

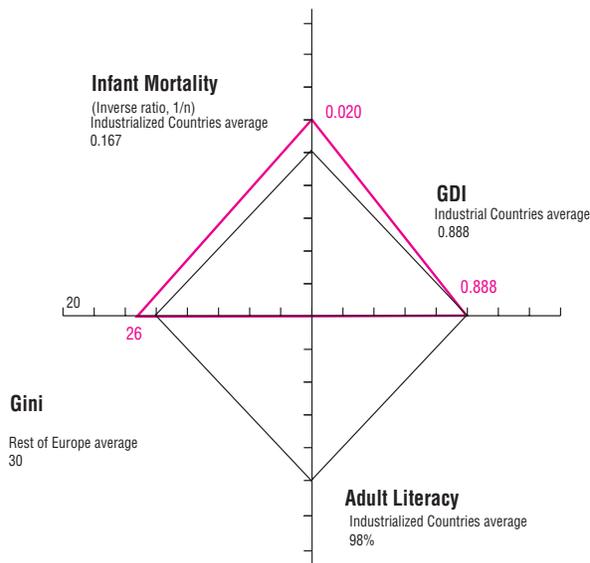
G E R M A N Y

R E P O R T

• RUTH BRAND

THE OTHER WALLS

«parents», people depending on social assistance, and low-income retirees.



The Equity Diamond: National values in terracotta compared to regional ones in blue.
 Source: **Infant mortality:** UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children, 1998*; **Adult literacy:** UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children, 1998*; **GDI** (Gender Development index): UNDP, *Human Development Report 1998*; **GINI:** World Bank, *World Development indicators 1998*. (The regional average for this indicator was calculated by *Social Watch*).

Although the quality of life in Germany is seriously deficient for some sectors of the population, it is satisfactory in comparison with many other countries. The basic infrastructure is accessible by the majority, although there are some worrisome facts, such as increases in the numbers of citizens who depend on social assistance, homeless people, street children, drug addicts, and others.

The recent elections brought a change in government (from a coalition of Christian Democrats and Liberals, to one of Social Democrats and Greens). Although the new government retracted on a few cutbacks in health and retirement policies, no major changes have been apparent so far. It should be kept in mind that the German political system is highly decentralised. The 16 states and the cities are primarily responsible for social policy (except for job market policies) and responsibility for implementation rests with local authorities.

SOCIAL RIGHTS

While Germany ratified the United Nations Convention on Human Rights and the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of 1950, and the European Social Charter of 1961, as late as July 1998 it had not signed or ratified the Revised 1996 Social Charter.

Current talks, within the sphere of both the European Union and Council of Europe, are focused on defining economic, social, cultural and educational rights as an intrinsic part of human and civil rights. The explicit reference to social rights in the basic treaties of the European Union would involve tougher obligations for the member states than those involved in the comparatively less strict drafting of the European Social Charter Council.

A peculiarity of the German administration is the subsidiary principle that governs the majority of social services. In general terms, this means that non-governmental organisations (NGOs)

The Christian Democratic and Liberal government that left office in Germany this year did not consider poverty a serious problem. Nevertheless, researchers and NGOs have pointed to a marked increase in poverty, especially among young people and members of single-parent households and large families. The gap between rich and poor has widened, largely due to unemployment. Moreover, women continue to bear the brunt of family responsibilities and are over-represented in high poverty risk groups: single

have priority over the local administration as providers of social services in the broadest sense. If an NGO is willing and able to provide a service, the local administration is to provide financial support, but must abstain from establishing the service itself. **This strong participation of NGOs has led to them being closely involved in the development of local social policies and to their being invited to hearings on relevant legislation**, at both state and national level. There is a recent trend in understanding that NGOs should be placed on a level of parity with commercial providers who, unlike NGOs, are profit-making enterprises.

POVERTY AND UNEMPLOYMENT

The out-going government did not see poverty as a serious problem. Nevertheless, some researchers and various NGOs have pointed out that poverty has been on the rise for some time now, especially among young people, single-parent households—especially those headed by women—and large families. The gap between rich and poor has widened in German society, mainly because of unemployment, particularly chronic unemployment.

Unemployment is at 10% to 11%, meaning there are more than four million unemployed individuals. In recent years, unemployment has been persistent, with overall percentages higher in East Germany, especially among young women, than in West Germany. There is a constant demand by women's organisations for greater participation of women in job creation and in training programmes. Their goal in this connection is for women's participation in these programmes to match the percentage of women's unemployment, taking as a point of comparison unemployment among men.

The out-going government prioritised controlling inflation, financial stability and economic growth, and considered that employment would rise as an eventual result of meeting these priorities. Among the factors that complicate economic restructuring are, undoubtedly, the financial transfers necessary for the *Neue Länder*, the name given to the former German Democratic Republic.

Attention has centred on establishing and supporting small business and job creation, and on job training programmes. Increasingly, young people, upon completing their education, have to deal with exclusion from the job market. Immigrants in particular face the greatest difficulties in this regard. The new government recently announced a programme for creation of jobs and training opportunities for approximately 100,000 youths.

EQUITY MOVES FORWARD, BUT ...

