

# Export to Germany



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# 1. General information

With a gross domestic product (GDP) of 4.121 billion euros in 2023, Germany is the third-largest economy in the world after the United States and China, and thus also the largest economy in Europe. In particular, the export of motor vehicles and parts as well as chemical products make Germany the third-largest exporting nation in the world. The service sector contributes the largest share to the country's GDP, accounting for 70%.



## Strengths

- Strong industrial base (23% of GDP in 2022)
- Low structural unemployment; well-developed apprenticeship system
- Importance of family-owned exporting SMEs (Mittelstand)
- Consensus-orientated politics, institutional system promoting representativeness

## Weaknesses

- Declining working population from 2020 onwards, despite immigration
- Strong dependence on international energy imports (share of net imports in domestic consumption was 64% in 2021)
- Economy's heavy dependence on foreign trade, which is mainly focused on single countries like China
- Prominence of the automotive and mechanical industries, particularly in exports (29% of total exports in 2022)
- Capacity constraints, insufficient investment (especially in internet accessibility) and venture capital limits productivity gains

## Trade Exchanges

### ↑ Export of goods as a % of total



### ↓ Import of goods as a % of total



- German economy set for mild recovery in 2024 after minor recession in 2023 but structural changes in trade relationships may persist
- Recovery driven by stronger growth in domestic consumer services sector
- Manufacturing sector outlook dependent on demand from abroad
- Supply chain issues decreased noticeably in 2023, limited impact expected in 2024
- Decrease in natural gas imports over summer 2023 reduces energy scarcity probability
- Demand-side recovery expected from personal consumption, likely to normalise in 2024
- Wage increases from collective bargaining agreements and minimum wage raise expected to boost personal consumption, although depending on inflation
- Inflation rate expected to decrease further in 2024, stabilise around 3%
- Construction activity expected to contract further due to high interest rates and slow decrease in house prices
- Modest increase expected in other corporate investments, while government expenditures likely to decrease further
- Five consecutive years of public deficit despite measures to support households and companies' post-energy crisis
- Termination of measures in 2024, higher CO<sub>2</sub> emission prices to increase revenues
- Public deficit to decrease further, but not enough for surplus; public debt as share of nominal GDP expected to decrease
- Current account surplus to recover due to improved terms of trade, increasing export volumes, and decreasing import volumes
- Structural deficit of trade in balance of services likely to widen as more Germans spend holidays abroad



## 2. Additional indicators

### Economic indicators

Find the main socio-economic indicators for this country, as well as its trade with Brussels and Belgium, in the publication "[Brussels and the world – Country statistics](#)" on [analytics.brussels](#), [hub.brussels](#)' online data library.

The "[Brussels and the world - General statistics](#)" publication also provides data on trade between the Brussels-Capital Region and the rest of the world, by continent and by major world region. The same type of data is also available for the various regions of Belgium, as well as for Belgium as a whole.

### Social and environmental indicators

If you'd like to know where your country stands in terms of social, environmental and economic issues, access a series of [composite indicators from the European Commission](#), structured according to the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals<sup>1</sup> and the European Commission's 6 priority policy areas<sup>2</sup>.

### Free trade agreements

European agreements have a major impact on market accessibility and trade with certain countries. The links below, published by the European Commission, will provide you with all the information you need on free trade agreements and trade barriers. Existing agreements, those that have not yet been ratified and those that are expected to be ratified, can be consulted here:

- [Free trade agreements](#)
- [Trade barriers](#)

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<sup>1</sup>No poverty, Zero hunger, Good health and well-being, Quality education, Gender equality, Clean water and sanitation, Clean and affordable energy, Decent work and economic growth, Industry, innovation and infrastructure, Reduced inequalities, Sustainable cities and communities, Sustainable consumption and production, Measures to combat climate change, Water life, Land life, Peace, justice and effective institutions, Partnerships to achieve the goals.

