



**OUR PROMISE TO THE FUTURE:  
A SELF-DETERMINED LIFE FOR  
EVERY CHILD AND YOUNG PERSON**

Introducing the CONCORDIA Social Projects' Impact Model



## LETTER FROM THE BOARD

*Did you know that one out of every four children in Europe still grow up in poverty and social exclusion? This tragedy is a reality and in stark contrast to the wealth and abundance of many of its people and cities.*

For 30 years CONCORDIA has tirelessly worked to develop and increase the opportunities of these children who grow into young people that too need specialised assistance.

We wanted to better understand the relevance and effectiveness of our interventions, driven by a question deriving from our vision:

*What changes does it take for children and young people to leave the fringes of society and lead a self-determined life?*

Our *Impact Model* describes the cross-national CONCORDIA model to generate impact and the short- and long-term-changes we work towards every day at an individual, family, community and social level in all the countries we are active in.

It has developed from past learning, our experiences from the present and our strategies and vision for the future. It reflects the passion and aspirations for progress of our colleagues in all CONCORDIA programmes in Austria, Bulgaria, Germany, Kosovo, the Republic of Moldova and Romania, when working with beneficiaries, communities and decision makers.

As a conceptual framework, the *Impact Model* provides a holistic perspective on how elements of our programme integrate in five pathways. These elements stem from the key interventions of our work and how they all contribute to achieving long-term impact for children and young people in need.

The results speak for themselves, showing increased social and emotional well-being, more supportive networks and relationships, sufficient income and resources and greater social responsibility and inclusion.

This *Impact Model* will serve as an anchor for future evidence building and learning in all our programmes and act as a practical guide to inform our strategic choices. We believe it definitely reflects our commitment to act as a highly professional, agile partner for social development in the regions we work in.

We know that we are not alone in our desire for positive change. In the future, we want to further strengthen our partnerships with civil society and the private and public sector so that we may always be in tune with the current and changing realities and to constantly search for the necessary innovation that will multiply our positive impact.

Thank you for all your support,

Ulla Konrad and Bernhard Drumel, representatives of the international CONCORDIA Board.

## WORDS OF ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

*The Impact Model* depicted in this paper has emerged from 30 years of pioneering work of thousands of highly motivated employees, volunteers, partners and donors, and most importantly, the children, young people, families and communities we serve.

We wish to express our heartfelt gratitude to all of you and our continued promise to turn the dreams and aspirations into real and lasting positive changes for every child and young person entrusted to us.

We would like to thank the national management teams from Austria, Bulgaria, Germany, Kosovo, the Republic of Moldova and Romania for their continuous efforts that guide the change processes towards a self-determined life.

## 1. BACKGROUND

CONCORDIA Social Projects (hereafter CONCORDIA) exists to support children and young people live a self-determined life in all its fullness. We orient ourselves towards a humanistic vision that embraces all cultures and religions. Our work is guided by the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

In the regions we work - central and eastern Europe – and despite some progress, there remains a large number of children and young people facing the threat of extreme poverty and suffering from exclusion, discrimination and a lack adequate resources and networks of support. Kosovo and the Republic of Moldova are countries with the lowest social and economic development in Europe and many of the children and young people living there are adversely affected.<sup>1</sup>

### Children at risk:

- Nearly one quarter of children in Europe today are at risk of poverty and social exclusion.<sup>2</sup>
- Children who grow up in poverty often remain in poverty for their entire lives. Losses in learning at a young age can result in children falling behind in school and never catching up.
- Without access to health care, children could miss out on vaccines that may be lifesaving in later years, and the treatment necessary to grow up healthy and thrive.<sup>3</sup>
- Roma children are particularly at risk - only half of them have access to early childhood education and care, and, in some countries, less than 10% complete secondary school.<sup>4</sup>

### Young people:

- The youth unemployment rate currently stands at 23.4% and is rising.<sup>5</sup>
- Worryingly 17 % of young people aged 25-29 years are neither in employment nor in any kind of education and training programme.

