



“Children Outside Prison” **COPE Summary Participation Report**

“Children Outside Prison”, the year-long project in which COPE participated with Türkiye Çocuklara Yeniden Özgürlük Vakfı (TCYOV, Youth Re-autonomy Foundation of Turkey), a COPE affiliate, came to a close in January. Founded in 1992, TCYOV is the largest independent non-governmental organization in Turkey working in the field of juvenile justice. Through its advocacy and fieldwork carried out by a team of professionals, TCYOV has changed the way children affected by parental imprisonment are perceived in Turkey, having stimulated and supported new thinking and new approaches to policy and practice for children of prisoners, and in highlighting the need for respect for European and international standards.

Just as TCYOV initially went from working outside the prison to developing support initiatives inside the prison, using music as a therapeutic vehicle for young offenders, “Children Outside Prison” developed as an extension of its project “Children Inside Prison”. Currently being implemented in eight women’s prisons in various cities in Turkey and targeting the some 530 children aged 0 to 6 living with imprisoned mothers, the Children Inside Prison project aims to provide the logistical development of kindergartens and prison play rooms. In Turkey, separate units for mothers and babies do not exist in prisons; there are nurseries and playrooms. The nurseries and playrooms have facilities, including toys, for children, but toys are banned from the dormitories where children reside with their mothers. Children do not have their own beds but share beds with their mothers. Children aged 3¹ to 6 may go to prison kindergartens.

¹ Since January 2017, children aged 2 may be granted access to the kindergarten at Bakirkoy Prison if they fulfill certain conditions.

The Adalet School at Bakirkoy Prison is being showcased as a good practice model for the systems model being developed by TCYOV. The kindergarten at Bakirkoy is warm and inviting, with its child-friendly layout and facilities that structure children's lives, surround them in an enriching world alternative to that found inside the prison, and ground them to that world. Designed with intention and purpose, the space supports the wellbeing and learning of children, stimulates their imagination and beckons them to engage with the space and with one another. The rooms are colourful, clear, light and open and the energy vibrant; prison bar decals on the windows have been refashioned into perches for birds, the dynamic architectural design is uplifting, fostering play. TCYOV has introduced a vital philosophical underpinning, a foundational framework, an intentional structure, reflecting care and support for children. Everything is geared to acknowledge and respect the child and to cultivate respect, for them to feel safe and "at home" as they open their minds to learning and fulfilling their potential. Some children face certain challenges in integrating the space and additional support services are available for those needing it. Various activities reinforce the notion of identity and responsibility, to counter the anonymity of the prison world they inhabit. Everyday pursuits such as baking and cooking are coupled with a more traditional learning curriculum featuring subjects ranging from anatomy to math. Adalet School at Bakirkoy Prison is recognized as a model in TCYOV's pursuit of additional kindergartens.

During the "Children Inside Prison" project, imprisoned mothers expressed concern over their children from whom they are separated; TCYOV responded by going beyond the project's original defined scope and developed the "Children Outside Prison" initiative, to explore the situation for children separated from a parent in prison, estimated to be 245,000 in number² [The latter is a conservative estimate, based on a prisoner parent rate of 1.3 offspring per prisoner established in France by the national institute of statistics; TCYOV estimates for the number of children separated from an imprisoned parent in Turkey are significantly higher] and to work to develop and implement support systems for children of prisoners. The "Children Outside Prison" project kicked off with a learning exchange highlighting good practice for children of prisoners in France, Belgium and Italy.

Both "Children Inside Prison" and "Children Outside Prison" emphasized that children affected by parental incarceration should receive public attention; that violations of their

² Children of Prisoners Europe. Statistic based on a prisoner parent rate of 1.3 offspring per prisoner established by INSEE in France during a national census in which 1,700 male offenders were included, using data from the [World Prison Brief](#).

rights should be mitigated through advocacy and that NGOs and other related institutions should cooperate with one another for these children both inside and outside prison. The challenges that exist to establishing these kinds of efforts and partnerships were highlighted at the closure meeting organized in January 2017 for the “Children Outside Prison” project, featuring cross-sectoral delegates, and national and European partners, including COPE founder Alain Bouregba and COPE Director Liz Ayre. The tools developed over the course of the project, including a good practice document on parental incarceration and information pamphlets for imprisoned mothers/children and for prison staff, were launched at the conference. The “Children Outside Prison” project was co-financed by the European Union and the Republic of Turkey as a part of the former’s Civil Society Dialogue program. TCYOV and COPE are working to disseminate the results of the “Children Outside Prison” project across Europe and internationally. The Turkish edition of the COPE Network publication “Children with Imprisoned Parents: European Perspectives” will help disseminate and implement good practice initiatives to prisons in Turkey, benefiting children and imprisoned parents nationwide. The launch of the book in Turkish and TCYOV’s role in its dissemination strengthens the organisation’s professional grounding in its work to advance children’s rights in Turkey.

The pilot project at the Bakirkoy kindergarten also provides a vehicle for developing holistic support systems for children and their imprisoned parents. In addition to providing support and guidance for children, the project has great potential for bringing together imprisoned mothers and their children, and for them to engage in activities that satisfy the above requirements—allowing the mother to show the child how cookies are made, making a cake and proudly giving it to the child; providing support and guidance for the mother in terms of child development and the challenges of raising a child within the restricted prison context; allowing for intimate moments between the mother and child in a private setting—to counter the lack of opportunities for intimacy and privacy at Bakirkoy. In addition to supporting the child, the Adalet School at Bakirkoy could be used as a resource for reinforcing parental agency—through hands-on activities between mothers and children, by providing space for mother-child intimacy, and by serving as a therapeutic space for counseling of parents on child developmental and other issues. The latter could be combined with prison-based crafts workshops where mothers create transitional objects for their children while informal discussions take place around these developmental issues and concerns by a trained staff person, ideally a prison officer to ensure sustainability. In this way, when the school door shuts behind the child, the mothers continue to provide guidance, structure and support and sustain what the child has learned and acquired at the school. The

“transitional objects” created by parent could be toys, one way of circumventing the general ban on toys for children in the dormitories. In short, the schools have great potential as resources for strengthening the child-parent bond. As it currently stands, the mothers are largely absent from the Adalet School at Bakirkoy.

TCYOV, supported by the Children of Prisoners Europe network, is well positioned to provide guidance on how fundamental principles enshrined in international and regional human rights and humanitarian law instruments for women and their children residing in prisons in Turkey, and separated from an imprisoned parent, can be translated into concrete actions.