

Annex 2: A Letter to Feminist Community

Dear Feminist Community, Our Movement,

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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