



Federal Ministry for
Family Affairs, Senior Citizens,
Women and Youth

*Think, learn and act across
generations – our future society.*

Parenting in Germany.

Summary of the Expert Commission's Report

Foreword

How to strengthen families so that children and their parents can live, learn and work well? So that they feel comfortable, have financial security, have time for each other and look to the future with confidence? Our elaboration of a sustainable family policy over recent years has provided good answers to these questions. This is also confirmed by the Ninth Family Report, which focuses on parents. Parents were asked how they want to live, what they would like for their children, what puts them under pressure, and from where and whom they expect support. The recommendations, which the Expert Commission has derived from the parents' responses, confirm our view that a triad is needed: with sufficient time for the family, effective and unbureaucratic cash benefits, and a well-developed infrastructure. These factors enable both partners to have a livelihood-securing gainful employment. They enable parents to reconcile family and work in a more equal way, and they allow to have the diversity of family life reflected in the law as well. For example, the members of the Expert Committee all call for educational institutions to clearly and reliably take responsibility for educating children and promoting their development. We take on this mission to develop our family policy in such a way that investment in families places an even greater focus on equal opportunities for a good education, promotion of children's development, childcare, and counselling for both parents and their children.

Parents want to be “good parents” for their children. They want their children to have the best possible opportunities in their lives. To this end, they need a family-friendly society in which family and work are compatible and the opportunities for quality care and education are equally distributed.

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Why a Report on “Parenting in Germany”?

Parents bear, in a particular way, the responsibility for a good upbringing, and for the educational and future opportunities of the next generation. They shape family life not only in the present, but they also equip and prepare their children for their later life in a changing society. Although parents do not do this all by themselves, they still are the key actors in shaping family life and promoting the well-being of their children.

Parenting has become more demanding. Decisive factors are, on the one hand, changes in guiding principles of child-centred parenting, thus heightening the demands and expectations placed on parents, as well as parents’ own aspirations. Parenting has undergone an “intensification,” which expresses itself in more demanding standards of care, supervision,

and active support for children’s development, and results in an increased investment of time in these activities. On the other hand, the transformation of gender roles, more complex family structures, and the challenges of digitalization have also contributed to making the upbringing and support of children more demanding.

At the same time, many parents are confronted with rigid social structures that make it difficult for them to offer their children a good start and promising prospects. Parents, thus, often find themselves under pressure, are looking for guidance and would like to have more effective support, as also shown in the Allensbach study “*Elternschaft heute*” (Parenting Today) (2020).

Why a Report on “Parenting in Germany”?

Three central aspects are worthwhile noting in this context:

- There are still persistent social inequalities in families’ living conditions and, thereby, unequal conditions under which children grow up. This situation is inconsistent with the claim to equal opportunity.
- The increased demands on parents, in the sense of an intensification of parenting, present the danger that well-resourced families follow this trend toward increasingly involved parenting more vigorously than others. Hence, social divisions could be reinforced.
- This concerns, above all, the unequal educational opportunities of children depending on their parents’ social position. Despite reform efforts to date, these inequalities stubbornly persist and make the social advancement more difficult for children from resource-poor families. Reducing these educational barriers poses considerable challenges (not only) for the educational system.



Many of these problems are magnified in the Corona pandemic. As children are confined to home learning during lockdown and quarantine-related closures of daycare centres and schools, it is particularly the danger of unequal educational opportunities, which has become exacerbated. A lack of sustainable cooperation between parents and educational institutions in the sense of an educational partnership, and the patchy provision of digital resources to schools, have made communication and genuine ‘home schooling’ more difficult.

Against this background, policy should aim to strengthen equal opportunities, provide support to parents and empower them to master the existing challenges. In the Commission’s view, new “partnerships in responsibility” (*Verantwortungspartnerschaften*) are required to this end, above all, in the cooperation between parents and educational institutions and the state’s co-responsibility for improving children’s opportunities for participation in society.

The economic stabilisation of families belongs to the key policy tasks in the current Corona pandemic. Short-time work (*Kurzarbeit*) as an instrument to avoid unemployment and to compensate workers’ loss of income as well as the Corona parental allow-

ance (*Elterngeld*) make an important contribution in this respect. In the long term, however, removing obstacles to the substantial participation of both parents in the labour force and, thus, in securing the family’s income is key to preventing poverty. An egalitarian division of labour between parents in gainful employment and domestic work is a widespread ideal, but one that is relatively infrequently realised in Germany. The support of companies and local authorities in reconciling work and family life is, therefore, essential to foster equal sharing of responsibilities.

Families in Germany have become more diverse: in their household structure, cross-household parent-child and generational relationships, and in the ways of becoming a parent. This has given rise to a need for legal reforms that must respond to changing desires, options, and realities of families’ lives. In part, this is tied to increased demands for parental counselling that policy has to facilitate and shape. Finally, immigration – through refugee migration, but even more through increasing mobility among EU member states – has contributed to the increasing diversity and heterogeneity of families. Tapping the potential of immigration and efforts to improve the integration of immigrants are key tasks for all institutions.

Why a Report on “Parenting in Germany”?

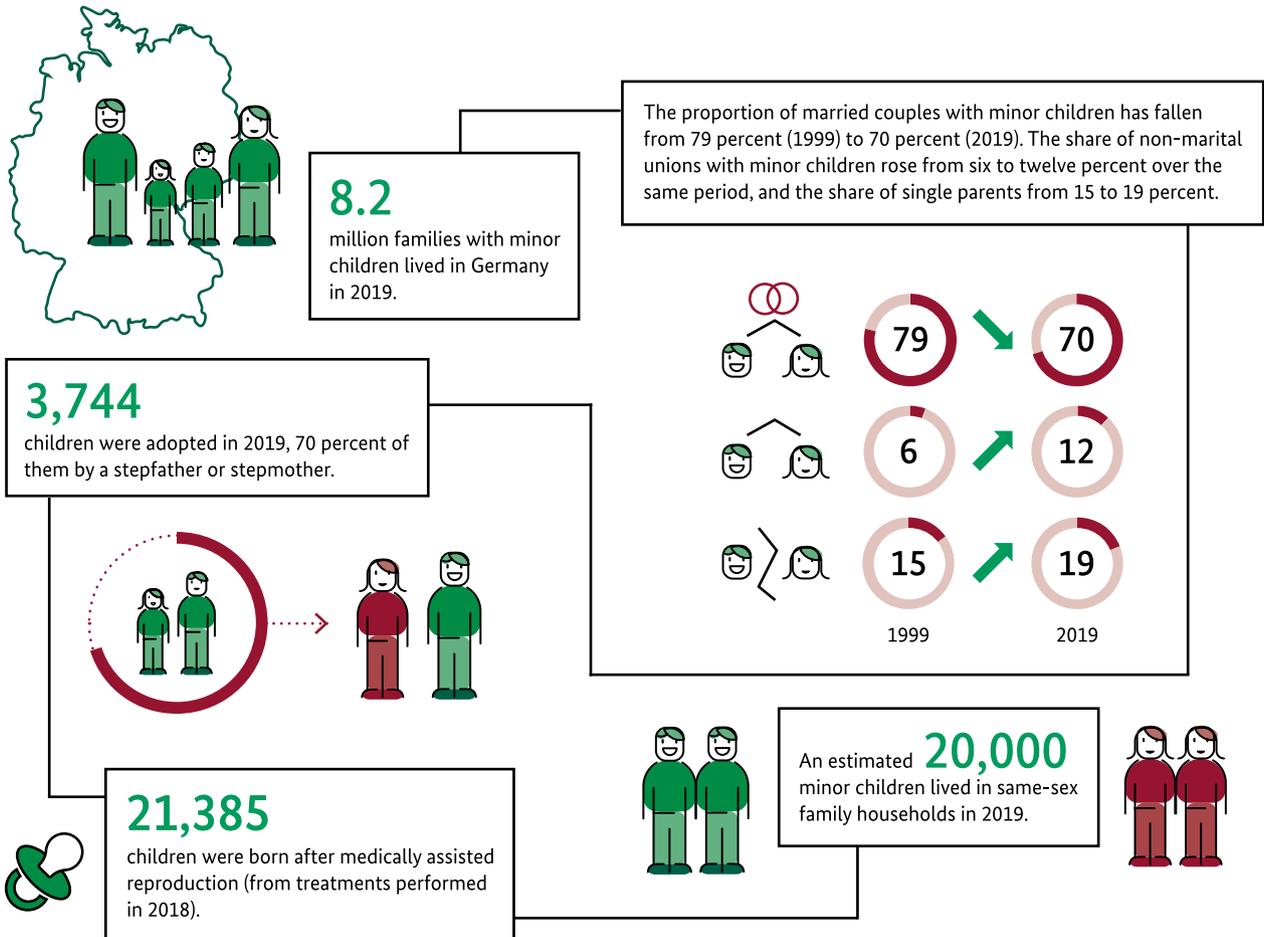
This makes it clear that policy for families goes beyond family policy. In order to inform policy and to be able to demonstrate available options for effectively and sustainably promoting families, in every other legislative period, the Federal Government presents a report on the situation of families in Germany on behalf of the German *Bundestag*. The aim is to demonstrate the many different aspects of the social transformation that is underway and the diversity of families, the mechanisms that have an impact on family life, the existing needs and the options for providing support to families.

