

Britz Refugee Support Group (fluechtlingshilfe@britzerinitiative.de)

Thirteen Steps on the way to your own apartment

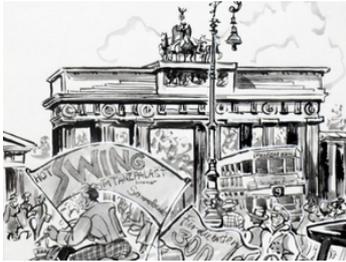
Notes on how to find an apartment



Britzer Flüchtlingshilfe (Hrsg.) c/o Jürgen Schulte, Rambowstr. 30, 12359 Berlin

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.

Attention: 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:



www.immobilienscout24.de
www.immowelt.de
www.wohnungssuche-berlin.net
www.immobilo.de
www.immobilien.de
www.immobilienmarkt.de
www.immonet.de
www.immopool.de
www.wohnfinder.de
www.gimmo.de
www.kalaydo.de

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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
www.howoge.de
www.degewo.de
www.bg-ideal.de

www.gesobau.de
www.gewobag.de
www.wbm.de

Attention: 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) à 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 mould? 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 the heating costs usually? 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 (Kautiion)
- 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 (Kautiion). 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 Mierverhältnisses)
- **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!

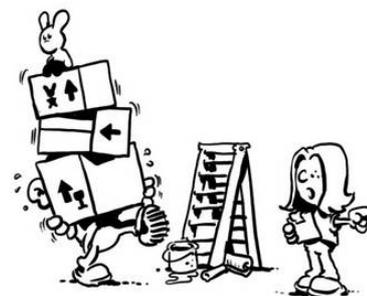
You've signed the rental agreement? Then apply immediately at the JobCenter or Social Welfare Office for an initial furnishing of the apartment. The initial furnishing includes pieces of furniture, curtains, mattresses, cooking utensils, dishes and, if non-existing in the apartment, a cooker, kitchen 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 conclusion, you already know at which date you can move in. Many times, apartments are empty even before the actual rental agreement starts. In these cases, ask the landlord if you can clean and furnish the apartment before moving in. Combine with friends and supporters a day on which they can help you. Remember that you might need a car or transporter 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!

Appendix 1

Table A (referring to § 4 Sentences 2 to 4) – Guide Values for appropriate monthly rent including heating (gross)

Size of household (Number of People)	Building space (square meters)	Fuel Oil	Natural Gas	Long Distance Heating
		Guide Value gross, incl. heating (monthly in €)	Guide Value gross, incl. heating (monthly in €)	Guide Value gross, incl. heating (monthly in €)
1	100-250	435,00	419,00	428,00
	251-500	432,00	415,00	426,00
	501-1000	429,00	413,00	423,00
	> 1000	427,00	411,00	421,00
2	100-250	522,00	503,00	514,00
	251-500	519,00	498,00	511,00
	501-1000	515,00	495,00	507,00
	> 1000	512,00	493,00	506,00
3	100-250	621,00	596,00	610,00
	251-500	616,00	591,00	606,00
	501-1000	611,00	587,00	602,00
	> 1000	608,00	584,00	600,00
4	100-250	703,00	675,00	692,00
	251-500	698,00	669,00	687,00
	501-1000	692,00	665,00	682,00
	> 1000	689,00	662,00	680,00
5	100-250	831,00	799,00	817,00
	251-500	825,00	792,00	812,00
	501-1000	818,00	787,00	807,00
	> 1000	814,00	783,00	804,00
For each additional Person	100-250	103,00	99,00	102,00
	251-500	102,00	98,00	101,00
	501-1000	102,00	98,00	100,00
	> 1000	101,00	97,00	100,00

Table B (referring to § 4 Sentence 4) – Monthly additions to Guide Values for hot water supply (€)

Size of household (Number of People)	Monthly additions to Guide Values for hot water supply (€)	Size of household (Number of People)	Monthly additions to Guide Values for hot water supply (€)
1 Person	10,00	4 Persons	18,00
2 Persons	12,00	5 Persons	20,00
3 Persons	16,00	Each additional person	3,00

Appendix 2

Check list for inspecting the apartment

GENERAL ADVICE

Always visit the apartment at day light! Only then you can see any particularities or shortcomings. Four eyes always see more: If possible, visit the apartment with someone you trust. Avoid visiting the apartment on holidays or Sundays. Shortcomings such as noisy traffic will not be audible on these days, but may be important for permanent living.

