

YERELIZ's Contribution to OHCHR's Call for
Inputs to the Report on

“Women, Girls and the Right to a Clean, Healthy and Sustainable Environment”



LOCAL MONITORING RESEARCH AND
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This report was prepared by the Local Monitoring Research and Implementation Association (YERELIZ) on October 2022, upon the call of the The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

It is aimed to contribute to the report prepared by the OHCHR Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment on women, girls and the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, a right recognized in 2021 by the UN Human Rights Council Resolution 48/13.

YERELIZ aims this report will contribute on the efforts for immediate actions and policies to make the effect of the climate crisis visible on women, girls and all other vulnerable communities in national and global scales.

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A The interrelation between the climate justice and gender equality became much more visible on a global scale with the COP13 meeting. Although it is now widely accepted that if climate adaptation policies are not designed and implemented from a gender equality perspective, women will be affected more negatively than men, the relationship between climate justice and gender equality is either excluded from national and local policy documents or included without well-defined goals and activities. Talking about climate crisis and adaptation is still predominantly seen as thinking about a dystopia of a distant future, so ways to empower women and increase their resilience in the face of changing climate conditions is not planned with a holistic political design based on concrete steps to be taken but rather with ad hoc implementations.

B Women's

- ~ disproportionate domestic caregiving responsibilities,
- ~ limited freedom to move independently from other household/family members,
- ~ limited access to economic resources,
- ~ crucial physiological processes such as menstruation, pregnancy and menopause are the main factors behind the fact that the climate crisis have more destructive effects on their lives.

In Türkiye, in fact we do not know exactly how women and girls are and will be affected due to the lack of data.



Türkiye's National Climate Change Adaptation Strategy and Action Plan¹ covers only two of the climate change-based risks faced by women:

- 1) Agriculture vanishing as a means of livelihood,
- 2) Increased risk of cancer.

One out of every four women in employment in Türkiye works in the agricultural sector (in contrast to 1:8 ration in men) and 75% of women working in this sector are unpaid family workers². Nevertheless, agriculture stands out as an area where women in Türkiye at least meet their basic food needs and find more employment opportunities. Due to this gender composition in the agricultural labor force, it is predicted that climate change's destructive effects on the means of livelihoods will disproportionately affect women. The policy objectives defined in the Action Plan against this risk are

- ~ planning trainings on sustainable farming methods and tools for women farmers,
- ~ giving priority to cooperatives established by women farmers to be supported,
- ~ informing women farmers about opportunities of access to micro credits and insurance.

In many rural development projects, trainings are given to women farmers as merely a procedural requirement of projects while these "procedural" trainings are also insufficient to increase the resilience of women. Women are not provided with the financial nor social resources that are necessary implement what they have learnt in these training modules. In the statement titled "*We Do Not Celebrate the World Women Farmers Day*"³ made by the TMMOB (Union of Chambers of Turkish Engineers and Architects) Chamber of Agricultural Engineers in 2021, it was underlined that what women working in the agricultural sector needed is more than education. According to the statement, it is not possible to talk about a real policy of increasing women farmers' resilience unless the demands of women in agriculture

- ~ to eliminate precarious working conditions,
- ~ to re-allocate public lands (that are no longer forest) for agricultural activities of women farmers,
- ~ to revitalize social and public life in the countryside.

1 https://webdosya.csb.gov.tr/db/iklim/editordosya/uyum_stratejisi_eylem_plani_TR.pdf

2 İSTANPOL (2021) "The Place of Women in the Labor Market and Policy Recommendations". <https://www.istanpol.org/post/i-%C5%9Fg%C3%BCc%C3%BC-piyasas%C4%B1nda-kad%C4%B1nlar%C4%B1n-yeri-ve-politika-%C3%B6nerileri>

3 <https://m.bianet.org/bianet/siyaset/251884-15-ekim-dunya-kadin-ciftciler-gunu-yuzde-95-i-sigortasiz>

These three demands require policy actions directly related to Türkiye's

- ~ social security system,
- ~ governance of the ownership of public lands,
- ~ integration of development policy and social policies.