In July 2018, an independent expert commission consisting of seven scientists was appointed to prepare the Ninth Family Report. The Commission examined the changing realities of parents and children and developed recommendations on how policy can support families more effectively.

The Commission sees policy for families as a mission for society as a whole and draws on the “triad” of time, money, and infrastructure policy for families that was formulated in the Seventh Family Report. In so doing, it places particular focus on the further (quantitative and qualitative) development of family-related infrastructure in the sense of sustainable social investment. In addition, the Commission calls for a stronger impact orientation of family-related services and measures, which requires improved data bases and evaluations. The present summary provides information on key findings.

The Structural Diversity of Parenthood

Family Statistics at a Glance



Sources: German IVF Register, Federal Statistical Office (Microcensus, Adoption Statistics), Calculations by the Office of the Ninth Family Report

The Structural Diversity of Parenthood

Family forms and ways of becoming a parent have become more diverse

It is still the case that the overwhelming majority of men and women in Germany intend to have children. This also applies to women and men in homosexual partnerships. However, family forms have changed considerably and have become more diverse. This is manifested by the high shares of births to unmarried women and the high prevalence of separation and divorce, as a consequence of which many parents are single parents or live in a stepfamily or separated from their children. The diversity of family forms is also clear in the increasing decoupling of biological and social parenthood, which appears not only in stepfamilies, but also in adoptive, foster and reproductive families.

One out of every three children is born outside of marriage

More than a third of children in Germany are born to unmarried women, in eastern Germany even more than half. Cohabiting unions with children are a widespread form of family in eastern Germany, whereas in western Germany married couples with children continue to predominate. But even in western Germany, a rise in cohabiting couples with children could be observed in recent years. Marriage is, thus, less often – as was still usual a few decades ago – the precondition for founding a family, and it is also no guarantee for the stability of a family.

One in every three marriages ends in divorce

About one in three marriages in Germany ends in divorce. The divorce rate had been increasing steadily until it began decreasing slightly again a few years ago. Half of the divorces involve couples with minors. Although divorce rates in eastern Germany are lower than in western Germany, couples with children are in fact far more unstable in the East than in the West, as, obviously, the divorce rate only provides information on couples that have been constituted by marriage. However, unmarried couples with children are more likely to separate than married ones and they are not part of the official divorce statistics. Even if unmarried parents face the same challenges as married couples after separating – for instance, with respect to cooperation in rearing their children or the choice of a model of shared parenting – different legal provisions apply for unmarried parents and this affects the rights and duties that they have with respect to one another.



As a result of the considerable rise in divorces and separations in Germany, there has, on the one hand, been an increase in the significance of single parenting, which is more widespread in eastern Germany than in western Germany. While women make up 84 percent of single parents, there are increasingly more fathers who are also single parents. After a separation or phase of single parenting, many parents set up a stepfamily, in which one of the parents is not related to the children who live in the family. In order to transform their social parenthood into a legal one, stepparents have the option of adopting their stepchildren. The adoption of stepchildren represents the majority of adoptions taking place in Germany. In addition to children from previous relationships, “complex stepfamilies,” which make up about a quarter of all stepfamilies, also include children that the parents have together.

The number of single parents and stepfamilies is rising

Children living together with their biological parents is, thus, just one of many family forms that exist in Germany. Thus, biological and social parenthood are also separated in foster families and in certain reproductive families. At the same time, donors in assisted reproduction are genetically related to the child, but do not usually seek to be active parents. The different techniques of assisted reproduction are becoming increasingly significant in helping people to become parents who have, hitherto, been unable to fulfil their desire for children and for same-sex couples.

Biological and social parenthood are increasingly separated



The Diversity of Parenthood in Law

Current law is no longer adapted to the changing reality of families and the many different ways of becoming a parent. A core aspect of this changing reality is the increase in unmarried couples living with their children. Many parents assume long-term responsibility for their children together without constituting their relationship by marriage. There is hardly any difference here between the family life of unmarried and married couples with their children. Unlike married parents, however, unmarried parents, besides having to have the paternity acknowledged, need to make additional declarations on joint parental custody when their children are born; otherwise, only the mother has parental custody. To strengthen joint parental responsibility in the couple, unmarried parents who live together should also be accorded joint custody by law upon the birth of the child.

Joint custody
for unmarried
couples with
children

Precisely in the event of separation or death, the legal situation is different for unmarried parents than for spouses. There are inadequate protections for the children, as well as for the parent who has invested more in childcare than in his or her professional activity. A legal framework needs to be created here that includes provisions, in the case of separation, for using the family home, for support to compensate for relationship-related disadvantages, as well as for an adjustment of assets that also includes retirement entitlements. Inheritance rights for unmarried parents should be accorded in the event of death.

Compensation
for relation-
ship-related
disadvantages

The Diversity of Parenthood in Law

Joint adoption

Unequal treatment due to family form also exists in adoption law. Whereas, in the meanwhile, it is also possible for unmarried parents to adopt a stepchild, this is not the case for the joint adoption of a child who is unrelated to either parent: for instance, a foster child. This inequality also needs to be eliminated.

