

# Raising the Bar: Turkey's Gender Equality Performance from 2000 to 2019: A Rights-Based Analysis via UNDP Human Development and Gender Development Indices

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## Overview

This year, the United Nations (UN) called for a New Social Contract and New Global Convention that creates equal opportunities for all and respects the rights and freedoms of all, as a solution to the inequalities before and during the pandemic<sup>1</sup>, and offered concrete proposals for a more just and sustainable way forward. It was stressed that recovery after the COVID-19 pandemic can take place with a socioeconomic recovery aimed at gender equality, and that recovery efforts should be modified accordingly in order to present regressions in gender equality and build more inclusive societies. Suggestions made have been long standing concerns within the Human Rights Conventions<sup>2</sup>: States committed “..to ensure that the available resources are allocated at the maximum level to the quality public services necessary for the enjoyment of minimum and basic economic and social rights, especially health, social protection and education.”<sup>3</sup>

This global call highlights also that “investing in human rights is investing in country’s resilience to crises”. Nearly a century ago, it’s been committed by all the States to ensure that everyone has access to justice and an effective remedy for violations of human rights, including economic, social and cultural rights. Recognizing this legal equality; the global goals and standards have been targeted and monitored by UN’s development agencies to ensure de facto gender equality across the globe. Within the context of 2030 Development Agenda, the States are now committed to promote decent job generation and achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value in order to achieve inclusive and sustainable development.

In order to monitor and evaluate progress on the globally set targets, the UN agencies developed comprehensive sets of indicators over through the past three decades. The Human Development Index (HDI) and Gender Development Index (GDI) introduced by the UNDP in 1990s set the origins of these cross-country measurement of development performance and progress, which have evolved towards to the largest set of indicators established for the Sustainable Development Goals. Recommendations are made today for the use of human-rights approach to development and rights-based indicators to explore countries’ development performance. In this context, the current study aims to understand changes in Turkey’s HDI and GDI scores over time, making use of the information provided by the rights-based indicators developed for monitoring gender equality in Turkey.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/a-new-social-contract-for-a-new-era/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/10/1102452>

<sup>3</sup> <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/annual-full-day-discussion-human-rights-women-panel-2-gender-equal-socioeconomic>

Turkey's Human Development Index values increased from 2000 to 2019 constantly, and quite rapidly. The HDI value increased from 0.660 to 0.820, an increase of 24.2 percent. Turkey advanced from medium human development category in 2000 to very high human development category in 2019. The Gender Development Index also increased in this period although not as rapidly as the HDI. The GDI, however, first evolved from 0.847 in 2000 to 0.93 in 2016, though stagnated in 2017 and decreased afterwards. Turkey is in the 4<sup>th</sup> group of countries in the GDI. While both female and male HDI values increased, the limited increase of the female HDI caused the decrease in the GDI in the last years. The GII values exhibit a similar pattern to the GDI until 2018, demonstrating that gender gaps are narrowing rather quickly. GII, unlike GDI, does not suggest a worsening of gender inequality after 2018, but rather a slowdown in progress.

Due to the deep rooted disparity between male and female HDI values Turkey falls into the fourth group in terms of GDI value scores. Turkey's GDI scores have also been lower than both the very-high HDI and the high-HDI group countries. Among the very high human development countries only two countries other than Turkey present moderate improvement in GDI when compared to their HDI scores (Saudi Arabia in Group 5 and Bahrain in Group 4).

The decomposition of the HDI growth into its components (health, education and income) demonstrate that the improvements in the HDI are driven mainly by improvements in education in all the periods under study. Throughout the period, education contributed 58 percent on average to human development. The relative importance of health and income indicators varies depending on the time period. Decomposition of growth in female and male HDIs yields similar results in terms of the contribution of education. Education is the most important factor in both female and male human development. Income is the second most important factor for women, while it is the health component for men. On average, income contributes 26 percent of female human development growth. Men's improvement of health contributes nearly as much to their human development as women's income does to theirs: 28 percent.

The analysis of the components of GDI in order to investigate the main reasons of disparities between genders in Turkey shows that the female health index has been higher than male health index in all the years under study. This implies that in terms of life expectancy, the situation of women has been better than men in Turkey over the period. However, gender inequalities in health have steadily shifted in favor of men, albeit in a small and steady way, throughout time. Contrary to health, education and income components show gender disparities in favor of men in the analyzed period. Comparing the last two we observe that gender inequality in income is higher than that in education in the whole period except 2000. The income component is trending towards equality during this period. The same is true for education until 2016. After 2016, the trend reversed, and educational disparities between men and women began to expand again.

