

Social Rights Monitor 2025 - Country Report - Germany



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About SOLIDAR

SOLIDAR is a European network of progressive Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) working to advance social justice through a just transition in Europe and worldwide. We represent over 50 member organisations based in 26 countries (19 of which are EU countries), among which national CSOs in Europe, as well as some non-EU and EU-wide organisations, working in one or more of our fields of activity.

The network is brought together by its shared values of solidarity, equality and participation.

SOLIDAR voices the concerns of its member organisations to the EU and international institutions by carrying out advocacy actions, project management and coordination, policy monitoring and awareness-raising across its different policy areas.

What is the Social Rights Monitor (SRM)?

The Social Rights Monitor assesses the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) at national level from a civil society perspective. The EPSR – also known as the Social Pillar – is a set of 20 principles that guide the action of the European Union in the realm of social affairs and policies. In other words, it is intended to be a compass guiding the EU towards a more social Europe. For too many people, however, the implementation of these principles at national and EU level is not yet a reality.

Thanks to the contribution of our members and their networks on the ground (the National Strategy Groups), SOLIDAR monitors the extent to which social rights are respected, upheld and promoted for all people living in the EU. The Social Rights Monitor also investigates the health of civic space and social and civil dialogue in the EU, as well as the extent to which a just transition is being pursued. Therefore, the thematic areas covered by the Monitor are the following: Equal opportunities and access to the labour market; Fair working conditions; Social inclusion and protection; a Just transition; and Civic space. The first three correspond to the three chapters of the EPSR, while the last two have been added to give a fuller picture of social justice in Europe.

Thanks to first-hand data gathered by national civil society organisations, the Social Rights Monitor constitutes a direct channel of policy recommendations between the national level and EU policymakers. It thus amplifies the voices and needs of the most marginalised groups. The Monitor dedicates a section to “advocacy messages” which result from the national-level analyses in each thematic area and are addressed to EU policymakers.

Countries are assigned a score for each thematic area out of a maximum of 100 points. This makes immediately visible how each country is performing in each area and enables comparison with other countries. The numerical scores originate from the National Strategy Groups’ (NSGs) assessments of national developments related to social rights, civic space and just transition. Negative developments in an area result in lower scores. NSGs rate these developments for each country by replying to Linkert-scale questions. This means that the score of a country’s thematic area is given by adding up all the rates given to the questions concerning that thematic area and expressing the score out of 100. The overall score of a country is the average of the thematic areas scores. Further details on the questionnaire and data gathering are provided in the section “About: What is the process?”

Since the SRM score reflects the NSG’s assessment of changes—either improvements or deteriorations—in each of the five areas over the past 12 months, it does not represent the overall status of these dimensions in absolute terms. Instead, it highlights recent trends. For example, a country with a historically strong welfare state might receive a low score if recent reforms have significantly weakened social rights or pose a risk of doing so. This does not imply that the overall situation is poor, but rather that recent developments are cause for concern and may undermine social standards over time.

Therefore, the SRM should not be used to compare the overall situation of social rights across countries—official statistics are more appropriate for that purpose. Instead, it serves as a tool to track short-term national trends and to understand the perspectives of civil society organizations (CSOs) on these developments.

What is the process?

The Social Rights Monitor is a tool that amplifies the voice of progressive civil society at national level. Its content is based on the inputs provided by the National Strategy Groups (NSGs) set up by SOLIDAR’s members and partners, which are active in the countries analysed. They consist of NGOs, associations, movements, trade unions, academia and thinktanks, ensuring that the perspective of civil society is mirrored in the Social Rights Monitor’s analysis. The Monitor reflects the experiences of these organisations, which are active on the ground, and the experiences are complemented by scientific data gathered through desk research.

The data elaborated in the Social Rights Monitor are gathered by SOLIDAR’s secretariat through a questionnaire distributed to the National Strategy Group Leaders (our national members) and completed with information produced by each group. From 2023, this questionnaire has been carried out online.

Based on the picture that emerges from the Monitor, SOLIDAR and the NSGs together devise policy recommendations for EU policymakers. These aim to make social rights, a healthy planet and an enabling, free, protected civic space a reality for all in Europe. The key recommendations stemming from the analysis are used as a basis for SOLIDAR's social affairs advocacy work.

