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Turkey's Second
VNR

Civil Society Alternative Report

UN High Level Political Forum
Sustainable Development Goals

9 – 18 July 2019

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"We need equality urgently! Really urgently"

Turkey will be presenting its implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for the second time, as a part of the Voluntary National Reviews, in the High Level Political Forum (HLPF)'2019. Even though Turkey's commitment to report on the SDGs at the international level presents a promising outlook, the steps for the realization and monitoring of the SDGs within Turkey are not taken with the necessary speed and effectiveness. There are worrisome structural back steps and political statements regarding gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, which makes it impossible to reach Goal 5 and other targets related to women and girls. This alternative report aims to present a civil society perspective, from a gender equality and empowerment of women and girls framework, on Turkey's implementation of Agenda 2030 and the SDGs. ¹

SDGs in Turkey, since 2016

Turkey was among the first 22 countries that reported on their plans for the implementation of SDGs, in 2016. Unfortunately, it is not possible to say that the

1 This report has been prepared by the representatives of the independent women's movement in Turkey, Women for Women's Human Rights - New Ways, Women's Solidarity Foundation, Foundation for Women's Solidarity, Women's Coalition - International Working Group, Association for Struggle Against Sexual Violence, Purple Roof Women's Shelter Foundation, Equality Monitoring Women's Group and one of the important CSOs working on SDGs in Turkey, YERELİZ - Local Monitoring, Research and Implementation Association. The alternative civil society report that has been prepared for Turkey's first VNR in HLPF'16 can be reached at: <http://kadinininsanhaklari.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/hlpf-shadow-report-wwhr.pdf>

process, which started quite promptly in this regard, has continued with the same momentum. Even though, Turkey has undertaken some meetings in 2016 - 2017, attended by public officials, the private sector and the civil society, to make a baseline assessment on Turkey's context regarding the SDGs, the final report of the meetings had not been shared with the public or the participants.

Again in 2017, SDGs have been integrated, to a limited extent, through the participation of civil society organizations, to the development of the 11th Development Plan of Turkey. However, the development and the publication of this plan was interrupted by the changes in the regime and institutions due to the 2017 referendum, which resulted in Turkey to move from a parliamentary democracy to a presidential government / executive presidential system, and thus the plan was not published as this alternative report was being prepared. The regime change has also resulted in the Ministry of Development, which was responsible for the monitoring of SDG implementation, to dissolve, and this task was transferred to the newly established Presidency of Strategy and Budget, directly under the Presidency of Republic of Turkey. In light of these developments, it is not possible to conclude that Turkey's current development program is planned and implemented in accordance with the SDGs.

Furthermore, a process / mechanism such as the one mentioned in the Para 79 of "Transforming Our World," where countries can monitor and evaluate their progress under the SDGs, where the civil society can participate, and that is well resourced and effective, has not been established in Turkey between 2016 - 2019. Because the important documents and reports regarding development and SDGs have not been finalized and published, and because an effective SDG mechanism has not been established, it is not possible for the work on SDGs, at the level of public institutions, academia and civil society, to progress on a holistic, cooperative, multilateral manner.²

2 In the time of the preparation of this report, Turkey's full VNR report had not been published yet. This alternative report has been prepared in light of the "Main Messages" of Turkey's VNR, and the experiences of the women and civil society organizations during these years. The summary of Turkey's 2019 VNR report titled "Turkey's 2nd VNR review - Main Messages: Strong Ground for Common Goals" can be reached at: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/23000Turkey_VNR__Turkey.pdf

At the same time, this context makes it harder for us, as women's and civil society organizations, to present alternative reports and advocate on them, in light of reliable data and analyses, in the SDG reviews at regional and international levels.





Gender Equality in Turkey, since 2016

Turkey ranks as the 130th among 149 countries in the World Economic Forum's annual "Gender Gap Index," in 2018. In the alternative report we have prepared in 2016, it can be seen that Turkey also ranked as the 130th in the 2015 report.³ This shows us that this lag observed in the SDG implementation in Turkey, is also present in the achievement of gender equality.⁴ Further, the issue of women's rights, which we know have been a part of Turkey's VNR report preparations, are totally absent from the summary VNR report of Turkey, titled "Main Messages: Strong Ground for Common Goals" document. We believe that this absence indicates that gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls are not prioritized by Turkey, neither in Goal 5 nor under the other goals.

