



Information Sheet

for performing Federal Volunteer Service

Last updated: May 2024

Conclusion of an agreement

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

Important: Persons with authority to instruct in an assignment location, e.g. board members of an association, are not eligible **for undertaking a** Federal Volunteer Service programme at that assignment location.

Age

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

Occupational doctor's examination

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

Workplace protection

The relevant German health and safety regulations and the Act on the Protection of Young People at Work (Jugendarbeitsschutzgesetz – JArbSchG) apply to work in the Federal Volunteer Service.

Foreigners in the Federal Volunteer Service

Foreigners are eligible to participate in the Federal Volunteer Service. To do so, they must possess a residence permit entitling them to work. A residence permit (visas qualify as residence permits) may usually only be granted if a person's subsistence is secured, Section 5 Para. 1 No. 1 of the Residence Act (Aufenthaltsgesetz – AufenthG). According to Section 2 Para. 3 of the Residence Act this is the case if a foreigner is able to earn a living without recourse to public funds (e.g. housing benefit). Payment of a subsidy to the Federal Volunteer Service by the German government is no obstacle to a residence permit being granted. Under Section 19 Para. 1 of the Residence Act, volunteers from abroad can generally be granted a residence permit specifically in order to participate in the Federal Volunteer Service.

Nationals of non-EU states who wish to serve in the Federal Volunteer Service must apply for a visa for performing voluntary services while still in their home country, since they will only be issued the required residence permit in Germany if they entered the country with the appropriate visa. In addition

to citizens of the European Union, no visa is required for nationals of Australia, Israel, Japan, Canada, the Republic of Korea, New Zealand and the United States of America.

Foreigners with temporary suspension of deportation status (Section 60a of the Residence Act) can participate in the Federal Volunteer Service if they have a corresponding work permit issued by the responsible Aliens Registration Office.

Advice

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

Taxation during Federal Volunteer Service

The allowance paid for Federal Volunteer Service is non-taxable (Section 3 No. 5 Letter d in conjunction with Section 32 Para. 2 Sentence 2 No. 2 Letter d of the Income Tax Act (Einkommensteuergesetz – EStG). Monetary and in-kind benefits paid above and beyond the allowance are fully taxable, however, once an individual has exceeded the respective exemption threshold. For transport subsidies the taxation depends on the purpose of the subsidy. A determination in such cases can only be made by the tax office.

Citizens' Benefit

Individuals receiving Citizens' Benefit (Bürgergeld) can, as a rule, participate in the Federal Volunteer Service.

In the event that Citizens' Benefit is being paid, then the Federal Volunteer Service allowance is considered income and shall be treated accordingly under Section 11 Para. 1 Social Code II (Sozialgesetzbuch – SGB II) . Monetary payments and in-kind benefits for accommodation, meals, work clothing, and transport subsidies are treated – as has been the case to date – completely as the individual's own income.

Exceptions from this treatment include

- For volunteers under age 26, up to EUR 538 per month
- For volunteers age 26 and over, up to EUR 250 per month

If, in addition to income from voluntary service, additional income is earned from work (e.g., a “mini-job”), then this higher exempt amount also applies. As is customary, an additional exemption is granted for income over EUR 100 received for work, up to total income of EUR 1200 (for individuals receiving benefits with at least one child up to EUR 1500). If the necessary expenditures associated with earning the allowance and the income from work total more than the basis exemption of EUR 250 / EUR 538, then the higher amount is deducted.

Participation in the Federal Volunteer Service is (as with the Voluntary Year of Social Service [Freiwilliges Soziales Jahr – FSJ] / Voluntary Year of Ecological Service [Freiwilliges Ökologisches Jahr – FÖJ]) deemed an important personal reason that is not compatible with the exercise of a profession (cf. Section 10 Para. 1 No. 5 Social Code II). Persons receiving Citizens' Benefit are not required to pursue employment during the time of their Federal Volunteer Service.

Recipients of benefits for the elderly, benefits for persons with reduced earning capacity, and social welfare subsistence allowance, in accordance with the Social Code XII (SGB XII) can also take part in the Federal Volunteer Service and the Volunteer Service for Young People (Jugendfreiwilligendienst, FSJ/FÖJ). If benefits are received, all income in money or money's worth will be deducted from benefit payments.

Income includes, among other things, the allowance and any benefits in kind (accommodation, meals, and work clothing) granted as part of the Federal Volunteer Service or the payments made in lieu of such benefits in kind, as well as transport subsidies.

Individual cases must be clarified in each case, with the responsible provider of benefits for the elderly, benefits for persons with reduced earning capacity, and social welfare subsistence allowance.

Data protection

The assignment locations, central offices and supporting organisations may process personal data which are part of the agreement (Section 8 Para. 1 Sentence 2 BFDG) to the extent that this is necessary for implementing the BFDG.

Term

Federal Volunteer Service lasts at least six months and at most 18 months. It is generally served for a duration of twelve consecutive months. In exceptional cases, it may be extended to a term of 24 months if there are valid reasons for this as part of a special pedagogic concept.

