

Equal Opportunities, successful Development and sufficient regulation in North Rhine-Westfalia/Germany

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Overview of Today's Presentation

This presentation will provide an overview of the following issues

1. The initiative “Leave No Child Behind” in North Rhine-Westfalia
2. Factors of success and research findings
3. Status of the implementation: The prevention chains in the towns and municipalities in North Rhine-Westfalia
4. Legislation for a working prevention chain
5. Conclusion

The Initiative “Leave No Child Behind” in North Rhine-Westfalia

The Initiative „Leave No Child Behind“

In 2011 the State Government of North Rhine-Westphalia and the Bertelsmann Stiftung launched the project

- aims to **improve development prospects** and **provide equal opportunities for all children** (but: focus on children in vulnerable situations)
- integrated and comprehensive approach including different sectors: **child welfare, education, health, social services**
- **40 municipalities** take part in the initiative
- Municipalities create **local prevention chains**:
 - Systematic collaboration between stakeholders
 - Intention: improve the effectiveness of local support
 - Transition between institutions and competences

➤ The **Bertelsmann Stiftung** was responsible for the **accompanying scientific research**

Definition of local prevention for children and young people

- The idea of the initiative „Leave No Child Behind“ is to **think from a child's point of view**
- Prevention aims both at a direct influence on the **behaviour** of the target group and at a positive change in the target group's **environment**
- Prevention of risk factors and strengthening of protective factors → **resilience**
- Prevention includes
 - ...**universal preventive offers** that take effect before a problem arises (e.g. home visitation programmes for all families), prevention in pre-school, schools, health care.
 - ...**targeted approaches**, that support the most disadvantaged (e.g. specialised programmes for families in need)

Definition correlates with the commission's recommendation „*Investing in Children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage*“ (2013)

Definition of Disadvantage and Risk of Exclusion

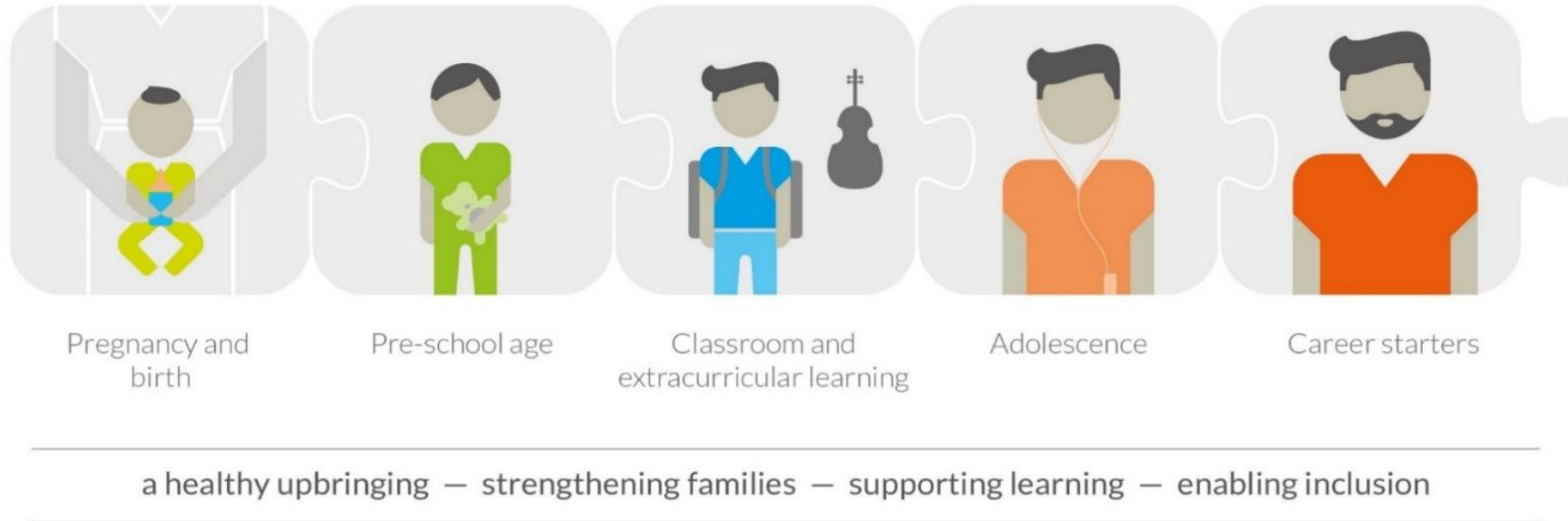
Children are considered disadvantaged if they

- lack **familial support** or come from **dysfunctional, impoverished, or socially isolated** families.
- face **language barriers, homelessness, minority status, or migration** backgrounds.
- possess **limited personal resources** or **low educational aspirations**.
- depend on **welfare services** and face **difficulty** transitioning to **independence**.

