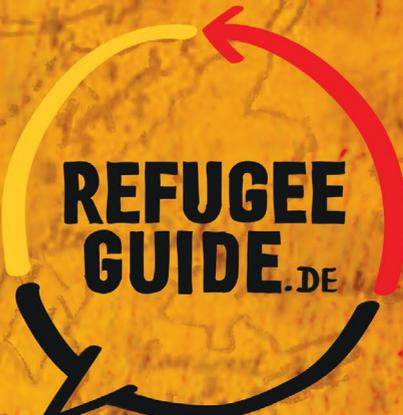


# A Guide for Orientation and Communication in Germany



**REFUGEE  
GUIDE**.DE



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Germany!

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Welcome to Germany! This guide aims to provide information about the country you now find yourself in. It has been designed in response to common questions of refugees. Much of the advice in this little book should not be seen as a law or a strict rule. People in Germany will not always act according to this guide. However, most of the behavior described below is common practice for most of the people, most of the time.



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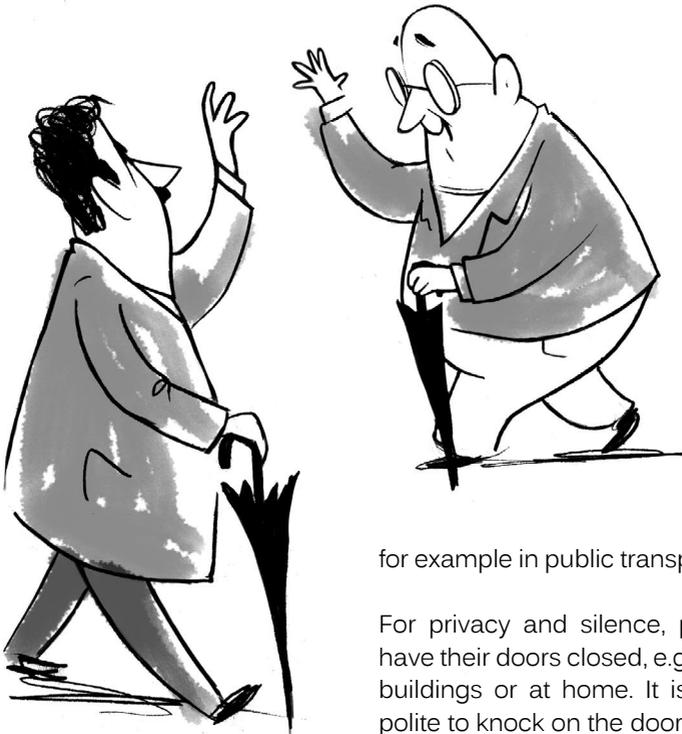
# Public Life

“Guten Tag” (Good day) and “Auf Wiedersehen” (Good bye) are common greetings.

Greeting everybody is particularly common where you meet only one or a few people. For example when entering small shops or doctors' waiting rooms with “Guten Tag”, one greets the people who are already there as a whole group. In the same way you can greet people on the road in villages and remote areas.

Smiling in public is not usually considered flirting, even when you are talking with a stranger. People normally just try to be friendly and welcoming when smiling.

People in Germany value their personal space and their privacy, which can appear distant at times. It is completely common to sit next to a stranger in a train or in the restaurant for hours with only saying hello and goodbye. As well, many people prefer to sit on their own,



for example in public transport.

For privacy and silence, people often have their doors closed, e.g. in big office buildings or at home. It is considered polite to knock on the door before entering and usually you will be welcome

and asked in.

Sunday is a quiet day. Almost all shops are closed and only few people work. Neighbors might complain if your noise disturbs their resting day, e.g. if you mow the lawn or put a new shelf on the wall. Likewise, people in Germany expect silence during sleeping time which is between 22 o'clock (10 pm) and 7 o'clock in the morning (7 am).

