

2021

SMALL PROJECTS ISTANBUL ZEYTİN AĞACI DERNEĞİ

*"Strengthening the wellbeing of the refugee community
through participatory mechanisms during COVID-19"*



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“The Project: Strengthening the wellbeing of the refugee community through participatory mechanisms during COVID-19” June 2021-2022

Small Projects Istanbul (registered as Zeytin Ağacı Derneği), has been working closely with the refugee population in Istanbul since its establishment in 2015. The community, which has been continuously growing, has more than 800 members at the moment. Communication among these members is maintained through a WhatsApp group which is used to get information, share questions and have discussions with each other. Every weekend, a topic to be discussed is determined by the “Community Outreach Team” in the “Weekend Discussions” activity in order for the members to share their opinions with active participation.

The strong communication between Small Projects Istanbul and its community, with the support of **The Black Sea Trust Foundation**, has continued with practices involving Syrians who are under Temporary Protection and other refugees as “The Project of Strengthening the wellbeing of the Refugee Community through participatory mechanisms during Covid-19”. This project aims to tackle the services and rights of the SPI’s refugee community (including law, health, education, employment, social aid services, public health) from the perspective of the issues and hurdles raised by COVID-19. The Project will be implemented between June 2021-2022.

Activities Included in the Project:

- Community Informing Activities
- Activities Involving the Preservation of Well-being
- Community Council Meetings
- Children Council Meetings
- Individual Protection Practices

The Project aims to develop mechanisms which enable the eliciting of feedback which encourages the participation of community members regarding the problems they face and to suggest solutions. To provide an effective presentation of services and results during and after the pandemic, it is essential to fill in the gaps by taking a holistic approach. Within the project activities, increasing the access to available services and rights will be carefully handled by maintaining meaningful and participatory channels between the beneficiaries and the service provider.

Within the scope of the project, following community informing activities and the preservation of well-being that began in July, the idea of the Small Projects Istanbul Community Council was introduced, then the applications for Community Council activities were opened. After interviewing the Community Council members who volunteered to take part in the activities, the first Community Council activity was created online in August.



Community Council Studies

The purpose of the Community Council is to strengthen the feeling of solidarity among the refugee community and to create a space for them to share the problems they face. By creating feedback mechanisms through the participatory approach of a Community Council, it is believed that services provided by NGOs, other institutions and public institutions can be improved.

What Was Achieved in the First Community Council Meeting?

The Council Meeting which first took place in August, has now happened three times since the first week of October. In total, 29 community members have attended these meetings.

When we look at the distribution of the Community Council members according to their age, gender and ethnicity:

- attendance between the ages of 25-59 is the highest (27 members)
- attendance by women is the majority (27 women compared with 2 men).
- attendance by ethnicity - Syrians are the highest (26 attenders).

With Arabic- Turkish translation, the Community Access Manager was the facilitator and topics were discussed such as non-governmental organizations and their purposes, advocacy, volunteerism, democratic participation and Community Councils and their purposes. Other Community and Refugee Councils that do similar work in Turkey were also studied. By inviting the Refugees Association Refugee Council to the meeting (which took place at the beginning of October), the aim was for members of the Refugees Association Refugee Council to share their experiences with the planned Community Council within SPI. Lastly, Small Projects Istanbul Community Council research areas and the methods to be used to increase the visibility of these studies were evaluated. It was decided that the results of the Community Council activities should be reported, including community informing activities, verbal and written feedback that was taken at the end of the activities (which involves the preservation of well-being), as well as the problems Council members have faced in their lives and suggested solutions.



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COMMUNITY COUNCIL ACTIVITIES

RECOMMENDATION REPORT

AUGUST-OCTOBER 2021 TERM

The community members' expectations from public institutions and non-governmental organizations regarding their needs as outlined in the "The Project of Strengthening the wellbeing of the Refugee Community through participatory mechanisms during Covid-19" which began in July (Community Informing Activities and Activities Involving the Preservation of Well-being) and in terms of the weekly activities "Weekend Discussion" are as follows:

Access to Education can be defined as:

- Support for the additional school costs needed by the refugees
- Solving the ID issues that are common for the education of refugee children
- The number of Turkish and ISMEK courses to be increased
- Activities in schools and NGOs that can help children integrate into their schools
- Mechanisms that can help solve the language barrier children have in their education
- The lack of financial opportunities and of individuals who can help children with their school work within a household, especially with regards to accessing remote/ online education
- Public institutions and non-governmental organizations carrying out actions to address children dropping out of school.

Legal Issues can be defined as:

- Notifications from Non-governmental organizations for access of complaint mechanisms like CİMER; executing complaint mechanisms of public institutions
- For the correct information to be given out by non-governmental organizations on topics such as ID, residence permits, citizenship and for public institutions to make this process easier
- Access to free lawyers and legal counseling services

Access to Job Opportunities can be defined as:

- Support from public institutions in terms of access to work permits and employers to be informed about the importance of this process
- Registered employment to be encouraged for refugees
- Unemployment paychecks to be provided to unemployed refugees in the case of not being able to find any job opportunities
- To increase income opportunities for single parents and disabled people especially

Access to Health can be defined as:

- Notifications from non-governmental organizations on essential issues such as hospital appointment systems, polyclinic services and Covid-19 vaccinations
- The presence of a translator during examinations, especially in public hospitals



Public Services can be defined as:

- Kids' essential needs like stationary materials to be provided by public institutions such as the municipality or local administration
- Language options to be increased for online government services (for example, e-devlet, e-okul, EBA, ...)

Social Adaptation Processes can be defined as:

- For Non-governmental organizations and other local public institutions to conduct local social adaptation and integration activities

Preservation of Well-being can be defined as:

- Free psychosocial support mechanisms to be provided for the refugees,
- Hobby areas for women and children especially to be provided,
- Group activities that help family members to communicate correctly and effectively with each other to be conducted
- Activities with children, social activities
- Social activities with women (like trips, breakfasts) to be conducted



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CHILDREN'S COUNCIL ACTIVITIES

RECOMMENDATION REPORT

AUGUST-OCTOBER 2021 TERM

From August of 2021, the activities of the Zeytin Ağacı Derneği Children's Council were begun. In the Children's Council, the aim is for children to learn about their rights, their skills to be developed and their confidence and advocacy to be supported.

The Children's Council Meeting Count Between August-October: 3

Total Number of Kids Who Attended the Children Council Meetings: 20

Distribution of the Children Council attenders by age and gender:

| | Girls | Boys | Total Number |
|--------------|-------|------|--------------|
| Age 11 | 3 | 0 | 3 |
| Age 12 | 3 | 6 | 9 |
| Age 13 | 4 | 3 | 7 |
| Age 14 | 0 | 1 | 16 |
| Total Number | 10 | 10 | 20 |

* 19 attenders were Syrian; 1 was Iraqi (12-year-old boy).

By reaching out to the community members for the Children's Council activities, a group of children between the ages of 11-14 was approached. For Turkish-Arabic translation, a volunteer from the community was picked, and this person, called the "Volunteer Children Council Assistant", attended the Children Council meeting as the "Children and Youth Activities Coordinator".

Taking the "United Nations Children's Rights Act" as the foundation for the online Children's Council meetings, Q&A was carried out starting from the definition of "child". Videos about children's rights were watched and the aim was to build a discussion forum for the children. In this report, notes from the council activities with children will be shared.

