Making the future possible: A focus on the next generation

The Savings Banks Finance Group is a trusted financial partner, employer and educational mentor.

Young people are growing up in a world characterised not only by rapid change and great uncertainty, but also by new opportunities: digital technology is taken for granted, yet there is a desire for personal guidance; global perspectives coexist with a sense of regional connection, and individual freedom is balanced against a strong need for security. Caught in this conflicting situation, young people today are faced with far-reaching financial and career decisions from an early stage in their lives. At the same time, economic uncertainties and technological developments such as AI are noticeably changing the conditions for entering the workforce. This makes reliable partners who provide guidance and open up new prospects all the more important.

The Savings Banks Finance Group fulfils precisely this role for young people: as their first point of contact for financial matters, their first employer and a long-term companion through key stages of life. The many points of contact range from current accounts and digital services to apprenticeships, university studies and international career opportunities. The younger generation has a clear picture of the Savings Banks as employers: above all, they associate them with security, solidarity and good career prospects.

Attracting young talent with a distinctive profile

These strengths form a solid foundation in the competition for young talent. Young people expect a broad range of entry-level and career development opportunities, combining traditional apprenticeship pathways – such as the bank clerk qualification – with academic and practice-integrated formats such as dual study programmes or trainee schemes. This is complemented by a comprehensive in-house training system, which lays the foundation for continuous professional development and long-term career prospects. At the same time, issues important to the younger generation – such as personal growth, modern working conditions and flexibility – are being increasingly integrated.

This approach is proving effective: by 2024, the Savings Banks had already significantly increased the number of new hires, with a total of over 11,000 new staff – a rise of 12.1 percent on the previous year – a trend that was also reflected in the apprenticeship sector.

This trend continued in 2025. Despite a challenging labour market environment, the Savings Banks succeeded in recruiting around 10,800 new staff from the external labour market. In addition, some 3,500 young professionals were taken on from their in-house training programmes, thereby making a significant contribution to securing a skilled workforce from their own ranks.

In total, around 15,030 apprentices were employed by the Savings Banks at the end of 2025 – a further increase of 9.7 percent compared with the previous year.

The trend in applicant numbers sends a very clear signal: applications for apprenticeship places rose by 33.9 percent in 2025, following strong growth recorded the previous year. As a result, the application rate has increased to 12.0 applications for every apprenticeship place and has already reached the target level set for the coming years.

Against this backdrop, the Savings Banks Finance Group continues to invest specifically in young people – both as future talent and as customers – thereby creating opportunities for development, learning and assuming responsibility in a changing world. The following articles show how the Savings Banks reach out to, support and guide the younger generation over the long term – and in doing so, work together with them to make the future possible.

Please watch the video statement by Karolin Schriever, Executive Member of the Board of the DSGV:

“Customer satisfaction today is about much more than just traditional banking”

Young customers, in particular, have different expectations: an interview with Dr Joachim Schmalzl

Digitalisation, artificial intelligence and a generation that is rethinking financial services: the Savings Banks Finance Group faces enormous challenges. In this interview, Dr Joachim Schmalzl, Executive Board Member of the DSGV, explains how Germany’s largest financial group is positioning itself between digital speed and personal proximity, how it is attracting young people as customers and employees, and why the multi-channel approach is becoming part of its long-term strategy.

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In order to remain successful, we are investing in digital infrastructure, platform solutions and integrated services.
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Dr Joachim Schmalzl,
Executive Member of the Board of the DSGV

Dr Schmalzl, what are the main challenges currently facing the Savings Banks Finance Group?
→ **Schmalzl:** The Savings Banks Finance Group is currently undergoing a profound transformation, characterised by digitalisation, artificial intelligence, changing customer expectations and intensified competition. Young customers in particular expect intuitive digital services, fast processes, a high degree of transparency and flexibility. We are also seeing that financial services are increasingly being used in parallel across different providers. This is raising expectations of our services. At the same time, customer access is undergoing fundamental changes due to digital platforms, AI-supported services and new competitors.

Is the Group in a good position to deal with this change?
→ **Schmalzl:** The Savings Banks have a strong market position with around 42 million customers; our reach is well over 50 percent. Security, reliability and regional responsibility remain our key strengths. Our experience and competitive terms are crucial for customer loyalty and form part of the foundation of our success. To ensure our continued success, we are investing in digital infrastructure, platform solutions and integrated services. This enables us to offer our customers security and autonomy, so that we can support them as effectively as possible. However, it should also be clear that the future of our work will not only be digital and sustainable, but also personal and social.

What are the specific challenges when dealing with young people such as Generation Z?
→ **Schmalzl:** Young people expect digital services that are intuitive, fast and flexible to use. They want to decide for themselves how they manage their financial affairs – whether digitally, in person or by switching between the two. There is also a great need for clear guidance on financial matters. They expect transparency, simple processes and control over their own finances. Gen Z often use financial services on a case-by-case basis, combining different providers depending on which solution best suits their needs at any given moment. Financial education is becoming increasingly important because it contributes to financial self-determination and economic participation. This is where we step in with specific initiatives, such as the School Service, the Stock Market Simulation Game or the ‘Money & Household’ advisory service. It is crucial to reach young people where they spend their time in everyday life, including in digital environments and on social media platforms.

With this in mind, how is the strategic direction of the Savings Banks Finance Group evolving?
→ **Schmalzl:** We are consistently building on our multi-channel approach: people should be able to decide for themselves how they conduct their financial transactions with us – in person, digitally or flexibly, switching between the two. The aim is to provide an excellent and seamless customer experience across all channels of contact. The success of this approach can be seen, for example, in the user figures for our app: 20 million users are a strong indication of the trust people place in the Savings Banks. For many, our app has long been the main way they access their finances.

In the digital world, the Savings Banks are making targeted investments in several areas to ensure their services are fit for the future. A key focus is on the further development of the ‘Sparkasse’ app, as well as on digital and innovative products and services. One example is S-Neo within the Sparkasse app, which provides a wide range of securities for independent investors and makes it easy to start investing in shares, funds and ETFs. Another key component is Wero, part of the European Payment Initiative (EPI), an alliance of 16 banks and financial service providers, which includes the Savings Banks Finance Group.

The Wero payment system enables fast mobile-to-mobile payments and offers a standardised, digital omnichannel payment solution across Europe, which is already used by more than 42 million people. What remains unchanged, however, is that personal advice remains a key factor when it comes to complex financial decisions – even for younger target groups.

So it's primarily about customer satisfaction. Could you explain this approach in a bit more detail?
→ **Schmalzl:** Customer satisfaction today is about much more than just traditional banking. It also includes modern digital solutions such as secure identity and authentication procedures, as well as, looking ahead, the EUDI Wallet – the European Digital Identity Wallet. This combines proof of identity and payment in a secure European wallet. With Wero, we are introducing a European payment solution into the EUDI Wallet ecosystem. All our customers need for all of this is a smartphone. AI-powered services and digital assistants will also play a greater role in future, for example when searching for information, in service processes or with personalised offers. Customers expect digital solutions for their interconnected everyday lives – whether for banking, on social media, when travelling or when working in Europe. In the age of AI, the tension between personalised offers and data protection is growing. The combination of technological innovation, a personal approach and trust in the Savings Banks brand therefore remains crucial. In figures, this means: around 35.4 million online banking accounts and 196 million visits to our online branches demonstrate the high level of usage of our digital services. At the same time, around 129,000 advisers are on hand to provide personal, local service.

» Young people want to decide for themselves how they manage their financial affairs – whether digitally, in person or by switching between the two. «

Dr Joachim Schmalzl,
Executive Member of the Board of the DSGV

How does this approach affect young people in particular?
→ **Schmalzl:** Young people are digitally savvy, but still seek personal guidance when making important financial decisions. The Savings Banks are therefore positioning themselves as relevant partners in their everyday lives. This includes accessible financial education, transparent digital services, flexible communication channels and straightforward transaction processes, as well as personal advice where needed. Young target groups are increasingly being reached via digital platforms, social media, gaming formats such as 'Schwein gehabt' on the Fortnite platform, and modern content offerings. At the same time, new formats are emerging, such as Gen Z concept branches, which are designed by young people for young people. Examples include the trainee branch at Sparkasse Leipzig and 'barer41' in Munich. In addition, there are digital advisory services via messaging apps and video. S-Neo also specifically targets young audiences, new customers and minors with attractive savings plan solutions. Those who win over young customers early on like this have the chance to build long-term relationships spanning all stages of their financial lives. Young people's need for guidance, stability and a reliable partner by their side becomes even greater in times of economic uncertainty. The Savings Banks fulfil this need: we are both digital and present on the ground.

In light of these considerations, what role will the local branch play in the future?
→ **Schmalzl:** Branches remain important places for guidance, advice and building trust. Many customers still want a personal point of contact, particularly when it comes to complex financial matters. The strength of the Savings Bank model lies in the interplay between personal and digital proximity. With around 10,500 branches, the Savings Banks continue to have the densest network in Germany. For 90 percent of the population, a Savings Bank is within eight minutes' reach. Adjustments to the branch network are made where advice and service can be usefully consolidated. At the same time, digital services, self-service locations and mobile solutions such as the Sparkassenbus ensure comprehensive coverage.

We've been talking a lot about what's on offer for young people as customers. How do you attract Gen Z as an employer?
→ **Schmalzl:** The Savings Banks combine security, social responsibility and a modern working culture. This generation has high expectations of employers: opportunities for development, modern digital working environments, flexible working models and remote working are taken for granted. The Savings Banks are making targeted investments in these areas. Artificial intelligence is increasingly becoming part of everyday working life and is intended to support staff. At the same time, the Savings Banks continue to invest heavily in training and the development of young talent. The

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Our aim is to achieve excellence and consistent customer experience across all channels
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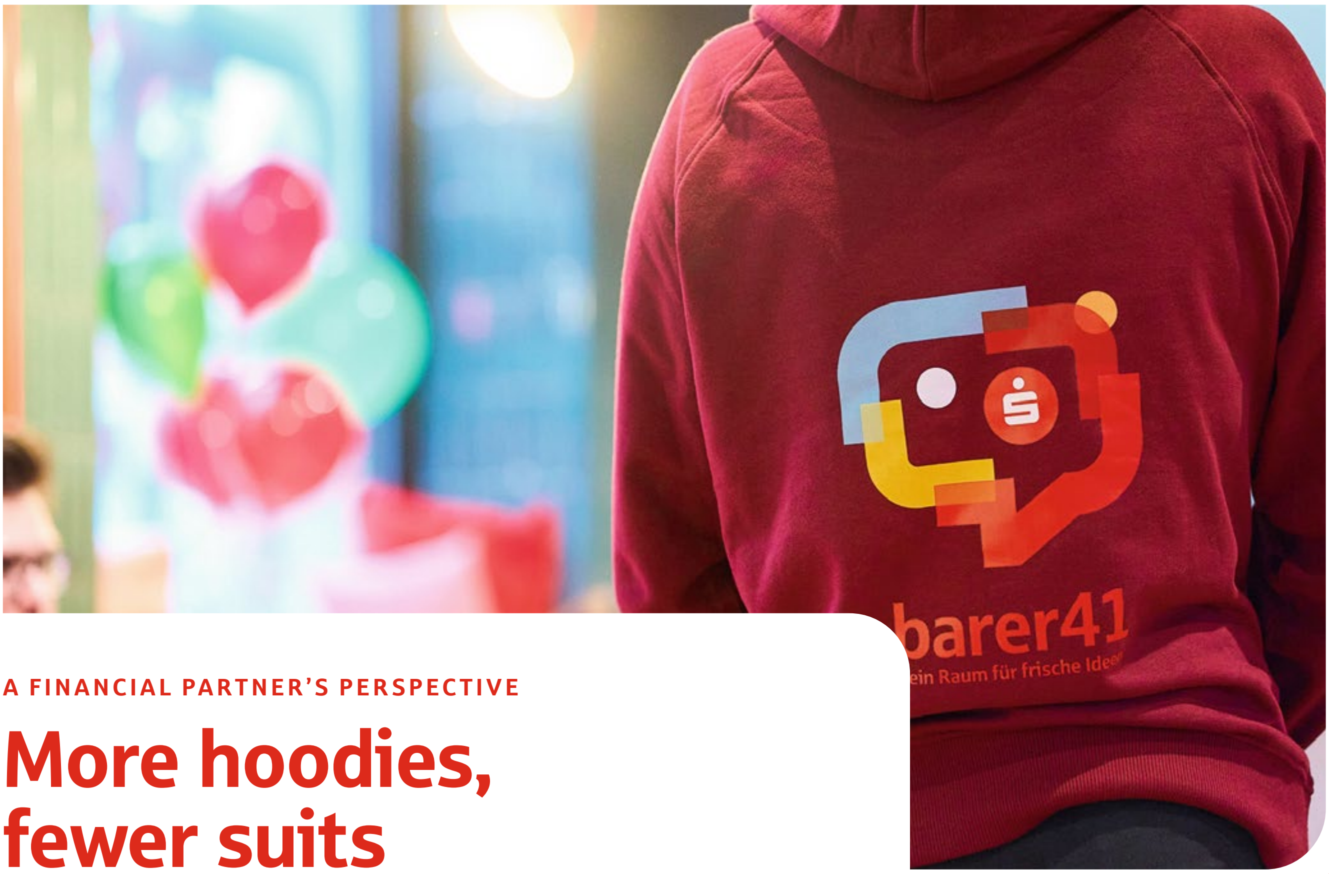
Dr Joachim Schmalzl,
Executive Member of the Board of the DSGV

number of apprentices has recently risen significantly: by the end of 2025, around 15,030 apprentices were employed by the Savings Banks, representing an increase of 9.7 percent compared with the previous year. The trend in applicant numbers sends a particularly clear signal: applications for apprenticeship places rose by 33.9 percent, following strong growth recorded as early as 2024. The public mandate and regional commitment create social relevance and a sense of identification, particularly among young people. This is also demonstrated by the programmes offered by the German Sparkassenstiftung for International Cooperation (Savings Banks Foundation – DSIK) abroad, such as the deployment of young employees from the Savings Banks Finance Group in sustainable projects worldwide. The combination of stability, long-term security and innovative capacity remains a key competitive advantage in the labour market.

What does the future hold for the multi-channel approach?
→ **Schmalzl:** The multi-channel approach is not a transitional model, but a long-term strategic decision. Banking will remain diverse because people have diverse needs. Personal advice and digital capabilities will converge even more closely in future. Our aim is an integrated customer experience across all contact channels. People expect freedom of choice rather than fixed channel requirements. The combination of digital speed, personalised support, trust and security, as well as transparent self-determination, remains strategically crucial. AI-supported services and digital assistants will play a greater role in future, for example in searching for information, in service processes or in providing tailored offers. At the same time, personal advice remains a central component of the Savings Bank model. It is our aim that Savings Banks will remain robust, relevant and future-proof, particularly for younger generations.



A FINANCIAL PARTNER'S PERSPECTIVE

More hoodies, fewer suits

Concept branches such as the "barer41" run by Stadtsparkasse München consistently focus on the needs of Gen Z and Gen Alpha.

Specialised branch concepts for young people are becoming increasingly important within the Savings Banks Finance Group. They represent new approaches to engaging with customers, which are consistently geared towards the lifestyles of younger generations – with a stronger focus on interaction, support and financial education. The example of 'barer41', run by Stadtsparkasse München in the university quarter of Maxvorstadt, illustrates what such an approach might look like in practice and the added value it offers to young customers.

Jonas is surprised. He had actually just wanted to pop in; a friend had told him about a former branch in the university quarter. But what the 22-year-old student sees at Barer Straße 41 bears little resemblance to the image he had previously held of a Savings Bank. There are no counters and no typical branch atmosphere. Instead, there is an open-plan space, a café counter instead of a bank counter, comfortable armchairs, students with laptops and young staff in Savings Bank hoodies rather than suits. The walls and columns are tiled in dark green, with cables and pipes running openly beneath the ceiling. The only familiar feature is the Savings Bank red: ceiling beams, sofas, napkins and even the tiles in the toilets are finished in this striking colour. “At first I thought I was in the wrong building,” admitted Jonas, who has become a Savings Bank customer following that initial visit. “It felt more like a café than a bank.”

What Jonas experienced was entirely intentional. With “barer41” – the name is simply the address – Stadtsparkasse München is consciously breaking new ground to appeal to young people. The “branch”, which opened in February 2024, is aimed primarily at students, apprentices and those starting their careers. It sees itself less as a traditional bank branch and more as a place for socialising, support and financial education.

Young people taking mobile phone photos or selfies are a common sight at ‘barer41’

A space for exchange and guidance

Its location in Munich’s university district is no coincidence. Here, among lecture halls, libraries and cafés, is where the target group spends their daily lives. ‘barer41’ has been deliberately designed to blend into this environment. Covering around 240 square metres, a complete refurbishment of an old, traditional branch has created a new space that can be used flexibly: for discussions, for focused work or for events with up to 60 people. “We wanted to create a place where young people feel at home and enjoy spending time – completely free from the usual banking barriers,” says Sabine Derheld, Head of Student Advisory Services at Stadtsparkasse München. “Financial matters often come to the fore when something changes in one’s life. It is precisely at these moments that we want to be a point of contact on an equal footing.”

‘barer41’ sees itself as a ‘space for fresh ideas’. This motto is no coincidence, as it is evident in everyday life: as a special feature, students make use of the two associated project rooms – which can be booked free of charge and are fully equipped – for group work; some drop in to study, whilst others come specifically for advice. Coffee, Wi-Fi and an open atmosphere are, of course, all part of the experience. At the same time, ‘barer41’ remains open to everyone – including older customers, whose enquiries are referred to other departments where necessary.

Long-term support

However, the focus is on personalised support based on mutual respect. The topics covered go far beyond traditional banking matters. Filing tax returns whilst at university, taking the first steps on the stock market or questions about setting up a business are just as much a part of this as basic guidance on financial matters. Jonas is a case in point. For a long time, he simply left his savings sitting in his current account. “I actually wanted to start investing at some point, but I never really got to grips with it,” he explains. During an advisory session at ‘barer41’, it was clearly explained to him how funds and ETFs work and how wealth can be accumulated even from small amounts. Today, he invests 40 euros a month in a fund and ETF savings plan. “I never thought it would be so straightforward.

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We wanted to create a place where young people feel at ease and enjoy spending time – completely free from traditional banking barriers.

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Sabine Derheld,
Head of Student Advisory Services at Stadtsparkasse München

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At first I thought I was in the wrong building.
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Jonas,
student and today's 'barer41' customer

Brief profile
Stadtsparkasse München

Stadtsparkasse München was founded in 1824 and is now one of the city's leading financial institutions serving private and corporate clients. In the 2025 financial year, it achieved a net profit of EUR 48 million. With total assets of EUR 24 billion, it is the fourth-largest Savings Bank in Germany. Stadtsparkasse München employs 2,376 staff, including 272 apprentices, and operates 41 branches across the city. In 2025, it supported 257 charitable projects with more than three million euros.

↘ www.sskm.de

I finally understand how long-term saving really works." For him, this isn't just a financial decision, but also a source of security for the future.

"Many young people come to us with similar questions," notes Sabine Derheld. "It's rarely just about a single product. It's about explaining the bigger picture and working together to develop solutions that suit their individual circumstances." These conversations often mark the beginning of a longer-term partnership.

A place for more than just advice

The fact that this approach resonates is also evident from how the space is used. In the years since it opened, 'barer41' has quickly established itself as a meeting place. Events, workshops and presentations are a central part of the concept. Topics such as investment strategies, tax issues and personal development feature on the programme alongside more informal sessions.

The high demand confirms the effectiveness of the approach: the project and learning spaces are almost fully utilised, particularly during exam periods at the end of each semester. For many visitors, the branch is therefore more than just a place for financial matters – it becomes part of their everyday lives. Lena, a 20-year-old student with a part-time job, has also benefitted from this uncomplicated approach. "I just didn't know where to start," she says, looking back. Topics such as insurance and retirement planning initially seemed complex and confusing to her. At "barer41", she worked with an adviser to develop a solution tailored to her situation: a combination of personal liability insurance and an early start on a

Sabine Derheld (bottom centre) with her young, multilingual team in front of the counter at 'barer41'

The layout and design of 'barer41' are deliberately colourful and modern.

» It's rarely just about a single product. It's about explaining the bigger picture and working together to develop solutions that suit each person's individual circumstances. «

Sabine Derheld,
Head of Student Advisory Services at Stadtsparkasse München

life savings account via ETFs. "It's great that everything was explained to me so simply," she says. "I now feel secure and know that I'm making early provisions for the future." For Lena, the advice was an important step towards confident financial management.

Digital solutions seamlessly integrated

Whilst the in-person advice is highly personalised, digital services are also an integral part of the overall experience. For many young customers, the 'Sparkasse' app serves as the central hub for managing their finances. Features such as Wero for fast mobile-to-mobile payments and the S-Neo securities account for investors who wish to manage their investments independently round off the range of services on offer. Digital wealth management solutions such as SmartVermögen can also be integrated seamlessly.

'barer41' demonstrates how these channels work together: as a combination of personal proximity and digital flexibility. Advisory meetings can take place in person, but can also be conducted via video, chat or telephone if required. 'barer41' is therefore not an alternative to the digital world, but a complement to it.

New approaches, a clear stance

With concepts such as 'barer41', the Savings Banks are responding to the changing expectations of young people. Generations such as Gen Z and Generation Alpha have grown up with digital services, but at the same time are seeking guidance and a personal approach, particularly when it comes to complex financial matters. "Our aim is to support young people from an early stage and give them a sense of security," explains Sabine Derheld. "To do this, we also need to break new ground – in the way we engage with them, in the formats we use and in the design of our branches."

Stadtsparkasse München is deliberately gathering experience with 'barer41'. And it has already become clear that the concept works: as a place where advice is not just provided, but becomes part of everyday life. For Jonas, this has long since become second nature. For him, "barer41" is now more than just a "bank branch": "I sometimes just pop in," he explains. "To study or to meet someone. And if I have a question, there's always someone there to answer it quickly."

Concept branches: 'barer41' and Co.

With the barer41 branch, which opened in 2024, Stadtsparkasse München has deliberately broken new ground. The premises of a converted traditional branch were designed as a meeting place for the younger generation, with the motto 'Space for fresh ideas'. As such the facility also includes events, workshops and project rooms available to hire free of charge. Other Savings Banks are also pursuing similar approaches with innovative branches of a different kind, for example under the names "maxxs." in Bad Hersfeld, "Smoney" in Düsseldorf or "Klub zur hohen Kante" in Berlin.

↘ https://www.sskm.de/de/home/privatkunden/junge-kunden/barer41.html

AN EMPLOYER'S PERSPECTIVE

Giving young people a chance

Successful trainee branches, such as those run by Sparkasse Leipzig, are a hit both inside and outside the organisation

Trainee branches are an integral part of modern training programmes at many Savings Banks in Germany. They offer the opportunity to learn in a real-world working environment, where trainees take on responsibility at an early stage and work independently in customer-facing roles. The example of Sparkasse Leipzig, which will celebrate its 200th anniversary in 2026, illustrates how this model can work and why it offers added value for both young talent and customers.

When customers enter Sparkasse Leipzig's Hainstraße Financial Centre, they are met at first glance by the familiar sight of a modern Savings Bank branch. On closer inspection, however, one thing stands out: it is mainly young people who are providing advice here. Welcome to the trainee branch!

Responsibility right from the start

Following a successful pilot phase in 2023, the trainee branch was established as a permanent training base at the start of 2024. The idea behind it is as simple as it is effective: trainees should not only acquire their knowledge in theory, but also apply it through direct contact with customers as early as possible. What makes this special is that the concept was co-developed by the trainees themselves during a workshop. Today, the branch is an integral part of the training programme. Around 30 trainees in their first or second year of training spend up to nine weeks there each year, taking on different roles depending on their stage of training: from organising consultation appointments and carrying out service tasks to providing independent customer advice and even acting as temporary branch managers.

This turns the branch into a genuine learning environment within day-to-day operations. The trainees work with a regular client base, plan workflows as a team and organise internal processes independently. At the same time, they are systematically prepared for their future roles, such as private client advisers. "Today's trainees are our specialists and managers of tomorrow.

MICK JUNGMANN,
MEMBER OF THE TRAINEE BRANCH TEAM IN 2023

»We were able to help shape things right from the start and put our skills to the test in a real-world setting.«

The trainee branch was one of the most exciting stages of my training – particularly because I was involved right from the pilot phase. Back then, a lot of things were still new, and we had to work out together how processes worked and how to organise the branch. This set-up phase and the joint development of structures were what made it so appealing to me. What's more, you get to work independently from an early stage and conduct advisory meetings without a direct 'supervisor' looking over your shoulder. Being able to try things out freely in real customer interactions really helped me to gain confidence quickly.

What I liked most was the independence. Together with the other trainees, we were able to contribute our own ideas and think about how to shape the branch. The feedback from young customers was also very positive. Talking on an equal footing and quickly finding common ground made a lot of things easier. I think it's great that the trainee branch is now an integral part of the training programme.

In March, 25 trainees at Sparkasse Leipzig celebrated the successful completion of their training. Also present were Dr Harald Langenfeld (right), Chairman of the Board of Management, and Board member Andreas Nüdling (left).

We invest specifically in their training, and the trainee branch serves as a kind of learning laboratory for us," explains Sandra Glimm, Head of Training and Personnel Development at Sparkasse Leipzig. "Here, the trainees can take on responsibility, make decisions and experience first-hand what their actions mean for customers."

Quality is ensured at all times. Behind the scenes, experienced customer advisers support the trainees' work, provide feedback and step in to help when necessary. This creates a learning environment that encourages personal responsibility whilst offering a sense of security.

Learning through teamwork

Another key element of the concept is the structured transfer of knowledge between generations of trainees within the branch. Each new group is introduced by the previous one during an opening workshop. Together with trainers and experienced advisers, processes, customer structures and best practices are passed on. Regular feedback sessions highlight successes. This creates a continuous learning process that preserves experience and further develops the quality of the training.

At the heart of the trainee branch is advice given by peers. The service is deliberately aimed at young customers, who meet people of their own age here. Conversations are often more open and direct – a particular advantage when it comes to making their first financial decisions. The positive feedback confirms the success of the concept. Many customers find the advice particularly accessible and personal. As well as traditional financial topics, they also receive support with everyday issues: from moving into their first flat and transport to practical tips on living in Leipzig and the surrounding region.

MARIE ERMISCH,
MEMBER OF THE TRAINEE BRANCH TEAM IN 2025

»At the trainee branch, you learn to find solutions independently and grow from the experience.«

For me, the trainee branch was an important experience because you really get a feel for what a day in the life of an adviser is like. What made a particular impression on me was having to resolve many situations on my own. This independent problem-solving and personal development are what helped me progress the most.

This was also evident in my day-to-day work. Greater courage, self-confidence and a confident manner helped me to lead discussions proactively and develop my own advisory style. The role of project manager gave me the opportunity to acquire skills such as planning, structuring and organising projects. Working as part of a team was also important. Close cooperation and learning together strengthened our team spirit. Overall, my time at the trainee branch helped me develop both professionally and personally.

Brief profile of Sparkasse Leipzig

With total assets of around EUR 12.1 billion and over 570,000 private and business customers, Stadt- und Kreissparkasse Leipzig is the leading financial services provider in the city and the districts of Northern Saxony and Leipzig. Founded in 1826, it celebrates its 200th anniversary in 2026 with the motto 'Strong together for tomorrow' and is now one of the largest Savings Banks in Germany. The financial institution employs more than 1,400 staff and operates over 65 financial and advisory centres across its catchment area, including a trainee branch.

↘ sparkasse-leipzig.de

↘ 200 years of Sparkasse Leipzig: Strong together for tomorrow.

"We're finding that young customers are responding very positively to this initiative," says Silvia Zetzsche, a trainer at Sparkasse Leipzig. "Receiving advice from peers builds trust and makes it easier to get to grips with financial matters."

Practical training strengthens loyalty

For Sparkasse Leipzig, which will have almost 110 young people in training by 2025, this approach also pays off in the long term. Taking on responsibility at an early stage and gaining first-hand experience of advisory situations strengthen employees' sense of identification with

Prime location: In the heart of the city, Sparkasse Leipzig's young professionals advise their customers.

the company. This has a noticeable effect on staff retention: the retention rate currently stands at 88 percent. The trainee branch contributes to this by combining practical training with personal development and highlighting career prospects within Sparkasse Leipzig.

Its anniversary year of 2026 in particular highlights how Sparkasse Leipzig brings tradition and the future together: with a clear focus on supporting young people and with initiatives such as the trainee branch, which not only teaches responsibility but also brings it to life.

**CHRISTOPH SCHULZ,
MEMBER OF THE TRAINEE BRANCH TEAM IN 2023**

»We didn't just help out, we actively helped to develop the concept.«

I was part of the pilot phase of the trainee branch and am proud to have contributed to its successful implementation. A lot hadn't been finalised, and we had to develop solutions together. This opportunity to help shape things and keep an eye on the bigger picture had a particularly big impact on me.

It was also exciting for me to champion the concept within the company. I gave presentations to branch managers and introduced the idea of the trainee branch – a wonderful experience. The concept was also well received by customers. Some came specifically because of the trainee branch, and I'm still in touch with a few of them today. I now work as a training officer and get to see the next generations going through this programme. This really brings home to me the lasting impact of this concept.

Brief profile of Sparkasse Leipzig Trainee Branch

Following a successful pilot phase, Sparkasse Leipzig's trainee branch has been a permanent training base for the company's trainee bankers since 2024. Designed to operate all year round, the branch team typically comprises three trainees each from the first and second years of their training. This makes Sparkasse Leipzig the first and, to date, only institution in Saxony to run such a branch on a permanent basis. The on-site trainee team, supported behind the scenes by an experienced customer adviser, places particular emphasis on advising their peers. However, older customers can also expect the usual range of services.

↘ www.sparkasse-leipzig.de/de/home/privatkunden/junge-kunden/azubi-filiale.html

AN EMPLOYER'S PERSPECTIVE

Development opportunities – also internationally

Broaden your horizons by getting involved in the global projects run by the German Sparkassenstiftung

Whether in Africa, Asia or Latin America: for more than 30 years, the German Sparkassenstiftung for International Cooperation (Savings Banks Foundation – DSIK) has been dedicated to transferring Savings Banks expertise to developing and emerging economies. There, it strengthens financial systems, facilitates financial inclusion and thus contributes to economic development. At the same time, it opens up new prospects through its projects, particularly for younger staff members of the Savings Banks Finance Group, by offering targeted assignments abroad.

The German Sparkassenstiftung is currently running around 50 projects in 51 countries. This offers many opportunities for committed junior managers to gain international experience at the DSIK teams' global locations as part of assignments abroad lasting several weeks, and to develop their professional and personal skills in a targeted manner. To this end, the DSIK has launched two initiatives.

Staff Development Programme since 2013

The focus is on the staff development programme launched in 2013, which is supported by the Foundation's 'Förderkolleg' (fellowship programme) for academic research. It is aimed at particularly high-performing young managers and specialist staff within the Savings Banks Finance Group who are either currently working at DSIK member institutions or are completing a university degree as participants in the 'Förderkolleg'.

Applications are made on an individual basis: interested candidates submit their applications directly to the DSIK and undergo a multi-stage selection process. In addition to training in banking, the requirements include a very good command of English, an open-minded attitude towards international engagement and the support of the institution sending the candidate. The selected participants work for four to eight weeks on specific DSIK projects where they can best contribute their expertise. The DSIK covers the organisation and costs. Since the programme began, a total of 164 overseas assignments have been carried out – with growing demand and rising numbers of applicants.

Since 2025, this programme has been complemented by the Personnel Development Programme Plus. It is specifically aimed at the HR departments of DSIK's member institutions and expands the scope for strategic personnel development. Unlike the traditional programme, applications are not submitted by individuals but by the institutions

For more than 30 years, the German Sparkassenstiftung has successfully delivered training courses worldwide on financial and business education, drawing on the expertise of the Savings Banks Finance Group. These courses are aimed not only at staff from financial institutions but also at the local population.

themselves. These institutions often select suitable staff members through an internal recruitment process and submit the applications to the DSIK. Assignments last between four and six weeks, with costs borne by the respective institution via a transparent flat-rate model. The DSIK is responsible for organisation, professional support and global integration into suitable projects.

Both programmes share a common goal: to open up new perspectives for participants and to contribute the Savings Bank philosophy to global development. Whilst the staff development programme promotes individual talent through a scholarship model, the Programme Plus specifically strengthens staff development within the institutions and, at the same time, enhances their appeal as employers.

Everyone involved benefits

The high demand confirms the effectiveness of this approach: around 70 applications were received for both programmes for the year 2026. In total, around 25 participants can undertake an assignment abroad each year, around a third of whom do so through the Plus programme. They are deployed in selected DSIK projects wherever their expertise is most needed. This creates dual added value for the Savings Banks Finance Group. The international projects benefit from the practical experience of the seconded specialists. At the same time, these specialists return with new perspectives, intercultural skills and a keener understanding of the role of Savings Banks in a globally interconnected world. International development opportunities have thus become an integral part of modern human resources development.

The German Sparkassenstiftung supports financial associations and microfinance institutions with professional advice. Together, they develop, for example, new digital and sustainable financial products that benefit the local population.

Testimonials from graduates of the staff development programme

Whether at a Savings Bank, a leasing company or a service provider within the Savings Banks Finance Group; whether on a dual study programme or already in a permanent professional role; whether in Laos, Malawi, Mexico or Rwanda: Lena Abb, Yasmin Bade, Janine Max, Denise Meyer and Maiko Stelter talk about their assignments abroad – their motivations, impressions and insights …

Four questions for Yasmin Bade and Maiko Stelter

Yasmin Bade spent time in **Mexico** through the DSIK. She completed her apprenticeship at Kreissparkasse Köln and subsequently studied business administration as part of a dual-study programme at Bonn-Rhein-Sieg University of Applied Sciences. She now works as an internal auditor. Maiko Stelter, on the other hand, went to **Rwanda**. He trained at Sparkasse Lüneburg and subsequently completed a dual degree in Banking & Sales at the University of Finance and Management in Bonn. Stelter is now head of the corporate finance department at the Savings Bank.

Why did you apply to the DSIK's staff development programme?
→ **Yasmin Bade:** I applied in 2023 because I wanted to contribute my personal and professional experience and knowledge to a DSIK project. I also wanted to step out of my comfort zone by taking on new responsibilities in a place that was likely to be unfamiliar to me, whilst not communicating in my native language.

→ **Maiko Stelter:** My motivation for applying in 2024 was based both on personal experiences and on a clear conviction regarding the programme's content. Back in 2022, as part of my Master's degree, I had the opportunity to study and live in Toronto for several months. I wanted to build on that experience in a targeted way – particularly with regard to the environment in a developing or emerging country. Based on this, three key motivations were decisive for me: firstly, the opportunity to make a concrete contribution using my knowledge within the context of development work; secondly, the chance to promote our Savings Bank philosophy – and thus our social mission – internationally; and thirdly, the prospect that such a placement would provide the ideal environment for in-depth personal and professional development.

Brief profile German Sparkassenstiftung
The German Sparkassenstiftung for International Cooperation (Savings Banks Foundation – DSIK) is the development policy-focused, non-profit organisation of the Savings Banks Finance Group. It promotes the German Savings Bank philosophy worldwide, drawing on 200 years of experience. Its aim is to strengthen regional economic development and financial infrastructure in developing and emerging economies, as well as to provide people with access to financial services. To this end, the DSIK has implemented around 250 projects in over 100 countries since its foundation in 1992.

↘ www.sparkassenstiftung.de

Maiko Stelter

What was the highlight of your time there?
→ **Bade:** The local people and culture were the highlight for me. I met so many friendly and helpful people and was made to feel very welcome by the DSIK team in Mexico.

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*My time in **Mexico** was a formative experience for me. I was able to contribute my expertise in an international context whilst gaining new professional and cultural perspectives. In particular, the open dialogue and trust within the team showed me that sustainable transformation is possible through cross-border collaboration. I came away from the programme with valuable insights and a great deal of motivation, and I can recommend it to anyone who wants to play an active role in shaping sustainability and think beyond their own horizons.*
«

Denise Meyer
Sustainability Manager,
Deutscher Sparkassenverlag,
six-week assignment in Mexico

Yasmin Bade

Another highlight was my presentation to the staff of a 'Caja' – a local savings bank – on the dual vocational training system. It really highlighted just how important the DSIK's work is and how much I've been able to improve my Spanish in such a short space of time.

→ **Stelter:** I find it difficult to single out just one highlight. Rather, it was the combination of professional and personal experiences that made my stay in Rwanda so special. In the day-to-day running of the project, I was particularly impressed by the exceptionally high level of interest in the subject matter. The project participants' thirst for knowledge and high level of self-motivation were remarkable. It was simply a pleasure to drive things forward together. On a personal level, I was profoundly moved by the country's history, its nature and culture, and the openness of the people living there.

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*My placement in **Malawi** was incredibly enriching, both professionally and personally. It showed me just how much change is possible through collaboration and what a positive impact the work of the DSIK and its local partners has on the lives of the local people. The approach of 'rolling up our sleeves and making a positive difference together' has had a lasting impact on my day-to-day work. It's precisely for this reason that I can highly recommend the programme.*
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Lena Abb
Senior Corporate Strategy Officer, Deutsche Leasing, six-week assignment in Malawi in 2025

Did the overseas assignment meet your expectations?

→ **Bade:** Yes, definitely. I had the opportunity to work in an international team for six weeks and take on new tasks, which I carried out independently. I also got to know a lot of new people and places – experiences I would have missed out on without my time abroad.

