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How Can Public Administration Support Adolescents With a Migration Background to Successfully Get Into Vocational Education and Labour After School? - A Practical Approach -

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The KING project's objective is to elaborate a report on the **state of play** of migrant integration in Europe through an interdisciplinary approach and to provide decision- and policy-makers with **evidence-based recommendations** on the design of migrant integration-related policies and on the way they should be articulated between different policy-making levels of governance.

Migrant integration is a truly multi-faceted process. The contribution of the insights offered by different disciplines is thus essential in order better to grasp the various aspects of the presence of migrants in European societies. This is why **multidisciplinarity** is at the core of the KING research project, whose Advisory Board comprises experts of seven different disciplines:

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How Can Public Administration Support Adolescents With a Migration Background to Successfully Get Into Vocational Education and Labour After School? A Practical Approach¹

1. INTRODUCTION: SITUATION OF THE TARGET GROUP

Participation in working life is deemed to be an important factor in the social integration of migrants (see CBP n. 3). Since the 1980s, however, the unemployment rates for Germans and migrants have increasingly followed divergent trends; in Hessen, the rate for foreigners is now about three times as high as the rate for Germans (Hessen **Ministry of Justice**, for **Integration** and **Europe** 2013: 88). Migrants and their offspring make up nearly half of the unemployed (Hessen **Ministry of Justice**, for **Integration** and **Europe** 2013: 89). Especially, migrants are overrepresented among the longterm-unemployed.

Hence, the situation of the younger generation in the educational system is under increasing observation. Hessen was among the first federal states in Germany to evaluate student data concerning the migration background. Again, the 2014 Hessian Integration Report on Education states that young people with a migration background tend to have lower graduation rates than those without a migration background² (Hessen **Ministry for Social Affairs and Integration** 2014b: 10; see figure 1).

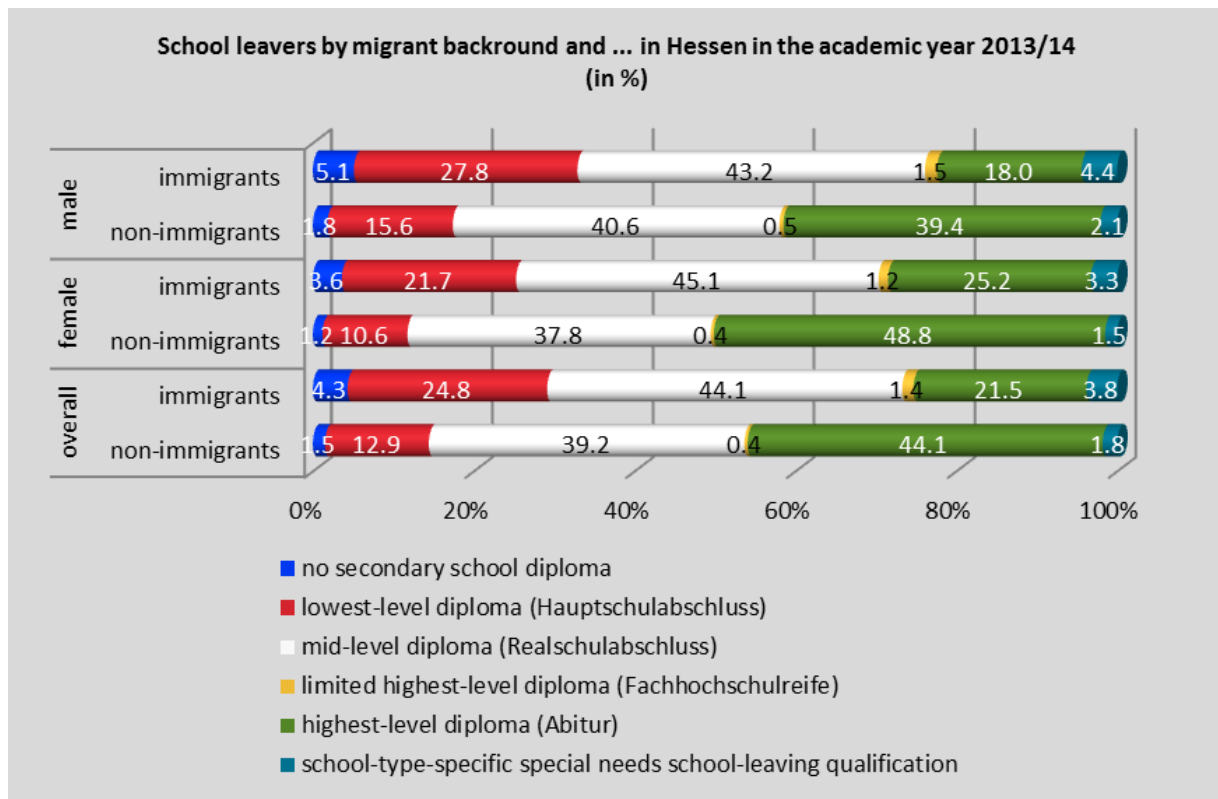
According to the data of the Hessian Statistical Office, 10% of the students with a migration background visited a lower secondary school (*Hauptschule*, lowest secondary qualification) in the school year of 2013/2014, and 36% visited the Gymnasium (highest secondary qualification), whereas 4% of the students without an immigrant background visited the *Hauptschule* and 53% the Gymnasium (Hessen **Ministry for Social Affairs and Integration** 2014b: 6; for an explanation see the excursus on the German education system). 4% of the teenagers with a migration background finish school without obtaining a degree, 24% receive the lowest secondary school qualification. The numbers for the students without a migration background are 2% and 13% respectively. The highest secondary school qualification, the *Abitur*, is acquired by 22% of the youth population with and by 44% without a migration background (ibid.).

