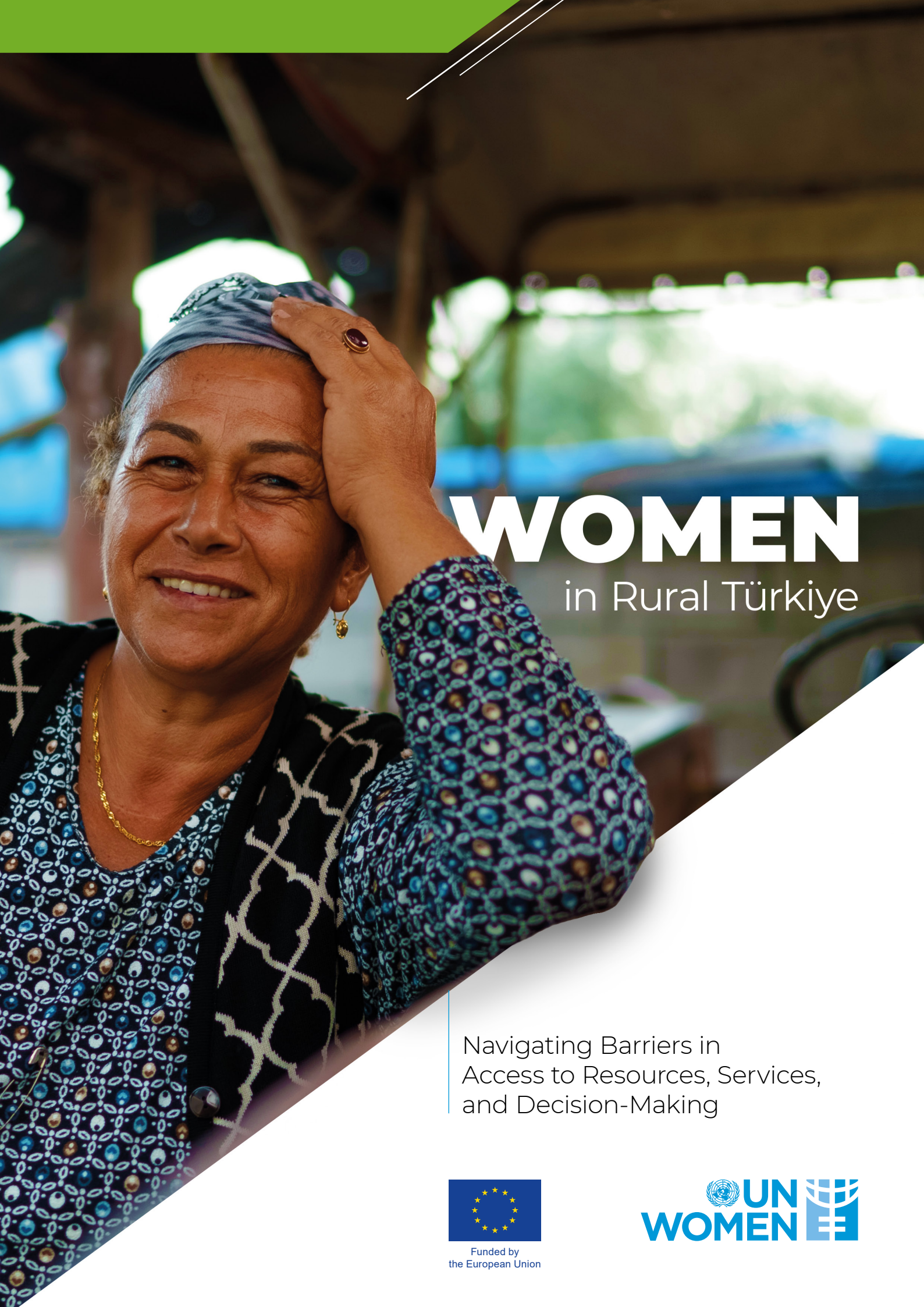




WOMEN

in Rural Türkiye

Navigating Barriers in
Access to Resources, Services,
and Decision-Making



Funded by
the European Union



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ACRONYMS

Bağ-Kur	Social Insurance Institution for Tradesmen, Artisans, and Other Self-Employed Individuals.
CATI	Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviewing
ÇKS	Farmers Registration System
CSO	Civil Society Organization
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
KII	Key Informant Interviews
VAW	Violence Against Women
GBV	Gender-based Violence
KADES	Women's Emergency Support Application
SGK	Social Insurance Institution
ŞÖNİMs	Violence Prevention and Monitoring Centers
TDHS	Türkiye Demographic and Health Survey

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LIST OF TABLE AND CHART

Table # Table Name

1	Population of province/district Centers and towns/villages by sex (2015, 2020)
2	Average number of children and household members
3	Access to Key Services

Chart # Chart Name

1	Respondents by Age Group
2	Household Types
3	Marital Status
4	Primary Factors Affecting the Workforce Participation of Rural Women
5	Level of Education
6	Highest Level of Education Attained by Age Groups
7	Barriers to Access to Education
8	Women who have no access to agricultural training activities, by education
9	Means of Access to Agricultural Training
10	Women Engaged in Paid/Unpaid Work, by Level of Education
11	Average Number of Children by Level of Education
12	Average Monthly Household Income of Respondents
13	Women's Activities on a Typical Day
14	Barriers in Accessing Decent Work Opportunities
15	Household Members Engaged in Agricultural Activities, by Gender
16	Women's Engagement in Agriculture, by Age
17	Women's Engagement in Agriculture, by Education
18	Top 3 Leisure Activities Mentioned by Rural Women
19	Who primarily makes the economic decisions in the household?
20	Who makes decisions on the following issues?
21	Attitudes on Gender Equality and Rights
22	How Women Access Public Transport, by Age
23	Social Security Coverage
24	Barriers Faced by Women Who have not Accessed Health Care
25	If / how women can access a hospital, by age group
26	Barriers Faced by Women Who have not Accessed Birth Control
27	Access to Clean Water and Sewerage Services
28	Impact of COVID-19

CONTENT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	06	HEALTH CARE	42
INTRODUCTION	12	FREEDOM FROM VIOLENCE	46
PROFILE OF SURVEYED RURAL WOMEN	14	EMERGENCY, DISASTER AND RISK REDUCTION	48
EDUCATION	18	CONCLUSION	50
PAID AND DECENT WORK	22	RECOMMENDATION	50
PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING	30	CALL FOR ACTION	51
ACCESS TO SERVICES AND SOCIAL ASSISTANCE	36	BIBLIOGRAPHY	52

Executive Summary

Women in rural areas of Türkiye make vital contributions to all aspects of life in their communities and households, from the production of goods and services to agriculture and livestock farming to providing the bulk of unpaid care and domestic work. Despite their essential roles, their unique needs, priorities, and the challenges they face in social, economic, and domestic domains are often overlooked in policymaking and largely not considered when official data is collected and analyzed. This data gap hinders a comprehensive understanding of their socio-economic conditions and limits the development of targeted solutions.

In 2022, UN Women carried out a research study to better understand the situation of rural women regarding access to services, rights, resources, and decision-making power. This report presents the main findings of the research which is based on quantitative and qualitative data collection methods capturing the experiences and views of rural women from 26 provinces. The report highlights some of the key considerations that influence rural women's lived experiences and seeks to provide an update on women's status in rural Türkiye today.

People living in rural areas constitute 17 percent of the nation's population,¹ and their lived experiences are intricately intertwined with the socio-economic fabric of rural communities. In recent decades, three key socio-economic shifts have profoundly influenced the lives of women and men in rural communities in Türkiye: the modernization of farming technologies, rural-urban migration, and the introduction of compulsory primary education.² Women living in rural areas in Türkiye have been affected by rapid urbanization and change in modes of production, with implications for the full enjoyment of their rights, access to the labor market, decent working conditions, and access to basic services such as education, health, security and justice, among others. Despite advancements in basic services such as education and health, women living in rural areas, especially those with lower education levels, face difficulties adapting to new social and economic conditions and in accessing ways to engage in modern agricultural practices or related economic opportunities, which further entrenches their economic vulnerabilities. Women also face challenges when dealing with changing socio-economic conditions due to social norms, community pressures and limitations in accessing services, resources, and opportunities.

Data about women and girls living in rural areas is scarce in official statistics, and there are data gaps regarding women working in the agriculture sector and women living in (semi-) urban areas where sociologically rural conditions persist. Research regarding the status and needs of women in seasonal agricultural work and those living in remote

¹TurkStat. 2023b.

²Gündüz-Hoşgör & Smits, n.d., p. 27; Yüksekaya, 2018, p.188; Baturuoğlu Balcı, 2019, p. 163.

rural areas is also limited. The available research on women living in rural areas, on the other hand, underlines limited access to rights and services, gender inequality, particularly violence against women, and forced and early marriages.

Rural women³ have been part of the national policy discourse mainly in relation to socio-economic development through targeted measures such as agricultural entrepreneurship training, access to new technologies, and sustainable agricultural practices. Policy documents also acknowledge the challenges posed by informal labor, particularly the reliance on unpaid family labor and emphasize the need for social protection for women in agricultural work. There have been a few key efforts to support rural women through national policy, such as the National Development Plan, the National Rural Development Strategy, and the National Action Plan on the Empowerment of Rural Women (2012-2016). However, since 2016, there has been no specific action plan dedicated to rural women.

Türkiye's **12th National Development Plan (2024-2028)** contains a section on "Rural Development," which includes several measures that aim to positively impact rural women. These measures focus on increasing women's entrepreneurship and technological literacy, improving access to quality services, and reducing poverty. The Plan also emphasizes the provision of quality, affordable and accessible care services, formalization of the employment of women working as agricultural laborers, and supporting women, including young women in rural areas to enter the labor force via innovative social programs and access to digital services. Additionally, creating sustainable livelihoods in rural neighborhoods, villages, and forest villages and reducing poverty in rural areas through social and solidarity economy are key focuses of the Plan.

The National Action Plan on the Empowerment of Rural Women (2012-2016) aimed to empower women in rural areas by addressing various socio-economic challenges. Its main goals include improving women's position in rural areas, making the agricultural sector gender-responsive, integrating rural women into national

development activities, and enhancing Türkiye's international standing on gender statistics. The Plan also highlighted the importance of capacity-building programs, promoting women's employment in agriculture, and creating better social security systems tailored to women in rural regions. Activities such as training programs on alternative livelihoods, entrepreneurship, and the use of natural resources are also emphasized to ensure women's active participation and to improve their economic independence.

The National Rural Development Strategy (2021-2023),⁵ on the other hand, highlights the importance of empowering women in rural areas through increased participation in economic activities and decision-making processes. Women, alongside young entrepreneurs, are prioritized in grant programs and policies aimed at supporting entrepreneurship and employment. The Strategy emphasizes **equal opportunity**, focusing on increasing entrepreneurship and employment. It also refers to **positive discrimination** towards women and young farmers ensuring that producer organizations are leading institutions in social solidarity, cooperation, education, and finance. Additionally, it encourages **women's employment in agriculture** and the marketing of their products, while promoting innovative practices and rural tourism. Women who have left agricultural jobs are also supported to engage in both agricultural and non-agricultural activities, ensuring their continued contribution to the rural economy.

The success of existing and new policy measures will depend on their effective implementation and the extent to which they address the specific needs and challenges faced by rural women. Therefore, data on rural women is crucial for formulating effective policies with an understanding of their unique challenges and needs.

To complement existing data with new insights in key areas, UN Women commissioned research on the situation of rural women to highlight the socio-economic conditions, access to services, and decision-making power of rural women, and to inform policy makers and stakeholders about the urgent needs and gaps that exist.

³In this report, the term 'rural women' is used without attributing any inherent characteristics to women living in rural areas. It is important to note that in Türkiye, the term 'rural' has become ambiguous due to definition ambiguities at administrative and statistical levels. Furthermore, the research findings revealed that 'rural' should not be conflated with 'village' or 'agricultural.' Therefore, the terms 'rural women' and 'women living in rural areas' are used interchangeably with this note on ambiguity.

⁴Ministry of Food Agriculture and Livestock, 2012.

⁵Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, 2020.

The research included a quantitative survey of **4,299 rural women** above the age of 18, in **26 provinces** within the NUTS-2⁶ classification throughout Türkiye. Additionally, key informant interviews (KIIs)⁷ and focus group discussions (FGDs)⁸ were conducted in 9 different provinces. Data collection took place between June and September 2022.

The average age of the surveyed women is 46.2 years. Most are primary school graduates, married, and have an average of 3.1 children, with a household size of 4.5 members. They typically do not engage in paid employment but instead undertake significant unpaid work, including household chores, caregiving for dependents, and agricultural duties.

The main findings per area are as follows:

Education

- 20.7 percent of the surveyed rural women have had no formal education or are illiterate.
- Higher levels of education are closely linked with a rural woman's ability to access essential services, resources, agricultural/vocational training, and paid work.
- The level of education is higher among younger women and lower among older women, who consequently face many challenges due to their illiteracy. These challenges include difficulty accessing essential services (health care and legal services), limited opportunities for agricultural/vocational training and paid work, and reduced ability to participate in family decision-making processes.
- The majority (74.3 percent) of women who could not access education reported that this was due to social factors: either their family's lack of approval (58.8 percent) or community pressures (15.5 percent). In addition, 31.7 percent of surveyed women who could not access education said this was due to a lack of information about their rights and available services.

Paid and Decent Work

- Only 13.8 percent of the surveyed women are engaged in some form of paid work. Although higher levels of education correlate with increased participation in paid work even with tertiary education, a significant proportion of women (56.5 per cent) remain engaged in unpaid work, suggesting that education alone does not guarantee labor force participation.
- Despite the transition away from agriculture for many rural women, it remains one of the few viable employment options and, crucially, a primary source of livelihood (47.2 percent). Notably, women and girls constitute 57 percent of all household members engaged in agricultural activities. However, only 18.7 percent of all surveyed women have ownership over agricultural land, underscoring the challenges rural women face in achieving economic independence and securing livelihoods.
- Women in paid agricultural work face significant challenges as well. Female seasonal workers have struggles related to very low wages, lack of social security, child labor and poor hygiene conditions.
- A significant proportion of rural women are engaged in unpaid work: 95.9 percent in household chores, 83.6 percent in childcare, 44.5 percent in farming or gardening, and 39.7 percent in animal care. Additionally, 6.8 percent care for older persons, and 3.5 percent care for sick individuals or those with disabilities. Despite their extensive contributions, 84.6 percent of women not in paid work describe themselves as "housewives," highlighting the undervaluation of their labor.
- Almost half, 47.9 percent of the surveyed women who could not access work, say this was due to their lack of knowledge on their rights and available opportunities.

Participation in Decision-Making

- Women's participation in public life is often associated with their limited access to public spaces and institutions, which can be linked to traditional gender norms and extensive unpaid care and domestic work at home. Additionally, low levels of education are correlated with reduced engagement in social and economic spheres.

⁶In 2002 in agreement between Eurostat and the Turkish authorities, TurkStat has been using NUTS classifications as officially termed statistical regions with three levels: NUTS-1: 12 Regions, NUTS-2: 26 Subregions, NUTS-3: 81 Provinces.

⁷KIIs were conducted with mainly with civil society organizations, rural trainers (i.e. agriculture trainers), mukhtars, agencies providing agricultural credits (i.e. Ziraat Bank), public officers working in organizations such as İŞKUR and KOSGEB providing training aimed at supporting women entrepreneurship in agriculture, Rural Development Cooperative, Agricultural Credit Cooperatives, producer cooperatives, chambers of agriculture, as well as service providers and beneficiaries such as mid-wives, teachers, and doctors.

⁸FGDs were conducted with Agricultural Workers and Landowners (Women working in various agricultural sectors, Women employing different agricultural methods), Groups Not Participating in Agricultural Production Retired women, Unemployed women, Special Groups Requiring Particular Attention (Disabled women, Elderly women, Widowed women, Single mothers, Poor women, Early married women, Seasonal workers, Refugee women).

- Women are included in many decisions connected to the household but lack independent decision-making power especially when it comes to monetary decisions, which are primarily made by male household members. Women are strongly in favor of equal participation in the public sphere, with over 90 percent of respondents agreeing that men and women should participate equally in employment and education. However, traditional social norms remain entrenched, as evidenced by nearly half of the respondents expressing the belief that men should have the final say in household decisions.
- Women's engagement in organizational involvement is notably low, with only 10.1 percent of registered farmers in the Farmers Registration System (ÇKS) being women, and their membership rates in cooperatives and political parties standing at just 2.3 percent and 1.2 percent, respectively. Participation in civil society organizations (CSOs) is also low, with only 0.4 percent of surveyed women being involved civic engagement and advocacy efforts.

