

International Day of the Girl Child 2019

*"Success Stories in Girls' Empowerment:
Overcoming Invisible Challenges"*

Conference Report

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY





The International Day of the Girl Child is observed every year on October 11 to increase the public's awareness on gender inequalities faced by girls all over the world.



This report summarizes the issues addressed at the 5th International Conference on the UN Day of the Girl Child organized in collaboration with UNICEF, UNFPA, UN Women and Aydın Doğan Foundation, in consultation with the UN Gender Result Group. The conference was held on the 11th October 2019 in Istanbul.

The International Day of the Girl Child is observed every year on October 11 to increase the public's awareness on gender inequalities faced by girls all over the world. The specific purpose of this special day is to highlight the significant efforts being made in the social, economic and political spheres in realizing the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as they relate to the girl child. In addition, it aims to bring attention to how important breaking the cycle of generational poverty, violence, exclusion and discrimination is to create a more equitable society for women and girls.

The theme of the conference in 2019 was "Success Stories in Girls Empowerment: Overcoming Invisible Challenges". This theme was used as a framework to discuss how to ensure the most vulnerable girls are included and contribute to the SDGs, especially SDG 4 on Quality Education and SDG 5 on Gender Equality. The conference created a platform to discuss the social and economic benefits of creating an environment of equality between boys and girls. It served this aim by galvanizing both the local and international community. Themes of raising awareness, collaboration and the need to "dream big" permeated nearly every speech, panel, and workshop held. The conference focused on cultivating stories of hope and change, highlighting progress while noting that the final goal of full gender equality has yet to be reached.

The motto for events related to the 2019 International Day of the Girl Child was "Strong Girls, Strong Future". The program included youth workshops prior to the conference, attended by Turkish and Syrian girls and boys from over Turkey. The one-day conference was split into two sessions and followed by simultaneous workshops for percussion, paint, dance, and cartoon drawing, in which the children and youth reflected their ideas and expectations for realizing their rights. The one-day conference also included a photo exhibition of the

Panels welcomed speakers who have successfully overcome these barriers in their personal, social and professional lives, sharing their insights and success stories.

photos taken for the “Ben İstersem” [“If I want”] photo book highlighting the accomplishments of girls all over Turkey in the fields of science, art, athletics, and more. The national and international speakers and panelists who participated, included youth women’s rights activists, international civil servants, and philanthropists. Panelists included inspiring youth and successful women who have national and international reputations in healthcare, business, and television.

Panels welcomed speakers who have successfully overcome these barriers in their personal, social and professional lives, sharing their insights and success stories while drawing attention to participation of women and girls in labor force, as well as the gender inequalities predominant in social life.

In her inauguration speech, Acting Chair of Aydın Doğan Foundation Vuslat Doğan Sabancı stated: “Our young people, who have inspired us and given us hope with their courage, deserve the greatest of all the thanks. We need to support and empower our girls specifically in education, then in economy, social life, within their families, at politics, in short, in every aspect of their lives. We need to support all the initiatives in our country, which give us hope regarding our future.”

Philippe Duamelle, UNICEF Representative to Turkey underlined in his opening speech that “many girls in today’s world grow up in a challenging environment where being a female is considered a disadvantage and where they are less valued than boys. This situation deeply influences the opportunities they have, as well as the decisions they make - such as continuing their education, accessing basic health services, getting married or making a living on their own. On the other hand, this situation is now changing considerably thanks to the efforts and actions of girls and women. Girls no longer want to leave themselves to the mercy of the world. As entrepreneurs, innovators, artists and architects of today’s world, they are the main instigators of many global movements.”

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Karl Kulesa,
UNFPA
Representative in
Turkey, underlined
that "United
Nations Population
Fund emphasizes
the importance
of girls' freely
determining their
lives and enjoying
their rights to the
full extent."



Defne Hadiş, student from Nuova Accademia di Bella Arti in Milan, addressed the audience as keynote speaker. She stated: "It is very important that girls and women have access to quality education, decent means of living and equal employment opportunities, receive an equal treatment in their homes with boys concerning the distribution of household responsibilities and freedom. We must eliminate all forms of discrimination, which are attributed merely to gender, that girls may face when they grow up. We must eliminate limitations on girls as well as privileges extended under the so-called positive-discrimination label. We must ensure that girls and women have equal say with their opposite sex at the workplace as well in social life, and most important of all, we must provide them with a safe life that is free from violence. Girls and women will manifest themselves as free individuals and will be fully empowered only if we can grant them these conditions. Freedom is a glorious opportunity, for which, one has to fight each and every day. We must make the best use of this opportunity, because although we live under different conditions, we face the very same challenges and we are all individually very strong."

Karl Kulesa, UNFPA Representative in Turkey, underlined that "United Nations Population Fund emphasizes the importance of girls' freely determining their lives, enjoying their rights to the full extent and supporting the empowerment of girls and women for the elimination of gender-based violence, rendering boys as the agents of social change. Such efforts do not only matter to girls, but to the entire society. We know that it is a long path and there is a lot of space for progress."

More than 500 participants, including representatives of hosting and supporting organizations, public figures and opinion leaders, in addition to children of primary and high-school age from around Turkey, attended the conference.

