

MONITORING REPORT ON NATIVE-LANGUAGE ACCESS TO LOCAL GOVERNMENTS' VIOLENCE PREVENTION SERVICES FOR WOMEN IN ISTANBUL

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FOREWORD

Equality is a founding principle of a democratic society and of a fair understanding of public service. Yet genuine equality is achieved not merely by offering everyone the same service, but by ensuring that everyone — with their different needs, identities, and experiences — can actually and equally access those services. Even when a service is “open to all” on paper, if it remains inaccessible to vulnerable groups, particularly women, because of language, ethnic identity, class, or cultural position, formal equality turns into de facto inequality. It is precisely at this point that equality must be transformed from an abstract principle into a concrete guarantee through which every woman can access her rights within her own reality.

Women face an intersecting experience of discrimination in which, within the patriarchal order, inequalities operate together not only on the basis of sex but also on the basis of ethnic identity, native language, migration status, and socioeconomic position. Women whose native language is Kurdish and who are subjected to violence experience both gender inequality and language-based exclusion at the same time; this leaves them facing a layered discrimination that cannot be attributed to a single cause. An approach that ignores these differences and treats offering everyone the same service as equality in fact deepens existing inequalities rather than remedying them. Genuine equality is only possible by making visible women’s differing needs and experiences, and by removing the barriers to access — above all barriers related to native language — so that every woman can reach services on her own terms.

With this understanding, Kadın Zamanı Derneđi continues its work as a space of solidarity where women subjected to gender-based violence, or who witness violence, can safely apply for and receive information and support. Guided by a feminist approach, we place women's empowerment, agency, and equal access to rights at the center of our work, and we regard combating discrimination in all its forms as a core responsibility.

This report, prepared as part of the monitoring study we carried out with the support of the European Endowment for Democracy (EED), examines how Istanbul's municipalities address multilingualism in their services for women, and in particular the current state of access to Kurdish-language services in cases of violence. Our aim is to make visible the structural and institutional barriers to native-language access, and thereby make the fight against discrimination an integral part of local government policy. We hope that this study will contribute to strengthening women's access to services in their native language and to a more equitable understanding of public service.

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INTRODUCTION

Violence against women is one of the most widespread human rights violations reproduced by the patriarchal social order, threatening women's right to life, bodily integrity, and equal participation in social life. Combating violence requires not only protecting women from violence, but also enabling them to access their rights, have a say over their own lives, and become empowered. As the public actors closest to women's everyday lives, local governments sit at the center of this struggle.

However, the mere existence of anti-violence mechanisms is not sufficient in itself; what truly matters is who can access these mechanisms, and under what conditions. A woman can describe the violence and trauma she has experienced most accurately and completely only in the language in which she feels most able to express herself — that is, her native language. A woman who cannot receive support in her native language faces serious obstacles in learning her rights, applying for help, and reaching protection mechanisms. For this reason, native-language service is not a “good practice” or an additional convenience; it is a fundamental right directly connected to equality, access to justice, and the right to life.

This right is not an abstract principle; it rests on a concrete legal foundation. Article 10 of the Constitution guarantees that everyone is equal before the law without distinction as to language.

Law No. 6284, which remains in force and constitutes the core domestic legal basis for combating violence, requires that protective and preventive measures be implemented effectively and accessibly for all women; a woman's inability to access these

measures in her native language directly undermines the effectiveness of that protection.

In the same vein, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which Turkey has been a party to since 1985, guarantees women's access to public services without discrimination; the Convention's General Recommendation No. 35 on violence against women explicitly requires states to provide support services in a way that removes all barriers to access, including language barriers. Accordingly, a woman subjected to violence being unable to receive support in her native language is not merely a matter of service quality; it amounts to a de facto breach of the constitutional principle of equality and of the state's duty of protection. This obligation also has a concrete counterpart at the local government level. Law No. 5393 on Municipalities requires municipalities with a population over 100,000 to open shelters for women and children, and also obliges all municipalities with a population over 50,000 to prepare a strategic plan. Native-language access is therefore not a matter municipalities may address at their discretion; it is an area of responsibility that can and should be turned into an institutional goal through strategic plans. Our association, founded to help eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and contribute to women's empowerment in every sphere of society, adopts gender equality, women's empowerment, and the right to equal, accessible, native-language public services as a core principle in all of its work. Within the scope of this project, we focused on the area where gender inequality intersects with other forms of multiple discrimination such as language, ethnic identity, and access to public services, seeking in particular to make visible the layered discrimination experienced by women whose native language is

Kurdish. Istanbul is one of the cities hosting the largest Kurdish population in the world, and millions of Kurdish women live in this city. In addition to gender-based violence, these women face a further inequality arising from their inability to access services in their native language. A Kurdish woman subjected to violence being forced to express herself, at her most vulnerable moment, in a language she does not understand, lowers the quality of the support she receives and, at times, leads to her being unable to access her rights at all. This turns native-language access from a mere matter of service quality into an equality issue that directly concerns women's safety and right to life. Despite this, data and monitoring studies that comprehensively present the current state of native-language and specifically Kurdish-language access within local governments' anti-violence services are extremely limited. This report aims to fill that gap. Under the study titled "Women's Native-Language Access to Local Governments' Violence Prevention Services," the practices, institutional capacities, and approaches of Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality and the 39 district municipalities in this area have been monitored. The study's findings have been assessed within a feminist, rights-based framework and translated into concrete policy recommendations for local governments. Our aim is not only to identify the current situation, but to make visible native-language access as a right of women and an obligation of local governments, and to build a lasting basis of solidarity for putting this right into practice. The detailed steps of the monitoring process are presented in the following section ("Methodology").

1. METHODOLOGY

This study was carried out using a mixed monitoring approach combining quantitative and qualitative methods, aimed at revealing the state of native-language (particularly Kurdish) access within Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality's and the 39 district municipalities' anti-violence services for women. The study consists of four complementary stages: desk research, data collection via an electronic questionnaire, in-person field interviews, and digital mapping. The entire process was designed within a feminist, rights-based framework; the information collected was used solely for research purposes and was not associated with individuals' names.

Project Team and Preparation Process

Within the scope of the study, which began on August 1, a project management process was established and preparatory work commenced. In the initial planning meeting, the scope, objectives, implementation timetable, division of tasks, and monitoring method of the study were clarified; the method, tools, and workflow for the data collection process were planned. In addition, the data collection tools to be used prior to fieldwork were reviewed, a work calendar was drawn up, and preparations for coordinating the entire research process were completed.

Desk Research

In the first stage, national legislation, strategy documents, and policy texts defining local governments' responsibilities in combating violence against women were compiled. To understand the current situation of local governments in Istanbul, the strategic

plans of the 39 district municipalities were reviewed; political parties' electoral statistics reports were analyzed; and districts of Istanbul with a dense Kurdish population were identified. These analyses formed the basis for the design of the data collection tool (the questionnaire).

Data Collection via Electronic Questionnaire

To assess municipalities' approaches to multilingual services, and specifically to the provision of Kurdish-language services in the field of combating violence, an electronic questionnaire (e-form) was prepared, structured under four main headings and consisting of 17 questions. The questions covered topics such as languages in which services are provided, institutional structure, staff capacity, application mechanisms, and future planning.

The data collection process was carried out between November 11, 2025 and January 30, 2026. Relevant units at all district municipalities, particularly IMM, were contacted by email — including mayoralities, deputy mayoralities, directorates of women and family affairs, social support units, information-technology units, and private secretariats. When the expected level of response was not achieved, municipalities were contacted by phone, follow-up emails were sent to their registered electronic mail (KEP) addresses, and, in the final stage, official written applications were made via the postal service (PTT) under the right to information. As a result of this multi-channel communication strategy, a total of 29 institutions took part in the study: 28 district municipalities plus IMM.

Challenges Encountered in the Data Collection Process

Various structural challenges were encountered during the data collection process. Failing to receive the expected level of response to the questionnaire sent out was one of the most significant challenges of the process. Communication barriers included: municipalities' registered electronic mail (KEP) addresses used for official information requests not being active, some municipal officials declining to answer because they considered the questions in the form to be "political," and the absence, within organizational charts, of a designated unit or contact person directly responsible for violence against women.

At the institutional level, frequent staff turnover in the relevant units, internal confusion over authority, and the negative impact on the working environment and municipalities' willingness to cooperate caused by legal operations against some municipalities and mayors during 2025, all made the process more difficult. This experience made visible not only the technical difficulties of the data collection stage, but also the structural problems that local governments encounter — and at times reproduce — in fulfilling their obligation to provide equal, accessible, native-language services in combating violence against women.

Field Interviews

The field interviews were not conducted for the purpose of data collection, but rather, after the survey data had been analyzed and the policy recommendation document prepared, in order to share that document with municipalities and present native-language access recommendations directly to decision-makers. In this

context, in-person interviews were conducted with five district municipalities (Arnavutköy, Ataşehir, Avcılar, Beyoğlu, Sancaktepe) and with Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality. In selecting the municipalities to be interviewed, criteria such as population size and migration density (particularly Kurdish population), the existence of services for women, openness to cooperation with civil society, representation of different political parties, and a balance between the European and Anatolian sides were taken into account. The interviews were recorded, and notes were compiled and assessed within the team. In this respect, the field interviews constitute the advocacy component of the study.

Digital Mapping

A digital mapping study was carried out bringing together municipalities' women's support services, addresses, working hours, and district information, and was published as an online map with an interface entirely in Kurdish under the name "JinMap" (jinmap.kadinzamani.org).

