



## **COUNSELING FOR THE APARTMENT SEARCH IN BERLIN**

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## Who is Multitude and how does the counseling work?

### Wer ist Multitude und wie läuft die Beratung ab?

Maybe you know us through the German classes that we offer regularly and for free in Lichtenberg. You might also know us because you went to one of our picnic's or a Multitude-Café. Maybe you do not yet know us at all.

That is why we would like to introduce us shortly: We are a group of people which is happy that you arrived in Berlin. We would like to support you with various offerings and activities and therefore founded an initiative called „Multitude“. Our group does not have any relationship to the German state or to the Aliens Authority/ Ausländerbehörde and is independent of the administration of the camp. We are also independent of churches and political parties. We do not want to use these offerings in order to convince you of anything and even more so we do not make any money off of it: All the activities that we offer are for free and all of us work voluntarily. Since our resources and capacities are limited, we cannot give you any guarantee that you will find an apartment.

Since 2003, people who applied for asylum in Berlin, have the right to rent their own apartment. Actually moving into one though, proves to be difficult in practice and therefore does not happen that often. Reasons for that are among others the steadily sinking number of available apartments and the rapidly increasing amount of rent which make it harder to find an apartment in Berlin – not only for refugees, but especially for refugees. Another reason is that in Berlin, the politics have failed for years to accommodate refugees in apartments rather than in collective housings. This deficit becomes especially obvious when the total number of people applying for asylum increases. Furthermore, refugees are being discriminated against in different ways on the housing market. Only an accent that is perceived as not being German can lower the chances in the awarding of an apartment. What makes it additionally harder for refugees besides the racist criteria for choosing is the low economical statues alongside the ban from working. On top of that there is also the lack of a permanent permission to stay. About 12.000 Berliners (people who have a suspension from deportation/Duldung as well as those who applied for asylum and whose cases are still pending) solely receive a permission to stay which is usually limited to six months. A lot of landlords do not care about the fact that these are generally being extended over the course of years and decades. Instead they point out that they do not rent out their apartments for limited periods of time.

We think that the placement in collective housings incapacitates, makes people dependent, provokes conflicts and restricts privacy. Which is why we argue in favor of accommodating refugees in their own apartments.

We see the disadvantages that refugees are confronted with regarding the apartment search and want to take action against this. Currently a majority in our group is in a privileged position on the structurally racist housing market. Having this in mind, we want to try and encourage structures of solidarity and provide information for the apartment search that can empower refugees to independently practice their legal right to live in apartments. We do not want to provide a professional service but instead want to and have to learn from the experiences of the refugees in the course of the counselings.

We hope to facilitate and speed up the search for an apartment with our support, in order for more refugees to be able to live in their own apartments than it is the case now. We would like to encourage applicants for asylum in their legal right to live in an apartment in Berlin. In this context, we want to act consciously political: We hope that our project might serve as a model for demands on the State Agency for Health and Social Issues/Landesamt für Gesundheit und Soziales. We hope that this way, a professional and payed counseling for the apartment search will become the standard for accommodation. Through our practical work, we want to collect knowledge about the willingness of individual housing associations and renters to rent out apartments to refugees at the same time.

With this guideline at hands we do not only make you aware of the right to live in an apartment but most of all inform you about how you can start the apartment search in Berlin. We put together important information regarding the different steps of the apartment search in Berlin: What you need for the apartment search, how much the rent can cost at most, who pays for the rent, what you have to pay attention to in the course of your search for an apartment and what happens once you found one. Besides providing these information, we will support you in filling out application forms, finding offerings for apartments and arranging for the viewings of apartments. We hope that we will manage to get these information well across to you. Nobody's perfect – so please understand that we do not have answers to all questions. But we will do our best to find answers and advise you as good as possible.

On top of that we want to learn a lot from you! Because in fact you are the expert who will make all kinds of positive and negative experiences during the search for an apartment. So you are most welcome to share your experiences with us and other people here in the camp so that as many people as possible will find their own apartment.

The search for an apartment in Berlin will probably not be that easy. We do not want to discourage you though to look for an apartment but rather encourage you to begin as soon as possible and not give up! We hope that you will be able to find your way through our information and start your apartment search feeling reinvigorated.

## From which point of time on am I allowed to move into an apartment?

Ab wann darf ich in eine Wohnung ziehen?

According to the asylum procedure's law/Asylverfahrensgesetz (AsylVerfG), applicants for asylum in Germany are being placed in collective housings. In Berlin there are facilities for the initial accommodation where you usually only have to live for **three months at most** and are then referred to another collective housing unit. In Berlin there has been this special regulation since 2003 that three months after you filed your application for asylum, you are allowed to move into an apartment of your own. But the process of moving into an own apartment is very difficult, which is why some people live in these collective housings for many years.

The first thing you have to do if you want to move out of the collective housing is to file an **application for the absorption of the rental costs** at your case worker at the Social Security Office/Sozialamt/ZLA. We can provide you with one of these application forms and support you in filling it out, if you want us to. You will then get a **certificate for the absorption of rental costs/ „Mietübernahmeschein“** (you can find an example of the „Confirmation of cost-covering from Social Security Office/Sozialamt/ZLA („Mietübernahmeschein“)“ in **attachment 4**) which will allow you to start your search for an apartment. This certificate will also say how much your apartment can cost at most.

## How do I find an apartment through the Social Security Office/ Sozialamt/ZLA?

Wie finde ich eine Wohnung über das Sozialamt/ZLA?

