Research Article

Gender Policies of Development Agencies in Türkiye: A Comparative Research in the Context of Regional Plans

Türkiye'deki Kalkınma Ajanslarının Toplumsal Cinsiyet Politikaları: Bölge Planları Bağlamında Karşılaştırmalı Bir Araştırma

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Abstract

This research examines the gender-related policies in the regional plans of 26 development agencies in Türkiye for the 2024-2028 period using the qualitative data analysis method. In the research, the regional plans were coded under four main themes (gender equality, participation in economic life, violence and social protection, equality in education and safe spaces) and 18 sub-themes using Taguette qualitative data analysis software. The findings show that agencies frequently address gender equality in their regional plan policy texts through women's participation in economic life, while themes such as combating violence against women, social protection and education remain relatively in the background. While there is no significant difference between the regional socio-economic development level and the emphasis on gender, superficial approaches that are far from political integrity are striking in the plans of some agencies. In addition, it was observed that micro-scale determinants such as cultural codes, local norms and women's daily experiences are not sufficiently reflected in the plans. Similar results were seen in the regional vision definitions of the agencies. The research reveals that development agencies need to adopt a more transformative and inclusive gender perspective; It emphasizes the importance of considering women in policy documents not only as productive actors but also as subjects of social rights.

**Keywords:** Gender, Development Agency, Regional Plan

**JEL Classification:** J16, O20, R58

_Öz_

Bu araştırma, Türkiye'deki 26 kalkınma ajansının 2024-2028 dönemine ait bölge planlarında toplumsal cinsiyete ilişkin politikalarını nitel veri analiz yöntemiyle incelemektedir. Araştırmada Taguette nitel veri analiz yazılımı kullanılarak bölge planları dört ana tema (toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği, ekonomik yaşama katılım, şiddet ve sosyal koruma, eğitimde eşitlik ve güvenli mekânlar) ve 18 alt tema çerçevesinde kodlanmıştır. Bulgular, ajansların bölge planı politika metinlerinde toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliğini sıklıkla kadınların ekonomik yaşama katılımı üzerinden ele aldığını, ancak kadına şiddetle mücadele, sosyal koruma ve eğitim gibi temaların görece geri planda kaldığını göstermektedir. Bölgesel sosyo-ekonomik gelişmişlik düzeyi ile toplumsal cinsiyet vurgusu arasında belirgin fark bulunmazken, bazı ajansların planlarında politik bütünsellikten uzak, yüzeysel yaklaşımlar dikkat çekmektedir. Ayrıca kültürel kodlar, yerel normlar ve kadınların gündelik deneyimleri gibi mikro ölçekteki belirleyicilerin planlara yeterince yansıtılmadığı görülmüştür. Benzer sonuçlar, ajansların bölge vizyon tanımlarında da görülmüştür Araştırma, kalkınma ajanslarının daha dönüşümcü ve kapsayıcı bir toplumsal cinsiyet perspektifi

benimsemeleri gerektiğini ortaya koymakta; politika belgelerinde kadınların sadece üretken aktörler olarak değil, sosyal hak öznesi olarak da ele alınmasının önemini vurgulamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Toplumsal Cinsiyet, Kalkınma Ajansı, Bölge Planı*

JEL Sınıflandırması: *J16, O20, R58*

1. Introduction

The issue of gender is increasingly gaining importance within the framework of contemporary approaches that development policies should not only focus on economic growth but also include social justice and human rights dimensions. Ensuring equal access to opportunities for women and men in development processes is of critical importance not only in terms of securing individual rights but also in terms of building sustainable social welfare. In this context, designing and implementing public policies in a gender-sensitive manner plays a decisive role in eliminating social inequalities.

Development agencies established to ensure regional development in Türkiye operate in line with both economic growth and social integration goals. The regional plans prepared by these agencies are strategic documents that bring together national development goals and local dynamics, and are an important data source in terms of analyzing how gender equality is structured at the local level. This research examines the regional plans of 26 development agencies in Türkiye for the period 2024-2028 from a gender perspective, and aims to analyze how gender-based equality approaches are represented in the policy texts of the agencies and how regional differences are reflected in this representation.

2. Conceptual and Theoretical Framework of Gender and Development

The concept of gender is the totality of social identities and expectations constructed at the social level in connection with real or assumed gender characteristics (Waters, 2008, p. 379). JW Scott also stated with a similar definition that gender is a social category imposed on a body with sex (Scott, 2007, p. 11). The concept of gender is also used to emphasize that gender difference is different from sex, which is thought to mean "natural" or "biological" difference (Rose, 2018, p. 16-17). While gender is the psychosocial characteristics of an individual characterized as feminine or masculine, gender roles are the way femininity and masculinity are expressed in social environments (Rice, 1996). There are different views on the role played by biological structure and environmental factors on the differences between women and men and on the reflection of these in terminology. While there are those who argue that differences with a biological basis should be expressed as "sex" and differences with a sociocultural basis as "gender", there are also those who argue that the differences between women and men stem from both and that it is not appropriate to present them as separate causes (Dökmen, 2009, p. 18). Environmental conditions and biological differences of the sexes push women to be more home-centered, to jobs and professions that do not require physical strength, while men are pushed into social life, jobs and professions that require physical strength, and to a position that allows them to be influential over women (Vatandaş, 2011, p. 48).

In the creation and/or maintenance of gender, there are institutional reasons such as family, sociocultural elements, traditions, customs and traditions, taboos, religion and moral understanding, as well as economic policies, globalization and poverty, media and politics (Adaçay, 2014, p. 33). When it comes to gender equality policies, the most discussed issues are women's inequality before the law, low representation rates in parliament, low participation in administration, education, labor force and social life. It is often not seen how all these are related to women's daily life problems (Alkan, 2006, p. 15). The differences and inequalities that occur between the sexes due to the social and political structure also lead to the diversification of the needs and demands of these sexes. Gender-sensitive policy refers to a perspective that aims to develop policies that are sensitive to the needs that arise from these differences and interests and that aim to eliminate inequalities between the sexes in the long term by taking these differences into account. This approach primarily focuses on solving legal, political, social and economic problems that arise from inequalities between the sexes. In this context, it is aimed to first meet the needs of women who are victims of this unequal relationship and then to strengthen the situation of these women. Gender-sensitive policy is ultimately a policy approach that aims to take the necessary steps to eliminate inequalities and takes into account the different interests that arise from this inequality (Sumbas, 2013, p. 33).

