



The Austrian programme for early childhood intervention: supporting families in need

Sabine Haas

Definition

Overall concept of interventions (especially health promotion measures and targeted early intervention) in **early childhood** (pregnancy to school entry), which consider the specific circumstances and resources of families.

A central element is the **cross-sectoral and cross-professional networking** of diverse approaches, services, structures and actors in all relevant policy and practice fields.



Objectives of the Austrian Model

To reach and support families during pregnancy or within the first years of a child, especially those that live under burdened life circumstances

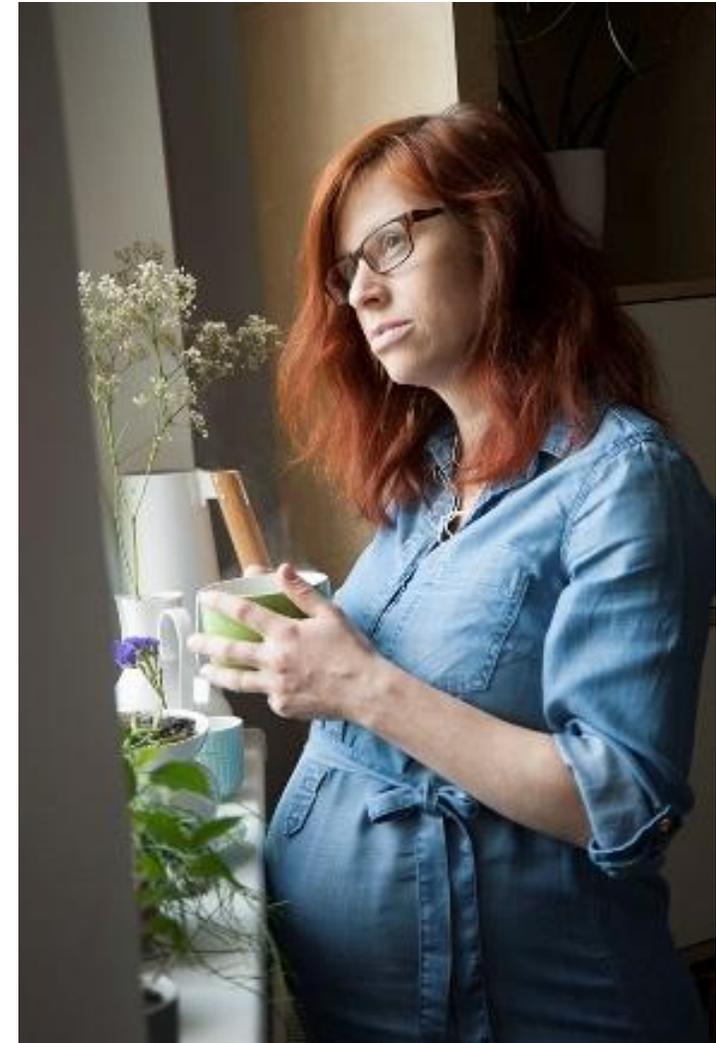
Specific Objectives:

To strengthen resources and reduce strains/burdens of families with children (0-3 years, maximum 6 years)

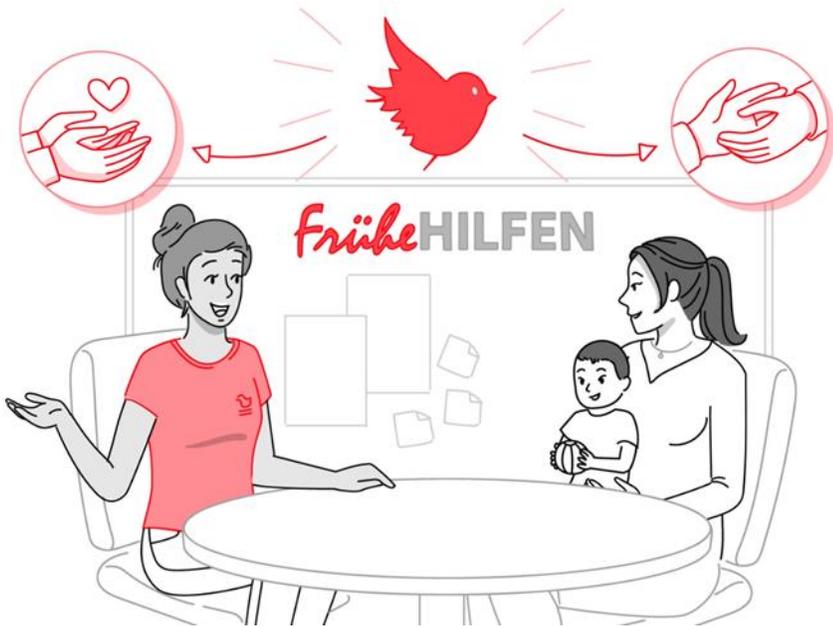
To promote and ensure well-being and development of children at an early stage

