

Gender and Technology in Turkey: Bridging the Digital Divide

To the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights pursuant to Human Rights Council Resolution 32/13

The Turkey Blocks Project

<https://TurkeyBlocks.org>

<https://twitter.com/TurkeyBlocks>

contact@TurkeyBlocks.org

Turkey Blocks is an independent, non-partisan digital rights organisation working on sustainable internet access, equality, privacy and safety for women, at-risk groups and the general public in Turkey. We submit our findings on gender and technology.



The adoption of mobile technology, namely the rapid deployment of 3G and 4G technology by Turkey's access providers has helped equalise access to online information in a country with often patchy landline internet service.

However, the regulatory landscape around equality and women's rights has not kept pace. Online equality has deteriorated over the last year instead of moving forward. We believe this is in part due to the government's new initiative to encourage "traditional" values online, reversing some hard-won rights for women and LGBTI individuals. As documented in our research, Internet restrictions and mass-censorship pose a disproportionate risk to vulnerable groups, threatening individual rights and freedom of expression on a wide scale.

Social media harassment disproportionately affecting Turkish-speaking women

We are concerned that global social media network operators have failed to bring new anti-harassment tools to Turkish-speaking users.

Reporting procedures that work relatively well for English-language users are available to at-risk individuals in Turkey.

- Shaming and abuse online targeting women is prevalent and goes unchecked.
- Shaming is universal affects professionals and journalists as well as minority communities and those from disadvantaged backgrounds

Online job search websites, mobile apps and gender discrimination

We have been particularly concerned by gender discrimination on online employment and job-seeking websites in Turkey:

- Up to a third of senior management positions are listed as only being available to male applicants
- A significant proportion of science, engineering, management and leadership careers are made invisible to logged-in female jobseekers using internet portals
- Job listings available to women often specify a required marital status

We are not aware of any group actively working to address this issue. The figures above are empirical and represent early findings.

Widespread sex-shaming with no recourse available to victims

We dealt with a particularly concerning incident where a leading video sharing site's staff disregarded requests by a young woman to have a private video containing sexual content removed from a former partner's account.

The abuse team instead re-classified the video as "18+" allowing the perpetrator to profit from the non-consensual revenge video. They failed to address the victim and even appeared to endorse the abuser.

Turkey's legal system provides little recourse and the government does not regulate these matters proactively, hence technology businesses have little incentive to respond to or escalate complains by vulnerable users, particularly women facing abuse online.

Concerns over civil society and international aid

The government does not run effective schemes to seek digital gender equality. A growing segment of the population consider the empowerment of women to be at odds with morality and national values. Hence there is an increased pressure on civil society groups to provide self-help for women, LGBT individuals as they seek to build resilient support networks.

We suspect that international aid provided to officially sanctioned institutions to improve gender equality in the technology sphere do not generally reach the intended target communities. Apparent corruption and a lack of accountability only worsen the situation.

Meanwhile grass-roots communities and social enterprises are left to fend for themselves. They are left to do essential work on the ground without access to local, national or international support networks.

Turkey Blocks is working to improve digital gender equality in Turkey and we are not alone. We seek to draw attention to smaller groups that are carrying a disproportionate burden to support society. We invite all those who share our objectives to reach out, and enclose our contact details below.

February 2017, The Turkey Blocks Project

contact@TurkeyBlocks.org

<https://TurkeyBlocks.org>

<https://twitter.com/TurkeyBlocks>



accessnow

Turkey Blocks is a partner in the global fight against internet shutdowns and equality online

Turkey Blocks is a finalist for the Index on Censorship Freedom of Expression Digital Award 2017

INDEX
ON CENSORSHIP

In response to the 14 points of the questionnaire

1. In Turkey we find that online harassment, conservative views limiting the participation by women, and the lack of effective regulation all harm equality and diversity in technology.

2. Yes. Our work benefits minorities and groups less represented online, with one the goals being to achieving better gender representation online.

3. Turkey Blocks does not collect personally identifiable data. Nor have we conducted surveys on gender to date.

4. A 50/50 gender representation has developed naturally at our organisation, whose members are assessed on skill and technical merit. We will strive to maintain that going forward.

5. Our team is diverse in gender, background and age. The different skills, approaches and styles all complement our work to build systems that are assessing and improving human rights in Turkey.

6. Our work revolves around universal access, empowerment for minorities and the improvement of society through technology. We have good ties with local and international human rights, equality and freedom of expression communities.

7. Turkey Blocks engages women's groups in Turkey, supports individuals facing online risks and works to increase awareness around information privacy and online security.

8. We are dedicated to sustainable development in the field of ICT and gender. It is our mission to bring those objectives to the rest of the community in Turkey.

9. Yes. Our team evaluates Turkey's laws relating to digital privacy, internet access and the fair provision of services to the public.

10. Yes. Turkey Blocks is founded to map and ensure the provision of network access, and challenge internet blocks which relate to the rights of the individual.

11. We are a recognised leader in the use of IoT (**Internet of Things**) technology for human rights, namely for our data collection platform that maps digital rights in Turkey as described at <https://turkeyblocks.org/methodology/>

12. Supporting women's digital rights is one of Turkey Blocks' founding goals.

13. Yes. Turkey Blocks most recently participated in the **Internet Governance Forum 2016** sessions on internet shutdowns and internet regulation.

14. We recommend that the OHCHR seeks to engage smaller stakeholders, social enterprises and grass-roots initiatives to achieve lasting change in Turkey.

