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Gender equality in Türkiye: A critical analysis and action plan for schools

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	This study critically analyzes the current state of gender equality in Turkiye with a specific focus on its intersection with educational outcomes. Utilizing secondary data from the Turkish Statistical Institute (TUIK) and the Ministry of National Education (MoNE), the research examines key indicators aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 5. The findings reveal that, despite progress in girls' enrollment and literacy, women's labor force participation remains low (36%), political representation is limited (17.3% in parliament), and ownership of agricultural land by women stands at only 13.2%. The study also highlights persistent gender stereotypes in both domestic and professional domains, reinforced by cultural norms and unequal access to digital technologies. Building on these findings, the study introduces a novel, school-based framework composed of nine strategic actions aimed at reshaping societal perceptions and promoting gender-responsive learning environments. The proposed framework emphasizes the transformative role of education in addressing structural inequalities and offers a practical roadmap for institutional reform within schools. The research fills a critical gap in the literature by providing actionable strategies for integrating gender equity into educational policy and practice in Turkiye. **Keywords:** gender equity, sustainable development goals, gender stereotypes, social norms, educational policy

INTRODUCTION

Gender equality is a fundamental human right and a critical pillar of sustainable development. It is embedded as a core principle in international frameworks, most notably in the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, where Goal 5 specifically emphasizes the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls (Allwood, 2020). Achieving gender equality requires a comprehensive and multifaceted strategy that addresses deep-rooted societal norms, entrenched cultural practices, and persistent economic inequalities.

Despite global advances and legislative efforts in many countries, gender-based disparities remain widespread, particularly in contexts characterized by complex cultural and institutional dynamics, such as Turkiye. Although significant progress has been achieved in increasing women's educational attainment, gender inequalities endure in other domains. Women continue to be underrepresented in leadership roles, specific professional fields, and political participation (World Economic Forum, 2023). Gender-based discrimination remains prevalent across various facets of life, including limited access to resources, restricted property ownership, and diminished decision-making power (McCracken et al., 2015; Stromquist, 2015).

Furthermore, while global research highlights the transformative potential of education in dismantling gender inequalities, Turkiye has not sufficiently leveraged its educational system to challenge and reshape dominant gender norms. There remains a clear gap in the literature regarding the role of schools as proactive agents in promoting gender-responsive learning environments and transforming social perceptions. This study addresses this gap by:

(1) Conducting a comprehensive analysis of Turkiye's current gender equality indicators based on national and international data;

(2) Critically assessing the role of education in shaping gender attitudes and behaviors; and

(3) Proposing a novel, school-based action framework aimed at transforming societal perceptions and promoting a culture of gender equality through education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Gender is a socially constructed framework encompassing roles, attitudes, behaviors, relationships, and attributes deemed appropriate for men and women within a given cultural and temporal context. It is an acquired identity shaped through socialization processes, inherently contextual, temporally fluid, and subject to continuous transformation

(European Commission, 2023; Rai & Staudt, 2018). Gender determines the expectations, acceptable behaviors, and societal value assigned to individuals based on their sex within specific socio-cultural settings (Rai & Staudt, 2018). These roles are created and perpetuated by social norms, which in turn influence public perception. Therefore, gender refers not only to men and women as individual categories, but also to the dynamic relationships between them (Elbers & Grigore, 2018).

The concept of gender equality aims to ensure the full and active participation of both women and men in all spheres of social life. It is defined by the provision of equal rights, responsibilities, opportunities, conditions, and treatment for individuals of all genders across political, economic, and social domains (Council of Europe, 1998). Gender equality means that individuals should be free to develop their abilities and pursue their aspirations without limitations imposed by stereotypes, rigid gender roles, or prejudices. It entails recognizing, valuing, and supporting both women and men equally, while also acknowledging and appreciating the different roles they may perform in society (Council of Europe, 1998; Elbers & Grigore, 2018). Moreover, gender equality promotes the acceptance of difference, ensuring that such distinctions are equally valued and do not lead to inequality. It emphasizes inclusivity and equity by recognizing diversity both within and across gender groups (Rai & Staudt, 2018). This approach requires awareness of how factors such as social class, political ideology, religion, ethnicity, race, and sexual orientation intersect with gender to shape individuals' lived experiences (Council of Europe, 1998).

Gender equality encompasses a variety of meanings, each reflecting different aspects of the concept. According to EIGE (2013) and Elbers and Grigore (2018), it involves ensuring equal access to dignity, personal integrity, resources, and assets; fair distribution of both paid and unpaid labor; and the right to make choices and attain economic independence. Furthermore, it supports women in fully realizing their potential and contributing to society, aims to improve gender balance in the labor market, and advocates for the creation of quality employment opportunities and equitable prospects for both women and men.

Achieving gender equality entails ensuring equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities for women, men, girls, and boys, and equal power to shape their lives and contribute meaningfully to society (UN Women, 2022). The Gender Equality Index emphasizes not only equal distribution of assets but also equal respect for the dignity and integrity of both sexes. This perspective includes recognizing and valuing the distinct contributions and roles of women and men in social structures (Council of Europe, 1998).

Scholarly approaches to gender equality can be broadly categorized into three theoretical models:

(1) Equality through sameness, which advocates identical rights and treatment;

(2) Equal valuation of difference, which promotes specialized support and the transformation of gender-biased practices; and

(3) Gender mainstreaming, which embeds gender considerations into all aspects of policymaking and institutional practice (DCAF, 2017; EIGE, 2013; Walby, 2005).

These perspectives reject the idea that gender equality assumes men and women are the same; rather, they insist that access to opportunities and life outcomes should not be dictated by gendered expectations (DCAF, 2017).

Gender is a culture-bound construct of femininity and masculinity that varies across time and contexts. Cultural values play a crucial role in shaping gender roles both in the domestic and professional spheres. Social and cultural traditions have historically influenced the persistence of gender biases (Vallejo Álvarez, 2018). This underscores the fact that gender roles are not universal; instead, they evolve and adapt in response to broader societal changes. Therefore, gender roles can be both reconstructed and reproduced at the individual and societal levels. Through increased awareness, individuals challenge and reshape the roles they embody, thereby influencing societal norms and expectations (DCAF, 2017).

In Turkiye, the discourse on gender equality has evolved through three distinct phases since the 1970s. The initial phase focused on biological differences between men and women, attributing social roles to these distinctions. The second phase emphasized gender as a socially constructed identity, shaped by specific cultural norms and learned behaviors. In the third phase, gender is recognized as a central analytical category in all social issues, incorporating intersectional perspectives such as class and patriarchy. It is within this third phase that the structural and institutional dimensions of gender inequality gained prominence in academic and policy discourses (Ecevit, 2011).

Education and Gender Equality

Although the targets of Sustainable Development Goal 5, which aims to "achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls" do not explicitly reference education, none of these targets can be effectively achieved without addressing gender equality within educational contexts. Education holds the dual potential to either reinforce gendered stereotypes or to serve as a transformative platform through which such stereotypes can be challenged and reshaped (Queisser, 2016). Unterhalter (2015) identifies seven key areas within policy and practice that are essential for advancing gender equality in education. These encompass systemic structures, pedagogical approaches, societal norms, and educational outcomes.

