

## COUNTRY REPORT GERMANY



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## Executive Summary

Based on case studies from the manufacturing sector and one of Germany's most influential trade unions, the IG Metall, the report scrutinizes German union's efforts at representing and organizing young workers. Although the IG Metall is currently adapting its approach to 'youth', the union's representation and organizing strategies are still determined by the legacy of a successful past. Throughout the post-war period, union density among young workers was high and the union was considered an important player both in sphere of work and in politics. Retrospectively, this success was based on the historical congruence between labour market structures (the dominance of one specific pathway between the educational system and the labour market) and the legal power resources embedded in the institutional framework of interest representation. The legal framework of firm-level interest representation (*Betriebsverfassungsgesetz*) endows works councils with significant resources for establishing an institutionalized representation of young workers, namely the youth and apprentice committee (*Jugend- und Auszubildendenvertretung*). As throughout the post-war period more than 80 percent of young Germans entered the labour market through an apprenticeship within the dual system, the institutionalized *young workers and apprentice committee* successfully linked young workers to both works councils and trade unions. However, unions' approach to young workers was limited to the group of apprentices. The unions, thus, replaced biological age as a criterion for classification with the status of an apprenticeship.

The *pluralization of young workers' pathways into the labour market* since the 1980s is dissolving the congruence between labour market structures and the unions' classical approach to 'youth'. While increasing numbers of young workers enter the labour market through pathways other than the classical vocational training, both firm-level interest representation and union strategies continued to focus on apprentices, resulting in a tangible "representation gap". In a way, the IG Metall seemed to fall victim to their own past success. Yet, rising union density among young workers since 2004 reflects that German unions are finally readjusting their approach to young workers. In particular, one group of workers has attracted significant attention in the recent past, namely labour market entrants holding a university degree. By establishing several organizing projects, the IG Metall and other German unions attempt to organize these highly-qualified, young workers. Note that the strategic reorientation of German unions takes the

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

form of a stepwise enlargement of the group of young workers. Unions still do not address all biologically young workers as ‘young’ but only certain status groups, i.e. apprentices and students. Particularly those in precarious employment and young unemployed are practically not yet considered to be part of this ‘youth’ group. In this sense, the success of German unions, as reflected in increased union density, is to a certain degree contingent on low unemployment and the country’s economic success in export markets. In case of a continuing proliferation of precarious employment or a significant growth of unemployment, a tangible ‘youth representation gap’ could emerge – unless German unions will modify their current approach to young workers.

## **Introduction: Young Workers and German Unions**

Trade unions are important organizations for a democratic and fair working life. They ensure that workers have a voice in what constitutes one of the most important areas of life, the sphere of salaried work. The democratic function of unions is of particular importance in respect to the younger generation. High youth employment and the proliferation of precarious employment and work represent serious threats to young workers' participation in working life, and therefore to young workers' participation in politics as well.

This report represents the German case study of the EU-finance research project YoUnion. Its aim is to scrutinize German unions' efforts to organize young workers and represent their interests. Using case studies from the manufacturing sector and the IG Metall, we attempt to analyze innovative union approaches to organize the various groups considered to be 'young' and to represent their interests. We chose to concentrate our research on the manufacturing sector and the IG Metall for a number of reasons. Firstly, the IG Metall is still one of Germany's most influential and powerful unions, equipped with significant resources allowing the union to pursue an experimental approach. We expect the union to create considerable space for innovation within the German model of interest representation and the respective standard practices. Secondly, manufacturing belongs to one of the key sectors of the German export-driven economy and thus benefits particularly from the country's economic success in recent years. Firms cannot escape the competitive pressures but are not under acute rationalization pressures. Thirdly, according to our informants, the IG Metall is confronted with a particular 'representation gap' with respect to young workers. Whilst the union commands the necessary resources for innovative learning processes, they are at the same time confronted with the challenges that make innovation necessary.

The report proceeds as follows; first, the labour market changes impacting youth' positions and union efforts are scrutinized, focussing on *the pluralization of young workers' pathways from the educational system into the labour market* and the associated polarization of risks. For the present labour market, three relevant institutionalized pathways are identified, namely vocational training, higher education and precarious employment. The three pathways are characterized by a highly unequal distribution of labour market risks. Second, the

institutional background of interest representation in general and of young workers in particular are discussed. Of particular interest for this report are the legal power resources for the establishment of an institutionalized firm-level interest representation for young workers, the young and apprentice committee. Third, the efforts of the IG Metall to come to terms with youth-related labour market changes – the pluralization of young workers' pathways into the labour market – are scrutinized using three case studies. Each case study focuses on one pathway analyzing innovative elements as well as challenges and limitations. The first discusses the conditions of union success within the classical pathway of vocational training, the second scrutinizes the union's extension of its youth perspective to include the higher education pathway as well, and the third one, though displaying an innovative and successful approach to bargaining for precarious workers, illuminating the limitations of the union's current definition of young workers.

### *Methods*

In order to obtain a multi-faceted picture of Youth and unions we used a wide array of qualitative methods and quantitative. In order to map unemployment and non-standard employment we used various available datasets. As official union membership numbers are scarce we use a specific German data set (ALLBUS) to calculate subgroup-specific densities and their development over time. Our main sources of information for the analysis of union strategies and practices were semi-structured interviews with apprentices (2), students (3) and precarious workers (3), works councils (4), members of youth and apprentice committees (3 as well as local union youth representatives (3) and general representatives from the union's national administration. For an overview of the interviews, see table 1. As a contrasting case, we interviewed a member of a youth and apprentice committee and works council in a large hospital. This case served as background information helping us to contrast the peculiarities of the manufacturing sector. All of the interviews were done face-to-face and lasted between 30 and 120 minutes.



Table 1 – Overview over Case Studies and Interviews

	Pathway I Vocational Training	Pathway II Higher Education	Pathway III Precarious Employment
Young workers	2 apprentices	3 dual students	3 temporary agency workers
Local union youth representatives	1	1	1
Youth and apprentice committee	2	1	-
Works councils	2	1	1
General union representatives	3		

Documentary analyses (such as company reports, union and university websites) as well as the existing academic literature fed into our work.

Field access was gained via the centre of trade union actives in the field (IG Metall, ver.di) as well as via already existing contacts to works councilors. They established contact with apprentices, students and further union and employee representatives.

We would like to express our gratitude to all those who participated in the research process for giving their time and for openly sharing their knowledge with us. Without their generous supply of their time, this research would not have been possible.

## **1. Youth on the German Labour Market: low unemployment, pluralization of pathways and polarization of risk**

In order to analyze German unions' representation strategies it is helpful to first map the labour market positions of young workers in Germany. As the following section will show, youth unemployment in Germany is relatively low in European comparison. This does not, however, mean that young workers in Germany face no significant challenges in their transition from the educational system to the labour market. Since the 1980s and 1990s, the labour market in Germany was itself in a period of deep transition – with tangible consequences for young workers and German unions. Traditionally, young worker's entry paths into the German labour market were dominated by vocational training within the dual system. Throughout the post-war period more than 80 percent of all young workers chose an apprenticeship in the famous German dual system of occupational education as the transitional mode between the educational system and the labour market. The dominance of vocational training as a pathway into the labour market had consequences for young workers, as well as for German unions. With a few notable exceptions, the successful completion of an apprenticeship was throughout the post-war period tantamount to the status of a skilled worker (*Facharbeiter*) which in turn provided a high level of employment security, decent wages and some opportunities for occupational provision. Only in typical female jobs such as the care sector or some branches of retail, did skilled workers receive below-average wages. For German unions, the dominance of vocational training as the primary labour market entry point for young workers proved to be a fertile ground for successful recruitment. The basic pattern of the dual system resulted in a long-term integration of young workers into the employers firm. As a consequence, the firm became the most important space of contact between workers and German unions. Particularly in large firms, unionized works councils assumed the responsibility to recruit apprentices as union members. However, since the late 1980s vocational training is slowly losing its position as the primary pathway of young Germans into the labour market. Particularly in the 1990s and 2000s, the country witnessed a pluralization of pathways into the labour market. The numbers of young Germans entering the labour market directly from higher education institutions is increasing rapidly at the expense of the classical apprenticeship, producing a growing segment of highly qualified workers with university degrees. At the same time, the subsequent deregulation of non-standard employment resulted in the consolidation

of a segment of unskilled young workers in precarious employment characterized by high risks of unemployment and low wages. The pluralization of pathways into the labour market has tangible consequences for young workers as each pathway is characterized by specific labour market risks and opportunities, as well as for German unions as these risks and opportunities structure young workers' interests with each pathway entailing specific opportunities for contact between youth and unions. The pluralization of pathways is associated with a polarization of risks and the emergence of new arenas for union representation of young workers.

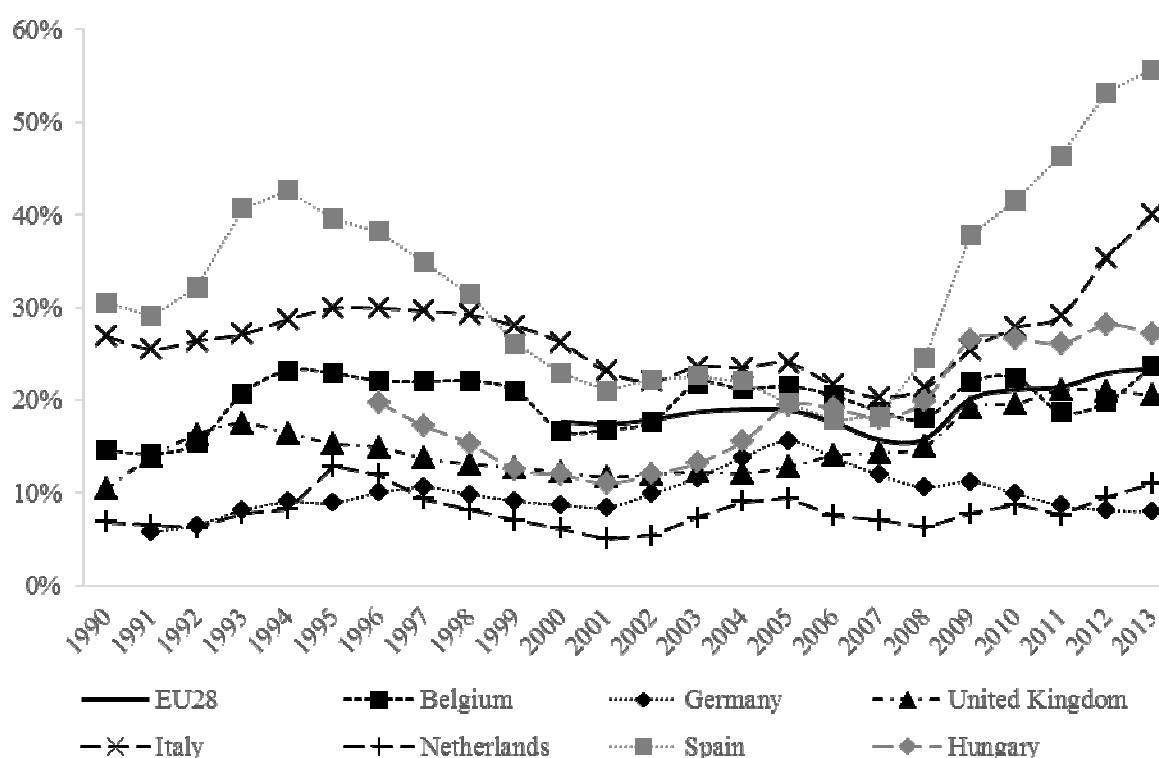
We refer to the concept of a *pathway* in order to signify the most relevant passages or trajectories of young workers into the labour market (Ashton/Field 1976, Bradley/Devadason 2008). Note that the focus on three dominant pathways does not suggest that vocational training, higher education and precarious employment are the only ways in which young workers enter the German labour market. Rather, institutionalized pathways are “trails” between the educational system and the labour market taken by large numbers of people, each constituted from a variety of factors including the institutional structures of the educational system and the labour market, firms' recruitment and staffing practices and individual labour market strategies. Any change in one of these factors might result in a reconfiguration of the existing pathways or the emergence (institutionalization) of a new pathway. The German labour market reforms deregulating employers' use of non-standard employment since the 1980s can serve as an example. The reason for carving out a pathways precarious employment is only secondarily rooted in growing numbers of unskilled workers. German manufacturing firms traditionally have had a significant segment of unskilled workers among which migrants are overrepresented (Hirsch-Kreinsen 2013). Yet, in the past employers had to hire these workers on the basis of a regular employment contract, equipping even unskilled workers with a level of employment protection equal to those of the skilled workers. It was only with the reforms of the labour market in the 1990s and 2000s, that a stable pathway of precarious employment emerged.

