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Map4FosterCare 

# MAP4Fostercare

## NATIONAL REPORT



**PUHU Research & Consultancy**

**Türkiye**



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## 1. Introduction

The MAP4Fcare project is an EU-funded initiative aimed at improving the foster care system by addressing the needs and experiences of foster parents, children, and other stakeholders involved in the process. The project seeks to enhance support and training provided to foster parents, ensuring better outcomes for foster children across different cultural and institutional contexts within the EU.

The main objectives of the MAP4Fcare project are:

1. To review and assess the current state of foster care systems in participating countries.
2. To identify the needs and challenges faced by foster parents, children, and professionals involved in foster care.
3. To develop and implement improved training programs and support mechanisms for foster parents.
4. To foster collaboration and knowledge exchange among EU countries to enhance the overall quality of foster care services.

Work Package 2 (WP2) is a critical component of the MAP4Fcare project, focusing on the enhancement of adult education through the development of inclusive educational content for foster parents. WP2 aims to align with the overarching objectives of the project, which include creating upskilling pathways and improving accessibility to adult education. This work package seeks to provide qualitative data on foster care practices, contributing to guidelines and training for foster care parents and professionals. Additionally, it aims to enhance current training programs and promote experience exchange among parents.

The key aims of WP2, as outlined in the project indicators, are:

1. To demonstrate qualitative data on the parental aspect of foster care practices
2. To develop and evaluate educational content for foster parents
3. To contribute to adult education
4. To support current training programs.

The insights gained from WP2 will inform the development of tailored training programs and support mechanisms for foster parents, ultimately contributing to the overall objectives of the MAP4Fcare project. By ensuring that the data collection instruments are robust, culturally sensitive, and relevant, WP2 lays the foundation for meaningful and actionable findings that can improve foster care practices across the EU.



## 2. Foster Care Practices in Türkiye

### 2.1. Overview of Foster Care System

The foster care system in Türkiye was first implemented in 1961. Despite the establishment of a legal and administrative infrastructure, the number of children placed in foster care did not see significant growth for many years. One of the reasons for this stagnation is the perception of foster care as a stepping stone to adoption, leading families to prefer adoption over becoming foster parents (Karatay, 2017). From the initiation of the foster care program in 1961 until the establishment of the Social Services and Child Protection Agency (Sosyal Hizmetler ve Çocuk Esirgeme Kurumu - SHÇEK) in 1983, only around 1,000 children had been placed with foster families. Even after SHÇEK's formation, institutional care remained the predominant form of child protection. Consequently, it can be said that SHÇEK, despite being created to unify social services under one roof, was not successful in developing and expanding the foster care model. There has been a particular emphasis on the need to change societal perceptions of foster care and to increase the number of foster families, promoting it as a professional service model (Karatay, 2017).<sup>1</sup>

In 2011, following the establishment of the Ministry of Family and Social Policies, there was a noticeable increase in the number of foster families. The Ministry's efforts to encourage foster parenting contributed to this rise. Indeed, the number of foster families increased from 1,190 in 2011 to 5,967 in 2019. According to the General Directorate of Child Services within the Ministry of Family, Labor, and Social Services, by the end of 2021, there were 13,302 children under institutional care, while 8,459 children were being cared for by foster families (AÇSHB, 2021).<sup>2</sup> As part of Türkiye's social policy objectives, it is expected that involving private sector actors and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the provision of foster care services will contribute positively to the development of this system (Dal & Akbaş, 2020)<sup>3</sup>.

### 2.2. Types of Foster Care

In Türkiye, the foster care system is categorized into four main types, each serving different needs and circumstances for children in care (Resmi Gazete, 2012)<sup>4</sup>:

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<sup>1</sup> Karatay, A. (2017). Türkiye'de koruyucu aile: Kökenleri, gelişimi ve bugünü. *Üsküdar Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, 0(5), 389-427.

<sup>2</sup> Aile, Çalışma ve Sosyal Hizmetler Bakanlığı (AÇSHB). (2021). Kurumsal istatistiklerimiz: <https://www.aile.gov.tr/media/108736/kurumsal-istatistikler.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Dal, V., & Akbaş, E. (2020). Koruyucu aile hizmetinde sivil toplum örgütlerinin rolü. *Türkiye Sosyal Araştırmalar Dergisi*, 24(3), 523-546.

<sup>4</sup> T.C. Resmi Gazete. (2012). Koruyucu Aile Yönetmeliği. Resmi Gazete tarihi ve sayısı: 14.12.2012, 28497. <https://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2012/12/20121214.pdf>



- 1. Kinship or Close Environment Foster Care Model:** This type of foster care involves relatives or individuals from the child's immediate circle, such as family friends, neighbors, or caregivers, who are not legal guardians or custodians. These caregivers provide care based on pre-existing relationships or family ties. Although not mandatory, it is recommended that caregivers in this model participate in basic parenting education to enhance their communication skills and relationship with the child.
- 2. Long-term Foster Care Model:** In this arrangement, children who are unable to return to their biological families in the short term or cannot be permanently placed with their families are cared for by individuals or families. Like the kinship model, it is beneficial for caregivers to undergo basic parenting and foster care training to better support the child's upbringing in a non-biological family environment.
- 3. Temporary (Emergency) Foster Care Model:** Temporary foster care is designed for children who require immediate protection or do not yet have a finalized care plan. These children are placed in the care of trained individuals or families for a brief period, ranging from a few days to a maximum of one month. The caregivers in this model have often undergone specialized training to provide professional-level care during this emergency phase.
- 4. Specialized Foster Care Model:** This model focuses on children with special needs or those facing significant challenges. It involves caregivers with a higher level of training or relevant professional qualifications, such as a university degree or specialized education. These foster families are equipped to handle the particular needs of children requiring more intensive support.

