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The support system for people with disabilities

Information for refugees with disabilities and their families from the project **Empowerment Now** and the group **Now! Nicht Ohne das Wir**



What are my rights in Germany?

Many refugees with disabilities and their families face significant challenges when they arrive in Germany: How can they get support and help? They have many questions about the support system in Germany. They also want to know what rights they have to support and assistance. But often they cannot find information in their own language.

That's why there are now six brochures with information in nine languages. We inform you about your rights to support and the different types of support available. And we answer questions about the support system in Germany. "What information would I have wanted when I arrived in Germany?" This question was important to us when we wrote up the information.

You are not alone!

There are many counselling centres in Germany. You can get advice there. Always seek support!

Why should I go to a counselling centre?

Counselling centres can help you apply for support services or if your application is refused. After receiving advice, you will better understand your needs and options, and get the right support services.

Counselling centres

[Supplementary Independent Participation Counselling Centre \(Ergänzende unabhängige Teilhabeberatung, EUTB\)](#)

[Migration Counselling Centres of Welfare Associations \(Migrationsberatungsstellen der Wohlfahrtsverbände\)](#)

For questions about health care, medical rehabilitation and care, you can contact the [Independent Patient Counselling Centre Germany \(Unabhängige Patientenberatung Deutschland, UPD\)](#).

You can also contact disability associations, the Social Welfare Office (Sozialamt), the Employment Agency (Agentur für Arbeit) or the Integration Office (Integrationsamt). They are often close to you.

There are even more counselling services in many federal states. It's best to get information at your place of residence.

The support system for people with disabilities

In Germany, people with disabilities can rely on the support system. Refugees with disabilities and their families also receive support from the state when they arrive in Germany. They can turn to the support system and receive help.

The support system consists of services, facilities and benefits. It helps people with disabilities of all ages and in different situations to lead as independent life as possible. The support system enables people with disabilities to participate in all areas of life.

What support services does the support system offer to people with disabilities? How do they differ from social services? What are aids and what are medical treatments? How can you get your disability recognised? And what do the letters on your disability card mean? This booklet provides answers to these questions.

What help can I get from the support system?

In Germany, there are benefits for participation. There are also social benefits, such as social assistance. The difference between the two is that the benefits are designed for different purposes and target groups.

What are participation benefits?

They enable people with disabilities to take part in social life. These benefits put people with disabilities on an equal footing with people without disabilities, i.e., they can take part in everything in the same way as people without disabilities. This is called participation.

Participation benefits include assistance, aids, home adaptations and medical rehabilitation.

What are social benefits?

For example, social assistance, housing benefit or child benefit. Everyone, including people without disabilities, can apply for social benefits. However, certain conditions have to be met. Social benefits are provided to people with very low income and assets. There are also social benefits that do not depend on income. For example, all families receive child benefit regardless of their income.

The aim of both participation and social benefits is: to support people and improve their quality of life.

What are participation benefits for?

Among other things, for rehabilitation and participation. People with disabilities should get the help and support they need.

And what is integration assistance?

Participation benefits are part of integration assistance. Integration assistance (Eingliederungshilfe) includes legal provisions for people with disabilities, which are set out in Book IX of the Social Code (Sozialgesetzbuch). It consists of various groups of benefits. For example:

Medical rehabilitation

For example, medical treatment, psychotherapy, physiotherapy, occupational therapy and the provision of aids.

Participation in working life

For example, vocational rehabilitation, workplace adjustments, technical aids.

Participation in education

For example, school support, technical aids, further training

Social participation

For example, assistance services, mobility aids, home adaptations

Am I entitled to integration assistance (Eingliederungshilfe)?

This depends on your residence status. Some people have a residence title (Aufenthaltstitel), i.e., they are recognised as refugees, asylum seekers or beneficiaries of subsidiary protection. They are entitled to integration assistance.

Persons with a residence permit under Section 24 of the Residence Act (Aufenthaltsgesetz) are also entitled to integration assistance

If you are applying for asylum or have a tolerance (Duldung) permit and have been in Germany for less than 36 months, you are not automatically entitled to integration assistance. However, you can sometimes receive integration assistance benefits under the Asylum Seekers Benefits Act (Asylbewerberleistungsgesetz): **discretionary benefits (Ermessensleistung)**. The office authorises integration assistance benefits at its own discretion if

- they are medically necessary or contribute to safeguarding health,
- special needs of children must be met.

After 36 months, asylum applicants and persons with a tolerance (Duldung) permit are entitled to integration assistance. However, these are still discretionary benefits. They must be approved by the Social Welfare Office (Sozialamt).

