

Britz Refugee Support Group ([fluechtlingshilfe@britzerinitiative.de](mailto:fluechtlingshilfe@britzerinitiative.de))

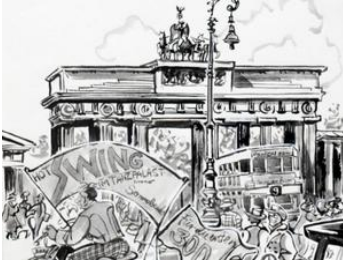
## Thirteen Steps on the way to your own apartment

### Notes on how to find an apartment



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## 0. Welcome to Berlin



The Britz Refugee Support Group hopes that you will soon feel comfortable in Britz and Berlin. We wish for you to make friends quickly and to arrange your life according to your wishes. Certainly, having your own apartment is part of this. Living in a collective accommodation should only be a temporary solution. To take part in the normal life in Berlin, you should live among Berlin's people. However, it is not easy to find an apartment in Berlin. The Britz Refugee Support Group wants to help you find an apartment. When reading this leaflet you will quickly notice that finding your own apartment is steep and winding. And you also have to avoid some traps. In order to overcome the challenges more easily, you should look for a German-speaking assistant who will accompany you along the way. If you don't know anyone, you can ask the Britz Refugee Support Group or another welcoming initiative that works together with your current place of accommodation. You will get the contact from the information desk in your accommodation. We are looking forward to working together with you and wish you good luck in finding a new home.

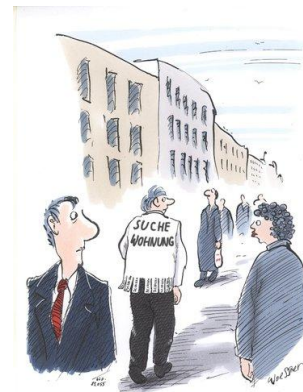
### 1. Start early with finding an apartment!

In Berlin you are allowed to rent your own apartment at the latest after living for three months in the home for asylum-seekers, even if the asylum proceedings have not been completed yet. The LaGeSo (**L**andesamt für **G**esundheit und **S**oziales – Department for Health and Social Affairs) bears the costs according to a standard rate. The same applies to the purchasing of household inventory and furniture.

*Note: The reimbursement includes hot water and heating costs, but no other electricity costs. Those have to be paid by yourself from the basic social grant.*

In addition to the options mentioned below and in case the JobCenter is not responsible for you yet, you can sign up as a home seeker at the Lutheran Youth- and Welfare Organisation (EJF - Evangelisches Jugend- und Fürsorgewerk). The accommodation office of the EJF is located in the building of the LaGeSo in Turmstraße 21, House K, entrance D, 10559 Berlin. Telephone number: 030 30208985. The office is open on Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday from 9 to 12 o'clock. Even if the chances are not so high, you should use them!

As soon as you receive a positive decision on your asylum proceedings, you fall within the competence of the district offices (JobCenter, Social Welfare Office) and the EJF is not responsible anymore.



### 2. Which documents do you need to find a flat?

When you start looking for an apartment, you should first apply for a **Certificate of eligibility for public housing** (Wohnberechtigungsschein - WBS). Many landlords and housing associations require this WBS. To be on the safe side, you should apply for this WBS right now. Where do you get the WBS? Application forms are available in the district offices (in Neukölln there is one in Blaschkoallee 32) and on the internet:

<https://senstadtfms.stadt-berlin.de/intelliform/forms/Wohnen/berlin/BW502/index>

The official in charge in the district office may help you to fill in the application form (or you can ask the social workers in your accommodation or the supporters for help). You can hand in the completed application form directly at the district office or send it there via mail.

### **What do you need the WBS for?**

The WBS is valid for the whole city of Berlin and for one year. It is supposed to provide home seekers who have "special housing needs" with social housing or apartments of the municipal housing companies. The term "special housing needs" is printed on the WBS. All refugees who are living in a collective home for asylum-seekers are entitled to "special housing needs". If they are registered for one year or more in Berlin, they can get a certificate of urgency.

