



Federal Ministry for
Family Affairs, Senior Citizens,
Women and Youth

*Think, learn and act across
generations – our future society.*

Promoting democratic education from childhood to early adulthood

Key findings and recommendations from the 16th Federal Report on Children and Youth

Foreword

Dear Reader,

Every day at the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, we work to make life better for children, young people, women, families, older people and those working on their behalf. For us to be able to continue doing this in future, we regularly ask experts for their analysis and advice. The Federal Government uses this analysis and advice for reports on five key policy areas: civic engagement, families, the elderly, gender equality, and children and young people.

The subject of the 16th Report on Children and Youth is promoting democratic education from childhood to early adulthood. This Report draws attention to something which I believe is particularly important: our ongoing task of winning young people over to democracy and empowering them to participate.

Over some 600 pages, the Report presents detailed findings on the diverse social spaces where young people encounter political education. Political education takes place right through childhood and youth, in families, nurseries, schools, vocational and university education, in extracurricular youth education centres, through involvement in political and social causes, and even in the Bundeswehr. The many people involved are responsible for providing education which is up-to-date and age-appropriate. The Report also describes the challenges facing our democracy and calls for politicians to make a clear commitment: political education guided by democracy and human rights is essential.



The 16th Report on Children and Youth forms an excellent basis on which to assess the state of political education for young people and develop it further. We have summarised the key findings and recommendations for you in this brochure.

I hope it makes for thought-provoking reading.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Franziska Giffey". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Franziska Giffey
Federal Minister for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth

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Democracy needs more democratic education, or: Why talk about political education now?

The Federal Government's 16th Report on Children and Youth focuses on promoting democratic education from childhood to early adulthood. This is the first time a Report on Children and Youth has engaged with this issue on this scale. By doing this, the Federal Government is making it clear that it believes politicians, professionals in the field and society bear a special responsibility for the political education of young people. It also takes onboard one of the challenges set by the 15th Federal Government Report on Children and Youth. That report focused on the challenges during adolescence and in early adulthood and made an emphatic case for a significant strengthening of political education with new, attractive ways of disseminating democratic values and practices.

Active engagement and advocacy are essential to democracy and young people must be won over to and empowered to participate in democracy. Democratic education is a matter for everyone, from people who are interested but need more knowledge and experience, to those who have previously taken very little interest in social and political issues, and even those who sympathise with extremist, racist and anti-democratic views.

Against this background, the Federal Government asked an independent commission of experts to give a wide-ranging account of democratic education from childhood to early adulthood, to identify what requires improvement and to make recommendations. The Commission was also asked to evaluate the most-up-to-date research where possible at the same time.

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It was also required to consider all age groups, from children through to young adults, as well as the various instances of political education and services providing it. The first foundations of democratic behaviour are laid in childhood, with early years education institutions also involved in teaching those values. Of equal consideration are all wider educational contexts connected to political education under the aegis of child and youth welfare services, education at schools (including all-day education settings), vocational and university education as well as educational projects and programmes. The Commission was required to give particular emphasis to youth education in non-school contexts and youth work and associations. The Report was also to give its views on how learning about democracy is influenced by families, young people's peers and digital media.

The Expert Commission for the 16th Report on Children and Youth carried out these duties and presented a nuanced overview of the various social spaces and digital worlds in which young people encounter political education. The Report also makes connections between areas of practice and services providing political education, outlines commonalities and differences, and identifies foreseeable challenges.

The Expert Commission for the 16th Report on Children and Youth sees democracy as a way of life (in the sense of a culture of co-existence in society), a social structure (in the sense of a democratic civil society and a free and diverse public sphere), and a form of government (in the sense of a state, whose role and function is founded on political equality and the right of the people to participate in politics), which is challenged by far-reaching social changes. These changes, which the report calls "megatrends", not only influence how young people grow up, but they also shape "the portfolio of social duties and responsibilities which fall to today's generation of young people" (Chapter 1). These megatrends also represent challenges to political education. The report gives detailed accounts of the tensions inherent to globalisation, issues of climate change and the destruction of the environment, seeking refuge, migration, the tensions within digitalisation, the consequences of demographic change, as well as rearmament and (the threat of) war.

Moreover, the Report sees democracy as being confronted with challenges and crises which "could, to a greater or lesser extent, pose a threat to its very essence" (Chapter 1). Chief among these challenges are those groups which reject, undermine or even openly attack democracy. The

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language of the social sciences is somewhat cumbersome on this point, yet it is apposite to speak of group-focused misanthropy, sweeping exclusionary statements, authoritarian nationalism, right-wing extremism and populism, as well as of religiously-contextualised threats to democracy. Reference is also made to left-wing extremism and what is commonly referred to as Islamism, although the Commission makes it clear that both these terms are not uncontroversial.

The Report also pays attention to widespread phenomena which pose serious challenges to the credibility and validity of representative democracy. These phenomena include frustration with parties and politicians and a feeling of one's own political powerlessness.



