



## Family Descriptions

### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

Our overview of our 18 families begins with a short summary of the developments in each family's situation during the study. They appear in alphabetical order, with an initial focus on the original criteria for selecting the families (see Chapter 4): the socio-economic situation of each family, with particular attention being paid to income, the job situation, the housing situation, the formal education (of parents), the family constellation (nuclear family, patchwork family, single-parent households, extended families, migration background etc.); a description of the core characteristics of the families, with any subsequent developments, then follows.

### 5.2 THE FAMILIES OF THE PANEL

#### 5.2.1 *The Aufbauer Family with Their Daughter, Amelie*

When first recruited, Ms. Aufbauer, a qualified goldsmith, was living together with her then partner and her two daughters, each of whom had a different biological father. Amelie was the younger of the two siblings, and subsequent interviews with her took place at 5, 7, 10, 12, 14, 16 and 17. The family constellation changed several times, as Ms. Aufbauer gave birth to another child in 2007, but was already separated from the father by that time. In 2014, Ms. Aufbauer had another

child, while no longer being involved with the father. Ms. Aufbauer always made clear that she was a single mother by choice and claimed that she was only interested in the children, not in the men. In 2016, Ms. Aufbauer was living together with daughter Amelie—the oldest daughter had moved out in the meantime—and with her two younger sons. Ms. Aufbauer was either unemployed (2005, 2012), only briefly working in a sales position (2010), or on maternal leave (2007, 2014, 2016). She, therefore, had to rely largely on social welfare support. As a consequence, the Aufbauer family moved frequently, since financial allowances for housing—one of the main pillars of the Austrian social welfare system—often ran out, and a new apartment had to be found. When the study began, Ms. Aufbauer and her children were living in the city, later they moved to the country, and by the end, they were about to move back to their old neighbourhood in the city. The décor of their apartments made a pleasant impression, within the limitations of a small budget, being notably neat and tidy. By the time the study ended, Amelie was pursuing a general qualification for university entrance with a special focus on business and economy.

### 5.2.2 *The Boll Family with Their Son, Gregor*

The Boll family is an extended family, and at the study's onset consisted of the parents and ten children—four girls and six boys (the oldest son had already moved out since he was already grown up). Our subject, Gregor, is the third youngest; interviews with him took place at 5, 7, 11, 13, 15, 16 and 17. Initially, the family was renting a run-down farm house in rural northern Austria, where the poor local infrastructure meant that the children experienced a certain degree of isolation before going to kindergarten or school. The family's previous house had been forcibly sold in a court-ordered auction.

When our study began, Mrs. Boll was at home with the children, and Mr. Boll was on parental leave. Later on, he started working as a massage therapist. In addition, the parents had a dog and horse breeding business, together with some farming to generate additional income. By our second wave, Mrs. Boll was also working as a cleaner in her oldest son's bar. The family experienced a crisis when Mrs. Boll was diagnosed with cancer, had to undergo chemotherapy and was unable to work afterwards. While she was in treatment, her husband had an affair, which led her to leave him and take some of the children with her. They filed

for divorce after 22 years of marriage, and in 2011 Mrs. Boll moved back to her old home in Northern Germany, together with the six youngest children. She has been receiving 1000 €/month disability allowance since then, but her ex-husband did not pay any alimony. The low prices for houses in her home region enabled Mrs. Boll to buy an old house (25,000 €) to rebuild her dog breeding business, in order to create a second source of income. This income was often used to pay the bigger bills, like heating oil. Gregor adjusted well to the new environment, completed school and started training as a retail salesman.

### 5.2.3 *The Dornbacher Family with Their Daughter, Gudrun*

Gudrun's parents remained married throughout the study; apart from Gudrun—interviews with her took place at 5, 6, 10, 12, 14, 15 and 16—they have another daughter three years younger than Gudrun. The Dornbacher family was fairly stable as a family throughout, but the job situation, especially for the father, was sometimes uncertain, which meant that the financial situation fluctuated, leading to minor conflicts. The mother remained employed part-time throughout, while the father was on paternity leave during our first wave, unemployed during the second and was participating in professional retraining in the third, although he later abandoned it. Finally, he was able to secure a full-time position in a local industry, which substantially improved their financial situation, so that at the study's close, the family was no longer at risk of poverty. Over all the years, the Dornbacher family lived in the same owner-occupied apartment on the outskirts of their town, which they had paid off by our fifth visit. Although the apartment tended to be crowded towards the end, the family members were always satisfied with their housing situation. The proximity to the town and the good public transport were especially perceived as extremely positive. Daughter Gudrun was attending a secondary school by the time the study ended and had plans to study at the academy of music.

