



Confidence requires trust

The situation of the young generation and the state
of child and youth welfare services in Germany

*Key findings and recommendations of
the 17th Report on Children and Youth*



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

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Foreword

Dear Readers,

Twenty-two million children, adolescents and young adults live in Germany. They start out in a variety of circumstances, have different interests and needs and their lives take different paths. But they are all entitled to have their development nurtured and to enjoy an upbringing conducive to the development of autonomous, independent, socially competent personalities. This right is enshrined in Section 1 of the Child and Youth Welfare Act (Book VIII of the German Social Code) and is something that I also take as a guiding principle in my work as Federal Minister for Youth.



On behalf of the German Federal Government, I tasked an independent expert commission with drawing up the 17th Report on Children and Youth, asking the Commission to set out the situation of the young generation and the state of child and youth welfare services and to formulate political and professional recommendations. My express wish was to have young people contribute extensively to the production of the report, too. I am delighted that the Commission did its utmost to fulfil this request, putting questions on a variety of topics to some 5,400 young people aged between five and 27.

The 17th Report on Children and Youth makes it amply clear that the current young generation in Germany is the most diverse ever. And young people are growing up in a dynamic, in part crisis-ridden time that is extremely demanding for us all. The young generation is facing plenty of challenges, such as the climate crisis and the fallout from the pandemic; peace in Europe is also becoming less of a given. Worries about the future are eroding the confidence of children and adolescents. They need guidance and assurance – and at the same time have far fewer options than adults when it comes to participating in and shaping society. Rarely has the Report's core message been as important as it is today: 'Confidence requires trust'.

Politics and society as well as child and youth welfare services in particular need to make it possible for the young generation to have an optimistic outlook on the present and future. Reliable general conditions encompassing robust, resilient facilities and services are the order of the day. This young generation and future ones need to be able to rely on having solid prospects for development. Against this backdrop, the Report formulates valuable recommendations and requirements for up-to-date child and youth welfare services.

This concise brochure summarises the key findings and recommendations of the 17th Report on Children and Youth. I hope it makes for thought-provoking reading.

Yours faithfully,



Lisa Paus
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Content

<i>Confidence requires trust: remit, key message and core content of the 17th Report on Children and Youth</i>	6
<i>Being young in diversity in a changing society: the young generation's situation in Germany</i>	10
<i>Measured against their own ambitions: aspirations, achievements and overall situation of child and youth welfare services</i>	20
<i>Being able to be young with optimism and trust – guidelines for child and youth welfare services and recommendations to politics, scientists and professionals</i>	25
<i>Participation of young people in the 17th Report on Children and Youth</i>	37
<i>Members of the Expert Commission for the 17th Report on Children and Youth</i>	39
<i>Federal Government's Reports on Children and Youth</i>	41
<i>Order and download the Report on Children and Youth</i>	44

Confidence requires trust: remit, key message and core content of the 17th Report on Children and Youth

Some 22 million young people (children, adolescents and young adults) live in Germany at present. They are growing up in a variety of circumstances, have a diverse array of interests and needs and their lives are taking different paths. The 17th Report on Children and Youth highlights the diversity of the current young generation.

Moreover, the report clarifies how variable and at times crisis-ridden the circumstances are in which young people in Germany are living today. They are faced with complex challenges and need guidance and certainty in what are tough times for everyone. In addition, it is fundamentally the case that children and adolescents have far fewer options in terms of participating in and shaping society than adults.

Despite having experienced multiple crises (such as climate change and the Covid-19 pandemic, though also peace in Europe becoming less of a given), the young generation has shown itself in surveys to be largely

The young generation is diverse and hence is affected to varying degrees by current crises.

optimistic and content with their subjective life circumstances. As the report Commission puts it, many have 'good reasons' for optimism. However, the report also highlights that the results merit differentiated analysis. Firstly because young people's confidence in the future has fallen overall. And secondly because the effects of the multiple crises on young people's daily lives, opportunities and well-being are extremely varied.

Remit of the report

In order to improve the general conditions for young people's life circumstances and the efficiency of child and youth welfare services, the Federal Government is reliant on solid analyses and well-founded proposals.

The Federal Government tasked an independent expert commission with producing the 17th Report on Children and Youth, which was published in September 2024. As a so-called comprehensive report, on the one hand it sets out – like every third Report on Children and Youth – the current situation of the young generation in Germany and on the other hand it analyses aspirations, achievements and the overall situation of child and youth welfare services. In addition to this remit under Section 84 of the Book VIII of the German Social Code (SGB VIII), the Federal Government specified two substantive emphases: growing up in a diverse society and growing up in times of crisis.

The Federal Government also asked the experts to identify developmental needs and to formulate political and professional recommendations – including with regard to the implications of demographic change and intergenerational relations. In addition, the Federal Government wanted young people to contribute extensively to the production of the report.

The Commission fulfilled this task. The 17th Report on Children and Youth presents valuable findings on the young generation's situation and provides a broad basis for further handling of various theoretical and practical questions – bolstered by consistent reference to previ-

ous reports on children and youth and other reports at federal level. As a comprehensive report, the 17th Report on Children and Youth also serves as a reference work on the duties and achievements of child and youth welfare services. At the same time, it makes a valuable contribution to the discourse on the ongoing professional development of child and youth welfare services and the action required in a modern policy oriented towards young people.

The key message: confidence requires trust!

With regard to young people's present and future and to the continued development of child and youth welfare services in Germany, the report emphasises two points: first of all, even (indeed: especially) in times that tend to be described as crisis-ridden, trust is at times a scarce but indispensable commodity. This holds in particular for trust on the part of young people and families. At the same time, in view of complex challenges and dynamics, it is becoming ever clearer how much of a decisive factor trust is for adequate societal stability while remaining open to prospects for societal development.

