# Early Childhood Interventions Guideline for Network Building

## Version 3

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## Summary

**Early childhood interventions** aim at promoting health for all children and parents. Since 2015, the **Austrian Early Childhood Interventions Programme** has been gradually expanding regional early childhood intervention networks across the country. The National Centre for Early Childhood Interventions (NZFH.at) established at the Austrian Health Institute (GÖG), supports this process with regard to a well‐coordinated and quality‐assured implementation.

This guideline is intended to support the **establishment and maintenance** of **regional early childhood intervention networks** and the necessary structures in accordance with the basic model for early childhood interventions in Austria developed by the Austrian Health Institute (GÖG). The guide deals exclusively with how the **“indicated” offer** of early childhood interventions can be established for families in stressful life situations, not with the basic offer for all families, which is also provided for in the basic model.

**Early childhood intervention networks** are multi‐professional networks established at regional level with a variety of coordinated services for parents and children in the early childhood phase of life. They provide needs‐based support to families in stressful situations. The core elements of an early childhood intervention network are **network management**, which is responsible for establishing and maintaining cooperation, and **family support**, which uses a variety of networked services in cooperation with various providers according to need.

The central **target groups** of the guideline are those responsible at the federal state level who commission and plan the establishment of regional early childhood intervention networks, and the professionals who are entrusted with the implementation. The guideline offers step‐by‐step **guidance** through the essential tasks of first setting up and then maintaining a regional early childhood intervention network. The described stumbling blocks and success factors for successful implementation are based primarily on practical experience, but also on the literature.

The guideline distinguishes between four central phases of an early prevention network:

* **planning phase:** At the state level (steering level), all essential strategic questions and  
  cornerstones of the regional implementation of early prevention networks are clarified.
* **preparatory phase:** At the regional level (= network level), the situation is analysed and preparations are made for setting up the network and supporting the families.
* **structure‐building phase:** A sustainable network including cooperation agreements is  
  established at regional level in intensive cooperation with the regional partners.
* **Ongoing maintenance** of the network ensures functionality and sustainability.

The **planning phase** aims at a common understanding of early prevention and the commitment of the responsible persons at the supra‐regional level in order to obtain their support for the implementation at the regional level. The main tasks of this phase include

* clarification of all structural issues,
* preparations at the supra‐regional level in order to be able to start the detailed planning phase at the regional level, and
* clarifying the long‐term financial security of early prevention in the federal state.

The **preparatory phase** serves to prepare the practical implementation of regional network management and family support involving all target groups. The main tasks of this phase include

* the selection of suitable persons,
* the organisation and implementation of trainings,
* providing the infrastructure,
* developing quality assurance processes,
* designing communication and public relations work and producing information materials, and
* an initial analysis of the services available in the region.

The **structure‐building phase** includes the establishment of the necessary structures with the involvement of the network partners. The main tasks of this phase include

* the organisation of a kick‐off event with all network partners,
* deepening the network analysis with the involvement of network partners, and
* the conclusion of cooperation agreements.

The **ongoing maintenance of the network** serves to maintain and optimise the regional network in the long term. The main tasks of this phase include the regular reflection of experiences and the continuous exchange with the network partners.

Keywords

Early childhood interventions, guideline, network building, network maintenance, network management