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CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION IN ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE POLICIES IN TÜRKİYE

ICHILD Climate Movement - Human Rights
Monitoring & Reporting Activities - II
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WE EXPRESS OUR GRATITUDE!

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"This report was prepared as part of the "Youth in Action: Monitoring Children's Participation Rights in Climate and Environment Policy" study supported by the ACAR Project Civil Society Organizations Cooperation Program, implemented by UNICEF with co-financing from the European Union. The responsibility for the content lies entirely with the International Child Rights Ambassadors Association - ICHILD and cannot be interpreted as reflecting the views of the European Union and UNICEF."

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Who Are We? ICHILD Climate Movement

The ICHILD Climate Movement works with children and within the framework of children's rights to create a safe environment through an inclusive, accessible, participatory, and collaborative approach. It monitors the effects of the climate crisis on children's rights and children at the local level and carries out activities to combat the inequalities brought about by the climate crisis.

By monitoring the effects of the climate crisis on children's rights with a participatory perspective that broadens children's areas of expression and intervention, it aims to raise awareness among both the public and decision-makers and to reduce the negative effects of the climate crisis on children's rights.

The ICHILD Climate Movement was founded under the ICHILD umbrella, led by seven children from six different cities. Over time, with the addition of two new members, the team structure changed during the process and continued its work with a core team of four. The diversity of the founding members and the team, who come from different geographical backgrounds, has enabled the movement to adopt an inclusive approach and bring together different perspectives.

The Climate Movement pays attention to the intersectionality of various issues in its work. Within this intersectionality, it attaches importance to the inclusion of women from disadvantaged groups and individuals with different socio-economic statuses. Based on its Principles and Values Document, the ICHILD Climate Movement embraces a "biocentric approach." This approach is based on defending the rights of all living beings in the ecosystem as a whole, not just humans. ICHILD Climate Movement works to provide children with an accessible, participatory, and safe environment, using nonviolent and peaceful language, based on mutual respect and team energy, without creating hierarchy, taking into account the Community Rules determined by the coordination team.

Who Are We? ICHILD - International Children's Rights Ambassadors Association

The International Children's Rights Ambassadors Association (ICHILD) is a civil society organization working to ensure that every child is recognized as an equal citizen and rights holder in society. ICHILD operates with the goal of building a society where children can have a say in their own lives, defend their rights, and take an active role in decision-making processes.

To this end, it aims to strengthen existing mechanisms that implement children's rights and, when necessary, design new participation, monitoring, and advocacy tools led by children. All of its work centers on the best interests of the child, the child's right to participation, and the principle of solidarity. Ensure that children's rights are not just a concept but a living value.

ICHILD does not work for children; it works with them. By supporting children's access to information, participation, freedom of expression, and freedom of association, it encourages them to become active agents in their own rights struggles. This approach aims not only to protect children but also to empower them and enable them to exist as active citizens in social life.

ICHILD builds partnerships and solidarity networks with public institutions, local governments, civil society organizations, and academia to protect and strengthen children's rights. At every step, it values children's ideas, emotions, and experiences-working to ensure that children's rights are not merely a concept, but a living value in society.

Introduction

As discussed in detail in our first monitoring report, titled *The Impact of Environmental and Climate Policies on Children in Türkiye*, climate change causes rights-based problems in many areas, from food security to access to water, from the sustainability of livelihoods to living conditions. Children are one of the groups that will be most affected by these problems today and in the future. In these conditions of increased social vulnerability, children should be seen not only as a vulnerable group but also as equal citizens and rights holders with the right to access information, express their views, associate and participate in decision-making processes.

As a party to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), Türkiye is obligated not only to protect children from environmental risks but also to seek their views on environmental issues, allow them to organize, and ensure their voices are reflected in policy-making processes. Articles 12 and 15 of the UNCRC and General Comment No. 26 emphasize that children have a right to be heard on environmental matters and that these rights must be supported by meaningful and structural mechanisms, not merely symbolic ones.

Therefore, implementing children's right to participate in environmental matters, supporting their freedom of association and ensuring their voices are heard in policy-making processes is a priority for Türkiye to fulfill its national and international obligations.

The report you are about to read is the second output of the ICHILD Climate Movement's human rights monitoring work. As part of their monitoring work, first they prepared a report titled "The Impact of Environmental and Climate Policies on Children in Türkiye." You can access the report via the link below.

Purpose and Scope

This monitoring report addresses children's right to participate in decision-making processes related to the environment and climate crisis in Türkiye. It examines the extent to which children's rights to information, expression, participation, and organization are recognized and supported, whether children's views are taken into account in the preparation and implementation of public policies, and whether the necessary mechanisms for effective participation are in place. This assessment is based on public institutions' strategy plans, documents obtained through requests based on freedom of information, workshops with children and youth working in the field of climate, and surveys conducted with NGOs. Articles 12 and 15 of the UNCRC and General Comment 26 emphasize the need to guarantee children's rights to express their views, organize, and participate. Consequently, children should be recognized and included not only as an affected group but as subjects of the process in environmental and climate issues; this is critical for the realization of children's rights and the achievement of environmental justice. The report aims to provide policymakers with concrete recommendations for developing child-participation-based environmental policies.

Methodology and Data Collection Methods

This report was prepared as a study conducted by children to assess the extent to which child participation is meaningfully and effectively implemented in the areas of climate crisis and children's rights. First, a set of indicators was prepared within the framework of international human rights standards, as presented in Annex 1, and these indicators guided the entire data collection process.

Desk Research:

The monitoring of child participation at the intersection of the climate crisis and children's rights in Türkiye was examined by assessing the strategy reports, regulations, and action plans of relevant institutions for their compliance with the UNCRC and UNCRC General Comment 26.

Information Requests:

During the study process, although some responses were received as a result of information requests made to relevant public institutions, these responses were mostly limited to repeating data already in the public domain and did not contain sufficient explanation. Therefore, in order to go beyond the existing data and conduct a more in-depth assessment, it became necessary to turn to alternative sources; thus, the monitoring process was largely shaped by existing reports.

Surveys and Workshops:

Qualitative data collection methods were used within the scope of the methodology; accordingly, two separate workshops were organized with children and young people aged 15-18 and 18-25. These workshops created a safe space for participants to share their experiences and thoughts on the climate crisis, and the discussions were conducted in accordance with the principle of confidentiality. The information provided by participants was anonymized based on the principles of confidentiality and protection of children's rights; assessments were made based on general trends and inferences rather than personal statements. In addition, through a survey conducted with representatives of 15 civil society organizations working at the intersection of children's rights and the climate crisis, institutional experiences and recommendations related to the process were also collected, and the data was analyzed anonymously.

Limitations and Challenges

This report was prepared entirely by children, using resources accessible to them and monitoring tools they developed. It should be noted that this is the first human rights monitoring work developed by children in Türkiye, that previous monitoring activities on the right to participation have been quite limited, and that the report should be evaluated with the following limitations in mind.

- Limited Time and Data Collection Resources:

The analyses and data presented in the reports are based solely on the examination of certain documents within a specific time frame and on interpretations made based on these documents. Accessible sources were carefully identified and examined in detail; some gaps were addressed through requests for information. However, responses to information requests may be irrelevant, incomplete, difficult to understand, or written in highly technical language. This has not allowed for the scope of the data collected to be expanded. As a result, the report is based on information obtained from a limited number of documents.

- Limited "Expertise" of the Team:

Although the study was supported by children's rights experts, the content of the report was written entirely by children under the age of 18. Although this subject group of children has been working on climate activism for a long time and knows the field, their technical expertise is limited. It should also be noted that they volunteered for this process while continuing their education during intense exam periods.

- Representation Limitations in Workshop Subject Groups:

One of the most important principles of the study is diversity and representation; however, due to the limited number and participant profile of the reported workshops and subject group studies, they may not reflect the views of all children.

