



**Promoting ESC Rights  
of Disadvantaged Groups  
in Turkiye through  
Monitoring and Advocacy**

**REPORT I Policy Dialogue Forum I:  
Children's Economic, Social and Cultural Rights:  
Protection, Development and Policy Recommendations<sup>1</sup>**

**The Importance of Monitoring Children's  
Economic, Social and Cultural (ESC) Rights**



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## **REPORT I Policy Dialogue Forum I: Children's Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: Protection, Development and Policy Recommendations<sup>1</sup>**

### **The Importance of Monitoring Children's Economic, Social and Cultural (ESC) Rights**

Monitoring children's ESC rights is crucial for holding governments accountable for their commitments, identifying gaps, and tracking progress over time. Strong monitoring mechanisms are particularly important for children, who are already vulnerable to age-based discrimination, as their rights are often overlooked or inadequately addressed. This is especially vital for children from communities that have historically faced discrimination, including girls, individuals with disabilities, LGBTI+ individuals, indigenous peoples, and ethnic, linguistic, and religious minorities. Monitoring also strengthens advocacy efforts by providing data-based evidence to influence policy reforms, budget allocations, and international support.

Accordingly, a range of measures and policies is needed to monitor children's ESC rights. These include the following:

Children's active participation should be ensured and supported in monitoring processes, with data collected regularly to prepare periodic reports.

ESC rights are vital for the holistic development and well-being of every child.

Although ESC rights are universal, they are most effective when tailored to address children's specific needs. This requires considering ESC rights alongside civil and political rights.

States must immediately ensure that the minimum essential levels of each right can be enjoyed.

As it is not feasible for a state to fully realise certain rights immediately, progressive realisation must be monitored and tracked. The obligation of progressively realising ESC rights also means that measures which diminish the current enjoyment of rights are prohibited.

Upholding the principle of non-discrimination, dedicated measures must be taken to prioritise the protection of marginalised populations' rights.

To fulfil these rights, barriers must first be removed. It is the state's responsibility to eliminate harmful and threatening situations.

Deficiencies in data and inadequacies in monitoring processes hinder the identification of rights violations.

Although ESC rights are often seen as abstract, effective monitoring can make them litigable.

Data related to ESC rights can be collected using digital tools like Uwazi and transformed into concrete evidence for court proceedings. Being litigable is essential for the recognition and implementation of a right.

Children are often not treated as individuals. Children's right to have a political voice and participate in political processes is a significant matter.

Children's participation in political processes and mechanisms for defending their rights must be strengthened.

(1) 14 November 2024, New Park Hotel, Ankara – Türkiye

## Policy Forum: Opening and Overview

The Forum was held on 14 November 2024 in Ankara as part of the “Supporting the Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of Disadvantaged Groups in Turkey through Monitoring and Advocacy Partnerships” project, jointly organised by the Association for Monitoring Equal Rights (AMER) and the Human Rights Information and Documentation Systems (HURIDOCs). The Forum aimed to provide beneficiary organisations with an opportunity to share their field research reports with stakeholders.

During an 18-month preparatory period leading up to the Policy Dialogue Forum, the collaborating CSOs carried out various research and documentation activities, along with training programmes on digital data tools and advocacy campaigns. Participants, including CSOs, international organisations, and public representatives, discussed the outcomes of these activities and field studies.

The Policy Dialogue Forum, organised in four sessions, began with opening remarks delivered by representatives of the project executives, AMER and HURIDOCs. The representatives highlighted the Forum as the culmination of 18 months of practical work and emphasised the meaningful contribution of participants’ unique perspectives to the monitoring and advocacy efforts aimed at protecting ESC rights.

The opening speeches also stressed that ESC rights must be addressed with an approach rooted in human dignity. Speakers highlighted a rights-based perspective, framing ESC rights as essential for individuals to fulfil their potential and fully utilise their capacities.

## Discussion Sessions

### 1. The Right to Education and Equality

This session featured the field research results of the project cluster comprising the Roma Memory Studies Association, the Civil Dreams Association, and the FISA Child Rights Centre. The discussion focused on the barriers preventing Roma, Dom, and Abdal children living in poverty from accessing their right to education. It emphasised that inequalities in education are closely tied to socioeconomic status and social exclusion, particularly among disadvantaged groups.

