Federal Office
of Family Affairs and
Civil Society Functions

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Information Sheet for Performing the Federal Volunteer Service

Conclusion of an agreement

The German government (Federal Agency for Family and Civil-Society Tasks) and the volunteer shall upon mutual proposal by the volunteer and an assignment location approved for the Federal Volunteer Service conclude a written agreement prior to the start of Federal Volunteer Service. The mutual rights and obligations shall result both from the German Federal Volunteer Service Act (*Bundesfreiwilligendienstgesetz* – BFDG) and from the individual agreements.

Important:

Persons with authority to instruct in an assignment location, e.g. board members of an association, are not eligible for serving on the Federal Volunteer Service programme at that assignment location.

Age

The Federal Volunteer Service is open to men and women of any age after the completion of full-time mandatory education. The mandatory education laws of the relevant State must be observed.

Occupational doctor's examination

The assignment location shall organise any medical examinations and preventive measures required and bear the associated costs.

Workplace protection

The German workplace protection laws, the Act on the Protection of Young People at Work (*Jugendarbeitsschutzgesetz*) and the Federal Holidays Act (*Bundesurlaubsgesetz*) apply mutatis mutandis to work in the Federal Volunteer Service.

Foreigners in the Federal Volunteer Service

Foreigners are eligible to participate in the Federal Volunteer Service. To do so, they must possess a residence permit entitling them to work. A residence permit (visas qualify as residence permits) may usually only be granted if subsistence is secure, Section 5 (1) No. 1 of the German Residence Act (*Aufenthaltsgesetz*). According to Section 2 (3) of the Residence Act this is the case if a foreigner is able to earn a living without recourse to public funds (e.g. housing benefit). Payment of a subsidy to the Federal Volunteer Service by the German government is no obstacle to a residence permit being granted. Under Section 18 of the Residence Act, volunteers from abroad can generally be granted a residence permit specifically in order to participate in the Federal Volunteer Service.

Nationals of non-EU states who wish to serve in the Federal Volunteer Service must apply for a visa for performing voluntary services while still in their home country, since they will only be issued the required residence permit in Germany if they entered the country with the appropriate visa. Apart from citizens of the European Union no visa is required for nationals of Australia, Israel, Japan, Canada, the Republic of Korea, New Zealand and the United States of America.

Advice

The advisors of the Federal Volunteer Service are employed in the field by the Federal Agency and are available as contact persons to all participants.

Federal Volunteer Service pertaining to refugees

Regarding the Federal Volunteer Service pertaining to refugees please refer to the provisions of the "Information Sheet for the Federal Volunteer Service pertaining to Refugees".

Data protection

The assignment locations, central offices and supporting organisations may gather, process and use personal data which are part of the agreement (Section 8 (1) second sentence BFDG) to the extent that this is necessary for implementing the BFDG.

Term

The Federal Volunteer Service is generally served for a duration of twelve consecutive months. Service lasts at least six months and at most 18 months. In exceptional cases it may be extended to a term of 24 months if there are valid reasons for this as part of a special pedagogic concept. In the context of a pedagogic overall concept it is also possible to perform service in several separate periods of time if each period is of at least three months' duration.

Areas of assignment

The Federal Volunteer Service is as a rule performed through practical assistance at institutions that are focused on the common good, in particular institutions for the welfare of children and youth, including institutions providing youth education and youth work outside the education system, in social welfare, health and old-age care institutions, disability welfare, cultural and heritage preservation, sports, integration, civil society and disaster protection and in institutions active in the area of the environment, including environment protection and education in sustainability.

Working times

The Federal Volunteer Service is generally comparable with full-time employment in the relevant assignment location. Where the volunteers are older than 27 years of age part-time service of over 20 hours a week is possible. Details will be agreed with the assignment location.

Release from service

Volunteers may be released from service with or without remuneration with the agreement of the assignment location. A release from service for the purposes of undertaking an internship will always be without remuneration.