Secondly, the report notes that, in order to build trust, young people (and older people) need fellow human beings, organisations and institutions that appear trustworthy and above all prove themselves to be trustworthy, too. In that sense, trust and optimism are closely interconnected. And so, especially in challenging times characterised by social dynamics and uncertainty, it is important to have general conditions that foster an



optimistic outlook on the present and the future. Hence politics and society as well as child and youth welfare services in particular need to provide young people with reliable general conditions encompassing robust, resilient facilities and services.

Report topics

At around 600 pages long, the 17th Report on Children and Youth starts by setting out the current general societal conditions in which children, adolescents and young adults are living in Germany. These conditions are partly connected to global dynamisation processes on the one hand and on the other to change and social inequalities in our society.

The report identifies specific change processes in Germany, in particular with regard to social diversity and demographics, though also with regard to the working world with its shortage of skilled professionals as well as to spatial disparities. With globally dynamic and uncertain times in mind, a description is given of climate change, the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, forced migration, loss of confidence in peace in Europe, the digitised world and increasing opposition to democracy.

The 17th Report on Children and Youth nonetheless clarifies that the term 'crisis' is not suitable to characterise all these processes. After all, it is not always a matter of exclusively problematic social processes, and nor can one simply assume that the high points or turning points of the respective developments have already been reached. Accordingly, the Commission is generally open to ambiguities and potentially positive developments and specific opportunities for young people.

Then, under the heading ‘Being young today’, the report consistently changes perspective and paints a picture of young people growing up in the aforementioned general societal conditions – with childhood, adolescence and young adulthood each being regarded as separate stages of life. However, the Commission consistently applies two normative standards: young people’s rights to protection, support and participation; and equitable distribution of resources and opportunities in life and equitable options in terms of participating in and shaping society.

In order to systematically describe the socially unequal position of young people in Germany in a changing society, the Commission deals with the following aspects: being young in an immigration society, in a (non-)participation society, in poverty and in a democracy under pressure. Other sections are dedicated to being young with disabilities, with sexual and gender diversity, with religious and ideological diversity, in East Germany, in urban and rural environments, as well as the link between youth and the dynamics of violence.

The report then sets out what characterises youth in dynamic, uncertain times: in the wake of the pandemic, in the light of global forced migration, in times of threat of armed conflict, in a digitised world and mediatised environments, in an ageing society and in times of climate change.

Against this backdrop, consideration is subsequently given to child and youth welfare services as part of young people’s living environments and as an ‘indispensable player in a social infrastructure of growing up’ – with their foundations, structures, professionals, resources, facilities and services as well as their users.

Politics and society as well as child and youth welfare services in particular need to provide young people with reliable general conditions encompassing robust, resilient facilities and services.

The report also examines the extent to which child and youth welfare services are currently living up to their important position and whether they are tapping into their potential to contribute effectively to tackling social disadvantages.

Last but not least, the Commission formulates guidelines that it believes would mark out child and youth welfare services as being reliable, trustworthy while inspiring optimism, and puts forward recommendations to politics, scientists and professionals who will be using the guidelines to get their bearings.

Being young in diversity in a changing society: the young generation's situation in Germany

Young people are growing up with an increasing degree of diversity in terms of life circumstances, orientations and affiliations. At the same time, society is marked by a variety of change processes and these are dynamic, and in part, crisis-ridden times. The 17th Report on Children and Youth sets various analytical focal points in this context. A selection of findings and recommendations is summarised below.

Different national-ethno-cultural affiliations and attributes entail different privileges and disadvantages

Being young in an immigration society

The 17th Report on Children and Youth steers well clear of 'migration background' as a statistical category due to the fact that it suggests a homogeneous group that does not belong to mainstream society. Instead, the report highlights that all children, adolescents and young adults have different nationalities, ethnic identities and cultural affiliations – of various combinations and with an individual degree of personal identification.

And yet different national-ethno-cultural affiliations and attributes entail different privileges and disadvantages, right down to explicit contempt and hostility. This usually pertains to young people from families with an immigration background, including approximately 37 percent of young people of school age and 41 percent of children under six years of age.



Being young with sexual and gender diversity

The 17th Report on Children and Youth notes: On the one hand, there is increased acceptance of sexual and gender diversity. On the other hand, traditional, heteronormative views are associated with a societal structure that creates both challenges and specific discrimination for those who do not conform to these norms.

Young trans*, gender-queer or non-binary people and those who identify as non-heterosexual are still experiencing discrimination in their day-to-day lives despite

Despite growing societal and legal recognition of sexual and gender diversity, queer young people are still experiencing discrimination in their day-to-day lives.

increasing legal recognition in some areas. At the same time, coming-out processes may have an aspect of empowerment if queer young people develop resilience and educate and engage politically in social movements, too.

Being young with disabilities

Young people with disabilities still live at increased risk of poverty, higher rates of experiencing violence and social exclusion. It is common for their needs in terms of both inclusion and specific support to not be taken adequately into account, to the detriment of their chances of self-determination and participation in society.

Social barriers and mechanisms of exclusion in particular limit opportunities of young people with disabilities in terms of self-determination and participation.

The Commission notes critically that 'disability' in Germany continues to be regarded in an overly one-sided manner as a personal shortcoming. In line with the UN's Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the World Health Organization, greater consideration than previously should be given to the fact that social barriers and mechanisms of exclusion in particular are 'disabling' factors.

Both the official data and the underlying attitudes to disability have so far been inadequate. With regard to young people, it is becoming clear that this group gets unregarded by research and societal discourses, particularly when it comes to education, leisure and cultural participation.

