

IS REALITY CHANGING FOR WOMEN IN TURKEY?

Legal reform is only the first step on a very long road. It needs to be backed up by resources and government initiatives, to raise awareness and empower citizens to use the new legal framework. Even then, it can take many years for the effects to become visible across society. The vast range of cultures and lifestyles, ranging from post-modern to neo-feudal, in Turkey is one of the most important policy challenges facing Turkish policy makers.

Over the past 18 months, a team of ESI analysts has been researching the changing reality of women in Turkey. We talked to dozens of Turkish politicians, activists, academics and businesspeople. Our research took us from women's shelters in wealthy areas of Istanbul, through the growing urban centres in Turkey's south-east, to small towns near the Iranian border. We sought to answer two questions: what are the root causes of Turkey's vast gender gap; and what is being done by Turkish political actors to try to close it?

The entire report, titled "Sex and Power in Turkey: Feminism, Islam, and the Maturing Democracy of Turkish Democracy", can be accessed at www.esiweb.org



A. Women of Van

1. Songül's Story

On 30 October 2006, Songül A., a 22 year old woman living in the small, Kurdish village of Hacıkışlak in the Özalp district of Van, not far from the Iranian border, went with her brother to visit a lawyer. Like hundreds of thousands of other girls across rural Turkey, Songül had not been registered by her family at birth. As far as the Turkish state was concerned, she did not exist. She had never been to school and did not know how to read.¹

Songül had been raped by Hüseyin, a neighbor, while her husband Mehmet was away for seasonal work. Bahattin, a relative of Songül's husband, found out about the rape, and had kept Songül tied up in a barn for two days, torturing her. As is usually the case, the woman was seen as the guilty party for violating her husband's honor, rather than as the victim.

The traditional village mechanism for resolving questions of 'honor' sprang into action. An 8 person council of elders was convened to discuss how to prevent a blood feud between the *two aşirets* (tribes). In Özalp, as across the region, tribes form the backbone of the social and political structure at the local level. The main issue at stake was how to restore the 'honor' of Songül's husband Mehmet and his family. The council decided that the appropriate solution was to dissolve Songül's marriage and to oblige the 16 year old daughter of Hüseyin, the rapist, to marry Songül's husband Mehmet, through a religious ceremony, as 'compensation'.

Songül returned to her father's house, in Günyüzü village. However, with Songül pregnant from the rape and gossip about the incident spreading rapidly, Songül's life was increasingly at risk from her own extended family. That was when her brother decided to take her to Özalp town to visit a lawyer who was known to their family.

The lawyer took them to the state prosecutor in Özalp town. Songül told the prosecutor the story of her rape, her unwanted pregnancy and the danger she was in for dishonoring her husband and his family. The prosecutor ordered the gendarmerie to bring Hüseyin, the alleged rapist, and Bahattin, the relative who had tortured Songül, in for questioning. Rather than taking her under protection however, he sent Songül back to her father's house, warning the family not to hurt her.

¹ To research Songül's story ESI made a series of interviews in Van in Spring 2007 with women activists –including Zozan Özgökçe of the Van Women's Association, lawyers– including Songül's lawyer Necip Bagatur, and state authorities including the governorate, Social Services directorate, and a judge and prosecutor of the Family Court.

The prosecutor came from Afyon in Western Turkey and had only recently been appointed to Özalp. According to Songül's lawyer, it is common for state officials appointed from other regions to have little understanding of the local tribal structure and its accompanying traditions. The lawyer told ESI that, if he did not have a strong tribe (aşiret) of his own behind him, he would not dare take on a case such as Songül's, which places him under threat from the family of the accused.²

Zozan Özgökçe, an activist on women's issues in Van, learned about Songül's situation from the media. She was immediately concerned. In an incident only a month earlier in a different part of the province, a state prosecutor had declined to offer protection to a teenage girl who had given birth out of wedlock. Based on assurances from her family, the prosecutor had returned the girl to her family home. Four days later, she was murdered by her own brother.³

Fearing that Songül's life was also in danger, Özgökçe turned to the official institutions in Van. Although it was a Sunday, she called several departments in the security apparatus and the provincial director for social services. They said they could not take action without an order from the prosecutor. She could not reach the prosecutor or the provincial governor. As a last resort, Özgökçe contacted Fatih Çekirge, a journalist who she knew was preparing a documentary about honor killings. He was scheduled to appear live on television that evening, and promised to raise the issue. During the show, Çekirge provocatively called on the governor of Van province to do something, stating: "Let us see if the state really exists!" The response was immediate. The same night, both Songül and the daughter of the rapist were taken into protection by the gendarmerie.⁴