### 5.2.4 *The Ebner Family with Their Daughter, Elisabeth*

The Ebner family and their daughter Elisabeth—interviews with her took place at 5, 6, 9, 11, 14, 15, 16 years—had been living together as a nuclear family, including a brother two years her elder, since the study began. The parents married in 2013, and Mr. Ebner, who had trained to be a farmer,

worked as such throughout. Mrs. Ebner is a qualified cook, but she worked as a cleaner from wave one to four. As of the fifth wave, she was working full-time on the farm with her husband. The financial situation remained fairly stable throughout the study, but the family was still at risk of poverty when it ended. At the onset, the family was living in an old farmhouse in need of renovating, without any heating and riddled with mould. This caused asthma in Elisabeth's brother, so that the housing situation became unbearable. By our second wave, they had moved into a newer house on the same property. Elisabeth was training to become a florist after the fifth wave. She is very good at her profession, winning an award for apprentices, and wants to gain the master craftswoman's<sup>1</sup> certificate.

### 5.2.5 *The Fein Family with Their Daughter, Olivia*<sup>2</sup>

Ms. Fein, a qualified hairdresser, was a single mother with two kids when the study began: daughter Olivia—interviews with her took place at 5, 7, 10, 12 and 15—and a younger son. They were living in a small apartment on the outskirts of their town. Due to the very low household income, she largely had to rely on social welfare. Between the second and fourth wave, Ms. Fein acquired a new partner, a qualified carpenter. She moved to his house in a rural village. They had a daughter together, and her partner undertook professional retraining, so Ms. Fein could only work very few hours a day, so that the household income meant the overall financial situation of the family remained precarious. During most of this time, Olivia was living in a supervised living facility for young people due to an incident in school and an intervention by the child protection agency. When Ms. Fein's relationship ended, she became a single mother again and unemployed. As she was suffering from psychological problems, she was able to receive an early pension, following a long time of sick leave at the age of 33. She and her children moved to the nearest city, and by our sixth wave, Ms. Fein was having an open relationship with a man twice her age. Olivia was in a special school at this time to prepare her for later job training and was earning some pocket money there (80 € a month).

### 5.2.6 *The Grubert Family with Their Son, Erich*<sup>3</sup>

Ms. Grubert was a single mother when the study began and was living together with her son, Erich—interviews with him took place at 6, 8, 11, 13, 15 and 17—in what she considered a problem neighbourhood.

Hence, she would not allow her son to play outside or have contact with the neighbours' kids. The apartment was small and untidy. Ms. Grubert was working part-time (15 hours/week) as a switchboard operator, so that their financial situation was precarious. By the second wave, Ms. Grubert had a new partner and had already moved with him to a new and bigger apartment in a nicer neighbourhood. This newly formed, patchwork family continued to live in the same apartment until the end of the study. The socio-economic situation of the family improved slowly but steadily, especially after Ms. Grubert's partner, an IT technician, managed to get a better paid job with a new employer after our fourth wave. From then on, the family was not at risk of poverty anymore. Erich has completed his years of compulsory education and started job training as a cook and was making his own money, but he continued to live at home with his parents. He did not have to contribute to the living expenses and could use his money for himself.

### 5.2.7 *The Hirtner Family with Their Son, Mario*<sup>4</sup>

At the beginning of the study, the Hirtner family consisted of Ms. Hirtner, her partner, son, Mario—the interviews with him took place at 5, 11, 13, 16 and 17—and the youngest son. The family had been living in a very small flat (45 sqm) during the recruitment phase and was later able to move to a subsidised flat twice the size near their town's train station. Ms. Hirtner has not completed any form of job training, while her partner actually had, but both were unemployed at the first wave. So the family had to get by on social welfare. Between the first and the third waves—the Hirtners could not be interviewed in 2007 for the second wave—both Ms. Hirtner and her partner found full-time jobs, which improved the financial situation.

Yet Ms. Hirtner was unemployed again by the time of the fourth interview. A big change for the family happened, when, by our fifth wave, Ms. Hirtner and her partner had split up. Mario always thought that his mother's partner was his biological father and learned that this was not the case after the separation, when the partner was no longer responsible for the children. By the end of the study—the family again did not participate in an interview in 2014—Ms. Hirtner had a new partner, was living in the same flat and was working full-time again, which was again followed by an improvement of the financial situation. By this time, her son, Mario, who had previously started training as an

electrician only to quit due to health issues, had been able to get into new training in the IT sector.

