

International Voluntary Service in Germany

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1 The Voluntary Service Program

1.1 Program description

This 12 month volunteer program of AFS Germany is a great opportunity to integrate into the local German culture, to get to know the German landscape of social and community work and the daily work life in a German organization.

At the same time you will contribute to the positive development of communities and people. Germany has a quite big social service system which provides care and support for all aspects of a person's life - from educational services, to medical care and support and to services in culture and arts. These services are carried out by a wide range of organizations and the people that work for them. Those people work for the community. In Germany the social service sector employs many thousands of volunteers each year who work fulltime for these organizations and are important colleagues in the team. For the organization it is a tremendous support of their work for rather little costs, which they could otherwise not get. For the volunteer it is often a year of professional orientation (to find out what to study or to work) and of making work experience.

The main component of this program is the work in a Community Project Organization (CPO or simpler "project"). It is accompanied by seminars to build up social and cultural competences and to reflect on the personal development.

All together this will be a complete intercultural experience with personal learning and a strong focus on a practical career step. The program focuses on the work life in Germany. Travel and tourist activities are not a priority and can take place during leisure-time.

1.2 Bundesfreiwilligendienst

AFS Germany will run this program in the frame of the "Bundesfreiwilligendienst" (translation: Federal Voluntary Service, the abbreviation is BFD).

In Germany there is a long tradition of voluntary service since the early 1960s. Today about 70.000 Germans each year serve in two major government funded programs (BFD is one of them). This means the organization receives support from the German ministry to cover part of the cost of employing a volunteer. Due to this long tradition and official character, the projects have a lot of experience in working with (German) volunteers and they are expecting high standards in terms of commitment and reliability. Most organizations receive one or more German volunteers each year, international volunteers are rather new to them so far.

The BFD is a contract of voluntary work in a social non-profit organization – this contract is signed between (1) the organization, (2) the volunteer and (3) the German ministry. AFS is the administering agency in this contract and will clear all details between the three of you.

You as volunteer on the German BFD will receive a visa rather easily. Further you will be registered to the German health care and social security system.

2 German work life of volunteers

You will jump into German work life! Depending on the CPO, this opportunity offers a wide range of possibilities for personal growth and development but will also be demanding.

Although volunteers are not employees in the legal sense the CPO does not regard you as someone who "comes in and helps a bit", but as full-time staff members who will be assigned certain duties and take over responsibilities for them.

The rules and regulations concerning working hours, vacations, and sick leave are clearly defined, e.g. when you call in sick, you will have to obtain a medical certificate from a doctor and hand it in. The projects are expecting the volunteers to respect these formalities like every other staff member. Absence from work without valid and timely excuse will not be tolerated by the project. You therefore should be prepared to responsibly engage in a professional environment.

The legal conditions defined by the BFD require you to work fulltime (i.e. 40 hours per week) with 26 days of vacation for the 12 month service. You will be expected to be on time, be reliable and take over certain tasks independently after a short introduction. Overtime work can occur when you have to work in shifts and during weekends and can be reduced through additional days off.

However any absence has to be clarified with the respective staff within the organization well ahead of time. You are not allowed to just take time off without prior notice.

Very often volunteers find themselves working as many hours and as hard as any normal employee in the organization. You will be regarded as a colleague at the same time the expectations towards your work performance are just as high.

3 Your profile

3.1 Living independently from family

You should be motivated to go abroad and be open for a completely new experience. New experiences will come on several levels at the same time: There will be a new culture with a new language in a totally new surrounding and in addition to that you will work 8 hours a day.

A few CPOs provide accommodation for their volunteers or give them enough pocket money to cover the rent of a private room in a shared flat. So chances are likely, that you will live on your own, where you will have to care for yourselves independently (cleaning, cooking, grocery shopping etc.). Should the CPO not offer accommodation you will live in an AFS - host family. Living in a family means to respect the house rules and to actively take part in family duties and free time activities.

3.2 Work qualifications

It is desirable that candidates have a proven interest and first experience in the working field. This can either be through (voluntary) work or internships in their home countries or through university studies for instance.

Candidates with a Bachelor or Masters Degree are especially welcome to apply. It will be a great chance for them to combine a year abroad with the opportunity to gather work experiences and learn about their future professional opportunities.

