FOCUS GROUP

Hard to Reach Learners and Youth

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Project Team: Research Group
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Paper: Germany’s Education System and Hard to Reach learners – a first overview

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Guiding Questions:

How is the term Hard to Reach used in the countries represented in our work group (research group)?

Which other terms are used by State and non-Governmental agencies in those countries?

What are the characteristics of the groups which are considered as Hard to Reach / excluded / marginalized etc. according to official policies and non-Governmental agencies in those countries?

What systems and policies are currently in place for the social inclusion of these groups?

Examples of good practice for the education and inclusion of these groups?

What educational policies and systems for educational provision are in place for the education of these particular groups?

New Research Question:
What opportunities exist for the Hard to Reach groups to participate in civic dialogue and to receive citizenship education?
Preliminary remarks

This is a draft paper aimed at giving a first overview on problems of the German education system to provide full access and equal chances to all pupils and students in Germany regardless of their social and ethnic background. Since the publication of the famous PISA assessment more than 10 years ago it has become clear that the structure of the German education system (including the faculty of schools) is contributing to and reproducing significant social inequalities in Germany. Even former members of the German government speak of the danger of a new ‘educational precariat’. (http://www.cicero.de/berliner-republik/kooperation-von-bund-und-laendern-der-bildungs fleckenteppich-muss-weg/57865) NGOs like the Open Society Initiative and others have been recently campaigning against the obvious discrimination against children and pupils of migration background. (http://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/reports/standing-equality-germanys-schools)

Recent studies and reports on education in Germany show that up to 20% of children and students can be considered as an excluded minority and cut off from the chances offered by the education system. And they point out that a great number of these young people have a so-called ‘migration background’, i.e. have been raised in immigrant families. For our debate here it is important to note that there is an overlap of social and ethnic (cultural) discrimination issues shaping the debate on ‘hard to reach learners’ in Germany both inside and outside of schools. We refer at this point to the initial paper by Michalis Kakos on the opening questions guiding the work of the research group. He asks whether we should focus on education in general or citizenship education in particular. Regarding the above mentioned (by no means homogenous) group of hard to reach learners it is obvious that the access to and success in the general education system is the most important foundation for any further efforts to build citizenship competencies of these young people. We therefore need a new and broad understanding of citizenship education when it comes to ‘hard to reach learners’ in Germany (and elsewhere). On the one hand we should contribute – as Michalis pointed out – to the development of participation skills (and their social, psychological and cognitive preconditions) within a wide range of practical projects and – on the other hand – should be able to transcend this broad and general approach and politicize daily and practical issues in the context of a new form of citizenship education – focusing on the political role and chances of young citizens in society. To put it very shortly: citizenship educators should be able to walk and chew gum at the same time.

Our report concentrates on a description of main challenges of the German education system within this context – using a variety of national reports and studies on these issues. Our findings refer mainly to these basic facts aimed at providing a first overview for the members of our Focus Group. We are looking forward to questions and comments.

Graphic 1: Persons with migration background in Germany in 2012, sorted by origin

35,9 % Foreigners with personal migration experience
5,2 % Foreigners without personal migration experience
19,7 % (Late) Resettlers and Germans with personal migration experience but without naturalization
11,3 % Naturalized persons with personal migration experience
2,6 % Naturalized persons without personal migration experience
21,3 % Germans without personal migration experience (at least one parent immigrated or born in Germany as foreigner)

1. Introduction: German Education System

Graphic 2: Structure of the German School System (simplified)


Germany is a federal state consisting of 16 Länder (states). Education policy belongs to the competences of the Länder, which means that in fact, no singular “German education system” exists – rather there are 16 slightly different systems.

However, the framework is similar in all of the Länder. Compulsory school attendance begins at the age of six years and mostly ends at the age of 18, differentiating between full-time compulsory education (9-10 years) and part-time compulsory education, also called compulsory vocational education. The education system is divided in five different phases or sectors (Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany, 2014):
1. Elementary sector: Kindergarten etc., not compulsory.

2. Primary sector: Primary school (4-6 years), begin of the compulsory school attendance. The pupils' performance is essential for their further education chances.

3. Secondary sector I: Different types of secondary schools: Hauptschule, Realschule, Sekundarschule, Gymnasium, Gesamtschule etc. with or without specific educational achievements. The achieved school leaving certificate determines what kind of further education pupils can aim at. This sector has been undergoing a number of reforms in recent years in order to increase the efficiency and the upward mobility of the lower type of schools within this sector.

