

= Germany =

Germany ( / ˈdʒɜːrməni / ; German : Deutschland , pronounced [ ˈdɔʏtʃlant ] ) , officially the Federal Republic of Germany ( German : Bundesrepublik Deutschland , listen ) , is a sovereign state and federal parliamentary republic in central @-@ western Europe . It includes 16 constituent states , covers an area of 357 @, @ 021 square kilometres ( 137 @, @ 847 sq mi ) , and has a largely temperate seasonal climate . Its capital and largest city is Berlin . With about 81 @. @ 8 million inhabitants , Germany is the most populous member state of the European Union . After the United States , it is the second most popular human migration destination .

Various Germanic tribes have occupied the northern parts of modern Germany since classical antiquity . A region named Germania was documented before 100 AD . During the Migration Period the Germanic tribes expanded southward . Beginning in the 10th century , German territories formed a central part of the Holy Roman Empire . During the 16th century , northern German regions became the centre of the Protestant Reformation .

In 1871 most of the German states unified into the Prussian @-@ dominated German Empire . After World War I and the German Revolution of 1918 ? 1919 , the Empire was replaced by the parliamentary Weimar Republic . The establishment of the national socialist dictatorship in 1933 led to World War II and systematic genocide . After a period of Allied occupation , two German states were founded : the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic . In 1990 , the country was reunified .

In the 21st century , Germany is a great power and has the world 's fourth @-@ largest economy by nominal GDP , as well as the fifth @-@ largest by PPP . As a global leader in several industrial and technological sectors , it is both the world 's third @-@ largest exporter and importer of goods . Germany is a developed country with a very high standard of living sustained by a skilled and productive society . It upholds a social security and universal health care system , environmental protection and a tuition @-@ free university education .

Germany was a founding member of the European Union in 1993 . It is part of the Schengen Area , and became a co @-@ founder of the Eurozone in 1999 . Germany is a member of the United Nations , NATO , the G8 , the G20 , and the OECD . The national military expenditure is the 9th highest in the world . Known for its rich cultural history , Germany has been continuously the home of influential artists , philosophers , musicians , sportspeople , entrepreneurs , scientists and inventors .

= = Etymology = =

The English word Germany derives from the Latin Germania , which came into use after Julius Caesar adopted it for the peoples east of the Rhine . The German term Deutschland , originally diutisciu land ( " the German lands " ) is derived from deutsch ( cf. dutch ) , descended from Old High German diutisc " popular " ( i.e. belonging to the diot or diota " people " ) , originally used to distinguish the language of the common people from Latin and its Romance descendants . This in turn descends from Proto @-@ Germanic \* þiudiskaz " popular " ( see also the Latinised form Theodiscus ) , derived from \* þeudʰ , descended from Proto @-@ Indo @-@ European \* tewtéh ʔ - " people " .

= = History = =

The discovery of the Mauer 1 mandible shows that ancient humans were present in Germany at least 600 @, @ 000 years ago . The oldest complete hunting weapons found anywhere in the world were discovered in a coal mine in Schöningen where three 380 @, @ 000 @-@ year @-@ old wooden javelins were unearthed . The Neander Valley was the location where the first ever non @-@ modern human fossil was discovered ; the new species of human was called the Neanderthal . The Neanderthal 1 fossils are known to be 40 @, @ 000 years old . Evidence of modern humans , similarly dated , has been found in caves in the Swabian Jura near Ulm . The finds include 42 @, @

000 @-@ year @-@ old bird bone and mammoth ivory flutes which are the oldest musical instruments ever found , the 40 @,@ 000 @-@ year @-@ old Ice Age Lion Man which is the oldest uncontested figurative art ever discovered , and the 35 @,@ 000 @-@ year @-@ old Venus of Hohle Fels which is the oldest uncontested human figurative art ever discovered . The Nebra sky disk is a bronze artifact created during the European Bronze Age attributed to a site near Nebra , Saxony @-@ Anhalt . It is part of UNESCO 's Memory of the World Programme .

= = = Germanic tribes and Frankish Empire = = =

The Germanic tribes are thought to date from the Nordic Bronze Age or the Pre @-@ Roman Iron Age . From southern Scandinavia and north Germany , they expanded south , east and west from the 1st century BC , coming into contact with the Celtic tribes of Gaul as well as Iranian , Baltic , and Slavic tribes in Central and Eastern Europe . Under Augustus , Rome began to invade Germania ( an area extending roughly from the Rhine to the Ural Mountains ) . In 9 AD , three Roman legions led by Varus were defeated by the Cheruscan leader Arminius . By 100 AD , when Tacitus wrote Germania , Germanic tribes had settled along the Rhine and the Danube ( the Limes Germanicus ) , occupying most of the area of modern Germany ; Austria , Baden Württemberg , southern Bavaria , southern Hessen and the western Rhineland , however , were Roman provinces .

In the 3rd century a number of large West Germanic tribes emerged : Alemanni , Franks , Chatti , Saxons , Frisii , Sicambri , and Thuringii . Around 260 , the Germanic peoples broke into Roman @-@ controlled lands . After the invasion of the Huns in 375 , and with the decline of Rome from 395 , Germanic tribes moved further south @-@ west . Simultaneously several large tribes formed in what is now Germany and displaced or absorbed smaller Germanic tribes . Large areas known since the Merovingian period as Austrasia , Neustria , and Aquitaine were conquered by the Franks who established the Frankish Kingdom , and pushed further east to subjugate Saxony and Bavaria . Areas of what is today the eastern part of Germany were inhabited by Western Slavic tribes of Sorbs , Veleti and the Obotritic confederation .

= = = East Francia and Holy Roman Empire = = =

In 800 , the Frankish king Charlemagne was crowned emperor and founded the Carolingian Empire , which was later divided in 843 among his heirs . Following the break up of the Frankish Realm , for 900 years , the history of Germany was intertwined with the history of the Holy Roman Empire , which subsequently emerged from the eastern portion of Charlemagne 's original empire . The territory initially known as East Francia stretched from the Rhine in the west to the Elbe River in the east and from the North Sea to the Alps .

The Ottonian rulers ( 919 ? 1024 ) consolidated several major duchies and the German king Otto I was crowned Holy Roman Emperor of these regions in 962 . In 996 Gregory V became the first German Pope , appointed by his cousin Otto III , whom he shortly after crowned Holy Roman Emperor . The Holy Roman Empire absorbed northern Italy and Burgundy under the reign of the Salian emperors ( 1024 ? 1125 ) , although the emperors lost power through the Investiture Controversy .

In the 12th century , under the Hohenstaufen emperors ( 1138 ? 1254 ) , German princes increased their influence further south and east into territories inhabited by Slavs ; they encouraged German settlement in these areas , called the eastern settlement movement ( Ostsiedlung ) . Members of the Hanseatic League , which included mostly north German cities and towns , prospered in the expansion of trade . In the south , the Greater Ravensburg Trade Corporation ( Große Ravensburger Handelsgesellschaft ) served a similar function . The edict of the Golden Bull issued in 1356 by Emperor Charles IV provided the basic constitutional structure of the Empire and codified the election of the emperor by seven prince @-@ electors who ruled some of the most powerful principalities and archbishoprics .

Population declined in the first half of the 14th century , starting with the Great Famine in 1315 , followed by the Black Death of 1348 ? 50 . Despite the decline , however , German artists ,

engineers , and scientists developed a wide array of techniques similar to those used by the Italian artists and designers of the time who flourished in such merchant city @-@ states as Venice , Florence and Genoa . Artistic and cultural centers throughout the German states produced such artists as the Augsburg painters Hans Holbein and his son , and Albrecht Dürer . Johannes Gutenberg introduced moveable @-@ type printing to Europe , a development that laid the basis for the spread of learning to the masses .

In 1517 , the Wittenberg monk Martin Luther publicised The Ninety @-@ Five Theses , challenging the Roman Catholic Church and initiating the Protestant Reformation . In 1555 , the Peace of Augsburg established Lutheranism as an acceptable alternative to Catholicism , but also decreed that the faith of the prince was to be the faith of his subjects , a principle called *Cuius regio , eius religio* . The agreement at Augsburg failed to address other religious creed : for example , the Reformed faith was still considered a heresy and the principle did not address the possible conversion of an ecclesiastic ruler , such as happened in Electorate of Cologne in 1583 . From the Cologne War until the end of the Thirty Years ' Wars ( 1618 ? 1648 ) , religious conflict devastated German lands . The latter reduced the overall population of the German states by about 30 percent , and in some places , up to 80 percent . The Peace of Westphalia ended religious warfare among the German states . German rulers were able to choose either Roman Catholicism , Lutheranism or the Reformed faith as their official religion after 1648 .

