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## IKV BRIEF

### **MIND THE GAP: GENDER (IN)EQUALITY IN TURKEY**

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## **MIND THE GAP: GENDER (IN)EQUALITY IN TURKEY**

Gender equality is one of the founding values of the EU and it goes back to 1957 when the principle of equal pay for equal work became part of the Treaty of Rome. Turkey, on its path to EU membership, accelerated the efforts for promoting gender equality with consequent demands for reforms to align with the EU *acquis* on gender policy. Although Turkey put several legislative and institutional reforms in place regarding the gender equality in the country, implementation and realization of these rights still remain as a challenge for Turkey which reflects itself in the world-wide rankings on gender equality published by the United Nations (UN) and World Economic Forum (WEF). According to 2014 data presented by the reports, Turkey is ranked well below the Member States of the EU.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The concept of gender equality is used in everyday language and at several different platforms. Yet, drawing the boundaries for conceptual clarity is quite important for the purposes of measuring gender equality itself. Gender equality is defined as “equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men” by the United Nations. This conceptualization refers to the situation where responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether people are born male or female rather than meaning that women and men will become the same<sup>1</sup>. Besides being a fundamental human right, gender equality is also considered as a policy priority for the EU and for several developed countries in the world. In fact, gender equality has become a precondition for and also an indicator of an effective democracy and sustainable development in the last decades.

Equality between men and women is considered to be achieved when women have the same rights and opportunities as men in all sectors of the society including political, economic and social sphere. As the very definition of gender equality reveals, it is an issue touching upon different dimensions. Such a multi-dimensional nature necessitates gender equality to be analysed through focusing on different aspects such as educational attainment of women compared to men, comparing the number of women to men in national parliaments or at ministerial positions; or comparing the number of women in companies' board members and so on.

The most widely-used way of measuring gender equality is combination of different components to have a full grasp of the status of women as the definition of gender equality suggests. In this regard, there are two commonly used world-wide measurement of gender equality. The first is Gender Inequality Index (GII) released annually by the UN within the framework of UN Development Programme. Based on the same logic with Human Development Index of the UN, GII measures human development costs to better expose differences in the distribution of achievements between women

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<sup>1</sup> UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, Retrieved from <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/conceptsanddefinitions.htm>

and men<sup>2</sup>. The second index is published by WEF and named as The Global Gender Gap Report (GGGR) covering 142 countries in the world. Both indices are similar with regard to the components – though they differ in sub-components – included in the measurement of gender inequality<sup>3</sup>. European Commission also publishes regular reports analysing the gender equality in the EU Member States. Since Turkey is not included in European Commission Report, it is only used for comparison with regard to certain components of measuring gender equality.

## **Promoting Gender Equality in Turkey**

### **- *Early Developments***

Gender equality is – and has always been – a key issue in Turkey. In fact, Turkey is one of the few countries where first legislative acts regarding the equality between men and women were taken long before some other Western European countries. In 1925, a political party for women's rights (Women's People Party – *Kadınlar Halk Fırkası*) was established with the aim of increasing participation of women in politics under the leadership of Nezihe Muhittin. Five years after the establishment of Women's People Party, Turkish women were granted the right to vote in municipal elections. On 5 December 1934, they were granted full universal suffrage where they could vote and to be elected in national elections. In the first elections following the suffrage, women who participated in the elections obtained 18 seats in the parliament (4.6% of total seats).

Considering the fact that women in some of the oldest (i.e., France, Italy) and relatively newer (i.e. Slovenia, Malta, Bulgaria and Romania) Member States of the EU gained right to vote and to be elected for public office in the 1940s, Turkey stands as one of the pioneer countries for providing gender equality in Europe. Yet, Turkey failed to keep up its early initiatives for promoting gender equality and fell behind almost all Member States of the EU. Until the 1980s – even 1990s – there were no major developments towards improving women rights in Turkey. One major improvement was the signing and ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) which is the most comprehensive legal act at the international level. Signing of CEDAW was an important step taken for bringing women into the focus of public policy and for drawing the boundaries of gender equality.

