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Minorities, Accountability, Rights, Collaboration

Independent Project Evaluation

May 2024

Patrick Regan, Rights Evaluation Studio

Executive Summary

Context

Türkiye's legal framework does not provide comprehensive protections for the diverse range of minorities in the country, with many non-Muslim minorities in particular not officially recognised by the State. Although the Constitution promotes quality before the law, there are no or little protections in place which protect discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, religion, gender, sexuality, language etc.

Türkiye has witnessed significant human rights violations against minorities in recent years, characterised by violence or threats targeting racial, ethnic and other minority groups including refugees, Kurdish minorities, and LGBTQI+ individuals. The situation for minorities has also been exacerbated by persistent restrictions on freedom of expression and association following the 2016 coup attempt, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the 2023 earthquakes.

Project

MRG's Minorities, Accountability, Rights and Collaboration (MARC) programme sought to contribute to the full realisation of the rights of ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities in Türkiye and to slow down/halt the clear trend of erosion of rights. The programme, funded by the European Commission, was delivered between February 2021 and April 2024. Specifically, the programme sought to establish a strong network of minority rights defenders to: monitor & document violations of minority rights; produce and publish authoritative reports; and carry out linked advocacy to increase awareness of the situation of minorities in Türkiye.

Evaluation

The evaluation was conducted by an independent evaluator, Patrick Regan from Rights Evaluation Studio, between February and May 2024. The evaluation objective was to assess the relevance, effectiveness, sustainability, relationships and impact of the project.

In order to obtain data and information for the evaluation, the evaluator engaged in contextual desk research, a document review of data and reports provided by MRG, a small key informant interview programme with MRG staff and external stakeholders, a MARC network survey, and two group workshops with MARC network members.

Whilst the data and information provided and collected has helped provide an evidence base for the evaluator, engagement rates for some of the evaluation activities were limited, and the evaluator did not have access to all of the requested project documentation.

Findings

<u>Project Performance</u>

According to the data provided by MRG's most recent logframe, MRG were successful in delivering the expected activities, securing the anticipated project outputs, and contributing to its outcome indicator targets. This is particularly impressive given the increasingly difficult operating environment and the number of challenges presented which were outside of the project's control (the Covid-19 pandemic, earthquakes etc.). Unfortunately, two of the three

overall objective indicators were not achieved. These related to changes in law and policy and increase actions at the national level to protect minorities. The evaluation found that these targets were unrealistic given the challenging operating environment, and this does not mean that the project has not made a contribution towards advancing minority rights in the country. As discussed in the findings, the project has made important steps towards establishing a network of minority rights activists, increasing their capacity to engage in monitoring efforts and advocacy, and has resulted in increased instances of international recognition of the current state of minority rights in the country.

Relevance

The evaluation found that there was a well-established need for a project which connected minority groups across the country (the network created was described as unique and the only of its kind); and which built their capacities and facilitated opportunities to engage in human rights monitoring, documentation and international advocacy, given that many minority activists are working in isolation from other groups, and may not have had formal training in these areas before.

MRG were well positioned to deliver such a project, having worked in the country before, and have a strong reputation internationally – provide reputability and access to relevant international human rights bodies and EU institutions.

Greater participation by minority groups in the project design, stronger considerations of security and wellbeing needs, and a clearer gender and intersectionality intention for the project were identified as areas to build on for the future to enhance relevance.

Efficiency

The project overcame many challenges which affected the efficiency of the delivery of the project, such as Covid-19 pandemic which restricted face-face network meetings, staff changes at MRG, and the earthquakes in 2023 which caused delays in certain activities. These all had an impact on the momentum of the project delivery. However, the team were efficient and effective in responding to these challenges, as seen from their ability to deliver the majority of their activities within the project timeline.

A lack of clarity on the scope and intention of the network, as well as an underestimation I the time needed to recruit, establish and build trust between the network mean the project required more staff time than initially expected.

Project implementation was managed diligently to monitor the implementation of the project activities and intended results according to the project logframe.

Effectiveness and Impact

The combination of network building, training and practical opportunities to engage in human rights monitoring, documentation and international advocacy appears to have had a positive impact on the capacity of the MRG network members involved in these activities. 91% of network members felt more equipped to engage in human rights monitoring activities, and 64% felt they knew how to protect themselves and others when conducting human rights monitoring activities.

The main inhibitors of effectiveness were reported to be a lack of clear purpose/direction of the network, and a lack of practical opportunities for network members to work collaboratively together on substantive documentation or advocacy projects. A lack of consistent engagement of the network members also appears to have been a challenge which limited the network from reaching the desired impact of its most active members.

Despite these challenges, network members valued the opportunity to be part of the network, and those who received support to engage in field reports/documentation, and international advocacy felt they improved their knowledge and skills, and also established relationships which can be levered for future advocacy.

The emergency support fund which provided a lifeline to individual activities facing hardships, and public facing reports and films which have reached an impressive number of viewers.

Despite it being too early to talk about longer term impacts, there are already examples of how the project activities have made contributions to the international recognition of minority rights issues in Türkiye through UN and EU reporting.

Sustainability

The project shows promising indictors of sustainability. The advocacy opportunities offered to network members created connections and relationships between members and international bodies, network members could continue to share relevant data and human rights monitoring information with these EU and UN contacts. The project was designed in such a way to develop a number of tangible "products" such as the advocacy and monitoring reports, films etc. These products have the potential to be used as ongoing evidence and advocacy tools by minority rights activists in the future.

Most importantly, the network established has huge potential to be a productive and effective platform for different communities to use to purse and advance minority rights in the country: trust, connections, relationships and communication channels have been established between a diverse network, many of whom seem motivated to continue to use the network as a building block for future work. The main concern from members was how to solidify the network in the absence of clear next steps in order to ensure it remains impactful and effective.

EU added value

The programme's direct engagement with EU institutions facilitated the added value at the EU level, for example by establishing communication and relationships between civil society and EU bodies. One clear outcome of the project was that network participants better understood the different mechanisms and avenues they would engage with in relation to international advocacy for minority rights – this included increased recognition of EU opportunities.

The EU's own report in 2023 identifies backsliding of Türkiye's commitments to human rights and democracy, and therefor a programme which sought to strengthen rights in the country is relevant in relation to some of the EU's key concerns in relation to the rights situation in the country.

Recommendations

For the European Commission:

1. Encourage (and even insist) that programmes working on human rights and situations where staff and project participants could be exposed to trauma or vicarious trauma, include budget and plans to protect wellbeing.
2. Consider funding and encouraging project design phases within projects to allow for organisations to engage in meaningful, participatory approaches to project design.
3. Consider funding or connecting MRG/the network to other funding sources to be able to solidify and transition the network.

For MRG:

1. Develop a clearer strategy in relation to gender and intersectionality.
2. Consider using MEL budget for an independent learning partner as opposed to a final evaluation. This would facilitate the programme team to have access to MEL expertise throughout the project to facilitate stronger learning and evaluation.
3. Invest further in risk assessment, digital and physical security, and mental wellbeing support for both network members and MRG programme staff.
4. When designing projects, be realistic in terms of the amount of time, resources and budget you need to implement the project effectively, factoring in time to deal with unexpected challenges, participatory approaches, and relationship building.
5. Consider implementing future capacity building projects with trainings that have a more guided application approach to implementing knowledge/theories/skills. This would allow members to gain knowledge, apply it in practice with the support of an expert, and leave with a tangible outcome they can continue to work on or use.
6. Explore the possibility of collaborating with other NGOs working on related issues in target countries.
7. Find opportunities to co-conceptualise project ideas and future plans with relevant parties further in advance, creating a “bank” of needs informed project concepts.
8. Future programmes which involve networks should establish clear definitions of what is meant by the term, and remind and reinforce this with members and new staff throughout the project.

For the network:

Ideally, the below recommendations could be conducted using funding secured by MRG to help transition the network to its next phases. If not, the network could explore implementing these autonomously.

1. Map the needs, interests, and skills within the network to help inform subsequent recommendations.
2. If feasible, organsie an additional meeting (or series of workshops) to take stock of the network and redefine its values, goals and working models.
3. Map the representation of different minority groups within the network to ensure there is adequate balance between the membership, and no group dominates the direction/discussion of network meetings,
4. Strengthen empathy and solidarity by identifying and exploring opportunities to collaborate, support one another’s advocacy strategies and strengthen one another’s work.
5. Review digital and physical security protocols and needs for the network.
6. Create structures which allow for collaborative decision-making and shared ownership of the network.

Minorities, Accountability, Rights Collaboration (MARC): Independent Programme Evaluation

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Introduction

Special thanks

I wish to give a special thanks to the Minority Rights Group (MRG) team for facilitating access to a range of key participants, being open and honest in their feedback and reflections, and for supporting with the interpretation and translation of key materials. I would also like to express my appreciation for the time, insights and support from the network members that engaged in the evaluation process and to those that helped to interpret meetings.

Project environment

In Türkiye, minority rights are governed by a legal framework established by the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, which officially recognises only non-Muslim minorities.[1] The Treaty itself does not specify any non-Muslim communities. However, Türkiye's official stance recognises only Armenians, Greeks, and Jews as minorities, reflecting their historical status as the largest Millet groups under the Ottoman administration.[2] Consequently, other non-Muslim groups such as Assyrians, Chaldeans, Nestorians, Baha'is, Yezidis, and adherents of the Syrian Orthodox Church, not being part of this system, were denied equivalent rights.[3] This exclusionary recognition has also left many ethnic, linguistic and religious groups, including Kurds, Alevis, Caucasians, Circassians, Laz, Roma and Assyrians, without full legal recognition and vulnerable to systemic discrimination and marginalisation.

Furthermore, the Turkish Constitution omits specific references to minorities. Article 10 is the principal clause relevant to this issue, ensuring "equality before the law" for all individuals and forbidding discrimination on grounds such as language, race, colour, sex, political opinion, philosophical belief, religion, and sect.[4] However, despite this provision, the legal framework lacks dedicated laws to protect minorities and explicit safeguards against discrimination, leaving significant gaps in the protection and recognition of minority rights in practice.[5]

According to the U.S. Department of State's 2023 country report, for example, Türkiye has witnessed significant human rights violations against minorities, characterised by violence or threats targeting racial, ethnic and other minority groups including refugees, Kurdish minorities, and LGBTQI+ individuals.[6] To understand the current landscape of minority rights in Türkiye, it is essential to consider three major events that have shaped recent developments: the 2016 coup attempt, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the 2023 earthquake.

Following the 2016 coup attempt in Türkiye, the government launched extensive purges and arrests targeting military personnel, civil servants, journalists, and activists, often lacking substantive evidence or due process.[7] The crackdown included the suppression of media and freedom of expression, resulting in the closure of numerous outlets and the detention of journalists under accusations of supporting the coup plotters.[8] Civil society, NGOs and human rights defenders faced increased surveillance and operational restrictions, contributing to a marked decline in human rights and democratic governance within the country.[9] Minorities have also been significantly impacted by this antidemocratic wave.[10] The

[1] Section III, Articles 37-44, Treaty of Lausanne (24 July 1923) < https://www.mfa.gov.tr/lausanne-peace-treaty-part-i_-political-clauses.en.mfa>
[2] Sule Toktaş and Bülent Aras, "The EU and Minority Rights in Turkey," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol.124, No.4 (Winter 2009-10), p. 700.
[3] Ibid, 700.
[4] Article 10, Constitution of the Republic of Turkey <https://www.anayasa.gov.tr/media/7258/anayasa_eng.pdf>
[5] Nurcan Kaya and Clive Baldwin, "Minorities in Turkey, Submission to the European Union and the Government of Turkey," *Minority Rights Group International* (July 2004), p. 6.
[6] U.S. Department of State, *2023 Country Report in Human Rights Practises: Turkey (Türkiye).*
[7] Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2017 -Turkey*.
[8] Amnesty International, *Amnesty International Report 2017/2018 – Turkey*.
[9] Amnesty International, *The State of the World's Human Rights April 2024 -Turkey*.
[10] Freedom House, *Turkey: Freedom in the World 2018 Country Report;* Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2024 -Turkey*.

already precarious situation of these groups worsened as the government intensified its security measures and rhetoric against perceived 'enemies'.

During the COVID-19 pandemic in Türkiye, minorities faced significant discrimination fuelled by government actions. Media outlets and government-supported figures spread baseless accusations blaming LGBTI+ people for the pandemic. The head of Türkiye's Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet), for example, publicly attributed the cause of the pandemic to the LGBTQI+ community and individuals living with HIV/AIDS in a sermon broadcast across tens of thousands of mosques.[11] Additionally, provincial authorities have been accused of selectively invoking COVID-19 restrictions as a pretext to prohibit peaceful demonstrations organised by activists advocating for LGBTIQ+ rights, intensifying the challenges these minorities faced.[12] The report also highlighted the Roma community experienced severe socioeconomic impacts during the COVID-19 pandemic, disproportionately affected due to their predominant employment in the informal economy.[13] Social-distancing measures cut off their access to traditional income sources, preventing many from accessing available social safety nets like unemployment benefits. As a result, some Romani families were evicted; for instance, 60 families in Izmir were forced into tent camps. Romani children also struggled to access distance education. The national government provided no compensatory support for Roma forcibly removed from tent cities in Cesme.

On February 6, 2023, two severe earthquakes hit south-eastern Türkiye and north-west Syria, resulting in over 50,000 deaths in Türkiye, at least 100,000 injuries, and many more displacements.[14] According to the Amnesty report, these disasters have significantly impacted minorities, including Roma communities, Syrian refugees and the LGBTQI+ community, highlighting systemic discrimination and the need for protective measures.[15]

These events underline the critical role and need for civil society to advocate for Turkish authorities to fulfil their obligations to protect all individuals within their jurisdiction, ensuring non-discriminatory access to human rights and actively countering racism and discrimination.

Project overview

MRG's Minorities, Accountability, Rights and Collaboration (MARC) programme sought to contribute to the full realisation of the rights of ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities in Türkiye and to slow down/halt the clear trend of erosion of rights. The programme, funded by the European Commission, was delivered between February 2021 and April 2024. Specifically, the programme sought to establish a strong network of minority rights defenders to: monitor & document violations of minority rights; produce and publish authoritative

[11] Umut Rojda Yildirim, "Worsening Repression in Turkey: The Ongoing Crackdown on the LGBTI+ Community", *Freedom House* (February 2024) p. 4.
[12] Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2022 -Turkey*.
[13] U.S. Department of State, Turkey *2021 Human Rights Report,* p.75.

[14] Human Rights Watch, World Report 2024 -Turkey.

15 Amnesty International, "Türkiye/Syria Earthquakes: A Human Rights Approach to Crisis Response" (23 February 2023).

reports; and carry out linked advocacy to increase awareness of the situation of minorities in Türkiye.

The programme strived to achieve these objectives by:

- creating and facilitating a network of minority rights defenders and activists from across the country
- facilitating training, human rights monitoring and documentation projects, and international advocacy opportunities for network members
- providing emergency support grants to human rights defenders in need
- producing a series of short films/documentaries
- publishing a national country report.

Evaluation Methodology

The evaluation objective was to assess the relevance, effectiveness, sustainability, relationships and impact of the project; and to facilitate learning, reflection and recommendations to inform future projects and programmes; and for accountability purposes to communities, partners, donors and MRG.

Firstly, the evaluator consulted with MRG staff and the network on their learning priorities to help finalise the evaluation questions (see annex 1 for the full list of agreed questions). The second phase involved a desk review of key project documents (see annex 2 for a list of documents reviewed), desk research on the project context, and a series of data collection activities which included:

Network micro-survey
We sent a short survey to the network members via Kobo Toolbox which consisted of a small number of both quantitative and qualitative questions in relation to their perceptions of the project's relevance, effectiveness and impact. The survey was sent in Turkish, and members were given two weeks to complete the survey. A total of 11 responses were received (22% of the network).

Network Workshop
Two network workshops were organised which facilitated learning and reflection with network members. Workshops were conducted in Turkish via translation support from bilingual members. The workshops sought to address three key topics:

- Preliminary analysis of the survey (seeking further input and insights in relation to emerging themes)
- Defining network strength and sustainability and assessing the MARC network
- Exploring impacts, challenges and future needs

Unfortunately, fewer members participated in the workshops than expected, and some of the activities planned had to be adapted to different group sizes and dynamics. However, the key topics were still explored, and the workshops generated some useful insights for the evaluation. A total of seven network members attended the workshops (14% of the network).

Emergency Fund Recipients Survey
A short survey was sent to all 13 emergency fund recipients to explore in which ways the fund has added value to their work as human rights defenders and how such a fund could be improved for the future. Only three responses were received (23% of recipients). MRG had previously conducted a survey with the fund recipients which has been used to supplement the data relating to this activity.

Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)
In depth interviews were carried out with relevant project stakeholders, including MRG staff and advocacy/information targets. These interviews were semi-structured, in order to target information relevant to the evaluation but allow flexibility for unexpected results and learnings. All KIIs were conducted online. A total of six interviews were conducted (three with MRG staff, two academic/CSO representatives, and one representative from the European Union).

Limitations

As with all research, there are limitations to the data and analysis which should be cited in order to support meaningful interpretation of the data. The key limitations identified are:

- Due to changes in staff, there were some gaps in documentation relating to the project.
- Workshops were done through interpretation, which although was effective in supporting communication between the evaluator and the participants, some information may have been "lost" in translation, and fewer topics were able to be explored during the workshops to allow for interpretation.
- There was limited involvement in some evaluation activities (see methodology section above). This is possibly related to a lack of wider engagement in the network, and the short time frame for data collection (see findings). This limits to extent to which we can make confident conclusions on the whole of some of the project activities.

Despite these limitations, the evaluator is confident that they have been able to make an informed evaluation of the project, and has identified some key themes, insights and discussions for MRG to reflect on going forward. However, more data and engagement would of course enhance the evaluation.

Findings

Project Performance[16]Focusing specifically on the achievement of the indicators for the results in the project logframe, MRG reached, or even exceeded the majority of their outcome and output level targets (see Table 1: Programme Performance Overview). Unfortunately, the two out of three of the impact level targets were not achieved. However, based on the evaluation data collected, and the evaluator's professional experience of evaluating similar projects and programmes, this does not mean the project has not made a contribution towards its impact goal, but rather that the indicators may not have been relevant or achievable within the timescale and scope of the programme (this is discussed further under the relevance section of this report). For one their impact indicators (Number of mentions of minority rights in Turkey made on record at various international forums), MRG exceeded their intended target of 25 and reported 30 instances.

[16] Please note the project performance section was developed using the logframe data provided to the evaluator on 22 May 2024. However, the evaluator notes there are inconsistencies in some of the figures reported by MRG in the lograme and in their draft narrative reporting, and therefor the analysis can only be considered as provisional. It is the evaluator's strong opinion that MRG should ensure more up-to-date record keeping is maintained for future projects and shared with external evaluators in advance of conducting a review. Some of the indicators lacked specificity which may have made them difficult to track and monitor in a consistent way. In addition, the evaluator has not had access to relevant data to be able to verify the figures reported so far.

Table 1: Programme Performance Overview

Intended Result	Indicator	Target	Final Result	% progress
To contribute to the full realisation of the rights of ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities in Turkey. Current clear trend of erosion of rights is slowed or halted	concrete or positive law, policy or practice officially adopted which can be linked to advocacy & recommendations made under this Action. This could include a successful campaign against a new negative measure preventing its adoption or implementation	1	0	0.00%
	Number of examples of increased local/national positive attention on advancement of the rights & inclusion of minorities in Turkey.	4	0	0.00%
	Number of mentions of minority rights in Turkey made on record at various international forums (ie UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, COE Commissioner for Human Rights).	25.00	30.00	120.00%
OC 1: To establish a strong network of minority rights defenders to **a)** monitor & document violations of minority rights; **b)** produce and publish authoritative reports; **c)** and carry out linked advocacy to increase awareness of the situation of minorities in Turkey.	Number of Network members report that the network has helped them to monitor & document minority rights issues	17	30	176.47%
	Number of key recommendations made by HRDs and organisations under this action are adopted by regional, and/or international decision-makers & authorities in the form of questions or recommendations to the Turkish state to address and reduce discrimination against minorities in Turkey and positively promote and protect their rights.	7	18	257.14%
	Rate of participating HRDs security concerns are reported and adequately addressed by affected HRDs;	100%	100%	100.00%
	Rate of network members report that their security concerns were taken seriously by MRG.	100%	100%	100.00%
Op 1: Strengthened and increased capacity of a network of HRDs and organisations working securely and collaboratively to promote the rights of minorities in Turkey;	Percentage of supported HRDs state that as a result of the provided support they feel safer, more confident and equipped in conducting HR monitoring.	85%	100%	117.65%
	Number of Minority network meetings successfully conducted.	9	9	100.00%
	Number of cases supported through the HRD protection fund.	11.00	16.00	145.45%
	Percentage of the 20 HRDs (disaggregated by sex) trained in HR monitoring and security risk management carry out monitoring and submit data for report/film/multimedia pack use. (A.1.1)	85%	90%	105.88%
Op 2: Regular and authoritative information and research regarding violations of minority rights in Turkey distributed to key regional, and international actors;	Numbers of key international decision makers and authorities that the research outputs of the project are distributed to.	150	220	146.67%
	Number of research outputs produced and disseminated by the end of the project.	7.00	6.00	85.71%
	Number of instances where the report(s)/bulletin(s) are referred/used in advocacy meetings.	3.00	46.00	1533.33%
	Number of instances x year of media coverage of project research/ multimedia outputs.	15.00	153.00	1020.00%
	Number of reports launches successfully held.	3.00	4.00	133.33%
	Number of decision makers attending the report launches.	45.00	25.00	55.56%
	Number of short films produced on the situation of minorities in Turkey and uploaded online.	5	5	100.00%
	Number of unique user views watching the short films produced on the situation of minorities in Turkey.	500,000	1,619,156	323.83%
	Percentage of viewers that take further action (reshare/comment/likes).	5.00%	Data not yet available	
	Number of multimedia story package produced.	1	3	300.00%
	Number of unique views of the multimedia packages produced.	20000	2049	10.25%
Op 3: Strengthened capacity and opportunities for CSOs to engage in joined up sustained advocacy based on research findings at the regional and international levels improve accountability for violations of minority rights.	Number of international advocacy trips carried out or statements	9	9	100.00%
	Number of key decision makers outreached in advocacy to increase commitment of stakeholders to minority rights protection in Turkey.	45	55	122.22%
	Number of HRDs participating in the out-of-country advocacy visits or making statements on international platforms report that they received helpful guidance and support from MRG in order to successfully complete their advocacy.	15	16	106.67%
Op 4. Greater priority given to addressing discrimination, intolerance, and violence against minorities in Turkey amongst local, national, regional and international actors, in particular EU, COE, OSCE, UN human rights mechanisms, and international agencies.	Number of side events) successfully conducted	2	1	50.00%

The programme's intended outcome was to establish a network of minority rights defenders to engage in human rights monitoring, reporting and advocacy. The data collected by MRG which corresponds to the related indicators for this outcome have all been met or exceeded (these indicators relate to the proportion of network members which report the project has helped improve their monitoring efforts, that percentage of project participants that felt their security concerns were addressed, and the number of advocacy recommendations taken on by international institutions and bodies). The Log frame data reported uses data collected directly by MRG, however the data collected through this evaluation indicated slightly different results according to some of these indicators. For example, MRG's data indicates that 100% of their network members security concerns were dealt with, whereas the data from the survey conducted as part of this evaluation indicated 73% of members felt like security concerns were dealt with seriously by MRG (which is just shy of their intended target

of 85%). With the exception of the number of decision makers attending their report launch, and the views of the multi-media package, most of the output level results were achieved.

Note to readers: Due to the security concerns and consent preferences of individuals engaged in the evaluation, the evaluator was unable to include many direct quotes to help ensure transparency of the evidence used to inform the evaluation. Where possible, quotes have been included directly or paraphrased. All findings included in the report are representative of themes that emerged across the project evaluation activities, from multiple individuals. The evaluator has explicitly stated where feedback or findings are based on their opinion, or the feedback from a single individual only – all other findings can be assumed to represent themes that arose from multiple data points (documents, survey data, interview or workshop data).

Relevance

Relevance of programme design

As detailed in this report's introduction, there are significant challenges and obstacles facing minority groups in Türkiye, as well as for the associations and defenders which seek to advance their rights. This is further intensified by an overall climate of restrictions on freedom of expression in the country. It was reported by many evaluation participants that there can be division and tensions between some minorities groups in the country, which this project has supported individuals to overcome. Therefore, there was a clear need for a programme which would help to strengthen minority rights defenders work and capacities (due to the difficult operating environment), and connect groups from across the country facing similar challenges (to strengthen and overcome barriers between groups). Network participants reported that this was the first and only network of this type which worked as a platform for different minority groups to come together. For example, one member stated that they felt activists were very well informed of their own issues, but this was the first time such a broad network was organised in order to learn about the struggles of others.

The project was unique in that it brought a huge variety of minority groups together to form the network, a quality that was reported as a key strength of the network by MRG, and other stakeholders engaged in the evaluation, helping members to gain perspective, and identify common struggles and experiences. The network convened individuals from the following groups: Hemshin, Armenian, Syriacs, Arab Alawi, Yazidi, Kurdish with Sunni background, Kurdish with Alawi background, Pomak, Jewish, Circassian, Oseth, Zaza with Sunni background, Zaza with Alawi background, Greek, Roma, Domani, Adige and Abkhaz, as well as minority LGBTQI+ groups. Evaluation participants were keen to emphasise that convening such a diverse network is no easy feat, and was a significant achievement in itself.

Network members which were selected to take part in the international advocacy opportunities (such as the UN minority rights forum, and to Brussels based EU institutions) a described taking part in these activities as highly relevant for pursuing their advocacy goals and a unique opportunity for them to be able to engage with international institutions, which they would have been unlikely to be able to engage with without MRG's support. Similarly, trainings and support given on human rights advocacy and documentation was perceived as highly relevant (such as how to prepare for international advocacy meetings, the UN forum, disability rights) and important for and by network members as many members may have not

previously had formal education on this. Members also appreciated having access to resources in order to be able to pursue these activities as comprehensively as they have under the programme.

It is difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of the public facing outputs produced under the programme due to a lack of available data.[17] However, based on the feedback and input provided from those engaged in the evaluation regarding the lack of established documentation of minority rights issues in Türkiye, the sensitivity of minority issues, and the need to increase pressure on Turkish authorities to better respect the rights of minorities, there is coherence to the project's design in addressing these issues through the development and publication of films and public advocacy reporting, so that these experiences and stories reach more people.

One critique by the evaluator in relation to the relevance of the design of the programme was the indicator/goal of achieving domestic law and policy change on minority issues in Türkiye – whilst an admirable goal, it can take a long time for laws and policies to change (even in open and progressive contexts), and there for achieving this in a highly restrictive context, where MRG had already identified a need to strengthen the capacity of minority rights defenders to engage in effective advocacy, seems overly ambitious. This relates to a key aspect of the project design which may have been overlooked: the amount of time needed to create, establish and develop an effective network (an important, but time consuming process); and/or steps needed to establish a network membership that will be sufficiently autonomous in reaping the benefits and opportunities generated through the network. . Now that the network has been established, there may be opportunity to now further strengthen and activate the network to collaborate and engage in advocacy, which could help to change laws, policies and practices, however MRG need to be realistic in future programme planning of the timescales for this to happen.

Participation in design and principles of do-no-harm

In terms of participation of minority rights defenders in the design and delivery of the programme, MRG acknowledged that they would have liked to design the programe in a more participatory way, however MRG only had a limited numbers or partners at the time of designing the project, and limited time and resources available to sufficiently expand on this at the project proposal stage. This meant MRG y relied on their pre-existing understanding of the needs for minority rights defenders in Türkiye (the majority of which were validated as being relevant and needed).

In terms of implementation, for the majority of the project, it appears to the evaluator that MRG were in regular communication with the network, sought feedback from them on trainings, and encouraged their input into the design and focus of network meetings. Feedback from network meetings appears to have focused mainly on logistical matters concerning where meetings might take place, duration of meetings etc. It was reported by several interviewees that there was a lack of information exchange and network participation in the first phases of the network (for example one describe that communication only flowed in one direction at the start, from MRG to the members), and it may be that this prevented some members from feeling like they were able to feed into the project in a more substantive

[17] The country report was realised close to the end of the project, and limited data was available relating to the reach, engagement or views relating to the films.

way. This issue was mostly resolved after a change of staff, with many network members reporting that the programme was significantly improved with the new staff member's more collaborative, relationship orientated and personal approach.

In relation to safety, security, and wellbeing (important pillars of a do-no-harm approach). In particular, network members did not feel clear on the overall accountability and risk responsibility that MRG would take if there was a security incident as a result of taking part in an MRG activity. It may be that MRG does indeed have protocols in place, however ensuring that joint risk assessments, and clear procedures and protocols for security incidents are shared with collaborators and network members is important to ensure people can make an informed choice about exposing themselves to risk. Similarly, the programme is engaging with groups who are likely to have experienced distressing and traumatic events, and are required to re-engage in some of these events through their network and advocacy activities. Stronger wellbeing practices and trauma informed approaches could help to protect the wellbeing of staff and participants to prevent re-traumatising, vicarious trauma or other adverse wellbeing impacts which might undermine the sustainability of human rights defenders' work.

Finally, one factor which was perceived by some MRG staff to have limited inclusion in some project activities was the need for network members to be able to speak English in order to be eligible to be considered for the international advocacy opportunities. Whilst this may have been strategic to maximise the potential benefits and impact of this activity, it did limit the extent to which non-English speakers could directly engage. Whilst MRG may have liked to support other participants to take part in these activities with the support of interpretation, the costs allowed under the project budget did not facilitate this.

MRG's positioning

MRG were well positioned to deliver this programme in Türkiye, having worked on a range of issues in the country previously (human rights monitoring, minority rights and education, internal displacement etc.). Many stakeholders reported MRG provided an important sense of safety and security as a third party, which gave them more confidence in joining the network, which is particularly important due to the potential threats and harassment human rights defenders could face in the country. Their reliability, and reputation for high quality international advocacy was also noted as significant by many; this, combined with their ability secure human resources and funds for this project made them a coherent and relevant organisation to deliver the project.

Gender, inclusion, and intersectionality

The programme appears to have taken steps to ensure a gender balance in terms of its beneficiaries (monitoring the number of men and women taking part in different project activities). MRG also appear to have taken steps to pursue a more intersectional inclusion lens by providing a disability rights training to network members, and seeking to engage LGBTQI+ minority rights defenders in their network. Whilst some steps were taken, in the future MRG might wish to engage in a more robust gender analysis and strategy (or more effective mainstreaming of their existing policy), and potentially engage a specialist to help equip staff to engage on gender and intersectional issues (for example, in some reporting MRG seem to have conflated issues of gender and sexuality, which although related, are separate). MRG have already identified some gender related programme ideas for future

projects which might be explored in the future, such as having sub-groups of the network looking at the intersection of gender and minority rights or women's only meetings.

Contextual changes during the project

During the project timeframe, a number of important developments took place which affected the operating context, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, and the 2023 earthquakes affecting Türkiye and Syria (see project context section). These events highlighted the need for a project which focused on minority rights, given these events highlighted the discrimination experienced by many groups in Türkiye[18]. MRG were also responsive to these contexts, for example by enabling their emergency support fund to be used for minorities affected by the earthquake – three of the 16 grants were allocated to earthquake response requests, to enable minority groups to obtain essentials like clothing, blankets, hygiene products, food, and water, during the aftermath of the earthquake. The operating environment further deteriorated through increasingly restrictive political, social and legal developments (see project context section), including restrictions on freedom of expression and association. Whilst these might have made achieving positive impacts in relation to law and policy change even more challenging, it also made the need for projects seeking to strengthen minority rights advocacy and human rights monitoring and documentation all the more relevant.

Efficiency

As seen from the analysis of the logframe, on the whole, the MRG team were able to deliver the project to meet many of its intended targets, despite a number of internal and external challenges which affected activity implementation. In terms of efficiency, MRG and the evaluator agreed to focus on operational challenges and the programme's ability to efficiently respond, adapt and mobilise resource (re)allocation.

Difficult operating environment

The 2023 earthquake delayed some of the filming activities. The Covid-19 pandemic in particular presented many challenges to the programme, given that many of the activities required travel and face-face contact. For the advocacy activities, this meant delaying many of the activities to later on in the project period. Similarly, the pandemic meant it was more challenging to convene and establish the network, given the need to build trust and connection between members which can be very difficult to do via online meetings. Those interviewed as part of this evaluation felt that this caused a delay in establishing some momentum with the network. This was further exacerbated by staff changes within MRG's programme personnel. It is understood by the evaluator that the first coordinator did not allow for effective communication between network members (e.g. a WhatsApp group was created which only MRG staff were allowed to send messages on, making communication one-directional). Some members indicated this had a negative impact on some people's perceptions of the network, its modes of operation, and the potential effectiveness of the network, which might have stifled engagement. Despite this challenge, it was reported that once the new programme staff had been appointed, the quality, communication and usefulness of the network increased and improved significantly. Members engaged in the evaluation were keen to express their gratitude to MRG for implementing the project, and the

[18] https://reliefweb.int/report/turkiye/devastating-impact-recent-earthquakes-turkeys-minorities

project coordinators personable, thorough, and collaborative approach to managing subsequent project activities with the network.

The domestic advocacy/national media coverage planned as part of the project is the only aspect of the project which has not been fully realised – MRG were aware of this potential limitation at the design phase, noting direct engagement with national and local authorities would only be possible in the situation improved. Unfortunately, the political environment became more and more challenging during the project timeframe, introducing and increasing security risks to MRG and project participants. This also impacted on key decisions and activities like the emergency fund (MRG decided it could be too risky to advertise publicly the offer of support, which may have limited the number of applications received). Despite this, there is hope by many of those engaged in the evaluation that the connections, networks, reports and documentation produced under this project will serve as tools and opportunities for further advocacy in the future. Interestingly, at the time of conducting this evaluation, local election results indicated a weakening of the current ruling party hold on some key jurisdictions, with some evaluation participants hopeful that this could be a possible indication that there will be more openings in the future to engage in advocacy domestically.

Lack of resources

The other main challenge which has impacted the efficiency (and outcome) of the programme is a lack of resources. The project had a wide range of activities, many of which were very time intensive. In particular, it will be important for MRG to consider the amount of time needed for activities which requite substantive relationship building (building a network like the one created under this project requires a huge relationship building effort in order to build trust and breakdown barriers between groups). This, combined with the pandemic related delays, and staff changes, meant many activities ran behind the intended schedule. For example, the country wide report was published in the last days of the project, limiting the amount of additional dissemination activities that could be done within the project to maximise its impact. The evaluator is off the opinion that MRG appear to have worked hard in addressing these challenges, and programme staff have gone “above and beyond” to ensure the project activities were implemented to a high standard – however, more time, and more resources, could have ensured activities were done more efficiently and impactfully, and without the risk of additional burden on programme staff. From the evaluator’s experience of evaluating a range of human rights projects across different contexts, ensuring projects are realistically implementable with the resources provided is a particularly important factor to consider when staff have personal connections to the project context, and are likely to work beyond the resources they have due to their motivation to ensure the project is impactful, increasing the potential risk of burn-out or negative effects on wellbeing.

Overall, MRG were resilient and responsive in delivering a project under a very difficult set of circumstances. Despite many of the operational challenges faced, they were able to implement much of the project as planned, with reasonable adaptions to changes in the operating environment, in a way that has culminated in useful outcomes (see effectiveness and impact section). More realistic resourcing considerations at the project design phase, including for wellbeing, could help to improve efficiency of future programmes.

Project monitoring

In terms of monitoring project delivery, MRG Europe monitor project implementation, discuss and document key challenges and solutions through Department Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation "DPME" meetings. During these meetings the team also review and update result indicators according to their project log-frame. MRG might consider enhancing this process by also using this as a time to critically engage with project performance at the outcome level, identify and reflect on project outcomes, and ways to improve project delivery to enhance programme impact (including qualitative examples of outcomes and impacts and unintended outcomes). . One way to achieve this might be to considering using their M&E budget to develop more frequent touch points with project beneficiaries and engaging in reflective practices (see recommendations section for more detail).

Increasing efficiency of capacity building activities

Evaluation data from MRG's trainings, and the survey conducted indicates that the training activities were indeed efficiently organised and effective at increasing knowledge of human rights documentation and advocacy. However, one recurring theme that emerged in the evaluation process has been the lack of substantive opportunities to put some of the knowledge into practice, and to collaborate with other members on different research or advocacy projects (see recommendations section for some suggestions on how this could be addressed).

Effectiveness and Impact

MRG sought to contribute to one key outcomes in their project: To establish a strong network of minority rights defenders to a) monitor & document violations of minority rights; b) produce and publish authoritative reports; c) and carry out linked advocacy to increase awareness of the situation of minorities in Türkiye. Data collected from the evaluation surveys and the evaluation workshops can help us to explore the extent to which this has been achieved.

Strengthening the capacity of a network of human rights defenders

Key Indicator: Percentage of network members that report they feel safer, more confident, and more equipped to engage in human rights monitoring		
Project target	**MRG's Reported Result**	**Result according to independent evaluation survey**
85%	100%	91% feel more equipped to engage in human rights monitoring activities. 64% felt they knew how to protect themselves and others when conducting human rights monitoring activities

MRG's own post network meeting evaluation surveys already indicated that members found the network meetings to be helpful, relevant and a good opportunity to learn about other minority groups in Türkiye and about international advocacy. It is clear that MRG took steps to respond to suggestions raised in the feedback forms to improve the utility of future meetings (e.g. one suggestion included inviting local civil society to present and take part in network meetings in the different host cities, which was later implemented for future meetings). This responsiveness is important to ensure the network is meeting the members needs and interests. MRG's own data collection also indicated that members supported to attend international advocacy increased their knowledge of EU mechanisms, international advocacy and how CSOs can engage.

The network member survey sent as part of the independent evaluation yielded11 responses, roughly 22% of the network members. 54% (6) were women, 9% (1) were non-binary, and 37% (5) were men.

The majority of survey respondents indicated that the network meetings were relevant, participants felt safe to contribute their ideas, and that there was a sense of respect between the network members. However, only 36% indicated that they were as involved as they would have liked in the planning and design of the network meetings and activities (see Figure 1: Network Meeting Management). The concerns around participation were explored in the evaluation workshops, with members reporting that there were two few opportunities to be able to take part in the international advocacy opportunities (for example one member described that there were very limited places for the international advocacy visits, and they were all allocated English speakers only). They also indicated that there was a lack of clear forward planning of the network meetings (members described meetings weren't planned with a clear vision of what was going to be achieved at each meeting). .

Figure 2 (Network Outcomes) outlines that the majority of respondents have increased their knowledge, skills and capacity relating to human right monitoring, advocacy, and the issues facing other minorities in Türkiye. 72% of respondents indicated they felt better connected to other minorities as a result of being part of MARC.

Figure 1: Network Meeting Management

% which agree or strongly agree

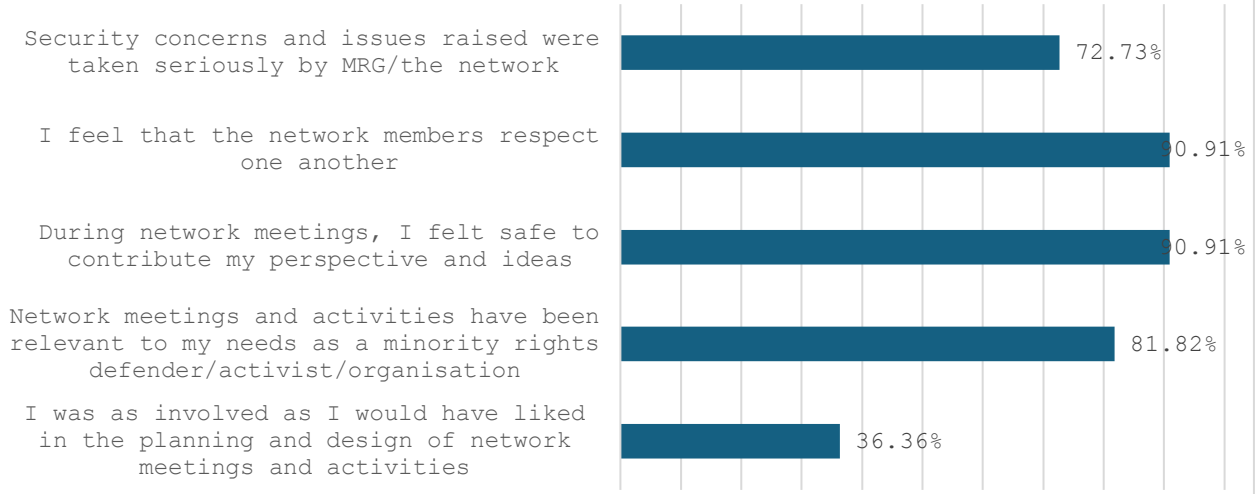
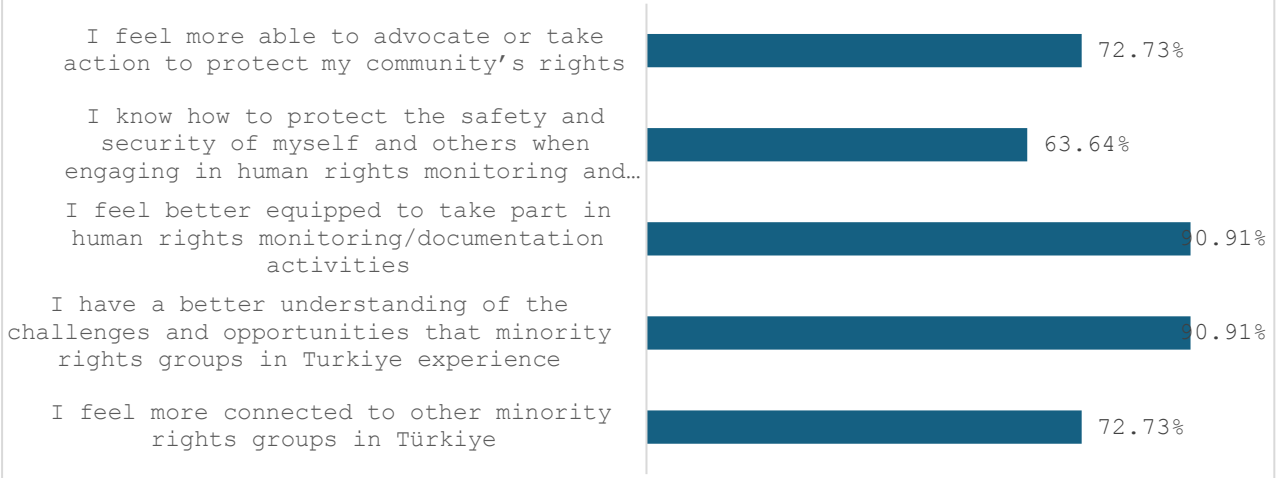
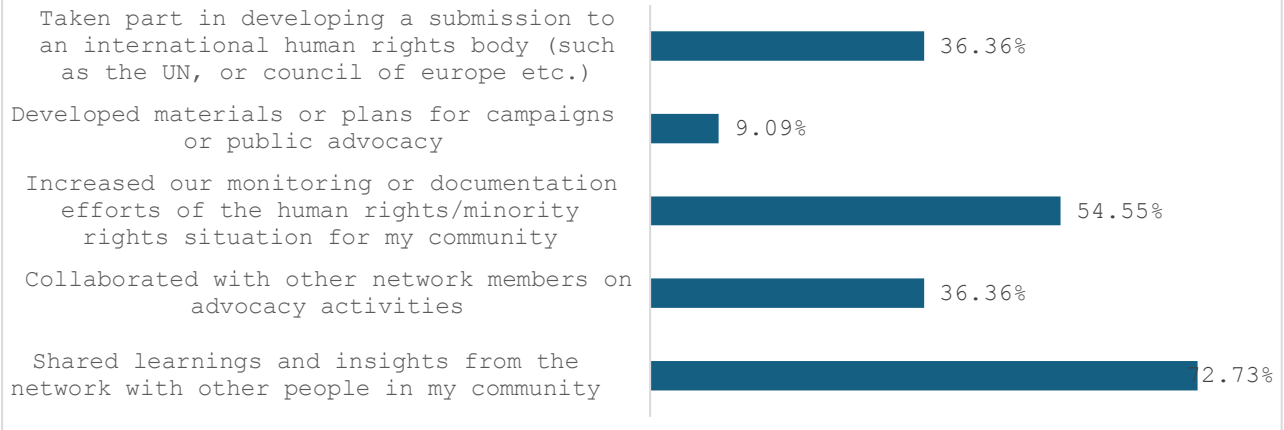


Figure 2: Network Outcomes
As a result of being part of the MARC network.....
% which agree or strongly agree



The survey also sought to explore what kind of actions the network members had taken since being part of the network. Almost three quarters of the respondents had shared the learnings and insights gained with others in their community, indicating the project is having reach beyond the direct network members (see figure 3). Over half of the respondents increased their monitoring/documentation efforts, and a third had taken part in developing international advocacy submissions, and had collaborated with other network members. This indicates that, at least for some members, knowledge and capacity gain is being translated into concrete actions. According to feedback from qualitative survey questions and the evaluation workshops, the main barrier that prevented more members from taking action was a lack of clear/common purpose for the network, and a lack of action orientated meetings and opportunities which would enable cross member collaboration.