In the 18th century , the Holy Roman Empire consisted of approximately 1 @, @ 800 territories . The elaborate legal system initiated by a series of Imperial Reforms ( approximately 1450 ? 1555 ) created the Imperial Estates and provided for considerable local autonomy among ecclesiastical , secular , and hereditary states , reflected in Imperial Diet . The House of Habsburg held the imperial crown from 1438 until the death of Charles VI in 1740 . Having no male heirs , he had convinced the Electors to retain Habsburg hegemony in the office of the emperor by agreeing to the Pragmatic Sanction . This was finally settled through the War of Austrian Succession ; in the Treaty of Aix @-@ la @-@ Chapelle , Maria Theresa 's husband became Holy Roman Emperor , and she ruled the Empire as Empress Consort . From 1740 , dualism between the Austrian Habsburg Monarchy and the Kingdom of Prussia dominated the German states in the 18th century . As a consequence of the French Revolutionary Wars , and the subsequent final meeting of the Imperial Diet , most of the secular Free Imperial Cities were annexed by dynastic territories ; the ecclesiastical territories were secularized and annexed . In 1806 the Imperium was dissolved ; German states , particularly the Rhineland states , fell under the influence of France . Until 1815 , France , Russia , Prussia and the Habsburgs competed for hegemony in the German states during the Napoleonic Wars .

= = = German Confederation and Empire = = =

Following the fall of Napoleon , the Congress of Vienna ( convened in 1814 ) founded the German Confederation ( *Deutscher Bund* ) , a loose league of 39 sovereign states . The appointment of the Emperor of Austria as the permanent president of the Confederation reflected the Congress 's failure to accept Prussia 's influence among the German states , and acerbated the long @-@ standing competition between the Hohenzollern and Habsburg interests . Disagreement within restoration politics partly led to the rise of liberal movements , followed by new measures of repression by Austrian statesman Metternich . The Zollverein , a tariff union , furthered economic unity in the German states . National and liberal ideals of the French Revolution gained increasing support among many , especially young , Germans . The Hambach Festival in May 1832 was a main event in support of German unity , freedom and democracy . In the light of a series of revolutionary movements in Europe , which established a republic in France , intellectuals and commoners started the Revolutions of 1848 in the German states . King Frederick William IV of Prussia was offered the title of Emperor , but with a loss of power ; he rejected the crown and the proposed constitution , leading to a temporary setback for the movement .

King William I appointed Otto von Bismarck as the new Minister President of Prussia in 1862 . Bismarck successfully concluded war on Denmark in 1864 , which promoted German over Danish interests in the Jutland peninsula . The subsequent ( and decisive ) Prussian victory in the Austro

@-@ Prussian War of 1866 enabled him to create the North German Confederation ( Norddeutscher Bund ) which excluded Austria from the federation 's affairs . After the French defeat in the Franco @-@ Prussian War , the German princes proclaimed the founding of the German Empire in 1871 at Versailles , uniting all scattered parts of Germany except Austria . Prussia was the dominant constituent state of the new empire ; the Hohenzollern King of Prussia ruled as its concurrent Emperor , and Berlin became its capital .

In the Gründerzeit period following the unification of Germany , Bismarck 's foreign policy as Chancellor of Germany under Emperor William I secured Germany 's position as a great nation by forging alliances , isolating France by diplomatic means , and avoiding war . Under Wilhelm II , Germany , like other European powers , took an imperialistic course , leading to friction with neighbouring countries . Most alliances in which Germany had previously been involved were not renewed . This resulted in creation of a dual alliance with the multinational realm of Austria @-@ Hungary , promoting at least benevolent neutrality if not outright military support . Subsequently , the Triple Alliance of 1882 included Italy , completing a Central European geographic alliance that illustrated German , Austrian and Italian fears of incursions against them by France and / or Russia . Similarly , Britain , France and Russia also concluded alliances that would protect them against Habsburg interference with Russian interests in the Balkans or German interference against France .

At the Berlin Conference in 1884 , Germany claimed several colonies including German East Africa , German South @-@ West Africa , Togo , and Cameroon . Later , Germany further expanded its colonial empire to include German New Guinea , German Micronesia and German Samoa in the Pacific . In what became known as the " First Genocide of the Twentieth @-@ Century " , between 1904 and 1907 , the German colonial government in South @-@ West Africa ( present @-@ day Namibia ) ordered the annihilation of the local Herero and Namaqua peoples , as a punitive measure for an uprising against German colonial rule . In total , around 100 @,@ 000 people ? 80 % of the Herero and 50 % of the Namaqua ? perished from imprisonment in concentration camps , where the majority died of disease , abuse , and exhaustion , or from dehydration and starvation in the countryside after being deprived of food and water .

The assassination of Austria 's crown prince on 28 June 1914 provided the pretext for the Austrian Empire to attack Serbia and trigger World War I. After four years of warfare , in which approximately two million German soldiers were killed , a general armistice ended the fighting on 11 November , and German troops returned home . In the German Revolution ( November 1918 ) , Emperor Wilhelm II and all German ruling princes abdicated their positions and responsibilities . Germany 's new political leadership signed the Treaty of Versailles in 1919 . In this treaty , Germany , as part of the Central Powers , accepted defeat by the Allies in one of the bloodiest conflicts of all time . Germans perceived the treaty as humiliating and unjust and it was later seen by historians as influential in the rise of Adolf Hitler . After the defeat in the First World War , Germany lost around thirteen percent of its European territory ( totaling more than 27 @,@ 000 square miles ) and all of its colonial possessions in Africa and the South Sea .

= = = Weimar Republic and Nazi Germany = = =

Germany was declared a republic at the beginning of the German Revolution in November 1918 . On 11 August 1919 President Friedrich Ebert signed the democratic Weimar Constitution . In the subsequent struggle for power , the radical @-@ left Communists seized power in Bavaria , but conservative elements in other parts of Germany attempted to overthrow the Republic in the Kapp Putsch . It was supported by parts of the Reichswehr ( military ) and other conservative , nationalistic and monarchist factions . After a tumultuous period of bloody street fighting in the major industrial centers , the occupation of the Ruhr by Belgian and French troops and the rise of inflation culminating in the hyperinflation of 1922 ? 23 , a debt restructuring plan and the creation of a new currency in 1924 ushered in the Golden Twenties , an era of increasing artistic innovation and liberal cultural life . Underneath it all , though , lay a current of animosity and frustration over the Treaty of Versailles , widely perceived as a stab in the back , which provided the basis of much of the anti

@-@ Semetism rife in the next two decades . The economic situation remained volatile . Historians describe the period between 1924 and 1929 as one of " partial stabilization . " The world @-@ wide Great Depression hit Germany in 1929 . After the federal election of 1930 , Chancellor Heinrich Brüning 's government was enabled by President Paul von Hindenburg to act without parliamentary approval . Brüning 's government pursued a policy of fiscal austerity and deflation which caused high unemployment of nearly 30 % by 1932 .

The Nazi Party won the special federal election of 1932 . After a series of unsuccessful cabinets , Hindenburg appointed Adolf Hitler as Chancellor of Germany in 1933 . After the Reichstag fire , a decree abrogated basic civil rights and within weeks the first Nazi concentration camp at Dachau opened . The Enabling Act of 1933 gave Hitler unrestricted legislative power ; subsequently , his government established a centralised totalitarian state , withdrew from the League of Nations following a national referendum , and began military rearmament .

Using deficit spending , a government @-@ sponsored program for economic renewal focused on public works projects . In public work projects of 1934 , 1 @.@ 7 million Germans immediately were put to work , which gave them an income and social benefits . The most famous of the projects was the high speed roadway , the Reichsautobahn , known as the German autobahns . Other capital construction projects included such hydroelectric facilities as the Rur Dam , such water supplies as Zillierbach Dam , and such transportation hubs as Zwickau Hauptbahnhof . Over the next five years , unemployment plummeted and average wages both per hour and per week rose .

In 1935 , the regime withdrew from the Treaty of Versailles and introduced the Nuremberg Laws which targeted Jews and other minorities . Germany also reacquired control of the Saar in 1935 , annexed Austria in 1938 , and occupied Czechoslovakia in early 1939 .

