Over recent months all partners involved in the Children First project have continued to make progress towards the project goal of creating good governance, justice and protection for children in Turkey with a range of activities. Research into child well being is being developed, implemented and finalised, training for care givers is conducted on a large scale and ongoing educational activities aimed at expanding the knowledge of key institutions are being conducted in tandem with efforts to strengthen cooperation and collaboration between partners. Some highlights of activities by project partners are detailed below.

**Early Childhood Development and Effective Parenting**

UNICEF continues to support the Ministry of National Education (MONE) in the development of a policy on parenting education programmes in Turkey with key partners, including the Ministry of Health, the Social Services and Child Protection Agency (SHÇEK), the Ministry of Justice (MOJ), local councils and NGOs such as the Mother and Child Education Foundation (AÇEV) and Lions. Since various parenting education models are currently implemented across the country by different sectors, MONE aims to improve inter-sectoral coordination with a parenting education policy agreed by all concerned actors. To this end it has been agreed that representatives from each sector will meet regularly over the next six months in order to finalise the policy by the end of third quarter and to develop a budget — based on a cost–benefit analysis currently being carried out by an international expert and Turkish economist. The parenting education programme will reach at least 8 million parents with a particular focus on families living in hard-to-reach inner-city and rural areas.

In addition to strategic development, the My Family 0–6 Parenting Family Education package is currently being finalised following comments and input on an earlier draft from stakeholders including field implementers, UNICEF, international and national experts and beneficiaries. A graphic design and PR company has been contracted to work on the design. More than 2,000 copies of the package will be printed and distributed to implementers throughout Turkey in the near future. Two new modules have been finalised and added to the core package for parents and caregivers of children under 6 years of age.

The first training for social workers responsible for foster care and adoption was conducted by SHÇEK with support of the international experts. During the first session, two groups of 94 social workers were given the opportunity to provide comments on both the training and existing SHÇEK rules and regulations. Participating social workers are now using the training material to train adoptive and foster parents in all of Turkey’s 81 provinces.

Cooperation with the private sector continues to develop, consolidating gains made so far and helping ensure further advancement of key messages. A new partnership agreement has been established with Unilever on awareness raising using key ECD messages.

**Education**

A Life Skills–based Education (LSBE) Pilot Training was held in Denizli for 11 school counsellors and 22 students from selected schools including boarding schools. Adolescent peer educators are now implementing the programme under the supervision of school counsellors in Denizli as a follow-up to the training. Initial feedback indicates that participants enjoy the activities led by their peers and found them very useful.

Development of a comprehensive, relevant, flexible and gender–sensitive catch–up education programme is also moving ahead. Findings from a needs assessment on catch–up education has contributed to work on the programme by the Ministry of National Education General Directorate of Primary Education including training sessions and a seminar. A monitoring system with indicators and an implementation guideline of the catch–up education programme have been developed and drafted. So far 34 catch–up education textbooks have been developed in addition and training modules are currently being developed by a group of education specialists.
A training session on the Better Parenting programme for families with children between 7 and 19 years of age was held for 70 school counsellors from 12 provinces on 13–17 August 2007 in Ankara. Participants reported that they found the training programme content satisfactory to meet their needs in working with parents. The trained school counsellors have commenced parent-training sessions and feedback from parents in turn has been very positive with reports that families are trying to use different approaches with adolescent children such as better communication.

**Protection**

The final draft of the study on minimum standards for children deprived of parental care is complete. Besides the main study, the final draft also includes a desk review on existing national policies, rules and regulations. The main body of the study focuses on the adaptation and development of a set of international minimum standards of care and protection for children living without parental care in the Turkish context. The standards have been developed with the participation of a wide range of stakeholders over the course of 14 workshops and many individual and focus group interviews. Read more about the Minimum Standards of Care and Protection in this edition of *Children First*.