### **- *EU as an Anchor in Promoting Gender Equality: Legislative and Institutional Developments***

Turkey's efforts for promoting gender equality have been accelerated with the improvement of Turkey-EU relations. The initiatives started with Turkey-EU dialogue are further developed when Turkey gained a candidate status at the Helsinki Summit in

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<sup>2</sup>UNDP, Human Development Reports. Retrieved from <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/gender-inequality-index-gii>

<sup>3</sup> World Economic Forum, The Global Gender Gap Report 2014, p. 4.

1999<sup>4</sup>. To harmonize Turkish law on women's right with EU *acquis*, a series of changes in Turkish legislation were put in place in the course of 2000s.

The fundamental documents regulating all issues related to gender equality are the Constitution, the Turkish Civil Code, Labour Law and the Penal Code. In the last two decades, the Turkish Civil Code and Penal Code were changed and major amendments were put in place in other documents. The 2002 Turkish Civil Code adopted legal measures to ensure gender equality in family with respect to surname of women, profession and jobs of spouses and property regime between spouses etc. The 2005 Turkish Penal Code includes regulations on the discrimination between people with respect to sex. Regarding the Constitution, the amendments to Articles 10, 41, and 66 were major steps taken towards ensuring the gender equality in the family and before the law. In addition, amendment to Article 90 of the Constitution regarding the international treaties made CEDAW superior to national law in gender policies<sup>5</sup>. Finally, the Law for Equal Opportunities Commission for Women and Men was adopted in the Parliament in 2009 which paved the way for establishing an Equal Opportunities Commission in the TGNA including parliamentarians from different political groups. Establishing a Commission for promoting gender equality at the decision-making level is important for ensuring the compliance of Turkish law with CEDAW standards<sup>6</sup>.

Institutionally, the first steps for promoting gender equality were taken in the 1980s. The first separate unit for gender equality entitled "Advisory Board for Policies with regard to Women" was established in 1987 with the aim of increasing awareness in public policies. This initiative was followed by the establishment of the Directorate General on the Status of Women (KSGM) in 1990 upon the ratification of CEDAW. The main aim of KSGM is to promote gender equality for eliminating all forms of gender based discrimination through publishing reports on gender policy in Turkey and preparing national action plans for gender equality. Currently, KSGM acts under the authority of Ministry of Family and Social Policies<sup>7</sup>.

In 2011, the State Ministry for Women and Family Affairs was transformed into Ministry of Family and Social Policies. Although it was an important step to form a Ministry for gender policies, it was also subject to severe criticism due to removal of "women" from the title of the Ministry. It is also considered a step-back in promoting gender equality since the focus is shifted from women to family issues where women are seen as the integral part of the family.

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<sup>4</sup>Emine Bozkurt, "Women's Human Rights; Turkey's Way to Europe". Retrieved from [http://www.esiweb.org/pdf/esi\\_turkey\\_tpq\\_id\\_84.pdf](http://www.esiweb.org/pdf/esi_turkey_tpq_id_84.pdf)

<sup>5</sup>Chapter 23 Screening Report by the EU, Retrieved from [http://www.ab.gov.tr/files/tarama/tarama\\_files/23/SC23DET\\_Basic%20Human%20Rights%20%28GenderEquality%20and%20Women%27s%20Rights%29.pdf](http://www.ab.gov.tr/files/tarama/tarama_files/23/SC23DET_Basic%20Human%20Rights%20%28GenderEquality%20and%20Women%27s%20Rights%29.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> More information on the legal developments for promoting gender equality can be reached on <http://kadininstatusu.gov.tr/uygulamalar/turkiyede-kadin> (in Turkish)

<sup>7</sup> Directorate General on the Status of Women, Ministry of Family and Social Policies. Retrieved from <http://kadininstatusu.gov.tr/>

Finally, on the way to alignment with the EU *acquis*, KSGM also prepared a National Action Plan for Societal Gender Equality for 2008-2013 which is based on the idea of eliminating gender inequality in education, health and access to decision-making process. The Plan reflected the priorities set out by the EU in promoting gender equality, but it has not been published for 2014-2019 period yet<sup>8</sup>.

