

## **MEMO Youth Study by the IKG at Bielefeld University and the EVZ Foundation: How young adults remember history**

- In the context of the National Socialist era, young adults want to be given factual knowledge and be taught about historical places and contemporary references
- Half of the 16 to 25-year-olds questioned are unable to correctly name the period of National Socialist rule
- One in three respondents has felt discriminated against in everyday life

**Berlin, February 21, 2023** – National Socialism and World War II are central points of reference in Germany's culture of remembrance for adolescents and young adults. This is the result of the MEMO Youth Study carried out by the Institute for Interdisciplinary Research on Conflict and Violence (IKG) at Bielefeld University. The survey was funded by the Foundation Remembrance, Responsibility and Future (EVZ). 63% of young adults, although just 53% on average across all the age groups, say they have dealt intensively with National Socialism. Decisive factors in the debate are the respondent's own educational background and that of their parents, rather than other factors such as age, gender or the family's history of origin. Approximately three quarters of 16 to 25-year-olds do not question the value of a critical examination of this part of German history. At the same time, the evaluations of the MEMO Youth Study show gaps in factual knowledge about National Socialism and provide new approaches for educational work.

**Prof. Dr. Jonas Rees, Bielefeld University:** "Young adults are often accused of historical and lack of political interest. However, our survey presents a picture of a largely committed and interested generation. At the same time, systematic gaps are evident in relation to the most basic knowledge of historical facts. As a society, we would do well to take the group of young adults seriously as future bearers of the culture of remembrance. We should ask ourselves what importance the remembrance of National Socialist crimes still plays for us today because that can be measured not just by what we remember collectively but also by what we collectively forget."

### **In the context of the National Socialist era, young adults want to be given factual knowledge and be taught about historical places and contemporary references**

Young adults were asked which issues were most important to them in relation to self-determined learning about the National Socialist context. It is important to most adolescents and young adults to learn new factual knowledge (75%), to have opportunities to visit historical places (51%) and for educational offerings to establish a contextual reference between the past and the present (48%). The desire for "entertainment" plays no more than a subordinate role. Respondents report the most pressing interest in terms of

content with regard to the social circumstances of National Socialist crimes as well as the role and responsibility of the supposedly uninvolved German population (35%).

### **Half of the 16 to 25-year-olds questioned are unable to correctly name the period of National Socialist rule**

Potentials for new educational formats become clear at this and other points in the MEMO Youth Study. Deficits are revealed in the study in relation to current historical factual knowledge, among other things. For example, only just under half the respondents were able to name the period of National Socialist rule fully and correctly. Whilst more than half of the 16 to 25-year-olds knew at least three victim groups of National Socialism, one in five respondents were able to name only one or no victim group at all. Individual groups of victims are less well known. For example, less than half the respondents named people with illnesses and people with disabilities as a victim group, and less than a third mentioned Sinti and/or Roma.

**Dr. Andrea Despot, Chief Executive Officer of the EVZ Foundation:** "People who engage in a critical examination of deprivation of rights, persecution and extermination by the National Socialists, take a more sensitive look at discrimination today. The teaching of history is a booster for solidarity and democracy. Adolescents want to understand and learn rather than being entertained. We need interactive and participatory education when it comes to history – inside and outside of school. Participatory forms of teaching can counteract another finding by the MEMO Youth Study: A large number of respondents did not feel politically heard or represented."

### **One in three respondents has felt discriminated against in everyday life**

60% of the respondents said they had been sensitized to issues such as exclusion and discrimination by dealing with the history of National Socialism. The extent to which young people themselves feel disadvantaged is considerable: One in three reports feeling discriminated against in everyday life, at least to some degree. This affects especially young people with migration biographies, as well as those from lower-income and educationally disadvantaged families. Many also feel they are not represented politically (44%).

### **Committed young people have dealt more frequently with National Socialist history**

The majority of 16 to 25-year-olds are worried about social cohesion in Germany. Approximately a third of them perceive no cohesion in society. It is especially young adults who have dealt more intensively with the history of National Socialism that express their own commitment to social issues and challenges in the present. Overall, commitment is heterogeneous across the survey sample: Nearly 40% of the respondents report little or no social engagement. However, approximately one in five (21%) report strong personal involvement. In addition to their commitment to climate and environmental protection (43%), many respondents say they are being active against racism, discrimination and exclusion in German society (22%).

## **MEMO Youth Study**

The MEMO Youth Study is carried out by the Institute for Interdisciplinary Research on Conflict and Violence (IKG) at Bielefeld University and is funded by the EVZ Foundation. For the MEMO Youth Study, 3,485 representatively selected young people between the ages of 16 and 25 were interviewed online in September/October 2021; 838 participants were surveyed again online in September 2022. The MEMO Youth Study is the most comprehensive study of its kind and systematically expands the previous five MEMO studies (2018 to 2022) to include young adults: the future bearers of culture of remembrance.

**Further information** [www.stiftung-evz.de/memo-jugendstudie](http://www.stiftung-evz.de/memo-jugendstudie):

- Statements by other participants in the press conference on February 21, 2023
- Film on the MEMO Youth Study
- Study in German and English with graphics

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