Progress has also been made on strengthening the juvenile justice system. A final draft of the Juvenile Justice training package has been developed, reviewed by the training institutes and field tested in partnership the MOJ. Two workshops on effective communication with children and implementation of alternative measures for children in contact with the law were also held for judges and public prosecutors in consultation with the Ministry of Justice in November. Work continues on strengthening coordination and implementation of the Child Protection Law as well as instituting an in-service training package for professionals working with children deprived of their liberty.

**Data Collection, Ombudsman and Children’s Rights Day**

The Population Association has submitted its analysis of the 25 Quality of Life indicators designed to monitor the state of Turkey’s children. The Ministry of Interior is expected to launch the 25 indicators in the near future when data collected from all provinces over the period 2003–2006 is fed into the DevInfoTurk data collection and monitoring system. DevInfoTurk is a very significant and important output of the *Children First* project since it is expected to greatly improve data assimilation, monitoring, planning and advocacy on all matters concerning the well being of Turkey’s children when it is rolled out nationwide.

A five-day visit to Turkey by European Children’s Rights Ombudsmen is planned in connection with the one-day international conference organised by the Turkish Bar Association in Ankara. The purpose of the visit and the conference is to provide policy and decision-makers, civil society, children and media with an opportunity to familiarise themselves with the role and function of an independent children’s rights institution. It will also be an opportunity for the European Ombudsmen to share their experiences, results and challenges encountered with the establishment and running of such an institution. The key outcome of the visit and conference is to engage policy and decision-makers and civil society in addressing the demand for the office of a Children’s Rights Ombudsman in Turkey.

On November 20, 162 child representatives met with President Abdullah Gül in Ankara to celebrate International Children’s Rights Day and the 18th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). One girl and one boy from each of Turkey’s 81 provinces took part in the meeting, which was part of the annual Children’s Forum. Each year delegates from provincial Children’s Rights Committees meet and discuss activities to advance children’s rights at the event which is organised by SHÇEK with the support of UNICEF, the EU and Algida.
Catch-up Education

Catch-up education will provide children between 10 and 14 years of age who never enrolled in or attended school or who otherwise missed out on their education the opportunity to complete their primary education by equipping them with the necessary competencies that will enable them to return to school and finish in the appropriate primary school grades. Catch-up education will enable children to complete the basic stage of their formal education in a class suitable to their age, learning needs and abilities and by means of a condensed curriculum.

The need in this area emerged during the process of drafting the Child Protection Law of 2005 and also during the course of the UNICEF–supported Haydi Kızlar Okula! girls’ education campaign. Director General of Primary Education, İbrahim Er, who is responsible for the preparation of the Catch-up Education Programme at the Ministry of National Education (MONE), explains:

“Catch-up education programmes are not new to Turkey. There have been several in different forms at different times. However, the current programme was deemed necessary to ensure the schooling of children who have missed out or been deprived of access to primary education for any number of reasons.”

Although he wouldn’t say precisely how many students will be included within the scope of the catch-up education programme, Mr. Er stressed that the potential benefits of the programme, in providing 10–14 year-olds with the opportunity to finish their basic education, were enormous: whatever the social problems or issues that block a child’s access to school, it is essential that all children have access to education.

Mr. Er defines the basic principles of class practices under the catch-up education programme:

- Each student is prepared for placement in the appropriate primary school grade — although the programme does not grant any form of diploma, it enables the student to re-enter the primary education system.
- Subject to an assessment of his or her level of preparedness, the student can be transferred to a programme that is suitable to his or her age and level of educational attainment.
- A student can begin catch-up education at any time, continuing classes until the end of the school year.
- Special attention is given to ensuring that students who have been admitted to catch-up education are kept in the school environment for as long as possible.