The city of Berlin owns six housing associations through which 275 apartments a year are being placed exclusively at the disposal of asylum applicants. This offer is called **“Apartments for Refugees”/“Wohnungen für Flüchtlinge“**. Out of these 275 special apartments, 125 are One-Room-Apartments and 150 are apartments with several rooms. These apartments are being assigned to refugees who are in special need of protection. If you or one of your relatives is severely sick or handicapped for example, you will be registered on this list. The so called **Evangelische Jugend- und Fürsorgewerk (EJF)**, a protestant organization for youth and welfare, is responsible for this offer and

provides an apartment counseling and also functions as a housing agency. Their office is on the grounds of the Social Security Office/Sozialamts/ZLA. You can find their current office hours including translators and a site plan attached on our info sheet „**Apartment counseling in the Social Security Office/Sozialamt/ZLA**“ ([attachment 1](#)).

You let the counselor know, how many people belong to your household, meaning whether you are alone or whether you are with a family. If you are alone, you can apply for a One-Room-Apartment. In case you are a family of two or more people, you can apply for an apartment with more than one room. Then you give them your phone number and you are registered on a waiting list. Each time there is a suitable apartment available, the applicants on the list are being called one after the other. In an ideal case, you will be called after a couple of weeks but it might also take a couple of months. Sometimes you might be called faster if you tell about how discontent you are with living in the collective housings and describe your individual experiences. Furthermore it might have a positive effect for you if you can prove that you are looking for apartments on your own as well. If you do not like the apartment that is being offered to you, you do not have to take it. **The dismissal of an apartment does not have any effects on your asylum procedure.** You will still be registered on the waiting list. If any problems occur for you in this context, please contact us.

Even if this search for an apartment might take some time, it is still worth a try. The best thing for you to do would be to simultaneously look for an apartment on your own as well, also because there are not enough apartments in this contingent for everyone.

## Who pays the rent for my apartment?

Wer zahlt die Miete für meine Wohnung?

The Social Security Office/Sozialamt/ZLA pays the rent for the asylum applicant's own apartments. In order for the Social Security Office/Sozialamt/ZLA to take over the costs of the rent, some very specific conditions have to be fulfilled. For example the rent cannot be too high. On the next pages, we will explain to you how this procedure works exactly. It is possible that you will have found an apartment but the Social Security Office/Sozialamt/ZLA refuses to take over the rental costs. Do not be discouraged by that and rather come to us or talk to the social workers in your house about it. Together we can think about what to do next. Sometimes it is worthwhile to file a complaint or enter an objection.

## How much can the apartment cost at most?

Wie viel darf meine Wohnung kosten?

The Social Security Office/Sozialamt/ZLA does not pay just any amount of rent. The rent cannot exceed a certain amount. The point at which the rent is being exceeded is determined by four criteria:

1. Number of people in the household
2. Size of the house in which the apartment is
3. The kind of heating (fuel, gas, district heating)
4. The kind of hot water supply

The **table „How much can my apartment cost at most? (Mietobergrenzen) with three exemplary cases“** ([attachment 2](#)) shows how much the rent can be depending on the number of people, size of the house and heating. This way, while looking at apartment offers you can immediately check if the rent is too high or if it is okay. The size of the house as well as the kind of heating and hot water supply are almost never mentioned in the offers for apartments though. Most apartment buildings in Berlin are larger than 1000m<sup>2</sup>, which is why you can orientate yourself by the given rent for more than 1000m<sup>2</sup>. Most of the time, central heating/„Zentralheizung“ or district heating/„Fernheizung“ are given which does not yet state anything about whether the apartment is being heated with fuel, gas or district heating. At first, you can orientate yourself by the highest rents. Sometimes the heating

costs are not included in the rent because the apartment has a gas heating system which is separate for every storey for example. In this case you pay separately for the costs of the gas (see below “Who pays for electricity and gas?”). You either call the renter and ask how big the building is and ask about the kind of heating and how water is being heated up or you wait until the viewing of the apartment and ask on that occasion.

If the costs for hot water are included in the rent, the rent can be a little higher. These will be paid additionally to the first payment. In a second table you can find the amounts for the hot water supply.

The calculation of how much the apartment can cost at most according to the Social Security Office/Sozialamt/ZLA, is not all that easy. Based on the table with the separate figures we calculated the rents for three exemplary cases: one adult, two adults and one child, two adults and four children. You can find the table and these three examples in the **attachment 2 „How much can my apartment cost at most? (Mietobergrenzen) with three exemplary cases“**.

The Social Security Office/Sozialamt/ZLA can pay for a rent which is up to ten percent above the stated costs that will be absorbed according to the table. This is for example the case in exceptions that are supported by special reasons, for example chronic illness, HIV-infection, pregnancy, being a single parent, age or a handicap. If there are very important reasons in favor of a certain apartment and the absorption of the rental costs is rejected even though the price does not exceed the maximum by more than ten percent, consult us. We will then try to argue with the Social Security Office/Sozialamt/ZLA about the importance of the apartment. The maximum limit does not apply if you need an apartment that is wheelchair accessible, meaning that the apartment can be more expensive.

The Social Security Office/Sozialamt/ZLA always pays the rent for the apartment, the operating costs (for example cold water, garbage disposal and the cleaning of the building) as well as the costs for heating and hot water supply. The Social Security Office/ Sozialamt/ZLA does not absorb the costs for electricity (light, telephone, internet), you have to pay that yourself. The stove is run by electricity or gas. If it is run by electricity, you will get more money per month from the Social Security Office/Sozialamt/ZLA. If the stove is run by gas, you have to pay that yourself though. But if the heating system or the hot water supply are run by gas, you also get more money per month from the Social Security Office/Sozialamt/ZLA. (see „Who pays for electricity and gas?“)

## Which documents do I need for the apartment search?

Welche Unterlagen brauche ich für die Wohnungssuche?

Currently there are only very few apartments available in Berlin for which a lot of people apply at the same time. It is the landlords alone who decide to whom they want to rent out. There are no general criteria which you have to fulfill in order for you to get an apartment. Your chances will be higher if you are well prepared and fast.