<sup>2</sup> A green pact for Europe, An economy serving people, A Europe fit for the digital age, A stronger Europe on the world stage, Promoting our European way of life, A new impetus for European democracy.



## 3. On-site: a step-by-step guide

### Market access and first contacts

#### Prospecting

- 'Germans sell in English, but prefer to buy in German' – it is slowly changing but, in some sectors, German is still mandatory
- Germany is a very price-conscious market – check on your competitiveness in Europe's biggest market
- For all consumption goods, it is to consider the market size and check on the price, for which similar products already sold in Germany
- In some sectors, agents might be the appropriate partner – legally, they are very well protected in Germany.
- Germany is THE decentralized country, Berlin is the political, but not the economic capital of the country, economic power is spread all over the country.
- Germans want to know, whom they are dealing with – have a website (preferably in German, at least in English) to which you can refer – in Germany, an 'imprint' with the company details is mandatory
- If you want to reach out to a company you don't know, reach out to them by phone, even in English, a cold mail will be deleted unread. After the initial call, you can write an email referring to your call.



#### Exporting

##### company types

Below is the overview of the major business forms available in Germany. Please note that it is legally required for a business in Germany to identify their legal form as OHG, GmbH or AG.

- Sole Proprietorship (Einzelunternehmen): Mostly opted by people who are willing to start their business run by a sole trader
- Partnership (Personengesellschaft): When two or three people or companies as a sole proprietorship work together
  - Offene Handelsgesellschaft, **OHG**: also known as general partnership consists of two partners at least. There is no set limit on liability for each partner. OHG can also include legal entities as members, in spite of them being established in the umbrella of German or foreign law.
  - Civil Law Partnership (**GbR**): This type of company is defined as an association of business or individuals coming together to achieve a unified contractual purpose. This is purely suited for startups to launch their company or business in cooperation.
  - Limited Partnership (**KG**): his type of business is related to an OHG. In this type, there is an option to limit the liability of some partners.
  - Limited Partnership for Shares (**KGaA**): This is not a very common type of company. It is a combination of limited company (AG) and limited partnership company (KG).



- Corporation (Kapitalgesellschaft): the most favorite legal entity preferred by most start-ups and funded companies.
  - Private Company with Limited Liability (**GmbH**): This company type is most commonly used business form when starting a business in Germany.
  - Joint Stock Company (**AG**): An individual can establish this type of company with a capital of around 50,000 euros at minimum
- Non-profit Companies in Germany: Foreign residents and German citizens can also start a non-profit company (Gemeinnützige GmbH – **gGmbH**) when planning to start a business in Germany.

### Registration of the new company

- Registration with the German commercial register (Handelsregister) via a German notary is mandatory. Since August 2022 it can be done online
- Once registered in the commercial register, the GmbH becomes a legal entity and the limited liability exists.
- Before business operations are started, the competent local trade office (Gewerbe-/Ordnungsamt) must be notified about the planned activity. A business license or permit is not necessary for registering the business in the majority of cases. In some sectors, a permit or authorization might be required.

### Support and subsidies

Discover all subsidies for Brussels businesses on the Brussels Economy and Employment website.



