



# Tips for appointments with government offices

## Stay calm!

*[CoRa] – a DGB-Bildungswerk Thüringen e.V. and  
Refugee Council of Thuringia e.V. project*



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contra RassistInnen · pro MigrantIn und Asyl!

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DGB-Bildungswerk  
Thüringen e.V.

## Tips for appointments with government offices, agencies and local authorities

Stay calm!

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## Tips for appointments with government offices, agencies and local authorities

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This guide informs you about your rights when you have appointments with government offices, agencies and local authorities and gives you tips to ensure a successful outcome.

## 1. Recording appointments

Keep a written record of what you have done with each government office, agency and local authority. You will then be able to prove that you have submitted applications or claims and that you attended the respective appointments.

### 1.1 Make a note of the following details:

- Why did you have an appointment with the government office, agency or local authority? What was the appointment about?
- Time and date of the appointment
- Name and address of the government office, agency or local authority
- Name of the government office, agency or local authority employee you dealt with
- Room number of the office of the government office, agency or local authority employee you dealt with
- Name of the person who accompanied you (if applicable)
- What documents did you hand over or present?
- What documents did you sign?

Use your mobile phone to take a picture of the name plate on the employee's office door. You can also record this information as a voice message on your mobile phone.

It's a good idea to attach copies of the documents you have handed over or presented to your notes.

## 2. Support during appointments

When you attend an appointment at a government office, agency or local authority, you speak for yourself. However, you can also take someone with you for support. This person can be **anyone qualified to offer you support (Beistand)**, or **someone who is authorised to represent you (Bevollmächtigte/r)** (as per § 14 of Germany's Administrative Procedure Act, VwVfG).

### 2.1 Beistand

The person supporting you can be a friend, a social worker or an interpreter, for example. They can speak for you, provided you are present. However, they may do so only if you explicitly consent to this and do not object to what they are saying.

If the person who is supporting you wants to obtain information in your absence, you have to release them from their duty of confidentiality by means of a written document. This could be the case, for example, if the person who is supporting you makes a phone call to a government office, agency or local authority on your behalf. A **confidentiality release (Schweigepflichtsentbindung)** is a document signed by you. By signing this document, you confirm that the person who is supporting you may discuss your situation with a govern-

ment office, agency or local authority employee.

► Confidentiality release template:

[fluechtlingsrat-thr.de/arbeitshilfen/antragshilfen](https://fluechtlingsrat-thr.de/arbeitshilfen/antragshilfen) (under "Sonstige")

## 2.2 Bevollmächtigte

Someone who is authorised to represent you could be a lawyer, for example. They act on your behalf. An authorised representative can represent you in all dealings with a government office, agency or local authority and can submit claims or applications on your behalf in your absence. A person does not become your authorised representative until you have given them a respective mandate. This **mandate (Vollmacht)** is a document signed by you to confirm that the person is your authorised representative.

Authorised representatives have the right to access your records. **The right to access your records (Akteneinsicht)** means that the government office, agency or local authority is legally obliged to show your records to you or your authorised representative on request, or must send you or them a copy.

## 3. Preparing for appointments

### 3.1 Discuss the appointment beforehand

If you take someone with you to a government office, agency or local authority for support, it's a good idea to discuss the appointment beforehand. What do you want the person

who is accompanying you to do? Should they just sit in, should they record what is being said in writing, or should they also ask or answer questions on your behalf?

### 3.2 Learn as much as you can

Learn as much as you can about your rights and duties when dealing with government offices, agencies and local authorities. Read different brochures and texts online that apply to your situation. Ensure that you trust only information provided by reputable websites. A website is likely to be trustworthy if it is provided by counselling centres such as Diakonie, Caritas or Parität, by refugee councils or by government ministries.

The more you know, the better you will understand the actions of the government office, agency or local authority. You will be able to argue your case better and assert your rights.

▶ You can find information for refugees and asylum seekers in various languages here:

[fluechtlingsrat-thr.de/arbeitshilfen/mehrsprachige-infos](https://fluechtlingsrat-thr.de/arbeitshilfen/mehrsprachige-infos)

[fluechtlingsrat-thr.de/arbeitshilfen/beratungshilfen](https://fluechtlingsrat-thr.de/arbeitshilfen/beratungshilfen)

## 4. During appointments

### 4.1 Who will be interpreting?

Germany's official language is German. You have the right to bring an interpreter with you to the appointment (see Support). However, you are not legally obliged to bring an interpreter with you, even if a government office, agency or local authority insists that you do.

