Report on Operational Capacity
of CSOs and MRLOs in Cyprus

Bridging Services Project

CYPRUS
REFUGEE
COUNCIL

RRA
REFUGEE RIGHTS ASSOCIATION

GENERATION
FOR CHANGE CY

Table of Contents

PART I

Research Overview

| Introduction

The following two reports were prepared within the framework of the Building bridges and capacity among CSOs and refugee/migrant led groups providing services to vulnerable groups in the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot community (Bridging Services) project.

The Project aims to strengthen capacity and sustainability of CSOs and Refugee/Migrant Led organizations (MRLOs) that operate on both sides of the divide, offering services to vulnerable persons within refugee/migrant communities, such as victims of trafficking, torture, and gender-based violence.

The project proposes the development and delivery of training sessions promoting the adoption of interdisciplinary, multi-level and holistic needs assessment methods for attending vulnerable refugees/migrants, as well as that of operating principles that ensure transparent and accountable governance among CSOs/MRLOs in the sector.

The Bridging Services project benefits from a grant under the Active Citizens Fund Cyprus programme, funded by Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway, through the EEA and Norway Grants 2014-2021.

| Summary

The following two reports describe current operational capacity and relevant training needs of Migrant/Refugee-Led Organisations (MRLOs) and Civil Society Organisation (CSOs) who provide (or are planning to provide in the future) services to vulnerable refugees or migrants, in both sides of the divide.

The reports explore CSOs and MRLOs capacity and knowledge in the following areas:

- The characteristics of vulnerable refugees/migrants
- The local/international regulatory framework governing vulnerable persons' access to rights and services
- The different types of service provision, namely, individual, community, and advocacy level interventions and their interconnection
- All official/unofficial actors influencing/providing services to vulnerable refugees/migrants
- The interconnections between organisational structure, capacity and design, implementation, sustainability, impact of services to vulnerable groups
- Valid methods and tools for identifying and addressing vulnerable persons' needs.
- Networking/referral methods for supporting vulnerable persons
- Good governance principles, transparent and self-regulated operation models
- GDPR compliance and other protection policies
- Financial control principles
- Other policies required for a sustainable and effective operation.

The first report describes CSOs' and MRLOs' governance models and the second one – their capac-

| Participating Organisations

CSOs and MRLOs which met the project criteria were identified through desk research and networking. In total, 21 organisations and informal groups were invited to join the research phase of the project; 15 of them completed the Self-Assessment Form.

The CSOs and MRLOs who joint the project reported various levels of experience and years of operations. The years of establishment varied from 1991 to 2022, while most organisations (10) were established in years 2016-2022, followed by 4, established in years 2007 – 2008; only one organisation was established over 30 years ago, in 1991.

Many of the organisations do not have any (5) or have only 1-3 (5) paid staff members. Four organisations have 5-7 staff members and only one – reported as many as 84. All but one organisation seem to greatly rely on the work of volunteers. The number of volunteers ranges from 0 to 165, with a mean of 40.

While all the organisations provide services to either refugees or migrants (or both), many of them focus on assisting a population with a specific profile, i.a., members of LGBTQI+ community, minors and families, persons with disability, students, persons with HIV positive status, mothers and victims/survivors of human trafficking.

The organisations also differ in terms of the type of services provided. In an overview the services include: 1) awareness raising, 2) advocacy, 3) charity actions, 3) provision of material support (clothes, food products), 4) assistance in finding accommodation, 5) assistance in finding employment opportunities, 6) referrals to governmental and nongovernmental services, 7) legal, psychological and social support, 8) peer support, 9) assistance in accessing medical rights, 10) guidance regarding HIV testing and post diagnosis procedures, 11) capacity building and 12) sports, informal education and art activities.

| Data Collection Methods

The main source of data was collected through the Self-Assessment From (Annex I). The initial draft version of the Form was developed by the Cyprus Refugee Council (CyRC), Refugee Rights Association (RRA) and Generation for Change (G4C). The final version of the Form was created following two meetings with Expert Staff (i.e., lawyers, integration officers, financial officer, social advisor, and psychologist), who provided their feedback and comments.