At a glance: key findings and recommendations of the 16th Report on Children and Youth

In light of the challenges described in the report, there can be no doubt that political education in childhood and youth should be given more emphasis if it is to deliver what is required. The Report, therefore, calls for more stability and greater appreciation of this field of this area of practice and for political education of young people to be more widely established.

The expert Commission for the 16th Report on Children and Youth has identified the following key findings and associated recommendations:

1. Political education is democratic education.

Political education cannot be neutral, since its overarching goal is for young people to be guided by democratic values and to develop powers of critical judgement. Hence, political education is a process of forming responsibility which is aligned with the “irreducible core” of democracy, alongside principles such as equality, pluralism, human

rights, the rule of law, the separation of powers, and the protection of minorities (confer Chapter 2). The Report demands that political leaders support political education oriented towards democracy and human rights and make a clear commitment to said political education.

2. Political education begins in childhood and continues into early adulthood.

From early childhood to early adulthood, young people encounter political education in a wide range of social spaces and everyday contexts which are important for their upbringing. The responsibility to provide age-appropriate and up-to-date education falls to many different actors. This Report analyses political education in a range of contexts, including families, childcare facilities, schools and all-day education settings, vocational education and universities, child and youth work, youth education connected to political parties, protests and social movements,

voluntary services, the Bundeswehr, and the media and digital worlds. Political education is, therefore, not just a matter of acquiring knowledge about political and social institutions and their functions: political education goes beyond theoretical subject-matter. Rather, it is held to be a multi-faceted learning process which, along with acquiring knowledge, includes experiences and emotions, practical actions and taking charge of one's own world. Ultimately, it is about developing the ability to analyse, judge, and act politically.

3. All young people have a right to political education.

Young people's right to political education can be inferred from applicable laws, but there must be a stronger obligation to honour that right and it should be more strongly enshrined in law, such as in the constitutions of all Länder [federal states] and by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child being included in the German Constitution. There is also a need for greater recognition and expansion of organisations for young people who have experienced migration, people of colour and post-migration stakeholders as providers of political education. Unhindered access to political education must become a widely-established reality for young people with disabilities and impairments.

4. Political education is not just about preventing extremism.

The 16th Report on Children and Youth refutes attempts to reduce the role of political education to preventing extremism. That carries the risk of giving up core principles of political education, especially the principle that young people should be given open-ended opportunities based on their capabilities, not on what they lack.

5. Political education is transnational.

The 16th Report on Children and Youth criticises the fact that political education is all too often conceptualised in categories based on the nation state, and calls for more transnational learning experiences. This applies particularly with a view to Europe, where the strengths and advantages of European integration should be valued, just as current challenges are subjected to critical discussion.

6. Political education and political participation go hand in hand.

A well-grounded political education, alongside effective opportunities to participate, contributes to winning young people over to democracy and empowering them. A core and indispensable principle here is that young people should be able to participate wherever they grow up. The Report also calls for reducing the legal voting age to 16

in elections at all levels. Moreover, experiences of participation must always be assessed keeping in mind what young people learn when they participate in politics.

7. Political education for young people is youth policy.

Political education must take into account not only young people's rights, but their interests and living circumstances, both in terms of public discourse and the services it provides itself. The Report also draws attention to the differences between youth and adult education and urges that the professional autonomy of political education for young people should be strengthened and developed.

8. COVID-19 creates challenges and learning opportunities for political education.

The Report describes the COVID-19 pandemic and the strategies to handle it as a "stress test for an open democratic society" (Chapters 1 and 16). It identifies limited and unequal educational opportunities as the key challenges for political education. The Report also takes a quite critical view of the rapid increase in digitalisation across the range of educational contexts brought about by the pandemic.

The Report also criticises the lack of opportunities for young people to participate in the response to crises, as well as a view of young people which sees them as no more than school students. It also draws attention to the existential threats to providers of and institutions for extra-curricular political education.

In addition to this, the Report identifies opportunities for political education arising from the pandemic, such as when considering fundamental rights and how they can be restricted in emergencies and for disease control purposes. The European Union and national statehood in times of crisis should also be debated as part of political education, as should, for example, the role of democratic and civil society bodies in the public sphere. Discussions must also consider how conspiracy theories are sustained and disseminated in the context of pandemics.



Political education is democratic education

It is often not clear what exactly is meant when talk turns to politics as a matter of course, democracy, education or to political or democratic education. It is to the credit of the 16th Report on Children and Youth that it has made some helpful suggestions to clarify such pertinent terms, which are generally used in multifaceted ways.

According to these suggestions, politics is: “the totality of activities and structures whose goal it is to create, implement and challenge universally binding and publicly relevant regulations within and between groups of people” (Chapter 2). The emphasis here is on regulations which have been created communally or which are yet to be created this way. It should be borne in mind that the political process in either case is about gaining and holding onto power in order to enforce interests, and that the tussles of political stakeholders also represent the working-out of social conflicts.