The recent national elections and the formation of a new government have visibly increased the participation of women in the political process, not only because of the «quota» system. Equity has made advances, even if deficiencies still exist in various

Although the migration coming from Europe and from outside the continent is a common phenomenon, Germany does not consider itself to be a country of immigrants. Immigrants seeking asylum are discouraged by progressively more restrictive laws and regulations, and while it is not a generalised attitude, xenophobia occasionally surfaces. An increasingly worrisome problem is the growing exploitation of children in the production of pornographic material distributed over the Internet.

areas. For example, women do not hold an equal share of real positions of political and economic power, and they are grossly under-represented in academic teaching, despite the fact that the student population is distributed almost equally in terms of gender. **Women still bear the brunt of family responsibilities and are over-represented in high poverty risk groups:** single «parents», people depending on social assistance, and low-income retirees. Child-care services are still inadequate, although they have improved in recent years. Introduction of long-term care insurance into the health insurance system reduced poverty among the elderly, primarily women, who receive insufficient pensions.

The third government report for the Federal Republic of Germany under Articles 16 and 17 of the International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ESCR) has been presented to the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. The German NGO Forum on the World Summit for Social Development produced supplementary information for the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. This includes information on topics such as the right to work in equitable and favourable conditions, the right to social security, family-protection rights, the right to adequate housing, and the right to education. **The Forum criticised the out-going government's report, since it was based only on government sources and did not make reference to diverse analyses of the economic and social situation made by several NGOs. The report was designed without consulting the NGOs or any other social group involved.**

In its development cooperation, the out-going government concentrated on civic and political rights and refused even discuss the possibility of an optional protocol. It is hoped that the new government will not only put more emphasis on ESCR, but that it will also have a generally more progressive perspective.

EDUCATION

The educational system as a whole—which is decentralised and under the authority of German states—was the subject of criticism and severe scrutiny when a recent international study (the TIMSS) gave it a low ranking in terms of effectiveness.

The right to education is part of the 20/20¹ compact. The

German government played an active role in setting goals for this initiative. This was nevertheless followed by more talk than action. There was no clear reorganisation of the development budget subsequent to the Copenhagen Summit. On the contrary, we find a clear cutback in spending on basic education in the annual plan for 1998.

In 1995, 8.5% of bilateral commitments for financial and technical aid were allocated to this crucial 20/20 area. In 1998, funding for primary education was cut to 2.5%, ie, close to US\$52 million in bilateral commitments. The new government committed, within the framework of the coalition agreement, to strongly promote primary health and education for women and young women, and to promote the 20/20 implementation process. The German NGO Forum on the World Summit for Social Development has a successful working group on the 20/20 Initiative.

IMPACT OF ADJUSTMENT

Preparations for the European Monetary Union have imposed serious restrictions on the budgets of candidate member States, at a time when the ageing of the population, unemployment and, in Germany, reunification are adding increasingly large burdens to social spending. **The introduction of market elements in the social sector and local policies geared to attracting investments by improving technical and cultural infrastructures are of no help to the excluded population.** The reduction or elimination of participation by local authorities in the social services sector leaves this sector exposed to commercial competition and profit-seeking.

Statistical material on poverty is scarce and not easily accessible, due in part to the decentralisation of the competent authorities for social matters. To offset this lack, the German National Conference on Poverty (NAK)—a permanent conference of twelve NGOs organised at national level and active in fighting poverty and social exclusion, of which the German Organisation of

Labour Unions is a member and supporter—has repeatedly asked the government to put out a national report on poverty. This request has been strongly supported by the German NGO Forum on the World Summit for Social Development, of which NAK is a member. Apparently, this request—like one for a report on wealth—is included in the coalition agreement made by the parties composing the new government.

The out-going government did not make visible efforts, at national level, to follow-up on the Social Summit commitments. To cite a prominent cabinet member, NGOs were advised to «look to the third world and see the poverty there.» **This strategy is frequently employed in national politics to divert attention from defects at domestic level, but the fact is that being poor and excluded is a terrible fate in any context.**

The German NGO Forum on the World Summit for Social Development has, among its members, those devoted to development and those dealing with poverty and social exclusion in the national context. At the outset of the Summit, the minister for economic cooperation and development was open to dialogue, although not to significant initiatives. Since authority for social development is spread out over various ministries and since the NGOs were more specialised than the government with the subject of development, both nationally and internationally, it was—and still is—not easy to foster mutual understanding and joint action. With the opening up of national economies to the European Common Market within a global context, there is broader recognition of the fact that we also share problems—and not only benefits—and that it is necessary to find solutions together.

- GERMAN NGO FORUM is an alliance of about 50 organisations and groups working in social, environmental and development cooperation areas and promoting implementation of the commitments taken at the World Summit for Social Development.

1 The 20/20 Initiative establishes the goal of universal access to basic social services for all persons living in a situation of poverty. Having been officially adopted by the chiefs of State during the World Summit for Social Development in March 1995, the Initiative seeks to establish mutual contract among recipient and donor nations, whereby 20% of official development assistance granted by the donor country and 20% of public spending of the recipient country be allocated to basic social services (*Control ciudadano* No. 1 1997, p. 44).