Data Analysis

The quantitative data obtained from the questionnaire were summarized using tables and charts; open-ended responses were categorized thematically (single-category coding) and analyzed. The qualitative findings obtained from the field interviews were assessed and interpreted together with the survey results. All findings obtained formed the basis for the report's "Monitoring Findings," "Conclusion," and "Policy Recommendations" sections.

2. MONITORING FINDINGS

Overall Participation

Of the questionnaire sent to Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality and the 39 district municipalities, 29 institutions (28 district municipalities and IMM) responded, while 11 district municipalities did not respond despite all communication efforts. This corresponds to a participation rate of approximately 72.5%. Some of the non-responding municipalities declined to answer on the grounds that they considered the questions raised through written and verbal communication to be “political” in nature; others provided no explanation at all.

This picture indicates that multilingual services in the context of combating violence against women can, at times, be treated by local governments as a politicized issue rather than as a technical and administrative service area. The level of participation and transparency should itself be regarded as a finding; the reluctance to share information in a field as vital as combating violence against women is, in itself, a notable indicator with respect to accountability.

The table below presents the municipalities that participated in and did not participate in the study.

Municipalities That Participated in the Study	Municipalities That Did Not Participate in the Study
Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality (IMM)	Arnavutköy Municipality
Adalar Municipality	Başakşehir Municipality
Ataşehir Municipality	Çatalca Municipality
Avcılar Municipality	Eyüpsultan Municipality
Bağcılar Municipality	Kağıthane Municipality
Bahçelievler Municipality	Küçükçekmece Municipality
Bakırköy Municipality	Pendik Municipality
Bayrampaşa Municipality	Silivri Municipality
Beşiktaş Municipality	Sultanbeyli Municipality
Beykoz Municipality	Şile Municipality
Beylikdüzü Municipality	Üsküdar Municipality
Beyoğlu Municipality	—
Büyükkçekmece Municipality	—
Çekmeköy Municipality	—
Esenler Municipality	—
Esenyurt Municipality	—
Fatih Municipality	—
Gaziosmanpaşa Municipality	—
Güngören Municipality	—
Kadıköy Municipality	—
Kartal Municipality	—
Maltepe Municipality	—
Sancaktepe Municipality	—
Sarıyer Municipality	—

Municipalities That Participated in the Study	Municipalities That Did Not Participate in the Study
Sultangazi Municipality	—
Şişli Municipality	—
Tuzla Municipality	—
Ümraniye Municipality	—
Zeytinburnu Municipality	—

Table 1: Participating and Non-Participating Municipalities (Total: 29 participants, 11 non-participants)

Institutional Position of Responding Representatives

It is notable that responses to the questionnaire came from a variety of different titles and units within municipalities. Responses were submitted by institutional units such as the Directorate of Social Support Services, the Directorate of Women's and Family Services, the Equality Unit, and the Directorate of Culture and Social Affairs, as well as by individuals in different roles and positions, such as deputy mayors, council members, psychologists, sociologists, and office staff.

Title / Unit	Number
Deputy Mayor	6
Directorate of Social Support Services	3
Directorate of Women's and Family Services	3
Director	2
Council Member	2
Psychologist	2
Sociologist	2
Directorate of Culture and Social Affairs	1

Title / Unit	Number
Chair of the Migrants and Refugees Commission	1
Equality Unit Officer	1
Responsible person (unspecified)	1
Office Staff	1

Table 2: Distribution of Titles of Municipal Representatives Who Responded to the Survey

While this diversity may at first suggest broad participation, the study's findings reveal that no clear institutional area of responsibility for multilingual services has been defined within municipalities. The fact that questions on the same subject were answered by different units and individuals shows that the provision of multilingual services is not tied to any defined policy, standard, or line of authority within municipalities. Particularly in a field as vital as combating violence against women, the concentration of knowledge and practice regarding multilingual services in specific individuals — rather than being institutionalized — poses a significant risk to the continuity, institutional memory, and reliability of services.

Anti-Violence Unit / Mechanism

48.3% (14) of municipalities stated that they have an active unit or mechanism, while 37.9% (11) stated that no such structure yet exists, and 13.8% (4) stated that such mechanisms are in the preparation or establishment phase.