1 Human Development Report 2020, UNDP, 2020 - <http://hdr.undp.org/en> (accessed in January 2021)

2 Being young in Europe today, Eurostat, 2020 - [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Being\\_young\\_in\\_Europe\\_today\\_-\\_executive\\_summary#Children.E2.80.99s\\_lives\\_in\\_the\\_EU\\_.E2.80.94\\_a\\_mixed\\_picture](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Being_young_in_Europe_today_-_executive_summary#Children.E2.80.99s_lives_in_the_EU_.E2.80.94_a_mixed_picture) (accessed in January 2021)

3 The Child Guarantee: Phase III - "Testing the Child Guarantee in the EU Member States", UNICEF, 2020 <https://www.unicef.org/eca/child-guarantee-phase-iii-testing-child-guarantee-eu-member-states> (accessed in January 2021)

4 Ibid 3

5 Global Employment Trends for Youth 2020, ILO, 2020 - [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms\\_737648.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_737648.pdf) (accessed in January 2021)



Children and young people who have already experienced extreme poverty and discrimination are disproportionately likely to be suffering from the effects of the economic downturn related to the COVID 19 pandemic, and for some of them this is going to last a lifetime.<sup>6</sup> Addressing their material deprivation will not be enough. High quality, inclusive, accessible, affordable social services are critical to reaching the most vulnerable and breaking intergenerational cycles of disadvantage.

Within this context and basing its intervention on 30 years of national and international experience, CONCORDIA assumes a central role in strengthening the resilience capacity and developing the potential of children and young people, as well as their families, social workforce and various community members who care for and support them.

This *Impact Model* gives direction on where and how to sharpen our interventions and resources:

- Childcare
- Community-based support
- Education
- Employment
- and Empowerment of children and young people

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6 <https://data.unicef.org/covid-19-and-children/>





## 2. WHO WE WORK WITH

CONCORDIA has at the heart of its concern children and young people from the most vulnerable communities who suffer discrimination and marginalisation and are often out of sight of any kind of support.

We define **children in most vulnerable conditions** as children (aged up to 18 years) whose capacity to live a fulfilled childhood is limited by various factors such as poverty, disability, ethnicity, migrant background, precarious family situations or living in institutions.

We define **young people** as those who are transitioning out of childhood into adulthood. We acknowledge that the United Nations defines young people (mainly for statistical purposes), as those aged between 15 to 24 years and adapt our definition to the specific legislation and circumstances in the countries where we work. Irrespective of the definition, *youth* is always understood as a period of many critical transitions, when many physical, cognitive, emotional, economic and social changes are taking place.

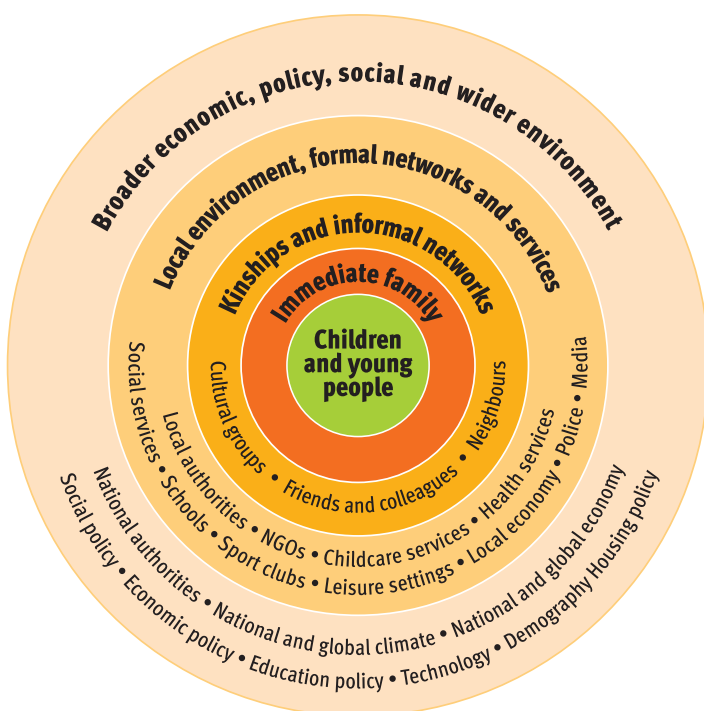


Fig. 1 - Systems of support around children and young people.

In our work with children and young people we equally focus on the various “systems of support”, pictured in Figure 1. adapted after the Urie Bronfenbrenner’s ecological framework for human development theory (2009, *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design*. Cambridge, Massachusetts).

The systems of support constitute the immediate and extended environment around children and young people. We support families, social professionals and teachers (generally named the “social workforce”) who play a critical role in supporting children and young people to overcome vulnerability and lead a self-determined life.

We also work with local community leaders and specific groups, business organisations, local and global governmental and non-governmental stakeholders.

We share resources and engage in transparent relationships, developing partnerships based on mutual trust at all levels.

## 3. OUR IMPACT MODEL

### 3.1. Development and application

The *Impact Model* is an attempt to explain how key interventions (*inputs*) are understood to bring about a series of changes (*outcomes*) that are all necessary to achieve a long-term vision (*impact*) (see Figure 2).

