INSIGHTS ON FAMILY POLICIES

DOSSIER 3

EARLY INTERVENTION NETWORKS AND PREVENTION CHAINS IN GERMANY:
MUNICIPAL FAMILY POLICY AS A CATALYST OF WELFARE TRANSFORMATION

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EUROPEAN OBSERVATORY ON FAMILY POLICY

ABOUT THE INSIGHTS ON FAMILY POLICIES

Insights on Family Policies is an editorial series dedicated to examining contemporary developments in family policy across European contexts. Published by the European Observatory of Family Policy, the Insights series engages with critical debates on the design, implementation, and coordination of policies that support families in diverse and evolving societal landscapes. Its analytical focus extends to cross-sectoral approaches in service provision, particularly those that integrate health, education, and social care systems to address the complex and interrelated needs of families.

The Insights proceed from the understanding that families constitute dynamic systems characterized by varying demands, dependencies, and potential tensions across gender and generational lines. Conventional policy divisions - between child-focused programs, adult-oriented support, and elderly care - often fail to account for the interconnected nature of family well-being. The series thus emphasizes the value of multi-agency cooperation as a means to overcome fragmentation, advocating for holistic frameworks that enhance accessibility and responsiveness.

By disseminating research on national and local policy innovations, the Insights seek to inform policymakers, practitioners, and scholars while fostering dialogue on effective family support mechanisms. The series maintains a commitment to evidence-based analysis, with particular attention to initiatives that strengthen coordination among public administrations, service providers, and community actors. In doing so, it contributes to a more nuanced and integrated approach to family policy in Europe - one that acknowledges the multiplicity of family structures and the necessity of adaptable, interdisciplinary solutions.

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EARLY INTERVENTION NETWORKS AND PREVENTION CHAINS IN GERMANY:

Municipal family policy as a catalyst of welfare transformation

INSIGHTS ON FAMILY POLICIES

DOSSIER 3

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FOREWORD
JÖRG FISCHER

Germany, with its long tradition of a social state [*'Sozialstaat'*], is in the midst of profound change.

On the one hand, the social state remains a central pillar of social cohesion and the German political system. Through its well-developed benefits within a three-tiered social security system - statutory social insurance [*'gesetzlichen Sozialversicherung'*], social welfare provisions ['*sozialen Versorgung'*] and social assistance programs [*'Sozialfürsorge'*], the social state plays a decisive contribution to ensuring social security and broad prosperity. The social state is widely valued by the population, and no democratic political actor seriously questions its fundamental character. Without the social state, democracy would be inconceivable.

At the same time, shifting societal conditions are challenging the social state. Beyond the far-reaching consequences of demographic change, evolving needs, new global disruptions, and domestic challenges - along with legislative reforms, the Europeanization of social policy, the rise of populist tides, and the imperative of maintaining a robust economy as the basis for welfare state financing - are testing both the financial sustainability and the political legitimacy of the German social state.

Two distinctive features are crucial for understanding the German social state's current situation.

Following two dictatorships in which the state became severely overbearing towards the individual, Germany deliberately opted for establishing its social state on a subsidiarity principle. The system prioritizes individual responsibility [*'Eigenverantwortung'*] over collective responsibility [*'Fremdverantwortung'*], with the family unit constituting the core of living together [*'Zusammenlebens'*] and receiving special state protection. To support families, the state therefore provides a wide array of social benefits while mandating the support of civil social organizations to ensure the provision of services. By law, independent service providers [*'Freien Trägern'*] are given priority over public organizations, reflecting both the legal restraint on state overreach and an obligation to empower independent providers in accordance with subsidiarity principles.

This is intrinsically linked to Germany's emphasis on being a *Sozialstaat* rather than a conventional welfare state [*'Wohlfahrtsstaat'*]. Another defining characteristic stems from the country's federal structure. The federal government (*'der Bund'*) at the national level, the federal states [*'die Bundesländer'*] at the regional level and the municipalities [*'die Kommunen'*] at the local level maintain distinct social welfare responsibilities and funding mechanisms. Social assistance programs *['Sozialfürsorge']*, which are the particular focus of this dossier, are predominantly provided at the municipal level.

Beyond statutory insurance entitlements - for instance, pension or unemployment benefits - and social welfare benefits, the evolving design of public assistance programs and their institutional framework is of central importance. This dossier focuses on tracing developments that exemplify the progressive development of these benefits - particularly through changing access routes, methods, and strategies. It also examines implications for coordinating these new approaches within the institutional framework.

The reasons for these changes in the functioning of the social state are evident: beyond the question of long-term financial sustainability amid demographic and political-global shifts, the focus here lies on two key developments: the growing 'juridification', or legal formalization [*'Verrechtlichung'*] of social welfare provision, and efforts to enhance the effectiveness of both individual benefits and the overall governance system. In this context, several emerging trends will be analyzed in this dossier:

- **Participation**, conceptualized as cooperative stakeholder engagement ['*Mitwirkung*'],
- **Inclusion** in the sense of low-threshold accessibility for all individuals,
- **Networked-governance** ['*Vernetzung*'] through inter-institutional and multi-professional collaboration ['*Zusammenarbeit*'],
- **Prevention** emphasizing **early intervention** ['*Frühzeitigkeit*'] and **strategic targeting** ['*strategishe Ausrichtung*'],
- **Evidence-based approaches**, with clearly defined success metrics.

This dossier examines three case studies from distinct policy domains that illustrate innovative approaches to preventive social policy design in the German social state:

- With its dual focus on policy reforms and local implementation, a paradigm shift is occurring in both the conceptualization and practice of family policy. Beyond mere cash transfers ['*Sozialtransfers*'], the federal government, the federal states and local authorities are now investing multiples of previous decade spending in expanding social infrastructure - with facilitating work-life balance ['*Vereinbarkeit von Familie und Beruf*'] as a key priority. At the same time, however, unresolved problems persist - notably above-average family poverty, especially among single parents, large families, and families with migration backgrounds. In response, evidence-based, participatory, and strategically targeted local programs are being designed to address families' actual needs while providing indirect poverty prevention.
- Closely associated with this is the successful '*Frühe Hilfen*' (Early Intervention) program, which establishes low-threshold, early preventive services. This initiative provides support services for parents and children from pregnancy until the child's third year of life. With its early-action and low-threshold approach, it bridges the gap between universal support and targeted assistance for families in conditions of vulnerability. Implemented nationwide, its networked service delivery model generates significant momentum for welfare state innovation.
- Finally, the institutional context of this dossier is framed by '*Präventionsketten*' (Prevention chains) as an approach seeking to consolidate all preventive services, particularly for children and their families, while ensuring political commitment. Unequal life chances and circumstances constitute the backdrop for actions that advocate for increased cooperation, prioritize evidence-based approaches toward verifiable improvement, and moving beyond purely administrative problem management within traditional jurisdictional silos.

