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Foreign worker's children in primary and secondary schools

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6.5. Foreign workers' children in primary and secondary schools

In the early 1960's, West German industry began to recruit foreign workers, mainly from the less industrialized countries of Southern and Southeastern Europe, including Turkey. Workers from these countries and their families made up the bulk of the roughly 4.5 million foreigners registered in West Germany in 1980. Although the influx of foreign workers was reduced to a trickle after active recruitment in these countries was halted in 1973, children from families already settled in West Germany are entering school in increasing numbers (cf. Figure 6.3). In the main, these families come from Turkey, Italy, Greece, Yugoslavia, and Spain (cf. Table 6.3). In 1979, every tenth child under 15 years of age was non-German, and in the group under 6 the ratio was 1 out of 7. The proportion is likely to continue to increase, as, on the whole, the birthrate among foreign workers is higher than that of the German population. Moreover, foreign children are still entering the country, having been left behind until their parents had become settled in Germany. This applies particularly to Turkish families.

The education of these children is only one of a great number of problems created by this wave of economically motivated immigration, problems which initially were accorded very little attention. Nationwide, the proportion of foreign children in primary and general nonvocational secondary schools was 5.8 percent in the school year 1979/1980. They were overrepresented in primary schools (9.6%), in Hauptschulen (8.1%) and in special schools for the handicapped (6.4%). Their representation was below average in the Gymnasien (1.7%) and in the Realschulen (also 1.7%).

The educational disadvantage of the foreign workers' children is shown by a comparison of enrollment rates at the various types of secondary school. Whereas nationwide, only 38 percent of 13-year-olds attend the Hauptschule, for the foreign workers' children the figure is 78 percent. By contrast, among German children, 26.7 percent of the appropriate age group attend the Gymnasium but only 7.6 percent of the foreign workers' children. The latter figures are also approximately those for the Realschule. Comparison with other foreign children in the Federal Republic clearly shows that these proportions indicate a social-minority problem: for most of these others notably those from other Western European countries, the United States, and Japan, the situation is much more favorable.

Statistical averages for the country as a whole tend to obscure major regional differences. On the average nationally every sixth

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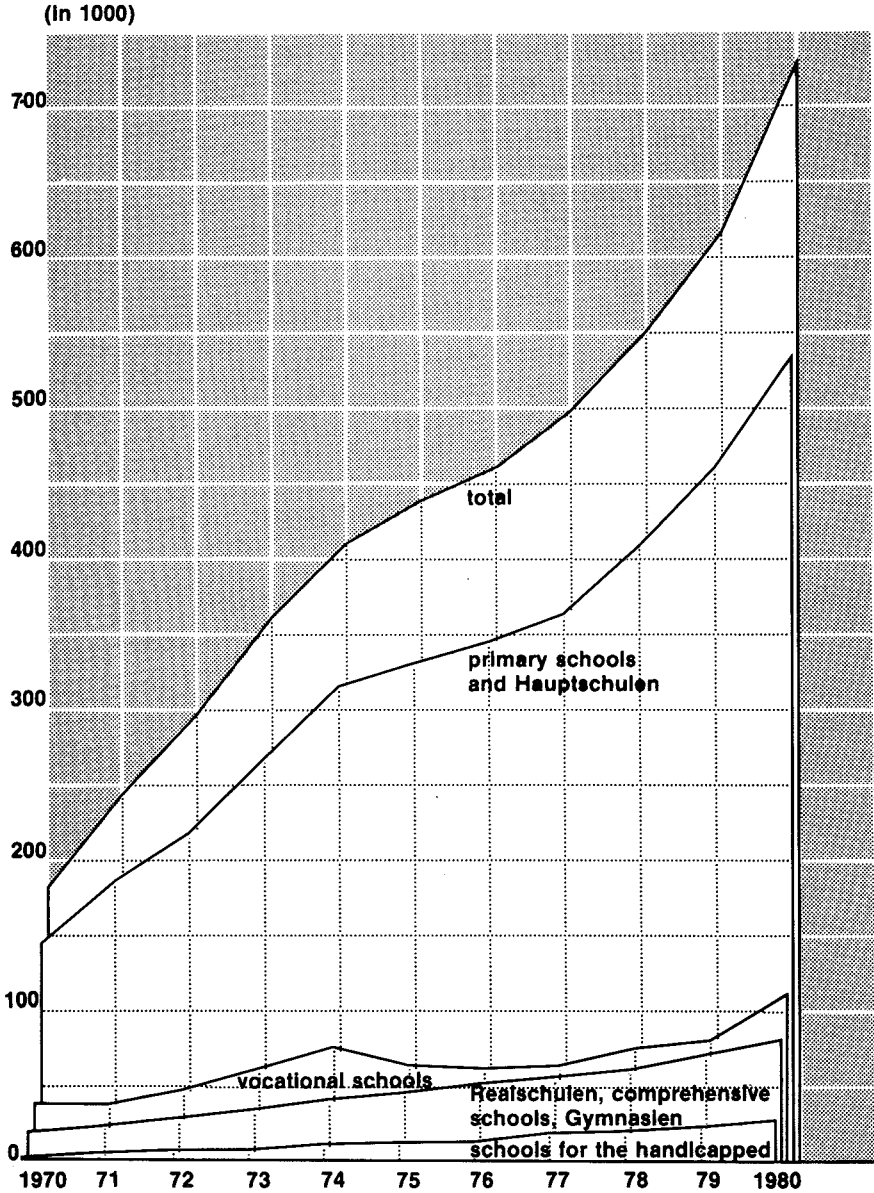


