

Terms you need to know about renting in Germany

Renting a flat or a room abroad can be very confusing. Every advertisement contains unfamiliar terms and/or abbreviations that mean nothing to you at first. We have listed and explained the most important terms here. At the end of the list, you will find a link to a list of abbreviations that explains even more (common) abbreviations.

We've tried to organize the terms in a way that gives you an overview: We've grouped abbreviations together that concern rent/expenses, social matters around flats, the apartment itself and a little bit about tenancy law.

Rent/Expenses

Kaltmiete (KM)

The pure rental costs of the room/flat without utilities and other extras.

Nebenkosten (NK/NBK)

Utilities, often abbreviated "NK". Includes heating and hot water, garbage fees, etc. You pay an estimated amount in advance and once a year your landlord/landlady will present you a detailed bill on how much you actually used. Depending on this bill you will either get some money back (if you paid for more than you actually used) or will have to pay some extra (if you used more than was estimated).

Not included in the NK are electricity and Wi-Fi, for which you will have to conclude separate contracts (for example with the "Stadtwerke", the local power supplier, for electricity, and a provider like Telekom or Vodafone for Wi-Fi). In WGs (see below), usually one person has such a contract for the whole flat and you pay your share of the costs directly to this person.

Warmmiete (WM)

Kaltmiete + "Nebenkosten". This is the amount of rent you will have to pay each month.

Untermiete

Sublease/Subtenancy. One of your roommates has the main rental agreement for the flat, they usually take care of all additional contracts (electricity, Wi-Fi, etc.) and manage contact with the landlord/landlady (paying rent, reporting issues with for example heating, broken equipment in the flat, etc.). You get a sublease from this roommate and pay your part of the rent to them, including all additional costs stated above.

Rent/Expenses

Kaution (Kt.)

Security deposit. For every room or flat, the landlord/landlady will expect you to pay a security deposit for potential damages that are discovered after you move out or if the bill for your NK is not yet ready at the time you move out and they do not know yet if you have to pay extra or not. The amount is usually around two or three times the Kaltmiete and will have to be paid shortly before or with the beginning of your contract – but never before signing the contract! This is the point where you have to look out for scammers: legitimate landlords/landladies will give you a viewing and your signed contract before you pay anything.

Rundfunkbeitrag (formerly GEZ)

Television and radio fee. This is a fee that has to be paid for every apartment (regardless of the number of people living there) to support public broadcasting institutions. These are TV channels and radio stations that are independent from state and private investors (unlike private channels like RTL and ProSieben, which are owned by media companies and rely on making money through ads and promotions). The fee has to be paid regardless of whether you have the means to access these services or not (whether or not the apartment/your room has a TV connection, or you own a TV/radio). You may be exempt from paying this fee if you can prove that you have a low income (living on welfare/receiving Bafög) or have certain health issues.

Staffelmiete

With a graduated rent, the rental agreement specifies when and by how much the rent will increase on a regular basis – for example, by £20 per year. The increases are predictable and can be planned for.

Indexmiete

The index-linked rent is based on the inflation rate. The rent can be adjusted in line with the consumer price index. The landlord must give written notice of the adjustment and provide reasons for it.

Ortsübliche Vergleichsmiete

Rent that has been charged on average for comparable flats in the residential area over the last 12 months. The landlord may add up to 20% to this average rent.

Rent/Expenses

Mietpreisüberhöhung

If it is determined that the landlord has added more than the permitted 20% to the local comparative rent, this constitutes a rent increase. In this case, the tenant can demand a rental reduction. A surcharge of more than 50% constitutes what is known as rent profiteering. If this is determined, the landlord faces a fine. It is important for tenants to find out about the local comparative rent from the local authority.

Mietpreisbremse

The Mietpreisbremse applies in areas with a tight housing market. These areas are determined by the federal states. In these areas, the rent may only exceed the local comparative rent by a maximum of 10%. The Mietpreisbremse may be suspended in certain situations (e.g. for furnished flats/rooms, etc.).

Due date of rent

Unless otherwise agreed in the rental agreement, the rent is always to be paid by the 3rd of the month at the latest.

Nettokaltmiete (NKM)

This is the basic rent only, excluding additional costs.

Bruttokaltmiete

This is the basic rent including ancillary costs, excluding heating and hot water supply.

Bruttowarmmiete

This is the basic rent including all additional costs (including heating and hot water supply).

Nebenkosten Vorauszahlung (NkVz)

In this case, a monthly deposit is paid. Then, once a year, the utility costs are settled. This may result in either having to pay additional utility costs or being in credit.

Nebenkostenpauschale

In this case, a fixed amount for ancillary costs is determined and paid. There is no final settlement and therefore no additional payment or refund.

Social Matters

WG (“Wohngemeinschaft”)

A shared flat. Usually, every member of a WG has their own room (called “WG-Zimmer”) in the flat, while the kitchen, bathroom/restroom and sometimes a common room/living room area are shared spaces. Depending on the preferences of the landlord/landlady you have separate contracts for each room, or one person has the main contract and the others have subcontracts. Everyday life in WGs can differ, some WGs like to do things together like cooking, game nights, going out together, or sharing hobbies, in other cases the residents keep more to themselves and rarely spend time together apart from sharing a cup of coffee in the morning or settling whose turn it is to buy toilet paper (this is often called a “Zweck-WG”).