Mr. Er points out that catch-up education should not be seen as an alternative to the existing education system and that any such misconception should be avoided. He also explains that the programme and guidelines for transition to primary school are structured flexibly, are gender-sensitive and designed to meet the needs of the target group in a
way that encourages their attendance to primary education. The curriculum has been prepared in the field by a group of teachers and academics in order to ensure that it is compatible with the current primary education curriculum.

Preparation of the educational materials and implementation manual are underway and the programme is pending approval by the Education Board. Regarding approval, Director General Er says: “We expect approval shortly, so that we can speed up finalisation of the programme.”

Emphasising that the catch–up education programme has been prepared with an inclusive approach and that it is very important to raise public awareness on this matter, Mr. Er says that we must ensure ownership of this matter.

Since there is a strong relationship between ownership and success, MONE is keen to promote dialogue on the programme between stakeholders. Mr Er says that since many partners and stakeholders working in the education sector — including NGOs, school directors, public officials, teacher unions — are assuming responsibility with regard to the issue, it is important to see how school staff will actively implement the programme and interpret its aims in the process.

Director General Er says that there were some concerns at the beginning of the process that the programme might be perceived as an alternative to the formal education system, and as such it might be subject to abuse in certain quarters. However, he emphasises that these concerns have been allayed and that the public is now ready for the catch–up education programme. Really important outcomes are expected from the programme, according to Mr. Er, but nevertheless it will be important to ensure feedback during the implementation phase and to maintain public awareness of the programme in order to achieve success.

Stressing that the latest enrolment figures for primary education are very positive, the Director General concludes reiterates his view that catch–up education is essentially a temporary measure:

“Our objective is to ensure that the Catch–up Education Programme is needed for only a limited time and that the need for this programme will decrease as enrolment rates accordingly increase, which of course will be a very satisfying outcome for our country. The catch–up education programme currently under preparation will contribute to achieving our target of 100% enrolment and completion in primary education.”
The process of Turkey’s accession to the European Union has led to rapid changes in legislation over recent years, including significant changes to the fundamental legislative framework of the Penal Code. These changes have led, in turn, to a necessary revision of the Law on the Establishment, Duties and Adjudication Processes of Juvenile Courts in order to ensure that it is in line with international instruments such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) to which Turkey is a party.

The first law specifically on children was Law number 2253 in 1979, which was put into force in 1982. More recently a new Child Protection Law, setting out the fundamental legislation on children, was developed and adopted by the Grand National Assembly of Turkey (TBMM) in 2005.

The Child Protection Law divides children into two groups: children in need of protection and children in contact with the law with the objectives to protect them, to guarantee their rights and to ensure their well being. Accordingly, the protective and supportive measures foreseen for children both in need of protection and those who are or have been involved in crime are laid down in the law and the establishment, procedures and authorities of juvenile courts have been re-regulated in order to implement them.

The Ministry of National Education (MONE), the Ministry of Labour and Social Security, Ministry of Health, local administrations and the Social Services and Child Protection Agency (SHÇEK) all have specific responsibilities and roles to play in order to ensure that protection, consultation, education, care, healthcare and sheltering opportunities are provided to children with the Ministry of Justice in a coordinating role — with the Training Department functioning as secretariat — in the delivery of these services and adoption of relevant measures. Under the umbrella of Children First, technical support was provided by UNICEF with funding from the EU.

Several training sessions and seminars have been conducted with the support of the Children First project to increase knowledge, practice and understanding of the new Child Protection Law among personnel and management of the involved institutions and to promote cooperation between stakeholders. Several hundred participants including judges from juvenile and family courts, public prosecutors, members of the Supreme Court, social workers, psychologists and educationalists from the juvenile and child courts discussed a range of issues and shared their experience during the course of training as joint plans and new cooperation mechanisms were developed and established.

Some training modules focused on legal aspects whereas other modules were designed to increase coordination between social workers and judiciary personnel working in separate institutions with a view to strengthening implementation of the protective and supportive measures laid down in the Child Protection Law.