- **Rationale:**

Members of the cluster argued that the 6 February earthquakes worsened the challenges Roma, Dom, and Abdal children faced in accessing their right to education in the affected cities.

- **Scope:**

The field studies conducted in Hatay and Adiyaman after the earthquakes employed qualitative research methods. These studies explored the issues hindering children from Roma, Dom, and Abdal communities in accessing education, including the lack of education in their mother tongue, bullying and discrimination, and the reasons for school dropouts.

- **Findings:**

- In the immediate aftermath of the earthquakes, Roma communities faced discrimination when seeking access to tents and food aid and were forced to live in unhygienic conditions. This situation hindered school attendance for children in Adiyaman and Hatay, significantly increasing dropout rates following the disaster.

- o Roma, Dom, and Abdal children face discrimination because of their ethnic identities and poverty. As a result, poverty and discrimination emerge as the greatest barriers to the right to education. Challenges such as not being able to afford basic educational expenses, inadequate access to safe school transport, and insufficient transport services further impede children's participation in education.
- o Interviews revealed that girls face even greater discrimination, a finding that intersects with gender inequality.
- o Malnutrition negatively impacts children's academic performance, often leading to school dropouts and/or forcing children into work. Consequently, child labour, particularly in seasonal agricultural work, has risen.
- o Based on information from interviews, issues such as malnutrition, stunted growth, and developmental delays, both mental and physical, adversely affect Roma children's academic success. All but one caregiver stated that they could not provide their children with a full, nutritious meal.
- o The interviews also revealed a lack of psychosocial support and inclusive education policies.

- **Recommendations:**

- o Revise the Roma Strategy Action Plan to prioritise combating discrimination and incorporate measures for post-disaster recovery.
- o Increase opportunities for mother-tongue education and improve access to school transportation.
- o Implement anti-discrimination programmes specifically designed for Roma children. The Ministry of National Education should enforce a zero-tolerance policy towards discrimination in education and conduct internal training programmes.
- o The Human Rights and Equality Institution of Türkiye (HREIT) and the Ombudsman Institution (KDK) should recommend anti-discrimination policies to local governments and the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye (TBMM).
- o Provide adequate nutritional support for children.
- o Develop and expand anti-bullying and social service programmes in schools.
- o Collaborate with organisations using inclusive and intersectional approaches for advocacy, networking, monitoring, and reporting efforts.

## **2. The Right to Adequate Nutrition and Health**

The project cluster, comprising the Sulukule Volunteers Association, the Günbağı Village Culture and Solidarity Association, and researcher Aysun Koca, examined the consequences of the lack of free meal support in schools.

- **Rationale:**

Since 2021, discussions about nutrition in schools and its direct impact on school attendance and academic success have increased. Field research was conducted to investigate the consequences of not providing free meal support, as free meals are not recognised as a right by public authorities.

- **Scope:**

Using semi-structured individual interviews, the research examined the inadequacy of nutritional support for children in schools in Istanbul and Erzincan and its impact on educational success.

- **Findings:**

- Children without access to adequate nutrition at school experience negative effects on their learning, physical health, and academic performance.
- Social assistance programmes are deemed unsustainable, and public services are not sufficiently accessible.
- Basic nutrition support is effective and motivating in ensuring school attendance among children living in poverty.
- Children not only have the right to healthy free meals but also to choose what they consume.
- It is unacceptable to exclude nutrition from state policies for children who spend an average of seven hours per day in compulsory education.
- The exclusion of children's nutrition and health rights from public policies leads to stunted physical and mental development due to inadequate nutrition driven by poverty. This, in turn, negatively impacts societal welfare in the long term.

- **Recommendations:**

- Expand free school meal programmes as a fundamental public right.
- Strengthen coordination between social assistance and social services.
- Improve school cafeteria infrastructure and allocate funding for it in the central budget.
- Local governments should work with central authorities to implement models that deliver quick results for free meal support.
- Implement free school meal programmes while adhering to the no-harm principle.

