

Women, Education and Development in Turkey

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The main focus of this chapter is an evaluation of possibilities and obstacles in relation to women, education and development in Turkey. Following a brief discussion of the progress and problems in women's education over time, an attempt will be made to evaluate such obstacles and possibilities mainly with the help of empirical descriptions and testimonies from the field.

One of the *sine qua non* determinants of a democratic and just society is the extent to which women participate in production and organisational activities on an equal basis. According to the World Bank, by hindering the accumulation of human capital in the home and the labour market, and by systematically excluding women or men from access to resources, public services, or productive activities, gender discrimination diminishes an economy's capacity to grow and to raise living standards (World Bank 2002). The eradication of barriers to women's advancement and empowerment is therefore among national and international priorities. Education is considered to be one of the most important mechanisms for this advancement and empowerment. Vital in its own right for the realisation of individual capabilities, the education of girls has the potential to transform the life chances of the girls themselves, their future families, and the societies in which they live (Levine 2006). Increases in the marriage age, labour-force participation or income levels for women are associated with increased female participation in education. There are inverse relationships between the schooling of women and fertility rates or infants' and mothers' mortality risk at birth. Lack of schooling translates into poor quality of care for children and then higher infant and child mortality and malnutrition. Low investment in female education reduces a country's overall output (World Bank 2002).

According to its legal provisions and international commitments, education is one of the basic human needs and rights in Turkey.¹ In the Turkish Constitution

¹ Turkey has a population of 72,065,000 according to the latest estimates (www.die.gov.tr). In the last census (2000) the proportion of urban population was calculated to be 59.5 per cent. Women constitute 49.3 per cent of the total. The ideal number of children per family is considered to be 2.5, whereas the average number of children is 4.0. As in many other countries, life expectancy at birth is considerably higher for women (73.6) than men (68.8). The total fertility rate is 2.23 per cent and the population growth rate is 12.9 per cent (www.die.gov.tr).

(Article 42), it is stated explicitly that no one can be prevented from making use of the right to education, and that primary education for girls and boys is mandatory and free in the state schools. The state is mandated to support disadvantaged pupils through scholarships, and by compelling the parents and legal guardians if necessary. Education has been one of the most sought-after objectives of the women's movements ever since the Ottoman period. The actualisation of this demand for large segments of the female population, however, was made possible only after the creation of the Turkish Republic in 1923. Some of the most critical reforms of the new republic were those related to education. Secular education became a central institution of the nation-building process in Turkey. Compulsory primary education required all children to attend primary school. Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk) in his public speeches frequently emphasised the importance of gender equality in education. In his words, 'Circumstances today require the advancement of our women in all respects. Therefore, our women, too, will be enlightened and learned and, like men, will go through all educational stages.' (From Atatürk, *Speeches*, 2: 89-90 quoted in Arat 1994: 60.) The change from the Arabic to the Roman script in 1928 was another reform initiating nation-wide educational mobilisation in order to ensure literacy among adult citizens, regardless of sex.

Progress and problems

The Republican reforms are generally viewed as having had a positive effect on women's lives by granting them access to education, public office and employment opportunities, although the benefits were not enjoyed equally by the entire female population (Arat 1994, Berktaş 1995, Kağıtçıbaşı 1998, Erman 1998). Some of the achievements of the Republican era in the education of girls and women can be stated as follows. With the enactment of the Unification of Education Law in 1924, the Ministry of National Education (MONE) was put in charge of public education, and equal opportunities in education, in general, and the education of women, in particular, were secured as legal rights in the law. National Education Basic Act No. 1739 stated that the opportunity of education is equal for all women and men (Article 8) and institutions of education are open to everyone, regardless of language, religion, race and sex (Article 4). Primary Education Act No. 222 confirmed the rule of equality of opportunity in education (Article 1). According to Act No. 1739, co-education is the main principle at all levels. Some schools, however, can be allocated to boys or to girls depending on the type of education, the possibilities and the necessities (Article 15).

Turkey has also signed many international agreements directly or indirectly related to women. It ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 1985. It also accepted without reservation the Action Platform which was adopted at the Fourth World Women's Conference held in Beijing in 1995. Among the Republic's undertakings at this Conference, two were directly related to education:

- To make the eight-year primary education mandatory.
- To increase the ratio of literacy among women to 100 per cent.