Feedback received by the Training Department of the Ministry of Justice, showed that the training sessions have been very rewarding for the participants who were pleased to be informed on the various provisions and applications under the Child Protection Law. New perspectives were acquired on how children in contact with the law should be tried before the court and participants also looked into reasons the causes that lead children to come into contact with the law in the first place.

Moreover, participants expressed that the sessions provided them with an opportunity to exchange ideas with colleagues.
from other provinces. The training also helped participants to change their perception of children in contact with the law significantly — viewing them as children in need of protection rather than simply being perpetrators of crime. The need to view their situation from a broader angle, taking into account the psychological, sociological and economic aspects of the issue and how this can support the protection of children was recognised.

According to Judge Özcan Avci, Head of Training at the Ministry of Justice, communication with the child should be established immediately when he or she comes into contact with the law and both the judge and the prosecutor have an important role to play in establishing a dialogue with the child and to act in the child's best interest. “We have studied and discussed how children are questioned, which methods are used when they are under arrest and what the most suitable rehabilitation means are,” he says. “Under the Child Protection Law, there is a possibility of applying alternative measures to children under 15 years of age in stead of handing out a prison sentence.”

Moreover, Judge Avci explains: “the establishment of a coordination mechanism is key if an efficient and strong implementation of the Child Protection Law is going to be realised. The main aim at the moment is to create cooperation mechanisms at the provincial level in order for each individual institution to meet its responsibilities and obligations.”

Judge Özcan Avci concludes that “Our discussions will continue to aim at enhancing the knowledge, practices and skills of our judges, public prosecutors and social workers. We will also continue to work to increase cooperation between those institutions responsible for implementing alternative measures rather than depriving children of their liberty. In this regard, we would like to acknowledge the good endeavours of every individual who is working to make these meetings a success.”

“The protection, care, development and participation of children is everyone’s responsibility. We all of us share the responsibility of looking after children, not only in a professional or institutional sense, but as individual members of society. By acting hand in hand and by collaborating for and with children, we can overcome all any problem or trouble with love, understanding and tolerance. The next step now is to put in place a coordination model at provincial level to ensure an efficient and effective implementation of the law.”

Judge Özcan Avci

Alternative Measures

Here are two cases where the provision of alternative measures has been effective — one for a child in contact with the law and one for a child victim. Both examples were provided by judges who participated in the workshops on alternative measures.

1) The court deferred its verdict for a 14 year–old boy arrested for theft and proven guilty. Taking his background into account, it was the court’s opinion that the child was not prone to re–offending. Based on the Social Inquiry Report, the court put the child on one year probation as recommended by the Child Protection Law article 36, ruling for an ‘education measure’ for the child and a ‘counselling measure’ for his family.

2) For a 15 year–old victim of sexual abuse by her father, the court ruled for ‘health and education measures’. In her best interest and speedy recovery the court ordered that the child should be supported to continue her education since she was traumatised and suffering from depression. The court also ordered counselling for the mother in order to support her in taking care of her children and ensuring their education and protection.
The new set of minimum standards of care and protection for children living without parental care is about to be finalised. All stakeholders involved in the development of this instrument expect that it will provide children with the highest standards of care possible.

"Considering the well being of children, the most important thing is to have caring parents. If this isn’t possible, children should be adopted or placed in the care of foster parents. They should only be institutionalised as a last resort," says Nurdan Tornaci, Deputy Director of the Social Services and Child Protection Agency (SHÇEK). "This study including the development of a new set of minimum standards has been initiated to guarantee that Turkish children living without parental care are receiving the best possible care. As the coordinating institution for child protection in Turkey, it supports our objective to ensure the healthy development of children who will in their turn contribute to a healthy society."

