

STATUS OF WOMEN IN TURKEY

Today, gender equality is approved as a basic principle of democracy. And it is considered, essential for sustainable development. It is well known that, in countries where human rights are supposed as crucial rights, women having the same rights as men are accepted as a fundamental human right. It is agreed that women should be able to enjoy all rights that will allow them to participate in social, cultural, economic and political life. This understanding has been integrated in international human rights instruments, international conventions and in some national laws.

Legal Framework in Turkey

The legal revolution were realised in the first decade following the year of the foundation of the Turkish Republic in 1923. The legal revolution led not only to the reconstruction of the Turkish society, but also to granting the citizenship rights to women. Women and men were provided with equal educational opportunities by the Law on the Unification of Education (1924). The Turkish Civil Code, adopted in 1926, the social life of women was regulated and women were granted fundamental rights. Women have been given to right to elect and be elected in local authorities in 1930, and in the Turkish Grand National Assembly in 1934. Although, the Turkish women were granted the right to participate in politics long before in most other countries but the very recent representation in politics is far below of what it should actually be (9.1%, in 2007). It is attributable to the social barriers for women representation in politics and the male dominant construction of the political parties. Similar reasons might be led to the under representation of women at the other decision-making positions.

Turkey guarantees the equality between women and men in its Constitution and other laws.

In recent years the legislative framework has been expanded; numerous arrangements have been made in the Constitution, the Criminal Code, the Civil Code and the Labour

Act. Strategies and arrangements for implementation have been formulated by legal Regulations and Circulars.

Turkey signed and became a party to the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), in 1985. It is the only legally binding instrument at the international level, regarding equality between women and men. As other human rights treaties the CEDAW is followed by an Optional Protocol, which gives individuals and groups of women the right to appeal to the Committee. Turkey signed the Protocol in 2000 and put it into force in 2003.

The revisions on the Constitution in 2004 were inevitable for encouragement to the regarding issues. The terms *“Men and women have equal rights. The State shall have the obligation to ensure that this equality exists in practice”* and *“In the case of a conflict between international agreements in the area of fundamental rights and freedoms duly put into effect and domestic laws, due to differences in provisions on the same matter, the provisions of international agreements shall prevail.”* were added to the Constitution. Therefore, international agreements on fundamental rights and freedoms, including the UN CEDAW, are granted priority over national regulations by this adjustment.

Turkish Civil Code, which is the fundamental code regulating the rights and obligations of citizens, was revised and entered into effect in 2002, followed by the establishment of the Family Courts in 2003. In order to prevent domestic violence *“the Law on the Protection of the Family”* was enacted in 1998, and revised in 2007. The concept of domestic violence was for the first time defined in a legal text in Turkey by this law. The police and judicial mechanisms are now legally allowed to take action in case of domestic violence even if reported by a third person.

The new Turkish Criminal Code put into force in 2005. According to the new Code, perpetrators of honour and custom killings will be punished with life imprisonment, which is the heaviest punishment stipulated by the law in Turkey.

Turkey approved the Articles of the European Social Charter that related “*to recognise the right of men and women workers to equal pay for equal work*”, “*the right of the family to social, legal and economic protection*”, and “*the right of employed women to protection during maternity*”. Turkey also approved the numerous Conventions of the International Labour Organisation (ILO), regarding equality between women and men.

The Turkish National Programme on the Adoption of the EU Acquits, which came into force after publication in 2003, aims at the dissemination and active implementation of equality between women and men in the labour market.

The National Action Plan For Gender Equality in Turkey

Despite the mentioned achievements in legal framework, a review of the present status reveals various gender inequalities. A certain level of gender sensitivity has been reached in education and health, but the desired level of sensitivity has not yet been reached in the areas of employment, power and decision-making. Violence against women is also one of the problematic realities, as it is the case in many other countries around the world.

Gender sensitive and oriented organizational structure was expanded. Since policies related to women are implemented by different ministries, Directorate of the Status of Women (KSGM) conducts its operations in due collaboration with relevant public agencies and institutions. In this process, the role of KSGM is to facilitate the implementation of the policies developed with the aim of securing gender equality and to monitor progress and results of the implementation. KSGM cooperates with many NGOs and universities. Some of the NGOs and academicians are represented in the Advisory Board of KSGM as well as in the seven commissions dealing with specific gender equality issues. It is clear that such an organizational structure will contribute to the common goal of promoting gender equality.

15 universities have “Women Research and Implementation Centers” and 4 universities have “Departments of Women Studies” that conduct research on gender, social and economic status of women, health, education and violence with the participation of academics from different disciplines. These are regarded important mechanisms in terms of generating human resources for the field of gender equality as well as raising gender sensitivity in the whole society.

Turkey accepted the Gender Equality Community Programme, one of the Social Policy Programmes of the EU, by publishing the decision of the Council of Ministers, in 2003.

The National Action Plan For Gender Equality (1996) and the project “Promoting Gender Equality” (2006-2013) and their subsection projects were prepared with the aim of enabling women to benefit from social opportunities on an equal basis with men and protecting women’s human rights. A comprehensive analysis has been done on the current situation the areas of economy, poverty, participation in the power and decision-making processes, health, media, environment, education and institutional mechanisms. The summary of these analyses will be shared in this paper.