In August 1939 , Hitler 's government signed the Molotov ? Ribbentrop pact with Stalin that divided Eastern Europe into German and Soviet spheres of influence . Following the agreement , on 1 September 1939 Germany invaded Poland , marking the beginning of World War II . In response to Hitler 's actions , Britain and France declared war on Germany . In the spring of 1940 , Germany conquered Denmark and Norway , the Netherlands , Belgium , Luxembourg , and France forcing the French government to sign an armistice after German troops occupied most of the country . The British repelled German air attacks in the same year . In 1941 , German troops invaded Yugoslavia , Greece and the Soviet Union . By 1942 , Germany and other Axis powers controlled most of continental Europe and North Africa , but following the Soviet Union 's victory at the Battle of Stalingrad , the allies ' reconquest of North Africa and invasion of Italy in 1943 , German forces suffered repeated military defeats . In June 1944 , the Western allies landed in France and the Soviets pushed into Eastern Europe . By late 1944 , the Western allies had entered Germany despite one final German counter offensive in the Ardennes Forest . Following Hitler 's suicide during the Battle of Berlin , German armed forces surrendered on 8 May 1945 , ending World War II in Europe .

In what later became known as The Holocaust , the German government persecuted minorities and used a network of concentration and death camps across Europe to conduct a genocide of what they considered to be inferior races . In total , over 10 million civilians were systematically murdered , including 6 million Jews , between 220 @,@ 000 and 1 @,@ 500 @,@ 000 Romani , 275 @,@ 000 persons with disabilities , thousands of Jehovah 's Witnesses , thousands of homosexuals , and hundreds of thousands of members of the political and religious opposition . Nazi policies in the German occupied countries resulted in the deaths of 2 @.@ 7 million Poles , 1 @.@ 3 million Ukrainians , and an estimated 2 @.@ 8 million Soviet war prisoners . German military war casualties were estimated at between 3 @.@ 2 million and 5 @.@ 3 million soldiers , and up to 2 million German civilians . German territorial losses resulted in the expulsion of circa 12 million of ethnic Germans from Eastern Europe . Germany ceded roughly one @-@ quarter of its pre @-@ war territory . Strategic bombing and land warfare destroyed many cities and cultural heritage sites . After World War II , former members of the Nazi regime were tried for war crimes at the Nuremberg trials .

= = = East and West Germany = = =

After Germany surrendered , the Allies partitioned Berlin and Germany 's remaining territory into four military occupation zones . The western sectors , controlled by France , the United Kingdom , and the United States , were merged on 23 May 1949 to form the Federal Republic of Germany ( Bundesrepublik Deutschland ) ; on 7 October 1949 , the Soviet Zone became the German Democratic Republic ( Deutsche Demokratische Republik ) . They were informally known as " West Germany " and " East Germany " . East Germany selected East Berlin as its capital , while West Germany chose Bonn as a provisional capital , to emphasise its stance that the two @-@ state solution was an artificial and temporary status quo .

West Germany was established as a federal parliamentary republic with a " social market economy " . Starting in 1948 West Germany became a major recipient of reconstruction aid under the Marshall Plan and used this to rebuild its industry . Konrad Adenauer was elected the first Federal Chancellor ( Bundeskanzler ) of Germany in 1949 and remained in office until 1963 . Under his and Ludwig Erhard 's leadership , the country enjoyed prolonged economic growth beginning in the early 1950s , that became known as an " economic miracle " ( Wirtschaftswunder ) . West Germany joined NATO in 1955 and was a founding member of the European Economic Community in 1957 .

East Germany was an Eastern Bloc state under political and military control by the USSR via occupation forces and the Warsaw Pact . Although East Germany claimed to be a democracy , political power was exercised solely by leading members ( Politbüro ) of the communist @-@ controlled Socialist Unity Party of Germany , supported by the Stasi , an immense secret service controlling many aspects of the society . A Soviet @-@ style command economy was set up and the GDR later became a Comecon state . While East German propaganda was based on the benefits of the GDR 's social programmes and the alleged constant threat of a West German invasion , many of its citizens looked to the West for freedom and prosperity . The Berlin Wall , built in 1961 to stop East Germans from escaping to West Germany , became a symbol of the Cold War . It was the site of Ronald Reagan 's " Mr. Gorbachov , Tear down this wall ! " speech of 12 June 1987 , which echoed John F. Kennedy 's famous Ich bin ein Berliner speech of 26 June 1963 . The fall of the Wall in 1989 became a symbol of the Fall of Communism , German Reunification and Die Wende .

Tensions between East and West Germany were reduced in the early 1970s by Chancellor Willy Brandt 's Ostpolitik . In summer 1989 , Hungary decided to dismantle the Iron Curtain and open the borders , causing the emigration of thousands of East Germans to West Germany via Hungary . This had devastating effects on the GDR , where regular mass demonstrations received increasing support . The East German authorities eased the border restrictions , allowing East German citizens to travel to the West ; originally intended to help retain East Germany as a state , the opening of the border actually led to an acceleration of the Wende reform process . This culminated in the Two Plus Four Treaty a year later on 12 September 1990 , under which the four occupying powers renounced their rights under the Instrument of Surrender , and Germany regained full sovereignty . This permitted German reunification on 3 October 1990 , with the accession of the five re @-@ established states of the former GDR .

= = = Reunified Germany and EU = = =

The united Germany is considered to be the enlarged continuation of the Federal Republic of Germany and not a successor state . As such , it retained all of West Germany 's memberships in international organizations . Based on the Berlin / Bonn Act , adopted in 1994 , Berlin once again became the capital of the reunified Germany , while Bonn obtained the unique status of a Bundesstadt ( federal city ) retaining some federal ministries . The relocation of the government was completed in 1999 . Following the 1998 elections , SPD politician Gerhard Schröder became the first Chancellor of a red ? green coalition with the Alliance ' 90 / The Greens party .

The modernisation and integration of the eastern German economy is a long @-@ term process scheduled to last until the year 2019 , with annual transfers from west to east amounting to roughly \$ 80 billion .

Since reunification , Germany has taken a more active role in the European Union . Together with

its European partners Germany signed the Maastricht Treaty in 1992 , established the Eurozone in 1999 , and signed the Lisbon Treaty in 2007 . Germany sent a peacekeeping force to secure stability in the Balkans and sent a force of German troops to Afghanistan as part of a NATO effort to provide security in that country after the ousting of the Taliban . These deployments were controversial since Germany was bound by domestic law only to deploy troops for defence roles .

In the 2005 elections , Angela Merkel became the first female Chancellor of Germany as the leader of a grand coalition . In 2009 the German government approved a ? 50 billion economic stimulus plan to protect several sectors from a downturn .

In 2009 , a liberal @-@ conservative coalition under Merkel assumed leadership of the country . In 2013 , a grand coalition was established in a Third Merkel cabinet . Among the major German political projects of the early 21st century are the advancement of European integration , the energy transition ( Energiewende ) for a sustainable energy supply , the " Debt Brake " for balanced budgets , measures to increase the fertility rate significantly ( pronatalism ) , and high @-@ tech strategies for the future transition of the German economy , summarized as Industry 4 @.@ 0 .

Germany was affected by the European migrant crisis in 2015 as it became the final destination of choice for most migrants entering the EU . The country took in over a million refugees and developed a quota system which redistributed migrants around its federal states based on their tax income and existing population density .

## = = Geography = =

Germany is in Western and Central Europe , with Denmark bordering to the north , Poland and the Czech Republic to the east , Austria to the southeast , Switzerland to the south @-@ southwest , France , Luxembourg and Belgium lie to the west , and the Netherlands to the northwest . It lies mostly between latitudes 47 ° and 55 ° N and longitudes 5 ° and 16 ° E. Germany is also bordered by the North Sea and , at the north @-@ northeast , by the Baltic Sea . With Switzerland and Austria , Germany also shares a border on the fresh @-@ water Lake Constance , the third largest lake in Central Europe . German territory covers 357 @,@ 021 km<sup>2</sup> ( 137 @,@ 847 sq mi ) , consisting of 349 @,@ 223 km<sup>2</sup> ( 134 @,@ 836 sq mi ) of land and 7 @,@ 798 km<sup>2</sup> ( 3 @,@ 011 sq mi ) of water . It is the seventh largest country by area in Europe and the 62nd largest in the world .

Elevation ranges from the mountains of the Alps ( highest point : the Zugspitze at 2 @,@ 962 metres or 9 @,@ 718 feet ) in the south to the shores of the North Sea ( Nordsee ) in the northwest and the Baltic Sea ( Ostsee ) in the northeast . The forested uplands of central Germany and the lowlands of northern Germany ( lowest point : Wilstermarsch at 3 @.@ 54 metres or 11 @.@ 6 feet below sea level ) are traversed by such major rivers as the Rhine , Danube and Elbe . Germany 's alpine glaciers are experiencing deglaciation . Significant natural resources include iron ore , coal , potash , timber , lignite , uranium , copper , natural gas , salt , nickel , arable land and water .

