

Germany: More than one-third of all students at acute risk of poverty

Ela Maartens**27 November 2022**

The already dramatic social plight of German students is growing worse. According to the latest figures from the German Federal Statistics Bureau, more than a third of all students were at risk of poverty in 2021. For students living alone or in a shared apartment, the percentage of students facing poverty reached a shockingly high 76.1 percent. Policymakers are leaving students in the cold.

Since the start of the coronavirus pandemic, many students have been laden not only with massive health risks, but also to financial burdens. According to a report by the charity organization Paritätischer Wohlfahrtsverband from May of this year, one in three German students lived below the poverty line in 2020. Inflation and skyrocketing energy prices—both consequences of NATO's proxy war against Russia in Ukraine—are drastically exacerbating the situation.

All told, 37.9 percent of all students were at risk of poverty last year, according to the Federal Statistics Bureau. More than three-quarters of students who lived alone or with other students were considered vulnerable. The extent of student poverty becomes clear when compared with the population as a whole: The overall poverty rate in Germany is 15.8 percent.

But even these already dramatic figures do not reflect the full reality and are based on padded values presented by well-heeled EU bureaucrats. According to the European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC), an unmarried individual is not considered at risk of poverty until he or she has less than €1,000 per month before taxes at his or her disposal.

The figures hardly begin to illustrate the dramatic impact that the massive increase in energy prices will have on students in the coming months. Two in five students (38.5 percent) were unable to finance a major

unexpected expense in 2021. The same was true for 55.5 percent of students who do not live with relatives. Back payments for incidental expenses amounting to several thousand euro, which countless people face, will drag students into the financial abyss, even if they are spared other difficulties.

The disastrous housing situation that students face in almost every university city is likewise not reflected in the figures of the Federal Statistical Office. Rents are mostly unaffordable and rooms in student dormitories are few and far between. Overall, almost a quarter of all students are considered overburdened by monthly rents consuming over 30 percent of their meager income. Those who live alone or in a shared apartment are hit even harder, spending 56.6 percent, more than half of their monthly income, on rent.

The financial burden of the ever-escalating confrontation with Russia is not just being passed on by the federal government to workers and pensioners. It is also hitting students with full force. Last week, the government coalition committed a one-time energy supplement for students amounting to a pitiful €200. This sum was announced in September with a so-called relief package, for which a vote in the Bundestag (federal parliament) is still pending.

It is completely open as to when students will be able to apply for this "mercy money," let alone receive it. Even the question of how the energy supplement can be requested is unresolved. If, contrary to expectations, a swift decision is made, this will not prevent countless students from falling into debt. In October, the Federal Statistical Office calculated a staggering 43 percent price increase for energy products compared to the same month last year. And there is no end in sight.

In response to the increasing social hardship suffered by students, especially since the start of the coronavirus

pandemic, the maximum federal student loan (Bafög) was increased last July. But these adjustments are nothing more than a drop in the bucket: instead of €427, students receive a maximum of €452 per month. The rent subsidy was raised by a meager €35 to €360. Meanwhile, inflation is devouring these subsidies while students are still struggling through the complicated application process.

Furthermore, completely inadequate BAföG adjustments were concluded with regard to the allowances for parental income: the age limit was increased and the maximum family income for eligibility was raised.

Meanwhile, the disbursement of the €230 heating cost subsidy for BAföG recipients is barely moving forward. So far, only 40 percent of those entitled have received the payment, although it was announced in the summer to be automatically implemented. Meanwhile, a further subsidy of €345 concluded.

It is significant that, according to the report by the Paritätischer Wohlfahrtsverband, the number of BAföG recipients has continually decreased since 2012, while the number of students at risk of poverty has risen sharply, especially in the last two years. In 2010, 18.4 percent of students still received state support. Due to years in which no increase was made to adjust to the reality of life, the number dropped to 11.3 percent in 2020.

Students are being plunged ever deeper into social catastrophe by the ruling coalition of Social Democrats (SPD), the Greens and the liberal Free Democrats (FDP) with the support of all bourgeois parties and the unions.

According to the Paritätischer Wohlfahrtsverband, inflation and further increases in energy prices will have a massive impact on the educational opportunities for young people. Very few parents can afford to support their children financially during their studies, the study concluded. Andreas Aust, social policy officer at Paritätischer, told *Deutsche Welle*: "Those who are short of money will think twice and three times before sending their children to study under these conditions."

While ever greater numbers of students, pensioners, workers and their families are suffering the consequences of the coronavirus pandemic and the war in Ukraine, the government decided in February to

create a special fund for the German armed forces amounting to €100 billion. This week will see the second reading of the 2023 federal budget, which will also be dominated by the cost of military rearmament.

The population will have to bear the costs in two ways. On the one hand, every euro that flows into the military will be balanced by cuts in education, social services and health care. On the other hand, the ruling class continues to escalate the NATO proxy war in Ukraine against nuclear power Russia, which puts the existence of the entire human race at risk.

This dangerous development must be confronted by young workers and students in particular. On December 10, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality are organizing an online meeting titled "For a mass movement of youth and students against the war in Ukraine!" The war must be stopped! We call on all workers, students and youth to participate in this important meeting and discuss with us a socialist perspective against war and capitalism.



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