(Source: Prof. Dagmar Kutsar & Prof. Helena Heleva, *Social inclusion of youth on the margins of society: Policy review of research results*, EU 2012)

“Leave No Child Behind” promotes community-based prevention chains to support children and young people and improve their participation in society.

Prevention chains without gaps to improve prospects for the future of every child!



- **Prevention Chains: Cross-Phase Network Collaboration**
- From early help to youth work and career entry.
- Coordination among daycare, schools, health and social services.
- A strategy to avoid developmental gaps.
- Coordinates stakeholders from pregnancy to career entry.
- Promotes health, family stability, educational pathways, and inclusion.

Factors of success and research findings

The accompanying research 2012 – 2015 shows, prevention / social investment works if...



What and how to do?

- **Disparities in Service Usage**

- Not all families equally access services.
- Barriers include low education, migration background, and complex family issues.

- **Reaching Families**

- Health services (e.g., pediatricians, midwives, obstetrics/maternity wards) are key access points.
- Main info sources: social networks, schools, daycares.

What and how to do?

- **Integration Gaps**

- In NRW, health and education are **marginalized** in prevention policy.
- Integration would improve access to at-risk families.

- **Early, Evidence-Based Action**

- Earlier daycare entry improves school readiness.
- Targeted funding for high-need institutions is efficient (e.g., plusKita).
- Extra-curricular participation (sports, clubs) can **compensate disadvantages**.

Status of the implementation: The prevention chains in the towns and municipalities in North Rhine-Westfalia

Funding over three legislative periods by the State of North Rhine Westfalia

The state continuously promotes the implementation of prevention chains by

- strengthening interdisciplinary cooperation between different institutions that work with children, young people and families.
- establishing and supporting coordination offices that improve cooperation between different agencies and departments.
- helping to use and to maintain the online tool 'Guter Start NRW' (Good Start NRW).
- starting and continuing the analysis of networks and measures in the youth welfare office district.
- fostering measures at regular institutions: Support for, e.g., family primary school centres, guidance services in maternity clinics and doctors' surgeries, municipal family offices and outreach services.

“Leave No Child Behind” - Evaluation 2023

Results

(Ten years after the Bertelsmann Foundation's research findings)

Prevention chains are significantly more successful when they are politically anchored – e.g. in council resolutions or through support from senior administrators. Without this backing, projects often remain isolated and less sustainable.

Some municipalities already have well-developed prevention chains, while others are still in the early stages.

- The majority of municipalities have established initial prevention structures. Their binding nature and scope vary greatly.
- Only some have established systematic control, for example through permanent coordination offices or monitoring.
- In most municipalities, the comprehensive survey has shown that there are strong networks between youth welfare services, educational institutions and independent organisations.
- Health services and labour market actors are still underrepresented.

“Leave No Child Behind” - Evaluation 2023 Results

(Ten years after the Bertelsmann Foundation's research findings)

- Many municipalities report that prevention chains enable them to reach families earlier and more effectively.
- Family offices, guidance services and digital information platforms are particularly successful.
- The shortage of skilled workers is a limiting factor in all municipalities.
- Financial constraints are also slowing down the process of consolidation.
- **The comprehensive survey has shown that cooperation and exchange in the municipalities have improved.**
- **Services are better coordinated and reach the target groups more often.**

“Leave No Child Behind” Evaluation 2023

Tasks and recommendation for the State of North Rhine Westfalia

- Clear political framework conditions and reliable funding are needed to secure the structures established in the municipalities in the long term.
- Prevention should be recognised and supported as a mandatory task.

Legislation for a working prevention chain

or

**Combating the myth that prevention is a
voluntary task**

Constitutional Foundations

- Children are **bearers of all fundamental rights from birth**.
- Key articles of the German Basic Law (GG):
 - Art. 1(1): Human dignity is inviolable.
 - Art. 2(1): Right to personal freedom.
 - Art. 3(3): No discrimination based on social background.
 - Art. 6: Protection and duty of care by parents and the state.
 - Art. 7: Education oversight by the state.
 - Art. 12: All Germans have the right to freely choose their profession, workplace, and place of training.
 - Art. 20: Commitment to democratic and social governance.
- The state is **obliged to give children access to their rights**.

