In Germany with Your Family

Work Permit for Your Spouse

If your spouse is to come with you in Kiel, he or she may wish to work while in Germany. If your spouse wishes to work somewhere as a regular employee, he or she will need a work permit from the German government (unless he or she is a citizen of another EU nation or of Iceland, Liechtenstein or Norway). Spouses of foreign academic visitors wishing to pursue gainful employment must indicate this prior to arrival so that they can apply for a corresponding residence permit (one with the designation Erwerbstätigkeit gestattet ‘employment allowed’). The work permit itself must be obtained from the Arbeitsamt (employment office). The process is time consuming – just processing the application can take several weeks – and applications are not always successful. In light of the difficult situation in Germany’s labour market, it can be difficult just to find an open position.

Because of this, spouses of past foreign academic guests recommend that you consider well in advance of your arrival how best to use the time you will be spending in Germany. Not only is it possible to register for courses as the University as a guest auditor, but the Volkshochschule (VHS) – the local adult education centre – also offers courses on various topics. If you have children, it is advisable to plan for their time away from home by having them enrolled in school or kindergarten here.

Kindergarten and Child Care

You are not required to send your children to kindergarten in Germany. However, children three years and older are legally entitled to attend one. Kindergartens are operated by local municipalities, by the Evangelical or Catholic churches, or by not-for-profit organisations and other similar initiatives.

Lately the availability of space in kindergartens for children over three has greatly increased, but the situation for children under three remains critical. One difficulty is that parents must have registered their children for current kindergarten year (kindergarten opens in August or September, depending on your region) the previous spring, since this is when space in kindergartens is assigned. Also, many kindergartens still have long waiting lists. For this reason we urge you to register your child for kindergarten as early as possible and to ask – potentially through your institutional host – about the local situation. If space is available, many kindergartens do accept new children even after the year has begun.

If you are bringing children to Germany, we ask you to get in touch with the administrators of the University’s guest houses, Ms. Isolda Ritter or the Family Service Office of the CAU. We will be pleased to help you locate a kindergarten near a guest house or the University.

School and Instruction

The school year begins at the end of summer break in either August or September; the date varies from year to year.

All children living in Germany 6 years of age up to and including age 1, regardless of nationality, are required to attend school. All children begin their schooling in the Grundschule, primary school, which encompasses grades 1 through 4. After this – or following a two-year transitional period called Förderstufe or Orientierungsstufe, depending on the state – children are diverted into one of a few different tracks through middle and secondary school:
• The *Hauptschule* or ‘general/main school’ leads to the *Hauptschulabschluss* at the end of the ninth or tenth school year, depending on the state;
• The *Realschule*, which leads to the so-called ‘middle diploma’ at the end of the 10th school year;
• The *Gymnasium*, which leads to the *Abitur* (the so-called ‘higher education diploma’ entitling students to enrol in a university degree programme) at the end of the 13th school year;
• In some states, the *Gesamtschule*, or ‘common school’, which combines several of the school types described above in one facility, and at which children may attend various courses according to their aptitude without having previously been diverted into one of the tracks described above.

There are no fees for attending a state school in Germany. Private schools or international schools that charge tuition fees are uncommon, and they are usually very expensive. In big metropolitan areas, some elementary schools have instituted special classes for foreign children in which students primarily learn German in addition to the normal curriculum. This is meant to prepare them eventually to integrate into the normal classroom.

**Instruction**

Instruction in German schools takes place almost exclusively in the morning, usually between 8 a.m. and 1 p.m. In earlier grades, instruction is usually much shorter, spanning as little as a few hours per day, and it is less regular. In later grades and at the *Gymnasium*, students have the opportunity to follow various courses of study according to their interests, and they receive instruction in these. Some of the instruction, e.g. athletics, takes place in the afternoon. In the afternoon students should do their homework for the next school day. The amount of time this requires varies considerably. Only the relatively rare schools that offer all-day instruction provide their students with a midday meal.

Some schools offer supervision of children in so-called *Kinderhorten*, extracurricular programs that keep children occupied before and/or after regular instruction, often between 7 a.m. and 5 p.m. Participating children receive a midday meal and may do their homework or play freely in a supervised environment. Placing a child in a *Kinderhort* currently costs parents €150 for five hours of daily supervision. This includes the cost of participating during school holidays. It is usually difficult to find an opening for a child in a *Kinderhort* during the school year, because space is limited. The earlier you can register your child for such an afterschool programme, the greater the chances your child will be accepted. There are now elementary schools that supervise children all morning as well. Students at the *Gymnasium* are normally unsupervised during their free time.

It can be complicated to plan your day as a parent, especially if you have one child in kindergarten and another already attending school. One child needs to be brought to and picked up from kindergarten and the other to and from school. Add to this buying groceries and running whatever other errands there may be, and you have arrived at the daily feat many mothers and fathers in Germany have to perform, given that quality, all-day day care for their children is in such limited supply. This is particularly challenging for families in which both parents work.

But guest researchers visiting from abroad almost unanimously report that bringing their children with them to Germany was a positive experience. Children usually adapt very quickly to the new environment.
They meet new friends and often learn the language more quickly than their parents do. Children push their families to integrate into daily life and engage with their new surroundings in a special way.

If you plan to bring your children along, we ask that you get in touch with the administrators of the University’s guest houses, Ms. Isolda Ritter or the Family Service Office of the CAU. We will be pleased to help you locate a kindergarten near a guest house or the University.