Since 2016, there is a growing opposition within the political discourse and from some particular groups supported by the government (e.g. victimised/divorced father's groups, family

³ The unfavorable picture Turkey presents in this regard, is also evident in the shadow reports and concluding reports prepared for the Council of Europe Istanbul Convention and UN CEDAW Convention processes. The reports can be reached at the below links:

CoE Istanbul Convention Civil Society Shadow Report: <http://kadinininsanhaklari.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Istanbul-Sozlesmesi-Golge-Rapor-ENG.pdf>

CoE Istanbul Convention (Baseline) Evaluation Report of the GREVIO Committee:

<https://rm.coe.int/eng-grevio-report-turquie/16808e5283>

CEDAW Convention Civil Society Shadow Report: <http://kadinininsanhaklari.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/ShadowReport.pdf>

CEDAW Committee Concluding Observations - Turkey:

https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW/C/TUR/CO/7&Lang=En

⁴ In UN SDSN's "Sustainable Development Report - 2019" Turkey's current situation on Goal 5 is indicated as "Major challenges remain" and its progress on Goal 5 looks "stagnated."

councils etc.), as well as the media that supports the government, against the acquired rights on gender equality and empowerment of women and girls. These attacks are currently against the right to alimony women get after divorce, the Law No. 6284 that protects women against violence against women and domestic violence, the Istanbul Convention and women's sexual and reproductive health and rights, from these particular groups. It is worrisome to see that the oppositional discourse from these groups is also reciprocated by the state officials.

While in written documents and reports, such as the Women's Empowerment Strategy Document and Action Plan 2018 - 2023, the state mentions SDGs and their significance for enhancing gender equality and empowerment of women and girls, yet at the same time, institutions such as the Council of Higher Education cancel their projects on gender equality, claiming that they are not "in accordance with Turkey's values."⁵ The state institution that is responsible for monitoring the human rights within the country, Human Rights and Equality Institution of Turkey, organizes symposiums such as "The Right to the Protection of the Family" and in the final declarations of the symposiums incomprehensively criticizes the Istanbul Convention for prioritizing women in the prevention of violence against women, declares that living together without marriage or the practices of living together by LGBTI+ couples cannot be alternatives to the family, and argues that SDGs should be implemented through family oriented policies.⁶

It is perturbative that the state pays attention to entities that focus on the family and approach the issue of rights through religious references, while opening up the spaces for consultation to them, instead of the independent women's rights organizations which have been working on preventing and combatting violence against women for decades.

Moreover, the highest officials of the state, including the President himself, continue to make declarations on important gender equality documents, such as the Council of Europe's Istanbul Convention, saying that "it is not the word of the Prophet, if necessary it can be annulled" due to the opposition from the above mentioned interest groups they support and often come together. Statements such as these are proof that a political will for gender equality does not exist, and that the mindset which locks women and girls into their traditional gender roles within the family is supported by the highest levels of the state.⁷ The state officials and institutions

5 T24 Website. "Erdogan said the Istanbul Convention, which is considered a threat to Muslims, can be annulled" (Müslümanlara Tehdit olduğu savunulan İstanbul Sözleşmesi için Erdoğan Feshedilebilir Dedi) <https://t24.com.tr/haber/muslumanlara-tehdit-oldugu-savunulan-istanbul-sozlesmesi-icin-erdogan-feshedilebilir-dedi,824334> [Last accessed 16 June 2019]

6 TİHEK. "Protection of the Family Symposium Final Declaration" (Ailenin Korunması Hakkı Sempozyumu Sonuç Bildirgesi) <https://www.tihkek.gov.tr/ailenin-korunmasi-hakki-sempozyumu-sonuc-bildirisi/> [Son erişim 19 June 2019]

7 T24 Website. "Erdogan said the Istanbul Convention, which is considered a threat to Muslims, can be annulled" (Müslümanlara Tehdit olduğu savunulan İstanbul Sözleşmesi için Erdoğan Feshedilebilir Dedi) <https://t24.com.tr/haber/muslumanlara-tehdit-oldugu-savunulan-istanbul-sozlesmesi-icin-erdogan-feshedilebilir-dedi,824334> [Last accessed 16 June 2019]

work very closely with these interest groups and GONGOs that prioritize only the family unity and instrumentalize or overlook women's and girls' rights towards ensuring this unity. Moreover, the state takes steps, argued as serving to reach gender equality, with these groups, while in reality these steps only restrain women and girls into their traditional gender roles under the pretext of "traditional values." All these steps push the independent women's movement away from the decision making mechanisms of the state.

Such statements and collaborations by the state incline us to question the continuity and the effectiveness of the steps Turkey argues to take towards gender equality in its VNR reports, as well as Turkey's statements in its other international reports.

