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# A NEW CHAPTER WITH BİRLİKTE

TUĞÇE BAHADIR CANKARA



We see this whole process as a crucial opportunity for learning and development, not only for ourselves but also for civil society as a whole. We are committed to conducting our program in an environment of mutual trust that fosters continuous and collective learning and ownership. In doing so, we believe that one of the key words is “sincerity”.

I think there is no need to start from scratch to describe BİRLİKTE in this second implementation period. So, I must begin somewhere. I believe the missing parts will be filled by the section we allocated to BİRLİKTE on our website. The reason for my initial struggle is actually the long history behind BİRLİKTE. BİRLİKTE is a product of various efforts and collective learning we have undertaken at STGM and within the civil society with different colleagues over the years. Without acknowledging and paying tribute to those efforts, the story would be incomplete. Therefore, I want to start by wholeheartedly greeting everyone who contributed to this journey.

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## BİRLİKTE: WHY INSTITUTIONAL GRANTS?

ZEYNEP ATAY

Since our establishment in 2004, we have run 9 different grant programs for civil society organizations (CSOs), including the current BİRLİKTE program; we have provided grants and technical support to more than two hundred CSOs through these programs. 7 of these grant programs were project support, which is the most widely implemented and known type of grant in the civil society field.

MSince our establishment in 2004, we have implemented 9 different grant programs for civil society organizations (CSOs), including the current BİRLİKTE program; we have provided grants and technical support to more than two hundred CSOs through these programs. 7 of these grant programs were project support, which is the most widely implemented and known type of grant in the civil society field.

In March 2017, we launched a type of grant support that we had not implemented before and which is little known and practiced in the civilian field in Turkey: the institutional grant, or “general operational grant”. At the time of its launch, BİRLİKTE was the first of its kind and the first institutional grant program implemented in Turkey with the support of the European Union.

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## AN INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT MODEL FOR CSOS “BİRLİKTE”

AYSUN TELEK • HATİCE KAPUSUZ • ZEHRA TOSUN • AYSUN KOCA ÇAĞLAR YENİLMEZ • NEVZAT KIRIÇ

This journey is like “water dripping on stone.” It is a journey that requires patience and years, but in the end even the stone can be pierced, creating incredible changes. Therefore, the journey itself is important, but it is also important to learn how to remain a traveler and attribute value to it. BİRLİKTE is actually a deep and long journey that we take with organizations, and we are accompanying the first two years of this long journey, which is why it is valuable.

We have recently updated the “Institutional Development Model”; we developed and implemented for the BİRLİKTE Support Program, which we designed based on our long experience in the civic space and implemented its first period between 2017-2020, and started to implement it with the participants of the new period.

is a difficult and long process. The reasons for this difficulty can be briefly attributed to the following issues; the first of these is that the party that will design the model should know the audience that will use the model well, know its culture and management needs in detail. The second issue is the need for a thorough understanding of the field and sector where the model will be implemented.

**Why did we need an update? How did we make the update? What did we take into account?**

We have written about why and with which needs the institutional development model we developed in the first period of this long-standing journey was updated in the new implementation period and our preparation process with the aim of providing ideas and inspiration for the subjects working in this field.

In terms of management models in general, designing a model

into account the sensitivities of this sector.

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Turning a scar into a scar of life

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Isolation is a human rights violation



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Finally, even if the target audience and sector are well known, the team preparing the model should have a good command of management. This way, the most suitable and development-supporting model framework is outlined for the target audience and sector.

In 2018, while preparing the Institutional Development Model within the scope of the BİRLİKTE Program, we paid particular attention to these three issues. We have repeatedly addressed the culture and needs of rights-based civil society organizations that we have been serving for years in the design of the model. In addition, we also took into account the difficulties and problems experienced by the civil society field in Turkey and the existing prejudices.

For example, we prepared a section in the model based on the difficulty of developing resources outside the project in the field of civil society. Again, we prepared a governance section based on the fact that participation makes a difference for a strong civil society organization. In the development of this model, we brought together experts who know the subject of governance very well with experts who know the organizations and the sector well. We carried out the first pilot study with the participation of the entire mentor team in the first term of BİRLİKTE. We standardized the model in the structure you can see below.



## A model that incorporates the years of experience of STGM and many experts in the field

After standardization, together with five mentors, we carried out field studies to implement the model in 42 organizations. We used this institutional development model for 2.5 years. With the feedback from mentors and organizations, we reviewed the suitability of the model in terms of organizations, the entire civic space and the management framework. We closed the program in 2020 with the archiving of all these learnings.

The continuation of the BİRLİKTE Program in 2022 brought about two advantages together. The opportunity to transfer the learnings previously gained for organizations and civil society to the field, and the opportunity to further improve an already well-developed, tested, and proven management model that had been meticulously crafted within the BİRLİKTE program before. Thus, we started to work on carefully reflecting the changing needs of the field, which had already been recognized in the BİRLİKTE program, in this new model. We carried out the work with the participation of the whole team and with the support of external experts on certain technical issues in a period of about six months. This is how we ensured that dozens of people and years of experience were transferred to the model. We reviewed the entire model and redesigned it by taking into account the needs of civil society and organizations, especially in the areas of membership, staff and volunteers, digitalization, monitoring and evaluation.

Members, one of the important stakeholders that make up the base of organizations, and the systems that need to be designed for them are discussed in the membership section. We have further developed this section to ensure that civil society employees have access to their rights within the organization and to ensure their sustainability through well-developed human resources policies. We have added a digitalization section in line with the learning from developments in the world and the needs of organizations. We have redesigned monitoring, evaluation and learning with a system logic, with the question of how it can be handled in a holistic way.

## We integrated gender equality perspective into the model

Another important innovation in the updating process was the integration of a gender equality perspective into the model. In line with the objectives and approach of BİRLİKTE Program, we have treated gender equality not as an isolated topic in the model, but as a fundamental issue that cuts across all areas. Thus, we emphasized

that gender equality is a fundamental issue that needs to be addressed with subtlety and depth in all areas from governance to membership, from workspace to communication.

## What are the advantages and challenges of the model?

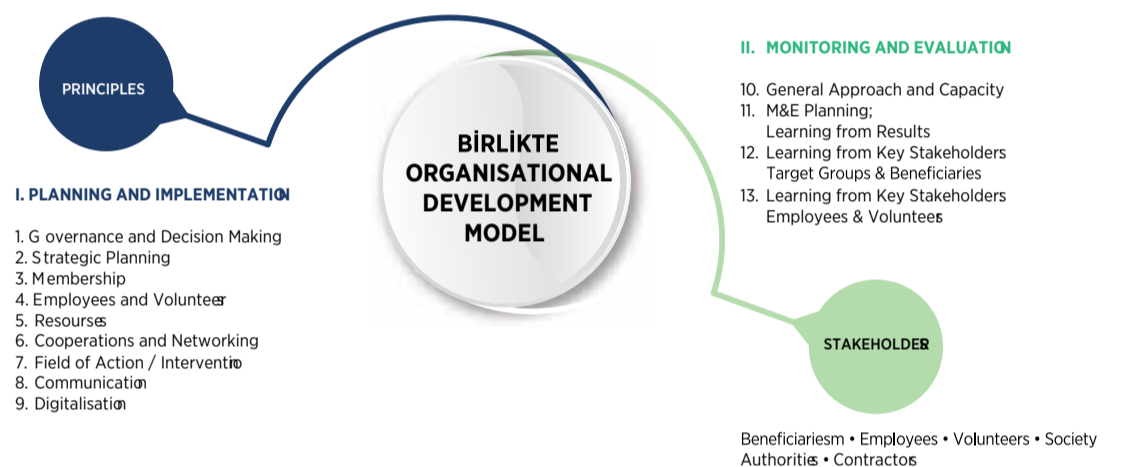
Management is a multifaceted issue with the stakeholders it addresses, has a certain philosophy with the values it is based on, and deals with many areas systematically. This is why it is likened to art when it is done well; doing it with both good systems and a good philosophical depth makes management an art. It is not possible to meet these multi-stakeholder, systemic and philosophical features of management with a checklist. A model that addresses all these holistically is needed.

When such a model is used, organizations can move towards a more mature organizational culture with a certain philosophical depth. When the philosophical depth is not well understood, there may be problems in the implementation of the established systems. As in the chicken and egg relationship, without systems, the philosophy cannot find the space to come to life. As a result, the impact and change that should be created for stakeholders do not emerge.

For example, if “employee participation” is a philosophy, creating participation mechanisms (such as giving everyone equal say in meetings, creating environments where employees are consulted on relevant decisions, creating environments where suggestions and complaints are received) is the system dimension of the work. In an organization where the philosophy and mechanisms of employee participation are not in place, many stakeholders, such as employees, target groups, members, volunteers, etc., are negatively affected.

Therefore, models make an important contribution to better management and sustainability of organizations.

Participation • Value Creation  
Transparency • Accountability  
Sustainability • Equality & Prevention of Discrimination



## 6 principles for the change process

It is important for organizations, which are the main actors of the civic space, to work with principles and values. For this very reason, the model we have created in BİRLİKTE takes reference from some basic principles in order to radically realize the desired change process. The model is based on 6 principles: value creation, participation, sustainability, equality & prevention of discrimination, transparency and accountability. We apply these principles and values by mainstreaming them throughout the model.

There are also aspects of the models that challenge the implementing parties. The first of these is the insufficient prioritization of the philosophy of the model, which refers to the principles and values on which the model is based, or the expectation for the philosophical depth to be established all at once. It's not possible for an organization struggling with implementing participation to suddenly have participation firmly in place. The establishment of the philosophy, in other words, a cultural change, requires a consistent and patient effort spanning years.

Another challenge is working with systems. Organizing practices such as volunteer work, activism, being fast and reflexive can make it difficult for organizations that grow over time to create systems that fit their needs. As a result, for some organizations, arbitrary and daily work without a system can be confused with flexible and creative work.

For this reason, organizations may not want to establish a system that creates benefits in many respects. The organization is deprived of many of the benefits of systems. Such as the fact that work is not dependent on individuals, the existence of institutional realistic methods, the formation of institutional memory, the reduced likelihood of making mistakes, employee and volunteer motivation, focus on the needs of stakeholders, transparency and accountability. This list can be extended.

## How is the self-assessment structure in the model an experience for organizations?

We define self-assessment as the self-evaluation of an organization according to a model.

According to the BİRLİKTE model, organizations conducted their first self-assessment between March and May 2023. They can best describe what the experience was like, but we can also briefly express our observations.

Knowing yourself is one of the most difficult issues in life. During the self-assessment process, the most important step taken by the organizations participating in BİRLİKTE was to look back at themselves and know themselves. In the hustle and bustle of daily life, organizations that had not had the opportunity to stop and ask what are we doing, how are we doing it, what results have we achieved, looked at themselves from this perspective and confronted themselves on many managerial issues. This confrontation took two forms. Sometimes it was “the happiness that we are not so bad”; and sometimes it was “the realization that we are not so perfect”.

The confrontation that there is something better can also bring a denial in itself. “No, we were good, how could we be in this situation”; is the first stage. The second stage is the acceptance of “maybe, we may not be that perfect” and finally the dynamism of “there is no end to the good, we must change and continuously improve for our stakeholders”;. In order to achieve these phases, a self-assessment is conducted at the beginning of each year to analyze the current situation, that is, to know oneself, followed by annual improvement plans and the implementation of prioritized improvements. The aim is to make these efforts as long as the organization exists and to make them sustainable. In other words, to prolong its lifespan and have a high impact.



## What is this journey like?

This journey is like “water dripping on stone” It is a journey that requires patience and years, but in the end even the stone can be pierced, creating incredible changes. Therefore, the journey itself is important, but it is also important to learn how to remain a passenger and attribute value to it. BİRLİKTE is actually a deep and long journey with organizations, and we are accompanying the first two years of this long journey, which is why it is valuable.

## What are we learning as BİRLİKTE?

- What are the practices and requirements of being a learning organization while providing institutional grants?
- What are the processes we need to improve in the program in terms of mainstreaming and sustainability?
- How can we ensure our own transformation in the principles proposed by the model?
- What are the needs of organizations in Turkey?
- What is their culture?
- In which areas are they strong?
- In which areas do they have potential for improvement?
- Where are the resistances focused?
- Where are the enthusiasms concentrated?
- How can we use what we learned while implementing the program to improve it?
- How can we contribute to the civic space as a whole with what we have learned in the program?

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## A NEW CHAPTER WITH BİRLİKTE

TUĞÇE BAHADIR CANKARA

BİRLİKTE is an institutional development model we developed for civil society organizations. The model consists of institutional grants and mentorship support for institutional development. We have been implementing BİRLİKTE as an EU-funded sub-grant mechanism since 2017. The second implementation period of our program started in January 2022, and the support mechanism came into effect in February 2023. During this period, we will work together with a total of 25 civil society organizations participating in the program for two years.

So, what are our goals with BİRLİKTE? How do we aim to contribute to the supported organizations, ourselves, and the civil society at large? First and foremost, supporting the organizations by basic institutional as rent and person-fulfill their core doing so, we also strengthening their institutional structures through the model, resources, and tools we provide.

**Having set out to strengthen civil society, Birlikte is expanding its path in its second term by learning from experience.**

we focus on participating covering their expenses, such nel, so they can functions. While work towards

As in the previous period, a colleague from our program team will mentor each organization throughout the two-year process to facilitate the journey. We want the organizations participating in BİRLİKTE to strengthen their institutional structures and continue to contribute to their target groups and civil society as effective actors after the completion of the program.

We see this whole process as a crucial opportunity for learning and development, not only for ourselves but also for civil society as a whole. We are committed to conducting our program in an environment of mutual trust that fosters continuous and collective learning and ownership. In doing so, we believe that one of the key words is “sincerity”.

The basic principles on which the program’s institutional development model is based are also the basic principles on which rights-based work is built. We don’t want universal principles like participation, transparency, and accountability, which we constantly emphasize, to remain mere words. As civil society organizations in the program, we collectively think about how we can better implement and improve these principles both in our own management processes and in the areas in which we work. We make sincere efforts to identify our strengths and areas for improvement and work in solidarity to enhance them. Knowing the significant importance of this sincere effort in civil society and its potential multiplier effect, we strive to walk with responsibility, engage, and foster relationships.

## New priorities, methods, and tools in the new implementation period

In this implementation period, we have included some new priorities, methods, and tools in our support. We strive to design BİRLİKTE as a space to test and disseminate new methods, tools, and approaches in the civil society. We see ensuring the effectiveness of this opportunity for civil society as a responsibility.

This period, we focus on gender equality mainstreaming as a priority area within our program. All participating organizations will work on gender equality mainstreaming as part of their institutional development process. Our GEMI (Gender Equality Mainstreaming Initiative) expert



in the program will facilitate this process. In addition, we aim for BİRLİKTE for TCEA Initiative, in which the organizations in the program will voluntarily participate, to lead these efforts and provide information, resources and motivation. This will be a new experience for us too. With all its ups and downs, we know that this experience will be a significant learning opportunity for the entire civil society and similar programs. In the coming months, we will regularly share with you the current developments related to this matter.

## BİRLİKTE Hub as a collective learning space

Another important innovation is our BİRLİKTE Hub, or our BİRLİKTE Learning Community.

The previous period of BİRLİKTE showed the value and potential of the collective learning environment that the program provided us. For all of us, especially our program team, BİRLİKTE also functioned as a kind of school where we learned by experiencing together. Based on this experience, we structured this feature of the program in a better way and launched our BİRLİKTE HUB, hosted by a digital sharing platform. BİRLİKTE HUB is essentially a meeting space that brings organizations together. First of all, it aims to facilitate all kinds of communication and sharing among program participants. In addition to this digital platform, we also organize various events to pave the way for organizations to jointly learn, co-produce and collaborate. In the coming weeks, we will introduce HUB to you in more detail and share the events we organize within the scope of HUB.

## Stronger together with an international partner

In this implementation period, we also have a partner in our project. Our partner, “the Wheel,” is an umbrella organization in Ireland that supports civil society organizations with a mission similar to STGM. They support us, particularly in international collaborations, sharing experiences, and networking activities. This partnership holds significant potential to bring together participant organizations with good practice examples and open new horizons for all of us, and it truly excites us. In the coming months, we will regularly inform you about the developments related to these activities planned for the second year of the program.

Parallel to the collaborations of the BİRLİKTE participant organizations, we have also started to come together regularly with peer organizations that have been implementing sub-grant programs for some time to share experiences, learn from each other, improve our practices, and work in better coordination. We are striving to build and facilitate this community as a learning community. We take this opportunity to thank all other implementing organizations that contribute to this community and share our commitment to facilitate this collaboration throughout the next period.

Since we started, BİRLİKTE has truly lived up to its name for us. Both our colleagues involved in the process and the organizations participating in the program have put in sincere efforts to do justice to this togetherness, and they continue to do so. I consider myself very fortunate to be a part of this process, and I extend my heartfelt thanks to everyone who contributed. I hope that in the coming periods, our paths cross on various occasions, and we have opportunities to learn and experience together.

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ZEYNEP ATAY

## BİRLİKTE: WHY INSTITUTIONAL GRANTS? IT'S NOT JUST THE PROJECT THAT NEEDS SUPPORT; THE ORGANISATION DOES TOO

What is an Institutional Grant?

Institutional grants are now a well-known type of grant among CSOs in Turkey, and we can say that there has been a significant increase in the number of institutional grant programs in the civil field in the last 6 years. Nevertheless, it is still useful to make a brief definition:

“Institutional grant support, in the most general sense, is a type of grant that is provided to civil society organizations in order for them to continue their existence and achieve their goals, and aims to support CSOs to achieve their missions as a whole, without the condition of developing any project or program.”

Institutional grant programs do not require the development of a project and/or program. It supports the CSO as a whole within its own organizational structure, that is, it is an unrestricted, unconditional resource provided for CSOs to carry out their daily work, regular activities and to work in line with their mission.

### Why do we provide institutional grants to CSOs at BİRLİKTE?

As a matter of fact, the answer to the question of why we prefer to provide institutional grants is included in the definition of institutional grants. Institutional grants are the most effective way to sup-

port the work of CSOs working on a specific mission, in other words, CSOs that have a cause and are trying to create change, in line with their missions and goals.

We all know that CSOs aiming for change in their fields of work cannot be resilient, financially sustainable and carry out quality work in line with their goals only with activity-based support. CSOs need to have a basic and fixed resource to meet their fixed expenses without any problems, to invest in new technologies, to increase the salaries and social rights of their employees, to meet and manage crises, to meet their urgent needs, to carry out institutional communication activities and other institutional needs. Institutional grants stand out as a vital support mechanism to meet all these basic and/or urgent needs.

Our nearly 20 years of field experience, our contacts, meetings and collaborations with countless CSOs and local activists from various fields of work, what we have learned, what we have seen and what we have accumulated have shown us that a grant that meets the definition we have listed above as the characteristics of institutional grant support is exactly the type of grant that CSOs in Turkey need most for their empowerment.

“In the period before BİRLİKTE Institutional Support Program was designed, in May and June 2016, we conducted needs assessments with 123 CSO representatives and found that the most important

needs of local CSOs were concentrated in areas such as institutional fixed costs for sustainability, resource development, strategy development and implementation, effective institutional communication, use of digital tools and financial management.”

The institutional grant, which is a support that is in line with the needs of the civic space in Turkey, will close a gap in the field and enable CSOs to meet their basic expenses and empower them, has thus come to the fore as the main grant type of the grant programs we implemented in 2017 and beyond.

If you haven't come across it before, you can also look here and here to read about BİRLİKTE's support other than institutional grants and how it supports participating CSOs holistically.

### How did we design the institutional grant?

Designing a grant program is not a process that gives the program team a lot of leeway. It is a technical process and has many constraints. The team designing the program works to make the most appropriate planning for their own goals within all these tedious technical details and constraints.

Our main desire in designing BİRLİKTE's institutional grant support was to create a system that would enable grant beneficiary organizations to use their grant support in the most effective and flexible way without overwhelming them with too many details and implementation rules. In other

words, we tried not to create a design that is independent from the nature of the institutional grant and the reasons why the civic space in Turkey needs this type of grant.

We worked on a series of measures to design flexible and effective institutional grant support. First of all, we tried to design the budget structure as simple as possible and to meet all the needs of a CSO for its daily operations and fixed expenses. We wanted the application guide and budget explanations to be as simple as possible. While setting the ground rules for the implementation process, we also took into account that the budget at the time of application is an estimate, a dynamic document that can be changed during implementation in line with evolving needs and changing priorities. Therefore, we tried to keep our grant implementation rules as flexible as possible, believing that flexibility is one of the fundamental characteristics of institutional grants.

We experienced during the implementation process that our efforts to create a flexible structured grant support, which we worked on a lot during the design process, were very accurate.

In both phases of our program, we, together with all our participating organizations, faced large-scale crises that we could not have foreseen: The COVID-19 pandemic that broke out in 2020 and the large-scale earthquakes we experienced earlier this year.

In sudden crises such as this one, the flexibility of institutional grant support worked as a very

convenient mechanism to meet the rapidly changing priorities and needs of participating organizations. Our participating CSOs were able to change their budgets effectively and quickly in line with their changing needs and tried to minimize the impact of the crises as much as possible, as far as the BİRLİKTE budget allowed.

On the other hand, the culture of working in partnership with participating organizations, which we tried to establish with BİRLİKTE, has been one of the main principles in the field of grant implementation/management. In order to prevent any participating organization from being harmed due to the grant it received or due to a wrong application, being in constant communication, negotiating the necessary situations and making joint decisions has been one of the vital issues for us while drawing the boundaries of the implementation process. Perhaps we can even say that BİRLİKTE's own unique design is reflected in the grant implementation rules and processes, shaping them to the extent possible.

### Conclusion

We are one of the many institutions that provide institutional grants to civil society; however, we have designed and implemented this institutional support grant around the principles of the BİRLİKTE program, of which it is a component, in a way to carry its entire character and culture. Therefore, in our opinion, it is a unique example in the field. Our greatest desire is that this uniqueness will contribute to making the participating organizations stronger, more resilient and sustainable.

EZGİ KOCAADAM

## A TEAM WORKING PASSIONATELY TO CREATE CHANGE BİRLİKTE



I started working at BİRLİKTE Program in August 2019. This program was my first work experience. While most of my friends secured positions in the private sector, I chose to work in civil society. The idea of working for a for-profit company in the private sector didn't resonate with me, whereas working for a cause I believe in within civil society excited me. Fortunately, this enthusiasm has only increased during my time at STGM.

Working in an organization that always considers the feelings and thoughts of its employees and values their well-being makes me enjoy my work even more. Working in a competitive environment may increase productivity for some people, but I have always wanted to work in an environment where there is a spirit of solidarity. An environment where team members complement each other's shortcomings and work together to do a good job increases my productivity, and working at BİRLİKTE provides me with exactly that environment. When I have difficulties, I can ask my colleagues for support without hesitation, and I always get positive responses from them. The BİRLİKTE team is a team of people who are passionate about their work. I think it is a privilege for me to

play a role in this team that works with the belief and enthusiasm to create change.

### A Dynamic Role with Diverse Responsibilities: Program Assistant

Program assistants need to know about every aspect of every phase of the program. For this reason, they have a wide range of responsibilities. These include, for example, carrying out standard and advanced clerical tasks, providing administrative support to the pro-

gram team, filing, preparing and archiving digital and printed program documents, assisting with the financial reporting of the program and ensuring financial control under sub-grant agreements, assisting with the monitoring and reporting processes of the program, preparing meeting minutes, providing support to the program team for logistics, accommodation and meeting arrangements of events and organizations, etc.

These responsibilities are not limited to these areas alone, but also include the diverse support needs of the program team in various areas of work. For example, a typical day might start with taking notes at an event planning meeting, continue with transcribing a video, and end with revising the event checklist. In between, announcements on the STGM website might be translated, stationery ordered and contact addresses of BİRLİKTE participants updated. Quite a busy day, isn't it?

These tasks and the opportunity to support the team in these tasks, to be involved in the whole process and at the same time to see the whole process from a bird's eye view, is very helpful in deciding what I want to specialize in. It also makes my work more dynamic and fun.

### Richness in Diversity and Motivation for Civil Society Development

In the BİRLİKTE Program, we support organizations working on different topics. I believe that being alongside organizations working in very different areas of rights such as children's rights, LGBTI+ rights, disability rights, and prisoners' rights is also a great enrichment. This way, I can gain insights into the work of organizations with knowledge and experience in many different fields.

As a team, we continuously strive to explore different ways of supporting organizations participating in BİRLİKTE, while also updating the tools and methods we use, aiming to produce materials that can contribute to the civil society sector. This effort of ours has a developmental and transformative effect on us as well. As we witness the contributions made by the organizations we support to their stakeholders and the wider civil society and receive positive feedback about the benefits of the support provided by our program, our belief in our work grows stronger. Embracing this belief and maintaining our faith in the possibility of continual improvement, we continue to work together.

19.Aug.2024

## We engaged with Irish civil society organizations

Together with the organizations we support as part of the BİRLİKTE Support Program, we made a study visit to Dublin from 26 to 28 June 2024. During this visit, we met with our Irish implementing partner The Wheel as well as with civil society organizations working in various fields and discussed human resource management, multidimensional leadership and good governance.



The theme of the meeting we organized with The Wheel in Dublin on 26-28 June 2024 was organizational capacity, while the topics of good governance, HR management and leadership were discussed with The Wheel, Carmichael Center, Enclude and Smashing Times. The visit was accompanied by 9 BİRLİKTE Program participants from Ankara, Istanbul and Diyarbakır.

The first meeting was held at Europe House, where the structure of Irish civil society, The Wheel's role in this structure, and its governance model were explained. Additionally, The Wheel's risk management, monitoring and reporting of processes and progress, and governance principles were also discussed at this meeting.

A visit was made to Carmichael House to learn about the governance models of different civil society organizations in Ireland. The meeting introduced the governance model, human resource management and leadership approach

of Carmichael House, a civil society organization that provides offices, community spaces and resources to civil society in Ireland.

The study tour also included meetings with Enclude, which provides diverse and tailored IT support to civil society organizations in Europe, and Smashing Times, an interdisciplinary organization that works to promote human rights and equality and provides resources, networks and support for artists.

### Through the eyes of The Wheel

The Wheel were delighted to welcome STGM and 9 Birlikte beneficiary organisations to Dublin, Ireland in June 2024 for the second thematic meeting of the programme. Due to visa requirements and travel, in the interest of time, it was decided to combine the second thematic meeting with the third. This led to a large group of 13 people travelling to Dublin. This 2.5-day thematic meeting focused on topics relevant to all organisations present: Good Governance, HR/wellbeing and Leadership.

**Day 1**, The Wheel introduced the topics and had staff members with expertise in these areas speak to the group. This was an engaging experience for all with members of The Wheel staff learning more about the governance requirements in Turkey and HR legislation, or lack thereof. The Q&A session that was held throughout the day was thought provoking and engaging.