## = = = Climate = = =

Most of Germany has a temperate seasonal climate dominated by humid westerly winds . The country is situated in between the oceanic Western European and the continental Eastern European climate . The climate is moderated by the North Atlantic Drift , the northern extension of the Gulf Stream . This warmer water affects the areas bordering the North Sea ; consequently in the northwest and the north the climate is oceanic . Germany gets an average of 789 mm ( 31 in ) of precipitation per year ; there is no consistent dry season . Winters are mild and summers tend to be warm : temperatures can exceed 30 ° C ( 86 ° F ) .

The east has a more continental climate : winters can be very cold and summers very warm , and longer dry periods can occur . Central and southern Germany are transition regions which vary from moderately oceanic to continental . In addition to the maritime and continental climates that predominate over most of the country , the Alpine regions in the extreme south and , to a lesser degree , some areas of the Central German Uplands have a mountain climate , with lower temperatures and more precipitation .

## == Biodiversity ==

The territory of Germany can be subdivided into two ecoregions : European @-@ Mediterranean montane mixed forests and Northeast @-@ Atlantic shelf marine . As of 2008 the majority of Germany is covered by either arable land ( 34 % ) or forest and woodland ( 30 @-@ 1 % ) ; only 13 @-@ 4 % of the area consists of permanent pastures , 11 @-@ 8 % is covered by settlements and streets .

Plants and animals include those generally common to Central Europe . Beeches , oaks , and other deciduous trees constitute one @-@ third of the forests ; conifers are increasing as a result of reforestation . Spruce and fir trees predominate in the upper mountains , while pine and larch are found in sandy soil . There are many species of ferns , flowers , fungi , and mosses . Wild animals include roe deer , wild boar , mouflon ( a subspecies of wild sheep ) , fox , badger , hare , and small numbers of the Eurasian beaver . The blue cornflower was once a German national symbol .

The 14 national parks in Germany include the Jasmund National Park , the Vorpommern Lagoon Area National Park , the Müritzer National Park , the Wadden Sea National Parks , the Harz National Park , the Hainich National Park , the Black Forest National Park , the Saxon Switzerland National Park , the Bavarian Forest National Park and the Berchtesgaden National Park . In addition , there are 14 Biosphere Reserves , as well as 98 nature parks . More than 400 registered zoos and animal parks operate in Germany , which is believed to be the largest number in any country . The Berlin Zoo , opened in 1844 , is the oldest zoo in Germany , and presents the most comprehensive collection of species in the world .

## == Urbanization ==

Germany has a number of large cities . There are 11 officially recognised metropolitan regions in Germany . 34 cities have been identified as regiopolis . The largest conurbation is the Rhine @-@ Ruhr region ( 11 @-@ 7 million in 2008 ) , including Düsseldorf ( the capital of North Rhine @-@ Westphalia ) , Cologne , Bonn , Dortmund , Essen , Duisburg , and Bochum .

## == Politics ==

Germany is a federal , parliamentary , representative democratic republic . The German political system operates under a framework laid out in the 1949 constitutional document known as the Grundgesetz ( Basic Law ) . Amendments generally require a two @-@ thirds majority of both chambers of parliament ; the fundamental principles of the constitution , as expressed in the articles guaranteeing human dignity , the separation of powers , the federal structure , and the rule of law are valid in perpetuity .

The president , Joachim Gauck ( 18 March 2012 ? present ) , is the head of state and invested primarily with representative responsibilities and powers . He is elected by the Bundesversammlung ( federal convention ) , an institution consisting of the members of the Bundestag and an equal number of state delegates . The second @-@ highest official in the German order of precedence is the Bundestagspräsident ( President of the Bundestag ) , who is elected by the Bundestag and responsible for overseeing the daily sessions of the body . The third @-@ highest official and the head of government is the Chancellor , who is appointed by the Bundespräsident after being elected by the Bundestag .

The chancellor , Angela Merkel ( 22 November 2005 ? present ) , is the head of government and exercises executive power , similar to the role of a Prime Minister in other parliamentary democracies . Federal legislative power is vested in the parliament consisting of the Bundestag ( Federal Diet ) and Bundesrat ( Federal Council ) , which together form the legislative body . The Bundestag is elected through direct elections , by proportional representation ( mixed @-@ member ) . The members of the Bundesrat represent the governments of the sixteen federated states and are members of the state cabinets .



Since 1949 , the party system has been dominated by the Christian Democratic Union and the Social Democratic Party of Germany . So far every chancellor has been a member of one of these parties . However , the smaller liberal Free Democratic Party ( in parliament from 1949 to 2013 ) and the Alliance ' 90 / The Greens ( in parliament since 1983 ) have also played important roles .

The debt @-@ to @-@ GDP ratio of Germany had its peak in 2010 when it stood at 80 @. @ 3 % and decreased since then . According to Eurostat , the government gross debt of Germany amounts to ? 2 @, @ 152 @. @ 0 billion or 71 @. @ 9 % of its GDP in 2015 . The federal government achieved a budget surplus of ? 12 @. @ 1 billion ( \$ 13 @. @ 1 billion ) in 2015 . Germany 's credit rating by credit rating agencies Standard & Poor 's , Moody 's and Fitch Ratings stands at the highest possible rating AAA with a stable outlook in 2016 .

== = Law == =

Germany has a civil law system based on Roman law with some references to Germanic law . The Bundesverfassungsgericht ( Federal Constitutional Court ) is the German Supreme Court responsible for constitutional matters , with power of judicial review . Germany 's supreme court system , called Oberste Gerichtshöfe des Bundes , is specialised : for civil and criminal cases , the highest court of appeal is the inquisitorial Federal Court of Justice , and for other affairs the courts are the Federal Labour Court , the Federal Social Court , the Federal Finance Court and the Federal Administrative Court .

Criminal and private laws are codified on the national level in the Strafgesetzbuch and the Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch respectively . The German penal system seeks the rehabilitation of the criminal and the protection of the public . Except for petty crimes , which are tried before a single professional judge , and serious political crimes , all charges are tried before mixed tribunals on which lay judges ( Schöffen ) sit side by side with professional judges . Many of the fundamental matters of administrative law remain in the jurisdiction of the states .

== = Constituent states == =

Germany comprises sixteen federal states which are collectively referred to as Bundesländer . Each state has its own state constitution and is largely autonomous in regard to its internal organisation . Because of differences in size and population the subdivisions of these states vary , especially as between city states ( Stadtstaaten ) and states with larger territories ( Flächenländer ) . For regional administrative purposes five states , namely Baden @-@ Württemberg , Bavaria , Hesse , North Rhine @-@ Westphalia and Saxony , consist of a total of 22 Government Districts ( Regierungsbezirke ) . As of 2013 Germany is divided into 402 districts ( Kreise ) at a municipal level ; these consist of 295 rural districts and 107 urban districts .

== = Foreign relations == =

Germany has a network of 227 diplomatic missions abroad and maintains relations with more than 190 countries . As of 2011 it is the largest contributor to the budget of the European Union ( providing 20 % ) and the third largest contributor to the UN ( providing 8 % ) . Germany is a member of NATO , the OECD , the G8 , the G20 , the World Bank and the IMF . It has played an influential role in the European Union since its inception and has maintained a strong alliance with France and all neighboring countries since 1990 . Germany promotes the creation of a more unified European political , economic and security apparatus .

The development policy of Germany is an independent area of foreign policy . It is formulated by the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development and carried out by the implementing organisations . The German government sees development policy as a joint responsibility of the international community . It is the world 's third biggest aid donor in 2009 after the United States and France .

In 1999 , Chancellor Gerhard Schröder 's government defined a new basis for German foreign

policy by taking part in the NATO decisions surrounding the Kosovo War and by sending German troops into combat for the first time since 1945 . The governments of Germany and the United States are close political allies . Cultural ties and economic interests have crafted a bond between the two countries resulting in Atlanticism .

### = = = Military = = =

Germany 's military , the Bundeswehr , is organised into Heer ( Army and special forces KSK ) , Marine ( Navy ) , Luftwaffe ( Air Force ) , Bundeswehr Joint Medical Service and Streitkräftebasis ( Joint Support Service ) branches . In absolute terms , German military expenditure is the 9th highest in the world . In 2015 , military spending was at ? 32 @. @ 9 billion , about 1 @. @ 2 % of the country 's GDP , well below the NATO target of 2 % .

