

WELCOME
to your new home

USEFUL INFORMATION FOR THE FIRST STEPS



Centre for Migration and Integration

Ostbelgien 

Belgisches
ROTES KREUZ 

FOREWORD ANTONIOS ANTONIADIS

LIVING AND WORKING IN EAST BELGIUM - YOUR NEW HOME COUNTRY

You have decided to live in one of the nine municipalities of the German-speaking Community. A lot of things in your new environment may be unusual or even new to you. Understandably, you may have questions.

Where do I go when I am sick? Which German courses are available? Who can help me apply for a job or an apprenticeship position? How can I get a driving license? In what leisure and sport activities can I participate?

As the Minister of Social Affairs for East Belgium, it is particularly important to me that all newcomers to the region learn to find their way around as quickly as possible and are given the best possible start to their new lives. I have, for this reason, asked Info-Integration - the reference centre for migration and integration - to produce this brochure, which contains essential information about the first steps to becoming acquainted with life here in the East Belgian community. I would like to thank the entire team at Info-Integration for their efforts in producing it.

This brochure offers answers to many of your questions and will provide you with useful information on navigating daily life in East Belgium.

I hope that it serves as a helpful resource for your successful integration into our community. Although you will still face challenges, you need not worry. You will not be on your own. The Integration Programme and numerous other government and civil society measures are meant to help you on your way.

Antonios Antoniadis
Minister of Family, Health and Social Affairs



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. Antoniadis', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

FOREWORD VÉRONIQUE WETZELAER

“The first step to human encounter is to approach one another”

(Ernst Ferstl)

WELCOME TO EAST BELGIUM!

After a long journey you have finally arrived in East Belgium. In taking the first steps in your new life, the information contained in this brochure will help you open your first few doors.

However, there are also people who will stand by you, including the Info-Integration team of the Belgian Red Cross. We will eagerly provide you with information and assistance.

I hope that you will feel soon at home in our community so that it becomes your community as well! We look forward to meeting you!

Véronique Wetzelaer

Director of the “Belle Vue” Reception Centre for Asylum Seekers and the Belgian Red Cross Info-Integration Service.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "V. Wetzelaer". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a long, thin horizontal line that extends to the right.

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1. REGISTERING WITH THE MUNICIPALITY

You must register at the municipal administration office no later than eight days after moving to your new place of residence. You must report to the Population and Civic Registry Department and provide them with your new address and personal details. It is important to have your residence permit with you!

A few days later, the police will visit your home in order to verify that you live at the address you have given. You need not be afraid, as this procedure is carried out for everyone in Belgium.

Only then will you be registered with the municipality.

By the way: if you wish to travel abroad for more than 3 months, please contact your municipal administration before your departure to inform them about your plans. This way you will avoid any difficulties when returning to Belgium.



2. MAKING AN APPOINTMENT WITH INFO-INTEGRATION

Info-Integration will take care of your integration programme. The organisation will help you arrange for language and integration courses, support you while taking them, and refer you to services for finding employment. For more information, consult the brochure “the integration programme”, which you can ask for at your municipal administration office.

Info-Integration is a service of the Belgian Red Cross and, in its role as a reference centre, is subsidised by the German-speaking Community.

This service can answer your questions about life in the German-speaking Community (education system, healthcare, leisure activities, housing ...).

Info-Integration

Address: Rathausplatz 14A, 4700 Eupen

Tel.: 087 76 59 71 or 0497 52 27 89 (Whatsapp)



3. STILL LOOKING FOR WORK?

3.1. MAKING AN APPOINTMENT WITH YOUR MUNICIPAL PUBLIC CENTRE FOR SOCIAL WELFARE OR ÖSHZ

If you are unemployed and you have no or very little income, your municipal Public Centre for Social Welfare (ÖSHZ) can provide you with help.

The ÖSHZ can, for instance:

- provide financial assistance.
- answer your questions about your social security rights.
- provide information about assistance.
- in some cases, help you find a job.

Do not therefore hesitate to talk to your social worker about your situation and your problems.

3.2. JOB SEARCH

If you are not yet employed and would like to work, you must register as a jobseeker at one of the Public Employment Office locations the German-speaking Community (Arbeitsamt).

Sankt Vith Office
Vennbahnstraße 4/2, 4780 Sankt Vith
Tel. 080 280 060
Email: info@adg.be

Eupen Office
Hütte 79, 4700 Eupen
Tel. 087 63 89 00
Email: info@adg.be

The Employment Office can help you:

- find job.
- write an application.

