

# Building Transformative, Collaborative, Feminist and Accountable Funding Ecosystems for Feminist Organisations in Türkiye

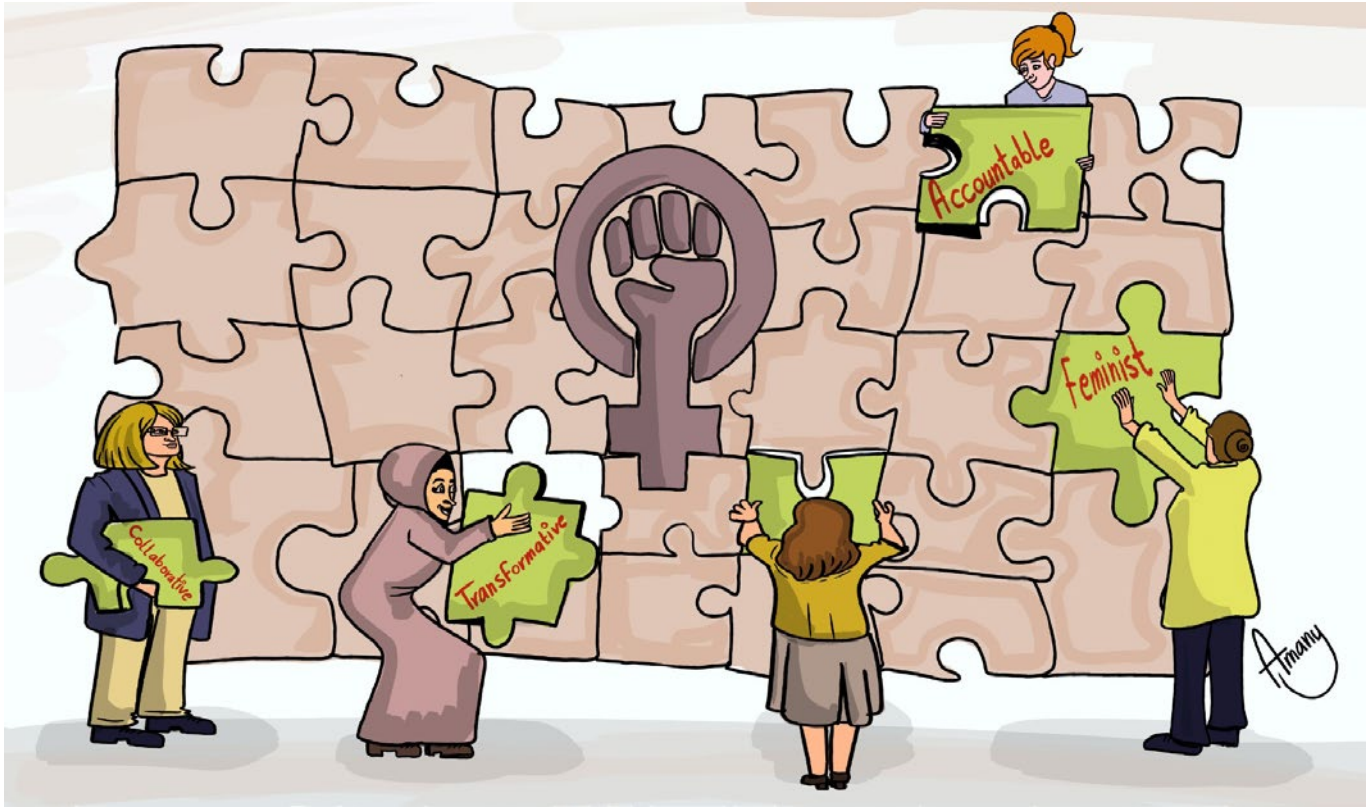
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# Contents

<b>Advocacy Summary</b>	236
Background and Objective	236
Literature Review	236
Key findings	237
Key Recommendations	238
Authors and Acknowledgements	239
Acronym List	240
<b>Introduction</b>	241
<b>Methodology</b>	243
<b>Literature Review</b>	245
<b>Findings</b>	251
<b>Conclusions and Way Forward</b>	263
<b>Recommendations</b>	267
Bibliography	270
Annex 1: Feminist Funding Ecosystem Progress Levels	273
Annex 2: A Letter to Feminist Community	274



## Advocacy Summary

### ■ Background and Objective

Feminist organisations in Türkiye struggle with financial and structural challenges due to declining international support, limited domestic funding, and political restrictions. This research explores how to build a transformative, collaborative, feminist, and accountable funding ecosystem that ensures long-term sustainability for feminist movements. It examines how official development assistance and private sector funding can be improved to better support feminist activism. In this context, a literature review was conducted first, followed by 20 in-depth interviews with Official Development Assistance (ODA) donors, private sector representatives, philanthropic organisations, feminist activists and organisations.

### ■ Literature Review

Feminist funding ecosystems aim to shift away from hierarchical donor-driven models toward movement-led, participatory, and sustainable financing structures. However, global data indicates that feminist organisations receive only 0.13% of total Official Development Assistance (ODA), with the majority of funding

directed toward governments or large institutions (AWID, 2021a). ODA and private sector funding remain largely inaccessible to feminist organisations due to a lack of transparency, bureaucratic barriers, and donor-driven priorities that do not align with feminist movements' needs (OECD, 2024). The private sector primarily engages in gender equality initiatives through short-term corporate social responsibility (CSR) projects, avoiding direct collaboration with feminist movements (Willems, 2022). Alternative feminist funding models—such as community-led funds, participatory grant-making, and social entrepreneurship—are emerging globally but remain underdeveloped in Türkiye (Akduran Erol and Aklar, 2023). To build a more effective feminist funding ecosystem, donors must ensure flexible, multi-year funding, engage feminist movements in decision-making, and support independent women's funds (Miller & Jones, 2019).

## ■ Key findings

The feminist funding ecosystem in Türkiye is still in its early stages and remains weak across most dimensions. While FFP has yet to become a transformative tool or a mechanism for increasing ODA funds, it continues to serve as a valuable advocacy instrument. FFP offers a framework for initiating national-level discussions on gender equality, but its potential remains largely untapped. Feminist organisations in Türkiye rely heavily on international funding due to the scarcity of domestic resources, which is largely a result of political barriers. Although ODA remains a critical funding source, the growing unpredictability of global crises, the shifting priorities of donor countries, and the rise of right-wing governments in ODA-DAC nations have made access to these funds increasingly uncertain.

Transparency and accessibility in funding continue to be significant challenges. With few exceptions, complex application processes, excessive reporting requirements, and donor-driven priorities limit the ability of feminist organisations to access long-term and sustainable funding. In Türkiye, both ODA providers and private sector institutions often collaborate with UN agencies on gender-related issues, seeking legitimacy while minimising political risks. However, engagement between the private sector and feminist movements remains minimal. Most corporate funding is allocated through CSR programs that fail to address structural inequalities, and businesses tend to avoid politically sensitive topics such as LGBTQI+ rights and reproductive justice. To ensure movement-led decision-making and financial resilience, diversifying fundraising models and establishing independent feminist funding structures is urgently needed.

## ■ Key Recommendations

### → ODA Providers:

- Prioritise Türkiye and gender equality with direct, flexible, and multi-year funding aligned with feminist values, avoiding intermediaries.
- Ensure transparency and simplify processes to make funds more accessible to grassroots feminist organisations.
- Support independent women's and feminist funds and embed intersectionality and crisis-responsiveness in all funding strategies.

### → Private Sector:

- Build trust-based partnerships and include feminist organisations in decision-making on funding and social investments.
- Develop joint funding pools with other actors and channel resources directly to feminist movements.
- Increase internal awareness on feminist movements and engage feminist intermediaries to guide funding practices.

### → Feminist Community:

- Advocate for direct ODA and resist its diversion to intermediaries and demand core, long-term funding to strengthen feminist movements' political power and sustainability.
- Diversify funding streams beyond ODA, mobilising local and private sector resources.
- Forge alliances with feminist actors inside the private sector and community to expand influence and solidarity networks.

## Authors and Acknowledgements

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feminist magazine in 1995 during her college years. She contributed to the *University Women United for Solidarity* initiative and *Akıllara Zarar* feminist magazine during that time. In 2000, she enrolled in the Women's Studies Master's Program at Istanbul University and completed her thesis on the gender dimension of privatisation. She was actively involved in establishing the Socialist Feminist Collective and contributed to the early years of *Feminist Politika* magazine. Her book "The Household, the State, and the Market" based on her doctoral dissertation completed in 2011, explored the topic of gender-sensitive budgeting in the context of social policies and women's labor. Since 2008, she has collaborated with numerous women's organisations, civil society organisations, and municipalities on gender-sensitive budgeting and equitable public service delivery.

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## Acronym List

AWID	Association for Women's Rights in Development	OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
AFD	French Development Agency	Prospera	Prospera International Network of Women's Funds
CERV	Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme	SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility	Sida	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
CSO	Civil Society Organisation	TIKA	Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency
DAC	Development Assistance Committee	TUSEV	Third Sector Foundation of Türkiye
EUD	European Union Delegation	UN	United Nations
GONGO	Government-organised Non-Governmental Organisation	UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
GRI	Global Reporting Initiative	UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
GDWG	Gender Donor Working Group	UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
FFP	Feminist Foreign Policy	UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisations	WEPs	Women's Empowerment Principle
ODA	Official Development Assistance		



## Introduction

The rights-based civic space in Türkiye is increasingly under threat due to growing political pressures, restrictive legal regulations, and shrinking funding opportunities. These conditions, together with the reinforcement of patriarchal discourse shaping policies and daily life, hinder the sustainability of the feminist movement by limiting access to financial resources and deepening power imbalances between donors and grantees. They also pose a challenge to feminist organisations in developing long-term resilience strategies.

In this context, ODA funding has played a crucial role in sustaining feminist advocacy in Türkiye. The most significant ODA funds for gender equality advocacy in Türkiye come from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) and the EU Delegation to Türkiye (EUD Türkiye). Sida's 20-year support for Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in Türkiye is now at risk due to Sweden's 2022 election, which brought a right-wing government to power and ended its feminist foreign policy. Additionally, Sweden's NATO membership negotiations with Türkiye have influenced its diplomatic priorities, potentially affecting its ODA allocation. In 2024, Sweden joined NATO with Türkiye's approval, reinforcing a shift toward maintaining good relations with the Turkish government, which may have further implications for funding feminist organisations. Similarly, EUD Türkiye remains a key ODA provider, but political negotiations increasingly shape its funding allocation. Since the 2016 Türkiye-EU migration agreement, which is renewed every five years, the Turkish state has insisted on managing most EU funds, significantly limiting direct support for CSOs. Additionally, since it does not contribute financially, Türkiye remains ineligible for the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme (CERV). Meanwhile, the rise of right-wing politics across Europe, reinforced by far-right gains in recent EU elections, is expected to shape EU policies on gender equality and human rights funding, potentially affecting resources allocated to feminist movements in Türkiye.

Against this backdrop, feminist organisations in Türkiye have struggled to survive, particularly in the last 15 years<sup>1</sup>, under a growing right-wing authoritarian and gender-oppressive regime in Türkiye. Public resources are inaccessible, and the private sector is ineffective in filling this gap. Private sector funding remains restricted mainly to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs, which favor short-term, project-based grants rather than sustained, flexible, or movement-building support. Therefore, the funding ecosystem in Türkiye is

1. For the historical evolution of shrinking civic space in Türkiye, see Büyükgöze 2023; Esen and Gümüşçü 2016.



underdeveloped, predominantly depending on international funds. ODA constitutes the largest share among these international funds, and the organisations with access to these funds are predominantly civil society organisations that engage in subgranting. The public funds are granted to service-based CSOs or Government-Organised Non-Governmental Organisations (GONGOs) rather than right-based organisations.

In response to similar challenges globally, feminist movements worldwide have increasingly sought to develop alternative funding models that prioritise collective decision-making, movement sustainability, and financial autonomy. These include community-led funding initiatives, intersectional philanthropy, participatory grant-making, and feminist investment models designed to reduce dependency on traditional donor structures. However, in Türkiye, such models remain primarily underdeveloped due to political and legal restrictions on civil society, the corporate sector's preference for short-term CSR initiatives over structural change, stigma around feminist and LGBTQI+ organisations, limited recognition for alternative feminist funding models, and economic instability that hinders long-term financial planning for feminist organisations.

This research examines the feminist funding ecosystem as a theoretical and practical framework. It seeks to investigate the current feminist funding ecosystem in Türkiye but also critically examine its limitations and propose pathways toward a more accountable, collaborative, and transformative funding structure. By incorporating insights from feminist organisations, ODA providers, private sector representatives, and feminist funding experts, this study aims to contribute to the ongoing discussion on creating sustainable financial infrastructures that empower feminist movements without compromising their core values. Ultimately, this research advocates for a feminist funding ecosystem that is financially viable and politically and ethically aligned with feminist principles, ensuring that feminist organisations can continue to thrive despite growing political and economic constraints.

Longstanding engagement in the feminist movement and experiences and insights from the research team played a crucial role in shaping the foundation of this research.

## Methodology

This research aims to analyse the feminist funding ecosystem in Türkiye by exploring the challenges and opportunities for feminist organisations in accessing sustainable financial resources. It addresses key questions, such as how to transform ODA financing mechanisms, and how Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP) commitments can transform funding sources to be more effective, transparent, and collaborative. It also questions how to integrate the private sector in funding feminist organisations, and how to build a multi-actor, sustainable funding ecosystem that responds to the different needs of feminist organisations at various levels. The research questions, centred around the three main problem areas of study, along with the supporting sub-questions, are as follows:

- **Research Question 1:** How can ODA funding be transformed into a more context-sensitive and sustainable funding centre in Türkiye? How can the funding processes become more equitable, participatory, and feminist?
- **Research Question 2:** How can the private sector (corporate foundations and corporations) play a new role in funding feminist organisations in Türkiye? What are the necessary conditions for this?
- **Research Question 3:** How can the feminist movement and women+ organisations benefit from the developments and discussions taking place around the feminist funding ecosystem and mechanisms that are aligned with feminist values and based on feminist solidarity across the world?

This research employs a qualitative methodology to explore the feminist funding ecosystem in Türkiye, with a focus on ODA, private sector contributions, and feminist funding models. The study is structured around a thematic analysis of in-depth interviews and supported by a literature review. Thematic analysis was used to identify recurring patterns and key themes within the data, allowing for an in-depth understanding of the dynamics. Additionally, a comprehensive literature review contextualised the findings within global feminist funding trends, drawing from sources such as AWID, OECD, and Prospera International Network of Women's Funds.

To explore these research questions, key stakeholders from ODA funding agencies, the private sector, and feminist organisations were identified using a purposive sampling approach. The research team also identified informants/activists whose insights were sought for each question. Before interviewing the ODA donor representatives, OECD data was analysed to assess the total ODA funding these countries provided to Türkiye. In total, the research team

conducted **21** in-depth interviews. Of these interviews, **6** were with ODA donor representatives,<sup>2</sup> **7** with private sector institutions currently offering funding or with the potential to do so, **8** with key informants and international women's organisations. The views of feminist women+ movements operating in Türkiye regarding the funding ecosystem are integrated from Silva's research (Akduran Erol and Aklar 2023) which provided critical perspectives from feminist women+ movements in Türkiye. Silva's research findings were reflected in the recommendations to ensure that the analysis not only reflects donor and institutional perspectives but is also grounded in the lived experiences of feminist actors.

The political climate in Türkiye also significantly impacted the research process, particularly in interviews with private sector representatives and ODA providers. In discussions with the private sector, it became evident that these conversations would likely not have occurred without anonymity. In contrast, ODA providers were informed from the outset that institutional names would be referenced, leading representatives to exercise even greater caution in their statements. To ensure methodological integrity, it was clearly stated that findings and direct quotations from interviews would only be included with interviewees' approval, and this principle was strictly followed. All but one ODA provider gave feedback, allowing the text to be finalised in consultation with them. However, one of the ODA providers later decided not to be included in the study, requesting that all references to their interview be removed. This entire process highlights not only the structural and data-related limitations of ODA funding in Türkiye but also the intense political sensitivity that researchers of this paper had to navigate throughout the study.

## Limitations

The first limitation encountered in this research was the lack of precise data on ODA allocation in Türkiye. Funding flows through multiple channels, including government agencies, international organisations, and civil society actors, making tracking difficult. The OECD's data system is also complex, making it challenging to determine how much ODA funding reaches feminist organisations and through which mechanisms.

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2. The interviews were conducted with representatives from the German Embassy, the Dutch Embassy, the French Embassy, Sida, UN Women Türkiye, and the EUD, including the EUD's gender focal point. These ODA donors (excluding UN Women and the EUD) have either formally adopted or previously committed to a feminist foreign policy (FFP). An exception is the EUD, which, despite not having a formal FFP commitment, has made significant contributions to gender equality initiatives in Türkiye. Its substantial investment and sustained support for women's rights and inclusive policies position it as a key actor, warranting its inclusion alongside FFP-aligned donors. All information pertaining to Sida in this research has been exclusively derived from the Open.Aid website.

Beyond data challenges, the structure of ODA funding itself adds another layer of complexity. ODA operates through both centralised and decentralised funding streams, which affect the transparency and predictability of resources for feminist movements. While embassies play a key role in decentralised funding, they cannot map centrally allocated funds fully, making it difficult to establish a clear picture of funding distribution.

## Literature Review

Achieving gender equality clearly needs the presence of strong feminist movements. However, in addition to the existence of the climate of multiple crises, the world is witnessing the rise of anti-gender movements and increasing restrictions on civic space which is not coincidental (Alliance for Feminist Movements 2022). Feminist movements are waging this struggle with significantly diminished access to funding. While billions are pledged at international forums like the Generation Equality Forum, only a tiny fraction (7.4%) reaches feminist movements. Between 2015 and 2019, half of the women's rights organisations applying for funding from the Global Fund for Women and a 2021 assessment by the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) indicated that 48% of women's rights and feminist organisations in the Majority World, had annual budgets below USD 30,000 (Alliance for Feminist Movements 2022 & AWID 2021a). This underscores the urgent need for increased investment in feminist organisations and movements in all countries to build a future rooted in gender equality (Alliance for Feminist Movements 2022).

It would be appropriate to examine the funding support provided by official development aid and charitable organisations more thoroughly to better illustrate the situation from the perspective of women's rights organisations and feminist movements.