## Interesting markets for a first export

- **Digitalization of the medical sector**
  - The Covid Crisis has turned out to be an accelerator for Germany's digitalization in general. The medical sector is now more open to new solutions than never, being really in need for modernization
  - However, the medical sector in Germany is extremely regulated and solutions have to be tailor-made taking those regulations and the reimbursement policy of the healthcare system in consideration
- **Decarbonizing the German industry**
  - The German chemical industry as well as the German steel industry are leading industry sectors in Europe. Both industries are seeking decarbonization in order to reduce their carbon footprint - and will therefore be moving to hydrogen within the next few years. This decarbonization trend will create new investment opportunities along the entire value chain: for the production of decarbonized chemicals, for the production of green steel as well as for technology providers that enable this transition.
- **Start-up Location Germany**
  - There are more than 60,000 start-ups in highly specialized sectors across the country. As both Europe's biggest economy and largest market, Germany plays an important role within the European start-up scene. The country is highly competitive in comparison with other international start-up centers thanks to its unicorns (including Celonis, FlixBus and N26).
- **Sustainable construction**
  - Germany has to catch up in sustainable construction and is looking at Belgium for its positive reputation in this specific field. The whole country is in need of affordable housing which has to fulfill ambitious and climate-friendly regulations
- **Circular Economy**
  - The circular economy is expected to record annual growth of more than five percent - reaching market volume of EUR 32 billion by 2030.
  - Germany has long been a leader in the transition towards a circular economy. Progressive policies and initiatives promote resource efficiency and waste reduction. The sector has the potential to create new business opportunities, employment and environmental benefits as well as contributing to Germany's sustainable development goals.





## Trade fairs

Germany is one of the traditional fair countries with 70 trade fair venues. Germany is home to four of the world's ten largest exhibition centres, and several organisers are among the world's top 10. 160 to 180 international and national trade fairs are held in Germany every year. These fairs attract more than 180,000 exhibitors and ten million visitors:

AUMA – Association of the German Trade Fair Industry - AUMA

### **AGRITECHNICA**

The world's largest trade fair for agricultural machinery and equipment  
09-15.11.2025 – Hannover  
<https://www.agritechnica.com>

### **Anuga**

The world's largest trade fair for food and beverages  
04-08.10.2025 - Cologne  
<https://www.anuga.de/>

### **Automechanika**

International exhibition for the automotive service industry.  
10-14.09.2024 - Frankfurt  
<https://automechanika.messefrankfurt.com>

### **Bauma**

The world's leading trade fair for construction machinery, building material machines, mining machines, construction vehicles and construction equipment.  
7.- 13.04.2025 - Munich  
<https://bauma.de>

### **BIOFACH + VIVANESS**

World's leading trade fair for organic food/international trade fair for organic personal care  
11.-14. 2.2025 - Nuremberg  
<https://www.biofach.de>

### **DMEA**

Europe's leading platform for digital healthcare  
April 2025, TBD – Berlin  
<https://www.dmea.de>

### **DMEXCO**

The Meeting Place for Key Players in Digital Business, Marketing and Innovation  
18.-19.9.2024, Cologne  
[www.dmexco.com](http://www.dmexco.com)

### **FRUIT LOGISTICA**

International trade fair for fruit and vegetable marketing  
5.-7.2.2025 – Berlin  
<https://www.fruitlogistica.com/>

### **Gamescom**

World's Leading Trade Fair for Computer and Video Games  
21. - 25.8.2024 - Cologne  
<https://glowstaff.de/en/gamescom-cologne-en/>

### **Hannover Messe**

The world's leading trade fair for industrial transformation  
31.3.-4.4.2025 - Hannover  
<https://www.hannovermesse.de>

### **IFA**

one of the world's leading trade shows for consumer electronics and home appliances.  
6.-10.9.2024 - Berlin  
<https://www.ifa-berlin.com/>

### **IFAT Munich**

World's Leading Trade Fair for Water, Sewage, Waste and Raw Materials Management  
13.-17.5.2024 – Munich  
[www.ifat.de](http://www.ifat.de)

### **InnoTrans**

The leading international trade fair for rail and transport technology  
24.-27.9.2024 - Berlin  
<https://www.innotrans.de>

### **Internorga**

International trade fair for the hotel, gastronomy, and bakery industries  
14.-18.3.2025 - Hamburg  
<https://www.internorga.com/>



**ISM Süßwarenmesse**

World's Leading Trade Fair for  
Confectionery and Snacks  
2.-5.2.2025 - Cologne  
<https://www.ism-cologne.de/>

