



PHD IN THE HELMHOLTZ ASSOCIATION

A HANDBOOK FOR CURRENT AND FUTURE PHD CANDIDATES
IN THE HELMHOLTZ ASSOCIATION



Helmholtz Juniors

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GREETING AND ADDRESS BY THE HELMHOLTZ JUNIORS

DEAR FUTURE, NEW AND PROSPECTIVE PHD CANDIDATES,

*“If we are continually finding points of contact and comparison in our notions, in thinking, desires of the intellect and in our feelings; then we begin to see hidden capacities”
(Hermann von Helmholtz)*

Welcome to the Helmholtz community! Are you considering or have decided to complete a PhD project within Helmholtz? From our experience, you can expect to join rich national and international scientific networks with a wide range of research fields. In becoming a PhD candidate, you will contribute to important latest research, and be given responsibility and freedom.

On your journey as a PhD candidate you may face many challenges big and small, scientific and bureaucratic. In order to help you in making your way through the bureaucratic jungle, this booklet was put together from PhD candidates from the HeJu (Helmholtz Juniors) network who were facing these same challenges: figuring out what their

working contract meant or where to find support when confronting problems.

We encourage you to read this booklet closely and to use it to make informed decisions before and during your PhD. Furthermore, we suggest talking to the Helmholtz Junior and DokTeam (PhD Representative Teams) at your center for local information and guidance from friendly faces to help you integrate into life at your center and in the city or town. We, as Helmholtz Juniors, are especially glad that many researchers from abroad are joining the Helmholtz community, enriching diversity and collaboration on both personal and scientific levels. However, especially as a foreigner you may bump into some additional challenges when starting your

PhD, cultural differences and language issues and plenty of paperwork, which may confuse you at first. We hope that this booklet will guide you through the first steps and help you in deciphering the way of life in Germany.

We wish you have a smooth start to your scientific career and encourage you to persevere through the highlights and lowlights and never give up too early!

Your Helmholtz Juniors

DEAR READERS,

An interesting PhD that addresses relevant research topics can serve as a springboard for an academic career or open the door to senior positions outside the world of research. The approximately 6,700 PhD students who are educated at the Centers in cooperation with the universities are therefore a major target group of the Helmholtz Association's talent management activities. To this end, the Helmholtz Association has set up Helmholtz Research Schools and Helmholtz Graduate Schools in almost all of its 18 research centers. These schools offer structured PhD training, which provides the early-stage researchers with excellent supervision, stable working conditions and an educational program tailored to their individual

needs. In addition to access to the Association's unique infrastructure, the PhD students have the opportunity to join renowned research teams and international networks.

As we believe that junior researchers are a key asset in our organization, we are in close dialogue with them. They are involved in committees and working groups, and they have a say when it comes to decisions that directly concern them. The Helmholtz Juniors are an important partner in this process. This handbook is yet another proof of their commitment. A handbook written by (current) PhD students for (future) PhD students: This is a great idea since our PhD students are the experts. They can tell you what you



Prof. Dr. Jürgen Mlynek,
President of Helmholtz Association

need to know when starting your PhD in the Helmholtz Association.

I wish you all the best for your PhD projects, and I am looking forward to meeting you soon at one of our Helmholtz Centers!

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jürgen Mlynek". The signature is stylized and fluid.

Jürgen Mlynek

1 THE HELMHOLTZ COMMUNITY

1 HELMHOLTZ ASSOCIATION IN GERMANY

The Helmholtz Association of German Research Centers is the country’s largest scientific non-university organization, consisting of 18 scientific-technical and biological-medical centers located all around Germany. Helmholtz institutes are strategically aligned with core research themes: energy; earth and environment; health; aeronautics, space and transport; key technologies; structure of matter which aim to solve grand challenges in science, society and in industry.

The Helmholtz Association’s namesake is the German physician and physicist Hermann von Helmholtz (1821-1894). The official mission of the Association is “pursuing the long-term research goals of state and society, and maintaining and improving the livelihoods of the population”. Scientists at Helmholtz therefore target to identify and explore the major challenges facing society, science and the economy. The association’s research is primarily funded by the federal government and employs greater than 36000 people, with approximately 6000 PhD students.

More information about each Helmholtz Center can be found here:

www.helmholtz.de/en/about_us/helmholtz_centres/



The 18 Helmholtz Centers (status 02/2014)

2 HELMHOLTZ JUNIORS (WORK AND PHILOSOPHY)

The Helmholtz Juniors (HeJus) are an association of the PhD student representatives of all Helmholtz centers. Networking and exchange, increasing the opportunities for professional development for PhD students and improving working conditions are central to their work.

Different working groups cover the regular completion of surveys within Helmholtz PhD students, requesting and analyzing working conditions to identify areas of need of improvement, the organization of networking events (“PhD days”) for Helmholtz PhD students, and the gathering and distribution of information particularly applicable for doctoral students. This booklet is the product of one of these working groups.

[More information about the Helmholtz Juniors can be found here: *www.helmholtz.de/en/jobs_talent/funding_programs/doctoral_students/helmholtz_juniors/*](http://www.helmholtz.de/en/jobs_talent/funding_programs/doctoral_students/helmholtz_juniors/)

2.1 LOCAL SUPPORT AT YOUR HELMHOLTZ CENTER

In addition to speakers representing your center in the HeJu network, most institutes and centers have local PhD representatives. These teams (often called “DokTeams”), respond to the requirements of doctoral students at each location and organize local networking and social events, provide support and information for current students and are useful contacts to have.

PhD webpages of the different centers

- › AWI: DokTeam (e-mail: dokteam@awi.de)
- › DESY: DOIT (e-mail: doit@desy.de)
- › DKFZ: PhD Students Portal
(e-mail: phd-student-council@dkfz.de and contact form here)
- › DLR: Infos für Studierende (e-mail: dove@dlr.de)
- › DZNE: No working PhD initiative at the moment, information can be distributed to all PhDs at DZNE via Nina Ritter (Feb 28th 2014) (e-mail: nina.ritter@dzne.de)
- › FZJ: Studium Universale (e-mail: su@fz-juelich.de)
- › GFZ: GeoDoc (e-mail: phd@gfz-potsdam.de)
- › GSI: PhD-Wiki (e-mail: helmholtz-juniors@gsi.de)
- › HMGU: DINI (e-mail: dini@helmholtz-muenchen.de)
- › HZB: Doktorandenkoordination
(e-mail: helmholtz-juniors@helmholtz-berlin.de)
- › HZDR: No publicly accessible webpage
(e-mail: dokvertreter@hzdr.de)
- › HZG: No webpage available (July 18th 2014)
(e-mail: helmholtz-juniors@hzg.de)
- › HZI: DO IT (e-mail: doit@helmholtz-hzi.de)
- › KIT: Promovierende am KIT (PaKIT)
(e-mail: pakit@khys.kit.edu)
- › MDC: PhDRep (e-mail: phdrep@mdc-berlin.de)
- › UFZ: do-it (e-mail: do.it@ufz.de)
- › IPP: Student Speakers (e-mail: phdreps@ipp.mpg.de)
- › GEOMAR: GEOMAR-DokTeam (e-mail: phd-reps@geomar.de)

3 COMPLETING YOUR PHD WITHIN THE HELMHOLTZ ASSOCIATION

Completing your PhD at a Helmholtz institute, you will likely face different organizational and personal challenges and run through several steps of bureaucracy and decisions. This chapter covers information that you may need to successfully settle and perform your PhD project at a Helmholtz center.

3.1 BECOMING A DOCTORAL CANDIDATE

There are a number of pre-requisites for starting your PhD. Not only you need to find the appropriate supervisor (or supervisory committee), but also you need to be accepted as a doctoral candidate in a university department or faculty. As a PhD student, you pursue an academic degree that can only be awarded by a university. Non-university institutions such as the Helmholtz Association are therefore unable to officially award your PhD. This is why you usually need to be matriculated at a university alongside your work on your thesis at the scientific institute.