These models are differentiated based on the relationship with the child, the expected duration of care, the training level of the caregivers, and the specific needs of the children. The diversity in these foster care arrangements allows the system to address the varying circumstances and needs of children requiring protection.

## 2.3. Foster Parent Recruitment

### Eligibility Criteria<sup>5</sup>

In Türkiye, individuals wishing to become foster parents must meet specific legal and administrative requirements under the Foster Care Regulation. Whether married or single, prospective foster parents can apply if they meet the following criteria:

- Turkish citizenship
- Permanent residence in Türkiye
- Aged between 25 and 65
- Minimum education level of primary school graduation
- Regular income
- Not the biological parents or legal guardians of the child

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.aile.gov.tr/sss/cocuk-hizmetleri-genel-mudurlugu/koruyucu-aile-hizmeti/>



Prospective foster parents are required to submit the following:

- Certified copy of the diploma or proof of educational status
- Certified documents proving employment, income, and social security status
- Criminal record clearance
- Health report confirming no physical disabilities, mental illnesses, or contagious diseases (for the foster parent and any cohabitants)

### **Foster Parent Training Programs Provided by the Ministry of Family and Social Services<sup>6</sup>**

In Türkiye, the Ministry of Family and Social Services provides a structured training program for both prospective and current foster parents to enhance their understanding of foster care responsibilities, foster collaboration with the institution, and improve their caregiving skills. The foster parent training is divided into two key packages: **the First-Level Training Package** and **the Second-Level Training Package**, each designed to address different aspects of foster care depending on the specific needs and responsibilities of the foster families.

#### *First-Level Training Package*

The first-level training is aimed at all foster parents and is designed to provide foundational knowledge about the foster care system and the psycho-social needs of children in care. This training focuses on ensuring that foster parents understand their responsibilities and can support the healthy development of the children they care for. It includes 11 modules:

- Introduction (Merhaba)
- Readiness (Hazırım)
- Building Connections (Birlikteyiz)
- Attachment and Development (Bağlanma ve Gelişim)
- Life Structure (Yaşam Düzeni)
- Skill Development (Beceri Kazanma)
- Trauma and Healing (Travma ve İyileşme)
- Adolescence (Ergenlik)
- Understanding and Approaching Addiction (Bağımlılığı Anlama ve Yaklaşım)
- Healthy Transitions (Sağlıklı Geçişler)
- Empowerment and Coping with Stress (Güçlenme ve Stresle Başa Çıkma)

#### *Second-Level Training Package*

The second-level training is specifically designed for foster parents in specialized or temporary foster care arrangements. These families deal with children who may have more complex needs or face unique challenges. The second-level training consists of three advanced modules:

- Children in Conflict with the Law (Suça Sürüklenen Çocuklar)
- Victims of Crime (Suç Mağduru Çocuklar)
- Children with Special Needs (Özel Gereksinimli Çocuklar)

<sup>6</sup> <https://aile.gov.tr/koruyucuaille/egitimler/>



For **Kinship** and **Long-term Foster Care**, basic parenting courses are optional but recommended to improve child-caregiver communication. For **Temporary** and **Specialized Foster Care**, both Level 1 and Level 2 Foster Parent Training are mandatory, ensuring foster parents are equipped to care for children with special needs or who require immediate protection.

While these training programs are organized regularly by the provincial directorates under the Ministry, many foster parents report difficulties in accessing them. Interviews with foster parents indicate that most have not received any formal training, suggesting a gap in the availability and reach of these education programs. Additionally, there are no comprehensive reports assessing the quality or effectiveness of the training provided, raising concerns about its consistency and impact.

### *Support for Foster Parents*

The Turkish Ministry of Family and Social Services provides various support mechanisms to foster parents:

- 1. Monthly Allowances:** Foster parents receive a monthly stipend for each child to cover the child's care, education, and upbringing costs. The stipend is increased by 50% for children with special needs or disabilities.
- 2. Education Support:** At the beginning of each academic year, foster parents receive a stipend three times the monthly amount to cover education-related expenses.
- 3. Clothing Allowance:** Twice a year, foster parents receive an additional clothing allowance, equivalent to double the monthly stipend.
- 4. Healthcare Coverage:** All medical expenses for foster children are covered under the Social Insurance and General Health Insurance Law.
- 5. Pocket Money:** Children receive a monthly allowance, adjusted based on their age and education level.
- 6. Vocational Training Support:** Children can attend vocational training courses offered by public or private institutions. If no free quota is available, the Ministry covers the costs, including course fees, summer school, exam, and transportation expenses.
- 7. Extended Care for Adult Foster Children:** Children who reach adulthood but are still pursuing education may continue to receive protection, with their needs being met by extending the care order.
- 8. Social Security Support:** If one of the foster parents (without social security) is unemployed or reliant on a spouse or relative, the Ministry covers their voluntary insurance premiums based on the minimum wage, provided they submit proof of payment.

Besides governmental support, several NGOs are operating to support foster parents.



- KOREV
- Çanakkale Koruyucu Aile ve Evlat Edinme Derneği (ÇAKEV)
- Denizli Koruyucu Aile Derneği
- Hayat Sende Gençlik Akademisi Derneği (Hayat Sende)
- İstanbul Koruyucu Aile Derneği (ISTKAD)
- KALBEN Korunma Altında Yetişen Gençler ve Koruyucu Aile Derneği (KALBEN Derneği)

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1. Procedure

The methodology for this work package includes a combination of online questionnaires, in-depth interviews, and group discussion interviews ([for a complete list of questions, please refer to the annex](#)). The following outlines the process for each data collection method:

#### Online Questionnaires

As the leader of the WP2, PUHU prepared a collection of questions in English for the primary phase. These questionnaires were reviewed, revised, and adjusted by partners to ensure they were relevant to the target groups, including professionals, volunteers, and foster parents. Partners translated the questionnaires and consent forms into their national languages. They also discussed and implemented necessary cultural and institutional adaptations. After finalizing the questionnaires, partners engaged their associated partners, relevant professionals, and foster parents to collect responses. A pilot test was conducted to ensure the effectiveness of the questionnaires, with a minimum of 15 responses collected for initial testing.

#### In-depth Interviews

Each partner conducted in-depth interviews with 5 participants, either online or in-person, to gain a comprehensive understanding of their experiences. Pilot testing was recommended to evaluate the questionnaires and refine the interview procedure. Interviews were conducted following a structured format to ensure consistency. The focus was on gathering detailed insights into the foster care process from the participants' perspectives.

#### Group Discussion Interviews

Partners conducted group discussion interviews with a minimum of 3 participants. Ideally, these participants included the same individuals who participated in the in-depth interviews to maintain consistency and depth of understanding. As the WP leader PUHU provided a guideline to ensure the quality and ethical approach essential for ethnographic interviews. These group discussions were audio-recorded to document the process and ensure no





significant information was lost. The recordings helped in capturing the nuances of the discussions for a thorough analysis.

## 3.2. Participant Demographics

### Online Questionnaires

The demographic profile of the participants includes a diverse range of backgrounds and experiences. The majority are female (27), with a smaller group of male participants (7). Birthplaces are varied, with the highest numbers from Ankara (7), İstanbul (7), and Bursa (3). Age-wise, the participants range from 30 to 66 years old, with the largest groups being in the 30-39 and 40-49 age ranges. Educationally, most have completed a bachelor's degree (19), followed by high school (6), associate degrees (2), master's degrees (3), and doctoral degrees (2).

Occupationally, the participants are mostly employed in various fields (14), with a significant number retired (10), some self-employed or freelance (4), and a few homemakers (6). Employment status reflects a predominance of currently working individuals (17), while others are retired (10) or homemakers (6). In terms of marital status, the majority are married (28), with a smaller number being single (6).

Participants have a range of children, with the majority having 1 or 2 children (16). The ages of these children vary, with notable groups in the 6-10 and 11-15 age ranges. The gender distribution of children shows a balance between males (20) and females (18), with some households having both genders (7).

Household composition reveals that most participants share their home with a partner or spouse (24) and children (22), while some live alone (2) or with other relatives (3). The type of foster care provided is mostly short-term (15), with some long-term (11) and a few specialized placements (3). The duration of foster parenting experience ranges widely, with some participants having less than a year of experience, while others have been involved for over 10 years (12).

Other caregivers involved in the child's care predominantly include spouses or partners (24), family members (6), and professional caregivers (4), with a few managing care alone (2).

### Focus Group

The focus group meeting involved six participants with diverse experiences in foster care. **Participant 1** has been a foster parent for the past three years and has two daughters aged 8 and 12. They began their foster care journey with one child and have been fostering another child for the past two years. **Participant 2**, who does not have biological children, has three daughters aged 31, 33, and 35. They started their role as a foster parent in 2000, with the children being adopted after they turned 18. About three years ago, these children were officially adopted. **Participant 3** has both an adopted child, aged 14, and a biological child, aged 27. Their foster care experience lasted approximately six months, while they have lived



with their biological children for 20 years. **Participant 4** has a biological son aged 31, another biological son aged 15, and an adopted daughter aged 21, practicing temporary foster care. **Participant 5**, aged 46, has been fostering a 7-year-old child for five years, including three years and three months of voluntary foster care. Finally, **Participant 6** has two daughters with special needs, aged 26 and 18, with the protective decision for the elder daughter being lifted in December. Participant 6 is involved in foster care under a special status, reflecting their unique experience.

## Interviews

The interviews conducted for this research involved a diverse group of participants, each with unique backgrounds and experiences in foster care. The first participant, a 61-year-old retired telecommunications engineer from Istanbul, has been actively involved in foster care for several years. She and her spouse have cared for two children, one of whom joined the family at the age of 10 and remained for 15 years, while the other has been with them for the past four months. Her extensive experience includes both voluntary and official foster care models.

The second participant is a 50-year-old journalist from Eskişehir with a background in Communication. She has been a single foster parent since May 2010, caring for a 10-year-old daughter. She lives with her daughter, father, sister, and two nephews, following the recent passing of her mother. The third participant, a 54-year-old journalist originally from Switzerland, has been a continuous foster parent for 11 years. She lives alone with her dog and manages all aspects of care for her 10-12-year-old foster daughter independently.

The fourth participant, aged 42, resides in Zonguldak and has been a continuous foster parent for six years. With dual university degrees and experience as an English teacher, she lives alone with her 9-year-old son. The fifth participant, born in 1963 in Akşehir, Konya, is a retired Air Force officer who transitioned to foster care in 2010. He previously worked in an electrical contracting firm and has been a foster parent since then. Lastly, the sixth participant, born in 1954 and residing in Istanbul, provides foster care details that remain unspecified but form a critical part of the diverse experiences captured in this research. Each participant's background and foster care experience contribute valuable insights into the complexities and challenges faced in the field.

## 4. Findings and Analysis

### 4.1. Application Process

#### 4.1.1. Challenges:

The findings reveal significant themes surrounding the foster parenting application and admission process, motivations for fostering, challenges faced, support systems, and the need for comprehensive training and preparation.



