

Press Release

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Sandra Lades
GfK Verein Press
Tel. +49 911 95151 989
sandra.lades@gfk-verein.org

Ronald Frank
GfK Verein Studies
Tel. +49 911 951 51 987
ronald.frank@gfk-verein.org

GfK-Nürnberg e.V.
Nordwestring 101
90419 Nuremberg, Germany

hello@gfk-verein.org
www.gfk-verein.org

Management:
Prof. Dr. Raimund Wildner
Dr. Andreas Neus

Executive Board:
Manfred Scheske
Ralf Klein-Börling
Prof. Dr. Nicole Koschate-
Fischer
Dr. Andreas Neus
Prof. Dr. Raimund Wildner
(Vice Presidents)

Chairman
of the Members' Council:
Claus-P. Rach

Register of Associations
at Nuremberg District Court

Immigration Remains the Main Concern for Germans – With a Continuing Downward Trend

Findings of GfK Verein's "Challenges of Nations 2018" study

Nuremberg, Germany, September 21, 2018 – Many of the topics that dominated the general election in fall 2017 are once again on the list of concerns for German citizens in 2018: The topic of "immigration and integration" is at the top of the list, but it decreased slightly again compared to the previous year to 53 percent. Areas of growing concern among Germans include the topics of old-age provision, poverty, education policy, health care and the housing market.

Overall, well over half of Germans are concerned about immigration and integration. Thus, this topic remains in first place: 53 percent of Germans see it as one of the most urgent situations to solve in the country. However, this concern has fallen for the second year in a row: Last year, the figure was 56 percent, and in 2016 it was actually 83 percent. Concerns about this topic are currently falling more sharply in eastern Germany (49 percent) than in the west (54 percent). However, the amount of people who explicitly reject (further) immigration is significantly higher in eastern Germany at 23 percent than in the west (16 percent).

Provisions for old age and poverty are increasingly becoming a focus

In second place on the list is concerns about pensions and provisions for old age. 20 percent of the respondents see this as an urgent issue that is clearly becoming more current. In 2016, this value was only 8 percent. Due to demographic change, more and more pensioners are faced with fewer and fewer working people who pay into the system.

Closely linked to the issue of pensions is the concern about poverty, which has doubled since 2016 to a record 20 percent. Around half of the respondents explicitly name poverty among seniors as a problem.

In the two areas of poverty and provisions for old age, differences between the regions are apparent. In western Germany, 21 percent of respondents

worry about provisions for old age, while in eastern Germany, people are more concerned about poverty (22 percent), each with an upward trend.

Contrary to concerns about poverty, unemployment concerns dropped to 12 percent (8th place), the lowest in the history of the “Challenges of Nations” study. The result is clearly in line with the unemployment figures: According to the OECD, the unemployment rate in 2017 was 3.8 percent, and fell overall in the course of 2017.

Nursing and healthcare are raising concerns

The shortage of skilled workers is now particularly noticeable in some sectors. These include healthcare, and especially nursing. It is therefore understandable that people are giving more thought to this issue: Healthcare concerns rose by 9 percentage points to 14 percent in 2018 compared to the previous year. A specific topic of concern is nursing care for the elderly: 9 percent of Germans see it as an urgent problem to solve, and 6 percent are explicitly concerned about the lack of nurses for the first time.

Germans are also more and more skeptical about educational policy: Concern rose for the second time in a row to now 18 percent (2016: 9 percent), putting it in fourth place in the ranking.

Following the election, an unusually lengthy government formation was in the foreground, as the coalition negotiations were difficult due to the majority situation. Against this background, 16 percent of German citizens are concerned about the topic of politics and government. With an increase of 7 percentage points, the topic now ranks fifth.

Concerns about pricing and purchasing power remained unchanged year-on-year at 12 percent. According to the OECD, prices rose by 1.7 percent in 2017, which still represents a rather low level despite the rise.

The topic of housing and rent is gaining importance again

12 percent of Germans are also worried about the topic of housing, rent and real estate prices. The last time this topic was in the top 10 of the Challenges study was in 1996. It has therefore been a more minor concern for a long time, but it has been gaining relevance for some years now. With the positive economic development and the low interest rate policy in recent years, demand on the housing market has also increased. As a result, real estate prices have increased noticeably, especially in metropolitan areas. Therefore, this concern is noticeably greater in large cities at 16 percent.

There has been a slight easing of tension at the bottom of the list of concerns this year. That is where concern over crime is ranked, which decreased significantly to 11 percent – the level from 2016.

The Challenges in Germany 2011 to 2018

In percent	2011	2013	2015	2016	2017	2018
Immigration / Integration	16	8	35	83	56	53
Pensions/ Provisions for old age	17	14	16	8	14	20
Poverty	6	13	15	10	17	20
Educational policy	23	16	15	9	12	18
Politics/ Government	12	7	6	10	9	16
Healthcare	19	7	9	6	5	14
Developments in pricing and purchasing power	33	29	16	8	12	12
Unemployment	55	32	22	13	16	12
Housing problems/ Rent and real estate prices	2	3	4	6	8	12
Crime	17	8	10	10	16	11

Source: GfK Verein, Challenges of Nations 2018

Unemployment and pricing / purchasing power dominate the international list of concerns

In an international comparison of all 19 countries, the problem of unemployment is number one again in 2018 at a steady 23 percent. Spain is the only country where more than half of the citizens expressed their concerns about this. Italy, France, India and South Africa are also showing above-average concern. Overall, unemployment concerns ranked first in four countries. Slightly fewer people than in the previous year – a total of one in five – are skeptical about the development of pricing and purchasing power, particularly in developing and emerging countries: The topic ranks first in Kenya, Indonesia, Iran and also in Russia. There is great concern about this in India and Brazil as well. France and Poland are above the European average, where concern about purchasing power is paramount.

The two key global challenges, unemployment and inflation, are each in the lead in four countries. Healthcare is the most pressing issue for three nations – the United Kingdom, Poland and Brazil. As in Germany, immigration is in first place in Sweden, while for Mexicans and South Africans, crime is the biggest challenge. In contrast, other countries are struggling with more specific concerns. For example, citizens are most worried about terrorism in Turkey. In Japan, family policy and care for the elderly have traditionally played an important role against the background of demographic change. In South Korea, economic development is the main concern. For Americans, however, criticism of politics and the government is currently in the foreground.

About the study

These findings are taken from the “Challenges of Nations 2018” study and based on around 23,000 interviews conducted on behalf of the GfK Verein in spring 2018 across 19 countries: Brazil, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Iran, Italy, Japan, Kenya, Mexico, Poland, Russia, Spain, South Africa, South Korea, Sweden, Turkey, the UK and the USA. The survey is based on the following open-ended question which is asked every year: *“What do you believe are the most pressing challenges that need to be solved today in [respective country]?”* There are no restrictions on the responses given by those surveyed, and several issues can be mentioned.

About the GfK Verein

The GfK Verein is a nonprofit organization founded in 1934 to promote market research. It is comprised of around 540 companies and individuals. The purpose of the Verein is to promote the training and continuing education of market researchers; to follow fundamental structures and developments for private consumption in society and the economy; and to research the impact of these on consumers, markets and market decisions. The GfK Verein is a shareholder in GfK SE.

Additional information is available at www.gfk-verein.org.

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GfK Verein, Press
Sandra Lades
Nordwestring 101
90419 Nuremberg, Germany
Tel. +49 911 95151 989
sandra.lades@gfk-verein.org