

**THE SHRINKING  
DEMOCRATIC  
SPACE AND  
THE COVID-19  
PANDEMIC  
IN TURKEY  
2020-2021**

***FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF 48  
RIGHTS-BASED CIVIL SOCIETY  
ORGANISATIONS***

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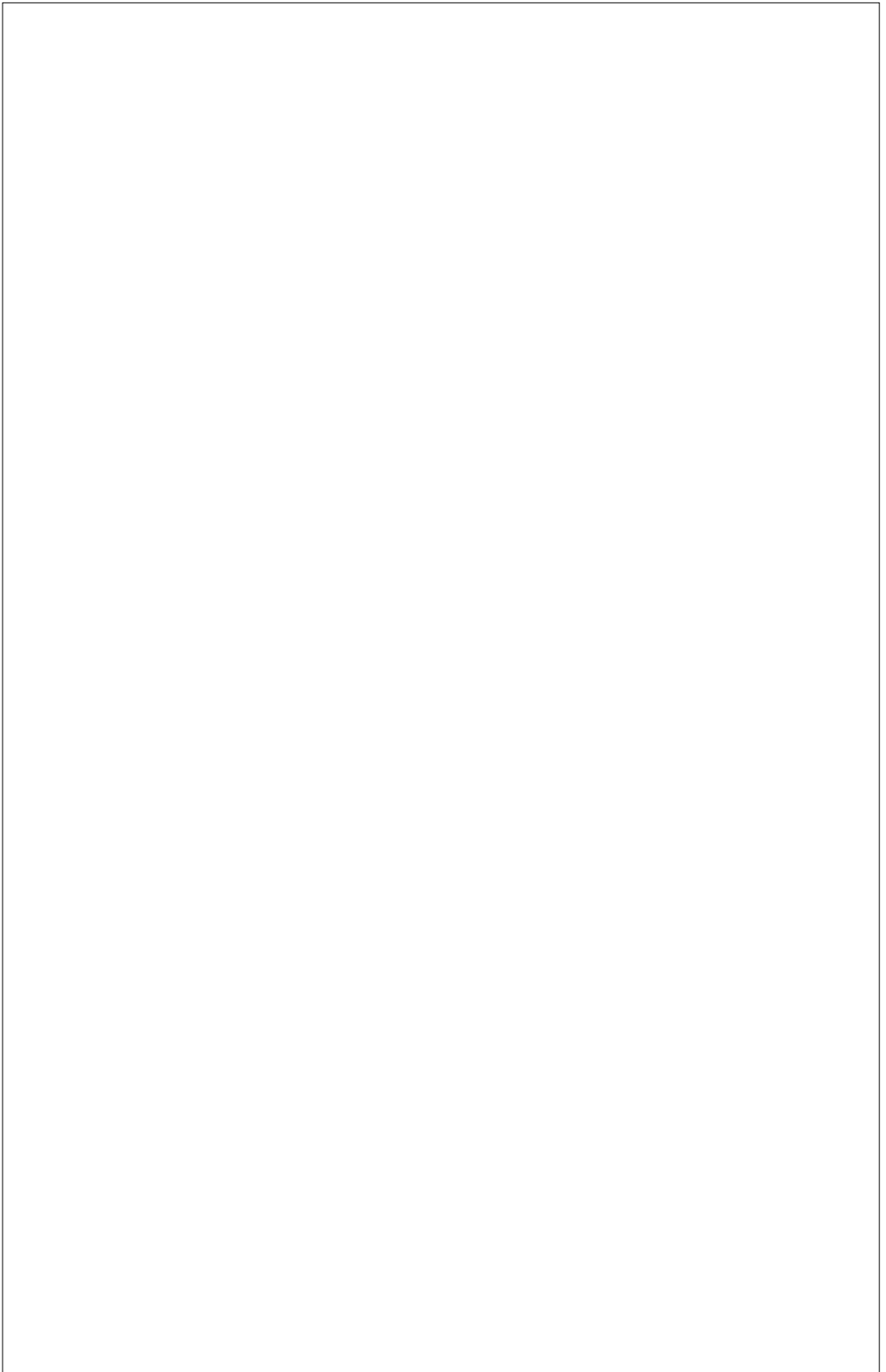
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## The Haklara Destek Programme and Framework of the Report

The **Haklara Destek** Programme was developed as part of the “Building Resilience, Strengthening Human Rights: Human Rights Support Mechanisms in Turkey” grant programme funded by the Delegation of the European Union to Turkey and conducted by *Hafıza Merkezi* (Truth Justice Memory Center) and the Heinrich Böll Stiftung. To increase the capacities of rights-based civil society organisations (CSOs)<sup>1</sup> in Turkey, and to contribute to the development and institutionalisation of human rights and democracy, the first phase of the programme ran in 2020-2021.<sup>2</sup> Within the scope of the programme, besides operational grant support, 48 rights organisations were offered mentoring, one-on-one expert support as well as a capacity-building programme which provided different means in prioritised fields. The workshops held in this context focused on strategic planning, general advocacy, digital advocacy and activism, financial management and sustainability, project development and implementation, assessment, and management of the organisation's impact, working with volunteers, and running and monitoring campaigns.

The United Nations defines the rights-based approach as a conceptual framework based on international human rights standards and promotes support and protection of human rights in practice. It aims to analyse inequalities that lie at the centre of developmental issues, and to correct discriminatory practices and the unfair distribution of power. Through its anti-discrimination work that comprises fragile and excluded groups, its long-term objective is to define and increase the responsibility of relevant individuals and institutions related to human rights, animal rights, and environmental rights. This work is approached in a way that even the most serious rights violations are encompassed, both to ensure the participation of beneficiaries in the process, as well as to strengthen the frame for demanding their rights. Rights-based CSOs' work is found at state and society levels for the following reasons: protection and improvement of rights, the documentation and elimination of rights violations, and the securing and restitution of justice. Organisations that took part in the Haklara Destek Programme, which is open to rights based associations, foundations and cooperatives, are operating in areas such as human rights, fundamental rights and freedoms, the rule of law, the right to access justice, the right to fair punishment and fair execution, the right to peace, the right to equality

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<sup>1</sup> Civil society organisation (CSO) is used for non-profit and non-governmental organisations established as associations, foundations, or cooperatives in Turkey.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.haklaradestek.org/>



and non-discrimination, women's rights, LGBTI+ rights, children's rights, disability rights, environmental rights, animal rights, minority rights, refugee rights, right to the city, digital rights, and advocacy for human rights defenders. Organisations that work in fields such as the right to life, right to freedom from torture and ill-treatment, freedom of expression, and freedom of assembly and association, which are fundamental for the improvement of human rights law and democracy in Turkey, as well as those organisations, which bring forward the intersectionality of gender equality and minority rights, were prioritised.

Figures about the fields of work and geographical distribution of CSOs in Turkey illustrate that approximately 40% of rights organisations are located in Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir, and Bursa, whereas 60% are based in the remaining 77 cities. Based on this fact, the open call of the Haklara Destek Programme has received more applications from these larger cities. The evaluation process took into consideration the balance between these two groups in order to ensure that small cities with fewer numbers of rights-based organisations could also benefit from the programme. Eventually, from within the 134 calls the programme has received, 48 CSOs from 15 different cities across Turkey were selected: Istanbul (16) and Diyarbakır (12) were two cities from where the highest number of rights-based organisations participated in the programme, followed by Ankara (5), Van (3) and Izmir (2). Each of the cities of Hatay, Mersin, Gaziantep, Mardin, Eskişehir, Nevşehir, Denizli, Balıkesir, Kocaeli and Ordu participated in the programme with one CSO. According to the fields of activity, the organisations mainly focused on issues of human rights, law, and peace (12), and LGBTI+ and woman's rights (12). These were followed by organisations from different cities that were active in the fields of youth and children's rights (7), minorities, migration, and refugees (6), city and ecology (3), media and culture (3), academy (2), disability (2) and labour rights (1). An extensive list of the 48 rights-based organisations, including detailed information about their fields of activity, can be found in Attachment-1: List of Participant CSOs in the 2020-2021 Period of the Haklara Destek Programme.

The planning phase of the Haklara Destek Programme in 2019 was one part of the two-year institutional support, guidance, and training process that was meant to bring together organisations that focus on different issues in different cities of Turkey and increase the interaction between them. At the end of the process, a forum was going to be held where organisations that participated in the first step could convene to talk about and exchange the local experiences, challenges, and solutions they've found with regard to the shrinking democratic space in Turkey. When the programme started in early 2020, the unexpected COVID-19 pandemic breakout

hindered in-person assemblies. Instead, the programme was mostly conducted through online meetings, except for the in-person convening at the closing meeting and the forum held at the end of 2021. The forum focused on the shrinking civic space in Turkey and the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on rights-based CSOs. The following questions were shared beforehand with the participating organisations helped to shape the main line of discussions during the forum and the closing meeting:

1. Have you ever objected to direct or judicial intervention in your organization's activities? (For example, loss of members and volunteers, actions or activities being prohibited or prevented, problems encountered during donation and aid collection, other kinds of direct suppression and restraints on the organisation itself or in the field of work, etc.?)
2. What is your anticipation of the new Law No. 7262? What kind of measures are you taking against this law's restrictions?
3. Were there any activities that you had planned but could not implement? Or did you ever change the form of certain actions?
4. How did the difficulties you have faced affect your target group and field of work? How do you plan to deal with those difficulties from now on?
5. Has there been any fieldwork, meeting, training, etc., or organisational activity that you needed to cancel due to the COVID-19 pandemic? (For instance, because you were compelled by legal regulations and restrictions or because of the health risks caused by the pandemic?)
6. How did the pandemic process affect your activities in terms of content and method? Have different ways for carrying out activities been found? Is a hybrid structure considered for the future?
7. Did you have difficulties in financing your organisation due to the pandemic? Can you assess your financial situation concerning project-based and institutional funding? Will there be any changes concerning your search for funding?
8. Is your target group or your field of work vulnerable to or have special requirements that make them prone to direct effects of the pandemic?
9. Are there any impediments or restraints, which have become permanent following the pandemic that arrived at a time when the civic space was shrinking? Can you share one good example of the contents and methods you have developed against this shrinking?
10. What kind of support and solidarity was possible in the shrinking civic space and the pandemic? What sort of solidarity is needed hereafter?

The report at hand is based on a collection of different data from the final mentor reports written by Aysel Ergün, Bilge Taş, Evren Ergeç, and Hatice Kapusuz, 4 of the

9 mentors, who have monitored the participating organisations for two years and prepared the final presentations within the scope of the Haklara Destek Programme; the problems and solution suggestions mentioned by CSO representatives in guidance of the above-listed questions, and the minutes of the discussions held during the closing meeting and the forum. The report approaches the restrictions that affected CSOs even more with the pandemic in the last two years and their outcomes for the fields of work and target groups by referring to the experiences of participant organisations and local perspectives. Several rights-based organizations from numerous areas have published different reports concerning the shrinking civic space and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Some of them are listed in Annex-2: List of Other Major Reports Published on the Shrinking Civic Space and the Pandemic.

Nonetheless, the report aims to foreground the common issues stemming from the personal experiences of the 48 rights organisations that have participated in the Haklara Destek Programme and make the needs and solutions mentioned here visible, rather than taking a comprehensive picture of the field and providing a generalised research result by documenting every single problem. In this sense, what has been mentioned by the participant organisations was brought together from a perspective that is based on local and city-based micro experiences, focusing on the needs of the target groups and the organisations themselves, pointing to issues that unite the civic space beyond thematic categories, opening up areas of struggle beyond losses, drawing on concrete examples and the impact on the field, and finding hope in solidarity. To comply with the needs of a narrative flow and considering the report's limitations, examples and citations were anonymised. Still, all participants and their fields of work can be found at the end of the report. We hope that this report, which is based on concrete and actual experiences of CSOs, contributes to enhancing the chances for cooperation and solidarity through the exchange of knowledge and expertise for broadening the shrinking civic space.

FERDA ÖNEN

**INTRODUCTION:**  
**SHRINKING**  
**DEMOCRATIC**  
**SPACE IN THE**  
**WORLD AND IN**  
**TURKEY**

## Shrinking Democratic Space in the World

We are faced with a new global socio-political development that has left its mark on the 21<sup>st</sup> century – the shrinking civic space. On the one hand, civil society is trying to comprehend these changes; on the other, it seeks to develop new strategies for struggle and resistance. The Global Civil Society Alliance CIVICUS defines the civic space as universal norms that enable people to communicate with each other and participate freely and unimpededly so that they can affect the political, economic, and social structures they are surrounded by.<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, the shrinking of the civic space can be defined as the suppression of the civil society and the restriction of its mobility in implementing these norms. Similar policies and methods implemented in almost every country where the civic space is shrinking produce expected results, which essentially involve the limitation of the freedom of association, peaceful assembly, expression, and serious rights violations. According to the November 2001 figures of CIVICUS, currently, only 3% of the world population live in open societies: 39 countries are classified as available, 41 countries as narrowed, 43 countries as obstructed, 49 countries as repressed, and 25 countries as closed. These figures lay bare that in 117 out of 197 countries, the civic space is considerably restricted.<sup>4</sup> Repressed countries, including Turkey, are described as countries where the “civic space is severely restricted, advocacy work is consistently impeded, authorities make threats of closure, and threats of violence come from state as well as non-state actors.”

The shrinking of the common political ground of the society brings about a profound polarisation and authoritarianisation in almost every country that stands in the same situation. This polarisation and the authoritarianisation is mainly characterized by being “local and national” and receives substantial mass support. The systematic politicization of the judiciary, the depreciation of basic legislation processes, putting the media under a biased and partisan control, and the impairment of the organized sections and structures of the society, which used to raise their voices, are ongoing developments that are backed by mounting nationalism and security paradigms. When the deterioration of democratic institutions merges with a fabricated – primarily national, but occasionally also foreign– enemy perception, the outcome is nationalism and racism, which is based on a populist discourse. In this generated atmosphere of uncertainty and fear, a particular portion of the society comprehends authoritarianism as the only remedy.

According to the 2021 Democracy Report of the V-Dem Research Institute, the global regression in liberal democracies continued in 2020, and electoral autocracies are

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3 <https://monitor.civicus.org/quickfacts/>

4 <https://findings2021.monitor.civicus.org/in-numbers.html>

still the most common type of political regime. Accordingly, one significant change was that India, the biggest democracy in the world with its 1.37 billion population, turned into an electoral autocracy. Currently, only 32 countries with a share of 14% of the world population are ruled by liberal democracy, whereas 68% of the world population lives in 87 countries that are electoral and closed autocracies. Electoral democracies in 60 countries constitute the remaining 19% of the world population (the figures are rounded up in the report). The report states that the adverse drift, called the “third wave of autocratisation,” continues without losing speed. Poland ranks first on the list of the most autocratic countries of the last decade, followed by Hungary and immediately by Turkey. Recently, three new countries have joined the list of authoritarian states: Benin, Bolivia, and Mauritius. On the Liberal Democracy Index, which assesses 179 countries, Eritrea, North Korea, Yemen, Syria, Turkmenistan, China, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Burundi, are the worst scores. Turkey ranks 149<sup>th</sup> between Congo and Rwanda.<sup>5</sup> The report also illustrates that the autocratic transition follows a similar pattern in every country. Ruling governments first attack media and civil society to spread dis- or misinformation and ensure that the opposition is discredited to polarise the society. Having power and authority, these governments also try to sabotage elections to maintain permanency.

In its 2021 Democracy Report, Freedom House also points out that there has been a constant decline in freedoms throughout the last 15 years. “As a lethal pandemic, economic and physical insecurity, and violent conflict ravaged the World in 2020, democracy’s defenders sustained heavy new losses in their struggle against authoritarian foes, shifting the international balance in favour of tyranny.”<sup>6</sup> Accordingly, we are going through a period in which the number of countries that experience deterioration has reached the highest levels since 2006. The consequences of the long-standing democratic recession are registered to rise globally; not only in the most brutal dictatorships but also in countries that have long been ruled by democracy. One of the remarkable results of the report is that in 2020, 75% of the world’s population have lived in one of the countries where freedoms were observed to be deteriorating. Freedom scores were at their lowest level in the global freedom rating: the number of free countries decreased from 89 to 82, non-free countries rose from 45 to 54, and partially free countries increased from 58 to 59. As in the previous years, Turkey is classified among “non-free” countries (regarding political rights and civil liberties) with 32 points.

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5 Autocratization Turns Viral: Democracy Report 2021 (V-Dem Institute, 2021) [https://www.v-dem.net/democracy\\_reports.html](https://www.v-dem.net/democracy_reports.html)

6 Freedom in the World-2021: Democracy under Siege (Freedom House, 2021) <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2021/democracy-under-siege>

In almost every region of the authoritarian world, populist leaders and groups who refuse plurality and demand unchecked power to protect the special interests of their supporters attack democracy. The fact that democracy and human rights in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are attacked by dictators and elected leaders has created a new line of tension between democracy and human rights. The human rights regime, which is based on diversity, recognition of differences and the equal representation of identities, has become the target of these new politicians and policies. Their methods of targeting are also similar to each other: targeting that is initiated personally by politicians, supported by trolls on media, and nurtured by a local nationalism discourse; practices of enemy criminal law; arbitrariness of security forces and reinforcement of impunity armors; racism, xenophobia, detentions, intimidations and punishments through an expanded control and surveillance mechanism. To this we can also add the filling of the civic space with GONGOs (Government-organised non-governmental organisations). Unpredictability and uncertainty are other common features. In other words, it is a common trait of these regimes that you cannot know, what will happen to you or when it will happen. 8 out of 10 indicators that V-Dem uses in its assessments are related to the freedom of expression and media. According to the report, threats against the freedom of expression and media are on the rise, and in the last decade almost all indicators point to regression. The report also draws attention to the intensifying suppression of the civil society and the threats against the freedom of organisation. According to the figures in this field, a significant deterioration was registered in 50 countries in the last decade.<sup>7</sup>

Another feature of authoritarian regimes is their hatred of women and LGBTI+ movements, which were established because of long years of struggle. The predominance of hate speech and hate crimes derives from the fact that regimes and leaders, whose cultural roots are in religion, represent conservative policies. In Turkey, the women and LGBTI+ rights took a major blow when the President declared, on 20 March 2021, that he would withdraw from the Istanbul Convention. As Baytok discusses, “Especially when taken into consideration that gender-based violence has been on the rise and the mechanisms to protect women and LGBTI+ groups in the country are weak, “it is not at all surprising that the justification for the withdrawal shows parallels to the anti-gender rhetoric that can be observed in Poland.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> V-Dem, “Autocratization Turns Viral,” 7.

<sup>8</sup> Cemre Baytok, “The Istanbul Convention, Gender Politics and Beyond: Poland and Turkey,” (Berlin: Hafiza Merkezi, 2021), 5. [https://hm-berlin.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/HMB\\_Pub2\\_ENG\\_v2.pdf](https://hm-berlin.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/HMB_Pub2_ENG_v2.pdf)

In many countries, the pandemic combined with the global shrinking of the civic space led to extreme surveillance, discriminatory restrictions in freedoms of association and assembly, as well as the arbitrary or violent enforcement of these restrictions—including the ones ruled with democracy. Furthermore, new restrictions and impediments introduced on the grounds of protecting public health also ensured the construction of a “legitimate” public consent. Waves of false or misleading information manufactured deliberately by political leaders disguised reliable data and endangered human life. In fact, people who stood up for scientific truths were targeted. At the same time, we have witnessed an increased use of force by governments; in many places opponents had to face extensive prison terms, torture, or violation of the right to life. Again, those who were most harshly affected by this process were the weakest ones; women who became unemployed to look after their children when the schools were closed, health workers who risked their lives daily, labourers, refugees, and urban and rural poor. The authoritarian regimes used the pandemic as a way to eliminate cultural production that they deemed as disturbing, negatively impacting the works as well as the artists. We can delineate this period as an atmosphere of multiple crisis where health, natural, ecological, and economic crises are intertwined. The pandemic, similar to the climate crisis, has emerged as a different aspect of the global ecological destruction. However, instead of tackling these crises together and responding with solutions, global authoritarianism took heart from the changing conditions and continued the plundering of the environment. Again, it utilised the crisis to instigate nationalist discourses, xenophobia, and racism, and created new scapegoats. Those who were stigmatised as the source and carrier of the virus, international institutions seeking a common solution, or vulnerable migrant and minority groups who “share the economic resources of the country” were hostilised. To this, we can also add the lack of sharing and international cooperation regarding the vaccination issue as a contributing factor that exacerbated the crisis.

Global violations caused by the pandemic can be classified as the following: discrimination against minorities, violation of fundamental rights, use of excessive force, restriction of the executive by the legislative, limitations on the freedom of media, official misinformation campaigns, lack of time limits for emergency measures, and alternative methods of abuse. V-Dem’s assessment of the pandemic period also supports these violations empirically. Accordingly, although democratic countries have to a great extent acted responsibly, international norms were seriously violated in 9 countries. In 23 countries these norms were violated moderately. In 55 autocratic regimes, suppressive acts mounted increasingly so that freedoms and rights were violated to medium or great extents. Suppression of the freedom of media was the most widespread: two-thirds of all countries imposed either moderate or major restrictions,



while one-third implemented emergency measures indefinitely.<sup>9</sup> Major emergency measures, which were put in practice because of the pandemic, are still being maintained as tools of oppression. History provides ample examples of how states have perpetuated emergency practices that were initiated as reactions to states of exception. China makes the techniques created for the surveillance of its citizens during the pandemic permanent. In the West, unpaid leaves, part-time work, insecure workplaces and vaccine discrimination can be observed as measures used to alleviate the crisis of capitalism.

Despite these negative developments and severe restrictions on the public sphere, there were also encouraging examples in the democracy block, especially in small countries. Four countries turned into new democracies in the last decade. On the other hand, even though the destructive effects of the global shrinking have put a lid on them, global human rights movements have also developed in a different way. It is also necessary to emphasize that pro-democracy protests and campaigns organised and run through social media as well as instant mobilisation have abounded globally, while important strategies and solidarity networks have been established against the pandemic. Despite all the difficulties, social movements struggle for expansion by transcending usual patterns. With the expansion of online platforms, the global human rights movement has obtained a more favourable environment for the development of cooperation and solidarity. Technological knowledge is advancing and online applications, groups as well as news platforms found on social media enable the opposition to convene and organise instantly.

## **Suppression of Media, Academy and Civil Society in Turkey**

While these were happening in the world, Turkey was also classified among the countries affected by the rising autocracy wave and accordingly assessed negatively in all indicators. We have witnessed that the civic space has decreased and its effects were considerably mortified in this period. The main causes of this situation can be listed as authoritarian politics, extreme polarisation created through hate speech, elimination of the checks and balances system, and the separation of powers, practices of enemy criminal law in the judiciary and court cases with no veracity, politics of impunity, suppression of the media, and a fashioned atmosphere of anxiety and fear. All opposition forces, especially the media, academy and civil society have been

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9 V-dem, "Autocratization Turns Viral," 6.

turned into targets. Finally, to exacerbate all existing struggles, the pandemic arrived. It is no coincidence that countries with the highest number of casualties are also the ones ruled by authoritarian leaders. In Turkey, the pandemic was not handled from a preventive perspective that aims at protecting public health. It was rather tackled as a security problem with a militarist mindset. Consequently, authoritarianisation, racism and militarism accelerated while human rights violations became the routine.

The shrinking of the democratic space in Turkey has started with two significant historical milestones: Firstly, the last of three dialogue periods in the quest for a solution of the Kurdish issue (1999-2004 Imrali Process; 2008-2011 Oslo Process and 2013-2015 Solution Process) has failed. This milestone has marked the start of a rapid authoritarianisation process for the government, which since the 2000s has tried to establish relative economic and political stability. All hitherto efforts for establishing societal peace, including the Solution Process, democratisation packages and other initiatives that were initiated for different identity groups, were hereby terminated. Although pressure on different sections of the civil society were ongoing in the 2000s, there was also a comparative expansion in the civic space. This expansion began to decrease after the Gezi Protests of 2013 and the consequent suppression of and ban on protests and activities in the public sphere. Immediately following the general elections of 7 June 2015, (in which the AKP administration failed to achieve its expected success), the ceasefire was terminated along with the Solution Process, which –despite the lack of a complete and transparent programme– had been initiated with great expectations for the democratic and peaceful solution of the Kurdish issue. This milestone marked the beginning of an extraordinary period for Turkey: clashes that spread to cities caused the death and the displacement of many civilians; enforced curfews violated the Constitution and other international obligations, specifically in violation of the European Convention on Human Rights in terms of fundamental human rights.<sup>10</sup>

The second milestone refers to the state of emergency declared right after the coup attempt of 15 July 2016, which has escalated the situation to even more ominous levels. On 20 July 2016, using the authority given by the Article 120 of the Constitution of the Republic of Turkey, and within the scope of the State of Emergency Law No. 2935, the government declared a state of emergency across the country for three months, entering into effect on 21 July 2016. Following the first three months, the state of emergency was extended 6 more times. Within a 20-month period from 21 July 2016,

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<sup>10</sup> For rights violations in this period, see the data provided by the TIHV (Human Rights Foundation of Turkey)-Documentation Centre: <https://tihv.org.tr/sokaga-cikma-yasaklari/16-agustos-2015-1-ocak-2020-bilgi-notu/>

when the state of emergency was declared, to 20 March 2018, a total of 31 decree laws (KHK) were issued. During the state of emergency, 1,419 associations, 145 foundations, 9 trade unions and 174 media and broadcasting organisations were closed by decree-laws. At least 160,000 people were detained, 155,000 people were indicted for being a member of an “armed organisation”, and 228,137 people were imprisoned with arrest warrants. The decision of lifetime expulsion for 112,679 people is still in force.<sup>11</sup> Another important effect was the appointment of trustees to 99 municipalities, of which 94 were ruled by the DBP (Democratic Regions Party). Moreover, in addition to basic rights and freedoms, some of the obligations such as the right to fair trial and prisoners’ right for humane treatment were also suspended in this period. Closing institutions, expelling hundreds of thousands of people from their duties and generating an atmosphere of fear and other restrictive measures were an attempt to completely render the civic space inactive.

Finally, it is necessary to draw attention to the destruction caused by the “Turkish type of presidency system” which came into effect with the 24 June 2018 elections, bringing changes in politics and the functioning of the state and further shrinking the democratic space. The new system that aims at consolidating the “legitimacy” of authoritarian practices, the separation of powers was abolished, the parliament and other institutions were weakened, and the judiciary became politicised. With the complete abolishing of the separation of powers, the checks mechanisms of the executive were eliminated, and a new regime, with power concentrated at one centre, was built. Even though the state of emergency was terminated in July 2018, we bear witness to the entire policies of security and repression that were created during this period that are systematically maintained today, revealing that the civic space is still under siege. Yet another dynamic of this period was the fact that the mainstream media fell completely into the hands of the government. Mainstream media was taken over by pro-government business elites and was turned into a monophonic choir where repetitive headlines and programmes dominated the scene and not much space was left for alternative voices. Critical journalists were targeted and ordered by name to be removed from their posts. They were either fired from the media outlets they were working for or intimidated through threats of persecution and imprisonment. The increasing number of closed media outlets and anti-terror cases brought against journalists during the state of emergency led to a considerable regress of independent and critical journalism. It can be said that the pressure on the media has been on

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11 21 Temmuz 2016-20 Mart 2018 Olağanüstü Hal Uygulamaları: Güncellenmiş Durum Raporu (21 July 2016 – 20 March 2018 State of Emergency Practices: Updated Status Report) (IHOP, April 2018) <https://ihop.org.tr/olaganustu-hal-uygulamalari-guncellestirilmis-durum-raporu/>

the rise since the state of emergency and still abides today. According to the BIA Monitoring figures, 35 journalists were sentenced to 92 years of imprisonment, at least 41 journalists were detained, and 56 journalists were attacked in 2021. The number of journalists that were convicted of having insulted the President in the last 7 years reached 702.<sup>12</sup>

Following the events after the signature and release of the peace declaration “We will not be a party to this crime!” by the Academics for Peace, the country has faced –in a quite cruel way– the reality that there was no academic freedom in Turkey. Administrative and criminal investigations were launched against thousands of academics who had signed the “Peace Declaration” –they were suspended, dismissed, and blacklisted. Academics for Peace were punished and pushed into “civil death” in several ways: some of them were imprisoned, their passports were confiscated and their chances for getting jobs were completely hindered. Eventually after the Constitutional Court ruling in 2019, almost all of them were acquitted, yet most of the applications for reinstatement were rejected. In this period of shrinking civic space, academic freedom and freedom of expression were severely damaged and a period of fear and obmutescence started in the universities. The pressure on the academy is being pursued today at the Boğaziçi University. When Melih Bulu was appointed as rector on 2 January 2021 per presidential decision, the reaction of academicians, students and public opinion was immense. While over the last year at least 663 students were detained, 11 students were arrested and hundreds stood trial<sup>13</sup>, the daily “turning their back” protest of the academicians in front of the rectorate building has become an encouraging example of resistance.

Stigmatising, targeting, discrediting, and finally punishing are the primary methods of suppression over the civil society. Civil society actors and rights defenders are usually criminalised by being flagged as potential “internal enemies” who serve the purposes of terrorist organisations and threaten national security. With the support of the media, these defamation campaigns feature especially the relations with international actors and funding organisations. Funding relations are presented as evidence for relations with “hostile foreign powers”. Leading examples of this strategy are the Büyükada Case in which different CSO representatives are standing trial and being sentenced, the still

12 “Haberciden özgürlük mücadelesi, yargıdan umut ışığı (Journalist’s struggle for freedom, judiciary glimmer of hope),” *bianet*, 24.01.2022, <https://bianet.org/bianet/medya/256364-haberciden-ozgurluk-mucadelesi-yargidan-umut-isigi>.

13 Canan Coşkun, “Boğaziçi direnişinin birinci yılında hasar tespit raporu (Damage assessment report on the first anniversary of the Boğaziçi resistance),” *Diken*, 02.01.2022, <https://www.diken.com.tr/bogazici-direnisi-linci-yilinda-kayyim-ректорlerin-hasar-tespit-raporu/>.

ongoing Osman Kavala case, hate speech directed against those working in the field of LGBTI+, and news that aim at discrediting CSOs that receive grants from foreign funding institutions. In December 2021 the Committee of Ministers, the decision-making body of the Council of Europe, has decided to introduce a violation procedure against Turkey, due to the fact that it did not implement the decision of the ECHR to release Osman Kavala, which stated that there was no concrete evidence for the crimes he was charged with and that he was “kept in prison for unlawful reasons and for being silenced”. Turkey was given time until 19 January 2022 to indicate how it was going to implement the ECHR decision, however this decision was also rejected in the last trial, revealing another aspect of the unlawfulness and the disregarding of international norms.<sup>14</sup>

This broad interpretation of the Anti-Terror Law, which went so far to stretch the scope of the crime with an indefinite flexibility to encompass connection/junction, has been the primary method used in the labelling and targeting of all opposition forces and government critiques as “usual suspects”. Judicial harassment and criminalisation methods most commonly include accusations such as terrorist propaganda, membership to a terrorist organisation, inciting the public to hatred and enmity, defamation of the president, and opposition to the Law of Demonstrations and Public Meetings. Political pressure on the judiciary and the abolition of accountability mechanisms give rise to severe violations of the right to fair trial. In the meantime, hearing and prosecution processes that are not built on solid evidence are being run. Rights defenders are being accused of their work in the field of human rights, or for what they share on social media. “Evidence” such as testimonies of anonymous witnesses, phone records, civil society activities, or wire transfers is being associated with crime. We can say that almost all of these methods have been used in the Büyükada and Gezi cases. In this period numerous rights defenders were detained, investigated, have faced trials and were sentenced for activities such as defending women's rights, LGBTI+ rights, or ecological rights, for defending the freedom of press, for making use of the right to assemble and demonstrate, or for making press releases. Criminal cases against a number of civil society actors are still continuing.

One of the gravest results of political authoritarianisation and security policies has been the effort to completely exclude and disable the opposition, especially those actors from the civil society, academy, and media as well as politicians that are not supporting the political authority. Activities that constitute the basic missions of

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14 “Osman Kavala'nın tutukluluğunun devamına karar verildi (The decision on the continuation of Osman Kavala's detention),” BBC News / Türkçe, 17.01.2022, <https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-turkiye-60024641>.

the civil society, such as knowledge production, agenda setting, advocacy, developing solutions, influencing decision-making processes, or monitoring outcomes are being severely disrupted. Losing the spaces that were long fought for, as can be seen at the stripping of the Saturday Mothers of their protest spot, the banning of the Pride Parade, or at the withdrawing from the Istanbul Convention, has also caused regression in these fields. The civil society is wished to become non-functional, specifically by being entirely excluded from decision-making processes. Inspections, audits and legislative amendments –which are given a special place in this report– have become critical tools of oppression over the civil society. The civil society was consulted neither for the “Law on the Prevention of the Financing of the Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction” (Law No. 7262) that entered into force in December 2020, nor for the amendments made in the Associations Regulation. On the contrary, it was observed that these legal steps were actually designed as new tools to render the civil society inactive. Although the purpose of the law was presented as conforming to international standards, it has caused long lasting discussions and objections, based on the interpretations that its actual aim was to arbitrarily constraint civil society activities. The tightening of association and foundation legislations and the pressure created through audits, surveillance mechanisms such as the obligation of reporting memberships, the seizure of accounts, and revengeful inspections and fines have presented the civil society with constant repression and uncertainty. As a matter of fact, the United Nations Financial Working Group on the Prevention of Money Laundering (FATF) has listed Turkey on the “grey list”, which includes countries that “do not show enough effort” to fight money laundering and financing terrorism.

While the civic space continued to decrease, on 11 March 2020 the first COVID-19 case was announced in Turkey, which ignited a number of government practices that instrumentalised the pandemic as a new surveillance and control mechanism, which rapidly exacerbated the declining civic space. Alone the fact that the Ministry of Interior instead of the Ministry of Health managed the process and medical associations were not involved at all, exhibited that the pandemic was perceived as a security issue rather than a matter of public health. As it happened in all authoritarian countries, data was manipulated, and real facts were withheld from the society. On the other hand, the Turkish Medical Association was targeted as well as the Chamber of Medicine. Its directors and member doctors who criticised the government for not being transparent and pronounced the real facts and figures about the pandemic, were detained and indicted.<sup>15</sup> During the lockdowns there was no civic space left, which by itself constitutes a violation of rights. Basic rights were suspended and restriction

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15 <https://www.sessizkalma.org/defender/turk-tabipleri-birligi/>

criteria, such as necessity, transparency and proportionality were disregarded. The pressure on the labour movement and trade unions that were already struggling with the economic hardships of the pandemic has increased. 1<sup>st</sup> of May demonstrations and protests against layoffs were suppressed violently. Unionists were detained, prosecuted and sued because of their advocacy activities.

While the opening up of the Istanbul Convention to discussion during the pandemic increased the police pressure and intensified hate speech against the women's and LGBTI+ movements; peaceful protests for the Istanbul Convention, 8<sup>th</sup> of March demonstrations and the Pride Parade were attacked, and participants were detained. The head of the Directorate of Religious Affairs targeted the LGBTI+ during a Friday sermon and held them responsible for the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>16</sup> While the environmental pillage continued at full speed, defenders of environmental rights and ecology also got their share from the ongoing repression under the pretence of the pandemic. Defenders who participated in the "Water and Conscience Watch" at the Kaz Mountains were fined hundreds of thousands of Turkish Lira.<sup>17</sup> The due dates for associations not to hold general assembly meetings was postponed by the Ministry of Interior first until 1 December 2020, then once again until 28 February 2021. As the general assemblies are fundamental for the activities of associations, their complete banning instead of making different arrangements has become a threat for civil society activities. As a result of lockdowns and other restrictions on civil society activities, the civil society was hindered in reaching its target groups. Especially those organisations that worked with vulnerable groups had difficulties in providing services in the face of increasing applications from the victims of violence; they were not able to conduct fieldwork. Digital communication tools, which replaced face-to-face interviews, were not only unsuitable for every group. They also made class inequality more apparent among poor sections of the society that had no access to these tools.

## Spaces of Struggle and Negotiation

Despite all these negative developments in the world and in Turkey, the civil society launches methods and strategies as a response to maintain the field and its achievements, while carrying on the struggle for opening up new fields of work. As part of multiple crises, the pandemic continues to enhance social struggle and the push for political change. The climate movement has gained momentum by

16 Hilal Köylü, "Korona günlerinde Diyanete 'nefret suçu' tepkisi ('Hate crime' reaction to the Directorate of Religious Affairs in the days of Corona)," DW Türkçe, 27.04.2020, <https://www.dw.com/tr/korona-g%C3%BCnlerinde-diyane-te-nefret-su%C3%A7u-tepkisi/a-53260541>.

17 <https://www.sessizkalma.org/defender/su-ve-vicdan-nobetileri/>

reproaching us for the human effect on the future of the natural environment and the planet. It demonstrated that if humans continue conquering wildlife areas and increasing carbon emissions, this and similar other crises will endure, meaning that we are approaching the point of no return. When in 2021 extreme temperatures caused widespread breakout of forest fires, we started to hear highest authorities saying aloud that a new system was needed. Ecology/environment-oriented movements, women's and LGBTI+ movements together with movements against all sorts of sexual discrimination stood out and displayed a gradually rising, high profile trend. As the pandemic rendered previously unnoticed fields of work and occupations visible, the mobility among the workers in these areas also increased around the world: health workers, storage workers, couriers, online sale services, supermarket workers, bakery workers. We have realised that it is possible to bring this struggle further by benefiting from each other's positive experiences and strengthening friendship and solidarity.

Shrinking imposes openings in certain fields. Despite all obstacles, human rights organisations and civil society organisations in Turkey keep on their perseverance for struggle and negotiation. In spite of the restrained situation, the civil society continues its struggle for maintaining institutional existence, responding to the needs of the target groups and adapting themselves to the novel situations with new contents, approaches, models and areas. For coping with these problems, mostly new communication methods and technologies are being used. With the potentialities brought about by digitalisation, geographical borders have become irrelevant. Accordingly, civil society actors push the limits to extend their fields of activity by coming together, reaching across local, national, and international scales. Campaigns have gained strength with the effect of new languages and methods; the visibility of the civil society has increased. Methods of advocacy are changing, too. Rights based civil society organisations have started to use lots of diverse methods and strategies in their advocacy activities. Civil society has become specialised in monitoring, documentation, reporting, litigation and accessing international mechanisms. For justifiable reasons, solidarity and cooperation are being valued among CSOs more than ever in this period. The attitude exhibited by the signatures of 694 organisations that came together against the Law No. 7262 counts as a positive example in terms of fast mobilisation as well as flexibility in the face of shared problems.<sup>18</sup> Especially solidarity and cooperation created by network-like structures invigorate CSOs. Also, with the synergy brought about by digitalisation, it is now possible to extend the scope of sharing and build collaborations not only at national but at the international level.



By not leaving the streets, women have been demonstrating a resistance that can set an example for the whole civil society with their struggles in every field. They set successful examples of coming together against upcoming legal amendments, developing joint strategies and hampering legal regulations, both on the streets and on online platforms. They have showed us all that closed channels can be cracked open through struggle. The Istanbul Convention demonstrations by the women's movement –despite the pandemic– organised across the country to protect the achievements of the field, were one of the most striking instances in that regard. On the other hand, the insistent struggle of the women's movement in holding together against all kinds of harassment and violence against women, and following cases of murder, as well as their strengthening of the solidarity with established networks, has given hope to all rights defenders in this period. The LGBTI+ has stood tough against the targeting and discrimination they faced and have kept staying visible and vocal –this was a source of power for all of us. Another very creative action in this period was the digital Pride Parade, organised under the theme “Where I am?”. That the academicians at Boğaziçi University have been standing in front of the rectorate building to protest the anti-democratic appointment of the rector, by carrying banners that state “We do not accept, we do not give up” for more than a year, has opened up a noteworthy space in the struggle for academic freedoms. We have seen how successful the youth were, for example in the Boğaziçi solidarity when they refused to leave the streets despite all the pressure, or when they came together in the “We can't shelter movement” and succeeded in making their voices heard. In the face of all the oppression health workers, doctors and their professional chambers continued to seek the truth and maintained the struggle for the right to health as well as the rights of health workers in an organised manner, which further strengthened this field. Finally, concerning the ecological struggles, the Kaz Mountains Resistance and the local solidarity movements against the urban pillage at the Validebağ Grove, the Bomonti Beer Factory, and the Şişli Etfal Hospital, set an example of not leaving the streets.

Following this introduction, which aimed at offering a macro glance at the shrinking democratic space in the world and in Turkey, we can move on to the focus of this report, which comprises the assessment of this period by the experiences of 48 CSOs that have benefited from the Haklara Destek Programme. The report represents a fragment of the struggle methods of rights based CSOs under the changing, evolving and differing conditions of repression and restriction in Turkey, as well as a partial assessment based on experience, observation and examples.

SECTION ONE

**FREEDOM OF**  
**ASSOCIATION**  
**AND LEGAL**  
**AMENDMENTS**

The right to freedom of association, which is defined as a constitutional right and protected under the international human rights law, was restricted by the Law No. 7262 on the Prevention of the Financing of the Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction, which entered into force on 31 December 2020. Throughout 2021, many CSOs published fact sheets and reports criticising the changing practices built on this legal amendment, which can be assessed as the culmination of the shrinking civic space in Turkey.<sup>19</sup>

“Even though the title of the law suggests that the scope is limited to the prevention of the financing of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, Law No. 7262 has also brought a series of changes to the financing of terrorism and laundering of the proceeds of crime. As such, the Law transposes many UN Financial Action Task Force (FATF) Recommendations beyond the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions on financing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the Recommendation 7 adopted by FATF in 2012 into domestic law. The law has been subjected to criticism on the grounds that with the amendments made to the Law on Associations and the Law on the Collection of Aid, it has become preventive and disincentive in terms of organising, and that it unlawfully restricts the freedom of organisation.”<sup>20</sup>

It is seen that the amendments made to the Law No. 7262 aims at suppressing civil society organisations within the frame of the Law on Associations and the Law on the Collection of Aid. Subsequent practices in 2021 aimed at suppressing the freedoms of expression and association through inspections and penalties. A significant part of the problems raised by the 48 CSOs that came together within the scope of the **Haklara Destek** Programme was related to the instrumentalization of the Law No. 7262. This assessment on the impact of the amendments made to this law takes into consideration the basic issues shared by most of the civil society organisations –such as administrative audits, pressure mechanisms and penalties– as well as restrictions on fundraising and memberships.

19 At the end of this report, *Annex 2: List of Other Major Reports Published on the Shrinking Civic Space and the Pandemic* provides a non-exhaustive list of major reports published by rights based CSOs as of January 2022.

20 Betül Durmuş, “7262 Sayılı Kitle İmha Silahlarının Yayılmasının Finansmanının Önlenmesine İlişkin Kanun Hakkında Hafıza Merkezi İçin Hazırlanan Değerlendirme (The Evaluation Report Prepared for Hafıza Merkezi on the Law No. 7262 on the Prevention of the Financing of the Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction),” (2021), 1-2. [https://www.sessizkalma.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/7262-Sayili-Kanun\\_Degerlendirme-son\\_bb.docx.pdf](https://www.sessizkalma.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/7262-Sayili-Kanun_Degerlendirme-son_bb.docx.pdf).

## Administrative Audits

“With the amendments made in the Article 19 of the Law on Associations, it was regulated that audits, which assess whether associations are operating in accordance with the purposes listed in their statutes and whether they keep their books and records in line with the regulations, are to be carried out ‘every year, not exceeding three years, according to the envisaged risk assessments’. The audits can be carried out by public officials appointed by the Ministry of Interior or the local authority and comprises all kinds of facilities and establishments as well as partnerships of the associations.”<sup>21</sup>

With the amendment in the Law on Associations, it was envisaged that civil society organisations would be inspected on a yearly basis in line with the new risk assessment system. Throughout 2021, administrative audits that were expeditiously put in practice following the amendment, constituted one of the most important items on the agenda of the 48 participant CSOs of the **Haklara Destek** Programme. Being exposed to audits is not unknown to associations and other CSOs. Under normal circumstances, regular audits can even have a supportive and alleviating effect on the administrative functioning of associations in terms of regulatory compliances. Some associations maintained that they could be seen as an opportunity to realise administrative faults and shortcomings, to record everything in a country where working environments are dominated by oral culture or to strengthen their institutional and administrative archives, thus, as a chance in terms of developing institutional sustainability and proper transfer of work. However, with the amendments made at the end of 2020, the audits were based on an assessment system with ambiguous criteria, the frequency and duration of them were changed, and a tripartite classification system defined associations as “risky, moderate-risky and risk-free”. This resulted in the rights based CSOs experiencing the audits not as routine administrative procedures but as a pressure mechanism through a direct administrative intervention. It can be concluded that rendering organisations inspectable at any given time through the legal amendment and the high penalties in question are a booster on anxiety and pressure in the civic space.

Specifically for civil society organisations that were classified as “risky”, the repercussions of the audits which were carried out by the Directorate of Civil Society Relations under the Ministry of Interior, by public authorities such as the Governorship, or by the Ministry of Finance, were “fines imposed for very ordinary

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 4.

reasons”, “intention of preventing activities by blocking bank accounts” and interruption of activities. Currently, we do not have comprehensive information about the penalties since some of the audited organisations have not received the conclusions yet. In most cases it is about administrative fines only, but there are also practices of preventing the organisations’ activities by blocking their accounts during the audit period before even determining whether a criminal situation exists at all. There are also examples of opening lawsuits and confiscating the publications of some organisations which were produced within the scope of their legal activities. (See *Mechanisms of Repression in the Civic Space > Punishment, Detention and Lawsuits*).

There were periods when the time and labour devoted to the successive “long and tiresome” audits reached such levels that the activities of the CSOs in the field were disrupted. An organisation that works for LGBTI+ rights stated that they had 4 different inspections in 2021, carried out by the Ministries of Finance and Interior as well as the regular audits by the international funding organisations. A rights-based CSO from Diyarbakır described the 8-months audit period that they went through as following: “Obviously the long audit periods and their persistent effort to find mistakes are an indication of their condemnation on us for financing terrorism. They said: this one is over, but ‘be prepared, you are in the list of moderate-risky organisations, the Ministry is also going to inspect you’. This shows that the policy of pressure and intimidation will endure.”

The United Nations Financial Action Task Force (FATF) Recommendation Report was used as the basis of the amendments to the Law No. 7262 on the Prevention of the Financing of the Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction. However, it is observed that the definition and scope of “risk” in FATF has been expanded and used differently in Law No. 7262. “As an outcome of the National Risk Assessment (NRA) conducted by Turkey in 2018, non-profit organisations that carry the highest risk were identified as those that are the humanitarian aid organisations operating close to the conflict zone in the south of the country. [...] The finding of the 2018 National Risk Assessment that humanitarian aid organisations, especially those close to the conflicts in the south of the country, were at risk was reflected in the FATF Mutual Assessment Report, but not in the Law.”<sup>22</sup> What happened instead was that rights based CSOs that operate outside the humanitarian aid field –and according to the FATF definition are not involved “primarily in collecting and distributing money”– have been put under strict control and obligations of authorisation.

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22 Ibid, 12 and 22.

Implemented through administrative audits, penalties and prison sentences; these measures are being used to restrict activities of legitimate civil society organisations. Particularly those organisations working on human rights, peace and minority rights, migration and refugees, LGBTI+ and women's rights, and those carrying out their activities in Kurdish have been defined as risky groups and faced tight controls. Beyond activities in the Kurdish language, most of the activities in Diyarbakır and the region are defined as risky and are being terrorized. (See *The Places We Meet: Streets, Digital Spaces, Networks*) Although it is not part of an administrative audit, for example, the content of a children's storybook published by an organisation in Diyarbakır, has become a routine part of these inspections. Organisations that work in the field of LGBTI+ rights have said that the audits had already been increasing in recent years and have now become a routine practice following the legal amendment in 2020. CSOs that are classified as moderate and highly risky and inspected with regard to their working fields and regions of activity are constantly expecting further audits and penalties. There was one organisation that pointed out to the "two contradictory elements" in the relation of the organisations with risk factors during the audit process: "Organisations that work on peace and minorities have become accustomed to possible interventions and pressure. Compared to many other organisations, they are less affected by these interventions; audits don't pose an existential threat for them. Yet, at the same time, despite the possibility of continuous audits and pressure, these organisations do not have a risk plan and have not carried out proper internal control processes."

Among the CSOs within the Haklara Destek Programme, there were a small number of foundations and associations that have not undergone the audit process yet. It was observed that these organisations have been trying to prepare themselves for this process on the basis of the experiences of other organisations. In order to be ready for the disproportionate inspection possibility, organisations try to compensate their administrative shortcomings, regulate the bureaucratic processes and improve their accounting systems. Although they operate in a transparent and participatory manner, a lot of rights-based organisations not yet affected by audits have expressed their concern about not being able to foresee the long-term effects as "their implementation ways and results were unknown". Many CSOs have emphasized the incontestable importance of psychological pressure in a civic space which either provides very limited support mechanisms or in which these are completely absent. The fact that civil society employees "feel the constant pressure of audits", continue their activities under "constant fear of being inspected" and that "questions asked during the audits affect their motivation adversely" illustrates that a routine administrative procedure is being utilised as a means for creating some sort of psychological pressure as well as fear.

## Donations and Memberships

“The first of the regulations of the Law No. 7262 that will have a direct impact on civil society organisations is related to the act of collecting financial aid. In the general preamble of the Law, it is stated that the purview is to ‘prevent the abuse of the existing sense of social cooperation’ in addition to the struggle against the laundering of crime proceeds and the financing of terrorism. Firstly, the additional paragraph brought to Article 6 of the Law No. 2860 on the Collection of Aid is about the activity of collecting aid online. Accordingly, in case the act of aid collection is being done on the Internet, the Governorship of the Ministry of Interior makes a legal notice to the content and/or hosting provider to remove the content. It is regulated that in case the content is not removed within 24 hours, or the content and/or hosting provider does not receive a legal notice, applications can be made to the Criminal Courts of Peace for denying access to the content. With the second amendment, the number of administrative fines foreseen for actions contrary to the Law on the Collection of Aid has been increased. For instance, prior to the amendment, the administrative fine foreseen for an unauthorised aid collection activity was 7 000 TL. With the new regulation, an administrative fine from 5 000 TL to 100 000 TL is foreseen.”<sup>23</sup>

Many rights-based organisations can no longer organise widespread donation campaigns, due to the fact that the recent amendments made it very difficult to meet the necessary requirements to do so, to fulfil the procedures and get the authorisation for collecting donations online. (See *Mechanisms of Repression in the Civic Space > Permits and Cooperation with Public Bodies*) Organisations that have participated in the Haklara Destek Programme mentioned many concrete examples. The application of an organisation, which is active in the youth area, to the Governorship for getting a fundraising permit did not get a response within the legal term of 45 days. When the organisation followed-up their application persistently, their permission request was denied on the grounds of “Article 9 of the Law No. 2860, and Article 7 of the Directives on the Principles and Procedures of Aid Collection”. Looking at the legal basis, it can be figured that the authorities have considered that the donation will not be used in a proper way. During their application for aid collection permission, an organisation working for children’s rights and carrying out neighbourhood activities in Istanbul, was told that “the application of a small association for such a comprehensive aid collection may not be accepted, and it could have been easier to receive the permit if they were a nationwide or internationally operating organisation”. When their application was

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23 Ibid., 3.

rejected in written form, they were asked to “make a protocol with the Provincial Directorate for National Education”. Yet, the organisation has been carrying out activities within the scope of the protocol that was made with the District Directorate for National Education already. The application made to the Provincial Directorate for National Education was rejected. Another organisation has summarised their recent financial difficulties as following: “Calls for grants decreased. The number of individual donations dropped. Subscription fees don’t exist at all. Marathon donations, which used to make up a significant amount, could not be collected. We have made another application for extensive donation collection but received a negative response.”

One of the greatest challenges the civil society organisations face in Turkey is fundraising. Moreover, some organisations can be targeted according to the foreign institution they are funded by and be exposed to administrative control. That some specific international funding sources are being reflected as “suspicious” and targeted on the media, also leads to restrictions in the funding sources of organisations. In an atmosphere of declining funds resulting from repressions on civil society as well as decreasing project-based grant supports and changing priorities, what gains critical importance are core funding, institutional grants, membership fees and donations. On the other hand, under the circumstances of political pressure, the donors also refrain from “giving support explicitly”. Some propose to make their donations in cash so that their names don’t appear on the receipts. On top of all these, the impoverishment caused by the recent economic crisis and the pandemic has also rendered it impossible for organisations to collect subscription fees or individual donations. (See *The Effects of the Pandemic on Civil Society Organisations ≥ Financial Sources and Support*) The amendments to the Law on the Collection of Aid as well as the difficulties and obstacles in free fundraising do not only jeopardize the sustainability and existence of many rights-based organisations with already very limited financial sources but also make their target groups even more vulnerable.

With the amendment to the Law on Associations, the declaration of members became an obligation. This has caused discontent and reservation among potential members and volunteers, resulting in the distancing of members from the associations or even in loss of members. Being associated with civil society, i.e., being a member of organisations that are active in many areas such as women’s rights, animal rights, right to the city, right for peace, minority rights, and partaking in their activities, can cause a fear of getting “flagged”, being targeted and harmed. Some of the people who want to engage actively in the activities of civil society, despite the oppressive atmosphere, prefer to support “without mentioning their names” or confine themselves to voluntary support without being registered officially to the association. Those who are already members



terminate their official memberships and work on a voluntary basis. Most of the organisations that have participated in the Haklara Destek Programme stated that there is an inclination towards volunteering rather than membership, but that they have lost both members and volunteers in any case. (See *The Effects of the Pandemic on Civil Society Organisations > Organisational Changes*) Loss and distancing from civil society activities was observed predominantly in areas that have been targeted, such as the LGBTI+, women, migrants and minorities, peace and human rights. For instance, the obligation of declaration of membership caused a loss of official members in LGBTI+ organisations based on several factors such as the fear of being exposed or experiencing negative effects in their work lives, etc. An employee of a women's rights organisation that is active in a Kurdish populated city told: "In the East and South-east there is an intensive pressure over CSOs. Therefore, the number of our members has fallen, there are no candidates for the general assembly, some come and go as volunteers. For example, there was a veiled woman who wanted to work with us, but her husband was not convinced. After she worked for a while, the woman said to us: before we came here, we went to the Police station and asked what kind of organisation this is, they answered "They have members in parties but no political activities in this institution. Yet this doesn't mean that they will not have any.' This is the way how they see us." (See *Mechanisms of Repression in the Civic Space > Targeting*)

Detention, repression and criminal investigation of members, volunteers and administrators have become a routine procedure recently. Following the new amendments, resignations in the boards of directors and changes in the administration have occurred frequently. In some associations in 2021, more than one board member has undergone investigation and detention. In case an association member or employer is punished, either for being dismissed through decree law or due to their out-of-association activities –such as social media posts–, the punishment may affect the organisation, too. This is why some members under criminal investigation prefer to leave the associations or terminate their official memberships. There are executive board members or employees who were sued, detained or arrested on the grounds of their field of work, especially among organisations that work in the areas of human rights, forced migration and in the Kurdish populated cities. Currently the situation for those organisations whose executives/administrators are either in prison or under criminal investigation has become very difficult; organisations have become even more vulnerable because of this. (See *Mechanisms of Repression in the Civic Space > Punishment, Detention and Lawsuits*) With such an indirect administrative intervention to rights based civil society organisations, the elbowroom of human rights defenders was further restricted. It can be said that this amendment to the Law on Associations has become a tool of the ongoing political oppression to restrict freedom of association.

## Measures Against the New Law

Considering Turkey “not as a constitutional state” anymore, many CSOs think that the new legal amendments pose a threat to the freedom of expression and association, hence to a free democratic/civic space. CSOs continue the effort to carry out their activities under the restrictions brought about by the Law No. 7262 as of 2021. Rights based organisations try to deal with the situation and overcome restrictions by developing some practical measures in an atmosphere of control implemented through administrative audits, limitations in collecting donations and obligations in membership declaration. The primary precaution taken against the audits that have become more frequent and diversified according to “risk” groups through the Law No. 7262, is to be prepared for them by improving all administrative processes. Realising that regular audits were introduced swiftly as of 2021, many organisations got ready for the inspections by implementing different methods: keeping all expenditure records and books more attentively, carrying out their own internal assessment, reviewing all papers and documents of the association by making “audit rehearsals or simulations”, updating all legal documents regularly, starting to work with a traditional accountant in the office, getting traditional and independent audit services, planning risks through legal assistance and completing what is missing, updating the employment structure... Some prepared internal risk assessment procedures and implemented them. Hence, organisations prepared themselves as if there would be an audit any time. Obviously, all these preparations have placed an administrative burden on many organisations that were already working with limited human resources. Therefore, it was stated that a need for raising new funds emerged in order to be able to prepare and keep the administrative infrastructure up to date and intact.

Due to the fact that the inspections exceeded the scope of administrative audits, some organisations also reviewed the contents and documents of their activities from the perspective of an auditor. In particular, there were organisations that made internal control of their publications and web pages, studied and learned the Personal Data Protection Law thoroughly and prepared internal guidelines by participating in digital security trainings. (See *Being Targeted and Surviving > Turning Inwards*) Some organisations also indicated that they “work on bylaws against the arbitrariness of the new law” and that they “gather external expert opinions while shaping their donation campaigns”. Due to the obligation of declaring members, many organisations had to select the members of their governing bodies among those “who are not prosecuted” and began to check on a regular basis whether there were any prosecutions against their employees. A small number of organisations said that they disregarded the legal change in the matter of their members and that they did not make any changes in memberships. Even those organisations that did not experience any problems regarding their members were

worried about a future possible criminal case to be extended to the organisation and said that they are “acting more cautiously” when it comes to their members and directors. All processes were put down on paper; written permissions were taken from interlocutors at field studies or implemented measures were also documented so that they could contribute to policy papers. They have prepared a text of principles, which documented their approaches to the issues of fundraising and working with funds. Some organisations took precautions regarding their assets “with the anticipation that anything can happen anytime”.

On the other hand, it was also observed that audits have enhanced communication, information exchange and solidarity in the field. Organisations that were already inspected shared information on the process with those that were not yet and enabled them to learn from their experiences. Some organisations have cooperated with institutions that work for international human rights defenders in order to improve themselves in matters of risk analysis and precautions. Especially for local and smaller civil society organisations, it is of critical importance to overcome the audit processes together with stronger organisations. Many organisations have mentioned the benefits of fast communication via several *WhatsApp* groups and other platforms built at a time of mounting controls during the pandemic last year. (See *The Places We Meet > Networks and Cooperations*)

Some organisations that have received punishments as a result of audits or whose judicial process is still continuing think that “there is not much to do after that point” against the new legal regulations. Besides those who say they would “start over, again and again...”, there are those who examine possible measures that can be taken against the termination of their organisational activities. In this process, some associations have developed different methods to protect the memory of existing associations and especially their archives. A small number of association employees stated that they decided to “disregard the new legal amendments”, hence they have not taken any precautions against the new law. On the other hand, there are also CSOs that perceive the new legal amendments as a site of struggle, and for instance file administrative lawsuits for invalidating the amendment that makes the declaration of members obligatory by applying to the Constitutional Court or the European Court of Human Rights. Institutions that initiate strategic lawsuits and litigation have to plan their activities by taking the length of the cases into consideration. It has been observed recently that due to these countersuits and the investigations against employees and members of the associations, the workload of especially the legal units and lawyers has increased tremendously in many civil society organisations. Hence, associations need a regular lawyer support in the face of increased legal obligations as well as possible investigations and prosecutions. (See *Mechanisms of Repression in the Civic Space > Punishment, Detention and Lawsuits*)

## SECTION TWO

# MECHANISMS OF REPRESSION IN THE CIVIC SPACE

Attacks on freedom of expression, freedom of association and peaceful assembly intensified in Turkey especially after 2015. The sphere of movement and influence of rights defenders and CSOs was restricted; their work on knowledge production and advocacy were brought to a halt. The immediate reaction to the ever expanding and intensifying repressions was to retreat, be less visible and refrain from entering risky areas in order to safeguard existing achievements. Through repressions on a very large group of journalists, lawyers, academicians, health workers and civil society actors; the government tries to render civil society non-functional while the judiciary is being abused to criminalise all sorts of rights claims. Under these circumstances, the pandemic has also been used as a repressive tool. (See *The Effects of the Pandemic on Civil Society Organisations*) Restrictions imposed on civil society organisations through legal regulations, audits and penalties, the abolition of street demonstrations, discrimination and targeting, physical police pressure, appointing of trustees to municipalities and institutions as well as prosecution, detention and arrest of rights defenders are on the rise.

This repressive atmosphere has an adverse effect not only on the organisations but also indirectly on the living spaces, the cultural values, the nature, the animals and the people whose rights they have been defending in their fields of work. Under circumstances in which they are continuously targeted and punished, it is very difficult for rights based CSOs to preserve their existence and continue working for their target groups. Many small and local organisations that already existed within a fragile structure and tried to be active with limited financial resources struggled to survive in this period. Today, it is nearly impossible to undertake activities freely in the Kurdish populated cities or in areas such as women's and LGBTI+ rights, which already got their share of social repression. Despite all of these, it can still be observed that targeted rights defenders create new grounds for struggle by responding to emergencies rapidly and jointly, developing new methods for protecting their fields of work and achievements, and that promising examples of solidarity are emerging.

## **Permits and Cooperation with Public Bodies**

One can say that the state pressure over the civil society is functioning through a number of different mechanisms simultaneously. The leading one is the direct and physical prevention of civil society activities. Complicating, restricting or rejecting the tender of official authorisation is reflected in the field as a policy of repression and intimidation. The most recent example of this was seen in the restriction of aid collection permits through the new amendments. Restricting the collection of donations and other fundraising activities is one way of precluding organisations from carrying out their activities. (See *Freedom of Association and Legal Amendments > Donations*

*and Memberships*). In specific fields where the activities are directly dependent on the authorisation of public institutions, this contraction is observed more evidently. For instance, associations that work in the field of migration have stated that they have difficulties getting permits to make family visits through which they access their target groups. Although fieldwork is not prohibited completely, its realisation is limited by several obstacles.

Street demonstrations, on the other hand, which are a substantial component of rights advocacy, have not been restricted through permits but were recently entirely terminated on the grounds of the state of emergency and the pandemic. (See *The Places We Meet >The Streets in an Atmosphere of Oppression*). Some gatherings in public space which permit regulations cannot suppress are disturbed by the physical existence of the police or gendarmerie with the aim of dissuading the organisations. Specifically, those organisations that are located in the Kurdish populated cities, and those public activities in the areas of minorities, peace, women's rights and LGBTI+ are facing much more police prosecution and harassment. There are organisations that have "received open threats" from security forces. Organisations that work in the abovementioned areas and were already "facing pressure and harassment even at times when the civic space was not limited this much", have developed "an ability to work under hard conditions". While some employees of civil society organisations have stated that they got used to the existence of the police who "waits at the door of the association", closely follows their activities, "controls the content of speeches before the meeting" and "makes video recordings during demonstrations", this pressure causes unease among new members or volunteers. "Doing business while being on alert at all times" has an adverse effect on the energy and motivation of rights defenders. In the long run, every single situation in which security forces are present, not to "maintain the security" of civil society activities but as a tool of visual and verbal harassment, causes the silencing of the members as well as the target groups, and contribute to estrangement from civil society.

Another implementation that puts pressure on civil society activities has been the gradual shutting down of the public bodies' doors in several fields of work that require the direct cooperation of public institutions. Maintaining the relations with relevant public bodies and prisons is a must for civil society organisations that work with migrants and convicts in order to be able to access target groups and carry out their activities. Nevertheless, public institutions gradually come less often together with relevant rights-based organisations and impair their access and impact in the field. A civil society organisation that conducts children's work and whose "work at schools was ceased due to a ban to enter public institutions" was concerned that this approach could also become permanent with the pandemic's effect. Organisations that seek ways to maintain cooperation with public bodies are required to change the tone and terminology on their permission applications or keep specific subjects silent

and invisible for a certain period. (See *Being Targeted and Surviving > Censorship/Self-Censorship*)

The state-appointed trustees' takeover of associations and municipalities has been another important barrier that hampers cooperation. After the Supreme Election Board decided not to give their mandates to six of the sixty-five metropolitan, provincial, district and town municipalities that HDP won in the 31 March 2019 local elections because they were dismissed by decree-laws, a total of forty-eight municipalities passed to the administration of trustees – an outcome of the trustee appointments that started on 19 August 2019.<sup>24</sup> Consequently, in some regions the cooperation between rights based organisations and municipalities has almost dissolved. The replacement of mayors elected by the local population with the state-appointed trustees has also affected many civil services provided by the municipality-affiliated sub-institutions and resulted in a withdrawal from rights-based activities. More often than not, trustees were dead against cooperation with civil society organisations. Instead, they carried out local activities with new “civil institutions” that they have founded. (See *The Places We Meet > Networks and Cooperations*) The investigation and closure processes of some associations ended with the transition of the association administrations to the trustees. Some of the organisations that are in this position search for ways to found new associations in Turkey or abroad to be able to continue their activities. The organisations that did not face any criminal investigations or are not exposed to closure cases are nevertheless under the threat of appointed trustees and refrain from making institutional investments or making their work visible freely. A civil society organisation working on the right to the city in Diyarbakır has stated that they too maintain their activities “just like all organisations that fight for rights, under the threat of being shut down and the appointment of a trustee”. Two organisations from the Kurdish populated cities that were standing trial, expressed that there were times when they clear the office against the risk of being locked and sealed, or the appointment of a trustee. An organisation that works in the field of youth studies relinquished to purchase an asset in the name of the association since in case of possible trustee appointment real properties would be confiscated. (See *Adaptation to Online Systems > Adjustment Problems*)

## Targeting

One of the most entrenched mechanisms of putting the civic space under pressure in Turkey has been the act of targeting. The language of public authorities and the media accompanies the restrictive legal regulations, targeting and aggravating rights

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24 Hukuk ve İnsan Hakları Komisyonu 10 Aralık Dünya İnsan Hakları Günü Raporu (Law and Human Rights Commission 10 December World Human Rights Day Report, HDP - Halkların Demokratik Partisi, 2020), 7. <https://hdp.org.tr/Images/UserFiles/Documents/Editor/2020/2020-insan-haklari-raporu.pdf>.

advocacy even more by causing legitimate fields of work and activities to be perceived as crime. Those who were targeted recently constitute a long list: organisations that carry out activities in the Kurdish language, with and on Syrian refugees, women's and LGBTI+ rights defenders, foreign funding organisations, academicians who refuse to hide scientific data, journalists and independent media outlets, health workers during the pandemic, defenders of minority rights, etc. (See *The Places We Meet > The Streets in an Atmosphere of Oppression*) The ongoing politics in recent years generated increased racism and discrimination in the society; the targeting mechanisms of oppression and an "informant culture" mutually breed each other. For instance, about a meeting that a civil society organisation from Diyarbakır will hold in Antalya, the police would come upon a notification that "Kurds have come, they will do separatism in Antalya". In another example, a planned meeting in Trabzon may be cancelled due to a prior provocation, in order to avoid engendering any incident. The social media is one of the channels in which such informant mechanisms and hate speech can advance. Some civil society organisations have mentioned that they try to protect themselves by filing complaints against groups that spread hate speech or acts of targeting on social media or by demanding security when they are being threatened. (See *LGBTI+ and Women's Rights > Discrimination and Hate Speech*)

Organisations directly under political pressure and are being targeted constantly lose supporters, members and volunteers. As it can be concluded from what has been conveyed by many of the organisations that have participated in the Haklara Destek Programme, many people refrain from assuming official tasks in associations and prefer to give support from afar due to acts of targeting and the pressures on the civic space. (See *Freedom of Association and Legal Amendments > Donations and Memberships*) The abovementioned pressure mechanisms augment the stress and concerns of rights defenders, enervate the motivation and strength of organisations, hinder the realisation of activities, narrow down the impact area of the civil society and render its legitimacy questionable. The act of presenting legitimate and legal fields of work as criminal activities endangers the existence of a free, plural and transparent civic space.

## **Punishment, Detention and Lawsuits**

Direct and indirect mechanisms of repression have intensified especially after 2015 and appeared as fines, detentions, organisational as well as individual lawsuits for those rights defenders and CSOs that are active in areas defined as "risky". Although not being hindered in their activities, many CSOs that advocate women's rights have defined the subsequent penalty processes as following: "We have carried out the activities with negotiation and struggle, yet we were confronted with the indictments afterwards. We have faced raids, detentions and arrests." Some of the inspections of the associations,



which became more frequent after the new legal amendment, ended with administrative fines and the blocking of the associations' accounts. (See *Freedom of Association and Legal Amendments > Administrative Audits*) However, when the directors of the associations and rights defenders were hereby scrutinised and imposed penalties, it became obvious that the audits did not only aim at administrative control. Some organisations that are active in the fields of peace and minorities reported that they have been imposed fines because of their activities and that their founding members were filed claims for compensation. Not only are activities under restriction but also people are being punished for criticising public institutions or policies in those areas they are active in: A civil society organisation that works with migrants has received an "administrative fine, after its critique of the repatriation centre". Investigations that are being run about some organisations' actions and activities are not finalised yet.

Fines issued for "inconvenient" posts on social media are not only on the agenda of civil society organisations and rights defenders. Still, they are an issue for everyone who lives in Turkey. Civil society organisations' social media accounts and posts are under close watch, and "access to these accounts can be restricted systematically". For example, the project of an organisation that works for people who have no access to a fair trial was censored on an online platform, and its social media account was shut down for more than a week. Considering that freedom of expression is already restricted and the suppression of associations, such posts can be punished at multiple levels in Turkey. (See *Being Targeted and Surviving > Censorship/Self-Censorship*) Denying access to print and digital publications is another frequent type of punishment. Particularly in the populated Kurdish cities, organisations that work on human rights violations and forced migration are exposed to severe pressure and are punished based on their publications and posts. There are ongoing lawsuits against reports and publications of organisations that work on forced migration and court decisions for the confiscation of publications. While these types of punitive practices restrict the access and visibility of civil society organisations, they pave the way for the perception of civil society activities as "crime".

Several civil society organisations have stated that they have been exposed to "judicial harassment through legal pressure" in recent years. In this process, particularly journalists have become vulnerable by facing more judicial harassment based on their journalism. Many civil society organisations working in diverse areas have ongoing lawsuits against them or their administrators. Some investigations were related to the associations through the "tapping of the members' conversations" and the members' activities outside the associations. (See *Freedom of Association and Legal Amendments > Donations and Memberships*) Dealing with repression, detention and arrests have even become part of the daily functioning of some civil society organisations. Different examples display its extent and severity. For instance, a person who was a member of the

executive board of an organisation that operates in Diyarbakır was “kept in detention for four days for arbitrary reasons”. In another case, the person was subjected to an investigation, apart from the reason for his detention, and an additional indictment was issued. (See *The Places We Meet > The Streets in an Atmosphere of Oppression*)

There are associations whose members and directors were arrested or still in prison and whose ongoing lawsuits are ongoing. Within the last year, “two executive board members” of an association working in human rights advocacy “faced criminal investigation, one of them was released after being kept in detention for almost four months”. The director of a civil society organisation fighting extreme poverty and hunger in Diyarbakır was sentenced to imprisonment. The head of an association fighting sexual violence was sentenced to 26 years imprisonment following a series of lawsuits. There is another administrator in the same association who is being prosecuted. (See *Freedom of Association and Legal Amendments > Measures Against the New Law*) A women’s association said that since 2020 “they have been exposed to 5 operations and 2 raids, that most of their members, administrators and volunteers have been detained and imprisoned for 4-5 months on average”. In addition to the repeated detentions, arrests and home raids, and the continuous surveillance it faced, all accounts of this association were blocked too. (See *LGBTI+ and Women’s Rights > Discrimination and Hate Speech*)

In regions with intense political pressure and appointed trustees, the work of the civil society was aggravated significantly through police raids and the constant monitoring of their activities and employees, primarily through interventions in demonstrations and fieldwork. On top of that, prolonged judicial processes negatively affected their employees and the target groups. Facing oppression directly, associations operating in Diyarbakır and around stated that legal processes might run differently in the east and west of the country: “Investigations initiated in western provinces are concluded quickly; here, on the other hand, they are combined with other actions and turned immediately into the accusation of membership to a ‘terrorist’ organisation.” While organisations try to maintain rights advocacy under these conditions, they also try to follow up on cases, become a party and disseminate the gains. For example, it was mentioned that the rate of involvement in the implementation of various ECtHR decisions in the inspection process increased by making Rule 9.2 notifications to the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe (CM). This was possible after the way was opened for civil society organisations to express their opinions as third parties in the cases of rights violations that continue to be heard at the ECtHR. In the absence of information and data provided by civil society organisations, the CM would only have access to the information provided by the states; hence for having an efficient inspection process, notifications from organisations are of critical importance. When the verdicts favour acquittal and rights, organisations try to make “encouraging shares” by widely publicising the results.

SECTION THREE

**LGBTI+ AND**  
**WOMEN'S**  
**RIGHTS**

Rights-based civil society organisations struggle and negotiate with actors that can initiate a change in their field of work to defend the rights and improve the conditions of their target groups. After 2015, following the increased pressure and restrictions on civil society, the space for negotiation and struggle –as we know– with the state or public actors has shrunk and even disappeared. While many civil society organisations continue to preserve their existence and not lose their achievements, they also strive to open up these spheres in various ways and develop new forms of struggle. Despite the intense pressure and direct violence, they are exposed to, rights defenders active in gender and women's rights display an excellent example of struggle. We can look at the methods developed by LGBTI+ and women's rights defenders to see how it can be possible to organise against restrictive legal amendments, develop joint strategies, assemble and struggle either online or on the streets in order not to lose the already acquired rights and push closed channels.

## The Istanbul Convention

The field of women's and LGBTI+ rights is the locus of legal restrictions, societal discrimination, hate speech and policies of hostility. Mechanisms that nurture the atmosphere of oppression and the latest implementations in this regard constitute a long list: the withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention, the refusal of the cancellation of Law No. 6284 despite the campaigns for its cancellation, the increase in violence against women and femicides, anti-gender-equality discourses, the targeting of feminist and LGBTI+ organisations as well as issues resulting from the new legal amendments –also affecting other CSOs– such as loss of members, penalties, judicial harassment against members and directors, difficulties in collecting donations and aid... One women's rights defender who attended the Haklara Destek Programme stated: "We have returned to square one; we wanted to expand our rights, yet we have come to the point where we must defend our most basic rights."

The first binding document on violence against women and domestic violence in the international arena, the "Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence" (shortly the Istanbul Convention), which had entered into force in 2014, was abolished in 2021 for Turkey. Turkey's abrupt withdrawal from the Convention implies the start of a more difficult period regarding violence against women and the victims of violence. The statement concerning the withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention reads: "The Istanbul Convention, which initially aimed to foster the strengthening of women's rights, was manipulated by a group of people who try to normalise homosexuality incompatible with Turkey's social and familial values". This expression has become one of the recent examples of how

LGBTI+ are discriminated against and targeted at the state level. Upon this incident, the working hours of all women's and LGBTI+ rights defenders and organisations have increased. While women's rights defenders were "trying to enforce" the articles of the Istanbul Convention, their task suddenly changed into an effort to "prevent the abolition of the Convention". To this end, in addition to the routine support offered to victims of violence within the scope of the activities of the associations, many steps were taken in every city, such as street protests, press statements, panels and interviews, and activities directed at the members of the parliament, meetings in collaborative networks and platforms as well as legal objections to the decision of termination. (See *The Places We Meet > The Streets in an Atmosphere of Oppression*)

## Discrimination and Hate Speech

Numerous mechanisms related to gender issues in society –such as prejudices and discrimination, political polarisation and hate speech, societal pressure and targeting– have a greater effect on women's and LGBTI+ rights than other rights advocacy fields. The extreme polarization brought about by the political atmosphere has also caused the polarisation of groups in digital mediums and social media and let organisations be "confronted with negative responses, lynchings and threats". Politicians, representatives of public bodies and media outlets maintain their hate speech by targeting LGBTI+ groups and organisations. Targeting, discriminating and terrorising news and broadcasts about LGBTI+ organisations circulating in the national press and mainstream media have caused reservations, especially among newly contacted activists in their communication with the organisations. Following the withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention, the state has explicitly criminalised LGBTI+s. In an environment where the state targeted LGBTI+ associations and initiatives, an association that identified itself as a "trans-self-organisation" has been subject to direct threats and pressures. An LGBTI+ organisation applied to the district governor's office when certain groups started to organise on social media last summer and circulated a "call for a march to raid LGBTI+ associations". As a precaution, security forces protected their offices for a while. They decided not to go to the office unless there were unavoidable situations, not to stay alone in the office when they had to be there, and eventually to move the office to a new address. An organisation that carries out local activities was exposed to statements such as "are you funded by LGBTI+ barons?" that refers to and targets one of their partnerships. (See *Mechanisms of Repression in the Civic Space > Targeting*)

Some organisations have neither experienced direct pressure nor were they fined, yet they were still affected by the hostile discourses in the field. For instance, a local

women's organisation expressed that there was no concrete event involving their organisation but that membership and volunteer applications they received had decreased due to the increasing prejudices against women's and LGBTI+ organisations. The same organisation started to work on incorporating LGBTI+s in their activities on women. It was mentioned that it is essential for different parties working in the field of gender to "know each other and act together" especially in an atmosphere in which they are being targeted. (See *The Places We Meet > Networks and Cooperations*.) Currently, the number of organisations trying to intersect their work on LGBTI+ and women is growing. Under circumstances where teams, members and target groups were under constant attack, an organisation has organised picnics and outdoor activities for women and children, conceiving that "the state of well-being must also be supported".

The fieldwork of women and LGBTI+ organisations were also negatively affected by repression and restrictions. As a result of raids and audits, the accounts of some women's organisations were blocked, and their activities were hindered. Despite the threat of judicial harassment and closure, these organisations sustained their support to those who were subjected to violence and refused to go to the shelters of the municipalities which were handed over to trustees. (See *Mechanisms of Repression in the Civic Space > Punishment, Detention and Lawsuits*) Field studies and trainings of organisations working in the LGBTI+ rights were intended to be restricted on the grounds of their content. Going through control mechanisms of local administrations before implementation, several gender equality trainings were banned, or partners withdrew from cooperation due to the fact that they contained LGBTI+ issues. Municipalities and local headmen prevented the use of LGBTI+ support system materials in local activities. The March 8 and Pride Parades as well as press statements and protests against the withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention were precluded. The Ankara Governorship's ban on LGBTI+ organisations which was issued previously in 2017 spread to other cities, causing the target groups to refrain from organising in an atmosphere of repression. After the ban was lifted, an obligation to declare all activities and obtain permission was introduced. So, holding events related to LGBTI+ rights in places open to the public brought along feelings of anxiety and fear as well as a negative impact in organising due to the increased vulnerability to intervention at any time. When LGBTI+ rights defenders pushed these circumstances and organised street protests and demonstrations without getting permissions at all costs; they have faced direct police violence and detentions as well as prevention of LGBTI+ banners, trans- and rainbow flags on the streets. (See *The Places We Meet > The Streets in an Atmosphere of Oppression*)

## Violence, Impunity and Advocacy

The legal regression in LGBTI+ and women's rights and restrictions in the implementation were followed by the lockdowns during the pandemic, causing together a "dramatic increase" in the impoverishment and polarisation, hate speech and domestic violence, and thus in applications made to the support centres. This increase caused some disruptions in the activities of associations providing consultancy services. While domestic violence increased with the pandemic and lockdowns, transgender people and women who were subject to violence and seeking for support were adversely affected by the slowdown at the police stations and refusals of shelters. Some of the counselling services could be given by phone or were offered online, yet many administrative and legal processes have been slowed down. Due to the fact that courts were closed during the pandemic, many cases were postponed, creating difficulties and delays in obtaining restraining orders, which were meant to be made ready swiftly. Women who faced violence felt even more helpless and were forced to stay within the cycle of violence as the processes were prolonged. In regions where economic and physical violence increased, it was observed that incest cases also increased. It was mentioned that there was a rise in women trafficking during this period too. (See *Vulnerable Groups in the Pandemic > The Situation of Vulnerable Groups in the Pandemic*) Besides the situation of women who were subject to violence, rights violations experienced by LGBTI+s who are systematically being targeted have also increased, resulting in a rise in the number of applications received due to discrimination, stigmatisation and violence. Furthermore, it can be seen in the reports of the organisations working in this field that support centres received applications about "anxiety, worry, insecurity" while police stations were not processing domestic violence applications on the basis of the withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention. In this period, the existence of organisations providing support services to people who struggled to survive was of vital importance, since women and LGBTI+s were at risk, violence mounted, and impunity became prevalent and there were difficulties in accessing support services in the aftermath of violence.

While violence becomes widespread, post-violence support processes are being slowed down through legal retrogression and impunity is extending. The disruption of protection and prevention processes caused by the disregard of public employees and security forces and the failure to protect the right to life further intensifies the vulnerability of LGBTI+ and women. The growth in the number of court decisions in crimes involving violence given in favour of the perpetrator also raises the spread of impunity and causes loss of trust in the justice system. In such an environment, the situation of imprisoned women gets even worse: women are hesitant to proclaim the

naked search and sexual torture by guards since they don't have trust in the system and are scared of disciplinary punishment. The prevalence of impunity throughout society, as can be seen in the guardians, has a significant part in the increase in violence against LGBTI+ and women.

As we have recently observed an increase in human rights violations including the area of sexual violence, CSOs working in the field of LGBTI+ and women's rights have been forced to partake in more reactive advocacy activities. The uncertainty and unpredictability of the political environment, the "sudden appearance of violations, law proposals, or termination of contracts through midnight decisions" required civil society organisations to take swift decisions and produce "actions and discourses against these violations". In order not to leave the spaces of action and be able to offer political discourses within the scope of advocacy, organisations had to take more risks. (See *Being Targeted and Surviving > Not Leaving the Field*) Various women's rights organisations stated that they make an effort to sustain their existence in the field through rapid changes they implement in the methods of negotiation and struggle. The needs that were mentioned can be listed as support for the activities in the field through litigation and producing policy documents; multiplying the platforms where LGBTI+ and women's organisations can exchange knowledge, experience and support; "more walking the road together" and improving themselves in their fields of work and intersectional issues by organising internal trainings. On the other hand, the increased oppression on the organisations and their target groups "spread fear at the beginning" but also create a "strong solidarity" in the field. Some organisations stated that the growing visibility of "rights violations that can no longer be justified" has raised awareness to a certain extent at the societal level and allowed their work to be supported more. The need for improving the existing support and solidarity climate, sharing experiences by getting to know each other better and increasing the grounds for acting together was expressed widely. (See *The Places We Meet > Networks and Cooperations*) LGBTI+ and women's organisations try to survive in an environment of physical and emotional repression as well as violence. The process and methods of their struggle by "not being silent, not being afraid and not obeying" can set an example for the entire field of rights advocacy in Turkey.



SECTION FOUR

**BEING**  
**TARGETED AND**  
**SURVIVING**

In an atmosphere where some associations are closed down and their directors arrested, many participants expressed their determination to stay in the field to keep up the struggle for rights despite all the difficulties and exhaustion. What cherishes the resistance and hope in this long and tough process is the solidarity in the field as well as the determination of the rights defenders facing unlawful allegations, targeting and physical impediments. An organisation in Diyarbakır, which has been subject to diverse lawsuits and punishments, uttered the encouraging effect of “more people’s support and solidarity” while expecting loss of members in this oppressive environment. An organisation working in the field of human rights indicated that the recent solidarity with other civil society organisations and academics elevated their hopes and defined their vision for the future with these words: “The feeling of being in the right place and with the right people is a revelation. We will carry on with young people and with a perspective that is encouraging for change and development.”

Furthermore, organisations also develop new strategies to survive on this path. Those who feel under pressure in the current political atmosphere have preferred to adjust the content and methods of their work to protect themselves as well as their target groups. In most of the 48 CSOs that have participated in the Haklara Destek Programme, one could notice an inclination towards some shared fields of interest and methodological approaches. These can be summarised as turning inwards (i.e. archiving, focusing on research and reporting, decreasing visibility, looking after the institution itself and capacity-building), self-censorship (mostly by altering the language, delaying publications, taking precautions for online activities, being more cautious in social media posts, etc.) and not leaving the field (by pushing the channels of legal struggle, documenting and archiving the acts of suppression, searching for new methods, increasing individual access, etc.). Every organisation and every rights defender interpret the fine line between escaping from being a target and not leaving the field of rights advocacy in a different way depending on their own field of work and resources. It seems crucial to share different examples of individual or project-based micro-struggle strategies and of institutional or macro approaches that are relevant for the complete field, in order to learn from each other and to improve channels of solidarity. (See *The Places We Meet > Networks and Cooperations*)

## Turning Inwards

It can be argued that in such periods when rights advocacy is either limited or impossible because of oppression, the civil society first turns inwards as a reflex. Many organisations have stated that they have “focused on internal documents and processes by turning inwards”; that they tended to work on archives, research and reports; that they reported and archived existing rights violations or developed strategy and policy papers; carried out research in their fields of activity and on the target groups; prepared reports and

policy papers accordingly and increased the number of their publications eventually. We can say that civil society organisations also had a role in shifting knowledge production to an alternative platform at a time when universities and the independent academic field was also under pressure, especially with difficulties in working at public universities on issues related to Kurdish studies. For instance, 4 organisations that focus on neighbourhood projects came together and compiled a report about the access of children to their rights in different parts of Istanbul, with the outcomes finding place in the press. Another organisation that works on disability rights developed a two-years monitoring strategy within the scope of evidence-based international advocacy studies which is built on the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. On the other hand, in order to be able to make strategic planning under these circumstances dominated by ambiguity, prospective political, economic and social analyses are required. Every strategic plan made may need to change directions swiftly due to unpredictable government policies, judiciary harassment and repression mechanisms. Under these circumstances, having a “Plan B” for administrative processes and public actions and activities has become a routine for civil society organisations.

Participant organisations frequently emphasized the need for improving internal administrative processes and rendering them more transparent in order to make the organisations less likely to be affected adversely from legal processes. Organisations that turned inwards not only used this period for content development and reporting but also for improving their institutional capacities by looking closer at their own institutional processes. With the impact of the pandemic that slowed down their activities or brought them to a standstill, the organisations observed their internal processes and allocated “for the first time so much time for capacity building”. Under the conditions of repression, audits and the pandemic which resulted in a slowing down, many organisations have realised their deficiencies, made an attempt to redress them and initiated processes of organisational change to adjust to the new conditions. They had the chance to deal with institutional communication, renewing the website or building the infrastructure for social media or other sharing channels – matters that could not be prioritised in terms of time or other resources during normal times. (See *Adaptation to Online Systems > New Tools, New Approaches*) Some of these organisations mentioned that change and adaptation were not always easy and that they occasionally encountered resistance against change, either from within the organisation or from the target group.

A lot of organisations turned to internal trainings for capacity building purposes. They have organised activities for the improvement of their employees and volunteers in relation to their fields of work or administrative issues. (See *Adaptation to Online Systems > Access and Other Opportunities*) While the target groups were expanding in this period, it was a priority to improve the capacity of human resources to be able to cope with increasing pressures. For instance, an organisation that works in the area of sexual

health and human rights has realised that they were not “administrating themselves” properly after carrying out a needs analysis in this period and organised trainings for the administrative staff. The activities were helpful in re-organising the functioning of the association, increasing the human resources and for the team to improve themselves in methods of fundraising. One of the needs that came to the forefront in this period was getting more funds and increasing the human resources due to the expansion of the target group in the women’s rights area as well as the increased workload. (See *The Effects of the Pandemic on Civil Society Organisations > Financial Sources and Support*) It was an achievement of this period that in some organisations the directors and employees carried out discussions on the improvement of the organisational structure. Things done blindly were systematised: departmentalisation of administrative work, building of advisory committees from the field of human rights, developing strategies for volunteers, preparing communication papers, setting guidelines for internal use, writing down the task descriptions for the board of directors, revising association charters, completing missing parts of documents, making plans for institutional sustainability etc. Thus, the period of repression and the pandemic have created an opportunity for some organisations for institutional build-up and organisational change. (See *Freedom of Association and Legal Amendments > Measures Against the New Law*)

In all fields of work, the most “visible” strategy of introversion preferred by organisations was “not to be much in the limelight” in order to avoid any possible harm caused by oppressive policies. Mainly due to the fact that social media turned into a platform of investigation, many organisations stated that they avoided visibility and tried to stay in their small spaces, hence making fewer announcements about their activities. This situation precipitated outcomes such as avoiding visible activities, not announcing the work, preferring closed meetings eventually leading to the fact that most of the work that has been done stayed hidden on the websites. Some organisations even told that they did not announce their activities until they were finished, and if they did so, they “acted more carefully”. An organisation that works in the field of peace has described this state of being “quiet and invisible” as “playing dead”. The pressure over organisations that work in the field of peace has increased after 2015, paving the way for avoiding visibility and suspending the chances to have a word about issues they work on. A Diyarbakır based organisation mentioned that they started to present their research results and publications in closed groups with limited number of people only. Another organisation has postponed the publication of their report, which coincided with the administrative audits and did not organise a launch event for the report. They have scheduled closed meetings for the workshops on peace efforts which were attended by other organisations. Hence the advocacy activities of organisations functioning under the threat of administrative fines, closure and arrests; had to be moved to more secure spaces, to more closed formats and became less visible most of the times. (See *The Places We Meet > New Digital Spaces*)

Reducing visibility was an important avoidance strategy, not only for the organisations themselves but also for their partners, supporters and target groups. Numerous vulnerable groups began to refrain from participating in fieldwork carried out by civil society organisations. For example, workers who were scared about being fired, preferred not to cooperate with associations that worked on rights violations and refused to give information about their working conditions. (See *Vulnerable Groups in the Pandemic > The Pandemic and New Vulnerabilities*) After being targeted by a media outlet, a LGBTI+ organisation abstained from being involved in the struggle for rights, since being visible would have meant being targeted even more. Some participants have avoided attending the meetings held by the organisations; some were afraid that “they would lose their jobs, if their photos would appear in press”. When subscribers of publications on Kurdish history hesitated to receive the posts to their work address in order not to reveal the name of the sender, the organisation changed to online publication and the number of their subscribers increased. Academics working at public universities didn’t want their names to be used on event announcements or publications of some civil society organisations. Considering the anxiety and security concerns of their target groups, partners, interlocutors and participants due to these and similar reasons, organisations refrained from sharing their activities with the public as much as possible. An organisation that is active in the field of children’s’ studies has added that they don’t publish some of their reports yet for the sake of their interlocutors. There are more examples of similar cases.

## **Censorship/Self-censorship**

Even not being subjected to direct censorship, most of the organisations participating in the Haklara Destek Programme confirmed the existence of a “climate of censorship” being normalised indirectly through multi-level mechanisms. This climate became even more perceptible in the populated Kurdish cities through severe pressure on organisations working on human rights violations and forced migration, restrictions on their activities and punishments based on their publications and posts. Many organisations have changed the way, means and mediums of expressing themselves. Although a few organisations stated that they had never self-censored and been censored in their work, the majority of the organisations mentioned the adjustments they had to undertake in the content and methods of their activities and the measures they had not taken before. For example, an organisation working in the field of peace, which stated that its participants are now more concerned due to the current political climate, has experienced “a negative outcome such as self-censorship” in their work. Another organisation working in the field of peace stated that they “did not feel safe” because of the pressure. The activities of organisations that could not act freely in their work were disrupted, as they preferred not to practise self-censorship. Some organisations that avoid self-censorship

perceive “each process as a possible breeding a unique solution in itself”, so they continue to seek different methods and approaches for every new occasion. In conclusion, the majority’s effort is trying to protect their achievements and fields of work by avoiding being direct targets.

In particular cases where censorship or self-censorship are involved, organisations restrict the scope of their activities. In order to not be targeted, some organisations adjusted their subjects or themes, or undertook minor and temporary changes. They have conducted field research but not written the reports or published them due to security concerns. Pre-checking the texts on the website or on social media to reduce risks, having the press releases read by lawyers, examining publications “through the eyes of the prosecutor”, not participating in certain petitions, softening the language used in official applications as well as other texts shared with the public were mentioned as the most common practices. Many organisations use different terminologies in their applications for approval and permits. For instance, an organisation that made a permit application to the Ministry of National Education for fieldwork, used terms “preferred” by the Ministry in defining the target groups in the petition. They also preferred a softened language for the texts shared with the public. Some organisations altered the terminology they use in their projects, in order not to be affected by the public pressure related to the gender issue. For example, descriptions such as “adolescent health” were preferred in order to avoid mentioning the word “sexuality”. An organisation that works in the area of women’s rights prefers to use “peer bullying” instead of “dating violence” in its public trainings. (See *Mechanisms of Repression in the Civic Space > Permits and Cooperation with Public Bodies*) In most texts the word “activist” is not being used anymore. Organisations engaged in print and digital publishing have become one of the primary targets of suppression, due to the prominent nature of press and journalism. Although this situation does not affect their areas of interest, content production or the way they approach social events and issues; they nevertheless stick to a more cautious editorial policy.

Becoming prevalent with the pandemic and getting in use by almost every organisation for their activities, digital platforms have quickly turned into the locus of repression and self-censorship. Some of the organisations that hold online events have taken several measures to protect their participants and institutions. Among these measures were, for instance, avoiding live broadcasting and publishing the content of the event later after having reviewed it; recording the parts of the events with presentations and opting for either not recording or not broadcasting the Q&A so that the audience feels more comfortable in contributing. An organisation working in the field of youth mentioned that also the speakers they invite to events might apply censorship: “Someone who comes to our organisation as a speaker already arrives with the reflex ‘I have to be careful with what I say’. Especially in online activities speakers practise self-censorship and say, ‘you

definitely are being watched' even before we make any intervention. They wish not to leave us in a difficult situation, but they also have this self-protection reflex." Civil society organisations have been using social media more intensively in the recent years for announcing their activities, enhancing their visibility, doing advocacy and reaching out to their target groups. It was already mentioned that social media has become one of the most critical tools of current political pressure. (See *Mechanisms of Repression in Civic Space > Punishment, Detention and Lawsuits*) The "liberty of broad interpretation" in the investigations launched on the grounds of social media posts has been affecting the freedom of expression of the civil society organisations. A lot of organisations stated that they act more "careful and precautionary" not to get harmed because of their social media posts.

## Not Leaving the Field

A major portion of rights-based organisations has stated that they look for new methods and approaches to continue rights advocacy despite the difficulties that affect their target groups and institutions negatively. While some run counter legal and administrative processes, some developed new areas of struggle by applying more creative methods. LGBTI+ and women's rights defenders applied to the State Council against the annulment of the Istanbul Convention while they also activated certain mechanisms to make pressure on the Members of the Parliament in this direction. (See *LGBTI+ and Women's Rights > Violence, Impunity and Advocacy*) Even though complaints about legal obstructions in the fields of freedom of association and women's rights have not been answered yet, rights defenders have made legal achievements in other areas. For instance, after the omnibus bill titled "Draft Law on Undertaking Some Arrangements in the Fields of Food, Agriculture and Forestry", which contains articles that stipulate censorship on food-related publications, was brought to the Parliament, the "Raising the Food Movement Together" group initiated a campaign. The campaign demanded that the articles assuming censorship regarding food be withdrawn. In consequence of the effective use of social media, on the fifth day of the campaign, those articles assuming censorship in food were removed from the omnibus bill.

Not leaving the field means to insist on rights advocacy even if no positive results can be obtained in the short run. For instance, some organisations working in the field of youth applied to the Governor's Office for permission instead of withdrawing after restrictions were issued on the collection of aid, even though they knew that they would be rejected. They considered making persistent applications and recording the reasons for rejection as a tactic of not leaving the field. As a result of the ban on protests and activities prevailing since the state of emergency all through the pandemic, rights defenders were unable to take to the streets at all and ended up organising indoor demonstrations for a long period. Parallel to their regular activities, numerous

organisations committed themselves to monitoring, reporting and archiving the rights violations that emerged in this period. (See *The Effects of the Pandemic on Civil Society Organisations > Disruptions in Activities and Fieldwork*) Examples of such reports that were prepared in this period comprise the documentation of rights violations on the countryside, the preparation of a detailed report about immigrants who passed away at the borders, the report documenting the violations of women's rights in the grip of the pandemic and violence, the policy paper on the prevention of sexist conducts and mobbing, the policy document on sexual violence, the report on parent-child relationships in Diyarbakır Sur in the aftermath of forced migration, the report on rights violations in the penal institutions of Van prisons, the report on academic rights violations, the report on the peace signatories process, the report on arrested university students, the anti-corruption and transparency report, the gender inequality and LGBTI+ monitoring report, or the monitoring and documentation of house raids and the subsequent detention and arrest processes. Considering that the periods of shrinking civic space will eventually come to an end, it is not difficult to anticipate that these reports, which document different facets of suppression in different fields of work, may constitute an important part of counter-legal processes and the pursuit of rights in the long run.

Certain organisations that lost their working field due to permission restrictions preferred to identify what is possible in the field and tended towards new research and methods. For some organisations, channels of cooperation and dialogue have shifted towards individual acquaintance and one-on-one relationships. On the other hand, many organisations, that also by force of the pandemic had to benefit from the opportunities provided by the digital space, continued their production in new channels and reached out to their target groups through altered ways in this period. An organisation that works on cultural heritage has developed a digital city archive on the axis of Sur – the central neighbourhood of Diyarbakır demolished during the clashes. The organisation plans to make its oral history studies conducted in the field a part of this database which archives urban memory and shares it through online exhibitions. An organisation working on the Kurdish language conducted fieldwork in 6 cities, compiled products of oral Kurdish literature and published 7 books. A lot of organisations began to produce podcasts and started to use YouTube channels actively. (See *Adaptation to Online Systems > New Tools, New Approaches*) Institutions that have improved themselves in hitherto unaccustomed channels and tools have managed to expand their field of work as well as target groups. It was frequently emphasized that it was very important to document and archive the activities and processes themselves, in order to be able to maintain all these methods, which were developed for not leaving the field, and to transfer them to people who would join the organisations in the future.



SECTION FIVE

**THE EFFECTS**  
**OF THE**  
**PANDEMIC ON**  
**CIVIL SOCIETY**  
**ORGANISATIONS**

The democratic/civic space in Turkey had been shrinking especially after 2015, but it took another hit with the COVID-19 pandemic that has impinged upon the world and restricted every single aspect of our lives as of 2020. On the one hand, it can be suggested that civil society organisations trying to keep up their work under difficult circumstances albeit limited resources and in an environment of growing pressure, have great manoeuvring capabilities in crises due to these experiences. However, as an exceptional global crisis of our age, while the COVID-19 pandemic has allowed for the development of new opportunities for civil society organisations in Turkey, it also augmented their vulnerabilities. The “abuse” of the measures taken by the state against the COVID-19 pandemic has further affected this situation adversely. There was an obvious attempt to restrict the right to assembly on the grounds of the pandemic. Several examples can be mentioned here, such as restrictions on the permissions for demonstrations on the streets, the unions being sued due to the May Day, several investigations in process against the reports about rights violations written by some organisations. Hence, while the state was already looking for excuses to restrict the civic space, the pandemic served as a unique opportunity through which restrictions became the standard and were almost normalised. (See *Mechanisms of Repression in the Civic Space*)

Besides the restrictions on activities deriving from the pandemic, the effects of health problems and the psychological repercussions of the pandemic had adverse effects on the target groups and the employees and members of civil society organisations. There were times when people had to stay in quarantine and could not work due to being infected or being a person of contact. Many organisations had to cancel their face-to-face activities and fieldwork or look for online possibilities. Half of the organisations participating in the Haklara Destek Programme have experienced difficulties transitioning to online due to the lack of technical infrastructure, employees or volunteers. Field research and judicial processes were adversely affected. Many employees have experienced the positive aspects and difficulties of working from home. Nevertheless, some organisations stated that they could overcome the challenges brought about by the pandemic easily since they were prepared for disruptions. There were also organisations that had sufficient technical infrastructure, albeit a small proportion, and were able to adapt their activities to the new conditions with their employees and supporters. The pandemic has created new vulnerable groups and diverse fields of work; some organisations had to turn to these swiftly and necessarily. Urgent issues that concern the whole world made it also into the agendas of civil society organisations. The connection between an unanticipated public health problem and the climate crisis and the need for systemic change has become more evident and was more on the agenda.

## **Disruptions in Activities and Fieldwork**

The majority of the civil society organisations that have participated in the Haklara Destek Programme were forced to cancel their face-to-face activities in the 2020-2021 period due to the restrictions that emerged when the COVID-19 pandemic came into our

lives abruptly in March 2020. More than half of the organisations were able to move their activities to online channels when restrictions were imposed on gathering and travelling. However, organisations, which had insufficient technical infrastructure and employees, ones experiencing financial challenges or whose activity structure was not compatible for online, had to cancel their activities completely. For certain organisations, the transition from face-to-face activities to online and the efforts put in for adjusting have resulted in significant time losses. The most noteworthy gain of the organisations that went online is that they were able to reach out to target groups beyond their cities, hence much more people than usual. (See *Adaptation to Online Systems*)

It was impossible to organise various activities in person: panels, interviews, autograph sessions, conferences, symposiums, seminars, film screenings, children's festivals, training programmes, workshops, focus group discussions, field meetings, marches, association congresses... Dialogue meetings of organisations that work in the field of peace, or traditional face-to-face activities of some organisations had to be cancelled. Open-air events could be partially realised during the summer months. Nevertheless, national and international gatherings were suspended. At the time the borders were closed, exchange programmes stopped, therefore learning in different countries ceased to be an opportunity for young people. Several local cooperations could not be realised, and short films and culinary activities in villages had to be suspended. Besides exercises, press releases had to be made indoors instead of public spaces. Especially during the first wave of the pandemic, where it was obligatory to work remotely, and employees could not enter the offices, several organisations had difficulties in reaching the necessary data and experienced disruptions in many activities. Venues of some events had to be changed: a memory walk which would go through the basins affected by hydroelectric power plants (shortly referred to as HES in Turkish) in the Black Sea region had to be relocated to Kanallıstanbul in Istanbul, where the headquarters of the association is located. In a project aiming to increase the cultural interaction between local and refugee beneficiaries, both the number of activities that require physical participation as well as the number of participants were reduced so that the project could be accomplished.

For organisations working directly in the field, reaching their target groups has become more difficult. Some organisations have insisted on face-to-face indoor events instead of going online: they organised fewer events and reached their target groups less. Since going out to the field would have increased the risk of disease, field visits, which constitute the backbone of some organisations' activities, had to be cancelled. The ones most adversely affected by this situation were the activities such as family visits, visits to prisons and refugee camps, research plans for Syrian immigrants, visits to tents of seasonal agricultural workers or neighbourhood-based field studies that could not be moved to online and had to be carried out face-to-face to comply with the needs of the target groups. Organisations whose target groups were socio-economically more affected by the pandemic had to maintain fieldwork and direct support. (See *Vulnerable Groups in the Pandemic > Target Groups and Poverty*) It was not possible to visit the refugee families

who immigrated to Istanbul but communication with them was kept alive via phone calls, especially with those who had language problems. Some projects were not able to meet the required fieldwork conditions and had to be cancelled due to the pandemic. A project that focuses on traumas and coping methods of children and caregivers in conflict areas is such an example. Some networks also had to terminate their work for a certain time during the pandemic. Some of the organisations that could not come into direct contact with their target groups focused on monitoring rights violations and developing their advocacy activities instead of conducting fieldwork and research. (See *Being Targeted and Surviving > Not Leaving the Field*)

Event cancellations, the incapability to organise public events or the decrease in the number of participations in events in compliance with social distancing rules made it significantly harder for organisations to acquire members and volunteers and meet potential volunteers. Several organisations stated that they used to receive more member and volunteer applications during activities that were held in person. Due to the pandemic, the use of association venues for gatherings has also decreased markedly. Engagement in local processes or local collaborations has stopped or was blocked. During the period when the courthouses were closed, organisations' legal activities were interrupted. Contact visits were restricted; hearings, case observation and monitoring, lawyer visits to the ones in custody and prison visits were impossible. Judicial applications and files were dragged on for a long time. Organisations faced several problems concerning the follow-up of cases related to refugee accidents: not being admitted to the courthouse or not being able to follow topics that were transferred to another city due to travel restrictions. In some court cases where litigation was mandatory, the crowded settings posed a health risk for the association's employees. Legal advice had to remain very restricted.

## **Financial Sources and Support**

Insufficient financial sources used to be one of the primary problems of rights based civil society organisations operating in Turkey. In a setting with very few local and national grants and very limited access to public funds for rights-based organisations, international funds and donations are of significant importance. However, access to these resources has been becoming more and more difficult recently due to legal restrictions and the targeting of international funds. In an environment where the culture of individual giving is rudimentary and trust in civil society organisations is already very little, the restriction imposed on fundraising activities with the Law No. 7262 has also precluded organisations from organising fundraising campaigns. (See *Freedom of Association and Legal Amendments > Donations and Memberships*). Furthermore, some independent foreign funding sources are portrayed as "suspicious" and targeted in the press, while rights-based organisations that receive funding from these are being criminalised. Some of the foreign funds preferred to withdraw in this repressive atmosphere and not to support rights-based activities in Turkey. Some new sources, on the other hand, generated new grant programmes precisely because of this repressive atmosphere.

The outbreak of the pandemic on top of the repression on the civil society has created new target groups and fields of work, leading to a change in the priorities of the funds accordingly. As urgent global and intersectional issues such as the pandemic and the climate crisis are prioritised by more grant programmes, other rights-based issues such as peace and conflict resolution have lagged behind in finding support, while their already imperfect opportunities for fundraising have contracted further. A grant giving institution rejected a project, which it had agreed to support in principle before the pandemic started, on the grounds that its priorities changed. Another funding institution that an LGBTI+ rights organisation contacted and that was previously willing to support their project just before the pandemic, withdrew its support, with a decision to support health workers during the pandemic instead. In addition to the fact that some funding institutions changed their priorities due to the pandemic, it was also stated that support for activities in certain areas such as peace, conflict resolution and minorities decreased markedly after 2015. There is now less support for advocacy work, in which accomplishing results has become more difficult in an atmosphere of political pressure.

During the pandemic, organisations had difficulties collecting membership fees from members who were not able to come to the association. It has been very tough for organisations to manage their existing resources and generate new income throughout the last two years. Funding organisations have not been able to keep up with the pandemic and organisations have not been able to adapt swiftly to changing priorities and approaches of grants. Almost all organisations had to make changes in their ongoing projects. Events that have been cancelled or moved online rendered restructuring of the projects and changes in the budgets necessary. The pandemic altered the needs of human resources at organisations and maintaining the existing human resources became harder. Upon experiencing the first year of the pandemic, most organisations included items such as technical equipment and computer programs instead of travel and workshop expenditures in planning new project budgets. Nevertheless, there were organisations that reported that it was difficult to get digital tools funded, and even if they would be able to provide those tools for their own organisation, it was still impossible to provide Internet support for some of their target groups and beneficiaries. On the other hand, institutions working with immigrants and other vulnerable groups felt helpless when they were faced with the rising expectation of support for financial or basic needs parallel to increasing poverty. For example, an organisation trying to meet the basic needs of sex workers who became unemployed because of the pandemic has experienced difficulties in finding support beyond its field of work. Eventually, it cooperated with the municipality and managed to deliver aid parcels to these people. Another organisation has given support to migrant women who could not meet their basic needs during the pandemic, by arranging food and hygiene parcels in cooperation with various public institutions. (See *Vulnerable Groups in the Pandemic > Target Groups and Poverty*)

As a result of decreased project funding or changing priorities, the need for core funding or institutional funds –to replace project-based support– has increased. Since the key

resource in the civic space is human resources, the scarcity of institutional funds that are allocated for supporting primarily the human resources of organisations is seen as an important problem. More flexible resources such as membership fees and donations have become more critical for organisations. In order to ensure sustainability, the diversification of resources has become essential. Several organisations have tried to search for and experiment with new fundraising methods. Some organisations with difficulties in generating financial resources and obtaining support, consider changing to service-based activities instead of doing advocacy, to be able to overcome these difficulties in the upcoming period. Yet, most organisations consider maintaining their activities and diversifying their fundraising as far as possible. An organisation working in the field of children's rights has developed tools such as online certificates and virtual cards to obtain one-time individual support. Another organisation decided to increase individual support by offering the possibility of e-journal subscription. Some headed for crowdfunding or participated in marathons to collect donations as far as they could obtain the required permission to do so. They made applications to grant schemes or funding institutions. Almost all the organisations that have participated in the Haklara Destek Programme prepared at least two-year financial plans while some of them also developed strategic plans for fundraising. (See *Being Targeted and Surviving > Turning Inwards*)

## Organisational Changes

When in early 2020 the pandemic suddenly locked everybody down in their houses, this also directly affected teams and organisational processes of civil society organisations. Face-to-face meetings were cancelled. Since it was not possible to switch to online systems yet, board meetings and general assemblies, which constitute an essential part of the administrative processes of associations, also had to be cancelled or postponed for a long time resulting in interruptions in the decision-making processes. That the state bureaucracy is still based on original signed paperwork was another factor that slowed down many administrative procedures during the pandemic. Since the board meetings could not be held, disruptions occurred in the organisational functioning. They had to change administrations that either got tired or lost their motivation. General assemblies could not be saved either. There were cases where people considered themselves risky for the organisation and intended to withdraw from the management but could not leave for a long time. In other cases, organisations that needed to change their bylaws for different reasons had to wait. Although employees could not go to their offices for a long time, different working combinations of infrequent and alternate ways of working at home, in the office or online were implemented as far as the pandemic measures did allow.

The employees of associations have experienced both the positive aspects and the challenges caused by the replacement of office work with working from home for a long period in the beginning of the pandemic. For many organisations the face-to-face encounter in the work environment was a chance that precipitated the reflex for noticing,

identifying and solving problems. In teams that had to work far from each other over a long time, the workload increased while their fast-decision-making processes and problem-solving skills got affected. While some employees stated that working from home made them lazy, some evaluated it positively in terms of productivity. Employees fashioned their own practical solutions depending on the conditions at home. They tried to find their own balance by working from home during the weekend curfews and going outside in the weekdays for errands. But it was not possible to have the same working standard in every domestic environment. Since the schools were closed too, those whose children stayed at home had great difficulty in working. With the increasing frequency of online activities over time, the concept of working hours disappeared. (See *Adaptation to Online Systems > Adjustment Problems*) In addition to those who could adjust to a working programme without concrete shifts, there were many employees who stated that they couldn't plan their own time, that they felt obliged to work also in their private time as "any time, any spot was perceived as an office" and that they had an experience in which the boundaries of work became blurred. Those who were exposed to extreme digital communication and had to spend hours in front of the computer have experienced negative side effects. It was mentioned that the issue of "the well-being of employees" which actually should have been discussed in this situation, is often seen as a "luxury" in civil society and that this may make it hard for the teams to mention the difficulties they were facing.

The most direct effect of the pandemic on the organisational functioning was its influence on the physical and psychological state of the human resources. In a significant portion of the organisations, employees got infected with the coronavirus, they had to self-quarantine as contact persons, or their acquaintances passed away due to the illness. For many of the organisations, this already difficult period became even harder when employees got infected or had to stay in quarantine. Shifting project schedules, numerous cancellations and the need for rescheduling placed an additional burden on the employees. Some expressed the increase in miscommunication and tension within their institutions during this period. The loss of members and volunteers has also put an extra burden on employees. (See *Freedom of Association and Legal Amendments > Donations and Memberships*) On the other hand, there were also organisations receiving more volunteer and trainee applications in certain fields of work. Some of the organisations have prepared a "volunteering strategy" and initiated structured volunteer programmes. They attributed this increase to a growing wish to be a part of the movement of change based on the accumulating anxiety induced by the pandemic and the course of events threatening the future of the planet. Though out of their institutions, the difficulties their partners were experiencing during the pandemic have also affected the work of the organisations directly. For example, organisations that frequently collaborate with artists in their activities observed the severe effects of the pandemic on most of them.

## SECTION SIX

# VULNERABLE GROUPS IN THE PANDEMIC



The COVID-19 pandemic has got hold of the world for the last two years. However, as it is the case with every crisis, the pandemic has not affected everyone equally. Numerous groups that were already “vulnerable” have been affected to varying degrees from the pandemic depending on where they were living or their culture, their social and economic backgrounds and how their countries approached the pandemic politically. Especially local civil society organisations that have direct contact with vulnerable groups have been witness to this influence. Who are vulnerable groups; the people who become even more fragile with every crisis? They are foremost children and youth under protection, women and LGBTI+s who are subject to violence, people with disabilities who experience problems of access in countless areas of life, minorities who are being targeted, immigrants and refugees who are exposed to hate speech, detainees and convicts whose living conditions deteriorate under oppression and the poor who have become even more impoverished during the pandemic. A crisis such as the pandemic that has a direct influence on all parts of life, has affected the situation of these groups more adversely than anyone else. Furthermore, one can also mention new vulnerable groups that are created by the pandemic and the repressing atmosphere: healthcare workers who were targeted in the pandemic, employees who had to work during the pandemic and could not obtain their rights, academics, journalists, artists and citizens whose freedom of expression was repressed... The particular increase in the number of people who were oppressed and punished based on their social media posts reveals a further narrowing in freedom of expression for pandemic-related issues.

## Target Groups and Poverty

How the COVID-19 pandemic affected the vulnerable groups in Turkey has varied across cities depending on the public infrastructure, social support systems and the organisational state of the civil society. Yet, it is still possible to observe some common traits in the experiences of civil society organisations that work with vulnerable groups. Restrictions in fieldwork during the pandemic has reduced organisations’ access to all target groups, particularly to those who became even more vulnerable. As a result of the effects of the pandemic and increasing poverty, civil society organisations experienced difficulties in accessing their target groups and catching up with their needs. (See *The Effects of the Pandemic on Civil Society Organisations > Disruptions in Activities and Fieldwork*) A small number of organisations that could maintain their fieldwork albeit the pandemic restrictions were forced to decrease the number of people to be reached within the target group. For most of the groups with no possibilities to meet face-to-face, it was also impossible to shift to online systems. It was first necessary to provide these groups with certain tools, such as Internet connection and tablets, in order to enable their communication and access the target groups. At a time when centres receiving applications and providing direct support were closed, organisations tried to remain accessible by phone and sustain the support.

The needs of vulnerable groups have also changed; new, urgent demands emerged. Even though their field of work was not humanitarian aid, organisations began to receive requests for food support from their target groups. Numerous people, who can be described as vulnerable, asked for help in kind or in cash. Experiencing difficulties in providing basic food and hygiene materials, organisations nevertheless tried to meet the most vital needs of vulnerable groups through local cooperation. Although not focusing on poverty, eventually all organisations that worked with vulnerable groups had to expand their aid-based activities within own capacities. (See *The Effects of the Pandemic on Civil Society Organisations > Financial Sources and Support*) An organisation that is active in the field of peace and human rights explained the change that occurred in their communication with their target groups in the last year as following: “In addition to our rights-based activities, we had to deliver humanitarian aid. Previously, we used to support families in their public matters, with the pandemic we also had to deliver aid in cash, food and clothing. This situation poses a risk of changing our relationship with our target group, but thanks to the well-established previous connections no such change occurred.”

It was the poor –more than anyone else– who were directly affected by health policies in the pandemic. Accumulation of economic difficulties gave rise to an increase in workload and violence among vulnerable groups. Disadvantaged groups have experienced challenges in accessing education. Countless children, who gradually got impoverished, fell behind in education. Parallel to increasing poverty, the need for financial support moved to the top of the agenda of women, effecting also the demands received by the women’s organisations. The increase in these demands was partly related to the substantial rise of poverty among housecleaning workers. Many women’s organisations had difficulties in meeting the hygiene and health needs of their target groups. The most pervasive effects of the pandemic in this area probably were the increase in poverty, the deep poverty becoming more evident and a boost in the impact of prevailing conflicts especially in impoverished families. This is why organisations working with vulnerable groups continued their intensive online efforts to work with experts and share information in order to draw attention to the emerging deep poverty and rising inequality.

## **The Situation of Vulnerable Groups in the Pandemic**

8 women’s and 4 LGBTI+ organisations that have participated in the Haklara Destek Programme are working on combatting violence and provide support services at different levels. The data and reports of all organisations point to the fact that domestic violence has steadily increased during the pandemic with adverse effects on women. Those exposed to violence or were under the threat of violence could not leave their houses due to the lockdowns or other pandemic measures. They also experienced difficulties in reaching out to shelters and legal or psychological support. Furthermore, it is stated that in addition to violence applications, the number of economic support

demands was ample due to rising poverty. While women and LGBTI+ have experienced domestic violence when locked down at their homes, they were exposed to hate speech and targeting outside on the streets. (See *LGBTI+ and Women's Rights > Violence, Impunity and Advocacy*)

Domestic care duties multiplied with the pandemic became a great challenge for women, resulting in an increase in the tendency for “suicides committed by many women stripped of the opportunities to go out and breath”. Suicide figures have increased. The loss of function of shelters also increased the distance between victims of violence and support mechanisms. When the institutions accepting applications were closed, the expanding scale of needs and applications was not reflected correctly in reports. The difficulties that organisations working on violence have experienced in this period, particularly in conducting face-to-face interviews and fieldwork, resulted in not being able to answer the support requests of their target groups adequately and in operating beyond their capacities. In order to follow up violence cases, organisations had to stay in constant touch with the local headman, police and the gendarmerie. On the other hand, for instance the conditions of ill women in prisons deteriorated even more, and there were cases when they couldn't receive treatment. Since visits to prisoners were restricted in the pandemic, organisations' support to these people also became difficult. Due to the fact that social services were closed during the pandemic, there was an increase in the number of people who contacted civil society organisations by phone. The example mentioned by a women's organisation employee is striking: “For example, a woman who had just given birth had to stay closed at home for 6 months. She has called and told that she had no milk to breastfeed and had no access to formula.” With the pandemic, disruptions occurred in the communication with target groups that were receiving psychological support or were in group therapies. The closure of schools for a long time expanded the burden at home and affected many women negatively. Due to this increase in the number of applicants, organisations with support centres had to reopen their offices rapidly when the measures were relatively loosened in the third month of the pandemic.

Organisations working in the field of LGBTI+ rights also indicated that their target groups were adversely affected by the pandemic. There were serious disruptions in the body adaptation processes of LGBTI+ individuals who were forced to return to their homes during the lockdown and had only restricted access to safe spaces. As a result of the closure of brothels and the concomitant increase in the basic needs of sex workers, foremost being shelter and work, these people slipped to unsafe spaces. It was observed that there was an increase in the violations of their rights. During the pandemic, a dramatic increase was observed in the demands for consultancy services offered by organisations. This example is illustrative: while the hotline of an Istanbul based LGBTI+ organisation received 1 082 applications in 2019, in 2020 the same organisation received 2 085 applications –almost the double of the previous year. Other LGBTI+ associations

also stated that during the pandemic they received the highest number of applications in terms of rights violations compared to previous years. An LGBTI+ organisation established an LGBTI+ lifeline in this period by “starting a psychological counselling department for the first time in the association and employing a psychologist”. Applicants could then receive support via video calls, phone calls and e-mail. Another LGBTI+ organisation delivered legal support to its applicants by employing a lawyer in the association within the scope of its access to justice programme. An LGBTI+ organisation has organised an online counselling hotline training for volunteers; in this way, it not only increased the number of volunteers but also maintained its support for the applicants from home. A network of voluntary psychologists and lawyers also provided support by phone and accompanied women at the police station.

The impoverishment, which intensified through the lockdowns and restrictions during the pandemic, has also affected some of the children and young people drastically. The switch to online education has been particularly difficult for children in poor families who had no Internet access and lacked technical infrastructure at home. (See *Adaptation to Online Systems > Adjustment Problems*) Some of the school age children became estranged to education due to illiterate caregivers, lack of access to technological tools or lack of information. Learning became increasingly difficult in shared rooms and small spaces at home. In this period, some children and young people had to drop out of school and start working. Young people were directly affected by the pandemic: universities were closed, dormitories were evacuated and there was a long curfew for those under the age of 18. During the pandemic, the number of children working on the streets has risen. It became harder to reach children who were subject to violence. Prior to the pandemic, teachers generally notified organisations about children who are exposed to violence. As the ties with teachers were dissolved during the pandemic, notifications also declined. An association that directly supports groups at risk established a support line against child abuse in this period. During times of high COVID-19 cases, the disease directly affected children and their families in certain areas. An organisation that has been dealing with child traumas in conflict zones has stated that the pandemic curfews have reactivated the troubles of children caused by the conflict and state of emergency in Sur. At the point where face-to-face education stopped, the education of children with disabilities was particularly affected. Certain children’s rights organisations have assisted vulnerable children in filling the gap by offering education and study support –by contacting children and parents by phone– whenever necessary.

Recently, the increasing population of migrants and refugees in Turkey can be defined as a gradually growing vulnerable group. The still ongoing civil war in Syria has caused the arrival of millions of immigrants in Turkey. Violations of their rights, oppression and attacks, racist attitudes created by polarisation, hate speech and the policies of impunity have made immigrants and refugees vulnerable. It should not be forgotten that these groups lack the necessary means of raising voice, face economic difficulties and

are exposed to the threat of deportation. Many immigrants and refugees struggling to survive under these conditions in Turkey were also affected negatively by the pandemic. Civil society organisations working with immigrants underlined the rise in the number of requests for vital needs received from their target groups. Migrants and refugees became even more vulnerable during the pandemic as a result of the combination of diverse factors such as poverty, exclusion and being targeted, insufficient language skills and problems of integration. The language barrier and the limited health literacy made it hard for immigrants to access health services in particular. For organisations that work with migrants in the field, it became difficult to reach the target groups and collect reliable data. Organisations told about the challenges and rights violations that some of their applicants have experienced during and after “trying to cross illegally to Greece, due to the economic crisis caused by the pandemic and the pressures of the state”.

The pandemic has also directly affected detainees and convicts in the prisons in Turkey. There were disruptions in the communication with the prisons and in the prison visits. For a long time, civil society organisations that work with prisoners were not able to reach their target groups and pursue their rights. Due to the pandemic restrictions, items coming from outside the prisons were not let in; the clothes bank that supports LGBTI+ detainees could not function properly. Access to health services has become more difficult for those who had chronic illnesses or got ill in prison. Prolonged quarantine periods in the quarantine wards as well as the ban on visits and phone calls have cut off the communication with detainees. There were delays and disruptions in the letters sent to the prisons; publications were not taken in. When the mail correspondence was interrupted, organisations working in this field tried to keep the communication with the inmates alive as much as possible via the hotline.

Civil society organisations working with vulnerable groups not only provided direct support to their target groups, but they also organised events and published reports to monitor and document the situation of vulnerable groups. Some of these reports and their links are included in Section III (Covid Evaluation Reports) of Annex 2: List of Other Major Reports Published on the Shrinking Civic Space and the Pandemic.

## **The Pandemic and New Vulnerabilities**

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the target groups of civil society organisations have expanded. Not only has the number of those whose situation became more difficult in the existing vulnerable groups increased but also some new target groups that were previously not considered as such have emerged. Healthcare workers are the central group in that sense. All health workers including physicians working under challenging conditions from the very beginning of the pandemic have been targeted, medical chambers have been investigated on the grounds of sharing information and criticising the government –ending up in detentions. Workers have also experienced brutal situations

during the pandemic. An organisation that is active in the field of labour rights, where face-to-face work is important, stated that its work is affected by both the restrictions that come with the pandemic and by the risk of disease. A study that was carried out about textile workers in this period was expanded so that healthy working conditions could be investigated in a field study, the pandemic being the focus. Organisations have stated that the workers are more insecure now, and for this reason, that many of them do not even wish to participate in the activities carried out by civil society organisations. In the same period, the salaries of some workers working in the textile sector were not paid; in factories, cases of forced labour were observed. The income of informal workers decreased and became irregular. (See *Being Targeted and Surviving > Turning Inwards*) Female workers had to leave their jobs due to domestic care responsibilities. Young people who could not continue their education joined the labour force. Organisations that tried to draw attention to the rights violations in this field by conducting research and preparing reports on the pandemic and labour rights, reported on an online platform about the workers' demonstrations in the context of occupational disease.<sup>25</sup> In the studies concerning occupational diseases, the working conditions of health workers were brought to the fore. Trying to bring up the right to practise a profession and conditions of working, an association started a campaign at the beginning of the pandemic, suggesting that COVID-19 should be acknowledged as an occupational disease for all employees. Later, it narrowed down the scope to focus only on healthcare workers.

The effects of the health policies during the pandemic varied depending on geographical differences. Organisations in Kurdish populated cities, which were already under pressure, expressed that they were affected by the restrictions more severely. In addition, due to the limitations in the field, some researchers on the countryside had to shift to new target groups in the city. For instance, a human rights organisation that makes typically field visits to border villages to draw attention to home raids and rights violations, shifted the locus of research to the city when the pandemic started, to raise awareness among institutions and individuals against rights violations in the urban context. Civil society organisations collaborating with artists mentioned that some of the artists, who mostly had to work without social security, had a very tough time due to the inability to organise cultural and artistic events for an extended period. It was also observed that restrictions on freedom of expression increased with the pandemic. Especially the restrictions on the freedom of expression on social media can be identified as a new vulnerability created in this period. Similar to what has happened with the healthcare workers and researchers, those spaces in which journalists and academics expressed divergent opinions about the pandemic and the pressure were repressed. During this period, a Diyarbakır based organisation carried out a study to support young academicians whose restricted spheres of expression.

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25 <https://www.meslekstalisti.org/>

SECTION SEVEN

**ADAPTATION**  
**TO ONLINE**  
**SYSTEMS**

With the COVID-19 pandemic, a number of changes occurred in the fieldwork, research, advocacy and visibility activities of civil society organisations. At times when meeting physically was impossible, most of the activities were adjusted to online. (See *The Effects of the Pandemic on Civil Society Organisations > Disruptions in Activities and Fieldwork*). As for everyone else, it was also an important outcome for the civil society organisations to see that many activities that would have been cancelled could also be carried out online. They have especially recognised the advantages of opening local events to new audiences from different and distant cities in a short time. On the other hand, as time passed, challenges of the digital field have also emerged. In addition to the fact that most of the organisations were not technically prepared for this sudden change and have experienced compatibility problems, the access issues of certain target groups were an important part of the process too. Although organisations require support for adapting to online systems, many of them managed to maintain their activities online during the period when the pandemic was in full force.

## **New Tools, New Approaches**

Numerous online programs that were previously unknown or not much used before the pandemic have rapidly become part of our lives. Seminars, workshops, film screenings, and other similar meetings typically held at the venues of the associations have turned into online webinar formats. Programs such as Zoom, Google Meet, Skype, Stream Yard and teleconferences came into the lives of the associations and “did not leave ever”. Many organisations opened institutional Zoom accounts and continue to organise their regular activities here. Furthermore, an organisation that arranged a “psycho-social support workshop via teleconference” during the quarantine period developed a new model using the multi-call method of teleconferencing, which was not much used despite being easily accessible by everybody. This method set an example for other civil society organisations that work with vulnerable groups, particularly those with no access to the Internet. Another organisation that is working with children preferred the teleconference method for storytelling. It was possible to have a collective storytelling session by “one person connecting five children” in the teleconference. It was indicated that despite the difficulties, a certain level of interaction was achieved with those children who were locked in their homes when meeting face-to-face was not possible. Interviews with families or hotline services that could not be transferred to the digital realm, were maintained via phone calls. When the offices were closed during the first months of the pandemic, employees working from home ran the hotline through their personal mobile phones. In this period, administrative matters and physical mails that needed to be sent to target groups became less frequent. Existing mail was sent only once a week.

Some organisations have produced podcasts and shared them regularly. Their YouTube channels and social media accounts have become much more active. Simultaneous live



broadcasts were made on Facebook and YouTube. WhatsApp and Telegram have become mass communication channels. Meetings with members were carried out on e-mail groups and via WhatsApp. New WhatsApp groups were formed for maintaining the communication between organisations working in the same field. Some organisations have used online document sharing tools such as Padlet and Miro. Networks were established to provide mobile support while using all online methods.

After they have begun to host meetings and activities online, the visibility of many organisations in the digital space has also changed. Some organisations that didn't update or even have websites before the pandemic started to deal with building and updating websites, making them appropriate for target groups, using social media actively, creating a corporate identity and visibility policy, and acquiring online tools. For example, a women's organisation, which has not had a website for 15 years, has built one in this period. Another organisation opened Twitter and YouTube accounts and began to employ a social media manager. Social media was used much more efficiently. Many organisations have increased their visibility on Twitter and Instagram while using Facebook for promoting their events. They have updated the existing websites, added different language options and access for disabled people and improved the infrastructures. In the face of increasing applications, some organisations need to build digital data management systems. (See *Being Targeted and Surviving > Turning Inwards*)

An LGBTI+ organisation has maintained its consultancy services online and built a lifeline. In this way, it was possible to engage in the intervention to crises and cases of suicide attempts, particularly among trans individuals. Print publications were partially digitalised, some organisations started to publish e-journals. There are numerous examples of activities carried out by the participants through digital tools during the pandemic: (See *Being Targeted and Surviving > Not Leaving the Field*)

- A human rights organisation has organised an online film screening and public talk to draw attention to the situation in the prisons during the pandemic.
- An organisation working on forced migration has prepared cartoon films in different Kurdish dialects and used its YouTube channel actively.
- An organisation working in the field of peace has modified its seminar series and academic activities to organise an online academy. Another organisation has published the content that it produced about the shrinking civic space as a podcast series on the grounds that this is a less controllable medium.
- An organisation, which is active in the field of minorities and language rights, has organised online language courses. A publishing organisation has put up a series of webinars in Turkish and Kurdish as part of its ongoing archive project.
- In the media field, there were many online broadcasts that have widely been shared.

- An organisation, active in the areas of refugees and culture, has produced a video series about migrant women labour during the pandemic.
- An organisation working on youth rights has organised an online exhibition with young artists. Another youth organisation has completely transferred its education module to an online format and added a session on promoting psychological health during the pandemic.
- The children's rights academy was organised online. A children's rights organisation has provided psychosocial support for children via teleconference during the quarantine period. Another organisation has told children fairy tales on the phone.
- An organisation working in the field of women's rights developed a digital module focusing on children's rights through games and disseminated it on social media. Another women's solidarity organisation prepared donation certificates with various messages including March 8 and disseminated them as an online fundraising method.
- An organisation that is working in the LGBTI+ field has employed a social media expert and increased its visibility by getting trainings on digital communication and advocacy on social media. Another organisation expanded its network of volunteers for the support hotline and enabled them to support their target groups from home.
- An organisation working on disability rights has shared good practices on autism and disability from Turkey and the world as part of an online program.
- In a podcast series produced about the right to the city, ecological manifestos for the post-pandemic era were discussed.
- An organisation that carries out academic studies in Diyarbakır has held online readings and workshops on masculinity with participants from several cities.

## Access and Other Opportunities

Except for those who work one-on-one with vulnerable groups, a vast majority of the organisations that have participated in the Haklara Destek Programme have managed to transfer their activities to online platforms. By this means, the small numbers of followers of the organisations have expanded beyond their locality, and the number of people participating in the activities has grown. Thanks to this unintended positive side effect, associations increased their visibility and thus their cooperation opportunities, target groups and the possibility of meeting potential members. Some organisations said that their target groups have changed over time. For example, while the participation figures in festivals and online trainings organised by an association was decreasing at the local level, it has increased at the national level. Another human rights organisation stated that they have converted "from a local association to a national association". Costs of transportation and accommodation for seminars, workshops and trainings were reduced in the project

budgets. At the same time, it became possible to organise more online trainings with participants from different cities and countries. After building their infrastructure and securing the functioning of their online systems, some organisations have increased the number of activities they conduct online and have reached a larger audience than ever before. In addition to such events, services such as legal and psychological counselling could also be provided online. Certain commemoration events and demonstrations have also moved to the digital space: “The Saturday Mothers demonstrations have been carried out online for a long time, which has enabled an increase in the reach of the action.” The lawsuit against trans sex workers, which an LGBTI+ organisation followed, has been turned into a social media campaign and gained extreme visibility. The video-documentary series produced in this framework was viewed 260 000 times. Online campaigns also enabled organisations to convey information to countless women by sharing the questions and answers based on their experience in the support centres with women who were subject to violence. Organisations that used social media actively in the pandemic carried out productive work, especially during earthquakes and fires, when they shared their expertise and experience in disaster management and crisis response through live broadcasts. Disaster management has become an essential agenda item for the organisations. Instead of the cancelled fieldwork, organisations have held online public talks focusing on how disadvantaged groups have been affected by the pandemic and reached broad audiences. (See *The Places We Meet > New Digital Spaces*).

New tools and new target groups have also paved the way for new contents. As the possibilities of the digital space were explored, organisations have developed new activities with similar contents but different methods and approaches. They have not only adapted face-to-face activities to online formats but also produced new digital contents. For example, a women’s rights organisation started to produce content about violence in digital dating. An organisation that is defending the rights of disabled people started online broadcasting for the general public and shared good practices from the field of disability. It was also observed that online participation opportunities have strengthened certain target groups: “Families of disabled persons are quite protective and generally concerned about leaving their children outside. There were many disabled participants who attended online meetings and were empowered by these. They were inspired. They said, ‘I can do it too’”. When the whole world was isolated at home during the pandemic, there was an increase in the need to get together and organisations have pushed the possibilities provided by online spaces. In the early stages of the pandemic, an organisation working in the field of LGBTI+ rights carried out activities with its target group through live broadcasting on a daily basis. It has established ties with its audience, even online, and managed to sustain the supportive environment created by togetherness.

In the process of adapting to online systems, organisations have renewed their technical infrastructure or improved its capacity. Employees “have improved themselves in

technology” increasing technology literacy. They had the opportunity to use and follow different online tools and social media more effectively. Access to online information has also expanded with regard to the improvement of teams and fields of work of civil society organisations. An organisation working in the field of human rights stated that they organise institutional trainings more frequently via Zoom, which has generated qualitative changes in their work. (See *Being Targeted and Surviving > Turning Inwards*) Once the technical infrastructure was set, it also became timesaving to carry out some activities online, compared to face-to-face activities. Moreover, considering the growing significance of digital advocacy in the world, it can be argued that tending more to online may also be an important tool for advocacy, besides having advantages for target groups and visibility. Most of the civil society organisations that have participated in the Haklara Destek Programme stated that, in addition to holding face-to-face meetings, they would continue to use digital platforms even after the pandemic is over. Based on the various new opportunities that were mentioned above, many organisations stated that digitalisation suited them, yet that they also experience challenges and problems of adjustment.

## Adjustment Problems

Half of the civil society organisations did not possess the technological infrastructure that started to be used with the pandemic. Some organisations had little but sufficient technical infrastructure to adjust their activities to online platforms with the collaboration of their employees and supporters. Still, one of the most repeatedly mentioned difficulties by the organisations was the adaption to online systems. It could be observed that organisations’ adaptation to online systems was not only related to factors such as city, region, the capacity of human resources and member profiles; but also, existing technical infrastructure and equipment and the fields of work and target groups have affected the adaption process differently. Not every organisation was able to perform the same in this process. Some organisations have stated that prior to the pandemic their associations were threatened by closure or the appointment of trustees as part of the increasing pressure on the civic space, therefore, they did not invest in technical infrastructure or the purchase of properties. (See *Mechanisms of Repression in the Civic Space > Permits and Cooperation with Public Bodies*) It was observed that organisations that had already completed their institutionalisation process, working with professionals and were active on a national and international level were much more inclined to adjust to online working and diversify online activities. In organisations that receive direct applications, work at the regional or local level, and in which volunteering is the dominant form; the transition to social media and online platforms is somewhat limited. In such organisations, institutional communication was not fully developed; their digital channels did not exist or were not used actively. Even though these organisations

required support for using and adapting new digital tools after meeting their technical needs, many organisations were able to continue their activities by adjusting them for online platforms.

“Young” organisations are more inclined to work online and diversify the approaches in this field. In organisations that “adhered the traditional” the transition to online was either not preferred or was more complex and took time. Some organisations have obtained the programs such as Zoom, yet they insisted on not using online programs or were not able to carry out their activities online. These organisations could not be active during the pandemic. Being accustomed to and insisting on face-to-face working format has been observed as an internal resistance mechanism that hindered the transition to online working. It was much easier for most of the LGBTI+ organisations to make a transition to online systems, use digital tools and adjust to alternative advocacy practices by being active on social media when compared to other organisations. This can be justified based on their experiences gained through the pre-pandemic restrictions and crises in the field: “Following the indefinite-unlimited ban on LGBTI+ activities which was first imposed by the Ankara Governorship in 2017 and expanded to other cities afterwards, organisations had started to use online platforms actively. For example, one organisation has continued to actively use the YouTube channel, which it opened in that period, also during the pandemic”.

Some organisations have difficulties adjusting to online systems and were impossible to work via online platforms due to the nature of their field of work and their target groups. These organisations have taken risks by carrying out activities such as training, fieldwork and counselling face-to-face during periods of limited opening after the lockdowns. For example, it was difficult for organisations that work on violence against women to provide online support to the applicants or conduct in-depth interviews. The communication with women subjected to violence was interrupted. When the schools were closed during the pandemic, women who stayed at home with kids had no access since children used the computers for online education. Some organisations that work in this field developed mixed methods, such as providing face-to-face psychological counselling one day a week, giving support only by phone calls or using online tools for psychological support. On the other hand, in conflict resolution or peace, issues are not always easy for the parties to talk and discuss; there is social trauma in the background. Those kinds of activities require gathering in person and spending extended time next to each other. Some organisations that work in these fields had difficulties transitioning online. They needed new methods to work on complex issues in online activities. When fieldwork was disrupted, online tools were complementary. However, due to the fact that computer literacy was limited and being interviewed with online tools was not welcomed due to security concerns in many regions, disruptions occurred in many field studies. (See *The Places We Meet > New Digital Spaces*)

Online work made logistical shortcomings evident, and new budget needs have emerged. Technical infrastructure, computer and Internet deficiencies of employees and members have created problems in the adaptation process. Associations could meet these needs only to a limited extent. Some organisations could not participate in the online meetings of the networks due to technical insufficiencies. Moreover, the lack of technical infrastructure among the target groups made it impossible to work online in some areas. Particularly for organisations that work with vulnerable groups, this imposed working face-to-face more clearly. One of the most critical problems during the lockdowns was the children's access to online education. It was observed that many children who couldn't adapt to this period left school eventually. Some civil society organisations managed to find supporters and enabled children without tablets to continue their education. On the other hand, since digital tools comprise a huge budget item, it is quite challenging to get it funded to serve the whole target group or provide Internet access for the target group. Due to this fact, many organisations that operate at the local level could not sustain their activities during the pandemic despite transferring online since they could not access their target groups. Furthermore, some activities that were run particularly for children were not suitable for changing to online. For instance, some organisations have mentioned the challenges of including children in online exercise sessions because their families mocked them. Certain specific activities that were run for children via teleconferencing have not been sustainable because children could not stay at home and in front of the computer when the lockdown was lifted. Due to the fact that there was no Internet access in villages, many vulnerable groups in rural areas stood alone; it was not possible to access them via online activities. Hence, numerous people who had no digital infrastructure or could not adjust were not able to benefit from online programs offered by civil society organisations. (See *Vulnerable Groups in the Pandemic > The Situation of Vulnerable Groups in the Pandemic*)

Working online and from home has imposed a work format expanding and extending beyond regular working hours. This in turn has caused the employees to be accessible 7-24, to work constantly and to get exhausted. With the rising number of applicants during the pandemic, the burden on the employees has increased even more. Employees who figured they were attending a number of online meetings over the day and following activities in the evening came up with suggestions like "putting time limits for meetings to reduce digital exhaustion or developing meeting models with definite moderation". The increase in WhatsApp correspondence and the use of phone groups as email groups were also among the mentioned problems. The communication within teams was also run online during the pandemic. Some organisations stated that adjustment to this situation occurred not in the same way for everyone. An employee described the intra-organisation communication during the pandemic as following: "Our interaction on Zoom was not the same as in the office and this created tension from time to time. This year, we have learnt how to communicate on Zoom, but last year was tough." (See *The Effects of the Pandemic on Civil Society Organisations > Organisational Changes*)

## SECTION EIGHT

# THE PLACES WE MEET: STREETS, DIGITAL SPACES, NETWORKS

Supervening on the already shrinking democratic space in the recent years in Turkey, the COVID-19 pandemic has directly affected the way how CSOs come together and organise –as in all other areas of life. Specific spaces, where assembly and organising has been possible for rights defenders for decades, have become narrower while the pandemic has opened up new digital spaces. Even though online possibilities appear as a chance when streets are not an option anymore, the use of digital spaces needs further elaboration based on issues of inclusiveness and access, fragility and being directly open to potential control mechanisms. As it was seen in the experiences of CSOs in previous chapters, the locus of meeting also affects the advocacy, methodology and content of the work. On the other hand, the importance of coming together, cooperating and getting stronger through solidarity is increasing, be it on the streets or online, wherever it is possible and perhaps even by creating places that are not yet possible.

## **The Streets in an Atmosphere of Oppression**

Street bans which started with the Gezi Protests of 2013, have been even more intensified after the termination of the Solution Process and herewith the ceasefire in 2015 and the declaration of state of emergency particularly in the Kurdish populated cities. The politics that have taken the country to polarisation in the aftermath of the 2015 elections became more authoritarian following the coup attempt in 2016. Restrictive practices that commenced primarily in the Kurdish populated cities in those years have later expanded to the whole country. Curfews, appointment of trustees, state of emergency practices, dismissal of opponents through decree laws and inactivating civil society organisations by closing them down marked the beginning of a period of repression continuing up until today. These restrictions accompanied by discrimination and hate discourse has gradually generated a civic space in which LGBTI+s, women, migrants and minorities as well as opponents and rights defenders were targeted and punished directly. (See *Mechanisms of Repression in the Civic Space > Targeting*) Arbitrary arrests –particularly of politicians, academicians, journalists and rights defenders– upsized the oppression and intimidation policies. In the same period, civil society organisations also diverged as the ones that are “close to” and “far from the government”.

The arbitrary ban on street demonstrations and activities turned gradually into repression on the mobility of the civic space. In 2020 the COVID-19 pandemic has arrived on top of an atmosphere where public gatherings were almost impossible or possible only under clashes. In order to fulfil the requirements of social distancing and isolation, partial curfews have ruled for a long time. However, most of those who participated in the Haklara Destek Programme have stated that the bans were also utilised as a “valid” excuse to suppress the civil society and “seal up the streets completely”, and that the state has “abused” a public health issue “for exercising power over the civic space”: “The



pandemic was exploited as a blessing to the fullest.” In conclusion, as we go through a period of opening after having lived two years with the pandemic, it seems not imaginable for civil society to organise any street protest or make press statements in public space without encountering any problems. (See *Mechanisms of Repression in the Civic Space > Permits and Cooperation with Public Bodies*)

All the civil society organisations and rights defenders in Turkey have been affected by the suppression of the street protests and the exceptional punishment of those taking to the streets in the recent years. However, the work of CSOs that are working in the fields of human rights, peace and minority rights, academia, struggles for habitats, migration, and refugees, LGBTI+ and women's rights, or of those operating in the Kurdish populated regions were affected directly. The violation of the right to life, as well as the violation of law and policies of impunity, which accrued the restrictions on the freedom of association, have also brought the field gradually under pressure. (See *Freedom of Association and Legal Amendments > Administrative Audits*) In addition to the physical and psychological risks caused by the pandemic, it can be said that uncertainty makes the actors of the civic space feel even more under pressure. While rights defenders and organisations were struggling against the rights violations faced by their target groups and maintaining advocacy, they also tried to stand upright as subjects of these oppressions. Now, a novel field emerged for human rights defenders: “the defence of rights defenders” (See *Mechanisms of Repression in the Civic Space > Punishment, Detention and Lawsuits*)

Numerous organisations have continued to “push for the streets” in the face of the ban on street protests in the atmosphere of repression and the pandemic. They have gathered in public spaces for press releases and demonstrations. During this period, a women's organisation was fined 100 000 TL for having issued press statements and organising protests for the Istanbul Convention. (See *LGBTI+ and Women's Rights > Istanbul Convention*) An organisation that carries out its activities in Diyarbakır has summarised the restrictions of this period as follows: “Even back in 2015, we were able to make press releases and hundreds of people would participate—now making a press release has become the equivalent to committing a crime. For ten women making a statement, 20-30 police officers come to the venue of the statement. You have to filter every single step you take.” During the struggles for forests and habitats last year, environmental defenders and local people were confronted with security forces numerous times. Women have organised “purple convoy, purple bicycle” protests against violence against women in traffic; trying to raise awareness against violence by “cycling” in Diyarbakır. The Pride Parade planned to take place in Taksim in 2021 was banned on the grounds of “the indivisible integrity of the state, public morality and COVID-19 measures”. The police interfered in the crowds gathering in Taksim despite the ban

and prevented the march. But this experience has turned into an inspiring example for everyone. These struggles are multiplying and continue to elevate the hopes of rights defenders. (See *LGBTI+ and Women's Rights > Discrimination and Hate Speech*)

## New Digital Spaces

While the opportunities to come together for rights defenders were reduced in the repressive atmosphere, we have recognised the potential of digital tools that came into our lives with the pandemic. Online meetings had a “lifesaving” role at places where curfews prevailed. In the past two years of the pandemic, many civil society organisations that have participated in the Haklara Destek Programme moved some of their activities to online spaces. Organisations that anticipate a hybrid future will use YouTube live streams, online webinars, and internal Zoom meetings more frequently. Despite their advantages and the practical solutions they generate, it was also mentioned that online tools are not suitable for particular activities, that their impact might be low, and that the feeling one gets is not comparable to that of face-to-face meetings. As an employee of an organisation in the human rights field said, “online activities and the hybrid working model are among practices that came with the pandemic and have become permanent. Even though we benefit from their advantages, we are searching to make up for the deficiencies of not working directly and face-to-face”. Especially those organisations working with target groups with limited Internet and computer access returned to the field when the pandemic regulations were relaxed, still maintaining their face-to-face activities. In this sense, it appears to be difficult for online tools to completely replace actions in which conflicting issues and vulnerable groups are brought together. (See *Adaptation to Online Systems > Adjustment Problems*) Some had mentioned that meetings requiring one-on-one time had not produced the same effect when they were transferred to the digital space. Some have also stated that “they stayed activity-based, they were not sustainable” when referring to online relations. Here, the need for long-term plans was expressed to be able to sustain the contact and solidarity with partners.

Specific new digital tools that enable the coming together of organisations with their teams and other organisations were also used for several advocacy activities and protests, especially during severe restrictions imposed due to the pandemic. For example, the Saturday Mothers protest action continued for a long time in digital space, also causing an increase in the number of people the protests have reached. (See *Adaptation to Online Systems > Access and Other Opportunities*) On the other hand, it is unclear to what extent the online demonstrations and advocacy activities are sustainable; neither can it be assessed for how long the participants will be motivated to come together. Additionally, issues such as the digital fatigue, the increase in several

people who refrain from coming together in visible and recordable spaces, the turning inwards of CSOs due to security concerns and the feeling of insecurity based on the fact that online tools are directly open to state control need particular attention. (See *Being Targeted and Surviving > Turning Inwards*) Hence, even though the new digital tools represent a good alternative that complements the street, it is still a fragile area in terms of inclusiveness, access and openness to control mechanisms. It would suffice to remember the websites and digital platforms that were denied access for long periods in an attempt to be kept under state control in the recent past.

## Networks and Cooperations

Organisations feeling alone during times of crisis needed each other more than ever and sought ways to get strength through solidarity. According to the CSOs that have participated in the Haklara Destek Programme, “solidarity and knowing that they are not alone” has a significant share in “standing upright in times of repression and the pandemic”. (See *Being Targeted and Surviving*) Many organisations expressed that they have cooperated more in this period to learn from experiences of other organisations working in the same fields, that they have built collaborations with local partners not exclusively from their fields but also from different disciplines, and that they have become more involved in national and international networks. Some organisations have created new projects or activities based on institutional collaborations not existing before. For example, organisations working in the field of human rights or peace were able to develop unique project content through collaborations from the fields of media and arts. It must be emphasised that cooperation crosscutting different disciplines and fields are beneficial in terms of sustainability and access to new target groups, even if these are just project-based. An organisation that works on immigration, for instance, has produced and shared a video series about language and cultural rights in partnership with the Bar Association of the city where it was active. A human rights association maintains solidarity by keeping close contact with its followers from the media outlets, journalists, academicians and students.

Although the activity-based support received from municipalities constituted an important example of local cooperation for various associations, these cooperations were blocked to a great extent after 2015, especially through the appointment of trustees to municipalities in the Kurdish populated cities. (See *Mechanisms of Repression in the Civic Space > Permits and Cooperation with Public Bodies*) A Van based organisation stated that “the pandemic and appointed trustees have impaired local organisations and networks” and that many areas of cooperation have been lost. On the other hand, an organisation in Istanbul has managed to develop a model of participation in the city council in which the Metropolitan Municipality budget planning process would

be opened to the citizens. It was also observed that the online channels actively used in the activities of the organisations after the outbreak of the pandemic, has positively affected the exchange of information and communication at the international level. For example, it is now possible for an organisation in the field of LGBTI+ rights to meet with “organisations working on sex work in New Zealand, Sweden and Germany” via Zoom and engage in information exchange on legislation and implementation.

If the national or international networks built by organisations working in the same fields of work can be kept alive, it can make a significant contribution for horizontal information exchange, advocacy, solidarity and empowerment. The need for such solidarity platforms, particularly in times of repression and crisis like the pandemic has been mentioned countless times: “It is a tough period for the civil society, severe oppression and challenges, coupled with the constraints of the pandemic, it was a time when CSOs felt lonely. Two years have passed in the search for solidarity and support.” One of the vital needs is to come together in secure spaces and stay upright as one, united voice in a climate of repression. It is in this context that organisations perceive solidarity networks as a space for togetherness, where they can share coping mechanisms for the difficulties in the field and good examples to identify ways and methods for maintaining their existence together. It has been stated that communication and solidarity on social media and platforms have increased recently. A WhatsApp group was founded for CSOs working on similar issues in order to exchange information quickly and share experiences from the field. (See *Freedom of Association and Legal Amendments > Measures Against the New Law*) There were organisations that have received assistance from communication and solidarity networks in many different areas including venue support, legal support, technical infrastructure support and field-specific academic support.

There are many local, regional, national and international networks and communication platforms working in different fields. The organisations with various thematic focuses taking part in the Haklara Destek Programme have also taken different positions in relation to the networks. It was mentioned that there is a connection and solidarity between organisations that work in the field of academia. Participants also shared their observations on different perspectives among organisations working in the field of peace, which prevents them from acting altogether. While some of those organisations communicate and cooperate more closely with each other, some deviate from others in their traditional organisational structures and in the way they approach the peace issue. Despite this situation, there are regional networks in the areas of peace studies that offer solidarity to their members and actively support them. “The existence of the social peace network motivates the region. The very existence of the network is important, yet it lacks institutional capacity.” Many national or regional networks need to be strengthened in their institutional structures for increasing their efficiency in the long run. For

example, an organisation working in the field of migration told that even though they have observed an increase in solidarity during the pandemic with joint activities being organised during the migration week, the inter-institutional relations that were established here have remained rather activity-based and no long-term joint plans were made. The refugee solidarity network that has emerged from here was not very active either. An organisation that has participated in the programme from the field of labour rights has expressed the need for making visible the rights violations experienced by workers and increasing solidarity with the consumers. Being a member of a global network that works in this direction, the organisation also provides information on local rights violations at the international level.

Most LGBTI+ organisations are members of numerous international umbrella institutions and communication networks. Moreover, at the national level, they are not only part of gender solidarity networks but also of those where human rights defenders come together. In a similar vein, do women's organisations participate in gender and human rights-related communication networks as far as possible? For example, organisations running women's support centres have received tremendous support from the network for struggling against violence in the face of increasing applications from victims of violence. An organisation that defends women's rights has stated that they specifically "took heart from organisations with which they stood together in urgent matters". (See *LGBTI+ and Women's Rights > Discrimination and Hate Speech*) An organisation from Diyarbakır, whose directors were arrested after various raids, has received support and experienced solidarity with rights defenders and other organisations: "After being released from prison, the support and solidarity of my friends who stayed outside, of rights defenders, of networks and platforms, including women's organisations, gave us strength. The solidarity shown by everyone here was central for us in terms of sustainability. We have joined many networks and platforms. This has developed and empowered us. Each time, in our efforts to stand up again and again to reopen the organisation, these networks have a more special meaning for us." An employee of an organisation from the children's rights field has stated that "they need solidarity networks very much, that organisations working in the field of children are part of networks, but actually these networks are not very effective". The need to strengthen support and solidarity networks was expressed many times. (See *LGBTI+ and Women's Rights > Violence, Impunity and Advocacy*)

Independent media organisations participating in the Haklara Destek Programme carry out activities in the field of freedom of expression, yet they are unique structures which also have their own publications. Therefore, they stated, solidarity networks were not a part of their agenda. Nevertheless, a network based on cooperation and exchange of experience in the matter of right to fair trial was established last year. There were

also other newly established networks and cooperation initiatives: organic agriculture network in Turkey, the communication and solidarity network of women's associations in the Black Sea region, the refugee solidarity network, solidarity network of queer artists, a network platform within the efforts such as to build a cultural plurality platform, pool of academics and network building initiatives among artists... A civil society employee who said that there was a "network inflation due to thematic organisation" also pointed to the problems of establishing introverted networks by organisations that work in particular areas. The fact that intersectional issues such as the LGBTI+, Kurdish women and immigrant women are kept out of the "mainstream" of the civil society can be mentioned as an example in this regard. Within this context, while the significance and impact of networks as areas of struggle and transformation were uttered at every opportunity, the existence of diverse subjects among vulnerable groups based on their "intersectional identity" and the importance of enhancing the interaction with them was also emphasized: "We constantly have to talk about these differences within networks. It is important to multiply the spaces where we stand together, for the mainstream movements to understand us and for us to understand each other."

On the other hand, given the importance of networks and platforms, we can discuss the impact of the lack of an umbrella organisation on intersectional issues. There are examples of the state supporting the civil society via Ministries or umbrella institutions and networks that bring together all civil society organisations in Europe. However, in Turkey, "the state itself was perceived as an umbrella institution" and as such constituted a critical obstacle for the organisation among the civil society. As can be seen in examples from around the world, thematic or national umbrella networks are important tools for enabling citizens' participation by improving relations with the state and sectors out of the civil society. It seems relevant to think about developing a struggle strategy for Turkey, in which this need will also be addressed as the civil society is strengthened and the efficacy of networks is increased in the future.

Due to the shrinking civic space, many organisations in search of renewal and improvement have joined some networks and tried to strengthen solidarity. Some organisations that were not part of networks before became members of national and international networks during this period and tried to keep their relations alive. However, unless used actively and efficiently, the sole existence of old and new networks and platforms or becoming a member of those does not generate solidarity and empowerment per se. Hence, there is a need to conduct more studies on the functioning of networks. Organisations working in similar fields and funding institutions should cooperate in analysing this area's needs. It also seems essential to share the experiences of international networks. There is a need for activities that improve and strengthen networks, for ongoing and sustainable spaces where organisations can freely come together and discuss with a sense of trust and solidarity.

**CONCLUDING**  
**REMARKS:**  
**STRUGGLING**  
**WITH**  
**REPRESSION**  
**AND**  
**UNCERTAINTY**

The COVID-19 pandemic, which broke out when Turkey's democratic/civic space was gradually shrinking, especially after 2015, has affected rights-based CSOs enormously. In times of crisis, when the legal, health and education systems were also under direct pressure, both the number of rights violations and their scope has augmented. In contrast, the punishment policies of rights defenders constricted the space for struggle. Under challenging conditions, civil society organisations continue to sustain their existence, defend the rights of their target groups, monitor and document rights violations, and pursue a long-running path of struggle to avoid leaving the field. Within this context, the experiences of 48 CSOs that have participated in the Haklara Destek Programme from 15 different cities in Turkey include various examples from the fields of human rights, freedom of expression, children's rights, youth, disability, minorities, language, culture, law, academia, peace, gender, LGBTI+ and women's rights, labour rights, migration and refugees, ecology, right to life and environmental struggles. Based on these experiences, we can take a closer look at the transformation of civil society in a repressive and uncertain environment in recent years, comprehend the needs, be inspired by their solutions, attend to the fields that need improvement and create new channels of solidarity.

## **The Situation in Different Fields of Work**

For organisations working in human rights and their target groups, the post-2015 period has been a time of extensive rights violations. The prohibition of street protests, the targeted punishment of those who pushed for the streets, prisons getting full, and a new immigration wave from the populated Kurdish provinces made the work in this field even more difficult. Organisations working with immigrants and refugees –who are exposed to discrimination and hate speech and who experience poverty, exclusion, language and integration problems– have witnessed the effects of the pandemic more noticeably. Areas such as peace, academia, and minority rights have increasingly been subject to investigations and punishment and have become more targeted politically and socially. Organisations that operate in peace studies, in particular, have been undergoing a serious narrowing in their fields of work after 2015. Organisations based in the populated Kurdish cities felt the oppression and restrictions more powerfully, with detentions, arrests and closure of institutions becoming the routine. Academic organisations, most of which were established after the decree laws in 2015, work with the motivation to move the academy beyond the confines of universities and to support the scholarly works of academicians who lost their jobs with the decree laws. Throughout the last year, LGBTI+ and women's organisations have been under permanent risk and pressure due to the withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention, the amendments brought by the Law No. 7262, the effects of the Bosphorus resistance on LGBTI+ organisations, the outcomes of the pandemic, anti-gender-equality discourses



and practices, the increasing violence against the target groups and the prevalence of impunity due to regressions in legal practices. Organisations working in youth and children's rights had difficulties accessing their vulnerable target groups and pursuing their rights, particularly during the pandemic. Their situation got even worse by financial challenges such as problems with volunteer management, reduced visibility and restrictions on aid collection.

## **Change and Uncertainty**

Uncertainty is one of the most distinguishing features of times of crisis –such as political oppression and the pandemic. It mainly implies being in the process of change but not being able to foresee neither its duration nor its direction and destination.

While the climate of uncertainty has blunted the capability of civil society organisations to make predictions about themselves or the future of their target groups, it has also created a permanent state of worry, anxiety, uneasiness and precaution. The unpredictability of the political environment or the amendment of laws through midnight decisions has rendered organisations helpless in advocacy and in developing an institutional strategy. Any finished plan might need to change direction due to unpredictable government policies, judicial harassment and suppression mechanisms. Therefore, organisations that always work with a “Plan B” need prospective political, economic and social analyses to make strategic plans in their fields of work. Intending to reduce institutional risks in this atmosphere of uncertainty, many organisations resort to strengthening their administrative structures, preparing for audits that are being instrumentalised by the state, documenting the process by writing down the methods of internal improvement and struggle. Organisations seek ways to strengthen themselves by adapting to change as much as possible, yet without giving up on their demands: “Nothing is permanent, everything changes very dynamically and rapidly. There is hope for us, and we feel it. What is permanent is our demand for peace, that we repeat it repeatedly with different tools.”

## **Being Both Visible and Invisible**

In the face of the shrinking civic space, organisations search for ways to continue their work while avoiding becoming the target of suppression and punishment mechanisms. Especially in recent years, when publications, as well as social media posts, have become subjects of investigation, they pay more attention than ever to what they write and share. Most organisations expressed that they now carry out their activities without leaving their small spaces and being less visible. Much content was produced in this period when the civic space turned inwards, but most of it was either shared in a controlled and limited way or is still waiting to meet its audience someday. Visibility

has a crucial role for civil society in obtaining members, volunteers, supporters, and donors, reaching out to them to defend their rights and carrying out their advocacy and fundraising activities. Hence, they experience the adverse effects of invisibility or limited visibility at different layers. The new online and digital spaces that have developed thanks to the pandemic have presented new opportunities for visibility. However, these spaces are more prone to control mechanisms and might create new vulnerabilities. This is why those organisations that can adjust to digital spaces and adapt their activities online search for ways of staying away from pressure and being targeted while being visible to audiences selectively.

## **Psychological and Legal Support**

The pressure and anxiety in the civic space intensified when CSOs were rendered inspectable at any time and imposed high and arbitrary fines. Employees and directors of numerous organisations have faced prison sentences, while some institutions have been closed or are exposed to the threat of being closed down. While organisations were struggling against rights violations that target groups were exposed to, it became difficult for them to survive as the very subject of oppression. Now, civil society organisations have an additional field of struggle on their task list: “defending the rights defenders, too”. As an outcome of growing rights violations against their target groups and the investigations started against the directors of the associations, the workload of legal units and lawyers in CSOs has increased. Many organisations that did not receive any legal support before having expressed this need and pointed to the insufficiency of existing support mechanisms. Hence, associations now also need regular lawyer support for increasing legal obligations, probable investigations, and lawsuits. It is also necessary to extend psychological support due to the increasing concerns among the employees of organisations under repressive circumstances and the needs of the target groups whose rights have been violated and who try to cope with violence. It seems inevitable for civil society organisations to receive regular psychological and legal support to be able to survive under conditions of oppression and the pandemic.

## **Intersectional Issues, New Target Groups**

The target groups of CSOs expanded with the COVID-19 pandemic. Not only has the number of those whose situation became tougher in prevailing vulnerable groups increased but also certain new target groups that previously could not be counted as vulnerable have emerged. Most of the organisations worked to meet the changing needs of their target groups who were struggling with the pandemic, poverty and violence at the same time. In addition to that, many groups, including healthcare workers, workers, artists, journalists, academicians, scholars, and rights defenders, experienced

the adverse effects of the crackdown. Monitoring and reporting rights violations of existing and new vulnerable groups became more and more critical. It seems essential to perceive these reports as a part of the quest for rights. The organisations have also mentioned the need to further improve themselves on intersectional issues in their fields of work. It can be expected that issues such as gender equality, economic rights, poverty and inequality, pandemic and health conditions, and climate change that crosscut numerous different fields, including LGBTI+ and women's rights, youth and children's rights, human rights, peace and minorities, migration and refugees are going to be on every organisation's agenda in some way.

## **Hybrid Activities and Protests**

Many civil society organisations that have participated in the Haklara Destek Programme had to move some of their activities online with the pandemic outbreak. As of the second year of the pandemic, it can be said that numerous organisations moved their suitable activities and publications to digital spaces and used social media much more actively and effectively. Nevertheless, the change to digital spaces has been difficult for organisations whose work used to be based on face-to-face interaction, bringing together people on the street and in venues. These CSOs stated that although they have experienced the advantages of online tools, the digital spaces are not suitable for certain activities. Their impact may be limited and cannot replace the feeling that one has in face-to-face encounters. Further, the little technology literacy and the lack of Internet and computer access among many vulnerable target groups were also significant adjustment challenges. After all, it is challenging to apply nothing but online tools, especially for activities that deal with conflict issues and bring together vulnerable groups. On the other hand, digital tools had also opened a space for advocacy and protests when the streets were sealed up through repression and the pandemic and enabled access to new and distant audiences. Although new digital spaces are good alternatives that complement the physical realm, it should not be forgotten that they are quite fragile due to issues of inclusion, access, and being exposed to control mechanisms. Hence, it can be assumed that hybrid activities that incorporate both face-to-face and online opportunities will proliferate in the upcoming years.

## **Flexibility and Sustainability**

As the civil society organisations turned inwards with the crises, they realised the problems in their institutional structures and sustainability difficulties. Associations worn out with administrative audits have undergone various institutional changes, including improving bureaucratic processes, renewing the human resources structure, strategic planning and diversifying financial resources. It is anticipated that these

improvements, which can be seen as a positive side effect of this period, will increase the flexibility and sustainability of institutions and, in this way, enable the creation of enduring structures. Fundraising was at the top of the needs list in this period. Other needs and requirements were identified as facilitating access to available funding sources, removing the language barrier and providing the opportunity to submit applications in Turkish, creating emergency funds and providing more flexible structures for project priorities and plans in grant schemes. Many organisations were challenged by the restrictions imposed on fundraising and the targeting of foreign funds that lessened the possibilities in the field. The situation got even worse with changes in the priorities of the funds brought about by the pandemic. Compared to project-based support, the need for core grants or institutional funds has increased. It has become essential to discover new methods to grow institutional core funds, which are rare in Turkey and develop more flexible resources such as membership fees and donations. Diversifying resources has become critical for ensuring sustainability.

## **Solidarity and Cooperation**

The mounting pressure on civil society organisations and their target groups may have created some anxiety and uneasiness and fashioned resilient solidarity in the field. The most concrete example of this is the WhatsApp groups established to share information and experience against the administrative inspections, which were increased with the amendments made to Law No. 7262. It can be argued that the visibility of evidently increasing, non-justifiable rights violations have enhanced societal awareness, thus support and solidarity. The existing support and solidarity environment must be improved; organisations share experiences by better knowing each other and enlarge the grounds for joint actions. Due to the shrinking civic space, various organisations became members of national and international networks in this period. However, existing, and new networks, platforms, or membership alone, do not ensure solidarity and empowerment unless used actively and efficiently. This is why organisations pointed to the importance of conducting more studies on networks' functioning, making needs analysis in the field by organisations that work on similar issues and funding institutions, and transferring the experiences of international networks. We expect that activities, which foster and strengthen networks, will intensify cooperation in the long run and generate spaces in which organisations can freely come together and discuss with a sense of trust and solidarity.

## APPENDIX

### Annexe-1: List of Participant CSOs in the 2020-2021 Period of the Haklara Destek Programme

**Ali İsmail Korkmaz Foundation, Hatay, <https://alikev.org/>**

ALİKEV (Ali İsmail Korkmaz Vakfı) is carrying out activities intending to make the youth free from prejudices and more participatory and social individuals. For a more equal and free society, it encourages young people to participate in social benefits activities.

**Association for Legal Support Against Sexual Violence, İstanbul, [hukukiyardimburosu@gmail.com](mailto:hukukiyardimburosu@gmail.com)**

The association (Cinsel Şiddete Karşı Hukuki Yardım Derneği), whose central activity is to provide legal assistance in cases of sexual violence against women, is also engaged in activities such as prison visits, follow-up of legal processes, criminal complaints, awareness-raising meetings, and panels as well as publishing press releases.

**Association for Struggle Against Sexual Violence, İstanbul, <https://cinselsiddetlemucadele.org/>**

The association (Cinsel Şiddetle Mücadele Derneği), which offers guidance and legal consultancy support to people who have been subject to any kind of sexual violence, their relatives, and other people in need; carries out support, advocacy and awareness activities with a queer-feminist perspective to render sexual violence visible and questionable, and to combat sexual violence.

**Association for Solidarity with Refugees, İzmir, <https://mülteci.org.tr/>**

Being a human rights and humanitarian solidarity organisation, Mülteci-Der (Mültecilerle Dayanışma Derneği) engages in the solution of the problems of refugees, asylum seekers, immigrants, people seeking temporary asylum and those who are eligible for secondary protection procedure, regardless of any difference in terms of language, religion, sexual orientation, political views and otherwise.

**Association of University Faculty Members, İstanbul, <http://www.univder.org/>**

UNIVDER (*Üniversite Öğretim Üyeleri Derneği*) carries out advocacy, cooperation, support and solidarity activities to ensure solidarity and unity among academic staff who are currently working and have previously worked in higher education institutions, to defend their rights and interests, to encourage scientific and artistic studies and to provide a democratic environment in which higher education can develop freely.

**Bir+Bir Culture and Arts Association, Balıkesir, <https://birartibir.org/>**

The association (*Bir+Bir Kültür ve Sanat Derneği*) carries out digital publishing and rights-based journalism activities. With the magazines 1+1 Express and 1+1 Forum, it tries

to monitor, publicize, and document social rights struggles and solidarity examples on a wide range of scales.

**Buğday Association for Supporting Ecological Living, İstanbul, <http://www.bugday.org/>**

Within the scope of the right to environment and the right to food, the association (*Buğday Ekolojik Yaşamı Destekleme Derneği*) works to create awareness and sensitivity for ecological life in individuals and the society as a whole, to offer solutions to the problems that result from the irreversible deterioration of ecological balances, and to support life in harmony with the nature.

**Cappadocia Women's Association, Nevşehir, <http://kapadokyakadinderneği.org.tr/>**

The association (*Kapadokya Kadın Dayanışma Derneği*) carries out awareness raising and advocacy activities in the areas of violence against women, women's health, women's participation in politics, women's employment as well as asylum-seeking and refugee women. It also offers counselling services for women subjected to violence.

**Centre for Spatial Justice, İstanbul, <https://mekandaadalet.org/>**

The MAD (*Mekanda Adalet Derneği*) produces, gathers and shares innovative, qualified and public knowledge. It carries out transdisciplinary studies for improving fairer, ecological and democratic processes/practices in urban and rural spaces.

**CISST Civil Society in the Penal System Association, İstanbul, <http://www.cisst.org.tr/>**

The CISST (*Ceza İnfaz Sisteminde Sivil Toplum Derneği*) Association works to maintain the conditions in Turkey's prisons with international human rights standards, to protect the rights and liberties of prisoners and make them compatible with human dignity and universal values.

**Clean Clothes Campaign Turkey Association, İstanbul, <http://www.temizgiysi.org/>**

The association (*Temiz Giysi Kampanyası Derneği*), whose primary purpose is to improve the working and living conditions of textile workers, carries out advocacy and consultancy activities that aim at allowing textile workers to work under conditions that will not trigger occupational diseases and work accidents – all of which can be prevented by direct protection methods– while earning an adequate salary without exceeding the regular working hours.

**Colourful Hopes Association, Diyarbakır, <http://rengarenkumutlar.org/>**

The association (*Rengarenk Umutlar Derneği*) provides psychosocial activities for children aged 5-18 and for women who have been affected by the clashes in recent years in the Sur district of Diyarbakır. Furthermore, it carries out activities for the creation of a culture of peace, organises workshops for children on issues such as gender equality and early children's rights, engages in cooperation and experience sharing in the field and provides support to applicants on issues such as sexual abuse, early marriages and inequality of opportunity.

**Denizli Autism Association, Denizli, <https://denizliotizm.org/>**

DOD (*Denizli Otizm Derneği*) works to ensure that individuals with autism and their families lead a life in accordance with human rights and dignity and integrate with society, as well as supporting trainers and trainer candidates working in the field of autism.

**Diyarbakır Association for the Protection of Cultural and Natural Assets, Diyarbakır, <https://www.dkvd.org/>**

The DKVD (*Diyarbakır Kültür Tabiat Varlıklarını Koruma ve Yaşatma Derneği*) aims to raise awareness in different parts of the society by documenting, recording and archiving the deep history and the age long accumulated memory of Diyarbakır. The organisation collects all kinds of materials such as written, visual, audio information and documents related to the history, culture and architecture of the city on digital platforms, and creates a city archive.

**Diyarbakır Institute for Political and Social Research, Diyarbakır, <http://www.disa.org.tr/>**

DİSA (*Diyarbakır Siyasal ve Sosyal Araştırmalar Enstitüsü Derneği*) conducts researches and brings them to the attention of interested parties with the intention to increase egalitarian social sensitivity which enables the peaceful coexistence of differences and fosters dialogue. It also contributes to sharing of information through conferences, symposiums, panels, workshops and reports.

**Eksi 25 Association, Eskişehir, <http://www.eksi-25.org/>**

With a focus on the best interest principle, the association carries out activities at home and abroad to ensure that every individual up to the age of 25 lives, develops, participates and is protected from neglect, abuse and all sorts of violence, regardless of their language, religion, race, gender and age. Its areas of activity encompass children's and youth rights, rights violations, prevention of all forms of violence, etc.

**Freedom of Expression Association, İstanbul, <https://www.ifade.org.tr/>**

To advise right holders about the current situation, regulations and violations in the field of freedom of expression and to support them in their requests to lawful authorities when their rights are violated, İFÖD (*İfade Özgürlüğü Derneği*) engages in activities that aim at influencing and empowering decision-makers and relevant leaders for the improvement and protection of these rights.

**Human Rights Association, Ankara, <http://www.ihd.org.tr/>**

The İHD (*İnsan Hakları Derneği*) carries out activities to document and report violations of rights, to struggle for a democratic and peaceful solution to the Kurdish problem –which is one of the leading causes of the human rights and democracy problem in Turkey– to work on Turkey's coming to terms with its past, to render

violations visible and organise actions and activities to raise awareness, to support the victims in their processes of seeking justice, to combat impunity, to promote the concept of human rights, to struggle for the formation of awareness and culture of right, and to organise human rights training.

**Human Rights Association Diyarbakır Branch, Diyarbakır, <http://www.ihddiyarbakir.org/>**

To prevent and eliminate human rights violations, the İHD Diyarbakır (**İnsan Hakları Derneği Diyarbakır Şubesi**) carries out practical advocacy activities, organises campaigns and activities for raising public awareness/sensitivity about human rights violations and when necessary, also offers legal advice and support to victims.

**Human Rights Association Van Branch, Van, <https://ihdvan.org/>**

The İHD Van (**İnsan Hakları Derneği Van Şubesi**), who predominantly works on human rights and freedoms and supports victims, also struggles against all kinds of discrimination, the death penalty, war and militarism. It carries out advocacy activities to strengthen the right to a fair trial and defence, the right to peace, the right to mother tongue, and the freedom of expression and association.

**Human Rights Agenda Association, İzmir, <https://rightsagenda.org/>**

In accordance with international and supranational human rights conventions, documents, values, and the principles of international humanitarian law and democratic values, the İHGD (**İnsan Hakları Gündemi Derneği**) carries out activities for implementing, developing and improving human rights and for preventing human rights violations.