Figure 6.3. Foreign Pupils in General and Vocational Education, 1970-1980

child under the age of 6 was born of foreign parents; in Berlin, however, the ratio is 1 in 4, whereas in Schleswig-Holstein it is 1

Table 6.3: Foreign Pupils in General Education According to Type of School and Nationality, Federal Republic of Germany, 1980

Nationality	Primary schools and Hauptschulen	Schools for the handicapped	Real-schulen	Gymnasien	Comprehensive schools	Total
Greek	42,484	1,465	2,498	3,740	503	50,690
Italian	62,295	5,995	3,759	2,956	1,104	76,109
Spanish	18,661	1,451	2,076	1,902	508	24,598
Yugoslavian	53,373	2,435	4,457	4,014	786	65,065
Portuguese	16,126	954	896	692	220	18,888
Turkish	286,041	12,956	8,072	6,195	4,072	317,336
Other	50,846	2,560	7,262	20,553	3,295	84,516
Total	529,826	27,816	29,020	40,052	10,488	637,202

Source: Statistisches Bundesamt: Fachserie 11: Allgemeines Schulwesen 1980.

in 16. Table 6.4 shows the resulting differences in the proportion of foreign children in primary school and the Hauptschule in the various Länder. The data for secondary schools other than the Hauptschule vary considerably, reflecting not only demographic patterns, but also differences in policy from one Land to the next. Comparable variance, depending on the Land, can be observed in the ratio of non-German children to German children in special schools. Attendance at special schools by immigrant workers' children varies also from one nationality to another. In 1980, the average nationwide enrollment ratio of foreign children in these schools was 7.8 percent, with the extremes ranging from 16.1 percent in Baden-Württemberg to 3.0 percent in Rhineland-Palatinate.

Within each of the Länder, the distribution of non-German pupils is far from being even. Average figures cannot show that a potentially explosive situation exists in certain industrial and urban districts, where the proportion of non-German pupils is far above average. In the Ruhr region, for example, which for many decades has been the center of Germany's coal-mining and steel industries, there are schools in which more than three fourths of the pupils are of foreign origin. In Berlin, as in other cities, foreign workers tend to be

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Table 6.4: Foreign Pupils in General Education According to Type of School and Land, Federal Republic of Germany, 1980 (Percentage of Total Enrollment)

Land	Special kindergartens	Primary schools, Hauptschulen	Schools for the handicapped	Real-schulen	Gymnasien	Comprehensive schools	Total, general education schools
SH	8.2	4.4	3.1	0.9	1.0	2.3	2.9
HA	. ^a	17.4	10.4	3.8	2.7	4.8	9.4
LS	11.2	4.9	4.5	1.0	1.0	2.7	3.6
BR	24.3	12.1	6.2	4.2	1.5	4.1	7.9
NW	22.1	13.3	6.9	2.2	1.9	4.4	8.5
HE	31.9	12.3	9.4	3.2	2.5	4.6	8.2
RP	12.6	5.9	3.0	1.1	0.9	2.0	3.9
BW	18.2	14.2	16.1	2.9	2.2	4.5	9.1
BA	7.9	7.4	4.9	1.6	2.3	3.5	5.4
SL	14.8	5.5	5.1	1.6	1.1	3.8	3.9
WB	26.4	22.9	13.7	6.4	3.5	8.7	15.4
FRG	16.3	10.4	7.8	2.1	1.9	4.8	7.0

^a Included in primary schools.

SH = Schleswig-Holstein, HA = Hamburg, LS = Lower Saxony, BR = Bremen, NW = North Rhine-Westphalia, HE = Hesse, RP = Rhineland-Palatinate, BW = Baden-Württemberg, BA = Bavaria, SL = Saarland, WB = West Berlin.

Source: Statistisches Bundesamt: Fachserie 11: Allgemeines Schulwesen 1980.

concentrated in certain districts, and their children in the schools of these districts.

