

## Germany – A short overview

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## 1. Germany at a glance<sup>1</sup>

<b>Location:</b>	Central Europe
<b>Area:</b>	357,021 km <sup>2</sup>
<b>Inhabitants:</b>	82.4 million (July 2006 est.)
<b>Capital:</b>	Berlin
<b>State system:</b>	Democratic- parliamentary federal state
<b>Administration:</b>	16 states
<b>Currency:</b>	1 euro = 100 cents
<b>Gross national income:</b>	EUR 2,168.82 billion
<b>Association with international Organizations</b>	European Union, United Nations, OECD, IMF, World Bank, OSCE, NATO
<b>Time zone:</b>	Central European Time (CET)
<b>Telephone country code:</b>	+49
<b>Official language:</b>	German

### The country



The Federal Republic of Germany is situated in the heart of Europe, linking the west with the east, the north with the south. Germany, the country that exhibits the highest density of population in Europe, has bordered nine neighboring states since the unification of the two German states in 1990. Germany plays a significant role within the European Union and also the NATO, Germany is a partner to the central and eastern European states that are en route to becoming part of a united Europe. The Federal Republic of Germany encompasses an area of 357,022 square kilometers. The greatest distance from north to south in a straight line amounts to 876 kilometers, and from west to east, 640 kilometers. There are some 82.6 million people living in Germany; the country

boasts a unparalleled cultural diversity and particular region-specific qualities, charming towns and gorgeous landscapes.

<sup>1</sup> CIA-Factbook „Germany“: <https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/gm.html>

## Germany in the internet

[www.deutschland.de](http://www.deutschland.de)

Official portal of the Federal Republic of Germany. It provides access in Arabic, English, French, German, Russian, and Spanish to link lists for all areas of society

[www.bundesregierung.de](http://www.bundesregierung.de)

The comprehensive German federal government Web site, including topical news on government policies (English, French and German)

[www.auswaertiges-amt.de](http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de)

Information on aspects of German foreign policy and addresses of the German embassies abroad (Arabic, English, French, German and Spanish)

[www.facts-about-germany.de](http://www.facts-about-germany.de)

A reference book offering a wide variety of up-to-date and reliable information about Germany (in 8 Languages)

[www.invest-in-germany.de](http://www.invest-in-germany.de)

The Web site of the federal agency Invest in Germany GmbH provides information on Germany as a business hub (in nine languages)

[www.goethe.de](http://www.goethe.de)

The Goethe-Institut Web site provides information on language courses and events at the 144 institutes as well as on German culture and society (English and German)

[www.ifa.de](http://www.ifa.de)

The Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen (ifa) offers an overview of topics relating to international cultural exchange (English and German)

[www.daad.de](http://www.daad.de)

The German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) provides information on funding and exchange programs for students, graduates and scientists (in 22 languages)

[www.dw-world.de](http://www.dw-world.de)

German foreign broadcasting station Deutsche Welle (DW) provides a wealth of topical editorial information (in 30 languages)

[www.deutschland-tourismus.de](http://www.deutschland-tourismus.de)

The German National Tourist Board Web site offers a wide range of details on Germany as a holiday destination (English and German)

[www.land-der-ideen.de](http://www.land-der-ideen.de)

The Web site of the “Germany. Land of Ideas“ initiative offers information on the activities of the campaign of the same name (English and German)

[www.destatis.de](http://www.destatis.de)

Web site of the German Federal Statistical Office (English and German)

[www.magazine-deutschland.de](http://www.magazine-deutschland.de)

Web site of “Deutschland” magazine, with articles on current topics, a service section and a media corner for journalists (in ten languages)

## **2. History of Germany**

For most of its history, Germany was not a unified state but a loose association of territorial states that jointly constituted the “Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation”. The German Reich was not founded until 1871.

The use of the expression “deutsch” (=German) dates back to the 8th century. It referred to the language spoken in the eastern part of the Franconian dominion, and stood for “as the people speak” - as opposed to Latin, the language of scholars. After Charlemagne’s death in 814 the Franconian realm disbanded, primarily along the linguistic divide between early Medieval French and Old High German. It was only little by little that a feeling of belonging together materialized among the inhabitants of the eastern areas. The country of “Germany” was supposed to be where the language of “German” was spoken. Whereas the western border was established at an early date, colonization of the East remained unwaveringly active the 14th century. The resulting contact between and intermingling of the German and Slavonic populations persisted until World War II.

### **The National Socialist dictatorship**

As for the recent German history, the rise of the National Socialist Party proved to be a landmark event. At the end of the 1920s, left-wing and right-wing extremists were able to take advantage of the unbearably high unemployment rate and the longstanding abysmal economic performance. No other majorities capable of government were to be formed in the Reichstag, and the cabinets depended on the emergency powers of the Reich President to issue decrees, in other words it was possible to govern without the aid of parliament. As early as 1925 a candidate from the right, former Field Marshal Paul von Hindenburg won over Friedrich Ebert, a social democrat, as Reich President. Although he abided strictly by the constitution he never committed himself personally to the republic. At the beginning of 1933, when the economy crisis had already started to ease, members of the right-wing camp figured they would be able to use the exceedingly anti-democratic Adolf Hitler to further their own ends by transferring the office of chancellor to him. As an outcome of the economic crisis, his National Socialist party had become the most influential political power in Germany, without however enjoying majority support neither among the population nor in Parliament. Regardless of the greatest of misgivings, Hindenburg still appointed him head of government and approved of his demand to suspend the Reichstag. The Nationalist Socialists’ seizure of power had thus begun.

Even in the election campaign Hitler intimidated the other contenders with violence and harassment. In spite of resistance from the Social Democrats he exerted tremendous pressure on those members of parliament who had not been detained or had refused to agree to an “Enabling Act”, which offered him almost unrestrained political powers. It was only a matter of weeks before the National Socialists had broken down all democratic barriers and substituted them with pseudo-legal structures. Hitler virtually repealed basic rights, prohibited trade unions and outlawed all political parties apart from his own, revoked the freedom of the press and subjected those that disagreed to ruthless terror. Thousands disappeared without trial in concentration camps.