In the event of important decisions that pertain to your rights, the government office, agency or local authority must ensure that you understand everything. However, this does not apply to written decisions, but particularly to oral hearings that take place before a written decision is issued.

Children often interpret for their parents. However, although this may be a convenient solution in everyday situations, it can lead to problems and should not be a permanent solution. Important issues might overtax or frighten children, for example if the appointment is about serious questions concerning the whole family's right to remain in the country.

The Thuringia local government provides a free video and audio interpreting service. The offer can be used by counselling centres, government offices, agencies and local authorities, doctors and many other places that offer support.

▶ Please ask the staff if you would like to make use of the video interpreting offer:

[justiz.thueringen.de/fileadmin/TMMJV/Themen/migration/Flyer\\_Videodolmetschen\\_2020.pdf](https://justiz.thueringen.de/fileadmin/TMMJV/Themen/migration/Flyer_Videodolmetschen_2020.pdf)

▶ For meetings with parents, schools can ask the Sprintpool Thüringen service for an interpreter. The Thuringian ministry for education will bear the cost. Ask the school whether they can arrange for an interpreter.

[bildung.thueringen.de/schule/migration/schulbesuch/#c13186](https://bildung.thueringen.de/schule/migration/schulbesuch/#c13186)

## 5. Submitting an application or claim

### 5.1 Always submit your application or claim in writing

When you submit an application or claim to a government office, agency or local authority, they must either accept it or tell you which government office, agency or local authority you should submit your application or

claim to. You should also ask whether the application or claim is complete and correct. The government office, agency or local authority is legally obliged to advise you on the respective issue.

It's a good idea to obtain written proof of your application or claim submission. There are different confirmation options:

- **Option 1:** If you submit your application or claim to a government office, agency or local authority employee in person, you can ask them for a copy of your application or claim. This copy should be stamped with the government office, agency or local authority stamp, and the date and time of the submission should be written on it.
- **Option 2:** You can send your application or claim by registered post as recorded delivery.
- **Option 3:** You can fax your application or claim and keep the fax confirmation on file. After you have sent the fax, you can call the government office, agency or local authority and check whether they have received it. Note down the time of your call, the name of the person you spoke to and their telephone number, or record these details as a voice note on your mobile phone. However, please note that neither the fax confirmation nor the phone call are considered legal evidence of your submission.

Note down when and how you submitted the application or claim. You can also record this information as a voice note on your mobile phone.

## 5.2 Do not sign anything straight away

When a government office, agency or local authority employee asks you to sign a document, you do not have to sign it straight away.

Ask whether you can take the document home with you and return the signed document to them later on. You can read through the document in your own time at home. Find out what the contents of the document are and visit a counselling centre or a lawyer if you need more information. You can then return the signed application or claim by post or in person.

If you cannot take the document home with you, ask whether you can have a copy of the document. You can also take a photograph of the document with your mobile phone.

If you were not allowed to take the document home with you or to copy or photograph it, make a note of this after the appointment. If that was the case, contact your lawyer or an counselling centre. It is extremely unusual and not acceptable to not receive a copy or be allowed to take a copy of documents in a matter that concerns you.

## 6. Decisions regarding an application or claim

A government office, agency or local authority can reply to a written application or claim orally, in writing or via email. However, you have the right to receive a written answer, i.e. to receive a written notification. You should already mention this in your application or claim. The written reply must include the reasons why an application or claim has been rejected (as per § 37 and § 39 of Germany's administrative procedure act VwVfG).

This written reply can help counselling centre staff and lawyers to understand the situation and to help you.

### 6.1 Processing time of an application or claim

If it takes a government office, agency or local authority a long time to process an application or a claim (over three months, in some special circumstances also less than three months) without good reason and they do not respond to respective enquiries, you should check with a lawyer whether it makes sense to apply to a court for a so-called **writ of mandamus (Untätigkeitsklage)** (as per § 75 of Germany's code of administrative court procedure, VwGO), which legally obliges the government office, agency or local authority to respond. Threatening a government office, agency or local authority with a writ of mandamus may already motivate them to process the application or claim.

### 6.2 Information on legal remedies

You can appeal against the rejection of an application or claim or a written notification. You can file an objection with a court, for example.

