

SUPPORTING PARENTS AND CARERS IN THE EARLY YEARS: INTEGRATED MODELS OF INTERVENTION – THE FAMILY CENTER SYSTEM IN NORTH RHINE-WESTPHALIA

EXPERT MEETING
„THE ROLE OF LOCAL LEVEL PREVENTION SYSTEMS
FOR IMPLEMENTING THE EUROPEAN CHILD GUARANTEE“
COFACE FAMILIES EUROPE/AGF, BERLIN, OCTOBER 9TH, 2024
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1 CHILD DAY CARE IN GERMANY'S FEDERAL SYSTEM

- National government: sets a framework through the Social Code VIII, e.g. by establishing legal entitlements (§ 24 SGB VIII) or regulating to a certain degree the structure of parental fees (§ 90 SGB VIII)
- *Länder*: specify this framework and determine the educational and organizational structure of the services
- Municipalities: the youth welfare offices are responsible for the local infrastructure and the fulfillment of the legal entitlements
- Non-profit providers (*freie Träger*), e.g. welfare associations : generally provide the services (approx. 70% of daycare centers are run by non-profit providers, 30% by public providers)
- Funded primarily by the *Länder* and local authorities; additionally, in most *Länder* parents have to pay fees, which vary between the *Länder* and often within each *Land* as well

2 THE FAMILY CENTER SYSTEM IN NRW (NORTH RHINE-WESTPHALIA)

- Even before 2006, there were a few family centers in NRW initiated either by municipalities or non-profit providers => grassroots “movement”/“bottom-up” process
- In 2006, the *Land* began developing daycare centers into family centers as part of a state program
- In 2007, family centers were included in the North Rhine-Westphalia Children's Education Act (KiBiz)
 - Family centers are daycare facilities that, in addition to the core tasks of educating, raising and caring for children, provide or help to find easily accessible services for advice, support and education of families that are oriented to the needs of the neighbourhood (§ 42 KiBiz).
 - The prerequisite for funding is certification according to the “Family Center NRW” quality seal (valid for four years)
 - Since 2020/2021 amount of funding: 20,000 euros/year; dynamized since 2021/2022 (§ 43 KiBiz)

– Up to now, there has been an annual expansion

- In 2007, 261 family centers were certified
- In 2023/2024, there were around 3,300 family centers

(<https://www.familienportal.nrw/de/3-bis-6-jahre/betreuung-bildung/familienzentren-nrw>)

- This means that approx. a third of daycare centers now work as family centers
- Comprehensive infrastructure in NRW

Criteria of the seal of quality/1

(https://www.familienzentrum.nrw.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Publikationen/ISA_br_Guetesiegel_web_RZ_1_.pdf)

A. **Services** of the family center (6 basic and 6 advanced services each)

1. Counseling and support for children and families

- Example of basic service (1.1): “The family center has a directory [...] of counseling and therapy options in the area [...].”
- Example of advanced service (1.12): “The family center organizes services for parents for labor market and career orientation (at least one time per year) [...].”

2. Family education and educational partnership

3. Work-Family balance

4. Profile areas (employment and time-sensitive services design; family support; heterogeneous structures; childcare care; rural areas; migration and integration; prevention)

Criteria of the seal of quality/2

B. **Structures** of the family center (4 basic and 4 advanced structures)

5. Orientation of the services to the neighbourhood

- Example of basic structure (5.3): “The family center opens up services for families in the neighbourhood who do not have children in the daycare facility [...].”
- Example of advanced structure (5.8): “The family center cooperates with a senior citizens' facility or groups of senior citizens in the neighbourhood and organizes joint services with children and senior citizens (at least one offer per half-year) [...].”

6. Binding cooperation structures

7. Target group-oriented internal and external communication

8. Quality safeguarding through steering and team development

3 FAMILY CENTERS IN NRW AS INTEGRATED MODELS OF INTERVENTION

3 guiding principles:

1. Orientation towards **families**
2. Orientation towards **cooperation** with external partners
3. Orientation towards the **neighbourhood** (*Sozialraumorientierung*)

The idea is to support children...

- ... by supporting their parents,
- ... by enabling easily accessible services without stigmatisation,
- ... by offering services from a single source,
- ... by fostering multi-professional cooperation.

Family centers are daycare facilities that, in addition to the core tasks of educating, raising and caring for children, **provide or help to find easily accessible services for** advice, support and education of **families** that are oriented to the needs of the **neighbourhood** (§ 42 KiBiz).

4 PRACTICAL EXAMPLES

PRACTICAL EXAMPLES I: FAMILY COUNSELING AND SUPPORT

- A core element of family centers: promoting easy access to counseling and support services for families
- Family centers either expand their own services in this regard or cooperate with various external partners, in particular with educational counseling centers (*Erziehungsberatungsstellen*)
- A new form of service has been created here: Employees of educational counseling centers offer consultation hours on the premises of the family center, usually once a month => easily accessible
- Very often, employees of the counseling centers are also invited to parents' cafés or parents' evenings in order to provide general information, but above all to get to know each other and to build trust

“The family center [...] 1.8 ... makes it possible for children to receive individual therapies [...] (on the premises of the family center and/or through a pick-up and delivery service).“

- e.g. speech therapy: premises for the children are familiar, integration into “normal” everyday life
- easily accessible for children in all-day care and for children whose parents are unable to organize therapy appointments
- Cooperation between staff and therapists: professional exchange, staff functions as a “bridge” to the parents

Challenges:

- (Public) health insurance: Concern about “creating demand”
- Difficulties with billing (home visits)
- Skepticism among professional associations (suboptimal spatial conditions, competition problems)
- Challenges at the interface between the healthcare and the youth welfare system

5 CONCLUSION: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

CONCLUSION: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES I

- All in all, family centers contribute to a preventive social policy by using daycare centers as infrastructure to reach children and parents where they are anyway
- By doing so, family centers link primary (easily accessible services) with secondary (individual advice/support, e.g. through educational counseling) and tertiary prevention (as a guide/*Lotse* by referring to specialized services outside the family center, e.g. debt counselling, social paediatric center, psychotherapy)
- Family centers function as an anchor/as a place to go to for the neighbourhood
- The cooperation between family centers and various external partners is generally perceived as an enrichment from all sides

CONCLUSION: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES II

- However/1, there are also challenges, because ...
 - ... cooperation sometimes suffer from limited capacities – both on the side of the family centers and on the side of their partners
 - Lack of financial resources
 - Shortage of personnel and/or skilled workers
 - Moreover, cooperation sometimes suffer from regulations that actually restrict the possibilities to cooperate
 - “social selectivity“ in the use of services, mainly due to lack of spaces
- However/2, all in all, family centers are a very good approach to reach – perhaps not all, but – many parents and children

**THANK YOU VERY MUCH
FOR YOUR ATTENTION!**

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