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# Women's empowerment on a local level in Turkey: the case of violence against women

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## ABSTRACT

Moving from the assumption that local governments are significant stakeholders of women's empowerment policies, this article aims to examine the struggle against violence against women (VAW) at the local level through gender-sensitive policies employed by female mayors from a gender perspective and how these can be utilized as collective transformative resources for women's empowerment. Based on a field-study, the contention of this article is that gender budgeting, gender-sensitive collective-labor contracts, and women's support centers are institutional resources for the transformation of the municipal-budget, for attitude transformation in male employees, and for sustainable empowerment policies in the struggle against VAW in municipalities in Turkey. This article, stressing the link between the struggle against VAW and women's empowerment, reveals the significance of institutionalization of gender-sensitive policies and the struggle at local level as two prominent factors taken to be into consideration in women's empowerment.

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**KEYWORDS** Women's empowerment; violence against women; municipality; gender equality in Turkey; gender policy

## Introduction

Since the 1980s, the literature on women's empowerment has associated the concept with developmental issues and thus has principally looked at it in relation to three main indicators: women's education, employment, and political participation.<sup>1</sup> The ultimate goal of women's empowerment, from this perspective, is to attain gender equality by challenging patriarchal power relations. Hence, the scholarly literature on women's empowerment in Turkey mostly concentrates on these standard indicators as essential measures of empowerment, with a specific emphasis on rural and working

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women.<sup>2</sup> In contrast to these studies, a study by Kardam and Kardam looked at women's empowerment in practice through the gender training programs provided by women's organizations, which targeted change at the personal level in terms of self-confidence and making personal choices – the 'power within' – as well as collective empowerment through participating in society as citizens – the 'power with.'<sup>3</sup> This article aims to examine women's empowerment in the struggle against violence against women (hereafter VAW) at the local level through gender-sensitive policies employed by female mayors from a gender perspective and how these can be utilized as collective transformative resources for women's empowerment. We believe that this research has a potential to fill the gap in the literature on gender and politics by focusing on the successful policy implementation of municipalities in reducing VAW. This article, stressing the link between the struggle against VAW and women's empowerment, reveals the significance of institutionalization of gender-sensitive policies and the struggle at the local level as two prominent factors that should be taken into consideration in women's empowerment.

VAW is one of the most widespread problems women face worldwide, and according to statistical data, one in three women both across the world and in Turkey are exposed to violence.<sup>4</sup> We take VAW as a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women,<sup>5</sup> as well as an outcome of gender inequality leading to women's subordination and restricted access to resources. As Kabeer has noted,<sup>6</sup> if poverty is the most significant constraint leading individuals dependent on others and disempowering women from making real choices at the individual level, being exposed to violence as a result of having no alternative is another cause of women's disempowerment that should be taken into serious consideration. Moreover, VAW is not just a personal but a collective problem for women and therefore must be combated with collective action.

Since the mid-2000s, several significant steps have been taken in Turkey to achieve gender equality at all levels of government and decision-making bodies, as well as to combat VAW. Turkey is proud to have been the first signatory of the Istanbul Convention, a Council of Europe treaty on preventing and fighting VAW and domestic violence.<sup>7</sup> But it cannot be claimed that the government has fully carried out its responsibilities in terms of combating VAW. In 2017, 409 women were documented as having been killed by men in Turkey.<sup>8</sup> The United Nations Gender Inequality Index (2016) and Global Gender Gap Index (2017) also demonstrate that Turkey needs to strengthen the institutional capacities of its state mechanisms in the pursuit of gender equality.<sup>9</sup>

We assert that the implementation of statutory responsibilities and the adoption and prioritization of gender-sensitive policies are critical for an effective struggle against VAW in terms of women's empowerment,

particularly in the highly gendered local politics in Turkey.<sup>10</sup> Here, we employ ‘gender-sensitive policies’ to refer to gender budgeting, gender-sensitive collective-labor contracts and women’s support centers as local-level resources for women’s empowerment as part of the struggle against VAW. Borrowing from Kabeer and Mosedale,<sup>11</sup> we define women’s empowerment as a process of gaining access to the resources that encourage women to become self-reliant and gain agency at the individual and collective level for the eradication of gender inequality, here with a special focus on VAW, which shifts power relations at the household, community and market level in favor of women. Based on the findings of our field research, the contention of this article is that gender-sensitive policies adopted by municipalities in Turkey governed by female mayors can function as transformative resources that empower women by reinforcing a collective institutional struggle against VAW at the local level through acting as agents for the transformation of the municipal budget, making changes in attitudes, and instituting sustainable policies of women’s empowerment. Hence, this research adds to the literature by examining good municipal-level policy practices essential for the transformation of institutions towards supporting gender equality and empowering women.

The article is divided into four parts. The first part of the article contains an overview of the literature and the conceptual background concerning women’s empowerment and gender-sensitive policy in the elimination of VAW. The second part examines the significance of women’s empowerment and gender-sensitive approaches at a local level in Turkey in terms of gender equality and VAW. The third part introduces the research design of the study and the fourth part of the article investigates gender-sensitive policies such as gender budgeting, gender-sensitive collective-labor contracts and women’s support centers in selected municipalities in Turkey as ‘transformative resources’ to empower women in the fight against VAW.