Applying a gender lens to analyze social norms and uncover gender-based biases in education is crucial. This is particularly important in social contexts where gender roles are dynamic and can evolve significantly over time, influenced by various cultural and institutional factors. Accurately understanding gender-related issues requires nuanced interpretation of social dynamics and institutional environments. Gender dynamics profoundly affect educational processes, and conducting gender analyses allows for deeper insights into how gender roles are constructed and contested. Such insights are essential for designing targeted strategies that address the needs and experiences of all learners, educators, and stakeholders (INEE, 2010).

Seemingly small actions within classrooms can lead to significant shifts in gender perceptions. Teachers, in particular, hold a unique capacity to disrupt entrenched gender norms by fostering gender-responsive educational environments tailored to specific cultural contexts. By critically interpreting classroom interactions through a gender lens, educators can guide students in interrogating existing gendered behaviors and beliefs. This can be achieved through reflective exercises, critical questioning, and the encouragement of independent thought, all of which contribute to reshaping students' understanding of gender norms (Queisser, 2016).

A robust body of research emphasizes the central role of education in shaping attitudes toward gender and challenging stereotypes (Garriott et al., 2017; Shapiro & Williams, 2012; Skelton et al., 2007). Educational institutions - through curricula, pedagogical methods, and institutional policies-can either reproduce or confront traditional gender ideologies. Creating inclusive learning environments that promote gender equality empowers individuals and contributes to building more equitable societies (McQuillan & Leininger, 2021).

Social norms and cultural values are foundational determinants of how gender equality is experienced and understood (Alesina et al., 2013; Bonvillain, 2020). These norms are shared expectations about acceptable behaviors within a given society or group (Cislaghi & Heise, 2018). Cultural contexts influence how gender roles are defined, performed, and regulated. Furthermore, the intersection of gender with race, class, and ethnicity adds layers of complexity to the experience of inequality (Bonvillain, 2020; Kartolo & Kwantes, 2019). Meaningful transformation of gender norms thus requires shifts in institutional policies, public discourse, media narratives, and social power structures (Cislaghi & Heise, 2020).

Gender stereotypes encompass socially constructed roles and assumptions about what is considered appropriate behavior for men and women. These stereotypes are embedded in attitudes, values, and cultural beliefs and function both as causes and effects of discrimination. They act as significant obstacles to achieving gender equality, perpetuating restrictive and often harmful representations of women and men. Gender sensitivity refers to an awareness of, and responsiveness to, the different needs, experiences, and roles of all genders. It involves a conscious effort to avoid perpetuating discriminatory practices and to recognize how gendered experiences shape individual realities (Ecevit, 2011). Stereotypical assumptions often constrain women's career choices, civic engagement, and social autonomy, reinforcing perceptions of women's subordination to men (European Commission, 2023). Within educational settings, teacher attitudes, classroom interactions, and pedagogical strategies all contribute to the construction and reinforcement of gender roles (McCracken et al., 2015).

Work-family balance remains a prominent dimension of gender equality, with implications for both men and women (Crespi, 2007; Masselot & di Torella, 2010). Achieving this balance is influenced by access to resources, personal values, societal expectations, and institutional frameworks. These factors collectively shape individuals' strategies for managing responsibilities in both professional and domestic spheres (Geist & Cohen, 2011). Gender ideologies held by partners-defined as normative beliefs about the roles of women and men-play a key role in the distribution of household labor (Bergh, 2007).

Gender-based discrimination in education-whether in the form of biased expectations by teachers or unequal treatment of students-undermines equal educational opportunities and reinforces broader patterns of social inequality. Failure to address such inequalities in educational settings perpetuates gender disparities at the societal level (McCracken et al., 2015; Queisser, 2016). Attitudes toward gender roles serve as indicators of individuals' support for or resistance to gender equality. These attitudes shape adolescents' career aspirations and contribute to the cultural environment within schools (McCracken et al., 2015). Social norms are reflected in school curricula, learning materials, teacher-student interactions, and the broader institutional ethos. Promoting gender equality in schools thus requires all educational actors to adopt a gender-sensitive lens in planning, implementing, and evaluating their work.

The Council of Europe's Strategy for Gender Equality (2018-2023) underscores the need to combat gender stereotypes and promote inclusive education (Council of Europe, 2018). In alignment with this perspective, the action plan developed in this study focuses on reshaping societal perceptions of gender roles and norms, with the ultimate goal of preventing and eliminating gender-based stereotypes.

Gender Equality in the World

Gender equality in education, including equal access to enrollment, has been largely achieved in many contexts. However, certain population groups still require targeted interventions. The focus must now shift toward ensuring equality within educational systems and, more importantly, addressing disparities in educational outcomes. The overarching goal of gender equality is to establish conditions in which women and men experience equitable opportunities, fair treatment, and the ability to reach their full potential. This includes the exercise of their human rights, preservation of dignity, and active participation in-and benefit from-economic, social, cultural, and political development (UNESCO, 2020).

Gender equality is a multidimensional and interdisciplinary concept that permeates several aspects of society, including education, economics, social norms, cultural dynamics, and legal frameworks. A substantial body of literature emphasizes the interconnectedness of these dimensions, underlining the complexity of gender equality and the need for comprehensive, cross-sectoral approaches.

Over the past 25 years, considerable progress has been made globally in advancing gender equality, supported by the implementation of legal frameworks guaranteeing equal rights for women and men in many countries (Elson, 2012). Educational attainment has emerged as one of the most significant achievements, with girls now outnumbering boys in schooling within many OECD countries (McInturff, 2013). However, women remain underrepresented in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields, and they are less likely to occupy managerial positions. Gender disparities persist in employment, entrepreneurship, and

public life, suggesting that legislation alone is insufficient to eliminate these structural inequalities (OECD, 2017).

In some regions, progress has been slow. Women in these areas are less likely to access and complete formal education and attain literacy. They also face limitations in labor market participation and entrepreneurship. Moreover, women continue to devote more time to both paid and unpaid labor compared to men, while holding significantly fewer managerial roles (Elson, 2012). Beyond statistical inequalities, societal perceptions and enduring stereotypes remain among the most potent barriers limiting the capabilities of both women and men (European Commission, 2023).

Education functions not only as a fundamental right but also as a critical instrument for personal development and social participation, particularly in the context of women's empowerment. It equips individuals of all genders with the knowledge and skills needed to participate in economic and civic life and to support the development of democratic societies (SADEV, 2010). Education plays a transformative role in addressing core gender-related issues. As Aikman and Unterhalter (2005) argue, "Quality education cannot be achieved without gender equality and equity." The education system shapes perceptions of gender roles and builds capacity for gender awareness from early childhood. Addressing the structural inequalities embedded within education is essential for realizing gender equality. Educational equity is deeply influenced by the broader societal context and is recognized as a powerful mechanism for promoting social justice and challenging discrimination (Aikman & Unterhalter, 2005). The principle "If you educate a woman, you educate a nation" aptly reflects the aim of school-based gender equality initiatives. Educating girls not only empowers them individually but also generates broader social change by fostering gender-sensitive perspectives within families and communities (European Commission, 2023).

The status of women in European societies has undergone significant transformation over the last century. In the early 1900s, few European nations allowed women to vote, own property, or work outside the home, where they were often confined to traditional roles (Esping-Andersen, 2009; Reher, 2004). Today, women across Europe are free to pursue employment, lead businesses, hold political office, and exercise autonomy in major life decisions. However, legal equality does not automatically result in social or economic parity. Women still earn less than men on average, and they remain underrepresented in leadership and ownership roles, despite some progress in recent decades (Fortin et al., 2017; Maida & Weber, 2020).