**IPS Communication Foundation, İstanbul, <http://bianet.org/>**

With the objectives of transforming the language and environment of the media in Turkey and ensuring that information/content is independent of capital and the state, the foundation (**IPS İletişim Vakfı**) carries out editorial production and capacity building activities by grounding its work of reproduction and distribution of knowledge on social utility, rights-centredness and the right to information in mother-tongue. The Foundation works with a trilingual (Turkish, Kurdish, English) media tool (bianet) in its focus to practice and spread this journalism perspective.

**İsmail Beşikci Foundation, İstanbul, <http://www.ismailbesikcivakfi.org/>**

Based on the freedom of thought and expression, the İBV (**İsmail Beşikci Vakfı**) organises Spring and Fall Academy programs for undergraduate and graduate students, conferences, panels and seminars in order to open a space for Kurdish studies and make these studies visible. It supports research activities with its public library and publishes various books in the fields of history, sociology and geography as well as the quarterly Journal of Kurdish History.



**Kocaeli Solidarity and Research Association, Kocaeli, <http://www.kocaelidayanisma.org/>**

The Kocaeli based KODA (*Kocaeli Dayanışma ve Araştırma Derneği*) is a civil initiative that is engaged in the struggle for responsible intellectuals and scientists and carries out activities on peace and democracy, freedom of expression and academic spaces.

**Lotus Youth Space Association, Diyarbakır, <http://www.lotusgencalanderneği.org/>**

The association (*Lotus Genç Alan Derneği*) monitors violations and inequalities in local and refugee women and children's groups. It carries out activities to prevent and correct discriminatory practices at societal and state levels. It exchanges experiences with other civil society organisations on the matters of women, children and youth.

**Kırkayak Culture Art and Nature Association, Gaziantep, <http://www.kirkayak.org/>**

The Kırkayak Kültür (*Kırkayak Kültür Sanat ve Doğa Derneği*) carries out rights-based social integration activities based on an understanding of dialogue and solidarity against the prejudices and discrimination that socially and culturally disadvantaged groups under risk are confronted with. The activities are held under three separate programs that focus on "Migrants and Refugees", "Culture and Art", and "The Dom".

**Life Cooperative for Women, Environment, Culture and Enterprise, Van, [yaka.koop@gmail.com](mailto:yaka.koop@gmail.com)**

Yaka-Koop (*S.S. Yaşam Kadın Çevre Kültür ve İşletme Kooperatifi*) is the first women's organisation in Van, which was founded by 25 women. It provides psychological and legal support to women, who have been subject to violence, makes litigation, offers counselling services to refugee/asylum seeking women and children and supports their social integration process. It is also engaged in activities that prevent early and forced marriages.

**Mardin Joint Association for Women's Cooperation, Mardin, <http://www.mokid.org/>**

MOKID (*Mardin Ortak Kadın İşbirliği Derneği*) is a women's centre that offers social, psychological and legal counselling services and cooperates with other civil society organisations in building collaborations with public institutions and participation in training.

**Mersin 7 Colours LGBT Training, Research and Solidarity Association, Mersin, <http://www.mersinyedirenk.org/>**

With the intention to raise awareness within the society about LGBTI+ individuals, who are discriminated against and stigmatised in numerous areas of life, the association (*Mersin 7 Renk Lezbiyen Gey Biseksüel Trans Eğitim Araştırma ve Dayanışma Derneği*) carries out activities such as reporting, litigation and research; and organises trainings, workshops and conferences.

**Mesopotamia Association for Linguistic and Cultural Studies, Diyarbakır,  
medderamed@gmail.com**

MED-DER (*Mezopotamya Dil ve Kültür Araştırmaları Derneği*) aims to serve as a bridge for the coexistence of different languages, cultures and identities in the region. It carries out activities on the Kurdish language and culture, including material production, language and education workshops, translation workshops, seminars, and panels; offers translation and education services for organisations; and prepares compilations of oral and written Kurdish literary works.

**Mesopotamia Education, Science, Art, Health and Culture Foundation, Diyarbakır,  
<https://www.wmezopotamyaye.org/tr>**

The foundation (*Mezopotamya Eğitim Bilim Sanat Sağlık ve Kültür Vakfı*) aims to found a multilingual university in the long term to support the coexistence of different identities with a mutual understanding. It carries out activities such as preparing educational content and material that fosters diversity, equality, and pluralism, facilitating the use of Kurdish as a mother tongue, standardising language and compiling manuscripts and oral-literary products, and archiving and documentation of language-history-ethnography.

**Migration Monitoring Association, İstanbul, <https://www.gocizlemedernei.org/>**

Göç-İz (*Göç İzleme Derneği*) is engaged in offering support to internally displaced people in their pursuit of justice, in making the violations of fundamental rights created by forced displacement visible to the public, in raising awareness about social, economic and psychological troubles that citizens experience during the resettlement process, in addressing the grievances of people who suffer grave human rights violations and in contributing to the recognition and reparation of these.

**Migration and Humanitarian Aid Foundation, Diyarbakır, <http://www.giyav.org.tr/>**

The foundation (*Göç ve İnsani Yardım Vakfı*) works on the development of economic, social, cultural and legal rights of individuals, especially children and youth, who have migrated for various reasons and are affected by migration.

**Nirengi Association, İstanbul, <https://www.nirengidernei.org/>**

The association aims at contributing to the individual and society's capability for leading lives in human dignity and to increase their well-being and quality of life in accordance with international standards. To this end, it carries out activities of support, advocacy and networking as well as developing quality and accountability standards for groups at risk (women, children, people with special needs, minority groups, etc.). Its areas of operation include child protection and children's rights, humanitarian aid, disaster and emergency management, psychosocial support, policy development, social dialogue and development, capacity building and research.

**Nonviolent Education and Research Association, İstanbul, <http://www.siddetsizlikmerkezi.org/>**

The Nonviolence Centre (*Şiddetsizlik Eğitim ve Araştırma Derneği*) organises trainings, produces resources (books, booklets, articles) and conducts research on topics such as nonviolence, nonviolent organisation, approach to conflicts, consensus and power analysis to increase the capacities of civil society organisations that carry out rights-based activities.

**Ordu Association for the Empowerment of Women, Ordu, <http://www.orkaguder.org/>**

The association (*Ordu Kadını Güçlendirme Derneği*) provides support to groups of women and children that are subject to violence, abuse and discrimination in the Black Sea Region, particularly in the city of Ordu. Besides the focus on empowering women and girls, it continues to reveal rights violations of other disadvantaged groups to increase human rights awareness, to promote gender equality and to increase the representation and visibility in public space through collaborations. It is engaged in the monitoring and reporting of local decision makers' women-centred activities, projects and budgets.

**Pembe Hayat LGBTI+ Solidarity Association, Ankara, <http://www.pembehayat.org/>**

The association (*Pembe Hayat LGBTİ+ Dayanışma Derneği*) develops projects on issues such as discrimination, hate crimes, violence and social exclusion –primarily for trans people– and provides direct support services. It pursues advocacy activities at the national and international levels and carries out studies of fundamental human rights based on the principles of non-discrimination and equality. It also provides clothing support to prisoners and LGBTI+ people in need through the Dilek İnce Clothing Bank and academic resources and supervision through the Ali Aligül Arıkan Library based on its competence in LGBTI+ rights.

**Red Umbrella Sexual Health and Human Rights Association, Ankara, <http://www.kirmizisemsiye.org/>**

The association (*Kırmızı Şemsiye Cinsel Sağlık ve İnsan Hakları Derneği*) aims to point at the human rights and sexual health issues of sex workers, who are among the vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in Turkey and to develop suggestions to overcome their problems. It is also engaged in advocacy activities regarding the areas of gender equality, access to justice, improvement of social policies, public health and combatting discrimination and hate crimes.

**Research Centre for Democracy, Peace and Alternative Politics, Ankara, <http://www.demos.org.tr/>**

DEMOS (*Demokrasi Barış ve Alternatif Politikalar Araştırma Derneği*) produces alternative, semi-academic knowledge in various areas of the social sciences, particularly on peace which everyone has a right to, and on transitional justice, memory, identity and the Middle East with a grassroots and subject-oriented gender perspective.

**Rosa Women's Association, Diyarbakır, <http://www.rosakadindernegi.com/>**

The association (*Rosa Kadın Derneği*) aims to combat all kinds of social, political, cultural, economic, sexual and psychological violence against women, to carry out activities that ensure the elimination of all types of discrimination against women, to develop and implement projects to promote gender equality, to engage in actions to strengthen civil society and women's organisations, to protect nature and natural life, to spread the ideals of ecological life and the culture of democracy and peace, and strive for their realisation. It continues rights-based collaborations, lobbying, and advocacy activities to these ends.

**Serhat Association for Migration Research, Van, <http://serhatgocarastirmadernegi.org/>**

The association (*Serhat Göç Araştırmaları Derneği*) carries out advocacy activities for people who have left their country or were internally displaced, regardless of language, religion, race, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, disability, political opinion and other reasons.

**Social Policies, Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation Studies Association, İstanbul, <https://spod.org.tr/>**

SPoD (*Sosyal Politika Cinsiyet Kimliği ve Cinsel Yönelim Çalışmaları Derneği*) carries out activities in the areas of LGBTI+ rights, political participation, cooperation, consultancy and academic studies. Its employees and volunteers provide legal counselling and psychosocial support to LGBTI+s. In addition to its advocacy activities, it aims at developing service models for LGBTI+s and set examples for public institutions, abolishing all kinds of discrimination in here and providing exceptional services for LGBTI+ with public collaborations.

**Sulukule Volunteers Association, İstanbul, <http://www.sulukulegonulluleri.org/>**

The association (*Sulukule Gönüllüleri Derneği*) was found with the intention to mitigate the psychosocial effects of the Sulukule Urban Transformation Project. It is engaged in activities to prevent school drop-outs, to raise rights awareness among women and children and to support the right of every single child to access living conditions and quality education that will support its development.

**The Federation of Associations for Barrier Free Living, Diyarbakır, <http://www.engelsizbilesenler.org.tr/>**

The federation (*Engelsiz Bileşenler Federasyonu*) works to ascertain the sense of democratic civil society, to initiate and improve civil society activities, to provide coordinated services for member associations working on this issue and to strengthen individuals, groups, institutions and organisations working in the field of disabled people.

**The Foundation for Women's Solidarity, Ankara, <http://www.kadindayanismavakfi.org.tr/>**

The foundation (*Kadın Dayanışma Vakfı*) struggles against gender inequality and all

forms of violence against women in line with feminist principles and in solidarity with women subject to violence through their independent Women Support Centre. They organise awareness-raising activities such as workshops and trainings with regard to combating violence against women.

**The Media and Law Studies Association, İstanbul, <https://www.mlsaturkey.com/>**

The MLSA (*Medya ve Hukuk Çalışmaları Derneği*) carries out activities in the areas of right to obtain information, freedom of expression and freedom of press, and provides legal support for people who stand trial on the grounds of their professional activities, journalists being their primary target group.

**Tigris Social Research Centre, Diyarbakır, <http://ditam.org/>**

DİTAM (*Dicle Toplumsal Araştırmalar Merkezi Derneği*) aims to increase the role of civil society organisations in the improvement of fundamental rights and freedoms as well as the solution of the Kurdish problem by conducting research on economic, social and political issues, primarily in Diyarbakır, by means of experts in the field.

**Zan Foundation for Social, Political and Economic Studies, Diyarbakır, <http://zanenstitu.org/>**

Zan (*Zan Sosyal Siyasal İktisadi Araştırmalar Vakfı*) carries out activities with the aim of conducting scientific academic research on Turkish and Middle Eastern societies, encompassing all areas of the social, political and economic sciences. It has an interdisciplinary approach and is sharing the knowledge that it acquires through these research in the public sphere. It also provides support to people living in Diyarbakır, who cannot benefit from their right to education.

## Annex-2: List of Other Major Reports on the Shrinking Civic Space and the Pandemic

### I) Civil Society Reports

1. Shout Out, Let Them All Hear You - Evolving International Advocacy Approaches and Practices of Civil Society in Turkey (Hafıza Merkezi Berlin, 2021)  
HM Berlin – Shout Out (ENG)  
<https://hm-berlin.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/shout-out-en.pdf>
2. Türkiye Kısım II – Türkiye’de Tehlike Altındaki Sivil Toplum: Örgütlenme Özgürlüğü ve Daralan Sivil Alan (Turkey Part II – Civil Society Under Threat in Turkey: Freedom of Association and Shrinking Civic Space, OBS, İHD – Human Rights Association, May 2021)  
OBS – İHD Raporu (TR)  
<https://www.ihd.org.tr/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/OBS-%C4%B0HD-T%C3%BCrkiye%E2%80%99de-Tehlike-Alt%C4%B1daki-Sivil-Toplum-%C3%96rg%C3%BCtlenme-%C3%96zg%C3%BCrl%C3%BCr%C4%9F%C3%BC-ve-Daralan-Sivil-Alan.pdf>
3. Kuşatma Altındaki Yurttaşlık Alanı: Susturma, Baskılama ve Suçlaştırma Pratikleri (Citizenship Under Siege: Practices of Silencing, Suppression and Criminalisation, TİHV – Human Rights Foundation of Turkey, 2021)  
TİHV – Kuşatma Altındaki Yurttaşlık Raporu (TR)  
[https://tihv.org.tr/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Kusatma\\_Altındaki\\_Yurttaslik\\_Alani.pdf](https://tihv.org.tr/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Kusatma_Altındaki_Yurttaslik_Alani.pdf)
4. Verilerle 2021 Yılında Türkiye’de İnsan Hakları İhlalleri (Data Based Evaluation of Human Rights Violations in Turkey in 2021, TİHV – Human Rights Foundation of Turkey, İHD – Human Rights Association, 2021)  
TİHV İHD – 2021 İnsan Hakları İhlalleri (TR)  
[https://tihv.org.tr/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Verilerle\\_2021\\_Yilinda\\_insan\\_Haklari\\_ihlalleri.pdf](https://tihv.org.tr/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Verilerle_2021_Yilinda_insan_Haklari_ihlalleri.pdf)
5. A Defenseless Defense (Association for Monitoring Equal Rights, Hafıza Merkezi, Netherlands Helsinki Committee, 2021)  
A Defenseless Defense Report (ENG)  
<https://hakikatadalethafiza.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/A-Defenseless-Defense.pdf>
6. Representation of CSOs in National Media: Media Analysis (YADA Foundation, 2021)  
YADA – Representation of CSOs in National Media Report (ENG)  
[https://yada.org.tr/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/REPRESENTATION-OF-CSOS-IN-NATIONAL-MEDIA\\_MEDIA-ANALYSIS\\_FEBRUARY-2021.pdf](https://yada.org.tr/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/REPRESENTATION-OF-CSOS-IN-NATIONAL-MEDIA_MEDIA-ANALYSIS_FEBRUARY-2021.pdf)
7. Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism on the role of measures to

- address terrorism and violent extremism on closing civic space and violating the rights of civil society actors and human rights defenders (United Nations, 2021) UN Report of the Special Rapporteur (ENG)  
[https://www.sessizkalma.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/A\\_HRC\\_40\\_52.pdf](https://www.sessizkalma.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/A_HRC_40_52.pdf)
8. Autocratization Turns Viral: Democracy Report 2021 (V-Dem Institute, 2021) V-Dem\_Democracy Reports (ENG)  
[https://www.v-dem.net/static/website/files/dr/dr\\_2021.pdf](https://www.v-dem.net/static/website/files/dr/dr_2021.pdf)
  9. People Power Under Attack 2021 (CIVICUS, 2021) CIVICUS 2021 Global Report (ENG)  
<https://civicus.contentfiles.net/media/assets/file/2021GlobalReport.pdf>
  10. Freedom in the World 2021: Democracy under Siege (Freedom House, 2021) Freedom in the World Report 2021 (ENG)  
<https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2021/democracy-under-siege>
  11. Freedom on the Net 2021: The Global Drive to Control Big Tech (Freedom House, 2021) Freedom on the Net 2021 Report (ENG)  
<https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/2021/global-drive-control-big-tech>
  12. Civic Mobilization in Authoritarian Contexts (Freedom House, 2021) Civic Mobilization Report (ENG)  
[https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2021-07/PSDL\\_FH\\_07012021\\_Precursors\\_Annotated\\_Bibliography\\_2021.pdf](https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2021-07/PSDL_FH_07012021_Precursors_Annotated_Bibliography_2021.pdf)
  13. Censorship and Self-Censorship in Turkey: January 2021 – December 2021 (SUSMA – SPEAKUP24 Platform Against Censorship and Self-censorship, 2021) SpeakUp Platform Censorship and Self-censorship Report (ENG)  
<https://s3.fr-par.scw.cloud/fra-susma24-tr/2022/03/Speak-Up-Censorship-and-Selfcensorship-in-Turkey-2021.pdf>
  14. Chess, Hide-and-Seek and Determination – Civil Society in Difficult Times (Anadolu Kültür, 2020) AK Civil Society in Difficult Times Report (ENG-TR)  
[https://www.anadolukultur.org/\\_FILES/Contents/991/aksiviltoplumraporu\\_full\\_web.pdf?v=20220330104107](https://www.anadolukultur.org/_FILES/Contents/991/aksiviltoplumraporu_full_web.pdf?v=20220330104107)
  15. Engelliweb 2020: Fahrenheit 5651: The Scorching Effect of Censorship (Freedom of Expression Association, 2020) EngelliWeb 2020 Report (ENG)  
[https://ifade.org.tr/reports/EngelliWeb\\_2020\\_Eng.pdf](https://ifade.org.tr/reports/EngelliWeb_2020_Eng.pdf)
  16. EU Support to Dismissed Civil Society in Turkey: Yes, There is a Better Alternative – Policy Paper (Vocal Europe, 2019) Vocal Europe-Turkey (ENG)  
<https://usercontent.one/wp/www.vocaleurope.eu/wp-content/uploads/Policy-Paper-on-Turkey.pdf?media=1642546813>
  17. 21 Temmuz 2016 – 20 Mart 2018 Olağanüstü Hal Uygulamaları: Güncellenmiş Durum Raporu (21 July 2016 – 20 March 2018 State of Emergency Practices: Updated Status Report, IHOP Human Rights Joint Platform, April 2018) İHOP-OHAL Uygulamaları Raporu (TR)  
[http://www.ihop.org.tr/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Ola%C4%9Fan%C3%BCst%C3%BC-Hal\\_17042018.pdf](http://www.ihop.org.tr/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Ola%C4%9Fan%C3%BCst%C3%BC-Hal_17042018.pdf)

18. Fırtınaya Göğüs Germek – Türkiye'deki Korku İkliminde İnsan Haklarını Savunmak (Weathering the Storm – Defending Human Rights in Turkey's Climate of Fear, Amnesty International, 2018) AI-Fırtınaya Göğüs Germek (TR)  
<https://www.amnesty.org.tr/public/uploads/files/Rapor/F%C4%B1rt%C4%B1naya%20G%C3%B6%C4%9F%C3%BCs%20Germek.pdf>
19. Turkey: Freedom of Expression in Jeopardy – Violations of the Rights of Authors, Publishers and Academics Under the State of Emergency (Yaman Akdeniz, Kerem Altıparmak, 2018) English Pen – Freedom of Expression in Turkey Report (ENG)  
[https://www.englishpen.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Turkey\\_Freedom\\_of\\_Expression\\_in\\_Jeopardy\\_ENG.pdf](https://www.englishpen.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Turkey_Freedom_of_Expression_in_Jeopardy_ENG.pdf)
20. Swedish Aid in the Era of Shrinking Space – the Case of Turkey (EBA, 2018) EBA – The Case of Turkey Report (ENG)  
[https://eba.se/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/2018-06-Shrinking-Space\\_webb\\_Tillganp.pdf](https://eba.se/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/2018-06-Shrinking-Space_webb_Tillganp.pdf)
21. Trends in Turkish Civil Society (Center for American Progress, Istanbul Policy Center, Istituto Affari Internazionali, July 2017) Trends in Turkish Civil Society (ENG)  
<https://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/turkishcivilsociety.pdf>

## II) Evaluations on the Law No. 7262

1. 7262 Sayılı Kitle İmha Silahlarının Yayılmasının Finansmanının Önlenmesine İlişkin Kanun Hakkında Hafıza Merkezi İçin Hazırlanan Değerlendirme (The Evaluation Report Prepared for Hafıza Merkezi on the Law No. 7262 on the Prevention of the Financing of the Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction, Betül Durmuş, 2021) Betül Durmuş-7262 Sayılı Kanun Değerlendirme (TR)  
[https://www.sessizkalma.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/7262-Sayili-Kanun\\_Degerlendirme-son\\_bb.docx.pdf](https://www.sessizkalma.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/7262-Sayili-Kanun_Degerlendirme-son_bb.docx.pdf)
2. 7262 Sayılı Kitle İmha Silahlarının Yayılmasının Önlenmesine İlişkin Kanun (The Law No. 7262 on the Prevention of the Financing of the Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction, Resmi Gazete, 27.12.2020) Resmi Gazete-7262 Sayılı Kanun (TR)  
<https://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2020/12/20201231M5-19.htm>
3. İstanbul Milletvekili Abdullah Güler ve 43 Milletvekilinin Kitle İmha Silahlarının Yayılmasının Finansmanının Önlenmesine İlişkin Kanun Teklifi (2/3261) ve Adalet Komisyonu Raporu (TBMM 247) TBMM Adalet Komisyonu Raporu (The Law Proposal by 43 MPs, including Istanbul MP Abdullah Güler, on the Prevention of the Financing of the Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (2/3261) and the Report of the Justice Commission (The Turkish Parliament 247) Justice Committee Report)
4. 7262 Numaralı Kitle İmha Silahlarının Yayılmasının Finansmanının Önlenmesine İlişkin Kanun'da Yardım Toplama Kanunu ve Dernekler Kanunu'nda Yapılan



Değişiklikler (Amendments to the Law on Aid Collection and Law on Associations in Law No. 7262 on the Prevention of Financing of the Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction, TÜSEV) TÜSEV-7262 Sayılı Kanun Değerlendirme (TR)

[https://www.tusev.org.tr/usrfiles/images/7262\\_Numarali\\_Kanun-Degisiklikler-Karsilastirmali20012021.pdf](https://www.tusev.org.tr/usrfiles/images/7262_Numarali_Kanun-Degisiklikler-Karsilastirmali20012021.pdf)

5. General Remarks on the Bill on the Prevention of the Financing of the Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (STGM – Association of Civil Society Development Centre, 2020)  
STGM – General Remarks on Law No. 7262 (ENG)  
<https://www.stgm.org.tr/sites/default/files/2020-12/on-the-prevention-of-the-financing-of-the-proliferation-of-weapons-of-mass-destruction.pdf>
6. What does the Draft on Preventing the Financing of the Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction Bring for the Associations? (KAOS GL, 18.12.2020)  
KAOS GL – Draft on NGOs (ENG)  
<https://kaosgldernegi.org/images/library/draftonngos.pdf>
7. AKP'den Kitle İmha Silahlarının Yayılmasını Önleme teklifi: "Sivil toplumun tabutuna son çivi" (AKP's Proposal to Prevent the Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction: "The final nail in the coffin of civil society", MLSA, 2020) [www.mlsaturkey.com](http://www.mlsaturkey.com) (TR)  
<https://www.mlsaturkey.com/tr/akpden-kitle-imha-silahlarinin-yayilmasini-onleme-teklifi-sivil-toplumun-tabutuna-son-civi/>
8. Rapporteurs urge Turkish parliament not to adopt new restrictions on NGOs (PACE, 2020) PACE monitors for Turkey (ENG)  
<https://pace.coe.int/en/news/8147/rapporteurs-urge-turkish-parli>

### III) COVID-19 Evaluation Reports

1. The Complaints About the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Outbreak Received from Prisons (CİSST – Civil Society in the Penal System Association, monthly reports)  
CİSST – COVID-19 Reports (ENG)  
<https://cisst.org.tr/en/tcps-publications/reports/covid-19-reports/>
2. COVID-19 Salgını Döneminde Belediyeler: Toplumsal Cinsiyet Eşitliği İçin Neler Yapıldı? (Municipalities During the COVID-19 Outbreak: What Has Been Done for Gender Equality?, Woman Coalition, 2021)  
Kadın Koalisyonu – Covid-19 Döneminde Belediyeler (TR)  
[http://kadinkoalisyonu.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/kadin-koalisyonu-rapor\\_2021\\_baglanti.pdf](http://kadinkoalisyonu.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/kadin-koalisyonu-rapor_2021_baglanti.pdf)
3. Pandemiye Artan Çocuk İşçiliği Araştırma Raporu Diyarbakır Örneği (Research Report on the Increase of Child Labour During the Pandemic – The Case of Diyarbakır, RUMUD – Colourful Hopes Association, 2021)

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This report examines the restraints placed on civil society organizations and the impact of these restraints have had on their field of work and target audiences, based on the experiences of 48 civil society organizations that have taken part in the Haklara Destek Programme during 2020-2021.

In this report, these 48 rights-based organizations involved in the Haklara Destek Programme, financed by the European Union Delegation to Turkey, in partnership with the Truth Justice Memory Center (Hafıza Merkezi) and Heinrich Böll Stiftung, share their experiences in order to highlight common issues and make their needs and solutions visible.