Over time, the transfer of control from agriculture and other sectors to men as a result of technological developments has reduced women to a secondary status. In the liberal economic system, solutions such as combating poverty, women's health and education, and increasing employment are envisaged to correct this situation, and it is assumed that when the problems that the capitalist system fails are resolved, inequalities towards women will decrease on their own. Due to their roles in the production and reproduction processes, women play an important role in favor of the capital class in both international and local-regional capitalist relations. Capital accumulation processes in the world economy are carried out with the support of the patriarchal system (Rai, 2011). On the other hand, the care and production labor that women perform within the family within a loving relationship are not considered as economic activities (Beneria, 2003). In terms of gender equality, It is becoming more important today for states to increase their efforts to empower women, support other institutions and organizations, especially non-governmental organizations and the private sector, at local and national levels, expand social policy measures on issues such as empowering young girls and women, and encourage the socio-economic empowerment of women through information, education, employability support, and improving working and living conditions (Bardakçı & Oğlak, 2022, p. 87).

Development is the political interventions that enable a society to undergo a process of change and development from an undesirable level to a desired level (Thomas & Potter, 1992, p. 116). According to Haq, the main goal of development should be to create an environment that will allow people to live healthier, longer and more creative lives by increasing their choice options. However, human development is in danger unless it is gendered (Baru, 1998). According to Perrons, gender inequality is lower in countries with more organized and developed social policies. However, this framework is insufficient to explain regional differences. The industrialization history of regions and traditional gender roles affect women's participation in the workforce. Thus, regional inequalities are not only related to the economy but also to patriarchal structures. Perrons' work reveals how regional development shapes gender inequalities and how new economic models continue these inequalities. Although women's labor force participation rate is increasing, the quality of employment and sectoral distribution continue to perpetuate patriarchal patterns that limit women's economic empowerment (Perrons, 1995).

In the welfare approach, which has been applied in development since the 1950s, the focus has been on male production power in underdeveloped countries and women have been seen only as reproduction power, such as providing the conditions that will ensure the continuity of production power, feeding, caring for and cleaning men and their children (Mooser, 1993, p. 42). The developments experienced after the Second World War have highlighted that economic growth alone is not sufficient in the national development process and that it must be balanced with social, cultural, environmental and spatial dimensions in other areas of life. In a sense, this transformation, which has brought out the concept of "sustainable development", has evolved the concept of development from economic growth to social development. It has begun to be emphasized that it is a whole that includes concepts such as the size of physical production capacity, increase in income levels, the distribution of income between regions, the change in social and cultural structures, and democratization, as well as social development (Stiglitz et al. 2009). Ester Boserup's 1970 book Woman's Role in Economic Development, which remains one of the key references for gender equality–oriented development programs today (e.g., the UN Sustainable Development Goals), challenged the prevailing development theories of its time by placing women's invisible labor in the economy at the center of analysis and examining the contradictory effects of modernization on women. According to Boserup, traditional development theories ignore gender and render women's labor invisible. In the 1980s, it can be said that an understanding of "productivity" came to the fore, in which even home production was taken into account, as women were asked to participate more in the economy during the crises experienced in developing countries (Mooser, 1993, p. 69).

Since the 1990s, a new approach, the concept of "human development", has emerged that evaluates basic human needs beyond physiological and welfare needs. This approach has been developed under the leadership of many international organizations such as the United Nations, and envisages the evaluation of the social roles of both women and men together in order to ensure equality and social justice in the development processes of underdeveloped and developing countries. It has been argued that a country

can develop if problems such as nutrition, shelter and protection, as well as human rights, equal opportunities, minority representations, and gender equality are solved (Adaçay, 2017, p. 3).

In the literature on the relationship between women and development Rathgeber's The concepts and systematics of Women in Development (WID), Women and Development (WAD), Gender and Development (GAD) make important determinations. The "Women in Development" (WID) approach ignores questions about why women benefit less from development processes by taking existing social structures as data and focuses only on how to integrate women into development projects. This approach has avoided questioning the ways women are oppressed and the structural reasons behind this, and has been limited to advocating equal participation of women in education, employment and other areas. Criticisms against the WID approach have paved the way for the emergence of the "Women and Development" (WAD) approach. Instead of integrating women into development, the WAD perspective has focused on the relationships between women and development processes and has advocated the recognition of women's differences and unique roles. However, WAD has been criticized on the grounds that it is inadequate in transforming male-dominated power structures. In this process, the "Gender and Development" (GAD) approach was developed because both the WID and WAD approaches did not sufficiently take into account the structures underlying gender inequalities. GAD addressed development policies within the holistic framework of social organization; it pointed out the need to question women's material conditions and class positions, as well as patriarchal structures. It also opposed understandings that presented gender relations as natural and argued that these relations were socially constructed and could be transformed. Finally, the criticism of ignoring the cultural dimension led to the emergence of the "Women, Culture and Development" (WCD) approach. By combining cultural, critical and feminist perspectives, WCD aims to examine women's experiences in the fields of production and reproduction in a cultural context and to center women's struggles (Rathgeber, 1990, Serdaroğlu & Yavuz, 2008).

The publicly supported women's entrepreneurship development approach, which Harrison and others define as pink ghettoization, where women are concentrated in areas with limited opportunities, sometimes supports women's empowerment, but mostly reinforces niches that marginalize women. Instead of public policies based on the assumption that women are 'different' and should be addressed separately from 'male' entrepreneurship norms, women's entrepreneurship should be seen as part of economic and social structures, not a 'private' issue, in order to achieve regional development goals. As a result, women's entrepreneurship policies mostly reinforce gender inequalities rather than changing them (Harrison et al., 2020). In the context of feminist theories and development, Molyneux's distinction between "practical and strategic interests" points to an important issue in development and gender studies. In conducting a policy analysis, one should not only consider the existence of policies targeting women, but essentially examine the type of these policies and whether they transform patriarchal structures. According to Molyneux, a development project may "improve" women's lives, yet this does not necessarily mean that it emancipates them. It is therefore crucial to assess whether such projects address the structural causes underlying women's subordinate position like patriarchy, property rights and violence (Molyneux, 1985, pp. 232-233). Although assumptions that entrepreneurship in rural and urban areas can reduce gender inequalities and accelerate women's participation in public life are increasingly common, it is important to distinguish between practical and strategic needs. Some literature and practices overly praise women's entrepreneurship for enabling them to balance home and work responsibilities, implying that entrepreneurship naturally eases women's lives. However, this approach fails to challenge women's domestic burdens or present them as fully independent actors. In entrepreneurship initiatives not framed within an empowerment approach, women remain responsible for household duties, and patriarchal structures persist. Employment alternatives for women are only viable to the extent that they do not conflict with domestic responsibilities (Topateş et al., 2022, p. 1066).

