

Columbia Global Resilience Fund Stakeholders Meeting Briefing Note

Dates: June 17–18, 2025

Location: Columbia Global Center Istanbul

Two years after the devastating earthquakes struck southern Türkiye, Columbia Global's Resilience Fund has played a vital role in helping support recovery and building resilience. In that time, its projects have delivered trauma-informed mental health programs, youth engagement initiatives, and community-based rebuilding strategies. These efforts illustrate that recovery is not only about physical reconstruction—it is about restoring community, memory, and the social fabric of life in affected regions.

In June 2025, Columbia Global Center Istanbul convened a two-day Stakeholder Meeting to take stock of what has been learned and achieved, identify persistent gaps, and chart the next steps for sustainable, community-driven recovery. The gathering brought together local NGOs, Turkish universities, Columbia faculty, and philanthropic organizations, creating a collaborative space where local insights met global expertise.

This report summarizes the highlights of those discussions, outlining key takeaways, lessons

learned, and next steps while capturing the cross-project learning that makes the Resilience Fund an evolving, integrated ecosystem for resilience.



Day 1: Stakeholders Roundtable

The first day gathered Columbia project leads, local partners, and academic collaborators for in-depth discussions of the five active Resilience Fund projects:

- **HEARTS:** Assessing health equity and tracking resilience among Syrian refugees in Türkiye
- **I-HOPE:** Delivering grief-focused psychosocial support to earthquake survivors
- **Building Back Better in Hatay:** Linking spatial reconstruction with social recovery

- **Preserv-AI:** Protecting cultural heritage and memory using AI tools
- **ASCENT:** Supporting the mental health and psychosocial wellbeing of adolescents

Participants included: Hatay Psychologists Association, Maya Foundation, Olive Branch Organization, Basmeh & Zeitoneh, Hatay Mustafa Kemal University, and Middle East Technical University (METU).

A key theme emerging from Day 1 was the importance of continuity and knowledge-sharing across projects. Participants noted that the impact of individual initiatives grows when they are viewed as part of an integrated ecosystem. For example, insights from the completed HEARTS project on trauma and community well-being are informing the design and direction of the forthcoming ASCENT project. This transfer of lessons ensures that new initiatives build on prior experience rather than starting from scratch.



Similarly, Preserv-AI and Building Back Better in Hatay highlight how spatial reconstruction, cultural heritage, and the social fabric of communities intersect. Both projects demonstrate that space is not just physical—it is a carrier of memory, identity, and healing. By examining these projects collectively, the Resilience Fund reinforces a holistic approach to recovery that spans disciplines, timelines, and communities.

Day 1 discussions also underscored the value of sustaining projects beyond the pilot stage and

avoiding isolated interventions. Local partners emphasized that Columbia's rapid mobilization of expertise and resources was catalytic, but long-term collaboration is essential to achieve enduring outcomes.



Day 2: Search Conference

Day 2 expanded the conversation to include a larger circle of civil society organizations and funders in a structured Search Conference format. Participants included:

- **Civil Society and Philanthropy:** Turkish Philanthropy Funds (TPF), Vehbi Koç Foundation, Yuva Project, Center for Spatial Justice (MAD), CORE Research Institute, May 17 Association, Association for Migration Research (GAR), and the Turquoise Coast Environment Fund
- **Academic Institutions:** Koç University, Galatasaray University, Topkapı University, and Beykent University
- **Local NGOs and Columbia Faculty:** Continuing from Day 1.

The second day began with the announcement of the Columbia Global – Turkish Philanthropy Funds (TPF) Resilience Initiative, a project that unites Columbia's academic expertise with TPF's deep local knowledge and philanthropic network. With TPF's critical funding, this project is designed to move beyond short-term relief toward long-term, research-based community resilience, combining world-class research with locally grounded, community-led approaches.

Participants worked in thematic roundtables:

1. Equitable recovery for vulnerable populations
2. Psychosocial support and community well-being
3. Multi-risk-informed urban planning
4. Cultural and environmental preservation



They identified persistent challenges: the semi-permanence of container settlements, inadequate affordable housing, spatial segregation, ongoing trauma, service duplication, and youth unemployment. Discussions also highlighted how universities can contribute through needs assessments, training-of-trainers programs for psychosocial services, workshops on impact evaluation and policy writing, and shared data and toolkits to strengthen collaboration.

Local partners expressed renewed interest in collaborating with Columbia researchers. New project partners, such as the Maya Foundation and METU Cultural Heritage Protection Program, were able to see the full scope of the Resilience Fund and identify ways to expand their research projects and develop new components that complement ongoing work.

Key Takeaways and Next Steps

Takeaways:

- Continuity and cross-project learning are critical for meaningful, lasting impact.
- Recovery must integrate physical, social, and cultural dimensions, treating space as a carrier of memory and community.

- Lessons from completed projects like HEARTS are already informing new efforts such as ASCENT, demonstrating the value of building on prior work.
- Columbia's role as a global university includes amplifying local voices, facilitating knowledge transfer, and convening cross-sector collaborations.
- Local partners are eager for deeper, ongoing engagement and see value in Columbia's global visibility for advocacy and support.
- The new Columbia Global-TPF collaboration strengthens the pathway toward sustainable resilience-building.

Strengthening resilience requires universities to partner with civil society—building local capacity, sharing data and tools, and fostering cross-disciplinary collaborations that drive impact and visibility.

Next Steps:

- Analytic Mapping: Develop a database of actors, needs, and ongoing efforts to improve coordination and guide future projects.
- Sustainable Program Design: Transition pilot initiatives into long-term, community-owned efforts that build on previous learning.
- Improving research capacity on resilience related issues: The Resilience Fund Initiative will develop new educational programs, courses and visitor programs that address learning and research needs on resilience.
- Cross-Disciplinary Collaboration: Leverage Columbia's diverse academic expertise to co-create practical, research-informed solutions.

This meeting reinforced that resilience is a collective process, requiring deep local knowledge, global partnership, and sustained commitment. The insights gathered will inform the next phase of the Resilience Fund and the Columbia-TPF collaboration, ensuring that the progress of the past two years strengthens future community recovery and resilience.