4. Secondary sector II: Vocational education, sixth form/upper school. The latter enables the achievement of matriculation standard.

5. Tertiary sector: Universities, universities of applied sciences, vocational higher education, specialized academies. This sector has also been undergoing significant reforms in recent years aimed at increasing the number of students in the tertiary sector and at a diversification of qualifications and graduation schemes.

Table 1: Share of pupils in different school forms (General Education)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School form</th>
<th>2011/2012</th>
<th>2012/2013</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary school</td>
<td>2 790 138</td>
<td>2 746 379</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High schools (Gymnasium)</td>
<td>2 433 128</td>
<td>2 387 590</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehensive schools (Gesamtschule)</td>
<td>632 675</td>
<td>681 493</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Realschule</td>
<td>1 130 004</td>
<td>1 080 598</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hauptschule</td>
<td>656 754</td>
<td>607 878</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Needs Schools (Förderschule)</td>
<td>365 715</td>
<td>355 139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational Schools</td>
<td>2 612 483</td>
<td>2 557 398</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>641 545</td>
<td>669 926</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>11 262 442</td>
<td>11 086 401</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Own composition on the basis of DESTATIS data

2. Hard to Reach groups in Germany

How is the term Hard to Reach used in the countries represented in our work group (research group)?

Which other terms are used by State and non-Governmental agencies in those countries?

What are the characteristics of the groups which are considered as Hard to Reach / excluded / marginalized etc. according to official policies and non-Governmental agencies in those countries?

Hard to Reach Learners can be considered as a ‘group’ defined by specific features such as:

- School drop-outs and youth with low educational and social status
- According to a classical survey on subcultures, the Sinus-Meta-Milieus researched by the Sinus Institute, typical characteristics of the HTR in Germany are a hedonistic and materialistic lifestyle combined with precarious standards of living, leading to dissatisfaction with their lives and aversion towards politics.
- Children and youth from immigrant families form a significant part of this group.
There are several German terms describing this specific group, e.g., *bildungsfern* meaning “educationally distanced” or *bildungsbenachteiligt*, which means “educationally disadvantaged”. Trying to avoid any discriminatory notion in naming this specific group citizenship educators recently have been using the term ‘special target groups’ in order to include everyone who is considered not to belong in the mainstream of citizens who have or are able to access resources of democratic citizenship. However, there is no general conclusion or consensus in Germany on the issue of how to appropriately speak about Hard to Reach Learners.

**Graphic 3: Youth at Risk**

![Share of 18-year-olds at risk of social exclusion](http://www.bildungsbericht.de/daten2012/bb_2012.pdf)


### 3. Challenges in German Schools

What systems and policies are currently in place for the social inclusion of these groups?

Germany has improved equity as well as mathematics performance since 2003, the latter being mostly due to better performance among low-achieving and disadvantaged pupils. The latest PISA results from 2012 show that German pupils perform above the OECD average in problem solving, mathematics, reading and science. However, 17% of the variation in student performance in mathematics is attributed to the differences in socio-economic status – only 7% of the pupils are resilient, that is to say that they perform better than expected of their socio-economic background. (OECD PISA key findings 2012)

**Basic challenges for the German education system are:**

- The rapid and profound transformation of the demographic structure in Germany leading to an older, more colourful and less populated Germany. As a rule one can expect the part of the population with German origins to grow older and become fewer in the next decades while the ‘more colourful’ part of the German population will be younger on average and will have a growing percentage of children and pupils from immigrant families in educational institutions.
- 14.5% are functionally illiterate and over 10% of the 16-29-year-olds are “NEETs” (Not in Education, Employment or Training).

**Social-economic background and educational achievement:**

In Germany, youth who have not graduated from upper secondary education face poor lifetime employment prospects. Education outcomes depend strongly on socio-economic background although
Progress has been made in enhancing both the quality and equity of the education system (OECD Economic Survey Germany, May 2014). The OECD survey highlights the role of childcare and early childhood education for reducing the link between socio-economic background and performance in the school system. Furthermore, it asks for reforms to reduce the stratification of the school system. For instance, a relatively large share of pupils with learning difficulties is placed in classes or schools for children with learning difficulties or disabilities (so-called Förderschulen or special needs schools), which undermines their career prospects in many cases – pupils are more likely to be assigned to such schools if their socio-economic background is disadvantaged, including immigrant background. Thus OECD recommends in its latest report to continue reducing the assignment of pupils to special needs schools and making sure that an assignment to such schools does not reflect the socio-economic background of the pupils.