The SRM is published every year, around the end of November/beginning of December and its findings cover the period going from June of the previous year to May of the year of the publication. This timeline is due to the fact that the NSGs submit their questionnaire by the end of May of the publication year.

How do we use it?

SOLIDAR's main role as a European-level civil society network is as a bridge between EU institutions and their policies on the one hand and our progressive members working at the national level on the other. The Social Rights Monitor is a valuable tool to gather information from the ground and bring it to policymakers' attention. This ensures that the voices of the most neglected social groups are duly taken into account. For example, the SRM complements the European Semester, by providing a more-complete assessment of Member State policies. Regrettably, the Semester is still too focused on countries' economic and financial performances and does not provide sufficient guidance on upward social convergence in the European Union.

SOLIDAR disseminates the findings of the Social Rights Monitor in various ways, including through the Social Europe Conference, an annual event at which it is presented, and which also explores a topic of priority for social Europe. More generally, the Monitor is one of the main ways through which the SOLIDAR network presents its positions on social affairs, so its findings are mainstreamed throughout our advocacy work.

Social Rights Monitor Overview

SCORE: 50

The 2024-2025 period has been turbulent for Germany. Insufficient funding of key social and civil society organizations has become an increasingly significant problem. In particular, drastic cuts to the public funding of welfare organizations have limited their activities. The political environment has been hostile to CSOs, and public funds have been denied to organizations that express dissident opinions. Migration policy has become increasingly focused on the labour market's needs and turned harsher for people who do not match these. Gender equality is far from being realized: The pay gap persists, and gender-based violence has reached record highs. Fundamental safeguards, such as the statutory minimum wage and social security benefits, do not prevent people from falling into poverty. Civil society remains strong but faces increasing challenges, as civic space narrows amid a lack of institutional safeguards.

The NSG for Germany was led by SOLIDAR's members **Willi Eichler Akademie** and **AWO international**.



Equal Opportunities and Access to the Labour Market

SCORE: 50

Investment in the welfare system

A significant portion of welfare services in Germany are provided by non-profit organisations (NPOs). These have various forms of funding. One is traditional sources, such as donations from the public, collections and gifts. Others are lotteries – such as the Glückspirale, Aktion Mensch e.V. and the German Television Lottery – and the surcharges on the Wohlfahrtsmarken, (welfare stamps).[1] Welfare NPOs are also funded by service charges, collected either directly from users, who are then reimbursed (fully or partially) through social security schemes, or from public providers, most often social insurance institutions.

However, a significant part of NPOs' funding comes from public subsidies, which stem from the state's legal obligation to support independent welfare providers so that people receive quality services. The financing comes from both the federal state and the Länder (regions). The 2025 federal budget foresees €180 billion for work and social affairs,[2] of which nearly €130 billion is allocated to pensions. Each of the Länder drafts its own budget and allocations, so there are differences. However, there is an overall trend of cuts to the budgets of welfare services.

North Rhine-Westphalia, the biggest Land, can be used as an example of a national trend. Its initial 2025 budget foresaw €83 million budget cuts to a broad spectrum of social services.[3] After protests by more than 32 000 people in November 2024, these cuts were reduced to €40 million. Nevertheless, the cuts still place a large financial burden on many welfare organizations. Services for the most vulnerable – such as addiction counselling, probation aid and debt advice – were object of discussions about funding cuts for a long time, leading to high level of uncertainty for the organisations providing such services. Key inclusion services for the disabled, such as employment,[4] counselling and health-related services, were cut by between 40% and 60%.[5] Public funding was reduced by 35% for HIV prevention programmes and nearly two-thirds for debt counselling services.[6] There were also significant budget cuts for family and youth services, such as family education, pregnancy counselling and programmes to support young people's transition to the labour market, like "Kein Abschluss ohne Anschluss".[7]