## Official Development Assistance

ODA and charitable foundations predominantly sustain the financial framework for women's rights organisations and feminist movements. Nevertheless, these sources frequently fail to satisfy the financial requirements of these groups. Furthermore, a mere 0.13% of total ODA and 0.42% of foundation funding are expressly designated for women's rights and feminist organisations (AWID 2021a). According to a recent OECD report, ODA allocated to support women's rights organisations, movements, and state institutions decreased by approximately

29%, from USD 891 million in 2019-2020 to an annual average of USD 631 million in 2021-2022 (OECD 2024a). The decrease was even more significant when excluding funding directed to state institutions such as ministries of women, dropping by around 44%, from USD 767 million to USD 432 million in 2021-2022 (OECD 2024a). While there are pockets of support, these significant gaps in funding and inclusion persist, especially for grassroots feminist organisations in the Majority World (Deepak 2023). This underfunding, exacerbated by peer funders changing course, limits the impact of feminist organisations, especially in sectors like violence prevention and women's rights.

As ODA countries diminish their financial support (OECD 2024a) and global funders' commitment to gender issues wanes (Rajvanshi 2024), the private sector can fulfil the funding requirements of feminist organisations centred on gender equality. Nonetheless, partnerships with the private sector do not offer a straightforward trajectory for feminist organisations.

## Private Sector Partnerships

Feminist organisations' primary motivation for pursuing private sector partnerships is often the increased access to funding and potential visibility. Feminist activists have expressed concerns that these collaborations could dilute feminist messages or shift the perception of feminism towards a consumption-oriented and individualistic model rather than one focused on structural and societal change (Willems 2022). While accepting corporate partnerships may give feminist organisations more significant funding and visibility, they may require them to compromise their values and priorities while corporations' dominance, power, and resource inequities leads to marginalisation of them (Grosser 2016).

While the private sector's funding relationship with women's organisations primarily emerge through CSR initiatives, the main criticism indicate that CSR initiatives the involvement of women's organisations in new governance systems must be guaranteed, and their participation in the dialogue should be increased to improve the accountability of these initiatives (Grosser and Moon 2005; Grosser and McCarthy 2019)

CSR methods, especially in developing countries, oversimplify women's empowerment by emphasising individual empowerment stories. They ignore power dynamics' complexity and are imposed top-down without consulting women (McCarthy

2017). According to Adrienne Roberts (2015), “transnational business feminism<sup>3</sup>” reduces women to economic resources by framing women’s empowerment projects as ways to use their labor for financial gain rather than addressing structural challenges (Roberts 2015). They tend to see women’s empowerment as a financial benefit for companies rather than as a means to address the root causes of gender inequality or to transform power structures (Calkin 2016). These projects, especially in the Majority World, are seen as neocolonial power dynamics rather than gender equality attempts (Ozkazanc-Pan 2019). Therefore, engagement of the corporate world in women’s organisations carries the danger of co-option of feminism by neoliberalism (Fraser 2013; Prügl 2015).

## Feminist Funding Ecosystem

At its core, feminist funding ecosystems embody the ideal of transitioning from a structure where grantees are dependent on and subordinate to donors to a dynamic, interconnected, learning, transparent, intersectional, and inclusive funding ecosystem based on the interdependence and relationality of all actors (Arutyunova 2018; Miller and Jones 2019). The feminist funding ecosystem emphasises the sustainability of resources distributed to feminist movements. It adopts an approach that prioritises the needs and priorities of feminist movements rather than the issues funders consider significant. As proposed in the AWID report (Miller and Jones 2019), all participants are crucial in creating a feminist funding ecosystem. Activists can challenge systems by being critical, tracking financial flows, and advocating for resource redistribution that meets their needs; they can challenge fragmented funding sources by focusing on intersectional issues. Funders should rigorously align their grantmaking policies with feminist and social justice values, advocate for additional funding from other sources, and involve feminist movements in strategic and financial decision-making to maintain transparency and accountability (Miller and Jones 2019).

A recent study by Silva Association, also offers similar conclusions from the perspective of feminist women+organisations in Türkiye and emphasises a climate that ensures mutual empowerment, learning, and change in clearly defined and participatory planned funding processes is needed (Akduran Erol and Aklar 2023).

Current women’s rights and feminist organisational financing streams fall into three pillars: self-generated institutional, commercial, and movement funding

3. Transnational business feminism is a politico-economic project launched in response to the 2008 global crisis, and has been another significant initiative to promote gender equality through the efforts of corporate actors. It is backed by a coalition of states, financial institutions, the UN, corporations, and CSOs, and it promotes the role of business in advancing gender equality.



(Arutyunova 2018). Institutional and commercial funding do not offer a smooth path for women's organisations and feminist movements. Autonomous financing is becoming increasingly significant, particularly when the civic space and the operating environment for women's rights actors are shrinking (Arutyunova 2018). The COVID-19 pandemic significantly contributed to the proliferation of autonomous resourcing, a relatively new funding method (IWDA, 2021; Jones 2022). The political and financial power of "autonomous resourcing" is highlighted (Dolker 2019). The feminist movement has used various strategies to create autonomous resources while forming alliances and benefiting from international support. Unlike working with external funding, autonomous funding has provided feminist movements empowerment, flexibility and the ability to adapt to emergencies quickly (Tesorio 2022) with setting their agendas, responding swiftly to urgent issues, building alliances, and fostering a solidarity economy through creative fundraising methods (AWID 2021b). However, its limited financial capacity can restrict movements' reach and legitimacy (AWID 2021b).

As an alternative to conventional financing sources, women's funds frequently prioritise community-driven solutions, participatory grant-making, and sustained commitment to feminist causes (Arutyunova and Clark 2013) by putting feminist groups' needs and voices front and centre and subverting established financing hierarchies (Miller and Jones 2019). Since most of the women's funds are born out of movements and maintain linkages to the communities they serve and the context, their resilience is crucial to maintaining the activities of global movements promoting gender justice (Fenomenal Funds 2023). According to Fenomenal Funds, a global initiative established in 2020 composed of women's funds, private philanthropies, and the Prospera International Network of Women's Funds (Prospera INWF), based on feminist funding principles<sup>4</sup>, women's funds and private foundations should have equal power in decision making (Fenomenal Funds 2023), emphasising the need for feminist philanthropy (Daly and Carrasco-Scherer 2017).

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4. <https://astraefoundation.org/wp-content/themes/astraefoundation/microsites/feminist-funding-principles/index.html>



## A Short Glance at Financial Environment of Feminist and Rights-Based Civil Society in Türkiye

Especially over the past two decades, feminist movements and organisations in Türkiye have grown significantly alongside the growing influence of feminist politics across civil society organisations. While deep-rooted history of feminist movement within civic space in Türkiye, feminist organisations today face increasing challenges in an increasingly restrictive civic space. At the same time, in line with the anti-gender movement at global level, opposition to gender equality has intensified, often referred to as a ‘gender backlash.’ This backlash includes various regressive actions aimed at undermining women’s and LGBTQI+ rights, manifesting through political polarisation, restrictive legislation, and social marginalisation (Atay, 2024) with increasing restrictions on civic space (Eldén and Levin, 2018). An overview of recent challenges in Türkiye’s civic space provides essential context for the discussion on the feminist movement’s financial sustainability.

Financial challenges force feminist CSOs to prioritise survival over sustainability, as economic instability and targeted repression deepen their financial struggles (Akduran Erol & Aklar, 2023). The restrictive nature of Türkiye’s philanthropic landscape further exacerbates the financial struggles of feminist organisations. Despite recent initiatives, philanthropy in Türkiye remains traditional, with power imbalances between donors and grantees and limited transparency and inclusion. The prevailing grant culture fails to address the shrinking civic space, as GONGO-type organisations uphold strict administrative and fiscal barriers that exclude independent CSOs (Akduran Erol and Aklar 2023; Büyükgöze 2023).

Beyond financial constraints, CSOs frequently face challenges such as excessive audits, restricted access to funding, exclusion from state–CSO meetings, arbitrary arrests, and forced shutdowns. (Doyle 2017; TÜSEV 2023). While new legal regulations have increased penalties and imposed additional sanctions on organisations, significantly complicating their financial sustainability (TÜSEV, 2024). New draft legislative regulations are also on the agenda which carries the risk of making all these legitimate activities of civil society organisations subject to investigation and punishment (Amnesty International, 2024). If enacted, this law could severely restrict the civic space in Türkiye (TÜSEV, 2024) in particular the access to international funding opportunities.

In this challenging landscape, anti-gender movements, misogyny, and escalating political pressure continue to marginalise feminist and LGBTQI+ organisations. In addition, the financial needs of the feminist movement have become more

visible due to the rapid impoverishment and increased political targeting of feminist activists within society (Akduran Erol and Aklar 2023).

CSOs receiving international funding often face smear campaigns, particularly those advocating for human rights, women's rights, LGBTQI+ rights, ethnic minorities, and migrants. They and their funders are frequently accused of terrorism or being "foreign agents." Additionally, Türkiye's tax policies hinder the growth of CSOs by taxing nonprofit entities like commercial ones and providing tax-exempt status arbitrarily. This lack of transparency in tax policies limits the financial support available, with tax incentives benefiting only a few organisations. There is also an absence of systematic public funding that supports the sustainability and development of CSOs, which constrains their capacity to foster social change.

In addition to all the challenges described above in the funding ecosystem for feminist organisations, the last few years have been marked by disasters, crises and attacks on vested rights. The crises in Türkiye have become all but perpetual amid the mounting threat against the feminist movement's gains, deepening problems faced in the realm of human rights fueled by the growing authoritarianism of the regime, the past two decades' sharpest fall in national economy, and the Türkiye-Syria earthquakes in 2023 that struck 11 provinces, resulting in immeasurable losses and an uncontrollable disaster.

Last but not least, Türkiye currently lacks a national women's fund or a feminist funding organisation. Until 2022, this gap remained unaddressed, with no formal initiatives to establish a sustainable, movement-driven funding mechanism for feminist organisations.

## Findings

### I. ODA Contributions to Women's Rights and Feminist Organisations in Türkiye

Between 2016 and 2022, Sweden contributed 133 million USD, the Netherlands 116 million USD, France 1.02 billion USD, and Germany 1.89 billion USD to ODA funding (OECD 2024b). While funding from Sweden and the Netherlands to Turkish government institutions is relatively rare, most ODA funding from Germany and France was directed toward government institutions, primarily for migration and infrastructure projects.

Over 27 years (1998–2024), Sida has distributed a total of 186 million USD, with 51.21% (95.29 million USD) directed at civil society, and 12% (22.32 million USD) specifically to feminist organisations<sup>5</sup> (Openaid 2024). However, conducting a similar analysis for the Netherlands is not possible due to a lack of comparable data. Nevertheless, it has been stated that approximately 50% of the total 1.5 million EUR distributed annually through the Matra and Human Rights Grant Programs of the Dutch Embassy is allocated to women's rights initiatives.<sup>6</sup>

When focusing on the allocation of ODA funds to gender-related initiatives (classified under significant and principal objectives) and directed to civil society, Sweden and the Netherlands emerge as the leading contributors to women's and feminist organisations despite their overall funding being significantly lower than Germany and France's. Notably, in 2015—just a year after Sweden had announced its FFP—Sweden allocated a record-breaking 3.8 million USD under the principal objective category for gender equality in Türkiye (OECD 2024c).

#### 1. Türkiye's Middle-Income Label: A Double-Edged Sword for Feminist Funding

Türkiye's classification as an upper middle-income country has significantly influenced its standing in ODA funding allocations. Many international donors rely on income-based eligibility criteria, leading to Türkiye's exclusion from crucial funding streams for feminist and women's rights organisations.

5. In Türkiye, Sida has been providing funding to feminist organisations since 2005. The proportion of total annual funding allocated to feminist organisations has varied over the years. In 2024, 16% of the total funding was directed to feminist organisations, while in 2023, this share was 8%. In previous years, the allocation fluctuated, with 23% in 2022, 21% in 2021, 17% in both 2020 and 2019, 9% in 2018, 8% in 2017, 15% in 2016, and 18% in 2015. Earlier, feminist organisations received 11% of the funding in 2014, 10% in 2013, 6% in 2012, 9% in 2011, 11% in 2010, 8% in 2009, 9% in 2008, 12% in 2007, 6% in 2006, and 10% in 2005 (Openaid 2024).

6. Information gathered from the interview with the Dutch Embassy.

After the announcement of its FFP, the Netherlands launched global special grant programs for feminist and women's organisations. However, the geographical focus of these funding programs did not include Türkiye, as the country is now categorised as “developed.”

Türkiye has simultaneously transitioned into a donor role, conducting development projects through its development agency, Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA)<sup>7</sup>. This dual position—simultaneously an ODA recipient and emerging donor—complicates its standing in global development frameworks.

While Türkiye is classified as an upper middle-income country based on economic metrics, its progress in societal and gender equality remains misaligned with this categorisation. According to the 2024 Gender Equality Index, Türkiye ranks among the lowest globally, positioned 20th from the bottom, trailing nations such as Nigeria, Gambia, and Senegal. Furthermore, the World Economic Forum's June 2024 statistics place Türkiye at 127th in gender parity. The gap between economic classification and gender equality realities highlights the challenges of employing broad income-based categorisations to assess developmental needs.

Türkiye's receipt of ODA funds has been further constrained by shifting global priorities due to escalating international crises and conflicts. Wars in Ukraine, Palestine, and Sudan have led to a reallocation of funds toward urgent humanitarian interventions, as these crises present more significant needs. Moreover, it is generally expected that ODA flows to Türkiye may decline as resources are prioritised for countries facing more severe challenges.

Regarding the classification of Türkiye, UN Women Türkiye acknowledges that development-focused aid in Türkiye is not at the same level as in other recipient countries. However, the decline in ODA financial aid does not reflect the realities on the ground, and many global targets remain unmet. UN Women's Gender Snapshot 2024 report highlights the urgent actions needed to achieve gender equality. Given this pressing agenda, the contraction of essential ODA financial aid during such a critical period inevitably impacts efforts on the ground. They underlined that the decline in ODA financial aid imposes significant constraints on organisations, both regarding program implementation and sustaining their structures. Particularly in a period of rising anti-gender movements, it is crucial to ensure uninterrupted financial support that reaches local organisations and strengthens global connections among gender advocates. Additionally, the

7. For the TIKA projects in the field of Women's Empowerment please see: <https://tika.gov.tr/en/activity/womens-empowerment/>. The analysis of these projects through a feminist lens is the focus of a separate study.

close link between ODA decisions and shifting geopolitical agendas makes organisations heavily reliant on external funding vulnerable.

## **2. Uneven Commitments: ODA Providers' Diverging Approaches to Gender Equality in Türkiye**

The prioritisation of gender equality and women's rights among ODA providers in Türkiye varies significantly. While Sweden, the Netherlands, and the EU have placed gender equality at the core of their aid strategies, others, such as Germany and France, take a more situational approach. Germany recognises gender equality in policy documents but does not consistently integrate it into its ODA framework, often treating it as secondary to broader development goals like migration and infrastructure. The Netherlands, in contrast, directs a significant portion of its decentralised ODA funding (30-40%) to women's rights issues, aligning with its FFP. France also funds gender-related initiatives in Türkiye, particularly through multi-sectoral aid streams, but transparency around funding allocation remains limited.

According to some of the key informants, as a strong advocate in this field, Sweden's potential policy shift could create uncertainties regarding the long-term sustainability of core funding for feminist organisations in Türkiye, potentially putting their continuity and impact at risk. UN Women Türkiye also acknowledges that in recent years, factors such as the increasing intensity and influence of anti-gender movements not only at the national but also at the global level, shrinking funding opportunities, and restrictions on civil liberties have directly impacted the work of women's organisations. Therefore, they state that partnerships with women's organisations and civil society organisations play a crucial role in mitigating the impact of existing restrictions (Interview with UN Women Türkiye).

## **3. Transparency in Grant Processes: Practices and Implications**

Transparency in grant allocation and management varies among ODA providers in Türkiye, and political and strategic considerations shape it. The Netherlands and France<sup>8</sup> have shifted toward confidentiality in funding disclosures, citing the need to protect CSOs, though this limits CSOs' ability to make independent decisions about transparency. In contrast, Germany operates a Transparenz Portal<sup>9</sup>. At the same time, Sweden's OpenAid platform stands out as a good practice, offering detailed and accessible data on multi-year ODA allocations, including funding for feminist organisations. Another noteworthy example is

8. [data.aide-developpement.gouv.fr](https://data.aide-developpement.gouv.fr)

9. <https://www.transparenzportal.bund.de/en/>

Türkiye's centralised online system for tracking EU funding to CSOs, which enables a more comprehensive assessment of the impact of these financial flows.

#### 4. The Impact of Feminist Foreign Policy in Türkiye

The implementation of FFP in Türkiye exhibits significant variability across donor countries. FFP promises systemic change and gender mainstreaming in donor countries' foreign assistance frameworks. Most FFP donor countries commit to flexible funding globally, yet such commitments often lack implementation in Türkiye, where rigid project-specific funding models dominate. Except for Sweden, there is little evidence of FFP influencing embassy- or development-agency-led funding practices.

In the context of Türkiye, Sweden is the only example where we can assess the impact of FFP on development assistance over eight years. Its implementation provides valuable insights and good practices regarding FFP application. However, Sweden's exit from FFP marked a significant shift in its foreign policy and development aid, leading to the adoption of a new strategy for civil society cooperation on February 2, 2024.<sup>10</sup> This strategy suspended some civil society partnerships in Türkiye, with only a few exceptions. Sweden's withdrawal from FFP introduces significant uncertainties for feminist organisations, as future funding priorities remain unclear. Uncertainty has already impacted organisations in Türkiye, as illustrated by layoffs at gender-focused CSOs such as Association for Struggle Against Sexual Violence<sup>11</sup>. The ongoing geopolitical shifts (e.g., the war in Ukraine) are expected to influence Sida's funding strategies. Sweden's former FFP, announced in 2014, did not have a specific funding target. However, the ODA funds Sweden provided to Türkiye with a "principal" objective, reached its highest level of USD 3.8 million in 2015, marking the peak between 2009 and 2022. This achievement can be interpreted as a clear impact of the FFP.

France establishes specific funding targets linked to gender equality within its development cooperation. Establishing the Support Fund for Feminist Organisations in 2020 shows France's commitment to directly supporting feminist organisations worldwide. However, the tangible impact of these targets remain unclear, as this fund is not operating in Türkiye.

Germany's FFP Guidelines aim to deliver 100% of humanitarian assistance in at least a gender-sensitive manner. However, interviews suggest these goals remain abstract and challenging to quantify. The guidelines also highlight the

10. <https://www.openaid.se/en/contributions/SE-0-SE-6-17014>

11. <https://cinselsiddetlemucadele.org/2024/12/27/cinsel-siddetle-mucadele-derneginden-bilgilendirme/>



importance of the Istanbul Convention, but the practical application of these commitments in Türkiye appears minimal. Despite acknowledging women's interests in Germany's foreign policy, the broader goal of systemic change has not been realised. This suggests a need for more actionable strategies beyond policy documents.

In line with its FFP, the Netherlands has initiated two strategic partnerships in Türkiye and organised four women's rights consultations. Through these regional consultations, it actively engages with women's organisations and independent grassroots feminists nationwide, demonstrating its commitment to supporting women's rights. Their internal FFP guidelines exist but are not publicly disclosed. While women's rights were already a funding priority, FFP has facilitated and increased gender mainstreaming in broader activities. The Netherlands does not establish explicit FFP funding targets. Instead, FFP in Dutch development cooperation focuses on integrating gender mainstreaming across activities without directly linking it to funding allocations.

The EU does not operate under an FFP framework but integrates gender-related objectives through its comprehensive Gender Action Plan III and Country Level Implementation Plan (CLIP). These plans are aligned with gender equality principles. Gender Action Plan III outlines five key pillars of action, including a significant commitment: by 2025, 85% of all new actions across external relations will contribute to gender equality and women's empowerment.<sup>12</sup>

## 5. Preference for Collaborations with UN Agencies

Another critical issue with ODA funding in the Turkish context is that increasingly, it is being routed through UN agencies instead of directly reaching local organisations. The EUD collaborates with UN Women on projects like "Strengthening Civil Society Capacities and Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships to Advance Women's Rights and Gender Equality", granting EUR 4.5 million over three years. Similarly, Sida's funding to UN partners increased from 34% of total funding in 2022 to 46% in 2023 (OpenAid 2024). The EUD sees UN Women as a key partner due to their expertise in managing large-scale financing and ability to connect with diverse grassroots organisations while avoiding political entanglements. The Netherlands generally favors direct CSO support and does not systematically use UN agencies, except for specific cases, it primarily funds UN agencies through central mechanisms. However, under the Matra Program, which should target local and national organisations, the Netherlands supported in the past various UN

12. [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/gender-action-plan-iii-towards-gender-equal-world\\_en](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/gender-action-plan-iii-towards-gender-equal-world_en)



agencies for niche projects. France and Germany provide project-based funding to UN agencies but do not use them as primary grant distributors. Donors trust UN agencies for their intense monitoring, evaluation, and reporting mechanisms, ensuring compliance with funding objectives and transparency. Additionally, UN agencies are perceived to have operational capacity, established networks, neutrality in fund allocation, and the ability to engage across multiple policy levels.

UN Women Türkiye states that it carries out this grant distribution role under its Operational Mandate (Implementation Support Role), one of its three globally defined areas of authority while considering its strategic priorities. UN Women Türkiye has most recently implemented the “Strong Civic Space for Gender Equality Project” (October 2021-2024) with financial support from the EUD. It has provided funding support to 49 CSOs within this framework. UN Women Türkiye implements various projects with CSOs and the presidency, executive, and judiciary bodies as beneficiaries. UN Women acknowledges the political, economic, and social conditions and, as well as the associated political risks in this process. Unlike civil society organisations, they operate with a longer-term projection, allowing them to strategically navigate and manage these risks strategically as they move forward.

In response to the role of third parties and UN Agencies serving as sub-granting mechanisms, UN Women Türkiye stated that one key reason is to enhance access to funding, as grants provided by the EUD and embassies come with significant barriers, including project writing expertise and language requirements. This often results in limited long-term access to a select group of organisations, while smaller and newer local CSOs struggle to obtain the resources they need.

The relationship between UN Women and civil society—particularly the women’s movement and activists—is ongoing and organic, as UN Women emerged from feminist advocacy. Many of its staff come from activist backgrounds, maintaining a continuous connection with the movement. Structured engagement occurs through regular meetings where priorities are set and corresponding support measures are planned, while the most formalised collaboration—financial and technical support—is provided through open calls in line with transparency and accountability principles.

## **6. Challenging Constraints: How ODA Donors Engage with Türkiye’s Gender Policies**

Although aware of the challenges faced by feminist organisations in a restrictive political environment, most ODA donors emphasise the importance of communication,

negotiation, and collaboration with the state as a means to achieve meaningful societal impact. The EUD continues to support gender-related projects and has adjusted the Turkish translation of the project title “Gender Sensitive Planning and Budgeting” to “Women-Men Equality Sensitive Planning and Budgeting,” reflecting a shift in terminology.<sup>13</sup> However, this adjustment demonstrates a response to governmental preferences rather than a reframing initiated by the EU. Germany promotes diplomatic dialogue, by actively raising the Istanbul Convention in bureaucratic meetings, while France prioritises civil society support and adapts its language to maintain engagement. The Netherlands also undertakes similar efforts to promote gender equality through formal dialogues, public diplomacy, and advocacy efforts. They bring up women’s rights and the fight against violence against women in conversations with Turkish counterparts.

Donors focus on supporting civil society and engaging in diplomatic dialogue, but the political climate constrains their impact.

## **7. Challenges and Debates Around Core Funding for Feminist Organisations**

Core funding, which provides financial support for general operations (such as human resources, rent, administrative expenditures, etc.), is a significant facilitator for the sustainability and long-term impact of feminist organisations. However, donor countries have different attitudes toward core funding, shaped by accountability concerns, procedural constraints, and evolving policy priorities.

The EUD in Türkiye has no theoretical restrictions on providing core funding. However, due to the lack of human resources and the complex tender processes that organisations would be subject to, it prefers collaborating with UN agencies and other intermediaries. While intermediaries like UN Women could facilitate core funding, this approach may still be constrained by EU procedures and donor commitments, which prioritise project-specific funding models. Nevertheless, despite the current emphasis on project-based financing, the EUD is also exploring ways to increase core funding within these collaborations.

France acknowledges the importance of core funding. However, it was noted that implementing such support would require changes to public accounting rules in Paris, making immediate action difficult. For the Netherlands, core funding might face Dutch people’s opposition over development aid expenditures. If core funding leads to misuse, even minor scandals could trigger widespread public and political backlash, jeopardising other funding streams. As they have

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13. [https://ab.gov.tr/turkiyede-cinsiyet-odakli-planlama-ve-butcelemenin-uygulanmasi\\_52223.html](https://ab.gov.tr/turkiyede-cinsiyet-odakli-planlama-ve-butcelemenin-uygulanmasi_52223.html)

expressed, despite persistent requests over the past 20 years to provide core funding, the recent government change and Sida's shift away from this practice make it increasingly unlikely.

## 8. Coordination and Communication Among ODA Providers

Coordination among gender-focused ODA providers remain critical to maximising impact and efficiency in allocation. Efforts such as the Gender Donor Working Group (GDWG)<sup>14</sup>, coordinated by the EUD Gender Focal Point, show potential. However, there is a long way to align strategies, schedules, and practices. In addition, its temporary status (two years) and reliance on external funding may lead to concerns about a lack of institutional commitment from the EU in contributing to gender policies at the national level.

The existence of GDWG may facilitate better coordination among donors, potentially reducing redundancies and streamlining grant application processes for feminist organisations. GDWG could help mitigate the burden on grantees by fostering information-sharing and aligning funding timelines, allowing them to focus more on program implementation rather than administrative workload. However, without a long-term commitment and structural integration into EU mechanisms, its effectiveness in shaping sustainable gender-focused ODA strategies remain uncertain.

## II. The Potentiality of Corporate Giving and Philanthropy of Private Sector in Türkiye for the Feminist Funding Ecosystem

This section examines the current state of private-sector funding for feminist organisations in Türkiye based on in-depth interviews conducted with representatives of private sector institutions<sup>15</sup> supporting civil society organisations through various resources, including CSR collaborations, corporate foundations, or different methods of giving.

14. The Gender Donor Working Group comprises representatives from the EU Delegation Türkiye, the German Embassy, Sida Türkiye (Sweden), the Norwegian Embassy, the UK Embassy, and the Netherlands Embassy. While previously inactive, the group was revitalised a year ago following the appointment of Gender Focal Point Amra Levnjak, is seconded and funded by Sweden, who played a key role in strengthening engagement with rights-based civil society organisations working on gender issues. However, as this is not an ordinary EU position, it lacks guaranteed continuity.

15. The term "private sector institutions" in this research refers to holding companies, corporate companies, corporate foundations, and banks that were interviewed. These institutions also function as key corporate and philanthropic actors within the broader private sector ecosystem.

## 1. Position of Private Sector Institutions Towards Philanthropy and Funding

Despite growing awareness of attacks on women's rights and gender equality, Türkiye's severe economic conditions create uncertainty about the impact of financial support for feminist organisations. While there is consensus on the necessity of such funding, economic instability has made it difficult for private sector entities to initiate new feminist/gender-oriented investments. This financial strain is expected to affect CSR budgets, leading to reductions by 2025.