The Employment Office also offers vocational training and education programs, as well as language courses. You may want to also register with an **employment agency**. Such an agency matches potential employees with companies and allows workers to gain experience in various fields and with various employers. It is usually easier to find work through these agencies.

You can also find current vacancies advertised in local and regional newspapers (Grenz-Echo, Wochenspiegel and Kurier-Journal).



Applying for degree equivalence

If you have a high school diploma or a degree from your country of origin, you should apply for an equivalent. This will enable you to:

- Study or continue your studies in Belgium
- Undergo vocational training
- Enter into a profession

If you wish to study, it is the Community where the higher education institution (college or university) of your choice is located that is responsible for recognising your degree.

For example: If you wish to study in Louvain-la-Neuve or in Liège, it is the **French Community** of Belgium that is responsible for examining degree equivalence. If you wish to study in Antwerp or in another Flemish town, it is the **Flemish Community** that is responsible for examining degree equivalence.

If you wish to study at the Autonomous University of East Belgium, please contact the Education and Teaching Organisation Department of the Ministry of the German-speaking Community.

Ministry of the German-speaking Community
Education and Teaching Organization Department
Adress: Gospertstraße 1, 4700 Eupen
Tel. 087 59 63 00

4. ENROLLING IN A GERMAN COURSE

German is the main language of East Belgium. It is therefore important to learn the language in order to communicate with others and to find work. There are different kinds of German courses: daytime, evening, intensive or just once a week.

You can learn more about current course offerings at Info-Integration. They will help you find the right course for you.



5. ENROLLING YOUR CHILDREN IN KINDERGARTEN OR SCHOOL

In Belgium, **school attendance is mandatory from the ages of 5 to 18** regardless of the child's nationality or residence status. It is therefore important for you to enroll your school-aged children in a school. There is at least one primary school in each municipality and there are secondary schools in Eupen, Kelmis, Sankt Vith and Büllingen.

Children from the ages of 3 to 6 have the option to attend kindergarten. In the school year 2020-2021, the compulsory school-age has been reduced to 5 years. Consequently, from the age of 5, children have to attend kindergarten regularly (in the morning and the afternoon). Kindergarten serves as preparation for school. Therefore, every elementary school also has a kindergarten.

Many communities also have homework schools which are places where children are given support with their work.

If your child has learning difficulties, you can contact "**Kaleido**".

Kaleido Ostbelgien

Gospertstraße 44, 4700 Eupen

Tel. 087 55 46 44

Email: info@kaleido-ostbelgien.be

Do not hesitate to ask any questions regarding the education system at Info-Integration.



6. REGISTER WITH A HEALTH INSURER

In Belgium it is **compulsory** to have health insurance cover. It is therefore important to arrange for cover with a health insurer as soon as possible. You can choose between:

- The Public Health Insurance Company (HKIV)
- One of the following five private insurers:
 - *Christliche Krankenkasse*
 - *Freie Krankenkasse*
 - *Liberale Krankenkasse (no office in East Belgium)*
 - *Neutrale Krankenkasse*
 - *Sozialistische Krankenkasse*

All insurance companies offer more or less the same services. Members of the Public Health Insurance Company do not have to pay extra fees. Private health insurers might offer supplementary compulsory insurance cover that is not included in the basic insurance package.

Important things to know

- When you go to the doctor, you will first have to pay for the visit yourself. The doctor will then give you a document that you have to send to your health insurance company, which will then reimburse you in part or in full.
- Should you go to the hospital, you will receive an invoice with the amount you have to pay yourself. The rest will be paid by the health insurance company.
- When purchasing medication from a pharmacy, you will need your identity card or your ISI+ card. You will have to pay part of the costs.
- The health insurance company will pay you benefits to compensate you for loss of income due to long-term or chronic illness, pregnancy or parental leave.
- You must contact your health insurance company as soon as possible in the event of an accident or an illness, or to report any changes, such as change of employment or personal address.
- There are doctors on duty during weekends and bank holidays. You can find their contact information by consulting:
 - *Wochenspiegel newspaper*
 - *Grenz-Echo newspaper, "Notdienste" section*
 - *www.grenzecho.net*



- Doctor appointments are more expensive on the weekend. If not an emergency, consult doctors during the week.
- Home visits (when a doctor visits a patient `s house for a consultation) are also more expensive. Go to the doctor `s surgery, whenever possible.
- Hospital Emergency Rooms (ERs) are also open at night, on weekends and bank holidays. ERs should, however, only be visited for true medical emergencies, such as injuries due to accidents or heart conditions.
- You can discuss anything with your doctor. All medical professionals are bound by professional confidentiality. This means that they are not allowed to disclose any information about a patient without their prior consent.
- Do not hesitate to asks any questions. Sometimes, it is difficult to understand the medical terminology. Doctors can provide explanations in simple terms, if requested.