Then, the identified research participants (21 CSOs and MRLOs) were contacted via phone, informed about the project in general and the research activities in particular. Following that initial contact, the Self-Assessment Form was sent to them via email.

In order to ensure that the research participants felt comfortable while completing the Form, as well as to ensure thorough responses, the Form was anonymous.

After the completion of the Form, another two meetings with the Expert Staff took place to jointly reflect on the responses collected and to provide insight on operational contexts in both sides of the divide, regarding CSOs' and MRLOs' governance models as well as their capacity to identify and assist vulnerable refugees/migrants.

PART II – Report on CSOs' and MRLOs' Governance Model

| Operational Context of CSOs and MRLOs

Work of CSOs and MRLOs is regulated by the Law on Associations 23/2016 in the TTC, and in the GGC by the Law on Associations, Foundations and Clubs (104(I)/2017) as well as Companies Law, Cap 113 (for organisations registered as non-profit companies).

In the GCC the process of establishing an association is particularly difficult for persons with refugee background, as most of the documents and guidelines are available only in Greek language and there are limited opportunities for free of charge support in this area.

There are no associations set up by asylum seekers, even though the relevant law does not prohibit them from establishing an association and there are groups of asylum seekers who expressed such interest.

Moreover, persons with a refugee background oftentimes struggle to support their basic needs, which makes their involvement in MRLOs rather complex and difficult. Other identified obstacles include lack of stability and sense of insecurity about the future, psychological challenges, unwelcoming environment, racism and prejudice, limited access to information, fear of consequences of being active, limited funding opportunities and challenges related to commitment and refuge identity.

In the TCC it is not permitted to establish an association for a person with a refugee background, and in general for foreigners. They may have the opportunity to establish an informal initiative, but this limits their access to funds and/or protest in the street. Documents and guidelines are mainly in Turkish and it is difficult to find support in this area.

In addition, persons with a refugee background often experience an unwelcoming environment, racism and prejudice, and limited access to information. They experience poor detaining conditions and when there is an irregular entry it results in refoulement in most cases as there is no law to prevent this. In a case, whether a person is diagnosed as HIV Positive, they immediately receive deportation, and it does not matter whether they have a student/employment visa or they have a vulnerable background. The conditions lead to psychological challenges, feeling unsafe, and feeling insecure about the future. Moreover, there are issues with developing a sense of belonging, expressing identity, and integration.

| Financial Management

Organisations who participated in the research reported moderate capacity regarding the financial management. In particular, 8 (out of 15) organisations stated that they have written financial policies, 7 have a bank account in the organisation's name and 12 prepare and file financial documentations.

Regarding staff members responsible for the financial and operational management, 4 organisations have staff members with relevant background/experience, 8 – without such background/experience, 1 outsources financial and/or managerial tasks and 2 have no tasks to perform.

Many organisations reported having procedures regarding various financial operations (Chart 1). In particular, 10 have procedures regarding purchasing goods or services, 9 – petty cash, 9 – staff costs, 6 – selecting a new supplier, 1 – other and 3 do not implement any financial procedures.

Chart 1

Financial Operations and Procedures

Category	Value
Purchasing Goods or Services	10
Petty Cash	9
Staff Costs	9
Selecting New Suplier	6
None	3
Other	1
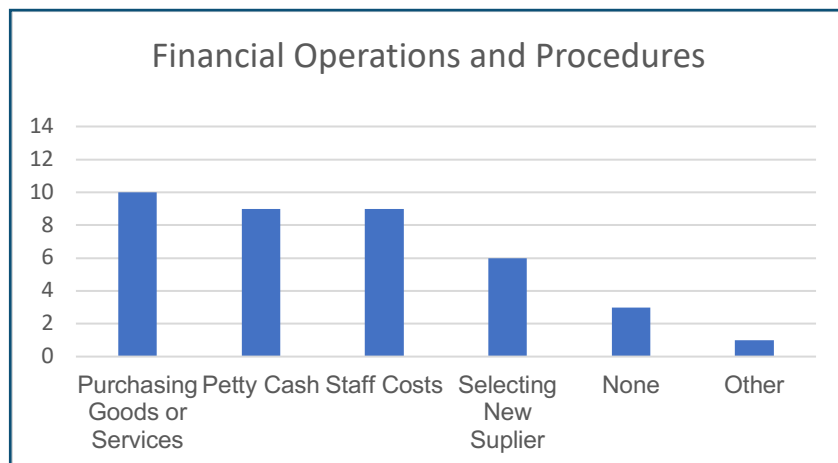
| Financial Operations and Procedures

The organisations have various sources of funding and donations (Chart 2); most of them (10) receive cash donations, followed by in-kind donations (8), EU funding (4), other grants (3) and income from organising events (1). Few organisations (3) do not receive any funding or donations.

Chart 2
Sources of Funding and Donations

Sources of Funding and Donations

| Category	Value
Cash donations	10
In-kind donations	8
EU funding	4
Other gratns	3
No funding / donations received	3
Organising Events	1
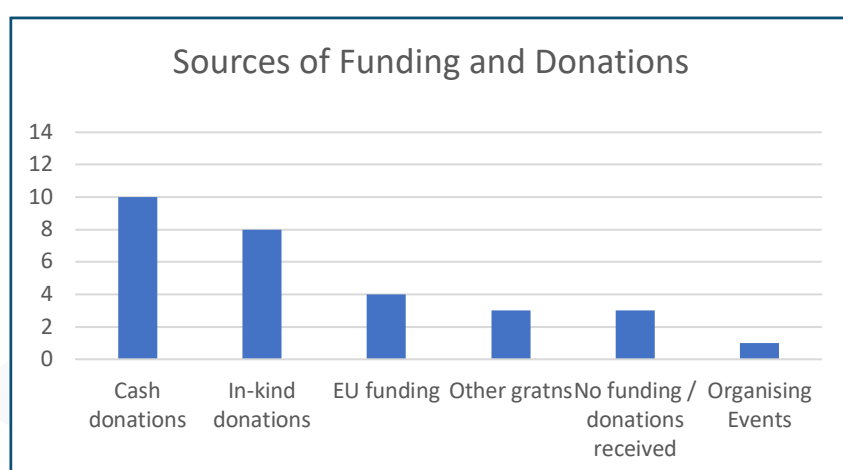
Moreover, 10 organisations reported to have a capacity to prepare a funding application. Since 4 of them do not benefit from any kind of funding (hence, have limited experience in this area) it is questionable whether they are indeed skilled in the funding proposal writing.
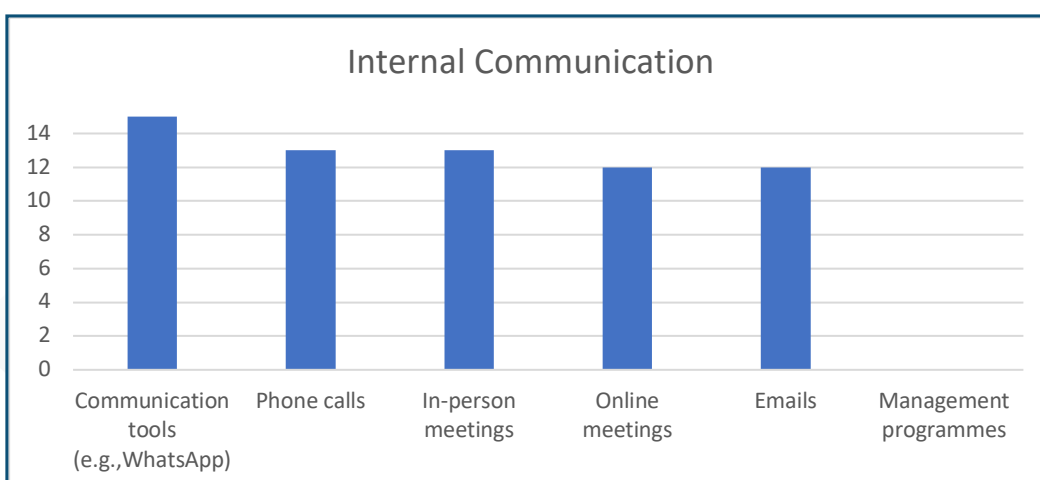
Operational Management

Many of the CSOs and MRLOs which participated in the research reported having various policies and procedures in place (Chart 3). Most of the organisations stated that they follow Standard Operating Procedures (11) and implement some procedures / policies (13). Specifically, 12 organisations implement GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation), 12 - Age, Gender and Diversity Policy, 10 - PSEA (Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse), 10 - Child Protection Policy and 7 - Anti-fraud Policy.