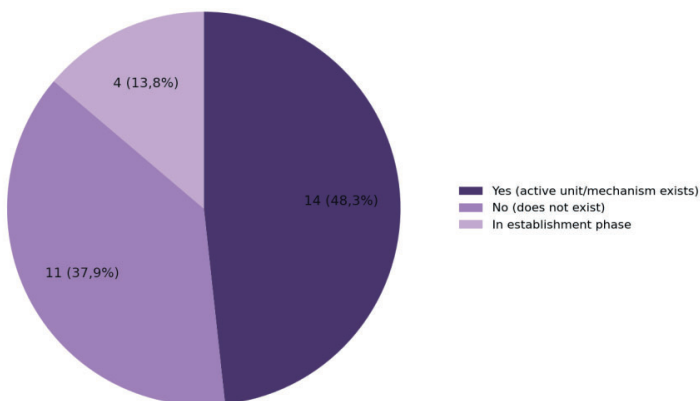


Chart 1: Anti-Violence Unit / Mechanism in Municipalities

Status	Number of Municipalities	Percentage
Active unit/mechanism exists	14	48.3%
Does not exist	11	37.9%
In establishment/preparation phase	4	13.8%

Table 3: Distribution of Anti-Violence Units/Mechanisms

This distribution shows that institutional structures for combating violence have not yet become widespread and standardized across all local governments, and that in some municipalities service provision is still in the process of development and institutionalization. The absence of such a structure in one out of every three municipalities points to a structural gap that stands in the way of combating violence against women becoming an institutional priority at the local level.

Current Status of Multilingual Service Provision

Data on the current status of multilingual service provision clearly show that these services have not yet become widespread at the

local government level. 72.4% (21) of the municipalities surveyed stated that they do not provide any multilingual service. In contrast, 4 municipalities stated that multilingual services are provided on a regular basis, and another 4 municipalities stated that such services are limited to specific areas or events.

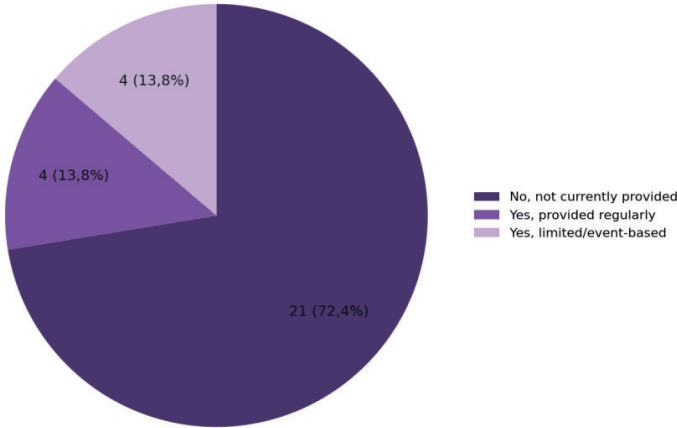


Chart 2: Current Status of Multilingual Service Provision in Municipalities

Status	Number of Municipalities	Percentage
No multilingual service provided	21	72.4%
Provided regularly	4	13.8%
Limited / event-based	4	13.8%

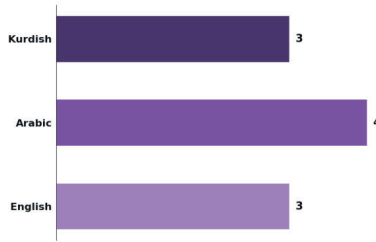
Table 4: Distribution of Multilingual Service Provision

This distribution shows that multilingual services have not become an institutional and continuous public-service practice in most municipalities, and that existing practices remain exceptional, fragmented, and lacking in continuity. That regular and limited practices combined amount to just 8 municipalities in total shows

that native-language and multilingual service is far from being a public-service standard on the scale of Istanbul.

Kurdish's Place within Multilingual Services

Municipalities that stated they provide multilingual services were asked in which languages they provide services. Arabic (4 municipalities) and English (3 municipalities) stood out, while the number of municipalities providing Kurdish-language services was limited to just 3. The municipalities that stated they provide Kurdish-language services are Bağcılar, Avcılar, and Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality.



Municipalities offering Kurdish-language service: Bağcılar, Avcılar, and Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality

Chart 3: Languages Offered by Municipalities Providing Multilingual Services

Language Offered	Number of Municipalities
Arabic	4
Kurdish	3
English	3

Table 5: Languages Offered by Municipalities Providing Multilingual Services (multiple choice)

This finding shows that even among municipalities where multilingual practices exist, Kurdish is one of the least represented languages. The greater visibility of Arabic- and English-language service provision suggests that multilingual services are approached predominantly within the framework of migrant- and refugee-focused policies. This indicates that women whose native language is Kurdish — who make up a significant share of Istanbul's population — remain in a secondary and invisible position within local services.

- Kurdish-language services are provided not through an institutional system but through the one-to-one communication of Kurdish-speaking staff (in all 3 municipalities).
- Only 1 municipality (Bağcılar) has employed dedicated staff for this purpose; in the others, the service relies on the individual language skills of existing staff.

