

# EMPLOYMENT IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR AND MUNICIPALITIES IN TURKEY

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LABOUR RESEARCH DEPARTMENT



**DISK / GENEL-İŞ**  
Union of General Services Workers of Turkey



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**Union of General Services  
Workers of Turkey - DISK / GENEL-IS**

Labour Research Department  
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In recent years, the deepening economic crisis, policies moving away from the principle of the social state and the progressive contraction of public services have had a clearly negative impact on working and living conditions for workers in Turkey. The year 2025 has likewise come to a close as a period in which these adverse trends for the working class persisted, with precarity and inequalities becoming even more pronounced. The limited scope of public service provision, the widespread expansion of privatisation practices, and the failure to adequately employ qualified labour within public staffing structures have led to a deterioration in quality of life for broad segments of society and a weakening of social protection.

This report, aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the current state of public and municipal employment in Turkey, the share of the public sector in the state budget, working conditions, occupational accidents, and workplace murders, as well as levels of trade union organisation. Drawing on up-to-date statistics and comparative data, the report seeks to reveal the transformation of public employment and to make visible the urgent need for labour-centred public policies.

**Turkey’s Share of Public Expenditure in GDP is 12% Below the OECD Average**

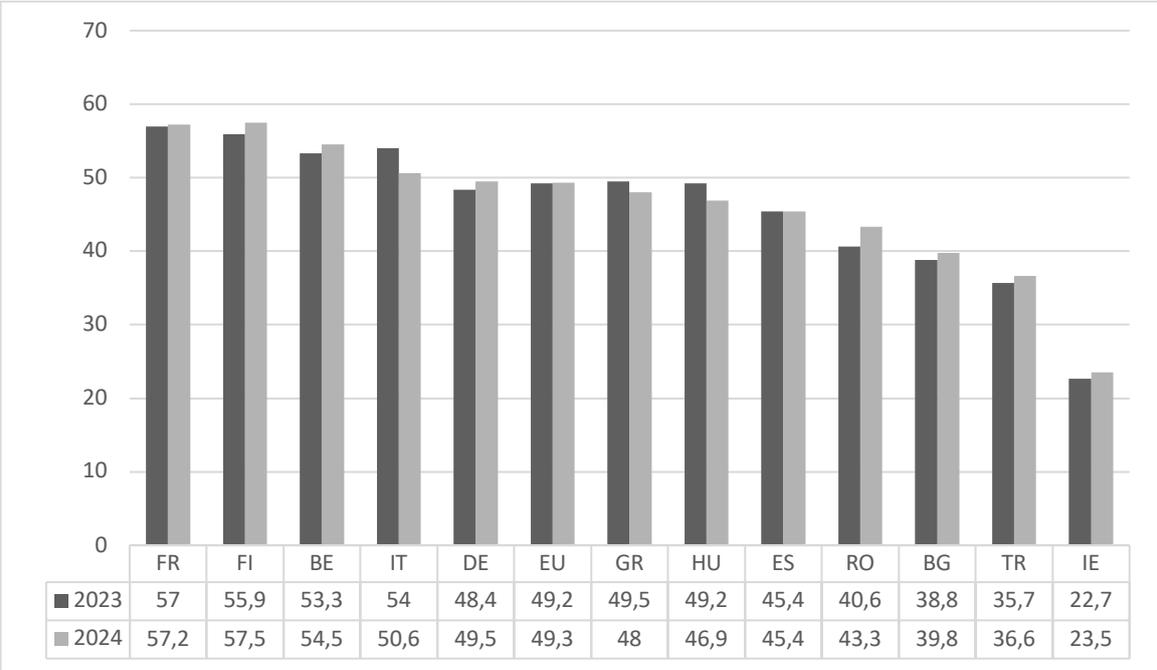
In Turkey, the share of public expenditure within GDP remains low when compared with OECD countries. This low ratio is not merely a technical economic indicator; it also constitutes the structural background to some of the most pressing social challenges of today, including inequalities in education, difficulties in access to healthcare services, and the weakness of social support mechanisms.

The low level of public expenditure as a share of GDP is the result of policy choices that have increasingly favoured the “shrinking of the public sector” in recent years. These choices have accelerated the marketisation of public services and have made access to quality and free basic services progressively more dependent on income levels.