**Day 2** consisted of the group meeting three of The Wheel's members. Carmichael, Enclude and Smashing Times are three very different organisations, but all of them ensure practices of good governance, and HR management. It was beneficial for all involved to meet multiple

organisations and gain a deeper insight into how charities and community organisations operate in Ireland. The group discussed similarities and difference between the countries and their own organisations. It was an eye-opening experience and very thought provoking for all involved as it gave an opportunity for both sides to learn from each other and improve their existing practices.

Member organisations of The Wheel (Carmichael, Enclude and Smashing Times), noted that they really enjoyed getting to meet the Turkish participants and were very impressed by how engaged they were throughout the thematic meeting and their knowledge on Irish society.

**Day 3** involved a cultural experience around Dublin city. Secret Street Tours, a social enterprise who employ tour guides who previously faced addiction and homelessness, delivered a walking tour of the south side of Dublin city. This tour was a brilliant experience and enjoyed by all.

The Wheel were delighted to host STGM and the 9 Birlikte beneficiary organisations in Dublin for a very engaging and useful thematic meeting.

### About The Wheel

The Wheel is an umbrella organization for civil society

organizations in Ireland. Organizations working in all sectors, both service providers and advocacy organizations, can become members. The Wheel provides a range of support to strengthen civil society and also acts as a negotiator and facilitator of civil society's wishes and needs to government.

### The participating organizations are as follows;

Aramızda, the Association for Gender Research, Civil Society in the Penal System Association, The Association for Monitoring Equal Rights, LGBTI+ Association for Rights Equality Existence, Positive Living Association, Civic Space Studies Association, Social Policy, Gender Identity, and Sexual Orientation Studies Association, Uğur Mumcu Investigative Journalism Foundation and Zan Foundation for Social, Political and Economic Studies.



02.Apr.2024

## BİRLİKTE Participants came together with CSOs from Ireland in Istanbul

BİRLİKTE Corporate Support Programme participants came together in Istanbul on 23-26 January 2024 as part of the Learning Community (BİRLİKTE HUB) activities. Representatives from the Irish project partner The Wheel attended the meeting we organised within the scope of our BİRLİKTE Programme supported by the European Union.



In the first thematic meeting of BİRLİKTE HUB, civil society organisations working in different fields in Ireland shared their experiences. Gay Project, which carries out awareness, solidarity and psycho-social support activities in the field of LGBTI, Women's Collective, which brings together local women's organisations in Ireland under the roof of a network, Alienated Children First, which works in the field of children's rights, Land Use, Tenure and Agrarian Reform, which works to empower women in rural areas, and GOSHH Ireland, which provides information, counselling and training on HIV/AIDS, attended the meeting.

The guests from Ireland had the opportunity to visit BİRLİKTE organisations working in a similar field in their offices. 3 groups of BİRLİKTE organisations, Hevi LGBTI Association, Positive Living

Association, Social Policy, Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation Studies Association, Ali İsmail Korkmaz Foundation, Civil Society in the Penal Execution System Association and Buğday Association hosted the visits.

Within the scope of gender mainstreaming, policy documents of BİRLİKTE participating organisations and mechanisms to prevent intra-organisational violence were

discussed and experiences were shared.

Non-Violence Education and Research Association, LGBTI Association for Rights, Equality and Existence, Aramızda Association and Young LGBTI Youth Studies and Solidarity Association talked about their policy preparation processes, on which need they decided to prepare a gender equality document, how the preparation process went and what they did to make the document concrete.

Mechanisms to prevent violence within organisations were discussed together with the Women's Solidarity Foundation and the Human Rights Association. In this session, information was given about the decision to establish a mechanism to prevent intra-organisational violence, the design and preparation processes of the mechanism, and the functioning processes of the mechanism.

Intersectionality was also discussed in the meeting. In the session where organisations evaluated how inclusive they are in their policies and practices, the issue of intersectionality was discussed with a focus on accessibility, youth, children, gender and environment. In this session, Social Policy, Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation Studies Association, Young LGBTI Youth Studies and Solidarity Association, International Children's Centre Association, Association for the Visually Impaired in Education and Buğday Association shared their experiences.

On the last day of the meeting, organisations' questions on finance and grants were answered. The Gender Equality Mainstreaming Working Group (GEMI) held its first face-to-face meeting. In this meeting, GEMI worked on the gender equality questions in the BİRLİKTE self-assessment tool and revised the questions.

# NEWS

28.Nov.2024

MELTEM ÇOLAK

## Using Art without Despairing: On the Trail of Creative Power

*Art is one of the most powerful tools to touch our deepest emotions, make complex issues visible and inspire social transformation. So, how can we use art as an advocacy tool in an age when we are surrounded by so much information and injustice without making us feel helpless? We searched for the answer to this question together in the panel "Influencing without Despairing and Using Art as an Advocacy Tool" organized as part of the thematic meetings of BİRLİKTE Institutional Support Program*



The panel brought together rights-based civil society organizations and artists to explore the effects of art in different disciplines and find creative solutions to social problems. Freda Manweiler from Smashing Times, Özlem Işıl from Altyazı Cinema Association, Kerem Çiftçioğlu from Hafıza Merkezi, Aslı Alpar from Muzır.org, Communicator and writer Fehmi Ağduk and CultureCIVIC representative Ayşe Eraslan were our guests and we discussed the transformative power of art with these speakers coming from different perspectives.

### Art: A Journey from Despair to Hope

Throughout history, art has been one of the most effective ways of addressing social issues. Today, however, the bombardment of information and a constant state of crisis can cause individuals to become desensitized instead of taking action. One of the key questions of the panel was: How can we use art strategically to capture people's attention and mobilize them?

Freda Manweiler talked about how Smashing Times, through theater and film, contributes to peace processes in post-conflict societies. "Art is a mirror of society and telling the right stories is the key to social healing," Freda said, emphasizing the critical role storytelling plays in building trust and confronting trauma in post-conflict processes. She emphasized the necessity of making art accessible, especially for marginalized groups to be heard. Freda also expressed her intention to collaborate with human rights defenders in Turkey and shared her experiences in this field:

"Small projects are the seeds of big changes. It is very important to see and share the transformative power of art in these processes."

### Art and Humor: The Smiling Face of Protest

Cartoonist and rights defender Aslı Alpar was with us at the panel. In her speech, Aslı drew attention to the role of humor and protest art in social resistance. In particular, she emphasized that humor can increase social solidarity by going beyond being a way of coping with difficult issues. A statement Aslı shared perfectly summarized the power of protest art: "Art is not just a form of expression; it is also a process that blends resistance, emotion and transformation."

Aslı stated that art is everyone's right and that aesthetics is not exclusive to the elite. She also expressed that art can be used more effectively in new and creative ways in rights-based struggles.

### Memory and Confrontation: Constructing Social Memory through Art

Kerem Çiftçioğlu, who thinks about communication in terms of hope-based communication and storytelling, shared how the Memory Center uses art as a tool of confrontation and memory. He gave examples from the production process of the "Dargeçit" documentary on enforced disappearances and emphasized the importance of telling traumatic stories with aesthetic sensitivity. Kerem drew attention to the ethical dimension of art with the following words:

"Art requires approaching traumatic events with an aesthetic sensitivity. Any work done without this sensitivity is both ethically and socially problematic."

In Hafıza Merkezi's work, art is a tool for building social memory while at the same time building bridges of empathy between individuals.

### Empathy and Dialogue with Cinema

Özlem Işıl from Altyazı Cinema Association talked about how independent cinema can be used as a tool for dialogue and empathy. In particu-

lar, the video activism work done as part of the Fasikül program aimed to build a bridge of political empathy between audiences that celebrates differences. Özlem expressed the importance of this process in the following words:

"In order to create empathy in the audience, Altyazı Fasikül tries to avoid approaches such as making the subjects who tell the stories in the video more likable and taming the political content. It adopts a political and radical understanding of empathy that does not ignore political, class and gender-based differences, conflicts and contradictions, but rather starts with their acceptance. In this sense, it sees empathy as an important tool to break down social prejudices."

### Imagination and Social Participation

Communicator and writer Sait Fehmi Ağduk discussed how creative projects can increase social participation. Fehmi, who enables individuals to imagine the future of their communities through projects such as "The Dream Newspaper", emphasized that art is not only a means of individual expression, but also a means of building a collective future.

### Art and Activism: Inspiring Examples from Turkey

CultureCIVIC representative Ayşe Eraslan talked about the collaborative projects of artists and civil society organizations in Turkey. She stated that focusing on local producers can increase the impact of art and offer more creative solutions to social problems. Ayşe's projects demonstrated once again that art is not only a form of expression, but also a transformative force.

### Conclusion The Transformative Power of Art

When used correctly, art not only conveys messages but also raises social awareness, builds hope and encourages individuals to take action. The panel discussions in Ankara reminded us once again of this potential of art and creativity. Using art without despair is an effective way to confront and resolve complex social issues. This process can only be possible with the contribution of all segments of society, not just creative individuals. Today, it is up to us to build a more just, inclusive and hopeful future together, inspired by the power of art...

08.May.2024

ZEHRA TOSUN



## Gender Equality for Organizational Transformation, Organizational Transformation for Gender Equality

*In the new implementation period of BİRLİKTE, we have included some priorities in our support. In the new period of the BİRLİKTE Program, which we see as a process of organizational transformation from individual practices to a system, from customary practices to written procedures, we have identified gender equality as one of our main lines. We have considered this as both a goal and an essential, strengthening and accelerating element of organizational transformation at all stages of the program*

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Since gender equality is a fundamental element of human rights, it was naturally one of the main issues in the first period of the BİRLİKTE Program. The fact that anti-gender equality policies pose a threat not only to women's and LGBTI+ organizations but also to the civic space as a whole; that policies and practices that do not take gender dynamics into account carry the risk of limited impact not only for the public but also for civil organizations; and that there is no possibility to implement principles such as equality, transparency, participation and democratic culture in our organizations without gender equality were the main factors that made it necessary to address this issue.

During the institutional development work we carried out in the first period of BİRLİKTE, we had a wide range of experiences in which organizations questioned gender-based inequalities within themselves. Although we conducted activities in this field with BİRLİKTE participant organizations, we were aware that such partial activities had limited contribution to organizational transformation.

### Gender equality should not only be a demand but also a commitment for CSOs

We believed that gender equality should not only be a demand but also a commitment for civil society organizations. For this reason, we pursued the question of how we can implement equality not only in the field we struggle for but also within the organization. With the inclusion of 25 organizations in the new period of BİRLİKTE, both we and our questions multiplied and deepened.

This learning enabled us to address the issue in a more focused and defined way in the second period of BİRLİKTE. In the first period of BİRLİKTE, organizations fighting for gender equality were distant from the institutionalization process, while organizations fighting for rights in other fields found gender equality important, but did not see it as a priority issue. As someone who has been struggling in this field for many years, but who is also a mentor in a very well-structured institutional development program such as BİRLİKTE, I can say that I experienced the first transformation in this intersection. As a feminist, I never lost faith in the power of the street, but I had the opportunity to understand that institutionalization or strategic planning is not the bogeyman.

### What did we do and how did we do it?

While structuring the new period of BİRLİKTE, we proceeded based on the approach of gender equality for organizational transformation and organizational transformation for gender equality.

Despite the very justified feminist criticism of 'Gender Equality Mainstreaming' (GEM), we saw it as an effective strategy that we could use in BİRLİKTE. GEM is more of a public demand, but in recent years it has also been used for civil society's own transformation. We have integrated the mainstreaming approach and its useful tools into BİRLİKTE's unique institutional development model.

We can say that we carry out GEM activities in three parts. The first is our work at the program level. The principles of the program, the application and grant guidelines we developed, and the evaluation criteria for CSO applications were all developed with a gender equality perspective. In the evaluation process, which is an important stage of the program, we prioritized the inclusion of organizations that stand out in the field of gender equality as well as organizations that demonstrate the need for change in this direction. In the online information activities, we

underlined as much as possible that this issue is the main element of the program. In this process, we tried to understand what the organizations wanted to do for gender equality not only in their working areas but also within the organization.

Another and perhaps the most important line is the mentoring work we carry out with 25 civil society organizations participating in BİRLİKTE. From the very beginning, we have been conducting GEM activities as a dimension of mentoring for organizational development. The experience of BİRLİKTE mentors in civil society and organizational capacity development, as well as their knowledge, curiosity and excitement in the field of gender equality facilitated and strengthened the process more than we could have imagined. We put a lot of thought together to carry out coordination, communication, finance, monitoring/evaluation & learning activities on the basis of gender equality.

The focus of the mentoring activities is our organizational development model and self-assessment tool, which we developed in the first period of BİRLİKTE and explained in detail in our previous article. In the self-assessment tool, we positioned gender not as a separate area such as governance, members and volunteers or resources, but as an issue that cross-cuts all areas in the tool. Thus, BİRLİKTE organizations evaluated the points that needed to be improved in terms of gender equality separately for each area and shaped their improvement plans for the first year accordingly. The improvement plans include both GE-focused improvements and notes on how they will address the GE perspective in other improvements.

Civil Society Development Center Association is our third line. STGM is an organization where many gender equality activists take part in different roles such as members, employees and board members. Gender equality is an issue that has been on STGM's agenda for many years.

In 2010, a book written by İlknur Üstün and edited by Aksu Bora titled "Gender Equality: Can We Take it into Account?" is a publication of a study in which STGM's activities and functioning are comprehensively evaluated with a focus on gender. With this publication, we understand that STGM started a self-assessment process with a focus on gender equality about 15 years ago. Although STGM has defined and implemented various practices in this field in its institutional documents, we have diversified and accelerated our work in this direction with the BİRLİKTE Program, saying that there is always more for gender equality. In addition, in order to make these efforts more comprehensive, effective and sustainable, we decided to create a gender equality group that includes STGM's board of directors, members and employees. In this respect, it would not be wrong to say that STGM has become the 26th organization in the BİRLİKTE Program that learns by sharing, not knowing and teaching.

## Gender equality for organizational transformation organizational transformation for gender equality

We endeavor to support our work on GEM through various activities and mechanisms. We think about this issue together with participating CSOs and discuss the tools and documents developed together. For living and transforming gender equality policy documents, we evaluate how the practices and mechanisms defined in the documents will be included in which institutional document. We make use of STGM's pool of experts for the specific expertise that CSOs need in their gender equality work, and we mediate the meeting of organizations and experts. We meet and share our knowledge and experiences in face-to-face events and online events where we prioritize organizational mechanisms for gender-based complaints and intersectional discrimination. We share important and up-to-date resources and events on the subject at the digital meeting point (BİRLİKTE Hub) open to BİRLİKTE participant CSOs. We organize various events in Ireland and Turkey with the Wheel, the partner of our program in Ireland.

## To share experiences and knowledge: BİRLİKTE Initiative for Gender Equality

In the context of GEM work, we should also make special mention of the BİRLİKTE Initiative for Gender Equality. The Gender Equality Mainstreaming Initiative, abbreviated as GEMI in the program, was formed with the participation of activists from BİRLİKTE participating organizations. We can say that it is a BİRLİKTE formation that is eager to devote its knowledge and time for gender equality in civil society. We can already foresee that the contribution of the information, documents and tools that the initiative, which recently held its first meeting and will soon come together again to formulate its work program, will go far beyond BİRLİKTE organizations.

It is exciting just to think about the contribution that these structured and comprehensive studies carried out by 25 civil society organizations focusing on different areas of rights on the basis of gender equality will make to the struggle for gender equality. We will continue to share with you what we learn as time progresses. However, I will end this article with the good news that we will hand over the floor to the real owner of TCEA's work, GEMI.

14.Aug.2024

## #JusticeforAhmetYıldız: This search for justice is also a search for the fight against discrimination and hatred

*We spoke to Miran Koçkur, Digital Media and Communications Coordinator of HEVİ LGBTİ+ Association, about the Justice for Ahmet Yıldız Campaign and the discrimination and violence LGBTİ+ people face in Turkey.*

HEVİ LGBTİ+ Association has been following the case of Ahmet Yıldız, who was murdered by his father, the first LGBTİ murder in Turkey, since 2015. We talked to HEVİ LGBTİ+ Association, which calls for the case not to be time-barred, for the case to be brought to the public agenda and for Ahmet Yıldız's murderer to be found and punished as he deserves, and which runs the "Justice for Ahmet Yıldız Campaign", about a struggle against discrimination and hatred, and a search for justice.

**Could you tell us about the Ahmet Yıldız case, its importance for LGBTİ+ people and the process leading to the Justice for Ahmet Yıldız Campaign?**

In 2008, Ahmet Yıldız was murdered by his father in front of his house in Istanbul after his family threatened him for being gay. Ahmet Yıldız was also recorded as the first known 'honor' murder in which violence and hatred separated him from us due to his sexual orientation. This murder not only ended Ahmet's life but also exposed the discrimination and violence faced by LGBTİ+ individuals in Turkey, revealing how moral judgments, culture, the concept of family, the system, and even the judiciary legitimize death when it comes to the right to life of LGBTİ+ people, and in fact, the fate that heterosexism has condemned us to.

In the years that followed the murder of Ahmet Yıldız, no justice was served, no effective process was carried out and the perpetrators remained unpunished. This situation showed that threats and discrimination against LGBTİ+ persons are not taken seriously, how discrimination is legitimized in the social and legal dimension, and that the concept of protection is not enough when it comes to LGBTİ+ persons. In this respect, Ahmet Yıldız became the most visible aspect of a symbolic process of impunity, discrimination and isolation for all LGBTİ+ persons. Every hearing has been a proof that unless justice comes to Ahmet, it will not come to us. That is why Ahmet was killed again and again in every hearing. We were being driven away from equality and justice in every hearing.

**What kind of solution does the campaign seek in the face of the lack of justice and the system's production of injustices?**

The Justice for Ahmet Yıldız Campaign was launched to ensure that this terrible situation is not forgotten and to demand justice. In the process, we have seen how



we have been left alone, how the system itself produces injustices and how we have been pushed into helplessness. As an action against this process, we said Justice for Ahmet Yıldız, Justice for all of us. In this way, we tried to include not only LGBTİ+ people, but also all others, rights defenders and everyone in search of justice in the process. In this direction, we contacted many institutions before the last hearing. We ensured the participation of many people from bar associations, CSOs and initiatives. Perhaps with the effect of this, the last trial was the first time in years that people were allowed to attend the hearing. At least we were able to overcome an arbitrary practice. This was thanks to the efforts of our lawyer, journalist and activist friends who filled the courtroom. Our goal now is to increase the number of people who call for justice for Ahmet Yıldız, to increase public pressure and to do everything we can to get justice for Ahmet Yıldız. For this, STGM's contributions before the last hearing helped us to carry the process to a better point. For this, we would like to especially thank the STGM team. They made us feel more closely that we are not alone in this process.

Thank you for your persistent pursuit of justice for Ahmet Yıldız. Achieving justice will be an important development for all struggles for rights and justice.

The campaign is still renewing itself. That is why we are open to all kinds of support. We expect support from all segments of society to keep Ahmet Yıldız's memory alive and to ensure that justice is served. Achieving justice will be a big step not only for Ahmet Yıldız's friends, but for all LGBTİ+ people and human rights.

This campaign is not only a search for justice for Ahmet Yıldız, but also a call for understanding that LGBTİ+ people are equal and free citizens like everyone else in society. This fight for justice also aims to ensure that everyone, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity, is recognized as deserving of equal rights. Let us not forget that justice for Ahmet Yıldız is justice for all of us. Ensuring justice will bring justice, hope and confidence to the whole society, especially LGBTİ+ people.



## 20 Years of Effort: Building a World of Equality for Everyone Living with HIV

Since 2005, we have held onto a powerful dream: a world where everyone living with HIV enjoys equal rights, free from discrimination and stigma. Much has changed over the years. Today, HIV is a manageable health condition—one that, with regular treatment, allows people to lead healthy, productive, and long lives. However, widespread misinformation and deep-rooted prejudices in society have not evolved at the same pace. This is exactly why we are here.

Today, approximately 48,000 people are living with HIV in Türkiye. For them, HIV represents much more than a health condition. It can mean facing discrimination in the workplace, being denied healthcare services, or encountering invisible barriers in every area of life simply because of their status. HIV itself does not restrict social life—stigma and discrimination do. They become real obstacles that profoundly affect people's lives: losing a job, being denied essential treatment, or being excluded from a circle of friends. None of these stem from HIV itself; they are the consequences of fear, misinformation, and societal stigma.

In today's world, living with HIV is no barrier to living a full and healthy life. Yet we still have a major challenge ahead: fighting stigma, discrimination, and exclusion. Since 2005, Pozitif Yaşam has been at the heart of this struggle. We advocate for the rights of people living with HIV, create support mechanisms, and work to deliver accurate information to society. Because living with HIV should never be an obstacle to living equally.

Perhaps the most important point is this: a friend, a colleague, or a family member of yours may be living with HIV. A subject you might think distant could already be part of your life—or one day, it could even become part of your own story. That is why breaking down prejudices about HIV is not only the responsibility of those living with it, but a shared responsibility for all of us. Accurate information and solidarity are the strongest forces for healing. Together, we can change society for the better.

## NEWS

## BİRLİKTE PROGRAM AND ITS IMPACT ON OUR ORGANIZATION



Our organisation's previous participation in similar programs, combined with the tools and opportunities offered by the BİRLİKTE Program specifically designed for rights-based organisations, enabled us to benefit effectively from its components. The motivation, mentorship, and support provided by the BİRLİKTE team not only enhanced our team's motivation but also fostered effective dialogue and active engagement with the program's goals.

The program's systematic and comprehensive self-assessment processes, along with its participatory and supportive structure, greatly contributed to maximizing our learning.

Activities such as training sessions, peer to peer gatherings, the meetings of Gender Equality Mainstreaming Initiative (GEMI), and the Birlikte Hub increased our collaboration and knowledge-sharing with other participating organisations and experts, making the process much more productive.

Facing challenges with a sense of shared experience strengthened our resilience. Through the first self-assessment, we realized how scattered and incomplete some areas of our work were. By the second self-assessment, we identified and addressed many missing pieces, and by the third, we recognized our strengthened capacity and clearer vision. The mentorship support provided through BİRLİKTE was a significant driving force throughout all stages of our work. We especially extend our deepest gratitude to our mentor, Nevzat Kırac, whose vast experience and solution-oriented, systematic approach played a crucial role in supporting our organisational development.

### Strengthening Our Advocacy and Organisational Structure

Thanks to BİRLİKTE, AYHED took stronger steps in rights-based advocacy. The self-assessment and improvement processes allowed us to strategically shape our advocacy activities.

We revised our vision and mission and developed a three-year Strategic Plan with clear outcomes, indicators, and objectives aligned with four strategic goals—one of which was strengthening our collaborations with bar associations and focusing on joint advocacy efforts.

Through the program, we also: strengthened our organizational structure, clarified our working units, and established a more sustainable operational model. established the Gender Equality Mainstreaming Unit (GEM), strengthened our monitoring and evaluation systems, and created a digital archiving system to make legal support efforts more systematic.

### Integrating Gender Equality Across All Work Areas

One of the most concrete changes over the two years of BİRLİKTE was the full integration of gender equality (GE) into all our areas of work, significantly advancing our gender perspective. Key achievements include:

- Mainstreaming gender equality as a strategic priority in our strategic plan, with projects aimed at strengthening access to justice through a gender equality lens, especially in our advocacy work.
- Embedding GEM principles into our organisational culture and working language, and integrating them into our human resources and procurement policies.

- Developing and internalizing a GEM Policy Document, guiding both internal and external stakeholder relations.

- Strengthening our institutional capacity with a dedicated GEM Unit, staffed by three volunteer lawyers and one institutional development officer; our organisation now consists of a five-woman team.

- Initiating the establishment of a Violence Response Mechanism aligned with the GEM Policy Document and creating an Ethics Committee Directive.

- Updating our organisation's by-laws in line with GEM priorities, including new articles addressing the monitoring, reporting, and legal support for issues concerning women, children, persons with disabilities, refugees, LGBTIQ+ individuals, and human rights defenders, and adding misconduct clauses such as hate speech, discriminatory behaviour, and psychological violence.

- Increasing the GEM awareness of our internal stakeholders through training sessions, workshops, and knowledge-sharing meetings.

- Strengthening external stakeholders' capacities in GEM by organising trainings and monitoring activities, particularly with bar associations in 15 provinces.

- Building stronger collaborations with bar associations such as Şanlıurfa and Van, supporting the formation and empowerment of Women's and Children's Rights Committees, and promoting sustainable legal aid mechanisms.

- Integrating the GEM perspective into our legal support activities. Through the We Act program, we established an LGBTIQ+ Legal Support Network and expanded legal assistance for women and girls' access to justice.

- Initiating systematic monitoring of the impact of our activities on gender equality through data

collection and evaluation mechanisms led by the GEM Unit.

- Developing gender-sensitive reporting systems to reflect GEM perspectives in our project outputs.

- Designing GEM-centered advocacy projects, including a project supported by the Dutch Embassy focused on enhancing young women's participation in political decision-making processes and linking access to justice with political participation.

A brief note on this new advocacy approach linking access to justice with political participation is attached.

### Looking Ahead

The gains we achieved through this program have strengthened not only our organisation but also the capacities of human rights defenders and legal professionals we work with.

We view this as just the beginning and aim to further expand the knowledge and experience we have gained to wider audiences in the future.

We sincerely thank the BİRLİKTE Program and all supporting stakeholders.

### Mainstreaming gender equality in the context of access to justice and political participation

Access to justice is not merely a technical issue concerning the functioning of judicial mechanisms; it is one of the fundamental pillars of social justice. Access to public resources, legal support mechanisms, and decision-making processes is a primary obligation of a social state. However, it is clear that this access is not equally guaranteed for everyone. Women, in particular, face multiple barriers in accessing justice mechanisms, defending their

rights in legal proceedings, and participating in political life. Women's access to justice is not limited to the ability to file a lawsuit; it is directly linked to political participation, legal reforms, and public awareness.

Individuals who are aware of their rights, have access to legal support, and trust the justice system play a critical role not only in transforming their own lives but also in contributing to broader societal change.

The barriers women and vulnerable groups encounter in accessing justice create a cycle that systematically excludes them from social and political spaces.

At AYHED, some of the main issues we have observed in the field include:

- Patriarchal structures and gender biases within the judiciary often result in women's complaints being dismissed or referred to reconciliation mechanisms, even in cases of violence.

- Economic barriers such as lawyer fees, court costs, and transportation expenses make it difficult for women to sustain legal proceedings.

- The lack of sufficient support mechanisms for women during legal processes and the lack of continuity in women's rights commissions within bar associations leave women isolated in their legal struggles.

- Restricted access of civil society organizations and bar associations to judicial mechanisms undermines the effectiveness of legal monitoring and observation efforts.