As of December 2015 the Bundeswehr employed roughly 178 @, @ 000 service members , including 9 @, @ 500 volunteers . Reservists are available to the Armed Forces and participate in defence exercises and deployments abroad . Since 2001 women may serve in all functions of service without restriction . About 19 @, @ 000 female soldiers are on active duty . According to SIPRI , Germany was the fourth largest exporter of major arms in the world in 2014 .

In peacetime , the Bundeswehr is commanded by the Minister of Defence . In state of defence , the Chancellor would become commander @- @ in @- @ chief of the Bundeswehr .

The role of the Bundeswehr is described in the Constitution of Germany as defensive only . But after a ruling of the Federal Constitutional Court in 1994 the term " defense " has been defined to not only include protection of the borders of Germany , but also crisis reaction and conflict prevention , or more broadly as guarding the security of Germany anywhere in the world . As of January 2015 , the German military has about 2 @, @ 370 troops stationed in foreign countries as part of international peacekeeping forces , including about 850 Bundeswehr troops in the NATO @- @ led ISAF force in Afghanistan and Uzbekistan , 670 German soldiers in Kosovo , and 120 troops with UNIFIL in Lebanon .

Until 2011 , military service was compulsory for men at age 18 , and conscripts served six @- @ month tours of duty ; conscientious objectors could instead opt for an equal length of Zivildienst ( civilian service ) , or a six @- @ year commitment to ( voluntary ) emergency services like a fire department or the Red Cross . In 2011 conscription was officially suspended and replaced with a voluntary service .

### = = Economy = =

Germany has a social market economy with a highly skilled labour force , a large capital stock , a low level of corruption , and a high level of innovation . It is the world 's third largest exporter of goods , and has the largest national economy in Europe which is also the world 's fourth largest by nominal GDP and the fifth one by PPP .

The service sector contributes approximately 71 % of the total GDP ( including information technology ) , industry 28 % , and agriculture 1 % . The unemployment rate published by Eurostat amounts to 4 @. @ 7 % in January 2015 , which is the lowest rate of all 28 EU member states . With 7 @. @ 1 % Germany also has the lowest youth unemployment rate of all EU member states . According to the OECD Germany has one of the highest labour productivity levels in the world .

Germany is part of the European single market which represents more than 508 million consumers . Several domestic commercial policies are determined by agreements among European Union ( EU ) members and by EU legislation . Germany introduced the common European currency , the Euro in 2002 . It is a member of the Eurozone which represents around 338 million citizens . Its monetary policy is set by the European Central Bank , which is headquartered in Frankfurt , the financial centre of continental Europe .

Being home to the modern car , the automotive industry in Germany is regarded as one of the most competitive and innovative in the world , and is the fourth largest by production . The top 10 exports of Germany are vehicles , machinery , chemical goods , electronic products , electrical equipments ,

pharmaceuticals , transport equipments , basic metals , food products , and rubber and plastics .

= = = Companies = = =

Of the world 's 500 largest stock @-@ market @-@ listed companies measured by revenue in 2014 , the Fortune Global 500 , 28 are headquartered in Germany . 30 Germany @-@ based companies are included in the DAX , the German stock market index . Well @-@ known international brands include Mercedes @-@ Benz , BMW , SAP , Volkswagen , Audi , Siemens , Allianz , Adidas , Porsche , and DHL .

Germany is recognised for its large portion of specialised small and medium enterprises , known as the Mittelstand model . Around 1 @,@ 000 of these companies are global market leaders in their segment and are labelled hidden champions . Berlin developed a thriving , cosmopolitan hub for startup companies and became a leading location for venture capital funded firms in the European Union .

The list includes the largest German companies by revenue in 2014 :

= = = Transport = = =

With its central position in Europe , Germany is a transport hub for the continent . Like its neighbours in Western Europe , Germany 's road network is among the densest in the world . The motorway ( Autobahn ) network ranks as the third @-@ largest worldwide in length and is known for its lack of a general speed limit .

Germany has established a polycentric network of high @-@ speed trains . The InterCityExpress or ICE network of the Deutsche Bahn serves major German cities as well as destinations in neighbouring countries with speeds up to 300 km / h ( 186 mph ) . The German railways are subsidised by the government , receiving ? 17 @.@ 0 billion in 2014 .

The largest German airports are Frankfurt Airport and Munich Airport , both hubs of Lufthansa , while Air Berlin has hubs at Berlin Tegel and Düsseldorf . Other major airports include Berlin Schönefeld , Hamburg , Cologne / Bonn and Leipzig / Halle . The Port of Hamburg is one of the top twenty largest container ports in the world .

= = = Energy and infrastructure = = =

In 2008 , Germany was the world 's sixth @-@ largest consumer of energy , and 60 % of its primary energy was imported . In 2014 , energy sources were : oil ( 35 @.@ 0 % ) ; coal , including lignite ( 24 @.@ 6 % ) ; natural gas ( 20 @.@ 5 % ) ; nuclear ( 8 @.@ 1 % ) ; hydro @-@ electric and renewable sources ( 11 @.@ 1 % ) . The government and the nuclear power industry agreed to phase out all nuclear power plants by 2021 . It also enforces energy conservation , green technologies , emission reduction activities , and aims to meet the country 's electricity demands using 40 % renewable sources by 2020 . Germany is committed to the Kyoto protocol and several other treaties promoting biodiversity , low emission standards , water management , and the renewable energy commercialisation . The country 's household recycling rate is among the highest in the world ? at around 65 % . Nevertheless , the country 's greenhouse gas emissions were the highest in the EU in 2010 . The German energy transition ( Energiewende ) is the recognised move to a sustainable economy by means of energy efficiency and renewable energy .

= = = Science and technology = = =

Germany 's achievements in the sciences have been significant , and research and development efforts form an integral part of the economy . The Nobel Prize has been awarded to 104 German laureates . In the beginning of the 20th century , German laureates had more awards than those of any other nation , especially in the sciences ( physics , chemistry , and physiology or medicine ) .

Notable German physicists before the 20th century include Hermann von Helmholtz , Joseph von

Fraunhofer and Gabriel Daniel Fahrenheit , among others . Albert Einstein introduced the relativity theories for light and gravity in 1905 and 1915 respectively . Along with Max Planck , he was instrumental in the introduction of quantum mechanics , in which Werner Heisenberg and Max Born later made major contributions . Wilhelm Röntgen discovered X @-@ rays . Otto Hahn was a pioneer in the fields of radiochemistry and discovered nuclear fission , while Ferdinand Cohn and Robert Koch were founders of microbiology . Numerous mathematicians were born in Germany , including Carl Friedrich Gauss , David Hilbert , Bernhard Riemann , Gottfried Leibniz , Karl Weierstrass , Hermann Weyl and Felix Klein .

Germany has been the home of many famous inventors and engineers , including Hans Geiger , the creator of the Geiger counter ; and Konrad Zuse , who built the first fully automatic digital computer . Such German inventors , engineers and industrialists as Count Ferdinand von Zeppelin , Otto Lilienthal , Gottlieb Daimler , Rudolf Diesel , Hugo Junkers and Karl Benz helped shape modern automotive and air transportation technology . German institutions like the German Aerospace Center ( DLR ) are the largest contributor to ESA . Aerospace engineer Wernher von Braun developed the first space rocket at Peenemünde and later on was a prominent member of NASA and developed the Saturn V Moon rocket . Heinrich Rudolf Hertz 's work in the domain of electromagnetic radiation was pivotal to the development of modern telecommunication .

Research institutions in Germany include the Max Planck Society , the Helmholtz Association and the Fraunhofer Society . The Wendelstein 7 @-@ X in Greifswald hosts a facility in the research of fusion power for instance . The Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz Prize is granted to ten scientists and academics every year . With a maximum of ? 2 @.@ 5 million per award it is one of highest endowed research prizes in the world .

= = = Tourism = = =

Germany is the seventh most visited country in the world , with a total of 407 million overnights during 2012 . This number includes 68 @.@ 83 million nights by foreign visitors . In 2012 , over 30 @.@ 4 million international tourists arrived in Germany . Berlin has become the third most visited city destination in Europe . Additionally , more than 30 % of Germans spend their holiday in their own country , with the biggest share going to Mecklenburg @-@ Vorpommern . Domestic and international travel and tourism combined directly contribute over EUR43.2 billion to German GDP . Including indirect and induced impacts , the industry contributes 4 @.@ 5 % of German GDP and supports 2 million jobs ( 4 @.@ 8 % of total employment ) .