From the very beginning political persecution went hand in hand with racist mania, which was grounded on the myth of a “northern race”, and developed via thoughts about people being “unworthy of life”, because they did not conform to ideal perceptions about life, leading to a holocaust. Whereas the latter was kept under cover for fear of civil unrest, anti-Semitic excesses were carried out in public. In full view of the general public, Jewish citizens were expelled from everyday life, dishonored, removed from public office, threatened with their lives and eventually systematically persecuted. In 1938, synagogues and other Jewish buildings were demolished in the wake of a pogrom. More often than not, it was beyond people’s imagination to picture what the Nazi troops did to the Jews who had been sent to concentration camps: “Extermination” by means of inhumane accommodation and fatigue from work, medical experiments that showed no respect for human life, and ultimately in the final years the assassination of all Jews, especially those in the conquered territories in the East, who were taken into custody by the regime. It is estimated that six million people were executed in just a few years.

The German people’s response to these proceedings was contradictory. On the one hand, they experienced rampant violence and, on the other, successful policies from which they benefited. Hitler amplified the pace of the economic upturn, which had already set in prior to his seizure of power and would have propped up any government. From the standpoint of the jobless, benefits were derived from widespread job creation programs that were used for propaganda purposes, not to mention an unparalleled strategy of rearmament, which sooner or later would have burned the country’s capital funds unless fresh financial resources were channeled into the economy, for example through the exploitation of the conquered territories. Success in foreign affairs, prominently the return of the Saarland into the German Reich strengthened Hitler’s position. Other noteworthy foreign policy events included, in 1936, German troops reentering the Rhineland, which had remained a demilitarized zone since 1919, the annexation of Austria in 1938 and in the same year the granting of the Sudetenland by the Western powers to Hitler.

## **World War II**

Hitler was still unsatisfied with the expansion of the territory of the German Reich. In March 1939, he ordered German troops to occupy Prague and on September 1 of the same year he instigated World War II by invading Poland. The ensuing conflict lasted five and a half years, took the lives of 55 million people and laid waste to great parts of Europe. In many countries the Germans were seen as cold-blooded occupiers. The area occupied by German Troops stretched from the Atlantic coast in France to just short of Moscow, from North Norway to North Africa. The attack on the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941 marked the beginning of a ruthless campaign of annihilation in the East.

The entry of the United States into the war and the defeat of the German army at Stalingrad, in Russia, proved to be a turning point. When liberating occupied territories, the Allied troops encountered resistance groups, some of which were better organized than others. Even in Germany there had been acts of resistance against the Nazis by individuals or resistance groups throughout the years. A bomb attack orchestrated by Graf Stauffenberg and other resistance fighters on July 20, 1944 failed: Hitler survived and had more than 4,000 people executed in retaliation. The war continued, claiming unprecedented numbers of casualties on both sides, until the Allies overpowered the entire German Reich. Hitler committed suicide on April 30, 1945 and one week later the darkest chapter in the history of Germany was brought to a close with the country’s unconditional capitulation.

## Germany since 1945



Following Germany's defeat in World War II and the beginning of the Cold War Germany was split for about 40 years, representing the focus of the two global blocs in the east and west. Only in 1990 would Germany be reunited.

It was agreed to in August 1945, after Germany's unconditional surrender on May 8, 1945, the Allies divided Germany into four military occupation zones – French in the southwest, British in the northwest, United States in the south, and Soviet in the east. The territories east of the Oder-Neisse line were separated from Germany, and put under Polish administration, effectively shifting Poland westward, so the Soviet Union could itself shift westward.

As a result an estimated 15 million “displaced persons” from former German territories became a burden for the occupation zones. Countries were urged to stop the transfers at that particular moment due to the strain the refugees put on available resources in the Western occupation zones.

### Allied occupation zones in 1945

Key items in the occupiers' agenda were the five D's: Denazification, Democratization, Dismantling, Disarming and Decentralization.

However, by 1948 with the emergency of increased tensions between the eastern and the western powers and fears of the population turning communist the western powers had a change of hearts. They grew concerned about the deteriorating economic situation in their "Trizone"; the American Marshall Plan of economic aid was extended to Western Germany and a currency reform introduced the Deutsche Mark and brought the unchecked inflation to a standstill. The Soviets had not agreed to this currency reform and withdrew in March 1948 from the four-power governing bodies and commenced the Berlin blockade in June 1948, blocking all ground transport routes between Western Germany and West Berlin. The Western Allies responded with a continuous airlift of supplies to the western half of the city. The Soviets withdrew the blockade after 10 months.

### Two Germanies

On 23 May 1949, the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG, *Bundesrepublik Deutschland*) was established on the territory of the Western occupied zones, with Bonn as its "provisional" capital, and declared "fully sovereign" May 5, 1955. On 7 October 1949 the Soviet Zone was established as the German Democratic Republic (DDR, *Deutsche Demokratische Republik*), with East Berlin as its capital. The two states were termed informally as "West Germany" and "East Germany" respectively. In both states the former occupying troops remained permanently stationed there.

The former German capital, Berlin, was a special case, being divided into East Berlin and West Berlin, with West Berlin completely surrounded by East German territory. Though the German inhabitants of West Berlin were citizens of the Federal Republic of Germany, West Berlin was not legally incorporated into West Germany; it remained under the formal occupation of the western allies until 1990, although most day-to-day administration was conducted by an elected West Berlin government.

West Germany was allied with the United States of America, the UK and France. A western capitalist country with a "social market economy", the country enjoyed a prolonged period of economic growth (*Wirtschaftswunder*) which was buoyed by the population's pent-up demand, which in turn had been prompted by the currency reform of June 1948 and US assistance through Marshall Plan aid (1948-1951).