## **Foster Parenting Application and Admission Process**

The foster parenting application and admission process is multifaceted, encompassing several key stages that introduce various challenges. The online questionnaire revealed that participants generally begin by submitting applications to relevant institutions or social services, a step requiring extensive paperwork such as health reports and employment records. Some utilized e-government services, while others approached institutions directly, with the collection and preparation of documents demanding considerable time and effort.

Psychological assessments and interviews constitute a crucial aspect of the process, designed to evaluate applicants' suitability for fostering. These assessments often involve multiple steps and can be time-consuming, adding to the overall length of the process. After completing applications and assessments, the subsequent document review and approval phase can vary in duration, with some participants experiencing swift approvals while others face extended waiting periods due to the thorough examination of backgrounds and home environments.

Home visits are integral to evaluating the suitability of the living environment for the child. These visits ensure compliance with safety and comfort standards, although delays can arise due to scheduling issues. Following approval, the matching process introduces participants to potential children, which may take several months, often involving multiple interactions to build a connection. Participants described initial meetings as pivotal, sometimes likening the experience to "love at first sight," solidifying their decision to proceed with the match.

Throughout this process, participants encountered challenges such as long waiting times exacerbated by external factors like the pandemic. Emotional stress and anxiety over uncertain timelines were significant, alongside the difficulties of navigating the complexities of the application process and adapting to unexpected changes or requirements. Upon matching, participants prepared their homes and families for the child's arrival, implementing strategies to ease adaptation and integration.

## **Motivations to Foster**

Motivations behind fostering vary widely, shaped by personal experiences. Insights from focus group discussions indicate that individuals often feel a profound commitment to supporting children in need. For example, motivations may stem from an educational background and a belief in the transformative power of education, or personal trauma, such as childhood experiences of instability that inspire a desire to provide safety and security. Some individuals experience a significant evolution in their sense of responsibility toward fostering, realizing its importance as a societal role during formative years.

Others may enter fostering due to community influence, shifting from intentions of adoption to recognizing the immediate need for family placements for children. The dynamic nature of motivations suggests that constructive conversations with social workers can help prospective foster parents adjust their initial goals, illustrating the importance of thorough communication in fostering journeys.

## Challenges Faced

The narratives shared by participants highlight various challenges faced during the fostering process. Interviews reveal that emotional crises among children can require immediate intervention and long-term support strategies, emphasizing the hands-on approach necessary to navigate trauma complexities. Delays in the application process due to external circumstances often lead to frustration, requiring resilience from foster parents. Initial concerns regarding children's developmental issues, particularly in cases involving autism, demand careful handling and proactive intervention, highlighting the need for collaboration with educators and therapists. Moreover, some individuals enter fostering with preconceived negative perceptions of the system, which can shift positively through engagement with social workers and the fostering process itself. This transformative journey underscores the emotional complexities and challenges inherent in foster parenting, necessitating patience, adaptability, and strong support networks.

## Support Systems

The significance of support systems emerged as a critical factor influencing fostering experiences. Focus group insights demonstrate that institutional support during the matching process is vital for facilitating smooth transitions and providing resources for educational needs. Previous volunteer experiences in children's homes enrich foster parents' understanding of the emotional and practical requirements of children in care, enabling them to navigate complexities more effectively.

Community and familial support are equally important, as evidenced by participants who benefited from connections with other foster parents and organizations, such as the Istanbul Foster Family Association. This communal network fosters practical advice and emotional encouragement, bolstering the motivation of foster parents during challenging times. The unexpected positive reactions from family members can also play a vital role in sustaining enthusiasm for the fostering journey.

## Training and Preparation Needs

A pressing need for comprehensive training and preparation for prospective foster parents is evident from the findings. Interviews indicate a consensus that pre-emptive training could equip families to face the multifaceted challenges of fostering, potentially reducing negative outcomes, such as children returning to institutional care. Interviewees recognize that fostering is a significant, lifelong commitment that necessitates extensive knowledge and skills, underscoring the importance of understanding the differences between adoption and foster care.

Training programs should encompass not only logistical aspects of caring for children but also trauma-informed care, communication strategies, and emotional resilience. This collective call for improved training resources highlights a shared understanding that effective fostering requires both dedication and a robust foundation of knowledge to meet the emotional and developmental needs of children in care.



Overall, these themes collectively illustrate the complexity of the foster parenting journey, emphasizing the importance of support systems, comprehensive training, and a clear understanding of the emotional and practical challenges faced by foster parents and the children in their care.

#### **4.1.2 Support Needs:**

##### **Psychological and Emotional Support**

The need for psychological and emotional support emerged as a significant theme across all data collection methods. The online questionnaire indicated that children with severe past traumas require ongoing psychological assistance, leading many participants to seek help from mental health professionals. Focus group discussions reinforced this, as participants shared their emotional turmoil, particularly during the early stages of fostering, due to a lack of clear information about children's histories. Interviews further illustrated this theme, with Interviewee 1 emphasizing the importance of tailored psychological interventions to cope with the emotional landscape of fostering, while Interviewee 2 highlighted the ongoing emotional strain and the inadequate financial support for psychological treatments.

##### **Operational and Institutional Support**

Operational and institutional support was another crucial theme identified through the various methods. In the online questionnaire, participants expressed a need for clearer information and guidance regarding the foster parenting process, highlighting difficulties with bureaucracy. The focus group echoed this, with participants calling for improved communication about application and matching processes, which could alleviate anxiety for prospective foster parents. Interviews provided further insights, as Interviewee 2 discussed the administrative challenges faced and the necessity for better advocacy within the system, while Interviewee 4 highlighted the role of social services in providing essential guidance.

