



Policy Position Paper by

Beijing+25

Women's Platform
Turkey

2019

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In the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) it is, unfortunately, impossible to say that the actions outlined in the Platform and the ultimate aim of gender equality has been achieved, in any country of the World. In spite of the numerous international documents¹ that address to support this aim, we are miles away from the empowerment of women and girls, and gender equality, on global, national and local levels.

Even though the legislation in Turkey, developed through the decades long, powerful struggle of the women's movement, provides a favorable ground for gender equality, it is not possible to say that legislation is implemented and reflected to the lives of women and girls. The women's and LGBTQI+ organizations, through this report, aim to both briefly present the current status of women and girls, and gender equality in Turkey, and to put forth a proposal for the establishment of "Global Independent Women's Body," which the global developments since the Beijing Conference has put forth as an emerging need.

Gender Equality / Inequality in Turkey

According to the Global Gender Gap Report², Turkey ranks as the 130th amongst 149 countries participated in the index. While Turkey has some slight progress on closing its gender gap in "economic participation and opportunity," mainly related to increased participation of women in labour force and their representation in senior and technical positions, deepening wage inequality for similar work curbs the country's overall progress in this sector, where Turkey records the deepest gender inequality.

Data released by the Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK) reveal that women's participation in labour force (33.6%) and women's employment rate (28.9%) are particularly low in Turkey³. According to the seventh periodic Concluding Observations of the CEDAW Committee, the unequal labour force participation is not fully independent from the unequal division of household work⁴ while 55% of women indicate household and family duties as the main reason to stay out of the labour market⁵. Amongst those in labour

1 For example, UN Security Council Resolutions 1325, 1820 and 2122, Sustainable Development Goals (especially Goal 5), Council of Europe's Istanbul Convention etc.

2 World Economic Forum. 2018. Gender Gap Report. http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2018.pdf [last accessed 20 October 2019]

3 Turkish Statistical Institute. 6 March 2019. İstatistiklerle Kadın (Women in Statistics). <http://tuik.gov.tr/PreHaberBultenleri.do?id=30707> [last accessed 20 October 2019]

4 Concluding Observations on the Seventh Periodic Report, CEDAW/C/TUR/CO/7, 25.07.2016, p. 14.

5 TurkStat, Household Labour Force Statistics, 2014.

force, unregistered work is rather rampant, as one of every two working women are unregistered, with this ratio rising up to 93.7% in rural areas⁶. In addition, those who can reach the job opportunities still have to face severe gender based inequalities at the work place, as indicated by the fact that men earn almost double wage of women with similar skills and education⁷. Access to income generating activities is even further restricted amongst refugee women, majority of whom is constituted by Syrian women and girls. A Needs Assessment study⁸ denotes that only 15% of the targeted Syrian women work in income generating jobs and the income level is very low with 24% of the Syrian women living in a household with an income below 700 TL per month.

Women are still represented significantly poorly “at all levels of decision-making, both national and local, including within the Government and the Parliament”⁹. While women’s representation in the national parliament was 14.7% in 2017, it has only increased slightly to 17% after the 2018 elections. For women’s political participation, Turkey ranks as 113th among 149 countries in the Global Gender Gap Report¹⁰. In the 2019 local elections, out of the total 8263 candidates put forth by the political parties, only 652 were women¹¹. And according to the official results of the 2019 local elections, only 45 of the 1389 mayors throughout Turkey are women (3.23%)¹². There are only 2 female ministers, out of the 21, in the current cabinet¹³. Further, even though female academics make up 41% of the academic ranks, only 5.6% of these women are in decision making positions¹⁴.

After the 2014 local elections, mostly in cities where the Kurdish population predominantly lives, trustees have been appointed by the central government, to the 96 of the 102 mayorships won in the elections by the political party DBP, through statutory decrees in 2016. These elected representatives have been forced out of their assignments

6 Turkish Statistical Institute, 2018.

7 World Economic Forum. 2018. Gender Gap Report. http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2018.pdf [last accessed 20 October 2019]

8 UNWOMEN. 2018. Needs Assessment of Syrian Women and Girls Under Temporary Protection Status in Turkey. http://sgdd.org.tr/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/The_Needs_Assessment_ENG_WEB.pdf [last accessed 23 October 2019]

9 Concluding observations on the seventh periodic report of Turkey, CEDAW, 2016

10 World Economic Forum. 2018. Gender Gap Report. http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2018.pdf [last accessed 20 October 2019]

11 Kadın Koalisyonu. 2019. Kadın Adayların Siyasi Partilere, Belediyelere, İllere Göre Dağılımı (The Distribution of Female Candidates According by Political Parties, Municipalities, Cities). <http://kadinkoalisyonu.org/kadin-adaylarin-siyasi-partilere-belediyelere-illere-gore-dagilimi/> [last accessed 20 October 2019]

12 A political party, HDP, introduced co-mayorship with equal representation of both sexes. However, this practise has not been legitimized by the High Electorate Institute of Turkey.