Asya Varbanova, UN Women Turkey Country Director, expressed that “I believe it is in our hands to create a world where girls and boys can live free from stereotypes, exclusion, violence and visible and invisible barriers, where they can take charge and define their own future. This world – where every woman, girl, boy and man - enjoys their rights and freedoms – is not one of a distant and unachievable future. But to achieve it, we can only do this together – girls and boys, women, and men leaders from all sectors of society, parents, educators, leaders.”

The panel on “Stories of Empowerment: Role of supportive community and school environment” was moderated by **Prof. Selçuk Şirin** and the panelists were **Büşra Fidanoglu**, student at İstanbul University Faculty of Law and Team Member in Aydın Doğan Foundation “Sen de Yapabilirsin! [You can do it, too!]” Project, **Rama Alsabsabi**, Student at İstanbul University Department of Sociology and an Activist and **Betül Esra Akyüz**, Graduate of Ankara University Faculty of Law and an Activist.

The panel on ‘Success Stories in Professional Life: Women breaking the gender barriers’ was moderated by Journalist **Şirin Payzın** and the panelists were **Gupse Özay**, Comedian, Actress, Screenplay Writer and Director, **Dr. Dilek Gürsoy**, Cardiovascular Surgeon, and **Sevil Zeynep Becan**, Member of Board of Directors of Fenerbahçe Sports Club.

The motto of the youth workshops was “Raise your voice to overcome invisible challenges.” The workshops were organized on fabric painting, percussion instruments, dancing and cartoons. These workshops were participated by 130 young people and they spent pleasant time with the experts in their relevant fields. **Azra Akın** in dancing workshop, **Ercan Akyol** in cartoon workshop, percussion artists **Amy Salsgiver** and **Nihal Saruhanlı**, the teachers of Aydın Doğan Fine Arts High School **Melih Ağdağ** and **Ertem Akkuş** in percussion instruments workshop and **Murat Bingöl** in fabric painting workshop came together with the youth.

More than 500 participants, including representatives of hosting and supporting organizations, public figures and opinion leaders, in addition to children of primary and high-school age from around Turkey, attended the conference. In terms of media works, the project reached to more than 10 million people (Based on Interpress media report data).

This report summarizes the main discussions held at the conference, while also providing key observations and recommendations from the conference to guide the global community in removing the invisible barriers to the realization of equality between boys and girls. Based on the discussions held at the conference, this report provides an overview of key issues that were addressed, while not following the exact order of the speeches.

I. RAISING PUBLIC AWARENESS FOR GENDER EQUALITY FOR GIRLS AND BOYS



The importance of raising awareness of the issues affecting the lives of girl children to a variety of groups was a key theme raised throughout the conference.





**A BOY CHILD
PARTICIPATING THE
PERCUSSION WORKSHOP
AT A SIDE EVENT TO
THE CONFERENCE**

"Men and male leaders need to be made aware of the impact of their actions and change their behavior."

The importance of raising awareness of the issues affecting the lives of girl children to a variety of groups was a key theme raised throughout the conference. Specific consideration was given to cross-cutting issues which multiply discriminatory conditions, and the need to inform women and girls about their rights. Gender-blind or discriminatory use of language reproducing gender stereotypes, though at times not intended to harm, can reduce girl's drive to reach their dreams and re-confirm restrictive social norms which are harmful to both boys and girls. Cross-cutting issues such as ethnicity, refugee status, poverty can multiply the negative effects of restrictive social norms on girls. Because of this, reaching out to these populations who have increased vulnerability and informing them of the rights and services afforded to them on both national and international levels is of the utmost importance.

Start the Change with the Language We Use!

Gendered language is ingrained in societies worldwide. To use words and phrases related to a child's gender harms their ability to fully express themselves, pursue their dreams and reiterates unequal social norms. But there is a reason to hope. By removing such language from our vocabulary, we can create positive change within our communities. However, this process of social change will take time, and as such women and girls need some strategies to deal with the current status quo when it comes to overcoming the harmful nature of gendered language in their personal and professional lives.



**DR. SELÇUK ŞİRİN**

"First we [must] mind our language [and] we should really question [the] patriarchal language that we employ."



The unintentional harm of gendered language is one of the most prolific invisible barriers to gender equality. Dr. Selçuk Şirin (professor of behavioral science at NYU) noted that men are at times unaware of the negative consequences such gendered terminology can have on the women and girls in their lives. One of the most consequential effects of such language on girls is the fact that they reiterate unequal social norms between boys and girls on a near-daily basis. Büşra Fidanoğlu (Graduate of Istanbul University Faculty of Law) also mentioned the ramifications of these phrases, stating that "Masculine language has a lot of impact on the life of a girl...". She especially made note of this in terms of individuals and societies deeming some activities and aspirations are "girly" while others are not.

To overcome this most prolific invisible barrier, a two-pronged approach emerged through panel discussions. First, is the more long-term goal, the aspect of personal responsibility and self-policing to bring about overall social change within societies. The second strategy was more pragmatic and noted how women and girls can deflect the harm such phrases can cause them in current times.