The existence of these barriers affects not only women's ability to seek their individual rights but also their capacity to engage in political processes.

Strengthening access to justice mechanisms will enable women to participate more actively in political life and support policy changes centered around gender equality.

### Gender Equality Mainstreaming and Political Participation

Integrating a gender equality perspective into legal processes is crucial not only for seeking justice but also for ensuring democratic representation.

Increasing women's representation in political decision-making processes also reinforces the fairness and inclusiveness of justice mechanisms.

Women's empowerment through access to legal support strengthens their capacity for political participation.

With the support of the Civil Society Development Center (STGM) through the BİRLİKTE program, AYHED has significantly strengthened its GEM work by establishing a dedicated GEM Unit, through which we planned the following initiatives:

**Legal Advocacy:** Proposing legislation and developing local recommendations for judicial reforms to strengthen political decision-making processes from a gender perspective.

**Training and Awareness:** Collaborating with bar associations and human rights organisations to provide capacity-building training for lawyers and human rights defenders in gender equality advocacy.

**Rights Monitoring and Legal Support:** Preparing monitoring reports on rights violations, providing legal support, and conducting case observation studies in collaboration with bar associations and civil society organizations.

**Strategic Litigation:** Developing precedent-setting cases to drive transformative change within the judicial system and increase women's access to justice.

**Enhancing Political Participation:** Implementing training and mentorship programs to strengthen young women's participation in political decision-making mechanisms.

In this framework, we are currently implementing the project "Strengthening Participatory Democracy and Women's Participation in Political Decision-Making Mechanisms" with the support of the Embassy of the Netherlands, aiming to build a joint advocacy network among political parties, local governments, and gender equality-focused civil society organisations across six provinces.

## What Are We Aiming for with this Initiative?

to foster sustainable working spaces and dialogue opportunities by encouraging young women lawyers from different political parties to share their experiences.

- to strengthen young women's engagement in political decision-making mechanisms and foster joint advocacy and campaigning efforts.
- to enhance the knowledge and skills of young women politicians in the fields of gender equality and participatory democracy.
- to build the capacity of young women politicians across different political parties in campaign development, digital activism, and joint advocacy strategies.

## What Are We Doing?

We are organizing two-day interactive training sessions for 120 young women politicians from six provinces, led by four expert trainers, on the following topics:

- Participatory Democracy and Rights-Based Approach
- Gender Equality Advocacy
- Political Party and Local Government Law
- Effective Participation in Political Decision-Making Processes
- Digital Activism

Following the training, we offer two months of mentorship support to groups interested in developing projects, strategies, and activities in areas such as:

- Active participation in local, national, and international participatory mechanisms
- Campaign creation
- Application and participation pathways in decision-making processes
- Strengthening and monitoring departmental activities
- Project development and resource mobilization for gender equality work

## The Broader Objective

Ultimately, through this joint advocacy movement, we aim to:

- Support legal reforms that will enhance women's access to justice,
- Strengthen political parties and CSOs working in the field of women's rights,
- Facilitate easier access to courts for women through bar associations and civil society initiatives,
- Prevent women from being left isolated in legal processes.

We must collectively develop programs that encourage women's political participation and strengthen their representation in decision-making bodies.

Justice is not achieved solely within courtrooms; it is a concept that must permeate every aspect of societal transformation.

Women's right to access justice is inherently tied to their right to equal participation in political decision-making processes.

Thus, gender equality mainstreaming must not be confined to legal proceedings—it must be integrated across all public policies and democratic practices.

## Acknowledgments

We extend our deepest thanks to the STGM BİRLİKTE team, the Women's Coalition Network, the Embassy of the Netherlands, our association's team, and all our valuable trainers and mentors who contributed to this initiative.

As AYHED, we will continue to work towards strengthening both legal mechanisms and political processes through a gender equality perspective—because our fight for justice will continue until it is achieved equally for all.

18.Feb.2025

# BİRLİKTE PARTICIPANTS MEET IN EGED'S NEW PODCAST SERIES



*The Association of the Visually Impaired in Education (EGED) continues to broadcast from different digital platforms. EGED, which broadcasts podcasts in many different fields such as disability, education, technology, accessibility, social life and general culture, meets with its listeners. EGED recently started a new series in 'Voice Givers', which hosted people who gave voice to books, sports competitions and films in the past period, in 'Campus Conversations', which aims to bring universities to your ears, and in 'Solution Time', which talks about the issues on the agenda regarding disability.*

EGED, one of the participants of the BİRLİKTE Corporate Support Programme, gives voice to the organisations participating in the Programme in its new series of publications. BİRLİKTE organisations working in many different fields from children's rights to the environment, women's rights to cultural rights find a place in the 'We are Together' series. We asked EGED member Ümmü Seyrek, who prepared the series, about the new series.k.

### How did the 'We are together' series start?

During BİRLİKTE meetings, the idea of collaborating with other orga-

nisations that are beneficiaries of the Programme emerged. Together with the team, we thought that we could realise this idea with a podcast. We were going to talk about disability, introduce EGED to other organisations and get to know other organisations. This made me enthusiastic not only as a member of EGED but also as Ümmü.

The first part was with Zehra Tosun from Among Us Gender Research Association and STGM. Because EGED had recently published the Gender Equality Policy Document and I was one of those who took responsibility for the preparation of the document. We had worked with our BİRLİKTE team and Zehra Tosun while preparing EGED's Gender Equality Policy Document. With this publication, we discussed the dissemination of the Gender Equality Policy Document.

In the second part, we recorded with Özlem Işıl from Altyazı Cinema Association. In this broadcast, we talked about accessible cinema techniques. In the third episode, Pelin Erdoğan and Tolga Kızılay from the Nonviolence Education and Research Association talked about nonviolent organisation, nonviolent campaigning and well-being within organisations. In the fourth episode, our guests were Fatih Fethi Aksoy and Meliha Bilge from Çiğdemim Association. In this meeting, we talked about the disability contacts of Çiğdemim Association and EGED Environment and Zero Waste Policy Document. The fifth and so far the last episode was hosted by Nejat Taştan from the Association for Monitoring Equal Rights. In this conversation, we talked about the Association for Monitoring Equal Rights and the monitoring activities of the association on the basis of disability.

You can listen to all the episodes published so far on Spotify and Apple Podcast and on the YouTube channel of the Association of the Visually Impaired in Education as 'Birlikte 'yiz series. "Birlikte"yiz serisi olarak dinleyebilirsiniz.

### Which topics will you discuss in the coming days?

We are planning an episode with the International Children's Centre Association. I had originally planned six episodes, but we are planning to continue with new organisations. We have archived good episodes, we hope we have produced a permanent content.

07.Sep.2023

# Wheat Association: Production and Consumption Methods that Feed Selfish Lifestyles Deepen the Food Issue



**First of all, we would like to ask about the relationship between food and climate. How are these two topics interconnected?**

The climate crisis is a result of unchecked consumption frenzy and production methods that cause carbon emissions. This crisis, which now directly affects our lives, is making food production and fair access to food increasingly difficult every day... Soils are becoming impoverished, water is dwindling, heirloom seeds and biological diversity are being irreversibly destroyed.

Wars, pandemics, and the climate crisis have made us realize that the food crisis is only the tip of the iceberg. The poor have been experiencing serious problems in accessing food for a long time, and their numbers are increasing day by day. The problem of production and consumption methods that feed our selfish lifestyles continues to deepen.

Lab-grown meats, soilless agriculture, GMO technologies, vitamin supplements... We must urgently transform our production and consumption methods, as well as the policies applied in many areas such as agriculture, energy, economy, infrastructure, urbanization, and rural life that affect food and its production...

For this, we need to reexamine our relationship with food first; we need to reconsider the cost of our food, including the monetary, social, and ecological costs, and we need to confront the fact that the reasons that make access to food difficult are not just wars and the economy.

*We are experiencing the hottest summer in recent years and experts say temperatures are set to rise. The climate crisis is at the center of our lives as an agenda we can no longer escape. While we are living the climate crisis closely and our lives are changing, there is also the issue of food in relation to it. We talked about the climate crisis and food with the Wheat (Buğday) Association for Supporting Ecological Living, which has been working for many years to provide access to healthy and safe food, to popularize nature-friendly production and consumption habits, to strengthen the ties between rural and urban areas and to raise awareness of ecological living in society.*

The second reason is food waste. Here, we're not talking about food wasted in households. Every year, one-third of the food produced, approximately 1.3 billion tons of food, goes to waste from the field to the table. In developing countries, 40% of the loss occurs during harvesting and processing, while in developed countries, the same percentage occurs at the consumption stage.

The third reason is the loss of the nutritive qualities of food products, which are artificial or, in other words, "processed" foods. The synthetic chemicals and additives used in agriculture push the nutritional value of foods into the background, causing health problems due to inadequate nutrition.

Research indicates that the world produces enough agricultural and food products to feed the global population. In Turkey, it is possible to feed our population of 80 million with ecological/chemical-free agricultural products using only half of the existing

agricultural lands. The remaining 50% can be used for pastures and animal production (Y. Demir, B. Aslan, Organik Tarım Türkiye'yi Besler).

**To feed the world's population, transitioning to ecological production on just 60% of the existing agricultural lands is sufficient**

The data presented suggest that the problem is multifaceted and includes erroneous policies, planning, and practices, along with overconsumption, improper nutrition, logistical and storage issues caused by centralized systems, farmers abandoning production due to increasing costs, monoculture farming on extensive areas leading to reduced biodiversity, soil and water pollution, and challenges in food production and access resulting from conflicts and disasters caused by the climate crisis.

In light of all the problems associated with the existing industrial agricultural production model, agroecology not only offers a sustainable agricultural model based on the preservation of natural resources and social balances but also provides solutions as a comprehensive model that ensures fair access to healthy products and enhances the economic, social, and cultural well-being of rural communities.

Agroecology, aimed at balancing food systems from an ecological, economic, and social perspective, strengthens rural life by promoting social justice and nurturing cultural identities. While preserving and enhancing natural assets, agroecology addresses the diversification of farms and agricultural lands, replacing chemical inputs with natural biodegradable inputs, optimizing biological diversity, and stimulating interactions among different agricultural ecosystem types.

The Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL) examined this issue and revealed what would happen if organic farming were adopted worldwide in all agricultural areas by 2050. According to the study, with complementary factors, organic agriculture can indeed feed the world. In fact, to feed the world's population,

transitioning to ecological production on just 60% of the existing agricultural lands is sufficient.

According to FiBL, to achieve this, there needs to be a decrease in animal product consumption, a reduction in the number of animals raised, and consequently, a decrease in feed production and waste. Given the scale of food waste worldwide, the rapid increase in meat production and consumption relative to the population, and the excessive consumption of meat in developed countries, we can say that the "reduction in animal production" requires not only planning but fundamentally a transformation based on ethical and justice principles.

According to the report of the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food to the United Nations General Assembly Human Rights Council's Thirty-Fourth Session, "Commonly used and forecast to continue to be used worldwide, pesticides are harmful to human health and the environment. Alternatives that reduce the use of these pesticides are available and can be further developed. Increasing organic farming practices in many places show that it is possible to farm with fewer or no pesticides. Research indicates that agroecology can feed the global population and provide adequate nutritional value."

**In the context of food, issues such as obesity, food waste, and access to healthy food are interconnected problems. From here, we would like to discuss food security as well. First of all, what is food security, and how is it ensured?**

The fundamental elements that make up food security are listed as availability, accessibility, reliability-quality, and stability. Availability refers to the presence of a sufficient quantity of appropriate-quality food, either through local production or imports. Accessibility means that individuals have the purchasing power and resources to access nutritious food. Reliability-quality encompasses adequate nutrition, clean water, hygiene, and health services to meet all physiological needs for healthy nutrition. Finally, stability describes the ability of a population, household,

## Food production is both the cause and victim of the climate crisis

One of the contradictions we face today, with hunger on one side and waste on the other, is that food production is both a cause and a victim of the climate crisis. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Report, 21-37% of total greenhouse gas emissions can be attributed to the current food system. In other words, the stakeholders in the food system, which is one of the primary causes of the climate crisis, also have to deal with the disasters caused by climate change.

Approaches such as Sustainable Soil Management, Permaculture, Soil Food Web Farming, Holistic Planned Grazing, Regenerative Agriculture, Conservation Agriculture, Conservation Tillage, Crop Rotation, Agroforestry, while having some methodological differences, all fundamentally prioritize sustainability, fairness, ecology, and health criteria.

Agroecological methods such as efficient water use, rainwater harvesting, reduced soil tillage or no-till farming, holistic grazing, and compost applications to improve soil, as well as direct access systems from producer to consumer, can reduce the effects of climate change in the short and long term.

Informing farmers about these remedial methods, encouraging their adoption, and promoting the widespread use of these methods are crucial. The widespread use of these methods, along with the preservation of soil, water resources, and biological diversity, translates into fair access to food, diversification of rural livelihoods, and resilient systems against the climate crisis.

**You are advocating for the protection of agricultural lands and the ban on chemicals in the process of growing crops, and you say "ecological agriculture can feed the world." Can you explain this a bit? How is this possible?**

Research shows that there is enough food production in the world to feed 8 billion people healthily. So why do more than 800 million people suffer from hunger, and 2.3 billion people experience malnutrition?

There are three main reasons for this problem. First, there is inequality in food distribution. In 2017, the average meat consumption was around 124 kilograms per person in the United States, 80 kilograms for a European, 40 kilograms for a person in Turkey, and about 10 kilograms for a person in Nigeria. According to reports from the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the highest number of undernourished people is in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa.



or individual to access enough food at all times. The absence of any one of these elements means a lack of food security. Food security encompasses various areas and dimensions, from clean seeds, clean soil and water, clean energy, fair trade, and cooperative partnerships to consumers and communities taking responsibility for their food. Growing healthy food is impossible without clean soil and water, and reducing the impact of the food system on the climate crisis is not possible without establishing local production-local consumption mechanisms.

According to the Global Food Security Index, Turkey ranks above the global average. However, high food inflation in Turkey, the depreciation of the Turkish lira, the import of products produced in Turkey from abroad, especially small farmers giving up production because they cannot cover input costs, rural populations migrating to cities, and problems such as drought, water stress, erosion, and extreme weather events that seriously affect agricultural production constitute the most important food security risks in Turkey. In addition to these effects, the increase of Turkey's population by 20 million in the last 20 years has led to an increase in food demand, while the non-purposeful use and gradual shrinkage of agricultural land negatively affect the supply-demand balance.

Even in countries with a large rural population, urban dwellers consume 70% of the food supply. Unplanned urbanization and increasingly consumption-focused lifestyles can be the source of a range of problems, including

challenges in accessing healthy food, increased carbon emissions, restricted mobility, and the support of obesity and excessive overweight. More people are now driving to go shopping, turning to processed foods instead of cooking at home, or eating from restaurants and cafeterias without questioning the food they consume, while children are developing unhealthy eating habits without knowing where and how their food is produced. The number of consumers who rely solely on the information on packaging is not insignificant!

#### **The adoption of local and self-sustaining circular production systems is necessary**

At this point, centralization and the long-distance transportation of food to urban consumers, which escalates with the increase in urban population, is one of the complex factors that exacerbates food insecurity issues. The procurement of food and agricultural inputs from miles away, or even from abroad with foreign currency, leads to an increasing gap between producers and consumers and results in higher product prices due to intermediary costs. Instead of centralization that causes these problems, the adoption of local and self-sustaining circular production systems, as much as possible, brings solutions such as reducing carbon emissions, providing price advantages by eliminating many intermediaries, and better functioning control mechanisms.

To address all these complex issues, a multi-faceted change in mindset is needed, from radical transformations in food production systems to lifestyle changes that guide our consumption. Even simply reducing the distance between producers and consumers by establishing local production-local consumption systems can provide many benefits, such as improved access to food, reduced carbon emissions, better operation of consumer control mechanisms, production planning based on consumer needs, and waste reduction.

#### **For quite some time, you have been involved in a campaign against pesticides used in agricultural production in collaboration with the “Zehirsiz Sofralar Platformu” (Toxin-Free Tables Platform). During the early stages of this campaign, called the “Zehirsiz Kampanya” (Toxin-Free Campaign), 27 pesticide active ingredients were banned. What is the current situation, and could you tell us a bit about this platform and your recent activities?**

ZThe “Zehirsiz Sofralar Platformu” (Toxin-Free Tables Platform) has two major campaigns: “Toxin-Free Tables for All Creatures” and “Take Action for Toxin-Free Cities.” The “Toxin-Free Tables” project, which is funded under the European Union’s Civil Society Dialogue V Program and carried out in partnership with the European Pesticide Action Network, started in 2019.

During Turkey’s EU accession process, 223 pesticide active ingredients were banned, which was in parallel with bans in the EU. Out of these, 37 bans occurred during the period when the “Zehirsiz Sofralar Projesi” (Toxin-Free Tables Project), led by the Buğday Ekolojik Yaşamı

Destekleme Derneği (Buğday Association for Supporting Ecological Living), was carried out under the “Zehirsiz Sofralar Platformu” (Toxin-Free Tables Platform) campaign. We demand an immediate but gradual ban on all 13 active ingredients identified by the World Health Organization as “extremely hazardous”, “highly hazardous” and “probably carcinogenic”. Unfortunately, we were only able to ban 5 of these 13 substances during the campaign. but the processes are lagging behind the EU in terms of its own conditions or products that are not exported to the EU and the relevant pesticide actives.

With the “Towards Poison-Free Cities” project, which started on April 1, 2021, in partnership with the European Pesticide Action Network (PAN Europe) and in cooperation with the Poison-Free Tables Platform, and supported by the EU Civil Society Dialogue Programme VI, we demanded that the use of pesticides and biocidal products containing the same active ingredients as pesticides and licensed by the Ministry of Health be restricted and that alternative environmentally friendly methods be gradually adopted. In this context, our pioneering municipalities have made certain commitments by signing goodwill documents. The platform’s activities also include providing consultancy to various CSOs working in the field of public health and supporting public health congresses.

#### **Finally, with the knowledge that large-scale steps need to be taken to tackle the food and climate crises and emphasizing the duties of states, what can in-**

#### **dividuals or small communities do to combat these crises? What can we do to create sustainable agriculture and food systems?**

Agroecological methods such as conservation water use, rain harvesting, reduced tillage or no-till agriculture, holistic grazing, soil improvement through composting practices, and unmediated access systems from producers to consumers can mitigate the impacts of climate change in the short and long term.

Transitioning to sustainable food systems will not only reduce environmental, social and health costs, but also ensure that all people have access to materially healthy food. Our choices determine our future. Systemic transformations are directly related to consumer demands. With our choices and demands, we can accelerate change in production methods and support an ecological and just transformation.

Changes in our lifestyles, from diets to shopping habits, can also be an important tool for food systems to take into account the limits of the planet. It is possible to eat organic and agroecologically grown foods, reduce meat consumption, prefer foods produced from local seeds in the region where we live, and avoid ready-made foods that contain many chemicals that we do not know what they mean. Avoiding as much as possible, shopping from local producers, switching to waste-free kitchen practices, organizing for solidarity (cooperatives, food communities, etc.), supporting NGOs working on the issue will make a significant difference for transformation.

26.Jun.2025

# WE CYCLE TOGETHER WE CHANGE PERCEPTIONS



*We spoke with Okan Öztürk, Digital Media Manager at Eşpedal Association, which sees tandem cycling not only as a physical activity but also as an opportunity to break down mutual prejudices and look at life from different perspectives, about the competitive side of tandem cycling.*

#### **First of all, we would like to get to know you better. Could you tell us a little about the Eşpedal Association and tandem bicycles?**

The Eşpedal Association was established as a meeting point for sighted and visually impaired bicycle enthusiasts. On tandem (two-person) bicycles, the sighted person, or pilot, sits in the front seat, while the visually impaired or blind person, or co-pilot (assistant pilot), sits in the rear seat. Since November 2015, we have traveled thousands of kilometers. Of course, tandem bicycles existed before us.

#### **When did tandem bicycles establish their place in the racing world?**

The origins of tandem bicycles date back to the 1880s. As performance-focused improvements were made over the years, “tandem bicycle races” also found their place in the Olympic Games by 1972.

**“Some steps are revolutionary, some pedals increase the speed of the revolution.”**

#### **So, what are your initiatives as an association regarding participation in the Paralympic Games?**

The Tandem Cycling category was first introduced at the 1984 New York Paralympic Games, the pinnacle of disabled sports. Since then, no Turkish athlete has been able to participate in these events in the cycling category. The Eşpedal Association took the initiative at this point and embarked on a major struggle to enable visually impaired cyclists to represent themselves in Europe, the world, and the Paralympic Games.

#### **Where does the Tandem and Eşpedal Association fit into the competitions held in Turkey?**

The Gran Fondo bicycle races, known as amateur bicycle races in Turkey and around the world, were a great opportunity to promote tandem bicycles and increase their visibility. On average, around 15 races are held each year, and the Tandem Cycling Association participates in many of these races with its tandem category. By participating in bicycle races with its own resources and volunteers, the association contributes to the recognition of this branch by authorized federations.

Without getting lost in statistical data, it is known that there are 1 million visually impaired people in our country. For many, access to sports is either nonexistent or severely limited. As the Eşpedal Association, we use cycling as a tool to achieve our ideals of equality, accessibility, and barrier-free living. Among our 2025 goals, one of our greatest aspirations is to activate the Para Cycling B category under the umbrella of the Cycling Federation and perhaps even produce the first national athletes from within the Eşpedal family.

#### **Is there anything else you would like to add?**

We have a campaign running on Change.org: “Activate the Para Cycling B Branch, Let Visually Impaired People Participate in Tandem Cycling Races.” We are waiting for your support for our campaign. Every pedal turned together strengthens the concept of companionship. Although we talk about the race-focused story of tandem bicycles, the roots of Eşpedal lie in a love for nature. Through our traditional summer camps held in different cities each year, our long-distance bike tours, and our fun and educational events, perhaps our paths will cross one day. Happy pedaling to all!

28.Dec.2023

## WE COME OUT OF A MAJOR DISASTER WITH SOLIDARITY

### Turning a scar into a scar of life



*As we close a challenging year, we wanted to give the floor to ALİKEV and listen to their perspective on the past year. ALİKEV, which set out 10 years ago to “turn a scar into a scar of life”, today says “we are coming out of this disaster with solidarity”.*

We are closing a very challenging year. We continue to experience the effects, pains and problems of the great disaster we experienced in February, right at the beginning of the year. Many problems are waiting to be solved in the cities affected by the earthquake. What has happened so far shows that life in the earthquake zone will not return to its normal course soon and easily.

However, civil society organizations that have been in the field since the early days of the earthquake, making tremendous efforts to heal wounds and contributing to the rehabilitation of those affected by the earthquake, are not working to return to the pre-earthquake era; instead, they continue to work to build something better. One of these organizations is ALİKEV, established in the name of Ali İsmail Kormaz, who we lost at the age of 19 during the Gezi Resistance in 2013.

Founded in the name of Ali İsmail and working in Ali İsmail’s hometown of Hatay, the Foundation emerged from the Kahramanmaraş Earthquakes with great damage. As we close the year, we wanted to give the floor to ALİKEV and listen to their perspective on the past year.

**Firstly, we would like to express our condolences. 2023 has been very challenging for all of us, especially for those living in disaster-stricken areas. You also lost your building in Hatay during the earthquakes on February 6th. We would like to inquire about your activities in Hatay. When will the foundation return to Hatay? How is your program structured?**

This disaster, which affected 11 provinces, also deeply affected Hatay, where our foundation has been operating for 10 years. Our building, which has been hosting us since the establishment of our foundation, was completely destroyed in the earthquake.

We are emerging from this great disaster with solidarity. We set out with very important contributions for a new foundation center. We immediately started working with the support of Mor ve Ötesi, Mozaik Foundation, Sivil Toplum için Destek Vakfı (Support Foundation for Civil Society) and Herkes İçin Mimarlık Derneği (Architecture for All Association) to build a new center from scratch.

We want to offer a much more functional space to the service of young people in this new center. The project of the center, which will provide more opportunities with a library, workshop area, music studio, stage, ALİKEV products and open spaces, has been prepared. We expect the construction to start soon. We hope that we will have our center, which will host many activities, in 2024.

**In the first days of the earthquake, you said “we will overcome these bad days with solidarity” and gave us all hope in that difficult time. We would like to hear from you about the Foundation’s recovery process, not to bring back bad memories, but to remind us how we were able to stand side by side in difficult times. How was this one year and what happened?**

ALİKEV was founded 10 years ago with the hope of realizing the dreams that Ali İsmail wrote in his diary, and to turn his scar into a scar of life. We knew that our friends from all over Turkey and even the world would not leave us alone today, just as they did not leave us alone in those days. Unfortunately, as a country, we are very accustomed to gaining hope from pain and rising from our ashes. Hands of solidarity were extended for the reconstruction of our foundation building that was destroyed in the earthquake. Thanks to this, we were able to quickly take steps for our new center in Hatay.

After the earthquake, the health and well-being of our team became our top priority. Thanks to our collaboration with the Travma Çalışmaları Derneği (Trauma Studies Association), we provided psychosocial support to our employees and board members.

On the other hand, as an organization that produces social benefits for young people, another priority was to stand by our beneficiaries in our field of work. We were not alone in the steps we took to provide one-time earthquake support scholarships to students affected by the earthquake. Thanks to our individual and institutional supporters, we reached 249 students affected by the earthquake and provided one-time scholarships.

With the “What Would Young People Say?” project, we focused on meeting young people affected by the earthquake and supporting their well-being by creating space for them. “What Would Young People Say?” is a rights-based media production project in which young people between the ages of 18-25 tell their own “invisible” agendas through participatory

methods and aims to amplify the voices of young people.

Coach e.V. also pioneered the “Youth Bridge” project, which promotes international youth exchange and symbolizes our commitment to not only rebuilding but also strengthening together.

**What are you doing as a foundation to lift up both Hatay and your work in Hatay?**

Aware of the importance of cultural and social fabric, we have come together with regional and national civil society organizations to protect Hatay’s rich heritage.

In this process, we also launched the “What Would Young People Say?” project, which we attach great importance to, so that young people in the earthquake region can make their voices heard. After the disaster, we saw that there was no mechanism that took into account the needs and demands of young people in the decisions taken on issues concerning young people, and that young people were not prioritized in times of crisis. Young people, whose existing problems were added to new ones with the earthquake, are expressing the problems they have identified by producing media content through written, visual and audio methods.

What Would Young People Say? started in September with an inaugural camp where young people also received psychosocial support. Two bulletins have been published so far. Young people work for a month and publish their bulletins at the end of that month. In November, they worked on gender equality. You can read the bulletin here. In the previous month, they talked about the difficulties of being a student in Turkey with a focus on education and housing. You can also read the October bulletin here .

In addition, in order to strengthen Hatay, we allocated this year’s entire scholarship quota to high school and university students from Hatay who were affected by the earthquake. We received 2,368 applications, 505 from high school students and 1863 from university students. Interviews have been completed and this year we will be awarding scholarships to a total of 250 students, 127 of which will be new students.