### **1.1. Germany in European Comparison: low youth unemployment**

Youth unemployment has become a topic of intense debate both in European politics and in academic discourses. Following the financial crisis of 2007/08 and the subsequent economic problems in several European economies, youth

unemployment<sup>1</sup> has risen to well over 50 percent in some countries. It is important to note however, that the ongoing economic crisis just highlighted problems whose origins date much further back than 2007. Apparently, it was the boom resulting from the speculative bubble which came to a sudden end in 2007, that masked these deep-seated problems. Figure 1 shows the development of youth unemployment rates since 1990 of the countries taking part in YOUNion and the EU-28 countries (average rate). In 2013, the average youth unemployment rate in the EU-28 countries was about 24 percent – an equivalent to 5.6 mill.

Figure 1 – Youth unemployment in Europe (in percent)



Source: Eurostat

Young people – compared to an unemployment rate of persons above 25 years old of about 9 percent. The high levels of youth employment are not a mere consequence of the economic crisis. In fact, in most developed countries a ‘gap’

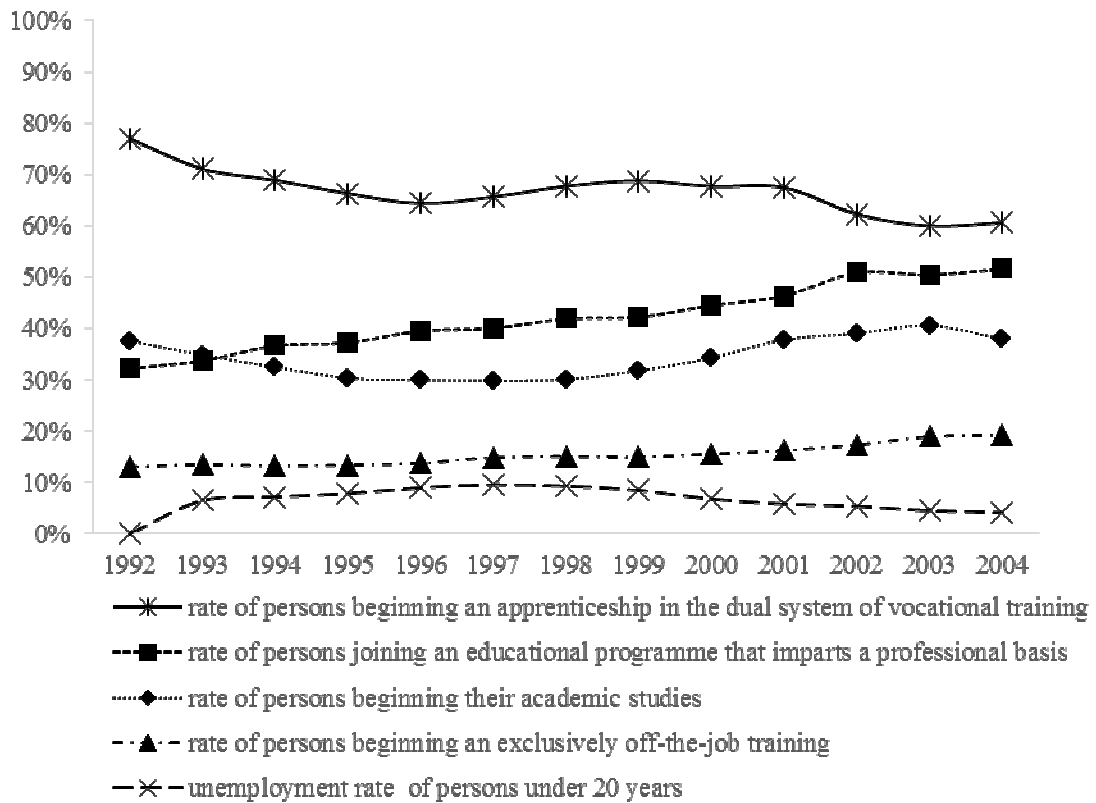
<sup>1</sup> In regards to the high youth unemployment rates it should be considered that just a relatively small share of the youth is actually active on the labor market and therefore vulnerable to unemployment. Leaving young people in vocational or educational training aside, the actual labor force participation rate is at roughly one third of all people in the given age group throughout the EU-28 countries (DIW 2012, p. 8).

between youth unemployment and non-youth unemployment can be observed. A recent German study points out that youth unemployment actually reflects boom and recession to a greater extent – overall these distinct amplitudes may be explained by greater adaption to the current economic situation in the supply of employment and also by demographic effects in the observed age group (DIW 2012, p. 4f.). What is more important for our purpose is the comparatively low level of youth unemployment in Germany, apparently reflecting the country's economic success since 2009. In general, large differences in the level of youth unemployment exist between the European countries. Whereas in Spain the rate of youth unemployment was in 2013 as high as 54 percent, in Germany the rate was at 8 percent which is the lowest among the examined countries, reflecting at least partially the success of the country's export economy since 2009.

## **1.2. Young workers' entry into the German labour market: pluralization of pathways**

We will return to the question of youth unemployment later, but first we want to outline an important development in the German labour market for young workers, namely the pluralization of institutionalized pathways into the labour market. In international comparison of both the German economic model of the post-war period and its respective labour market, scholars have frequently stressed one specific institutional peculiarity of the German model: the dual system of vocational training. Up to the mid-1980s, almost 80 percent of young workers entered the German labour market through an apprenticeship. Within the dual system, which originated in the 1920s and reflects some older *Handwerk* traditions (Thelen 2004), vocational training takes place in two distinct arenas: the firm and the vocational training school. The duality of the two learning arenas resulted in a balance between firm-specific and general knowledge. As shown by numerous studies analyzing labour market segmentation in Germany, the German *Facharbeiter* possesses general and thus transferable knowledge, decreasing his or her dependency on single firms. Vocational training was offered in virtually all economic fields, the most popular being various forms of clerks and merchants in retail and trade, vocations in the nursing and care sector, and various production-related vocations in the manufacturing sector.

Figure 2 – Entwicklung der relativen Bildungsbeteiligung (1992-2004)



Source: Statistisches Bundesamt; AusbildungPlus

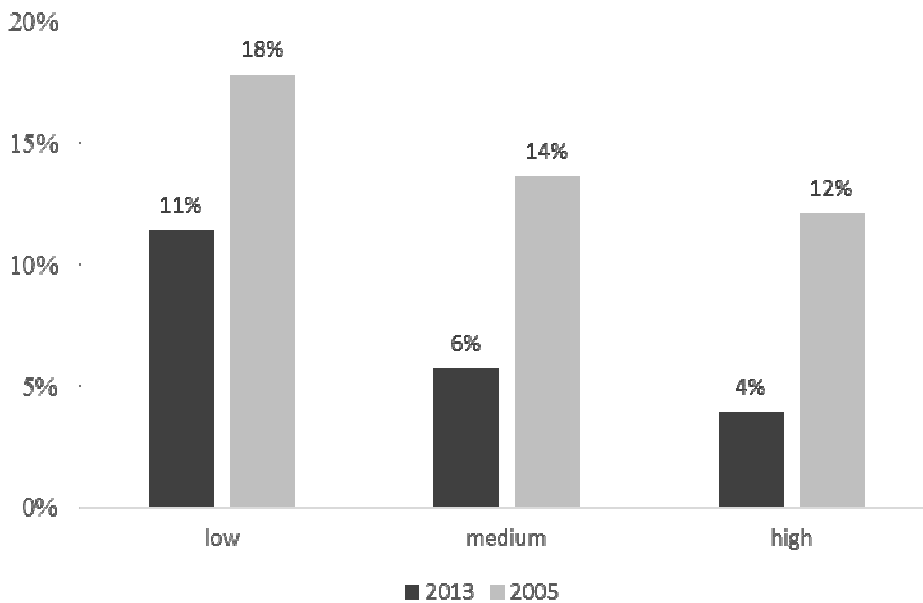
Yet, since the 1980s, vocational training has lost its status as the primary pathway for young German workers into the labour market. Increasing numbers of young Germans enter the labour market through pathways other than this classical pathway. To clarify this: Vocational training still constitutes an important pathway but it is today one among several. Particularly striking is the *increasing share of university graduates* among labour market entrants. Currently, the number of young people entering higher education institutions is almost as high as those starting a vocational training in the traditional dual system. One of the drivers of this development is the introduction of so called “dual studies”, a hybrid form of academic study with classical vocational training. Students spend roughly half of their time in higher education institutions acquiring theoretical and abstract knowledge, the remaining they spend in a firm acquiring practical, more firm-specific, knowledge. By 2007, the number of students was for the first time higher than the number of classical apprentices (Statistisches Bundesamt 2014). Yet, the pluralization of pathways into the labour market goes beyond the transformation of a higher education degree into an important standard pathway into the labour

market. The deregulation of the German labour market in the last 20 years – the liberalization of part-time employment, temporary agency work and marginal employment – has paved the way for a third pathway, namely precarious employment (for a more in-depth account of the labour market reforms in Germany see Holst/Dörre 2013). Before turning to the three pathways *vocational training*, *higher education* and *precarious employment*, we will take a look at the polarization of risks accompanying the pluralization of pathways.