The paths developing from the **key interventions** to the intended **changes** are known as **pathways of change** and are usually graphically illustrated for ease of understanding.

The impulse for developing the *Impact Model* for our programmes emerged from a constant reflection within our organisation about the relevance of our interventions – and to what extent they support achieving our long-term vision.

The question we tried to answer was:

*What does it take for children and young people to leave the fringes of society and lead a self-determined life?*

A steering group was set up to guide the process and each programme team in the national CONCORDIA organisations participated in a national workshop aimed to define the changes they intended to achieve through their interventions.

After further international stakeholder consultation the results were synthesised, and we compiled an *Impact Model* infographic (see page 10) that illustrates the changes we aim to achieve at both the individual (children and young people) and system level (including the immediate and more distanced environment of the individual). Depending on the first point of intervention we differentiate what we intend to influence in the short, medium, and long term. Change takes time and we are committed to the process every step of the way.

This *Impact Model* reflects CONCORDIA's current understanding on how changes can be catalysed along various pathways. Overall, it offers a clear conceptual framework for all CONCORDIA organisations to adopt and gives a 'big picture' perspective as to how the individual elements of our programming integrate to support broader change processes. It also enables a foundation for evidence gathering and learning across all our programmes and acts as practical guide to inform our strategic choices.

As we mature as an organisation, we will constantly fine-tune and adapt our *Impact Model* to always ensure the most relevant interventions and services for the young people we serve.

### 3.2. The pathways of change

There are four long-term impact areas that make it possible for children and youth to live a life free from the injustice of poverty and discrimination.

- Social and emotional well-being: This helps to support the goals of SDG 1 and SDG 2
- Supportive networks and relationships contributing to the achievement of SDG 1 and SDG 10
- Resources and opportunities that help support the achievement of SDG 4 and SDG 8
- Greater social responsibility and inclusion which contributes to the achievement of SDG 10



Fig. 2 - Our path from outcomes to impact



## OUR PROMISE TO THE FUTURE: A SELF-DETERMINED LIFE FOR EVERY CHILD AND YOUNG PERSON

The programmes at CONCORDIA are structured along five pathways of change that are rooted in five key intervention areas:

- (1) Childcare
- (2) Community-based care and intervention
- (3) Education and professional training
- (4) Employment and social entrepreneurship
- (5) Empowerment.

Each pathway has its own journey, timeframe and leads to at least one of the long-term impact goals being achieved.

### PATHWAY 1 – CHILDCARE

Our childcare programmes ensure that all children and young people have their basic needs fulfilled and enjoy quality care in a protective family environment. Positive parenting and a safe environment increase the chances of more supportive and reliable relationships and the ability to respond to life changes.

Ultimately their increased emotional resilience leads to higher **social and emotional well-being**.

In our **Childcare Programmes** we focus on caring for children in foster families and small family-like groups. Both children and foster parents are supported through a multidisciplinary team of psychologists, teachers and social workers and receive regular supervision. Whenever possible, (and if in the best interest of the child) we actively support the reintegration of children with their biological families. Children emerging out of our care programmes receive constant support to further develop their skills for living an independent life.

To date more than 500 children and young people have benefited from these childcare programmes every year.

At the system level, we work with families (biological and foster families), the private and public childcare service and local and national authorities. We offer support with childcare services and for care givers.

We strive for quality in care and have developed training and supervision support programmes for foster parents and the social workforce.

Well trained and motivated social professionals can raise the trust levels of those in need of social support services and ultimately transform these services to be more inclusive and non-discriminatory.

### PATHWAY 2 – COMMUNITY-BASED CARE AND INTERVENTION

In our **Community Based Intervention Programmes**, we combine the work of the mobile teams who visit and support families in their own homes with the activities in the community centres. We mostly work in marginalised communities, most of them in rural areas or in areas with a high number of Roma families. Nearly 10,000 people (children, young people, families) benefit from our community-based support every year in Austria, Bulgaria, Kosovo, the Republic of Moldova and Romania.

An African proverb wisely says: “*It takes a village to raise a child*”. Children and young people need to grow up and enjoy the support of their families and vital communities around them. This enables them to feel accepted and encourages active participation in their community and society. Where various services and resources are already available at community level, we activate these resources and connect them to networks of support for children and families. Where they do not exist (yet), we partner with local groups, author-



ities and donors to develop community-based services to support the most vulnerable children, young people and their families.