Being young in East Germany

More than 30 years after German reunification, young people in East Germany are living in conditions that are largely adverse compared to those enjoyed by their peers in the west of the country. Their life circumstances, future prospects and attitudes are influenced by a specific experiential background (of transformation) unique to East Germany as well as by the current socioeconomic situation.

However, the Commission also describes the commitment of many (young) people in East Germany to democratic coexistence and the growing interest among a self-assured young generation in this aspect of their identity. The report recommends describing growing up in East Germany more emphatically from the perspective of young people and to strip negative attributes out of the discourse on and in East Germany.

To a large extent, the living conditions and future prospects of the young generation in East Germany are worse than those in West Germany.

Being young in urban and rural environments

Comparative analysis of social spaces makes clear that there is considerable variety in terms of the spatial conditions in which young people live, despite their needs and interests being generally similar. Whereas competition for access to space and resources predominates in towns and cities, there is often a shortage of services and infrastructure in rural areas.

Whereas growing up in urban areas is commonly marked by competition for space and resources, young people in rural areas are often faced with a dearth of services and infrastructure.

Nonetheless, social inequalities can vary significantly more within a region than the typical urban versus rural comparison might suggest. This underscores the need for differentiated child and youth policy responding to the specific realities of life and opportunities of young people in their respective social spaces.



Being young and the dynamics of violence

Discussions in the media and society of serious acts of violence perpetrated by young people often bolster misconceptions about the rates of violence among young people.

And yet young people's real involvement in violence is complex – with many young people being victims of violence and a minority being perpetrators (or recidivists). Violent behaviour among young people is often episodic in nature and declines with age, with boys being more likely than girls to be on record as perpetrators of violence though also as victims of violence. Social stresses and individual support needs which challenge child and youth welfare services and partner institutions in a unique way become noticeable in the context of delinquency and victimisation.

The frequency of youth violence is often perceived in a distorted way, and the actual involvement of young people in violence is complex.

Being young in a democracy under pressure

The 17th Report on Children and Youth notes that democratic society in Germany is under particular pressure at present, just as it is in many other countries. It is known that antidemocratic attitudes can be amplified in social crises – all the more so where political representation and participation are felt to be inadequate. Social isolation is another factor potentially posing a threat to democracy. Support for democracy is dwindling in tandem with declining civic involvement too. Against this backdrop, the encouraging of volunteer work is having a stabilising effect on society and democracy. Democratic education is faced with significant challenges – not least due to the dissemination (particularly on social media) of conspiracy theories and misinformation driven in part by aggression.

A majority of young people in Germany profess faith in democracy. And yet half of them mistrust political institutions such as governments and political parties, which they take to be short-termist and lacking in transparency – especially when it comes to the interests of young people and future generations.

Most young people trust democracy. Nonetheless, many of them do not see their interests being given sufficient consideration by governments and political parties.

Political education programmes need to include young people in a resource-oriented process rather than addressing them as a potential threat to democracy. It is essential for democratic education to make young people experience being listened to, taken seriously and above all genuinely involved. Where democratic education is successful, it is about transferring responsibility and sharing power, as each generation has to safeguard and continue developing the foundations of the democratic community afresh.

Being young in the wake of the pandemic

The effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on young people were considerable and frequently unregarded. Their resilience was put to the test and in many cases the ongoing stresses and restrictions impacted on their mental well-being. Almost two thirds of young people

aged 15-30 surveyed during the pandemic stated that they felt psychologically stressed. 68 percent expressed anxiety about the future and more than one third mentioned financial worries. Many young people felt themselves to be mere objects within pandemic policy, with their needs getting neglected in the political decision-making processes.

The effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on young people were considerable and frequently unregarded. Greater consideration will need to be given to young people's needs in acute situations of crisis in future, too.

Greater consideration will need to be given to young people in such acute situations of crisis in future and their participation in decision-making processes will need to be ensured. The 17th Report on Children and Youth fundamentally recommends enforcing the young generation's rights to protection, support and participation, including during pandemics, providing accessible counselling and support services, a sustainable education plan to compensate for pandemic-related restrictions and safeguarding professional social contact and child protection, for example.



A great many young people feel acutely unsafe due to the threat of armed conflict. Child and youth welfare services are required to both deal with these fears and provide accommodation and care for young refugees.

Being young in times of threat of armed conflict

The crises in recent years have taken their toll on many young people's psychological well-being. Some changes are perceived to be fundamental and permanent. These include the threat of armed conflict.

Events such as the Russian invasion of Ukraine since February 2022 or the terrorist attack by Hamas on Israel on 7 October 2023 and its fallout have further heightened awareness of the presence of war with direct effects on Europe and Germany. Many young people in Germany have lost the feeling of being able to grow up in peace, freedom and security.

There are varying levels of demand on child and youth welfare services. They provide young people with places to open up about their fears and concerns as well as to relax and engage in leisure activities. Nevertheless, there is a particularly high level of strain on child and youth welfare services when it comes to accommodation and care for many young refugees. Tremendously important in this regard is what child and youth welfare services have been achieving with sizeable numbers of volunteers for years now. It does, however, illustrate the limits of a system that has so far failed to establish reliable, durable structures despite persistent global forced migration movements.

Being young and global forced migration

According to the 17th Report on Children and Youth, the consequences of global forced migration for young people in Germany are growing in importance and may be regarded as a lasting phenomenon.

Studies reveal that most young people in Germany take a positive view of refugees. But sympathy for and acceptance of young refugees is not as pronounced, particularly in regions with low levels of national-ethno-cultural diversity. Often there is none of the contact between them that is needed to foster mutual tolerance and social integration. Nonetheless, the Commission is hoping it will be possible to move beyond scaremongering, populism and claims of crisis and to capitalise on the increased attention being given to young refugees in the political arena, in society and in academia in order to make the most of the opportunities that exist for an immigration-reliant country like Germany.

