

TODAY'S ZAMAN

Despite efforts, Turkey falls in gender gap ranking

Although Turkey has passed much legislation and tried to implement policies to close the gender gap, the recent Global Gender Gap Report 2009 published by the World Economic Forum ranked the nation 129th out of a total of 134 countries in terms of equality between men and women.

Furthermore, Turkey has continued to fall in the rankings: It held 105th place in 2006, was 121st in 2007 and 123rd in 2008. This year, only Saudi Arabia, Benin, Pakistan, Chad and Yemen ranked lower than Turkey.

The report ranked Turkey 110th in women's educational attainment, 130th in economic participation and opportunity and 107th in political empowerment, out of 134 countries.

Experts note that the reason for Turkey's gender gap is more due to mentality than a lack of legislation, at least in terms of economic participation and partly for education. However, analysts argue that new legislation is needed for the political empowerment of Turkish women, calling for positive discrimination in every field.

Full employment needed

Selma Acuner, a board member at the European Women's Lobby and a women's rights activist, notes with displeasure Turkey's falling rate of female employment, pointing out that while Turkish women had, according to Acuner, a 24 percent employment rate in 2008, the number slipped to 22 percent this year. She said that this figure is the lowest among European Union and Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries.

She underlined that the low participation of women in the economy is making them poorer, which in turn prevents them from reaching health and education services.

"The children of poor women are poor, too. This is a vicious circle," she said.

According to Acuner, measures should be implemented immediately for better employment opportunities for women.

"In Turkey, women are directed either toward jobs that are low-paid, half-time and not secure or toward establishing their own jobs. Of course entrepreneurship is something very good, but it requires some qualifications that not all women have," Acuner told Sunday's Zaman.

According to Acuner, the main reason for the lower participation of women in economic life is a lack of adequate childcare and elderly care options, which leaves women responsible for those undertakings.

“Just to say that women have to participate in the economy is not good enough, there should be an action plan for women’s employment and such a plan should be prepared with a female-friendly approach,” Acuner underlined.

She said there are only a few indirectly discriminative laws against women in the economy, but there are a lot of glass ceilings.

For education, the situation of women also is not bright despite state-organized campaigns and positive discrimination in financial assistance to families whose daughters are enrolled in primary education.

Despite the fact that every Turkish citizen must undergo eight years of compulsory education, there are still difficulties in reaching every child.

Education itself is a source of sexism

According to Zübeyde Kılıç from the Education Personnel Union (Eğitim-Sen), the official rate of school enrollment is 99.9 percent for boys and 95.7 percent for girls. Kılıç underlines that many girls do not attend school after the fifth grade, a fact that is not necessarily reflected in the official statistics.

“More than laws, economic conditions and social perception have a negative effect on girls’ education,” she told Sunday’s Zaman.

Kılıç recalls that education is still a problem not only for girls but also for women, since one out of every five women is illiterate.

The same inequality for is also true for educators. Kılıç said 40 percent of Turkey’s teachers are women, but there are only a few women in the higher positions in the national education system.

“There is only one woman working as a province education director, although there are 81 posts. The school headmasters are also men. Only at the universities are the numbers of women academics relatively better, but they are a small island, in a small part of society,” she said.

Kılıç emphasizes that the education system itself is sexist and reinforces the gender gap via the textbooks used.

“For example, there are still women’s jobs and men’s jobs delineated in the school books. The classical division of labor within the family is frequently

underlined,” Kılıç said.

The participation of women in political life is not at the desired level either. In this field, according to experts, the obstacle is not only glass ceilings; legislation also must be changed in order to improve the situation of women.

Glass ceilings in politics

İlknur Üstün from the Association for Education and Supporting Women Candidates (KA-DER) emphasizes that positive discrimination in favor of women must be constitutionally protected until equality is ensured.

“Turkey definitely needs a quota system to overcome the gender gap in politics. The Political Parties Law also has to be amended to make the women’s branches of political parties a part of the decision-making body,” Üstün told Sunday’s Zaman.

According to Üstün, political parties frequently claim that they are open to women but women aren’t interested; however, they are not sincere in their protestations. “Political life is heavily organized for male daily life, it is organized in a very patriarchal way and politics does not create a suitable atmosphere for women to participate,” she said.

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