### **1.3. Young workers' labor market positions: polarization of risks**

In the discussion of vocational training, higher education and precarious employment as institutionalized pathways of young workers into the German labour market, the polarization of risks resulting from the processes underlying the pluralization of pathways has become obvious. Besides considerable differences in wages between higher education graduates, skilled workers and unskilled workers in precarious employment, risks of unemployment and non-standard employment differ remarkably.

Whereas in most European countries *youth unemployment* is not, for the most part, contingent on their level of occupational qualification and therefore mainly attributed to their lack of professional experience, in Germany there is a strong connection between youth unemployment and level of occupational qualification (DIW 2012, p. 9f.). Figure 3 shows the association between these two indicators: The higher the level of education attained the lower the probability of unemployment, leaving those with no occupational qualification with the highest vulnerability to unemployment – especially in times of a high labor demand as in 2013 where the unemployment rate of adolescents without vocational training was nearly twice as high as the rate of those with a higher level of education attained. In addition, the numbers show that those with higher levels of education benefitted more from the general decrease in youth unemployment between 2005 and 2013.

Figure 3 – Youth unemployment rates by level of education attained <sup>2</sup> (in percent)

Source: Eurostat

Both vocational training and a higher education degree are thus associated with lower rates of unemployment than the third standard pathway of Youth into the labour market, namely as unskilled labour.

A second important indicator of the position of an individual in the labour market is the *employment status*. It has already been mentioned that in spite of the decrease in youth unemployment, the actual number of employed adolescents has decreased slightly as well. However, parallel to the decrease in unemployment the share of young workers in non-standard employment<sup>3</sup> grew. The question of non-standard employment touches on the quality and stability of the actual employment for those adolescents concerned, e.g. the greater vulnerability to unemployment in times of crisis. But it also affects the relationship between employees and unions as non-standardized employment makes it difficult for

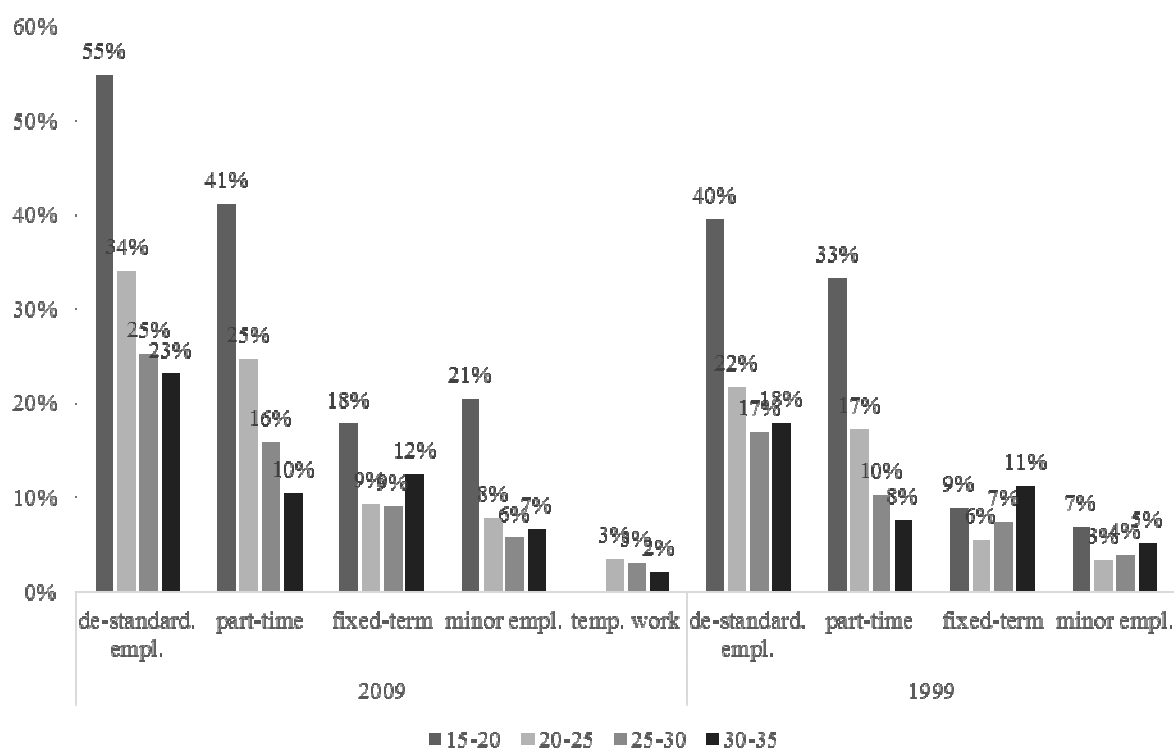
<sup>2</sup> The highest level of education attained is measured along the common categorization of the International Standard Classification of Education ISCED 2011. The different levels are composed in the following manner, low: 0-2 pre-primary, primary and lower secondary education, middle: 3-4 upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary, higher: 5-8 short-cycle tertiary, bachelor, master and doctor or their respected equivalents.

<sup>3</sup> Non-standard employment comprises employment which differ from the central characteristics of the standard employment relationship (SER): full-time and permanent employment. Part-time, minor, fixed-term and temporary employment account for de-standardized employment.



employees to see a long-term prospect in their given workplace and therefore possible benefits from commitment to the union. Figure 4 details the rising share of de-standardized employment among adolescents. Initially, non-standard employment is much more pronounced in younger cohorts – there is a clear linear association between age and nearly all subtypes of non-standard employment. Hence, employees aged 15 to 20 years work almost twice as often in non-standard working conditions than those aged above 30.

Figure 4 – Employment status by different age groups (in percent)



Source: Mikrozensus, quoted from Wingerter (Statistisches Bundesamt 2011)

The second observation based on the illustrated data is the increase in de-standardized employment in all cohorts over the given timeframe. De-standardized work, and the difficulties it brings about for the concerned employees, are an integral part of today’s labor market in Germany and especially in the first phase of the working life.

## 1.4. Three Institutionalized Pathways: vocational training, higher education and precarious employment

This section summarizes the three most relevant institutionalized pathways between the educational system and the labour market, including the opportunities and risks associated with each of them. As we will see further down, each of the pathways entails distinct opportunities and challenges for trade unions' attempts to organize young workers.

### *Pathway I: vocational training*

One of the most striking characteristics of *vocational training* as a pathway between the educational system and the labour market is the early integration of apprentices into the firm's workforce. Already from day one of the training, apprentices are regularly present in the employing firm. Despite increasing discontinuities in the direct post-training period, the vocational training as a pathway into the labour market is still associated with relative employment stability and a decent wage. Statistically, an apprenticeship in the long run still leads to permanent employment and wages well above the social minimum. Notable exceptions can be found in the care sector and parts of the retail business; both dominated by female workers. Here, vocational training does not represent a secure protection against low wages. In general, temporary contracts and even shorter periods of unemployment have become more regular components of this pathways as labour market regulation increases employer freedom to use non-standardized forms of employment and corporate strategies are changing. Yet, in most occupations, non-standard employment and thus precariousness are only transient phenomena for skilled workers. In addition, particularly in large firms, skilled workers possess some opportunities for promotion into supervisory jobs. Note that workers might subjectively interpret the proliferation of non-standard employment very differently from the ways suggested by aggregate numbers. The fact that precariousness is only a transient phenomenon for the vast majority of skilled workers does not imply that a temporary contract is not associated with insecurity and uncertainty for the individual. On the contrary, it is the very possibility of unemployment which is introduced into this pathway by firms' frequent use of temporary contracts apparently which shapes young workers interests.

Currently, about 50 percent of German school leavers start an apprenticeship within the dual system. The dual system covers the entire economy; yet, interesting differences exist concerning both gender and school degrees. To date, male apprentices can be predominantly found in typical male occupations, including industry, trade and craft. About 75 percent of these received their

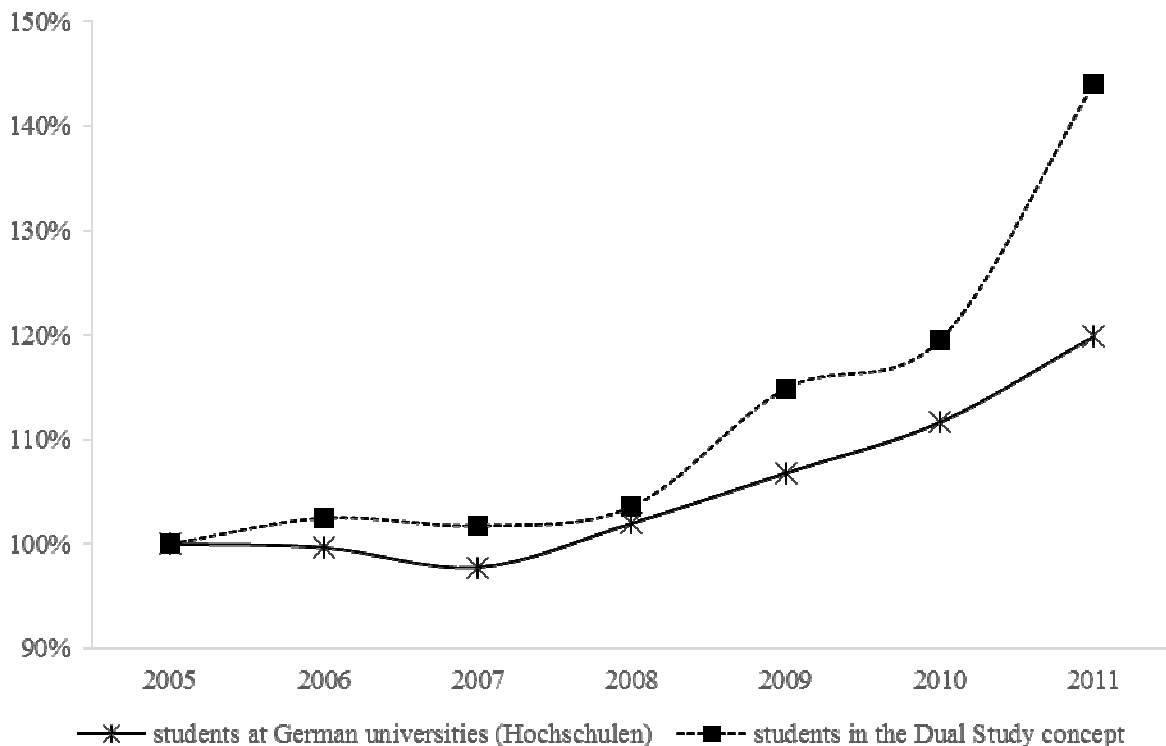
training in manufacturing, and only around 20 percent did their training in services. The preferred occupations include car mechanic (*Kraftfahrzeugmechatroniker*), industrial mechanic (*Industriemechaniker*) and merchant (*Einzelhandelskaufmann*). Female preferred occupations include saleswoman (*Verkäuferin*), merchants (*Einzelhandelskauffrau*) and office clerks (*Bürokauffrau*) (BMBF 2014: 25ff.). The second significant difference concerns the school degrees of the apprentices. Concerning school degrees, an increase of apprentices with final secondary-school examinations can be observed. This highly qualified segment is mostly absorbed by the various occupations within the finance sector, in particular banks and insurance (Steinmann 2000: 49).