In all three municipalities, it was stated that Kurdish-language services are provided not through an institutionalized system or official mechanism, but through the one-to-one communication of Kurdish-speaking staff. This shows that Kurdish-language services in municipalities still rely on personal capacity and individual initiative, and therefore have a fragile structure in terms of continuity, standardization, and institutional guarantee. In areas that require continuity and trust in particular — such as services for combating violence against women — such individual solutions are insufficient to constitute a lasting public-service practice ensuring equal access.

The profile of the 11 municipalities that did not respond to the study is notable, as it helps complete the missing part of the picture. The silence of these institutions should be read not merely as an 'administrative gap,' but

as a manifestation of the 'political invisibility' of multilingual services within local governments. This lack of participation — particularly in areas with a dense Kurdish population or with distinct socio-political dynamics — also helps explain why the map of multilingual services could not be drawn in full. Given the apparent correlation between the profile of participating municipalities and the socio-economic indicators of non-participating ones, it becomes clear that native-language service is not a 'preference,' but an indicator of a municipality's capacity for democratic transparency.

Kurdish-Language Support and Staffing in Cases of Violence

The table below presents the assessment, among the 8 municipalities that stated they provide multilingual services, of the provision of Kurdish-language support and information to women who apply in cases of violence.

Description	Number
No, there is no such policy or practice	6
Yes, but not systematic / individual initiative	1
Yes, a written policy or practice exists	2

Table 6: Status of Kurdish-Language Support and Information in Cases of Violence

Within this scope, the 8 municipalities that stated they provide multilingual services were assessed. Among these municipalities, 6 stated that there is no policy or practice for providing Kurdish-language support or information to women who apply in cases of violence. 1 municipality stated that Kurdish-language support is not provided through a systematic practice, but rather through the individual initiative of Kurdish-speaking staff, depending on the situation. This finding shows that there is no direct overlap between the existence of multilingual service provision and the guarantee of

native-language access in services for combating violence against women. Even in municipalities that state they provide multilingual services, Kurdish-language support is mostly carried out not as an institutionalized, sustainable, and systematic mechanism, but through limited, fragile, and person-dependent practices.

Staff Employment	Number
No, there is no staff support at all	4
No, but existing Kurdish-speaking staff provide support when needed	3
Yes, dedicated staff have been employed for this purpose (Bağcılar Municipality)	1

Table 7: Employment of Dedicated Staff for Kurdish and Other Languages in Municipalities

This distribution shows that even in municipalities that state they provide multilingual services, Kurdish-language services largely rely not on institutional staffing but on the individual language skills of existing personnel. The fact that only one municipality has employed dedicated staff shows that native-language service has not yet been embraced as an area of institutional investment.

Support Mechanisms in Municipalities Without Multilingual Services

Municipalities that stated they do not provide multilingual services were asked what kind of support mechanism operates for citizens whose native language is not Turkish. The most common response was that support is provided not through an institutional mechanism but through staff or individuals who speak the language (6 municipalities). In some municipalities, where no in-house solution can be produced, support is sought through referral to IMM or civil

society organizations; in 5 municipalities, there is no support or referral mechanism of any kind.

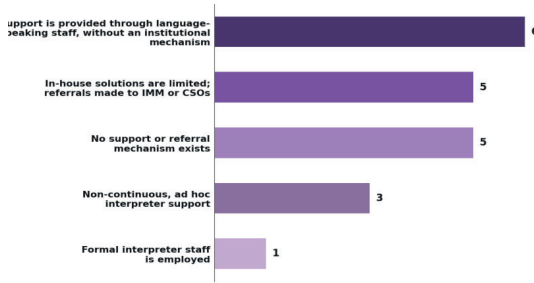


Chart 4: Support Mechanisms in Municipalities Without Multilingual Services

This picture shows that, in the absence of multilingual services, access for citizens whose native language is not Turkish depends on personal initiative, temporary solutions, and external referrals — meaning that equal and safe public-service provision is not institutionally guaranteed. The existence of 5 municipalities reporting no support mechanism at all is critical, as it shows that the language barrier is entirely disregarded in some municipalities.

Intention to Include Multilingual Services in Future Plans

Responses to the question posed to municipalities that stated they do not provide multilingual services — “do you plan to include multilingual service practices in your future policies?” — point to a positive but cautious orientation for the coming period.

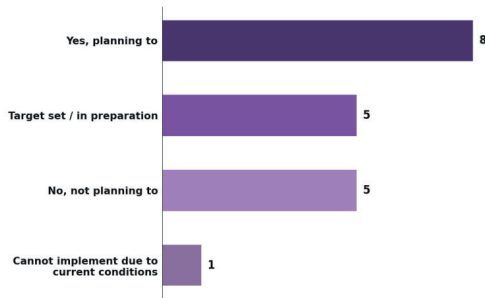


Chart 5: Intention to Include Multilingual Services in Future Plans (19 municipalities)

Orientation	Number of Municipalities
Planning to	8
Target exists, in preparation	5
Not planning to	5
Unable to implement due to current conditions	1

Table 8: Intention to Include Multilingual Services in Future Plans

Of the 19 responding municipalities, 8 stated that they plan to include multilingual services, and 5 stated that such a target exists but implementation is still in the preparation phase. In contrast, 5 municipalities stated that they do not intend to include multilingual services in their future plans. These responses show that native-language service provision largely remains at the level of “intent” and has not translated into concrete, scheduled, budgeted plans with an assigned responsible unit.

