

SFB 1601

Welcome Brochure



Version: 1.13

Bonn and Cologne, October 2023

Welcome to the SFB

We are very happy to welcome you to the University of Cologne, Bonn or the Max Planck Institute for Radio Astronomy.

A short introduction to the institutes:

The **I. Physikalisches Institut (ph1)** of the University of Cologne is built on four pillars: (1) observational astrophysics, (2) simulations, (3) laboratory astrophysics, and (4) instrumentation. In these fields, six professors and their working groups work on modern astrophysical questions. The **Argelander-Institut für Astronomie (AIfA)** of the Bonn University has currently eight working groups that work in different fields of astrophysics and cosmology. The **Max-Planck-Institut für Radioastronomie (MPIfR)** has three main departments: (1) Fundamental Physics in Radio Astronomy, (2) Millimeter and Submillimeter Astronomy, and (3) Radio Astronomy / VLBI.

This **Welcome Brochure** should support you in taking your first steps here, especially if it is the first time that you are living or working in Germany or Europe! It also contains important information for doctoral candidates (PhD students) and postdocs. This guide should help you to consider the most important points before and during your stay here. However, this guide cannot explain everything in full detail because details may change with time and things might be different for each person.¹ You may choose to read individual chapters if you are only interested in specific topics.

In Cologne, a **Buddy System** was introduced. Your buddy should be another student who can help you with getting settled here in Cologne. If you do not have a buddy yet, ask your professor to change this! The buddy can explain everything in this brochure in more detail.

There is also a checklist with the most important things you should organize for your stay at the end of this brochure! For example, you should really start early to search for a flat since it can take up to several months to find a proper place, so start now!

Again, we hope this Brochure will help you a lot!

If you face any problems, do not hesitate to ask the student council for help:

studentscouncil@ph1.uni-koeln.de

Feedback and criticism about this Welcome Brochure are warmly welcome, especially if important things are missing!

We look forward to meeting you in person: the members of the SFB 1601.

¹We also cannot guarantee and take any responsibilities for correctness and completeness of this brochure.

Contents

1	Things to consider BEFORE your arrival	5
1.1	Your personal Buddy	5
1.2	VISA	5
1.3	Accommodation	5
1.4	Health insurance (“Krankenversicherung”)	8
1.5	Liability insurance (“Haftpflichtversicherung”)	8
2	Things to consider when you have just arrived	9
2.1	Register with the city	9
2.2	Get a residence permit (For Non-EU citizens)	9
2.3	Student ID card	10
2.4	Open a bank account	11
3	Things to consider while living in Cologne/Bonn (Germany)	12
3.1	Public transportation and car sharing	12
3.2	Pensions (“Rente”)	13
3.3	Taking Holidays (“Urlaub”)	13
3.4	Finding a Doctor	13
3.5	Psycho-Social Counselling of Mental Health, LGBTQI+ and Diversity issues	14
3.6	Sick leave (“Krankmeldung”)	15
3.7	German language courses	16
3.8	Tax office (“Finanzamt”)	16
4	University bureaucracy	17
4.1	Promotion regulation (Promotionsordnung)	17
4.2	Docfile (Cologne only)	17
4.3	Documents and Certified Translation Services	18
5	University structures	19
5.1	Supporting structures	19
5.1.1	BCGS	19
5.1.2	SFB 1601	19
5.1.3	International Office	20
5.1.4	Bonn Graduate Center	21
5.1.5	TRA Matter (Bonn)	21
5.1.6	ASTA	21
6	Plausible research funding opportunities in academia after the Doctorate degree	22
6.1	The Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, German Research Foundation)	22
6.2	Germany - Funding by Ministries	22
6.3	Horizon Europe (2021-2017)	23
6.4	Funding by Foundations	23

7	FAQs	24
7.1	International office of University of Cologne	24
7.2	What is LBV?	24
7.3	What is VBL?	24
7.4	What is “Rundfunkbeitrag” and why do they want money from me?	24
7.5	Where can I look for sports?	24
7.6	What does this acronym stand for?	25
7.7	Useful links	25
8	Checklist (for you)	26
9	Checklist (for the Buddy)	27

1 Things to consider BEFORE your arrival

1.1 Your personal Buddy

If you know that you will work in Cologne, your first step is to ask your professor/supervisor for a Buddy. You should receive an email ID (or WhatsApp Contact) of this person, so you can easily and quickly communicate with them. They should be able to help you with getting settled here in Cologne and, most importantly, answer your open questions based on their work schedules and availability. The buddy might also help with translation problems which might occur, especially with the bureaucracy.

If you do not have a buddy yet, ask your professor to change this!

1.2 VISA

This point should be obvious and self-explanatory. Remember to apply as early as possible for your German National VISA, seeing the competitive scenario for getting a VISA appointment. Since this procedure is different for all countries and laws and regulations are changing frequently, we just want to remind you here not to forget about your VISA.

1.3 Accommodation

It is very hard to find an apartment in Cologne and Bonn. **Start as soon as possible to search for a flat.** If you only get a temporary apartment, you should start searching for the next one as soon as possible. You may have a certain preference for one of the different possibilities. A shared flat is called “Wohngemeinschaft (WG)”, where you share a kitchen, bathroom, living room etc. with other people. There are furnished (“möbliert”) flats and non-furnished (“unmöbliert”) ones. If it is not furnished, even the kitchen is not a part of the apartment. Sometimes a person who lived there offers to sell the kitchen or other furniture, and some of them could be too expensive. If you are not sure how much would be a reasonable price, ask your colleagues for opinions. You might find the websites given below quite helpful, though of course others exist.