We set the focus on providing information about available services and, for local decision-makers, about the needs of the most vulnerable members of their communities. When there is a high degree of information and services available, not only can we assist more, but the impact is more long-term and socially sustainable.

### **PATHWAY 3 – EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL TRAINING**

We work to make sure that all children and young people can go to school every day. In order to do this, they have to be able to get to school, have all necessary textbooks and learning materials, are clothed and fed and (most important) that someone from home (or their community) is there to encourage and support them with their homework. We also work with teachers, partner organisations and decision-makers to ensure that whilst at school, children and young people enjoy a respectful and encouraging environment, where their talents are cultivated.

**Flagship project - The CONCORDIA EduCampus** in Ploiesti, Romania, is an innovative and unique example of inclusive educational opportunities for children (ages 6-11) and teenagers (ages 14-18). The primary school in the campus offers children from the nearby neighbourhoods (where many families suffer poverty and discrimination) a modern, stimulating, highly creative learning environment. The vocational school supports young people who grew up in care. The educational model combines theoretical subjects with professional training and qualifications, in different professions. Both groups of students are supported by a multi-disciplinary team of educators, psychologists and social workers.

With more children staying in school, we see that the improved learning outcomes ultimately lead to higher personal wellbeing and access to more opportunities.

Children and young people from marginalised communities need an education system that is sensitive and aware of their specific social needs. We create bridges of cooperation between the education system and the social service system and provide them with examples of tailor-made paths of education and professional training for learners coming from disadvantaged families and communities, some of whom have missed years of formal education.

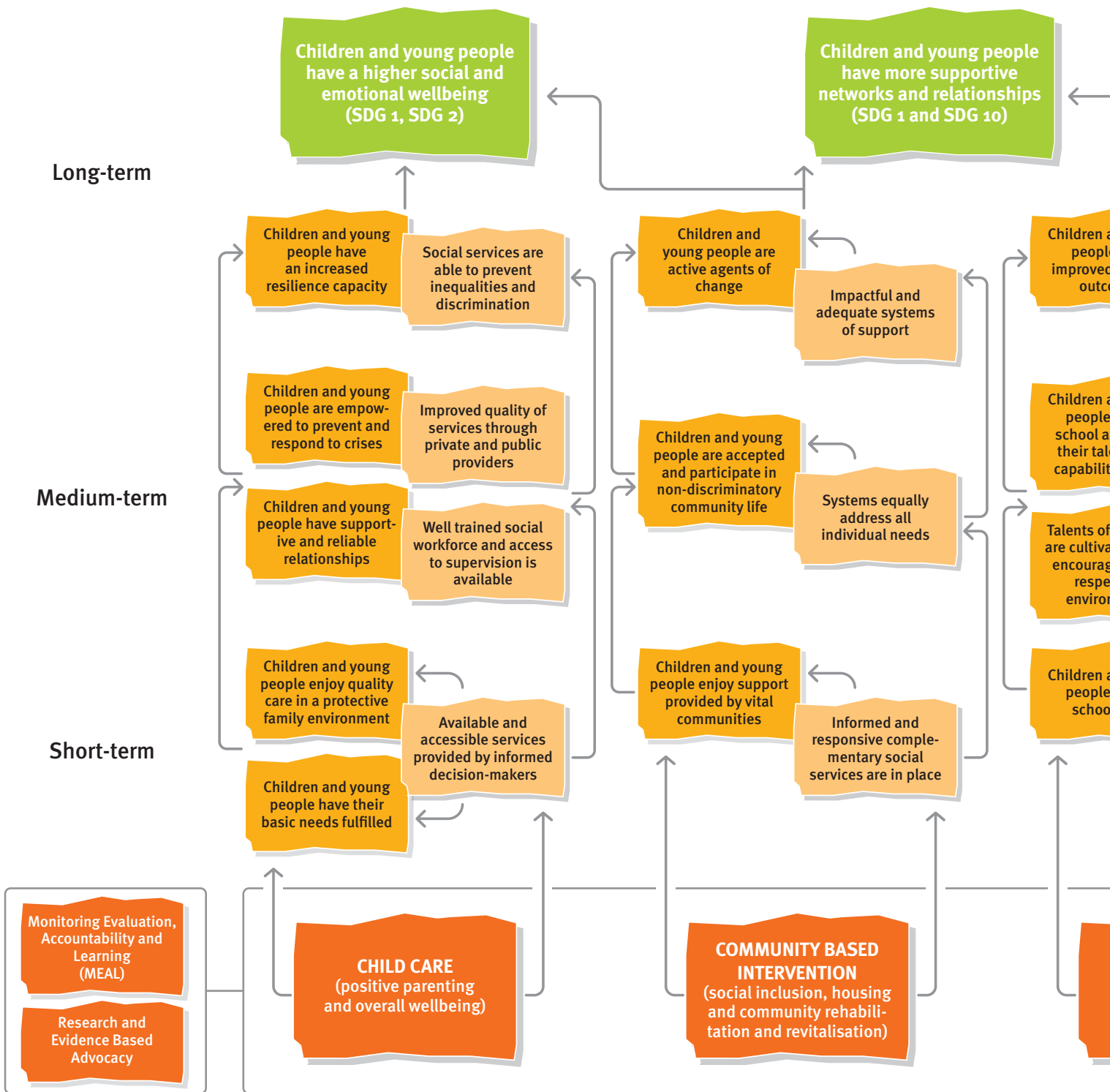
### **PATHWAY 4 – EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP**