Additionally, Türkiye's political climate, characterised by a rising anti-gender movement, the government's intolerance toward the concept of gender, and the removal of gender-related terminology from public institutions' vocabulary discourages the private sector from openly funding feminist organisations. As a result, private sector actors hesitate to openly fund feminist organisations, fearing potential backlash or being perceived as opposing government policies. Concerns over reputational risks, regulatory scrutiny, or jeopardising business relationships with state institutions further deter companies from forming direct partnerships with feminist groups. This reluctance significantly narrows the opportunities for collaboration, reinforcing the financial precarity of feminist organisations and limiting the scope of private sector contributions to gender equality initiatives.

Türkiye does not have large-scale philanthropic foundations similar to those in other parts of the world. The most noteworthy finding about corporate giving in Türkiye is that many holding companies - among them, one of the wealthiest foundations in Europe- created a closed ecosystem by working within their affiliated foundations or organisations. Donations and social investments were confined mainly to this ecosystem.

International corporate foundations and philanthropic umbrella organisations play a crucial role in enhancing the strategic development of national foundations. By contributing to field monitoring and fostering knowledge exchange, these institutions help shape funding strategies for gender equality initiatives.

## 2. Relevance of Social Investments with Gender Equality

Regarding the issues that private sector institutions prefer to invest in; they tend to prioritise the societal problems with high visibility, rapid impact and high return. They like to invest strategically and politically in these areas. Many holding companies and corporate foundations focus their social investments on education and health, integrating gender equality within broader CSR principles rather than as a standalone issue. Some private sector institutions focus on

gender-specific issues such as combating violence against women, promoting workplace equality, and supporting women's employment<sup>16</sup>. However, topics like abortion rights, sexual health, sexual orientation, and gender identity remain avoided mainly due to political sensitivities.

When the development of gender equality initiatives within the private sector institutions' historical trajectory is examined, corporate foundation representatives attribute the gender sensitivity within their organisations to the importance placed on this issue by their founders—particularly in family businesses—where a central or leading female figure within the family often champions the cause. Women on the board of directors have sometimes driven these efforts by donating their assets.

Reporting requirements in terms of sustainability commitments is another driving force that has a positive impact on forcing them to engage in gender equality initiatives, enabling the emergence of other intersecting themes, such as climate justice. Many organisations integrate gender themes into their CSR principles to align with international protocols, such as the UN Women's Global Compact and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

For private sector institutions, incorporating gender equality into CSR strategies protects brand reputation, especially in sectors targeting female consumers. In certain industries, companies may also align with values such as sexual health if relevant to their products or services. Even among private sector institutions that prioritise gender equality, structured long-term funding is rare. Instead, most private sector companies prefer one-off donations, event sponsorships, and short-term collaborations within CSR projects.

### **3. Private Sector Engagement with Feminist and Women's Organisations**

The private sector's engagement with feminist organisations remains superficial. Private sector institutions often lack knowledge about these organisations' work and perceive them as rigid, challenging to collaborate with, or politically marginal. Additionally, LGBTQI+ organisations are notably excluded from discussions, reflecting a significant recognition gap.

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16. Beyond the findings from the interview discussions and the philanthropy and funding preferences of the private sector on feminist organisations, it is important to highlight the active involvement of major Turkish holdings in the HeForShe campaign<sup>#</sup>, launched under the initiative of UN Women in 2014. In its early years, companies invested in various areas, including mainstreaming gender equality within their institutions, sports, and technology. Although its visibility and impact have diminished over time, these efforts continue. This campaign provides a significant insight and foundation for understanding how a segment of the private sector in Türkiye approaches the issue of gender equality.

Feminist organisations and individuals often engage in internal corporate initiatives to signal indirect support rather than sustained investment. Most private sector institutions prefer and have experience engaging with individual feminist gender equality experts and academics, mainly through ad hoc bilateral professional consultations rather than institutional partnerships with feminist groups. Feminist and women's organisations are occasionally consulted during crises, such as pandemics and earthquakes, but these interactions lack long-term commitment and structured funding. Once they are willing to support or collaborate, collaborations are primarily formed with well-established, reputable women's organisations with long-standing work, public trust, and strong ties to government institutions, often facilitated through references from trusted individuals.

Some corporate foundations, particularly those distributing grants or funds, engage with feminist organisations to some extent. Foundations that are most frequently in contact with feminist and women's movements and actively follow new organisations, policies, and developments in the movements are usually corporate foundations of this kind. However, as a shortcoming, these corporate foundations prioritise establishing partnerships with women's organisations that have developed institutional capacity, ensure legal guarantees, and have the expertise on reporting.

#### **4. Challenges and Considerations for the Collaboration of Private Sector with Feminist Organisations**

Although the private sector has limited institutional engagement with feminist organisations, it is not entirely disconnected from the field. While it may not fully embrace all feminist values, issues such as violence and equality in the workplace are recognised and taken seriously. Interviews also revealed that women figures within companies often follow, take an interest in, and are curious about the feminist movement on an individual level. In this context, despite the observed challenges in institutional collaboration between the private sector and the feminist movement, the findings indicate that cooperation is highly possible under certain conditions.

First and foremost, it is imperative to underline that private sector engagement with CSOs, including feminist groups, is often shaped by broader perceptions of civil society, reflecting concerns around reputation management and perceived political risks. These factors heavily influence the depth, nature, and sustainability of collaboration.



In parallel with this general perception toward CSOs, they noted that the organisation's identity and political stance mattered. Organisations seen as too politically targeted by the government or at risk of being shut down due to the political climate were considered challenging partners. LGBTQI+ organisations were identified as a deterrent for companies, given the government's antagonistic stance toward LGBTQI+ rights. Therefore, private sector institutions do not prefer partnering with them to avoid taking any political and legal risks.

In addition, aligning with feminist principles, the power hierarchies matter. Imbalances in power dynamics negatively impact partnerships between private sector institutions, corporations and feminist organisations.

Besides these external factors, private sector institutions believe that feminist organisations hesitate to engage in institutional partnerships with corporations. For effective collaboration, it was emphasised that feminist organisations should take proactive steps to engage with the private sector. Yet, the private sector prefers to collaborate with feminist and women's organisations that are institutionalised, reliable, transparent, and capable of impact assessment and reporting. A key challenge is the lack of institutional capacity and legal guarantees for feminist and LGBTQI+ organisations in Türkiye. Companies seek partners that operate in a structured and professional manner, aligning with corporate approaches to sustainability and governance.

Another major challenge for the private sector is the lack of knowledge about existing feminist and women's organisations including their missions, focus areas, and organisational capacities. This knowledge gap often leads to missed opportunities for meaningful collaboration, as private sector actors may struggle to identify relevant organisations, understand their work, or recognise potential synergies. Structured mechanisms are needed to bridge this gap, improve mutual information flow, and foster deeper engagement.

## **5. Preference for Collaborations with UN Agencies**

As highlighted in ODA funding findings, the private sector prefers to collaborate with UN agencies such as UN Women, UNDP, and UNICEF for gender equality initiatives. This preference is driven by several strategic advantages that UN partnerships offer corporations.

Working with UN agencies grants private sector actors access to high-profile global platforms, enabling them to position themselves as key stakeholders in international gender equality efforts. Also, partnerships with UN agencies facilitate



strategic engagements with public institutions, including national governments and intergovernmental bodies. Moreover, collaborating with UN agencies provides companies with structured and pre-designed project proposals, reducing the need for extensive in-house program development. While these collaborations offer numerous benefits, they may reinforce existing power dynamics and limit direct engagement with grassroots feminist and women's organisations, which often operate outside the UN system.

UN Women Türkiye states that they collaborate with umbrella organisations and sister UN agencies to advance gender equality in and through the private sector. Together, they follow globally established principles and procedures, while assessing partnerships based on the scale of the impacted target group, mobilised resources, and the potential for replication and sectoral influence. Within the framework of partnerships established with the private sector, particularly under the Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs), relevant institutions and organisations are expected to adopt a gender equality perspective and implement corresponding policies and practices.

## Conclusions and Way Forward

Türkiye's funding ecosystem for gender-related initiatives is shaped by ODA providers and private sector institutions, each with distinct approaches, priorities, and limitations. When assessed against established frameworks, Türkiye's current ecosystem based on our findings and existing definitions of a "feminist funding ecosystem," we found that it is far from aligning with established frameworks. However, we also identified promising initiatives and opportunities that give us hope.

Given that Türkiye is not at a starting point but is still far from an ideal ecosystem, we sought to understand how to position this context. As a result, we developed a preliminary benchmark, "Feminist Funding Ecosystem Progress Levels," based on seven key criteria, combining existing theoretical frameworks with our research findings (please see Annex 1). The benchmark we created is not a finalised tool but an instrument to spark further discussion. Below is an evaluation of the ecosystem in Türkiye based on seven key criteria from this benchmark.

- 1. An interconnected and communicative structure** – ODA providers have only recently started becoming interconnected through a working group moderated by the EUD Türkiye. In contrast, most private sector institutions

return their resources to their foundations, creating a closed-loop system within corporate capital groups. However, an opportunity lies in the private sector's growing desire to enhance its social impact, which motivates them to engage with different sectors.

