ici here together

All languages are important!



Do you have an offer aimed at preschool children? We have put together a few tips for promoting multilingual upbringings.

Growing up multilingual: all languages are important!

What is more important for preschool children who are growing up multilingual: the language outside in the playground or the language(s) at home? The answer: all languages are important! We have put together a few tips* on how to support children growing up multilingual and further develop your services.

The concept:

Learning the local language is the top priority of many integration programmes aimed at adults. Preschool children, on the other hand, have different needs. In order to develop well linguistically and emotionally, they also need to master the first language(s) of their close carers.

"ici. here together." supports projects and meeting places that promote a multilingual upbringing: neighbourhood social spaces, family centres, multilingual playgroups and more.

*** Study "Growing up multilingual:" (2025)**
On behalf of "ici. here together.", the St. Gallen University of Teacher Education observed eight projects and surveyed more than 80 parents. This has yielded the following tips for project teams.

Living and promoting multilingualism: why?

Children are real language talents! Research shows that children easily learn several languages in a multilingual environment. These two conditions help them:

The “language of the heart” is key in the family

Parents speak their first language(s) with their children, the “language of their heart” – the language which the parent values most and speaks best. This first language strengthens the relationship with the child and shapes their identity. That’s why it has an important place at home – it is used at lunch and while getting dressed; it is the language of the bedtime story.

The local language is added playfully

Outside the family, children discover the local language. The sooner they do this, the better. This requires specialised meeting places, such as those offered by multilingual projects, but also nurseries and playgroups. By playing with other children, children come into contact with the local language while simultaneously trying out their first language(s).

Each language a child grows up with is important. None is less valuable than the other, none has priority.



Promoting multilingualism: three tips for project teams

These tips are not guarantees for success. They are recommendations from the study, based on research and good experience in practice. The tips are intended to encourage you to tailor your programme to the needs of the participants even more effectively and develop it further.



Tip 1: Recognise and cultivate multilingualism in the project

All languages are equally important. That's why the local language is just one of many in your project. Spontaneously translating for others is normal. The most important thing is to understand each other! Children, in particular, feel more comfortable when a carer also speaks their first language.

Sensitise project managers, employees and volunteers to the issue of multilingualism and provide further training, for example, in a workshop.

Ask participants about their first language; connect families and people in the team who speak the same language, for example, at a get-to-know-you coffee meeting.

Offer information translated into numerous languages

Complement the project team so that it reflects the linguistic diversity in the neighbourhood.

Always emphasise a different language in project activities: for example, a greeting in Turkish, a story in Croatian, a counting rhyme in Ukrainian or a song in Tamil.



Offer monolingual and multi-lingual picture books, placed in such a way that the language(s) are clearly visible – for example, on a colourful shelf.

Tip 2: Think about the diversity of languages on offer

What helps the children, what helps the parents? Which topics and languages could be integrated? It is worth getting together to think about how multilingualism can be further promoted and experienced in the project.



Provide children and parents with meeting spaces and programmes in which their first language is spoken: for example, play groups, parent-and-child groups or activities such as cooking.

Encourage parents to speak their first language(s) with their children and introduce them to the written language, for example, through picture books.

Encourage families to avail themselves of offers promoting their first language(s) outside the project, for example, from libraries.

Facilitate multilingual encounters where people speak to each other in the local language and other languages, for example, as part of playgroups or open-play programmes.

Advise parents on which local language programmes are suitable for their children so that they can learn the language at preschool age, for example, at nursery.

Tip 3: Advance the quality of the offering

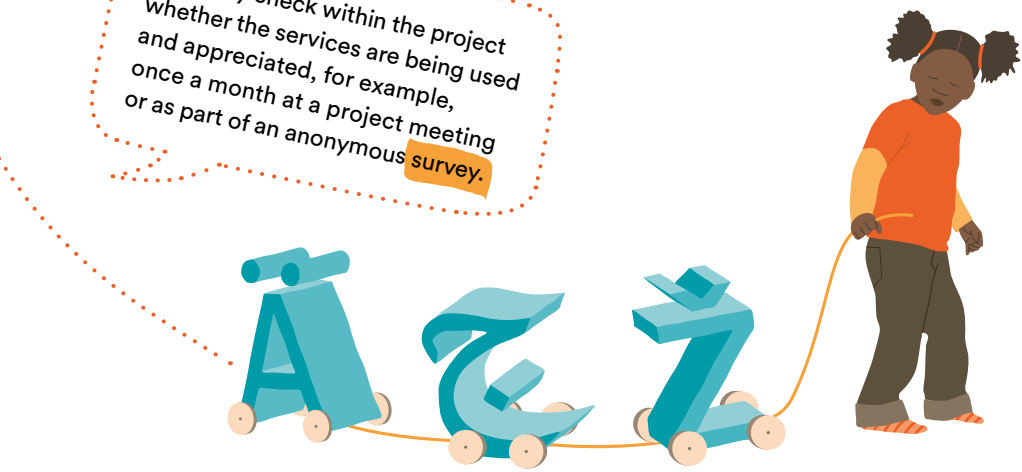
The study also shows that the quality of a multilingual project is crucial to its success. Together, the team can regularly explore questions such as: What are the various needs of our participants? Can we still improve our attitude, communication, structures or spaces?

Shape relationships between project staff and **parents on an equal footing**, for example, by involving project participants in multilingual activities and integrating their specific strengths and interests.

Provide easy access to activities and specialised counselling services, for example in a **café without compulsory consumption** and with a play area.

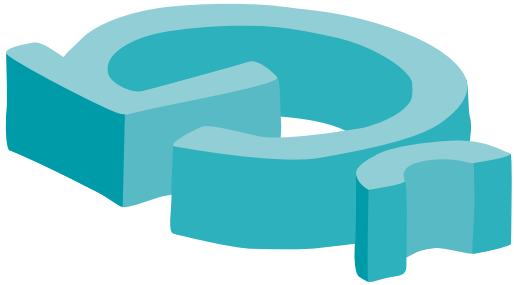
Ask families how they experience the projects and what else they would like to see.

Regularly check within the project whether the services are being used and appreciated, for example, once a month at a project meeting or as part of an anonymous **survey.**



More tips on growing up multilingual, the study by the St. Gallen University of Teacher Education, and useful links are available here:

www.ici-gemeinsam-hier.ch/children



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