

# Germany deploys soldiers to classrooms as militarisation of schools accelerates

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In the first quarter of 2026 alone, Bundeswehr soldiers made 2,013 visits to schools and 20 to higher education institutions nationwide—with further ones already planned. This emerges from the response of the Ministry of Defence to a parliamentary question by the Left Party group in the Bundestag. The frontrunner was Bavaria, with 562 visits in just these three months, followed by North Rhine-Westphalia (291), Lower Saxony (269) and Baden-Württemberg (219).

Schools and universities are increasingly being turned into tools for preparing society for war. The federal and state governments are attempting to prime an entire generation ideologically for rearmament, conscription and war. Germany's ruling class is preparing for war—and for that it needs the youth. Between 2021 and 2024, the number of Bundeswehr visits to schools more than doubled—from 2,558 to 6,137. In 2025, too, it remained at a high level, with 5,529 appearances.

## What “youth officers” actually do in schools

The Bundeswehr maintains a corps of so-called “youth officers,” who visit schools on behalf of the Defence Ministry. Formally, they are not considered recruiters; open recruitment is the responsibility of career advisers. The actual content of their work, however, refutes this distinction.

They turn up in Politics/Social Studies, History and Ethics lessons—precisely the classes where pupils are supposed to engage critically with politics. Their discussion topics are “the mission and tasks of the Bundeswehr,” “national and alliance defence,” “collective security” and, since 2022, above all the Ukraine war and the alleged threat from Russia.

In 2022, the youth officers' annual report recorded 4,308 lectures reaching 123,928 school pupils and students, compared with 83,320 in 2019.

The most revealing format is the multi-day simulation game POL&IS (Politics and International Security). The world is divided into 13 regions; pupils take on the roles of heads of government, business representatives and media, while youth officers run the event. The target group is the upper secondary level, precisely those groups approaching conscription age. For the first quarter of 2026, the Bundestag documents numerous POL&IS events in Berlin, Göttingen, Soest, Aachen, Teterow and many other cities.

That the dividing line between “education” and “recruitment” does not exist in practice is demonstrated by a study commissioned by the Ministry of Defence itself. According to this study, 24 percent of young men interested in working for the Bundeswehr previously had contact with a youth officer.

At the same time, the budget for recruitment of young people was

increased from €35.3 million in 2023 to €58 million in 2024.

## Hamburg and Berlin: Institutionalising militarisation

In April 2026, Hamburg's Schools Senator (state minister) Ksenija Bekeris (Social Democratic Party, SPD) and State Commander Captain at Sea Kurt Leonards signed a seven-page cooperation agreement at Hamburg City Hall. It takes effect from the 2026/27 school year and is intended to “support, promote and perpetuate” the existing collaboration.

Hamburg is thus the latest of at least 10 federal states with corresponding agreements. The oldest date back to 2008. The infrastructure for the militarisation of schools was therefore built up long before the Ukraine war; the “new era” of aggressive foreign and security policy has massively accelerated its implementation.

The cooperation agreement is not limited to occasional visits by soldiers. It provides for a regular exchange between the school authority and the Bundeswehr and facilitates youth officers' access to schools. Information services and further training are also to be expanded. The Bundeswehr is thus effectively recognised as an institutional actor in political education.

Bekeris justified the step by stating that the Bundeswehr contributed “external expertise” and fostered “responsible, critical thinking young people.”

But uniformed soldiers who promote rearmament and NATO war policy on behalf of the Ministry of Defence are not neutral educational providers. They are propagandists of German militarism.

Berlin, too, has now concluded a similar cooperation agreement with the Bundeswehr. On June 8, Education Senator Katharina Günther-Wünsch (Christian Democratic Union, CDU) and Bundeswehr representatives signed a cooperation agreement that institutionally anchors the collaboration between schools and the military, expanding youth officers' access to Berlin schools. According to the Senate (state executive), the Bundeswehr is to act as a partner in political education in future and expand its offerings at Berlin schools. The capital now also has a formalised cooperation arrangement between the education administration and the military.

Similar agreements in Hamburg and Berlin underscore that the militarisation of the education system is not a regional phenomenon, but part of a nationwide strategy.

It is no coincidence that the agreements are signed by the parties driving forward rearmament policy. Under then-Federal Chancellor Olaf Scholz, the SPD proclaimed a “new era” in foreign and security policy, organising the €100 billion “Special Fund for the Bundeswehr.” The current CDU/CSU-SPD federal government under Friedrich Merz is driving forward a rearmament programme comparable only to the arms madness

on the eve of the two world wars. The plans were also supported by the nominally “left” opposition parties—the Greens and Left Party.

