

// Education International: Refugee programme //



## TEACHERS ORGANISING FOR QUALITY EDUCATION PROVISION FOR REFUGEES

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## Welcome to Bremen

In 2015 some 12,000 refugees, including many young people under 18 without parents, arrived in the state of Bremen (population 670,000). Simultaneously, many migrants from poorer parts the EU have been attracted by the combination of jobs and affordable housing.

An education system which was already struggling with the highest levels of child poverty in Germany alongside low levels of funding (compared with other major cities) has struggled to cope.

The response of the state government has been to expand the system via a massive outsourcing of jobs combined with a significant reduction of staff terms and conditions.

For the young refugees, long waiting times of up to and over 6 months before being able to access a school place still exist. Recently, the class sizes in some parts of the state of Bremen have been raised by 25% to 'increase capacity' and reduce waiting lists.

In addition these young people are often labelled 'Sprachanfänger' ('Speech-beginners' instead of DAZ - German as Second Language) despite clearly being able to speak a range of languages other than German – often being actively bi-lingual (e.g. Kurdish / Arabic speakers.)

The staff in the 'new arrivals' and German as a Second Language classes (DAZ / VBK etc.) are under intense pressure – often newly qualified, or with limited teacher training qualifications - facing learner groups with high levels of heterogeneity, fluctuation and often trauma. Resources allocated to these groups of learners are generally significantly less than those of regular class groups.

Many of the newly arrived young people make excellent progress in developing their German skills – but as the limited free places within the mainstream education system fill up however there is an increasing jam at the point of entry into regular classes – or once there, support is limited - leading in both cases to further frustration.

In the vocational sector, where students with a migrant background born in Germany face significant structural discrimination in accessing apprenticeship places, newly arrived young people find themselves at the back of the queue.

Bremen has made significant progress in the development of an inclusive education system – just as all children and young people should have a right to a place at a quality public school regardless of disability, they also have the right to an education alongside their peers regardless of immigration status.

With support from our international union – Education International, the Bremen State Branch of the education industry union in Germany – the GEW – is delivering a project called "Teachers Organising for Quality Education for Refugees."

In initial project work leading up to a launch meeting we have been inviting submissions for this pamphlet. Our members write here from the chalkface of education provision.

Every day in schools in much of Germany, teachers are delivering education to tens of thousands of newly arrived refugees and other migrants. Teacher voices need to be heard – and governments need to take action - if we are to ensure quality education for all young people in Europe and beyond.

## Teaching Adult Refugees and Migrants

### What does your work look like?

There are 5 teachers who are qualified to teach German as a second language (DaZ), and there are other teachers who teach German in the rest of the school who also deliver courses. There are a few teachers without DaZ qualifications who teach subjects like art, maths, and the sciences in order to broaden the curriculum. These colleagues developed skills in teaching DaZ groups over the last few years.

There is hardly any official cooperation between staff in the preparatory courses. As necessary, teachers discuss lessons plans, approaches and curriculum units.

We offer three levels of courses

- initial literacy
- beginners German (level A1\* - equivalent to Entry Level GCSEs in an MFL) and
- threshold courses (level A2/B1\* - equivalent to Foundation or Intermediate Level GCSEs in an MFL) as preparation for a regular basic level Year 10 graduation certificate (EBBR\* - equivalent to Foundation level GCSEs)

### What do you need to do a good job?

- in-service training for intercultural sensitive communication and teaching strategies
- timetabling to ensure the maximum possible number of lessons in the one course, to be able to respond to the needs of the students and to build trusting professional relationships
- additional lessons within out timetables as 'Advisors' for student questions
- flexible offers for different levels of German language ability
- a principle that "we make an offer for every student" - that depending on what the student knows, we'll find something appropriate

### What do staff and students need to make a good start?

- Good team work – it exists at our school but the time to swap ideas and to induct new staff is necessary but not allocated. That's up to our school to organize
- Students should be allocated to a class group and get a continuing curriculum offer
- Form tutors should not be chopped and changed and should teach a lot of lessons in their groups
- The previous two points are critical as a basic education concept

### What can our union do?

- Support teachers in swapping their experiences
- Network with the education department and teacher training authority
- Organise information forums with speakers and the education department
- Organise a conference for all those involved in the preparatory classes with speakers and world café style workshops
- Publicity – particularly press work
- Documentation of what's going on – leading to suggestions for solutions
- Work with politicians and other groups demanding a general policy concept for educating migrants

*The writer works with young adults*

## **“I was never homesick – my school was my new home.”**

In 2011 I was asked to start teaching German as a Second Language (DaZ) by my school, because the demand for DaZ had risen significantly, even though I wasn't trained for the area. I was pretty much left to myself to get on with it, so that it felt like I was doing a second Uni degree in my free time, including on the weekends.