Gender gaps in education in Turkey persisted over time and did not catch up to the level of high and very high HDI countries, the group she moved out of and up to, respectively. In both high and

very high-HDI countries, the ratio of female to male education index remained around 1 on average, while it was still 0.887 in Turkey in 2019.

The observations support the persistence of large gender gap in income (GNI per capita female is still lower than half of the GNI for male in Turkey), which could not be compensated by the recent progress in education. Men in Turkey earn on average an income level equal to almost three quarters of their counterparts in the very high human development group. However, women earn only half the income her peers earn in the group. The gender gap in national income per capita reflects the gap in labor force participation rates. Women's participation in the labor force is remarkably low (34%) compared to the average rate observed in the high human development (54%) and very high human development country groups (52%). Overall, the data indicate that the relationship between women's relative educational attainment and relative incomes in Turkey during the 2000s was weak. Gender inequalities in Turkey have deepened even more in the context of the economic crisis that has developed in our country and in the world under the conditions of the Covid-19 Pandemics. There has been an unprecedented rise in unpaid care work due to the pandemics due to quarantine and stay-at-home measures, school closures, restrictions on access to health, education, social services and home services, and increased hygiene and care requirements<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, along with large employment losses, women's participation in the labor market decreased by 4 percentage points despite women's higher share among the essential workers in health, education and retail employment<sup>5</sup>.

According to a closer look to education component of HDI/GDI, improvement in school enrollment can be seen as the leading determinant of education-related improvement in the indices. In GDI two indicators with respect to education are expected years of schooling and mean years of schooling. In GII the indicator is the population with at least secondary education. Two important developments related to the education system influence these indicators significantly. These are the regulations about the extension of compulsory schooling to 8 years in 1997 and to 12 years in 2011.

Compulsory education of 8 years increased girls' and boys' school enrollment to a great extent and decreased the difference between men and women in both the expected years of schooling and the average years of schooling. Indeed, the regions with low HDI levels managed to catch up with other regions' HDI and GDI levels mostly due to this regulation. People usually attended the 5-year compulsory primary school and did not continue with the secondary education before this regulation. After the implementation of the regulation almost all the children continued further 3 years of education leading to higher expected years of schooling and mean years of schooling for both men and women. In fact, poverty is the determining factor in the failure of children to attend

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<sup>4</sup> İlkaracan, İ., and E. Memiş. "Covid-19 Küresel Salgın Sürecinde Türkiye'de Bakım Ekonomisi Ve Toplumsal Cinsiyet Temelli Eşitsizlikler." UNDP- Turkey, 2020.

<sup>5</sup> TUIK-Household Labor Force Statistics, 2021.

primary education and it affects girls more negatively especially in the regions of North East Anatolia, Central East Anatolia, and South East Anatolia.

With the 4+4+4 regulation in 2011, the compulsory education period was increased to 12 years. The difference between men and women with respect to the expected years of schooling, mean years of schooling and population with at least secondary education decreased until 2016. The law, which increased the compulsory education year to 12 years, also brought structural changes in education. Depending on the change in the law, the process of transforming general high schools to Anatolian high schools or transferring them to vocational and technical secondary education continues, and accordingly, the share of general high schools in secondary education continues to decline. The rate of students attending religious high schools continues to increase regularly. When the distribution is analyzed by sex, there is a more significant increase in the rate of female students attending religious high schools. There is a strong tendency for girls to be directed to religious education schools where only girls attend. With the legislative arrangements made by the Ministry of National Education in 2018 and 2019, activities related to "gender equality" were abolished.

The data of the indicators related to the education index indicate a break in terms of gender-based differences in 2015-2016. The gap between men and women, which tended to decrease, started to increase again. The causes of this development require extensive research and only some guesses can be made at this stage.

Despite the increase in enrollment rates over the years, there is a significant population of children who are out of school at both primary and secondary education levels. Although there is not much difference between the sexes in Turkey, gender inequalities by regions continue. Southeastern Anatolia (68.4%) and Middle East Anatolia (70.8%), the regions with the lowest secondary school enrollment rates for girls in the 2018-19 academic year, are also the regions where the difference between boys' enrollment rates and girls' enrollment rates is highest. Despite the increase in school enrollment rates there are serious problems with attendance and graduation and the absenteeism rate increases throughout the years. It results with the dropout from the school system which is slightly higher for girls than for boys. It can be said that long-term absenteeism rates will result in dropping out of school.