Peeing in public can be an offense. Public restrooms are available in a lot of places. Restrooms are usually equipped with toilet paper, but not with mini-water showers. It is perfectly safe to throw toilet paper into the lavatory, not into the garbage bin. However, this doesn't apply to sanitary pads or tampons. Use the brush to erase any possible stains. Make sure to leave the restroom clean and dry. Therefore, it is advisable to use the toilet in a sitting position. Where no urinal is available, this applies for men, too. Moreover, washing your hands before leaving the bathroom is a hygienic standard.

In public, particularly in public transportation, it is considered rude to have lengthy and loud conversations. Conversations and phone calls are rather low pitched.

In public transportation there are seats and places reserved for the elderly, sick, and pregnant - and some for buggies

and wheelchairs. People usually try to leave these places free or move aside if they are needed.

On escalators, people usually stand on the right side and walk on the left side.

If you need help, feel free to ask any adult person: People are usually friendly. It is advisable not to approach children without permission from their parents.

# Personal freedom

Everybody can confess to and practice his or her own religion - or no religion at all. Religion is considered a private matter. So you are free to believe whatever you like, but you are also expected to accept that other people believe in another God or nothing at all.

Sauna areas and few swimming spots are "textile free". Otherwise people wear swimwear in public pools. Usually there is no gender separation in swimming pools and saunas either, although sometimes special times are reserved for males/females only.

Opinions and debates in Germany are rather oriented towards compromising than polarizing. The press enjoys a special kind of freedom, the freedom of the press. This is guaranteed by law. The press addresses a wide range of topics, including criticism of the government and societal institutions (such as churches). "Freedom of speech" allows you to speak your mind - as long as no one is discriminated, deeply insulted or threatened.

Public displays of affection among (same or different sex) couples are common. It includes holding hands and sometimes kissing or cuddling in public places. This is commonly accepted behavior and should be ignored when passing by.

Partial nudity is common and normal, for example wearing t-shirts and shorts or short skirts. Staring at other people is considered impolite.



# C ommunity Life

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People in Germany do a lot of handshaking, and they like to do so both when arriving and when departing, and when meeting new people. It is common for a person who is joining a group to have a firm handshake with every single individual. The handshake is accompanied by a straight look in the other person's eyes. The handshake is common for all people in the group - male and female.



When welcoming friends it is very common for people to hug, and in some regions of Germany, to kiss the cheeks, mostly the opposite gender on the cheeks. This is understood in a friendly non-sexual way.

People often say exactly what they think. They do not want to be impolite but honest. (Constructive) criticism is considered a central part in improving oneself and others, particularly in work life. So being criticized or criticizing someone is not uncommon.

Punctuality is important. If you are late for an appointment or for meeting people, 5 minutes can already be seen as a lack of respect because you keep the other person waiting. If you are late, call the person and inform them about your delay. This is usual for both work and private occasions, such as visiting friends.

If you are offered something, "nein, danke" (no, thanks) is a polite "no", and "bitte" or "gerne" means "yes".

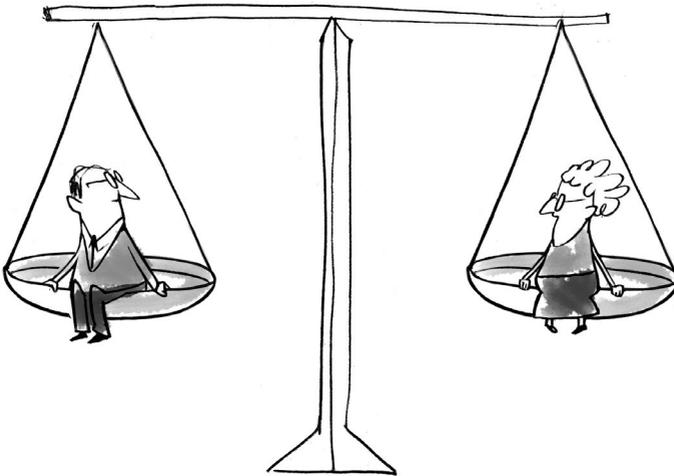
# Equality

Discrimination based on gender, race, religion or sexual orientation is illegal and can be prosecuted. If you feel discriminated, or threatened, even if only verbally: call the police. Violence is never an acceptable response to any type of comment, be it insulting, discriminating or threatening. Moreover, violence is illegal in Germany.