East Germany was at first occupied by and later (May 1955) allied with the Soviet Union. An authoritarian country with a centrally planned economy, East Germany soon became the wealthiest, most advanced country in the Soviet bloc, but many of its citizens looked to the West for political freedoms and economic prosperity.

### **West Germany**

The Western Allies gradually transferred greater authorities to German officials and encouraged the establishment of a future German government by creating a central Economic Council for their zones. The program later provided for a West German constituent assembly, an occupation statute governing relations between the Allies and the German authorities, and the political and economic merger of the French with the British and American zones.

On May 23, 1949, the *Grundgesetz* (Basic Law), the constitution of the Federal Republic of Germany, was promulgated. Following elections in August, the first federal government was formed on September 20, 1949, by Konrad Adenauer (CDU). The next day, the occupation statute came into force, granting powers of self-government with certain exceptions.

After the Petersberg agreement West Germany quickly advanced towards greater sovereignty and tight association with its European neighbors and the Atlantic community. The London and Paris agreements of 1954 reinstated most of the state's sovereignty in May 1955 and paved the way for German membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). In April 1951, West Germany, France, Italy and the Benelux countries initiated the European Coal and Steel Community (forerunner of the European Union).

The three Western Allies maintained occupation powers in Berlin and certain responsibilities for Germany as a whole. Under the new arrangements, the Allies stationed troops within West Germany for NATO defense, pursuant to stationing and status-of-forces agreements. With the exception of 45,000 French troops, Allied forces were under NATO's joint defense command. (France withdrew from the collective military command structure of NATO in 1966.)

### **East Germany**

In the Soviet occupation zone, the Social Democratic Party was compelled to merge with the Communist Party in April 1946 to form a new party, the Socialist Unity Party (SED). The October 1946 elections resulted in coalition governments in the five *Land* (state) parliaments with the SED as the unquestionable leader.

Under Soviet leadership, a constitution was drafted on May 30, 1949, and adopted on October 7, the day when East Germany was formally proclaimed. Wilhelm Pieck, was elected as President, and an SED government was set up. The Soviet Union and its East European allies immediately recognized East Germany, although it remained largely unrecognized by non-communist countries until 1972-73.



East Germany installed the structures of a single-party, centralized, communist state. On July 23, 1952, the traditional *Länder* (states) were abolished and replaced by 14 *Bezirke* (districts). Despite the formal existence of other parties, all government control was in the hands of the SED, and almost all important government positions were held by SED members.

The National Front was an umbrella organization nominally consisting of the SED, four other political parties controlled and directed by the SED, and the four principal mass organizations – youth, trade unions, women, and culture (although different content similar methods as the Nazis) . However, control was clearly and solely in the hands of the SED. Balloting in East German elections was not secret. In line with other Soviet bloc countries, electoral participation was consistently high, with nearly unanimous candidate approval.

### **East -West Relations**

The continuous stream of East Germans fleeing to West Germany put great strains on East German-West German relations in the 1950s. East Germany closed the borders to West Germany in 1952, but people continued to flee from East Berlin to West Berlin. On August 13, 1961, East Germany started building the Berlin Wall around West Berlin to impede the flood of refugees, effectively cutting the city in half and rendering West Berlin an enclave of the Western world in communist territory. The Wall became the symbol of the Cold War and the division of Europe. Shortly afterwards, the main border between the two Germanies was reinforced.

In 1969, Chancellor Brandt announced that West Germany would remain firmly rooted in the Atlantic alliance but would step up efforts to improve relations with Eastern Europe and East Germany. West Germany commenced this *Ostpolitik*, initially under fierce opposition from the conservatives, by negotiating nonaggression treaties with the Soviet Union, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, and Hungary.

West Germany's relations with East Germany posed particularly difficult questions. Though ready to alleviate serious hardships for divided families and to diminish hostility, West Germany under Brandt's *Ostpolitik* was determined to abiding by its concept of "two German states in one German nation." Relations improved, before the 1970s, the official position of West Germany was that of the Hallstein Doctrine which involved non-recognition of East Germany. In the early 1970s, *Ostpolitik* led to a form of mutual recognition between East and West Germany. As a result both Germanies joined the United Nations, in September 1973.

### **The unification of East and West Germany**

During the summer of 1989, swift changes took place in East Germany, which in the end led to German reunification. Growing numbers of East Germans emigrated to West Germany via Hungary after the Hungarians decided not to intervene forcefully to stop them. Thousands of East Germans also attempted to reach the West by staging sit-ins at West German diplomatic facilities in other East European capitals. The exodus generated demands within East Germany for a political change of course, the number of mass demonstrations rose in several cities – particularly in Leipzig. On October 7, Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev visited Berlin to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the creation of East Germany and urged the East German leadership to pursue reform, without success.

On October 18, Erich Honecker was forced to resign as head of the SED and as head of state and was replaced by Egon Krenz. But the mass emigration continued uninhibited, and calls for

political reform mounted. On November 4, a demonstration in East Berlin attracted as many as 1 million East Germans. In the end, on November 9, 1989, the Berlin Wall was thrown open, and East Germans were allowed to travel freely. Thousands stepped over the border into the western sectors of Berlin, and on November 12, East Germany began dismantling the infamous Berlin Wall.

## **Settlement**

On December 2, 1990, all-German elections were held for the first time since 1933. In fact, accession meant that East Germany was added to West Germany: the new country kept the name Bundesrepublik Deutschland, used the West German "Deutsche Mark" for currency, and the West German legal system and institutions were embraced by the east. Berlin would officially become the capital of the united Germany. The political institutions, however, remained at Bonn for the time being. Only after a heated debate in 1991 did the *Bundestag* agree to moving itself and most of the government to Berlin as well, a project that took until 1999 to complete, when the *Bundestag* held its first session at the reconstructed *Reichstag* building.

