

City Impression Berlin

1) General information

Berlin is a city with more than 3.7 million inhabitants. About 35% of the city's total population has a migration background – mostly Turkish, Polish, Arabic, Italian and Russian.

There are 210,000 children between 0-6 years. Around 171,000 of these children take part in childcare. This number reflects nearly 77 percent of all children in this age group (around 95% of the three to six-year olds and around 68% of the children under three).

There is a broad consensus in society and politics that early childhood care in institutions does not only have a positive impact on children but that it also secures the income of families, especially of women, and thereby promotes their careers. The development of early childhood education therefore has economic, educational and family policy reasons. In the whole of Germany, the federal law entitles all children from their first birthday up to school entry at the age of six to a place in childcare for some hours a day. In all federal states¹, except in Berlin, there is still a fee for childcare facilities. Due to the so-called *Kulturhoheit der Länder* (sovereignty of the states in cultural matters), childcare is mainly the responsibility of the federal states. The childcare providers are voluntary organizations, churches and parental organisations. There are just a few state institutions but also most of the private providers do not operate commercially.

1.1) Finances

The total amount of state funds for childcare in 2015 in Berlin was about 1.5 billion euro with an upward trend. Among other factors, the increased expenditure can be explained by the political decision to make childcare free of charge for parents from 01.08.2018.² During the last decade, the investment of the federal state has been growing as extra funding from the German State to the states was agreed and reconfirmed in the Coalition Agreement in 2017. By the year 2022, around € 5.5 billion should be spent nationwide on day care for quality improvements. (<https://www.bmfsfj.de>)

² Except for the cost of food to the amount of 23 euros per child monthly.

1.2) Administration

The legal mandate for day care providers is laid down in the Code of Social Law VIII as a mandate for education, care and upbringing. According to the law, parents and teachers/educators are jointly responsible for the education and upbringing of children. The aim is the establishment of an educational partnership (*Erziehungspartnerschaft*) between parents and teachers/educators, which can develop over the years. In this age of the children, the parents are of great importance. The education of children against the will of their parents is politically undesirable. As children enter school the responsibility for their education shifts towards more influence of the state: the care for school children is the responsibility of the schools in their function as state institutions. Each school can decide to be either responsible for the day care themselves or to “hire” other institutions. But in the end the school is responsible for all the work from teaching to afternoon care.

One aspect of the legal mandate for childcare - besides upbringing and care - is education (*Bildung*): The German word (as in *Bildungsprogramm*) is the core of the policy for equal opportunities for all children. Education is an individual and lifelong process characterized by successes and irritations, ultimately leading to an active appropriation of the world. Workers in childcare facilities have the task of creating a stimulating environment for the educational processes of children. An important basis for this constitutes the education schedules which exist in every federal state. In Berlin it is the *Berliner Bildungsprogramm für Kitas und Kindertagespflege* (2014)
<https://www.berlin.de/sen/bildung/schule/bildungswege/fruehkindliche-bildung/>.

The daily stay of a child in a childcare institution varies from 5 to 12 hours a day, depending on the age of the child, the need of its parents to go to work and the (special) needs of the child - for example the need to learn the German language before attending school.

2) Inclusion Politics

For decades, across all political parties in Berlin, there has been a consensus that all children, irrespective of their origin, cultural background or financial resources, should have access to early childhood education. Accordingly, the integration of children with disabilities and learning problems has a long tradition in Berlin. Discrimination should be avoided from the very beginning. This is especially true for children whose family language is not German: they

need to attend a childcare facility to acquire the German language before they start school. The exemption from fees can be understood in this context: no child should be excluded from day care for financial reasons. In addition, Berlin is trying a variety of measures to motivate parents to send their children to kindergartens as early as possible. Politicians try to enhance the possibilities for all children in many ways. Inclusion is also an important part of the Berliner Bildungsprogramm.

Already before the adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989 (<https://www.kinderrechtskonvention.info>), Berlin developed models, initiated by committed parents of children with disabilities and pedagogues, of joint education for children with and without disabilities. Together with trained educators they established day care centres, where all children could go regardless of physical and mental disabilities. Self-help groups like *Eltern helfen Eltern e.V.* - parents help parents - (<http://www.ehe-berlin-brandenburg.de>) became unions that offer counselling to affected parents. The general idea of these parents was to include their children in “normal” education institutions. Later on, this kind of integration became the political agenda as well. Germany is committed to the UN Disability Rights Convention of 2006, which demands the participation of all people in society.

It is a long-term element of child and youth welfare in Berlin that children who need special attention and care need extra support like extra hours from teachers and educators as well as specialised teachers/educators. A central element of the Berlin inclusion politics is the additional support (extra hours) for Children with a so called *erhöhter Förderbedarf*. For these children additional professionals are paid for special support (*Förderung*). This can be ¼ of a full-time teacher/ educator for an “A-child” and ½ of a full-time teacher/educator for a “B-child”. This is a very successful part of the inclusion policy of Berlin, because institutions and teachers/educators have no longer any reason for rejecting children with an integration status for the extra work.