Mrs. Tornaci is referring to the study aim of establishing minimum standards for children deprived of parental care who are living in SHÇEK institutions, with foster parents, in boarding schools or in juvenile justice institutions. The study was undertaken as part of an international process initiated by the Committee on the Rights of the Child which encourages countries to develop a national set of minimum standards for children living without parental care, thereby ensuring the good care and healthy development of all children. An international working group has drafted UN Guidelines for the appropriate use of alternative care for children with the participation of UNICEF, Governments, NGOs, academicians and the Committee itself in support of this aim. By developing her own set of minimum standards, Turkey fulfills a responsibility under the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

The Turkish study on minimum standards was carried out throughout 2007 by a team of national consultants, EDUSER, together with an international expert under the coordination of SHÇEK. The project benefitted greatly by financial support from the EU and technical support from UNICEF under the umbrella of the Children First project. The main objective of the study has been to adapt the international guidelines to the Turkish context with the active involvement of all institutions providing care for children who are living outside of parental care.

“The major outcome of this study is that Turkey now has a set of minimum standards that will apply to every institution, — including boarding schools, orphanages and detention centres — that provide care to children living without parental care. A set of minimum standards that should be met by everyone,” says Aige Akpınar, who is the national coordinator of the study team.

“The study has shown that in terms of regulations there is no major discrepancy in Turkey, a corollary for almost all minimum standards can be found in the existing rules and regulations. Sometimes there are some overlaps or gaps but the fundamental legal framework is in place,” Akpınar says. On the other hand, she points out, the objective of this study has not been to analyse the overall provision of care to children in Turkey but more specifically to look into the legal framework and adapt the international standards and guidelines to the Turkish context. "It has not been our objective to judge the implementation or quality of care given to children in Turkey,” she says.

SHÇEK Deputy Director, Nurdan Tornaci, explains how the study deals with 28 minimum standards, under five main headings, which have been developed or adapted to the Turkish context. The wording has been adjusted and discussed and perhaps more importantly — new elements have been added to the international standards. The process has involved consultations with all stakeholders and a series of workshops and interviews have been conducted in
support of the study. People working with children in more than fifty provinces have participated. “All stakeholders — from top level managers to care givers in the institutions have been involved,” Tornaci says, adding that she has been satisfied with the thoroughness of the work and especially the participation of children in the process.

The standards deal with the practical provision of services to the children, taking into account the nature and quantity of resources required and the nature of training the staff need. “We talk about the children, resources and personnel — but what about relations between the personnel?” Mrs. Tornaci asks and continues, “an important part of our work with the minimum standards is to ensure a competent management system that will support the children and compensate for their lack of parental care in the best possible way.”

As she talks about the minimum standards and the work SHÇEK is doing for children, it is apparent that Mrs. Tornaci genuinely cares for the children. She clearly sees the study as an opportunity to strengthen the implementation of rules and regulations in order to provide the best possible care for the children deprived of parental care. “I believe that in the end this study will not only improve implementation of existing child care policies but that it will also contribute to the development of further policies to improve their situation.”

Mrs. Akpınar from EDUSER, emphasises that the next step is for each institution to develop an action plan on how to go about implementing the minimum standards including setting up medium and long term targets for different priorities — including a cost analysis identifying the financial needs of implementing the minimum standards.

Aışe Akpınar emphasises the important point that the study includes recommendations from participating personnel: “It isn’t the words of the consultants, it is the recommendations of people working directly with the children or in management of the institutions.” One area that was underlined is the need for on–the–job–training of staff.

In answer to a question about the outcome of the consultations, Nurdan Tornaci says that she has not yet seen the final report but that she is looking forward to examining the outcomes in more detail and discussing options on the best possible ways forward with colleagues, in order to continue to support the needs of children in their care.

Mrs. Tornaci points out that one very important outcome that already has been identified is that, through the consultation process, all stakeholders, including MONE, SHÇEK, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Interior and the Gendarmerie, now share the same point of view.

Aışe Akpınar speaks of the commitment of everyone involved in the study:

“We enjoyed it very much. To begin with this study has not just been about collecting data but also about working with children and families and professionals dealing with vulnerable groups. We feel very strongly that we are doing something for both the country and the children in carrying out this study.”