Landlords want a lot of documents from you. In general it is better to always have all the documents with you, since it leaves a good impression and increases your chances of getting the apartment. **You should always hand in copies and never the original version of any documents.** You can take copies with us or the social guardians. Sometimes it can take some time until you receive all the documents you need, which is why you should start collecting them well before you actually start your search for an apartment. In the end you will have a stack of documents which you should file so that you do not lose anything. Since you have to submit these documents at almost every viewing of an apartment, it is good to always recopy them.

### Copy of your residence permission

Landlords have the right to know who the people are that they are renting apartments to. Do not forget to copy the front and back side.

### **Copy of the notification for social security benefits by the Social Security Office/Sozialamt/ZLA**

Landlords want to know how applicants for an apartment finance themselves in order to be able to decide to whom they want to rent the apartment. ([attachment 3](#))

### **Copy of the confirmation of cost-covering from Social Security Office/Sozialamt/ZLA/ „Mietübernahmeschein“**

The so called „Mietübernahmeschein“ includes a general approval of the Social Security Office/Sozialamt/ZLA to take over the rental costs and states how much the rent can be at most. Your case worker at the Social Security Office/Sozialamt/ZLA will file this rent absorption certificate for you. ([attachment 4](#))

### **Copy of the information by the credit investigation company/SCHUFA**

The SCHUFA is a credit investigation company which collects all registered debts in Germany (for example those which result from cellphone contracts) and provides information about these. This way, landlords try to hedge themselves. If the SCHUFA does not have any data about you, they also provide information about that. Since the SCHUFA is only a momentarily statement, it is possible that you have to renew it during the process of your apartment search. Some landlords only accept SCHUFA statements which are not more than two weeks old while others accept SCHUFA statements which are half a year old.

The SCHUFA application ([attachment 5](#) „**Application for the information by the credit investigation company (Schufa-Auskunft)**“) is for free but it needs to be printed and sent in an envelope. You can get a SCHUFA application from us. We can also support you with filling out the application.

Once you filled out the application, you need to copy your residence permission as well as your registration certificate of the district office/Bezirksamt and send this along with the filled in application. You can also get an envelope and a stamp from us. You have to write the following address on the envelope:

SCHUFA Holding AG  
Postfach 61 04 10  
10927 Berlin

It can take up to six weeks until you receive the SCHUFA statement. **This is why it is very important that the SCHUFA application is the first thing for you to take care of!** You will need the SCHUFA statement at almost every viewing of an apartment.

There is a second possibility if you need the SCHUFA statement very urgently: You can get a SCHUFA statement at any branch of EASY CREDIT at the same day that you go there. You can get a **list of EASY CREDIT branches** ([attachment 6](#)) from us. There you also have to put forward a copy of your residence permission. This is a fast possibility for getting a SCHUFA statement, but it costs 18,50 Euro. You cannot pay that cash at the place, you have to transfer it. If you do not have a German bank account of your own, approach us or the social workers at your accommodation.

### **Copy of the certificate which states that you do not have any back rent**

Your former landlord, meaning your present landlord, needs to issue a certificate which states that you do not have any back rent ([attachment 7](#) „**Certificate stating you do not have any back rent (Mietschuldenfreiheitsbescheinigung)**“). The renters also use this to hedge themselves. It states that you always payed your rent on time. You can ask the social workers at your accommodation about that, they can issue these certificates.

### **Form with personal details**

Often landlords want you to fill out a question paper regarding your personal data (the so called „Selbstauskunft“). In order for you to be able to fill out this question paper rather fast on the spot, it is good for you to have an already filled out list at hand. You can find an exemplary version of such a disclosure of your personal data at the end of this information ([attachment 8](#) „**Form with personal details (Selbstauskunft)**“). It is good if you filled out this list once before and if you take it with you to

any apartment viewings so that it can help you to orientate yourself while filling out the question paper. At the apartment viewing itself you usually fill out a different but very similar list.

## How do I find an advertisement for an apartment?

Wie finde ich ein Wohnungsangebot?

There are homepages on the internet on which renters offer available apartments with detailed information. (If you have no free internet access you can go ahead and look at **attachment 9** for „free internet cafés in Berlin“). On these pages you can specify how much and how big the apartment should be or in which part of the city it should be in a relatively detailed way. Examples for such **homepages** are:

www.immobilienscout24.de

www.immonet.de

www.immowelt.de

Using the homepage „immobilienscout24“ as an example, we will show you how to find suitable advertisements for apartments on the internet. This search works in a similar way on other homepages. You can also ask us if you need any support for this.

In the orange-rimmed box you can specify what it is that you are looking for and where. „Wo“/ „Where“: You can simply name „Berlin“ here or one or several districts where you would like to live in addition to that. „Was“/ „What“: Here, you leave „Mietwohnungen“/ „Rental apartments“. In the categories „Preis bis“/ „Price maximum“ and „Zimmer ab“/ „Minimum number of rooms“ you can specify how much your apartment can cost at most and how many rooms it should include at least.

**IMMOBILIEN** **SCOUT 24** **Rein ins neue Leben.**

Suchen | Suchanzeigen | **Wohnen** | Gewerbe | Anbieten | Eige

Immobilien | Baufinanzierung | Miet-/ Kaufpreise

Wo: Ort, PLZ, Scout-ID oder Straße **Berlin** Was: Eigentumswohnung, Haus kaufen ... Mietwohnungen

Preis bis: 437 EUR Zimmer ab: 1+ Fläche ab: Radius: keiner

**1.383 Treffer**

Das Immobilien-Branchenbuch Makler, Bauträger und mehr in Ihrer Nähe

As a single adult person you can fill in „437“ for example in the box „Preis bis“/ „Price maximum“, since according to the table by the Social Security Office/Sozialamt/ZLA, your apartment can cost 437 Euros at most, including hot water. In the box „Zimmer ab“/ „Minimum number of rooms“ you put „1+“, since you are allowed to have at least one room in your apartment. After doing that you have to click on the orange button at the bottom right.