Young people in Germany take an overwhelmingly positive view of refugees. Personal interaction reinforces mutual tolerance and social integration.

Being young in a digitised world and mediatised environments

The Commission also takes global development dynamics to include digitisation and mediatisation processes and associated far-reaching societal and culture changes.

Young people are entitled to carefree, secure participation in the digital world. They need to be protected from harmful, dangerous content while being enabled to navigate digital media responsibly. The 17th Report on Children and Youth notes that digital technologies are deeply embedded in young people's daily lives, educational contexts and social interactions – adolescents use their smartphones as their main medium for communication and entertainment and even children have extensive access to digital media. Almost half of children aged six to 13 have their own smartphone, with the percentage rising in line with age. Social media focuses on concrete interaction prompts, putting children and adolescents at risk of exposure to disinformation, extremist content as well as cyberbullying and cyber grooming. This development is putting child and youth welfare services under pressure to act in two ways. They need to adapt their services in view of the (socio-)pedagogical challenges accompanying digitisation. This will encompass integrating digital content and places into education and training processes but will also mean sensitisation to the potential and the risks of digital media. Nonetheless, child and youth welfare services will also have to adapt to these rapid developments. This will entail such things as ensuring

proper digital equipment for professionals and institutions as well as professional support that enables and fosters both media education and competence in terms of handling risks.

Young people are entitled to secure participation in the digital world. They need to be protected from risks and enabled to navigate digital media responsibly.

Being young in an ageing society

The 17th Report on Children and Youth notes that the demographic shift has been an everyday reality rather than a forecast for quite some time now. One indicator of this is the comparison between the so-called youth and old-age dependency ratios: these provide an indication of how many young people aged under 20 or older people aged 65 or over there are per 100 people aged 20-64. In 2019 the youth dependency ratio was 30.8, putting it below the old-age dependency ratio (36.4). Looking at youth dependency ratios from

previous decades sheds light on the historical dimension of this shift in demographic structure. For example, in 1950 the youth dependency ratio was still 50.8 and the old-age dependency ratio was 16.3. The old-age dependency ratio has been exceeding the youth dependency ratio since 2006 – that year marking the tipping point of a longer-term trend.

The demographic shift entails both positive and negative implications for the young generation and raises questions about the sustainability of the welfare state system.

There are ever fewer children, adolescents and young adults relative to older people. In this situation, it is not just older people but also young people who describe their personal relationships with members of different generations as meaningful and positive, as fulfilling and invigorating. The current young generation tends to appreciate their parents' parenting style and to turn to them in the event of problems. That said, when asked about overall intergenerational relations in society, their assessments are markedly more negative and conflicts of interest are made manifest.

How exactly demographics will develop in Germany will largely depend on decisions in the spheres of migration, asylum, education, family and social policy. All these policy areas involve decisions with far-reaching significance that could have considerable consequences for the overall generational mix, though in particular for the life prospects of the younger generations in an ageing society.



The life chances of younger generations in an ageing society will depend on how politics manage the demographic change.

Measured against their own ambitions: aspirations, achievements and overall situation of child and youth welfare services

Child and youth welfare services provide young people with accompaniment, support and encouragement. They are multifaceted and their remit is broad. The 17th Report on Children and Youth examines the social positioning of child and youth welfare services while also serving as reference work, containing as it does descriptions of the legal mandate and legal basis, the users, provider structures and organisational development, human resources and the funding of child and youth welfare services.

Other sections deal with young people's participation in decisions concerning child and youth welfare services as well as with digitisation processes and also all spheres of activity, statutory benefits and other tasks.

The report explains in detail the tasks and current challenges associated with: child and youth work, youth social work, school social work, educational child and youth protection, promoting upbringing within the family, early help, childcare up to and including primary

school age, socio-educational support, integration assistance for children and adolescents with mental disabilities (or risk thereof), support for young adults, fostering collaboration with autonomous user-led organisations, ombudsmanship, hazard assessment, support planning, taking into custody, protection of children and adolescents in institutions, involvement in proceedings in the family courts, youth welfare services in criminal proceedings and in juvenile court assistance, guardianship by the youth welfare office, foster care and assistance arrangements, adoption, quality, youth welfare services planning and cooperation. Additional sections are dedicated to national and European or international child and youth policies as well as democratic education.

Current challenges

The Commission notes that a lot has happened in recent decades in terms of expanding rights, services and other tasks for child and youth welfare services. Demand for these has intensified considerably in recent years, with a significant factor in that regard being the pressure exerted by societal changes. It has to be acknowledged that child and youth welfare services are functioning well despite the unforeseeable exceptional circumstances over the past few years. Professionals are putting a lot of personal effort into being active for children, adolescents, young adults and their families and providing needs-driven support and assistance.

Child and youth welfare services are functioning well despite the exceptional circumstances over the past few years, but are increasingly hitting their limits.

Nevertheless, the success story of child and youth welfare services is increasingly playing out in more difficult circumstances, and the quantitative growth in services and facilities is definitely eclipsing their qualitative form. Here too it is evident that the crises that mark young people's growing up are pretty much reflected in child and youth welfare services. Against

this backdrop, the report analyses the extent to which child and youth welfare services are living up to their own claim of reducing social inequalities or at least partially compensating for their consequences.

To the Commission's way of thinking, the challenge for child and youth welfare services is to become better than they currently are, to do their bit towards ensuring that all young people grow up with equality of opportunity and to avoid reproducing social inequalities in their own structures. On the one hand child and youth welfare services are indispensable for young people's growing up. On the other hand, their services do not benefit all young people in the way necessary for growing up fairly. Last but not least, the Commission takes the view that the preservation and potential further expansion of child and youth welfare services will depend on budgetary distribution decisions being geared towards the needs of young people and families.

