

An Overview of Turkish Women's Status in Turkey

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Abstract: Turkey displaying characteristic and prominent historical experience in the world in line with the policies related to woman issue has presented the dignity already deserved to Turkish women through the reforms actualized by Atatürk's leadership within the first ten years of its foundation. No longer, the existence of woman in public areas such as education, working life and politics has taken its place among the other subject matters cared about by the new Republic via secular law interiorized. However, though all these significant progresses and remarkable steps taken, in today's present situation, the reality of Turkish women has still built an agenda as a case for discussion and the crag between theory and practice has brought with its question marks in both social and economic context.

Keywords: Status of woman, gender, education, labor market, working life, NGOs,

Türkiye'de Kadının Statüsünün Bir Gözdengeçirmesi

Özet: Kadına ilişkin politikalarında dünyada özgün ve dikkati çeken bir tarihsel deneyim sergileyen Türkiye, kuruluşunun ilk 10 yılı içerisinde Atatürk'ün önderliğinde gerçekleştirdiği reformlarla Türk kadınına hak ettiği değeri vermiştir. Artık eğitim, çalışma yaşamı, siyaset gibi kamu alanlarında kadının varlığı, Laik hukukun benimsenmesi ile yeni Cumhuriyet'in önem verilen konuları arasında yerini almıştır. Ancak bütün bu önemli gelişmelere ve kayda değer adımlara rağmen, bugün gelinen noktada Türk kadınının gerçeği hala tartışma konusu olarak gündem oluşturmakta, teori ve uygulama arasındaki uçurum hem sosyal hem siyasal bağlamda soru işaretlerini de beraberinde getirmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kadın statüsü, toplumsal cinsiyet, eğitim, işgücü piyasası, çalışma yaşamı, STK

Introduction

Traditional views of gender roles and relations have persisted in tandem with changes in the status of women both within and outside the family. These changes began during the latter years of the Ottoman Empire, when women were given opportunities to work as teachers, clerks, and industrial workers. Change accelerated during the early republican era. The

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1926 civil code granted women unprecedented legal rights, and in 1934 they received the right to vote and to stand for election.

As known, the rights given were not enjoyed equally by all women, many Turkish women gained the right to education, community office, and employment opportunities and obtained rights as good as those of women in developed countries. In reality, the statistics of female representation in the professions in Turkey has been more inspiring than in many western countries. Since the 1950s, their participation in the labor force, the professions, and in politics has increased steadily but unevenly.

In 1970s, Turkey ranked third among all nations, following the United States and Canada in recruiting women into academia. But not all changes have resulted in improved conditions. In some instances, especially among rural and newly urbanized, changes have disturbed a traditional order that has provided meaningful, guaranteed roles for women without introducing new ones.

During the 1950s, rural women who migrated to the urban *gecekondus* generally found work as maids in private homes. Since the 1960s, employment opportunities for women in industry, especially light manufacturing, have been expanding.. Nevertheless, a majority of women in the *gecekondus* do not work outside the home. Most urban working-class women are single and hold jobs for less than five years; they tend to leave paid employment when they get married. While working and contributing to family income, women enjoy enhanced status and respect.

Urban middle-class and upper-middle-class women tend to have more education than working-class women and generally are employed in teaching, health care, and clerical work. Upper-class women tend to work in the prestigious professions, such as law, medicine, and university teaching. They were concentrated in Ankara, Istanbul, Izmir, and a few other large urban centers.

Struggling for Rights after 1980s

At the time when women first started challenging equal opportunity in the 1980s in the Muslim world, governments did not encourage them. This was a time-consuming process. However, it was to some degree dissimilar in Turkey with variations caused by liberal and conservative governments who first made concessions and then imposed barriers. Women's actions also started in the 1980s in Turkey and for the first time most Turkish women called themselves feminists, meaning that they raised questions and concerns stemming from their communal individuality as women. By the 1990s, Middle Eastern women's associations went through a new period; they were not only more numerous, they had a new vision. The 1990s saw a new level of professionalism in women-run NGOs and their development methods, and as a consequence they attracted more financial support.

Although Turkey's achievements in gender equality date back to the 1930s, when Turkish women were granted full voting rights, it was the country's ratification of the **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against women (CEDAW)** in 1986 that led to the establishment of a national machinery for the promotion of gender equity. Since then Turkey has increased its commitment to achieving genuine gender equality by passing milestone legal reforms that eliminate fundamental discriminatory provisions against women, including those on violence, poverty and economic exploitation.

While Turkey has made considerable progress in achieving legal gender equality, the existing challenge is implementation. Behavioral change has not necessarily followed legislative change, creating a gap between law and practice. Turkey remains far from the desired levels in terms of basic development indicators, including women's participation in decision-making. The Government reports that women are still extremely under-represented in Turkey's parliament; violence against women remains a social problem; and allocation of resources is still gender biased. Advancements are also being overshadowed by growing socio-economic and regional disparities: inequality and poverty are more prevalent in the eastern part of the country, in rural versus urban settings, in low-educated versus highly-educated.

While there is still much to be done in strengthening the national machinery for the advancement of women in both the public and private spheres, Turkey's potential to make great strides in the years ahead is clear given the good will of the state as well as the determination of academic and civil society organizations.

Advocacy, awareness, and resources appear to be key: public attention to issues of violence against women, including domestic violence, honour killings and trafficking is limited. Women are often restrained in exercising their rights fully or are unaware of the scope of their rights. Organizations working to protect the rights of women need more support to be able to do so. Collaborative efforts between government (local and national), NGO's, labour market partners, media and private co-operations in the area of women's rights are virtually needed.

In 1990s, the status of women in Turkey remained a multifaceted, complex issue. Although the government guarantees women equal work and pay opportunities, the traditional value system elevates gender segregation in the workplace and other public spaces as a social ideal. Even urban, educated, professional women may encounter the persistence of traditional, religiously colored values about gender roles among their putatively modern, secular husbands.

Male-female relations remain an area of some tension in Turkish society. The conflict between traditional and modern values and between patterns of socialization within the family and at school affect the social relationships that both men and women establish. Even among modernized

urban dwellers, family loyalty, family obligations, and family honor remain strong considerations. Thus, even though Turks professing to have modern values may define the "ideal" family as one in which equality exists between spouses, wives who actually attempt to establish themselves as equal partners usually meet with resistance from their husbands.

The conflicting tensions of traditional and modern values also influence social relations outside the family. The mass media and modern education popularize ideas such as social equality, openness between spouses, romantic love, and platonic friendships between the sexes, concepts that men and women with traditional values find objectionable but that their adolescent children may find appealing. Furthermore, whereas some young women have been readopting headscarves and modest dress to demonstrate their commitment to Islam, others have been attracted to the latest Western fashions in clothes and cosmetics, which traditionalists perceive as evidence of a general decline in female morality.

Turkish Case on International Platform

UNDP's (United Nations Development Program) contributions to gender equality in Turkey have been recognized by the Turkish Government, NGOs, academia, and beneficiaries. UNDP initiated its assistance in 1992, with the launch of the National Programme for the Enhancement of Women in Development. Over the years, this umbrella technical assistance programme has supported the capacity building of government offices (including the **General Directorate on the Status and Problems of Women**) as well as of independent experts to advance research in gender studies; awareness raising, advocacy and support for NGOs; and the establishment of international linkages.

Since 2001, UNDP has been gradually adopting gender mainstreaming as its policy to combat gender inequalities in Turkey. In its next phase of country programming, 2006-2010, UNDP will remain committed to supporting gender equality goals in its programmes as well as through an active participation in the UN Gender Theme Group. UNDP will also continue to play a central role in advocacy and policy advice through the publication of its National Development Reports as well as the Millennium Development Goals Reports.

Turkey has accomplished important progress with regard to gender equality legislation. However, the situation of women in Turkey remains a source of concern, in three inter-related areas: violence against women, low participation in the labor market, and access to education. Particular consideration has to be given to strengthening the role of women in society and their representation in political decision making, whether on national level or on regional and local level.

The Turkish Constitution provides for equality between women and men. Further reforms must be adopted in order to translate this general principle into practice, and to genuinely comply with the *acquis communautaire* and to implement it on the ground. Implementation remains a challenge. Full respect of women's rights remains a critical problem, particularly in the poorest areas of the country. Women are vulnerable to discriminatory practices, due largely to a lack of education and a high illiteracy rate.

Overcoming the gender gap in education and training and boosting women's overall level of education and skills is a fundamental factor to provide the present and future generations of women with the necessary basic skills to enter the labor market. Domestic violence against women remains an important problem across Europe, and Turkey is no exception. Honor killings are also a major concern, especially in the South East. In this respect, strengthening the administrative capacity is essential.

In Being Effort on Labor Market

The situation of women on the Turkish labor market further deteriorated in recent years. Participation of women in the labor market remains very low; one of the lowest amongst OECD countries. Female unemployment is on the rise. There is a strong gender divide in the labor market partly coinciding with the urban/rural and regional divides. Women activities are highly concentrated in agriculture and unpaid employment.

Turkey needs to attract more women to the labor market and ensure good working conditions in line with the decent work agenda promoted by the International Labor Organization and the European Union. This is essential not just for the sake of equal opportunities, but also for the sustainable growth and productivity of the Turkish economy. Women constitute more than 75% of the informal economy, as a result of a combination of the low level of education of many women, regulatory obstacles and the limits of the social services.

In this respect, the efforts engaged to combat undeclared work and to transform informal economy into formal economy must be praised. Social partners have a key role to play in this process. Turkey will need to prepare a national employment strategy with a view to participating in the medium term in the European Employment Strategy. In this context, the situation of women will have to be clearly mainstreamed. The changing socio-economic situation of women and the links to poverty, urbanization, displacement and internal migration must be taken into account. Specific priorities must be identified to promote women's activity and ensure active follow up to address the various challenges women face.

On the other hand, it is well-known fact that there is a significant pay difference between men and women workers all over the world. Women are

minority groups in employment and concentrated in certain generally low-paying occupations and industries. Empirical studies of labour market discrimination in both developed and developing countries show that there are persistent wage discrepancies between men and women workers.

In analysing discrimination it is very important to understand what is meant by discrimination and to recognize that it can be of different types and take different forms. For instance, women's inferior position in the labour market can involve wage discrimination (where equally productive men and women are employed in the same job but being paid different wages); employment discrimination (where women face lower opportunities in being hired and /or promoted although they have the same qualifications and experience as men),(Table 1).

Table 1: Statistics on Employment in Turkey

TURKEY	2000 (thousands)	2005 (thousands)	Change (thousands)
15 + Female Population	23 295	25 617	2 322
15 + Male Population	22 916	25 209	2 293
Female Labour Force	6 188	6 352	164
Male Labour Force	16 890	18 213	1 323
Female Employment	5 801	5 700	- 101
Male Employment	15 780	16 346	566
Unemployed Women	387	652	265
Unemployed Men	1 111	1867	756
Women not participating in Labour Force	17 108	19 264	2 156

There are three essential forms of employment discrimination. Hiring discrimination takes places when males are preferred in the recruitment process even though females have equivalent employment-related characteristics. Promotion discrimination arises when women with equivalent achievement to man are treated differently in promotion decisions and in access to further training. Finally, firing discrimination happens when women are selected in termination decisions because of their gender rather than their relative productivity.

In the Turkish labour market, information about real productivity is difficult to obtain, so when the employers are not able to obtain information and statistics about their applicants' productivity, they trust prevailing assumptions and beliefs. In contrast to the reality of women's situation in the labour market it is believed that because of their domestic responsibilities women are not as reliable as male workers, and that they withdraw from their work when they become a mother or when they get married. Thus, it is assumed that the turnover rate is higher than that of men and attachment to work is lower. Also in Turkey it is argued that "a female household member is

not principally responsible for the upkeep of the household; rather she works to keep the household supplied with non-essentials" So, she can easily leave her job when she is needed by her family for domestic reasons. These kinds of negative stereotypes penalize those women who are as committed to the labour force as men.

Beliefs about differences between the genders that are grounded in traditional cultural values contribute to the persistence of gender discrimination. These beliefs take as axiomatic that women's primary sphere is the home and that of men is the workplace, and assume innate gender differentials in personality and physical characteristics that are supposed to suit women and men. There are patriarchal relations and gender based cultural roles in family and society in Turkey.

Women's status is determined generally by tradition, custom and religion and employers think women's main role is as homemaker, and men are the breadwinners, so this belief in the appropriate roles for women and men does affect the wages, promotion and hiring of women. Women are paid less than men because it is thought that women are dependent on men and the main breadwinners are men, so they must be paid more.

In Turkish case, male employers and employees do have some prejudices and this social custom reinforces different types of roles among men and women. The male role is expected to be main source of their family income i.e., 'head of the household' and the female role is proposed to be mother and housewife and their primary assignment is domestic jobs and only secondly as workers.

