

Federal Volunteer Service

Information for volunteers and aspiring
volunteers.



Welcome to the Federal Volunteer Service

This handbook was made for anyone interested in a Federal Volunteer Service (BFD) in environmental protection or conservation, or who has already begun volunteering.

The BUND Federal Volunteer Service is an exciting time filled with interesting and informative seminars and many different places of assignment. Get involved and support non-profit organisations in protecting the environment.

We want to assist you and inform you of the individual steps and processes, and of your rights and obligations.

We look forward to
having you volunteer with us!



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Introduction to the Federal Volunteer Service

The most important information for you

- Open to all age groups past mandatory schooling age
- Open to all nationalities
- Service between at least 6 and at most 18 months
- The service time is at least 20.1 hours/week for persons over 27 years of age
- Volunteers under 27 years of age work full-time, and can only work part-time if they have a justified interest in part-time work
- Start working at any time

The Federal Volunteer Service may be of interest to...

- Persons who want to make a voluntary contribution to society
- School graduates who want professional orientation
- Employed persons who want to discover new areas of involvement
- Job seekers looking for a way back onto the job market
- Pensioners who want to get involved and share their knowledge
- ...

The BUND takes care of these matters

- Contract coordination between the Federal Office, the volunteers, and the places of assignment
- Placement of open BFD positions to applicants
- Supervision and advice for volunteers and managers of places of assignment
- Mediation in conflicts between volunteers and their places of assignment
- Provision of seminars
- Contact for any questions about the Federal Volunteer Service

Differences between BFD and Voluntary Ecological Year (FÖJ)

- The FÖJ is scheduled for a specific amount of time, and can only begin on 1 September of the respective year. The BFD can be started at any time
- The FÖJ is limited to persons up to 27 years of age, but the BFD has no age restrictions
- The FÖJ lasts 12 months, while the BFD can last between 6 and 18 months

Getting started with the BFD

What is a place of assignment and where will I find the right one for me?

A place of assignment is a non-profit organisation recognised by the Federal Office of Families and Civil Social Affairs (BAFzA) as a place of deployment for the Federal Volunteer Service.

Each place of assignment must be allocated a central office that consolidates the interests of the places of assignment and tends to centralised administration.



You can find the right position for you on our [online placement map](#) or on the [BAFzA](#) webpage.

You can apply directly with the contact person listed there.

Your place of assignment is responsible for conducting the BFD properly. Each position comes with a contact person with whom you can talk about your questions, concerns and problems.

What will be my duties during my BFD?

The tasks you will perform vary widely. They depend on the needs and tasks of the respective place of assignment. For example, you could be working in environmental and animal conservation, agriculture, childcare and youth groups, public relations, environmental consultation, an office, and much more.

What is an agreement and what does it entail?

If you have found the job you want and have reached an agreement with the organisation, an agreement will be made. This specifies the working hours, duration, number of leave days, and seminar days. The amount of your allowance is also determined in the agreement.

After the place of assignment and you have signed the agreement, it is sent to the BUND central office. After around 3-6 weeks you will receive an agreement signed and confirmed by the BAFzA.

The BFD requires social insurance payments. This means that, during your service, the place of assignment must pay pension, accident, health, care and unemployment insurance dues.

Getting started with the BFD

Are Unemployment Benefits II (ALG II) compatible with the BFD?

Recipients of ALG II can volunteer with the BFD. If you receive Unemployment Benefits II (ALG II), you generally receive an allowance of 250 euros.

All cash or non-cash income is counted against the ALG II benefits. This includes allowances and non-cash benefits. The allowance is not provided if you work with the BFD and hold additional employment. Please speak with your contact at the Agentur für Arbeit for further information.

Can pensioners volunteer with the BFD?

The BFD is open to all ages, so pensioners are also welcome to volunteer.

I am under 27 years of age. Can I still volunteer part-time?

Persons under 27 years of age can volunteer part-time with the BFD (at least 20.1 hours per week) in the event of "justified interest". Reasons for part-time volunteering include:

- Caring for a child or a relative
- Physical or mental impairments
- Attending an integration course (German Residence Act)

You must present proof of the circumstances to your place of assignment, e.g. the child's birth certificate, assessment of care requirements, doctor's attestation, copy of the certificate of participation in the respective educational service or integration course.

