BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE · COP31 BLUE ZONE

Growing Green Futures

Rural Youth, Skills and the Green Transformation of Work

Turkish title: Yeşil Gelecek İçin Dönüşümün Beceri Anahtarı: Kırsaldaki Gençliğin Dayanıklılığında

Date	Time	Venue
Saturday, 14 November 2026	16:00–16:45	Türkiye Pavilion, Room 1 (B125)

Why this panel?

The climate crisis is transforming both production and daily life in rural areas. Drought, extreme weather, shrinking access to water and falling yields are weakening farm incomes and putting more pressure on food systems. As livelihoods weaken, young people leave rural areas faster and the farming population grows older.

When young people leave, rural areas also lose much of their capacity to adapt to climate change. These young people are the generation that will put adaptation measures into practice, manage soil and water, and bring new technologies into production. That is why we see the presence of young people in rural areas not only as a demographic issue, but as part of the response to the climate crisis.

Genç Hayat Foundation has worked with young people in rural areas since 2010, and with children and young people in seasonal agriculture since 2014. This experience lets us observe in the field how climate pressure shapes rural young people's decisions about education and work.

> **What we see in the field: young people are not wary of work itself, but of working conditions that offer no development, no security and no say in decisions.**

Young people's decision to leave rural areas cannot be explained by a lack of jobs alone. The young people at our field sites do not see rural life as limited to farming; they count infrastructure, agriculture-related industries and everyday services among the factors that will shape their future there. Investment in rural services mostly responds to the needs of an older population, while young people's access to the services they need in daily life remains an unsolved problem.

The green transition does not reach rural areas on its own

While the transformation of work is debated in cities, the green transformation of work is also under way in rural areas. Digital and green technologies can raise farm productivity and cut water and fertiliser use; agriculture-related industries, food processing and rural manufacturing open up jobs beyond farming. But these opportunities are not shared equally across rural areas.

Up to 30%
Share of green jobs in employment in capital regions

Up to 5%
Share of green jobs in employment in remote rural regions

Source: OECD, The Future of Rural Manufacturing, 2023.

If young people cannot access information, skills, decent work and decision-making, the green transition may deepen the gap between rural and urban areas. When that access is in place, the green transformation of work does more than create new jobs: it helps build places where young people can choose to stay or return.

Policy context

Türkiye has announced a net-zero emissions target for 2053 and given the green transition a legal framework through its Climate Law. The Ministry of Labour and Social Security is preparing a National Just Transition Strategy together with the ILO. The COP31 Presidency's youth work plan also lists among its priorities making visible the leadership of rural youth in climate action, highlighting youth-led innovation in food and agriculture, and connecting young farmers with policymakers and funders.

Purpose of the panel

To bring the decline of youth in rural areas onto the COP31 agenda as part of the response to the climate crisis, and to discuss how the green transformation of work can become an opportunity that makes it possible for young people to stay in rural areas and build their future there.

Main themes

1. **The climate crisis and rural transformation.** How drought, shrinking access to water and pressure on food systems affect young people's decisions to stay in rural areas.
2. **Youth renewal in rural areas.** How young people see rural life, and the conditions for staying in or returning to rural areas.
3. **The green transformation of work and new skills.** Emerging occupations in agriculture and non-farm rural sectors, and how a just transition can bring these opportunities to young people.
4. **Liveable rural areas for young people.** Beyond decent work: access to transport, digital connectivity, education, health and social life, and participation in decisions.
5. **The future of agriculture and the rural economy.** A rural economy diversified through food processing, rural manufacturing, entrepreneurship, cooperatives and local value chains.

Some of the questions we will discuss

- Will the green transition offer rural young people a new future, or leave them facing new inequalities?
- Are we preparing young people for the jobs of the future, or creating the jobs of the future in rural places where young people will want to live?
- Will rural young people be only the workforce of the green transition, or also its designers, entrepreneurs and decision-makers?

Speakers

Prof. Dr. Bülent Gülçubuk · Moderator
Department of Agricultural Economics, Faculty of Agriculture, Ankara University

Chizuru Iwata
Adolescent Development and Participation Specialist, UNICEF Türkiye

Uğur Gülderer
General Director, Genç Hayat Foundation

Suat Dede
Deputy Director General for Labour, Ministry of Labour and Social Security

Cem Ertal
Executive, TOPRAQ AI

Panel outcome

On 16 November we will publish our outcome statement, the **"Manifesto of Rural Youth"**, shaped by the voices of young people at our field sites, on our event page at genchayat.org.