### **A conceptual overview of women’s empowerment**

The concept of women’s empowerment was first articulated in the 1980s and 1990s with the intention of transforming power relations and economic, social, and political structures by taking into account gender equality. The key steps in that regard were the UN 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, China) and the United Nations Millennium Summit in 2000 where women’s empowerment and gender-sensitive strategy were encouraged to promote gender equality and combat VAW. In particular, the third Millennium Development Goal, recommending the empowerment of women as the key policy objective, provided a solid basis for the struggle against VAW.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, since the mid-1990s, both international conventions<sup>13</sup> and women’s organizations have strongly advised the adoption of

governmental and institutional mechanisms to render policymaking gender-sensitive to eradicate gender inequality in general and VAW in particular all over the world. One hundred twenty-five countries, which ratified the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), outlawed domestic violence, and all the member states of the European Union (EU) have officially sought to foster women's empowerment. Women's empowerment has been adopted into the mainstream development discourse and most policy strategies aiming at women's empowerment prioritize the issues of women's education, health, economic development and political participation.<sup>14</sup> In this process, political actors and gender experts have devised a variety of policy tools and mechanisms to reformulate/reorganize all kinds of policy strategies from immigration, employment, micro-credit, and poverty to agriculture, health and culture from a gender perspective.<sup>15</sup>

Women need resources, capacity building, and the ability to exercise more agency in their lives in the context of gender equality, as they are presently disadvantaged and disempowered at different levels of social, economic and political relations due to their perceived gender roles and identities.<sup>16</sup> From this perspective, women's empowerment connotes a socio-political process that includes shifts in power relations between and across men and women as individuals and social groups. In this regard, empowerment is very much related to power: 'power over' (male domination), 'power to' (capacity-building), 'power within' (individual empowerment) and 'power with' (collective empowerment). Therefore, it is closely related to prevailing patterns of access and control over economic, social, political, natural and intellectual resources and the institutions that reinforce existing power relations in the socio-political realm.<sup>17</sup>

Due to the symbiotic relation of gender equality and women's empowerment, the notion of women's empowerment should address a broader framework which includes various attempts and policies that are part of the struggle against different sorts of gender-based discrimination and inequality issues within society.<sup>18</sup> One such issue is VAW. Generally, the research focusing on women's empowerment and VAW approach the issue from an economic perspective in the extent of micro-rural credit programs in eliminating violence.<sup>19</sup> Yet, as Kabeer and Batliwala note, in addition to the contribution of access to financial services, there is a need for other transformative interventions and resources to distribute power throughout institutions and interpersonal relations for empowering women which are contingent on context.<sup>20</sup> These transformative resources are prominent means for the achievement of women's capacity building which is one of the primary goals of women's empowerment, through satisfying their practical and strategic needs and inspiring change in their status at a collective level. Hence, the transformative resources of women's empowerment, building the individual and collective

capacity of women, can constitute to progress to sustain gender equality in the long run. However, since institutional bias can constrain one's ability to make strategic choices, this progress can be accomplished through the transformation of institutional mechanisms and the presence of accountable authorities with regard to the problems of inequality and violence in order to undermine the systematic reproduction of gender inequality<sup>21</sup> and to create real social transformation.<sup>22</sup>

Kabeer conceptualizes women's empowerment in three dimensions: agency (the processes by which choices are made), resources (the medium through which agency is exercised) and achievement (the outcomes of agency).<sup>23</sup> We regard gender-sensitive policies such as gender budgeting, gender-sensitive collective-labor contracts and women's support centers as transformative resources, and going some way to an effective struggle against VAW as their achievement. At this juncture, these gender-sensitive policies have been implemented by municipalities in institutional forms, but they may serve to help attain gender equality and empower women at the individual and collective level concerning VAW, which remains on the sidelines as a 'cost' or 'luxury' separate from the center of local politics.<sup>24</sup> In this vein, Krizsan and Pap have pointed out that effective coordination at the local level is important to provide localized and contextualized responses to VAW.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, gender-sensitive policies as transformative resources carry the potential to initiate change in the patriarchal mentality<sup>26</sup> and structures of local government in Turkey.

### **Women's empowerment at the local level in Turkey: the issue of VAW**

Prime Ministry Circular no. 2006/17 rendered the struggle against VAW state policy in Turkey and for the first time attributed responsibility to local governments as key stakeholders in this struggle. Although Weldon and Htun<sup>27</sup> argue that policy adoption is important for getting governments to take violence seriously and take action against VAW, there is still no legally-binding commitment in Turkey towards the empowerment of women and the adoption of gender-sensitive policies in combating VAW at the municipal level.<sup>28</sup> İlker Haktankaçmaz, an official at the Turkish Ministry of Interior Affairs, has argued that local governments have failed to meet their liabilities in redressing VAW in the case of women's shelters, and that approaches considering these shelters as the fundamental actors in preventive precautions regarding VAW have proven to be dysfunctional.<sup>29</sup> According to Haktankaçmaz, the underlying factor in this failure is a common understanding of municipalities' key responsibilities as being the provision of urban infrastructure services such as water, sewage systems and transportation; geographical and urban data systems; environment and environmental health,

cleaning and solid waste. He claims that mayors are not willing to invest in secondary issues, such as VAW, which do not bring them votes. Accordingly, as the studies of Şenol et al., and Gunluk-Senesen et al. on gender equality policies in municipalities in Turkey also highlight, most local governments continue to be gender-blind, or at best their initiative stays *ad hoc* addressing a specific crisis in service delivery and combating VAW in Turkey.<sup>30</sup>

Initiatives such as the UN's Women Friendly Cities Programme (WFCP-2006) have introduced the idea of empowering women at the local level in Turkey by developing gender-sensitive perspectives in policy-making processes through the adoption of institutional arrangements and capacity-building measures such as gender-budgeting and equality commissions.<sup>31</sup> The WFCP revealed that the pilot cities (İzmir, Kars, Nevşehir, Şanlıurfa, Trabzon, Adıyaman, Antalya, Bursa, Gaziantep, Malatya, Mardin, and Samsun) had not fully achieved the adoption of a gender-based perspective in governance and most of the expected institutional change through these measures remains idle in practice due to the lack of compulsory provisions and of the political will to achieve them among local leaders.<sup>32</sup>

Municipalities who have adopted elements of gender-responsive governance include İstanbul/Beylikdüzü<sup>33</sup> (CHP), Bursa/Nilüfer (CHP), İzmir/Urla (CHP), İzmir/Bornova (CHP), Eskişehir (CHP), Edirne (CHP), Şanlıurfa (AKP), Şanlıurfa/Eyyübiye (AKP), and Gaziantep (AKP), which have attempted to apply gender-budgeting, and Ankara/Çankaya (CHP), which has started an initiative to promote a 'Local Equality Action Plan' and founded a Department of Women's Services.<sup>34</sup> These particular policies and practices, taking a gender-sensitive approach at the local level in Turkey, have not yet resulted in a full-fledged understanding for the consolidation of gender equality awareness in local/municipal politics. In line with Alanso's<sup>35</sup> analysis of Spain where the VAW statistics are alarming,<sup>36</sup> we argue that good practices can be assessed as 'lessons drawn',<sup>37</sup> and it is essential to shed light on gender-sensitive policies in Turkey that are laying the fundamentals for the establishment of an institutionalized agency to collectively empower women at the local level in the face of VAW and gender inequality.

