

Background Information

With the **International German Forum** the Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, Dr Angela Merkel, has created a new forum for interdisciplinary exchange on internationally relevant, future-related issues. The International German Forum offers a platform for experts from politics, business, science and civil society to discuss ways of shaping economic and ecological, social and political transformation processes and elaborate concrete plans of action. The aim of the International German Forum is for participants to learn from one another through interaction and to establish a **network for global learning** in the long term.

The idea for the International German Forum arose from the Federal Chancellor's "Dialogue on Germany's Future" conducted in 2011 and 2012, in which she discussed the question "How do we want to live in the future?" with citizens and experts.

The 1st International German Forum

The primary goal of the International German Forum is to discuss "what matters to people" and to help maintain and improve the wellbeing of current and future generations throughout the world. "Wellbeing" was therefore the subject of the 1st International German Forum, which was held at the Federal Chancellery in Berlin on 5 June 2013. Around 120 national and international experts from civil society, business, politics, administration and various academic disciplines discussed the topic "**What matters to people – wellbeing and progress**". Debate focused on how wellbeing as perceived by citizens, academics, businesspeople and politicians can be measured and how improving wellbeing can be given a more prominent role in political activity. For further information and a video recording of the conference, see [bundesregierung.de](http://www.bundesregierung.de)¹

The 2nd International German Forum

The 2nd International German Forum will take place at the Federal Chancellery in Berlin on January 19 and 20, 2015. Preparatory workshops will expand the opportunities for knowledge-sharing and global learning.

The topic of the 2nd International German Forum is:

"What matters to people – innovation and society"

¹ <http://www.bundesregierung.de/ContentArchiv/EN/Archiv17/Artikel/2013/06/2013-06-05-merkel-beim-idf.html>

While improving wellbeing remains the main focus of the International German Forum, the central question of the second conference is: “How do our societies generate innovations that improve wellbeing in a time of complex challenges and digital opportunities?”

Throughout the world societies are facing increasingly complex challenges of a predominantly global nature, such as climate change, scarcity of resources, demographic change, urbanisation and digitalisation. Given the complexity of these global tasks, new approaches are needed which go beyond linear or one-dimensional patterns of thought and action. To develop new solutions to complex issues, a societies’ capacity for innovation needs to incorporate technological progress and economic opportunities along with new answers on the level of societies and institutions. Not least, it should take into consideration the process of evaluation and acceptance of any innovation as well as any changes induced by innovations in a society. Research institutions and enterprises, but also individuals, civic interest groups and society as a whole can be catalysts for complex innovation processes of this kind.

Innovation is not an end in itself but a means to enhance a better future for societies. The capacity for innovation is a crucial factor in the successful elaboration of solutions to economic, ecological and social challenges. This raises several questions. What form does a societies’ capacity for innovation take in different countries with their own distinctive cultural heritage and institutional structures? Who are the key players? How can technological and social innovations help to solve future tasks and improve wellbeing? How can interaction between politics, business, science and civil society be organised so that it enables comprehensive innovations and effective solutions? What opportunities does digitalisation offer for societies’ capacity for innovation? And last but not least: What steps can be taken to strengthen capacity for innovation and improve wellbeing?

A broader and more comprehensive understanding of innovation and capacity for innovation has been a topic of discussion for several years. The German Government led by Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel is focusing on this issue from various angles:

- In the Federal Chancellor’s *Dialogue on Germany’s Future* a working group was examining the topic of innovation culture.
- The Governmental strategy “*Wellbeing in Germany – what matters to us*” is an innovative public consultation approach. In 2015 the Federal Government will ask people across Germany what is important to them in life. This will be the basis for a new system of indicators, a report and a plan of action on wellbeing in Germany.

- In September 2014 the Federal Government adopted the new “*High-tech Strategy – Innovations for Germany*”, which acknowledges that innovative solutions are the driving force behind wellbeing and progress. It is based on an expanded concept of innovation which includes both technological and social innovations and incorporates society as a key player in the process.
- For many years the Federal Government has engaged in a “*Dialogue for Innovation*” with representatives from business and science to establish effective conditions for research, science and technological development.
- The Federal Ministry of Education and Research organises the annual international conference *ITAFORUM*, which brings together experts from science, research, politics, society and business to discuss current issues concerning innovation and the acceptance of technology.
- The German Houses of Research and Innovation in Moscow, New Delhi, New York, São Paulo and Tokyo provide a platform for the German research and innovation landscape and present the achievements of German science and research-based enterprises.

Innovation as a means to generate growth and improve wellbeing is discussed throughout the world in different contexts. The 2nd International German Forum offers participants with diverse perspectives a common ground to connect and engage in an international, interdisciplinary and cross-cutting dialogue on the potential of societal capacity for innovation.