

Civil Society in Turkey:
AN ERA OF TRANSITION

CIVICUS CIVIL SOCIETY INDEX REPORT FOR TURKEY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



CIVICUS Civil Society Index
An international action-research project coordinated by CIVICUS:
World Alliance for Citizen Participation



FOREWORD

The Third Sector Foundation of Turkey (TUSEV) was established in 1993, with the pioneering leadership of 23 foundations. Today, TUSEV comprises a network of over 100 foundations, in support of a common mission to *‘strengthen the legal, fiscal and operational infrastructure of the non profit sector in Turkey’* and programs in policy advocacy, research, and building partnerships. To date, the CIVICUS Civil Society Index (CSI) project has been one of most important initiatives undertaken by TUSEV, and was the first comprehensive and internationally comparative study on civil society in Turkey. Aside from an invaluable collection of data presented in the country report, the project offered a number of other benefits.

To begin, the CSI project offered an analytical and conceptual framework. This enabled the assessment of the complex construct of civil society in a structured manner. The multitude of indicators assessed ranged from structural issues (resources, participation), environmental factors (rule of law, rights and freedoms), values (empowering women, environmental sustainability) and impact (on policy and improving the lives of people).

Another important contribution of CSI was the variety of research methods used to collect and analyze data. Some methods (particularly the media review) were used for the first time in the Turkish context, thereby bringing a range of skills and tools to be employed in future studies. This also contributed to building the research capacity of TUSEV as well as other individuals and organizations involved in the CSI project.

Last but certainly not least, this project was more than a research initiative- it had convening power, bringing over 250 stakeholders and experts together over the course of the project, to reflect on civil society and their role as part of this burgeoning movement. It created a sense of empowerment that knowledge is power; and that by reflecting and planning, we could unlock the immense potential of civil society and civil society organizations (CSOs) in Turkey.

As we complete this project, we are hopeful that both the process and the outcomes of this study will shed a new perspective on civil society, with a view to promoting more initiatives aimed at strengthening this vibrant and dynamic sector.

Prof. Dr. Üstün Ergüder
Chairman of the Board
TUSEV- Third Sector Foundation of Turkey

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First and foremost we are thankful to the international non-governmental organization **CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation** for pioneering the design of the methodology, awarding TUSEV the opportunity to implement the project in Turkey, and providing training and guidance throughout the project. We are grateful particularly to Mahi Khallaf and other CIVICUS colleagues for their assistance.

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The **National Advisory Group (NAG)** of the project provided guidance on the local implementation of the CSI.¹: **Aziz Celik** Kristal Trade Union, **Bilgi Bulus** UNDP Global Environment Facility, **Derya Akalin** Mother Child Education Foundation, **Fikret Toksöz** Istanbul Policy Center, **Funda Erdem** Kars Municipality, **Gülcan Korkmaz** Youth for Habitat and World Bank Youth Voice Project Group, **Hakan Gümüs** Turkish Youth Council, AEGEE-Ankara, **Neslihan Tombul** Education Volunteers Foundation Board Member, Bank of New York Director, Turkey, **Murat Çelikkan** Helsinki Citizens Assembly, **Nurhan Yentürk** Bilgi University NGO Training Programme, **Ömer Çaha** Fatih University and Civil Society Journal Editor, **Pinar Ilkcaracan** New Ways- Women for Women's Human Rights, **Sunay Demircan** Civil Society Development Center, **Seyhmus Diken** Diyarbakir Art Center and **Sentürk Uzun** Department of Associations, Ministry of Interior. We are most grateful for their time and insightful contributions.

The project was coordinated by a core '**National Index Team**' or **NIT**, established at the Third Sector Foundation of Turkey (TUSEV) to manage the data gathering and research activities, project implementation, and preparation of research for publication of this final report: Dr. Ahmet Icduygu (Koc University), Dr. Fuat Keyman (Koc Univeristy), Gulhan Ozdemir, Z. Muge Dane, Zeynep Meydanoglu. Exceptional thanks to this team, without their efforts this project would not have been possible. Thanks also to the media review teams at Istanbul Bilgi University (team led by Dr. Asli Tunc) and Hacer Foggo from IPS Communication Foundation, and Basak Ekim, Murat Aksoy, experts who prepared the reports on CSO policy impact. Finally, a special thanks to our project intern Pinar Sayan for her work on the media database, the National Forum team of facilitators and note-takers for their efforts, TUSEV colleagues who provided critical inputs and feedback, and our support staff for their diligent project administration. I would also like to thank the key informants which were consulted throughout the process of conducting this study- especially Rana Birden, previously from the Civil Society Development Project (CSDP).

Last but not least I would like to thank all of those actively working with and supporting

¹ Note organizational affiliations may have changed since the beginning of this project.

CSOs- and especially CSI survey and consultation participants who patiently shared their perspectives and provided great inputs to this study. Your tireless efforts and dedication are an inspiration to us all.

I anticipate this report will provide an informative perspective on civil society, guidance on developing initiatives to strengthen the sector, and set a precedent for additional research efforts. Perhaps most importantly, I hope that it will leave you, as it did me, with great admiration for civil society's current vitality, and conviction to further enable its role for the benefit of Turkish society.

Filiz Bikmen

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Executive Director, TÜSEV- Third Sector Foundation of Turkey

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This publication presents findings of the Civil Society Index (CSI) project, the first comprehensive and internationally comparative study on civil society's structure, environment, values and impact in Turkey. The purpose of this report is to convey current challenges and opportunities facing civil society in Turkey, and ultimately stimulate greater discussion and action to strengthen its ability to promote sustainable and democratic society.

The analytic framework of this complex study was based on four main dimensions (structure, environment, values, and impact) and 74 corresponding indicators². The indicators were supplied with a wealth of data collected between 2004 and 2005 by the National Index Team (NIT) of practitioners and academics from a broad range of secondary sources. Additional field studies included case analyses and active consultations with over 200 representatives from civil society, government and private sector. Data was subsequently synthesized in a draft report similar to this final country report, and 'scored'³ by the project's National Advisory Group (NAG) which yielded a quantified assessment and visual graph of CSI findings (see figure 1, Civil Society Diamond for Turkey). In December 2005, approximately 100 participants (most of them from civil society organizations, or CSOs) came together in a two-day National Forum to discuss outcomes, implications and draft action plans. Hence, this country report presents a substantial amount of information compiled from a broad array of research activities conducted as part of the CSI project.

While the study revealed a great deal of insight on the current 'state' of civil society, it also confirmed the 'reality' (based on experiences and perceptions of the research team and other stakeholders) that civil society in Turkey is of limited strength, yet undergoing a significant era of transformation. The Diamond (figure 1) presents a general visualization of research outcomes, which are described in great detail in the comprehensive country report.

In terms of a brief discussion of the main dimensions, the **structure** of civil society in Turkey faces greatest limitations. This is particularly apparent given *the narrow depth and breadth of civic participation, inadequate skills and resources of CSOs, and undeveloped linkages among CSOs*. Relative to structure, other dimensions scored almost twice as high, yet still relatively low on the scale of 0 to 3.

The **environment** within which civil society operates is ostensibly hindered by a *lack of adherence to rule of law, corruption and highly centralized state administration as well as undeveloped linkages between state-civil society and private sector-civil society*. However, recent reforms suggest a progressively more enabling *legal framework* for CSOs and expanded *civic rights and liberties*.

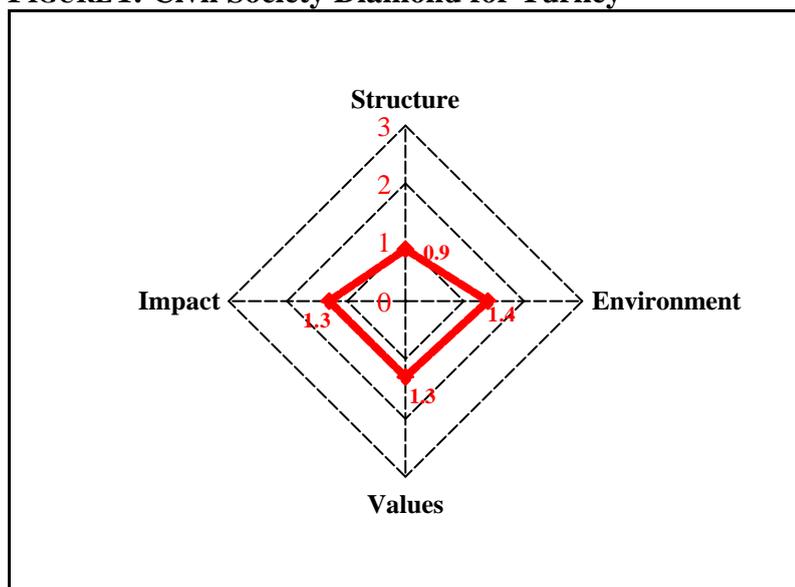
² Please see Appendix for detailed explanation of indicators.

³ Please see 'Methodology' section for more on the research activities and scoring process.

The **values** dimension reveals a limited adoption of practices such as *tolerance, democratic practices and good governance* within CSOs and limited actions to promote *poverty eradication*. However, these limitations are balanced by civil society’s strength in promoting *gender equity, non-violence and environmental sustainability*.

Finally, the **impact** dimension yields a rather low score; partly as a result of limitations on CSO advocacy initiatives (due to state interference), as well as lack of civil society activities in *holding the state and private sector accountable and responding to social interests*. These limitations however, are balanced by a particularly strong role *in meeting societal needs, empowering citizens and increasing level of engagement around policy issues*.

FIGURE 1: Civil Society Diamond for Turkey



The following sections provide an overview of the current context and major trends in Turkey, followed by a summary of key findings.

Overview of Civil Society in the Turkish Context

In order to decipher the ‘current’ assessment of civil society, it is necessary to provide a brief overview of the current circumstances in which it exists. While Turkey’s historical roots of civil society are described in more detail in the full report, several occurrences over the past ten years have been significantly important in shaping the current context. The first of these was the Habitat Forum in 1996, an international meeting in Turkey that mobilized hundreds of Turkish CSOs and other key stakeholders, paving the way for Turkey’s participation in the global movement of civil society while also increasing awareness of the role of CSOs in addressing mandates around social justice and sustainable development.

A few years later in 1999, a devastating earthquake in the Marmara region created widespread destruction, leading to the death of over 20.000 people. In response to this catastrophic disaster, CSOs mobilized thousands of volunteers and donations to help affected populations. During this time, the general public witnessed the crucial role of CSOs in meeting the urgent needs of citizens; far beyond the capacity of the government.

Following this incident was perhaps one of the most significant milestones affecting the recent changes in Turkey's civic landscape on a political level. With the acceptance of Copenhagen Criteria in 2001, the Government of Turkey (GoT) agreed to demonstrate political will and adherence to adopting democratic values and practices of the EU. As a result, significant reforms- many of which directly affected civil society in terms of rights and freedoms- were undertaken between 2002-2004. These reforms were critical for enabling space for civil society in Turkey (granting freedom of association, assembly), which had been under significant restriction for a period of approximately 20 years. Subsequent reforms included new provisions in key laws at the central and local level to promote dialogue on strategy and policy issues such as human rights and social policy.

As a backdrop to these specific events, a number of other factors have affected social and economic life and ultimately, the role of civil society- among them the peaks and troughs of Turkey's burgeoning market economy and government de-centralization, which has led to less public spending for key services. Not unlike other developing countries and emerging democracies, these factors galvanized a new set of mandates for the role of CSOs in Turkey's plight for sustainable development and democratization.

This brings us to the present, an era in which civil society is of increasing importance for economic and political leaders, and society in general. In response to these opportunities, CSOs are shifting from being loose, informal groups to more structured and 'organized' institutions. While the number of CSOs remains relatively low given the size of the overall population- with only 108 associations and 6 foundations per 100.000 citizens- the recent onset of the 'project culture' phase, has created more impetus for CSOs in mobilizing toward specific objectives regarding development and democratization.