Many of the newly employed staff, who are being employed despite not being qualified teachers are however highly competent in the field and good with people. However they aren't given an induction in terms of how 'school' works as a system – and so the old hands in the staff group have to provide the information about structures, procedures and legal requirements.

The subject specific work around German as a Second Language, is only one small part of the work when you're in classes with people with experience of being refugees, and or a history of experiencing violence.

A student who had fled Syria came into my class with her brother in November 2011. In the Summer of 2014, this young woman had been elected school spokesperson (the chair of the students representative council – 'Schulsprecher\*in') and at her graduation ceremony she said to me:

“I was never homesick – my school was my new home.”

That moved me greatly because it showed me what school means for these young people. As their teacher you experience it all on a daily basis – you are sister and mother, friend and role model. You show them the city, try to give them a view into the world of work, discuss the rights of women and gay marriages and dry tears – and yes – you also teach them German.

You're not left entirely alone with this job – for our 13 groups we have got 1.5 social work posts and can get advice there. Amongst colleagues, we advise one another and have the option of supervision – albeit after the day's work is done.

Because the form tutors are the connecting point between the students and their support networks, between the job centre and apprenticeships, between the employers and future schools – we need structured support backed up by resources (person hours) - preferably available on the school grounds or at least nearby.

That means:

- Support when the young people begin apprenticeships
- Support when the young people go onto other schools
- Support for the young people's 'personal' problems – everything from eviction from supported accommodation due to being 'too old', the after effects of trauma, pregnancy

We have been fighting a long defensive struggle to keep many services which were good, tried and tested - that these support structures are now being reduced adds to the pressures on staff and damages the student's futures.

*Preparatory Course Teacher – Vocational College.*

## “To do a good job I need ... “

Good appropriate teaching materials for students learning German at A1 (beginners) level – not just for German as a second language but also for teaching politics and careers to the young people at the vocational college where I work.

(There are text books which cover these subjects but only at a more advanced level (A2 / B1 – *equivalent to satisfactory to very good GCSEs at in a MFL*). Anyway, the young people who hope to get an apprenticeship have other priorities. Since we don't have the material we have to develop it ourselves.)

More time, including preparation time, to develop these materials and match them to the language abilities and needs of our students

### **Demands:**

- Workload reduction lessons (Entlastungsstunden) - i.e. more paid preparation time, less teaching time
- Staff to support students in specifically in the vocational parts of their education
- More financial support for cultural and other education activities

*Preparatory Course Teacher – Vocational College.*

### **Conditions For a Good Start**

#### **For Students**

- Support workers for dealing with the problems of everyday life
- Psychologists and social workers
- Support in looking for work experience and job applications / job interviews
- Careers counselling for the German apprenticeship system including the students' personal competencies
- More financial support so that they can participate in cultural and education activities
- Individual support including individual tuition where appropriate \*

(\* Students in Germany can get this as part of their social welfare benefits)

#### **For Teachers**

- More support in dealing with organisation activities
- Additional support lessons for students as promised by the curriculum provision plan
- Support in preparing students for apprenticeships



## **“My class has had to learn young.”**

I've had my class as a form tutor for over two years now. I teach them German, Careers and Social Studies.

My class was thrown together from various primaries and came from 8 different countries. Some were born in Germany to parents with German as their mother tongue, some are children of previous generations of refugees, some are children of economic migrants from within Germany and inside and outside the EU. Some children had statemented special needs and some brought theirs along undocumented from primary school. A few kids meet state curriculum expectations in terms of attainment.

What almost all of them share is a life of poverty in a state which ships the famous German luxury cars around the world and has the highest level of child poverty in Germany. Most live less than a kilometer from the sea but their horizons are already closing in.

Since last year, we have had three kids from the preparatory classes ('Vorbereitungs Kursen.') It seems strange that kids with the least to give can often give the most. The new students have been welcomed into our class community. We were lucky - some kids could translate with languages like Arabic, Turkish and Bulgarian. Many had their own personal biographies of arrival to fall back on and share. A couple of lessons a week of German as a Second Language support, were also made available via reallocation of resources within the school.

In 2015 Ms. Merkel said that 'we can do it' ('wir schaffen das') ... my class, and hundreds like it across Germany showed that they could rise to the challenge.