Non-discriminatory access to assisted reproduction

For many different reasons, assisted reproduction is acquiring more and more importance as a way of becoming a parent. The current legal provisions are inadequate, however, and no longer in keeping with the times. Thus far, only sperm donation is allowed, but not the donation of egg cells. Access to measures of assisted reproduction is dependent on the income, status, gender and sexual orientation of the intended parents. It is, thus, imperative to create a law on reproductive medicine that grants non-discriminatory access to assisted reproduction. Moreover, those who participate in the conception of a child using assisted reproduction must receive comprehensive counselling and their legal positions must be better protected.

Same-sex parents

Thus far, in the case of same-sex couples the legal parenthood of both would-be parents is not recognised when the child is born. The wife or partner of the birth mother has to revert to the detour of stepchild adoption, which is not only costly, but also involves the risk of failure: for instance, if the mother dies during childbirth. Hence, for reasons of equality and to protect the child, obtaining the legal status of parent should be made possible immediately upon birth.

There is much debate about surrogate motherhood. In light of the example of other countries, the legislature should examine whether surrogate motherhood in the form of altruistic motherhood on behalf of others should be allowed, provided that the autonomy of the birth mother and the rights of the child are protected. Even if the domestic prohibition of surrogate motherhood is maintained, there is a need for provisions on the recognition of legal parenthood in cases of cross-border surrogacy.

Need for provisions on surrogate motherhood

De facto parental responsibility is increasingly being assumed by third parties who are not, at the same time, the legal parents of the child. This applies, above all, to stepparents, but also to foster parents. It is only in rare cases – when the biological parent has sole custody and the partners are married – that the stepparent obtains the so-called “small” or limited custody. In order to give legal recognition to stepparents’ assumption of responsibility, the possibility should be provided to secure the relationship between stepparent and child by way of genuine custody. Custody for more than two persons is also of great importance in family constellations in which, already before the child’s conception, the plan was for more than two parents to assume parental responsibility: say, a lesbian couple together with a male friend. Finally, the social parenthood of foster parents should also be legally secured to a greater extent than it has been up to now. In case it is improbable that the child will return to the family of origin, foster relationships should in the future receive stronger legal recognition as part of a long-term life perspective. In those cases, in which a return to the family of origin is not an option, adoptions by foster parents should also be more strongly promoted.

Legally strengthening social parenthood



Heterogeneity Due to Immigration

The increasing heterogeneity of families also results from Germany's long and diverse immigration history. Emigration, immigration and transit migration do not only have a long historical tradition, but have contributed significantly to the social, cultural and ethnic diversity of families. Today, Germany is the second most important destination country worldwide for international migrants after the USA. Nearly 13.8 million people in Germany have immigrated in the course of their lives, one quarter of the population has a so-called "migrant background"¹, and either all or certain family members have a migrant background in 40 percent of all families with minors in the household.

Migration contributes significantly to the heterogeneity of families

Immigrants predominantly come from EU countries. Since 2010, the share of EU citizens has almost consistently accounted for more than half of all new immigrants, primarily from Eastern and Southeastern European countries. Refugee migration shaped migration patterns in 2015 and 2016 in particular. Overall, migration patterns in Germany have, thus, become more differentiated over the past decades. This is reflected in the data on migrant families. Today, of the more than three million families with minor children and migrant background, 15 percent come from Turkey, ten percent from Poland, eight percent from the Russian Federation and four percent from Syria.

Immigration makes a major contribution to Germany's economic development, both through the innovative strength of highly qualified immigrants as well as through its contribution to the recruitment and retention of skilled workers. Measured in terms of their share of the working-age population, migrants are disproportionately often employed in „system-relevant“ occupations, a considerable number of which consist of precarious and low-paid jobs. Strategically, the recruitment of skilled labour through immigration is of great importance for Germany. Here, it needs to be taken into account that labour force migration and family migration are closely interlinked.

Immigration in the family context secures skilled workers and economic growth

1 According to the definition used by the Federal Statistical Office of Germany, a person has a migrant background if they or at least one parent did not acquire German citizenship by birth.

Heterogeneity Due to Immigration

The need for removing hurdles to family reunification

Migration is often a „family affair“. Family considerations play an important role in migration decisions. In order to attract skilled workers from abroad, it is, therefore, necessary to improve conditions of entry for family members and to offer prospects in Germany to family members accompanying migrants or joining them later. Bureaucratic hurdles and restrictive entry conditions for family members are a burden for many people. This applies to German citizens who start new relationships during stays abroad and would like to live with their new partners in Germany, as well as to immigrants from third countries and their family members in their country of origin. Especially in the context of refugees, family reunification has to be simplified for persons entitled to subsidiary protection and must not be further complicated by legal restrictions. The procedures for issuing visas should, thus, be optimised in crisis and conflict zones and long waiting times should be avoided.

Family is a motor of integration

Research shows how stressful it can be for family members to be separated from one another. The family is an important anchor for emotional stability and identity – and it is a motor of integration. Learning a language is easier, if you do not have to worry about family members in need. It has been long known that immigration early in life has a positive impact on children’s language acquisition and their subsequent educational success. A “family-friendly immigration policy” or simplifying the conditions of entry for family members from third countries is, thus, advisable in Germany’s own interest for securing skilled labour and for promoting processes of integration. In the case of specific groups, such as beneficiaries of subsidiary protection, it is also required for humanitarian reasons.

The family is important for the process of integration of its members in a variety of respects. Integration as a process of gaining membership and adjusting living standards also requires the safeguarding of participation by the institutions of the host society. Parents benefit from language and integration courses, as well as vocational orientation and training courses, whose attendance is compatible with the demands of the family. In addition, the “intercultural openness” of all the society’s institutions continues to be a key task for policy and society as a whole. A social attitude toward migrant diversity and inclusion gains expression in the translation of the various elements of intercultural openness into practice. It reflects the self-conception of a society of immigration and conveys important signals of belonging and a fundamentally open and appreciative attitude to immigrants and their children.

Intercultural
openness of
institutions
facilitates
inclusion





An Intensification of Parenthood?

Parenting has changed and involves both rising standards and greater demands. In comparison to the past, many parents feel that greater expectations are placed on their role and find that rearing children has become more difficult. The widespread ideal of a child-centred upbringing, which places the wishes and interests of children in the foreground, also contributes to this. Rising educational expectations are added to this. Many parents see it as their duty to support their children's development in the best possible way, even if they themselves have to take a back seat to do so. Intensive parental involvement in taking care of their children demands a high level of commitment from parents – especially from mothers – and can sometimes lead to their being overwhelmed. Many parents feel social pressure to meet the ideal of the self-sacrificing parents. This also makes it more difficult to achieve the required balance between supervising children and encouraging them to be autonomous. Finally, additional demands result from a greater need for coordination in organising the family's daily life and childcare when both parents share gainful employment and family-related work.

One indication of the “intensification” of parenting is parents' investment of time and money in their children. In line with international developments, a significant increase in the amount of time parents spend each day caring for their children can also be observed in Germany in the period from 2001/2002 to 2012/2013 – not only among fathers, but, in absolute terms, even more so among mothers. This is particularly notable in light of the increasing participation of mothers in gainful employment. At the same time, this points to a persistent gender-specific role specialisation in families. Nonetheless, parents are increasingly dissatisfied with the amount of time they spend with their children and increasingly feel that they are not able to support them sufficiently due to a lack of time. On the other hand, contrary to the trends in other countries, parents' monetary expenditures for their children, e.g. for consumption purposes or on education, have remained largely constant. Due to rising income inequality, however, spending on children is increasingly diverging: i.e. the spending gap between poorer and richer families has widened, thus exacerbating existing inequalities.