Multiple separate periods of time may also be combined up to a maximum duration of 18 months. Volunteers may only perform a total of up to 18 months of service (24 in exceptional cases) prior to their 27th birthday. If a volunteer has already performed a term of Volunteer Service for Young People (FSJ/FÖJ) in accordance with the Youth Voluntary Services Act (Jugendfreiwilligendienstegesetz – JFDG), then this time shall be included in the total duration. Furthermore, at least five years must pass between the performance of one or more term of Federal Volunteer Service, and/or FSJ/FÖJ terms with a total duration of 18 (24) months and the beginning of a new term of Federal Volunteer Service. The five-year limitation begins after the final month of service of the 18 (24) months.

Areas of assignment

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

Deployment time

This depends on the working hours of the particular deployment location. Federal Volunteer Service may involve full-time or part-time service. For part-time Federal Volunteer Service, the weekly working hours must exceed 20 hours. There is no legal right to part-time Federal Volunteer Service. The volunteers and the respective assignment location must determine whether Federal Volunteer Service

can be performed on a part-time basis and must be in agreement on this point. Part-time Federal Volunteer Service with an entity for which a part-time training programme is already being completed is not permitted. The same generally applies for parallel marginal employment in the same assignment location.

In the case of adolescents under the age of 18, the protection regulations of the Act on the Protection of Young People at Work apply (for example, no night work, lengthy holidays, separate break regulations).

The seminar time counts as deployment time.

Release from service

Volunteers may be released from service with or without remuneration with the agreement of the assignment location for not longer than one month. A release from service for the purposes of undertaking an internship will always be without remuneration.

Certificate of good conduct

Volunteers undertaking Federal Volunteer Service (as with the FSJ/[FÖJ]) are exempted from the fee for issuing a certificate of good conduct if it is required to exercise this volunteer service. The presence of these prerequisites is to be proven.

Supplemental income limits when taking early retirement or a reduction in earning capacity

Old-age pensions may be drawn in their full amounts, regardless of the amount of any supplemental income. The income limit that previously applied for old-age pensions that were taken early has since been eliminated.

Pensions resulting from a reduction in earning capacity may be drawn in consideration of dynamic supplemental income limits.

For pensions resulting from a partial reduction in earning capacity there is a supplemental income limit of EUR 37,100 in 2024; for pensions resulting from a complete reduction in earning capacity it is EUR 18,550. However, for pensions resulting from a reduction in earning capacity, employment or freelance work may only be undertaken within the framework of the ability to perform that has been documented and is the basis for the reduction in earning capacity. Otherwise the right to a pension resulting from a reduction in earning capacity may be forfeited even if the limit on supplemental income is not exceeded.

Supplemental income includes, i.a., all income from work, regardless of whether it is received as a monetary payment or as payment in-kind. Therefore, both the Federal Volunteer Service allowance and all benefits for accommodation, meals, work clothing, and transport subsidies must be counted as supplemental income.

Individuals interested in performing Federal Volunteer Service should inquire with old-age pension authorities in advance. These authorities must determine whether a reduction in earning capacity will continue in the event of the performance of Federal Volunteer Service in a given timeframe, and thus whether the right to a pension will continue to exist.

Child benefit

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

Illness

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

Health insurance

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

Compulsory insurance with a statutory health insurance scheme also includes persons who were insured privately prior to starting Federal Volunteer Service. However, compulsory insurance with a statutory health insurance will not apply to persons who are exempt from compulsory insurance. Additional information on this topic can be found in the Guidelines of the Federal Volunteer Service Act (BDFG LL) Section 13 Para. 2 Sentence 1.

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

Additional information on compulsory insurance with a statutory health insurance scheme is available on the website of the Federal Ministry of Health at: <https://www.bundesgesundheitsministerium.de/gkv.html>

Termination

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

After expiry of the trial period the agreement may be terminated extraordinarily (without notice) for good cause by either party within a period of two weeks of gaining knowledge of the reason for termination. Besides this, the agreement may be terminated by the parties with four weeks' notice to the fifteenth of the month or to the end of the calendar month (ordinary termination). Notice of termination must be in writing.

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

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

The Federal Volunteer Service constitutes voluntary work and is as such unremunerated. The **allowance** which volunteers may receive for their work is set, effective 29 May 2024, at a maximum rate of EUR 604 per month (8% of the income limit for the assessment of contributions in general old-age pension insurance). The exact allowance will be agreed with the respective assignment location. In addition, volunteers may receive free accommodation, meals, work clothing, and transport subsidies as either monetary or in-kind compensation.

Social insurance contributions (state health insurance, long-term care insurance, state pension and unemployment insurance including contributions to the state accident insurance) shall be paid in their entirety by the assignment location, i.e., both the employer and employee components.

Important: Please note that payments from the Federal Volunteer Service may affect other benefits and/or claims.

Maternity protection

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

Pedagogical support

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

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

Supporting organisations

Assignment locations may instruct supporting organisations to take on tasks for them, such as pedagogical support.

Holiday

For a term of service that lasts at least 12 months, volunteers aged 18 and above have a right to at least 20 days of holiday. This figure assumes a distribution of regular weekly working hours across five days. The end result corresponds to a right to at least four weeks of holiday leave per year. If regular weekly working hours are distributed across more or fewer than five days, then the days of holiday leave shall be converted such that the end result corresponds to an entitlement to at least four weeks of holiday leave per year.

For youths under age 18 a right to longer holiday leave is granted under the Act on the Protection of Young People at Work.

Orphans' pension

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

Testimonial

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