What is a “discretionary benefit”?

A person has no legal entitlement to a benefit. Instead, the authority decides whether to grant the benefit. This is a discretionary benefit. You must actively apply for a discretionary benefit and justify why you need it.

Who pays for integration assistance services?

Which authority pays for the service depends on the type of service you have applied for and your status.

The **Social Welfare Office (Sozialamt)** covers the costs for asylum applicants, people with a tolerance (Duldung) permit and people who cannot support themselves. Livelihood support is the money that a person needs for their daily life. This includes food, clothing, household goods, electricity, personal care, housing, heating and similar items. In some federal states, this is not the responsibility of the Social Welfare Office, but of the District or State Office (Bezirks- oder Landesamt).

Do you have statutory health insurance and would like to apply for medical rehabilitation benefits or aid? If so, your **health insurer (Krankenkasse)** will cover the costs.

The **Youth Welfare Office (Jugendamt)** pays the costs for services for children with a mental disability.

If you want to work in the primary labour market, the **Federal Employment Agency (Bundesagentur für Arbeit)** or the **Inclusion/Integration Office (Inklusionsamt/Intergrationsamt)** will pay for vocational training, technical work aids or work assistance.

Are you unsure which authority pays the benefits you receive? Get information from a counselling centre, such as the [Supplementary Independent Participation Counselling Centre \(EUTB\)](#) in your area.

You can submit your application for integration assistance to one of the payers listed above. Payers are public institutions, such as the Social Welfare Office or statutory health insurer. The payer must decide whether it is responsible. If it is not responsible, it must tell you within two weeks whether another authority is responsible and send your application to that authority.

What are aids?

Aids support people with disabilities in their activities. They are designed to prevent disability or compensate for disability. Aids are tailored to the needs of the individual. Aids consist of, for example:

Mobility aids

Wheelchairs, walking aids, prostheses

Sensory aids

Hearing aids, visual aids



Orthopaedic aids

Bandages, splints, insoles

Communication aids

Sign language interpreting, electronic voice generators

Technological aids

Computer programmes, applications, devices such as screen readers, special keyboards, speech recognition software

Incontinence products

Nappies, bed protection covers, incontinence trousers

Nursing care aids

Care beds, raising aids, bathtub lifts, toilet chairs

Aids for nursing care at home

Bandages, wound care products, compression stockings



How do I get an aid?

If you are a recognised refugee, asylum seeker or beneficiary of subsidiary protection, you are insured. This means you can see a doctor. The doctor will give you a prescription for the aid. This also applies to people with a residence permit under Section 24 of the Residence Act (Aufenthaltsgesetz).

Should your health insurer cover your aid? You should first check whether your health insurer has to approve the aid. If so, submit a written application to them. If you meet all the requirements, your health insurer will send you a decision. Now take the prescription to the **medical supply store (Sanitätshaus)** and pick up your aid.

The medical supply store bills your health insurer. However, you will have to contribute to the cost: a minimum of €5 and a maximum of €10. Children and young people under 18 do not have to pay anything.

If your health insurer does not pay for the aid, it must forward your application to the competent authority within two weeks. They must also tell you to whom they have sent your application.

What are medical supply stores?

A medical supply store is a shop that sells medical aids. They have a wide range of products that people need for their health, rehabilitation, mobility and care. Medical supply stores offer personal advice to help you find the right aid.

When can I be exempt from making co-payments?

There is a maximum amount you can pay towards the cost of medicines, aids and medical treatment. For people with chronic illnesses, this limit is one percent of their gross annual income, and for everyone else it is two per cent. Your personal co-payment limit is calculated by adding together the co-payments of you and your family members living in the same household. Once you have reached the one or two per cent limit, you can apply to your health insurer for a waiver of the co-payments for the current year. To do this, you must send all original receipts for your co-payments for medicines, therapies and aids, as well as copies of your income statements, to your health insurer. It is therefore very important that you keep all original receipts.

If your application is approved, you will receive a letter from your health insurer stating that you are exempt from co-payments. You will not have to pay any co-payments for the rest of the year. If you have already paid too much, you will receive a refund. The exemption applies for the rest of the year.

There is a fixed threshold for people who receive income support, citizen's allowance or basic social security. In 2024, it will be €135.12 per year for individuals and €67.56 per year for people with chronic illnesses.



Asylum applicants are covered by the Asylum Seekers Benefits Act (Asylbewerberleistungsgesetz). If they need an aid, they first go to the Social Welfare Office (Sozialamt). Here they get the aid approved, i.e., they get a treatment certificate.