The two women are now in a shelter for abused women in a different province. Criminal cases have been brought against Hüseyin (for the original rape), the village elders who forced the rapist's under-aged daughter to marry against her will, and against Songül's former husband.⁵

Songül's dramatic story is not an isolated incident. Across Turkey, police figures for honor killings number 1,091 in total between 2000 and 2005. This reflects only the killings that take place in urban settings, under the jurisdiction of the police. A parliamentary report on honor killings admits in 2005 that "comprehensive and systematic research about violence against women has not been carried out" so far.⁶

² ESI telephone interview with Necip Bagatur, April 2007.

³ Bianet, <http://www.bianet.org/2006/11/14/87688.htm>, 13 November 2006

⁴ ESI interview with Zozan Ozgokce, March 2007.

⁵ Consummating a marriage against the girl's consent constitutes rape.

⁶ *Parliamentary Report on Honor Killings*, 2005, p. 132.

2. “Let us see if the state really exists”

Violence is a feature of daily life for a large number of women in Van. In surveys, 82 percent of women are victims of violence ‘often’ or ‘very often’. Fifty-three percent of women report violence from their husband, and 30 percent report violence from their mother-in-law.⁷ The triggering events for domestic violence can range from leaving home without permission or returning home late, to neglecting household chores or refusing marital sex.⁸

The high rate of violence against women in Van has a distinct cultural, socio-economic and political context. Lying on the Iranian border in the far east of Anatolia, Van is one of Turkey’s poorest provinces. It has experienced dramatic social and economic change. Over the past decades, it has received major migration from people displaced by the armed conflict between the Turkish military and the terrorist PKK in Turkey’s southeast, swelling its population by nearly a quarter. As a result, even in the urban areas, village lifestyles are prevalent. Cut off from their land, many of the immigrants depend on casual or seasonal work. Van’s industrial zone, set up in 1998, has only 27 active businesses; the remaining 73 plots are empty or under construction. Employment in industry in this province inhabited by more than one million people is less than 7,000. Per capita income is only 55 Euros per month. By any measure of socio-economic development in Turkey, Van ranks near the bottom of the list.⁹

In the face of such deeply rooted poverty, large families continue to be a key mechanism for social protection and control. Households in Van average 7.4 members, with most women kept at home to look after children and the elderly and to perform domestic work. Girls marry at a very young age –around half of them between 16 and 20¹⁰ – and often within the extended family.

Sixteen percent of men and nearly half the women in the province are illiterate. Although there is a university in Van only a third of the students continue from primary on to secondary school. These factors –high dependence on subsistence farming, sudden and very recent urbanization, low incomes, large families, poor education outcomes– combine to entrench a deeply conservative society, in which traditional views of a woman’s place and a man’s honor prevail, among women and men alike.

Yet even in Van, there are cautious signs of change, as we can see from Songül’s story. The influence of an activist like Zozan Özgökçe is one new factor. On 9

⁷ The survey based on 776 interviews in poorer quarters of the city of Van was produced by VAKAD in the summer of 2005.

⁸ Vildan Yirmibeşoğlu, *Topraga Düşen Sevdalar – Töre ve Namus Gereğiyle İşlenen Cinayetler* [Love Fallen into the Earth – Murders Committed with the Reasoning of Customs and Honor], 2007.

⁹ Are Bülent Dinçer and Metin Özaslan, *Regional Disparities and Territorial Indicators in Turkey: Socio-Economic Development Index*, State Planning Organization, Ankara, June 2004.

¹⁰ Aynur İlhan Tunç, *Van’da Kadın Sorunları ve Eğitim* (Women’s Problems and Education in Van), Yüzüncü Yıl University; available at: http://efdergi.yyu.edu.tr/makaleler/cilt_1/aynur_ilhan.doc.

