



2025 EDITION



Facts about Germany







FOREIGN POLICY SOCIETY EDUCATION ECONOMY CULTURE



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Germany at a glance

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Facts and figures at a glance.



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What does federalism mean in Germany?

Germany is a federation made up of 16 constituent states, the Länder, which have their own governments and decision-making powers.



Germany has 16 federal states with their own state governments.
© dpa

Germany is a federation. The federal government and the 16 federal states each have their own decision-making powers. The individual states are responsible for decisions relating to internal security, schools and higher education, culture and municipal administration. At the same time, the state governments implement not only their own laws but also those issued by the federal government. The governments of the states are directly involved in the federal legislative process through their representatives in the Bundesrat (the second chamber of parliament).

Why does Germany have a federal system?

Federalism in Germany is more than just a system of government. Deeply rooted in tradition, it reflects the country's decentralised cultural and economic structure. Above and beyond their political function, the federal states also embody distinct regional identities. Their key role was enshrined in the Basic Law in 1949.





How many federal states does Germany have?

Since reunification in 1990, Germany has consisted of 16 federal states; five new states were established when the German Democratic Republic (GDR) joined the Federal Republic: Brandenburg, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt and Thuringia. North Rhine-Westphalia is the state with the biggest population at around 18 million, while Bavaria is the largest in terms of surface area at around 70,540 square kilometres. The territory of three federal states is limited to a single metropolitan region: these are the “city states” of Berlin, Bremen/Bremerhaven and Hamburg.

A journey through Germany’s states

Baden-Württemberg



Heidelberg is located in Baden-Württemberg, in south-western Germany.
© dpa/pa

The third-largest state is located in south-west Germany, bordering France and Switzerland. The state capital is Stuttgart. With more than eleven million inhabitants, Baden-Württemberg is famous for its holiday regions such as the Black Forest and cultural centres like Heidelberg (photo), not to mention its economic strength. Baden-Württemberg is Germany's number one export state and home to both large, internationally renowned corporations and smaller global market leaders - so-called “hidden champions”.



Bavaria



Munich is the capital of Bavaria.
© Adobe/Stock

In the south-east of Germany lies the largest federal state with its panorama of the Alps to the south. Germany's highest mountain is also to be found in Bavaria: the Zugspitze. Each year, the state capital Munich (photo) hosts the world's biggest beer festival, the Oktoberfest. With a population of over 13 million, Bavaria is also home to Bayern Munich, Germany's most successful football club, and is one of the country's economically strongest regions.

Berlin



The Reichstag, seat of the Bundestag in the German capital Berlin.
© dpa/pa

As a “city state”, the capital of Germany is also a federal state in its own right - like Hamburg and Bremen. Nearly four million people live in the city, which was divided into two parts until the Berlin Wall fell in November 1989. Berlin has landmarks that are famous worldwide, such as the Brandenburg Gate, the Reichstag (photo) - the seat of the German Bundestag - and Checkpoint Charlie at the former internal German border crossing. The capital offers rich cultural diversity, including the Museum Island in the heart of the city - a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Brandenburg



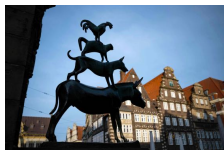
Sanssouci Palace in Potsdam, the capital of the German state of Brandenburg.
© dpa/pa

This federal state surrounds the vibrant capital of Berlin. A sparsely populated region with forests



and some 3,000 lakes, it attracts numerous city dwellers at the weekend. Around 2.5 million people live in Brandenburg, more than a million fewer than in Berlin. With its world-famous Sanssouci Palace (photo), the state capital Potsdam directly borders Germany's capital.

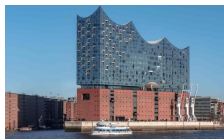
Bremen



The Bremen Town Musicians, a landmark of Bremen.
© dpa/pa

This "city state" is the smallest federal state and is made up of two cities: Bremen and Bremerhaven, located directly on the North Sea coast around 60 kilometres to the north. It has a population of some 700,000. The Bremen Town Musicians (photo) are a city landmark: a statue in the city commemorates the adventures of the donkey, cat and cockerel - the characters in the folk tale of the same name.

Hamburg



The Elbphilharmonie is located in the city-state of Hamburg.
© dpa/pa

The Hanseatic city of Hamburg is Germany's second-largest city and one of Germany's three city states. With a population of nearly two million, it is Germany's biggest seaport - a gateway to the world. A longstanding tradition of trade and commerce is still very much in evidence in this cosmopolitan northern metropolis. The Elbphilharmonie concert hall (photo) has recently become established as a new city landmark, offering concerts, fascinating architecture and spectacular views of the city and harbour.

Hesse



Frankfurt am Main is a financial centre in Hesse.
dpa/pa

After the Second World War, Hesse's finance and trade metropolis Frankfurt am Main was a possible candidate for the capital of the Federal Republic of Germany, though instead this honour went initially to Bonn and then, after reunification, to Berlin. With its skyline, stock exchange and Germany's biggest airport, Frankfurt (photo) still defines the image of Hesse to this day, though the state capital is nearby Wiesbaden. With a population of over six million, Hesse is also one of the most densely forested regions in Germany.

Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania



Schwerin Castle is located in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania.
dpa/pa

Located in the north-west of Germany and with a population of 1.6 million, the most sparsely populated federal state is a scenic paradise: with more than 2,000 lakes and 350 kilometres of Baltic coastline, it is one of the country's most popular travel destinations. Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania is also home to Germany's largest island, Usedom. The state capital is Schwerin, where the imposing Schwerin Palace (photo) with its 1,000-year history has been the seat of the state parliament since 1990.

Lower Saxony



Hanover is the capital of Lower Saxony.
dpa/pa

Germany's second-largest state in terms of surface area extends from the East Frisian islands in the North Sea such as Borkum and Norderney to the Harz mountains. With a population of some eight million, the state has an economy that is dominated by tourism and agriculture. The automotive industry is also a key factor, while important trade fairs are held in the state capital of

Hanover (photo).

North Rhine-Westphalia



Cologne is a large city in North Rhine-Westphalia.
dpa/pa

Germany's most populous state combines such diverse regions as the Ruhr, which was once defined by its [coal mining industry](#), and the Rhineland, which features Cologne (photo) - a city of over a million inhabitants - and state capital Dusseldorf at its heart. North Rhine-Westphalia is in transition, too: in this state with a population of 18 million, research and culture are now taking the place of coal mining. Up until reunification in 1990, the city of Bonn near Cologne was the capital of the Federal Republic of Germany.

Rhineland-Palatinate



There are many wine-growing regions in Rhineland-Palatinate.
Adobe/Stock

This state in the country's south-west is the number one [wine-growing state](#) in Germany: six of Germany's 13 wine-growing regions are to be found in Rhineland-Palatinate, including the largest of these - Rhine Hesse (photo). The Romans left their mark on the region more than 2,000 years ago; nowhere else in Germany are there more Roman monuments. Rhineland-Palatinate has a population of some four million and its capital is Mainz.

Saarland



The capital of Saarland is Saarbrücken.
dpa/pa

It was not until 1957 that Saarland became the tenth federal state of the Federal Republic of

Germany, having initially been a semi-autonomous state with close ties to France after the Second World War. The state's location within the greater European SaarLorLux region, which extends across parts of Germany, France, Luxembourg and Belgium, significantly influences the lives of its nearly one million inhabitants. Saarbrücken (photo) is the state capital of Germany's smallest territorial state.

Saxony



Dresden is the capital of Saxony and attracts numerous tourists.
dpa/pa

Boasting more than 1,000 years of history, the Free State of Saxony is situated on the border to [Poland](#) and the Czech Republic. With a population of four million, the state is a key business hub in eastern Germany but also attracts numerous visitors every year to the state capital Dresden (photo) - known as "Florence on the River Elbe" - as well as to the economic and cultural metropolis of Leipzig and the Ore Mountains.

Saxony-Anhalt



Quedlinburg is located in Saxony-Anhalt and has a particularly beautiful old town.
dpa/pa

With six UNESCO [World Cultural Heritage sites](#), this state in the middle of Germany boasts one of the highest numbers of world heritage sites. These include the Bauhaus in Dessau, the memorials to Martin Luther in Eisleben and Wittenberg and the historic centre of Quedlinburg (photo). With a population of around two million, the state is also an important centre for the chemical industry and European chip production. The state capital is Magdeburg.

Schleswig-Holstein



The North Sea island of Sylt belongs to Schleswig-Holstein and is one of Germany's most popular holiday destinations.
dpa/pa

Known as the "land between the seas", Schleswig-Holstein is situated between the North Sea in the west and the Baltic Sea in the east, and borders Denmark in the north. Germany's northernmost federal state has a population of almost three million and its capital is Kiel. With islands such as Sylt (photo), the state is among the most popular holiday regions. Stretching from the Netherlands to Germany and Denmark, the Wadden sea World Heritage Site is an important landmark.

Thuringia



The famous German poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe lived in Weimar for many years.
dpa/pa

This state is geographically located at the heart of Germany and was where Goethe, Bach and Luther lived: the composer Johann Sebastian Bach was born in Eisenach, the poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe lived for many years in Weimar (photo) and the reformer Martin Luther translated the New Testament of the Bible into German at Wartburg Castle. The state has a population of over two million and its capital is Erfurt.

Parliament and parties in Germany

The German Bundestag is elected every four years by free, secret and direct ballot by citizens who are eligible to vote.

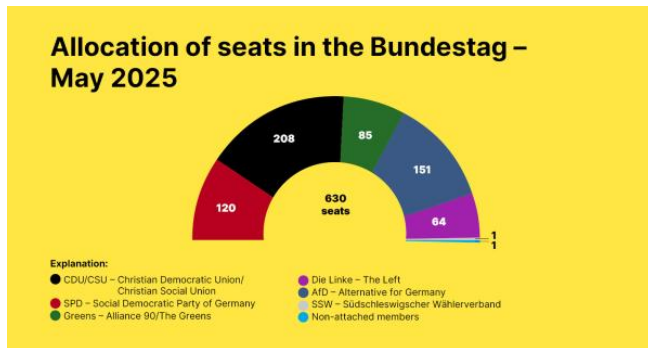


The German Bundestag is elected every four years.
© dpa

How is the German Bundestag elected?

The German Bundestag, which is the country's parliament, is elected every four years by free, secret and direct ballot by citizens aged 18 and over who are eligible to vote. The 630 members of the Bundestag are elected according to second votes from parties' state lists and on the basis of first votes cast for individuals in 299 constituencies.

An amendment to the electoral law for the 2025 Bundestag election has reduced the individual vote element and increased the list vote element. Of the 630 seats, direct mandates will only be allocated in the 299 constituencies if the seats are covered by the proportion of second votes the party has achieved. Previously, what are known as "balance seats" and "overhang seats" had meant that the number of MPs had been significantly higher of late. There were 733 MPs in the 20th Bundestag. The electoral reform has ensured that the parliament will become smaller again.



The role of the parties

Why is Germany governed by coalitions?

The electoral system makes it difficult for any single party to form a government on its own, which is why coalitions of at least two parties are the norm in Germany.

What is the significance of the five-percent hurdle?

To prevent the party landscape from becoming fragmented, which would make the process of forming a government in the Bundestag more complicated, parties must receive at least five percent of the votes (five-percent hurdle) in order to obtain seats in the parliament.

What role do political parties play in Germany?

Political parties have an extremely important role to play in Germany. They help shape the political decision-making process and are indispensable for democratic elections. The Basic Law therefore accords them constitutional status in Germany. If a party seeks to eliminate the free democratic basic order of the Federal Republic, the Federal Constitutional Court may ban that party. However, the barriers to this are very high.

Which parties are represented in the German Bundestag?

Following the election on 23 February 2025, the 21st German Bundestag is made up of six parties and 630 members: the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD), the Christian-Democratic Union of Germany (CDU)/Christian-Social Union in Bavaria (CSU), Alliance 90/The Greens, The Left and the Alternative for Germany (AfD). Since the first Bundestag election in 1949, the CDU, which runs in all of Germany's federal states apart from Bavaria, and its sister party the CSU, which runs only in Bavaria, have formed a joint parliamentary group in the Bundestag. One seat is reserved for the South Schleswig Voters' Association SSW, the party that represents the Danish minority in northern Germany.

How does Germany's Federal Government operate?

The Federal Chancellor and the federal ministers form the Federal Government, the cabinet.



The Federal Cabinet consists of 16 ministers.
© picture alliance/dpa

The Federal Chancellor is the head of the Federal Government. Together with the federal ministers, he or she forms the Federal Government, the cabinet. Alongside the chancellor's power to determine policy guidelines, the principle of ministerial autonomy applies, according to which the ministers conduct the affairs of their departments independently within the limits of the policy guidelines set by the Federal Chancellor, as does the principle of collegiate responsibility, which states that the Federal Government decides on contentious issues by means of a majority vote.

How many federal ministers does the German government have?

The number of ministers is not stipulated in the Basic Law. Ministers may also be replaced during the course of a legislative period.

Since May 2025, the Federal Cabinet has comprised Federal Chancellor Friedrich Merz, 16 ministers and the head of the Federal Chancellery. The federal ministries are the most senior

federal authorities in each department.

→ bmds.bund.de

Where is the official seat of the German government?

The German capital [Berlin](#) is the seat of government. Before [German reunification in 1990](#), the capital was [Bonn](#). In June 1991, the Bundestag decided that Berlin would become the seat of parliament and government. However, six federal ministries kept their headquarters in Bonn and all ministries have offices in both cities. Bonn, as the second political centre of the Federal Republic, also bears the name of the Federal City of Bonn.

Which ministries does the German government have?

Federal Ministry of Finance

→ bundesfinanzministerium.de

Federal Ministry of the Interior

→ bmi.bund.de

Federal Foreign Office

→ dipl.o.de

Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy

→ bundeswirtschaftsministerium.de

Federal Ministry of Justice and Consumer Protection

→ bmi.de

Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs

→ bmas.de

Federal Ministry of Defence

→ bmvg.de

Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Regional Identity

→ bmel.de

Federal Ministry for Education, Family Affairs Senior Citizens, Women and Youth

→ bmfjsfj.de

Federal Ministry of Health

→ bundesgesundheitsministerium.de

Federal Ministry of Transport

→ bmv.de/DE/Home/home.html

Federal Ministry for the Environment, Climate Action, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety

→ bundesumweltministerium.de

Federal Ministry of Research, Technology and Space

→ bmftr.bund.de

Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development

→ bmgz.de

Federal Ministry for Housing, Urban Development and Building

→ bmwsb.bund.de

Federal Ministry for Digital Transformation and Government Modernisation

How does the political system function in Germany?

The Federal Republic of Germany is structured as a federal state and parliamentary democracy.



Germany is a parliamentary democracy.
© Unsplash

The Federal Republic of Germany is structured as a federal state and parliamentary democracy. The Basic Law sets down that all state authority derives from the people. The people confer this power to the federal and state parliaments for one legislative period.

Separation of powers in Germany

Which three powers are there?

State authority is divided between the legislative branch, the executive branch and the judicial branch, which is responsible for the administration of justice. The separation of powers is a core component of all democracies and is enshrined in Germany's constitution, the Basic Law.

What is the legislative?

The legislative discusses, agrees on and amends laws that govern the way people live together in Germany. It also oversees the work of the government (executive).

The legislative includes

- the German Bundestag, which is the parliament elected by the people;
- the Bundesrat, which represents the 16 federal states at federal level. The Bundesrat plays a role in federal lawmaking;
- the Landtage, which are the parliaments of the 16 federal states

What is the executive?

The executive enforces laws and implements them in daily life.

At federal level, the executive comprises

- the Federal Government (Federal Chancellor, federal ministers)
- the Federal President (representative head of state with certain executive duties)
- the Federal Administration (ministries, federal agencies, Federal Police etc.)

At federal state level, it comprises

- the state-level governments (minister presidents and state-level ministers)
- state-level administrative bodies

At municipal level, it comprises

- mayors and district administrators
- city and district governments

The police force and administrative authorities (e.g. the inland revenue) also belong to the executive.

What is the judiciary?

The judiciary is the branch that ensures that laws are upheld.

The judges who preside over the courts at federal and state level are independent and reach their decisions solely on the basis of the laws.

The highest German court is the Federal Constitutional Court, which is the "guardian" of the Basic Law. All other state organs are bound by the verdicts reached by the 16 constitutional judges.

Which are the highest political offices in Germany?

The Federal President is for protocol purposes Germany's most senior representative.

The Federal President is represented by the Bundesrat President – an office held on an annually rotating basis by a minister president of one of the 16 federal states.

For protocol purposes, the Bundestag President ranks second-highest.

The office with the greatest scope for shaping policy is that of the Federal Chancellor. He or she determines policy guidelines.

The president of the Federal Constitutional Court, the highest German court, is likewise one of the country's senior representatives.

At a glance



© bundeskanzler.de/Tobias Koch

Friedrich Merz

CDU, Federal Chancellor since May 2025



© picture alliance/Gora

Julia Klöckner

CDU, Bundestag President since March 2025



© Bundesregierung/Steffen Kugler

Dr. Frank-Walter Steinmeier

Federal President



© dpa

Prof. Dr. Stephan Harbarth

President of the Federal Constitutional Court

How do people vote in Germany?

Free and fair elections are an essential precondition for any democracy.



Elections in Germany are free, equal and secret.
© dpa

Why are elections held regularly in Germany?

Free and fair elections are an essential precondition for any democracy. They are a key instrument for the political participation of citizens. The German Basic Law states that the representatives must be elected through general, direct, free, equal and secret elections.

Which basic rules apply to elections in Germany?

All citizens who are eligible to vote, irrespective of their gender or income, have the vote, their voting decision must not be influenced - and every vote counts equally. Voters must be at least 18 to vote in Bundestag elections, while 16 is the minimum age for local Landtag and municipal elections in some states. Secret elections guarantee that every voter can cast their vote unobserved and on their own.

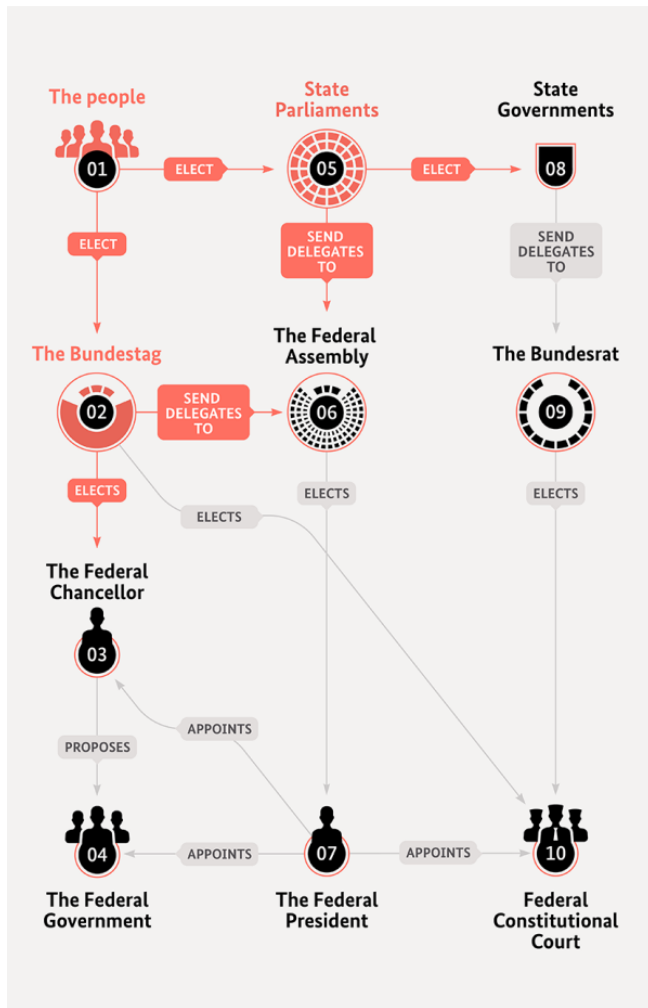
How often are elections held in Germany?

The German Bundestag is normally elected every four years. Elections are generally held every five

years in the 16 federal states. Then there are municipal elections, which usually also take place every five years, to elect for example city parliaments.

How is Germany's federal president elected?

The federal president isn't elected directly by the people, but every five years by the Federal Convention. The Federal Convention is made up of all the members of the Bundestag and an equal number of delegates elected by the state parliaments. These delegates can also be members of the public such as artists or scientists.



Germany: Geography and Climate

How many countries border Germany and what else distinguishes it geographically.



Baltic Sea island of Usedom
© picture alliance

Germany is situated at the heart of Europe. In the north it has access to the Baltic Sea and the North Sea. In the south it borders the Alps. It shares a border with nine other countries:

- Belgium
- Denmark
- France
- Luxembourg
- Netherlands
- Austria
- Poland
- Switzerland
- Czech Republic

No other European country has more neighbours.

What is Germany's highest mountain called?

The highest elevation is the Zugspitze mountain in Bavaria, at 2,962m above sea level.

Where is the lowest point to be found in Germany?

The lowest point in the country stands 3.54m above sea level in Neuendorf-Sachsenbande in the state of Schleswig Holstein.

What area does Germany cover?

Covering 357,588 square kilometres, Germany is the fourth-largest country in the European Union, after France, Spain and Sweden. Just under a third of the total land area is covered with forest. Lakes, rivers and other watercourses make up over 2% of its area.

What is the name of Germany's longest river?

The Rhine is the longest river. In the south-west of the country, it forms the border between Germany and France. Further to the north, Bonn, Cologne and Düsseldorf stand on its banks. Germany's second-longest river, the Elbe, connects Dresden, Magdeburg and Hamburg before flowing into the North Sea.

What climate does Germany have?

Germany has a temperate climate. In recent years, climate change has resulted in significant shifts, the consequences including heatwaves, storms and heavy rain. With an average temperature of 10.9 degrees Celsius, 2024 was the warmest year since records began in 1881. The lowest monthly average temperature in 2024 was 1.5 degrees, recorded in January, while the warmest month was August, with an average temperature of 19.9 degrees. 36.5 degrees was the highest temperature recorded in the summer of 2024, though other years have even seen temperatures exceed 40 degrees in Germany.

Getting around in Germany

From visas to voltage: discover important information to help you prepare for your trip to Germany.



Germany has a well developed rail network.
© Markus Mainka/stock.adobe.com

Which identity cards and visas are there in Germany?

When entering the country, foreigners need a valid passport or replacement documents. Citizens of most states in Western Europe require only a valid ID card. In most cases, children require their own travel documentation. Travellers from certain countries require a visa to enter Germany. Travellers should contact Germany's embassies and consulates for more information.

→ auswaertiges-amt.de

Which airports are there in Germany?

All the major international airlines operate routes to Germany. The global network connects more than 20 airports in Germany with all regions of the world. The largest airports are in Frankfurt am Main, Munich, Berlin and Düsseldorf. All [airports](#) have good connections to onward transport networks.

→ berlin-airport.de

→ frankfurt-airport.de

→ munich-airport.de

→ dus.com

How well developed is the rail network in Germany?

Germany's rail network covers the whole country, at around 39,200 km in length. The timetables are arranged to allow easy connections between local and long-distance routes. More than 330 daily international services connect Germany directly to twelve European countries. Deutsche Bahn phone hotline: +49 30 2970

→ bahn.de

Is it easy to get around Germany by bus?

It is also easy to get around Germany by long-distance bus, with several hundred long-distance bus routes. Urban areas are particularly well served, as all German cities and many smaller towns can be reached by long-distance bus routes. Long-distance bus travel information:

→ busliniensuche.de

→ fernbusse.de

How easy is it to drive around Germany by car?

Germany's road network is state-of-the-art. Hundreds of motorway service stations and petrol stations are open round the clock on Germany's 13,000km network of Autobahns. Motorists can fill up with the following unleaded fuels: Super (95 octane), Super Plus (98 octane) and diesel. The network of charging stations for electric cars is continuously expanding.

Unless otherwise indicated by speed limit signs, there is no speed limit on the Autobahn, although motorists are advised to drive no faster than 130km/h. A speed limit of 50km/h applies in built-up areas and 100km/h elsewhere. There are no fees for cars on German Autobahns, though cars may have to pay a charge to use certain tunnels or private and residential stretches of road. Seatbelts must be worn by law. Children up to 150cm in height must have a child seat. Roadside emergency telephones are available to contact the emergency services or roadside assistance. Germany's major motoring clubs are the ADAC and the AvD, which provide information for tourists travelling by car.

Where can I spend the night in Germany?

Accommodation is available in every class and category, from private rooms to holiday flats and luxury hotels. Standards are set and monitored, even in the cheaper price brackets. Tourism associations and tourist information offices provide specific lists of accommodation providers.

→ germany.travel

Are there youth hostels in Germany?

Over 400 youth hostels in Germany belong to the German Youth Hostel Association, which is affiliated with the International Youth Hostel Federation. International travellers can purchase an international guest pass which allows them to stay in the hostels.

German Youth Hostel Association jugendherberge.de

Which forms of payment are accepted in Germany?

The euro is legal tender in Germany. 1 euro = 100 cents. You can withdraw cash at any time from ATMs using an EC card or international credit or debit card. All valid credit and debit cards are accepted. Prices are inclusive.

How can I call for help in an emergency?

Tel.: 110 for police emergencies

Tel.: 112 for fire and ambulance services

Which time zone is Germany in?

Germany is in the central European time zone (CET). Summer time applies between late March and late October, with the clocks moved forward by one hour. The clocks go forward on the last Sunday in March and go back on the last Sunday in October.

What voltage is used in Germany?

Germany uses a voltage of 230 volts.

Leisurely Enjoyment

What sets German cuisine and German wines apart internationally and which culinary trends there are.



High quality: German cuisine enjoys a good international reputation.
© AdobeStock

German cuisine, wine and beer are popular around the world and in high demand. Regional and health-focused products are particularly fashionable. Yet for all the many international influences, many amateur and professional chefs are returning to home grown ingredients. Organic foods are making up an ever larger share of the market.

German wine has been enjoying an international renaissance since the turn of the millennium. The "Riesling miracle" is embodied by a generation of young winemakers who prioritise high quality instead of large yields. Germany's climatic conditions lend its wines a fine texture without high alcohol content.

Which varieties of grape are grown in Germany?

Wine is grown in 13 regions across Germany with a wide range of distinctive regional characteristics and around 103,000 hectares under vine.

Germany's wine-growing areas are the following:

- Ahr
- Baden
- Franken
- Hessische Bergstraße
- Pfalz
- Rheingau

- Rheinhessen
- Mittelrhein
- Mosel
- Nahe
- Saale-Unstrut
- Saxony
- Württemberg

With some 15,000 or so producers, Germany is a medium-sized producer when compared to other wine-producing nations. Production in 2024 stood at 7.8 million hectolitres. Around 9% of Germany's total wine-producing area is given over to organic wine production. Germany's wine-growing areas are some of the most northerly in the world. Most are located in the south and south-west of the country, the exceptions being the regions of Saxony and Saale-Unstrut. The three largest wine-producing areas are Rheinhessen, Pfalz and Baden. While over 100 different grape varieties are cultivated in Germany, around 20 dominate the market, particularly the white Riesling and Müller-Thurgau grapes. White wine accounts for around 70% of German wine production. Red wine makes up 30%, with Pinot Noir and Dornfelder as the leading varieties. In 2021, the German Commission for UNESCO included Germany's wine culture in the country's "intangible cultural heritage".

What is Germany's Purity Law?

Germany is also a beer-loving land whose beer is appreciated as belonging to a centuries-old tradition of brewing by many small family-owned breweries and monastic breweries. Apart from a very few exceptions, all German beer is subject to the Purity Law of 1516, the world's oldest regulation for foodstuffs. It states that beer may contain water, hops and barley and no other ingredients. Between 5,000 and 6,000 types of beer are produced in Germany, most of them in the pilsner style. Overall, however, beer consumption is falling. A popular trend in recent years has been craft beers. Produced by small independent breweries, these beers focus on unusual flavour combinations.

Which culinary trends are there in Germany?

The German restaurant industry is known for its dynamism and diversity and is considered among the best in Europe. Haute cuisine sits alongside crossover cooking and an increasing range of restaurants catering to vegetarian and vegan tastes. Meanwhile, traditional varieties of produce are enjoying a renaissance, such as parsnips, turnips and Jerusalem artichokes. These are the pillars of the current boom in all things healthy, seasonal, regional and reminiscent of home cooking. At the same time, a generation of young chefs are reinterpreting classic dishes and spicing them up with global influences.

Innovative economy: Germany reinvents itself

How does an industrial nation remain competitive in a digital era? Germany believes that innovation, start-ups and well-trained skilled professionals are the way forward.



Technology at work: humans and machines are increasingly interconnected in German factories.
© dpa

Germany is the largest economy in the European Union (EU) and the third largest in the world after the US and China. As such, it enjoys a strong network of partnerships around the world and regularly ranks in the top three nations for exports as well as imports. Germany's gross domestic product totalled some 4.3 trillion euros in 2024. That year, it exported goods worth around 1,555 billion euros and imported goods worth over 1,316 billion euros.

Germany's most important trade partners are:

- the countries of the EU (accounting for roughly two thirds of the total volume)
- China
- the USA

German industries that are particularly successful on the global market include:

- the automotive industry

- mechanical and plant engineering
- the chemicals industry

Germany's strengths: SMEs, start-ups, research

Germany also boasts a diverse and active start-up scene. The backbone of the German economy is the Mittelstand - small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) - which includes many globally successful hidden champions from all regions of Germany.

The engine that drives economic development is the innovative strength of German companies. To secure and increase this, Germany invests more than three percent of its gross domestic product in research and development. More than two thirds of the over 121 billion euros spent in total per year are invested by businesses.

How is Germany making innovation part of its future strategy?

Germany is also providing targeted funding for new and disruptive technologies, innovations and business models. This included setting up the Federal Agency for Disruptive Innovation (SPRIND) in 2019 and the German Agency for Transfer and Innovation (DATI) in 2021. The Federal Government adopted a new AI Strategy in 2018 and created a similar Startup Strategy in the summer of 2022.

From social market economy to social-environmental market economy

Since 1949 German economic policy has been based on the model of a social market economy. Developed in the post-war years by Ludwig Erhard (who would later become Federal Chancellor), this concept has kept Germany's economy on an upward track. It guarantees that businesses can trade freely while simultaneously striving to create social checks and balances.

Why is the dual vocational training system a role model for the world?

The German economy is characterised by its strong "Mittelstand", with small and medium-sized enterprises making up over 99 percent of all businesses in the country. They also provide more than half of all jobs and employ around 75 percent of trainees. In so doing, they safeguard the system of dual vocational training, which combines theoretical knowledge at vocational schools with practical training in companies. This dual model enjoys an outstanding reputation around the world and has been adopted by many other countries.

Frankfurt: home of finance and European monetary policy

Successful major international corporations also help shape Germany as a place to do business. Many are listed on the DAX stock exchange in Frankfurt, the key financial centre on the continent of Europe. Frankfurt is also home to the headquarters of the European Central Bank (ECB), whose duties include monitoring the price stability of the euro.

A stable and attractive employment market

The German employment market has shown itself to be robust in the past, even during periods of

crisis. Germany has one of the highest rates of employment in the European Union and one of the lowest unemployment rates. In 2024, for example, the unemployment rate in Germany averaged 6.0 percent. Youth unemployment is also very low.

How can the short-time working allowance safeguard jobs?

The short-time working allowance has proven to be a useful tool. It involves the state temporarily covering a major part of the salary shortfall if a company's economic situation means that employees have to reduce their working hours for a certain period. This enables employees to keep their jobs despite a crisis and companies do not lose their experienced staff.

How is Germany addressing the skilled labour shortage?

Well-trained specialist professionals are essential to the competitiveness of the German economy. Germany is therefore taking steps on the one hand to enable people to undergo training, for example by further improving full-day childcare. On the other hand, laws such as the [reformed Skilled Immigration Act](#) aim to help recruit skilled professionals from abroad - which is vital against the backdrop of demographic shifts.

How is digital infrastructure advancing the industrial transformation?

Like almost every other country around the world, Germany is faced with the challenge of promoting digitalisation in the economy and also of how to shape the digital transformation in the world of work. To help make this happen, Germany is expanding its [digital infrastructure](#) in the form of broadband and 5G mobile technology. By developing technology for the Internet of Things (IoT), Germany is providing targeted support for Industry 4.0, where production processes are integrated with ways of communicating over the Internet.

What is being done to strengthen Germany as a location for start-ups?

Through its [Startup Strategy](#), the Federal Government also aims to make Germany a leading [location](#) for start-ups in Europe. A range of measures and initiatives are helping clear away legal and regulatory barriers to setting up and financing startups, across areas such as innovation, digitalisation and sustainability.

Vibrant Hub of Knowledge

Excellent cutting-edge research, wide-ranging academic system: why Germany is a centre for science and scholarship that sets global standards.



Germany is one of the world's leading centres of science and research.
© dpa

[Germany](#) enjoys a reputation around the world for its strength in innovation and wide-ranging academic and research system. The country's 426 higher education institutions are the foundation of this success. Industrial research forms another key element in Germany's status as a higher education location. One sign of this strength is that Germany is among the world's leading nations in terms of numbers of patent applications. Germany's four major non-university research institutes enjoy an excellent international reputation and play a key role in Germany's scientific and academic success. They are the:

- Fraunhofer-Gesellschaft
- Helmholtz Association
- Leibniz Association
- Max Planck Society

How much does Germany invest in science and research?

Germany invests heavily in research and science to safeguard and further consolidate this [innovative capacity](#). This puts the Federal Republic among a leading group of nations that invest around 3% of GDP annually in research and development. By 2030, the proportion of total state

expenditure is to rise to at least 3.5%.

What sets the German education system apart?

Even beyond the domain of cutting-edge research, the [German education system](#) is very well tailored to the needs of the employment market, especially by international standards. Roughly 80% of adults have attained the university entrance qualification (Abitur) or hold a vocational training qualification. As such, Germany reflects the average level of countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Germany's dual system of vocational education and training has long been a key element of this and enjoys an excellent reputation internationally.

The number of university students has risen sharply in recent years. In response, the federal and state governments adopted the Higher Education Pact 2020 which provides funding for more places on university courses. Building on this, federal and state governments have implemented a "future agreement" to improve conditions for students and teaching quality in the long term.

Which Clusters of Excellence and Universities of Excellence are there in Germany?

The Federal Government's Excellence Strategy supports pioneering research at universities. The Strategy funds Clusters of Excellence for targeted areas of research and Universities of Excellence, which are acknowledged internationally as beacons of outstanding higher education. From 2026, 687 million euros will be available each year for the programme as a whole.

Which are the eleven German Universities of Excellence?

- Berlin University Alliance
- University of Tübingen
- Karlsruhe Institute of Technology
- Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München
- RWTH Aachen University
- University of Bonn
- Dresden University of Technology
- Technical University of Munich (TUM)
- Universität Hamburg
- Heidelberg University
- University of Konstanz

Which areas of research are a particular focus for German government funding?

The Federal Government aims to use its Future Strategy Research as an effective way of consolidating resources. As part of this, it has defined key "future fields", which include:

- developing modern technologies for competitive and [climate-neutral industry](#),
- creating a sustainable agricultural and food production system,
- strengthening technological sovereignty and
- developing a modern and resilient healthcare system that makes use of the opportunities from biotech and medical processes.

Covid-19 vaccine: an outstanding example of state funding

The development of the first mRNA Covid-19 vaccine is considered a paradigm of successful state funding. The vaccine was developed by the Mainz-based firm BioNTech, whose founders, Özlem Türeci and Uğur Şahin, also teach at the University of Mainz. The state provided substantial support for vaccine development at BioNTech and other centres.

German higher education and research institutions place great importance on maintaining an international outlook. Following the "Bologna process" of European higher education reform, the majority of university courses in Germany have been restructured as bachelor's and master's degrees, which have become the international standard. Many courses, particularly at master's level, are offered in a foreign language, primarily in English.

Why German universities are attractive to international students

For many years Germany has been considered the most popular non-English-speaking country for international students. Around one in ten of Germany's approximately three million students come from abroad. Unlike many other countries, students pay no or only very limited fees to study at public higher education institutions in Germany (with the exception of certain states such as Baden-Württemberg). Germany's higher education and research institutions are also very attractive for international staff. For example, around 30% of scientists at the four major non-university research institutes come from abroad.

Which subject groups are most often chosen by international students in Germany?

The subjects chosen most often are the engineering sciences (42%) and law, economics and social sciences (25%).

How many Germans study abroad?

Nearly 140,000 Germans study abroad, with most of them also aiming to graduate abroad.

How many academics and artists of non-German citizenship are employed at universities in Germany?

Around 65,500 academics and artists of non-German citizenship are employed at universities in Germany, i.e. 15% of the total.

Which countries are international academic staff most frequently from?

The most important countries of origin of international academic staff are India (9%), China and Italy (each 7%).

Cooperation with international partners

Networking with international partners is also very important to German higher education institutions, which are continually expanding their partnerships around the world. Germany's support for its higher education institutions includes the [German Academic Exchange Service \(DAAD\)](#), and the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, which are funded by the Federal Foreign

Office. Scholarship programmes are an essential element of Germany's foreign academic and higher education policy. These provide assistance to foreign students, academics and researchers for stays in Germany. Germany also funds higher education partnerships around the world. Over 37,000 agreements exist between higher education institutions in Germany and partners in over 150 countries.

Climate policy pioneer

Climate protection is given high priority: how Germany is pushing forward with the expansion of renewable energies worldwide.



Protecting the climate and the environment plays an important role in Germany.
© AdobeStock

Germany aims to become a climate-neutral industrial nation by 2045. This puts the Federal Republic at the forefront of international efforts to combat the [climate crisis](#). The planned energy transition is key to success, involving a rapid shift from fossil fuels to renewables. Germany has already phased out nuclear power, the last three German nuclear power plants having been shut down in 2023. It has also decided to phase out coal-fired electricity generation by 2038 at the latest.

Germany's climate policy is guided by:

- the UNFCCC,
- the 2015 Paris Agreement,
- the 2030 Agenda and
- the principle of climate justice.

Under the Paris Agreement, the international community set itself the target of keeping global warming well below two degrees Celsius and below 1.5 degrees if possible. The Federal Government is consistently working towards this climate protection target. Protecting nature and the environment have also been high on the agenda in Germany for decades.

What does the German climate protection law stipulate?

Explicit guidelines for climate protection have been set down in law since May 2021. The law requires Germany to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by at least 65% compared to 1990 levels by 2030. This figure is to reach 88% by 2040 and by 2045 Germany must ultimately achieve greenhouse gas neutrality. This means there is a balance between the generation of greenhouse gas emissions and their removal from the atmosphere.

There have already been substantial cuts to greenhouse gas emissions in Germany since 1990. By 2024 emissions were down by around 48.2% to 649 million tonnes. However, this figure must be reduced to 438 million tonnes at the most by 2030.

CLEAR CLIMATE ACTION GOALS

Germany aims to become a climate-neutral industrial nation by 2045.

What is the current status of the energy transition?

The energy transition is the defining project of this century and the Federal Government intends to make decisive progress this decade. By 2030, 80% of Germany's energy needs will have to be met by renewable sources such as wind or solar power. The original plan was to phase out coal by 2038 at the latest, but now this goal is ideally to be achieved significantly sooner. Coal-fired electricity generation is considered one of the most serious causes of harmful CO₂ emissions.

Security and economic policy concerns make it necessary to implement the energy transition as quickly as possible. The Federal Government intends to use measures such as speeding up planning and approval procedures for solar and wind power facilities to support the restructuring of energy supplies.

EXPANDING RENEWABLE ENERGY

Renewable energy has greatly increased as a proportion of gross electricity consumption since 2000.

How Germany is boosting climate protection internationally

Why is Germany committed to global cooperation on climate protection?

The target of limiting temperature rises can only be achieved if the international community works together. Developing countries that do not have the necessary financial resources must be supported accordingly.

Which role does the European Union play in this?

With the EU "Green Deal", Europe aims to become the first climate-neutral continent by 2050. To this end, Germany's support includes reforms to EU emissions trading and a CO₂ price escalator, which will incentivise climate protection.

Which partnerships does Germany have outside Europe?

Germany supports partner countries worldwide through bilateral climate and development partnerships, and through the G7 Just Energy Transition Partnerships (JETPs). In addition, Germany is making around 5.7 billion euros available for climate protection and climate adaptation in developing countries in 2023.

Protecting the environment - a national objective

Germany is also committed to improving protection for the natural world and biodiversity, both at home and internationally. Since 1994, the Basic Law has required the state to protect the natural environment. The Action Plan on Nature-based Solutions for Climate and Biodiversity is one way the Federal Government is boosting efforts to maintain biodiversity (the diversity of genes, species and natural habitats). A total of 3.5 billion euros is available until 2027 for the programme, which aims to help restore natural ecosystems such as forests, meadows and moorland.