For students in Cologne:

- **Kölner Studierenden WERK** (ONLY for the registered Masters’ and PhD students in Cologne)

To search flats, click “*Free Rooms? Rent to students*” and then click the link in the “*Looking for a room*” section. You can also fill the application form for halls of residence, but there is typically a very long waiting list. They generally give higher priority to International Students while making waiting lists. However, once you apply asking for an apartment, they will be sending a monthly email to make sure if you are still looking for one. You need to confirm by saying “Yes” if you did not get anything else for your accommodation till then. Some of your colleagues who are already staying at WERK can also help you get in touch via their WhatsApp group of WERK students, which might be helpful to get a TEMPORARY room - as some WERK students sublet their rooms while going for a vacation.



- **University of Cologne:** This University web-page provides information on how to find an accommodation for International Students.

For students in Bonn:

- **Bonner Studierendenwerk** (ONLY for registered Masters' and PhD students in Bonn)



- **University Bonn:** This Bonn University web-page that provides information on how to find an accommodation.



In general:

- **Immobilien scout24:** This website is for all people, not specifically for students.



- **WG-Gesucht (not only shared flats/WG):** This website is often used by students for permanent and temporary flats. Here you will find WGs, single flats, and other options. The pricing is quite reasonable on this site, especially for WGs.



- **Kleinanzeigen** Here you can find offers for apartments as well as other household items like furniture, kitchen, sports equipment, etc.

At the web pages mentioned above, typically you can contact the offerer through a web form or via email. Even if you are not fluent in German, it is helpful to send a hybrid response (i.e. in German and English) - use DeepL/Google translator or ask someone at the institute to help with the German message. If the offerer is interested in your request, they will contact you back, e.g. asking more information on you. They will often also be asked for personal information (hobbies etc). Make sure to answer these questions with personal and detailed responses! Typically after that the offerer asks for an appointment to view the apartment (“Besichtigung”). If you are not in Germany at the time, it may be worth asking someone at the institute to visit on your behalf.

You may also be asked to show or give some documents at some later date, for example, a copy of work contract, a copy of salary details (“Bezugsmitteilung” - you will get it after the first month), or SCHUFA. SCHUFA is a certificate (credit report). You can get your SCHUFA [here](#). If you are new in Germany, the content is probably just empty. Considering apartments are very competitive, showing those documents may be useful even if they have not yet been requested.

Be aware that there are some fraudulent offers. For example, someone may post a fake offer and request a contact person to pay some amount in advance. They may tend to contact you in English, but this is not always the case. ***In any case, DO NOT pay anything before you sign the rent contract! Even read everything carefully while signing***

any contract. (Translate in English if the contract is in German and understand what each clause in the contract means and what consequences it might lead to.)

You can also use a renting agency. Since 2015, the fee to a renting agency (“Provision”) should not be required unless you asked them to search apartments for you. However, some agencies still try to charge you in different ways. For example, some offers from such web pages are from an agency, and when you contact them, they say “this flat is not available any more, but we can offer some similar flats”, and if you say yes, they count it as “your request for searching” and charge you a fee after you get it.

If you are wondering where you should stay when you come to Cologne and you do not find a place on your own, you can contact **Bettina Krause** (krause@ph1.uni-koeln.de) and ask about the Cologne University Guest Houses. The best way is to fill an [online form on the Studentenwerk website](#). This being said, the University International Office has decided not to allow PhD students to avail University Guest Houses on their arrival (due to large number of such requests and limited available places, maybe). This option is available only for the Postdocs as per the current scenario.

If you are already in Cologne, you can go in person to the Studentenwerk office:

Universitätsstraße 16, 50937 Köln

You can also talk to your colleagues or send an email to

hera@ph1.uni-koeln.de

(institute mailing-list) to ask whether someone knows of an available apartment.

Typical vocabulary:

Miete	= Rent
Kaltmiete	= Rent without additional costs (see below)
Nebenkosten	= additional costs (services, garbage containers etc.)
Heizkosten	= heating cost
Kaution	= deposit
Schlafzimmer	= sleeping room
Badezimmer	= bathroom
Keller	= basement
Souterrain	= whole flat in the (half-)basement
Aufzug	= elevator

The counting of rooms usually excludes the kitchen and bathroom. If not explicitly mentioned, the electricity and/or kitchen stoves are charged additionally as per the ongoing rates, though it may be helpful to clarify about this and other utilities.

1.4 Health insurance (“Krankenversicherung”)

Health insurance is mandatory, but there are many insurance companies (“Krankenkassen”). The basic service is quite similar for most of them, but there are differences (typically slightly different fees). You can choose your insurance company freely.

Everyone should compare the different conditions for themselves online. Most of the institute employees are members of “Techniker Krankenkasse” (TK). There is a university counselor of TK in Cologne, *Mrs. Ina Guenther* (ina.guenther@tk.de) who can be contacted for help, alongside the personnel at your institute. *Mr. Lukas Baumann* is TK’s student advisor for UniBonn. You can find more information about the services provided by TK for UniBonn students [here](#). For foreign students from certain countries (listed here), the German government recognises the health insurance plans from their home countries as valid in Germany. More information for foreign students can be found [this](#) page.

1.5 Liability insurance (“Haftpflichtversicherung”)

In Germany you should ALWAYS have a “Haftpflichtversicherung”. While it is not strictly required, it is quite cheap, and can help avoid huge financial risk for you.

From Wikipedia:

“Liability insurance (also called third-party insurance) is a part of the general insurance system of risk financing to protect the purchaser (the “insured”) from the risks of liabilities imposed by lawsuits and similar claims”.

EVERYONE SHOULD HAVE A HAFTPFLICHTVERSICHERUNG.

This insurance is really important to have, since you have to pay for all kinds of damages you may cause, even if it is an accident. For example, if you cross a road as a pedestrian and accidentally cause a car to have an accident, you will have to pay for the damages on the car, the damage the car produced while crashing, nursing and care costs and so on. This can easily go into the millions.