Legal basis

The core legal basis for child and youth welfare services is Book VIII of the Social Code (SGB). Section 1 SGB VIII stipulates that each and every young person is entitled to have his or her development nurtured and to enjoy an upbringing conducive to the development of an autonomous, independent, socially competent personality. This entails avoiding or reducing obstacles. Moreover, the state's duty to intervene in safeguarding matters is cited at the outset in the legislation.

**Section 1 SGB VIII:
All young people are entitled to have their development nurtured and to enjoy an upbringing conducive to the development of an autonomous, independent, socially competent personality.**

Several amendments have been made to SGB VIII since its introduction, which have led to a rise in legal claims on the one hand and to a refining of legal codifications on the other, including in the sphere of child protection. The most recent major and more comprehensive amendment came in the form of the Children and Youth Support Act (Kinder- und Jugendstärkungsgesetz/ KJSG) in 2021. It reformed the SGB VIII with improvements in terms of child protection, supporting young people who are growing up in foster families or in residential care, with increased prevention on site, participation and a fundamentally inclusive form of child and youth welfare services.

The amalgamation currently in progress of services for children and adolescents with and without disabilities under the auspices of child and youth welfare services will not be able to resolve all social inequalities, but in the Commission's view it is a necessary step en route to a greater degree of societal involvement. In that regard, progress has already been made in many places.

Funding

Expenditure on child and youth welfare services more than doubled between 2012 and 2022 – from 32.2 to 65.8 billion euros. This rise is due to such factors as additional childcare facilities and increased use of child and youth welfare services and structures. Spending on child and youth welfare services corresponds to one fifth of a local authority's welfare expenditure on average. In that regard, the most significant area of expenditure is childcare, followed by socio-educational support, and child and youth work and youth social work.

Child and youth welfare services are reliant on adequate funding and planning security to be able to fulfil their duties and respond to crises. The report suggests that the expansion of services will need to be accompanied by an increase in funding so that the supply and quality of services can be ensured and to avoid continuing to (re)produce unequal social relations.

In order to be able to fulfil their growing responsibilities, child and youth welfare services are reliant on adequate funding and planning security.



Human resources

The expansion of child and youth welfare services is particularly evident in the staffing levels. These doubled to nearly 1.2 million (not counting volunteers) between 2006/2007 and 2020/2021. This shows child and youth welfare is perceived as an attractive field of work. Education and social work are among the professional fields young people are interested the most.

And yet there is extremely high demand for qualified professionals. The growing importance of child and youth welfare services, the creation of legal claims for education and care, and efforts to provide high-quality

Education and social work are among the professional fields young people are interested the most. And yet the professions relevant to child and youth welfare services rank first and second when it comes to having the biggest shortages of skilled professionals.

services are linked to an increasing need for professionals. Which represents one of the most significant challenges in all spheres of activity – especially in times of an overall increasing shortage of skilled professionals, not least for demographic reasons.

The professions relevant to child and youth welfare services rank first and second when it comes to having the biggest shortages of skilled professionals. The Commission cites more difficult working conditions such as working hours, opportunities for promotion and remuneration as further reasons for the shortage of skilled professionals in child and youth welfare services. Furthermore, the shortage of skilled professionals is also increasing social segregation processes within child and youth welfare services, because well-informed, mobile parents are at an advantage when it comes to competing for scarce (childcare) places, for instance.

It is not just public bodies and politics at all levels that are required to address the shortages of skilled professionals but also the education system, independent providers and institutions as well as professional bodies and associations. In view of the competition between employers, child and youth welfare services will have to adapt to the changing needs of staff. Moreover, a greater degree of societal recognition of activities in child and youth welfare services is needed.

And there is potential to attract people with a migration background to vocational training and academic study. In the opinion of the Commission, the staff in child and youth welfare services do not yet collectively reflect the diversity of the users. Last but not least, it will be imperative to combat a relaxation of professional standards by means of programmes to attract, train and retain staff.

Essentially, the 17th Report on Children and Youth explains the shortage of skilled professionals as a fourth crisis (alongside the pandemic, the threat of armed conflict and climate change) – one that is having a particularly pronounced effect on the life circumstances of young people and their custodial persons as well as on the structures and services of child and youth welfare services.

Being able to be young with optimism and trust – guidelines for child and youth welfare services and recommendations to politics, scientists and professionals

The Commission assumes that if child and youth welfare services are to continue to contribute to optimism in society in the future, they must first and foremost avoid jeopardising their own trustworthiness. However, this

occurs wherever their reliability is perceived to be fragile by young people and their families, providers and staff and where the general public perceives them as being overwhelmed.

The 17th Report on Children and Youth notes that child and youth welfare services will have to demonstrate their own trustworthiness by

- 1.** deeming themselves responsible for all young people and families, but not for all problems in society,
- 2.** focusing on the right to grow up in a violence-free environment,
- 3.** taking responsibility for participation and fostering young people's involvement,
- 4.** aligning their actions with the diversity that characterises youth and growing up and by proactively championing societal involvement of all young people,
- 5.** offering and calling for a reliable infrastructure for young people,
- 6.** taking a variety of approaches to boosting their appeal as an employer,
- 7.** taking a science-based approach and being open to new findings,
- 8.** supporting digitisation and critically reflecting on its potential,
- 9.** representing young people's interests in a manner that bolsters democracy and
- 10.** meeting the requirements of climate justice.

The report's recommendations to politics (at federal, state and local level), scientists and professionals are directly linked to these principles. They are intended to illustrate the political and professional framework conditions that will enable effective child and youth welfare services, in conjunction with a wide array of parties, to fulfil the requirement of making it possible to be young with optimism and trust.

