

Mr. Chairperson and honorable members of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. I, Zozan Özgökçe, on behalf of Van Women's Association, of Roj Women's Association, 19 women's organizations and six nationwide women's coalitions, welcome this initial review of Turkey under ESCR Convention. We would like to raise the following concerns with a particular focus on the Turkish State obligation to ensure the equal right of men and women to the enjoyment of all economic, social and cultural rights.

Despite continued high growth rate, Turkey's wealth is mainly concentrated in the northwest and west, while the east and southeast suffer from lower economic production and higher levels of unemployment. Across the country women and women's rights have barely benefited from growth.

1. The female employment rate in Turkey is one of the lowest of the world, stagnant around 20% for the past 25 years (while men's participation in the labour market is about 75%). When women work they earn 57% of the income of men for similar work which represents a decrease in relation to past years. The current official emphasis on entrepreneurship and microcredit as the main channels for women's entry in to the labour market falls short of challenging waged employment as a male domain. Currently the Government is not taking any action to challenge this. For instance, there has been no progress in the provision of publicly sponsored childcare and preschool education services; from birth until the age of 5 children are presumed to be in full-time care of their mothers. Similarly, there is no paternity leave for fathers.

2. The National Action Plan to combat violence against women is the most important policy to tackle this abuse. Sadly, a budget has not been allocated and, as EU funds for this purpose extinguish, initiatives such as shelters are closed. 52 shelters for a population of more than 35 million women shows the limited political will in addressing violence against women. Additionally, the Plan also lacks a comprehensive mechanism for monitoring and evaluation. It relies on each enforcing party's self-assessment.

3. Turkey's approach to women's health services focuses on reproductive age, neglecting adolescent, menopausal and post-menopausal women. Despite this approach maternal mortality is 28,5 per 100,000 live births. In addition, discrimination also occurs at legal level. For example: Population Planning Law, includes a provision that requires spousal consent for married women to have an abortion.

4. Education on gender roles for women's empowerment is essential. 62% of women who do not work claim that their home duties keep them from seeking work. However, school textbooks still contain stereotypes about women's role and status which the government committed to remove. Moreover, traditional gender roles that deem domestic work and children rearing as women's tasks only are reinforced through government programmes. For example, according to the "*Child Education Programme*" mothers are '*deemed the core of the family*', and thus they are the only ones targeted to '*activate the educational potential*' of families in Turkey.

5. Lastly, with the new Social Security and General Insurance Law women are further excluded and made more dependent on their male relatives to be included in the social security network.

We would thus like to suggest the following recommendations:

1. A law on Gender Equality should be drafted urgently. The Constitutional Law and the anti-discrimination law being drafted by the Government should include a definition of discrimination based on gender, including sexual orientation and gender identity. These should be applied consistently in the Civil and Penal Codes.
2. Gender equality education should be integrated into the training of public officials such as law enforcement personnel, health professionals, social workers, teachers. The Government should take all the necessary measures to promote the rights of disabled women, including right to education, health, work, politics and adoption.
- 3 The Prime Minister Circular regarding women's employment should be fully implemented. For this purpose..
4. Funds should be allocated for preschool education and childcare services for children in the 0 to 5 age group.
5. An appropriate budget should be assigned and a comprehensive monitoring system with specific benchmarks, targets and deadlines developed for the implementation of to the National Action Plan to combat violence against women.
6. Relevant statistics should be compiled to measure progress in the implementation of the Circular on women's employment and of the National Action Plan to combat violence against women and of the Gender Equality Plan of Action.
- 7.. Programs targeting women who are neglected regarding access to women's health services should be established, including awareness-raising programs for expectant mothers in order to reduce maternal mortality.
9. The government should ensure that girls are registered at the State population register and develop efficient mechanisms to monitor their regular attendance and prevent invisible dropouts.
10. Lastly, the government must produce gender responsive budgets: all financial plans should be redesigned to the effect of meeting the above recommendations.

I thank the Committee for their kind attention.