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GOOD PRACTICES IN SOCIAL INCLUSION AND ACCESS TO EDUCATION

**Cooperation Network for
Children in Need
Good Practice Review
Report**

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PREFACE

As Koruncuk Foundation, the “Cooperation Network for Children” project, which constitutes an important phase of our ongoing efforts to ensure that children grow up in a safe, supportive, and inclusive environment, has been implemented as of 2024 with the partnership of İhtiyaç Haritası (Needs Map) and the support of the European Union Delegation.

The main objective of this project is to increase access to social support services for girls whose rights are restricted and whose access to education and basic needs is at risk, as well as for their families in our country. In line with this goal, in order both to strengthen our Foundation’s own practices regarding children’s social inclusion processes and access to education and to contribute to practices in Türkiye, we had the opportunity to conduct on-site study visits to civil society organizations and the social service activities they carry out in three European Union countries.

During the selection of the countries to be visited, our team conducted comprehensive desk research and established contacts with institutions in various countries. In this process, it was adopted as a core principle to focus on examples with different focal points than the reference countries examined in our previous projects. As a result of the analyses and consultations carried out, Italy, Romania, and Croatia were selected for good practice visits, taking into account cultural similarities, geographical proximity to Türkiye, the complementary stages they have reached in their EU alignment processes, and their implementation of social service organizations at different economic scales.

Italy stood out with its well-established role of civil society in social service practices, its effective child protection system, and its experience in working with migrant populations. In addition, its large size and significant regional differences present similarities with Türkiye. Romania was considered a comparative learning area for Türkiye’s own reforms, as it provides an example for observing post-EU-membership transformation processes and for having successfully transitioned to family-oriented services with limited resources. Croatia’s experience in strengthening social inclusion policies through multi-stakeholder structures and its modulation from a transition economy to a professionalized social service model were found worthy of observation in terms of Türkiye’s local capacity-building objectives.

These visits not only enabled us to become familiar with the child protection and social support systems of different countries, but also allowed us to observe a variety of concrete, applicable, and sustainable models that could be developed to strengthen children's participation in education and social inclusion in our country. The institutions visited presented significant experiences ranging from inclusive education and family support programs to cooperative-based social service models and new protection mechanisms required by the digital age.

The main purpose of this report is to bring together these comparative observations and to demonstrate how good practices in the field of child protection are shaped within the framework of European Union policies, what kind of impact volunteerism and local partnerships create in civil society work, and why holistic approaches are critical in services for children. This report both sheds light on how the experiences gained can be evaluated in the context of Türkiye and develops practical recommendations that may inspire institutions and professionals working in the field of social services.

We would like to thank all the institutions that shared their knowledge and experience with us throughout this process, our project team, and the European Union Delegation. We hope that this report will contribute to the collective efforts to strengthen children's access to education and social inclusion in Türkiye.

Koruncuk Foundation, 2025

1. SOCIAL INCLUSION

Social inclusion, according to the European Commission, is a process which ensures that those at risk of poverty and social exclusion gain the opportunities and resources necessary to participate fully in economic, social and cultural life and to enjoy a standard of living and well-being that is considered normal in the society in which they live (European Commission, 2004). As one of the fundamental concepts of social policy, social inclusion combines the objective of increasing the welfare levels of individuals and groups with the aim of enabling them to benefit from this increase on an equal basis. By definition, the concept draws attention to two important points. The first is that there is an existing social “sphere” or framework and that certain individuals or groups remain outside of it. The second is that social inclusion is a process made possible through equal access to opportunities and resources. In this context, an increase in welfare is not limited merely to macro-level economic growth or micro-level income increases; rather, it becomes tangible through individuals’ active participation in areas such as education, employment, and access to social services. In order for this process to take place, active intervention policies must come into play.

Intervention policies that function as redistribution mechanisms, special programs, and public-CSO-private sector partnerships support the participation of at-risk groups in social life through mechanisms such as the European Union’s IPA funds. In this process, Civil Society Organizations stand out as implementing actors; the strengthening of equal opportunities is often realized particularly through education-based initiatives. Within frameworks such as the European Pillar of Social Rights, the European Commission approaches social inclusion along the axis of “strengthening equal opportunities,” implementing it through education and lifelong learning policies (European Commission, 2024)..

1.1. Social Inclusion And Education

The relationship between education and social inclusion is frequently discussed in EU sources and academic literature primarily in the context of the inclusion and integration of children with special needs in education. However, the relationship between social inclusion and education is far more complex and multi-dimensional than this limited perspective suggests. When the core components of social inclusion are considered - namely that social exclusion manifests itself in areas such as poverty and material deprivation, exclusion from employment, income inequality, restricted access to basic services (education, health, housing), and weakened participation in social life - the problem of access to education emerges as a critical axis that cuts horizontally across all these areas. In other words, the problem of access to education is not only one of the sources of these exclusion domains; it also reinforces their consequences and creates the ground for their cyclical reproduction.

This cyclical nature causes inequalities in education to become both a cause and a result of social exclusion, thereby threatening social inclusion goals. Therefore, “Education is a central instrument in breaking the cycle of poverty and supporting the equal participation of individuals at risk of social exclusion in social life; because inequalities encountered in education can deepen individuals’ disadvantaged positions in both employment and social participation” (Walczak, 2024).

“In line with the goal of social inclusion, expanding access to education systems and ensuring the effective participation of disadvantaged individuals and groups in these systems not only increases individual opportunities but also contributes to the reduction of social inequalities” (European Commission, 2004).