All in all, young people with a migration background achieve lower qualifications than people without a migration background. Thus, they have fewer chances in beginning and completing an (initial) vocational training (VET). In Germany, completed vocational training is regarded as an essential prerequisite to enter into the working life and into permanent employment.

¹ We thank Helena Falk and Lillith Stukenberg for their support.

² A migration background in the school statistics is based on three characteristics: citizenship, prominently spoken language within the family, and country of birth. The parents' migration experiences do not count as a characteristic. This definition of a migration background differs considerably from the one of the Federal Statistical Office in the Microcensus, which does e.g. not consider the language spoken at home.

Figure 1 - School leavers by migration background and sex with the various graduation qualifications in Hessen, academic year 2013/2014; data in per cent



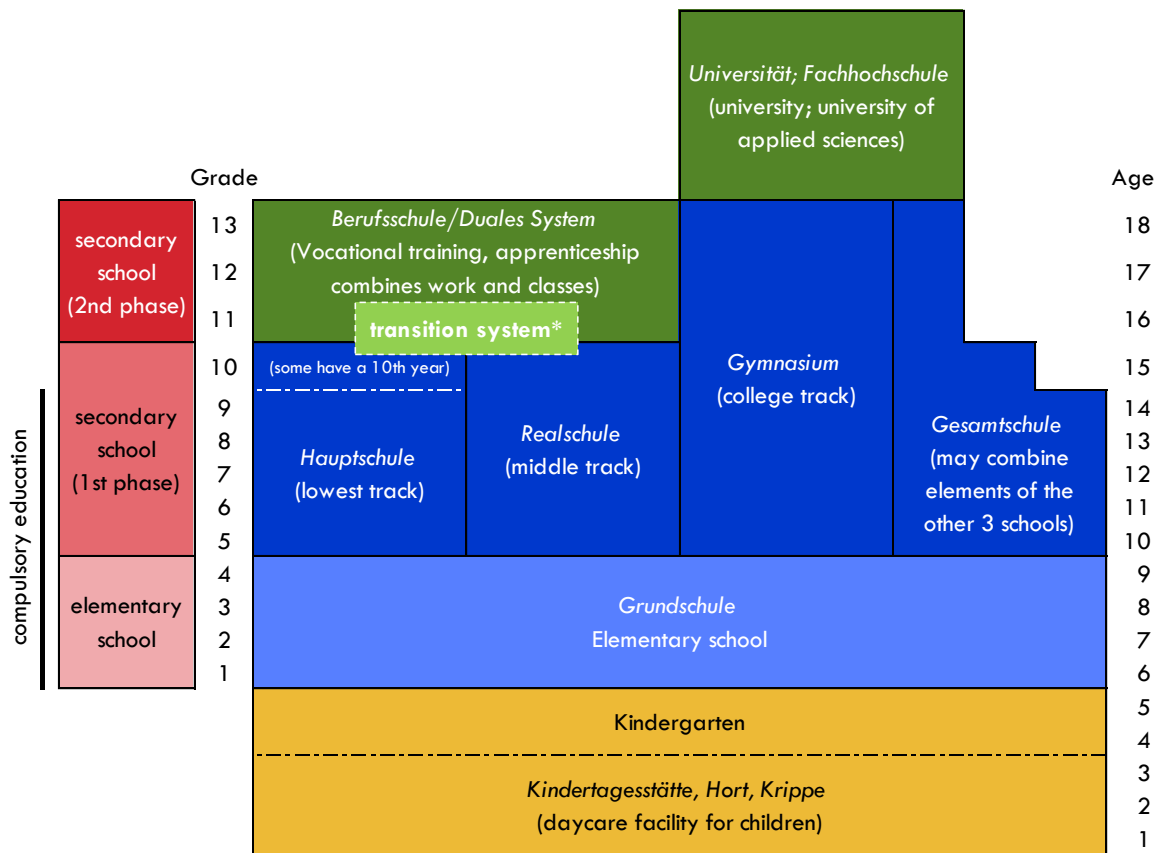
Source: Hessen Ministry of Social Affairs and Integration 2014c (authors' calculation based on data from the Statistical Office of the State of Hessen)