For services such as daycare that are in dire need of investment to expand access, budgets were only increased to match inflation. In September and October 2024, workers from "Kitas" (public and private daycares) held several strikes to demand better working conditions.[8] The strikers demanded better pay and an end to understaffing, as the centres suffer from a chronic lack of skilled workers. Additional budget was made available for the education of elderly-care nurses, but financial support was reduced significantly for infrastructure, ambulant care and caregivers.[9]

Even though most of the foreseen cuts in the sectors of social and health were dismissed after protests, the fact that 38.25% of the federal budget was spent on labour and social affairs in the 2024 fiscal year instead of the planned 36.84% shows the increasing need for social spending, which in this case was just enough to match the rising consumer costs caused by inflation. Despite this, nationwide spending on labour and social affairs was set at 37.88% in 2025.[10]

Inclusion of migrants, refugees, asylum seekers and minorities

Germany's approach to migration has been pulling in different directions since April 2024. Some measures were introduced to facilitate migration, particularly of workers. But other measures have had a negative impact on migrants. One of these latter measures was the Repatriation Improvement Act, which came into force in February 2024.[11] It extended the possible duration of detentions pending deportation from 10 to 28 days and abolished the requirement to notify the persons concerned a month prior to the deportation, except in the case of families with young children.[12] Public authorities were also granted greater powers to locate people they have decided to deport. The Act also impacts asylum seekers who are legally residing in Germany. The maximum duration of the period during which they receive reduced welfare benefits has been doubled from 18 months to 36 months.[13] With the new government, the Act reduced the waiting period for employment eligibility from six to three months for asylum seekers who are not required to live in reception centres – depending on their housing situation – therefore facilitating their entry into the labour market.[14] In practice, the waiting time is often the maximum of 6 months. Several Länder also introduced “social cards” to replace cash benefits.[15] These are prepaid cards that let a refugee buy goods, whilst in theory preventing them from wiring the money they receive in benefits to family in their country of origin. However, experts doubt whether this measure will be successful, they highlight its patronizing and discriminatory nature.[16] Germany has also tightened its border rules and now turns away everyone without valid identification documents except for children and pregnant women.[17] It has also strengthened controls by adding around 3 000 new federal police officers.[18] These measures have been criticized for breaching EU law and Germany's international obligations, such as the obligation to refrain from controlling borders with other countries in the Schengen Area.[19]

Problems have even arisen with measures to facilitate migration. The “Chancenkarte” (Opportunity Card) was introduced in June 2024 as a points-based labour migration system for third-country nationals without a permanent job in Germany.[20] However, visa issuance has been slow in general, severely limiting use of the card. It also requires submission of a lot of information, to the point where an “Anerkennung in Deutschland” (Recognition in Germany) portal was set up to facilitate this process.[21] Another concern is Germany's increasing reliance on biometric data to boost the efficiency of migration processes. Biometric data might enable more accurate identification, but the use of such sensitive personal data also risks disproportionate surveillance and discrimination.[22] The pilot project “Match'in” uses an algorithmic system to send refugees to municipalities based on their individual characteristics and integration prospects. Initial results for the acceptance and integration of these refugees are positive.[23]

Good practice:

A positive development is the expansion of the “Integreat” app, a non-profit, multilingual information platform for people arriving in a new municipality.[24] The app covers over 120 municipalities, providing information on local housing, education, work and healthcare. It greatly aids the integration process and meets very high data protection standards, with no storage of personal data, as reported by several administration employees who have been using it in their work.[25]

Quality of work permits for third-country nationals

Several pathways exist for third-country nationals (TCNs) to migrate to Germany. Many are specifically aimed at labour migration, providing residence permits that also function as work permits. For example, the EU Blue Card for highly skilled workers requires TCNs to have a university degree and a concrete job offer in Germany with a minimum annual salary. This card applies only to sectors with a shortage of skilled workers. Blue Card migrants benefit from an expedited path to permanent residence after 27 months, or 21 months if they have sufficient German language skills. The Skilled Worker Visa is similar in that it requires a concrete job offer and recognized qualification, but this qualification does not have to be a university degree.[26] The Freelance Visa is available to the self-employed and freelancers, provided they have proof of clients. Under the right to family reunification, family members of people who legally reside in Germany can obtain residence permits.[27] Ukrainian refugees currently benefit from a special status, under which their temporary residence permit usually also includes a permit to start working immediately. They are, however, excluded from certain regulated professions, for example in healthcare and education.[28]

The Chancenkarte is a recent addition to the various pathways. It uses criteria such as language skills, qualifications and professional expertise to provide skilled TCNs with a one-year temporary residence permit.[29] During this time, they can search for a job in Germany, so they can migrate even without a concrete job offer. But they still need qualifications, language proficiency, and proof of sufficient means to support themselves.[30] This option was only used to a limited extent, as shown by the low number of visas issued in 2024 and 2025.[31] (See section above on inclusion of migrants and others.)