On the other hand, increasing access to education does not merely mean raising school enrollment rates; the ability of disadvantaged children to remain and succeed in education is only possible when holistic social support mechanisms directed at both the child and the family accompany this process. As also emphasized in the European Commission’s “Active Inclusion” approach, social inclusion policies are based on the simultaneous functioning of three core elements: adequate income support, inclusive labor market measures, and access to quality social services. This framework highlights that education policies alone cannot be effective; complementary mechanisms such as social services, psychosocial support, household well-being, and the fulfillment of basic

needs directly determine children's participation and continuity in education (European Commission, Active Inclusion, 2025). In this context, NGOs that use social support as an instrument and focus directly on social assistance rather than providing education themselves also play a significant role in facilitating participation in education.

The education–social inclusion relationship should not be addressed solely at a conceptual or normative level; it is also necessary to consider how this relationship is constructed at national and international levels, which policy tools support it, and how it is implemented in the field by various actors. The realization of social inclusion goals is directly linked to structural conditions such as the capacity of social protection mechanisms, the inclusiveness of social services, regional inequalities, and the diversity of sensitivity to children's needs within each country. Therefore, examining Türkiye's legal framework regarding social inclusion and children's access to education together with the practical outcomes of this framework in the field is of critical importance in assessing to what extent education policies are integrated with social support mechanisms and what complementary role NGOs assume in this process. In this context, the following section will first examine Türkiye's approach to social inclusion, its legislation, and the limitations observed in practice, and will then address child-focused social inclusion efforts and the contributions of civil society in selected EU countries through concrete examples.

2. SOCIAL INCLUSION IN TÜRKIYE AND INCREASING CHILDREN'S ACCESS TO EDUCATION

The Republic of Türkiye, with the objective of supporting disadvantaged families and children, has developed comprehensive legal regulations and policies in the field of social inclusion at both national and international levels. While these regulations aim to provide a protective and preventive framework against social exclusion and poverty, their effectiveness in practice continues to be discussed in light of official data. Civil Society Organizations play a key role in the field-level implementation of these policies and attempt to bridge the gaps between the legal framework and reality. This section examines Türkiye's legislation focused on social inclusion and access to education, supports the practical limitations of this legislation with official data, and presents good practice examples of selected CSOs operating in this field.

Türkiye has established a strong legal foundation for the protection of children's rights and the improvement of their social conditions. At the international level, Türkiye ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1990 and is also a party to fundamental texts such as the United Nations International Covenant on Economic, Social

and Cultural Rights and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. At the national level, strategy documents such as the 11th Development Plan (2019–2023) have been prepared to achieve social inclusion goals. Equality of opportunity in education is regarded as a critical element of social inclusion, and the state implements projects aimed at increasing the participation of disadvantaged groups in educational processes. Key legislative frameworks include the Child Protection Law (Law No. 5395), legislation concerning Persons with Disabilities (Law No. 5378), and the Law on the Protection of the Family and Prevention of Violence Against Women (Law No. 6284).

The most important institution in the implementation of these policies is the Ministry of Family and Social Services (MoFSS). The Ministry develops policies aimed at preventing poverty and social exclusion and organizes trainings for personnel, academics, and CSO representatives within the scope of the “Türkiye Social Inclusion Training Program.” Practices managed by the MoFSS include Social Assistance Programs (financial support, in-kind assistance), Household-Oriented Social Services, and Educational Support Programs (scholarships, material support, preschool education). The Foster Family Services Regulation, which supports children’s upbringing within a family environment, is also part of this legal framework.

2.1. Limitations In Practice and Structural Critiques

Although Türkiye has a strong legal infrastructure in the field of social inclusion, the impact of existing policies in the field remains limited, and significant structural deficiencies are observed in implementation, monitoring, and regional equality.

Poverty and Targeting Problems: Despite the Social Assistance Programs of the Ministry of Family and Social Services (MoFSS), according to the 2024 data of TURKSTAT, one third of children in the 0–17 age group are still at risk of material deprivation. This rate is approximately twice the European average. Critiques emphasize that conducting social policies with a household-based rather than a child-centered approach leads to negative outcomes. Social assistance generally remains at the level of short-term cash support, while investment-based policies that would strengthen children’s long-term social development are not sufficiently widespread.

Regional Inequalities and Gaps in Inclusiveness: In the field of education, regional inequalities persist. Data from UNICEF and the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) reveal that participation rates in preschool education in eastern and southeastern provinces still show differences of up to 30% compared to western regions. In terms of inclusiveness, two critical areas stand out.

The first of these relates to refugee children. Türkiye is responsible for the right to education of more than one million refugee children; however, UNICEF's 2023 data indicate that approximately one third of these children still remain outside formal education.

Another population that requires attention in terms of inclusiveness is children with special needs. Although inclusive education policies are included in the legislation, significant gaps continue in schools in the areas of physical accessibility, teacher support, and psychosocial monitoring.

Institutional Coordination and Digital Inequality: One of the main problems reducing the effectiveness of social inclusion policies is the lack of inter-institutional coordination and data sharing. There is no integrated child welfare data system among the MoFSS, MoNE, and local administrations; this situation makes the early identification of children at risk of dropping out of school more difficult. In addition, digital inequalities that deepened with the COVID-19 pandemic have created a new test in the field of social inclusion. According to TURKSTAT's 2023 Household Information Technologies Survey, internet access in rural areas is still below 70%. This constitutes a serious obstacle to the expansion of online education.

2.2. The Role Of Civil Society And Good Practice Examples In Access To Education

CSOs carry out activities with the aim of filling the gaps in the legal framework and increasing the social welfare of disadvantaged individuals and families that public services cannot reach. Public-CSO collaborations often remain project-based and cannot transform into permanent institutional mechanisms. Nevertheless, the models developed by CSOs provide concrete solutions in the struggle against inequalities in the field. Below you will find a brief summary of the work of six CSOs we met within the scope of this study.