According to feminist theorist N. Fraser, traditional and neoliberal development policies do not empower women but rather transform them into "cheap labor" for the capitalist system. For her, genuine feminist development should go beyond women's participation in the market and instead aim for a radical transformation that addresses how care work is socially organized, how economic resources are distributed more equitably, and how women are fully recognized not only economically but also culturally and politically (Fraser, 2013, p. 250). Similarly, Naila Kabeer's (1999) empowerment

approach advocates for women to be positioned in social life not merely as income earners but as rights-bearing citizens with equal standing. According to Kabeer, mere access to a resource (for instance, credit to start a business) or an increase in income cannot be considered empowerment if it is not achieved through a woman's own agency or does not enhance her autonomy. Defining women's empowerment in terms of their capacity to make choices, Kabeer emphasizes that empowerment must be understood not only at the individual level but also in relation to social norms and structures (Kabeer, 1999).

Amartya Sen's capabilities approach deepens this debate by moving beyond reductionist perspectives that assess women's well-being solely through economic indicators, instead focusing on individuals' "capabilities" (Sen, 1999). According to Sen, development should be measured by the expansion of people's freedom to choose and pursue the kinds of lives they value. Accordingly, women's empowerment cannot be reduced merely to an increase in their labor force participation; rather, it requires the enhancement of their opportunities to act freely across different spheres of life, including education, health, political representation, social security, and cultural participation.

Perrons and Dunford say that the obsession with gross domestic product, which is the regional development performance indicator in the axis of neoliberal policies, is only growth-oriented and ignores social welfare and gender inequalities. The solution is, more inclusive and socially sustainable regional development The answer to the question of '' What kind of local and regional development and for whom?'' lies in the unequal and geographically differentiated distribution of who benefits and loses from certain types of regional development and where. Regionally determined development models should not be developed independently of more fundamental principles and values such as democracy, equality, internationalism and justice (Pike et al. 2007). In today's developed societies, the general growth rate and average income level are no longer seen as the only indicators of development. How the income is generated, with which segments' contributions, and how it is distributed among segments and in space are also evaluated among the development indicators (Göymen, 2005).

In the context of the above-mentioned theoretical discussions and certain proposed solutions to gender-related problems, it is frequently noted that both private sector actors and public institutions resort to "gender washing." Defined as "a set of communications intended to lead the public to adopt overly positive beliefs about the impact of an organization's practices, policies, or products on girls and women" (Walters, 2021, p. 1579), gender washing—similar to "greenwashing" (pretending to be environmentally responsible)—is employed by institutions or states to create the impression of progress in gender equality without making sufficient genuine efforts. The absence of gender equality action plans, or the failure to implement them in a rational way when they exist, along with copy-paste symbolic discourses lacking structural reforms, are among the most common forms of gender washing encountered in policy practices and documents.

3. Approach of Development Plans and Development Agencies to Gender in Türkiye

In Türkiye, gender achievements that began with the Turkish Civil Code in 1926 and women being granted the right to vote and be elected in 1934 have been clearly secured by Article 10 of the Constitution of the Republic of Türkiye. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) dated 1979, which Türkiye ratified and became a party to in 1985, and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action dated 1995, include the obligations that states, civil society organizations and the private sector must undertake in achieving gender equality. The regulation of national, local and regional legislation has an important place in these obligations. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted on September 25, 2015, consist of 17 goals aimed to be achieved by 2030. United Nations member states, including Türkiye, have made commitments to achieve these goals at local, regional, national and international levels. Article 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals has been determined as 'To achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls'. In addition, 10 of the other 16 goals directly include gender in their sub-targets. The monitoring of progress on the 17 SDGs and 169 sub-targets and the creation of indicators are carried out by the Turkish Statistical Institute (TUIK).

Although significant steps have been taken in Türkiye since the 2000s to eliminate gender inequality, it is quite difficult to say that there has been serious progress in this area (UNFPA, 2021). According to the "Women in Statistics 2024" report of the Turkish Statistical Institute (TUIK), the labor force

participation rate of the population aged 15 and over in 2023 was 35.8 percent for women and 71.2 percent for men. According to the report, unlike men, the unemployment rate increases as the level of education increases in women, and women are pushed more than men to work in flexible and precarious ways. While women earn lower wages than men, the gender wage gap continues in favor of men at all levels of education (tuik.gov.tr, 2025). According to the 2024 Global Gender Gap Report published by the World Economic Forum (WEF); Türkiye ranks 127th out of 146 countries (weforum.org, 2024). World Bank G. Gender Strategy According to the Documents 2024-2030 report, women's participation in the workforce in Türkiye remains well below the world average due to reasons such as gender discrimination and restrictive gender norms (Worldbank, 2024). Women's participation in the economy and equal opportunities issues appear to be the biggest problems in both reports. According to Zorlutuna, who conducted a statistical study on how provinces in Türkiye are clustered according to gender equality indicators and the relationship between indicators and clusters; when looking at the general index, eastern and western provinces are separated from each other and it is seen that gender equality is higher in western provinces (Zorlutuna, 2024). The Gender Equality Report Card for 81 Provinces, prepared by TEPAV to measure gender equality at the provincial level and to define gender equality policies at national and international levels, examined the dimensions of "participation in education," "participation in production activities," and "representation in politics and the economy." The report revealed that "participation in production activities" is the area where Turkey needs to make the most progress in gender equality. The report also noted that women's participation in political life in Turkey, both at the local and national levels, is below the EU average (Kavas, 2018).

Moser (1993: 161–170) identifies five approaches to addressing gender inequalities in development processes: the welfare approach, which views women as passive recipients of development; the equity approach, which highlights how modern technologies displace women from traditional roles; the anti-poverty approach, which aims to reduce income inequality but is insufficient in addressing strategic gender needs; the efficiency approach, which links women's limited social participation to lack of education and low-productivity technologies; and the empowerment approach, which focuses on enhancing women's autonomy and decision-making capacity. When examining Turkey's development plans through Moser's framework, historically, Turkey has adopted the efficiency approach, which views women as instruments of economic development, and the anti-poverty approach, which sees women primarily as a means to reduce poverty. This is based on the logic of "increasing women's labor force participation so that both the economy grows and household income rises." Except for the Tenth Development Plan, policies that challenge women's gender roles and patriarchal structures, aiming to empower them (the empowerment approach), have not been consistently or permanently included in the plans. In the last two plans, it is evident that a traditional welfare approach has been reinstated, defining women as integral parts of a strong family while relegating their individual rights and social status to the background. This paints a picture in which practical needs (employment) are prioritized, whereas strategic needs (representation, decision-making power, transformation of patriarchal norms) are largely neglected.