**Flagship project – The CONCORDIA bakery in Romania** is a social business project well known for its wholemeal bread and delicious cakes distributed daily to companies and individual households. But it is equally well-known as a protected workplace where young people can learn to bake bread and practice the general social and psycho-emotional skills needed to work within teams and live independently. An impact assessment in 2018<sup>7</sup> revealed that 90% of the young people starting their training there have gone on to other jobs as bakers or related professions within catering.

Young people coming from marginalised families and communities often need additional support (such as job coaching or mentoring) to develop employment skills and access to opportunities on the job market. Often at risk of economic exploitation, we support young people to be employed at a living wage and to use their talents and qualifications to continue their professional development. We mentor them on how to maintain their employment and

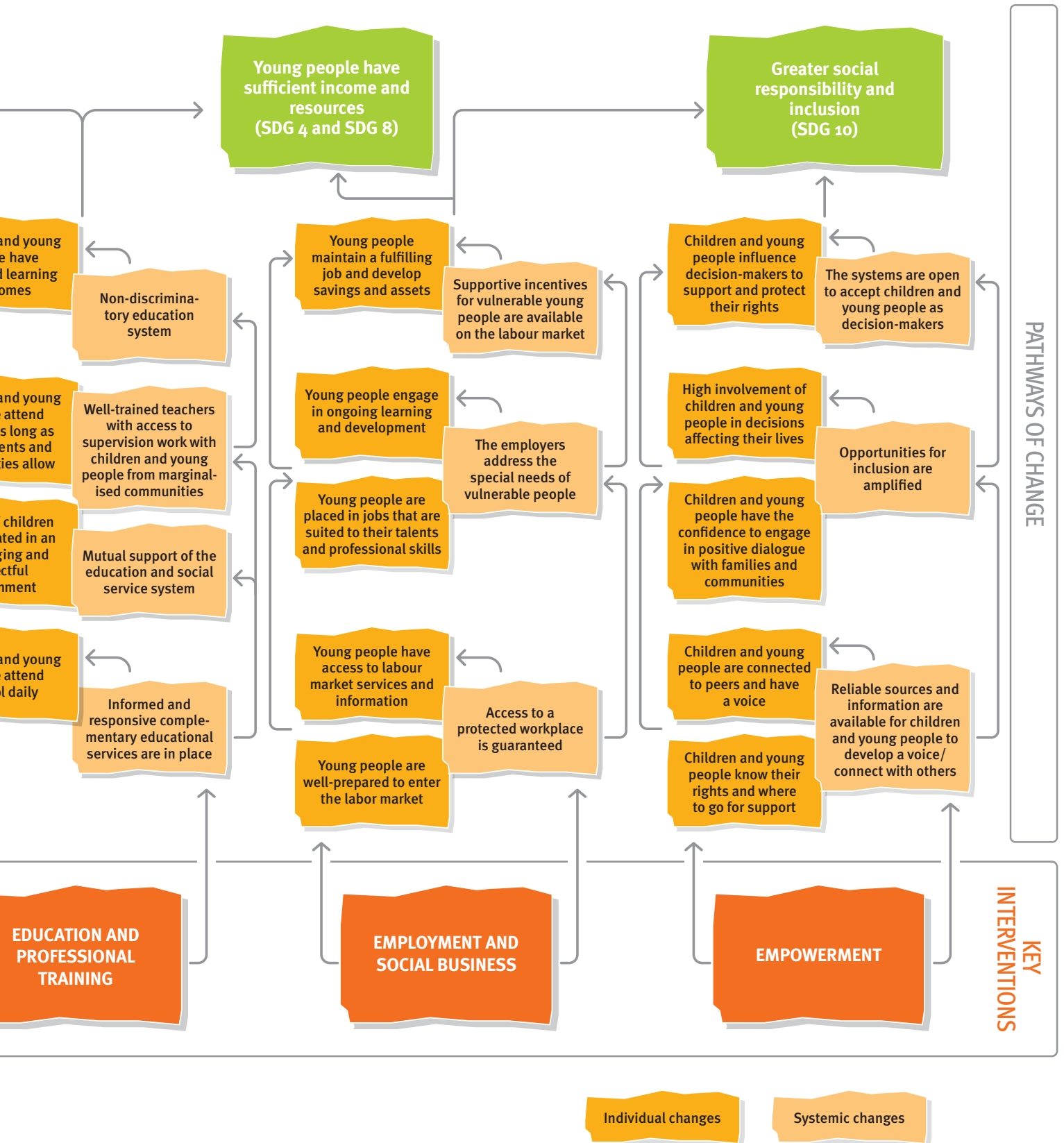
<sup>7</sup> Impact Study CONCORDIA Bakery, Humanitarian Organisation CONCORDIA, Bucharest, 2017 - <http://www.concordia.org.ro/concordia/resurse/publicatii>