Most Helmholtz institutes and centers are closely affiliated with the universities in the same city/region and it is widely accepted that students enroll there within 6 months of starting their PhD. Note that this is not done automatically and you must contact the university yourself to enroll. Germany is a land where everyday life involves a lot of paperwork and enrolling in a university is no different. To enroll, there is usually an application form and the university may also require your academic records, certificates as well as the proof of support of your supervisor. The exact regulations vary between universities as well as between states or countries, so see the “Promotionsrichtlinie” (i.e. guidelines) at your university for more information. Also the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) website is a useful

source of information (www.daad.de). Ask at your center if someone in-house or at the international center at the university can help you with the enrollment process.

It is usually a good idea to discuss with your group leader who your committee members should be. Many groups have a standard set of committee members who are familiar with the type of work done in the lab. In other cases, your group leader might have useful suggestions for a good committee. Otherwise, it is your own job to find members for your committee.

3.2 WHAT DOES A PHD THESIS CONSIST OF?

There are different structures that the PhD written thesis can take. One of the more common structures is a compilation of the publications produced during the PhD which support the thesis, and also includes a synthesis of the results. One publication is usually one chapter. A benefit is the feedback from co-authors and reviewers during the publication process.

Another common way to produce a PhD thesis is the completion of a monograph. It is a single author contribution to a single subject and is a record of the state of knowledge in a particular subject area.

Your university (or supervisor) might specify which you must do, and this should be discussed early in your PhD. See the “Promotionsordnung” of your university and the “Promotionsrichtlinie” at your center for more information (i.e. regulations governing doctoral studies).

3.3 HOW LONG DOES A DISSERTATION TAKE?

There is no exact time frame or deadline for a PhD dissertation in Germany, although it usually should take 3 to 3½ years and should not take longer than 5 years. Although most universities have a primary deadline by which you should have submitted your thesis, this is usually extendable. This deadline is not attached to the funding which is provided either through a working contract or scholarship.

3.4 WHO CAN BE MY SUPERVISOR?

Generally your supervisor is a professor or a faculty member who has completed a “Habilitation”. This is a particular qualification like a second dissertation that is common for those in academia in Germany and permits to teach at university. Anyone could be your supervisor; however, you must have at least one professor or “PD” on your committee as your “Doktorvater/-mutter”.

3.5 WHAT TO EXPECT FROM MY SUPERVISOR?

Ultimately, your supervisor should support and guide you throughout your time as a PhD candidate to produce a good dissertation. Your supervisor should meet with you regularly to give advice on problems that arise but not do the work for you.

Some Helmholtz centers provide special supervisor guidelines which specifically define tasks and duties of scientific supervision.

As your project gets underway, your supervisor should support you planning your experiments, laboratory and field

work. When you have become more familiar with your topic, they should allow you increased freedom in the laboratory and give more attention to the analysis, interpretation and presentation of your results.

Your supervisor will also have a better idea about how long it takes to write a dissertation and when you should end practical work and start to write up.

Supervisors know many people in their field; so use their capacity as great networking tools. At conferences or at your institute they should introduce you to faculty or academics in the same field as you.

An article in the Science magazine Careers section entitled ‘The PhD-Doctor: What (Not) to Expect From Your Supervisor’ by **Herman Lelieveldt** is also well worth a read: www.sciencecareers.sciencemag.org/career_magazine/previous_issues/articles/2003_08_22/nodoi.2427969316782463479

3.6 WHAT SHOULD YOUR SUPERVISOR EXPECT FROM YOU?

Supervisors expect you to take your PhD seriously, to drive the project and to be excited about your research and share the interesting results with them openly for discussion. They expect you to turn up to meetings on time, and heed the advice they give to you. You should organize regular meetings to discuss your project as this will help to keep you on track.

At the beginning, you will learn a lot from your supervisors but towards the end of your time as a PhD, your advisor will expect to be learning something from you! Please also check your center’s individual PhD and supervision guidelines.

3.7 GRADUATE SCHOOLS

Graduate schools are structured programs that provide a framework for a slightly formal education in relation to your work towards your PhD degree. The structure and education provided by each graduate school differs greatly. Some are very specialized while others foster the education of students across various disciplines.

Most graduate schools promote the structure for the formal education of PhD students at the institute. This does not necessarily mean just attending classes, but often can involve all or some of the following:

- Lecture series or workshops on relevant material. Attendance may be compulsory at some institutes/centers.
- PhD events or retreats for the enrolled students.
- Establishing thesis committees for PhD candidates and encouraging regular PhD committee meetings at which you present your work and progress for discussion.
- Some graduate schools can help you with the administrative issues when you first start at the institute and may provide information on enrolling at a university.

Current Helmholtz graduate Schools (as of August 2014)

Helmholtz Graduate School for Macromolecular Bioscience

Helmholtz Zentrum Geesthacht, Teltow, University of Potsdam and Freie Universität Berlin

www.hzg.de/macrobio

PIER Helmholtz Graduate School for particle physics, nanoscience, photon science, infection and structural biology

University of Hamburg in cooperation with Deutsches Elektronen-Synchrotron (DESY), Hamburg

<https://graduateschool.pier-hamburg.de/>

BioInterfaces International Graduate School (BIF-IGS)

Karlsruhe Institute of Technology

www.bif-igs.kit.edu

Helmholtz Graduate School (HITEC) Helmholtz Interdisciplinary Doctoral Training in Energy and Climate Research

Forschungszentrum Jülich and five partner universities

www.hitec-graduate-school.de

KIT-Graduate School for Climate and Environment (KIT-GRACE)

Karlsruhe Institute of Technology

www.grace.kit.edu

Helmholtz Graduate School Environmental Health HELENA

Helmholtz-Zentrum München, in conjunction with LMU, Technical University, München

www.helmholtz-helena.de

Helmholtz Graduate School Molecular Cell Biology

Max-Delbrück-Centrum für Molekulare Medizin, Berlin-Buch

www.mdc-berlin.de

Helmholtz International Graduate School of Cancer Research

German Cancer Research Centre (DKFZ)

www.dkfz.de/en/phd-program

Helmholtz Interdisciplinary Graduate School for Environmental Research (HIGRADE)

Helmholtz Centre for Environmental Research (UFZ), Leipzig

www.ufz.de/higrade

Helmholtz Graduate School for Polar and Marine Research (POLMAR)

Alfred-Wegener Institute for Polar and Marine Research,

Bremerhaven, www.polmar.awi.de

[Helmholtz Graduate School for Hadron and Ion Research \(HGS-HIRe\)](#)

GSI Helmholtz-Zentrum für Schwerionenforschung, Darmstadt, in conjunction with the universities at Darmstadt, Frankfurt, Giessen, Heidelberg and Mainz and FIAS
www.hgs-hire.de

[Helmholtz Graduate School for Infection Research](#)

Helmholtz Centre for Infection Research, Braunschweig; Helmholtz Institute for Pharmaceutical Research Saarland, Saarbrücken, Twincore, Hannover
www.helmholtz-hzi.de/en/organisation/locations/campus_braunschweig

[International Helmholtz Graduate School for Plasma Physics \(HEPP\)](#)

Max-Planck-Institute for Plasma Physics (IPP) and partner Universities (Technical University of Munich (TUM), Ernst-Moritz-Arndt University of Greifswald (EMAU)); associated partners are the Leibniz Institute for Plasma Science and Technology (IPN), Greifswald, and the Leibniz Computational Center (LRZ), Garching
www.ipp.mpg.de/hepp

[Helmholtz Research Schools](#)

Helmholtz Research Schools are small units that focus on specific research topics. Each one brings together up to 25 PhD students to work in teams and to conduct research on a specific topic. The links to the Helmholtz Research Schools can be found on the Helmholtz webpage:

www.helmholtz.de/en/jobs_talent/funding_programs/doctoral_students/helmholtz_research_schools/

[Affiliated or associated graduate and research schools](#)

[Connecting particles with the Cosmos](#)

Deutsches Elektronen-Synchrotron (DESY), Hamburg
lexi.desy.de

[Integrated School of Ocean Sciences \(ISOS\)](#)

Helmholtz Centre for Ocean Research Kiel (GEOMAR)
www.futureocean.org/en/isos/index.php

[Karlsruhe School of Optics and Photonics \(KOSP\)](#)

Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT)
ksop.idschools.kit.edu

[Karlsruhe School of Elementary Particle and Astroparticle Physics \(KSETA\)](#)

Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT),
www.kseta.kit.edu/index.php

[MDC - NYU Exchange Program in Medical Systems Biology](#)

Max Delbrück Centre Berlin (MDC)
www.mdc-berlin.de/14187058/en/bimsb/phd_program

[MYOGRAD - International Research Training Group for Myology](#)

Max Delbrück Centre Berlin (MDC)
www.mdc-berlin.de/34467842/de/phd_ausbildung/phd_program/Research_Schools/MyoGrad

[School of Integrated Climate System Sciences \(SICSS\)](#)

University of Hamburg, Max Planck Institute for Meteorology, Helmholtz-Zentrum Geesthacht and German Climate Computing Centre
www.sicss.de

3.8 FUNDING POSSIBILITIES FOR YOUR PHD

There are different ways of funding for you and your PhD project. Three different possibilities and some specific details are briefly introduced in the following table. You might have signed a work contract, a PhD contract (“Doktorandenvertrag”) or a scientist contract (“Wissenschaftlervvertrag”), or you might have been awarded a stipend, either by the Helmholtz Association or by third parties.