It can be argued that the inclusion of women in the development process was not so evident until the Seventh Five-Year Development Plan (1996-2000) among the development plans implemented in Türkiye. It is noteworthy that the content of this plan, which covers the years 1996-2000, includes specific targets for women. In the eighth, ninth and tenth plans prepared in subsequent years, the proposals and policy frameworks drawn for women's participation in development processes, their participation in education, employment, decision-making mechanisms and the strengthening of women's social status have been in a direction that strengthens the relationship between women and development. It is important that the Tenth Development Plan in particular includes issues such as increasing women's participation in social, cultural and economic life in the context of gender equality; assigning a role to public policies in changing gender relations; and developing gender-sensitive budget practices (Aslanpay Özdemir & Altay 2018, p. 138). In the context of the integration of gender into development policies, the plan in which this approach was most clearly included was the Tenth Development Plan. The main reason for this is that the plan's objectives section directly refers to gender equality, demonstrating a clear will to achieve this equality. In addition, gender-sensitive budgeting, one of the policy tools of critical importance in the process of mainstreaming gender, was explicitly included only in this plan and only once (Damgacı, 2024, p. 513). When we look at the 11th Development Plan

covering the 2019-2023 period, we see that the concept of gender was removed from the plan and not used. The concept of gender was also not included in the Twelfth Development Plan covering the years 2024-2028; instead, the concept of equal opportunities between women and men was used. In the Twelfth Development Plan, where the perspective of preserving traditional gender roles and addressing women in the context of the family came to the fore, the female labor force participation rate target for 2028 was determined as 40.1% and the employment target as 36.8%. It is stated that the female labor force participation rate will be increased to 60% for 2053, and considering that the female employment rate in 11 EU countries has reached 70%, it is predicted that it will take at least 30 more years for Türkiye to reach this level (ceid.org.tr, 2025, p. 25). Despite the promises that transformative policies will be implemented due to reasons such as long-standing instability in institutional structures, the habit of restructuring, deficiencies and uncertainties in legal foundations, and lack of coordination, most of the policies made in the field of gender still do not go beyond providing social services that will only meet the practical daily needs of women (Sancar, 2021, p. 54).

As a result of the Second World War, the increasing economic and social differences between the regions and the necessity of restructuring the regions led to the establishment of regional development agencies. Although there are some differences from country to country and historically, the most obvious aim of all development agencies is to revitalize the economy in the region with policies developed by taking into account the current situations and problems of the regions in which they are located, and to contribute to the social, economic and cultural development of the people of the region with technical and financial support in line with these policies.

Türkiye's first initiative regarding development agencies began with its recognition as an EU candidate country at the Helsinki Summit in 1999. Thus, within the framework of the EU's demands, it began to shape its regional policy criteria according to the EU from that date onwards. In line with this, Türkiye grouped its 81 provinces into 26 regional units in 2002 by implementing the regionalization system made by EU member countries, namely the NUTS (Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics). In 2006, the "Law on the Establishment, Coordination and Duties of Development Agencies" numbered 5449 was adopted. Later, a total of 26 Development Agencies were gradually established (Yaman & Özcan Sarıhan, 2021, p. 225-226). The table containing the names of the development agencies and the provinces they are responsible for is included in appendix at the end of this research. Regional plans are taken as the basis in the policy design of the development agencies established to accelerate and sustain regional development. Development agencies use various data collection and analysis methods for regional plans prepared based on the knowledge and experience of local stakeholders within a dynamic and participatory process. These methods include secondary data collection, surveys, meetings, conferences, workshops, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions.

Development agencies have important roles in activities to raise awareness of women's rights, to qualify the labor market with education, to produce projects suitable for the regional structure and to provide both technical and financial support in the process of implementing these projects. The success of development agencies in these roles is that they both encourage new projects and serve the economic revitalization of the region. Recent examples prove that regional development agencies established in Türkiye create awareness about women's employment and entrepreneurship (Özaktaş & Konur, 2012, p. 79). On the other hand, as of the end of 2023, the personnel distribution of 26 development agencies in Türkiye consists of 394 women and 806 men. The share of women personnel in the total personnel corresponds to 33%. While the number of female and male personnel is equal or close to each other in some agencies (TRAKYAKA, İSTKA, İZKA, DOKA, ÇKA, BEBKA), there are serious differences between the number of female and male personnel in some other agencies (KUDAKA, KARACADAĞ, DAKA, FKA) (sanayi.gov.tr, 2025). This situation shows that some agencies do not take into account the principle of gender equality in their human resources policies.

Açıkalın's study, which questioned how grant projects for women in the region transformed or reproduced gender inequalities within the scope of the Eastern Anatolia Development Program (EADP) , implemented in Eastern Anatolia with the support of the European Union in Türkiye in the early 2000s, states that development in Türkiye was constructed from a male-dominated perspective and that women participated in development within the framework of family functions. According to the results of the study, women's social roles are limited to traditional areas such as motherhood, wife and producer, and

this situation limits the transformative potential of the projects. Concepts such as "participation", "equality" and "empowerment", which are frequently used in development discourses, often remain weak in practice due to social and cultural restrictions (Açıkalın, 2011).

4. Methodology: Analysis of 2024-2028 Regional Plans of 26 Development Agencies in Türkiye in Terms of Gender

In Türkiye, development plans are at the top of the hierarchy of basic strategy documents for regional development. This is followed by the national regional development strategy and regional plans. Regional planning is the process carried out in line with predetermined targets for the social, economic, cultural and physical development of any region or the activities of organizing the area defined as a region in the most rational way and equipping it as required by this organization (Taneri, 1986, p. 5). A Regional Plan is a strategy, coordination and guidance document prepared to determine the relationship between the policies, plans and strategies produced at the national level and the activities to be carried out at the local level for the development of a region, to strengthen the cooperation and coordination between institutions and organizations at the local level, to develop the cooperation between the public, private sector and civil society organizations; to accelerate regional development, to ensure its sustainability, to ensure the appropriate and effective use of resources and to form the basis for regional programs and projects (gmka.gov.tr, 2025). An in-depth examination of such an important policy document from many perspectives, especially gender, will contribute to the scientific literature.

In the data management phase of the research, firstly, the regional plans of the 26 development agencies in Türkiye for the years 2024-2028 were accessed. In the next phase, the downloaded and saved regional plans were uploaded to the Taguette qualitative data analysis program in the form of a pdf document. Thanks to qualitative data analysis programs, researchers can more easily deal with large amounts of qualitative data in a systematic way; thus, research findings can reach the opportunity of generalizability instead of being few, limited or idiocentric (Kuş, 2006, p. 3).

Taguette, an open access, computer-aided qualitative data analysis software tool, was used in the research. Taguette, one of the qualitative data analysis tools such as NVivo, ATLAS.ti, Dedoose and MAXQDA, directly supports the qualitative research of text materials and can qualitatively highlight sections of the text. These highlights are organized in the form of hierarchical tags that can be created, combined and recalled at any time. The program user can export a codebook as a document or spreadsheet that is a list of all tags along with their descriptions and the number of associated highlights throughout the project. Another option is to export a highlighted document where the sections highlighted by the user are marked and each is annotated with associated tags. Finally, it is possible to export a list of all highlights across documents for all tags or a specific tag or tag hierarchy (Rampin & Rampin, 2021; Kumar, 2023; library.nyu.edu, 2025; taguette.org, 2025). After the data obtained in the research was exported in excel and other formats, it was visualized with word cloud and heat map frequency graphs to increase understanding.