Excursus - The German education system

Children generally start attending school at the age of six. Around ten, the children move on to secondary schools (see figure 2). For secondary schools, the German educational system splits (in most federal states) into three different levels of education: the *Gymnasium*³, the *Realschule*, and the *Hauptschule*. The *Gymnasium* is the most ambitious type of secondary education, followed by the *Realschule* and then the *Hauptschule*, which is the least challenging. The *Gesamtschule* combines all three tracks. Students can attain either of the three school degrees. For children who need extra help, there are special schools. By graduating from a *Gymnasium*, students attain the *Abitur*, similar to the A-Levels in Great Britain. While the *Abitur* is the prerequisite for entry to a university, a course at a university of applied sciences (*Fachhochschule*) can be started a year before the completion of the *Abitur* (with a so called *Fachhochschulreife*). After graduating with a secondary school degree from *Hauptschule* (with a *Hauptschulabschluss*) or *Realschule* (with a *Mittlere Reife*), students can participate in vocational training in specified fields.

³ Eight or nine years, depending on the federal state

Figure 2 - German education system (simplified view of the situation in Hessen)



* Supporting measures (variable length) for pupils without graduation or with low grades to get into vocational training

Source: Compiled by the authors

The German system of initial vocational education and training comprises three segments (Authoring Group Educational Reporting 2014: 98). Traditionally, vocational education is organised within the *dual system*: companies take responsibility for the practical training, which is supplemented by instruction at public part-time vocational schools to cover the theoretical orientations and knowledge-based elements of the specific occupation. For many decades, *dual system* has met Germany's needs for young skilled workers, kept youth unemployment at a low level in comparison with other European countries, and integrated young people from less well-educated families into recognised occupations (Authoring Group Educational Reporting 2008). Since apprenticeship contracts are market-allocated, however, overall imbalances can arise in sector-specific, occupation-specific or regional sub-segments of the market. Although the high pressure on the apprenticeship market has been alleviated during the last years, it can still be assessed as difficult for applicants without a good school qualification.

The second pillar of vocational education is the *school-based vocational system*. Young people learn the theoretical and practical elements of a specific occupation in full-time vocational schools. This means that no companies are involved. Because young people used the predominantly publicly financed *school-based vocational system* as a fall-back option and some occupations can be only learned here, this segment gained in significance. The main institutions in this category are the full-time vocational schools offering courses leading to a full vocational qualification and the health service vocational schools. In contrast, the

various programmes offered within the *transition system (Übergangssystem)*, which has undergone similar expansion, only cover general knowledge and skills “relevant” to vocational education or, in some cases, to particular occupational fields. This means that the programmes of the transition system do not provide a recognized vocational degree. One primary goal is to help young people attain “maturity” to start an apprenticeship. Rather than leading to a recognised vocational qualification, the system frequently results in a series of work-scheme placements.