Gender equality

Gender inequality is persistent in Germany despite several important initiatives introduced in 2024 and 2025. Gender-based violence and violence against women has reached record highs, with 360 feminicides in 2023.^[32] This increase likely continued, though official statistics for 2024 are not yet available. Populist and conservative media try to give the impression that migrants are the perpetrators of these crimes, but women's associations and protection organisations indicate that the decisive factor is not ethnicity but simply gender, since the large majority of gender-based crimes are committed by men.^[33] The worrying increase spurred the Bundestag to pass the Violence Protection Act in February 2025.^[34] This includes the right to free protection and counselling and a €2.6 billion allocation to expand women's shelters. However, the right to free protection and counselling will only become effective in 2032. And the budget for women's shelters is spread out over 11 years – just €236 million a year until 2036. The German Women's Shelters Coordination Association (FHK) urged the German government to speed up the implementation of this Act, as well as to remedy its lack of a clear definition of rape.^[35]

An important development in LGBTQI+ rights was the entry into force of the Self-Determination Act on 1 November 2024.^[36] This greatly simplified the process of changing legal gender, requiring only a declaration from the person concerned instead of a judicial ruling. It has led to a substantial increase in people changing their legal gender, with estimates indicating that around 100 applications are submitted each day.^[37]

Germany's gender pay gap persists, the NSG points out. The gap decreased by 2 percentage points in 2024 from 2023, yet women still earned 17% less than men in 2024, according to official government statistics.^[38] In male-dominated economic branches, such as finance and insurance, the gap is particularly pronounced at 26%.^[39] Age is an important factor, as women over 50 earn 23% less than men of the same age group.^[40]



Fair Working Conditions

SCORE: 50

Adequate wages

Wage adequacy is a persistent challenge in Germany, the NSG reports. Whilst the statutory minimum wage increased to €12.41 per hour in January 2024 and again to €12.82 in January 2025, it is insufficient to guarantee a decent standard of living. Germany formally transposed the EU Directive on Adequate Minimum Wages in November 2024, which indicates one way to define "adequate minimum wage" as at least 60% of the gross median wage or 50% of the gross average wage. For Germany to reach these thresholds, the statutory hourly minimum wage would need to be at least €13.50, Eurofound estimates. The Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund (German trade union confederation) already in April 2024 advocated an increase in the minimum hourly wage to €14, to keep pace with inflation and meet the rising cost of living. Civil society organisations and the Paritätischer Gesamtverband (a national welfare organisation) have supported this call, pointing out the need to target improvements at particularly vulnerable groups, such as single parents and disabled workers.

However, despite the Directive's formal transposition into national law, none of Germany's implementing measures are sufficient for wages to reach the thresholds. Instead, the minimum wage was decided by recommendations from the German Minimum Wage Commission, a tripartite advisory body composed of employers' representatives, trade unions and independent experts, which was applied in the government. Its advice contributed to the increase of the minimum wage in January 2025, but the trade union representatives criticized this rise as inadequate to provide decent living conditions.