**IMMOBILIEN** **SCOUT 24** **Rein ins neue Leben.**

Suchen | Suchanzeigen | **Wohnen** | Gewerbe | Anbieten | Eige

Immobilien | Baufinanzierung | Miet-/ Kaufpreise

Wo: Ort, PLZ, Scout-ID oder Straße **Berlin** Was: Eigentumswohnung, Haus kaufen ... Mietwohnungen

Preis bis: 938 EUR Zimmer ab: 3+ Fläche ab: Radius: keiner

**1.863 Treffer**

Das Immobilien-Branchenbuch Makler, Bauträger und mehr in Ihrer Nähe

However, if you are two adults and four children, you can write „938“ in the box „Preis bis“/ „Price maximum“, since according to the table by the Social Security Office/Sozialamt/ZLA, your apartment can cost 938 Euros at most, including hot water. You can put „3+“ in the box „Zimmer ab“/ „Minimum number of rooms“, since your apartment should come with at least three rooms. After that you click the orange button at the bottom right.

A new page will be opening up now, where you will see a lot of offers for apartments. If you want to, you can change the order in a way that the cheapest offers are listed first. You can do so by clicking on the second line that says „Kaltmiete (niedrigste zuerst)/ „Cold rent (lowest first)“ at „Sortieren nach“/ „Sort by“.



Now you can look at the many offers for apartments which are already shortly described on this site. Some offers only state the cold rent, even though there will be other additional costs. You should especially watch out for that!



If you like a certain offer especially much, you can click on the blue headline and a new page will open up. This one here is named „Gemütliche Single Wohnung“/ „Cozy Single Apartment“.



Here you can usually look at photos of the apartment, figure out the location and especially the exact information regarding the flat. The „Gesamtmiete“/„Total rent“ states how much you have to pay for the apartment per month, which is „259,29“ Euros in this case. The „Kaltmiete“/„Cold rent“ of „181,29“ is the price for just the apartment itself. The „Nebenkosten“/ „Service charges“ which are „47,00“ Euros include garbage disposal, the lighting for the hallways in the building and the wage for the caretaker for example. The „Heizkosten“/„Heating costs“ are „31,00“ Euros for this apartment. The electricity costs for your apartment are not yet included in the total rent (also called „Warmmiete“/ „Warm rent“). These costs come in addition to the rent (see „How pays for electricity and gas?“). **You can look up the terms „Kaltmiete“/„Cold rent“ and „Warmmiete“/„Warm rent“ in the glossary at the end of this guideline.**

<b>Kaltmiete:</b>	<b>181,29 EUR</b>	<a href="#">▶ mit lokalem Mietspiegel vergleichen</a>
Nebenkosten:	+ 47,00 EUR	
Heizkosten:	+ 31,00 EUR	
<b>Gesamtmiete:</b>	<b>= 259,29 EUR</b>	
Stromverbrauch:	ab 1.200 kWh*	<a href="#">▶ Stromrechner</a>
	<small>*ImmobilienScout24-Schätzung</small>	
Umzugskosten:	<a href="#">▶ Jetzt Angebote einholen</a>	
Kautions- oder Genossenschaftsanteile:	Genossenschaftsanteile	
Provision für Mieter:	Nein	
SCHUFA-Auskunft:	<a href="#">▶ Online SCHUFA-Auskunft anfordern</a>	
<b>Hauptkriterien</b>		
Zimmer:	1,00	
Wohnfläche ca.:	27,89 m <sup>2</sup>	
Nutzfläche ca.:	27,89 m <sup>2</sup>	
Wohnungstyp:	Etagenwohnung	
Etage:	1	

If you like the apartment and the amount of rent is okay according to the table of the Social Security Office/ Sozialamt/ZLA you can contact the landlord in order to get an appointment for a viewing of the apartment. Sometimes the date for the viewing of the flat is already mentioned in the offer. If that is the case, you can simply go there but it is still advisable to make sure to check with the landlord first. Some of them you can only ever contact online. You will then find a possibility from which you can directly contact them next to the apartment offering. You only have to type in your name and email address. In the small text field at the bottom, you can shortly write that you are interested in the apartment and would like to know when you can have a look at it. Then you click „Absenden“/ „Send“ and wait until you get a response in your email account. If you want to, you can ask us and we will support you with this. If you do not have an e-mail account and need support by creating one you can have a look at [attachment 10 „How do I open an e-mail-account?“](#)

**Frau Marion Wiediger**  
Märkische Baugenossenschaft eG

★★★★☆  
[\(101 Bewertungen\)](#)

[► Mehr Details](#)

**E-Mail versenden**

Anrede    Vorname    Nachname\*

keine ▼    Lara    Sommer

Telefon    0160 1234567

E-Mail\*    larasommer1979@gmail.com

Gleichzeitig registrieren ?

AGB und [wichtige Kundeninformationen](#) wurden zur Kenntnis genommen und akzeptiert.

Sehr geehrte Frau Wiediger,

Ihr Wohnungsangebot gefällt mir sehr gut. Wann gibt es die Möglichkeit, mir die Wohnung anzusehen?

[+ Meine Adresse angeben](#)
Absenden

Sometimes the renters also directly state their phone numbers which makes the whole procedure faster since you can call them directly. If you want to, you can also ask us or the social workers about that.