#### *Pathway II: Higher Education*

In the last two decades, a higher education degree has gained significant importance as a pathway for young Germans into the German labour market. Due to a steep increase in university enrollment, today the number of school leavers entering a higher education institution has surpassed those starting a vocational training in the traditional dual system. Labour market entrants choosing this pathway are generally older than someone in an apprenticeship as their training is – with the notable exception of dual study programs – not employer-related and takes place in a higher education institution. The growing importance of higher education degrees in the German labour market is a consequence of shifts on the supply and demand side of labour. Particularly in the export-oriented manufacturing sector, firms increasingly recruit highly qualified workers such as engineers and accountants while production jobs are rationalized and in some case even relocated to low-wage countries in Middle and Eastern European countries. At least to some degree, firms' growing demand for higher education degrees reflects shifts in the positioning of German locations in global production networks and in the global economy in general. School leavers tend to choose higher education institutions over the classical training as both a reflection of changing labour market conditions and the introduction of new higher education programs including hybrid types of dual studies. Despite significant differences between professional areas, a higher education degree is generally associated with low unemployment risks, above-average wages and opportunities for occupational promotion. Similarly to the previous pathway, vocational training, higher education as an institutionalized pathway into the labour market is not an absolute safeguard against unemployment or non-standard employment; yet, periods of precariousness or unemployment are frequently only transitory.

In addition to the classical programs at universities, there are different dual study concepts in Germany, combining academic studies at a higher education institution with practical phases at a specific employer. The dual study concept has become quite popular in Germany and the number of students is growing faster than the numbers in classical academic studies at higher education institutions. The following chart visualizes this impressive development in the last decade:

Figure 5 – increase of number of students in the Dual Study concept and at German universities in general (2005=100)



Sources: Statistisches Bundesamt, AusbildungPlus

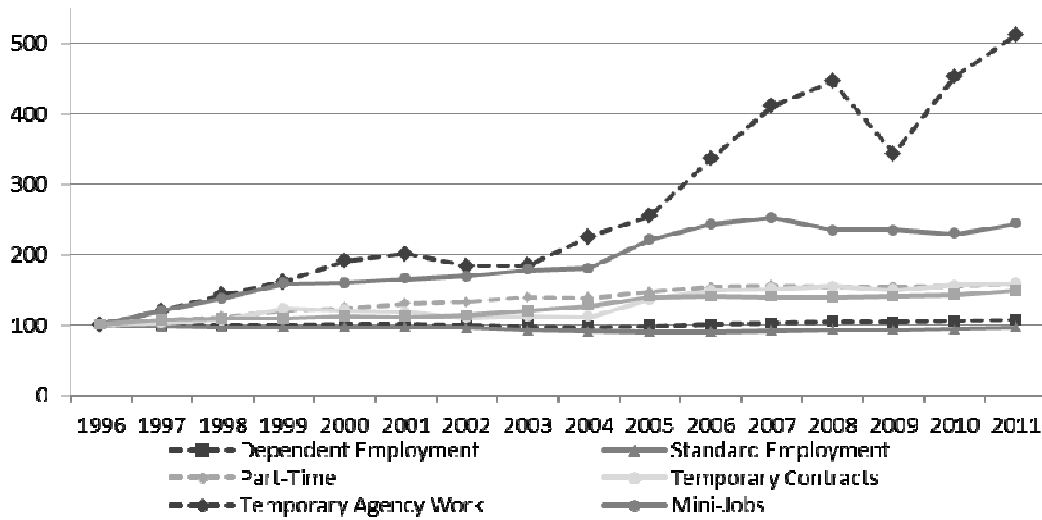
The origin of the dual study concept dates back to the 1970s. At this time the number of high-school graduates increased greatly and there were more applicants for a place at university. At the same moment companies wanted to become more attractive to these graduates. Baden-Württemberg was the first German Federal Land that began establishing this system. In October 1974 the first pilot project started with approximately 160 students and 50 companies in Stuttgart and Mannheim. The demand for a place was high so therefore the number of concepts was augmented. At present, 64.358 persons are enrolled in dual study programs –

98% of them at universities of applied sciences or universities of cooperative education (Berufsakademie).

*Pathway III: Precarious Employment*

The newest of the pathways of young workers into the German labour market discussed here can be labeled precarious employment. Though studies show that the share of unskilled workers is relatively stable in the German labour market in general and in manufacturing firms in particular, shifts in labour market regulation and in business strategy result in a consolidation of a new institutionalized pathway. In the past, unskilled labour enjoyed at least some benefits normally ascribed to the classical pathway of vocational training. Unskilled workers were used for more or less repetitive tasks and frequently received lower wages; yet, as labour market regulation limited the use of non-standardized employment and certain legal norms such as dismissal protection were universal, employment security was relatively high even in this segment of the labour market. However, this has changed significantly with the labour market reforms beginning in the 1980s and new corporate strategies. Today, precarious employment constitutes a discrete pathway with specific characteristics such as a high risk of unemployment and low wages. Note that precarious employment as a pathway for young workers into the labour market differs remarkably from the two pathways discussed previously. While vocational training and higher education, in most cases, result in what can be called a completed transition, i.e. the permanent integration into stable employment, the pathway named precarious employment is, to a certain extent, permanently transient. As a consequence, young workers in this pathway are physically present *in the employing firm but not long-term integrated in its workforce*.

Figure 6 – Development of non-standard employment since the mid-1990s



Not surprisingly, research has shown that not all groups are equally affected by the growth of destandardized employment. The factors associated with an increased risk of non-standard employment are the “usual suspects”: education, gender and migration. The higher the education of a person the lower her or his risk of having to accept a non-standardized employment contract (with the notable exception of the academic workforce). Equally overrepresented among holders of non-standard jobs are women (specifically part-time) and workers with a migrational background. In addition, age is an important factor as well. Young workers are highly overrepresented among those holding part-time contracts or working within temporary agency work. As for many young workers, a destandardized employment contract constitutes a transition period between vocational training and permanent employment, so these numbers need to be interpreted with care. Yet, we believe that there are good reasons to identify a third pathway into the labour market, which is precarious employment. Particular for those without complete vocational training, precarious employment such as short-term contracts or temporary agency work constitutes the primary pathway into the labour market. Contrasting with the two previously identified pathways, *vocational training* and *higher education degree*, *precarious employment* denotes a passage with a more or less uncertain end. Whilst most forms of vocational training as well as any higher education degrees still predominantly lead to a more or less stable participation in the labour market, precarious employment often forms a permanently transient position between unemployment and a salaried employment..

## **2. The German Institutional Framework for Interest Representation**

International comparison of national systems of the representation of workers' interests generally point to one peculiarity of the German model, namely the dual system of interest representation. By law, the articulation and representation of workers' interests is characterized by the co-existence of two formally independent arenas: the arena of firm-level interest representation through works councils and the arena of industry-wide collective bargaining in which trade unions represent workers' interests (Jacobi et al. 1998, Schmidt/Trinczek 1999). On the functional level, an elaborate division of work exists between the two arenas. Within collective bargaining, trade unions act on behalf of the workers and negotiate the basic parameters of employers' purchase of labour, including its price (wage) and working time. The law exclusively assigns the right to participate in collective bargaining to trade unions. Works councils are not allowed to sign collective agreements setting wages or defining the basic terms of the exchange with employers. Within the second arena, the firm, works councils negotiate the concrete terms on the utilization of labour. Unions have no direct access to the negotiations on work organization.

The German institutional framework of interest representation (*Betriebsverfassungsgesetz*) endows works councils with significant resources and codetermination, consultation and information rights. Particularly in large firms from the manufacturing sector and certain services such as banking and telecommunications, works councils enjoy high legitimacy both by workforces and management. It is important to note that formally both arenas are fully independent units. Works councils are, by law, obliged to act in the interest of the firm and its workforce, and are bodies fully independent from trade unions. Particularly in large firms, unions such as the IG Metall or the service union ver.di maintain independent networks of workplace representatives, the so called *Vertrauensleute*. The union workplace representatives serve as a link and spokesperson between the union members in the company and the union's full-time personnel. As they are on-site contact persons, their focus lies on the employees' interests and problems concerning their workplace. However, in practice, the union workplace representatives often constitute an extension of the unionized works councils as the latter are highly influential within the local

unions. Despite the legal independency, works councils and trade unions are, particularly in the core sectors of the German economy, practically highly interdependent units. Unionized works councils represent the unions' most prominent representatives on firm-level and often enjoy a remarkable influence on intra-union decision making as well (Schmidt/Trinczek 1999).

Concerning the representation of young workers, the institutional framework of interest representation (*Betriebsverfassungsgesetz*) entails an interesting and consequential peculiarity, namely the youth and apprentice committee (*Jugend- und Auszubildendenvertretung*). In firms with young workers under the age of 18 or apprentices under the age of 25, works councils are entitled to establish a youth and apprentices committee whose foremost object is to represent the interests of young workers both towards the works councils as the institutionalized representation of the entire workforce and the management. As a consequence, in firms in which an institutionalized works council exists, a distinct organization for the representation of young workers is set up. As we shall see later, this institutional support for the representation of young workers' interests was – and still is – an important cornerstone of young workers' interest representation. In addition, the institutionalization of a youth and apprentices committee has impacted the organizational structures of German unions as well. Both the IG Metall and ver.di have established a network of local union representatives (*JugendsekretärInnen*) supporting the youth and apprentices committees.

The institutional framework of interest representation, the co-existence of two autonomous arenas, has influenced union recruitment of new members as well. Reflecting the practical interdependencies, unionized works councils have traditionally taken over the responsibility to recruit new members for the unions. This holds particularly true for larger firms with high unionization and influential works councils such as in large parts of the German manufacturing sector. By recruiting new members, works councils maintained high unionization levels in the workforce and therefore contributed to the reproduction of their own power base.

