

ERASMUS+ project: "Health begins in the families - Prevention and health promotion for families in precarious circumstances in Europe"

Together in the Neighbourhood - Growing Up Healthy

As part of the funding programme "Together in the Neighbourhood - Strengthening Children - Securing the Future (ZiQ)", the Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Affairs of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia has been funding projects to combat child and youth poverty in disadvantaged urban neighbourhoods with up to eight million euros annually from the European Social Fund and state funds since 2018. The aim is to establish local support services through low-threshold projects whose approach supports the individual development opportunities of people, especially children and young people, and thus contributes to shaping a positive future for the people in the neighbourhood. Currently, about 110 projects are being funded which are active in the project modules "Reference Persons in the Neighbourhood" and "Growing Up Healthy". Within the framework of an Erasmus+ project meeting on the topic of "Health begins in the families - Prevention and health promotion for families in precarious circumstances in Europe", which took place from 27-29 June 2022 in Linz (A), one of the topics was the question of the characteristics and effects of health inequalities. In this context, G.I.B. was invited to provide input on the topic of "health inequality" as well as insights into the socio-spatial project work.

Health and Health Inequality

Although Germany is one of the western industrial nations in which the population can participate in a high general standard of living and a well-developed social security system, according to the Robert Koch Institute these resources are unequally distributed in the population. Poor and socially disadvantaged people are very often also disadvantaged in terms of health. In particular, socio-economic differences have an impact on the health status of children and adolescents. According to the 2018 Federal Health Report, this is already clear in the school entrance examination: socially disadvantaged children and adolescents show significantly higher physical, psychological, cognitive, linguistic and motor development deficits than their peers from better-off families. Health literacy with regard to a health-promoting diet, i.e. the ability to recognise, evaluate and apply health information, is often not as pronounced among people with low incomes and low levels of education as it is among groups of people with higher incomes and levels of education. In professional circles, the individual "nutrition environment" plays a special role in nutrition behaviour. The nutritional environment includes, for example, the availability, accessibility, composition, portion sizes, presentation and promotion of different foods and beverages. It thus also includes financial resources, individual behaviour as well as social and cultural influences. Many studies have proven that, in addition to a healthy diet, physical activity increases one's vitality and well-being, supports healing processes and can prevent illness. Nevertheless, according to the North Rhine-Westphalia State Centre for Health (LZG.NRW), about 80 - 90 percent of adults in Germany suffer from a lack of physical activity. According to WHO estimates, 3.2 million people die prematurely every year as a result of physical inactivity. In lower social classes and among members of an ethnic minority, the amount of leisure-time physical activity is lower than among those with a higher socio-economic status and among people of German origin.

Policy for a healthy diet

It has been proven that there is a close connection between the social and health situation of an individual. What measures could help to improve the health situation of people in

Germany, but especially in cities or neighbourhoods with poor inhabitants and those at risk of poverty? A publication by the Chair of Public Health and Health Services Research at the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich (LMU Munich) and the Leibniz Institute for Prevention Research and Epidemiology (BIPS) within the framework of the "Policy Evaluation Network" funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) shows possible or necessary interventions from the political levels of the European Union (EU) to the municipalities. Central to this is the exemption of healthy food from VAT, a manufacturer's levy on sweet drinks and the provision of high-quality catering in municipal day-care centres, schools, clinics and other public institutions.

Already in childhood, sometimes even before birth, the basis for health development in life is laid. Health-related attitudes and behaviour patterns that are formed at a young age often persist into adulthood. However, most of the factors that influence health can be positively influenced and shaped. Here, support services can educate, support and motivate people to strengthen their personal health resources and potentials and to increase their responsibility for their own well-being. Knowledge about spatial differences in the health situation and the collection of small-scale health data in the sense of sustainable municipal social planning is helpful for the development and placement of such support measures.

Low-threshold, social space-oriented health promotion in the ZiQ projects

The projects of the ZiQ funding programme in North Rhine-Westphalia are impressive examples of how social space-oriented support services for strengthening health skills for children, young people and their families can look in practice. The funding module "Growing up healthy" has its strengths in the area of nutrition and physical activity as health determinants.

To illustrate: cooking and eating together, fruit spritzer tasting, experiencing adventures in the nearby forest, gardening in the inner city garden, planting vegetable beds in former car parks, getting to know herbs during hikes in the neighbourhood, dancing hip-hop and romping in the sports hall at Open Sunday are just a small excerpt of an imaginative range of offers to improve the motor, social and health skills of children and youths and thus promote their social and educational participation. The nutrition and physical activity programmes are participatory and activating. They are oriented towards the living environment of the children and young people in the neighbourhood and offer them the opportunity to experience their body sensation positively and as self-effective and also involve their families. The important thing here is that access must be low-threshold and it should be fun! Like explorers and researchers, children and young people conquer public open spaces in the neighbourhoods, such as backyards, schoolyards, residential car parks and public parks, together with project staff, in order to integrate movement into everyday life. Community discovery, experience and learning seem to be even more necessary than before due to the Covid-19 pandemic, because children and young people's social behaviour and their own willingness to resolve conflicts have suffered significantly due to the contact restrictions.

Note: This article is largely taken from a specialist journalistic publication prepared by the journalist Marion Slota on behalf of the G.I.B.. The original text (German language) is available for download at the following link:

<https://www.gib.nrw.de/service/downloaddatenbank/handout-gesundheit-zusammen-im-quartier-kinder-staerken-zukunft-sichern>

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