



## For a society based on solidarity and a living democracy

Joint Position Paper of the German Federal Youth Council and the German National Association of Senior Citizens' Organisations

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As a working group of 35 youth federations and 16 regional youth councils, the DBJR represents more than six million children and young people in Germany.

**T**he German Federal Youth Council (DBJR) and the German National Association of Senior Citizens' Organisations (BAGSO) are democratically organised interest groups representing children, young persons and senior citizens. They are committed to their joint responsibility for a solidarity-based and diverse society in a peaceful and democratic Europe. We do this against the backdrop of anti-democratic and anti-European tendencies, including in our country. And we intend to show that young and old – in contrast to some people's assumptions – stand together on important socio-political issues.

### Shaping democracy, preserving peace

The participation of all citizens in social and political decision-making processes is a cornerstone of our democracy. For us, the principle that "all state power emanates from the people" (Article 20, Paragraph 2 of the Basic Law) means the right to participation and joint responsibility for shaping the present and future. This applies to all areas of life, regardless of age and gender.



Humans are dependent on each other, especially at the beginning and end of their lives. We strive to help everyone live as self-determined a life as possible. Self-determination must be possible, and it requires self-responsibility.

We advocate a representation of interests that encompasses life in all its phases. For us, representing interests in our democracy means making what exists visible, introducing new ideas and proposing ways of implementing them. This also includes the struggling for good solutions.

We reject all forms of xenophobia, anti-Semitism and racism. And we are concerned that many people are looking for simple truths, while falling victim to anti-democratic, populist ideas and liars. We all have a responsibility to counter this development – in our personal life as well as in public space (including the Internet). Political education must be expanded.

And we are committed to European integration, to which we owe a peace that has lasted for many decades. We do not want less of Europe, we want more of Europe. We want to build bridges, not walls and fences!

### **Sustainable development**

A major challenge for our society is the agreement on the global goals of sustainable development for everyone – across generations. We are aware that – in the interest of our own country as well – people and the reality of life in other European countries as well as worldwide demand our attention and action. The major ecological, economic and social issues, the issues of human rights and peace cannot be resolved in isolation by nation states.

We perceive that our European and even more our global opportunities are limited. But some things are nevertheless possible. The scale of the challenges must not prevent us from setting clear priorities with particular emphasis: ecological – protection of the environment; economic – long-term safeguarding

of performance and prosperity. Research, innovation and skills are indispensable to reach this goal; social prosperity must be shared equitably. Opportunities in life must be guaranteed to all people, regardless of their origin or place of residence.

The issues of safeguarding human rights and peaceful coexistence first arise locally and depend on the willingness of our society to display solidarity. Each and every one of us is called upon to do this. We are guided by this thought. And this also applies to the admission of people entitled to asylum who come to Germany from other countries and their integration.

### **Participation of all**

For us, it is essential that participation is not limited to just certain groups. In a living democratic society, self-determined participation by all must be possible. The focus has to be on making participation possible. Financial and spatial conditions should not be the deciding factor, and people with special needs must also be given equal opportunities to participate.

Both young and old should be able to decide themselves as to how and when they wish to participate in political processes. This also applies to the question of age restrictions on active or passive voting rights. Age alone is not an appropriate yardstick for whether and when a person is able to participate in political processes.

### **Equality**

Equality is and will remain important. The Basic Law enshrines gender equality. However, the implementation of this stipulated equality is not guaranteed universally. Gender is still a major cause of inequality, and although there has been great progress in recent years, there have unfortunately been setbacks as well. Gender-specific role attributions are widespread, and open sexism is on the rise. Structural discrimination is often not questioned and is seen as an individual problem. It permeates many areas of life even in adolescence and triggers greater inequality



in old age – the “gender pay gap” turns into the “gender pension gap”.

### Preventing poverty

Youth poverty and poverty in old age make participation more difficult. We see it as an urgent task to prevent and combat poverty in all circumstances, especially among single parents and their children. Growing up in poverty significantly reduces the prospects of children and young adults.

The transition phases (from school to vocational training and from vocational training to work) are particularly difficult for adolescents and young adults, where the risk of drifting into unemployment and poverty is particularly high. In addition, conditions of temporary work and subcontracted labour (especially for those under 35), low wages, interrupted employment biographies and part-time work (also due to parental and care periods) give rise to the fear of not being able to rely on the state pension in old age. Long-term unemployment represents a particularly high risk of poverty in old age.

