

MIGRATION AND CIVIL SOCIETY

by ICMPD Turkey

1. Introduction

In Turkey, civil society organizations (CSOs) have long been providing services to migrants and refugees. With the influx of Syrian refugees following the outbreak of the Syria crisis in 2011 however, the number of CSOs active in the field of migration increased, with the establishment of many new national/local CSOs and the involvement of international CSOs in the provision of assistance to refugees in Turkey. Today, CSOs play a significant role in the field of migration in Turkey by providing a large variety of services to migrants and refugees, and supporting existing government capacities. Yet, cooperation between CSOs and public institutions remains relatively limited due to several factors ranging from continued limitations in CSO capacities and over prudence on the side of public institutions to collaborate with CSOs. The 11th Development Plan of Turkey (2019-2023) envisages strengthening CSO-public sector cooperation and increasing CSO capacities, and the Ministry of Interior's Directorate General for Migration Management (DGMM) – the central authority for migration management in Turkey – has been taking steps several steps in recent years to support these efforts.

2. Trends in 2020

In 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic has profoundly affected the civil society, just like almost any other sector. Due to the lockdowns throughout March to June 2020, with the exception of the Turkish Red Crescent (TRC), CSOs could not offer face-to-face services to refugees. TRC on the other hand continued face-to-face service provision through its community centres only for urgent cases. The majority of CSOs had to suspend activities at their service centres in order to abide by social distancing rules. Instead, they mostly provided phone counselling and information on Covid-19 measures, notably to persons from risk groups. They also provided updates on DGMM's revised service provision modalities. According to the CSOs interviewed by ICMPD during March-June 2020 on the impact of Covid-19 on refugee populations, the major issues reported through phone counselling were increasing needs for cash assistance and basic needs items due to high rates of layoffs. According to another rapid field study¹ conducted by the Association for Solidarity with Asylum Seekers and Migrants (ASAM) in April 2020 on the impacts of Covid-19 on refugee households, a vast majority of respondents reported difficulties in paying utilities (33,05%) or rent (31,84) or in covering basic needs

¹ A Sectoral Analysis of the Impact of COVID-19 Epidemic on Refugees in Turkey <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/76640>

(25,71%). According to the same report, unemployment sharply rose from 17% to 88% among the respondents after the epidemic. While 62.65% of the respondents reported lower access to food items due to the epidemic, 6.71% reported no access at all. The 3RP Regional Needs Overview 2021² issued in November 2020 also supports these findings. The Overview referred to a rapid needs assessment, which reported negative changes in employment and income status in 80% of the surveyed households, resulting in an increase in basic needs. According to the assessment, more than half of the households reported struggling to meet costs of rent, food, hygiene and other daily expenses. The Overview thus suggested that refugees are under the risk of indebtedness and negative coping mechanisms.

Because of increasing basic needs, CSOs' budget allocations for face-to-face service provision or budget savings were to a great extent reprogrammed for provision of cash assistance and basic need items. CSOs also supported Governorates and local administrations for distribution of basic needs items to refugees and migrants. However, limitations on face-to-face service provision resulted in strong difficulties in the identification of protection cases by CSOs.

The 3RP Regional Needs Overview 2021 also refers to increasing protection concerns due to the negative changes in working status of refugee individuals. According to a rapid assessment referred to in the Overview, these protection concerns included heightened risk of exposure to protection risks for persons with specific needs including increased stress, increased conflict within households and increased domestic violence in their communities. In some CSO reports, reference was made to the increasing risk of sexual and gender based violence (SGBV), specifically of domestic violence notably during such periods. In addition, the CSOs interviewed by ICMPD between March-June 2020 suggested that refugee individuals increasingly reported domestic violence through phone counselling during the lockdown period. However, due to limitations on data collection on SGBV notably under the pandemic conditions, CSOs were not able to produce evidence-based data confirming these reports. On the other hand, SGBV interventions by CSOs' and public institution remained very limited due to constraints on service provision during the pandemic.

3. Major Policy Developments

As part of Turkey's efforts to capacitate and strengthen cooperation with the civil society in the field of migration, in early 2020 the DGMM established a Civil Society Unit under its Department of Migration Policies and Projects, responsible for ensuring a broader outreach to and increasing cooperation with CSOs. DGMM also continued implementing the two-year EU-funded Technical Assistance for Cooperation with Civil Society in the Field of Migration

² 3RP Regional Needs Overview 2021 https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/RNO_17Dec2020_0.pdf

(TACSO) Project³, in cooperation with the ICMPD Western Balkans and Turkey Regional Office. Within the framework of TACSO, a mapping exercise was finalized in 2020 identifying more than 900 CSOs in Turkey engaged in service provision to migrants and refugees, while trainings on migration and international protection developed by ICMPD under the project reached to 194 representatives from those CSOs between February-March 2020⁴. In addition, ICMPD conducted a field study in the first half of 2020 for identifying potential areas for CSO-public sector cooperation in the field of migration. Interviews were conducted with 47 major CSOs active in the field of migration alongside other relevant actors. The findings of the field study point out, inter-alia, that there is a strong need for CSO-public sector cooperation in various areas, including but not limited to refugee integration, trafficking of human beings (THB), irregular migration, and protection monitoring. The report also draws attention to the strong willingness on the side of CSOs to support public institutions, reciprocating the strong need for civil society involvement expressed by public institutions notably at the local level. Based on these findings, further work is ongoing within the framework of the TACSO project to develop generic protocols and standard operating procedures for facilitating potential partnerships between the public sector (primarily the DGMM) and CSOs in two pilot thematic areas, namely integration and prevention of trafficking in human beings.

In 2020, there has also been a significant development opening the way for CSO- public sector cooperation in addressing irregular migration. Within the framework of the establishment of a national assisted voluntary return (AVR) mechanism in Turkey, a Letter of Intent was signed in June 2019 among the DGMM, TICA (Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) and the Turkish Red Crescent – the largest CSO with public benefit status in Turkey. These efforts were supported through the SUPREME⁵ project implemented by the ICMPD.

DGMM published the long awaited “Harmonization Strategy Paper and Action Plan” in June 2020 in order to provide strategic guidance and a road map for integration activities targeting refugees in Turkey. The Strategy recognizes the important role played by CSOs in the field of migration notably for integration and envisages cooperation with CSOs, in particular for improving perceptions among host communities on refugees; for implementing integration programmes; for the provision of efficient, equitable and sustainable health services; and for information dissemination on recent legislative changes on access to labour market and labour rights of refugees. The Action Plan also includes activities for further capacitating CSOs

³ Technical Assistance for Cooperation with Civil Society in the Field of Migration (TACSO)

⁴ The remaining 18 training rounds were postponed to 2021. The trainings are expected to reach 750 CSO staff in total.

⁵ Strengthening Utilization of Additional Policies and Measures for Reinforcing Migration Management in Turkey (SUPREME)

and for collaborating with CSOs for provision of counselling and Psychological Support Services (PSS). Furthermore, the Action Plan aims to strengthen coordination mechanisms with CSOs and other relevant actors in ensuring efficient assistance distribution to refugees. Finally, it is envisaged to ensure CSO participation during the monitoring phase of the Action Plan.

4. Conclusions

The Covid-19 pandemic is likely to have a protracted impact on CSO activities in the field of migration and overall service provision to refugee populations in Turkey. Constraints on CSOs' face-to-face service provision will further affect refugee's access to rights and services. If constraints persist throughout 2021 CSOs with limited funding might need to cease their services/activities targeting refugee and migrant communities. This might in turn further reduce reach-out to these communities and hamper identification of protection cases; thereby aggravating vulnerabilities among refugee communities. Hence, efforts to sustain CSO services in 2021 should be closely followed and supported. It is also essential to closely monitor protection needs and gaps, and to support CSO efforts in this respect, to facilitate necessary measures by relevant migration authorities and other public entities. The DGMM is committed to further its collaboration with CSOs in 2021 in the field of migration, as manifested by its determination to progress on the implementation of the Strategy Paper and the Action Plan on Harmonization, including through activities under the two above-mentioned ICMPD projects (TACSO and SUPREME). In 2021, it is essential to closely follow and further support DGMM's efforts for cooperation and coordination with CSOs in these areas as well as others. It is also important to follow and support DGMM's facilitation efforts to foster cooperation between other public institutions and CSOs in migration sector.

5. Policy Recommendations

- Despite recent efforts by the DGMM to improve cooperation with CSOs in the field of migration, it is worthwhile to note that CSOs reports are indicating that the level of cooperation is not at the desired level yet. Further efforts at reviving the overall relations between public institutions and CSOs in Turkey would help improve cooperation in all fields, including cooperation towards a more inclusive and protection oriented migration management in Turkey.
- At the same, it is also vital to further invest in efforts on CSO capacity building, and to facilitate solid cooperation between CSOs and public institutions. The DGMM and other relevant ministries, such as the Ministry of Family, Labour and

Social Policies, need to reflect on sustainable mechanism for delivery of public support to capacity building of CSOs active in the field of migration.

- The Covid-19 pandemic is expected to affect CSOs and their ability for service provision in Turkey well into 2021; hence hamper the access of refugees' access to services provided by CSOs. Support for efforts in regular protection monitoring (notably by CSOs) need to be stepped up in 2021 in order to ensure that necessary measures are put in place for protection-oriented migration management.

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