

Support Foundation for Civil Society



Principle 5



For us, Support Foundation for Civil Society stands apart from other donors. What makes this relationship so meaningful is that it is not defined by the traditional giver–receiver dynamic. Instead, it feels like standing side by side as teammates, working together to empower rights holders. This rare kind of partnership allows both donor and implementer to feel like members of the same team, united by a shared purpose.

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Case Overview

This case study describes how Support Foundation for Civil Society (Sivil Toplum için Destek Vakfı - STDV) responded to the financial insecurity and shrinking civic space facing rights-based grassroots organisations in Türkiye by reinventing itself as a philanthropic intermediary.

Beyond pooling and distributing funds, STDV bridges the gap between donors and grantees — mediating competing agendas, reframing organisations' core operational needs as fundable project outcomes, and reducing the administrative burden on grantees. By linking institutional and individual donors and the grassroots organisations they support, while sustaining democratic Giving Circles that let communities direct their own giving, STDV shows how an intermediary can build trust, cut bureaucracy, and strengthen the resilience of giving ecosystems in a difficult and restrictive operating environment.

About Support Foundation for Civil Society

Support Foundation for Civil Society (STDV) was established in 2014 and started its operations in 2016 in Türkiye by a group of individual donors and change-makers. Its mission is to foster a culture of giving and philanthropy by bridging the gap between donors and civil society organisations through grantmaking. STDV collaborates with philanthropists, companies, and international donors to create thematic pooled funds that support rights-based grassroots organisations — groups working on advocacy and rights rather than direct services — through project grants, core funding, and organisational development support.

Between 2016 and 2025, STDV mobilised resources from over 2,056 individual and corporate donors, distributing more than EUR 7,158,814 in 462 small grants through trust-based approaches.

What was the challenge?

Türkiye is a society facing shrinking civic space, with increased pressure on civil society and philanthropy. There are numerous reasons for this: government funds are limited, and international donors are often relied upon for rights-based issues. Certain areas, such as arts and culture, are funded by the private sector and thus vulnerable to economic fluctuations. Although Türkiye has a high GDP (around USD1.57 trillion in 2025), there is immense income disparity, and individual donors are often reluctant to give due to the legally restrictive environment and lack of transparency, which erodes trust. Compounding these issues is a high wave of migration of young, educated people towards the West.

In this context, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in the nation face an already challenging operational environment and a systemic lack of resources, with local foundations preferring to support CSOs that provide services, often leaving CSOs involved in advocacy work to compete for EU (and other international) funding.

What was the response?

STDV was originally established as a grantmaking foundation to support civil society organisations in Türkiye and to build a culture of giving. It raised money through Giving Circles — groups of donors who pool their money and decide together where it goes — as well as from corporate and international donors. As it grew in its first years, it was funded mainly by individual donors in Türkiye (89% in 2016) rather than by institutional donors, including international foundations and corporations.

Pooling, matchmaking, and translating across the sector

Remaining nimble and taking listening seriously, STDV developed a set of innovative “products” — tailored entry points that let different kinds of donors join the giving ecosystem on terms that feel right to them — as well as innovative ways

of working. In practice, these take three main forms: making grantmaking more equitable, brokering partnerships between donors and organisations, and acting as a trusted point of referral across the sector.

This work happens on several levels. First, STDV continues to pool funds. With no endowment or parent company of its own, it raises and pools resources to support grassroots CSOs, managing a network of pooled funds driven by and geared towards the issues in their communities. Second, STDV acts as a 'matchmaker'. Unlike typical foundations, it connected donors with grantees whose thematic interests align — overseeing numerous uniquely formed giving communities, signing off on grants, and reporting on behalf of its constituents, while protecting the individuality of each cohort and reducing the administrative burden on grantees.

Third, STDV acts as a 'translator'. It listens to the priorities of all involved parties — donors and grantees — and employs various strategies to enable each to hear the other and work together effectively. Overseeing numerous uniquely formed and customised giving communities, STDV manages and administers the functioning of the organisation as a whole, signing off on grants and reporting on behalf of its constituents, while protecting the individuality of each of its cohorts and reducing the administrative burden for grantees.

Negotiating the many individual and institutional donor agendas, goals, and requirements, while also navigating open calls, due diligence, and concerns of CSOs, is highly complex administrative, relational, and mediation work. Mandates of funders may often look rather different to those of the grassroots organisations they support. STDV has realised that because of difficult histories in traditional philanthropy, these agendas need to be effectively mediated in order for both parties to work together, seeing obstacles as 'situations' rather than 'problems' and setting up the infrastructures that make negotiation possible. This is where the work of 'translation' comes in.

An example of this is that, broadly speaking, donors are generally more interested in funding projects than funding the core operations of grassroots organisations. On the other hand, organisations are often desperately seeking support to sustain their general operations. In encountering this obstacle time and again, STDV realised that they need to come up with ways to use the resources available to mediate a solution that would address the aims of each party: to show donors project outcomes and to fund organisations' core costs. To do this, STDV has been engaged in processes of writing up the entirety of grantee organisations' work over the course of a year and reframing it as 'projects', itemising particular outcomes that are funded by donors using their money. This type of work is applied specifically to core grants and for projects to make it easier to show what is being funded. In this sense, the donors understand the true value of supporting organisations and not specific projects.

Such interventions change the conditions under which philanthropic support reaches the organisations themselves, without expending energy on convincing donors of what their intentions or aims should be. STDV therefore does more than pool and administer funds: it also pools social, logistical, and administrative resources, facilitating connections and translating concerns between parties so they can work together despite difficult circumstances.

Sustaining Giving Circles and democratic giving

While of course STDV sees the value of, and continues to rely on, institutional fundraising for their own grantmaking programmes, they also continue to advocate for and facilitate Giving Circles that allow donors to choose the areas they want to support. With its own history as a pooled fund, STDV understands that smaller, regular donations often present more sustainable and resilient forms of funding, offering grantees more flexibility in their spending. Furthermore, these circles allow the organisation to significantly expand its direct network, with donors making their own fundraising efforts and introducing their networks to its various projects. To effectively facilitate these democratic giving structures, STDV must let go of some control so that donors are able to make decisions about who they would like to fund. STDV fulfils the back-end operations — that is, the due diligence and government reporting requirements — in order to allow these democratic processes to continue on the ground.

To extend support for CSOs in Türkiye further, in 2016, a Turkish associate of STDV, together with a group of philanthropists of Turkish background, founded the charity [Türkiye Mozaik Foundation](#) (TMF) to mobilise UK funds for Turkish CSOs. Although the organisations are completely separate, TMF is a significant donor to STDV and, through their common co-founder, has benefited from the know-how of Giving Circles, pool funds, and donor culture that STDV has been establishing since its founding. TMF represents a strategic example of STDV's work in strengthening philanthropic societies across geographies.

Influencing donors and building grantee capacity

STDV also hopes to influence the donors and grantees they work with, not only acting as a mediator in fulfilling their agendas, but also working towards a transformed and more equitable philanthropy that encourages all parties to self-reflect. The foundation creates 'curated' environments that gather donors to engage in group and self-reflection, ultimately working towards collective change. STDV evaluates their influence on donors using the WINGS Philanthropy Transformation Initiative [Principles](#).

On the grantee side, beyond its efforts in strengthening diasporic philanthropic communities and fundraising on institutional and individual levels, STDV also facilitates other forms of support for its grantee partners in an effort to build the capacity of CSOs and the greater network. While the foundation itself does not offer these services directly, its full-time capacity-building staff member acts as a connection point, bringing together individuals, organisations, and existing trusted resources. STDV additionally commissions organisations they work with to run workshops on their own experiences and expertise, sharing their knowledge with the broader community.

Seeing the community in '360'

STDV has thus found ways to navigate the challenges of Türkiye's restrictive environment, managing the high risks inherent in the nation's civic space and philanthropy by speaking the different languages of CSOs, donors, and policy and regulatory frameworks. Their team of staff who have long backgrounds in civil society and are equipped to effectively navigate partner aims and agendas and those of philanthropy, are of incredible value in this work.

Ultimately, STDV tries to see the community surrounding any philanthropic party 'in 360' – that is, as a whole. While a grantee organisation may imagine their community to be only those they serve, STDV encourages an approach that also acknowledges donors and boards as part of this philanthropic community, and seeks to provide a kind of support that allows true participation from all community members. Thus, treating people — whether big or small, institutional or individual donors, activists, community members, and board members — equally, and acknowledging the value of every kind of contribution, is key in strengthening and protecting the sustainability of giving ecosystems.

In these many ways, STDV, when faced with the exacerbated issues of civic space through the COVID-19 crisis and the ongoing financial crisis, have harnessed the connections they do have to act as a complex philanthropic intermediary. As a network, resource, and translator for its many constituents, STDV facilitates a philanthropic community based on knowledge sharing and the creation of infrastructure for action.

What did they learn?

- ✓ **Treat competing demands as puzzles to solve, not problems.** Do your best to mediate the desires of both donors and grassroots organisations, seeing their demands as a challenge to solve rather than a problem. Donors can often be seen as 'enemies' of grassroots organisations, potentially because of difficult historical relationships. As an intermediary, STDV has employees with diverse backgrounds, able to mediate and translate between different parties, from donors to CSOs, in ways that are meaningful to both.
- ✓ **Find flexible approaches to meet donor priorities.** STDV offers a variety of 'products' — tailored entry points that let different kinds of donors join the giving ecosystem on terms that feel right to them. For example, local donors can enter a process to establish their own grantmaking programme and witness its progress first-hand. These entry points add an extra layer of work for the foundation, which works to streamline the processes, recognising that donor relationships are a priority.
- ✓ **Get a team with the right experience for flexibility, speed, and reduced bureaucracy.** STDV has staff with experience in civil society work. As such, they understand both sides of fundraising and the funding landscape. This knowledge helps the team balance the needs of the donors and grantees in ways that allow them to cut red tape and simplify bureaucratic processes. Having an experienced team also means having an awareness of what's happening on the ground, allowing STDV to be a good site for referrals in the sector.

- ✓ **Harness existing relationships and communities through Giving Circles.** The Giving Circles extend the opportunity to give to broader society — enabling people to identify problems in their own communities and help make a change. By making use of Giving Circles, STDV emphasises the importance of having insiders as fundraisers and advocates of change, creating social networks that, in turn, organise flows of donor money to specific organisations.
- **Clarify your focus and build relationships to manage restrictive environments.** Be clear on your core work, thematic areas, and portfolio of partners. Create strong frameworks that can be easily operationalised. Building trust amongst parties is also important: STDV ‘curates’ relationships so that donors and CSOs find opportunities to get to know each other and build trust. While these are not grand strategies, they are crucial to help a foundation remain operational in the context of a restrictive environment where trust is hard-earned.
- ✓ **Expand philanthropic infrastructure, even when it means creating competition.** Share your ‘know-how’ freely and widely with stakeholders. If this means that they go on to create organisations of their own that are in competition with yours, remember that the larger vision is in strengthening giving ecosystems, and more organisations doing this work benefit society more. Connect donors, organisations, and others with trusted resources and people in order to allow connections to grow and knowledge to be shared.

Key outcomes and impact indicators

From 2016-2025

STDV awarded EUR 7,158,814 EUR in grants.

From 2016-2024

STDV awarded 462 grants.

From 2016-2024

STDV's grants averaged EUR 15,495 per civil society organisation.

STDV supports a number of funds

including The February 6 Fund: Equal Start for Every Child; Emergency Support Fund; Cemre Fund (for poverty), Children's Fund; Digital Transformation Fund; Gender Equality Fund; Equality Fund in Education; Organisational Development Fund; Arts and Culture Fund; Innovative Approaches in Education Fund; Solidarity Fund for the Future; In All Ages Fund (for elderly rights); and Equal Opportunity Fund in Youth Employment.