Certificate of good conduct

Volunteers in the Federal Volunteer Service and the Youth Volunteer Service are exempt from the fee for the issue of a certificate of good conduct. An application for fee exemption must be submitted alongside the application for the certificate. The registration office may not in this case charge a fee but shall wait for the decision of the solely responsible Federal Office for Justice, to which the application for issue of a certificate of good conduct including the application for fee exemption shall be forwarded. As proof of the voluntary service, which includes the Federal Volunteer Service, the Voluntary Year of Social Service (FSJ) and the Voluntary Year of Ecological Service (FÖJ), appropriate written confirmation from the assignment location must be provided and specified as the reason for special application.

Child benefit

Parents whose children are under the age of 25 and are serving on the Federal Volunteer Service or an FSJ/FÖJ may claim child benefit and/or tax-free allowance.

Illness

In the event of illness the assignment location must be informed without delay. Detailed provisions are contained in the agreement between the Federal Agency and the volunteer. In the event of illness, the allowance and payments in kind shall usually continue to be paid for up to six weeks. Thereafter, volunteers will usually receive sickness benefit from their statutory health insurance. Full-time old-age pensioners form an exception, as they are not entitled to sickness benefit.

Health insurance

Volunteers in the Federal Volunteer Service will be compulsorily insured as a member of a statutory health insurance scheme for the term of their voluntary service. Contributions will be borne in full by the assignment location and paid to the health insurance. Any previously existing family insurance policy will be excluded for the term of voluntary service and may – e.g. upon commencement of vocational training, further school attendance or commencement of a university course – be continued thereafter.

Compulsory insurance with a statutory health insurance scheme also includes persons who were insured privately prior to starting Federal Volunteer Service. However, compulsory insurance with a statutory health insurance will not apply to persons who are exempt from compulsory insurance.

Exempt from compulsory insurance are, for example, civil servants, judges, short-term members of the armed forces and pensioners who are eligible for financial aid in the event of illness according to provisions and principles applicable to the civil service (Section 6 (1) Nos. 2 and 6 of the German Code of Social Law V (SGB V). However, exemption from compulsory insurance does not extend to relatives who are eligible under these financial aid provisions; i.e. for example children of civil servants are subject to compulsory insurance with the statutory health insurance scheme for the term of the Volunteer Service.

Likewise exempt from compulsory insurance are persons over 55 years of age if they have not been statutorily insured in the last five years and were exempt or released from compulsory insurance or in full-time self-employment for at least half of this time (Section 6 (3a) SGB V).

Being in receipt of an old-age pension does not result in an exemption from compulsory health insurance. An old-age pensioner with state insurance who serves on the Federal Volunteer Service is therefore subject to compulsory insurance pursuant to Section 5 (1) No. 1 SGB V.

Termination

The first six weeks of the assignment are considered a trial period. During this trial period, either party to the agreement can terminate the agreement with two weeks' notice. The assignment location may request a termination from the Federal Agency without explanation during this trial period.

After expiry of the trial period the agreement may be terminated extraordinarily (without notice) for good cause by either party within a period of two weeks of gaining knowledge of the reason for termination

Besides, the agreement may be terminated by the parties with four weeks' notice to the fifteenth of the month or to the end of the calendar month (ordinary termination). Notice of termination must be in writing.

The assignment location may request a review of the termination stating the grounds for termination. The responsible auditor of the Federal Agency may be called in to clarify the circumstances.

Payments in the Federal Volunteer Service/Effect on other payments and/or benefits

The Federal Volunteer Service constitutes voluntary work and is as such unremunerated. The **allowance** which volunteers may receive for their work is currently (2015) set at a maximum rate of EUR 363 per month (6% of the income limit for the assessment of contributions in general old-age pension insurance). The exact allowance will be agreed with the respective assignment location. In addition, volunteers may receive free accommodation, meals and work clothing, or corresponding monetary compensation instead of accommodation, meals and work clothing. Details on this shall likewise be agreed with the respective assignment location.

Social insurance contributions (state health insurance, long-term care insurance, state pension and unemployment insurance including contributions to the state accident insurance) shall likewise be paid by the assignment location.

Important:

Please note that payments from the Federal Volunteer Service may affect other benefits and/or claims. Recipients of pension benefits should check with the competent pension fund if and to what extent the payments from the Federal Volunteer Service will affect their pension.