Bringing up children is becoming more demanding; new guiding principles are putting parents under pressure

Parents are devoting more time to their children; the social gap in spending on children is growing

An Intensification of Parenthood?

Parents with fewer resources cannot support their children as much as they want

Especially parents with fewer resources, who have high expectations for their children's social advancement, lack the time and financial means to support their children as much as they would like to. As guarantee of good prospects later in life, the educational success of one's own children has great significance and, therefore, puts parents under pressure. Research has identified different ways in which families support their children's education. It has been shown that this does not only take place by way of the material and social stimulation offered by the family's everyday life or taking advantage of institutional support. The parents' involvement in their children's schooling, their support of learning at home as well as conveying the value of education and corresponding educational aspirations also play a role. Adequate support for and constructive involvement in children's schooling proves to be a challenge especially for families of a lower socio-economic status, but it is not a given for well-resourced parents either.

Imparting health-related skills is becoming more important

At the same time, prevention and care with respect to children's physical and mental health – for instance, by way of averting risks or imparting skills for staying healthy – is becoming an important task for parents. Often, however, they are not able to draw on the relevant health-related knowledge. Although no increase in parental worries can be observed in this regard, parents are challenged by changed conditions of growing up as well as a non-negligible prevalence of physical and mental illnesses among children and adolescents.

Parents are largely left to their own devices in dealing with digital media

One of the new challenges comes from the increasing mediatisation of everyday life, which many parents are not well prepared for. Encouraging appropriate use of digital media, imparting online skills, and protecting against harmful experiences are, first and foremost, the responsibility of parents. In educating their children about media, parents in Germany have hitherto mainly relied on restrictive measures: in particular, in the form of time limits or parental oversight. Even if this reduces risk, online potentials are best exploited when activating strategies are employed as often as possible: i.e. an active discussion-oriented approach to internet use, technical control and monitoring. Parents in Germany tend to have reservations about technical monitoring using parental control software or apps. Especially here, they find themselves in a dilemma between fulfilling their supervisory duties and respecting the personal rights of their children.

Parenthood in Different Family Contexts

Families have different needs depending on their life circumstances and family constellation. In many situations, parents are confronted by difficult and complex challenges. For the purposes of policy-making, it is important to know each of the specific challenges, in order to be able to offer targeted support and prevention. The Commission highlights six life situations and family forms, and points to the need for action concerning family life education and counselling services, socio-pedagogical support for families, and child protection.

Families with Limited Socio-Economic Resources

Living in poverty can have a highly adverse effect upon the psychological well-being of family members. The worries and fears about the future of parents who are not able to provide for their family from their own resources put a strain on the family climate and the upbringing of the children. Financial benefits are a key instrument for offsetting disadvantages. But equal opportunities are also promoted by strengthening public responsibility offering for an upbringing of children that fosters their development. When children from families with limited socio-economic resources spend more time in schools and daycare centres where they receive targeted support, their educational opportunities and opportunities for social participation improve. At the same time, this provides relief to parents and makes it easier for mothers, in particular, to participate in gainful employment. Parents' integration into the workforce is especially important, since it makes an essential contribution to stabilising everyday family life, even if the parents are unable to earn a sufficient income. To strengthen parents' relationship and parenting competencies, it is important that there are low thresholds of access to preventive family life education and counselling services that are adapted to the target groups. This is especially the case for parents with limited financial and educational resources, since they need support in child-rearing more often, but are less likely to be reached by family life education.

Integration into the labour market and low thresholds of access to support services are crucial for families with limited socio-economic resources

Families with a Migrant Background

Attending a daycare facility promotes the integration of both children and parents with a migrant background

Families with a migrant background face a variety of challenges when they arrive in the destination country. Especially if they lack the requisite language skills, they are at risk of being viewed as deficient and being downgraded to “high-risk parents”. To facilitate their integration in the destination country, an accommodating and open attitude is needed, as are migration-sensitive support services in which cultural diversity is valued and reciprocal processes of interaction and learning are encouraged. The “double dividend” of early childhood education and care is of decisive importance, since children’s daycare attendance both benefits their educational and professional future and promotes the social integration of parents and especially mothers. The longer the time that children spend in daycare, the greater these effects are. In the interest of the children, it is important to bring the educational styles and practices in daycare centres and the parental home into balance, and to strive to provide individualised support for children and young people. In both daycare centres and schools, it is important to involve parents in the daily life of the institutions and, thus, to make support services accessible to them, also in partnership with migrant organisations, parent associations, and self-help networks.

Parenthood in the Context of Illness and Disability

Interface problems complicate access to support services for families with a disabled child

Families in which a parent or child suffers from a physical, mental, psychological or sensory disability are confronted by complex challenges and situations, which are difficult in multiple ways, and they particularly are often in need of support. The Federal Act on Participation of Persons with Disabilities (*Bundesteilhabegesetz*), which was passed in December 2016, created an essential basis for support and equality of participation, which goes beyond the provision of health care. Nonetheless, empirical findings show that support for families with a disabled child is often hindered by issues of administrative responsibility or interface problems (particularly, in Books VIII and IX of the German Social Code) (*Sozialgesetzbuch – SGB VIII and SGB IX*). Hence, it is important to continue to advance the concept of the “inclusive solution” further.

If parents are affected by a disability, they are often dependent in their daily lives and in the care and upbringing of their children on tailored support services that relieve them of parental duties and make their children's assistance unnecessary. Since 1 January 2020, when the transfer of integration assistance from Book XII of the Social Code to Book IX, Part 2 (*SGB IX, Teil 2*) came into force, there has been, for the first time, a clear legal framework for providing support to the parents in question. Nonetheless, the different service segments lead to parallel offers of youth or integration assistance and fail to take into account the family system. In light of "threshold fears" (often due to fear of stigmatisation or even of losing one's children), it is important to make access to support easier. Outreach services (e.g. home treatment), pilot services, and interdisciplinary and coordinated health management are particularly useful in this context. The close cooperation of public health insurance providers, public youth welfare services, and medical services, as well as the availability of well-qualified staff with knowledge of adjacent legal areas, could represent key features of successful, tailored support.

Parents with impairments are dependent on a stronger family orientation in participation law

Co-parenting and Shared Care after Parental Separation

After a separation, parents are faced with the challenge of shaping their cooperation in the care and upbringing of the children (co-parenting) and deciding on their respective shares in the care of the children. Not only the quality of individual parenting, but also parents' co-parenting is essential for children's well-being. Both ongoing conflicts and the undermining of the other parent's efforts at parenting put a strain on the children.

Cooperation between parents after a separation is crucial for the well-being of children

Post-separation shared parenting requires legal adjustments in custody, access, and child support

This is all the more the case when parents share the care for their children taking turns in shared physical custody. The traditional division of roles as “one pays, one takes care of the children” is no longer adequate for the changed demands on and expectations of parenting. In choosing a care model, it is important to keep in mind not only its feasibility in day-to-day life, but, above all, the well-being of the children. Besides good cooperation, the quality of the parental care and the special features of the children, such as their age and personality, are also relevant. For parents, counsellors, family court judges, and psychological experts, related information based on sound empirical findings is of great importance. By anchoring shared care in family law adjustments in child maintenance law become necessary. Here, the income of both parents is to serve as basis in keeping with their respective shares in childcare. Variations in these shares can be taken into account in a step model. The close link between shares in childcare and child support payments makes it more important that parents receive integrated counselling on all issues that need to be addressed after separation.