##### **Financial Support and Resources**

Financial constraints emerged as a recurring theme among participants in the online questionnaire, with many noting the burden of medical and psychological treatment costs. The focus group revealed a significant gap in understanding financial support available to foster parents, leading to increased anxiety regarding their financial responsibilities. This theme was echoed in the interviews, where Interviewee 2 articulated the inadequacy of financial aid for covering psychological treatment expenses, and Interviewee 3 emphasized the need for resources to help navigate application costs.

##### **Training and Preparedness**

The theme of training and preparedness was prominently featured across all methods, highlighting the necessity for comprehensive training programs for prospective foster parents. The online questionnaire revealed a desire for more information about the attachment



process, while focus group discussions emphasized the importance of mandatory training to prepare parents for the challenges of fostering. Interviews reinforced this theme, with Interviewee 5 advocating for early training on attachment processes to prevent negative outcomes, and Interviewee 4 sharing struggles due to a lack of practical training in infant care tasks.

## **Community and Networking Support**

Community and networking support emerged as a vital theme, underscoring the importance of shared experiences in the fostering journey. The online questionnaire indicated that participants valued connections with others who have faced similar challenges, while focus group discussions highlighted the role of social media and associations in accessing information and support. Interviews further illustrated this theme, with Interviewee 5 sharing how community support empowered them to handle complexities more effectively, and Interviewee 3 acknowledging the crucial role of family support in addressing concerns during the fostering process.

## **4.2. Adjustment Process**

### **4.2.1 Experiences during the adjustment process with the child**

#### **Adjustment Challenges**

The process of adjusting to a child presents various challenges and positive experiences. Online Questionnaire findings indicate that many participants experienced difficulties during the first six months, with some contemplating ending the process. However, they ultimately established strong bonds through positive therapies and support, leading to successful adjustments. The past traumas experienced by the children made this process challenging, as building trust took time. Participants noted additional challenges, such as work-related stress, which impacted the adjustment process. Focus Group discussions highlighted that while adjusting to very young children was generally easier, habits from previous institutional settings complicated the adaptation process, particularly concerning group friendships, meal times, and sleep routines. Participants reported varying experiences; some found the process swift and smooth depending on the child's age, with enjoyable interactions during initial encounters positively affecting the adjustment.

#### **Parenting Experiences and Support Needs**

Participants shared insights on their parenting experiences and the support they required during the adaptation process. Interviews revealed that Interviewee 1 faced difficulties with their first child, attempting to resolve issues independently due to a lack of information about the child's learning difficulties. This gap in understanding initially prevented them from recognizing and addressing the problems. Once the challenges were identified, Interviewee 1 sought treatments but encountered inadequate support from official institutions. In contrast, for their second child, Interviewee 1 noted that different approaches were necessary based on



the child's age, and they highlighted the benefits of psychological support received from external sources during adaptation. Interviewee 2 described their child's transition to a new home, as characterized by confusion and discomfort. The parents engaged with the child to address these issues, which significantly helped the child feel at ease. The stress of missing old friends and adapting to a new environment prompted them to seek further assistance, eventually consulting a psychiatrist and arranging psychological support, which provided crucial guidance on attachment and behavioral strategies, facilitating the child's adaptation to their new home.

### **Importance of Legal and Educational Support**

Participants identified significant issues related to legal and educational processes during the adjustment phase. Online Questionnaire findings emphasized that inadequacies in these areas led to additional challenges, highlighting a perceived need for support and guidance. The psychological and emotional support needs of the children were also recognized as critical factors for a successful adjustment. Focus Group discussions reinforced the importance of addressing these issues, suggesting that improvements in legal and educational frameworks could enhance the overall adjustment experience for families. The findings from the Interviews echoed these sentiments, illustrating the struggles faced by parents in navigating these systems while attempting to support their children's needs.

#### **4.2.2 Support Issues:**

##### **Psychological Support Needs**

The necessity for psychological support emerges as a crucial theme for both parents and children in the foster care system. Many families emphasized the importance of this support, highlighting disparities based on financial resources. Families with limited means face significant challenges in accessing essential psychological assistance, which is vital for successful adaptation. Parents expressed that the emotional and psychological challenges they encountered often went unaddressed, and while some institutional support exists, it frequently falls short of their needs. Interviewees reported instances of emotional strain, underscoring the need for regular psychological support to manage ongoing stress, particularly given the psychological issues faced by both biological and foster children.

##### **Balancing Responsibilities**

Balancing responsibilities proved to be another significant challenge for parents, affecting their ability to manage the adjustment process effectively. Many participants indicated difficulties in reconciling work and family life, with time management and financial constraints complicating their efforts to provide adequate care and support. Focus group discussions revealed that parents often struggled to meet their own needs while simultaneously addressing those of their children, especially when integrating a new child into existing family dynamics. Interviewees noted that the demands of parenting required significant adaptation, particularly when transitioning from a fast-paced lifestyle to a slower pace of child-rearing.



## **Bureaucratic Navigation**

Navigating bureaucratic processes was highlighted as a notable difficulty by many participants, who indicated that communication with institutions and dealing with biological parents hindered their access to necessary support. This lack of guidance complicated the adjustment process for both parents and children. Focus group discussions revealed that parents experienced frustrations related to obtaining information about their children's educational and health needs, suggesting that improved communication from social services could significantly enhance their experiences. Several interviewees noted that managing relationships and conflicts among children also posed challenges, emphasizing the need for clearer guidance on integration and conflict resolution.

## **Community and Professional Support**

The importance of community and professional support emerged as a critical factor in fostering adaptation. Participants collectively noted that ongoing professional guidance, training, and respite opportunities could positively impact the adjustment process. They stressed the necessity for social services to improve their offerings to better assist families navigating the complexities of fostering. Many interviewees acknowledged the value of community resources, such as support groups, which provided platforms for sharing experiences, advice, and emotional support among foster parents. This sense of solidarity within the community was recognized as a key factor in enhancing the fostering experience and maintaining the mental health of parents.