Germany is also actively engaged in promoting species protection, such as under the Washington Convention. The Convention protects endangered plant and animal species from excessive exploitation by international trade. Around the world over a million species are threatened with extinction, with many at risk of dying out in the next few decades.

Land of Diversity

Life in Germany often has an urban feel, yet regionality still plays an important role.



Diverse country, diverse society
© Adobe Stock

What is Germany like in geographical terms?

Covering around 358,000 km², Germany is the fourth-largest country in the European Union, after France, Spain and Sweden. From the North Sea and Baltic Sea to the Alps in the south, Germany can be divided up into the following distinct geographical regions:

- the North German Plain
- the Central Uplands
- the hills of the southwest
- the foothills of the Alps in the south
- the Bavarian Alps

From its northernmost to its southernmost point, Germany measures 876 kilometres, and 640 kilometres from the most easterly to the most westerly point.

How high is the standard of living in Germany?

Germany has one of the highest standards of living in the world. According to the 2023 United Nations Human Development Index (HDI), Germany ranked fifth out of 192 countries.

Do more people in Germany live in cities or in rural regions?

With a population of over 83 million, Germany is the most populous country in the EU and one of the most densely populated. Around 78 percent of the population live in densely or moderately populated areas, while around 32 percent live in major cities with over 100,000 inhabitants, of which there are 80 in Germany. The cities also attract many tourists. Berlin is a particularly popular choice and regularly sets new visitor records. A metropolis of 3.8 million people, it is one of Europe's top tourist destinations, with 30.6 million overnight stays in 2024.

Are there still differences between East and West Germany?

The Federal Government is committed to delivering good living conditions for people of all nationalities across the whole country, from cities to the countryside. The gap has narrowed between East and West Germany since reunification in 1990, and living conditions are becoming more and more similar. A new "Future Centre for European Transformation and German Unity" has been set up in Halle an der Saale to continue the process of social cohesion, and to demonstrate the close connection between German unity and democracy in Europe.

Germany's demographic transition is particularly apparent in rural areas and regions with a lack of well-paid jobs, where rates of urban migration are above average. The Federal Government is providing targeted support for affected areas in the form of packages of measures aimed at increasing employment, mobility and infrastructure.

How much money do people spend on organic food in Germany?

Consumers in Germany spent around 17 billion euros on organic food and drinks in 2024. Organic products are certified, with more than 111,000 products already registered in the Bio-Siegel (organic seal) database.

How many organic farms are there in Germany?

There are more than 36,000 organic farms in Germany, accounting for 11.5 percent of the country's agricultural land. Roughly two thirds of this land is farmed in line with the regulations issued by the organic farming associations.

How many people eat a vegetarian or vegan diet in Germany?

Around four percent of people in Germany identify as vegetarians, while roughly one percent say they are vegans.

How many Michelin-starred restaurants are there in Germany?

Gourmet cuisine is still in demand, with 340 restaurants in Germany holding one or more Michelin stars in the 2024 Michelin Guide – more than ever.

Vibrant Nation of Culture

Why Germany is seen as an important cultural nation worldwide and why the country's cultural scene is so cosmopolitan and lively.



German singer Zoe Wees
© dpa

Germany's reputation as a major cultural nation is based on great literary figures such as Goethe, Schiller and Thomas Mann, and famous composers such as Bach, Beethoven and Brahms. Yet contemporary authors like

- Carolin Emcke,
- Jenny Erpenbeck,
- Navid Kermani and
- Juli Zeh

and musicians like

- Kim Petras,
- Milky Chance,
- Robin Schulz and
- Zoe Wees

are also keeping Germany's cultural life in the public eye around the world.

In recent years, young artists and creators from migrant backgrounds have made a particular

contribution, opening up new perspectives through their work and enriching the cultural landscape. The work taking place at the Maxim Gorki Theatre in Berlin is a prime example of this, whose director, Shermin Langhoff, has coined the term "postmigrant theatre". A strong postmigrant current is also underway in the world of literature, represented by writers like Fatma Aydemir, Nino Haratischwili, Abbas Khider and Saša Stanišić.

How does Germany's federal structure shape the country's cultural diversity?

Germany's federal structure also contributes to the richness and diversity of the country's cultural landscape. Since its foundation in 1949 and reunification in 1990, the Federal Republic has consciously drawn on its federal traditions and given cultural sovereignty over to its federal states.

How many theatres, museums and orchestras are there in Germany?

Germany's structure, composed as it is of many former small and medium-sized states and free cities, has resulted among other things in around

- 115 municipal and state theatres,
- around 86 private theatres and
- 129 professional orchestras, some of which are affiliated to the public service broadcasting companies.

More than 7,000 museums and exhibition venues make for an unparalleled museum landscape. In addition, there are globally famous cultural events that take place all over Germany, such as the Berlinale – the Berlin International Film Festival – Frankfurt Book Fair, the Bayreuth Festival and Rock am Ring.

Germany's cultural and creative economy is one of its most innovative sectors. In 2023, the sector generated sales of 204.6 billion euros, accounting for 2.2 percent of the total sales volume of the German economy.

How are culture and creativity fostered in Germany?

The Federal Government is keen to boost the creative and cultural economy, and has expanded funding and financing tools to this end. International cooperation, cultural exchange, cultural diplomacy and cultural tourism are also to be intensified. The Federal Government has highlighted the potential that artificial intelligence (AI) offers in art and culture - provided that proprietary rights are upheld and artificially generated content remains clearly recognisable. Together with the federal states, a "Culture and AI" strategy is to be developed.

What role does foreign cultural and educational policy play in Germany?

Foreign cultural and social policy is a high priority for Germany. Alongside classical diplomacy and foreign economic policy, it forms a core element of the foreign policy spectrum. Through dialogue between people and civil society, it facilitates discussions in what Germans call "pre-political spaces". This creates opportunities to improve mutual comprehension. It allows conflicts and crises to be defused, and a basis for discussion persists even during periods of political instability. One way this basis can make a difference is by helping at-risk artists and creative individuals to find refuge in Germany or a third country through one of the protection programmes run by the

Federal Foreign Office, where they can then continue their work supported by scholarships. Foreign cultural and social policy is also responsible for restoring and preserving significant buildings and items of global cultural heritage and promoting the German language abroad. Through its funding for translations, the Federal Foreign Office is also committed to ensuring that Germany's cultural diversity is available to an international audience.

Why is German so popular around the world?

Around 15.5 million people around the world are currently learning German. The majority are in Europe, but increasing numbers of learners are in Africa and Asia. Germany's strong economy and the demand for skilled workers, accompanied by its high-quality [higher education system](#), make learning German a very attractive option. The Goethe-Institut's 150 offices in 99 countries provide a gateway to Germany's language and culture.

Attractive School System

Compulsory school attendance, types of school, costs of attending school: how the German school system is structured.



It costs nothing to attend a state school in Germany.
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In [Germany](#), responsibility for the [school system](#) lies mainly with the country's 16 federal states. This is why there are different school systems, curricula and types of schools across Germany. The Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany (KMK) guarantees the conformity or comparability of the education programmes and the qualifications awarded.

Which types of school are there in Germany?

In the 2024/2025 academic year, 11.4 million pupils attended the 40,000 or so general education and vocational schools, which employ nearly 870,000 teachers. Roughly nine percent of pupils in general education attend the country's 3,800 or so general private schools, while around ten percent of students in vocational education attend the roughly 2,200 vocational private schools. School attendance is compulsory for all children from the age of six for a nine-year period. At the same time, early-years education and how it connects with primary schooling is a high-priority issue in education policy. Around 20,000 whole-day schools now have a firm place in the education system. These schools are intended to improve equality of opportunity, particularly for children from educationally deprived backgrounds.

How many primary schools are there in Germany?

There are around 15,500 primary schools in Germany.

How many pupils at general education schools in Germany come from abroad?

Around 1.4 million pupils in Germany come from abroad.

What is a vocational school?

A vocational school is an educational institution that teaches students the knowledge and skills they need for a specific occupation, either as part of a programme of dual vocational training or for the purposes of purely school-based education.

How many pupils in Germany attend a vocational school?

Roughly 2.3 million pupils in Germany attend a vocational school.

How much does it cost to attend school in Germany?

It costs nothing to attend a state school in Germany. The school system is divided into three levels: primary education and secondary education levels I and II. As a rule, all children attend a primary school, which lasts from Year 1 to 4 (Years 1 to 6 in Berlin and Brandenburg). After primary school, students pursue one of three standard forms of secondary education:

- a non-selective "Hauptschule", which teaches up to level 2 qualifications (Years 5 to 9 or 10),
- a "Realschule" (Years 5 to 10) where students attain the "Mittlere Reife" (a level 2 qualification)
- or a selective grammar school (Years 5 to 12 or 13) to attain a general higher education entrance diploma, or Abitur.

Some schools provide a single form of secondary education, while others combine two or three (as in the case of comprehensive "Gesamtschulen"), making it easier to switch between different forms. The names of these types of school vary depending on the state; only grammar schools ("Gymnasium") are known as such in all states. In 2024 around 373,000 school students achieved a [higher education entrance diploma](#).

Are there schools in Germany for children with special educational needs?

Children with special educational needs can attend separate schools that are able to cater for their specific needs. Nevertheless, the aim is for it to become standard for children with and without disabilities to learn together, in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities. The Federal Government is paying particular attention to providing better educational opportunities to children and young people, regardless of their parents' social situation.

Are there German schools abroad?

The 136 German schools abroad provide an excellent education in over 70 countries. Around 85,000 students learn together at these schools, 66 percent of them being of non-German origin.

Most of the schools are privately funded, but they receive financial and staffing support from the Central Agency for German Schools Abroad (ZfA). Since 2008, the PASCH initiative ("Schools: Partners for the Future"), which is coordinated by the Federal Foreign Office, has been working with the ZfA and the Goethe-Institut to create an even larger network of German students. It connects more than 2,000 schools around the world, with over 600,000 students learning German.

Enriching Diversity

Germany's diversity: people from all over the world live together in Germany, bringing together highly diverse beliefs, ideals and aspirations.



People from all over the world shape German society.
© AdobeStock

The 83.5 million or so people who live in Germany have widely differing attitudes and approaches to how they live their lives. Some live as part of a family, in a long-term relationship or with flatmates. They practise different religions, hold different political views and have different social expectations. Many come from migrant backgrounds. What they all have in common is that they live in freedom and can fulfil their hopes and dreams as they wish. The Federal Government works on a range of levels to ensure everyone living in Germany can live in freedom and according to their own choices and values.

How does Germany shape migration?

Germany is a modern country with an active and orderly government, which is a popular destination for immigrants. The government wants to keep migration to realistic levels and ensure it meets Germany's future needs. It plans to reduce irregular migration and facilitate migration through regular channels. Germany takes humanitarian responsibility for refugees and asylum seekers, such as people fleeing regions affected by crises and conflicts. Around 251,000 asylum applications were submitted to the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) in 2024. One of the Federal Government's key priorities is to improve living conditions for people so they

do not have to leave their home countries. Germany has set in motion numerous initiatives to promote political, economic and social stability in these countries and to create security.

All immigrants and their relatives who are living permanently and legally in Germany are actively included in German society and have a right to integration services provided by the Federal Government. These include language and integration courses which are aimed at making it easier to settle into German society. Migrants who plan to stay in Germany for the longer term will be able to access the labour market quickly. In addition to this, promoting future-oriented and needs-based migration of skilled workers from around the world is a priority for the Federal Government.

How many people with a foreign passport live in Germany?

In 2024 there were around 14.1 million holders of foreign passports living in Germany.

How many people with a migrant background live in Germany?

In 2024, around 21.2 million people in Germany came from a migrant background. That's roughly one in four of the population.

How many people with a migrant background have a German passport?

Around 9.3 million people of migrant background had a German passport in 2024. They either had German citizenship since birth, were ethnic Germans who moved to Germany from the former Eastern Bloc or were nationalised.

NATURALISATIONS

How many people were nationalised in Germany in 2024?

In 2024, nearly 292,000 people were naturalised as German citizens.

Equality for all citizens

Promoting equality for all citizens across many levels of society is a major issue in Germany. Germany is committed to the acceptance of [diversity](#). For this reason, the Federal Government supports LGBTIQ rights (lesbian, gay, bi-, trans, intersex, queer) and is fighting to end discrimination. The government has therefore appointed a Commissioner for the Acceptance of Sexual and Gender Diversity.

How does Germany support families?

Many people live in family units in Germany, and there were a total of around 11.8 million families in 2024. Supporting and assisting families is a key objective of German family policy. The Federal Government is committed to providing targeted support to help people balance their careers and family lives, as well as financial security and high-quality childcare. This means all parents can claim up to three years' maternity or paternity leave to care for and bring up their offspring.

The state also pays a parental allowance which compensates for lost earnings when parents are looking after their child after the birth. Families can access additional financial support such as

child benefits, supplementary child support for disadvantaged parents, and maternity benefits.

It is increasingly the case that starting a family means mothers must interrupt their careers. Overall, women are more likely than men to suffer discrimination in the labour market. A range of employment laws have been passed to improve transparency around pay and to increase the number of women in senior positions, including through the use of quotas. Single and separated parents achieve additional targeted support such as tax credits or advance child support payments where necessary.

What characterises the German welfare state?

Germany is a welfare state. It is committed to economic security and social justice for all its citizens. In 2024 Germany spent more than 1.3 trillion euros on health, welfare, unemployment and other related benefits.

The combination of several different forms of insurance is a key element of the welfare state. The following types of statutory insurance protect members of the public against existential threats or provide them with a means of subsistence in old age:

- health insurance
- pension insurance
- accident insurance
- nursing care insurance
- unemployment insurance

A basic income and tax credits help pensioners, mothers, families and those permanently unable to work.

How do citizens engage in civil society?

Germany's thriving civil society is an important pillar of social coexistence and cohesion. German citizens are certainly committed and active. Around 29 million people (around 40% of the population) volunteer in their free time to support areas such as sport, culture, music, environmentalism and conservation, social issues and education. By volunteering they make a major contribution to promoting diversity, justice and freedom in Germany.



Freedom of Religious Worship

How freedom of religion is enshrined in the Basic Law in Germany and why the religious landscape is marked by increasing plurality.



The Basic Law guarantees freedom of religious faith.
© dpa

Freedom of religion or belief is enshrined in the Basic Law in [Germany](#). Article 4 of the constitution states that “freedom of faith and of conscience and freedom to profess a religious or philosophical creed shall be inviolable”. This includes the freedom to profess and practise a religion, along with the freedom not to profess any religion.

How many Christians live in Germany?

Germany's religious landscape is increasingly shaped by diversity and secularisation.

According to Church statistics, the Roman Catholic Church has around 19.8 million members, while nearly 18 million people belong to the Protestant Church. In addition, some 285,000 people belong to Protestant free churches, while 366,000 are members of other Christian churches and communities and around 3.85 million belong to Orthodox churches. The two major Christian denominations are organised into 27 Roman Catholic dioceses and the German Bishops' Conference, and into the Protestant regional churches under the umbrella organisation of the Protestant Church in Germany (EKD).

With 19.8 million members in Germany, the Roman Catholic church belongs to the worldwide



church with the Pope at its head. The EKD is the association of the 20 independent regional Lutheran, Reformed and United churches. With around 18 million members, it includes the majority of German Protestant Christians. Around 50.1% of the population are of different faith or do not belong to any religious denomination.

What role does Islam play in Germany?

Migration is making Islam an increasingly significant part of religious life. While no definitive survey has been carried out, the number of Muslims in Germany has been estimated to be between 5.3 and 5.6 million, with roots in 50 different nations. Large Muslim communities have grown up in many cities. Established in 2006, the German Islam Conference (DIK) provides an official framework for exchange between the state and Muslims. Furthermore, German universities offer imam training programmes.

How many Jews live in Germany?

Jewish life in Germany, which was entirely destroyed by the Holocaust, is once again firmly rooted in Germany. It is estimated that 200,000 Jews live in the Federal Republic of Germany today. Around 90,000 of them are members of some 100 Jewish communities that cover a broad religious spectrum and are represented by the Central Council of Jews in Germany, which was founded in 1950.

How does the state work together with religious communities in Germany?

Germany does not have an established church. Instead, the state works with religious communities as partners. The state contributes to funding kindergartens and schools that are sponsored by religious communities. The churches levy a church tax which is collected by the state to fund social, medical and other services. Schools must provide religious education as part of their standard curriculum, although restrictions to this apply in Berlin and Bremen.

The teaching of Islam as part of religious education is being expanded. Additional teachers are being trained to ensure that Muslim children and young people who attend school in Germany can be offered religious.



Strong Welfare State

How Germany protects its citizens against threats to critical aspects of their lives.



The German welfare system protects citizens against risks.
© AdobeStock

Germany has one of the world's most comprehensive social security systems. As in other developed democracies, spending on the welfare state represents the largest individual item of public spending. Social security expenditure amounted to some 1.34 trillion euros in 2024 - equivalent to 31.2 percent of GDP.

How did Germany's welfare state come about?

The tradition of the state welfare system goes back to the age of industrialisation in Germany in the second half of the 19th Century and is associated with the then Reich Chancellor, Otto von Bismarck. It was under his chancellorship that mandatory health insurance was first introduced in 1883. Over the following years, legislation was expanded that would form the basic principles of the welfare state. The Basic Law further enshrines the principle of the welfare state for the Federal Republic of Germany. According to the Basic Law, political leaders and society must continually negotiate and update the form that the welfare state takes. Demographic change is making assimilation necessary.



Which forms of insurance protect people in Germany?

Various forms of basic insurance for health, pensions, accidents, nursing care and unemployment provide a tightly-woven network protecting members of the public against threats to critical aspects of their lives. The network of welfare support includes a basic income for pensioners and those permanently unable to work, along with tax benefits such as the family allowance. Families receive child benefit payments each month.

How are pensions dealt with in Germany?

The pension package that entered into force in 2014 especially improves the situation of elderly people. The reform saw the introduction, among other things, of the full pension from 63 years of age (for those born in or before 1952) and the so-called "mother's pension", which acknowledges mothers' work in raising children. Women who brought up children born before 1992 were not able to access the childcare support available to parents today, which reduced their opportunities in the world of work. The mother's pension acknowledges the work they did in bringing up children.

Why are pensions stable in Germany?

In 2025, a law was adopted to stabilise the pension level and to fully compensate for periods spent raising children (known as the "2025 pension package"). It will ensure that the pension level does not fall below 48 percent until 2031.

A basic pension scheme was introduced in early 2021. Anyone who has paid pension insurance for at least 33 years but had low earnings - this applies in many cases to women - will receive an additional payment in future.

Is health insurance compulsory in Germany?

Health insurance cover is a legal requirement in Germany. Medical care is provided through a wide range of services including hospitals, medical practices and rehabilitation clinics.

Germany and Europe

Germany is one of the founding members of the European Union. It works to strengthen and develop the EU as a guarantor of peace, security and prosperity.



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1957



The process of European integration begins.

With the signing of the Treaties of Rome, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands establish the European Economic Community (EEC).

1979



Members of the public are invited to vote in European elections.
This is the first time that Members of the European Parliament have been directly elected. They had previously been delegated by national parliaments.

1993



Visible signs of European integration at the borders:
in Schengen in Luxembourg, Germany, France and the Benelux countries agree to end border controls between the states. Other countries join the agreement later.

2002



The EU gets its own currency.
Known unofficially as the Eurozone, 20 states make up the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) of the European Union. They use the euro as their common form of currency.

2004



Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Hungary, Malta and Cyprus
join the EU on 1 May. Bulgaria and Romania followed in 2007.

2013 -2022



Croatia joins the EU in 2013.
The UK ceased to be a member of the EU in February 2020. The current official accession candidates are Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Turkey and Ukraine.

What form does Germany's commitment to European integration take?

Germany is one of the founding European Union member states and even in difficult times supports European cohesion.



Germany is one of the founding European Union member states and supports European cohesion.
© dpa

What is meant by European integration?

No other country in Europe has as many neighbours as Germany. Germany shares borders with nine countries, eight of which are members of the EU. For Germany, European integration forms the basis for peace, security and prosperity. Despite the UK's exit from the EU at the end of January 2020, it remains a key task for German foreign policy to further develop and strengthen the Union, even under complex and often highly fraught conditions.

The EU is a historic project that began in the early 1950s and now encompasses around 450 million citizens across 27 member states. Germany's European policy has established itself as a driving force at every stage of European unification, playing an active role in shaping European integration. The foundation of Germany's European policy is its awareness of the historical significance of the European Union as a peace project. The EU was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2012.

Which are the six founder members of the European Union?

Along with France, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg, Germany was one of the six founder members of the EU which concluded the Treaty of Rome on 25 March 1957. The signing of this treaty is regarded as the moment the European Union was born. Officially, at that point the Treaty established the European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom).

What is meant by the common European market?

European integration has created the world's largest common market. It is unique thanks to the four fundamental freedoms stated in the Treaties of Rome: the free movement of goods within EU member states, the free movement of persons, the freedom to provide services within the EU and the free flow of capital. The scale and economic output of the European common market make the EU a key player in the global economy. The European internal market is of vital importance to Germany's economy, as European countries are some of Germany's most important trading partners.

Which is the EU's strongest economy?

As the EU's strongest economy, Germany bears a particular responsibility, particularly during periods of economic and social transition. This was evident during the Global Financial Crisis. EU member states set up the European Stability Mechanism (ESM) as an emergency fund. EU states also showed solidarity during the Covid-19 pandemic, agreeing on a reconstruction package worth billions of euros. The "NextGenerationEU" plan was based on a [Franco-German initiative](#).

What role does Germany play in EU enlargement?

Germany is supporting the integration of more members into the EU. The Union has been expanded many times in recent decades. The eastern enlargement of the EU in 2004 was especially important to Germany. At that time, ten Eastern and Central European countries joined - the biggest expansion in the history of the EU. When the UK left at the end of January 2020, this was the first time a member state had exited the EU. Germany continues to prioritise close relations with the UK and sees itself as bearing a particular responsibility for shaping the UK's future relationship with the EU.

The Federal Government is committed to further states joining the EU. For example, Germany is supporting the accession of the countries of the Western Balkans. In June 2024, EU accession negotiations commenced with Ukraine, which is under attack from Russia, and its neighbour Moldova. Germany is one of the leading advocates of the two countries joining the EU.

Promoting joint European action

Germany works closely with its European partners across all policy areas. This also includes finding shared responses to climate change. In late 2019, the European Commission presented its "European Green Deal". The aim is to make Europe the first climate-neutral continent by 2050. Germany is committed to actively promoting efforts to achieve this goal and become climate neutral itself as early as 2045.

The Federal Government is also promoting the development of the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). The Policy encompasses roles ranging from crisis prevention to conflict management and post-conflict stabilisation. During its tenure of the EU Council presidency, Germany initiated what is known as the "Strategic Compass" in 2020. It is aimed at setting a clear

course for common policies. The European Peace Facility was set up in 2020 during Germany's Council presidency, aimed among other things at covering the shared costs of CSDP operations. Since February 2022 this has played an important role in supporting Ukraine in its defence against Russia's illegal war of aggression.

What is Europe's Green Deal?

The European Union's "Green Deal" provides a master plan for a just transition to a sustainable, climate-friendly future.



Europe is to become the first climate-neutral continent by 2050.
© dpa

What are the objectives of the Green Deal?

With its "Green Deal", the European Union has set itself a far-reaching goal: by 2050, Europe is to become the world's first climate-neutral continent. This means emitting no more greenhouse gases than ecosystems are able to absorb naturally. The plan is to reduce netgreenhouse gas emissions by at least 55 percent by 2030 - compared to 1990 levels. The "Fit for 55" package, which contains concrete measures designed to reach this target, is one of the key instruments that is being used. The aim is to enable future generations to lead a better and healthier life.

Is Germany supporting the Green Deal?

The project, which EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen presented when she took office in December 2019, is a master plan to modernise Europe in a sustainable and social manner. It is the Commission's response to the growing risks confronting EU economies as a result of climate change and species extinction.

Germany supports the "Green Deal" and has in fact set itself even more ambitious targets. The aim is already to achieve climate neutrality by 2045.

Is the Green Deal compatible with economic growth?

Essentially, the Green Deal is a new growth strategy. The underlying idea is simple: a large part of Europe's economic output depends on preserving the natural foundations of human life. This applies to water, air and soils, as well as forests, seas and a stable climate. Taking precautions now is the best way to secure future prosperity. The Green Deal thus promotes green technologies and the sparing use of natural resources. The goal is to decouple economic growth from resource use, while at the same time creating new jobs. The project's numerous initiatives also give companies the predictability they need to be able to plan, as well as establishing the framework for a more crisis-resilient EU.

Is the Green Deal about more than just sustainability?

Sustainability as a basic EU principle is nothing new, but the Green Deal goes a step further: it supports and accelerates the transformation that has already begun and turns it into an all-encompassing concept for the future. The plan takes all areas of business and society into account - from industry, trade, transport and agriculture to biodiversity, natural heritage, circular economy and structural change. As important levers for transformation processes, taxes and finance will also be designed in accordance with green criteria in future.

Franco-German friendship – a driving force

Germany and France share an eventful history. As partners they feel themselves particularly responsible for the future of Europe.



German Federal Chancellor Friedrich Merz (left) and French President Emmanuel Macron
© dpa

How did the Franco-German friendship come about?

France is Germany's most important partner in Europe. Parallel to [European integration](#), after the Second World War both countries established a close partnership, which nowadays is often regarded as a model for reconciliation between two nations. In 1957, both countries were amongst the six founding members of the European Economic Community (EEC), the core of today's EU. Franco-German friendship, sealed by the 1963 [Elysée Treaty](#), is nurtured by close relations at the level of civil society and by numerous Franco-German institutions.

How are Germany and France deepening their partnership?

Signed in January 2019, the "Treaty of Aachen" follows on from the Élysée Treaty and realigns Franco-German relations for future challenges. Amongst other things, in it [Germany and France](#) agree to work closely to advance the [European Union](#) along with the other EU Member States, and to promote even further [all those aspects of life shared](#) by German and French citizens. For

this reason, as of 2019 there has been, amongst other things, a Franco-German cross-border cooperation committee, and since 2020 a Franco-German citizens' fund.

Furthermore, the partners intend to expand their collaboration in foreign, defence, security, and development policy, as well as their cooperation in the fields of education and research – for example through the mutual recognition of qualifications. The partners will also [focus more closely on](#) global issues such as climate protection and health.

How do the parliaments of Germany and France cooperate?

The parliaments of both countries likewise have close ties. As of 2019 the [Franco-German Parliamentary Assembly](#) convenes twice a year. It is made up of 50 members each of the [German Bundestag](#) and the French National Assembly. The body's duties include monitoring implementation of the Treaty of Aachen, further rapprochement in terms of German and French parliamentary work, and the elimination of obstacles to a Franco-German economic area.

Germany and France are each other's most important trading partner in Europe. [Airbus](#), the aerospace corporation, is a symbol of the success of the close cooperation between Germany and France.

What form of social and cultural exchange do Germany and France cultivate?

Amongst others, the [Franco-German Youth Office \(FGYO\)](#) shapes [exchanges](#) between the two countries at the civil society level. It was founded on the back of the 1963 Elysée Treaty. Since then, almost ten million children and youngsters from both countries have participated in exchange programs and other FGYO activities. A dense network of twinning agreements also enables encounters between people from both countries.

The German and French cultural institutes abroad also work closely together; indeed, this can even lead to individual cultural institutes being integrated under a single roof. Since its foundation in 1991, the joint [TV station](#) arte has been an outstanding example of media collaboration in the two countries.

How does the EU cooperate with its partners?

The European Union maintains close and friendly ties with its neighbours.



The European Union cooperates closely with its neighbouring states.
© efta.int

What are the EU's goals?

The European Union pursues the goal of creating a stable, secure and prosperous common area within its outer borders. This also includes maintaining close and friendly relations with the EU's immediate neighbours, and this is likewise a key element of German foreign policy.

What is the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP)?

Since 2004, the EU has pursued a systematic "European Neighbourhood Policy" (ENP) oriented towards its neighbouring states to the east and south. There are two groups of states, to each of which several countries belong: the "Eastern Partnership" and the "Union for the Mediterranean".

Both operate under the umbrella of the ENP and each have their own bodies and objectives. The fundamental goal of European Neighbourhood Policy is to support partner countries with modernisation and stabilisation projects and especially with implementing constitutional and democratic reforms.

How has the EU's Eastern Partnership changed as a result of the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine?

The environment for the EU's Eastern Partnership changed hugely following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Three countries - Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia - applied for membership of the European Union. Accession negotiations are already underway with Ukraine and Moldova. Germany supports the admission of the two countries.

The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) should not be confused with the EU's enlargement policy, however. The ENP involves no decision being made in advance about any potential EU accession; rather it is a means of maintaining conducive relations with neighbouring states and thereby creating stability in the EU's neighbourhood. This involves the European Union offering its neighbours a privileged partnership, provided that both sides commit to values such as democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

The ENP also supports implementation of these action plans by providing financial resources and technical cooperation. In doing so, the neighbourhood policy follows the principles of "more for more": those who do more to promote the expansion of democratic reforms and liberal societies receive more support.

How does the EU work with Africa?

The European Union attaches high priority to cooperation with the neighbouring continent of Africa. In 2022, the leaders of the EU and the African Union agreed on a common vision for the partnership going forward. The objectives here are solidarity, security, peace, prosperity and sustainable and continuous economic development for the citizens of the African Union and the European Union. The partnership aims to bring together people, regions and organisations.

The Federal Government is pushing for greater economic cooperation with Africa, and especially cooperation in the energy sector. To this end, the Federal Government is for example providing four billion euros until 2030 to support an EU-African green energy initiative.

Political System and Federalism in Germany

The Federal Republic of Germany is a thriving democracy based on values, with a diverse political landscape. The country is deeply shaped by its federal structure, consisting of 16 federal states.



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How does Germany's Federal Government operate?

The Federal Chancellor and the federal ministers form the Federal Government, the cabinet.



The Federal Cabinet consists of 16 ministers.
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How many federal ministers does the German government have?

The number of ministers is not stipulated in the [Basic Law](#). Ministers may also be replaced during the course of a legislative period.

Since May 2025, the Federal Cabinet has comprised Federal Chancellor Friedrich Merz, [16 ministers and the head of the Federal Chancellery](#). The federal ministries are the most senior



federal authorities in each department.

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Where is the official seat of the German government?

The German capital [Berlin](#) is the seat of government. Before [German reunification in 1990](#), the capital was [Bonn](#). In June 1991, the Bundestag decided that Berlin would become the seat of parliament and government. However, six federal ministries kept their headquarters in Bonn and all ministries have offices in both cities. Bonn, as the second political centre of the Federal Republic, also bears the name of the Federal City of Bonn.

Which ministries does the German government have?

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Federal Ministry of Justice and Consumer Protection

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Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs

→ bmas.de

Federal Ministry of Defence

→ bmvg.de

Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Regional Identity

→ bmel.de

Federal Ministry for Education, Family Affairs Senior Citizens, Women and Youth

→ bmfjsfi.de

Federal Ministry of Health

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→ bundesumweltministerium.de

Federal Ministry of Research, Technology and Space

→ bmftr.bund.de

Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development

→ bmgz.de

Federal Ministry for Housing, Urban Development and Building

→ bmwsb.bund.de

Federal Ministry for Digital Transformation and Government Modernisation

Commitment to peace and security

Germany participates widely in multilateral cooperation and promotes democracy, and human rights all over the world.



Germany's multilateral links - for example in the United Nations - form the basis for the deployment of the Bundeswehr.
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What is the basis for Germany's commitment to peace and security?

Germany's global commitment to peace and security, promoting human rights and protecting minorities are unchanging foundations of its foreign policy and are rooted in the Basic Law. On the one hand, Germany accepts this duty out of recognition of its historical responsibilities. On the other hand, it is in Germany's interest to prevent crises and manage conflicts, as the effects of crises may be felt around the world, including in Germany. Russia's illegal war of aggression against Ukraine gravely undermines international security and stability in Europe.

Germany's multilateral links form the basis for its foreign policy activity. For example, deployments of the Bundeswehr, the German armed forces, always take place within systems of collective defence or security. Above all, these involve international organisations such as the [United Nations](#) (UN), the [European Union](#) (EU) or the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). The Bundestag must also approve deployment of the Bundeswehr abroad. For this reason, the German armed forces are considered a parliamentary military force.

Why does Germany place an emphasis on crisis prevention?

The German government always prioritises civilian measures, the primary goal being to identify crises and conflicts at an early stage and to defuse them before they can escalate. Since 2017, the guidelines on "Preventing Crises, Resolving Conflicts, Building Peace" drawn up under the auspices of the Federal Foreign Office have underpinned activities aimed at peace, security, freedom and prosperity.

An increasing focus is on new [threats](#) to global security in [cyberspace](#). The German government is addressing these wide-ranging challenges with a National Security Strategy based on a comprehensive definition of security that encompasses all aspects of human security.

What is the National Security Council?

A National Security Council established in 2025 will have the following tasks:

- coordinating the main issues relating to an integrated security policy
- providing strategic development and foresight
- jointly assessing situations
- acting as the body for joint political will formation

A Federal Government National Crisis Unit spanning federal, state and ministerial levels and a National Situation Centre at the Federal Chancellery will ensure that crises are tackled holistically.

How does Germany assume responsibility in NATO?

Ever since the formation of the Bundeswehr in 1955, Germany has been integrated into NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) both politically and militarily. Germany's place at the heart of the north Atlantic alliance is part of the DNA of German foreign policy. Collective defence is the most important principle of the alliance: its member states pledge to protect one another and to respond jointly in the event of a conflict. [NATO](#) currently has 32 member states.

The [Bundeswehr](#) is a major provider of NATO troops, taking part in international missions and alliance defence activities. For example, Germany has contributed to the NATO KFOR security force in Kosovo since 1999. In Lithuania, German armed forces are also taking a leading role as a "framework nation" to help secure NATO's eastern frontier. This is part of the enhanced Forward Presence mission (eFP), which contributes to safeguarding Eastern European states. Germany is supporting the close cooperation between NATO and the European Union.

How much does Germany spend on defence?

In the context of Russia's illegal war of aggression against Ukraine, the German government set up a special fund for the Bundeswehr worth 100 billion euros in 2022. Germany provides Ukraine with financial support, weapons and humanitarian assistance. The German government also welcomes the decision taken by NATO in June 2025 to increase member states' defence expenditure to 5 percent of their respective GDP by 2035 at the latest – with 3.5 percent to go on direct military spending and 1.5 percent on military infrastructure. Germany is thus modernising the equipment used by the [Bundeswehr](#) and strengthening its national defences and those of its allies so that the Bundeswehr can make a key contribution to NATO's deterrence and defence capabilities. The aim is also to ensure that Germany and Europe can guarantee their own security to a much greater extent.

What role does Germany play as a member of the United Nations?

Since joining the United Nations in 1973, Germany has been a committed, reliable and valued member of this global organisation. It is also the fourth-largest contributor to the UN general budget. In 2024, Germany provided around 219 million US dollars, accounting for 6.1 percent of the budget. Germany is likewise the fourth-largest contributor to the budgets of the individual peacekeeping missions, which it supports in a variety of ways - including stabilisation measures, diplomatic mediation efforts and post-crisis management. It also makes troops, police officers and highly qualified personnel available to the missions.

Does the United Nations have a representation in Germany?

The United Nations (UN) has numerous branches in Germany. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) opened a regional office in Bonn in 1951. Today there are around 30 UN organisations in Germany, especially on the UN Campus in Bonn, which is home to more than 20 institutions.

In which other peace organisations is Germany active?

Another essential pillar upholding peace and security is the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), which Germany supports in intensive and varied ways.

The Center for International Peace Operations (ZIF) established by the Federal Government and the Bundestag in 2002 also works to help prevent crises and consolidate peace around the world. Working on behalf of the Federal Foreign Office, the ZIF trains civilian experts and supplies personnel for peace and election observer missions. Over the course of 20 years, it has sent out around 6,000 of these people to monitor elections.

How does Germany promote disarmament and arms control?

Germany is making an important contribution to global security through its commitment to disarmament and arms control. The Federal Government is working towards a world free of nuclear weapons, based on the foundation of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). In addition, Germany is campaigning to promote the universality and enforcement of international treaties and agreements relevant to this area, such as the Chemical Weapons Convention, which codifies rules prohibiting the use of chemical weapons. Germany is also actively involved in promoting the global ban on mines and cluster munitions. Specifically the Federal Government is supporting humanitarian efforts to clear mines and weapons and to care for victims.

Climate policy pioneer

Climate protection is given high priority: how Germany is pushing forward with the expansion of renewable energies worldwide.



Protecting the climate and the environment plays an important role in Germany.
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Germany aims to become a climate-neutral industrial nation by 2045. This puts the Federal Republic at the forefront of international efforts to combat the [climate crisis](#). The planned energy transition is key to success, involving a rapid shift from fossil fuels to renewables. Germany has already phased out nuclear power, the last three German nuclear power plants having been shut down in 2023. It has also decided to phase out coal-fired electricity generation by 2038 at the latest.

Germany's climate policy is guided by:

- the UNFCCC,
- the 2015 Paris Agreement,
- the 2030 Agenda and
- the principle of climate justice.

Under the Paris Agreement, the international community set itself the target of keeping global warming well below two degrees Celsius and below 1.5 degrees if possible. The Federal Government is consistently working towards this climate protection target. Protecting nature and the environment have also been high on the agenda in Germany for decades.

What does the German climate protection law stipulate?

Explicit guidelines for climate protection have been set down in law since May 2021. The law requires Germany to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by at least 65% compared to 1990 levels by 2030. This figure is to reach 88% by 2040 and by 2045 Germany must ultimately achieve greenhouse gas neutrality. This means there is a balance between the generation of greenhouse gas emissions and their removal from the atmosphere.

There have already been substantial cuts to greenhouse gas emissions in Germany since 1990. By 2024 emissions were down by around 48.2% to 649 million tonnes. However, this figure must be reduced to 438 million tonnes at the most by 2030.

CLEAR CLIMATE ACTION GOALS

Germany aims to become a climate-neutral industrial nation by 2045.

What is the current status of the energy transition?

The energy transition is the defining project of this century and the Federal Government intends to make decisive progress this decade. By 2030, 80% of Germany's energy needs will have to be met by renewable sources such as wind or solar power. The original plan was to phase out coal by 2038 at the latest, but now this goal is ideally to be achieved significantly sooner. Coal-fired electricity generation is considered one of the most serious causes of harmful CO₂ emissions.

Security and economic policy concerns make it necessary to implement the energy transition as quickly as possible. The Federal Government intends to use measures such as speeding up planning and approval procedures for solar and wind power facilities to support the restructuring of energy supplies.

EXPANDING RENEWABLE ENERGY

Renewable energy has greatly increased as a proportion of gross electricity consumption since 2000.

How Germany is boosting climate protection internationally

Why is Germany committed to global cooperation on climate protection?

The target of limiting temperature rises can only be achieved if the international community works together. Developing countries that do not have the necessary financial resources must be supported accordingly.

Which role does the European Union play in this?

With the EU "Green Deal", Europe aims to become the first climate-neutral continent by 2050. To this end, Germany's support includes reforms to EU emissions trading and a CO₂ price escalator, which will incentivise climate protection.

Which partnerships does Germany have outside Europe?

Germany supports partner countries worldwide through bilateral climate and development partnerships, and through the G7 Just Energy Transition Partnerships (JETPs). In addition, Germany is making around 5.7 billion euros available for climate protection and climate adaptation in developing countries in 2023.

Protecting the environment - a national objective

Germany is also committed to improving protection for the natural world and biodiversity, both at home and internationally. Since 1994, the Basic Law has required the state to protect the natural environment. The Action Plan on Nature-based Solutions for Climate and Biodiversity is one way the Federal Government is boosting efforts to maintain biodiversity (the diversity of genes, species and natural habitats). A total of 3.5 billion euros is available until 2027 for the programme, which aims to help restore natural ecosystems such as forests, meadows and moorland.

Germany is also actively engaged in promoting species protection, such as under the Washington Convention. The Convention protects endangered plant and animal species from excessive exploitation by international trade. Around the world over a million species are threatened with extinction, with many at risk of dying out in the next few decades.

What role do political foundations play in Germany?

Civic education is one of the core activities of political foundations. Though the foundations are affiliated to political parties, they act independently.



The primary job of political foundations is to educate.
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The political parties in Germany are among the key pillars of democracy and the important role they play in the formation of the population's will is enshrined in the Basic Law. Political foundations are organisations that are affiliated to the parties but legally and de facto independent. They make a key contribution to social and democratic education activities and are an important part of the political culture in Germany. Their services are available to everyone.