According to the data of the European Statistical Office (Eurostat), Turkey has the highest rate of early school leaving among European countries with comparative results. The difference between men and women is also highest in Turkey; In 2017, this rate was 34% for women and 31% for men. In Turkey, 27.2% of young people between the ages of 15-29 are neither studying nor working. This is the highest rate following Columbia (29.6%) among OECD member countries. The OECD average is 14.1%. This rate, which is 16.9% for men aged 15-29 in Turkey, is 42.4% for women in the same age group in Turkey.” (OECD, 2020).

It can be concluded that since there is almost no difference in enrollment rates, the difference between the average school year and the expected school year may be due to the difference in absenteeism between girls and boys in the following period after they are registered to school and,

accordingly, in early school leaving. Besides gender-based division of labor that directs girls to being housewives, the quality problems of education in Turkey, the low level of connection with the labor market, namely the weak transition from school to working life as the very high youth unemployment rates demonstrate can be the factors behind this situation.

While educational advancements are the most important factors of human development for both women and men, income comes in second for women and health comes in second for men. Because women had a higher life expectancy at birth than men during the period of 2000-2019, the health index of women was higher than that of men. Due to the improvement in health services and conditions over the years, the life expectancy of men at birth has increased, and the male/female age gap decreased.

There are two main indicators under reproductive health in the GII index: Maternal mortality rate (per hundred thousand live births) and Adolescent birth rate (births per thousand women under the age of 15-19). Positive developments in "maternal health" services regarding pregnancy and childbirth in Turkey over the years are effective in decreasing maternal mortality and adolescent birth rates. However, with the gradual abandonment of the gender equality norm in political decision mechanisms, the issues of reproductive health, family planning, reproductive and sexual rights have begun to appear less and less in official documents. While women's health is not addressed holistically and considering all life stages "maternal health" is emphasized. It is problematic to deal with sexual and reproductive health by reducing it to motherhood and childbirth only. Whereas the share of induced abortions (medical intervention) has decreased versus the unexpected rise in spontaneous abortions (non-medical intervention) since 2008, this development can be related to the impossibility of access to induced abortion services in public health institutions. With one third of families having "unmet need for family planning" unwanted pregnancies and risky pregnancies can have a significant share among the causes of maternal deaths. The importance of the quality and delivery of birth control methods and family planning services in terms of women's health exist as an important issue in Turkey.

In GII one indicator of the empowerment component refers to the share of women in the parliament. The proportion of women in the parliament increased from 4.2% in 2000 to 17.4% in 2019 in Turkey. Although there is a more than four-fold increase between 2007 and 2019, this rate is lower than all country groups with different levels of human development. While this rate is 24.5% in high-development countries, it is 28.3% in countries with the highest level of development. In Turkey, none of the basic laws regulating the political decision processes and the principles of political representation include a definition of the realization of gender equality. The strategic and action plans for the empowerment of women that foresee to increase women's representation in decision-making mechanisms envisage only indirect intervention and advisory activities like awareness raising, mentality transformation etc. which have very limited impact.

With regards to the income component of HDI, the macroeconomic indicators present that despite high volatility, Turkey's GDP per capita has almost doubled from 2000 to 2019 achieving a better

performance than the world average. The relatively higher growth rate between 2002-2008 in Turkey was attained partly by the favorable external conditions with the cheapened foreign currency, the rapid expansion in the world economy and hence expansion in exports with cheaper imports, larger government consumption along with lower interest rates during the period. Given relatively lower cost of borrowing and low interest rates construction activities were boosted over the whole period. Thus, throughout the first decade of 2000s, Turkey's growth performance was widely absorbed by the construction sector rather than industry or services with high potential for generating new jobs. However, over the second decade of the 2000s, lacking favorable external conditions' the growth performance could not be achieved given the highly cyclical investments in construction. Despite a higher level of total tax revenue as a share of GDP in Turkey when compared to both country groups (the high and the very high-HDI) taxes on income profits and capital gains are much lower. Unlike the direct tax rate, indirect taxes have regressive distribution effect on income. Turkey has the highest rate of consumption tax and highest share of indirect taxes in total tax revenues among the OECD countries,