Note: Working conditions for scholarship holders are very different from those with contracts! Balance the pros and cons before you decide for one or the other. The DokTeam at your Helmholtz Center can give you general information about the different working conditions, but they strongly depend on the scholarships themselves. Generally we recommend considering carefully whether or not to do the dissertation on the basis of a scholarship.

All given information is kept very general and may not apply to your individual situation or center. Thus we strongly recommend you to look into the respective forms during your application, the selection process, negotiations and keep informed while working and seek advice from your local human resources department or your PhD representative team at your center.

3.9 OVERVIEW OF COMMON PHD FUNDING POSSIBILITIES

	PhD contract (Doktorandenvertrag)	Scientist contract (Wissenschaftlervvertrag)	Stipend/ scholarship
Purpose/ obligations	Funds directly the work related to your PhD project.	Funds not necessarily directly the work related to your PhD (i.e. teaching, reviewing of scientific work, management, administration, technical maintenance). You might have to do your PhD work additionally to your contracted working hours.	Funds directly the work related to your PhD project.
Employment status	Employed	Employed	Not employed – guest scientist status without contract
Type of contract	Partial (50%, 66%, 75%) or full public (100%) service contract on national level (TvÖD) level 13	Partial (50%, 66%, 75%) or full public (100%) service contract on regional level (TvL) level 13	Scholarship contract/ agreement
Approximate net monthly income	€1000-2000	€1000-2000	Up to €1365 net (tax free)
Holiday allowance	Usually 20 days	Around 30 days	Theoretically ‘unlimited’, depends on contract
Insurance coverage	Cost split between employee and employer	Cost split between employee and employer	No insurance coverage (some health insurance coverage might be available)! Additional costs!
Additional payments/ bonuses	Usually 60% of month’s salary as Christmas bonus	Usually 50% of month’s salary as Christmas bonus	Some extra payments may be offered (~€100) to assist with health insurance. No Christmas bonus!

3.10 DISCRIMINATION AT THE WORKPLACE AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

It is a mission of the Helmholtz society to create a working environment that allows the employees to develop themselves optimally. Central points are

- Equal opportunities
- Compatibility of family and work
- Networking between centers to realize best practice examples
- Support of women to increase their proportion in leading positions.

How to deal with discrimination at the working place

In Germany, any discrimination due to race or ethnic origin, gender, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation is prohibited by the General Act on Equal Treatment (“Allgemeines Gleichstellungsgesetz” (AGG)). This of course also applies to your workspace. The AGG even defines duties of employers to ensure the equality of all employees. Also, every institution is obliged to supply an office that receives complaints in case of discrimination.

If you are faced with any kind of discrimination, you should not accept this!

If you don't know how to handle the situation, please take advice from confidants, equal opportunity commissioners or students' representatives. There are also a number of official constitutions offering advice or helping to establish a diversity management for institutions.

An overview of consulting centers can be found at the webpage of the Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency (“Antidiskriminierungsstelle des Bundes”)

www.antidiskriminierungsstelle.de/EN/Home/home_node.html

Equal opportunity commissioners

Helmholtz Centers are equal opportunity employers, but recognize that gender imbalances nevertheless exist. That's why most centers have equal opportunity officers working to support the active involvement of both men and women in the scientific community and to make a scientific career and having a family more compatible. Consulting services are included in:

- all cases of application and employment
- all questions about pregnancy, motherhood and parental leave
- conflict situations

Mentoring programs

A mentoring program for women is one approach the Helmholtz Association has in place to increase the number of women in higher level and executive positions. It is targeted at aspiring women who are working in management or administration and are recent PhD graduates within the association.

For further information concerning equal opportunities see:

www.helmholtz.de/en/jobs_talent/equal_opportunity

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4 BEYOND THE PHD – SOCIAL SECURITY AND DUTIES

Being paid a taxable income (if you are not getting a scholarship), you will face some national social regulations, tasks and benefits beyond your PhD: you will have to have particular insurance cover, you will have to pay taxes to the German government, and, in reverse, obtain support in particular situations, e.g., support when founding a family. Some regulations, e.g., covering certain compulsory insurances, also apply to scholarship holders. In this chapter, we try to present the most important topics.

4.1 THE GERMAN SOCIAL INSURANCE SYSTEM

The German social insurance is a statutory insurance system, which plays a predominant role in Germany's overall social security. Based on the solidarity of the community of the insured, it provides effective financial protection against the major life risks and their consequences, including:

- Unemployment,
- Old age,
- Illness,
- Occupational accidents and
- Need for long-term care.

Social insurance guarantees (or: should guarantee) a stable standard of living for every individual. Coverage encompasses the following branches, referred to as insurance funds or fund.

The branches of social insurance

1. Unemployment insurance (“Arbeitslosenversicherung”): insures employees' livelihood in case of unemployment.

Please note: To obtain unemployment benefit, you must have

completed the qualifying period and you must have registered as unemployed in person at the latest three months before finishing an employment relationship. If there are less than three months between knowledge of and the actual end of the employment relationship, the registration must be made within three days after knowledge of the end date.

2. Pension insurance (“Rentenversicherung”):

insures members in old age as well as in case of reduced earning capacity and upon an employees' death insures his/her surviving dependents as well.

3. Health insurance (“Krankenversicherung”):

compulsory - supports maintenance and restoration of good health and eases the financial consequences of illness; a health insurance company has to be chosen individually.

4. Occupational accident insurance (“Berufsunfallversicherung”):

helps an employee regain his earning ability after a (work-related) accident; financed exclusively through employers' contributions.

5. Long-term care insurance (“Pflegeversicherung”)

provides financial support for those dependent on care and assistance from others; affiliated to the health insurance (but is an extra fund).

Who is statutorily insured?

Employees above a certain gross income level (>400 to 4350 €/month) are as a rule automatically compulsorily insured. The social insurance funds are generally financed by contributions from insured fund members and their employers. The contributions roughly amount to 31-33 % of the employees' gross income (“Bruttoeinkommen”).

Exceptions from the statutory insurance:

- Freelancer
- Civil servant (“Beamte”)
- Judge
- “mini-jobs” (income up to 450 EUR/month)
- Scholarship holder (scholarships generally don’t count as income; but health and long-term care insurances are mandatory!)

Situation for PhD students

1. PhD students with a regular contract of employment

In this case, you are automatically insured within the statutory social insurance system and the contributions for all the insurance funds mentioned before are paid automatically from your gross income or solely by your employer (only the occupational accident insurance).

But: As an employee you are only covered by the occupational accident insurance (1) in the workplace, (2) on the direct journey to or from work, and (3) on the job during business trips. During research expeditions (mostly), a private accident insurance is highly recommended, to cover also risks off the job.

2. PhD students without a regular contract of employment (e.g. scholarship holder, guest status)

As a scholarship holder you are not subject to the statutory social insurance system, meaning that you don’t have to pay for the insurance funds mentioned before (but you are also not insured in most cases!). Only exceptions are the health and the long-term care insurances, these you have to pay (yourself)!

Health/long-term care insurance:

There are two options for these insurances for scholarship holders: you can (1) choose a statutory health insurance, in which you are insured voluntarily (“freiwillig versichert”), or (2) a private health insurance (“private Krankenversicherung”). There are several aspects to be taken into account when choosing one of these options. For more information, please contact the personnel department.