Germany is well known for its diverse tourist routes , such as the Romantic Road , the Wine Route , the Castle Road , and the Avenue Road . The German Timber @-@ Frame Road ( Deutsche Fachwerkstraße ) connects towns with examples of these structures . There are 40 UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Germany , including the old town cores of Regensburg , Bamberg , Lübeck , Quedlinburg , Weimar , Stralsund and Wismar . Germany 's most @-@ visited landmarks include i. e . Neuschwanstein Castle , Cologne Cathedral , Berlin Bundestag , Hofbräuhaus Munich , Heidelberg Castle , Dresden Zwinger , Fernsehturm Berlin and Aachen Cathedral . The Europa @-@ Park near Freiburg is Europe 's second most popular theme park resort .

= = Demographics = =

With a population of 80 @.@ 2 million according to the 2011 census , rising to 81 @.@ 5 million as at 30 June 2015 and to at least 81 @.@ 9 million as at 31 December 2015 , Germany is the most populous country in the European Union , the second most populous country in Europe after Russia , and ranks as the 16th most populous country in the world . Its population density stands at 227 inhabitants per square kilometre ( 588 per square mile ) . The overall life expectancy in Germany at birth is 80 @.@ 19 years ( 77 @.@ 93 years for males and 82 @.@ 58 years for females ) . The fertility rate of 1 @.@ 41 children born per woman ( 2011 estimates ) , or 8 @.@ 33 births per 1000 inhabitants , is one of the lowest in the world . Since the 1970s , Germany 's death rate has exceeded its birth rate . However , Germany is witnessing increased birth rates and migration rates

since the beginning of the 2010s , particularly a rise in the number of well @-@ educated migrants .  
Four sizable groups of people are referred to as " national minorities " because their ancestors have lived in their respective regions for centuries . There is a Danish minority ( about 50 @,@ 000 ) in the northernmost state of Schleswig @-@ Holstein . The Sorbs , a Slavic population of about 60 @,@ 000 , are in the Lusatia region of Saxony and Brandenburg . The Roma and Sinti live throughout the whole federal territory and the Frisians live on Schleswig @-@ Holstein 's western coast , and in the north @-@ western part of Lower Saxony .  
Approximately 5 million Germans live abroad .

= = = Immigrant population = = =

In 2014 , about seven million of Germany 's 81 million residents did not have German citizenship . Ninety @-@ six percent of these people lived in western Germany and mostly in urban areas .  
In the 1960s and 1970s , the German governments invited " guest workers " ( Gastarbeiter ) to migrate to Germany for work in the German industries . Many companies preferred to keep these workers employed in Germany after they had trained them and Germany 's immigrant population has steadily increased . As of 2011 , about six million foreign citizens ( 7 @.@ 7 % of the population ) were registered in Germany .

The Federal Statistical Office classifies the citizens by immigrant background . Regarding immigrant background , 20 % of the country 's residents , or more than 16 million people , were of immigrant or partially immigrant descent in 2009 ( including persons descending or partially descending from ethnic German repatriates ) . In 2010 , 29 % of families with children under 18 had at least one parent with immigrant roots .

In 2015 , the Population Division of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs listed Germany as host to the second @-@ highest number of international migrants worldwide , about 5 % or 12 million of all 244 million migrants . Germany ranks 7th amongst EU countries and 37th globally in terms of the percentage of migrants who made up part of the country 's population . As of 2014 , the largest national group was from Turkey ( 2 @,@ 859 @,@ 000 ) , followed by Poland ( 1 @,@ 617 @,@ 000 ) , Russia ( 1 @,@ 188 @,@ 000 ) , and Italy ( 764 @,@ 000 ) . Since 1987 , around 3 million ethnic Germans , mostly from the former Eastern Bloc countries , have exercised their right of return and emigrated to Germany .

= = = Religion = = =

Since its foundation in 1871 , Germany has been about two @-@ thirds Protestant and one @-@ third Roman Catholic , with a notable Jewish minority . Other faiths were also present , but to a much lesser degree . The religious makeup changed gradually in the decades following 1945 , with West Germany becoming more religiously diversified through immigration and East Germany becoming overwhelmingly irreligious through state policies . It continues to diversify after the German reunification in 1990 .

According to the 2011 German Census , Christianity is the largest religion in Germany , claiming 66 @.@ 8 % of the total population . Relative to the whole population , 31 @.@ 7 % declared themselves as Protestants , including members of the Evangelical Church in Germany ( EKD ) ( 30 @.@ 8 % ) and the free churches ( German : Evangelische Freikirchen ) ( 0 @.@ 9 % ) , and 31 @.@ 2 % declared themselves as Roman Catholics . Orthodox believers constituted 1 @.@ 3 % , while Jews ? 0 @.@ 1 % . Other religions accounted for 2 @.@ 7 % . In 2014 , the Catholic Church accounted for 23 @.@ 9 million members ( 29 @.@ 5 % of the population ) and the Evangelical Church for 22 @.@ 6 million ( 27 @.@ 9 % of the population ) . Both large churches have lost significant number of adherents in recent years .

Geographically , Protestantism is concentrated in the northern , central and eastern parts of the country . These are mostly members of the EKD , which encompasses Lutheran , Reformed and unions of both traditions dating back to the Prussian Union of 1817 . Roman Catholicism is concentrated in the south and west .

In 2011 , 33 % of Germans were not members of officially recognised religious associations with special status . Irreligion in Germany is strongest in the former East Germany and major metropolitan areas .

Islam is the second largest religion in the country . In the 2011 census , 1 @. @ 9 % of Germans declared themselves to be Muslims . More recent estimation suppose , there are between 2 @. @ 1 and 4 million Muslims living in Germany . Most of the Muslims are Sunnis and Alevites from Turkey , but there are a small number of Shi 'ites , Ahmadiyyas and other denominations .

Other religions comprising less than one percent of Germany 's population are Buddhism with 250 @, @ 000 adherents ( roughly 0 @. @ 3 % ) and Hinduism with some 100 @, @ 000 adherents ( 0 @. @ 1 % ) . All other religious communities in Germany have fewer than 50 @, @ 000 adherents each .

### = = = Languages = = =

German is the official and predominant spoken language in Germany . It is one of 24 official and working languages of the European Union , and one of the three working languages of the European Commission . German is the most widely spoken first language in the European Union , with around 100 million native speakers .

Recognized native minority languages in Germany are Danish , Low German , Sorbian , Romany , and Frisian ; they are officially protected by the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages . The most used immigrant languages are Turkish , Kurdish , Polish , the Balkan languages , and Russian . Germans are typically multilingual : 67 % of German citizens claim to be able to communicate in at least one foreign language and 27 % in at least two .

Standard German is a West Germanic language and is closely related to and classified alongside Low German , Dutch , Frisian and English languages . To a lesser extent , it is also related to the East Germanic ( extinct ) and North Germanic languages . Most German vocabulary is derived from the Germanic branch of the Indo @- @ European language family . Significant minorities of words are derived from Latin and Greek , with a smaller amount from French and most recently English ( known as Denglisch ) . German is written using the Latin alphabet . German dialects , traditional local varieties traced back to the Germanic tribes , are distinguished from varieties of standard German by their lexicon , phonology , and syntax .

### = = = Education = = =

Responsibility for educational supervision in Germany is primarily organised within the individual federal states . Optional kindergarten education is provided for all children between three and six years old , after which school attendance is compulsory for at least nine years . Primary education usually lasts for four to six years . Secondary education includes three traditional types of schools focused on different academic levels : the Gymnasium enrolls the most gifted children and prepares students for university studies ; the Realschule for intermediate students lasts six years and the Hauptschule prepares pupils for vocational education . The Gesamtschule unifies all secondary education .

A system of apprenticeship called Duale Ausbildung leads to a skilled qualification which is almost comparable to an academic degree . It allows students in vocational training to learn in a company as well as in a state @- @ run trade school . This model is well regarded and reproduced all around the world .

Most of the German universities are public institutions , and students traditionally study without fee payment . The general requirement for university is the Abitur . However , there are a number of exceptions , depending on the state , the college and the subject . Tuition free academic education is open to international students and is increasingly common . According to an OECD report in 2014 , Germany is the world 's third leading destination for international study .

Germany has a long tradition of higher education reflecting the global status as a modern economy . The established universities in Germany include some of the oldest in the world , with Heidelberg

University ( established in 1386 ) being the oldest . It is followed by the Leipzig University ( 1409 ) , the Rostock University ( 1419 ) and the Greifswald University ( 1456 ) . The University of Berlin , founded in 1810 by the liberal educational reformer Wilhelm von Humboldt , became the academic model for many European and Western universities . In the contemporary era Germany has developed eleven Universities of Excellence : Humboldt University Berlin , the University of Bremen , the University of Cologne , TU Dresden , the University of Tübingen , RWTH Aachen , FU Berlin , Heidelberg University , the University of Konstanz , LMU Munich , and the Technical University of Munich .