## **Recommendations for Improvement**

Overall, the findings emphasize the necessity for better support systems to help parents navigate the adaptation process effectively. Recommendations include providing targeted professional guidance, specific training, and comprehensive social services to address the challenges faced by parents. By ensuring that parents receive adequate support, the adaptation process can be made more effective and sustainable, ultimately benefiting both parents and the children involved. Improving communication from social services and offering structured opportunities for respite care will also contribute to a healthier and more harmonious family environment during this critical transition.

# **4.3. Training and Support Process**

## **4.3.1. Training Details:**

### **Training Content and Structure:**

Across all methods, the structure and content of training were highlighted as key areas for improvement. In the online questionnaire, participants who received training appreciated its focus on psychological needs, trauma, and foster care processes but felt that more comprehensive information on interactions with biological families and trauma management was needed. Participants who did not receive formal training reported relying on personal





experiences, often finding institutional information insufficient and seeking more detailed content. Similarly, in the focus group, participants voiced concerns about the inadequacies of current training programs, noting that the content often lacked depth in addressing behavioral problems, family dynamics, and health management. They called for more proactive and relevant training to better equip foster parents. This sentiment was echoed in the interviews, where interviewees mentioned that training often focused on theoretical knowledge rather than practical application. They highlighted the lack of specific training plans and expressed a need for content tailored to real-life challenges faced by foster parents.

### **Impact of Training:**

The impact of training varied significantly depending on its availability and quality. In the online questionnaire, those who received training felt better prepared to manage children's psychological adjustment and trauma, while those without formal training developed personal coping strategies. The training was seen as a crucial factor in helping foster parents navigate the challenges of fostering. Focus group participants similarly discussed how insufficient training negatively impacted the adaptation process for both children and parents. They emphasized the need for training that improves parent-child interactions and supports the overall adaptation process. In the interviews, participants who had attended training acknowledged its usefulness but also pointed out its limitations, noting that a more comprehensive and systematic approach could significantly improve family dynamics and their ability to handle the psychological complexities of fostering.

### **Accessibility and Relevance of Training:**

The accessibility and relevance of training were recurring issues across all methods. According to the online questionnaire, training was often optional rather than mandatory, making it less accessible to all foster parents. This optionality was especially problematic for participants who did not attend the offered sessions and missed the chance for formal instruction. The focus group further emphasized accessibility challenges, with one of the participants noting that changes in Türkiye's education system have affected the implementation of training programs, making them difficult to access. Participants agreed that training needed to be mandatory to ensure that all foster parents received adequate preparation. In the interviews, one of the interviewees highlighted similar concerns, noting that training was often scheduled at inconvenient times, which made it difficult for working parents to attend. They suggested that training should be mandatory and offered at more flexible times to ensure accessibility for all foster parents.

### **Support Systems Beyond Training:**

Beyond formal training, participants across methods highlighted the importance of additional support systems. In the online questionnaire, participants who did not receive formal training sought support from associations and relied on self-education to navigate the foster care process. They noted the value of practical advice and peer-sharing to compensate for the lack of institutional training. The focus group echoed this need, with participants agreeing that fostering requires ongoing support, particularly psychological and practical support, which is



often missing from training programs. Similarly, the interviews revealed that foster parents frequently sought additional guidance from child psychologists and external resources to fill the gaps in their formal training. Interviewees stressed that self-education and peer networks played a vital role in addressing the emotional complexities of fostering, particularly when formal training was inadequate or inaccessible.

### **Recommendations for Improvement:**

Participants across all methods provided recommendations for improving training programs. In the online questionnaire, participants suggested that training should include more detailed information on relationships with biological families and trauma management, as well as practical advice tailored to the needs of foster parents. Focus group participants reinforced this by calling for more comprehensive, proactive, and relevant training content that addresses behavioral and health issues while improving communication skills. The interviews added further insights, with interviewees advocating for continuous and practical training that is responsive to the specific challenges faced by foster parents. They also recommended involving biological families in the training process to ensure a more holistic approach to fostering and better support for both parents and children.

These common themes underline the collective call for more accessible, comprehensive, and practical training programs, as well as the need for ongoing support systems to help foster parents successfully navigate the complexities of their roles.

#### **4.3.2. Community Experiences**

The responses from the online questionnaire reveal a diverse range of social interactions among foster parents. Some foster parents report meeting with other foster parents multiple times a year, especially through associations like Foster Family Associations and events at local art schools, where regular gatherings occur. Others mention only meeting once or twice a year during institutional or association events, often organized by provincial directorates. In contrast, some foster parents do not meet with others at all. Social media platforms, such as WhatsApp groups, facilitate more frequent interactions, allowing foster parents to share experiences and support each other despite face-to-face meetings being infrequent. Additionally, some foster parents maintain strong social connections within their family and friend circles, extending their networks through associations. While there are various opportunities for interaction, some foster parents express a need for more regular and comprehensive meetings to strengthen their social networks and support systems.

### **Content of Shared Experiences:**

Foster parents share a wide array of topics during their interactions, as highlighted in the online questionnaire responses. Many foster parents exchange personal experiences, emotions, and concerns related to child development and the challenges of fostering. A recurring theme is the anxiety about the conditions and frequency at which children are returned to their biological families. Furthermore, parents frequently share problems and solutions, focusing on coping strategies and institutional shortcomings, as well as legal and procedural information, which helps foster parents navigate health and legal challenges.



Educational and social interactions, including discussions about children's educational progress and relationships with teachers, are also common. Association meetings and social media platforms play a key role in facilitating these exchanges. However, some foster parents limit their sharing to a close circle of friends or refrain from sharing altogether due to personal preferences or difficulties in communicating with unfamiliar people.