7. HOUSING

7.1 HOME HUNTING

There are several ways to find housing on the **private housing market**:

- **signs posted in the windows of houses and apartments** indicating for rent (zu vermieten/ à louer) or for sale (zu verkaufen/à vendre).
- **classified ads in the newspaper**. In the German-speaking Community, such advertisements can be found in the free newspapers Kurierjournal or the Wochenspiegel (also online);
- **real-estate agencies** that manage private property. Beware: real-estate agents always charge commission fees.

Low-income earners, i.e. those who earn little money, often have difficulties finding something on the private housing market.

There are other options available to them.

The following organisations can offer further assistance:

Public Housing East Belgium (ÖWOB) or Tri-Landum in Kelmis, Lontzen, Raeren and Eupen

ÖWOB in Eupen Maria-Theresia-Straße 10 4700 Eupen Tel. 087 63 97 60 Opening hours: Thursday from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m.	ÖWOB in Kelmis Kahnweg 30 4720 Kelmis Tel. 087 63 97 60 Opening hours: Monday from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m.	Tri-Landum ASBL in Kelmis Kirchplatz 15-17 4720 Kelmis Tel. 087 63 97 70 Email: info@tri-landum.be
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Public Housing Eifel (ÖWOB St.Vith) and “Living space for all” (“Wohnraum für Alle”)
in Sankt Vith, Burg Reuland, Amel, Bütgenbach and Büllingen

ÖWOB St.Vith Mühlenbachstraße 13 4780 Sankt Vith Tel. 080 22 93 91 Opening hours: Tuesday and Thursday from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m.	Wohnraum für Alle Bahnhofstraße 11 4780 Sankt Vith Tel. 080 22 66 83 Opening hours: Monday from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. and Tuesday from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m
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7.2 SIGNING A CONTRACT WITH AN ENERGY SUPPLIER

There are multiple electricity and gas suppliers in Belgium (Electrabel, Luminus, Lampiris, Eon, etc.). If the rented accommodation has its own meter, the tenant must sign a contract with an energy supplier.

Important: you should write down the date and meter-reading before you move into your accommodation! The Consumer Protection Centre or Verbruicherschutzzentrale (VSZ) can help you choose a supplier. For more information visit www.mesfournisseurs.be

Important: Electricity and gas are expensive in Belgium! You also have to pay for water. Normally, you pay an estimated amount in your monthly energy bills. The amount of energy actually consumed is checked after 12 months. If you consumed more than expected, you will have to make an additional payment. This can sometimes be very high.

7.3 WHAT ELSE DO I NEED TO KNOW?

- Carefully read the entire tenancy agreement. If you have questions or doubts, do not hesitate to contact your local **Consumer Protection Centre**, ideally before signing the contract. Once it is signed, it is impossible to undo.
- New legislation requires the tenant to take out home and household insurance, which insures you against damage to other people's property, such as their home and furniture, against personal injury and against damage to your own furniture. If something happens and you are not insured, you risk falling heavily into debt for the rest of your life. There are a number of different insurance providers where you can take out an appropriate policy.
- You also have to pay taxes on waste disposal.



8. FINANCES AND INSURANCE

A Belgian **bank account** is very useful, because it enables you to receive money transfers (salary, social benefit, child benefit) and to transfer money (to the health insurer, to pay your rent, etc.). To open a bank account, you will need a passport or any other valid identification document. The ÖSHZ can help you with opening an account. In each municipality, there are different banks.

In addition to compulsory health insurance, you can take out other **insurance policies**, such as:

- automobile liability insurance cover for motor vehicles (this is compulsory if you own a car, a motorcycle, etc.)
- personal liability insurance cover
- home insurance and household insurance cover (see explanations in the housing section)

For more information about lease agreements, energy suppliers and insurance policies, please contact the Consumer Protection Centre or Verbraucherschutz-zentrale at:

Verbraucherschutzzentrale Eupen

Address: Neustraße 119, B-4700 Eupen

Tel.: 087 59 18 50

9. FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN

Families with children are eligible for the **Child Benefit**, providing they have a legal residence status.