This dossier is intended as an introduction to the German situation, the efforts toward further development of the welfare state, and the strengthening of modern elements of family policy. It is an invitation to become acquainted with the German discourse within a European debate and to find connecting points for further professional exchange.

JÖRG FISCHER (Erfurt University) maps the evolution and challenges of local family policy within Germany's federal structure. Historically dominated by fragmented fiscal support measures, family policy is increasingly shifting toward local implementation ("localization") since 2007, driven by work-life balance goals and childcare expansion. This move emphasizes developing needs-based social infrastructure at the municipal level, where proximity to families' lived realities is greatest. However, local authorities face significant hurdles, including the lack of a formal mandate, fragmented services, unclear state-local responsibilities, and misalignment with actual family needs. The article argues that overcoming these challenges requires binding state frameworks, integrated planning, evidence-based needs assessment, and empowering local expertise to effectively strengthen families as the foundation of social cohesion.

JÖRG BACKES (National Centre for Early Prevention) and JÖRG FISCHER (Erfurt University) together examine Germany's *Frühe Hilfen* program, an innovative social policy strategy providing comprehensive, low-threshold support to parents from pregnancy through a child's third year. Emerging in response to child protection failures and health disparities in the early 2000s, the program was institutionalized via the 2012 Child Protection Act and sustained through federal funding foundations. Its core innovation lies in systematic interdisciplinary networking - particularly bridging child welfare and healthcare systems - and the development of new professions like family midwives, emphasizing resource-oriented support over deficit models. The National Centre for Early Prevention drives nationwide implementation, rigorous monitoring/evaluation, and quality development. *Frühe Hilfen* enhances preventive child protection by strengthening parental competencies and improving child development conditions through accessible, needs-based services embedded within Germany's federal-local governance structure.

HEINZ-JÜRGEN STOLZ (Münster Institute for Social Work) examines Germany's *kommunale Präventionsketten* as a sub-strategy to mitigate child and family poverty by addressing systemic inequalities in life opportunities. The approach coordinates place-based institutions across sectors (health, education, welfare) within municipalities to create integrated, needs-based support systems spanning key life transitions. Core features include cross-sectoral networking, evidence-based practice, social space orientation, and beneficiary participation. Despite innovative potential, implementation faces significant obstacles: fragmented multilevel governance, restrictive funding constraints, path-dependent institutional legacies, and limited legal mandates. The strategy's effectiveness hinges on overcoming systemic barriers - including Germany's complex welfare bureaucracy and jurisdictional fragmentation - to foster resilient local "communities of responsibility" while navigating inherent tensions with traditional administrative structures.

LOCAL FAMILY POLICY AS PART OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SOCIAL STATE IN GERMANY

JÖRG FISCHER
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With growing recognition of work-life balance challenges, and the resulting expansion of early childhood services, the family has finally moved into focus of German politics' focus. Notwithstanding the fact that Germany has had regular family reporting since 1968, influencing ideologically charged family policy debates with empirically grounded arguments continues to pose persistent challenges (Gerlach 2014). When it comes to providing support to families, basing decisions on families' actual needs rather than on those perceived by decision makers or on their political calculations. Traditional family policy is primarily fiscal in nature, which means that it defines itself chiefly through the scope of the amount of financial support families receive. Through direct benefits like parental allowance after a child's birth or indirect benefits of a tax-related nature or within the pension system, families have been and continue to be supported via compensatory measures. In sum, this results in numerous family-related benefits that are difficult to keep track of, and which also do not systematically build upon one another. These include, for example, child benefit and daycare provision, as well as free co-insurance in health system, housing allowances, *BAföG* - support payments for students from low-income families. Over the decades, additional measures have continually been added to respond to societal changes and family needs.

At the municipal level, research documenting living conditions demonstrated that while family constituted an important element of political discourse, available data across all domains of family were rarely incorporated into political decision-making processes (Fischer et al., 2012). It also became evident that, given the absence of strategic policy targeting, family service providers found it particularly difficult to align their offerings families' actual needs. Rather, societal assumptions and institutional access channels had a strong influence in shaping the existence and arrangement of services (Fischer & Römer, 2016).

At the same time, however, developments can be observed that move beyond merely fiscal support for families. One central catalyst has been family policy's enhanced emphasis on the reconciliation of work and family life, manifested primarily through the aforementioned expansion of daycare for children *'Kindertagesbetreuung'* since 2007. Beyond individual family subsidies, a second support pillar was substantially advanced - the development of early childhood social infrastructure.

With this new institutional focus has come a reinforcement of planning elements, political steering mechanism, and a more preventative orientation. Expanded empirical research in this domain contributes to family policy decisions aligning more closely with needs-based solutions while corresponding less to ideological family constructs. Another trend associated with this more service-focus and preventive approach is the increased shift toward the local level, - the level within Germany's tripartite federal structure *'Bund, Bundesländer*, and *Kommunen'* where the connection to families' lived realities is most pronounced, as will be explained in greater detail (Fischer & Hilse-Carstensen, 2025). This development reflects, what might be termed a localization of family policy *'Lokalisierung der Familienpolitik'* - understood as both a shift towards spatial living conditions and a localization *'Kommunalisierung'* of family policy in accordance with the principle of local political jurisdiction (Wunderlich, 2013). This leads not only leads to a transformation in the role of local administrations in family-related matters, but equally alters the self-conception/self-understanding of state governments *'Bundesländer'* regarding their family policy responsibilities. This constitutes a transition from direct funding of specific family-oriented institutions such as family centers *'Familienzentren'* or family recreation facilities *'Familienfreizeiteinrichtungenhin'* to indirect governance by the federal state. Under this system, the *Bundesländer* set family policy objectives, establish the quality framework/standards, and make financial resources available that the *Kommunen* - the local administrative level including both districts *'Landkreisen'*, or *'Kreisen'* and major cities that are not form part of a district *'kreisfreien Städten'*, or *'Stadtkreisen'* - can autonomously use through planned deployment. The following section will further outline these developments.