**You recently moved your office to Istanbul. How are things going in Istanbul, have you gotten used to the city? And of course, with this spatial change, what will happen at ALİKEV in the new period?**

In fact, one of our bases has always been in Istanbul. With the decision taken by the board of directors in 2019, some positions were opened for Istanbul residents. With this decision, some of our team was carrying out activities from Istanbul. We see the Istanbul office, which became operational in October, as a collective space where we come together with young people, meet with volunteers, and open it to the use of our friends from civil society who need space. Of course, this collective space has also provided us with important opportunities. The Istanbul Team of the Dream Ambassadors Program, which had

to hold its meetings and workshops in different venues since its establishment, now holds its workshops and meetings at ALİKEV Istanbul office.

Genç Sanatçı Fonu (GSF) (The Young Artist Fund) also continues to develop. On December 22, the GSF opened the exhibition of the works of 12 young artists it supported this year at Karşı Sanat Çalışmaları. GSF, which has been holding its exhibitions in Istanbul since its inception, has had the opportunity to establish a closer relationship with its stakeholders in this field and to expand this support.

Another advantage of our Istanbul Office is that it has created a space where we can come together with our adult volunteers as well as our target audience. We will be able to meet with our volunteers, most of whom live in Istanbul and have been supporting us since our establishment, in this space in line with their needs. With all these steps, we are looking forward to a period in which we come together more with young people and civil society stakeholders in Istanbul and become stronger together.

29.Apr.2025

## BİRLİKTE We Listen: How Did the Policy Document Preparation Process Go for the Migration and Humanitarian Aid Foundation?

*There’s a topic we’ve been hearing often in the civil sector recently: policy documents. These documents are crucial for organizational development as they define systems and processes. However, unfortunately, they often end up gathering dust in files without being implemented. But organizations are living and learning structures, and naturally, the papers they produce must be constantly renewed with these experiences.*

In her article titled “A Very Famous Policy Document!”, Hatice Kapusuz, one of the mentors of the BİRLİKTE Institutional Support Program, wrote the following about these documents: “A policy document is a learning memory that emerges at the end of a process in which the organization and its members engage with themselves, reflect on the issues, and share their experiences. It is a tool for clarification, mutual understanding, and naming the problems correctly.”

In the BİRLİKTE program, which we designed with a learning organization approach, organizations participate with their mentors to create policy documents for their structures. One of the organizations in this process is the Migration and Humanitarian Aid Foundation (GİYAV). We asked GİYAV about this challenging document preparation process in order to support organizations working on this topic.

**First of all, we are curious about how you decided to create this document. Why did you feel the need to prepare a policy document?**

The Migration and Humanitarian Aid Foundation (GİYAV) began its work in 1999 in Mersin, one of the provinces most affected by internal migration due to village burnings and forced evacuations. However, instead of focusing solely on the concept of “migration,” the foundation identified the different impacts of migration on women due to gender inequality and initiated a unique project in this field. Additionally, they aimed to take a holistic approach by addressing various other areas such as ecology, mother tongue, and children’s rights. In 2010, when the foundation moved its headquarters to Amed (Diyarbakır), it realized that while the Kurdish Women’s Movement was very strong, no organization was focusing on children, and thus, children became the target group of their work.

The reason we are sharing this process is to emphasize that our organization had an awareness of this issue 25 years ago, when gender was barely discussed by any institution. Although we don’t have a written document on gender, we are proud to say that we have an oral tradition and a well-established organizational culture regarding gender.

Well, since you have such a well-established organizational culture, we can almost hear the question: why did you feel the need for this document? The answer we found after discussing this was: because the “masculinity contract” has much stronger and older roots. When combined with the “Turkishness contract” and the “Islamic contract,” which form the foundations of this country, it perpetuates a sexist, racist, discriminatory, and harmful system every day. This system, which feeds on itself, produces unequal relations that are constantly changing and manipulative, and those fighting against it need definitions and mechanisms that are also constantly changing and evolving.

With this document, we aim to clarify the ambiguity in concepts by identifying definitions agreed upon by the organizational subjects, raise awareness of gender within the organization, and systematize our gender-based decision-making practices in daily work or activities with children into a written document. We also want to create monitoring mechanisms that will clarify the institution’s approach in the event of violations. Although we have applied various methods in practice, the document will be a way for the organization to establish a position independent of individuals.

**The preparation process was probably not easy. Can you share what you went through?**

As we were writing this document, we wondered to ourselves if we were too Kurdish again. Once again, we connected everything, once again, we said that we can’t find a solution to any of them without finding a solution to all of them. Once again, we couldn’t separate the topics from each other, as expected of us, as it should be (?). Then,

we questioned who decides or could decide what should be. In the face of the organization and wholeness of the evil before us, our struggle has become one in search of a holistic solution, a realization that sometimes we can only express our concerns with sentences consisting of six lines. This is not a choice, but a necessity. Whether we call it intersectionality or inclusivity, without knowing, it's the anxiety of not leaving anyone behind, the anger towards those who do not feel this anxiety, and perhaps a bit of bitterness.

A method that comes from seeing the hidden pattern between the exclusion of a Kurdish woman activist from speaking about alimony rights—without an intersectional basis—and the absolute exclusion of a woman lawyer from explaining cadastral law. Despite being able to find a place for ourselves as ‘subjects of the field,’ even if tokenistically, on issues related to war and conflict, when the topic is not directly related to Kurdish children (we don't know how this is even possible), the feeling of being relegated to the periphery in a study is perhaps the anger we feel about being treated like a laboratory subject. No matter what we do, no matter how well we do it, the feeling that it is never enough. The life cycle in which others know what's best, and we are always in a learning position. Therefore, this document's emphasis on unequal relationships, without establishing a hierarchy between inequalities and without separating them from each other, is not just due to our need to express ourselves but also due to the intersectionality of colonialism and patriarchy. We do not think that we could solve this with just one document, nor do we think we can solve it with five separate documents. When we need to choose between two methods with equal results, perhaps because we don't know how they differ, we chose a holistic approach. We have no regrets.

### **Preparing a policy document should be a process supported by participation and inclusivity. So, what did you do for this preparation process, how did you get ready?**

To run a participatory process, we invited all management, employees, and volunteers to the workshops we organized. Unfortunately, no one attended the meetings other than those actively working in the organization. So, we conducted the workshops with the foundation president (the only person from the management), four employees, and three volunteers.

We actively discussed the our mentor's questions with those actively working in the organization, sometimes unable to convince each other, and had repeated discussions. We noted the topics that emerged during these discussions, and two of our colleagues took responsibility for the writing process. We did not include any issues or sentences with annotations from any of the workshop participants in the document we prepared. We presented the draft of the document again to the same team for approval, and we made revisions based on their feedback. We sent the revised draft to our female friends (mentors) with whom we have a joint collaboration at BİRLİKTE and are progressing on the same GEMİ, and we are currently waiting for their suggestions. The policy document, which will undergo some changes based on the feedback and criticisms, will be opened for the management board's suggestions, and we will make the necessary revisions according to their feedback.

### **What did your organization learn or realize from the process of preparing this document?**

The biggest learning for our organization was the shared awareness that emerged from the discussions we had about how we define gender inequality. Hearing the examples we encountered in practice while conducting these discussions increased our awareness on many issues we didn't previously consider gender-related. Additionally, we confessed to each other how much the other forms of discrimination, which occur in parallel with and interact with gender-based discrimination, are present and effective in our lives. We faced the reality that the elements we call organizational culture are actually subject to the subjectivity of each individual, and everyone carries different experiences and perspectives in their hands. When sharing the feeling of inequality we experienced not only in internal relations but also in the relationships we developed with other organizations and individuals, we saw how much we share common experiences, and this allowed us to name the discrimination we face regarding our intersectional identities. Our inability to view intersectionality separately opened the ground for re-discussing the source of the problem.

One of the biggest learnings for our organization was the realization that, as part of our claim to prioritize children's participation rights, we couldn't define the principles and mechanisms regarding children. We agreed that we had no right to define these for children. However, since we constantly work with children, we also realized that we needed a document in this area. These two circumstances led us to plan a six-month study for a policy document to be written by children, where they would define their principles, definitions, and mechanisms.

### **What changes have you observed in your organization after this preparation?**

Although this document has not yet reached its final version, we can clearly state that even just initiating the discussion has significantly increased our awareness.

The most tangible example of this is that we named the gender-based and patriarchal attitude towards female employees in the relationship with a third party from whom we regularly procure services, and we ended the service procurement contract. Additionally, after the discussions, we started to examine our everyday practices more comfortably from a gender perspective. We began to prioritize this topic more in workshops with children and to review every subject in our strategic plan in this context. Therefore, it would not be wrong to say that it has opened the way for change and made us stronger.

28 Nov 2024

HATİCE KAPUSUZ

# A VERY FAMOUS POLICY DOCUMENT!

*Policy documents appear as an undeniable tool to keep peace at home while struggling in an unfair and unequal world. But of course, in the complex universe of human relations, regulating the relations between the people of the organization and the organization's relations with people, solving existing problems and preventing new ones requires efforts beyond 3-5 page documents. Therefore, in this article, we would like to offer some answers to the question “so what to do?” and an invitation for reflection.*

One of the elements that has recently been on the rise in the civilian sphere is policy documents. There is even a state of inflation. One reason for this popularity is obviously funder demands.

Another reason is that the political, social and economic tensions of recent years and the shrinkage of civic space have manifested themselves in various conflicts and challenges within organizations.

Another very important reason is that while the civic space and activists are being updated with new concepts and approaches, organizations face the necessity to change their old procedures, approaches and ways of relating. As such, policy development imposes itself as a necessity for organizations.

Policy documents appear as an undeniable tool to keep peace at home while struggling in an unfair and unequal world. But of course, in the complex universe of human relations, regulating the relations between the people of the organization and the organization's relations with people, solving existing problems and preventing new ones requires efforts beyond 3-5 page documents. Therefore, in this article, we would like to offer some answers to the question “so what to do?” and an invitation for reflection. For this, we will try to contribute from the perspective of prevention, transformation and learning instead of the classic interventionist policy document logic.

### **How can a policy document leave the pages and penetrate organizational life?**

Firstly, the policy document needs to move away from being a “written for pages, we'll implement if fate allows” manuscript. Because a policy document is not a specialized product; it is not a mere compilation of standard procedures. A policy document is the result of a process where the organization and its people become intimately connected, where issues are contemplated, and a collective learning memory emerges after sharing experiences and discussing concerns. It is a tool for clarification, for understanding each other, for giving the right name to problems. It may be a cliché, but it is also true for policy documents; “it is not the destination that matters, but the road itself”. In other words, the policy document is not a few pages of documents, but the process of its preparation. Therefore, it is necessary to make policy documents an occasion for discovery and learning processes and to change the preparation process.

### **So how?**

First of all, it is necessary to give policies, which are an important element of institutionalization, the importance and time they deserve.

However, the biggest contradiction of every work that gives soul to institutionalization is workload, organizational intensity and fatigue. Organizations are of course right about this. Who can underestimate what an organization has to deal with on a daily basis?

Unfortunately, every improvement and institutionalization effort that we cannot allocate time for ends up costing much more than the time we consider excessive. The absence of descriptive policies such as job descriptions and human resources, as well as preventive and empowering policies against issues like violence and mobbing, can lead to motivation, labor, memory, employee, member, volunteer, and reputation losses. The individuals, who are the most crucial element of organization, are bruised and detached from the organizations. Organizations that derive their strength from people are left without them. It is essential, in this situation, to prioritize the phrase “let's handle this first” over “we need it but don't have time” regarding policy documents and to allocate time. It is necessary to support time with participation and inclusiveness. It should be remembered that everyone can contribute their input and experience to a policy document. Opening the door to hearing these contributions, moving away from expertise and templates, and developing tools are enjoyable ways to foster collective learning and empowerment.

### **How to produce a functional policy document?**

Other important elements of functional policy documents are being a learning organization, balancing the organization and the individual, sharing responsibility, and the intersections of these three.

If we start with the learning organization approach, the concept is defined as an organization that has the ability to continuously acquire new knowledge and skills, use existing knowledge effectively and adapt to changing conditions. It can make a big difference if the process of drafting policy documents and the internal logic of the document are in line with this concept.

To elaborate a bit, policy development processes offer us the opportunity to make sense of and learn from past experiences. The guidance of questions such as what happened, why it happened, how it happened, what are our tools that need to be preserved, what needs to be changed, what needs to be corrected allows us to prepare policies based on our experiences and strengthen us as a team. Approaching past processes with these questions turns negative experiences into learning opportunities instead of black holes that cannot be overcome. Instead of a passive approach to problems, seeking responsibility from outside, getting involved as agents of change strengthens the organization, its people and relationships, and makes ties more durable. It replaces the dichotomy of right and wrong in the face of challenges and problems with elements of learning, improvement and transformation.

### **Good design: prevention, intervention, repair, transformation**

As for the design of policy documents, the common approach is focused on identification and intervention. However, the policy document should include prevention, intervention, repair and transformation pillars on

### **But do policy documents solve everything?**

Yes and no.

If we were to delve into the answer ‘no’; documents that define systems and processes, such as policy documents, are indeed significant areas for empowerment within organizations. However, expecting a document to be a cure-all can lead to disappointment in the end. The implementation of a document is undoubtedly influenced by processes such as individuals within the organization sharing responsibilities, and the organization and its members being familiar with the document. Yet, along with these, the needs upon which the policy is built often bring additional improvement responsibilities to the organization and its management. For example, the source of internal team difficulties may stem from uncertainties in the organization's job design or deficiencies in planning. Focusing solely on conflicts or parties here may not have the ability to provide a definitive solution to the problem. After all, the source of the conflict is not only individuals but also organizational and managerial needs.

If we move from here to ‘yes’, the preventive mechanisms, actions and responsibilities we define when preparing policies point exactly to this point. If an organization identifies the needs and shortcomings well and takes the initiative to implement the preventive actions that emerge from this, it will strengthen the function of the policy document. In addition, of course, seeing the process as cyclical, learning from and updating implementation experiences will increase the solution capacity of policy documents.

In conclusion, when we intersect the concept of learning organizations with policy documents, and when we add prevention and transformation to intervention, we can learn and grow from the challenging processes as organizations and individuals. The learning organization approach is also one of the main elements of BİRLİKTE Institutional Support Program. Therefore, in the mentoring processes we conduct, we approach policy-making processes with this understanding, accompany organizations, and continue to learn.

28 Nov 2024

# A Look at Rights-Based Civil Society Organizations

## What Does the Organizational Well-Being Research Tell Us?

*The concept of well-being and how to achieve it within an organization is on the agenda of civil society organizations. The Nonviolence Center recently conducted the Organizational Well-Being Research with the aim of identifying the working conditions and needs of rights-based civil society organizations in Turkey through the concept of organizational well-being. The study, besides assessing the current situation, proposes methods to promote well-being and shares positive examples to strengthen it. We also spoke with the researchers Cansu Kılınçarslan, Hilal Başak Demirbaş, and Merih Beler about how the well-being of employees in rights-based civil society organizations in Turkey can be strengthened and how they cope with the challenges they face.*

The researchers' answers to the questions were compiled and merged, with their names included where they wanted to emphasize their unique perspectives.

### Before we start discussing the research, could we hear about the Nonviolent Center from you?

As the Nonviolence Education and Research Association (Nonviolence Center), we dream of a world without violence in every situation. We define this dream as a world where human rights and freedoms are protected, and societal peace and democracy are established. We believe that human rights defenders and grassroots organizations are the most important actors in reaching this vision; thus, we develop empowering programs to ensure these groups adopt nonviolent methods and use them effectively.

Since 2015, we have been working on raising awareness, developing skills, and increasing the capacity of organizations in the fields of LGBT+ rights, women's rights, environmental struggles, peace efforts, and human right

### How did you decide to focus on well-being in rights-based organizations?

Employees of rights-based organizations often have to cope with heavy workloads, limited resources, and societal pressures. These challenges have detrimental effects at both individual and organizational levels. We believe that well-being-based approaches will enhance internal solidarity in organizations and create a more nonviolent and supportive work environment. This research started with a curiosity to understand what rights-based civil society organizations in Turkey are doing at the organizational level to promote the well-being of their employees, volunteers, and members.

### What is the scope and goal of the Well-Being Research?

**C.K.:** We aimed to look at the experiences of rights-based civil society organizations in Turkey from the perspective of "organizational well-being." We tried to understand what creative practices exist, even though they are not widespread in organizations, and how they provide resources or, conversely, what common needs organizations share.

**HBD:** How? We sent out survey invitations to rights-based organizations, and then conducted in-depth interviews with some of the survey participants. A total of 118 people participated in the survey. The organizations of the participants are located in cities such as Ankara, Çanakkale, Denizli, Diyarbakır, Edirne, İstanbul, İzmir, and Rize. In addition to the surveys, we also conducted semi-structured interviews with 22 people, considering gender distribution, age, positions in the organization, and diversity across cities.

**C.K.:** Based on what we saw and heard, we started to look for positive examples that could strengthen organizational well-being, how to overcome the challenges, and what better examples there are. There were productive discussions. We aimed to participate in these and make what we have visible and discussable. We think that this way, both organizations and the related stakeholders who aim to strengthen organizational well-being in civil society organizations will find it easier to take this issue into account.

**MB:** We approached the concept of well-being with the idea of nonviolent organizing and aimed to identify factors affecting the well-being of employees in the balance between work and life and offer solutions for improvement. We included rights-based civil society organizations in the scope as a sample.

**"When the organization's way of working, decision-making mechanisms, how it responds to situations, and the steps it will take in the face of risks are clear, employees feel more secure."**

### What are the key findings of the research? In which areas are problems encountered?

**C.K.:** We chose to analyze the organizational well-being experience by relating it to a framework that we developed for organizations, which includes organizational structure, organizational culture, environmental factors, and cognitive characteristics. I will respond based on those categories: Environmental factors are experiences related to the structure of the organization. Negative experiences were concentrated in environmental factors where the impact was more limited. In particular, we can mention relations with the state and those in power. Working on the basis of rights, conducting campaigns, and raising objections naturally brings one into conflict with the authorities. In an environment where any confrontation quickly leads to criminalization and even targeting, activists feel trapped. This has both negative and positive effects on organizational well-being. We saw that it triggered conflicts within the organizational culture, but at the same time, it led to solidarity and creative security measures in response to risks from the environment.

Another example of environmental factors is that we are going through an economic crisis. The inadequacy of these resources increases the workload. In many ways, the limitations of the organization's resource model and new challenges such as the increase in the culture of sacrifice bring difficulties to the organization in many different areas in terms of organizational well-being. Like environmental factors, uncertainties about the organization's structure, communication flow, spatial arrangement, or the rights of activists within the organization may be more concrete and easier to identify, and we have heard about negative experiences that affect the opinions reflected in the survey. Of course, in these areas, the challenges are easier to describe. Because they are based on concrete and understandable experiences, either from outside or within the organization. The areas where we can identify problems intensely tell us something, so we need to think about this.

It is important to keep in mind that there are also deeper issues that are more difficult to identify. From my perspective, examples of disclosure and how they are handled in terms of organizational well-being are examples of this. We have reached a point in the discussion where we recognize that sanction mechanisms based on shared values and ethical principles in advocacy can support organizational well-being. When addressing widespread disclosure incidents, I believe that, in addition to accountability and solidarity with victims, there is a need for compensatory and even preventive mechanisms.

### Sanction mechanisms based on shared values and ethical principles in advocacy can support organizational well-being

**HBD:** When we think about rights-based CSOs, we assume that they are structures that share certain principles and values. If the organization's working methods, decision-making mechanisms, how it responds to certain situations, and how it will take steps in the face of risks are clear, then employees feel more secure. This increases people's commitment to the organization and their well-being. In addition, if people can find spaces where they can express themselves in their work environment, exist within the group with their identity, and speak in their native language, this has a positive effect on their well-being. It is also important to add inclusive, child-friendly, and accessible office conditions that meet the needs of employees to this list.

Continuing with the work environment and conditions, another prominent finding is that hybrid and flexible working models have become permanent in most organizations after the COVID-19 pandemic. Along with flexibility, the positive contributions of being able to continue working not only from home but also from different cities and countries are evident. Employees and managers said that this way of working had a positive impact on their work and that the responsibility of being able to determine their own time increased initiative and mutual trust within the organization. In addition, those who continued to work in the office frequently emphasized the need to organize the workplace in a way that takes into account the well-being of employees. This study revealed how vital it is to have spaces where employees can be alone, take breaks, and relax in a comfortable chair.

### What was the most surprising finding during the research process?

**HBD:** Almost everyone who participated in the discussion was clearly aware that Turkey is an uncertain and risky country, especially in light of the recent earthquake and various other disasters. However, I was very surprised to see that the vast majority of associations did not have any plans in place to prepare for risks. Of course, there are exceptions to this generalization. For example, I remember that everyone working at an LGBT+ association had already given power of attorney to the association's lawyer. Another surprising thing was the breadth of thought that some of our "I agree" and "I disagree" statements opened up among the participants. I think this study contributed more than I expected to raising awareness about well-being, in addition to gathering participants' experiences.

**C.K.:** To be honest, when I move toward a new conceptualization, I believe it's necessary to be critical — and that's where I position myself as well. In the interviews, I expected more objections. What surprised me was that even those who said 'I have strong biases' still looked at what they could take from this for their organization. I thought there would be a curiosity about organizational well-being, but also a bit of a search for arguments and a need to be convinced. I can't quite call it 'not being ready.' It's more like: 'What am I entitled to, and to what extent?' It would help if the framework was a bit clearer.' There's a sense of grappling with difficulties, trying to develop strategies, and the recurring question: 'Who will be responsible for this?' Add this to the to-do list for the new workweek: 'Organizational well-being project.' (laughs) Of course, as we discussed earlier, there are the underlying struggles behind this.

My second surprise, and also something I had to face, was that quick solutions did not come in areas that were quickly identified. The importance of inclusiveness in terms of organizational well-being was

mentioned in the interviews. Let me give an example from there. As I mentioned earlier, physical arrangements or conservatism in organizational communication are identified quickly because they are based on very concrete data. The desire to confront the situation and make changes is sincere... However, it is also said that nothing has changed for years. Inclusive measures and arrangements that could be addressed under physical barriers and diversity of development are not being implemented, even if they are simple. There is much to review even in the funding application systems of institutions that provide funding in these areas of rights. The supportive add-ons of social media applications are not well known. These issues are acknowledged but still seem unsolvable. Alternative solutions and creativity are not coming into play. I was surprised to find a lack of information sharing despite the solidarity and communication between organizations.

**"We hope that organizations will take concrete steps toward organizational well-being, adopt and disseminate good practices in this area, and strengthen a culture of solidarity."**

### What impact do you expect this research to have on organizations?

We expect this research to bring the issue of well-being to the agenda in organizations and raise awareness about the well-being of employees. We believe that the findings of the report will guide organizations in assessing their own working conditions and help them identify areas for change. We also hope that organizations will take concrete steps toward organizational well-being, adopt and disseminate good practices in this area, and strengthen their culture of solidarity. Finally, we expect stakeholders to recognize the importance of this issue and support organizations in their well-being processes.

### What recommendations would you make to increase well-being in rights-based organizations?

**C.K.:** During this process, the phrase that kept repeating in my mind was "construction, not repair or improvement." Organizations' agreement on the intention to develop organizational well-being means structuring themselves in line with their needs. This is true; it requires a planned, multidimensional effort. Because we need to look at the fact that the needs of organizations will differ from one another. Effort, in this context, means not only creating space, identifying needs, and helping those within the organization recognize their unique resources, but also bringing them to the surface and supporting them with structural mechanisms. This can transform organizational culture and all external relationships... It can make their lives much easier in an instant. Let's not paint a rosy picture, of course. Some organizations may first need support in conflict resolution to achieve organizational well-being. Taking steps in this direction is better than putting it off.

To increase well-being, understanding the needs within the organization and creating spaces where these needs can be freely expressed is a good place to start. As Cansu said, the important thing is to start where you can. Developing fair and equitable practices, establishing transparent communication, and strengthening organizational solidarity are important steps in this process. As rights-based organizations, we have a lot to learn from each other. For ideas on how to strengthen solidarity, check out the 'Organizational Solidarity Handbook for Organizational Well-being'.

**Even small routines and activities can make a big difference.**

**Did you have any experiences during the research process that increased your awareness of well-being or changed your perspective?**

**HBD:** Before participating in this research, I thought that macro-level resources, decisions, and practices were needed to support well-being in an organization. I would say that this view has been expanded by some

of the participants' contributions to the research. I had the opportunity to see how even small routines and activities that become part of the organizational culture are important for employees. I was already aware of the importance of starting to discuss these issues within the team even without a budget, but my focus on this topic has definitely grown significantly. I observed that open communication, being heard, having one's efforts seen and appreciated are critical within an organization.

**C.K:** I also had concerns about the functioning of the individual well-being perspective within the system. I held the rights perspective on organizational well-being, but I wanted to turn the issue around in my mind, and my learning area expanded greatly during the research. In terms of practice: I realized that the easy part of organizational well-being is identifying problems and needs. On the other hand, when we asked the people we interviewed what they were doing well or how they solved the problems described, we encountered small touches and creative solutions. I found myself wondering if we might not be able

to share the resources we have at our disposal when we experience difficulties. This was followed by complaining less about what was going on around me. I think I'm focusing more on how to do things... I heard examples of how a phone call when someone was sick made them feel better, or the impact of asking "how are you?" I may have started doing more of what older people call "courtesy," which I sincerely consider signs of solidarity.



08.May.2024

ÇAĞLAR YENİLMEZ • NEVZAT KIRAC

# LEADING CHANGE

## Designing and Implementing Programs With Guiding Principles

*In our work with civil society organizations (CSOs), we sometimes overuse some concepts, wear them out quickly or neglect to engage sufficiently with the concepts. This article is about the principles that come together to form the values that we adopt by investing time, effort, mind, work and willpower, and that we observe in the process of turning our individual efforts into a promise for social change (i.e. when we get organized in one way or another), and how these principles can be organized in practice.*

**What are the operating principles of rights-based CSOs?**

A system is a whole made up of multiple physical or conceptual components that interact with each other and their environment to achieve a goal or outcome. CSOs also emerge and operate with the collective will of individuals who come together on a voluntary basis to achieve a specific goal. Therefore, each of them is a system that sits within, influences or is influenced by larger systems.

This book description points to the following questions: What is our collective will as an CSO, what do we want to change, and what outcome do we want to achieve? How should we build and strengthen the relationships between our sub-units and our relationships with the external environment so that we gain the position, consistency and strength to influence other systems towards our goal and create the change we want to achieve?