Occupational accident insurance (“Berufsunfallversicherung”):

It is very important to check whether your accident insurance is covered by your employer or university. Scholarship holders and guests are often only covered by the occupational accident insurance in the workplace. The prerequisite is often registration at a domestic or foreign university.

But: It is likely that you are not covered by occupational accident insurance (1) on the journey to or from work, (2) on the journey between different places of work or (3) during business trips in general.

Conclusion: A private accident insurance is highly recommended for scholarship holders and long-term guests to cover all these unassured risks!

Further important insurance – the personal liability insurance (“Privathaftpflichtversicherung”)

In Germany, persons can be made liable for damages inflicted to third parties, i.e. damages can be sued for. The personal liability insurance covers all typical risks of everyday life (with some exceptions). Parents are liable for their children. These policies are not expensive (some around €60 - €100 per year) and it is therefore highly recommended that you also take out a private liability insurance policy in order to protect yourself in the case that you accidentally inflict damages to a third party.

Depending on your institute, there are differences between the liability of PhD students with employment contracts and scholarship holders. According to the different guidelines it is either obligatory or only recommended for PhD students to have a liability insurance.

4.2 THE GERMAN TAX SYSTEM

The German tax system is, like many taxation systems, complicated. Below is some basic information, primarily for international doctoral candidates, to help to orientate yourself with how your income will be taxed.

If you are liable for tax in Germany, your employer will automatically deduct all taxes, social security and health insurance contributions from your monthly salary and pay this to the respective local revenue office. You need to register for a tax number at the financial office in your city or on the internet and submit your tax identification number to your employer.

Short-term employee from overseas

If you have a contract of employment with your institution and you stay in Germany for less than six months, you pay taxes in your home country.

Stipend/Scholarship holders

If you are granted a stipend or fellowship, you are not obliged to pay taxes for this income in Germany. However, you may have to pay taxes in your home country. Please ask your stipend-giving institution for more information on this.

Long-term employee (longer than six months)

If you stay longer than six months, you automatically become

liable for income tax and social security contributions in Germany. In order to avoid paying taxes both in Germany and your home country, there are double taxation agreements with a number of countries, which define the country in which your tax contribution has to be paid. The human resources department at your institute or your tax department from your home country will be able to give you detailed and specific information regarding your tax situation.

The tax identification number (Steueridentifikationsnummer, IdNr) may automatically be sent to you after having registered at your local registration office. Alternatively you might need to visit your local financial office ("Finanzamt") or the internet to register for your IdNr.

How much your income is taxed depends on several factors, such as number of children, marital status, income, etc. As a rule of thumb, the more you earn the more taxes you have to pay (taxation rates vary from 14% to 45%). As of August 2013, all salaries are subject to a tax-free "basic tax allowance" of 8,130€ a year (8.354€ in 2014) if you are not married and 16,260€ a year (16,708€ in 2014) per married couple. The "basic tax allowance" increases the more children you have. In order to take the different situations into account, every employee is classed into one of the following income tax brackets (Steuerklasse, StKl.):

- StKl. I: Single, divorced, or widowed and with no children
- StKl. II: Single parents who live alone
- StKl. III: Married employees can choose this tax bracket if one of the spouses does not work or has considerably less income than the other.
- StKl. IV: If both spouses earn more or less the same amount, this bracket benefits them.
- StKl. V: Open to married employees if their spouse is in bracket III

- StKI. VI: For your second or third job. This bracket corresponds to the highest tax rate.

If you are employed according to the TVöD regulations, you can check your net income at:

www.oeffentlicher-dienst.info/tvoed/bund

In Germany, a church tax is also deducted from your salary if you belong to one of the churches that participate in the church tax system (most of the German Christian churches). Membership in a church is noted on your pay slip and you can opt out if you are not a member of a congregation. You can do this, for example, when you complete your city registration. At the beginning of a calendar year, you have the option to file an application for tax return for the previous year with your local revenues office. This means you may have part of your taxes refunded. If you have chosen to be in bracket III, V or VI, you are obliged to file the application for tax return by the end of May of the following year. Consult your administration, a tax adviser or www.elster.de (in German only) for support.

4.3 THE GERMAN HEALTH SYSTEM

The German health system has a good reputation and a network of hospitals and doctors throughout all regions – but medical treatment in Germany is never free! All costs, even for emergency treatment, must be paid for by you or your health insurance. Comprehensive health insurance is therefore very important and proof must be provided when you visit a doctor, normally by means of your health insurance card.

Whom to contact in case of illness?

Dependent on your institute's practice, you should contact

the respective responsible person in case of illness (e.g., supervisor, secretary etc.). In case of sickness for 3 or more days, you will likely require a medical certificate from your doctor (e.g., general practitioner/GP "Allgemeinarzt"). However, check the exact requirements with the administration at your institute/center.

Medical services

If you need to consult a doctor, you may ask your colleagues to recommend one. A list of doctors can also be found in the local directory ("Gelbe Seiten"). A general practitioner ("Hausarzt" or "Allgemeinmediziner") will refer you to a specialist, if necessary.

Some doctors and assistants do not speak English; therefore it might be advisable to bring a native speaker to a doctoral appointment.

You will usually make an appointment in advance. In case of emergency, you will be treated immediately. Otherwise, you may have to wait for an appointment, mostly a few days, for some specialists even weeks.

Emergency services

At the weekends, doctors' offices are normally shut, but emergency services are available 24/7. Please call medical emergency or the on-call service "ärztlicher Notdienst" or "Bereitschaftsdienst". If you need medication at night or during the weekend, please look for the pharmacy's emergency service "Apotheken-Notdienst". Keep the receipt for any treatment costs safe!

Emergency numbers (free of charge):

Medical Emergency & Fire Department: 112

Ärztlicher Bereitschaftsdienst: 116 117

Further health support for internationals

There is an institution called “Unabhängige Patienten Beratung” (UPD) that gives advice on most aspects of Germany’s health system. From a fixed-line telephone, you can call them free of charge. They speak German, Turkish and Russian.

4.4 FAMILY SUPPORT

The Helmholtz Association also strongly supports the wish of its employees to manage work and family at the same time. At every Helmholtz center there is a special position called Equal Opportunity Commissioner. It is their job to help you with family planning, career decisions. Every institute offers individual support – so don’t hesitate to ask.

Childcare

Childcare is provided by the state for every child from the age of one year onwards. Before that daycare centers (“Kinderkrippe”) or day-nannies take children from 8 weeks on (maternity protection ends after the 8th week). After the age of 3 the so called “Kindergarten” starts and although there should be enough spots available for every child, it is sometimes hard to find a place that suits you and your child. It is your responsibility to organize a spot for your child and it makes sense to start early.

In some federal states in Germany childcare is free of charge. In all others you pay a monthly fixed rate or a rate calculated as percentage of your (and your partners) income.

Note: Some Helmholtz centers have kindergartens or daycare facilities. Ask at your institute for availability at your workplace.

Medical services for children covered by health insurance

- Doctor’s appointments and health checks (some screenings cost additional fees)
- Support and supervision by a midwife - before and after childbirth
- Childbirth
 - screening/check-ups (so called U-Screenings from U1 to U11), to ensure the healthy and age-appropriate development of the child
 - Children are insured via family insurance from their parents and do not cost additional fees

Note: Please check which services are covered, when you are privately insured.

Pregnancy and Maternity protection law

In Germany the “Mutterschutzgesetz” (maternity protection law) ensures the protection of the mother and child from the start. The booklet “Leitfaden zum Mutterschutz” (guideline for maternity protection) (www.bmfsfj.de/BMFSFJ/Service/publikationen,did=3156.html) gives broad information and explains the rights of an expectant mother in detail.

Although it is wise to take action as soon as possible concerning your safety, especially if you work in the laboratory, it is up to you whom you inform that you are pregnant. There is no law in Germany that tells you when you have to inform your employer about your pregnancy. It is, however, suggested to tell as soon as possible (e.g. after the third month) because only then the “Mutterschutzgesetz” applies to you.

Maternity benefit and “Elterngeld”

In Germany maternity protection starts 6 weeks prior to the calculated birthdate of the child and extends 8 weeks after the actual birth date. During this time you will receive

maternity benefit (“Mutterschaftsgeld”) from the health insurance and your employer. This is comparable to your salary and is calculated on what you earned during the last months.