Coming from a family of Turkish migrants to Germany, Dr. Dilek Gürsoy mentioned how she, instead of “turning back” the “stones” of hurtful and gender discriminatory comments, she “stepped” upon them, like stepping stones across a pond or lake.



Providing a strategy girls and women can employ to deal with the “status quo” of gendered language came from Dr. Dilek Gürsoy, the first heart surgeon to perform a total artificial heart surgery in Europe. Coming from a family of Turkish migrants to Germany, Dr. Dilek Gürsoy mentioned how she, instead of “turning back” the “stones” of hurtful and gender discriminatory comments, she “stepped” upon them, like stepping stones across a pond or lake. She spoke of the importance of not reacting to the comments, staying relaxed, of not giving up, and focusing on gaining experience. Gaining expertise in one’s field of choice, stated Dr. Dilek Gürsoy, is one of the main self-directed strategies that women and girls alike to employ and create their self-liberation from the chains of gendered social norms.

Overcoming Prejudices

During her opening speech to the second panel, Ms. Asya Varbanova, UN Women Turkey Country Director, stated that millions of girls had barriers that keep them away from resources, opportunities or technology and these barriers were multiplied for young women and girls living with disabilities, or those living in or with the consequences of war, conflict






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To combat the multifaceted discrimination faced by Roma girls and boys, Betül Esra Akyüz opened the Home of Dreams.

and displacement, or other situations of vulnerability. As illustrated by Betül Esra Akyüz, who mentioned her work with the Roma children in Ankara, women within this community face a double exclusion. The first discrimination comes from being a woman. This is compounded by the stigmatization faced by the Roma people, including the stereotypes towards and the high levels of poverty within their communities. To combat the multifaceted discrimination faced by Roma girls and boys, Betül Esra Akyüz opened the Home of Dreams. Home of Dreams is a safe space where Roma, along with other disadvantaged children, can come for classes and activities on a variety of subjects. By placing such services within their community and making their services to everyone regardless of ethnic or religious background, Betül Esra Akyüz was able to develop opportunities for social inclusion between individuals of various backgrounds. Though the main ethnic group mentioned at the conference was the Roma people, the hurdles they face and the work Betül does on social inclusion and education is an anecdote for the struggles faced by ethnic minorities across the world.





Speaking to how the loss of her father at an early age impacted her emotionally and caused some financial hardships for her family, Defne Hadiş noted in her keynote speech that she was supported to success through strong educational environments.



Stigmatization of refugees within host communities is another cross-cutting issue affecting the rights of women and girls. Rama Al Sabsabi, a Syrian refugee and Istanbul University Sociology Department student, recounted the trials she faced in school enrolment due to language barriers. Though she desperately wanted to start school, her parents did not know where to send her and did not have the ability to ask for help. Thankfully her neighbor decided to see past prejudices and helped to get Rama enrolled in school. Şirin Payzın, Columnist and Anchor, reminded the audience that Turkey is hosting nearly 4 million refugees and that the youth within this group will be part of the future of Turkey while moderating the second panel. As such supporting them, especially the girls, is imperative to the nation's overall economic and social progress. Rama's description of herself as a bird, longing for her homeland but knowing she cannot return echoed the assertion that refugees and migrants must be provided opportunities to integrate within their host communities. Once given opportunities to rebuild their lives, migrants and refugees must take advantage of every opportunity, as Dr. Dilek Gürsoy did as the daughter of a migrant growing up in Germany and Rama did as a child refugee. Both panelists, though faced with an array of disadvantages in their youth, were determined to inspire others. Rama was firm in her commitment to work towards a world in which no other girls experience what she did. Dr. Dilek Gürsoy told the audience that no matter one's heritage or socioeconomic status, "Everyone can be something somewhere."

Poverty, another vulnerability that is cross-sectoral, disproportionately harms women and girls. Speaking to how the loss of her father at an early age impacted her emotionally and caused some financial hardships for her family, Defne Hadiş noted in her keynote speech that she was supported to success through strong educational environments. Dr. Dilek Gürsoy, who also lost her father at an early age, also stated the importance of strong social and educational systems to help families and girls faced with multiple vulnerabilities. They both, in their way, built upon this assertion. They stated that access to high-quality education, without the incursion of further financial burden, is one of the best equalizers in the face of vulnerabilities like poverty and gender inequality. The opportunity to learn also made a positive impact on Rama's life, though financial barriers at times hindered her ability to attend university full time. Going to school also facilitated her writing abilities, enabling her to ensure her story, the story of a women refugee, would be heard.



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One way to combat cross-cutting issues is by informing women and girls about their rights through outreach and empowerment programmes.



The complexities of cross-cutting vulnerabilities were discussed at length during the conference. The main action point which was reiterated throughout the panels and workshops was the need to see one another as equals. Betül Esra Akyüz spoke about how there will always be different people in the world, who come from different walks of life, but we must approach them with kindness and neutrality. In the percussion workshop, a girl participant stated that “women and men are always equal” regardless of the barriers (both visible and invisible) and social norms imposed by society. Dr. Selçuk Şirin put all of these thoughts quite succinctly, stating simply that “we should not give in to our prejudices of others.”