## **Germany today**

In the 2000s Germany has been arguably the centerpiece of the European Union (though the importance of France cannot be disregarded in this context). The German government was a strong supporter of the enlargement of NATO and European Union. German troops contribute to the multinational efforts to bring peace and stability to the Balkans. The nation is comparatively well off, being the world's third-richest economy (nominal GDP) (following the USA and Japan). It ranks among the top five countries in Internet access worldwide. Many Germans speak English and/or French, in addition to standard German and their local dialect of German (of which there are many).

Dealing with social issues faced by European countries in general - immigration, aging populations straining social-welfare and pension systems - is also imperative to Germany. Employment is a particularly delicate issue these days Germany - figures released in February 2005 showed an unemployment rate of 12.6% of the working age population, or 5.2 million workers, which represents the highest jobless rate since the 1930s.

Germany adopted a far less embracing stance towards America's 2003 invasion of Iraq; many analysts attribute the SPD's re-election in autumn 2002 to strong opposition to the impending invasion. The majority of the public was opposed to the conflict, and any deployment of troops. Under the impression of an out and out defeat for the SPD in regional elections in the state of North Rhine-Westphalia (22 May 2005), Chancellor Schröder request a vote of non-confidence by the German Bundestag (lower house of parliament). Schröder contended that it had become increasingly difficult to push for the necessary socio-economic reforms because of the opposition majority in the upper house of the parliament, the Bundesrat, as well as the tensions within his own party. After receiving this vote (July 1st), Chancellor Schröder asked the German President, Horst Köhler, to call new national elections.

On 21 July 2005 Federal President Horst Köhler dissolved the parliament, thus agreeing to Chancellor Gerhard Schröder's request, and scheduled early parliamentary elections for September 18. The elections resulted in a stalemate for both major parties, SPD and CDU/CSU, as neither gained enough votes to achieve a majority, unless they were to take multiple coalition partners. This was resolved on November 11th 2005, when both parties

agreed to form a "Grand Coalition" led by Angela Merkel who became new chancellor of Germany.

### **Germany's history in the internet**

[www.dhm.de](http://www.dhm.de)

The Deutsches Historische Museum in Berlin provides an insight into Germany's history (English, German). The "Lebendiges Museum Online" [www.dhm.de/lemo](http://www.dhm.de/lemo) (German) is also of interest.

[www.hdg.de](http://www.hdg.de)

Das Haus der Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland provides information about modern history, also by means of virtual exhibitions (English, German, French)

[www.wege-der-erinnerung.de](http://www.wege-der-erinnerung.de)

A joint European Web project offering information on the wars and conflicts in the first half of the 20th century (English, German, French, Italian, Dutch, Spanish)

[www.holocaust-mahnmal.de](http://www.holocaust-mahnmal.de)

The Web memorial to the murdered European Jews (English, German)

[www.historikerverband.de](http://www.historikerverband.de)

The Web site of the Verband der Historiker und Historikerinnen Deutschlands, Europe's largest association of historians (German)

[www.ena.lu](http://www.ena.lu)

A knowledge base dedicated to the history and institutions of a united Europe. (English, German, French, Spanish)

### **3. Political system**

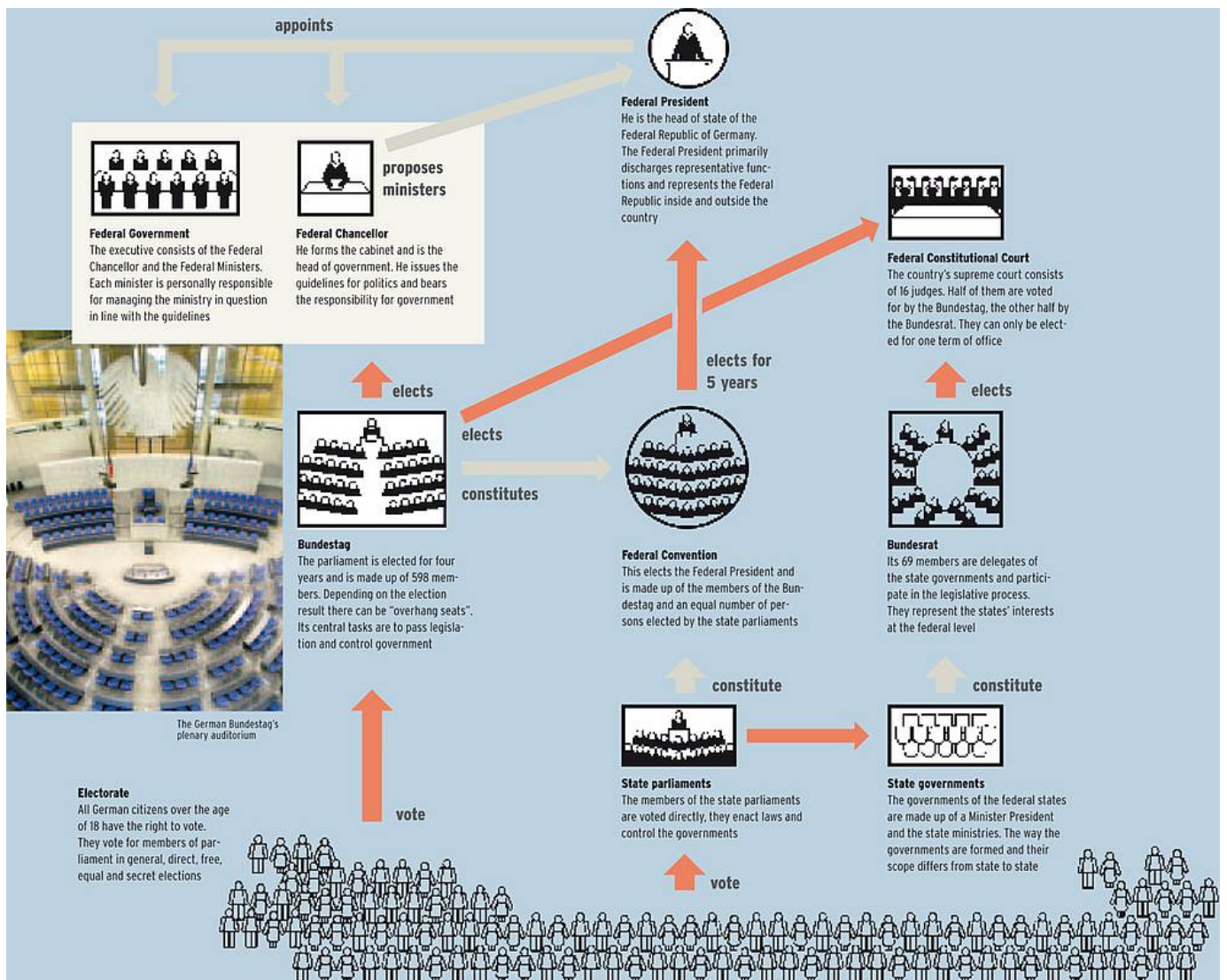
- Legislation:** Bicameral system in addition to the Bundestag, the Bundesrat (comprising delegates of the state governments to endorse the states' interests) participates in legislation.
- State structure:** Germany is a federation comprised of 16 federal states, each with its own constitution, parliament and government. The highest state authority is exercised by the federal government. Through the agency of the Bundesrat, the states are represented at the federal level and participate in federal legislation.
- Suffrage:** Universal, equal and secret suffrage as of 18 years of age (in the case of municipal elections in part as of 16), elections to the Bundestag are held every four years.