April 2004, Özgökçe and six other women formally established VAKAD (Van Kadın Derneği) [Van Women's Association] to offer support to victims of family violence. With ten staff and a network of 30 volunteers, they provide advice and training courses. One of their goals is to help Kurdish women overcome their reluctance to deal with state institutions (many Kurdish women in the region do not speak Turkish). One study by WWHR found that 57 percent of women in Eastern Turkey had experienced physical violence, but only 1.2 percent had notified the police and 0.2 percent had filed a complaint.¹¹

VAKAD is not the only such organization in Van today. Yakakop –the first women's NGO to be established in Van town– organizes training courses for women on health issues and basic skills. “No woman ever left the house without a man from the family”, Gülmay Ertünen remembers from her own time as a young bride.¹² Now she runs Yakakop. Yakakop began with a small World Bank grant. Ertünen struggled for months to persuade husbands to permit their wives to leave home alone to attend the courses. It took the intervention of the local imam to reassure the men that Yakakop was an ‘honorable’ organization.

The political environment for these activities is also difficult. Zozan Özgökçe explains that some women's organizations in Ankara and Istanbul resist her attempts to raise the specifically Kurdish cultural context for gender inequality. “They tell me not to create a hierarchy of victimization, arguing that ‘we are all women and need to struggle together’.”¹³ Yet from within Van, VAKAD is at times denounced as a missionary agency or agent of foreign interests, owing to the funds it receives from international sources, including the European Union. Upon her return from a CEDAW meeting in New York, word spread through the town that Özgökçe was carrying bibles in her suitcase. In fact, they were brochures by international women's organizations. Conservative circles attack her for undermining families and for generating negative publicity for the town. She has received death threats from the families of the women she supports.

The reaction of public institutions to Songül's case is also an indication of change. It illustrates how long it takes for legal and institutional reforms to filter down to the local level. Law 4320 on domestic violence, introduced in 1998, enables prosecutors to seek protection orders for women from abusive or violent husbands, including the provision of shelter for those who cannot remain in their homes.¹⁴ However, as Songül's lawyer told ESI:

¹¹ Pinar İlkaracan and Women for Women's Human Rights, “Exploring the Context of Women's Sexuality in Eastern Turkey”, *Reproductive Health Matters*, Vol. 6. No. 12, November 1998

¹² ESI interview with Gülmay Ertünen, March 2007.

¹³ ESI interview with Zozan Gökçe, March 2007.

¹⁴ The law provides for a range of protective and preventive measures to contain the risk of domestic violence. A judge can order the “abusive spouse” to a range of restrictions, from staying away from alcohol to leaving the home altogether for a period of time. Failure to comply with the court order can result in charges being brought against the perpetrator of violence in a Criminal Court, where he can face a prison sentence ranging from three to six months.

“A request for protection is not something that is done here... Even if I lose the case against these men, it is already a victory. Everyone has heard now that the state protects women under these circumstances.”¹⁵

There are few applications from women in rural areas, according to local prosecutors, because transport and communications are so poor. Prosecutors are often reluctant to use their power to intervene, fearing that they may trigger an escalation of violence. The informal power of tribes remains strong. There are also doubts as to whether the Family Protection law applies to the couples (estimates go up to 20 percent) married only through religious ceremonies (imam nikahı), which are not recognized by the courts. WWHR found that in 1996 11 percent of women lived in polygamous relationships –officially banned since 1926¹⁶ For many of these women, even the best law is simply out of their reach.

Poor coordination between state institutions and the absence of a suitable shelter were additional problems. Now a shelter is being established. The governorate has also established an inter-agency Monitoring Committee to coordinate action among institutions for protecting women subject to violence.¹⁷ The first Family Court opened in Van in September 2005.

These actions are in part a response to central government initiatives, following a directive issued by the prime minister in 2006 on “Precautions to be taken against violence towards children and women, and customs and honor killings”. It was based on the findings of a 12- member special parliamentary commission set up in May 2005 under the leadership of AKP deputy Fatma Şahin. It calls for a broad national strategy to enhance the status of women in Turkey and combat violence, and includes a reference to the need for positive discrimination measures until equality between men and women is achieved.¹⁸ Ensuring that these initiatives are effective in a place like Van will require a great deal more effort.

B. Women of Kadıköy

Across the other side of Anatolia, a long way from Van geographically, culturally and economically, lies Kadıköy, one of the most prosperous districts of Istanbul. It is a favorite spot for the country’s executive class. On Bağdat Street, international brands vie for wealthy customers, and outdoor cafes are filled with young professionals. There are exclusive sailing clubs along the shores of the Marmara Sea. Where Van is isolated, Kadıköy is a transport hub, connected by boat, train and bus to every corner of Turkey. It is home to an alternative music scene, and Fenerbahçe football club, one of İstanbul’s big three. It has a population of 660,000, more than some EU member states. The municipal motto is: “It is a privilege to live in Kadıköy.”

