

Early Childhood Interventions. Figures, Data and Facts 2020. FRÜDOK Annual Report

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Summary

Background

Since the beginning of 2015, regional early childhood intervention networks were started to be set up and expanded to all provinces according to a national model. The aim of these regional networks is to provide needs-based support to (expectant) parents and families with small children in stressful life situations and to promote health equity.

Regional implementation is accompanied by the National Centre for Early Childhood Interventions (NZFH.at). Its tasks include the provision of uniform documentation and the statistical analysis of the data collected.

Methods

A descriptive data analysis of contacts with early childhood intervention networks and families supported for the year 2020 was performed and structural characteristics of the regional networks as well as feedback of families on the satisfaction and benefit of the offer are presented. In the chapter on single-parent families, the entire period from 2016 to 2020 is included in the evaluations.

Findings

Early childhood intervention networks are implemented in all nine provinces since 2016. As of 31 December 2020, regional early childhood intervention networks were active in a total of 65 political districts. In 2020, there were 1,803 families in Austria who were placed with regional early childhood intervention networks by professionals in the health and social sector or friends, acquaintances, and relatives or who made contact themselves. 2,198 families were supported throughout the year, and 1,061 family supports were completed.

The primary target group – pregnant women and families with infants and young children up to three years of age – is reached very early, as in the previous years: 26 percent of contacts were made during pregnancy; forty percent of families had children under three months. In line with the objective of early childhood interventions, families with social, psychological and/or medical burdens were in focus: e. g. more than half of the families were at risk of poverty, forty percent of the mothers had a migrant background, and thirty percent each had at most a compulsory school leaving certificate and/or lives without a partner.

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Almost one fifth of the children were born premature and eleven percent were multiple births.

Single-parent families supported by early childhood intervention networks not only tend to have more burdens than couple families, but they also have fewer resources to fall back on to compensate. Women from single-parent families are more often unplanned pregnant, are on average younger, more often have a low level of education, are less often employed and are even more often in a precarious financial situation than couple families. In addition, they have more often experienced violence (still at the beginning of the support), the custody situation is more often a stressful issue, they report more often fears about the future and were or have been more often treated for a mental illness. Fortunately, however, they are reached comparatively early: 36 percent of all family supports for single-parent families started during pregnancy.

In summary, it can be said that a particularly large number of single-parent families, families at risk of poverty and families with children with increased care requirements make use of early help.

Conclusions

Even in the challenging year 2020, the regional early prevention networks supported many families in their specific life situation and tried to reduce the burdens as much as possible and to activate (existing) resources. During the lockdown phases, there was a decrease in referrals, especially from hospitals, and referrals were also difficult. Nevertheless, families could be reached and supported during this time. A further expansion of early intervention should be strived for throughout Austria. At the same time, the support networks in the regions must be stabilised so that all families in stressful situations have the opportunity to receive tailored support.

Keywords

Frühe Hilfen, early childhood intervention, documentation