You will find the deadline by which you must file your objection or appeal against the rejection or written notification on the last page of the written notification under the heading **Rechtsbehelfsbelehrung (information on legal remedies)**.

Watch out for deadlines! Sometimes, you only have one or two weeks to appeal or object. Contact a specialist lawyer or a counselling centre; they will help you.

▶ More information about how to deal with written notifications:

[fluechtlingsrat-thr.de/sites/fluechtlingsrat/files/pdf/umF/FLR\\_Arbeitshilfe-Umgang-mit-Bescheiden\\_Feb2017\\_final.pdf](https://fluechtlingsrat-thr.de/sites/fluechtlingsrat/files/pdf/umF/FLR_Arbeitshilfe-Umgang-mit-Bescheiden_Feb2017_final.pdf)

## 7. Complaining about the actions or behaviour of a government office, agency or local authority employee

You can complain about certain actions or behaviour of a government office, agency or local authority employee. Behaviour you can file a complaint about includes, for example, shouting at you, locking the office door during your conversation with them, or racist remarks.

If you want to file a complaint about such behaviour, you should take notes from memory for yourself regarding the details of the incident:

- When and where did the incident happen?
- Who was present?
- Who did or said what?

You can write down these notes of memory or save them as a voice note on your mobile phone.

Filing an official complaint against a government office, agency or local authority employee often takes a long time and is not always successful. If many people complain about the same actions or behaviour, the likelihood that a government office, agency or local authority will improve the way its employees act or behave in future increases. A complaint is unlikely to lead to a result in your specific case. However, it might bring about a positive change for others who may be affected in future. It's important to take action against misconduct.

There is no specialised counselling centre for such complaints.

If you need help, you could contact the coordination office for anti-discrimination issues, for example:

▶ **Thüringer Staatskanzlei**  
 Koordinierungsstelle für Antidiskriminierungsfragen  
 Regierungsstrasse 73 // 99084 Erfurt  
 Phone: 0361-5732111-52  
 Email: [R1B4\\_PF@tsk.thueringen.de](mailto:R1B4_PF@tsk.thueringen.de)  
 Internet: [antidiskriminierungsstelle.de/SharedDocs/Akteure/DE/TSK\\_Koord\\_ADfragen.html](https://antidiskriminierungsstelle.de/SharedDocs/Akteure/DE/TSK_Koord_ADfragen.html)

If you experience physical attacks or other forms of racist, right-wing, anti-Semitic violence as well as serious threats, you can contact ezra:

▶ **ezra** – mobile counselling service for victims of right-wing, racist and anti-Semitic violence in Thuringia  
 Juri-Gagarin-Ring 96 / 98 // 99084 Erfurt  
 Phone: 0361-21865133  
 Email: [info@ezra.de](mailto:info@ezra.de)  
 Internet: [ezra.de](https://ezra.de)

## Stick together!

You are welcome to pass on this information to friends and acquaintances. The better informed you are about your rights, the easier it will be for you to assert them.

## Further information

▶ Right to asylum and right to remain related issues

### Flüchtlingsrat Thüringen e. V.

“BLEIBdran - Berufliche Perspektiven für Flüchtlinge in Thüringen” – Thuringia's asylum seeker and refugee integration network

Schillerstr. 44 // 99096 Erfurt

Phone: 0361-518051-26

Email: [beratung@fluechtlingsrat-thr.de](mailto:beratung@fluechtlingsrat-thr.de)

▶ Overview of local counselling centres:

[thueringen.de/th10/ab/beratung/](http://thueringen.de/th10/ab/beratung/)

[migrationsdienste/](http://migrationsdienste/)

▶ Employment law related issues  
**DGB-Bildungswerk Thüringen e. V.**

“Faire Integration”

Schillerstr. 44 // 99096 Erfurt

Phone: 0361-2172716

Email: [faire-integration@dgb-bwt.de](mailto:faire-integration@dgb-bwt.de)

▶ Anti-discrimination in Thuringia  
The Thuringian anti-discrimination network **thadine** campaigns for an independent anti-discrimination counselling centre.

See their website for more information:

[thadine.de](http://thadine.de)

### PLEASE NOTE:

This publication does not reflect the opinions of the Thuringian Ministry for Education, Youth and Sports (TMBJS).

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IST KOSTENFREI, ABER IN  
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UNTERSTÜTZEN SIE UNSERE ARBEIT!

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