Often, the Social Welfare Office does not issue the treatment certificate easily. However, according to the law, refugees with disabilities have a right to aids.

Tip: Submit a statement from your doctor with your application for an aid. This will increase the chances of success and speed up the processing of your application. The statement should include a medical explanation of why the aid is needed and what features the aid must have.

What should I do if my health insurer or Social Welfare Office rejects my application for an aid, or if the approved payment is too low?

You can file an appeal with the Social Welfare Office or health insurer. They will then have to review their decision. Before you do this, go to a counselling centre near you, for example a [Supplementary Independent Participation Counselling Centre \(EUTB\)](#) or an [Independent Patient Counselling Centre Germany \(UPD\)](#).

You can also find counselling services for people with disabilities in our [Crossroads Roadbox](#) or on [Handbook Germany](#).

What are medical treatments?

Medical treatments are treatments provided by therapists. They are not medicines, yet medical treatments help to restore or maintain health. Medical treatments include physiotherapy, occupational therapy, voice therapy, speech therapy, swallowing therapy, podiatry and nutritional therapy for people with a rare congenital metabolic disorder or cystic fibrosis.

How do I get medical treatment?

As a recognised refugee, asylum seeker or beneficiary of subsidiary protection, you are insured.

So you go to the doctor. This also applies to people with a residence permit under Section 24 of the Residence Act (Aufenthaltsgesetz). The doctor will give you a prescription for the medical treatment. The prescription specifies the number and frequency of treatments. You can use the prescription for medical treatment to make appointments for treatment in a therapy practice.

Attention: You usually have to start treatment within 28 days of receiving the prescription, otherwise it loses its validity. If you continue to have symptoms after the last session, your doctor may prescribe further treatment.

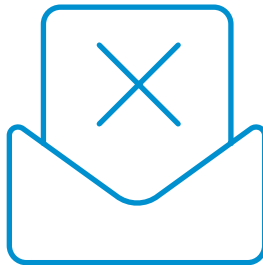
Your health insurer will pay for the treatment. You pay €10 for each prescription plus 10 per cent of the cost of treatment. For children and adolescents under the age of 18, the health insurer will pay for the medical treatment. If you have already reached your personal limit for co-payments, you can apply to your health insurer for a waiver of co-payments for the current year (Note: Waiver of co-payments).

If you have applied for asylum, you are covered by the Asylum Seekers Benefits Act (Asylbewerberleistungsgesetz). This means that you are not legally insured and it is more difficult to get medical treatment.

Nevertheless, go to your doctor and get a prescription for medical treatment. Then go to the Social Welfare Office (Sozialamt) and get the medical treatment approved. With the prescription for medical treatment and a medical certificate from the Social Welfare Office or your health insurance card, you can now make an appointment for treatment at a therapy practice. The practice will bill the Social Welfare Office. You don't have to pay anything.

The Social Welfare Office has rejected my application for medical treatment!

In this case, you can file an appeal with the Social Welfare Office. It is best to get support from a counselling centre in your area, for example from a [Supplementary Independent Participation Counselling Centre \(EUTB\)](#) or an [Independent Patient Counselling Centre Germany \(UPD\)](#). You can find even more counselling services in our [Crossroads Roadbox](#) or on [Handbook Germany](#).



How can I get my disability recognised?

Recognition of a disability is based on the degree of disability (Grad der Behinderung "GdB"). To do this, you must submit an application to the Welfare Office, which will determine your degree of disability. In some federal states, the application is processed by municipal offices or the central state office. These offices are called "Social Affairs Office" (Amt für Soziale Angelegenheiten) or "Social and Welfare Office" (Amt für Soziales und Versorgung). In the [Family guide](#), you can find the authority in your federal state.

What conditions do I have to meet for the office to recognise my disability?

You must have had a disability for at least six months or be expected to have a disability in the future to file an application. You must also have your "ordinary residence" in Germany. Ordinary residence means that the authorities assume that you will live in Germany on a permanent basis. Even if your residence title is a tolerance (Duldung), you are entitled to have your disability recognised if you are expected to stay in Germany for more than six months.

To apply for the degree of disability (Grad der Behinderung "GdB"), you need medical certificates. These must describe your disability in detail. You will receive the certificate after a medical examination. Bring any important documents you have already received from a doctor with you to the appointment. This will make it easier to assess your application and determine your correct degree of disability.