Knowing Our Rights

One way to combat these cross-cutting issues is by informing women and girls about their rights through outreach and empowerment programmes. Connecting with girls in rural villages and individuals in vulnerable communities are two important aspects of outreach. Additionally, empowerment is best facilitated by creating environments in which girls can discover their strengths, capabilities, and voice themselves.



BÜŞRA FİDANOĞLU

"Inequalit(ies) like those based around gender norms are due to a lot of invisible barriers [and] therefore awareness raising is key."



Ms. Asya Varbanova said that the digital divide remained a gendered one and quantified this by noting most of the 3.9 billion people around the world who are offline are in rural areas, poorer, less educated and tend to be women and girls. Because these areas are more difficult to get to, women there often do not know their rights. However, Vuslat Doğan Sabancı mentioned some women who do outreach in remote villages. They engage women one on one, word by word, and discuss civil law along with the rights of women and children. Connecting with these vulnerable communities in their homes is essential to raising awareness.

Defne Hadiş's keynote speech focused on how gendered societies hold women back, and the importance of empowerment. She noted that in order to be empowered, one must have power, but also that such power needs to be tested. Once these challenges are overcome, and one sees that they can "do it", they become empowered. This was exemplified when she stated, "Creation comes before existence. So, people are what they do, what they act. So, in order to be powerful, what can you do? Empowerment is something that comes from the inside."



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The students who participated in this year's International Day of the Girl Child Conference held in Istanbul benefited greatly.

However, adults must also create environments where self-realization and empowerment can flourish. Rama Al Sabsabi noted that perhaps these awareness-raising and empowerment projects need to be facilitated for younger children in addition to the programs which target adolescents and adults. With that being said, the students who participated in this year's International Day of the Girl Child Conference held in Istanbul benefited greatly. As one of the girls who attended the event mentioned during the paint workshop, "[Attending this conference] was a turning point in my life because it was the first time I was exposed to this kind of thing." This comment was closely followed by another empowered proclamation provided by her companion, who stated that she would return to Erzurum and tell all of her friends about gender equality.



II. WORKING TOGETHER



Another main theme discussed throughout the 2019 International Day of the Girl Child Conference in Istanbul was the need to work together. Significant discussions were had around men and boys' involvement and cross-sectoral collaboration.





Rather than being passive or promoting practices that are harmful to women and girls, men and boys must become positive agents of change.

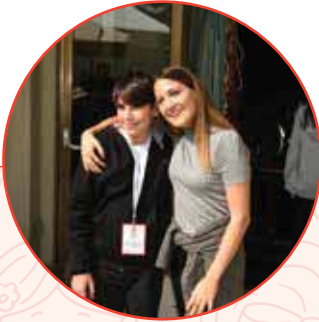
Another main theme discussed throughout the 2019 International Day of the Girl Child Conference in Istanbul was the need to work together. Significant discussions were had around men and boys' involvement and cross-sectoral collaboration. The involvement of men and boys was mentioned in terms of engaging them as agents of change, the HeForShe movement, and "waking up" world leaders to the overall social and economic benefits to increasing gender equality. Cross-sectoral collaboration concepts examined included spheres of responsibility, thinking outside the box, and personal networks.

Men and Boys' Involvement

With half of the world's population being men or boys, incorporating them into the movement towards gender equality is imperative. Rather than being passive or promoting practices that are harmful to women and girls, men and boys must become positive agents of change.

Change agents were discussed at length during the conference. This tone was set by the opening speeches from Philippe Duamelle, UNICEF Representative to Turkey and Karl Kulessa, UNFPA Representative in Turkey. Mr. Duamelle noted the importance for us all to become agents of change, commenting that humanity cannot "realize its full potential if we continue to leave one half of it behind." All members of society can take action as agents for positive change in gender equality. This includes both adults and children, in addition to community leaders, non-profit





BOY CHILD ATTENDING THE CONFERENCE

"After the first day I was asking women and girls around me in my life about problems they (were) experiencing."



professionals, and elected officials. Mr. Kulesa set the tone on men's and boys' involvement in bringing about this change. For without all of society on board, working towards equality between genders, we will not be able to accomplish our goals.

Both individuals and organizations can take action to galvanize men and boys for the rights of women and girls. That is exactly the goal of the HeForShe movement mentioned by Sevil Zeynep Becan, Secretary-General of the Board of Directors of Fenerbahçe Sports Club. Started by the UN, HeForShe is a movement that highlights men's support and solidarity for the advancement of gender equality. According to Becan, Fenerbahçe as partner of the movement, has started training partners in their work on the HeForShe initiative. Such programs, when taken on by businesses with influence such as the Fenerbahçe Sports Club, can normalize working together toward equality to lift both the visible and inviable barriers faced by women.

In an anecdote provided by comedian Gupse Özay, the oppression of emotions and the inability for men to be themselves within the current gender normative culture was apparent. Instead of feeling comfortable enough to go see one of her films in a theatre, the fan felt that he needed to secretly watch it at home because as a man he "couldn't be seen buying a ticket to a women's movie". Outreach opportunities, such as HeForShe and this conference in celebrating the International Day for the Girl Child, are imperative to creating a culture of collaboration between the genders. Open communication and awareness can create allies in men and boys: easing the path towards the removal of invisible barriers.

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In terms of spheres of responsibility, personal responsibility, bravery in the face of change, and coming together in support of girls. Vuslat Doğan Sabancı noted the importance of personal responsibility in her opening speech.

Cross-Sectoral Collaboration

Another strategy that will assist in the realization of gender equality is cross-sectoral collaboration. This includes various actors taking charge within their spheres of responsibility, leveraging personal and professional networks. As the invisible barriers faced by women and girls are multi-faceted, the solutions must take a multi-dimensional approach.

In terms of spheres of responsibility, personal responsibility, bravery in the face of change, and coming together in support of girls. Vuslat Doğan Sabancı noted the importance of personal responsibility in her opening speech. Each of us, no matter our station or vocation, can make changes in the way we speak about and to girls. Even these small things can make a change. In our spheres of responsibility, both at work and home, it is important to create spaces for girls to grow. Mr. Duamelle also recognized the ability for individuals to make great change, stating “There are so many others around the world who find the courage, strength, and determination to positively transform their communities and their societies”. Sometimes our spheres of responsibility overlap with those of others; and in those instances, it is even more imperative to collaborate. By doing so, we can create communities and societies that are not afraid of change but stand bravely in the face of it. Mr. Kulesa’s speech also internalized this need for bravery, reiterating the need for adults to come together in support of girl’s dreams.

After clearly establishing the need to take responsibility, the conference participants began discussing how we can collaborate, and the need to think outside the box. Without input from youth, who tend to have an easier time thinking creatively, we may miss some things. Ms. Varbanova furthered this point by stating such innovation can be spurred by working together, and that by doing so, the world - where every woman, girl, boy and man enjoys their rights and freedoms – is not one of a distant and unachievable future, but a reality in our lifetime. By standing side by side and pushing boundaries, there are no challenges girls and boys can’t overcome.



Ms. Asya Varbanova had hope for the future and called to the audience, "You can become the generation that makes gender inequality a thing of the past. You are 'Generation Equality.'"



The theme of working together and creating strength across groups was built via discussions of developing and leveraging personal and professional networks. Dr. Dilek Gürsoy spent some time on this subject, encouraging the girls in the audience not to shy away from networks. In her case, the support of women has given her a lot of confidence and ambition. At times, developing a network or using your network to further education and career goals can be seen as something negative – especially if a woman is trying to use such a tactic to get a leg up in her profession. Dr. Dilek Gürsoy impressed upon the audience that establishing a network is not only OK but an extremely significant part of professional life. Networks can be broad and cross-sectoral. Maintaining these relationships and being there to support other young professional women is an important tool to use in increasing the gender parity in male-dominated professions, such as medicine.

Ms. Asya Varbanova had hope for the future and called to the audience, "You can become the generation that makes gender inequality a thing of the past. You are 'Generation Equality.'"

III. SOCIETAL CONSTRAINTS



Panelists and speakers reiterated the harmful effects of societal constraints based on gender. Restrictive gender norms, violence against women, and how difficult it is for women and girls to be seen as an “individual” were all main areas of discussion.



Not being seen as a person, compounded by prescriptive gender norms which harm both boy and girl children, was a major focus of many presenters at the conference.

In addition to awareness-raising and working together, panelists and speakers reiterated the harmful effects of societal constraints based on gender. Restrictive gender norms, violence against women, and how difficult it is for women and girls to be seen as an “individual” were all main areas of discussion. In terms of objectification and gender norms, two main things were noted: the need to have a specific look or career and the general difficulty of operating within patriarchal societies. Instances of intimate partner violence, honor killings, and child marriage were all brought up as major issues in the battle to end violence against women.

Gender Norms

Not being seen as a person, compounded by prescriptive gender norms which harm both boy and girl children, was a major focus of many presenters at the conference. Restrictive cultures increase gender disparity in career choices and make it difficult for girls to see all the options before them. Also, the constraints put upon women and girls by patriarchal systems permeated all speeches, panels, and workshops.

Gender disparity in careers, based both on gender stereotypes and a lack of confidence in the capability of women and girls to take on certain tasks, hinders both economic and societal development. All women and girls who participated in the 2019 International Day of the Girl Conference expressed feeling this pressure. Dr. Gürsoy, having risen far in her career as a heart surgeon in Germany, had some advice for the women and girls in attendance. By being in the front line, making sure to tell everyone that you are important and should be valued, is incredibly important. Though at times, when the “stones” are thrown at you for being too big, too proud of your accomplishments, this can be hard, women and girls must stand strong, fight for their goals, and claim their space next to men.

Ms. Asya Varbanova mentioned gaps in economic life whereas women continue earning less than men and gender pay gap at 23% which means women earn 77% of what men earn. Ms. Varbanova also noted that women still were significantly under-represented in parliaments, as mayors and in local councils, in the ICT and STEM sectors. Dr. Gürsoy also recognized this double standard on how women are perceived as late-





Gupse Özay added that the work of breaking the inherent gender disparities needs to start from childhood. This is because the gender norms imposed on children follow them throughout life.



career professionals, stating, "There is almost an invisible rule that says 'we can't be'" in certain spaces, in certain vocations, in certain positions of power. Ms. Sevil Becan, one of three women board members for Fenerbahçe, also felt this as she was studying as a mechanical engineer. Her peers told her to just quit because they didn't believe in her potential. But, "by being visible, making ourselves (as in women and girls) heard, and supporting each-others progress, we can create change not only for future generations but today."