**Frau Barbara Scharmann**  
CONNECTA Immobilien GmbH  
[www.conecta.de](http://www.conecta.de)

★★★★☆  
[\(119 Bewertungen\)](#)

[► Mehr Details](#)

Mobil:    0152 07760329

Telefon:    030 342 00 77

**E-Mail versenden**

Anrede    Vorname    Nachname\*

keine ▼

On top of that a lot of **daily and weekly newspapers** publish offers for apartments on certain days. Every Saturday, „Der Tagesspiegel“, „Berlin Kompakt“ („Berliner Zeitung“ and „Berliner Kurier“) as well as „Berliner Morgenpost“ contain large real estate sections which include a lot of offers for apartments.

These apartment offerings are being updated regularly on the **homepage of these three newspapers:**

tagesspiegel.immowelt.de  
www.berlinonline.de/markt  
www.morgenpost.de/berlin/wohnung-mieten/

Once you have found an appropriate apartment, you have to contact the landlord. This contacting is usually done via phone or email. Together with them you make an appointment for a viewing of the flat. It is also possible for you to ask us or the social workers and social guardians to contact the landlord in your name via phone or email. **For this purpose, we recommend that you take down the most important information about the apartment in the list „My apartment offerings“.** Sometimes the appointments for public viewings of the apartment are already stated in the offer in which case you can just show up there. There will be a lot of other people as well who are interested in the flat.

There are also pages on the internet where the **current renters of an apartment offer their flats themselves.** The contacting also works via phone or email. Examples for such homepages are:

www.kleinanzeigen.ebay.de  
www.zweitehand.de/immobilien

If the owners do not rent the apartment themselves, they task the **property management** with it or larger **housing companies** offer apartments of their own. Occasionally it is better to go directly to the offices of the property managements or the housing companies and ask for available apartments there. Most of the time they will ask for a disclosure of your personal information. The best thing for you to do is to regularly ask whether there are apartments available since these available flats are not being published most of the time. We have a long list of property managements and housing companies which you can get from us. Check the homepages of the property managements and housing companies as well, since public viewings of apartments are being announced there.

A lot of the time you will find the terms **„Kautio“/„Deposit“, „Provision“/„Commission“ or „Courtage“/„Broker's fee“ as well as „Genossenschaftsanteile“/ „Share in the cooperative“** in the offerings for apartments. We explain what these terms mean and who pays for this in the section **„Who pays for deposit/Kautio / commission/Provision / broker's fee/Courtage / share in the cooperative/Genossenschaftsanteile?“**

In some offers for flats it says **„nur mit WBS“/„only with WBS“.** „WBS“ stands for **„Wohnungsberechtigungsschein“** which translates to **„Certificate for eligibility for public housing“.** Up until now, only refugees with a residence permission receive this, but nonetheless you – as an asylum applicant – can try to apply for a WBS with the help of your social worker.

If **friends, acquaintances or family members** inform you about apartments that will become available, it is recommendable for you to check with the landlord directly. It is possible that the apartment has not yet been announced as being available publicly which would increase the chances of you getting the apartment.

Another possibility is to rent **single rooms in an apartment that is already rented or to rent a whole apartment which is already rented.** In these cases you have to conclude a sublease contract (**attachment 11 „Sublease Contract (Untermietvertrag)“**) with the actual person who rented it, who is the main tenant. The Social Security Office/Sozialamt/ZLA also absorbs the costs for this if the rent is all right according to the table of the Social Security Office/Sozialamt/ZLA. In the sublease you need to put down who pays for electricity, heating costs and so on and whether the apartment will be rented out empty or furnished. Under certain conditions it is even possible to sublet a whole flat. Single rooms in apartments with several rooms are mostly offered in **Wohngemeinschaften (WG)/flat shares.** Available rooms are usually described in a detailed way on the internet. After introducing yourself in an informal email, the people living in the flat share might invite you into their apartment to get to know you.

www.wg-gesucht.de  
www.wg-company.de

All internet addresses are listed on the **information sheet „Apartment search on the internet“ (attachment 12)**.

## **Who pays for the deposit/Kaution, commission/Provision, broker's fee/Courtage, share in the cooperative/Genossenschaftsanteile?**

**Wer zahlt Kaution / Provision / Courtage / Genossenschaftsanteile?**

Essentially almost all landlords want you to pay a **deposit** if you move into the flat. The deposit is a guarantee for the landlord in case you do not pay your rent or damage the apartment severely. The deposit usually amounts to three cold rents and has to be payed before or while moving into the apartment. When you move out of the apartment and everything is in order, you get back the whole amount of the deposit. The Social Security Office/Sozialamt/ZLA takes over the deposit as a loan for you. "Loan" means that in this case the Social Security Office/Sozialamt/ZLA initially pays the whole amount and that you pay back the costs in the following months in small sums. **On that account you file an informal application for the absorption of the deposit at the Social Security Office/Sozialamt/ZLA.** If you want to file such an application, you can ask the social workers or us about that as well. **If the Social Security Office/Sozialamt/ZLA demands that you pay back the costs in small sums taken from your monthly benefits, approach us or the social workers!**

Sometimes landlords do not take care of the renting out of apartments themselves but employ brokers for that. For this you would have to pay money, which is called commission or broker's fee. The maximum amount of money for the commission or broker's fee is two cold rent plus value added tax, which is a maximum of 2.38-times the value of the cold rent. **Since the costs of a commission or broker's fee are not being absorbed yet by the Social Security Office/Sozialamt/ZLA, it is possible that you have to pay for that yourself if you move into the apartment.** But it still makes sense for you to check nonetheless – maybe the Social Security Office/Sozialamt/ZLA will actually agree. If the Social Security Office/Sozialamt/ZLA demands that you pay back the costs in small sums taken from your monthly benefits, approach us or the social workers! **It would probably be best for you not yet to sign the lease if the Social Security Office/Sozialamt/ZLA has not yet conceded the absorption of the commission or broker's fee and if you cannot pay the commission or broker's fee yourself!**

Some housing associations are organized in a special way. If you move into one of their apartments, you basically buy a share of the housing association. You get this share back once you move out. These shares are called „**Genossenschaftsanteile**“/„**cooperative shares**“. **The Social Security Office/Sozialamt/ZLA takes over the costs of the cooperative shares up to a triple of the warm rent. For that to happen, you can file an informal application for the absorption of the costs.** If you are planning on filing such an application, you can ask the social workers or us.