Inclusion policy is also implemented in schools. Besides more human resources, solutions are smaller classes, welcome classes, specialized teachers and barrier-free buildings. The goal is to include handicapped children in regular schools. There are only some special institutions, for example for deaf children. The general line of approach is to create a friendly and favourable environment for all children, youth and parents. No child should be left behind.

Also nationwide, integration and inclusion were promoted. An example of this is the long-term financial support of the Children's Worlds project (<https://situationsansatz.de/fachstelle-kinderwelten.html>) by the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, which since the 2000s has been implementing inclusion in practice and scientific research throughout Germany.

To sum-up: The inclusion policy is an integral and long standing part of the childcare politics. The parents are an integral part of the inclusion in policy and practice.

2.1) The challenge of including refugee-children in day care institutions and schools

Recently the inclusion of refugee-children has been a new challenge. The arrival of more than 1.5 million refugees in Germany gave priority to the inclusion of these children. They are another important part of the inclusion-policy of the federal state of Berlin. Refugee policy became important in 2015.

In 2015 – especially from August until the end of the year – many families, singles and unaccompanied children and teenagers came as refugees across the Balkan to Germany. Between September and November 2015 several hundreds of new arrivals were counted only in Berlin every day. All of them had to be registered first in order to receive accommodation, food, clothing, a residence status and other state services. Registration was the first step in a long process of arriving and integrating into the new home.

The following description characterizes the situation of families and children as well as unaccompanied minors.

The institutions that were responsible for the initial reception of the families were soon overwhelmed by the rapidly growing number of people seeking help. There was neither sufficient space, nor a sufficient number of employees to assist those seeking protection on their arrival. This led to people gathering in front of the building where they could submit their application. They waited outside without protection in all kinds of weather. At first they were not even provided with tents, food and drink, and were only given medical care in emergency situations. Tense and sometimes aggressive situations arose due to limited possibilities of communication caused by language barriers. The fact that all of them had to go through the procedure of initial recording before they finally reached a safe place after a long journey and a dangerous escape from their homelands also contributed to the tense atmosphere. When it became clear that the authorities couldn't react adequately to the situation, a large number of



volunteers jumped in. They effectively organized necessities to make people's stay bearable. Especially for babies, young children and mothers, the surroundings of the initial reception area was not a good place. The kidnapping of a four-year-old from the site and his assassination is a particularly tragic event and gives an impression of the chaos and the excessive demands that all involved parties had to face. The difficult situation in Berlin attracted the attention of the press worldwide.

After the registration, the families were assigned a housing option - usually in a gymnasium or in another large hall like the empty former Tempelhof Airport – where they had to live together with many others. There was little privacy, the sanitary facilities were restricted and the families could not prepare food for themselves. Furthermore, possibilities of employment were limited and the many different cultural backgrounds of the families could not be considered at first. After some time, the mostly private operators of these shared accommodations for refugees decided to separate single men from families or created areas just for women and children. Minor children and teenagers were sent to special homes, where they had to wait for the hearing as part of the asylum procedure. They were looked after by social workers, but there were not enough of them to help all the young people. Many teenagers therefore disappeared, continued their travels on their own or were hit by homelessness during this period– until now it is not known exactly how many of them have escaped state control. Weeks and months of waiting for a change of their living situation were also challenging for the adults. While the refugees were struggling with these difficult circumstances, resistance against them started to develop in some districts among the German population.

At the schools, so-called *Willkommensklassen* (welcome classes) for school-age refugee children were set up quickly, where the German language was taught in small groups. This was a first important step towards integration. Younger children should enter a regular day nursery as soon as possible. However, they encountered a very tense situation, since the need for nursery places had been extremely high for years and the planning did not count on a significantly higher demand. Missing places and missing staff could not be made available in the short or even medium term.

Voluntary initiatives, which developed rapidly over the months, provided great support. But they could not compensate the difficulties of the state to react flexibly to the people's needs. This is especially true for state tasks like provision of schooling, child protection etc.

In the end of 2015 and during the whole year of 2016 many state-run projects for children and families started with the following goals:

- Integration/inclusion of families and children as early as possible:
- Attendance of school or day care centres
- Familiarity with the German education and training system
- Quick acquisition of the German language in day care centres and Willkommensklassen
- Quick transition to the regular education institutions
- Avoidance of further ghettoization, which had already started due to the housing situation.
- Improvement of accommodation by moving people into more suitable apartments or residences.
- Protection of children in shared accommodations and initial reception centres.