Köy Okulları Dayanışma Ağı (KODA)

KODA aims to ensure that children living in rural areas where regional inequalities are intense receive better and higher-quality education. KODA's work focuses on closing the regional gaps indicated by MoNE and UNICEF data..

1. **Teacher Support Programs:** In order to facilitate adaptation to educational processes in rural areas, theoretical and practical trainings such as the "First Step to the Village Program" are provided. To support effective teaching in multigrade classrooms, which is a challenging model, KODA has prepared guidance and activity books in cooperation with the Ministry of National Education.
2. **Response to Digital Inequality:** Within the scope of family support programs, Family Trainings via Teleconference Method have been developed. Through this method, even families in rural areas without internet access have been provided with information on parenting and child development..

Sosyal Ben Vakfı

Sosyal Ben Vakfı aims to help disadvantaged children between the ages of 7-13, especially those in transported education, discover their social skills and talents. The foundation contributes to children's social identity and self-development and supports equality of opportunity in education..

1. **Talent-Focused Workshops:** Activities beyond the MoNE curriculum such as painting, music, drama, short film, and sports are included. Children whose talents are identified through observations are directed to MoNE-approved courses.
2. **Crisis-Time Intervention:** Sosyal Ben has provided psychosocial support to children during disasters (Soma, Kahramanmaraş Earthquake) through mobile activity trucks and Skill Development Centers (PeGEM) in Hatay and Adıyaman. This work is one of the practices aimed at closing the gap in psychosocial monitoring and support identified in the legislation..

Nesin Vakfı

Founded in 1972, Nesin Vakfı aims to raise children who lack educational opportunities as self-confident, socially responsible, and productive individuals. The campus in Çatalca, Istanbul meets children's shelter, education, and social needs through a holistic approach. In addition to the programs implemented for children residing in this full-time living environment, the foundation instills a love of science and mathematics through art activities and camps organized at Nesin Mathematics Village. It also provides psychological support to the families of the children it serves in unexpected adverse situations.

Anne Çocuk Eğitim Vakfı (AÇEV)

AÇEV stands out in the fields of early childhood education and development and parent support programs. In response to the low participation rates in preschool education in rural areas, AÇEV indirectly supports children's development by offering training programs for parents through volunteer trainers.

1. Mother Child Education Program (AÇEP): This 25-week home-based program aims to inform mothers about their children's cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development and to strengthen parenting skills. The program has been implemented in 78 cities to date.
2. Child Education Program (ÇEP) and Summer Preschool: These programs aim to improve the language and pre-literacy skills of children aged 4 and above, especially those with limited access to preschool education, and to increase school readiness. Materials that support children's self-confidence and homework habits are used. The Summer Preschool also organizes a "Mother Support Program" for mothers.
3. Comprehensive Family Support Programs: AÇEV implements the Mother Support Program for mothers of children aged 3–6 and the Father Support Program for fathers of children aged 3–6 and 7–11. The Father Support Program aims to strengthen fathers' interaction with their children, encourage responsibility-taking, and develop non-violent parenting attitudes.
4. Women Empowerment Programs: The foundation supports gender equality. The "Life-Enriching Gatherings" program aims to empower women aged 18–40 by providing life-skills training such as basic literacy, health, critical thinking, and access to the labor market..

Sulukule Gönüllüleri (SGD)

The main objective of SGD is to make visible the children and families affected by urban transformation-related demolition and relocation processes, prevent school dropout, and facilitate access to social services..

1. Access to Education and Combating School Dropout: School return projects, scholarships supporting school attendance, and nutrition practices are carried out. Through campaigns such as "Let's Give School Nutrition Its Due," the association raises awareness, focuses on the relationship between nutrition and poverty, and brings the issue of coming to school hungry to the agenda.

2. **Psychosocial Support and Participation:** In order to support children’s psychosocial well-being, it aims to create safe spaces through game-based workshops, art, and sports activities. SGD develops practices based on child participation methods, ensures children’s active involvement in processes, and publishes reports documenting their own experiences.
3. **Holistic Support Network:** Its working approach includes both direct workshops and activities with children and empowerment efforts with caregivers, teachers, and local actors. In addition, holistic support is provided to families in need through social assistance (such as nutrition and education scholarships) and referral mechanisms.

Türkiye Eğitim Gönüllüleri Vakfı (TEGV)

TEGV focuses on providing out-of-school, free, and qualified educational support to primary school-aged children. It aims to support children’s learning processes through contemporary, participatory approaches that strengthen equality of opportunity. Its activities are largely carried out with volunteer support. Volunteers take part in various roles such as activity facilitation, instruction, and resource development.

TEGV delivers its educational services through different infrastructure models. These include Education Parks, which are comprehensively equipped centers in cities, and smaller activity points located near schools or in community centers, namely Learning Units and Firefly Units. These units offer continuous or short-term programs to children outside school hours. The trainings provided by the foundation cover a wide range including science, mathematics, reading, drama, social-emotional learning, English, design, and skills workshops. In recent years, applications focusing particularly on 21st-century skills have been developed. Through practices such as “Design and Skills Workshops,” children’s problem-solving, collaboration, and creativity skills are strengthened by supporting informatics, coding, design-oriented thinking, and hand-eye coordination. Trainings are implemented both face-to-face and through distance education, and rapid adaptation to online education was achieved especially during the pandemic period.

