



## **Youth and Politics**

Working Paper

**Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung**

Task Force - Youth

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## 1. Introduction

Without young people there can be no state. A stable and lasting democracy is possible only if young people participate in it and help to shape it. Friedrich Ebert's remark that »Democracy needs democrats« must, therefore, also be understood as a call to promote youth, which amounts to investing in our future. The issue of young people, therefore, plays a central role in the activities of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FES), at both the national and the international level.

### 1.1 The youth-policy activities of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation in the Federal Republic of Germany

*First*, the FES, through its **scholarship programme**, supports talented and socially committed students and PhD scholars in their academic pursuits. The sponsorship and support of talented young people is one of the founding principles of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation. When Friedrich Ebert was the – first – President of the Weimar Republic, children from deprived social strata, however talented, did not have access to university or research programmes. It was for this reason that, in 1925, the Foundation began to award scholarships to exceptionally bright young people from the working class, who actively supported the nascent democracy of the Weimar Republic. The objective of the scholarship programme, even today, is to reduce social deprivation and to promote persons who, at present as well as in the future, are committed to promoting freedom, justice and social cohesion. Apart from financial assistance, scholarship holders also receive broad-based non-material support, which comprises an extensive seminar programme, numerous grant-based activities and also supervision by tutors and mentors. In addition, all former and current scholarship holders constitute a large network.

*Second*, the FES's **political and civic education programmes for young people**, with their participatory and youth-centred format, equip young people to better understand political developments, to develop and articulate independent standpoints and to acquire important skills for their political and social engagement. The FES does not view young participants merely as passive, but rather as actors in a democratic decision-making process.

The FES's political and civic education work for young people in Germany represents by far the most varied branch of its youth-policy activities. Consequently, it constitutes the main focus of this report.

*Third*, at conferences, meetings and expert workshops, decision-makers, opinion-formers, experts and the interested public are invited **to enter into dialogue on issues of youth policy**. Thus, the Foundation does not merely focus on young people as a separate target group, but also actively initiates discussions on topical issues and decision-making processes related to issues of youth policy at the federal and state levels. These interactive and consultative programmes focus on political and social areas

which have a direct impact on the life and development of young people in our society, such as combating unemployment or juvenile delinquency. The practical options open to social-policy decision-makers are discussed and developed within this framework.

The goal of these activities, besides educating young people politically, is to actively support the creation of the relevant enabling conditions for youth policy and the networking of opinion-formers. In this way, the synergies generated by engaging with the same issue in both areas of the Foundation's youth-related work can be utilised. Thus, for example, knowledge gained through the Anti-Violence Training Programme for young people can be applied directly in discussions on youth policy relating to the prevention of juvenile violence and vice versa.

## **1.2 The youth-related political activities of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation at the international level**

The issue of young people is also central to the **international activities** of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation. In their capacity as voters, active citizens and, in due course, decision-makers, young people will be actively involved in national affairs. A democracy can attain permanent stability only if its young people actively participate in it and shape it.

In developing countries in particular, young people have enormous potential for bringing about social change since they constitute a very high proportion of the total population. At the same time, many young people in these countries have been severely affected by crises and problems, such as violent conflicts, unemployment and social injustice.

As part of its international activities, the Friedrich Ebert Foundation promotes the participation of young people in the political process and also trains young researchers through its wide range of programmes and measures. A good example of such programmes is the *Youth Leadership Training Programme* (for further information see [www.fes.de/themen/jugendprojekte.htm](http://www.fes.de/themen/jugendprojekte.htm)). In addition, young people are being used as important opinion-formers in the work of the Foundation.

## **2. Guiding principles of the political and civic education programmes**

The FES's political and civic education programmes are based mainly on the following principles:

- the values enshrined in the Basic Law and
- the fundamental values and political principles of social democracy.

The principle of adherence to values underlying the FES's political and civic education programmes is augmented by the principle of openness, which has two dimensions:

- our programmes are basically open to all those who want to take advantage of them;
- our approach to political education is as a discussion process which is open to conflicting points of view.

### **3. Political and civic education programmes for young people**

#### **3.1 Objectives**

Through its efforts to inform and educate young people about important political and social issues, as well as by imparting knowledge about political structures, processes and instruments through a participatory and youth-centred approach, the Friedrich Ebert Foundation contributes towards:

- arousing the interest of young people in politics;
- promoting young people's democratic participation;
- helping young people to become qualified, so that they can bring their interests to bear more effectively in society and politics;
- encouraging young people's political and social commitment;
- strengthening the identification of young people with the fundamental values of social democracy; and also
- imparting the principles of a society based on solidarity, peace and social justice.