Stepfamilies and Patchwork Families

Stepfamilies are rarely addressed by family education so far

Stepfamilies are gaining in importance as separation rates rise. They are formed when a parent with at least one biological child forms a household with a partner who is not the biological parent of the child. Despite their diversity, all stepfamilies share the asymmetry in the parenting roles that arises initially due to the longer relationship of the biological parent to the children. Maintaining the relationship to the other biological parent who lives elsewhere can also present challenges. When a joint child is born to the partners, this increases the degree of complexity of the family system and sometimes puts a strain on the family climate and the children. Despite these greater demands, stepparents are still rarely addressed by family education, which could provide guidance in shaping complex roles and relationships.



Danger Zones in Child Rearing

Strict standards for government intervention in the case of a threat to child welfare

Problematic forms of parent-child relationships and parenting can arise in all family contexts and may threaten children's well-being to an extent that requires government intervention (§ 1666 of the German Civil Code, *Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch (BGB)*). Forms of child abuse include physical violence, sexual abuse, psychological violence, and neglect. Strict standards are applied in using the legal concept of a threat to child welfare. Provision is made for government intervention and the taking of the child into public custody only if the parents are not themselves able or willing to avert a threat (*ibid.*, para. 1). The government only intervenes after all realistic possibilities of support have been exhausted. Specialists estimate that the number of unreported cases of threats to child welfare is high.

Prevention of violence and neglect must start from their causes

Prevention of violence and neglect must start from the complex conditions under which they arise. The consequences of violence against children and of child neglect are also diverse and can be mutually reinforcing. Since interactions with close family members and caregivers are the foundation for all later social relationships, it is important that support for both parents and children is offered as early as possible and according to their needs. Both the participation of parents and respect for children's rights should be taken into account as important qualitative dimensions of child protection.

Parent Education and Support

Strengthening the primary prevention significance of family education

Child and Youth Welfare Services (Book VIII of the German Social Code, *Kinder- und Jugendhilfe (SGB VIII)*) offer a wide range of support services to relieve and strengthen parents in the upbringing and care of their children. Family education services (*Familienbildung*) assume important primary prevention functions in a variety of forms. In many cases, however, these services are mainly used by parents who already have strong resources and are sensitised to the relevant topics and issues (prevention dilemma). The increasing integration of family education into family centres is intended to counteract this. Despite its potentially key importance for the prevention of problematic situations, family education is not always incorporated into youth welfare planning and its structures are fragile.

Early Childhood Intervention (*Frühe Hilfen*), which is directed at parents during pregnancy and in the first three years of a child's life, is more firmly anchored structurally. These services are located at the interface between the health care system and child and youth welfare services, and, thanks to the outreach work of health care staff, they are particularly well-suited for reaching families in difficult situations. Through sustainable cooperation of different professions, they can also direct families to other services that are adapted to their needs. They are also an important partner in child protection, but limited to the early family phase.

Multi-profession cooperation in Early Childhood Intervention can provide a model for other services

Among the parenting support services (*Hilfen zur Erziehung*), which are primarily geared toward secondary prevention, parenting counselling (*Erziehungsberatung*) continues to play a major role, and outreach services, like the Social-Pedagogical Family Support (*Sozialpädagogische Familienhilfe*) provided by the Youth Welfare Office, are of growing significance. Family conflicts are increasingly the reason for seeking parenting counselling, with such conflicts playing a key role especially among single parents and in stepfamilies. An analysis of counselling services shows that the timely start of counselling, broadly qualified staff, extensive diagnostics, and cooperation with other providers of support are important. In contrast, less is known about the Social-Pedagogical Family Support. Its core objective is to strengthen the family in the sense of empowerment, to reduce the need for intervention, and, thus, to counteract threats to the child's welfare. However, a further development and impact evaluation of the Social-Pedagogical Family Support has long been pending.

In order to counteract the prevention dilemma, low thresholds of access, pilot services, and support that is tailored to families' needs are of great importance. Low-threshold access comprises, for example, free services, outreach work, and a welcoming infrastructure for family-education services (for instance, family centres). There is, however, a lack of data on the accuracy of fit and effectiveness of the wide variety of support services for parents. Needs assessments combined with service provision studies, such as those carried out for Early Childhood Intervention, should take into account the entire age spectrum of minors.

The further development of parenting support must be tailored to families' needs in an impact-oriented way



Educational Institutions as Part of Public Services for Families

In Germany, educational success has always been closely linked to parents' social and economic resources. Children from families with higher socio-economic positions tend to perform better in school compared to children from less privileged families (so-called primary effects of social background). At the same time, children from privileged families choose more demanding educational programmes than children from less privileged families even if the children perform equally well in school (so-called secondary effects of social background). In Germany, both effects of social background, the primary and the secondary effects, are important. Yet, the secondary effects are more decisive: children from privileged families tend to decide more often on pursuing more demanding school tracks or a university degree programme than children from less privileged families. There are several reasons for performance differences and different propensities to pursue advanced degrees based on family characteristics. For example, the stimulation of (early childhood) cognitive and emotional development is different across families. Likewise, families differ in their knowledge and information about school requirements and prospective monetary and non-monetary returns to education.

Educational success is highly dependent upon social background

Equality of educational opportunities is, however, the key to a fair start in life. It is important to support parents in creating a stimulating and enabling learning environment for their children. Thus, the establishment and development of child-rearing and educational partnerships between parents on the one hand, and educational professionals on the other hand becomes vital. For example, family education centres and daycare facilities are being transformed into multifunctional family centres, which integrate educational, care and supporting services into their profiles and create low thresholds of access. In some places in Germany, family centres have also been set up at primary schools, in order to provide seamless support to families even beyond the stage of early childhood education and care.

Further expansion of child-rearing and educational partnerships necessary

Educational Institutions as Part of Public Services for Families

In addition to adapting public services to family needs, specialists also have high expectations for multi-profession teams, which include school nurses, social workers, and psychologists, and in which various sponsors and institutions are integrated. Mentoring programmes, in which volunteers take on educational responsibility, are also showing promising results and further contribute to providing relief for the teaching staff.

Children from disadvantaged families especially benefit from high quality daycare

At the same time, the expansion of both daycare and all-day schools continues. Early childhood education becomes more important, and the need to reconcile work and family is more pressing. The number of children under three in daycare (both in daycare centres and with individual care providers) has risen considerably, but the demand is also growing. Even though the opportunities for daycare expand throughout the country, the expansion is characterised by regional differences and by different childcare cultures in eastern and western Germany. Although early childhood education and care has crucial significance for the development of competencies, the utilisation of daycare services for children under three is socially selective. Thus, children from disadvantaged families are less likely to be found in (high-quality) daycare than children of the same age from more privileged families. But it remains clear that apart from the quantitative expansion and the time that children spend in a daycare facility, the quality of the pedagogical work is, in particular, an important dimension for inequality-reducing effects in the early childhood domain.

Quality and cooperation with other professions is also decisive in all-day schools

For all-day schools, there are similar challenges. This is especially true with respect to the ambitious expansion of high-quality all-day places. Important quality characteristics are, in particular, multi-professional cooperation, the structural exchange of schools on the one hand, and child and youth welfare services on the other hand, and an orientation towards the actual needs of young people. Studies show that apart from the expected improvement in performance and the offsetting of educational inequalities thanks to high-quality all-day education, children and young people especially benefit from the services in terms of their social behaviour and their socio-emotional development.

