

Germany: Occupational choices of youths remain unchanged

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In early 2014, new data were published on young people's transitions from school to the vocational training market. The Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training recorded 530,715 new contracts between October 2012 and September 2013. However, young people's occupational choices have not changed much over the past few years and remain limited, with young men often taking up apprentices in technical roles and young women entering sales, administrative or service professions. Occupational choices are of major importance when it comes to pay prospects and employment opportunities later in life.

About

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Background

Given the ageing society with a declining birth rate, one of the challenges facing Germany is the decrease in the number of employed persons in its labour market. A shortage of labour is anticipated for the so-called STEM occupations in science, technology, engineering and mathematics. In addition, doctors, nurses and carers are needed (Anger et al, 2014).

One solution to the future skills shortages in STEM professions is considered to be a higher participation rate for girls. On the occasion of [Girls' Day 2014](#), the Federal Employment Agency in Berlin-Brandenburg highlighted in a [press release \(in German\)](#) that only a small proportion of employees in technical and IT professions are women, though these sectors are looking for skilled labour and offer good career prospects.

In general, choosing a STEM profession raises a young person's employment and pay prospects.

At the same time, greater participation by men in the social and caring professions is considered highly desirable by the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ). In an [article on the role of men in early childhood education \(in German\)](#), the ministry argues that children in kindergartens need role models (that is, teachers) of both sexes, as kindergarten teachers are currently predominantly women.

Looking into developments in the vocational training market and the occupational choices of young people therefore provides an indication of whether these possibilities can be realised in the future.

Latest research findings

Together with tertiary education, vocational educational and training (VET) is one of the main providers of the occupational skills young people will need later in their working lives. VET has remained for years the main entrance point for young people to the German labour market.

Between 1 October 2012 and 30 September 2013, a total of 530,715 new vocational training contracts were concluded, as reported in a [press article on the training market \(in German\)](#) by the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB). This represents a decrease of 3.7%, or around 20,500 contracts, from the previous year. In February 2014, the BIBB also released its [data on occupations \(in German\)](#) for which new contracts were concluded. The data are based on the vocational training market statistics maintained by the Federal Employment Agency (BA) and the VET survey conducted by the BIBB.

The BIBB figures reveal that young people's occupational choices are limited: 33.5% of all new apprenticeship or vocational training contracts were concluded in only 10 professions.

As Table 1 shows, the top three VET training professions for young boys are motor, industrial mechanic and retail clerk. Overall, boys lean more towards technical occupations.

Table 1: Top 10 male professions for which new contracts were concluded (2012–2013)

	VET profession chosen	Number of newly concluded training contracts	Share of all newly concluded contracts (%)
1.	Motor mechanic	18,594	5.9
2.	Industrial mechanic	12,729	4.0
3.	Retail clerk	12,369	3.9
4.	Electronics technician	11,688	3.7
5.	Plant mechanic for sanitation, heating and air conditioning systems	10,881	3.4
6.	Sales assistant	10,413	3.3
7.	IT specialist	9,843	3.1
8.	Specialist for warehouse logistics	8,796	2.8
9.	Wholesale and export/import clerk	8,775	2.8
10.	Cook	7,953	2.5

Note: * Reporting date: 30 September 2013.

Source: BIBB

Table 2 shows the top three choices for girls, however, are sales assistant, retail clerk and office clerk. Girls usually prefer VET in sales, administrative or caring occupations.

Table 2: Top 10 female professions for which new contracts were concluded (2012–2013)

	VET profession	Number of newly concluded training contracts *	Share of all newly concluded contracts (%) *
1.	Sales assistant	15,456	7.2
2.	Retail clerk	14,637	6.8
3.	Office clerk	13,854	6.4
4.	Medical assistant	13,692	6.4
5.	Dental assistant	12,000	5.6
6.	Industrial clerk	11,385	5.3
7.	Hairdresser	10,008	4.7
8.	Assistant in office communication	8,727	4.1
9.	Specialised shop assistant in the food trade	7,680	3.6
10.	Management assistant for the hotel industry	7,386	3.4

Note: * Reporting date: 30 September 2013.

Source: BIBB

The top 10 professions for girls remained completely unchanged over the previous year. Similarly, the ranking for boys' preferences altered little. Though the choices of young people are also influenced by regional supply, in recent years there has been little variation in the top 10 professions in which contracts are concluded.

However, alternative occupational choices would offer girls better pay and career prospects. As an analysis by the Cologne Institute for Economic Research (IW Köln) shows, most of the top 10 VET professions for which labour shortages existed between September 2011 and August 2013 were in technical fields: agricultural and construction machinery, heating and air conditioning systems, automation technology, mechatronics and electrical plant engineering. Only two of the professions currently preferred by girls are in the same top 10: geriatric care and nursing.

The social partners support different initiatives aimed at providing young people with training possibilities and influencing their occupational choices.

Social partner actions

The Confederation of German Trade Unions (DGB) supports the project Future Now. Since 2010, girls and boys from grade eight upwards have been invited to attend 'future camps'. The participants learn to organise themselves, work in different teams to test their skills and gain an overview of a wide range of occupations in different fields.

The Confederation of German Employers' Associations (BDA), the Confederation of German Industry (BDI), the German Chambers of Industry and Commerce (DIHK), the German Association of Skilled Crafts (ZDH), the German Federal Association of Liberal Professions (BFB), the Federal Government representatives and the BA are partners in the Pact on Apprenticeships initiated in 2004. When the pact was extended for the second time in 2010, the pact partners agreed to create an annual average of 60,000 new vocational training positions, 30,000 places in companies for school-leavers needing to obtain the entry-level qualifications required for a vocational training position and 10,000 places for obtaining special entry-level qualifications for young people needing particular help with the transition from school. They also committed themselves to adding 30,000 new companies to the list of those training young people.

Additionally, the same organisations are engaged in initiatives directly aimed at widening the occupational choices made by young people. The DGB, BDA, BDI, DIHK and ZDH all support Girls' Day. Since the first event of this kind in 2001, around 1.5 million girls have visited companies or organisations on the annual Girls' Day and taken a closer look at apprenticeship positions or university courses in the fields of IT, skilled trades, technical professions and the natural sciences. The first Boys' Day was staged in 2011. Also held annually, this event gives boys a chance to visit social, caring or educational organisations and companies. Since its inception, 100,000 boys have participated.

References

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