¹⁵ ESI telephone interview with Necip Bagatur, April 2007.

¹⁶ Pınar İkkaracan, “Exploring the Context of Women’s Sexuality in Eastern Turkey”, *Women and Sexuality in Muslim Societies*, WWHR, 2000.

¹⁷ ESI interview with Deputy Governor of Van, Mustafa Yavuz, March 2007.

¹⁸ Parliamentary report on honor killings, 2005, p. 132.

So how is life for the women of Kadıköy in 2007? 95 percent of Kadıköy's residents are literate, and one in five is a university graduate. Female employment has become increasingly common, and more women are achieving professional and managerial positions. Many women are choosing to delay marriage and childbirth, and the average household size has fallen to 2.4. Exposed to wider European influences, the women of Kadıköy have been at the forefront of Turkey's women's movement, forming a large number of voluntary associations. İnci Beşpınar, Kadıköy's female deputy mayor, explains:

"Kadıköy provided the environment for women to raise questions about their place in society. The women had sufficient economic means and time at their hand to think about these things. They also had the culture and foreign languages to be linked to the outer world. Kadıköy was also integrated with women's organizations abroad. We would wait in anticipation for them to come from trips abroad to read about their new insights. Time, money and culture... these are the three main ingredients."¹⁹

Both the municipal authorities (run since 1994 by a CHP mayor) and the private sector have responded to the rising expectations (and spending power) of middle-class families. The first pre-school opened in 1989/90. There are now five crèches and 38 private pre-schools.²⁰ The social stigma attached to putting the elderly into professional care is also fading slowly, although some see this as an unwelcome intrusion of Western values.²¹ There are now 17 homes for the elderly (5 state and 12 private). Another controversial social trend is the rising divorce rate, albeit from very low levels.²² There are five family courts operating in Kadıköy, all opened since January 2003 as a result of EU-inspired judicial reforms. The new courts are well equipped by any standards, with psychologists, social workers and public-education specialists. Few of the 157 family courts elsewhere in Turkey have managed to fill these positions.²³

Yet the rise of the middle-class woman is only part of the story of Kadıköy. Like Van, its population has grown rapidly in recent decades, from 241,000 in 1970 to over 660,000 in 2000. Growth has been driven almost entirely by urbanization, with 60 percent of the population born outside of Istanbul. The poorer immigrants live in shanty towns stretching south along the E5 motorway, making up around 10 percent of Kadıköy's population.²⁴ Largely illiterate, with poor employment prospects and dependent on social assistance, the women in these communities face many social problems. So how effectively does a wealthy Turkish municipality deal with these kinds of problems?

¹⁹ ESI interview with Deputy Mayor of Kadıköy, İnci Beşpınar, April 2007.

²⁰ Kadıköy District Government, <http://www.Kadikoy.gov.tr/index.asp?category=111040010>.

²¹ Interview with Kadıköy District Governor Hasan Karahan, April 2007.

²² Interview at the First Family Court of Kadıköy, April 2007.

²³ "Boşanmayın, Çaya Geliyoruz" (Don't Get Divorced We're Coming Over for Tea), *Turkuaz Magazine of Zaman Newspaper*, Büşra Erdal, 21 May 2006, and ESI interviews at the First Family Court of Kadıköy, April 2007.

²⁴ ESI interview with Hasan Karahan, Kadıköy District Governor, April 2007.

İnci Beşpınar, Kadıköy's deputy mayor, embodies the vitality of Kadıköy women. In one corner of her spacious office, a group of women are planning a forthcoming cultural project, while her phone is ringing constantly. Outside her office, a team of municipal civil servants are trying to handle a long queue of women and men dropping into her office to ask for assistance.

Beşpınar's own life is a reflection of improvements in the position of women in Istanbul in the past generation. The eldest daughter of an old Istanbul family she went to study economics in Ankara, encouraged by her father. Kicked out of university for participating in protests she returned to Istanbul. In 1973 and 1975 she gave birth to her two daughters. At first her mother-in-law looked after them, but when she died in 1976 Beşpınar had to stay at home. She was offered a job in 1977, which she could not take up. The first municipal pre-school only opened up in 1989.