Afterwards the “Elterngeld”-regulations will come into effect. The “Elterngeld” is meant as a support mechanism for women and men who want to spend time with children right after the maternity protection time. During this time, which can be up to 14 months (when each parent takes between two to twelve months of work, or for single parents), the state will support you by paying you between 65% and 67% of your former income, if it exceeded 1000€. This will be at least 300€ (e.g. stipend holders) and can be as high as 1800€. If you earn less than 1000€ the percentage paid by the state will rise according to your salary to allow you to cover your basic living expenses.

If you already have a child below the age of 3 living in your household, the Elterngeld percentage will also increase by 10%. It is also possible to work part time up to 30h/week and receive Elterngeld for the hours you are staying at home. If you are planning to stay home with your baby for longer than 12 months or at the same time as your partner and receive Elterngeld, it is possible to do so. The Elterngeld, however, will be reduced or adjusted depending on the deficit in income and the duration of your parental leave.

Note: Unfortunately, scholarship holders will not get the full amount of Elterngeld but only the minimum amount of €300/month for the first 12 (14) months after giving birth.

Further information:

The ministry for family affairs (“Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend” (BMFSFJ)) has a

well-developed website ([www. bmfsfj.de](http://www.bmfsfj.de)) and many leaflets concerning family life, pregnancy and motherhood. Answers for key word search and questions from A-Z are nicely processed under www.familien-wegweiser.de.

For every question or problem concerning family life and partnerships you can contact state independent organizations, which also offer special consulting services to foreigners, for example:

- profamilia (www.profamilia.de)
- Bundeskonferenz für Erziehungsberatung e.V. (www.bke.de)
- Diakonie (www.diakonie.de)

5 FURTHER INFORMATION FOR INTERNATIONAL PHD STUDENTS – SETTLING INTO YOUR LIFE IN GERMANY

Being abroad for several years often involves many good experiences, but also poses many challenges. This chapter tries to prepare you for some specifics of German everyday-life, but most likely still won't save you from some surprises...

5.1 WHICH LANGUAGE SKILLS ARE REQUIRED?

Like in most of the world, the scientific community in Germany and within the Helmholtz Association is both international and culturally diverse. As a result, in almost all laboratories, English is the primary working language. If you are one of the few foreigners in your group, German may be more commonly spoken on a day-to-day basis. Don't be afraid to say you don't understand especially in your working group and work discussion. Sometimes your German-speaking colleagues might need a gentle reminder that you do not understand the discussion, but would like to. If this does not resolve the problem, then do not hesitate to talk to your DokTeam or the diversity management team at your institute or center.

Outside of work, you will probably meet a lot of people that have a good knowledge of the English language, which makes day-to-day life without German knowledge possible (supermarkets excluded!). However, if you want to integrate yourself, knowing the language (even not perfectly) might be necessary.

Some Helmholtz centers offer free courses, although these tend to be introductory and as a result do not provide intense training. To make the most of your time when you first arrive and get to know fellow international students it is recommended that an intensive German language course is taken. This allows you to use your new skills and adapt faster to your new

life here. Take every opportunity to speak, and focus on communication, not on grammar: your hosting university might have an international student mentoring system, or a language tandem exchange where you can share your native language and improve your German at the same time.

5.2 RECOGNITION OF FOREIGN PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS

Demographic change is transforming our society and is already resulting in a shortage of experts in certain segments of the labor market. These include medical and educational professions, nursing, and so-called MINT professions (mathematic/information technology/natural sciences/technology). It is therefore essential that potential sources of skilled labor already on hand in Germany are utilized. Germany is also striving to become a more attractive location for trained professionals from abroad. In the future, it will be easier for individuals to obtain recognition for foreign professional qualifications. The corresponding Assessment and Recognition of Foreign Professional Qualifications Act, or so-called "Recognition Act", came into effect on 1 April 2012.

More information:

- Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung (BMBF)
www.bmbf.de/en
- IHK Foreign Skills Approval
www.ihk-fosa.de/en
- European Commission
www.ec.europa.eu/internal_market/qualifications/index_en.htm
- Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung (www.bibb.de)
- Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge
(www.bamf.de/SharedDocs/Meldungen/)

- Anerkennung ausländischer Bildungsabschlüsse (ANABIN)
www.anabin.kmk.org/

5.3 TYPES OF VISA FOR YOUR TIME AS A PHD STUDENT IN GERMANY

What kind of visa to require?

This information is deliberately general because the type of visa and the specific allowances are highly dependent on your personal situation. It is strongly recommended that you talk to the human resources department at your institute and the authorities “Ausländerbehörde” about your particular visa requirements and regulations including to what extent you can work/earn money.

As a foreigner living in Germany, you must have an appropriate residence or working permit (“Aufenthaltstitel”) issued by the Foreign Office (“Ausländerbehörde”) to remain in the country.

What type of visa you need depends on your needs and the purpose of your stay in Germany. Common visas include: student visa (§ 16), work visa (§ 18), skilled specialist visa (§ 19) and the research visa (§ 20).

It is important to check the specific regulations for your visa as to whether you are allowed to work, to what extent you are allowed to work or earn money, your eligibility for unemployment money (“Arbeitslosengeld”) or parental support (“Elterngeld”), and if your visa can be renewed or extended.

If you receive a working contract (“Arbeitsvertrag”) after being a student, it may be advisable to change the type of visa you have because paid parental leave (“Elterngeld”) and unemployment benefit (“Arbeitslosengeld”), in many cases, cannot be paid to student visa holders. Working visas are usually attached to the employer, particularly for the first two years.

Student visas may also have more restrictions on the number of working hours allowed per month.

Important documents to take with you when applying for a visa/working permit:

- valid passport
- copy of your university enrolment papers
- copy of your work contract
- biometric passport photo
- evidence of city registration

Suggested questions to ask

- If my visa is attached to my employer and my work contract, what are the options to extend my residence permit? This is important for the end of your PhD, in case you run out of funding through your work contract, but have not yet submitted.
- Do the regulations of my current/this particular visa enable me to get “Elterngeld” or “Arbeitslosengeld”, if needed?

If you have some problems between your institute and the “Ausländerbehörde”, then get the two sides to talk to each other to help resolve the problem so that you don’t find yourself caught in the middle of a tussle between the two.

Find some useful information here:

www.gesetze-im-internet.de/englisch_aufenthg/residence_act.pdf

The Federal Foreign Office also has valuable information about visa regulations for Germany.

5.4 GETTING SETTLED IN GERMANY

Checklist – what to bring from home?

- Passport pictures
- Certified birth certificates
- Copies of high school certificates (including for unemployment money)
- ...

Registration at the resident registration hall

When you arrive in Germany, you have one week to register yourself, usually at the city hall. This depends on the city where you are living: In Munich you have to go to the “Kreisverwaltung”, in Berlin to the local “Bürgeramt”. To do so, you need to bring your ID or passport, and an official paper stating your address (e.g., the rental agreement), which is obviously hard to get within one week. Additionally, these papers are required for opening a German bank account, or initialization of a mobile phone contract. Yes, to buy a phone in Germany, you have to provide your address.

At the registration office, you will be asked about your religion. This is because in Germany some religious communities require church tax, which will be directly deducted from your pay roll in case you register e. g. as a Protestant or a Catholic.

Registration at the foreigners' registration office (“Ausländerbehörde”)

If you are not an EU citizen, then you must register at the foreigner's registration office (“Ausländerbehörde”). The registration process depends on your country of origin and your visa requirements. Dealing with the details, paperwork and bureaucracy can be challenging and confusing and not all offices have staff who can speak English! Ask the DokTeam, human resources department or secretary if you can talk

to a foreign PhD student in your institute or working group who has experience with this. Additionally, think about taking a German-speaking colleague along to your appointment if language is a problem.

Finding accommodation

Before you arrive, we recommend contacting your institute to ask for possible accommodation possibilities. Most institutes will be able to help organize transient accommodation or something a little bit more permanent before arrival.

