

Housing Search and Living in Siegen



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Housing Search for Students



Housing Search for Students

Introduction

In Germany, a spot at university does not automatically include housing. You must look for an apartment or room on your own. The University of Siegen does not offer its own dorms or apartments. There are several student dormitories in Siegen, but the supply of rooms is limited, meaning you should be prepared to look for apartments or rooms on the private housing market.

Note:



The housing market tends to be very tight at the beginning of each semester, especially the winter semester (September, October). **As such, it is crucial to begin looking early!** All students are in the same situation, and the search for suitable housing can be a long and difficult.

Get started before you travel to Germany. Be flexible about how and where you could potentially live.

Location



Among the most popular locations for students are the Siegen-Zentrum and Siegen-Weidenau districts. We recommend incorporating other districts, including Geisweid, Eiserfeld, Kaan-Marienborn, Achenbach, and Trupbach, as well as the nearby cities of Kreuztal and Netphen into your search. Towns such as Hilchenbach, Wilnsdorf, Freudenberg, Betzdorf, and Kirchen are also relatively easy to reach. Being flexible on location increases the chances of finding affordable housing.

We encourage you to center your search based on the campus where you'll be attending the most classes, and to take into account shopping options and bus/rail connections.

Living Constellations



Many students live in shared apartments (known as a *Wohngemeinschaft* or *WG* in German). But it's also possible of course to rent an unshared room or apartment.

Wohngemeinschaften (WG)

WGs are very popular among students because the residents rent the apartment together and then split the costs (both rent and additional expenses) and can provide a source of mutual support. Each renter typically has their own bedroom but shares the bathroom and kitchen with their fellow residents.

Generally speaking, the current residents select new residents. This means that you should be extra friendly when contacting potential WGs so as to make a good first impression with the current residents. If the members of the WG feel that you are a good potential fit, they will invite you to a personal get-together—often called a ‘casting’—before making a final decision. WGs are best for people who enjoy social contact with others.

Private Room

As an alternative, you can also look for a room in a dormitory or from a private property owner. In this configuration, you generally rent a room of your own, share a kitchen and bathroom, but enjoy somewhat greater privacy than in a WG.

In some cases, rooms are offered from private persons (for example, in family homes).

Studio or Multiroom Apartment

A studio (one-room) or larger apartment is often more expensive than renting a private room. The benefit is the freedom to live entirely based on your own individual interests; the downside, of course, is that you have to handle and pay for everything yourself, including registering for utilities and internet, etc. Some renters also find it more difficult when living alone to establish contact with neighbors, etc.

Housing Providers

Student Dormitories (*Studierendenwohnheim*)

The central provider of rooms in most student dormitories is the [Studierendenwerk Siegen](#). Rooms in *Studierendenwerk* dormitories are highly coveted. They are relatively close to the university yet also relatively affordable. As might be expected, however, spots are limited and waiting times can be long. Average monthly rent for a furnished room is between €270 – €400, as well as a deposit equaling two months' rent. Some dormitories offer only single rooms, while others have space for complete WGs and yet others comprise primarily small studio (one-room) apartments.

Those interested in this option should apply for a spot in a dormitory as soon as they know they want to study in Siegen. It is not necessary to actually be enrolled at the University of Siegen until it is time to sign the rental contract.

Please note that interns who are not officially enrolled and students over the age of 35 are not eligible for rooms in student dormitories.

For more information about rents and the application process, please visit the Studierendenwerk Siegen website:

www.studierendenwerk-siegen.de/wohnen/wohnanlagen/

There are also **private** dormitories to which you can apply:

City Campus Siegen

www.city-campus-siegen.de/

Studentenwohnanlage am Oberen Schloss

www.studis-oberstadt.com/

Seven Homes Apartments

www.livus.de/de/siegen

Private Residences

The private market also contains listings for apartments, studio apartments, private rooms, and rooms in apartment shares (known as *Wohngemeinschaften* or *WG*).