In fact, all systems, whether civil society organizations, corporations, mafia-like organizations or states, provide answers to these questions in one way or another. Each of them has a purpose, sub-units and principles, values or morals that determine its relationship and position in relation to external systems. This inevitably leads us to the following question: on the path to the change we want to bring about as CSOs, and particularly as rights-based CSOs, what are the factors that differentiate our existence from all other systems or strengthen our relationships with similar systems and ensure our consistency and legitimacy? The answers we give to these questions on a personal level as individuals within the CSO will also be reflected in the collective will of the CSO.

The Universal Human Rights, guarantees human and inalienable freedom, justice has been the basic work for all work purpose for 75 years. legal system based framework give people today hope to claim, create and live a life and a future worthy of human dignity and in harmony with all other living beings and nature.

**A distinguishing feature for CSOs based on a rights-based approach: Working with principles**

Declaration of which defines and dignity and the equal rights of people to and world peace, normative frame-conducted for this The rights and the on this fundamental

Rights-based CSOs have set themselves the task of realizing the rights and freedoms defined in this framework and creating equal opportunities and possibilities for all. However, there are no universal rules for what a rights-based approach should be.

In general, it is expected that the principles and values defined at the normative level are internalized by the CSOs working to realize these principles and values and that the organizations are able to look at the

field of rights with an integrated understanding in order to fully realize the rights and freedoms. It is believed that in this way, rights-based CSOs will be able to adopt an integrated approach that ensures coherence between their goals and their existence, and implement an integrated approach by developing the necessary skills in this direction.

From this perspective, it can be said that all principles and values defined as conditions for guaranteeing and realization of rights and freedoms constitute a set of commitments that distinguish rights-based CSOs from other systems and strengthen the legitimacy of rights-based organizations.

**Working with principles as a prerequisite for good governance**

Rights-based CSOs generally advocate for the protection, development or use of a particular right or rights. The compatibility of principles with a particular right or rights can help the CSO to define its mission and objectives, but also forms the basis for the work of the organizations. Ideally, there should be harmony between the change an organization wants to bring about, the role it assigns itself in creating that change, and the way it achieves it. While CSOs develop effective strategies to recognize certain rights and prevent violations, principles form the basis of these strategies. They provide guidance in setting tasks and goals and in planning.

Rights-based CSOs often take on

the task of protecting the rights and interests of society and rights-holders in general, on the assumption that this will lead society to a better place. It is therefore of great importance that society trusts and supports the CSO. To ensure this relationship of trust, it is important that the organization acts transparently, accountably and reliably by working with principles.

In designing the BİRLİKTE program, we wanted to ensure that the principles we set out in the model are guided and implemented in different ways at different levels of the program. In doing so, we first defined the general principles of the BİRLİKTE program based on the founding principles and values of the STGM with the participation of the entire team. We dedicated a lot of time to this process. As a team, we had the opportunity to discuss relationship between what they mean, what practice and what we particular.

**At the top of these principles is participation**

topics such as the principles and values, they can facilitate in need to focus on in

BİRLİKTE program and 6 principles that are internally connected. Although the principles for organizational development of good governance adopted by an organization must be a product of its own reality, as mentioned earlier, we have developed the organizational capacity development model in the light of our work with more than ten thousand civil society organizations for almost twenty years, the experience we have gained and the discussions in the international literature. We have identified six principles that are inextricably linked. (\*)

We can define participation as the creation of opportunities that ensure equal and active involvement of all parties affected by decisions at all levels.

The most important of these opportunities are the mechanisms of openness and accessibility for all stakeholders and beneficiaries of CSOs, information, consultation, involvement and feedback on these processes and outcomes. CSOs become transparent, accountable and reliable to the extent that they increase their participation. For an CSO, participation means not only the involvement of all stakeholders in decision-making mechanisms through established methods, but also the involvement of the CSO in the decision-making mechanisms and processes that affect the area in which it operates (policy, administration, etc.).

We define the principle the evaluation of all plans and activities and implements in based on the change create.

**The other principle we have identified in our model is value creation.**

of value creation as policies, strategies, that an CSO designs line with its mission, and social value they

Indeed, CSOs have the potential to create social value through the opportunities that arise from their very existence and the activities they carry out. Joining together for a common goal and developing collective thinking and action is in itself an important opportunity for the well-being of the group, community or society concerned. On the other hand, in today's world, CSOs can play an increasingly active role in solving many social problems. The value they create in every area - from strengthening participatory democracy to disasters and emergencies, from the environment to health, from poverty alleviation to education, from culture to sports - with the expertise and resources they can mobilize is also a key value for the organizational development of an CSO. For this reason, one of the principles of the organizational capacity development model we have developed is to focus on the organization's ability to provide answers to the problems it faces. This is

also an expression of effectiveness.

We interpret on three levels. Transparency in our

organization's governance, decision-making, selection and management of staff and volunteers, organizational structure and processes related to its functioning are defined in advance and that information from the field is accessible to relevant stakeholders. Transparency of activities means that information about the activities carried out by the organization is available to the public, while financial transparency means that external reports such as the organization's financial statements, audit reports, and information and documents related to financial management are available to the public.

Transparency is a necessary condition to ensure the trust and legitimacy of an CSO among its staff, volunteers, target groups and stakeholders. At the same time, it enables it to be seen as a secure organization by donors and funders. In this sense, we can consider transparency as a prerequisite for an organization to be participatory, accountable and sustainable.

**Another principle of ours is the principle of accountability.**

By accountability in the broadest sense, the organization should be accountable

to the relevant parties for the appropriate use of its resources and powers and to take responsibility for fulfilling its obligations. This principle also means that decisions and practices must be defensible and that the CSO's leadership and management team, volunteers and staff are accountable for the actions and statements they put on behalf of the organization. To meet this requirement, the organization's decision-making processes and administrative and financial transactions must be recorded in a way that is understandable to all stakeholders.

In contrast to transparency, accountability also emphasizes the obligation to respond, justify and act responsibly. The accountability of CSOs also includes demonstrating that their activities are compatible with their non-profit status.

**The principle of sustainability in our model refers to the CSO's ability to continuously create the resources and management capacity to ensure its existence.**

Necessary elements that an organization human and financial work to achieve its plans and reviews manager, leadership of the CSO change, successful transfer of values and governance is also a prerequisite

According to this principle, we assess the CSO's contribution to the sustainability of society and the world in environmental, social and economic terms, in addition to its own sustainability, and the development of strategies, plans and actions in this direction.

This principle states that the CSO should base its organizational structure and functioning on equality and inclusiveness in terms of rights, freedoms, resources and opportunities, both in the administrative processes within the organization and in all the work that the organization carries out towards third parties, and strengthen these elements.

CSOs adhere to and the production accessible to all. An this principle is gender equality; It requires ensure gender equality processes within the as in all studies, field research, support and services, advocacy, policy making and development.

**The last and perhaps most important principle of our model is anti-discrimination and equality.**

standards for services of information that is important element of equality. Social gender active measures to in all administrative organization as well

**How did we design and implement the program based on these principles?**

After determining the program principles, we determined what these principles mean for the BİRLİKTE program, how the principles should be implemented at the program level, and which principles should be applied in the activities planned in the program document and how. Therefore, we have prepared a detailed checklist of the work that needs to be done at the component level or the issues that need to be considered in order for the whole program to be in line with the determined principles.

We then carried out detailed studies to ensure that the tools developed within the program were in line with the principles. For example, when defining the organizational capacity development model and creating the list of questions for the self-assessment tool, we created a context matrix showing which questions relate to which principle, identified the indicators and listed the tool sets.

In the events we organized together with the organizations participating in the program during the BİRLİKTE program, we tried to see the principles as a guide for ourselves, like a checklist, starting from the beginning with the information process and in various consultation processes and joint application methods, including event planning.

Working with the principles; determining the methods and mechanisms for implementing the principles and values of our organization both in our organizational structures and in our work and applying them effectively is an indispensable compass for us on the path to the change we want to create.

So how can we better implement a system in which no rights holder is left behind and social change in the organizations we work with is organized on the basis of principles? This question is perhaps one of the issues we should continue to think about.

06.Feb.2025

NEVZAT KIRAC

## WHAT KIND OF THING IS THIS PARTICIPATION?



*In one of BİRLİKTE's blog posts - Directing change: designing and implementing programmes with guiding principles - we said that we argue that rights-based CSOs can strengthen their consistency and legitimacy by implementing the principles of the rights-based approach while moving towards the change they want to create, and explained the BİRLİKTE programme's approach to working with principles. This article proposes a framework and a tool for implementing one of the most important main principles of the rights-based approach in the above framework, participation, within the organisation.*

### How is it possible to embed a rights-based approach and participation in CSOs?

The history of humanity is also the history of people's continuous struggle for a "better life" and "freedom". The demands of these struggles are expressed today as demands for the "rights". Today, the demand for the realisation of rights is a direct or indirect part of the functioning of global, regional, national and local institutional structures and organisations

On the other hand, human history is a time in which people have been enslaved and exploited with a sense of a "better life" and "freedom"; a history in which they have even fought for enslavement and exploitation. Despite the normative international human rights framework that covers almost all areas of life, we live in a world where human rights violations and even massacres of the entire planet occur from one moment to the next. This situation shows the limits of the practises of institutions and bodies that have built today's world on the "model of juridical thinking" and the limits of interventions against borderless practises. However, it cannot be said that we as human beings have a real tool to overcome this contradiction, except to gain the "empowerment" and "ability" provided by the struggles for freedom.

The rights-based approach, which has been discussed since the 1990s and was defined as a global norm by the United Nations in 2003 and over time became one of the basic policies of the European Union and other funding development agencies, enables the implementation of international human rights standards in practise and human rights. It aims to bring about change through its principles.

Rights-based approaches, especially in relation to two of the main principles common in different definitions - access to decision-making processes with meaningful and inclusive participation and empowerment of rights-holders to use and claim their rights - refer to the "empowerment" of subjects and their acquisition of the ability to "do" to achieve change.

As the rights-based approach is the main policy of donors, especially the UN and the European Union, and is designed as a tool of change for implementation at the legal and policy level in many different thematic areas, from fisheries to cultural heritage protection and armed conflict resolution, civil society organisations carrying out their work in many different thematic areas gradually began to adopt this approach and structure their work on this basis. However, due to the complex structure of change, it has become a serious challenge for rights-based civil society organisations to monitor and know to what extent rights-based approaches, which essentially aim at legal interventions and change, contribute to social change in practise. One of the most important reasons for this is that the adoption of a rights-based approach does not mean that this approach is automatically and genuinely implemented. This is true for donors, obligated parties and civil society organisations pursuing this approach. In particular, the principles-based approach requires institutional change while at the same time striving for social change. It can be said that organisational change and social change are different. However, if organisations do not embrace the rights-based approach as a policy in itself, it will be difficult for them to mobilise the principles of this approach for real social change. The organisations' perception of social change also determines the way in which they bring about this change.

### Who are the rights-based civil society organisations?

The number of civil society organisations operating in Turkey that pursue a rights-based approach is very small and there is virtually no research on the structures of these organisations.

Our recently published report entitled Civil Society Organisations in Turkey: Freedom of Association and the Right to Participate looks at the impact of freedom of association and freedom of assembly on civil society organisations and focuses on the right of civil society organisations to participate in decision-making processes

In order to reach the right target group, this report proposes four factors (indicators) of the rights-based approach that determine the definition of "rights-based organisation" in the organisations' institutional (written) documents. These are as follows;

- Whether the written documents include the protection and promotion of fundamental rights and freedoms for all people,
- Whether there is a strategic vision and action plan (advocacy plan) for the protection and development of fundamental rights and freedoms,
- Whether the strategic vision and action plan include a call for reform or the mobilisation of public opinion for the protection and development of fundamental rights and freedoms,

- The existence of some form of value statement that states in writing that any discrimination is wrong and will not be tolerated. In this study, which is a first on the structure of "rights-based organisations" and the situation of these organisations in relation to freedom of association and the right to participation, as a result of the assessment based on the indicators listed above, the organisations are divided into three groups: "weak", "medium" and "strong" according to the degree of their rights-based approach.

The report uses as a criterion for the rights-based approach whether the rights-based approach is included in the CSOs' written documents. It is particularly emphasised that the practical attitudes and behaviour of the organisation or its representatives are not the subject of this analysis.

## Based on practise and self-regulation

Indeed, it is extremely difficult to identify the elements of the rights-based approach in the corporate culture and practises of organisations and to standardise these elements; in this context, only some principles of application based on self-regulation can be mentioned.

In the BİRLİKTE Institutional Development Model, we propose a set of indicators and tools that support the rights-based approach in organisations to become a part of the organisational culture based on 6 principles - benefit creation, participation, sustainability, prevention of discrimination and equality, transparency and accountability. The self-assessment tool developed as part of this model contains indicative questions for mainstreaming these principles into the institutional structures and processes of rights-based organisations. We would like to describe one of these tools, the proposed framework for mainstreaming participation within the organisation.

## How is it possible mainstreaming participation in civil society organisations?

In the BİRLİKTE Institutional Development Model, we define the principle of participation as follows:

The principle of participation is to ensure that all stakeholders participate in the CSO's decision-making mechanisms through established methods and that CSOs also participate in the decision-making mechanisms and processes related to the area in which they work. The most important of these methods are the mechanisms of openness and accessibility to all stakeholders and beneficiaries of the CSO, information, consultation, involvement and feedback on these processes and outcomes. CSOs become transparent, accountable and reliable to the extent that they increase their participation

We have also defined what this principle means from a programmatic perspective. We take this into account as a guideline for programme implementation:

The programme conducts the necessary studies or research and implements interventions to ensure the effective and meaningful participation of all stakeholders in the decision-making processes and mechanisms in the studies under the programme through established methodologies; participates in the decision-making mechanisms and processes related to the study area; supports the participation of organisations under the programme in the mechanisms and processes in their area.

In this context, we also propose a tool within the programme to strengthen and facilitate participation in the institutional structure and activities of civil society organisations. This tool, to be used both in organisational management and in programme or activity management, aligns participation processes and participation styles, thus facilitating the planning and monitoring of participation processes and practises.

## A functional process: How was the participation ladder adapted to the programme?

When it comes to forms of participation, the definition of the Council of Europe's "ladder of participation" is generally used. The forms of participation below have been adapted for civil society organisations, based on the basic levels of civic engagement defined by the Council of Europe.

- **Information:** Providing all necessary information in decision-making processes, in accordance with the principles of open data, in clear and easily understandable language, in a convenient and accessible format, without bureaucratic obstacles and, in principle, free of charge.
- **Consultation:** When a civil society organisation seeks the views of the target group and other stakeholders on a particular policy, issue or activity as part of the institutional process.
- **Involvement (dialogue/consultation):** The civil society organisation conducts structured, long-term and results-oriented processes based on a shared understanding to engage with the target group and other stakeholders (individuals, CSOs, public administration, etc.).
- **Partnership (active co-operation):** Active collaboration of the civil society organisation with the target group and other stakeholders in defining problems and developing solutions, and co-creating solutions and applications.

## How were the participation processes adapted to the programme?

The phases of the participation cycle, which includes planning the systems and activities of civil society organisations, implementing them as planned, measuring the impact and results of implementation, and improving subsequent planning based on the lessons learned from these measurements, have been taken from the Guide to Strategic Plans for Communities and adapted to civil society organisations, as shown below.

**Opinion collection:** It refers to the collection of opinions, suggestions and expectations of stakeholders who will be affected by the implementation. This process includes stakeholder identification, stakeholder prioritisation, stakeholder evaluation, and the phases of receiving and evaluating stakeholder opinions and suggestions.

**Planning:** This is the process in which the objectives, targets, performance indicators, activities, resources, target risks and control measures related to the application are defined.

**Implementation:** The coordination of the planned work in accordance with the scope, time and budget. This phase also includes regular monitoring of implementation, data collection and reporting.

**Monitoring, evaluation and learning:** The monitoring, evaluation and learning process ensures organisational learning and, accordingly, continuous improvement of activities. Monitoring is an iterative process in which quantitative and qualitative data is continuously and systematically collected and analysed before and during implementation to track progress against objectives and targets. Monitoring activities consist of monitoring the results of target achievement at a certain frequency against defined indicators to show progress, and reporting and submitting to manager evaluation at certain intervals. Evaluation is a detailed examination to determine the extent to which ongoing or completed activities enable the achievement of objectives and targets and the extent to which they contribute to the decision-making process. The evaluation analyses the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of the objectives, targets and performance indicators in the plan.

## Wrapping up...

This article argues that the effect of the legal model of thinking that forms the basis of the rights-based approach is not visible or spontaneous in terms of securing social change. With the assumption that this approach requires not only legal but also organisational change, we have tried to reiterate the need to implement the basic principles of the approach at the organisational level.

Of course, at the level of standards, there is no standard framework for the implementation of participation, one of the main principles of the rights-based approach, in civil society organisations. These practises are determined by the civil society organisations according to their own possibilities and needs. However, if they are not implemented on a specific system basis, it can be difficult for organisations to monitor how they implement the principle of participation in their work. While we "properly" incorporate such a loaded concept into documents, perhaps we should also subject our attitudes and behaviours in practise to multi-layered scrutiny...

From this perspective, civil society organisations should be able to implement participation in their own institutional structures and activities and demonstrate that they have implemented it, make visible and take into account different experiences, ensure that the social change they seek is implemented with the participation of all parties and strengthen the accountability of the organisation; thus it will help to increase its impact.

We hope that this article helps you to reflect on your organisation and your work. Participation is a living process that is fuelled by experience. I wish us all a good journey in this process.

11.Sep.2024

# KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE IRISH STUDY VISIT INSIGHTS AND REFLECTIONS FROM BİRLİKTE ORGANISATIONS



From 26-28 June 2024, we undertook a study visit to Dublin with the organizations we work with as part of our BİRLİKTE Support Program. During the study visit, we met with our Irish implementing partner The Wheel, Enclude, which provides diverse and tailored IT support to civil society organisations in Europe, Smashing Times, a structure that works across disciplines to support human rights and equality and provides resources, networks and support to artists, and Carmichael House, a civil society organisation that provides offices, community spaces and resources to civil society in Ireland.

*From 26 to 28 June 2024, we organized a study visit to Dublin with the organizations we work with as part of our BİRLİKTE Support Program. We asked our participants 2 questions to find out how the study visit went, what they remembered and what they experienced during the visit. The answers show that while the Irish example can inspire the civic space in Turkey, we still have a long way to go in terms of good governance, human resource management and leadership.*

Ceren Akçabay from Aramızda, the Association for Gender Research, Serhat Kaçan from the Civil Society in the Penal System Association (CISST), Gamze Rezan Sarışen from the The Association for Monitoring Equal Rights (ESHİD), Emine Şimşek from the Hevi LGBTI+ Association for Rights Equality Existence, Yağmur Şenoğuz from the Positive Living Association, Berna Akkızal from the Civic Space Studies Association, Oğulcan Yediveren from the Social Policy, Gender Identity, and Sexual Orientation Studies Association (SPOD), Özge Mumcu Aybars from the Uğur Mumcu Investigative Journalism Foundation and Dilek Akyapı from the Zan Foundation for Social, Political and Economic Studies (ZAN) were with us.

We asked our participants two questions to find out how the visit went, what they remembered and what their experiences were. The answers show that the Irish example can inspire the civic society space in Turkey and that we still have a long way to go in terms of good governance, human resource management and leadership.



You travelled to Ireland, a European country you are not familiar with. There you heard first-hand from several organizations about their work and approaches to leadership, good governance and human resources. What did you think during these conversations? What would you say if you were looking at your organization with this information?

**Berna Akkızal | Civic Space Studies Association:** Especially in terms of governance, our organization needs to grow gradually and planned, and I gained a lot of experience on which organizational schemes we can follow while growing, and on leadership, monitoring, and evaluation methods. Although the conditions and priorities are different, practical solutions such as sharing spaces, support programs for employees, and an organizational policy handbook with policy texts can be applied to our organization. We have previously tried to tackle the issues of art and human rights together and organized a series of workshops called ALAN(A)ÇIK. By taking inspiration from the methods used by the Smashing Times organization, we will reopen the discussion on reaching young students whom we could not attract or draw attention to with our campaigns.

**Emine Şimşek | Hevi LGBTI+ Association:** What caught my attention was Carmichael's use of a "task tracking checklist" to monitor employees' work, conducting informal performance evaluations every three months, and using the GROW model during this process. In addition, a monthly meeting for remote workers is a necessary preventative measure for a civil society organization whose capacity is growing daily. I also believe that the training system put in place to support the well-being and welfare of staff will encourage their motivation and development. In civil society organizations, where the number of team members is growing, new colleagues are joining and turnover is constantly increasing, the creation of an employee handbook is a useful tool to inform, adapt and save time.

**Serhat Kaçan | Civil Society in the Penal System Association:** From the perspective of our organization, I would like to examine and discuss how effective it would be to solve the problem of HR by outsourcing services to an external institution, as is done in Ireland. I would also like to take a closer look at the documents provided by The Wheel and benefit from them. Unfortunately, I was reminded once again that we are doing too much work with too few people. Finally, I realized once again how important the professionalization of human resources is both for the development of the sector and for civil society in Turkey.

**Özge Mumcu | Uğur Mumcu Foundation for Investigative Journalism:** I evaluated the internal structure of The Wheel, which brings together 2400 organisations of different types- including charities- and manages their internal operations with 29 people, as a successful example. Despite the complexity of coordinating the administrative,

financial and project-related work of 2400 organizations operating in different fields, I think it is important that their internal organization and operations are healthy.

The examples such as "Probationary review - the practice of probation in the employment of staff" have led me to consider that different methods of institutional capacity development can be created for my organization. However, examples such as the difference in the structure of civil society organizations in Ireland and Turkey and the fact that the state provides 70% financial support to 2400 organizations have made me aware of the difficult situation we are in as civil society organizations in Turkey. For example, as a non-profit organization, we are not allowed to make a profit and have to manage the staff budget together with different income models. This is the biggest financial obstacle we face.

Applications like HR Locker can enable communication about our internal functioning. I thought it would be good if we took some initiatives

for internal orientation. At the same time, bringing staff together in different environments for the good of the organization can also have a quality that can prevent internal conflict. Of course, Wheel's role as a mediator between policy makers and civil society is also a positive example that should be emphasized. I have made a mental note to do a study on institutional identity. A study on the growth model could also be conducted. The importance of the CRM database was also one of the models we should start implementing.

### We can take the transformative potential of working with the public as an example

**Ceren Akçabay | Aramızda the Association for Gender Research:** First of all, thank you for making this experience possible. I was very impressed by the grassroots work of civil society organizations in Ireland. It is admirable that they are continuing the tradition of "charity" organizations and doing work that is sensitive to people's needs, especially the changing view and inclusivity in society despite the Catholic Church in relation to LGBTI+ freedom and equality. I think there are many points that authoritarian, conservative countries like Turkey can learn from. The most important of these is the transformative potential of working with the people for the people. In Ireland, however, the overemphasis on neoliberal systems of government in the institutionalization of civil society work also poses dangers that could undermine the traditional process of solidarity and development. The concentration of time and project-based work can lead to volunteer work losing its value and importance.

At our organization, the Aramızda Association for Gender Research, we believe that volunteering and solidarity activities are central to a rights-based civil society. However, we are still a small organization. Based on examples from Ireland, I have come to the conclusion that we need to accelerate the processes of institutionalization and volunteering for our organization at the same time.

**Dilek Akyapı | Zan Foundation for Social, Political and Economic Studies:** Meeting people from a community that has struggled with difficult historical processes and being in the area gave a different feeling. As in many areas, the exchange of experiences and different practices from different cultures makes an important contribution to the civil society sector, both individually and institutionally. Physical connections also offer advantages for the creation of different labour and solidarity networks in the future.

I found their approaches and work on leadership very useful. Although the concept may seem less compelling in Middle Eastern geography, which works with leader cults as we do, I found their discussions on leadership and their work, particularly their approaches to organizational leadership, very useful.

As far as the administration was concerned, the division of labor and the areas of work were very distinct and involved specialization and pro-

fessionalism. This indicates that specialization is necessary and important in the field of civil society. Furthermore, the specialization and professionalization of those who make a living by working in this sector, as well as the division of labor, are crucial. People with different economic sources need to focus on strengthening the organization through solidarity networks based on volunteer work. The fact that our board consists mainly of academics suggests that we can easily implement this system. I also think that we can adapt and use the manuals for management and staff according to our organization and local dynamics. I have also considered creating manuals for our foundation and for volunteers and staff that include analyses of the historical processes, the importance and development of civil society, and the desired and current conditions.

### There are so many things we know to be right but fail to do

**Yağmur Şenoğuz | Positive Living Association:** In trying to accomplish a lot of work with limited human resources in Turkish civil society, I was reminded of how many things we know are right but do not do. On the one hand, I felt hopeless about the structural problems we face, but on the other, it reminded me that there is always room for small changes, which gave me a sense of relief.

On the first day, when we discussed human resource management and well-being, I made a lot of notes about things we could change in our association. When I returned to Istanbul, in the first management meeting, I suggested a change in practice to promote team wellbeing (something I had wanted for a long time but had not prioritized due to my workload) and we quickly put it into action. On the second day, the joint management handbook and Carmichael's employee handbook were very informative for me. As our Annual General Meeting will take place in 2025, I made a mental note to create a similar management handbook for myself as I prepare for this process. What struck me most over the two days was the clarity of the organizational charts in all the institutions and the crucial role they play in governance.

**Oğulcan Yediveren | Social Policy, Gender Identity, and Sexual Orientation Studies Association:** First of all, I have to say that the governance of civil society organizations in Ireland is very strong. In Turkey, our institutions tend to grow and become bloated, especially in administration and operations, but we find that the governance aspect is not as robust. Often the boards of our associations are only on paper. This often leads to problems with risk management, accountability, transparency and the delivery of consistent activities aligned to strategic objectives to increase impact. This journey has inspired me to apply the governance models of several organizations to my own organization.

I also saw that our HR practices are not very different from those in other organizations. However, since most accessible grants in

Turkey are smaller and activity-based and the amounts are limited, our salaries are low while our workload is high. Given the current economic crisis and inflation, it is only possible to maintain the welfare of civil society employees in Turkey to a certain extent. Even though we have similar human resource management to organizations in Ireland, I believe our wellbeing is lower because of this. Perhaps we as Turkish civil society need to lobby internationally for more flexible and accessible grants.

## Ireland deserves a closer look at the way it deals with social issues

**Gamze Rezan Sarışen I Association for Monitoring Equal Rights:** Ireland, and Dublin in particular, has always been a geography I have been curious about. I'm not sure I found what I was expecting. But as soon as we landed at the airport, I was surprised. A country that still criminalized homosexuality in the 90s greeted us very differently during our visit, which coincided with Pride Week. The progress a country can make in 30 years is truly impressive. The experience of civil society in Ireland is also different. The state provides public services through organizations we call "charities". These charitable organizations are funded by the state, which also contributes to the economy and employment. Unless I have misheard, one in eight people are employed by charities. They only use terms like "civil society organization/charitable institution"; for organizations that operate internationally.