Men and women are equals and enjoy exactly the same rights. If anybody asks you to leave her or him alone, you should absolutely accept this: harassing other people, both men and women is forbidden. Ask permission before taking a picture of another person.

Homosexuality is seen as normal in Germany. For example a previous foreign minister was openly gay. Homosexual couples can also register a legal partnership.

People may freely choose whom they want to marry and whether they want to marry at all. It is completely normal to remain unmarried, have unmarried parents or not to have or want any children.



# E nvironment and Ecology

People in Germany are well known for their environmentally friendly behavior: they separate garbage and try to recycle a lot. They do not like litter on the ground. This is true both in the city, and in nature, for example in parks, next to roads and in the woods. It is quite common for garbage to be kept and thrown into the nearest waste bin, even if this means carrying the waste until they reach a waste bin. Typically there will be waste bins in public spaces, including train stations, bus stops, parks etc.

Lots of people in Germany try to limit their use of energy and resources. This is done for environmental protection but also to save money. For example, people try to not leave the refrigerator open for too long (at home or in the supermarket). People usually also switch off the lights when leaving the room.

Closed windows usually seal tightly. Hence, it might be necessary for ventilation to open the windows from time to time. To save energy, turn off the heating while the windows are open.

Many bottles have a small deposit (between 8 and 25 Cent) that will be refunded when you return the bottle. You can return them to any supermarket selling them, not only the supermarket where you bought it. This is meant to



help the environment by recycling and re-using bottles and producing less garbage.

# Food, Drinks, and Smoking

Drinking water from the tap is perfectly safe. Tap water is strictly supervised in Germany and free of risks. There are only few exceptions to this rule, for example on public places or in trains, which are specifically labeled: “Kein Trinkwasser” (no drinking water).



In Germany you will find a variety of meals which might include pork, beef or chicken. You can always ask which meat is included in a meal if you do not want to eat a particular type. Traditionally Germans eat a lot of pork.

You might find a lot of places which offer Döner, simply kebab meat in a bread roll. It comes either with chicken,

veal or lamb meat. Döner, like other fast food (pizza, burgers, fries etc.) is usually eaten without cutlery. However, cutlery is usually used when eating at the table.

A lot of German sweets contain gelatin made from pork, so if you want to make sure that a sweet is halal, buy the ones that say “vegetarian” on the label or check the list of ingredients for

“Gelatine”.

Germany has a variety of cheap discounters (for example ALDI, LIDL, and Penny) and more expensive supermarkets (for example REWE and EDEKA) that offer everything that people need for their living. Besides, there are also farmers' markets, and small supermarkets, including Turkish, African, Asian or Greek supermarkets. If you only eat halal meat and sweets you will most likely find them in the Turkish or Arabic supermarkets (or restaurants). Unlike supermarkets, some petrol stations are open 24h a day and often sell groceries, but they are very expensive in comparison.

Alcohol, mostly beer and wine, is considered a common part of social events in the evening, such as during dinner or hanging out. Nevertheless, it is completely accepted to not drink alcohol and many Germans do not drink any alcohol at all. If you are offered an alcoholic drink, you can always decline it with a “nein, danke”. Driving after you have consumed alcohol is forbidden.

Smoking is common in many public spaces, both for men and women. In restaurants and at train stations there are designated “smoking areas”. It is generally considered more polite to go outside or on the balcony for smoking.

Smoking next to non-smokers, children or pregnant women is considered to be rude.