2. **Needs and Priorities of Feminist Movements as the Primary Focus** - Most ODA providers engage with only a tiny fraction of feminist organisations, and their funding processes rarely allow for mutual learning. However, their commitments to FFP can serve as both a foundation and a guide to strengthening engagement with feminist movements. Recently, some initiatives have emerged to understand the needs of women's organisations beyond funding relationships, as an outcome of FFP. In the private sector, open grants for gender equality are minimal, and while UN Women Türkiye representatives may be involved in funding decisions, feminist organisations often lack representation. However, decision-makers within these institutions hold feminist values, engage with feminist movements, and are eager to learn—creating an opportunity for shared learning and collaboration, particularly in advancing intersectional approaches. Intersectionality is not yet a widely recognised or adopted approach within the ODA providers and private sector; particular identities are deliberately excluded from discussions to avoid political and reputational risks.
3. **Presence of a holistic approach aimed at achieving social and systemic change** - Apart from Sweden and the EUD, most ODA providers do not focus on systemic change, instead funding isolated gender equality projects under broader human rights grants. For ODA providers committed to FFP, leveraging FFP as a tool could present an opportunity to drive systemic change. The private sector lacks a holistic, multidimensional approach to addressing gender inequality at a systemic level. Companies typically engage in gender-related initiatives that align with their CSR principles and pose no political risk, often through project platforms or collaborations with UN agencies. Private sector funding decisions prioritise corporate-defined thematic areas rather than systemic change in gender equality. However, increasing authoritarian pressure and the broader impact of Türkiye's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention have sparked discussions within the private sector on the need for systemic change.
4. **Presence of Collective Funding Mechanisms**- There is no collective funding mechanism among ODA providers supporting gender-related initiatives in Türkiye. The GDWG, facilitated by the EUD, is a new initiative where the EUD gender focal point is working to foster collective action, but it has yet to yield

concrete outcomes. Similarly, private sector institutions that provide open-call gender funding lack a collective approach, and while some express interest in such a platform, no institution has taken the lead yet. However, donations remain the safest way for private sector actors to contribute to social issues, and both corporations and women philanthropists are open to collaborative funding if a trusted multi-stakeholder environment is established, allowing resources to grow and amplify impact.

#### **5. Addressing Gaps in Funding for Marginalised Groups and Stigmatised Issues**

- The ODA providers interviewed have no recorded funding relationships with organisations working with sex workers. At the same time, support for LGBTIQ+ groups exists but has become increasingly invisible due to political concerns. Stigmatised issues like abortion and the Istanbul Convention receive little direct funding, except within broader feminist initiatives supported by Sweden or the EUD. Similarly, private sector funding does not extend to underfunded groups or stigmatised issues, and representatives acknowledge that topics like abortion and LGBTQI+ rights are unlikely to be funded in the current political climate. However, the private sector could support these groups indirectly via umbrella organisations or independent funds. Additionally, intermediary organisations could use tools like cryptocurrency to enable anonymous donations outside traditional financial systems.

#### **6. Commitment to Transparency and Accountability-**

Among ODA providers, Sweden stands out for its transparency, publishing all development aid data on Open.Aid, while Germany has the Transparenzportal. Other countries like France and the Netherlands previously shared funding data but stopped to protect their partners from potential risks. EUD funds can be tracked through various platforms and sources, but it lacks a transparency system as comprehensive as Open.Aid. In the private sector, open-grant providers disclose past funding recipients. Still, those using other funding methods rarely share details on beneficiaries or financial allocations, and corporate links to feminist organisations beyond CSR initiatives are also not publicly accessible. However, transparency and accountability are closely tied to the broader political context, and fostering even small circles of trust can strengthen both, creating a positive cycle of increased openness and reliability.

#### **7. A system open to mutual learning and development-**

There is no structured space for ODA providers or private sector institutions to engage with civil society, particularly feminist organisations, for mutual learning. The EUD GDWG has established a CSO consultation group to provide input twice a year. Still, the lack of direct interaction between the two groups and the

infrequent meetings limit its effectiveness. Private sector representatives also highlight the need for dedicated spaces to facilitate regular engagement with civil society. However, both ODA and private sector representatives have expressed a strong willingness to share knowledge, presenting an opportunity to build a collaborative solidarity network for gender equality.

The assessment of Türkiye's feminist funding ecosystem reveals that, across multiple criteria, it remains **weak**, with some **emerging** elements in certain areas. ODA providers and private sector institutions show limited engagement with feminist movements, systemic change, and marginalised issues, while collective funding mechanisms and transparency remain underdeveloped. However, there are signs of progress, such as the GDWG, increasing awareness within the private sector, emerging female philanthropists and a willingness to engage in mutual learning.

A key takeaway from this analysis is the critical need for an independent women's fund to address funding gaps and strengthen the ecosystem. Such a fund could serve as a resilient funding mechanism, complementing ODA funding while fostering strategic partnerships with the private sector, particularly as ODA support declines. Given the shifting landscape, feminist organisations must diversify resources and think beyond traditional financial methods. A women's fund could play a catalytic role in expanding access to funding, building cross-sector partnerships, and enhancing financial autonomy.

Based on this research's findings, the following section presents recommendations for ODA providers and the private sector. As part of the feminist movement, the research also aims to share its observations with the community in a way that aligns with feminist values; rather than presenting recommendations in bullet points, it embraces a feminist approach by making a call through a letter.

## Recommendations

### ODA Providers

- ➔ Adopt feminist funding principles that align with FFP guidelines and prioritise Türkiye and gender equality in funding allocations. Ensure funding is flexible, multi-year, and adaptable to feminist organisations' needs, including covering human resources costs. Move beyond project-based funding to provide sustainable, long-term support.
- ➔ Establish dedicated gender expertise within embassies and development agencies to maintain meaningful relationships with feminist movements. Align political priorities with feminist agendas by actively consulting with feminist organisations and integrating their insights into policy decisions.
- ➔ Ensure transparency in funding processes by publicly disclosing funded organisations and past funding data. Simplify grant applications and reporting requirements to remove bureaucratic barriers that disproportionately burden feminist organisations. Make funding accessible to grassroots feminist groups, not just well-established actors.
- ➔ Coordinate funding decisions with other ODA providers supporting gender equality to prevent over-centralisation of resources among a few organisations. Support the establishment and sustainability of independent women's/ feminist funds in Türkiye to strengthen the ecosystem of feminist organising. Compensate feminist activists for their participation in panels, conferences, and consultations to prevent invisible labor.
- ➔ Respond to crises by ensuring continued support for feminist organisations, as women are disproportionately affected by conflicts, economic instability, migration, and health emergencies. Implement context-sensitive MEAL tools to assess impact effectively. Apply intersectionality as a guiding principle in all funding allocation and management processes.

### Private Sector Institutions

*"Invest our common future, trust our collective power"*

- ➔ Create safe, trust-based spaces for open and transparent dialogue where feminist organisations and other stakeholders can discuss needs, ethical dilemmas, expectations, redlines, and opportunities. Establish diverse, inclusive, and equitable dialogue mechanisms to facilitate meaningful engagement with feminist organisations and movements and to promote mutual empowerment, learning, and change.

- ➔ Ensure the meaningful and comprehensive inclusion of feminist organisations in decision-making processes concerning social investments, funding allocation, and strategic philanthropy. Leverage the deep expertise, insights, and policy frameworks developed by the feminist movement to inform and enhance these processes.
- ➔ Recognise the opportunity to establish a collaborative funding pool alongside other private sector stakeholders committed to gender equality and dedicated to resourcing this cause while collectively assuming responsibility. This strategic pooled fund can be efficiently directed toward the feminist movement through diverse and impactful funding mechanisms.
- ➔ Enhance the knowledge and awareness about feminism, the feminist movement's core advocacy areas, diverse organisation models and its history and achievements in Türkiye.
- ➔ Think about alternative methods to respond to expectations from the business field in funding processes and collaborations with feminist movements by navigating good practices of international philanthropic institutions. Consider that intermediary feminist institutions can share the responsibility by keeping the feminist movement's field experience and knowledge.

### **Feminist Community<sup>17</sup>**

- ➔ Advocate for increasing ODA funding to feminist movements and ensuring its direct allocation to feminist organisations, rather than diverting it through intergovernmental intermediaries such as UN agencies, which often prioritise maintaining state cooperation. Emphasise that the core mission of UN agencies should focus on policy development, advocacy, and lobbying to transform state policies, while addressing the fact that the real issue is not resource scarcity but the ongoing reshaping of funding channels and priorities by political agendas, limiting feminist organisations' access to ODA—the largest funding source within the ecosystem.
- ➔ Assert that systemic change and gender equality are only possible when feminist movements are supported with core, sustainable, and long-term funding. Challenge and resist funding models that weaken advocacy by shifting resources to service provision only. Demand direct investment in feminist movements and resist colonial funding structures that limit their political power.
- ➔ Diversify funding strategies by building a broad-based funding ecosystem that includes ODA, private sector partnerships, individual donors, and local resource mobilisation, open and enlarge the communication channels with

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17. Please look at Annex 2: "A Letter to Feminist Community" to find out the background of these recommendations.

female philanthropists, women from different communities and sectors to resist the anti gender movement and practices.