In accordance with these undertakings, in 1997 mandatory primary education was extended from five to eight years (United Nations 2003, TÜSİAD 2000).

In the past decade, several other attempts have been made to catch up with the advances on the international scene to eliminate fundamental discriminatory provisions against women, as well as other initiatives to expand the boundaries of women's equality.² By the amendment to Article 10 of the Constitution in 2004, the state was obligated to ensuring the practical right to equality. This article implied not only that discrimination was not acceptable, but that the government had to ensure that no discrimination existed. In the same year, Article 90 of the Constitution stated that, in the event of a contradiction between national and international law, the latter prevailed, including the application of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). It was stated in Turkey's combined Fourth and Fifth country reports to CEDAW that, taking the two articles together, they explicitly favoured equality between women and men (United Nations 2003) .

Literacy rates for women were very low and far behind those of men at the beginning of the Republic. A greater increase in literacy rates was made possible for females than for males.

Table 1: Change in literacy rates over time by sex

	M	F
Literacy 1935	29.3	9.8
2004	95.3	81.8

Source: SIS 1995; www.die.gov.tr as of 27 March 2006.

Similar advances were made in primary and secondary education. In the years between 1930 and 2004 the ratio of female students increased from 35.6 to 47.8 per cent in primary education, and from 23.9 to 43.0 per cent in secondary education, to catch up with the boys' ratios (SIS 1995; MONE 2005). The reform in 1997, which finally extended mandatory education from five to eight years seems to have given a stimulus to positive development in girls' enrolments.³ In the first three years following the reform, enrolment rates at primary school level increased by 18.5 per cent for girls and 11.3 per cent for boys (MONE 2005). But the most remarkable change was recorded at the level

² In 1998, by the adoption of the Protection of the Family Law, domestic violence was legally defined for the first time. In 2001, Parliament ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), by which individuals or groups of individuals can petition the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. In 2002, the new Civil Code was adopted. In 2005 the new Penal Code, for the first time, criminalised marital rape and sexual harassment in the workplace.

³ In addition to the increase in the length of mandatory education, the Government ratified ILO Convention 138 on the Minimum Age of Employment in 1998, and Convention 182 on Eliminating the Worst Forms of Child Labour in 2001. As a result of these developments, the Apprenticeship and Vocational Education Act was amended to increase the minimum age of employment to 14 and regulate working conditions, with particular attention to the health and educational/training opportunities for those who enter the workforce at a young age. In accordance with the 8th Five Year Development Plan (2001-5) and decisions adopted by the National Education Congress, proposals are on the table to extend compulsory basic education to 12 years (United Nations 2003).

of higher education. The ratio of females at this level increased from 16.3 per cent in 1930 to 41.9 per cent in 2004 (SIS 1995, MONE 2005).

One of the most emphasised outcomes of the higher education of women in Turkey has been the large number of well-qualified women in professions that women have found very hard to enter in the West (Erkut 1982, Acar 1996, Neusel 1996, TÜSİAD 2000; see also Gök, this volume). Professional women are represented with high ratios as university teachers and in the fields of medicine, dentistry and law. Among those now doing their residency in medicine, the ratio of females is 43.1 per cent (HEC 2005). More than a quarter (27.6 per cent) of practising lawyers and judges in the country are women (www.kssgm.gov.tr). The large number of women in teaching has been considered significant for the education of girls. It is also meaningful in this respect that teaching has been one of the oldest professions for women and is considered to be ‘the most suitable profession’ for women in Turkey (Tan 1996: 40-41). The great majority of pre-school teachers in the country are female, and the ratio of female teachers at the other levels of education closely follows female students’ ratios (Table 2).

Table 2: Female share in education, 2004-2005

	% of Total Students	% of Total Teachers
Pre-school	47.8	93.3
Compulsory	47.1	45.6
Secondary	42.9	40.4
Tertiary	41.9	38.3

Source: MONE 2005, HEC 2005.

At the tertiary level, the proportion of female academics has traditionally been high by world standards.

A great number and a rich variety of local and regional projects have been put into practice by governmental and non-governmental organisations.⁴ Some of these projects with special emphasis on raising awareness of the importance of women’s education aim to enhance the enrolment and retention of girls. There are also numerous attempts initiating non-formal education and training systems to reach women and girls in rural communities and other disadvantaged and marginalised groups. In view of the cultural constraints on the physical mobility of girls in rural areas, open primary school centres have been established by the Ministry of National Education. Distance education,

⁴ A joint nationwide campaign (Haydi Kızlar Okula) of MONE and UNICEF since 2003; Project for Supporting Social Development and Employment in East and Southeast Anatolia Region which started in 2000 to deal with the educational needs of poor adults, particularly women; Multipurpose Community Centres (ÇATOMs) targeting the women in the eastern part of the country established by the Southeastern Anatolia Project (GAP) Administration with the aim of integrating women in the development process, various informal adult education programmes for men and women that aim to improve literacy, awareness in citizenship and civic rights and responsibilities, and vocational skills are among these projects (United Nations 2003, TÜSİAD 2000).

on the other hand, allows school drop-outs to finish their courses and encourages them to continue to higher levels of schooling (United Nations 2003).

The critical voice of the women's movement and a rich volume of publications on women's issues have been deepening women's awareness and strengthening demands for social action and change. The feminism of the post-1980 period in Turkey has addressed itself not only to fighting for women's rights but also to the task of self-identification and of questioning traditional gender roles and stereotypes (Berktaş 1995: 109; see also Apak, this volume). Terminating the tradition of state feminism (Criss 1993: 251), post-1980s feminism has been very active in defining women's own needs, changing discriminatory laws, and altering social relationships abusive of women. Women's issues common to all societies, such as gender discrimination in education and the workplace, domestic violence, inadequate representation in decision-making positions, etc., have been questioned from the woman's point of view.

The long history of academic interest in gender disparity is now organised as interdisciplinary, postgraduate Women's Studies Programmes in several universities. Currently there are four such graduate programmes in various universities in the country. There are also Women's Research Centres set up in universities focusing on women's problems and offering training programmes. Since the mid-1990s, the number of such centres has reached 14 (United Nations 2003).

In spite of the gains made in the process, the relationships between the educational system and the other institutions are complex, and the educational opportunities and experiences of women reflect the gender disparities of the social structure and culture (Tansel 2002, TÜSİAD 2000, Kağıtçıbaşı 1998, Gök 1993). The target of raising women's literacy rates to 100 per cent by the year 2000, one of the commitments Turkey made in Beijing, has not been realised. Illiteracy among women at 18.2 per cent is estimated to be four times that among men (4.7 per cent). Although pre-school education has nearly a century-old tradition in Turkey, facilities are inadequate and the rates of enrolment are low: 15.2 per cent (SPO 2005: 137). The scarcity of resources at this level is indicative of the fact that mothers (or other female relatives) are still expected to be the main minders of pre-school and young school children. The gender gap in primary, secondary and tertiary enrolments is closing but women still lag behind men at all levels.

Table 3: Enrolment ratios, 2004-2005

	M	F
Mandatory	93.6	90.2
Secondary	50.2	42.4
Tertiary	14.2	12.0

Source: www.kssgm.gov.tr as of 27 March 2006.

Gender disparity becomes more visible at the secondary level and even more

pronounced in vocational and technical education. Whereas the ratio of girls in general high schools in the 2004-5 school year was 46 per cent, it dropped to 37.7 per cent in vocational technical education (MONE 2005). Historically, vocational technical education has been differentiated by gender. In 1975, however, standard curricula and co-education were accepted in order to abolish gender discrimination at this level. As the gender-specific names of the schools remained unaltered, no significant change has been observed in the student composition. The female share is 80 per cent in girls' vocational technical schools and 12 per cent in boys' (MONE 2005). In religious-instruction schools established to train intermediary personnel for religious posts which can only be filled by men, the ratio of women is an exceptional 45.7 per cent (MONE 2005). The high proportion of female enrolment in religious education has given support to the arguments about the violations of the basic objectives of these schools and their role in reproducing traditional gender segregation in a secular school system (c.f. Akpınar, this volume).

Females' chances of getting an education differ more by region than they do for males. In the less developed eastern and south-eastern regions, girls and women have the lowest chances of schooling (Tansel 2002; UNICEF 2000). These regions are also home to the largest concentration of Kurdish population in Turkey. In the eastern regions 85 per cent of males as compared with 61 per cent of females have been to school, whereas the corresponding ratios are 95 per cent for males and 85 per cent for females in the west (HÜNEE 2004). Women living in urban areas also have a better chance of getting an education than those in rural areas. The ratios of formally uneducated among urban and rural women are 18.3 and 30.5 per cent, respectively. While 22 per cent of women living in the urban areas had a secondary school diploma in 2003, this rate was only 5 per cent for rural women (HÜNEE 2004: 35). But even in such relatively developed metropolitan cities as Istanbul, Ankara, and Adana the total number of girls not enrolled is very high (TÜSİAD 2000: 36), indicating that the problem is not confined to eastern and rural areas and is being reproduced in the cities by migration and displacement.

Men tend to predominate in most fields of higher education in Turkey, the only exceptions being the health sciences (including medicine, dentistry and nursing) and the arts.

Table 4: Share of women in higher education, 2004-2005

Health Sciences	57.9
Arts	52.5
Education	48.9
Social Sciences	46.8
Maths and Science	44.1
Language and Liberal Arts	43.7
Nuclear Energy	24.3
Technical Sciences	22.8
Computer Systems	20.6
Electronics	10.1

Source: HEC 2005.

The proportion of women in Education is a high 48.9 per cent, giving a large share to females in the teaching profession, as mentioned above (see Table 2). As in most regions of the world, Liberal Arts and Social Sciences are the other fields of study most frequently chosen by women in Turkey. The graduates in such higher-education fields can acquire teaching certificates and are most frequently employed as teachers. The large group of women in Mathematics and Science can also be explained by the same employment prospects in teaching. Electronics, Computer Systems, Technical Sciences and Nuclear Energy are the fields of study where women's representation is lowest. Gender differentiation of academic staff also varies according to the areas of specialisation, showing a situation parallel to that of the student body (HEC 2005).

The rhetoric of educating women has not been accompanied by the same desire to give women better representation in the public sphere. As shown in Table 5, low participation rates of women in paid work, especially in the urban areas (19.7 per cent), are relevant in this respect. The great majority of women within the labour force work in the agricultural sector as unpaid family workers.⁵

Table 5: Labour force participation by sex (2005)

	Total	Urban	Rural
W	23.2	19.7	29.0
M	71.0	71.3	70.6

Source: www.die.gov.tr as of 27 March 2006.

Unemployment for women and men is a common problem, although the unemployment rate is at its lowest (1.6 per cent) for illiterate females, and urban women experience unemployment more intensely (17.1 per cent) than do rural women (5.1 per cent). Educational certificates provide unequal job opportunities for the different genders. Men holding a secondary education diploma have a lower chance of being unemployed (11.3 per cent) than women (24.9 per cent) with identical qualifications. Although it is possible to talk about a positive correlation between the education and the participation of women in the workforce, 13.6 per cent of female as compared to 8.7 per cent of male university graduates are unemployed (SIS 2005). While the principle of equal pay for work of equal value is guaranteed under the law, there are wage/salary inequalities between women and men due to gender inequalities in educational levels, patterns of job continuity, promotion procedures, etc. In both the public

⁵ The labour-force participation of women has shown a downward trend, dropping from 30.5 per cent in 1995 to 25.9 per cent in 2000. During the same period, male participation decreased from 77.9 to 72.9 per cent. The primary factor that accounts for the falling rates in female labour-force participation is rural-to-urban migration, whereby the majority of the migrating women, who previously worked as unpaid family workers in agriculture, become housewives in the urban setting or engage in informal sector jobs. Although, with the recent changes in the Civil Code, women's contribution to the household economy is acknowledged, this understanding is not reflected in the labour-force statistics. Similarly, income-generating activities, or piecework that women may engage in at home or other forms of informal sector employment, escape the formal statistics. It is estimated that women hold nearly 65 per cent of the informal sector jobs, whereas for men this ratio is 37.5 (United Nations 2003).

and the private sectors, since the management-level jobs are occupied mainly by men, men earn 20-60 per cent more than women in the former and 30-150 per cent more in the latter (United Nations 2003). Underrepresentation of women in elected bodies and government is another facet of the unequal benefits of getting an education. The ratio of women in Parliament, which was 4.5 per cent in 1935, has not improved in the seventy years since; 4.4 per cent of the present members of Parliament (www.kssgm.gov.tr) and only one minister happen to be women.