- Difficulty in Interpreting Survey Responses:

The process of obtaining responses to the survey prepared for non government organizations (NGOs) from 15 institutions/communities was challenging. It was difficult for the institutions to find time during their busy work periods, and in some cases, the responses were not very detailed or were incomplete. This affected the process of interpreting and analyzing the responses.

- Human Rights Reporting Formats Not Being Child-Friendly:

Human rights monitoring and reporting efforts are not only for adults. Commonly used reporting formats may not be easily understood by children. The university/institutional standard formats being prepared from an adult perspective created a limitation in our work. Therefore, instead of following the widely accepted approach, we prepared this study by creating our own methods and format.

Section 1:

Current Situation in Relevant Policy Documents

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A. Legal and Political Framework: Existence and Compliance with International Standards

This section examines Türkiye's legal and political infrastructure regarding children's participation in environmental and climate policies and assesses the extent to which this infrastructure is aligned with international benchmarks.

Protecting children's rights and ensuring their participation in relation to the environmental and climate crisis is not only a matter of domestic policy but also a legal obligation arising from international treaties to which Türkiye is a party. Although Türkiye's national policy framework recognizes children's rights as a general principle, serious difficulties have been observed in integrating this principle into specific and technical areas such as the environment and climate. This section analyzes the extent to which Türkiye's current policies and practices are consistent with the most fundamental international documents in the field of children's rights. The main reference points for the analysis are the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and General Comment No. 26 of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, which interprets the provisions of this convention in the context of the environmental and climate crisis. This analysis aims to reveal the extent to which Türkiye has fulfilled its international commitments and where policy gaps are concentrated.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child contains many principles and articles that refer directly and indirectly to children's environmental rights. Furthermore, General Comment No. 26: Children's Rights and the Environment, with a Special Focus on Climate Change, published by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2023, serves as a roadmap for contracting countries. This document also specifies the environmental rights obligations of states towards children. In Türkiye, children's rights are guaranteed in Article 41 of the Constitution as follows: *"Every child has the right to benefit from protection and care, to establish and maintain personal and direct relations with his or her parents, unless this is clearly contrary to his or her best interests. The State shall take protective measures to protect children from all forms of exploitation and violence."*

However, this article primarily aims to protect children and does not contain any provisions regarding child participation. In addition, although the Child Protection Law states that "the rights of the child to life, development, protection, and participation shall be guaranteed," the provisions on how to ensure child participation are quite limited. To ensure children's participation in environmental and climate policies, regulations that legally guarantee this right are needed first.

The 2024-2028 Strategic Plan of the Ministry of Family, Labor, and Social Services does not refer to compliance with international conventions such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child or General Comment No. 26 of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, and no strategies consistent with these plans have been identified.

There is no clear provision regarding children's right to direct participation as stated in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and UN CRC General Comment 26. Although the "Türkiye's Long-Term Climate Strategy" document adopts an inclusive and participatory approach in general terms, there is no specific policy, law, or regulation that enables children's participation in decision-making mechanisms. None of the regulations of the Child Rights and Protection Board (ÇŞİDB) demonstrate a clear approach to "children's rights." Children's rights are generalized as human rights without being specified.

TTürkiyes Combined Fourth and Fifth Periodic Report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child merely refers to general mechanisms (School Councils (1), Provincial Children's Committees) under the heading of child participation. The report does not provide any concrete examples or data on how these mechanisms play a role in environmental and climate issues. The most critical point is that the principles of General Comment No. 26, which was under discussion during the process of preparing and submitting the report, or children's environmental rights in general, are not addressed in any way. When the above observations regarding TTürkiyes environmental and climate policies are evaluated in light of children's rights and the principles and rights outlined in the General Comment, the following shortcomings are apparent:

The Best Interests of the Child (2): This principle requires that the best interests of the child be given "primary consideration" in all public and private actions affecting children. However, there is no systematic application of this principle in the fundamental mechanisms shaping TTürkiyes environmental policies. For example, in Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) processes for industrial facilities, mines, or power plants, the potential health, developmental, and well-being impacts of the project on children (air pollution, noise, loss of water resources, etc.) are not analyzed as a specific and priority issue. Decisions are generally made based on economic benefits and general environmental impacts, and the "best interests of the child" are not used as a primary criterion.

Right to Participation: International law recognizes the right of children to freely express their views on any matter affecting them as a fundamental principle. This principle requires not only allowing children to speak, but also giving their views "due weight." However, an examination of TTürkiyes environmental and climate policies reveals serious gaps in the implementation of this fundamental right. The documents of the relevant ministries do not define age-appropriate, safe, and inclusive mechanisms that would enable children to participate specifically in environmental decision-making processes. Mechanisms such as the current "public participation" meetings are far from providing a platform for meaningful participation by children due to their adult-oriented language, technical content, and format. This situation also contradicts the principle of "meaningful participation" emphasized by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child.

(1) With the approval of the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) Board of Education and Discipline, dated April 17, 2019, and numbered 7821597, titled "Abolition of the Directive on the Democracy Education and School Councils Project," the long-standing directive has been repealed.

(2) The first report prepared within the scope of ICHILD CLIMATE MOVEMENT'S human rights monitoring and reporting efforts primarily presented an assessment within this framework of principles.

According to the Committee, participation requires that children's views be taken into account at every stage of policy and decision-making processes, including design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation, and should never be a tokenistic activity.

In Türkiye, although the inclusion of children's views in the preparation process of the 2023-2028 Children's Rights Strategy Document stands out as a positive exception in this regard, this approach has not yet become an established state policy. Consequently, the absence of a standard procedure that systematically ensures the participation of children and the civil society organizations representing them in the preparation of laws, regulations, strategies, or budgets related to the environment and climate shows that children's right to participation remains a theoretical guarantee.

Right to Health: Article 24 of the Convention stipulates the obligation of states to ensure children's right to the highest attainable standard of health. Paragraph 2(c) of this article explicitly states that, as part of this obligation, states must combat disease and malnutrition "taking into account the dangers and risks of environmental pollution." This is one of the clearest provisions of the CRC linking environmental health directly to children's health. Türkiye's national health policies or environmental strategies lack a comprehensive and preventive policy framework based on this article to prevent the specific effects of environmental factors such as air pollution, chemical waste, or noise pollution on children's health.

Right to Access Information: The General Comment emphasizes that states must proactively ensure children's access to information on environmental issues. This includes not only making information publicly available but also presenting it in child-friendly formats (accessible language, visual materials, digital tools). Climate change reports, emission data, or EIA reports available on the websites of the Turkish Ministry of Environment and Urbanization or relevant institutions are written in technical and legal language and are not accessible to children. Although environmental education is included in school curricula, this education generally remains theoretical and lacks a practical dimension that informs children about local environmental issues and policy processes.

Access to Justice/Remedies: The General Comment states that it is a fundamental duty of the state to ensure that children whose rights have been violated have access to effective remedies. This includes enabling children and their families whose health has been damaged, whose living spaces have been destroyed, or whose education has been disrupted due to environmental harm to access judicial and administrative mechanisms. In Türkiye, there is no specific legal regulation that facilitates children filing lawsuits on environmental issues on their own behalf or through their representatives. The length of judicial proceedings, high costs, and children's lack of knowledge about legal processes pose serious obstacles to access to justice. Although the Public Oversight Institution (Ombudsman) is an important mechanism that generally handles children's complaints, specific regulations and efforts to increase awareness and utilization of the Ombudsman by children for environmental complaints are not included in relevant policy documents.

Obligations Towards the Business World: The General Comment emphasizes that states, the private sector and the business world have an obligation to ensure that their activities respect children's rights, particularly environmental rights. Türkiye has significant shortcomings in this regard. There is no strong legal framework requiring companies to analyze the impact of their activities on children in their environmental and social responsibility reports or investment projects and to take measures to mitigate these impacts.

