

Challenges

In the course of the project Erasmus we got to experience and document our experiences of the differences comparing Hammerfest and Münster but also Germany and Norway regarding the challenges the different countries face.

Even though there are certain similarities of life in each country, especially the people living in Hammerfest, the most northern city in the world, experience different challenges as the population of Germany as for example the climate with its polar days and nights is very dissimilar to Germany.

Germany

Germany, placed in Central Europe, faces many challenges at the moment including aspects like migration, education or the transition of energy whereas the politics of the country need to find sustainable and pertinent solutions.

Regarding migration integrating refugees is a big challenge for Germany due to the large influx of arrivals in the past years and the missing capacity.

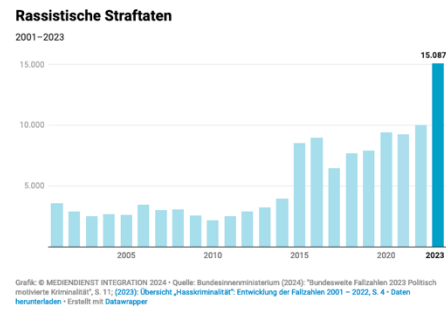
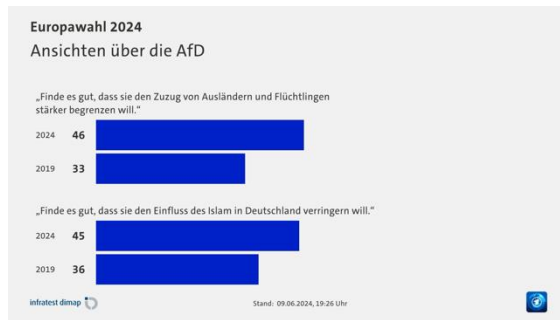
Furthermore language barriers are hindering access to essential services. Also difficulties in securing employment are enlarging due to language skills and qualification recognition issues. Additionally, the shortages of affordable housing, that are already a problem, are playing an even bigger factor when facing migration.

However, most refugees also have experienced many disturbing situations and are therefore in need of therapy on healing their trauma and mental health, which Germany can not always address sufficient.

Moreover, the navigation of complex legal and administrative processes is a challenge Germany is facing currently in the context of migration. However, the contending with public opinion and political dynamics surrounding immigration should also not be forgotten.

Due to these factors, Germany has already implemented various policies and initiatives in order to support refugee integration efforts.

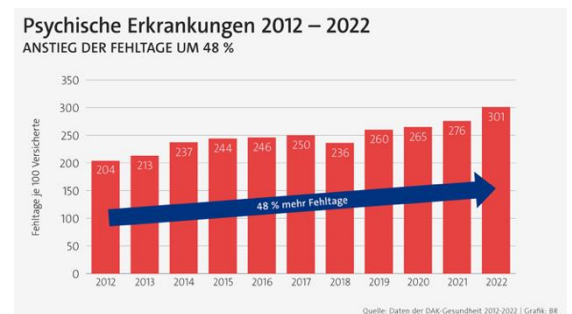
Besides, in the context of immigration, the German society is faced with increasing right-wing extremism. The results of the recent European election on June 6, 2024 showed an increase in the popularity of the AfD by 8.8 percentage points in the last ten years. The national conservative and euro-sceptical party Alternative für Deutschland demands a restrictive migration policy. Moreover, it is sceptical about the scientific evidence on climate change. Throughout Germany, the party has been categorised as “rechtsextremer Verdachtsfall” and many racist statements by politicians were recorded.



Additionally, a rise in racist motivated crimes has been registered. It is important to point out that any racist ideologies have been proven wrong. Nevertheless, racism and exclusion pose a threat to society especially to people with a migration background.

Another serious challenge is the inclusion of an increasingly diverse population. Heated debates about gendering, opportunities to change one’s gender, sexual orientation have deeply divided society. Many people face hate and exclusion. In order to overcome hate and to strengthen a sense of community mutual tolerance and acceptance is required.