Which political foundations are there in Germany?

There are six political foundations in Germany that are affiliated to the parties represented in the Bundestag and financed out of the federal budget:

- the SPD-affiliated Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES)
- the CDU-affiliated Konrad Adenauer Foundation (KAS)
- the CSU-affiliated Hanns-Seidel-Stiftung (HSS)
- the FDP-affiliated Friedrich Naumann Foundation for freedom (FNF)

- the Alliance 90/The Greens-affiliated Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung (HBS)
- the Left Party-affiliated Rosa Luxemburg Foundation (RLS)

In which areas of activity are political foundations involved?

Generally speaking, political foundations pursue activities in three main areas: civic education, funding of studies and research and consulting. In addition, they engage in international cooperation, especially with countries in the Global South.

What is meant by democratic education activities?

Social and democratic education is the core remit of political foundations. This is aimed at providing knowledge and orientation, and at encouraging and empowering people to engage in civic and political activities. Political foundations enter into contact with citizens by staging lectures, conferences, colloquiums and discussions, and by publishing magazines, books and online publications. The information they provide is objective and they offer a platform for political discourse.

How do political foundations support students?

The funding provided by political foundations for academic study follows the same principles and rules as those used by other talent funding organisations that support outstanding students. Funding is equally open to students and postgraduates from abroad, especially from countries of the Global South.

Are political foundations active in research and consulting?

Political foundations also pursue research and consulting activities in the areas of political studies and the social sciences, for example by conducting studies on all kinds of different topics. To this end, they collaborate in some cases with other research institutions. They fund or commission scientific work and support its publication. They also maintain renowned archives, libraries and documentation centres. In this way, foundations foster dialogue and knowledge transfer between civil society, science, politics and business.

How are political foundations involved in development cooperation?

First and foremost, Germany's political foundations are involved in international development cooperation with the countries of the Global South. However, they are also active for example in Europe and North America.

In the area of development cooperation, the foundations act in the capacity of German non-government organisations. As a rule, they collaborate with partner organisations at the local level, such as civil society actors, political parties or unions. The foundations are especially committed to establishing and strengthening democratic structures and institutions.

How are political foundations funded?

Political foundations are independent and non-profit organisations that receive more than 90 percent of their funding from Germany's federal budget. In addition, they receive grants from the federal states and, to a very small degree, generate their own revenues from participation fees and

donations.

AT A GLANCE

How do people vote in Germany?

Free and fair elections are an essential precondition for any democracy.



Elections in Germany are free, equal and secret.
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Why are elections held regularly in Germany?

Free and fair elections are an essential precondition for any democracy. They are a key instrument for the political participation of citizens. The German Basic Law states that the representatives must be elected through general, direct, free, equal and secret elections.

Which basic rules apply to elections in Germany?

All citizens who are eligible to vote, irrespective of their gender or income, have the vote, their voting decision must not be influenced - and every vote counts equally. Voters must be at least 18 to vote in Bundestag elections, while 16 is the minimum age for local Landtag and municipal elections in some states. Secret elections guarantee that every voter can cast their vote unobserved and on their own.

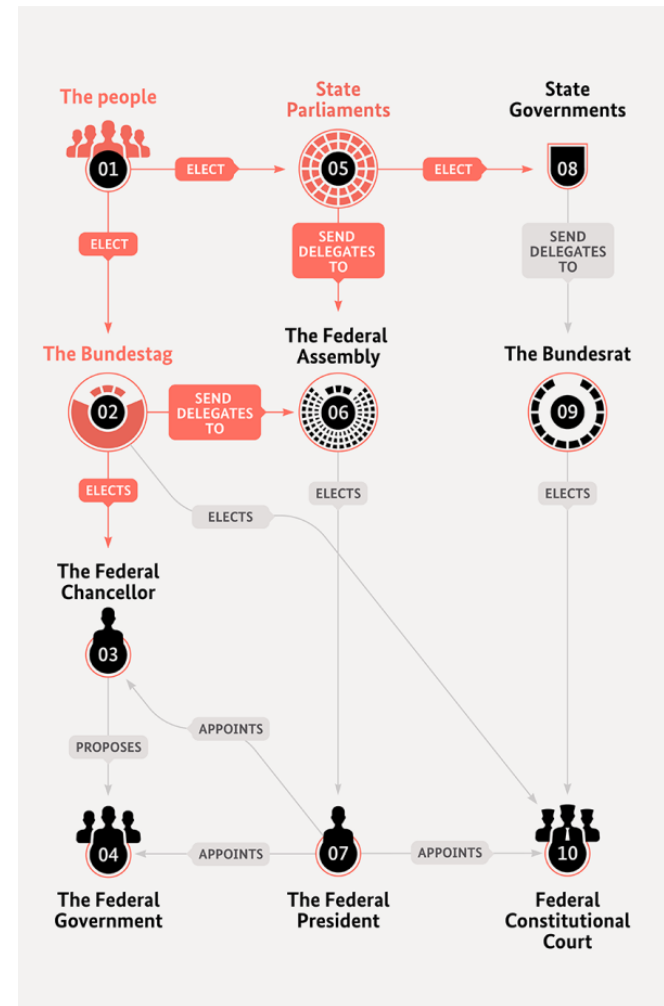
How often are elections held in Germany?

The German Bundestag is normally elected every four years. Elections are generally held every five

years in the 16 federal states. Then there are municipal elections, which usually also take place every five years, to elect for example city parliaments.

How is Germany's federal president elected?

The federal president isn't elected directly by the people, but every five years by the Federal Convention. The Federal Convention is made up of all the members of the Bundestag and an equal number of delegates elected by the state parliaments. These delegates can also be members of the public such as artists or scientists.



Federal State

Germany is a parliamentary democracy. Its federal character can be seen from the great independence enjoyed by the 16 federal states.



On the roof of the Reichstag in Berlin: around 8,000 people visit the parliamentary building every day © stock.adobe.com

Germany is a parliamentary and federal democracy. The German Bundestag, the constitutional body most present in the public eye, is directly elected by citizens eligible to vote every four years. The most important tasks of the Bundestag are legislation and to oversee the government's work. The Bundestag elects the Federal Chancellor for the legislative period by secret ballot. Within the Federal Government the Chancellor has the authority to lay down guidelines, in other words determines binding broad policy. The Federal Chancellor appoints the federal ministers, and from among them a Deputy Chancellor.

In actual fact, however, it is the parties that make up the government that decide which persons will head the ministries they were allocated in the coalition negotiations. If a coalition collapses, the Chancellor can also fall prior to the end of the electoral term, as the Federal Government has the right to vote the head of government out of office at any time. In such cases parliament must, however, name a successor at the same time in what is known as a "constructive vote of no confidence". This means that there can be no period of time without an elected government in office.

Coalition governments are the rule in Germany

The system of personalised proportional representation is decisive with regard to the character of the parliament. This way, smaller parties are also represented in the Bundestag in proportion to their election results. For this reason, with one exception, the Federal Government has always been formed through an alliance of several parties that had competed against each other in the election; since the first Bundestag election in 1949 there have been 24 coalition governments. To avoid fragmentation in parliament and make forming a government easier, parties must poll at least five per cent of the votes cast (or three direct mandates) in order to be represented in the Bundestag (this rule is known as the five percent hurdle).

Germany's federal character is revealed in the large level of independence the 16 federal states enjoy, in particular with regard to the police, disaster control, the law, and culture. For historical reasons the cities of Berlin, Hamburg, and Bremen are also federal states. The close links between the federal states and central government is unique, resulting in the state governments having numerous opportunities to play an active role in central government policy.

Great diversity of coalitions represented in the Bundesrat

This occurs primarily through the Bundesrat, the upper house, which is made up of members of the federal state governments and is likewise in Berlin. Densely populated federal states have greater representation in the Bundesrat than smaller ones. By being coalition partners in federal state governments, parties that at federal level are in opposition, or not even represented in the Bundestag, can thus potentially exert an influence on politics at federal level, as numerous federal acts and decrees require the approval of the Bundesrat.

Because there is no uniform election date for the federal state parliaments and the legislature periods vary, parallel to the legislative term in the Bundestag the balance of power in the Bundesrat can change several times. With the current constellation of the chamber of federal states, the Federal Government has no majority in the Bundesrat. There are no longer any distinct blocks demonstrating uniform voting behaviour, as there is more diversity with regard to coalitions in the 16 federal states than ever before since the foundation of the Federal Republic.

The Federal President is the most senior political person in the country

In terms of protocol the Federal President holds the highest office. S/he is elected not by the people, but by a Federal Assembly convened specially for the purpose. Half of it is made up of the members of the Bundestag, the other half of members elected by the federal state parliaments in relation to the distribution of seats there. The Federal President holds office for five years and may be re-elected once. Dr. Frank-Walter Steinmeier has been Federal President since 2017. As an SPD politician he served as Federal Foreign Minister from 2005 until 2009 and from 2013 until 2017. Steinmeier is the 12th Federal President since 1949. Although the Federal President's duties are primarily representational in nature, he can refuse to put his signature to legislation if he has doubts about it complying with the constitution.

Previous incumbents have exerted the greatest influence through public speeches, which receive great attention. The Federal Presidents refrain from becoming involved in party politics, but do tackle current issues and from time to time urge the government, parliament, and the population to take action.

The Federal Constitutional Court in Karlsruhe: guardian of the Basic Law

The Federal Constitutional Court in Karlsruhe, which the population holds in very high esteem, exerts great influence. It is regarded as “the guardian of the Basic Law” and through its important decisions provides a binding interpretation of the constitutional text. In two panels it passes judgement on disputes between constitutional bodies about areas of jurisdiction, and can declare laws to be incompatible with the [Basic Law](#). Any citizen can appeal to the Constitutional Court if he is of the opinion that a law violates his basic rights.

Parliament and parties in Germany

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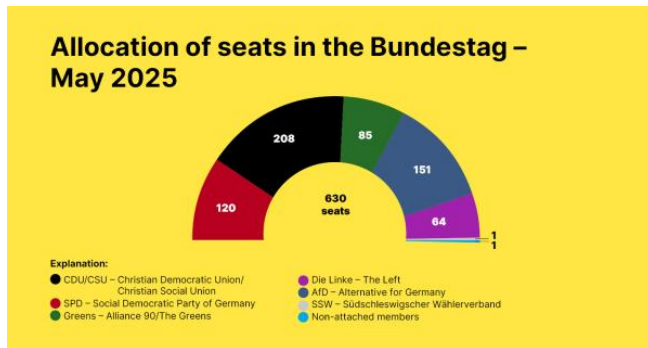


The German Bundestag is elected every four years.
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How is the German Bundestag elected?

The German Bundestag, which is the country's parliament, is elected every four years by free, secret and direct ballot by citizens aged 18 and over who are eligible to vote. The 630 members of the Bundestag are elected according to second votes from parties' state lists and on the basis of first votes cast for individuals in 299 constituencies.

An amendment to the electoral law for the 2025 Bundestag election has reduced the individual vote element and increased the list vote element. Of the 630 seats, direct mandates will only be allocated in the 299 constituencies if the seats are covered by the proportion of second votes the party has achieved. Previously, what are known as “balance seats” and “overhang seats” had meant that the number of MPs had been significantly higher of late. There were 733 MPs in the 20th Bundestag. The electoral reform has ensured that the parliament will become smaller again.



The role of the parties

Why is Germany governed by coalitions?

The electoral system makes it difficult for any single party to form a government on its own, which is why coalitions of at least two parties are the norm in Germany.

What is the significance of the five-percent hurdle?

To prevent the party landscape from becoming fragmented, which would make the process of forming a government in the Bundestag more complicated, parties must receive at least five percent of the votes (five-percent hurdle) in order to obtain seats in the parliament.

What role do political parties play in Germany?

Political parties have an extremely important role to play in Germany. They help shape the political decision-making process and are indispensable for democratic elections. The Basic Law therefore accords them constitutional status in Germany. If a party seeks to eliminate the free democratic basic order of the Federal Republic, the Federal Constitutional Court may ban that party. However, the barriers to this are very high.

Which parties are represented in the German Bundestag?

Following the election on 23 February 2025, the 21st German Bundestag is made up of six parties and 630 members: the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD), the Christian-Democratic Union of Germany (CDU)/Christian-Social Union in Bavaria (CSU), Alliance 90/The Greens, The Left and the Alternative for Germany (AfD). Since the first Bundestag election in 1949, the CDU, which runs in all of Germany's federal states apart from Bavaria, and its sister party the CSU, which runs only in Bavaria, have formed a joint parliamentary group in the Bundestag. One seat is reserved for the South Schleswig Voters' Association SSW, the party that represents the Danish minority in northern Germany.

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Federal Ministry of Defence

→ bmvg.de

Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Regional Identity

→ bmel.de

Federal Ministry for Education, Family Affairs Senior Citizens, Women and Youth

→ bmfjsfj.de

Federal Ministry of Health

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Federal Ministry of Transport

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Federal Ministry of Research, Technology and Space

→ bmftr.bund.de

Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development

→ bmgz.de

Federal Ministry for Housing, Urban Development and Building

→ bmwsb.bund.de

Federal Ministry for Digital Transformation and Government Modernisation

How can one get involved in politics in Germany?

Be it in political parties, associations or action groups - people in Germany get involved in politics in all kinds of different ways.



Germany offers many opportunities for political participation.
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How can one get involved in political parties in Germany?

Political parties play a central role in Germany's political system. "Political parties shall participate in the formation of the political will of the people," states Article 21 of the country's Basic Law. This obliges them to uphold their own internal democracy: committees, chairpersons and candidates are elected in secret ballots by delegates of the party membership at party conferences. To strengthen this internal democracy, parties have recently taken to consulting their members directly on important decisions.

Political parties enable citizens to get actively involved in politics and political decision-making processes. Some 1.3 million people in Germany are active in political parties. Most parties also have their own youth organisation.

What is meant by passive voting rights?

Passive voting rights enable a person to be voted into political office. A person who wishes to become a member of the Bundestag must be at least 18 years old and have German citizenship. Members of the Bundestag are nearly always party members, though it is not obligatory to belong to a party to be elected.

Who can vote in Germany?

All citizens eligible to vote in Germany have the chance to co-determine the country's political direction by taking advantage of their active voting rights. In principle, all Germans aged 18 or above can vote in Bundestag elections. Municipal elections are also open to citizens of other EU countries resident in Germany, and in many federal states the minimum age for voting in municipal elections is 16.

How high is voter turnout in Germany?

Voter turnout in Germany is relatively high by international standards. 82.5 percent of those eligible to vote went to the ballot box during the Bundestag elections in February 2025. The average turnout for the Landtag elections in Germany's 16 federal states is 68 percent. In the European elections in June 2024, voter turnout was 64.7 percent in Germany, while the EU average was 50.7 percent.

Which opportunities for political participation does Germany offer besides parties and elections?

Besides political parties and elections, there are numerous other opportunities to get involved in politics and the life of society in Germany. For example, around 25 million people volunteer in 620,000 associations with over 50 million members. Germans are also active in thousands of clubs, unions, action groups, foundations, forums and interest groups. Opportunities to participate in youth parliaments, civil society initiatives or non-governmental organisations are particularly attractive to young people. Social media also play a very important role as platforms for expressing political opinions and engaging in political action. Citizens can also take part in the political process in direct democratic formats such as referendums and petitions. Opportunities for direct democracy have been increasingly offered at state and municipal levels in recent years, and citizens have been making great use of these.

Last but not least, citizens' councils are also becoming more important as a way of enabling people to take part in decision-making processes. These councils are generally concerned with specific concrete issues where they make recommendations to political leaders.

What does federalism mean in Germany?

Germany is a federation made up of 16 constituent states, the Länder, which have their own governments and decision-making powers.



Germany has 16 federal states with their own state governments.
© dpa

Germany is a federation. The federal government and the 16 federal states each have their own decision-making powers. The individual states are responsible for decisions relating to internal security, schools and higher education, culture and municipal administration. At the same time, the state governments implement not only their own laws but also those issued by the federal government. The governments of the states are directly involved in the federal legislative process through their representatives in the Bundesrat (the second chamber of parliament).

Why does Germany have a federal system?

Federalism in Germany is more than just a system of government. Deeply rooted in tradition, it reflects the country's decentralised cultural and economic structure. Above and beyond their political function, the federal states also embody distinct regional identities. Their key role was enshrined in the Basic Law in 1949.



How many federal states does Germany have?

Since reunification in 1990, Germany has consisted of 16 federal states; five new states were established when the German Democratic Republic (GDR) joined the Federal Republic: Brandenburg, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt and Thuringia. North Rhine-Westphalia is the state with the biggest population at around 18 million, while Bavaria is the largest in terms of surface area at around 70,540 square kilometres. The territory of three federal states is limited to a single metropolitan region: these are the "city states" of Berlin, Bremen/Bremerhaven and Hamburg.

A journey through Germany's states

Baden-Württemberg



Heidelberg is located in Baden-Württemberg, in south-western Germany.
© dpa/pa

The third-largest state is located in south-west Germany, bordering France and Switzerland. The state capital is Stuttgart. With more than eleven million inhabitants, Baden-Württemberg is famous for its holiday regions such as the Black Forest and cultural centres like Heidelberg (photo), not to mention its economic strength. Baden-Württemberg is Germany's number one export state and home to both large, internationally renowned corporations and smaller global market leaders - so-called "hidden champions".



Bavaria



Munich is the capital of Bavaria.
© Adobe/Stock

In the south-east of Germany lies the largest federal state with its panorama of the Alps to the south. Germany's highest mountain is also to be found in Bavaria: the Zugspitze. Each year, the state capital Munich (photo) hosts the world's biggest beer festival, the Oktoberfest. With a population of over 13 million, Bavaria is also home to Bayern Munich, Germany's most successful football club, and is one of the country's economically strongest regions.

Berlin



The Reichstag, seat of the Bundestag in the German capital Berlin.
© dpa/pa

As a "city state", the capital of Germany is also a federal state in its own right - like Hamburg and Bremen. Nearly four million people live in the city, which was divided into two parts until the Berlin Wall fell in November 1989. Berlin has landmarks that are famous worldwide, such as the Brandenburg Gate, the Reichstag (photo) - the seat of the German Bundestag - and Checkpoint Charlie at the former internal German border crossing. The capital offers rich cultural diversity, including the Museum Island in the heart of the city - a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Brandenburg



Sanssouci Palace in Potsdam, the capital of the German state of Brandenburg.
© dpa/pa

This federal state surrounds the vibrant capital of Berlin. A sparsely populated region with forests

and some 3,000 lakes, it attracts numerous city dwellers at the weekend. Around 2.5 million people live in Brandenburg, more than a million fewer than in Berlin. With its world-famous Sanssouci Palace (photo), the state capital Potsdam directly borders Germany's capital.

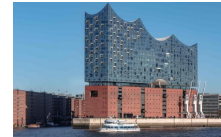
Bremen



The Bremen Town Musicians, a landmark of Bremen.
© dpa/pa

This "city state" is the smallest federal state and is made up of two cities: Bremen and Bremerhaven, located directly on the North Sea coast around 60 kilometres to the north. It has a population of some 700,000. The Bremen Town Musicians (photo) are a city landmark: a statue in the city commemorates the adventures of the donkey, cat and cockerel - the characters in the folk tale of the same name.

Hamburg



The Elbphilharmonie is located in the city-state of Hamburg.
© dpa/pa

The Hanseatic city of Hamburg is Germany's second-largest city and one of Germany's three city states. With a population of nearly two million, it is Germany's biggest seaport - a gateway to the world. A longstanding tradition of trade and commerce is still very much in evidence in this cosmopolitan northern metropolis. The Elbphilharmonie concert hall (photo) has recently become established as a new city landmark, offering concerts, fascinating architecture and spectacular views of the city and harbour.

Hesse



Frankfurt am Main is a financial centre in Hesse.
dpa/pa

After the Second World War, Hesse's finance and trade metropolis Frankfurt am Main was a possible candidate for the capital of the Federal Republic of Germany, though instead this honour went initially to Bonn and then, after reunification, to Berlin. With its skyline, stock exchange and Germany's biggest airport, Frankfurt (photo) still defines the image of Hesse to this day, though the state capital is nearby Wiesbaden. With a population of over six million, Hesse is also one of the most densely forested regions in Germany.

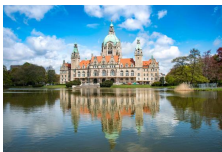
Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania



Schwerin Castle is located in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania.
dpa/pa

Located in the north-west of Germany and with a population of 1.6 million, the most sparsely populated federal state is a scenic paradise: with more than 2,000 lakes and 350 kilometres of Baltic coastline, it is one of the country's most popular travel destinations. Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania is also home to Germany's largest island, Usedom. The state capital is Schwerin, where the imposing Schwerin Palace (photo) with its 1,000-year history has been the seat of the state parliament since 1990.

Lower Saxony



Hanover is the capital of Lower Saxony.
dpa/pa

Germany's second-largest state in terms of surface area extends from the East Frisian islands in the North Sea such as Borkum and Norderney to the Harz mountains. With a population of some eight million, the state has an economy that is dominated by tourism and agriculture. The automotive industry is also a key factor, while important trade fairs are held in the state capital of



Hanover (photo).

North Rhine-Westphalia



Cologne is a large city in North Rhine-Westphalia.
dpa/pa

Germany's most populous state combines such diverse regions as the Ruhr, which was once defined by its coal mining industry, and the Rhineland, which features Cologne (photo) - a city of over a million inhabitants - and state capital Dusseldorf at its heart. North Rhine-Westphalia is in transition, too: in this state with a population of 18 million, research and culture are now taking the place of coal mining. Up until reunification in 1990, the city of Bonn near Cologne was the capital of the Federal Republic of Germany.

Rhineland-Palatinate



There are many wine-growing regions in Rhineland-Palatinate.
Adobe/Stock

This state in the country's south-west is the number one wine-growing state in Germany: six of Germany's 13 wine-growing regions are to be found in Rhineland-Palatinate, including the largest of these - Rhine Hesse (photo). The Romans left their mark on the region more than 2,000 years ago; nowhere else in Germany are there more Roman monuments. Rhineland-Palatinate has a population of some four million and its capital is Mainz.

Saarland



The capital of Saarland is Saarbrücken.
dpa/pa

It was not until 1957 that Saarland became the tenth federal state of the Federal Republic of



Germany, having initially been a semi-autonomous state with close ties to France after the Second World War. The state's location within the greater European SaarLorLux region, which extends across parts of Germany, France, Luxembourg and Belgium, significantly influences the lives of its nearly one million inhabitants. Saarbrücken (photo) is the state capital of Germany's smallest territorial state.

Saxony



Dresden is the capital of Saxony and attracts numerous tourists.
dpa/pa

Boasting more than 1,000 years of history, the Free State of Saxony is situated on the border to Poland and the Czech Republic. With a population of four million, the state is a key business hub in eastern Germany but also attracts numerous visitors every year to the state capital Dresden (photo) - known as "Florence on the River Elbe" - as well as to the economic and cultural metropolis of Leipzig and the Ore Mountains.

Saxony-Anhalt



Quedlinburg is located in Saxony-Anhalt and has a particularly beautiful old town.
dpa/pa

With six UNESCO World Cultural Heritage sites, this state in the middle of Germany boasts one of the highest numbers of world heritage sites. These include the Bauhaus in Dessau, the memorials to Martin Luther in Eisleben and Wittenberg and the historic centre of Quedlinburg (photo). With a population of around two million, the state is also an important centre for the chemical industry and European chip production. The state capital is Magdeburg.

Schleswig-Holstein



The North Sea island of Sylt belongs to Schleswig-Holstein and is one of Germany's most popular holiday destinations.
dpa/pa

Known as the "land between the seas", Schleswig-Holstein is situated between the North Sea in the west and the Baltic Sea in the east, and borders Denmark in the north. Germany's northernmost federal state has a population of almost three million and its capital is Kiel. With islands such as Sylt (photo), the state is among the most popular holiday regions. Stretching from the Netherlands to Germany and Denmark, the Wadden sea World Heritage Site is an important landmark.

Thuringia



The famous German poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe lived in Weimar for many years.
dpa/pa

This state is geographically located at the heart of Germany and was where Goethe, Bach and Luther lived: the composer Johann Sebastian Bach was born in Eisenach, the poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe lived for many years in Weimar (photo) and the reformer Martin Luther translated the New Testament of the Bible into German at Wartburg Castle. The state has a population of over two million and its capital is Erfurt.

Parliament and parties in Germany

The German Bundestag is elected every four years by free, secret and direct ballot by citizens who are eligible to vote.



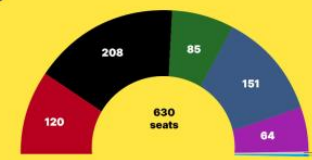
The German Bundestag is elected every four years.
© dpa

How is the German Bundestag elected?

The German Bundestag, which is the country's parliament, is elected every four years by free, secret and direct ballot by citizens aged 18 and over who are eligible to vote. The 630 members of the Bundestag are elected according to second votes from parties' state lists and on the basis of first votes cast for individuals in 299 constituencies.

An amendment to the electoral law for the 2025 Bundestag election has reduced the individual vote element and increased the list vote element. Of the 630 seats, direct mandates will only be allocated in the 299 constituencies if the seats are covered by the proportion of second votes the party has achieved. Previously, what are known as "balance seats" and "overhang seats" had meant that the number of MPs had been significantly higher of late. There were 733 MPs in the 20th Bundestag. The electoral reform has ensured that the parliament will become smaller again.

Allocation of seats in the Bundestag – May 2025



Explanation:

- CDU/CSU - Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union
- SPD - Social Democratic Party of Germany
- Greens - Alliance 90/The Greens
- Die Linke - The Left
- AfD - Alternative for Germany
- SSW - Südschleswiger Wählerverband
- Non-attached members

The role of the parties

Why is Germany governed by coalitions?

The electoral system makes it difficult for any single party to form a government on its own, which is why coalitions of at least two parties are the norm in Germany.

What is the significance of the five-percent hurdle?

To prevent the party landscape from becoming fragmented, which would make the process of forming a government in the Bundestag more complicated, parties must receive at least five percent of the votes (five-percent hurdle) in order to obtain seats in the parliament.

What role do political parties play in Germany?

Political parties have an extremely important role to play in Germany. They help shape the political decision-making process and are indispensable for democratic elections. The Basic Law therefore accords them constitutional status in Germany. If a party seeks to eliminate the free democratic basic order of the Federal Republic, the Federal Constitutional Court may ban that party. However, the barriers to this are very high.

Which parties are represented in the German Bundestag?

Following the election on 23 February 2025, the 21st German Bundestag is made up of six parties and 630 members: the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD), the Christian-Democratic Union of Germany (CDU)/Christian-Social Union in Bavaria (CSU), Alliance 90/The Greens, The Left and the Alternative for Germany (AfD). Since the first Bundestag election in 1949, the CDU, which runs in all of Germany's federal states apart from Bavaria, and its sister party the CSU, which runs only in Bavaria, have formed a joint parliamentary group in the Bundestag. One seat is reserved for the South Schleswig Voters' Association SSW, the party that represents the Danish minority in northern Germany.

How does the political system function in Germany?

The Federal Republic of Germany is structured as a federal state and parliamentary democracy.



Germany is a parliamentary democracy.
© Unsplash

The Federal Republic of Germany is structured as a federal state and parliamentary democracy. The Basic Law sets down that all state authority derives from the people. The people confer this power to the federal and state parliaments for one legislative period.

Separation of powers in Germany

Which three powers are there?

State authority is divided between the legislative branch, the executive branch and the judicial branch, which is responsible for the administration of justice. The separation of powers is a core component of all democracies and is enshrined in Germany's constitution, the Basic Law.

What is the legislative?

The legislative discusses, agrees on and amends laws that govern the way people live together in Germany. It also oversees the work of the government (executive).

The legislative includes

- the German Bundestag, which is the parliament elected by the people;
- the Bundesrat, which represents the 16 federal states at federal level. The Bundesrat plays a role in federal lawmaking;
- the Landtage, which are the parliaments of the 16 federal states

What is the executive?

The executive enforces laws and implements them in daily life.

At federal level, the executive comprises

- the Federal Government (Federal Chancellor, federal ministers)
- the Federal President (representative head of state with certain executive duties)
- the Federal Administration (ministries, federal agencies, Federal Police etc.)

At federal state level, it comprises

- the state-level governments (minister presidents and state-level ministers)
- state-level administrative bodies

At municipal level, it comprises

- mayors and district administrators
- city and district governments

The police force and administrative authorities (e.g. the inland revenue) also belong to the executive.

What is the judiciary?

The judiciary is the branch that ensures that laws are upheld.

The judges who preside over the courts at federal and state level are independent and reach their decisions solely on the basis of the laws.

The highest German court is the Federal Constitutional Court, which is the "guardian" of the Basic Law. All other state organs are bound by the verdicts reached by the 16 constitutional judges.

Which are the highest political offices in Germany?

The Federal President is for protocol purposes Germany's most senior representative.

The Federal President is represented by the Bundesrat President – an office held on an annually rotating basis by a minister president of one of the 16 federal states.

For protocol purposes, the Bundestag President ranks second-highest.

The office with the greatest scope for shaping policy is that of the Federal Chancellor. He or she determines policy guidelines.

The president of the Federal Constitutional Court, the highest German court, is likewise one of the country's senior representatives.

At a glance



© bundeskanzler.de/Tobias Koch

Friedrich Merz

CDU, Federal Chancellor since May 2025



© picture alliance/Gora

Julia Klöckner

CDU, Bundestag President since March 2025



© Bundesregierung/Steffen Kugler

Dr. Frank-Walter Steinmeier

Federal President



© dpa

Prof. Dr. Stephan Harbarth

President of the Federal Constitutional Court

How does Germany's Federal Government operate?

The Federal Chancellor and the federal ministers form the Federal Government, the cabinet.



The Federal Cabinet consists of 16 ministers.
© picture alliance/dpa

The Federal Chancellor is the head of the Federal Government. Together with the federal ministers, he or she forms the Federal Government, the cabinet. Alongside the chancellor's power to determine policy guidelines, the principle of ministerial autonomy applies, according to which the ministers conduct the affairs of their departments independently within the limits of the policy guidelines set by the Federal Chancellor, as does the principle of collegiate responsibility, which states that the Federal Government decides on contentious issues by means of a majority vote.

How many federal ministers does the German government have?

The number of ministers is not stipulated in the [Basic Law](#). Ministers may also be replaced during the course of a legislative period.

Since May 2025, the Federal Cabinet has comprised Federal Chancellor Friedrich Merz, [16 ministers and the head of the Federal Chancellery](#). The federal ministries are the most senior

federal authorities in each department.

Where is the official seat of the German government?

The German capital [Berlin](#) is the seat of government. Before [German reunification in 1990](#), the capital was [Bonn](#). In June 1991, the Bundestag decided that Berlin would become the seat of parliament and government. However, six federal ministries kept their headquarters in Bonn and all ministries have offices in both cities. Bonn, as the second political centre of the Federal Republic, also bears the name of the Federal City of Bonn.

Which ministries does the German government have?

Federal Ministry of Finance

→ [bundesfinanzministerium.de](https://www.bundesfinanzministerium.de)

Federal Ministry of the Interior

→ [bmi.bund.de](https://www.bmi.bund.de)

Federal Foreign Office

→ [diplo.de](https://www.diplo.de)

Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy

→ [bundeswirtschaftsministerium.de](https://www.bundeswirtschaftsministerium.de)

Federal Ministry of Justice and Consumer Protection

→ [bmj.de](https://www.bmj.de)

Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs

→ [bmas.de](https://www.bmas.de)

Federal Ministry of Defence

→ [bmvg.de](https://www.bmvg.de)

Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Regional Identity

→ [bmel.de](https://www.bmel.de)

Federal Ministry for Education, Family Affairs Senior Citizens, Women and Youth

→ [bmfsfj.de](https://www.bmfsfj.de)

Federal Ministry of Health

→ [bundesgesundheitsministerium.de](https://www.bundesgesundheitsministerium.de)

Federal Ministry of Transport

→ [bmv.de/DE/Home/home.html](https://www.bmv.de/DE/Home/home.html)

Federal Ministry for the Environment, Climate Action, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety

→ [bundesumweltministerium.de](https://www.bundesumweltministerium.de)

Federal Ministry of Research, Technology and Space

→ [bmfr.bund.de](https://www.bmfr.bund.de)

Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development

→ [bmz.de](https://www.bmz.de)

Federal Ministry for Housing, Urban Development and Building

→ [bmwsb.bund.de](https://www.bmwsb.bund.de)

Federal Ministry for Digital Transformation and Government Modernisation

How do people vote in Germany?

Free and fair elections are an essential precondition for any democracy.



Elections in Germany are free, equal and secret.
© dpa

Why are elections held regularly in Germany?

Free and fair elections are an essential precondition for any democracy. They are a key instrument for the political participation of citizens. The German Basic Law states that the representatives must be elected through general, direct, free, equal and secret elections.

Which basic rules apply to elections in Germany?

All citizens who are eligible to vote, irrespective of their gender or income, have the vote, their voting decision must not be influenced - and every vote counts equally. Voters must be at least 18 to vote in Bundestag elections, while 16 is the minimum age for local Landtag and municipal elections in some states. Secret elections guarantee that every voter can cast their vote unobserved and on their own.

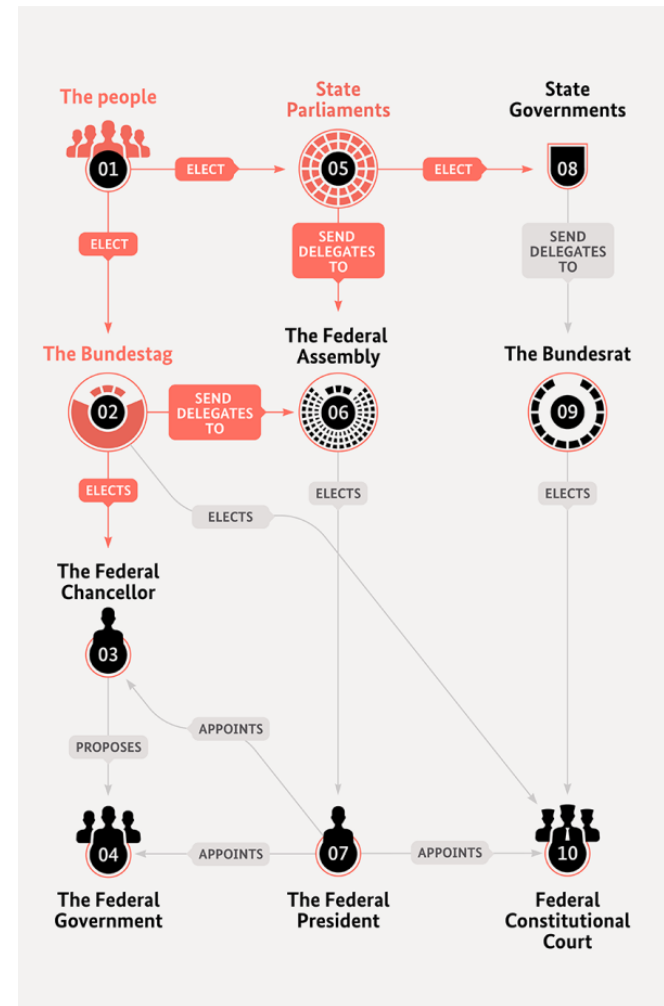
How often are elections held in Germany?

The German Bundestag is normally elected every four years. Elections are generally held every five

years in the 16 federal states. Then there are municipal elections, which usually also take place every five years, to elect for example city parliaments.

How is Germany's federal president elected?

The federal president isn't elected directly by the people, but every five years by the Federal Convention. The Federal Convention is made up of all the members of the Bundestag and an equal number of delegates elected by the state parliaments. These delegates can also be members of the public such as artists or scientists.



Working in Germany

Germany's stable employment market offers attractive career opportunities to professionals from around the world.



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Germany: top destination for skilled workers

Germany's employment market offers many opportunities - and thus attracts international skilled workers.



Skilled workers have attractive prospects in Germany - in the healthcare sector, for example.
© AdobeStock

Germany's stable employment market offers attractive career opportunities to professionals from around the world. On average, 46.1 million people in Germany were in gainful employment in 2024 - the highest number since German reunification in 1990.

“Kurzarbeit” reduced-hours scheme protects jobs in times of crisis

This success is built on Germany's strong economy, but the employment market has also been supported by tried-and-tested crisis response measures implemented by the government. For example, government intervention to support workers on reduced hours had already proved its worth during the 2008-2009 financial crisis, and made a vital contribution to mitigating the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Where a crisis causes a significant loss of work to businesses, the “Kurzarbeit” scheme allows employers to temporarily transfer employees to state-supported reduced hours. This helps avoid redundancies and makes it easier to restart work after the crisis.

Reforms to create a modern employment market

As part of creating a modern, fair and transparent employment market, the Federal Government



has implemented a number of groundbreaking projects in employment policy.

- The legal minimum wage came into force in 2015 and is updated regularly.
- A [quota for the proportion of women](#) is bringing about more equality at management level. Since 2016, publicly listed and equally co-determined companies have been required to have at least 30 percent of the seats on their supervisory boards filled by women.
- The regulations on pay scale uniformity ensure that employers do not apply different pay scales to the same work.

Mobile work models: the key to greater flexibility?

The world of work in Germany is going through a period of change. Digitalisation is making its mark, but another significant change is that many roles no longer need to be carried out from specific locations, along with the opportunity to work from home at least some of the time. The Covid-19 pandemic gave a huge boost to mobile working, with up to a third of employees now working from home at least part of the time. The Federal Government is ensuring that their rights and protections are guaranteed, even when working away from the office.

Flexibility at work in Germany

Many workers in Germany now have far more influence over how they organise their working time than even a few years ago. Employees also have the right to reduce their working hours for up to six months to allow them to care for relatives. In addition to working part time, they can use flexitime to decide for themselves (within certain limits) when their work day begins and ends.

Germany remains a top destination for skilled workers

There is an important trend in increasing mobility within the European labour market. Freedom of movement is one of the fundamental principles of the EU, so migration within Europe is an important issue for professionals, and Germany is a major destination.

Why do many jobs remain vacant?

Germany lacks skilled workers. In view of demographic shifts, [ensuring a sufficient supply of skilled workers](#) for the German economy is one of the most pressing challenges facing the Federal Government. According to the German Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DIHK), 43 percent of the nearly 23,000 companies surveyed were unable to fill vacancies due to a lack of suitable applicants in 2024.

Why are skilled workers in such high demand in Germany?

- Demographic shifts: Germany has an ageing population. This means that more people are retiring than are being replaced by young workers. This trend is being reinforced by a birth rate that has been low for decades and thus further limits the size of the next generation of workers.
- Structural changes in business and society: digitisation, automation and technological innovations are creating new occupations and transforming existing jobs. This raises the requirements for employee qualifications, which in turn increases demand for workers with specialist skills.
- Economic growth and investment: new infrastructural projects, the energy transition and modernisation require highly qualified skilled workers, especially in the construction, engineering and technology sectors.

Which sectors are facing the most acute shortage of skilled workers?

- Childcare and education
- Social work and social pedagogy
- Healthcare and nursing
- Geriatric care
- Electrical professions and the skills crafts and trades
- Construction

How many immigrants does the German employment market need?

A 2024 study conducted by the Bertelsmann Stiftung shows that the number of workers in Germany will decline by 10 percent by 2040 without immigration. To meet the demands of the employment market in future and ensure that the potential workforce does not slump, around 288,000 international workers will be required by 2040.

What opportunities does the Skilled Immigration Act offer?

Germany has made long-term preparations to support the migration of skilled workers. One important element is the [Skilled Immigration Act](#) that has been in force since 1 March 2020 and is subject to continuous revision. The Act makes it easier for skilled workers from countries outside the EU to access the German labour market. Previously, this was only possible for workers with academic qualifications. Since 2020 this access has also been open to workers who have gained a vocational qualification abroad. Because of the special features and high standards of Germany's [dual vocational training system](#), the Skilled Immigration Act also improves opportunities for people to come to Germany to obtain qualifications. Those interested in embarking on a course of training are now also eligible for a residence permit.

Opening doors for skilled workers to find jobs in Germany

Skilled workers are in demand across many areas of the German economy. New regulations are making it easier for them to come to Germany.



Skilled workers are also needed in the construction industry.
© stock.adobe.com/JU.STOCKER

Many regions and industries in Germany are facing a shortage of well trained workers, and demand is only going to continue growing. Alongside promoting training and professional development, Germany's Federal Government is focusing on modernising its immigration policies to attract skilled workers from around the world. Since 2020 new regulations have been introduced in stages to make it easier to come to Germany from abroad. To this end, the Federal Government is clearing away bureaucratic obstacles.

As part of reforms approved in 2023, the government created three new routes for skilled workers to migrate to Germany.