As in any city, local knowledge is best as to which suburbs or areas are the quietest, most vibrant, or those areas that are a little unsafe and you would like to avoid. When you first arrive, ask at your institute if there are any guesthouses or rooms available for your first weeks or months to give you some time to find somewhere more permanent to live. Science is a mobile community. Often people go on a research trip or sabbatical for a number of months leaving their room/house available to rent while they are away.

It is very common to rent an apartment or room in a shared apartment in Germany. Some universities also offer student dormitories at rates often cheaper than private apartments but the demand is high for limited places so you should ask early for a room.

You have two choices when searching for an apartment (1-person or shared apartment): either (1) enquire (and pay!) at a leasing agency or (2) search privately through newspapers and the internet. Finding fees for leasing agencies are usually 10-20% of the costs or a lump sum which varies.

Be warned: unfurnished means unfurnished! Renting a new flat in Germany might mean the flat has no sinks in the kitchen, no stove, or even no light fittings.

Useful web pages (partly only in German):

www.wg-gesucht.de

www.howtogermy.com/pages/housing.html

www.toytowngermany.com/wiki/Apartment_rental

www.reddit.com/r/germany/comments/19z6o4/a_friend_wrote_a_guide_renting_apartments/

Terminology

Kaltmiete: Basic rent for the flat, net rent

Warmmiete: includes most utilities like heating and water, but usually does not include phone/internet

Nebenkosten: additional costs e.g. heating, water, rubbish removal, cleaning of common areas in the apartment building, maintenance

Staffelmiete: this means your rent will be increased each year

OG: "Obergeschoss" is the top floor

EG: "Erdgeschoss" is the ground floor

Vermieter: landlord

Mieter: tenant

Hauptmieter: main tenant

Untermieter: sub-tenant (if the room is allowed to be sub-let)

Miete: rent

Before signing a contract

It is common, and highly recommended, to go through the flat at the beginning of the lease to agree on the condition and defects of the flat. This inventory will be used at the end of the lease to indicate any damage or missing parts that need repair (or the money will be deducted from your deposit ("Kautions")). Make sure you or a trusted person see the apartment first before you transfer any money for rent or deposit. Unfortunately scammers sometimes try to take advantage of the situation of people arriving from overseas.

Common contractual obligations for landlord and tenant

The landlord is required to provide an apartment in a livable condition and maintain the walls, heating and electricity supply, drainage system, and windows.

As the tenant, you are responsible for maintaining the apartment in the same condition as you found it. Particularly important is proper heating and sufficient ventilation because otherwise mold ("Schimmel") may develop. The costs of any damages may be deducted from your deposit. If you moved into a freshly painted apartment, then you should also paint the apartment before you leave. There may be details about this written into your contract. Talk to your landlord and agree on what is required before you move out.

Mietervereine

Support from the German Tenant Association ("Mieterverein") is available for members if you run into trouble with your rental situation. Membership costs around €50-100 per year although if you have a very short question, you can also try their hotline 0900 12 000 12 (from a German landline, costs €2 per minute) or for initial advice, send an e-mail to the Mieterverbund 24 (www.mieterbund24.de) who will provide you with assistance within 6 hours (at a cost of €25).

This is the central website for all of the "Mietervereine" in Germany, where you can search for the one for your city www.mieterbund.de (only in German).

www.toytowngermany.com/wiki/Mieterverein (unofficial information in English)

5.5 COSTS OF LIVING

Like in most countries, the cost of living is very dependent on the city or suburb in which you live. Rent is particularly expensive in larger cities such as Munich and Hamburg and typically cheaper in smaller cities, or further from the city center. But it is important to balance out the cost of commuting long distances when considering where to rent.

To get an idea about regional differences and what normal items you might buy cost e.g. at the supermarket in Germany, take a look at this website 'How much does it cost to live in Germany?' (https://www.study-in.de/en/plan-your-stay/money-and-costs/cost-of-living_28220.php)

Water, heating and electricity costs are usually based on estimates ("Vorauszahlung"). At the end of the year, the difference is calculated and either you receive a refund, or you will have to pay. Most cities and towns have well-developed cycle networks which are begging for you to use them – it is one effective way to save on transport costs!

5.6 OWNING A DOG IN GERMANY

If you own a dog in Germany, you have to pay dog tax and register the dog in the registration office ("Bürgeramt"). Also consider getting a third party liability insurance policy to cover any incidents with your beloved pet. Your liability insurance ("Haftpflichtversicherung") policy may already cover pets.

5.7 RELIGION (SEPARATION OF STATE AND RELIGION)

Germany guarantees freedom of religion and the possibility to practice one's religion and beliefs. This leads to 32% to 37% of Germany's population officially not belonging to any church. Around 30% are Catholic, 30% Protestant, 2% - 5% Muslim, the rest Buddhist, Jewish, and other religions.

Although government and church are separated, the German tax bureau collects taxes for the Catholic and Protestant churches from their members (cf. Chapter 4.2).

5.8 BANKING

If you earn wages or salary, this will be deposited directly into a German bank account, so it is important to set this up as soon as possible after you arrive.

There are many different banks to choose from in Germany and each offers a variety of accounts. Some have special deals for students while others offer fee-free accounts or a cash bonus when you join. Do some research, as some have charges or restrictions, such as accounts only available through online banking and the internet. Some banks even offer online banking in different languages such as English. Banks are generally open between 8.30 am and 4 pm from Monday to Friday. Choose a branch close to you as changes to your account can only be done by this particular branch. EC cards are for use in electronic transactions in the shops, or at ATMs (bank automats/cash machines) which are available 24 hours a day. There are usually (not unsubstantial!) fees to withdraw cash from ATMs from banks other than your own, even within Germany. One exception is the "Cash Group" where customers of particular banks (i.e. Deutsche Bank, Commerz-

bank, Comdirect, Berliner Bank, Postbank, Hypovereinsbank, Norisbank, DAB bank, Bankhaus Neelmayer) are allowed to pick up money for free from the partner banks. Consider which bank has ATMs that are close to where you live and where you often visit (or even in your home country) as well as the account benefits like fee-free withdrawals, as cash is still commonly used in restaurants and some shops - sometimes EC cards are not accepted.

Credit card regulations may be different to those in your home country. Some credit cards will automatically deduct the balance from your current account at the end of each month and any overdraft charges will come from your current account rather than accruing interest.

If you lose your EC card or your credit card, you can report it as stolen and can freeze the card by ringing a hotline provided by your bank at any time of day or night. 116 116 is a nationwide blocking hotline. You should report the loss as soon as possible not to be liable for misuse, and in case of crime also state the loss to the police.

5.9 EMERGENCY NUMBERS

- Police: 110
- Fire / Rescue Service / Emergency Services: 112
- Medical Emergency Service: 116 117
- Children and Youth hotline: 0800 1 11 03 33

5.10 TRANSPORT AND TRAVEL

Bicycle

Whether you buy a bicycle or rent it for a day, most cities are equipped with very good bike paths systems and many

people pick the bike as their only means of transportation. Although Germans love rules, it seems as if the traffic rules are not well-known by bikers (and the car drivers that have to deal with them). Therefore, especially when you are not used to biking, ride carefully and be aware of police controls for bikers.

Public transport system

The public transport system in Germany is very well developed and makes owning a car often unnecessary, especially in the cities.

Most places are reachable with the local public transport services ("Nahverkehr") for which you can usually buy monthly or yearly tickets, as well as single rides and daily tickets. Often the semester tickets you get from University serve as bus pass and are sometimes valid for very large distances. Smaller towns usually are equipped with buses, while in larger cities offer busses, trams, ferries and underground systems. Towns are usually connected by city trains. The local public transport providers are private companies and therefore the service quality can be very different, but is usually relatively high and trains run on time. There are special offers for tickets which allow you to use the complete "Nahverkehr" of a federal state or Germany-wide (single or group) for one day (check www.db.de "Wochenendticket" or "Länderticket"). Timetable information is in many cases available online and predicts easiest connections either by stops or by address.

Trains

The train company ("Deutsche Bahn") is one of the companies that raise negative emotions in German people, because they are not always punctual and quite expensive. Anyway, trains are a very convenient way to travel through Germany/Europe and you avoid being stuck in a traffic jam. It is worth, though,

to book tickets in advance (online or machine), which is much cheaper, but you need to decide on a specific train and have to pay €15 to change it. If you travel frequently, you may find it useful to buy a “BahnCard”, which gives you discounts of 25% (costs ~60€) or 50% (>220€) for each ride. These can even be paid by your institute under some circumstances. It might be useful to inform yourself.