- ➔ Engage with private sector actors that may align with feminist values to build stronger alliances and may serve as bridges for developing progressive funding practices and partnerships. Remember that within these institutions, there are many women employees who may share feminist values, and reaching out to them can further strengthen the mass base and solidarity networks of the feminist movement.



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## Annex 1: Feminist Funding Ecosystem Progress Levels

Criteria	Weak Ecosystem	Emerging Ecosystem	Strong Ecosystem
<b>An interconnected and communicative structure</b>	There is no interconnect- edness in terms of funding between the sectors that make up the ecosystem (public, civil, and private sectors), nor is there interconnectedness within the sectors themselves.	There is no interconnect- edness in terms of funding between the sectors that make up the ecosystem (public, civil, and private sectors), but interconnectedness within each sector can be observed.	Interconnectedness in terms of funding can be observed both between the sectors that make up the ecosystem (public, civil, and private sectors) and within each sector itself.
<b>Needs and Priorities of Feminist Movements as the Primary Focus</b>	Funding processes in the field of gender equality are deter- mined independently of the needs and priorities of feminist movements, and feminist actors are not included in the process.	In funding processes related to gender equality, the needs of feminist movements are partially considered; however, the inclusion of feminist actors in funding and decision-making processes remains limited.	In funding processes related to gender equality, the needs and priorities of feminist movements are at the center, and feminist actors actively participate in decision-making processes.
<b>Presence of a holistic approach aimed at achieving social and systemic change</b>	Funding is predominantly short-term, project-based, and isolated, lacking a clear focus on driving systemic change.	Some funding mechanisms aim for systemic change to a certain extent; however, short-term and isolated project-based approaches still dominate.	The ecosystem is designed in a coordinated manner, incor- porating long-term, flexible funding and core funding to foster systemic change, moving beyond isolated project-based approaches.
<b>Presence of Collective Funding Mechanisms</b>	Funders operate entirely inde- pendently, with no collective funding pools or joint grant programs established.	There are certain sectoral collaborations among funders on specific issues; however, collective funding pools and joint grants are limited and not sustained over time.	A strong and widely practiced culture of creating collective funding pools and joint grant programs exists among funders, both within and across sectors.
<b>Addressing Gaps in Funding for Marginalised Groups and Stigmatised Issues</b>	Funding for marginalised groups and stigmatised issues is insufficient or entirely absent.	Some initiatives exist, but the needs of these groups and issues are not fully met.	Funding for marginalised groups and stigmatised issues is treated as a priority, ensuring adequate support.
<b>Commitment to Transparency and Accountability</b>	Funding processes are not transparent, and accountability mechanisms are weak.	Transparency and account- ability principles are partially applied, but standards are not clear.	Funding processes are fully transparent, and accountabil- ity mechanisms are strongly enforced.
<b>A system open to mutual learning and development</b>	There is no information sharing between funders and recipients, and no transfer of experience takes place. The principles of egalitarianism and reciprocity are not considered in processes and relationships.	Some learning and develop- ment processes exist but are not sufficiently institutional- ised. Even if not in processes, efforts are made to uphold the principles of egalitarianism and reciprocity in relationships.	There is continuous informa- tion sharing, feedback mech- anisms, and development-ori- ented collaborations between funders and recipients. The principles of egalitarianism and reciprocity are fundamental in both processes and relation- ships.

## Annex 2: A Letter to Feminist Community

### Dear Feminist Community, Our Movement,

From the very beginning of this research, we pursued one central question: What kinds of tools can strengthen us as a feminist movement, hold up a mirror to our work, and simultaneously make our presence and voices more visible? If a feminist funding ecosystem is to take root in Türkiye, we must always remember that our movement is and should be the key actor in shaping it. For this reason, we wanted to first share our findings, insights, and recommendations with you in the form of a letter. Let's be clear from the start—we are eager to hear your thoughts, challenges, and feedback and to engage in discussion together.

When we started writing this letter, Trump had just begun his presidency and was already turning the world into a dystopia. The alliance of right-wing governments and the wealthy, conservative men backing them had likely never been this widespread in history. As we saw most recently with Trump, conservative right-wing governments have made it their first order of business to dismantle human rights mechanisms, undo the hard-won gains of democratic political movements, and suspend or terminate ODA, including support for rights-based civil society.

According to OECD reports, in 2022, 211 billion USD in ODA was distributed globally, marking a 17% increase in real terms compared to the previous year. So, overall, these state-provided funds are not decreasing but rather growing. But how much of this funding actually reaches feminist organisations? While exact calculations are difficult, we know that in 2022, only 5.6 billion USD—a mere 3%—was allocated to initiatives where gender equality was the primary focus. In 2020, the total amount of private sector and foundation funding dedicated to gender equality was 892 million USD. Even though feminist organisations receive only a small share of total ODA, state funding still constitutes the largest financial source for our movements and will continue to do so. The problem is not that there is no money—rather, the institutions and channels through which this money flows are constantly being reshaped by political agendas.

Our research suggests that ODA allocated to Türkiye will likely decrease in the coming years, given that Türkiye is classified as an upper-middle-income country by traditional development indicators. We are living in a country where waving a rainbow flag is considered a crime, where state-sponsored hostility against LGBTI+ communities has become official policy, and where at least three women are murdered every day. What kind of development are we talking about? Development cannot be defined solely by economic indicators. This is why we must continue to demand, track, and advocate for more feminist funding. However, the issue is not only about securing more funds—we must also ask, how can we ensure that these funds align with feminist values? Feminist funding is not just about creating financial resources for feminist causes; it is also about structuring and managing these resources in ways that align with feminist principles.

One of the key findings of our research is that ODA is increasingly reaching feminist organisations through indirect channels rather than direct support. In Türkiye, we observed that states providing ODA are choosing to channel gender equality funding through UN agencies rather than directly to feminist organisations. When we asked them why, we heard arguments such as the need to work at different policy levels, professionalism, maintaining cooperation with the state, and being an independent intermediary donor. However, our own herstory tells us that real systemic change and gender equality gains come from political movements fighting for them.

Alongside broader civil society, we must resist this funding trend as a political stance and demand more direct funding for feminist movements. We should emphasise that UN agencies' primary mission should be policy development, advocacy, and lobbying rather than acting as funders. We must resist the shift from advocacy-based funding to service-delivery projects, because this is not just a technical change—it is a transformation that weakens the role of feminist movements in social change. Resisting this trend also means insisting on core and multi-year funding while raising our voices against colonial funding norms and bureaucratic barriers that restrict movement-building.



Let's always remind ourselves: The feminist movement in Türkiye has played a powerful role not only in national victories but also in shaping global discussions. We have made significant contributions to mechanisms such as the Sustainable Development Goals, CEDAW, and the Istanbul Convention. However, over the past 20 years, relentless attacks on our hard-won rights, deepening poverty, crises, and resource limitations have slowed this engagement. Despite these challenges, feminist activists in Türkiye continue to provide critical expertise and perspectives in various international platforms. Feminist movements must actively shape international policies, not just network and lobby. This is a message we must continue to deliver persistently to funders.

While we do not intend to abandon ODA funding, we must also remain realistic about the political landscape in Türkiye and globally. As we conducted this research and considered the needs of feminist movements, we realised that diversification is a critical strategy for long-term financial sustainability. Over-reliance on a single funding source poses serious risks to the resilience of feminist movements. Rather than completely breaking ties with certain donors, we believe a diverse funding portfolio that ensures a steady flow of income from multiple sources is a more effective and risk-mitigating approach.

Alongside ODA funding from developed countries, we must also consider private sector institutions that align with feminist and women's movements, wealthier individual donors and mid-level philanthropists, and small-scale individual donors like you and us. Thinking about all these sources together, and mobilising local resources, is key to sustaining feminist movements at scale.

Although the relationship between feminist movements and the private sector is not as widespread or viable in Türkiye as in some international examples, there is still time—and even a need—to initiate these conversations.

The private sector is not a monolithic entity; it consists of varied dynamics and different actors. While we do not seek to ignore patriarchal capitalism, we must also recognise that some companies may be more aligned with feminist principles or could potentially support elements of the feminist movement.

Rather than focusing only on corporate entities, let's also support feminist allies working within the private sector. These individuals can serve as bridges, enabling meaningful collaborations and progressive funding practices within their institutions.

Feminist organisations worldwide are using storytelling and strategic communication to illustrate the impact of feminist funding to donors. We should keep this in mind. Our research findings indicate that neither ODA nor private sector funding alone can ensure the sustainability of feminist movements. Alternative feminist funding models already exist—we can start building infrastructure for Solidarity Philanthropy and Community Philanthropy as viable options.

Structures like Silva Women's Fund for Türkiye and Feminist Fund Türkiye are becoming more widely recognised as feminist funds that channel direct resources to the movement while centering solidarity and participation. These funds have the potential to redefine philanthropy. If we believe in their vision, let's amplify their voices and advocate for more funding to be directed toward them.

Finally, let's reflect together on how we arrived at this point. But let's never forget—this is not our fault.

We hear criticisms like “they are too dependent on external funding” or “they haven't developed their own resources”. Let's acknowledge these critiques but not allow them to lead us into despair. Instead, let's deepen our solidarity, strengthen our collective resilience, and continue forward with unwavering belief in our power.