# CONCORDIA Social Projects' Impact Model



## VISION

Children and young people get to live a self-determined life, out of marginalisation



develop savings and assets. Through advocacy and partnerships with the corporate sector we contribute to creating a supportive system for young people, with access to protected workplaces (sometimes in the form of social businesses). We teach employers to understand the special needs and support that young people coming from marginalised communities require and how important it is for incentives that encourage these youth to join the labour market.

### **PATHWAY 5** – EMPOWERMENT

We aim to empower children and young people to be well informed citizens and become agents of change. We inform them about their rights and where to turn to for support. We encourage them to connect with their peers and create networks of support where

Our work on **empowerment** is often supported by partnerships with institutional donors, such as the European Commission in Romania and Bulgaria or the Austrian Development Agency in Moldova. A Moldova UNICEF study from 2019<sup>8</sup> has shown that more young people trust they might have a better future abroad than if they stay and work in Moldova. For young people growing out of care, having a safe place to live, finding a decent job and maintaining positive relationships seems to be more difficult than for their peers who live with their families. We supported the establishment of a Network of Young Care Leavers in Moldova, where they can meet, exchange and advocate for more adequate support towards living a self-determined life.

they have opportunities to express themselves and have their opinions heard. Ultimately, we encourage them to use their own networks to engage with decision-makers and advocate for protecting and respecting their rights. Reliable sources of information shall be available to all children and young people, in a language they can understand and through sources they can access. There is also a need for all decision-makers in the system (surrounding and supporting children and young people) to create opportunities for them to participate in. When the opinions of children and young people are integrated into decision making (be it at a social or governmental level) we can achieve greater social responsibility and inclusion in society.

Two inter-connected activities support all five key interventions:

- **Monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning (MEAL) activities** ensure that progress is defined, measured, evaluated and the results are factored into the design of future activities and processes.
- **Research and evidence-based advocacy activities** work with empirical evidence (gathered from practice and research) to advocate for the rights of all children and young people and for a favourable legal and financial framework for private and public service providers.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/moldova/media/2971/file/Moldova%20Youth%20SCORE%20index%20secondary%20analysis.pdf>



### 3.3. An enabling environment

For the above five pathways of change, an enabling environment is vital so that success can be accelerated and remain sustainable in the long term.

These are the four assumptions that determine the success of our *Impact Model*:

**1. Social norms and community values are inclusive and allow children and young people's development and participation** - CONCORDIA works to ensure that community members have the necessary knowledge about children and young people who are at risk of discrimination and develop a mutual interest to support them in their development. Community revitalisation and inter-generational activities are the core of our community support.

**2. Stakeholder engagement and collaboration** CONCORDIA unites social, educational and economic institutions. We advocate for a multi-disciplinary and multi-sectorial approach to the complex challenges children and young people face when wanting to live a self-determined life. We build partnerships with local authorities, NGOs and the private sector, and this increases our impact.

**3. Legal frameworks and financial and non-financial resources are in place to enable the fulfilment of children and young people's rights** – Although the childcare legislation in the eastern European countries we work in are generally rather progressive, translating them into lived practice is still challenging. CONCORDIA identifies gaps in the process of implementing legal measures and support those bound by law to develop social, educational and health policies with know-how, capacity building and promising practices and models of impactful social intervention. We promote well tried and tested solutions, such as adapted models of professional training for young people who have missed many years of basic education, restorative education supportive for children with limited access to quality education or practice oriented models of professional training for social workers in the public and private sector.

