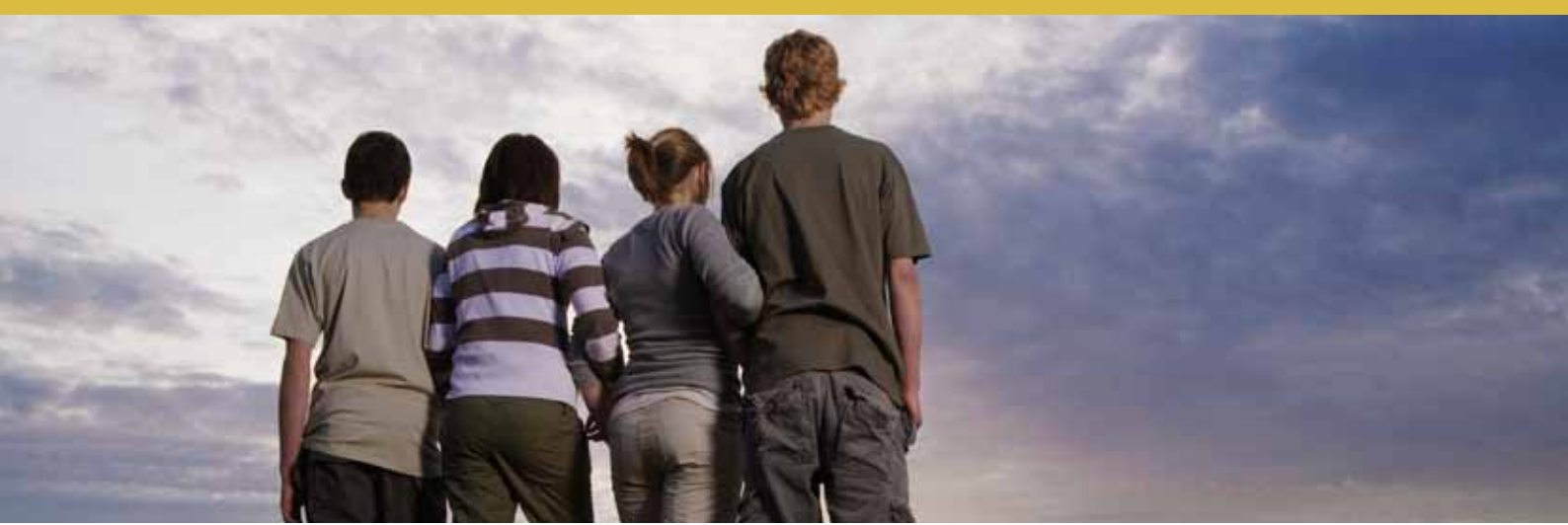


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# **Lebenswerte Kommune – Bevölkerungsentwicklung und Lebensqualität vor Ort**

Zusammenhangsanalysen mit Städte- und Gemeindedaten  
des Portals Wegweiser Kommune



## Abstract

Using aggregated municipality and city data from the Wegweiser Kommune information system, this study tracks fundamental sociodemographic developments in Germany and their local factors of influence. Significant causal relationships and consequences of social, familial and demographic change over recent decades are considered against the backdrop of current social- and family-policy debates, and empirically supported findings from scholarly studies are compiled, outlined on the basis of the Wegweiser data, and regionally presented.

The analyses show one thing clearly: In an era of declining birth rates that no longer balance deaths, migration is becoming of increasing significance with regard to demographic trends. Today, shrinkage and growth in the vast majority of Germany cities and municipalities are influenced hardly at all by the level of the birth rates in these cities and municipalities. Rather, migration processes in the short and probably also the medium-term are increasingly more influential in shaping local population trends. This applies without exception to all cities and municipalities in Germany.

In this regard, the migration of families (although this shows a slight downward trend), as well as migration by education-oriented young people play a more important role. But even migration processes in old age contribute something to the shrinkage or growth of populations in individual municipalities. As a consequence of extensive internal-migration

movements in recent decades, population structures as well as the socioeconomic and familial profiles of German cities and municipalities have increasingly shifted and diversified. Small and medium-sized suburban municipalities have gained through the arrival of families, while large university towns and agglomerations have expanded as a result of education-related migration. Losses to migration, either through education- or family-related emigration, are by contrast increasingly often affecting the same communities, mostly in eastern or central Germany. Cities and municipalities already shrinking here are being hit particularly hard.

The effects of regional economic and labor-market trends on the population's development are also an increasing focus for local-government policymakers. As a result of the overall positive employment trends in German in recent years, the effect of "systemic" shrinkage – that is, the mutually reinforcing nature of demographic and socioeconomic shrinkage – has subsided over time. At the same time, however, labor markets function regionally, and also develop regionally. Thus, positive and negative labor-market effects on population trends show themselves increasingly less at the municipal level, but more strongly on the regional level. Regionally functioning labor markets also mean that the overall positive employment effects have not corrected the across-the-board, still significantly higher rate of unemployment in eastern German rural and urban districts.

Unemployment is less and less the sole criterion for poverty today; indeed, there is evidence of an increasing trend of decoupling with regard to poverty and labor-market developments. Thus, the nationwide poverty level is significantly higher than the number of unemployed people. At the spatial level, there remains a perfect statistical correlation between unemployment and poverty: Every rural and urban district with high or the highest unemployment rates also finds itself facing the highest rates of SGB-II (Basic Social Security) benefits recipients, and thus conditions of poverty. In addition, there are no differences with regard to age groups affected by poverty – cities and municipalities with the highest SGB-II ratios overall also face the highest rates of child and youth poverty, and are home to the greatest number of families on the Hartz IV welfare program. Child poverty is in this regard marked by severe regional disparities: In Germany, a west-east differential remains characteristic, but a south-north difference is also clear.

Notable socio-spatial inequalities are evident not only between cities, but even or particularly within cities. Poverty segregation can in this regard be seen in both large and small cities. For (western German) cities, a superposition of socioeconomic, demographic and ethnic segregation is today in many places characteristic; this means that children's opportunities for education and participation are to a large extent influenced by their place of residence, their parents' social position and their ethnic background. To some extent, this differs more strongly within cities and municipalities than between them.

Education participation and opportunities in Germany vary by the school systems of each individual federal state. The risk of leaving school without a certificate is particularly high in eastern German federal states, as well as for foreign school-leavers overall. The negative environmental effects of poverty with regard to the educational opportunities of children and youth are only weakly perceptible at the city and municipal

level, as cities' overall internal heterogeneity clouds the picture somewhat. Stronger effects are evident at the level of the social environment, particularly in segregated neighborhoods with high poverty rates.

A need for political action arises where spatial diversities become spatial inequalities, negatively influencing social participation – that is, where the location or spatial environment acts disadvantageously, and the degree of political support provided contravenes the Basic Law's "establishment of equal living conditions throughout the federal territory" (Art. 72, para. 2). This is particularly common in shrinking cities and municipalities with precarious socioeconomic conditions, for example in eastern Germany, in former industrial metropolitan areas, and in peripheral regions.

The experiences of urban research with segregation can be drawn upon to support the need for political action: In order to ensure social integration, disadvantaged areas need "positive discrimination," and especially institutional support. Inequality should be handled unequally.