Access to Services and Social Assistance

- Women's ability to access services is impeded by limited transportation means and the degree to which they can move independently. Age and education are key factors impacting women's independent movement and access to services.
- Women in rural areas often lack access to formal social protection mechanisms, largely due to their limited participation in paid work. As a result, they are not directly covered by social security systems. Instead, they depend on the social security benefits of household members, typically their spouses. This dependence leaves them economically vulnerable, as any external shock—such as a spouse losing their job or health benefits—can severely impact their well-being. Their low level of economic independence further amplifies this vulnerability, as they have limited means to access resources or secure social protections on their own.
- Women have limited access to legal services due to limited autonomy and the complexity of legal procedures that they are not familiar with. Community and family pressures play a substantial role in limiting access. Additionally, educational attainment significantly affects autonomy and ability to access services.
- Challenges in access to and enjoyment of inheritance rights highlight a significant gap in asset transfer to women; limited use of inheritance rights and access to legal services further exacerbates this issue.

Health Care

- Despite a relatively good level of awareness and availability of health care services in general, access to necessary health care services is unavailable to 18.7 percent of the surveyed rural women.
- Age, education, disability, and income, among others, are intersecting factors preventing specific groups of women from accessing health care institutions and services such as hospitals, medical Centers and midwives. Mobility and literacy significantly influence women's access to health care. Younger and educated women are more likely to be able to access health care by themselves, whereas older and less educated women are heavily reliant on other household and community members to access the health services they need.
- 23.6 percent of respondents do not have access to clean water and sewerage services, both of which are essential for maintaining health, particularly regarding menstrual health, hygiene, and sanitation. The lack of clean water access is strongly correlated with low household income.

Freedom from Violence

- Women have varied knowledge about violence prevention and protection services. Awareness is notably high for “traditional” services like police and gendarme support but lower for relatively newer services such as KADES (Women's Emergency Support Application).
- Higher education levels are positively correlated with greater awareness of ŞÖNİMs (Violence Prevention and Monitoring Centers), KADES, and women's shelters. Women with education above the primary level have a significantly greater understanding of the different services provided.
- Despite high awareness, the actual use of protective services is notably low. This discrepancy suggests barriers beyond awareness.
- Harmful social attitudes and economic hardship are major factors perpetuating early, child and forced marriages. 28.4 percent of the surveyed women do not see an issue with marriage for girls below the age of 18.

Emergency, Disaster and Risk Reduction

- The COVID-19 pandemic has had significant impacts on rural women and their households, negatively impacting their income, physical and mental health, care responsibilities and home life. Specific risks related to violence against women (VAW), which increases especially during crisis periods, have also been a key issue for rural women.

- The crises significantly intensified the caregiving responsibilities for rural women and strained women's access to health care as well as children's access to educational services.
- Rural women are at significant risk of being disproportionately affected by future disasters and emergencies, such as those brought on by climate change.

In conclusion, these findings offer insights for more informed policy- and decision-making on a wide range of sectors and issues that affect rural women and their communities. Policy makers and service providers can use these insights to develop tailored policies and interventions that consider demographic shifts, prioritize education and health care, challenge harmful gender norms, and strengthen the delivery of – and access to – services. Considering the multi-faceted nature of the challenges faced, there is also a need for strong collaboration and coordination among institutions and with civil society organizations. By taking these steps, we can ensure that rural women thrive in all aspects of society, can fully exercise their rights and fully participate in and benefit from the nation's overall development and progress.

⁹After the field data collection for this research report was completed in 2022, Türkiye experienced two significant earthquakes on February 6, 2023. Consequently, references to the effects of the earthquakes in this report are based solely on secondary data, as primary data collection could not capture the immediate aftermath and impacts of these earthquakes. This limitation underscores the importance of interpreting the findings with an understanding of the context in which the data was gathered, and the constraints faced during the analysis.





Introduction

Research Objectives /

1. To provide a profile of rural women in Türkiye, mapping out their specific needs and priorities.
2. To identify rural women's gaps in access to services, rights, resources, and decision-making opportunities.
3. To offer duty-bearers and rights-holders evidence on the situation of rural women, to enable them to advance their status and rights through informed decision-making and advocacy.

The research used a mixed-methods approach: a quantitative survey and qualitative research. The quantitative survey provides a profile of the average rural woman, drawing upon a sample of **4,299 women above the age of 18** in 26 provinces in the NUTS-2 classification throughout Türkiye. Data collection took place between June and September 2022. The qualitative component consisted of 10-15 key informant interviews (KIIs) and 3-4 focus group discussions (FGDs) in 9 provinces representing diverse profiles of women across the country. A desk review of secondary sources was also conducted to provide further context to the findings.

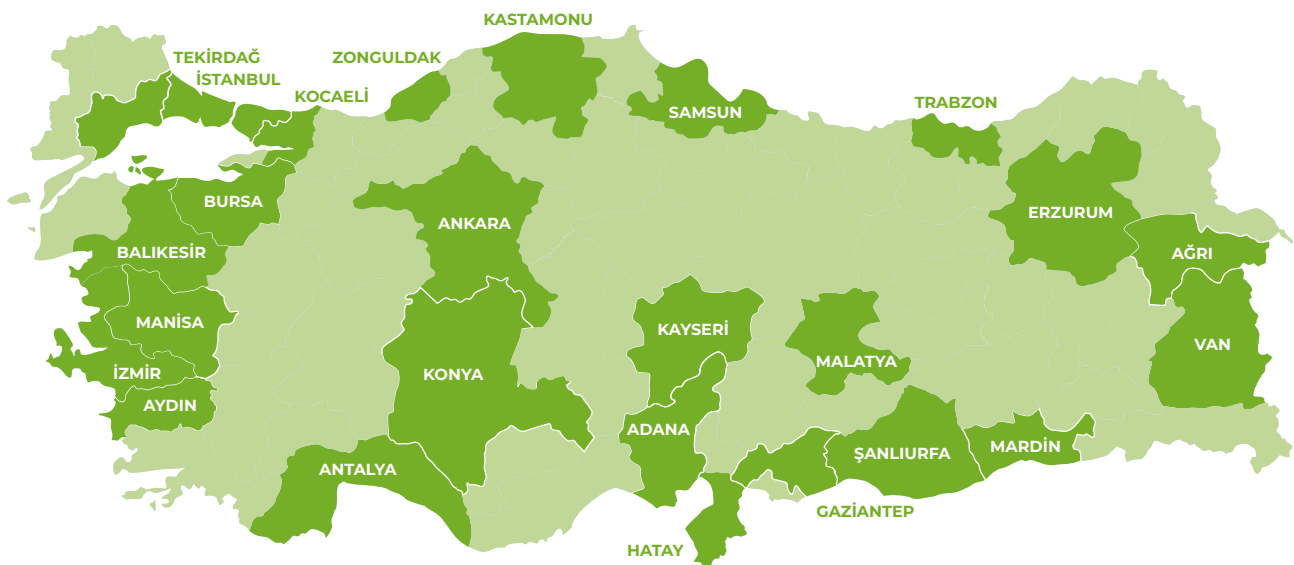


Figure 1 // 26 Provinces Reached through the Quantitative Survey

The **quantitative survey** used multi-stage stratified sampling and had a sample size of 4,299 respondents.¹⁰ The survey's target population was rural women, defined as women aged 18 and over living in a rural area/sample unit. The distribution of sample units accounts for the 2011 change in rural-urban classification, and figures for these locations are based on TurkStat 2020 Population Statistics. Where possible, the survey questions were asked face-to-face, and Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) was used where this was not possible.

The **KIIs and FGDs** enable a deeper understanding of the deeply rooted issues hindering equality for rural women. These in-depth discussions help to identify the main obstacles, challenges and potential opportunities for rural women's empowerment. FGDs in each province included both women and men, in sex-segregated discussions. KIIs¹¹ and FGDs¹² were conducted in the following nine provinces: Aydın, Ankara, Hatay, Erzurum, Kayseri, Bursa, Ağrı, Mardin, and Trabzon.

How many women live in rural parts of Türkiye?

The definition of 'rural populations' in Türkiye has been changing in the last decade,¹³ and as such different sources and statistics provide different estimates on the number of women residing in rural areas. Caution should therefore be taken when reviewing statistics on rural populations.

The official definition of "rural" in Türkiye, used in this research, is, "Those living in villages outside of the metropolitan provinces and population of the province must be under 750,000 inhabitants."¹⁴ As such, the villages within the territories of 30 metropolitan provinces are administratively registered as quarters, even though they are not located in urban areas. This influences the Turkish Statistical Institute's (TurkStat) statistics on rural populations, which only takes into consideration those villages located outside of the 30 metropolitan provinces.¹⁵

Some indication of the populations residing in towns and villages can be seen in the table below with official statistics from 2020 and 2022. However, it is likely that these numbers are larger in reality, as they do not include the quarters registered in remote parts of the 30 metropolitan provinces.

	Province / District Centres		Towns / Villages	
	Female Population	Male Population	Female Population	Male Population
2020	38,814,375	38,921,666	2,884,002	2,994,319
2022	39,810,840	39,802,439	2,764,601	2,901,673

Table 1 // Population of Province / District Centres and Towns / Villages by Sex (2020, 2022)¹⁶

For the purposes of this research, the research team estimated that there are **approximately 3.8 million women over the age of 18 living in rural areas** based on a variety of sources and definitions of rural populations. This estimate was only used for the purposes of determining an appropriate sample size for the research but also gives an approximate indication of the number of women residing in rural areas.

¹⁰This was determined with a confidence level of 95% and confidence interval of 1.5% from the estimated rural population (Total rural women population in 2020 was 5,172,078, and approximately 75 % of this population was 18+ years old, i.e., 3,880,000. So, N= 3,880,000 and n=4,300, and therefore, the sample population representation ratio is $f=n/N=0.0011$).

¹¹The KIIs included a wide range of relevant actors, including civil society organizations, rural trainers, mukhtars, agencies providing agricultural credits, public officers working in organizations such as İŞKUR and KOSGEB, Rural Development Cooperative, Agricultural Credit Cooperatives, producer cooperatives, chambers of agriculture, as well as service providers and beneficiaries such as midwives, teachers and doctors.

¹²The FGDs included: agricultural workers and landowners, women not participating in agricultural production (including retired and unemployed women) and special groups of consideration (disabled, elderly, widowed, early married, refugee and poor women, seasonal workers, and single mothers).

¹³Yardımcı, 2023.

¹⁴Government of Türkiye, Legislative Department, 2012.

¹⁵In May 2023, TurkStat issued an Urban-Rural Statistics based on a new classification. This classification was created with the distinction of 'Dense Urban, Medium Dense Urban, and Rural,' with the aim of developing a sustainable structure in line with international standards and producing statistics at this level. The classification is based on the 'Degree of Urbanisation (DEGURBA)' developed by the European Statistical Office, and Spatial Address Registration System (MAKS) and the Address Based Population Registration System (ABPRS) were used as data sources. The data used in this report on the other hand relies on the data derived from Address Based Population Registration System (ADNS).

¹⁶TurkStat, 2022.

Profile of Surveyed Rural Women

The survey of 4,299 respondents from 26 provinces across Türkiye reveals a highly diverse demography of women living in rural areas. Age, marital status, household size, education, employment, income and social norms vary greatly among the surveyed population. That said, there are prevalent patterns across the population of surveyed rural women that are worth highlighting.

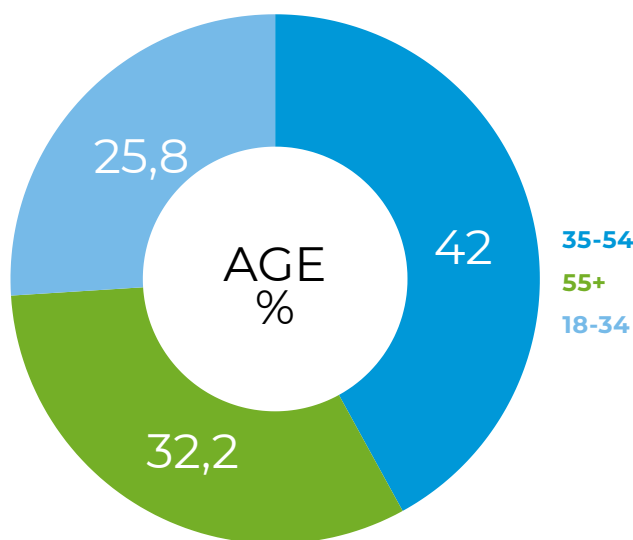


Chart 1 // Respondents by Age Group

The average age of the surveyed women is 46.2 years.¹⁷ Most are primary school graduates, married, and have an average of 3.1 children. They are typically not engaged in paid employment but instead undertake significant unpaid work, including household chores, caregiving for dependents and agricultural duties.

¹⁷Note that the sample of respondents only included women older than 18 years.



Surveyed Rural Woman
National Average

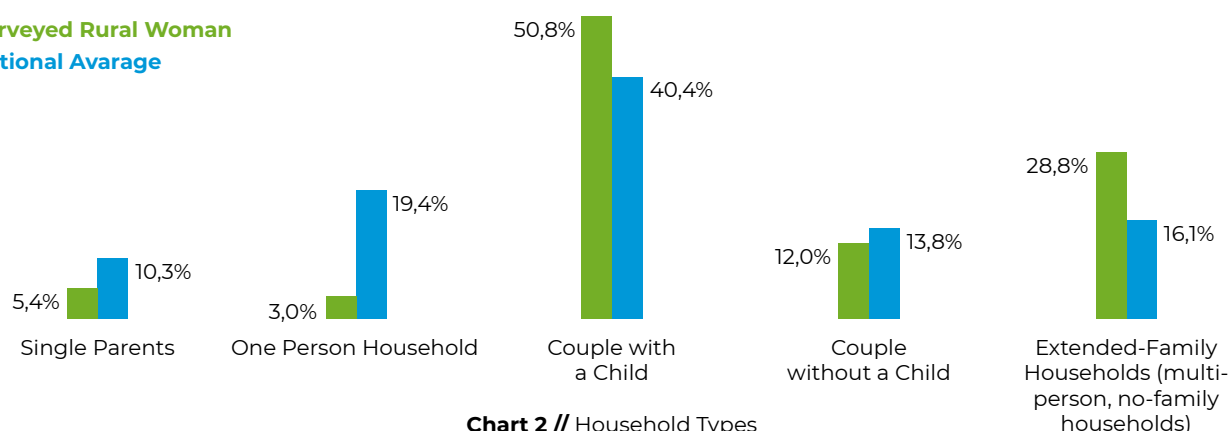


Chart 2 // Household Types

Rural women tend to have larger households, with an average of 4.5 people per household, in contrast to the national average of 3.2 people. They are also more likely to have extended family members residing within their households (28.8 percent) than the national average (16.1 percent).

The average **number of children** among women in rural areas is 3.1, which is much higher than the national average of 1.7.¹⁸ 23 percent of household members are children under the age of 18, as compared to estimates of 30 percent in urban areas.¹⁹ Among the surveyed population, 88.1 percent had at least one child, and 57.1 percent had three or more children.