Child and youth welfare services are responsible for all young people and families, but not for all problems in society

According to the 17th Report on Children and Youth, child and youth welfare services will need to continuously adapt to young people's needs and life circumstances, including to be perceived publicly not only as an institution engaged in intervention but also as a positive, supportive organisation. This is a task for all political levels and encompasses not just legal provisions but also facilitating and monitoring compliance with these.

Hence there is particularly high demand for fulfilling the legislative responsibility on the federal level when it comes to young people's entitlement to child and youth welfare services. In that regard, a lot has happened in recent decades in terms of expanding rights, services and other tasks for child and youth welfare services. At state level, too, plenty of initiatives have been introduced in recent years (such as expanding

early help and prevention and childcare, child protection and in the context of child and youth policy) which need to be maintained or expanded.

However, one thing that is still awaited is genuine equal participation on the part of all young people in these accomplishments. This is largely due to competing jurisdictions within federal German social law. There is a pressing need for reform on the road to creating a genuinely inclusive legislative framework for child and youth welfare services in terms of equal involvement of young refugees and refugee families or young people with disabilities.

Hence it will largely be down to local authorities to ensure that child and youth welfare services' self-perception is reflected in their reality. Both their standard services and those geared towards providing assistance and support in specific life circumstances should apply equally to all young people. The situation is inconsistent with this if tasks are not being performed, or are only being performed to a minimal extent, due to a lack of funding the moment there is no individual legal entitlement. Local authorities need to have sufficient funding to set appropriate priorities themselves in order to be able to fulfil their overall responsibility, safeguard obligations and guarantor status under youth welfare law. After all, child and youth welfare services constitute a core area of local self-administration.

In order for child and youth welfare services to be able to fulfil their advocacy role for and responsibility towards all young people and their families, they also need robust independent providers. These play a crucial role in the provision of services and support, as they are



often in a position to respond with a unique degree of flexibility to the needs of young people and families and help them to assert legal rights and objective obligations.

Increased public relations work at all federal levels is also needed, with the focus being on child and youth welfare services' contribution to ensuring that all young people grow up fairly. This could also help to correct the still widespread public impression of municipal youth welfare offices as being purely intervention authorities.

The 17th Report on Children and Youth also makes it clear, however, that besides its duties towards young people and families, child and youth welfare services also need to recognise the limits of their competencies and to unambiguously identify and draw on the responsibilities of other parties in society.



Child and youth welfare services are focused on the right to grow up in a violence-free environment

Children and adolescents are entitled to grow up in a violence-free environment. It is important that they themselves and in particular all the adults around them are aware of, acknowledge and honour this right. However, relevant knowledge, including on options in terms of support and advice in the event of experiencing violence, cannot yet be presumed to be universally present – neither among children and adolescents nor among the adults who are supporting them. According to the report, the Federation, the states (Länder), local authorities, providers, professionals and academics have more to do in this regard.

Since 2010, the Federation has taken important steps and made a significant contribution to enabling young people to grow up in violence-free environments. According to the 17th Report on Children and Youth, the federal level, it should nonetheless continue to strengthen measures to combat child sexual abuse in particular (including through regular surveys and reporting requirements and the stabilisation of care services for those affected) and should also look into how all other forms of violence can be addressed in a targeted fashion.

The federal states are advised to contribute in a legal, financial and structural sense towards enabling young people to grow up in violence-free environments, such as by means of concrete action plans combating violence as well as guidance and participation forums for those affected. They should also keep in mind consistent implementation and the bolstering of residential care's supervision. Likewise, the reappraisal of violent incidents falls under the responsibility of the federal states as well as the regulation of opportunities for acquiring knowledge and skills through training and further and higher education.

At local authority level, child and youth welfare services are faced with the huge challenge of fulfilling their protection remit despite a shortage of skilled professionals. Effective multi-professional cooperation and regular assessments of local protection concepts are also required. Moreover, it is important to ensure that children and adolescents themselves are involved in the development of protection concepts.

Child and youth welfare services take responsibility for participation and foster young people's involvement

Participation is a basic right, but according to the 17th Report on Children and Youth, it is seldom exercised adequately – even though a rise in young people's participation has been evident at all political levels and also in child and youth welfare services in recent years. The Commission recommends further expanding and securing participation formats and self-critically

exploring one's own (non-)participation in practice. To this end, a necessary political step for the Federation and the states will be to enshrine children's rights in the constitution.

The report also recommends considerably expanding and ensuring opportunities for young people to participate and submit complaints within child and youth welfare institutions (including outside of residential settings) beyond what has previously been possible. Young people should also be listened to and given the opportunity to voice their opinions on child and youth welfare committees as well as in other political committees engaged in 'their' issues. The relevant committees should be obliged to address the concerns raised by young people and to give serious consideration to young people's interests in decision-making processes. The interests and needs of young people should be factored in more systematically in reporting on children, young people and social issues.

Fostering young people's participation should not be limited to merely providing opportunities for it. There also needs to be sufficient funding in place for diversity-sensitive participation structures in order to reduce barriers to access for disadvantaged young people.

All young people should be able to take up and do voluntary work and volunteers must be given support in the form of advice. It is at least as important to bolster trust in, acknowledge and encourage the young generation's involvement and to give young people decision-making power. This requires active support from adults and institutions that fosters children's and youth participation by means of resources and educational opportunities.

Child and youth welfare services align their actions with the diversity that characterises youth and growing up and proactively champions societal involvement of all young people

According to the 17th Report on Children and Youth, making the honouring of children's rights the benchmark for political action for everybody means overcoming the biographical relevance of inequalities due to one's origins and combating instances of exclusion from participation that can be attributed to age, social class, disability, national-ethno-cultural affiliations, sex and gender, sexual orientation and religion or worldview.

