



Being Trans in the AFS Program to Germany

Trans and AFS

For AFS, the diversity of individual personalities is just as important as cultural and linguistic diversity during program participation. That's why we're really excited that you want to go on your exchange experience with us! We consider the diversity of gender and sexual identities a great benefit for our organization. To make sure that your experience abroad goes as smoothly as possible, there are a few things you should know and clarify in advance.

What's important for you to know?

- You're the **expert of your situation**, your identity counts – no matter how you choose to express your gender in everyday life.
- Please answer the following questions and send your answers to the AFS office or QueerExchange. Your answers (or parts of them) will then be forwarded to your AFS chapter, camp organizers, and your AFS host country.
 1. *Which name and pronoun(s) should be used to refer to you?*
 2. *Who may/should know what? May/should anyone explicitly not be informed?*
 3. *The shared rooms and bathrooms at seminars are usually separated by binary genders. Which gender would you like to be placed with if possible?*
- By now, many people know people who are trans. This has boosted tolerance. Nevertheless, most trans people experience **discrimination** on a daily basis, even though it is **prohibited by law** in Germany, and there is still a long way to go for social acceptance. You should discuss harassment with your host family and/or the AFS office staff and also whether the police should be involved.
- AFS has started to train full-time staff and volunteers on the topic of transidentity. Still, it's possible that some people don't know enough (yet). Please assume good will, even if other people ask you uncomfortable questions or are (too) curious, but be sure to know that you don't have to explain anything if you don't want to.
- Try to learn important vocabulary in advance, as **explaining yourself** in a foreign language is complicated and can lead to more misunderstandings. Keep in mind that trans people in other cultures may live more openly or not as openly as in your country and that other prejudices may be existing.



- English has a long established, **genderneutral pronoun** (“they”), as do other languages. Unfortunately though, many languages like German don’t have gender-neutral pronouns and their structures are very binary in other ways as well. Some people who identify as non-binary, agender, genderqueer, genderfluid, or the like, use their name as a pronoun instead of “he” or “she,” or a **new pronoun** such as “xier” or “dey,” but these are not very common and unknown to most people so far.
- People in Germany usually **communicate very directly**. So if a German person asks you something straightforward, it’s usually not meant to be rude or offensive. But of course you can and should show your personal boundaries and are always free to choose how to deal with intrusive questions. An equally direct “no” is appreciated in Germany and not considered to be rude.
- There’s a **vast information and support network** for trans youth in Germany. You can search the internet for offers in your area or ask your host family, chaperone or QueerExchange.
- Your legal name is required on all official documents, such as visa papers and airline tickets, if you haven’t already changed it. However, AFS will make every effort to use your chosen name and correct gender on all other documents and letters.
- Apart from your personal chaperone, you are welcome to get in touch with QueerExchange at any time.

Very important (if applicable):

- Clarify in advance how you can take your hormones in Germany and whether your health insurance in your home country can cover the costs. Note that testosterone, as a controlled substance, may not be readily imported into other countries.
- Tell your host family and the main staff at the AFS office what medications you need and are taking, if this applies to you.
- If you’re not feeling well, you should consult a doctor and get a medical checkup. Please discuss this with your host family and the AFS office. Queermed Deutschland has a list of doctors who are sensitized to trans patients.

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