The services women and girls can access in terms of gender equality and women's human rights is also extremely limited. The services towards women after incidents of gender based violence against women is minimal and the number of shelters (ŞÖNİMs) are not adequate. There are no rape crisis centers or sexual violence referral centers. Only a minute portion of the budget of Family, Work and Social Services Ministry is reserved for eliminating gender based violence. Accessing the existing services are also quite hard. Moreover, comprehensive sexuality education, one of the most effective methods to eliminate gender based violence, is not a part of the curriculum, even though it is a part of SDG 3.7.

Early and forced marriages, in spite of SDG 5.3., continue to be a problem

for women and girls. In recent years, the government shockingly found it in themselves to suggest a legal amendment to first postpone, and then annul after five years, the sentencing of rape perpetrators if they marry the children they have sexually harassed. Moreover, another proposal was put forward to give amnesty to early and forced marriage perpetrators.

On the other hand, Turkey continues to host nearly 2.5 million women and girl migrants, of which 1.6 million are Syrian refugees. These populations are the most vulnerable groups in the face of gender based violence and precarious employment. It is true that the Syrian refugees are able to reach services comparatively easier than other migrant groups. However, both Syrian women and women with international protection status, such as Afghani, Iraki and Iranian women, and many irregular and / or undocumented migrant women from Eurasia, Africa and Asia are not able to reach the services for gender based violence. Unfortunately, there is no trustable and gender disaggregated data about the migrant populations, except the Syrian refugees. Especially the undocumented and irregular migrants work under precarious employment with the threat of sexual violence, and are not able to use their legal rights due to the fear of being deported. In the last six months, the number of unlawful deportation incidences, which are in violation of the Geneva Convention and the Istanbul Convention, are more frequent than before.

Unfortunately, the implementation at the level of the local governments is also not promising. All 17 SDGs, and 92



“Violence has no language, religion or race”

of 169 targets are directly related to the local governments, and thus localization of SDGs at the local governance levels is a must.

The European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life, submitted to the 2006 Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), has a content that can guide the localization of Goal 5. However, as of September 2018, only 24 local municipalities has signed onto this Charter. Moreover, the dissemination and continuation of the results of the UN project, Women Friendly Cities, undertaken between 2006-2012, have been very limited. The Equality Units, which were aiming to mainstream gender equality into local authorities, established within the project period, were either closed down or became nonfunctional since then. Even though the Circular No. 2010/10, published by the Ministry of Interior, opened the way for all public institutions and local authorities to establish Equality Units and Equality Commissions, the process was left to the initiative of the local authorities, and thus only a few number of municipalities has opened up these units.

In light of all these examples, it is not possible to conclude that Turkey has progressed on the goals and targets regarding gender equality and empowerment of women and girls. For Turkey, a true change of mindset and accelerated and well-resourced steps are necessary to be able to reach the SDGs by 2030.

Indicators

The area that Turkey has shown concrete progress regarding Agenda 2030, between 2016 - 2019, has been the indicators. In January 2019, Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK) has completed its work on the updating of its Sustainable Development Indicators, in light of the SDGs and 232 nonrecurring SDG indicators. TÜİK published 83 Sustainable Development Indicators, and the related data between 2010 - 2017. This indicator set, which is only a quarter of the UN SDG indicator set, can only instruct the SDG implementation of Turkey, in a limited manner.

When the indicator set of TÜİK is examined, it can be seen that only 19 of the 83 indicators are disaggregated by gender. There are also nine other indicators that are only relevant to women and girls. Furthermore, only six out of the 14 total indicators under Goal 5 are present in the TÜİK indicator set. The data for these six indicators is not collected on an annual basis, which makes it even harder to find fast and effective solutions, based on informed, data driven analyses.⁸

However, the below selection from the existing data from TÜİK indicator set can give a glimpse into the current situation of gender equality in Turkey:

- **Proportion of time spent on domestic and care work, by gender (2015):**

Male: 3,6 / Female: 17,9

- **Proportion of seats held by women in the national parliament (2018): 17,32**

- **Proportion of women in managerial positions (2017): 17,3**

- **Proportion of youth (aged 15-24) not in employment, education or training (2017):**

Male: 14,6 / Female: 34,0

- **Proportion of individuals using the internet (2017):**

Male: 72,8 / Female: 56,5

⁸ We are not able to update the data table, on the then current situation of Turkey regarding gender equality and empowerment of women and girls, we have presented in our 2016 Alternative report, due to this lack of annual data collection and gender disaggregation among the indicators.

Integration of Goal 5 to the implementation of the other SDGs

One of the strongest perspectives of Agenda 2030 and the SDGs, that can work towards its achievement by 2030, is the linkages it builds among the goals, as well as its intersectional approach to many issues including gender equality. Exactly because of this, it is only possible for Turkey to reach the SDGs by 2030, if it follows such a holistic and intersectional approach.

Gender equality and empowerment of women and girls are addressed intersectionally to some extent, especially under health, education and employment goals (Goals 3,4, and 8), but even there these issues are not addressed in the work towards all the targets of these goals. As mentioned before, in the remaining SDGs, gender disaggregation is extremely limited, whereas gender equality and empowerment of women and girls should be integrated to all the goals, though maybe with different methodologies. In the data from TÜİK between 2010 - 2017, for example for unemployment, working without social security, proportion of young people neither in education nor employment, feeling secure at night and internet usage, the disadvantaged position of women and girls' is evident.

Furthermore, there are no known data or projects underway for discerning the different experiences of women and girls and the opportunities they can or cannot reach, on issues such as climate change, disability, urbanization, energy, sustainable production and consumption, and strengthening of infrastructure and innovation.

Unfortunately, as Turkey's reports on SDGs, its 11th Development Plan and its full VNR report were not ready by the time we prepared this alternative report, and as Turkey's plans to achieve gender equality are not transparently shared with the public, it is not possible to monitor and follow Turkey's SDG implementation with regards to gender equality and empowerment of women and girls. However, to reiterate, lack of political will, attempts to step back from the existing laws, and the statements from the highest levels of the state are expediting the backlash on gender equality and empowerment of women and girls as individual members of the society. In this context, even when the legal rights are protected with the strong advocacy of the women's movement in Turkey, the exercise and enjoyment of these rights is becoming harder day by day.



Suggestions

- ✿ *Turkey needs to conclude its current work on the SDGs, including the 11th Development Plan, with urgency and start immediately on implementing the SDGs. If there are projects and programs underway for the implementation of SDGs in Turkey, information regarding these should be shared with the public. Turkey should not waste another three years to realize SDGs.*
- ✿ *An SDG mechanism that will guide the realization, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation processes of SDGs should be established urgently. This mechanism should be well-resourced, and independent women's and civil society organizations should be equal partners within this mechanism.*
- ✿ *The opposition and resistance exhibited by certain interest groups towards gender equality and empowerment of women and girls should be overcome through awareness raising and political determination. These oppositional statements should not be supported by the political actors. The commitments given by Turkey for enhancing gender equality, in international reports, should not be negated through the statements by state officials that confine women and girls into their traditional gender roles.*
- ✿ *There are no sexual violence crisis centers in Turkey. In accordance with SDG Target 5.2, Turkey should establish sexual violence referral centers, as well as a support unit and a hotline that will provide support against gender based violence.*

✿ Turkey is currently hosting a total of 5 million migrants, either displaced or forced to flee due to poverty. Considering that this number will increase in the next 10 years due to economic crises, the border and resettlement policies towards the protection of migrant women and girls should be urgently reexamined from an SDG perspective.

✿ Holistic strategies should be prepared and implemented with effective resources, in order to disseminate, monitor and maintain the programs, documents and mechanisms for localization of Goal 5 and other targets related to women and girls.

✿ Data collection and analysis are vital parts of monitoring of the progress on SDGs. For this reason, TÜİK should collect regular data on gender based or gender disaggregated indicators among its sustainable development indicator set, and should start the preparations for collecting and analysing currently non-gender disaggregated data in gender disaggregated manner.

✿ Turkey, taking into consideration its weak position among other countries regarding gender equality and women's empowerment, should prioritize Goal 5 and other related targets in its SDG implementation. Furthermore, a gender equality perspective should be utilized in the implementation and monitoring of all SDGs, and how women and girls are affected from, as well as the ways for their meaningful participation to these processes should be examined.

Turkey already has a strong independent women's movement, as well as international agreements it's party to, that can guide Turkey in this regard.

✿ Independent women's movement of Turkey will not give up the already acquired rights of women and girls. We will also be close followers of the SDGs and their realization in Turkey. Independent feminist and women's rights organizations should be integral parts of the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation processes of the work that will be undertaken to achieve the SDGs.

✿ Achieving SDGs by 2030, ensuring gender equality and empowerment of women and girls can only be possible through a human-rights centered and strong understanding of democracy and democratic institutions. In order for women to contribute equally to such institutions, they should be in decision making levels. In the current governance regime of Turkey, how the institutions are operated is not known by the public. Turkey has important steps ahead to ensure democracy and functional institutions.

Photos

March 8th Feminist Night March / İstanbul 2019

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RESPECT

FAT POSITIVE

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