Figure 3: Network Member Actions
% which took action



Survey respondents were also invited to describe the strengths and weaknesses of the network. Figure 4 below outlines the key themes which emerged, which highlight the importance of having created a platform and point of connection between different minority groups and increasing their visibility, but also highlighted the challenges in relation to lack of engagement across the network, and a lack of clear purpose and strategy for the network. These sentiments were also identified in the evaluation workshops – with many praising the uniqueness and importance of creating a network which can bridge historic divisions between minorities, create a stronger sense of awareness of other minority issues, and provide a space for increasing advocacy skills and opportunities. The biggest challenges expressed during the workshops were also similar, with members emphasising a lack of a clear and common vision for the network, a lack of clear "actions" or outputs of the network, and a lack of engagement of the wider network. Some members also felt that some groups were more represented than others, resulting in dominance within the network, and that not all members treated other groups empathetically. Therefor there may be more work to do to ensure that members share a common purpose and sense of values.

Figure 4: Feedback from network members on the strength and weaknesses of the network.

Strengths (number of responses)	Weaknesses (number of responses)
1. Diversity and Inclusion: Responses that emphasise bringing together diverse groups and learning from each other. (7) **2. Connection and Dialogue:** Responses mentioning connections between individuals and institutions, and dialogue facilitation. (4) **3. Empowerment and Voice:** Sum of responses that highlight giving a voice and making voiceless people visible. (3) **4. Knowledge and perspectives:** Sum of responses discussing learning about others' problems and sharing experiences. (2) **5. Organisational Strength:** Responses that point to organisational power and the capability to connect people and institutions. (1)	**1. Organisational and Coordination Issues:** Responses related to the poor timing and organisation of events and meetings**. (6)** **2. Lack of Clear Purpose and Strategy:** Responses indicating unclear objectives, unrealistic outcomes and lack of strategic planning**. (4)** **3. Lack of Diverse Representation:** Responses mentioning underrepresentation or dominance by specific groups. (2) **4. Weak Communication and Interaction:** Responses highlighting poor communication, weak engagement, and issues with individual representation (2) **5. Inequitable Treatment:** Responses concerning difficulties in participating due to coordinators. (2)

> "There were too many inactive members which made it hard to establish strong connections with the wider group. There are many individuals in the project WhatsApp group, but there is only a small core active group which frequently engage ~ *Network member.*"

Engagement was a key issue raised by many of those in the evaluation activities. Whilst there are 51 individuals that attended network events, on average approximately 20 members attended each meeting. On average each member attended 3 meetings. Importantly, 31% of individuals only attended one meetings, and 31 of individuals attended four or more meetings (out of eight). Significant rotation of members, and lack of consistent

engagement in network activities can easily undermine the effectiveness of a network – however there appears to be a cohort of “core” members that are highly engaged and very active (see annex 3 for participation summary table).

The evaluator has evaluated a range of networks, associations and collaborative platforms over the years, and one common challenge which also appears to have affected the MARC network is different expectations and interpretations of what a “network” is and for. Clearly defining the network, its objectives and member expectations could help to improve future network programmes – this was shared by members, for example multiple members in one of the evaluation workshops indicated the objective and purpose of the network wasn’t clear from the start, making it difficult to know how they should engage.

Human rights documentation and international advocacy

The project also sought to have impact by directly facilitating further documentation of human rights issues and facilitating opportunities for network members to share their reports, perspectives and situations before international bodies and institutions. This was regarded by many of those interviewed or engaged in the evaluation as one of the most impactful/effective activities within the programme.

MRG supported 13 research reports to be developed by network members following training sessions. The process alone allowed for an opportunity for members to increase their research skills and put theory into practice. Whilst there were some concerns regarding consistency and quality with the final research reports, the members felt confident that this process has been useful to support them to document human rights issues and have a resource or tool to be able to use for further advocacy. MRG are considering co-designing future similar initiatives (i.e. research methodologies) to help ensure the quality of CSO led research meets the required standards to have maximum impact.

The international advocacy opportunities were also praised by the network members who emphasised that having the opportunity to attend meetings, and to be supported with the brand recognition of MRG was unique and impactful for them. These opportunities had a dual benefit of increasingly the knowledge of the members attending of how international advocacy mechanisms work and how they can engage, as well as providing information, materials and insights to be shared with influential actors who can then use this information in their reporting and documentation of human rights in Türkiye. These opportunities also established connections and relationships between activists, CSO’s (network members) and international institutions which could be built on in the future.

> “We did field reports for the first time, and there were no reports on some of these issues before. We created new documentation to expose something. We plan to now convert these reports to formal publications for advocacy. ~ *Network Member*

The advocacy and monitoring reports have already yielded some concrete results – for example, interviewees reported that the EU Neighbourhood Enlargement country 2023 report on Türkiye had significantly more detailed section on minority rights in 2023 compared to previous years following a series of meetings and information sharing with EU officials. An interview with an EU source also confirmed that they use MRG Türkiye reporting in their own reports. Similar examples were shared relating to a report created by a network member

documenting the Roma rights situation in relation to earthquake relief. This report was shared with the UNDP who has since engaged directly with the network member for further information. MRG also facilitated an interview between the member and Aljazeera media on the topic of Türkiye's earthquake relief response.

> MRG's language panel event and the UN Forum was inspiring – we discussed how laws are being implemented or not, but importantly we were able to understand the reality of the issues people facing on the ground – these stories are not known, and MRG facilitated these voices being heard at an important platform. ~ *Civil Society Organisation Representative*

Emergency Fund

The emergency fund also appears to have been an effective, temporary measure, to provide urgent 'lifeline' support to minority rights defenders and individuals. MRG's own survey to the defenders that received the support reported that the grants were useful, that they were satisfied with MRG's process and coordination of grants, and that they had shared the opportunities with others who might be in need of similar support. The evaluator sent a short follow up survey to fund recipients, to which three responses were received (all respondents were women). The grants appear to have provided a sense of comfort, assurance, and security for the recipients, and were used for a range of things such as legal fees to address cases against them or to challenge rights violations, living expenses, health costs etc. as well as being used to further their own advocacy activities.

Whilst our independent survey only garnered three responses, these are coherent and consistent with the feedback captured by MRG. Experiences of the three respondents have been summarised below.

Amidst the economic crisis and historical gender-based exploitation, grant funding became a lifeline for an activist working on women's rights. It alleviated economic worries, and enabled them to focus on advocacy. As a result of the grant, collaboration with women's groups deepened, addressing regional disparities and confronting violence. A continuation of grants could promise essential support, covering legal fees, facilitating technological adaptation, and fostering global networking among rights defenders.

In the midst of the pressures of activism, the grant arrived as a beacon of relief, easing financial burdens and boosting motivation. It allowed her to stay active in her work, ensuring continuity despite challenges. Yet, she emphasised the importance of swift response times in the application process, urging support to reach those in genuine need.

During economic turmoil, the grant brought a much-needed reprieve, allowing her to enhance her working conditions and reach out to others. However, she stressed the importance of a swift post-application process. They are grateful for the support, and she recognised its impact on individuals facing similar hardships.

MRG's longer term goal

In terms of MRG's long term goal "To contribute to the full realisation of the rights of ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities in Türkiye/Current clear trend of erosion of rights is slowed or halted", whilst there may not yet be any solid policy or legal changes resulting from the programme (see project performance section), the programme has made a contribution to developing and strengthening advocacy networks and tools which can be built on in the future to help realise the rights of ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities.

This evaluation has found that the programme has effectively facilitated opportunities for CSOs and minority rights defenders to connect, collaborate and gain deeper knowledge about minority rights in Türkiye, and possible strategies to drive change. It has also established important connections and collaborations between minority groups and international institutions. Evaluation informants reported the significance of the network's contribution to gaining perspective and to identifying common trends and patterns in discrimination. Building trust between a diverse network is a particularly important achievement given the security and information sharing context in the country which often forces groups to work in silos. Substantive collaboration opportunities are needed to maximise the impact of the network and sustain it going forward, prioritising the development of further solidarity between groups, and outcome/impact-oriented meetings.

Sustainability

Whilst it is too early to fully evaluate the sustainability of the outcomes achieved by the project, based on the data and perspectives gathered through the evaluation, the evaluator is of the opinion that there is a high degree of potential for longer-term sustainable impact based on foundations of what has been established under this project for three key reasons: firstly, the advocacy opportunities offered to network members created connections and relationships between members and international bodies, now that these lines of communication and trust have been established, network members could continue to share relevant data and human rights monitoring information with EU and UN contacts; secondly, the project was designed in such a way to develop a number of tangible "products" such as the national report produced by MRG, the reports produced by network members, and the films/documentaries produced. These products have the potential to be used as ongoing evidence and advocacy tools by minority rights activists in the future; and thirdly, and most importantly, the network established has huge potential to be a productive and effective platform for different communities to use to purse and advance minority rights in the country: trust, connections, relationships and communication channels have been established between a diverse network, many of whom seem motivated to continue to use the network as a building block for future work.

Some of the project outcomes also have a degree of sustainability built into them. For example, MRG and the network have been able to contribute to more comprehensive documentation of minority rights issues in Türkiye, including by previously less heard voices, in reports and statements from the EU and UN – creating a respected and authoritative record of issues, by highly respected and influential institutions. Establishing these records is an important step to be able to increase pressure on authorities to better comply with their human rights obligations.

The emergency support fund activity may have the biggest limitations regarding sustainability, given they are not designed to provide long term/ongoing support to minority defenders (the one-off nature of the grant was the main criticism of fund recipients which may limit the impact).However despite this limitation, the funds were still deemed as valuable lifelines to address short term, specific challenges faced by the fund recipients, which are likely to have been important for them to sustain themselves and their work.

Risks to sustainability

> Creating this network was a huge and important step, but the political situation means if no action is taken, the network will get lost. Something needs to happen to keep it alive – the next phase needs a more interactive project where members work together, produce reports together and explore intersectional discrimination issues. ~ *Turkish Civil Society Organisation Representative*

It takes time for networks to establish themselves, their ways of working together, and to build trust between members. Now that MRG has developed a network with the potential to be an effective advocacy force for minority rights, it will be important to ensure momentum is not lost, and that the network it supported to move into more practical and outcome focused coordination – this will require a degree of "taking stock" of the network to agree and align values, goals and ways of working, and ensuring members are fully committed to realising these. Resources and funding will be needed to facilitate this.

An important focus for future network will be finding ways to establish a stronger sense of solidarity between members (this was highlighted by network members as an important factor for a minority rights network to be impactful, with some members reporting that more could be done by individual members to show their support to one another's causes e.g. taking part in commemoration or special days important to each group). Achieving a common sense of solidarity, common purpose, and with practical and actionable outputs will ensure the impact of the network is felt by the membership and hopefully for minority communities. Future projects might consider embedding more cross-minority collaboration opportunities, and more co-visioning of the network earlier on in the development phase.

During the evaluation workshops we identified some key criteria for effective networks – focusing on trust, security, communication, solidarity and impact. This evaluation has established that the network was effective in building trust between a diverse membership of minorities in Türkiye and had established communication channels (in particular a WhatsApp group). Strengthening the solidarity between the network members, and ensuring an impact/result orientated approach will ensure the network remains active and reaps rewards that will be felt by members and their communities.

EU Added Value

The programme's direct engagement with EU institutions facilitated the added value at the EU level, for example by establishing communication and relationships between civil society and EU bodies.

One clear outcome of the project was that network participants better understood the different mechanisms and avenues they would engage with in relation to international advocacy for minority rights – this included increased recognition of EU opportunities.

Following one advocacy mission, a network member described "During our visit to Belgium, we gained valuable insights from our meetings with EU Members of Parliament. We better understood the European Union's commitment to human rights and minority rights. We learned how the EU develops policies and programs to promote diversity and multiculturalism. Additionally, we acquired valuable information about strategies that can be employed to advocate for the rights of minority groups in Europe".

The EU's own report in 2023 identifies backsliding of Türkiye's commitments to human rights and democracy, and therefor a programme which sought to strengthen rights in the country is relevant in relation to some of the EU's key concerns in relation to the rights situation in the country[19].

A number of evaluation participants (MRG staff, network members, independent experts) expressed an interest or suggestion for MRG to consider how the MARC programme could be enhanced, replicated or extended to be a multi-national one, including (but not limited to) EU countries, where there may be opportunities to exchange strategies, learnings and impacts across minority groups or build coalitions between networks/groups. This could help build on, and enhance, the national and regional impact of MRG's programmes.

Conclusions

In conclusion, MRG designed a highly relevant and much needed programme to support and strengthen minority rights civil society across Türkiye. The combination of network building, training and practical opportunities to engage in human rights monitoring, documentation and international advocacy appear to have had a positive impact on the capacity of the MRG network members involved in these activities. These were complimented by an emergency support fund which provided a lifeline to individual activities facing hardships, and public facing reports and films which have reached an impressive number of viewers. Despite it being too early to talk about longer term impacts, there are already examples of how the project activities have made contributions to the international recognition of minority rights issues in Türkiye through UN and EU reporting.

Whilst the project was relevant, and has achieved some important initial results, the design was potentially overly ambitious in terms of policy and legal change targets, in the amount of time required to build and establish networks, and the human and financial resources needed to do this effectively, safely and in a way that protects the wellbeing of those involved. The programme faced significant challenges which complicated delivery of the project such as Covid-19 pandemic, earthquakes and an increasingly restrictive operating environment for civil society and human rights defenders. These challenges, conflated with difficult programme staff changes at MRG, culminated in some lost momentum and difficulty is cementing strong working/collaboration principles within the MARC network. MRG were resilient and responsive in adapting their programme to these situations, however more work is required to ensure the network can continue to be impactful and sustainable.

MRG have successfully established that here is a need and appetite for a cross minority network to promote and advocate for minority rights across the country, and that they can produce relevant advocacy materials to advance their rights. This has laid the foundations to

[19] https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-11/SWD_2023_696%20T%C3%BCrkiye%20report.pdf

develop a network that could be highly impactful. MRG now needs to take stock of the network's membership, further develop a common purpose/goal, a blueprint for the future and build the infrastructure to protect the safety and of the network. This needs to include network governance structures, and clear modes of operation. A collaborative co-designing process which facilitates network members to develop and agree a common vision, values and a blueprint for moving forward could help to transition the network to a more autonomous entity, which is action/impact orientated. Part of this process should seek to explore ways in which trust and solidarity can be strengthened between the network.

Risk assessment, security (digital and physical), and wellbeing could be further strengthened for future phases of the MARC programme or for similar initiatives – these factors underpin a healthy and strong network and needed dedicated resources.

MRG have made some important steps towards their goal of contributing to the full realisation of the rights of ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities in Türkiye. Whilst this contribution may not (yet) be in form of legal/policy change, MRG have created a unique, diverse and one-of-a-kind platform of minority defenders from across Türkiye, but it must act in order to solidify the network, and help move the network into a more impact orientated phase of its development.

Recommendations

For the European Commission:

4. Encourage (and even insist) that programmes working on human rights and situations where staff and project participants could be exposed to trauma or vicarious trauma, include budget and plans to protect wellbeing.
5. Consider funding and encouraging project design phases to allow for organisations to engage in meaningful, participatory approaches to project design and co-develop targets, indicators for success – this could help promote project relevance and impact.
6. Consider funding or connecting MRG/the network to other funding sources to be able to solidify and transition the network. This will be important to not lose the potential for impact that this project has laid the foundations for/and or increase transparency of future calls for proposals and objectives in the pipeline so organisations can adequately plan and respond.

For MRG:

1. Develop a clearer strategy in relation to gender and intersectionality. It may be helpful for MRG to use the UNDP's Gender Results Effectiveness Scale to guide a reflection in relation to how they see their programming in relation to gender, and plan where they want to be as an organisaion. This could help MRG to develop a clearer and more consistent approach to incorporate gender and intersectionality. If MRG has budget, it could be useful to engage a qualified expert to facilitate this and upskill the programme teams on good practices in gender responsive/transformative programe design and implementation.
2. One of the limitations of this evaluation has been a lack of data. There were also a number of ways in which key monitoring, evaluation and learning tools used under the project could be improved to yield more precise and useful insights. For future programmes, MRG might consider using its MEL budget for an independent learning

partner as opposed to a final evaluation. This would facilitate the programme team to have access to MEL expertise during the delivery, facilitate more periodic reflections on outcomes, and provide opportunities for the external learning partner to collect and analyse data at more opportune moments in the programme that could yield more comprehensive engagement and data.

3. Invest further in risk assessment, digital and physical security, and mental wellbeing support for both network members and MRG programme staff. Consider reviewing your support offering in terms of security and wellbeing for all stakeholders that you have a responsibility for, including staff, consultants and project participants. Ideally wellbeing should be supported at different levels (organizational/structural, personal wellbeing e.g. wellbeing action plans, and access to support or services when in high need or experiencing wellbeing issues).
4. When designing projects, be realistic in terms of the amount of time, resources and budget you need to implement the project effectively, factoring in time to deal with unexpected challenges, participatory approaches, and relationship building. This should extend to the targets and goals in your log-frames and project proposal (many of the outputs described under this programme could be argued to be outcomes).
5. MRG could consider implementing future capacity building projects with trainings that have a more guided application approach to implementing knowledge/theories/skills. For example, MRG could use a "clinic" approach used by many litigation organisations, where defenders and activists are supported and guided to develop litigation strategies and filings – but in MRG's context it could be replaced with developing advocacy reports, UN submissions, campaign strategies etc. These could be guided by relevant experts using real, tangible cases/issues that they are working on (for example, a clinic could cover developing a submission for the UN's UPR exposing the key issues for their minority group). This would allow members to gain knowledge, apply it in practice with the support of an expert, and leave with a tangible outcome they can continue to work on or use. This could be a practical way to build capacity whilst simultaneously working on tangible advocacy materials, and help to deepen knowledge whilst also increase the impact of capacity building work.
6. Explore the possibility of collaborating with other NGOs working on related issues in target countries. There are organisations working on crosscutting rights such as freedom of expression and association which could benefit from a minority rights perspective and facilitate greater mainstreaming of minority rights in wider civic action.
7. MRG might consider finding opportunities to co-conceptualise project ideas and future plans with relevant parties further in advance, creating a "bank" of needs informed project concepts, so they are in a stronger position to develop strong and participatory project concepts when funding opportunities arise.
8. Future programmes which involve networks should establish clear definitions of what is meant by the term, and remind and reinforce this with members, new staff members etc. throughout the project. Future network based projects MRG might wish to explore different network models to, such as have a core working/steering group who work to drive the network forward, whilst others interested individuals might be members or observers; and cocreating and developing difference governance and accountability models with the network could be a way to achieve this without creating hierarchy. It may also be important to explore strengthening the membership criteria to maximise impact, ensuring all members are well positioned within their communities to be able to represent their group (taking preference for established groups and institutions where they exist, to help allow for the breadth of opinions within communities to be heard).

For the network:

Ideally, the below recommendations could be conducted using funding secured by MRG to help transition the network to its next phases. If not, the network could explore implementing these autonomously.

1. Network members should reflect on their interests, motivation and realistic amount of time they can dedicate to the network, and their potential added value as a member of the network (what skills, access, perspectives can they bring). The network could map the needs, interests, and skills to help inform subsequent recommendations.
2. If feasible, organsie an additional meeting (or series of workshops) to take stock of the network and redefine its values, goals and working models. Ideally engage a facilitator to support and guide the group to create an aligned vision for the network, a blueprint for moving forward, and with clearer operational models which focus on impact and action (they group might want to consider steering groups, thematic working groups, different types of membership etc.).
3. Mapping the representation of different minority groups within the network might also be important to ensure there is adequate balance between the membership, and no group dominates the direction/discussion of network meetings,
4. Strengthen empathy and solidarity by identifying and exploring opportunities to collaborate, support one another's advocacy strategies and strengthen one another's work.
5. Review digital and physical security protocols and needs for the network – the network may want to enlist the support of a relevant professional, or contact NGOs that have robust security protocols in place, to provide advice and ensure members do not face additional risks.
6. Create structures which allow for collaborative decision-making and shared ownership of the network.

Annexes

Evaluation Questions

Sub-questions (below) have been created to detail the overall line of enquiry for each evaluation area. EU evaluation criteria have been used to frame the lines of enquiry to ensure we evaluate the programme against all key evaluation criteria.

Gender: Gender and intersectionality will be embedded across the evaluation criteria and process (and therefore specific questions are not specified, except for one question which enquires into the way in which the project engaged with gender and intersectionality in the first place, as this helps to establish the framework of how this line of enquiry can be embedded across the evaluation).

Criteria	Question	Sub-questions
Relevance	To what extent were project activities and outcomes relevant to the minority rights situation in Türkiye?	What steps were taken to ensure activities corresponded to a genuine need? How well positioned were MRG in order to respond to the minority rights situation in Türkiye? Where there any unmet needs relevant to the project stakeholders and target audiences?

		What changed in the external environment during the project's lifespan and how did this impact the project's strategy and relevance? To what extent was the project implemented in line with MRGs core values of a human rights based approach; participatory planning; inclusion; and do no harm? In which ways were gender and intersectional discrimination lens engaged and used in the programme design and implementation? And to what end?
Efficiency	To what extent were activities completed as planned?	What challenges did the programme face in its delivery and what impact did they have on the project? What steps did MRG take to ensure the project was delivered on time and to budget? How effective were these strategies to project management? How did MRG respond and adapt to challenges faced and what can be learned for future programmes? Have any inefficiencies been identified? Could the intervention have been done in a more efficient way? Did new risks present themselves during project delivery? How efficiently and effectively were these addressed?
Impact and effectiveness	To what extent did the project contribute to its intended goals and impact?	Which project goals were achieved and which were not? Were some activities perceived to be more effective or impactful than others? If so, why? What is the overall perceived value and impact of the project? What learnings and recommendations can be identified in relation to what MRG could do to maximise effectiveness and outcomes in the future? What good practices can be identified in relation to MRG's approaches to achieving the intended results? What lessons can be learned?

	What were the intended and unintended outcomes achieved and how do they compare to the original project proposal?	What changes can be identified in relation to: • capacity, connection or sustainability of networks, activists, groups and CSO's in Türkiye working on minority rights • quality, accessibility and engagement with documentation and information relating to minority rights in Türkiye • recognition, prioritisation and engagement with minority rights issues in Türkiye by laws, international rights and cooperation bodies and the internationally community • laws, policies or practices (or steps towards changes) • effects, changes or results for minority communities engaged in the project Did anything inhibit or prevent outcomes from being achieved?
Sustainability	Are there signs that project outcomes may continue to have benefits or yield future outcomes beyond their immediate effect? If so, what?	What risks to sustainability exist? What worked well in terms of approaches to strengthening and building relationships, collaboration and communication between network members? What actions or steps could MRG or others do to ensure sustainability of what was achieved through this project?
EU Added Value	What was the added value at the EU level of the project activities?	In which ways did the project engage with EU bodies, institutions, processes and mechanisms and what was their (potential) added value? How does the programme align or contribute to relevant EU policies, visions or goals?

Annex 2: Documents Reviewed

1. MRG Meeting Minutes from Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (meeting 3,5,7).

2. MARC Programme Reports to the European Commission (Report 1: Jan 2023 and Report 2: Sept 2023).

3. MARC Programme Project Proposal and Logical Framework

4. Network meeting attendance records

5. Network meeting evaluation form data and activity reports (meetings IV – VIII only)
6. Survey data from emergency support fund recipients
7. International advocacy visit activity reports

Annex 3: Network Participation Summary

Participant Reference	Gender	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Total Number of Meetings Attended
1	Female						Y	Y		2
2	Female	Y				Y	Y		Y	4
3	Female	Y	Y	Y	Y		Y		Y	6
4	Female	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	8
5	Male								Y	1
6	Male					Y				1
7	Female	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y			6
8	Male	Y	Y	Y	Y			Y		5
9	Male							Y	Y	2
10	Female	Y	Y	Y		Y	Y	y	Y	7
11	Male						Y	Y		2
12	Female				Y			Y		2
13	Male							Y	Y	2
14	Male			Y						1
15	Female	Y								1
16	Male							Y		1
17	Female	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	7
18	Female		Y							1
19	Female	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y			Y	6
20	Male	Y	Y	Y		Y	Y	Y		6
21	Female	Y	Y	Y	Y	y	Y	Y	Y	8
22	Male						Y		Y	2

23	Female					Y	Y	Y		3
24	Female							Y	Y	2
25	Non binary	Y	Y	Y		Y	Y	Y		6
26	Male					Y				1
27	Male				Y					1
28	Female		Y	Y						2
29	Male					Y	Y	Y		3
30	Non binary						Y	Y	Y	3
31	Female			Y	Y					2
32	Unknown								Y	1
33	Male						Y	Y	Y	3
34	Female	Y								1
35	Male			Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6
36	Unknown				Y					1
37	Male	Y			Y	Y	Y	Y		5
38	Male					Y				1
39	Female		Y	Y			Y			3
40	Female	Y					Y			2
41	Male					Y	Y	Y	Y	4
42	Non binary	Y	Y	Y	Y					4
43	Unknown				Y					1
44	Female	Y	Y	Y						3
45	Male						Y			1
46	Male					Y	Y		Y	3
47	Male								Y	1
48	Male	Y	Y	Y			Y			4
49	Male						Y		Y	2
50	Female	Y	Y							2
51	Female		Y				Y		Y	3

Total Attendees		19	17	18	15	18	26	21	22	