To contribute to a healthy upbringing including the right to be protected, supported and to be able to participate

To promote health and social equity



Early Childhood Intervention Networks



Needs-based support for families in stressful situations → established at regional level, **outreach**, **free of charge** and **voluntary**.

Specific goals:

Systematic and early identification and reaching of families in stressful life situations

Promoting a secure parent-child bond and a successful parent-child interaction and relationship

Promoting the psychosocial well-being and health of parents/families in stressful life situations

Strengthening families ("empowerment" in the sense of helping them to help themselves)

Credits: © NZFH.at, VerVieVas

Characteristics of Early Childhood Networks



reach families actively and systematically = Raising awareness among those who can identify and refer families in need



provide continuous and comprehensive support = family support (mostly as home visits) throughout a longer time span; builds up mutual trust; provides model for bonding; refers to specific services within the regional network



general as well as case-related cooperation and networking = network-management for establishment and continuous maintenance of the regional network,



which serves as multiprofessional support system, offering well coordinated manifold services for parents and children



Target group: Families in need

Families with a **variety of strains/burdens**:

Social burden, like financial distress, social isolation, inadequate housing, domestic violence

Mental burden, like mental illness/addiction, unwanted pregnancy

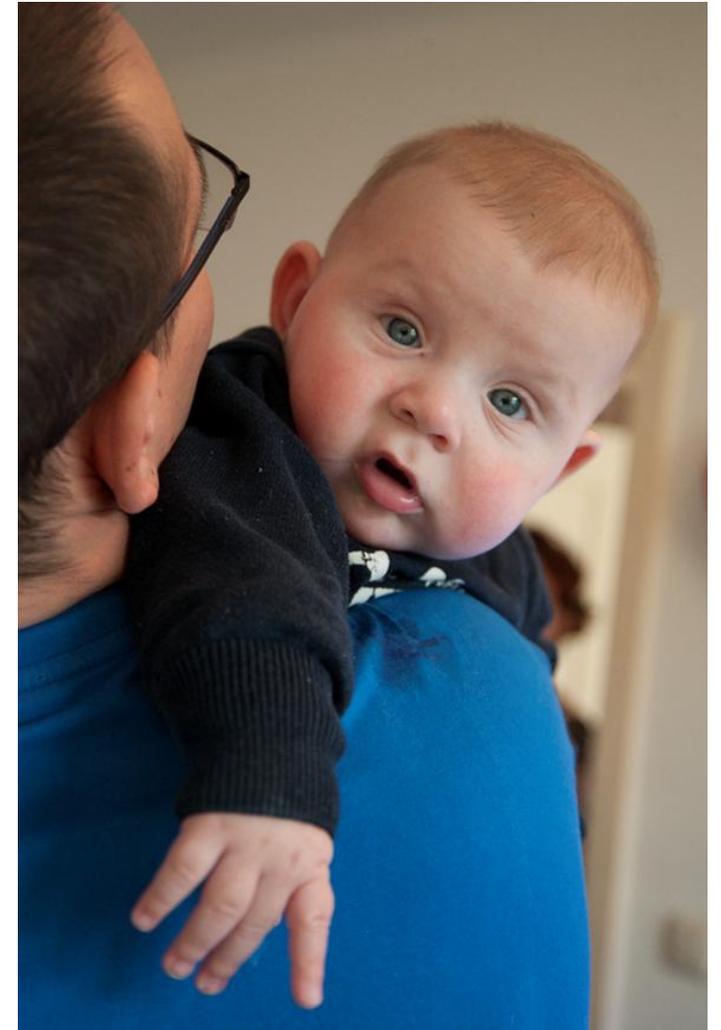
Specific characteristics of the parents, like minor-aged, single parent, disability or somatic chronic illness

Increased need for care of the child, like premature birth, multiple birth, developmental disorders, congenital illness or disability

Strong anxiety concerning future

Difficulties with acceptance of resp. care for the child, troubles with mother-/parent-child-interaction

In most cases **several burdens** are present at the same time in combination with a **lack of compensating resources**; 7 % of all births and additional 10 % for short-term support



Implementation Partnership



Cornerstones of implementation:

First **pilot project** starting 2009, additional **modell regions** from 2024 on; **broader implementation** since 2015

Cooperation at regional level of provincial governments (often health, social affairs and child welfare) and social insurance providers (esp. health insurance)

Professional support by the **National Centre for Early Childhood Interventions (NZFH.at)** at the GÖG to support a well-coordinated, efficient and quality-assured regional implementation (documentation, training, networking, professional principles, etc.)