The principle of equal pay, first articulated in the Treaty of Rome, gained practical significance through European Council directives on equal pay and sex discrimination in the 1970s. These directives required member states to incorporate gender equality principles into national legislation. Subsequent rulings by the European Court of Justice introduced the concept of indirect discrimination, significantly strengthening the legal framework. In 1997, the European Union launched the European Employment Strategy (EES), which encouraged member states to develop national action plans. The EES aimed to boost employment and modernize welfare systems while integrating gender mainstreaming into all employment policies. At the Lisbon Summit in 2000, the EU set ambitious employment targets, 60% for women and 70% overall by 2010. In 2002, the Barcelona Summit introduced childcare coverage targets to support these goals. Despite these efforts, implementation remained voluntary, leading to ongoing debate regarding their effectiveness in promoting gender equity (Lewis, 2006; Rubery, 2003, 2015; Walby, 2004).

Economic research has consistently demonstrated the positive relationship between gender equality and economic development. Increasing women's participation in the labor market enhances productivity, reduces poverty, and supports sustainable growth (Kabeer, 2021; Klasen, 2006; Klasen & Lamanna, 2009; OECD, 2008; Revenga & Shetty, 2012). Eliminating discrimination in employment requires policies that ensure equal opportunities and workplace fairness (Kim et al., 2020).

Despite marginal improvements, gender parity in the labor force remains elusive. Women's global labor force participation rose from 63% in 2022 to 64% in 2023. Nevertheless, unemployment remains higher for women (4.5%) than for men (4.3%). Even when employed, women are more likely to occupy precarious or informal jobs. Since 2020, four out of five new jobs for women have been in the informal sector, compared to two out of three for men (World Economic Forum, 2023).

LinkedIn's 2023 global data reveals ongoing gender imbalances in workforce and leadership representation. While women comprise 41.9% of the global workforce across 163 countries, only 32.2% hold senior leadership roles such as Director, VP, or C-suite positions. A similar disparity exists in political leadership: although more women are assuming high-level positions, gender parity remains distant. As of December 31, 2022, 27.9% of the world's population (2.12 billion people) lived in countries with a female head of state. Gender disparities are also evident in STEM fields, where women remain significantly underrepresented. Enhancing women's economic and political participation is essential to addressing broader inequalities in households, communities, and economies (World Economic Forum, 2023).

The Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI) assesses gender parity across four key domains: Economic Participation and Opportunity, Educational Attainment, Health and Survival, and Political Empowerment. Scores range from 0 (absolute inequality) to 1 (full parity). In 2023, the global average gender gap score across 146 countries was 68.4%, reflecting a modest 0.3 percentage point improvement from 2022. While global parity was nearly achieved in Health and Survival (96%) and Educational Attainment (95.2%), gaps remained wider in Economic Participation (60.1%) and Political Empowerment (22.1%).

Regionally, Europe led with a score of 76.3%, followed by North America (75%) and Latin America and the Caribbean (74.3%). Sub-Saharan Africa (68.2%), Southern Asia (63.4%), and the Middle East and North Africa (62.6%) lagged behind (World Economic Forum, 2023). No country has achieved full gender parity. However, the top-performing nations-Iceland, Norway, Finland, New Zealand, Sweden, Germany, Nicaragua, Namibia, Lithuania, and Belgium-have closed at least 80% of

Table 1. Turkiye's global gender gap index 2023: Subindex results

Subindex	Score	Rank
Health and Survival	0.966	100
Educational Attainment	0.980	99
Political Empowerment	0.118	106
Economic Participation and Opportunity	0.500	133

Source: World Economic Forum, 2023

their gaps. Iceland leads globally for the 14th consecutive year with 91.2% gender parity.

Turkiye ranks 129th out of 146 countries, with a GGGI score of 0.638, indicating it is just over halfway toward achieving full equality (see **Table 1**). Regionally, Turkiye ranks last among Central Asian countries. While nearly reaching parity in Health and Survival and nearing it in Educational Attainment, the country remains far behind in Political Empowerment and faces persistent challenges in Economic Participation and Opportunity (World Economic Forum, 2023).

Gender Equality in Turkiye

Gender is constructed within the frameworks of institutions and culture, giving rise to diverse expressions of masculinity and femininity. Education systems play a significant role in either perpetuating or challenging existing gender stereotypes (Queisser, 2016). Schools, in particular, are influential in shaping gender identities (Connell, 1996). The social structure of schools and the actions of their constituent elements contribute to the reproduction and, in some cases, the exacerbation of gender inequalities (Aragonés-González et al., 2020). However, schools also possess the potential to initiate transformative interventions, redefining the values they promote, recognizing and addressing gender inequality, and revising academic content to eliminate the invisibility of women in curricula and to counteract sexist stereotypes (Aragonés-González et al., 2020). This dynamic is evident in Turkiye, where schools often reinforce prevailing patriarchal cultural norms (Aslan, 2021). Therefore, early intervention in the educational system is essential for promoting gender equality (Aragonés-González et al., 2020).

Recent research assessing gender equality in Turkiye indicates that despite ongoing improvements in socio-economic indicators at both national and international levels, women's position in public life remains suboptimal (Kavas, 2018). A critical discourse analysis of forty textbooks used in primary and secondary education between 2017 and 2018 revealed significant shifts in gender representation compared to earlier editions. Notably, while the 2016 textbooks lacked positive examples of gender equality, more recent materials demonstrated an increase in content that perpetuates gender-based discrimination and inequality (Bayhan & Aratemur-Çimen, 2019).

Cin and Walker (2016) identified persistent structural barriers and unequal educational opportunities faced by girls in Turkiye, criticizing national policies for failing to promote equitable access. Several studies have shown that teachers in Turkiye often uphold traditional values and patriarchal attitudes, which are shaped and sustained by deeply rooted societal stereotypes and prejudices (Aslan, 2021; Çöker, 2020). These biases contribute to the perpetuation of gender inequality within educational institutions. Furthermore, primary school learning materials have been criticized for reinforcing traditional gender roles and for marginalizing the representation of women (Bayhan & Aratemur-Çimen, 2019; Çöker, 2020).

Education is essential in enabling individuals to understand and assert their rights. Özaydınlık (2014) emphasizes that girls in Turkiye face systemic disadvantages from birth, which are reflected in multiple domains of life. Bingöl (2014) also highlights persistent gender disparities in educational and political representation, noting that women remain significantly underrepresented in political institutions. The perception of femininity as a disadvantage in political contexts contributes to women's limited participation in leadership roles. Özaydınlık (2014) further argues that despite legal frameworks ensuring equality, deeply entrenched societal norms prevent women from being perceived as equals to men. Achieving genuine equality, therefore, requires a fundamental transformation in collective mindset-a dismantling of conceptualizations that position femininity as "other."

Bal (2014) underscores that gender inequality places women at a systemic disadvantage, manifesting in poorer health outcomes, limited educational attainment, lower workforce participation, and occupational segregation into lower-paid jobs. Gender-based disparities are prevalent across Turkiye's labor market, healthcare system, decision-making structures, and education system (Selim & Ok, 2022). Despite numerous legislative efforts to increase school enrollment for girls, particularly at the primary and secondary levels, Kaya (2013) argues that these interventions have not been sufficient to eliminate regional disparities or to ensure comprehensive gender equality in education. The persistence of educational inequality illustrates the complex and multidimensional nature of gender-based disparities, which intersect with socio-economic, cultural, and political factors.