Status of Concrete Steps Toward Kurdish-Language Services

Municipalities that indicated they were considering Kurdish-language service practices were asked, in an open-ended question, what concrete steps they planned to take in this direction; the responses were analyzed using single-category coding.

Description	Number of Municipalities
Report having no concrete plan or step	16
Express positive intent but no concrete steps	6
Point to limited / temporary measures (brochures, referrals)	4
Address the language barrier through Turkish-language instruction	1
Propose structural and institutional steps (staff, unit, council decision)	2

Table 9: Status of Concrete Steps Toward Kurdish-Language Services

This analysis shows that concrete steps toward Kurdish-language services have not yet reached the planning stage in the large majority of municipalities. More than half of the responding municipalities stated that no defined step or program exists in this area. A limited number of municipalities expressed positive intent, but this has not yet translated into scheduled or institutionalized steps. The very limited number of responses pointing to structural and institutional steps indicates that Kurdish-language services need to be addressed through institutional policy and decision-making mechanisms rather than individual efforts.

Perceived Barriers

Thematic analysis of the open-ended responses shows that the perception of difficulty in implementing Kurdish-language services is shaped largely by the fact that the service is simply not provided. A significant proportion of responding municipalities (12) stated that they could not identify difficulties or barriers in this area because they do not provide Kurdish-language services at all.

The fact that Kurdish-language services rely entirely on the individual initiative of staff poses a critical risk in terms of 'institutional memory' and 'service continuity.' When such staff rotate, change institutions, or leave their positions, the relevant municipality's Kurdish-language service capacity is reduced to zero. This causes the service to shift from being the 'fulfillment of a right' to a 'favor' contingent on the chance presence of a specialist happening to work at that municipality. In this model, which lacks any institutional procedure, women access the service every time they apply with the anxiety of 'is there staff on duty today who speaks my language?' – which undermines a safe application mechanism from the outset in traumatic processes such as violence.

Perceived Difficulty / Barrier	Number of Municipalities
Cannot identify difficulty because Kurdish service is not provided	12
Perceive no barrier at all	6
Legislative, institutional capacity, and resource constraints	4
Do not perceive a barrier, citing lack of demand	3
Point to political and structural barriers	2
Lack of staff and expertise	1

Perceived Difficulty / Barrier	Number of Municipalities
Communication and expression difficulties	1

Table 10: Perceived Difficulties and Barriers to Implementing Kurdish-Language Services

Responses of “no barrier at all” were mostly framed around an emphasis on “equal service”; this approach shows that the need for multilingual services becomes invisible within the discourse of “equal service” and is not treated as a distinct, planned, and targeted policy area. Some municipalities define barriers in terms of a lack of demand; however, this approach disregards the fact that language barriers may already be limiting application behavior in the first place. A smaller number of municipalities define the barriers in terms of legislation, institutional capacity, resource constraints, and, in particular, political-administrative reservations; these responses show that the difficulties are predominantly structural and political in nature rather than technical.

Taken as a whole, the findings show that the difficulties regarding Kurdish-language services stem not primarily from technical shortcomings, but from a failure to implement, the rendering-invisible of demand, and political-institutional reservations. This picture shows that multilingual services are not a secondary practice for local governments, but a policy area that can be realized through clear will and institutional determination.

Key Findings

- Multilingual services rely on individual initiative rather than institutional policy.
- Kurdish is the least represented language among multilingual services (only 3 municipalities).
- The diversity of the individuals and units answering the questions shows that there is no clearly defined institutional responsibility.
- Most of the perceived barriers stem from the service simply not being provided at all; only a small number of municipalities point to legislative, resource, or political/structural barriers.
- Native-language service remains at the level of “intent” in most municipalities and has not translated into concrete plans, timelines, or budgets.

Field Interviews

In order to deepen the quantitative picture obtained from the electronic questionnaire and to understand municipalities' approach to native-language service within their own institutional context, in-person interviews were conducted with five district municipalities (Arnavutköy, Ataşehir, Avcılar, Beyoğlu, Sancaktepe) and Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality. In selecting the municipalities to be interviewed, criteria such as population size and migration density (particularly Kurdish population), the existence of services for women, openness to cooperation with

civil society, representation of different political parties, and a balance between the European and Anatolian sides were taken into account.