## **How does the viewing of an apartment pass off?**

**Wie läuft eine Wohnungsbesichtigung ab?**

Do not sign a lease if you have not yet seen the apartment! The appointment for the viewing of the flat is either already mentioned in the offer for the apartment so that you can just go to the appointment where other people interested in the flat will be present as well, or you arrange an appointment of your own with the landlord.

At the viewing itself you do not have to present your **ID card** instantly, but you should include it as a copy in the documents that you hand in.

During the viewing of the apartment, you will have time to get a closer look of the flat and decide whether or not you like it. Look at the surroundings and the entire building as well. In the apartment, you should pay special attention to possible **defects**. Common defects are water spotting, damage of

the floor, holes in the walls, leaking windows, mold You can confront the landlords about this and ask if these defects will be corrected.

In case it was not clear in the offer of the apartment how the flat is being heated and how the hot water supply works, you can also ask the landlord about it now. You can ask about the size of the entire building as well and that way figure out exactly the maximum amount of rent according to the table by the Social Security Office/Sozialamt/ZLA.

During the viewing of the apartment you can also ask if the increase in rent is regulated in the lease by a scaling. „**Staffelmiete**“/„**Stepped rent**“ means that the rent will be increased by a certain percentage at a specific point in time; for example that the cold rent is raised by five percent a year. The Social Security Office/Sozialamt/ZLA only absorbs the costs for apartments with stepped rent/Staffelmiete only if the increases in rent will be all right according to the table of the Social Security Office/Sozialamt/ZLA during the whole tenancy.

It is advisable for you not to go to apartment viewings alone: Two heads are better than one. **Ask friends or acquaintances to accompany you to the viewing of the apartment.**

If you like the apartment, approach the landlord and ask which documents are required. Either you give the copies of your **documents** directly to the landlord or you send it via email afterward; sometimes the documents need to be dropped off at an entirely different place.

Probably you will have to fill out a **form with personal details (Selbstauskunft) (attachment 8)** on the spot. Here, you fill in a form with your personal information and then you are on the list of applicants. Sometimes you will get an **apartment offer** which includes the information about the flat: rent, size, heating and so on. **Request that the size of the entire building, the kind of heating and the hot water supply are noted on this offer.** The cold rent and the operating costs for the apartment are also important. If not all of these information are included in the apartment offer, you can ask the landlord to add these information handwritten and sign it.

## What can I do if I feel like I am being discriminated against?

Was kann ich tun, wenn ich mich diskriminiert fühle?

It would be good if somebody accompanies you to the apartment viewing, who speaks the same language as you. It is possible that you will feel like you are being discriminated against during the viewing for not having a German passport, for not speaking fluent German without any accent, for belonging to a certain religion or for not looking „German“ to the landlord. Unfortunately, it happens again and again on Berlin's housing market that landlords – consciously or unconsciously – treat prospects unequally during apartment viewings: Unequal treatment is admittedly allowed sometimes, discriminatory treatment is not though!

**It is not allowed for landlords** to „disadvantage people because of their ethnic origin, gender, age, handicap, religion or sexual identity“ during the access of an apartment. This is stated in the General Equality Act of 2006.

**It is (unfortunately) allowed for landlords** to disadvantage applicants for an apartment if they state „preservation of social living structures“, „settlement structures“ or „balanced economical, social and cultural conditions“ as a reason.

An example: It is unlawful if landlords state that they only accept tenants who speak perfect German „since otherwise they would not be able to understand the lease“. Obviously, they are trying to exclude migrant tenants by doing this. But you can also get the lease translated, if you do not speak perfect German. In this case, you have the right to file a law suit. And also in other cases, when you feel like you have been rejected too fast or feel disrespected, it can be important to approach the landlord once again together with supporters. If after the viewing of an apartment you feel like the landlord rejected you too fast or did not give you enough space for questions, you can do the following:

Come to our counseling! Together we can think about what kind of options there are. You can also talk about it with the social workers.

Call the landlord again and find someone who will listen to the phone call with you. You can talk about why you are interested in the apartment. You can also ask why you have been rejected. It is also possible for you to ask us to listen or call the landlord. If you do not want to talk on the phone, you can also ask the landlord to give you another appointment. In this case you could talk about everything in person. You should definitely take someone with you to this conversation!

During the conversation you can try to talk the situation over with the landlord and figure out if you were discriminated against. If your feeling is affirmed, you can try to point out that they acted in a discriminatory way. Maybe then you can convince the landlord that they rejected you too fast. It is not certain that you will be successful. Try anyway. A lot might be resolvable in a conversation.

It is also good if tell us and others about your experiences. A lot of people do not know how difficult it is for refugees to find an apartment. We think it is important to collect these experiences and try to raise awareness.

If you feel like you have been strongly discriminated against, you can address yourself to the anti-discriminatory network/Antidiskriminierungsnetzwerk in Berlin. There, you will be counseled and supported professionally and at length.