For this reason, your “Haftpflichtversicherung” should cover some millions. As this service is just a few euros per year, there is no reason not to get it. You can easily compare and book a “Haftpflichtversicherung” here:



<https://www.check24.de/privathaftpflicht/>

(Check 24 is a comparison portal for many things.)

2 Things to consider when you have just arrived

2.1 Register with the city

When you start to live anywhere in Germany, you have to register your address to the local residents registration office of the city as soon as possible. The registration is called “Anmeldung” if it is your first time in that city in Germany, or “Ummeldung” if you have registered in the same city before. You also need to inform the city if you change address, e.g. If you have a temporary apartment, you have to register that residence first, and when you move to another place you have to change the registration. In Cologne, it should be done at one of the “Kundenzentrum” (or “Einwohnermeldeamt”). Often you have only two weeks to register and you need a letter of your landlord stating that you live in their flat now (**this is separate letter from your contract**). The Regulations (including deadlines and so on) and requested documents are listed in (for Cologne):

- [Registration of your domicile](#)



- [Change of domicile](#)



For Bonn you can visit:

- [General information](#)



- [Making an appointment in Bonn center](#)



If you live in a neighboring city, please follow the official website for that city.

2.2 Get a residence permit (For Non-EU citizens)

The residence permit is called “Aufenthaltserlaubnis” or “Aufenthaltstitel”. Students and doctoral candidates usually arrive in Germany with an initial ‘Long-Term Visa’ valid for a few months, which needs to be converted to a Residence Permit before the initial Visa expires.

The first step is to find the Ausländeramt or Foreigners’ office responsible for your local place of residence. You can use the website of the [Federal Office for Migration and Refugees](#)

to search with the postal code of your registered home address, and the map on this website will show the location/phone number/email address of the Foreigners' office.

Once you have the contact details, it is advised to contact the Foreigners' office with details of your status and to request an appointment to apply for a residence permit. This often uses an online form, however smaller offices may only be contacted via phone or email. ***Please note that appointments may only be available a few weeks or months later, therefore it is strongly encouraged to get in contact with the authorities soon after registering with the city, to avoid last-minute uncertainties in attaining a sufficient and legal immigration status in Germany!***

The officials from the Foreigners' office prefer to provide and receive information in German, including for contact through emails or phone calls. It is best to reach out for help with translation, to set up appointments and also during the visit to the offices. Translator services may also be provided by the ***International offices of Uni-Bonn (international@uni-bonn.de) and Uni-Köln (international.scholars@verw.uni-koeln.de)***. Another option is to contact the respective coordinators for BCGS, SFB 1601, IMPRS, or ML4Q graduate schools, who usually have information regarding translation services provided by these schools.

If the appointment to apply for a residence permit is requested through email or phone, the Foreigners' office can provide a list of documents needed for the application. Further information regarding documents that are generally required is available through the following links:

- [Welcome Center for International Students - Visa and Residence permit \(Uni-Köln\)](#)
- [Preparing your stay and important documents \(Uni-Bonn\)](#)
- [Entry and visa process \(Federal Foreign Office of Germany\)](#)

After the appointment, you may not immediately be granted a Residence Permit, but are instead provided with a Fiktionsbescheinigung, which is a type of temporary visa that secures your legal stay in Germany until the application is processed. The scope of validity and possibility of international travel with this document should be clarified with the Visa Officer during the appointment. It is normal for you to receive the final permit 6-8 weeks after a successful application. During this time, the Ausländeramt or Foreigners' office may ask for additional documents, so make sure to check your inbox/mailbox regularly. However, as long as your Visa date is valid, you will be able to roam around Europe. But once that is expired, having the Residential Permit is **MUST**. So, better to get it much before your Visa expires.

2.3 Student ID card

When you successfully enroll at the University you will get a student ID card. ***Included is a valid ticket for public transportation in NRW, both in Cologne and in Bonn.*** This is also required to buy food as a student at the Mensa (Mess/Canteen). In the Mensa, you must pay by bank card/phone banking.

You only receive the student card after completing your enrollment and paying the semester fees (social contribution), so make sure you hand in your documents as soon as possible! In order to complete your enrolment the University requires the **original copy** of any relevant **graduation certificates** (High School, Bachelor's, Master's, etc.). Without these documents you cannot enroll, and therefore will not receive this multi-use student ID card.

2.4 Open a bank account

You need to open a bank account in Germany in order to receive your salary. ***You must have registered your address with the city first!*** Typically the administrative personnel at the university can help with arranging the bank appointment. Often the appointment will be in German, so if you are not fluent you should ask for someone to accompany you.

To open a bank account (“Bankkonto”), usually you just go to the bank and tell them that you want to open an account. You can make an appointment to do this on a bank's website. There are many banks in Germany, with different costs and personal benefits, so you should compare these for yourself. There are also a number of banks around the institute, to name just a few:

- **Sparkasse KölnBonn**

It has many cash-out points (ATM machines) around the University. Registering for an appointment is easy enough using [this link](#). There is an account maintenance charge when you are above 26 years of age. Their on-line banking website and mobile apps are easy to work with.

- **Kölner Bank**

- **Deutsche Bank**

Online banking has a good English form. There is an account maintenance charge.

- **Hanseatic Bank**

- **Commerzbank**

Alternatively you can also use an Internet bank (like DKB). To use these banks, typically identification through a post office (or identification app POSTIDENT) is requested. By using these you can avoid or reduce the monthly account fees if your monthly income is above a certain amount (1200 € for DKB)

Once you open the account, give the account information to the institute secretary and the human resources department. It will be used for providing the salary, reimbursement of the travel money, and so on. If you submit this information late, you may receive your first salary packet several weeks late.

