

11.1 Educational and occupational success of the 'second generation' in Germany

German leaders only recognised immigration as a permanent reality towards the end of the 1990s. The experience of children of migrants in Germany (the 'second generation') reveals the long-term effects of 'guestworker' policies. If migrants are treated as temporary sojourners, despite all the evidence that a substantial share will stay, it is bound to shape the schooling and labour-force entry of their children. Recent research is beginning to show how much the second generation has been disadvantaged by this mistaken approach.

Since the 1980s, considerable efforts have been made to improve the chances of children of migrants in German schools. Yet such measures have had mixed success: school-leavers of migrant origin now generally have higher educational qualifications than their parents, but still show considerable deficits compared with young Germans (Meyer, 2002: 76).

An official report found that foreign children had lower participation in pre-school education (an important precondition for later school success). They also had far lower rates of participation in the higher levels of the selective secondary school system. In 1999, only 19 per cent of foreign students attended the *Gymnasium* (grammar school, which generally leads to higher education), compared with 40 per cent of Germans. Rates of attendance at the *Realschule* (middle school) were closer (18 per cent for foreigners, 22 per cent for Germans). But foreigners were dramatically over-represented at the *Hauptschule* (non-academic school, which generally leads to manual or low-level white-collar jobs) and the *Sonderschule* (school for students with learning difficulties). Just under half of all foreign secondary students were at one of these types of school, compared with 21 per cent of Germans. The result was that less than 10 per cent of foreign school leavers had the *Abitur* (certificate for admission to higher education), compared with 26 per cent of Germans (BBA, 2002: 199-201). Interestingly, this report notes that such disadvantage is linked to class as well as ethnic background: German children of working-class origin are also disadvantaged in education. However, children of immigrants tend to be disadvantaged by both class and ethnicity (BBA, 2002: 192).

A similar picture was to be found in vocational training - crucial in Germany, since entry to most occupations requires a training certificate. Normally, those who leave school at 15 or 16 are expected to register for an apprenticeship (*Berufsausbildung*) combining on-the-job training with theoretical instruction at a vocational school. Among Germans of this age group no longer in full-time education, 68 per cent were in an apprenticeship in 1999, but the figure for young foreigners no longer at school was only 39 per cent (BBA, 2002: 419). Moreover, the majority of foreign trainees were enrolled for training in occupations with fairly low qualification levels and limited prospects for promotion, such as retail clerks, hairdressers, motor mechanics, painters, electricians, and plumbers (BBA, 2002: 422). The general picture, therefore, was that the second-generation migrants were likely to obtain better qualifications than their immigrant parents, but were still usually worse-off than Germans of the same age group. In view of the decline in formal-sector jobs open to low-skilled labour-market entrants, poorly qualified young foreigners have few opportunities, and are likely to end up in a situation of casual employment alternating with unemployment.

References

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- Meyer, T. (2002) 'Sozialstruktur und Migranten: die soziale Lage der Arbeitsmigranten in Deutschland' in Treichler, A. (ed.) *Wohlfahrtsstaat, Einwanderung und ethnische Minderheiten*, (Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag).