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GERMANY

INTRODUCTION

Since the early 1990s the German hospital sector has been in an ongoing process of restructuring. The most obvious signs for this are a continuing decline in the number of hospitals and hospital beds and a growing number of hospital privatisations. Concerning the latter there have been two waves of privatisations so far. The first wave started in the early 1990s and following German unification was very much concentrated on eastern Germany. A second wave started after 2000 and now covers the whole of Germany. The current wave hit its temporary peak with the first privatisation of a university hospital, involving the universities of Marburg and Gießen at the beginning of 2006.

The privatisation of hospitals in Germany is mainly driven by the large budget deficits of public authorities at the regional and municipal levels. For the latter privatisation has the advantage that they do not have to compensate any longer for the budget deficits of public hospitals and might even make some money through the sale – which they can use to tackle their own financial problems.

1. THE GERMAN HOSPITAL SECTOR – AN OVERVIEW

According to the German hospitals statistics in 2004 there were 2,166 hospitals with more than 530,000 beds.¹ Since the beginning of the 1990s, hospital capacities in Germany have shown a continuous decline. The total numbers of hospitals fell by about 10% while the number of beds decreased by about 20%. In 2004 there were 6.4 beds per 1,000 inhabitants compared with 8.3 beds in 1991.

There are somewhat more than 1 million employees working in the German hospital sector. This is about one quarter of all employees in the German health sector, which in total covers about 4.2 million employees (cf. Rolland 2005, 842; Statistisches Bundesamt 2006b, 41). In comparison to the fall in the number of hospitals, the decline of employment has been relatively moderate. Since the early 1990s the total number of employees has dropped by about 3.6%. Calculated on the basis of full-time equivalents, however, the decline has been more than twice as high, reaching 8%. The latter indicates an increasing use of part-time and marginal part-time employment in German hospitals.

¹ The German Federal Statistical Office provides annual hospital statistics including basic data on all hospitals in Germany (for the most recent issue, see: Statistisches Bundesamt 2005). There is a legal obligation for hospitals to provide certain information on a regular basis, since the hospital statistic is one major source for national hospital planning. For more information on the structure and the methodology of the hospital statistics, see: Rosenow and Steinberg (2002).