The webpage of Deutsche Bahn also offers a very good timetable service, which also includes local connections (see www.bahn.de). They also provide the “DB Navigator”, an App for your smartphone.

Busses

Deutsche Bahn had the exclusive right for terrestrial long distance transportation for many years. Although regulations have changed, the bus system is not very well developed in Germany, but new companies are emerging every day. They can be a cheap alternative to trains (e.g., www.postbus.de, www.berlinlinienbus.de).

Car sharing and car rentals

Other convenient ways of transportation are joining one of many car-sharing companies (e.g., Drivenow, Flinkster, Multi-city, Car2Go) or renting a car. On longer time scales, this often shows to be cheaper than having your own car and allows you to pick the car that you need for the particular occasion. Also, the cars are relatively new and fuel-efficient.

Car-pooling

Car-pooling can be a cheap alternative to the public transportation, if you drive with your own car and want to earn some money, or if you want to save money driving with someone else. Several online platforms offer this service (e.g., www.mitfahrgelegenheit.de, www.blablacar.de).

5.11 DRIVING CARS IN GERMANY AND INSURANCE

Driver's license (“Führerschein”)

You may drive in Germany for 6 months with a driving license issued in your country of origin. After this 6 month period, driving licenses that have not been issued in an EU country must be exchanged for a German driver's license. The rules and regulations regarding German driving license exchanges depend on your country of origin and the German state where the application is made. The “Landratsamt” or “Kreisverwaltung” in your local area will be able to accurately inform you of the current requirements.

Traffic regulations (“Strassenverkehrsordnung”)

If driving in Germany, it is important to familiarize yourself with the German traffic regulations, which can be found in German at www.strassenverkehrsordnung.de.

Many independent companies print handbooks for those under-taking their drivers license test, which are easily understandable.

Some key points to be familiar with:

- Driving in Germany is on the right-hand side of the road
- It is compulsory for everyone in the car to wear a seatbelt
- For children under the age of 12 who are smaller than 150 cm a car seat is required.
- Making telephone calls is only permitted when used in conjunction with a hands-free system
- The speed limits, when not otherwise signposted, are 50 km/h in built-up areas, 100 km/h on country roads, and unlimited on motorways.
- It is required that a first aid box, first aid blanket, reflective vest and warning triangle are carried on board. In case of an accident, the warning triangle must be placed at 50 m,

100 m, or 200 m (inner-city, country road, motorway) before the location of the accident.

- Driving is permitted only if you are below the legal blood alcohol limit of 0.5 per mill. However, should an accident occur when your blood alcohol is lower than the limit but higher than zero, you may become the at-fault party when you would otherwise not be.
- Winter or all-season tires must be fitted when travelling in snowy or icy conditions. Should an accident occur, you may be considered at fault if your tires are not appropriate for the conditions. On the spot tire inspections can also be made by police and there can be stiff fines for having the wrong tires equipped.

Car Insurance (“KFZ Versicherung”)

There is a large number of companies that offer insurance in Germany. Insurance usually falls into three categories:

- Third-party insurance
- Third-party and extras insurance
- Comprehensive insurance

Every car must be covered by at least third-party insurance even before registration of the car is allowed. For more expensive cars, comprehensive insurance is often preferred. For second-hand cars and cheaper alternatives third-party and third-party with extras insurance is the standard. Insurance is expensive in Germany and will make up a large part of the running costs of your car.

Registration, Technical inspection authority and emissions sticker (“Registrierung”, “TÜV” and “Umwelt-Zonen”)

Environmental zones (“Umwelt-Zonen”) exist in many major German cities. Cars are equipped with a red, yellow or green sticker based on the carbon emission of the car. Some cities will ban your entrance into a city if your current emissions sti-

cker does not match their restrictions. Over the coming years, the severity of the restrictions will be increased so it is recommended to only consider cars with a green emissions badge. The “TÜV” is the Technical Inspection Authority that is in charge of the roadworthy test in Germany. All cars must pass this test every two years (costs appr. 90 € + repairs). A large number of places can undertake this test. If your mechanic cannot carry it out, ask for somewhere nearby where you can get it done.

To register your car, you will need to go to the local “Landratsamt” or “Kreisverwaltung” with the car papers, identification, car insurance number and your residence permit. If all the paperwork is in order, it is possible to register your car, have your license plates (“Kennzeichen”) printed and stamped with the required TÜV and emissions sticker on the same day.

5.12 COMMUNICATION

Telecommunication

Mobile phone calls are getting cheaper, and it might not be necessary for you to organize a landline connection. Anyway, having landline is usually not much more expensive than having home internet only.

It’s also not necessary to arrange a mobile phone contract, but it is often cheaper to get a prepaid card. In many companies you can pick prepaid based monthly flat rate options, which if you want, extend automatically if enough credit is available, but you are more flexible in picking the right option for your current situation. Also, single calls without a flat rate option (even within Europe) are very cheap and getting cheaper.

For calls home, internet calls (e.g., Skype) might in the meantime be the best option, but also telephone and mobile

companies sometimes offer special arrangements for cheap calls to a certain country.

Note: Germans say their name (full name or surname) when answering the phone!

Television and “Gebühreneinzugszentrale” (GEZ)

In Germany, the state charges a compulsory flat rate for listening to the radio and watching TV. Every household that has receiving devices like TV sets, radios, computers or phones with internet access has to register. Each home, no matter how many people live there, has to pay 17.98/month (as per June 2014). Visit GEZ online for more information (<http://www.rundfunkbeitrag.de/>).

Mail (“Post”)

Be aware: receiving goods from abroad costs you taxes when the value is ~€45. The post is allowed to open the parcels to check the value and the parcel can easily end up in some departments for some weeks before you finally receive it.

5.13 PUBLIC HOLIDAYS

Here you find a list of official holidays in Germany: www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Public_holidays_in_Germany
The table below shows all of the official public holidays for all states.

You will see that some are valid for the whole country while others only concern certain federal states.

Public holidays for all states

Holiday	Date
New Year’s Day (“Neujahrstag”)	1st January
Good Friday (“Karfreitag”)	Variable (March/April)
Easter Monday (“Ostermontag”)	Variable (March/April)
Labour Day (“Tag der Arbeit”)	1st May
Ascension Day (“Christi Himmelfahrt”)	Variable (Thursday in May)
Pentecost (“Pfingstmontag”)	Variable (May)
Day of German Reunification (“Tag der Deutschen Einheit”)	3rd October
Christmas Day (“Weihnachtstag”)	25th December
Boxing Day (“Zweiter Weihnachtstfeiertag”)	26th December

5.14 ELECTRICAL CONNECTION

First, the standard household electrical outlet in Germany is 220-240 volts, (i.e. twice the standard household voltage in North America). A normal 110/120 V electrical appliance designed for use in the US, Canada or Mexico will probably be

destroyed by connecting it to a 220 V outlet. Second, a German plug has two round prongs. Logically, a German electrical outlet has two round holes for a receptacle.

5.15 SHOPPING & GOING OUT

Shopping hours

Since 2006 each of Germany's 16 states has been allowed to pass its own laws concerning store hours. Normally, shopping on Sunday or after 8:00 p.m. in most of Germany will be not successful.

Sales Tax/VAT („Mehrwertsteuer“/Mwst)

When you see a price tag or a menu in Germany, what you see is what you'll pay. The VAT (value-added tax) is included in the price, but you can see the tax amount on your receipt. The sales tax is a national tax, and the standard tax rate is 19% in Germany (since 2007; 7% for groceries, books and magazines, flowers, transportation.)

Paying the Bill & Tipping

This is usually done at the table with the waiter or waitress who served you. They even carry a money pouch to take care of the financial transaction. Depending on the service you received, you should tip the normal 10% or so. Of course, if the service was poor, you don't have to tip at all.

Paying by credit cards (“Kreditkarten”)

Very few German grocery stores (or any stores for that matter) accept credit card payment, and then only in tourist areas or at larger stores. Most will accept the EC bank card (which requires a German bank account), but your best bet is plain old cash. There is usually an ATM (“Geldautomat”) in or (at least) near the store.