**ITB**

The world's largest tourism trade fair  
4.-6.3.2025 - Berlin  
<https://www.itb.com>

**IT-TRANS**

International conference and exhibition on  
the intelligent urban transport systems  
14.-16.5.2024 - Karlsruhe  
<https://www.it-trans.org>

**Medica/Compamed**

The world's largest trade fair for the  
medical industry, including medical  
technology, electromedical equipment,  
laboratory equipment, diagnostics, and  
pharmaceuticals

11.-14.11.2024 - Düsseldorf  
<https://www.medica.de/>

**parts2clean**

Leading international trade fair for  
industrial parts and surface cleaning  
7.-9.10.2025 - Stuttgart  
<https://www.parts2clean.de>

**ProWein**

International Trade Fair for Wine and  
Spirits  
16.-18.3.2025 – Düsseldorf  
[www.prowein.de](http://www.prowein.de)

**WindEnergy**

WindEnergy Hamburg is one of the world's  
biggest and most important wind business  
platforms for exchanging news and views,  
building networks and closing major deals.  
24. - 27.9.2024 - Hamburg  
<https://www.windenergyhamburg.com>



## 4. Business culture

- **Hierarchy and Structure:**
  - Well-defined hierarchical structures with clear lines of authority.
  - Top-down decision-making with senior management delegating tasks.
- **Efficiency and Precision:**
  - Valued qualities include efficiency, precision, and thoroughness.
  - Punctuality and meeting deadlines are essential.
- **Professionalism:**
  - Conducting oneself professionally and adhering to company policies is crucial.
  - Maintaining a high standard of performance is expected.
- **Work-Life Balance:**
  - Strong work ethic balanced with valuing personal time.
  - Flexible working hours, part-time options, and generous vacation time are common.
  - Observance of public holidays and regional variations.
  - Consideration of holidays when scheduling business activities.
- **Teamwork and Collaboration:**
  - Emphasis on teamwork over individual achievement.
  - Encouragement of collaborative efforts to achieve common goals.
- **Direct Communication:**
  - Direct communication style with emphasis on honesty and clarity.
  - Respectful address using titles and last names initially – in German, you usually stick to Mr./Mrs./Dr. etc. and you are no on first name terms very quickly.
- **Attire and Clothes:**
  - Conservative and formal business attire (depending on the sector and the region).
  - Neat and professional appearance is important.
- **Language:**
  - Proficiency in English common but basic German phrases appreciated.
  - Effort to communicate in German can build rapport.



## 5. What can we do for you?

### Local contact points

The General Delegates and Local Representatives of the Region employed by hub.brussels are official representatives of the Brussels Government abroad, they support Brussels companies that want to export, and search and prospect for new investors.

They have the information, expertise and in-depth knowledge about the specifics of different foreign markets. Based on that knowledge, they help to refine and fine-tune your export plans, with advice on regulations, competition, market entry conditions, permits, etc. Furthermore, they can support you with your questions regarding exports, certain sectors within the jurisdiction, contacts with intermediaries, business culture, and much more.



**Nikola Winzler**

Germany (Berlin - Hamburg - Cologne)

Embassy of Belgium  
Jaegerstrasse 52-53  
D-10117 Berlin  
Germany

+4930206586406  
+4915901770785

berlin@hub.brussels

### Useful websites to delve into

[www.gtai.de](http://www.gtai.de) – Germany Trade & Invest, offers very interesting articles about the German Economy in different sectors

[www.debelux.org](http://www.debelux.org) – German-Belgian-Luxemburg Chamber of Commerce

[www.destatis.de](http://www.destatis.de) – German Federal Statistics Office

[www.handelsregister.de](http://www.handelsregister.de) – German commercial register

Mapping of German Clusters: [Clusterplattform Deutschland - Startseite](#)

Halle Institute for Economic Research - [IWH - Leibniz-Institut für Wirtschaftsforschung Halle \(iwh-halle.de\)](#)