In addition to alleviating the consequences of poverty, the focus must be placed even more strongly on creating a basis for avoiding poverty. To this end, young and old people must be given equal (educational) opportunities and opportunities to participate.

### Intercultural co-existence

Both young and old in Germany are moved by the question of how well different nationalities and cultures can live together. Different experiences with war, peace and migration characterise the respective generation and yet reveal clear parallels. It all comes down to the following: A life in peace and freedom and without fear of war and persecution must be possible for all of us. Reasons for migration have to be combated in the countries of origin, and all those living in Germany must be given fair opportunities for equal living conditions. There should be no breeding ground for envy-driven debates.

The international exchange of both young and old people is an important means of ensuring the peaceful coexistence of different cultures in the long term. International understanding, respect for others and the value-free recognition of different interests are the basis for peaceful coexistence.

### Digitalisation

The digital world poses new and partly diverse challenges for all generations. In addition to ensuring equal technical access for all, issues such as copyright protection, securing network neutrality and data protection are gaining in importance. These questions must be answered for people of all ages. The world in which old and young people live and work is changing and necessitates adjustments. Digitalisation at the workplace is a matter of course for young people; for many older ones it can contribute to maintaining their independence. Their use in nursing and health care similarly brings new opportunities, but also new dependencies.

The significantly improved opportunities for obtaining information and forming opinions are offset by the discussion about “fake news”. The question of the credibility of news influences our lives just as much as the constant discussion about new threats from the digital world. It is therefore important for us to include both positive and negative aspects in our consideration and assessment.

### Voluntary engagement

In all age groups, we find people who are active in associations and federations, initiatives and groups, in churches and trade unions as well as in democratic parties. This makes them the supporting pillars of our democracy.

This engagement must be enabled and sustainably strengthened through appropriate framework conditions, especially at the municipal level. This also includes information and advisory services. In order to ensure sustainability, we advocate making the pro-



motion of voluntary engagement a municipal duty and equipping the municipalities with the necessary means. This also serves the goal of equal living conditions.

Young people in particular need to be given the freedom to become involved. Bureaucratic hurdles have to be reduced, spaces should be created for the actual experience of self-efficacy and time and financial resources have to be made available.

Personal requirements – regardless of age – must not be criteria for voluntary engagement. People with special needs or in special circumstances must also have access to voluntary work.

The best recognition of volunteering is its support. However, a culture of recognition goes beyond symbolic measures. Educational and qualification offers are just as important as generational and intercultural projects in terms of mutual enrichment.

### Intergenerational solidarity

Many social challenges which politicians are struggling to solve affect all generations. This is particularly evident in the area of “care”. All improvements in the care system benefit not only those in need of care, but also their relatives and professional caregivers, including many young specialists and volunteers. To prevent overstraining, we should maintain the independence of those in need of care and need to make arrangements that take account of the limits of all those involved.

The interests of young persons do not always coincide with those of people of advanced age. There are differences: Childhood and youth as well as different living conditions shape individuals. But we are allied in our democratic and social coexistence. We seek mutual understanding and – building on this – meaningful compromise for different interests.

To us, there are no substantial differences between the generations. There are points of contention across all generations – between those who have better or worse educational opportunities, between those with or without a secure income, between wealthy and poor people. To proclaim everything to be an inter-generational problem or even conflict is nonsense. And it goes without saying that problems cannot be solved unilaterally at the expense of one generation or another. That is what we are committed to.

We appeal to all, young and old, to actively and democratically participate in our society. We are making our contribution. We expect much from the state where it has responsibility. But we also know how important civic engagement is for a society based on solidarity and a living democracy.

### These areas require action most urgently:

1. Democracy is not a rocking chair. Each and every one of us is challenged. Voluntary engagement is a cornerstone of our democracy.
2. We question all age limits, because the number of years of life says very little about abilities and skills.
3. We are committed to a positive development of gender equality – we cannot and will not accept setbacks.
4. The prevention of poverty is an urgent task. We regard equal educational opportunities to be essential. A changing world requires lifelong learning.
5. Respect and appreciation, including in political disputes, are the basis for peaceful coexistence. ■

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