However, in the last decade, German unions have started to experiment with new organizational strategies and practices (Brinkmann et al. 2008). Facing a sharp decline in membership and the erosion of political influence, unions such as the IG Metall and ver.di began to import successful strategies and practices from union organizations from other countries, including bottom-up organizing approaches developed in the US. The ongoing structural change of the German economy – globalization, tertiarization and destandardization – resulted in

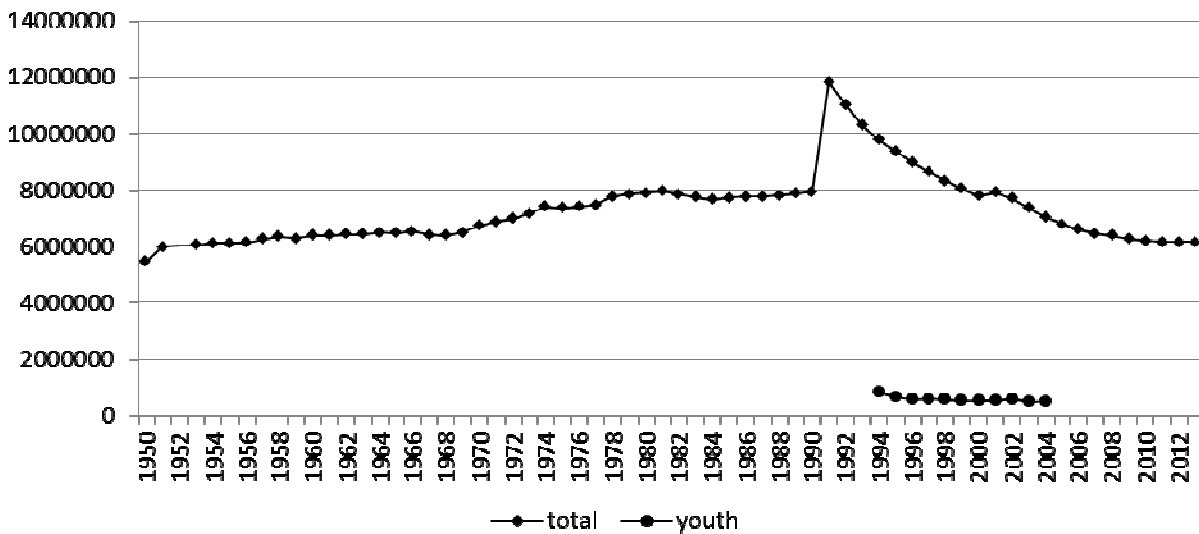


shrinking union strongholds and the emergence of new industries and services without established union structures. As these new segments are dominated by small and medium firms, often populated either by highly qualified workers or unskilled labour, unions are in need to revise their traditional approaches and to establish new representation strategies to accommodate the rapid recomposition of the German workforce.

### 3. German Trade Unions and Young Workers: statistical evidence

The question of the development of union membership of the youth has to be seen in the context of the general trend regarding unionization in Germany. The decrease of unionization is a well-documented trend particularly in the last three decades, where union density dropped roughly by 15 percent from nearly 39 to 24 percent in the period between 1980 and 2010 (Schnabel 2013, p. 257). Figure 6 shows this general trend on the basis of membership figures of the DGB. The count of union members stagnated at about 7.9 mill. people in the 1980s and has been decreasing ever since – apart from the boost in union membership due to German reunification and the absorption of union members of the former GDR by unions organized in the DGB in 1990 – to today's count of about 6,1 mill. union members. The membership figures of the DGB also inform on the count of young union members, even though data on the development of the membership of this age group are limited to a relatively short time frame from 1994 to 2004. However, the general trend can also be seen in this specific age group where the count of young union members decreased within ten years from about 810,000 to 500,000.

Figure 6 – Members of DGB-unions (total numbers)

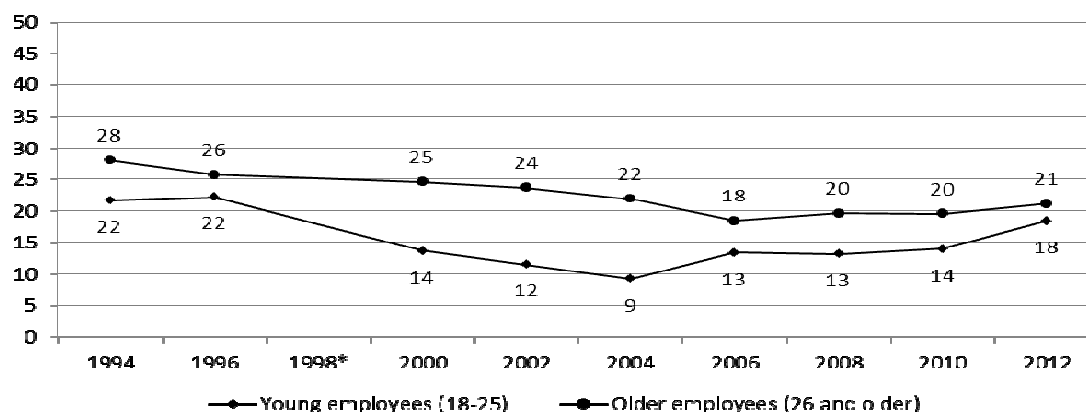


Source: DGB-Mitgliederstatistik

Despite the high level of documentation in regards to the general trend of unionization, specific studies on the development of union membership of the youth are scarce apart from the basic finding that union density is lower in younger age groups (Schnabel 2007, p. 122ff.). In order to study the development of youth union membership, data from the German ALLBUS – a longitudinal survey which is reiterated every second year – will be used.

Figure 7 shows the development of union membership among young and other employees. Two basic observations can be deduced from those illustrated data. Firstly, unionization of young employees lies consistently below that of other employees. Secondly, and more interesting for our purpose, youth unionization reveals an interesting development over time. From the mid-1990s, following the short increase in unionization after reunification, union density of young workers declined for more than a decade to a post-war minimum of 9 percent in 2004. This relatively steep reduction in unionization among young workers in Germany was in line with the general development of union density in the country, albeit a bit more dramatically. In the last 10 years however, German unions have apparently facilitated some degree of turnaround as unionization among young workers is increasing again. Our own calculations show that union density has more than doubled in the last decade. This development is even more striking as it is partially decoupled from the general trend in union density. Overall union density ceased to decline but no parallel increase in the union membership of the German population can be detected. This positive trend suggests that German unions in the most recent past have organized young workers more successfully than in the past. We will come back to this point in our analysis of the IG Metall's representation efforts and strategies below.

Figure 7 – Development of union membership among young and other employees (percentages)



Source: ALLBUS, own calculations

In addition to the general development of union density among young workers, Table 2 provides further information on the socio-demographic structure of the unionized young workforce. In every subgroup the share of union members within the workforce develops according to the above outlined pattern alongside the stronger amplitudes in the pattern within the group of young employees. Hence, contrary to some prevailing myths, there appears to be no group which shows explicit hostility towards trade unions in general and union membership in particular.

Table 2 – Development of union membership among young and older employees (percentages)

	1994		2004		2012	
	Young Empl.	Other Empl.	Young Empl.	Other Empl.	Young Empl.	Other Empl.
Overall	21.6	28.0	9.2	21.9	18.4	21.1
Western Germany	20.3	25.4	9.7	22.3	19.0	22.0
Eastern Germany	29.3	39.5	5.4	19.2	17.0	17.3
Male	26.2	31.1	12.7	25.5	28.4	26.2
Female	14.6	22.9	4.3	17.0	7.5	15.1
Blue collar	29.1	34.6	14.0	28.7	24.1	25.5
White collar	11.0	22.0	5.4	15.0	11.5	16.5
Civil servants	*	38.1	*	40.4	*	38.5

\* number of cases too small

Source: ALLBUS, own calculations

The table shows that unionized young workers do not differ greatly from the social composition of the other employees – hardly any significant effect of gender (male employees are more likely to be organized), region (employees in Western Germany are more likely to be organized) as well as by employment status (blue collar workers and civil servants are more likely to be organized) can be observed. In other words, German unions have difficulties organizing women, East Germans and white collar workers, but they apparently do not have additional problems with young workers along these categories.

#### **4. German Unions and Young Workers: three case studies of innovative representation practices and organizing activities**

This section contains three case studies in which IG Metall's efforts to come to terms with the pluralization of young workers' pathways into the labour market and the resulting polarization of risks are scrutinized. Before turning to the innovative practices of IG Metall, particularly in relation to the new *higher education* and *precarious employment* pathways, we will briefly describe the union's standard approach to young workers reflecting both the labour market conditions of Germany's post-war economy and the country's institutional framework for interest representation. From the union's perspective, biologically young workers seem to be 'identical' to apprentices. IG Metall's efforts at representing the interests of young workers relied predominantly on the institutionalized youth and apprentices committees (*Jugend- und Auszubildendenvertretung*) and on the capacities of the union's youth secretaries (*Jugendsekretäre*) which in turn concentrated their efforts on supporting the aforementioned committees. It is worth noting that what retrospectively appeared to be a narrow focus – the reduction of the category 'youth' to the status of an apprentice – reflected the particular labour market conditions up to the mid-1980s and the power resources allocated by the institutional framework of interest representation. More than 80 percent of young Germans entered the labour market through the vocational training pathway. The dominant position of the dual system of occupational education in terms of young workers' labour market entries influenced young peoples' first contact with trade unions: i.e. it was in their apprenticeship firm that the vast majority of young workers had their first contact with the IG Metall. As unionized works councils and unionized youth and apprentices committees were willing to recruit apprentices as new members, the union did not need parallel structures to reproduce its power base among young workers.

Yet, as the observations above demonstrate, the congruence of the labour market conditions and the institutional framework of interest representation had been dissolving since the 1980s. The pluralization of pathways connecting the educational system and the labour market resulted in a growing flow of biologically young workers entering the German labour market through ways

other than vocational training in the dual system. In the words of a union representative responsible for organizing young workers:

*“Something is changing in our firms, particularly in large firms. There are more people entering the firms which we, in the past, did not have to deal with but which we want to meet and represent”.*

The pluralization of pathways between the educational system and the labour market has consequences for the representation practices as well. Both alternative pathways (higher education and precarious employment) do not integrate young workers in a firm’s workforce in ways similar to that of traditional vocational training. Those entering the labour market after pursuing a higher education degree are frequently significantly older than a classical apprentice, often older than 25 and therefore formally fall out of the scope of the youth and apprentice committees, whilst those caught in precarious employment are only integrated in a fragile way into a specific firm and its workforce. As research has demonstrated, precarious employment results in a ‘stable-instable’ position (Holst/Dörre 2013). As a consequence of this, the institutionalization of youth and apprentice committees in firms with works councils does not necessarily constitute a power resource concerning groups of biologically young workers pursuing pathways other than classical vocational training.