Recipients of benefits covering basic living expenses for long-term job-seekers – the so-called “Unemployment Benefit II” (*Arbeitslosengeld II*) – may, according to the responsible Federal Employment Agency, participate in the Federal Volunteer Service or FSJ/FÖJ. In the case of recipients of *Arbeitslosengeld II*, all income in money or money’s worth will be deducted from benefit payments.
Income is deemed, amongst others, the granted allowance and any benefits in kind (accommodation and meals) or the payments made in lieu of such benefits in kind.
An allowance amount of EUR 200 is usually exempt from deduction from benefits payments in the case of both the Federal Volunteer Service and the FSJ/FÖJ (Section 1 (7) of the Unemployment Benefit II/Income Support Ordinance (Alg II-V). However, where in addition to the income from voluntary service income is earned from gainful occupation (e.g. “mini job”), this increased allowance

amount will not apply; instead, the provisions on deductability in the case of income from gainful occupation will apply. According to these, an amount of EUR 100 from income from gainful occupation is exempt from deduction, cf. Section 11b (2) of the German Code of Social Law II (SGB II).
An additional allowance amount is granted for gross income from gainful occupation above EUR 100 up to an income of EUR 1,200 (for recipients with at least one child this is up to EUR 1,500). In this case, apart from the deductible amounts for income from gainful employment the expenses necessary in relation to receiving the allowance will also be deducted from the allowance.
Participation in the Federal Volunteer Service or FSJ/FÖJ is considered an important personal reason constituting an obstacle to working (cf. Section 10 (1) No. 5 SGB II). Recipients of *Arbeitslosengeld II* are not obliged to take up employment for the duration of their work in voluntary services.

Maternity protection

The German Maternity Protection Act (*Mutterschutzgesetz*) applies to the Federal Volunteer Service. Amongst others, the special provisions on workplace arrangements (Federal Volunteer Service assignment location), protection from unlawful dismissal, etc. apply.
Female participants in the Federal Volunteer Service will also be entitled to maternity protection benefits, such as payment of an additional payment to maternity benefit during maternity leave periods and maternity benefit in the case of prohibition to work outside the maternity leave periods.

Pedagogical support

The Federal Volunteer Service includes pedagogical support with the aim of developing participants' social, ecological, cultural and/or intercultural competencies and strengthening a sense of responsibility for the common good. Volunteers will also be instructed in their specific field of work by the assignment location.

In addition, seminars will take place during the Federal Volunteer Service, attendance at which is obligatory and which are deemed work time. The total duration of the seminars in the case of twelve months' service in the Federal Volunteer Service will be at least 25 days; volunteers over 27 will attend seminars to the appropriate extent. At least one day per month is generally considered appropriate.

Supporting organisations

Assignment locations may assign supporting organisations which will undertake responsibilities for them, such as the pedagogic support. The exact responsibilities will be detailed in the appendix to the agreement.

Holiday

The provisions of the Federal Holidays Act (*Bundesurlaubsgesetz*) apply mutatis mutandis to holidays during the Federal Volunteer Service. In the case of volunteers of full age on a term of twelve months' service this results in an entitlement to at least 24 working days' holiday (working days are deemed all calendar days which are not Sundays or public holidays). For young people under 18 years of age an increased holiday entitlement applies in accordance with the Act on the Protection of Young People at Work (*Jugendarbeitsschutzgesetz*).

Details with regard to the extent of holidays will be agreed with the respective assignment location.

Orphans' pension

Orphans' pension after reaching the age of 18 will upon application be paid if the orphan is serving either on the Federal Volunteer Service pursuant to the German Federal Volunteer Service Act before the end of the month in which s/he turns 27 years of age or is in a transitional period of no more than four months between a period of education and service on the Federal Volunteer Service pursuant to the BFDG (Section 48 of the German Social Code VI (*Sozialgesetzbuch VI*).

Testimonial

Upon termination of voluntary service the volunteer will receive a written testimonial about the type and duration of the voluntary work from the assignment location. The testimonial will include work performance and conduct during the service period. The features of the Federal Volunteer Service which constitute training in vocational or professional skills will be included in the testimonial. In addition, the assignment location will issue a confirmation of service to the volunteer after termination of service.