- University graduates can practise any career for which they are qualified.
- Skilled workers can immigrate to Germany if they have at least two years' experience and a professional qualification that is officially recognised in their country of origin.
- The government has also introduced the Opportunity Card which uses a points system to rate

potential applicants.

What has changed as a result of the Skilled Immigration Act?

The Skilled Immigration Act came into force on 1 March 2020. The act makes it easier for skilled workers from countries outside the EU to access the German labour market. This was previously only open to skilled workers with university degrees, but the new regulations open doors to skilled workers who gained vocational qualifications abroad.

What role is played by the EU Blue Card?

Starting in late 2023, the regulations have been updated in several stages to make it easier for skilled workers to move to Germany. This included updating the requirements for the EU Blue Card, which allows highly qualified individuals from outside the EU to come to Germany. Among other things, the salary threshold was lowered from November 2023.

A second stage in March 2024 included extending guidelines for skilled workers with professional experience to all career areas. For example, anyone who has two years' experience in a non-state regulated career can work in Germany without needing to get their degree recognised. Their vocational qualification or university degree must be recognised in the country where they completed their education or training.

How does the Opportunity Card work?

Introduced in June 2024, the Opportunity Card allows certain skilled workers from non-EU countries to come to Germany to find a suitable job without having to go through the drawn-out process of getting their qualifications recognised here. The card is based on a points system. Criteria include for example:

- qualifications
- command of German and English
- professional experience
- age

Structuring Immigration

Germany is a cosmopolitan country that relies on international skilled professionals. At the same time, the Federal Government is keen to control migration to a greater extent.



International skilled professionals play an important role in the German economy.
© AdobeStock

The Federal Government is increasing rates of immigration for skilled professionals from around the world. It embraces its humanitarian responsibility for refugees and asylum seekers who have been forced to flee from regions in crisis or conflict. At the same time, it is keen to control and limit migration to a greater extent, for example by

- temporarily suspending the family reunification rights of those with subsidiary protection status
- ending voluntary admission programmes for refugees
- designating more countries of origin as safe
- entering into further migration and readmission agreements

How many people with a foreign passport live in Germany?

In 2024 there were around 14.1 million holders of foreign passports living in Germany.

How many people with a migrant background live in Germany?

In 2024, around 21.2 million people in Germany came from a migrant background. That's roughly one in four of the population.

How many people with a migrant background have a German passport?

Around 9.3 million people of migrant background had a German passport in 2024. They either had German citizenship since birth, were ethnic Germans who moved to Germany from the former Eastern Bloc or were nationalised.

How many people were nationalised in Germany in 2024?

In 2024, nearly 292,000 people were naturalised as German citizens.

What role do skilled international professionals play in Germany?

Migrants make a significant contribution to Germany's social and economic development. The growing need for skilled workers is attracting well qualified people from abroad. The Federal Government wants to facilitate increased migration, not least to counteract the shortage of skilled workers which is due to demographic change.

In addition to boosting the activation of Germany's own pool of potential skilled workers and encouraging greater immigration from EU member states, the Federal Government sees the migration of skilled workers from third countries as a means of counteracting demographic change and helping ensure there are enough skilled workers. To this end, Germany reformed its Skilled Immigration Act in 2023, introducing among other things the "[Opportunity Card](#)". This visa enables qualified professionals who fulfil certain conditions to come to Germany for a year to search for work. In the first year after the Opportunity Card was introduced, around 11,500 such visas were granted.

How integration works in Germany

Germany offers integration opportunities, but these also require some effort on the part of those wishing to integrate. Successful integration is a two-way process.



Language is an important key to integration.
© dpa

Integration is a priority area for German policymakers and is considered a responsibility for the whole of society. Integration is not just something that society offers: it also requires that migrants commit to making an effort themselves. Integration can only succeed if it is a mutual process. According to the Residence Act, those foreigners who legally live long-term on German territory have a right to access federal integration services. These services include language lessons, integration in training, work and education, as well as social integration. The goal is to enable these persons to be part of and play a part in society.

How does the Federal Government foster integration?

The core element is an integration course consisting of language lessons and an orientation course. The Federal Government is also increasingly funding vocational language courses. The aim is for integration to begin early, which is why the Federal Government is planning among other things to reintroduce "language daycare centres" in which additional specialist staff will be on hand to promote language learning. At the same time, it wants to call upon migrants to make greater efforts themselves, for example by getting them to make a binding "integration declaration".

Is dual citizenship possible in Germany?

Reforms to citizenship laws in 2014 introduced dual citizenship. For people who were born to foreign parents after 1990 and who grew up in Germany, this removed the obligation to renounce either their German or their parents' nationality. Previously, they had only been allowed to keep both nationalities until they turned 23. Following further reforms to citizenship laws in 2024, dual citizenship is now possible for everyone in principle, whereas previously it was only available to certain nationalities.

Is it possible to start working quickly?

Migrants who are likely to remain for a longer period in Germany are to be given the chance to quickly embark on a course of training or apprenticeship or start working. To this end, the Federal Government introduced legislation in 2019 to promote education and employment for foreigners. Anyone with good prospects of remaining in the country can start working more quickly. The law also improved the provision of language courses and other integration services.

What other integration support is available?

Volunteering plays a major role in supporting integration, both through the work of many volunteers who offer courses and everyday support to refugees and migrants, and also migrants who provide voluntary services themselves.

Dual vocational training

Combining theory and practice - why Germany's system of dual vocational training is a role model worldwide.



In demand worldwide: Germany's system of dual vocational training gets young people into skilled jobs.
© AdobeStock

What makes Germany's dual system of education and training different is the way it combines theory and practice. Germany's low rate of youth unemployment compared to its European peers is thanks in part to this system.

The dual system of education and training differs from purely classroom-based learning that represents the entry point into working life in many countries:

- Students spend three to four days a week learning the practical elements of a profession in the workplace.
- On the other day(s), they receive specialist theoretical teaching at vocational college.
- It generally takes between two and three and a half years to complete dual vocational training, and trainees are paid during this time.

Why dual vocational training offers great opportunities in Germany

Over a million young people in Germany are training on officially recognised training programmes. In 2025, they were able to choose from 327 different careers. In 2023, around 470,900 people signed up for a new course of training in the dual system.

How many trainees are there in Germany?

Around 1.22 million people are undergoing dual vocational training in 2025.

Which professions are particularly popular?

The trade and industry sector has the highest number of trainees, namely 688,500. The second-highest number is to be found in the skilled crafts and trades, with around 337,800 trainees. Then come the freelance professions (111,000), the civil service (41,500) and agriculture (31,700).

What percentage of people who opt for dual vocational training are women?

In 2024, 36 percent (170,700) of new vocational training contracts were concluded by women and 64 percent (300,200) by men.

Vocational education in Germany is supported by many stakeholders who also ensure training is high quality. For example, chambers of commerce offer advice to firms providing on-the-job training and assess their facilities, while also organising assessments and examinations. Trade unions and employers' associations negotiate the remuneration for trainees and help define standards for professional training. The state funds and oversees the public vocational college system. It also helps unemployed and disadvantaged young people to get into training.

Great international interest in dual vocational training

The integration of theoretical knowledge and practical professional experience is in considerable demand among many companies. There is also great international interest in the system: [many countries are in the process of adopting the system of dual vocational training](#). To meet the high demand, the Federal Government has established the German Office for International Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training, or [GOVET](#) for short, at the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB).

Germany's international partnerships in dual vocational training

GOVET handles all inquiries about the German vocational training system, many of which come from abroad. As part of its work with partners around the world, the Federal Government supports partner countries with developing their own vocational training systems, thereby improving opportunities for young people to become qualified in a profession. The framework for this is the Federal Government's strategy for international cooperation on vocational education and training, which was adopted in 2013 and updated in 2019.

Ambitious Cutting-Edge Research

Why Germany is one of the world's most innovative economies.



Mobility of the future - one of the fields in which researchers from Germany are active, often with partners from all over the world.
© Fraunhofer IGCV with Airbus

In 2023, spending on research accounted for 3.1% of Germany's GDP. The intention is for this to rise to 3.5% by 2030. This puts [Germany](#) among a leading group of nations that spend more than 3% of GDP on research and development (R&D). Germany also ranks tenth internationally among the world's most research-intensive economies. In 2023, spending on R&D in Germany amounted to just under 130 billion euros. Of this total,

- 88.7 billion euros was spent by the business sector,
- 22.4 billion was spent by higher education institutions, and
- 18.6 billion euros was spent by non-university, public and publicly funded research institutions.

The strength of [cutting-edge research in Germany](#) is reflected in the number of publications produced by researchers. In the 2025 "Nature Index", which evaluates the publication performance of research and higher education institutions, Germany was ranked highest in Europe. Against its international competitors, Germany is ranked third, behind the front runners China and the US.

What are the goals of the "Future Research and Innovation Strategy"?

Since 2023, the German government's "Future Research and Innovation Strategy" has been the central document guiding German research and innovation policy. It replaces the "High-Tech

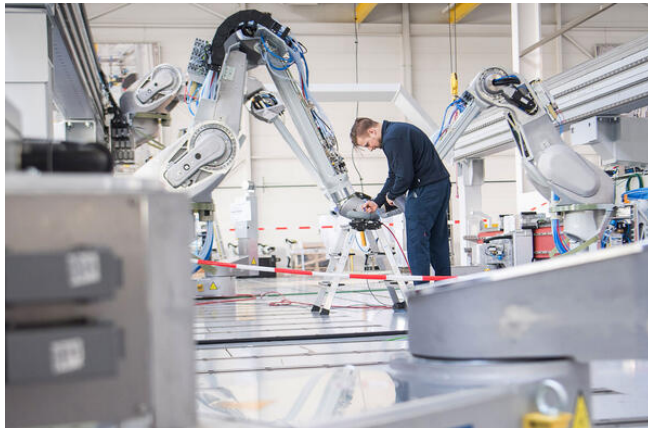
Strategy" that was previously in place and focuses more on an innovation policy that addresses specific societal challenges. The goal is to combine scientific excellence with social impact in an even more targeted manner and to steer innovation processes across the different ministries. To this end, the Future Strategy defines six priority goals, strengthens strategic dialogue between policymakers, science, business and civil society and makes innovation more impact-oriented:

1. enabling a resource-efficient, circular economy-based and competitive industry and sustainable mobility
2. spearheading climate protection, climate adjustment, food security and the preservation of biodiversity
3. improving health for everyone
4. securing Germany's and Europe's digital and technological sovereignty and harnessing the potential of digitalisation
5. strengthening astronautics, exploring, protecting and sustainably using space and oceans
6. strengthening social resilience, diversity and cohesion

This is intended to ensure that Germany remains internationally competitive, while at the same time actively shaping key future issues.

Innovative economy: Germany reinvents itself

How does an industrial nation remain competitive in a digital era? Germany believes that innovation, start-ups and well-trained skilled professionals are the way forward.



Technology at work: humans and machines are increasingly interconnected in German factories.
© dpa

Germany is the largest economy in the European Union (EU) and the third largest in the world after the US and China. As such, it enjoys a strong network of partnerships around the world and regularly ranks in the top three nations for exports as well as imports. Germany's gross domestic product totalled some 4.3 trillion euros in 2024. That year, it exported goods worth around 1,555 billion euros and imported goods worth over 1,316 billion euros.

Germany's most important trade partners are:

- the countries of the EU (accounting for roughly two thirds of the total volume)
- China
- the USA

German industries that are particularly successful on the global market include:

- the automotive industry

- mechanical and plant engineering
- the chemicals industry

Germany's strengths: SMEs, start-ups, research

Germany also boasts a diverse and active start-up scene. The backbone of the German economy is the Mittelstand - small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) - which includes many globally successful hidden champions from all regions of Germany.

The engine that drives economic development is the innovative strength of German companies. To secure and increase this, Germany invests more than three percent of its gross domestic product in research and development. More than two thirds of the over 121 billion euros spent in total per year are invested by businesses.

How is Germany making innovation part of its future strategy?

Germany is also providing targeted funding for new and disruptive technologies, innovations and business models. This included setting up the Federal Agency for Disruptive Innovation (SPRIND) in 2019 and the German Agency for Transfer and Innovation (DATI) in 2021. The Federal Government adopted a new AI Strategy in 2018 and created a similar Startup Strategy in the summer of 2022.

From social market economy to social-environmental market economy

Since 1949 German economic policy has been based on the model of a social market economy. Developed in the post-war years by Ludwig Erhard (who would later become Federal Chancellor), this concept has kept Germany's economy on an upward track. It guarantees that businesses can trade freely while simultaneously striving to create social checks and balances.

Why is the dual vocational training system a role model for the world?

The German economy is characterised by its strong "Mittelstand", with small and medium-sized enterprises making up over 99 percent of all businesses in the country. They also provide more than half of all jobs and employ around 75 percent of trainees. In so doing, they safeguard the system of dual vocational training, which combines theoretical knowledge at vocational schools with practical training in companies. This dual model enjoys an outstanding reputation around the world and has been adopted by many other countries.

Frankfurt: home of finance and European monetary policy

Successful major international corporations also help shape Germany as a place to do business. Many are listed on the DAX stock exchange in Frankfurt, the key financial centre on the continent of Europe. Frankfurt is also home to the headquarters of the European Central Bank (ECB), whose duties include monitoring the price stability of the euro.

A stable and attractive employment market

The German employment market has shown itself to be robust in the past, even during periods of

crisis. Germany has one of the highest rates of employment in the European Union and one of the lowest unemployment rates. In 2024, for example, the unemployment rate in Germany averaged 6.0 percent. Youth unemployment is also very low.

How can the short-time working allowance safeguard jobs?

The short-time working allowance has proven to be a useful tool. It involves the state temporarily covering a major part of the salary shortfall if a company's economic situation means that employees have to reduce their working hours for a certain period. This enables employees to keep their jobs despite a crisis and companies do not lose their experienced staff.

How is Germany addressing the skilled labour shortage?

Well-trained specialist professionals are essential to the competitiveness of the German economy. Germany is therefore taking steps on the one hand to enable people to undergo training, for example by further improving full-day childcare. On the other hand, laws such as the [reformed Skilled Immigration Act](#) aim to help recruit skilled professionals from abroad - which is vital against the backdrop of demographic shifts.

How is digital infrastructure advancing the industrial transformation?

Like almost every other country around the world, Germany is faced with the challenge of promoting digitalisation in the economy and also of how to shape the digital transformation in the world of work. To help make this happen, Germany is expanding its [digital infrastructure](#) in the form of broadband and 5G mobile technology. By developing technology for the Internet of Things (IoT), Germany is providing targeted support for Industry 4.0, where production processes are integrated with ways of communicating over the Internet.

What is being done to strengthen Germany as a location for start-ups?

Through its [Startup Strategy](#), the Federal Government also aims to make Germany a leading [location](#) for start-ups in Europe. A range of measures and initiatives are helping clear away legal and regulatory barriers to setting up and financing startups, across areas such as innovation, digitalisation and sustainability.

Vibrant Hub of Knowledge

Excellent cutting-edge research, wide-ranging academic system: why Germany is a centre for science and scholarship that sets global standards.



Germany is one of the world's leading centres of science and research.
© dpa

[Germany](#) enjoys a reputation around the world for its strength in innovation and wide-ranging academic and research system. The country's 426 higher education institutions are the foundation of this success. Industrial research forms another key element in Germany's status as a higher education location. One sign of this strength is that Germany is among the world's leading nations in terms of numbers of patent applications. Germany's four major non-university research institutes enjoy an excellent international reputation and play a key role in Germany's scientific and academic success. They are the:

- Fraunhofer-Gesellschaft
- Helmholtz Association
- Leibniz Association
- Max Planck Society

How much does Germany invest in science and research?

Germany invests heavily in research and science to safeguard and further consolidate this [innovative capacity](#). This puts the Federal Republic among a leading group of nations that invest around 3% of GDP annually in research and development. By 2030, the proportion of total state

expenditure is to rise to at least 3.5%.

What sets the German education system apart?

Even beyond the domain of cutting-edge research, the [German education system](#) is very well tailored to the needs of the employment market, especially by international standards. Roughly 80% of adults have attained the university entrance qualification (Abitur) or hold a vocational training qualification. As such, Germany reflects the average level of countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Germany's dual system of vocational education and training has long been a key element of this and enjoys an excellent reputation internationally.

The number of university students has risen sharply in recent years. In response, the federal and state governments adopted the Higher Education Pact 2020 which provides funding for more places on university courses. Building on this, federal and state governments have implemented a "future agreement" to improve conditions for students and teaching quality in the long term.

Which Clusters of Excellence and Universities of Excellence are there in Germany?

The Federal Government's Excellence Strategy supports pioneering research at universities. The Strategy funds Clusters of Excellence for targeted areas of research and Universities of Excellence, which are acknowledged internationally as beacons of outstanding higher education. From 2026, 687 million euros will be available each year for the programme as a whole.

Which are the eleven German Universities of Excellence?

- Berlin University Alliance
- University of Tübingen
- Karlsruhe Institute of Technology
- Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München
- RWTH Aachen University
- University of Bonn
- Dresden University of Technology
- Technical University of Munich (TUM)
- Universität Hamburg
- Heidelberg University
- University of Konstanz

Which areas of research are a particular focus for German government funding?

The Federal Government aims to use its Future Strategy Research as an effective way of consolidating resources. As part of this, it has defined key "future fields", which include:

- developing modern technologies for competitive and [climate-neutral industry](#),
- creating a sustainable agricultural and food production system,
- strengthening technological sovereignty and
- developing a modern and resilient healthcare system that makes use of the opportunities from biotech and medical processes.

Covid-19 vaccine: an outstanding example of state funding

The development of the first mRNA Covid-19 vaccine is considered a paradigm of successful state funding. The vaccine was developed by the Mainz-based firm BioNTech, whose founders, Özlem Türeci and Uğur Şahin, also teach at the University of Mainz. The state provided substantial support for vaccine development at BioNTech and other centres.

German higher education and research institutions place great importance on maintaining an international outlook. Following the "Bologna process" of European higher education reform, the majority of university courses in Germany have been restructured as bachelor's and master's degrees, which have become the international standard. Many courses, particularly at master's level, are offered in a foreign language, primarily in English.

Why German universities are attractive to international students

For many years Germany has been considered the most popular non-English-speaking country for international students. Around one in ten of Germany's approximately three million students come from abroad. Unlike many other countries, students pay no or only very limited fees to study at public higher education institutions in Germany (with the exception of certain states such as Baden-Württemberg). Germany's higher education and research institutions are also very attractive for international staff. For example, around 30% of scientists at the four major non-university research institutes come from abroad.

Which subject groups are most often chosen by international students in Germany?

The subjects chosen most often are the engineering sciences (42%) and law, economics and social sciences (25%).

How many Germans study abroad?

Nearly 140,000 Germans study abroad, with most of them also aiming to graduate abroad.

How many academics and artists of non-German citizenship are employed at universities in Germany?

Around 65,500 academics and artists of non-German citizenship are employed at universities in Germany, i.e. 15% of the total.

Which countries are international academic staff most frequently from?

The most important countries of origin of international academic staff are India (9%), China and Italy (each 7%).

Cooperation with international partners

Networking with international partners is also very important to German higher education institutions, which are continually expanding their partnerships around the world. Germany's support for its higher education institutions includes the [German Academic Exchange Service \(DAAD\)](#), and the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, which are funded by the Federal Foreign

Office. Scholarship programmes are an essential element of Germany's foreign academic and higher education policy. These provide assistance to foreign students, academics and researchers for stays in Germany. Germany also funds higher education partnerships around the world. Over 37,000 agreements exist between higher education institutions in Germany and partners in over 150 countries.

German industry's digital transformation

Germany is switching to digitised and networked production by implementing Industry 4.0 - while remaining Europe's leading innovator.



Digital perspectives: Industry 4.0 is making Germany a pioneer of smart and networked production.
© dpa

The economy is going through the fourth industrial revolution. Driven by the Internet, the real and virtual worlds are merging to become an "Internet of Things". The Federal Government aims to provide support to business and academia with the development and implementation of "Industry 4.0", with the aim of positioning Germany as a leading provider of these technologies.

Tailormade production

What makes Industry 4.0 different is how products are highly individualised within production systems and environments that are digital and very flexible. Alongside the "Internet of Things", technologies such as artificial intelligence, cloud computing and automation play a central role. The fourth industrial revolution has long since begun in many factories: smart monitoring and decision-making processes control and optimise companies and entire value adding networks virtually in real time.

Demand for highly qualified skilled workers

This fundamental transformation of production and work processes requires highly qualified skilled workers who can take responsibility themselves and work semi-autonomously. Germany's unique dual vocational training system, coupled with a consistent further training strategy in

businesses, provide the basis for this.

Germany is Europe's innovation engine

Germany is considered the innovation champion of Europe. In 2024, German companies submitted more than 25,000 patent applications to the European Patent Office (EPO) in Munich, putting them in first place in Europe and second place worldwide.

An overview of the most important innovation drivers

Which technology fields show the most patent applications?

In 2024, the following fields of technology were in the top five in Germany:

- transport (mechanical engineering sector): 11,153 patent applications
- electric machines and devices, electric energy (electrical engineering sector): 8,248 patent applications
- measurement technology (instruments sector): 4,712 patent applications
- machine elements (mechanical engineering sector): 3,411 patent applications
- computer technology (electrical engineering sector): 3,311 patent applications

How much do German companies invest in research and development?

Spending 88.7 billion euros, German companies accounted for more than two thirds of total expenditure on research and development in 2023 – thus increasing their investment volume by 8 percent compared to 2022.

Why is international cooperation so important in technology development?

Research projects such as quantum computing, particle physics or climate simulations are so complex and expensive that they can only be pursued by alliances of many countries. Joint projects pool expertise, resources and funding. CERN in Geneva (Switzerland) is one of the best-known examples of top-class international research in particle physics. Scientists from 85 nations are working on answering the fundamental questions of the universe there. Another future-oriented project is JUPITER, Europe's first exascale computer (capable of a trillion calculations per second). It was presented at Forschungszentrum Jülich in 2025. One of the most powerful computers in the world, JUPITER is a key project when it comes to digital advances in Germany and Europe.

Automotive sector remains patent leader

In 2024, nearly 59,300 inventions were registered at the German Patent and Trade Mark Office (DPMA), around 40,000 of which originated in Germany. Automotive supplier Bosch was the most active, submitting nearly 4,500 applications, followed by the car makers BMW (2,297) and Mercedes-Benz (2,138). Exactly 153,654 German patents were in force in 2024.

Schools and universities

As a place to learn and research, Germany enjoys a strong international reputation, from its school system to the dual vocational education system and its varied higher education system.



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2005



2005

The Excellence Initiative is announced for higher education institutions. The Joint Initiative for Research and Innovation provides funding for non-university research organisations.

2017



2017
Almost all courses have been switched over to ~Bachelor's and Master's degree courses. State-regulated ~degree courses, Medicine and Law are an exception. The proportion of state spending on research and development as a ratio of gross domestic product has exceeded three percent for the first time.

2019



2019
Ten universities and one university group in Berlin were selected to benefit from the Excellence Initiative pursued nationally and by the individual federal states. Comprehensive financial support will help them to heighten their profiles still further in coming years.

2021



2021
Since 2021, the federal and state governments have each provided 1.88 billion euros annually through the 'Strengthening Teaching and Learning' pact. Since 2024, the amount has risen to 2.05 billion euros each.

2024



2024
The Startchancen programme was introduced for the 2024/25 school year and will run for ten years. The federal government is providing up to one billion euros annually in additional funding for this programme. Around 4,000 schools with a high proportion of socially disadvantaged pupils will receive targeted support through the programme.

Dynamic Academic Landscape

Study opportunities with international appeal: the German academic world is diverse, international and excellent.



A high level of research and teaching: German universities
© AdobeStock

Germany has a remarkably diverse higher education sector. It includes famous universities in major cities like Berlin and Munich, yet outstanding higher education institutions can also be found in Aachen, Heidelberg and Karlsruhe. Medium-sized universities with a strong focus on research and smaller institutions with an outstanding reputation form the nucleus of the academic world. Many German universities feature in international rankings, with eleven German universities in the top 200 in the Shanghai Rankings, nine in the QS World University Rankings and 20 in the Times Higher Education World University Rankings. The universities of Munich and Heidelberg perform particularly well.

How many universities are there in Germany?

Students in Germany could choose from 426 higher education institutions in 2024:

- 120 universities
- 249 universities of applied sciences
- 57 academies of music and art

Higher education institutions in Germany offer a total of 22,078 degree courses. Funding for 273 higher education institutions is provided by the state, 38 by the church and 115 are funded privately.

Which types of higher education institution are there in Germany?

In Germany there are essentially three types of higher education institution: universities, universities of applied sciences and academies of music and art. They differ in terms of their structure and purpose.

While conventional universities offer a broad range of subjects, technical universities (TU) concentrate on basic research in the engineering and scientific disciplines. In 2006 the nine leading technical universities formed the TU9 Initiative.

What sets German universities of applied sciences apart?

Highly practical in their orientation, the 249 universities of applied sciences are a distinctive feature of German higher education. Some remarkable social and technological innovations have been achieved at universities of applied sciences and at smaller and medium-sized universities. To promote the transfer of these innovations to business, the Federal Government plans to set up a German Agency for Transfer and Innovation (DATI). Up to 190 million euros has been earmarked for the "Datipilot" funding programme by 2029. The idea is to further boost the overall start-up culture at German universities.

Is research conducted at German universities?

Universities see themselves not only as teaching institutions but equally as places for research and in this sense continue to embody Humboldt's educational ideal of uniting research and teaching. The universities' primary objective is to nurture the next generation of academics and researchers, to teach academically robust specialist knowledge, and to train academics to work and research independently.

How many people in Germany enrol at university?

University education is on the rise in Germany. In 2005, 37% of young people enrolled on a university course, but by 2023 that figure had risen to around 56%. The Federal Training Assistance Act (BAföG) enables young people to complete a degree course independently of their family's financial situation. In the 2024/2025 winter semester there were a good 2.8 million students enrolled at higher education institutions. To ensure the continued and long-term quality of higher education and teaching, the Future Contract for Strengthening Studies and Teaching was adopted in 2019. This has seen federal and state governments each provide 1.88 billion euros in funding per year since 2021. In 2024 this figure was increased to 2.05 billion euros each.

What is the objective of Germany's Excellence Initiative?

With the Excellence Initiative, the Federal Government and the individual Bundesländer are giving a boost to cutting-edge research at universities. The Initiative funds Clusters of Excellence in specific fields of research as well as so-called Universities of Excellence. It follows on from the previous Excellence Initiative of 2005 to 2017, when the Federal Government and the states provided particularly outstanding research projects and facilities with funding worth a total of 4.6 billion euros. The Excellence Initiative consists of two parts. Through the Clusters of Excellence, internationally competitive fields of research at universities are funded on a project-by-project basis. These clusters facilitate interdisciplinary collaboration among academics working on a specific research objective. A total of 57 Clusters of Excellence were selected for the first round of funding, which lasts for seven years and commenced in 2019. Total funding for all Clusters of Excellence each year is worth 385 million euros.

In the second competition phase for the funding period 2026 to 2032, 70 Clusters of Excellence at 43 universities were selected and will receive total funding of 539 million euros per year.

How many Universities of Excellence are there in Germany?

Universities involved in at least two Clusters of Excellence can use the title "University of Excellence". For a period of seven years from the end of 2019, ten Universities of Excellence throughout Germany and the Berlin University Alliance, which comprises the Freie Universität, the Humboldt-Universität, the Technische Universität and the Charité University Hospital, are receiving total funding of around 148 million euros each year.

What role does internationalisation play for German universities?

German universities have a strong international focus and extensively promote international cooperation and exchange programmes for students and researchers. This boosts research, teaching and innovation and helps consolidate and expand Germany's position as an attractive place for science and business.

How many agreements are there with international partners?

The German Rectors' Conference has identified more than 37,000 international cooperation agreements with partner institutions in more than 150 countries. Many of these partnerships include programmes where students can achieve double degrees. Many higher education institutions are involved in the development of German study courses and the setting up of higher education institutions based on the German model, such as those in China, Egypt, Hungary, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Mongolia, Oman, Singapore, Vietnam and Turkey.

How many German students complete a period of study abroad?

In 2022, around 138,800 Germans studied abroad, the majority also with a view to obtaining their degree abroad. The most popular host countries were Austria, the Netherlands, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the USA. Scholarships such as those offered by the Erasmus+ programme support these valuable periods of study abroad.

A popular study destination

Why Germany is such a popular destination for students from all over the world and how many foreign-language and international degree courses are on offer.



Internationally networked and largely free: universities in Germany
© AdobeStock

Germany has long been the most popular non-English-speaking host country for international students. Around 1 in 10 of Germany's approximately 3 million students come from abroad. Unlike many other countries, students pay no or only very limited fees to study at public higher education institutions in Germany (with the exception of certain states such as Baden-Württemberg). Germany's higher education and research institutions are also very attractive for international staff: 30 percent of the researchers at the country's four main non-university research institutions come from abroad, for example.

What role does international networking play for German universities?

Networking with international partners is also very important to German higher education institutions, which are continually expanding their partnerships around the world. Germany's support for its higher education institutions includes the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) and the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, which are funded by the Federal Foreign Office. Scholarship programmes are an essential element of Germany's foreign academic and higher education policy. These provide assistance to foreign students, academics and researchers

for stays in Germany. Germany also funds higher education partnerships around the world. Over 37,000 agreements exist between higher education institutions in Germany and partners in over 150 countries.

How many international students were there in Germany in the 2023/24 winter semester and what proportion of the total student population did they represent?

379,939 international students were enrolled at German universities in the 2023/24 winter semester - a year-on-year increase of 3 percent. They accounted for 13 percent of all students in Germany (universities: 15 percent, universities of applied sciences: 11 percent).

Which countries do these international students mainly come from?

Nearly 33 percent of international students come from Asia/Pacific, followed by North Africa/Middle East at 19 percent and Western Europe at 15 percent. The predominant countries of origin are India (13 percent), China (10 percent) and Turkey (5 percent).

What is the goal of international students in Germany?

93 percent of international students are looking to graduate in Germany, while 7 percent come to Germany as exchange or visiting students without any intention of acquiring a degree.

Which degrees and subjects are most popular?

35 percent of international students in Germany are working towards a bachelor's degree, while 45 percent hope to obtain their master's. The most popular subjects are engineering (42 percent) and law, business studies and social sciences (25 percent).

Non-university research

Important pillars of science: an overview of Germany's non-university research institutions.



Excellent: German non-university research
© AdobeStock

Germany is home to some 1,000 publicly funded research institutions. Alongside universities, four major non-university research institutions in particular form the backbone of the country's [research landscape](#).

- the Max Planck Society (MPG)
- the Helmholtz Association
- the Fraunhofer-Gesellschaft
- the Leibniz Association

What does the Max Planck Society stand for?

Founded in 1948, the Max Planck Society (MPG) is the most important non-university centre of basic research in the natural sciences, life sciences, social sciences and humanities. Around 7,000 scientists, 3,400 PhD students and 3,200 guest researchers work at the 84 Max Planck institutes and research institutions, some of which are outside Germany. 57.2 percent of its scientists are non-German nationals. Since its establishment, more than 30 Nobel Prizes have been awarded to Max Planck Society researchers.

What sets the Helmholtz Association apart?

The Helmholtz Association conducts pioneering research in six main fields: energy, earth and environment, health, information, materials, and aeronautics, space and transport. With more than 46,000 employees at the 18 Helmholtz centres, including the German Aerospace Center (DLR), Helmholtz is Germany's largest research organisation. The Association is planning to set up a new centre for gerontology research.

In which fields does Fraunhofer conduct research?

The Fraunhofer-Gesellschaft has 76 institutes and research institutions across the whole country and is the largest institution for application-oriented development in Europe. Its key research areas include health and the environment, mobility and transport, and energy and fuels. With nine independent Fraunhofer affiliates in Europe, North and South America and Asia, numerous representative offices and its senior advisors, the Fraunhofer-Gesellschaft is active in many countries around the world.

What does the Leibniz Association stand for?

The Leibniz Association brings together 97 independent research institutes, with research interests ranging from the natural sciences, engineering and environmental sciences to aerospace engineering, economics, the social sciences and the humanities. An overarching focus for its 12,200 or so researchers is on transferring knowledge to policymakers, business and the general public.

Wide-ranging funding: the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft

As Europe's largest research funding association, the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) is responsible for funding science, academia and research. The DFG's headquarters are in Bonn, and it also maintains offices in India, Japan, Latin America and North America, as well as running the Sino-German Center for Research Promotion in Beijing (CDZ). It provides funding for researchers in Germany to collaborate with colleagues abroad - especially but by no means exclusively in the European Research Area.

What are non-university research institutions?

Non-university research institutions in Germany are scientific institutions that are not directly linked to universities. They pursue basic or applied research. In many cases, they are well connected internationally and collaborate with universities, businesses and political decision-makers.

How many researchers work at non-university research institutions in Germany?

Around 16,600 researchers of non-German citizenship are employed at the four largest non-university research institutions. Their number has doubled since 2012.

How many Nobel Prizes have been awarded to researchers at German non-

university research institutions to date?

To date, 34 Nobel Prizes have been awarded to researchers at German non-university research institutions.

When did researchers at a German non-university research institution last receive a Nobel Prize?

The 2023 Nobel Prize in Physics was jointly awarded to Ferenc Krausz, director of the Max Planck Institute of Quantum Optics, and two other researchers for their research on attosecond physics. An attosecond is one billionth of a billionth of a second. The movements of individual electrons can be traced using laser pulses that last just a few attoseconds.

Vibrant Hub of Knowledge

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Germany is one of the world's leading centres of science and research.
© dpa

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- RWTH Aachen University
- University of Bonn
- Dresden University of Technology
- Technical University of Munich (TUM)
- Universität Hamburg
- Heidelberg University
- University of Konstanz

Which areas of research are a particular focus for German government funding?

The Federal Government aims to use its Future Strategy Research as an effective way of consolidating resources. As part of this, it has defined key "future fields", which include:

- developing modern technologies for competitive and [climate-neutral industry](#),
- creating a sustainable agricultural and food production system,
- strengthening technological sovereignty and
- developing a modern and resilient healthcare system that makes use of the opportunities from biotech and medical processes.

Covid-19 vaccine: an outstanding example of state funding

The development of the first mRNA Covid-19 vaccine is considered a paradigm of successful state funding. The vaccine was developed by the Mainz-based firm BioNTech, whose founders, Özlem Türeci and Uğur Şahin, also teach at the University of Mainz. The state provided substantial support for vaccine development at BioNTech and other centres.

German higher education and research institutions place great importance on maintaining an international outlook. Following the "Bologna process" of European higher education reform, the majority of university courses in Germany have been restructured as bachelor's and master's degrees, which have become the international standard. Many courses, particularly at master's level, are offered in a foreign language, primarily in English.

Why German universities are attractive to international students

For many years Germany has been considered the most popular non-English-speaking country for international students. Around one in ten of Germany's approximately three million students come from abroad. Unlike many other countries, students pay no or only very limited fees to study at public higher education institutions in Germany (with the exception of certain states such as Baden-Württemberg). Germany's higher education and research institutions are also very attractive for international staff. For example, around 30% of scientists at the four major non-university research institutes come from abroad.

Which subject groups are most often chosen by international students in Germany?

The subjects chosen most often are the engineering sciences (42%) and law, economics and social sciences (25%).

How many Germans study abroad?

Nearly 140,000 Germans study abroad, with most of them also aiming to graduate abroad.

How many academics and artists of non-German citizenship are employed at universities in Germany?

Around 65,500 academics and artists of non-German citizenship are employed at universities in Germany, i.e. 15% of the total.

Which countries are international academic staff most frequently from?

The most important countries of origin of international academic staff are India (9%), China and Italy (each 7%).

Cooperation with international partners

Networking with international partners is also very important to German higher education institutions, which are continually expanding their partnerships around the world. Germany's support for its higher education institutions includes the [German Academic Exchange Service \(DAAD\)](#), and the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, which are funded by the Federal Foreign

Office. Scholarship programmes are an essential element of Germany's foreign academic and higher education policy. These provide assistance to foreign students, academics and researchers for stays in Germany. Germany also funds higher education partnerships around the world. Over 37,000 agreements exist between higher education institutions in Germany and partners in over 150 countries.

Attractive School System

Compulsory school attendance, types of school, costs of attending school: how the German school system is structured.



It costs nothing to attend a state school in Germany.
© AdobeStock

In Germany, responsibility for the school system lies mainly with the country's 16 federal states. This is why there are different school systems, curricula and types of schools across Germany. The Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany (KMK) guarantees the conformity or comparability of the education programmes and the qualifications awarded.

Which types of school are there in Germany?

In the 2024/2025 academic year, 11.4 million pupils attended the 40,000 or so general education and vocational schools, which employ nearly 870,000 teachers. Roughly nine percent of pupils in general education attend the country's 3,800 or so general private schools, while around ten percent of students in vocational education attend the roughly 2,200 vocational private schools. School attendance is compulsory for all children from the age of six for a nine-year period. At the same time, early-years education and how it connects with primary schooling is a high-priority issue in education policy. Around 20,000 whole-day schools now have a firm place in the education system. These schools are intended to improve equality of opportunity, particularly for children from educationally deprived backgrounds.

How many primary schools are there in Germany?

There are around 15,500 primary schools in Germany.

How many pupils at general education schools in Germany come from abroad?

Around 1.4 million pupils in Germany come from abroad.

What is a vocational school?

A vocational school is an educational institution that teaches students the knowledge and skills they need for a specific occupation, either as part of a programme of dual vocational training or for the purposes of purely school-based education.

How many pupils in Germany attend a vocational school?

Roughly 2.3 million pupils in Germany attend a vocational school.

How much does it cost to attend school in Germany?

It costs nothing to attend a state school in Germany. The school system is divided into three levels: primary education and secondary education levels I and II. As a rule, all children attend a primary school, which lasts from Year 1 to 4 (Years 1 to 6 in Berlin and Brandenburg). After primary school, students pursue one of three standard forms of secondary education:

- a non-selective "Hauptschule", which teaches up to level 2 qualifications (Years 5 to 9 or 10),
- a "Realschule" (Years 5 to 10) where students attain the "Mittlere Reife" (a level 2 qualification)
- or a selective grammar school (Years 5 to 12 or 13) to attain a general higher education entrance diploma, or Abitur.

Some schools provide a single form of secondary education, while others combine two or three (as in the case of comprehensive "Gesamtschulen"), making it easier to switch between different forms. The names of these types of school vary depending on the state; only grammar schools ("Gymnasium") are known as such in all states. In 2024 around 373,000 school students achieved a [higher education entrance diploma](#).

Are there schools in Germany for children with special educational needs?

Children with special educational needs can attend separate schools that are able to cater for their specific needs. Nevertheless, the aim is for it to become standard for children with and without disabilities to learn together, in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities. The Federal Government is paying particular attention to providing better educational opportunities to children and young people, regardless of their parents' social situation.

Are there German schools abroad?

The 136 German schools abroad provide an excellent education in over 70 countries. Around 85,000 students learn together at these schools, 66 percent of them being of non-German origin.

Most of the schools are privately funded, but they receive financial and staffing support from the Central Agency for German Schools Abroad (ZfA). Since 2008, the PASCH initiative ("Schools: Partners for the Future"), which is coordinated by the Federal Foreign Office, has been working with the ZfA and the Goethe-Institut to create an even larger network of German students. It connects more than 2,000 schools around the world, with over 600,000 students learning German.

Dual vocational training

Combining theory and practice - why Germany's system of dual vocational training is a role model worldwide.



In demand worldwide: Germany's system of dual vocational training gets young people into skilled jobs.
© AdobeStock

What makes Germany's dual system of education and training different is the way it combines theory and practice. Germany's low rate of youth unemployment compared to its European peers is thanks in part to this system.

The dual system of education and training differs from purely classroom-based learning that represents the entry point into working life in many countries:

- Students spend three to four days a week learning the practical elements of a profession in the workplace.
- On the other day(s), they receive specialist theoretical teaching at vocational college.
- It generally takes between two and three and a half years to complete dual vocational training, and trainees are paid during this time.

Why dual vocational training offers great opportunities in Germany

Over a million young people in Germany are training on officially recognised training programmes. In 2025, they were able to choose from 327 different careers. In 2023, around 470,900 people signed up for a new course of training in the dual system.

How many trainees are there in Germany?

Around 1.22 million people are undergoing dual vocational training in 2025.

Which professions are particularly popular?

The trade and industry sector has the highest number of trainees, namely 688,500. The second-highest number is to be found in the skilled crafts and trades, with around 337,800 trainees. Then come the freelance professions (111,000), the civil service (41,500) and agriculture (31,700).

What percentage of people who opt for dual vocational training are women?