As such, the 'picture' of civil society presented in this study was taken in a time of great transition (which continues in the present), during which both the concept and practice of civil society was subject to drastic and rapid changes in its environment. In this sense, taking a picture was more like following a moving target. However, this research offered a previously unavailable opportunity to look at civil society from a number of different angles- such as its role in society, levels of participation and impact, values espoused and practices- and to gain a better understanding of what civil society looks like as a result of these transitions, and what to expect in the future. Some of the key findings are described in summary below.

Overview of Key Findings.

These findings highlight both the strengths and limitations of civil society as assessed through the CSI lens.

Meeting Societal Needs. Given the relatively nascent stage of the sector overall, a handful of CSOs are demonstrating an impressive ability to respond to societal needs- whether it be a new school, a dorm, rescue missions and relief efforts for natural disasters or human rights training for judges and border police training on working with refugees. There are also an increasing number of CSOs working beyond Turkish borders, such as helping victims of the tsunami in South East Asia. However, in order to continue providing services and expanding their reach, CSOs necessitate better fiscal benefits (e.g. VAT discounts for purchasing and mobilizing large quantities of goods) and incentives for donors.

Individual Participation. This study reveals that while a group of strong and highly capable CSOs is emerging, a majority of Turkish citizens remain rather disconnected from this movement. Per 100.000 citizens, only 5790 are registered members of associations⁴. While Turkish citizens demonstrate a proclivity to support one another among their close networks of kinship, they are less likely to make donations to other CSOs or participate as volunteers. CSOs share concerns about limited membership and their outreach to society, noting the need to promote more citizen involvement.

Organizational Capacity. Recent changes in the Turkish context have created new mandates for CSOs in the area of service delivery and advocacy. Yet many newer CSOs struggle with building skills (in basic management as well as programmatic delivery) and obtaining resources to operate programs. CSOs with established capacity face challenges with scaling up and sustainability in light of growing demand for their programs. While a number of recent training programs have been launched to provide training and support, demand still outweighs supply. In addition, programs tend to be focused on new or emerging organizations, leaving more experienced CSOs without support on how to advance their organizations to the next level. Finally, a lack of resources and organizational management skills limits CSOs' ability to recruit and compensate professional staff, resulting in a conundrum of limitations with skills and capacity. These challenges merit significant support in a number of areas, especially 1) creating mechanisms to facilitate the flow of resources to CSOs 2) increasing training opportunities around basic skills of fundraising, program delivery, and other areas, and 3) investing in capacity (human and technical infrastructure).

Collective Action and Cooperation among CSOs. Over the past few years there has been a rise in the number of CSO networks and platforms. Two very commendable examples are the environmental movement, which is extremely well organized as a sub-sector with a number of regional and national platforms. The women's movement has also become rather well networked as a sub-sector. Human rights groups and other organizations are following a similar trend. A comparable increase is observed in the number of meetings and conferences organized with international CSOs- likely a result of EU related initiatives that encourage collaboration. However, this study reveals that CSOs continue to remain concerned about cooperation and communication among their fellow organizations- both within and between sub-sectors. They also feel rather disconnected from their international counterparts, most likely due to lack of opportunities to interact and exchange information. It is yet to be seen whether larger networks and umbrella organizations will be formed, or if, given the vast size and diversity of the country, a number or smaller organizations will fulfil this role.

Civil Society Relations with the Public Sector. Relations between civil society and the Government of Turkey (GoT) is a critical issue affecting the development of civil society in Turkey. The new association law was not even one year old during the time this study was conducted; yet many stakeholder discussions and other reports indicated its positive impact on improving relations between CSOs and the GoT. However, concerns regarding the gap between laws to protect rights of civil society and the actual practice of implementing these laws result in a sense of cautious optimism. Several cases of excessive government interference and control continue to emerge, leaving CSOs feeling uneasy in expressing opinions that challenging the state with fear of sanction. This is reflected in low levels of civil society activity in holding the state accountable and promoting state transparency. Thus, while Turkey has effectively started transitioning out of an era of state control over civil society, there is still a long road ahead in achieving a fully enabling environment. This suggests an

⁴ Not including trade unions.

important role for CSOs in monitoring the implementation of laws and policies and bringing discrepancies to light.