I have made a note that 70% of services for disabled people are provided by these so-called charities. Of course, this information needs to be verified, but the fact that these institutions, which we hear about as the equivalent in Turkey, participate so actively in public life, provide public services with state support and see themselves as "partners" of the state is something we are not used to here and cannot even imagine. In a country where various risks are low, it can be said that charities focus on human resources and good governance with the resources they receive from the state and have developed a good organizational model. It is possible to benefit from good examples, especially in terms of organizational well-being and human resources policies.

Finally, Ireland is a different model. Equality, anti-discrimination and the fulfilment of the Association for Monitoring Equal Rights targets are supported by equality institutions. This was outside the scope of our visit, but from what we followed from afar, it appears to be an institution that has achieved a degree of autonomy. The different organizational structures in Ireland, their relationships with the state, the way they maintain their autonomy and their engagement with social issues merit further detailed investigation and curiosity.

## After this visit, having heard and seen different civil society organizations and civil society in Ireland, what would you say in comparison to Turkey?

**Oğulcan Yediveren I Social Policy, Gender Identity, and Sexual Orientation Studies Association:** The development of civil society in Ireland and Turkey has historically followed different paths. In European countries, we see that central governments, i.e. the state, were relatively weaker in the past and civil society was a structure that enveloped the state and fulfilled the tasks that the state could not do. Indeed, in the past, religious organizations and the church took over the function of social services, but with the secularization of European societies, civil society began to take over this function. Ireland is the best example of this. In Turkey, however, civil society is opposing the repressive practices of an all-powerful state. In other words, far from embracing it, it is in conflict with it. Therefore, civil society in Ireland has more room for maneuver because the state is less repressive, and it is more developed because it is almost a complementary element of the state. The question of how we can deal with our historical obstacles here goes beyond the scope of this article and requires us to think together.

**Özge Mumcu I Uğur Mumcu Foundation for Investigative Journalism:** In Ireland's 100-year history, following the transition to secularism and the transfer of charities from the Catholic Church to the state, the state's 70 per cent support for organizations is an important example of the continuity of the link between the state and CSOs. However, it is questionable to what extent civil society organizations will protest against government or state policies after receiving state support. This harbors the risk of creating a mechanism that can be translated as "embedded" or "attached".

In Turkey, especially in recent years, CSOs have split into those that are connected to the government/state and those that are not. The increasing social polarization has a negative impact on all CSOs working in the field of rights. There are also obstacles to implementing positive policies that relate to their own areas, such as policy development and capacity building. Similarly, the narrowing of project pools leads to a loss of human resources in institutions and a shrinking or cessation of spaces created for rights and/or projects. In this context, although there is a risk of an anti-government mechanism emerging in Ireland, it can be noted that the country has a much freer and more progressive structure compared to Turkey.

## The shrinking of civic society space in Turkey is not only related to external factors but also to internal organizational mechanisms.

**Dilek Akyapı I Zan Foundation for Social, Political and Economic Studies:** It would be useful to evaluate this issue together with the discussions on civic space that I participated in for a while. The discussions on civic space have enabled us to see the big picture by showing us



that some negative aspects that we have observed in our own organization or in a few organizations are actually prevalent with nuances throughout the space. We can say that the problems we have experienced in this case are not singular (organizational) but unfortunately have also become a tradition. I can say that the shrinking civic space in Turkey is not only related to external factors, but also to internal organizational mechanisms, as the governance and operational mechanisms we heard about in Ireland show.

Given the historical and cultural differences between the two countries, we can say that civic work in Ireland is grassroots and socialized. It would make sense to see the culture of "philanthropy" here as a continuation of the tradition in the churches. The fact that civic solidarity and socialization, building on a cultural heritage, is not a direct result of "modern" times or "secularism" in Ireland, and that it can be sustained and carried out through different mechanisms, is also something to be appreciated.

In Turkey, there is a state tradition and pressure that is allergic to the concept of being organized or being organized in any field, and since the support mechanisms for organizations working in the field of civil society are very low, human resources are not at the desired level. In this situation, solidarity and volunteerism have an important role to play. Unfortunately, the practices of civil society organizations in this field turn human resources, both at work and in volunteering, into a mechanism of exploitation (using the concepts of solidarity that we love). At this point, the question for me in Ireland was whether we should continue to observe the practical manifestations of concepts that we do not accept in theory, or whether we should prepare for a new era by discussing issues such as human resources and governance (by evaluating different country models and experiences) that are traditional and do not meet the needs.

**Serhat Kaçan I Civil Society in the Penal System Association:** What impressed me most was how civil society in Ireland developed in a different historical reality and how all the support offered by charities was done in collaboration with the state. Another factor that struck me was how strong

the rights-based culture of civil society is in the Turkish context. Given their field of work, a rights-based civil society organizational model seemed to be a very distant concept for them. For this reason, it is common in Ireland, as in many other European countries, to continue to exist as subcontractors of the public sector. Although I have not had the opportunity to talk much about it, I have heard a few times that civil society does a lot of the work because of the high salaries of civil servants. Although they have many practices that I think are much better than in Turkey, it made me wonder if this is some kind of exploitation model created by the state. Nevertheless, I thought that they are much better than Turkey in terms of workload and working conditions because the country has a very favorable social structure in terms of volunteer work.

## The wheel and Ireland were inspiring

**Berna Akkızal I Civic Space Studies Association:** The structure, components and general perspective of civil society in Ireland and Turkey are very different. The fact that 2,400 associations are members of The Wheel and that they were a conservative society until recently is also encouraging for us. One of the biggest differences between their civil society sector and ours is the funding of associations and organizations by the state and the efforts of umbrella organizations like The Wheel to provide a critical perspective. The ratio of 30,000 associations to a population of 5 million statistically emphasizes the historical importance of volunteering in their society. The structure has generally taken over much of the work that was done by the church a century ago.

**Yağmur Şenoğuz I Positive Living Association:** There are very obvious differences between civil society in Turkey and in Ireland. First of all, the state's support for civil society and its ease in dealing with grants/resources is remarkable compared to us. However, I find even more remarkable the differences that 84% of the Irish population consider the work of civil society important and one in eight people have worked in an CSO. There are historical, sociological and cultural reasons for the high level of civic engagement in volunteering.

I believe that a similar understanding of civil society as in Ireland can be achieved in Turkey through social change rather than a changed understanding of the state and management.

**Ceren Akçabay I Aramızda, the Association for Gender Research:** We are in a process in which organizational processes in Turkey are becoming increasingly restricted. Therefore, compared to Ireland, where the work of civil society is directly supported by the government, it is quite a challenge to do such work in our country. In this regard, I have learnt that our resilience is also appreciated by our friends in Ireland. On the other hand, the grassroots work in Ireland, which I mentioned earlier, can serve as an example for Turkey. Moreover, it is possible that when authoritarian control processes are tightened, as in Ireland, institutional civil society organizations can facilitate these controls. Moreover, this institutionalism can support efforts to increase membership and contribute to grassroots struggles for rights by reaching a wider audience.

**Emine Şimşek I Hevi LGBTİ Association:** Support from state institutions in Ireland can increase the reach of civil society organisations and support them in many ways. However, such support can sometimes become a form of pressure. This situation can limit the potential of civil society and its role as a lever for advocacy. The impossibility of local cooperation in Turkey also limits the visibility and influence of civil society organizations.

In the interviews mentioned above, they did not consider it necessary to separate different groups and areas of work and realized that different areas of work could come together. This is not the case for many civil society organizations in Turkey. The lack of common ground between existing civil society organizations in Turkey and their different priorities make it difficult to come together.

**Gamze Rezan Sarışen I Association for Monitoring Equal Rights:** We face similar problems, such as housing. Housing is also a serious issue in Ireland. The problem of homelessness and especially children living on the streets is reflected in international reports. However, there is also a strong will to solve these problems.

22.Jan.2025  
SELİN BERGHAN

# GOOD GOVERNANCE, HR MANAGEMENT, AND LEADERSHIP A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE ON IRELAND



*This year, our association is celebrating its 20th anniversary and our BİRLİKTE Institutional Support Program is in its second implementation period as a product of this long experience in civil society. We also have a partner in this period. We are working with The Wheel, an umbrella organization for civil society organizations in Ireland. On the occasion of this partnership, which is a very exciting experience for us, we organized a visit to our program partner in the last days of June.*

Between 6-28 June 2024, we organized a study visit to Dublin with 9 organizations participating in the BİRLİKTE Institutional Support Program. The theme of this meeting, which we organized to bring together civil society organizations in Turkey and Ireland and to share experiences around certain themes, was good governance, HR management and leadership.

Before sharing the details of this meeting with you, let me give a brief introduction about our partner: The Wheel, is an umbrella organization for civil society organizations in Ireland, where both service-providing and advocacy organizations and individuals working in every field can become members. The Wheel provides various supports to strengthen civil society and also undertakes the role of conveying and negotiating the wishes and needs of civil society to the governments.

## Where did we visit and who did we listen to?

The theme of the meeting we organized with The Wheel was chosen from the topics of organizational capacity. We set off for Dublin on June 25th with representatives of 9 participating organizations from Ankara, Istanbul and Diyarbakır to listen to four different types of organizations on governance, HR management and leadership.

Our program started on June 26th at Europe House. We were welcomed by CathyAnne Fox from the Wheel with whom we organized the program, Ivan Cooper, CEO of the Wheel, Fergal Moran, Finance and Operations Director and Jon McBride, Governance Director. After a short opening speech by CathyAnne introducing the program, Ivan Cooper gave us a presentation on the structure of Irish civil society, the Wheel role in this structure and its governance model and answered our questions. Then, Governance Director Jon McBride made a presentation on The Wheel's risk management, monitoring and reporting of processes and progress, and governance principles. We were particularly impressed by our Irish partner's layered governance structure, which includes subcommittees established to connect the operational level with the management level, as it brings the principle of participation to life in organizational management.

During this visit, we also had the opportunity to get to know one of The Wheel's programs, the Leadership Academy. The director of the academy, Sharon Hughes, provided information about the goals, activities, and structure of the academy. This leadership academy approaches leadership in a broader context and in four different dimensions, unlike the traditional sense. It focuses on determining our goals as individuals and organizations and acquiring the knowledge and skills to achieve them. It defines the tools for being one's own leader. This session raised different questions in all of our minds. While we continued to ponder these questions, we began planning to address them in broader meetings.

On the first day of our visit, we also met with The Wheel's Finance and Operations Director, Fergal Moran. Fergal introduced us to HR management models that simultaneously consider the well-being of both employees and the organization.

The Wheel has a committee responsible for ensuring the well-being of its employees. Through employee support programs, they provide various expert supports to employees experiencing personal or work-related problems to help solve their issues. The recruitment and performance evaluation processes are also well-defined and systematic. The performance evaluation process consists of regular meetings and evaluations that create meaningful dialogue with employees, providing opportunities to discuss achievements and any skills that may need development. It sounds fantastic, doesn't it?

On the second day in Dublin, we went to Carmichael House to listen to the governance models of different civil society organizations. Carmichael House is a civil society organization that provides offices, common areas, and resources to the civil society sector. Here, we lis-

tened to Róisín McGuigan discuss Carmichael's governance model, HR management, and leadership approach. What caught our attention most in the Carmichael example were the free training support provided to employees. These trainings cover a wide range, from first aid training to domestic violence training for those in managerial positions. Additionally, a certain payment is made to employees who need consultancy services such as career coaching. To support transparency and accountability in the civil sector, they also give "good governance awards" to organizations every year.

Following this inspiring and motivating meeting, we had the opportunity to listen to Sylvester Murphy, CEO of Enclude, who provides customized technological supports to meet organizational needs in Irish civil society. Addressing the insufficient utilization of technology in civil society, this organization, founded by a group of mostly computer engineers, now offers various customized IT supports not only in Ireland but across Europe. They focus on building infrastructure across the civil sector with a long-term perspective, aiming to support the broader civil society. Their vision, holistic approach to the field, and contributions to the civil sector deeply impressed us.

For the final presentation of the second day, we listened to Freda Manweiler, director of Smashing Times. Smashing Times is an interdisciplinary structure that supports human rights and equality through providing resources, networks, and support to artists. They engage in activities expressing human rights and equality through artistic means, involving diverse groups such as women and youth. Their collaborative artistic activities in Europe, including Turkey, aim to support human rights through advocacy and cultural events, such as the annual Dublin Arts and Human Rights Festival. Their impactful work at the intersection of human rights advocacy and cultural arts provided us all with inspiration on how similar initiatives could be organized in Turkey.

On the final day, we enjoyed a delightful city tour. Our tour guide was a former drug addict who spent his childhood and youth in petty crime. Through various programs provided by civil society, he overcame his addictions and now shares the untold stories of Dublin's less known places, narrating the city tours based on his personal experiences. Thus, we not only heard stories about Dublin Castle but also about the back streets behind the castle. After the city tour, groups dispersed to shop, visit parks, pet deer, or enjoy conversations over beer. The following day, before our long journey back, we engaged in brief tourist activities.

## What did we take away from the meeting?

This richly filled visit, the presentations we listened to, and the discussions that followed provided us with an opportunity to compare Irish and Turkish civil society. Ireland is a country with no tradition of a centralized state. Services such as education and health were provided by the church until the 1980s, then by civil society under the name of "charity"; today the state supports civil society financially and legally to do these things. The terminology and legal structures in Ireland are also different. Civil society receives most of its financial support from the government. Therefore, the focus is not only on projects but also on governance issues. The importance of transparency and accountability is emphasized both for the continuity of financial support from government and for donations from society. These principles are implemented through the establishment and operation of specific organizational systems.

Governance models, organizational structures, policies, employee relations, recruitment and performance evaluation processes are defined and systematic. The members of the Boards of Directors do not receive remuneration under any circumstances; they serve on a voluntary basis and rotate regularly at fixed intervals. In a society where one in eight people is a volunteer, it is not a problem to find volunteers for boards, as is the case in Turkey. Relationships with employees and support within the organizational structure are also crucial. Providing various support measures for employees to address both personal and workplace issues, offering training to improve their knowledge and skills and performance evaluation based on mutual dialogue were points of interest for us.

On the other hand, Turkey has a very strong tradition of state control. This leads to strict state control over all aspects of civil society activities, including the "decision register" and their determination by the state. Unlike in Ireland, civil society in Turkey does not so much co-operate with the state as it is in a permanent lobbying position to demand basic rights and freedoms.

The limited financial support from the state and the restrictions imposed by fundraising laws mean that organizations focus on fundraising and consequently on projects. This often leads to governance issues taking a back seat.

Management models, recruitment processes, feedback mechanisms and even job descriptions are often unclear or arbitrary in Turkey. This affects both the well-being of employees and the organization itself, hinders the development of a supportive organizational culture and inhibits the growth and strengthening of organizations. We tend to think of concepts such as leadership, performance appraisal and HR management as belonging to the private sector and distance ourselves from them. However, we struggle to develop alternative mechanisms that are appropriate for our own cultures. We also often find it difficult to devote time and resources to developing systems that protect both our people and our organizations.

In conclusion;

Whilst this meeting has given us all different thoughts, we have once again realized that there is still a lot of work to be done and many issues to discuss. As BİRLİKTE Program, we will continue to focus on good governance, discuss the issue with our organizations and provide institutional support. The topics chosen as the theme of the meeting were those that our organizations specifically wanted us to address during this implementation period. We also discussed these topics in the "Civic Space Talks" workshops that we organized within the scope of BİRLİKTE Learning Community activities. Our publication, which summarizes these discussions and focuses on rights and organizational well-being in civic space, is currently being written by the BİRLİKTE organizations. We will also be incorporating the experiences we have had in Ireland into this publication. Stay tuned.

Lastly during this visit, we were accompanied by Ceren Akçabay Karataş from Aramızda, the Association for Gender Research, Serhat Kaçan from the Civil Society in the Penal System Association, Gamze Rezan Sarışen from the The Association for Monitoring Equal Rights, Emine Şimşek from the Hevi LGBTI+ Association for Rights Equality Existence, Yağmur Şenoğuz from the Positive Living Association, Berna Akkızal from the Civic Space Studies Association, Oğulcan Yediveren from the Social Policy, Gender Identity, and Sexual Orientation Studies Association, Özge Mumcu Aybars from the Uğur Mumcu Investigative Journalism Foundation and Dilek Akyapı from the Zan Foundation for Social, Political and Economic Studies. We would like to thank our accompanying organisations once again for their participation, contributions and cooperation. It was wonderful to be together again. We hope that we will continue to discuss good governance together in the coming period...

29.Apr.2025

AYSUN KOCA • AYSUN TELEK • ÇAĞLAR YENİLMEZ • TUĞÇE BAHADIR ÇANKARA

# ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN DIFFICULT TIMES WORKSHOP AT THE CIVIL VOICES FESTIVAL

## Experiences of Organizations



Since February 2023, when the second implementation period of the BİRLİKTE Support Program began, we have been carrying out organizational development work with 25 participating civil society organizations for more than a year and a half. To better understand the experiences organizations go through while engaging in efforts for organizational capacity development — and to learn from one another — we organized a workshop during the Civil Voices Festival held on October 4–5.

Since February 2023, when the second implementation period of the BİRLİKTE Support Program began, we have been working on organizational development efforts with 25 participating civil society organizations for more than a year and a half. Both the organization representatives and the program team have devoted significant effort to this work, gaining valuable learnings and experiences. Of course, all these efforts are not happening independently of external conditions. Recently, these external conditions have been increasingly challenging and marked by overlapping crises. Although these challenges do not discourage our internal efforts within the organizations, they can significantly drain our energy. On the other hand, these difficulties can also serve as a catalyst for building new resilience and empowerment. As the program team, we frequently discuss these challenges and risks in our evaluations, brainstorm solutions, and strive to take measures that facilitate the processes and unlock bottlenecks.

Based on this background, we organized a workshop during the Civil Voices Festival on October 4–5 to better understand the experiences of organizations that are dedicating efforts to organizational capacity development and to learn from one another's experiences.

In the workshop, attended by 36 participants from 27 organizations, we focused on examining how institutional grants and capacity-building support contribute to organizational sustainability, how these supports are influenced by external factors, and how these effects can be mitigated. Our participants came from organizations with varying levels of experience in organizational development. This diversity provided an opportunity to explore the topic from multiple perspectives and fostered rich mutual learning.

### How Do We Understand Organizational Development?

We started the workshop by asking what we understand by organizational development and what it means to us, and expressed the associations the concept evoked in our minds through a word cloud. Participants mainly defined organizational development through the following aspects:

**Organizational identity and structure:** Organizing appropriately under a unified identity in line with the mission and vision, and establishing a strong organizational data management system.

**Sustainability and transmission:** Developing processes to ensure the organization operates independently and to maintain organizational memory and continuity, and building organizational systems.

**Collaboration and visibility:** Interacting with stakeholders, ensuring accountability and reliability.

**Risk management and flexibility:** Being able to sustain and protect organizational goals during crisis periods and being prepared for such times.

**Well-being of members, employees, and volunteers:** Empowering, enabling, and protecting the well-being of organizational people.

**Ability to create impact:** The power and competence to realize the organization's dreams and goals.

### What Tactics Did We Use During Crisis Periods? What Did We Learn?

The third focus topic of the workshop was the methods and tactics organizations used to increase the functionality of organizational development efforts during crises and difficult times. The experiences we discussed with examples are as follows:

**Flexibility, adaptation, and digitalization:** Rapid digitalization of activities and adapting to new conditions with an agile approach during crises like the pandemic was highlighted as very important.

**The power of inclusive and collective action:** In times of crisis, collaboration, solidarity among organizations, focusing on common goals, and especially supporting each other through peer learning proved to be very beneficial.

**Communication strategy, rapid interaction, and volunteer mobilization:** Having a strong communication network with internal and external stakeholders is critical, especially during crises. Organizations that manage volunteer communication and relations well encounter relatively fewer difficulties in reaching their target audiences during challenging times.

**Risk analysis and preparedness:** Conducting risk analysis is crucial for being prepared for crises.

**Transparency and trustworthiness:** Being a reliable and transparent organization during crises provides a significant advantage in securing support and funding. For exactly this reason, organizational steps taken in this area are highly meaningful and important.

**Inclusiveness:** It was noted that as organizations become more inclusive, expand their boundaries, and adopt a rights-based perspective in their activities, they become even stronger.

**Approach and flexibility of support programs:** The flexibility provided by financial or technical support programs utilized during difficult times and crises is very important. In particular, institutional grants offer freedom for organizations to shape financial support according to their needs, especially in disaster situations like pandemics and earthquakes.

Participants emphasized that while coping with such diverse difficulties, organizations need to develop different strategies and particularly shared ways to enhance resilience. For example, organizations sometimes have to shape their projects according to funders' priorities, which can lead them away from their core missions. However, organizations that can proactively manage these challenges are able to develop innovative strategies that strengthen their resilience.

### Why Organizational Development Despite All Challenges?

In this workshop, our intention was to understand what organizational development efforts bring to organizations despite the challenges they face. In this context, we compiled the following insights from the participants' responses to the discussion question. Of course, these do not cover everything that was discussed or all the examples shared during the workshop, but they offer us important ideas regarding the main themes where these gains converge.

- Organizational development efforts conducted with the facilitation of an external facilitator and through specific methods and tools significantly contribute to fostering a culture of systematic and planned work within the organization. Advancing through the facilitation of an external perspective and a structured process boosts the organization's motivation to work.
- Organizational development efforts support organizations' visibility and accountability, paving the way for them to reach broader audiences. Trust in the organization increases, which also contributes to relationships with all stakeholders and the public.
- Strengthening an organization organizationally boosts its self-confidence, which in turn has an encouraging effect both on its external actions and in building relationships.
- It contributes to the development of organizational policies and facilitates approaching them in a deeper and more participatory manner.
- It supports managing the organization's internal relationships with its staff and contributes to organizational well-being.
- It fosters the improvement of organizational governance and enables internal decision-making mechanisms to be handled in a more participatory way. It creates a more collective basis for discussion, decision-making, implementation, and production within the organization.
- It enables us to realize that the development process within an organization is never-ending. This awareness facilitates understanding the importance of organizational learning. It provides an opportunity to experience how thinking about and investing effort in monitoring, evaluation, and learning processes, as well as implementation processes, contributes to the organization.

For a civil society organization, it is no easy task to simultaneously engage with the social issues it addresses and at the same time reflect on its own organizational capacity, take it seriously, and make long-term investments in this area. It requires resources, motivation, commitment, and perhaps sometimes even a bit of stubbornness. Moreover, when we add internal organizational factors to the external conditions discussed in the workshop, it becomes clear that internal challenges are also not to be underestimated.

### Key Factors Challenging Organizational Development: External Factors

We then discussed the external factors that shape and sometimes hinder organizational development processes. Participants shared that many factors such as political dynamics, public reactions, polarization, the erosion of social dialogue platforms, economic instability, increasing competition conditions, states of war, natural disasters, and similar crisis situations, as well as the approach of funders toward civil society, create serious challenges in this process.



06.Feb.2025  
AYSUN KOCA

# DID YOU SAY “OHOO, UNTIL WE GET TO CHILD PARTICIPATION..”?



*When we think of participation, children rarely come to mind, and when they do, it is rarely in “participatory” ways. This article is about how we can make children’s participation real... Because really, “If you ask children, they will know what is harmful and what is not.”*

A child living in an old neighborhood in Istanbul said, “They want to change a place, they say let’s paint here. Again, they more or less ask us. They ask us about the color, but if we say no to the painting, will they accept it, maybe they will.” (age 12), he conveys our adults’ view of child participation, which is the subject of this article, in such a clear and lucid way.

In society at large, children are defined in terms of adulthood as ‘inadequate human beings’, ‘a being that needs to reach adulthood’, ‘incomplete subjects’, ‘little people’. For adults, children are beings who are told ‘we will decide what is best for you and do what is necessary’. Childhood is always seen as a temporary ‘state’ associated with the future and is always kept under control for protection.

However, Yaşar Kemal writes in *Children are Human Beings*: “I do not treat children like children. If I have a relationship, a friendship with a child, then it is my friend and not a child. I do not see them as children. I do not see them as a separate human species. Why is that? I have never believed that children are children, the way people treat them. They are simply human beings.”

In child participation, the child is seen as either a ‘citizen of tomorrow’ or a ‘stakeholder of today’. The perspective that sees the child as a citizen of tomorrow is similar to society’s view of the child and does not define children as equal individuals supporting their participation, while the perspective that sees them as stakeholders of today recognizes the child’s right to a voice and values their participation. However, in practice, it is very rare to come across examples reflecting this perspective. This is because it is challenging for decision-makers to find a common ground for child participation, and they usually make decisions by anticipating the child’s needs instead. This may be because it is not clear which children will be involved, how and by what means, through what legal and procedural processes and at what stages, and who will be responsible for monitoring, supervision and feedback. This leads to the stereotype that the involvement of adults is more important than the involvement of children. This stereotype in turn gives children the idea that their opinion will not be heard anyway and that even if it is heard, it cannot change anything.

## How can children be involved in decision-making?

Child participation is not a difficult, complex and incomprehensible process. Children’s right to participation is just like adults’ right to participation, i.e. adult participation is the ability to influence and be involved in decisions, policies, laws or practices that affect their lives,

and this is the same for children, but with one difference. Adults are responsible for ensuring that children’s right to participation is meaningful and timely. This means that it is important to consider segments of society that lack equal opportunities and resources for meaningful and fair participation. This also includes planning which children with their specific characteristics and abilities can or cannot participate in which phases. Recognizing participation as a right requires understanding that it is not just an outcome, but a process.

## We can make child participation meaningful with these simple guidelines:

The environment in which children participate should be appropriate for them

- Where did the children come?
- Is the physical space where we come together with children suitable for children in terms of heights, lighting, ventilation, etc.?
- Is the environment safe?

There should be space for the child’s expression

- Are the children ready?
- Have we informed the children about the topic?
- Do we know the children in terms of literacy, disability, whether they

like to draw, etc.?

- Have we considered the appropriate medium for each of them?

It should be clear from the beginning where and how the child’s views will be conveyed

- Who will listen to the child?
- What do we do with children’s views?
- Do children know to whom their views will be presented?

Children’s views should have an impact

- How can children’s views be taken into account by adults who have the power to bring about change?
- Do we have a plan to pass back to children what we have done with the information we have received from them?

## Do children know what can and cannot harm them?

As child participation becomes ingrained in adult minds as a right, the understanding that it is not a reward for children can be understood by children.

Most of the time, children perceive it as ‘normal’ or ‘ordinary’ for decisions about themselves and their peers to be made by adults, as illustrated in examples such as “**The municipality didn’t inform us even a quarter of a gram,**” (age 12) “**They don’t inform us...**” (age 11), and when referring to local governments asking for their opinions, saying “**Don’t misunderstand, you’ll see it in your dreams.**” (age 11). Even if they express their views with an understanding of a ‘reward’ offered by adults, they believe that they cannot change anything, as stated: “**A decision made instead of me. I can’t intervene in that.**” (12 years), and therefore feel that they are not taken seriously as children..