### **Mind the Gap: Facts and Figures**

As argued above, the efforts for promoting gender equality in Turkey is accelerated with the EU accession process. Despite positive developments, Turkish women continue to have challenges such as low level of participation to labour force and low level of political representation as indices on gender equality developed by the UN and WEF reveal. In 2014 GII, Turkey is ranked as 69<sup>th</sup> out of 187 countries while the worst-performing EU Member State Bulgaria is ranked as 58<sup>th</sup>. Furthermore, Turkey along with Bulgaria and Romania is in the category of “High Human Development” while all other EU Member States are in “Very High Human Development” category. In 2014 GGGR, Turkey is ranked 125<sup>th</sup> out of 142 countries – only leaving countries such as Algeria, Ethiopia, Oman, Egypt and Saudi Arabia behind.

**Table 1:** Rankings of EU Member States and Turkey in 2014 GGGR

<b>Ranking</b>	<b>Country</b>
2	Finland
4	Sweden
5	Denmark
8	Ireland
10	Belgium
12	Germany
14	Netherlands
15	Latvia
16	France
22	Bulgaria
23	Slovenia
26	United Kingdom
28	Luxembourg
29	Spain
36	Austria
39	Portugal
44	Lithuania
55	Croatia
57	Poland
69	Italy
72	Romania
90	Slovakia
91	Greece
93	Hungary
95	GCASC
96	Czech Republic
99	Malta
125	Turkey

<sup>8</sup> Directorate General on the Status of Women, Ministry of Family and Social Policies. Retrieved from <http://kadininstatusu.gov.tr/ulusal-eylem-planlari/toplumsal-cinsiyet-esitligi-ulusal-eylem-planlari>

### - ***Health and Survival***

Health and survival is the component of gender equality where Turkey's performance is the highest. GII published by the UN measures reproductive health based on maternal mortality rate and adolescent birth rate. According to 2014 GII, 20 out of 100.000 women in Turkey lost their lives due to pregnancy-related causes. On the other hand, adolescent birth rate is 30.9 which means almost 31 women ages 15-19 per 1.000 women ages 15-19 gave birth to a child. Comparing these figures with the worst performing Member State of the EU, Bulgaria, shows that Turkey is ahead of Bulgaria in terms of adolescent birth rate where the number in Bulgaria is 35,9 but fell behind it in terms of maternal mortality rate<sup>9</sup>. According to 2014 GGGR, Turkey is ranked 1<sup>st</sup> along with 34 other countries out of 142 countries. Surprisingly, Latvia is the only EU Member State in the 35 best performing countries ranked in the index. All other EU Member States are ranked below 30.

### - ***Educational Attainment***

Educational attainment is the component of gender equality where Turkey shows a relatively good performance. Yet, GII and GGGR scores points different trends with regard to education indicator. According to 2014 GII, percentage of women who have received a secondary level of education is 39 compared to 60 percent of men in Turkey. Comparison of Turkey with Bulgaria also presents a huge gap between the two countries where percentage of women with secondary level of education in Bulgaria is 93. In contrast, Turkey is ranked as 105<sup>th</sup> country in GGGR where Turkey receives at least 0.85 female-to-male ratio in the sub-categories. Except from female enrolment in tertiary education, the ratios in Turkey with regard to literacy rate, enrolment in primary and secondary education are above the sample average.

### - ***Participation to Labour Force***

Participation to labour force is one of the two problematic areas for Turkey where women are underrepresented. Women access to employment in 2014 GII is 29 percent compared to 70.8 percent of male participation to labour force. Furthermore, for over the past 25 years the share of women having or seeking for jobs shows a decreasing trend. The labour force participation rate of Turkish women decreased from 34.3 percent in 1988 to 29.4 percent in 2014<sup>10</sup>. On the contrary, the rate of women in labour force in the EU Member States has been increasing over the decades. In 1980s, while Turkey enjoyed similar levels of female labour force participation with more developed countries such as Austria and Netherlands, currently Turkey is well below the average rate of EU Member States (50.8%).