**4. Children and young people have the aspiration to lead a self-determined life** - Living with discrimination can lead to a loss of hope and vision for a better future. CONCORDIA works with children and young people directly, as well as with their parents, their teachers, and decision-makers in general to support, encourage and motivate children and young people to build a vision of what a self-determined life could be AND to actively participate in achieving it by continuing with their education, professional training. We also support them to advocate for their legal rights.



## 4. OUR COMMITMENT AND CALL FOR ACTION

The *Impact Model* is equally applicable to how changes are happening in CONCORDIA's programmes and is a road map for remaining strong and engaged in the development of social services in Austria, Bulgaria, Kosovo, the Republic of Moldova and Romania.

These are our commitments:

1. As **new technologies will open new avenues for engaging in the social service and education sector**, we call on partners and decision-makers who can innovate programmes that can assist marginalised children and young people to work with us.
2. When **marginalisation and discrimination become more subtle and difficult to observe**, we will remain close to the most hidden from view and in need of support. It is imperative that decision-makers and partners address the root causes of poverty and develop multi-sectorial interventions to ensure the aspirations of children and young people are met.
3. Recent **successful national and global campaigns and movements have reactivated trust in the power of civic engagement**. Our strategic intention is to prioritise the empowerment of children and young people and support them in becoming stronger agents of change. We call all decision-makers, service providers and policy influencers to engage with them, listen and consider their opinions in all decisions affecting their lives.
4. As the society demands increasingly **agile organisations and institutions we will** invest in the development of our organisations, our high performing staff, volunteers and partners, in order to develop our resources so we remain a dynamic, agile player within the system and its stakeholders.



## ANNEX - GLOSSARY OF TERMS

The following definitions express our understanding of the key terms we use in this document.

The **term and concept of vulnerability in regard to children and young people** implies that they are more exposed to poor outcomes, risks or dangers in comparison to their peers. Vulnerability is a relative state that may range from resilience to total helplessness and is centred around the three fundamental aspects of dependence:

1. *Material resources* - financial resources, food, clothing, shelter, health care and education
2. *Emotional support* - care, love, space to grieve and control of emotions
3. *Social realities* - absence of a supportive peer group or role models to emulate, or to guidance to navigate difficult situations and risks in the immediate environment.<sup>9</sup>

**Children and young people in most vulnerable conditions** are those whose quality of life and prospects for a fulfilled self-determined life are significantly at risk from extreme poverty, ethnic discrimination, lack of essential opportunities for personal and professional development, exposure to abuse and a general lack of supportive families and communities. We believe vulnerability and marginalisation are temporary conditions, and resources and opportunities can be made available to address the problems.

**Communities** are understood as locality and a social group of any size whose members reside in a specific group of people, organisations and institutions that share a location, a government, and often have common cultural and historical heritage.

**Empowerment** is the ability and the power of children and young people to take action towards greater social responsibility and inclusion, and as such to become agents of change. Empowerment happens when the family and wider community supports them to grow, focusing on their capacities and strengths.

**Skills for employment** are understood as those skills that assist young people to search for, obtain and maintain employment. This includes the ability to describe their own skills and interests, to set career goals, write a resume' and contact employees, to search for suitable jobs on the labour market and to maintain these jobs for a longer period of time.

**Families facing difficulties to care for their children and at risk of collapse** refers to families who, for whatever reason, may find it difficult to keep their children safe. Unemployment, poverty, addiction, violence and mental health issues, the presence of a child with disabilities are all major risk factors associated with child abuse and neglect<sup>10</sup>. Some of these families are at risk of separation and they might often need special, early support.

**Life skills** are a set of psychosocial abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enables individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life. They are loosely grouped in three broad categories of skills:

- (a) cognitive skills for analysis and processing information
- (b) personal skills for developing self-agency and self-control
- (c) and inter-personal skills for communicating and interacting effectively with others.

**Positive parenting** refers to the attitude of affection, empathy and respect for the child coupled with the concrete skills of attention, support and encouragement that parents

<sup>9</sup> Changing the Odds for Vulnerable Children: Building Opportunities and Resilience, OECD, 2019 - <https://doi.org/10.1787/a2e8796c-en> (accessed in January 2021)

<sup>10</sup> Childhood Foundation, 2021 – web - <https://childhood.org/this-is-childhood/children-that-childhood-wants-to-reach/families-at-risk/> (accessed in January 2021)



(understood here as everyone who has and assumes the parenting roles, including guardians and foster parents) can show. Positive parenting has a demonstrated impact on the increased quality of life of children. It increases their resilience, reduces the risks of abuse and violent behaviour, improves their overall emotional stability, educational achievement and their social belonging. CONCORDIA promotes early intervention and prevention of family separation at the core of its positive parenting interventions.