The migrants’ situation

The 2013 Integration Report for Hessen (“Hessischer Integrationsmonitor”), analyzing the participation in the company-based “dual system”, shows a gap between Germans and migrants (**Hessen Ministry of Justice**, for *Integration* and *Europe* 2013: 67).

In Germany as a whole, in 2013 26.6% of all young people interested in vocational education entered the transition system (257.626 persons). Three out of four of these young people had a foreign nationality (Authoring Group Educational Reporting 2014: 98f.). Many young migrants are ultimately left without any vocational qualification. Yet in Germany, the completion of VET in a recognised occupation is an increasingly important prerequisite for entry into working life, continuity of the employment biography, and security against unemployment and poverty. Thus, the facts described have substantial consequences for the future position of young migrants in the labour market, as well as their socioeconomic status (Wilkens 2010). On the other hand, a shortage of sufficiently qualified junior employees is noted, which may have a detrimental impact on the local and national economy.

2. HOW CAN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION HELP?

Hence, there is a vast need for action in the vocational education and training (VET) system for several reasons. The Federal Government has early emphasized the goal of raising the participation of migrants in VET in its National Integration Plan (Federal Government 2007). The current Hessen State Government (2013: 59) has explicitly made a commitment to improve the transition from school to work. Varieties of supporting measures are offered in Hessen as well as in all German federal states to smooth the transition from school to work, especially for those young people who are at risk to drop out of school or to be not accepted in the dual or the school-based vocational system. The administration develops the measures and the curricula, finances the teachers and social workers, and provides a monitoring.

Another central possibility for public administration to foster successful transition from education to labour market is to reinforce the cooperation between schools where those programmes take place and possible employers in the region. There is a high synergy potential between the schools itself as they face the same target groups and similar problems. Public administration can support this cooperation by offering regular meetings and workshops where teachers, social education workers and representatives from companies can exchange experiences.

In order to develop new indicators and to combine monitoring and evaluation (see CPB n. 11) the Hessen Ministry of Integration has analyzed several such measures concerning their effectivity in one county;⁴ the focus was placed on teenagers with a migration background. In this paper we will introduce the programme EIBE (*Eingliederung in die Berufs- und Arbeitswelt* - Integration in the Vocational and Working Environment) and we will present central results of surveys with deepening interviews of the experts (such as teachers) in the county of Main-Kinzig in the eastern part of Hessen. There, the programme is offered by four schools. The willingness to participate in the study was very high.

A practical example: The EIBE-Programme of the Hessen State Government

EIBE (*Eingliederung in die Berufs- und Arbeitswelt* – Integration in the Vocational and Working Environment) is offered in Hessen at vocational schools in full-time and is financially supported by the European Social Funds. Teenagers with a migration background are defined as the explicit target group in the EIBE-guidelines (Hessen Ministry of Education 2006: 25). Participants can obtain a secondary school qualification in small classes of up to 15 students. The lessons in this programme are based on individually designed support plans. The programme imparts general and vocational basic skills in a chosen profession. Additionally, practical abilities are acquired through e.g. work in workshops. Obligatory internships, optional German language tuition courses and qualification modules as well as socio-pedagogical support are included in this programme. The programme's goal is the transition into a vocational training or employment or into other educational institutions. The courses take one or two years and are directed at teenagers between 16 and 19 years of age, who achieved only a poor secondary school degree or no degree at all. Full-time education is still obligatory for these students.

Throughout Hessen, 2,695 students participated in this programme in the school year of 2012/2013 (40% female, 60% male). 57% of the students did not have the secondary school qualification at the beginning of the measure; 63% of the participants had a migration background (HessenAgentur 2013).

Our quantitative investigation in the Main-Kinzig county shows that the participants in EIBE are a heterogeneous group which is a challenge concerning their promotion. 69% of the EIBE-starters are male. The average age at the beginning of the measure is 16.5 years. 60% do not have a secondary school qualification. Two thirds have a migration background,⁵ of which one fifth immigrated itself. Only 61% consider their knowledge of the German language as fluent, about 7% speak little German (Hessen Ministry for Social Affairs and Integration 2014a: 85ff.).