3 Things to consider while living in Cologne/Bonn (Germany)

3.1 Public transportation and car sharing

If you are a student, your student card is valid for public transport within the state of North-Rhine Westphalia (Nordrhein-Westfalen, NRW) state. This includes Aachen, Bonn, Cologne, and Düsseldorf, along with surrounding towns such as Wuppertal (**VRS region**). This is true for buses, trams, all trains except IC/ICEs, etc. This is a key benefit with registering with the university - make sure to pay the fee every semester to keep your card valid! If you are asked for a ticket by an attendant, you can just present the student card. You may also want to take another form of photo-id with you to be safe.

For student tickets, you can offer a free ride to one adult and three children in the **VRS region** (region around the Bonn-Cologne region) after ~ 7 pm on work days and on the full weekend days. You can also take a bike at these times. Check **SWB Bonn** for the exact conditions, applicable area, and different cases with a connection to a neighbouring area. This is unfortunately not possible with the **49 Euro ticket**.

If you are not a student, if you have not received your student card yet, or if you expect to travel outside of NRW frequently, you may want to consider the **49 Euro ticket**. This allows you to use any form of public transport throughout the whole of Germany, with the exception of the IC/ICE trains, for a month. If you need to use this for work (e.g. you travel out of state frequently for work) it may be worth asking if the university can pay for it as a work expense.

At present, there is no staff ticket provided (e.g. a “Großkundenticket”), as it has been supplanted by the 49 Euro ticket.

Students with their semester ticket can use KVB/Nextbike bikes free of charge for the first 30 minutes of a trip after being registered with their student email in the Nextbike App. A further 30 minutes will be charged at 1€ each, the 24-hour rental is available at a fixed price of 9€ (as of 2023). All you need is your key account ticket and a mobile phone.



<https://www.kvb-rad.de/de/koeln/>

There are also multiple e-bike and scooter renting services throughout Bonn and Cologne (e.g. **Bolt**). There is no student discount from them; however, with their apps these services are very cheap.

Students with their semester ticket can take advantage of discounted car-sharing offers (as of 2023):

- cambio: you pay no registration fee regardless of the tariff selected and thus save 30 € if you choose your tariff freely.
- car2go: In addition to free registration, you receive 10 € starting credit.
- Drive Now: In addition to saving the one-off registration fee of 29 €, you receive a free 30-minute drive. <https://www.kvb.koeln/service/carsharing/index.html>



3.2 Pensions (“Rente”)

After registering with the health insurance a pension insurance number (“Rentenversicherungsnummer”) is given to you. You will be informed by the German pension system (“Deutsche Rentenversicherung”). This number also appears in the membership certificate of “Krankenkasse”. “Deutsche Rentenversicherung” deals with the mandatory part of pensions. You can claim pension benefits after paying the contribution for 5 years.

There is an additional pension system, which is “Versorgunganstalt des Bundes und der Länder” (VBL). Non-academic employees have a 1.81 percent contribution (as of 2023) of the gross salary regardless of the period of employment. For academic employees, it is voluntary for the first 5 years, but after 5 years you must pay the contribution. To be precise, as long as you get a contract that exceeds 5 years, you should consider paying the extra fee. So if you do not plan to stay in Germany for more than 5 years, it is not worthwhile to pay the contribution. If you pay the contribution and leave in less than 5 years, it is still possible to get the contribution back, but this is an expense that can be avoided.

3.3 Taking Holidays (“Urlaub”)

For academic employees with 5 working days (Mo.-Fr.) in a week, 30 days of holidays are available per year. You should take these holidays! These days expire at the end of the following year - that is, your 2024 vacations days only expire on December 31, 2025. However, don’t hoard these days, as the holidays should contribute to your recovery. When you want to take them, please discuss your holidays with your PI and your colleagues, **fill in the holiday request form (“Urlaubsantrag”)**, and let it be signed by the responsible professor or group leader. Then please give the holiday request form to your administrative personnel. You can request the “Urlaubsantrag” from these HR members.

3.4 Finding a Doctor

It is very helpful to choose a general doctor (“Hausarzt”, in German) shortly after your arrival in Germany. A general doctor is usually the first person you want to contact when you need whatever kind of help regarding health issues: not only if you feel unwell, but also for vaccinations, periodic check-ups and so on. If it is necessary, they will then address you to another doctor who fits best with your needs. It is possible to go to most of specialists directly without going to a general doctor before.

You are not automatically assigned to a general doctor (e.g. by your health insurance company): this is something you have to do autonomously. So, how to find a general doctor who is suitable for you? In principle this is very simple, you can just google it

on the web and find one close to your place. Normally, health insurance company websites have search engines which you can use: this is the case, for instance, on the TK website (<https://www.tk-aerztefuhrer.de/TK/englische-suche.htm>), where you can search for a doctor by entering the town, the kind of specialization (General Practitioner is the “Hausarzt”, for instance), and even the language spoken (which is useful if you are not fluent in German). Note that you do not necessarily have to be insured with the TK to use this search engine, and that it can be really useful for specialists such as dentists. Another good website is <https://www.doctolib.de> (in German only), which allows you not only to find a doctor filtering by spoken language, but also to directly book a visit. You can also book a vaccination appointments (e.g. for Covid-19) via this website (also booster vaccinations). Other information about vaccinations (e.g. the Covid-19) can be found at https://www.rki.de/EN/Home/homepage_node.html. <https://www.116117.de> is a good address to search for doctors, emergency assistance and for general health information.

Note that there are obligatory vaccinations in certain facilities (e.g. measles in Childcare).

