



# Information Sheet

## for performing the Federal Volunteer Service

Last updated: January 2024

### Conclusion of an agreement

The German government (Federal Office of Family Affairs and Civil Society Functions) and the person supplying voluntary services shall upon mutual proposal by the person supplying voluntary services and an assignment location approved for the Federal Volunteer Service conclude a written agreement prior to the start of Federal Volunteer Service. The mutual rights and obligations shall result both from the German 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 serving on the Federal Volunteer Service programme at that assignment location.**

### Age

The Federal Volunteer Service is open to people of any age after the completion of fulltime 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 German workplace protection laws, the Act on the Protection of Young People at Work (Jugendarbeitsschutzgesetz) and the Federal Holidays Act (Bundesurlaubsgesetz) apply mutatis mutandis to work in the Federal Volunteer Service.

### Foreign volunteers

People from foreign countries 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 subsistence is secure, Section 5 (1) No. 1 of the German Residence Act (Aufenthaltsgesetz). According to Section 2 (3) of the Residence Act this is the case if a people from foreign countries are 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 (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. Apart from 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.

People from foreign countries with temporary suspension of deportation status (§ 60 a Aufenthaltsgesetz - AufentG) can participate in the Federal Volunteer Service if they have a corresponding work permit issued by the responsible Aliens Registration Office.

### **Advice**

The Advisory Team is employed in the field by the Federal Agency. The contact persons of the Advisory Team and are available to all participants.

### **Taxation in the Federal Volunteer Service**

The allowance paid in the Federal Volunteer Service is tax-free (Section 3 (5) (d) in conjunction with Section 32 (2) Sentence 1 No. 2 (d) of the Income Tax Act -ESTG). If, in addition to the allowance, benefits in kind such as board and lodging or corresponding benefits in kind are granted, these are subject to taxation. Clarification in individual cases can only be made by the responsible tax office.

### **Data protection**

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

### **Term**

The 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 if each period is of at least six months' duration, 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 28th birthday.

If a volunteer has already performed a Voluntary Year of Social Service [FSJ]/Voluntary Year of Ecological Service [FÖJ] in accordance with the Youth Voluntary Services Act [Jugendfreiwilligendienstgesetz], then this time shall be included in the total duration.

Furthermore, at least five years must pass between the performance of one or more 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**

The 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 oldage 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 environment protection and education in sustainability.

### **Deployment time**

This depends on the working hours of the particular deployment location. Federal Volunteer Service generally involves all-day service.

Parttime Federal Volunteer Service of more than 20 hours a week is also possible for volunteers over 27 years of age.

If a legitimate interest exists, volunteers under 27 can perform part-time Federal Volunteer Service for more than 20 hours a week. For example, a legitimate interest exists if volunteers

- have to look after a child or relatives,
- have health problems and cannot perform the regular daily or weekly deployment time,
- are taking part in educational and qualification courses, including participation in an integration course according to the Residence Act, which collide with full-time Federal Volunteer Service or
- for comparable serious reasons cannot perform any full-time Federal Volunteer Service.

The volunteer must clarify with the particular deployment location whether the part-time Federal Volunteer Service can be performed. The weekly deployment time for part-time Federal Volunteer Service for volunteers under 27 should correspond to the maximum personal deployment time. As a result, part-time Federal Volunteer Service at a facility where a part-time training is already being completed, for example, is not possible. Normally, the same will apply to the parallel minor employment at the same deployment location. No legal claim to part-time Federal Volunteer Service exists.

In the case of adolescents under 18, the protection regulations of the Youth Employment Protection Act 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. A release from service for the purposes of undertaking an internship will always be without remuneration.

### **Certificate of good conduct**

Volunteers in the Federal Volunteer Service (as with the Voluntary Year of Social Service [FSJ]/Voluntary Year of Ecological Service [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.

### **Child benefit**

Parents whose children are under the age of 25 and are serving on the 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 payments in kind shall usually continue to be paid for up to six weeks. Thereafter, volunteers will usually receive sickness benefit from their statutory health insurance. This does not apply to volunteers who receive a full old-age pension, as they are generally not entitled to sickness benefit.

### **Health insurance**

Volunteers in the 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.

Exempt from compulsory insurance are, for example, civil servants, judges, short-term members of the armed forces and pensioners who are eligible for financial aid in the event of illness according to provisions and principles applicable to the civil service (Section 6 (1) Nos. 2 and 6 of the German Code of Social Law V (SGB V). However, exemption from compulsory insurance does not extend to relatives who are eligible under these financial aid provisions; i.e. for example children of civil servants are subject to compulsory insurance with the statutory health insurance scheme for the term of the Volunteer Service.

Likewise exempt from compulsory insurance are persons over 55 years of age if they have not been statutorily insured in the last five years and were exempt or released from compulsory insurance or in full-time self-employment for at least half of this time (Section 6 (3a) SGB V).

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 serves on the Federal Volunteer Service is therefore subject to compulsory insurance pursuant to Section 5 (1) No. 1 SGB V.

