

Argelander Institute for Astronomy

Welcome Notes

A Hitchhiker's Guide to the AIfA



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Welcome to AIfA

Dear new members,

We are very happy to welcome you to the [Argelander-Institut für Astronomie \(AIfA\)](#) at the Bonn University (UniBonn). Currently, AIfA has 8 research groups and roughly 90 members working in different fields of astrophysics and cosmology.

These Welcome Notes should support you in taking your first steps here, especially if it will be the first time that you are living and working in Germany or even Europe. These also contain further 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 is not meant to explain everything in full detail because laws and formal procedures can change and things might be different for each person.¹

These notes should guide you. For this reason, you can find a checklist at the end with the most important things you should organise for your stay in Bonn. 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 these notes will help you a lot!

Feedback about these Welcome Notes is warmly welcomed, especially if important things are missing.

We are all looking forward to meeting you in person,
your AIfA family :)

¹Therefore, we cannot take any responsibility for the correctness and completeness of these notes for every person.

Contents

1	Things to consider BEFORE your arrival	4
1.1	VISA	4
1.2	Accommodation	4
1.3	Health insurance (“Krankenversicherung”)	5
1.4	Liability insurance (“Haftpflichtversicherung”)	6
2	Things to consider when you have just arrived	7
2.1	Register with the city	7
2.2	Get a residence permit (For Non-EU citizens)	7
2.3	Student ID card	8
2.4	Open a bank account	8
3	Things to consider while living in Bonn	10
3.1	Learning German	10
3.2	Ticket for public transportation	10
3.3	Pensions (“Rente”)	11
3.4	Taking Holidays (“Urlaub”)	11
3.5	Finding a Doctor	11
3.6	Psycho-Social Counselling of Mental Health, LGBTQI+ and Diversity Issues	12
3.7	Sick leave (“Krankmeldung”)	13
3.8	Tax office (“Finanzamt”)	13
4	University bureaucracy	15
4.1	Promotion regulation (Promotionsordnung)	15
4.2	Documents and Certified Translation Services	15
5	University structures	17
5.1	BCGS	17
5.2	IMPRS	17
5.3	Bonn Graduate Center	17
5.4	The International Office	17
5.5	AStA	17
5.6	TRA Matter	18
5.7	AlfA committees and representatives	18
5.8	Kids	18
5.8.1	Parent-child room	18
6	FAQs	19
6.1	What is LBV?	19
6.2	What is VBL?	19
6.3	What is “Rundfunkbeitrag” and why do they want money from me?	19
6.4	Where can I look for sports?	19
6.5	What does this acronym stand for?	19
7	Checklist	20

1 Things to consider BEFORE your arrival

1.1 VISA

This point should be self-explanatory. Remember to apply as early as possible for your VISA. Since this procedure is more or less different for all countries and laws and regulations are changing frequently, we just want to remind you here to not forget about your VISA.

1.2 Accommodation

It is very hard to find an apartment in Bonn. Start as soon as possible to search for a flat. And 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 these websites quite helpful (of course there are more).

For students in Bonn:

- [Bonner Studierendenwerk](#)
- [University Bonn](#) This is a webpage of UniBonn that provides information on how to find accommodation.

In general:

- [Immobilien scout24](#): This website is for all people, not specifically designed 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 and single flats and many more. 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 landlord/landlady through a web form. If the landlord/landlady is interested in your request, they will contact you back e.g. asking for more information on you. They will often also ask for personal information (e.g., lifestyle, hobbies, etc.). You should invest some time to answer these questions with personal and detailed responses. This helps a lot. Typically after that the landlord/landlady asks for an appointment to view the apartment (“Besichtigung”).

Further on, you may be asked to show or give some documents, for example, a copy of your 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](#). However, if you are new in Germany, the content is probably just empty. Considering

the high competition to get an apartment, those documents may be useful even if they have not yet been requested.

Be aware that there are many fraudulent offers. For example, someone posts a fake offer and requests 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, don't pay anything before you sign the contract!**

Typical vocabulary:

Miete	= Rent
Kaltmiete	= Rent without additional costs (see below)
Warmmiete	= Rent including additional costs
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 excludes the kitchen and bathroom. If not explicitly mentioned, the electricity is typically additionally charged.

