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The student survey in Germany: 22nd Social Survey

The Economic and Social Situation of Students in Germany 2021





Executive Summary

“The Student Survey in Germany”

A comprehensive data base for the monitoring of higher education policy

“The Student Survey in Germany” provides insights into the living and studying conditions, the economic and social situation of students in Germany. It continues the 70-year tradition of the Social Survey and supplies the German data for the monitoring of higher education policy in the European Higher Education Area (EUROSTUDENT). The present report on the 22nd Social Survey is based on data collected in the summer semester of 2021. A total of just under 188,000 students took part in the survey.

Integrating separate long-term surveys

With its new modularised design, “The Student Survey in Germany” integrates three long-term surveys that have previously been conducted separately: the Social Survey, the Student Survey and “best – Studying with Impairments”. The merging of these surveys reduces the burden on participants, students as well as universities.

Academic everyday life during the pandemic

As the survey was conducted in the summer semester of 2021, the findings of “The Student Survey in Germany” should be viewed against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic and the pandemic-related changes in students’ everyday life. Although nationwide lockdowns were no longer in place, the summer semester of 2021 was still affected by the pandemic. However, changes in relation to the results of earlier Social Surveys cannot be clearly categorised as either pandemic-related exceptions or as genuine trend reversals. This will only be possible with future data from “The Student Survey in Germany”.

Mapping the realities of study and life

Potentially all students at German universities form the target group of “The Student Survey in Germany”. Therefore, distance learning students as well as international students are now part of the sample, in contrast to previous Social Surveys. In addition, students at private universities (7.1 percent) could also be included. Overall, traditional classroom learning is no longer as dominant as it used to be, for there are more extra-occupation students and distance students.

Extra-occupation students are more likely to study part-time (70.8 percent), often at private universities (26.3 percent). They are 33.1 years old on average. Distance students are also frequently enrolled at private universities (27.9 percent) and are 30.2 years old on average. To reflect the realities of students' lives and studies in Germany as accurately as possible, numerous items were newly included in the survey, for example questions on students' caregiving responsibilities or on their sexual orientation.

Diversity of the student body today

Many students in steady partnerships

Around 42 percent of students live in a steady partnership, and just under 10 percent are married. At almost 36 years of age, married students are markedly older than the average.

Students have care responsibilities

About 8 percent of students have children, slightly more women than men (9.2 and 6.5 percent, respectively). Most of these students are married (68.9 percent) or living in a steady partnership (20.9 percent); only a small proportion are single parents (10.5 percent). Most of the children are of toddler or preschool age. Compared to childless students, the ones with children more often use study formats that are not full-time and/or campus-based. Just under 12 percent of students assume caregiving responsibilities in their

private sphere. On average, they are somewhat older than those without caregiving tasks.

Higher educational level of families

In Germany, the overall level of education has risen over the last three decades, so that more and more students come from a home where at least one parent has acquired a higher education entrance qualification. Since 1991, the respective proportion has increased from 43 to 68 percent. The percentage of students from academic families (at least one parent with an academic degree) has also increased, from 36 percent in 1991 to 56 percent in the summer semester of 2021.

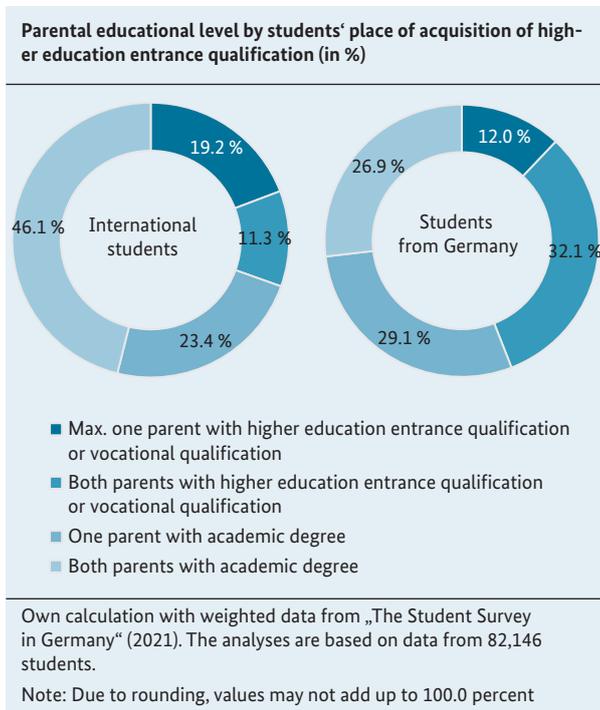
Comparing students with and without migration background