The study on the minimum standards is based on thorough work including a series of workshops with 196 personnel from SHÇEK, MONE Regional Boarding Schools, the Ministry of Justice and the Security Forces. Twenty interviews were conducted with individuals as well as focus group interviews with foster or adoptive parents and their children and with 48 children in institutional care. A total of 264 people participated in the study. A final draft of the report, currently being shared with stakeholders, will be discussed at a workshop in 2008.
Partnership Supports Children

Children’s Rights Committees throughout Turkey benefit from a partnership between the well-known ice cream brand Algida, UNICEF, children and local administrations. The partnership supports children’s activities and creates a platform for children to voice their opinion and to participate in matters affecting their life. Algida have supported a variety of Children First project activities in order to promote awareness of children’s rights and empower children to participate in decision-making processes at the provincial level. The joint achievements have included a Children’s Rights Campaign implemented in 25 provinces across Turkey, the Children’s Forum, art competitions and awareness raising activities.

The partnership began in 2006 when Algida developed a corporate social responsibility (CSR) programme. The CSR included support to Turkey’s children and, according to Algida representatives, it was a straightforward decision to team up with UNICEF in its work to support Turkey’s children. Algida explain that: “Algida is aware of its responsibilities and an important part of our CSR strategy is to be sensitive about issues concerning children. Therefore this partnership is linked to Algida’s mission of being proactive about children’s rights.”

Private companies in Turkey and all around the world increasingly seek to develop CSR programmes with international development organisations like UNICEF and NGOs. UNICEF recognises the potential role of the private sector in helping to bring about positive change for children and might be best known for its collaboration with the

legendary football club FC Barcelona whose team members sport the UNICEF logo on their jerseys.

For UNICEF Turkey the partnership with Algida very much a first step to involve the Turkish private sector more directly in its work for children. “After two years the partnership with Algida has shown that doors can be opened to a wider cooperation with the private sector in Turkey,” says UNICEF Turkey Deputy Director Lila Pieters. The positive outcome for both UNICEF and for Algida, has also led to new alliances within Turkey. Together with Algida’s parent company, Unilever, UNICEF will soon launch a new partnership on micronutrients to support children’s growth and development. “UNICEF hopes that the model partnerships we are currently establishing in Turkey could work as an inspiration and a model for UNICEF offices in other countries,” says Pieters.

The Children’s Forum, now in its eighth year, is a two-day event that brings delegates from all over Turkey together to discuss their local problems and find solutions. Participants prepare a manifesto, which they in the past have presented in parliament to the Vice-President of the Turkish National Assembly, Members of the Parliament and the press. This year the children met with President Abdullah Gül in Ankara.

Thanks to the involvement of such a well known company as Algida, the Children’s Rights Committees have had a strong partner to help them foster local private sector participation. There is of course a risk that other companies will be reluctant to contribute when they see that Algida is involved but so far it has worked positively for the Committees. Besides financial support, Algida also played a pivotal role in contributing their expertise in PR and communication since it was important for the children to communicate their key messages of the child’s right to participate and to be heard to local media.

Another activity under the partnership highlighted by Algida representatives is the participation of Turkish children from SHÇEK institutions in an International School Art Project with the theme Reality and Dreams. The project was sponsored by Unilever and Algida decided to support it in cooperation with UNICEF and SHÇEK. More than 150 children from SHÇEK institutions entered their work in the contest. The winners, 12-year-old Havva Kaçar from Şehy Zayed Children’s Community Home in Istanbul and 14-year-old Faruk Yılmaz from Tekirdağ travelled to London to see their work exhibited at a special reception in the Tate Modern.

Algida emphasises that the partnership has been rewarding for the company and that it will engage in similar partnerships since the successful outcomes of the projects and PR activities reinforce the company’s efforts to brand itself.