Rooms or apartments can be offered as **furnished** or **unfurnished**.

There are a variety of online portals dedicated to the housing search, including rental options for undergraduate and graduate students, WGs, etc.

www.wg-gesucht.de
www.studenten-wg.de/
www.zwischenmiete.de
www.57immo.de

www.mitwohnzentrale.de
www.immowelt.de
www.kleinanzeigen.de



IMPORTANT: Apartment listings in German differentiate between the **Warmmiete** and **Kaltmiete**. It is crucial to understand the difference! The *Warmmiete* includes the cost of utilities such as water and heating costs. The *Kaltmiete* by contrast covers only the cost of the rental itself, without utility and running expenses such as water and heating. In both cases, the renter is also expected to pay for power and internet. As such, it is important to not to look at the *Kaltmiete* as the final price, but rather understand that significant additional costs should be expected. Very few landlords (with the *Studierendenwerk* being an exception) cover all costs as part of the rental. See also: [Utilities and Running Costs](#).



Always insist on a rental contract and read it through carefully. More information about this can be found in the following section.

Accommodations during the Housing Search

The following links can provide help finding accommodations while you are searching for housing in Siegen, or if you choose to travel to Siegen or the region in advance to familiarize yourself:

www.visitsiegen.de/tourismus/unterkuenfte

Siegen itself does not have a youth hostel or classic hostel. There is however a youth hostel in the Siegen area, the Jugendherberge Freusburg:

www.jugendherberge.de/jugendherbergen/freusburg-359/portraet/

Another option is to search for free or inexpensive private offerings:

www.couchsurfing.org

www.airbnb.de

In emergency situations: For new students unable to find housing at the start of the winter semester, the *Studierendenwerk* maintains a supply of temporary emergency housing. Please contact the *Studierendenwerk* for details:

www.studierendenwerk-siegen.de/wohnen/wohnanlagen/

Understanding Rental Contracts



Understanding Rental Contracts

What issues do I need to consider before signing a rental contract?

Costs	Terms of Notice
Rent, security deposit, ancillary costs Some landlords apply a one-time administrative fee.	Normally 3 months—review how long in advance you must inform your landlord that you wish to terminate your rental contract!

The Rental Contract



The signed rental contract is a binding legal document. Even if you haven't yet moved into the new apartment, it's no longer possible at this point to withdraw from the contract!! Your landlord is obligated to provide you with a document called a *Wohnungsgeberbestätigung*. You'll need it to officially register with the city that you are now living at this address.

Rental Deposit



A rental deposit must be usually be provided upon signing. This deposit is returned once you move out and the apartment is confirmed as in order and free of damages. The deposit may not exceed three months' *Kaltemiete* and may be paid in installments. The first installment is always due together with the first months' rent. Repayment of the rental deposit can be delayed up to six months after the end of the rental relationship. The landlord is entitled to retain a suitable sum based on outstanding invoices or other expenditures.

Move-In (Handover of Keys)



We recommend arranging for a written record to document the move-in. This involves going through the apartment carefully with the landlord before you move in and documenting any damages that are already present at the time of handover of the keys. A detailed list of this kind provides security for both sides. The record should also document promised modifications or renovations on the part of the homeowner (including dates) as well as details and agreements (such as use of cellar, stipulations for cleaning corridors / sidewalks). It is strongly recommended that a German acquaintance accompany you to the handover of the apartment, as he or she will know the procedure and can ensure that there are no linguistic misunderstandings.