Chart 3
Policies
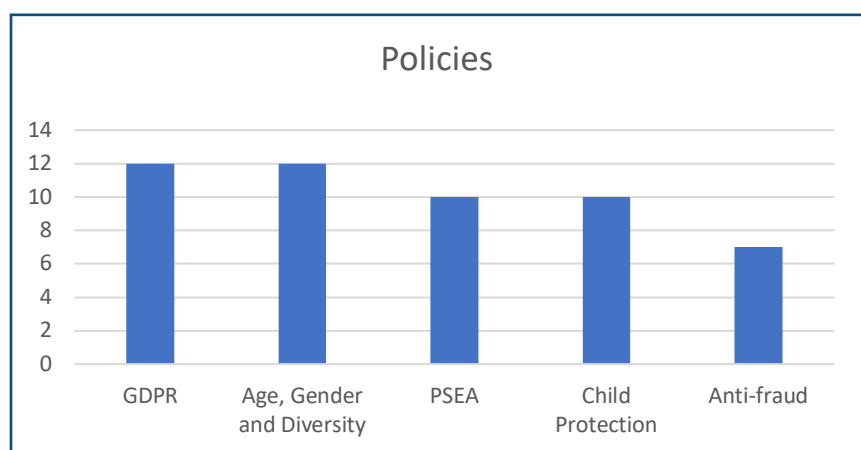
Most of the organisations use multiple tools to communicate with each other (Chart 4). Staff member meetings are organised with various frequency (Chart 5). Seven organisations organise team meetings every 2-3 weeks, 5 – once a week or more frequently, 2 – less frequently than once a month and 1 – once a month. Almost all CSOs and MRLOs record minutes (14).

Chart 4
Internal Communication

Chart 5
Internal Meetings

Internal Meetings

■ Once a week or more frequently	■ Once every 2 or 3 weeks
■ Once a month	■ Less frequently than once a month
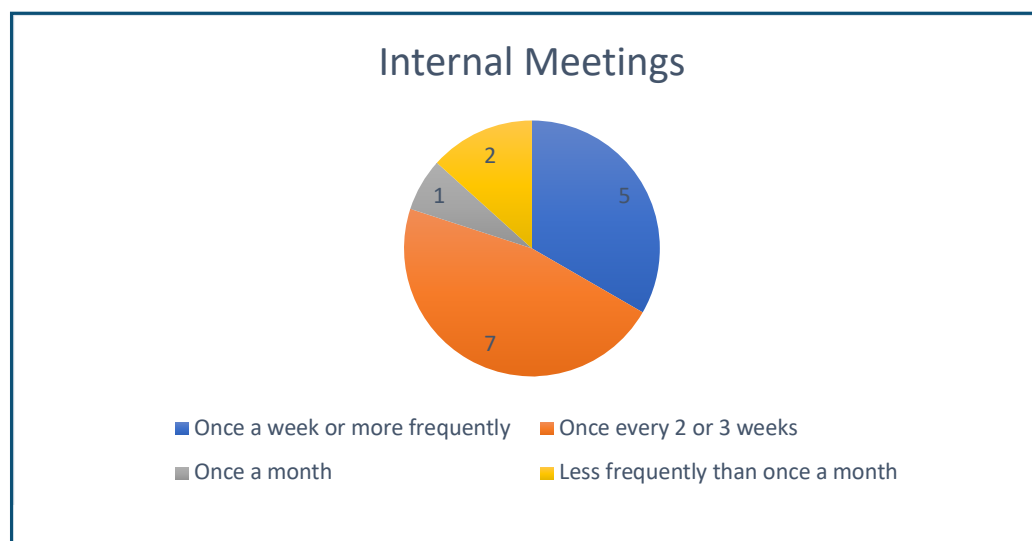
In most organisations, decisions are approved by board members / senior staff.