Ambiguous results from a study

During October and November 2004, a sum total of 47 persons from the Ministry of National Education (MONE), the State Planning Organisation (SPO), the political parties, the Education and Women's Studies departments of the universities, UNICEF, non-governmental organisations, teachers' unions, public and private schools, and women's organisations were asked what they considered to be the main obstacles to the development and education of women in Turkey. We made two focus group interviews, four individual interviews and sixteen written opinions, which contributed to the formulation of the contents of this report.⁶ Data revealed by analysis of the written opinions and the tape recordings of interviews can be grouped under two main headings: socio-economic and cultural barriers hindering girls' and women's equal participation in education, and reproduction of gender disparities by the school system.

One of the most consistent opinions among the participants in the study is the effect of family factors on gender disparity in education. Unfavourable economic conditions and the persistent patriarchal values of the family are considered to be negatively associated with the educational attainment of girls. As mentioned above, mandatory education is free in state schools. However, efforts to create additional revenues have led to the introduction of user fees. In the low-income groups unable to afford school expenses, such additional costs constrain the girls' access to education more than the boys'. In the words of a primary school teacher:

School is not completely free of cost although it is legally supposed to be. Everything, from the clothing to the school supplies, puts an additional burden on the family. When the family does not have enough resources for all, the boys are sent to school while the girls are kept at home.

Child labour, which is a serious strategy for families in fighting poverty, also has different implications for boys and girls. According to the teachers' testimonies, in the rural areas girls more often than boys are kept away from school to help on family farms or in the house:

⁶ Field data for this study are based mainly on the Outputs of Education of Women subsection of a more comprehensive project supported by TÜBA (Turkish Academy of Sciences) and UNFPA, aiming to facilitate the participation of a wide group of social actors at every level of the formulation and implementation of effective population and development strategies. For a summary of the preliminary results of the project, see TÜBA (2005).

In the villages boys are generally needed for seasonal work which is limited to certain periods in the year. The girls are much more eager to come to school. They are, however, more irregular because they are endlessly needed for the care of siblings, sick or elderly relatives and routine housework.

An academic pointed out that the situation is pretty much the same among the rural and urban poor:

Boys work on the streets or in industry whereas the girls from the age of ten are put to work in the textile ateliers of the big cities. This kind of work is illegal, paying very little and offering no social security at all. Many of the other girls are kept away from school to assist their mothers who are engaged in home-based work. Among girls of the 12-14 age group the proportion of unpaid family workers is estimated to be around 65 per cent, whereas it is about 35 per cent among boys in the same category.

Gender disparities in education are also related to the gender-based cultural expectations deeply internalised by men and women, and to the patriarchal norms accepted by many sections of the population. In the families adhering to such traditional norms, discriminatory practices leave little room for the girls' needs to receive education to prepare them for any role other than that of wife and mother. One social worker observed that real poverty must be distinguished from the 'poverty' used to cover parental priorities and cultural imperatives:

You ask them 'why don't you send your daughter to school?' And they answer that they have no money. Then you see the brothers are in school. Or they can arrange to pay for a high bride price or an ostentatious wedding ceremony for an elder son... Yet some of the others make no pretensions at all, answering with a blunt 'it is against my religion'.

Decreasing enrolment rates of girls after grade 5 are widely associated with family perceptions of adolescence corresponding to grades 6 and 8. Some respondents claimed that in the countryside girls are considered to be fit to marry as soon as they reach adolescence, if not before. Most of the rural parents and many in the towns are anxious to arrange the marriage of their offspring themselves. For a girl, attending some co-educational school, and even walking to school or taking a bus, is a serious threat. She can always meet a strange young man that way. Yet it is not the only threat. According to these respondents 'some of the parents think the streets or the roads to school, and even the schools, are full of real or perceived threats, violence or abuse for girls. So keeping them at home is a way of also keeping them safe'.