LOCAL FAMILY POLICY AS THE KEY

Local family policy *'Kommunale Familienpolitik'* is one of those policy and operational domains that resists clear-cut definitional boundaries, whether in terms of content or structure. Although structural developments indicate that specialized family-focused departments are increasingly established within administrations, family policy remains better conceptualized as a classic multi-level governance domain. This stems primarily from the distinct legal frameworks and administrative competencies where family matters are situated. Family policy extends horizontally across multiple departments, while vertically it defies clear jurisdictional assignment according to traditional separation of powers. Typically, family policy operates simultaneously at federal, state, and local levels. Whereas economic and legal interventions remain primarily the federal government's domain (Strohmeier, 2021), *Kommunen* function within this framework in an operational

capacity. Their mandate involves implementing policy programs and concrete measures. In doing so, they must navigate an operational framework significantly shaped by family policy objectives, visions and normative expectations from federal and state authorities. That local family policy occupies the lowest rung in the vertical political hierarchy need not inherently constrain its potential for substantive policy development. Precisely through its embeddedness in local structures, local family policy can realize significant transformative potential.

Thus, among proactive decision-makers, family policy is perceived as one of the 'soft' - and therefore locally malleable - factors in local development policy. The sphere of influence of local family policy operates at the infrastructural level, encompassing the shaping of socio-spatial environment for families, and educational and support-oriented measures (Strohmeier, 2021). This understanding of family support as the development of a local, family-friendly 'infrastructures' connects to three additional focal points:

1. *Localized needs assessment.* The notion that what families require in their immediate environments and daily lives is most effectively addressed at the local level. Consequently, needs-based orientation serves as a central criterion for family policy measures. This focus on a family-friendly - and thus needs-based - infrastructure results in significant regional heterogeneity among local family policies.

2. *The evolving family construct.* Needs-based policymaking presupposes that local actors engage with the very definition of family, namely with the question of *how broadly the concept of family should be defined*, and which living arrangements (and associated needs) should be included in the definition. For decades, Germany's dominant model was the middle-class nuclear family ['*bürgerliche Kleinfamilie*'] - father, mother, and child(ren) - with fixed gender-specific roles. Today, a broader notion prevails, whereby caregiving and socialization functions are considered independently of marital or biological configurations. Family may now be defined as, for instance, a solidarity-based community (as in §2 of the Thuringian Family Support Security Act). Depending on how family is defined (family forms, structural composition, parent-child relations, etc.; see Simon, 2023), the term encompasses vastly different environmental expectations and needs. Additionally, families face intensifying pressures in childrearing and education amid shrinking resources - a challenge that Walper (2022) has summarized as in the notion of 'intensification of parenthood' ['*Intensivierung von Elternschaft*']. Social inequalities are exacerbated as a result of this trend - educational opportunities remain strongly resource-dependent and unevenly distributed. In this context, investment in "service infrastructure could reduce pressure and inequalities" (ibid).

3. *Structural positioning of local family policy.* Family policy is a component of local public service provision. This connects to the debate about the structural positioning and thus binding nature of local family policy. Section 16 of Book VIII of the Social Code (SGB VIII) outlines the scope of family support services, including family education ['*Familienbildung*'], family counseling ['*Familienberatung*'], and family recreation ['*Familienerholung*'] - along with the mandate to develop networked, cooperative, and community-oriented service structures ['*sozialraumorientierten Angebotsstrukturen*']. Whereas this represents a nationwide call to action anchored in child and youth welfare services, in practice the federal states (*Länder*) demonstrate varying levels of engagement in establishing binding requirements for local family policy.

CHALLENGES OF LOCAL FAMILY POLICY

From both professional and political perspectives, the integration of family policy measures into the local service infrastructure, presents the following key challenges:

- While local entities (*Kommunen*) serve as the living environment for families [*'Lebensort'*] they currently lack any formal mandate to shape family policy.
- There is no shared understanding of family policy between the state (Land) and local levels.
- At all levels, family policy is characterized by a high degree of fragmentation [*'Unübersichtlichkeit'*] in approaches, making it difficult for both recipients and providers/ policymakers to maintain an overview of available services.
- Within public administration, there are no

systematically structured and/or cross-departmental family policy services.

- Core challenges facing families have not yet been adequately incorporated into family policy approaches; key thematic areas - such as family and caregiving, family and addiction, family and social environment - remain largely unaddressed.
- Services for - and by - families are often externally determined, inadequately tailored, and insufficiently aligned with families' current realities.

PRACTICAL APPROACHES TO IMPLEMENTING LOCAL FAMILY POLICY

In current discussions by the German Association for Public and Private Welfare [*'Deutschen Vereins für öffentliche und private Fürsorge'*], it is noted: "Family support [is] often regarded as a "voluntary" local service - the long-term development of programs with guaranteed scope, quality and funding is frequently lacking" (German Association for Public and Private Welfare, n.d.). There is no obligation for state governments to establish concrete implementation guidelines or funding directives. Yet, precisely this framework would serve as an essential catalyst for family policy to realize its full potential: both in addressing the specific needs of families and, more broadly, in strengthening social cohesion and reinforcing the structural foundations of communities.

In recent years, there has been a growing number of state-level initiatives aimed at establishing frameworks for sustainable local family policy. North Rhine-Westphalia and Baden-Württemberg are considered pioneers in this field due to their state policy innovations (Wunderlich, 2014). North Rhine-Westphalia was among the first *Bundesländer*, as early as 2001, to expand *Frühen Hilfen* infrastructure and actively promote *kommunale Präventionsketten*, 'local prevention chains'.[1] Baden-Württemberg is currently in the process of advancing a legislative proposal through its State Family Council to mandate quality and quantity standards for local family policy structures.

Two other states have also embarked on this path and have enacted family support legislation:

- Berlin, in 2021, with the Act on the Promotion and Participation of Families (Family Promotion Act) ['*Gesetz zur Förderung und Beteiligung von Familien (Familienfördergesetz)*'], and
- Thuringia, in 2018, with the Thuringian Family Support Security Act ['*Thüringer Familienförderungssicherungsgesetz*'].