== Health ==

Germany 's system of hospices , called spitals , dates from medieval times , and today , Germany has the world 's oldest universal health care system , dating from Bismarck 's social legislation of the 1880s , Since the 1880s , reforms and provisions have ensured a balanced health care system . Currently the population is covered by a health insurance plan provided by statute , with criteria allowing some groups to opt for a private health insurance contract . According to the World Health Organization , Germany 's health care system was 77 % government @-@ funded and 23 % privately funded as of 2013 . In 2005 , Germany spent 11 % of its GDP on health care . Germany ranked 20th in the world in life expectancy with 77 years for men and 82 years for women , and it had a very low infant mortality rate ( 4 per 1 @,@ 000 live births ) .

In 2010 , the principal cause of death was cardiovascular disease , at 41 % , followed by malignant tumours , at 26 % . In 2008 , about 82 @,@ 000 Germans had been infected with HIV / AIDS and 26 @,@ 000 had died from the disease ( cumulatively , since 1982 ) . According to a 2005 survey , 27 % of German adults are smokers . Obesity in Germany has been increasingly cited as a major health issue . A 2007 study shows Germany has the highest number of overweight people in Europe .

== Culture ==

Culture in German states has been shaped by major intellectual and popular currents in Europe , both religious and secular . Historically Germany has been called Das Land der Dichter und Denker ( " the land of poets and thinkers " ) , because of the major role its writers and philosophers have played in the development of Western thought .

Germany is well known for such folk festival traditions as Oktoberfest and Christmas customs , which include Advent wreaths , Christmas pageants , Christmas trees , Stollen cakes , and other practices . As of 2016 UNESCO inscribed 40 properties in Germany on the World Heritage List . There are a number of public holidays in Germany determined by each state ; 3 October has been a national day of Germany since 1990 , celebrated as the Tag der Deutschen Einheit ( German Unity Day ) .

In the 21st century Berlin has emerged as a major international creative center . According to the Anholt ? GfK Nation Brands Index , in 2014 Germany was the world 's most respected nation among 50 countries ( ahead of US , UK , and France ) . A global opinion poll for the BBC revealed that Germany is recognised for having the most positive influence in the world in 2013 and 2014 .

== Music ==

German classical music includes works by some of the world 's most well @-@ known composers . Dieterich Buxtehude composed oratorios for organ , which influenced the later work of Johann Sebastian Bach and Georg Friedrich Händel ; these men were influential composers of the Baroque period . During his tenure as violinist and teacher at the Salzburg cathedral , Augsburg @-@ born composer Leopold Mozart mentored one of the most noted musicians of all time : Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart . Ludwig van Beethoven was a crucial figure in the transition between the Classical and Romantic eras . Carl Maria von Weber and Felix Mendelssohn were important in the early

Romantic period . Robert Schumann and Johannes Brahms composed in the Romantic idiom . Richard Wagner was known for his operas . Richard Strauss was a leading composer of the late Romantic and early modern eras . Karlheinz Stockhausen and Hans Zimmer are important composers of the 20th and early 21st centuries .

Germany is the second largest music market in Europe , and fourth largest in the world . German popular music of the 20th and 21st century includes the movements of Neue Deutsche Welle , pop , Ostrock , heavy metal / rock , punk , pop rock , indie and schlager pop . German electronic music gained global influence , with Kraftwerk and Tangerine Dream pioneering in this genre . DJs and artists of the techno and house music scenes of Germany have become well known ( e.g. Robin Schulz , Paul van Dyk , Paul Kalkbrenner , and Scooter ) .

= = = Art = = =

German painters have influenced western art . Albrecht Dürer , Hans Holbein the Younger , Matthias Grünewald and Lucas Cranach the Elder were important German artists of the Renaissance , Peter Paul Rubens and Johann Baptist Zimmermann of the Baroque , Caspar David Friedrich and Carl Spitzweg of Romanticism , Max Liebermann of Impressionism and Max Ernst of Surrealism . Such German sculptors as Otto Schmidt @-@ Hofer , Franz Iffland , and Julius Schmidt @-@ Felling made important contributions to German art history in the late 19th and early 20th centuries .

Several German art groups formed in the 20th century , such as the November Group or Die Brücke ( The Bridge ) and Der Blaue Reiter ( The Blue Rider ) , by the Russian @-@ born Wassily Kandinsky , influenced the development of Expressionism in Munich and Berlin . The New Objectivity arose as a counter @-@ style to it during the Weimar Republic . Post @-@ World War II art trends in Germany can broadly be divided into Neo @-@ expressionism , performance art and Conceptualism . Especially notable neo @-@ expressionists include Georg Baselitz , Anselm Kiefer , Jörg Immendorff , A. R. Penck , Markus Lüpertz , Peter Robert Keil and Rainer Fetting . Other notable artists who work with traditional media or figurative imagery include Martin Kippenberger , Gerhard Richter , Sigmar Polke , and Neo Rauch . Leading German conceptual artists include or included Bernd and Hilla Becher , Hanne Darboven , Hans @-@ Peter Feldmann , Hans Haacke , Joseph Beuys , HA Schult , Aris Kalaizis , Neo Rauch ( New Leipzig School ) and Andreas Gursky ( photography ) . Major art exhibitions and festivals in Germany are the documenta , the Berlin Biennale , transmediale and Art Cologne .

= = = Architecture = = =

Architectural contributions from Germany include the Carolingian and Ottonian styles , which were precursors of Romanesque . Brick Gothic is a distinctive medieval style that evolved in Germany . Also in Renaissance and Baroque art , regional and typically German elements evolved ( e.g. Weser Renaissance and Dresden Baroque ) . Among many renowned Baroque masters were Pöppelmann , Balthasar Neumann , Knobelsdorff and the Asam brothers . The Wessobrunner School exerted a decisive influence on , and at times even dominated , the art of stucco in southern Germany in the 18th century . The Upper Swabian Baroque Route offers a baroque @-@ themed tourist route that highlights the contributions of such artists and craftsmen as the sculptor and plasterer Johann Michael Feuchtmayer , one of the foremost members of the Feuchtmayer family and the brothers Johann Baptist Zimmermann and Dominikus Zimmermann . Vernacular architecture in Germany is often identified by its timber framing ( Fachwerk ) traditions and varies across regions , and among carpentry styles .

When industrialisation spread across Europe , Classicism and a distinctive style of historicism developed in Germany , sometimes referred to as Gründerzeit style , due to the economical boom years at the end of the 19th century . Regional historicist styles include the Hanover School , Nuremberg Style and Dresden 's Semper @-@ Nicolai School . Among the most famous of German buildings , the Schloss Neuschwanstein represents Romanesque Revival . Notable sub @-@ styles



that evolved since the 18th century are the German spa and seaside resort architecture . German artists , writers and gallerists like Siegfried Bing , Georg Hirth and Bruno Möhring also contributed to the development of Art Nouveau at the turn of the 20th century , known as Jugendstil in German .

Expressionist architecture developed in the 1910s in Germany and influenced Art Deco and other modern styles , with e.g. Fritz Höger , Erich Mendelsohn , Dominikus Böhm and Fritz Schumacher being influential architects . Germany was particularly important in the early modernist movement : it is the home of Werkbund initiated by Hermann Muthesius ( New Objectivity ) , and of the Bauhaus movement founded by Walter Gropius . Consequently , Germany is often considered the cradle of modern architecture and design . Ludwig Mies van der Rohe became one of the world 's most renowned architects in the second half of the 20th century . He conceived of the glass façade skyscraper . Renowned contemporary architects and offices include Hans Kollhoff , Sergei Tchoban , KK Architekten , Helmut Jahn , Behnisch , GMP , Ole Scheeren , J. Mayer H. , OM Ungers , Gottfried Böhm and Frei Otto ( the last two being Pritzker Prize winners ) .

= = = Literature and philosophy = = =

German literature can be traced back to the Middle Ages and the works of writers such as Walther von der Vogelweide and Wolfram von Eschenbach . Well @-@ known German authors include Johann Wolfgang von Goethe , Friedrich Schiller , Gotthold Ephraim Lessing and Theodor Fontane . The collections of folk tales published by the Brothers Grimm popularised German folklore on an international level . The Grimms also gathered and codified regional variants of the German language , grounding their work in historical principles ; their Deutsches Wörterbuch , or German Dictionary , sometimes called the Grimm dictionary , was begun in 1838 and the first volumes published in 1854 .