In 2024, 36 percent (170,700) of new vocational training contracts were concluded by women and 64 percent (300,200) by men.

Vocational education in Germany is supported by many stakeholders who also ensure training is high quality. For example, chambers of commerce offer advice to firms providing on-the-job training and assess their facilities, while also organising assessments and examinations. Trade unions and employers' associations negotiate the remuneration for trainees and help define standards for professional training. The state funds and oversees the public vocational college system. It also helps unemployed and disadvantaged young people to get into training.

Great international interest in dual vocational training

The integration of theoretical knowledge and practical professional experience is in considerable demand among many companies. There is also great international interest in the system: [many countries are in the process of adopting the system of dual vocational training](#). To meet the high demand, the Federal Government has established the German Office for International Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training, or [GOVET](#) for short, at the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB).

Germany's international partnerships in dual vocational training

GOVET handles all inquiries about the German vocational training system, many of which come from abroad. As part of its work with partners around the world, the Federal Government supports partner countries with developing their own vocational training systems, thereby improving opportunities for young people to become qualified in a profession. The framework for this is the Federal Government's strategy for international cooperation on vocational education and training, which was adopted in 2013 and updated in 2019.

What does federalism mean in Germany?

Germany is a federation made up of 16 constituent states, the Länder, which have their own governments and decision-making powers.



Germany has 16 federal states with their own state governments.
© dpa

Germany is a federation. The federal government and the 16 federal states each have their own decision-making powers. The individual states are responsible for decisions relating to internal security, schools and higher education, culture and municipal administration. At the same time, the state governments implement not only their own laws but also those issued by the federal government. The governments of the states are directly involved in the federal legislative process through their representatives in the Bundesrat (the second chamber of parliament).

Why does Germany have a federal system?

Federalism in Germany is more than just a system of government. Deeply rooted in tradition, it reflects the country's decentralised cultural and economic structure. Above and beyond their political function, the federal states also embody distinct regional identities. Their key role was enshrined in the Basic Law in 1949.



How many federal states does Germany have?

Since reunification in 1990, Germany has consisted of 16 federal states; five new states were established when the German Democratic Republic (GDR) joined the Federal Republic: Brandenburg, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt and Thuringia. North Rhine-Westphalia is the state with the biggest population at around 18 million, while Bavaria is the largest in terms of surface area at around 70,540 square kilometres. The territory of three federal states is limited to a single metropolitan region: these are the "city states" of Berlin, Bremen/Bremerhaven and Hamburg.

A journey through Germany's states

Baden-Württemberg



Heidelberg is located in Baden-Württemberg, in south-western Germany.
© dpa/pa

The third-largest state is located in south-west Germany, bordering France and Switzerland. The state capital is Stuttgart. With more than eleven million inhabitants, Baden-Württemberg is famous for its holiday regions such as the Black Forest and cultural centres like Heidelberg (photo), not to mention its economic strength. Baden-Württemberg is Germany's number one export state and home to both large, internationally renowned corporations and smaller global market leaders - so-called "hidden champions".

Bavaria



Munich is the capital of Bavaria.
© Adobe/Stock

In the south-east of Germany lies the largest federal state with its panorama of the Alps to the south. Germany's highest mountain is also to be found in Bavaria: the Zugspitze. Each year, the state capital Munich (photo) hosts the world's biggest beer festival, the Oktoberfest. With a population of over 13 million, Bavaria is also home to Bayern Munich, Germany's most successful football club, and is one of the country's economically strongest regions.

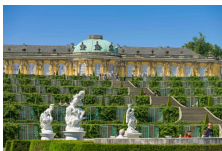
Berlin



The Reichstag, seat of the Bundestag in the German capital Berlin.
© dpa/pa

As a "city state", the capital of Germany is also a federal state in its own right - like Hamburg and Bremen. Nearly four million people live in the city, which was divided into two parts until the Berlin Wall fell in November 1989. Berlin has landmarks that are famous worldwide, such as the Brandenburg Gate, the Reichstag (photo) - the seat of the German Bundestag - and Checkpoint Charlie at the former internal German border crossing. The capital offers rich cultural diversity, including the Museum Island in the heart of the city - a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Brandenburg



Sanssouci Palace in Potsdam, the capital of the German state of Brandenburg.
© dpa/pa

This federal state surrounds the vibrant capital of Berlin. A sparsely populated region with forests

and some 3,000 lakes, it attracts numerous city dwellers at the weekend. Around 2.5 million people live in Brandenburg, more than a million fewer than in Berlin. With its world-famous Sanssouci Palace (photo), the state capital Potsdam directly borders Germany's capital.

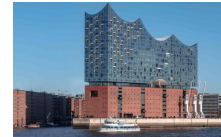
Bremen



The Bremen Town Musicians, a landmark of Bremen.
© dpa/pa

This "city state" is the smallest federal state and is made up of two cities: Bremen and Bremerhaven, located directly on the North Sea coast around 60 kilometres to the north. It has a population of some 700,000. The Bremen Town Musicians (photo) are a city landmark: a statue in the city commemorates the adventures of the donkey, cat and cockerel - the characters in the folk tale of the same name.

Hamburg



The Elbphilharmonie is located in the city-state of Hamburg.
© dpa/pa

The Hanseatic city of Hamburg is Germany's second-largest city and one of Germany's three city states. With a population of nearly two million, it is Germany's biggest seaport - a gateway to the world. A longstanding tradition of trade and commerce is still very much in evidence in this cosmopolitan northern metropolis. The Elbphilharmonie concert hall (photo) has recently become established as a new city landmark, offering concerts, fascinating architecture and spectacular views of the city and harbour.

Hesse



Frankfurt am Main is a financial centre in Hesse.
dpa/pa

After the Second World War, Hesse's finance and trade metropolis Frankfurt am Main was a possible candidate for the capital of the Federal Republic of Germany, though instead this honour went initially to Bonn and then, after reunification, to Berlin. With its skyline, stock exchange and Germany's biggest airport, Frankfurt (photo) still defines the image of Hesse to this day, though the state capital is nearby Wiesbaden. With a population of over six million, Hesse is also one of the most densely forested regions in Germany.

Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania



Schwerin Castle is located in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania.
dpa/pa

Located in the north-west of Germany and with a population of 1.6 million, the most sparsely populated federal state is a scenic paradise: with more than 2,000 lakes and 350 kilometres of Baltic coastline, it is one of the country's most popular travel destinations. Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania is also home to Germany's largest island, Usedom. The state capital is Schwerin, where the imposing Schwerin Palace (photo) with its 1,000-year history has been the seat of the state parliament since 1990.

Lower Saxony



Hanover is the capital of Lower Saxony.
dpa/pa

Germany's second-largest state in terms of surface area extends from the East Frisian islands in the North Sea such as Borkum and Norderney to the Harz mountains. With a population of some eight million, the state has an economy that is dominated by tourism and agriculture. The automotive industry is also a key factor, while important trade fairs are held in the state capital of



Hanover (photo).

North Rhine-Westphalia



Cologne is a large city in North Rhine-Westphalia.
dpa/pa

Germany's most populous state combines such diverse regions as the Ruhr, which was once defined by its coal mining industry, and the Rhineland, which features Cologne (photo) - a city of over a million inhabitants - and state capital Dusseldorf at its heart. North Rhine-Westphalia is in transition, too: in this state with a population of 18 million, research and culture are now taking the place of coal mining. Up until reunification in 1990, the city of Bonn near Cologne was the capital of the Federal Republic of Germany.

Rhineland-Palatinate



There are many wine-growing regions in Rhineland-Palatinate.
Adobe/Stock

This state in the country's south-west is the number one wine-growing state in Germany: six of Germany's 13 wine-growing regions are to be found in Rhineland-Palatinate, including the largest of these - Rhine Hesse (photo). The Romans left their mark on the region more than 2,000 years ago; nowhere else in Germany are there more Roman monuments. Rhineland-Palatinate has a population of some four million and its capital is Mainz.

Saarland



The capital of Saarland is Saarbrücken.
dpa/pa

It was not until 1957 that Saarland became the tenth federal state of the Federal Republic of



Germany, having initially been a semi-autonomous state with close ties to France after the Second World War. The state's location within the greater European SaarLorLux region, which extends across parts of Germany, France, Luxembourg and Belgium, significantly influences the lives of its nearly one million inhabitants. Saarbrücken (photo) is the state capital of Germany's smallest territorial state.

Saxony



Dresden is the capital of Saxony and attracts numerous tourists.
dpa/pa

Boasting more than 1,000 years of history, the Free State of Saxony is situated on the border to [Poland](#) and the Czech Republic. With a population of four million, the state is a key business hub in eastern Germany but also attracts numerous visitors every year to the state capital Dresden (photo) - known as "Florence on the River Elbe" - as well as to the economic and cultural metropolis of Leipzig and the Ore Mountains.

Saxony-Anhalt



Quedlinburg is located in Saxony-Anhalt and has a particularly beautiful old town.
dpa/pa

With six UNESCO [World Cultural Heritage sites](#), this state in the middle of Germany boasts one of the highest numbers of world heritage sites. These include the Bauhaus in Dessau, the memorials to Martin Luther in Eisleben and Wittenberg and the historic centre of Quedlinburg (photo). With a population of around two million, the state is also an important centre for the chemical industry and European chip production. The state capital is Magdeburg.

Schleswig-Holstein



The North Sea island of Sylt belongs to Schleswig-Holstein and is one of Germany's most popular holiday destinations.
dpa/pa

Known as the "land between the seas", Schleswig-Holstein is situated between the [North Sea](#) in the west and the Baltic Sea in the east, and borders Denmark in the north. Germany's northernmost federal state has a population of almost three million and its capital is Kiel. With islands such as Sylt (photo), the state is among the most popular holiday regions. Stretching from the Netherlands to Germany and Denmark, the Wadden sea World Heritage Site is an important landmark.

Thuringia



The famous German poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe lived in Weimar for many years.
dpa/pa

This state is geographically located at the heart of Germany and was where Goethe, Bach and Luther lived: the composer Johann Sebastian Bach was born in Eisenach, the poet [Johann Wolfgang von Goethe](#) lived for many years in Weimar (photo) and the reformer Martin Luther translated the New Testament of the Bible into German at Wartburg Castle. The state has a population of over two million and its capital is Erfurt.

Germany: a country of innovation

Germany is a nation of innovation. The foundations for this are found in its ambitious cutting-edge research and global academic networks.



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1995



1995

At the Fraunhofer Institute in Erlangen, a team headed by electrical engineer and mathematician Karlheinz Brandenburg develops the MP3 process for compressing audio data, which is nowadays standard throughout the world.



2008



2008

Nine years after the discovery of the giant magnetoresistance effect, which led to the breakthrough of gigabyte hard drives, the German Peter Grünberg and the Frenchman Albert Fert are awarded the Nobel Prize in Physics.

2012



2012

The European Patent Office honours Heidelberg physicist Josef Bille, the inventor of the eye laser, for his lifetime achievement. With almost 100 patents, Bille paved the way for present-day eye surgery using lasers.

2014



2014

Stefan Hell, a Director at the Max Planck Institute for Biophysical Chemistry, together with two US researchers receives the Nobel Prize in Chemistry for developing high resolution fluorescence microscopy.

2019



2019

The Joint Science Conference involving the Federal and state governments resulted in a resolution on a package of measures to give a definitive boost to research and teaching in Germany: With the "Future Contract for Strengthening Study and Teaching", the "Innovation in Higher Education Teaching" agreement, and the continuation of the "Pact for Research and Innovation", the donors aim to invest more than 160 billion euros over the next ten years.

2020



2020

Less than a year after the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, the USA and the EU issue initial approvals for a vaccine against the virus. The vaccine was developed by the German Biontech firm, working in collaboration with Pfizer. The vaccine saves millions of human lives.



Artificial intelligence: a key technology

With billions in investment, cutting-edge research and a growing start-up scene, Germany is driving advances in AI - in a responsible and networked manner.



Germany considers it very important to promote artificial intelligence.
© Adobe Stock

Hardly any other technology is changing the world of work, or indeed people's everyday lives, as quickly and fundamentally as artificial intelligence is (AI). That's why it is in focus, not only in German politics but also in business and research. AI programs have long been used in many companies, and new applications are being developed at universities and by nascent start-ups. The German government supports these developments with funding programmes.

How the German Federal Government is promoting AI

The German government already launched an AI strategy in 2018 aimed at continually stepping up investment in this key technology. Building on this, the Federal Ministry for Education and Research (BMBWF) presented an "Artificial Intelligence Action Plan" in November 2023 that identifies eleven central areas of action: from funding centres of AI excellence to the expansion of computing capacity.

How Germany is aiming to become a leading AI nation

Artificial intelligence (AI) plays an important role in the German government's business and technology strategy. To advance AI, the Federal Government has launched an AI offensive and is

planning substantial investment in digital infrastructure and in expanding AI capacities. The idea is to establish Germany and Europe as leading centres of AI. A wide-ranging AI offensive is planned that will include setting up an "AI gigafactory" with 100,000 high-performance graphics processing units (GPUs). GPUs can handle multiple tasks at once, allowing them to train complex AI models much more quickly and efficiently than conventional processors can. By building and expanding high performance computing and supercomputing centres, an efficient infrastructure will be made available to give universities and research institutions access to the computing capacity they require. In addition, networked cutting-edge AI centres will be established.

How Germany is investing in digital infrastructure and AI

This expansion will require huge investments in the cloud and AI infrastructure and in linking AI and robotics.

To achieve this, the Federal Government is relying on

- disruptive AI innovations (such as sector-specific AI language models),
- improved access to data,
- supercomputing capacities,
- more skilled professionals, especially women, for the IT industry.

SMEs and start-ups in particular are to be supported by specific services such as AI living labs.

In which areas of AI is Germany leading the field?

For Germany to hold a top-class position, research at universities, non-university research organisations and companies is vital. According to the Action Plan, Germany and Europe are world leaders in this field. This is based on key indicators such as the number of AI publications and citations, and the country's contributions to the development of open-source AI software: in these terms, Germany regularly ranks among the best five or six nations.

One outstanding example of the connection between basic and applied research is Cyber Valley in Stuttgart and Tübingen, Europe's leading centre for excellent research and innovation in artificial intelligence and state-of-the-art robotics. Tech companies work closely with universities and research institutions there.

What form European cooperation in the field of AI is taking

To position Germany at the forefront of artificial intelligence in the long term, the government is investing among other things in centres of AI excellence where leading research institutions collaborate on artificial intelligence. One central role is played by the German Research Center (DFKI) for Artificial Intelligence, which is one of the most important centres of excellence in the world of international science.

Germany is also focusing on international cooperation, especially with European states. "European and international networking is to become a hallmark of the German AI ecosystem," states the AI Action Plan.

How big is Germany's AI start-up scene?

The German start-up scene is growing in the area of AI, the number of such firms soaring by 35 percent year-on-year in 2024. What is particularly interesting are their close ties with science: more than 40 percent of young companies are scientific spin-offs. By way of comparison: they account for just shy of 2.5 percent of all German start-ups. In terms of AI patents, Germany is

regularly among the world's top ten.

A number of start-ups have also achieved international renown. The Cologne-based AI company DeepL is a world leader with its translation programs. Another pioneer is the Heidelberg start-up Aleph Alpha, whose Luminous language model is internationally regarded despite huge competition. With its models, the company has specialised in applications in public administration and industry.

In Heilbronn in the southwest of Germany, a globally regarded AI hotspot is to be created over the next few years. Start-ups, science and the public sector are to collaborate at the Innovation Park Artificial Intelligence there. Among the things to be set up there is an international AI campus.

Ethics and AI – what form Germany's commitment takes

Germany wants to take advantage of the opportunities offered by AI without losing sight of its consequences and possible risks. In this respect, the AI Action Plan states: "AI should be integrated into our society and our legal, value and institutional systems responsibly. This requires a broad societal debate." The German Ethics Council, which advises the German government, warns against uncritical enthusiasm. In its published opinion "Humans and Machines", the Council presents not only the opportunities but also the risks. When presenting it in March 2023, the Council stressed: "Artificial intelligence must not diminish human flourishing."



Ambitious Cutting-Edge Research

Why Germany is one of the world's most innovative economies.



Mobility of the future - one of the fields in which researchers from Germany are active, often with partners from all over the world.

© Fraunhofer IGCV with Airbus

In 2023, spending on research accounted for 3.1% of Germany's GDP. The intention is for this to rise to 3.5% by 2030. This puts Germany among a leading group of nations that spend more than 3% of GDP on research and development (R&D). Germany also ranks tenth internationally among the world's most research-intensive economies. In 2023, spending on R&D in Germany amounted to just under 130 billion euros. Of this total,

- 88.7 billion euros was spent by the business sector,
- 22.4 billion was spent by higher education institutions, and
- 18.6 billion euros was spent by non-university, public and publicly funded research institutions.

The strength of cutting-edge research in Germany is reflected in the number of publications produced by researchers. In the 2025 "Nature Index", which evaluates the publication performance of research and higher education institutions, Germany was ranked highest in Europe. Against its international competitors, Germany is ranked third, behind the front runners China and the US.

What are the goals of the "Future Research and Innovation Strategy"?

Since 2023, the German government's "Future Research and Innovation Strategy" has been the central document guiding German research and innovation policy. It replaces the "High-Tech



Strategy" that was previously in place and focuses more on an innovation policy that addresses specific societal challenges. The goal is to combine scientific excellence with social impact in an even more targeted manner and to steer innovation processes across the different ministries. To this end, the Future Strategy defines six priority goals, strengthens strategic dialogue between policymakers, science, business and civil society and makes innovation more impact-oriented:

1. enabling a resource-efficient, circular economy-based and competitive industry and sustainable mobility
2. spearheading climate protection, climate adjustment, food security and the preservation of biodiversity
3. improving health for everyone
4. securing Germany's and Europe's digital and technological sovereignty and harnessing the potential of digitalisation
5. strengthening astronautics, exploring, protecting and sustainably using space and oceans
6. strengthening social resilience, diversity and cohesion

This is intended to ensure that Germany remains internationally competitive, while at the same time actively shaping key future issues.

Non-university research

Important pillars of science: an overview of Germany's non-university research institutions.



Excellent: German non-university research
© AdobeStock

Germany is home to some 1,000 publicly funded research institutions. Alongside universities, four major non-university research institutions in particular form the backbone of the country's research landscape.

- the Max Planck Society (MPG)
- the Helmholtz Association
- the Fraunhofer-Gesellschaft
- the Leibniz Association

What does the Max Planck Society stand for?

Founded in 1948, the Max Planck Society (MPG) is the most important non-university centre of basic research in the natural sciences, life sciences, social sciences and humanities. Around 7,000 scientists, 3,400 PhD students and 3,200 guest researchers work at the 84 Max Planck institutes and research institutions, some of which are outside Germany. 57.2 percent of its scientists are non-German nationals. Since its establishment, more than 30 Nobel Prizes have been awarded to Max Planck Society researchers.

What sets the Helmholtz Association apart?

The Helmholtz Association conducts pioneering research in six main fields: energy, earth and environment, health, information, materials, and aeronautics, space and transport. With more than 46,000 employees at the 18 Helmholtz centres, including the German Aerospace Center (DLR), Helmholtz is Germany's largest research organisation. The Association is planning to set up a new centre for gerontology research.

In which fields does Fraunhofer conduct research?

The Fraunhofer-Gesellschaft has 76 institutes and research institutions across the whole country and is the largest institution for application-oriented development in Europe. Its key research areas include health and the environment, mobility and transport, and energy and fuels. With nine independent Fraunhofer affiliates in Europe, North and South America and Asia, numerous representative offices and its senior advisors, the Fraunhofer-Gesellschaft is active in many countries around the world.

What does the Leibniz Association stand for?

The Leibniz Association brings together 97 independent research institutes, with research interests ranging from the natural sciences, engineering and environmental sciences to aerospace engineering, economics, the social sciences and the humanities. An overarching focus for its 12,200 or so researchers is on transferring knowledge to policymakers, business and the general public.

Wide-ranging funding: the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft

As Europe's largest research funding association, the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) is responsible for funding science, academia and research. The DFG's headquarters are in Bonn, and it also maintains offices in India, Japan, Latin America and North America, as well as running the Sino-German Center for Research Promotion in Beijing (CDZ). It provides funding for researchers in Germany to collaborate with colleagues abroad - especially but by no means exclusively in the European Research Area.

What are non-university research institutions?

Non-university research institutions in Germany are scientific institutions that are not directly linked to universities. They pursue basic or applied research. In many cases, they are well connected internationally and collaborate with universities, businesses and political decision-makers.

How many researchers work at non-university research institutions in Germany?

Around 16,600 researchers of non-German citizenship are employed at the four largest non-university research institutions. Their number has doubled since 2012.

How many Nobel Prizes have been awarded to researchers at German non-

university research institutions to date?

To date, 34 Nobel Prizes have been awarded to researchers at German non-university research institutions.

When did researchers at a German non-university research institution last receive a Nobel Prize?

The 2023 Nobel Prize in Physics was jointly awarded to Ferenc Krausz, director of the Max Planck Institute of Quantum Optics, and two other researchers for their research on attosecond physics. An attosecond is one billionth of a billionth of a second. The movements of individual electrons can be traced using laser pulses that last just a few attoseconds.

Making a difference through science diplomacy

Why academic mobility and academic partnerships are becoming ever more important, including as part of German foreign policy.



Germany is committed to international cooperation in science and academia.
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Academic mobility and academic partnerships are becoming ever more important, including as part of a sustainable [German foreign policy](#). [German](#) science diplomacy is an active force in shaping these networks and campaigns for the freedom of academia and research around the world. Ultimately, the only way to overcome global challenges such as peace, climate change and pandemics is by working together with international partners.

How many international students are enrolled at universities in Germany?

In the 2023/24 winter semester, 379,939 international students were enrolled at universities in Germany - that's 13 percent of all students in Germany.

In which host countries are German students most likely to be found?

The most popular host countries are Austria, the Netherlands, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the USA.

How many academics and artists of non-German citizenship are employed at universities in Germany?

Roughly 65,500 academics and artists of non-German citizenship were employed at universities in Germany in 2023.

How does Germany support young talents worldwide?

Scholarship programmes form a key plank of German science and higher education policy. Such scholarships provide funding for foreign students and researchers to visit Germany. For example, the [German Academic Exchange Service](#) (DAAD) and Alexander von Humboldt Foundation award scholarships and fund academic programmes. In this context they work closely together with German diplomatic missions and develop funding projects such as the "Leadership for Africa" scholarship programme, which enables talented young students from countries that take in high numbers of refugees to do a master's degree course in Germany.

Dual degree programmes and binational universities

Besides such scholarship programmes, Germany also funds higher education partnerships around the world. The Higher Education Compass lists around 37,000 cooperative projects with over 5,400 partner universities in more than 150 countries. Such cooperation agreements have also led to dual degree courses and binational universities abroad, e.g.

- the Kazakh-German University in Almaty,
- the German University in Cairo or
- the Turkish-German University in Istanbul.

Beacons of German academic cooperation with partner countries include the DAAD's Global Centres for Climate and Environment and Centres of Excellence, and the Humboldt Research Hubs in Africa. These centres serve as platforms for academics from Germany and other countries to share ideas and collaborate on global challenges, with a particular focus on working with academics from the Global South.

How does Germany promote academic freedom?

Academic protection programmes are a major priority for German science diplomacy. One example is the Philipp Schwartz Initiative, which has been administered by the Humboldt Foundation since 2015. It is a special programme to help at-risk academics and researchers to assimilate and integrate in Germany. The Federal Government also acknowledges its key responsibility to give young people living through crises and in conflict zones the prospect of gaining academic and scientific training. Germany provides support and services to refugees around the world. This eases the burden on those countries that are the first port of call for refugees, while also giving refugees the prospect of finding employment and reducing secondary migration. For more than 30 years the Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative (DAFI), which is funded by the Federal Foreign Office, has worked with the UNHCR to help refugees access higher education in their countries of first arrival.

Germany – research and innovation hub

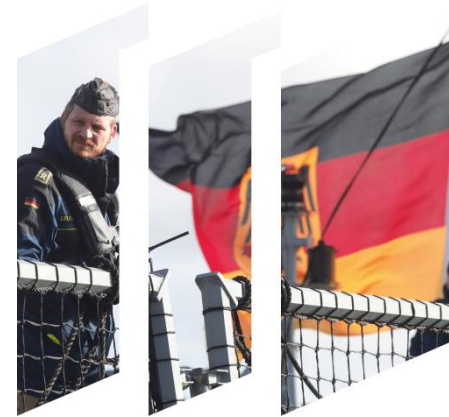
Germany is a high-tech nation, so promoting international partnerships is an essential element of all strategic future planning. As a “shop window” and long-term presence for German academic and scientific organisations, the German Centres for Research and Innovation (DWIH) work in cities such as

- New Delhi,
- New York,
- Tokyo,
- São Paulo and
- San Francisco

to promote and network on behalf of Germany as a nation of innovation.

Peace and security

Together with its partners, Germany champions peace, security, democracy, and human rights the world over.



© dpa

How does Germany assume international responsibility?

Germany relies on international cooperation and campaigns with its partners for security, freedom and prosperity.



Human rights are the foundation of German foreign policy.
© picture alliance/dpa

What are the core objectives of German foreign policy?

Being the world's third-largest economy and largest member state of the European Union (EU), Germany's foreign policy is oriented towards the interests of its citizens. At the same time, Germany is fully aware of its European and international responsibility. In its foreign, security and defence policy, the Federal Government seeks close cooperation with its democratic partners to defend shared values and tackle global challenges. A key pillar of this is the EU as a project to promote peace and freedom, where Germany plays an active role in shaping the Union's future.

The primary objective of German foreign policy is to preserve security, freedom and prosperity. One of its guiding principles is comprehensive integration into the structures of multilateral cooperation. In concrete terms, this means forging constructive partnerships with EU member states and transatlantic partners, campaigning for Israel's right to exist, playing an active and committed role in the United Nations (UN) and Council of Europe, and strengthening the European security architecture within the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE).

With which countries does Germany cultivate particularly close partnerships?

Germany's partnership with France is historically close. Because many European integration initiatives are the result of Franco-German cooperation, the two neighbours are seen as the engine of the European Union. The Weimar Triangle is an important forum for productive cooperation between Germany, France and Poland.

Being the largest European countries, Germany, France and the United Kingdom are known as the E3 and engage in intensive and cooperative exchange to coordinate their foreign policy goals. The UK-German Friendship Treaty signed in July 2025 additionally strengthens the close ties between Germany and the United Kingdom.

In addition, Germany is firmly anchored in a transatlantic alliance with the USA - a relationship that has evolved over decades.

How is Germany connected internationally?

Germany is well connected in the international political arena. It maintains diplomatic relations with almost 200 countries and is a member of a range of multinational organisations and informal coordination groups such as the Group of Seven (G7).

Who is the German foreign minister?

Since May 2025, Johann Wadephul (CDU) has been the country's foreign minister. Around 12,000 people work for the Foreign Service, which has its headquarters in Berlin. In total, Germany maintains 225 diplomatic missions around the world.

How does Germany support human rights?

Human rights are the foundation of German foreign policy. Article 1 of the Basic Law states that "Human dignity shall be inviolable". Germany therefore works with partners around the world to achieve this. This is not just a moral obligation, it is also in Germany's foreign policy interests, as preserving human rights contributes to peace and stable development.

How does Germany contribute to resolving international conflicts?

Embedded in a multilateral framework, Germany has accepted the increased responsibility that came about following reunification in 1990: through wide-ranging and ever-increasing efforts, Germany now contributes to stabilising crisis regions and finding political solutions to conflicts. It also helps maintain peacekeeping structures, as well as playing a role in crisis management by contributing personnel to UN peace missions.

Ever since Russia began its illegal war of aggression against Ukraine, Germany has been one of Ukraine's biggest supporters in defending its sovereignty.

How does Germany provide humanitarian assistance?

Germany also provides humanitarian assistance in crises, conflicts and natural disasters to help people in acute distress. Germany also works with UN organisations, the Red Cross and Red Crescent organisations, and NGOs. Germany aligns its development activities with the sustainable

development goals set down in the United Nations' Agenda 2030. The 17 goals include combating hunger and poverty, promoting climate protection and achieving gender equality.

Fostering sustainable development

The sustainable development of all countries is the basis for a peaceful future. What Germany is doing to promote this.



Germany works with its partners to promote sustainable ecological development.
© AdobeStock

German development policy is a cornerstone of a global structural and peace policy, helping improve living conditions in partner countries. It aims to defeat hunger and poverty around the world and to strengthen democracy and the rule of law. Germany's development policy follows the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development, which was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 2015. At its heart are 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) on three levels:

- social
- economic
- environmental

The SDGs range from eradicating hunger and ensuring equal access to education for all, to taking climate action and promoting peace.

The Federal Government is a trusted and robust partner when it comes to implementing the development agenda. As one of the largest providers of funding for public development work, Germany is taking responsibility by actively shaping global partnerships. In 2024, Germany made

around 30 billion euros available to support developing countries. Support for projects in partner countries is provided by GIZ (the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit), the KfW banking group and other organisations.

Which areas does German development policy focus on?

In the years after the Second World War, Germany itself received billions of dollars of aid from the USA's Marshall Plan. For decades it has implemented an active development policy and in 1961 became the first country in Europe to establish a Ministry for Development. German policy prioritises promoting ways for people to help themselves, acting as part of a broad partnership that includes members of the public, private enterprise, and state and civil society organisations as well as governments. The Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) sees its role as a ministry of transformation, promoting the global transition to a sustainable, climate- and environmentally friendly economic system, while at the same time strengthening peace, freedom and human rights. Significant aspects of German development policy are:

- combating hunger and poverty,
- protecting the climate and species diversity,
- health
- education,
- fair supply chains,
- the use of digitalisation and technology transfer,
- boosting private investment to promote sustainable development worldwide.

What is Germany doing to combat hunger?

The global fight against hunger remains a key challenge. In 2024, Germany was the second-largest donor to the World Food Programme (WFP) of the United Nations. The Federal Government provided the programme with around 900 million euros. In this context, Germany is committed to humanitarian assistance following disasters and also funds long-term development programmes.



How does Germany protect human rights?

The respect of human rights is enshrined in the Basic Law. On the global level, too, Germany is committed to protecting basic freedoms.



The protection of human rights is enshrined in the German constitution.
© dpa

How are human rights enshrined in the German constitution, the Basic Law?

"Human dignity shall be inviolable. To respect and protect it shall be the duty of all state authority." This is the clear duty imposed by Article 1 of the Basic Law, in which Germany has committed itself to "inviolable and inalienable human rights" as "the basis of every community, of peace and of justice in the world."

What role do human rights play in Germany's international relations?

The protection and strengthening of human rights play a particular role in the context of foreign policy and international relations, as systematic human rights violations are often the first thing that happens in conflicts and crises. As a member of the Council of Europe, Germany works with



partners in the European Union and the United Nations to protect and improve human rights standards around the world.

How is Germany involved in promoting human rights at the United Nations?

Germany is a signatory to all the major UN human rights conventions and their supplementary protocols. These conventions allowed states to create a comprehensive system of treaties to protect human rights, based on the Charter of the United Nations and the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Germany has ratified many legally binding conventions, including the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Convention Against Torture, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and the Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.

German law enshrines the rights and obligations of the state that are defined in the treaties. At the same time, the Federal Government's activities around the world include promoting protection from discrimination and racism. It also campaigns against the death penalty and calls for greater political participation and the protection of rights. Germany defends freedoms of religion and conscience, combats human trafficking and pushes for the enforcement of rights to habitation, clean drinking water and sanitation, for example. The German government is also committed to upholding the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans- and intergender and other queer people (LGBTIQ+). Another current priority of German rights policy is protecting human rights in the digital age. Within the United Nations, the Federal Government is actively supporting the work of the UN Human Rights Council and campaigning to further strengthen the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

How does Germany promote human rights in the Council of Europe?

When it comes to protecting and promoting human rights, the rule of law and democracy across the whole of Europe, Germany is one of the most active members of the Council of Europe. There are 46 members of the Council, including the 27 members of the European Union. Through groundbreaking agreements and above all the European Convention on Human Rights, the Council of Europe is helping develop a common European legal space. It also monitors observance of binding common standards and values in the continent of Europe. The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), which is based in Strasbourg in France, is a core institution by which the Council can enforce these rights. All citizens of member states can appeal to the ECHR against violations of rights protected by the Human Rights Convention. Germany strongly advocates for all state parties to implement the court's decisions. The International Court of Justice (ICJ) in the Hague in the Netherlands is responsible for punishing serious crimes under international law such as war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide. Germany supports universal recognition of the ICJ.

Commitment to peace and security

Germany participates widely in multilateral cooperation and promotes democracy, and human rights all over the world.



Germany's multilateral links - for example in the United Nations - form the basis for the deployment of the Bundeswehr.
© Getty Images

What is the basis for Germany's commitment to peace and security?

Germany's global commitment to peace and security, promoting human rights and protecting minorities are unchanging foundations of its foreign policy and are rooted in the Basic Law. On the one hand, Germany accepts this duty out of recognition of its historical responsibilities. On the other hand, it is in Germany's interest to prevent crises and manage conflicts, as the effects of crises may be felt around the world, including in Germany. Russia's illegal war of aggression against Ukraine gravely undermines international security and stability in Europe.

Germany's multilateral links form the basis for its foreign policy activity. For example, deployments of the Bundeswehr, the German armed forces, always take place within systems of collective defence or security. Above all, these involve international organisations such as the [United Nations](#) (UN), the [European Union](#) (EU) or the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). The Bundestag must also approve deployment of the Bundeswehr abroad. For this reason, the German armed forces are considered a parliamentary military force.

Why does Germany place an emphasis on crisis prevention?

The German government always prioritises civilian measures, the primary goal being to identify crises and conflicts at an early stage and to defuse them before they can escalate. Since 2017, the guidelines on “Preventing Crises, Resolving Conflicts, Building Peace” drawn up under the auspices of the Federal Foreign Office have underpinned activities aimed at peace, security, freedom and prosperity.

An increasing focus is on new [threats](#) to global security in [cyberspace](#). The German government is addressing these wide-ranging challenges with a National Security Strategy based on a comprehensive definition of security that encompasses all aspects of human security.

What is the National Security Council?

A National Security Council established in 2025 will have the following tasks:

- coordinating the main issues relating to an integrated security policy
- providing strategic development and foresight
- jointly assessing situations
- acting as the body for joint political will formation

A Federal Government National Crisis Unit spanning federal, state and ministerial levels and a National Situation Centre at the Federal Chancellery will ensure that crises are tackled holistically.

How does Germany assume responsibility in NATO?

Ever since the formation of the Bundeswehr in 1955, Germany has been integrated into NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) both politically and militarily. Germany's place at the heart of the north Atlantic alliance is part of the DNA of German foreign policy. Collective defence is the most important principle of the alliance: its member states pledge to protect one another and to respond jointly in the event of a conflict. [NATO](#) currently has 32 member states.

The [Bundeswehr](#) is a major provider of NATO troops, taking part in international missions and alliance defence activities. For example, Germany has contributed to the NATO KFOR security force in Kosovo since 1999. In Lithuania, German armed forces are also taking a leading role as a “framework nation” to help secure NATO's eastern frontier. This is part of the enhanced Forward Presence mission (eFP), which contributes to safeguarding Eastern European states. Germany is supporting the close cooperation between NATO and the European Union.

How much does Germany spend on defence?

In the context of Russia's illegal war of aggression against Ukraine, the German government set up a special fund for the Bundeswehr worth 100 billion euros in 2022. Germany provides Ukraine with financial support, weapons and humanitarian assistance. The German government also welcomes the decision taken by NATO in June 2025 to increase member states' defence expenditure to 5 percent of their respective GDP by 2035 at the latest – with 3.5 percent to go on direct military spending and 1.5 percent on military infrastructure. Germany is thus modernising the equipment used by the [Bundeswehr](#) and strengthening its national defences and those of its allies so that the Bundeswehr can make a key contribution to NATO's deterrence and defence capabilities. The aim is also to ensure that Germany and Europe can guarantee their own security to a much greater extent.

What role does Germany play as a member of the United Nations?

Since joining the United Nations in 1973, Germany has been a committed, reliable and valued member of this global organisation. It is also the fourth-largest contributor to the UN general budget. In 2024, Germany provided around 219 million US dollars, accounting for 6.1 percent of the budget. Germany is likewise the fourth-largest contributor to the budgets of the individual peacekeeping missions, which it supports in a variety of ways - including stabilisation measures, diplomatic mediation efforts and post-crisis management. It also makes troops, police officers and highly qualified personnel available to the missions.

Does the United Nations have a representation in Germany?

The United Nations (UN) has numerous branches in Germany. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) opened a regional office in Bonn in 1951. Today there are around 30 UN organisations in Germany, especially on the UN Campus in Bonn, which is home to more than 20 institutions.

In which other peace organisations is Germany active?

Another essential pillar upholding peace and security is the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), which Germany supports in intensive and varied ways.

The Center for International Peace Operations (ZIF) established by the Federal Government and the Bundestag in 2002 also works to help prevent crises and consolidate peace around the world. Working on behalf of the Federal Foreign Office, the ZIF trains civilian experts and supplies personnel for peace and election observer missions. Over the course of 20 years, it has sent out around 6,000 of these people to monitor elections.

How does Germany promote disarmament and arms control?

Germany is making an important contribution to global security through its commitment to disarmament and arms control. The Federal Government is working towards a world free of nuclear weapons, based on the foundation of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). In addition, Germany is campaigning to promote the universality and enforcement of international treaties and agreements relevant to this area, such as the Chemical Weapons Convention, which codifies rules prohibiting the use of chemical weapons. Germany is also actively involved in promoting the global ban on mines and cluster munitions. Specifically the Federal Government is supporting humanitarian efforts to clear mines and weapons and to care for victims.

How does Germany provide humanitarian assistance?

Germany helps people in need worldwide as a result of crises or natural disasters, regardless of their causes.



The German Federal Government supports people in need worldwide.
© AktionDeutschlandHilft/ThorstenThor

How are human rights and humanitarian assistance enshrined in German policymaking?

The office of the Commissioner for Human Rights Policy and Humanitarian Assistance has been part of the Federal Foreign Office since 1998. The commissioners are the primary point of contact for matters of human rights protection. They are active internationally as members of EU and OSCE committees, the Council of Europe and the United Nations (UN). They also hold an important position when it comes to involving civil society organisations and groups in human rights policy. Internally their role is as independent advisors, supporting relevant processes across the whole Federal Government.

At a parliamentary level, German human rights policy has been supported and overseen - likewise since 1998 - by the Committee for Human Rights and Humanitarian Assistance of the German Bundestag. The German Institute for Human Rights was established in Berlin in 2001 as a state-funded but still independent office. Its role as the national human rights institution is to contribute to promoting and protecting human rights in Germany and abroad in accordance with

the Paris Principles of the United Nations.

How does Germany help people in dire need?

The Federal Government provides humanitarian assistance to support people around the world who are in distress due to natural disasters, armed conflicts or other crises or conflicts, and who are consequently at specific risk. Aid is provided regardless of the cause of the hardship. Humanitarian assistance is an expression of ethical responsibility and a sign of solidarity with those in need. It is targeted at the needs of those in distress and is based on the humanitarian principles of benevolence, neutrality, impartiality and independence.

Around the world, Germany takes responsibility for those in need and is an active campaigner for a stronger and better developed international humanitarian system. This can be seen from Germany's actual financial commitment – the Federal Republic is the world's second largest state donor of humanitarian aid. The Federal Government made a total of 2.25 billion euros available in 2024, working closely with the various aid organisations of the United Nations (UN) in particular. The Federal Government is also campaigning to make the system of humanitarian assistance more efficient and effective.

Besides the UN organisations, key partners are the International Red Cross and Red Crescent movements and other NGOs. Support is provided above all for activities in the areas of food security, health, mine and explosive ordnance clearance, water supply and sanitation, accommodation, protection and disaster prevention. Many projects address several of these areas simultaneously.

Through the Federal Foreign Office Strategy for Humanitarian Assistance Abroad that it published in September 2024, Germany's aim is to make its engagement effective and efficient, even under difficult conditions. Despite growing challenges and declining resources, Germany remains a central actor in international aid.

Climate and energy

Climate action is a top priority in Germany. The Federal Government aims to be a driving force in the energy transformation both at home and abroad, supporting the expansion of renewable energy sources.



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1976



1976
The then German Ministry of Research resolves to build a 100-metre-high large wind power plant (Growian) in north Germany. However, the first experiment with wind power fails and Growian is torn down in 1988.

1987



1987
At Kaiser Wilhelm Koog on the west coast of Schleswig - Holstein, the first German windfarm goes turnkey. Since then, 32 wind turbines have been transforming North Sea wind into electrical power.