However, German unions are not passive observers of the changes in the labour market and the shifts in corporate strategies. The sharp increase in union density among young workers since 2004 can be interpreted as a consequence of a strategic reorientation of the IG Metall. This reorientation is also reflected in the following words from the union representative quoted above:

*“Typical for the IG Metall is a strong focus on employed young workers under 35, those in apprenticeships or in dual study programs or in internships. Well, these areas – study programs and highly skilled people which increasingly flow into the firms – they have been the focus of the IG Metall for about 10 years now. Not country-wide but in single regions or localities. It is only in the last two, three or four years that these groups have enjoyed country-wide recognition”.*

This statement shows that the union and its leadership have reflected on the pluralization of pathways between the educational system and the labour market and its consequences for the union and interest representation on firm level. In the following sections, we will analyze IG Metall’s attempts to cope with the pluralization of young workers’ pathways by modifying their representation strategies and extending their category of young workers towards new, previously unaddressed, groups. We will do so by discussing three case studies, each

representing an innovative approach to one of the three pathways outlined above, but at the same time displaying the challenges and limitations of such distinct approaches as well.

The first case study analyzes an innovative example of utilizing the institutional power resources for the representation and organization of young workers in the *vocational training* pathway. The firm under scrutiny is a traditional production company in the German automotive sector, where vocational training still constitutes the primary pathway of young workers into the firm. Here, works councils and youth and apprentice delegates report that young workers are increasingly difficult to organize. Yet, these difficulties can be overcome due to the high union density among the total workforce (union membership is part of organizational normality), the close and trustful cooperation of works councils and the youth and apprentice committee constituents, and the intensive external support of the local trade union. The limitations of this approach however, concern the specific definition of the term ‘youth’. The workplace representatives concentrate their representation work on apprentices and their interests while students and young temporary agency workers are not included in youth-related activities.

The second case study looks at the higher education pathway. In several organizing projects, the IG Metall aims to organize students before they enter the firm as young workers. As a consequence, the union has to enter a new arena, namely the university. Organizing students has shown some success in recent years but the union’s concentration on the utility of membership in future employment situations limits its recruitment potential in this arena. To scrutinize the firm-level effects of the IG Metall’s discovery of students as potential union members, we have conducted a small case study at another traditional production site within the manufacturing sector. In this firm, vocational training has already lost its status as the primary entry point for young workers. For some years, dual students outnumbered apprentices in the new recruits group. Both the works councils and the youth and apprentice committee had to thus align their representation practices to the changing composition of the youth workforce. Increasing union density among dual students indicates that this has been achieved with some success. The most important factor for this success seems to be the institutional segmentation of young workers’ interest representation. The committee includes a student representative who is formally responsible for the representation of students while the other members should represent those of the classical apprentices. Note that this form of integration is still fragile as it is dependent on individual persons and union density among young white-collar



workers is still significantly lower than among young blue-collar workers. Further, the cultural differences between the two major groups addressed by the youth and apprentice committee exacerbate interest representation.

The third case study concentrates on the *precarious employment* pathway. Similar to the first case, the firm is a production site in the automotive sector, yet it is dominated by unskilled labour entering the firm through various forms of non-standard employment. In recent years, the IG Metall has proven itself to be an innovative player and has succeeded in improving pay and working conditions within this firm. Yet, even though the majority of the workforce can be classified by age as ‘young’, the union approach did not carry the label ‘youth’ nor were any youth-related instruments utilized. The precarious workers were primarily addressed as ‘temps’, due to their employment status and not as young workers. The third case study thus reveals the boundaries of the union’s redefinition of its youth concept. From the viewpoint of organizational sociology, attempts to integrate the higher education pathway into the union’s concept of ‘youth’ represents the smallest possible modification to the standard approach rather than some form of radical innovation.

#### **4.1. Interest Representation and Organizing in the Pathway ‘Vocational Training’: innovative and successful, but narrow**

The first section – a firm-level case study of a German OEM’s traditional production site for vehicles and components – focuses on the classical pathway between the educational system and the labour market; namely a vocational training within the dual system. Annually, more than 100 school leavers start their apprenticeship within this firm. Vocational training constitutes the primary entry point into the firm’s workforce which is dominated by skilled workers (*Facharbeiter*). In addition, the firm utilizes temporary agency workers, and whilst the works council attempt to transfer some of these into regular employment, the majority of them remain on the instable peripheries of the workforce. For some years, a smaller number of dual students were recruited as well. Yet, the majority of young workers belong to the group of apprentices. Both the works councils and the local union bargain for infinite contracts for all apprentices after completing their three-year training. However, management refuses to recruit all apprentices. Currently, around 90 percent of the firm’s apprentices are hired on a permanent basis after the training period, the remaining 10 percent are presented with a temporary contract.

The firm under scrutiny qualifies as a successful case of both organizing and interest representation of apprentices. The fundamentals of this success lie in the innovative linking of the youth and apprentice committee within the institutionalized works council. Union density among the apprentices is higher than 85 percent, and thus well above the unionization rate in the total workforce. In general, apprentices are recruited in their first weeks following their entrance into the firm. The works council, the youth and apprentice committee and the local youth representative of the IG Metall introduce themselves and their work in an introductory meeting. According to our interviewees, the majority of new apprentices join the union during this introductory meeting. Those who were hesitant or actively refuse to join were to be contacted by the youth and apprentice committee in the following weeks. Though not representative, our interviews with apprentices suggest that three topics feature prominently on their agendas: income, transition into permanent employment (after completing the apprenticeship) and the quality and content of training. A first-year apprentice articulates her interests in the following way:

*“Of course, more money. Then, yes, [...] I think working time is okay, but now I simply say shorter working time while receiving the same salary so to speak [...] yes and that this production site will be kept in the future, because there are discussions” (1st-year apprentice).*

All our interviewees state that the local youth and apprentice committee represent their interests and acts in their name. Yet, due to the limited number of interviews these findings need to be interpreted with caution. It seems unlikely that those individuals that are highly critical of their workplace representatives would have been selected as interview partners.

*Thesis 1: The case study demonstrates that within the classical pathway of vocational training the institutionalization of youth and apprentice committees (Jugend- und Auszubildendenvertretung) through the German institutional framework of interest representation constitutes a powerful institutional support for German unions' attempts to organize young workers.*

Our analysis shows, that the youth and apprentice committee is considered to be an integral part of the institutionalized interest representation at the firm-level. Traditionally, the chairman of the committee is on leave from work and becomes a member of the works council when he/ she reaches the age limit for working in the committee (25 years). The fact that the chairman is on leave from his regular

work (this only refers to the post-training period) is the result of an older package deal between the local works council and the local management. The consequences of this are rather far-reaching. Firstly, the youth and apprentice committee is equipped with significant additional resources as due to their leave from regular work duties, the chairman is able to collect and process information on future work reorganization and at the same time to stay in close contact with the apprentices. Therefore, the needs and interests of apprentices are channeled into the works council and into the discussions on ongoing restructuring processes. Secondly, the job as a chairman of the youth and apprentice committee represents in some way an informal training for future works councils; as already in the early years of their careers, the members of youth and apprentice committee (in general) and its chairman in particular are socialized into the rights and duties of a workforce representative. Not surprisingly, both works councils and the members of the youth and apprentice committee praise the close co-operation as being beneficial for both sides.

Additional conditions of the youth and apprentice committee's success in representing apprentices' interests encompass the intense support of the union youth representative and the respectful relationship to the local management. Firstly, the local IG Metall supports the work of the youth and apprentice committee with informational and organizational resources. The committee's members are offered a variety of seminars and workshops, each focusing on important topics for their representation practice including the legal foundations, the content and structure of vocational training and the implications of techno-organizational restructuring. The members of the youth and apprentice committee we interviewed in this case study all considered the seminars highly relevant for both their practices as workplace representatives and their everyday experience as skilled workers in production. Secondly, the respectful relationship between the local management and the youth and apprentice committee is a direct consequence of the relationship between the works council and the local management. As the youth and apprentice committee, in practice, represents an extension of the works council into the segment of young workers, the traditional cooperative bargaining and negotiation culture includes the committee as well.

Before turning to the limitations of the impressive success of the inclusion of young workers into the firm-level representation of workers' interests, a few supporting factors should be mentioned, particularly the positive economic situation of the plant and German OEM's in general and the long-established pro-union culture of the firm. Firstly, throughout the last five years, production volume has been on a stable high level, reflecting the corporation's success on

export markets. In a way, the site under scrutiny has thus benefitted from the economic performance of the German export-driven economy which in turn benefits significantly from the imbalances in the European economy. Of course, the positive economic climate and outlook influence the opportunities of works councils and young workers' workplace representative to negotiate improvements with local management. Secondly, union membership seems to be an integral part of normality among the workforce dominated by skilled workers. Contrary to other areas within the corporation, no relevant radical organized opposition to the works council exists in the firm under scrutiny. Both the works council and the IG Metall are considered relevant players in the sphere of work and in local politics. Against the backdrop of this pro-union culture, organizing young workers does not seem to be a particularly arduous task.

*Thesis 2: However, the case reveals as well that the institutionalization of a youth and apprentice committee in the legal framework of interest representation is not only a power resource for organizing young workers. It also contains the seeds of the narrowing of the category 'youth' to the apprenticeship as an employment status.*

The strong position of the institutionalized interest representation of young workers – the youth and apprentice committee and the local IG Metall – seem to come with a certain price, namely the narrow focus on apprentices. Interest representation of young workers concentrates strikingly on the large group of apprentices and therefore, to use the terminology of the report, on the pathway of vocational training. However, there are other workers in the plant which, according to an age criterion, have to be considered as young (under 27 years). The local union youth representative is aware of the limitations to this narrow approach – obviously without being able or willing to change it at present:

*“In the end, when we talk about the IG Metall youth, we pretend a little, because as soon as the apprentices have completed their apprenticeship, they drop away for us and we are unable to focus on youth topics, youth mobilization or on topics which could be interesting to youth to establish a collective bargaining or societal movement. Here, we are really, really weak. Other countries have the edge over us, because for them only this possibility exists” (local union youth representative).*

Already, for a number of years, the firm has recruited a small number of dual students to become the future middle management. Despite their biological youth, these young workers are not addressed as young workers, neither by the young and apprentice committee nor by the local union's youth representative. In the

words of a works council and former chairman of the youth and apprentice committee: *“Concerning the dual students we, that is the committee and the local union, have not responded quick enough”*. So far the workplace delegates have no dedicated approach to this growing group of students. Our interviewees unanimously report that the non-inclusion of this group of students in the representation work of the youth and apprentice committee is mirrored in the apathy of this group towards interest representation in general and union membership in particular. As several interviewees reported: *“They see themselves as future managers, and that’s why they don’t want to get involved with the union.”* Whether a more active approach towards this group of young workers would change their attitudes has remains an open question. Yet, the concentration of institutionalized youth representation on the group of apprentices does not promote the union’s case. This holds true for the second group of biologically young workers which enter the firm not as apprentices, but as young temporary agency workers. Similarly to the students, these individuals are not addressed as part of the young segment of the workforce but as temporary agency workers.