Educational Institutions as Part of Public Services for Families

The Covid-19 pandemic put the challenges of parents and the shortcomings of educational institutions in bright light. Parents had to arrange education, care and homeschooling of their children. How well children get through the pandemic varies by the socio-economic position of the families, their language proficiencies and their social networks. Communication and transfer of information between school and the parental household stagnated, the compensatory effects of educational institutions were absent. The structural provision of schools and pupils with digital infrastructure was as limited as the competencies of some teaching staff in dealing with the situation. The Corona crisis has undoubtedly given a major impetus to the further development of digitalization and e-learning in schools.





Gainful Employment, the Division of Labour in the Household and Reconciling Family and Work

Parents in Germany very often follow the so-called modernised breadwinner model, in which the woman is employed part-time or marginally, whereas the man is employed full-time. The unequal division of gainful employment between parents is closely connected to a gender-specific division of childcare and domestic work. Here, mothers, despite the steady rise in their employment rate – most recently to 73 percent in western Germany and 80 percent in eastern Germany – still do the lion's share. Moreover, the gender-specific division of labour does not always correspond to parental preferences, but is also the result of economic constraints and incentives. Thus, fathers would often like to reduce the amount of time they work, and complain about having too little time for their families. At the same time, many mothers would gladly expand the amount of time they are employed and often wish that their partners would be more involved in taking care of and rearing the children.

Differences in employment do not only exist between mothers and fathers, but also between mothers in eastern and western Germany and depending on whether they are in a relationship and what sort of relationship it is. In eastern Germany, single mothers and mothers in a couple are employed to similar extents. In western Germany, on the other hand, mothers in a couple are far less likely to be employed full-time than single mothers. In addition, the employment of west German mothers in married and unmarried couples differs considerably.

There are still numerous obstacles to an egalitarian division of labour between mothers and fathers

Employment of both parents is central for the economic stability of the family

On the one hand, the gender-specific unequal involvement in gainful employment has negative consequences for the employment of women subject to mandatory social security contributions. The high – also by international standards – level of poverty and welfare dependency among separated and divorced mothers in Germany is often a consequence of the employment model that applied during the marriage or relationship. On the other hand, the gainful employment of both parents is very important for the economic security of the family – above all, in times of crisis. Most recently, the Corona pandemic has once again demonstrated how unexpectedly a parent can be affected by short-time work or even the loss of his or her job and what consequences this can have for the family as a whole.

Disincentives to work due to taxation of joint-income

The unequal integration of mothers and fathers in the labour market is favoured by the existing form of joint-income taxation for spouses in the tax category combination V/III, which creates disincentives to work, especially for married women². A new IV/IV standard combination of tax categories using the factor method (to take account of the partners' actual income shares) would bring about a more equitable distribution of individual net income (and income support benefits), while keeping the couple's overall tax burden constant. In the medium term, however, a move to another model of income taxation of couples, namely *Realsplitting*³, will be required, in order to avoid disincentives to work. Since unmarried couples with children also often involve a gender-specific division of labour, joint taxation of these couples should be considered as well in the long run. For the same reason, an alternative to the premium-free enrolment of not employed or marginally employed spouses in public health insurance and nursing care insurance has to be developed in the longer-term.

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2 The combination of tax class III and V is only available to married couples and benefits those with unequal income since the higher-earning partner (typically the husband) can choose lower taxation, whereas the lower-earning partner (typically the wife) receives higher taxation. This way, the overall monthly tax is lower throughout the year compared to equal taxation based on the tax classes IV for both partners, but differences in net income between partners are accentuated, providing little incentive for the lower-earning partner to increase working hours. The yearly tax load as determined according to the tax declaration at the end of the year differs only to a minor degree from the combination of tax classes IV/IV for both partners, particularly if the factor procedure allows to transfer a certain amount of the income from the higher-earning to the lower-earning partner. This produces less asymmetrical net incomes which provide the basis for several benefits including parental allowance.

3 De facto income splitting with max. transferable amount of 13,805 euros https://www.diw.de/documents/publikationen/73/diw_01.c.800659.de/dwr-20-41-1.pdf (p. 427).

At the same time, however, the reconciliation of family and work also needs to be facilitated in order to enable fathers and mothers to secure living wage employment and to pursue their professional goals. From the point of view of family policy, the further expansion of institutional childcare, not only for children under three, but above all for children in primary school, seems crucial. But, the continuation of initiatives that have already been undertaken as part of local family time policy to reduce families' time-related stress factors also play an important role.

Expansion of institutional childcare and local family time policy make it easier to reconcile family and work

Ultimately, it is also the responsibility of businesses to make it easier to reconcile family and work – not least out of their own self-interest in the context of the competition for skilled labour. Flexible working hours and more remote work are regarded as important tools for achieving this aim. For the latter, however, there must, at the same time, be greater awareness of the risks involved in blurring the boundaries between working life and private life, and a better social-structural balance in its utilisation has to be achieved. Employers' associations and unions also have an important role to play in the implementation of family-oriented flexibility in businesses.

Flexitime models and remote working in businesses

In particular, further development of the parental allowance (*Elterngeld*) can contribute to a more equitable sharing of unpaid work in couples with children. Four in ten fathers now receive parental allowance. Evaluation studies show positive effects of parental leave on subsequent labour force participation of mothers and the participation of fathers in childcare. Changes in the gender-specific division of labour come about, above all, from parental leave months that fathers take independently of their partners. Thus, for instance, more individual parental leave months in combination with a dynamic wage replacement rate, which reduces the allowance after a certain time, could contribute to a more egalitarian distribution of parental leave months between parents. At the same time, this would create stronger incentives for fathers to take parental leave more extensively and more often as sole person responsible for childcare.

Further development of the parental allowance can strengthen fathers' responsibility for childcare



Economic Stability and Security for Families

The economic situation of families in Germany has, for the most part, improved in the last 15 years. The inequality at the extremes of the income distribution has increased, however. Whereas the top ten percent of households achieved above-average increases in income, the real incomes of the bottom ten percent of households lagged behind the overall trend in income growth. There is also little mobility at the upper and lower extremes, and the proportion of children earning a higher income than their parents has fallen. This limits the possibilities available to low-income parents for helping their children to improve their social status. Parents with higher incomes can offer their children a better start: for instance, by virtue of a greater time investment and a greater material investment in education and health. This tends to lead to rigid income inequality across generations.

Increasing income inequality at the extremes limits opportunities for social advancement

Up to now, it has, thus, not been possible to reduce the high risk of poverty among children and young people. One in five children under 18 in Germany is (according to data from the Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP) and the Microcensus) at risk due to the relative poverty of their parents: i.e. the family has to get by with less than 60 percent of the median net equivalence-adjusted income. Those most affected are single parents, families with multiple children, families with limited educational resources and immigrant families. Several social risks often come together, so that it is hardly possible to secure a living or one's future independently. From the point of view of children, the risk of poverty is greatest if parents have low levels of education and are unemployed, inactive or marginally employed. This underscores how important training programmes and support for the integration into gainful employment of both parents are for avoiding poverty. Nonetheless, many families, especially in the mini-job sector, remain dependent on supplementary income support under Book II of the Social Code.