In an effort to engage with CSOs, the GoT recently ratified a number of new provisions to promote cooperation and dialogue with civil society- such as encouraging CSO participation in city councils, cooperation in service delivery, a joint human rights commission and a social policy commission. These developments have served to further relations between the two sectors. While these points of progress merit acknowledgement, looking forward, the GoT must continue to develop clear frameworks and mechanisms to translate policies into practice, and ensure transparent and accessible relationships between the two sectors. Finally, tax reforms are critical to ensuring fair access to advantages for CSOs that contribute to the public good; on the other hand, CSOs must also fulfil their role as partner in developing policy which affects the sector, and be organized to effectively negotiate new policies and practices which will shape the sector and relations with the GoT.

Philanthropy: Individual and Institutional Donors. As the sector continues to expand in size and scope of activity, so do corresponding needs for resources. While the EU is emerging as a significant source of funds for CSOs, other (Turkish) funders are falling behind. Turkish funders- individual and institutional- are not familiar with organized giving, grantmaking, and other financial means to support CSOs. While 80% of Turkish citizens give in one form or another (religious, to needy close kin and friends, to CSOs), most have a proclivity toward making small donations directly to needy individuals in their close circles (86%), rather than to CSOs (18%). Annual total donations (including all forms of giving) are estimated to be less than 0.01% of GDP, or an average of 53 USD per household. Private foundations in Turkey are ‘operating foundations’, i.e. generally funding their own programs and/or institutions rather than grantmaking. Corporates are increasingly keen to ‘partner’ with CSOs on projects, which are framed as ‘sponsorship’ initiatives rather than grants through corporate giving or corporate philanthropy programs. The GoT is not an official grantmaker per se; to date, transfer of funds and/or in kind support has been on a one-off basis. However, incoming structural funds from EU matched with Turkish funds will increase their role as donors for CSOs.

With a lack of structured funding practices (and a corresponding lack of skill in ‘fundraising’ on behalf of CSOs), the sector is currently limited in terms of its resource base. This is especially challenging for CSOs working on rights-based issues as opposed to service delivery. New strategies and mechanisms to broaden the base of donors and thus increase the flow of resources to CSOs will be of great benefit to the sector both in terms of increasing participation and support from Turkish funders and donors, and in creating access to more financial resources for CSOs.

Trust and Social Capital. While Turkish people tend to display a great deal of ‘helpfulness’, by and large, levels of trust and tolerance are quite low. This manifests itself in a lack of cohesive and cooperative action- especially in the civil society arena where many groups remain divided along lines of ideology, geography and in some cases, ethnicity. Although CSOs express concern about these divides, they remain vague and uncertain in terms of their role in addressing root causes and building greater social cohesion. On a positive note, while overall levels of trust in institutions are low, CSOs fare quite well in comparison. Recent studies also reveal that 1 out of every 2 people think CSOs can make a positive contribution to Turkish society. This suggests that CSOs have an opportunity to harness public support in their plight to ‘bond’ and ‘bridge’ diverse groups in society.

Good Governance: Transparency and Accountability of CSOs. Although CSOs are playing an active role in promoting democracy, they criticize their lack of good governance and practices of internal democracy. The sector is not perceived to be corrupt per se; however, CSOs remain keen to advance their practices of institutional transparency and accountability. Codes of conduct, standards and other self-regulatory mechanisms will be important to facilitate the advancement of CSO governance.

