

Parents scramble for daycare places in Germany ^[1]

Latest figures show that Germany has fewer children than any other EU country, with just 16.5 percent of the population under 18. One reason is the shortage of child care.

Author: Grathwohl, Daphne

Source: Deutsche Welle

Format: Article

Publication Date: 3 Aug 2011

EXCERPTS

Veit is 11 months old and he isn't in the least bit shy of strangers. Cradled in his father's arms, he regards the microphone and its blue windsock with curiosity. His parents, Mario and Irina Gaul are looking for a kindergarten place for him. Irina, 37, is a sociologist at Caritas, the largest Catholic social welfare association in Germany. She first began looking for a daycare place for her son when he was just five weeks old.

In the meantime they've applied to eight different kindergartens. Irina originally wanted him to attend a Catholic daycare center. She was also keen for him to go to a nursery that already had the seal of approval from friends. But by the end of their lengthy search, she said she no longer had any particular criteria: she just wanted a place.

Lack of Children

Germany has proportionally fewer children than any other European country, with just 16.5 percent of the population under 18. Ten years ago, the figure was 18.8. And according to a report by the Federal Bureau of Statistics published on Wednesday, that trend is expected to continue. One reason for the shortage is the difficulty families have of combining work and parenthood.

Irina took maternity leave until Veit was seven months old. Now that she has returned to work, Mario has taken time off to look after his son. He's relying on the parental leave supplied by the state, which can be taken up by either parent in the first 14 months of a child's life. For Mario and Irina, that financial support will run out in October, at which time both parents will have to return to work.

Just under half a million children under the age of three were attending daycare facilities in Germany in March 2010. That's 23 percent of all children in that age group. But there are huge discrepancies between the former East Germany and the western states. That's largely because state childcare was the norm in the German Democratic Republic before 1989, and most mothers went out to work. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, the infrastructure was already in place to allow that trend to continue. In March 2010, in the eastern state of Saxony-Anhalt, 56 percent of children under three had places in daycare facilities, compared to just 14 percent in the western state of North Rhine-Westphalia.

Turned away

Marlies Mertens runs a Catholic daycare center in the Rhineland city of Bonn. She says she is regularly forced to turn away parents who want to register their children for a place in her nursery. Mertens is less worried about families where both parents go out to work. But she is concerned about poorer families with several children to care for; or families who don't speak much German; or families where the parents are poorly educated. Mertens says she always fights for such children to be given a place in her nursery.

Mertens regrets that she doesn't have enough space to take in everyone. She says it's important to support the children of young mothers who want to complete their education. She also says she sees more and more mothers suffering from depression: such families also need publicly funded childcare provision.

The Bureau of Statistics points to the problem of poverty among children, especially among those who live in single-parent families. Three times as many single-parent families live in poverty - 37.5 percent - than do conventional families. Often that's because single parents are forced to stay at home to look after children because of the lack of childcare.

A boom in the number of child minders

Irina Gaul learnt at the beginning of February that there would be no space for Veit in a daycare center. Almost all of the places were given to younger siblings of children already attending the centers, which meant new families didn't stand a chance. From the autumn, therefore, Veit will be looked after by a child minder. More and more people are recognizing the gap in the care system and training as nannies. It is estimated that there are around 35,000 child minders in Germany, most of them in the western states. Veit's new male nanny has received all the training and looks after five children in his home. Irina says this isn't a bad solution, but it is less flexible than a kindergarten. And twice as expensive.

In Germany, all children have a legal right to childcare from the age of three. From 2013-2014 that will apply to all children over the age of 12 months. The government and local authorities want to make places available to at least one in three children under the age of three by

2013 - that would require the creation of at least 140,000 new kindergarten places over the next two years.

Marlies Mertens is skeptical as to whether this can be achieved. She explains that the basis for good childcare facility is good training and high staffing levels. Only then can the carers build up good relationships with both the children and their parents.

Irina Gaul says the lack of childcare provision has a catastrophic effect on society. She fears that many highly competent women, who want to work, are stuck at home looking after children. Other women are choosing not to have children at all. And still more are living in poverty, because they can't afford childcare and can't go out to work.

-rerptined from Deutsche Welle

Region: Europe ^[2]

Tags: spaces ^[3]

availability ^[4]

pre-school ^[5]

Source URL (modified on 27 Jan 2022): <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/11/08/parents-scramble-daycare-places-germany>
Links

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/11/08/parents-scramble-daycare-places-germany> [2]

<https://childcarecanada.org/category/region/europe> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/spaces> [4]

<https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/availability> [5] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/pre-school>