Gender-based discrimination in education functions both as a cause and consequence of broader societal inequality (Sayılan, 2012). Given education's central role in advancing gender equity, it is concerning that the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) has undertaken only limited efforts in this area. The "Improving Gender Equality in Education Project," implemented between 2014 and 2016 by the General Directorate of Secondary Education, remains the only notable government initiative. The pilot phase of the project concluded in the most recent academic year (https://www.meb.gov.tr/basin-aciklamasi/haber/17798/tr) (MEB, 2023). However, aside from this initiative, MoNE has not sustained a systematic or widespread effort to integrate gender equality into educational policy and practice.

Social norms and gendered expectations significantly influence how boys and girls are raised and educated, leading to unequal educational experiences and outcomes-especially for girls and students from marginalized communities. Cultural beliefs surrounding the appropriateness of certain professions based on gender contribute to occupational segregation and limit individual career choices (Özpolat & Gökkız, 2023). Ideally, educational systems should nurture the potential of every student, free from bias or restriction (Gedik, 2021). However, gender role socialization continues to shape

educational pathways, steering girls and boys toward traditionally "appropriate" professions. Fields associated with caregiving-such as teaching and nursing—are frequently promoted as suitable for women, often reflecting broader societal expectations that women prioritize family responsibilities (Özpolat & Gökkız, 2023).

Persistent gender disparities in Turkiye's education system have hindered the country's progress toward parity with high and very high Human Development Index (HDI) countries. While nations in these categories have nearly achieved gender parity in education, with female-to-male education indices approaching 1, Turkiye's index stood at 0.887 as of 2019. Kızılırmak et al. (2022) argue that achieving parity in both education and income indices is critical for improving Turkiye's Gender Development Index and aligning with international benchmarks.

Both national and international literature consistently emphasize the importance of women's participation in economic, social, and educational spheres as drivers of societal transformation. Despite this, a significant research gap persists in Turkiye concerning gender equality. This study aims to address that gap by systematically analyzing key indicators related to gender and educational attainment. The resulting analysis will serve as the foundation for an empirically grounded action plan designed to shift societal perceptions and promote gender-equitable representation within education and beyond.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study aims to critically investigate the current state of gender equality in Turkiye by integrating multiple dimensions, economic participation, educational attainment, labor force engagement, and socio-cultural Dynamics, within the broader framework of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5: Gender Equality. Emphasizing the transformative potential of education, the research further explores the role of schools as catalysts for social change in dismantling gender-based stereotypes and inequalities. The study ultimately seeks to develop a context-specific, school-based framework designed to advance gender-responsive education and promote long-term societal transformation.

In line with this aim, the research addresses the following questions:

RQ1 To what extent has Turkiye progressed toward achieving gender equality based on key SDG 5 indicators?

RQ2 What insights do national educational statistics provide regarding the persistence or reduction of gender disparities?

RQ3 How can an education-based framework be designed to transform social perceptions and institutionalize gender equality in schools?

To the best of our knowledge, there exists no prior comprehensive study that systematically evaluates Türkiye's gender equality performance based on SDG 5 targets and indicators while proposing a school-based transformation framework. This gap highlights the originality and scholarly

value of the present study. By addressing both national data and global frameworks in an integrated manner, our work contributes a novel perspective to the discourse on gender equality in Türkiye and offers practical, education-centered strategies for social change.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative-quantitative mixed-methods approach through comprehensive secondary data analysis, designed to provide a multi-layered understanding of gender equality indicators in Turkiye in alignment with Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5). The research design aimed to examine the interconnection between statistical trends, educational outcomes, and socio-cultural structures, with a particular emphasis on the role of schools in transforming gender norms.

Research Design

The research adopted a descriptive-comparative design, focusing on identifying trends, disparities, and contextual factors over time. The rationale for using secondary data analysis lies in its capacity to uncover macro-level patterns across extended time frames, which is essential for evaluating the progress of gender equality indicators in policy and practice. In this study, secondary data serve as a foundational element to triangulate findings across social, economic, and educational dimensions.

Multiple-source secondary datasets were collected from the following official and publicly accessible institutions:

- Turkish Statistical Institute (TUIK): Providing nationally representative datasets related to demographics, education, labor, and gender-based statistics.

- Ministry of National Education (MoNE): Offering yearly statistical publications covering educational attainment, gender parity indices, and access-to-education metrics.

- Relevant institutional reports from national bodies and international organizations such as the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) and Institute for European Environmental Policy (IEEP) (SDSN & IEDP, 2019).

The datasets span two primary periods:

1) 2013-2023: A longitudinal perspective to observe a decade of change.

2) 2020-2023: A focused lens on recent trends post-pandemic and in the context of SDG 5 updates.

Indicator Selection and Alignment with SDG 5

The selection of indicators in this study is directly aligned with the sub-targets of Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5), which seeks to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. Gender equality is a multidimensional objective, and SDG 5 outlines nine key targets to advance this goal. In this study, five core targets were selected and categorized under three thematic domains "education, gender
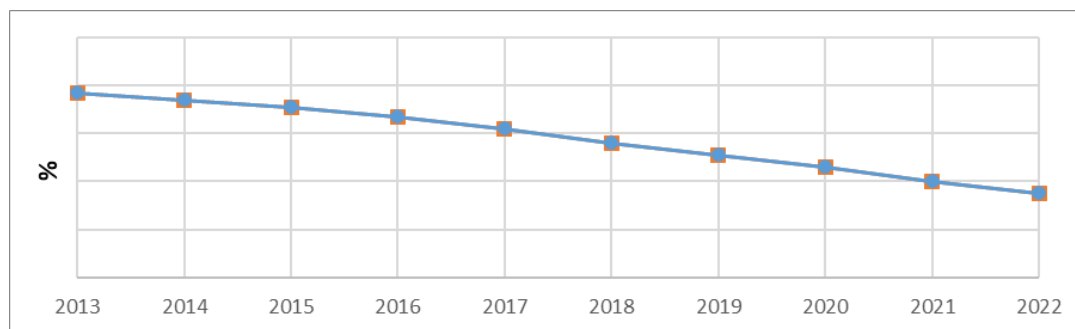
Figure 1. The proportion of women aged 20–24 who were married before the age of 18 (Data: TurkStat. (2023). Marriage Statistics, 2013-2022. https://data.tuik.gov.tr/)

stereotypes, and the economy" to reflect Turkiye's performance and progress across these critical areas.

Education-related targets

Target 5.1: Ensure universal access to education and equal opportunities at all levels. This target emphasizes the elimination of barriers to education by promoting inclusive access for all, regardless of gender or socio-demographic background, thereby directly addressing systemic discrimination in educational opportunities.

Target 5.2: Increase the educational attainment and literacy rate of women and girls. The aim is to enhance gender parity in educational outcomes and reduce disparities in literacy levels through policy initiatives and targeted programs.

Stereotype-related targets

Target 5.3: Eliminate harmful gender norms and stereotypes. This goal involves creating awareness and educational interventions to challenge societal perceptions of gender roles and expectations, which are often reproduced through formal education systems.

Target 5.4: Promote equal sharing of domestic and societal responsibilities. This target addresses the socio-cultural division of labor and calls for a reevaluation of gender roles in both private and public spheres, particularly through gender-responsive pedagogy.

Economy-related target

Target 5.5: Ensure women's full and effective participation in decision-making in political, economic, and public life. This includes increasing women's representation in leadership roles, enabling equal economic participation, and ensuring equity in decision-making structures.