5. Findings of the research

The coding phase is to determine various aspects of the data and mark or label them in pieces. Coding refers to the process of separating the data converted into text into meaningful pieces and preserving the integrity of meaning between these pieces while also collecting the text or visual data into small categories of information (Creswell, 2013; Miles & Huberman, 2016). In the second phase of the application part of this research, codes and a codebook were created from the documents uploaded to the qualitative data analysis program Taguette. In the next process, main themes and sub-themes were obtained from the coded texts. In qualitative analysis, themes capture important things about the data in relation to the research question and represent certain stereotyped answers or meanings within a data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82). In the scope of this research, 4 main themes and 18 sub-themes were created under them as seen in Table 1.

Table 1: Gender Themes and Subcodes of Themes in the 2024-2028 Regional Plans of Development Agencies

Themes	Sub Codes
Theme of Gender Equality	• Gender Equality Policies • Prevention of Discrimination • Participation of Women in Decision-Making Mechanisms • Gender-Based Egalitarian Practices
Theme of Women's Participation in Economic Life	• Increasing Female Employment Rate • Women Entrepreneurship • Women's Cooperative • Unregistered Women's Employment • Social Security
Theme of Violence and Social Protection	• Victims of Violence • Preventing Violence • Social Protection Measures • Psychosocial Support Mechanisms Provided to Women
Theme of Education Equality and Safe Spaces	• Education of Girls • Vocational and Technical Empowerment of Women • Equal Opportunity in Education • Safe Urban and Rural Spaces

In table 2 the frequency analysis of gender themes and subcodes in the 2024-2028 regional plans of 26 development agencies in Türkiye, based on the main themes and subcodes determined within the scope of the research, is listed alphabetically.

Table 2: Frequency Analysis of Gender Themes and Subcodes in the 2024-2028 Regional Plans of 26 Development Agencies in Türkiye (Agencies are listed alphabetically.)

Agency Name	Gender Equality	Women's Participation in Economic Life	Violence and Social Protection	Education Equality and Safe Spaces
AHIKA	7	9	5	6
ANKARAKA	15	12	6	8
BAKA	14	9	4	8
BAKKA	18	11	7	8
BEBKA	8	12	5	7
CKA	9	10	6	7
DAKA	11	9	5	7

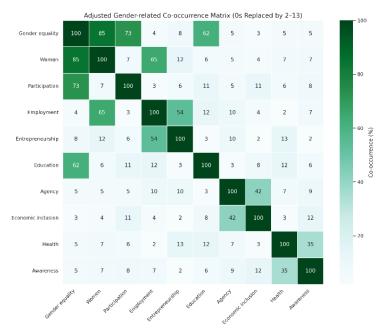|				
DIKA	13	19	11	12
DOGAKA	12	8	6	9
DOKA	8	9	6	7
FKA	18	14	9	7
GEKA	12	18	7	9
GMKA	15	18	12	10
IKA	15	12	10	8
ISTKA	15	20	12	10
IZKA	12	16	7	12
KARACADAG	9	12	4	7
KUDAKA	19	25	13	17
KUZKA	11	15	7	9
MARKA	14	11	8	7
MEVKA	8	10	5	6
OKA	8	14	6	5
ORAN	22	17	7	9
SERKA	17	21	15	11
TRAKYAKA	13	15	9	12
ZAFER	26	17	8	15
TOTAL CODES	**349**	**354**	**157**	**210**

The ZAFER regional plan stands out in the gender equality discourse. The AHIKA regional plan is in last place. In terms of women's participation in economic life, KUDAKA is in first place, while DAKA is in last place. The regional plan with the highest emphasis on violence and social protection belongs to SERKA. BAKA is the regional plan with the least emphasis on violence and social protection. Finally, the KUDAKA regional plan places the highest emphasis on equality in education and safe spaces. The OKA regional plan is the agency that places the least emphasis on this theme. In the total of the regional plans of 26 agencies, the highest emphasis is on women's participation in economic life (354). The emphasis on gender equality comes in second place (349). The emphasis on violence and social protection is striking as the least mentioned theme (157). When considered in general terms, it is understood that the regional plan policies of the agencies are shaped around the integration of women into the productive workforce, but social protection policies are ignored. Some agencies score high on certain themes only, while falling short in other areas, suggesting that the policy coherence of plans on gender is limited. shows.

Figure 1: Word Cloud of Gender Themes in the 2024-2028 Regional Plans of 26 Development Agencies in Türkiye

As seen in figure 1, this word cloud obtained from the regional plans of 26 agencies shows that gender equality is not just an "additional theme" in the policies of development agencies, but a fundamental axis. It is seen that gender policies supporting the equal participation of women in economic, social and political areas are focused on economic issues, especially labor force, entrepreneurship and employment. As seen in table 2, there are fewer emphases and policies on violence, social protection, education and safe spaces.

Figure 2: Heat Map Showing the Co-Occurrence Rates of Gender-Based Keywords in the 2024-2028 Regional Plans of 26 Development Agencies in Türkiye (Co-Occurrence Matrix)

In the heat map in Figure 2, "gender The concept of "equality" is the term with the highest rate of occurrence together with other concepts. Especially the 85% match rate with "Women" shows that development agencies consider women as a priority subject in the context of gender equality. The intense relationship established with the concepts of "Participation" (73%) and "Education" (62%) reveals that the equality discourse is constructed on the basis of women's participation in decision-making mechanisms and access to education. The 65% relationship between "Women" and "Employment" shows that women's adaptation to the labor market has an important place in agency policies. The 54% connection in the axis of "Employment" and "Entrepreneurship" reveals that women are positioned not only as participation in employment but also as productive actors through entrepreneurship. "Agency" and "Economic The "inclusion" (42%) connection shows that individual competencies and access to economic rights are addressed together at the institutional level. This pair can be associated with concepts such as access to institutional tools, especially for disadvantaged groups. The low but

significant connection between "Health" and "Awareness" (35%) shows that gender policies also include access to health services and social awareness dimensions. This shows that the agencies have internalized the social welfare-based approach to a limited extent. As a result, the general pattern of the network structure reveals that gender in regional plans is defined more in the context of strengthening women's individual capacities, ensuring their participation in economic activities and increasing educational opportunities. On the other hand, it is striking that structural themes such as social norms, domestic labor and care economy are not included in the network.