In specific terms, this involves the following:

- We encourage young people to adopt a critical approach to contemporary German and European history and train them to deal with anti-democratic and extremist tendencies.
- We promote an interest in and the skills needed for involvement in democratic parties and civil organisations.
- We help young people to navigate the internationalisation of politics, the economy and culture, and elucidate the principles of solidarity and peaceful cooperation in the globalisation process.
- We demonstrate the importance of an education policy oriented towards equal opportunities for social participation.
- We promote peaceful and respectful cooperation by developing alternatives to violent behaviour with young people
- We foster students' leadership skills and judgement with regard to democracy and motivate them to participate.
- We raise young people's awareness of prevalent forms of discrimination, examining the impact of gender-specific role models and various forms of exclusion.

Our activities are directed towards all young people. That means, for example, that we offer both general and specific programmes for students from different kinds of schools. In selecting our methods and programme formats we put particular emphasis on participation.

### **3.2 Target Groups**

The FES's political and civic education programmes for young people are, in principle, open to all. An important aspect of our work is to stimulate interest in politics among young and first-time voters and to instil a desire in them to participate in political processes. It is also important to imbue in the younger generation a willingness to engage in voluntary or honorary political activities.

The target groups for our political and civic education programmes are:

- young people in the age group 15 to 25 years;
- those involved in running school and youth magazines;
- student representatives at the school level;
- young people engaged voluntary and honorary political activities;
- representative bodies for young workers and trade union youth wings;
- young people active in civil society organisations;
- student representatives;
- those awarded FES fellowships;
- committed conflict mediators;
- political interns.

### **3.3 Partners**

The FES's youth policy activities are carried out in close collaboration with a wide range of partners, including the following:

- student councils;
- student initiatives, youth clubs and youth organisations;
- agencies or institutions responsible for youth programmes;
- institutions for political and civic education;
- school teachers;
- educators in non-school settings;
- parent representative bodies;
- youth welfare offices and counselling centres;
- political and administrative policy-makers;
- research institutions where young people are the research focus.

We attach considerable importance to collaboration with trade unions and their youth organisations. The focus here is on issues such as youth unemployment and equality in the educational system and vocational education.

### **3.4 Methodology and Practical Examples**

The political education activities of the FES rest on the following four pillars: *communication and presentation of political reality, seminars and project-based learning, skills training and political counselling*. These modules are to be viewed as ideal types; in reality, however, the blurring of distinctions is possible, leading to an overlap. Each of these pillars, in its own way, contributes to the development of a democratic political culture and enhances the capacity of citizens to assess things and to act. We select our methods in accordance with the optimal realisation of the key objectives of our political education programme. In this we pursue the principles of the greatest possible activation and participation. The choice of methods and formats for our political and civic youth programmes is influenced by young people's experiences and life worlds and approached in a youth-friendly manner.

#### ***Communication and presentation of political reality in project-based learning***

The Friedrich Ebert Foundation regularly organises discussions and conferences that specifically address young people and take up topical political and social issues that affect them particularly. Experts from the fields of politics, administration, academia, media and civil society inform young people about real-life political issues and are open to questions from the audience. Participatory and innovative formats, such as Fishbowl, Open Space, World Café and Future Workshop, play an extremely important role in our youth programmes. Simulated games offer a great opportunity for the communication and presentation of political reality in a praxis-oriented and interactive manner.

The following are examples of different formats used in youth education programmes:

#### Fishbowl

The Fishbowl discussion enables the largest possible number of people to participate actively in a discussion, infusing it with their own particular concerns and interests. In the middle of the room five or six chairs are arranged in a circle, one of which is kept empty for the moderator and normally two others for the external experts. The remaining two or three chairs are for the public. Participants are free to seat themselves on these two or three chairs and to participate in the discussion for a while, and then to move out of the circle again, giving others an opportunity to participate in the discussion and to raise issues that are close to their hearts.

### Youth Planning Cells

Youth planning cells help young people to formulate their concerns and ideas on issues that affect them and to present these effectively within their respective communities. After collating, discussing and assessing the detailed information that has been collected, the young people draft a proposal, which is then submitted to local policy-makers.