Graphic 4: Discrimination of graduates with immigration background. School leavers in the three fields of higher vocational education, sorted by school leaving certificate


Note: Three subsystems within the higher vocational education sector are the dual system: Vocational education for an in the vocational education law (BBiG) or handicraft order (HandwO) acknowledged profession (apprenticeship with collateral vocational school lessons), the school-vocational system: Apprenticeship for a profession acknowledged by law in a full-time vocational school and the vocational transition system: (Vocational) education supply without a graduation certificate (enhancement of the individual skills needed for taking up an apprenticeship or a job or to catch up a general education with school leaving certificate).

Educational participation:

Educational participation of young migrants is increasing and the amount of drop-outs sank to 6.5% (Federal Ministry of Education and Research, kmk 2012). Nevertheless, problematic domestic conditions disadvantage pupils in their school success and the parents’ socio-economic status is often crucial for the school type and school leaving certificate the pupil can aim at. As families with immigration background often have a lower socio-economic status and poorer living standards than native German families, pupils with migration background have considerably lower chances to attend a high school and graduate with matriculation standard than their native German peers (Federal Ministry of Education and Research, kmk 2012). Regarding reading competence, children with both parents born abroad often lack behind their peers about one school year after primary school (SVR 2014). That contributes to the large share of “risk pupils” among children with immigration background, who will not be able to follow the lessons without linguistic problems in the next grade after the primary school. The lacking
competence of pupils with migration background is reinforced in the performance-orientated school forms after primary school, which assort the pupils according their skills (SVR 2014).

**Teacher qualifications:**

Only few teachers in German schools have a migration background which leads to feelings of being underrepresented among students with migration background in schools. At the moment there is no proper teaching plan for multilingualism and simultaneous boosting of the pupils’ German skills throughout the subjects. In Germany there is a special need to enhance the penetrability of the stratified school system, to increase the individual promotion of pupils and revise the education and training of teachers in handling the heterogeneity of schools instead of orientating on an imaginary “average German pupil” and homogeneous classes (SVR 2014).

**School segregation:**

A recent research paper of the Expert Council of German Foundations on Integration and Migration (henceforth mentioned as SVR) and Stiftung Mercator on educational segregation states that school segregation is a particularly strong phenomenon in German cities: In bigger cities almost 70% of primary school pupils with migration background go to school with mostly other children of non-German origin in their class, whereas that is only for 17% of German pupils the case. School segregation disadvantages especially pupils with migration background causing a “double disadvantage”: Unfavourable learning conditions at home, as parents born abroad often lack the competence to help their children, and negative influence of the poor performing peers at school. (SVR 2013)

School segregation is mostly due to residential segregation which is a result of city planning and social housing schemes for immigrants and lower income families in the past decades. Chances to go to a high school (Gymnasium) strongly depend on the social background of the pupils, whereas migration background is irrelevant: With the same social status and performance pupils with migration background are even more likely to get a recommendation for a high school. But as the share of socially disadvantaged pupils among children with migration background is above average, they face hardship in the transition to higher school forms after primary school. Pupils with low social status have to be approximately 1.5 school years further than their peers in reading competence in order to get a recommendation for high school from their teachers, for social advantaged pupils a reading competence under the average is enough. (SVR 2013)

**Graphic 5: School Segregation in Germany**

![Graphic 5: School Segregation in Germany](http://www.svr-migration.de/content/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/SVR-FB_Studie-Bildungssegregation_Web.pdf)

4. Initiatives to reach the Hard to Reach

Examples of good practice for the education and inclusion of these groups?

What educational policies and systems for educational provision are in place for the education of these particular groups?

In Germany there are several civil society and governmental initiatives to meet the needs of the Hard to Reach but no consistent state policies. The Federal Ministry of Education and Research launched the “National Action Plan for Integration” in 2011 (BMBF 2011) with the following strategic aims:

1. Optimal framework for equal educational chances and participation
2. Enhancing transitions and improving the penetrability of the school system
3. Individual furtherance, recognition of the potentials of youth with migration background
4. Ensuring and developing quality of education, differentiating education research

The National Action Plan for Integration includes several programmes and projects initiated by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research in cooperation with mostly non-governmental organizations. The Ministry has already taken action in the following fields:

- Identification and reduction of juridical barriers: improvement of educational participation chances of children and youth without legal residence permit status and better conditions for foreign students with German degree on the labour market
- Reducing discrimination of children with migration background in the school system
- Strengthening the cooperation between schools and parents and taking advance of the potentials of migrant organizations
- Programmes for learning German
- Linking extracurricular integration boosting offers and schools
- Furtherance of scientific research of education as a basis of education policy and management
- National Education Panel (NEPS): Data about individual education processes
- Statistical collection of data about persons with migration background
- Education reports and monitoring for guaranteeing and improving quality of education: annual reports about vocational education, biannual reports “Education in Germany” and international performance comparison tests (PISA, IGLU, TIMMS, ICILS)

In order to achieve these goals the Ministry has designed projects directed at the different levels of the German education system. For instance in the field of Early Childhood Education the aim is to increase the number of children going to kindergarten and boosting language learning in kindergartens. Since 2011 there are also “Reading Start Sets” available for parents with one-year-old children. There is also an initiative for supporting further education of early child hood educators – not only for pre-school educators but also for personnel in afternoon care and extracurricular activities of primary school pupils. (BMBF 2011)

Regarding the school system the Ministry of Education and Research aims at reducing the number of school drop-outs by 4% until 2015, adjusting the share of pupils with migration background to the number of pupils without migration background and diminishing the performance gap between pupils with and without migration background. The focus is on all-day schools: Helping children from socially or educationally disadvantaged families to abolish lingual, social and cultural deficits. Furthermore, programmes have been established for promoting children unmotivated to go to school and in need of encouragement in order to graduate. (BMBF 2011)

The newest PISA study shows already the first success: The reading competence of pupils with migration background has improved since 2000, more young foreigners leave school with matriculation standard, the number of school drop-outs among the youth with migration background is still high but decreasing and the number of young adults from immigrant families without any kind of school leaving certificate decreases. (BMBF 2011)

Nevertheless, the transition from school to further education seems to be particularly problematic for students with migration background. In this case individual supervision and case management has been proven to be an effective method of helping the students to find their way to vocational education, universities or other further education in the tertiary sector after general education.
5. Conclusions and recommendations

What opportunities exist for the Hard to Reach groups to participate in civic dialogue and to receive citizenship education?

As Germany’s population becomes older and fewer, long-term demographic trends will have a significant impact on education policies. On the one hand youth will have more and better chances to get an apprenticeship position and find a job after graduation because of a labour market changing to their favour. The number of young people in tertiary education has increased significantly over the last years and will continue to do so. Still, the demographic change will lead to a lack of skilled workers which will make an increase of migration essential for the German economy (Berlin Institute for Population and Development, GfK Verein 2014).

On the other hand German primary schools and kindergartens are in danger of becoming more segregated, as the amount of pupils will decrease as less children are born. More than 400,000 teachers will retire within the next 10 years leading to a dramatic increase in demand of young teachers and creating new opportunities to replace faculties in schools.

As a conclusion to the described changes and challenges, OECD recommends Germany to undertake a thorough structural reform (OECD Economic Survey Germany, May 2014):

- Continue to reduce the stratification in the school system, notably by delaying the tacking decision beyond age 10 and reducing the number of school tracks across all Länder
- Improve teacher quality, e.g. by holding schools and teachers accountable for the progress of students and by making greater use of financial incentives for good teaching in those Länder which have not yet introduced such measures
- Make tertiary education more attractive and responsive to labour market requirements by increasing universities’ input flexibility
- Further reform the VET (vocational education and training) system by considering reducing the variety of VET qualifications and providing continuing education offers for general skills (mathematics, German, foreign languages, computer skills) according to labour market needs
- Raise participation in lifelong learning
- Make the educational chances more equal from the beginning in order to reduce the impact of social background on education outcomes
- Socially disadvantaged young people must be given a second (and sometimes a third) chance – their special needs must be taken more strongly into consideration in the education policy

In its research paper on segregated schools he SVR concludes that more cooperation between the political and administrative fields is needed to modernize the German education system. Furthermore, almost two thirds of newly graduated teachers claim that teacher education does not prepare for the real life practice – indeed only one fifth of universities obligates to obtain pedagogic competences in handling heterogeneity. Hence a reform of teacher education must be carried out. Schools facing challenging circumstances must be provided with more financial and material support for teachers and educators, what could be put into practice e.g. through a “social index” of schools measuring the need for such attempts. The actual surveys also prove that all-day schools promote poor performing pupils better than part-day systems. As education is the most important key to integration in the German society, it is essential to enhance the educational participation and equity of all disadvantaged (and in particular: immigrant) groups.
Sources/Literature:

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**OECD**: PISA results 2012.  
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