At a time when rising living costs in Turkey are increasing the need for social state support among broad segments of society, the continued decline in public expenditure has become one of the most critical issues of public debate. This situation places the question of “strengthening public services versus further reliance on market mechanisms” at the centre of the current political agenda.

According to the comparative OECD data presented in the table, as of 2024 the average share of public expenditure in GDP across European countries stands at 49.3 per cent. In many of them, this ratio ranges between 40 and 60 per cent. Public expenditure accounts for 49.5 per cent of GDP in Germany and 57.2 per cent in France. In Turkey, however, this share remains at 36.6 per cent, placing the country approximately 12 percentage points below the OECD average.

**Figure 1.** Share of Public Expenditure in GDP (2023-2024, %)



**Source:** OECD, Government at a Glance<sup>i</sup>

This picture demonstrates that public expenditure in Turkey has been kept at a limited level for a prolonged period and that the state has increasingly moved away from the principle of the social state, progressively privatising public services. This insufficiency in public spending deepens social inequalities and makes access to public services more difficult for broad segments of the population.



### **Only 3% of GDP Allocated to Education and Health**

Public social expenditure is primarily directed towards education, health and social security systems, as well as areas such as pensions, unemployment benefits, childcare, and care for persons with disabilities, housing and family allowances. The main purpose of these expenditures is to support vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in society, reduce income inequalities, and improve overall living standards.

Social expenditure, one of the most concrete expressions of the social state, reflects the state's responsibility to meet the basic needs of its citizens and to guarantee social protection. However, an examination of current policies in Turkey shows that the share of social expenditure allocated from the public budget remains highly limited.

An examination of the shares allocated to education, health, and social protection within public services reveals that the lowest share of GDP is allocated to education. The share of GDP allocated to education remains at 3.4 per cent, with an increase of only 0.3 percentage points over the past twenty years, indicating a very limited expansion. Expenditure on health services, meanwhile, has not shown a significant increase outside the pandemic period and stood at 4.2 per cent of GDP as of 2025. Social protection expenditure, covering; pensions, social assistance, non-contributory payments, and direct income support accounts for 7.9 per cent of GDP, falling below its 2015 level.

**Table 1.** Share of Public Sector Social Expenditure in GDP over a 10-Year Period (%)

	2005	2015	2025
Education	3,1	3,9	3,4
Health	3,6	3,7	4,2
Social Protection	7	8,2	8,2
<b>Social Expenditure</b>	<b>13,6</b>	<b>15,7</b>	<b>15,9</b>

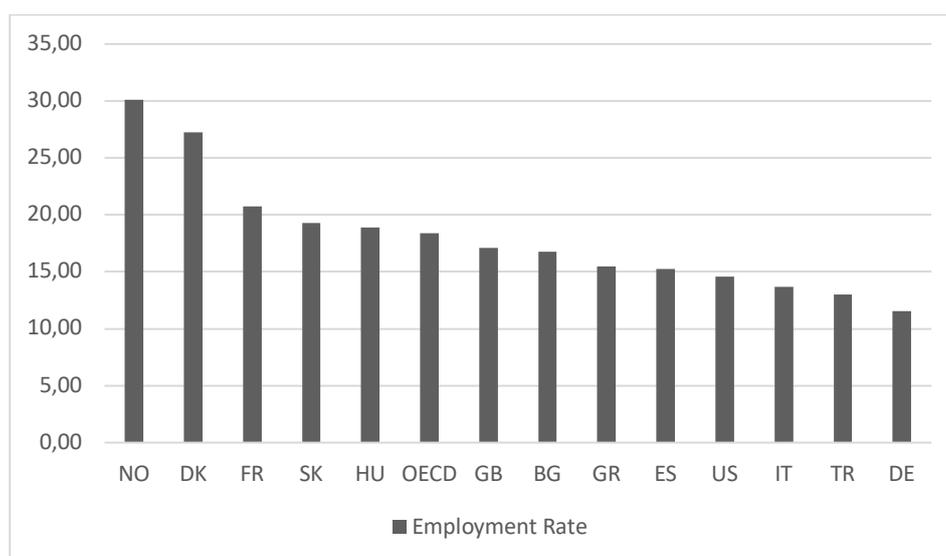
**Source:** DSB, Public Sector Social Expenditure Statistics<sup>ii</sup>;  
MOTF, Central Government Budget Expenditure Outturns<sup>iii</sup>

### **Public Employment in Turkey is 5.3% Below the OECD Average**

Public employment is a key factor that directly determines both the accessibility and quality of services provided by the state to citizens, while also constituting an important source of security for workers. In Turkey, the share of public sector employees within total employment is strikingly low compared to many European countries. At the root of this problem lies the insufficient employment of the workforce required within public staffing structures to deliver the qualified and effective public services that society needs.

The share of public sector employment in Turkey remains 5.3 percentage points below the OECD average. According to 2023 data, public employment accounts for 13 per cent of total employment in Turkey, whereas the average across OECD member countries stands at 18.4 per cent. This situation not only results in the growing social demand for public services going unmet, but also contributes to persistently high unemployment rates in the country. In order to ensure the sustainable provision of quality public services and to meet social needs, Turkey needs to reassess its public sector employment policies.

**Figure 2.** Share of Public Sector Employment in Total Employment by Country (%)



**Source:** OECD, Government at a Glance<sup>iv</sup>

**Only Two Out of Every Ten People are Employed in the Public Sector**

Although public employment in Turkey has increased in absolute terms, it remains at a low level when compared with European countries. Considering the growing needs of the population, the fact that public employment accounts for only 16.4 per cent of total employment indicates that public services are not being delivered at an adequate level. The widespread expansion of privatisation policies has resulted in new employment opportunities being created predominantly in the private sector rather than in the public sector.

According to third-quarter data for 2025 published by the Department of Strategy and Budget (DSB), 5,325,724 people are employed in the public sector. This figure corresponds to 16.4 per cent of total employment. While OECD data show Turkey’s public employment rate at 13 per cent, the DSB calculates this rate at 16.4 per cent. The main reason for this discrepancy is that the DSB includes workers employed in State Economic Enterprises (SEEs) and MEEs within the scope of public employment.

**Table 2.** Data on Employment in the Public and Private Sectors (2024-2025)

Year	Employment	Private Sector		Public Sector	
2024	32,716,000	27,466,072	83,9%	5,249,928	16,1%
2025	32,491,000	27,232,276	83,6%	5,325,724	16,4%
<b>Change</b>	<b>- 0,7%</b>	<b>- 1%</b>		<b>+ 1,4%</b>	

Sources: DSB, Public Sector Employment Figures<sup>v</sup>; TURKSTAT, Labour Force Statistics<sup>vi</sup>

**Precarious Employment in the Public Sector is Increasing: The Number of Contracted Staff and Temporary Workers has Risen**

An examination of the employment status of public sector workers shows that civil servants account for 65.6 per cent of public employment (approximately 3.4 million people). This is followed by “permanent workers” at 23.2 per cent (around 1.2 million people) and “contracted personnel” at 8.3 per cent (approximately 444,000 people). This picture indicates that public employment is predominantly based on the secure status of civil service, while at the same time workers employed under worker status constitute a critically significant share in the delivery of public services.

In Turkey, policies on public employment have increasingly become an instrument used by the government during election periods. In each election cycle, the current government has pursued policies aimed at boosting its vote share, such as converting contracted personnel into “civil servants” and transferring subcontracted or temporary workers into “permanent worker” positions. The rising trend in the number of permanent workers in public employment is largely the result of Decree Law No. 696, adopted in 2017. This regulation provided for the transfer of workers employed by subcontracting companies through service procurement tenders based on personnel provision into permanent worker positions within central government institutions, while subcontracted workers employed by municipalities were transferred to MEEs.

**Table 3.** Figures and Proportion of Employment in the Public Sector by Status

Status	2024		2025		Change
Civil Servant	3,487,795	66,4%	3,494,214	65,6%	+ 0,2%
Worker	1,224,882	23,3%	1,236,891	23,2%	+ 1,0%
Contracted Personnel	399,426	7,6%	444,353	8,3%	+ 11,2%
Other	99,739	1,8%	98,196	1,8%	- 1,5%
Temporary	38,086	0,7%	52,070	1,0%	+ 36,7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>5,249,928</b>		<b>5,325,724</b>		<b>+ 1,4%</b>

Source: DSB, Public Sector Employment Figures<sup>vii</sup>

### **83% of Employment in Municipalities Consists of Workers**

Total employment in the General Services sector increased by 2.3 per cent over the period in question, rising from 991,976 to 1,014,943. This increase indicates that the demand for labour in the provision of local services continues and that the sector has maintained its capacity to generate employment. However, it is clear that this quantitative expansion has not been distributed evenly across employment statuses.