Thuringia's legal framework, has successfully:

- Established binding structures for local family support while preserving local autonomy.
- Devolved responsibility to the local level, redefining the relationship between the state (funding provider) and local authorities (as the on-the-ground expert with management responsibility).
- Institutionalized needs-based assessment as the core criterion for developing family support infrastructure.
- Mandated integrated social planning processes as the foundation for evidence-based, participatory local family support (Hammer & Hilse-Carstensen, 2023).

The German Association for Public and Private Welfare urged during the 82nd *Deutschen Fürsorgetages,* 'German Welfare Congress', that local authorities must develop the necessary political will for policy formulation, while state governments should assume their legislaitve responsibilities: "It is essential to activate local family policy and grant local authorities an active, formative role by recognizing them as on-the-ground experts. However, this is only possible when an overarching framework exists - when political decision-makers at higher levels become sensitized to and convinced of local needs" (Deutscher Verein für öffentliche und private Fürsorge, n.d.).

CONCLUSIONS FOR THE FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF LOCAL FAMILY POLICY

Local family policy in Germany has moved beyond merely serving as a recipient of state funding

1 See for example, https://www.kinderstark.nrw/.

allocations for individual providers and programs. Many local authorities now recognize that the active acknowledgement and intentional engagement, proactive policy design, and genuine appreciation of diverse family situations constitute essential strategies for (i) maintaining vital public services, and (ii) enhancing community appeal. Needs-oriented services family services have emerged as critical determinants of both livability and long-term local sustainability.

In practice, the realization of family-responsive infrastructure requires coordinated efforts across multiple domains. Fundamentally, this requires grounding both thought and action in a contemporary understanding of family structures. Local authorities may draw upon findings from the Federal Government's family reports [*'Familienberichterstattung der Bundesregierung'*] or local data sources to systematically incorporate family needs from the outset.

Effective local family policy emerges when it:

- Rejects ideological frameworks in favor of evidence-based responses to actual family needs.
- Treats family policy as central rather than peripheral to community development.
- Empowers intergenerational engagement by encouraging prospective, new, and experienced parents to participate in shaping family policy discourse - rather than ceding this domain exclusively to generations beyond childrearing.

Effective family support policies thus demand the intensive citizen engagement at the local level. This should be viewed not merely as an additional responsibility, but as an opportunity to empower residents to take active ownership of community life, raise awareness about democratic participation and social cohesion, and motivate civic engagement within municipalities. To professionally support these processes, three key elements are required: a clear alignment with family needs, integrated planning approaches, and active political oversight of service development and implementation. Such measures simultaneously strengthen and expand local authorities' scope for action. State governments bear responsibility as catalysts, funders, and monitors in this framework. Local authorities are facing significant challenges in this regard. While families constitute the reliable, well-functioning, and recognized foundation of social coexistence - a foundation highly valued and perpetuated by younger generations - local family policy must simultaneously fulfill another critical function: it must strengthen families' capacities to effectively navigate structural societal transformations while fostering the motivation and confidence essential to sustaining their vital societal role. Investments in local family policy are, fundamentally, investments in a community's future resilience.

EARLY CHILDHOOD INTERVENTION - AN INNOVATIVE SOCIAL POLICY STRATEGY TO SUPPORT FAMILIES

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The terms *Frühe Hilfen* ('Early Childhood Intervention') refers to a program of comprehensive support for parents and their children, extending from pregnancy through the child's third year of life. The program is grounded in a strengths-based approach to parenting that emphasizes parental competencies. Through its proactive, low-threshold services, it bridges the gap between universal support programs and child protection interventions.

The program demonstrates significant innovative capacity through its systematic networking of diverse professional disciplines and institutions. This integrated approach enables coordinated service delivery [***'Hilfen aus einer Hand'***] particularly through close collaboration between child welfare services and healthcare providers working collectively to support family wellbeing. Within this network framework, services are organized to provide easily accessible counseling and support for families facing particular stressors (NZFH, 2020).

The program's core objectives are:

1. To strengthen parents in their childrearing roles,

2. To improve children's developmental conditions, and

3. To thereby enhance preventive child protection measures.

These goals are pursued through improved service offers and low-barrier access points, emphasizing early intervention with positively framed support - deliberately avoiding problem-focused approaches and operating below the threshold of child welfare interventions.

DEVELOPMENT OF FRÜHE HILFEN IN GERMANY

Over the past two decades, *Frühe Hilfen* has established itself in Germany as a pioneering approach in social policy. The necessity for such programs became evident in the early 2000s following highly publicized cases of child endangerment and infanticide. Additionally, data on child and adolescent health revealed a growing prevalence of chronic and mental health conditions - termed "new morbidity" (Thyen, 2007; Schlack & Kurth, 2008).

These developments exposed structural gaps in the support system: families with young children in high-risk situations were often identified too late or not at all. In response, the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth ['*Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend*, BMFSFJ', since May 2025: Federal Ministry for Education, Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth '*Bundesministerium für Bildung, Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend'*, BMBFSFJ] launched the action program *Frühe Hilfen für Eltern und Kinder und soziale Frühwarnsysteme* ('Early Childhood Intervention for Parents and Children and Social Early Warning Systems') (BMFSFJ, 2006).

Beginning in 2007, this initiative funded pilot projects across all German states ['*Bundesländer*'] to develop and test *Frühe Hilfen* intervention models. These projects laid the foundation for nationwide implementation while generating practical insights and empirical evidence on service access, program design, and network coordination. Concurrently, the ***N****ationales Zentrum Frühe Hilfen* (NZFH) ('National Center for Early Prevention') was established to oversee research, expansion, quality improvement, and interagency collaboration. Operated by the Federal Institute for Public Health ['*Bundesinstitut für Öffentliche Gesundheit'*, BIÖG] in cooperation with the German Youth Institute ['*Deutsches Jugendinstitut'*, DJI], the NZFH exemplifies the federal government's emphasis on cross-sectoral cooperation, particularly between public health and child welfare services (Renner & Heimeshoff, 2011).

