

What expectations will volunteers have of me?

The cultural values surrounding time are less flexible in Germany than they are in other countries. This means that punctuality and reliability are important to the majority of volunteers. If you have an appointment and something comes up and you can't make it, or if you change your mind after a consultation, the volunteer will expect you to inform them of this in good time.

If you don't want the support any more, or if you would like something else, or if you have a problem with a certain type of behaviour, you are expected to say so. The majority of people in Germany don't find this impolite, in fact, they find it honest and a sign of trust. Volunteers are not allowed to accept money or gifts of high value from you for their commitment. However, they will be very happy if you just say thank you. There are several reasons why a volunteer might stop working with you. You shouldn't take this personally.

What organisations are there?

Volunteers work in charitable organisations in Germany. The large organisations are welfare associations. One of these is Diakonie, the evangelical church's social service. You can find more information on Diakonie consultation centres at:

www.diakonie.de/Broschuere_Migration-2015.pdf

In most federal states (Bundesländer), welfare organisations have professional asylum consultation centres and sometimes they also have accommodation facilities. However, several volunteers also work there and they offer several smaller projects to support refugees. Furthermore, there are initiatives and projects which are not part of large organisations. Many of these initiatives are called "Welcome Initiatives" (Willkommensinitiative). Here, people will spontaneously come together to provide help. There are also individual people who offer help.

Contact and Information

Diakonie Deutschland – Evangelischer Bundesverband
Evangelisches Werk für Diakonie und Entwicklung e. V.
Caroline-Michaelis-Straße 1
10115 Berlin

Responsible

Lorenz Hoffmann
Coordination, qualification and promotion
of voluntary assistance for refugees
Center for migration and social issues

Information

Mirjam Appel
Phone: +49 30 652 11-1975
Fax: +49 30 652 11-3975
mirjam.appel@diakonie.de
www.diakonie.de

Promoted by:



What are volunteers / voluntary workers?

Social welfare work for human beings	Information
December 2016	

What are volunteers / voluntary workers?

In Germany, the state is tasked with providing certain services for refugees. These include accommodation and food, or money to allow you to look after yourself. The state is also responsible for the social care of those they are housing, basic medical care and the asylum seeking process, if this process is taking place in Germany. In the asylum seeking process, it is settled whether or not you may receive protection and remain in Germany.

There are not enough social workers who are employed to work with refugees. For instance, in the majority of residences, there is only one social worker for 120 people, maybe even more. They alone cannot do everything needed to be done. For the majority of refugees, there are no German courses and few opportunities for them to get to know their new surroundings and to have a social life. Translation is rarely funded.

People will often help out of solidarity or a willingness to do so. These people are called volunteers or voluntary workers. They do not earn any money and work in their free time. Some of them have sought refuge themselves or their parents did a long time ago. People help out for many different reasons. Just ask!

What do volunteers do?

For example, they help refugees to learn German or they accompany them to the doctor's or to state offices. They help them to understand letters or put together applications and to find an asylum consultancy centre or lawyer. Others provide support with looking for a place of residence or work, or help children with their homework and organise meetings with locals. For example, there are also lots of cultural and sports activities arranged by associations. In addition to this, many migrants who have already been living in Germany for some time work as volunteers. They provide assistance with their linguistic knowledge, e.g. by often acting as interpreters.

In general, volunteers do not have any professional experience as social workers but work in a variety of different professional fields. A lot of things are new to them too: they cannot replace a teacher, lawyer or doctor or provide legal advice. They can however tell you about daily life in Germany and where you can go if you need to speak to an expert. They can accompany you to the state offices, thereby providing you with more assurance. That means that you don't have to do everything on your own. But the responsibility is always fundamentally yours. Volunteers can support you, but should not act on your behalf. If, for example, a volunteer accompanies you to a hearing in your asylum seeking process, you have to explain yourself how and why you have fled; the volunteer cannot do this for you. This is your concern and you should seek advice from experts. Only by doing so will you be able to make good decisions. In addition, please note: personal documents or official letters should not leave your possession, so it is good to make copies. These copies can be given to volunteers in order to allow them to make a phone call to a state office on your behalf, for example.

Volunteers can provide you with information which is difficult to find. However, a lot of the time, the legal conditions are so strict that volunteers are limited in how they can assist you, e.g. with searching for a place of work or residence. You should always discuss questions surrounding residence or asylum, i.e. whether you can receive protection and can stay in Germany, with experts.

What can you request?

You cannot request services from volunteers as you can from those who are paid for the work they do. That also means that no one can promise or guarantee that there will be enough volunteers for everyone. However, even though volunteers are not paid for their work, you can expect that these volunteers will adhere to the arrangements.

The majority of volunteers have jobs and many of them have families. Their time is limited. It is good to ask how much time they will actually have to support you.

Volunteers are not supposed to pass on anything you tell them about yourself or other refugees. Nevertheless, this does happen a lot. Only things you tell professional consultants and lawyers are guaranteed to not be passed on any further as this is part of their job.

Before volunteers do anything for you, they have to ask you whether you agree that they do so. You should seek support if you get into conflict with a volunteer, particularly if you have difficulties expressing yourself. Perhaps you can resolve the conflict between you? You can also stop using the help services or cut off contact altogether, even if you have been grateful for the help in the past. However, if this is the case, it is good to give a reason for doing so.