The number of municipal workers (including permanent staff, workers employed in Municipal Economic Enterprises - MEEs, and temporary workers) increased by 3.3 per cent, raising their share of total employment from 82.5 per cent to 83.3 per cent. This shows that employment growth in the General Services has taken place primarily through municipalities and that the role of municipal employment within the sector has become even more decisive. At the same time, the fact that the category of municipal workers encompasses permanent, company-based, and temporary statuses makes it difficult to interpret this increase as a direct expansion of secure employment. By contrast, the number of workers employed in private companies and household services declined by 2.3 per cent, and their share of total employment fell from 17.5 per cent to 16.7 per cent. This decline demonstrates that employment originating from the private sector and household services within the General Services has relatively contracted, reducing its overall weight within the sector.



**Table 4.** Distribution of Employment Statuses in General Services Sector:  
Figures and Proportions (2024-2025, %)

Status	2024		2025		Change
	Number	%	Number	%	
Municipal Workers	818,351	82,5%	845,313	83,3%	+ 3,3%
Private Companies & Household	173,625	17,5%	169,630	16,7%	- 2,3%
<b>General Services (Total)</b>	991,976		1,014,943		+ 2,3%

**Source:** DSB, Public Sector Employment Figures<sup>viii</sup>;  
MLSS, Number of Workers and Trade Union Membership Figures<sup>ix</sup>

When the employment statuses of municipal employees are examined, 83 per cent of workers (700,625) are employed under worker status. Of the remaining employees, 16 per cent are civil servants (135,982), while 1 per cent (8,706) are employed under contracted personnel status.

**Table 5.** Employment in Municipalities (2024-2025)

	Civil Servant	Contracted Personnel	Worker			Total
			Permanent	MEEs	Temporary	
2024	134,296	9,366	29,662	640,580	4,447	818.351
2025	135,982	8,706	23,893	671,863	4,869	845.313

**Source:** DSB, Public Sector Employment Figures<sup>x</sup>

**While 96% of Municipal Workers Are Employed in MEEs,  
the Number of Permanent Workers Fell by 19.4% Over the Past Year**

During the 2024-2025 period, the total number of workers employed in municipalities increased by 3.8 per cent. The main driver of this increase was the rise in employment within MEEs, where the number of workers grew by 4.8 per cent. The number of workers employed in MEEs reached 671,863, corresponding to a striking 96 per cent of all municipal workers.

By contrast, the number of permanent workers declined sharply by 19.4 per cent. Over the past year, the number of permanent workers decreased by 5,769, falling to 23,893. These figures demonstrate that municipal employment is moving away from permanent and secure forms of work and increasingly towards more flexible and precarious forms of employment through MEEs.

**Table 6.** Distribution of Municipal Workers by Employment Statuses (2024-2025)

	Permanent	MEEs	Temporary	Total
2024	29,662	640,580	4,447	674,689
2025	23,893	671,863	4,869	700,625
<b>Change</b>	<b>- 19,4%</b>	<b>+ 4,8%</b>	<b>+ 9,5%</b>	<b>+ 3,4%</b>

**Source:** DSB, Public Sector Employment Figures<sup>xi</sup>

## While the Union Density in Turkey is 14%, It Reaches 54% in the General Services

Across all sectors, the overall unionisation rate stands at 14 per cent, corresponding to 2,429,527 unionised workers. In the General Services, however, union density is significantly higher: out of a total workforce of 1,014,943, some 546,001 workers are union members, resulting in a unionisation rate of 53.8 per cent. Compared with other sectors, municipal workers therefore display a markedly higher level of union organisation and, likewise, benefit from collective agreements at higher rates than workers in other branches.