**Party system:**

Multi-party system, parties have a special constitutional status, receive state financial support, can only be prohibited by the Federal Constitutional Court.

**Legal system:**

Germany is a social constitutional state. It is based on the principle of a division of powers and the lawful administration. All organs of state are subject to the constitutional order. The Basic Law guarantees every individual citizen basic and human rights. The Federal Constitutional Court watches over adherence to the Basic Law. All the other organs of state are obligated to heed its rulings.



Source: Facts-About-Germany

## **Federal President**

The German head of state is elected for a five year term by the Federal Electoral Assembly, and can be reelected once. The Federal President (Bundespräsident) represents the Federation under international law and swears in the diplomatic representatives. At the Chancellor's suggestion he appoints the federal ministers, federal judges and federal officials – and nominates the Federal Chancellor for election by Parliament.

On the homepage of the Federal President you can read up on the constitutional foundations of his office and learn about the further duties of his office. Here you'll find his biography, speeches and quotes, as well as a gallery of former Federal Presidents. Virtual tours take you through his offices in Bellevue Palace and Villa Hammerschmidt.

[www.bundespraesident.de](http://www.bundespraesident.de)

## **Federal Parliament**

The Federal Parliament (Bundestag) is the parliament of the Federal Republic of Germany and its supreme federal legislative organ. Its central task is to represent the will of the people. As the most powerful constitutional organ, its duties include passing federal laws, electing the Chancellor and overseeing the work of the government. Members of Parliament are elected to four year terms.

How do the Parliament and its committees work? What do the Members of Parliament do? [www.bundestag.de](http://www.bundestag.de) carries plenary debates live online and provides an overview of the political parties. Forums let you exchange opinions on certain subjects. Or you can sign up to visit a session in the plenary hall.

[www.bundestag.de](http://www.bundestag.de)

## **The Federal Government**

The Federal Government, the executive constitutional body, consists of the Federal Chancellor and his Federal Ministers; together they make up the "Cabinet". There are three principles that govern the division of labor in the Cabinet: the Chancellor, the Colleague and the Responsibility principles. Each minister is responsible for keeping his department on the Chancellor's course.

Learn about the makeup and the tasks of the government first-hand here, in interactive role playing, for example, and find all kinds of information on current political topics from A to Z. A "clipboard" function lets you download articles and under "Service" you can subscribe to the E-Magazine of the Federal Government or join in on the discussion of political issues in one of the forums.

[www.bundesregierung.de](http://www.bundesregierung.de)

## **Federal Chancellor**

Every four years, the citizens of Germany decide anew who will represent them in their parliament, the German Bundestag. The State President proposes a candidate to the parliament to be elected as the Federal Chancellor. In order to win the election, a candidate requires an absolute majority of the votes cast in the parliament. Dr. Angela Merkel is the first woman to

ever hold the office of Federal Chancellor in Germany. She was elected in November 2005 and now governs the course of politics in the country.

The new Chancellor's website offers information on current political events – including a calendar, articles, speeches, interviews and photo series. Read up on the biography of the Chancellor, watch a film that takes you through the history of the Chancellors in office or find out exactly what the Chancellor is expected to do according to the German Constitution. Informative texts for kids round out the homepage.

[www.bundestkanzlerin.de](http://www.bundestkanzlerin.de)

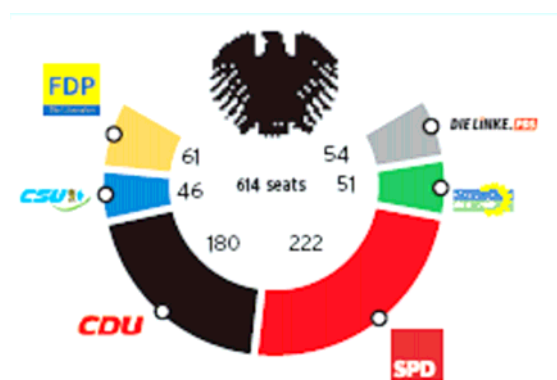
## Federal Council

The Federal Council (Bundesrat) is the federate constitutional organ in Germany, an additional legislative organ alongside the Federal Parliament. Federal laws which affect the responsibilities of the German states must be passed by the Bundesrat. Through the Bundesrat, the 16 states of Germany also play a role in the federal administration of the country and in European affairs. Members of the Bundesrat are appointed by the state governments.

How is the Bundesrat put together? Informative graphics illustrate how the votes are allocated, a system which is based on the size of the individual state's population. You can access interesting information on the states by simply clicking on the interactive map in the section on "Länder".