Antidiskriminierungsnetzwerk Berlin des Türkischen Bundes in Berlin-Brandenburg (TBB)  
Oranienstraße 53 (U8 „Moritzplatz“)  
10969 Berlin  
Phone: 030 / 61305328  
Fax: 030 / 61304310  
Email: adnb@tbb-berlin.de

## What happens after the viewing of an apartment?

### Was passiert nach der Wohnungsbesichtigung?

You have to hand in the detailed apartment offer that you got during the viewing of the apartment and the filled out application for the absorption of rental costs **personally and as fast as possible** at the protestant organization for youth and welfare/Evangelische Jugend- und Fürsorgewerk (EJF). You can pick up **application for the absorption of rental costs** from us or the social workers. We can support you in filling out the application if you want us to.

Wohnungen für Flüchtlinge (Apartments for refugees)  
Turmstraße 21  
House K  
First floor  
10559 Berlin (Moabit)

The people working at EJF deal with the apartment offer and check if the rent is not too high in consultation with the Social Security Office/Sozialamt/ZLA. At the same time, you also send the offer to your case worker at the Social Security Office/Sozialamt/ZLA. You can hand in the offer personally or send it to the case worker via fax or email. Ask the people working at EJF when they will be done checking your apartment offer and when you can come back.

If the Social Security Office/Sozialamt/ZLA agrees to the absorption of the costs for the submitted apartment, you inform the landlord about it **immediately**. If the apartment is still available and the landlord wants to rent it out to you, you present them with the letter of the Social Security Office/Sozialamt/ZLA. The landlord will then give you an appointment for signing the lease.

Sometimes it takes the Social Security Office/Sozialamt/ZLA a very long time to examine the apartment offer. Most of the time the apartment has already been rented to other prospects by then. While the examination is going on, you can call the landlord and let them know that you are still interested in the flat. You can also ask us or the social workers about that.

If the Social Security Office/Sozialamt/ZLA agrees to take over the rental costs, but the apartment has been rented to someone else in the meantime – don't lose heart and go on searching!

## What do I have to pay attention to in the lease?

### Was muss ich beim Mietvertrag beachten?

If the Social Security Office absorbs the rental costs, if the apartment is still available and if the landlord decides in favor of you, you have made it! You will be invited to sign the lease. **Do not sign the contract immediately, but take your time to read it carefully!** You can also take it with you and if necessary have it be explained by us or the social workers. A lot of the time, the **nighttime peace and the house rules** which you should follow once you have moved into the apartment are stated in the lease.

In case you noted any defects during the viewing of the apartment, you should definitely have these be registered in the contract or in a „**Protocol of defects**“/“Mängelprotokoll“ so that you cannot be made responsible for them after you moved out. It would be best if you had the chance to walk through the apartment together with the landlord and take down the defects in the lease, in a list of defects or in a move-out checklist. The landlord is not obliged to sign this list or this protocol. It is always good to bring acquaintances that bear witness of the flat handover. You can pick up a protocol of defects from us.

Most of the time it is clarified in the lease how the rent is being payed to the landlord. Do by no means pay in cash! You can present the letter of the Social Security Office/Sozialamt/ZLA which confirms that the Social Security Office/Sozialamt/ZLA will pay the rent for the apartment. Usually the Social Security Office/Sozialamt/ZLA will transfer the rent directly to the landlord. The deposit will be

paid by the Social Security Office/Sozialamt/ZLA as a loan as well (see „Who pays for the deposit/Kaution / commission/Provision / broker's fee/Courtage / share in the cooperative/Genossenschaftsanteile?“).

During the apartment handover, which often takes place at another day, you will receive the **keys to the apartment** at the latest.

## Who pays for the first pieces of furniture?

Wer zahlt die ersten Möbel?

You do not have to pay your furniture yourself. Instead you can file an **„Application for an initial basic equipment“** at the Social Security Office/Sozialamt/ZLA. We have this application and support you in filling it out, if you want us to. The Social Security Office/Sozialamt/ZLA presets who receives how much money:

1 person	1.073 Euro
1 adult + 1 child	1.359 Euro
2 adults	1.417 Euro
1 adult + 2 children	1.611 Euro
1 adult + 3 children	1.821 Euro
2 adults + 1 child	1.736 Euro
2 adult + 2 children	1.899 Euro
2 adults + 3 children	2.109 Euro
for each additional child+	165 Euro

With this money, you should be enabled to buy furniture for the **living room, the bedroom, the children's room, the bathroom, the hallway, the kitchen, the garniture for the bed and household effects**. Electronic devices, curtains and carpeting are not included in this. **You can apply for money to spend on electronic devices separately**. For a lot of devices, the Social Security Office/Sozialamt/ZLA presets the following original prices:

Electric stove + installation	250 Euro (a stove is usually already in the apartment)
Gas stove + installation	350 Euro (a stove is usually already in the apartment)
Fridge for up to 4 people	200 Euro
Fridge for more than 5 people	300 Euro
Washing machine	275 Euro

Usually there are individual rules that apply for further devices as well as for curtains. Concerning this, you can ask the social workers or us.

## Who pays for electricity and gas?

Wer zahlt Strom und Gas?

The costs for electricity are not included in the rent. **The Social Security Office/Sozialamt/ZLA does not pay the costs for light, telephone and internet; you have to pay for that yourself. If the stove is run by electricity, you receive more money each month from the Social Security Office/Sozialamt/ZLA.**

In Germany there are a lot of electricity providers that differ in their offers and especially in their prices. If you move into the apartment, you already have electricity from the default provider „Vattenfall“, which is usually very expensive though. It is better for you to look for a cheaper electricity provider and conclude a contract with them. Sometimes the Social Security Office/Sozialamt/ZLA transfers the money for electricity directly to the electricity provider. At the same time, the amount of money that you get each month will be net of this sum. It is also possible that you will pay the money to the electricity provider yourself.

If the stove is run by gas, you have to pay the costs for this yourself. If the heating or hot water supply is run with gas though, you receive more money per month from the Social Security Office/Sozialamt/ZLA. In most of these cases, the costs for the gas heating are already included in the rent.