Responses received from the children when they were asked about the concept of rights:

- "Everyone from the ages of one to 18 has a right". (age 12)
- "Anyone under the age of 18 is a child and has rights". (age 11)
- "Playing games and education are rights". (age 13)
- "Things we can do according to our age are our rights. We have the right of health as well as the right of travelling". (age 12)
- "Equality, love, respect, human rights, compassion... these are our rights. For example, in school I answered a question incorrectly and my teacher dropped 10 points from me. He says he is not discriminating against me, but he is". (age 12)



Responses received from the children when they were asked what children's rights could be:

- "Not having to beg, not being sad, going out.." (age 12)
- "Making your own decisions". (age 11)
- "Playing, reading". (age 14)
- "Reading, buying the stuff I want. Children exist because they have rights". (age 11)

Responses received from the children when they were asked about the right of playing:

- "Playing games". (age 13)
- "Having fun". (age 13)
- "There are also computer games, but we spend too much time on these". (age 11)

Responses received from the children when they were asked about the right to education:

- "Going to school and playing games". (age 12)
- "In school, there are communicative subjects, we communicate with our friends more". (age 12)

The children were shown the "Children's Rights Act Animation Film" which was made by Istanbul Bilgi University Children Studies Unit within the "Convention on the Rights of The Child". Responses received from the children when they were asked about what they remembered from the video:

- "Mothers and fathers should treat their children well and take care of them". (age 13)
- "The Children's Right Act was accepted in 1995 in Turkey". (age 13)
- "We shouldn't stay away from our mothers and our fathers". (age 12)
- "I think the government should protect children's rights". (age 13)
- "Everyone under the age of 18 is a child". (age 13)
- "They shouldn't share children's personal information with anyone". (age 11)
- "Every child should be treated equally". (age 13)
- "More than 133 countries signed the Children's Rights Act. Turkey is also among them". (age 13)
- "Health and safety rights are very important for children. These should be provided first". (age 11)
- "Application of rights in life is the government's duty. Children have the right of conversation". (age 13)

When the children discussed what changes they would like in their school environments, requests were made under different topics. These topics are shared in the report as the education system, the school's physical and social environment and communication with teachers.

The Education System:

- "I wish the lessons were 1 minute long". (age 11)
- "Maths should be taught in a more simple way in schools". (age 12)
- "I think they give Kur'an-ı Kerim lessons for too long, 6 hours. They could increase other lessons instead". (age 13)
- "I want more play time in school. 40 minutes should be for lessons, 20 minutes for breaks. Breaks are 5 minutes long. Also all the students in school should be educated with respect. Physical Education lessons could be increased. Some students do not take the lessons seriously and others don't understand, they should be suspended. Why are they coming if they won't listen?" (age 12)
- "Music lessons should be removed. The teacher acts like a soldier giving orders". (age 12)



The Physical environments of schools:

- "I want school uniforms to be removed. Let everyone wear whatever they want". (age 12)
- "I want a football field instead of a basketball court. They always throw balls at our heads".age 12)
- "Phones should not be banned at schools. I want to call my mom when I get sick, but they don't let me". (13)
- "There are so many differences between public and private schools". (age 13)
- "We want to be educated in cleaner and more comfortable classrooms". (age 12)
- "Outfits for physical education became mandatory. The tracksuits are 200 TL and too thin, you get cold. We would get frozen if we wore these in winter". (age 12)
- "They get angry at us when we don't wear our masks, but teachers don't wear them either". (age 11)

The Social environments of the schools:

- "I wish I could prevent students from making fun of each other and calling each other names. So, I would like to forbid exclusion". (age 12)
- "We have a friend who is slant-eyed, he looks Chinese. They make fun of him. They discriminate between black and White". (age 12)

Communication with the teachers:

- "For instance, other students call pupil X "anchovy" but the teacher doesn't say anything. They should suspend such students. Other students sometimes even hit us, sometimes I hit them back, sometimes I tell it to the teacher but he doesn't do anything. The teacher drew a picture of an anchovy on the board, teachers behaving so strangely, so discriminatorily". (age 12)
- "I will complain about the teachers. They get angry with us when we ask questions. They only write things on the board". (age 13)
- "Equality, love, respect, human rights, compassion... these are our rights. For example, in school I answered a question incorrectly and my teacher dropped 10 points from me. He says he is not discriminating against me , but he is". (age 12)

The Community Council and Children Council will continue their activities, activity notes will be shared with periodic reports during the project (June 2021-2022).



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