Persistently high risk of child poverty

Economic Stability and Security for Families

Monetary benefits often do not have the desired effect on preventing poverty

Monetary benefits for families and children – above all, child benefits (*Kindergeld*) and child allowance (*Kinderfreibetrag*) – make a major contribution to the economic stability and inclusion of families, but often do not have the desired effect in terms of poverty prevention. It is, above all, families with higher incomes that benefit from tax breaks (e.g. split-income taxation, deductibility of childcare costs), whereas transfer payments help families in lower income brackets. The child-related elements of the unemployment benefits II (*Arbeitslosengeld II*) and the housing benefits (*Wohngeld*) help to reduce poverty and are economically efficient, as is the child supplement (*Kinderzuschlag*). However, some application-based benefits are infrequently claimed, whether for lack of knowing they exist, shame, worries about having recourse to them, or due to other obstacles. The multitude of co-existing benefits in social, tax and child support law leads to a lack of transparency and the well-known interface problems that result from the different definitions of a minimum subsistence level for children in the different areas of the law. A case in point is the deducting of child benefits and (the) child maintenance (advance) (*Unterhalts(vorschuss)*) from the basic income support (*Grundsicherung*) for the parents or other members of the household in which the child lives.



The Commission takes up reform proposals that are currently being discussed and calls for the bundling together of monetary benefits into independent minimum child security benefits (*Kinderabsicherung*). The holder of the entitlement should not be the parents, but rather the child itself. Key features of such minimum security benefits are: the empirically consistent determination of a childhood minimum subsistence level, which meets at least the objective subsistence minimum level of the standard needs rate (*Regelbedarf*); is differentiated according to the children's age, but not according to the number of children; and is moderately reduced if the parents earn their own income. Since the gainful employment of parents is an effective means of reducing the risk of family poverty, investment should be made in further improving the compatibility of family and work, in order to increase, above all, mothers' chances of achieving a financially rewarding level of employment. Accordingly, the child security benefits should be accompanied by family-related infrastructure, which enables the gainful employment of both parents and the social inclusion and integration of the children. A broad selection of daycare offers and all-day school options have an impact on large sections of the population in this regard. Where parents under strain are preventively receiving support – for instance, in coping with the family's day-to-day existence – access in the sense of a supportive welfare state has to be improved and interface problems reduced.

Bundling together monetary benefits into minimum child security benefits

Finally, the housing situation plays an important role in the reality of families' lives. Especially for low-paid workers, single parents and families with multiple children, it is becoming increasingly difficult to cope with housing costs. Moreover, social networks are shaped by residential location and neighbourhood. One political implication that could be drawn, would be the provision of affordable, family-friendly housing: by way of the promotion of ownership, the construction of public housing and other housing, and rent-to-buy or cooperative building models. Others would be support via neighbourhood management and, in general, development planning that takes family needs into account.

Families need affordable, family-friendly housing

Commission Recommendations

The recommendations of the Expert Commission are guided by the objectives of a sustainable family policy and the maxims of a social policy investment strategy that aims at inclusive growth and pursues a clear impact orientation. The Expert Commission derives a total of 31 recommendations with respect to seven objectives from its report. Among these recommendations, the following are to be regarded as particularly crucial– also in light of the current Corona pandemic.

1. Ensuring the Economic Stability of Families

Jobs are being lost in the Corona pandemic and short-time work is becoming more prevalent. But digitisation is also leading to significant changes in professions and the world of work and to the possible devaluation of qualifications. This brings the economic stabilisation of families to the forefront of family policy missions.

Promoting longer part-time work and eliminating marginal employment

- Securing jobs and promoting the integration into gainful employment of both mothers and fathers is crucial to preventing poverty. For mothers in particular, it is important to make longer part-time work easier, by improving the compatibility of family and work, and to counteract the perpetuation of marginal employment. Existing incentives for merely marginal employment, such as tax exemption for mini-jobs, should be limited in the medium term to selected groups of people (e.g. students and people of retirement age) whose employment is not aimed at their long-term security.

Criteria for effective child security benefits that is adapted to needs

- Due to an increased risk of poverty, the introduction of child security benefits gains greater importance. The Expert Commission recommends that their design should be based on eight criteria. These include a uniform empirical determination of children's participation needs and desires for the different types of benefits that are to be brought together in the child security benefits, differentiation according to age, in order to do justice to the age-related variation in children's needs, but not according to the number

of children, since every child should have its own equal claim to financial support. A moderate rate of reduction of support with increasing income is also recommended, so that families in need take advantage of the benefits, while, at the same time, parents are given incentives to earn their own income. The further expansion of education and childcare infrastructure is an important supplemental building block of child security, which empowers children and, by making it easier to reconcile work and family life, facilitates parents' access to gainful employment.

- The expansion of family-related infrastructure effectively provides relief for families, which, addition to childcare facilities, child and youth welfare facilities and public recreation facilities, also includes promoting family-friendly housing. Affordable housing is essential for families and, above all in high-priced areas of agglomeration, more of it has to be created: e.g. through the promotion of cooperative building and the development of a rent-to-buy model. As a whole, public authorities should invest more in providing infrastructure for families.

Expanding family-related infrastructure and promoting family-friendly housing

2. Strengthening an Egalitarian Division of Labour and Making it Easier to Reconcile Family and Work

Highly asymmetrical forms of the division of labour between parents are in contradiction to an egalitarian model of the family and weaken families' economic situation. Disincentives should be eliminated, and incentives should be extended to enable a fairer work-life-balance.

- Split-income taxation for married couples creates inappropriate incentives for clear differences in the extent to which both partners are employed. It is important to eliminate such incentives. In the short term, the Commission recommends establishing the tax category combination IV/IV with factor method as the norm and abolishing tax categories III and V (compare p. 37). In the longer term, further development of taxation toward de facto income splitting should take place.

Entry to exit split-income taxation

More sole parental leave months and a more dynamic parental allowance

- Since the early phase of family life often sets the course for the later labour division among parents, it is advised to further develop the parental allowance, which already provides an important impetus for an egalitarian division of labour. More exclusive months for fathers' paternity leave and a more dynamic parental allowance could make an earlier and longer use of parental leave attractive for fathers.

Family-friendly conditions for remote work

- Remotely working from home often makes it easier to reconcile family and career and has become far more widespread during the Corona pandemic. A family-friendly corporate culture has to raise awareness about the advantages and disadvantages of remote work and to create flexible framework conditions for making use of it.

3. Reducing Parents' Burden, Promoting Children's Development and Increasing Educational Equality

The persistently large inequality in educational opportunities of children in Germany has to be effectively reduced. It is important to establish high-quality educational programmes with mandatory attendance and an ambitious and broadly conceived pedagogical mission.

Further expanding all-day options, reinforcing quality and mandatory attendance

- The expansion of all-day options for nursery and school-age children can provide relief for parents and targeted support for children's development, if the offers are of the highest possible quality and mandatory attendance is reinforced. A legal right to all-day care should, thus, be established and developed. In order to ensure the participation of low-performing pupils in the offers at all-day schools and, at the same time, to preserve a certain degree of temporal autonomy, the Commission recommends the expansion of part-time mandatory all-day schools, providing for mandatory use of the all-day option on, for example, three weekdays.