Once you choose the doctor, you should contact them and make an appointment for a first visit. On that occasion, you will be asked to fill some forms with information about your health situation, and you will probably undergo a general medical procedure. After that, you can just contact the doctor again in the future when you need to. The visits to your general doctor are in general fully covered by your health insurance. If you are not sure, you may ask the doctor you chose if the insurance you have covers for the expenses, but this is the case for the vast majority of doctors and health insurances. Of course, if you chose the doctor via the website of your health insurance you are sure that the expenses are covered. Remember to always bring the insurance card with you when you go to a doctor, as they need it to get their payment via the health insurance company. Health insurance normally covers periodic check-ups at dentists and gynecologists, so feel free to take advantage of this possibility too!

Note that in Germany you do not have to officially declare your general doctor to the public health departments or to your health insurance. In principle, you can always choose another doctor at some point and decide that this new one will be your general doctor (you probably will have to repeat the first introductory visit), and no other communications are needed. It is in general a good idea not to change the doctor once you have chosen one, so that they have a better overview of your whole health.

3.5 Psycho-Social Counselling of Mental Health, LGBTQI+ and Diversity issues

One must also be aware of opportunities to take care of mental health issues and get help if necessary. There are various services offered by the Universities of Bonn and Cologne to students and employees that can be accessed free of charge. It is important to note the difference between medical intervention and psycho-social counselling in this case. One can approach the Hausarzt or general doctor regarding mental health issues, who then formally recommends to consult with a medically trained therapist (one can also seek appointments directly at the clinics of psychotherapists). On the other hand, psycho-social counselling

refers to preventive advice offered to deal with mental health issues, academic and psychological stress, general support for studies and everyday crises.

Additionally, there are services run by both students and professionals that focus support on the LGBTQI+ community and deal with cases of racism and discrimination. These issues are not always specific to mental health, but can be closely connected. Below is a non-exhaustive list of services:

- 1) University of Cologne:
 - [Obelix: Counselling for physical, psychological and other problems by the students' council of the whole physics department Cologne \(in English\)](#)
 - [Beratung und Unterstützung für Studierende mit psychischen Erkrankungen oder Belastungen](#)
 - [Psychological Counselling by the Kölner Studentenwerk](#)
- 2) University of Bonn:
 - [Psychological Counselling Offers of the Uni-Bonn](#)
 - [Psychological Counselling Center of the Studierendenwerk Bonn](#)
- 3) Support hotline at nighttime (for students in Cologne): [Nightline Köln \(website in German, services offered in English to some degree\)](#)
- 4) Advice from the perspective of LGBTQI+ issues (including cases of violence and discrimination): [Rubicon Koeln](#)
[LGBTQI+ in Bonn](#)
- 5) More issues and offers regarding inclusion and diversity:
 - [Advice and support for students with disabilities or chronic illnesses \(Uni-Cologne\)](#)
 - [Advice and support for students with disabilities or chronic illnesses \(Uni-Bonn\)](#)
 - Finding the right person for counselling and advice: [BeratungsFinder \(Uni-Cologne\)](#)
 - [Inclusive University: Offers and Support Services \(Uni-Bonn\)](#)
 - Advice against racism and discrimination: [Autonomous BIPoC unit of the University of Cologne](#)

3.6 Sick leave (“Krankmeldung”)

If you cannot work because of sickness, you are obliged to inform the employer. Just send an email (to your professor, supervisor and your secretary (mandatory)), or call the corresponding secretary or one of her colleagues, then they will report this to the personnel department. You also need to fill out [The electronic certificate of incapacity for work \(eAU\)](#) (two times: the first day when you are ill and the first day when you are back to work). In Germany you can stay at home for 3 days without having to consult a doctor. However, the weekend counts. If you cannot go to work on Friday and the following Monday, this is counted as 4 days and you have to consult a doctor and get a notification of sickness. You also need to provide a scan of the notification of sickness to the university system (eAU). Note, that up to 3 sick days it is not mandatory.

3.7 German language courses

There are different options to learn German, from the city or from the university. There are also free courses available.

Volkshochschule: It is significantly cheaper than usual private language schools. The category is “Deutsch als Fremdsprache”. They have different offers such as intensive courses (every day), evening course (2 evenings per week) and so on, for different levels. You can find general information, in several languages, [here](#)



For individual courses, you can search with the keyword of “Deutsch als Fremdsprache” under the search field in: <https://vhs-koeln.de/> and <https://www.vhs-bonn.de/programm/deutsch-und-integration.html>



To register on the course, you need to get advice from the service center. [Deutsch als Fremdsprache Sprachenberatung](#)

University courses (doctoral candidates only): The University offers a German course for doctoral candidates, called “[German as a Foreign Language](#)”. If you contact the International Office and allow them to send emails to you, you will receive emails before each semester which allow registration for the course.



German language courses for SFB1601-PhD-students will be offered by the Bonn-Cologne Graduate School ([Contact Petra Neubauer-Günther or Isabelle Breloy](#)).

If these courses are fully booked, we recommend taking courses at the “[Deutschakademie](#)”, which will be reimbursed.

3.8 Tax office (“Finanzamt”)

In the German tax system, you will be assigned to one of the tax categories (“Lohnsteuerklasse”) depending on whether you are married, whether you have children (without being married) and so on. For more details, see for example: [Wikipedia: Lohnsteuerklasse](#).

The initial assignment is usually done in such a way that the maximum possible tax is subtracted from your salary. If you are not married and have no children, you are probably fine. If you are assigned to an inappropriate “Lohnsteuerklasse”, you need to go to the tax office (“Finanzamt”) to change it. In principle, if you make a tax declaration in the next year, you can get the tax if you have payed too much, but it is recommended to get your tax band fixed sooner rather than later.

Reminder: Keep the receipts if you bought something related to your work privately. You can get some of the taxes back when doing your taxes if you didn’t get a reimbursement from your institute.