Kehrwoche

This is a very swabian thing, where all tenants take turns in cleaning the building, especially sweeping and wiping the staircase, but sometimes also shovelling snow in the winter and cleaning the access path from the street to the building. Some buildings have a caretaker or janitorial service that takes care of these things, or you can commission a company to do it for you, but that’s usually not financially worth it.

Mülltrennung

In Germany, we love to separate our waste to recycle it as efficiently as possible. There are different systems depending on the municipality, so if you are not sure about a certain item, ask your roommates/neighbours or look it up on the municipality’s website. In general, household waste is separated in general waste (Restmüll, black container), compostable/biodegradable waste (Biomüll, green container), recyclables (Gelber Sack, a yellow plastic bag you can get free of charge at several distribution points), and paper (Altpapier, blue container). Other types of waste like batteries, LED lightbulbs, broken electronic devices, etc, have to be brought to special collection points and are not allowed to be part of the household waste. If you separate your waste incorrectly, the waste collectors might refuse to empty your containers and in severe cases you may have to pay a fine. If you want to know what goes where in Tübingen, have a look at this website:

<https://www.abfall-kreis-tuebingen.de/entsorgen/welche-abfaelle-habe-ich/>

Social Matters

Lautstärke

Everyone has their own perception of what is a loud noise, but there are certain rules that you have to follow – to keep the peace with your neighbours and also because there are actual laws on this subject. It is for example not allowed to play loud music between 10 pm and 8 am, all noise has to be on room volume (aka cannot be heard outside your room or flat, and if so, barely) during this time. So, turn down your music/TV show, do not use loud household appliances like a blender or vacuum cleaner, and do not jump/run around as if you were part of an elephant stampede. There are also a few rules concerning loud noise on sunday: loud domestic chores (mowing the lawn, drilling holes and other loud home improvement/diy-activities) are not allowed, as well as playing an instrument that can be heard outside your room/flat. Having friends over is always okay but try to schedule your parties for the weekend and, depending on how sensitive your neighbours are, inform them beforehand if you plan a larger gathering. If you have a neighbour whose noise bothers you, asking them politely to turn down the volume will resolve the issue most of the time. Please note that issuing these rules in the dorms is not always possible because of the large number of people living there

Apartment

Nachtabsenkung

In most buildings, the temperature of your hot water and heating system will be reduced to save energy. You will still be able to take a warm shower, but the water will not be hot enough to wash dishes and the temperature in your room might be a little lower. This is usually effective between 11 pm/midnight and 6 am but can differ depending on the building.

Mieterselbstauskunft

A Mieterselbstauskunft is a statement by the tenant about their personal and financial circumstances, which landlords request for the purpose of credit checks.

Möbliert (möbl.)

The room/flat is furnished. The rent is more expensive because of the existing furniture.

Teilmöbliert (teil-möbl.)

The room/flat is partially furnished. The rental agreement specifies which furniture is already in the flat. You must bring all other furniture yourself.

Unmöbliert

The room/flat is not furnished. You must bring your own furniture.

Wohnfläche (Wfl.)

The living space comprises all rooms that are used directly for living – e.g. living room, bedroom, kitchen or bathroom. Balconies and terraces are usually included in the living space on a pro rata basis (usually, 25–50%).

Energieausweis (EA)

Shows the expected energy costs for the flat.

Wohnungsgeberbestätigung

A document issued by the landlord confirming that the flat has been handed over to the tenant.

Apartment

Zentrale Heizung (ZH) und Warmwasser

Heating and/or hot water is generated in the building and billed according to the consumption of the individual tenants.

Dezentrale Heizung und Warmwasser

The tenant is responsible for the energy costs and must obtain their own gas or electricity contract.

Tenancy law

Deutscher Mieterbund

The Mieterbund represents the interests of tenants in dealings with landlords. If problems arise in the tenancy, the Mieterbund can be consulted for advice. They can help with all questions relating to renting. <https://www.mieterbund-rt-tue.de/>

Mietrechtsberatung in Tübingen

The city of Tübingen also has a contact point for problems relating to renting. The advisors there can assess how the problems should be dealt with and can also refer you to the appropriate support services. <https://www.tuebingen.de/mietrechtsberatung>

Rechtsberatung StuWe

In Wilhelmstraße 19

<https://www.my-stuwe.de/en/advice/legal-advice/>

Abbreviations

Many advertisements contain a wide variety of abbreviations. We have linked a list of the most common abbreviations related to renting here:

<https://tuebingenresearchcampus.com/en/tuebingen/accommodations/finding-a-home/list-of-abbreviations>

We have already added the most common abbreviations for the terms explained here.

University of Tübingen

Division IV.1 Student Administration

Subsection: Support for International Students

<https://uni-tuebingen.de/en/169695>

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