A distinctive feature of the German system is its federal structure: implementation responsibility lies with the *Bundesländer* and local authorities. This means *Frühe Hilfen* Interventions are consistently adapted locally and embedded within existing frameworks. The 2012 enactment of the Federal Child Protection Act ['*Bundeskinderschutzgesetz'*, BKiSchG] formally institutionalized *Frühe Hilfen* Intervention, providing them with legal foundation (BMBFSFJ, 2025). Another milestone in the program's development was the subsequent introduction of the Federal Initiative for Early Childhood Intervention [***'Bundesinitiative Frühe Hilfen'***], and later the Federal Foundation for Early Childhood Intervention [***'Bundesstiftung Frühe Hilfen'***] creating a permanent funding mechanism to expand, enhance, and stabilize services while maintaining quality standards. This also enabled the establishment of a comprehensive network with coordination offices at municipal, state, and federal levels. Administered by the BMBFSFJ, the Foundation has provided sustained annual funding of at least €51 million since 2018 to secure network operations and psychosocial support for families, supplementing resources from states and municipalities (Paul et al., 2018).

Characteristics of Early Childhood Support Services (Frühe Hilfen)

The programmatic approach, or operating framework, of *Frühe Hilfen* Interventions is defined by three core principles: resource orientation, early intervention, and low-threshold access. The services' entry points and offerings are specifically designed to build upon existing parental motivations, strengths, and potentials within their social environments, moving beyond a narrow problem-focused approach, while consistently prioritizing empowerment and capacity-building throughout the intervention process.

The principle of resource orientation ['*Ressourcenorientierung*'], involves working with young parents in a manner that deliberately shifts focus from traditional deficit-based perspectives in child protection. Instead, it utilizes positively-framed contacts as starting points for strengthening parental competencies and improving children's circumstances through motivated acceptance of support. Service effectiveness remains fundamentally tied to voluntary parental cooperation, as successful implementation requires active family participation. The resource-oriented approach demonstrates particularly high utilization rates in contexts such as welcome visits for new parents and midwifery services, creating significantly different perceptions among population groups that typically resist conventional child and youth welfare services due to previous negative experiences (van Staa & Renner, 2018).

The programmatic component of early intervention ['*Frühzeitigkeit*'] establishes *Frühe Hilfen* Intervention programs as the first public support system addressing healthy child development. Working collaboratively with pregnancy counseling services [*'Schwangerschaftsberatung'*] and medical professionals, these services assist expectant mothers and parents-to-be from the earliest stages. This comprehensive approach encompasses both participation in prenatal preparation courses [*'Geburtsvorbereitungskursen'*] and referrals to additional support services. The guiding principle of "support from the beginning" facilitates proactive outreach to ensure parents become aware of available support structures as early as possible in their new life circumstances.

The commitment to low-threshold service provision ['*Niedrigschwelligkeit*'] is fundamentally interconnected with both resource orientation and early intervention principles. Low-threshold access is characterized by precise alignment with young parents' objective living conditions and subjective perceptions of their life circumstances, along with the clear expectation that services will be perceived as highly accessible. While *Frühe Hilfen* Intervention programs aim to guarantee minimally burdensome access, practical implementation remains particularly challenging. These challenges stem from inherent tensions in prevention work, including the prevention paradox (Sahrei & Bittlingmeyer, 2024) manifesting as competition between target groups for limited services, and persistent programmatic uncertainties regarding the services' positioning between primary and secondary prevention approaches.

Innovations in family support: emerging professions at the intersection of child welfare and healthcare systems

Currently, *Frühe Hilfen* Interventions encompass:

1. existing services that have been "networked", or integrated into coordinated local Frühe Hilfen Intervention Networks ['Netzwerke Frühe Hilfen'] (such as pregnancy counseling),

2. enhanced programs/services (including welcome visits for new parents), and

3. novel support models (such as long-term home-visiting support for families by professionals), which have given rise to partially new professions (Fischer, 2025).

This interdisciplinary space, or intersection, between child/youth welfare [*' Kinder- und Jugendhilfe'*] and healthcare has generated an entirely new, innovative dynamic, facilitating networked approaches creating synergistic effects, novel strategies for volunteer engagement, and progressive professional development models

A key development that is noteworthy here has been the emergence of specialized healthcare professionals, particularly family midwives [*'Familienhebammen'*] and family health pediatric nurses [*'Familien-Gesundheits-Kinderkrankenpflegerinnen und -pfleger'*]. These practitioners receive standardized nationwide training to meet the demanding requirements of *Frühe Hilfen* Interventions.Their role in supporting families extends beyond purely medical care, to include (i) bridging and navigation functions [*'Brücken- und Lotsenfunktion'*]: building trust with

families, (ii) early identification of support needs, (iii) facilitating service navigation and referrals to other services when needed. Adopting outreach, resource-oriented, and culturally sensitive approaches, these professionals play a pivotal role in reducing systemic barriers and promoting equitable access to services (Hahn & Sandner, 2012, 2014).

Additionally, the *Frühe Hilfen* network also incorporates child welfare professionals in counseling and support services such as welcome services [*'Willkommensdiensten'*] or pregnancy and family counseling [*'Schwangeren- und Familienberatungen'*], as well as volunteers in family centers [*'Familienzentren'*]. Regardless of their respective (professional) goals and approaches, what all participants share is participation in the networks, which requires corresponding competencies (Fischer, 2023).

The networked structure of local *Frühe Hilfen* Interventions generates valuable cross-sectoral insights for all actors more or less directly involved, with implications that also concern family policy. Family policy actors, for example in family centers, benefit from the professionalization boost through the development of additional professional profiles up to the utilization of training opportunities. All initiatives are supported by rigorous practice-based research and evaluation, ensuring evidence-based development within a critical, reflective professional discourse.

The Frühe Hilfen Intervention networks constitute a central component, or building block, in the system that provides coordinated support to families facing adversity. These networks consolidate the collaboration, or collective action ['*Zusammenarbeit*'], of various actors, with the primary objective of delivering timely, appropriate, needs-based assistance through professional exchange and coordinated services.

Organizationally, the networks are typically located at and administered by child welfare offices ['*Jugendämter*'], which also assume coordination responsibilities.

The coordination offices are staffed with professionals who organize, coordinate, and facilitate cross-departmental collaboration. Their tasks include managing network structures, organizing training programs, facilitating knowledge transfer, and ensuring quality assurance. Through these functions, they contribute significantly to the stability and further development of interdisciplinary cooperation (Hoffmann et al., 2013).

The close integration of these new professional roles within the *Frühe Hilfen* networks enhances coordination among the healthcare system, child and youth services, and social welfare programs. Simultaneously, they are transforming professional practice by institutionalizing three key elements: interdisciplinary cooperation, collaborative case management, and a strengthened focus on prevention.