Current situation of women in education

In Turkey, primary education of eight years (age group 6-14) is compulsory for girls and boys, and free of costs in public schools. Of Turkey’s population 35 per cent is under 20 years of age, while the population of 65 and above composes 6 per cent. This figure lead to the most of the citizen is in the education rank. In 2006, the literacy rate between 15-24 years was 94.1 per cent for women and 98.4 per cent for men. In the school year 2007-08 the net schooling rates for boys and girls were respectively 98.5 per cent and 96.1 per cent. The rate of the population which is at least a graduate of high school is 23 per cent for men and 14 per cent for women. The gender gap becomes smaller when age is taken into account.

There are 6.5 million people in the age group at university (18 to 22 years old), and 2.49 million of them enter university. 43 per cent of all university students are women. Of all female university graduates 70 per cent is gainfully employed. This rate is only 22 per cent for women with an education below higher education. It is shown that the level of education is directly related to the economic participation of women, in Turkey. In the school year 2007-08 the teachers working in primary education of which 49 per cent were women and the teachers worked in secondary education of which 41 per cent are women. Non-formal education activities for adults organized within or out of the formal education. A total of 103,742 students, 83,481 female, attended these non formal education activities. Various successful policies, scholarships for children of poor families, well managed campaigns and the numerous successful projects increased girls' enrolment within the last decade.

Labour force participation of women

It is noticed that the participation in the labour force increases with higher educational levels. In 2006 the labour force participation rate of women was 24.9 per cent and their employment rate was 22.3 per cent. Taking into consideration of the marital status the profile dramatically changed as follows; in 2006, the labour force participation rate was 23.1 per cent for married women, 34.2 per cent for single women, and 42.1 per cent for divorced women. The reasons of the low labour force participation rate might be attributed to the low educational level, the annual increase of the working-age population, the increased migration to urban areas, economic crises, social barriers, working in the informal unregistered sector, flexible forms of employment, and the early retirement age.

Due to the economic crisis of 2001 the unemployment rate rose, women were hit more severely than men. In 2006 the unemployment rate was 10.3 per cent for women and 9.7 per cent for men. The comparable unemployment rates of men and women in the 27 EU countries were 8.9 per cent and 7.6 per cent respectively.

Expectations for future development

Turkey has undertaken to further develop course of actions, to make legal arrangements and to put these laws into practice in accordance with international instruments such as;

1. The United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW),
2. The European Social Charter,
3. The Convention on the Rights of the Child,
4. Conventions, decisions and recommendations of institutions such as
 - a. The International Labour Organisation (ILO),
 - b. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD),
 - c. The Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE),
 - d. The Cairo Conference on World Population and Development Action Plan,
 - e. The 4th World Conference on Women Action Plan and the Beijing Declaration,
 - f. The EU directives on equality between women and men.

Conclusion

The data shared above, clearly showed that the myth of male superiority is unfortunately and rigorously still maintained in our society. Somehow partly rigid gender norms and some social practices such as restriction on movement of women, early marriage, bride price in some regions and other practices lead to insufficient achievement for education, employment, financial power and public role for women. Besides these realities, cultural diversity and the level of economic development and education are also widely varied in Turkey. Not unexpectedly, the magnitude and directions of factors associated with attitudes towards gender equality varies. Understanding cross country diversities may aid in the identification of regions that may need to be particularly targeted with education and prevention programs.

It is universally accepted that social norms and gender roles in a society are learned and transmitted from generation to generation. To break the norms that sustain women's

vulnerability in society, there is a need for proactive efforts toward socioeconomic development and promotion of equity. Direct concerted efforts from the government, non-governmental organizations and enlightened men and women within the society are necessary to raise awareness about the issue as well as questioning the social norms. Taking into consideration this scientific knowledge, as the members of Turkish Grand Lodge of Women Mason, we should to be a part of such scientific researches and we should design scientific studies to evaluate the facts that related to the gender issues in our society. Every Mason should have a role in public awareness and education campaigns aiming to increase the sense of gender equality and to change men's distorted attitudes toward gender issues. Every Mason should willing to offer hard work for advocacy, technical assistance and funding, depending upon her own financial capabilities, for achievement the targets of Turkish National Action Plan on gender equality.

As the members of Turkish Grand Lodge of Women Mason, we believe that realizing the rights and equality of women are the keys to the survival, development, liberty, happiness and prosperity of a nation and humanity. We certainly recognize our responsibilities and duties to commit efforts for improvements the capacities of gender equality in our society. We should give much more efforts to reflect our Masonic thoughts and values relevant to the liberty, equality and fraternity. Mason's moral principles are common to all people and applicable in all situations. There is no limits are imposed on the search for truth, and guarantees complete freedom of thought, refuses dogma. In all circumstances, Masons are duty bound to help, assist and protect one another and to fight injustice. A Mason must always remember that each human being is a brother or a sister.

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