Nebenkosten (Ancillary Costs)



Nebenkosten are expenses that you pay to the landlord in addition to the *Kaltemiete*. They cover the overhead costs for the apartment, such as property tax, water, wastewater, lighting of common spaces, cleaning of the chimney and street, and waste disposal. If, for example, the apartment building employs a superintendent (maintenance person), or if there is a laundry room, these costs are distributed among all renters. *Nebenkosten* can only be charged to the renter if they are stipulated explicitly in the rental contract and actually occurred. Typically speaking, *Nebenkosten* are paid out monthly in advance in negotiated installments; if you consume more than anticipated, you'll be asked to pay the difference at

some later point. By the same token, if the costs are lower than expected, you'll receive the difference back from your landlord. A clear and comprehensible tabulation of the *Nebenkosten* must be made within 12 months after the conclusion of the accounting period. After the end of that deadline, the landlord loses the right to reclaim those costs (excepting where he or she is not at fault for the delay). Review the tabulation of *Nebenkosten* carefully to ensure that it has been allocated correctly (such as by person or square meter) and that the individual costs match those agreed upon in the rental contract, and that no hidden repair costs are included. As a renter, you have the right to view all invoices and documentation of expenses upon which the ancillary costs are based. Beyond *Nebenkosten*, you will typically also need to organize and pay for other utilities such as power and internet.

Problems with the Apartment



You are obligated to report any damages immediately to the landlord.¹ Failure to do so voids your claim to a reduction in rent, and the landlord is furthermore entitled to demand compensation from you.²

Notification of damages/defects should be made in writing and in the form of a detailed description (type of defect, location, and extent) and should include a reasonable deadline for repair. In the event of an extensive defect, a reduction in rent can also be submitted. If the landlord reacts with gross negligence despite awareness of the defect, you can also demand compensation/rent reduction.³

Cosmetic Repairs



Cosmetic repairs (such as painting the walls) can be assigned within the rental contract to the renter. Rough guidelines have been established for different room types that can serve as an orientation: kitchen/bathroom/shower should be painted every three years; living rooms and bedrooms every five years; other rooms every seven years.

Please clarify from the start whether you are obligated to paint the walls on move out.

Rent Increase



A rent increase must be made in writing and must be justified. Starting from the time when notification of the rent increase is made, you have two months to decide whether you accept the rent increase or not. If the increase is accepted, then it goes into effect on the first day of the 3rd month after receipt of the rent increase.

¹ As per § 536c Article 1 of the German Civil Code (Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch [BGB]).

² Defects occurring during the lease period; notice of defect by the lessee, § 536c Article 2 BGB.

³ A reduction of rent is only permissible if the landlord does not remove the defect within the set deadline. There is no fixed amount for a rent reduction; the amount varies on a case-by-case basis. In principle, a rent reduction is permissible up to the point of complete elimination of the defect (including the final painting work).

The landlord may only enforce a rent increase where the following **three conditions all apply at the same time**:

- The rent amount was stable for one year.
- The new rental price does not exceed the average rent (*Mietspiegel*) for the respective residential area.
- The rental amount has not risen by more than 20% in the past three years.

Renters in an Apartment Share (*Wohngemeinschaft or WG*)



If you choose to join an apartment share, you should consider carefully who will be the official renter(s). If the rental contract is concluded with one person, then that person is the **sole contact person** to the landlord and is **solely responsible** for payment of rent and other contractual obligations. The other residents are then sub-lessors to the primary renter. If all residents sign the rental contract, then they are mutually responsible to the landlord for fulfillment of the contractual obligations and payment of the rent. The individual renters are then responsible to each other and jointly for administrative matters. The rental contract can, in that case, also only be terminated by all renters together. This can be complicated, given that the composition of the residents can often change. It is also possible for each person to sign an individual contract with the landlord.

Termination



A three-month termination deadline is standard in Germany. This deadline starts at the end of the month in which you submit the notice of termination. For example, if you submit the notice of termination on 15 March, the three-month deadline begins on 31 March, and you are thus required to continue paying rent until the end of June.

It is possible to reach other (written) agreements with the landlord. In some cases, it is possible to work around the termination deadline by pro-actively seeking a replacement tenant. Please clarify this possibility with your landlord.