The Commission sets this definition of politics alongside a three-dimensional conceptualisation of democracy.

1. The *formal dimension* of democracy refers to the ways in which universally binding rules are drawn up and set down, as well as how they can potentially be challenged. This chiefly considers procedural aspects such as participation, representation, competition between different ideas, and engagement in discourses.
2. In the *substantive dimension*, irreducible democratic principles become the focus of attention. This chiefly refers to the principle of equality, the rule of law, the limitation of power through the separation of powers, human rights, the protection of minorities and the recognition of pluralism.

Political education is democratic education

3. The *procedural dimension* reminds us that democracy is not just a historical achievement, but that democracy itself is subject to the processes of historical change and transformation and must, therefore, be in a constant state of renegotiation (Chapter 2).

The Report also unpacks concepts of education, upbringing, acquisition, learning, didactics and socialisation. Political socialisation here is defined as “conscious and unconscious lifelong learning and the development of the individual personality in relation to the subject of ‘politics’” (Chapter 2). This conception of political socialisation not only forms a recurrent theme in the report, but also describes a process which extends right through childhood and into early adulthood.

Against the background of defining education as a process of transfer and (proactive) acquiring of knowledge, the Report traces the contours of the concepts of political education and democratic education and concludes that a strict delineation between the two is not constructive. Rather, aligning young people with democratic values and developing critical faculties are the overarching goals of political education. As such, political education is a process of developing responsibility and maturity. This includes acquiring a culture of open discussion, strengthening tolerance of other opinions and ways of life, gaining the ability to

compromise and to accept majority decisions while still protecting minorities and the principles of the rule of law. The Report demands that political leaders support political education oriented towards democracy and human rights and make a clear commitment to it.

The state contributes to the reproduction of its own political and cultural preconditions by promoting political education within civil society, in that these services reflect the diversity of parties and ideologies in society. Given the tendency of society to fracture, it is particularly important to support spaces and forums where mutual questions about how we live together can be discussed. Clear guidelines are essential for this, such as those already drawn up in the Beutelsbach Consensus, which was the outcome of a 1976 conference on politics and education. These were:

1. Prohibition against overwhelming the student (no indoctrination),
2. Controversy edict (acknowledging controversial positions),
3. Mandate of empowerment (empowering learners to scrutinise political situations, to recognise their own interests and to also defend those interests).

According to these principles, political education should promote engaged and open exchanges in line with the principles of the Constitution, as well as identifying anti-democratic and misanthropic statements for what they are, and strengthening young people's abilities to withstand currents of this kind.

In contrast to the pluralism of political education offered by civil society, state-run political education should not take ideological or party-political positions. Yet this does not mean political education is neutral or to be dismissed. Quite the contrary: state-run political education is required to stand up for democratic principles, human rights and the concrete form given to those rights by the Constitution.



Political education begins in childhood and continues into early adulthood

From early childhood to early adulthood, young people encounter political education in a wide range of social spaces which are important when growing up. Social spaces are less to do with the examples which might immediately come to mind: concrete, quasi-delineated physical and geographical locations or organisations. Rather, they have to do with how young people and other actors act in these various social spaces, how they (co-)create them and make use of them. It is not the classroom which is of interest, but the processes which happen there. On the one hand, these processes are, to a certain extent, predetermined, but they must also be filled with life and given shared support. This approach brings to the fore the experiences, issues and actions of children and young people in these various spaces and also keeps our attention on the boundaries and conflicts which may arise from them. Even though there are, of course, many areas of overlap between these spaces, their receptiveness to academic and

political influence varies and they, therefore, require nuanced discussion.

Political education does not only consist of acquiring knowledge about democratic institutions and their interdependencies. Rather, it must contribute to young people developing democratic attitudes, reasoned opinions and a readiness and ability to participate and be involved in democracy. The 16th Report on Children and Youth, therefore, goes beyond only investigating whether democracy is addressed in educational contexts. It also directs its view to the issue of how democratic the structures of education themselves are, whether these structures are hierarchical and functional and what effect they have on opening up or closing off opportunities to participate. An issue of equal importance is the question of how far young people can create their learning processes themselves and even step forward as political actors.

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In this way, the Report facilitates a precise expert discussion and, for the first time, delivers a comprehensive and yet also systematic view of the social spaces in which young people's political education takes place.

Family

The role of the family in young people's growing up is a critical one, and the same can be said of political education. Particularly in the first years of a child's life, the family is the central site of care, education and upbringing. Parents initiate learning processes every day and lay the foundations for their children's future paths through education and life. Yet children are also involved in a range of other educational contexts and institutions, such as daycare and schools, which should work in partnership with families.

How families influence the political socialisation of young people begins with the formation of fundamental attitudes and values such as consideration, solidarity, sympathy and how to treat strangers. It is part of ordinary family life for children and young people to encounter real examples of participation, and families also

influence their political orientation and behaviour, such as when they relate personal experiences from the generations of the children's parents and grandparents.