- Normally, every child is eligible to receive the Child Benefit up to the age of 18.
- In some cases, children who attend school or university can receive the Child Benefit until the age of 25.
- Even if children who are older than 18, are registered as jobseekers, they might still be able to receive the Child Benefit in some cases.

For more information, please contact:

Ministerium der Deutschsprachigen

Gemeinschaft/Ministry of the German-speaking Community,

Fachbereich Familie und Soziales/ Family and Social Affairs Department

Kaperberg 6, 4700 Eupen

Email: Familiendienstleistungen@dgov.be

www.ostbelgienlive.be, The “Family - Child benefit” or “Familie – Kindergeld” section

Parents cannot always look after their children themselves, because they have to go to work, take a German course or have a doctor’s appointment. There are **organisations that offer childcare**. For more information, please contact Info-Integration or the ÖSHZ.



10. PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES AND THE ELDERLY

The Service for Independent Living (DSL) has been tasked with assuring that living a self-determined life becomes a reality for all people in East Belgium. The DSL allows people with support needs to continue living independently by informing, advising and offering assistance to them and their relatives. This includes among, other things:

- coordinating support services at home, and in inpatient- and day-patient care.
- offering personal assistance to promote mobility and independence, where possible in their own home.
- promoting accommodation measures in training and education.
Please contact us; we are happy to come to you

Service for Independent Living

Vennbahnstraße 4/4, 4780 Sankt Vith

Tel. 080 22 91 11, children, teenagers, adults

Tel. 087 59 05 90, elderly living in the North of East Belgium

Tel. 080 22 91 11, elderly living in the South of East Belgium

www.selbstbestimmt.be

11. SOCIAL LIFE

The German-speaking Community offers a variety of **associations and clubs** for leisure activities, such as sports, music and dance. Participation in club activities is a great opportunity to meet other people and to practice the language.

Certain municipalities also organise **“Social Meeting Places”** offering many opportunities for people to meet.

Furthermore, there are **international Women´s Erzählcafés**, where women can talk about their everyday lives and get to know each other over a cup of tea or coffee.

There are also **organisations for youth**, such as KLJ, Scouts and the Chiro. These organisations organise fun activities for children or teens during the weekends and school holidays.

Finally, various municipalities also have special **sponsorship programs for newcomers**. Sponsors are people who offer their assistance to newcomers with everyday tasks. For example, they accompany them to appointments at the municipality administration office, medical appointments, parent-teacher conferences in schools or help them with learning the German language.

Low-income earners, i.e. those with low income, are eligible to receive **food, clothes and furniture at low or no costs** from organisations, such as the food banks and clothing stores of the Belgian Red Cross, the Vinzenz Association, etc. For more information, please contact the ÖSHZ or info-integration.



12. DRIVING LICENSE

Non-EU driving licenses are not valid in Belgium. Certain licenses, such as licenses from Turkey and Morocco, can be exchanged for a Belgian license at the municipal administration office.

Licenses that are not recognized in Belgium are not eligible for exchange (licenses from Syria, for example). You will have to pass both the driving theory and practical exam again to apply for a Belgian driving license.

The municipal administration office will be able to inform you if your driving license is recognized, eligible for exchange or if you will have to take both exams.

Important: You may use an interpreter when taking driving theory exam. For more information, please contact Info-Integration.



13. BUS AND TRAIN

- **Train:** There is only one train station in East Belgium, which is in Eupen. You can ask questions about monthly and annual train passes and the train schedules at the station's ticket office. Make sure to check the opening hours of the office! If it is closed, you can purchase your tickets online or from the ticket vending machine. Visit www.belgiantrain.be for further information on train schedules or online ticket sales.
- **Bus:** The East-Belgian public transit network contains a large variety of bus routes. Tickets can be purchased online or at a TEC sales point. If you do not have valid proof-of-payment, you may be issued a fine. Should you take the bus on a regular basis, there is always the option of purchasing a multi-trip ticket or a bus pass. If you have any questions, please contact your local TEC sales office. There you can also obtain the bus schedules. Additionally, visit www.infotec.be for further useful information on schedules and fares or for online ticket sales.