B. Functioning of Engagement Mechanisms: Accessibility, Inclusiveness, and Effectiveness

This section focuses on the question, "Are there mechanisms, and how do existing mechanisms work in practice?" It analyzes how policies and legal frameworks are reflected in practice and how effective, widespread and accessible to all children the existing engagement channels are. By comparing the strategic documents and relevant legal regulations of the main ministry responsible for children's rights and the main ministry responsible for environmental policies, the fragmented nature of the current approach to children's participation and the lack of a systematic framework will be detailed. The analysis aims to reveal why existing mechanisms are inadequate and the practical consequences of "invisibility" in policy documents.

Ministry of Family and Social Services (MFSS) Approach: General Mechanisms and Thematic Limitations

The Ministry of Family and Social Services, which acts as the coordinating body for the protection and promotion of children's rights in Türkiye, has nationally structured mechanisms to ensure child participation. The most well-known and widespread of these mechanisms are the Provincial Children's Rights Committees, which operate in every province. These committees were established to implement the principle of "respect for the views of the child" guaranteed in Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The aim is for children to come together to form opinions on issues that affect their own lives, communicate these opinions to local and national decision-makers, and influence policy processes.

Document analysis shows that, despite their theoretical potential, these committees have been extremely limited in practice in placing environmental and climate crisis issues on their agendas. An examination of MFSS's strategic plans and activity reports reveals that the work of Provincial Children's Committees has largely focused on social issues such as education, access to health services, peer bullying, child labor and violence against children. While these issues are undoubtedly of vital importance, the long-term and existential effects of the environmental and climate crisis on children's rights are not reflected in these agendas.

The environment and climate change are complex issues that require technical knowledge and a multidisciplinary perspective. There is no evidence that the adult facilitators guiding the Provincial Children's Committees or the child members of the committees have undergone any specific training or capacity-building programs in this area. This situation may pose a significant obstacle to children forming qualified and informed opinions on these issues.

In Türkiye's Combined Fourth and Fifth Periodic Reports submitted to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, it is stated that, in addition to Provincial Children's Rights Committees, mechanisms such as the Children's Rights Monitoring and Evaluation Board, the Children's Advisory Board, and annual reports shared with the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye operate at the national level, while at the local level, in addition to Provincial Children's Committees, School Student Councils [3] are actively working. Furthermore, according to the Review of the Türkiye Child Rights Strategy Document, the Child Rights Monitoring and Evaluation Board and Provincial Children's Committees are good practice examples that support children's right to participation. Children's Forums are also of great importance in terms of enabling children to express their views. In its final observations, the Committee notes that child rights mechanisms exist at the national level and that children are given the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes on issues that affect them. Furthermore, it welcomes the progress made in increasing opportunities for participation and establishing child-friendly procedures. However, there is no clear assessment of how widespread these mechanisms are, to what extent they cover the whole country, or whether they are implemented effectively. In summary, although mechanisms for child participation exist, there is no data or analysis available to measure the inclusiveness, effectiveness, and accessibility of these engagement mechanisms.

Consequently, the MFSS's approach treats "child participation" as a general umbrella concept applicable to all areas, but fails to provide the thematic depth and specialization required by specific areas such as the environment. Therefore, it appears that the existing mechanisms have not become an effective channel for making children's environmental voices heard.

Ministry of Environment, Urbanization, and Climate Change (MEUCC) Policies: Technical Focus and the "Invisibility" of Children

The strategic documents of the MEUCC, the designer and implementer of environmental and climate policies, show a clear lack of recognition of children as rights holders and actors of participation. The Ministry's approach focuses primarily on technical, engineering, and economic dimensions, neglecting the social dimension of policies and, in particular, their impact on children.

Although the Ministry's new strategic plan includes principles such as "inclusiveness" and "human-oriented" children are not specifically identified as a target group when these principles are translated into operational objectives. Nowhere in the plan are the terms "children's rights" or "child participation" directly mentioned. Children are included in the definition of groups requiring special policies, along with women, the elderly, people with disabilities, and low-income individuals.

The strategy also includes other references to "children" in relation to efforts to raise awareness about the risks that women and girls may face in the context of climate change. Such references suggest that children are not fully recognized as stakeholders at the highest level of policy design.

[3] With the approval of the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) Board of Education and Discipline dated April 17, 2019, and numbered 7821597, titled "Abolition of the Directive on the Democracy Education and School Councils Project," the directive that had been in effect for many years was repealed.

Furthermore, general definitions were insufficient to cover a heterogeneous group with specific communication, protection, and participation needs, such as children and had the potential to result in the exclusion of these groups of children in practice.

Türkiye's Long-Term Climate Strategy and other policy documents, while setting out Türkiye's climate targets and adaptation policies, are entirely technical and economic in perspective. While topics such as mitigation scenarios, energy efficiency, and renewable energy targets are detailed, the impact of these policies on future generations and today's children (the intergenerational justice dimension) has not been analyzed. There is no mention of children's or young people's views being taken into account in the policy-making process.

As mentioned in the section above, the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Regulation stipulates the "participation of the public most affected by the projects" as a requirement. However, this participation is usually limited to one-off meetings held at the project site, where technical presentations are made and adults ask questions. This format is difficult to access and understand, and does not meet the needs of children of different age groups. Alternative methods designed to ensure the participation of children, such as child-friendly information brochures, workshops, or special sessions held in schools, are not included in the legislation and documents.

2023-2028 Türkiye Children's Rights Strategy Document and Action Plan

Despite this generally pessimistic picture in national policies, the 2023-2028 Türkiye Children's Rights Strategy Document, prepared under the coordination of MFSS, is of critical importance in terms of emphasizing child participation and signaling the first signs of change in this regard.

- **Participation as a Process:** The most distinctive feature of the document is that the preparation process itself is an example of participation. The reflection of the results of the International Children's Forum held in 2022 with the theme "Climate Change and Child Participation" and the children's views expressed there in the strategy document demonstrates a desire to move from making policies "for children" to making policies "with children."
- **Emphasis on the Environment as Content:** The inclusion of a popular environmental movement such as the "Zero Waste Project" as an example of child participation is important in terms of combining environmental awareness with the right to participate.
- **Commitments for the Future:** Goals included in the Action Plan, such as "giving children a role in the preparedness model for crises and emergencies" and "creating an international child participation platform," are valuable in that they reflect a perspective that sees children not only as passive victims of the climate crisis, but also as active actors in the solution and adaptation processes.

However, for this positive development to have a lasting impact, this strategy document must not remain merely an MFSS document; it must be integrated into the policies and practices of all relevant ministries, primarily MFSS and MEUCC, implemented, and monitored. Otherwise, child participation risks remaining an isolated "goodwill" activity, detached from the mainstream of environmental policies.

C. Protecting and Guaranteeing the Rights of Children Actively Involved in Environmental and Climate Policies

This section focuses on the special protection of children and children's groups who are actively involved in environmental and climate policies and who identify themselves as activists, child human rights defenders or in other ways which is one of the most sensitive aspects of the participation process. It seeks to answer the question, "Are children safe in these processes, is their participation genuine, and are they supported in seeking their rights?"

The global climate movement has now become a major movement led by children and young people. Greta Thunberg has become the symbol of this movement and children around the world have begun to speak out against the climate crisis that threatens their future. These children are not only environmentally conscious individuals, but are also defined as "child human rights defenders" ⁽⁴⁾ who play an active role in the public sphere, demanding policy change by exercising their fundamental rights such as freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association. This movement has also had an impact in Türkiye with various children and children's groups actively participating in this area. The emergence of these new actors has brought to the fore the obligation of states to recognize not only the general rights of children but also their activist identities and to provide protection against the specific risks arising from these identities. This section analyzes the extent to which Türkiye's legal and political framework responds to this new phenomenon and what gaps it contains in terms of protecting child environmental activists.