1.3 Health insurance (“Krankenversicherung”)

It is mandatory by law to have health insurance in Germany. Broadly speaking, there are two types of health insurance systems - statutory health insurance and private health insurance. The eligibility and obligations are slightly different for students and employees.

Students: Most students are obliged to enrol in a statutory health insurance plan. All statutory health insurance providers are obliged to offer reduced fees for students up to the age of 30. Many students opt for “Techniker Krankenkasse” (TK). 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. PhD students who receive a stipend can and generally opt for private health insurance.

Employees: As an employee, you are obliged to contribute to a statutory health insurance scheme in Germany. However, for certain employment contracts and fellowships, (e.g., the Humboldt Research Fellowship), you need to opt for private health insurance. You need to inform the personnel department (i.e., the Human Resources department) about your choice of health insurance before the start of your employment (you generally specify this in a form submitted along with the documents required to prepare an employment contract at UniBonn) You can find more information about your contribution and benefits [here](#).

There are several insurance providers (“Krankenkassen”) for statutory and private insurance. The basic service is quite similar for most of these, but there are differences (slightly different fees). You can (and must) choose your insurance company. Everyone should compare

the different conditions for themselves. You can use [check24](#) or the respective websites to compare. If you are new to Germany, you can ask your classmates/colleagues for suggestions. More information about the German healthcare system can be found on [here](#) (note that the webpage is for foregin migrants and refugees, but contains general information relevant for everyone).

1.4 Liability insurance (“Haftpflichtversicherung”)

In Germany, you should ALWAYS have a “Haftpflichtversicherung”. (Even if it is not strictly legally required.)

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.

This insurance is quite cheap and avoids a huge financial risk from you.

EVERYONE SHOULD HAVE A HAFTPFLICHTVERSICHERUNG.

This insurance is really important since you have to pay for all kinds of damages you may cause. Even though it might have been an accident. For example, if you just cross a road as a pedestrian, but it is your fault that a car has an accident. You will have to pay not only for the damages on the car, the damage the car produced while crashing, but also for nursing and so on. This can easily go up in the millions.

For this reason, your Haftpflichtversicherung should cover some millions. And you get this service for just a few euros per year, so don't be a fool, take a Haftpflichtversicherung. You can easily compare and book a Haftpflichtversicherung here: <https://www.check24.de/privathaftpflicht/> (Check 24 is a comparison portal for many services like electricity, insurance, etc.)

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 with 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. If you have a temporary apartment, you have to register this one first, and when you move later to another place, you have to change the registration. Often you have only 2 weeks to register and you need a letter from your landlord/landlady stating that you live in their flat now (this is an additional letter, not your contract). For Bonn, you can visit:

- [General information](#)
- [Making an appointment in Stadthaus Bonn](#)

If you live in a neighbouring city, please follow the official website for that city. If the next available appointment is far off in the future, try checking at 8:00am as open appointments get posted on the website then. You may also use one of the 'Außenstellen' in Bad Godesberg, Beuel or Hardtberg. These are usually not as crowded and overbooked.

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 has 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 follow the website of the [Federal Office for Migration and Refugees](#), where you can search with the postal code of your registered home address and the map on this website will show the location, phone number and email address of the Foreigners' office.

Once you have the contact details, it is advised to email or call the Foreigners' office with details of your status and to request an appointment to apply for a residence permit. Please note that appointments may only be available a few months later, therefore it is strongly encouraged to get in contact with the authorities well in advance, 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 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 UniBonn (international@uni-bonn.de). You could also ask a colleague/friend of yours to accompany you as a translator.

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

- [Preparing your stay and important documents \(UniBonn\)](#)
- [Entry and visa process \(Federal Foreign Office of Germany\)](#)

During the appointment, it is possible that you are not immediately granted a Residence Permit, but are provided with a “Fiktionsbescheinigung”, which is a type of temporary visa that secures your legal stay in Germany till the time 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 the final permit to reach you up to 6-8 weeks after a successful application. During this time, the Ausländeramt may ask for additional documents, so make sure to check your inbox/mailbox regularly.

