

# Changes in Child Care Could Reduce Job Options for Eastern German Mothers

by Karsten Hank

More than 10 years after unification, substantial social, economic, and cultural differences persist between eastern and western Germany. In public day care for children, though, there has been some convergence. Still, this coming together is not necessarily for the better, in terms of mothers' employment prospects.

In contrast to the United States, where day care for children is mostly subsidized through cash transfers, German day care is publicly provided. The day-care centers are run either by municipalities or by subsidized nonprofit organizations. The coverage levels, however, have differed widely between eastern Germany (the former German Democratic Republic) and the western states of the Federal Republic.

Throughout the history of the GDR, the East German government strongly supported the use of institutional day care for children of all ages. Apart from ideological purposes, the government's primary aim was to establish the compatibility of childrearing and the employment of mothers. In the 1980s, child-care slots for about 80 percent of infants and school-age children were available. The provision of slots in kinder-

garten was as high as 95 percent, and the cost of care to parents was negligible.

In contrast, the situation in West Germany was—and is—very different. Since childrearing is considered primarily the mother's responsibility, the provision of day care, especially for very

TABLE 1  
**Child-Care Provision Rates in Eastern and Western Germany, 1994**

Number of slots per 100 children of the respective age group		
Age of child	Eastern Germany	Western Germany
0-3 (infants)	41	2
4-6 (kindergarteners)		
– at least part-time care	116	85
– care all day	97	17
7-10 (school-age children)	60	5

Source: German Youth Institute (DJI).

young children, has been limited, and all-day care has only rarely been available.

Data from the German Youth Institute show that the child-care provision rates in eastern

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have a critical impact on the balance between Christians and Muslims.

Can the Palestinian Authority, its economy and infrastructure ravaged, handle the return of refugees to the West Bank and Gaza? Even without the return of the Palestinian refugees from neighboring countries, the West Bank and Gaza face their own population explosion. If the current rate of natural increase (3.7 percent per year) continues, the Palestinian population of the West Bank and Gaza will double in 20 years. Forty-six percent of the population is under the age of 15. Such a young population (see figure in box at left) means that population growth will continue even if fertility declines sharply.

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Where virtually the oldest refugee population in the world will be settled remains crucial for both the Arab and Israeli sides, and it remains to be seen. ■

### For More Information:

Philippe Fargues, "Protracted National Conflict and Fertility Change Among Palestinians and Israelis," *Population and Development Review*, 26, no. 3 (September 2000).

Abdel R. Omran and Farzaneh Roudi, "The Middle East Population Puzzle," *Population Bulletin* 48, no. 1 (Washington, DC: Population Reference Bureau, 1993).

Howard Schneider, "For Palestinian Refugees, Rhetoric Confronts Reality," *The Washington Post*, Jan. 12, 2001.

Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics: [www.cbs.gov.il](http://www.cbs.gov.il).

Palestinian Bureau of Statistics: [www.pcbs.org](http://www.pcbs.org).

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Germany did not drop dramatically after unification. This finding is somewhat surprising, given that many day-care facilities closed at that time because subsidies from the central government were discontinued. The explanation is that birth

years after unification. In 1990 and 1992, about 60 percent of all children under the age of 3 attended a day-care center for at least half the day. After 1993, however, this share declined to about half of the former GDR level, leveling off at about 30 percent in the late 1990s. Enrollment of children in kindergarten declined modestly from 1990 to 1999, and no substantial drop occurred in the share of school-age children (those ages 7 to 11) using public day care in eastern Germany.

In western Germany, on the other hand, there have not been substantial changes in the day-care situation. Even care for half the day is still common only for children ages 4 to 6 who attend kindergarten.

What are the consequences of the changing day-care situation after unification for the opportunities of women, particularly mothers, to participate in the labor force? Parents in eastern Germany demand fewer child-care slots for their children than are potentially available. One explanation for this is the high unemployment rate among eastern German women, which has led to a shift from institutional day care to maternal care. Consequently, it is likely that the number of child-care slots will be further reduced. In times of better labor market prospects, eastern German mothers would then no longer be in a better position than their western counterparts to pursue childrearing and gainful employment. ■

TABLE 2  
**Day-Care Use in Eastern and Western Germany, 1990-1999**

Percent of children in the respective age group

Age of child	1990		1995		1999	
	Eastern	Western	Eastern	Western	Eastern	Western
0-3 (infants)	62	6	21	6	34	7
4-6 (kindergarteners)						
– at least part-time care	98	82	92	80	89	85
– care all day	80	21	60	15	56	20
7-11 (school-age children)	35	2	27	3	24	5

Source: German Socio-Economic Panel, Wave 6-16.

rates decreased by about half in the first years after unification. (In fact, the total fertility rate for eastern German states was 0.8 in the mid-1990s.) Accordingly, child-care provision rates in eastern Germany still exceed western German levels many times over (see Table 1, page 3).

Yet changes in use of day care in eastern Germany are perceptible with data for 1990 to 1999 from the German Socio-Economic Panel. The survey in 1990 took place before unification, permitting a direct comparison between the pre- and post-unification period (see Table 2).

In eastern Germany, use of public day care for infants held fairly steady for the first few

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**For More Information:**

This article is based on Working Paper 2001-003, "Außerhäusliche Kinderbetreuung in Ostdeutschland vor und nach der Wiedervereinigung," by Karsten Hank, Katja Tillmann, and Gert G. Wagner. It is available (in German only) on the website of the Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research at: [www.demogr.mpg.de/papers/paperspres.htm#work](http://www.demogr.mpg.de/papers/paperspres.htm#work).

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