1991



1991
The Electricity Feed-In Act regulates the obligation for power utilities to purchase electrical energy from regenerative transformation processes and sets fixed tariffs for the remuneration thereof.

2000



2000
The Renewable Energy Sources Act (EEG) comes into force. Among other things, it lays the legal basis for prioritising renewable sources when feeding electricity into the national grid.

2011



2011
After the nuclear reactor disaster in Fukushima the German Federal cabinet adopts parameters for energy policy: the exit from nuclear power is to be achieved step by step by 2022 and energy supplies placed on an eco-friendly footing.

2019



2019
In December, the Climate Protection Programme 2030 comes into force, with the help of which the government hopes to achieve climate goals in a way that is both economically sustainable and socially equitable. The core elements of this are the German Climate Protection Act and the new CO2 pricing system for transport and heating applicable from 2021.



2022



2022

The German car industry boosts investments in electric mobility. In July 2022, 80 electric vehicle models made by German manufacturers were available. The Federal Government provides wide-ranging support for the use of electric vehicles. Approval was granted for the millionth electric car in early March 2023.

2024



2024

The law on heat planning and decarbonisation of heating networks comes into force.

Climate policy pioneer

Climate protection is given high priority: how Germany is pushing forward with the expansion of renewable energies worldwide.



Protecting the climate and the environment plays an important role in Germany.
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Germany aims to become a climate-neutral industrial nation by 2045. This puts the Federal Republic at the forefront of international efforts to combat the [climate crisis](#). The planned energy transition is key to success, involving a rapid shift from fossil fuels to renewables. Germany has already phased out nuclear power, the last three German nuclear power plants having been shut down in 2023. It has also decided to phase out coal-fired electricity generation by 2038 at the latest.

Germany's climate policy is guided by:

- the UNFCCC,
- the 2015 Paris Agreement,
- the 2030 Agenda and
- the principle of climate justice.

Under the Paris Agreement, the international community set itself the target of keeping global warming well below two degrees Celsius and below 1.5 degrees if possible. The Federal Government is consistently working towards this climate protection target. Protecting nature and the environment have also been high on the agenda in Germany for decades.



What does the German climate protection law stipulate?

Explicit guidelines for climate protection have been set down in law since May 2021. The law requires Germany to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by at least 65% compared to 1990 levels by 2030. This figure is to reach 88% by 2040 and by 2045 Germany must ultimately achieve greenhouse gas neutrality. This means there is a balance between the generation of greenhouse gas emissions and their removal from the atmosphere.

There have already been substantial cuts to greenhouse gas emissions in Germany since 1990. By 2024 emissions were down by around 48.2% to 649 million tonnes. However, this figure must be reduced to 438 million tonnes at the most by 2030.

CLEAR CLIMATE ACTION GOALS

Germany aims to become a climate-neutral industrial nation by 2045.

What is the current status of the energy transition?

The energy transition is the defining project of this century and the Federal Government intends to make decisive progress this decade. By 2030, 80% of Germany's energy needs will have to be met by renewable sources such as wind or solar power. The original plan was to phase out coal by 2038 at the latest, but now this goal is ideally to be achieved significantly sooner. Coal-fired electricity generation is considered one of the most serious causes of harmful CO₂ emissions.

Security and economic policy concerns make it necessary to implement the energy transition as quickly as possible. The Federal Government intends to use measures such as speeding up planning and approval procedures for solar and wind power facilities to support the restructuring of energy supplies.

EXPANDING RENEWABLE ENERGY

Renewable energy has greatly increased as a proportion of gross electricity consumption since 2000.

How Germany is boosting climate protection internationally

Why is Germany committed to global cooperation on climate protection?

The target of limiting temperature rises can only be achieved if the international community works together. Developing countries that do not have the necessary financial resources must be supported accordingly.

Which role does the European Union play in this?

With the EU "Green Deal", Europe aims to become the first climate-neutral continent by 2050. To this end, Germany's support includes reforms to EU emissions trading and a CO₂ price escalator, which will incentivise climate protection.

Which partnerships does Germany have outside Europe?

Germany supports partner countries worldwide through bilateral climate and development partnerships, and through the G7 Just Energy Transition Partnerships (JETPs). In addition, Germany is making around 5.7 billion euros available for climate protection and climate adaptation in developing countries in 2023.

Protecting the environment - a national objective

Germany is also committed to improving protection for the natural world and biodiversity, both at home and internationally. Since 1994, the Basic Law has required the state to protect the natural environment. The Action Plan on Nature-based Solutions for Climate and Biodiversity is one way the Federal Government is boosting efforts to maintain biodiversity (the diversity of genes, species and natural habitats). A total of 3.5 billion euros is available until 2027 for the programme, which aims to help restore natural ecosystems such as forests, meadows and moorland.

Germany is also actively engaged in promoting species protection, such as under the Washington Convention. The Convention protects endangered plant and animal species from excessive exploitation by international trade. Around the world over a million species are threatened with extinction, with many at risk of dying out in the next few decades.

For the mobility of the future

Transforming the transport system is an essential element of achieving climate protection goals in Germany and around the world.



A hydrogen-powered tram being tested.
© dpa

Transforming the transport system is an essential element of achieving climate protection goals in Germany and around the world. For this to happen, there will need to be substantial reductions to harmful emissions from the transport sector in the 2020s. The Federal Government therefore wants to encourage work on alternative fuels and expand the rail and cycling infrastructure. The long-term goal is to completely decarbonise the transport sector.

Getting more electric cars onto the roads

In 2025, there were around 1.6 million electric cars in Germany. The Federal Government is supporting the expansion of electric mobility. At the same time, the charging station infrastructure is being expanded. Germany is cooperating with its EU partners on this: from 2035, it will no longer be possible to register a new petrol or diesel car anywhere in the EU. The Federal Government also wants Germany to become the leading market for driverless vehicles and to this end is working with the federal states to develop model regions.

Promoting battery cell manufacturing

Battery cell manufacturing is considered a key industry for electrical transportation, as powerful batteries are needed to allow electric cars to drive long distances and charge quickly. The Federal Government intends to make Germany a "Centre for Battery Research, Manufacture and

Recycling". Germany is working closely with other EU partners under the aegis of Important Projects of Common European Interest (IPCEI) to promote battery cell manufacturing, with numerous German firms taking part. Germany will invest over 13 billion euros by 2030 through IPCEI projects alone, while around 3 billion euros has been allocated to expand battery cell production for the period up to 2031.

National hydrogen strategy

Why does Germany have a National Hydrogen Strategy?

The use of hydrogen and its derivatives will play a key role in decarbonisation efforts, especially when it comes to the transformation of the energy, transport and industrial sectors that will be taking place by 2030.

Where can hydrogen be used?

In all cases where electrification is not appropriate, for example in the chemical and steel industry, for heavy-duty commercial vehicles and, increasingly, in aviation and shipping.

What are the goals of the National Hydrogen Strategy?

The National Hydrogen Strategy, which was adopted by the Federal Government in 2020 and continued in 2023, aims among other things to accelerate the market ramp-up of hydrogen, its derivatives and application technologies. In addition, hydrogen and its derivatives are to be made available in sufficient quantities and an efficient hydrogen infrastructure built up.

Expanding rail and cycle transport

Railways are also to play an important role in tomorrow's mobility. The Federal Government therefore wants to step up investment in the rail network. Cycling, as an integral form of sustainable mobility, is also to be encouraged.

Innovative Force behind Climate Cooperation

What role Germany plays in international climate policy and how it advocates climate cooperation worldwide.



The United Nations Climate Change Secretariat in Bonn
© dpa

The climate crisis requires global cooperation because no state or region can overcome this challenge on its own. For decades Germany has been campaigning for climate action, including at an international level.

What role does Germany play at the world climate conferences?

The COP world climate conferences held under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) are a key lever in international climate policy. Germany was a driving force behind the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro and the 1997 Kyoto Protocol. The 2015 Paris Agreement, which saw all states committing themselves for the first time by law to drawing up and implementing Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), was a major breakthrough. The international community has also set itself the goal of keeping the rise in global temperatures to well below 2°C and to below 1.5°C if possible.

Active support of the IPCC

Germany wants to achieve the targets set out in the agreement by pursuing an active climate policy. Within the framework of the Petersberg Climate Dialogue, for example, the Federal Government brings together high-ranking state representatives from all over the world in Germany each year to pave the way for successful negotiations at the world climate conferences. It also actively supports the work of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), whose reports summarise and evaluate the current state of global [climate research](#), laying an important foundation for science-based climate policy.

How does Germany support developing countries with climate action?

Germany acknowledges its responsibility to help developing countries implement climate protection and adaptation measures. Industrial nations have pledged to mobilise 100 billion US dollars each year towards this end. The target was increased at the COP 29 world climate conference in Baku in 2024, and is set to rise to 300 billion US dollars by 2035. In 2023, Germany contributed around 5.7 billion euros from its budget. Germany is also a driving force behind climate partnerships with other countries. For example, it is working with states through the NDC partnership, which was set up in 2016, to help them achieve their national climate protection goals.

Germany also used its G7 Presidency in 2022 to campaign for international cooperation on climate action. At its instigation, the G7 nations agreed to set up a Climate Club which will effectively be open to all countries. In addition the G7 committed themselves to pushing forward [Just Energy Transition Partnerships](#) (JETP). These partnerships with pivotal countries for climate policy in the Global South provide a powerful lever to help implement the Paris Agreement. Such partnerships have been established with the following countries:

- South Africa (since 2021)
- Indonesia (since 2022)
- Vietnam (since 2022)
- Senegal (since 2023)

Energy Transition – A Project for Generations

Germany has been promoting renewable energies since the 1990s. The Energy Transition is leading to electricity predominantly coming from regenerative sources.



Solar energy plays an important role in the energy transition.
© Unsplash

The energy transition is being driven forward as a high priority in Germany. The core elements are improving energy efficiency and expanding renewables as quickly as possible.

Germany is to become climate-neutral by 2045.

Instead of generating electricity from oil, coal, gas or nuclear power, in future Germany will get its power from the wind, sun, water and biomass. By 2030 at least 80% of the electricity used in Germany will be produced from renewable sources. This fundamental shift in energy supplies is a key precondition for Germany to transform itself into a climate-neutral industrial nation by 2045. An additional challenge arises from the fact that expanding renewables must cover expected increases in demand, such as from the greater use of electrical mobility.

Reducing dependencies

In response to security and economic policy concerns, Germany intends at the same time to end its dependency on oil and gas imports. The Federal Republic has few natural resources of its own, so it must import the majority of its fossil fuels from other countries. The rapid switch to renewable energy sources therefore also serves to minimise and ultimately completely remove the associated dependencies. The energy transition is the defining project for this generation, and will guarantee energy supplies that are cleaner, cheaper and safer in future.

Phasing out coal-fired electricity and nuclear power

When did Germany decide to phase out nuclear power?

In 2000 the then Federal Government made an agreement with German energy companies to phase out nuclear power.

Has nuclear power already been phased out?

Yes. After the disaster at the Fukushima nuclear power plant in Japan in 2011, the decision was taken to cease all nuclear power generation by the end of 2022. The last power stations went offline in 2023.

When is Germany phasing out coal-fired electricity?

A law passed in 2020 requires that Germany phases out all coal-fired electricity generation no later than 2038.

What will happen to the coal-producing regions affected?

The coal-producing regions in Germany that are affected by the change are being given assistance with the necessary structural transformation.

Setting a course early for renewable energy

Germany first began promoting regenerative energy sources in the 1990s and passed the Renewable Energies Law (EEG) in 2000. The law included what was known as the EEG levy, which distributed the increased cost of expanding environmentally friendly generation across consumers on a proportional basis. The Federal Government scrapped the levy in 2022 in order to reduce the burden felt by consumers due to sharp rises in the cost of energy.

More private photovoltaic installations

Thanks in part to government funding, a significant share of Germany's electricity now comes from renewable sources. In 2024 this share was around 54 percent. The Federal Governments wants to drive this expansion further forward. In concrete terms, this means that new wind farms will be built on land, but especially offshore. Private households are being encouraged to install photovoltaic panels to contribute to their own energy supply. Digitisation is to help speed up application processes.

Expanding the electricity grid

However, the energy transition not only requires new generating facilities – a suitable electricity grid is also needed. Hundreds of kilometres of new high voltage transmission lines will need to be built, above all to carry electricity generated from wind power in northern Germany to the large industrial complexes in the south of the country.

example, they can ensure that enough electricity is available as more and more people plug their electric cars in to charge at the same time during the evening and at night.

How important is green hydrogen for the energy transition?

The use of green hydrogen (hydrogen produced using electricity from renewable sources) is considered vital to the success of the energy transition. This is particularly important to make industrial activity sustainable. For example, green hydrogen can be used in applications where electrification currently appears impractical or impossible. This includes for example the following areas.

- Steel industry
- Chemical industry
- Aviation
- Shipping

Germany's hydrogen strategy places a strong emphasis on international partnerships. This is due to the need to import large quantities of green hydrogen, which is easiest to produce in areas where there are adequate sources of renewable solar or wind energy. One way the Federal Government is meeting this need is by establishing strategic partnerships, such as with countries in the Middle East and North Africa (the MENA region), with South Africa and West Africa, and with Australia. At the same time Germany is promoting research and development in green hydrogen with the goal of creating modern and future-oriented climate protection technologies to become a leader on the international stage.

How is energy consumption developing in Germany?

Germany's energy is not only to be produced more greenly, however, but also used more efficiently and sparingly. After all, as the saying goes: "the cleanest and cheapest energy is the energy you don't even use." Primary energy consumption has already dropped considerably: by comparison with 1990 levels, it was down by nearly 30 percent in 2024, and by 2050 is to be slashed by 50 percent.

Where can energy savings be made in particular?

There is clear potential to make savings in buildings and homes. These use around 35% of Germany's total consumption, such as for heating and hot water. Germany is providing government funding to help members of the public renovate their homes in an energy-efficient way. Since 2000, over 5 million property owners have carried out renovation of this kind, such as replacing old heating systems or installing energy-saving windows.

What role does digitalisation play in the energy transition?

Digitisation is also helping to bring about a successful energy transition, for example through the introduction of intelligent measurement systems. Analogue electricity meters are increasingly being replaced by "smart meters". One advantage they offer is that they display the actual amount of electricity used and when. This can make it easier for consumers to identify the best way for them to save energy.

Intelligent measurement systems also help match electricity supply and demand in the grid. For

Media and communication

Germany boasts a free and broadly representative media world. Over the past few years, digitisation has significantly changed the way people utilise the media.



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1945



1945
After the end of Nazi rule, in Germany initially newspapers may only appear under Allied licence. In the US zone of occupation the first licence is awarded on 1 August 1945 to the Frankfurter Rundschau.

1950



1950
The six West German broadcasting houses agree in Bremen to join forces to form the "Arbeitsgemeinschaft der öffentlich-rechtlichen Rundfunkanstalten der Bundesrepublik Deutschland," or ARD broadcaster.

1984



1984
In Ludwigshafen the Programm-gesellschaft für Kabel- und Satellitenrundfunk, or PKS for short, starts broadcasting. This marks the birth of private TV channels in Germany.

1995



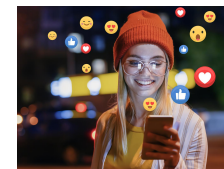
1995
The first German newspaper, namely the leftist/liberal taz, goes online only six years after the foundation of the World Wide Web. After its go-live, the membership of the digitaz community surges.

1997



1997
About 4.1 million German citizens over the age of 14 use the new online access channels at least occasionally. In 2014, the figure rises to around 55.6 million, or 79.1 percent of the over-14s in Germany.

2022



2022
Around 93% of people in Germany (78 million) are online, and 87% use social media (73 million). The average user has five accounts. There are 118 million mobile phones for 83.2 million people.



2025



2025

At a summit on European digital sovereignty in Paris in February 2025, politicians and business leaders hold out the prospect of billions in investment in artificial intelligence (AI).

CULTURE & THE MEDIA

Guaranteed freedom of the press in Germany

How Germany protects freedom of the press and why this is among the nation's most important basic principles.



The freedom of the press and freedom of expression are among the most important basic principles in Germany.

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A free press is one of the most important prerequisites for a democracy. In Germany, this is protected by the Basic Law. Article 5 describes freedom of opinion and the press as: "Every person shall have the right freely to express and disseminate his opinions in speech, writing and pictures and to inform himself without hindrance from generally accessible sources. (□□.) There shall be no censorship."

How many newspapers are there in Germany?

The lifeblood of press freedom is a diverse media landscape. People in Germany can find information in sources of all kinds and form their own opinions. The press is not controlled by governments or parties. Instead, media companies are funded through private enterprise. Germany has the world's fifth-largest newspaper market, after China, India, Japan and the US. Currently, the media landscape comprises around 330 newspapers with more than 660 different titles. This huge variety and a daily circulation of more than 12 million make Germany Europe's largest newspaper market. In its World Press Freedom Index, the nongovernmental organisation Reporters Without Borders ranked Germany eleventh out of 180 countries in 2025.

Media use in Germany

Digitalisation has brought about a marked shift in the media that Germans can access. German



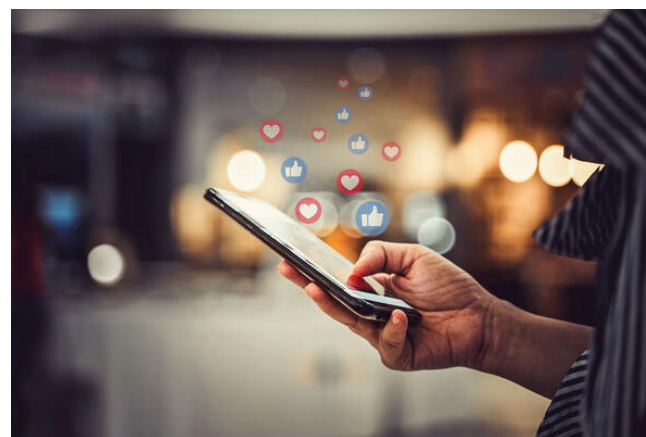
newspapers sell more than 2.9 million digital editions per day of publication, around 60 percent of this total to subscribers. Growing by around eight percent per year, digital newspapers are accounting for an increasingly important share of total circulation. Media consumption has also changed significantly: nearly everyone in Germany uses the internet at least on rare occasions - this even applies to 100 percent of the 14 to 49 age group. As in many other countries, the digital revolution has brought with it a new understanding of the public sphere, as social media and blogs allow everyone to contribute their opinions to discussions.

How Germany combats fake news and disinformation.

Nevertheless, the media still have a key role, such as when it comes to combating fake news and disinformation. Journalists are responsible for informing the public on the basis of careful research and faithful reporting. Germany's public service broadcasters have a legal mandate to supply as many people as possible with information, education, advice and entertainment. They follow the British model as corporate bodies funded by licence fees or public entities, and form the second pillar of a dual system built on both public and private services. This principle has essentially remained unchanged since the foundation of the Federal Republic in 1949.

How do people in Germany use digital media?

Most people in Germany are online, and use of social media and AI is on the rise.



Around 63 percent of internet users in Germany regularly use social media networks.
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Media use has also changed noticeably in Germany in recent years, with digital offerings being prioritised: close to 100 percent of people between 16 and 65 use the internet, according to the Bitkom industry association in its 2025 report on digital participation. By contrast, only 47 percent of those aged over 75 were regularly online. Smartphones are the most widely used devices across all age groups, says Bitkom. Laptops and notebooks are also widespread.

Do people in Germany use artificial intelligence (AI)?

Use of AI is rising rapidly in Germany. Roughly two thirds of people use generative AI such as ChatGPT at least now and again, according to a 2025 Bitkom survey. The figure was still only 40 percent in 2024. Three quarters of people view AI as more of an opportunity than a risk, though 60 percent also believe that Germany should become more independent of US AI firms.

How many people in Germany use social media networks?

Around 63 percent of internet users regularly use social media such as Instagram or TikTok, found the 2025 ARD/ZDF media study - that's around 44 million people.

Is use of social media growing?

Yes, but no longer as quickly as in recent years, according to the 2025 ARD/ZDF media study. The growth rate was three percent in 2025, compared to eight percent the year before.

Which social media are particularly popular?

Instagram was the most used social media platform in Germany in 2025, according to the ARD/ZDF media study. Facebook and TikTok take second and third place respectively. Among the 14 to 29 age group, the proportion of people who use TikTok regularly is even one in two.

How is the German newspaper market evolving?

Germany is Europe's largest newspaper market. Though the circulation of printed newspapers is on the decline, business with digital newspapers and online services is growing.



Digitisation is also progressing rapidly on the German newspaper market.
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How big is the German newspaper market?

Germany has Europe's largest newspaper market and the fifth-largest market in the world - after China, India, Japan and the US.

How many newspapers and magazines are there in Germany?

In 2024, 333 different newspapers were produced, including 19 weekly and Sunday newspapers. There are nearly 7,000 magazines, of which roughly 5,550 are specialist publications, approx. 1,150 are popular magazines and around 100 have a religious focus.

What is their reach?

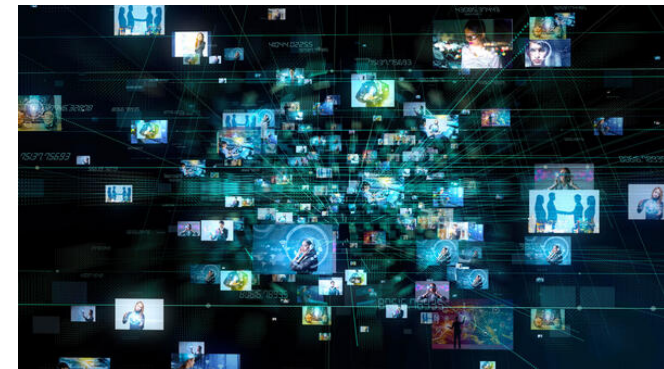
In the second quarter of 2024, 12.6 million newspapers were sold per day of publication in Germany. Over 32 million people read a newspaper on a daily basis. Each year, around 900 million popular magazines are sold - on average 11 per person. Across all the different channels, magazines reach 5.5 million readers per publication interval in print and digital form.

How are digital offerings evolving?

While the circulation of printed newspapers is on the decline, digital versions are booming. In 2024, for example, digital newspapers saw a daily circulation of around 2.9 million copies - a year-on-year increase of 8.4 percent. With their digital offerings, newspapers reached nearly 70 percent of people across all age groups in Germany each month in 2024 - that's more than 48 million readers.

How are radio and television organised in Germany?

The media with the greatest reach in Germany are organised according to the dual principle of public-service and private broadcasters.



Public service broadcasters in Germany have a mandate to inform and educate.
© Getty Images/Stockphoto

How is broadcasting organised in Germany?

The so-called dual principle applies in Germany: fee-funded public service broadcasting has a legal coverage mandate, while private providers are funded for the most part via advertising and subscriptions.

What does public service broadcasting's legal mandate comprise?

Public service broadcasters are supposed to provide culture, education, information and advice, as well as entertainment.

Which are Germany's public service broadcasters?

The key public service broadcasters in Germany are ARD, which stands for Arbeitsgemeinschaft der öffentlich-rechtlichen Rundfunkanstalten der Bundesrepublik Deutschland (the Working Group of Public Broadcasters of the Federal Republic of Germany) with its nine regional

broadcasters, ZDF (Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen) and Deutschlandradio.

How many stations are there?

In all, there are 20 public service TV stations and more than 60 regional radio stations in Germany, plus hundreds of commercial radio and TV channels.

How is public service broadcasting funded in Germany?

Funding is provided mainly via the licence fee, which is designed to ensure reliable financing that is independent of the state. Per household, regardless of the number of people it contains, a monthly fee of 18.36 euros is charged.

What is Deutsche Welle?

Deutsche Welle (DW) is Germany's international public service broadcaster. It provides information in 32 languages and is intended among other things to foster cultural exchange. DW is financed from federal funds, i.e. not out of the licence fee.

What is the German News Service (GNS)?

Funded by the Federal Foreign Office among others, the German News Service is a project run by DW together with the German Press Agency (dpa). It provides news and reports on topics related to Germany for media and the general public in several languages (including Arabic, English, Spanish, Russian and French).

How popular is linear television in Germany?

74 percent of the German population watch linear TV at least once a week.

How popular are streaming services?

45 percent use streaming services at least once a week.

How popular is radio?

78 percent of Germans listen to the radio at least once a week.

How popular are podcasts?

25 percent of Germans listen to a podcast at least once a week.

Migration and Integration

Germany is a popular destination for immigration and the country prioritises an active policy of integration. At the same time, the federal government wants to control immigration to Germany more strictly.



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1955



1955

Strong economic growth leads to a shortage of labour in Germany in the mid-1950s. Recruitment agreements with Italy, Spain, Greece, Turkey, Morocco, Portugal, Tunisia, and Yugoslavia follow.

1964



1964
The millionth migrant worker, called "Gastarbeiter", is welcomed to Germany. Recruitment is halted in 1973 with the oil crisis. Now around four million foreigners are living in Germany.

1990



1990
Immigration increases rapidly in 1990 with the fall of the Iron Curtain and the wars in former Yugoslavia. Moreover, 400,000 people of German origin arrive in Germany from Central and Eastern Europe.

1997



1997
Alongside migrant workers, since the mid-1980s ever more asylum seekers have been coming to Germany. From 1997 the Dublin Convention determines responsibilities of the EU states regarding asylum procedures.

2005



2005
The "Microcensus" offers the very first opportunity to survey the migratory background of the population. According to the census, in 2015 every fifth person in Germany has a migratory background.

2014



2014
More than 200,000 people apply for asylum in Germany in 2014. For the first time, almost half a million more people move to Germany than leave it in the same period.

2015



2015
The civil wars in Syria and Iraq lead to increased flows of refugees towards Europe. During the course of the so-called "refugee crisis", around 890,000 people apply for asylum in Germany. That number falls again in subsequent years.

2020



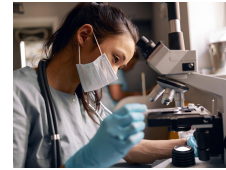
2020
A new Skilled Labour Immigration Act comes into force. Now, skilled workers with a foreign qualification in any profession can get a visa or a residency permit.

2022



2022
Over a million Ukrainian refugees are registered in Germany.

2023



2023
The Skilled Labour Immigration Act is being reformed. Among other things, the 'opportunity card' is being introduced, a job search visa for qualified skilled workers.

2024



2024
The reformed Citizenship Act comes into force. It facilitates naturalisation and generally allows dual citizenship.



2025



2025
The federal government adopts various measures to control and limit migration more strictly.

MIGRATION AND INTEGRATION

More inclusion thanks to citizenship

Immigrants who live permanently in Germany can obtain a German passport if they meet certain criteria.



A person wishing to obtain a German passport needs to pass a citizenship test.
© AdobeStock

Citizenship opens up new opportunities in Germany: German citizens can for example vote in elections at all political levels or indeed run for election themselves. A German passport also grants freedom of mobility within the European Union and allows many other countries even outside Europe to be visited without a visa. A number of conditions have to be met to obtain German citizenship, however.

One of the requirements for a person wishing to obtain a German passport is to pass a citizenship test. The questions in the test are about the legal and social system in Germany, and the way people live there. Additional criteria include:

- sufficient knowledge of the German language
- the absence of any criminal record
- a commitment to the "liberal democratic basic order of the Federal Republic of Germany".

Anyone involved in antisemitic or racist activities will certainly not be granted a German passport. Citizenship is also out of the question for anyone who engages in polygamy or disregards equality.



In principle, a reform adopted in 2024 allows a person to hold not only German citizenship but also that of another country.

Which rules apply to children born in Germany?

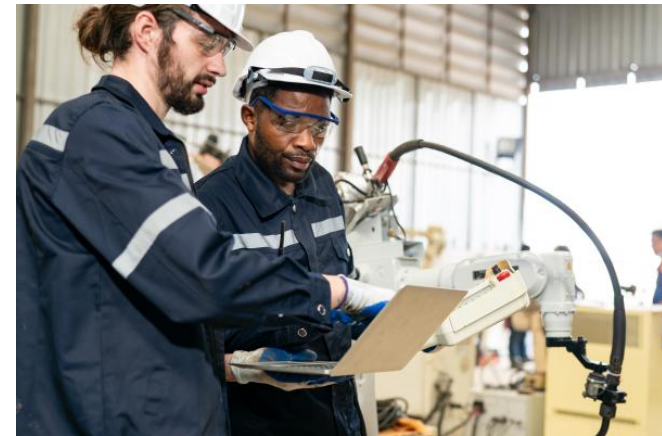
Children who are born in Germany to foreign parents are automatically granted German citizenship and can keep the citizenship of their parents if at least one parent has been living lawfully in Germany for more than five years and has the right of permanent residence.

Which rules apply to the “guest worker generation”?

Anyone who came to West Germany as a guest worker or to the former East Germany as a contract worker only has to demonstrate oral German skills to obtain citizenship. Furthermore, people from these two groups no longer need to take a citizenship test. This is in recognition of their lifetime achievement. “Guest workers” were those immigrants who were invited to come to Germany, above all in the 1950s and 1960s, to address the labour shortage at the time. Many of them came from Turkey.

Structuring Immigration

Germany is a cosmopolitan country that relies on international skilled professionals. At the same time, the Federal Government is keen to control migration to a greater extent.



International skilled professionals play an important role in the German economy.
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The Federal Government is increasing rates of immigration for skilled professionals from around the world. It embraces its humanitarian responsibility for refugees and asylum seekers who have been forced to flee from regions in crisis or conflict. At the same time, it is keen to control and limit migration to a greater extent, for example by

- temporarily suspending the family reunification rights of those with subsidiary protection status
- ending voluntary admission programmes for refugees
- designating more countries of origin as safe
- entering into further migration and readmission agreements

How many people with a foreign passport live in Germany?

In 2024 there were around 14.1 million holders of foreign passports living in Germany.

How many people with a migrant background live in Germany?

In 2024, around 21.2 million people in Germany came from a migrant background. That's roughly one in four of the population.

How many people with a migrant background have a German passport?

Around 9.3 million people of migrant background had a German passport in 2024. They either had German citizenship since birth, were ethnic Germans who moved to Germany from the former Eastern Bloc or were nationalised.

How many people were nationalised in Germany in 2024?

In 2024, nearly 292,000 people were naturalised as German citizens.

What role do skilled international professionals play in Germany?

Migrants make a significant contribution to Germany's social and economic development. The growing need for skilled workers is attracting well qualified people from abroad. The Federal Government wants to facilitate increased migration, not least to counteract the shortage of skilled workers which is due to demographic change.

In addition to boosting the activation of Germany's own pool of potential skilled workers and encouraging greater immigration from EU member states, the Federal Government sees the migration of skilled workers from third countries as a means of counteracting demographic change and helping ensure there are enough skilled workers. To this end, Germany reformed its Skilled Immigration Act in 2023, introducing among other things the "Opportunity Card". This visa enables qualified professionals who fulfil certain conditions to come to Germany for a year to search for work. In the first year after the Opportunity Card was introduced, around 11,500 such visas were granted.

How integration works in Germany

Germany offers integration opportunities, but these also require some effort on the part of those wishing to integrate. Successful integration is a two-way process.



Language is an important key to integration.
© dpa

Integration is a priority area for German policymakers and is considered a responsibility for the whole of society. Integration is not just something that society offers: it also requires that migrants commit to making an effort themselves. Integration can only succeed if it is a mutual process. According to the Residence Act, those foreigners who legally live long-term on German territory have a right to access federal integration services. These services include language lessons, integration in training, work and education, as well as social integration. The goal is to enable these persons to be part of and play a part in society.

How does the Federal Government foster integration?

The core element is an integration course consisting of language lessons and an orientation course. The Federal Government is also increasingly funding vocational language courses. The aim is for integration to begin early, which is why the Federal Government is planning among other things to reintroduce "language daycare centres" in which additional specialist staff will be on hand to promote language learning. At the same time, it wants to call upon migrants to make greater efforts themselves, for example by getting them to make a binding "integration declaration".

Is dual citizenship possible in Germany?

Reforms to citizenship laws in 2014 introduced dual citizenship. For people who were born to foreign parents after 1990 and who grew up in Germany, this removed the obligation to renounce either their German or their parents' nationality. Previously, they had only been allowed to keep both nationalities until they turned 23. Following further reforms to citizenship laws in 2024, dual citizenship is now possible for everyone in principle, whereas previously it was only available to certain nationalities.

Is it possible to start working quickly?

Migrants who are likely to remain for a longer period in Germany are to be given the chance to quickly embark on a course of training or apprenticeship or start working. To this end, the Federal Government introduced legislation in 2019 to promote education and employment for foreigners. Anyone with good prospects of remaining in the country can start working more quickly. The law also improved the provision of language courses and other integration services.

What other integration support is available?

Volunteering plays a major role in supporting integration, both through the work of many volunteers who offer courses and everyday support to refugees and migrants, and also migrants who provide voluntary services themselves.



Enriching Diversity

Germany's diversity: people from all over the world live together in Germany, bringing together highly diverse beliefs, ideals and aspirations.



People from all over the world shape German society.
© AdobeStock

The 83.5 million or so people who live in Germany have widely differing attitudes and approaches to how they live their lives. Some live as part of a family, in a long-term relationship or with flatmates. They practise different religions, hold different political views and have different social expectations. Many come from migrant backgrounds. What they all have in common is that they live in freedom and can fulfil their hopes and dreams as they wish. The Federal Government works on a range of levels to ensure everyone living in Germany can live in freedom and according to their own choices and values.

How does Germany shape migration?

Germany is a modern country with an active and orderly government, which is a popular destination for immigrants. The government wants to keep migration to realistic levels and ensure it meets Germany's future needs. It plans to reduce irregular migration and facilitate migration through regular channels. Germany takes humanitarian responsibility for refugees and asylum seekers, such as people fleeing regions affected by crises and conflicts. Around 251,000 asylum applications were submitted to the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) in 2024. One of the Federal Government's key priorities is to improve living conditions for people so they



do not have to leave their home countries. Germany has set in motion numerous initiatives to promote political, economic and social stability in these countries and to create security.

All immigrants and their relatives who are living permanently and legally in Germany are actively included in German society and have a right to integration services provided by the Federal Government. These include language and integration courses which are aimed at making it easier to settle into German society. Migrants who plan to stay in Germany for the longer term will be able to access the labour market quickly. In addition to this, promoting future-oriented and needs-based migration of skilled workers from around the world is a priority for the Federal Government.

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NATURALISATIONS

How many people were nationalised in Germany in 2024?

In 2024, nearly 292,000 people were naturalised as German citizens.

Equality for all citizens

Promoting equality for all citizens across many levels of society is a major issue in Germany. Germany is committed to the acceptance of diversity. For this reason, the Federal Government supports LGBTIQ rights (lesbian, gay, bi-, trans, intersex, queer) and is fighting to end discrimination. The government has therefore appointed a Commissioner for the Acceptance of Sexual and Gender Diversity.

How does Germany support families?

Many people live in family units in Germany, and there were a total of around 11,8 million families in 2024. Supporting and assisting families is a key objective of German family policy. The Federal Government is committed to providing targeted support to help people balance their careers and family lives, as well as financial security and high-quality childcare. This means all parents can claim up to three years' maternity or paternity leave to care for and bring up their offspring.

The state also pays a parental allowance which compensates for lost earnings when parents are looking after their child after the birth. Families can access additional financial support such as

child benefits, supplementary child support for disadvantaged parents, and maternity benefits.

It is increasingly the case that starting a family means mothers must interrupt their careers. Overall, women are more likely than men to suffer discrimination in the labour market. A range of employment laws have been passed to improve transparency around pay and to increase the number of women in senior positions, including through the use of quotas. Single and separated parents achieve additional targeted support such as tax credits or advance child support payments where necessary.

What characterises the German welfare state?

Germany is a welfare state. It is committed to economic security and social justice for all its citizens. In 2024 Germany spent more than 1.3 trillion euros on health, welfare, unemployment and other related benefits.

The combination of several different forms of insurance is a key element of the welfare state. The following types of statutory insurance protect members of the public against existential threats or provide them with a means of subsistence in old age:

- health insurance
- pension insurance
- accident insurance
- nursing care insurance
- unemployment insurance

A basic income and tax credits help pensioners, mothers, families and those permanently unable to work.

How do citizens engage in civil society?

Germany's thriving civil society is an important pillar of social coexistence and cohesion. German citizens are certainly committed and active. Around 29 million people (around 40% of the population) volunteer in their free time to support areas such as sport, culture, music, environmentalism and conservation, social issues and education. By volunteering they make a major contribution to promoting diversity, justice and freedom in Germany.

Opening doors for skilled workers to find jobs in Germany

Skilled workers are in demand across many areas of the German economy. New regulations are making it easier for them to come to Germany.



Skilled workers are also needed in the construction industry.
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Many regions and industries in Germany are facing a shortage of well trained workers, and demand is only going to continue growing. Alongside promoting training and professional development, Germany's Federal Government is focusing on modernising its immigration policies to attract skilled workers from around the world. Since 2020 new regulations have been introduced in stages to make it easier to come to Germany from abroad. To this end, the Federal Government is clearing away bureaucratic obstacles.

As part of reforms approved in 2023, the government created three new routes for skilled workers to migrate to Germany.

- University graduates can practise any career for which they are qualified.
- Skilled workers can immigrate to Germany if they have at least two years' experience and a professional qualification that is officially recognised in their country of origin.
- The government has also introduced the Opportunity Card which uses a points system to rate

potential applicants.

What has changed as a result of the Skilled Immigration Act?

The Skilled Immigration Act came into force on 1 March 2020. The act makes it easier for skilled workers from countries outside the EU to access the German labour market. This was previously only open to skilled workers with university degrees, but the new regulations open doors to skilled workers who gained vocational qualifications abroad.

What role is played by the EU Blue Card?

Starting in late 2023, the regulations have been updated in several stages to make it easier for skilled workers to move to Germany. This included updating the requirements for the EU Blue Card, which allows highly qualified individuals from outside the EU to come to Germany. Among other things, the salary threshold was lowered from November 2023.

A second stage in March 2024 included extending guidelines for skilled workers with professional experience to all career areas. For example, anyone who has two years' experience in a non-state regulated career can work in Germany without needing to get their degree recognised. Their vocational qualification or university degree must be recognised in the country where they completed their education or training.

How does the Opportunity Card work?

Introduced in June 2024, the Opportunity Card allows certain skilled workers from non-EU countries to come to Germany to find a suitable job without having to go through the drawn-out process of getting their qualifications recognised here. The card is based on a points system. Criteria include for example:

- qualifications
- command of German and English
- professional experience
- age

Sustainability and environment

Germany works with its partners to promote sustainable global development. German policy is guided by the United Nations' 17 sustainable development goals.



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Fostering sustainable development

The sustainable development of all countries is the basis for a peaceful future. What Germany is doing to promote this.



Germany works with its partners to promote sustainable ecological development. © AdobeStock

German development policy is a cornerstone of a global structural and peace policy, helping improve living conditions in partner countries. It aims to defeat hunger and poverty around the world and to strengthen democracy and the rule of law. Germany's development policy follows the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development, which was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 2015. At its heart are 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) on three levels:

- social
- economic
- environmental

The SDGs range from eradicating hunger and ensuring equal access to education for all, to taking climate action and promoting peace.

The Federal Government is a trusted and robust partner when it comes to implementing the development agenda. As one of the largest providers of funding for public development work, Germany is taking responsibility by actively shaping global partnerships. In 2024, Germany made



around 30 billion euros available to support developing countries. Support for projects in partner countries is provided by GIZ (the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit), the KfW banking group and other organisations.

Which areas does German development policy focus on?

In the years after the Second World War, Germany itself received billions of dollars of aid from the USA's Marshall Plan. For decades it has implemented an active development policy and in 1961 became the first country in Europe to establish a Ministry for Development. German policy prioritises promoting ways for people to help themselves, acting as part of a broad partnership that includes members of the public, private enterprise, and state and civil society organisations as well as governments. The Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) sees its role as a ministry of transformation, promoting the global transition to a sustainable, climate- and environmentally friendly economic system, while at the same time strengthening peace, freedom and human rights. Significant aspects of German development policy are:

- combating hunger and poverty,
- protecting the climate and species diversity,
- health
- education,
- fair supply chains,
- the use of digitalisation and technology transfer,
- boosting private investment to promote sustainable development worldwide.

What is Germany doing to combat hunger?

The global fight against hunger remains a key challenge. In 2024, Germany was the second-largest donor to the World Food Programme (WFP) of the United Nations. The Federal Government provided the programme with around 900 million euros. In this context, Germany is committed to humanitarian assistance following disasters and also funds long-term development programmes.



Essential Diversity

Germany is a country with great biodiversity. What the Federal Government is doing to protect it.