Secondly, it was emphasized in the Action Plan that free cancer screening is provided to all men and women aged 50-70 through KETEMs (Cancer Early Diagnosis and Screening Units) in the face of the increased risk of cancer due to climate change and increasing temperatures. The target for female farmers is defined in a concrete and monitorable form (**UT 2.5.2.** "Giving women farmers trainings on agricultural production techniques to adapt to the effects of climate change and/or including them in existing training activities") while no specific action is identified for the protection of women (especially agricultural workers) against the risk of cancer. As stated in the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's final Assessment Report, much more radical measures need to be taken⁴.



UNFPA explains the reasons why women are more affected by the climate crisis under 5 main themes:

- 1) the possibility of increasing gender-based violence,
- 2) the increase in child marriages due to poverty,
- 3) premature and stillbirths,
- 4) maternal and newborn health risks,
- 5) restricted access to reproductive health services and contraceptive products⁵.

In Türkiye, these five areas fall under the jurisdiction of the

- ~ Ministry of Health,
- ~ Ministry of Family and Social Services,
- ~ local governments.

However, the plan does not define an accurate division of responsibilities neither among ministries nor between ministries and local governments. Many municipalities in Türkiye carry out rural development and sustainable agriculture projects and provide social services for violence against women, poverty alleviation and sexual health. Therefore, increasing women's resilience in the face of the climate crisis is not possible by excluding any of these public actors and

⁴ https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg2/downloads/report/IPCC_AR6_WGII_FullReport.pdf

⁵ <https://esaro.unfpa.org/en/news/five-ways-climate-change-hurts-women-and-girls>

integrating their services to a climate adaptation perspective. For example, in Istanbul, Türkiye's most populous metropolis, households' access to clean water is provided by İSKİ, an affiliate of the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality (İMM). Istanbul's waste management is also largely under the responsibility of İMM and district municipalities. According to the latest Environmental Statistics announced by Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK), it was determined that 90.7% of the municipal population and 55.5% of the village population were served by the sewerage network⁶. In the same year, the wastewater of 78.7% of the municipal population and 10.2% of the village population was treated. Excluding the municipalities or their services from climate adaptation programs will diminish the efficiency.



Climate-born disasters and how they are handled is another crucial topic. Disaster and risk management is under the jurisdiction of AFAD (Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency) which is affiliated to the Ministry of Interior. In AFAD's current strategic plan covering the years 2019-2023, the words "women" and "gender" are not mentioned even once. AFAD has neither a gender-sensitive disaster management perspective nor institutional capacity with its employment composition. It does not have an institutional capacity that can address the needs of women and the special risks they face during climate-born disasters such as extreme weather events . 67% of AFAD's central staff and 83% of its provincial staff are male⁷.



Although Türkiye's institutional actors with authority and responsibility at the intersection of climate crisis and gender equality are quite diverse as listed above, the only policy area where women are strategically identified is the agricultural labor force. However, this agenda neither could be carried beyond the goal of "raising awareness" of women agricultural workers nor meet with sustainable local development policies and social policies.

To summarize, the structural barriers to increasing women's resilience in the face of the climate crisis and their access to fundamental rights, especially clean water and clean environment are:

- ~ lack of data policy and gender-sensitive needs analyses;
- ~ the absence of a holistic and binding macro policy based on an accurate division

⁶ TÜİK (2018) Environmental Protection Expenditures Statistics.

⁷ https://www.afad.gov.tr/kurumlar/afad.gov.tr/e_Kutuphane/Planlar/AFAD_2019_2023_STRATEJIK_PLAN.pdf

of responsibilities between different institutions; that is, lack of coordination between development policies, social policies, environmental policies and inclusive disaster/risk management programs;

~ lack of support to the local implementations of the Sustainable Development Goals;

~ the underappreciation of local governments, which take a disproportionate responsibility especially for clean water and clean environment, within the macro adaptation policy.



In addition to all these barriers, counter-interventions such as the destruction of water resources and green areas due to the construction-based and “Mega Project” oriented development approach of the central government undermine the Climate Adaptation Plan of Türkiye. Interventions on villages and HEPP (Hydro Electric Power Plant) projects that damage the ecosystem are generally met with “village women’s resistances”. Although the struggle of local women leaders such as “Mother Havva”⁸ and “peasant women’s activism” especially in the Black Sea Region are quite impressive; this is not enough. The solution lies in a climate adaptation policy based on an accurate and gender sensitive central-local division of responsibility.