But since 2015, decisions have been made by people far away which have affected my work and my class greatly. By saying that some countries are 'secure countries of origin'

('sichere Herkunftsländer') a system of quick deportations has begun and is being sped up. These deportations are going to directly affect some dozen children in my school (from about 400 in total.)

My class has had to learn young, how to say dignified sorrowful farewells. And amazingly, they're still not bitter yet.

We could discuss if decisions about a country made by people who at best have been there, but not left the confines of their international hotel, in the relative privilege of the capital city, are right.

But I suspect the future for Roma kids in the back blocks of Macedonia is pretty fucking grim.

What isn't up for discussion, is the fear and distress that these deportations are causing other refugee children in school. How can I explain that Afghanistan is 'safe', and that students will be sent back there - and explain that the students from Aleppo can be certain that they won't be sent back.

I'm not able to - das schaffe ich nicht!

*'Mainstream' Teacher – Junior Secondary*

## **“Our work is damaging our health.”**

Our school got its first preparatory class in 2014 and a second in 2015. At the moment there are 20 children in each class with students from 10 – 16 years old. The students come from different countries – their mother tongues include Arabic, Kurdish, Bulgarian, Farsi, Polish, Serbian and Russian.

The children sometimes come from communities with little interaction with the education systems of their home countries, and or have not been in a school for some years.

Apart from German as a Second Language, the students get Maths, Social Studies, English, Science, Sport, Art and Home Economics lessons.

- In early 2016 the number of students per group was increased from 16 to 20 – the workload for staff increased dramatically
- Teachers are left to fend for themselves
- There’s no special needs support
- There’s a high level of fluctuation - students come and go all the time
- The classes have particularly high levels of mixed ability
- There is often tension between students
- There is no formal state curriculum, nor concept for what should be done, to guide teachers in what they should teach
- Due to lack of staff there is no support or extension work for students – for individual teachers it’s too much

- There is no possibility for speech diagnosis (leading to speech therapy where necessary)
  - Some students display socially difficult behavior towards staff and other students
  - Study lessons were staffed overwhelmingly by support staff, but are now often left completely unstaffed – the children are left alone
  - Some students, particularly those from war zones, have no therapeutic services offered to work through their traumatic experiences and show psychological disturbance
  - The pressure to prepare students for mainstream classes as quickly as possible\*, increases the pressure on the class teachers immensely.
- (\*At the start of 2016 over 900 students were waiting for a school place.)

### **The points which we have listed are leading to our work damaging our health.**

*The colleagues who wrote this piece work as preparatory course teachers in a junior secondary school.*



## “There’s no water in the Sprachbad.”

hool. What’s primary school like for some refugee and migrant children in the State of Bremen? Due to lack of places at schools, children up to eight years old (if they haven’t been to school in their home countries) are enrolled along with children as young as six in first grades.

The refugee and migrant kids are removed from lessons for two lessons (90 minutes in total) a day for additional language support. These courses run for year. The rest of the time they participate in the activities of the rest of the class. This model (called Sprachbad (Language Bath) in German) should help them use and further develop their German skills via immersion.

So much for the theory – what does the reality look like?

My first grade class has 15 children (nice and small one may think) - four of them have German as a mother tongue and another child is so far developed in acquiring German that with good language models it would be OK. The other ten children have hardly any German if at all – two of these ten were enrolled at a nursery in Germany and so aren’t eligible for any additional language support.

I’ve worked in challenging schools for the last 5 years but not being able to communicate with the children makes the work very difficult and sometimes almost impossible.

Three examples:

- A child becomes intensely distressed when their mother doesn’t appear outside the school (the kids can see the street from the classroom) well before going home time. I can’t comfort them, or find out why they begin to panic
- Children fight. But if you can’t explain to them how and why you are intervening it is impossible to de-escalate, and impossible to be transparent in what you are doing as a teacher
- Even simple mathematical exercises, modelled with objects and on the board are often not understood

There’s not much water in the Sprachbad. And I can’t find a plug either.