2.3 Student ID card

Students who successfully enrol at the University will get a student ID card. **Included is a valid ticket for public transportation in NRW.** You can pick up the additional Mensa card using your student ID in any Mensa of Studentenwerk Bonn. Non-student employees need a signed form from the institute and should bring it to the information in Mensa, then you will get a card. It can be loaded with credit in the Mensa either with cash or with your bank card (EC-card).

When you have arrived, 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 enrol, and therefore will not receive this multi-use student ID card.

2.4 Open a bank account

The first thing you need is to open a bank account in Germany to receive your salary. To open a bank account (“Bankkonto”), usually you just go to the bank and tell them that you want to open an account (at least you will be told what documents you need to do it). Here are a few important points regarding the banking system in Germany:

- The German EC-card is sufficient for most purposes within Germany or even Europe without the need for a VISA. So there is, as a baseline, no need for expensive VISA gold options apart from buying online. In general, foreigners who have a VISA card from another account do not need one in Germany.
- The ATM system in Germany. Banks are organized in ATM networks and withdrawing cash outside your network will, in most cases, result in a substantial fee. For instance, Sparkasse has the most ATMs as stated above, but banks like Deutsche Bank, Commerzbank, Postbank, HypoVereinsBank are part of one single large network of ATMs that is essentially as convenient as Sparkasse. BVR from Volksbank & Co. is yet another one. So, people have to consider where they may want to withdraw cash from before choosing a bank and then stick to their network otherwise substantial fees may be charged. As “cash is king” in Germany, and many shops and cafes around AIfA do not accept card payments below a certain amount, this is an important choice. Most Germans use either Sparkasse or Volksbank.
- The maintenance fees for a Girokonto in many banks depends not only on the service required but also on the cash flow on your account and/or your age. In such case, depending on your salary/income/monthly transit the cost will differ, therefore this

information is required when looking for an optimal bank. Here again, [check24](#) may be helpful for comparison.

There are many banks in Germany, with different costs and personal benefits, so you should compare these for yourself. Here is a list of some popular banks:

- Sparkasse KölnBonn:
It has many ATMs (“Geldautomat”) (also near the University). There is an account maintenance charge when you are above 25. Their online banking website is easy to work with.
- Deutsche Bank:
Online banking has a good English form. There is an account maintenance charge.
- Hanseatic Bank
- Commerzbank

You might also want to ask your colleagues. Once you open the account, give the account information to the institute administrators (the form is available from them). It will be used for getting the salary, paying for a public transport subscription if you want (see below), reimbursement of the travel money, and so on.

3 Things to consider while living in Bonn

3.1 Learning German

- **At the University**

The University of Bonn offers German courses free of charge for students and members of the University staff every semester at different levels (look [here](#) and [here](#) for more information).

Note, however, that the class sizes are small (18-20 students per class) and the courses get fully booked within minutes, particularly the A-level ones, so you need to be quick and have a good internet connection :)

- **Volkshochschule Bonn**

[Volkshochschule Bonn](#) also offers (paid) German courses at all levels. 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 courses (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 at: <https://www.vhs-bonn.de/>

3.2 Ticket for public transportation

If you are an international student you should register at the international office website, before coming to Bonn. You register as an international student and ask them for some student tickets (before you get your student ID card). For doctoral candidates or other students, the student ID card can be used as public transportation tickets (the cost is included in the semester fee). This student NRW (Nordrhein-Westfalen) ticket allows the usage of any trains, trams, and buses inside NRW, excluding IC and ICE trains (the fast ones). The exact details of the tickets might differ and change with time. [Here](#) you can get all information (in German).

Non-student employees need to order a ticket if they want one. A ticket for one ride costs about 3€. The costs can be reduced by buying several at a time or buying them through mobile apps like VRS, KVB, DB navigator. If you use a tram, train, or bus to come to the institute, it's worthwhile to get a monthly subscription with the 49€ ticket which will in addition give you access to local buses and trains all over Germany.

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 and on the weekends. 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€ ticket.