### Open Space

In Open Space, people come together to work collectively on an issue or to find a solution to a problem; only the general theme and the timeframe are defined. The principle underlying Open Space is that of self-organisation. The participants are the main actors – they bring to bear their own skills and opinions on an equal footing. Open Space is driven by the participants' skills, experiences, ideas and goals and this motivates them to participate, to organise themselves and to accept responsibility.

### Simulation games

The methodology underlying game simulation is the realistic re-enactment of the functioning of a political institution, for example, parliament. Thus, the simulation games of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, which include issues relating to municipal policy, European policy, globalisation and the United Nations, simulate real political processes. The objective is to ensure that young people do not perceive and experience politics merely as passive spectators but rather become active participants.

In addition, the FES makes use of a wide variety of media in its political and civic education programmes for young people in order to impart information more vividly and to arouse the participants' interest. This lively interaction includes *readings*, where authors present their books and discuss them with young people. At *film screenings*, young people have the opportunity to discuss and debate with filmmakers, actors and actresses, as well as with socially and politically relevant persons. The Friedrich Ebert Foundation also organises *exhibitions* on various topics. Thus, for example, one such exhibition can highlight the dangers of right-wing extremism and provide information on the potential of political engagement to counter racism and violence. These exhibitions can be loaned out to schools, youth organisations or public institutions.

The Friedrich Ebert Foundation also organises events and programmes – for example, workshops – in smaller groups for specific target groups or on specific issues. In these cases also, the participatory aspect is to the fore: discussion and participation are the guiding principles of such programmes. The workshops cover a broad range of topics,

including »Training in Rational Argument to Counter Populist Slogans«, »Bullying«, »Intercultural Dialogue« and »Learning How to Stand Up for One’s Beliefs«.

### ***Skills Training***

The Friedrich Ebert Foundation offers programmes on skills training for committed and interested young people, where they can acquire and practice the skills necessary for engaging successfully in political and voluntary work, such as public speaking, argumentation, discussion and presentation. These very focused sessions provide support for young people who are, for example, already working in schools as student representatives or are active in producing the school magazine, or are involved in local issues, youth organizations, trade unions or other representative bodies or associations or who want to take up these activities in the future.

Some programmes of skills training address specific target groups:

#### Training for student representatives (at school level)

At our weekend training programmes we motivate pupils to take up voluntary work at their school and acquaint them with the legal framework of representation activities. The problems faced by student representatives in the real world constitute the starting point of the training programme. The objective is to support young people in the representation of their interests and to equip them with the skills they need for this purpose.

#### Youth Media Academy

The Youth Media Academy organises training programmes for young media creators and editors of school magazines. Motivated and assisted by young teams, pupils acquire the tools of the journalist’s trade to become editors and to launch themselves in the media. Knowledge of particular techniques, such as researching, conducting interviews, writing, photography, radio and video production, podcasting and much more is imparted in this training programme, which is offered throughout Germany.

### ***Policy advice***

The Friedrich Ebert Foundation provides youth with visibility and a platform to articulate their needs, goals and expectations, so that politicians can take note of them. Thus, for example, a Youth Agenda for the German EU Council Presidency and a Youth Agenda

for Climate Protection were formulated and published. These set out young people's demands very clearly and thus articulate their expectations with regard to politicians.

#### **4. Future Prospects**

In recent years, youth policy issues, participatory formats for young people and young people as a target group have become increasingly important in the work of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation. This is reflected in the steadily rising number of youth activities: for the past few years, the Friedrich Ebert Foundation has organised more than 300 youth programmes and events in Germany each year and this trend is on the rise. The FES's commitment to young people is also reflected at the organisational level: since 2006, a task force on young people has met regularly, thus establishing a forum for cross-departmental discussions and the exchange of ideas. The Internet-Focus on »Generation Next – Youth Policy in the FES«, published in 2006, included diverse contributions on the whole range of youth policy activities undertaken by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation. A corollary of this was the creation of a youth portal that provides access to information and contacts for all interested persons.

#### **5. Additional Information**

Additional information on our youth-related activities is available on the following FES websites:

FES Portal »Young People«:

<http://www.fes.de/themen/jugend/>

Forum Policy and Society (Berlin):

<http://www.fes.de/forumpug/inhalt/jugend.htm>

Forum Youth and Politics (Bonn):

<http://www.fes.de/forumjugend/>

Fellowships:

[http://www.fes.de/sets/s\\_fes\\_d.htm](http://www.fes.de/sets/s_fes_d.htm)

Youth Media Academy:

<http://www.jugendmedienakademie.de/>