The Report aligns itself with the criticism that educational opportunities in Germany remain too closely bound to parents' educational backgrounds and the circumstances families live under. This then bears on the question of whether the family context is a place where children (can) experience those things which are important to the development of their own political values.

The Commission also notes that there is still untapped potential when it comes to supporting family life, such as providing family education. In addition to familiar subjects such as violence-free parenting, democratic approaches to children's upbringing and strengthening self-efficacy, the question is what services families and their networks require if they are to make democracy part of their everyday lives. The report notes that it is also important in this context to consider parents and families affected by anti-democratic values and the behaviour of their children, or who themselves advocate extremist views.

Day care centres

Independent of the opportunities afforded within the family home, early years education supports children's development and contributes to equal starting conditions and opportunities to participate. As the primary place of education and upbringing outside the family, it falls to childcare centres to prepare children to live together within a diverse, democratically constituted society.

Nurseries and daycare centres lay the first foundations of democratic education. It is important that children be taken seriously, their rights respected and their concerns listened to. Central to all this is the experience of self-efficacy and recognition. This involves children participating in their day-to-day life and giving them the chance to help shape it. Children's rights, democratic education and participation should, therefore, be fixed parts of everyday learning, as well as being given adequate emphasis in the Länder's syllabuses, teacher training programmes and in the quality assurance and development of early years programmes.

Schools and all-day education settings

Schools are the one institution through which all children and young people pass as they go along their educational journeys and, as such, theirs is a key role in disseminating political knowledge and democratic values. Schools number among the most important sites of democratic education in many forms, be it as a distinct subject in the curriculum, a duty which applies to all subjects, a part of a school's educational ethos and as a structural element within democratic school development.

The 16th Report on Children and Youth identifies shortcomings for schools in all aspects of political education. For example, the amount of time allocated to political education is not consistent across the Länder, and the subject is all too often taught by non-specialists. The Report recommends guaranteeing a minimum of two teaching hours per week in all types of secondary schools from grades 5 to 10, along with revisions of the prescribed subject content. Primary schools have also failed to make adequate use of opportunities for political education. Political education should also

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be included in training for all teachers, regardless of their chosen subject specialisms. There should also be a push to recruit specialist teachers for general studies, politics, and history, as has been the case for STEM subjects in recent years.

Some Länder give very little time to political education in lower and upper secondary levels at gymnasiums, and three quarters of Länder do not allocate any time whatsoever for political education in grades 5 and 6. In some cases, relevant teaching does not begin until grade 9 or even 10. The Commission criticises the fact that, in nine Länder, lower-secondary age children who do not attend gymnasiums currently receive less teaching in political education than those attending gymnasiums. The Commission believes it is impossible to reconcile the importance of the subject and the right of all young people to

political education with the fact that how much political education they receive varies according to which Land they live in and the type of school they attend.

Political education in and at schools is, however, not just limited to lessons; democratic school cultures which include effective participation for students are no less important.

Finding ways of embedding political education in all-day education settings is a particular challenge. These schools offer afternoon programmes in addition to the subject content specified in the syllabus. There is, thus, a need not only for increased co-operation between schools and extra-curricular providers of child and youth welfare services, but also to develop new formats, particularly in primary schools. This would allow political education to come into effect not only in the form of project days or weeks or other time-limited programmes.

Vocational education

There is a close association between political and vocational education, particularly where young people are starting their careers and have specific political questions, such as about social security, the tax system and how tax revenues are used. However, although the framework curricula for vocational schools set by the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs include political education, in practice and in school leaving examinations, it is overshadowed too much by vocational subjects.

Trades unions also have a very important role to play in education about (labour) politics, if they do not limit their activities only to representing their members' interests in the workplace. It is important to extend their educational offerings more strongly to young people working in small businesses without tariff commitments, people on short-term contracts, young adults without school-leaving qualifications or training, and also to young people in the transitional system. Given that rights to educational leave are not consistent across the Länder, the Report also recommends a further federal education law which allows workers anywhere in the country to request leave for (political) educational purposes.

Universities

At universities, political education does not only take place when political sciences or history are being studied. As a way of strengthening universities as political (education) spaces, the 16th Report on Children and Youth recommends creating enough unregulated spaces for students to encounter political education on their own terms, a properly constituted student body, greater involvement for academic self-governance in student affairs and an unrestricted political mandate for student representatives. The Commission also recommends enshrining political education in all courses of study. It also identifies a duty to universities to see themselves as open spaces in which social conflicts can be negotiated, and to develop appropriate principles and modes of interaction.

With regards to teaching and research into political and democratic education, the Commission identifies that they are not systematic and are spread across a range of academic disciplines, and that there is a lack of ongoing and comprehensive exchange between academia and practice. This particularly applies to extracurricular political education and to interdisciplinary issues such as political education in the media.