### 5.2.8 *The Holzner Family with Their Son, Benedikt*

At the first and second waves, Ms. Holzner was living alone with her son, Benedikt—interviews with him took place at 5, 7, 10, 14 and 16—and his two older siblings in a sublet apartment in a terraced house. Benedikt had been traumatised by Ms. Holzner's previous partner being violent. Ms. Holzner was unemployed, and the financial situation was precarious, so the family had to rely on social welfare; later Ms. Holzner briefly worked in a toy store in 2007.

By the second wave, Ms. Holzner had met a new partner, who was working full-time, and had moved in with him. Benedikt, like his older siblings, had meanwhile been taken into a supervised living facility for young people and was only visiting on weekends—so that an interview with him was not possible in 2010 and only Ms. Holzner was interviewed. Between the third and fourth interview, Ms. Holzner and her partner got married and founded a new family including two more sons, who were born between then and the end of the study. Meanwhile, the family did not participate in an interview in the fourth wave, since Ms. Holzner was involved in a court case that affected Benedikt and his older siblings, but no more information was provided about its exact nature.

Ms. Holzner was on maternity leave during the last two panel waves, when they participated in the study again, and was working a couple of hours each weekend to earn some extra money. Of his own volition, Benedikt was still living apart from his family when the study ended.

### 5.2.9 *The Kaiser Family with Their Son, Torsten*

Mr. and Mrs. Kaiser have three sons together. Interviews with Torsten took place at 5, 7, 10, 12, 14 and 16. By the time of our second visit, they had divorced, and Mr. Kaiser had remarried by the third panel wave and later had a daughter. Mr. Kaiser was working as a civil servant and also gave dance lessons. Between our second and third panel waves, he completed his final secondary school examinations through the second-chance programme. The financial situation was fraught throughout the years, as the father's income was the only one, and later Mrs. Kaiser was herself the sole breadwinner. Mrs. Kaiser started working part-time, but the divorce

had negative effects on her psychological well-being. Although the family owned a freehold flat, they were always at risk of poverty.

Torsten was always ambivalent about school, due to his bad grades and a lot of missed lessons because of internships, so he quitted school and focused on finding an apprenticeship. Torsten was able to get into training and moved to a boarding school during the week, which is very typical for apprentices in Austria.

#### 5.2.10 *The Landinger Family with Their Son, Timo*

The Landingers are an extended family, consisting of six children, Mrs. Landinger, who did seem cognitively impaired, and Mr. Landinger, the father of the four youngest children. When the study began, Mr. Landinger was not living permanently with the rest of the family. The Landingers' flat impressed as desolate, with old and damaged furniture. The living area exhibited some neglect and grime.

Mr. Landinger is a qualified stonemason but was working in construction before the study began. By the time of the first interview, he was unemployed and remained so subsequently. At first, Mrs. Landinger was contributing to the family income through part-time work as a switchboard operator, later she was also unemployed due to health issues. The family climate was always tense, and by our third wave, Mrs. Landinger had fled to a women's shelter with three of her children following a dispute with her partner. Soon after the incident, they were reconciled and moved to another county, where they rented an old house in need of renovating and eventually got married.

The socio-economic situation of the family varied between dire and precarious throughout, especially when both parents were unable to work due to health issues. Their son, Timo, who is cognitively impaired—interviews with him took place at 6, 7, 11, 12, 15, 16 and 17—entered a supervised living facility with a socio-pedagogical focus between the fourth and fifth interviews, but later lived at home again. When the study ended, he was in a special programme in a socially inclusive workshop.

#### 5.2.11 *The Oblinger Family with Their Son, Manfred*

The Oblinger family is another extended family, consisting of Mrs. Oblinger, with three children from a previous relationship, and Mr. Oblinger, with his three children. Manfred is a highly gifted boy, and

our interviews with him took place at 6, 7, 11, 12, 15, 16 and 17. The two oldest children were not living at home anymore when the study began. Mrs. Oblinger has no job training and was mostly at home, doing charitable work until she suffered a stroke and other health issues and was rendered unable to work.

Mr. Oblinger was working as a technical draftsman, but, after moving to the country to get a larger flat to accommodate the large family, he had to go back to his old profession as a cook as there were no other job opportunities for him. The family received social welfare because of their precarious financial situation. By the fifth wave, the last source of income had fallen away, after Mr. Oblinger had an accident on his way back from work and contracted a serious infection following an operation. This rendered him unable to work and later led to depression. Since then, the family has been living on social welfare alone. Manfred's wish was to find a job as soon as possible to earn money and support the family. He started one training programme but quit. Later, he was able to find training as an IT-technician, which, he declared, was like a dream come true for him.