## Research design

As the literature on gender and local politics<sup>38</sup> has revealed, the political will of female mayors with a feminist awareness can play a critical role in the process of transforming local governments into gender-responsive agents and effectively combating VAW, as well as fighting the patriarchal mentality in local government. This is the case in Turkey specifically due to the 'strong mayor' system, where the elected mayor is responsible for the management of budgets, outlining the agendas of municipal meetings and hiring for municipal jobs. This system grants the elected mayor substantial political and administrative

authority over the municipality.<sup>39</sup> That the leading successes in terms of gender-sensitive policies are to be found in municipalities with female mayors in Turkey can be regarded as evidence to support this claim.<sup>40</sup> For instance, a recent study on the implementation of gender budgeting by municipalities in Turkey indicates that Diyarbakır/Bağlar, which has been governed by female mayors since 1999 and is one of the municipalities covered by our study, is a very successful example.<sup>41</sup> Additionally, the authors underline the significance of Fatma Şahin, the female mayor of Gaziantep Municipality since 2014 and the former Minister of Family and Social Policies of the AKP government, who works in close relationship with the women's organizations, as one of those who has been pushing for more gender budgeting.<sup>42</sup>

This research<sup>43</sup> comprises all 36 municipalities governed by female mayors in the period between 2004–2009 and 2009–2014 in Turkey (see Table 1) from different political parties (the AKP, CHP, and Peace and Democracy Party-BDP).<sup>44</sup> In line with the objectives of this article, our findings are derived from the municipalities that have demonstrated the successful adoption of gender-sensitive policies such as gender budgeting, gender-sensitive collective-labor contracts, and women's support centers as lessons to be drawn in women's empowerment and the combating of VAW.

As seen below in Tables 2–4, these successful practices have mostly been adopted by mayors from BDP municipalities with gender-sensitive local governments. The comparative findings of the nationwide 'Domestic Violence Against Women on Turkey' Research Projects (2015) which spotlighted a decrease in VAW in the Southeastern part of Turkey, which had been mostly ruled by BDP municipalities, can be evaluated as evidence for the role of the political will in the struggle against VAW.<sup>45</sup> At this point, we acknowledge that these practices may be observed in other BDP-controlled municipalities, and that the party's gender policy is one of the key factors influencing the implementation of gender sensitive policies in Turkey. However, the female mayors from the BDP we interviewed also drew attention to the differences between them and male mayors from the same party in putting gender-sensitive policies into practice (Diyarbakır/Bismil, 2004–2009 and 2009–2014; Tunceli, 2004–2009; and Mardin/Nusaybin, 2004–2009). Consequently, we are not making a general claim and we do not aim to give the full picture nationwide. For the sake of this article, we are only highlighting good practices in the struggle against VAW as resources for women's empowerment.

The data we used as the basis of this study was derived from the Reports on Municipal Facilities (hereafter RMF), the Strategic Plans of Municipalities (hereafter SPM), and municipal publications that indicated local service levels and reflected priorities in policy framing in the period between 2004 and 2014. Additionally, face-to-face semi-structured in-depth interviews lasting from 30 to 90 min were conducted with the mayors of the municipalities by the authors. They were audio recorded with the informed consent of



**Table 1.** Municipalities included in the research.

2009–2014	2004–2009
1. Aydın/Merkez (CHP)	1. Adana/Küçükdikili (BDP)
2. Aydın/İncirliova (CHP)	2. Bartın/Kozcağız (CHP)
3. Ağrı/Doğubayazıt (BDP)	3. Ağrı/Doğubayazıt (BDP)
4. Diyarbakır/Bağlar (BDP)	4. Diyarbakır/Bağlar (BDP)
5. Diyarbakır/Bismil (BDP)	5. Diyarbakır/Bismil (BDP)
6. Diyarbakır/Eğil (BDP)	6. Denizli/Honaz/Karaçay (CHP)
7. Diyarbakır/Lice (BDP)	7. İzmir/Menemen/Seyrek (CHP)
8. Edirne/Uzunköprü/Kurtbey (CHP)	8. Uşak/Hasköy (CHP)
9. Eskişehir/Mahmudiye (AKP)	9. Mardin/Kızıltepe (BDP)
10. Gaziantep/İslahiye (AKP)	10. Sivas/İnkışla (CHP)
11. Giresun/Doğankent (AKP)	11. Giresun/Doğankent (AKP)
12. Hakkari/Yüksekova (BDP)	12. Hatay/Küçükdalyan (CHP)
13. Hatay/Dörtöyl/Yeşilköy (AKP)	13. Hatay/Dörtöyl/Yeşilköy (AKP)
14. Iğdır/Melekli (CHP)	14. Mardin/Sürgücü (BDP)
15. Iğdır/Aralık (CHP)	15. Mardin/Mazıdağı (BDP)
16. Kırklareli/Kavaklı (CHP)	16. Kırklareli/Kavaklı (CHP)
17. Tunceli/Merkez (BDP)	17. Tunceli/Merkez (BDP)
18. Van/Bostaniçi (BDP)	18. Van/Bostaniçi (BDP)
19. Konya/Akşehir/Adıy (AKP)	
20. Mardin/Derik (BDP)	
21. Mardin/Nusaybin (BDP)	
22. Mardin/Savur/Yeşilalan (BDP)	
23. Muğla/Milas/Bafa (CHP)	
24. Muş/Varto (BDP)	
25. Şanlıurfa/Viranşehir (BDP)	
26. Şırnak/Üludere (BDP)	