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<sup>9</sup> <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/table-4-gender-inequality-index>

<sup>10</sup> Female Labour Force Participation in Turkey: Trends, Determinants and Policy Framework, World Bank. Retrieved from [http://siteresources.worldbank.org/TURKEYEXTN/Resources/361711-1268839345767/Female\\_LFP-en.pdf](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/TURKEYEXTN/Resources/361711-1268839345767/Female_LFP-en.pdf)

According to 2014 GGGR, female-to-male ratio of economic participation and opportunity in Turkey is 0.43 compared to the average level of all countries which is 0.59. In other words, men are twice more likely to be able to participate in the labour force than women in Turkey. With ratio of 0.43, Turkey is ranked as 133<sup>rd</sup> among all other countries which is worse than Turkey's average ranking of all gender equality indicators. Yet, it is important to note that increasing the labour force participation of women is critical for economic growth and development in the long run. As indicated at the beginning, gender equality is seen as a precondition for economic development for most of the developed countries and the EU. According to UNDP Turkey, "When development is not 'en-gendered', it is 'endangered'". For this reason, the numbers of female labour force participation in Turkey should at least be increased to the average level of EU Member States.

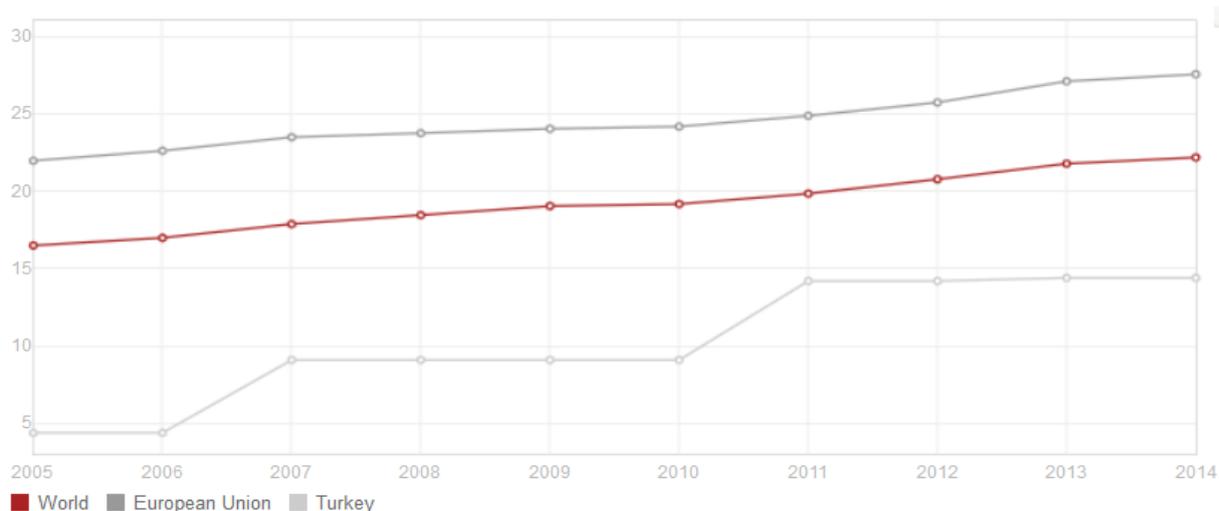
Another important indicator of measuring gender equality is wage equality for similar work. "Equal pay for equal work" has long been a priority for the EU included in the 1957 Treaty of Rome. In addition, it is among the objectives of Europe 2020 Strategy. Female-to-male ratio for wage equality for similar work is 0.62 in Turkey while it is 0.84 in the EU average.

#### - ***Political Empowerment***

The most pessimistic picture is presented with the figures on political empowerment of Turkish women. According to 2014 GII, Turkish women held 14.2 percent of the seats in the Parliament between 2005 and 2012. When compared to Bulgaria as the worst performing Member state of the EU, this figure increases to 24,6%. In 2014 GGGR, female-to-male ratio of political empowerment in Turkey's score is 0.088 which is close to what is defined as perfect inequality (score=0.00). For Turkey as a country on the way to EU membership, this figure presents an unacceptable fact since empowering women in political field is an integral part of an effective democracy which is a precondition for EU membership.

A detailed reading of Turkey's scores with regard to political empowerment reveals that female-to-male ratio in Turkish parliament is 0.17 and Turkey's ranking is 98 in 2014 GGGR. In other words, in 2011 general elections in Turkey women were able to hold only 79 seats in the Parliament compared to 471 male Parliamentarians. When the fact that 36,88% of MEPs in the European Parliament consist of women, the huge gap between Turkey and the EU becomes evident in terms of the percentage of female parliamentarians.