3. CSOS IN THE EU WORKING WITH A SOCIAL INCLUSION FOCUS AND THEIR PRACTICES!

3.1. Good Practices Derived from the Romanian Experience: Model Approaches in the Field of Social Inclusion and Child Education

The institutions that were the subject of our visit in Romania present approaches implemented at different scales and contexts in the field of social inclusion and child education. These experiences provide valuable learning opportunities for CSOs and public institutions operating in similar fields.

Asociatia de Asistenta si Educatie, although its history is based on religious foundations, is an organization that has adapted to modern child protection standards through Romania's EU harmonization process. The institution provides services to children aged 7-18 under state protection and particularly focuses on children who have not had the opportunity to return to their biological families or who have experienced various care environments. The family-type care model implemented by the institution has enabled the creation of smaller units where children receive more individualized support. In this way, children have the opportunity to grow and develop in a safe and supportive environment. In addition, through volunteer practices, university students support children in areas such as homework follow-up, language, and art activities. The institution positions the contribution of volunteers as a complementary element to the support provided by professional social work and psychology specialists.

Friends of Children in Romania (FCR) was established in 1994 with the aim of providing a warm, stable, and nurturing living environment for children who could not be cared for by their families. The most notable practice of FCR is its family-type care model that supports children's emotional and social needs. The institution takes an active role in Erasmus+ and other EU-supported projects, increasing children's participation in both educational life and social life. Although volunteer processes are based on university students collecting volunteer points before graduation, FCR carefully manages volunteer selection and supervision in order to increase the quality of this process. By organizing volunteers in a way that supports children's education and social development, the institution reduces the negative effects that short-term and irregular participation may create.

Innovation Education Lab (InnoEduLab), as a Braşov-based organization, focuses on supporting the personal and professional development of youth and adults. The main areas of activity of the organization include education, innovation, sustainable impact, solidarity, diversity and inclusion, accountability, cooperation, and adaptability. InnoEduLab organizes educational activities using interactive and experiential methods in which participants are at the center of the learning process. These methods include creative thinking, mindfulness, participatory research, interactive games, experiential learning in nature, and reflection groups. In addition, through the Circle of Security Parenting™ (COSP) program, InnoEduLab enables parents to build secure attachments with their children and supports them in better understanding their children's emotional needs. Volunteers are encouraged to participate in activities through social media, presentations in schools, university networks, and recommendations. As a first step, direct participation in activities is ensured, and those who are interested transition into volunteering. Volunteers can take on roles such as facilitator, organizer, and logistical support by participating in trainings and workshops. Volunteers who demonstrate continuous participation may receive leadership training over time. Although the volunteering process functions organically, it is supported by trainings.

Casa Bună focuses particularly on disadvantaged children who are not reached by the education system, who drop out of school early, and children from Roma communities. The institution's approach is not to reduce education solely to academic achievement, but to provide a learning environment supported by children's basic needs, hygiene, emotional support, and inclusive communication. In this institution as well, volunteers assume their own responsibilities after working with an experienced mentor and participate in activities in a coordinated manner through a very simple yet effective digital platform.

The experiences of these institutions highlight the following good practices in the field of social inclusion and child education:

1. Family-type care and an individualized approach: Enabling children to build secure attachments and develop in a stable environment.
2. Qualified and regular use of volunteer systems: Training and guiding volunteers in a way that contributes to child development.
3. Local community and family-focused interventions: Providing holistic support by considering that social exclusion affects not only children but also families.
4. Education and capacity development programs: Developing the skills of youth and parents through participant-centered, experiential, and interactive methods.
5. Independent and sustainable financing models: Ensuring operational flexibility through individual donations, sponsorships, and local partnerships.

The Romanian experience demonstrates that practices which support the holistic development of children, strengthen volunteering and community participation, take local needs into account, and possess a sustainable financial infrastructure are effective. These locally focused models reveal for public institutions and CSOs operating in the field that practices aimed at increasing the welfare of children and families can be implemented in a flexible yet participatory manner, supported by qualified staff and continuous, high-quality volunteer engagement.

3.2. Good Practices Derived from the Italian Experience: Cooperativism and Social Inclusion

The visit to Italy provided an extremely rich experience in observing how the social cooperative model, which has become a deeply rooted tradition particularly in and around Bologna, produces multi-layered and sustainable services for children, women, families, and disadvantaged groups. The region's "Third Sector" structure has institutionalized cooperation with public institutions, diversified service provision through cooperatives, and established a strong and well-embedded ecosystem in the field of social inclusion. The reason why the civil society field in Italy is defined as the "Third Sector" is that the law determining the legal status of civil society organizations and their relations with the public sector is Law No. 117/2017, named Codice del Terzo Settore, that is, the "Third Sector Law." The scope of this law is not limited only to associations, foundations, and volunteer organizations, but also considers non-profit cooperatives that function as social enterprises (social cooperatives) as part of the civic sphere. The distinction between Type A and Type B cooperatives presents a highly innovative model in terms of social inclusion. While Type A cooperatives directly produce social services across a wide

spectrum ranging from childcare to elderly services, from individuals with special needs to family support programs; Type B cooperatives conduct production activities in order to integrate disadvantaged individuals into employment. Thus, while social care services are strengthened on the one hand, the participation of the individuals benefiting from these services in the labor force is supported on the other. This dual structure institutionalizes the idea that care and employment are not disconnected processes but two complementary ones. The cooperative-based social service approach, which is not yet this widespread in Türkiye, therefore constitutes a transferable good practice in itself.

At the center of this ecosystem, *Confcooperative Emilia-Romagna*, is not merely an umbrella organization; it is a structure that determines the strategic direction of hundreds of cooperatives operating in the fields of health, education, employment, youth, and social care. In this context, Confcooperative:

1. Establishes structures that are sensitive to regional and local needs,
2. Acts in cooperation with administrative institutions in the European Union and Italy,
3. Supports legislative compliance in order to increase the effectiveness of cooperatives.