You can (and must, if you have additional incomes more than 410 € as of 2023 or if you work as freelancer) make a tax declaration (“Steuererklärung”) once per year (deadline is

in general end of May for the previous year), where you can declare many work-related expenses that were not reimbursed by the University; work-related books (if you own them), annual fee of an astronomical society, moving costs because of work, German courses, and much more. So keep those receipts!

You may seek support from the [Lohnsteuerhilfverein](#). This is a self-help facility by employees for employees to provide assistance in wage tax matters and in special income tax assessment cases. You have to be a member to ask for help. The annual fee depends on the salary and is about 127 € for a salary of 30.001-40.000 € gross earnings. <https://www.vlh.de/>



A company named Calisir organizes direct cash refund “Lohnsteuerbarauszahlung” of the amount paid in excess, charging 15%. The nearest facility is located in Düsseldorf, <https://www.calisir.de/filialen.html>.



4 University bureaucracy

If you apply for a doctoral candidate position/job, you must hand in a lot of documents and follow different regulations. As a doctoral candidate at the University of Cologne you also need to register in Docfile.

4.1 Promotion regulation (Promotionsordnung)

In general you should read the promotion regulations before you start your work. These regulations define everything around your doctoral candidatedship, what you are allowed to do and what you have to do. They define how you apply, how your thesis has to look like, how it is evaluated, and how you have to publish it.

- **Cologne:** you can find [the promotion regulations here](#). The general site, where they also explain step-by-step how you what you have to consider for handing in your thesis, announcing your defense, publish your theses, and so on [can be found here](#).
- **Bonn:** you can visit the following webpage: <https://www.mnf.uni-bonn.de/promotion>. It provides the promotion regulation and information on the registration process.

4.2 Docfile (Cologne only)

For the Cologne promotion regulation every doctoral candidate must register in Docfile. The university is, by state law, forced to collect data about doctoral candidates for statistical reasons. Therefore one needs to register online. **If you finished your doctoral thesis and you did not register, they will not hand over your doctoral certificate.** You can register here: <https://docfile.uni-koeln.de/home>.



4.3 Documents and Certified Translation Services

We suggest to check [this website](#) for an up-to-date list of documents you need, or for you to ask Bettina Krause. Some of these will be provided by the admin services, however you will need to provide several of your own documents:

- [Personal questionnaire with photograph](#) (Personalbogen mit Lichtbild)
- [Declaration form of working hours](#) (Erklärungsbogen zu Studium-, Promotions- und Beschäftigungszeiten)
- [LBV personal information](#) (LBV persönliche Angaben)
- [LBV "status statement"](#) (LBV Statuserklärung)
- CV (signed) (Lebenslauf; unterschrieben)
- Birth certificate (a copy is sufficient) (Geburtsurkunde; einfache Kopie ausreichend)
- Marriage certificate (a copy is sufficient) (Heiratsurkunde mit Namensführung; einfache Kopie ausreichend)
- Birth certificates of children (a copy is sufficient) (Geburtsurkunden der Kinder; einfache Kopie ausreichend). Please note: Applications for child benefits must be submitted directly to the responsible family benefits office.
- Training certificates (a copy is sufficient): High-school diploma, Bachelor-, Masters degree, Diploma-, PhD-, postdoctoral qualification certificate, etc. If you do not have a high-school diploma (as many countries do not provide this), try to find some document that has your final grades from your school.
- De-registration- and enrolment certificate (Ex-, Immatrikulationsbescheinigung)
- Confirmation of a valid health insurance (Mitgliedsbescheinigung Krankenkasse)
- Clearance certificate (not older than 6 months)
(Polizeiliches Führungszeugnis; nicht älter als 6 Monate)
- Copies of employment contracts (excluding ones with the University of Cologne)
(Kopien der Arbeitsverträge; ausgenommen Verträge mit der Universität zu Köln)
- Notice of termination of the previous employment relationship
Kündigung des bisherigen Beschäftigungsverhältnisses
- Residence permit (if you don't have it at the start of your work, you can hand this in after you receive it)
(Aufenthaltserlaubnis (ggf. nachreichen))

The University administrations may ask for certified translations of some academic documents (Transcripts, Degree etc.) to German before submitting them for enrolment/admission as a doctoral candidate. You can avail the services of the [Akademischer Übersetzungs- und Dolmetscherdienst](#) who provide certified translations exclusively for Uni-Köln for a small fee, or you can use a notary.

5 University structures

5.1 Supporting structures

There are supporting collaborative structures in the physical institutes of the CRC partners: the Graduate Schools Bonn Cologne Graduate School (BCGS), International Max Planck Research School (IMPRS) and Jülich Center for Doctoral Researchers and Supervisors (JuDocs) are associated with the Sonderforschungsbereich (Collaborative Research Center) 1601 (SFB/CRC 1601). They offer many soft skill courses, many events and being a formal member you can apply for some benefits.

All PhD-students of the astronomical and physical institutes in Bonn and Cologne are integrated in the BCGS. They benefit from a structured PhD program. Astronomy students can additionally apply for IMPRS, which is specialised on this research topic and offers additional benefits. Detailed information can be found here: <https://sfb1601.astro.uni-koeln.de/students/schools/>.

5.1.1 BCGS

The Bonn Cologne Graduate School (BCGS) is a graduate school where all students can be registered. There is no reason to decline registering for it, as they can provide stipends, additional travel money to go to conferences and so on. The Cologne coordinator of BCGS is Dr. Petra Neubauer-Guenther (room 203) (For students in Bonn [gradschool.physics\(at\)uni-bonn.de](mailto:gradschool.physics(at)uni-bonn.de) and for students in Cologne [gradschool.physics\(at\)uni-koeln.de](mailto:gradschool.physics(at)uni-koeln.de) The second address should reach Petra). You can find her in the office at the entrance of the institute. A lot of information about living in Cologne and the BCGS is available on [the BCGS's website](#). You can also email them for receiving help for: finding an apartment, organizing with health insurance, bank account, residence permit, booking appointments and making phone calls in German for you. On the BCGS website, you can also sign up for the [mailing list](#) with your university mail address.