LIVING ENVIRONMENT

How is the location and environment of the apartment (neighbourhood, social environment)?	
Does the infrastructure (public transport, shopping facilities, schools, church, kindergarten etc.) satisfy your needs?	
Pay attention to sources of noise (railway, industry, sport facilities, traffic noise etc)	
Are there enough parking opportunities?	

HOUSE/ APARTMENT

In which condition is the house (front, roof, windows, doors and staircase)?	
Pay special attention to mould, water spots and wet parts.	
Ask about the shortcomings and photograph them.	
Ask why the former tenant moved out.	
Check if you can hear noise from the neighbouring apartment.	
Are there playgrounds for children (court, garden, playgrounds)? Check their condition and opening hours.	
Are pets allowed?	
What is the actual size of the apartment? (Take a measuring tape with you!)	
Is the apartment sunny or shady? (Number of windows and apartments location determine how much light comes in)	
Check the condition of doors and floor.	
Which quality do the windows have (glass, frames)?	
Open and close the windows! Check if windows open easily and if they are water-resistant!	
Are there enough electrical outlets?	
Check the condition of sanitary facilities (open water taps, flush the toilet, open and close stopcocks. Check if there are any damages in the sink etc.)	
Is there enough space for a washing machine and dryer?	
How is the apartment heated? (Floor-, central or distance heating, gas, oil, night storage heating etc.)	
Do you have to pay any compensation for furniture etc. to the previous tenant?	
Check with the landlord, in which condition and with which facilities the apartment will be handed over and add relevant commitments to the contract.	
Don't do any oral agreements!	
If possible: Have a look at the calculation of running costs.	

Appendix 3

Application for initial furnishing

First name, name
 Haarlem Str. 89
 12359 Berlin
 Customer N°:



JobCenter
 Road
 Zip Code Berlin

Berlin,

Application for initial furnishing of the apartment (*apartment address*) in accordance with § 24 SGB II

Dear Sir or Madam,

I apply for the inventory listed below, in accordance with § 24 SGB II paragraph 3 sentence 1 No. 1 SGB II, which I need for the initial furnishing of the apartment mentioned above. I apply for the following pieces of furniture:

Item	Required furniture (please mark with X)	Number of necessary household furniture
Bedroom		
Bed (plus duckboard)		
Springmattress		
Complete bed for a baby		
Wardrobe		
Pillow		
Blanket		
Lamp		
Living room		
Cabinet / Sideboard / Shelving		
Couch or 2 chairs		
Couch table		
Dining table		
Dining table (extendable) – 5 people		
2 upholstered chairs		
Lamp		
Kitchen		
Kitchen furniture		
Sink cabinet		
Electric boiler (unless included in rented property)		

Siphon (unless included in rented property)		
1 hand mixer (unless included in rented property)		
Refrigerator (unless included in rented property)		
Electric or gas stove (unless included in rented property)		
Installation of electric or gas stove (unless included in rented property)		
Kitchen table		
Kitchen chair		
Lamp		

Bathroom + Hallway

Washing machine 1200 / rps (unless included in rented property)		
Laundry rack		
Mirror		
Lamp for bathroom / hallway		

Children's Room (applies only for school children)

Desk		
Desk chair		
Desk lamp		

Household items / linen

Vacuum Cleaner		
Cleaning utensils (broom, hand brush, bucket, mop, etc.)		
Electric iron		
Ironing board		
Curtains / Curtain rods		
Bed linen		
Desk / hand/ bath and tea towels		
Small household items (dishes, pots, utensils, etc.)		
Tool kit (hammer, pliers, screwdrivers, nails, screws, dowels, etc.)		

Towels, sheets and the like are classified as one-off grants for the household. When approving a block grant, please note that according to § 24 para. 1 SGB II it must meet all needs.

Please send back a written justified decision in accordance with §§ 33/35 SGB X or §§ 37/39 Administrative Procedure Act stating the approval basis, as well as all individually granted sums. Please take this request on file.

With best regards

Signature