Regarding the recruitment of the new staff members, 6 organisations have formal selection criteria, 5 – informal ones, 3 – accept everyone who is interested to join the organisation and 1 does not have any staff members as it is exclusively volunteer-based. Volunteers are chosen based on formal selection criteria by 4 organisations, informal criteria – by 5 while 6 organisations accept everyone who wants to get involved in their organisation's activities.

In 9 organisations decisions are approved by board members / senior staff, in 7 – they are made by organisation's leader / director, in 6 – they are made through voting procedures, in 3 – they are reached through consensus and in 1 – they are made based on internal decision-making procedures (which were not described in detail).

Operational areas which could particularly benefit from an improvement are 1) using Approved Authorisation Table – as only one third of organisations (5) use it and 2) risk management, as most the organisations (10) manage risks informally, 3 respondents did not know how the risks are managed in their organisations and only 2 CSOs/MRLOs follow a formal Risk Management Plan.

Over a half of the organisations (8) follow a Strategic Plan when planning their organisations activities, which is a good practice. However, the planning of activities has a short-term character in most cases. 5 organisations plan their activities for the next few weeks, 4 for the next few months and only 3 for the next year or more; 3 organisations did not specify for how long the activities are planned. The long-term planning strategies could be introduced to the CSOs and MRLOs participating in the project.

PART III – Report on CSOs' and MRLOs' Capacity to Work with Vulnerable Populations

| Operational Context of CSOs and MRLOs

CSOs' and MRLOs' work with vulnerable populations is affected not only by their capacity (which will be explored in the next section of this report) but also by the context within which they are operating. There are substantial differences between the operational contexts of the Greek Cypriot Community (GCC) and Turkish Cypriot Community (TCC).

In TCC, there are no local legal frameworks which regulate work with refugees and migrants. There are various international agreements in place, but they are not implemented in practice. Consequently, it is a common procedure to deport persons with refugee or irregular status to their countries of origin, with the exception of Syrian refugees who are being typically deported to Turkey.

Regarding work with vulnerable persons, up to recently there was no law applicable to cases of human trafficking. In 2020 such a law was adopted, but its application is still limited in practice. Similarly, in cases of other vulnerabilities, governmental support is greatly limited (or non-existent); e.g., there is only one shelter for victims/survivors of gender-based violence, with a very small capacity. The additional complication is that being vulnerable does not protect refugees and irregular migrants from being deported. That often stops vulnerable beneficiaries from seeking help.

There is no Social Welfare System available to other persons than TC nationals, and this practice is supported by a relevant regulation. That deprives all the vulnerable refugees and migrants from the necessary assistance and leaves the provision of social support to CSOs and MRLOs, which have limited resources.

Psychological support is also provided through CSOs and MRLOs and psychologists who cooperate with these organisations have availability which does not match needs of numerous beneficiaries with refugee/migrant backgrounds. Regarding the governmental mental health institutions, one of the experts expressed limited trust in the quality of services they provide.

Because of these systemic obstacles, MRLOs and CSOs greatly rely on each other when trying to assist vulnerable persons. There are no official referral mechanisms to governmental services, hence unofficial referrals between the organisations take place. Oftentimes, the only way to engage with the governmental bodies is through advocacy actions, and almost never – through cooperation.

CSOs and MRLOs in the TCC have limited financial and human resources, and the two aspects appear to be interlinked. The remuneration seems not to match the psychological burden of humanitarian work, so that many professionals choose to work in public sector or private companies. The financial resources lack sustainability and require continuous efforts to secure funding, which is particularly burdensome for organisations with limited human resources.

In the GCC, the operational context of CSOs and MRLOs seems less challenging in comparison, but it is not free from obstacles. Unlike in the TCC, in GCC there are implemented laws allowing asylum applications and preventing deportations of either asylum seekers or international protection holders.