	National Average	Surveyed Rural Women
Number of Children	1.7	3.1
Household Size	3.2	4.5

Table 2 // Average Number of Children and Household Members

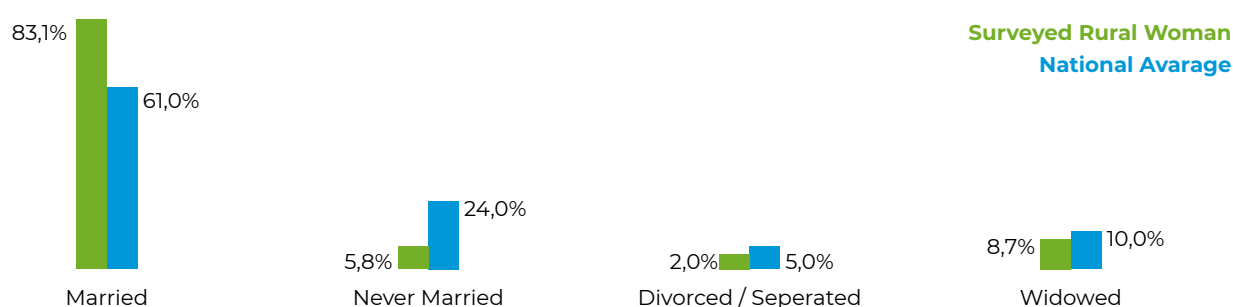


Chart 3 // Marital Status

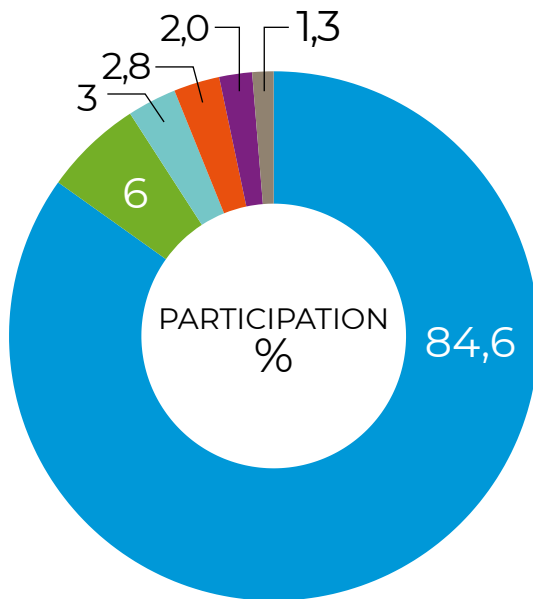
83.1 percent of rural women are **married** (civil and/or religious marriage). Overall, women in rural areas have significantly lower rates of singlehood and divorce than the national averages.

66.9 percent of respondents have resided in their **current residence** since birth, while 19.3 percent have lived there for over 15 years. Only 15.7 percent of women have experienced urban life within their current region. Those who have lived in urban areas are more likely to have a higher education level compared to those who have not experienced urban life.

Only 13.8 percent of rural women participate in regular paid work. This participation varies significantly with age: 19.4 percent of women between 18 and 49 years old are engaged in paid employment, contrasting sharply with just 9.4 percent of those aged 50 and older.

¹⁸TurkStat, 2021.

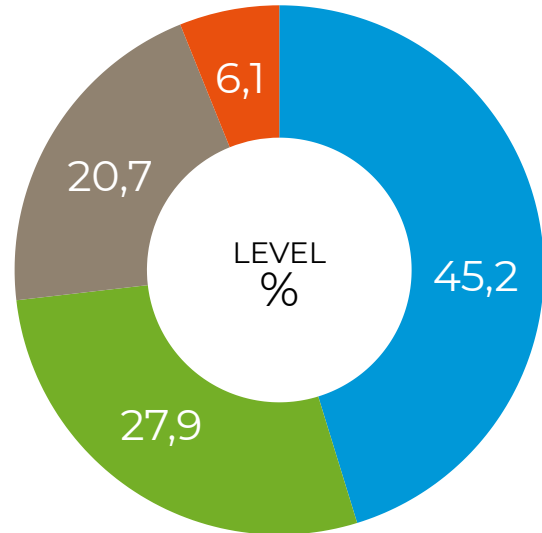
¹⁹UNICEF, n.d.



Domestic and Care Work Looking for a job
Retired Physical condition
Student unable to work
Other

Chart 4 // Primary Factors Affecting the Workforce Participation of Rural Women

As Chart 4 reveals, a significant portion of rural women – 84.6 percent – are engaged in domestic and care work, suggesting a prevalence of traditional gender roles and a lack of support for balancing domestic responsibilities with employment. Physical conditions prevent 2 percent from working, reflecting the impact of disabilities, chronic illnesses, or age-related issues. 6 percent of the women identified their status as ‘retired.’ This designation may not necessarily reflect prior employment but may indicate a status achieved through accumulated paid premiums. 3 percent are students and only 2.8 percent reported that they are actively seeking employment.



Primary Tertiary
Secondary No Education

Chart 5 // Level of Education

According to the Türkiye Demographic and Health Survey (2018), 73.6 percent of rural women have only received education at the primary school level or none at all. This is significantly higher than the 65.9 percent of all survey respondents in the same category, as depicted in Chart 5.

The prevalence of illiteracy is higher in rural areas, attributed not only to an aging rural population but also to limited access to schooling. Educational attainment differs substantially among women in terms of age, with younger women having achieved higher levels of education.



Education

Key Takeaways /

- 20.7 percent of the surveyed rural women have had no formal education or are illiterate.
- Higher levels of education are closely linked with a rural woman's ability to access essential services, resources, agricultural/vocational training and paid work.
- The level of education is higher among younger women and lowest among older women, who consequently face many challenges due to their illiteracy. These challenges include difficulty accessing essential services (health care and legal services), limited opportunities for agricultural/vocational training and paid work, and reduced ability to participate in family decision-making processes.
- 74.3 percent of women who could not access education say this was due to a lack of their family's approval (58.8 percent) and community pressures (15.5 percent). In addition, 31.7 percent of surveyed women who could not access education say this was due to not being informed about the rights and services.

Despite persistent challenges to attending school in rural areas such as distance, the need for child labor at home, seasonal migration, cultural biases against young girls, and child marriages,²¹ recent data suggest an increase in girls' education.²² Studies from 2012 and 2019 highlight that more

rural families are now valuing girls' education equally with that of boys,²³ a shift which is also reflected in the data from this report. As can be seen in the chart below, younger generations of rural women have significantly higher levels of education as compared to older women.

Tertiary
Secondary
Primary
No Education

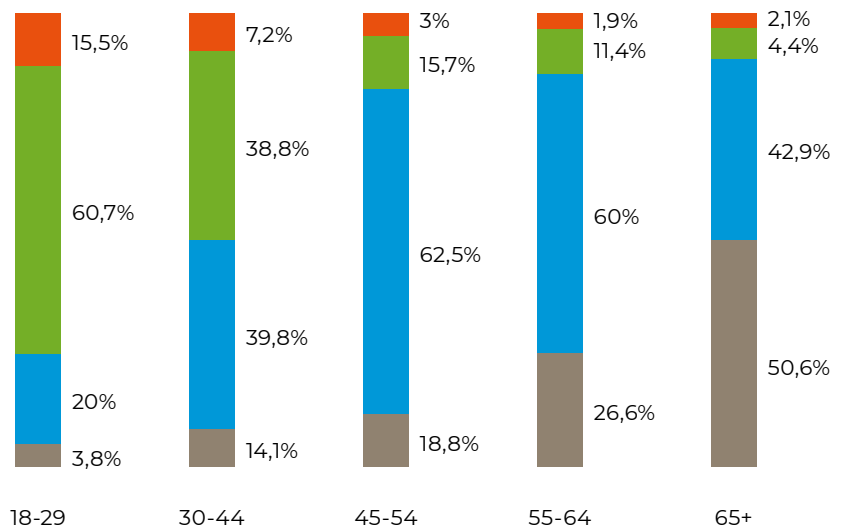


Chart 6 // Highest Level of Education Attained by Age Groups

²¹Beydili Gürbüz, 2017.

²²Hacettepe University Institute of Population Studies, 2018, and TurkStat, 2023b.

²³Baş, 2019, and Kan, 2012.

Formal Education

As Chart 6 above demonstrates, education levels are higher among younger women. Only 3.8 percent of the surveyed women with no education are in the 18-29 age group, compared to 50.6 percent for the 65+ age group. In the age groups of 18-29 and 30-44, a significant proportion of female respondents, 60.7 percent and 62.5 percent, respectively, have achieved secondary education.

The data also reveals that younger rural women are significantly more aware of their educational rights compared to older generations, indicating a shift in attitudes and increased opportunities for young women to access education.²⁴ Furthermore, the focus group discussions and interviews indicate that while many older women have not been able to access schooling, there is now a stronger commitment to girls' education. Many quotes from participants indicate that while they were not given the opportunity to attend school, the common understanding is that their children, particularly girls, should go to school.

Well, my daughter wanted to study, so we enabled her to study so she wouldn't be like us. We did not study, we tell them to work hard so that their lessons are good so that their efforts are not in vain."

-FGD, Ağrı

I never went to school. Now I say to my daughters, I do everything, you only go to school. I say to them, think of me."

- FGD, Erzurum

Of the women surveyed, 30.4 percent reported facing difficulties in accessing education. Among these, 8.3 percent are in the 18-29 age group and 15.1 percent are aged 65 and older. This suggests an improvement in educational access for younger generations but the persistence of barriers to accessing education. The reported barriers are similar among women of different age groups. Crucially, out of the 30.4 percent who had trouble accessing education, in every age group, a significant majority of women say they could not access education due to **family or community pressure** (see Chart 7). 74.3 percent of women who reported experiencing barriers in accessing education say this was due to their family's disapproval (58.8 percent) and community pressures (15.5 percent). In addition, 31.7 percent of surveyed women say this was due to not being informed on the rights and services. 20.7 percent of the surveyed women reported that being a woman is itself a barrier to access to education, signifying the pervasive gender biases that still obstruct women's educational opportunities.²⁵ This underscores the need for targeted policies and community education programs to dismantle these barriers and ensure equal access to education for all women.

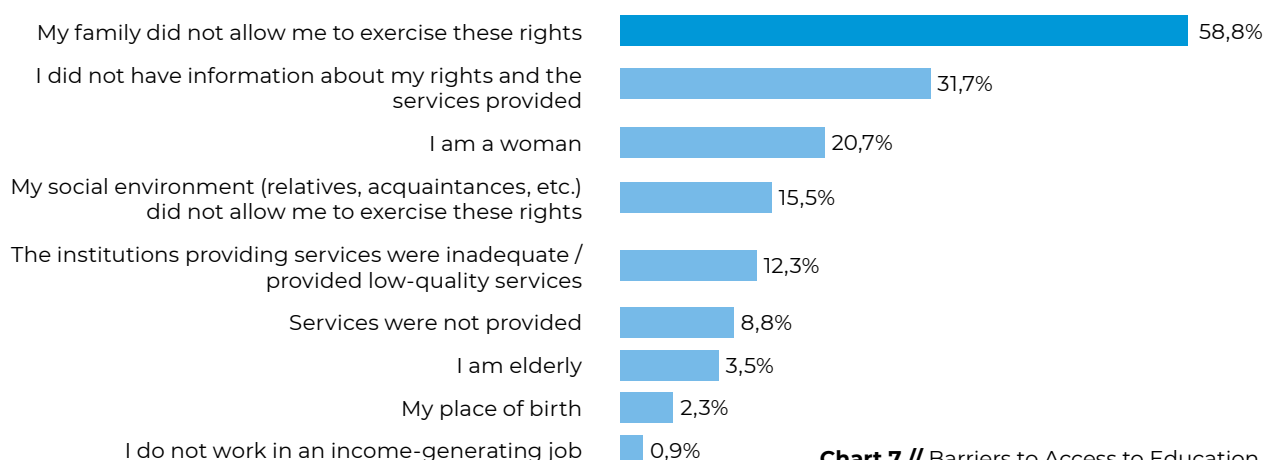


Chart 7 // Barriers to Access to Education

²⁴However, it is noteworthy that 9.9 percent of the surveyed women aged 18-29 were not aware of their right to education. This finding underscores the need for continued efforts to raise awareness about the right to education, particularly among older generations.

Besides social factors, survey respondents highlight that access to education today is largely affected by the distance to schools and educational facilities, as well as the lack of or infrequent transport services. For example, **18.1 percent of all surveyed women live in villages where no school exists.** Among the surveyed women who encountered barriers in accessing education, 8.8 percent indicated that this was due to the unavailability of educational services. This is significant, as many rural women are unable to use transport services independently (42.5 percent of the surveyed women), which impacts their ability to reach educational facilities.

Agricultural Education and Training

Education services outside of the formal schooling system, such as vocational and agricultural training, are crucial for improving skills and adapting to the changing landscape of income generation. Due to shifts in modern farming techniques, agriculture and animal husbandry have increasingly become technology- and knowledge-intensive. In addition, the impacts of climate change are requiring farmers to adapt to more sustainable and resilient agricultural methods such as agroforestry. As a consequence, failing to participate in training can result in the long-term loss of financial and social

opportunities and potential improvements to living standards. These training services are provided by various institutions like the Turkish Employment Agency (İŞKUR), Public Education Centers, and national and international organizations.

The survey data clearly highlights the relationship between education levels and ability to access vocational training, public education center courses and agricultural training activities. While access varies depending on age and education, overall rates of access to training services are poor. Many rural areas lack these services altogether. For instance, **58.1 percent of respondents have no vocational training institutions in their area, 59.9 percent lack Public Education Centers (Halk Eğitim Merkezi), and 69.5 percent do not have access to agricultural training offered by local and international organizations.**²⁶

As Chart 8 illustrates, women who have completed only primary and secondary school are largely unable to access various training activities and the opportunities that come with them. Meanwhile, women with tertiary education report the highest levels of access (only around 6.2 percent of women with tertiary education do not have access to agricultural training activities).

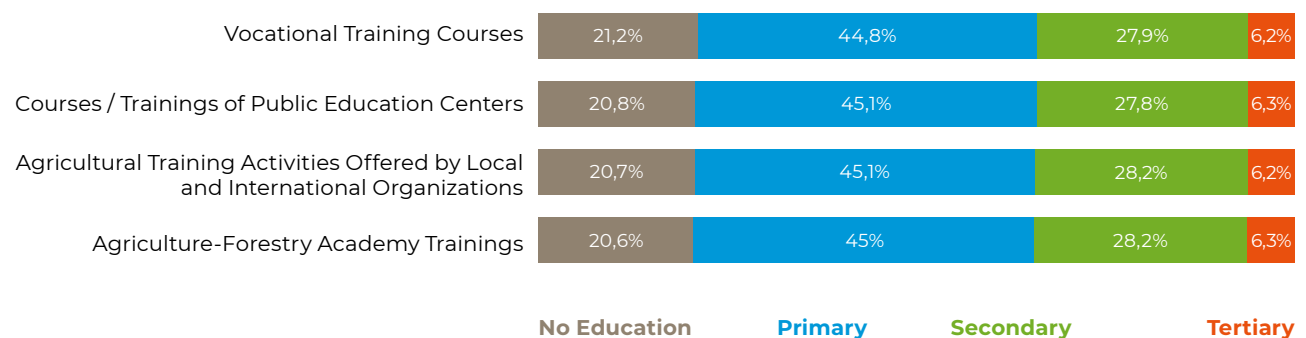


Chart 8 // Percentage of Women Who have No Access to Agricultural Training Activities, by Education

Similarly, younger women have greater access to training courses compared to older women, make more use of courses on agricultural skills and are generally more aware about available services. While the majority of respondents (78.9 percent) can mainly access training courses when

accompanied by someone else (see Chart 9), young women are more likely to access training courses independently than their older counterparts. This is largely due to the higher literacy rates of younger women, which enables more effective participation in further learning opportunities.

²⁶Additionally, 71.7 percent have no Agri-Forest Academy, 70.2 percent cannot access the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry's information and registration systems, and 76.1 percent lack language courses.

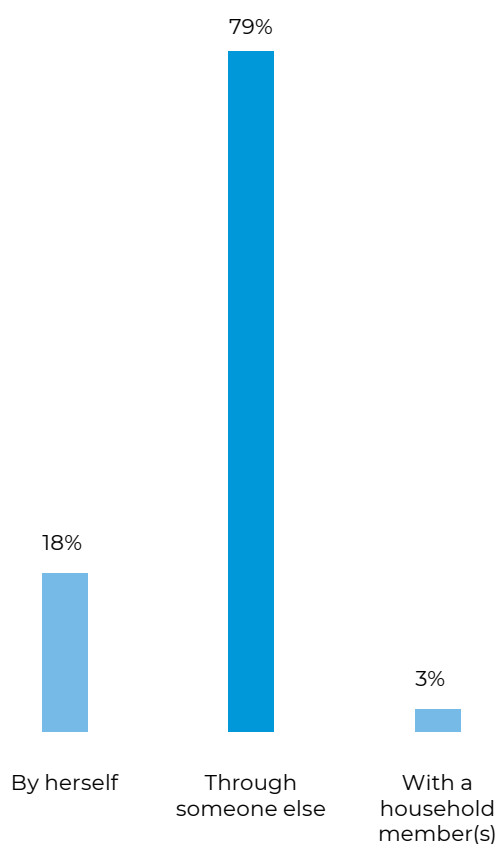


Chart 9 // Means of Access to Agricultural Training

Findings from the primary data collection revealed that agricultural trainings offered by national and international organizations are the least accessible to women. Only 5.5 percent of respondents can access these independently, indicating poor accessibility.

Beyond issues of proximity and distance to training services and levels of education, other factors also impact access to training. Even though women are responsible for a significant part of agricultural activity (as described further in subsequent chapters), they are typically left out of the extension trainings conducted by state and voluntary organizations since they are not registered as farmers. Women in rural areas do not have information on these programs, they find it difficult to spare time from daily chores and they may not be able to get permission from their husbands to receive training in male-dominated spaces.²⁵

²⁷Rad et al., 2012.



Paid and Decent Works



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Key Takeaways /

- Only 13.8 percent of the surveyed women are engaged in some form of paid work. Although higher levels of education correlate with increased participation in paid even with tertiary education, a significant proportion of women (56.5 percent) remain engaged in unpaid work, suggesting that education alone does not guarantee labor force participation.
- Despite the transition away from agriculture for many rural women, it remains one of the few viable employment options and, crucially, a primary source of livelihood. Notably, women and girls constitute 57 percent of all household members engaged in agricultural activities. However, only 18.7 percent of all surveyed women have ownership over agricultural land, underscoring the challenges rural women face in achieving economic independence and securing livelihoods.
- Women in paid agricultural work face significant challenges as well. Female seasonal workers have struggles related to very low wages, lack of social security, child labor and poor hygiene conditions.
- A significant proportion of rural women are engaged in unpaid work: 95.9 percent in household chores, 83.6 percent in childcare, 44.5 percent in farming or gardening, and 39.7 percent in animal care. Additionally, 6.8 percent care for older persons, and 3.5 percent care for sick individuals or those with disabilities. Despite their extensive contributions, 84.6 percent of women not in paid work describe themselves as “housewives,” highlighting the undervaluation of their labor.
- Almost half, 47.9 percent of the surveyed women who could not access work, say this was due to their lack of knowledge on their rights and available opportunities.

Rural women across Türkiye are engaged in a variety of productive work to support the income, livelihoods, and sustenance of their households. Whilst only **13.8 percent of the surveyed women are engaged in some form of paid work**; it is clear from the data that women form an integral role in providing unpaid work for their households in the form of both agricultural labor and care work.

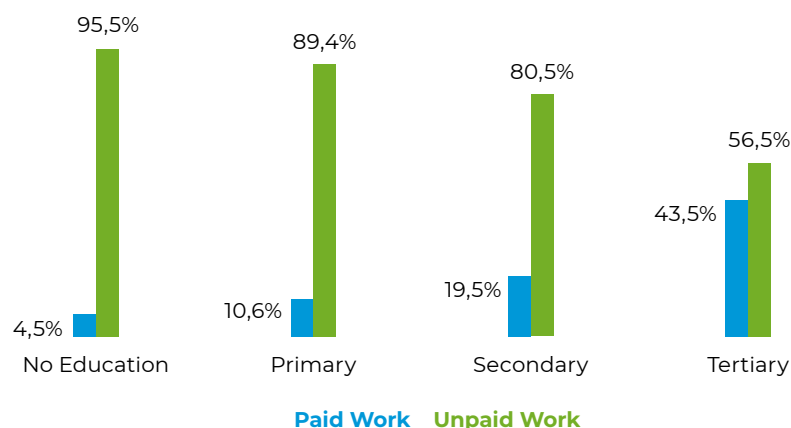


Chart 10 // Women Engaged in Paid / Unpaid Work, by Level of Education

Education is widely recognized as a key factor influencing socio-economic outcomes, as it can provide individuals with the skills, knowledge and qualifications needed to access better job opportunities, improve earning potential, and enhance overall quality of life. While education is a powerful tool for improving socio-economic outcomes, its effectiveness can be influenced by a variety of contextual factors.

As depicted in Chart 10, higher levels of education correlate with increased participation in paid labor among women living in rural areas. However, it is important to note that even with tertiary education, a significant proportion of women remain engaged in unpaid work, **suggesting that education alone does not guarantee labor force participation. Societal norms and domestic and care responsibilities profoundly affect women's ability to engage in paid employment, a challenge that is exacerbated by the scarcity of job opportunities in rural settings.**

Chart 11 shows a clear trend of increasing average number of children with decreasing levels of education. Women with lower educational attainment often have more children, which heightens the demands of domestic and care responsibilities, limiting the time women can devote to paid employment, participation in social life or skill development. Consequently, women with more children and lower education levels face challenges regarding unpaid care work and greater financial strain, increasing their risk of poverty.

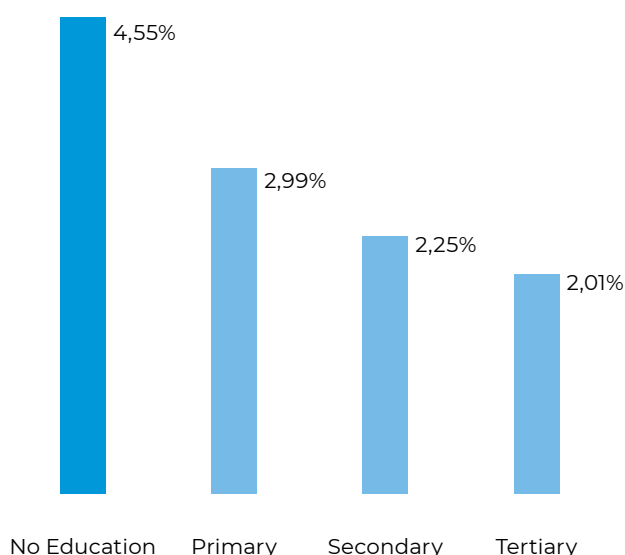


Chart 11 // Average Number of Children by Level of Education



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²⁸A World Bank, 2020.

²⁹In Türkiye individuals are considered to live below the poverty line if the household earns less than 5.5 USD per day according to the World Bank, (World Bank, 2020).

Women in Rural Türkiye

Navigating Barriers in Access to Resources, Services, and Decision-Making

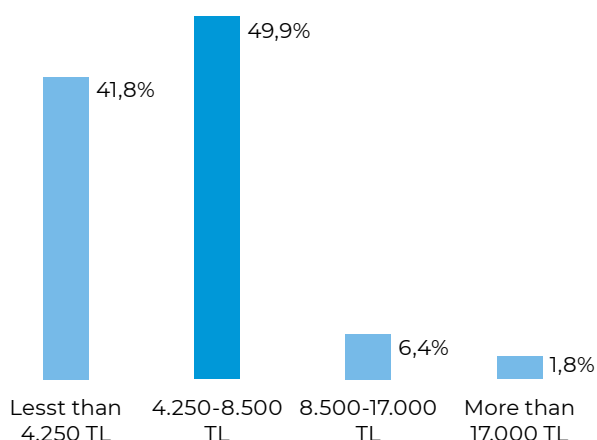


Chart 12 // Average Monthly Household Income of Respondents

A significant portion of respondents (41.8 percent) reported having a household income below the minimum wage of 4,253.4 TRY (approximately 288.6 USD³⁰ in the first half of 2022³¹). The second largest group of respondents (49.9 percent) reported a household income ranging between 4,250 and 8,500 TRY (up to two times the minimum wage). Additionally, 6.4 percent of respondents reported an income between 8,500 and 17,000 TRY, while only 1.8 percent had a household income exceeding 17,000 TRY. With an average household size of 4.5, these income levels indicate varying degrees of financial strain, highlighting the multifaceted barriers to social and economic empowerment that women encounter in rural contexts.

Paid and Unpaid Work

86.2 percent of the surveyed women are not engaged in paid work, and out of these, only 2.8 percent are actively seeking a job. A substantial majority of women who are not engaged in paid work (84.6 percent) described themselves as “housewives.” Rural women bear the primary responsibility for household chores and caregiving, especially for dependents, including children, older people and people with disabilities. Many women are also engaged in agricultural activities and animal husbandry for the purposes of family consumption. Despite their extensive contributions, women’s labor frequently goes unacknowledged by their male counterparts and even themselves. For instance, this is reflected by the fact that only **9.1 percent of the surveyed women identified themselves under the category “unpaid family worker,”** while at the same time, half of surveyed women say that they participate in different forms of agricultural activities without getting paid. Thus, while women overwhelmingly describe themselves as “housewives,” in fact they are actively involved in labor-intensive productive

activities which contribute to the sustenance of their households.

On a typical day, women engage in many unpaid yet productive activities in the home, such as household chores and childcare. Chart 13 illustrates that 95.9 percent of women are involved in household chores and 83.6 percent in childcare, making these the most common responsibilities. Nearly half of the women, 44.5 percent, engage in farming or gardening, and 39.7 percent care for animals while 6.8 percent care for older persons and 3.5 percent care for sick individuals or those with disabilities.

Women’s unpaid care work plays a crucial role in sustaining the household as a whole and enabling one or more household members to engage in other work. Notably, **70.4 percent of the surveyed women say that they do not have access to a nursery or childcare facilities,** meaning that women in their communities must take on these responsibilities.

³⁰The net minimum wage in Türkiye was 4,253.4 TL for the first six months of 2022. In the second half of 2022, the minimum wage increased to 5,500.3 TL. The net minimum wage is calculated as 288.6 USD for the first six months using the Central Bank of Türkiye’s exchange rates. For the second six months, this figure rises to 301.6 USD. These calculations are based on data retrieved from the Ministry of Labor and the Central Bank of Türkiye.

³¹For the net and gross minimum wage rates, please consult <https://www.csgeb.gov.tr/media/93378/netbrutasgari.pdf>

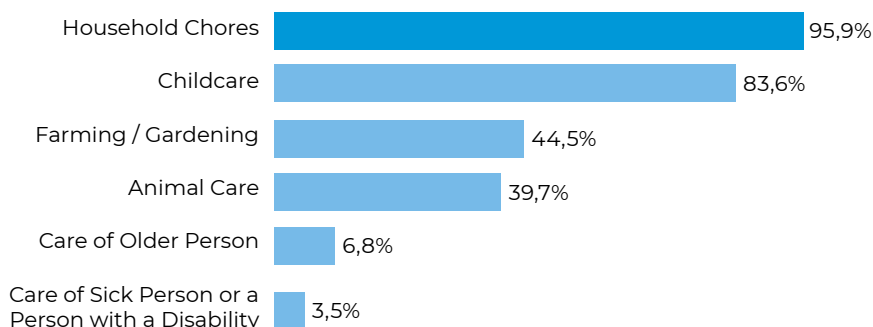


Chart 13 // Women’s Activities on a Typical Day (multiple answers possible)

While women do both important care work and agricultural labor that are imperative to help sustain a rural household, family members, particularly men, do not always recognize their valuable economic contributions to the household. As two male interviewees stated:

“Women do not go to the field nowadays. I do the farming; the tractors do the farming. Women do not know which field has which crop. They have a very comfortable life. They have tea at home. They live an urban life.”

- FGD with men, Kayseri

“What do women do all day? They eat and drink. There is no work at home, I swear. The machine does the job, the washing machine, the cleaning machine. Now the smart machine is out, they just adjust it and the house is clean.”

- FGD with men, Erzurum

These quotes mirror common tendencies highlighted in many other studies to disregard work done by women at home and connected to the home, such as care work, small-scale gardening and animal husbandry.³² When work is not acknowledged as actual work, this leads to an unequal distribution of caregiving duties within households and communities, creating a cycle where women face barriers to employment due to their double burden in terms of caregiving and other tasks.³³

As stated earlier, even educated women face challenges in encountering job opportunities. Although they have higher employment levels compared to less educated women, only 43.5 percent of tertiary-educated women in the survey are engaged in paid work. As one informant explains,

“I went to school, I am a business administration graduate. (...) I don't work, I don't actually have a job opportunity.”

- FGD with women, Hatay

There are also some women in paid work who face significant challenges and vulnerabilities. Female seasonal workers, for example, have struggles related to very low wages, lack of social security, child labor and poor hygiene conditions. These women also face an exacerbated ‘double burden,’ as they are expected to still care for the household while working long days in the field:

“I have been working as a seasonal worker for 5-6 years. (...) We are here from the 4th to the 10th month. Here, for example, we just came from the field. We will do the laundry, we will prepare the bread, we will prepare the food, we will wash the socks, we will lay the beds. We will do everything. Sometimes we cook bread until 2 am.”

- FGD with seasonal workers, Ankara

Several social and logistical barriers exclude rural women from economic participation as well. Of the women who stated that they had difficulty accessing the right to decent work, 47.9 percent lack knowledge of their right to work and available services.

³²Al-Haik, 2015, Candan & Günel, 2013, and Gülçubuk, 2010.

³³Al-Haik, 2015, Atakan Gönüllü, 2014, and Him & Hoşgör, 2017.



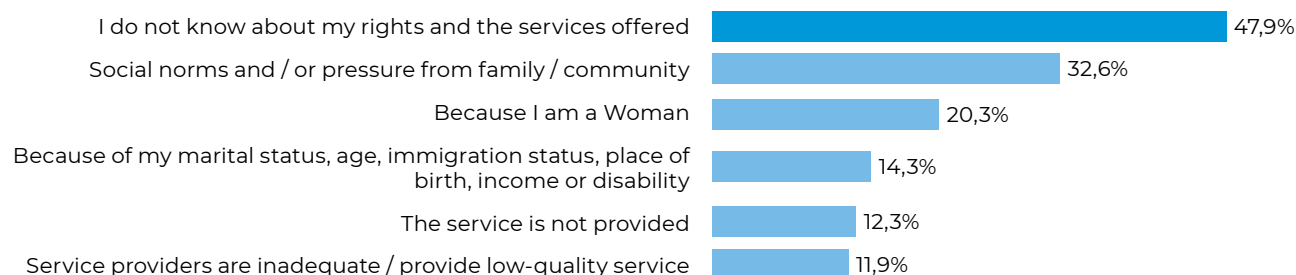


Chart 14 // Barriers in Accessing Decent Work Opportunities (multiple answers possible)

Social norms and pressure from family or community also play a substantial role, affecting 32.6 percent of women. Intersecting inequality axes such as marital status, age, immigration status, place of birth, income or disability serve as barriers for 14.3 percent of women. Women who face other intersectional challenges are also particularly vulnerable. For women with disabilities, older women, single women and female-headed households, the barriers to exercising the right to decent work can be even more pronounced. Additionally, 12.3 percent of women report that the necessary services are not provided, while 11.9 percent cite inadequate or low-quality service providers as a hindrance. Gender discrimination is another significant barrier, reported by 20.3 percent of women.

Another central issue relates to the limits to women's mobility in rural communities. 24.2 percent cite the absence or low quality of services as an impediment to work. As evident in Chart 14, social pressures can also limit women's possibilities to move and spend time outside of the home, affecting both their ability to find paid employment and engage in large-scale/non-home-based agriculture. As one informant explains:

It is very difficult [to include women in agriculture]. The view here is that the woman does not work outside but works in her own garden. If the field is too far outside, she will not work."

- KII, Ağrı

In rural areas, these obstacles are compounded by a lack of diverse job opportunities outside of agriculture. Historically, agriculture has been the primary form of work in rural areas of Türkiye. Yet, major socio-economic changes related to the modernization of farming technologies, rural-urban migration, and the introduction of compulsory primary education have reconfigured the labor landscape in recent decades. These changes are slowly driving a turn away from agriculture as the main form of livelihood among rural populations. This shift poses significant challenges for rural women seeking employment, as opportunities beyond agriculture remain limited.



Engagement in Agriculture

According to TurkStat (2023), agricultural employment accounts for 15.8 percent of the total workforce,³⁴ while 16.1 percent of the population resides in rural areas.³⁵ The research revealed that three out of four households still engage in agricultural activities in the surveyed area.