In addition to a guaranteed child allowance, the Commission highlights the reduction of educational disadvantages as the crucial factor in the fight against poverty. It urges the states in particular to ensure radical reforms of the German school system. Another recommendation made by the Commission focuses on young refugees having secure residency prospects and reliable integration prospects – including with regard to



childcare, school, training and work. Opportunities for participation often depend on where you live. Hence the Commission recommends fostering local living spaces and an active housing market policy to address socio-spatial disparities.

The providers of child and youth welfare services are called upon not only to keep pushing for a participation policy for young people and families but also to keep self-critically reflecting on the extent to which they themselves are doing their bit towards reducing social disadvantages or corresponding attributes.

Child and youth welfare services provide and call for a reliable infrastructure for young people

The 17th Report on Children and Youth makes it clear that children, adolescents and their families are entitled to reliable, modern child and youth welfare services. These should be capable of responding to changing needs and of bolstering young people's resources rather than just dealing with problems. In times of crisis, child and youth welfare services must continue to offer reliable services, based on political governance that regards them as an important facilitator of social cohesion.

The Commission advises adequate funding and the prioritisation of youth-friendly and family-friendly policies at federal, state and local authority level which transcend departmental responsibilities. This also

includes intensifying collaborative efforts with other service providers and areas of society, such as the health and education sectors, assistance services for young people with disabilities and child and adolescent psychiatry, as well as with autonomous user-led organisations. Such forms of cooperation require binding clarification of responsibilities and roles and a respectful attitude towards the capabilities and professionalism of others. Cooperation must also be structurally embedded, making it independent of personal contacts. And it cannot be accomplished as an 'extra', instead requiring its own resources, professional standards and continuous assessment.

One important control tool is the child and youth welfare committees in the federal states and local authorities. According to the report, they must be strengthened in their mandate to professionally assess needs and to promote needs-based service structures. The 17th Report on Children and Youth also highlights the significance of child and youth welfare service planning, which all too often is overshadowed by other areas of child and youth welfare services and is therefore poorly equipped. Nonetheless, child and youth (welfare) policy at local authority level does have the capacity to make a significant contribution to the reliability of the infrastructure by means of action sufficiently based on evidence. This requires planning on the basis of local authority data, though again there are not always enough human resources available for the purposes of amassing the data. This lack of data-based information could have a significant impact on the legitimisation of local authorities' child and youth welfare services.

Many new ideas are filtering through into practice through model approaches being promoted at all federal levels. That said, the Commission recommends sharper focus on the question of how regulatory structures could also be modified through model approaches.

Child and youth welfare services take a variety of approaches to boosting their appeal as an employer

The 17th Report on Children and Youth makes it clear that professionals constitute a key resource for the provision of child and youth welfare services. The shortage of skilled professionals is one of the main challenges in all spheres of activity. Hence the Commission recommends a statistically controlled, cross-sectoral overall strategy for the recruitment and retention of professionals.

Child and youth welfare services will need to respond with a wide array of measures to maintain their appeal as an area of employment and to ensure high standards of quality – including by means of decent pay, good working conditions, carefully guided lateral entry and appropriate further education and training opportunities. It will also be important to avoid de-professionalisation and to foster diversity among staff.

Child and youth welfare services must position themselves as responsible employers which not only focus on diversity and professionalism but also actively ensure

recognition and support for their staff. Furthermore, scientific monitoring of the need for skilled professionals is considered necessary for needs-based management of capacities in academic and vocational education and training.

Last but not least, attracting, training and supervising volunteers will also be important. Sufficient financial and human resources should be available for their training. Barriers to access and obstacles to voluntary work should be reduced. The Commission takes the view that there ought also to be formalised ways of recognising voluntary work – such as through volunteer allowances, pro-rata loss of earnings, leave options or recognition as personal contribution under subsidy law.

The 17th Report on Children and Youth also encourages debate on how the regulations for meeting the need for skilled professionals in the federal states can be made more uniform, even in different spheres of activity. At the same time, the need for skilled professionals should be handled carefully, as the Commission believes that relaxing standards for professionals has only a limited effect in terms of attracting new skilled professionals. Attracting and boosting the number of skilled professionals should not focus purely at the bottom but should also boost the appeal of child and youth welfare services as a labour market for a wide range of relevant academic qualifications.

Child and youth welfare services should also draw on the potential of the Skilled Immigration Act to recruit new skilled professionals with non-German passports. Those in particular who are already in Germany should hold appropriate qualifications or get further training.

To this end, there are often difficulties that need to be overcome when it comes to the recognition of qualifications, however.

Child and youth welfare services support digitisation and reflect on its potential critically

According to the 17th Report on Children and Youth, the extent to which the future-proof development of child and youth welfare services will succeed will be gauged in no small measure by whether or not the most is made of opportunities presented by digitisation while minimising the associated risks.

Providers will have to actively engage with digitisation and integrate digital solutions into their structures in a way that makes sense both administratively and educationally. In that regard, one challenge will be to arrange digital services in such a way that they are readily accessible and do not exclude certain groups. Technical infrastructures should be tethered to binding standards that create data-secure, legally compliant communication spaces to serve the needs of child and youth welfare services. This will also necessitate critical and reflexive monitoring of developments – including in the spheres of datafication, algorithmisation and the use of artificial intelligence (AI) – as well as their consequences (especially for disadvantaged groups) and advising parties working in child and youth welfare services on these issues. Digitised documentation, assessment and decision-making processes should be



professionally embedded in such a way that the technical logic is rendered subordinate to the professional logic and ethical questions are factored into software development and usage.

The Commission considers a joint strategy between the federal and state authorities to be necessary to financially and structurally support child and youth welfare services' digital infrastructure and equipment, create professional and legal security of operations and security, and safeguard and advance concept developments and professionals' digitisation-related qualifications. Ongoing training and education should be used to help professionals to competently manage the challenges presented by digitisation and to provide appropriate support to young people and their families.