- The mastering of extended pedagogical tasks on the part of the school, in imparting health-related, digital, social and personal competencies, should be facilitated by establishing multi-profession teams – involving health professionals, scholastic social work and IT expertise. In this context, it is advisable to empirically evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of linking this multi-profession staff to the school or to the municipality (public health service, general social services).
- In order to ensure all-day schooling and the expanded area of responsibility of the pedagogical staff, it is indispensable to actively recruit and train more staff and, in so doing, to establish high standards of quality. The contents of study programmes and training courses for teachers and for early childhood education professions should be updated and supplemented accordingly.

Establishing
multi-profession
teams in
schools

Recruitment
and training of
pedagogical
staff

4. Empowering Families and Strengthening Partnerships in Responsibility

Parenting increasingly ties up the time and emotional resources of both parents and requires increasingly complex orientation knowledge. It, thus, requires correspondingly specialised empowerment through tailored, effective support services based on sustainable cooperation between different professions and institutions.

- In light of parents' growing need for orientation with regard to child-rearing, education, health and digital media, family education is becoming increasingly important. As a primary prevention service, it should be more firmly anchored in youth welfare planning.

A firmer
anchoring
of family
education

Consistent implementation of child-rearing and educational partnerships

- The guiding principle of the educational partnership of daycare and school with parents must be implemented more vigorously in the everyday practice of educational institutions. Exchange with parents is the key to the individual promotion of children's and young people's development for which parents and educational institutions are jointly responsible. This requires time resources and specialised skills that have to be taught in dedicated training for the pedagogical staff. The Commission recommends that teachers be given a one-hour reduction in their teaching load per week, in order to free up time for working with parents. It is likewise important to organise and, thus, facilitate parents' access to support services via the children's educational institutions. Cooperation among family education, parent counselling and daycare facilities in family centres has proved itself and should be extended to schools.

Extending proved support services from the early childhood domain to later stages in family life and children's whole educational career

- Both Early Childhood Intervention, involving low-threshold visiting services by skilled workers, and the creation of coordinated multi-profession networks have proved themselves. They end, however, with a child's fourth birthday. In order to ensure sustainability in chains of prevention and to meet the support needs of families with older children equally well, existing services for these later family phases should be further developed along the lines of Early Childhood Intervention. Particularly with regard to children's educational opportunities, the two federal programmes "*Elternchance*" I and II (Opportunities for Parents) can be drawn on. The programmes support parents in promoting their children's development, but have so far been largely limited to the pre-school domain. The Commission recommends extending this service to primary school age as part of a new *Elternchance* III programme, in order to offer guidance to parents in this important stage of their children's education and, above all, to strengthen the involvement of resource-poor parents in their children's schooling.

5. Respecting Diversity in a Society of Migration, Strengthening Participation

Germany relies on immigration and can better utilise the opportunities of migration by improving the prospects for immigration in the family context and the opportunities for participation of immigrant families.

- The family plays an important support role in situations of immigration. The Commission, thus, calls for the dismantling of bureaucratic hurdles to family reunification for immigrant workers, skilled workers and professionals as well as for those in need of protection. Migrant policy has, thus, to look more closely at the family and not simply subordinate it to matters of security policy and internal order.
- In order to support newly immigrated parents or parents who, despite being in Germany for a longer time, thus far participate little in German society, the Commission recommends expanding tailored offers of (combined) language and integration courses for parents, as well as vocational orientation and training courses and paid internships. These should be organised in such a way that participation can be easily reconciled with the demands of the family for both fathers and mothers.
- Support for parents within the framework of a partnership of shared responsibility should be provided by professional, interculturally trained and, in the best case scenario, multi-lingual staff with a migrant biography, so that all parents are reached and sensitised to parenting issues as well as immigration-related topics such as language-learning assistance.

Facilitating the coexistence of immigrant families

Tailored course offers for new immigrant parents

Reinforcing culturally and migration-sensitive cooperation with parents

6. Facilitating Family Formation and Family Life in a Variety of Forms: Necessary Adjustments in the Law

Family forms and ways of becoming a parent are more diverse than they used to be. This requires an adaptation of the law, in order to (further) reduce discrimination against particular family forms and to create greater equality of opportunity for children and parents.

A fairer and more secure legal framework for unmarried couples with children

- In light of higher numbers of families in which children grow up with parents who are not married to one other, the legislature should create a legal framework for unmarried couples who live together with children. If parents live together, once the second parent's legal parenthood has been established, they should acquire joint custody. At the same time, legal provisions have to be established for protecting children and partners in the case of separation or of the death of one of the parents (provisions on the use of the home, on support to offset relationship-related disadvantages in employment opportunities, on an adjustment of assets that includes retirement entitlements, and on inheritance rights).

A tiered model of shared care after separation/divorce

- Following a separation, more and more parents are seeking to share the care of their children in both parental households. The Commission recommends legal arrangements that include both symmetrical and asymmetrical forms of shared care and provide for a graduated model in child support law. This should be accompanied by the creation of a legal entitlement to separation counselling that also covers financial issues.

Creation of a non-discriminatory reproductive medicine law

- In light of the growing number of people who want to realise their desire for a child with the help of assisted reproduction, the creation of a reproductive medicine law is needed. Provision has to be made for access to assisted reproduction regardless of status, gender, sexual orientation or income. When a child is born in a same-sex relationship, establishing the maternity of the wife or partner of the birth mother should be made possible at the time of birth. If more than two people aim to have a child together (intended multiple parenthood), it should be made possible to extend custody to more than two people. Under certain conditions, this option should also be available for stepfamilies.

Legal guarantees of social parenthood

7. Strengthening the Knowledge Base for an Impact-Oriented Social Investment Strategy in Family Policy

A strong, impact-oriented family policy requires a more solid basis in knowledge, in order to further develop its instruments in the diverse areas of monetary benefits, time policy and infrastructure policy.

- Evidence-based policy advising has an urgent need for better knowledge of the extent to which laws are implemented in practice and the extent to which families know about benefits and receive them. Far too little is known up to now about the jurisdiction on maintenance payments and care arrangements in post-separation families. Accordingly, the Commission strongly recommends strengthening research on “law in action” in Germany in the area of family law and giving it a consistently international orientation. To this end, the legal prerequisites for file inspection for research purposes must be created analogous to criminal law.
- In addition to research on the situation and development of families in complex and difficult circumstances, it is also important to further develop available support for child-rearing on the basis of empirical evidence. As an outreach service, Socio-Pedagogical Support for families shows great potential for supporting families in a way that is integrated into their everyday lives. Nonetheless, hardly any research has been done on the qualifications and practical strategies of the service’s professional staff. In light of its increasing importance, it should be further developed in a targeted manner.
- Finally, as an important source of information for policy planning, the official statistics have to reflect the diversity of family forms to a greater extent, to depict different biological and legal parent-child relationships within households, to identify parents living apart from their children, and to include forms of shared care.

Strengthening legal research in the field of family law

Impact-oriented further development of child-rearing support

Further development of the official statistics

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* For general questions to all government offices and agencies, the general public service number 115 is also available. In the participating regions, the 115 is open from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. between Monday and Friday. Calls to the 115 from a German landline and many mobile networks are charged at local rate and are, therefore, toll-free for flat rate holders. Deaf persons can access information by dialing the SIP address 115@gebaerdentelefon.d115.de. To find out if the 115 is available in your region and for more information on the general public service number, please visit <http://www.d115.de>.