North East-Belgium

Busdespot Eupen

Herbesthaler Straße, 85, 4700 Eupen

Tel. 087 74 25 92

South East-Belgium

Mobi-ESPACE Büllingen (mobile sales point)

Hauptstraße (Alte Post), 4760 Büllingen

Find the calendar of the Mobi-Espace on the website www.infotec.be.

You can also take a **taxi**, but keep in mind that taxi fares are expensive in Belgium. You can find all the taxi company contact details online or in the phone book.

There are also **carpooling and ride-sharing services** in which private individuals offer transportation to others. In the German-speaking Community there is a service called "Fahr mit". The "Bla-Bla-Car" service is also available. You can find more information on these services online.

A network of **blue ride-sharing benches** was established in the North of East-Belgium in collaboration with the municipalities. The concept is quite simple: you sit on the blue Mitfahr bench, and the next benevolent driver spontaneously stops and offers you a ride, because there is room in the car and the driver is going in the same direction anyway.

The Rules:

- Drivers and passengers are free to decide whether or not to share rides. Participation is voluntary.
- All rides are free-of-charge
- Passengers are legally co-insured when they are in the car
- Children under the age of 14 cannot participate and may not be given rides
- Adolescents aged 14 to 18 may only be given rides when they have the consent of their parents.

For further information, please visit the website www.fahrmit.be



14. WASTE MANAGEMENT

Waste is separated and recycled in Belgium.

Every municipality usually provides garbage bags and bins to separate paper and cardboard, PMC (plastic bottles, metal packaging and beverage cartons), organic waste (fruit and vegetables), and household waste. These are regularly collected in front of your house. You can ask for a **waste collection calendar** at your municipal administration office. This calendar contains all necessary information about the waste collection schedule. Additionally, there are recycling and waste disposal centres for the proper disposal of other types of waste. Glass bottles and containers are sorted by colour (white or green glass) and should be discarded in glass containers. Toxic or oversized garbage (electric appliances, cardboard containers, garden organic waste, batteries, oil, toxic paint, mattresses, furniture, etc.) must be disposed of at a municipal disposal. The municipal administration can give you their addresses. There are also services that will pick up your oversized garbage at home. Please contact your local municipal administration office for more information.

Important: Discarding household waste in or on public (e.g. public bins) or private property (e.g. forest) is illegal. You may be fined!

USEFUL ADDRESSES

Social Support Services

Addresses of the Public Centres of Social Welfare in all municipalities:

ÖSHZ Amel An de Bareer 13 4770 Amel Tel. 080 34 81 27	ÖSHZ Büllingen Hauptstraße 12 4760 Büllingen Tel. 080 64 00 23	ÖSHZ Bütgenbach Zum Brand 40 4750 Weywertz Tel. 080 44 00 91
ÖSHZ Burg-Reuland Lindenallee 29 4790 Burg-Reuland Tel. 080 32 90 07	ÖSHZ Eupen Limburgerweg 5 4700 Eupen Tel. 087 63 89 50	ÖSHZ Kelmis Kirchstraße 27A 4720 Kelmis Tel. 087 63 99 61
ÖSHZ Lontzen Kirchstraße 36 4710 Lontzen Tel. 087 89 80 40	ÖSHZ Raeren Burgstraße 42 4730 Raeren Tel. 087 85 89 51	ÖSHZ St.Vith Wiesenbach 5 4780 St.Vith Tel. 080 28 20 30

Special support services for newcomers

Info-Integration

Address: Rathausplatz 14 A, 4700 Eupen

Tel.: 087 76 59 71 or 0497 52 26 31

Social legal counselling concerning the right of residence; General newcomer support services to help navigate daily life in the German-speaking Community.

Social Meeting Places in the German-speaking Community

Patchwork in Sankt Vith Bleichstraße 8 4780 Sankt Vith Tel. 080 33 04 11	Animationszentrum Ephata Bergkapellstraße 46 4700 Eupen Tel. 087 56 15 10
Viertelhaus Cardijn CAJ Hillstraße 7 Temporary address: Monschaurstraße 10 (Villa Peters) 4700 Eupen Tel.: 0472 06 78 79	Haus der Familie Patronagestraße 27A 4720 Kelmis Tel. 087 78 88 02

Advisory and consultation services on insurance policies and lease agreements:

Verbraucherschutzzentrale (Consumer Protection Centre)

Neustraße 119
4700 Eupen
Tel. 087 59 18 50

Emergency telephone numbers:

- General Emergency Services: 112
- The on-call doctor and fire department: 100
- Police Department: 101
- Poison Control Centre: 070 245 245

DO YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS?