It is also possible to sign a rental contract for a fixed period; in this situation early termination of the contract is not possible!

Returning the Apartment (Moving Out)



In general, you will need to leave your apartment or room in “*besenrein*” (literally: broom clean) condition. This means that the space must be completely empty and the trash must be removed. You must also sweep or vacuum the floors.

You are fundamentally obligated to restore all changes to the apartment upon move-out, excepting where you have made a different agreement with the landlord. It is also helpful to create a written record and take photographs as necessary to avoid any wrongful complaints by the landlord. Do not sign any written record to which you do not agree (such as obligations to eliminate damages). If you have documented all previously existing damages in the apartment at the time of move in, you can then prove through the written record and photographs that you did not cause the damages.

Sub-Letting

Sub-letting means renting your apartment or a room to one or more persons. In all cases, you should clarify with your landlord whether this is allowed. (This information is also typically contained in the rental contract). If you violate the clauses of the rental contract, your rental contract can be terminated for just cause.

Interim Lease

Interim leases cover situations where you will not be present for a certain period and wish to sublet your room or apartment to another person. This too must always be clarified with the landlord.

Support in the Event of Problems



Support in the Event of Problems

Given the complicated nature of rental law, we recommend following the following rules to avoid issues:



Secure in writing all agreements related to the rental. Record all oral or telephone agreements in writing and have these signed by the landlord; they represent your sole proof in the event of a dispute.



All letters to the landlord should be sent by registered post (**Einschreiben**) or delivery should be witnessed by a third party. When you receive correspondence from the landlord, keep the envelope, as the postmark may be different from the date on the letter. Preserve all invoices, photos, and notifications as evidence in the event of a dispute. You should always, without exception, comply with mandatory **deadlines**: Respond to correspondence within the demanded time frame and answer correspondence from courts within the specified deadlines.



In the event of problems, you should immediately contact the **in-house attorney of AStA** at the University of Siegen (www.asta.uni-siegen.de). This service is free.

The **Mieterschutzbund** (Tenants' Protection Association) can also help in the event of problems. You must be a paying member to receive consultation, but it will quickly pay for itself if a major issue arises. The homepage also contains a variety of important information: www.mieterbund-siegerland.de

Other Notes about Living in Siegen



Other Notes about Living in Siegen

Registering with the City



You must register yourself at a Citizens' Service Office (*Bürgerbüro*) within two weeks of moving in.

If your new residence is within Siegen, you must make an appointment in advance: www.terminland.de/stadtsiegen/. The form for registering your primary or secondary residence ("Anmeldung des Hauptwohnsitzes bzw. Nebenwohnsitzes") can be found here (German only):

www.siegen.de/fileadmin/cms/olsformulare/AnmeldungWohnsitzInclSpeichern.pdf

If you live in a different town or city, please contact the appropriate Registry Office (*Einwohnermeldeamt*).

Electricity



When you move into an apartment, you must sign up with a power utility on your own. You can find a comparison of different offerings from utilities at www.stromanbietervergleich.de/. You pay a fixed installment (*Abschlag*) each month, and at the end of the year your actual usage will be compared with the estimate and you will either pay for the overage or receive a refund if you paid too much. It thus pays to conserve energy.

Electrical outlets in Germany are designed for 220 volts, 50 Hertz AC, and two-pole plugs. You can purchase adapters at an electronics store if needed.

Waste Disposal



Germany mandates trash sorting to promote as much recycling as possible. Packaging materials made of plastic or metal go into the yellow bag or bin. Paper and glass are collected separately: Paper goes into a blue bin or a public container, while glass must be brought to a publicly accessible container. In many cases, organic waste (compost) such as food scraps is disposed of separately (brown bin). Any remaining trash goes into the gray bins. Waste disposal normally comes once per week or every other week. It can be helpful to discuss the situation with your landlord or fellow residents, as the system can be difficult to understand at first.