Without this proof, part-time volunteering is not possible.

During the BFD

Release for a job interview and/or internship?

Notify your place of assignment that you are looking for employment, and ask whether you can be granted leave for a job interview. You require approval from the place of assignment for any release.

It may be granted with or without pay. For example, if you are doing an internship at your future training company, leave is granted without pay. This means that your allowance is cut for the duration of the internship, and your internship provider must ensure that you are insured accordingly.



During the BFD

Can I hold employment in addition to the BFD?

You may hold additional employment with approval from your place of assignment. There is no increased social insurance contribution for additional employment up to € 450.00.

Please note that BFD working hours take priority. This means that your additional employment cannot impair the BFD, including participation in seminars.

The working hours between the BFD and your additional employment cannot exceed 48 hours per week. If you are still underage, you cannot work more than 40 hours per week according to the Youth Employment Protection Act.

Do I have to work on holidays or Sundays?

Depending on your place of assignment and function, you may be scheduled to work on holidays or Sundays. Some seminars may also begin on Sunday.

If you are working on a holiday, you may claim an additional day of leave within eight weeks following the holiday. If you are working on a Sunday, the additional day of leave must be granted within two weeks.

What about overtime?

Did an event or campaign at your place of assignment necessitate overtime?

Overtime must be quickly balanced out with free time. The BFD is unable to provide compensation for the extra hours worked.

Is special leave possible?

Volunteers are subject to the same rules as employees at the place of assignment. Reasons for special leave include birth, a death in the family, or similar circumstances.



During the BFD

I am sick – what do I do?

Please notify your place of assignment immediately if you are sick. If you are sick for longer than three days, your certification of inability to work (AUB) must be submitted to your place of assignment by the next work day.

The AUB must have been submitted before seminars begin in order for you to be excused from the seminars.

If you cannot submit an AUB, your absence is unexcused and your allowance is cut for the days missed.

My sickness is persisting – what do I do now?

If you are sick for longer than 6 weeks (42 days), payment of your allowance will be suspended and you will receive sick benefits from your health insurance provider. It's important that you submit your certification of inability to work to your health insurance provider and place of assignment.

Persons in retirement have no claim to sick pay.

My child is sick – do I receive child illness benefits?

You may have a claim to child illness benefits if you have one or more children. This also entails release from service as long as your child or children is/are sick. Please contact your health insurance provider for further information.

If you have a claim to child illness benefits, your allowance will be cut accordingly for this period.



Is it possible to change my agreement?

Do you want to decrease or increase your service time? Have you gotten married during the BFD and your surname has been changed? Have you moved in the meantime and have a new postal address?

Please notify the BUND central office as quickly as possible. We will forward the changes to the Federal Office.

I'm unsatisfied at my place of assignment, what can I do?

Are you not happy with your place of assignment? Is your work not what you had hoped and imagined it would be?

If discussing the matter with your place of assignment was not fruitful, please report problems to your contacts at the BUND (regional office). We will find a solution together.

Seminars at the BFD

The BFD is a volunteering and education service, and promotes lifelong learning. Seminars are thus an important and legally grounded part of the BFD. Seminars are counted as work time.

If you are under 27 years of age (U27), you take part in two seminars per month, plus one additional seminar day. This means that if you are volunteering for 6 months, you attend a total of 13 seminar days. If you are volunteering for 12 months, you attend a total of 25 seminar days.

Of these seminar days, persons under 27 years of age attend the 5-day seminar on political education at a federal education centre.

Here is a quick example:

Service time of 6 months

6 months x 2 seminar days + 1 seminar day
= 13 seminar days

Service time of 12 months

12 months x 2 seminar days + 1 seminar
day = 25 seminar days

If you are 27 years of age or older (A27), you complete one seminar day per month. This equates to 6 seminar days for a service time of 6 months, and 12 seminar days for a service time of 12 months.

As of the 13th month of service, volunteers attend one seminar day per month regardless of age.



Example:

Service time of 18 months U27

25 seminar days + 6 seminar days
= 31 seminar days

Service time of 18 months A27

12 seminar days + 6 seminar days
= 18 seminar days

Participation in seminars is entirely free for you as a federal volunteer! You receive housing and food, and the place of assignment pays for the commute to and from the seminar.

For each seminar you receive a certificate of participation, confirming that you attended the seminar.