#### **4.2. Interest Representation and Organizing in the Pathway ‘Higher Education’: extending ‘youth’ and the emergence of a new arena**

In the following paragraphs, we will examine IG Metall’s attempts to establish itself as a relevant player in the second pathway into the labor market – that is higher education. Unlike the traditional approach towards apprentices, organizing students and representing their interests vis-à-vis their employers was not a primary activity of the union. However, notable increases in the share of highly educated workers into the workforce over the last decade have fostered union initiatives to extend its realm into this group of young workers. Drawing on a case study of projects concerning student recruitment and interest representation by IG Metall, the union’s efforts to establish sustainable structures for the organization of students will be reviewed. As we will see later in this work, the inclusion of students into the group of workers addressed as ‘young’ is accompanied by a number of challenges. Firstly, the organizational and representational efforts aimed at students are inevitably entering a new arena somewhat distant from the union’s core competencies, namely the university. The relocation of activities into a field which is both temporally and functionally distant from the future work life of the students constitutes a not insignificant challenge. Secondly, the inclusion of highly educated students alongside the

traditional clientele of apprentices produces tension and produces segmentation in the young workforce which impact union strategies as well.

As expressed in those introductory statements from the union representative, the decision within IG Metall to co-ordinate and increase its efforts to organize students and to represent their interests stems directly from the pluralization of pathways between the educational system and the labour market. Increasing numbers of young workers entered the firm from a higher education institution bypassing classical vocational training. As a consequence, unions were confronted with growing numbers of young workers who had not been socialized into the workplace and were therefore not explicitly affected by the institutional structures of young worker's workplace representation. The sharp decrease in union density to a post-war minimum of 9 percent in 2004 signifies a growing 'representation gap'. Caught in this, previously successful, concentration on apprentices, the IG Metall's youth approach was slowly desynchronized with labour market realities (i.e. the pluralization of pathways). The insight into a growing 'representation gap' was reinforced by indications of an ageing of the unions' membership. The low union density among young workers was interpreted as a severe threat to the union's future power base. Using scenario techniques, the leadership attempted to predict the future development of union density in its core areas. Thus, the extension of the category 'youth' and the inclusion of students into the group of young workers addressed by youth-related union strategies can be interpreted as a form of investment; an investment into the future capabilities of the IG Metall.

*Thesis 3: By extending its activities to students, the union entered a new arena relatively distant from its workplace-related core activities. As a consequence, the union will need great staying power before activities in this new arena will translate into membership gains. The majority of organizing attempts were to be based on the student's future interests as workers, not on their immediate interests as students.*

The starting point of attempts to extend the activities into the 'higher education' pathway date back to the 1990s and early 2000s. The first activities were initiated at the local level, either by union activists who started single union-related projects in universities or by individual works councils who saw the membership potential of the growing number of students working part-time. Over the last decade, numerous small projects and local initiatives were started aiming at making unions visible on the campus and to inform students about its purpose and what unions have to offer for students. However, these initiatives were only rarely supported by significant resources and therefore highly dependent on individual engagement. Yet, union activities geared towards students gained

significant momentum in the latter years. IG Metall then launched a project with the participation of all its regional districts aiming at establishing region-wide structures for addressing, involving and representing students and at streamlining all previous union activities at universities. Therefore, the project was equipped with resources in terms of personnel and materials which also shows the increasing significance placed on students in the union by the organization. Every regional district of IG Metall was provided with these resources to build and to maintain sustainable structures for union-student-communication. To structure these regional efforts, a central, co-ordinating office was installed to organize regular exchange of positive experiences and to support the regional work. Currently this project is still running but is due to close soon raising the question about the transformation of the project-type structures into the regular work of union representatives.

One important element of the organizing efforts of IG Metall are the campus information offices (*Hochschulinformationsbüros*) established in co-operation with other trade unions. The aim of these offices is to establish the union as a reliable partner for the students and to address their various needs. Thus, the campus information offices supply a wide range of consulting offers in terms of labour and social law, the transition from studying to entering the labour market as well as study-related issues like the financing of studies, scholarships and internships. A short survey into the practice of these campus information offices reveals that their level of activity and organizational success differ remarkably. While some offices became institutionalized spaces for a productive exchange between union and academia others remain mostly inactive. Yet, what is important for our purpose is the fact that by establishing campus offices and attempting to organize students before they join a firm the IG Metall enters a totally new arena, the higher education field. The resulting challenges are outlined by a local union representative:

*“The goal of the work with students is simply, taking the same systematic approach towards students [as towards apprentices]. Being present when they start, at the start of the semester, with info booths or discussions on questions where unions have the knowledge. Well, these are mostly topics or discussions, presentations that center on the aspects of working life: ‘What awaits me in the world of work? What can I earn?’ [...] up to what we bring forward on the firm-level under the heading ‘Better than Cheaper’, promoting product innovations and from that coming into dialogues with engineers. That would be a potential topic. And ultimately providing an understanding of democracy in the workplace. Well, regarding the uniqueness of the German system, structures of interest representation, work councils, youth and apprentices committee. Worker participation as a driver for innovation” (union representative).*

Note that the union's focus does not lay primarily on the students current interests as students but on their future interests as workers in firms. Not surprisingly, the unions organizational efforts at universities and other higher education institutions translates only marginally into increases in union density among students. The focus on future benefits allows students to postpone the decision to join the union until they leave the higher education system. Inevitably, the activities in this arena operate with a different time horizon than the union's core business. Immediate increases in union density are difficult to achieve in this new arena; organizing activities in the higher education field are implicitly oriented towards future membership gains. So far, it is an open question if the union will show the necessary patience and perseverance to successfully occupy the new arena.

*Thesis 4: Students' interests differ remarkably little from those of the classical apprentices. Yet, small differences in orientation produces tension and conflict impacting the union's capacity for interest representation.*

After looking at union activities directed towards the higher education field as a new arena for member organizing, we now turn to the consequences of the inclusion of students into the youth-related activities in IG Metall's traditional core arena (the firm). In order to do so we conducted a small case study in which the workplace representatives have developed an innovative approach towards students' interest representation. The firm under scrutiny is a production site with similar characteristics to our first case study. It is primarily engaged in planning, constructing, producing and building transformers and turbines for the global market. It has a long tradition as a production site and has had, particularly in recent years, a lively history including a couple of takeovers. Today it is a part of a globally invested company. In the past years the firm was characterized by a constant uncertainty regarding its future. This uncertainty has been accompanied with a constant downsizing of the work force and a restrictive personnel policy including a general freeze on recruitment. By these measures, the work force has been reduced from about 12.000 workers in the 1980's to approximately 2.000 workers today. While the firm always has been a "classic" training workplace, today dual students outnumber apprentices. Currently, about 100 apprentices and dual students are employed by the firm, the majority belonging to the first group. IG Metall is well connected to the firm and has a solid union density of well over half of the work force.



Several key questions are obvious such as what are the particular characteristics of students as objects of union organizing, and what are the similarities and significant differences between the apprentice as the classical young worker and the student? From the viewpoint of the IG Metall, the difference in interest is remarkably small:

*“Fears for future, objects and concerns or goals to reach, these are in fact not substantially different. Well, one wants to have some kind of security, one wants to make a decent living, to have a clear perspective, to develop. This is the same for each of them” (union representative).*

Worker surveys conducted by the union suggest that there is a wide consensus regarding interest and on important subjects like job security, fair payment or job content. However, the two groups differ significantly in their basic orientations. The majority of students are socialized in different environments than the apprentices and have very little contact with the union movement before entering the higher education system and the labour market.

However there is another important difference as well, and this difference proves to be particularly crucial to the union’s future success and their ability to establish itself as the legitimate representative of students. Our findings strongly suggest that the student population has a different attitude toward the ‘representation relationship’ in general. While the apprentices seem to accept a hierarchical representation environment in which an expert acts in their name, young workers with a higher education background expect a more equal consulting relationship. For the union, these differences point to the importance of group-specific communication and interaction patterns. The different orientations toward representation are expressed in the following words by dual students who retrospectively describe their experience of the initial workforce meeting in which both management and works council introduced themselves to new apprentices and students:

*“Especially the first contact with the worker representative. Well, this was actually, this was nothing at all [...] We were assembled as they say. We had just been here for three, four weeks back then, in the training workshop. Then you were assembled with the apprentices altogether, you were sitting in a room, the factory director gave a short presentation: ‘How is the factory structured? What is the world? How is the firm doing?’ and so on. Then the training supervisor added some things: ‘How is the firm doing?’ and so on. Well, and then comes the working representative. Well, and then, I felt, quite a bit overrun because it was a bit like the sledgehammer method, he was trying at once to say: ‘There are 40 young people. They don’t know what we are, what we are capable of, what we do. But: They have to be ours. We have to win them over’. And that was a bit too*

*unprofessional for the first day, yes. and everything is horrible and everything is bad. Well, one felt a bit deterred, wondering: 'Do you really want to belong to that?' Well, then there are those who, the apprentices liked that, they were enthusiastic, they were euphoric at it. Well, they gave their signature, joined after it was over. But especially for us dual students, we were all a bit, we didn't know what to think of the whole matter. Yes, because it was new to us and then like that. And then, one comes into such a firm and one doesn't want to make a mistake at the very beginning. 'What is the role of the work council? What is the, how do they [the management] see the work council? What are the disadvantages of joining, what are the benefits?' This is difficult to assess and one reacts with restraint." (dual student).*

Note that the student had become a union member by the time he was reflecting on this episode. Other students point to the same issue. Obviously, addressing the students in an appropriate way – especially upon meeting him or her for the first few times – is of great importance for the worker representatives. The first impression they make on the student potentially influences the follow-up meetings and in some cases it endures for the whole of the professional training period. It is not only the content of the first few addresses, the key messages that are important to form such a first impression, but also the style in which the worker representative addresses the student: the (body) language that he uses, the tone of the address.