Child and youth work

The 16th Report on Children and Youth gives considerable space to all kinds of child and youth work and acknowledges its major contribution to the political education of children and young people.

Child and youth work comes in a wide array of different forms. It includes non-school training and education centres, youth associations (from the Youth Fire Brigade, the Scouts and environmental groups to political youth organisations), open-door child and youth work (activities such as youth clubs and outreach services in the public sphere), international child and youth work, cultural education for children and young people, and child and youth work in sports. These services share common pedagogical standards and principles such as openness, voluntariness, self-determination and participation, as well as orientation towards young people's living and social environments. At the same time, the boundaries between the various areas of activity are fluid.

Political education happens in all areas of practice within child and youth work, albeit with markedly varying emphases. However, the 16th Report on

Children and Youth notes with regret the weak levels of cooperation and mutual recognition and reference. Against the background of a decline in numbers of institutions providing extracurricular political education, particularly in youth education centres, the Report recommends expanding those services having a legal basis aside from temporary funding programmes such as "Live democracy!"

The Report discusses extracurricular political youth education, youth associations, and open-door child and youth work in extensive detail. In sum, these areas of practice, as with the other areas of child and youth work, open up diverse opportunities for political education in ways that are guided by young people's needs and interests, and to experience democracy in practical ways, such as broadly independent opportunities to organise and take responsibility for their leisure time activities. These areas generally facilitate political education in three ways: as political education which is planned and conceived as such; as political education which is prompted by given situations; and as the expression of a practice which is based on the principles given above, notably those of being guided by young people's interests, voluntary action and participation.

Youth education linked to political parties

The 16th Report on Children and Youth notes that parties, their youth organisations, and foundations linked to political parties are “natural spaces for politics to be discussed and shaped”. The Report observes that political education for young people plays a subordinate role within the work of political parties, and is largely reduced to instrumental purposes in their youth organisations, with the primary goal of recruiting younger generations. It is acknowledged that foundations linked to parties make a significant contribution to political education for young people and adults, though they co-operate too little with one another and with the wider field of political education for young people.

Protests and social movements

The Report also sees great potential for young people’s political education in social movements and protest groups. It describes the political learning experiences young people gain from

their involvement in, for instance, Fridays for Future and LGBTTIQ movements (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, trans*, inters*, and queer/questioning).

The Report advocates strengthening support for forms of engagement of this kind, and for organisations and education providers which are committed to democratic values. It proposes making networking platforms and public spaces available as meeting places and to make information accessible to all, for example on how to register a demonstration and what must be taken into account when doing so.

Voluntary services

Voluntary services for young people are a particular form of civic engagement across a range of social, environmental, international and development areas of activity. Voluntary services are subject to fixed rules, are time-limited and structure the young participants’ routines. At the same time, voluntary services are organised as educational services, whereby a range of (political) educational opportunities emerge from participants’ practical work at the deployment locations.

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Voluntary service requires pedagogical support, for example in preparatory and follow-up seminars. They aim to “teach social, cultural and intercultural skills and build a sense of responsibility for the common good”. This is set down in the Act to Promote Youth Voluntary Services [Jugendfreiwilligendienstegesetz]. Comparable rules exist for the Federal Volunteer Service.

The 16th Report on Children and Youth recommends doing more so that all young people, regardless of their origins, educational backgrounds or individual impairments, can take part in voluntary services. The Report also recommends that participation rights for volunteers be expanded and that shared core objectives for political education in voluntary services be agreed on in an up-to-date and cross-provider manner. A further recommendation is for voluntary service providers to be given the opportunity—as is already the case for the Bundeswehr’s youth officers—to be present in schools.

Bundeswehr

The Bundeswehr is a parliamentary army. This means that the German Bundestag has authority to make decisions about the defence budget and deployment abroad. The Constitution provides

for a defence committee and, since 1956, there has been the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces of the German Bundestag whom soldiers can contact directly with all their concerns. This means that the Bundeswehr’s duty to parliamentary democracy is of a very special kind.

Ever since the suspension of compulsory military service, and against a background of ongoing international and national challenges, the Bundeswehr has been going through a process of change. The report argues for a strengthening of the civil-military dialogue, not least because the make-up of the Bundeswehr does not reflect society as a whole. The Report also states the importance of the Bundeswehr introducing itself as part of the state system and presenting military careers in schools in order to recruit the next generation of soldiers it needs. However, the Commission believes the mandate of youth officers should be limited to a purely informative one, not including advertising and recruiting.

An additional recommendation made by the 16th Report on Children and Youth is for systematic monitoring and data-gathering on extremist views in the Bundeswehr, supported by political education based on fundamental democratic principles for all ranks.