*The teacher works in a Primary School in Bremen.*

Education for Refugees and Migrants in Land Bremen - 2016 to 2017 School Year								Nov 16
City	Sector	Students	Classes	Staff - in House	Outsourced	Total Students	Newly Arrived as additional %	
		*				***		
<u>Bremen</u>	Primary	474	46	11	35 )	(17,197)	2,76%	
	Junior Secondary	852	55	36	34 ) combined below			
	Senior Sec. / Adult	142	8	incl in Jun. Sec		) combined below		
		1.468				52.824	2,78%	
	Vocational	1.053	79	42	45	19.727	5,34%	
	Total	2.521	188	89	114	72.551	3,47%	
	No school place	487	including ca. 400 in initial resettlement facilities not included in official statistics					
General support after leaving preparatory courses in 2015 /16								
		**	842	37,8	?			
(NB. Number of Students based on course sizes capacity in Bremerhaven rather than actual numbers ... but the course are generally (over) full!)								
<u>Bremerhaven</u>	Preplacement	204	17	none ?	But all	) combined below		
	Primary	384	30	? But all	none	) ( 4,024)	9,54%	
	Junior Secondary	384	20	? But all	2	) combined below		
	Senior Sec. / Adult	20	1	? But all		) combined below		
		992				12.071	8,22%	
	Vocational	210	11	? But all	none	5.335	3,94%	
	Total	1.202	79			17.406	6,91%	
	No school place	ca. 260	including 204 in preplacement courses, no children are left in initial resettlement facilities					
General support after leaving preparatory courses in 2015 /16								
		**	172?	?	?			
<b>Sources</b>	* Bremen	Parliamentary answer – 1.11.16						
	* Bremerhaven	Course Numbers - Report to School Committee – 14.6.16, Information from Education Department coordinator 10.11.16						
	**	Calculations from the education union GEW						
	***	<a href="https://www.bildung.bremen.de/schule_in_zahlen-3420">https://www.bildung.bremen.de/schule_in_zahlen-3420</a>						
		Figures for total school students in Land Bremen include the significant number of students from Lower Saxony who attend our schools, travelling in from the surrounding areas each day.						
		That explains why the figures overall for Bremen are somewhat less than would be expected from the national statistics -						
		- Bremen had a proportion of 3.62% of children aged 6 - 18 newly arrived in 2015. (National average 2.03%)						

## **Staff meeting makes clear the problems and lack of concept in the education of refugee and migrant children.**

There has never been a meeting in the education department with such a high proportion of staff attendance. Almost 80% of all teachers from preparatory courses (VK) in the City of Bremen came to the meeting hall at the Finance Ministry on Wednesday morning. There were intensive discussions about the problems facing the teachers in the VK.

"The many different problems and the lack of any ongoing concept in the education of refugee and migrant children were made clear" according to Arno Armgort, chairperson of the Staff Representative Council for Schools in Bremen who summarised the discussion. "The teachers in the VKs feel left alone with these problems."

Over a number of hours, the most urgent demands of the highly motivated VK teachers were formulated together. Many VK teachers are on temporary contracts with the 'Neighbourhood School' (Stadtteilschule\*\*) or other 'independent' providers. The staff meeting demanded an end to this casualisation of staffing via the offering of permanent contracts for all staff. On top of that, the meeting demanded an appropriate and fair payment for all staff – equivalent to what other teachers in Vocational Colleges and Senior Secondary Schools get. (TvL EG 13)

A further important demand was implementing a fixed maximum number of students for the VKs, so that the current practice of exceeding the recommended size would be ended, and so that the children and young people can be quickly and effectively integrated. The lack of special needs support and social work input was criticised, as was the lack of psychological services for children with trauma. In this context, the need for double staffing within VKs was made clear.

The VK teachers didn't just criticize their working conditions. For the children and young people in their care, they demanded a proper advisory system – particularly for the transition from primary to secondary school, and from junior secondary school to the vocational college or senior secondary school. They also demanded the allocation of students within the VKs according to their individual learning needs, and participation by the relevant staff in this. Basic literacy courses are important in all parts of the school system – including an offer for students learning Latin script.

There is also a need for a plan for a programme for language support for the children and young people for the time after they leave the preparatory courses, which includes enough support lessons. The participants at the staff meeting also demanded a flexible approach to the time spent by young people in the VKs. Many students need significantly longer than the currently foreseen 6 months in the primary school and 12 months in junior secondary – and some need less. Flexibility here would allow staff to take account of individual learning and development, as well as allow time for dealing with trauma. A similar flexibility was requested for the way children are (geographically) allocated to the courses.

The Staff Representative Council was delegated to give these requests to the Senator for Children and Education and to act for their implementation.

\* Under German Industrial Law, the Staff Representative Council (Personalrat Schulen), can call staff meetings of some or all staff in work time ((Teil) Personalversammlungen)

\*\* Stadtteilschule – an arms length company used by the city council in Bremen to outsource employment.