To operationalize these targets, the study analyzed the following indicators based on data from national and international sources:

- Child marriage rates (Target 5.3.1)
- Female labor force participation (Target 5.5.2)
- Representation in political leadership (Target 5.5.1)
- Ownership of property and agricultural land (Target 5.a.1)
- Access to enabling technology and education (Targets 5.b.1 and 4.5.1)

Each indicator was systematically mapped to the corresponding SDG 5 target to evaluate Turkiye's policy alignment and identify persisting gender-based disparities.

Data Analysis Procedures

The following steps were followed to ensure analytical rigor:

- Descriptive statistical analysis: Trends in percentages and ratios were calculated across years to visualize progress or regression.
- Comparative analysis: Gender-disaggregated data were compared across time periods and domains (economic, educational, political).
- Contextual interpretation: Statistical findings were interpreted in light of national education and gender policies, supported by literature review.
- Triangulation: Qualitative insights from policy documents and quantitative trends were integrated to reinforce validity.

Framework Development

To address the third research question, findings from the data analysis were synthesized with insights from the literature to construct a school-based gender equality framework. This framework is theoretically grounded in gender-transformative pedagogy and contextualized to the Turkish education system.

RESULTS

To What extent has Türkiye Progressed toward Achieving Gender Equality Based on Key SDG 5 Indicators?

To address this research question, the study analyzed key indicators of gender equality outlined in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to evaluate Turkiye's current standing. The findings presented below draw upon the most recent and relevant data available for each indicator, providing a comprehensive overview of progress and remaining gaps in achieving gender equality.

The percentage of women aged 20–24 who entered into marriage or a union before the ages of 15 and 18 (Indicator 5.3.1)

The percentages presented in **Figure 1** were calculated by determining the ratio of women aged 20-24 who were married
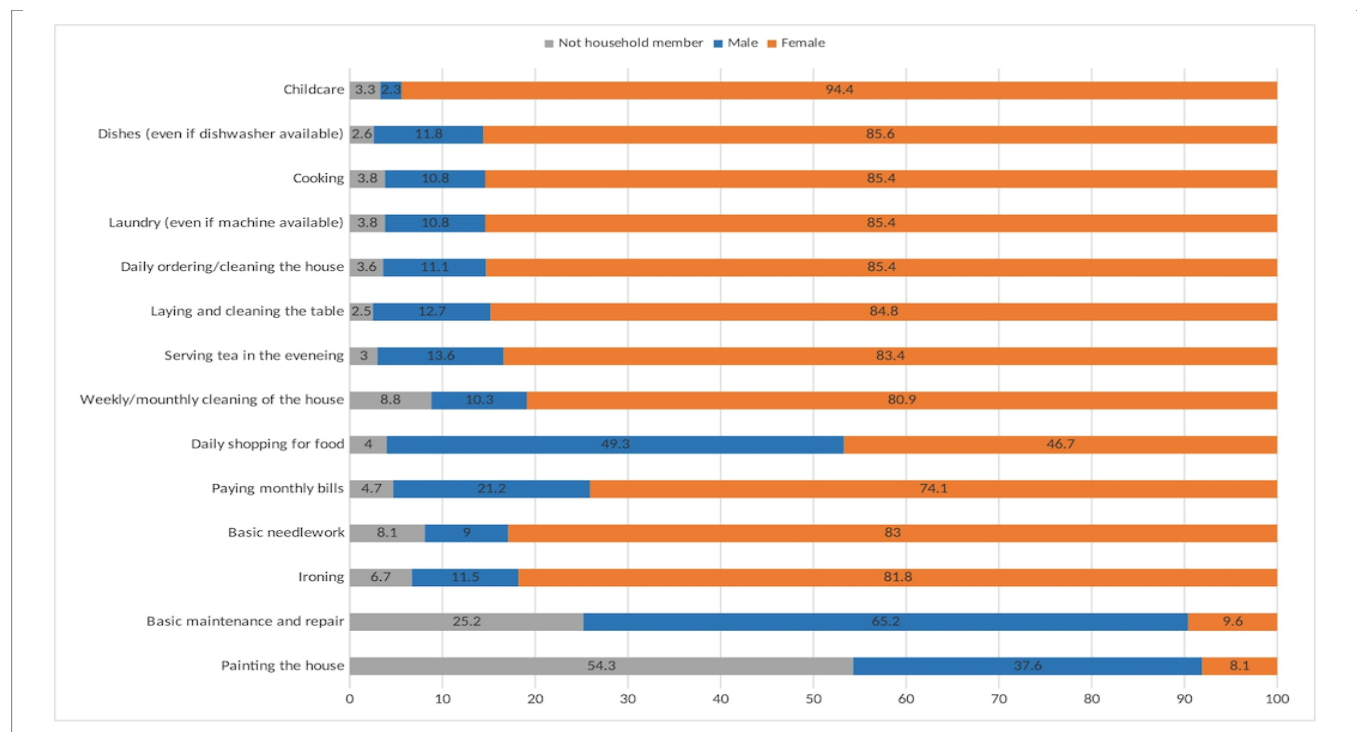
Figure 2. Individuals typically responsible for household chores (Data: TurkStat. (2023). Turk Family Structure Survey. https://data.tuik.gov.tr/)
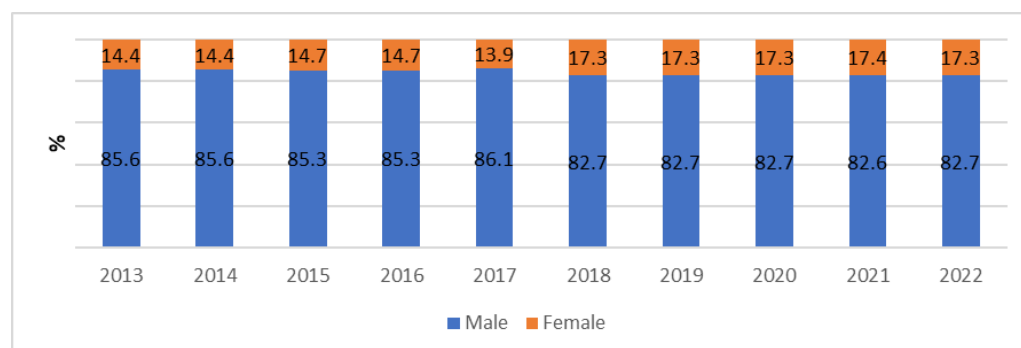

Figure 3. Seat ratio of women in the Turkish Grand National Assembly (Data: TurkStat. (2023). The Grand National Assembly of Turkiye, 2013-2022. https://data.tuik.gov.tr/)

before the age of 18 to the total female population within the same age group. Specifically, the number of women in this age cohort who were married before 18 was divided by the total number of women aged 20–24, and the result was multiplied by 100 to obtain the percentage. In 2009, 8.20% of women in this age group had been married before the age of 18. By 2022, this figure had declined to 3.50%. Although this represents a substantial reduction over the past decade, the prevalence of early marriage among young women in Turkiye remains a significant concern.

Proportion of individuals typically responsible for household chores (Indicator 5.4.1)

Domestic roles provide valuable insight into the gendered division of labor between women and men (See **Figure 2**). Empirical observations indicate that women disproportionately assume a larger share of household responsibilities, whereas men tend to engage in fewer domestic tasks. Responsibilities such as childcare, dishwashing, cooking, laundry, cleaning, and general household maintenance are predominantly performed by

women. Conversely, men are more frequently involved in tasks that are mechanically complex or physically demanding, including painting, repairs, and renovations. Furthermore, it is notable that individuals external to the household often contribute to specific activities such as painting and maintenance, reinforcing the gendered segmentation of domestic labor.