**Table 7.** Figures and Proportions of Workers and Unionised Workers by Sector (Total, General Services)

Year	No of Workers	No of Unionised Workers			
		All Sectors		General Services	
2024	16,864,733	2,524,547	15,0%	583,491	58,8%
2025	17,326,143	2,429,527	14,0%	546,001	53,8%
<b>Change</b>	<b>+ 461,410</b>	<b>- 95,020</b>		<b>- 37,490</b>	

**Source:** MLSS, Number of Workers and Trade Union Membership Figures<sup>xii</sup>

## Unionisation Rate among Women Workers in the General Services is 35.7%, and 61.6% among Men

It is evident that municipal employment is predominantly male and that unionisation rates among male workers are higher than those among women. In the General Services sector, 436,849 out of 709,165 male workers are union members, corresponding to a unionisation rate of 61.6 per cent. By contrast, only 109,146 of the 305,778 women workers are unionised, resulting in a significantly lower unionisation rate of 35.7 per cent.

**Table 8.** Numbers and Unionisation Rates of Women and Men in the General Services Sector (2025)

Gender	Workers	Unionised Workers	Unionisation Rate
Men	709,165	436,849	61,6%
Women	305,778	109,146	35,7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1.014.943</b>	<b>545,995</b>	<b>53,8%</b>

**Source:** MLSS, Number of Workers and Trade Union Membership Figures<sup>xiii</sup>

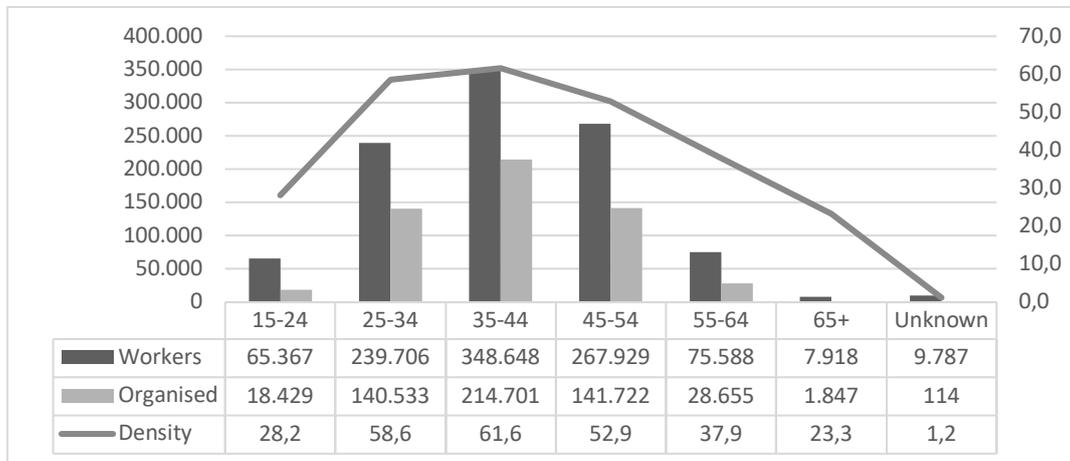
## Youth in the General Services Sector Remain Distant from Unionisation Their Organisation Rate is Only Half of the Sectoral Average

An age-based analysis of trade union organisation in the General Services sector shows that unionisation among young workers is notably low. Of the 65,367 workers in the 15-24 age group, only 18,429 are union members. While the overall unionisation rate in the sector

exceeds 50 per cent, it stands at just 28.2 per cent for this age group. The highest level of union organisation is observed in the 35-44 age group. In this cohort, 214,701 out of 348,648 workers are union members, corresponding to a unionisation rate of 61.6 per cent. By contrast, among workers aged 55-64, considered the older age group, the unionisation rate stands at 37.9 per cent.