13 Gazete Duvar. 15 April 2019. Ürperten Sonuçlar (Gruesome Results) <https://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/kadin/2019/04/15/urperten-sonuc-bin-389-belediyeye-45-kadin-baskan/> [last accessed 20 October 2019]

14 Council of Higher Education (YÖK) Statistics, 2017.

and 39 of them have been arrested. Between 2015-2017, 28 female co-mayors have been arrested. This situation affects the participation of women in politics negatively and weakens the representation of women.

Gender inequality in the country severely hampers the empowerment, well-being of and even violates the right to life of women and girls. The comprehensive research undertaken by the Ministry of Family and Social Policies in 2014 underlined that 36% of ever-married women are subjected to physical violence. In other words, approximately 4 out of every 10 women have been subjected to physical violence by their husbands or intimate partners¹⁵. The same research denotes that 12% of them have also been subjected to sexual violence; 44% of them have been subjected to psychological violence and, and 30% of them have been subjected to economic violence by their husbands or male partners in any period of their lives. Majority of the women who have been subjected to physical and/or sexual violence (89%) did not apply to institutions or organizations and 44% of them did not share this information with anyone. State policies and wide-spread political discourse, repeatedly undermining gender equality and stigmatizing those seeking help, negatively contribute to this aggravated picture by further discouraging women and girls from seeking help when vitally needed.

High prevalence of early and forced marriages is another alarm bell in Turkey. Despite the fact that legal age of marriage is 18 the practice allows legal marriage of those above 16. According to the current legal framework, children at age 17 can marry with the consent of their parents or legal guardians. Children at age 16 can marry with special permission from the courts 'under exceptional circumstances and on vital grounds'. Consequently, according to the 2016 Family Structure Research of the Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK) 28.2% of women and 5.6% of men, among the ever married population in Turkey, were first married before the age of 18¹⁶.

Refugee girls are even more prone to early and forced marriages. According to the Prime Ministry Disaster and

15 Hacettepe University. 2014. Domestic Violence Against Women in Turkey, http://www.hips.hacettepe.edu.tr/ING_SUMMARY_REPORT_VAW_2014.pdf [last accessed 20 October 2019]

16 TÜİK Research on Family Structure 2016, <https://biruni.tuik.gov.tr/medas/?kn=109&locale=tr> [last accessed 21 October 2019]





Emergency Presidency report, 24% of Syrian women in Turkey aged 15-18, inside and outside camps, are married¹⁷. Furthermore, Turkey continues to host nearly 2.5 million women and girl refugees, 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. 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.

LBTQI women face even more aggravated forms of violence and discrimination, which is exacerbated by impunity for the perpetrators of hate crimes and lack of accessible and non-discriminatory service provisions for the survivors of violence¹⁸.

Disabled women are also among the groups of women that face intersectional discrimination. The percentages of women's participation in education, labour force and decision making mechanism mentioned above, are even lower for disabled women. While a governmental research into disabled women subjected to violence against women does not exist, the research undertaken by the Disabled Women's Association (Engelli Kadın Derneği) between 2013–2014, indicates that many of the state institutions, including violence prevention centers (ŞÖNİMs) fall short of adequately servicing women with disabilities¹⁹.

Even though a large scale research on how women are affected by the ecological destruction and the climate crisis does not exist in Turkey, women are at the forefront of the struggle against ecological destruction and climate crisis in their locals. However, the fact that Turkey has not yet

17 - Syrian Women in Turkey, Prime Ministry Disaster and Emergency Management Authority, AFAD, 2014 <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/54512> [last accessed 20 October 2019]

18 Concluding Observations on the Seventh Periodic Report of Turkey, CEDAW, 2016

19 Engelli Kadın Derneği. 2014. Türkiye'de Engelli Kadınlara Yönelik Şiddet Raporu (Report on Violence against Disabled Women in Turkey). http://www.sabancivakfi.org/i/content/4826_2_Turkiyede_Engelli_Kadınlara_Yonelik_Siddet_2013_2014.pdf [last accessed 20 October 2019]

ratified the Paris Agreement, the lack of research and work on these issues from the standpoint of women's lives, and the scarcity of women in decision making mechanisms regarding these issues result in the invisibility of rights violations that may result from the ecological destruction and the climate crisis²⁰.