SUPPORT FOR NETWORKS AND PROFESSIONALS BY THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR EARLY PREVENTION SUPPORT (NZFH)

As of December 31, 2020, *Netzwerke Frühe Hilfen* existed in nearly all youth welfare office districts [*'Jugendamtsbezirke'*] across Germany. These networks differ significantly by region in their structure, resource allocation, and degree of stakeholder participation (NZFH, 2023).

The National Center for Early Prevention supports the local networks through specialized publications, practical tools, and a digital learning platform. It promotes cooperation and quality development through measures such as interprofessional quality circles [*'Interprofessionelle Qualitätszirkel'*, IQZ], the professional framing of services like navigation programs [*'Lotsendienste'*] in maternity and children's hospitals, and nationwide process support for municipal networks.

The NZFH's research program is designed to continuously evaluate the effectiveness, reach, and quality of *Frühe Hilfen* Intervention in Germany (NZFH, 2025). Its main research areas are:

1. **Prevalence and services research**
   ['*Prävalenz- und Versorgungsforschung*']
   Examining psychosocial stressors and resources among families as well as their use of support services. Key studies include the representative surveys "Children in Germany 0-3" [*'Kinder in Deutschland 0-3, KiD 0-3'*] from 2015 and 2022.

2. **Implementation research**
   [*'Implementierungsforschung'*]
   Focusing on the structural establishment and expansion of Early Childhood Services in Germany, this area employs regular municipal surveys that collect data on local implementation. Additionally, indicators have

been developed to enable ongoing empirical observation and evaluation of these services.

3. **Cooperation and interface research** [*'Kooperations- und Schnittstellenforschung'*] Investigating collaboration between healthcare actors and *Frühe Hilfen* Intervention. The ZuFa monitoring "Together for Families" [*'Zusammen für Familien'*] analyzes, for example, cooperation between inpatient perinatal care and support services involved in *Frühe Hilfen* Intervention.

4. **Accessibility and effectiveness of Frühe Hilfen Intervention** [*'Erreichbarkeit und Effektivität der Angebote Früher Hilfen'*] This research area evaluates whether *Frühe Hilfen* Interventions reach their target groups, particularly families in challenging circumstances, and what effects the services achieve. Investigations include the perspectives of healthcare professionals and parents as well as the utilization and impact of specific support services.

5. **Evaluations of practice projects and interventions** ['*Evaluationen von Praxisprojekten und Interventionen'*] This strand provides scientific monitoring and outcome evaluation of specific *Frühe Hilfen* projects and interventions. Examples include the Quality Dialogues for *Frühe Hilfen* [*'Qualitätsdialoge Frühe Hilfen'*, QDFH], the Interprofessional Quality Circles [*'Interprofessionelle Qualitätszirkel'*, IQZ], and the mobile services pilot project "Early Support is Here!" [*'Frühe Hilfen sind da!'*].

CONCLUSIONS

These scientific findings feed directly into practice development and support professionals, political decision-makers, and public discourse. The NZFH also maintains international research collaborations, thereby contributing to cross-border knowledge transfer.

LOCAL PREVENTION CHAINS AS A SUB-STRATEGY TO COMBAT CHILD AND FAMILY POVERTY

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THE SOCIAL CHALLENGE

The phenomenon of *Ungleiche Kindheiten*, 'unequal childhoods' - referring to disparities in life circumstances - shapes growing up in Germany and contradicts democratic ideals of equal opportunity (Betz, 2008). Compound disadvantages emerge precisely when - and to the extent that - family income poverty generates limitations across other life dimensions: education, health, social participation, psychosocial care, quality of the neighbourhood living environment, and beyond. Effectively addressing these complex constellations requires cooperation across diverse societal sectors within the political-administrative multi-level system - a task that, in modern functionally differentiates societies, accumulates sigificant coordination barriers. The specialist/ professional discourse addresses this challenge through a guiding principle: moving beyond from institutionally and legally distinct "responsibilities" towards "joint responsibility".

THE SOLUTION APPROACH

Given the absence of comprehensive, publicly mandated strategies within the multi-level political-administrative system - spanning the EU (European Social Fund+), federal government, federal state and local authorities - *kommunale Präventionsketten* ('Local prevention chains' - LPC), currently concentrate principally on alleviating poverty's effects. As territorial governing bodies, German local authorities exercise limited influence over direct economic anti-poverty interventions.

The *kommunale Präventionsketten* model engages municipalities in their dual role as both (i) community governance entities, and (ii) constitutionally recognized territorial authorities. The framework's foundational premise acknowledges that all institutions relevant to child development [*'aufwachsrelevanten Regelinstitutionen'*] - ranging from perinatal care facilities and pediatric services to educational institutions (daycare centers, schools), employment agencies, welfare services, community health programs, and family counseling centers - are inherently place-based, localized within the boundaries of a local authority, regardless of their institutional nature (public, private, not-for-profit) or legal jurisdiction. These institutions require networked integration through an anti-poverty local comprehensive local strategy [*'armutssensiblen kommunalen Gesamtstrategie'*] to realize the community commitment to "leave no child behind" [*'kein Kinder mehr zurücklassen'*].

The envisioned local *Präventionsketten* model requires a dual focus on *life-stage transitions* and *biographical* pathways, coordinated professionally at the municipal level. This bottom-up networking approach must be institutionally embedded within integrated planning processes that combine specialized and social service provision, while simultaneously being supported by strategic governance mechanisms. Collectively, these components should direct focused local infrastructure development in accordance with the equity principle of «providing differential treatment for unequal circumstances» [*'Ungleiches ungleich behandeln'*].