**Figure 3.** Union Membership Figures and Rates in the General Services by Age (Persons, %)



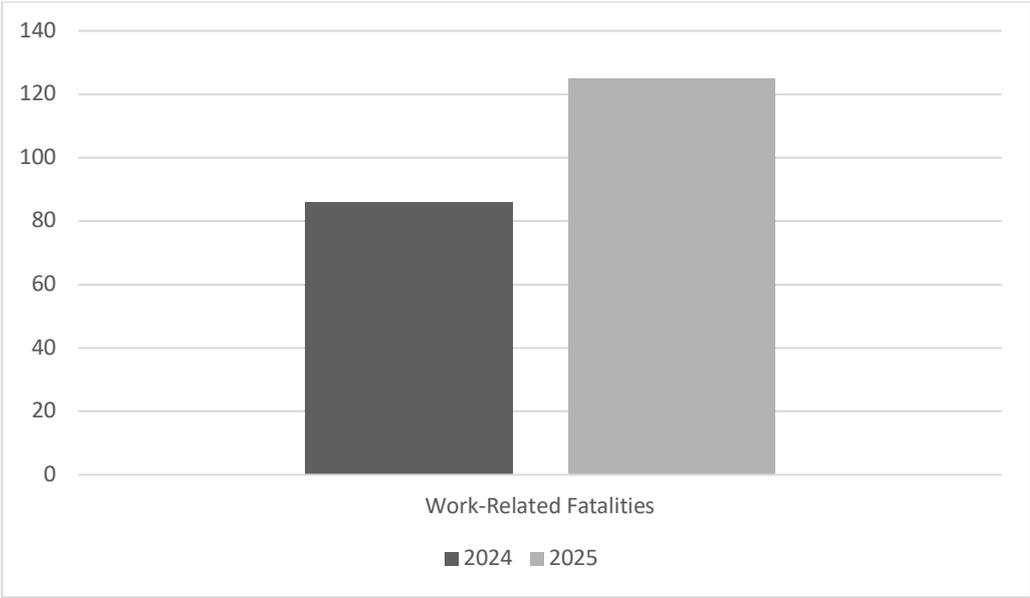
**Source:** MLSS, Number of Workers and Trade Union Membership Figures<sup>xiv</sup>

### **Last Year, 125 Workers in the General Services Lost Their Lives Due to Occupational Accidents**

The number of work-related deaths demonstrates that occupational health and safety measures in municipalities remain inadequate. According to data from the Health and Safety Labour Watch (İSİG), 125 workers in the General Services sector lost their lives as a result of occupational accidents in 2025. In 2024, the number of work-related deaths in the same sector stood at 86.

Municipal workers provide services across a wide range of activities, both within and outside municipalities, including waste collection, infrastructure services, road construction, and the maintenance of parks and green spaces. Fatal occupational accidents have been particularly prevalent in sewerage and construction work. Yet occupational accidents are 100 per cent preventable. For this reason, urgent, unit-by-unit risk assessments must be carried out for municipal services, and the necessary preventive measures must be implemented by employers.

**Figure 4.** Work-Related Fatalities in the General Services Sector (2024–2025)



**Source:** İSiG, Workplace Fatalities Reports<sup>xv</sup>

**Key Demands for Public Employment and Local Public Services**

1. The share allocated to public expenditure in Turkey must be increased; public employment should be strengthened in line with population growth and expanding service needs.
2. Subcontracting in public services must be fully abolished, and all subcontracted arrangements should be integrated into permanent public employment in order to unify public staffing.
3. Instead of contracted, temporary, and precarious forms of employment in the public sector, permanent, secure, and continuous employment should be established for all workers.
4. No regulation should be introduced in central or local government that would lead to the erosion of existing rights of public workers; all acquired rights must be safeguarded.
5. Workers employed in MEEs also directly deliver public services. Therefore, the rights of all municipal workers must be equalised, and workers in MEEs should be granted permanent status and entitlement to additional bonus payments.



6. The right to job security must be restructured to cover all workers in both the public and private sectors; a comprehensive system should be established to eliminate financial, social, and employment-status disparities among public employees.
7. Norm staffing limitations set out in Municipal Law No. 5393 should be abolished in order to enable municipalities to recruit staff according to actual needs.
8. Recruitment into public employment must be based on merit; transparent and accountable mechanisms should be established to prevent patronage, favouritism, and political appointments.
9. Comprehensive preventive and protective occupational health and safety measures must be fully implemented for municipal workers; additional safety and health protocols should be developed for workers employed in high-risk units.
10. The financial dependence of local governments on central administration should be reduced, and municipalities should be provided with direct budgetary allocations and resources to expand public employment.
11. Wage policies for workers employed in municipalities and public institutions should be based on the poverty threshold, ensuring a level of income sufficient for a decent standard of living.
12. The working conditions of women workers must be strengthened; mandatory women's policy units should be established within municipalities to ensure access to childcare and care services and to guarantee workplaces free from violence.
13. Taking into account the increasing pressures on municipal workers due to the climate crisis, disaster risks, and heavy workloads, special leave arrangements, additional compensation, and dedicated safety protocols should be implemented for workers during disaster situations.

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