Around 17 percent of students from Germany have a migration background. They went to school in Germany, but at least one parent or they themselves were born abroad. The majority of them are German citizens (72.5 percent). If they have dual or foreign citizenship, it is mostly Turkish. Slightly more often than students from Germany without migration background, they come from non-academic families, and they more often enter higher education with a general higher education entrance qualification without prior vocational training.

Many international students from academic backgrounds

Almost 15 percent of students in Germany are international students, i.e., they have acquired their higher education entrance qualification abroad. Nearly 70 percent of them come from an academic home, compared to 57 percent of students from Germany. More than 50 percent of international students already have a university degree when they come to Germany. Most of the educational certificates or academic achievements acquired abroad are recognized in Germany (74.5 percent of international students). Only 25 percent of international students come to Germany without any prior study experience. A large majority of international students (80.4 percent) view Germany as a safe place to study and more than half of them (58.1 percent) feel welcome.





Good health even with stress and overload

72 percent of students in Germany rate their health as (very) good. Nevertheless, almost 64 percent of students felt stressed during the four weeks prior to the survey and around 48 percent felt overburdened. While nearly 42 percent of students felt drained by their studies, 29 percent rarely or never experienced this feeling. For about 28 percent, studying (very) often was a heavy burden; for 41 percent, this was rarely or never the case. Overall, about 52 percent of the respondents were (very) often happy in the four weeks prior to the survey.

Health impairments often mental

Almost 24 percent of students in Germany have health impairments. Just under 16 percent of all students report at least one health impairment that has an aggravating effect on their studies. By far the most widespread are mental illnesses, which are reported by 65 percent of the students with study-impairing health problems.

Forms and courses of study

Access to higher education mostly via schools

Most students gain access to higher education through school (97.5 percent), the vast majority of them by

obtaining a general higher education entrance qualification (84.7 percent). For students at universities of applied sciences, however, it is not uncommon to have a subject-related entrance qualification or an entrance qualification for a university of applied sciences (together 26.0 percent). Private universities have the highest proportion of students with a non-school entrance qualification (14.8 percent). But even students with a school-based higher education entrance qualification often acquire a vocational training or continuing education qualification before enrolling at university (25.5 percent). Students with vocational qualifications are particularly likely to study at private universities (51.2 percent). Overall, there appear to be dynamic links between vocational and higher education – a large proportion of students in Germany have both vocational and school-based educational experiences.

Regional mobility at the start of studies varies

After obtaining their university entrance qualification, many students move to another federal state (Bundesland). Almost 38 percent do not study in the state where they obtained their university entrance qualification. The proportion of mobile students varies greatly between federal states, also due to the different study programmes on offer. In the densely populated states in western Germany (Nordrhein-Westfalen, Bavaria), the proportion of outwardly mobile students is lowest, while in some



eastern German states it is highest (Thüringen, Brandenburg). Moreover, more people move from the “new federal states” in eastern Germany to the “old federal states” in west Germany in order to study than vice versa.