Today, there are six major national confederations in Italy, covering 90% of cooperatives. Confcooperative is the largest among these structures and hosts more than 1,500 cooperatives in the Emilia-Romagna region alone.

Another significant example in Italy, MondoDonna Onlus, draws attention with the holistic support system it has established for migrant women and children. The institution demonstrates that it is possible to manage the multidimensional challenges faced by migrant women—such as housing, legal status, trauma, language barriers, employment, and childcare—through a single center. The coordination they establish between accommodation centers and counseling units seeks to enable women both to gain access to a safe living environment and to participate uninterrupted in education and job-seeking processes. The institution's pedagogical support approach for children is also noteworthy. In order to reduce educational losses caused by the migration experience, educators working one-on-one with children conduct daily home visits and carry out homework support programs, language development activities, and social cohesion events. This structure constitutes an important source of inspiration in terms of close-follow-up, on-site, and holistic intervention programs that can be developed in Türkiye for both migrant children and children at risk.

Operating in the field of violence against women and functioning as a sub-branch of MondoDonna Onlus, Chiama Chiama stands out with its emergency response capacity, direct application system that does not require bureaucracy, and multidisciplinary approach. It is emphasized that women being able to apply to the center without any referral or documentation is of vital importance, especially in moments of crisis. At the center, social workers, psychologists, lawyers, and crisis managers work within the same team and respond to women's needs on the same day. This fast and accessible model offers an alternative approach to the access and service diversity problems experienced by the shelter system in Türkiye. In addition, the awareness activities the center conducts for youth present a long-term vision for the prevention of violence against women.

La Venenta Kooperatifi is another different example that combines social service provision with economic activities. It operates both as a Type A (education and social services) and a Type B (sheltered employment) social cooperative. The cooperative offers comprehensive support models for various disadvantaged groups, primarily individuals with disabilities and women who are survivors of violence. The cooperative has three main areas of activity: Residential Psychiatric Service, Social Restaurant (Restorazione Sociale), and Textile Workshop. The social restaurant and textile workshop operated by the cooperative generate economic income while at the same time offering inclusive spaces where disadvantaged individuals develop working skills in a safe and supportive environment. In addition, the community-based psychiatric housing model is particularly remarkable. Individuals living in these houses are supported by professional teams and gain their autonomy within daily life without being isolated from society. La Venenta operates in a region consisting of eight municipalities. The primary goal of the institution is to improve the living conditions of individuals at risk of social exclusion, enable them to regain their resources, and integrate them into social life.

La Venenta currently has 101 employees and 9 volunteers. However, there is a distant and cautious approach toward volunteering. The role of volunteers is clearly defined; it is ensured that they do not overlap with professional services and that their relationships with beneficiaries remain limited. Cooperative managers state that volunteers sometimes struggle to set boundaries and may fall outside the professional framework. For this reason, La Venenta builds its long-term sustainability primarily on professional staff. Individuals who receive services from the cooperative are mostly admitted to the program through referrals from health institutions (AZL), social services, and relevant public bodies. Direct individual applications are not accepted, and thus social assessment and

referral processes are maintained through public institutions. La Vendita's central complex was obtained through a donation. This project emerged as a result of an individual donating their birthplace and land to the Carisbo Foundation before their death, on the condition that it be used in the field of social services. This investment, valued at approximately 4 million Euros, is operated by La Vendita; the cooperative is not the owner of the property but the service provider.

The other two institutions we visited, 2A Social Cooperative and Sociale Anima Cooperative, are cooperatives focused on the participation of individuals with disabilities in working life. In 2A Social Cooperative, each working team is accompanied by an educator and a psychologist; thus, not only the technical skills of employees but also their behavioral and social adaptation processes in the workplace are supported. This approach presents a structure that significantly strengthens the retention and development processes of employees with disabilities. The cooperative's small-scale but regular business partnerships with the private sector are also an important mechanism that increases sustainability.

Similarly, Sociale Anima Cooperative, operating in the Bentivoglio (Bologna) region, is a social cooperative that particularly focuses on integrating disadvantaged individuals into employment. Organizing educational transition programs, cultural events, and recreational activities, the cooperative's main objective is to support the social and economic independence of disadvantaged groups by including them in working life through social restaurant management.

Overall, the most important learning derived from the Italy visit is that social inclusion policies are only possible through holistic, cooperation-based, and economically sustainable models. Although cooperative-based service production is not a new or different model, the nuances in practice demonstrate that social inclusion can also be achieved through cooperatives. Especially in countries where there are interregional socio-economic inequalities, social cooperative structures that better analyze local needs and offer solutions stand out as strong and applicable good examples for both public institutions and civil society in Türkiye, through the institutionalization of public-CSO cooperation, diversified support systems for disadvantaged individuals, community-based care models, and inclusive employment mechanisms for individuals with disabilities.