An examination of Türkiye's fundamental documents on children's rights and environmental policies reveals that the concepts of "child activist" or "child human rights defender" are absent. This situation points to a policy gap beyond a simple lack of terminology.

Neither the Ministry of Family and Social Services nor the Ministry of Environment, Urbanization, and Climate Change make a single reference to the existence, rights, or needs of children who play an active role in environmental issues in their strategic plans, action plans, or activity reports. This "invisibility" shows that policymakers view children only as passive entities that need to be protected and have not yet fully internalized that they can be actors in the public and political sphere. In general, it contains regulations on the protection of children's rights. However, there is no specific regulation or policy on the special protection of child activists who are actively working on environmental or climate issues.

⁽⁴⁾ On the occasion of its 20th anniversary, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child held the General Discussion Day on "Protecting and Empowering Children as Human Rights Defenders" in Geneva in September 2018 - marking the first event to recognize children as part of the broader human rights defenders framework.

Türkiye's Periodic Reports to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child merely state that rights such as freedom of expression (Article 13), freedom of thought (Article 14) and freedom of association/peaceful assembly (Article 15) are legally guaranteed. However, these general statements do not provide concrete information or analysis on how these rights are exercised by children, particularly in the context of environmental activism, what obstacles children face when exercising these rights or what proactive steps are taken to support them. This confirms that child activism is not considered a policy priority even at the level of international reporting.

The absence of a specific legal framework to protect child environmental activists leaves them vulnerable to various risks. General legal safeguards are insufficient to take into account the specific circumstances and vulnerabilities of children.

Limits and Risks to Freedom of Expression: Türkiye's Combined Fourth and Fifth Periodic Report states that freedom of expression is guaranteed under Article 26 of the Constitution and Article 13 of the UN CRC. However, the document does not provide information on the obstacles children face in relation to issues such as environmental protests or climate activism. In its concluding observations, the Committee expresses concern about certain restrictions on children's freedom of expression and recommends that the state party take the necessary measures to remove these restrictions. In addition to restrictions on freedom of expression, children may also face various risks when exercising their right to freedom of expression. For example, when they express critical views on the climate crisis through social media, school newspapers, or local media, they face a greater risk of intimidation, ridicule, or being taken less seriously than adults. There is no specific mechanism to protect them from potential pressure on themselves and their families, especially when they criticize powerful economic interests (e.g., a mining company, a power plant).

Right to Peaceful Assembly and Practical Barriers: Climate strikes or protests organized by children and youth may fall under the legal right to "peaceful assembly," but in practice, they can face various obstacles. It is unclear whether security forces have specific protocols or training that take into account the "best interests of the child" principle when intervening in actions involving children. Furthermore, the risk of facing disciplinary action from school administrators or being labeled a "problem student" for participating in such actions can have a deterrent effect on children.

Digital Activism and Online Threats: Today's activism is largely conducted on digital platforms. Child environmental activists may be exposed to cyberbullying, harassment, hate speech, and smear campaigns in the online environment. While the state needs to take specific measures to protect children from such digital threats and equip them with safe digital literacy skills, there is no specific policy or program in this regard.

Children need not only legal protection but also a supportive ecosystem to safely and constructively realize their activist potential.

Schools are the most important places where children can learn and experience their freedom of expression and right to participation. However, the current education system generally positions children as passive recipients of information and avoids a pedagogical approach that encourages critical thinking and civic participation. Although structures such as environmental clubs exist, they are often limited to awareness-raising activities and do not have an activism focus that directs children to influence policy processes.

The development of child activism and increased participation of children in environmental and climate policies depend on the support of families and non-government organizations. However, the number and resources of non-government organizations that support children's rights-based activism, provide them with legal and psychological support, and develop their capacities are limited. Families, on the other hand, often tend to view their children's activist actions as a "risk" and discourage them from such actions due to security concerns. Another situation encountered is children being subjected to manipulation or token participation. Unfortunately, there are no studies assessing how often children encounter practices that violate their right to participate and harm them, nor are there any regulations to prevent this.

Section 2:

Children and Young People's Experience

Section 2: Children and Young People's Experience

As part of the monitoring work, two online workshops were held with groups of children and young people on June 18, 2025 and June 30, 2025. This section will present the experiences and views of children and young people based on these workshops.

A. Workshop with the Over-18 Group

An online workshop was held on June 18, 2025, with individuals who are currently over 18 years old but were actively involved in climate crisis initiatives when they were under 18. This workshop focused on gathering qualitative findings regarding children's participation in climate crisis initiatives, drawing on the experiences of those who have been actively involved in the field. The thematic findings that emerged from the workshop are listed below:

The Randomness of Participation Opportunities and Problems Accessing Information

Some workshop participants stated that they had "accidentally" come across the climate movement through social media. For the majority, however, participation in climate crisis work processes began with their own motivations, leading them to research, which eventually led them to safe civil society organizations through a series of coincidences. However, participants stated that they felt quite alone when they started the participation process and that they were in an environment where they did not have enough information about the climate crisis studies to feel secure. Yet, participation in climate crisis studies has been challenging, especially in cities such as Gaziantep, where access to information is quite difficult due to the low importance given to climate crisis issues.

"I was in a period where I was referring to everything I saw on Instagram. I heard about ICHILD completely by chance; they had posted an announcement about the Climate Movement."



"I didn't know much about it because I live in an area where people aren't very aware of their rights. I realized it after doing some research. There aren't many people working on climate issues in Gaziantep, but recently there has been a slight increase."

Inadequacy of Complaint and Support Mechanisms

Participants emphasized the inadequacy of the state's complaint and support mechanisms, apart from the limited number of safe civil society organizations they are involved in. In addition, they were quite skeptical about the effectiveness of the existing complaint mechanisms and stated that they anticipated their complaints would be fruitless.

On the other hand, while only some civil society organizations have established safe complaint mechanisms for children involved in climate crisis work, some associations have indicated that they have heard that facilitators have violated children's boundaries.

"I worked in a place that provided a safe environment. However, from what I heard in other civil society organizations, facilitators could cross certain boundaries in their relationships with individuals under the age of 18. These safe space boundaries are left to the facilitator. Perhaps oversight in this regard could be increased. Not everyone has the same safe experience."

"Even if we complained, it didn't make much of a difference"

"I didn't know about the complaint mechanisms, and even if I had complained, I don't think it would have made a difference."



Insufficient Awareness and Representation Regarding Child Participation

Most participants stated that the scope of children's participation was quite limited, especially when they first started the participation process, but that it has improved recently. They noted that despite having sufficient knowledge, such as knowing the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the areas where they could apply this knowledge in the field were quite limited. They also stated that the realization of children's right to participation is mostly dependent on adults, and that there is a lack of an independent mechanism based solely on child participation. Thus, the lack of the concept of "meaningful participation" was emphasized.

"When I first started, I didn't have much say, but I had knowledge. I read reports and articles about the climate crisis and watched documentaries. However, I didn't have a say because there was no such space."

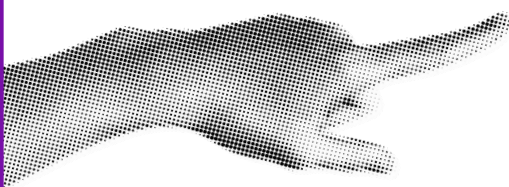
"As a child, I drew courage from the volunteers around me or from 'older brother/sister' figures."

"When talking about representation, we should also mention the concept of 'meaningful representation.' Decision-making mechanisms need to include structures that ensure diversity, inclusivity, and meaningful representation."



Recommendations for Rights-Based Participation

At the end of the workshop, it was emphasized that children should not only be "active participants" but also part of decision-making processes. It was recommended to facilitate the establishment of children's associations, develop participation mechanisms in line with children's rights, and establish stronger partnerships with local governments.