Additional information on compulsory insurance with a statutory health insurance scheme is available on the web site 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, 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 currently (2024) set at a maximum rate of EUR 453 per month (6% 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 board, lodging and work clothing, or corresponding monetary compensation instead of board, lodging and work clothing. Details on this shall likewise be agreed with the respective assignment location.

Social insurance contributions (state health insurance, long-term care insurance, state pension and unemployment insurance including contributions to the state accident insurance) shall likewise be paid by the assignment location.

### **Important**

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

#### **Citizen's Allowance (Bürgergeld)**

Since 1 January 2023, the benefits covering basic living expenses for long-term jobseekers – the so-called Unemployment Benefit II (Arbeitslosengeld II) – has been replaced by the Citizen's Allowance (Bürgergeld).

Recipients of Citizen's Allowance may generally participate in the Federal Volunteer Service, as the receipt of Citizen's Allowance - even for jobseekers - does not exclude participation.

In the case of receipt of Citizen's Allowance, the allowance for the voluntary service is generally to be regarded as income and taken into account in accordance with Section 11 (1) of the Second Book of the Social Security Code (SGB II). Board and lodging or corresponding benefits in kind are - as before - fully taken into account as personal income.

From 1 July 2023, the following is exempt from offsetting

- for volunteers up to the age of 25, an amount of 520 euros per month
- for volunteers from the age of 25, an amount of 250 euros per month.

If, in addition to the income from the voluntary service, further income is earned from gainful employment (e.g. mini-job), this increased allowance also applies. As usual, a further allowance is then granted on top of the gross income from gainful employment above 100 euros up to an income of 1,200 euros (up to 1,500 euros for benefit recipients with at least one child). If the necessary expenses associated with earning the allowance and the income from gainful employment exceed the basic deduction of 250 or 520 euros, the higher amount is deducted.

Participation in a Federal Volunteer Service (as with the FSJ/FÖJ) is considered an important personal reason constituting an obstacle to working (cf. Section 10 (1) No. 5 SGB II). Recipients of Citizen's Allowance are not obliged to take up employment during for the duration of their work in these voluntary services.

Recipients of benefits for the elderly, benefits for persons with reduced earning capacity, and social welfare subsistence allowance, in accordance with the Twelfth Book of the Social Security Code (Zwölftes Buch Sozialgesetzbuch, SGB XII) can take part in the German Federal Volunteer Service (Bundesfreiwilligendienst, BFD) and 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 is deemed, amongst others, as any allowance granted within the framework of the BFD as well as benefits in kind (board and lodging) or payments made in lieu of such benefits in kind.

An allowance amount of up to EUR 250 per month is exempt from deduction from benefits payments in the case of the BFD (as well as the FSJ/FÖJ).

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.

- Additional earnings limits when claiming early retirement and reduced earning capacity  
As of 1 January 2023, the supplementary income limits for early old-age pensions will no longer apply and any limit on supplementary income that results in a reduction of the pension will be removed. This puts early old-age pensions on a par with pensions received after reaching the standard retirement age, as there have always been no restrictions on supplementary income for these pensions.
- In the case of pensions for persons with reduced earning capacity, supplementary income limits must still be observed. In 2023, additional earnings of up to €17,823.75 per calendar year will not be offset for a pension received due to fully reduced earning capacity. In the case of a pension received due to a partial reduction in earning capacity, an individual supplementary income limit applies, but at least €35,647.50 per calendar year in 2023 is exempt from offsetting. If the calendar year's additional earnings exceed the relevant supplementary income limit, 40% of the excess is offset against the pension. However, this is only likely to occur regularly if additional income is earned in addition to the voluntary service. Supplementary income includes all income from employment, irrespective of the form in which it is earned. This means that the allowance earned from the Federal Volunteer Service as well as free board, lodging and work clothing must be taken into account as supplementary income at the respective benefit in kind value laid down by the Social Security Remuneration Ordinance.
- Anyone interested in taking up a voluntary service should contact their pension insurance provider in advance. The pension insurance provider must always check whether you are still disabled and therefore still entitled to a pension if you do voluntary service for a certain period of time.

### **Maternity protection**

The German Maternity Protection Act (Mutterschutzgesetz) applies to the 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 the 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 the 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 over 27 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**

The provisions of the Federal Holidays Act (Bundesurlaubsgesetz) apply mutatis mutandis to holidays during the Federal Volunteer Service. In the case of volunteers of full age on a term of twelve months' service this results in an entitlement to at least 24 working days' holiday (working days are deemed all calendar days which are not Sundays or public holidays). For young people under 18 years of age an increased holiday entitlement applies in accordance with the Act on the Protection of Young People at Work (Jugendarbeitsschutzgesetz).

Details with regard to the extent of holidays will be agreed with the respective assignment location.

### **Orphans' pension**

Orphans' pension after reaching the age of 18 will upon application be paid if the orphan is serving either on the Federal Volunteer Service pursuant to the German 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 German Social Code VI (Sozialgesetzbuch VI)).

### **Testimonial**

Upon termination of voluntary service the person supplying the voluntary service 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 person supplying the voluntary service after termination of service.