Proportion of seats held by women in (a) national parliaments and (b) local governments (Indicator 5.5.1)

The percentages presented in **Figure 3** were calculated by determining the proportion of women serving in the Turkish Grand National Assembly. This was expressed as the ratio of female members of parliament to the total number of parliamentarians, multiplied by 100.

In 2022, women constituted 17.3% of the Turkish Grand National Assembly, marking an increase from 14.4% in 2013. While the number of female representatives has grown notably over the past five years, their overall representation remains substantially lower than that of their male counterparts.
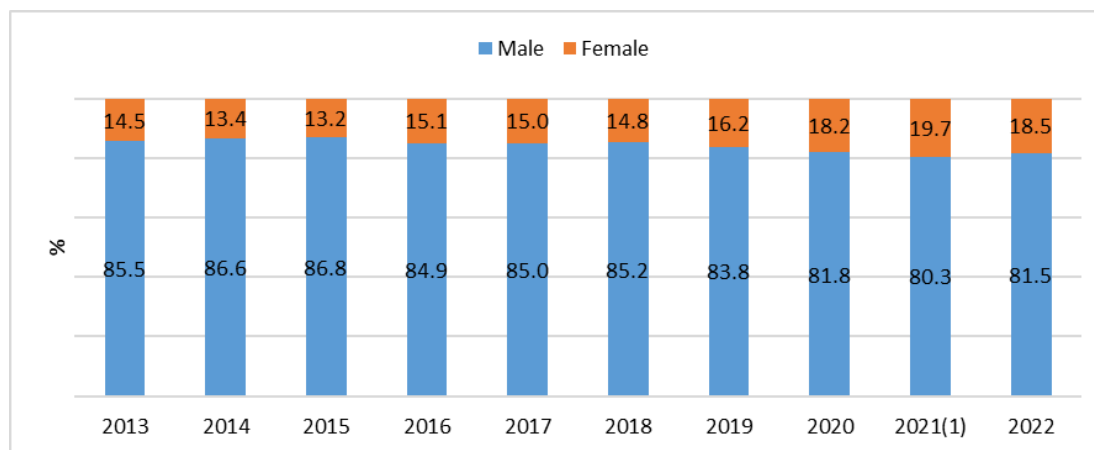
Figure 4. Distribution of individuals in management positions by sex, 2013-2022 (Data: TurkStat. (2023). TurkStat, Household Labour Force Survey. https://data.tuik.gov.tr/)
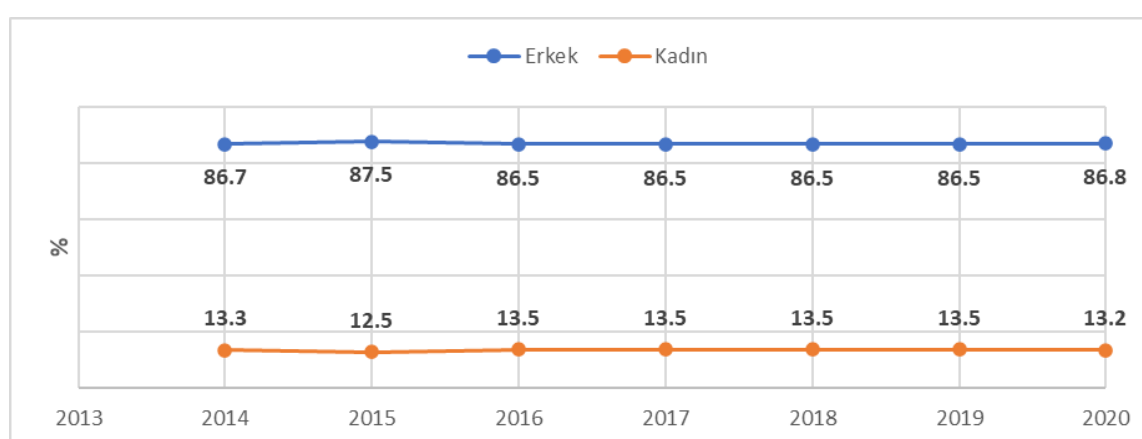

Figure 5. Distribution of agricultural land ownership by gender according to the Farmer Registration System (Data: TurkStat. (2023). General Directorate of Land Registry and Cadastre, 2014-2020. https://data.tuik.gov.tr/)

Proportion of women in managerial positions (Indicator 5.5.2)

The ratio presented in **Figure 4** was calculated by determining the proportion of women occupying senior and middle management positions relative to the total number of individuals in these roles. This was expressed as the percentage of women in managerial positions, obtained by dividing the number of women in management by the total number of individuals in such positions and multiplying the result by 100.

In 2013, women held 14.5% of management roles, a figure that increased to 18.5% by 2022. Although the representation of women in managerial positions has shown a steady upward trend since 2020, they remain significantly underrepresented in comparison to their male counterparts.

Proportion of total agricultural population with ownership or secure rights over agricultural land, by sex; and (b) share of women among owners or rights-bearers of agricultural land, by type of tenure (Indicator 5.a.1-a)

According to the Farmer Registration System, the ratios presented in **Figure 5** were calculated by determining the proportion of agricultural land owned by men and women, respectively. The ownership rate for men was calculated by dividing the number of agricultural lands owned by men by the total number of agricultural lands and multiplying the result by 100. Similarly, the ownership rate for women was calculated by dividing the number of agricultural lands owned by women by the total number of agricultural lands and multiplying by 100.

The distribution of agricultural land ownership reveals a significant gender disparity. While men own 86.8% of agricultural land, the ownership rate among women remains substantially lower, at only 13.2%.

Proportion of individuals who own a mobile telephone, by sex (Indicator 5.b.1)

The ratio presented in **Figure 6** was calculated by determining the percentage of individuals who used a mobile phone within the past three months. This was expressed as the number of individuals aged 16-74 who reported mobile phone use during the specified period (January-March of the relevant year), divided by the total population within the same age group, and multiplied by 100.

