

Voluntary service for young people

In Baden-Württemberg, young people can do voluntary service after leaving school. This means that they get involved in a social, cultural or ecological sector for a short period of time. In doing so, they make an important contribution to society and acquire valuable knowledge that can be of benefit to them personally and professionally.

There are various options for voluntary service in Germany: **FSJ**, **FSJ-Kultur** and **FÖJ**. **FSJ** is a voluntary social year (**Freiwilliges Soziales Jahr**), i.e. you do your service in the social sector (e.g. hospitals, nurseries, sports clubs). **FÖJ**, on the other hand, is a voluntary ecological year (**Freiwilliges Ökologisches Jahr**), i.e. the young people work in the ecological sector (e.g. animal welfare organisations, organic farms, environmental foundations). In the case of **FSJ-Kultur**, the young volunteers work in cultural institutions (e.g. theatres, opera, ballet or art projects).

This voluntary service usually lasts twelve months. During this time, young people can explore their options and test whether the chosen profession or field of work is suitable for them. Voluntary service also offers them the opportunity to gain the practical part of their Fachhochschulreife so that they can then start higher education studies.

What are the benefits of voluntary service?

Voluntary service helps young people to develop social skills that are in demand on the labour market. An FSJ, FÖJ or FSJ-Kultur can also be useful for attaining the Fachhochschulreife (advanced technical college entrance qualification). For example, anyone who has completed the school-based part of the Fachhochschulreife in year 1 at a Gymnasium or a Gemeinschaftsschule can then have the voluntary service recognised as the practical part of the Fachhochschulreife. Doing FSJ, FÖJ or FSJ-Kultur is also helpful if your child wants to study at university or do an apprenticeship. It is often recognised as an internship in social and healthcare apprenticeships and degree programmes and can improve the average score of the Abitur (school-leaving certificate that automatically qualifies you for higher education studies).

Who can participate in the youth volunteer service?

Young people between the ages of 15 and 26 who have already completed their compulsory full-time schooling (which is 9 years of schooling in Baden-Württemberg) can do youth volunteer service. The school-leaving qualification or nationality are not decisive.

How long does an FSJ or FÖJ last?

An FSJ or FÖJ generally lasts between six and 18 months, but usually twelve months. In special cases, it can be extended to up to 24 months if, for example, the young person is finishing school at the same time (to gain their Hauptschule or Realschule school-leaving certificate).

Do you get paid for voluntary service? And are you insured?

Volunteers normally receive pocket money and are covered by statutory social insurance. They are also entitled to Kindergeld (child benefit) until the age of 25. In some jobs, accommodation and meals can even be provided. In addition, young people with a volunteer ID card receive discounts in various areas, e.g. on buses and trains.

Federal Voluntary Service (BFD)

The Federal Volunteer Service (Bundesfreiwilligendienst; also known as **BFD** or **Bufdi** for short) is also available to anyone who wants to get involved for the common good. Age, gender, nationality or the type of school-leaving qualification do not usually play a role. BFD can be carried out in social, ecological and cultural sectors, but also in other sectors such as sport and integration, as well as in civil defence and disaster control. From the age of 27, BFD is also possible on a part-time basis.

What do you need to consider?

As a rule, voluntary services begin on 1 September or 1 March/1 April. If you are interested, you should get information and apply in good time. You can also do voluntary service abroad – programmes such as the International Youth Volunteer Service specialise in this service.

You can find more information and job vacancies at:

<https://www.fsj-baden-wuerttemberg.de/>

<https://www.lkjbw.de/fsj-kultur/>

<https://www.foej-bw.de/>

<https://ich-will-bfd.de/>