### **Association and Community Activities:**

The interviews shed light on the growing presence of foster parent associations in Türkiye, which have expanded significantly since the first one was established in Denizli, according to one of the interviewees. These associations, along with meetings organized by the Ministry of Family, have increased opportunities for foster parents to meet and collaborate on initiatives such as temporary foster care models for children affected by natural disasters. One other interviewee emphasized the use of WhatsApp groups for communication among foster parents, where discussions about education, support, and official matters take place. Despite these opportunities, financial and organizational challenges often limit participation in such groups. Another interviewee also highlighted the importance of community events, such as annual breakfasts, in fostering connections and providing practical and emotional support for foster parents.

### **Challenges in Social Interactions and Support Systems:**

Challenges in social interactions and support systems were raised by several interviewees. One of them discussed the emotional and psychological difficulties that hinder active participation in community programs. Foster parents face stress related to crisis management and navigating institutional systems, highlighting the need for moral and spiritual support alongside practical training, such as scenario-based exercises to better prepare for real-life situations. One other interviewee added that respite care for foster parents and support for biological children in foster families are critical areas in need of improvement. Another interviewee, who initially engaged with other foster parents through social media and WhatsApp groups, opted out due to changing group dynamics, stressing the need for comprehensive training materials and public awareness campaigns to normalize foster care.

### **Recommendations for Improvement:**

The interviews offer several recommendations for improving the foster care system. Interviewees emphasized the need for more comprehensive training programs that go beyond basic caregiving skills. One of the interviewees suggested specialized training focused on trauma-informed care, behavioral management, and crisis intervention strategies to address the specific needs of foster children. Enhanced peer support networks and access to professional development resources were seen as essential for navigating the complexities of foster parenting. Additionally, interviewees called for improved communication and collaboration between foster parents and government officials to create a more supportive environment for fostering.



Overall, the findings from both the online questionnaire and interviews highlight a diverse but sometimes challenging landscape of social interactions and support systems within the foster care community in Türkiye. Foster parents benefit from various forms of social connection, yet there remains a strong demand for more structured support, specialized training, and improved collaboration across associations, institutions, and governmental bodies.

## 5. Additional Insights

### Support Systems:

Across all methods, the need for more structured support systems for foster parents emerged as a primary theme. Foster parents highlighted consistent communication and reliable resources as key elements. In the online questionnaires, participants raised concerns over frequent changes in social workers, pointing out that stability in support structures is critical for effective communication and addressing their concerns. This need for consistency was further echoed in the focus group, where participants emphasized practical ways to improve communication, particularly in family dynamics. The interviews also underscored the importance of support systems, with one interviewee stressing collaboration between foster and biological families as a way to ease the foster parents' burden, promoting better child well-being.

### Financial and Emotional Support:

Financial aid, especially concerning psychological services, was another prominent concern raised across the methods. In the online questionnaires, foster parents highlighted the insufficiency of financial support, particularly for psychological services such as therapy and counseling, which are crucial but underfunded. Participants in the focus group reinforced the need for emotional support for foster children and foster parents, requesting more practical resources to help meet the emotional needs of children. Interviewees also addressed these gaps in support systems, advocating for comprehensive policies that support both biological and foster families.

### Legal Processes and Transparency:

The legal processes involved in foster care, particularly those related to returning children to biological families, were a significant concern. In the **online questionnaire**, participants called for more transparent and rigorous guidelines to protect children from unsafe environments. This concern was echoed in **interviews**, where interviewees stressed the need for better collaboration with biological families and clearer legal guidelines to ensure the safety and well-being of children in foster care. The interviews also revealed the lack of adequate research on foster care practices and outcomes, pointing to gaps in data that hinder improvements in legal frameworks and policies.



### **Training and Educational Needs:**

Training emerged as a consistent and crucial theme across all methods. In the online questionnaires, foster parents expressed a need for more comprehensive training, including education on child psychology, trauma, legal procedures, and managing adolescents and special needs children. They emphasized the importance of making training practical and accessible. The focus group feedback reinforced this, particularly highlighting the need for better training on family communication strategies, emotional support, and crisis management. Participants suggested that real-life examples and scenarios be integrated into training to improve its practical application. Additionally, the interviews pointed to the necessity of extending training to biological families, ensuring that all parties involved in the foster care process are equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge.

### **Research and Data Collection:**

A recurring theme in the interviews was the need for more comprehensive research and data collection on foster care practices. Interviewees pointed to significant gaps in data, particularly in Türkiye, where there is a lack of statistics on foster children's adjustment processes, mental health, and long-term outcomes. They called for extensive surveys and research to address these gaps, which would inform policy development and improve the foster care system. This call for better research supports the findings from the other methods, where foster parents and focus group participants stressed the importance of having data-driven, well-informed training and support systems.

### **General Assessment:**

The consistent themes identified across the different methods of data collection—improved support systems, financial and emotional resources, legal transparency, training needs, and research gaps—highlight key areas that need to be addressed to enhance the foster care experience. By focusing on these areas, particularly through more accessible and specialized training, better collaboration between foster and biological families, and informed policy development through data collection, the foster care system can be improved for both foster parents and the children under their care.

## **6. Conclusion**

Since its establishment in 1961, Türkiye's foster care system has experienced substantial evolution, particularly with the formation of the Ministry of Family and Social Policies in 2011. This transformation is evident in the remarkable increase in foster families, which surged from 1,190 in 2011 to 8,459 by the end of 2021. This growth signifies a shift in societal perceptions of foster care, moving beyond the narrow view of it being solely linked to adoption. The system now encompasses various types of care, including kinship or close environment foster care, long-term foster care for children unable to return home, temporary (emergency) foster care for immediate protection, and specialized foster care catering to children with special needs.