"If there were more child participation in civil society, for example, the establishment of children's associations, this process could be healthier."

"There needs to be an activist group demanding the creation of these support mechanisms and that group is us. We are working so that those who come after us can have support mechanisms."

Participants generally emphasized that, despite the fact that the area of participation and representation in child participation processes in climate crisis work has been quite difficult and lacking, especially in the recent past, momentum is developing in an upward direction.

"When I first started, I was alone, there wasn't much climate activism, the environment was more dangerous, concepts such as child safety were not really discussed. Over time, the environment improved, and there was an increase in child representation."



However, while representation is gradually finding its place, "meaningful representation" is still an area that needs considerable development. It is clear that inclusive, safe, and rights-based mechanisms need to be established for the meaningful representation and participation of children.

B. Workshop with the Under-18 Group

An online workshop was held on June 30, 2025, with children under the age of 18 who are actively involved in climate crisis-related work. The thematic findings that emerged from the workshop are listed below:

Awareness of Rights and Access to Accurate Information

Participants stated that accessing information and learning about their rights has become much easier, especially after the development of the internet, but that distinguishing accurate information has become equally difficult. While it is thought that anyone with internet access can know their rights, support is needed in interpreting information correctly at this point.

"I think that because we live in the age of the internet and technology, we can access information in an understandable way. I haven't experienced any difficulties in this regard to date."

"Access to information has become easier compared to the past, but at the same time, accessing the right sources has also become more difficult. The first sources reached are often not accurate."

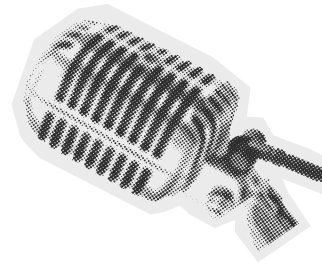
Access to Complaint and Participation Mechanisms

Although the vast majority of participants stated that they knew their rights, they emphasized that they did not have much information about concrete areas where they could exercise these rights in climate crisis work processes, especially regarding complaint mechanisms. Therefore, it is clear that knowing one's rights does not in itself bring about results; it is critical for climate crisis work processes that these rights are supported by complaint and participation mechanisms.

"I didn't open up to the outside world because I was in a closed association environment in climate work. But I didn't fully open up to an open space and was in a closed environment."

"I don't know of any institution as a complaint mechanism."

"The institution I know is the Public Ombudsman's Office. I received positive responses to my applications, and they assisted me with any complaints I had regarding public institutions. I know you can file complaints related to environmental pollution."



Dependence on Adults in Exercising Rights

Participants stated that when they took action to exercise their rights in the field of climate crisis, the situation mostly progressed in a way that was dependent on adult actors. It was emphasized that while adult actors were supportive in some cases, when they displayed obstructive or dismissive attitudes, it became very difficult and impeded for children to participate in the work. Difficulties in communicating with public institutions individually were noted and it was clear that there is a need for mechanisms that support children's right to participate independently of adults.

"I wanted to organize an entrepreneurship summit at school, but it was not very common for students at our school to undertake such projects. The principal and vice principals did not believe that students could do things like find sponsors and they had a very negative impact on me. However, we successfully carried out the program."

"My experiences applying to public institutions were difficult; mostly, I wasn't listened to. Only the POO (The Public Ombudsman's Office) KDK (Kamu Denetçiliği Kurumu) helped me in this regard and ensured I was heard."

"Generally, because I am a child, institutions do not pay much attention to me. When I go with my family, I can only share my thoughts with them or talk about my projects."

Solutions for Improving Participation

Participants suggested the following recommendations to make the process more fair, inclusive, and child-friendly:

- Recognizing the child as an individual, legitimizing participation
- Ensuring meaningful representation; enabling children to play an active role in participation processes independently of adults
- Widespread implementation of safe, easy-to-understand participation and complaint mechanisms and ensuring these mechanisms support access to and dissemination of accurate information.

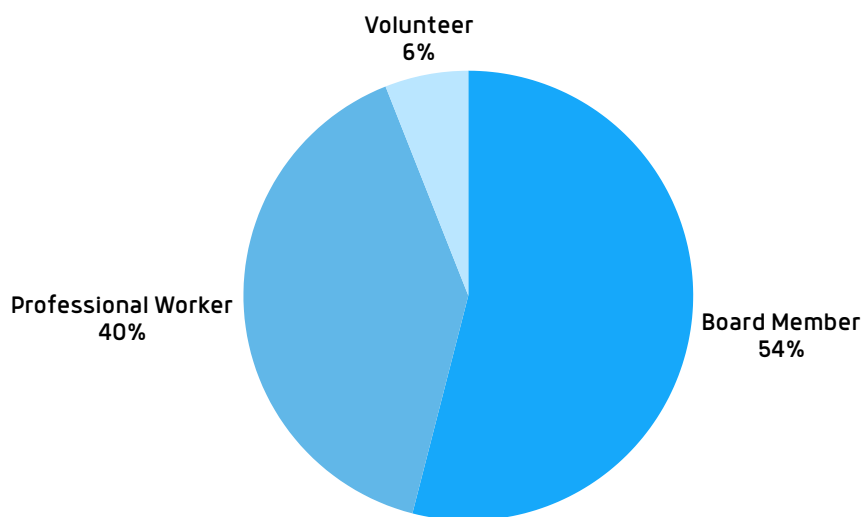
When the findings of the two workshops are evaluated together, they show that children's participation in the climate crisis should not be limited to visibility and participation processes dependent on adults; children need real and independent participation in access, safety, information, and decision-making processes. The findings highlight structural mechanism deficiencies for the second standard of the ICHILD Climate Movement's monitoring work (ensuring children's right to participation) and emphasize the importance of a child rights-based approach in climate crisis work.

Section 3: Civil Society Experience

Section 3: Civil Society Experience

An online survey was prepared to measure the extent to which the state considers child participation in combating the climate crisis and the status of child participation in Turkish civil society. The survey was directed at civil society organizations working in various regions of Türkiye in the fields of children's rights and the climate crisis and was answered by a total of 15 NGO representatives. The online survey was completed between June 1-30, 2025.

Of those who responded to the survey, 53.3% are board members at their organizations. 40% identify themselves as professional staff. The remaining 6% indicated that they are volunteers.



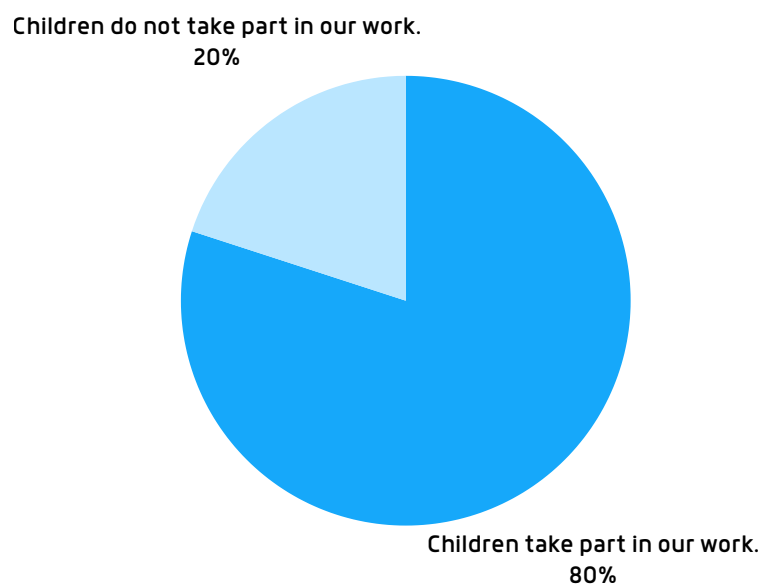
According to the responses provided by the non-government organizations participating in the survey, their areas of work are as follows:

- 10 organizations (66.7%) include child participation in their work.
- 9 organizations (60%) work in the field of children's rights.
- 9 organizations (60%) include climate change in their work.
- 6 organizations (40%) are active in the field of environmental rights.
- One organization each (6.7%) indicated the following areas in the "other" section: youth work and art, nature education, and the right to education.