### **Which documents do you need to get a WBS?**

In addition to the application form you need a copy of the following documents:

- Certificate of residence (Meldebescheinigung)
- Passport or identity card of all persons included in the application form
- The last confirmation of benefits (Leistungsbewilligungsbescheid) including a calculation sheet (Berechnungsbogen) either from the Social Welfare Office or JobCenter
- Current receipt of payment from Social Welfare Office or JobCenter (a current bank account statement is also ok)
- Certificate from the Social Welfare Office (form issued by the *Soziale Wohnhilfe* entitled Soz III G6) or the JobCenter confirming reimbursement of costs
- If applicable, any proof of mental or physical disability (e.g. Schwerbehindertenausweis, an identification card for severely disabled persons)
- A maternal pass in case of a pregnancy
- A marriage certificate if you are a married couple
- Birth certificates for all children who are to move in

(It is usually acknowledged that refugees are often unable to provide the documents mentioned under the last two items)

If the application is examined and approved, you will get a WBS valid for one year. The WBS also contains a note saying which apartment size is suitable for you and your family. The general rule is: one room for the applicant and one extra room for each family member. For example: A single person would be entitled to a one-room apartment, while a couple with three children would be entitled to an apartment with a maximum of five bedrooms. If you can prove special personal or professional needs, additional living space may be permitted

### **3. Where do you find housing offers?**

You will find most of the housing offers on the Internet. There, apartments and houses are usually presented with photos, floor plan, amount of rent and location. The most important webpages are:



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[www.immobilienscout24.de](http://www.immobilienscout24.de)  
[www.immowelt.de](http://www.immowelt.de)  
[www.wohnungssuche-berlin.net](http://www.wohnungssuche-berlin.net)  
[www.immobilo.de](http://www.immobilo.de)  
[www.immobilien.de](http://www.immobilien.de)  
[www.immobilienmarkt.de](http://www.immobilienmarkt.de)  
[www.immonet.de](http://www.immonet.de)  
[www.immopool.de](http://www.immopool.de)  
[www.wohnfinder.de](http://www.wohnfinder.de)

[www.gimmo.de](http://www.gimmo.de)

[www.kalaydo.de](http://www.kalaydo.de)

Furthermore, the large housing associations offer vacant apartments on their websites. There you can also find the addresses of local service and customer centres. At some of them you can sign in as a home seeker. These are the websites of the most important housing associations:

[www.stadtundland.de](http://www.stadtundland.de)

[www.gesobau.de](http://www.gesobau.de)

[www.howoge.de](http://www.howoge.de)

[www.gewobag.de](http://www.gewobag.de)

[www.degewo.de](http://www.degewo.de)

[www.wbm.de](http://www.wbm.de)

*Note: Private housing agencies (Wohnraumvermittlungsvereine)*

*In addition to the Internet there are also private housing agencies that offer apartments. They usually charge a member fee of about €80 for finding an apartment. However, they just try to make a good profit. Apart from laying out lists of supposedly vacant apartments, they often do not provide any real service in return. They also do not help with contacting the landlord. So beware of those tricksters!*



#### **4. Have you found an interesting housing offer?**

Then check if the total rent (including additional costs and heating) and the apartment's size are within the budget that the social security office or JobCenter assigned to you and your family (see Appendix 1).

Are the apartment's size and total rent ok? Then have a look at the location of the apartment, the district and the neighbourhood! Is there a kindergarten, schools, shopping facilities and public transport nearby? Everything seems to be ok? If you did not have any helping hand yet, you should now look for help from German-speaking friends and supporters in order to get in touch with the landlord or the housing association.

You should have a copy of the following documents ready:

- Passport, identity card or certificate from the Foreigners Office (Ausländerbehörde) with a residence permit
- Confirmation of benefits (Leistungsbescheid) from the Social Welfare Office or JobCenter with the general commitment that the rent will be reimbursed within certain limits
- Certificate of residence (Anmeldebescheinigung)
- If available, certificate of eligibility to public housing (Wohnberechtigungsschein)
- Credit report from Schufa
- Letter from your current landlord confirming that you have no rent arrears (Bescheinigung über Mietschuldenfreiheit) → you can get one from the responsible person in your accommodation

#### **5. Contact the landlord!**

Did you contact the landlord or housing association personally or by telephone because of a concrete accommodation offer? They will often ask you to fill in a questionnaire even before visiting the apartment. This questionnaire is used to get an overview of all potential tenants. Whoever wants to rent the apartment in question can't avoid filling in the questionnaire.

However, the tenant does not have to answer all questions: only those that are of legitimate interest to the landlord. Those include questions about the monthly net income as well as questions about your employment situation. Furthermore, the landlord may ask how many people will move into the apartment. You have to answer truthfully all the questions on which the landlord has a legitimate interest. Wrong information may be a reason for contract termination. For example, you should not claim a higher income than you actually have nor that you will move in with your wife/husband if you are not married.