Beşpınar has been instrumental in setting up Family Consultation Centers since 1994, targeting families who recently arrived from rural areas. These centers provide women from poorer families with health checks and the skills they need to adapt to urban life. Today there are ten such centers in Kadıköy, plus two vocational training centers.²⁵ They act as the municipality's eyes and ears, helping to identify vulnerable women and children in need of social assistance.

In a quiet area of the municipality one finds the result of another initiative of Kadıköy's activist deputy mayor. In 2001, a woman approached İnci Beşpınar, asking for protection. The next day, she was killed by her husband with an axe. After two sleepless nights, Beşpınar took the initiative to mobilize the resources needed to set up Kadıköy's first shelter for women at risk. Her initial funding came from the World Bank and the Turkish state. The district governorship contributed salaries for the resident nurse, psychologists, administrators and part-time doctors. The municipality pays for the premises and provides in-kind support. Starting with 15 beds, the shelter has expanded to fill two buildings. In the past three years, it provided shelter to 437 women and 269 children in need.²⁶

Kadıköy's local CHP administration has thus set a Turkey-wide standard. According to the UN, there should be at least one bed in a shelter for every 10,000 people. With 75 beds for a population of 660,000 Kadıköy meets this target. Across Turkey there is today one shelter bed for every 144,000 people.²⁷ Most Turkish municipalities have not implemented their new legal obligation to provide shelters for women.

At the same time, the affluence and modern lifestyle of many of Kadıköy's residents highlights one of Turkey's major public policy challenges: to define and

²⁵ According to a study done by the Social Responsibility Foundation in the district governorship, in Yeni Sahra quarter (one which is made up largely of recent immigrants), only 7 percent of women were employed.

²⁶ Kadıköy Municipality, 2006 Faaliyet Raporu [2006 Activity Report].

²⁷ Emine Bozkurt, *Report on Women's Role in Social, Economic and Political Life in Turkey*, 11 January 2007.

implement public policies in a highly centralized state that address the concerns of constituencies as different as the professional women in Kadıköy and the illiterate women in Van. The challenge for Turkish democracy is to find ways for both constituencies to be represented and to make their voices heard.

C. Turkey's Gender Gap

Gender equality is a difficult subject to measure, but a number of international organizations have attempted to quantify it –including the World Economic Forum, which assesses 115 countries covering 90 percent of the world's population.²⁸ The results are sobering for the Turkish political establishment: Turkey is ranked 105th, behind Bahrain, Algeria and Ethiopia, and well below the lowest EU member (Cyprus, at 83). What is the reason for this disastrous ranking, and is it an accurate reflection of reality for Turkish women?

1. Sweden	[...]
2. Norway	97. Algeria
3. Finland	98. India
4. Iceland	99. Mali
5. Germany	100. Ethiopia
6. Philippines	101. United Arab Emirates
7. New Zealand	102. Bahrain
8. Denmark	103. Cameroon
9. United Kingdom	104. Burkina Faso
10. Ireland	105. Turkey
11. Spain	[...]
[...]	

Table 1: Global Gender Gap Index 2006

The ranking covers four different areas: economic participation, educational attainment, health and political empowerment. To assess where Turkey's low ranking comes from, it is helpful to compare the detailed figures with two other European countries: Spain (ranked 11th) and Bulgaria (37th). Turkey scores poorly in higher education. Participation of women in political life is also very low, although the focus on the national level in fact flatters Turkey. If we look at the municipal level, only 18 of Turkey's 3,234 elected mayors (0.56 percent) are women, compared to an EU average of 20 percent. But it is the figures on female labor force participation that are the most striking.

²⁸ <http://www.weforum.org/pdf/gendergap/report2006.pdf>, p. 3.

Indicator	Spain	Bulgaria	Turkey
Female labor force participation	45 %	41 %	28 %
Legislators, senior officials, managers	30 %	30 %	6 %
Professional and technical workers	47 %	34 %	30 %
Enrolment - primary education	99 %	95 %	87 %
Enrolment – secondary education	99 %	87 %	-
Enrolment - tertiary education	72 %	44 %	24 %
Women in parliament	36 %	22 %	4 %
Women in ministerial positions	50 %	24 %	4 %

Table 2: Turkey' Gender Gap

At 28 percent, the labor force participation rate for women in Turkey is less than half of the EU average. Even this figure is misleading. Forty-two percent of women who work are actually unpaid family workers, mainly in agriculture.²⁹ In urban areas, the participation rate stands at only 18 percent.