This shows that institutions work in multiple areas and that there are institutions working together in the fields of environment and children's rights. There were 5 responses regarding work in the field of children's rights and child participation, 3 responses indicating work only in the field of climate change, 1 response regarding environmental rights and climate change, 1 response regarding environmental rights, climate change and child participation and 4 responses regarding work in the fields of environmental rights, climate change, children's rights, and child participation. Only one response indicated work in the field of youth work outside of these four areas.

Participating organizations provided various information about their activities in the areas they specified. Some organizations prepared online education portals, case cards, handbooks, and animations for children; some carried out awareness-raising activities based on art and media with the participation of children and some organized exhibitions and campaigns that provided opportunities for children to express their own views. In addition, children's executive committees were established and examples were shared of children being directly involved in strategic planning processes related to climate change. Nature-based activities, workshops with young facilitators, consultation meetings and local-level climate action initiatives were also among the examples presented. While some institutions referred to projects carried out in previous years, others shared links to their ongoing or planned activities.

Eighty percent of the organizations participating in the survey stated that children contributed to their work and participated in volunteer activities. The remaining 20% stated that they did not carry out any work based on volunteering directly with children in this age group. This difference shows that children's participation processes are approached in different ways between organizations.

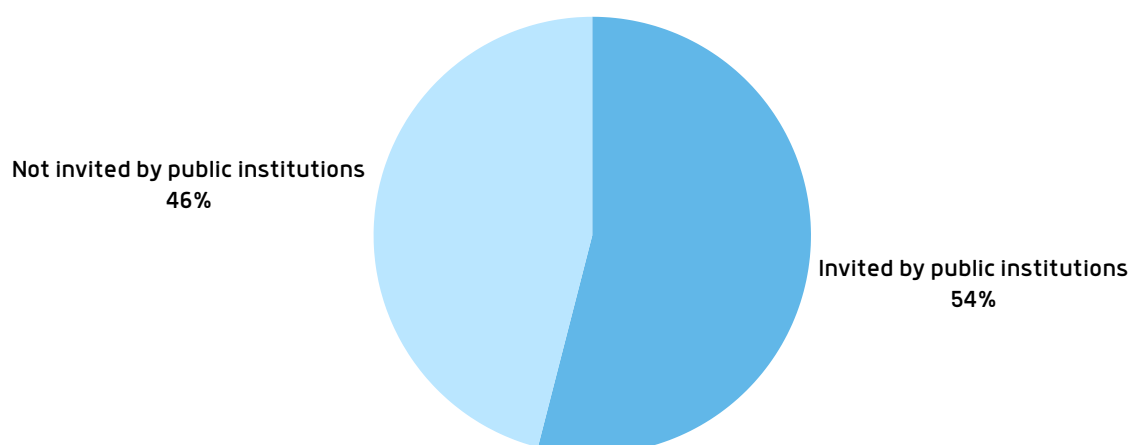


Of the 12 organizations that responded, 66.7% stated that they regularly included or consulted with groups of children in their decision-making processes. The same percentage of organizations defined child participation as an institutional priority and stated that they took into account the diversity of children (age, gender, disability, socioeconomic status, etc.) in the participation processes. 58.3% of the institutions stated that they support children's initiatives. These findings show that children can be included in institutional processes not only as participants but also as actors who guide the process. It is important to further disseminate these structures for the inclusiveness and sustainability of participation.

80% of the 15 NGO representatives who participated in the survey (12 responses) stated that they work with children aged 0-18 who contribute to their work and that they are involved in the process on a voluntary basis. This finding shows that children can be active participants in the civil society field not just as a target group.

A significant portion of these organizations also stated that children not only volunteer but also have a say within institutional structures. Indeed, 66.7% of the 12 organizations working with children stated that they regularly involve or consult with groups of children in decision-making processes; 66.7% stated that they ensure diversity among children in participation processes; and again, 66.7% stated that they view child participation as an institutional priority. Furthermore, 58.3% reported that children's own initiatives are supported. When these findings are evaluated together, it can be said that half of the survey participants accept children in their institutions not only as activity recipients but also as subjects who play an active role in decision-making processes and can speak for themselves. However, these figures also reveal that not every institution working with children has established structures that reflect this participation in decision-making processes or fully observes the principle of diversity in practice. This raises the need to question the extent to which children participating in the process through volunteering are effective in decision-making mechanisms.

Of the 15 NGO representatives who participated in the survey 53.3%, stated that they had been invited by public institutions to participate in policy and strategy development processes in the areas of the environment, climate change and children's rights. Meanwhile, 46.7% stated that they had not been invited to participate in such work. Some institutions were invited by local governments, while others were invited at the ministerial level.



"As part of our work focused on children's rights, we are invited to participate in some policy development processes, especially at the local level and we do participate."

"... I cannot recall any direct invitation or participation experience in policy development processes conducted at the central administration level at the intersection of environment, climate change, and children's rights..."

"We are not invited to discussions on the environment and climate change, but we are invited to meetings on child services and children's rights organized by UNICEF and MFSS."

Although they are not invited by the public sector, participants expressed different views on whether they find the public sector's work on the environment, climate change, and children's rights effective.

"... I find the work done by municipalities to be more effective and visible than that done by ministries. However, I do not think the work is sufficient or effective. I believe they do not bring together the necessary stakeholders to produce solutions and that they carry out their work without conducting a needs analysis beyond simply gathering children's opinions..."

"Not age-appropriate, not inclusive, not meaningful, not valid."

"In essence, the intention to take action is positive and quite commendable, but I believe there is a lack of implementation and comprehensiveness. These efforts are generally carried out in a piecemeal manner..."

"Climate change and zero waste are still new topics for municipalities; the departments are new. I see more youth work than child work. This is because NGOs bring up the issue of participation, and if they find funding, they set up projects in collaboration with the public sector. They include young people/children. I have not witnessed any work by the municipality on the issues mentioned in the context of children's rights."

We asked the survey participants to rate the child participation processes in public environmental and climate change policy work on a scale of 1 to 5. As a result, 53.3% of participants (8 responses) rated the process of including children's views in public environmental and climate change policy decisions as "1" (most inadequate). Forty percent (6 responses) rated this process as "2," meaning they found it quite limited. The fact that almost no institutions rated it as 3, 4, or 5 out of 5 indicates that public participation practices in this area are largely perceived as inadequate by civil society.

This situation suggests that children are not systematically and effectively involved in shaping climate and environmental policies and that existing forms of participation remain largely limited. These findings clearly highlight the need to establish structural and inclusive mechanisms for public decision-making processes based on children's views.

"In my opinion, children's views are sometimes taken into account at the local government level... spaces where children can express themselves can be opened on more prominent days like June 5. However, the process of incorporating their views is not fully realized; these spaces created to hear their opinions can sometimes be merely symbolic. Despite hearing children's opinions, no action is taken. This situation is more problematic in directly responsible public authorities such as the Ministry of Environment, Urbanization, and Climate Change. When environmental and climate change issues are on the agenda, meetings are held where only adults' opinions are considered, and children are not given any say."



"I believe that the public has begun to use concepts such as children's rights and child participation from the right perspective, but that they remain only on paper and are not effective in the implementation of policies."

Participants often used the adjective "symbolic" when describing child participation processes:

"In current practices, children's participation largely remains symbolic. Unfortunately, children are not seen as subjects of life and direct beneficiaries of services. This situation can lead to the experiences and needs of children becoming completely invisible in the areas of environment and climate change, which are already low on the policy agenda."