Despite these advancements, the system still faces significant challenges. Eligibility criteria for prospective foster parents include Turkish citizenship, a minimum age of 25, and a stable income. While the Ministry offers structured training programs divided into two levels, many foster parents encounter obstacles in accessing these programs, revealing substantial gaps in training availability. Support mechanisms, such as monthly allowances, education stipends, clothing allowances, healthcare coverage, and vocational training for foster children, are essential; however, ongoing improvements are needed to enhance the accessibility and effectiveness of these resources.

Our study's demographic analysis indicates a diverse range of foster parents, predominantly female, with varied backgrounds and experiences. The findings from online questionnaires, focus groups, and interviews illustrate the complexities of the foster parenting application and admission process, highlighting key themes such as motivations, challenges, and the critical need for robust support systems and comprehensive training. Participants expressed that the application process, often characterized by extensive documentation and psychological assessments, can be emotionally taxing, particularly due to prolonged waiting times and the pressures associated with preparing homes for children.

Motivations to foster frequently stem from personal experiences and a strong commitment to supporting children in need. However, participants reported various challenges, including emotional crises among children, delays in the approval process, and concerns about developmental issues. These factors necessitate collaboration with professionals to provide the psychological and emotional support that foster children require. Additionally, operational support is essential, as participants highlighted the need for clearer guidance throughout the fostering journey to alleviate anxiety.

Financial constraints emerged as a prevalent concern, with many foster parents struggling to cover medical and psychological treatment costs. This underscores the need for comprehensive training programs that adequately prepare foster parents for the complexities of fostering. Participants emphasized the importance of community and networking support, noting that connections with others facing similar challenges can be invaluable. Social media emerged as a useful tool for accessing information and emotional support within the foster care community.

The adjustment to foster parenting involves navigating various challenges alongside positive experiences. Many participants faced significant difficulties during the initial months, leading some to contemplate withdrawal from the process. However, strong bonds formed through community support facilitated successful transitions. Trust-building with children, who often carry the weight of past traumas, is critical, and work-related stress can further complicate the adaptation process.

Moreover, participants pointed to significant gaps in legal and educational support that exacerbate the challenges faced by foster families. Disparities in accessing psychological assistance can leave emotional issues unaddressed, increasing stress for both biological and foster children. The management of work-life balance and navigating bureaucratic processes further complicates this adjustment.

The findings underscore the vital role of community and professional support in enhancing the foster care experience. Participants expressed the necessity for improved social services and emphasized the value of support groups for emotional solidarity. The need for structured support systems is paramount, with recommendations advocating for targeted guidance,



comprehensive training, better communication from social services, and structured respite care to foster healthier family environments.

Training and support processes for foster parents reveal critical areas needing improvement. While training on psychological needs and trauma is valued, many participants feel it lacks depth regarding interactions with biological families and practical applications. Those without formal training often rely on personal experiences, finding institutional resources inadequate. The impact of training is varied; those who attended training felt better equipped to handle challenges, while insufficient training hindered adaptation.

Participants also indicated a strong desire for mandatory and flexible training schedules, emphasizing that training should not be viewed as optional. Beyond formal training, foster parents often seek support from associations and engage in self-education, highlighting the importance of ongoing psychological and practical assistance.

In summary, the need for structured support systems for foster parents was a significant theme in our findings. Participants stressed the importance of consistent communication and stable social workers, along with collaboration with biological families to alleviate burdens and enhance child well-being. The call for financial aid specifically for psychological services and emotional resources for both foster children and parents underscores the urgency of addressing these concerns.

As we move forward, it is clear that fostering in Türkiye requires a multifaceted approach. Improved training programs, financial resources, and clearer legal guidelines are essential to enhance the foster care experience. By addressing these areas, we can create a more supportive and effective foster care environment that meets the diverse needs of both children and foster families.

## Annex

1. Gender
2. Place of Birth
3. Date of Birth
4. Education
5. What is your job?
6. Work status
7. Marital Status
8. How many children (foster care or biological) do you have?
9. What is your child's age? (for each child)
10. Your Child's Gender? (for each child)
11. Who do you share your home with (except your child)?



12. What kind of foster parent are you?
13. How many years have you been a foster parent?
14. Who are the other people responsible for your child's care?

*1. Questions about the Decision, Application, and Experience Process*

15. When did you decide to become a foster parent?
16. What influenced this decision?
17. Who influenced this decision?
18. With whom did you first share this decision? What was their reaction?
19. Can you tell us about the matching process with your child?
20. When did you first meet your child?
21. Can you tell us about your application and admission process as a foster parent?
22. What kind of support did you need during this process?
23. Could you tell us about your experiences during the adjustment process with your child?
24. What were the issues that you needed support for as a parent in this process?
25. Did you receive any training during the adjustment process?

*2. Questions about the Training and Support Process*

26. Could you tell us about the training you received? (Are they provided by which institutions? Is it a preference, or is it mandatory for the process? etc.)
27. Could you tell us about the content of these trainings?
28. In which areas/events did these trainings support you?
29. In what other areas would you expect the training provided to support you?
30. What would you like to add, change, and transform in the context of existing training?
31. How would others you interact with (your spouse, family, other children, etc.) be affected when this change and transformation occurred?

*3. Questions about Sharing Experience*

32. Where and how often do you meet with other (foster) parents?
33. What do you share with other (foster) parents?
34. On which subjects would you like to receive training in this process?
35. If you were to create educational content to support foster parents, what kind of education would you design? What topics would you include?





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36. What knowledge and experiences would you like to share with new foster parents?
37. What do you want to share and add more?



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