Also language barriers for those speaking native tongues other than Turkish, which is the language of instruction, are cited among the additional reasons for absenteeism or the early drop-out of girls. Several NGO representatives claimed that in the Kurdish households where the mother does not speak Turkish, girls more often than the boys are likely not to speak it either. As the women in such households generally obtain information filtered by men, the campaigns encouraging girls' education are also likely to remain largely outside their limits. Even when women benefit from such supports they are seldom the direct recipients.

Among sections of the population brought to urban *gecekondu* (shantytowns) areas by forced displacement, gender disparities arising mainly from (non-

)participation in education are likely to continue (cf. Apak in this volume). Ethnic and religious group connections, which often provide the only support mechanisms for such families in their new, alien urban surroundings, help to reinforce patriarchal attitudes and dogmas limiting girls' chances. A teacher from Istanbul emphasised that 'in the communities where ethnic or religious closure is complete, girls' motivation is also diminished. Role models are limited – motherhood being the only role they see for themselves'.

Nationwide as well as local and regional efforts of public and non-governmental organisations to eradicate illiteracy and to enhance the enrolment rates of women have a long and highly commendable history in Turkey. The social assistance policies are, however, considered to be the source of further inequalities and problems. A member of the women's movement in Ankara pointed out that in many cases the problem could be solved by developing adequate public policies to eradicate poverty:

In some cases the girl is a very good student and the family, especially the mother, is anxious to keep her in school. I have seen mothers who wanted to get a job, just any job, to educate their children so that they have a better chance. In such cases parental determination is not enough. There must be more effective public policies to fight poverty, to deal with unemployment, to lift the poor up from where they are now.

In the focus groups, the ideological and commercial implications of the support, i.e. the political or religious commitments it may entail or the advertisement and tax-deduction opportunities it offers firms and individuals, were also discussed. The amount of cash provided by such mechanisms is generally found to be quite insufficient, and the risks involved in cash transfers were severely questioned:

The whole system is built on the concept of demand, which depends on application on the part of the needy. This kind of service cannot boast of reaching the real poor or the marginalised. And there are those who take the money, get the girl enrolled and still keep her at home. In many cases the money is spent not on the needs of the girl but on anything except that. Financial help has also not been observed to alter the sexist behaviour patterns in the family.

In addition to such observations by the NGO representatives, some of the teachers' union members complained about the marketisation of civil society and the creation and spread of a culture of dependency among the needy by such 'transactions' (see Tan and Somel 2005).

On another level, there were the problems involved in the organisation and the interrelations of the support. Distrust towards local initiatives, and unwillingness to cooperate, as well as perceived threats of colonisation, were among the common observations of the NGO members who had had experience of working on Istanbul-based projects designed to fit eastern or south-eastern regions. These members said that they try to help the local initiatives to express and organise for the solution of their own problems, but they are still accused of aiming at compromise or the assimilation of the Kurdish population. A medical doctor reminded us that 'even the attempts to teach women birth control have been cursed by Islamic groups or labelled as inter-

ventions to control the growth of the Kurdish population'. Participants in the focus groups also discussed the territorialism among the NGOs as well as the disconnectedness of micro- and macro-projects. A member of the women's movement complained about the 'self-centredness' dominating the women's organisations:

There's a lot that is going on in the name of women's education. Not many of the operating groups are willing to share their assets or knowledge, though. They want to be their own boss: Let it be small but let it be mine. That is the philosophy.

Another obstacle blocking cooperation was found to be the lack of agreement on the principles of women's education:

What is going to be our main purpose? Empowerment? Literacy training? Certification? Communication skills? Consciousness-raising? Teaching human rights of women? Better child care? Or fostering economic development? Do we want education for ourselves or for the betterment of the nation-state? As long as we don't have common goals we'll have problems in fostering common strategies.

Although it was generally observed in the study that the participation of women in paid work is increased by education, gender disparity is still found to exist at all levels of entry to the labour market. Limitations recently put on women's job applications at some of the public institutions, as well as rising unemployment rates among the younger generations of women, are some of the negative developments observed. Women's responsibilities concerning reproduction and the gendered division of labour within the family are considered to be the main forces limiting the employment chances of women.