- **Nextbike**: registering to NextBike with a uni-bonn mail address entitles you to 30m of free rides each day. It only costs a yearly fee of 3€ for the registration.
- **Cambio**: you pay no registration fee regardless of the tariff selected and thus save 30€ if you choose your tariff freely.

3.3 Pensions (“Rente”)

After registering with the health insurance, you are assigned a pension insurance number (“Rentenversicherungsnummer”). You will also be informed about your enrolment 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 contribution in the amount of 1.71 percent (as of 2017) of the gross salary regardless of the period of employment. For academic employees, it is voluntary for the first 5 years, after 5 years you have to 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. By default, you are enrolled in the VBL pension scheme, you need to inform them if you do not wish to contribute to it.

Also, remember to inform them if your residential address changes during your stay in Bonn.

3.4 Taking Holidays (“Urlaub”)

For academic employees with 5 working days (Mo.-Fr.) in a week, 30 holidays are available per year. You should and in most cases have to take these holidays within the same year. In general, you can transfer your current year’s holidays to the first three months (Jan-March) of the next year. For the exact rules relevant to your research group/ funding agency, ask your admin assistant. Discuss your holidays with your supervisor and contact the administrative assistant responsible for your research group for further formalities (if any). Generally, you must fill in the holiday request form (“Urlaubsantrag”) and get it signed by your supervisor.

3.5 Finding a Doctor

It is very helpful to choose a general doctor (“Hausarzt”, in German) shortly after you arrive in Germany. A general doctor is, as a general rule, 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 (for instance against COVID-19), periodic check-ups and so on. If it is necessary, he/she will then address you to another doctor who fits at best with your needs. It is possible to go to most specialists directly without going to a general doctor before.

You are not automatically assigned to a general doctor (by your health insurance company, for instance): this is something you have to do autonomously. So, how to find a general doctor, who is suitable for you? In principle it is very simple, you can just google it on the web and find one close to your place, but you can also do something more sophisticated. Normally, the websites of the health insurance companies have a search engine which you can use for this purpose: e.g., on this TK website: <https://www.tk.de>

[//www.tk-aerztfuehrer.de/TK/englische-suche.htm](http://www.tk-aerztfuehrer.de/TK/englische-suche.htm), 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 particularly 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 also for other doctors, like dentists. Another good website for this purpose is <https://www.doctolib.de> (in German only), which allows you not only to find a doctor filtering by spoken language but also to book a visit directly.

After selecting a doctor, the next step is to contact them and schedule your initial appointment. During this first visit, you will be asked to complete some necessary forms providing information about your health situation. Additionally, you will likely undergo a comprehensive medical checkup. Following this initial appointment, there are no further mandatory steps; you can simply contact your chosen doctor whenever you require a consultation.

It is important to note that visits to your primary care physician are typically fully covered by your health insurance. To confirm, you may inquire with the doctor you’ve selected about the coverage provided by your insurance. However, this is generally applicable to the vast majority of doctors and health insurance plans. If you choose your doctor through your health insurance company’s website, you can be confident that your expenses will be covered.

Always ensure that you have your insurance card with you when visiting a doctor, as they will need it to process payments through your health insurance provider. Many health insurance plans also extend their coverage to include routine check-ups with dentists and gynaecologists. If you’re uncertain whether a particular medical service, diagnostic procedure, or medication/vaccine is covered by your health insurance, you can verify this information through their website or by contacting them via phone or email.

Note that in Germany you do not have to officially declare your general doctor either 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. Anyway, it is, in general, a good idea not to change the doctor once you have chosen one, so that he/she has a better overview of your whole health and, even more importantly, because in particularly busy periods, like recently happened, doctors tend to refuse to accept new patients and give priority to those who visited them already.