However less than half of all households had earned income from agriculture in the last year. In the past year, households earned their income from various sources, with 47.2 percent coming from farming, 29.4 percent from salary/wage/daily wage, 20.5 percent from pensions, 5.7 percent from self-employment, and 3.7 percent from social assistance. The transition away from agriculture as the primary source of livelihood is evident, but for many rural women, agriculture remains one of the few accessible employment options. The survey revealed that **out of all household members who engage in agricultural activities, 57 percent are women and girls.**

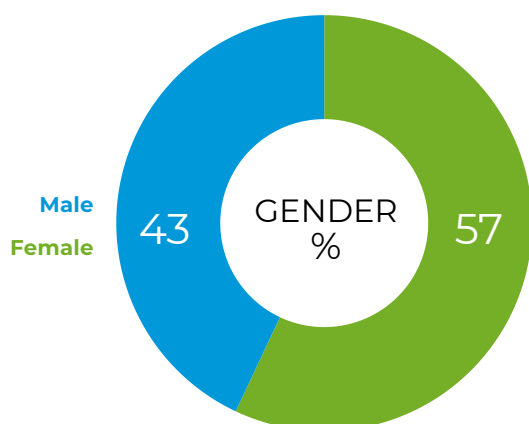


Chart 15 // Household Members Engaged in Agricultural Activities, by Gender

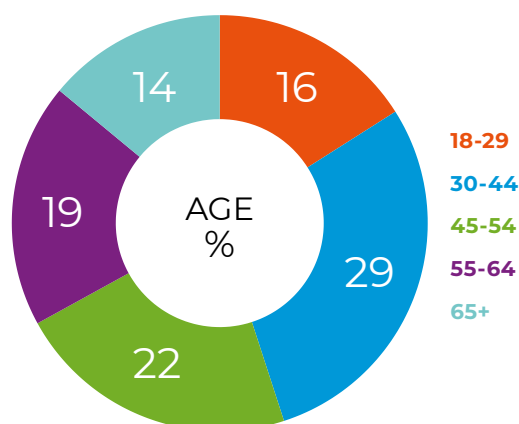


Chart 16 // Women's Engagement in Agriculture, by Age

Chart 16 illustrates the engagement level of women in agriculture across different age groups. Women aged 30-44 have the highest level of engagement, with 28.8 percent involved in agricultural activities. This is followed by the 45-54 age group, where 22.2 percent of women are engaged in agriculture. The 55-64 age group sees a further decline, with 19.3 percent participation. Younger women aged 18-29 show a lower engagement level of 15.6 percent (which is compatible with the national data of 15.8 percent),³⁶ while the lowest engagement is observed among women aged 65 and older, with

only 14 percent involved in agriculture. This trend suggests that women in their prime working years are more involved in agriculture, potentially due to a combination of experience, responsibility, and fewer alternative employment opportunities. The lower engagement of younger women, on the other hand, highlights a growing divergence from traditional agricultural roles. The aging workforce and the lack of younger individuals entering agriculture may lead to challenges in maintaining continuity and adapting to modern agricultural practices.

³⁴TurkStat, 2023c.

³⁵TurkStat, 2023a.

³⁶TurkStat, 2023d.

Chart 17 illustrates the correlation between educational attainment and participation in agricultural activities among women. It reveals that women with primary education exhibit the highest level of engagement in agriculture at 48.7 percent, confirming the hypothesis that this group may have limited employment opportunities outside the agricultural sector. In contrast, women with no formal education and those with a secondary education show lower engagement levels, at 19.3 percent and 26 percent, respectively. The lowest engagement is observed among women with tertiary education, with only 5.9 percent involved in agriculture. As discussed in the previous sections, while tertiary education increases the likelihood of paid employment (56.5 percent in paid employment), a substantial portion of tertiary-educated women still engage in unpaid work.

Out of the surveyed women who participated in crop activities in the last 12 months (gardening in the field, animal products, dairy products, bee products, fishery and greenhouses), 76.9 percent said these activities were done for their household consumption and 45.2 percent indicated that the crops/produce were for sale. This indicates that a significant portion of agricultural work focuses on meeting family food needs, which often falls into the category of unpaid domestic labor and is typically undervalued economically. Although some produce contributes to income, the emphasis on sustaining the household highlights the extensive unpaid labor performed by women.

As stated, despite their active involvement in agriculture, women's contributions are frequently underrecognized, and they face disparities in accessing agricultural grants and land ownership compared to men. For example, of the surveyed households who own agricultural land, only 37.2 percent are owned by women. Yet only 18.7 percent of all surveyed women have ownership of agricultural land. Previous research also highlights that women have had to assume responsibilities that were traditionally fulfilled by men, while not always being provided with the knowledge, opportunities or decision-making power to be able to do so without experiencing complications.³⁷ As highlighted in the previous chapter, women also do not have sufficient access to agricultural training opportunities.

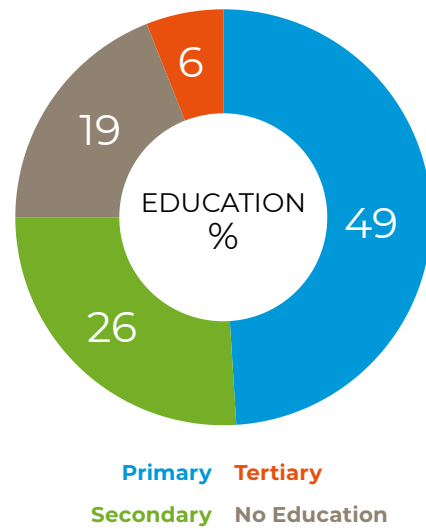


Chart 17 // Women's Engagement in Agriculture, by Education

In the context of rural communities experiencing significant transformations, it can be argued that men's work responsibilities have undergone more substantial changes compared to those of women. For example, historically female tasks connected to the home such as housework, animal husbandry, gardening and subsistence food production have remained within the domain of women. Men's responsibilities, on the other hand, were historically connected to the manual labor done in the field. Consequently, the mechanization of agriculture has reduced the need for hard manual labor, while further centering male labor responsibilities in the "public" sphere, including marketing, accessing credit and purchasing of agricultural tools and machinery and other inputs.³⁸ As one FGD participant in Kayseri put it, "the old days are over, here are many people who migrate to the city and work." Thus, labor needs have pushed men further away from the home while women's labor remains tied to it.

In regard to women's involvement in modern agriculture, besides the social factors discussed above, low levels of education and property ownership deter equal engagement in large-scale/modern agricultural undertakings. In terms of knowledge, it is men who tend to know about machinery and how to manage it and are more likely to have training in modern farming techniques. Lack of property ownership, especially agricultural property, also impacts women's

³⁷Cihangir et al., 2020, and Yükksekaya, 2018.

³⁸Cihangir et al., 2020.

opportunities to acquire knowledge, besides the obvious implications for economic autonomy and dependence. As a consequence, the majority of women do not have independent access to the main means of production in agriculture (i.e., land). In addition, this also means women cannot get credits as they have no collaterals, and they experience further problems in terms of registration with agricultural and livestock register systems, which prevents them from accessing training and services available to farmers (as noted, low levels of education also further complicate access to training services). Indicatively, just 12 percent of respondents had taken loan in the last 12 months, and only 4.3 percent of the women in the sample were registered to an agricultural registry system.

Alternative and Emerging Economic Activities

While the types of livelihood activities described above were the most common in our sample, there are some alternative livelihood forms that are worth highlighting due to their impact on women's life and as indication of emerging trends.

Entrepreneurial women and farmers: It has always been very common for women to sell or barter their own products within their immediate vicinity, and rural women's entrepreneurship has been encouraged by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (2021c), as well as many international programs, as a key poverty alleviation strategy.³⁹ The findings of qualitative research point to an emerging segment within this group of women bringing fresh perspectives and innovations to rural agriculture. On the one side, there are local entrepreneurs who often collaborate within family businesses but take a more active role in the family farming business than is the norm. There are also women with urban backgrounds who are investing in rural agriculture. These entrepreneurs are typically highly educated and leverage their urban experiences to bring innovation and change to rural areas. Women in this category are usually more involved women in decision-making processes, exhibit higher rates of property ownership and are able to benefit from preferential credit systems designed to support women's involvement in agriculture.

There is a former academic here who has retired from the industrial design department of the university. She does soilless strawberry cultivation. She personally works with the workers. Now many farmers realized that strawberry cultivation is very profitable so every year we see 200-300% increases in the yields. They sell directly to hotels, even to Europe."

- KII, Aydın



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Women cooperatives: Cooperative membership among surveyed women is only at 2.3 percent. However, cooperatives are highlighted as having a significant role in empowering rural women, offering opportunities for socialization and economic independence while also providing support in terms of childcare. By providing a platform for women to engage in collective activities, cooperatives can help members gain new experiences, connect with broader networks and achieve a degree of economic self-sufficiency. Despite these benefits, establishing and maintaining women's cooperatives presents considerable challenges. Many face difficulties in securing sufficient funding, effectively managing operations, and ensuring long-term sustainability. Additionally, the success of these cooperatives often depends on overcoming local cultural and logistical barriers, which can impede their ability to grow and thrive.

³⁹Gündüz-Hoşgör, 2014.

Participation in Decision- Making

Key Takeaways /

- Women's participation in public life is often associated with their limited access to public spaces and institutions, which can be linked to traditional gender norms and extensive unpaid care and domestic work at home. Additionally, low levels of education are correlated with reduced engagement in social and economic spheres.
- Women are included in many decisions connected to the household but lack independent decision-making power especially when it comes to monetary decisions, which are primarily made by male household members. Women are strongly in favor of equal participation in the public sphere, with over 90 percent of respondents agreeing that men and women should participate equally in employment and education. However, traditional social norms remain entrenched, as evidenced by nearly half of the respondents expressing the belief that men should have the final say in household decisions.
- Women's engagement in organizational involvement is notably low, with only 10.1 percent of registered farmers in the Farmers Registration System (ÇKS) being women, and their membership rates in cooperatives and political parties standing at just 2.3 percent and 1.2 percent, respectively. Participation in civil society organizations (CSOs) is also low, with only 0.4 percent of surveyed women being involved in civic engagement and advocacy efforts.

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Women's political participation and decision-making have traditionally been constrained by gender roles that confine women to the domestic sphere. However, with increasing rates of education and paid employment, there is an assumption that these dynamics are shifting. Survey data suggests that while education and employment positively impact rural women's participation in decision-making by increasing their access to various associations and political actors, these gains are still limited. Most rural women primarily participate in decisions related to the household, whereas their involvement in public political life remains minimal. Additionally, primary data indicates that when rural women do participate in household decision-making, it is often in collaboration with or under the guidance of their husbands or family members. In contrast, men frequently make household decisions independently, suggesting that men continue to be the predominant decision-makers. The survey also reveals the persistent barriers rural women face in achieving equal participation in both household and community challenges in terms of their engagement with agricultural institutions, access to networks and opportunities, and participation in social and political life.

Institutional Engagement, Access to Networks, Political Participation and Social Life

Understanding rural women's membership or enrolment in agricultural institutions provides insights into their involvement and influence in agricultural production and decision-making. The survey results indicate that rural women's engagement with agricultural institutions is significantly limited. For instance, the Farmers Registration System (CKS) has the highest membership rate at 10.1 percent, followed by agricultural producer/livestock associations at 7.1 percent, and chambers of agriculture at 6.1 percent. This suggests that only a small fraction of rural women is accessing the institutional support necessary for enhancing their agricultural activities.

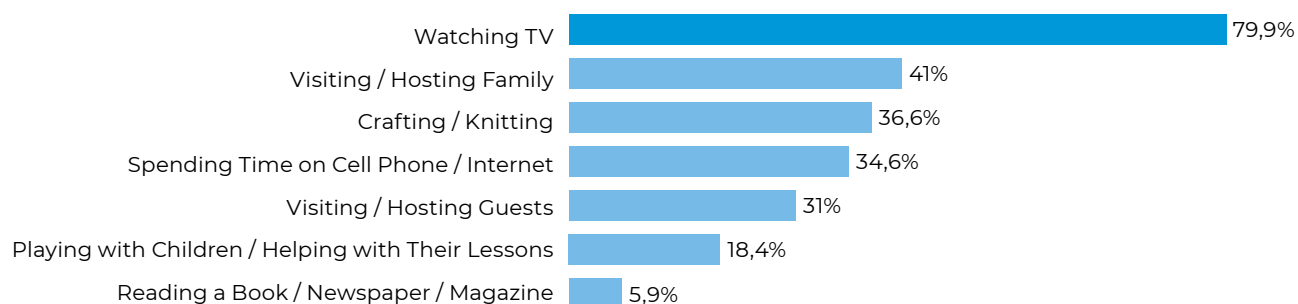
Women's low membership in cooperatives (2.3 percent) and political parties (1.2 percent) further highlight the barriers to accessing networks and opportunities that could empower women in rural settings. Furthermore, the minimal representation in microcredit associations, labor unions, and civil society organizations (CSOs) – with only 14, 18, and 17 women as members, respectively – underscores the challenges rural women face in leveraging collective action to advocate for their rights and interests in the agricultural sector. This lack of institutional participation can limit women's ability to influence their access to critical resources such as credit, information, and technology and to policies and decisions that directly impact their livelihoods.

A further indicator of political participation concerns the institutions that women can reach in cases of need. 36.2 percent of women indicate that they can reach the municipality, 11.7 percent agricultural producer/livestock associations, 11 percent cooperatives, 3.4 percent CSOs, 2.7 percent labor unions, and 1.7 percent micro-credit groups. While the municipality was by far the institution that most women could access in case of need, 36.2 percent is still low, and the field study

reveals that the relations of women with public officials and their elected representatives in rural areas vary significantly from region to region. In some places, women have almost no contact with them, while in other regions, women directly convey their demands and seek their rights.

Other factors that impact participation and membership in organizations are education and income. 12.6 percent of university graduates are registered to an organization compared to 1 percent for women who are illiterate. Membership is almost twice more in income groups above minimum wage, increasing from 5 percent to 23 percent. This indicates that when women are more actively engaged in activities outside of the home, which both education and employment entail, women also become engaged in other spheres of public and political life, with probable positive outcomes for women's empowerment.⁴⁰ Thus, while there are indications that rural women might become more politically empowered moving forward, the current situation is one where women's political participation is very limited. Furthermore, the qualitative interviews indicate variation in voting freedom and influence by women's spouses, with some men stating that they will also decide who their wives vote for in elections. These attitudes must be considered when analysing rural women's access to political participation, as they imply the existence of social norms which actively hinder rural women's political participation.

Women's participation in social life is also influenced by the activities they are involved in during the day. As has already been elaborated on, household chores and care of children and elderly relatives account for a significant portion of rural women's daily activities, as do other labor-intensive activities revolving around the house. Importantly, these activities take place within the confines of the home, limiting engagement with public life. In addition, women's leisure activities are often also home-based.



⁴⁰Atakan Gönüllü, 2014.

Chart 18 // Top 3 Leisure Activities Mentioned by Rural Women

Although rural women have limited time for leisure activities, they have a variety of preferred activities that bring them joy and well-being, most of which are closely tied to their homes. Chart 18 demonstrates the most common leisure pursuits among rural women, highlighting significant preferences in their free time activities. Watching TV emerges as the most popular activity, with 79.9 percent of women citing it as one of their top three leisure activities. This is followed by visiting/hosting family and guests, for 41 percent and 31.0 percent of women, respectively, reflecting the importance of social interactions in rural communities.

Crafting/knitting is also a notable activity, with 36.6 percent participation, indicating a traditional and productive use of leisure time. Additionally, 34.6 percent of women spend time on their cell phones or the internet, showing the reach of digital technology in rural areas. Conversely, activities such as playing with children/helping with their lessons and reading are less favored, with only 18.4 percent and 5.9 percent engagement, respectively. The fact that women's lives are centered around the home could contribute to low participation in public social activities.

Participating in Household Decision-Making

Regarding decisions made in the household, survey results show that decisions are most commonly made together with one's spouse. For instance, for 37.2 percent of respondents, this is the most common and primary way in which households decide on how to spend income, indicating a degree of economic participation for women (see Chart 19). However, the data also shows that, if taken together, it is more common that the economic decisions are primarily made by the respondent's spouse alone, or by the respondent's spouse and male relatives, without the participation of female household members. Only 21 percent of the surveyed women stated that they made decisions by themselves.

Respondents had the most independent economic decision-making power over decisions about the purchase of small household items (26.3 percent), large household items (15.8 percent) and animal breeding (9.4 percent) – which corresponds to respondents' most common daily activities (see Chart 20 as well as with the notion that housework and animal husbandry are seen as the responsibility of women. These categories also had the highest degree of participation in decisions overall, with 81 percent of women being involved in decisions on purchasing small household items, 75 percent in the purchase of large household items, and 72 percent in decisions concerning animal breeding. On the other hand, men in the household make decisions independently on issues of financing, employment, and business, in line with rural men's higher degree of involvement with this type of work.

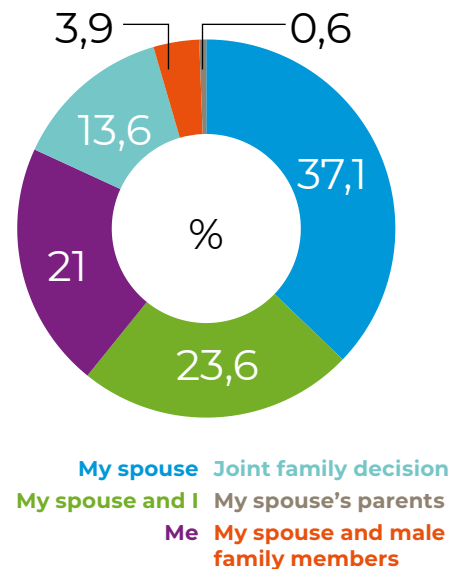


Chart 19 // Who primarily makes the economic decisions in the household?

Apart from decisions about the purchase of household items, women are the most involved in decisions regarding children's education (78.4 percent) and children's marriages (65.2 percent for boys and 68.3 percent for girls), consistent with women's care responsibilities in the home. However, it is worth noting that 19.7 percent of respondents indicate that boys are allowed to make their own decision when it comes to marriage, while only 15.7 percent do so when the question of marriage concerns female children. This indicates that male children are given more autonomy to make their own decisions, consistent with the other findings that grant rural men a larger degree of autonomy in terms of decision-making.

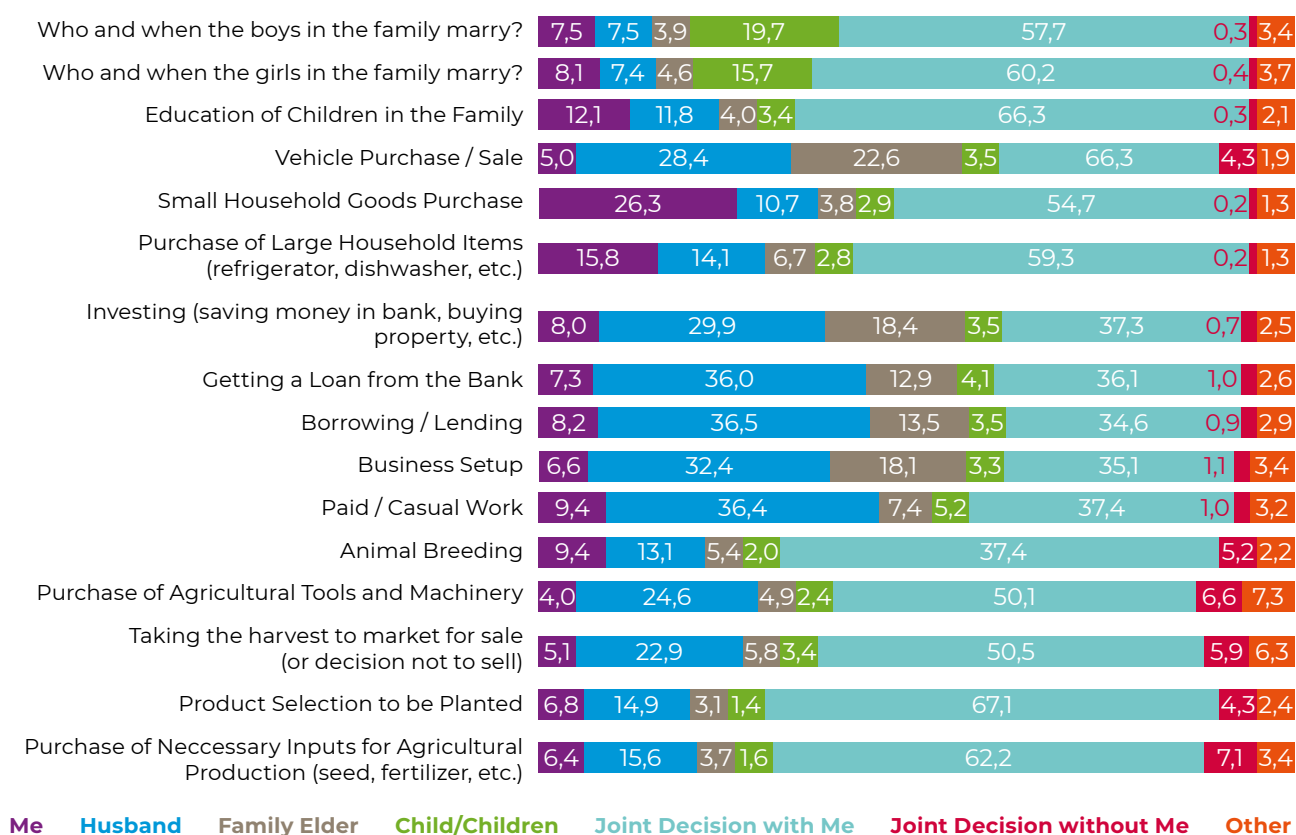


Chart 20 // Who makes decisions on the following issues?



Attitudes and barriers to participation and decision-making

Women's participation in political life is arguably curtailed by the persistent practice of women's lives and livelihoods being tied to the home and the household. Consequently, respondents report barriers in areas such as gaining employment or accessing services, socio-economic factors (such as care responsibilities, withdrawal from agricultural production and inability to access paid jobs) tying women to the home, and difficulties in accessing training and education, limited access to property ownership and low participation in social and public life also influence political participation.

The data suggests that while there is a strong desire among women for equal participation in public life, such as in employment and education, there are still significant barriers that prevent this from becoming a reality. Respondents are overwhelmingly in favor of women's equal participation in the public sphere, with over 90 percent of respondents agreeing that men and women should participate equally in employment (94 percent) and education (96.3 percent). This indicates that it is not women's attitudes or choices but other barriers that prohibit political participation.

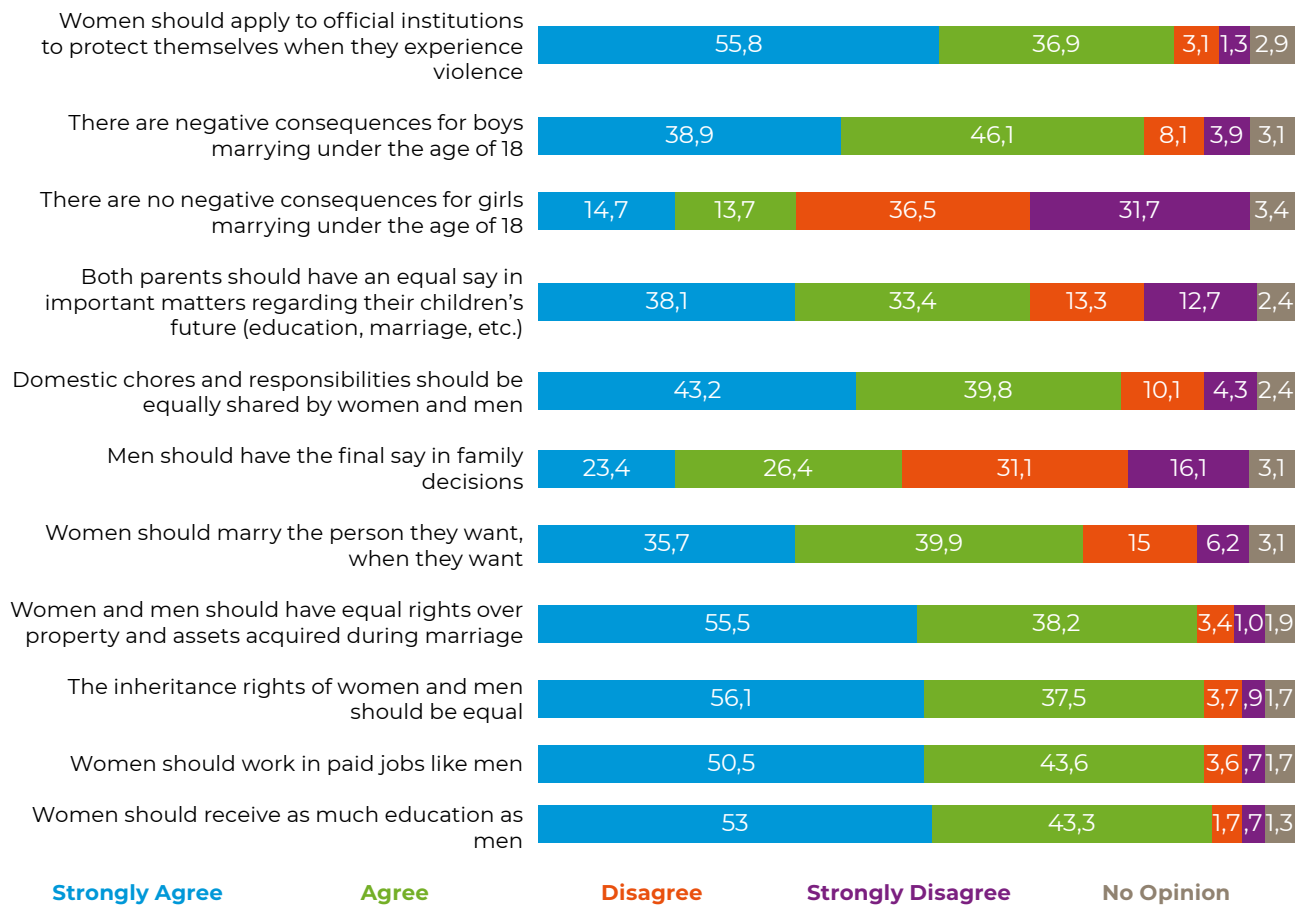


Chart 21 // Attitudes on Gender Equality and Rights

Interestingly, the data also reveals a dichotomy in women's attitudes towards decision-making within the family. On issues relating to the family, where women do have more influence, half of respondents stated they believed men should have the final word in the family. In addition, one third of women did not agree that parents should have an equal say on matters concerning the future of children. Together with women's attitudes on marriage of boys and girls, these attitudes show that, while the majority of respondents believe in women's and girls' right to make their own decisions, there is still a significant number of women – 24.4 percent of respondents – who do not believe that women and girls have the right to decide over essential aspects of their life such as marriage.

Collectively, responses show that many rural women hold limiting attitudes on gender concerning marriage and child-rearing, and on family decision-making in general. Education impacts these attitudes slightly, with most women (54 percent) with tertiary education disagreeing with the notion that men should have the last word in family affairs. Nevertheless, even among this group, a significant percentage of women have more conservative attitudes in regard to gender roles in the household. Interestingly, age did not significantly impact this position, with the same rate of young women believing men should have the final say in household affairs. The survey data shows that women tend to hold more conservative views on gender equality in areas where they have more influence. This suggests that women themselves contribute to maintaining traditional gender roles, as observed in other studies.⁴¹

⁴¹Çelik et al., 2015.



Access to Services and Social Assistance

Key Takeaways /

- Women's ability to access services is impeded by limited transportation means and the degree to which they can move independently. Age and education are key factors impacting women's independent movement and access to services.
- Women in rural areas often lack access to formal social protection mechanisms, largely due to their limited participation in paid work. As a result, they are not directly covered by social security systems. Instead, they depend on the social security benefits of household members, typically their spouses. This dependence leaves them economically vulnerable, as any external shock—such as a spouse losing their job or health benefits—can severely impact their well-being. Their low level of economic independence further amplifies this vulnerability, as they have limited means to access resources or secure social protections on their own.
- Women have limited access to legal services due to limited autonomy and the complexity of legal procedures that they are not familiar with. Community and family pressures play a substantial role in limiting access. Additionally, educational attainment significantly affects autonomy and ability to access services.
- Challenges in access to and enjoyment of inheritance rights highlight a significant gap in asset transfer to women; limited use of inheritance rights and access to legal services further exacerbates this issue.



Several factors impede women's access to a variety of services, including curtailed mobility, economic hardship and low levels of economic independence, social norms and family pressures, as well as low levels of education and literacy. Survey data (Table 3) shows that when rural women have access to key services like health care, social security and legal services, they are highly reliant on family members, presumably a husband, father or other male member of the family, to access these services. This significantly circumvents rural women's freedom and independence and makes them vulnerable to family and social pressures, as they rely on household members for essential services.

Table 3 // Access to Key Services

	Not Available	If Available, how does she access it?		
		By herself	Through someone else	With a household member
Daily Shopping	1.7%	53.0%	40.6%	4.7%
Banking Services	18.2%	30.6%	45.4%	5.7%
Judicial Services	26.8%	16.6%	44.8%	11.8%
Post office Services	20.1%	35.9%	40.0%	4.0%
Public Transport	10.2%	47.3%	39.4%	3.1%
Hospital	11.9%	41.1%	41.4%	5.6%
Medical Center	7.4%	48.0%	41.4%	3.2%
Midwife	17.0%	40.1%	40.4%	2.4%
School	18.1%	43.8%	33.2%	4.9%
Nursery / Childcare	70.4%	14.2%	14.7%	.7%
Clean Water	23.6%	50.7%	24.9%	.8%
Religious Services	6.6%	65.0%	27.2%	1.2%

The data further suggests that there is a noticeable variation in the availability and access method across different services. For instance, daily shopping and public transport are more accessible and accessed independently by more than half, presence of accompaniment is common. Services like banking (18.2 percent), judicial services (26.8 percent), and post office services (20.1 percent) are less available and more often accessed through someone else. Some services, like nursery/childcare and even clean water, show a high percentage of unavailability. This could significantly impact the quality of life and opportunities for women in these areas.

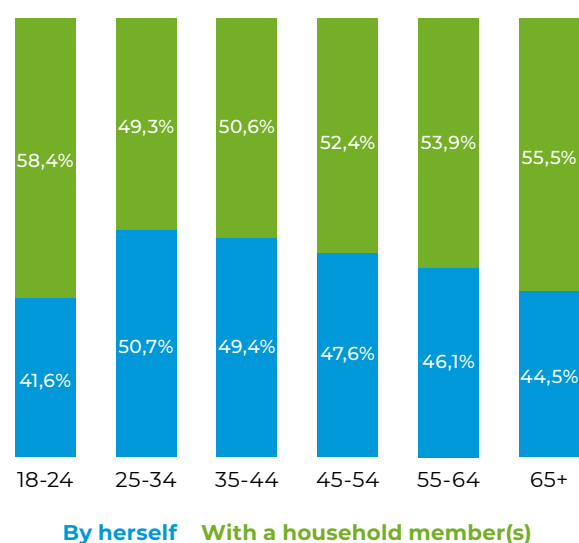
Transportation and Communication Services

Access to a vehicle and/or public transportation services is key since it determines access to many other services. Similarly, women's access to Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) is also important as it provides access to other services including education, employment and VAW-protection services.

Out of all households, only 39.9 percent have access to a vehicle (car or motorcycle), and out of those who have a vehicle, only 12.1 percent are owned by women. As such, women have a high reliance on various means of public transportation. While 89.9 percent of the respondents state that there is a public transportation service in their location, the qualitative study reveals women face difficulties in using this service due to low quality or insufficient

services provided. Values and practices that require women to use public transport in the company of others also limit women's use of transport services. Only 47.3 percent of respondents have accessed public transport on their own, and 39.4 percent need the company of a household member.

Furthermore, other factors such as health issues and education levels also impact women's ability to use public transport on their own. While 58.4 percent of the 18-24 age group indicated that they could use public transport by themselves, only 44.5 percent of those above age 65 do.

**Chart 22 //** How Women Access Public Transport, by Age

In addition, the qualitative study highlights that education and literacy are key determinants in using public transport, which consequently enables individuals to access other services and exercise their rights.

I mean, maybe we can say that the problem of women here is in literacy. A person who can't read can't get on the bus, can't go to one place, can't go to the hospital, but if they could read, they would go on their own. For example, when I go to the hospital, I know everywhere, I can see that this is the blood department, this is another department, because I can read, but people who do not know how to read suffer."