In addition, Turkey's total debt service as a percentage of gross national income/or exports and primary income (36.1%) have been three times as high as the high-HDI group average over the period of analysis. Throughout the second decade of 2000s there has been a particular increase in this ratio, which had adverse impact on investment potential of the country that at the end limited the ability to generate new employment. The unemployment rates for both women and men rose sharply during the early 2000s and remained stubbornly high (around 10 percent) before rising sharply toward the end of the 2010s in Turkey. Despite very low labor force participation rates women's unemployment rate presents a steady increase particularly after the year 2011, remarkably different than her global peers. We also observe a similar trend in youth's unemployment rates which rises more rapidly than the unemployment rate for the overall population. The labor share of GDP in Turkey keeps its level over the period of analysis, which however has been lagging majorly behind the average level of the very-high-HDI country group and falls below the worlds' average.

Can Turkey achieve the gender development index scores achieved by the very-high-HDI group? Alternative scenarios could help us understand the change better. Assuming i) the gender gaps in education and income have been closed in the same pattern over time, ii) the female to male income index was equal to the average of very high HDI countries' average level, iii) the female to male education index is equal to one may inform policy for better targeting. Our computations present that only if the achievements in education could be sustained, Turkey would reach the average GDI scores of the high-HDI country group. There exists significant role for the policies that address both the gender gap in education and in employment as well as gender-based wage gap in a holistic perspective.

## Introduction

Turkey has recently moved up into a higher human development country group, yet inequality remains a large challenge particularly due to persisting gender gaps. The long-standing debate on the intricate relation between economic growth and human development offers three arguments in understanding deviations across group countries in terms of inequalities:

- i) the economic growth does not necessarily result in equal gains for all,
- ii) not all inequalities are issues of economic growth or development per se,
- iii) there exists a two-way relation between growth and social inequalities and hence human development without a definitive path or direction.

The origins of these arguments coincide with a pioneering progress in the history of women's human rights: *the UN Beijing Declaration and Action Plan (BDAP), which was adopted at the 4th World Conference on Women in 1995*. The plan verifies that the preceding presumption of gender equality achievable through economic growth and modernization, is flawed and the assumption could be one of the impeding factors lagging progress towards gender equality.

At the 4<sup>th</sup> Conference, it was acknowledged by all member countries that despite all international efforts and rapid growth experiences across the world, substantive inequalities between women and men could not be eliminated. They persist within specific and intertwined national and international origins which likewise deteriorate the lives of the majority of people including the children that exacerbates the situation. On the other hand, gender equality and the prohibition of discrimination are mandatory for all States within the principle of equality in terms of international human rights norms and standards and States are committed to:

*"...ensure the full implementation of the human rights of women and girls as an inalienable, inseparable and indivisible part of all these human rights and fundamental freedoms (Declaration item 9).*

The potential impact of economic growth and development and close associations with women's rights are emphasized explicitly in BDAP:

*"...Accelerated economic growth, although necessary for social development, does not by itself improve the quality of life of the population. In some cases, conditions can arise which can aggravate social inequality and marginalization. Hence, it is indispensable to search for new alternatives that ensure that all members of society benefit from economic growth based on a holistic approach to all aspects of development: growth, equality between women and men, social justice, conservation and protection of the environment, sustainability, solidarity, participation, peace and respect for human rights... (para. 14)"*

Furthermore, gender equality is set as a precondition for a sustained economic growth:

*“...Sustainable development and economic growth that is both sustained and sustainable are possible only through improving the economic, social, political, legal and cultural status of women. Equitable social development that recognizes empowering the poor, particularly women, to utilize environmental resources sustainably is a necessary foundation for sustainable development (para. 56)” (para. 41) states that “...women's empowerment and their full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society, including participation in the decision-making process and access to power, are fundamental for the achievement of equality, development and peace. The advancement of women and the achievement of equality between women and men are a matter of human rights and a condition for social justice and should not be seen in isolation as a women's issue.”*

In addition States declared their determinacy to “*promote people-centred sustainable development, including sustained economic growth, through the provision of basic education, life-long education, literacy and training, and primary health care for girls and women (para 27) and the design, implementation and monitoring of the gender-sensitive policies and programmes, including development policies and programmes with the full participation of women are considered to be essential*” (para 19).