For example, it is assumed that all women in society lived with a man, either their husband or their father. The women's wage is seen as a supplement to the men's wage and therefore their lower pay and lower position in the labor market is not seen as problematic by the society. In addition, the employment status of women in the labor market reflects social and traditional beliefs in Turkish society. As known, there are some restrictions, which stem from the labour market, such as the employers' traditional attitudes and beliefs about women workers, which restrict women to certain occupations and therefore influences the elasticity of female labour supply.

Another crucial topic to discuss in Turkish case is if the trade unions or male organizations do play a substantial role in creating gender segregation. The unions' main plan has been to increase membership and represent as many workers as possible, so as to be recognized as a bargaining agent by employers. Thus, they have generally encouraged the membership of both genders, and they do not exclude women from the union. In addition women are not yet a real threat to men in the labour market because of the lower proportion of female labours in industry.

On the other hand, the government may discriminate against women to protect the dominant group (males) by constraining the occupations open to women workers. This may be by 'protective' legislation that does not permit women to work in jobs that require weight-lifting, night work, or overtime. The government may constrain the employers to employ females in only 'women's jobs' so that these are overcrowded. Also government may discriminate against women in the supply of education. Men may get better educational opportunities and job training than women, so that women's position in labour market is affected by lowering their human capital and job skills.

In Turkey, some labour legislation prohibits and restrains women from specific types of work. For example, according to legal regulations all types of underground and underwater work are forbidden to women. It is said that the crucial reason for this legislation is they are described as a 'men's jobs'. By the same token, women are banned from night work in industry with the exception of occupations in accordance with the regulation prepared.

Moreover, women over 18 years of age may be employed for industrial work of a continuous nature that demands skilful handling and quickness but is not physically strenuous. The following activities are deemed to be 'industrial' and women are forbidden: printing operations, the construction and operation of gas and water works, the building, repairing, the transportation of passengers, goods and animals by land, air or water, and loading, unloading and handling of goods at railway stations, warehouses, harbours, quays and airport .

Furthermore, institutional factors are responsible for occupational segregation. Women are thought to be physically weaker than men so they must work in 'light jobs' which is labour intensive and lower paid, whereas men must be employed in 'heavy jobs' which are capital intensive and better paid. Besides, women are crowded in certain jobs because of the low cost of their labour, and the assumption that they are naturally appropriate to certain types of activities in work. Also, the ideology of appropriate work for females plays a significant role in maintaining the occupational gender segregation in Turkey.

These beliefs and assumptions affect female education and on-the-job training as well. Girls are socialized to choose occupations, which are appropriate for them (e.g. nurse, teachers etc.) Also employers do not allow women workers to benefit from on-the-job training because they think it would be waste of money because women workers would leave their job when they marry or become mothers. Consequently, the government's protective legislations, and social and traditional thoughts and assumptions, rather than the trade unions, play a significant role in crowding women into certain jobs in Turkish case.

Conclusion

Gender equality is an enormous challenge and a top priority for the European Union, and indeed for all democratic societies. Turkey also has to face challenges to ensure equality between women and men. The ongoing transformation of Turkey into an industrial urban economy and society is likely to further impact on women's activities. Empowering women must be a priority in the pre-accession process and all stakeholders must be mobilized to ensure effective progress and implementation on the ground of the new rights.

This means strengthening the administrative capacity of relevant bodies and appropriate structures to monitor women's situation. The establishment of a permanent Gender Equality Committee in the Parliament, as foreseen in a circular of the Prime Minister, would be a strong commitment to further consider women's issues. Overall, there has been growing public attention on the issue of women's rights in Turkey and further debates must be supported for fighting with stereotypes and changing mentalities are always very significant issues.

Indeed, Turkey can play a leading role in the region, as demonstrated by its commitment in the organization of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership Ministerial Conference on women held in Istanbul in November 2006 and the further adoption of a common framework for action to strengthen the role of women in political, civil, social, economic and cultural spheres as well as to fight against discrimination.

The European Commission will continue to monitor the progress and support Turkish actors to ensure genuine improvement of the situation of women in Turkey. Last but not the least, "Human society is composed of two genders which are men and women; is it possible for one half to catch the sky while the other remains anchored to the land?" as stated by Atatürk must be kept in minds since empowering Turkish women and further promoting women's rights in Turkey will be the answers of this question.

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