bedarfsdeckend sein müssen.

Ich bitte um einen schriftlich begründeten Bescheid gemäß §§ 33/35 SGB X bzw. §§ 37/39 VwVfG mit Angabe der Bewilligungsgrundlage, aus der auch der jeweils bewilligte Einzelbetrag hervorgeht. Ich bitte darum, diesen Antrag zur Akte zu nehmen.

Mit freundlichen Grüßen

Unterschrift