Vision is simply a definition of what an organization aims for in the future. Vision becomes apparent as a result of the common values that the organization has. Vision means not only making predictions about the future, but also making decisions (Kılıç, 2020, p. 89). Mission, vision, purpose, and values are critical aspects of an organisation's strategic framework. The mission statement specifies the functions of the organisation, the vision statement indicates its desired future state, the purpose statement explains its reason for being, and the values describe its operational ethos. All these facets are linked and should be coordinated to ensure that the organisation is advancing towards a shared aim.

It is seen that the 2024-2028 visions of 26 development agencies in Türkiye, are concentrated around five main themes. These visions reveal that Turkey, at the level of development agencies; prioritizes the green economy, desires to create a structure resilient to crises, intends to invest in innovative and digital technologies, adopts a people-centered development approach and places local potential at the center of development. While the theme of improving the quality of life, strengthening the qualified workforce and human capital is emphasized in the vision of 21 agencies, the theme of green transformation and sustainability is included in 18. The theme of digitalization and innovation is also included in the regional plan vision of 16 agencies (Table 3). When the agency vision statements are evaluated in terms of gender, it is seen that the concepts of "woman" or "gender" are not directly included, but they are indirectly expressed at a conceptual level with expressions such as "fair sharing", "inclusiveness", "quality of life" and "human capital".

Table 3: Code System and Code Frequency Table Based on the Analysis of 26 Development Agency Vision Statements

Main Code of Visions	Frequency (Number of Agencies Coded)	Percentage (%)	Subcodes / Description
Sustainability & Green Transition	18	69	References to sustainability, ecological awareness, green growth, environmental protection.
Resilience & Disaster Preparedness	13	50	Statements about being resilient to crises, disasters, and climate risks.
Innovation & Digitalization	16	62	Mentions of innovative approaches, digital transformation, entrepreneurship, technology-driven development.
Human Capital & Quality of Life	21	81	Emphasis on qualified workforce, livable cities, improved life standards, and social development.
Local Resource Optimization	15	58	Use and development of local/regional resources, spatial potential, natural and historical assets.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

As can be understood from the conceptual definitions, the concept of gender is a social, cultural and political concept that is based on the unequal power relationship between male and female identities and

that manifests itself in many areas, primarily family, economy, politics and law. Although the meanings and values attributed to women and men in all societies in the world are different from each other, it is an undoubted fact that in almost every country in the world, there are social, economic, political, cultural and regional inequalities against women in many areas such as political participation, economic freedoms, property, access to education and health services and many more.

International and national statistics and indicators show that Türkiye is still not at the desired level in terms of achieving gender equality compared to the past. In particular, differences in employment rates, women in working life being in temporary and precarious jobs, working in low-wage jobs, increasing wage differences between women and men, increase poverty and concerns about the future, and deepen gender inequalities. Temporary measures or periodic projects and ideologically-oriented approaches are often far from making women, who are already struggling to exist under unequal conditions, more equal. The perspective that defines women and assigns roles only within the family on the basis of gender affects all national and regional policies. It cannot be denied that legal regulations are not sufficient and that strong administrative mechanisms and a social mental transformation are needed for the effective implementation of these regulations.

Regional development is closely related to the living standards, needs and expectations of women in the region they live in. Although not mentioned in the last two development plans, the gender emphasis and discussions expressed in other upper-scale plans and programs in recent years also find their counterparts in local and regional planning. The implementation of women-friendly cities, the implementation of local equality action plans within municipalities and the establishment of gender equality units, gender analysis reports of development agencies, awareness-raising activities and project supports are positive developments in terms of Türkiye's gender policies. Regional plans are long-term roadmap policy documents that explain the social and economic power, vulnerabilities, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the region in question, and include a general view of the region, vision, mission, strategic priorities, goals and measures. The fact that the regional goals in the regional plans are related to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals is of critical importance in terms of monitoring the goals and performances.

Local and regional development paradigms, were examined with the qualitative data analysis method and program, it is understood that a multidimensional approach is being followed to support women in both economic and social areas in terms of gender. However, it is seen that in some of the regional plans, the conceptual framework generally remains at a technical level and the struggle with local social norms is not addressed in detail. The need for micro-level policy development, especially in terms of cultural codes and women's daily life experiences, is striking. Although almost all of the regional plans provide a policy framework that supports women's empowerment, it is seen that the realization of these goals will depend on the implementation processes of the plan. The findings obtained from the qualitative data analysis reveal that the gender perspective should be addressed more deeply and with participatory methods in future regional planning processes.

When examined according to socio-economic development levels, there is no significant difference between agency regional plans. No significant difference was observed between the gender emphasis in the regional plans of a development agency located in a socio-economically developed region and in the regional plans of an agency located in a developing or more underdeveloped region. On the other hand, it is also an important issue that draws attention that the social, structural, historical and cultural inequality realities of the regions are not sufficiently integrated into the political documents. This situation suggests that the regional plan documents do not carry a transformative but a compensatory equality perspective, that is, instead of eliminating gender inequalities, policies are produced to reduce the consequences of these inequalities. At this point, agency regional plans are not adaptive and harmonizing, but rather social gender transforming it is necessary to act with logic. Regional plans need to be developed in a more balanced and holistic manner, not only addressing gender relations in economic dimensions but also including violence against women, social protection mechanisms, safe living spaces and education. On the other hand, it is observed that the 26 development agencies examined do not prefer the concept or emphasis of gender in the vision understanding they determined in their regional plans. The 2024-2028 agency regional plan visions, where sustainable economic development, green transformation and digitalization are emphasized, are lacking in gender.

Undoubtedly, policies cannot be created by only determining a vision, but it is important because it reflects future perspectives.

In general terms, the fact that regional development agency plans aim to integrate women solely into the economic system reflects a reductionist perspective from a feminist theoretical standpoint. Therefore, development agency plans should move beyond a narrow framework that prioritizes women's economic integration and be designed with a transformative vision that strengthens their political participation, influence in decision-making mechanisms, and visibility in public spaces. Such an approach directly addresses the feminist concern of women's agency, enabling women to possess equal rights and opportunities not only economically but also socially, culturally, and politically. Although Turkey's 2024–2028 regional development plans make references to gender equality through women's entrepreneurship and employment, these objectives often remain superficial and instrumental. Consequently, the gap between the plans' "egalitarian discourse" and the "lack of practical transformation" aligns with typical examples of gender washing.

In light of the research findings, the following concrete policy recommendations are proposed to make the regional development plans of Turkey's development agencies more effective, inclusive, and transformative in terms of gender equality. Implementing these recommendations will enable development agencies to adopt a genuine gender perspective, viewing women not merely as instruments of economic growth but as empowered individuals with equal rights, while aiming to transform structural inequalities.

1. Development of Comprehensive and Integrated Gender Action Plans: Each development agency should prepare Regional Gender Action Plans that cover not only economic participation but also dimensions such as combating violence, social protection, education, health, and participation in decision-making processes, supported by measurable indicators and concrete budget allocations. These plans should be directly aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 5 (Gender Equality). This approach can ensure rational and tangible gains in gender equality without falling prey to gender washing criticisms.

2. Implementation of Gender-Responsive Budgeting (GRB) Mechanisms: The principle of GRB should be integrated into the agencies' budget preparation processes. The potential differential impacts of projects and expenditures on women, men, girls, and boys should be analyzed in advance, and budget allocations should be made to reduce inequalities. In this context, GRB training should be mandatory for agency personnel.

3. Inclusion of Local and Micro-Scale Dynamics in Planning: Planning processes should move beyond macroeconomic data alone; in collaboration with women's organizations, local activists, sociologists, and anthropologists, region-specific cultural codes, patriarchal norms, and women's everyday experiences should be deeply analyzed. These analyses should directly inform the design of micro-scale projects that respond to local needs, such as "women-friendly cities" or "safe villages."

4. Strengthening Women's Representation in Decision-Making Mechanisms: Gender quotas should be applied in agency advisory boards, working groups, and project evaluation committees, ensuring at least 50% female representation. Agencies should initiate leadership schools and mentorship programs, in collaboration with local governments and civil society, to promote women's participation in politics and local decision-making processes.

5. Avoiding the "Pink Ghetto" Trap through Sectoral Diversification: Support for women's entrepreneurship and employment should not be limited to traditionally "female" sectors (e.g., textiles, food, handicrafts). Scholarships, training, and financing programs should be developed to encourage women's participation in traditionally male-dominated sectors such as technology, renewable energy, engineering, digital marketing, and high-value agriculture.

6. Strengthening Violence Prevention and Social Protection Networks: In regional plans, combating violence against women should be treated not merely as a "social service" but as a precondition for development. Agencies should implement joint projects with local governments and civil society to establish and strengthen women's shelters, counseling hotlines, legal support mechanisms, and psychosocial support centers.

7. Improving Intra-Agency Capacity and Employment: All development agencies should establish authorized and budgeted Gender Equality Units specializing in gender issues. Human resource processes should be transparent, and employment policies should consider gender balance. Female representation in senior management positions should be increased.

8. Transforming Vision and Mission Statements: The vision and mission statements in the agencies' 2024–2028 regional plans should be revised to explicitly include terms such as "gender equality," "inclusive development," and "decent work", alongside sustainability and digitalization. This will serve as a tangible indicator of a forward-looking political commitment.

The regional plans of 26 development agencies in Türkiye, which include strategic goals and policies determined for their regions between 2024-2028, constitute the limitation of this research. Other policy documents of development agencies with similar or different approaches and methods are also suitable for examination. It is hoped that this research, which was conducted with the aim of filling a gap in the literature, will shed light on those who will conduct similar studies in the future. Finally, as UN Secretary-General António Guterres has stated, achieving gender equality and empowering women and girls is the unfinished business of our time and the world's greatest human rights challenge.

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Appendix

26 Development Agencies in Turkey (Acronyms, Level 2 Codes, Provinces)

Level 2 Code	Development Agency (Acronym)	Provinces
TR21	TRAKYAKA	Edirne, Kirklareli, Tekirdag
TR10	ISTKA	Istanbul
TR22	GMKA	Balikesir, Canakkale
TR31	IZKA	Izmir
TR32	GEKA	Aydin, Denizli, Mugla
TR33	ZEKA	Afyonkarahisar, Kutahya, Manisa, Usak
TR41	BEBKA	Bilecik, Bursa, Eskisehir
TR42	MARKA	Bolu, Duzce, Kocaeli, Sakarya, Yalova
TR51	ANKARAKA	Ankara
TR52	MEVKA	Konya, Karaman
TR61	BAKA	Antalya, Burdur, Isparta
TR62	CKA	Mersin, Adana
TR63	DOGAKA	Hatay, Kahramanmaras, Osmaniye
TR71	AHIKA	Aksaray, Kirikkale, Kirsehir, Nevsehir, Nigde
TR72	ORAN	Kayseri, Sivas, Yozgat
TR81	BAKKA	Bartin, Karabuk, Zonguldak
TR82	KUZKA	Cankiri, Kastamonu, Sinop
TR83	OKA	Amasya, Corum, Samsun, Tokat
TR90	DOKA	Artvin, Giresun, Gumushane, Ordu, Rize, Trabzon
TRA1	KUDAKA	Bayburt, Erzincan, Erzurum
TRA2	SERKA	Agri, Ardahan, Igdir, Kars
TRB1	FKA	Bingol, Elazig, Malatya, Tunceli
TRB2	DAKA	Bitlis, Hakkari, Mus, Van
TRC1	IKA	Adiyaman, Gaziantep, Kilis
TRC2	KARACADAG	Diyarbakir, Sanliurfa
TRC3	DIKA	Batman, Mardin, Sirnak, Siirt

Gender Policies of Development Agencies in Türkiye: A Comparative Research in the Context of Regional Plans

Türkiye'deki Kalkınma Ajanslarının Toplumsal Cinsiyet Politikaları: Bölge Planları Bağlamında Karşılaştırmalı Bir Araştırma

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Genişletilmiş Özet

Bu çalışma, Türkiye'deki 26 kalkınma ajansının 2024-2028 dönemi için hazırlamış oldukları bölge planlarında toplumsal cinsiyet temalı politikaların nasıl kurgulandığını inceleyen nitel bir araştırmadır. Toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği, kadının ekonomik yaşama katılımı, şiddet ve sosyal koruma ile eğitimde eşitlik ve güvenli mekânlar olmak üzere dört ana tema ve bunlara bağlı 18 alt tema çerçevesinde yapılan analizler, kalkınma ajanslarının bölgesel kalkınma stratejilerinde toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliğini nasıl konumlandırdığını ortaya koymaktadır.

Araştırma, Taguette adlı açık kaynak kodlu nitel veri analiz programı aracılığıyla gerçekleştirilmiş; ajansların bölge planları detaylı biçimde kodlanmış ve sıklık analizleri, kelime bulutları ile ısı haritaları üzerinden görselleştirilmiştir. Bulgular, ajansların toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği konusuna öncelikli olarak kadınların ekonomik yaşama dâhil edilmesi çerçevesinde yaklaştığını; şiddetle mücadele, sosyal koruma ve eğitim gibi sosyal boyutların ise görece geri planda kaldığını göstermektedir. Bu durum, ajans politikalarının üretkenlik odaklı ve ekonomik katılım temelli olduğunu, ancak yapısal eşitsizlikleri dönüştürme potansiyelinin sınırlı kaldığını ispatlamaktadır.

Toplumsal cinsiyet kavramı, bireylerin biyolojik cinsiyetlerinden çok, toplumun onlara atfettiği roller ve beklentilerle ilgilidir. Kadınların tarihsel olarak üretim ve yeniden üretim rollerine sıkıştırılması, ataerkil düzenin ekonomik ilişkilerle birleşerek kadınların toplumsal yaşamdaki yerini sınırlandırmasına neden olmuştur. Modern kalkınma paradigmasında kadınların bu yapının dışında, eşit yurttaşlar olarak ele alınması gerektiği yönünde evrilen görüşler, kalkınma planlarının toplumsal cinsiyet duyarlılığı ile ele alınmasını gerekli kılmaktadır.

Bu bağlamda, bölgesel kalkınma ajanslarının planları, ulusal kalkınma hedeflerinin yerele nasıl aktarıldığını gösteren stratejik metinlerdir. Araştırmada elde edilen bulgular, bu planlarda kadınların çoğunlukla "ekonomik aktör" olarak konumlandırıldığını ve sosyal hak öznesi olarak yeterince ele alınmadıklarını göstermektedir. Kadın girişimciliği, kadın kooperatifleri ve kadın istihdamının artırılması gibi ifadelerin planlarda sıklıkla yer almasına karşın; şiddet, sosyal koruma önlemleri, kadınların karar alma mekanizmalarına katılımı ve toplumsal cinsiyet temelli eşitsizliklerin tarihsel nedenleri gibi yapısal konulara sınırlı şekilde değinildiği görülmektedir.

Sosyoekonomik gelişmişlik düzeyi açısından ajanslar arasında belirgin bir fark bulunmaması, toplumsal cinsiyet konusundaki yaklaşımların yerel dinamiklerden çok merkezi politikalarla şekillendiğini göstermektedir. Nitekim bazı ajansların planlarında oldukça yüzeysel ve teknik ifadeler yer almakta, bölgesel kültürel normlar, kadınların gündelik yaşam pratikleri ya da ataerkil yapılar gibi mikro belirleyiciler yeterince dikkate alınmamaktadır.

Bulgular, kadınların ekonomik yaşama katılımı temasının en çok vurgulanan alan olduğunu (354 kodlama), bunu toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği temasının izlediğini (349 kodlama) ve en az değinilen alanın ise şiddet ve sosyal koruma olduğunu (157 kodlama) ortaya koymaktadır. Eğitim ve güvenli mekânlar teması ise orta düzeyde bir vurguya sahiptir (210 kodlama). ZAFER Ajansı toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği konusunu en fazla vurgulayan ajans olurken, KUDAKA Ajansı hem kadınların ekonomik yaşama katılımı hem de eğitimde eşitlik konularında en yoğun politikayı geliştiren kurum olarak öne çıkmaktadır.

Bununla birlikte, ısı haritası analizleri, "kadın" kavramının en çok "eşitlik", "katılım", "istihdam" ve "girişimcilik" gibi kavramlarla birlikte geçtiğini göstermektedir. Bu durum, ajansların toplumsal cinsiyet politikalarını bireysel yetkinlikler ve ekonomik katılım üzerinden kurguladıklarını, ancak yapısal dönüşüm gerektiren eşitsizlikleri yeterince ele almadıklarını göstermektedir. "Sağlık" ve "farkındalık" gibi kavramların daha az ilişkilenmesi, sosyal refah eksenli politikaların zayıf kaldığını göstermektedir. 26 kalkınma ajansın bölge planlarında bahsedilen vizyon ifadelerinde de toplumsal cinsiyet kavramı yer almamaktadır. Ajansların neredeyse tamamının vizyon yaklaşımı sürdürülebilir ekonomik kalkınma, yeşil dönüşüm ve dijitalleşmeye yöneliktir.

Kalkınma ajansları, kadınların ekonomik yaşamdaki konumlarını iyileştirmeye yönelik proje ve destek programları geliştirse de bu çabaların toplumsal dönüşüm yaratacak düzeye ulaşmadığı görülmektedir. Mevcut planlarda toplumsal cinsiyet perspektifi daha çok pratik gereksinimleri karşılamaya yönelik olup, stratejik dönüşüm hedeflerinden uzaktır. Kadının yalnızca "girişimci", "çalışan" ya da "üretici" kimliğiyle ele alınması; onun birey olarak sosyal haklara, siyasal temsil olanaklarına, güvenli yaşam alanlarına erişim ihtiyacını arka plana itmektedir.

Araştırma, toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği perspektifinin planlara entegrasyonunun yalnızca nicel hedefler üzerinden değil; niteliksel bir yaklaşımla, kadınların deneyimlerini ve yerel bağlamı içeren katılımcı süreçlerle sağlanması gerektiğini vurgulamaktadır. Özellikle ataerkil yapının güçlü olduğu bölgelerde, yerel değerlerin dönüşümüne yönelik politikaların oluşturulması, kültürel kodların çözümlenmesi ve kadınların gündelik yaşam deneyimlerinin dikkate alınması gerekmektedir.

Araştırmanın ulaştığı bir diğer önemli sonuç, bazı ajansların belirli temalarda yoğunlaşırken diğer temaları ihmal etmesi nedeniyle planların politik bütünlükten uzak, parçalı yapılar içerdiğidir. Örneğin, kadın girişimciliğine dair oldukça kapsamlı bölümler bulunan bazı planlarda şiddetle mücadele ya da sosyal koruma gibi konulara hiç yer verilmemektedir. Bu durum, toplumsal cinsiyet politikalarının kapsayıcı değil, sektörel temelli biçimde ele alındığını göstermektedir.

Sonuç olarak, kalkınma ajanslarının bölge planlarının kadınların sadece ekonomik sisteme uyumlaştırılmasını değil; aynı zamanda toplumsal yaşamda eşit haklara erişimlerini sağlayacak şekilde bütüncül ve dönüştürücü bir bakış açısıyla yeniden düzenlenmesi gerekmektedir. Kadınların karar alma mekanizmalarına katılımı, şiddete karşı korunmaları, sağlık ve sosyal hizmetlere erişimleri, güvenli şehir ve köylerde yaşamaları gibi konular da ajans planlarının ana ekseni hâline gelmelidir.

Bu araştırma, Türkiye'deki kalkınma ajanslarının bölge planları bağlamında toplumsal cinsiyetin nasıl yapılandığını ortaya koymakla kalmamakta, aynı zamanda gelecekte hazırlanacak bölge planları için de uyarıcı ve yönlendirici bilgiler sunmaktadır. Araştırmanın sınırlılığı, yalnızca 26 ajansın bölge planları ile sınırlı olmasıdır. Ancak benzer veya farklı nitel analiz yöntemleriyle, ajansların faaliyet raporları, projeleri ve bütçeleri gibi diğer politika belgelerinin de analiz edilmesi, toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliğinin ne ölçüde hayata geçirildiğini ortaya koymada yararlı olacaktır.