

Governance and policy priorities

Responsibility of family support services is shared between national and local authorities in Germany. At the national level responsibilities lie with the federal ministry for family affairs, senior citizens, women and youth (BMFSFJ). Government action towards families is regulated by the Children and Youth Welfare Act (SGB VIII) which aims to ensure that children and teenagers in Germany receive the support that they and their families need, also through the provision of an effective, needs-based child and youth welfare service. The Act provides a structural frame for the functioning of local level networks for the wellbeing of children, e.g. to facilitate the co-operation of youth welfare offices with medical personnel when necessary. There are also regular meetings, consultations and data exchanges between the federal and state authorities (German "Länder").

Programmes, characteristics and use

Local governments use multiple measures to reach families that need support. Measures used by authorities in Berlin to support families include:

- Identifying (e.g. through routine screening, and analysis of administrative data) support services needed by the most vulnerable families and the associated policy response. For example in March 2021 the BMFSFJ published the 9th family report "neunter familienbericht" – an experts commission report on family policy issues that includes a statement by the federal government on the relevant issues and such a report is during every second legislative period. The Senate of Berlin

commissions the Berlin Advisory Council for Family Issues to prepare a Berliner Familienbericht on the situation of families in Berlin in every legislative period.

- Collecting information and/or statistics on the needs of families who use public family support services. For example, see the annual social report by the Berlin-Brandenburg Statistical Office ([Regionaler Sozialbericht Berlin und Brandenburg](#)), and published data by [Federal Statistics Office](#) also on children and youth supports [children and youth supports](#).
- Ensuring that the most vulnerable families are able to access and use the available services (e.g. through Regional Social Education Services; Early help; Seeking parental help; and, Family midwives (Box 1).
- Preventing the stigmatisation of vulnerable families by providing them and their children with key supports (e.g. children are able to access free school lunch for grades 1-6, free student public transport ticket and learning material exemption).
- Using a "two generational" approach (interventions that target both parents and children simultaneously) within family centers to help vulnerable families (Box 1).

Germany provides financial support for pregnant women in emergency situations nationwide through the [Federal Foundation Mother and Child](#). Pregnant women may access for financial support at any pregnancy counselling service.

Box 1. Examples of family support service programmes

[Family centers](#) were created to support the existing supply and care structures in Berlin and now offer a range of services in 45 facilities. Family centers offer high-quality education and care options for children as well as family-oriented meeting places such as parent-child cafes or family clubs. In addition, the centers offer family education and counseling for parents with a focus on parenting skills, health promotion, household skills or language acquisition. The family centers are intended to have a preventative effect through strengthening the potential of parents and, above all, families with a migrant background, to support their children competently and to motivate them to register their children for day-care centers at an early stage. Services aim to better reach and support families and provide them access to family centres without formal administrative hurdles or intercultural barriers. Better coordination efforts by service providers can play a role in improving the infrastructure of families centers.

Specially trained [family midwives](#) hold additional socio-educational qualifications in order to better support families who find themselves overwhelmed or in a difficult life situation and require additional support. Family midwives can accompany families with babies according to their needs until the child's first birthday.

In another programme “District mothers” [Landesprogramm Stadtteilmütter](#), mothers with a migration background who, as part of a peer-to-peer approach, advise and support other mothers on issues around upbringing, child health and other issues regarding family life with children up to twelve years of age. The district mothers role can also act as a bridging function to establish contact with the authorities, help families with application for family benefits and with orientation in the local care system. The district mothers complete a six month training programme with theoretical and practical elements that prepares them for their task.

Monitoring and knowledge sharing

Evaluations of family support policies and practice are conducted, in many cases by external auditors, in order to identify best-practice and support the scaling up of programmes that work (such as the Landesprogramm Stadtteilmütter programme discussed in Box 1).

Information and knowledge gained from family support services are shared through internal and external councils such as Berlin Family Advisory Board (Berliner Familienbeirat) and the State Commission for the Prevention of Child and Family Poverty (Landeskommission zur Prävention von Kinder- und Familienarmut).

In Germany, families’ opinions and needs are taken into account in order to help guide policy through the consultation of family associations, direct feedback from service users which encourage the participation process for drawing up a family support laws through regular consultation meetings with the various institutions and service providers. In addition, the family advisory board and the state and youth welfare committee (Familienbeirat, Landes- und Jugendhilfeausschuss) allow for service providers to share the needs and risks of the community with local authorities. The committee’s statistics branch provides information on the purpose and extent of surveys, survey criteria, auxiliary criteria, timelines and reporting periods, obligation to disclose, and passing of information.

Contact

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