Access to enabling technologies is a critical indicator for advancing gender equality. In 2018, 89.1% of women and 96.3% of men in Turkiye reported using a mobile phone. Although mobile phone usage among women has increased since 2018, a gender gap persists-albeit one that has narrowed by 3 percentage points over the observed period.
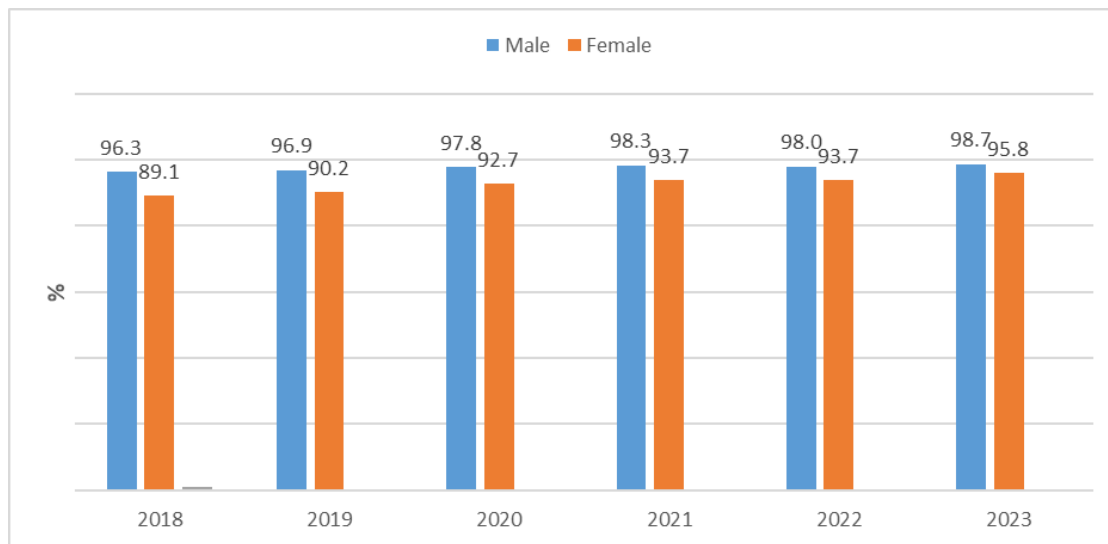
Figure 6. The proportion of individuals who have used a mobile phone in the past three months, disaggregated by sex (Data: TurkStat, (2023). Survey on Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Usage in Households and by Individuals, 2020-2023. https://data.tuik.gov.tr/) (*All household members aged group between 16-74 are included in the coverage.)

Table 2. Proportion of individuals using the internet in the last 3 months by sex and education level, 2020-2023

	No school completed		Primary school		Secondary and vocational secondary school		High and vocational high school		Higher education	
Year	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
2020	31.6	19.7	66.4	61.9	89.8	87.8	94.8	94.8	98.2	99.2
2021	37.4	27.0	69.3	65.8	93.3	90.8	95.9	97.0	98.8	99.4
2022	37.1	28.9	72.5	70.8	92.8	91.2	96.3	96.6	98.5	99,4
2023	39.0	34.4	76.9	75.0	94.6	92.3	96.7	98.0	99.3	99.5

*All household members aged group between 16-74 are included in the coverage. Data: TurkStat, (2023). Survey on Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Usage in Households and by Individuals, 2020-2023. https://data.tuik.gov.tr/

Table 3. Proportion of individuals who conducted learning activities over the internet for educational, professional or private purposes in the last 3 months by sex, 2020-2023

	Learning activity		Doing an online course		Using online learning material other than a complete online course		Communicating with educators or learners using audio or video online tools	
Year	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
2020	13.3	16.4	7.6	8.5	7.8	9.5	8.2	10.2
2021	16.4	17.8	10.8	10.5	13.0	14.4	-	-
2022	15.6	16.3	8.1	7.3	10.7	10.7	9.8	11.4
2023	18.1	19.4	8.0	8.4	10.5	12.0	12.6	14.1

*All household members aged group between 16-74 are included in the coverage. Data: TurkStat, (2023). Survey on Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Usage in Households and by Individuals, 2020-2023. https://data.tuik.gov.tr/

Internet usage rates, when analyzed by educational attainment, underscore the significant influence of education level on technology adoption (see **Table 2**). As educational attainment increases, internet usage rises accordingly, and the gender gap in usage narrows.

Technology usage is associated with Indicator 5.1.b, which captures data on the use of technology for learning activities over the past three months, disaggregated by gender (see **Table 3**). As educational attainment increases, the proportion of both women and men using the internet for learning purposes also rises. Notably, across all levels of educational attainment, the proportion of women engaging in online learning activities exceeds that of men.

Economic indicators and labor force participation are critical dimensions of gender equality (see **Table 4**). Since 2014, women's participation in the labor force has shown an

Table 4. Labour force participation rate for persons by sex, 2014-2022

Year	Total	Male	Female
2014	**53.0**	75.8	30.9
2015	**53.7**	76.1	31.9
2016	**54.4**	76.6	33.0
2017	**55.2**	76.9	34.2
2018	**55.4**	76.7	34.8
2019	**55.0**	75.9	34.8
2020	**51.7**	72.5	31.6
2021	**53.6**	74.4	33.5
2022	**55.2**	75.1	36.0

*All household members aged group between 16-74 are included in the coverage. Data: TurkStat. (2023). TurkStat, Household Labour Force Survey, 2014-2022. https://data.tuik.gov.tr/

Table 5. Formal education completed by sex, 2020-2022

		Illiterate	Literate without diploma	Primary school	Primary education	Junior high school and equivalent	High school and equivalent	Higher education	Master	Doctorate
2022	Male	0.9	1.8	17.9	11.0	14.6	27.1	21.9	3.0	0.5
	Female	5.7	6.3	26.8	8.3	11.1	18.8	18.7	2.5	0.4
2021	Male	0.9	1,9	18.6	11.4	14.7	26.5	21.3	2.9	0.5
	Female	6.0	6.6	27.6	8.5	11.1	18.3	17.8	2.4	0.4
2020	Male	3.8	4.7	23.8	10.7	13.0	21..	19.0	2.2	0.4
	Female	1.0	2.2	19.4	12.4	14.8	25,4	20.8	2.5	0.5

* Population of 25 years of age and over. Data: MoNE. (2023). MoNE, National Education Statistics Database, 2020-2022. https://sgb.meb.gov.tr/www/resmi-istatistikler/icerik/64

Table 6. Gender parity index of the gross enrolment ratio in primary, secondary and tertiary education, 2018-2021

Year	Primary education	Secondary education	Tertiary education
2018	1.008	0.938	0.963
2019	1,010	0.945	0.989
2020	1..05	0.954	1.025
2021	1,003	0.975	1.047

Data: MoNE. (2023). MoNE, National Education Statistics, Formal Education, 2018-2021. https://sgb.meb.gov.tr/www/resmi-istatistikler/icerik/64

Table 7. New framework for schools to lead social norms regarding gender equality

New framework for schools to lead social norms regarding gender equality
A.1 Define gender in its real term
A.2 Identify gender roles in the local context
A.3 Expand the use of context-specific gender roles for daily use
A.4 Eliminate common gender inequality discourse
A.5 Be sensitive to gender equality in attitudes and behaviors
A.6 Use re-constructed gender roles in all teaching and learning materials (exp. books, teaching materials and curriculum)
A.7 Foster the equitable participation of both women and men in all school activities
A.8 Promote gender responsive learning environment
A.9 Create learning environments sensitive to gender equality

upward trend. In 2022, the labor force participation rate for men was 75.1%, whereas the rate for women was 36%. This reflects a gender gap of more than 50 percentage points, underscoring a significant disparity in workforce engagement between men and women in Turkiye.

What Insights Do National Educational Statistics Provide Regarding the Persistence or Reduction of Gender Disparities?

Educational attainment plays a pivotal role in shaping gender equality. Levels of educational achievement serve as key indicators for interpreting the presence of equality or inequality between genders. The data presented in **Table 5** reveal that women's completion rates consistently lag behind those of men across all levels of education. In particular, a noticeable decline in women's higher education completion rates has been observed since 2020. Additionally, completion rates for women at the postgraduate level have remained stagnant, showing no improvement compared to 2020.

The Gender Parity Index (GPI) is a key metric for evaluating gender disparities in educational access (see **Table 6**). A GPI value below 1 indicates that girls are at a disadvantage compared to boys, while a value above 1 suggests that boys are relatively disadvantaged. In Turkiye, the GPI in primary education has shown a downward trend, reflecting a growing advantage for female students. However, in secondary education, the GPI remains below 1, indicating that girls continue to face notable barriers to accessing educational opportunities at this level. Conversely, at the tertiary level, the GPI exceeds 1, suggesting that female students benefit from relatively greater access to higher education compared to their male peers. This pattern implies that as the level of education increases, female students gain a relative advantage in terms of access and participation.

