



Together against discrimination: building a civil society coalition to improve access to justice for victims of discrimination

Funder: EuropeAid – Delegation of the European Union to Turkey

Timeframe: 3 years, starting per January 2022

Aim of project:

The overall aim of the project is to improve access to justice for victims of discrimination by building a stronger civil society coalition. Focus lies on improving civil society response to discrimination as a key condition for the protection and promotion of human rights in Turkey. In particular, it aims to strengthen the capacity of rights-based organisations in complaint handling in discrimination cases, strategic litigation and engaging with the National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs), and to facilitate networking and coalition building.

Discrimination remains deeply entrenched in social, political and legal structures in Turkey. The most impacted groups include those who are not officially recognised as minorities. In addition to racial, ethnic and religious minorities, members of disadvantaged groups in Turkey also include inter alia women, children, persons with disabilities, LGBTI+ and homeless people, who more often than not experience intersectional discrimination. Discrimination based on gender identity and sexual orientation is rampant and becomes all the more concerning now that violence against women, especially trans women, is rapidly rising.

As discrimination towards these groups is “widely tolerated” in society per studies conducted by AMER, victims of discrimination often have a lack of knowledge on and trust in NHRIs. This in combination with societal obstacles hinders people to turn to the existing redress mechanisms when they have been victims of discrimination. Their need in terms of awareness, support and information on how to seek their rights have become even more urgent as the lack of human-rights-based approach in the design and implementation of pandemic measures has only exacerbated the discrimination and rights violations experienced by members of disadvantaged groups.

The project commits to increasing access to the NHRIs by focusing on CSOs, as CSOs are often closer to and more accessible for victims of discrimination. AMER’s studies in 2019 and 2020 revealed that while CSOs receive individual applications from members of disadvantaged groups who experienced discrimination, they are not always able to effectively provide legal or other types of support due to a lack of experience, expertise and meaningful consultations with NHRIs. This results in a lack of awareness on how to utilize national mechanisms and how to call on them to effectively operate.



The project aims to address these needs by building the needed capacities of CSOs as complaint handlers. The capacity building activities will also increase CSOs' competences to exert influence on NHRIs through joint strategies, with the aim to increase engagement between CSOs and NHRIs. The Human Rights Action Plan 2021-2023 provides an important opportunity for all civic actors to both contribute to the implementation of the Action Plan, but also to ensure accountability of the public authorities tasked with the implementation. Goal 1.2 is mostly dedicated to improvement of NHRIs and Goal 4.4 calls on authorities to improve anti-discrimination policies, produce periodical reports, create a database to ensure proper data collection and adopt legal amendments in the Penal Code with respect to articles concerning hate crime and discrimination. While NHRIs in Turkey, TİHEK and the Ombudsman Institution (KDK), are currently not compliant with Paris Principles, the monitoring of implementation and response to the Action Plan, increased engagement with CSOs and international exchange can contribute to strengthening the effectivity of TİHEKs mandate to fight discrimination.

Target groups and final beneficiaries:

- Rights-based civil society organisations at the local and national level working on discrimination and human rights (target group & beneficiary)
- Academia (target group)
- Bar associations (target group)
- International civil society networks and networks of National Human Rights Institutions (target group)
- National Human Rights Institutions in Turkey (target group)
- Persons who experience discrimination and get support from these CSOs (beneficiary)

Outcomes:

Overall objective: To improve access to justice for people who experience discrimination in Turkey by strengthening civil society in addressing discrimination and advocating for more effective NHRIs in compliance with the Paris Principles,"

Outcome 1: Strengthened capacity and network of civil society organisations, academia and bar associations in combatting discrimination.

Outcome 2: Improved effectiveness of NHRIs in Turkey and cooperation with them through increased pressure from national and international advocacy coalitions to adhere to recommendations based on research and best practices from other European NHRIs.



Activities:

Output 1.1. Establishing the Equality Watch Centre

- Act. 1.1.1. Gathering of Equality Watch Centre members and inception visit to the Netherlands to meet experts from the Anti-Discrimination model;
- Act. 1.1.2: Collect information and learning resources;
- Act. 1.1.3. Coordination meetings with Members of the Centre.

Output 1.2. Capacity of network members in complaint handling and providing legal support is built.

- Act. 1.2.1. Develop, disseminate and collect data of needs assessment survey and baseline
- Act. 1.2.2. Hybrid online and offline learning module on monitoring and data collection, legal framework in Turkey and human rights-based interview techniques;
- Act 1.2.3. Training by international experts from the Anti-Discrimination Bureaus in the Netherlands on complaint handling;
- Act. 1.2.4. Training for CSOs and lawyers on how to work with the NHRIs in Turkey.

Output 1.3. Web portal / online platform for exchange, collection of information and online learning modules.

- Act. 1.3.1. Set up and maintain the website.

Output 1.4. A guidebook on working with NHRIs:

- Act. 1.4.1 Develop and publish the guidebook.
- Act. 1.4.2 Develop and provide online learning module.

Output 1.5. Sub-grants

- Act. 1.5.1. Issue call for proposals, evaluate and allocate sub-grant;
- Act 1.5.2. Develop and provide training for sub-grant receivers on grant management;
- Act. 1.5.3. Organise monitoring visits to sub-grant locations.

Output 1.6 Awareness raising and outreach campaign

- Act. 1.6.1. Develop and promote instruction videos
- Act. 1.6.2. Develop and promote podcasts;
- Act. 1.6.3. Develop targeted outreach strategies towards groups who experience discrimination in cooperation with local rights-based organisations and maintain complaint helpline.

Output 2.1. Stakeholder analysis

- Act. 2.1.1. Conducting a stakeholder mapping and analysis.



Op. 2.2 Stakeholder network established

- Act. 2.2.1. Meetings with stakeholder network.

Op. 2.3 International exchange with academics, CSOs and NHRIs from other European countries

- Act. 2.3.1. International conference
- Act. 2.3.2. Meeting between institutions in Turkey and experts from the NL anti-discrimination bureaus
- Act. 2.3.3. Academic exchange in The Netherlands between researchers in Turkey and Netherlands.

Op. 2.4. Monitoring and assessment tool towards NHRIs and annual assessment reports

- Act. 2.4.1. Co-creation workshops to collect input for development of tool;
- Act. 2.4.2. Development and dissemination of the tool;
- Act. 2.4.3. Publication of annual assessment reports.

Op. 2.5 Analysis conducted of decisions issued by NHRIs in Turkey and strategic applications submitted:

- Act. 2.5.1. Analysis of decisions issued by NHRIs in Turkey by expert;
- Act. 2.5.2. Strategic applications to NHRIs in Turkey and policy recommendations.

Op 2.6 Research grants:

- Act. 2.6.1. Publication of call for proposals, establishment of evaluation committee and grant allocation;
- Act. 2.6.2. Travel to present papers on international conferences.

International context

To facilitate international exchange of best practices, the project targets international civil society networks and networks of National Human Rights Institutions. These include the European Network for Human Rights Institutions, the Dutch Institution for Human Rights, and the NHC's network of equality bodies in the Western Balkans. Via international conferences, the project aims to bring together the NHRIs and other equality bodies from various countries in order to facilitate exchange of challenges and best practices, discuss how cooperation between CSOs and NHRIs is embedded in different countries, and give CSOs in Turkey the opportunity to share experiences, learn from and get introduced to other CSOs and their mechanisms. Via the participation of the Dutch Anti-Discrimination Bureaus in this project, a more concrete exchange in the format of training and coaching between The Netherlands and Turkey will be facilitated.