5.1.2 SFB 1601

The Collaborative Research Center 1601 (CRC 1601; in German: Sonderforschungsbereich (SFB) 1601) is a research structure supported by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG). The spokesperson is Prof. Dr. Stefanie Walch-Gassner and the scientific coordinator is Dr. Isabelle Breloy.

The SFB 1601 allows/supports students in many cases, e.g.:

- Conference expenses
- Observation expenses
- Exchange students - especially with a duration up to 3 months(!)
- Child care help
- Trainer help
- What to do in case of any kinds of harassment (Diversity Board)
- And many more...

Diversity Board:

The SFB comes with certain infrastructure and committees, one of which is the diversity board (DB). DB focuses its work on gender issues, but is also concerned with other matters of inequality and/or harassment at the workplace. Hence, the major DB tasks are:

- Monitoring of gender issues within the SFB 1601
- To raise awareness of gender issues within the SFB 1601
- Implementation of SFB 1601 specific gender measures
- Distribution of information on gender measures implemented at the participating institutions
- To serve as focal point for gender as well as other inequality issues and matters of harassment at work, with each DB member acting as a contact point
- Networking with related (university) groups working on gender issues

Resources related to all above mentioned points, including where to seek help or counseling, report a complaint, etc, can be found on the webpage of the [CRC1601: equality and family support](#). On the separate page there are members of the [Diversity board](#). For any questions or issues you can contact: [sfb-db\[at\]ph1.uni-koeln.de](mailto:sfb-db[at]ph1.uni-koeln.de) or use the [anonymos form](#) on the CRC1601 website.

Sustainability Board:

The Sustainability Board is responsible for coordinating the evaluation of the environmental impact of the CRC1601 activities, i.e. measuring in particular the carbon footprint of the research. This is done with the support of the sustainability offices of the partner institutions (e.g. the working group “Nachhaltigkeit” at UoC45). Based on this assessment, the board proposes measures to reduce the environmental impact. The list of members can be found [here](#). You can contact [sfb-studentcouncil\[at\]ph1.uni-koeln.de](mailto:sfb-studentcouncil[at]ph1.uni-koeln.de) or any of the Student council members if you have any questions or ideas.

Student Council:

The Student council is a student organisation in which any master or PhD student can participate. It is proactive, independent and aimed at solving important issues in the life of students. It also responsible for social activity of students, for example annual student retreat (typically happens during the summer every year) and other social gathering during the year. It also organises every semester student seminars to practice your presentation skills in a friendly environment. You can find the members of the [Student council](#) on the CRC 1601 website. Fell free to contact any of them as well!

5.1.3 International Office

The International Office is university wide institution which aims to make life easier for foreign students. For Cologne, one can find information at [on their website](#) along with a [contact form](#). **Make sure to contact them soon, as they can provide a lot of helpful advice! They are especially helpful when it comes to the residence permit**

application for foreign students!!!!

For Bonn, you can find information [at this page](#).

5.1.4 Bonn Graduate Center

The Bonn Graduate Center offers numerous workshops for early-career researchers via the [Doctorate Plus](#) and the [Postdoc Plus](#) programmes. These workshops cover a wide range of topics, including soft skills, writing, science communication, research funding, and career planning. To stay informed about upcoming events and workshops, you can visit their respective pages or subscribe to their newsletter. In addition to these training opportunities, the Bonn Graduate School offers guidance and financial support for early-career researchers to advance their careers through the [Argelander Program](#).

5.1.5 TRA Matter (Bonn)

TRA Matter is one of the six Transdisciplinary Research Areas of the University of Bonn. [TRA Matter](#) organizes e.g. workshops (e.g. on ML) and networking events for PhD students and PostDocs. To become a member you need to email Birgit Westernströer at tra2-matter@uni-bonn.de.

5.1.6 ASTA

The "General Students' Committee" is another university wide institution. It is organised by students and represents students in the context of the whole university (e.g. regulations and rights). Additionally, it provides consultations and services for students.

The links for Cologne are:

<https://www.asta.uni-koeln.de>

<https://www.asta.uni-koeln.de/international-site/>

<https://www.asta.uni-koeln.de/?tab=angebote-tt-auslaenderinnen-beratung#angebote>

The links for Bonn are:

<https://www.asta-bonn.de/>

<https://www.asta-bonn.de/Services>

<https://www.asta-bonn.de/Consultations>

6 Plausible research funding opportunities in academia after the Doctorate degree

This section briefly touches up on a few possibilities of navigating the research funding after the successful completion of PhD. This is applicable to the students who further plan to stay in the research and academic field, after PhD.

6.1 The Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, German Research Foundation)

- Funding of fundamental research in all branches of science and humanities
- Open-topic funding within different funding programs
- Funding programs for all researchers (from early postdoc phase to professorship)
- Researchers in Germany, or those working at a German research institution abroad, who have completed their academic training (a doctorate as a rule).
- Researchers of non-university research institutions should note the rules on the duty to cooperate.
- Forms and guidelines contain detailed information on the respective eligibility to apply.
- DFG funds (1) "Individuals" via programs like Walter Benjamin, Emmy Noether, etc., along with providing many other research fellowships. (2) "Institutions" via Collaborative Research Centres (CRCs), (International) Training Groups, DFG Research Centres, in addition to providing funding for open access publications, core facilities for research and instrumentation, other infrastructure. (3) "Individuals" via various prestigious prizes and awards like Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz Prize, Copernicus Award, Communicator Award, etc., to name a few.