Likewise, the increase of mental health problems has become a burden for Germany. Especially during the corona pandemic many young people have complained about psychological and physical stress due to the isolation during the lockdown and homeschooling. This period has had a long-lasting impact on society and simultaneously raised awareness for mental health issues. Personally, I have witnessed this development by students being absent from school because they attend a psychiatric institution.



Moreover, Germany is dealing with the development of education which is also highlighted by PISA study. According to PISA students in Germany are being less proficient in mathematics, reading and science as compared to 2018.

Regional disparities in student achievement and socio-economic inequities are therefore affecting educational outcomes. However, also the integration of immigrant students is playing a role regarding education in Germany. The development of education in the past years has therefore led to concerns about vocational education quality, teacher recruitment and training issues. Another point are the disparities in digital resources access that increased even through the COVID-19 pandemic.

Regarding these issues, Germany is in need of reforms to promote equity, improvement of teacher quality, enhancing of vocational education and the ensurance of equal acces to digital resources in order to face this challenge.

Furthermore the aging population in Germany closely connected to the pension and healthcare system is a big challenge.

It is developing that way due to the increased demand for healthcare services, the strain on financing as the workforce shrinks, but also due to the economic implications such as reduced growth. Other factors playing a role are the need for long-term care services but also the sustainability concerns to pension funds.

In order to come across with an solution for this increasing challenge Germany needs comprehensive policies, pension system sustainability and support for long-term care needs while promoting healthy aging and active participation in society.

Next up, the energy transition taking place in Germany at the moment is developing into a bigger challenge due to the need to transition from fossil fuels to renewables. Important factors are managing intermittency of renewable energy sources but also taking a look at the grid of expansion and modernization.

A significant factor is the phasing out of nuclear power. Germany already wanted to phase it out by 2022 after Fukushima. Therefore it added pressure to remain stability during the phase-out period.

However, it is also important to address social and economic impacts due to the job displacement.

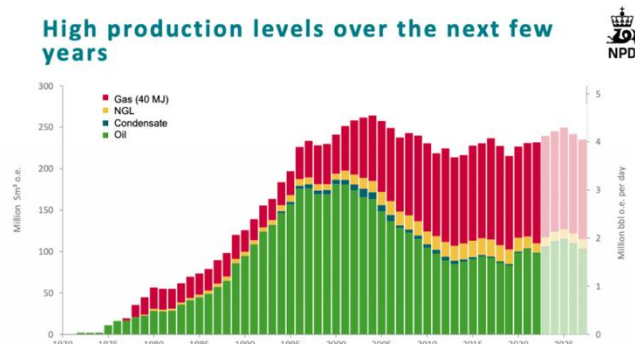
Other factors are the management of energy prices and competitiveness, but also ensuring international cooperation and energy security.

In order to achieve a sustainable and low-carbon energy future coordinated policies are needed, as much as investments in renewable energy infrastructure, support for affected communities and international cooperation.

Norway

Norway faces a number of challenges that affect a wide range of areas and influence its long-term well-being.

One of the key challenges is economic diversification. For decades, Norway's economy has been heavily dependent on oil and gas revenues. While this has brought the country considerable wealth, it also makes it vulnerable to the volatile fluctuations in the global energy markets. The dependence on fossil fuels also harbours risks for the environment and long-term economic success. Therefore, promoting a diversified economy that is not only based on fossil fuels but also includes other sectors such as renewable energy, technology, tourism and fisheries is crucial.



<https://businessportal-norwegen.com/2023/01/09/norwegische-erdoeldirektion-norwegens-oel-und-gasproduktion-nimmt-weiter-zu/>

Another pressing issue is climate change. With its rich natural environment and its great dependence on nature, Norway is facing the effects of climate change. Melting glaciers, rising temperatures and changing weather conditions not only threaten Norwegian ecosystems, but also have an impact on the economy, especially agriculture, tourism and fisheries. To meet these challenges, Norway has set itself ambitious targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and is investing heavily in renewable energy and environmental protection projects.