To a significant degree, the labor force figures are due to structural features of the Turkish economy. In a country transitioning from a primarily agriculture society to an economy led by industry and services, the first step is usually a decline in female participation –a dynamic observed all over southern Europe in recent decades. For as long as they are in the village, women work the land. Once rural families move to the town, however, the women have few marketable skills and tend to be confined to the home. A new generation of women will have more access to more opportunities in the urban areas, but it takes time for this to appear in the figures. The result is that, at present, three times as many women in Turkey are housewives than in the old EU 15.³⁰

Demographic trends make changing this a huge challenge. While the rate of population growth has been falling rapidly, halving between 2000 and 2006, the absolute growth in these years still amounted to 6.1 million people –an increase of a million people per year.³¹ Every year, far more workers enter the labor force than leave it. As a result in the next decade “a net increase of upwards of five million jobs will be required to maintain the percentage of adults in employment at its current low level.”³² Closing Turkey’s huge gender gap would therefore require even more rapid job growth:

²⁹ SIS, July 2006.

³⁰ Richard Rose and Yusuf Özcan, *Quality of Life in Turkey*, European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2007, p. 40.

³¹ IBID, p. 15.

³² IBID, p. 53.

“young Turkish women, who are generally more educated than their mothers and grandmothers, are more likely to seek paid employment outside of the home. Given the fact that over 15 million Turkish women of working age are not currently in paid employment, any shift in the proportion of Turkish women seeking employment would further increase already existing pressures on the demand for jobs.”³³

As it happens, Turkey has had rapid economic growth since 2001, averaging more than 7 percent per annum (6 percent in 2006).³⁴ Foreign direct investment (FDI) reached a record 15.4 billion Euros (19.2 billion U.S. dollars) in 2006.³⁵ This is unprecedented, and more in one year than the total between 1980 and 2000. In the first three months of 2007 alone, FDI reached 6.4 billion Euros.³⁶ It is therefore possible that, if the Turkish economy retains its dynamism, labor demand will begin to draw more women into the workforce.

However, employment growth is only part of the story. An additional problem in Turkey is the absence of institutions to take care of children and the elderly. In a country like Sweden, which ranks first on the global index, 70 percent of women were housewives in the 1960s. By the early 1980s, 80 percent were in the workforce.³⁷ In addition to strong job growth, these years also saw the introduction of a range of measures, such as extended parental leave and subsidized childcare, to make it easier for women to balance work with family life.

In Turkey, balancing work and motherhood remains very difficult – as evidenced by the fact that 63 percent of women who work do not have a child under six years of age.³⁸ Childcare facilities are extremely limited, or absent altogether. In theory, each private kindergarten is obliged to give free attendance to a minimum of two poor children designated by Social Services and Child Protection Institution (SHCEK), or 5 percent of its school population if the establishment is larger. In practice, however, only a total of 448 children in need are currently enrolled in private kindergarten under this rule in the entire country. Where private childcare services are available, their cost is prohibitive for most families. Care for the elderly is equally difficult to obtain. As of August 2006, the total capacity in care facilities for the elderly across the country was only 18,849 places.³⁹

³³ IBID, p. 54.

³⁴ Radikal Newspaper, <http://www.radikal.com.tr/haber.php?haberno=217307>, 3 April 2007; Sabah Newspaper, <http://www.sabah.com.tr/2007/04/02/eko98.html>, 2 April 2007.

³⁵ Central Bank of the Republic of Turkey, <http://tcmb.gov.tr/odemedenge/tablo20.pdf>.

³⁶ Central Bank of the Republic of Turkey, 2007 Year January March Period Payment Balance Developments, <http://www.tcmb.gov.tr/odemedenge/rapor.html>.

³⁷ Margareta Back-Wiklund, *The Family and the Welfare State: A Route to De-familialization*, Autonomy and Dependence in the Family, Istanbul, 2002.

³⁸ Hacettepe Population and Health Survey 2003.

³⁹ In its eighth Five-Year Plan (2001-2005), published in 2000, the State Planning Organization recognized that social changes brought by industrialization and urbanization, as well as longer life expectancy, made it imperative to provide more services for the elderly.