Work with vulnerable beneficiaries is also more regulated and structured than in TCC. For example, there is a step-by-step National Referral Mechanism for survivors/victims of human trafficking (THB), there are specialised shelters for victims/survivors of gender-based violence (GBV) or THB, there is foreseen support of Social Welfare Services and medical services available for refugees and migrants etc.

Even though it seems very functional in theory, in practice there are numerous limitations, e.g., the rights of refugees and migrants are not fully implemented, the social support is commonly delayed and oftentimes poor, the access to labour market is restricted for asylum seekers (but even migrants and international protection holders struggle to secure employment), there are systemic challenges which can be linked to racism and prejudices etc.

The CSOs and MRLOs who operate in the GCC context need to be able to navigate through these obstacles, to be familiar with laws and official procedures, to know whom to contact (both in governmental and nongovernmental sector) to support a beneficiary in receiving optimal assistance, and to be well trained in assessing and addressing needs of the population they are working with.

| Working with Vulnerable Populations – Self-Reported Capacity

Overview
CSOs and MRLOs who participated in the research were asked to describe the population they are working with. Some of the organisations provided detailed and thorough descriptions, while others replied in a rather vague manner. In an overview, the CSOs and MRLOs focus on different populations, some of them work with migrants and/or refugees in general, while others focus on a specific population, including minors, families, students, disabled, persons with HIV positive status, victims/survivors or human trafficking or torture and members of LGBTQI+ community.

Very few organisations provided information regarding the age and country of origin of their beneficiaries. Those who did, mentioned ages starting from below 18 y/o (minors) up to 70 y/o. The countries of origin which were listed included Cameroon, Gambia, Senegal, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Nepal, Ivory Coast, Nigeria, Liberia, Ukraine, Bulgaria and Poland, while some generally stated that they are working with a population coming from Africa.

Regarding vulnerabilities, all the organisations (15) who participated in the research come across vulnerable beneficiaries in their work, 12 provide services to vulnerable beneficiaries while the remaining 3 are planning to do so in the future. It is important to highlight that all the organisations come across more than one vulnerability in their work.

The vulnerabilities listed by the CSOs and MRLOs (Chart 6) included: migrants (15), refugees (14), victims/survivors of gender-based violence (13), persons in poverty (13), victims/survivors of trafficking in human beings (12), persons with mental disorders or psychological difficulties (12), persons experiencing homelessness (12), victims/survivors of torture (11), members of LGBTQI+ community (11), single parents (11), persons with disabilities (10), persons in detention (9), minors (8), sex workers (8), persons with severe physical illnesses (7), persons with HIV positive status (7) and elderly (7).

Chart 6
Vulnerabilities

Chart 6 — Vulnerabilities
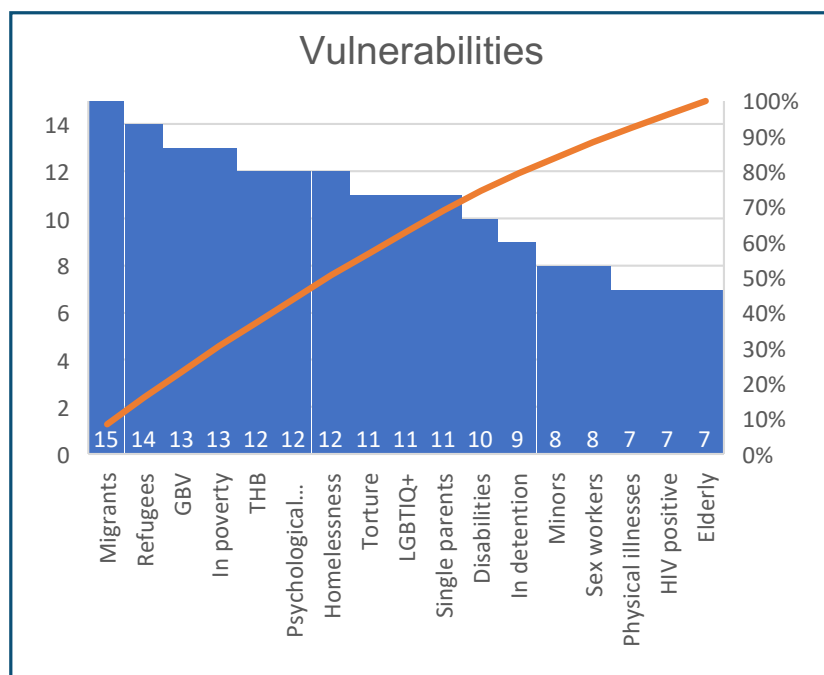
Vulnerability Screening, Assessment and Assistance
Out of 15 CSOs and MRLOs who completed the Self-Assessment Form, 12 provide services to vulnerable populations. These 12 organisations follow various methods of vulnerability screening, assessment and assistance.