The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured method that followed predetermined themes while leaving room for the interviewee's own experiences and assessments. The questions were organized around four main axes: the municipality's current services and units in the field of combating violence against women; whether it provides native-language (particularly Kurdish) services and, if so, through which mechanism; how it defines the barriers to native-language service; and whether it has a future plan in this area. These open-ended interviews made visible the institutional attitudes, justifications, and discourse behind the numerical responses in the questionnaire.

Taken together, the interviews revealed three distinct profiles among municipalities in terms of openness to cooperation and approach to native-language service:

Municipalities Interviewed in the Field and Their Cooperation Profile

Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality March 11, 2026	Provides Kurdish support
Avcılar Municipality April 7, 2026	Provides Kurdish support
Beyoğlu Municipality March 16, 2026	Open, resource-limited
Ataşehir Municipality April 1, 2026	Open, resource-limited
Sancaktepe Municipality April 8, 2026	Open, resource-limited
Arnavutköy Municipality April 2, 2026	Closed to cooperation

Chart 5: Municipalities Where Field Interviews Were Conducted and Their Cooperation Profile

Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality and Avcılar stood out among the municipalities interviewed as institutions that actually provide Kurdish-language support. IMM operates a 24/7 Women's Support Line offering support in Turkish, Kurdish, Arabic, and English, although this capacity has not yet been extended to all counseling centers. Avcılar, for its part, provides Kurdish-language support under the Emergency Assistance Protocol signed with IMM, to which 19 municipalities were party as of the date of this report; however, the number of Kurdish-speaking staff within the institution is limited, and a previously prepared multilingual service policy has not been fully implemented due to resource and priority constraints.

Beyoğlu, Ataşehir, and Sancaktepe are institutions that are open to the subject and willing to cooperate, but have not been able to turn native-language service into institutional policy due to resource constraints. In these municipalities, Kurdish-language service is not treated as an institutionalized practice but as a matter that may be considered case by case, with no concrete implementation timetable presented.

Arnavutköy Municipality, on the other hand, stated that it provides services only in Turkish and that no such demand has arisen; when the language barrier was raised, it regarded the inquiry itself as discriminatory and remained closed to cooperation. This example concretely shows that the issue is framed by some local governments as a political matter.

The common thread across all the interviews is that in no municipality is native-language service an institutionalized, guaranteed policy. Even in municipalities that provide Kurdish-language support, the practice remains an insecure area dependent on individual initiative, staff language skills, and political will.

Advocacy and Dissemination Process

The field interviews were not intended solely for data collection; they also evolved into an advocacy and dissemination process. The data analysis produced over the course of the study, along with the policy recommendation document, was presented directly to the five district municipalities interviewed and to Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality. This gave municipalities the opportunity to review, first-hand, the findings concerning their own service areas and the concrete recommendations for strengthening native-language access.

This step shows that the study evolved into an active advocacy practice that not only identifies the current situation, but also aims to create change by sharing the findings directly with decision-makers. Kadın Zamanı Derneği regards this process not as a one-off exchange, but as the beginning of a structural solution partnership to be built with municipalities.

Digital Mapping Initiative: JinMap



jinmap.kadinzamani.org

Although Istanbul is one of Turkey's cities with the densest Kurdish population, women's access, in their native language, to anti-violence mechanisms and social support services remains extremely limited. Many women do not know which municipal unit in their district can provide support; this lack of information and the fragmented structure of services create life-threatening risks, particularly for women subjected to violence. To eliminate this invisibility, Kadın Zamanı Derneği launched the digital mapping initiative called JinMap.

jinmap.kadinzamani.org brings together municipalities' mechanisms for combating violence against women, women's counseling centers, and, in particular, services offering Kurdish-language support. Prepared with an interface and content entirely in Kurdish so as to be fully consistent with the principle of native-language access, JinMap turns the report's core argument — women's right to access services and information in their native language — into a concrete practice, and continues to be updated in line with needs and feedback.

3. CONCLUSION

In combating violence against women, language is often an invisible but decisive threshold. A woman's ability to describe the violence she has experienced, to learn her rights, and to safely access protection mechanisms depends, above all, on her being recognized as a subject in the language in which she can best express herself that is, her native language. In this respect, native-language service is not a dispensable nicety or a "good practice," but an inseparable component of equality, access to rights, and the right to life. This study was carried out to make visible local governments' stance in Istanbul with respect to this fundamental right. The data obtained present a clear and striking picture. Of the 40 institutions sent the questionnaire, 11 did not respond to the study at all; some of the non-respondents declined to answer questions on a matter as vital as combating violence against women, regarding them as "political." The large majority of responding municipalities (roughly three-quarters) stated that they do not provide any multilingual service. When asked how access to services is ensured for women whose native language is not Turkish, five municipalities stated that they have no support or referral mechanism whatsoever showing that the language barrier is entirely disregarded in some institutions. The most striking aspect of this picture is the invisibility of Kurdish-language services. In a city where millions of Kurdish women live, only three municipalities stated that they provide Kurdish-language support in cases of violence, and only one municipality has employed dedicated staff to institutionalize this service. Even where multilingual services exist, the greater visibility of Arabic and English compared to Kurdish shows that multilingualism is largely