	Women (percent)	Men (percent)
Working	12	67
Unpaid family worker	8	3
Unemployed	3	10
Housewife	69	-
Retired	4	15
In education	1	3
Ill/disabled	2	2

Table 3: Economic Status of Women and Men in Turkey⁴⁰

There is also a persistence of cultural values encouraging women to stay at home. However, cultural factors appear less significant than the structural and institutional barriers.⁴¹ In Western Europe, prejudices against female workers broke down at a time when industrialization and rapid economic growth made it imperative to expand the workforce. A similar pragmatism inspired the Ottoman authorities in 1915. At the height of the First World War, when most men were drafted into the army, they issued a law that “instituted a form of mandatory employment which rapidly swelled the number of women workers.”⁴² Patriarchal prejudices were shelved for the greater benefit of the country. It is likely that economic success and employment growth would propel Turkish women into the workforce, as it has done for women across the rest of Europe. A recent survey also found that more than three quarters of respondents found it appropriate for women to hold professional and managerial positions in the private sector.⁴³

Closing the gender gap in education is also a major challenge. In theory, primary school attendance is compulsory and free of charge. Across the country, however, it was estimated in 2002 that 873,000 girls and 562,000 boys between the ages of 6 and 14 are not enrolled in education.⁴⁴ In rural eastern Turkey, many girls are not registered at birth, placing them beyond the reach of the state.

Since 2003, there has been a series of new initiatives to boost enrolment, including a national campaign, *Haydi Kızlar Okula* (Girls Let’s Go To School) to

⁴⁰ TUIK, Quality of Life Survey, 2003.

⁴¹ See also Rosemary Crompton, *Employment and the Family - The Reconfiguration of Work and Family Life in Contemporary Societies*, 2006, p. 53.

⁴² Deniz Kandiyoti, *From Empire to Nation State: Transformation of the Woman Question in Turkey*, UNESCO, 1988.

⁴³ Ersin Kalaycioglu and Binnaz Toprak, *İş Yaşamı, Üst Yönetim ve Siyasette Kadın* (Women in the Workforce, High Administrative Positions and Politics), TESEV, 2003.

⁴⁴ A Gender Review in Education, Turkey, UNICEF, 2003.

achieve 100 percent primary school enrolment.⁴⁵ Of the 273,000 girls approached by 2006, 223,000 were enrolled.⁴⁶ Teachers work with the village muhtar (headman) and imam to convince parents to send their daughters to school. A monthly cash incentive was offered for each child, and the funds distributed directly to mothers, through accounts opened in their name. For poor families, it amounts to a significant sum.

Levels of education are increasing and every generation of Turkish women is better educated than their mothers. In the 20-24 years age group, some 34 percent of women have completed secondary or third-level education, compared with 16 percent of women aged 40-44 years and just 3 percent of females aged over 60 years.⁴⁷ Education spending has also increased steadily from 2.3 percent of GDP in 1995 to 3.8 percent in 2005.⁴⁸ The challenge is again immense: There is a need to provide for more than a million additional pupils every year.

It is in the area of female participation in politics that rapid progress seems most achievable in the short term. In the 2002 general elections, only 4.4 percent of the 550 parliamentary seats went to women, producing 24 MPs (13 AKP; 11 CHP). This places Turkey 114th of 119 countries, and by far the lowest in Europe. Turkey is also last in Europe in terms of women as government ministers.⁴⁹

The AKP has 800,000 members in its women's section, and provides training to many of its female members.⁵⁰ Yet according to one female deputy, Fatma Şahin (AKP), the local party structure is heavily male dominated. "When it comes to primary elections, the men gang up against the women. After the primary elections, women no longer have the confidence to continue. Women can not rise within the existing structure."⁵¹ The AKP began with an informal 20 percent quota for women in its party structure, and increased this to 30 percent in 2006 on the orders of Prime Minister Erdoğan. At least in Istanbul province this goal is reached with 35.7 percent women in the executive board⁵² and 27 percent in the administrative board.⁵³ In much of Anatolia, however, the party falls far short – ostensibly because of the difficulty of finding qualified candidates.

In 2007, the women's NGO KADER⁵⁴ ran a national media campaign featuring photos of prominent women wearing fake moustaches, posing the question: "Is

⁴⁵ TUIK, ESI interview with Yaşar Koçak, head of the Primary School Directorate, Ministry of National Education, July 2006.

⁴⁶ Special site of the Ministry of Education dedicated to the campaign: http://www.haydikizlarokula.org/uygulama_sonuculari.php

⁴⁷ Richard Rose and Yusuf Özcan, p 39.