**Resilience** is the ability of children, young people, families, communities and systems to anticipate, prevent, withstand, manage and overcome stresses and shocks in ways which advance the rights of every child, yet paying special attention to the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children. We believe that everyone's resilience can be strengthened, while risk factors for vulnerability and marginalisation can be reduced in the surrounding environment.

**A Self-determined life** happens when one can maintain oneself by independent effort. In simple words, self-determination means that a human being, a family, even a community, can make things happen for themselves rather than being dependant on others. It implies self-acknowledgement, a set of skills and an appreciation of goals which can be achieved through individual or collective efforts. CONCORDIA promotes a **self-sustained life** which can happen when social, economic developments are supported by a healthy environment.

**Social business or social entrepreneurship** is generally understood as an entrepreneurial initiative created to support a social cause. Its success is based on how it improves society and the environment and whether it reduces inequalities whilst generating a profit for investors. At its most basic level, it means doing business for a social cause. Social business is seen as an effective path to achieve a mission-related impact through **mentoring** and **protected work environments** we support the socio-professional integration of young people coming from disadvantaged backgrounds. The income generated is re-invested in training and support programmes for young people.

**Social workforce** includes a variety of paid and voluntary governmental and non-governmental professional and para-professional workers serving the social service system. It focuses on preventative, responsive programmes that support families and children in communities by alleviating poverty, reducing discrimination, and facilitating access to services, promoting social justice and preventing and responding to violence, abuse, exploitation, neglect and family separation (Global Social Service Workforce Alliance - GSWA). At CONCORDIA we acknowledge the key role of the social workforce in securing and promoting social justice, equity and participation and invest in its constant development.

**Well-being** is generally understood as quality of life. We approach well-being from various perspectives: it can be objective (such as access to social, education and health services) as well as subjective (such as happiness and perceptions of life satisfaction). It encompasses physical, emotional and social wellbeing and is related to the present lives of children and young people, but also considers their future. Whilst we acknowledge that there are no fundamental differences between children and adult well-being, we consider that children's and young people's well-being is the ground from which the rest of their lives will flourish and requires more focused opportunities for learning and development.







## **CONCORDIA SOZIALPROJEKTE**

Gemeinnützige Privatstiftung  
Hochstettergasse 6  
1020 Wien  
T +43 1 212 81 49  
www.concordia.or.at

## **LOCATIONS**

### **CONCORDIA AUSTRIA**

Hochstettergasse 6  
1020 Wien  
office@concordia.or.at  
www.concordia.or.at

### **CONCORDIA MOLDOVA**

Str. A. Corobceanu 13/1  
2004 Chişinău  
moldova@concordia.md  
www.concordia.md

### **CONCORDIA BULGARIA**

Ul. Pavlina Unufrieva N. 4  
1510 Sofia  
bulgaria@concordia.bg  
www.concordia.bg

### **CONCORDIA ROMÂNIA**

Dr. Regimentului 20D  
013887 Bucureşti  
romania@concordia.org.ro  
www.concordia.org.ro

### **CONCORDIA GERMANY**

Hohnerstraße 25  
70469 Stuttgart  
stiftung@concordia-sozialprojekte.de  
www.concordia-sozialprojekte.de

### **CONCORDIA SWITZERLAND**

Industriestraße 49  
6302 Zug  
office@concordia-sozialprojekte.ch  
www.concordia-sozialprojekte.ch

### **CONCORDIA KOSOVO**

Rr Lahuta e Malesise p.n.,  
20000 Prizren  
office@concordia-kosovo.org  
www.concordia-kosovo.org

## **IMPRINT:**

Publisher: CONCORDIA Sozialprojekte Gemeinnützige Privatstiftung  
Hochstettergasse 6, 1020 Wien; T +43 1 212 81 49; Fax +43 1 212 81 49-23  
office@concordia.or.at; www.concordia.or.at

Responsible for the content: Bernhard Drumel;  
Text: Raluca Verweijen-Slamnescu, Lisa Ringhofer; Editing: Melissa Baird;  
Graphics: Cătălin Danţuş; Photos: Benjamin Kaufmann, Samir Karahoda;



[www.concordia.or.at](http://www.concordia.or.at)