Nationwide roll-out within the framework of the Austrian Recovery and Resilience Plan (RRF) with financial support of "NextGenerationEU"



Finanziert von der
Europäischen Union
NextGenerationEU

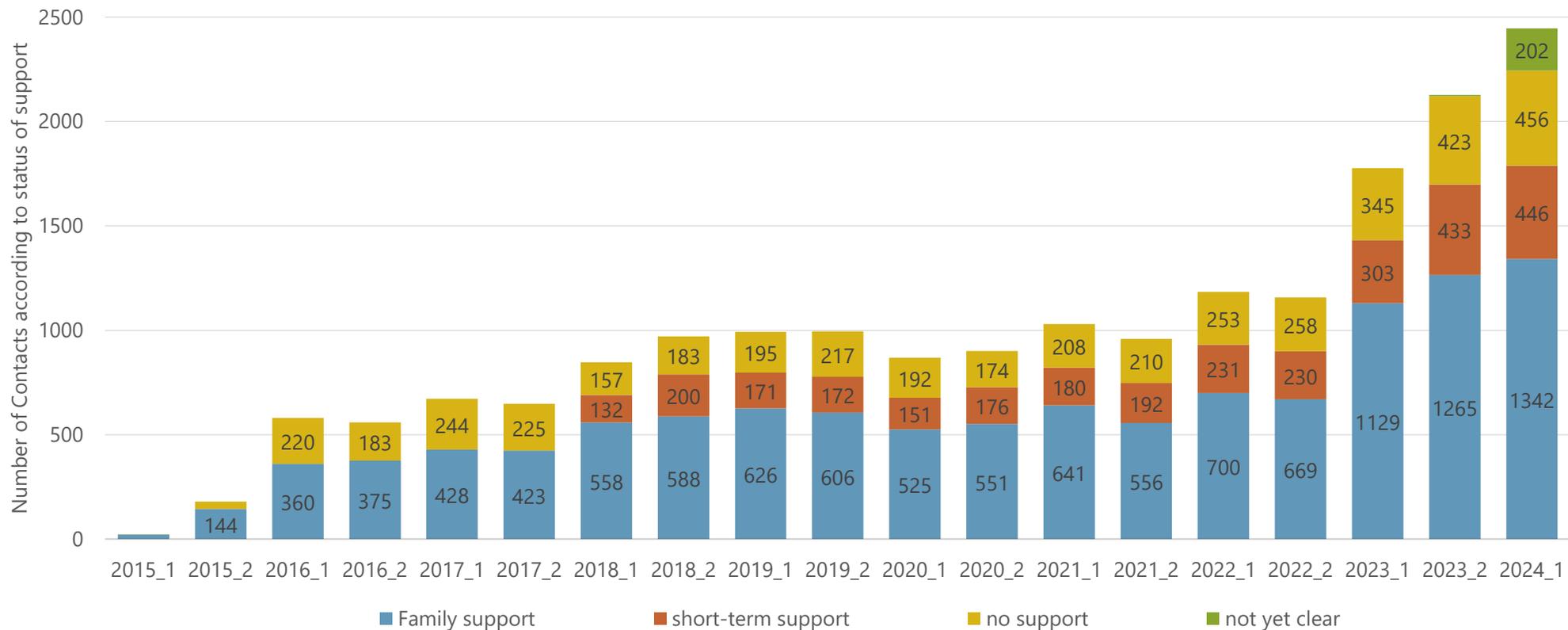


Bundesministerium
Soziales, Gesundheit, Pflege
und Konsumentenschutz

Legal anchoring in force since 1 January 2024 – providing **sustainable financing** in partnership of the federal government, the provinces and the social insurance institutions