Girls' enrolments as well as retention rates seem to be more sensitive than those of boys to school quality and to the specific services of the educational system. The remote locations of rural communities, and the distance that students have to travel to school, tend to limit the retention of girls more than that of the boys. It was emphasised that

...free busing and regional boarding facilities provided at the primary level for the children of low-income families have infrastructural and cultural impediments making such facilities less attractive for rural girls' families. Discontinuation of the boarding and busing facilities at the secondary level constitutes one of the main obstacles to rural girls' retention at this level.

In addition to such factors, a political party representative pointed out that 'the closing of small village schools due to long periods of armed conflict and targeting of civilians including women, children and teachers as well as the forced displacement of rural populations'. It led', he said, 'to the deepening of inequalities in girls' and boys' school attendance. The same reasons also made attracting and retaining teaching professionals, especially women, difficult in the rural eastern and south-eastern regions.'

Gender disparity in education is certainly not confined to enrolment. As observed in many other countries, school in Turkey works as one of the major agencies of the reproduction of asymmetrical power relations in the wider society. A feminist teacher argued:

Although raising the girls' enrolment rates is very important, it is not sufficient by itself to liberate them. Teachers have become regular agencies of the patriarchy. Women choose to be teachers because they have already internalised the sexist stereotypes of the establishment, taking it to be the best job for women, allowing them to carry out their main responsibilities as care-givers and house-keepers.

Educational microcultures, materials and curricula as well as teaching and management were found to incorporate the sex-role stereotypes and gender bias persisting in society and help to reproduce a conventional sexual division of labour. No significant progress has been recorded in the mainstreaming of gender sensitivity in teacher training. Women are underrepresented in leadership and management roles at all educational levels. 'It is very likely that the girls educated under such circumstances will later help to reproduce the male perspectives and prejudices,' the same teacher concluded.

A group of students from Ankara University who were assigned to this project to do a content analysis study of the latest Primary Education Curricula recorded that none of the women's organisations were consulted in the preparation of that document (see Tan 2005). These curricula which were implemented for the first time in the 2005-6 school year, they reported, 'do not incorporate a holistic approach to gender parity.' The female issue is treated once again in a fragmentary and encapsulated manner under the heading of 'the Turkish woman'. The most commendable aspect of the new document, however, was found to be the emphasis that 'girls too can be successful in science'.

In the non-formal education programmes, which exhibit great diversity throughout Turkey, the same gender bias or insensitivity is often repeated. A high-ranking official from the State Planning Organisation observed that 'in some of these programmes aiming to promote the traditional or "extra-income-generating" skills of women, insufficient attention is paid to the link between training courses and labour market dynamics'.

The population trends as predicted in the Turkish Population and Health Survey (HÜNEE, 2004) imply both opportunities and risks for the education of women in the near future. The decrease in fertility rates – from 4.33 in 1978 to 2.23 in 2003 – is positively associated with women's participation in education. However, data from the same study recorded no significant changes in the fertility rates of formally uneducated women (3.7) or of those living in the eastern (3.6) and south-eastern (4.2) regions. The child care and household activities of these categories of women cannot, therefore, be expected to change in the next twenty years. The number of children born to such women in the next twenty years is expected to be twice as many as those born to formally educated women. An academic working for the Ministry of National Education-UNICEF campaign (MONE-UNICEF) warned:

If there is no intervention, a significant portion of Turkey's future labour force will most likely consist of individuals born to formally uneducated parents and raised in poor and crowded families. As the enrolment rates for women are lower in the eastern and south-eastern regions, such differences will most likely help to reproduce regional disparities in the education of girls and women.

Participants in our study agreed that recognition of the partial autonomy of education implies that some degree of social change is possible through educational intervention. The challenge, however, for a just society must always be multi-faceted. In view of the fact that education is not a magic wand, such a struggle must involve the structure of the family, and economic and cultural factors, as well as the type of schooling. In the focus groups and interviews, it was brought up again and again that ‘clearing away some of the obstacles will only provide a symbolic progress’. Real transformation needs reconstruction of the structures of the basic power relations between women and men. To that end, a comprehensive policy of change needs to be formulated and implemented by the state and such agencies as international organisations, NGOs, the private sector, regional and local organisations, political parties and labour unions. The basic approaches of such a policy of change which obtains the greatest agreement among the participants in our study are as follows:

- Women must be considered as fully equal subjects rather than the objects or beneficiaries of development policies. This requires a strong commitment to put women’s empowerment and gender justice at the heart of the national agenda. The political will that supports development must change the conditions and structures which claim that women are unequal.
- Education should be understood as one of the basic human rights and the means of individual empowerment for women. It is essential for improving women’s living standards and enabling women to exercise a greater ‘voice’ in the development, education and well-being of future generations.
- In order to assess the implications for women and men of any planned action, a gender perspective should be introduced (mainstreamed) into the design, adoption and execution of all reform projects in education and national development programmes.
- The concept of gender equality as embodied in the Turkish Constitution and the other legal provisions is a very general one. In order to actualise an effective equality of opportunity for girls and women, temporary measures of positive discrimination must be adopted in all areas of women’s education.
- Turkey’s young and dynamic population is regarded by some as its main potential for growth. Whether or not this potential is turned into a well-qualified human force through education seems to be the principal determinant of future prospects and problems. Public education must, therefore, be strengthened in favour of the economically depressed and socially deprived sections of the population.
- Gender disparities in education should be approached not only by devising measures to improve women’s access to education, but also by adapting a series of different arrangements to alter the organisation, relations, language and the syllabus of the educational system in order to de-gender it.

Disputable areas

The strong agreement reached among the participants in this study on the policies and targets of women’s education demonstrates the will to see women as fully equal subjects of development. The education of women presents, however, a highly politicised agenda in Turkey. It reflects some of the most

debatable and disputed issues of modern Turkish politics. Among such disputed areas are women in religious instruction and education in native languages (see Akpınar and Lindberg, respectively, this volume).

In religious-instruction schools at the secondary level, established to train intermediary personnel for religious posts which can only be filled by men, the ratio of women is as high as 46 per cent (MONE 2005). The female share in religious instruction, which increased more rapidly than the males' before the introduction of the 8-year compulsory education, to reach a critical 51 per cent in 2000 (TÜSİAD 2000), has long been a controversial issue on the Turkish political agenda. One of the main arguments concerns the violation of the basic objectives of these schools by 'feminisation', since the girls cannot be appointed to religious positions. Such 'feminisation' is taken to be a sign of the potential of religious instruction to provide an alternative to secular education for girls. By keeping the girls away from the secular schools, it is then argued, religious-instruction schools have the capacity to reinforce a religiously based ideology reproducing traditional gender segregation. A second line of argument by some bureaucrats in the Ministry of National Education (MONE), however, maintains that religious-instruction schools are organised and operated as a part of the secular national education system. According to this point of view such schools answer a basic need of those parents who want to give to their children a sound knowledge of Islam. The same core curriculum as the other secular schools is adopted and the hours devoted to teaching religious subjects are limited by official regulations. It therefore opens a road to education for the girls who would otherwise be kept out of the school system.

One of the reasons for the low schooling rates of the girls in the eastern and south-eastern regions, according to proponents of this view, is found to be the fact that the number of religious instruction schools is very limited in such areas. The supporters of this argument also prefer religious instruction in state schools to that provided by the community organisations of competing sects (see also Akpınar, this volume).

As for education in native languages for the members of various ethnic groups, one line of argument runs that it should be taken seriously in relation to women's education. One member of a teachers' union said: 'Our target should be the access of women to education, not the secularisation or nationalisation of women. Only then can we build a large social consensus.' A female teacher from Istanbul maintained that:

The school success of children from homes where Turkish is not the native language may well be enhanced if they can see that their mother tongue is respected. Failure, absenteeism and drop-outs are often related to the disparity of languages used at school and at home.

According to another line of argument, however, it is important to first teach the citizens of this country the official language of its institutions. This is seen as a prerequisite of equalising citizens' life chances and opportunities. The members of various groups in this society, some academicians as well as several NGO representatives argue, have no objection to understanding and speaking Turkish. The males of different ethnic groups have always had a better chance than the females to learn Turkish because they are not home-

bound like the females. These men have had no difficulty in expressing themselves in government offices or hospitals or the courts. By teaching the official language of their country, school may rather help the girls of such groups to overcome this duality and possibly some of the others. This study therefore recommends that, in these two areas of women's education, further research involving different ethnic, religious and cultural representations must be activated.

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