3.3. Good Practices Derived from the Croatian Experience: Child- and Family-Focused Social Inclusion

Udruga Breza (Breza Association) was founded in 2001 in the city of Osijek, Croatia. Udruga Breza is a well-established civil society organization that carries out social services and youth work for children with limited family support and young people experiencing behavioral difficulties. The organization adopts a holistic model centered on social inclusion, independent living skills, and the active participation of young people in society. In this respect, it holds a position both as a strategic partner of public institutions within the regional social service ecosystem and as an actor that creates tangible transformation in the lives of young people. The foundation of Breza's work is the "comprehensive support through organized accommodation" approach, which combines a residential social service model with psychosocial support. This model is based on a therapeutic community structure implemented in small group homes similar to family houses and provides services across a wide spectrum, from meeting basic needs to developing independent living skills. Within this structure, accommodation, health, nutrition, and educational support are provided in an integrated manner. Regular trainings are delivered in areas such as daily life skills, responsibility-taking, self-management, and problem solving. Breza also organizes numerous community events to strengthen the cultural participation and visibility of young people. The most influential of these is the long-running "Zemlja bez granica" (Land Without Borders) festival. Breza also works in close cooperation with social service units, schools, municipalities, and national fund providers. Being an accredited organization by the National Foundation for Civil Society Development provides Breza with legal assurance and sustainable financing in the field of social services. The organization's coordinated case management with public institutions, its ability to test innovative models at a regional scale, and its capacity to sustain operations through public and international funding constitute an important example of good practice.

From the perspective of volunteer work, Breza has a highly formal and systematic structure based on Croatia's volunteering law and the organization's own internal regulations. The organization emphasizes that volunteering in an NGO working with children cannot progress randomly and therefore frames its volunteer program within a professional structure. Volunteering in Croatia has had a legal basis since 2004, and volunteer activities are conducted through rules that protect the organization, the volunteer, and the children. In addition to this framework, Breza has developed its own internal regulations. Since volunteering is transformed into a professional learning and experience field, volunteer selection is

subject to a rigorous evaluation process consisting of individual and group interviews. Subsequently, a contract defining responsibilities and boundaries is signed between the institution and the volunteers. Volunteer activities are carried out under the supervision of a professional specialist, and the records and data kept are submitted at the end of the year as an official report to the Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy. Each volunteer's work is recorded in the national volunteering registry. This document is valid for job and internship applications. Additionally, upon request, volunteers are issued a competency certificate in line with EU standards. This practice turns volunteering into a concrete learning and career tool, especially for young people.

Emerging as a sub-program of Breza and later becoming institutionalized, Dječji Kreativni Centar "DOKKICA", operating in Osijek, is one of the prominent civil society models in Croatia in the field of child and family welfare. Initiated in 2011 as a prevention program of the Breza Youth Association, the initiative quickly evolved into an inclusive and creative child-family center that responded to the need for a safe after-school space. The emergence of DOKKICA is rooted in structural gaps such as children being left unsupervised after school, limited social services for families, and the inability of the public system to fully respond to the developmental needs of disadvantaged children.

One of DOKKICA's most distinctive practices is the STEP program, implemented over three years. The program provides psychosocial support for at-risk children; approximately 30 children participate each term, and family- and child-based individual plans are implemented by two psychologists. Children referred by schools, social service centers, or families are supported through structured meetings and workshops focusing on emotional intelligence, social skills, screen time management, boundary setting, and parenting issues. Specialists work simultaneously with a maximum of 15-30 families and establish long-term support relationships for each family.

In Croatia, where peer bullying is widespread, the Be Cool (Peace in My Own Style) project, which aims to promote non-violent communication, is carried out in five-year cycles and reaches approximately 300 children each year. The peer educator model accelerates behavioral change within the community by enabling children to take active roles in their own classrooms. The book “My Emotional Diary,” developed by two psychologists, is also one of the pedagogical tools of this project.

DOKKICA's most nationally visible initiative is the “Father Matters” campaign, which emphasizes the fatherhood role. Awareness activities carried out with strong messages such as “Father is the law,” “This is my most important role,” and “Being a father is an art” have brought the emotional dimension of the father-child relationship to the forefront at a societal level. Visual materials presented in exhibitions have functioned as effective communication tools aimed at transforming perceptions of fatherhood. Although DOKKICA emerged specifically in Osijek, it constitutes a noteworthy reference in terms of developing child- and family-focused civil society models across the Balkans.

Another Osijek-based organization, Centar za Nestalu i Zlostavljanu Djecu (Osijek Centre for Missing and Exploited Children, CNZD), is a civil society organization that draws attention in the field of child protection, particularly with its holistic model for child protection in the digital age. Operating nationally with offices in Zagreb and Split, CNZD is supported by the Ministry of Social Services and is strengthened through EU funds and international partnerships. The organization's activities are carried out by an interdisciplinary team consisting of psychologists, social pedagogues, educators, counselors, and a criminologist specialized in digital crimes.

CNZD's most well-known service is the national hotline for missing children, which operates 24/7 in coordination with the police. It not only deals directly with missing cases but also provides psychological and counseling support to families throughout the process. As part of Croatia's Safer Internet Centre structure, the organization has developed strong expertise in online risks, cyberbullying, inappropriate content reporting, and internet literacy. Its Helpline/Hotline offers free support to children, parents, and adult users in cases of online violence, privacy violations, or bullying. Furthermore, through research conducted with the University of Zagreb, the effectiveness of digital safety programs is regularly measured, and a data-driven development approach is maintained. In addition, the organization operates a part-time support model for children with behavioral problems through the Legosi u Centru program. Within this program, children receive social skills training, communication support, sports, arts, and educational assistance in line with individual development plans, thereby preventing school dropout.

As part of deinstitutionalization policies that focus on supporting children without separating them from their families, CNZD operates part-time care centers for at-risk children and families referred by social services. In these centers, children participate in daily programs lasting 4–6 hours and receive psychological support, educational assistance, and social skills training. For families, a team consisting of a psychologist and a social worker conducts regular home visits, prepares development plans, provides counseling services, and, when necessary, redirects families to social service institutions.