3.3 Language skills

Generally speaking, you are expected to quickly take an active role in the project and work independently. Therefore you must be able to communicate with the project staff from the beginning about matters concerning tasks and the work environment in general. Therefore CPOs require our candidates to have sufficient German skills on arrival. You are expected to understand the information conveyed in conversations and writings, write private and formal messages (letters and emails) and hold a simple conversation on a topic (report on something, react, give your opinion, make a suggestion, ask questions).

Without sufficient German language skills applicants cannot be accepted to this program.

To prove language skills we ask all candidates to conduct a skypeinterview with AFS Germany. Additionally you may hand in a language certificates you have acquired, e.g. at the Goethe Institute. You will also receive additional language classes in relation to your existing language skills.

4 Logistics and Program Procedures

4.1 Application

The application will be open only online through your national AFS-Organization: [Click here to find the AFS-partner in your country](#). Only complete applications will be accepted. The online application will ask for additional documents:

1. a motivation letter preferably in German explaining your general motivation and interest in working on a voluntary service; what you can contribute to the project and would like to learn
2. a curriculum vitae
3. a questionnaire regarding personal skills
4. a health certificate

Please check here for application deadlines: [International Voluntary Program in Germany](#)

4.2 Placement procedures

This program is based on an official contract between the Germany ministry, the volunteer and the CPO. Only this signed contract will guarantee your participation in the program which means that your volunteer year is only guaranteed in the moment we have found a CPO for you and send you the signed contract.

Since normally German Embassies ask for eight weeks to issue visa the deadlines until the contract should be signed are end of May for a start in August and end of December for a start in February.

4.3 Support and mentoring

The “Bundesfreiwilligendienst” prescribes 25 seminar days in Germany on which you will not have to work. Those seminars address the development of competences in work and social life. Those seminars are in German and attended by German volunteers too. Often the participants see the seminars as a nice change from the work they are doing.

Additionally you will have AFS-seminars which focus on your personal learning and the intercultural experience which you are going through. There will be a one-week Arrival Camp to introduce you to your life in Germany. Further there will be an End-of-Stay Camp in the end of your year to reflect upon your experiences and learning.

In your CPO you will have a contact person, who is a colleague or supervisor, that will support you in the workflow and who will give you directions on your job and tasks.

Besides this you will have an AFS-mentor who will support you and be your local contact person in all questions, problems and in your social life. AFS-Mentors have been abroad as volunteers with AFS too and are now keen to help someone who volunteers in Germany.

AFS staff in the office will also support you and we offer a 24/7 emergency support.

4.4 Health and personal liability insurance

Your registration in the social security and public health care system of Germany is mandatory for the Bundesfreiwilligendienst. This means you will have free and full access to public health care. As soon as you arrive in Germany, you will register with the health insurance and may go to see any doctor. In addition AFS Germany will provide private liability insurance to all participants.

4.5 Visa and resident permit

You will have to apply for a visa based on the Bundesfreiwilligendienst. AFS Germany will send the official BFD-contract signed by the German ministry together with an invitation letter to your AFS organization for you. This contract is the key document in the visa procedure.

The visa is not a work permit and you are not allowed to work in other places or take additional jobs. The visa is valid only for the time of your voluntary service.

4.6 End of stay travel

You can travel during your individual vacation period (max. 26 days). Once the BFD-contract has ended and you have completed working in your CPO you have to return to your home country. The visa is bound to the BFD-contract and cannot be prolonged.

5 Terms and Conditions

The price of the program is given by the AFS-organization in your country. Please contact your AFS-office to find out the program price for you. You can find the contact [here](#).

Fully covered through the program are:

- Project placement (finding CPOs and administering them)
- Accommodation
- Monthly pocket money (of 230 US\$ min.)
- Health- and liability insurance
- 30 camp / seminar - days
- Transport from and to airport and seminars
- Language course
- Ongoing local support as well as emergency service

These costs have to be covered by you, if not stated otherwise by the Sending AFS-Partner:

- Cost for visa application
- Medical checks and vaccination prior to departure
- International flights

You will receive a monthly pocket money from the CPO which varies from project to project but is at least around 230 US\$ per month. Keep in mind: Germany is expensive and costs for living are quite high. Therefore you may have further costs for transport, activities and others depending on your lifestyle.

For all further inquiries and question please contact your [national AFS organization](#).

We look forward to welcome you in Germany on a voluntary service!

AFS Germany

International Voluntary Service - Hosting Department

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