**Graph 1: Proportion of Seats Held By Women in National Parliaments (Turkey, the EU, and the World)**



Source: World Bank

Furthermore, Turkey’s score for women in ministerial positions is 0.04 which is again close to ‘perfect inequality’. Currently, there is only one female minister at the 62<sup>nd</sup> Government’s Cabinet – Minister of Family and Social Policies. Apart from 62<sup>nd</sup> Government of Turkey, a long term comparison can be provided by looking at the female head of states in Turkey. In the last 50 years, there have been only 3 female heads of state in Turkey compared to 47 male heads of state.

**Table 2: Turkey’s HDI scores (GGI, the UN)**

Maternal mortality rate (2010)	Adolescent birth rate (2013)	Share of seats in the parliament (2005-2012)	Population with at least some secondary education (female)	Population with at least some secondary education (male)	Participation rate (female)	Participation rate (male)
20	30.9	14.2	39.0	60.0	29.4	70.8

**Table 3: Turkey’s GGGR Scores and Rankings**

TURKEY	Economic Participation and Opportunity	Educational Attainment	Health and Survival	Political Empowerment
Score	0.453	0.953	0.980	0.088
Ranking	132	105	1	113

\*Score: 0.00=inequality, 1.00=equality

# Mind the Gap: Labour Force Participation and Political Representation of Women in Turkey

## Political Empowerment



### Women in Parliament

Currently, 79 out of 550 seats in the Parliament are held by women.

## In GGGR 2014, Turkey is ranked...

Women in Parliament: 98

Women in Ministerial Positions: 133

Years with Female Head of State: 35

## Participation to Labour Force



Female participation to labour force in Turkey is increasing but it is still well below the average value of the EU (50.8%) and the world (50.2%)

## In GGGR 2014, Turkey is ranked...

Labour Force Participation: 128

Wage Equality for Similar Work: 87

Estimated Earned Income: 126

Legislators, Senior Officials and Managers: 111

Professional and Technical Workers: 102

## - *Gender-Based Violence*

Gender-based violence is not among the main components of gender equality in UN or WEF indices. Yet, it is important to touch upon the issue of gender-based violence in Turkey since it is one of the major problems of women in Turkey. Besides, gender-based violence is always on the agenda of Turkey regardless of the prevalent economic and political atmosphere. The major reason for gender-based violence to remain on the agenda is the uncontrollable increase in the number of victims of gender-based violence. Upon the discussion in the TGNA General Assembly in 2009, Ministry of Justice published a brief presenting the skyrocketing figures regarding women killings in Turkey: the number of murdered women in Turkey increased by 1400 percent between 2002 and 2009. In other words, while the number of women killings was 66 in 2002; this figure increased to 953 in 2012. Furthermore, tremendous increase in gender-based violence continues to be present in the last years. For instance, in March 2015, the number of murdered women is 33<sup>11</sup>. Such a figure recorded in only one month is half of the total number in 2002. Such an increase has already been pointed out by women associations for a long time.

The most comprehensive research on gender-based violence is National Research on Domestic Violence against Women in Turkey conducted by Hacettepe University Institute of Population Studies and funded by the Ministry of Family and Social Policies<sup>12</sup>. According the National Research, the rate of women who has experienced sexual or physical violence at least one in their lifetime is 36 percent. The most common type of violence is psychological violence with 44 percent while 36 percent of women expressed they experienced physical violence followed by 12 percent sexual violence.

Gender-based violence is a problematic area for the EU as well. According to Report on Equality between Women and Men 2014 published by the European Commission, 33 percent of women in the EU have been victims of sexual and/or physical violence since the age of 15. Comparing the numbers in Turkey and in the EU does not represent a huge difference regarding the gender-based violence. This, in fact, reveals a coordinated action among Turkey, EU Member States and also at the international level to prevent violence against women. In this regard, the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention) represents a valuable framework for combating the phenomenon at national and international level. Turkey is among the first countries to sign and ratify the Convention as well as nine Member States. 14 Member States also had signed and waiting for ratification.