To counteract the greenhouse effect, Norway invested immensely in electric mobility to reduce the Co2 emissions caused by internal combustion cars. The government promoted the use by many incentives such as tax exemptions, toll exemptions, free parking, and access to bus lanes. In general, high taxes are set on cars that produce much Co2 and low taxes on less environmental harmful vehicles. The objective is to make zero-emission the most attractive option for Norwegian citizens.

By 2025 all new cars sold must be emission free (electric, hydrogen). For comparison, in 2023 82.4 % of new cars sold were electric. However, in order to reach this goal an expanded charging network is necessary.

In addition to economic and environmental challenges, Norway also faces social challenges such as income inequality and demographic change. Despite a high standard of living and considerable social benefits, there are still significant inequalities in income and access to resources in Norway. These inequalities can exacerbate social tensions and restrict social mobility. At the same time, the Norwegian population is ageing, which puts a strain on the pension and healthcare system and increases the need for measures to promote labour market participation and support older people.

Infrastructure issues are also important, especially in remote and rural areas where access to services such as transport, health and education is often limited. Improving infrastructure in these areas is crucial for promoting regional development and social cohesion.

Immigration and integration is another challenge, especially given the increasing diversity of Norwegian society. Successful integration of immigrants requires not only access to education and employment, but also efforts to promote intercultural understanding and social inclusion.

Finally, the digital transformation brings new challenges, such as data protection, cyber security and the need to provide access to digital services for all citizens. Norway must keep pace with the latest technological developments while protecting the privacy and security of its citizens.

Overall, addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive and coordinated strategy involving government, business and civil society. By utilising innovative solutions and promoting sustainable growth and social justice, Norway can strengthen its position as one of Europe's leading countries and ensure a better future for its citizens.

Norway wants to significantly increase its defence budget over the next 12 years. The government in Oslo is planning to provide an additional NOK 600 billion by 2036. By then, the defence budget will have almost doubled from its current level, with NATO's target being at least 2 percent.

Considerable investments will be made in the navy in particular. Among other things, at least five new frigates and at least five submarines are planned. According to the Ministry of Defence, the Norwegian armed forces will also be strengthened with more than 20,000 soldiers, personnel and reservists. We need a defence that is adapted to the current situation and threats. This plan is a historic boost for Norway's defence," said Prime Minister Jonas Gard Støre. The plan will now be presented to the Norwegian parliament. In view of the Russian war of aggression in Ukraine and the possible return of the Nato-critical US President Donald Trump, many members of the military alliance are planning a significant rearmament.

Hammerfest- life in a northern town

In northern cities like Hammerfest, there are numerous challenges ranging from extreme weather conditions to economic difficulties that affect the daily lives of residents. Extreme weather conditions are one of the most problematic challenges, with extreme temperatures, heavy snowfall and prolonged winters characterising everyday life. Coping with problems such as frozen water pipes, clearing snow and navigating icy roads are all part of everyday life for residents.



Another important aspect of northern regions is daylight, especially in winter. The lack of sunlight can affect mood and energy levels, which is known as seasonal affective disorder (SAD). This affects the quality of life in northern cities.

The isolation and remote location of some northern cities pose an additional challenge. Limited access to services, healthcare and social activities can lead to a feeling of loneliness.



Other economic challenges arise in rural regions in Norway, especially if they are characterised by industries such as mining, forestry or agriculture. Fluctuations in commodity prices can contribute to economic uncertainty and a general weakening of the economy.

The rising cost of living in Norway is due to increased infrastructure, heating costs and the need for special means of transport. These are a burden on residents' budgets. However, the state allows people in Hammerfest to pay lower prices for heating or showers, for example, in the hope that more people will move back to Hammerfest and the region will not die out. Many young people who grew up there are moving away due to the lack of training centres and universities. After school, they are drawn away to big cities, which means that the population in Hammerfest lacks people in early adulthood. However, because the cost of

living is so low there, the state hopes that people will move back once they have chosen a career.