CORE QUALITY CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PRÄVENTIONSKETTEN FRAMEWORK

The local *Präventionsketten* model is characterized by several essential quality dimensions framework (Deffte et al., 2020)

A comprehensive local strategy ['*Kommunale Gesamtstrategie*'] with integrated cross-departmental and cross-sectoral coordination

- Conceptualization of local Präventionsketten as socially inclusive Commons, or 'common goods' (Deffte & Stolz, 2020)
- Implementation through purpose-driven agile management systems (DKJS/Phineo, 2024)
- Adoption of a beneficiary-centered approach emphasizing needs-assessment, and participation-engagement
- Preventive orientation in establishing formal child development institutions
- Commitment to evidence-based practice standards (Dezort et al., 2018)
- Application of Collective Impact methodology
- Community-oriented framework ['*Sozialraumorientierung*'] with integrated social space monitoring (Stolz, 2020).
- Combined primary and situational prevention ['*Verhältnisprävention*'] strategies
- Systematic deployment of outreach-based service delivery models

- Provision of professional intermediary and guidance services
- Meaningful civil society engagement and institutional integration
- Biography-sensitive transition management addressing both vertical (developmental) and horizontal (systemic) dimensions

This quality framework originated from local *Präventionsketten* implementations in Rhine-Westphalia - particularly through the local technical assistance approach of the Institute for Social Work, ISW [*'Institut für soziale Arbeit e.V.'*]. Other federal states have adapted the approach with varying emphases—some prioritizing children's rights, outcome measurement, or public health dimensions. These regionally differentiated adaptations enrich the national conceptual framework through the *Qualitätsverbundes Präventionsketten* ['Quality Network Prevention Chains'], an Auridis Foundation-funded initiative managed by ISW that serves as both a professional learning community and policy advocacy organization, with current focus on federal-level policy engagement.

This list, developed through the example of the kommunale Präventionsketten in North Rhine-Westphalia - particularly through the local technical assistance approach of the ISW - is nuanced differently by support agencies in other federal states, with some emphasizing children's rights, outcome orientation, or public health. These path dependencies across states enrich the shared conceptual framework and are consolidated nationwide through the Quality Network Prevention Chains ['*Qualitätsverbundes Präventionsketten*'], funded by the Auridis Foundation, with ISA serving as managing entity. The Quality Network operates as both a knowledge community and advocacy group, currently focusing strongly on federal-level policy engagement.

DEVELOPMENTAL PERSPECTIVES

Services associated with prevention of child and family poverty in Germany suffer from weak legal-formal obligations and are widely regarded politically as 'on-demand', or 'discretionary' service [*'freiwillige Leistung'*] subject to budgetary constraints. This creates a paradoxical situation that precisely those local authorities in socio-economically disadvantaged areas - typically with above-average child and family poverty - often operate with deficit budgets and, under fiscal oversight, may even be prohibited from making the particularly crucial investments needed to combat child and family poverty. Compounding this issue is a fragmented and uncoordinated funding landscape across the political-administrative multilevel system, which hinders local efforts to prevent redundant structures and build effectively upon existing resources. Multi-level governance and the strengthening of the legal system for prevention in the context of public services of general interest therefore represent an initial central development perspective.

A second area for development involves the improvement of conceptual integration of economic poverty reduction and mitigation of poverty's consequences; here too, conceptual progress can only be achieved through effective multi-level governance. However, the coalition agreement of the new federal government reveals no political prioritization of poverty reduction - and thus no equivalent to the politically unsuccessful basic child protection scheme [*'Kindergrundsicherung'*] of the previous government.

A third focus area can be framed under the heading of strengthening local resilience [*'Stärkung kommunaler Resilienz'*] amid growing economic pressure, increasing skilled labor shortages, and infrastructure development challenges in the face of multifaceted demographic change: How successfully can local Präventionsketten networks be established, expanded, or sustained locally under these adverse conditions?

A fourth and final priority is the quantitative expansion of LPCs: to date, these have been implemented in only approximately half of all German states - and even there, often only as pilot initiatives in selected local authorities.

OBSTACLES

The situation in Germany exhibits distinctive features that are not - or only partially - transferable to international contexts. Key examples:

- **An independently institutionalized Child and Youth services system** *['Kinder- und Jugendhilfe']*. Germany maintains an autonomous Child and Youth welfare system as a central (though not exclusive) organizational locus for social work pertaining to childhood and adolescents, equipped with its own legal frameworks.
- **Multilevel governance complexities.** The German political-administrative multilevel system demonstrates comparatively strong

local self-governance rights, a school system largely institutionalized at the state level, and a far-reaching constitutional prohibition on cooperation between federal and local levels that impedes federal-state programs. Another key structural element is the subsidiarity principle ['*Subsidiaritätsprinzip*'], which directs local authorities to outsource services to non-governmental providers (where adequate capacity and expertise exist). Consequently, these providers assume significant responsibility - particularly within the structure of local child and youth welfare (manifest in the dual structure of youth welfare offices with their legally established youth welfare committees, or '*Jugendhilfeausschusses*'). Moreover, higher regulatory levels can (at least formally) only transfer responsibilities to subordinate levels when providing commensurate resources (principle of connectivity, or '*Konnexitätsprinzip*').

- **Fragmented social welfare legislation.** The social welfare system suffers from pronounced regulatory fragmentation, currently comprising thirteen social codes, containing numerous benefit regulations that frequently appear poorly coordinated. This necessitates complex determinations of jurisdictional precedence between service providers and creates substantial barriers for families with limited administrative literacy, who often find themselves referred elsewhere due "non-jurisdiction" ['*Nicht-Zuständigkeit*']. local Präventionsketten have established specialized structures including intermediation and case management systems to address these challenges, namely, to support families during application processes and to mitigate the associated follow-up problems. Despite local authorities being legally mandated to provide referral/guidance ['*Hinführungsgebot*'] to potential benefit recipients, implementation of this legal obligation remains inconsistent, even in outreach contexts.
- **Mono-professional institutional legacies.** Core educational institutions that oversee child development remain dominated by single professional groups. Schools were historically established as half-day instructional systems ['*Unterrichts- und Halbtagsschule*'] focused on the teaching profession and didactics, while western German childcare developed as an educator-dominated domain. Recent decades have seen substantial efforts - particularly through local education initiatives and local Präventionsketten - to develop multiprofessional approaches in settings like daycare centers and schools. That such efforts remain necessary highlights the persistent challenges of this path-dependent system, with major public investments (family centers, family elementary school centers, all-day schools, school social work, integrated counseling centers) attempting to counter these historical developments. Municipal networks like Präventionsketten consequently assume crucial bridging and "gap-filling" functions to overcome these entrenched professional divides.

This by no means encompasses all the path dependencies that in Germany hinder a comprehensively supported system of "child development under public responsibility" ['*Aufwachsen in öffentlicher Verantwortung*'] (BMFSFJ, 2002), transforming it into a primary societal challenge. For instance, the enduring legacy of Prussian authoritarian governance continues to permeate public administrations, impeding their capacity to operate (i) with necessary flexibility, (ii) across legal jurisdictions, and (iii) through the substantive inclusion of children, young people, and families as their 'ultimate constituents' ['*Letztadressat:innen*'] within local coordinated networks.