Regarding the vulnerability assessment, 4 organisations use screening tools or vulnerability assessment tools, 2 assess vulnerability in unstructured, informal way, 2 refer vulnerable beneficiaries to other organisations (it is understood that the referral is made upon the identification of the vulnerability, however it was not specified how such identification is performed), 2 do not assess vulnerability at all, 2 did not specify whether and how they assess vulnerability.

Organisations also differ in terms of the assistance provided to vulnerable populations. One third of the organisations (5) refer vulnerable beneficiaries to other governmental or nongovernmental organisations / services, 4 offer legal, social or material help through the activities of their organisation, 1 intervenes at the governmental services on behalf of vulnerable beneficiaries and 5 did not provide any conclusive information about actions taken when working with vulnerable beneficiaries.

Cooperation with Governmental and Non-Governmental Stakeholders
The cooperation between CSOs and MRLOs with governmental and nongovernmental stakeholders is different in the TCC and GCC. In GCC there are more possibilities for the support or intervention of the governmental services, although they are oftentimes difficult to be reached and more limited in practice than in theory. In TCC collaborations between CSOs and MRLOs and the governmental actors are typically non-existent.

Regarding the cooperation between CSOs and MRLOs, they are possible and take place in both communities.

Regarding the cooperation between CSOs and MRLOs, they are possible and take place in both communities.

While almost all (14 out of 15) CSOs and MRLOs who participated in the research cooperate with other organisations / institutions, when asked about official services, procedures or referral mechanisms utilised to assist vulnerable beneficiaries, 7 organisations did not provide any conclusive information about the referrals or stated that they do not make any referrals, 4 refer vulnerable beneficiaries to governmental services, 4 refer vulnerable beneficiaries to other CSOs and 1 utilises governmental mechanism to reach the vulnerable beneficiaries.

Legal Frameworks Used
Most of the CSOs and MRLOs (8) do not support their work with vulnerable beneficiaries by any laws, 1 did not answer and 2 provided irrelevant information (either mentioned law that does not apply to vulnerable beneficiaries, i.e., Law for Associations or referred to ethical, not legal principles). Only less than one third of the organisations (4) are guided in their work by legal texts.

PART IV – Identified and Self-Reported Training Needs of CSOs and MRLOs

The CSOs and MRLOs who completed the Self-Assessment Form would like to receive training on the following subjects:

- Grant Writing and Fundraising
- Financial Management
- Project Management
- Research and Data Management
- Safeguarding Policies
- Standard Operating Procedures
- Risk Management
- Risk Assessment Tools
- Formal Vulnerability Assessment Tools and Procedures
- Advocacy
- Media Advocacy
- Grassroot Lobbying and Mobilization
- Human Rights Based Approach
- Human Rights Monitoring
- Accessing the UN and CoE Human Rights Monitoring Mechanisms (human rights monitoring, drafting monitoring reports, lobbying for their incorporation into country reports etc.)
- Human Resources Management
- Leadership Training
- Volunteer Training and Management

Based on the data collected and experience of the expert staff of the project, the following training subjects were identified:

- Advocacy
- Grant Writing and Fundraising
- Financial Management
- Vulnerability Screening Tools
- Needs Assessment Procedures
- Mapping of each CSO and MRLO Capacity and Areas of Activity (to ensure smooth cooperation and referral system)
- Step-by-Step Guidelines in Cases of Emergency
- Referral Mechanisms
- Relevant Legal Frameworks
- Risk Management
- Safeguarding Policies
- Selfcare