Gupse Özay on the other hand added that the work of breaking the inherent gender disparities needs to start from childhood. This is because the gender norms imposed on children follow them throughout life, and in turn make an imprint on the arts: creating movies where women take only supportive roles or roles where they are secondary to the male lead, or where their main goal is secondary to a man. This reality in cinematic arts, in turn, creates a false image for girls of what they should strive for: who they should be.

Three specific areas of violence against women and girls discussed during the 2019 International Day of the Girl Child Conference are intimate partner violence, honor killings, and child, early and forced marriage (CEFM).

Another main issue discussed in as the foundational issue was the systemic nature of the patriarchy. Defne Hadiş provided the strongest statement on how the patriarchy influences how women are perceived in society during her keynote speech. Referring to several notable writers, she painted a picture with her words, calling on women not so see themselves as objects. The self-objectification of women and girls comes from old laws that restricted women: not allowing them to be true actors in their self-interest. Throughout their lives, girl children are taught to observe their behavior, to act in the right way, to not stray from the path societies dominated by men have set before them. All of these ways to look, to react, to act relate to one question: how does she look in the eyes of the man? In her own words, "A woman is not born as a puppet, but a woman is transformed into a puppet." As such, this perception that both local and global society has of women, especially in regard to the use of gendered descriptors, must be rejected. Only then will we create a balance favorable to both women and men in the workforce and at home. Like the other speakers and attendees of the 2019 International Day of the Girl Conference, Defne Hadiş believes women and girls must be active, rather than passive, when claiming their right to be seen as equals.

Violence Against Women and Girls

An issue closely related to the systemic cultural problems discussed above is violence against women and girls. Though there are many provisions meant to protect women and girls in both national and international law, they are at times either insufficient or simply not upheld. Three specific areas of violence against women and girls discussed during the 2019 International Day of the Girl Child Conference are intimate partner violence, honor killings, and child, early and forced marriage (CEFM).

Ms. Varbanova mentioned that "2.5 billion women and girls are affected by discriminatory laws and lack of legal protection" and in many countries as much as 75% of the rights of women and girls are not explicitly protected in law. These unprotected rights, in many cases, include a lack of criminalization for honor killings and intimate partner violence. As underlined by the panellists, the laws and protections in place must be universally enforced, information about support mechanisms must be widespread, and women must be trained about their rights and empowered to break the cycle of intimate partner violence and establish their lives.



The invisible barriers to women and girls need to be addressed. Once this is done, there will be no need for quotas or other forms of positive discrimination to ensure gender parity across sectors of employment and within politics.

CEFM is another gender-discriminatory practice that, in many countries, is not protected against. Mr. Philippe Duamelle noted that though there has been a considerable reduction in cases of CEFM in the past decade, 12 million girls still enter into child marriages every year. Girls who enter these marriages are at increased risk for intimate partner violence. Mr. Karl Kulesa also highlighted this fact, mentioning how in many parts of the world a girl is viewed as of marriage age at 10 years old, and that 9 million girls age 15-19 were victims of forced sex within the last year.

As mentioned by all panelists, there are many miles to go until full equality is reached. The invisible barriers to women and girls need to be addressed. Once this is done, there will be no need for quotas or other forms of positive discrimination to ensure gender parity across sectors of employment and within politics. Şirin Payzın also noted her joy when looking at the progression of global society has made in the area of women's rights over the past few years. With that being said, she also noted that the world is not at the finish line when it comes to gender equality quite yet. She stated to the panelists and the audience that investments in women and girls must continue to be made, stating that "the 21st century is the century of women" and that many of these invisible challenges discussed during the conference can be overcome if only all members of society remain steadfast in their commitment to achieving this goal. As Ms. Varabnova noted, if this progress towards equality, though remarkable in many ways, is not accelerated, it will take over 108 years to have true gender equality.

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IV. BELIEVING IN CHANGE



The tone of hope and belief in the big picture and future permeated the comments of all the speeches and panelist comments.





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Büşra Fidanoğlu mentioned how by attending an ADF summer camp, she found her role models and was inspired to begin her project called "You Can Do It, Too."



The tone of hope and belief in the big picture and future permeated the comments of all the speeches and panelist comments. This focus on positive developments contained comments on role models and role model visibility, education and educational mentorship, and the importance of having dreams. When considering role models, panelists and attendees alike mentioned celebrities, family members, and non-profit professionals. In regard to education and educational mentorship, individuals mentioned providing high quality education, availability of teachers or peers as guides, and schools as platforms for activism.

Role Models and Their Visibility

This conference was a platform for role model visibility. Having panels containing both inspirational youths and female leaders in their fields, attendees were able to hear how different women and girls overcome gender inequality.