While the outlined forms of discrimination against women and girls are making it harder for them to access women's human rights, we also witness perturbative developments regarding the already acquired rights on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. Especially the discourse of the government against equality and the legislation and mechanisms on equality, has exacerbated the threat and aggressive attacks of some particular groups supported by the government (e.g. victimised/divorced father's groups, family 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, from these particular groups, 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.

The abolishment of the State Ministry on Women and Family, and relocation of issues regarding gender equality and women and girls under the Ministry of Work, Family and Social Security is also an indicator of the empowerment of women and girls being sent to the back of the political agenda.

Further, "gender equality" is being erased from the state documents both as a concept and as a terminology. The recent steps taken to remove the concept and the terminology of gender equality from the 11th Development Plan and the Social Activities Regulations of the Ministry of Education, showcase the adversity against gender equality among the state/public administration, and result in women's organizations' fear of a backlash. The state institution that is responsible for monitoring the human rights within the country, Human Rights and Equality Institution of Turkey, organizes symposiums titled "The Right to the Protection of the Family," with results that are detrimental to gender equality. The final declarations of the symposium 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 LGBTIQ+ couples cannot be alternatives to the traditional family, and argues that SDGs should be implemented through family oriented policies²¹.

As also underlined by the CEDAW Committee²², the tighter restrictions on civil society organizations have significantly impaired the long years of gender equality progress achieved by the concentrated efforts of the state and the independent women's move-

20 Nuran Talu. 2018. Türkiye'de İklim Değişikliğine Kadın Çözümleri (Solutions from Women to Climate Change in Turkey) https://issuu.com/nurantaludocs/_/klimvekad__n_kdd__ubat_2018 [last accessed 20 October 2019]

21 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/> [Last access 19 June 2019]

22 Concluding observations on the seventh periodic report of Turkey, CEDAW, 2016

ment in the country. Public – civil society cooperation on gender equality agenda became rather limited to favouritism of pro-governmental CSOs in the highly polarized political environment. State of emergency measures targeting women’s rights organizations, especially those founded in the Eastern parts of the country, combined with the steep rise of conservatism in the last decade, significantly curbed the voice of independent civil society that advocates for gender equality and women’s rights.

Moreover, under the State of Emergency measures, 370 civil society organizations, including 11 women’s organizations have been shut down. 43 women’s centers, in municipalities where the central government has appointed trustees, have also been shut down. Their properties and the registries belonging to applicant women to these institutions have been expropriated. As a result, many cities lack any consultancy centres for women to apply.²³ A serious security threat and a violation of rights ensue for women who have applied to these institutions, trusting their principle of privacy.

Many of the democratic protests, including public statements have been precluded through banning. Women who have come together, in some cities, to commemorate, march or organize an event for 8th of March International Women’s Day, or 25th of November International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, have been exposed to police brutality, been taken under custody or arrested. The investigations, unjust custody and imprisonments for human rights defenders, including women’s human rights defenders, suppress freedom of expression and assembly.

Furthermore, in the capital city of the country, all forms of activities by the LGBTQI+ organizations and all events on the issue of LGBTQI+ had been banned for two years until April 2019. Even though the ban has been lifted by the decision of the district court, LGBTQI+ activities ipsofacto still cannot take place, LGBTQI+ individuals and organizations are constantly being targeted by the political authority and its supporting media.

Proposal for Creating a “Global Independent Women’s Body”

Antifeminism and far-right movements are on the rise globally. The risk of being subjected to inequalities, violence, inhuman degrading treatment, arbitrary detentions or other type of rights violations exists and increasing in many situations where specifically women are deprived of their rights and liberty. There are setbacks, backlashes and push backs on gender equality in many countries, and, strikingly enough, in multilateral and bilateral international organizations or bodies.