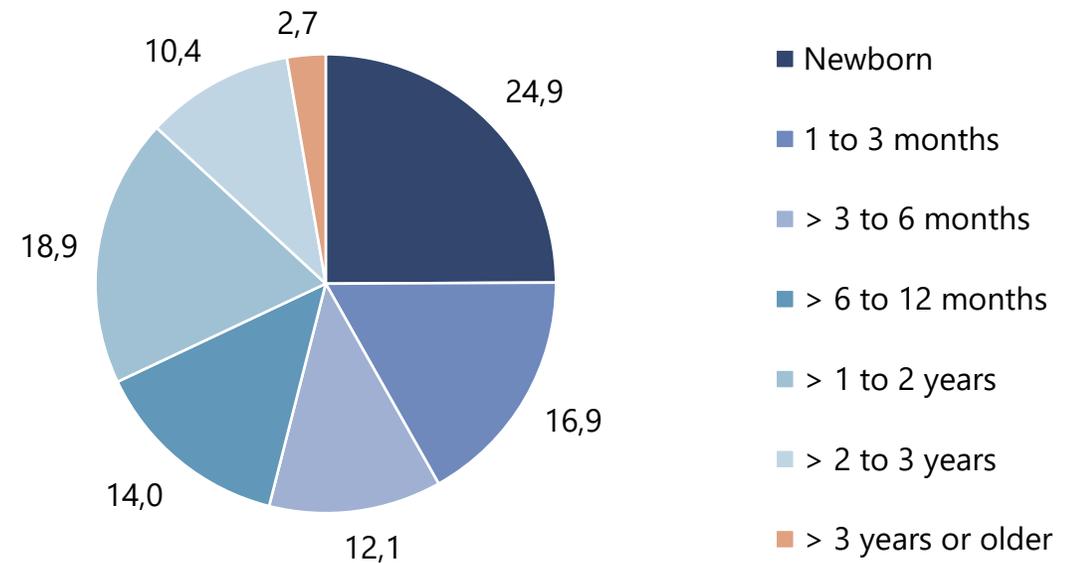
Programme is well used

2015 to 2024: almost **21,500** referrals to the programme; almost **16,400 families supported** throughout Austria (2024: ~ 4,900 family supports plus around ~1,100 short-term supports)