[www.bundesrat.de](http://www.bundesrat.de)

## The sixteenth German Bundestag



On September 18 2005, the 16th German Bundestag was elected. The election had been preceded by the dissolution of the Bundestag following a failed vote of confidence in the Federal Chancellor. The new Parliament is made up of five parliamentary parties. The SPD, the CDU and CSU together form a grand coalition government. The President of the Bundestag – and thus the second-highest ranking official in the country – is the CDU Member of Parliament Norbert Lammert. Women constitute 32 percent of the members of parliament.

Source: Facts-About-Germany

## Federal Constitutional Court

The Federal Constitutional Court (Bundesverfassungsgericht, BverfG) in Karlsruhe secures the adherence to the Basic Law. It is the supreme organ of constitutional jurisdiction, politically independent from all other constitutional organs. It takes action only on application. Rulings of the BverfG are non-appealable and binding for all other organs of state.

The website offers information on the two court divisions with eight judges each, who are elected by the Federal Parliament and Federal Council and appointed by the Federal President.

The judges in office are presented along with their *curricula vitae*. Information on decisions can be furnished by searching for key word, theme, file number or date.

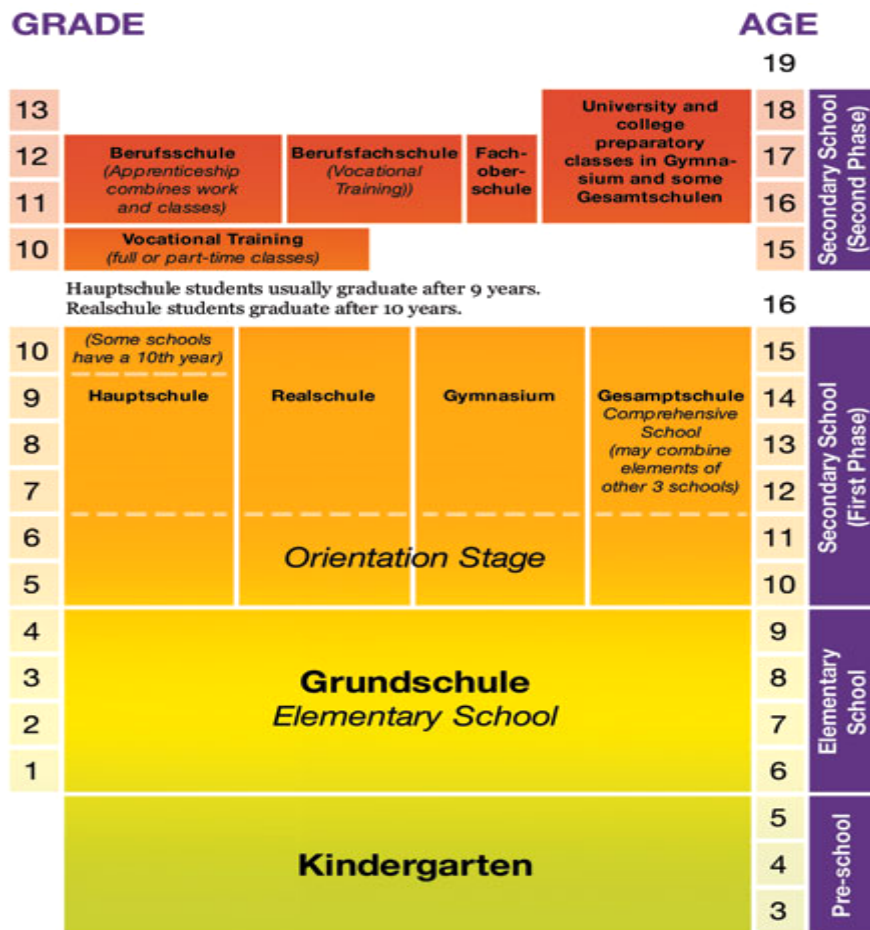
[www.bundesverfassungsgericht.de](http://www.bundesverfassungsgericht.de)

#### **4. Overview of the German school system**

Sound initial opportunities for everyone are a precondition for education and achievement. Hence, education in Germany encompasses nine years of compulsory education for all children. Once children have reached six years of age, they as a rule attend primary school for four years, before being able to transfer to a variety of secondary schools: *Hauptschule*, *Realschule*, *Gymnasium*. The standards and balancing of practical versus theoretical lessons differ.

- *Hauptschule* (the least academic, elementary school) until grade 9.
- *Realschule* until grade 10.
- *Gymnasium* (High School) until grade 12 or 13 (with *Abitur* as exit exam, qualifying for university).
- *Gesamtschule* (comprehensive school) with all the options of the three "careers" above.
- Upon completion of one of these schools the graduates may also choose to start a professional career with an apprenticeship in the *Berufsschule* (vocational school). The *Berufsschule* is typically attended twice a week during a two, three, or three-and-a-half year apprenticeship; the remainder of days is spent working at a company. This model offers the students knowledge of both theory and practice. In some fields the apprenticeship is training expertise that is required by law (special positions in a bank, assistance of a lawyer ...).

In Germany, the 16 federal states hold the exclusive responsibility in the field of education. The federal parliament and the federal government can influence the educational system only via the financial aid granted to the states. As a result, there are several different school systems; however, in every state the starting point is *Grundschule* (elementary school) for a period of 4 years. It is often difficult for families to move from one state to another, for there are rather different curricula for virtually every subject.



Source: "Guide - How To Germany"

### Life in a German school

While German students are in no way different from other students across the world, there are organizational differences. The main points are delineated below. Yet, it should be noted that there are additional differences across the 16 states of Germany.

