



CLIENT SERVICES & POLICY DIVISION Legal Assistance Office



Staying in Germany after Your ETS

Soldiers lose their NATO-SOFA status and revert to tourist status after ETS, so if a Soldier wants to stay in Germany permanently, he or she must apply for a residency permit and prove that he/she has health insurance and can support him/herself.

If the application is approved, an individual who is married to a German citizen will be granted a residency permit for three years. After three years, the individual may apply for permanent resident alien status. For an individual who is not married to a German citizen, their first residency permit will only be for one year. After one year, a second permit may be granted for two more years. After that, another two-year permit may be granted. Only after five years in temporary status may the individual apply for a permanent resident alien permit.

Students without NATO-SOFA status are also required to apply for residency permits. They will need a health certificate and proof of support. A student residency permit must be renewed annually. A student may work in Germany, with a permit, but may not run his/her own business.

An individual planning to operate a business should request a permit for that when applying for the residency permit. You have to meet the requirements of a number of agencies, and the processing time can be lengthy, so apply as early as possible.

Individuals may not retain a USAREUR driver's license after losing their NATO-SOFA status and will therefore need an international or German license to continue driving.

When authorized (must register and possess a pink card from the German Finanzamt) retirees may continue using the PX and Commissary but will be required to pay customs on items purchased at the PX and Commissary. For more information contact the USAREUR-AF Wiesbaden Customs Office at 537-3935 or visit their website at: <https://home.army.mil/wiesbaden/index.php/units-tenants/us-army-customs-agency-europe-wiesbaden-hub>.

Retirees are also subject to German income tax, except on military retired pay and Social Security payments, which are exempt under a treaty between the United States and Germany. After losing their NATO-SOFA status, retirees are also subject to the German Radio and TV tax (GEZ), pet tax, etc.

If you have further questions, please make an appointment with the legal assistance office by emailing us at: USARMY.WIESBADEN.USAREUR.MBX.OJA-WLC-LEGAL-ASSISTANCE-CALENDAR@MAIL.MIL.