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The Efficacy of Turkish Metropolitan Municipalities on Combatting Violence against Women within the International and National Legal Framework

By Ayşe Güneş^{1*}, Feriştah Yılmaz²

Abstract

Gender equality policies make women's subordination visible in both private and public spaces in local governments. Local governments have important roles and policies, such as gender awareness-raising public meetings, promoting women's participation in the labour force, and advocating for women's empowerment. These seek to build gender-inclusive and democratic urban centres and municipalities. Failure to achieve these objectives lead to deepened inequalities between women and men during times of crisis. The effects of measures taken to contain the Covid-19 pandemic, including stay-at-home orders, lockdowns, temporary school closures, along with increasing unemployment rates, have made women's private space open to male violence. Measures taken by the central government to combat rising cases of violence against women (VAW), in particular domestic violence, have not been sufficient. The aim of this study is to evaluate the policies of metropolitan municipalities to combat VAW within the international and national legal framework during the Covid-19 pandemic. This study shows to what extent thirty metropolitan municipalities in Turkey have taken measures for combatting VAW during Covid-19. The data is gathered by using the official websites of metropolitan municipalities, municipal council meeting records, activity reports, and strategic plans. This paper concludes that metropolitan municipalities' efforts to combat VAW are not satisfactory, and the cooperation between these municipalities and central government should be strengthened to reduce VAW in Turkey.

Keywords: Covid-19, Metropolitan municipalities, Turkey, Violence against women

Introduction

Gender equality policies make women's subordination visible in both private and public spaces in local governments. Local governments have important roles and policies such as gender awareness-raising public meetings, promoting women's participation in the labour force, advocating women's empowerment, etc., to build gender-inclusive municipalities. While providing these services, women's advisory groups are established as a participatory mechanism in local government focusing on the strategic needs of women, discussing their problems, and seeking to increase women's representation in local governments. In general, local governments provide a variety of services to women and prioritize the practical needs of women (Pınarcıoğlu, 2013: 77). Importantly, violence against women (VAW) is a policy area for municipal strategic responsibility (Alkan, 2006: 50). As a public institution, local governments are required to open

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shelters to protect women from violence, to provide social, psychological, and legal support for women in counselling centres, and to extend access to social aid services (Mor Çatı Kadın Sığınağı Vakfı, 2020: 4).

Failure to achieve these policies leads to deepening inequalities between women and men during times of crisis. The effects of measures taken to contain the Covid-19 pandemic, including stay-at-home orders, lockdowns, and temporary school closures, along with increasing unemployment rates, have made women's private space open to male violence. With the health crisis and lockdown implemented in several countries to curb the spread of Covid-19, VAW has shadowed the progression of the virus (Drenjanin, 2020). Measures taken by the central government to combat the rising number of cases of VAW, in particular domestic violence, have sometimes been insufficient.

Before the pandemic, 36% of married women between the ages of 15 and 59 have experienced physical and/or sexual violence from their partners at least once in their lifetime in Turkey (Hacettepe University Institute of Population Studies and Ministry of Family and Social Policies, 2015). Turkey has been faced with a sharp increase in cases during the pandemic. According to Istanbul Security Directorate, there has been 38.2% increase in domestic violence cases in March 2020 compared to March 2019 (UN Women, 2020: 34). According to the statement of the Federation of Women's Associations of Turkey (Türkiye Kadın Dernekleri Federasyonu) whose main aim is “to work for the material and spiritual development of the society through the development of women and to provide assistance and solidarity in this regard”, physical violence against women increased by 80%, psychological violence increased by 93%, the demands for shelters increased by 78%, and violence cases without legal support increased by 96% compared to the previous year before the Covid-19 pandemic in Turkey (Güllü, 2020: 7). The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) also shared the figures of the We Will Stop Femicide Platform (Kadın Cinayetlerini Durduracağız Platformu) established in 2010 by women who want to put an end to the increasing femicide, stating that the applications regarding VAW increased by 78% (UNDP, 2020). This indicates that women's rights have suffered setbacks during the pandemic. Thus, municipalities and regions must help reverse these trends.

All forms of VAW are gender-based violence and a violation of women's human rights. VAW limits the use of public spaces in women's lives by causing fear in the home and in public. Local governments' duties include providing awareness-raising training for both women and men in reducing violence and establishing guesthouses to provide shelters for women. Local governments need to eliminate gender-based violence not only to raise social awareness but also to ensure equality between men and women (Sumbas, 2013: 34). The protection of women against violence in the public or private sphere should be seen as the duty not only of central authorities, but also the local authorities (Alkan, 2006: 27). It is necessary to raise awareness programmes on VAW, guarantee equal participation of women in local councils, ensure access to urban services, increase women's employment in rural areas, and create opportunities in urban economic life (Şenesen, et al, 2017: 10). Therefore, it is essential to increase awareness-raising programmes in order to increase knowledge and understanding among the general public of the different manifestations of all forms of violence.

The data in this paper is gathered by using the official websites of metropolitan municipalities, including municipal council meeting records, their activity reports, and their annual reports. The study adopts a qualitative research method and is based on content analysis. While evaluating the qualitative data obtained from 30 metropolitan municipalities, the research focuses on the metropolitan municipalities' policy activities on combatting VAW. In the content analysis,

the research interprets the metropolitan municipalities' policies as a gender-mainstreaming strategy such as training, counselling centres, shelters/guest houses, and awareness-raising programmes on VAW and how these policies are regulated within the national (Turkish Constitution, Municipality Law No. 5393, Metropolitan Municipality Law No. 5216) and international (Local Agenda 21, European Charter for equality of men and women in local life, CoE Resolution 279) legal framework. Although metropolitan municipalities' policies are also relevant to women in the labour force, education and health are also accepted as a gender-mainstreaming strategy, but these are not considered and are a limitation of this study. This study's content analysis only focuses on how the policies of metropolitan municipalities protect victimised women against violence. Moreover, men are not under consideration in this study. Men are also victims of violence, particularly domestic violence, but mostly it is women who face violence. Findings indicate that metropolitan municipalities' efforts to combat VAW are not satisfactory and the cooperation between municipalities and central government should be strengthened to reduce VAW in Turkey.

Local governments are one of the most important actors in the fight against violence against women. Metropolitan municipalities, as a public institution, are responsible for providing the support women need to stay away from violence. This paper is important as contributing literature since it reveals to what extent 30 metropolitan municipalities do fulfil their responsibilities to reduce VAW despite a sharp increase in cases during the Covid-19 pandemic in Turkey. It also discusses the large share in the difficulties women experience in reaching support available. As a result of the municipalities' failure to consider the fight against violence against women as their main agenda, it reveals that the existing support for victimised women has not been adequate.

The aim of this study is to evaluate the policies of metropolitan municipalities on combatting VAW within the international and national legal framework during the Covid-19 pandemic. The research question of this study is to examine to what extent thirty metropolitan municipalities in Turkey have taken measures for combatting VAW during Covid-19. The first part of this paper discusses the duties and responsibilities of local governments on VAW applying international legal texts. The second part analyses Turkish legislation and policies on women at the local level within the concept of gender mainstreaming in local authorities. Metropolitan municipalities' activities on combatting VAW during the pandemic are examined in this paper's third part.

Evaluation of Local Governments' Policies as a Gender Mainstreaming Strategy within the International Legal Framework

The reason for the existence of local government is to provide financial, administrative, political, and social services for the public. As an institution, local governments, which have an autonomous and public legal personality, contribute both to the provision of services and to the development of the culture of democracy. For instance, metropolitan municipalities' administrations have undergone effective changes with a new understanding of public administration. Due to the fact that the policy-making process at the local level is based on the interaction of different groups and organizations within the concept of governance, centralism has resulted in decentralization (Şenesen et al. 2017:4). However, when the quality of local services is poor and provided at an affordable cost, women may be at greater risk in the first place. Poverty, urban water supply, and housing problems in metropolitan cities where urban population growth is concentrated and income inequality is widest has affected women more than men. The view of

evaluating different cultures, civilizations, and political and economic structures within a single world system under the influence of the globalization process has led to the transformation of women's policies into an international issue. Gender-based division by the men of task planning at the local level has been abandoned, and it has been discussed how women and men should make decisions together at the local level and take responsibilities at the international level (Biricikoglu, 2020: 22).

The United Nations (UN) Third World Women Conference took place in Nairobi 1985 and adopted the Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women (UN, 1985). The idea of gender mainstreaming has also emerged within this document (Charlesworth, 2005: 3). Moreover, focusing on gender equality in their agenda aimed to prevent social and economic inequalities between women and men at local, regional, and international levels. Further, it was emphasised that more concrete and powerful strategies at local, regional, and international levels should be developed by considering the countries' development level to restructure the social and economic order to prevent hierarchies from being reproduced (Çağatay, et al., 1986: 410). All states have been notified of the development of preventive policies and measures to combat VAW, the adoption of legal measures, the establishment of wide-ranging support mechanisms for victims of violence (Şen, 2018: 144). Further, it was emphasized that there is the need for the creation of legislation on gender inequality applied from the local level to ensure the effectiveness of legal measures (UN, 1985: paras: 50, 60, 65, 86, 88). Along with the Nairobi Conference, the idea and tools for gender mainstreaming began to take shape. Feminists have expanded the discourse on human rights by taking advantage of UN processes and including women's rights to live free of violence; they have effectively used local governments at the level of global governance (Walby, 2006: 461).

The European Urban Charter (1992), the Vienna Declaration (1993), the Habitat II Global Action Plan (1996), the Beijing Declaration (1995), and the Cairo Declaration (1994) are among the international legal texts focusing on the strategies of gender equality and VAW (Alkan, 2000: 15, 19). Significantly, a concrete global action plan entitled Local Agenda 21 (LA21) was adopted during the UN Conference on Environment and Development (Rio Conference) held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 (UN, 1992). LA21 emphasized that “several international conventions including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and conventions of ILO and UNESCO have also been adopted to end gender-based discrimination and ensure women access to land and other resources, education and safe and equal employment” (UN, 1992: Section 3.2 para. 24.1). It also aims to “consider adopting, strengthening and enforcing legislation prohibiting violence against women and to take all necessary administrative, social and educational measures to eliminate violence against women in all its forms” (ibid., para. 24 (2) (h)). Thereby, LA21 has drawn a special task area for local governments emphasizing the need for local governments to take part in implementing policies favourable towards women. Municipalities that participated in the LA21 program have supported many women's organizations (Altnay & Arat, 2008, p. 34). At this juncture, the UN Women-Friendly Cities Joint Program was established based on strong cooperation between local governments and non-governmental organizations on gender equality as a gender mainstreaming strategy.

At the regional level, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities (CEMR) has adopted a gender mainstreaming strategy undertaking work on women participation in public life, adopting recommendations and resolutions on gender equality, particularly contributing to action combatting VAW. In 2006, Congress adopted the “European Charter for equality of men and women in local life” (Council of European Municipalities and Regions, 2006). Although the

convention introduced new regulations on gender equality on a national level, it paved the way for international cooperation and solidarity between countries on this issue. The local governments that signed and ratified the convention are under the obligation to implement local action equality plans to promote gender equality in public life. Taking concrete steps towards women victims of violence, local governments and authorities are under obligation to take preventive measures and to facilitate women's access to justice (Özsoy and Sipahi, 2016: 38). In this way, Congress adopted Resolution 279, establishing a legal basis for ensuring that local governments are responsible for combatting VAW in 2009 (COE, CLRA Resolution 279, 2009a). Resolution 279 is an important document for both central and local governments in order to provide a coordinated response to the problem of VAW. It recommends that the regional and local authorities:

- *ensure that the victims have access to a wide range of free, high-quality services, specialising in providing assistance to women and children: emergency and temporary accommodation in refuges/shelters, rehousing, local services, telephone hotlines, health care, and social welfare services;*
- *introduce perpetrators' programmes in co-operation with the NGOs working in this field so as to guarantee victims' safety;*
- *provide appropriate training for local and regional government staff and elected representatives so that they understand the dynamics and impact of domestic and sexual violence in the context of gender equality and human rights, the role of local and regional authorities in this field and the need for inter-institutional cooperation;*
- *support NGOs working in the field of domestic violence against women, given that they are key players in upholding women's rights and assisting victims, and make resources available to them;*
- *raise awareness and inform the public at large;*
- *monitor and evaluate local and regional policies, the provision of services and other local and regional initiatives;*
- *and call on their parliaments and governments to become more actively involved in combating domestic violence against women, in association with local and regional authorities, and promote the measures identified by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe to prevent such violence, protect the victims and prosecute the perpetrators (Council of Europe, 2009a: para. 5).*

Following this resolution, Congress adopted Recommendation 260 on combatting domestic VAW (Council of Europe, 2009b). By welcoming the Council of Europe Task Force to Combat Violence against Women (Task Force), including Domestic Violence, the recommendation follows the Task Force's legal regulations, such as to strengthen national legislation to protect women victims from all forms of VAW and to punish the perpetrators of violence (Council of Europe, 2009b: para. 8a). It also emphasised establishing inter-institutional cooperation at the national, regional, and local levels between all the services and (police, health, social, youth, education, housing, etc.) and actors such as NGOs (ibid.). These documents indicate how the concept of gender mainstreaming has been adopted to combat VAW and domestic violence in local governments following the international conventions such as CEDAW, CEDAW

Committee's General Recommendations No. 19 (GR No. 19) and No.35 (GR No. 35), Beijing Declaration.

In 2016, the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (The Habitat III conference), adopted the New Urban Agenda as a new outcome document. The outcome Document of The Habitat III European Regional Meeting and the Prague Declaration were published during the conference (UN, 2016). This document emphasised the need to create safe environments to live for women and young girls (ibid.). Focusing on the elimination of VAW in both the public and private spheres during the conference, providing comprehensive social, medical and legal services to help victimized women, including migrant women, to reintegrate into society were underlined, reflecting the gender mainstreaming strategy (ibid.).

When local efforts are examined, each international and regional legal instrument is built upon one another. Although there were different periods, the intersecting issues in women's policies were political participation, social and cultural activities, education, mobility (transportation), employment, gender equality and VAW. Further, these documents indicate the gender mainstreaming approach as a strategy for ensuring equality between women and men at the regional level following the UN conferences on women. The next part of this paper analyses to what extent the local governments' efforts on combatting VAW within the Turkish legislation complying with the international and regional legal regulations have been successful.

Turkish Legislation and Policies on Women in Local Governments

Almost 50% of Turkey's population (83.6 million people) is women (41.6 million people) in 2021, according to the Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK, 2021). Indicators for the future suggest that this ratio will be fully equalised by 2023 and will change in favour of women in the following years (Çevre ve Şehircilik Bakanlığı, 2014). Local governments are public legal entities that are responsible for meeting local common needs. Although the municipality is included in the Constitution as a special provincial administration and village administration, metropolitan administrations have a legal status based on the article that particular forms of government can be implemented for large settlement centres, although not directly. According to Article 127 of the Turkish Constitution (1982), "local administrations are public corporate bodies established to meet the common local needs of the inhabitants of provinces, municipal districts and villages, whose principle of constitution and decision-making organs elected by the electorate are determined by law". A municipality may be formed "in a settlement with a population of 5,000 or more" (Municipality Law No. 5393, 2005: Article 4) and "municipalities whose population falls below 2,000 shall become village" (Municipality Law no. 5393, 2005: Article 11) in Turkey. Metropolitan municipalities are defined areas with more than one provincial municipality with a population of over 750,000 according to the latest population census (Metropolitan Municipality Law No. 5216, 2004: Article 4). Although Law No. 5216, enacted in 2004, is considered a generally applicable law on metropolitan administrations, Law No. 5393 is implemented in the management of district municipalities.

In Turkey, the focus of local governments on urban services, rather than on ensuring political participation, has led to the adoption of legal legislation using only urban service-oriented decisions. Since the primary duties of municipalities is to provide physical infrastructure and many other social and cultural infrastructure, women's issues are seen as secondary duties of the local governments. Thus, activities relating to women can be neglected (Alkan, 2006: 59). Hence, the Municipal Law No. 5393 and the Metropolitan Municipality Law No. 5216 were enacted with the

public administration reform between 2004-2005, and policies towards women gained a legal basis. The duties, authorities, and responsibilities of metropolitan municipalities include developing and sustaining all kinds of social and cultural services for adults, elderly, disabled, women, young people, and children (Metropolitan Municipality Law No. 5216: Article 7/v). The foundation of the idea of establishing city councils was laid down with the introduction of LA21 in Turkey in 2005. LA21 has opened the way for women's councils to achieve gender equality in cities. City councils have a responsibility to contribute to a participatory and sustainable local democracy and particularly women's participation in sustainable urban management (Sumbas and Ömürgönülşen, 2018: 66). However, women seen only in their domestic and reproductive relationship to others, as wives, mothers, and caregivers in a patriarchal society reduce the activation of participatory mechanisms (Negiz and Üçer, 2012: 4).

Table 1: Regulations on Women's Policies in Metropolitan Municipalities, City Councils, and Commissions

Regulations on Women's Policies, City Councils, and Specialized Commissions	Metropolitan Municipalities
Metropolitan municipalities that have signed The Women-Friendly City Commitment	Adana, Ankara, Antalya, Bursa, Gaziantep, İzmir, Malatya, Mardin, Mersin, Samsun, Şanlıurfa, Trabzon ve Van.
Metropolitan municipalities that sign the European Charter for equality of men and women in local life	Adana, Antalya, Bursa, Gaziantep, İstanbul, İzmir, Mersin, Ordu ve Trabzon (Erdoğan, 2017: 144).
Metropolitan municipalities that create a specialized commission on women's policies	Adana, Ankara, Bursa, İstanbul, Konya, Ordu, Antalya, Diyarbakır, Eskişehir, Gaziantep ³ , Şanlıurfa, Trabzon, İzmir, Mersin, Kayseri ⁴
Metropolitan municipalities that do not have a Women's Council of City Council	Ankara, Aydın, Hatay, Kahramanmaraş, Konya, Mersin, Samsun ⁵ .
Metropolitan municipalities that do not have kindergarten and day care homes	Balıkesir, Denizli, Hatay, Kocaeli, Konya, Malatya, Ordu, Sakarya, Samsun, Trabzon (CEİD, 2021: 8-10).

Crucially, thirty metropolitan municipalities have established equality commissions for women and men in different titles. For instance, five metropolitan municipalities in Turkey (Ankara, Bursa, İstanbul, Konya and Ordu) established the Equal Opportunities Commission. The Commission for the Equality of Women and Men in Adana Metropolitan Municipality, Women's Problems Research and Application Centre in Diyarbakır Metropolitan Municipality, Women and Men Commission in İzmir and Mersin Metropolitan Municipalities, Women and Family Commission in Kayseri Metropolitan Municipality, Men, Women and Equality Unit Coordination Bureau in Antalya Metropolitan Municipality and Equality Units Eskişehir, Gaziantep, and Trabzon Metropolitan Municipalities have been established. This indicates that all metropolitan municipalities implement gender mainstreaming as a strategy in their policies as establishing

³Gaziantep Metropolitan Municipality has the Women and Men Equality Unit (Bayraktar, 2017: 14).

⁴Turan and Şen, 2014: 67; Bayraktar, 2017: 9, 14. Eskişehir Metropolitan Municipality, 2021, Local Equality Commission. Trabzon Metropolitan Municipality 2021, Local Equality Commission.

⁵The information was created by scanning the official websites of metropolitan municipalities.

gender equality commissions, units, and centres. For instance, Diyarbakir Women's Problems Research and Application Centre Metropolitan Municipality focuses not only on gender equality policies but also on women's problems including all forms of VAW, such as domestic violence, child marriage, polygamy, and honour killings. However, the Kayseri Metropolitan Municipality is criticised as adding the family in the title of the commission, reflecting the perception of women as members of a family rather than as 'individuals'.

Combatting all forms of VAW through ground-breaking policies has been undertaken by the local governments. One of the important roles of local governments is to establish shelters and guesthouses for victims of violence. Article 14(a) of the Municipality Law No. 5393 states that all municipalities with a population larger than 50,000 are obligated to open shelters for women and children. Yet, Article 14(a) was amended to 'a population bigger than 100,000 municipalities are obliged to open shelters' in 2012 (Law No. 6360). The number of services for women in municipalities that fulfil their responsibilities by Article 14(b) of the Law No. 5393 including social assistance or services proceeds entirely on the initiative of local administrators. According to official data, as of June 2021, *Kadının Statüsü Genel Müdürlüğü*/General Directorate for the Status of Women (KSGM) serves victims of VAW in Violence Prevention and Monitoring Centres/ŞÖNİMs in 81 provinces (Aile, Çalışma ve Sosyal Hizmetler Bakanlığı, 2019). Currently, there are 241 municipalities with a population of more than 100,000; only 32 municipalities serve with a capacity of 703 (Aile ve Sosyal Hizmetler Bakanlığı, 2021: 96). Turkey has 149 shelters/guesthouses, 32 of which are run by municipalities (ibid.) and 10 of which are run by 30 metropolitan municipalities (Şener and İnaç, 2021: 5). Supporting municipal aids, training courses, accessible health services, and providing shelters are the policies on eliminating VAW. These are important in terms of bringing a gender-sensitive perspective into municipalities managements (Alkan, 2006: 7).

This next part of this study argues that as a strategy of gender mainstreaming, most goals in the strategic plans of the metropolitan municipalities have still not been achieved during the period of the pandemic. It also reveals that Turkey has partially fulfilled its gender mainstreaming activities and policies. For instance, Istanbul and Ankara Metropolitan Municipalities' Local Equality Action Plans are reported focusing on gender equality policies in detail. It is now estimated that local equality action plans will be effective in all decisions of metropolitan municipalities towards women in local governments.

Metropolitan Municipalities' Efforts on Combatting VAW during the Pandemic

The obligations and responsibilities of the local governments on combatting VAW have classified as preventive, deterrent-protective and supportive-empowering services (Lorasdagi and Sumbas (2015: 5). Preventive and deterrent activities, includes raising awareness on VAW through film, theatre, survey and information studies, and transforming mind-sets through education (ibid.). Shelters as protective policies, psychological, medical and legal counseling, women's cooperatives, vocational courses as economic policies, and women's council and gender equality commissions as supportive and empowering policies are among the policies of local governments on VAW (ibid.).

As a part of the fight against VAW, activities such as awareness-raising and mind-set transformation, as well as the protective and preventive services and the empowerment of victims of violence are among the main responsibilities of the local governments (ibid.). Moreover, these services apply to the refugee and asylum-seeking women and children, particularly providing

preventive and protective services. The Strategy Paper and Action Plan on Women's Empowerment (2018-2023) adopted by the Ministry of Family and Social Service consists of 5 main pillars for women's empowerment, following education, economy, health, participation in decision-making mechanisms, and media (Aile, Çalışma ve Sosyal Hizmetler Bakanlığı, 2018). The action plan also obligates local government's relevant units to take action on VAW at the local level. Further, it stated that local governments are also responsible for ensuring participation in social and economic life by the victims of violence (ibid.).

Table 2: Titles of Activities Related to Violence against Women and Metropolitan Municipalities

Metropolitan Municipality	Shelters connected to Metropolitan Municipalities	Women's Counselling Centres	Psychological and Legal Counselling Telephone or Online Hotlines	Awareness-Raising Activities	International Day for the Elimination of VAW	Data Collection and Mapping	Trainings on VAW	Data Sharing with NGOs and the City Councils
Adana	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
Ankara	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES
Antalya	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
Aydın	YES	YES	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO
Balıkesir	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
Bursa	YES	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
Denizli	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
Diyarbakır	YES	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
Erzurum	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
Eskişehir	NO	YES	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
Gaziantep	YES	NO	YES	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO
Hatay	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
İstanbul	YES	YES	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
İzmir	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	NO	YES	NO
Kahramanmaraş	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
Kayseri	NO	YES	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO
Kocaeli	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
Konya	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
Malatya	NO	YES	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO
Manisa	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
Mardin	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
Mersin	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	NO	YES
Muğla	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
Ordu	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
Sakarya	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
Samsun	NO	YES	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
Şanlıurfa	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
Tekirdağ	NO	YES	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
Trabzon	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
Van	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO

Shelters and women's counselling centres were formed using an analysis of "Enhancement of Participatory Democracy in Turkey: Monitoring Gender Equality Project Phase II" (Şener and İnanç, 2021: 6-10). Other data was collected by using the websites of metropolitan municipalities and strategic plans.

VAW and domestic violence have followed the progression of the virus, through the health crisis and lockdown implemented in various countries to restraint the spread of Covid-19 (Drenjanin, 2020). Reports on VAW from numerous countries indicate that the numbers have increased significantly. According to UN Women (2020), from March 2020 onwards, calls to violence helplines increased 25% in Argentina, 33% in Singapore, and 30% in Cyprus. The number of women reporting violence increased by 30% in France, and the number of shelter applications climbed in Canada, Germany, Spain, the UK, and the US (UN Women, 2020). Although there is no official data on VAW during the pandemic in Turkey, the Fourth Action Plan for Combatting Violence Against Women (2021-2025) published by the Ministry of Family and Social Services states that “the number of calls to the ALO 183 Social Assistance Helpline increased after the outbreak, as a result of which they prioritized responding to these calls, and made it possible for women calling to report violence to do so by simply dialling zero” (Aile ve Sosyal Hizmetler Bakanlığı, 2021: 98.) Thus, it is observed that there is an increase in cases of VAW in times of crisis such as pandemics, and women may be more exposed to different types of violence due to social isolation and lockdown. Similarly, pandemics increase the risks of abuse by reinforcing existing gender inequalities and vulnerabilities. In addition, social isolation reduces the use of support services by restricting their access to these interventions. More, the focus on responding to COVID-19 cases in healthcare facilities can disrupt care and support services for victims of violence. Along with improving institutional capacity in the fight against VAW, local governments, which are important stakeholders in the fight against violence, will be required to fulfill their existing responsibilities in the process of protecting and supporting victims of violence.

The significance of confidential counselling support and outreach services for women who have experienced, or are at risk of, threats, abuse, or violence emerged during the pandemic. Women's counselling centers provide psychological and legal supports for victims of all forms of violence. Yet, women's counselling centers in metropolitan municipalities seem to provide other activities, for instance, Kahramanmaraş and Şanlıurfa Metropolitan Municipalities provide hobby activities rather than psychological and legal supports for victims (Şener and Inanç, 2021: 8-10). Counselling centers in Kayseri, Malatya, and Trabzon Metropolitan Municipalities do not provide services only for women, but for families and children. The naming of counselling centers can sometimes vary depending on the cities. For instance, in Diyarbakir Metropolitan Municipality it is called the Center for Life, and in Mardin Metropolitan Municipality it is called the Department for combating VAW. However, there are no counselling service units in Bursa, Erzurum, Gaziantep, Kocaeli, Ordu, Sakarya, and Van Metropolitan Municipalities, while the counselling service unit is in the preparation phase in Adana Metropolitan Municipality (Adana Metropolitan Municipality Annual Report, 2020: 255). During the Covid-19 pandemic, Aydın and Muğla Metropolitan Municipalities stopped their counselling centers services (Şener and Inanç, 2021: 6,9). On the other hand, the centers of Istanbul and Ankara Metropolitan Municipalities have started counselling by online chat for victims of violence (İstanbul Metropolitan Municipality Local Equality Action Plan, 2021; Ankara Metropolitan Municipality Local Equality Action Plan, 2021). Although some metropolitan municipalities have provided women's counselling services through online or telephone hot lines, most metropolitan municipalities' counselling services prioritise protecting family life and preventing divorce cases rather than providing help to victimised women.

A sharp rise in domestic violence cases⁶ shines a spotlight on the overriding inadequacies of the shelters during the pandemic. Ensuring shelters for the violence survivors' safety is an essential duty for local governments. In Turkey, there are not guest houses/shelters in twelve metropolitan municipalities (Balıkesir, Eskişehir, Kayseri, Konya, Malatya, Manisa, Mardin, Ordu, Sakarya, Şanlıurfa, Tekirdağ). Muğla and Adana Metropolitan Municipalities have started to built shelters during the pandemic. Although shelters in Denizli, Kahramanmaraş, Samsun, Trabzon and Van Metropolitan Municipalities are affiliated to the ministry, there are guest houses in Gaziantep Metropolitan Municipality at both local and ministerial levels. In addition, Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality has targets for increasing the security of shelters in accordance with the Local Equality Action Plan measures. During the pandemic, only Ankara Metropolitan Municipality opened a shelter for the victims of violence (Ankara Metropolitan Municipality Annual Report, 2020: 261). Although the establishment of guest houses is mandatory for metropolitan municipalities pursuant to Article 14(a) of the Municipality Law No. 5393, the lack of guest houses in the metropolitan municipalities where the center and local government are under the same political party management is fulfilled by the central government.

During the pandemic, only five metropolitan municipalities operated awareness-raising programs on VAW. Orange masks erected in women's workshops for violence awareness were distributed to men in Ankara Metropolitan Municipality (Ankara Metropolitan Municipality, 31 July 2020). A 50% discount on public transportation service fees was applied on International Women's day on 8th March 2021 in Izmir Metropolitan Municipality (İzmir Metropolitan Municipality, 12 February 2021). A guidebook on combating VAW was distributed to the head of neighbourhoods in Mersin Metropolitan Municipality (Mersin Metropolitan Municipality Annual Report, 2020: 50) and to the localities in Eskişehir Metropolitan Municipality (Eskişehir Metropolitan Municipality Annual Report, 2020: 277). Increasing activities of the awareness on VAW is included in Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality (İstanbul Metropolitan Municipality Local Equality Action Plan, 2020).

As part of the International Day on the Elimination of Violence Against Women on 25 November, four metropolitan municipalities organized cultural events as well as training activities during the pandemic. A cloth bag design event was organized with migrant women by Ankara Metropolitan Municipality (Ankara Metropolitan Municipality, 29 November 2020). While Malatya Metropolitan Municipality organized a panel called "Solutions to violence from women's eyes" (Malatya Metropolitan Municipality, 25 November 2020), "Local Equality Action Plan Studies and Gender Equality Information Meeting" were held in Mersin Metropolitan Municipality (Mersin Metropolitan Municipality, 12 August 2020). Izmir Metropolitan Municipality organized fifteen events on VAW (İzmir Metropolitan Municipality Annual Report, 2020, s. 115) and an online seminar entitled "The Other Side of the Coin: The Problem of Violence in Close Relations" was held in Izmir Metropolitan Municipality (İzmir Metropolitan Municipality, 09 February 2021).

Ankara and Gaziantep Metropolitan Municipalities only took part in data sharing and mapping. UN Women launched an active interactive tool called 'Purple map' application that

⁶Although the Ministry of Interior (2020) reported that domestic violence against women decreased during the Covid-19 pandemic, there are reports that contradict this statement. For instance, according to the results of a survey conducted by the Socio-Political Field Research Center (2020) with the participation of 1,873 women living in 28 cities between 3-8 April 2020, violence against women increased by 27.8% during the pandemic. Also, the report prepared by the Police Academy (2020) on the Covid-19 pandemic and its aftermath indicates that there has been an increase in domestic violence cases with the pandemic in Turkey.

indicates women centres, day care centres, and gender-responsive municipal services of Ankara Metropolitan Municipality (UN Turkey, 2021). Gaziantep Metropolitan Municipality has initiated gender-based data and gender-sensitive budgeting (Gaziantep Metropolitan Municipality Strategic Plan, 2019, s. 102). Data collection facilitates data sharing policies between the local government and non-governmental organizations. The records of VAW from Ankara Metropolitan Municipality have been shared with the Women's Solidarity Foundation (Kadın Dayanışma Vakfı). At the same time, a meeting was held by the Women and Politics Commission of Mersin City Council to evaluate the increased cases of VAW during the pandemic in Mersin Metropolitan Municipality (Mersin Metropolitan Municipality Annual Plan, 2020: 50-51). This is an example of the strengthening cooperation between metropolitan municipalities. These policies should be accepted as one of the steps that facilitates women's ability to overcome their fears and get rid of family violence in urban areas (Kern, 2019: 167).

Further, the number of specialized commissions observing gender equality in metropolitan municipalities was ten in 2014 (Turan and Şen, 2014: 67 ; Şahin Duran & Temür, 2018: 363), and increased to thirteen in 2019 (Şahin Cinoğlu, 2019: 109) and to fifteen in 2021 with Eskişehir and Trabzon (Eskişehir Metropolitan Municipality Commissions, 2021; Trabzon Metropolitan Municipality Commissions, 2021). While the practices and policies aimed at combating VAW and guaranteeing women's right to life are in question in fourteen metropolitan municipalities. Currently twenty-two municipalities have counselling centers and telephone hotlines during the pandemic (Cinoğlu, 2019: 112). Despite these positive attempts on combatting VAW, it reflects negatively on sustaining gender equality training and activities by metropolitan municipalities during the pandemic. While the number of metropolitan municipalities operating gender equality training was fourteen in 2019, it fell by half by 2021 (Cinoğlu, 2019: 112).

On the other hand, most metropolitan municipalities (about 70%) did not set any strategic targets on combatting VAW in their annual strategic plans. For instance, Adana and Mardin Metropolitan municipalities have set eliminating VAW as a strategic target in their plans.⁷ Moreover, while Ankara, Balıkesir, Gaziantep, Muğla, Erzurum, and Hatay metropolitan municipalities have set goal to increase the number and capacity of shelters⁸. Increasing the satisfaction rate in combating VAW is an aim for İzmir Metropolitan Municipality⁹. Although almost all of them have targets to strengthen women's participation in economic life, activities related to political, social, and cultural life for women have been ignored. Approximately one quarter of the metropolitan municipalities have not yet been able to fulfil their work on women's shelters, women's counseling centers, and awareness-raising activities, which are among the targets of their strategic plans. Only Ankara achieved the goal of increasing women's shelters in 2020 (Ankara Metropolitan Strategic Plan 2020-2024, 2019: 51). Kocaeli, on the other hand, did not take any action regarding women's shelters, although it reported deficiency in the number of shelters in the 2019 annual report (Kocaeli Metropolitan 2019 Annual Report, 2019: 292). The reason is stated was the inability to allocate a budget due to austerity measures (ibid.). Further, shelters (Balıkesir, Hatay, Muğla Metropolitan municipalities), counseling centers (Bursa, Hatay, Sakarya Metropolitan municipalities), women's life center or social service centers (Diyarbakır,

⁷Adana Metropolitan Municipality 2020-2024 Strategic Plan, 2019: 77 Mardin Metropolitan Municipality Strategic Plan, 2019: 20.

⁸Ankara Metropolitan Municipality 2020-2024 Strategic Plan, 2019: 15, Balıkesir Metropolitan Municipality 2020-2024 Strategic Plan, 2019: 90, Gaziantep Metropolitan Municipality 2020-2024 Strategic Plan, 2019: 63, Muğla Metropolitan Municipality 2020-2024 Strategic Plan, 2019: 18, Erzurum Metropolitan Municipality 2020-2024 Strategic Plan, 2019: 140, Hatay Metropolitan Municipality 2020-2024 Strategic Plan, 2019: 89

⁹İzmir Metropolitan Municipality 2020-2024 Strategic Plan, 2019: 93.

Trabzon Metropolitan municipalities), and awareness-raising training (Hatay Metropolitan municipalities) are policies that cannot be carried out on combatting VAW. Therefore, this study reveals that the metropolitan municipalities have not met the needs of victims of violence during the pandemic, even though they set goals in their strategic plans and annual reports.

Conclusion

During the pandemic, the priorities of the metropolitan municipalities is to sustain their counselling services by using telephone hotlines or online methods while providing social services and social assistance. Metropolitan municipalities have failed to produce a wide-ranging policy on VAW and to provide an adequate number and level of shelters. There may be a threat if the issue of violence is left entirely to the local governments and if the municipalities' share from the central budget cannot meet the costs. Providing information sharing with NGOs, local equality plans, women's assemblies, and gender equality commissions having a say in decision-making and implementation will expand policies in preventing VAW. Plans and programs created to include employment, education, health, security, and urban planning will provide a great opportunity for local governments to combat VAW.

This study argues that although preventive or protective measures on combatting VAW are expected to be taken, three metropolitan municipalities (Adana, Şanlıurfa, and Trabzon) have not taken any measures on combatting VAW, indicating that their activities and strategic plans do not have any provision to fight VAW during the pandemic. Moreover, few metropolitan municipalities focus on eliminating VAW through supporting women during the pandemic. While the demands for shelters increased by 78%, this study shows that the efforts to improve the numbers or the capacity of shelters/guesthouses was limited among the metropolitan municipalities. At this juncture, only 10 of the 30 metropolitan municipalities provide Women's Counseling Centers and 10 of them provide shelter services (Şener and İnanç, 2021:5). There are several municipalities providing services under names such as Family Counseling Center, Family Support and Education Center, and Women's Life Center (ibid.). While counseling services are provided to women in some of these centers (Trabzon, Konya), some of them focus on hobby and vocational courses (Kahramanmaraş and Şanlıurfa). There are also municipalities that have suspended the activities of the counseling centres and transferred the employees of the counseling center to social assistance during the pandemic (ibid.). One of the municipalities providing counseling center services stated that they focused on these areas of social aid, social services, or family units due to the increasing need and demand for social assistance (Mor Çatı Kadın Sığınağı Vakfı, 2020: 5). This indicates that despite the reports on VAW during the pandemic, for instance, according to the Socio-Political Field Research Center, VAW increased dramatically by 27.8%. The need for women's counseling centres and shelters has increased since they are the most important tools in women's struggle against violence. Municipalities should open these units in provinces and districts that do not have shelters and solidarity centres, and increase the number and capacity of existing units, and also should support the work of local women's organizations.

The study indicates that metropolitan municipalities in Turkey have not reached the desired level of VAW during the pandemic. Policies towards women are a secondary goal in the metropolitan municipalities. Moreover, as a strategy of gender mainstreaming, aimed at harmonizing gender in local policies, programs and services across all systems and structures remain on the paper. The concept of gender mainstreaming on making strategies should be formed by women negotiating with men at the grassroots level. Databases at the local level of violence

(shelters, the number of women victims of violence, and causes of violence against women) must be created and should be shared with the central government and civil society.

A complete change in the “subordinate position of women in society” requires structural changes; however, local governments are not mostly involved in activities that will ensure this change. These activities also indicate that strengthening the “family” institution, rather than the women’s empowerment means a backlash against the rights of women and girls. It does not seem possible to prevent VAW unless there are local policies that emphasize the status of women. Although VAW is a global problem, it should not be forgotten that its solution is possible locally. These strategies reveal the shortcomings of policy and implementation in fighting VAW in Turkey.

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