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A day before marking International Women's Day, representatives from TEPAV are seen revealing the results of a study on gender equality in Ankara.

# Istanbul top city for gender equality: Poll

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Istanbul has the best record in regards to gender equality among 81 Turkish provinces, while the eastern province of Bitlis has been named the least equalitarian province, according to a recent survey.

A day before marking International Women's Day on March 8, the Economic Policy Research Foundation of Turkey (TEPAV), an Ankara-based think tank, announced the results of a study titled "Social Gender Quality Report Card for 81 Provinces" yesterday.

"We have a medium-technology industry. Decreasing gender inequality is among the steps that need to be taken to ensure this industry is sustainable and proceeding to a higher level. Gender equality should be a field about which local governors should be careful, in addition to central governors," said TEPAV Executive Director Güven Sak.

The eastern province of Muş and the central province of Yozgat preceded Bitlis as the least equalitarian provinces, while the northwestern province of Bursa and the central province of Eskişehir succeeded Istanbul in the report.

TEPAV had released a similar report card for the first time in 2014. Via adopting the United Nations' gender inequality index, the new report card drafted by Asmin Kavas Urul applied four fundamental criteria on Tur-

key's provinces - health, empowerment, political representation and the labor market.

Istanbul was also on top of the list according to these criteria in 2014. The capital city of Ankara, which was 15th in 2014 advanced to 4th this year.

According to the report card, overall Turkey has made progress in eliminating gender inequality. Yet, Urul recalled that the U.N. gender inequality index was most recently updated in 2014 and Turkey was 71st in 2014. In the new list, Turkey is expected to descend to 90th, Urul said.

When asked about reasons for this estimated decline, Emre Koyuncu, program manager from TEPAV, said, "Because the data of many countries on the U.N. list is swiftly getting better. Political representation here increased from four percent to 10 percent. However, when compared to other countries, the situation seems bad."

The decisive reason which led to differences between the 2014 and 2016 reports was the participation of women in municipal councils. The eastern province of Adıyaman, for example, displayed a huge difference, as it was 40th in 2014 and declined to 75th in 2016. Looking into details in changes in Adıyaman, progress was seen in the fields of health and the labor force for women, yet there was also a significant decline in representation of women in municipal councils.



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## Gender inequality is a men's problem

Despite the fact that it is generally now romanticized into just another commercial day like Mother's Day or Valentine's Day, March 8 "Women's Day" was originally called "International Working Women's Day." The U.N. and other international organizations for gender equality, as well as national institutions across the world, now use the day to increase awareness of the subject. That is good because everyone will be made aware of just how desperate the status of women is across the globe - perhaps with the exception of a handful of developed northern democracies.

Figures released by the Turkish Statistical Institution (TÜİK) on March 7, for example, show that women in Turkey are three times more disadvantaged than men in the labor force, while the illiteracy rate among women is 9.2 percent, five times that of men.

If it is considered homogeneously across the country, these rates might be misleading. In fact, they are much starker in the predominantly Kurdish speaking and more traditional east and south-east of Turkey, compared to the more urbanized and developed central, northern and western regions.

Another study published by the Economic Policy Research of Turkey (TEPAV) on March 7 showed that gender equality in Turkey is best in Istanbul and worst in the conservative eastern city of Bitlis.

But even within Istanbul, which is the size of a country with a population of 15 million, gender equality and the treatment of women changes from district to district. The number of children that families have, their level of education, and their level (and

quality) of employment also vary based on whether the district is generally conservative/traditionalist or secular/modernist.

Even in large, modern companies the number of women directors or women on executive boards is quite limited - with the exception of a few big family companies. There is a similar situation in government. Only two provincial governors out of 81 provinces in Turkey (the northern province of Sinop and the western province of Kiklarelili) are women. There only two woman ministers in the cabinet (one of them a deputy minister) and no undersecretaries for ministers.

Abuse of women is still a major problem in Turkish society, with news of women murdered or raped every other day on papers or screens. In the Çankaya district of Ankara yesterday (March 7), the municipality renamed a park in memory of Özgecan Aslan, the university student killed in 2015 trying to resist rape by a bus driver and his friend. But on the same day in Istanbul's Ümraniye district, 27-year-old Demet Karakaş was killed by her husband after she asked for a divorce.

Awareness is rising in the media, which has gradually stopped calling these "honor killings" in line with new laws adopted for harmonization with EU legislation. But it is not enough. There are still many judges who rule for reductions in sentences for killings or abuse of women (and children) based on "good behavior in the courtroom."

It is difficult to change the law in a male-dominant society. It is even more difficult to change the macho mindset that is the main source of gender inequality.