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<sup>11</sup> Kadın Cinayetlerini Durduracağız Platformu. Retrieved from <http://www.kadincinayetleriniDurduracagiz.net/veriler/All>

<sup>12</sup> National Research on Domestic Violence against Women in Turkey 2014 is not officially published by the Ministry of Family and Social Affairs due to technical reasons. The information above is obtained from an interview with Dr. Kaptanoğlu which is available on [http://www.bbc.co.uk/turkce/haberler/2015/03/150309\\_kadina\\_siddet\\_arastirma](http://www.bbc.co.uk/turkce/haberler/2015/03/150309_kadina_siddet_arastirma) (in Turkish).

## Contradiction between Reforms and Reality

The facts and figures presented above leads questioning of the positive developments Turkish authorities put in place with regard to promoting gender equality. When the legal and institutional developments for further alignment with the EU acquis and EU standards are taken into account, the expectation from the 'numbers' is – at least – reasonable rankings and scores on Turkey's scoreboard in world-wide rankings. Seeing Turkey ranked below almost all countries in the world – specifically EU Member States and OECD countries – leads to questioning of the legal and institutional developments in Turkey. As is seen, despite positive developments, Turkish women still have problems in participating in the labour force, participation in political decision-making and high levels of gender-based violence. Such a contradiction reminds Deniz Kandiyoti's conceptualization of 'emancipation vs. liberation'. According to Kandiyoti, the first years of the Republic emancipated Turkish women through providing civil, social and legal rights but the prevalent social codes related to dominance of men in the society continue to hinder the liberation of women<sup>13</sup>. Although Kandiyoti's conceptualization focuses on the early years of the Republic, it can still explain the current situation to some extent. Therefore, there is a necessity to understand the underlying factors of such a contradiction between the developments and what the figures say.

The first explanation for the contradiction between the steps taken and the reality is the problem of social transformation. Prevalent social norms and practices in Turkey have deep roots which impede implementation of such reforms related to gender equality in every layers of the society. Women have rights present "on the paper" but enjoying those rights requires support of the society as well. Another factor for non-implementation of the reforms put in place is the socio-economic transformation of Turkey. In the last years, there has been a significant internal migration in Turkey which allowed women to question patriarchal codes in the society while made them subject to restrictions due to cultural reasons by the patriarchal codes itself. In other words, the rapid change in the socio-economic environment and questioning of stereotypical roles attributed to women is attempted to be dominated by the patriarchy through gender-based violence.

For instance, in the case of gender-based violence, most women do not know the legal developments and rights and instruments provided to them by those acts. As argued above, Turkey stands as one of the first countries which signed the Istanbul Convention providing protective measures to the victims of gender-based violence<sup>14</sup>. Yet, the number of women who apply for those protective measures still remains at a very low level.

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<sup>13</sup> Deniz Kandiyoti, Emancipated but Unliberated? Reflections on the Turkish Case. *Feminist Studies*, 13(2), pp. 317-338.

<sup>14</sup> Council of Europe, Istanbul Convention. Retrieved from [http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/standardsetting/convention-violence/about\\_en.asp](http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/standardsetting/convention-violence/about_en.asp)

According to National Research on Domestic Violence against Women in Turkey conducted by Hacettepe University Institute of Population Studies and funded by the Ministry of Family and Social Policies, most women do not know which institution to apply if they are subject to gender-based violence. However, it is important to note that the first institution women apply is the police who prefer convincing women for reconciliation with their husbands or partners instead of sending the victims of violence to authorized institutions. The results of the study show that 41% of the women who applied for protective measures were not sent to the authorized institutions. According to coordinator of the study Dr. Kaptanoğlu, policemen are also trained on this issue but it is not enough to break the dominance of the norms and practices in the society.

As the instance above reveals the real obstacle is not the absence of legislation providing gender equality but the implementation of it. The solution of this problem requires a support through different mechanisms such as action plans, strong institutions and sufficient resources. The existence of political will is also another significant determinant in promoting gender equality. Cooperation among different layers of the Turkish government, social partners, NGOs and the EU is needed to realize the social transformation towards promoting gender equality<sup>15</sup>. As indicated in 2014 Progress Report for Turkey, Turkey does not fulfil the economic and political criteria for maintaining the equality between men and women and should increase efforts for ensuring women participation in labour market, policy making and decision-making in the public sector for further alignment with the EU standards.

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<sup>15</sup> Emine Bozkurt, Women's Human Rights: Turkey's Way to Europe.