Germany has diverse landscapes and a rich natural environment.
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Germany is a country with great biodiversity and home to around 72,000 species of animal, plant and fungus. Protecting the foundations of life is an official national objective, a requirement added to the Basic Law in 1994. 16 national parks and 17 UNESCO biosphere reserves, all very different in character, protect the environment and nature between the North Sea and the Alps. There are also thousands of nature reserves.

How is Germany involved in international conservation efforts?

Germany is a signatory to the most important international biodiversity conventions and to numerous international agreements and programmes aimed at protecting nature. By ratifying the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, the governments of 196 countries have committed themselves to protecting the diversity of life on Earth.

What is the status quo in terms of biodiversity in Germany?

The threat level of roughly 40 percent of Germany's native species has been ascertained so far. Almost a third of these species are at risk of extinction or severely endangered. Around three percent have already been classified as extinct. The measures put in place to address this include



minimising the harm caused to habitats by the construction of homes and roads, as well as keeping pollutants to a minimum, such as those due to intensive farming and the excessive use of fertilisers.

National Biodiversity Strategy 2030 (NBS 2030)

What is the NBS 2030?

Through its NBS 2030, Germany is implementing the Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) at the national level. The GBF is a global agreement reached at the UN Biodiversity Conference in Montreal in 2022.

What are the goals of the NBS 2030?

The NBS 2030 aims to halt the destruction of biodiversity and to protect and restore nature. In all, it defines 64 targets in 21 fields of activity and is backed up by concrete measures and measurable indicators.

How does Germany intend to achieve the targets?

A first action plan for the period until 2027 provides among other things for improved legal regulations to make it easier for cities to plant new and protect existing trees. A funding programme for the protection of floodplains is to be extended and the expansion of renewable energies better aligned to species protection.

How does Germany protect the seas?

In the area of marine protection, the Federal Government's priorities are to step up the fight against pollution, preserve biodiversity and remove old munitions from the sea. It wants to continue long-term programme to recover such old munitions from the North Sea and Baltic Sea, and to establish a federal competence centre where scientists, business and authorities can work together.

What else is Germany doing?

The action programme "Natural Climate Protection", which helps protect forests, peat bogs and floodplains, is to be made permanent.

Insects play a vital role in ecosystems, yet their number and diversity have been declining dramatically for years. To combat the decline in insect populations, a comprehensive package of measures was adopted in 2021. These include improving protection for biotopes such as meadow orchards as habitats for insects.

Sustainable Tourism

Demand for eco-tourism and sustainable travel is growing in Germany. What exactly this means.



Out and about by bike: definitely an environmentally friendly way to travel.
© dpa

Demand for eco-tourism and sustainable travel is growing in Germany. According to a 2024 study that was supported by the country's environmental protection agency (UBA) using funds provided by the Environment Ministry, 48 percent of the population want to take ecologically sound holidays, while 62 percent want holidays that are compatible with social standards. More and more travel providers are using legally binding environmental and social standards in their branding, supported by the associated certificates and labels. These relate for example to

- the sparing use of natural resources such as water
- climate-friendly transport
- reducing waste
- involvement in species protection projects

Organic farms offer guest accommodation and regional and seasonal menus, while eco campsites promote conservation and environmentalism.

Travellers in Germany love spending time in its rich and varied natural environments, such as the 104 natural parks and 17 UNESCO biosphere reserves. Everyone should be able to get around easily in Germany. To this end, many initiatives ensure that people with disabilities can also travel without restrictions in Germany.

There are 55 UNESCO World Heritage sites in Germany.



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Of these, 52 are Cultural Heritage sites and three are Natural Heritage sites.

For the mobility of the future

Transforming the transport system is an essential element of achieving climate protection goals in Germany and around the world.



A hydrogen-powered tram being tested.
© dpa

Transforming the transport system is an essential element of achieving climate protection goals in Germany and around the world. For this to happen, there will need to be substantial reductions to harmful emissions from the transport sector in the 2020s. The Federal Government therefore wants to encourage work on alternative fuels and expand the rail and cycling infrastructure. The long-term goal is to completely decarbonise the transport sector.

Getting more electric cars onto the roads

In 2025, there were around 1.6 million electric cars in Germany. The Federal Government is supporting the expansion of electric mobility. At the same time, the charging station infrastructure is being expanded. Germany is cooperating with its EU partners on this: from 2035, it will no longer be possible to register a new petrol or diesel car anywhere in the EU. The Federal Government also wants Germany to become the leading market for driverless vehicles and to this end is working with the federal states to develop model regions.

Promoting battery cell manufacturing

Battery cell manufacturing is considered a key industry for electrical transportation, as powerful batteries are needed to allow electric cars to drive long distances and charge quickly. The Federal Government intends to make Germany a "Centre for Battery Research, Manufacture and

Recycling". Germany is working closely with other EU partners under the aegis of Important Projects of Common European Interest (IPCEI) to promote battery cell manufacturing, with numerous German firms taking part. Germany will invest over 13 billion euros by 2030 through IPCEI projects alone, while around 3 billion euros has been allocated to expand battery cell production for the period up to 2031.

National hydrogen strategy

Why does Germany have a National Hydrogen Strategy?

The use of hydrogen and its derivatives will play a key role in decarbonisation efforts, especially when it comes to the transformation of the energy, transport and industrial sectors that will be taking place by 2030.

Where can hydrogen be used?

In all cases where electrification is not appropriate, for example in the chemical and steel industry, for heavy-duty commercial vehicles and, increasingly, in aviation and shipping.

What are the goals of the National Hydrogen Strategy?

The National Hydrogen Strategy, which was adopted by the Federal Government in 2020 and continued in 2023, aims among other things to accelerate the market ramp-up of hydrogen, its derivatives and application technologies. In addition, hydrogen and its derivatives are to be made available in sufficient quantities and an efficient hydrogen infrastructure built up.

Expanding rail and cycle transport

Railways are also to play an important role in tomorrow's mobility. The Federal Government therefore wants to step up investment in the rail network. Cycling, as an integral form of sustainable mobility, is also to be encouraged.

Energy Transition – A Project for Generations

Germany has been promoting renewable energies since the 1990s. The Energy Transition is leading to electricity predominantly coming from regenerative sources.



Solar energy plays an important role in the energy transition.
© Unsplash

The energy transition is being driven forward as a high priority in Germany. The core elements are improving energy efficiency and expanding renewables as quickly as possible.

Germany is to become climate-neutral by 2045.

Instead of generating electricity from oil, coal, gas or nuclear power, in future Germany will get its power from the wind, sun, water and biomass. By 2030 at least 80% of the electricity used in Germany will be produced from renewable sources. This fundamental shift in energy supplies is a key precondition for Germany to transform itself into a climate-neutral industrial nation by 2045. An additional challenge arises from the fact that expanding renewables must cover expected increases in demand, such as from the greater use of electrical mobility.

Reducing dependencies

In response to security and economic policy concerns, Germany intends at the same time to end its dependency on oil and gas imports. The Federal Republic has few natural resources of its own, so it must import the majority of its fossil fuels from other countries. The rapid switch to renewable energy sources therefore also serves to minimise and ultimately completely remove the associated dependencies. The [energy transition](#) is the defining project for this generation, and will guarantee energy supplies that are cleaner, cheaper and safer in future.

Phasing out coal-fired electricity and nuclear power

When did Germany decide to phase out nuclear power?

In 2000 the then Federal Government made an agreement with German energy companies to phase out nuclear power.

Has nuclear power already been phased out?

Yes. After the disaster at the Fukushima nuclear power plant in Japan in 2011, the decision was taken to cease all nuclear power generation by the end of 2022. The last power stations went offline in 2023.

When is Germany phasing out coal-fired electricity?

A law passed in 2020 requires that Germany phases out all coal-fired electricity generation no later than 2038.

What will happen to the coal-producing regions affected?

The coal-producing regions in Germany that are affected by the change are being given assistance with the necessary structural transformation.

Setting a course early for renewable energy

Germany first began promoting regenerative energy sources in the 1990s and passed the Renewable Energies Law (EEG) in 2000. The law included what was known as the EEG levy, which distributed the increased cost of expanding environmentally friendly generation across consumers on a proportional basis. The Federal Government scrapped the levy in 2022 in order to reduce the burden felt by consumers due to sharp rises in the cost of energy.

More private photovoltaic installations

Thanks in part to government funding, a significant share of Germany's electricity now comes from renewable sources. In 2024 this share was around 54 percent. The Federal Governments wants to drive this expansion further forward. In concrete terms, this means that new wind farms will be built on land, but especially offshore. Private households are being encouraged to install photovoltaic panels to contribute to their own energy supply. Digitisation is to help speed up application processes.

Expanding the electricity grid

However, the energy transition not only requires new generating facilities – a suitable electricity grid is also needed. Hundreds of kilometres of new high voltage transmission lines will need to be built, above all to carry electricity generated from wind power in northern Germany to the large industrial complexes in the south of the country.

How important is green hydrogen for the energy transition?

The use of green hydrogen (hydrogen produced using electricity from renewable sources) is considered vital to the success of the energy transition. This is particularly important to make industrial activity sustainable. For example, green hydrogen can be used in applications where electrification currently appears impractical or impossible. This includes for example the following areas.

- Steel industry
- Chemical industry
- Aviation
- Shipping

Germany's hydrogen strategy places a strong emphasis on international partnerships. This is due to the need to import large quantities of green hydrogen, which is easiest to produce in areas where there are adequate sources of renewable solar or wind energy. One way the Federal Government is meeting this need is by establishing strategic partnerships, such as with countries in the Middle East and North Africa (the MENA region), with South Africa and West Africa, and with Australia. At the same time Germany is promoting research and development in green hydrogen with the goal of creating modern and future-oriented climate protection technologies to become a leader on the international stage.

How is energy consumption developing in Germany?

Germany's energy is not only to be produced more greenly, however, but also used more efficiently and sparingly. After all, as the saying goes: "the cleanest and cheapest energy is the energy you don't even use." Primary energy consumption has already dropped considerably: by comparison with 1990 levels, it was down by nearly 30 percent in 2024, and by 2050 is to be slashed by 50 percent.

Where can energy savings be made in particular?

There is clear potential to make savings in buildings and homes. These use around 35% of Germany's total consumption, such as for heating and hot water. Germany is providing government funding to help members of the public renovate their homes in an energy-efficient way. Since 2000, over 5 million property owners have carried out renovation of this kind, such as replacing old heating systems or installing energy-saving windows.

What role does digitalisation play in the energy transition?

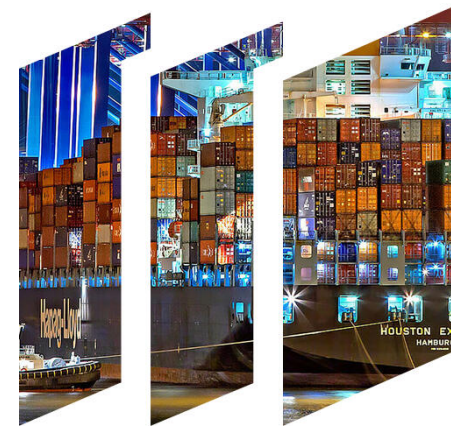
Digitisation is also helping to bring about a successful energy transition, for example through the introduction of intelligent measurement systems. Analogue electricity meters are increasingly being replaced by "smart meters". One advantage they offer is that they display the actual amount of electricity used and when. This can make it easier for consumers to identify the best way for them to save energy.

Intelligent measurement systems also help match electricity supply and demand in the grid. For

example, they can ensure that enough electricity is available as more and more people plug their electric cars in to charge at the same time during the evening and at night.

Global trade partner

Germany is one of the world's strongest economies. As an exporter, Germany is committed to free markets while also prioritising human rights protections in global trade.



© pixabay

1955



1955

On 5 August the one millionth VW Beetle leaves the assembly line in Wolfsburg. An absolute top seller, the car becomes a symbol of what went down in history as the Economic Miracle.

1969



1969

In Toulouse (France) the Airbus consortium is founded as a Franco-German joint venture. Today, Airbus S.A.S. is the world's largest aircraft manufacturer.

1989



1989

Postal Reform I marks the beginning of the privatisation of the giant publicly-owned corporation that is Deutsche Bundespost. The privatisation is regarded as one of the biggest reforms in German economic history.

1990



1990

The Treuhandanstalt, a government-owned but independent trust agency, begins transforming the socialist planned economy of the former East Germany with its several thousand state-owned enterprises into a market economy.

2002



2002

From 1948 until 1998 the Deutsche Mark is the official currency as "book money", until 2001 as cash. It is replaced on 1 January 2002: Germany and 11 other EU Member States introduce the euro.

2020



2020

In May 2020, the Corona pandemic meant 7.3 million employees were working reduced hours – more than ever before. The system involves a temporary reduction in working hours, whereby compensation is provided for a portion of workers' lost earnings. The aim here is to avoid redundancies.

2025



2025

In May 2025, the German stock index DAX broke through the 24,000-point mark for the first time since its introduction in 1988. The DAX measures the performance of the 40 largest companies on the German stock market.

Innovative economy: Germany reinvents itself

How does an industrial nation remain competitive in a digital era? Germany believes that innovation, start-ups and well-trained skilled professionals are the way forward.



Technology at work: humans and machines are increasingly interconnected in German factories.
© dpa

Germany is the largest economy in the European Union (EU) and the third largest in the world after the US and China. As such, it enjoys a strong network of partnerships around the world and regularly ranks in the top three nations for exports as well as imports. Germany's gross domestic product totalled some 4.3 trillion euros in 2024. That year, it exported goods worth around 1,555 billion euros and imported goods worth over 1,316 billion euros.

Germany's most important trade partners are:

- the countries of the EU (accounting for roughly two thirds of the total volume)
- China
- the USA

German industries that are particularly successful on the global market include:

- the automotive industry

- mechanical and plant engineering
- the chemicals industry

Germany's strengths: SMEs, start-ups, research

Germany also boasts a diverse and active start-up scene. The backbone of the German economy is the Mittelstand - small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) - which includes many globally successful hidden champions from all regions of Germany.

The engine that drives economic development is the innovative strength of German companies. To secure and increase this, Germany invests more than three percent of its gross domestic product in research and development. More than two thirds of the over 121 billion euros spent in total per year are invested by businesses.

How is Germany making innovation part of its future strategy?

Germany is also providing targeted funding for new and disruptive technologies, innovations and business models. This included setting up the Federal Agency for Disruptive Innovation (SPRIND) in 2019 and the German Agency for Transfer and Innovation (DATI) in 2021. The Federal Government adopted a new AI Strategy in 2018 and created a similar Startup Strategy in the summer of 2022.

From social market economy to social-environmental market economy

Since 1949 German economic policy has been based on the model of a social market economy. Developed in the post-war years by Ludwig Erhard (who would later become Federal Chancellor), this concept has kept Germany's economy on an upward track. It guarantees that businesses can trade freely while simultaneously striving to create social checks and balances.

Why is the dual vocational training system a role model for the world?

The German economy is characterised by its strong "Mittelstand", with small and medium-sized enterprises making up over 99 percent of all businesses in the country. They also provide more than half of all jobs and employ around 75 percent of trainees. In so doing, they safeguard the system of dual vocational training, which combines theoretical knowledge at vocational schools with practical training in companies. This dual model enjoys an outstanding reputation around the world and has been adopted by many other countries.

Frankfurt: home of finance and European monetary policy

Successful major international corporations also help shape Germany as a place to do business. Many are listed on the DAX stock exchange in Frankfurt, the key financial centre on the continent of Europe. Frankfurt is also home to the headquarters of the European Central Bank (ECB), whose duties include monitoring the price stability of the euro.

A stable and attractive employment market

The German employment market has shown itself to be robust in the past, even during periods of

crisis. Germany has one of the highest rates of employment in the European Union and one of the lowest unemployment rates. In 2024, for example, the unemployment rate in Germany averaged 6.0 percent. Youth unemployment is also very low.

How can the short-time working allowance safeguard jobs?

The short-time working allowance has proven to be a useful tool. It involves the state temporarily covering a major part of the salary shortfall if a company's economic situation means that employees have to reduce their working hours for a certain period. This enables employees to keep their jobs despite a crisis and companies do not lose their experienced staff.

How is Germany addressing the skilled labour shortage?

Well-trained specialist professionals are essential to the competitiveness of the German economy. Germany is therefore taking steps on the one hand to enable people to undergo training, for example by further improving full-day childcare. On the other hand, laws such as the [reformed Skilled Immigration Act](#) aim to help recruit skilled professionals from abroad - which is vital against the backdrop of demographic shifts.

How is digital infrastructure advancing the industrial transformation?

Like almost every other country around the world, Germany is faced with the challenge of promoting digitalisation in the economy and also of how to shape the digital transformation in the world of work. To help make this happen, Germany is expanding its [digital infrastructure](#) in the form of broadband and 5G mobile technology. By developing technology for the Internet of Things (IoT), Germany is providing targeted support for Industry 4.0, where production processes are integrated with ways of communicating over the Internet.

What is being done to strengthen Germany as a location for start-ups?

Through its [Startup Strategy](#), the Federal Government also aims to make Germany a leading [location](#) for start-ups in Europe. A range of measures and initiatives are helping clear away legal and regulatory barriers to setting up and financing startups, across areas such as innovation, digitalisation and sustainability.

Exports as economic engine: what drives Germany

Germany is closely interconnected with the global economy. Who buys German products - and which sectors drive exports?



Playing an important role for exports: Germany's sea and inland ports ensure the flow of goods worldwide. © dpa

Exports account for one out of every two euros earned. According to the World Trade Organization's annual rankings, Germany regularly ranks as the world's third-largest export nation, following the US and China.

The most important exports in 2024 included:

- motor vehicles and parts (262.8 billion euros)
- machines (217.4 billion euros)
- chemical products (138.9 billion euros)

These three groups, plus products in the areas of data processing and optics, account for more than half of German exports.

Which are the leading countries when it comes to German exports and imports?

The US was the most important consumer of German goods in 2024, followed in second and third place by France and the Netherlands. In 2024, the largest volume of imports came from China, the Netherlands and the US.

German firms create millions of jobs abroad

The importance of economic and trade relations with Asian states is growing all the time. Nearly half of all German companies have invested abroad, and almost eight million people are employed by German firms abroad.

Can Germany maintain its leading role in logistics?

Germany is a transshipment hub for the flow of goods in Europe and the world as a whole. More goods transit through Germany than any other EU country. More than three million people are employed in the logistics sector. The Port of Hamburg, which processes around eight million shipping containers each year, is a gateway to the world. Frankfurt Airport handled around 2.1 million tonnes of air freight in 2024, substantially more than any other European airport.

The importance of logistics for Germany

What role does the logistics sector play in the German economy?

In Germany, logistics is the third largest economic sector after the automotive industry and trade. It ranks ahead of the electronics industry and mechanical engineering.

How big is the road network in Germany?

The federal highway network in Germany comprises 13,210 kilometres of motorways and 37,746 kilometres of federal highways. This makes it one of the densest highway networks in Europe.

How long is Germany's rail network?

At around 33,500 kilometres, the German rail network is the largest in Europe. If you add up the routes of all railway companies, including those not owned by the federal government, the total length is around 39,200 kilometres.

How many kilometres does the German waterway network cover?

In Germany, inland waterways cover around 7,700 kilometres. They form an important transport network for freight transport and shipping.

Germany's commitment to fair and free global trade

How can trade be fair and offer benefits to both trading partners? Germany shows how economic interests can be reconciled with human rights and environmental standards.



Germany is committed to equal competition and sustainable supply chains.
© dpa

Germany is a strong export-focused economy with close ties to a network of partners around the world. The Federal Government is committed to open markets and rule-based trade. Along with promoting a multilateral trade regime, supporting the European Union's ambitious free trade agenda is also a priority. German economic diplomacy rests on key three pillars:

- 225 foreign diplomatic missions
- the offices of the 150 chambers of commerce abroad (AHK) in more than 90 countries, and the delegations and representations of German business worldwide
- the Germany Trade and Invest (GTAI) economic development agency of the Federal Republic of Germany

They provide targeted support to help German SMEs gain a foothold in foreign markets.

Germany: championing free trade

Germany is closely involved in shaping how international trade is regulated. For example, it is committed to strengthening and reforming the World Trade Organization (WTO), a key element of the rule-based global trade system. In addition, Germany accords high priority to the bilateral free trade agreements (FTA) of the European Union. The EU has already entered into agreements with 38 partner countries, and FTAs with numerous other countries are set to follow.

EU agreements strengthen global partnerships

Germany's Federal Government believes that broadly diversifying its trade relations is the best way to make the country's economy more competitive and resilient. Free trade agreements that the EU has already concluded with partners in all regions of the world, including Japan, Canada, Kenya, Korea, Vietnam and New Zealand, provide access to new markets and important sources of products such as critical raw materials or technologies.

In addition, Germany supports the following efforts to promote free trade:

- rapid ratification of the EU free trade agreements with Mercosur, Mexico and Indonesia
- implementation and further development of the trade agreement with the United States of America
- swift conclusion of negotiations with India, the United Arab Emirates and the ASEAN states
- resumption of negotiations with Australia

How do German businesses take responsibility?

Respect for and promotion of [human rights](#) worldwide plays a central role in German trade policy. At the end of 2016, the German government adopted its National Action Plan for Business and Human Rights (NAP), which is based on the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights adopted by the United Nations (UN) in 2011. Through a set of uniform and verifiable standards, the NAP imposes a responsibility on German businesses to uphold human rights along their global supply chains.

Dialogue formats link business, politics and society

Sector-specific dialogues and initiatives have been developed to help implement the NAP. The automotive industry dialogues, for example, involve businesses, associations and civil society groups, and have proposed wide-ranging recommendations to implement the UN Guiding Principles. Another forum is the Textile Partnership, where the Federal Government works with NGOs, businesses and trade associations to develop standards for a social, ecological and corruption-free textile and clothing industry.

What does Germany do to promote sustainable supply chains?

The Federal Government takes action on many levels to ensure equal competition and sustainable supply chains – also with a view to maintaining Germany's competitiveness. In this context, it cooperates closely with international organisations such as:

- the European Union
- the United Nations
- the International Labour Organization (ILO)
- the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)

Furthermore, Germany plays an active role in multilateral forums such as the G7, the G20 and the

Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM). It places especial emphasis in this context on the responsibility German businesses have for their supply chains – though without overburdening them with bureaucracy in the form of reporting duties.

In 2021, the Bundestag adopted the Act on Corporate Due Diligence Obligations in Supply Chains (LkSG), which for the first time lays down the responsibility that businesses have to uphold human rights and protect the environment in supply chains. Until such time as it is superseded by an act that transposes the European Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD) into national law, the LkSG will remain in force in modified form. During this transitional period, the LkSG will be amended to reduce the administrative burden on businesses and simplify its implementation in everyday life.

German industry's digital transformation

Germany is switching to digitised and networked production by implementing Industry 4.0 - while remaining Europe's leading innovator.



Digital perspectives: Industry 4.0 is making Germany a pioneer of smart and networked production. © dpa

The economy is going through the fourth industrial revolution. Driven by the Internet, the real and virtual worlds are merging to become an "Internet of Things". The Federal Government aims to provide support to business and academia with the development and implementation of "[Industry 4.0](#)", with the aim of positioning Germany as a leading provider of these technologies.

Tailormade production

What makes Industry 4.0 different is how products are highly individualised within production systems and environments that are digital and very flexible. Alongside the "Internet of Things", technologies such as [artificial intelligence](#), cloud computing and automation play a central role. The fourth industrial revolution has long since begun in many factories: smart monitoring and decision-making processes control and optimise companies and entire value adding networks virtually in real time.

Demand for highly qualified skilled workers

This fundamental transformation of production and work processes requires highly qualified skilled workers who can take responsibility themselves and work semi-autonomously. Germany's unique dual vocational training system, coupled with a consistent further training strategy in

businesses, provide the basis for this.

Germany is Europe's innovation engine

Germany is considered the innovation champion of Europe. In 2024, German companies submitted more than 25,000 patent applications to the European Patent Office (EPO) in Munich, putting them in first place in Europe and second place worldwide.

An overview of the most important innovation drivers

Which technology fields show the most patent applications?

In 2024, the following fields of technology were in the top five in Germany:

- transport (mechanical engineering sector): 11,153 patent applications
- electric machines and devices, electric energy (electrical engineering sector): 8,248 patent applications
- measurement technology (instruments sector): 4,712 patent applications
- machine elements (mechanical engineering sector): 3,411 patent applications
- computer technology (electrical engineering sector): 3,311 patent applications

How much do German companies invest in research and development?

Spending 88.7 billion euros, German companies accounted for more than two thirds of total expenditure on research and development in 2023 – thus increasing their investment volume by 8 percent compared to 2022.

Why is international cooperation so important in technology development?

Research projects such as quantum computing, particle physics or climate simulations are so complex and expensive that they can only be pursued by alliances of many countries. Joint projects pool expertise, resources and funding. CERN in Geneva (Switzerland) is one of the best-known examples of top-class international research in particle physics. Scientists from 85 nations are working on answering the fundamental questions of the universe there. Another future-oriented project is JUPITER, Europe's first exascale computer (capable of a trillion calculations per second). It was presented at Forschungszentrum Jülich in 2025. One of the most powerful computers in the world, JUPITER is a key project when it comes to digital advances in Germany and Europe.

Automotive sector remains patent leader

In 2024, nearly 59,300 inventions were registered at the German Patent and Trade Mark Office (DPMA), around 40,000 of which originated in Germany. Automotive supplier Bosch was the most active, submitting nearly 4,500 applications, followed by the [carmakers](#) BMW (2,297) and Mercedes-Benz (2,138). Exactly 153,654 German [patents](#) were in force in 2024.

How Germany's industry is shaping the future

Industry 4.0, high tech and billions for research: how Germany is driving innovation forward.



Production line in a German car factory
© dpa

Germany's economic strength is based not only on its SMEs, but also on the efficiency and innovative capacity of its industry. Employing around 780,000 people, the [automotive industry](#) in particular is seen as a prime example of "made in Germany".

These six major carmakers from Germany are driving the transition towards green mobility worldwide:

- Volkswagen
- Mercedes-Benz
- BMW
- Audi
- Opel (Stellantis)
- Porsche

Mobility in transition: billions for the future

In order to stay competitive, German businesses are investing billions in research and development (R&D). Electric motors, digital networks and assisted or even autonomous driving are megatrends in automotive transportation. Roughly two thirds of cars made by German manufacturers are produced in factories abroad.

Which German companies are setting standards worldwide?

Traditionally strong branches of the German economy also include the global corporations of the [chemicals industry](#), as well as plant and mechanical engineering firms. Established in 1865 and headquartered in Ludwigshafen, BASF employs around 112,000 people at its 235 production sites in 92 countries, making it the world's largest chemicals company.

The leading German [plant and mechanical engineering](#) firm is also a global leader in the key sector of [electrical engineering and electronics](#): Siemens is a global player operating in more than 190 countries that offers highly innovative applied solutions - from mobility to renewable energies.

Where are Germany's leading economic centres situated?

The leading economic centres in Germany are its big metropolitan regions, which include:

- the Ruhr region
- the greater Munich and Stuttgart areas (high tech, automotive engineering)
- Rhine-Neckar (chemicals, IT)
- Frankfurt am Main (finance)
- Nuremberg (industry, services)
- Cologne (media)
- Hamburg (port, aircraft construction)

In the east of Germany, leading high-tech centres have been set up in the following "flagship regions":

- Dresden
- Jena
- Leipzig
- Leuna
- Berlin-Brandenburg

Which companies lead the field in the German economy?

The list of Germany's biggest companies - in terms of turnover - was headed in 2024 by firms in the automotive and retail sectors:

- Platz 1: Volkswagen
- Platz 2: Schwarz-Gruppe (Lidl/Kaufland)
- Platz 3: Mercedes-Benz
- Platz 4: BMW

Three quarters of all jobs are created in the service sector

Germany's standing as a location for industry is also characterised to a large extent by the service sector. 80 percent of all firms are active in this sector, generating almost 70 percent of GDP and providing three quarters of the country's jobs - nearly 35 million in all.

Industry 4.0 in Germany: research as the key to progress

Germany is one of the world's leading industrial nations. German businesses are highly specialised developers of complex goods, especially capital goods and innovative production technologies. The German economy's ability to innovate is considered the driving force behind the country's economic strength. Intensive research and development activity is yielding very positive results. The Federal Government's high-tech strategy is also a key source of momentum. This includes the creation of the Federal Agency for Disruptive Innovation ([SPRIND](#)) in 2019 and the German Agency for Transfer and Innovation (DATI) in 2021. In 2023, around 130 billion euros were spent on R&D in Germany, equivalent to over 3% of GDP, and well above the OECD average of 2.7%.

How Germany and Europe are investing in research

Which EU country invests the most in research and development?

In 2023, Sweden led the field in terms of research expenditure, investing 3.6 percent of its GDP. Belgium and Austria followed, each spending 3.3 percent of their GDP. Germany came fourth with expenditure totalling 3.1 percent of GDP.

What role does business play in research funding?

In 2023, around 386 billion euros was spent in total on research and development in the EU. Two thirds of this came from business (257.1 billion euros). In Germany too, business accounts for more than two thirds of total expenditure on research and development.

Which regions in Germany invest the most in research and development?

Measured in terms of regional gross domestic product, spending is highest in the Stuttgart region at 6.8 percent. Braunschweig and Tübingen rank second and third, spending 6.1 and 5.5 percent of GDP respectively.

SMEs: made in Germany – in demand worldwide

Small and medium-sized enterprises - known as the Mittelstand - are the backbone of Germany's economy. What makes them so successful, both at home and abroad?



Production at an SME
© Rainer Bez, Heike Quosdorf

The Mittelstand is the beating heart of the German economy. Despite the presence of many global players and internationally famous major corporations, Germany's 3.5 million small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), freelancers and self-employed professionals are the distinctive feature of the country's economic structure. More than 99 percent of German companies are [SMEs](#).

An SME is a firm

- with an annual turnover of less than 50 million euros and
- fewer than 500 employees.

Nearly one in four self-employed professionals has non-German roots

Many migrants work in SMEs, and over 800,000 people from migrant backgrounds own their own business, making migrants in Germany a major factor in the economy.

How international are Germany's SMEs?

The "German Mittelstand" also plays a major role on the international stage. Worldwide, there are around 4,000 "hidden champions" - more than 1,700 of them are German SMEs.

German SMEs are European or global market leaders in their respective fields thanks to their

- highly innovative products and problem solutions,
- strong customer focus and
- short decision-making processes.

German SMEs think globally

How many SMEs from Germany are active abroad?

Around 763,000 SMEs from Germany are active abroad. On average, they generate 29 percent of their total sales outside Germany.

Which foreign markets are particularly important for industrial SMEs in Germany?

The EU single market is the most important foreign market for the great majority of Germany's industrial SMEs - when it comes both to procuring intermediate and semi-finished products and selling their own products. In terms of importance, the European single market is followed by other non-EU countries and China.

What role does the US play for German SMEs?

Around 16 percent of German SMEs have customers, suppliers, competitors or their own facilities in the United States.

The creative economy is driving change

Comprising SMEs for the most part, the creative sector is an integral part of Germany's economic fabric. It is a pioneer as Germany transitions into a digital and knowledge-based economy, and is a significant source of innovations. There are roughly 238,000 companies employing around two million people in the cultural and creative sector. The Berlin-Brandenburg region is an international hotspot for creative industries and start-ups.

Culture and art

Germany is a nation with a thriving cultural life. Its rich cultural and artistic sector is constantly developing and moving forward.



© dpa

Vibrant Nation of Culture

Why Germany is seen as an important cultural nation worldwide and why the country's cultural scene is so cosmopolitan and lively.



German singer Zoe Wees
© dpa

Germany's reputation as a major cultural nation is based on great literary figures such as Goethe, Schiller and Thomas Mann, and famous composers such as Bach, Beethoven and Brahms. Yet contemporary authors like

- Carolin Emcke,
- Jenny Erpenbeck,
- Navid Kermani and
- Juli Zeh

and musicians like

- Kim Petras,
- Milky Chance,
- Robin Schulz and
- Zoe Wees

are also keeping Germany's cultural life in the public eye around the world.

In recent years, young artists and creators from migrant backgrounds have made a particular

contribution, opening up new perspectives through their work and enriching the cultural landscape. The work taking place at the Maxim Gorki Theatre in Berlin is a prime example of this, whose director, Shermin Langhoff, has coined the term "postmigrant theatre". A strong postmigrant current is also underway in the world of literature, represented by writers like Fatma Aydemir, Nino Haratischwili, Abbas Khider and Saša Stanišić.

How does Germany's federal structure shape the country's cultural diversity?

Germany's federal structure also contributes to the richness and diversity of the country's cultural landscape. Since its foundation in 1949 and reunification in 1990, the Federal Republic has consciously drawn on its federal traditions and given cultural sovereignty over to its federal states.

How many theatres, museums and orchestras are there in Germany?

Germany's structure, composed as it is of many former small and medium-sized states and free cities, has resulted among other things in around

- 115 municipal and state theatres,
- around 86 private theatres and
- 129 professional orchestras, some of which are affiliated to the public service broadcasting companies.

More than 7,000 museums and exhibition venues make for an unparalleled museum landscape. In addition, there are globally famous cultural events that take place all over Germany, such as the Berlinale – the Berlin International Film Festival – Frankfurt Book Fair, the Bayreuth Festival and Rock am Ring.

Germany's cultural and creative economy is one of its most innovative sectors. In 2023, the sector generated sales of 204.6 billion euros, accounting for 2.2 percent of the total sales volume of the German economy.

How are culture and creativity fostered in Germany?

The Federal Government is keen to boost the creative and cultural economy, and has expanded funding and financing tools to this end. International cooperation, cultural exchange, cultural diplomacy and cultural tourism are also to be intensified. The Federal Government has highlighted the potential that artificial intelligence (AI) offers in art and culture - provided that proprietary rights are upheld and artificially generated content remains clearly recognisable. Together with the federal states, a "Culture and AI" strategy is to be developed.

What role does foreign cultural and educational policy play in Germany?

Foreign cultural and social policy is a high priority for Germany. Alongside classical diplomacy and foreign economic policy, it forms a core element of the foreign policy spectrum. Through dialogue between people and civil society, it facilitates discussions in what Germans call "pre-political spaces". This creates opportunities to improve mutual comprehension. It allows conflicts and crises to be defused, and a basis for discussion persists even during periods of political instability. One way this basis can make a difference is by helping at-risk artists and creative individuals to find refuge in Germany or a third country through one of the protection programmes run by the

Federal Foreign Office, where they can then continue their work supported by scholarships. Foreign cultural and social policy is also responsible for restoring and preserving significant buildings and items of global cultural heritage and promoting the German language abroad. Through its funding for translations, the Federal Foreign Office is also committed to ensuring that Germany's cultural diversity is available to an international audience.

Why is German so popular around the world?

Around 15.5 million people around the world are currently learning German. The majority are in Europe, but increasing numbers of learners are in Africa and Asia. Germany's strong economy and the demand for skilled workers, accompanied by its high-quality [higher education system](#), make learning German a very attractive option. The Goethe-Institut's 150 offices in 99 countries provide a gateway to Germany's language and culture.

Intercultural Dialogue

Why foreign cultural relations and social policy is a core element of a comprehensive foreign policy in Germany.



Germany's foreign cultural relations and social policy strengthens global partnerships.
© Photothek via Getty Images

[Germany's](#) foreign cultural and social policy is a core element of a comprehensive foreign policy. Sharing ideas through exchange and cooperating on culture and education, academia and research create "pre-political spaces" and form the basis for sustainable foreign policy for societies. It is through the dialogue between people and civil society organisations that new ways towards shared perspectives can be found. This also creates a basis to defuse conflicts and crises at an early stage, or even to prevent them.

How Germany promotes language and culture worldwide

Germany's foreign cultural and social policy also promotes the German language around the world, with the aim of raising awareness of Germany as a culture with a rich and diverse cultural life. Current initiatives include promoting a variety of cultural programmes such as exhibitions, cooperation projects by German theatres, supporting literature and films, along with various education programmes such as the PASCH initiative ("Schools: Partners for the Future"), a network of more than 2,000 schools that offer German as a foreign language.

Foreign cultural and social policy also covers

- projects in dialogue with the Islamic world
- and for example "kulturweit", a project that allows young people from Germany to spend a year doing voluntary service abroad.

To deliver foreign cultural and education policy, the Federal Foreign Office mainly works with private intermediaries with a range of specialisms. These include the Goethe-Institut, the ifa, the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), the German Commission for UNESCO, the Deutsche

Auslandsgesellschaft, and the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation. The Federal Foreign Office also partners with political, private and business-financed foundations, civil society organisations and subordinate authorities.

How Germany supports cultural preservation worldwide

Foreign cultural policy values a holistic view of culture that acknowledges the effect that culture can achieve in terms of foreign and social policy. This includes the significance for societies of their cultural heritage. Germany's programme to preserve cultural assets around the world helps foster cultural identities. The programme has helped preserve manuscripts from Timbuktu in Mali, as well as making digital recordings of traditional music from Afghanistan and conserving the Angkor Wat UNESCO World Heritage site. Since 1981, the cultural preservation programme has already enabled projects in more than 145 countries.

Returning bronzes to Africa – Setting a new standard

In July 2022 Germany and Nigeria agreed on a historic return of the "Benin Bronzes" from West Africa. These sculptures were taken to German museums after they were looted during the colonial era. The agreement introduced a new phase of the cultural partnership. It strengthens the partnerships between the museums and intensifies joint archaeological projects in order to give more people access to these works of art. The agreement, which is supported by the Federal Government, the states and Germany's museums, is a clear sign that Germany is increasing its efforts to engage with the responsibility that arises from colonialism.

Attractive Language

How widely used German is in the European Union and the world.



Learning German improves opportunities on the employment market.
© dpa

German is the most widely spoken first language in the European Union and ranks twelfth in the world's most widely spoken languages. Around 130 million people around the world - above all in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Luxembourg, Belgium, Liechtenstein and South Tyrol in Italy - speak German as their first language or regularly use it as a second language. Along with English, Dutch and Swedish, German is one of the 15 or so Germanic languages, a branch of the Indo-Germanic family of languages.

Where do most German learners live?

More than 15.5 million people around the world are learning German. Most of them are still in Europe, though German is growing in importance elsewhere too, especially in Africa and Asia. The number of people learning German in Africa has risen by almost 50% since 2015. This is partly because skilled workers increasingly need language qualifications. The Skilled Immigration Act that came into effect in 2020 and was reformed in 2023 makes it easier for qualified professionals from non-EU countries to migrate to Germany, thereby reinforcing this trend.

Where and how can one learn German?

Germany supports language schools at home and abroad. It also offers scholarships and provides opportunities for internationally mobile students to study in higher education. The Federal Foreign Offices uses targeted programmes run by intermediary organisations such as

- "Dhoch3" of the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD)
- or the Goethe-Institut's "Deutsch Lehren Lernen"

to support the qualification of German teachers.

How many German schools abroad are there?

An important role in German teaching is played by 135 German schools abroad and more than 2,000 schools that provide enhanced German teaching as part of the Federal Foreign Office's PASCH scheme (Schools: Partners for the Future).

Where can one learn German?

In 2024, around 267,000 people attended language classes at the Goethe-Institut, which offers courses and exams in German as a foreign language in almost 100 countries. Burkina Faso and Colombia both saw applications for language courses soar by around 70 percent. Though most people learn German in face-to-face classes, digital and blended learning formats are also very popular, accounting for roughly 40 percent. The Goethe-Institut's digital learning platform was visited more than 7 million times in 2024. By April 2025, 1.3 million people had registered to use the "DW Learn German" platform of the Deutsche Welle Akademie.

How important is German as a language of science?

There has been a gradual decline in the importance of German as the international language of science. Researchers who do not speak German only rarely publish in German. By contrast, German-speaking academics actively publish in English, particularly in the natural sciences. German has a long and significant heritage as an academic language in the humanities and social sciences.

Great cultural diversity

Why Germany's cultural scene is globally unique - and heavily influenced by the country's federal structure.



Be it theatres, museums or festivals: culture in Germany is thriving on countless stages, both large and small. © dpa

Germany's federal structure also contributes to the richness and diversity of the country's cultural landscape. Since its foundation in 1949 and reunification in 1990, the Federal Republic has consciously drawn on its federal traditions and handed over responsibility for culture to the states.

In the past, Germany was made up of many free cities and small and medium-sized states. One remnant of this former structure are around

- 38 national theatres
- 90 municipal theatres
- 25 state theatres
- 86 private theatres
- 35 independent symphony orchestras

Which cultural events take place in Germany?

7,200 museums and galleries make for an unparalleled museum scene. In addition, world-famous cultural events take place across the whole country. These include the Berlinale - Berlin's international film festival - the Bayreuth Festival, Frankfurt Book Fair and Rock am Ring.