Choice of field of study guided by interest

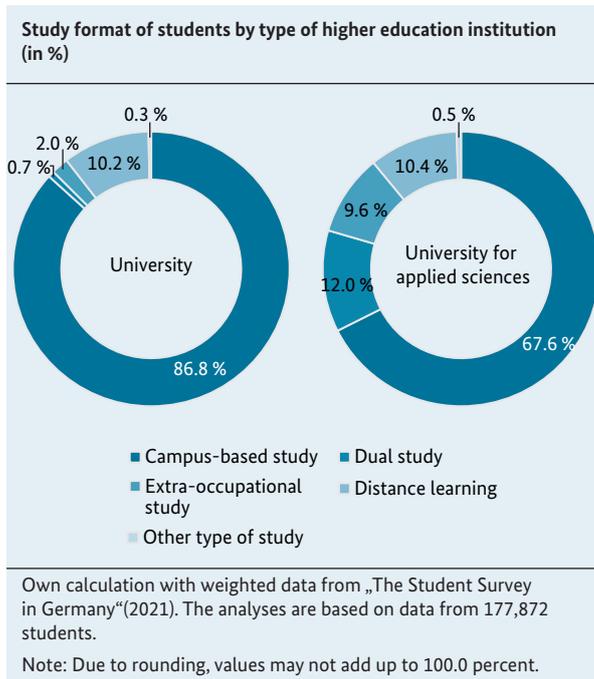
The decisive motive in choosing a field of study is the specific interest in the subject (81.9 percent). But career prospects also play an important role (66.9 percent), especially among students at universities of applied sciences. Specific subject interest as a central motive does not differ according to students’ educational background. Career prospects, on the other hand, are more important for those students whose parents do not have an academic degree. About 75 percent of them rate this motive as (very) important compared to about 61 percent of students from academic backgrounds.

Choice of university guided by fields of study on offer

Students’ choice of a university is largely based on whether their desired field of study is offered there. Other aspects, such as the attractiveness of the location or proximity to family and friends, tend to play a subordinate role. For students from academic backgrounds the reputation of the university is more important; for students from non-academic backgrounds, on the other hand, possible study formats, for example part-time studies, have greater priority.

Campus-based and full-time studies predominate - differences by type of higher education institution

Close to 80 percent of students are in traditional campus-based programmes, while a good 20 percent are in other study formats: distance learning, extra-vocational or dual study formats. But there are marked differences between types of higher education institutions: at universities, around 87 percent of students study on campus, at universities of applied sciences it is only around 68 percent, at private universities just under 35 percent. Study models that deviate from the classroom format are particularly widespread at private universities. The findings are similar for studying hours (full-time vs. part-time): although more than 80 percent of students study full-time, this is true above all for state universities. At private universities, about



50 percent of students study full-time, and various part-time arrangements play an important role here.

Slight increase in time spent on studying

Students spend an average of about 17 hours per week on courses and 17 hours on self-study. The total of around 34 hours per week that are spent studying is thus roughly equivalent to a full-time job. Compared to 2016, the time for courses has increased by 2.5 hours per week, while the time for self-study has remained the same. For gainful employment students spend an average of around 15 hours per week. Unsurprisingly, gainful employment reduces the amount of time that students use for study-related activities: the more hours students spend working, the fewer hours per week are used for studying.

Course of studies can be dynamic

About 21 percent of students have changed majors at least once, and about 17 percent have changed universities at least once. The proportion of students who have interrupted their studies at least once is lower (10.9 percent). More than 60 percent of students are satisfied with current conditions at their university; only 6 percent are seriously considering dropping out of their studies. Many students are already planning to continue their studies after obtaining their (first) degree: the majority intend to pursue a master’s degree (54.9 percent), especially students at universities

(66.9 percent) compared to students at universities of applied sciences (42.2 percent).

International mobility requires structural and financial framework conditions

Around 12 percent of bachelor students in higher semesters (6th university semester or more) have already spent time abroad. The figure for master's students in their 4th semester or higher is 31 percent. Female students and students with an immigrant background are more internationally mobile, while students from non-academic backgrounds or with children are less mobile. Study-related stays abroad are mostly organised within the framework of exchange programmes (75.3 percent), most frequently Erasmus+ (65.0 percent). To finance semesters abroad, the majority of students receive support from their parents or partners (70.5 percent) and use funds from their own employment (50.6 percent), scholarships (47.1 percent) or state funding (BAföG, 22.9 percent); in the case of internships abroad, remuneration for the internship is an additional source (41.9 percent). The most common reason for not spending time abroad is the financial burden associated with the stay (66.3 percent).

Financing of studies and students' economic situation

Gainful employment is an important source of income for students

63 percent of all students are gainfully employed while studying. The employment rate has thus fallen



by 5 percentage points compared to 2016, which could be due, above all, to the COVID-19 pandemic. Employment rates vary considerably between federal states and university locations. But the rates also depend on university profiles, as high employment rates can be observed where private universities offer a broad range of programmes and where the number of part-time students is correspondingly high.