The media/digital worlds

Today, children and young people are growing up in a highly digitised society. They live and act in analogue and a range of digital worlds simultaneously. This also applies to political education. The 16th Report on Children and Youth, therefore, recommends that political education and critical media education be properly interlinked. Such political media education should engage with economic and social processes which are contingent on the media, reflect on how new media structures are changing public spheres, and open up new means of self-empowerment.

The ability to use digital media competently and critically is, therefore, of foundational importance to political education. It is important for young people to be able to use digital media reflectively, creatively and on their own terms. Promoting media competence is of crucial importance to this. Moreover, the Report also calls for reforms on how the law protects children and young people as media users. Providers of online services should be made more accountable in order to respond more effectively to risks of interaction such as online bullying and hate speech on the Internet.

The Report also describes the contradiction which political education must be alert to when it criticises commercial platforms and channels and those which are not secure with regard to the grounds of data protection and safeguarding the private sphere, while at the same time using those very channels—social media, for example—to reach young people.

Political media education also relies on the support of the public service media, where there is an urgent need to improve the quality and scope of services for children and young people.



All young people have a right to political education

The 16th Report on Children and Youth sees the right of all young people to political education as arising from their right to being supported in their development and to be brought up as responsible and socially competent individuals (German Social Code VIII, section 1), as well as the right to education as stated in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. A recommendation is made that this right to political education be enshrined in the constitutions of all Länder in such a way that citizens' responsibility and maturity must be promoted through a dedicated teaching subject as well as in extracurricular educational contexts. Children's rights should also be enshrined in the Constitution.

There is a need for greater recognition and expansion of organisations for young people who have experienced migration, for people of colour, and for post-migration activists as providers of political education. The Commission is of the

opinion that long-term support for corresponding structures at a federal level (such as via the Federal Plan for Children and Youth [Kinder- und Jugendplan des Bundes] or the Federal Agency for Civic Education) would be a visible political sign of recognition, and would also facilitate networking for people working in this field.

The fact that political education promotes the ability to participate in politics and shape democratic processes also applies without restriction to young people with disabilities and impairments. Political education must, therefore, be seen as an essential precondition for the adherence to political rights in the sense of article 29 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. However, barrier-free participation in political education remains the exception, not the rule, for young people with disabilities and impairments.

Political education is not just about preventing extremism

The 16th Report on Children and Youth refutes attempts to reduce the role of political education in preventing extremism. Nevertheless, it is indisputable that successful political education opposes extremism in any form. However, if political education is focused only on the issue of preventing extremism, there is a risk of giving up core principles of political education. For example, potential issues, shortcomings and risk factors may become the focus, instead of the capabilities, interests and needs of young people. If that happens, it would

no longer be possible to provide all young people with services which are free from predetermined outcomes.

In other words, political education is not a “socio-political fire brigade” (Chapters 10 and 21). Rather, its ongoing imperative is based on the fact that democracy and democratic attitudes must be learnt and practised anew by each generation.

Political education is transnational

In the view of the 16th Report on Children and Youth, political education in Germany too often focuses only on issues related to Germany, such as the political system of the Federal Republic. Also people's first concrete political experiences usually relate to this field. However, Germany is also a member of the European Union and, as part of the international community, interwoven in diverse ways with other countries. In order for this not to remain abstract and strange ("faraway Brussels", as it is sometimes known in Germany), the Commission calls for more transnational learning experiences. This particularly applies with a view

to Europe: It is not just about broadening knowledge about the EU, its structures and processes, but to encounter Europe as a space for political action with all its contradictions and to acquire the competencies associated with that.

Transnationalism also includes presenting migration as a normal aspect of society and an ever-present part of German and European history. How politics deals with migration is, therefore, an important issue in political education.

Political education and political participation go hand in hand

Political education must go hand in hand with political participation. A robust political education in conjunction with effective opportunities to participate, contributes to winning young people over to democracy and empowering them to participate and work towards social cohesion.

Children and young people should be able to make a difference in the co-creation of their social spaces and be co-decision-makers about real conflicts and problems. That is why the Report also calls for the legal voting age to be reduced to 16 in elections at all levels.

At the same time, the report notes that participation may be a necessary, but “not a sufficient condition for political education processes” (Chapter 21). Moreover, the report argues that experiences of participation must always take into account what young people learn when they participate in politics.

Political education for young people is youth policy

The 16th Report on Children and Youth recommends enshrining political education as a key element of any youth policy, not only at Länder and Federal levels, but locally, too.

The Commission takes a clear position on this by calling for political education from childhood to early adulthood to take into account the rights, interests and needs of young people, both in public and political discourse and in its own structures and services. Where discrimination and exclusion occur in education and political participation, it is the job of political education to shine a light on them and work to curb them.

Programmes supporting political education should, therefore, be subjected to closer scrutiny whether they take sufficient account of the conditions in which young people grow up and the environments they inhabit, and if they adequately make politics a tangible experience for children and young people.

The Report also draws attention to the differences between youth and adult education and urges that the academic independence of political education for young people should be strengthened and developed.