- FGD, Erzurum

The majority of women have access to information and communication technologies (ICTs). Of survey respondents, 95.9 percent have mobile phones and 57 percent have an internet connection at home. Access to a computer or tablet is more limited, with only 24.1 percent of respondents having one available in their home. 60.2 percent of respondents used the internet every day, and only 13.3 percent never used the internet. The survey data indicates that as with public transport, older women, who also tend to be less educated, will face barriers in accessing information about other services available to them via the internet.

Social Security and Social Assistance

Many women are not registered in the social security systems as independent individuals, which impacts their access to social security benefits and instead makes them dependent on family members for vital insurance such as pensions.

Chart 23 shows that 85.1 percent of surveyed women have some kind of social security insurance.⁴² However, 44 percent of surveyed

women are insured through someone else in the household. The majority (47.7 percent) of the respondents who do not use social security do not do so because they have no knowledge of rights and available services. Besides low levels of employment and low numbers of women who earn their own living affecting women's access to social security, economic hardship at the household level also affects their access to social security and that of their families.

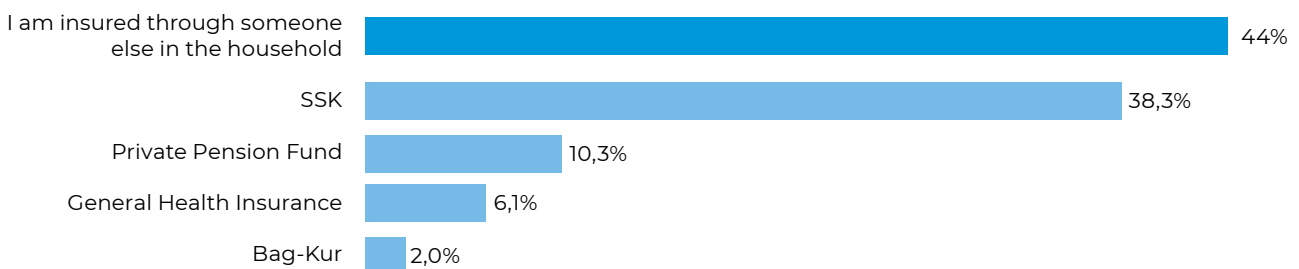


Chart 23 // Social Security Coverage (multiple answers possible)

Besides social security, survey results indicate that other forms of social assistance are very rarely used by respondents. The most accessed form of social assistance by households was child allowance, received by 7.4 percent of households. Additionally, 3.7 percent of households received family assistance and health aid, while 2.6 percent accessed disability assistance. Elderly assistance was accessed by 2.5 percent of households, and only 1.1 percent of women gained access to women-targeted assistance or disaster relief. Soup kitchens

were utilized by just 0.6 percent of respondents. Considering that lack of social security already exposes women to poverty, compounded by high rates of poverty and socio-economic vulnerability in rural areas, the low levels of access to social assistance suggest that rural households and rural women, in particular, are more exposed to external shocks and life changes that might impact their or their families' livelihood. (More on this in chapters to come.)

⁴²SSK is the insurance for all workers who are employed by an employer or an institution. Bağ-Kur, on the other hand, is the type of insurance that applies to employers, self-employed individuals, and professional groups not defined by law.

Agricultural technologies, credit and grants

Like social security, agricultural credits and grants are mainly accessed by women together or through another member of the household, though most women do not have any access. Survey results show that 61.6 percent do not have access to grants or credit programs at all, while 32.4 percent have access through another person/a member of their household. Only 6 percent of women have access to agricultural credit programs or grants on their own. These low numbers can be explained by the fact that women are not registered as farmers, generally do not own land, and do not have the necessary collaterals as outlined in previous chapters.

Furthermore, the qualitative data indicates that even when women have received an agricultural credit or grant, it is sometimes because their male family members exploit programs designed to favor women in an effort to stimulate women's agricultural activity. As one respondent explained: *"The general morality is that the husband is doing the job, he owns the property, but records his wife to ÇKS, that's what they do when it's a scam."* (KII, Ankara). Consequently, although the woman is listed as the recipient of the grant or loan on paper, the husband is the actual beneficiary.

The low levels of access to agricultural credits and grants hinder women's ability to explore new agricultural technologies or methods, which usually require higher inputs of capital and training. Only 0.3 percent of women reported using agricultural technologies such as drones, sensors, satellites, and information technologies in irrigated agriculture or animal husbandry or trying a new breed in animal husbandry. Additionally, about 29.3 percent of the respondents indicated that they had not heard about these technologies, and 70.4 percent of surveyed women knew about the technologies but did not ever use them.

Legal services

The use of legal services by women is limited due both to the patriarchal culture, which may limit the actions of women outside the family and community, and the complexity of legal procedures. Women primarily seek legal services for three main issues: inheritance disputes, divorce and violence against women (VAW). Divorce rates are generally low in Türkiye and even lower in the rural areas, and incidents of VAW, as underlined above, may go to the security forces but rarely to

court. However, this might be precisely because women struggle to access legal services.

Although most women (73.2 percent) reported having access to legal services, only 16.6 percent of the respondents could access services by themselves, compared to 61.5 percent with a household member (44.8 percent) or another person (11.8 percent), indicating limited independence for women in determining when they should access such services. 26.8 percent stated that there were no legal services available in their area.

A lack of awareness is perceived as the primary barrier to accessing legal services by more than half of the respondents (58.8 percent), who cited a lack of awareness of legal rights and available services. The combination of limited knowledge and complex legal procedures creates additional challenges for women in accessing legal services. Women with tertiary education are almost eight times more likely to use legal services on their own compared to those with primary education (43.4 percent and 5.9 percent, respectively). The use of legal services is also limited due to community, family and gender-based pressures for 29.3 percent of women, indicating many women are not allowed to use these services as they please. The absence of services (12.4 percent) and low quality of services (9 percent) are also seen as significant.

Survey results also show rural women face particular challenges when it comes to the legal enforcement of their property and inheritance rights. Only 20.4 percent of respondents have received an inheritance from parents, spouses or relatives, which, together with the low rates of property ownership, indicates a failure in the transfer of assets to rural women. This is corroborated by informant accounts of women either being made to transfer most or all their inheritance to male relatives to not risk social exclusion:

"Inheritance is equal, but girls usually don't take it, they leave it. They take some and give the rest to their brothers. It's very rare to find women who get inheritance from their fathers."

-FGD, Ankara

“Sisters who do not give their consent to give their inheritance to their brothers are excluded. If they say, no (...) it is taken from them by force. They do not talk to her, do not look at each other. (...) Kinship is very important here, no one risks being excluded by their relatives.”

- FGD, Ağrı

Among the survey participants, 50.3 percent of women identify family and relatives as the most common reason for not benefiting from inheritance and property rights. Additionally, 44.9 percent of respondents report a lack of knowledge of rights and available services and 32.9 percent of surveyed women attributed their challenges to gender-based discrimination. These practices, as described in the previous quotes, continue to pose significant challenges for women in rural areas. Such pressures also prevent women from turning to courts to ensure their inheritance rights are respected.





Health Care

Key Takeaways /

- Despite a relatively good level of awareness and availability of health care services in general, 18.7 percent of rural women do not have access to the health care.
- Age, education, disability and income, among others, are intersecting factors preventing women from accessing health care such as hospitals, medical centers and midwives. Mobility and literacy significantly influence women's access to health care. Younger and educated women are more likely to be able to access health care by themselves, whereas older and less educated women are heavily reliant on other household and community members to access the health services they need.
- 23.6 percent of respondents lack access to clean water and sewerage systems, both of which are essential for maintaining health, particularly in relation to menstrual health, hygiene, and sanitation. This inadequate access is closely linked to lower household income levels.

Access to adequate health care is central to human well-being and productivity, and it is one of the most known and used services among rural women, according to the survey. 92.8 percent of respondents know about their health rights, and 81.3 percent of respondents report they have access to health care.

However, when respondents could not access health care services (Chart 24), the most common reasons were the low quality of services or the lack of knowledge about available services and the right to access them. In addition, other intersectional factors such as disability, age and income impacted women's ability to access health care.

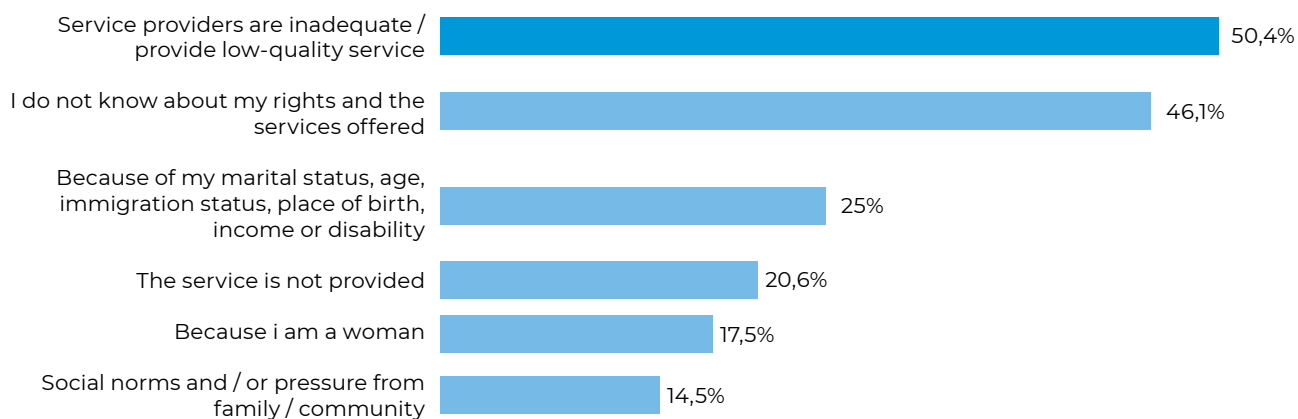


Chart 24 // Barriers Faced by Women who have not Accessed Health Care

While the survey indicates good availability of health care facilities in general, a significant portion of respondents still do not have access to vital health care services: 11.9 percent of the respondents state that there is no hospital where they live, 17 percent report a lack of midwives, and 7.4 percent mention no health centers in their place of residence.

In cases where women do not have direct access to health care facilities, accessing transport to reach health centers and personnel is key. However, as noted, this might be more difficult for

older women and women with disabilities, given their more limited use of public transport. Indeed, younger women, as well as educated women, are more likely to access health care services on their own (see Charts 24 and 25), indicating that mobility and literacy impact the ease with which rural women can access health care. The qualitative findings also highlight the importance of mobile services to ensure access to key health services, including those targeting women, such as mobile mammography scans, as a way to bring health care services directly to rural women and circumvent challenges posed by public transport.

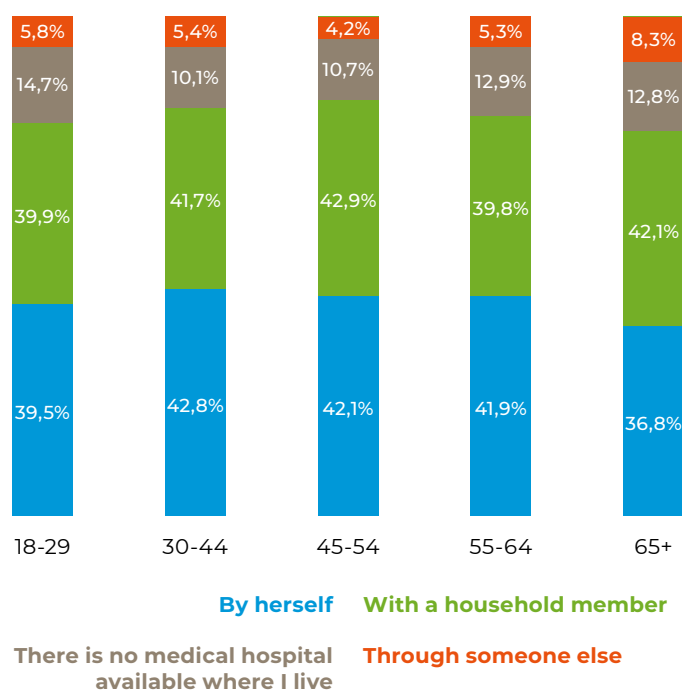


Chart 25 // If / how women can access a hospital, by age group

Chart 25 provides a detailed overview of the methods women use to access hospital services, segmented by age groups. It reveals that women aged 30-44 are the most likely to access hospitals independently, with 42.8 percent doing so, while women aged 65 and older are the least likely, at 36.8 percent. The reliance on household members for hospital access is consistently high across all age groups, peaking at 42.9 percent for women aged 45-54. Notably, a significant portion of younger women (18-29) report the unavailability of medical hospitals in their areas (14.7 percent), highlighting a critical gap in health care infrastructure. Additionally, older women (65+) show a higher dependence on others for accessing hospitals, at 8.3 percent, indicating potential mobility or health challenges.

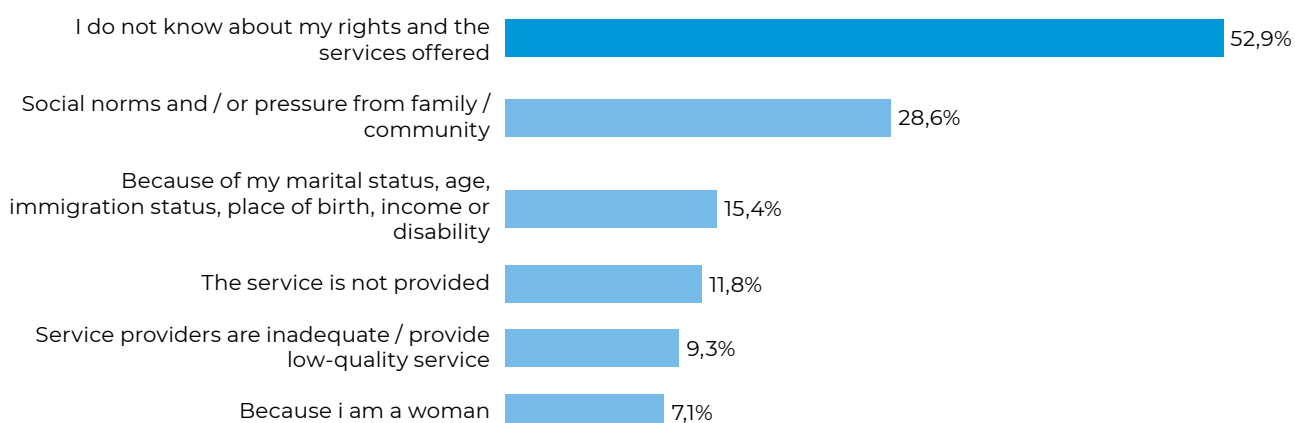
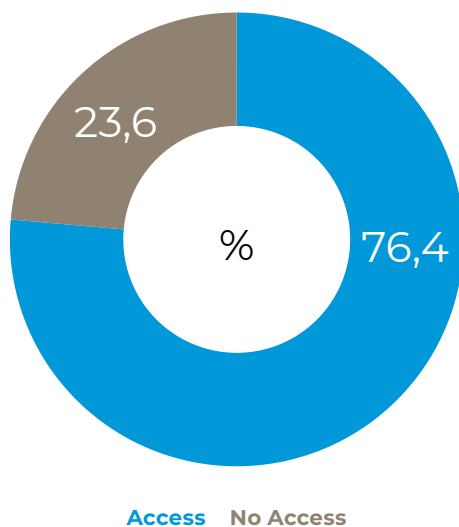


Chart 26 // Barriers faced by women who have not accessed birth control (multiple answers possible)

Access to birth control is another central part of women's right to reproductive health rights. 82.6 percent of surveyed women know about their right to birth control and more than half of women (51.3 percent) had used birth control, whereas 17.4 percent of surveyed women did not know their rights. Knowledge about reproductive rights, as well as use of and access to birth control, decreases with age and increases with education. Among surveyed women who do not have information about reproductive services, 5 percent have tertiary education in comparison to women with no education (21.4 percent).

Among respondents who have not been able to access birth control, over half cite lack of knowledge about this right or available services as the main reasons. Additionally, 28.6 percent report that family or community pressure affects their ability to access birth control.

Concerningly, 23.6 percent of survey respondents say they do not have access to clean water and sewerage services. Water and access to sewerage services play a significant role in ensuring women's health, especially as it relates to their menstrual health, hygiene and sanitation. The lack of access to clean water and sewerage services is closely correlated with a household's monthly income, as out of those households who struggle to access clean water, 91.8 percent are households with a monthly income of less than \$521.