Shopping carts

You'll need a 50 cent, €1 or €2 coin for the shopping cart deposit. Just insert the coin into the slot to unlock the cart. When you return the cart, you get your coin back.

Bottle return (“Leergut”)

Most of the beverage glass and plastic bottles you get in Germany/Europe have a deposit value that you can get back by returning them to any market (not necessarily the one where you bought them). The grocery chains have automated machines that scan each bottle and determine the deposit value. You get a ticket (“Bon”) with the total amount, which you give to the cashier at checkout to get your cash. Deposit bottles are labeled as follows:



5.16 SORTING WASTE/RECYCLING

Germany has a well-organized recycling and waste collection system. All waste is separated into at least 5 different categories, although the details, particularly for the yellow bag (“Gelber Sack”) may depend on which town you live in. If you are unsure, then ask your colleagues, neighbor, flat-mate, or the Town Hall for how it works in your city.

- 1) “Papiermuell” paper and cardboard
- 2) “Biomuell” biodegradable/compost/organic material
- 3) “Gelber Sack” recyclables including plastics and packaging, empty food cans and mixed plastic and metal. This may be collected in either yellow bags (“Gelber Sack”) which you may need to buy, or in large yellow bins.

4) "Restmüll" general waste

These collections are done from your house from large bins and the cost for collection is usually included in the "Nebenkosten" for your apartment.

5) "Altglas" glass waste is separated into white or colored glass and there are larger collection bins situated around the city or near supermarkets for this.

Don't forget to keep any bottles (plastic or glass) that have the "Pfand" label on them so that you can get the money back (see "Bottle return" above).

6) "Sperrmüll" - If you have a lot of larger furniture or old goods "Sperrmüll" that you need to get rid of, you can arrange for a pick-up from your doorstep. This is especially useful when moving out of an apartment. For all electronic goods, batteries, and paint there will probably be a special collection depot ("Wertstoffhof") somewhere in your city where these can be safely disposed of.

5.17 DINING ETIQUETTE

If you are invited to a German's house:

- Punctuality indicates proper planning, so arrive on time and never arrive too early.
- Never arrive more than 10 minutes later than invited without calling to explain you have been delayed.
- It is polite to put your mobile phone on silent.
- Bring a small gift, like a bottle of wine.

5.18 MEETING ETIQUETTE

- Greetings are often rather formal, with the exception of good friends.

- A quick, firm handshake with a straight look into the eyes is the traditional greeting. The other hands should be taken out of the pocket. Additionally, a handshake may be accompanied with a slight bow. Reciprocating the nod is a good way to make a good impression.
- Titles are very important and denote respect. Use a person's (academic) title and their surname until invited to use their first name. You should say Herr or Frau and the person's title and their surname. Always address people with the formal "Sie" and surname instead of the personal "Du" and first name, unless you are offered a "Du".
- In general, wait for your host or hostess to introduce you to a group.
- When entering a room, shake hands with everyone individually, including children. A weak handshake gives others the impression that you are insecure and not convinced of your abilities. For this reason, always shake hands firmly, without squeezing, and without holding on to the other's hand for too long or too short. A firm handshake sends a message of trust, frankness, sincerity, consideration and honesty. You may find that German people are more direct than what you are used to. Meetings and business are usually direct and to the point, but not unfriendly.

Some links concerning this topic (from a British perspective):

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-13545386>

<http://tweds7.wordpress.com/2012/12/12/german-directness-v-british-politeness/>

5.19 SMOKING RULES

Germany has one of the highest smoking rates and some of the most liberal smoking laws in Europe. Cigarettes and

tobacco can be bought from age 16. However, smoking is banned on public transport, in public and federal buildings, in hospitals, and in airports. In many public places, there are designated smoking areas. Smoking is allowed in some bars and clubs but this differs from city to city.

5.20 SPORTS

Many universities offer sports and activities as part of their “Unisport”. They don’t cost much and are a great way to meet new people. But most of them are held in German.

5.21 CULTURE ON OFFER

Most cities, including smaller towns, have their own professional opera house, ballet, museum, philharmonic orchestra and theater company where they offer local productions. But also hobby-theaters are popular in Germany and can provide you with creative and entertaining shows. They often have a student-discount or reduced tickets at the “Abendkasse” (normally opens one hour before the show starts). Bigger cities even provide you with discount memberships (e.g., Classic-Card in Berlin, www.classiccard.de).

5.22 IMPORTANT NEWSPAPERS

Print media is highly regarded within Germany with high readership and is a good way to improve your German and to learn about current events and the local culture. Many newspapers have online material that is easy and free to access. The Sueddeutsche Zeitung has considerable coverage of

arts and culture as well as a small number of English language articles. Die Zeit (“The Times”) is printed weekly with a number of critique and investigative journalism articles. Another famous, tabloid-style publication is the daily Bild.

5.23 SANITATION (TOILET CUSTOMS, PAYING FOR PUBLIC TOILETS)

Heading into town or travelling around Germany? Don’t be caught out! Make sure you keep some change, as public toilets in the streets or in train stations cost up to 1€.

5.24 PREPARATIONS TO BE DONE WHEN LEAVING

Aside from packing your bags, you will be busy with lots of things. The list below is a guide (but not an exhaustive list!) of things you should think of before you leave Germany:

- Cancel your rental contract early enough by written notice. There usually is a notice period mentioned in the contract, commonly 3 months. Sometimes the landlord agrees to a shorter period if you present them with a suitable new tenant. In case of doubt, please ask them in time.
- If you paid a security deposit (“Kaution”), make sure that you get it back. If you do not leave the apartment in good condition, costs for repairs or renovation may be deducted from your security deposit.
- Cancel utilities (water, electricity, heating, gas) and organize a final meter reading.
- Good furniture can often be sold via bulletin boards (e.g., www.kleinanzeigen.ebay.de). To get rid of old/damaged furniture you can organize for bulk trash (see “Sperrmüll”).

- Make sure that you also cancel contracts for telephone, internet, cable TV, magazine subscriptions, club memberships, etc.
- You might want to cancel your German bank account. Make sure, however, that it will be active long enough to settle and receive all outstanding payments.
- When you came to Germany, you had to register with the city/town registration office. Now you are required to deregister with them.
- In some cases it is also recommendable that you inform the foreigners' registration office. Every case is different; so no general advice can be given here.
- Inform your children's school or kindergarten in time.
- Make a list of the people who should be informed about your new address.
- Deutsche Post offers to forward your mail after you moved. Conditions and prices can be found here: www.nachsendeauftrag.de
- Please contact those people at your institute that need to know that you are leaving.
- You have probably been contributing to unemployment, retirement, health and long-term care funds. Especially in case of pension insurance, it is possible that the pension rights you acquired in Germany remain valid after you leave the country. As every case is different, no general advice can be given here. Please check with your human resources department at your institute or the insurance fund directly. It may be helpful to obtain written proof of your contributions. It will probably be a long time before you actually retire, and documents are sometimes harder to obtain after lots of years have passed.
- It is possible that you still owe taxes in Germany or are entitled to a refund. For further and more specific questions about your situation, please ask a tax consultant as every

case is different and no further general information can be given here.

5.25 HELPFUL LINKS

- Goethe Institute - Meet the Germans ;-)
www.goethe.de/ins/gb/lp/prj/mtg/typ/uno/en2668760.htm
- Discover Germany
www.research-in-germany.de/main/2220/discover-germany.html
- Deutsche Verbindungsstelle Krankenversicherung – Ausland (DVAK) – information health insurance
www.dvka.de/oeffentlicheSeiten/Fremdsprachen/Englisch.htm
- How to Germany - information on German regulations, taxes, etc.
www.howtogermaany.com
- Euraxess - Germany for researchers
www.euraxess.de
- Toytown Germany – English Language news and chats
www.toytowngermany.com
- Angloinfo - provides a good database for those wishing to come to Germany and their section on driving and road rules covers many if not all of the key points.
www.germany.angloinfo.com
- Brian's guide to getting around Germany - website dedicated to travel in Germany
www.gettingaroundgermany.info/regeln.shtml
- Common mistakes
www.german-way.com

Language/dictionaries/translations:

- www.dict.cc
- www.leo.org

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