# Formalities



Shops and (official) offices open and close on time. If for example the opening hours (“Öffnungszeiten”) end at 16 o’clock (4 pm), it is advisable to be there at 15.55 (3.55 pm), because at 16.01 (4.01 pm) you might already face a shut door. The same is true for trains, buses etc. and their departure times.

Dealing with bureaucracy is sometimes quite complex and can seem to be inefficient. It takes time and follows standardized procedures. This can be frustrating. However, this bureaucratic procedure is the same for everybody and it is designed to be fair. Offering or accepting bribes is a crime.

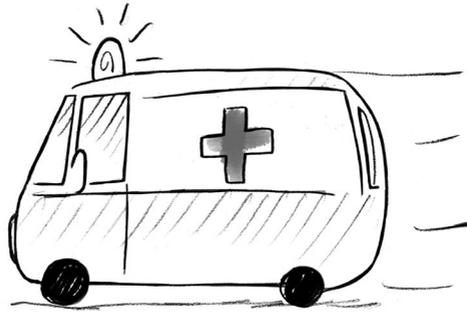
People in Germany mostly stick to the traffic rules. They obey signs and stop at red traffic lights even if nobody is in sight. If there is no sign or traffic light: the person coming from the right has the right of way ("rechts vor links").

Separate paths or lanes are designated for bicycles, particularly in cities. Texting and talking on the phone while driving is forbidden. When travelling by car, all passengers are required to fasten their seatbelts. In the car, children must use a special seat appropriate for their size.

Telephone calls are usually received during office hours. That means until 4 or 5 o'clock in the afternoon. Private calls are usually not received after 9 or 10 in the evening. When calling, identify yourself by stating your name first.

When using public transport, it is necessary to buy a ticket beforehand. You can buy those tickets at service points or ticket machines. When entering trams, busses or city trains, you sometimes have to validate that ticket for your ride (in some cities, like Berlin or Munich). The procedure and types of ticket available can vary between regions and cities.

## In Case of Emergency



Always try to help other people that are in danger. Never look away, you can always do something. Everybody is required to help a person in danger, for example by providing first aid and calling emergency services (see below).

In case of conflicts, theft, or sexual harassment: call the police (dial 110 on any phone). Police officers are generally friendly and there to help you and will take every call seriously.

In case of fire or medical emergencies: call the fire brigade (dial 112 on any phone). This hotline should be used only for (life-threatening) emergencies. The same is true for emergency rooms in hospitals.

To see a doctor, refugees have to consult the social security office first. Doctors' offices are usually open from 8 o'clock in the morning until 12 o'clock

and sometimes in the afternoon, too. Most doctors speak English.

If you need medication in the evening, Sundays or on holidays, you can visit a standby pharmacy ("Not-Apotheke"). To find out which pharmacy is on standby duty, use google or dial 22 8 33 (max. 69 Cent/Min.) from a mobile phone. The nearest standby pharmacy is also posted on the doors of all other pharmacies.

# About

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This guide is meant for visitors to Germany, refugees and future citizens. Its aim is to give orientation at the very beginning of their stay in Germany. With regard to refugees, this guide aims to provide useful information in times when they cannot yet participate in the integration courses and German classes offered by the government. As of September 2015, the BAMF (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge) does not provide any guide for this purpose.

The guide is available in different languages with illustrations where possible. It is available online with the option of printing it for distribution. A printed booklet may become available at a later date.

The sole purpose of this guide is to provide useful information. However, it is understood that this guide could also be perceived as arrogant or pejorative. This possible interpretation is constantly and critically reflected in this project.

The concept and the content of this guide has been designed and compiled with the support of many people (people from e.g. Syria, Afghanistan, Sudan, Egypt, Palestine; people who recently immigrated to Germany;

people who are currently refugees etc.). It was of utmost importance to involve refugees in designing this guide. When discussing this project with refugees, it was particularly debated if such a guide would be perceived as conveying an arrogant or pejorative attitude. The refugees explicitly alleviated this concern and to the contrary, they asked for information like this.