Often enough, neither these children nor their parents have a sufficient command of the German language and so lack the key to understanding many aspects of life in Germany. As a result, these children have communication problems and adjustment difficulties which greatly hamper their progress throughout the whole of their school career, and result in disadvantages in later life. School grades and qualifying credentials of all kinds are given great weight in the labor market as well as in entry into vocational training programs. Within this context it is significant that more than half of all non-German children leave the Hauptschule without obtaining its final

certificate. In 1977, 46 percent of the non-German Hauptschule pupils in Bremen failed to obtain the certificate, and in Schleswig-Holstein the figure was 70 percent. The rate is, of course, even higher for those foreign children who more or less recently joined their families in Germany. By contrast, only around 11 percent of German children leave school after completing the compulsory number of years without obtaining the Hauptschule certificate. Of course, improvement can be expected in the results for the growing number of non-German children who were born in the Federal Republic or who have spent their early childhood here.

Available statistics are unsatisfactory and rather unreliable with regard to the number of non-German juveniles who attend the various types of vocational school (cf. Chapter 11). Roughly speaking, only around half of a given age group of non-German youths attends vocational school. About 65 percent had no vocational training whatsoever in 1977; 10.1 percent participated in programs of partial vocational training not leading to certification (the year of basic vocational training or the part-time vocational schools); and only 24.7 percent were enrolled in a vocational training program leading to full certification (7.1% in full-time vocational schools, and 17.6% in the "dual system" of apprenticeships and attendance at part-time vocational schools.). Due to this relative lack of training, the bulk of non-German youths have a still harder time getting a job than Germans of the same age.

It took the public and the government, including the school administration, a long time to recognize that minority problems were arising in the Federal Republic in connection with the foreign workers' children. Neither the Education Council nor the Joint Commission of the Federal and Länder Governments for Educational Planning and Advancement of Research in its General Education Plan of 1973 addressed this problem. As a result, foreign children and youths attend schools that were not prepared in time to deal with their problems. And at the same time, non-German children as a group have a considerable impact on the learning situation in a class. With the growing number of foreign-born pupils, more and more classes are "tipping over," the term some teachers use to describe the situation in a class when a third or more of the children are non-German. Most teachers feel that regular instruction is no longer possible under these circumstances. When a school is faced with this problem, all children suffer, not just the foreign ones.

Schools, teachers, and the children themselves do their best to cope with the present situation. As yet, no long-term solutions have

been found. This is due in part to the fact that there have been such rapid changes in the numbers of children involved that the measures taken have continually lagged behind. At the beginning of the 1980's, for example, as a consequence of a family reunification program, authorities are expecting around three quarters of a million children, mainly Turkish, to arrive in Germany to rejoin their parents who are living here. Many of them are older children who have already begun their schooling and who will often enter school in the Federal Republic in the middle of an academic year without knowing a word of German. Moreover, measures adopted to help integrate foreign pupils have to take into account an extremely wide range of learning problems, arising because of the childrens' nationality as well as their family background and previous education.

One problem that has been affecting foreign children especially strongly is the uncertainty of their prospects. Unlike the United States and Australia, it has not been the policy of the Federal Republic to welcome immigration. Foreign workers are given a "guest" status, but not the full rights of a citizen. Most foreign workers arrived with the intention of returning home after working for a few years in this country. Hence, neither the German administration nor the parents involved saw any need to press for integration of foreign children into German schools.

As time went on, however, more and more foreign workers decided to remain in the Federal Republic, either for an indefinite period or for good. Often enough, it was not until the "second generation" grew up that the decision to stay was made. Years of indecision in such families often leave the children disoriented. However, disorientation may also result from parents' efforts to instill in their children the cultural values of their homeland, while at the same time placing value on a German education. In such a situation children attend special lessons after school in which they are taught the traditions of their countries of origin. For certain nationalities, a number of special schools have been established by the parents.

School administrations have worked out special programs to help foreign children adjust to German school life. The following are some of the ways in which help is given:

- Schools are given supplemental funds so that they may offer special assistance to foreign children who have difficulty following regular instruction. The children receive intensive tutoring in German and supplementary help in other subjects as the need arises.

- Schools which have particularly large contingents of foreign pupils may set up special preparatory courses in which groups of these children are prepared for regular, integrated instruction.
- Schools may recruit teachers from the pupils' countries of origin. These teachers take over part of instruction — for example in the children's native language or religion — and assist their German colleagues when language difficulties arise. They often function as interpreters between German teachers and foreign parents.
- Schools receive supplemental funds to purchase teaching materials especially designed for non-German pupils.
- Special courses are offered for teachers to prepare them to deal with the problems that arise in connection with the increasing numbers of foreign pupils.

Despite all these efforts, the chances for many foreign children to receive — and moreover to complete — a good education have not appreciably improved. These children have to acquire what sociologists call a "bicultural identity." Many of them seem to deal with the conflict astonishingly well. Nevertheless, there is no doubt about the strain these children feel because of their situation and the uncertain future it entails. This frequently leaves German teachers with an all but impossible task, well known to many of their colleagues in the United States and Great Britain, a task for which the teacher needs the qualities of a social worker in addition to those of an educator.