3.6 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 UniBonn 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 consulting 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:

- [Psychological Counselling Offers of UniBonn](#)
 - [Psychological Counselling Center of the Studierendenwerk Bonn](#)
- 1) Advice from the perspective of LGBTQI+ issues (including cases of violence and discrimination): [LGBTQI+ in Bonn](#)
 - 2) More issues and offers regarding inclusion and diversity:
 - [Advice and support for students with disabilities or chronic illnesses](#)
 - [Inclusive University: Offers and Support Services \(UniBonn\)](#)
 - [Counseling regarding racism](#)

3.7 Sick leave (“Krankmeldung”)

If you cannot work because of sickness, you are obliged to inform the employer. Inform your supervisor and the respective administrative assistant and they will report this to the personnel department. In Germany, it is allowed to stay at home for 3 days without consulting 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. The general rule is to hand in the original certificate to the administrative assistant responsible for your group at the latest on the fourth day of absence. For the rules relevant to your research group/ funding agency, ask your admin assistant.

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, probably you have nothing to do here. If you are assigned to an inappropriate “Lohnsteuerklasse”, you need to go to the tax office (“Finanzamt”) or call them up (see [here](#)) to change it. In principle, if you make a tax declaration in the next year, you can get the tax that you have paid too much, but it is recommended not to wait until then to avoid paying too much tax. You can (or have to, if you have an additional income above 410 € as of the beginning of 2017) submit a tax declaration (“Steuererklärung”) once per year, and you can declare any work-related expenses that were not reimbursed by the University; work-related books (but you own them), the annual fee of an astronomical society, moving costs because of the work, German courses, and many more. So keep those receipts. . Note, however, that here ‘additional’ incomes refer specifically to income(s) on top of your declared salary and that is not subject to tax. For instance, if you took a parental leave and earned ‘Elterngeld’ ([parental allowance](#) that you do not pay taxes on it but getting this allowance may impact

your tax class and the tax you need to pay on your taxable income(s). This [link](#) provides further useful information.

You may seek support from the [Lohnsteuerhilfverein](#) (e.g., the [VLH](#)). This is a self-help facility of employees for employees to provide assistance in wage tax matters and in special income tax assessment cases. You have to be a member to seek help. The annual fee depends on the salary and is about 127 € for a salary of 30.001-40.000 € gross earnings.

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

4 University bureaucracy

If you apply for a doctoral candidate position/job, you have to hand in quite a number of documents and follow different regulations. As a doctoral candidate, 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 candidatureship, what you are allowed to do and what you have to do. They define how you apply, how your thesis has to look, how it is evaluated, and how you have to publish it. You can visit the following webpage: <https://www.mnf.uni-bonn.de/promotion>. It provides the promotion regulations and information on the registration process. At the beginning of your PhD you need to get admission to the ‘Promotionsstudium’ by submitting the ‘Application for Admission to Doctoral Studies’ to the doctoral board of the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences. Usually, you cannot get the signature of the Department Chairperson yourself, so ask the admin assistant for your group (or Frau Kleuser) for help. Afterwards, they usually send the documents to the doctoral board themselves. Several documents that need to be attached: Certificates and diplomas for all university degrees, a copy of official photo ID and if applicable, a detailed supervisor declaration concerning adequate English language proficiency (§ 8, para. 6 of the Doctoral Degree Regulations). Additionally the registration form for recording statistics on doctoral students (Form available at <https://www.mnf.uni-bonn.de/promotion>) needs to be sent to: promotion.mnf@uni-bonn.de. You get a letter of admission from the doctoral office as soon as your application is approved. This letter then needs to be taken to the Studiensekretariat to enrol. https://www.uni-bonn.de/en/studying/consultation-and-service/student-registry/student-registry?set_language=en in general: if bureaucracy, forms, or anything else is too complicated, the admin assistants are your best friends, they have a lot of experience and are always happy to help.

4.2 Documents and Certified Translation Services

When you start any academic position at Uni Bonn, you need to submit certain documents (e.g., your CV, birth certificate, health insurance certificate, transcripts, degree and educational qualification certificates, etc.) depending on your position (e.g., doctoral candidate, postdoctoral researcher, etc.), type of contract and the funding agency. You will be asked by the administrative assistant/ contact person at the Human Resources Department to submit these documents before joining (usually a few months in advance of the start of your employment). Some of these documents like the [Polizeiliches Führungszeugnis](#) (Police clearance certificate) need to be requested by you at the Stadthaus(city hall).

Depending on your nationality, you might need to submit proof of a valid work permit for the duration of your employment. This can be tricky at times for non-EU residents as generally, one requires a work contract to obtain a work permit. In some cases, this can be resolved by an “Aufnahmevereinbarung” (Hosting Agreement) from the HR department. However, it is best to seek advice from the administrative assistants regarding this as the intermediate steps can vary from person to person.

UniBonn may ask for certified translations of some academic documents to English/German before submitting them for enrolment/admission as a doctoral candidate. In that case, you can ask one of the admin assistants regarding translation services provided by the University or in Bonn.

5 University structures

There are several supporting structures at Uni Bonn. Some of these like the Bonn Cologne Graduate School (**BCGS**) and The International Max Planck Research School (IMPRS) at Bonn-Cologne (**IMPRS**) are specifically targeted towards master and Ph.D. students while some others offer training and support for all early-career researchers.

5.1 BCGS

The Bonn Cologne Graduate School (BCGS) is a graduate school, where all students are registered if they are not declining. In general, there is no reason to decline it. Here, you can also apply for stipends, ask for additional travel money to go to conferences and so on. You can find all relevant information on **BCGS website**. You can also e-mail them to ask for help regarding finding an apartment, organizing your 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.

5.2 IMPRS

5.3 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**.

5.4 The International Office

The International Office is a university-wide institution, to make life easier for foreign students. It is supporting and advising international students. They frequently organize general events for all international students as well as workshops targeting specific groups (e.g. writing retreats for Ph.D. students). You can find all the information on their **webpage** and the webpage of the **International Club**.

5.5 AStA

The “General Students’ Committee” is another university-wide institution. It is organised by students and representatives. Additionally, it provides consultations and services for students. The relevant links are:

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

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

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

5.6 TRA Matter

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.

5.7 AIfA committees and representatives

Beside the University-wide structures, also within our institute, there are many initiatives and people you can contact (also anonymously). For student matters the Student Representatives are responsible. The [DEI committee](#) (who is also supplying you with this lovely guide) is, among other responsibilities, working on a welcoming, caring and inclusive culture. The social committee is organizing the Summer BBQ and Christmas Party. You will find the responsible people on the AIfA Intranet webpage.

You can find useful information regarding the computing facilities and services at AIfA on the [Intranet page](#) of the IT group

5.8 Kids

5.8.1 Parent-child room

There is a parent-child room in U1.007. It contains some toys, a crib, and various other things. It can be used whenever needed. You can contact one of the admin assistants to get the keys. Note, however, to do so during their office hours.

6 FAQs

6.1 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.

6.2 What is VBL?

It is the abbreviation of "Versorgungsanstalt des Bundes und der Länder", which is an additional pension system. See the section 3.3 for more details.

6.3 What is "Rundfunkbeitrag" and why do they want money from me?

You may be surprised to receive a request to pay for "Rundfunkbeitrag". 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](#).

6.4 Where can I look for sports?

[HoschuleSport](#) at the UniBonn offers various sports and fitness courses every semester and during semester breaks. 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: https://www.sport.uni-bonn.de/en/uebersicht?set_language=en). 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.

6.5 What does this acronym stand for?

BCGS	-	Bonn-Cologne Graduate School
NRW	-	Nordrhein-Westfalen
VRS	-	Verkehrsverbund Rhein-Sieg
SWB	-	Stadtwerke Bonn
LBV	-	Landesamt für Besoldung und Versorgung
VBL	-	Versorgungsanstalt des Bundes und der Länder
IMPRS	-	International Max Planck Research Schools
TRA	-	Transdisciplinary Research Area

7 Checklist

Before coming to Germany:

- Get your VISA
- SEARCH FOR AN ACCOMODATION - START AS SOON AS POSSIBLE!**

First Week in Germany

- Register to the city
- Open a bank account
- Health insurance (“Krankenversicherung”)
- Liability insurance (“Haftpflichtversicherung”)
- Get a residence permit

First week at university

- Get a Student ID card
- Make sure that your email address has been added to the institute mailing list

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