- Exams (which are always supervised) tend to be essay based, rather than multiple choice.
- At every school type, students study one foreign language (in almost all cases English) for at least five years. In *Gymnasium*, students can choose from a wider range of languages (mostly English, French, or Latin) as the first language in 5th grade, and a second mandatory language in 6th or 7th grade. Some categories of *Gymnasium* also require an additional third language (such as Spanish, Italian, Russian or Ancient Greek) in 9th or 11th grade.
- At the end of their schooling, students usually take a cumulative written and oral examination (*Abitur* in *Gymnasiums* or *Abschlussprüfung* in *Realschulen* and *Hauptschulen*).
- Report cards (*Zeugnisse*) are issued twice a year at the end of the semester, usually in February and June or July. The grade scale ranges from 1 to 6, where 1 is "Excellent" and 6 is "Failed". Students who fail to meet minimum standards are required to attend to the previous class once more before they are allowed to be transferred (which happens to almost 5% of students every year).



## College and university

Generally, it can be said that Germany does not boast "colleges" in the sense that is used in the US. Upon leaving school, students may choose to continue their educational career and transfer to university. Still, most (male) students will serve a year's military or civil service (*Zivildienst*) beforehand.

The *Gymnasium* graduation (*Abitur*) enables the student to attend to any university. The *Abiturdurchschnittsnote* (similar to GPA in the US, or A-Level results in the UK) is the decisive criterion in granting university places; an institution may quote an entry requirement for a particular course. This is called *numerus clausus* (literally "restricted number"), but it generally only applies to popular courses with a limited number of openings; for example a medical course could require an *Abitur* grade of between 1.0 to 1.5, equivalent to a 3.9 - 4.5 GPA in the USA approximately.

German university students largely choose their own programme of study and professors choose their own subjects for research and teaching. This elective system often results in students spending many years at university before graduating, and is currently subject to a reappraisal. Students choose and switch universities according to their interests and the opportunities of each university. Occasionally, students attend two, three or more different universities in the course of their studies. This freedom of mobility between German universities is unknown to the USA, the UK, or France.

*University degrees:* Changes related to the so-called Bologna-Agreement have started taking place to establish a more internationally accredited system, which includes new course structures - the Bachelor degree and the Master degree - and ETCS credits. Consequentially the majority courses lead up to a Bachelor or Master degree. The achievement of a doctoral degree usually takes another 3-5 years, with no formal classes, but independent research under the guidance of a single professor. Most doctoral candidates work as teaching- or research assistants, and are paid a reasonably competitive salary. This is different in medicine, where an M.D. is (effectively) required for work and hence a more streamlined process applies.

However, there is another type of post-*Abitur* university training available in Germany: the *Fachhochschulen* (Universities of Applied Science), which offer the same degrees as regular universities, but regularly focus on applied science as opposed to basic research and merely academic subjects. Students begin their courses together and as a rule graduate together and there is little choice in their schedule. To get on-the-job experience, an internship semester is a mandatory element of studying at a University of Applied Science. After 3,5 years approximately (depending on how a student arranges the courses he or she takes during his or her studies, and on whether he or she has to repeat courses) a University of Applied Science student can draw on a complete education and can easily move on to working life. Graduates of Universities of Applied Science obtain a Bachelor degree.

There are no university-sponsored scholarships in Germany. However, a number of private and public institutions grant scholarships, usually to cover the cost of living and books. Likewise, there is a law (*Bafög* or *Bundesausbildungsförderungsgesetz*) that provides needy students with up to 550 EUR per month for 4-5 years if they or their parents are unable to put up the costs involved with studying. Part of this money can be given as an interest-free loan and has to be paid back upon completion of the university career.

Figures for Germany are roughly:

- 1,000,000 new students at all schools put together for one year
- 300,000 *Abitur* graduations
- 30,000 doctoral dissertations per year
- 1000 habilitations per year (qualification to become a professor)

In addition, there are the courses leading to *Staatsexamen* (state examinations), e. g. for lawyers and teachers, that qualify for entry into German civil service, but which are not recognized in other countries as an academic degree.

### **Germany's education system in the Internet**

[www.bmbf.de](http://www.bmbf.de)

The comprehensive German Federal Ministry of Education and Research Web site, providing information on the German education system and research projects (English and German).

[www.daad.de](http://www.daad.de)

The German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) provides information on funding and exchange programs for students, graduates and scientists (in 22 languages)

<http://www.bildungsserver.de>

This website has been created in order to provide access to educational resources on the web. The Eduserver offers comprehensive collections of records for all those who would like to go into specific details, so relevant sites are pointed out here, too (English and German)

## **5. Economy**

### **Overview**

Germany ranks third in terms of total economic output; it is among the world's leading economies. In terms of exports, Germany takes first place worldwide. The country continues to be an attractive site for foreign investors, offering an unparalleled level of infrastructure development and a exceedingly motivated, highly-qualified work force. High caliber research and development projects are additional features of the nation. Reforms to the social security system and structural reforms to the labor market aim at a reduction of additional labor costs and provide momentum for economic growth.

In comparison with other industrial nation, the German economy exhibits an almost unmatched international focus. Just about a third of companies' profits are generated through exports, and almost one in four jobs is dependant on foreign trade. The rugged international competitiveness is most evident where companies oppose each other in the global arena. In recent years German industry has grown considerably more competitive and has asserted and expanded its leading market position on German, European and international markets. Regardless of sluggish world trade, the share of exports grew at a higher than average rate. In addition, the continuous increase in direct investments by international companies in Germany and by German companies abroad fortifies the strong international positioning of the German

economy. Alongside internationally active corporations, SMEs form the engine driving the German economy. Around 70% of all employees work in small and medium sized enterprises.

At the national level, the economy is buoyed by a favorable inflation rate and unit labor costs as well as by a stable political environment. The traditional sectors of Car-making, mechanical, electrical and precision engineering, electrical engineering, optics; medical technology and the chemical industry contributed particularly to the renewed expansion in the volume of industrial output. Still, other industrial areas such as logistics, information technology, aerospace biotech and genetic engineering as well as nanotechnology also threw their weight around. Nevertheless, the automobile sector remains the single most important branch accounting for every seventh employee and 40 percent of total exports.

