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Integration in Germany — Practical Tips for Daily Life

How to successfully integrate in Germany: language, Vereiny, cultural characteristics, and Ehrenamt.

Deutsche Begriffe: Integration | Integrationskurs | Ehrenamt | Verein | Nachbarschaft | Kulturelle Unterschiede

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What does Integration mean?

Integration does not mean giving up your identity — it means **becoming part of the society** you live in. You bring your culture, experiences, and perspective — and at the same time, you learn the **rules, language, and customs** of your new country.

Integration is a **mutual process**: you take steps toward German society, and German society takes steps toward you.

Deutsch lernen — the most important step

Why German is so important

• **Government offices** — without German, forms, letters, and conversations are almost impossible

• **Work** — most jobs require at least German B1

• **Friendships** — real relationships often develop only when you share the language

• **Independence** — with German you can handle your own affairs

• **Residence status** — you need B1 for Niederlassungserlaubnis, B1 for naturalization

Where to learn German?

- **Integrationskurs** — supported by BAMF, 600 + 100 hours (A1–B1)
- **VHS** (Volkshochschule) — affordable German courses, also evenings and weekends
- **Berufssprachkurse** — free, B2/C1 for work
- **Online:** DW (Deutsche Welle), VHS Lernportal, Duolingo
- **Sprachcafé** — free conversation groups in many cities
- **Tandem** — language exchange with native speakers (apps: Tandem, HelloTalk)

Vereine — the heart of German society

Germany is a **nation of clubs** — there are over **600,000 Vereiny** for almost everything: sports, music, culture, nature conservation, parent groups, politics, and much more.

Why join a Verein?

- **Networking** — Vereiny are the easiest way to meet Germans
- **Practice language** — in a Verein you automatically speak German
- **Pursue hobbies** — football, swimming, cooking, gardening, photography…
- **Integrate children** — sports clubs and music schools for children
- **Affordable** — club membership fees are often low (€10–30/month)

Popular types of Vereiny

Verein	What?	Costs (approx.)
Sportverein (football, swimming, running)	Training, matches, tournaments	€10–30/month
Musikverein (choir, band, orchestra)	Rehearsals, performances	€5–20/month
Gartenverein (allotment club)	Own garden, community	€50–200/year
Parent-child groups	Play, exchange, advice	€0–10/month
Kulturvereine (international meetings)	Festivals, exhibitions, exchange	€5–15/month
Nachbarschaftsverein	Neighborhood activities	Often free

How to find a Verein?

- **Google:** "Sportverein [your city]", "Chor [your city]"
- **District centers** and **community centers** — bulletin boards with club offerings
- **Club registers** — on your city's website
- **Sports associations** — Landessportbund or Stadtsportbund

Understanding cultural characteristics

Punctuality

In Germany, punctuality is **extremely important**:

- **Professional:** Arrive **5 minutes before** the appointment
- **Private:** Arrive at the agreed time (maximum 5–10 minutes late)
- **Public transport:** Buses and trains run on **schedule** (usually...)

Tip: If you're running late — inform the other person (call, SMS).

Quiet hours and order

- **Nighttime quiet:** 22:00–6:00 — music only at room volume
- **Midday quiet:** 13:00–15:00 — in many buildings (check house rules)
- **Sundays:** Rest day — no mowing, no drilling, no loud work
- **Trash separation:** Very important! (paper, plastic, bio, residual waste, glass)

Greeting and forms of address

- **Strangers and elders:** Use "Sie" (formal address)
- **Friends and colleagues:** "Du" — but wait until it's **offered**
- **Handshake:** Firm, brief, with eye contact — when greeting and saying goodbye
- **Greeting neighbors:** "Guten Tag!" in the stairwell is standard

Directness

Germans are considered **direct** — this is not rudeness, but honesty:

- **Feedback** is often direct: "That wasn't good" means exactly that
- **Saying no** is accepted — an honest answer is expected
- **Small talk** is less pronounced than in many other cultures

Ehrenamt — volunteering

Ehrenamtliches Engagement (voluntary work without pay) is highly valued in Germany:

• **30 million** Germans volunteer

• Areas: refugee assistance, sports clubs, fire department, tutoring, animal welfare, environment

• **Benefits for you:** practice German, network, gain experience, enhance your CV

Where to find volunteering?

• **Freiwilligenagenturen** — in every larger city

• **ehrenamt-deutschland.org** — search engine for voluntary activities

• **Caritas, DRK, AWO, Diakonie** — always looking for volunteers

• **Refugee initiatives** — you can help other newcomers (as interpreter, companion)

Neighborhood

Good neighborhood relations greatly simplify life:

Moving in — first steps

1. Greet neighbors — ring the doorbell of your direct neighbors and introduce yourself

2. Small gift — a note in the mailbox or a package of cookies when you ring

3. Introduce children — neighbor children are often the quickest contacts

Daily life

• **Greetings** — always say "Hallo" or "Guten Tag"

• **Consideration** — noise, trash separation, cleaning duty

• **Offer help** — accept packages, help with problems

• **In case of conflict:** address it calmly, don't escalate

Government matters

Migration counseling (MBE)

Free **counseling for adult immigrants** (from age 27):

- **Caritas, AWO, DRK, Diakonie, Paritätischer Wohlfahrtsverband**
- Help with government offices, job search, language courses, apartment hunting
- Available in many languages
- Find address: bamf.de → Migrationsberatung

Youth migration service (JMD)

For **young immigrants up to age 27**:

- Counseling on apprenticeships, school, language courses
- Mentoring and group programs
- www.jugendmigrationsdienste.de

Holidays and traditions

Public holidays (nationwide)

Date	Holiday
January 1	**New Year's Day**
Variable (March/April)	**Good Friday**
Variable (March/April)	**Easter Monday**
May 1	**Labour Day**
Variable (May/June)	**Ascension Day** (also "Father's Day")
Variable (May/June)	**Whit Monday**
October 3	**German Unity Day** (national holiday)
December 25	**Christmas Day**
December 26	**Boxing Day**

Regional holidays: e.g., Epiphany (Jan 6, Bavaria/BW/ST), Reformation Day (Oct 31, northern and eastern states), All Saints' Day (Nov 1, Catholic states)

Traditions to participate in

- **Carnival/Fasching** (February) — costumes, parades (Cologne, Düsseldorf, Mainz)
- **Easter** (March/April) — egg hunts, family meals
- **Oktoberfest** (September/October) — folk festival in Munich (and everywhere)

- **Christmas market** (December) — mulled wine, sausages, gifts
- **New Year's Eve** (December 31) — fireworks, raclette, "Dinner for One"

10 golden rules for Integration

1. Learn German — the most important key

2. Join a Verein — sports, music, volunteering

3. Greet your neighbors — a "hello" opens doors

4. Respect the rules — trash separation, quiet hours, punctuality

5. Be open — to new experiences, people, and ideas

6. Maintain your own culture — Integration doesn't mean giving yourself up

7. Accept help — migration counseling, courses, volunteers

8. Be patient — Integration takes time (5–10 years is normal)

9. Support children — daycare, clubs, education

10. Stay positive — setbacks happen. Don't give up!