## **6. Have a look at the apartment!**

You have made an appointment to visit the apartment? Then take a copy of all the necessary documents with you (Passport or ID with residence permit, WBS, confirmation of benefits from LaGeSo or JobCenter, certificate of residence, letter from your current accommodation or landlord saying that you have no rent arrears, current bank account statement, credit report from Schufa). Do not visit the apartment alone, but - if possible - together with a German-speaking friend or supporter. Do not make any oral or written commitment before visiting the apartment. Do not give money to anyone while visiting the apartment!

## **7. What do you have to consider when inspecting the apartment?**

Are the amount of rent, the number of rooms and the apartment's size in accordance with what is written in the advertisement? Is the apartment in the same condition as described in the advertisement? Is it renovated? Do windows and doors close properly? Is it free of mold? Are the electric cables ok? Are the water taps ok? (You can find a detailed checklist in Annex 2 of this leaflet).



If you find any shortcomings, write them all individually down in a list. At a later contract conclusion, a protocol should be made (Wohnungsübergabeprotokoll), in which the state and the defects of the apartment are listed. If such a protocol is not made at contract conclusion, you should send a list with all shortcomings immediately after contract conclusion to the landlord and ask him/her to fix them.

Check:

- What is the actual amount of rent? Usually, there are extra costs (TV, waste disposal, lift etc.), which are not included in the rent yet. Ask for the amount of "cold" extra costs ("kalte" Betriebskosten) and for the costs of heating and warm water.
- Is the stated amount of extra costs realistic?
- *Attention: Be aware of "false advertisement". If the stated amount of extra costs is too low, high additional demands may come afterwards.*
- How are the operating costs (Betriebskosten) distributed? In accordance with square meters or the number of people?
- How much are usually the heating costs? Is there an energy performance certificate (Energieausweis) in which the heat consumption is specified? (Ask for the year of fabrication of the heating system.)

### **7.1. Rental deposit, broker's commission, compensation – what may the landlord ask for?**

Many landlords/ housing associations ask for a rental deposit (Kaution). The rental deposit serves as a collateral in case the tenant does not pay the rent or that the apartment gets damaged. The JobCenter or Social Welfare Office usually provides a loan to pay this deposit.

However, the deposit must not be higher than three monthly rents (without operating costs). The tenant has the right to pay the deposit in three instalments.

Many times brokers offer apartments and charge a commission for that. As of spring 2015, a new federal law regulates that the broker's commission has to be paid by the person who hired the broker. This is usually the landlord. As soon as the new federal law comes into force (June 2015) it will be illegal to pass the broker's commission on to the tenant.

Brokers are not allowed to charge a commission for finding social housing! They are also not allowed to charge a commission for apartments administrated or owned by themselves.

*Attention: Be careful with compensation contracts or payments. Those are agreements that oblige the new tenant to take over objects and facilities from the former tenant. In principle, these agreements are allowed. However, agreements as to a compensation payment are invalid if the rental agreement itself has not been signed. The former tenant is also not allowed to charge unreasonably high costs for his belongings. The amount charged for some scrap furniture or a stained carpet must not be clearly disproportionate to the value of the inventory or a piece of furniture (see § 4, para. 2 WoVermG).*

## **8. Apply for reimbursement!**

Everything is fine? The apartment's rent and size are within the official standard rate? There are no shortcomings or you have written them down? And the landlord or housing association agrees to rent the apartment out to you? Then ask the landlord for a rental offer (Exposé), which should contain the following information:

- Living space in square meters
- Amount of net rent (Nettokaltmiete)
- Amount of operating costs (Betriebskosten)
- Amount of heating costs (Heizkosten)
- Total amount of rent
- Amount of the rental deposit (Kautiön)
- Information on heating system (oil, natural gas or long-distance heating)
- Information on hot water supply (centralized or decentralized)
- Size of the heated living area of the building
- Confirmation from the landlord that the apartment will be handed over in a renovated condition and that cooker and kitchen sink are included



Then take this rental offer (Exposé) to the JobCenter or Social Welfare Office and apply for reimbursement of the monthly rent and rental deposit (Kautiön). There are some guidelines, which you will usually get at the JobCenter or Social Welfare Office (see Appendix 1). The JobCenter or Social Welfare Office can make an exception from their rigid guidelines on apartment's size and amount of rent. In individual cases, the apartment may be slightly more expensive or bigger than specified in the guidelines. This is especially true for apartments that must fit the need of disabled people.

## 9. The rental agreement



You got the reimbursement agreement? Then send it to the landlord or take it there personally! Finally got luck? The landlord sends you a rental agreement or asks you to sign a contract? Congratulations! But be careful: A rental agreement can contain traps. Signing a rental agreement from the landlord binds you to all obligations contained in it. Please check carefully what you are signing!