Finally, as a result of Croatia’s volunteering structure, CNZD—similar to Udruga Breza—has more than 100 volunteers in addition to its professional team, the majority of whom are students of psychology, social work, and pedagogy. Volunteers participate in activities with children and young people under regular supervision. Volunteers are selected through online interviews, and a specialist staff member accompanies each activity to ensure a safe and professional working environment. Overall, CNZD offers a community-based model that combines the risks brought by the digital age with classical child protection issues within a holistic framework, continuously improves its programs through university-supported data collection and research, and touches both children and families. In this respect, it can be evaluated as an example of an organization striving to implement social inclusion effectively and sustainably across a broad spectrum, including the prevention of disappearance, neglect, and online abuse.

Another institution that stood out during the study visit in Croatia is The Center for Providing Services in the Community (Dugave), located in Zagreb and operating for approximately forty years. It is one of the most established and multi-layered intervention centers, particularly for children with behavioral problems. Operating under the Ministry of Social Services, the institution provides a holistic structure addressing different levels of the child protection system through both school-based prevention models and court-integrated mandatory programs.

Dugave’s work primarily targets children aged 7–18 experiencing behavioral difficulties; however, support can be extended up to the age of 21 when necessary. The interdisciplinary team—consisting of social pedagogues, psychologists, social workers, and nurses—adopts an intervention approach that addresses the child not only through individual behaviors but also in relation to family, school, and the legal system. Dugave’s approach is built upon an intervention chain that intensifies as the level of risk increases. At the first stage are main building programs that include child assessment, working with the family, and close cooperation with schools. Children

participate in a four-month, full-time weekday program, and their behavioral development is monitored through regular feedback from both school and family. The ability to refer children to other institutions when necessary stands out as a strong component of system flow. In addition, Dugave fills a significant gap in Croatia by operating an initial reception unit that provides emergency shelter and temporary care. This unit offers a 24/7 accessible safe space for children who have run away from home, lack parental support, or are left alone during migration processes. Although theoretically designed for short-term stays, in practice it has turned into a response to long-term needs. Compared to the very limited capacity of “emergency support centers” in Türkiye, this practice presents a more systematic and permanent model.

However, one of Dugave’s most striking good practices is its strong operational link with the child justice system. The Discipline Center and Temporary Measure Center, implemented on a legal basis, provide an intervention for children in conflict with the law lasting from 8 days to 3 months, based on intensive daily routines and behavior-regulating programs. The aim is to reduce the risk of harm both to society and to the child themselves. In programs structured as part of the judicial process, the purpose is not punishment but behavioral change. Until court proceedings are concluded, children are taken into care in these centers instead of being sent to prison or correctional facilities. Positive developments in children’s behavior and attitudes are both supported and reported to the court every two months, allowing the intervention to have a direct impact on judicial decisions. Prioritizing a rehabilitative rather than punitive approach, this structure presents a contemporary child justice model and has been developed as an alternative to institutional prisons, also reducing stigmatization.

One of the institution’s strengths is that it conducts preventive work not only with high-risk groups but also with children showing behavioral or learning difficulties. The after-school program implemented in 20 primary schools in Zagreb provides children with study skills, self-confidence, social life experience, and opportunities for cultural participation. This socially pedagogical approach represents an expanded protective system that does not limit child development solely to risk intervention. In Türkiye, similar models are implemented on a limited scale through civil society or municipalities, whereas Dugave offers a more systematic and publicly supported integration.

Dugave's volunteer system also benefits from the positive effects of Croatia's legal regulations on volunteering. The offering of volunteering as an elective course at universities and the opportunity for students to complete a one-week practicum or a three-week internship at Dugave both ensure a regular volunteer flow to the institution and contribute to the professional development of young professionals. This structure creates a strong contrast with the legal uncertainties in Türkiye that make it difficult, particularly for social work and psychology students, to be involved voluntarily in working with at-risk groups. At Dugave, volunteers strengthen the institution's social content by organizing workshops, social activities, and sports events.

In summary, the Croatian example presents a strong community-based approach that simultaneously addresses children's right to be in a safe environment, the support of families, and social participation. This structure—consisting of after-school support, parental education, mental health workshops, inclusive workshops, and social awareness projects—offers both a complementary function to public services and a solution sensitive to local needs. Although these NGOs in Croatia have emerged locally and region-specifically, they constitute noteworthy references for the development of child- and family-focused civil society models.

4. TURKEY-EU COMPARISON AND RECOMMENDATIONS IN SOCIAL INCLUSION AND CHILDREN'S ACCESS TO EDUCATION

In Türkiye, there is a strong legal framework and multi-actor implementation examples in the field of social inclusion and children's access to education. However, collected data and prepared reports indicate that this framework is not reflected in the field in a consistent and inclusive manner.

According to Eurostat's 2023 comparative social protection data, while social protection expenditures correspond to 26.7% of GDP on average in the EU, this rate is around 10.1% in Türkiye. Social protection expenditures directed toward children and families amount to an average of 2.3% of GDP in the EU, whereas in Türkiye this rate is below 1% (Social Protection Statistics, TURKSTAT-Eurostat joint classification). One third of children aged 0-17 in Türkiye are still at risk of material deprivation (TURKSTAT, 2024 data). This rate in Türkiye is approximately twice the European average. Significant inequalities also exist within Türkiye itself. Data from the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) and UNICEF reveal that participation rates in pre-school education in eastern and southeastern provinces differ by up to 30% compared to western regions. Türkiye is responsible for the right to education of more than one million refugee

children; however, according to UNICEF's 2023 data, approximately one third of these children still remain outside formal education. Internet access in rural areas is still below 70% (TURKSTAT, 2023).