Access No Access

Chart 27 // Access to Clean Water and Sewerage Services





Freedom from Violence

Key Takeaways /

- Women have varied knowledge about violence prevention and protection services. Awareness is notably high for “traditional” services like police and gendarme support but lower for relatively newer services such as KADES (Women’s Emergency Support Application).
- Higher education levels are positively correlated with greater awareness of ŞÖNİMs (Violence Prevention and Monitoring Centers), KADES, and women’s shelters. Women with education above the primary level have a significantly greater understanding of the different services provided.
- Despite high awareness, the actual use of protective services is notably low. This discrepancy suggests barriers beyond awareness.
- Harmful social attitudes and economic hardship are major factors perpetuating early, child and forced marriages. 28.4 percent of the surveyed women do not see an issue with marriage for girls below the age of 18.

Awareness of and Access to Violence Protection Services

The latest available national statistics on violence against women (VAW) indicate that 36 percent of women in Türkiye have experienced physical violence from their spouse or ex-spouse. In addition, physical violence rates are slightly higher in rural areas (38 percent) compared to urban areas (35 percent).

Out of survey respondents, 73.4 percent stated they could access protective services against VAW. However, survey results also show that respondents are not equally informed about every service available in the Turkish support system for VAW survivors, and a very low percentage of women indicated they had used any of the services. For instance, 93.5 percent of women had information about support provided by the gendarme and the police, while 67.2 percent knew about services provided by women’s shelters, and 57.7 percent had information about the Women’s Emergency Support Application (KADES). 43.1 percent had information about services provided by Violence Prevention and Monitoring Centers (ŞÖNİMs), even though ŞÖNİMs are the most comprehensive institutions for shelter reception and providing social services combatting VAW.

The varying durations of existence for different services may influence awareness levels among the population. The police and gendarme, for example, have had a long-standing presence in rural areas. In contrast, KADES commenced in 2018, and ŞÖNİMs were established in 2012. This difference in timelines may result in women having less time to familiarize themselves with these relatively newer services.

Survey results also illustrate that women with higher levels of education are more likely to know about ŞÖNİMs, KADES and women’s shelters.



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⁴³Proportion of ever-partnered women aged 15-59 years experiencing intimate partner physical and/or sexual violence at least once in their lifetime. Source: Hacettepe University Institute of Population Studies, Ministry of Family and Social Policies, 2015, p. 86.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵A mobile phone application which provides women with a hotline to report violence and direct law enforcement officers to the scene.

Even basic primary education significantly contributes to an increased awareness of women's shelters. However, education levels did not impact awareness of services provided by the police and gendarme, again indicating their long-standing presence in rural communities.

Neither general awareness levels about the different VAW prevention and protection services nor education levels significantly impacted the low rates at which respondents reported they had used different services: only 1.1 percent had used KADES, 1 percent had used ŞÖNİMs services, and 1.1 percent had used women shelters, while 4.7 percent indicated they had used police and gendarme services. However, given the sensitive nature of the topic, it is likely that there is a significant hidden number of women who did not wish to disclose that they have used VAW protection services.

Considering the significant percentage of rural women who have experienced VAW, the gap between respondents' attitudes towards applying to VAW services and relatively high rates of knowledge about different services versus the very low number of women using these services indicates there remain significant issues when it comes to rural women's access to protective services. Among survey respondents who indicated they had not exercised their right to protection against VAW, the majority of respondents, 74.3 percent, were not aware of their right and/or available services. In addition, more than 1 in 5 women (23.5 percent) identified gender and gender-related social pressures ('social pressures,' 'because I am a woman,' 'being widow or divorced') as preventing them from accessing VAW protective services.

Child Marriage

The occurrence of forced marriage and child marriage, especially for girls, has severe repercussions for individuals' future health, quality, freedom and safety. 1 in 5 rural women aged 18-45 in Türkiye were married as a child. Notably, **half of the women who were married before 18 have experienced physical violence, which is significantly higher than the national average.**⁴⁶

Girls from socio-economically vulnerable groups are at particular risk of entering into child, early or forced marriage. This issue remains a significant concern in rural Türkiye, where poverty and restrictive gender roles continue to influence marriage decisions. Survey results corroborate the persistence of these issues.

Firstly, across age groups, 28 percent of women have encountered obstacles in accessing protective services against child and forced marriage. This

indicates that difficulties in accessing protection services are widespread, regardless of age. Secondly, survey results also show that while the majority of respondents condemn forced and child marriage, there is simultaneously a large portion that does tolerate these practices. For instance, 28.4 percent do not believe marrying under the age of 18 has negative consequences for girls, suggesting that child marriage is still accepted by many women in rural communities. Additionally, over 21 percent of women disagreed with the notion that women should have the freedom to marry whom they choose. There is also a noticeable difference in attitudes based on gender. Only 12 percent of respondents consider marriage under 18 harmful to boys, compared to 28.4 percent for girls, highlighting a higher degree of social acceptance for early marriages involving girls.

Education has a modest impact on women's attitudes towards early and forced marriage. Women with tertiary education, in comparison to women with no education disagree with child marriage to a further extent, with 65.6 percent rather than 69.8 percent believing that marriage under 18 has a negative impact on girls. Attitudes towards early and forced marriage do not change significantly across age groups, except for the age group over 65, where approval is about 10 percentage points higher than in the others. This is congruent with other survey results that demonstrate small generational differences when it comes to attitudes relating to marriage and decision-making.

Of respondents, 17 percent reported that family and community pressures prevented them from exercising their right to protection against child marriage. This issue is not solely linked to attitudes towards child marriage but can also stem from economic hardship. One respondent shared that financial difficulties led her to marry off her daughters at a young age, despite her personal regret:

"I made my daughter marry at the age of 15. There was poverty, it was difficult to make a living, there were 4 children, I had a horny brother-in-law. None of my daughters turned 18, I had to marry them at the age of 15, 16, 17. I am very sorry, I regret it very much."

- FGD, Ankara

Thus, lack of economic and educational opportunities, pressure from the family and factors related to living in extended families (again including economic hardship) also affect the risk of early and forced marriages.⁴⁷

⁴⁶Ergöçmen & Yüksel-Kaptanoğlu, 2020.

⁴⁷Ibid.

Emergency, Disaster and Risk Reduction

Key Takeaways /

- The COVID-19 pandemic has had significant impacts on rural women and their households, negatively impacting their income, physical and mental health, care responsibilities and home life. Specific risks related to violence against women (VAW), which increases especially during crisis periods, have also been a key issue for rural women.
- The crises significantly intensified the caregiving responsibilities for rural women and strained women's access to health care as well as children's access to educational services.
- Rural women are at significant risk of being disproportionately affected by future disasters and emergencies, such as those brought on by climate change.

Impact of COVID-19 and Risks of Potential Crises

The COVID-19 pandemic had profound impacts on the lives of rural women and their households. During the pandemic, rural women experienced significant impacts on several aspects of their life, including in terms of economic hardship, an increase in care burden, higher rates of domestic violence and greater barriers to accessing services such as health care. Chart 25 shows the wide variety of impacts of COVID-19 on women and their households. Low-income households experienced the negative impacts of the pandemic most intensely across all the dimensions.

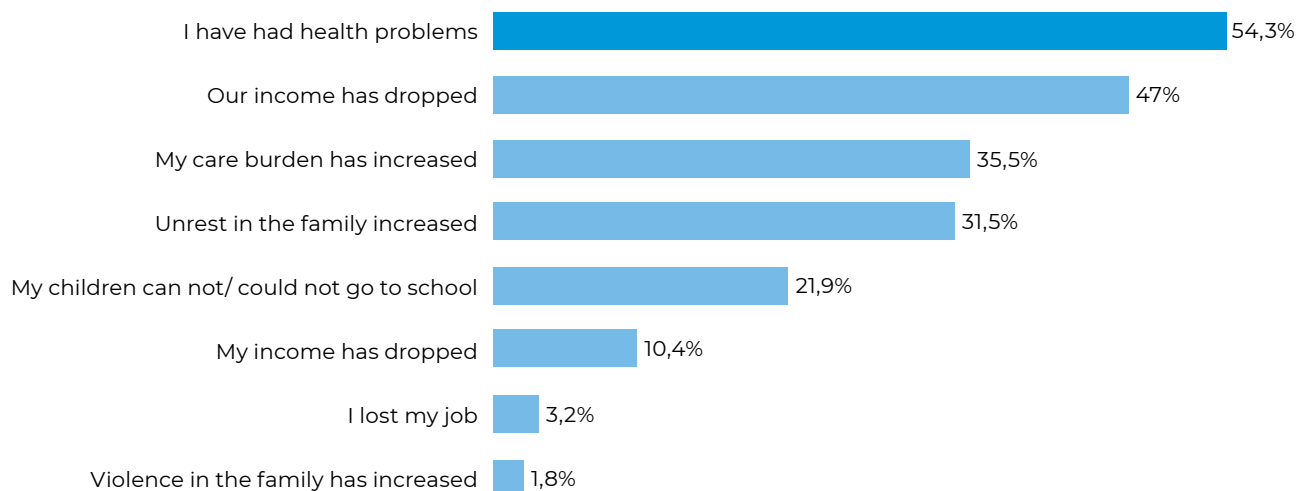


Chart 28 // Impact of COVID-19 (multiple answers possible)

As can be seen in the chart above, the care responsibilities of women increased significantly because of the COVID-19 pandemic. This has also been the case with the 2023 earthquake, with rural women facing increased care responsibilities due to more dependents resulting from injuries or illness.⁴⁸ Additionally, with rural populations facing poorer access to health services, crisis events that put higher pressures on health care services and draw services into urban areas impact rural women more, especially those with disabilities and older women. In the aftermath of the earthquake, damaged infrastructure further hindered service accessibility in rural areas.⁴⁹

The crises also intensified psychosocial trauma, adding emotional strain to the already heavy caregiving responsibilities. The survey revealed that 31.5 percent of women reported increased levels of “family unrest” as a consequence of the pandemic, and 1.8 percent highlighted increased violence in the home. These effects were likely exacerbated for rural women’s mental health due to having larger, extended households. In addition, due to the conditions of quarantine and isolation periods, women were rendered more vulnerable to domestic and sexual abuse, with even less support available to them.⁵⁰

The pandemic significantly disrupted children’s schooling, which further increased caregiving duties for rural women. Access to education became even more challenging, especially for children in rural areas without internet access or technology. In the qualitative study, respondents highlight the need for tools to access online education, including tablets, computers and internet connections. With 39.1 percent of respondents lacking internet access at home, many children faced difficulties accessing online education during lockdowns, placing additional pressure on women. Girls were particularly affected due to heightened family expectations regarding caregiving and household chores during school closures. The pandemic also disrupted economic activities, impacting livelihoods significantly. With relatively low employment rates and limited social security coverage, many rural women depend on male family members financially. The already low participation of women in the workforce worsened over the course of the pandemic, and the proportion of job losses has been shown to be higher among women.⁵¹ As a result, rural women, who often rely on fewer income sources, faced economic hardships.

⁴⁸EUN Women Türkiye, 2023a.

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰Significant challenges related to VAW have also been highlighted in the aftermath of the earthquakes (UN Women Türkiye, 2023b).

⁵¹UN Women, 2020.



CONCLUSION

This research provides new data illustrating the many factors shaping the lives, opportunities and challenges of rural women in Türkiye. The analysis focused on levels of and access to education, employment and income, access to health services and social assistance, protective mechanisms in the cases of VAW and other harmful practices, rural women's level of participation in political life and decision-making, the impact of external shocks including the COVID-19 pandemic, and how these different factors in a woman's life interact with and affect each other.

The findings illustrate that particularly noteworthy progress has been made regarding women's levels of education and that higher levels of education are closely linked with a rural woman's ability to access essential services, resources, agricultural/vocational training and paid work. At the same time, persistent patterns and attitudes that reinforce gender inequality endure across age categories, despite rapid rural change. Rural women have limited economic independence and continue to face barriers to accessing rights and services including limited access to paid employment, lack of childcare services, reliance on household members for social security, and low property and land ownership. Women make significant contributions to the agricultural work of a household while lacking decision-making power over economic decisions related to agricultural purchases or opportunities for equal involvement in formal agricultural enterprises or activities.

Women disproportionately undertake caregiving responsibilities, often serving as the primary caregivers within their households. This places them at a higher risk of economic hardship, as their unpaid labor limits their ability to engage in paid work. Additionally, they are more vulnerable to disruptions in essential services like education and healthcare, which further exacerbates their economic and social challenges. The crises have greater impact on those with lower educational levels, older women, and those with limited mobility, further stressing the need for targeted support in these areas.

Access to public transport also has a significant impact on women's access to other key services including health care and reproductive care. As a

result, the most vulnerable categories of women in rural areas are often older women, with lower levels of education, and who face additional barriers regarding mobility. Lack of knowledge of one's right to access essential services is also seen as one of the key barriers by survey respondents.

The findings underscore the importance of addressing the intersecting factors that affect rural women's needs and opportunities. While there have been advancements in education and service access, persistent gender inequalities, economic dependence, and barriers exacerbated by crises remain significant challenges. Understanding how these factors interplay is crucial for developing effective policies and interventions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the face of the climate crisis, care crisis and increasing agricultural production needs, it is vital to consider the unique and multifaceted experiences of rural women and to ensure that their voices and perspectives inform solutions and decisions taken to address such crises and to advance equitable and sustainable development. Equal and inclusive representation of rural women in decision-making systems needs to be ensured across political, public, economic, and private spheres.

Accelerating gender equality measures is key to strengthening the resilience and sustainability of rural communities and households. This aligns with several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), and SDG 13 (Climate Action).

To improve policy and planning decisions, it is essential to enhance gender-disaggregated data and incorporate the lived experiences of rural women into policy frameworks. This approach will help address the specific needs of the women, vulnerable groups and promote greater equity and resilience in rural communities.

We recommend prioritizing the following action areas to address the underlying barriers to women's full and meaningful participation in society related to education, livelihoods, health care and other social services to meet rural women's needs and priorities:

- Guarantee equal access to quality education to all rural communities. This includes targeted interventions to ensure accessible transport services to educational facilities and develop disaster risk reduction strategies to ensure access to educational materials and girls' continued schooling in times of crisis.
- Expand and ensure safe public transport to facilitate access to other key services for women. This includes improving the quality and accessibility of transportation infrastructure while prioritizing affordable public transportation.
- Increase and diversify vocational and training courses for rural women. This includes ensuring courses are inclusive and adapted to rural women's needs, for example, by developing cooperation between institutions in the design and implementation of training programs.
- Ensure that support for women's entrepreneurship and women cooperatives is effective. This includes technical and infrastructural support that would support the sustainability of the initiatives as well as the empowerment of women economically and socially.
- Dedicated initiatives to reduce women's unpaid childcare work and care for family members. This includes opening easily accessible childcare facilities, schools and services for people with disabilities, older people, and those affected by external shocks and disasters, as well as advocacy for men's engagement in unpaid childcare and domestic work.
- Promote active measures to ensure rural women's economic independence and access to property, including access to their inheritance rights. This includes raising awareness but also, developing legal tools, providing legal support services and stricter scrutiny mechanisms for the land distribution and registration processes.
- Support women's centers and other facilities to promote women's participation in public life. This includes supporting facilities that can serve as places for socialization, as well as meeting venues for women-targeted trainings, women's cooperatives and women's needs for childcare support.
- Develop media content to raise awareness about women's rights among rural women and men. This includes considering the widespread use of television and social media among women, developing TV programs and social media content to raise awareness about women's rights, particularly in relation to VAW services and child marriage. The same medium can be considered as a means of promoting best practices in cooperatives

and other agricultural / rural economic activities.

- Ensure climate and disaster risk mitigation measures target and engage with rural women. This includes considering the important role rural women play in agricultural activities and ensuring women can access agriculture training on sustainable and resilient food agricultural methods, as well as ensuring their access to social support and health care services.

CALL FOR ACTION

UN Women calls on policymakers, service providers and civil society organizations to collaborate in addressing the multifaceted challenges faced by rural women in Türkiye. This report offers insights for more informed decision-making on a wide range of sectors and issues that affect rural women and their communities. It underscores the importance of tailored policies and interventions that consider demographic shifts, prioritize education and health care, challenge harmful gender norms, and strengthen the delivery of – and access to – services. By taking these steps, we can ensure that rural women thrive in all aspects of society, can fully exercise their rights and fully participate in and benefit from the nation's overall development and progress.

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