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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

Employment Contract in Germany

What MUST be included in a contract?

Every employment contract in Germany must contain:

- ☐ Employer and employee data
- ☐ Start date
- ☐ Place of work
- ☐ Job description
- ☐ Salary (gross)
- ☐ Working hours (usually 40h/week)
- ☐ Vacation (minimum 24 days for 6-day week = 20 days for 5-day week)
- ☐ Notice period
- ☐ Probation period (if applicable)

Probezeit (Probation period)

- Maximum **6 months**
- During this time, termination requires only **2 weeks' notice**
- After Probezeit — Kündigungsschutz (dismissal protection) applies

Kündigungsschutz (Dismissal protection)

After 6 months of employment in a company with 10+ employees:

- Employer **CANNOT** dismiss you without valid reason

- Must provide reason in writing
- You can appeal to Arbeitsgericht (labor court)

Urlop (Vacation/Holiday)

- **Minimum 20 days** (for 5-day week)
- Most companies offer 25-30 days
- Unused vacation carries over to next year (until March 31)
- If you leave — unused vacation = paid out

Kündigung (Termination)

Length of service	Notice period
Probezeit	2 weeks
Up to 2 years	4 weeks
2-5 years	1 month
5-8 years	2 months
8-10 years	3 months
10+ years	4 months

Important: Termination MUST be in writing!

Arbeitszeugnis (Employment reference/Certificate)

You have the RIGHT to a work certificate. Your employer MUST provide it.

Watch for hidden language:

- "zu unserer vollen Zufriedenheit" = good employee
- "stets zu unserer vollsten Zufriedenheit" = excellent employee
- "zu unserer Zufriedenheit" = average (poor rating!)