How Can an Education-Based Framework Be Designed to Transform Social Perceptions and Institutionalize Gender Equality in Schools?

Social norms are shaped through the dynamic interplay of cultural influences, educational structures, societal institutions, and collective perceptions (see **Table 7**). Empirical evidence suggests that efforts to promote gender equality primarily focus on education, social norms, and stereotypes. As such, strategic interventions targeting these domains are likely to yield greater effectiveness when implemented through educational channels, which enable broader societal engagement (Bussolo et al., 2022; Cislaghi & Heise, 2020).

Although Turkiye has made considerable progress toward achieving gender parity in educational attainment, sustained efforts are required to reshape societal perceptions. Transforming social norms entails embedding a gender-sensitive perspective into everyday practices, attitudes, behaviors, and policy frameworks, thereby promoting equality across social and institutional hierarchies. The theory of transforming social perceptions, as proposed by scholars, seeks to demonstrate how shifts in prevailing norms can contribute to greater gender equality. This theoretical framework incorporates context-specific examples that highlight key gender norms as they manifest in real-life settings, including their representation in teaching materials, interpersonal interactions, and wider societal discourses.

The proposed framework is grounded in an extensive review of the literature and informed by empirical findings from diverse studies, aligning with the strategic priorities outlined by the Council of Europe for the 2018-2023 period. It aims to articulate gender in its authentic sociocultural context

(Lindqvist et al., 2021; McConnell-Ginet, 2013; Richardson, 2015), identify and contextualize gender roles within specific local environments, and expand their practical applications in daily life (Beutel et al., 2019; Holmgren & Hearn, 2009; Oberhauser et al., 2004). Furthermore, the framework advocates dismantling prevailing discourses on gender inequality (Fiig, 2008; Gender, 2014; Lombardo & Meier, 2008), fostering awareness of gender equality in attitudes and behaviors (Alonso-Sanz & Alfonso, 2023; Dagadu et al., 2022; Yaroshenko & Semigina, 2022), integrating reconstructed gender roles into all educational materials (Mackey, 2012; Sahayu et al., 2023), promoting the active participation of both women and men in school-related activities, and cultivating learning environments that are sensitive to gender dynamics and committed to gender equality (Akhigbe, 2021; Dorji, 2020; Kahamba et al., 2017).

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

Comprehensive analysis of gender equality indicators in Turkiye reveals a complex and nuanced picture. While significant progress has been made in certain areas, particularly in educational access and literacy among women, deep-rooted disparities persist across multiple domains, including economic participation, political representation, property ownership, and stereotypical gender roles.

Women's labor force participation remains disproportionately low, standing at 36%, which is considerably behind both European averages and Turkiye's national development targets. Despite improvements over the last decade, the persistent gender gap in employment highlights the structural and cultural barriers that continue to hinder women's integration into the workforce. Comparative insights from Europe underscore the importance of state-driven policy interventions, including gender quotas and expanded public services, in promoting equitable labor force participation (López-Martínez et al., 2022; Rubery, 2015).

The issue of child marriage, though showing statistical decline, continues to pose a serious challenge. The practice is deeply embedded in gender-based inequality and carries lifelong consequences for girls' health, education, and economic autonomy. Legal frameworks alone have proven insufficient, as regional and cultural variations sustain the practice across rural and urban contexts (Nguyen & Wodon, 2015; Parsons et al., 2015; Siddiqi & Greene, 2022).

In terms of political representation, women hold only 17.3% of parliamentary seats in the Turkish Grand National Assembly, indicating substantial underrepresentation relative to global benchmarks. While global data reflect incremental improvements, Turkiye still trails behind in integrating women into political decision-making structures, which hampers gender-responsive governance (Stromquist, 2015; World Economic Forum, 2023).

Persistent gender stereotypes, reinforced by cultural norms, significantly influence labor division in both domestic and professional spheres. Women are predominantly associated with household responsibilities and "nurturing" professions such as teaching and nursing, while men dominate decision-making and technical fields. These patterns are further reinforced by traditional gender ideologies that remain embedded in social institutions, particularly schools (Bergh, 2007; Ersoy, 2009; Geist & Cohen, 2011).

Gender disparities are also evident in the domain of property ownership. Women own only 13.2% of agricultural land in Turkiye, despite their significant contribution to food production. This imbalance underscores systemic inequalities in resource access and economic empowerment (SIDA, 2009; Stromquist, 2015).

Although technology holds potential for promoting gender equity, disparities persist in access to digital tools. While Turkish women increasingly utilize the internet for educational purposes, a gender gap remains in mobile phone and internet usage. Bridging this divide is essential for expanding women's opportunities in education, employment, and health (Mackey & Petrucka, 2021; Makun et al., 2022).

Educational outcomes indicate improvement in girls' school enrollment and completion rates, particularly at the primary and secondary levels. However, recent trends show stagnation or decline at the tertiary level. Moreover, academic success has not translated into equal professional participation, suggesting the need for targeted interventions that address the social expectations limiting women's career trajectories (McCracken et al., 2015; OECD, 2019).

The Gender Parity Index (GPI) suggests positive trends at the primary level, increasingly favoring girls. However, deeper analysis reveals structural barriers at higher levels of education and employment, which prevent girls and women from transitioning into specialized fields and leadership roles (UNESCO, 2020).

Crucially, the findings reveal that these gendered inequalities are not only social but also institutionalized through policy omissions. As Karademir and Şahin (2025) emphasize in their analysis of Turkiye's response to the 2023 earthquakes, disaster governance frameworks systematically overlooked women's vulnerabilities, exposing deep institutional biases that also manifest in education and employment policies. Similarly, critiques of the Turkish Civil Code illustrate how formal legal equality masks substantive inequalities. Akalın and Gürkan (2023) highlight how the lack of practical protections in areas such as property rights and family law continues to entrench patriarchal structures and marginalize women in both private and public spheres. The communication sector, as Geysi (2025) points out, reflects another gap between policy and implementation. Despite growing awareness of gender equity, practical applications remain inconsistent and fragmented, reinforcing the need for integrated, cross-sectoral strategies. In the realm of public administration, Sarı and Sarı (2025) demonstrate that gender-blind reform initiatives fail to account for the differentiated impacts of policy on men and women, undermining inclusive governance and democratic effectiveness.

Collectively, these findings emphasize that educational institutions must play a central role in dismantling patriarchal norms and promoting gender-responsive environments. Transformative change requires embedding gender equity into every facet of the educational experience-from curriculum development to school culture and teacher training. When gender-sensitive practices are integrated holistically, schools

can serve as foundational agents for social transformation, challenging traditional stereotypes and advancing equity (Stromquist, 2015).

Ultimately, while Turkiye has made progress in select domains, achieving substantive gender equality demands coordinated policy action, systemic educational reform, and a shift in societal norms. The data and analyses presented in this study support the urgent need for a school-based gender equality framework that fosters awareness, challenges biases, and prepares future generations for a more inclusive and equitable society. While significant progress has been made in certain areas, particularly in educational access and literacy among women, deep-rooted disparities persist across multiple domains, including economic participation, political representation, property ownership, and stereotypical gender roles.

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