Federal Constitutional Court Rulings

- Children have a **right to free personal development** and
- The state must **ensure living conditions** that promote healthy growth.

BVerfG, Urt. v. 19. 2. 2013 – 1 BvL 1/11, 1 BvR 3247/09c

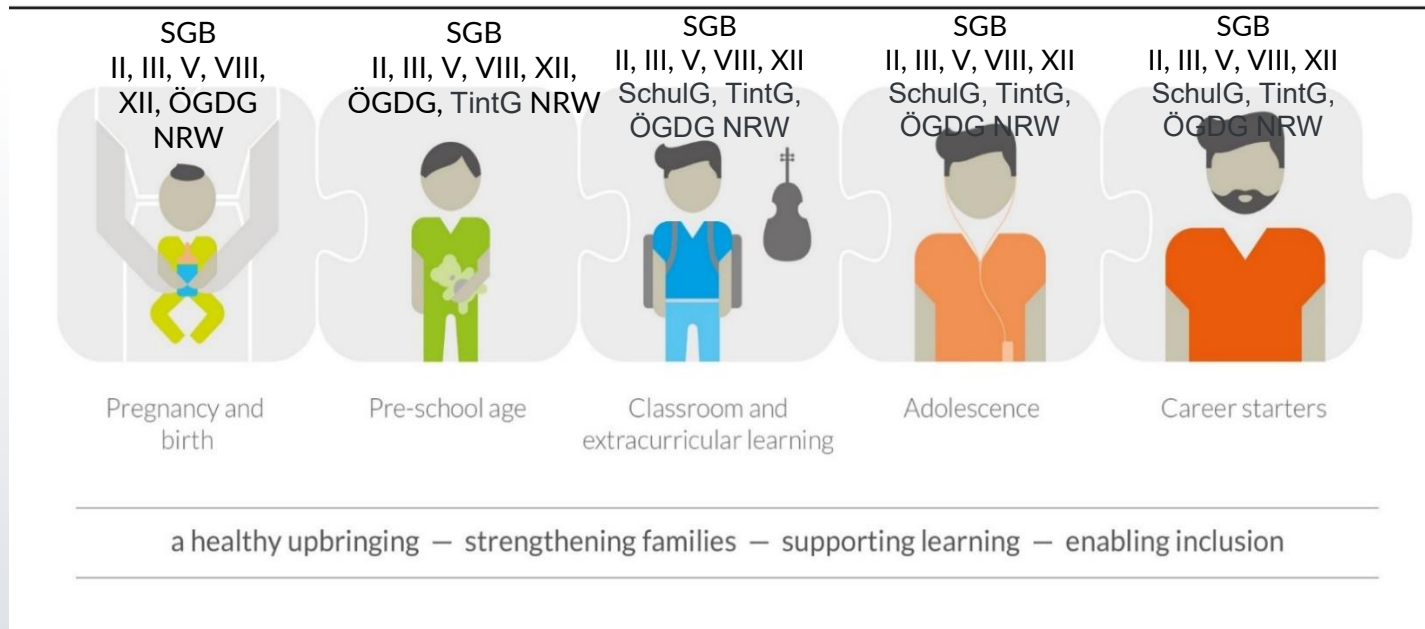
- There is a **right to education** with guaranteed minimum standards.

BVerfG Beschluss vom 19.11.2021 – 1 BvR 971/21, 1 BvR 1069/21

Legal Basis of Prevention Chains

- Anchored in German Social Code (SGB) I, II, III, V, VIII, XII.
- NRW laws: KiBiz, SchulG, ÖGDG, TIntG.

Prevention chains without gaps to improve prospects for the future of every child!



Legal provisions define (SGB I):

- Right to **consultation and support**.
- **Duty to cooperate** across sectors.
- Obligation to enable access and joint planning.

Legal provisions define (SGB X):

The service providers, their associations, and the public-law associations mentioned in this code are **obliged to cooperate closely in fulfilling their duties under this code**.

Conclusion

Final Thought

- Children need **support to exercise rights** effectively.
- Preventive chains contain not only individual entitlements but **require systemic implementation** at the municipal level.
- Prevention chains offer a vision for **cross-sectoral collaboration** to promote successful child development.
- No new initiatives are needed.
- **The legal framework already supports integrated action.**
- The **state is responsible** for ensuring that **children can exercise their rights**. It must therefore enable regional and local authorities to **comply with the law** and **monitor their compliance**.

Thank you!

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