

Language and Integration

[Integration](#)

[Integration Programmes](#)

[Language](#)

[Learning German](#)

Integration

Foreigners are expected to integrate into society. This involves abiding by the law, being economically independent, and learning German.

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 language spoken in 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 programmes.

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 Canton Aargau advice and support is available for new residents. The community of residence is always a good first contact. There are also specific information centres for immigrants. Apart from the Centre for Integration in Aargau (Anlaufstelle Integration Aargau, AIA) in Aarau there are some regional centres. Here information about life in Switzerland is available and specific questions on various subjects are answered. Persons who do not yet speak German may be accompanied by an interpreter or request an interpreter. Several centres offer information in other languages as well. There are centres that specialize in certain language groups.

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

dev.hallo-aargau.ch/en/language-and-integration/integration

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 programmes.

Specific Programmes

Numerous programmes for foreigners aid them in making contacts and becoming a part of Swiss society. These programmes include discussion groups, leisure time activities, talks, or classes. The Centre for Integration in Aargau (Anlaufstelle Integration Aargau, AIA) 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 Aargau are members of a club (Verein). 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 Aargau.

Offers for Young People

For young people in Canton Aargau there are many recreational offers that give them a chance to meet their peers. Many communities have meeting points and various recreational activities. The young people are supervised, can contribute ideas, and realize projects (Jugendarbeit). Most offers are free. Youth clubs are an opportunity to take part in outdoor activities 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)

dev.hallo-aargau.ch/en/language-and-integration/integration-programmes

Language

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

High German / Swiss German

Switzerland has four national languages: German, French, Italian and Rhaeto-Romance. German is the official language in Canton Aargau. There is a difference between High German (Hochdeutsch) and Swiss German (Schweizerdeutsch). High German is spoken at school and on certain radio and television programmes. 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.

German and Children

It is recommended that children who do not speak German meet German-speaking children as soon as possible. Ideal opportunities are playgroups or special programmes 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 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 specialise in taking cultural characteristics into consideration when interpreting. The typing service (Schreibdienst) made possible by the Swiss Red Cross (SRK) in Aarau or Baden offers help in understanding or writing letters or completing forms.

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

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Learning German

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

Offers

Many offers aimed at different groups of people are available in Canton Aargau. 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). Before enrolling in a German 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). The Centre for Integration in Aargau (Anlaufstelle Integration Aargau, AIA) or the community of residence will provide information regarding the various offers.

Language Levels

German 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). Levels A1 and A2 correlate with basic knowledge of the German language. Persons interested in a official professional education must achieve, in most cases, levels B1 or B2. Levels C1 and C2 for advanced students are generally required by universities.

Funding

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

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

dev.hallo-aargau.ch/en/language-and-integration/learning-german