**Table 2.** Municipalities with gender budgeting.

Municipalities
1. Diyarbakır/Bağlar
2. Diyarbakır/Bismil
3. Mardin/Nusaybin
4. Hakkari/Yüksekova
5. Ağrı/Doğubayazıt
6. Şanlıurfa/Viranşehir
7. Tunceli/Merkez

**Table 3.** Municipalities with gender-sensitive collective-labor contracts.

Municipalities
1. Diyarbakır/Bağlar
2. Diyarbakır/Bismil
3. Mardin/Nusaybin
4. Mardin/Sürgücü
5. Mardin/Kızıltepe
6. Mardin/Derik
7. Muş/Varto
8. Tunceli/Merkez
9. Şırnak/Üludere
10. Şanlıurfa/Viranşehir
11. Van/Bostaniçi
12. Adana/Küçükdikili

**Table 4.** Municipalities with a women's support center (WSC).

## Municipalities

1. Ağrı/Doğubayazıt-Arjin WSC
2. Diyarbakır/Bağlar-Kardelen WSC
3. Diyarbakır/Bismil-Nujin WSC
4. Diyarbakır/Lice-Nujiyan WSC
5. Hakkari/Yüksekova-Sosin WSC
6. Tunceli/Merkez-Dersim WSC
7. Van/Bostaniçi-Maya WSC
8. Mardin/Derik-Peljin WSC
9. Mardin/Nusaybin-Gülşinav WSC
10. Mardin/Kızıltepe-Nuda WSC
11. Şanlıurfa/Viranşehir-Berjin and Pelşim-Amara WSC

the respondents and transcribed verbatim with the field notes of non-verbal and paralinguistic communications.

Qualitative content analysis was used to classify and categorize the data gathered in order to highlight our findings. As Bryman argues, qualitative content analysis, 'comprising a searching-out of underlying themes in the materials being analyzed' enables the researcher to better interpret the text.<sup>46</sup> We used the data concerning the municipal services and policies to classify them under the headings 'protective,' 'preventive' and 'supportive-empowerment.' After re-reading and coding the data based on a detailed list of gender-sensitive services and policies in the municipalities, key themes concerning the gender-sensitive practices of these municipalities in the struggle against VAW appear as: gender budgeting as a resource for the transformation of the municipal budget, gender-sensitive collective-labor contracts as a resource for the transformation of the attitudes of male employees, and women's support centers as resources for sustainable empowerment policies.

### **Women's empowerment at the axis of the VAW issue in Turkey: gender-sensitive policies as 'transformative resources'**

This part of the article focuses on the gender-sensitive policies in municipalities that we regarded as the transformative resources of women's empowerment for an effective fight against VAW in Turkey. We classify these practices under three main policies: (1) gender budgeting, (2) gender-sensitive collective-labor contracts, and (3) women's support centers, none of whose implementation is legally regulated by the state in Turkey. Therefore, their application is dependent on the individual preferences of political leaders, making the political will critical to their implementation.

#### ***Gender budgeting: an institutional resource for the transformation of the municipal budget***

The strategy of gender budgeting rests on the idea that women's needs and interests should be taken into consideration in the planning of government

budgets.<sup>47</sup> The rationale is to ensure the allocation of financial resources necessary for the carrying out of policies and services from a gender-based perspective. The idea of gender budgeting in Turkey was introduced through projects funded by the UN since 2006; there were no reported cases of gender budgeting in Turkey before the WFCP.<sup>48</sup> The need for gender budgeting was first mentioned in Turkey as a recommendation in the government's Tenth National Five-Year Development Plan (2014–2018).<sup>49</sup> Though just a recommendation, it is still critical that this gender-sensitive policy which is vital women's empowerment and the combat against VAW was officially expressed in this way. The inadequate funding for services addressing VAW, particularly shelters, was also described as a fundamental obstacle to fighting VAW by the municipality personnel and representatives of civil society organizations in Turkey.<sup>50</sup>

Out of the 36 in this study, seven municipalities applied gender budgeting (see Table 2).

It is noteworthy that the municipalities concerned first clearly expressed their intention to adopt gender budgeting, which is very much intrinsic to their goal of women's empowerment, in their strategic plans. 'To allocate fund for women in the preparation of the municipal budget ... To prepare the necessary conditions for the implementation of gender budgeting to effectively respond to women's needs and problems' (Şanlıurfa/Viranşehir Municipality 2010–2014 SPM; Tunceli Municipality 2004–2009 SPM, 2009–2014 SPM, 2004–2009 RMF and 2009–2012 RMF).

At around this time, Gunluk-Şenesen et al. drew attention to the need for compulsory arrangements for gender budgeting. Notwithstanding this, their comparative research (2013–4) in five WFCP pilot cities with five neighboring cities revealed that these institutional attempts and arrangements as gender-sensitive recommendations did not result in a meaningful improvement or difference in the two categories. What they emphasized was the absence of the political will to apply gender budgeting.<sup>51</sup> Haktankaçmaz also pinpointed the unwillingness of the most of the local leaders and municipal councils in Turkey to allocate money from their budget to support areas of 'secondary responsibility' such as women's centers, shelters, empowerment training sessions and services addressing VAW.<sup>52</sup> At this juncture, as we have been trying to emphasize, the political will of the mayor is crucial to the existence of gender-sensitive institutional arrangements. In fact, they have is a kind of chicken-and-egg relationship. The following two excerpts from the interviews evince the intertwined relationship between these two factors:

We are expected to establish women's shelters in the municipality and very willing to fulfil this expectation. But the municipality budget is not allocated a special fund to cover such costs. We should consider how to afford it without government funding. (2009–2014, BDP)