Almost every second EIBE-starter (45%) does not live in a "classical nuclear family" with both birth parents. 23% of the teenagers live in a single-parent household; here, there are no differences concerning the migration status. Concerning the highest educational degree in the parental home, a broad distribution is to be found. 10% do not have an educational qualification at all, 22% have a lower secondary school degree (*Hauptschulabschluss*), 24% a secondary school degree (*Mittlere Reife*) and 17% the Abitur.⁶ Noticeable is the big proportion of parents with little knowledge of the German language: only half of the interviewees state that their mother and father speak German fluently. 16% of the mothers and 19% of the fathers do not speak German at all.

⁴ The one-year project was funded by the European Integration Fund (EIF) (EIF-12-0830 "Standardized Evaluation Tool for Political Integration Measures"). An evaluation report documents the results. On the basis of the experiences a standardized excel-based tool was developed to evaluate such measures. This tool enables institutions to evaluate their measures customized and in an uncomplicated way.

⁵ In our survey a migration background exists when the interviewee or his parents were born in a foreign country.

⁶ Foreign school qualifications were transferred into an equivalent German one. However, 27% of the participants did not answer this question.

3. CONCEPTION OF THE QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS

As the networking between the actors is a crucial point where public administration can help, we decided to focus the qualitative deepening both on the professionals in schools (namely teachers, social workers, principals and staff members of the local education authority) and experts with deep knowledge of the local economy and its demands (namely representatives from local enterprises, the chamber of commerce and industry and the labour union). In order to gather as many perspectives as possible we chose group interviews the best empirical tool, so we could interview 13 professionals in schools in one group discussion and 5 representatives from the economical side in the other group discussions.

The group discussions lasted around 90 minutes. A guide for the interviewer with several questions structured the discussions in three phases: In the first block the experts were asked to name the strengths and weaknesses of the EIBE programme and its participants from their point of view. In the second phase they should picture how an ideal programme to support adolescents to successfully get from school to work could look like. Finally, in the third block the experts should enumerate the three crucial factors that such a programme needs.

4. FINDINGS OF THE GROUP DISCUSSIONS

4.1 The professionals in schools

General strengths and weaknesses of EIBE

First, the respondents had the opportunity to evaluate EIBE in general. The feedback from the participants is positive. EIBE is praised for giving young people with poor educational qualifications a chance. Especially internships, social counselling and work in projects are considered as very important. Many participants had difficulties in their previous life and educational career. These young people can be helped by EIBE. („EIBE is an opportunity for young people who are considered failures. We try to give them a future and that they believe in themselves and recognize their strengths.“).

The flexibility offered by the EIBE framework is particularly praised. The curriculum is not rigid, but can be customized to the participants. Thus, the participants' individual strengths can be reinforced and their specific weaknesses can be reduced. EIBE also provides flexibility in the implementation of in-school projects. For example, one school in Main-Kinzig opened a café for students. In this café, the EIBE-participants prepare dishes under the guidance of professionals, operate and organise the café and get in touch with customers. Another mentioned positive aspect of the flexibility of EIBE is that the measure may be extended by another year if the participant has not achieved the learning objectives within one year. This is particularly helpful for adolescents with language problems.

Strongly criticised is the bureaucracy, which is rated by all panelists to be much too high. The teachers and social workers have to invest a significant part of their time in the administration of EIBE, for example for documentation and statistics. In the current situation, the administrative work has to be done very often in their leisure time. They demand a relief; for example the costs should be charged with a lump sum.

Special benefit of EIBE for participants with a migration background

EIBE is visited by two very different groups of participants: adolescents with difficulties to find a vocational training place (including many with migration background) and more and more recent immigrants without basic knowledge of the German language. These two groups have totally differing problems and requirements. This makes it very difficult for teachers to support both groups in one single measure. While the first group must make up skills in school and occupation, the second group requires basic language skills at first; some even have shortcomings in reading and writing.

From the perspective of the panellists, it is not effective to teach both groups in one class. (*"Teaching German beginners in a regular EIBE-class is highly problematic"*). Rather, they must be intensively prepared in their own classes for regular EIBE-classes. In some schools these special classes for language learners have been successfully implemented.⁷

One panellist suggested training the intercultural competence of the teaching staff, since many do not know the situation and structures of immigrant families. In addition, some teachers do not know how to deal with tensions between participants because of their origin, ethnicity or religion.

