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Employment Contract in Germany — What You Need to Know

How to read a German employment contract. What it must contain, your rights, probation period, and termination rules.

Deutsche Begriffe: Arbeitsvertrag | Kündigung | Probezeit | Kündigungsschutz | Arbeitszeugnis | Nachweisgesetz | Mindestlohn | Befristung | Arbeitsgericht | Betriebszugehörigkeit

Arbeitsvertrag — Employment Contract

An employment contract (**Arbeitsvertrag**) regulates your rights and obligations. Since August 2022, the **Nachweisgesetz** law requires your employer to provide you in writing with the most important employment conditions (part on the first day, the rest within 7 days / month).

What MUST the contract contain?

Employer and employee details Start date Workplace Job description Gross salary Working hours (usually 40h/week) Vacation Notice period Probation period (if applicable)

Minimum wage (Mindestlohn)

As of **January 1, 2026**, the statutory Mindestlohn is **€13.90/hour** (from 2027: €14.60). On a full-time basis, this is approximately **€2,343 gross/month**. Your employer cannot pay less. For casual work, see Minijob — the earnings limit from 2026 is €603/month.

Your gross and net salary differ by taxes and contributions — details in Lohnabrechnung.

Probezeit (Probation period)

- Maximum **6 months**
- During this time, termination is only **2 weeks**
- After Probezeit, Kündigungsschutz (employment protection) begins

Fixed-term contract (Befristung)

- Without stated reason (sachgrundlos): max. **2 years** (with possibility of 3 renewals within this period)
- With justification (e.g., replacement): longer
- After exceeding the limit, the contract becomes permanent

Kündigungsschutz (Protection from dismissal)

After 6 months in a company with **more than 10 employees** (KSchG):

- Employer **CANNOT** dismiss without justified cause
- Must provide a reason and maintain written form
- You have **3 weeks** to file a lawsuit at Arbeitsgericht (labor court) — after the deadline, dismissal becomes effective

Vacation

- Statutory minimum **20 days** (on a 5-day week); most companies offer 25–30. Full rules: Urlaubsanspruch.

Termination (Kündigung) — §622 BGB

Length of service	Notice period
Probation	2 weeks
Up to 2 years	4 weeks (to the 15th or end of month)
2–5 years	1 month
5–8 years	2 months
8–10 years	3 months
10–12 years	4 months

Length of service	Notice period
12-15 years	5 months
15-20 years	6 months
20+ years	7 months

Termination MUST be in writing (email/SMS are not sufficient). If you become ill during the notice period, Krankschreibung still applies.

Arbeitszeugnis (Employment reference)

You have the RIGHT to a reference. Watch out for coded language:

- "stets zu unserer vollsten Zufriedenheit" = very good rating (1)
- "zu unserer vollen Zufriedenheit" = good (2)
- "zu unserer Zufriedenheit" = satisfactory/poor!