Defence Minister Boris Pistorius (SPD) has made “Kriegstüchtigkeit”—fitness for war—the guiding concept of his policy, not just for the armed forces but for the whole of society. The concept ties in not only rhetorically but also historically with the darkest traditions of German militarism, first under the Kaiser and then under Hitler. The military strategy presented by Pistorius in spring 2026 explicitly declares the preparation of the entire society for military conflicts to be a strategic task.

The coalition agreement between the CDU/CSU and SPD that led to the formation of the current government stated: “We will anchor our Bundeswehr even more firmly in public life and are committed to strengthening the role of the youth officers, who fulfill an important educational mission at schools.” For its war plans, German imperialism needs not only weapons and billions in investment, but also new cannon fodder.

### **Higher education institutions: Research for war**

The “Law for the Promotion of the Bundeswehr” passed in Bavaria in July 2024 makes higher education institutions a central component of military rearmament. It promotes cooperation with the Bundeswehr, particularly in areas such as artificial intelligence, robotics and cyber warfare, while at the same time prohibiting “civilian clauses” that commit research exclusively to peaceful purposes. It creates the legal preconditions for research results to be increasingly used for military ends and made available within the framework of NATO cooperation.

Civilian clauses—voluntary commitments to exclusively peaceful research—are explicitly prohibited. The law is a massive attack on academic freedom and serves as a blueprint for other federal states. Nationwide, around 70 higher education institutions have civilian clauses; in Lower Saxony and North Rhine-Westphalia they have already been abolished.

The Centre for Digitalisation and Technology Research of the Bundeswehr, founded in 2020, pools armaments research at the Bundeswehr universities in Munich and Hamburg. Its stated goal is to anchor “the national security concept in broader society.”

The example of Bad Arolsen is telling. The University of Kassel ended a nearly twenty-year cooperation agreement with armaments companies due to its civilian clause. Rheinmetall and Krauss-Maffei Wegmann subsequently shifted their collaboration to the Technical University of Central Hesse, which does not have such a clause. Where peaceful research stands in the way, it is circumvented or abolished.

### **The role of the trade unions**

The GEW education union criticises the cooperation agreements with the Bundeswehr. For example, its chairman in Hamburg, Sven Quiring, stated: “Political education belongs in the hands of pedagogically trained professionals, not in those of Bundeswehr members.”

This criticism serves to deflect the widespread opposition among teachers and pupils to the presence of the Bundeswehr in schools, while at the same time concealing the real role of the trade unions in official war policy. The German Trade Union Confederation (DGB), to which the GEW belongs, fundamentally supports the government’s rearmament

policy. When Olaf Scholz announced the €100 billion special fund in 2022, the DGB trade unions openly supported this step. On September 1, 2025, the DGB explicitly declared that it saw the necessity of strengthening Germany’s and Europe’s “defence capability.”

Leading trade union functionaries spread the same propaganda as the federal government and the military brass—that massive rearmament and war preparation supposedly serve peace. The GEW merely criticises the most visible manifestations of militarisation in schools, while its umbrella organisation supports its political foundation.

### **Growing opposition to militarisation and conscription**

There is, however, growing opposition to this development.

In 2024, a 16-year-old pupil in Leipzig was threatened with being excluded from school after protesting against a Bundeswehr visit. Nineteen-year-old Bentik from Freiburg was victimized for making satirical criticisms of a youth officer visit. In 2025, when Zwickau town council passed a ban on advertising for the Bundeswehr and armaments companies on municipal property, the ban was overturned by the municipal supervisory authority.

In December 2025, tens of thousands of school pupils in over 90 cities took to the streets to protest against conscription, rearmament and war. On May 8, 2026, the anniversary of the liberation of Germany from the Nazis, around 45,000 young people again participated in nationwide anti-militarist protests.

The ruling class knows that its pro-war policies meet with broad rejection within the population, and particularly among young people. The mass school strikes against conscription, in particular, have shown that an entire generation is being radicalised against rearmament, militarism and war.

For precisely this reason, the ruling class is seeking to systematically turn schools and higher education institutions into instruments of military and ideological preparation. Sending youth officers into schools, the cooperation agreements with the Bundeswehr, the militarisation of higher education research and the reintroduction of conscription are components of a comprehensive political war strategy.

The decisive task is to link the growing opposition among young people with the struggles of the working class. The attacks on education, social rights and democratic freedoms are inseparably linked to a policy of war. While hundreds of billions of euros are made available for rearmament, schools, universities and social institutions are being devastated by massive cuts.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) fights to orient the opposition to conscription, militarism and war towards the working class, and to arm it with a socialist perspective. The struggle against the militarisation of education can succeed only as part of an international movement of the working class—against war, rearmament and capitalism itself.



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