According to Lila Pieters, it has also been valuable for UNICEF to see how it is possible to engage the Turkish private sector in activities which need long term investment and support. It was an innovative decision by Algida to support Children’s Rights activities. A decision not driven by a business minded approach but by the company’s CSR ambition — and that allowed it to get involved and to support a stronger voice for Turkey’s children.
Investment in early childhood development pays manifold returns to society. On this understanding, the Government of Turkey, with technical support from UNICEF, has been investing substantially in early childhood development for some time. Most recently, the partnership has been developing parenting education programmes under the Children First project.

One component of the parenting programme, My Family, targets families or caregivers of children under 6 years of age. According to Mr. Necmettin Yalçın, Director General of Non-Formal Education at the Ministry of National Education, the programme has been running in its current form since 2005, but the first parenting training programme began in Turkey as far back as 1993.

“The My Family programme is very important when you consider that the family is the core of any society and the level of education in a family forms determines the health of society,” says Mr. Yalçın, adding that: “parenting education is a tool to make lasting changes in society.” Mr. Yalçın explains that the parenting education programmes have reached many people: “We have reached up to 600,000 mothers, fathers and children since 2005 with family training. If we take into account those people participants have subsequently influenced as a result of their training, the number of people reached is probably more like one million. Nevertheless this is not enough,” he says, “so a national policy action plan is being prepared with the cooperation of NGOs and municipalities on how to expand the programme.”

Since the My Family training package consists of 16 modules run over a period of 16 weeks, it requires quite a long commitment from participants and thus makes it can be difficult for some families to participate. To this end, a shorter and more compact core package has been developed with the support of European experts in order to meet the needs of hard-to-reach parents and families. “The core package training programme is completely free of charge, enabling families who could not otherwise afford this kind of activity to participate,” stresses Mr. Yalçın.

The Ministry of National Education has worked with SHÇEK, the Ministry of Justice, NGOs, municipalities, the private sector and media publications such as Bebeğim (My Baby) magazine in developing both My Family and the core package. “Collaboration with the other stakeholders is very important,” Mr. Yalçın emphasises.

The main aims of the core package are to teach families about positive parenting, the benefits of better communication and new ways of problem solving. The core package still deals with a wide range of subjects including health issues like iodine deficiency, the importance of vaccination and children’s rights. The methodology in the core package is more flexible, allowing participants to work while taking part in the training activities. There is less emphasis on reading and writing skills so people who are illiterate have a chance to participate in the training. The core package is also gender-sensitive and includes a children’s rights perspective. The modular structure allows for sections to be added or subtracted according to the audience and its needs. The core package is also being integrated into the curriculum of pre-school teachers as well as the training of prospective foster or adoptive parents.

Initial results of the My Family programme have been very positive, showing an increase in communication within families, a drop in domestic violence, improved relations both within and outside the families, behavioural change and most importantly, says Mr. Yalçın, “parents have begun to consider their children as individuals with their own rights.”

According to Mr. Yalçın the core package is a very important part of the strategy to roll out the programme nationwide and reach more families. He also explains how the training is being used to combat illiteracy and also as a tool to detect children who are at risk. The parenting education programmes are helping illiterate women and “in this way the programme contributes to an increase in literacy rates”.

There is still a challenge to involve more fathers in the programmes, however: “Raising children is a difficult job and women deal with it mainly but fathers also need to be involved and to be trained and that is a big challenge for us,” says Mr. Yalçın and adds, “training sessions for fathers have reached at least 7,000 fathers but that’s not enough”.

“We are working hard to reach as many families and caregivers as possible and the core package is surely going to help us do that. One especially important issue is the provision of free transportation which would increase the number of participants,” explains Mr. Yalçın. “With this basic programme we are providing the first step for a lifelong education.”
What will *Children First* achieve?

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 standards of the CRC and the EU.