### 5.2.12 *The Öllinger Family with Their Daughter, Viktoria*

The Öllinger family has experienced a certain amount of turbulence over the years. In 2005, Ms. Öllinger divorced from her husband, the biological father of her daughter, Viktoria—interviews with her took place at 5, 7, 10, 12, 14, 15, and 16—but already had a new partner. Two years later she was alone again. She married after a short time, but got divorced again rather quickly in 2012. From then on, she has been living alone with her daughter.

Ms. Öllinger is a qualified cook but has largely been working in less skilled jobs, such as cleaner, switchboard operator or school bus driver. She has been struggling with health issues for a long time and was left unable to work after the fourth wave. She spent weeks on end in the hospital and almost died when she fell into a coma. Since then, she has been receiving a disability pension but had to file for private bankruptcy due to her strained financial situation. For financial reasons, Ms. Öllinger and her daughter moved frequently over the years. Their most recent flat was a pleasant, new one run by a co-operative on the outskirts of their town. Viktoria is planning to finish school after recently moving to a new one and wants to later work as an office clerk.



### 5.2.13 *The Pfortner Family with Their Son, Helmut*

The Pfortner family consists of the parents, who are married, their son, Helmut—interviews with him took place at 4, 6, 9, 11, 13 and 15—his older sister and the paternal grandmother who came to live with the family at the time of our the third wave. Mr. Pfortner is self-employed in the machine engineering sector, with a workshop adjacent to the family house. Mrs. Pfortner is a qualified office clerk and was working part-time in the family business. After the third panel wave, she was responsible only for the bookkeeping of the business and was working part-time as an office clerk outside of it. Through this additional income, the financial situation improved but was still close to the threshold of poverty risk. By the sixth wave, Mr. Pfortner was suffering from burnout.

The family still lives in the same large 120 sqm big house on the outskirts of their town. Between the fifth and sixth waves, they turned the upper storey into flats for the children, including a kitchen and a bathroom. Helmut, who was struggling with writing and reading in school, wanted to follow in his father's footsteps, and, after a trial session in a company, he was able to start his job training in it, as his talent became obvious. He will become a machine engineer, then, like his father.

### 5.2.14 *The Rohringer Family with Their Daughter, Isabelle*

The Rohringer family consisted of Mr. and Mrs. Rohringer and their three children when the study began. During our fourth wave, the eldest son moved out, as he was grown up. The family had been living in the same owner-occupied apartment for a couple of years before Mr. Rohringer, a qualified butcher, had to leave because of his severe problems with alcohol.

Mrs. Rohringer was a housewife at first; later she found a little work as a child minder and also as waitress; the family was financially supported by the grandparents.

By our third wave, Mrs. Rohringer had a new partner, who had his own transportation business, and she started working as a clerk in her office at home. By the end of the study, the household income was still slightly below the poverty line. The family spent most of the weekends in the new partner's flat and lived in their own apartment during the week. Isabelle—interviews with her took place at 6, 8, 11, 12, 15, 16, and 17—was almost done training to become a childcare assistant when the study ended.

### 5.2.15 *The Scheib Family with Their Daughter, Susanne*

Mrs. Scheib was a single mother when the study began. She was living together with her daughter Susanne—interviews with her took place at 7, 8, 11, 13, 16, 17 and 18—and the younger daughter in a small flat in a terrace house. Although she was working part-time as an office clerk, the family counted as very low income. By our second wave, Mrs. Scheib had got married and moved with her children to her new husband's apartment in a big city in Southern Germany. Her new husband was working full-time as a public servant. The socio-economic situation of the family has improved steadily ever since. When the study ended, Mrs. Scheib was working part-time as a sales assistant, plus a few hours for a security contractor. Susanne quit school following troubles with teachers and peers and began training as a mechanic but has been working on completing courses in German, English and Mathematics, in order to finish her secondary school education and later study (she was not clear about what) at the university.

### 5.2.16 *The Stab Family with Their Daughter, Simone*

Ms. Stab is a migrant from the South-East of the European Union and has been living in Austria for more than 20 years. When the study began, she was living together with her daughter, Simone—interviews took place at 4, 6, 10, 12, 14, 15 and 16—and her younger son, Simone's half-brother. Simone's biological father left the family when she was two years old. The family lived in a flat in the countryside, but moved after our first interview, since they could not afford the rent anymore. At the time of the third wave they moved again and remained in their new home until the end of the study.