In line with this process, UNDP leads the efforts for data collection and regular reporting on gender equality through “gender development index”, “gender inequality index” and the “gender social norms index”. Different aspects of gender equality and women’s empowerment have also been presented at world scale and in a way enabling comparison between countries by the “life course gender gap” and “women’s empowerment” dashboards. UNDP as the leading agency in helping countries achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 emphasizes the role of collaborative work with civil society organizations in implementing the policies leading to SDGs. In this context this project offers the potential of a new collaborative work between UNDP Turkey and Association for Gender Equality Monitoring (CEID).

The UNDP-Turkey Office carried out path-breaking research reports focusing on the specificities and the peculiar context of the country. These national reports allowed comprehensive exploration of composite indexes based on longitudinal analyses. Between the years 2014 and 2019 Turkey has excelled in Human Development Index, index value jumping from 0,796 to 0,820 points and moved up 5 places in the ranking. The long-term growth rates present a stable trend with an average annual growth rate at around 4,5% over the last fifty-year period in Turkey. Despite this stable trend, unwarranted short-term fluctuations remark the growth patterns of the country in the 2000s. In addition, the population growth rates declined in the 2000s, which had positive impacts on one the income component of HDI via GDP per capita. Demographic indicators present a relatively younger composition with lower elderly dependency rates than the very high HDI country group, yet however young dependency ratios are notably high when compared to her group average.

Turkey has been on a positive trend in terms of improving gender equality outlook in the country throughout the last decades, too. However, the overall standing of the country is far from being ideal. Turkey ranks in the Global Gender Inequality Index 68<sup>th</sup> despite its 54<sup>th</sup> place in the Human Development Index. By 2019, HDI value for men is 0,848 and the same index value for women is 0,784<sup>6</sup>, and this gap is indicative of the extent and persistence of gender inequalities. Meanwhile, gender social norms index reflects a negative trend, the share of people with at least one and at least two biases rising for both men and women between the periods 2005-2009 and 2010-2014.

In this context, the current study examines the gender indicator values for Turkey between the years of 2000 and 2019 looking at UNDP gender-inequality and gender-disaggregated HDI indices. Main objective of this research report is to pinpoint the primary dynamics both driving and restricting positive change towards greater gender equalities. To that end more specific objectives are:

- to put together the main findings of the UNDP country reports going back to 2001 and 2008 in terms of gender equality indexes
- to conduct a trend analysis on gender inequality index and gender development index values
- to analyze general trends in a causal framework and drivers of progress and obstacles/bottlenecks against positive change will be identified at the level of socio-economic, and policy parameters
- to present the main reasons for the gap between Turkey's human development and gender development performance and for the stagnant performance in gender inequality index over the years
- to provide policy recommendations and action points for the development actors

In order to explore the underlying factors behind the trends observed between 2000-2019, we conduct a longitudinal analysis bringing these indexes together with the following additional country specific indicators:

- evaluation of the socio-economic situation in Turkey with the selected socio-economic indicators at the national level particularly impact of macroeconomic policies on employment and income distribution
- theme specific rights-based institutional and structural monitoring indicators compiled by CEID

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<sup>6</sup> In parallel, gender development index value (Ratio of female to male HDI values) has fluctuated and presented a high variation between 2014 and 2019 as opposed to the general positive trend before 2014 and ended up as equal to 2014 value in 2019, as well. Downward trend is significant in 2018 and 2019. Estimations indicate that this loses will be deepened by the adverse impact of the Covid-19 crises.

Analysis above also makes use of the relevant thematic reports produced by CEID on gender equality monitoring with a rights-based perspective. The data compiled along with the thematic reports provides the background resources for the current research. Assessments derived from each thematic report as well as the consolidated Monitoring Report 2019-2020 of CEID are utilized to support periodization analysis briefly explained. Supportive/preventive underlying factors behind the progress achieved in terms of gender equality indicators are tried to be identified and elaborated based on the detailed discussions covered in each thematic report.

In the report the first chapter deals with Turkey's performance in Human Development and Gender Development Index Scores throughout the years comparing her with other country groups by HDI level. The second chapter is on the relative roles of components of HDI and GDI. The third chapter tackles Turkey's gender equality performance via thematic areas like education, access to health services and participation in political decisions. The fourth chapter is on economic growth and macroeconomic indicators. Final chapter is on discussion and policy recommendations.