→ **Stelter:** The assignment abroad not only met my expectations but significantly exceeded them. Both professionally and personally, I was able to gain far more experience and insights during those seven weeks than I had anticipated. I am all the more grateful to Sparkasse Lüneburg for giving me this opportunity.

What have you taken away from your assignment abroad for your future career in Germany?

→ **Bade:** I've learnt that you can still achieve your goals with a little more flexibility and composure.

→ **Stelter:** Above all, the assignment abroad has shown me how valuable it is to consciously shift perspectives and question familiar ways of thinking. I'm taking this openness with me, quite specifically, for my future career path. At the same time, my ability to develop pragmatic and flexible solutions has improved, as has my capacity to act and remain resilient even under unfamiliar circumstances. I have also gained an even greater awareness of the social mission of the Savings Banks. Seeing the contribution that functioning financial structures can make to economic development has permanently sharpened my perspective in regard to my own role.

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*My assignment in **Laos** was a profoundly enriching experience, both professionally and personally. I was able to put my knowledge to good use whilst gaining new perspectives on international cooperation and sustainable development. I was particularly impressed by the collaboration with local people: the open interaction, the mutual trust and the shared determination to bring about lasting change. The in-depth exchange and shared learning provided me with new perspectives and showed how much can be achieved when different experiences and skills come together. The staff development programme not only opened up new professional horizons for me, but also enriched me personally and has permanently sharpened my awareness of global interconnections and the importance of acting responsibly.*
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Janine Max
Incoming/Outgoing Payments Coordinator, SV SparkassenVersicherung, six-week assignment in Laos

AN EDUCATIONAL PARTNER'S PERSPECTIVE

Teaching financial literacy in a practical, real-life context

Learning, investing, starting a business: the Savings Banks Finance Group's range of educational programmes is extremely diverse.

Supporting young people on their journey to adulthood: this includes imparting basic economic knowledge to help them manage their money responsibly. A digital world full of temptations and new payment options can quickly lead to ill-considered spending or even debt. As part of their public mandate, the Savings Banks therefore promote financial education amongst broad sections of the population – particularly young people – through high-quality, long-term educational programmes.

Savings Banks School Service: Learning for life

"We learn not for school, but for life." There is hardly a phrase that better describes the mission of the Savings Banks School Service. Founded in 1975 and celebrating its 50th anniversary in 2025, the organisation embodies the Savings Banks Finance Group's long-term commitment to financial education in schools and builds on the historic founding principles of the Savings Banks: to strengthen the culture of saving and economic literacy – particularly among young people.

80,000
annual views of digital educational resources

200
teaching resources covering 26 topics

400
free school talks per year

>50
years of financial education in schools

The aim is to equip pupils at an early stage with the skills to manage money responsibly. The focus is on practical, everyday skills: making financial decisions, keeping track of income and expenditure, and avoiding excessive debt.

"Financial literacy is a key skill for social participation and personal independence," emphasises Karolin Schriever, Executive Member of the Board of the DSGV. "Through our educational programmes, we help young people to acquire practical knowledge on how to manage their money safely."

The Savings Banks School Service is continuously developing its free and ad-free programme. In addition to teaching materials, the focus today is on digital and interactive formats as well as school talks. In 2025, the talks alone reached around 10,000 pupils directly. This practical and real-life-oriented knowledge transfer is delivered by a skilled team of educators, debt counsellors, lawyers and Savings Bank staff.

↘ www.sparkassen-schulservice.de

Stock Market Simulation Game: Learning by doing

Analysing companies and market trends and then making sustainable financial decisions: the real stock market is no game. But fortunately, the Stock Market Simulation has been available to young people since 1983. Europe's largest online educational game on stock market activity provides a risk-free and practical introduction to economic relationships within the economy and capital markets, thereby offering valuable insights into personal financial literacy.

The organisers are the Savings Banks in Germany and Europe. The educational project is supported by the DSGV, the regional associations of DekaBank and the European Savings and Retail Banking Group (ESBG).

The online educational game launches every autumn in the categories of school pupils, university students and Savings Bank trainees. During the approximately four-month game period, the teams of young people trade securities in real time using fictitious start-up capital. In this way, they can test their financial knowledge in a safe environment and not only understand economic relationships in theory, but also experience them first-hand through their own actions. The Stock Market Simulation also promotes cooperative learning through teamwork. As a result, participants learn to develop strategies together and share responsibility, and also acquire basic knowledge of the stock market according to the principle of 'learning by doing'.

At the end of the game period, two winning teams are awarded prizes in each category: based on total portfolio value and sustainability returns. In 2025, the Stock Market Simulation concluded with a record number of around 130,000 participants. The next round of the game starts on 1 October 2026.

↘ www.planspiel-boerse.de

The Stock Market Simulation is a fun way to help young people learn about the world of business and the stock market.

"German Start-up Award for School Pupils": Do your own thing

Turning a vision into your own venture: with the "German Start-up Award for School Pupils" (DGPS), this is possible even at a young age – virtually and practically.The competition – one of the largest online business simulation games – has been teaching pupils how entrepreneurial thinking works for more than 20 years.

Pupils from year 9 onwards work in teams to set up a virtual company and learn to make decisions and develop solutions together. They are supported by digital and analogue tools, as well as through dialogue with experts from the business world and the Savings Banks.

The DGPS is sponsored by the Savings Banks, ZDF, Porsche and, since 2026, the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung. The aim is to inspire young people to take an interest in economic issues at an early age. The 2025 winning team, 'Intima' from Eschwege, developed an app that provides young people with anonymous information on sexuality and contraception.

↘ www.dgp-schueler.de