Send the medical certificate, the application form and other important documents to the Welfare Office (Versorgungsamt). The office will assess your application. You will then receive a certificate of disability from the Welfare Office or the relevant authority.

Once your disability has been recognised, you can apply for aids and support services with medical evidence or your degree of disability. What you get depends on your degree of disability.

In this [video](#), there is an explanation of how you can have your disability recognised. The video is available in several languages.

If you have a degree of disability of 50 or more, you are considered severely disabled. You can now also apply for a **severely disabled person's disability card (Schwerbehindertenausweis)**. The card contains details of your disability. It is important for many applications and gives you access to support services and discounts. These discounts are called disadvantage compensation. They include transport services, special leave and housing allowances. People with disabilities get disadvantage compensation because they often have higher expenses in their daily lives. They also have higher costs, such as for medication and care.

The application for recognition of a severe disability varies from state to state. So there is no uniform application. On the website [Simply participate](#) of the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (Bundesministeriums für Arbeit und Soziales), you can find the right application by searching for the federal state in which you live. Go to point 3 on the website: "Choose the right application."

It is best to seek advice before you apply for a degree of disability (GdB) and a severely disabled person's disability card (Schwerbehindertenausweis). The counselling centre can, for example, help you to obtain a higher degree of disability.



Reminder

In some other countries, people with a disability automatically receive state cash benefits every month. This is not the case in Germany. Here, people with disabilities apply for disadvantage compensation. The amount they receive depends on the degree and type of disability.

What do the letters on the disability card mean?

G stands for walking disability and indicates a significant impairment of walking ability.

aG stands for exceptional walking disability. If you have an aG, you are entitled to additional disadvantage compensation, such as free parking in parking spaces for the people with disabilities.

H stands for helplessness and indicates an impairment of the ability to cope independently in everyday life. If you have H, you are entitled to additional support services and financial assistance.

BI stands for blindness and indicates total visual impairment or blindness. If you have BI, you are entitled to special support and disadvantage compensation, such as the blind person's allowance.

GI stands for deafness and indicates total deafness. If you have GI, you are entitled to special support services, such as sign language interpreters.

B stands for accompanying person and indicates the need for a permanent companion. The accompanying person has access rights and discounts at some events.

RF stands for licence fee exemption. Every household pays a licence fee every time a TV, computer or internet is used.

VB stands for preferential authorisation in public transport. VB indicates discounts or free travel on public transport.

These are just some of the most common letters and their meanings.

The meaning of letter combinations can vary depending on the state, the situation of the person with a disability and the degree of disability. It is therefore important to check the rules in your state.

Information for refugees with disabilities and their relatives is a series that has published on:

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[The first steps after arrival in Germany](#) – Information on the most important points of contact after arriving in Germany

[The support system for people with disabilities](#) – Information on participation benefits, social benefits versus participation benefits, application for aids, recognition of a disability

2



3



[Health, rehabilitation and care](#) – Interesting facts about entitlement to medical care, rehabilitation and nursing care and about the health insurance system

[Support system for family members of children with disabilities](#) – Information on the right to education, care and support

4



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[Social participation and language courses](#) – Which services strengthen your participation in life in Germany? Information on integration courses, accessible accommodation and support

[Applying for and getting benefits](#) – Everything you need to know about the main state benefits and how to apply for them

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Who are “we”?

We are the “Empowerment Now” project of the organisation Handicap International and the self-advocates of “NOW! Nicht Ohne das Wir”. We are committed to improving access to information for refugees with disabilities and their families. The members of the group “NOW! Nicht Ohne das Wir” have experienced how difficult it is to get support and help in Germany. That’s why they want to share their knowledge. Also with you.

About the group

NOW! Nicht Ohne das Wir:



“NOW! Nicht Ohne das Wir” is the self-advocacy of refugees with disabilities. We are refugees ourselves and we have disabilities. Since our arrival in Germany, we have been confronted with barriers. But in our group we find understanding and solidarity. We support each other and work together for an inclusive society.

We work for a better life for refugees with disabilities and their families in Germany. The self-advocacy group “NOW! Nicht Ohne das Wir” is supported by Handicap International as part of the “Empowerment Now” project.



About the “Empowerment Now” project

With “Empowerment Now”, Handicap International supports the self-advocacy of refugees with disabilities and their families. Together with the group “NOW! Nicht Ohne das Wir”, we advocate for the rights and interests of refugees with disabilities. We are committed to systematically addressing the concerns of refugees with disabilities – from accommodation, to access to accessible language courses, to inclusion in the labour market.

The “Empowerment Now” project is funded by:



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