TRANSFER POTENTIAL

While this pronounced deficit perspective of Germany's historically path-dependent structural development remains strikingly evident, the nation's strong humanistic legacy must also be acknowledged as both positive and internationally inspiring.

First, contrary to predominantly neoliberal outcome discourses, outcome orientation within the LPC framework focuses primarily on improving children's and families' living conditions rather than fiscal relief for public budgets. This improvement is pursued not through the managerialization and economization of social work (as seen in Anglo-Saxon Social Return On Investment analyses), but rather through emphasizing social work's professional identity - which fundamentally involves irreducible, co-present relational work.

Second, following Humboldt's conception, "education" ['*Bildung*'] is understood as "the stimulation of all human faculties so they may develop through engaging with the world into self-determining individuality and personality" - never reduced to acquiring labor-market skills. Aligned with international debates and countering narrow equation of education with schooling/vocational training, this reflects an expanded educational understanding incorporating non-formal learning spaces (like youth work) and informal learning (peer contexts or self-directed learning).

Third, German early childhood centers [*'Kindertageseinrichtungen'*], particularly in western states, are generally not conceived as preschools [*'Vorschule'*], prioritizing care and socialization over (still important) educational goals - evident in the emphasis on free play [*'freies Spiel'*]. Even their educational mission follows process-oriented rather than skill-focused outcomes, following children's curiosity rather than formatting them toward "school readiness" [*'Schulfähigkeit'*]. This foundational approach faces periodic pressure as schools in particular - the "receiving" educational institution - appear somewhat dependent on the formatting of children's learning subjects ("precursor skills") while remaining poorly equipped for heterogeneous learning backgrounds (Sliwka, 2025).

Finally, in the domain of all-day school development [*'Ganztagsschulentwicklung'*], historical legacy of reform pedagogy persists, albeit in a form weakened by the fields increasing expansion towards standardised models of provision. Beyond simply combining morning class instruction [*'Vormittagsunterricht'*] and afternoon care [*'Nachmittagsbetreuung'*], a distinct "all-day education" [*'Ganztagsbildung'*] discourse has emerged, developing integrated, participation-oriented concepts conceived "from the child's perspective."

FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

The preceding outline makes clear that there exists no "one best way" for integrated municipal structural and strategic development. Rather, such development must proceed incrementally, anchored in participatory and outcome-oriented approaches tailored to specific individual and community contexts. The task of higher-level political-administrative actors lies in enabling local authorities to implements these approaches by shaping legal and fiscal framework conditions that strengthen local strategic capacities. For this purpose, the following approaches, some emerging from prior discussions, prove essential:

Systematic legal/structural framing of prevention. Institutionalizing prevention as a mandatory core service (preventive mainstreaming), moving beyond its current status as discretionary, budget-dependent supplementary programming.

Widespread trust in resource provision across 'subsidiary' actors. Local authorities require legal and fiscal flexibility to integrate newly available resources into existing structures (within the multilevel system), rather than being forced through funding guidelines to create redundant parallel mechanisms. Governance should occur through general specification of targets/objectives while recognizing local authorities' greater operational expertise (and capacity to employ funding effectively and efficiently) - an approach contrasting with current funding regulations often perceived as overly prescriptive.

Implementing children's rights through participation. Unequal biographies and living conditions transcend institutional jurisdictions. Cross-institutional collaboration must learn to understand challenges from beneficiaries' perspectives to enable joint action.

Single-source service delivery model. The multilevel governance system should mandate that (i) jurisdictional determinations between institutions, agencies and service providers occur through administrative coordination (back-office processes) without delaying service delivery; and (ii) services become application-free wherever feasible to guarantee access, removing barriers created by varying levels of families' administrative competence.

DIALOGIC OUTCOME ORIENTATION

The discourse surrounding outcome orientation within the local Präventionsketten framework does not conform to positivist approaches of purely quantitative "key indicator" measurement as supposedly interpretation-free tools for "impact assessment." The primary reasons include the following:

First, with its focus on biographical trajectories and living conditions, local Präventionsketten 's effectiveness operates within complex, non-linear systems that resist isolationist, reductionist cause-effect models (impact chains').

Second, its emphasis on synergistic effects among interconnected prevention measures and environmental modifications makes reliable quantification of individual interventions impossible.

Third, its longitudinal focus on biographical development precludes isolating local Präventionsketten specific contributions over time, particularly given Germany's lack of decades-long

longitudinal studies comparable to “Head Start.[2]”

Fourth, the local Präventionsketten concept of “evidence-based practice” emphasizes combining spatially differentiated monitoring data with dialogical quality improvement formats. Municipal effectiveness dialogues and community conferences exemplify such actionable approaches

Ultimately, Präventionsketten constitute not merely a structure but require cultivating a cross-sectoral “community of responsibility” [*‘Verantwortungsgemeinschaft’*] to develop professionally grounded impact assumptions and assessments.

Multiprofessional collaboration

The core professional challenge in the implementation of local Präventionsketten involves evolving from an information network to a (localized) “production network” that actually generates cross-institutional social services. Currently, this transformation remains partial, with the federally/state-funded *Frühen Hilfen* sector representing a notable exception.

Multiple systemic barriers indicate necessary reforms across Germany’s political-administrative multilevel system:

- Foundational pedagogical and social science training programs still inadequately address the full spectrum of educational practice and institutional contexts. For instance, social workers currently know too little about school pedagogy, while teachers lack sufficient social pedagogy training.
- Professional time allocations and job descriptions in schools and institutions either omit or inadequately accommodate network coordination responsibilities.
- In many fields (for instance early childhood education), growing professional demands dramatically outpace compensation, simultaneously impeding quality improvement and workforce recruitment.

Moreover, effective multiprofessional collaboration requires a unifying paradigm rooted in systemic and community-oriented thinking.

CONCLUSIONS

local Präventionsketten represents an agile response to complex societal problems - precisely what renders them only partially compatible with Germany’s entrenched administrative structures and path-dependent political multilevel system. The central challenge therefore lies in maintaining this approach’s political viability within an evolving discursive and policy landscape.

2 Head Start is a federally funded program operating across the United States and its territories that promotes school readiness for eligible children from birth to age five through comprehensive early learning, health, and family well-being services. It is delivered at no cost through center-based, home-based, and family child care settings.

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