Rights-Based Work and Policy Impact of CSOs. The increasing number of CSO initiatives on a broad array of issues from freedom of speech to torture and right to trial, women's rights, and children's rights are taking the rights-based agenda to a new level. Not only are these organizations providing services to disadvantaged groups (e.g. shelters for women and street children, legal aid); they also take active positions on a number of policies affecting their target populations. Most notable efforts include human rights CSOs efforts on expanding civic liberties, and women's CSOs that succeeded in their plight for gender-based reforms to the Turkish Penal Code. These are especially worthy of merit given the adverse conditions and restrictions under which they are undertaken- not to mention the scarcity of resources for such efforts (many of which rely on volunteers). This study also reveals an increase in the number of CSOs which wish to take a more active role in the policy making process which will be of great value to society given the immense amount of legislative reform awaiting Turkey in the EU accession process. As the rights-based CSO movement expands, staff and volunteers also express the need to scale up programs and enhance ability to impact policy, mobilize participation and generate more awareness and involvement of citizens.

Media Coverage of Civil Society. This study reveals a fascinating assessment of Turkish media portrayal of civil society. Highlights from this study reveal minimal television coverage, as compared to national-level print media. A majority of news items are short headings (announcement of activities, events), rather than longer pieces and/or opinion editorials, which have more room for insightful reflection. While diversity of coverage (in terms of themes) is impressive, depth and breadth is limited. In addition, trade unions and business associations tend to receive most visibility in the media. Media organs and especially columnists (which have a particularly important impact on public opinion) should be encouraged to allocate more attention to CSO issues and help generate more awareness of the general public.

Corporate Social Responsibility and Support of CSOs. As mentioned briefly under 'philanthropy', companies in Turkey appear to be increasingly aware of their role as donors and supporters of CSOs. However, they are lacking sound strategic practices in making grants and working with CSOs beyond a 'one-off' sponsorship level. Companies would benefit from donor education and services to increase their capacity in working with CSOs, and broaden their involvement through employee volunteering and donor programs (which could be encouraged with greater tax benefits). But most importantly, CSOs and companies should seek to create partnerships project funding with a view to aligning mutual objectives and respective strengths to address critical development challenges.

EU, the Accession Process and CSOs. CSOs participating in the CSI survey report a generally positive impact of the EU and pre-accession process on the development of civil society in terms of legal frameworks, and promoting certain values (see table below). Some of the more negative affects of the EU on civil society were around funding (noting the cumbersome procedures, bureaucracy and lack of transparency). The most significant and positive effects were related to the enabling environment (reform of CSO laws) and increased ability of CSOs to promote democratic values. Among the least significant yet still positive effects were related to promoting capacity for collective action and CSO dialogue with the state. In focus group discussions, the EU was frequently referred to as an elixir in addressing challenges with regards to rights and freedoms, providing funding for CSOs, promoting connections among CSOs, enabling citizens to make better use of their civic rights and increasing public awareness of CSOs. This emphasizes the critical importance of EU support for civil society and democratization efforts in Turkey’s trajectory as a future member of the Union. However, CSOs and other Turkish stakeholders are encouraged to balance this support with national sources and help promote broader ownership of these critical social changes.

Table 1: CSOs view on EU Impact

%	No impact	Limited / Negative	Limited / Positive	Somewhat Positive	Significant / Positive
Legal frameworks	0	9,4	7,1	46,5	35,4
Dialogue with state	3,1	0,8	33,9	38,6	19,7
Financial capacity	6,6	2,5	29,5	33,6	24,6
Promoting democratic values	1,6	1,6	14,2	48,8	33,1
Promoting capacity for collective action	3,2	2,4	42,1	32,5	17,5

Conclusion

The findings of the CSI study underline that civil society is at a critical turning point in its role as an agent of positive social change. The nascent stage of its development is clearly reflected in the CSI Diamond and outcomes, which clearly reveal a greater number of limitations as compared to strengths. However, the study also puts forth a number of opportunities to strengthen civil society’s contribution in pursuit of a sustainable, democratic and open Turkish society.

The CSI project was the first wide-scale research effort to explore and assess the state of civil society in Turkey. The full report includes a detailed section on findings related to each of the 4 dimensions and respective 74 indicators, as well as a summary of recommendations and next steps. This rich study has much to offer stakeholders in the public, private and non profit sectors, at both the national and international level, especially with regards to developing respective strategies, policies and projects targeting Turkish civil society. As such, this report will surely help inform and guide initiatives in the journey of enabling and encouraging private citizen action for public good in Turkey.