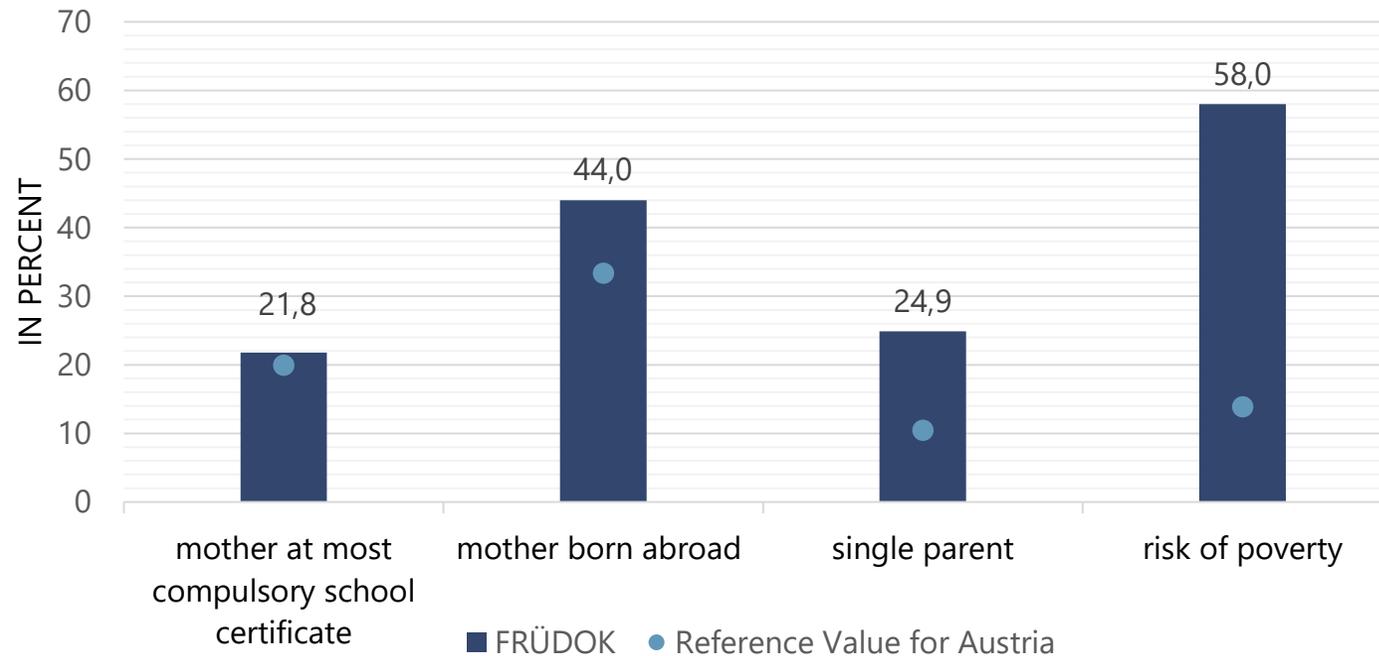
Families are reached early

- More than **25 %** of the family supports already start during pregnancy
- When entering the programme, **~ 70 % of the children** already born are **younger than one year old**



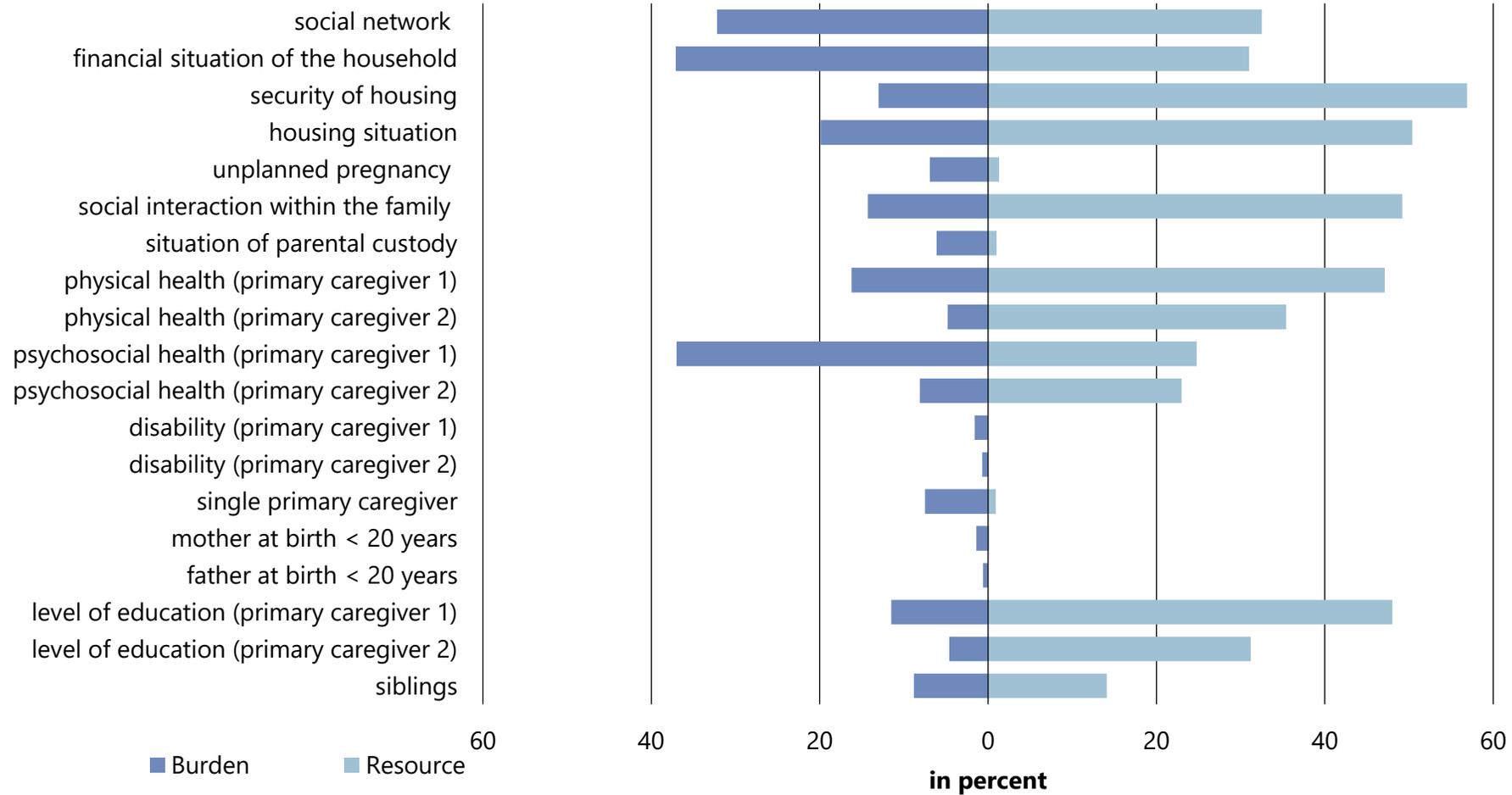
Notes: Figures in per cent of contacts in 2023 that were accompanied, n = 2,304
 This refers to the most recent pregnancy or the youngest child in the family.