### **3. Gender Equality and Child Marriages**

The Flying Broom Women's Communication and Research Association and the Association for Freedom and Equality for Women presented the findings of their field research on child marriages during the Policy Dialogue Forum.

- **Rationale:**

Building on the global statistic that over 800 million children are married before the age of 18, and Türkiye among the countries where this issue is prevalent, this research was conducted to assess the impact of the 6 February earthquakes on child marriages.

- **Scope:**

The research examined the common causes of child marriage and its links to gender inequality through field studies and surveys conducted in Adana.

- **Findings:**

- Child marriage is a matter of public health and human rights.
- Families resort to religious marriages to circumvent legal barriers to child marriage.
- Child marriages violate children's right to life.
- Suicide rates rise among children experiencing feelings of despair.
- Child marriages violate the rights of children, particularly girls, to education, health, and social participation.
- Practices such as dowries lead to girls being treated as sources of income through child marriage.
- Social norms and economic factors perpetuate the practice of child marriage.
- Marriage is often seen as a "guarantee for the future" for girls.

- **Recommendations:**

- Sign and implement the "National Action Plan and Strategy Document on Combating Early and Forced Marriages."
- Strengthen legal regulations to fully ban child marriages.
- Conduct training programmes for law enforcement officials.
- Actively and effectively involve the Human Rights and Equality Institution of Türkiye (HREIT) as a monitoring mechanism to prevent child marriages.
- Increase education and employment opportunities for girls.
- Organise awareness-raising campaigns.

#### **4. Protecting Children's Economic, Social and Cultural Rights**

In the final session of the Policy Dialogue Forum, an open discussion followed three sessions in which civil society organisations (CSOs) presented the findings of their field research. The discussion focused on how to monitor children's ESC rights and received contributions that resulted in the following recommendations.

#### **Recommendations Concerning Children's Economic, Social and Cultural Rights from the Policy Dialogue Forum:**

- o Establish stronger mechanisms for collaboration among public institutions, local governments, and civil society to ensure the effective implementation of ESC rights.
- o Acknowledge free educational materials and nutrition programmes as fundamental rights for disadvantaged groups, and expand these programmes through the aforementioned collaborations.
- o Develop gender equality policies to prevent early marriages in regions strongly influenced by religious or traditional norms.
- o Regular monitoring and data-driven studies are crucial for effectively tracking and reporting rights violations. Modern tools, such as digital platforms, should be utilised for this purpose. CSOs should clarify in their policy frameworks whether their focus is on research or monitoring. Methods of monitoring should be diversified.
- o Organise education and awareness programmes to empower children to defend their own rights.
- o Establish a specialised commission within the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye (TBMM) to address and combat children's rights violations.
- o Involve civil society organisations more in data collection and monitoring processes led by public institutions.
- o Conduct budget analyses and increase transparency in public expenditures to enhance the enforceability of ESC rights.
- o Protect children's individual rights from state interference.
- o Ensure the state fulfils its obligations to enable children to effectively exercise their rights.
- o Advocate for a comprehensive child rights policy that aligns with international legal standards.

**On a final note:**

The AMER and HURIDOCS are implementing an EU-funded project titled "Supporting the Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of Disadvantaged Groups in Turkey through Monitoring and Advocacy Partnerships," which spans from January 2023 to January 2026.

The project was designed as a model to address the limited number and capacity of civil society organisations (CSOs) in Türkiye that monitor the economic, social and cultural (ESC) rights of disadvantaged groups. It aims to foster capacity building and integrate digital learning processes into ESC rights monitoring activities.

Currently, most CSOs in Türkiye focus on civil and political rights, with only a few specialising in ESC rights. Moreover, systematic work on monitoring disadvantaged groups' access to ESC rights, the focus of this project, is nearly non-existent. For this reason, the work carried out by AMER and HURIDOCS is particularly critical in addressing two key needs within civil society: developing technical capacities in monitoring and advocacy, and establishing collaborations with other civil society actors to advance ESC rights for disadvantaged groups.