Data from Destatis, the German Federal Statistical Office, indicates that 6.5% of working adults lived below the poverty line in 2024.^[41] Whilst this was lower than the EU average of 8.2%, certain employees in Germany were at greater risk of poverty, such as part-time workers (9.6%) and workers with fixed-term contracts (13.4%). Though many of these workers are employed full-time, they still need to rely on "Aufstockerleistungen" (supplementary welfare benefits) to make ends meet. Regional disparities also persist: The average wage in eastern Germany is significantly – even up to 20% – lower than that in western Germany.^[42] Furthermore, collective agreements are typically weaker in rural and less-prosperous areas, compounding the differences and leaving workers in these areas vulnerable to exploitation. The number of people engaged in platform work or classified as solo self-employed has also been

increasing in Germany. These workers are particularly vulnerable, as the platforms argue they are independent contractors and thus fall outside the scope of wage protection and social security. This reasoning is faulty, but it was accepted by Berlin's Labour Court in April 2024. The EU Directive on improving working conditions in platform work, which was approved in 2024 and which will be transposed into national legislation by 2 November 2026, will oblige member states to introduce a national legal presumption of employment relations. This means that platform workers will be considered dependent workers until proven otherwise by the platforms. This reversal of the burden of proof should improve the labour protection of platform workers.



Social Inclusion and Protection

SCORE: 47

Poverty eradication

The nominal monthly income poverty threshold for single households increased to €1 381 in 2024 from €1 314 in 2023. But the poverty rate also increased by 1.1 percentage points over the same period, and 15.5% of the German population are now affected by poverty – around 13 million people.^[43] The young and the elderly are particularly affected.

The poverty rate of children under 18 was 15.2% in 2024. Affected children are mainly in low-income families, because their parents either work in low-wage jobs or have health problems or disabilities, the NSG points out. These difficulties are often compounded by a lack of available childcare, particularly for single parents. The Education and Participation Package includes 195€ for school material per year, provides free meals at schools and daycare centres, as well as free transport to school and school trips for children from low-income families that often are already entitled to other social benefits.^[44] The previous government of Olaf Scholz announced the introduction of “Kindergrundsicherung”, a basic income for children, but this did not happen. For young people (18-24 years old), the poverty rate was 24.8%. But the rate for young women was 26.9% – 4.2 percentage points higher than for young men. Many young people do not find an apprenticeship or training opportunity. Those who do, in particular if they no longer live with their parents, are often paid an insufficient amount to cover rent and daily expenses even with additional benefit support.^[45]

One important structural cause of poverty is the non-take-up of benefits due to stigma, bureaucratic barriers, complexity and a lack of information on how to access them.^[46] Another cause is inadequate benefits, which are affected by significant gender gaps. For example, the persistent gender wage gap translates into lower unemployment benefits and – importantly – pensions for women. The gender pension gap was 31.4% in 2024, which was mirrored in the poverty rate for women over 65. This was 21.6%, 5.4 percentage points higher than the rate for elderly men.



Civic Space

SCORE: 58

The CIVICUS Monitor classifies Germany as “Narrowed”, which represents a significant downgrade from its “Open” classification from 2018 until 2023.[47] The “Narrowed” classification reflects how restrictions on civil rights have become more commonplace and how civic space has become narrowed for civil society. Police conduct surveillance during protests and police violence has occurred during some pro-Palestine protests – even in the case of peaceful demonstrations. Certain protests are banned altogether. CSOs and other organisations, especially smaller ones, face an increasingly hostile environment, which compromises their activities through funding and administrative hurdles.

Enabling space for civil society

Civic space in Germany narrowed throughout 2024 and 2025, the NSG reports. Fundamental freedoms such as the freedom of assembly are increasingly restricted, in particular for pro-Palestinian demonstrations. Local authorities in Berlin, Hamburg and other cities have even pre-emptively banned pro-Palestinian protests, citing public security grounds as justification.[48] These decisions have been criticized by organisations such as Human Rights Watch as lacking a clear legal justification and being disproportionate and discriminatory.[49] The bans affected protests organized by student groups, migrant-led initiatives and even peace NGOs. Their organizers were subject to police surveillance and raids, and activists and academics invited as speakers were denied entry to Germany.[50] Additionally, the use of the slogan “From the River of the Sea” has become ground for prosecution, with regional case law divided as to the legality of this restriction.[51][52] Even peaceful protests by high schoolers were met with police violence and brutality.[53]