Influential authors of the 20th century include Gerhart Hauptmann , Thomas Mann , Hermann Hesse , Heinrich Böll and Günter Grass . The German book market is the third largest in the world , after the United States and China . The Frankfurt Book Fair is the most important in the world for international deals and trading , with a tradition spanning over 500 years , also the Leipzig Book Fair retains a major position in Europe .

German philosophy is historically significant : Gottfried Leibniz 's contributions to rationalism ; the enlightenment philosophy by Immanuel Kant ; the establishment of classical German idealism by Johann Gottlieb Fichte , Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling ; Arthur Schopenhauer 's composition of metaphysical pessimism ; the formulation of communist theory by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels ; Friedrich Nietzsche 's development of perspectivism ; Gottlob Frege 's contributions to the dawn of analytic philosophy ; Martin Heidegger 's works on Being ; the development of the Frankfurt school by Max Horkheimer , Theodor Adorno , Herbert Marcuse and Jürgen Habermas have been particularly influential ; and Oswald Spengler 's historical philosophy , including his book The Decline of the West , in which he predicts the fall of the western European civilization and describes the Germanic culture as Faustian .

= = = Media = = =

The largest internationally operating media companies in Germany are the Bertelsmann enterprise , Axel Springer SE and ProSiebenSat.1 Media . The German Press Agency DPA is also significant . Germany 's television market is the largest in Europe , with some 38 million TV households . Around 90 % of German households have cable or satellite TV , with a variety of free @-@ to @-@ view public and commercial channels . There are more than 500 public and private radio stations in Germany , with the public Deutsche Welle being the main German radio and television broadcaster in foreign languages . Germany 's national radio network is the Deutschlandradio while ARD stations are covering local services .

Many of Europe 's best @-@ selling newspapers and magazines are produced in Germany . The papers ( and internet portals ) with the highest circulation are Bild ( a tabloid ) , Die Zeit , Süddeutsche Zeitung , Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung and Die Welt , the largest magazines include

Der Spiegel , Stern and Focus .

The German video gaming market is one of the largest in the world . The Gamescom in Cologne is the world 's leading gaming convention . Popular game series from Germany include Turricon , the Anno series , The Settlers series , the Gothic series , SpellForce , the FIFA Manager series , Far Cry and Crysis . Relevant game developers and publishers are Blue Byte , Crytek , Deep Silver , Kalypso Media , Piranha Bytes , Yager Development , and some of the largest social network game companies like Bigpoint , Gameforge , Goodgame and Wooga .

= = = Cinema = = =

German cinema has made major technical and artistic contributions to film . The first works of the Skladanowsky Brothers were shown to an audience in 1895 . The renowned Babelsberg Studio in Berlin 's suburb Potsdam was established in 1912 , thus being the first large @-@ scale film studio in the world . Today it is Europe 's largest studio . Early German cinema was particularly influential with German expressionists such as Robert Wiene and Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau . Director Fritz Lang 's Metropolis ( 1927 ) is referred to as the first major science @-@ fiction film . In 1930 Josef von Sternberg directed The Blue Angel , the first major German sound film , with Marlene Dietrich . Films of Leni Riefenstahl set new artistic standards , in particular Triumph of the Will .

After 1945 , many of the films of the immediate post @-@ war period can be characterised as Trümmerfilm . Such films included Wolfgang Staudte 's Die Mörder sind unter uns ( The Murderers are among us ) ( 1946 ) . Notable East German films included Der Untertan ( 1951 ) ; Konrad Wolf 's Der geteilte Himmel ( Divided Heaven ) ( 1964 ) and Frank Beyer 's Jacob the Liar ( 1975 ) . The defining film genre in West Germany of the 1950s was arguably the Heimatfilm ( " homeland film " ) ; these films depicted the beauty of the land and the moral integrity of the people living in it .

During the 1970s and 1980s , New German Cinema directors such as Volker Schlöndorff , Werner Herzog , Wim Wenders , and Rainer Werner Fassbinder brought West German auteur cinema to critical acclaim . German movies such as Das Boot ( 1981 ) , The Never Ending Story ( 1984 ) , Good Bye , Lenin ! ( 2003 ) , Head On ( 2004 ) , The White Ribbon ( 2009 ) , Animals United ( 2010 ) , and Cloud Atlas ( 2012 ) also had international success . The Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film ( " Oscar " ) went to the German production Die Blechtrommel ( The Tin Drum ) in 1979 , to Nirgendwo in Afrika ( Nowhere in Africa ) in 2002 , and to Das Leben der Anderen ( The Lives of Others ) in 2007 .

The annual European Film Awards ceremony is held every other year in Berlin , home of the European Film Academy . The Berlin International Film Festival , known as " Berlinale " , awarding the " Golden Bear " and held annually since 1951 , is one of the world 's leading film festivals . The " Lolas " are annually awarded in Berlin , at the German Film Awards , that have been presented since 1951 .

= = = Cuisine = = =

German cuisine varies from region to region and often neighboring regions share some culinary similarities ( e.g. the southern regions of Bavaria and Swabia share some traditions with Switzerland and Austria ) . International varieties such as pizza , sushi , Chinese food , Greek food , Indian cuisine and doner kebab are also popular and available , thanks to diverse ethnic communities .

Bread is a significant part of German cuisine and German bakeries produce about 600 main types of bread and 1 @, @ 200 different types of pastries and rolls ( Brötchen ) . German cheeses account for about a third of all cheese produced in Europe . In 2012 over 99 % of all meat produced in Germany was either pork , chicken or beef . Germans produce their ubiquitous sausages in almost 1 @, @ 500 varieties , including Bratwürsts , Weisswürsts , and Currywürsts . In 2012 , organic foods accounted for 3 @. @ 9 % of total food sales .

Although wine is becoming more popular in many parts of Germany , especially in German wine regions , the national alcoholic drink is beer . German beer consumption per person stands at 110 litres ( 24 imp gal ; 29 US gal ) in 2013 and remains among the highest in the world . German beer

purity regulations date back to the 15th century .

The 2015 Michelin Guide awarded eleven restaurants in Germany three stars , the highest designation , while 38 more received two stars and 233 one star . German restaurants have become the world 's second @-@ most decorated after France .

= = = Sports = = =

Twenty @-@ seven million Germans are members of a sports club and an additional twelve million pursue sports individually . Association football is the most popular sport . With more than 6 @.@ 3 million official members , the German Football Association ( Deutscher Fußball @-@ Bund ) is the largest sports organisation of its kind worldwide , and the German top league , the Bundesliga , attracts the second highest average attendance of all professional sports leagues in the world . The German men 's national football team won the FIFA World Cup in 1954 , 1974 , 1990 , and 2014 , and the UEFA European Championship in 1972 , 1980 and 1996 . Germany hosted the FIFA World Cup in 1974 and 2006 and the UEFA European Championship in 1988 .

Other popular spectator sports include winter sports , boxing , basketball , handball , volleyball , ice hockey , tennis , horse riding and golf . Water sports like sailing , rowing , and swimming are popular in Germany as well .

Germany is one of the leading motor sports countries in the world . Constructors like BMW and Mercedes are prominent manufacturers in motor sport . Porsche has won the 24 Hours of Le Mans race 17 times , and Audi 13 times ( as of 2015 ) . The driver Michael Schumacher has set many motor sport records during his career , having won more Formula One World Drivers ' Championships with seven titles , than any other . He is one of the highest paid sportsmen in history . Sebastian Vettel is also among the top three most successful Formula One drivers of all time .

Historically , German athletes have been successful contenders in the Olympic Games , ranking third in an all @-@ time Olympic Games medal count ( when combining East and West German medals ) . Germany was the last country to host both the summer and winter games in the same year , in 1936 the Berlin Summer Games and the Winter Games in Garmisch @-@ Partenkirchen , and in Munich it hosted the Summer Games of 1972 .

= = = Fashion and design = = =

German designers were leaders of modern product design , with the Bauhaus designers like Mies van der Rohe , and Dieter Rams of Braun being essential .

Germany is a leading country in the fashion industry . The German textile industry consisted of about 1 @,@ 300 companies with more than 130 @,@ 000 employees in 2010 , which generated a revenue of 28 billion Euro . Almost 44 percent of the products are exported . The Berlin Fashion Week and the fashion trade fair Bread & Butter are held twice a year .

Munich , Hamburg and Düsseldorf are also important design , production and trade hubs of the domestic fashion industry , among smaller towns . Renowned fashion designers from Germany include Karl Lagerfeld , Jil Sander , Wolfgang Joop , Philipp Plein and Michael Michalsky . Important brands include Hugo Boss , Escada , Adidas , Puma and Triumph . The German supermodels Claudia Schiffer , Heidi Klum , Tatjana Patitz and Nadja Auermann have come to international fame .