Social factors affect student employment

Almost 67 percent of students from non-academic backgrounds and around 60 percent of students from academic backgrounds work alongside their studies. Among students from non-academic backgrounds, the purpose is often to cover their living expenses (68.3 percent vs. 50.1 percent for students from academic backgrounds). For the majority of students, gainful employment serves to “afford something extra” (65.4 percent) or to “gain practical experience” (60.0 percent). Students with children work more often than students without children (about 5 percentage points more), but they are also less likely to study full-time. About half of the students who receive BaföG are in gainful employment (54.7 percent), an employment rate that is lower than that of students who do not receive BaföG (63.6 percent). Yet, it is noteworthy that students receiving BaföG more often work to cover their living expenses (63.1 percent) than students without BaföG (57.7 percent).

Increase in student income

“The Student Survey in Germany” gathers information on students' income and expenditure via self-reporting. Some of the data are based on monthly estimates. Students in Germany report a total monthly income of over 1,100 euros on average. If, for the sake of comparison with previous Social Surveys, the analysis is limited to students who are studying full-time, do not live with their parents or other family members and are single, and if international and distance learning students are also excluded, the total income is 1,036 euros per month, which is a new high since 2009. However, it should be noted that the purchasing power of students' total monthly income has not increased to the same extent. If the total income is standardised using the consumer price index, students have a total monthly income, adjusted for purchasing power, of 876 euros (2016: 842 euros).

Sharp increase in rent expenditure

Rent costs have also increased for students in the summer semester of 2021. They average 410 euros per month, and almost 21 percent of students in Germany report rents of over 500 euros per month. If, for the purposes of comparison with previous Social Surveys, the analyses are restricted to students who are studying full-time, do not live with their parents or other family members and are single, and if international and distance learning students are also excluded from the analyses, then just under 16 percent have rent costs of more than 500 euros per month – a substantial increase, as it was only around 4 percent in 2016.

Many sources of income, many items of expenditure

In the survey, students were asked to estimate their individual monthly income and expenses. The data show that they finance their studies primarily through parents or relatives (82.7 percent), employment (58.9 percent), their own funds (47.2 percent) and partners (20.5 percent). The largest monthly expenditure items for students are rent (410 euros), food costs (198 euros) and health costs (100 euros). Students with children of their own have high financial burdens for childcare (191 euros) and other child-related expenses

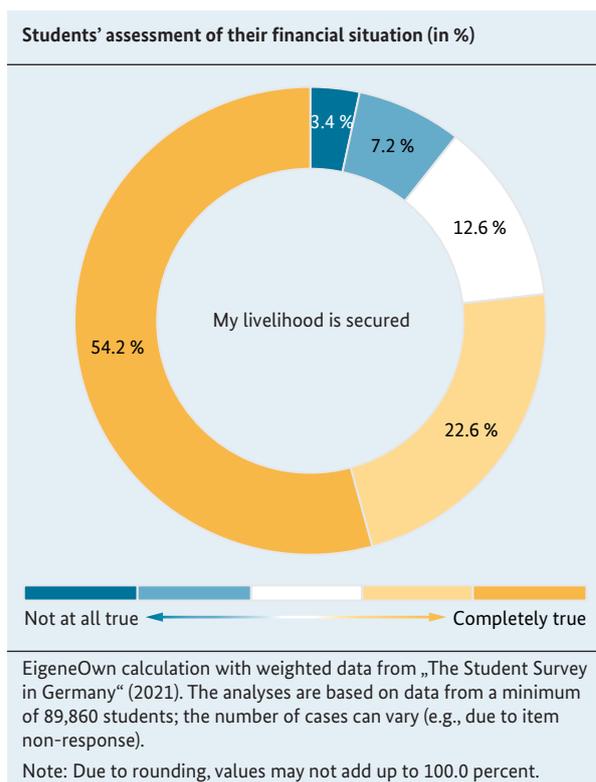
(138 euros). These data may be subject to inaccuracies, however, as they rely on students' self-reports. Depending on when they were surveyed respondents may recall different expenditure items; they may also have to convert singular receipts or expenditures into a monthly figure .

Most students view financing of studies as secured

Students in Germany are largely able to finance their studies: Around 77 percent of students can (fully) cover their living costs. However, there is a smaller proportion of students to whom this does not apply (at all) (10.6 percent). The financial situation also depends on the family background. The higher the parental education level, the more favourable are students' assessments of their financial situation.