⁴⁸ European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, *Quality of Life in Turkey*, 2007.

⁴⁹ European Commission, Database on decision-making in the national government: http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/women_men_stats/out/measures_out416_en.htm.

⁵⁰ ESI interview with AKP Istanbul MP and State Minister in Charge of Women and Family, Nimet Çubukçu, July 2006.

⁵¹ ESI interview with AKP Gaziantep MP, Fatma Şahin, June 2006.

⁵² AK Parti, <http://www.akpartiistanbul.com/yurutme.aspx>.

⁵³ AK Parti, <http://www.akpartiistanbul.com/yonetim.aspx>.

⁵⁴ KADER, <http://www.ka-der.org.tr/>.

it necessary to be a man to enter parliament?” The case for some form of a quota to increase women’s representation in parliament does seem overwhelming. Parliamentary Gaye Erbatur (CHP) admits that women find it hard to make their voices heard.

“I often feel very lonely as a woman in politics. When I go to the general assembly, I see hundreds of men with moustaches. We have to have a quota system to introduce more women in politics. Nobody can convince me that we can put more women in parliament without it.”⁵⁵

As EU Parliamentarian Emine Bozkurt noted at the end of May 2007:

“Officials from all political parties say they want more female candidates. Some are against quotas, while some support them. There is no quota right now but the parties have no obstacles standing in the way of fielding more female candidates. That’s to say, if they like they can do so.”⁵⁶

Some women face an additional obstacle if they wear the headscarf. They are not permitted to become electoral candidates because the headscarf is banned for those working in all state institutions, including parliament. The headscarf is also a barrier for covered women wishing to go on to university. One of the first women to be excluded from university for covering her head was Hatice Babacan, a student at the Ankara University Theology Faculty, in 1967, and the aunt of Turkey’s current minister of economics and chief EU negotiator, Ali Babacan.⁵⁷ At that time, there were relatively few women with headscarf seeking to enter university. Since the 1980s, however, the problem has escalated. The Law on Higher Education used to contain an article, Addendum 16, permitting girls to wear headscarves for religious reasons. This article was abolished by the Constitutional Court in 1989, on the basis that the Turkish constitution does not permit any reference to religion in the law. Since then the headscarf has become a highly charged symbol and following the so-called ‘soft coup’ in 1997 there has been little rational debate on the subject. Ayşe Böhürler (AKP) juggles a successful career as a television broadcaster with raising three children and an active engagement in politics. But despite her qualifications, she cannot hope to enter parliament.

“Women with headscarves can’t be candidates. They can serve in the party administration at provincial or district level, but not in municipal councils. Only in the party organization can you have a headscarf, although some municipalities and districts turn a blind eye.”⁵⁸

⁵⁵ TUIK, ESI interview with Gaye Erbatur, June 2006.

⁵⁶ Emine Bozkurt in Turkish Daily News, <http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/article.php?enewsid=74412>, 29 May 2007.

⁵⁷ Milliyet newspaper, <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/2005/01/23/yazar/yilmaz.html>.

⁵⁸ ESI interview with Ayşe Böhürler, May 2006.

According to a recent TESEV study, 37.5 percent of Turkish women reported that they did not wear any head covering; half of the women surveyed wear a headscarf, and 12 percent wear the *turban*⁵⁹ (only 1 percent wear a full-length *chador*).⁶⁰

Overall, then, there are currently a large number of initiatives underway. However, given its starting point, if Turkey is to overtake Algeria (97th) or catch up with the EU's worst performer, Cyprus (83rd), then the most promising way forward is to increase the number of women in positions of power. Part of the solution lies in government programs –improved access to education, better childcare facilities and the like. But gender equality is also a product of economic and social forces –falling population growth, accelerating urbanization, and above all high economic growth rates and the labour demand it will generate. It remains to be seen whether Turkey will sustain the positive dynamics of recent years, and follow in the path trodden by many other European countries.

⁵⁹ In standard usage in Turkey today *turban* refers to a tighter way of veiling, covering every string of hair as well as the neck. The *headscarf* is used to refer to a looser tie of the scarf. However, both are forbidden at university and for public officials.

⁶⁰ Binnaz Toprak and Ali Carkoglu, *Religion, Society and Politics in a Changing Turkey*, TESEV, November 2006.