Ms. Stab always had to work as unskilled labourer, because her general qualification for university entrance from her home country was not legally recognised in Austria. Throughout the study she was working only a few hours or part-time as a cleaner (2005, 2007, 2012, 2016), or she was unemployed (2010, 2014).

At the time of our fifth wave, she started a retraining programme to become a massage therapist, which she hoped would open up new perspectives, but without any success. Hence, the family always had to rely on social welfare to get by. Since our fifth wave, Simone's younger brother left the family during the week, moving to a socio-educational

facility. Simone was attending a polytechnic secondary school when the study ended and was planning to pursue a college degree afterwards.

### 5.2.17 *The Weiss Family with Their Son, Alfons*

Ms. Weiss was a single mother when the study began. She was living in a new but plain owner-occupied flat, together with her son, Alfons—interviews with him took place at 4, 6, 9, 11, 14, 15 and 16—and his half-brother, some three years his junior. Alfons' biological father has been separated from the family since the boy was three years old and was living farther away in the south of the same state in Austria, where he and his family possessed a farm. The financial situation of Ms. Weiss and her family remained rather mysterious until our sixth wave. She always declared a low income and not much other money, forcing her to rely on presents from relatives and charitable organisations, in order to get new clothes or furniture. She also said that she was extremely economical, which enabled her to acquire the flat and pay it off bit by bit. She explained her obviously improved situation since our first wave by her being extremely frugal. In our last wave, it turned out that she had inherited some real estate in the meantime, which provided her with additional sources of income and explained her better economic status, despite her unemployment at that time. During our last wave, she and her sons sold the flat and bought a semi-detached house.

Ms. Weiss had a new partner from our third wave onward, but it remained unclear how close the relationship really was. He never moved in with the family, and Ms. Weiss never talked much about him. Alfons himself always made it clear that he'd rather be living with his father, but his mother forbade it. During our fifth wave, Ms. Weiss had taken in a foster child, but problems ensuing between her and the child soon ended the relationship.

Alfons was in training when the study ended and was living during the week in the residential hostel provided by his training company in the city.

### 5.2.18 *The Zarbl Family with Their Son, Norbert*

The Zarbl family consisted of Mr. Zarbl, Mrs. Zarbl and their two children, Norbert—interviews with him took place at 5, 7, 10, 12, 14, 15 and 16—and his younger brother. Mr. Zarbl was working in the

insurance business, and Mrs. Zarbl was working part-time as a secretary. They were living in a house in the city. Despite both jobs, the family had only a very low household income. Mr. and Mrs. Zarbl separated in between our second and third waves, and Mrs. Zarbl found a new partner later on, who was working full-time. His arrival improved the socio-economic situation slightly. When the pair got married during our third wave, they moved in together in the house that Mrs. Zarbl and her ex-husband had lived in. Her new partner's children did not move in, however, since they were already grown-up. Mrs. Zarbl was later able to get more working hours, which contributed to the further improvement of the situation, and the family was no longer at risk of poverty. Norbert was visiting a secondary school when the study ended, planning to gain a general qualification for university entrance.

### 5.3 CONCLUSION

Twelve years are a long time when talking about children's development. Within the time frame of this study, the children in our sample grew up to become young adults, some of whom had already started an apprenticeship and thus made a big step towards an independent life in the future, while others were still undecided about their future paths. Their parents (above all, the mothers) also underwent many changes, in employment, in levels of relationships, work, health etc. Some changes were experienced positively and others negatively. In this sense, this chapter illustrates how dynamic the development was over this extended period, not only for the children but for the families in general.

The family descriptions above serve as a point of orientation for the following chapters and contribute to contextualising our results. In Chapter 8, we will go on to describe and interpret the situation of each family in much more detail.

### NOTES

1. For a description about the Austrian system for professional qualifications see the Directive 2005/36/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 September 2005 on the recognition of professional qualifications (Text with EEA relevance), *Official Journal of the European Union*, pp. L 255/70–L 255/71. Available online at: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LEXUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2005:255:0022:0142:EN:PDF>.

2. The Fein family did not participate in the fifth interview due to psychological issues on the part of the mother and was also not available for a call-back interview. We use the information about the five interviews conducted with them.
3. The Grubert family was not available for the call-back interview.
4. The Hirtner family was part of the sample from the first wave of data collection in 2005 onwards. However, it was not possible to contact them for the second and the fifth interviews. In order to close this knowledge gap, we specifically asked them what had happened in the intervening years when we met them for the fourth and sixth interviews.

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