In remote areas, medical care is very limited. Residents are often forced to travel considerable distances to receive medical care and the availability of specialised services is often limited.

Encounters with animals such as bears, moose or wolves can not only jeopardise the safety of residents, but also affect agriculture and other human activities.

Due to extreme weather conditions, infrastructure in northern regions, including roads and utilities, presents a particular challenge. Snow removal, road clearing and utility maintenance become demanding and time-consuming tasks.

The recruitment of qualified teachers and the provision of a wide range of educational programmes pose a unique problem. Unfavourable weather conditions can affect and disrupt regular school operations.

The isolation and harsh conditions can affect not only the physical, but also the social and cultural life of a northern European city. People may find it difficult to socialise and cultural events may be restricted due to limited resources and difficult conditions. Many people in northern regions develop a strong sense of community and a remarkable resilience to the adversities of their lives. This attitude helps to strengthen and develop the unique communities in northern cities.

Münster

Compared to Hammerfest, Münster as a growing major city faces very different challenges.

Firstly, Münster is currently struggling with public transportation. A lack of personnel forced the municipality to reduce the timetable leading to overcrowded buses and unsatisfied citizens. As residents switched to private transport the traffic on the roads increased contributing to a lower quality of life.

Furthermore, in order to approach the urgent issue of Co2 emissions the Stadtwerke Münster has already introduced 29 buses powered by electricity. In consequence, the city was able to save more than 1.000 tonnes of carbon dioxide per year. Currently, a high amount of subsidies is invested into building electric buses in order to fulfill the goal of having a completely emission free bus transport by 2029.

Secondly, the inhabitants are burdened by rising rent prices and a housing shortage.

Two main reasons for this development are on the one hand that neighbourhoods such as the Kreuzviertel and the Hafenviertel are experiencing gentrification. This is characterised by wealthy investors buying up run-down neighbourhoods inhabited by residents with little

income leading to a displacement of previous tenants. Building contractors then renovate and upgrade the apartments in order to sell them for increased value.

For instance, the previously mentioned Kreuzviertel was inhabited by university students and artists in the past. First, residents upgraded the neighbourhood by opening cafes etc. In consequence, investors became interested and bought and renovated numerous houses. Additionally, they invested in gastronomy, supermarkets and parks. Therefore, many families and wealthy people moved to the Kreuzviertel so that students could not afford to live here anymore.

On the other hand, Münster, offering high quality of life, is attracting a rising population leading to a great demand for living space. As a consequence, not only new-build flats but also old residential buildings are rising in price. For personal experience, I have seen many posters on trees looking for flats.

Besides, Münster as one of the most famous cycling cities offers a well-developed infrastructure for cyclists. However, the vibrant traffic poses a high risk of accidents. Often cyclists and car drivers get into heated arguments. It is interesting to note that in most cases (fatal and non fatal accidents) cyclists are the culprits. Nevertheless, the number of road accidents with injuries fell by just under ten per cent to 1.303 in 2023 (2022:1445). In order to keep this positive development, mutual consideration and caution are required in road traffic.

Likewise, expansion of digital infrastructure is a current challenge. High-performance Next Generation Access (NGA) broadband networks are vital for progressing towards a digital society. They enable access to social networks and cultural content. The city's strategy is in line with the German government's objective to provide nationwide gigabit network coverage by 2025. In order to achieve this aim high subsidies and the support of the people are necessary.

Lastly, the shortage of teachers throughout Germany has forced the city to transfer teachers from grammar schools to elementary schools. This is a burden for everyone involved. On the one hand, teachers have to adapt their teaching style and content to the new circumstances. Additionally, the new environment requires completely different pedagogical approaches. On the other hand, students have to get used to new teachers often in their last school year.