Do you have questions after reading this brochure? No problem.

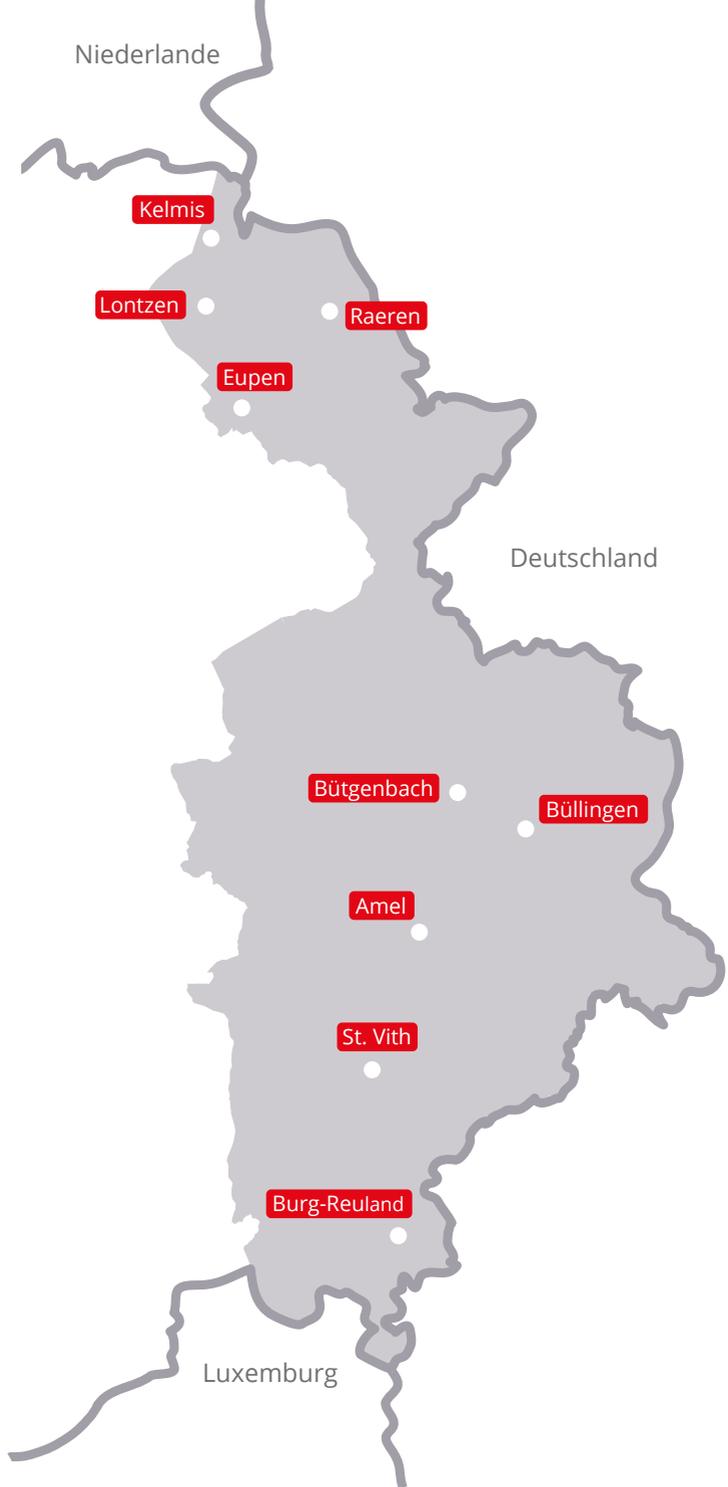
Please make an appointment with Info-Integration to ask your questions or contact us at:

- Tel. 087 76 59 71
- Email: info-integration@roteskreuz.be

Info-Integration offers their services free of charge and will provide with assistance, advice and information. The organisation is funded by the government of the German-speaking Community.

If you do not know which resources are available to you, Info-Integration can refer you to the right people.

We would like to thank everyone who was involved in developing this brochure for the contribution of their time and expertise, and for their support.



contact



Centre for Migration and Integration

Info-Integration
Rathausplatz 14 A · 4700 Eupen
Tel.: 087 76 59 81
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With the support of:

