

Is the Turkish National Action Plan to combat Violence against Women achieving its goals?

1. Violence against women in South East Turkey

In South East (SE) Turkey 1 out of 2 women are victims of violence against women (VAW) according to research. The national average is 39%. In a context of social and economic development neglect, pervasive patriarchal attitudes and militarization all contribute to high rates of VAW in the region. According to the last European Report Progress on Turkey, honour killings, early and forced marriages and domestic violence against women remain serious problems.

Abuse is perpetrated by women's own relatives through practices such as child and forced marriage, bride price, "berdel", honour crimes and domestic violence. Ka-mer, an organisation with 23 branches across the region that supports women victims of violence, has assisted 10,000 women throughout the last 12 years; since research shows that just 1% of VAW victims come forward to seek help from women's NGO, the actual number of women who have endured VAW in the region during this period could be as high as 1,000,000.

Additionally, violence by security forces (police, gendarmes and village guards) against politically active women targets those whose

The 3€ million budget allocated by the EU to tackle domestic violence produced the tools (action plan, national research) to help the Government in its efforts towards gender equality; thus, the responsibility to allocate funds for the implementation of the plan lies with the Turkish Government.

Targets and activities, along the responsible institutions for their enforcement, are established in the National Action Plan. All agents responsible for enforcement (public institutions and agencies, local governments, universities as well as the private sector) self-monitor their own effectiveness.

The Directorate on Women's Status does not plan to conduct an independent evaluation or to evaluate performance against a blueprint with benchmarks and deadlines of each enforcing party.

A budget has not been allocated to implement the NAP; enforcing parties are expected to put aside a part of their budgets to fulfill their responsibilities under it. The next NAP 2011-2015 has not been allocated a budget either.

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activism is related to taboo issues such as Kurdish self-determination. 1,400 applications of women victims of sexual abuse while in custody have been made within the last 10 years: nearly 90% cited political or war related reason as causes for their arrest. It is estimated that only 10% of women abused by security forces actually report the abuse.

Turkey is thus failing to comply with its obligations under CEDAW (Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women) and CAT (Convention against Torture). Yet, legal tools are available to tackle this problem. Overall, the legal and policy framework guaranteeing women's rights and gender equality is broadly in place in Turkey. **The National Action Plan to combat violence against women (NAP) is the most important measures among them.**

2. The poor implementation of the NAP

Enforcement mechanisms so that legislation is implemented consistently across the country are scarce. Abundant cases in the last months are proof that measures envisioned in the NAP are not in place.

Roj Women's research shows that whereas some work has been undertaken to address a few objectives of the plan (with unknown effectiveness) most of them are not acted upon. Publicly available records amount to a

repetition of the objectives and corresponding activities spelled in the Action Plan.

These reports describe activities without analyzing their impact, achievements or concluding next steps. Additionally, numerous activities carried out can hardly satisfy the objective they are expected to fulfill. Lastly, the reports notably focus on certain sub-objectives – those around which certain action has been taking -, ignoring to report on many other sub-objectives.

For example, despite **goal 4.4**, that seeks the inauguration of women's guesthouses by the municipalities and provision of support by local administrations to existing and new independent shelters, as of October 2010 the number of these shelters was 62, 11 of which were opened in 2010. The 2005 Law on Municipalities provides, however, for establishment of shelters for women in municipalities with a population of 50,000 or more. This is much lower than provided for by the law or required by the actual needs, both in terms of number of shelters and overall bed capacity. The availability and accessibility of intermediate protection and prevention services needs to be strengthened to meet the demand.

Moreover, there is no effective government oversight of shelters and of the work of municipalities. When asked what penalties a qualifying municipality would suffer if it did not build a women's shelter pursuant to the Law,

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Mural Zorluoğlu, Head of Department of Directorate General for Regional Authorities, stated that a warning was the only penalty in place.

A second instance regards **goal 2.7** that aims to incorporate gender equality and domestic violence against women in the undergraduate programs of the faculties of education, law, medicine, communication and others. To fulfill this objective, a number of workshops were delivered in different universities and colleges. Roj Women questions the effectiveness of a one-off workshop attended by a few students of particular year to achieve gender mainstreaming through the different disciplines at universities. Additionally, records of the action do not show how many students were reached or what proportion of total they represented.

Goal 6.2 is also overlooked. The local coordination boards envisaged under this goal have not been established yet. Yosma Altunbey's case is illustrative of this. In 2010 Gendarme Specialist Sergeant K.T. tried to make Yosma Altunbey withdraw a complaint against her violent husband and then assaulted her when she refused, while Sidika Platin was handed back to her violent husband due lack of shelters - that day he cut her ear off and caused her to enter a coma. These two cases happened in 2010 but similar ones occur too often. Roj Women wonders why

would local coordination boards leave these negligences unpunished as they remain today.

Similarly, **goal 4.6** that envisions the establishment of a mechanism of cooperation among institutions is not met as it is stated in the EU Progress Report 2010 (*'inter-institutional cooperation needs to be stepped up'*). *'In general'*, the EU Report goes on, *'there is a lack of an effective dialogue of the civil society organisations with the government on gender-related issues'*. Women's organisations report deterioration in their dialogue and their cooperation with relevant public institutions, at both central and local levels, which is not only in contradiction with goal 4.6, but also with **goal 3.1** which states that the government will support women's NGO's in capacity-building efforts and with funding for projects.

In the NAP Turkey commits in **goal 2.8** to inform the public opinion on gender equality related legal amendments; yet the EU Progress Report 2010 states that further training and awareness-raising on women's rights and gender equality are needed. The Kurdish Human Rights Project, commenting on the State-sponsored 'Stop Violence against Women Campaign', claims that while it may increase general awareness on the issue of domestic violence in Turkish society, it is not clear how such measures increase women's knowledge of the legal avenues available to them when they are faced with domestic violence.

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Goals 2.3 and 2.4 require the removal of negative gender roles and the incorporation of gender equality into the curriculum of formal and non-formal education programs is ignored. Once more, the EU complains that school textbooks still contain stereotypes about women's role and status.

Despite the United Nations Committee for the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women requests to produce sex-disaggregated statistics and data relating to Kurdish women and other groups of women subject to multiple forms of discrimination and their access to health, employment and education, as well as various forms of violence committed against them, and despite the fact that Turkey set itself to create indicators that shall enable national-level monitoring of domestic violence against women in **goal 6.5**, the Government does not provide much data on how or whether these reforms have truly improved women's status in society, specifically that of Kurdish women.

Goal 2.1 (preparation and distribution of visual and printed materials and campaigns targeting policy makers, service providers and the public in order to ensure the reflection of gender equality principles on policy and programs), **goal 2.2** (preparation of visual and printed materials and training programs to raise awareness and transform attitudes amongst men on gender equality and violence against women), and **goal 2.6** (preparation and broadcasting of awareness-raising programs

related to gender equality and violence against women) are complied with to a larger extent. Banners and posters were displayed on train stations and 50,000 leaflets distributed to passengers in 2008. 15,000 additional brochures were sent to provincial health centers, schools, community centers and adult education centers. The White Ribbon Campaign was launched in 2008 and followed by a conference.

3. The unsuitability of the NAP for measuring progress

Roj Women believes a comprehensive mechanism for monitoring and evaluating with detailed benchmarks and deadlines that does not rely on each enforcing party's self-assessment is essential. Else, the ambitious NAP might not render the desired results.

This is so not only because enforcing parties are unable to map out progress and gaps, and to learn from good (and bad) practice, it is also because civil society is unable to fulfill its role as ombudsman of the Turkish State's performance since monitoring the effectiveness of the implementation of the measures provided in the NAP is not possible.

Ensuring women's rights and gender equality in practice remain a challenge for Turkey not least because of its inability to measure progress and identify good and bad practice.

The Kurdish Human Rights Project observes that Turkey enumerates a series of legal

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reforms it has undertaken in compliance with Article 2 to reduce discrimination against women, such as amending Article 10 of its Constitution to provide for equality between men and women. However, Turkey fails to provide any proof of the actual effect of these legal reforms or evidence of reduced discrimination against women.

4. Roj Women Association calls for the Turkish government

Firstly, to assign a budget to the National Action Plan to combat violence against women, instead of relying on the enforcing parties to set aside a portion of their own budgets to pursue their responsibilities under the NAP.

Secondly, to develop a comprehensive monitoring system with specific benchmarks and deadlines in consultation with civil society, so that women's rights organisations can hold the government accountable.

Roj Women believes these action points would greatly contribute in the struggle to reduce violence against women in Turkey: a transparent process that allows civil society to monitor the performance of the State against its commitments spelled in the NAP. Moreover, without a monitoring system with specific benchmarks and deadlines against which progress can be measured and good practice identified, the NAP remains solely a document of good intentions.

While the NAP envisions a great number of measures that, if implemented, would surely have an enormous impact, without a budget or human resources assigned to it, implementation is very difficult.

What the European Union says about the NAP...

Implementation of the National Action Plan on gender equality and violence against women lacks sufficient human and financial resources. The action plan does not contain firm and measurable targets.

We fully share the importance of such mechanism [a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation mechanism] which will help to improve the effectiveness of the implementation [of the National Action plan in combating violence against women in Turkey]. This is one of the issues that the EU Delegation in Turkey, in its bilateral discussions with the Government, is persistently raising (...) the EU will continue to bring this issue to the attention of the Government of Turkey.