"Although we are seeing more frequent participation by children and children's councils in various works recently, both the feedback we receive and our own observations show that this participation mostly remains symbolic."

"Although some advisory boards and workshops are organized for children, these activities often remain symbolic."

Forty percent of participants (6 responses) indicated that children and young people actively involved in the climate crisis in Türkiye do not demonstrate sufficient diversity in terms of their characteristics and circumstances, selecting the "2" option out of 5. A 13.3% segment expressed a completely negative view on this matter, choosing the "1" option. The percentage of those expressing a moderate opinion is 40% (total 6 responses: 20% "3" and 20% "4"). Only 1 response (6.7%) gave the highest score, stating that the participation of children and youth in this field is inclusive in terms of various conditions and identities.

This distribution indicates that the representation of children and youth active in the climate field may be homogeneous in terms of socioeconomic status, disability, gender, and geographic region, and that inclusivity has not yet reached the desired level.

The fact that the right to participation is only accessible to certain groups undermines the integrity of the rights-based approach; this situation shows that egalitarian mechanisms that will increase diversity in representation need to be developed.

The vast majority of participants (73.4%) believe that children and young people actively involved in the climate crisis in Türkiye are predominantly from the middle-upper socioeconomic level (7 people answered "4" and 4 people answered "5"). A 13.3% segment gave a more neutral assessment, selecting "3," while a 13.4% minority ("1" and "2" responses) disagreed with this view. This distribution reveals that the general trend is toward active participation being concentrated among relatively advantaged groups.

This finding reveals that participation processes in the climate field do not offer equal opportunities for all children and that the representation of children from low-income backgrounds or with various disadvantages in these areas may be limited. This situation highlights that it is not possible to consider child participation in environmental and climate-related issues independently of socioeconomic inequalities and that it is necessary to develop inclusive approaches. Of the 15 responses to the survey, 86.7% (13 responses) indicated that they believe children and young people actively involved in the climate crisis in Türkiye face rights violations. Of these participants, 46.7% (7 people) indicated the highest level of participation by selecting the "5" option, while 40% (6 people) selected the "4" response. On the other hand, only 1 person each selected the "1" and "3" responses, indicating that they did not agree or only partially agreed with this view. This distribution reveals that the vast majority strongly observed that children encounter various rights violations in their activities in this area. Rights violations can manifest in different ways, such as freedom of expression, security, discrimination, unequal access, or ineffective participation in decision-making processes. On the other hand, the fact that some participants perceive this situation as less pronounced may vary depending on the institutions' areas of work, the regional context, or the ways in which the violations children are exposed to are defined. This picture is a clear indication of the need for specific policies and mechanisms to protect the rights of children active in the climate field.

66.7% of participants (10 responses in total) stated that children and young people active in the field of climate crisis in Türkiye face situations such as being targeted or humiliated in the media. This percentage emerges when the 46.7% segment (7 responses) who selected option "4" and the 20% segment (3 responses) who selected option "5" are evaluated together. A 20% group (3 responses) assessed the process more neutrally, while only 2 people (13.4%) stated that such situations did not occur or were very limited. This distribution indicates that the perceptions children engaged in climate activism are exposed to in the media may be problematic in terms of freedom of expression and safe participation. Being targeted in the media or subjected to derogatory discourse can negatively affect children's sense of safety and their long-term motivation to participate. In this context, promoting a rights-based and protective media approach in the representation of children's climate actions is an important need.

Eighty percent of participants (12 responses) stated that children and young people actively involved in the climate crisis in Türkiye experience a lack of access to the support, resources, and spaces they need. Of these responses, 53.3% rated the situation as "2" and 26.7% rated it as "1." Compared to the 6.7% who gave a medium rating, only 13.3% rated the process relatively positively ("4"). No participant selected the highest positive rating, "5."

This finding indicates that the material, spatial, pedagogical, and psychosocial support necessary for children to sustain their actions and participation in the climate field is not sufficiently provided. Strengthening participation is only possible not only through intention but also through concrete and continuous access to the resources children need in this area. Therefore, the widespread establishment of supportive infrastructure based on equal opportunities is critical for the realization of the right to participation.

According to the survey data, 46.7% of participants (7 responses) assessed the level of awareness of children and young people actively involved in the climate crisis in Türkiye regarding their own rights and freedoms as moderate ("3"). A 40% segment (6 responses) stated that they had a higher level of knowledge (3 responses "4", 3 responses "5"), while 13.3% indicated a low level of knowledge ("1" and "2"). Children's knowledge of their rights directly affects not only the quality of their participation but also their capacity to protect themselves against potential risks. Therefore, strengthening and expanding rights-based awareness-raising activities for children is of great importance in works conducted in the context of the climate crisis.

Sixty percent of survey participants stated that they did not use channels for obtaining information on climate change, the environment, and children's rights (PCC, POO, etc.). In contrast, 40% stated that they used such official channels for obtaining information. Open-ended responses reveal that the majority of participants who used official information channels experienced difficulties accessing information through these channels. Although some participants stated that they exercised their right to information from time to time, they indicated that the responses were limited, delayed, or unsatisfactory. It was reported that applications made in the field of children's rights often remained unanswered, that responses were contradictory, or that public institutions did not respond to applications on the grounds that they did not have the information. In addition, it was emphasized that the existing information documents were not prepared in a child-friendly language. These findings indicate that, for effective participation to be possible, information channels must be appropriate for children and civil society, understandable, accessible, and effective in achieving results.

The survey also asked participants whether they had observed any significant changes or turning points in the process of children's participation and active involvement in environmental and climate change initiatives. The following are excerpts from testimonies regarding the historical process:

"I think the wind that started in 2019 lost some of its visibility with the breakup of FFF Türkiye. I also think that the world agenda's perception of the environment and climate change as unrelated to issues affecting children's well-being, such as the wars, migration, and economic crises that have occurred frequently in the last five years, is an important turning point. This is also how it is addressed in Türkiye. Unfortunately, there is an understanding that begins with the phrase "there are so many things that need to be improved for children..." and pushes the negative effects of climate change to the bottom of the hierarchy. With the publication of the General Comment of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, it is possible to say that it is a positive development that the existing participatory mechanisms in which children are actively involved are being used as a tool to put this issue on the agenda."

"There are both positive and limiting turning points in Türkiye. In particular, the reflection of the global climate strike in Türkiye can be considered one of the turning points. This movement presents itself as a campaign in which many young people and children in Türkiye have taken action for the climate... On the other hand, Türkiye's signing of the Paris Climate Agreement has also been an official response to the calls for justice demanded by children and young people against the climate crisis...In addition, some of the processes carried out by the Ministry of Environment, Urbanization, and Climate Change include references to children and young people. However, these references generally remain at a representative level and no concrete mechanism has been implemented."



"I want to believe that approaches emphasizing that children are not only 'the owners of the future' but also the subjects of today in the field of climate and environmental advocacy have created a shift in the perspective of adults. I hope this awareness has the potential to make participation more inclusive."

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions and Recommendations

This report assesses the extent to which children's rights and participation are addressed in Türkiye's policies and documents developed in response to the climate crisis. This section of the report was prepared with contributions from participants at the "Preliminary Findings Sharing Meeting," which was held with the participation of children and adults.

Considering the information obtained during the monitoring process and the contributions received, two main issues that emerged jointly must be addressed first:

Mindset Change

Meaningfully implementing children's right to participation requires not only legal regulations but also a fundamental shift in the mindset of policymakers, educators, and society regarding children.

- ✓ Adult representatives should not be positioned as authoritarian figures in child participation processes.
- ✓ Children should be positioned not as victims of problems, but as actors and rights holders at the center of solution-building processes.

Capacity Development.

In order for participation to be meaningful, institutions that value child participation need to strengthen and develop their capacity regarding how the structures, processes, and tools they create for participation should be.

- ✓ Training and capacity building programs should be implemented for lower and middle-level public officials (e.g., teachers, municipal staff, department heads, managers in provincial organizations) to raise awareness and build skills on children's rights and participation.
- ✓ Only when the capacities of institutions and relevant individuals are developed can children and young people participate in advisory boards or other similar structures not merely as opinion-givers, but as members with voting rights who influence decision-making processes.

While implementing the above two points, based on the findings presented in the report and the recommendations gathered from stakeholders (NGOs, children, and youth), the following concrete steps are recommended to ensure meaningful, inclusive, and safe participation of children in environmental and climate policies.

A. Strengthening Policy and Participation Mechanisms

1

Legislation on children's participation is limited. Therefore, all relevant legislation should be reviewed, and additions should be made to emphasize the guarantee of children's right to participation. Furthermore, specific legal regulations should be established to facilitate children's access to relevant avenues for seeking rights, including on environmental and climate crisis issues, within the scope of the right to participation.

2

At the national level, cooperation between the Ministry of Family and Social Services (MFSS), the Ministry of Environment, Urbanization, and Climate Change (MEUCC) and the Ministry of National Education (MNE) is critical. Strong cooperation models should also be developed with local governments to ensure that municipalities play a facilitating role in communication with other public institutions and the local community.

3

At the local level (province/district level), small-scale workshops focusing on subjective/locally specific issues should be organized, especially in schools in rural areas, and children should be positioned not only as participants but also as decision-makers in these workshops.

4

Local advocacy networks should be established by drawing on NGO experiences, and existing platforms and networks should be made functional. Processes should be designed to be not only representative but also active and based on mutual learning.

5

Awareness and education activities on the environment and climate change in the education system should be designed in line with children's agendas and perspectives and based on a peer learning approach.

6

Independent regular monitoring activities should be conducted in collaboration with NGOs and relevant experts to support the implementation of clubs and course content related to climate justice, the environment, and child participation in schools in line with their purpose, and the necessary infrastructure should be provided for their effective implementation. The capacity of structures such as school clubs should be strengthened to ensure their effective participation in decision-making processes.

7

1. The outputs of projects developed by children and young people focusing on the environment and climate crisis (TÜBİTAK (The Scientific and Technological Research Council of Türkiye projects, science competitions, Teknofest (TechnoFest) events, etc.)) should be integrated into policy development processes, not limited to competitions.

8

When it is challenging to include all children in decision-making processes, certain groups of children and young people may be included as representatives due to resource constraints. For example, children and young people are selected or appointed as representatives to participate in the Conference of the Parties (COP), which is very important in terms of climate policies, or to take part in national platforms. In such cases, transparency should be ensured regarding who participates, in what capacity, and on whose behalf; the issue of "genuine representation" should be regularly reviewed.

9

Public budgets should allocate funds or increase existing relevant funds to meet the educational, logistical, and infrastructure needs for children's participation.

B. Access to Information and Communication

1

Child-friendly and accessible interfaces should be added to public institutions' websites; digital platforms that appeal to children visually, linguistically, and in terms of content should be created. Climate reports and Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) documents published by the public sector should be presented in formats that children can understand, rather than in technical and legal language.

2

The language and terminology used in meetings and events should be made child-friendly; children should be able to understand the subject and express themselves comfortably. Children should be informed in advance about volunteering, rights-based approaches, and advocacy.

3

National media outlets such as TRT should open up spaces for announcements and information aimed at children and young people. A rights-based and protective media approach should be promoted to prevent children engaged in climate activism from being targeted or humiliated in the media.

4

Public institutions should regularly publish open calls for meetings, events, and projects that children and young people can participate in, in a way that is accessible to everyone.

C. Security and Protection

1

Children who play an active role in environmental and climate issues should be recognized as "child human rights defenders," and a specific protection mechanism should be established for them. It is important for NGOs (especially human rights organizations) to raise awareness of the issue and for institutions such as THREA (Turkish Human Rights and Equality Agency) and MFSS to play an active role.

2

It is critical to promote easily understandable, secure, and independent complaint mechanisms for the right to universal participation. These mechanisms must be supported in order to access and disseminate accurate information. The awareness and usability of existing mechanisms, such as the Ombudsman Institution (POO), for children's environmental complaints must be increased.

D. The Role of Civil Society Organizations (NGO)

1

NGOs should be involved in regular capacity-building efforts in the areas of children's rights, environmental policies, and participation mechanisms, and should also develop their capacity in the area of meaningful participation processes with children and youth. In addition, they should continue their interactive work with children and youth in this process and be open to learning from children and youth.

2

Advocacy efforts should be designed to be open to the direct participation of children and young people and should be supported by practices such as open microphone events and youth forums.

3

It is important to establish regular meetings and common platforms to strengthen interaction and a culture of collaboration among NGOs; the participation of children and youth groups in these meetings and platforms should be supported.

4

Models of local children and youth advisory councils (such as the ICHILD Children's Advisory Council) should be structured at different levels, such as schools, neighborhoods, and municipalities, and should be disseminated and scaled up.

5

Strategies should be developed to ensure the inclusion of children from different socioeconomic, cultural, and geographical backgrounds in the process.

6

Good NGO practices related to child participation should be introduced to public institutions. NGOs should communicate with funding institutions and organizations to ensure that project criteria and grant announcements are formulated in a way that prioritizes child participation or takes into account that civil participation is not possible without child participation.

E. The Role of Children and Youth Groups

1

Children and youth groups should insist on being members who not only express their opinions but also influence decision-making processes and have the right to vote in order to support the realization of their participation rights.

2

They should regularly and actively carry out monitoring activities and bring existing shortcomings to the fore.

3

They should seek to use avenues for seeking rights and collaborate with NGOs and local authorities.

4

They should take care to use peaceful language in their internal processes, develop working practices with different children and youth groups, and support each other in organizing.

STANDARD 2: States must respect children's right to participate and their freedom of association in matters related to the environment.		
Structural Indicator	Process Indicator	Outcome Indicator
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At the national level, is there a law, regulation, strategy, or action plan that ensures children's participation in the work of relevant ministries? Are these documents aligned with the UN CRC and General Comment No. 26? • Are there child-participation mechanisms at the national and local levels? Do these mechanisms address environmental and climate-change issues? Is freedom of expression guaranteed? • Is there a legal basis or policy that protects the rights of child activists and child human rights defenders working on environmental issues? Are there safeguards against manipulation or tokenistic participation? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where children participate in the work of ministries, is this participation meaningful? Are children able to express their views freely, and are those views given due consideration? • Do children join participation mechanisms voluntarily? Are these mechanisms inclusive (in terms of age, gender, disability, socioeconomic background, and rural/urban differences)? Are safe spaces provided? • Do child activists know their rights? Do they have access to mechanisms to which they can turn in cases of rights violations? Do they face risks such as stigmatization, targeting, or manipulation in the media or public discourse? • Do State and civil society actors conduct awareness-raising activities to prevent adults from manipulating children or creating tokenistic forms of participation? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How many children are reached through the participation spaces opened by the Ministry of Environment, Urbanization and Climate Change? To what extent are children represented, and how inclusive are these processes? • Over the past ten years, how many environment- and climate-change-related initiatives have been carried out within mechanisms such as children's councils or child rights committees? Have these initiatives had any impact on public policies? • What is the number of complaints or submissions received from child activists through remedy or complaint mechanisms? Are the outcomes of these submissions protective of children's rights?

CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION IN ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE POLICIES IN TÜRKİYE

ICHILD Climate Movement

Human Rights Monitoring & Reporting Activities - II

ICHILD - ULUSLARARASI ÇOCUK HAKLARI ELÇİLERİ DERNEĞİ

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