Panelists mentioned that accessibility to role models is key. This does not mean necessarily an increase in celebrity meet and greets. However, it does mean providing opportunities for mentorship to girls in their communities. Büşra Fidanoğlu mentioned how by attending an ADF summer camp, she found her role models and was inspired to begin her project called "You Can Do It, Too." Over two years, she and her team

As one of the girls said during the percussion workshop, "Hearing the struggles celebrities faced was inspiring."

traveled to girls' dorms, spoke with them, informed them about gender equality, provided tips on studying, and more. This simple act created an environment where the girls started to see they could grow into so much more. For example, when the girls were first asked about their dream professions, they gave standard answers and did not aim for careers in science or medicine. But once they saw young adult women jumping over the gender barrier and studying to be a doctor, to be an engineer, to be a scientist, they were inspired. They began to believe that they too, can overcome these challenges, and achieve their true dreams.

This is not to discredit the impact of positive celebrity role models. As one of the girls said during the percussion workshop, "Hearing the struggles celebrities faced was inspiring." Often girls believe the celebrities they idolize have not had to overcome the same challenges related to gender. Because of this, their position can seem out of reach and perhaps discouraging. By talking about struggles, and how they were able to overcome them, women and girls who are celebrities humanize themselves and show that all women and girls face challenges in a world run by men.



The education has to be of quality, girls need access to teachers and peer guides, and the institutions must be open to becoming platforms for gender activism.

With this being said, those who are closest, such as family members, can be the best role models of all, as exemplified by some of the panelists. In addition to family members, children in contact with non-profit and social service professionals can see them as role models as well. Seeing other women in fields generally dominated by men enables young women and girls to see themselves in those positions. This, according to columnist Şirin Payzın is equally important to girls knowing their passions and the capability to accomplish their goals. Seeing is believing, and seeing such role models enables girls to start believing in their ability to become part of the bigger picture.

Education and Educational Mentorship

Once a girl has a mentor, she will need to train and learn and grow. Because of this education and educational mentorship is equally important. However, simply going to class is not enough. The education has to be of quality, girls need access to teachers and peer guides, and the institutions must be open to becoming platforms for gender activism. Only then can education become an avenue through which girls can have full visibility of the status quo, their current occasionally disadvantageous place in it, and their ability to become agents for positive change in the fight for gender equality.



Dr. Şirin, the moderator of this panel, summarized this as well, stating that when countries educate girls well, starting as early as preschool, the whole of society thrives.



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One theme touched upon repeatedly in terms of quality education is that it should be universal. All of the young adult women in Panel One mentioned quality education should be seen as a right for all: especially the most disadvantaged children. Dr. Şirin, the moderator of this panel, summarized this as well, stating that when countries educate girls well, starting as early as preschool, the whole of society thrives.

In addition to quality, girls need access to people who can guide them through the process of becoming a lifelong-learners. Educational guidance can be in the form of teachers, peers, or other members of the community. For Büşra Fidanoğlu, the process of becoming ranked 7th in turkey in 8th grade started with the support of her teacher. Wanting to receive her teacher's admiration, Büşra began applying herself in school and hasn't stopped since. Betül Esra Akyüz on the other hand is an example of a peer guide herself. By visiting Roma children, especially the girls, and showing them one can be a woman and also a law student.



Mr. Kulesa noted, girls in many parts of the world remain without access to quality education, which coincides with their familial or societal constraints on their ability to independently make decisions.



Once in school, gaining a quality education, and surrounded by educational guide in all forms, girls can become agents of change in their own right. Schools are great platforms for enacting gradual social change on local levels. However, as Mr. Kulesa noted, girls in many parts of the world remain without access to quality education, which coincides with their familial or societal constraints on their ability to independently make decisions. This fact makes it easy to see how SDG 4 on education and SDG 5 on gender equality must go hand in hand. As a global society, it is imperative to tackle these two issues head-on, to create quality educational opportunities for all girls, regardless of their ethnicity, their parent's financial status, or their family's immigration status.

Having Dreams

All the aforementioned themes, from raising awareness and working together, to societal constraints and the bigger picture, were permeated by the talk of dreams both big and small. For without dreams and aspirations the status quo of unequal gender balance within society



Dreams give girls hope, wings, and the path towards a future of equality for all. Speaking of equality, the dream of global gender equality was in front of everyone's mind.



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will never be dismantled. Some of the most common topics discussed concerning dreams were the goal of obtaining true gender equality, courageous leaders to help global and local society get there, and the importance of aiming high and having a plan.

Dreams give girls hope, wings, and the path towards a future of equality for all. Speaking of equality, the dream of global gender equality was in front of everyone's mind. In the opening speech of the conference, Mr. Philippe Duamelle mentioned the progress that has been made, stating, "Girls are moving from marginalization to dreaming big and achieving big."

The whole of the conference was uplifted by the dreams of women and girls alike. Vuslat Doğan Sabancı furthered this commitment to dreams, and the need to involve others in your success. "First you have to believe in something," she said, "then you have to make others believe it as well" to facilitate positive change in the lives of women and girls.



V. KEY CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS



Many different key recommendations expressed by the International Day of the Girl Child Conference panelists.