If the costs for gas are not included in the total rent, it is better to look for a cheaper gas provider and conclude a contract with them. When you move into the apartment, you already have gas from the default provider „Gasag“, which is usually very expensive though.

## What else do I have to pay attention to?

Was muss ich sonst noch beachten?

As soon as you have moved into your own apartment, you have to **notify a change in address (attachment 13 „Registration at the registry office after moving (Anmeldung bei der Meldebehörde)“)**. Until now, all of your mail goes to the collective housing, where you currently live. The people working at the collective housing are not obliged to forward your mail – in fact they do this in the least of all cases. **In order for your mail to reach you, it is very important that you announce your new address to the Federal Agency for refugees and migration/Bundesamt für Flüchtlinge und Migration (BAMF) as well as to the administrative court in case you entered an objection.** If you omit to notify them of your new address, it is possible that your asylum application will be dismissed. In order to notify the change in address, you have to fill out and sign a **form** and send it to the district authority of your district. We have this form and assist you with filling it out, if you want us to. In your new apartment, your name should be on the **mailbox**. In case you charged a **lawyer** with accept your mail, you immediately have to inform them about your new address as well so that they can forward your mail to you. You can also approach the social workers and social guardians at the collective housing on that account.

It sometimes happens that the Social Security Office/Sozialamt/ZLA does not pay the rent to the landlord on time. Since you are the one who signed the lease and is therefore responsible, the landlord will write a letter to you, requesting you to pay the rent. In this case, ask the Social Security Office/Sozialamt/ZLA immediately what the reason for the delay of the rent payment is. **If you want us to call the Social Security Office/Sozialamt/ZLA in your name, let us know.** Most of the time, the reason for the delayed payment is an administrative mistake and the rent will be payed in any case. You should inform the landlord about this right away then.

In Germany, all households have to pay a **fixed rate for public service broadcasting (radio, TV, „GEZ“ which stands for the fee collection center of public-law broadcasting institutions)**. It does not matter whether or not you actually watch TV or listen to the radio. A couple of weeks after you got registered at the district authority, you will receive a letter in which you will be requested to pay 17,98 Euro per month. **Since you receive social security benefits from the Social Security Office/Sozialamt/ZLA, you are exempted from this contribution and do not have to pay it!** The last notification that you got from the Social Security Office/Sozialamt/ZLA included a document called **„Bescheinigung über Leistungsbezug zur Vorlage bei dem Beitragsservice von ARD, ZDF und Deutschlandradio“** (this translates to **„Certificate about the receipt of benefits for the presentation at the fee collection service of ARD, ZDF and Deutschlandradio“**, the latter are the public-law broadcasting institutions). You now have to send a copy of this to the fee collection service/ Beitragsservice.

Whenever anything appears to be weird to you or you are uncertain about something, ask the social workers or us about it!

## Glossary

GEZ	GEZ stands for „Gebühreneinzugszentrale“, which translates to „Fee collection center of public-law broadcasting institutions“. Colloquially, this describes the contribution that has to be payed by every household in Germany for the public broadcasting (radio and TV) each month. The fixed rate amounts to 17,98 Euro for each apartment, regardless of whether or not there actually is a radio or TV in the flat. All asylum applicants are exempted from these contributions. On that account, the „Certificate about the receipt of benefits for the presentation at the fee collection service of ARD, ZDF and Deutschlandradio“/„Bescheinigung über Leistungsbezug zur Vorlage bei dem Beitragsservice von ARD, ZDF und Deutschlandradio“ from the Social Security Office/Sozialamt/ZLA needs to be send to the fee collection service.
Kaltniete	Cold rent. The cold rent describes the monthly rent without the additional heating and operational costs (also called „Nebenkosten“/utilities). Operational costs include for example cold water/sewage, cleaning of the building, lighting of the stairway and garbage disposal.
Kaution	Deposit. The deposit is a security which tenants pay to the landlord when they move into an apartment. The landlords can only ever draw on this if tenants do not pay the rent on time or do not repair damages themselves that they caused in the apartment. The deposit is not allowed to be higher than three times the amount of the monthly cold rent and can be payed in three equal monthly rates. Landlords pay back the deposit once the tenants move out, as long as all financial obligations were met. The deposit is absorbed by the Social Security office/Sozialamt/ZLA.
Provision/Courtage	Commission/Broker's fee. A lot of apartments are not brokered by the landlords themselves, but instead by real estate agents. In this case, tenants have to pay a fee the brokers for the successful finding of an apartment once they move in. The maximum amount of the commission or broker's fee cannot exceed two cold rents plus value added tax, which amounts to a maximum of 2,38 times the price of the cold rent. Up until now, the commission or broker's fee is not being absorbed by the Social Security Office/Sozialamt/ZLA.
Staffelmiete	Stepped rent. Stepped rent means that the rent will be increased by a certain percentage at a certain point of time; for example the the cold rent will be raised by five percent each year. The Social Security Office/Sozialamt/ZLA absorbs the costs for an apartment with a stepped rent only if the increases in rent are all right according to the table of the Social Security Office/Sozialamt/ZLA for the entire tenancy.
Warmmiete	Warm rent. The warm rent describes the whole amount of money that tenants monthly transfer to the landlords. The cold rent as well as the heating and operational costs are included in this. The monthly prepayments for heating and operational costs are usually being agreed upon in the lease. The costs for electricity are not included in the warm rent. Sometimes, the heating costs are not included in the rent as well because the apartment has a gas heating system for each individual storey.
Sozialamt/ZLA	Social Security Office, „Zentrale Leistungsstelle für Asylbewerber“ („Central Service Facility for Asylum Applicants“. This department is in Turmstraße in the district of Moabit. The services include housing (collective housing or private apartments) besides food, health and clothing.