Living in Germany

Society in the Federal Republic is diverse and cosmopolitan. Many people are actively involved in public life.



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Enriching Diversity

Germany's diversity: people from all over the world live together in Germany, bringing together highly diverse beliefs, ideals and aspirations.



People from all over the world shape German society.
© AdobeStock

The 83.5 million or so people who live in Germany have widely differing attitudes and approaches to how they live their lives. Some live as part of a family, in a long-term relationship or with flatmates. They practise different religions, hold different political views and have different social expectations. Many come from migrant backgrounds. What they all have in common is that they live in freedom and can fulfil their hopes and dreams as they wish. The Federal Government works on a range of levels to ensure everyone living in Germany can live in freedom and according to their own choices and values.

How does Germany shape migration?

Germany is a modern country with an active and orderly government, which is a popular destination for immigrants. The government wants to keep migration to realistic levels and ensure it meets Germany's future needs. It plans to reduce irregular migration and facilitate migration through regular channels. Germany takes humanitarian responsibility for refugees and asylum seekers, such as people fleeing regions affected by crises and conflicts. Around 251,000 asylum applications were submitted to the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) in 2024. One of the Federal Government's key priorities is to improve living conditions for people so they



do not have to leave their home countries. Germany has set in motion numerous initiatives to promote political, economic and social stability in these countries and to create security.

All immigrants and their relatives who are living permanently and legally in Germany are actively included in German society and have a right to integration services provided by the Federal Government. These include language and integration courses which are aimed at making it easier to settle into German society. Migrants who plan to stay in Germany for the longer term will be able to access the labour market quickly. In addition to this, promoting future-oriented and needs-based migration of skilled workers from around the world is a priority for the Federal Government.

How many people with a foreign passport live in Germany?

In 2024 there were around 14.1 million holders of foreign passports living in Germany.

How many people with a migrant background live in Germany?

In 2024, around 21.2 million people in Germany came from a migrant background. That's roughly one in four of the population.

How many people with a migrant background have a German passport?

Around 9.3 million people of migrant background had a German passport in 2024. They either had German citizenship since birth, were ethnic Germans who moved to Germany from the former Eastern Bloc or were nationalised.

NATURALISATIONS

How many people were nationalised in Germany in 2024?

In 2024, nearly 292,000 people were naturalised as German citizens.

Equality for all citizens

Promoting equality for all citizens across many levels of society is a major issue in Germany. Germany is committed to the acceptance of diversity. For this reason, the Federal Government supports LGBTIQ rights (lesbian, gay, bi-, trans, intersex, queer) and is fighting to end discrimination. The government has therefore appointed a Commissioner for the Acceptance of Sexual and Gender Diversity.

How does Germany support families?

Many people live in family units in Germany, and there were a total of around 11,8 million families in 2024. Supporting and assisting families is a key objective of German family policy. The Federal Government is committed to providing targeted support to help people balance their careers and family lives, as well as financial security and high-quality childcare. This means all parents can claim up to three years' maternity or paternity leave to care for and bring up their offspring.

The state also pays a parental allowance which compensates for lost earnings when parents are looking after their child after the birth. Families can access additional financial support such as

child benefits, supplementary child support for disadvantaged parents, and maternity benefits.

It is increasingly the case that starting a family means mothers must interrupt their careers. Overall, women are more likely than men to suffer discrimination in the labour market. A range of employment laws have been passed to improve transparency around pay and to increase the number of women in senior positions, including through the use of quotas. Single and separated parents achieve additional targeted support such as tax credits or advance child support payments where necessary.

What characterises the German welfare state?

Germany is a welfare state. It is committed to economic security and social justice for all its citizens. In 2024 Germany spent more than 1.3 trillion euros on health, welfare, unemployment and other related benefits.

The combination of several different forms of insurance is a key element of the welfare state. The following types of statutory insurance protect members of the public against existential threats or provide them with a means of subsistence in old age:

- health insurance
- pension insurance
- accident insurance
- nursing care insurance
- unemployment insurance

A basic income and tax credits help pensioners, mothers, families and those permanently unable to work.

How do citizens engage in civil society?

Germany's thriving civil society is an important pillar of social coexistence and cohesion. German citizens are certainly committed and active. Around 29 million people (around 40% of the population) volunteer in their free time to support areas such as sport, culture, music, environmentalism and conservation, social issues and education. By volunteering they make a major contribution to promoting diversity, justice and freedom in Germany.

Medical care for all

Why everyone in Germany has access to medical care, regardless of their income.



There are two types of health insurance in Germany.
© iStockphoto

Germany boasts a vast network of

- doctors' surgeries,
- hospitals
- and pharmacies

that ensure the highest level of medical care for all citizens. Every person living in Germany must have health and care insurance. This gives everyone access to healthcare – regardless of their income, age, social background or individual risk of illness.

Which types of health insurance are there in Germany?

There are two types of health insurance in Germany: statutory health insurance and private health insurance. Their health insurance funds cover the costs of things like

- medical treatment
- drugs
- vaccinations
- hospital stays
- and prevention and rehabilitation

Statutory health insurance is essentially compulsory for the employed, trainees, students and pensioners. Contributions, which are based on income, are paid by the insured persons and their

employers, or in the case of pensioners by the pension insurance providers. Family members without their own income receive joint cover for free. Those with statutory insurance are entitled to free treatment, apart from certain individual personal contributions and additional payments.

How many people in Germany are covered by statutory insurance?

Employees whose earnings exceed a certain threshold, the self-employed and civil servants are among those who are exempted from the statutory health insurance obligation. They can opt to take out private health cover instead. Unlike with statutory insurance, premiums for private cover depend on the scope of benefits insured and the individual insurance risk. However, nearly 90 percent of people in Germany have statutory health insurance cover.

Why is there care insurance in Germany?

Everyone in Germany is also required to have care insurance cover. Care insurance is also paid for equally by the insured individuals and their employers or pension insurance providers. The premium depends on their income. This insurance provides financial support for those requiring long-term care – be it at home, in a care facility or on an outpatient basis.

Citizens who have private health insurance must take out private care insurance.

Who do people turn to in Germany when they fall ill?

Around six million people are employed in the healthcare sector – in doctors' surgeries, hospitals, medical authorities and medical laboratories.

When a person falls ill, they normally go first to their GP, who guides them through the healthcare system. There is also a wide-ranging network of specialist doctors. Everyone is entitled to go to the doctor of their choice. Except in emergencies, a hospital stay has to be ordered by a doctor.

Medical drugs in Germany are supplied by the country's more than 17,000 pharmacies. Prescription medicines must be prescribed by a doctor.

Who pays for healthcare in Germany?

Statutory healthcare is funded via the healthcare fund, into which the contributions from employers, other social insurance providers, the insured themselves and a federal subsidy are paid. The health insurance companies then pay for the services they provide out of this fund.

The total costs of healthcare provision are high: in 2024, nearly 501 billion euros was spent on healthcare in Germany.

How does the healthcare system in Germany work?

Germany's healthcare system is funded according to the principle of solidarity: even those who are healthy pay in so that everyone will receive the care they need in the event of illness. This principle ensures access to healthcare for everyone, regardless of their age, income or state of health.

Why are there two types of health insurance in Germany?

The system of two separate types of insurance came about as a result of historical developments. It is designed to provide basic cover for the general population while allowing individual freedom of choice for people with higher incomes or those in certain professions.

Who decides whether a person is covered by statutory or private insurance?

This is determined primarily by their income, profession and insurance history. A person who earns above the threshold for compulsory statutory insurance or is a civil servant can switch to private health cover. For most people, statutory health insurance is compulsory.

How is the provision of healthcare organised in Germany?

Provision of healthcare is decentralised: GPs coordinate the treatment, while specialists and hospitals provide specialist care. Pharmacies ensure that medication is dispensed all over the country, including in rural regions.

What happens to health insurance contributions?

Contributions are not saved up individually but used according to the solidarity principle – i.e. directly to pay for the medical care of all insured people.

With a family, on their own or with others: how people live in Germany

Which new living arrangements are shaping German society and how targeted measures are being introduced to improve the reconcilability of career and family.



More and more people in Germany are choosing to live in same-sex partnerships, patchwork families or alone.
© AdobeStock

New living arrangements are shaping German society. Even in the individualised and highly mobile world of the 21st century, however, the family still plays a central role. According to the “Monitor Familienforschung” (Family Research Monitor), three quarters of the population feel welcome as a family, while nearly half of parents regard Germany as a (very) family-friendly country.

Family or single life - which different living arrangements are there in Germany?

At the same time, ideas are changing about what a family typically looks like. Less than half the people in Germany live as part of a family unit. Despite a decline in traditional family structures, married couples with children under 18 were still the most common family form in 2024, making up nearly 70 percent of family units. There were nearly 350,000 marriages in 2023. Since 2005, the divorce rate has been gradually falling, with just under 130,000 marriages ending in divorce in 2024. There were around 41,000 new marriages between German and foreign citizens in 2023.

How many single parents live in Germany?

The number of children born to cohabiting unmarried parents is growing significantly. Today, the parents are unmarried in 10 percent of the 11.8 million families with children under 18. 24 percent are single parents, most of them women. Single parents are particularly at risk of experiencing poverty. According to the Family Report, the poverty risk for single mothers is roughly three times higher than for mothers with partners.

How many same-sex partnerships are there in Germany?

There were more than 8,800 new same-sex marriages in Germany in 2024. In 2017, the Bundestag had passed legislation to provide "marriage for all". Among other things, this gives gay couples

- the right to get married
- the right to jointly adopt children
- the right to equal legal status

While new forms of cohabitation and family life are emerging, so is the number of single-person households, which now account for over 40% of all private households. On the one hand this development is due to demographic changes which have led to an increase in the number of older people living alone, but on the other hand more young people are also living on their own. According to a forecast by the Federal Statistical Office, one in four people in Germany will be living alone in 2040.

Strong Welfare State

How Germany protects its citizens against threats to critical aspects of their lives.



The German welfare system protects citizens against risks.
© AdobeStock

Germany has one of the world's most comprehensive social security systems. As in other developed democracies, spending on the welfare state represents the largest individual item of public spending. Social security expenditure amounted to some 1.34 trillion euros in 2024 - equivalent to 31.2 percent of GDP.

How did Germany's welfare state come about?

The tradition of the state welfare system goes back to the age of industrialisation in Germany in the second half of the 19th Century and is associated with the then Reich Chancellor, Otto von Bismarck. It was under his chancellorship that mandatory health insurance was first introduced in 1883. Over the following years, legislation was expanded that would form the basic principles of the welfare state. The Basic Law further enshrines the principle of the welfare state for the Federal Republic of Germany. According to the Basic Law, political leaders and society must continually negotiate and update the form that the welfare state takes. Demographic change is making assimilation necessary.

Which forms of insurance protect people in Germany?

Various forms of basic insurance for health, pensions, accidents, nursing care and unemployment provide a tightly-woven network protecting members of the public against threats to critical aspects of their lives. The network of welfare support includes a basic income for pensioners and those permanently unable to work, along with tax benefits such as the family allowance. Families receive child benefit payments each month.

How are pensions dealt with in Germany?

The pension package that entered into force in 2014 especially improves the situation of elderly people. The reform saw the introduction, among other things, of the full pension from 63 years of age (for those born in or before 1952) and the so-called "mother's pension", which acknowledges mothers' work in raising children. Women who brought up children born before 1992 were not able to access the childcare support available to parents today, which reduced their opportunities in the world of work. The mother's pension acknowledges the work they did in bringing up children.

Why are pensions stable in Germany?

In 2025, a law was adopted to stabilise the pension level and to fully compensate for periods spent raising children (known as the "2025 pension package"). It will ensure that the pension level does not fall below 48 percent until 2031.

A basic pension scheme was introduced in early 2021. Anyone who has paid pension insurance for at least 33 years but had low earnings - this applies in many cases to women - will receive an additional payment in future.

Is health insurance compulsory in Germany?

Health insurance cover is a legal requirement in Germany. Medical care is provided through a wide range of services including hospitals, medical practices and rehabilitation clinics.

Families and equality

How Germany supports families and helps parents to participate equally in working life.



Parental leave, parental allowances and childcare services support families in Germany.
© dpa

Thanks to parental leave, parental allowances and high-quality childcare services, [Germany](#) supports families and helps parents to participate equally in working life. Policymaking thus reflects social changes. In Germany, 71 percent of mothers with children under the age of 18 were employed in 2024. Since 2005, employment rates among mothers of children below 3 and 18 have risen significantly (+12 and +11 percentage points respectively). Over two thirds of women with children who are in employment work part-time.

How long does parental leave last in Germany?

Parental leave was introduced in 2007 and makes it easier for people to balance the demands of starting a family and developing their careers.

- The scheme allows both partners to take a break from their careers for up to three years.
- During this period parents are also given special protection against being made redundant. The parental allowance ("Elterngeld") is designed to compensate when parents lose income because they are caring for children. It is worth between 300 and 1,800 euros, depending on previous income. This support is available for both parents for up to a total of 14 months. If both parents share in caring for their children, each parent can claim parental support for between 2 and 12 months.

More and more fathers are taking up this offer and setting their jobs to one side for a few weeks or months.

How does Germany encourage parents to return to work early?

It is still mainly mothers who remain at home for a relatively long period after the birth of their children. The Elterngeld Plus programme was introduced in 2015 to make it even more worthwhile for parents to return to work early. The scheme gives parents working part-time additional support for up to 28 months.

Since 1 August 2013, children have had a legal right to a nursery place upon reaching the age of one. Over 2.2 million children aged three to six attend a nursery or other form of childcare. As of 1 March 2024, around 37.4% of children in Germany under 3 were attending nursery or other childcare.

How much equality do women in Germany enjoy?

Parental leave, financial support and easier access to childcare have strengthened the basis for women's equality, as required by the Basic Law. In some areas, young women have already overtaken their male counterparts in education. For example, women made up a good 52.3% of first-year students in the 2024/25 winter semester. Nevertheless, there remains a gap between the genders when it comes to earnings and career paths. Even where women hold the same formal qualifications and attributes, they still earn an average of 6% less than men. Women are still under-represented in managerial roles. The Federal Government is working actively to redress these disparities.

- In addition to direct support through programmes such as the parental allowance, legislation, such as regulations to promote transparency of remuneration, aims to close the gap between men and women.
- Quota requirements also ensure that women hold more managerial positions. The Federal Government is also actively committed to promoting gender equality on an international level.

Committed Civil Society

How volunteering and foundations strengthen social cohesion in Germany - and why more and more people are taking responsibility.



Millions of people in Germany take responsibility as volunteers.
© DLRG

Around 29 million people in Germany – just under 40% of the entire population – take social responsibility by volunteering in their free time. The figure has grown appreciably over the past 20 years, from around 31% in 1999. According to the 5th German Volunteer Survey, which was published in 2021, around 60% of respondents commit up to 2 hours a week to volunteering, with 17% volunteering for 6 or more hours. A key finding of the study was that volunteering takes many forms and a wide range of groups benefit from it. Most volunteers contribute to sport and exercise, followed by culture and music, social projects and services, and schools and nurseries.

How many clubs and associations are there in Germany?

The term "civil society" refers to the part of society which is not part of the government or a political party, but rather acts in a voluntary and public capacity to take action on social and political issues. Clubs and associations play a significant role when it comes to voluntary action. Together with charities, churches, cooperatives, aid organisations, non-profit organisations and private initiatives, the members of Germany's more than 620,000 clubs and associations form the backbone of the "third sector".

Which role do foundations play in civil society engagement?

Charitable foundations in particular are becoming increasingly significant. With more than 26,000 foundations with legal status according to civil law - the conventional legal form for foundations -

Germany is one of the European countries with the most foundations. More than 700 new foundations were established in 2024 alone. On average, there are 31.6 foundations for every 100,000 inhabitants in Germany. 89 percent of foundations with legal status according to civil law pursue solely non-profit activities - no small number of them having been doing so for centuries. The five largest foundations governed by private law, based on their expenditure, are the following:

- the Volkswagen Foundation,
- Stiftung Liebenau,
- the RAG-Stiftung,
- Evangelische Stiftung Alsterdorf,
- BruderhausDiakonie. Stiftung Gustav Werner und Haus am Berg

Community foundations are a growing force, where members of the public act as joint funders to support local or regional projects. The first foundations of this kind were established in 1996. These days there are 426 community foundations in Germany, 244 of them bearing the seal of approval of the Association of German Foundations.

How is civic engagement developing in Germany?

While levels of involvement in social projects and organisations have increased slightly in recent years, the main shift has been away from larger associations and towards small, independently organised groups and project-focused activities. One particularly significant period was during the major influx of refugees in 2015 and 2016, when many people in Germany volunteered through local initiatives to support the asylum seekers. The Covid-19 pandemic saw the emergence of new forms of voluntary activities, such as going shopping for people in at-risk groups.

How many sports clubs are there in Germany?

The German Olympic Sports Confederation records more than 86,000 sports clubs with more than 28 million members in total.

To what extent do people in Germany volunteer in sport?

8.7 million volunteers help out in organised sporting activities, while 6.3 million helpers provide support at club festivities, tournaments and other events. In 20 percent of sports clubs, people with a migrant background perform voluntary work. Between them, volunteers at management and operational levels chalk up 23 million hours of work per month in total.

How many children and young people are active in sports clubs in Germany?

More than 7 million children and youngsters below the age of 18 belong to a sports club in Germany. As such, they account for a quarter of all club members and are the largest age group in club sport.

Freedom of Religious Worship

How freedom of religion is enshrined in the Basic Law in Germany and why the religious landscape is marked by increasing plurality.



The Basic Law guarantees freedom of religious faith.
© dpa

Freedom of religion or belief is enshrined in the Basic Law in [Germany](#). Article 4 of the constitution states that “freedom of faith and of conscience and freedom to profess a religious or philosophical creed shall be inviolable”. This includes the freedom to profess and practise a religion, along with the freedom not to profess any religion.

How many Christians live in Germany?

Germany’s religious landscape is increasingly shaped by diversity and secularisation.

According to Church statistics, the Roman Catholic Church has around 19.8 million members, while nearly 18 million people belong to the Protestant Church. In addition, some 285,000 people belong to Protestant free churches, while 366,000 are members of other Christian churches and communities and around 3.85 million belong to Orthodox churches. The two major Christian denominations are organised into 27 Roman Catholic dioceses and the German Bishops’ Conference, and into the Protestant regional churches under the umbrella organisation of the Protestant Church in Germany (EKD).

With 19.8 million members in Germany, the Roman Catholic church belongs to the worldwide

church with the Pope at its head. The EKD is the association of the 20 independent regional Lutheran, Reformed and United churches. With around 18 million members, it includes the majority of German Protestant Christians. Around 50.1% of the population are of different faith or do not belong to any religious denomination.

What role does Islam play in Germany?

Migration is making Islam an increasingly significant part of religious life. While no definitive survey has been carried out, the number of Muslims in Germany has been estimated to be between 5.3 and 5.6 million, with roots in 50 different nations. Large Muslim communities have grown up in many cities. Established in 2006, the German Islam Conference (DIK) provides an official framework for exchange between the state and Muslims. Furthermore, German universities offer imam training programmes.

How many Jews live in Germany?

Jewish life in Germany, which was entirely destroyed by the Holocaust, is once again firmly rooted in Germany. It is estimated that 200,000 Jews live in the Federal Republic of Germany today. Around 90,000 of them are members of some 100 Jewish communities that cover a broad religious spectrum and are represented by the Central Council of Jews in Germany, which was founded in 1950.

How does the state work together with religious communities in Germany?

Germany does not have an established church. Instead, the state works with religious communities as partners. The state contributes to funding kindergartens and schools that are sponsored by religious communities. The churches levy a church tax which is collected by the state to fund social, medical and other services. Schools must provide religious education as part of their standard curriculum, although restrictions to this apply in Berlin and Bremen.

The teaching of Islam as part of religious education is being expanded. Additional teachers are being trained to ensure that Muslim children and young people who attend school in Germany can be offered religious.

Inclusion as an important social responsibility

Why enabling participation for people with disabilities is part of the fundamental understanding of democracy in Germany.



Equal opportunities: everyone should be able to participate equally in Germany.
© Getty Images/Photodisc

Around 13 million people with disabilities live in Germany. The Federal Government seeks to create equal opportunities for people with disabilities. It is working towards an inclusive society in which everyone can participate equally: at school, at work, in leisure time. This requires comprehensive accessibility – and the aim is to remove not only obstacles in buildings, on streets and paths, but also social hurdles, such as access to the labour market.

How does Germany support people with disabilities?

In 2007 Germany was one of the first states to sign the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, with a national action plan (NAP 2.0) structuring its implementation that involves 175 different measures in 13 action areas. Among other things, it envisages intensive preparation measures for working life for severely disabled youths. Going beyond the action plan, a federal participation law was enacted in 2017, which includes provisions for promoting education for young disabled people.

The status report produced in 2023 shows that national implementation of the Convention still has high priority for the Federal Government. In recent years, the various ministries have rolled out more than 400 measures and are thus consistently pursuing the NAP. The measures help raise awareness of the needs of disabled people amongst social-sector and state actors.

How does Germany promote accessibility?

The “Federal Accessibility Initiative” sees all ministries working closely together to remove obstacles in public and private spheres. The focus is on higher-level legislation and the areas of mobility, health, housing/building and digital matters.

How are older people supported in Germany?

The elderly constitute a further group whose needs and potential the Federal Government particularly has in mind. Roughly 22 percent of people in Germany are aged 65 or older. Their wealth of experience is considered beneficial to society. Their ways of life have likewise diversified and changed; overall elderly people are considerably more active today than in the past. They are frequently also still integrated in the labour market. As meeting places, around 540 multigenerational houses promote an intensive dialogue between old and young, bringing together people of different ages.

Political and social involvement

Social engagement: how active people are in Germany



Many young people volunteer in Germany.
© dpa

Voluntary work in the fields of sport and culture, for example, often involve direct support for other people. Socio-political involvement in parties, trade unions, and NGOs, meanwhile, enables people to help shape things on a strategic and political level. Here volunteering opens a door to intensive democratic participation. The major established organisations, however, are finding it increasingly difficult to get volunteers on board.

How engaged are young people in Germany?

The 14-24 age group has particular potential to engage in voluntary activities. It's clear from their interest in voluntary work that young adults are willing to contribute to society. Germany's Federal Volunteer Service was established in 2011. Open to all age groups, it complements the Voluntary Social Year scheme for adolescents and young adults that has been in place for more than 55 years. More than 31,000 federal volunteers were active in July 2025.

Do people from Germany also get involved in activities abroad?

It is also possible to volunteer abroad, for instance with the International Voluntary Service run by the Federal Ministry of Education, Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, the “Weltwärts” programme run by the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development or the “Kulturweit” voluntary service run by the German Commission for UNESCO in cooperation with the Federal Foreign Office.

Gender equality

Society, business, politics: how the Federal Government is strengthening the role of women in all areas of public and private life.



Legally speaking, equality between women and men has been achieved in Germany.
© Getty Images/Digital Vision

Parental leave, financial support and easier access to early-years and pre-school childcare have strengthened the basis for women's equality, as required by the Basic Law.

How many women sit on the board of a company in Germany?

While young women haven't merely caught up with but in some cases have actually overtaken young men in the area of education (women accounted for 55 percent of people with a university entrance qualification and 53 percent of university graduates in 2023), there are still gender disparities with respect to earnings potential and career paths: women in full-time employment earn on average just 80 percent of the salary earned by their male colleagues. Women are still under-represented in managerial roles. According to a report from the AllBright Foundation, only one in five board members in Germany's largest companies is a woman.

Is there a quota for women on executive boards in Germany?

Since 2015, a law has been in place to ensure equal participation of women and men in leadership positions, in both the private and public sectors. Among other things, it stipulates that 30 percent of supervisory board positions in publicly traded companies must be filled by women. In the autumn of 2020, the governing coalition agreed to introduce a quota for board membership, stipulating that in publicly traded and equally co-determined companies with more than three board members, one member must be a woman. In 2021, the second Leadership Positions Act came into force, laying down further requirements for more gender equality in the executive and

supervisory boards of major German companies, for companies in which the federal government holds a stake and for certain top-level positions in the civil service. The proportion of women in the Bundestag has dropped again recently and is currently 32.4 percent. That said, until 1983 less than 10 percent of MPs were female.

How high is the female employment rate in Germany?

In recent years, the employment rate among women aged 15 to 64 in Germany has risen to 74 percent and is thus nearing the figure for men. The majority of women who work are in part-time employment.

Why are fewer women employed than men?

Women in Germany devote 72 billion hours per year to caregiving and family-related activities - that's more than all the hours of work done by those in gainful employment in Germany put together. However, more and more women want to pursue gainful employment and expect to be able to reconcile the demands of family life and developing a career.

How much caregiving work is done by women in Germany?

Women in Germany spend roughly 29 hours per week doing unpaid caregiving work, while the figure for men is just under 20 hours. On average, women devote 43.4 percent more time per day to unpaid caregiving than men do. This equates to a difference of 76 minutes per day. The good news is that the gap between women and men in terms of unpaid work has narrowed over time: in 2012/13, the gender care gap was still 52.4 percent.

Vibrant Culture of Remembrance

Preserving memories: how the memory of the crimes committed by the Nazis and of the injustice of the system in the German Democratic Republic is kept alive in Germany.



Commemorative sites in Germany keep memories of the Nazi crimes and the injustice of the GDR system alive.

© picture alliance/chromorange

Addressing war and tyranny, ideologically motivated crimes and political injustice in the 20th century, not to mention commemorating the victims of persecution, play an important role in the culture of remembrance in the Federal Republic of Germany. Preserving eye-witness reports by persons who actually experienced the events is the key element in a culture of remembrance destined to make certain that coming generations are conscious of the crimes committed by the Nazis.

The numerous memorials to the various groups of victims all over Germany are also part of this vibrant culture of remembrance. In central Berlin, for example, the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe is a memorial to the six million Jewish victims of the Holocaust.

How Germany remembers war, resistance and dictatorship

In May 2025, Germany commemorated the end of the Second World War and thus the end of the Nazi dictatorship 80 years earlier. In October 2025, the country celebrated 35 years of German unity. During the anniversary years of 2014 and 2015, which marked 100 years since the beginning of the First World War and the 25th anniversary of the Fall of the Berlin Wall, the commemorations were marked above all by a sense of gratitude. They acknowledged the debt

owed to the Allied coalition for liberating Germany in 1945 and also the opportunity for reconstruction and reunification in 1990. There was also gratitude to those Holocaust survivors who bore witness to the crimes and were willing to be reconciled with democratic Germany after the Second World War.

Where can information about the GDR system be found in Germany?

Germany also intends to keep the memory alive of the communist dictatorship during the periods of the Soviet occupation zone (1945–1949) and the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in East Germany (1949–1990) for those generations who did not experience a divided Germany and the GDR system. At the Stasi Records Agency, files continued to be examined, sorted and made accessible to the people concerned, as well as to scholars. These tasks, and responsibility for the documents, were transferred in mid-2021 to the Federal Archive. A permanent exhibition in the building of the former headquarters of the Ministry of State Security of the German Democratic Republic (Stasi) gives fascinating insights into how the Stasi would spy on, control and intimidate the population, and the equipment they used to do so.

How does Germany commemorate the resistance to the Nazi dictatorship?

The German Resistance Centre in the "Bendlerblock" in Berlin's Mitte district commemorates those who opposed Nazi dictatorship. It stands on the historic site of the failed coup attempt undertaken by a group led by Graf Stauffenberg on 20 July 1944. The memorial centre documents in impressive form how individuals and groups resisted the Nazi dictatorship between 1933 and 1945 and took advantage of any scope for action available to them.

What is meant by a culture of remembrance in Germany?

In Germany, a culture of remembrance refers to the way society engages critically with the past, especially the crimes of the Nazis and the injustice of the GDR dictatorship.

Why does the Federal Government consider a culture of remembrance important?

It preserves historical truth, strengthens democratic values and counters extremist tendencies.

Which sites in Germany play a central role in commemorative activities?

There are numerous memorial sites, museums, monuments and former prison and concentration camps that provide information, engage critically with war and tyranny, ideologically motivated crimes and political injustice, and commemorate their victims.

Which institutions and social groups support the culture of remembrance in Germany?

The culture of remembrance in Germany is supported by state institutions such as the federal, state and municipal governments, as well as by foundations, associations, schools and engaged citizens.

Urban Quality of Life

Why German cities do very well in urban quality-of-life rankings and ever more people now want to live in an urban environment.



Surfing in the city: German cities offer attractive leisure opportunities.
© Unsplash

In the "Mercer Quality of Living Ranking 2024", which studied the quality of life in cities all over the world, five German cities were among the top 30

- Frankfurt am Main (7)
- Munich (11)
- Düsseldorf (16)
- Berlin (19)
- Hamburg (28)

How many cities are there in Germany?

Germany has 80 cities with a population of more than 100,000 and 626 medium-sized towns with between 20,000 and 99,999 inhabitants; around three quarters of Germans already live in towns and cities. However, experts are discussing whether the pronounced trend towards urban living may be slowing, at least temporarily. Given the many new flexible ways of working, such as working from home, it may become less of a priority for many people to live close to their workplace.

How many people in Germany live in rented accommodation?

The demand for housing in urban areas has led to a sharp rise in rents for renters starting new contracts, as well as significant increases in property prices. The ownership rate in Germany is 41.9%, with most people having to pay rent. On average, around 24% of income goes on rent or mortgage payments. This is why the Federal Government has extended the rent cap until 2029 so as to preserve social diversity in areas with a tight housing market. Thanks to the rent cap, federal states can specify areas where landlords may not increase rents by more than 10% more than a comparable home when renewing a tenancy.

How does the Federal Government support house building?

There are high levels of demand for housing in many regions. In response, the Federal Government has launched a “construction turbo” programme designed to simplify and accelerate planning processes at municipal level. The idea is for this to create more affordable housing. 3.5 billion euros in federal funding is being made available to build social housing in 2025, with 500 million euros of this total to be spent on housing for young people.

Sporting Challenges

How successful Germany is at sport - at both the elite and mass participation levels.



Athlete Malaika Mihambo
© dpa

Germany is a country of sports enthusiasts and a successful sporting nation. In the all-time Olympic Games medal table, Germany ranked third with more than 1,800 medals in 2025 - behind only the US and Russia. Some 27 million people in Germany belong to the country's 90,000 or so sports clubs. In addition to their sporting activities, these clubs have an important function in promoting participation and socialisation, particularly in the areas of youth work and integration. Almost all clubs have people from migrant backgrounds in their teams.

How sport promotes integration

The “Integration through Sport” programme is funded jointly by the German Olympic Sports Confederation (DOSB) and the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees. It acknowledges how migration enriches Germany's sporting landscape. The DOSB is an umbrella organisation for sport in Germany and sees itself as the largest civilian movement in the country. It funds both elite and mass participation sports. With around 7.8 million members, the German Football Association (DFB) also belongs to the DOSB.

How strong German football is

The Bundesliga is the shining light in German sport. As the top flight of German football, it is considered one of the most competitive leagues. Germany's national men's and women's teams are among the most successful teams in the world. Alongside football, popular sports in Germany include:

- winter sports
- basketball

- gymnastics
- athletics
- handball

The Stiftung Deutsche Sporthilfe has played a major role in much of Germany's sporting success through its support for around 4,000 athletes each year. Another major area of its work concerns supporting and funding athletes with disabilities. Such sportswomen and men from Germany have enjoyed high levels of success in international competition and the Paralympics.

How sport in Germany is used to foster international understanding

German sporting organisations are working through the International Sports Promotion programme to help develop sport in several countries in the Global South. The Federal Foreign Office is a partner in the programme. Over 2,000 short and long-term projects have been delivered in over 150 countries since the early 1960s.

Leisurely Enjoyment

What sets German cuisine and German wines apart internationally and which culinary trends there are.



High quality: German cuisine enjoys a good international reputation.
© AdobeStock

German cuisine, wine and beer are popular around the world and in high demand. Regional and health-focused products are particularly fashionable. Yet for all the many international influences, many amateur and professional chefs are returning to home grown ingredients. Organic foods are making up an ever larger share of the market.

German wine has been enjoying an international renaissance since the turn of the millennium. The "Riesling miracle" is embodied by a generation of young winemakers who prioritise high quality instead of large yields. Germany's climatic conditions lend its wines a fine texture without high alcohol content.

Which varieties of grape are grown in Germany?

Wine is grown in 13 regions across Germany with a wide range of distinctive regional characteristics and around 103,000 hectares under vine.

Germany's wine-growing areas are the following:

- Ahr
- Baden
- Franken
- Hessische Bergstraße
- Pfalz
- Rheingau



- Rheinhessen
- Mittelrhein
- Mosel
- Nahe
- Saale-Unstrut
- Saxony
- Württemberg

With some 15,000 or so producers, Germany is a medium-sized producer when compared to other wine-producing nations. Production in 2024 stood at 7.8 million hectolitres. Around 9% of Germany's total wine-producing area is given over to organic wine production. Germany's wine-growing areas are some of the most northerly in the world. Most are located in the south and south-west of the country, the exceptions being the regions of Saxony and Saale-Unstrut. The three largest wine-producing areas are Rheinhessen, Pfalz and Baden. While over 100 different grape varieties are cultivated in Germany, around 20 dominate the market, particularly the white Riesling and Müller-Thurgau grapes. White wine accounts for around 70% of German wine production. Red wine makes up 30%, with Pinot Noir and Dornfelder as the leading varieties. In 2021, the German Commission for UNESCO included Germany's wine culture in the country's "intangible cultural heritage".

What is Germany's Purity Law?

Germany is also a beer-loving land whose beer is appreciated as belonging to a centuries-old tradition of brewing by many small family-owned breweries and monastic breweries. Apart from a very few exceptions, all German beer is subject to the Purity Law of 1516, the world's oldest regulation for foodstuffs. It states that beer may contain water, hops and barley and no other ingredients. Between 5,000 and 6,000 types of beer are produced in Germany, most of them in the pilsner style. Overall, however, beer consumption is falling. A popular trend in recent years has been craft beers. Produced by small independent breweries, these beers focus on unusual flavour combinations.

Which culinary trends are there in Germany?

The German restaurant industry is known for its dynamism and diversity and is considered among the best in Europe. Haute cuisine sits alongside crossover cooking and an increasing range of restaurants catering to vegetarian and vegan tastes. Meanwhile, traditional varieties of produce are enjoying a renaissance, such as parsnips, turnips and Jerusalem artichokes. These are the pillars of the current boom in all things healthy, seasonal, regional and reminiscent of home cooking. At the same time, a generation of young chefs are reinterpreting classic dishes and spicing them up with global influences.



Security in Germany

Low crime rates and investigatory authorities with international links: why Germany is one of the safest countries in the world.



In the Global Peace Index, Germany is regularly among the highest-ranked countries. Adobe Stock

Germany is one of the safest countries in the world. In the Global Peace Index, which uses a variety of indicators to assess the degree of freedom in 163 of the world's countries, [Germany](#) is regularly among the highest-ranked countries. It ranked 20th in 2025, the leading group showing only marginal differences in scores in some cases. According to the Police Crime Statistics, 5.8 million criminal offences were recorded in Germany in 2024, with a clear-up rate of around 58 percent.

As in all countries, the investigative authorities in Germany are also increasingly facing the risks posed by cybercrime. Especially cross-border crime in the virtual sphere requires international cooperation. Against this backdrop, Germany cooperates with the European Cybercrime Centre at Europol, among others.

Who is responsible for police work in Germany?

As a matter of principle, [given Germany's federal structure the federal states](#) are responsible for policing. The German Basic Law stipulates, however, that specific duties shall be discharged at federal level. Federal police authorities are

- the German Federal Police Force and
- the Federal Criminal Police Office (BKA).



The Federal Police Force is responsible, above all, for protecting the country's borders and is deployed, for example, at railway stations and airports. The BKA concerns itself, amongst other things, with politically motivated violence and terrorism. In these areas, Germany again works closely with the security services in other countries and with international organizations such as Interpol.

Are German police officers also deployed internationally?

German police officers are also deployed in [countries in crisis or conflict](#) such as Armenia and Somalia. Usually as part of an EU or UN mission, they train local security personnel and/or strengthen the mechanisms underpinning the rule of law and human rights.

What is meant by “international police missions”?

Such missions include deployments of police officers (and civilian experts) in crisis regions worldwide – for example to advise, train, observe or carry out executive duties as part of UN or EU mandates.

Who coordinates these missions in Germany?

The Federal/State Working Group “International Police Missions” (AG IPM) is a permanent body of the Standing Conference of German Interior Ministers (IMK) and organises deployments from implementation to post-mission briefings.

What role is played by the Center for International Peace Operations (ZIF)?

ZIF, which was established in 2002 and operates on behalf of the Federal Foreign Office, makes civilian experts available for peace missions, humanitarian operations or election observation.

In which regions is Germany active and what are its objectives?

Germany sends teams to places such as the Sahel region, the Horn of Afrika and Iraq, as well as to countries including Kosovo, Moldova, Armenia, Georgia and Ukraine. Among other things, its goals are to strengthen the capacity of local security agencies to fight terrorism and organised crime and to help establish integrated border management and citizen-oriented police work.

How active is Germany currently in such missions?

In 2024, 123 German police officers were deployed in EU and UN missions abroad – a year-on-year increase of 24.2 percent. The Federal Government is planning to maintain or even expand this engagement.

Getting around in Germany

From visas to voltage: discover important information to help you prepare for your trip to Germany.



Germany has a well developed rail network.
© Markus Mainka/stock.adobe.com

Which identity cards and visas are there in Germany?

When entering the country, foreigners need a valid passport or replacement documents. Citizens of most states in Western Europe require only a valid ID card. In most cases, children require their own travel documentation. Travellers from certain countries require a visa to enter Germany. Travellers should contact Germany's embassies and consulates for more information.

→ auswaertiges-amt.de

Which airports are there in Germany?

All the major international airlines operate routes to Germany. The global network connects more than 20 airports in Germany with all regions of the world. The largest airports are in Frankfurt am Main, Munich, Berlin and Düsseldorf. All [airports](#) have good connections to onward transport networks.

→ berlin-airport.de

→ frankfurt-airport.de

→ munich-airport.de

→ dus.com

How well developed is the rail network in Germany?

Germany's rail network covers the whole country, at around 39,200 km in length. The timetables are arranged to allow easy connections between local and long-distance routes. More than 330 daily international services connect Germany directly to twelve European countries. Deutsche Bahn phone hotline: +49 30 2970

→ bahn.de

Is it easy to get around Germany by bus?

It is also easy to get around Germany by long-distance bus, with several hundred long-distance bus routes. Urban areas are particularly well served, as all German cities and many smaller towns can be reached by long-distance bus routes. Long-distance bus travel information:

→ busliniensuche.de

→ fernbusse.de

How easy is it to drive around Germany by car?

Germany's road network is state-of-the-art. Hundreds of motorway service stations and petrol stations are open round the clock on Germany's 13,000km network of Autobahns. Motorists can fill up with the following unleaded fuels: Super (95 octane), Super Plus (98 octane) and diesel. The network of charging stations for electric cars is continuously expanding.

Unless otherwise indicated by speed limit signs, there is no speed limit on the Autobahn, although motorists are advised to drive no faster than 130km/h. A speed limit of 50km/h applies in built-up areas and 100km/h elsewhere. There are no fees for cars on German Autobahns, though cars may have to pay a charge to use certain tunnels or private and residential stretches of road. Seatbelts must be worn by law. Children up to 150cm in height must have a child seat. Roadside emergency telephones are available to contact the emergency services or roadside assistance. Germany's major motoring clubs are the ADAC and the AvD, which provide information for tourists travelling by car.

Where can I spend the night in Germany?

Accommodation is available in every class and category, from private rooms to holiday flats and luxury hotels. Standards are set and monitored, even in the cheaper price brackets. Tourism associations and tourist information offices provide specific lists of accommodation providers.

→ germany.travel

Are there youth hostels in Germany?

Over 400 youth hostels in Germany belong to the German Youth Hostel Association, which is affiliated with the International Youth Hostel Federation. International travellers can purchase an international guest pass which allows them to stay in the hostels.

German Youth Hostel Association jugendherberge.de

Which forms of payment are accepted in Germany?

The euro is legal tender in Germany. 1 euro = 100 cents. You can withdraw cash at any time from ATMs using an EC card or international credit or debit card. All valid credit and debit cards are accepted. Prices are inclusive.

How can I call for help in an emergency?

Tel.: 110 for police emergencies

Tel.: 112 for fire and ambulance services

Which time zone is Germany in?

Germany is in the central European time zone (CET). Summer time applies between late March and late October, with the clocks moved forward by one hour. The clocks go forward on the last Sunday in March and go back on the last Sunday in October.

What voltage is used in Germany?

Germany uses a voltage of 230 volts.