These data show that despite the protective and preventive framework of social policies in Türkiye, child welfare remains behind the European average. Based on interviews with NGOs and observed practices regarding social inclusion applications in Romania, Italy, and Croatia, and when these observations are evaluated together with EU comparative data, it is seen that although Türkiye has established a strong legal foundation in the field of social inclusion, it needs capacity strengthening in the following areas in order to approach EU standards in practice:

Strengthening Local-Based Social Service Capacity

In order to increase the implementation quality of social services in Türkiye, strengthening local-based social service capacity may be an important step. In EU countries, a large portion of social services are carried out through partnerships among local governments, NGOs, and cooperatives. In particular, Italy's social cooperative model (Type A providing social care and Type B providing sheltered employment) presents a good practice area that can be directly adapted to Türkiye. Within this scope, it may be recommended to increase the institutional capacity of social service units within municipalities, to develop a permanent legislative framework for joint projects between local administrations and NGOs, and to establish a separate legal status or incentive mechanism for social cooperatives in Türkiye.

Standardization of Volunteering Mechanisms

In order to make volunteering mechanisms in social services safe and effective, the determination of standards would be beneficial. The examples of Croatia and Romania show that volunteer work needs to be supported by a legal framework, training, supervision, and a registration system. The establishment of national standards and an accreditation system in Türkiye for volunteers working with children should be considered. Because volunteering can only make a real contribution in the field of child protection when it is placed within a professional framework. In particular, the legal framework has a protective function for both volunteers and institutions. In addition to legal regulation, linking volunteering activities to academic credit or competency certificates at universities, transforming

volunteer work in NGOs into internship opportunities, and preparing a jointly produced and nationally accepted ethical and professional guideline for the volunteer processes of NGOs working with vulnerable groups—especially children—are among the measures that would increase the quality of volunteer work. In the Italian examples, it is observed that NGOs working with vulnerable groups often prefer not to conduct activities with volunteers despite existing legal regulations. Because one of the elements determining the quality of services for vulnerable groups is professionalism, and the other is continuity of service. When a volunteer who has developed a relationship with vulnerable individuals cannot ensure continuity, both the process is disrupted and individuals may be negatively affected. Therefore, while infrastructure should be prepared through legal regulations and ethical-professional guidelines that protect both the volunteer and the institution-service, volunteering policies should also be developed with a holistic approach that motivates volunteers and is designed together with various gains such as training, supervision, and internships.

Dissemination of Holistic Support Models in Children's Access to Education

While supporting children's access to education, it should be accepted that educational support and psychosocial support are inseparable. In this context, strengthening school dropout risk monitoring systems and establishing a joint database between the Ministry of National Education and the Ministry of Family and Social Services may be recommended. In rural regions, it would be beneficial to disseminate practices similar to the “teleconference-based family support” currently implemented by KODA in Türkiye and to expand safe after-school centers similar to the DOKKICA model in Croatia in cooperation with municipalities.

When comparing the practices examined in different countries in this report with Türkiye, differences in resources, scale, population, and geographical development should be taken into account. Nevertheless, in the field of social inclusion, it is observed that multi-component models yield more effective results. Instead of programs based on meeting children's needs through a single institution or a single intervention, the dissemination of programs that include collaborations—such as the joint programs of the Ministry of Justice, Ministry of National Education, and Civil Society implemented by Dugave in Zagreb—would be more beneficial. The impact of Dugave's collaborations with the Ministry of Justice in preventing and reducing delinquency, similarly the effect of MondoDonna's integrated approach—containing child-specific language support, homework follow-ups, and one-to-one pedagogical work—in reducing learning losses, demonstrate the usefulness of multi-dimensional collaborations at every scale.

Transition to Investment-Based Policies in Combating Child Poverty

In combating child poverty, transitioning from the distribution of social aid to investment-based policies is important in light of EU practices. In the EU, early childhood education, regional school supports, and income transfer programs come to the forefront in this struggle. Within this scope, restructuring existing social assistance to be child-focused and increasing the investment allocated to early childhood education should be considered. Additionally, in disadvantaged regions, the provision of services by social service units and schools as integrated centers is among the inferences obtained from EU examples.

Dissemination of Digital Social Inclusion Programs

Considering the risks brought by the digital age, the dissemination of digital social inclusion programs is of importance. The CNZD model in Croatia offers a multi-layered structure in areas such as online risks, missing children, and digital security, and the absence of an equivalent structure in Türkiye is noteworthy. Within this scope, steps such as implementing digital risk monitoring and psychosocial support programs in schools in Türkiye and making digital literacy curricula for children compulsory may be evaluated.

CONCLUSION

In the EU, a significant portion of social inclusion practices are carried out through institutionalized NGO and cooperative models in partnership with local governments. As in the case of Italy, Type A and Type B social cooperatives produce both social services and employment together. Public-NGO collaborations are secured by legislation. Volunteering and social service standards are linked to national frameworks.

In Türkiye, although social inclusion practices are supported with significant contributions by NGOs, the service models of NGOs are not integrated into the public system but are complementary in nature. Public-civil society collaborations are mostly not institutionalized and remain project-based. There are no national standards for volunteering mechanisms. Although examples such as KODA, SosyalBen, and AÇEV demonstrate that effective models are possible in Türkiye, when compared with EU examples, a weaker ecosystem emerges in terms of structural continuity and local government partnership.

In conclusion, the practices observed in Romania, Italy, and Croatia stand out as applicable, socially strengthening, and sustainable good practice areas that can be implemented in Türkiye by both public institutions and NGOs. Within this concrete roadmap, approaches such as the dissemination of cooperative-based service models, a volunteering system placed within a legal framework, intervention structures that integrate school, family, and social services, child protection models compatible with the digital age, and the establishment of inclusive local social service centers are included.

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