YERELİZ advocates that the central government should take primary responsibility in the following areas:

~ gender-sensitive and transparent data policy in all areas,

~ integration of macro policy areas (development, economy, social policy, environmental policies and disaster/risk management),

~ power sharing and additional resources for local governments for the sake of the local implementation of Sustainable Development Goals, especially with local governments ruling the “high-risk” areas against climate crisis.

We also advocate that local governments should play a more active role in the following areas:

~ rural sustainability programs,

~ women’s and sexual health,

~ participatory ecological and gender sensitive urban planning/urban regeneration policies,

⁸ “I am the people” : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bUpG2fL7Cic>

~ an advanced waste management system and investments in sustainable infrastructure services.



In case such a division of responsibility between the government and local governments and policies to mitigate the gendered risks of the climate crisis are not prioritized, what will happen to lives of women and girls can be predicted through the current problems in the following three areas:

- ~ Roma neighborhoods especially in deprived rural areas,
- ~ urban transformation/gentrification processes,
- ~ seasonal agricultural workers.

Example 1

Roma people living in shanties in *Istanbul/Silivri/Yeni Neighborhood* do not have access to clean water and infrastructural services⁹. These families live next to a solid waste facility while being surrounded by environmental wastes unpleasant smell and poisonous water. Despite spending a lot of time on housework and cleaning, women and girls constantly suffering from urinary tract infections, have to walk many kilometers every day to carry clean water, could not meet the hygiene conditions in their shanties and neighborhoods while living together with too many flies, insects and pests due to dirty water. Although men have access to clean water and a relatively clear environment during the day, as they work in the city center; women cannot move from the deprivation zone with their children. In the final report of the Roma Workshop¹⁰ held by IMM in 2019, it was emphasized that many women and girls in Roma neighborhoods suffer from similar problems.

Example 2

By the urban transformation that took place in *Istanbul/Okmeydanı/Fetihtepe Neighborhood* between August 2022 and October 2022, access to clean water was cut off by İSKİ as a legal requirement. In many urban transformation areas, water

⁹ <https://www.milliyet.com.tr/gundem/bu-mahallede-500-kisi-coplerle-ic-ice-1282696>

¹⁰ https://calistay.ibb.istanbul/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/IstanbulRomanCalistayi_Dijital.pdf

and energy supply is interrupted shortly after the decision of destruction is made. Although this made impossible to survive in the neighborhood, it was observed that the women in Fetihtepe tried to meet the clean water needs of their family members by drawing on huge water hoses extended to surrounding mosques and cemeteries which are generally exempt from “cutting-off-decision”¹¹.

Example 3

In some regions of İzmir, solar panels are used to improve the living conditions of seasonal agricultural workers through District Governorships. Thanks to these panels, agricultural worker families have access to hot water in their temporary accommodation for both washing dishes/laundry and showering and other personal hygiene needs. In addition, due to the change in the seasonal cycle, the harvest times may overlap with the first months of the schools. This, in turn, affects especially girls’ access to the right to education. According to the statement made by the Ministry of National Education in 2021, over 16.000 children in Türkiye continue their formal education while working as seasonal agricultural workers with their families¹². In 2019, the “mobile classroom” project for the children of seasonal agricultural workers was launched in Adana/Yüreğir with the support of UNICEF to reconcile the effects of climate change with children’s right to have equal opportunities¹³.

11 <https://ekmekvegul.net/gundem/fetihtepe-mahallesinde-yasayan-kadinlar-evimize-kafamiza-cokuyor-lar-gasbediliyoruz>

12 https://www.iletisim.gov.tr/turkce/yereL_basin/detay/milli-egitim-bakani-ziya-selcuk-yaz-aylarinda-tarla-da-mesaiye-baslayan-tarim-iscilerinin-cocuklarına-surpriz-bir-ziyaret-gerceklestirdi

13 <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/turkiye/tarim-iscilerinin-cocuklari-icin-mobil-sinif/1424761>

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