Socially disadvantaged families are supported



Notes: Data in percent of contacts in 2023 that resulted in family support, n = 2,314. The Austrian reference values were taken from the following data sources: Kaindl/Schipfer (2023); Statistik Austria (2023a); Statistik Austria (2024a); mother here refers to the primary main caregivers, who are the biological mothers in most families.

Multiple Resources and Burdens



EVALUATION: Families do benefit from early childhood intervention networks

Impact on health determinants (material, social and societal environment) by **increase in available resources** as well as **reduction of strains/burdens**:



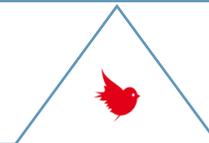
resources

- + self-esteem
- + health, health literacy
- + parenting skills, parent-child-bonding
- + child development
- + familiar relations/atmosphere
- + social net
- + perspectives for parents life/future



strains/burdens

- anxiety and exhaustion
- financial burden/distress



EVALUATION: Key elements for success



Success factors:

- Intersectoral cooperation
- Active access and outreach work
- Relationship work and “navigator function”
- Multi-professional teams
- Nationwide coordination - NZFH.at

“USP” – Unique selling points:

- Needs based scope of action
 - outreach support with its focus on relationship building
-
- preventive approach with special attention to the strengthening of family resources
 - integration of family support into a network of different services

E-Learning and Materials

E-Learning: Literature study and interactive training; cooperation with three professional societies (ÖGKJ, ÖGAM, ÖGGG);

available for doctors (meinDFP), midwives and nurses

<https://www.fruehehilfen.at/fortbildung.htm>

Start: INTERAKTIVE FORTBILDUNG



Interaktive Fortbildung & Literaturstudium

E-LEARNING

Frühe Hilfen verbessern die Entwicklungsmöglichkeiten und Gesundheitschancen von Kindern und deren Eltern frühzeitig und nachhaltig. Als frühe präventive Maßnahme wirken sie positiv auf den körperlichen und seelischen Gesundheitszustand von Kindern und Jugendlichen und legen den Grundstein für Gesundheit im Erwachsenenalter.

Um Familien mit Unterstützungsbedarf zu erreichen, braucht es einen aktiven und systematischen Zugang über Fachkräfte und Institutionen, die mit schwangeren Frauen und Müttern bzw. Familien mit Kleinkindern in Kontakt sind. Im Zeitraum von Schwangerschaft, Geburt und früher Kindheit kommt dem Gesundheitsbereich eine besondere Rolle zu, da nahezu alle Familien Gesundheitsdienstleistungen in Anspruch nehmen. Die regionalen Frühe-Hilfen-Netzwerke streben daher eine enge Kooperation mit dem medizinischen Bereich an und richten sich insbesondere an Krankenhäuser (v. a. Geburtseinrichtungen) sowie niedergelassene Gesundheitsberufe mit Fokus auf Gynäkologie, Pädiatrie, Allgemeinmedizin und Hebammen.

Materials:

Interview guidelines etc. for doctors

(multilingual) Materials for families



<https://www.fruehehilfen.at/arbeitsunterlagen.htm>

https://www.fruehehilfen.at/de/Service/Materialien/Eltern_Familie.htm

Feedback of families supported

Particularly helpful were:

- Talks with the family supporter
- the knowledge that there is someone who can help
- that the families are not alone with their worries and problems
- Tips and advice, pointing out the possibilities for support

"... that my fears, worries and problems were taken seriously, we got help quickly and without complications."

"... she always listened well and was like a strong shoulder for me without judging a person."

"...a lot of understanding and compassion is shown ... we felt we were not let down so we could manage everything well in difficult times and see more hope in life."



Thank you for your attention!

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GESUNDHEITS ZIELE ÖSTERREICH

Weiter denken. Weiter kommen.



KIN:DER_{NZFH}
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