An intensive network between schools and companies would be very helpful especially for participants with a migration background. First, this network could reduce prejudice towards migrants when employers got into contact with migrants and hire them for internships. This could facilitate entry into vocational training. Second, migrants could get an internship or vocational training more easily because they knew who and where to turn to. Such a network is available at most schools, but still expandable.

An ideal measure

Towards the end of the group discussion the professionals expressed their idea of an ideal measure designed at the transition from school to work. There are four cornerstones.

First, for students without adequate language proficiency, an intensive and job-related language class within the measure is indispensable. These students lack not only general, but also job-specific knowledge of German. This barrier hinders especially their entry into internships and apprenticeship as well as successful graduation of an apprenticeship because the exams rely heavily on specialized job-specific vocabulary. For students who need to be alphabetised, it takes an additional class within this ideal measure.

Second, a high share of practice in the curricula is a central factor. Internships are the first component. Internships should be thoroughly pre- and post-processed with the students. Intensive support during the internship is also considered as important. The second component is practice in the school, for example in the earlier mentioned café or by work in workshops. Through internships and practical job-related training in the measure two effects would result: first, the students gained professional skills, knowledge on the work environment and on various career options. Second, firms could be opened for participants in vocational preparation measures.

Third, from the perspective of the teaching staff an intensive social counselling is very important. This serves several purposes including strengthening of the personality and self-esteem of young people, the work-up of family problems and personal problems, the teaching of social skills (for example teamwork) and of psychological resilience (*"We need a school subject called 'life support'"*).

⁷ This is possible in larger cities, where there are a sufficient number of language beginners.

Fourth, in general, intensive care and dealing with the students is needed. Small classes are an essential prerequisite. In addition, each student needs a different duration in the measure. (*"Students need to get the time they need in the measure. Some need two or even three years."*). An ideal measure would deal with different individual needs as flexible as possible.

To summarize the discussion, the panellists were asked to mention the three most important elements of an ideal measure. A flexible framework, well prepared internships, social counselling/pedagogy for the attainment of social skills and self-confidence, special language instruction for language learners and good networking at the local level with firms were mentioned most often.

4.2 The professionals in the economy

The expert panel with representatives from business companies (retail, manufacturing), from the Chamber of Industry and Commerce and from a trade union had very different experiences and opinions on the 'transition system' between school and work.

The trade union representative sees the transition system in general critical since many young people attending these supporting programmes already have a school degree. He claims that thereby they demonstrate to be suitable for vocational training. The problem is not their performance but the insufficient number of apprenticeship training positions. The primary task of preventing youth unemployment is therefore to motivate enterprises to create additional training places. The 'transition system' itself makes only sense for adolescents without a school degree, apart from that it could be drastically reduced.

The representatives from the chamber of industry and commerce and from companies claim that students with a school degree are not necessarily suitable for vocational training. Enterprises already make great efforts to generate jobs and apprenticeship training positions, also for weaker students. Some graduates have massive knowledge gaps, so they are not able to successfully complete vocational training. They often lack social skills such as punctuality, reliability, teamwork ability, competence in problem solving and conflict resolution, and essential key skills such as learning strategies (*"Some young people are simply not capable of learning. They need to 'learn how to learn'"*) as well as mathematical and German skills (*"Some cannot even calculate the area of a room."*). In addition, several adolescents still lack professional orientation, not knowing in which occupational field to work after school. Particularly problematic is the situation of students receiving very little personal and educational support from their family.

Concerning adolescents with a migration background the experts report mixed experiences. Some young people seem to have problems to respect authorities, especially male adolescents. On the other hand the interviewees indicate many positive experiences, complimenting their high diligence (*"Those are usually my best!"*). One employer states: *"The migration background does not matter. Character, German language skills, writing, reading, maths is what counts."*

Cooperation between the stakeholders was another important topic in the group discussion. In some cases networking with schools could be improved: *"We have difficulties to get into contact with schools. This is based on the teachers' assessment. The schools reject supports by companies,"* states one employer. Schools should introduce the business world to their pupils. Another business expert evaluates the cooperation between his enterprise and schools, educational institutions and the employment office as favourable. Furthermore, he identifies a positive trend as a generational change is happening. *"I am impressed by the dedication of some vocational teachers; they really put their shoulder to the wheel."* From

a business perspective it would be beneficial if there was a stronger interaction with the teachers, so they could tell their students what employers demand. Furthermore the organizational problem that all students need internships at the same time (January and February) should be avoided, as it leads to a high concurrence.