The lack of clear legal protection for CSOs is an important problem, the NSG states. The “Gemeinnützigkeitsrecht”, Germany’s law on charitable status, does not contain clear protection for advocacy-based work.[54] This leaves CSOs vulnerable to politically motivated decisions on their charitable status, which is needed to be eligible for tax-deductible donations and public funding. In April 2024, for example, a climate justice group in North Rhine-Westphalia lost its charitable status, after it supported anti-coal demonstrations. This decision was heavily criticised by both Greenpeace and legal scholars.[55][56]

Other significant impacts on CSOs include the Repatriation Improvement Act, which was adopted in May 2024 and affects CSOs that work on migration. The act allows administrative sanctions against organizations and individuals that “facilitate an irregular stay”, even if this consists of providing humanitarian support.[57] CSOs working on anti-discrimination, gender equality and anti-extremism have had to deal with political hostility, both through media campaigns and administrative decisions. A clear example was the refusal of Saxony-Anhalt’s Ministry of the Interior to renew a long-standing grant for a youth democracy initiative, as it had publicly criticised far-right narratives.[58]

Each of these restrictions has had a chilling effect on organizations and the people who work in civil society. Their simultaneous arrival has compounded their impact. They reflect a broader pattern of trying to silence CSOs that challenge the dominant political views and narratives on key social issues. Over a third of 50 organizations surveyed by the DeZIM Institute experienced attacks several times a week.[59] These attacks included hate speech, intimidation and targeted disruptions, and they were both digital and physical. They have led many organizations to implement security measures. Nearly half the organizations reported volunteers withdrawing because of the hostile climate.

Smaller CSOs, community-based organizations and grassroots movements are especially susceptible to these kinds of threats and attacks. Marginalized communities are also particularly vulnerable, as their funding is often limited, and they can be easy targets for political attacks. These include people subject to race discrimination, migrants, queer and trans activists, and Roma advocacy groups. The European Commission addressed the worrying state of German civic space in its 2024 Rule of Law Report. It drew particular attention to the unclear legal definition of “non-political” charitable activity and inconsistent practices across Länder. The report, alongside other EU and OSCE reports, reflect the results of shadow reports by German CSOs.[60] These have documented and highlighted the extent of these barriers and the structural discrimination in public funding. German civil society has been forced to grow more resilient under these conditions. The German Foundation for Engagement and Volunteering has been offering broad support to ensure that organizations are financed and can continue to operate. One of its measures is the so-called rapid response mechanism to help organisations that face legal intimidation and politically motivated decisions to defund them.[61]



Just Transition

SCORE: 50

Access to energy and energy poverty

Energy poverty remains an important issue in Germany, with over 10% of the population at risk of not being able to cope with rising energy prices.[62] Concretely, this means that one tenth of the German population cannot heat their homes properly or else face a heavy financial burden to do so. Furthermore, three million households still rely on fossil fuels for heating, leaving them vulnerable to any price spikes. These households often live as tenants in multi-family buildings, and many are single parents or live off a small pension.[63]

The government has introduced several measures to combat energy poverty. These include financial support, as well as advisory and assistance services to help people understand their energy options and receive financial support. While these services are helpful, low-income people's access to them is limited by physical barriers (such as distance) and logistical barriers (such as the times they are available), the NSG points out.[64] Another advisory service is the Stromspar-check: consultations by long-term unemployed people, who have been trained to provide practical advice on reducing energy costs.[65] These consultations are free and organized through a collaboration between Caritas and the Federal Association of Energy and Climate Protection Agencies, with funding from the Federal Ministry for the Environment.

Another measure stems from the Social Climate Plans (the national plans for the implementation of measures funded by the EU Social Climate Fund) which aims to define energy poverty and vulnerability, develop indicators to identify these groups and design policies and measures that support these groups to transition to climate-friendly technologies and assists them in investing in these technologies.[66] The Bürgergeld is a social benefit that covers housing costs, such as rent, operating costs, and heating, provided these costs are "reasonable" for low-income households.[67] Beneficiaries have to pay any surplus on electricity bills, even if they cannot afford this and need to apply for a loan. The Scholz government also raised the Wohngeld (housing benefit) by introducing both a climate and a heating allowance.[68] That government also planned to introduce Klimageld to offset the increased costs of fossil energy. But this was not implemented due to the premature end of the government.[69]

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