You can select the seminars you want to attend on the BUND homepage. They should be booked within the first three weeks of starting your placement.

You can find the seminars online at meinbfd.bund.net/

Seminars at the BFD

The BUND seminars cover a wide range of exciting topics. Ornithology, fundraising, horse language, forests and marshes as habitats, communication and conversation, anti-racism, wilderness education, or the fundamentals of photography? It's not easy to choose.

The seminars at the BUND central office mainly cover environmental and conservational topics, and one topic from the fields of:

- Communication
- Organisation
- Environmental education.



Communication

You gain a fundamental understanding of public communication. Using a variety of techniques, you learn how to effectively present your organisation or place of assignment to the public and lead technically challenging discussions.



Organisation

You acquire basic knowledge about organising events. You learn how to get independently involved in large campaigns and how to organise smaller events like photo campaigns, an info stand, or a gala.

Environmental education

Here you learn how to process environmental topics in such a way that youths and adults can be educated about them in the long term. You also learn how to conceive your own environmental education programmes by using various methods.



Seminars at the BFD

What happens if I get sick and cannot travel to the seminar?

An illness for the entire duration of a seminar counts as an excused absence. The seminar is counted as attended and does not have to be repeated.

If you fall ill, you must immediately notify the trainer of your absence. The certification of inability to work (AUB) must be sent to the BUND central office by post or e-mail before the seminar begins. The contact details can be found in the invitation to the seminar.



Extension

Do you enjoy working at your place of assignment, are you happy and would you like to continue volunteering?

That's great! Please note that the maximum service time at the BFD is 18 months. If your agreement stipulates a shorter service time, you can extend your service up to the maximum service time of 18 months. There is no minimum duration of extensions.

Speak with your place of assignment about your wish to extend your service time. An extension can be requested with a one-page form, pending mutual agreement between you and your place of assignment. The application for extension should ideally be sent to the BUND no later than four weeks before the original end of your service time.

As of the 13th months, persons under 27 years of age also only attend one seminar day per month.

Remember to sign up for additional seminars early on.

Ending the BFD

Once your service time is over, your place of assignment sends you a certificate of service (DZB) and a qualified reference.

Ending the programme early – cancellation or termination

Would you like to end your service early because you have, for example, found permanent employment or are beginning your studies or an apprenticeship? Mutual cancellation is best in this case. This has no time frame and is conducted mutually by you and your place of assignment. Please utilise your full remaining leave time before ending the programme, in coordination with your place of assignment.

Are you unhappy with your BFD and would like to end it early?

Your contacts at the BUND are ready to help and will try to assist you find a solution.

In the case of unilateral cancellation by you or your place of assignment, the cancellation terms of 4 weeks until the 15th or end of a month should be observed.

Cancellations and terminations must be requested via the BAFzA central office. You will receive confirmation of the cancellation or termination by the Federal Office by post.

Even in the event of early cancellation, you are owed a certificate of service and a reference.



Your BFD contact at the BUND

Central office

Main contacts for places of assignment

Bund für Umwelt und Naturschutz
Deutschland (BUND) e.V.
Kaiserin-Augusta-Allee 5
10553 Berlin
www.bund.net/bfd
[bundesfreiwilligendienst\(at\)bund.net](mailto:bundesfreiwilligendienst(at)bund.net)



Katrin Müller-Thalheim
Director of Federal Volunteer Service and
Qualification
[katrin.muellerthalheim\(at\)bund.net](mailto:katrin.muellerthalheim(at)bund.net)
Tel: 030 275 86 - 541

Nadine Rothmaier
Contact for administration
[nadine.rothmaier\(at\)bund.net](mailto:nadine.rothmaier(at)bund.net)
Tel: 030 275 86 - 437

Felix Schwalbe
Contact for Seminar Planning and Booking
[felix.schwalbe\(at\)bund.net](mailto:felix.schwalbe(at)bund.net)
030 275 86 - 527



Regional offices

Main contacts for volunteers

Jan Breuer & Maike Bannick
(North & West regional office)
Contact for Bremen, Hamburg, Lower
Saxony, North Rhine-Westphalia, Rhineland-
Palatinate and Saarland.
[bfd\(at\)bundjugend-nrw.de](mailto:bfd(at)bundjugend-nrw.de)
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