

# **Widening participation in Higher Education: policies and outcomes in Germany**

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# Introduction

- Widening access to higher education is a long-term goal for the German higher education policy
- Main goal: create more social equality (or at least equal opportunities for everyone)
- Reforms started in the 1960s
- Current context:

*International:* European education policy, Bologna and Lisbon-process, goal: increase the participation in HE to 40% by 2020, include disadvantaged groups, remove the link between family background and educational success

*National:* reunited Germany, education expansion, PISA-studies: permanent reproduction of social inequality through the education system

# The German education system and access to higher education

- education system is mostly in the hand of the state
- “cooperative federalism”: decentral organisation, strong bureaucracy and university autonomy with self-organization and wide ranging decision competencies
- two-type-structure in higher education: universities and other university-level institutions (Colleges for Technology, Arts)
- access to higher education: general university entrance qualification (*Abitur*) or certificate of aptitude for specialized short-course higher education (*Fachhochschulreife*)
- early selection and self-selection of education careers
- especially students from non-academic background are disadvantaged

# Widening participation: policies in German (higher) education

## Background:

- 1957 “Sputnik-shock”
- “empiric turn” in social sciences, research about the connection between educational success and social background
- public discussion about widening policies
  - 1964 Georg Picht: “German education catastrophe”
  - 1965 Ralf Dahrendorf: “Education as a citizen right”



*Two goals:*

development of human capital and of social cohesion  
plus democratic participation

# Widening participation: policies in German (higher) education

## Policy measures:

### *1960s: discovering the topic*

- empirical studies about social inequality in education
- prototype of an educational disadvantaged person: a girl from a catholic working-class-family from the country-side
- new universities, central university management

### *1970s: establishing new policies*

- new school type: comprehensive school
- new system of student funding (“Bafög”)

# Widening participation: policies in German (higher) education

## Policy measures:

### ***1980-90s: neglecting the topic***

- education expansion, widening participation in HE
- reunion of the two German states, new universities, goals: more efficiency and effectivity

### ***2000s: discovering the topic again***

- 2001: “PISA-shock”
- new prototype of a disadvantaged person: a boy from a big city with migrant background



new public discussion about social inequality and widening participation in education

# Student funding systems: Honnef-Model and BAFÖG

## Background:

- increasingly economical view on (higher) education, growing calls to use private financing for this, especially with regards to student funding
- tuition fees: prohibition, introduction, abolition
- deterring impact on students from non-advantaged social backgrounds → counterproductive to widening participation
- ideas for student contribution: loan-funds (*Darlehenfonds*), education coupons (*Bildungsgutschein*) and taxes specifically for academics (*Akademikersteuer*)

# Student funding systems: Honnef-Model and BAFÖG

## Policy measures:

### *“Honnef Model” (1957)*

- state student funding system
- forerunner of the “Bafög”-system
- combination of a grant and a loan system, depending on the income of the parents
- budget of 30 Million DM
- about 20% of the students were benefited from it
- critic: lack of legal entitlement and the precondition “worthiness” (“Würdigkeit”)



# Student funding systems: Honnef-Model and BAFÖG

## Policy measures:

### “Bafög” (1971)

- state student funding system combined with a big education campaign
- Federal Law on Support for Education and Training (*Bundesausbildungsförderungsgesetz*)
- budget in 2016: 2.9 billion €
- also for students in school education from the 10th class
- grant (1970s), loan (1980-90s), grant and loan (current form)
- number of the supported students in 2016: 823 T, in HE: 584 T



a milestone in the German education policy to increase the number of students from non-academic families with low income

# Outcomes:

## Reducing or reinforcing social inequality?

- German Student Service (*Deutsches Studentenwerk*) has been collecting data about the (social) situation of students since 1951
- newest statistics: ***a typical German student in HE***
- has Abitur (95%), studies full-time (92%) for a Bachelor-qualification (62%) and spends 33 hours per week learning and 9 hours working
- has financial support from her/his parents (86%, on average 541 €), doesn't live with them (38%) and spends around 323 € per month for renting a flat
- has an academic background (52%) – that means, at least one parent has a higher education qualification – and is in a long-term-partnership (54%)

# Number of students and gender differences 1975-2015

Year	Number of students				
	altogether	male	%	female	%
2015	2 757 799	1 434 126	52	1 323 673	48
2010	2 217 294	1 157 485	52	1 059 809	48
2005	1 985 765	1 037 143	52	948 622	48
2000	1 798 863	969 922	54	828 941	46
1995	1 857 906	1 083 273	58	774 633	42
1990	1 712 608	1 046 727	61	665 881	39
1985	1 336 674	830 810	63	505 864	36
1980	1 036 303	656 087	63	380 216	37
1975	836 002	553 889	66	282 113	34
1951	118.312	98199	83	20113	17

*Data source: Statistisches Bundesamt, 2017,  
Deutsches Studentenwerk, 1952*

# Academic background of students 1991-2016

Year	Proportion of students (%)			
	low	middle	higher	high
2016	12	36	28	24
2012	9	41	28	22
2009	10	39	27	24
2006	10	39	28	23
2003	11	43	26	20
2000	13	43	25	19
1997	16	44	24	16
1994	20	45	23	12
1991	21	43	24	12

*Data source: Statistisches Bundesamt, 2017: 27*

# Conclusions

- there has been an education expansion and some progress to widening access to HE for social underprivileged groups
- but the access to higher education still reflects social inequalities: there are still 3.3 times more students in HE who are children of academics than students from a non-academic background
- the education expansion has mainly benefited socially advantaged groups from a middle class background, especially women
- especially for young men from disadvantaged migrant families with a low income the access to HE is still very difficult to attain



there is still social inequality in  
education participation and success

# Conclusion

- the experiences of the German HE-reforms from the 1960-70s show that widening access to HE has the potential to increase social mobility and to create more social equality
- to achieve this goal there are more policy measures needed, especially policies for direct support (like “Bafög”) and encouragement of socially disadvantaged groups
- although the education system can play a central role in supporting or impeding social mobility, it can not alone compensate for wider social and economic inequality
- this is a task for the whole political system (in Germany, in the European Union and beyond)