*Thesis 5: Works councils and unions can adapt to the differences in the basic orientations towards representation between apprentices (expert mode) and students (consulting mode) by segmenting their representation work.*

Although not representative, the case study points to important cultural differences between the two groups currently addressed as young workers. While apprentices apparently accept the classical expert model in which the representative acts in their name, students seem to expect a more participatory approach in which representatives assume the role of the consultant. This cultural gap between these two groups is reaffirmed by a local union representative:

*"The classic duties of the work councils have always been, well, to take care of the interests of the workers and then principally: Someone comes, details problems and then you get going and solve that. And this is a bit different with students. Students have more questions and students are also used to solving problems themselves. And then, a consulting role is basically the needed and desired role of the worker representative and of the union and not as much as: 'I am your problem solver and I will get going now for you'" (union representative).*

Within the production firm under scrutiny, both works councils and the youth and apprentice committee have recently found an innovative answer to this challenge. In order to cope with divergent orientations, institutionalized interest representation of young workers has been segmented. One of the five members of the young and apprentice committee originates from the student group. This person is responsible for representing student interests in the committee and towards the works council. The student representative in the youth and apprentice committee describes his experience with the new strategy towards this group of young workers:

*“I quickly realized that not much was done for the dual students, how to put it, not ‘not much’ was done but rather the connection between dual students and the youth and apprentice committee or work council hadn’t been really established yet. And because I’m a dual student, I’m able to talk to other students from my year at any time, as they say, and was at the same time working here. And when I picked up on something like: ‘Oh crap! There are so many problems yet again’, I thought to myself: ‘Hey, I can help with that.’ In this way, we started these dual students information sessions. This means, we invited students in groups into this very room [conference room of the youth and apprentices committee] and asked them simply: ‘Tell us about the theoretical phase, about the practical phase. How’s it going? Did you encounter any problems?’ Well, after the very first sessions we had, I don’t know how many pages in A4 filled with problems and issues that we tackled, that we divided up amongst us where we considered: ‘What can IG Metall do? What can the work council do? What can I do?’ [...] But many things that simply hadn’t been discussed, where simply no communication existed, could be resolved simply by discussing them and listening to them. And we could do many things. And we could do much for the students that had probably not even been recognized by future students who take them for granted.” (dual student).*

These observations highlight the fact that the institutionalized interest representation through a youth and apprentice committee is not necessarily limited to the group of apprentices. Rather, it can be used in an innovative manner in order to include other groups of biologically young workers as well. By simply including a student, interest representation now ‘speaks the language’ of potentially all young workers in the firm. Our interviewees report that the new practices – the innovative reorientation of interest representation towards students – has resulted in an increase of union density among students. One important limitation of our findings has to be reported, however. The student population in this plant is a rather specific one, belonging to the group of dual students which are characterized by a relative high level of integration into the firm’s workforce. Whilst the classical university student does not enter the firm before receiving her or his higher education certificate, the dual students are at least partially integrated

into the firm's workforce from the beginning of their studies. As a consequence of this, the integration of dual students into institutionalized interest representation might be easier to facilitate than the integration of classical students joining the firm only after finishing university. Yet, we do not see any substantial reason that the integration of students – and other groups belonging to the category of biologically young workers – into the traditional German institutions of workplace representation should not be possible. Rather the relatively close integration of dual students seems to constitute a facilitating factor, putting pressure on unions and works councils to reconsider their practices and adjust to the pluralization of pathways between the educational system and the labour market.

### **4.3. Interest Representation and Organizing in the Pathway 'Precarious Employment': innovative and successful, but not in the name of 'youth'**

The final part of this empirical section – a firm-level case study of an automotive supplier not participating in vocational training and with a high share of unskilled workers – focuses on the last of the three institutionalized pathways discussed in the report, namely precarious employment. As a case study we chose a firm from the manufacturing sector which belongs to the relatively stable segment of supplier firms without vocational training. Work is mostly standardized and repetitive, and the classical type of skilled worker, the *Facharbeiter*, is largely absent in this segment. The vast majority of workers belong to the category of unskilled labour. The firm under scrutiny, a supplier producing car seats for several OEMs, had a total workforce of 330 workers at the time of the interviews. Due to high flexibility demands resulting from the JIS-production systems of the OEM, the size of the workforce appeared to be less stable than in the other firms discussed in this report. About 40 percent of the current workforce were temporary agency workers. As a matter of fact, work agencies constituted the only entry point into the firm. The case study thus focuses exclusively on the 'precarious employment' pathway. The firm did not recruit directly from the labour market, empty positions were filled with experienced temporary agency workers. However, as regional unemployment is relatively high, the chances of the temps to be promoted into the permanent workforce were relatively small. As the firm did not participate in vocational training and workers were generally older than 18, no institutionalized youth and apprentice committee for young workers existed – although a significant share of the workforce was younger than 35 years (the IG Metall's categorization of young). Reliable numbers for the share of biologically young workers did not exist. However, due

to the high physical strain of working on the assembly older workers were generally rare. All our interviewees did not think that they would be able to do their job until they reach the official pension age.

*Thesis 6: Against the widespread myth that precarious workers are not an easy clientele for trade unions, our case study suggests that unions can successfully organize young workers in the pathway ‘precarious employment’ – if they credibly represent the interests of these workers.*

Today, unionization among temporary agency workers is, though lower than in the other two cases, on a remarkably high level for this labour market segment. Following intensive bargaining processes including several strike days, union density increased significantly a couple of years ago. The local union representative and the works council, who both early on discovered the membership potential in the segment of temporary agency workers, a group the IG Metall had previously more or less ignored, linked the power resources of the workforces stemming from the tight integration of the supplier into the JIS-production systems of the OEMs in order to improve the conditions of temporary agency workers. In a sense, the initial improvements were based on a redistribution of power between the relatively well organized core workforces and the, back then, mostly not-unionized precarious workers. Yet, in the long run this initial investment paid off. In particular, young temporary agency workers joined the union as they realized that works councils and local IG Metall represented their interests as well, and not only those of the long-term members.

*“The IG Metall really pushed for a collective agreement for the temps. That was great. Before, my colleague over there had a wage double as high as mine. Now, I receive almost as much money as the core workers” (temporary agency workers).*

Prior to the bargaining process and strike actions, many young temporary agency workers were convinced that trade unions were organizations of established skilled workers. As a consequence, the union power resources grew over time as union density increased steadily. Although our research is not representative, the interests of young temporary agency workers reveals surprising similarities to those of the apprentices and the students analyzed above with wage and job security featuring most prominently on their agenda. While job security is a difficult objective for unions and works councils as management are rarely open to bargain over the transition of temps into regular permanent employment, wage

increases for precarious workers seems to be a realistic target of interest representation

*Thesis 7: Although unions and works councils successfully organized young temporary agency workers in the case study they did so without any reference to the category of ‘youth’. Despite the extension of its youth focus there are still significant groups of young workers as yet unaddressed by the union’s youth approach.*

We chose this specific case study to illuminate a boundary of the union’s current approach to youth. The two case studies presented above tell a story of an extension of the previously rather narrow concept of ‘youth’. During the last decade, the IG Metall and other German unions extended their youth-related activities from the classical focus on apprentices to include students as well. In other words, the union responded to the pluralization of pathways between the educational system and the labour market by including a second pathway in its activities, namely higher education. Yet, the two major groups addressed by youth-labeled activities are by no means the only biologically ‘young’ workers in the general German labour market, the manufacturing industry in particular. Our report has identified at least another institutionalized pathway which has gained importance in the more recent past, namely precarious employment. Evidence suggests that labour market reforms and new corporate strategies result in the consolidation of a slowly growing segment of precarious employment. As our small case study highlights IG Metall and unionized works councils are very active in this segment, attempting to organize precarious workers and to integrate them into the institutionalized structures of interest representation. Yet, these activities are so far not linked to the ‘youth’ approach of the union. The following words of a union representative show that the organization is aware that the union approach only addresses certain segments of the young workforce:

*“Well, we are currently looking for areas in which we are not yet fully active in the name of ‘youth’. And this [precarious employment] is such an area. We currently discuss this as an interface [...] It is discussed as ‘job start’, not even limited to people under 35, people coming differently into the firm than previously. Not life-long employment on the basis of vocational training. Instead, people shift between firms and so on. But this is not an exclusive youth topic, people do not necessarily perceive themselves as that. It is more a transversal topic, the youth is involved but lots of other areas of the organization as well” (union representative).*

What is suggested here is something like ‘youth mainstreaming’, the incorporation of elements designed to address young workers into virtually all

union activities. This wide and inclusive approach would potentially extend the union's youth approach to all biologically young workers; yet whether it results in increasing union density and improvements of the union's representation quality remains to be seen. The report has shown that German unions respond to the imminent 'representation gap' resulting from the mismatch between the pluralization of young workers' pathways into the labour market since the 1980s and the union's concentration on apprentices. The discovery of students in the last ten years significantly reduces the representation gap – but does not completely remove it. There are still other groups of biologically young workers who are still not addressed by the union's youth activities.

## 5. Conclusions

Using evidence from the manufacturing sector, the report has analyzed German unions' response to the pluralization of pathways between the educational system and the labour market since the 1980s. Whilst throughout the post-war period the vast majority of young Germans entered the labour market through an apprenticeship, today multiple relevant pathways exist. *Vocational training* still plays an important role but it is only one of several pathways. The report has identified at least two pathways whose relevance for young workers has increased significantly in the last three decades, namely *higher education* and *precarious employment*. In order to identify union responses including opportunities and risks as well as the challenges inherent in each pathway, a case study approach has been selected. In three case studies, each expressing highly innovative elements of young worker organization and the representation of their interests, we attempt to show the potential of the union's responses to the imminent 'representation gap'. Our main findings can be summarized in seven arguments:

(1) Our analysis demonstrates that within the classical pathway of vocational training the institutionalization of youth and apprentice committees (*Jugend- und Auszubildendenvertretung*) within the German institutional framework of interest representation constitutes a powerful institutional support for German unions' attempts to organize young workers.

(2) However, the institutionalization of a youth and apprentice committee in the legal framework of interest representation is not only a power resource for organizing young workers. It also contains the seeds for the narrowing of the category 'youth' to the apprenticeship as an employment status.

(3) By extending its activities to students, the union enters a new arena relatively distant from its workplace-related core activities. Unions need a long staying power before activities in this arena result in membership increases. Currently, organizing attempts focus on the student's future interests as workers, not on their immediate interests as students.

(4) Students' interests differ remarkably little from those of the classical apprentices. Yet, small differences in the orientations towards representation



produces tension and conflict, negatively impacting the union's capacity for interest representation.

(5) Yet, works councils and unions can adapt to the differences in the basic orientations towards representation between apprentices (expert mode) and students (consultation mode) by segmenting their representation work.

(6) Against the widespread myth that precarious workers are not an easy clientele for trade unions, our evidence suggests that unions can successfully organize young workers in the pathway 'precarious employment' – under the conditions that they credibly represent the interests of these workers.

(7) Although unions and works councils in many firms successfully organize young temporary agency workers they apparently do so without any reference to the category of 'youth'. Interest representation and organizing activities address the status as a temporary agency worker, not their youth. Despite the current extension of the union's youth approach it still does not cover all biologically young workers.

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