6.2 Germany - Funding by Ministries

- The most relevant in this section for us are the funding options provided by the "Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF)".
- It funds and supports: (1) Collaborative projects, (2) Applied research (funding for fundamental research at the DFG), (3) German-based partners, and (4) Participation of international partners.
- Funding via calls for proposal
- Additionally, the Federal State North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) also has separate funding options, which are expected to be less competitive. But those mostly require the outcomes of the funded project to have a strong impact in the region of NRW based on their predefined annual innovation strategy.

6.3 Horizon Europe (2021-2017)

This program by the European Union is based on three main pillars of their motivation behind providing the funding: (1) Excellent science, (2) Global challenges and European Industrial Competitiveness, and (3) Innovative Europe. They have various funding programs as listed below:

- European Research Council
- Marie-Sklodowska-Curie
- European Innovation Council (EIC)
- European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT)

6.4 Funding by Foundations

There exist several foundations that promote fundamental and applied research by providing funding to chosen excellent young minds at the beginning of their research career and even to some experienced researchers at the later stages of their career. A few such foundations are listed here:

- Alexander von Humboldt Stiftung
- Begabtenförderungswerke
- Boehringer Ingelheim Fonds
- Deutsche Bundesstiftung Umwelt
- Fritz Thyssen Stiftung
- Gerda Henkel Stiftung
- Stifterverband
- Volkswagen Stiftung

7 FAQs

7.1 International office of University of Cologne

There is an international office at the University to support foreign students and employees. You can ask for advice for official procedures, problems on living in Cologne etc. They also hold social events for foreign students and employees on certain occasions.

7.2 What is LBV?

It is the abbreviation of “Landesamt für Besoldung und Versorgung”. This is the institution that calculates and transfers salaries. You will get salary details (“Bezügemitteilung”) on the first month and whenever the total amount changes. You will also get a yearly summary (“Lohnsteuerbescheinigung”) once per year.

7.3 What is VBL?

It is the abbreviation of “Versorgungsanstalt des Bundes und der Länder”, which is an additional pension system. See the section on pensions.

7.4 What is “Rundfunkbeitrag” and why do they want money from me?

You may receive an request to pay for “Rundfunkbeitrag”. This is equivalent to a “TV License” in the UK and other countries. The fee is 17.50€/month and every household has to pay it (there are some exceptions). It does not matter how many people live in a flat. The idea of this fee (“Rundfunkbeitrag”) is to guarantee free and independent media.



More information [about “Rundfunkbeitrag”](#)

Some information is also given [in several languages, here](#).

7.5 Where can I look for sports?

There is a comprehensive offer of many sports activities and exercises by Uni-Sport (https://unisport.koeln/index_eng.html) and Hochschulsport (<https://hochschulsport-koeln.de/en>). In Bonn: [Hochschulsport](#) The cost is reasonable and it is easy to participate. You can visit their office in the Mensa, or look on their website, if you want to know more.

7.6 What does this acronym stand for?

BCGS	-	Bonn-Cologne Graduate School
SFB 1601	-	Sonderforschungsbereich 1601
CRC 1601	-	Collaborative Research Center 1601
NRW	-	Nordrhein-Westfalen
KVB	-	Kölner Verkehrs-Betriebe
LBV	-	Landesamt für Besoldung und Versorgung
VBL	-	Versorgungsanstalt des Bundes und der Länder
IMPRS	-	International Max Planck Research Schools

7.7 Useful links

- GitLab of the I. Physikalisches Institut (Cologne): <https://git.ph1.uni-koeln.de/>
- Webpage of the SFB 1601 <https://sfb1601.astro.uni-koeln.de> You can get the password for the internal pages, containing documents and application forms, from the Isabelle Breloy
- Internal webpage of the PH1 in Cologne (You should be in the network of Uni Cologne, if you are outside you get the login information from Frank Schlöder schloeder@ph1.uni-koeln.de): <https://hipe.ph1.uni-koeln.de/internal/>
- Photo phone list of the institute in Cologne. Click on the circle to see the photo (Cologne network). It is useful if you are searching for a special person <https://dbmgmt.ph1.uni-koeln.de/list/staff/photo/>
- It's like a Wikipedia but for a group. Some working groups are using it and some not. If your group is using it you get the login information from the group's admin. <https://wiki.astro.uni-koeln.de/doku.php>

8 Checklist (for you):

Before going to Germany:

- Ask for a buddy
- Get your VISA
- SEARCH FOR AN ACCOMODATION - START AS SOON AS POSSIBLE!**

First Week in Germany

- Register with the city
- Open a bank account
- Health insurance (“Krankenversicherung”)
- Liability insurance (“Haftpflichtversicherung”)
- Fill out all the forms under section 4.3. This can change: please always check what is needed when you start!
- Get a residence permit

First week at university

- Get a Student ID card
- Register with Docfile (Cologne only)
- Your email address is added in the SFB 1601 institutes mailing list (Frank Schlöder schloeder@ph1.uni-koeln.de)
- Introduce to the SFB 1601 coordinator Dr. Isabelle Breloy
- Your email address is added in the mailing list of your working group
- Inform yourself about the SFB 1601 annual retreat
- Inform yourself about the SFB 1601 annual student retreat
- Inform yourself about the SFB 1601 student seminar
(You should give 3 talks within your doctoral candidate time - around one talk per year)

9 Checklist (for the Buddy):

- Introduce your new colleague to ALL secretaries/coordinators
- Introduce your new colleague to the mechanical workshop
- Introduce your new colleague to the electrical workshop
- Show the location of the mailboxes

Acknowledgments

Most importantly we want to thank Yoko Okada for sharing her “Welcome Brochure” with us. Actually a lot of this Welcome Brochure is copied/pasted from her. Thank you very much!

Further on we would like to thank Bettina Krause for their support in the process of developing this brochure.

We hope you have fun and, more importantly, you profit tremendously from this Welcome Brochure.

The Student Council