COVID-19 creates challenges and learning opportunities for political education

The Report describes the COVID-19 pandemic and the strategies to handle it as a “stress test for an open democratic society” (Chapters 1.1 and 3). The Report analyses the challenges and learning opportunities arising from the pandemic for children’s and young people’s political education.

It describes significant restrictions to young people’s political (self-)education processes and concludes that measures to limit the virus have not only made existing social inequalities affecting educational opportunities more visible, but have actually reinforced them. The Report also takes a quite critical view of the rapid increase in digitalisation across the range of young people’s educational contexts brought about by the pandemic. In the Commission’s opinion, this digitalisation is increasing social differentials and is harmful to data protection, it is driving the commercialisation of data, and is no substitute for shared experiences and personal encounters.

The Commission also identifies a major problem in the failure to adequately involve young people in decisions affecting them in the crisis, as well as in a lack of age-appropriate information, particularly for teenagers and young adults. It criticises young people being seen as no more than school students.

Moreover, the report describes how closure orders and restrictions caused by the pandemic are creating existential challenges for institutions and providers of extra-curricular political education. These are chiefly due to cancellations or severe reductions of seminars, projects, education measures or international encounters, as well as the long-term cancellation of school trips and events in partnership with providers of extra-curricular activities within and outside of schools.

COVID-19 creates challenges and learning opportunities for political education

The Commission identifies a number of points of contact when considering COVID-19 as a learning opportunity for political education. In the first place, it picks out fundamental rights and how they can be restricted, the separation of powers and the appropriateness and duration of restrictions in emergencies. Solo actions of nation states, border closures and efforts to find common European responses to economic effects are seen as occasions to discuss issues of the European

Union or thinking in nationalistic terms in the context of political education in times of crisis. Consideration should also be given to the role and scope of influence of democratic and civil society groups and scientific experts in the public sphere. Discussions could also address how conspiracy theories are sustained and disseminated in the context of pandemics. Using examples such as the “China virus”, which is claimed to affect only the “sick” and the “old”, the Report sees discrimination and “othering processes” as a major issue which alienates already marginalised social groups by the use of the categories of “us” and “others”. It also argues for a critical discussion of the conjunction between democracy and capitalism in the light of the pandemic, such as concerning the market-led organisation of the healthcare system. Of no less importance are the various questions of values which the COVID-19 crisis has brought to light and which can be linked to political education.

Children and young people's involvement in the Report on Children and Youth

The Federal Government's reports on children and youth should consider the various groups and perspectives of young people. Generally, this can happen at any stage of the reporting process. By considering the promotion of democratic education from childhood to early adulthood, the 16th Report on Children and Youth addresses a field of education and youth policy activity which young people themselves repeatedly describe as important, yet where they often feel they are not adequately informed and lack the necessary competencies, while at the same time being considered incapable of developing those same competencies. Specific consideration was also given to drawing on expertise from youth organisations when the commission was assembled.

It was also decided that young people should be a part of the reporting process via a range of formats by making direct contributions. However, their participation had to take legal requirements into account, along with the confidential nature of the Commission's work. This meant, for example, that the Commission alone writes and takes responsibility for the report.

The expert Commission for the 16th Report on Children and Youth held three youth workshops, one children's workshop and one round of talks with local youth councilpersons. It also held structured interviews with 13 nursery groups and three primary school classes. The Commission also commissioned a comprehensive secondary analysis of 13 nationwide youth participation processes and considered their outcomes.

Children and young people's involvement in the Report on Children and Youth

The children's and young people's workshops brought in a richly heterogeneous field of young people from diverse living conditions. The aim was that the participants should support the Commission in its work of identifying issues around political educational processes and social spaces for political education. One of the Commission's goals was to find out where children and young people come into contact with politics and democracy, and what their experiences are of political education.

In the workshops, children and young people made it "abundantly clear that they have strong interests in politics and have a high degree of need to exchange views on and ideas about it with each other, including in formal and structured contexts, such as in schools and youth work" (Chapter 3.2). When it comes to the value of political education for a democratic society,

young people appear "to rate it more highly than (...) is often expected or asked of them" (Chapter 3.2). The young people who participated see their political influences coming mainly from their families, peers and the media. They identify climate policy and local public transport, internet policy and media skills, social justice and Europe, discrimination and bullying, and populism and far-right extremism as key political issues from their point of view.

The Federal Ministry for Youth also believes it is important that young people have a stake in how the Report on Children and Youth is received. To this end, Jugendpresse Deutschland assembled a young editorial team for the 16th Report on Children and Youth to create their own brochure for young people, which consolidated the key issues and content from the report from the perspective of young people.