Receipt of BAföG still associated with educational background

About 13 percent of students in Germany receive BAföG in the summer semester of 2021. If international and distance learning students are excluded to allow for comparisons with previous Social Surveys, the figure is 15 percent. Since BAföG is aimed at students from lower-income families, and parental income is a sensitive and difficult-to-measure statistic, many analyses refer to the educational level of the parents. In the summer semester of 2021, BAföG receipt varies markedly according to the educational background of students: around 22 percent of the students with at most one parent holding a higher education entrance qualification or a vocational qualification receive BAföG funding. For students whose parents both have an academic degree, it is only about 6 percent.



Social infrastructure for students

Ratings for canteens largely positive

A good 54 percent of students eat in a canteen or cafeteria at least once a week. Students between 23 and 25 years of age use the canteen most frequently (58.8 percent). About 73 percent of the students are (very) satisfied with the value-for-money, almost 69 percent with the service, about 59 percent with the taste and freshness of the food and about 51 percent with the nutritional quality.

Diverse housing situations

The majority of students in Germany live in a shared apartment (27.9 percent), live alone (21.3 percent), with a partner (27.1 percent) or with their parents (24.3 percent). Just under 18 percent of students live in a hall of residence, around 6 percentage points more than in 2016. This increase could be due to an increase in privately run halls of residence, which alleviates the shortage of student housing, even if private student residences are somewhat more expensive. Compared to the summer semester of 2020, which was characterised by lockdowns, the proportion of students living with their parents has decreased again. It is now comparable to the winter semester 2019/20. Students' type of housing is associated with age: younger students more often live with their parents, whereas older students more often live alone, with partners and with children.

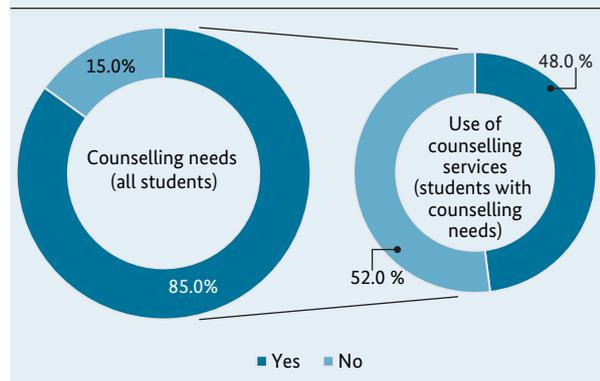
Students mostly satisfied with housing situation, but flat search can be difficult

Around 68 percent of students in Germany are satisfied with their housing situation. However, many students report difficulties in finding accommodation. For one thing, finding affordable housing is hard for 55 percent, and for another, social contacts are often needed for the housing search to be successful (53.6 percent). Around 26 percent of students have applied unsuccessfully for a flat at least once. This applies even more frequently to students from Germany with a migration background as well as to international students.

Overall high needs for study-related counselling

A large proportion of students in Germany report a need for counselling and information (85.0 percent). Compared to 2016, this is an increase of 24 percentage points, which could be due, among other things, to the COVID-19 pandemic. Study-related issues (e.g., problems with the organisation of work or with time management, problems with learning and performing) and personal issues (e.g., lack of contact, depressive moods) are mentioned more frequently (70 and 68 percent, respectively) than questions of study financing (32.7 percent).

Counselling and information needs of all students and use of counselling services by students with counselling needs (in %)



Own calculation with weighted data from "The Student Survey in Germany" (2021). The analyses are based on data from a minimum of 15,140 students; the number of cases may vary (e.g., due to item non-response).

Note: Due to rounding, values may not add up to 100.0 percent.

High demand for counselling – low use of counselling services

Although students indicate a fairly high need for counselling, only 48 percent of those who need guidance use one or more counselling services. The use of counselling services lags behind students' reported needs especially with respect to study-related topics (30.0 percent) and personal topics (26.4 percent). One reason is that students often find support in their private sphere (42.0 percent). Also, problems often just solve themselves (35.0 percent). In addition, 32 percent of students report that they lack the time for counselling or that the effort seems too great (29.9 percent). In contrast, it is rare for students not to reach anyone at a counselling centre (2.5 percent).



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