For meaningful participation of children, we adults in decision-making positions should be able to sincerely answer “yes” to the following questions:

- Am I ready to listen to children and hear their views?
- Am I willing to take the time to sit around the same table with children and discuss, to build a relationship of equals?
- Am I able to share the power that comes from being a decision-maker with children and do I facilitate this?
- Do I recognize that it is a policy requirement that children and adults share authority and responsibility for decisions?
- Do I value child participation for the development of the child’s capacity? (sometimes child participation that does not contribute anything to the child is just the attractive packaging of our work)
- Do I know how to do these things, am I open to learning?)

Reminding children that it is not ‘normal’ for adults to make decisions for them and that it is their right to participate in decisions commensurate with their capacities is also a mechanism to protect children. Because really, “**If they ask the children, they will know what is harmful and what is not.**” (age 13)

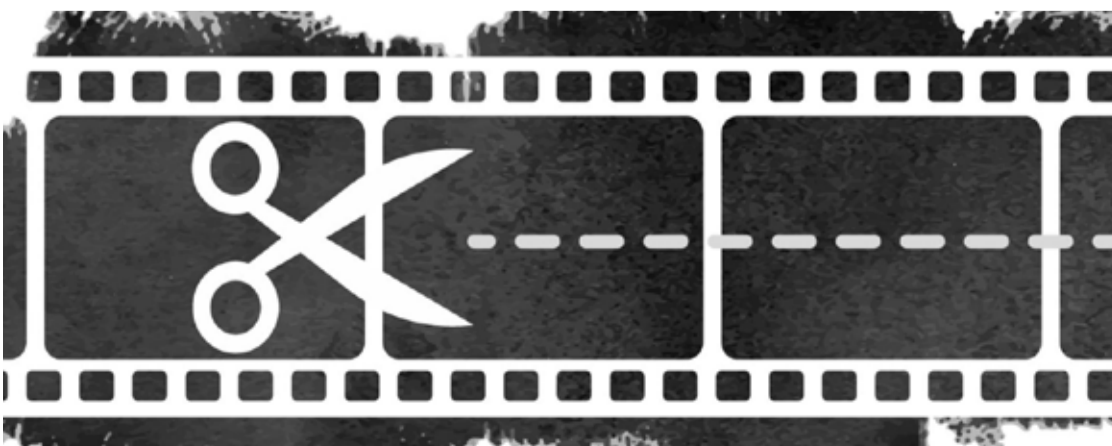
For us adults, a willingness to create opportunities and environments where decisions can be made together with children, and then to strive for an equal level of relationship, will be enough to get started. Children are human beings and should be able to live in the present first.

*\* All children’s opinions quoted in the article are based on the author’s interviews with children.*

12 Oct 2023

# A STORY OF CENSORSHIP AND A CANCELLATION

## We talked about the Golden Orange Festival with Altyazı Cinema Association



*Festivals in Turkey have long been associated with censorship and bans. Events and festivals that are denied permission or canceled at the last minute are now common news. The last example of this happened in Antalya. The 60th Antalya Golden Orange Film Festival was canceled after long discussions. The festival first made news by excluding the documentary *Kanun Hükmü*, which had applied to compete in the National Documentary Film category, from the competition selection on the grounds that the judicial process was ongoing. After intense reactions, especially from the film industry, the film was included in the selection again, but after targeted news reports and threats, it was removed from the screening again. The snake story process ended with the cancellation of the festival. We talked to Altyazı Cinema Association about censorship, internalized censorship mechanisms and the pressures on the field of culture and arts through the festival process*

**The 60th Antalya Golden Orange Film Festival made headlines this year by excluding the documentary Kanun Hükümü, which had applied to compete in the National Documentary Film category, from the competition selection on the grounds that the judicial process was ongoing. Then it was included again and the festival was completely canceled. When you think about this whole process, how do you evaluate the situation?**

As we stated in our statement as Altyazı Cinema Association, the festival management invented an excuse for censorship. They announced that they removed the movie on a ground that has no legal basis. As we also stated in the statement, the “crime of attempting to influence fair trial”, which was cited as a justification for the censorship, applies to verbal or written statements made with specific intent to influence prosecutors, judges, courts, experts or witnesses.

It is a violation of the constitutionally guaranteed freedom of expression to claim that screening documentaries, which are a form of cinematic expression, at festivals would lead to such a crime. Already in the following week, the documentary Kanun Hükümü was withdrawn from the program due to the reaction of the juries and the film community. Then came the press release in which the Ministry of Culture and Tourism announced that it was withdrawing its support and accused the festival of “terrorist propaganda”. Subsequently, pro-government media outlets and trolls attacked the festival management with threats and the documentary was again removed from the program. Finally, the Mayor of Antalya Metropolitan Municipality announced that he had canceled the festival and dismissed the festival management. This whole horrible process has already clearly shown us the motives behind the censorship and by whom.

If only the festival management had had the courage to say in its first statement that they were under pressure from the Ministry of Culture and Tourism to remove the film from the program on the grounds of “terrorist propaganda” and that the film had nothing to do with these accusations. We probably wouldn’t be in a worse position than we are now: The festival was canceled, the festival management was fired, the film (and, in a way, everyone who opposed the censorship of the film) was criminalized by government officials and pro-government media and trolls. The most important achievement we have is that the juries and the film community quickly and with one voice said that they will not be where censorship reigns, and the censoring power made itself clear.

### Censorship always persists in such festivals

Antalya Film Festival, one of the most prestigious film festivals in Turkey, is known for sometimes overcoming censorship and even rewarding censored films, and sometimes, as in this year’s case, for not screening films at the festival. Where does this fluctuating attitude stem from?

In fact, it is not exactly a fluctuating attitude. Censorship is always carried out secretly in municipally organized festivals like Altın Portakal, supported by the Ministry of Culture. Especially after 2014 (the year the censorship of Yeryüzü Aşkın Yüzü... took place in Antalya), it has intensified. The change of municipalities perhaps only has an impact on what will be censored. Censorship is always present in such festivals.

For example, in Antalya, the documentary competition and the national competition were abolished during the years when the municipality was under AKP rule (2014-2019). This is censorship in itself, perhaps even greater censorship than the banning of individual films. In other words, censorship, which became systematic in these years, lost its visibility and did not become an agenda. This is the main reason why there seems to be a fluctuation. When the municipality switched to CHP in 2019, the film industry had two demands. The first was for the festival to be autonomous from the municipality, and the second was for the festival to confront the 2014 censorship and screen the films that could not be screened that year. Unfortunately, since the new festival management did not embrace these two demands with the support of filmmakers, the festival was subjected to interventions by both the municipality and the ministries. As a result, with the open intervention of the ministry, we faced a case of censorship that went beyond what happened in 2014.k.



Source: Sendika.org

### The movie industry must also build stronger alliances against a multi-channel crackdown

**For a long time, festivals in Turkey have been associated with censorship. The Golden Orange Film Festival often witnesses protests by both artists and directors. How do you evaluate this and what would you like to say about the fight against censorship?**

In the past years, there has been no grounds for trust between festival directors and filmmakers to resist censorship and censorship mechanisms together. If such a ground had been established, we could be talking about other processes and other struggles.



Source: Sendika.org

We are far from the times when censorship was only done by the state, 40-odd years have passed. Now, capital, foundations, municipalities are also involved, as well as festival directors who are said to be independent but are not. In the case of “Kanun Hükümü”, even ministries other than the Ministry of Culture were involved. The Ministry of Justice was able to criminalize the screening of “Kanun Hükümü”, a film for which there was no banning order, on the contrary, the Constitutional Court, following an individual application made by the director, deemed the denial of permission to shoot the documentary a violation of freedom of expression, in other words, it opposed the prevention of its production. It must be realized that we are now in a new and much more dangerous dynamic.

On the one hand, we are in a process where not only the state but also unofficial, private, so-called autonomous structures are involved in the censorship mechanism, and on the other hand, filmmakers can be criminalized and targeted directly by the state. Against such a multi-channel oppression, the film industry must build stronger alliances within itself. It should be able to establish autonomous structures that do not work with the bureaucracy.

In addition, the movie industry itself should stop seeing the field of independent-oppositional-political documentaries as a source of threat. These films are being produced and will continue to be produced, despite all kinds of pressure. In order not to see these films only as a source of crisis, the film industry needs to organize itself without waiting for crises to occur and create permanent structures to resist censorship. Otherwise, we will be dealing with crisis management every time..

### There should be a “handbook” for festival management that focuses on protecting freedom of expression to the fullest

**How do you evaluate the imposition of censorship not through the usual means of the government, but through individuals from the film industry, and actors within the sector taking on this role themselves?**

There should be a “handbook” for festival directors to refer back to when they are subjected to censorship pressure or when they see self-censorship processes in action, focusing on protecting freedom of expression to the fullest. But whenever this happens, instead of adhering to the guidelines, festival directors place themselves between the municipality, government agencies and filmmakers. They play the role of “facilitators” looking for answers to the question “How can we handle this before the crisis erupts, how can we save the situation?” Instead of defending principles, they follow the question “how can we get out of this without messing it up?”. However, we would like to see festival directors who have served film culture for years and are competent in this field on the side of filmmakers, on the side of freedom of expression, which filmmakers have repeatedly shown the will to defend. If they want to resist censorship, they need to know that filmmakers and wider film culture actors are on their side.

Filmmakers in Turkey have a serious and historic resistance against censorship. It is not possible for festival directors to be unaware of this; filmmakers are not a community that cannot understand the pressures they are subjected to. However, no one can expect filmmakers to accept the violation of freedom of expression and censorship at a point where festival managements cannot resist the pressures. Trying to find legally invalid excuses for this is making fun of everyone’s minds.

As Altyazı Cinema Association, we suggest that when the pressure becomes unbearable, they should disclose it transparently and not sign on to censorship. Let whoever wants to censor the censorship sign it. It is not possible to understand why Ahmet Boyacıoğlu signed that statement that could almost create a new censorship mechanism.

One of our demands as Altyazı Cinema Association was that they withdraw this justification. But what happened was that the accusation of “terrorist propaganda”, which is already used in Turkey to restrict not only freedom of expression, but also freedom of assembly, demonstration and march, was dumped on the festival by the government and pro-government media channels and trolls. Neither the festival directors nor the municipality could come up with a word against this, nor did they dare to take the filmmakers with them and realize the program they had announced.

### There is no other way to act together against all kinds of rights violations?

Unfortunately, Turkey’s history of censorship, which had an institutional identity until 2004, did not disappear with the abolition of the Censorship Board. Is there an internalization of censorship here? How can we read this?

Yes, of course there is internalization, but the real problem is the lack of unity in the struggle against censorship. There are no large-scale collaborations like the great censorship march of 1977. Film festivals, even those supported by the ministry, do not act together with filmmakers, they work with bureaucrats.

In the years that Siyah Bant has been working on censorship and festivals, we have clearly seen this: Especially ministry-supported festivals and municipal festivals prefer to negotiate with censorship. For example, the ministry demands the exclusion of a film behind closed doors, saying that if you don’t exclude it, I will cut half of the budget, the festival tries to solve this problem through bargaining without making it public, for example, instead of including the film in the competition, it offers a special screening to the ministry, etc. It claims that this bargaining approach, which recognizes censorship, is in the name of culture and art. He thinks that without me, this field would be lost, he puts himself in a separate place from the power, etc. However, he 1-recognizes censorship, 2-institutionalizes it, 3-prevents it from becoming public. Therefore, there is an internalization, yes, but this is more of an internalization experienced as a result of the loss of power of publicness in the neoliberal period, that is, an understanding of ‘solving it from within’.

The state of taking censorship for granted exists at the institutional level rather than the audience and filmmakers, and it feeds from there. Of course, this situation also affects the audience and the filmmakers, pacifying them. However, the recent process in Antalya showed that filmmakers have the ability to act faster to say a clear no to censorship after the 2014 experience.

At a time when restrictive policies in the field of culture and arts are crossing new thresholds and increasing their impact, there is no other way but for filmmakers to act together against all kinds of rights violations and to further develop their solidarity practices.

03.Jun.2024

HATİCE KAPUSUZ • ÇAĞLAR YENİLMEZ

# IS VOLUNTEERING A PANACEA FOR EVERYTHING, IS IT SO EASY TO WORK WITH VOLUNTEERS?



*Volunteers are essential to organised life and perhaps one of the most important elements of organisations. With limited resources and a multitude of tasks / to-do's, collaborating with volunteers in handy. But are we concerned enough about this crucial human element? Are we giving this issue the importance it deserves? This article puts volunteering at the centre of a discussion on these questions and provides some tips for volunteer management.*

Volunteers are essential to organised life and perhaps one of the most important elements of organisations. With limited resources and a multitude of tasks / to-do's, collaborating with volunteers in handy. Keeping the organisation's office open, answering hotline calls, providing legal/ psychosocial support, campaigning, organizing festivals, maintaining an active social media presence, doing fieldwork/research with volunteers - these are activities we either currently do or hope to be able to do...

But are we paying enough attention to this crucial human element? This is an important question. As organisations, we often do not prioritise this issue enough and are not aware of the extent of the organizational needs that volunteers fulfil. Sometimes we think that working with volunteers starts when they knock on our door, or we think that inviting someone to volunteer is enough. Other times we try to navigate our way through the concept of volunteering, which has different meanings in the minds of everyone in the organisation.

However, collaborating with volunteers may not be as easy as we think or hope. Volunteers are perhaps the most careful and attentive human resource within an organisation because we expect to work towards a common goal with a group that is not made up of our members or employees. But who should come? Why should they come? Why should they stay? How much should they be involved internally and how much externally? What tasks should they take on? With so many unanswered questions, it is becoming increasingly difficult to achieve our goals.

Collaborating with volunteers depends on many components that need to be planned and defined before we start working with them. The point at which we meet with the volunteers is actually a later stage in the whole process. As will be shown in the following module, clarifying the definition of volunteers, accurately identifying their needs, designing orientation, training and feedback processes, and establishing the principles that

underpin all these processes are all factors that need to be clarified even before a call for volunteers is issued. If we do not give sufficient consideration to these aspects before engaging with volunteers, many accidents can occur on the road to volunteer sustainability. These accidents can harm not only our organisations, but also the volunteers themselves and the relationships they build with civil society. Protecting the rights and motivation of volunteers, who are not only members of our organisation but also subjects of civil society, is crucial for the entire civil sector.

If principles and feedback mechanisms are not defined, it can become impossible to recognise, intervene and remedy problems. If the orientation and training processes are not well designed, volunteers may not have access to the information and skills they need. It is therefore essential for us as a team to give a lot of thought to these issues before deploying volunteers.

At this point, needs play a very important role. As in many other areas, the backbone of collaboration with volunteers and a sustainable volunteer programme lies in a well-defined needs. Furthermore, it is crucial to define volunteer activities based on these needs in a correct, proportionate and fair way to ensure that the process is transparent and within healthy boundaries.

If you are interested in how we implement this at STGM, you can watch the videos prepared under the title "Relationships with Volunteers" in the "Scale Up Organisations" section of the STOK Capacity Improvement Programme or in the "Basic Steps Guide for Volunteer Management in Civil Society Organisations".

## So is everyone in our organisation a volunteer?

Each of the above headings represents a component of working with volunteers that requires sensitivity and care. In addition, it is crucial to designate the right people as volunteers and to differentiate the categories of volunteers by separating different positions and responsibilities within the organisation, as these ambiguities can lead to considerable mental and administrative chaos.

Therefore, it would be useful to start volunteer management in our organisation by answering the question "Who is a volunteer?" This way we can differentiate roles, build relationships with these roles and manage expectations of the different roles.

If we answer this question by saying, for example, that "anyone who does not receive a salary in the organisation is a volunteer", things get a little complicated. In this approach, the board members or members of some organisations also define themselves as volunteers. While this approach is not entirely wrong, it weakens the organisation's ability to manage different roles, responsibilities, tasks and authority within a single category. A leadership position in an organisation is not only a responsibility that transcends volunteering, but also a source of prestige

for individuals in these roles. It is, of course, in the nature of the organisation that there are overlapping aspects of the organisation's human resources. However, if we treat them all as one and the same category, we cannot conduct a proportionate, balanced and fair process.

For a correct approach, we may need to clarify how the issues of the organisation and expanding the membership base overlap with the working methods of the volunteers and where they diverge. The volunteers we work with today could be potential members or potential board members, which is a good tactic for the sustainability of the organisation. But even if that potential becomes a reality, the motivations and responsibilities are categorically different. Volunteers must be prepared and supported for this process, and participatory processes must be followed. This difference in responsibility differs significantly between people with leadership responsibility within the organisation and those who are new to the organisation.

In summary, for sustainable relationships with volunteers, it is necessary to define volunteering precisely, plan the processes well and distinguish between different organisational needs. If you are interested in initiating the process of volunteer management in your organisation, You can access the module for volunteers prepared as part of our institutional support programme BİRLİKTE and work on this topic step by step in your organisation.

İSMAİL AVCI

# CULTURAL HERITAGE AND LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY THE WORK OF THE LAZ INSTITUTE

The Laz Institute was established with the aim of preserving the Laz language and culture, both of which are at risk of disappearing. This article describes how this preservation effort evolved into an institutional experience.

Cultural heritage encompasses the tangible and intangible elements created by past generations and recognized as valuable by society. Alongside historical structures, monuments, and natural sites, intangible elements such as languages, traditions, and beliefs are integral to this heritage.

According to UNESCO, practices, knowledge, and skills passed down through generations, which provide communities with a sense of identity and continuity, are vital components of cultural heritage. Languages, in particular, play a crucial role in transmitting this heritage, forming the basis of oral traditions like proverbs, epics, and folktales.

Languages are among the most significant elements of the historical and anthropological legacy of societies. Yet, due to globalization and assimilation, the majority of the approximately 7,000 languages spoken today face the threat of extinction. Türkiye is no exception—many indigenous languages, especially those other than Turkish, are classified as "endangered" under UNESCO criteria due to declining speaker numbers and the lack of generational transmission.

## The Work of the Laz Institute

Lazuri, the indigenous language of the Eastern Black Sea region, is

among the endangered languages listed by UNESCO. The Laz Institute, founded in Istanbul in 2013, is a civil society organisation dedicated to preserving, promoting, and passing the Laz language and culture on to future generations.

Summarized in the mission "keeping Lazuri alive," the Institute operates in areas ranging from education to publishing. It played a pivotal role in introducing Lazuri as an elective course in middle schools and developed the curriculum and textbooks in alignment with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, published through Türkiye's EBA platform.

Beyond formal education, the Institute has trained nearly 100 Lazuri teachers through in-service training programs in collaboration with the Ministry of National Education. It also offers Lazuri courses both regionally and online, expanding access to the Laz diaspora and others interested in the culture.

The Institute actively documents and publishes elements of Laz cultural heritage, including folktales, epics, traditional music, and oral histories. Notable initiatives include the "Developing Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education in Lazuri" project (2016–2018), which produced comprehensive field research reports, digital learning materials, the Lazuri Dövügam – I Am Learning Lazuri textbook, and a 450-page Lazuri–Turkish dictionary made available online.

In addition to education, the Institute engages in advocacy and awareness-raising efforts. Events on International Mother Language Day (February 21) and Lazuri Language Day (November 7) highlight the risks faced by Lazuri. Public campaigns, brochures, posters, and short documentaries aim to raise awareness about the cultural loss that could result from the non-transmission of Lazuri to younger generations.

## Lazuri Language Day November 7

Declared by the Institute in 2021, Lazuri Language Day commemorates the publication of the first Lazuri newspaper and has since been celebrated widely.

Building international academic ties is also a priority. Through initiatives such as the EU-supported Laz-Circassian Civil Society Network project, the Institute has

26.May.2025  
SELİN BERGHAN

# INTER-ORGANIZATIONAL SOLIDARITY AND LEARNING JOURNEY

## THE LEARNING COMMUNITY

*We designed the BİRLİKTE Learning Community to help participating organizations get to know each other better, strengthen their communication, and facilitate experience sharing. Based on their needs and demands, we held multiple in-person and online meetings—sometimes featuring experts, sometimes led by the organizations themselves. With the support of our partner The Wheel, we connected with peer organizations from Ireland, engaged in discussions on current issues in civil society with guest experts, and turned these conversations into a publication. Most importantly, we learned from each other’s experiences. We made sure to include not only successful examples but also instances where we faced challenges and learned from our mistakes.*

### Our methods for community building: sharing and collaboration

The key principles in our community’s operation were sharing and collaboration. Each event provided an opportunity for participants to come together, exchange experiences, learn from each other, and collaborate. This collaboration was not limited to knowledge and experience sharing—it also contributed to joint advocacy, strategic partnerships, and solutions to common challenges in civil society. It was especially rewarding to see how one organization’s method could inspire another.

While forming the community, we recognized the diversity of experiences and knowledge among participants and the enriching effect of this variety. Therefore, we adopted an interactive approach, encouraging participants to share their experiences and utilize this knowledge in their own organizations as well as in the broader civil society sphere.

### What did we do? What did we discuss?

During our two-year implementation period, we organized multiple meetings focusing on organizational capacity topics based on the needs of our participant organizations. So, what did we discuss in these meetings?

• **Organizational Meetings:** We created spaces for collective work and learning. We held five in-person and seven online organizational meetings. These meetings allowed our organizations to take the lead and create experience-based learning environments. One of the highlights was ensuring an open and safe space for discussion. Thanks to this environment, organizations shared not only their successes but also their failures. Listening to the challenges of one organization helped another be better prepared for similar situations. Our participants consistently emphasized the safety of these gatherings, and we were pleased to foster such a supportive atmosphere.

• **Civil Space Discussions:** We addressed the pressing issues of civil society. This series of meetings, known as Civil Space Discussions, was designed to analyze and discuss current topics and challenges in civil society. We asked organizations what topics they wanted to explore,

and the most requested themes were workers’ rights and human resource management in CSOs. Adopting a participatory approach, organizations themselves shaped the content and final publication from these discussions. We’re excited to announce that our publication “Work Relations in Civil Society” will soon be available.

• **Online Information Sessions:** Bridging distances. We hosted 22 online interactive sessions, some of which were webinars led by our organizations in their areas of expertise. To ensure accessibility, we incorporated interactive tools and shared recordings on our digital platform for those who couldn’t attend live.

• **Thematic Meetings with Irish Civil Society:** During this implementation period, our program partner was The Wheel, Ireland’s equivalent of STGM. Through thematic meetings with peer organizations in Ireland, we had the opportunity to exchange experiences, compare civil society structures in both countries, and explore good practices. Some of our focus areas included good governance, HR management, leadership, and data systems—all strengths of our Irish partners.

• **On-the-Job Learning Program:** We designed this program to enhance the capacity of individuals (members, employees, volunteers) within participating organizations regarding their activities and institutionalization processes. This initiative allowed organizations to observe the operations, mechanisms, procedures, and principles of experienced peer organizations firsthand. Participants gained perspective by working at peer

organizations and applying best practices to their own organizations.

Through this program, organizations also participated in 10-15 day study visits to European organizations, fostering peer learning. These visits provided opportunities to observe, build closer relationships, and adapt best practices to their own organizations. Additionally, participants gained insight into the structure and functioning of civil society in various European countries. One of the most significant outcomes was the strengthening of partnerships—many organizations started working on joint projects with their host organizations.

### What did participants say about the BİRLİKTE Learning Community?

#### Safe Space & Solidarity

“It was a very safe space. We had two days of learning from each other and committing to support one another.”

#### New relationships & Sustainable bonds

“Getting to know organizations and their working areas enriches both our methods and our personal relationships. It was an exciting meeting, and the idea was highly appreciated. The relationships we built here continued beyond the meetings, leading to lasting bonds.”

#### Different perspectives & New applications

“This process made us ask how we could improve our existing institutional practices. For example, we never considered allowing leave for hormone therapy treatment, in addition to menstrual leave. We have now started working on adding this to our policy documents.

“I learned a lot about fundraising. We often felt helpless trying to run our organization solely depending on grants. This was incredibly helpful.”

#### Participatory & Productive meetings

“I think the meetings were highly participatory. It was well-prepared and structured over two days. Listening to experiences and receiving direct support from someone within civil society felt truly valuable.”

### What did we take away?

The BİRLİKTE Learning Community provided opportunities not only for education and knowledge sharing but also for collaborative problem-solving and developing partnerships. Perhaps the most significant takeaway from the BİRLİKTE process was discovering the power of coming together and thinking collectively. Because solidarity is not only needed in times of crisis—it is always a vital source of strength.

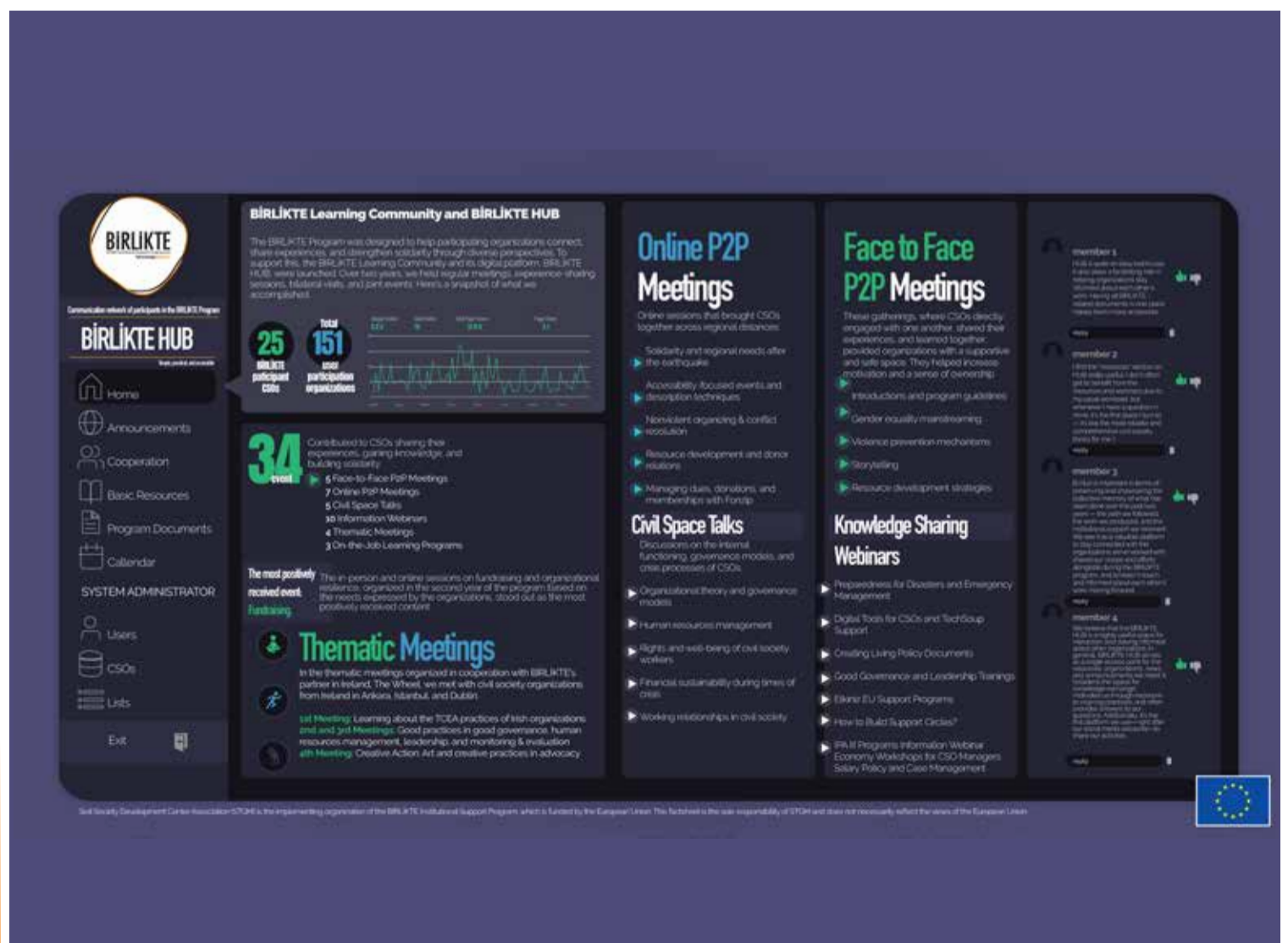
A heartfelt thank you to all the organizations that actively participated, to the experts who supported us, and to everyone who contributed sincerely to this journey.

organized the International Symposium on Endangered Languages and the International Caucasian Languages Conference. The Institute’s participation in global forums helps increase the academic recognition of Lazuri.