Members of the Expert Commission for the 16th Report on Children and Youth

Dr. Reiner Becker,
Philipps University of Marburg

Prof. Dr. Anja Besand,
TU Dresden

Ina Bielenberg,
Association of German Educational Organizations
(AdB) (deputy chairperson)

Prof. Dr. Julia von Blumenthal,
European University Viadrina

Prof. Dr. Andreas Eis,
University of Kassel

Prof. Dr. Frauke Hildebrandt,
University of Applied Sciences Potsdam
(deputy chairperson)

Cansu Kapli,
Turkish community in Germany
(until January 2020)

Thomas Krüger,
Federal Agency for Civic Education

Prof. Dr. Dirk Lange,
Leibniz University Hannover

Hanna Lorenzen,
Evangelische Trägergruppe für gesellschaftspoliti-
sche Jugendbildung (et) network for civic youth
education

Dr. Stine Marg,
University of Göttingen

Prof. Dr. Kurt Möller,
Esslingen University of Applied Sciences

Prof. Dr. Christian Palentien,
University of Bremen (chairperson)

Christian Weis,
German Federal Youth Council



The Federal Government's Reporting on Children and Youth

The Reports on Children and Youth fulfil the Federal Government's obligations under section 84 of the German Social Code VIII (SGB) to submit a report in each legislative period to the German Bundestag and the Bundesrat on the "conditions of young people and the aspirations and achievements of youth welfare services" and to give its views. Alongside surveys and analyses, the reports must include recommendations on the future development of child and youth welfare services. Every third report is to offer an overview of the general situation of children's and youth welfare. The Reports on Children and Youth provide key stimuli, whose effects continue to be felt beyond a given legislative period. They are the object of expert and political discourse at federal, Land and local levels, in academia and by practitioners in the field.

In the sphere of responsibility of the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, the Report on Children and Youth is the longest-running report, and the only report to be enshrined in law. The Federal Minister for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth entrusts an independent Commission of at least seven experts with the task of preparing the report on behalf of the Federal Government. The Federal Government adds its own statement to the independent Commission's report with the conclusions it considers necessary and submits both to the German Bundestag and the Bundesrat.

Federal Government Reports on Children and Youth since 1965

- German Bundestag: First Youth Report. BT-Drucksache IV/3515. Bonn, 14/06/1965.
- German Bundestag: Second Youth Report. BT-Drucksache V/2453, Bonn, 15/01/1968.
- German Bundestag: Aufgaben und Wirksamkeit der Jugendämter in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland [Tasks and efficacy of youth welfare offices in the Federal Republic of Germany]. Third Youth Report. BT-Drucksache VI/3170. Bonn, 23/02/1972.
- German Bundestag: Sozialisationsprobleme der arbeitenden Jugend in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland – Konsequenzen für Jugendhilfe und Jugendpolitik [Socialisation problems for working youth in the Federal Republic of Germany—Implications for youth welfare and youth policy]. Fourth Youth Report. BT-Drucksache 8/2110. Bonn, 19/09/1978.
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- German Bundestag: Bildung, Betreuung und Erziehung vor und neben der Schule [Education, care and upbringing prior to and outside of school]. Twelfth Report on Children and Youth. BT-Drucksache 15/6014, 10/10/2005. Berlin, 2005.
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- German Bundestag: Bericht über die Lebenssituation junger Menschen und die Leistungen der Kinder- und Jugendhilfe in Deutschland [Report on the life situations of young people and the performance of child and youth welfare services in Germany]. 14th Report on Children and Youth. BT-Drucksache 17/12200. Berlin, 30/01/2013.
- German Bundestag: Bericht über die Lebenssituation junger Menschen und die Leistungen der Kinder- und Jugendhilfe in Deutschland [Report on the life situations of young people and the performance of child and youth welfare services in Germany]. 15th Report on Children and Youth. BT-Drucksache 18/11050. Berlin, 01/02/2017.

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The 16th Report on Children and Youth, along with all previous reports, can be downloaded from <http://pdok.bundestag.de/> by entering the BT Drucksache reference number.

You can find detailed information about the 16th Report on Children and Youth, events on the subject of the report and the Commission for the 16th Report on Children and Youth at www.bmfsfj.de/kinder-und-jugendbericht.

For questions and requests for information about the Federal Government's Reports on Children and Youth, please contact:

**Geschäftsstelle für die
Kinder- und Jugendberichte**
Deutsches Jugendinstitut
Nockherstraße 2
81541 München
Phone: +49 89 62 306-0
Email: info@dji.de

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Report preparation

**Federal Ministry for Family Affairs,
Senior Citizens, Women and Youth**

Glinkastraße 24

10117 Berlin

Phone: +49 30 18 555-0

Email: poststelle@bmfsfj.bund.de

German Youth Institute (DJI)

Nockherstraße 2

81541 München

Phone: +49 89 62 306-0

Email: info@dji.de

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Email: publikationen@bundesregierung.de
www.bmfsfj.de

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service telephone: +49 30 20 179 130
Monday–Thursday: 9 a.m. – 6p.m.
Fax: +49 30 18 555-4400
Email: info@bmfsfj-service.bund.de

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