

children
first





Children First is important for Turkey

In the months leading up to the United Nations Special Session on Children in May 2002, an astounding 16 million people in Turkey affirmed their support for a brighter future for children by saying 'Yes' during the worldwide *Say Yes for Children* campaign.

At a rate of one signatory in every four of the population, this represents the highest per capita response of any country to the Global Movement for Children's campaign — second only to China's total of 20 million signatures.

Everyone who endorsed the campaign was asked to prioritise three out of ten actions as the most important steps to caring for children. The most popular choices for Turkey were to:

- Educate Every Child;
- Leave No Child Out;
- Fight Poverty — Invest in Children.

What is *Children First*?

The current climate of political stability, economic growth and social and institutional change has created an unprecedented opportunity to fulfil the promise of *Say Yes for Children* by strengthening the protective environment for children, especially the disadvantaged, and accelerating progress in addressing issues such as gender and social inequality. The Government, UNICEF and NGOs will achieve this with the support of the EU over a period of 27 months from August 2005 with a new child protection project, 'Towards Good Governance, Protection and Justice for Children in Turkey' or *Children First*.

Through *Children First*, Turkey will see the beginning of a change in child care and protection that should set the country firmly on the way to protecting and promoting the rights of boys and girls.

Children First involves the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of National Education, the Social Services and Child Protection Agency, the Turkish Bar Association, the State Institute of Statistics, the European Commission, UNICEF, various non-governmental organisations, children and parents.

children first

a basic right

Why do we say *Children First*?

The *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (CRC), ratified by Turkey in 1995, defines a child as anyone under the age of eighteen years — the age of majority in most countries when we vote on the issues that govern our lives. Until then, children are subject to the decisions that adults and society make on their behalf.

The CRC was created to protect children from decisions and actions beyond their control which could prove detrimental to their well-being. Children are defined as active participants in society, able to speak for themselves and express their own valid opinions.

Just under 26 million Turkish people — more than a third of the population — are under 18 years of age. One of the main tasks is to meet the needs of this vast section of the population by continuing work to align and implement legislation with the CRC and other international instruments.

Legislative reforms between 2002 and 2004 in Turkey have brought family law closer to the standards of the CRC and the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women* (CEDAW).

A major inquiry in 2004 into violations of children's rights led to the drafting of child protection laws more in line with the CRC. A parliamentary report on children living in/on the street and the allocation of increased resources to child protection were also welcome developments.

However, more coordinated and collaborative action by government ministries, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and civil society at large is needed in partnership with children if the protective environment for children is to be improved and established as a nationwide norm.

More remains to be done in the area of child protection — especially for the most vulnerable boys and girls who are living and/or working on the street; living in institutions; engaged in paid and unpaid agricultural and domestic labour; and those who are in contact with the law.





What will *Children First* achieve for children?

Research carried out under the *Children First* project will increase the capacity of key institutions responsible for child protection and help Turkey towards good governance, protection and justice for her children.

Children and parents will be active participants in the unprecedented use of this child-centred model as an instrument of change.

The incidence of children coming into contact with the law will be reduced as Turkish families and their children have access to education, early childhood care and development (ECD), counselling on conflict resolution and training in intra-familial understanding and tolerance.

Boys and girls who never enrolled or who drop-out of primary school will have a second chance to complete their primary education with access to a gender-sensitive 'catch-up' curriculum.

Professionals, policy-makers and decision-makers will be more able to take account of the situation of children who are in contact with the law or who are otherwise vulnerable to abuse or neglect. As such, they will be better prepared to provide a caring, protective environment that will promote and protect the rights of these children on their journey to adulthood.

Children First is also expected to create incremental returns for children living in institutions by:

- establishing minimum standards of care and protection for children living in institutions;
- placement of children with foster families for their care and protection — and only in institutions as a last resort.

for children

for families

What will *Children First* achieve for families?

Prevention is central to the strategy for protecting children who are at risk of coming into contact with the law. This involves increasing the capacity of families to provide care and protection for their children, preventing abuse and neglect of boys and girls and supporting the educational system to ensure that all children have access to early childhood development programmes and quality primary education.

Supporting the family with education is critically important. This involves:

- providing support for the care and development of children during the early years of childhood;
- improving communication and resolving conflict between parents and older children as they negotiate the difficulties of adolescence;
- emphasising the importance of a good quality basic education for all children — both boys and girls — in the family.

Children First will build upon Turkey's long history of specialised Early Childhood Development (ECD) programmes, expanding the Government of Turkey and UNICEF's Family and Child Training programme (FACT) to address issues related to adolescent development.

Children First will achieve this by:

- reaching the most disadvantaged families with the FACT programme and developing the programme for families with children between seven and nineteen years old;
- expanding parental counselling, peer education and referral for adolescents to vulnerable families in urban areas;
- implementing 'catch-up' education for children who are out of school or at risk of coming into contact with the law.





What will *Children First* achieve for Turkey?

Through *Children First*, Turkey is committed to ensuring that the protective rights of all boys and girls are fully met.

Children First will reinforce institutional responses to the increasing incidence of child abuse, neglect and deprivation of parental care with systematic research, monitoring and data collection, preventive measures and more policies and legislation in favour of child protection by:

- increasing the capacity of professionals working in child justice and protection to promote and protect children's rights;
- establishing alternative mechanisms of dispute resolution for children in contact with the law;
- giving children who are outside of the education system a second chance to catch up;
- promoting gender equality at all levels of society;
- reducing the worst forms of child labour;
- establishing preventive mechanisms, including family mediation and alternative models of care and protection;
- promoting caring, family environments rather than institutional placements for children who are not living with their parents or caregivers;
- establishing minimum standards of care and protection for children who are living in institutions and in foster care;
- increasing the life-skills capacity of adolescents so that they enjoy their rights and are aware of how to protect themselves.

The success of *Children First* will contribute to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, especially the goal of section VI of the Millennium Declaration on protecting the vulnerable, and also support implementation of reforms in the area of children's rights that will bring Turkey closer to full compliance with the CRC.

for Turkey

for good

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OF TURKEY



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