There is no legal obligation to encourage municipalities to apply gender budgeting in Turkey. Mayors and municipal councils do not hold the responsibility to adopt a gender perspective which, in turn, leads to a gender imbalance in the allocation of local services. We try to adopt a gender perspective in the formation of strategic plans and budgeting. For instance, while we are planning cultural-social activities and discussing about city-planning in municipal meetings, we consider women's interests and demands. VAW is a policy area that we had to divide up a budget to combat at municipal level. In doing so, we informally apply gender budgeting in our municipality. (2009–2014, BDP)

All in all, we claim that gender budgeting constitutes one of the essential resources for both carrying out empowerment policies and introducing gender-based services. First women's concerns and needs are taken into account in the process of agenda-setting and then in budgeting. Secondly, a claim to a share of the budget is believed to prepare the ground for the exercise of women's agency and the improvement of women-friendly policy framing as well as policy implementation. Hence, the application of gender budgeting in the municipalities can help to challenge the established patriarchal governing mentality in local governments which prioritize conventional service areas such as zoning, town-planning, and garbage collection. Hence, gender budgeting may be regarded as one of the transformative resources of women's empowerment in transmuting power relations with regard to 'access and control over economic and political resources.'<sup>53</sup> Therefore, as the following excerpt shows, the attempts of municipalities to implement gender budgeting make a substantial constitution to local governments providing and sustaining policies of empowerment.<sup>54</sup>

Gender-sensitive policy-making is closely related to the distribution of resources and funds. The capacities of local governments and mayors are limited by funding. In the current system, there is no legal and formal guarantee of funding for gender-sensitive policy priorities. You need to persuade the municipal council to save a budget for women's needs, which is usually impossible. Hence, we started an initiative in our party, particularly among female mayors, to create women's budgets in municipalities. We collected data to specify women's needs and problems, and we offered a strategic plan and then to budget in this respect. This makes it possible for us to support women's shelters and municipal women's support centers. (2004–2009, BDP)

Since the municipalities' scope of services closely influences the life of women as observed in the example of women's shelters, gender budgeting can be conceived as an opportunity structure to strengthen the realization of women's agency and empowerment in terms of accessing the necessary assets. For example, we found out that the municipalities adopting gender budgeting managed to provide services and empowerment strategies addressing VAW such as consciousness-raising activities on VAW, vocational trainings for women, women's shelter, social activities, counseling and rehabilitation programs for the victims of VAW (Diyarbakır/Bağlar Municipality SPM 2009–

2014; RMF 2009–2014; Diyarbakır/Bismil 2009–2014 SPM; Mardin/Nusaybin 2009–2014 SPM). More significant is the establishment of active women's support centers with the help of gender budgeting in Diyarbakır/Bismil (2009–2014 SPM), Diyarbakır/Bağlar (SPM 2009–2014; RMF 2009–2014) and Tunceli Municipalities (2009–2014 RMF, SPM). On that account, we contend that gender budgeting can be appropriated as a transformative resource and an institutional form of agency to help municipalities empower women in the struggle against VAW.

### ***Gender-sensitive collective-labor contracts: an institutional resource for attitude transformation***

The enforcement of gender-sensitive collective-labor contracts, designed to guarantee both the rights and obligations of the employees and employers in respecting gender equality to eliminate discrimination among men and women, is not compulsory in local governments in Turkey. The first gender-sensitive collective-labor contract was implemented by Diyarbakır/Kayapınar Municipality in 2004.<sup>55</sup> Following this, several other municipalities governed by mayors from the pro-Kurdish parties in Turkey stepped forward to further develop a gender perspective in collective-labor contracts to eliminate gender inequalities.<sup>56</sup> It is noteworthy that most of these were the municipalities governed by female mayors in our research. 22 out of 36 municipalities in our study have signed collective-labor contracts, but only 12 of them have adopted a gender-sensitive approach (see Table 3).

Since 2006, Adana/Küçükdikili, Tunceli and Diyarbakır/Bağlar Municipalities have adopted gender-sensitive collective-labor contracts including a clause intended to prevent all kinds of VAW by male employees which gives half of a male employee's salary to his wife in case a violent incident is recorded. In addition to this contract clause, Adana/Küçükdikili, Diyarbakır/Bağlar, Diyarbakır/Bismil, Mardin/Derik, Mardin/Nusaybin Municipalities have supported the struggle against polygamy and child-marriages with an additional clause which stipulates that the payment of benefits and severance pay of the male employees will be paid to the wife by civic marriage or the contractual rights of the employees will be lost should polygamy or a child marriage be discovered. Mardin/Derik and Mardin/Nusaybin Municipalities also enlarged the scope of their contracts to include the right to women's education, so they will terminate the contract of an employee if he prevents his daughter or sister from going to school. An excerpt from an interview with the mayor of Mardin/Nusaybin highlighted the potential impact of gender-sensitive collective-labor contracts as disincentives protecting women from violence and rendering local governments and labor unions responsible actors in the struggle against VAW.

We, particularly female politicians, cannot close our eyes to the problem of VAW ... The population of my municipality is around 100,000. I don't have the chance to touch each woman individually. Yet, we are able to reach a lot of men and women through our support for political measures to combat VAW. One such measure is the adoption of gender-sensitive collective-labor contracts. Through them, we are able to reach 400 families, meaning more than 1000 women at a time. We formulate the preventive-deterrence clauses in the contracts to prevent VAW before it happens. For instance, the salary of a male employee is paid to his wife if he commits violence against her and his labor contract is terminated if he becomes polygamous. It is not compulsory in Turkey but our political party has started an initiative within the party program to apply gender-sensitive collective-labor contracts. (2009–2014, BDP)

As emphasized in the above excerpt, the implementation of gender-sensitive collective-labor contracts works as an influential deterrence measure and an institutionalized policy response to encourage the empowerment of women in the struggle against VAW. In addition to these practices, the findings of our research demonstrate the need for the political will to achieve gender-responsive local governments because, as an officer of TUMBELSEN pointed out, the major barrier to the implementation of such gender-sensitive collective-labor contracts is the unwillingness of mayors to put them in place.<sup>57</sup>

Indeed, the expected result of these gender-sensitive collective-labor contracts might be the affirmative impact of these policies in creating a change in men's attitudes by deterring violence and preventing VAW in Turkey.