Furthermore, it supports researchers with data and resources and works to integrate Lazuri into digital technologies. In 2024, the Institute organized the “Artificial Intelligence, Language, Voice and Mozilla Common Voice Workshop for Endangered Languages,” contributing Lazuri voice recordings to open-source databases and paving the way for AI applications such as voice recognition and virtual assistants in Lazuri.

Through these efforts, the Laz Institute aims to ensure Lazuri’s survival not only as a cultural legacy but as a living language integrated into the daily lives of future generations.

\*President of the Laz Institute



24.Jul.2024

## DITAM: STRONG COOPERATION WITH A PARTICIPATORY ADMINISTRATION IS NEEDED TO SOLVE URBAN PROBLEMS



**After the March 30 local elections, a five-year period without a trustee began in Diyarbakır. However, the city faces many pressing problems. Tigris Social Research Center (DİTAM) has published a new study proposing solutions to these issues. We spoke with DİTAM on this occasion.**

Diyarbakır has been home to many civilizations throughout history, but the people of the region and the country often associate the city with trustees.

This is because the city was governed by trustee municipalities after the local elections in 2014 and 2019. In the 2014 local elections, Gültan Kışanak and Fırat Anlı were elected Co-Mayors of Diyarbakır Metropolitan Municipality. However, on October 25, 2016, they were arrested on charges of “membership in a terrorist organization” following an investigation. Subsequently, on November 1, 2016, Cumali Atilla, the then-District Governor of Ankara Etimesgut, was appointed as the trustee mayor of Diyarbakır Metropolitan Municipality.

In the 2019 elections, Adnan Selçuk Mızraklı was elected mayor of Diyarbakır Metropolitan Municipality but was dismissed after five months, and a second trustee was appointed. After the March 30 local elections, a trustee-free period began in Diyarbakır after 5 years. However, the city still faces many pressing problems. Tigris Social Research Center (DİTAM) has published a new study proposing solutions to these issues. We took this opportunity to speak with DİTAM.

**First of all, could you give us some brief information about DİTAM?**

Since its establishment in 2010, Tigris Social Research Center (DİTAM) has been conducting research on economic, social, and political issues, primarily in Diyarbakır, in collaboration with experts. This research aims to identify the current situation and contribute to solving problems by challenging relevant institutions. In this direction, we have also carried out a study titled “Identification of Urban Problems and Suggestions for Solutions.”

**Yes, you recently shared the report of this study. Where did this need arise from?**

Since 2016, municipalities in Diyarbakır and many other cities in the region have been under trusteeship. Trustee municipalities have negatively affected diversity and participation in the city. Public administrators unfamiliar with the city’s history, culture, and streets had significant roles in governance. More than 8 years of trusteeship led to a decline in the quality of services and distanced the municipalities from the people. This resulted in Diyarbakır not receiving adequate municipal services and a weakening of the city’s identity. This governance form continues to pose a significant problem for the city’s present and future.

As DİTAM, we launched the “Identification of Urban Problems and Suggestions for Solutions” study to highlight these issues. The study aims to identify Diyarbakır’s urban problems with CSOs, academics, and professional chambers and develop solutions.

**How did you proceed with the study?**

Firstly, on January 6-7, 2024, we held focus group meetings with around 80 representatives of civil society organizations and activists, identifying four main topics: “urban, environment and cultural heritage,” “socio-cultural life and policies,” “economic situation and rural development,” and “what kind of city for women, youth, and children.”

We shared the resulting data with the public on Tuesday, February 27, 2024, in Diyarbakır, under the title “What is Diyarbakır Losing in Local Services,” with the participation of civil society representatives.

Tunç Soyer, Mayor of Izmir Metropolitan Municipality, and Feridun Çelik, former Mayor of Diyarbakır Metropolitan Municipality, also presented their views at this meeting to compare municipal services in Diyarbakır with those in western Turkey. This collaboration with civil society brought together different perspectives and experiences, providing a more comprehensive overview of the city’s local service challenges. In this way, more sustainable solutions were proposed to address the city’s challenges and issues more effectively.

To make the outputs and results of these activities accessible, a publication was prepared. Titled “What Diyarbakır is Losing in Local Services,”

the publication is available in Kurdish, Turkish, and English. It addresses important issues such as the right to the city, cultural and language rights, the role of local governments, and the protection of urban identity.

**We assume that you have not only addressed the problems in the study but also presented your suggestions for solutions to these problems.**

Yes, we provide municipalities and elected officials with a comprehensive review and a road map by addressing the current situation in the city, detailing the problems and proposing solutions. There is also a perspective worth seeing for those curious about Diyarbakır’s urban fabric and the changes in local services under trustee administration. Our study shows that the problems in the city governed by trustees are not only economic but also negatively impact cultural life, social relations, and individuals’ daily lives. The outputs obtained with the contributions of CSOs reveal the need to include these issues in the strategic plans to be prepared by the municipalities, to produce appropriate solutions, and to work in strong cooperation with a participatory administration.

In conclusion, our study demonstrates the necessity of a participatory administration that includes civil society for the proper resolution of the problems in local services in Diyarbakır. It also shows that civil dynamics and local actors need to cooperate to make the best use of the city’s potential and achieve sustainable development.

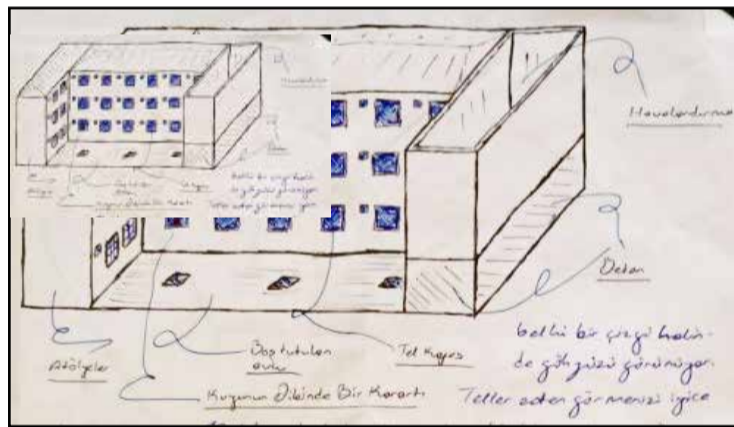
You can access the digital versions of our publication in Kurdish, Turkish, and English here.

You can also watch the footage and presentations of the meeting on DİTAM’s YouTube channel.

30.Oct.2024

## CİSST DECLARES HIGH SECURITY PRISONS ISOLATION IS A HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATION

**We conducted a comprehensive assessment of isolation conditions and human rights violations in S and Y type maximum security prisons with the representative of CİSST (Civil Society Association in the Penal System). CİSST aims to defend the rights of prisoners within the penal system in Turkey, monitor human rights violations in prisons and develop solutions by reporting these violations.**



Source: Bianet

**Let us start by getting to know you. Can you briefly tell us about CİSST and your work?**

As CİSST, we were founded in 2006 to protect the rights and freedoms of prisoners in prisons, which are among the most high-risk places in terms of human rights violations, and to ensure that prisons comply with international human rights standards and human dignity.

In line with these objectives, we carry out advocacy, monitoring and evaluation activities. We file human rights applications on reports of rights violations by prisoners and their relatives, track the results and report on them. We also submit requests for information about prisons and share the data we receive with the public. In this way, we aim to ensure that civil actors, academics and relevant professional groups, as well as the public, have access to accurate data on prisons and are motivated to engage with prisons.

**We know that you have recently focussed on type S and Y prisons, which have been increasing in number. Why are these prisons on your agenda?**

The reason why we have focussed on S and Y type prisons and wanted to put these prisons on the agenda is that prisons are built with a focus on isolation and solitary confinement and create harsh conditions for prisoners.

Type S and Y prisons, like type F prisons, belong to the category of ‘high security prisons’. In addition to type S, Y and F prisons, there are also maximum security prisons such as the closed maximum security prison Dumlu No. 1, which do not fall into any category but have a similar architecture to type S and Y prisons. The official authorities do not give sufficient explanations about the S and Y type prisons and do not provide sound information about the conditions and architecture of these facilities. It is said that only prisoners and detainees are housed in maximum security prisons, which are considered to be specially built for severe life sentences and which would negatively affect institutional order.

The lack of official data and information on S and Y type prisons has made it necessary for us as CİSST to establish our own monitoring activities. We have been collecting information on high security prisons for a long time by using monitoring tools such as correspondence with prisoners, hotline calls and lawyer visits. Since 2021, we have identified 714

rights violations in S-type prisons, 38 in Y-type prisons and a total of 1239 rights violations in prisons designated only as high-security prisons.

**So, what is the difference between S and Y type prisons and F type prisons?**

F type prisons, which adopt the social isolation model, took their place in the execution system in the 2000s. S and Y type prisons, on the other hand, are more isolated structures where isolation

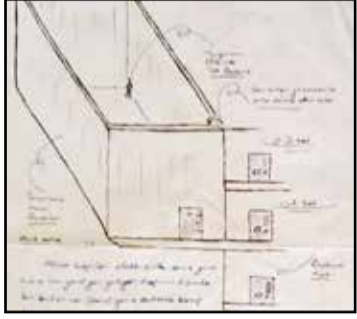


Source: Bianet

conditions are more severe compared to F type prisons. While F type prisons have both wards and cells, S and Y type prisons only have cells. While F type prisons have a separate independent ventilation area for the cells, S and Y type prisons do not have an independent ventilation area and prisoners are taken to a separate area by the prison guards to be aired for one hour. S and Y type prisons are prisons where prisoners are not allowed to communicate with each other in any way. In other words, prisoners who are not aggravated life convicts in S and Y type prisons are also held in aggravated life execution conditions.

In addition to all these, it is also reflected in the public opinion that prisoners in S and T type prisons are subjected to intensive strip searches on their way to and from prison, standing counts are imposed, and cells are monito-

red with cameras. With all these negative features, it is seen that S and Y type prisons are subject to a stricter execution regime and rules compared to F type prisons.



Kaynak: Bianet

### What are the effects of isolation in these prisons on prisoners?

Isolation is a human rights violation that we, as CİSST, particularly focus on and bring to the agenda. While prisoners were previously subjected to isolation as a means of punishment from time to time, prisoners who received aggravated life imprisonment and prisoners

who were held in S and Y type prisons, although they did not receive this sentence, are now held in isolation for the entire duration of their incarceration.

It is known that physical and psychosomatic diseases such as stomach problems, neck and back pain, and eye problems may occur in prisoners held in isolation conditions due to anxiety. At the same time, it has been determined by scientific research that social isolation and lack of social support increase stress and many other psychological disorders. Stress also increases the likelihood of developing cardiovascular diseases and triggers depression and many other psychological disorders.

In our book titled “Being a Prisoner with an Aggravated Life Sentence in Turkey”; we draw attention to the extreme anxiety of some prisoners about the future, their fears about whether they will lose some of their physical abilities, and their concerns about entering social environments in the future and whether they will be able to adapt to the new world order where technology is developing.

### In Turkey, the fact that prisons are closed to civilian surveillance leads to rights violations

What concrete examples do you know of the isolation conditions and human rights violations caused by the architectural structure of S and Y type prisons for prisoners? What impact do these prisons have on prisoners who have not been sentenced to life imprisonment?

Due to their architectural structure, type S and Y maximum security prisons lead to serious rights violations for prisoners, even without the intervention of third parties, and violate their fundamental rights by keeping prisoners in isolation. Prisoners, who are constantly recorded by

cameras, are deprived of their right to privacy. Contrary to international standards, their right to ventilation is limited to one hour per day. Prisoners are unable to socialise with each other and social isolation deepens. The structure of the windows, which block daylight, combined with the lack of ventilation, has an additional negative impact on the prisoners’ health. Their right to visit is severely restricted and prisoners can only meet with their visitors individually. The automatic opening and closing of the doors harbours risks for emergency situations. In short, “aggravated life sentence” is also applied to prisoners receiving lighter sentences, resulting in serious human rights violations.

### Is there anything you would like to add?

As CİSST, we are committed to protecting the rights and freedoms of prisoners detained in S and Y type prisons. We want to ensure that these prisons comply with international human rights standards and human dignity in terms of rights, conditions and practises. However, the fact that the prisons in Turkey are closed to civilian supervision hinders these efforts.

We emphasise once again that the psychological effects of isolation and prolonged detention need to be thoroughly researched and that prisons should be opened to academic studies and civil society organisations working for human rights in this regard. The construction of S-type, Y-type and maximum security prisons, which are inherently against human rights and whose architecture, conditions and order make execution an aggravated punishment, should be stopped. Existing prisons should no longer be used unless they are closed and brought into compliance with international human rights standards.

If you would like to receive more up-to-date information, you can visit our website.

14.Mar.2025

# NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATIONS OF ANKARA COME SIDE BY SIDE WE DEMAND PUBLIC SPACES OF THE CITY

*Seven neighborhood organizations came together under the leadership of Çiğdemim Association, which has been operating as a neighborhood organization in Ankara for more than 25 years, and took the first step of the Neighborhood Based Organizations Unity. The neighborhood associations, which came together before the local elections, demand a greeting relationship with the municipalities and the city’s vibrant and living public spaces. The associations, which also published a call for the kind of municipalism they want before the elections, want to expand the scope of the unity by spreading this call. We came together with the Çiğdemim Association and talked about the unity of neighborhood-based organizations, the needs for this unity and what they are planning.*

### What is the purpose of this alliance?

The general objective is to strengthen local civil society organizations to become effective and independent actors capable of forming public opinion in sustainability, policy-making and decision-making processes.

In addition, we aim to facilitate the sharing of knowledge, skills and connections of local civil society organizations through the platform to be established, to increase the impact of CSOs’ campaigns and advocacy activities through capacity building activities and to expand their sphere of influence.

### As far as we know, this is an Ankara-based association, so which neighborhood associations are part of this association?

We initially set out as Çankaya, but we also included the Gölbaşı Park Eymir Residents Association in the process, with whom we had previously held discussions. The following associations signed up for this collaboration: Ayrancım Association, Ayrancı Ahalisi Association, Bahçelievler Association, Çiğdemim Association, Kavaklıderem Association, Oran Güzelleştirme Association, and Park Eymir Residents Association.

We also invited Birlik’te Yaşam Derneği and ÇAKDER, which had to close their associations in the recent period, to the meeting we held with the associations. We listened to what kind of negative experiences they had and how they

had to close their associations.

### We don’t know of any other work where seven neighborhood organizations have come together. Why is this neighborhood organization important, what does it mean for these neighborhoods to come together?

Yes, not to mention seven, just 4 months ago 4 associations and the city council came together for a joint event and we couldn’t come to an agreement. It was really difficult to come together, but I think our stubborn attitude and our selfless and dedicated work to set an example for everyone made an impact.

They think they can develop the example of Çiğdemim Association in their own associations. We have never had any concerns such as competition or jealousy, if we had, we would not need to deal with such a collaboration.

As Çiğdemim Association, we took the work of STGM as an example. Just as you mentor CSOs and work for capacity development, we have made it our mission to do the same. From that day on, one of our main goals has been to be a pioneer and an example for similar organizations.

We realized this work from the BİRLİKTE-2 project budget. We had already discussed and planned this in the meeting we held with our mentor at the beginning of the semester. Apart from that, the trainings we received from STGM on this subject also contributed greatly.

Neighborhood organizations are actually the formations that should have a real say in cities because here neighbors take care of the area they live in regardless of their hometown. This is why we think we should be different from local associations. But unfortunately, local associations are more active in this field. We want to come together as those who try to beautify the place they live in and use our powers for this common purpose.

### Will the “Unity of Neighborhood Based Organizations” be only in Ankara? Do you plan to carry out this work in other provinces as well?

We want to expand this solidarity by including neighborhood/community associations whose paths intersect with ours. Firstly, we will invite two associations in Istanbul, which we visited during a study visit within Birlikte 2 Program, Komşu Kapısı Maçka and Kuzguncuklar Association.

Because we believe that those who take care of their neighborhood at the smallest scale will also participate and take care of it at the district/provincial/country level. For this reason, the number of associations like



ours should increase rapidly. This organization is not a political party organization, it is not a hometown-based organization. That is why we think it is important.

### You mention a concept such as “keeping at arm’s length” for this solidarity. Could you explain this a bit?”

This concept emerged in the speech of Prof. Dr. İlhan Tekeli, whom we invited to the meeting for the opening speech. İlhan Tekeli made a definition that distinguishes neighborhood-based organizations from CSOs by defining them as “people in a living environment come together to improve the quality of life in this environment or to solve a problem related to this area”. He then stated that it is necessary to create a diversity of public spaces at the neighborhood level. He said to demand from the municipalities the city’s vibrant, living public spaces where a relationship of greeting distance is established.

### As elections approach, what kind of action/activity plan do you plan to make?

In the meeting we held, we drafted a statement titled “What Kind of Municipality Do We Want as Neighborhood-Based Organizations and Our Recommendations” to be presented to the candidates for the upcoming local elections, and all associations signed it. We also decided to circulate this text widely. \*You can access the statement from the attachment.

### Do you have a contact address/social media account for those who want to be informed about your work?

Not at the moment, but in the first meeting we will decide on these and how the secretariat of the union will be run



08.May.2024  
SELİN BERGHAN



# BİRLİKTE HUB

## A LEARNING COMMUNITY STRENGTHENED BY EXPERIENCE

*In February 2023, we started the second implementation period of the BİRLİKTE Institutional Support Program, which is the result of STGM's long experience in the civic space. We completed the first implementation period of the program in fall 2020 and gained a lot of experience. We are working to implement the feedback we received from the civil society organizations we worked with during this second implementation period. One of these feedbacks was the need to create more opportunities for the CSOs participating in the program to meet more frequently to get to know each other, develop collaborations, and learn from each other's expertise. To better meet these needs, we established BİRLİKTE NETWORK as a learning and exchange community during the implementation period.*

Fundamentally, we created the BİRLİKTE Network to:

- To strengthen communication among BİRLİKTE participants,
- To ensure uninterrupted communication between the program and participants, and
- To create opportunities for organizations to learn from and with each other.

To achieve these goals, we organize various events as part of the BİRLİKTE Network. Our in-person and online trainings, webinars, and workshops will be followed by thematic meetings with peer organizations in Ireland, online forums, and in-person peer meetings. In addition, 5 representatives from participating organizations will have the opportunity to spend 2 weeks working with workplace learning in peer organizations in Ireland and learn about the approaches, methods and examples of best practices there.

### Digital meeting place B-HUB

In addition to these events, the BİRLİKTE Network also offers a digital meeting place: B- HUB.

B- HUB is the social media platform of the BİRLİKTE Program! Each organization of the program on B- HUB includes on its profile page information such as scope of work, target groups and contact information. In addition, members of the participating organizations, employees, volunteers, in short, anyone who wants to participate in this platform can become a member of B- HUB and create their own personal profile.

Organizations disseminate the announcements of their upcoming events and can post all kinds of publications such as researches, reports and bulletins to the B- HUB library. They can follow each other and group announcements according to their interests or the people and organizations they follow.

Profiles of all organizations are included under the collaboration title of B- HUB. From here you can scan according to the topic you would like to collaborate with.

Organizations also have a separate section where they post their resources, experience and expertise that they would like to share with other participants: Paying In Forward. In this section, each organization can announce their resources and opportunities, such as education, workshops, meeting rooms, that they would like to share in solidarity with the BİRLİKTE community. Organizations interested in these announcements can also submit a request here.

In addition to the library created with participant publications, B- HUB also has a basic resources section created by the program team.

The Basic Resources section contains resources in various formats and at various levels under 16 subtitles on the topics of the model of institutional development that we have implemented in BİRLİKTE. As a program team, we selected these resources by discussing them individually in a series of regular meetings. This section was created by compiling resources in various formats such as books, informational notes, beginner, intermediate, and advanced level videos that cover theoretical discussions on each topic, the legal framework, and practical applications. Participating organizations can access basic information here on the areas for improvement they have identified in their self-assessment processes.

We have compiled these resources into the following 16 subheadings:

- Governance and Decision Making • Strategic Planning • Staff - Volunteers - Members • Collaborations and Partnerships • Resources - Financial Management • Resources - Knowledge Management • Resources - Grants Management • Fundraising • Communication • Digitization • Monitoring and Evaluation • Rights-Based Approach • Gender Mainstreaming • Cross-cutters - Environmental Mainstreaming • Cross-cutters - Child Safety and Child Participation • Cross Cutters - Accessibility.

Program Documents complete the Library and Basic Resources sections. Program Documents consist of documents created and used during the BİRLİKTE Program, sample templates and webinar recordings for the application. In this section, participating organizations



can access any document they want whenever they want. These cover technical information from sample signature sheet, payroll schedule, visibility rules to grant application procedures.

### User-friendly and accessible system

BİRLİKTE Network events are posted at HUB announcements. The content, method, date, etc. of these events. We are working on new technical specifications to determine the details with the participating organizations. We also continue to strive and design new sections so that B-HUB enables much more interaction between users than its counterparts.

We are committed to making B- HUB user-friendly and accessible. For this reason, we evaluate all feedback from our participating organizations and share it regularly with our technical team.

B- HUB, which is currently only available to BİRLİKTE participants, could develop into a broader platform for civil society organizations in Turkey to learn from each other, discuss, and form new partnerships, from the scope of work to new methodologies to the institutional capacity of civil society organizations. Who knows? We will continue to work with all our energy to develop the lessons learned here into such a contribution, and we will keep this space updated with news from the activities of the BİRLİKTE network in the coming period.

21.Oct.2024

## Let's get to know TOGETHER

### THE CIVIC SPACE STUDIES ASSOCIATION HAS THE SAY

*We wanted to introduce you to the Civic Space Studies Association, which works in the field of youth, closely follows and reports on the pressures especially in universities, and carries out advocacy activities for freedom of expression on campuses.*

We are implementing the BİRLİKTE (TOGETHER) Support Program, which we designed with our long-standing experience and knowledge to strengthen civil society in Turkey, as a comprehensive support program that includes both institutional grants and mentoring components for institutional development for civil society organizations conducting rights-based work.

In our second implementation period, we are working with 25 CSOs on different topics from refugee rights to environmental rights, from LG-BTI+ rights to disabled rights, from children's rights to cultural rights. One of these organizations is the CCivic Space Studies Association (CSSA), founded in 2018 by a group of young rights advocates.

We wanted to introduce you to the Civic Space Studies Association, which works in the field of youth, closely follows and reports on the pressures especially in universities, and carries out advocacy activities for freedom of expression on campuses.

### For what purpose was the Civic Space Studies Association (CSSA) founded? What was your motivation for getting involved in the civic space?

We are an independent human rights organization whose main purpose is to protect and expand the civic space. Our goals include conducting research to protect fundamental rights such as freedom of expression, assembly and organization, developing policy recommendations and contributing to the strengthening of civil society.

At this point, as the Civic Space Studies Association, we aim to combat all kinds of discrimination such as race, language, religion, color, gender, age, sexual identity, sexual orientation, physical diversity and disability. Women, LGBTIQ+ and young people are especially the focus of our work. We care about and prioritize reflecting this pluralism and diversity not only in our target audience and our work but also within ourselves and our board of directors.

### Who are your studies aimed at? Which area are you focussing on?

Our target audience is the youth, especially the student youth. While the university campus is a place where free thinking develops and social change thrives, we see that students, as individuals who shape the future of society, have been increasingly restricted, penalised and silenced by various pressures in recent years. As CSSA, we place great importance on the protection of civic space on campus and the defence of student rights. In our fight against various forms of discrimination, women and

LGBTIQ+ people are our priority groups.

**We would like to address the title of freedom of expression, assembly and association. What kind of work do you do for these titles?**

Our priorities include developing projects in defence of freedom of expression, assembly and association, supporting student clubs and associations that work on this issue, promoting access to public spaces and artistic and cultural production.

To protect these freedoms on university campuses, we use methods such as data collection, mapping, field research, surveys and reporting. We also organise seminars, workshops, conferences and discussion panels, run campaigns and offer legal advice. Defending the rights of student communities to organise and become a centre where they can seek advice is also an important part of our work.

Developing projects to defend freedom of expression, assembly and organisation, as well as promoting access to public space and artistic and cultural production, are among our priorities. In this context, we use research methods such as data collection, mapping, field research, surveys and reports. We also organise seminars, workshops, conferences and panel discussions, run campaigns and try to use all kinds of advocacy tools.

**What kind of feedback do you get from the students?**

We get very positive feedback from the students. It's important for them to be able to make their voices heard and defend their rights. At the moment it is so difficult for them to get even the most basic information and support...

Our only goal is to make sure that they do not feel alone, especially in defending their rights to freedom of expression, assembly and organisation. Although there is a lot of feedback suggesting that this goal has been more or less achieved, this feedback is a great source of motivation for us.

**Is there anything else you would like to add?**

We believe in the power of civil society. We believe that civil society organisations play a crucial role in the change and development of society. That's why it's so important to work together and show solidarity to protect and expand civic space. Together we can create a stronger civil society.

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