There is an urgent need to dwell upon the shrinking democratic spaces and its reflections on civil society specifically on women’s NGOs, feminist organizations and women human rights defenders. The imminence of this need is also evident from the growing antagonism by governments to women’s organizations’ activities in the international platforms.

23 Shadow NGO Report on Turkey’s First Report on legislative and other measures giving effect to the provisions of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (September 2017), p. 19.

While such pushbacks are taking place, women activists, women human rights defenders and LGBTQI+ organizations do not have an independent body to directly appeal to when their rights are violated. There is need for substantial protection frameworks and resources to reduce the obstacles and risks women and women's NGOs face due to ongoing violence, instability, online and offline attacks and structural inequalities.

Although there exists some international monitoring appeal bodies on gender equality and human rights, such as CEDAW, GREVIO or HR Cttee (Human Rights Committee), it is rather difficult to consider them as fully independent bodies. The reason for this is that *the nominations and elections of these experts are made directly by the state parties/governments*. This matter has been very clearly stated both in CEDAW (Article 17²⁴) and GREVIO Rules and Procedures (Article 9²⁵). In addition, the above bodies offer either very limited or even no space for the participation of women's organizations during nomination and election processes.

One other body, namely an intergovernmental one, the UN - Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), where governments meet every March in New York and take decisions on women's rights and gender equality policies globally, has closed its doors severely to women's NGOs during the recent years.

In summary, neither equality structures within countries, where they exist, nor international bodies, provide space to independent women's NGOs or open minimal space except in few countries with advanced rights policies. Furthermore, for some years now, governments increasingly establish their own NGOs (namely GONGOs – Governmental NGOs) and pretend that they work with civil society. This leads to the exclusion of independent women's NGOs totally from the scene and the policy making processes.

In the view of the above, it will be right to say that *women and women's NGOs all around the World do not have an 'Independent Body' that they can appeal to, be part of and where they can decide and implement the policies and procedures that affects their lives themselves*.

There is an urgent need to re-institutionalize gender accountability since the existing bodies are not responsive to women's human rights. It is high time that we had an independent Body with powers and which will find solutions to the needs and complaints of women: A body where women can appeal to, and where they can place their complaints without any barriers (such as language, geography etc.) and get workable solutions,

24 CEDAW article 17: The experts shall be elected **by States Parties** from among their nationals ...

25 Istanbul Convention Rule 9

States Parties to the Convention have the right to nominate candidates for GREVIO membership. The government of each State Party may submit to the Secretary General of the Council of Europe the names and the curricula vitae, using the model set out in the appendix and in one of the official languages of the Organisation, of not more than three candidates who meet the requirements set out in Rules 2 to 5 to serve on GREVIO. States Parties shall endeavour to nominate as many candidates as possible within this limit with a view to providing experts with different professional qualifications relevant to GREVIO's work and to achieving gender balance

get protected or freed from violence or degrading treatment. Within this body, women can also have space for devising policies on enhancing women's human rights, gender equality, feminist values and women's empowerment. This independent structure should have the capacity to get complaints, prevent, protect, and be the intermediary body for punishment processes of those that commit crimes against women. The body should also develop monitoring and accountability structures to hold governments accountable to their responsibilities. It needs to have enough powers to apply pressure to governments for the accelerated harmonization of the internal legislations to the international conventions, and their implementation.

This body can monitor the implementation of the outcomes of the Global Forums of Beijing+25 process, but it should not be there to monitor only, its main function will be to *RESPOND*.

It can be a de-centralised structure with center/centers that will be managed by women/women's NGOs, in all their diversity, with a horizontal organizational model and with horizontal working relations. It should have to be acknowledged by international organisations and governments and also have powers to make protocols with existing bodies i.e CEDAW, GREVIO, special rapporteurs on women's rights and human rights or other pertinent institutions so that it will have a legitimate stance to act as a social partner in global policy making and monitoring processes.

It has to be responsive to urgent needs, for example, it must have the capacity to bring solutions to eliminate the language barriers which is a big hindrance for, especially, grassroots women.

