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# Integration in Germany — Practical Tips for Daily Life

How to successfully integrate in Germany: language, Vereine, 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.)
<b>Sportverein</b> (football, swimming, running)	Training, matches, tournaments	€10-30/month
<b>Musikverein</b> (choir, band, orchestra)	Rehearsals, performances	€5-20/month
<b>Gartenverein</b> (allotment club)	Own garden, community	€50-200/year
<b>Parent-child groups</b>	Play, exchange, advice	€0-10/month
<b>Kulturvereine</b> (international meetings)	Festivals, exhibitions, exchange	€5-15/month
<b>Nachbarschaftsverein</b>	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 Stadtspportbund

## 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](http://www.jugendmigrationsdienste.de)

## Holidays and traditions

Public holidays (nationwide)

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

**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!

--- As of: March 2026. All information without guarantee.