Thanks to its six renowned manufacturers VW, Audi, BMW, DaimlerChrysler, Porsche and Opel (General Motors), Germany resides alongside Japan and the USA as one of the top three automobile manufacturers in the world. Each year production volume reaches some six million cars, and German manufacturers produce an additional 4.8 million vehicles in global production sites. A distinguishing feature of their customers is their command for high-caliber workmanship and technical innovations with vehicles “made in Germany“. DaimlerChrysler is the third largest car-maker worldwide and number one in the premium class. The company’s headquarters and its most important production plants are sited in Stuttgart, which is also home to well-known automobile company Porsche. Volkswagen is Europe’s largest car-maker. BMW in Munich is also in the leading field of German automobile manufacturers.

### **Germany’s economy in the internet**

[www.invest-in-germany.de](http://www.invest-in-germany.de)

The Web site of the Invest in Germany GmbH federal agency provides underlying legal and business information as well as sector data, coordinates site selection processes in cooperation with local partners, and helps companies establish contact with the right people (in nine languages)

[www.ixpos.de](http://www.ixpos.de)

Ixpos presents a concise overview of services promoting German foreign trade (German)

[www.bmwi.de](http://www.bmwi.de)

The Federal Ministry of Economics and Technology Web site provides everything from quality management to e-commerce, information and links (English, German)

[www.ahk.de](http://www.ahk.de)

The Web site of the German Chambers of Commerce Abroad provides information for German companies planning to invest abroad (English, German)

## **6. Infrastructure**

### **Transportation at a glance<sup>2</sup>**

<b>Railways:</b>	47,201km
<b>Highways and roads:</b>	231,581km (including 12,037 km of expressways)
<b>Waterways:</b>	7,467 km; major rivers include the Rhine and Elbe; Kiel Canal is an important link between the Baltic Sea and North Sea (1999)
<b>Pipelines:</b>	crude oil 2,240 km (2001)
<b>Ports and harbours:</b>	Berlin, Bonn, Bremen, Bremerhaven, Cologne, Dresden, Duisburg, Emden, Hamburg, Karlsruhe, Kiel, Luebeck, Magdeburg, Mannheim, Rostock, Stuttgart
<b>Airports:</b>	552 (2005)
<b>Heliports:</b>	33 (2005)

### **Traffic in general**

Another national advantage Germany features is its highly developed supply and transport infrastructure. The road and rail network is widespread and tightly interlaced. This is also true for modern telecommunications infrastructure. This allows the swift exchange of goods, services and information. Thanks to the introduction and great acceptance of contemporary technologies further financial means are being channeled toward the infrastructure sector. For example, in 2004, more than half the population was using the Internet and approximately two thirds of the populations were equipped with mobile telephones.

### **Road traffic**

The volume of vehicles on the German roads is growing rapidly. The German road-system encompasses around 231,000 km of roadways and other through-fares, including 11,000 km of highway, making it one of the most extended road-systems in the world. The speed limit on the main roads lies between 70 and 100 km per hour, within residential area it ranges between 30 and 50 km per hour. In general, there is no speed limit whatsoever applies for the highways (*Autobahn*). Nevertheless, there are some speed limits for some kinds of vehicles, like trucks, busses, touring cars, and vehicles with trailers.

The automobile will remain unchallenged as the most common means of transportation, for it is indispensable for commuter traffic. What is more, the car is also offers personal independence. Much attention and eventually funds will be allocated to the effective combination of train and road traffic, to keep as many vehicles as possible off the road and preserve the free flow of traffic. Trucks have also become essential to securing economic advancement, swiftly transporting cargo all over Europe.

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<sup>2</sup> CIA-Factbook „Germany“ <https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/gm.html>

## Railway transportation



Germany has a very extensive network of railway-tracks. The formerly state controlled enterprise Deutsche Bahn AG offers the lion's share of railway transportation services. Trains are utilized for the transportation of bulk goods as well the transportation of passenger or a combination of both.

In addition the maintenance of already existing infrastructure and trains, the railway industry is also investing in R&D. Since 1991 high-speed trains, like the French TGV and the German ICE are in service. Furthermore, since early 1996 it is possible to travel from Cologne via Brussels to Paris in four hours, this route also services Amsterdam. A high-speed train also travels between Cologne and Frankfurt. A superior-speed magnetic-gliding-train, developed in Germany, was installed in Shanghai (China). Railway lines between Hanover, Würzburg, Mannheim, Stuttgart and Munich also attract businessmen in need of transportation service. On top of that, railways provide vital services in the area public transportation. This is particularly true for densely populated areas. The railway services try to convince the motorist to take the train to work instead.

## Marine transportation



Major German ports are situated in Hamburg, Bremen/Bremerhaven, Wilhelmshaven, Lübeck and Rostock. These harbours have invested heavily in new modern facilities and equipment, to keep the edge over other important European harbours. Container carriers can be loaded and unloaded very quickly. Resources, like oil products, building-materials, ores and coals are mainly transported using the inland waterways. The canals connect the North- and East Seas. The waterway system in Germany is just about 7,500 km long and most of the cargo, around 2/3 is transported on the river Rhine. Other main canals are the Main, Donau.

The most important inland harbours are Duisburg and Magdeburg.

## Air traffic



The bigger part of international air transportation of passengers and cargo is handled by 18 major airports. In addition to those major airports, there are also various smaller regional airports. In sum, German airports serviced 140 million passengers and transferred 3 million tons of cargo. Frankfurt am Main is the biggest German airport also ranks among the most important airports in Europe. It is positioned 7th place world-wide. Other central

airports are Munich, Düsseldorf, Berlin-Tegel and Hamburg. Germany's major airline company Lufthansa is one of the biggest airlines in the world. It is a member of the Star Alliance, the world's prime airline alliance.

Frankfurt am Main Airport - Biggest airport in continental Europe, has been transformed into one of the key travel hubs in Europe. It is located at the heart of the Rhine Main region, easily accessible not only from international destinations, but also entirely interlinked with the local transportation infrastructure.