Child and youth welfare services take a science-based approach and are open to new findings

There must be a scientific basis to child and youth welfare services. They need to not only draw on research results to legitimise their actions but also regard them as a means of critical reflection and development. Professionals must be able to have recourse to up-to-date, verified knowledge in order to be credible in their roles.

The 17th Report on Children and Youth also recommends expanding child and youth welfare service statistics and bolstering independent research on issues

pertaining to child and youth welfare services and their users which also focuses more emphatically on social inequality and diversity.

The importance of social scientific monitoring and regular reporting on children, young people and social issues is also highlighted. And young people must have a greater degree of participation in research on children and youth. Last but not least, a variety of methods is needed to adequately fulfil the complex requirements of child and youth welfare services in the context of sociopolitical transformations.

Child and youth welfare services represent young people's interests in a manner that bolsters democracy

The 17th Report on Children and Youth stresses the importance of active democratic education with opportunities for political participation for all young people. Child and youth welfare services contribute to this in the form of participatory programmes enabling young people to experience self-efficacy and learn democratic values. In that regard, all providers of child and youth welfare services are called upon to take their responsibility seriously, continue to develop their services and devise innovative formats.

Executives in particular are requested to act as role models and representatives of a democratically oriented professionalism that goes well beyond transparent, participation-friendly action. In general,



the Commission recommends more training for professionals in the spheres of promoting democracy and shaping diversity. Professionals should also be better supported when they stand up for the liberal democratic basic order and oppose disinformation and group-based misanthropy.

Nonetheless, child and youth welfare services will also need to become politically involved themselves – in all policy areas, in fact. Child and youth welfare services are in any case not politically neutral: they oppose hatred, ostracism, anti-democratic attitudes and group-based misanthropy and champion the rule of law, democracy and diversity.

Child and youth welfare services meet the requirements of climate justice

The 17th Report on Children and Youth makes it clear that young people in Germany are increasingly experiencing the effects of climate change. Many of them are calling for more vigorous political action, with their criticism largely pertaining to what they see as the inadequate implementation of the Paris Agreement.

Child and youth welfare services must regard themselves as part of the solution. Hence legislation, provisions and initiatives in the sphere of child and youth welfare services should always be assessed to see whether they are consistent with environmental sustainability targets.

Providers themselves are called upon to engage with climate justice and sustainability more closely. They should incorporate these considerations into their guidelines, integrate them into their day-to-day work and adjust their own infrastructures and buildings as well as spheres such as mobility and nutrition accordingly. And they should provide spaces for young people to learn and discuss how to respond effectively to climate change and support sustainable development. Lastly, research on climate change and climate justice within the context of child and youth welfare services needs to be intensified in order to develop sound approaches and measures to tackle this global challenge.



Participation of young people in the 17th Report on Children and Youth

The Federal Government's Reports on Children and Youth should consider the various groups and perspectives of young people. There is nothing to preclude this happening at any stage of the reporting process. Young people should also be involved via a range of formats. However, their welcome participation must give due consideration to the specific conditions of a Commission whose work is confidential as well as the legal requirements. Hence the Commission alone writes and takes responsibility for the report.

While drawing up the 17th Report on Children and Youth, considerable emphasis was placed on the extensive participation of young people. In order to acquire insight into the needs, views and current life circumstances of young people, the Commission held 10 participation workshops with selected target groups and a panel interview with committed young people. The Commission also received a sizeable volume of feedback through a nationwide participation process implemented under the motto 'Not about us without

In total, the Commission involved around 5,400 young people between the ages of five and 27 on a wide array of issues.

us!' with the aid of a workshop manual applied by professionals and autonomous user-led groups locally. In total, the Commission involved around 5,400 young people between the ages of five and 27 on a wide array of issues. In addition, the Commission ordered a comprehensive secondary analysis of previous participation processes and considered the results thereof.



The topics of greatest significance to the young people were: the importance of family and friendships in life, leisure activities, civic engagement, educational prospects and the education system, young people's mental health, challenges and experiences of discrimination with regard to gender and sexual diversity, experiences in refugee and migration contexts, societal and global crises, participation and opportunities for participation, as well as young people as users of child and youth welfare services.

The varied, carefully analysed results of young people's participation served the Commission primarily as a corrective and interpretational aid for its conclusions.

The results are also summarised in a separate section of the report. At the end of the day, not all of the dimensions that the Commission considered fundamentally important for successful child and youth participation – being given space, a say, influence and being listened to – could be fully implemented. Nonetheless, the findings with regard to young people's participation in the preparation of the Report on Children and Youth provide starting points for the future design, embedding and ongoing development of such participation processes – in social reporting in general, though also in subsequent Reports on Children and Youth in particular.

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Federal Government's Reports 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 on the 'conditions of young people and the aspirations and services of youth welfare' to the German Bundestag and the Bundesrat in each legislative period and to give its views. Alongside surveys and analysis, 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 child and youth welfare services.

The Reports on Children and Youth provide key stimuli, whose effects continue to be felt beyond a given legislative period. They are a subject of expert and political discourse at federal, state and local levels, academia and practitioners in the field.

The Report on Children and Youth is the longest-running report, and at the same time the only report to be enshrined in law in the sphere of responsibility of the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth. 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 opinion to the independent Commission's report with the conclusions it considers necessary and submits both to the German Bundestag and the Bundesrat.

Federal Government's 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 school]. 12th Report on Children and Youth. BT-Drucksache 15/6014. Berlin, 10/10/2005.
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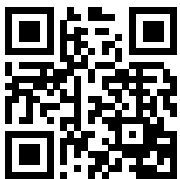
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