

Frühe Hilfen

Support in the implementation of the measures of the Austrian Recovery and Resilience Plan

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Summary

Background

In 2021, the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) was launched as the centrepiece of the EU's 'NextGenerationEU' programme. As part of the RRF, funds were approved for the investment 'National roll-out of 'Frühe Hilfen' (early childhood interventions) for socially disadvantaged pregnant women, infants and their families' (in short: RRF Frühe Hilfen). The Austrian Health Institution, Gesundheit Österreich GmbH (GÖG), was commissioned by the Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection (BMSGPK) to support the implementation of the objectives and measures defined in the Austrian Development and Resilience Plan for 'Frühe Hilfen'.

Methods

The project consisted of several work packages. The nationwide rollout was accompanied by the National Centre for Early Childhood Interventions (NZFH.at), which is based at the GÖG, primarily with regard to a concept-compliant, quality-assured and efficient implementation. This included advising and supporting those involved in and responsible for regional implementation, training the new employees of the regional 'Frühe Hilfen' networks and providing standardised documentation. The documentation was also the basis for monitoring the implementation status, including the families reached, as well as for providing the relevant data for the reporting obligations to the European Commission. GÖG also took care of the processing and technical support of the externally commissioned evaluation.

A further work package dealt with the development of tools and expertise for culturally sensitive communication with families. In this regard, a needs analysis was first carried out, a concept developed and subsequently implemented. The inclusion of families in terms of consultation, input and feedback was of great relevance in all of these work steps.

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GÖG's activities also included financing management. In this regard, a special financing guideline and a template for the financing agreement were initially drawn up and agreed. All submitted projects were checked both formally and financially, the contracts were processed, interim and final reports and settlements were also checked and payments were processed. In addition, other legal requirements (such as those relating to the transparency database and double funding) were also complied with.

Results

The investment 'National rollout of 'Frühe Hilfen' (early childhood interventions) for socially disadvantaged pregnant women, infants and their families' was successfully implemented. The national rollout was completed well ahead of the defined deadline. By September 2023, the services of "Frühe Hilfen" were available in all Austrian districts. In the course of the nationwide expansion, the personnel resources available in the regional 'Frühe Hilfen' networks more than doubled.

In the period from around mid-2022 to the end of September 2024, a total of 2,903 families received longer-term family support and additional 896 families short-term support as part of RRF Frühe Hilfen. In total, the newly created service benefited 12,779 persons (6,452 children and 6,327 adults).

In the course of creating culturally sensitive family information, twelve questions were prepared as FAQs, eleven information texts on pregnancy/birth and 26 information texts on early childhood were created. All texts were prepared in an 'easy read' German version and translated into nine foreign languages (Arabic, BCS, Dari/Farsi, English, Romanian, Russian, Ukrainian, Hungarian, Turkish) and made available on the programme's website fruehehilfen.at. Analyses of the hits on the website show that the family information has already been well used in the short time it has been available.

Conclusion

Overall, the project has been successfully implemented. The nationwide expansion of the early childhood interventions service was achieved, a sustainable basis for the long-term provision of 'Frühe Hilfen' was ensured through the employment and qualification of many additional specialists and an important contribution to greater health and parenting skills and the promotion of equal opportunities was made through the multilingual preparation of a wide range of culturally sensitive information for families. By concluding a legal basis for the national financing of the Austrian programme of "Frühe Hilfen", the sustainability of the investment is ensured. The evaluation also concludes that the national rollout of the regional 'Frühe Hilfen'-networks as part of the Austrian Development and Resilience Plan has been successful.

Keywords

Frühe Hilfen, early childhood intervention, NextGenerationEU, equity, culturally sensitive family information