Gender-blind or discriminatory use of language is reproducing gender stereotypes and change must start with challenging this language which reduce girl's drive to reach their full potentials.



The key recommendations expressed by the International Day of the Girl Child Conference panelists are summarized below:

- While considerable progress has been made in achieving gender equality, there is still need to raise awareness of the issues affecting the lives of girl children all over the world. Cross-cutting issues which multiply discriminatory conditions should be identified to eliminate all kinds of discrimination against women and girls.
- Gender-blind or discriminatory use of language is reproducing gender stereotypes and change must start with challenging this language which reduce girl's drive to reach their full potentials.
- Women and girls are stronger when they know your rights and have the ability and enabling environment to claim their rights. Training and empowerment programmes, especially targeting the most disadvantaged, including Roma, refugee, rural and financially constrained women and girls, must remain as key interventions.
- Cross-sectoral collaboration, including governments, grass root organizations, women's networks and private sector is needed for investing in adolescent girls and amplifying the impact of the efforts put for gender equality.



Visibility and accessibility of role models and mentors are of critical importance for young women and girls. Not only family members, but civil servants, education professionals and celebrities can play an important role and therefore have a crucial social responsibility.

- Men and boys are key actors in challenging adverse gender norms. Men and boys must be involved in working towards SDG 5 on Gender Equality. Not because it is a duty to do, or just with the sake of solidarity with women; but because the status quo harms them as well.
- Violence against women and girls is an issue that persists throughout society globally. Though progress has been made in tackling these issues of intimate partner violence, honor killings, and CEFM, there is still more work to be done. Systems and protections must be harmonized. Social norm change programs and social services must be made available to end the cycles of violence. Communities must be supported to protect their girls.
- As noted by panelists and presenters at the conference creating enabling conditions for empowerment is key and it can be achieved through high-quality education, equality in the family in terms of opportunities provided to children, equal say in society, elimination of discriminatory actions and policies, and providing opportunities (education, employment, and political engagement) to girls.
- Visibility and accessibility of role models and mentors are of critical importance for young women and girls. Not only family members, but civil servants, education professionals and celebrities can play an important role and therefore have a crucial social responsibility.
- Universal access to high quality education remains a necessity for the empowerment of girls, to help them gain the required knowledge and skills, through which they turn into individuals with the capability to change both themselves and the whole society.

APPENDIX 1. CONFERENCE AGENDA

2019 UN DAY OF THE GIRL CHILD INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE IN ISTANBUL

Theme: “Success Stories in Girls’ Empowerment: Overcoming Invisible Challenges”

09:30-10:00

Registration and “Ben İstersem” Photo Exhibition

10:00-10:40

Opening

Özge Uzun, Master of Ceremony

Opening Speeches:

Vuslat Doğan Sabancı, *Vice President of Aydın Doğan Foundation,*
Philippe Duamelle, *UNICEF Representative to Turkey*

Keynote Speaker:

Defne Hadiş, *Student at Nuova Accademia di Bella Arti School of Fine Arts and Painting;*
Graduate of Darüşşafaka

10:40-10:50

Music Performance

Aydın Doğan Foundation Fine Arts School

10:50-11:35

**Panel I – Stories
of Empowerment:
Role of supportive
community and
school environment**

Opening Remarks:

Karl Kulesa, *UNFPA, United Nations Population Fund Representative, Turkey*

Moderator:

Prof. Dr. Selçuk Şirin, *New York University*

Panelists:

Büşra Fidanoğlu, *Student at İstanbul University Law Faculty; Team Member in*
Aydın Doğan Foundation ‘Sen de Yapabilirsin!’ Project

Rama Alsabsabi, *Student at İstanbul University Department of Sociology; Activist*
Betül Esra Akyüz, *Graduate of Ankara University Law Faculty; Activist*

11:35-11:50

Coffee Break

11:50-12:50

Panel II - Success Stories in

Professional Life: Women breaking the gender barriers

Opening Remarks:

Asya Varbanova, *UN Women Turkey Country Director*

Moderator:

Şirin Payzın, *Journalist, T24*

Panelists:

Gupse Özay, *Comedian, Actress, Screenplay Writer, Director*

Dr. Dilek Gürsoy, *Cardiovascular Surgeon, Clinic for Cardiac and Thoracic Surgery at Helios Klinikum Siegburg, Germany*

Sevil Zeynep Becan, *Fenerbahçe Sports Club, Member of Board of Directors*

12:50-13:40

Lunch Break

Youth Workshops:

"Raise your voice to overcome invisible challenges"

Fabric Painting:

Murat Bingöl, *Sculptor*

Percussion:

Amy Salsgiver, *Percussionist, ITU MIAM*

Nihal Saruhanlı, *Percussionist, Drummer*

Melih Ağdağ & Ertem Akkuş, *Aydın Doğan Fine Arts High School Teachers*

Dance:

Azra Akın, *UNFPA, United Nations Population Fund Spokesperson*

Cartoon:

Ercan Akyol, *Cartoonist*

13:40-15:00

15:00 -16:30

Exhibition:

Visual display of workshop outcomes

Side Event:

"Ben İstersem" Photo Exhibition