Most beverage bottles made of glass or plastic should be returned to a store to receive the deposit (*Pfand*).

Public Transportation



Rents are often cheaper as you move further away from the city or the university. You can nevertheless reach those locations via bus and rail. The following websites detail public transportation in our region:

www.vws-siegen.de/

www.bahn.de

Beyond the regular bus lines, there are also extra buses (UX lines) that drive to the different campuses when classes are in session (known as the *Vorlesungszeit*).

Upon enrollment or re-enrollment, all students for any given semester receive the *Deutschland-Semesterticket*, which allows them to use all public buses, trains, and regional trains throughout Germany. The *Semesterticket* can be used via the *Verkehrsbetriebe Westfalen-Süd (VWS)* app.

Detailed information on the *Deutschlandticket* and how to activate it can be found here: www.uni-siegen.de/usicard/ticket/.

Public Broadcasting Fees



All residents in Germany are obligated to pay a monthly public broadcasting fee to finance public television and radio broadcasters. Foreign students are not excepted from this obligation. Once you register with the city, you will receive an official notification of the need to pay the public broadcasting fee. While you should receive this letter automatically, you can also register manually at: www.rundfunkbeitrag.de/.

The fees are currently set at € 18.36 per month. The public broadcasting fee is paid per residence, so if multiple people are living in an apartment, only one person actually transfers the money. The other residents are expected to submit their share to the paying party. However: **all persons** must still register with the public broadcasting fee agency. In this situation, you will ask for an exemption (*Befreiung*).

In apartment buildings, each resident must pay the full fee themselves, unless the residence is divided into small shared apartments or has corridors that can be closed off.

Insurance



It is not at all unusual for things to break in an apartment or bedroom. Germans expect you to cover the costs if you break something of theirs, and this can quickly get expensive. For this reason, it is recommended that you buy insurance. It typically costs only a few euros per month and is a huge help when something occurs. **Liability insurance**

(Haftpflichtversicherung) repays damages that the insured party accidentally causes to the property of others, for example if you damage something in the apartment building or cause an accident. **Household insurance (Hausratsversicherung)** covers damages in your own household, including break-ins or water damages. Some landlords demand that renters have a *Hausratsversicherung* policy upon signing of the rental contract.

Glossary, Technical Terms, and Abbreviations

3 Zi.-Whg - 'drei Zimmer Wohnung', three room apartment
3 ZKDB - 'drei Zimmer, Küche, Diele, Bad', three rooms, kitchen, entry area, bathroom
Unmöbliert - Apartment is unfurnished
DG - 'Dachgeschoss', top floor
EBK - 'Einbauküche', built-in kitchen
EG - 'Erdgeschoss', ground floor
K - 'Kaution', rental deposit
Kalt - Listed rent does not include electricity, water costs, gas, or waste disposal
NR - 'Nichtraucher', non-smoking
KM - 'Kaltmiete' (see *kalt*)
Nachmieter - Renter willing to assume the rental contract after current renter leaves
NK - 'Nebenkosten' (Costs for electricity, water, gas, waste disposal)
NMM - 'Nettomonatsmiete' (see *Kaltmiete*)
MVZ - 'Monatliche Vorauszahlung', monthly prepayment
Prov. - 'Provision', commission
qm - 'Quadratmeter', square meters
TG - 'Tiefgarage', subterranean garage
WG 'Wohngemeinschaft', apartment share
WBS erford. - 'Wohnberechtigungsschein erforderlich', certificate of eligibility for public housing
Wfl. - 'Wohnfläche', floor space
WM - 'Warmmiete', Kaltmiete plus *Nebenkosten*
Zi - 'Zimmer', room
ZH - 'Zentralheizung', central heating
zzgl. NK - Price does not include *Nebenkosten* (heating, electricity, etc)

This information provided was prepared with due diligence, but does not claim to be complete or correct.
In the event of serious complications, always seek the advice of a qualified legal expert.

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