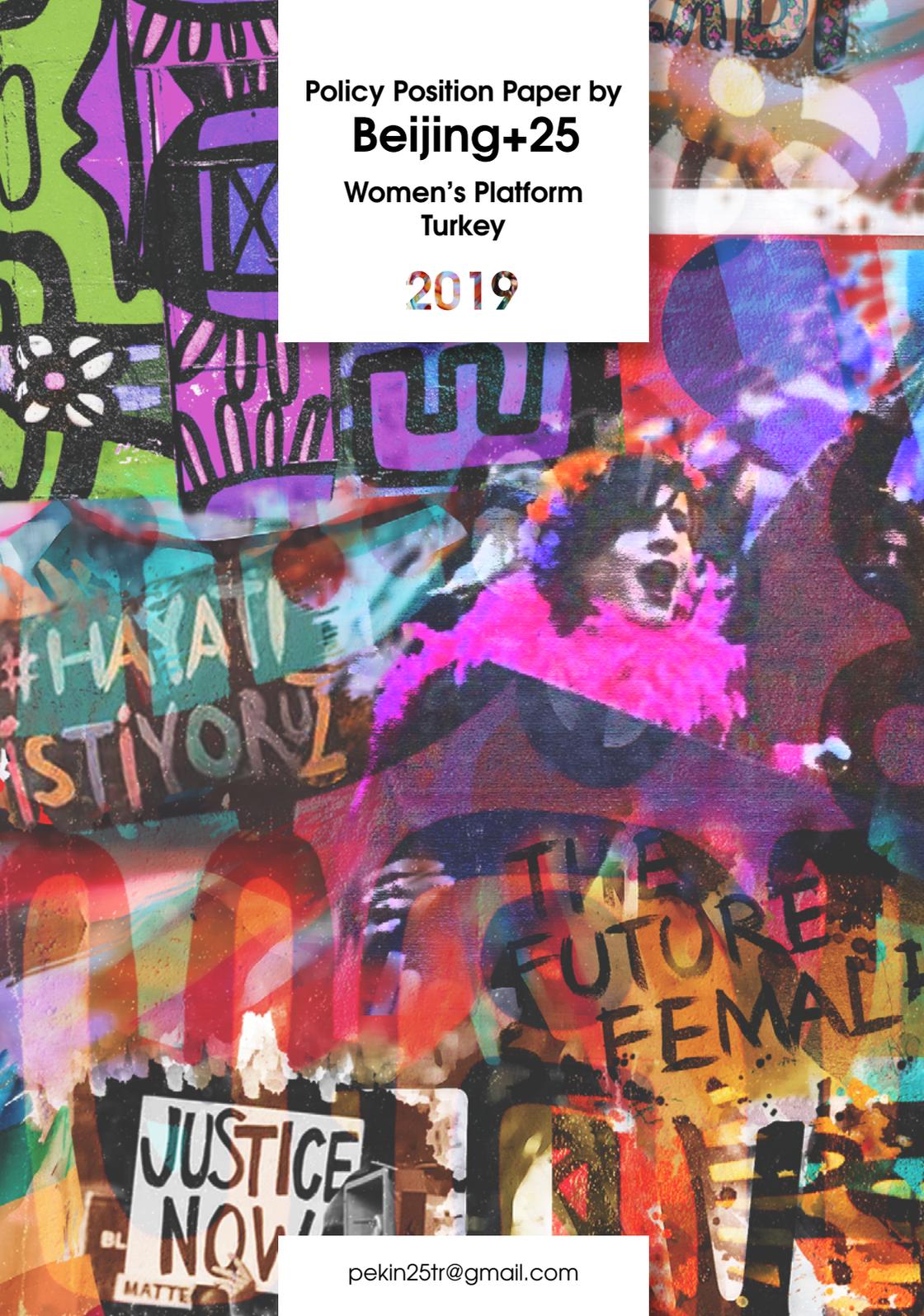
Needless to say the structure, its functions and funding of the 'Independent Body' will require extensive and comprehensive discussions during and after the Beijing+25 processes.

Further questions remain, such as what will be needed to ensure the legitimacy and the power of this body in relation towards states and multilateral institutions and how can the structure of this body be formed to enhance/ensure its powers. We hope to answer these questions through discussions with women's organizations.

Funding will be another important part of the discussion which we are hoping to undertake in the future regional and global meetings. Sponsorship from independent sources will be sought. The sustainability and the format of the funding will be important in order to ensure that this body can undertake the important and extensive work that it sets out to achieve.

Continuous and coordinated efforts will be needed during the regional and international Beijing+25 meetings and beyond, to shape such an Independent Body, owned and managed by women.

We need a global system responsive to women's needs. We need a world that will ensure equality and freedom for women. **This is a time for galvanizing change!**



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