What do you have to look for? In principle, the rental agreement should be made in writing. By signing a rental agreement, the landlord agrees on renting out the apartment to you and maintaining it in a good condition as stipulated in the contract. In return, you are obliged to use the apartment only within the defined scope and pay a monthly price (rent, or in German: *Miete* or *Mietzins*).

The rental agreement should contain:

- **Contracting parties** (Vertragsparteien). All persons that move in with you should be mentioned in the rental agreement. At the same time, the landlord must provide his full name and address! You need them e.g. to claim shortcomings or at the latest when you want to terminate the contract
- A **detailed description** of the apartment including a list of all rented rooms, for example: 1st floor on the right, 3 rooms, kitchen, corridor, bathroom and cellar
- The **amount of rent** (vereinbarte Miete)
- The **beginning of the tenancy** (Beginn des Mietverhältnisses)
- **Work still to be done by the landlord** (removal of any shortcomings)
- The **signature of the contracting parties**; whoever signs a rental contract becomes a tenant with all rights and obligations.
- Is the rental agreement **permanent or temporary**?
- Does the rental agreement say that the landlord wants to use the apartment himself/herself later on or that the house will be demolished or the apartment renovated? *Attention: Then there is no protection against unfair dismissal!*
- Does the contract contain a clause on **next tenants** (Nachmieterklausel)?
- Do you have to expect soon a **rental increase** or is it even already included in the contract?
- Is a **modernization** planned? *Attention: A modernization of the heating system or new windows allow for an increase of the amount of rent.*
- Does the rental agreement contain any information on **small repairs** (Klein- und Schönheitsreparaturen)?
- Does the landlord ask for a **rental deposit** (Kautions)? Do tenant and landlord have a shared access to the rental deposit?
- Does the rental agreement say anything about a duty to regularly do small repairs



(Schönheitsreparaturen) or to renovate the apartment at the time when you move out?

*Attention: Many of these clauses are legally invalid. Ask somebody who is familiar with these issues.*

Always keep in mind:

- Only sign contracts that you understand!
- Do not make any groundless payments!
- Pay nothing without a receipt!
- Do not agree on any additional obligations at time of contract conclusion (for example insurance contract or furniture acquisition contract)
- Make a written protocol on the state of the apartment, possible shortcomings, number of keys, count of water and electricity (Zählerstand von Strom und Wasser). Ask the landlord to sign this protocol at the time of contract conclusion.

### 10. Apply for initial furnishing!

You've signed the rental agreement? Then apply immediately at the JobCenter or Social Welfare Office for an initial furnishing of the apartment. The initial furnishing includes pieces of furniture, curtains, mattresses, cooking utensils, dishes and, if non-existing in the apartment, a cooker, kitchen sink, refrigerator and washing machine (see Appendix 3).

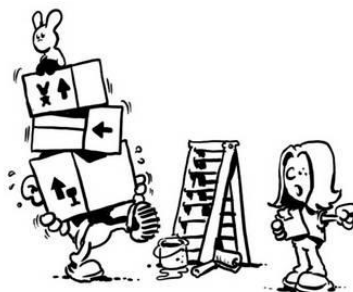
Experience shows that the revision and recognition of the application takes a couple of days.

The proceedings in the JobCenters are different: Either you get a list of items that are part of the initial furnishing and that you can buy within the scope of a pre-defined amount of money. Or you can make a list of items that you need within this pre-defined sum on your own. In this case, you must submit the list to the JobCenter or Social Welfare Office and obtain recognition. Only then you can go ahead and buy the things you need. It is always advisable to ask supporter initiatives if pieces of furniture can be purchased through donations.



### 11. Prepare your moving!

At the time of contract at which date you can apartments are empty agreement starts. In these can clean and furnish the Combine with friends and they can help you. need a car or transporter



conclusion, you already know move in. Many times, even before the actual rental cases, ask the landlord if you apartment before moving in. supporters a day on which Remember that you might with a driver.

### 12. Change your address

As soon as you know the date of your moving, share your new address with all relevant facilities. You should do this even before moving, so that the facilities will know your new address in time. You should inform the following facilities about your new address:

Foreigner's Office, JobCenter/ Social Welfare Office, health insurance, medical care – if needed, bank, kindergarten, integration course. Ask the post office to forward your



correspondence to your new address (Nachsendeantrag), beginning with the day of your moving.

After moving you should immediately register at the Civil Office of your new district to receive your confirmation of residence (Anmeldebestätigung).

### **13. Everything is done!**

Sit down in your new apartment and enjoy it! You can be proud of yourself. The Britz Refugee Support Group congratulates you.



**Congratulations!!!**

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**Appendix 1 - 3: See the German version**