



Kanton Bern
Canton de Berne

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Language and Integration

Integration

Integration Programmes

Language

Learning German or French

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Information for a good start at the new place of residence

Language and Integration



Integration

Foreigners are expected to integrate into society. This includes obeying the law, providing for oneself economically, and learning an official language of the place of residence.

Important Principles

All Swiss residents must abide by the Swiss constitution (e.g. equality of men and women) and abide by the law. It is expected that one is, as far as possible, economically independent. In addition, foreigners are expected to learn the official language of their place of residence as quickly as possible. Integration depends on efforts from both sides. An openness towards foreigners is expected of the local population.

Independence

The confederation, cantons, and communities provide foreigners with fair access to economic, social, and cultural life. In return foreigners must make independent efforts to integrate themselves. It is expected that they make use of available programs.

Taking Part in the Social Life

A good way of integrating oneself into Swiss society is joining a club. Attending festivities and events held by the community of residence is also a good way of meeting people. It may not be easy at first. Not all Swiss residents are equally open towards other cultures. Sometimes patience and perseverance is necessary.

Advice / Support

In the Canton of Bern, there are various agencies available to newcomers. The community of residence is always a good first source of information. There are also specific information centers for immigrants. In Canton Bern, there are four regional contact points for integration (Ansprechstellen Integration | antennes d'intégration). Here information about life in Switzerland is available and specific questions on various subjects are answered. Persons who do not yet speak German or French may be accompanied by an interpreter or request an interpreter. Several centres offer information in other languages as well. Several centers offer information in other languages as well.



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Additional information (links, addresses, information sheets, brochures)

www.hallo-bern.ch/en/language-and-integration/integration

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Integration Programmes

Integration takes place first and foremost at school and at work. For persons who do not (yet) have access to school or work, there are various integration programs.

Specific Programs

Numerous programs for foreigners aid them in making contacts and becoming a part of Swiss society. These programs include discussion groups, leisure time activities, talks, or classes. The integration services (AI) (Ansprechstellen Integration | antennes d'intégration) or the community of residence will provide information regarding the various offers. Many communities hold an event that welcomes new residents - a good way of gaining a first overview.

Clubs

Many residents in Canton Bern are members of a club (Verein | Association). There are clubs for a wide range of interests. Even small communities have athletic, cultural, and other clubs which are an excellent way of meeting people. Most clubs are open for everyone. Information regarding clubs can be found on the community websites.

Immigrant Organisations

Various clubs have been established by immigrants based on a common language group, country of origin, or religion. Many of these clubs have integrational or advisory offers aimed at supporting their members upon their arrival in Switzerland and in Canton Bern.

Offers for Young People

There are many recreational offers for young people in Canton Bern that give them a chance to meet their peers. Many communities have meeting points and various recreational activities. Young people are supervised, can contribute ideas, and realize projects (Jugendarbeit | Animation de jeunesse). Most offers are free. Youth clubs provide an opportunity to take part in activities and enjoy sports outside in nature with peers. The offers are provided by clubs, communities, or regional churches and are open for all young people. The community of residence will provide further information.

Additional information (links, addresses, information sheets, brochures)

www.hallo-bern.ch/en/language-and-integration/integration-programmes



Language

Non-German-or French speaking residents of Canton Bern are expected to learn German. Language skills are the essential requirement for successful integration into society and the job market.

Official Languages

Switzerland has four national languages: German, French, Italian and Romansh. Canton Bern has two official languages: German and French.

High German / Swiss German

There is a distinction made between High German (Hochdeutsch | l'allemand standard) and Swiss German (Schweizerdeutsch | le suisse allemand) in German-speaking Switzerland. High German is spoken at school and on certain radio and television programs. In everyday life people speak Swiss German. Swiss German is a German dialect that is not always easy to understand, even for people with good German skills. It is not expected that foreigners speak Swiss German, but it is expected that they are eventually able to understand Swiss German. It is always acceptable to ask the Swiss to speak High German.

Languages and Children

It is recommended that foreign language-speaking children meet German-speaking or French-speaking children as soon as possible. Ideal opportunities are playgroups or special programs for parents and their children. Parents can support their children in their learning by talking, listening, and telling them stories. They should do so in the parent's strongest and most natural language.

Translations

It cannot be expected that persons speak and understand German or French immediately upon their arrival. Nonetheless there are situations in which communication is essential. Many new arrivals ask family members or friends to interpret. In complicated, personal, or confidential conversations a professional interpreter may be called for. Intercultural interpreters specialize in taking cultural characteristics into consideration when interpreting. Various writing services (Schreibdienst | le service de correspondance) in the Canton Bern offer help with understanding and writing letters or completing forms.



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Learning German or French

In order to learn German or French properly a language class is recommended. There are many offers in Canton Bern that cater to different living situations.

Offers

Many offers aimed at different groups of people are available in Canton Bern. Some providers are commercial enterprises, some are charitable or public institutions. Persons who are not familiar with the Latin alphabet or have difficulties reading or writing may take a literacy class (Alphabetisierungskurs | Cours d'alphabétisation). Before enrolling in a language class one should take note of the different types of classes and their costs. Many communities offer special classes in which mothers and their children can enhance their language skills (MuKi-Deutsch | Cours de français mère-enfant). The regional integration services (Ansprechstellen Integration | antennes d'intégration) or the community of residence will provide information regarding the various offerings.

Language Levels

German and French language skills are often evaluated according to the "Common European Framework of Reference for Languages" (GER). The six progressive levels extend from A1 (beginner) to C2 (proficiency). Most language courses are based on these levels. Levels A1 and A2 correlate with basic knowledge of the German or French language. Persons interested in a official professional education must achieve, in most cases, levels B1 or B2. Levels C1 and C2 for advanced learners are required for university studies.

Language certificate

Immigrants speaking a foreign language must prove knowledge of a national language for naturalization, the granting and extension of a residence or settlement permit, and family reunification.

Funding

Generally language classes must be paid for by the participant. Costs vary and it is recommended to compare the offers (cost per lesson). Some courses receive financial support from Canton Bern or communities, enabling lower costs for the participants.



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