With regard to the infrastructure, all experts strongly criticize the non-transparent school system and transition system (some describe it to be like a 'jungle'). The manifold types of schools, curricula and degrees lead to confusion and make it impossible to know what kind of diploma comprises which contents ("*I don't look through any more.*"). However, both the representatives from the Chamber of Industry and Commerce and from the trade union praise the system, since it can individually identify strengths and weaknesses ("*On the whole, it works!*"). The training measures provide an additional great chance for these adolescents ("*For many, they are a chance. And they seize it.*"). Without it, they would end up empty-handed. From the employers' perspective, the large heterogeneity of the participants is problematic. It is difficult to take into account the attendees' different knowledge levels and interests.

Finally, the panellists were asked to picture an ideal supporting measure from their point of view. The most important suggestion was a transparent, clear system. One expert suggested creating one single, centrally organized pre-employment measure, which is then adapted to the participants: young people leaving school without diploma or with a low school degree could individually find out their proper and desired occupational area. In this career field they should be trained in special courses for at least one year by qualified and dedicated professionals and social workers. Another central point is gathering professional experience through long-term, well-supervised internships. In addition, those without a school degree should have the possibility to graduate.

5. DEDUCTIONS AND RECOMMENDED FOLLOW-UP ACTION

Recommendations for action - by the researchers

All interviewed experts agreed that the supporting measures in the 'transition system' are an important part of the education system and thus need to be preserved. So, public administration makes an important contribution to successful integration of adolescents. However, there is still room for improvement, making the measures more efficient and suitable to the labour market.

- The cooperation between the different stakeholders (schools, teachers, social pedagogues, local and regional business actors, employers, etc.) is already on a good path, but especially the communication with public administration (e.g. youth welfare office, social services department, employment centre) should be intensified and stabilized. Furthermore networking with local enterprises could be improved.
- Internships are a central pillar of the supporting measures in the transition system between school and labour market. They motivate pupils, enhance practical skills and reduce barriers between employers and adolescents with difficult social backgrounds. In the best case, the employer offers the intern a vocational training place or a permanent job.
- Bureaucracy should be drastically reduced as it is very time-consuming and costly. The adolescents would be the beneficiaries from the time saved.
- The employers demand basic qualifications, social competences, reliability, motivation, respect from authorities and resilience from their future trainees. If adolescents do not learn these virtues at home, social workers need to do an important job here.

With focus on adolescents with a migration background, the following deductions can be drawn:

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- Young migrants and adolescents from migrant families especially profit from supporting measures, since they have a higher probability of leaving school without a diploma or with poor school grades. They often have less vocational orientation. Research has shown that foreign adolescents concentrate on fewer occupational fields when they look for an apprenticeship training position (e.g. Federal Statistical Office 2012: 47). Through supporting measures they get to know more occupational fields.
 - Not only adolescents but also their non-native parents need more information about the German educational system in general and the chances of pre-vocational supporting measures in special. Understanding the system could increase the parents' support and their children's motivation.
 - Among other benefits, internships give migrants the chance to convince future employers which might have prejudices to hire foreigners for apprenticeships.
 - The intercultural competence of teachers and social workers as well as the intercultural openness of schools should be further strengthened, especially regarding the currently increasing immigration of young refugees without any German language skills and no previous knowledge of German curricula. It should be noted that the pupils' ethnic and social backgrounds are extremely heterogeneous.
 - It is ineffective to teach language beginners together with native speakers. For beginners, an intensive German language course in special groups is essential. A flexible exchange into regular classes should be possible at a sufficient language level. Of course, additional German lessons should be continuously offered. In order to promote the exchange between the two groups and not to isolate language learners, both groups could be taught together in subjects such as sports, arts, handicrafts or work together in practical projects, where language proficiency is less important.

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