The daughters and wives of our employees who are able to continue their education instead of having early marriages or who are no longer subject to domestic violence visit us to state their gratitude. These women are the proof of the effectiveness of gender-sensitive collective-labor contracts in preventing VAW and struggling against it. (2009–2014, BDP)

Gender-sensitive collective-labor contracts can be utilized as critical transformative agents leading to change in the attitudes of men who do not let their daughters/sisters go to school or force them to marry at early ages. By the help of these contracts, girls are empowered through finding the opportunity to gain an education and resist early marriages, resulting in their individual empowerment (power within). Since gender-sensitive policies essentially intend to alter the outcomes of established policies to encourage equality between the sexes by transmuting the existing masculine understanding within existing structures and among officials, the adoption of attitude transformation tools in local governments plays a fundamental role in women's empowerment. As Batliwala argues, such a cognitive and behavioral transformation can sustain true comprehensive women's empowerment by challenging the prevailing unequal distribution of power and bringing gender-related changes into women's lives.<sup>58</sup> Therefore, gender-sensitive collective-

labor contracts serve as opportunity structures and empower women not only at the individual level but also at the collective level through transforming men's attitudes and women's capacity for agency for collective struggle and hence enhance 'power with.' In doing so, they can be considered as transformative agencies to prevent VAW in the long run.

### ***Women's support centers: institutional resources for sustainable empowerment policies***

Women's support centers as the specialized women units are fundamental for diffusing a gender-based perspective at governmental level and empowering women, since they are institutionally designed to coordinate, monitor, and evaluate gender-sensitive policies/services.<sup>59</sup> Within the scope of our research, 11 municipalities out of 36 had established women's support centers (see Table 4).<sup>60</sup>

We found out that women's support centers in Diyarbakır/Bağlar (Kardelen-2004) and Diyarbakır/Bismil (Nujin-2010) carried out significant activities for women from a gender-sensitive approach and improved the capacity of their municipalities to empower women. The mayors of Diyarbakır/Bağlar and Diyarbakır/Bismil Municipalities stated (2009–2014, BDP) that one of the main concerns of Kardelen and Nujin was the struggle against VAW and, as the municipal records show (Diyarbakır/Bağlar 2009–2015 RMF, Diyarbakır/Bismil 2009–2014 RMF and 2009–2014 SPM), the Centers fulfilled their function effectively. 1109 victims of VAW had applied to Kardelen to ask for assistance, consulting and counseling-services as well as protection, and twelve thousand local women had benefited from awareness-raising meetings between 2005 and 2011.<sup>61</sup> Similarly, Nujin offered counseling and rehabilitation services for 610 victims of VAW in the first nine months.<sup>62</sup> Therefore, we claim that, like the women's units/centers in Northern Ireland's ROWAN, Albania's Community Coordinated Response (CCR) and United Kingdom's Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC),<sup>63</sup> women's support centers in Turkey can be regarded as successful institutions that have helped women to more easily air grievances, provide a secure environment, and ensure a comprehensive and coordinated response to VAW at a local level.

Additionally, these centers support policies for women's empowerment through child-care services, job opportunities, financial aid and awareness-raising activities to inform women about how to combat polygamy, early-marriage and violence (the campaign-conference Stop Violence Against Women, 2005; Research on VAW, 2010) (Diyarbakır/Bağlar 2004–2009 and 2009–2014 RMF; Diyarbakır/Bismil 2009–2014 RMF, SPM). These activities at women support centers are important to both strengthen women's capacity for agency and to improve the gender responsiveness of

municipalities by providing the necessary assets. For instance, research carried out on the issue of VAW triggered the Diyarbakır/Bağlar Municipality to establish a women's shelter (2009–2014, BDP). Moreover, Kardelen plays a key role in bringing VAW onto the public agenda.<sup>64</sup> Thus, as observed in the cases of Rwanda, Chile, and Frankfurt,<sup>65</sup> these centers have lead elected bodies to take women's concerns into account and help local women develop their capacity to resist inequality concerning VAW.

With reference to Batliwala's contention on women's empowerment, it is possible to claim that women's support centers not only treat women as the beneficiaries of local services; but also create a space for women to collectivize around VAW, raise consciousness of their own sense of subordination, and improve access to local services.<sup>66</sup> The words of the mayor of Diyarbakır/Bismil explain how Nujin makes a difference in women's lives as a transformative resource for women's empowerment.

We listened to the problems and demands of women: women asked for a place to spend time and have consulting services. Therefore, women decided what they wanted to see in this center. They even decided on its name, Nujin. It means 'new life' in Kurdish. In the beginning, we could not have imaged that this center would have been full of women. There are new applications every day asking for help in the struggle against VAW. Additionally, women work here voluntarily to help other women. In this respect, Nujin works thanks to the support of these volunteer women because as the municipality, we can only supply a limited number of personnel and funds. (2009–2014, BDP)

This excerpt tells us that women have become active agents through being part of something they wanted, and Nujin represents a 'new life' for them. In this sense, it helps women to gain self-reliance, which is severely curtailed by their powerlessness in relation to freedom of choice and action. Moreover, it provides a venue not only for women's empowerment in the struggle against VAW but also to harness women's collective agency through the participation of volunteer women and women's solidarity. Therefore, in addition to increasing the capacity of women to make their own personal choices, women's support centers' activities, particularly training and awareness-raising, prepare the ground for collective action by demonstrating that the problems women experience stem not from individual reasons but from patriarchal and gendered relations in Turkey.

Based on the findings of our research, we argue that women's support centers function as the focal points for women in accessing assistance for VAW, poverty, housing, unemployment and counseling all under one roof on the basis of the localization and contextualization of services in each municipality.<sup>67</sup> All in all, in terms of women's empowerment, women's support centers improve the institutionalization and sustainability of the necessary assets to help women exercise agency. Accordingly, they can be considered sustainable empowerment policies for women in the struggle against VAW



through changing the mentality of local governance towards providing gender-sensitive services and how these services help women to build individual and collective capacity.

## Conclusion

VAW is one prominent gender inequality problem that keeps women subordinate and restricts women's access to resources. Hence, this article has discussed the prospects for gender-sensitive policies within municipalities governed by female mayors in terms of women's empowerment to cope with VAW. As Çınar and Uğur-Çınar argue, the transformation of institutions and relations that sustain gender inequalities is essential, as otherwise women's educational, economic and political resources would not be sufficient for women's full empowerment.<sup>68</sup> The existing masculine design and gender-blind approach in Turkey's local governments render these institutional policies more vital.

In that vein, we assert that gender budgeting, gender-sensitive collective-labor contracts, and women's support centers can be regarded as such institutional transformative resources to eliminate the embedded disempowered position of women in society as a whole at the local level in the struggle against VAW. On that account, gender budgeting can be considered as a foundational resource for laying the ground for and sustaining gender-sensitive policies for women's empowerment in challenging the established patriarchal approach in decision-making process in municipalities in Turkey and, thereby, enabling women's access to assets to satisfy their practical and strategic needs. Gender-sensitive collective-labor contracts can be regarded as a transformative resource in yielding change not only in men's attitudes regarding VAW, but also in women's capacity for agency in resisting VAW. Women's support centers can function as the transformative resources of women's empowerment through developing the capacity of women in achieving agency by meeting the needs of women in the municipal area, ensuring assistance and protection to VAW victims, and increasing the sustainability of these policies addressing VAW. Accordingly, these gender-sensitive policies bring forth both the individual and collective empowerment of women at the local level.

Consequently, we assert that these institutional transformative resources are the cornerstones of women's empowerment in terms of VAW; albeit that the decisive factor in working towards the elimination of VAW is the political will to do it, which in our research was largely put forward by female mayors. Herein lies the contribution of this study to the literature on gender, local politics, and VAW in theory and micro-level policy framing in practice by providing an empirical case study on Turkey.

## Notes

1. Kabeer, "Gender Equality"; Goldman and Jani, "Innovative Grassroots NGOs"; Batliwala, "Meaning of Empowerment"; Batliwala, "Putting Power"; and Batliwala, "Taking the Power."
2. Beşpınar, "Questioning Agency"; Cindoğlu and Toktaş, "Empowerment and Resistance"; Erman, Kalaycıoğlu, and Rittersberger-Tılıç, "Money-earning Activities"; Landig, "Bringing Women to the Table"; Çınar and Uğur-Çınar, "What the City has to Offer"; and Gündüz-Hoşgör and Smits, "The Status of Rural Women."
3. Kardam and Kardam, "Empowerment through Training," 92.
4. WHO, *Addressing Violence*; Jansen et al., *National Research on Domestic Violence*; Yüksel-Kaptanoğlu, Çavlin, and Akadlı Ergöçmen, *Türkiye'de Kadına Yönelik Ailevi Şiddet*.
5. *Vienna Declaration*.
6. Kabeer, "Gender Equality," 14.
7. The Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence adopted by the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers on 7 April 2011.
8. We Will Stop Femicide Platform.
9. Turkey was ranked 69th out of 159 countries in the 2016 UN Gender Inequality Index and 131st out of 144 countries in the World Gender Gap Report of World Economic Forum, 2017.
10. Alkan, "Gendered Structures."
11. Kabeer, "Resources, Agency, Achievements"; Kabeer, "Gender Equality"; and Mosedale, "Assessing Women's Empowerment."
12. Cornwall and Rivas, "From 'Gender Equality'," and WHO, *Addressing Violence*.
13. UN Nairobi Conference-1985, Local Agenda 21-1997, Council of European Gender Equality-1998; European Commission Manual for Gender Mainstreaming of Employment Policies-2007, The European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life-2001, Istanbul Convention-2011.
14. Batliwala, "Putting Power"; Batliwala, "Taking the Power"; Cornwall and Rivas, "From 'Gender Equality,'" 9; and Rowlands, "A Word of Times."
15. Lombardo, Meier, and Verloo, "Policy Making," 688; Walby, "Introduction: Comparative Gender Mainstreaming"; Rees, "Reflections on the Uneven"; and Kiwala and Masaud, *Gender Mainstreaming*.
16. Schuler, Islam, and Rottach, "Women's Empowerment Revisited"; Mosedale, "Assessing Women's Empowerment"; Kabeer, "Gender Equality"; and Acharya and Ghimire, "Gender Indicators of Equality."
17. Batliwala, "Taking the Power."
18. WHO, *Addressing Violence*; Mosedale, "Assessing Women's Empowerment"; Afshar, "Women and Empowerment"; Kabeer, "Gender Equality"; Cornwall and Rivas, "From 'Gender Equality';" and Batliwala, "Taking the Power."
19. Schuler and Hashemi, "Credit Programs"; Mayoux, "Tackling the Down Side"; and Kim et al., "Understanding the Impact."
20. Kabeer, "Is Micro Finance a Magic," and Batliwala, "Taking the Power."
21. Kabeer, "Gender Equality," 16.
22. Batliwala, "Putting Power," 2.
23. Kabeer, "Resources, Agency, Achievements," and Kabeer, "Gender Equality."
24. Council of Europe, *Gender Mainstreaming*.
25. Krizsan and Pap, "Implementing Comprehensive," 25.

26. Kandiyoti, "Locating the Politics."
27. Weldon and Htun, "Feminist Mobilization," 234.
28. The only regulation concerning the struggle against VAW is the requirement to establish women's shelter in the municipalities whose population exceeds 100.000 (Article 14, 5393 No Code of Local Governments 2005).
29. Haktankaçmaz, "Yerel Yönetimler."
30. Şenol et al., *Women Friendly Cities*, and Gunluk-Senesen et al., "Gender Budgeting."
31. See <http://www.kadindostukentler.com/project.php>.
32. Gunluk-Senesen et al., "Gender Budgeting."
33. We list here the governing party, with AKP indicating the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*), which has ruled at the national level since 2002, and CHP the Republican Peoples' Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*), which has been the largest opposition party.
34. Akduran, "Yerel Yaşamda"; "Çankaya'dan ..."; "Urla ..."; Klatzer, Akduran, and Gültaşlı, *Belediyeler için Toplumsal*, 37–49; and KEIG Platformu Stratejik Plan Çalışması.
35. Alanso, "Who Learns," 177, 181.
36. 158,217 cases were reported as VAW in 2017 in Spain. <https://www.thelocal.es/20180312/violence-against-women-in-spain-highest-ever-in-2017>.
37. Local governments in Turkey may act as the main locus of combat against VAW through preventive, disincentive-protective and empowerment-supportive local services such as women's shelters, women's centers, and social-economic empowerment measures when gender-sensitive policies are promoted. See Koyuncu Lorasdağı and Sumbas, "Türkiye'de Yerel."
38. Haktankaçmaz, "Kadına Yönelik Şiddetle Mücadelede"; Gunluk-Senesen et al., "Gender Budgeting"; Diner and Toktaş, "Women's Shelters"; and Koyuncu Lorasdağı and Sumbas, "Türkiye'de Yerel."
39. Bowman and Kearney, *State and Local Government*, and Levine, *Urban Politics*, 118–119.
40. Klatzer, Akduran, and Gültaşlı, *Belediyeler için Toplumsal*, and Koyuncu Lorasdağı and Sumbas, "Türkiye'de Yerel."
41. Klatzer, Akduran, and Gültaşlı, *Belediyeler için Toplumsal*, 36.
42. Ibid.
43. This article is based on the findings of a research project funded by TUBITAK (The Science and Technology Research Institution of Turkey, Project No. 111K450) which aimed to investigate the discourses and activities of female mayors elected in 2004 and 2009 local elections concerning the combat against VAW.
44. DTP (Democratic Society Party) and BDP were pro-Kurdish political parties in Turkey, which had taken part in the 2004–2009 and 2009–2014 local elections. DTP's was closed in December 2009, and was followed by BDP as a successor party. In May 2014, the BDP was closed and it was succeeded by HDP (People's Democratic Party). We prefer to use BDP to represent these parties.
45. Yüksel-Kaptanoğlu, Çavlin, and Akadlı Ergöçmen, *Türkiye'de Kadına Yönelik Aileiçi Şiddet*.
46. Bryman, *Social Research Methods*.
47. Council of Europe, *Gender Budgeting*; Elson, "Gender Mainstreaming"; Çelik and Ertürk Atabey, "Toplumsal Cinsiyetin Ana Akımlaştırılması"; Akduran, "Yerel Yönetimde"; and Akduran, "Yerel Yaşamda."

48. Gunluk-Senesen et al., "Gender Budgeting."
49. Klatzer, *Yerel Yönetimlerde Toplumsal Cinsiyet*; Klatzer and Stiegler, *Gender Budgeting*; Quinn, *Gender Budgeting*; Günlük-Şenesen, "Toplumsal Cinsiyet-Duyarlı Bütçeleme," Şahin, "Toplumsal Cinsiyete-Duyarlı Bütçeleme"; and Cáceres, *Overview of Gender-responsive Budget*.
50. Altınay and Arat, *Türkiye'de Kadına Yönelik Şiddet*, and Diner and Toktaş, "Women's Shelters," 345.
51. Günlük-Şenesen, "Toplumsal Cinsiyet-Duyarlı Bütçeleme," and Şahin, "Toplumsal Cinsiyete-Duyarlı Bütçeleme."
52. Haktankaçmaz, "Kadına Yönelik Şiddetle Mücadelede," and Haktankaçmaz, "Yerel Yönetimler."
53. Batliwala, "Putting Power."
54. Klatzer, *Yerel Yönetimlerde Toplumsal Cinsiyet*, 11.
55. Çağlayan, "Kamusal Alan."
56. Despite the belief that gender-sensitive collective-labor contracts can be an effective strategy to deter men violating their wives and daughters, it is found controversial from legal perspective. See Bakırcı, "Aile içi veya Birlikte Yaşayanlar Arasındaki Şiddete."
57. Aktürk and Doğan, "Türkiye'de Belediyeler."
58. Batliwala, "Putting Power."
59. Walby, "Introduction"; Van der Leest, Xhelo, and Wittberger, *Gender Equality*; Franceschet, "Explaining Domestic Violence"; and Krizsan and Pap, "Implementing Comprehensive."
60. In Turkey, İzmir Metropolitan (CHP-2008), Ankara Metropolitan (AKP-2008), Çankaya (CHP-2010), Yenimahalle (CHP-2013), Bursa/Nilüfer (CHP), İstanbul/Beşiktaş (CHP-2016) Municipalities have also women's support centers.
61. GABB Bulletin, "Belediyemizde Cinsiyet," 28–30.
62. Ibid., 43–44.
63. Krizsan and Pap, "Implementing Comprehensive."
64. For instance, after the rape incident in Diyarbakır Hospital in 2012, in addition to providing shelter, psychological-legal consultancy to the victim woman, Kardelen paid specific attention to make this incident as a public issue. ("Kardelen Kadın Evi'nden tecavüz."). For the significance of municipal agenda setting to attract attention to VAW, see Andrew, "Getting Women's Issue Municipal Agenda."
65. Kiwala and Masaud, *Gender Mainstreaming*, 22; Şenol et al., *Women Friendly Cities*; and Franceschet, "Explaining Domestic Violence."
66. Batliwala, "Putting Power."
67. Krizsan and Pap, "Implementing Comprehensive," and Tosun, *Kadın Sığınmaevleri Projesi*, 37–8.
68. Çınar and Uğur-Çınar, "What the City Has to Offer," 258.

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