confined to migrant-focused policies, while Kurdish women a long-established part of Istanbul remain persistently sidelined within local services. The small amount of Kurdish-language service that is offered rests not on an institutional guarantee, but largely on a fragile foundation dependent on the individual effort of a language-speaking employee and on the shifting priorities and political will of changing administrations. Taken together, these findings show that native-language access has not even yet been defined as a policy area within local governments. The in-person interviews conducted with municipalities not only confirmed this picture but also made visible the institutional attitude behind the numerical data. The interviews showed that, even in the most cooperative municipalities, native-language service depends not on a responsible unit, a defined budget, or an implementation timetable, but on the presence of language-speaking staff and the personal approach of managers. More importantly, an almost universal discourse was encountered across municipalities of very different political affiliations, citing “lack of demand” as the justification. Yet the absence of applications in a given language to an institution that provides no information in that language does not indicate an absence of demand; it shows that the language barrier discourages applications from the outset. The “no demand” discourse thus becomes a basis for ignoring an existing need and for rejecting responsibility for addressing it. The fact that responses to the questionnaire came from different units and titles within municipalities shows that there is no clearly defined institutional responsibility or authority in this area, and that native-language service remains, in most municipalities, an undefined “intent” that has not translated into a concrete plan, timetable, or budget. Yet a right is only real once it is guaranteed. A service left to personal

initiative one that can disappear with the departure of a single manager is not a right women can safely rely on, but a favor that can be withdrawn at any moment. The findings presented in this report, together with the policy recommendations developed from them, show that native-language access is not a deferrable preference for local governments, but an institutional responsibility requiring concrete steps. Employing Kurdish-speaking staff, producing multilingual information materials, establishing native-language access as a defined target within strategic plans, and transparently monitoring service data are accessible and implementable steps toward fulfilling this responsibility.

Kadın Zamanı Derneği regards this report not as a concluding document, but as part of an ongoing monitoring and advocacy effort. Until native-language access is achieved, the association will continue to monitor practices in this field, make women's experiences visible, and share its findings with decision-makers. The core expectation arising from this study is clear: local governments must treat native-language access in anti-violence services for women not as a matter of favor or goodwill, but as a right guaranteed through concrete targets, responsible units, and allocated budgets. Ensuring native-language access on a lasting basis depends on the adoption of this institutional responsibility.

4. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The study's findings show that native-language access has still not become institutional policy within local governments. Closing this gap is not a matter that can be left to municipalities' discretion; it is a requirement of the obligation to plan, implement, and improve in line with the principle of "leaving no one behind." Indeed, the "Just Istanbul" vision committed to in the Istanbul 2050 Vision Strategy Document and IMM's Local Equality Action Plan also envisages that all women in the city be able to access municipal services without any discrimination whatsoever.

As a requirement of this inclusivity goal and of the rights of local citizenship (hemşehrilik) set out in Law No. 5393 on Municipalities, ensuring that Kurdish women — who make up a significant part of Istanbul's distinctive demographic makeup — can access anti-violence mechanisms in their native language is a strategic necessity. These policy recommendations were developed by Kadın Zamanı Derneği, in light of its field findings and strategic analyses, with the aim of making anti-violence mechanisms accessible to Kurdish women.

The 'no demand' argument is one of the primary defense mechanisms municipalities use to render barriers to native-language access invisible. However, this argument inverts the causal relationship between 'barrier to access' and 'lack of demand.' If a municipality has no Kurdish-language support mechanism, signage, or specialist, the absence of applications for native-language service at that municipality does not prove that there is no demand — it proves that the service is 'inaccessible.' Demand is directly proportional to an institution's accessibility;

the 'no demand' discourse is therefore, in effect, a way of admitting the institution's own structural shortcoming in service provision.

Current Situation and Key Problem Areas

- **Inclusivity:** Thousands of Kurdish women living in Istanbul face layered discrimination arising from the language barrier, in addition to gender-based violence.
- **Trauma and Difficulty of Expression:** Women subjected to violence being forced to express themselves, at the moment of trauma, in a second language (Turkish) lowers the quality of the psychological support and legal processes they receive.
- **Inequality in Access to Information:** The fact that information regarding Law No. 6284 and municipal social support services is provided only in Turkish prevents Kurdish women who are newcomers to the city, or who have been denied access to education, from learning their legal rights.
- **Lack of Budget and Targeting:** Combating violence is generally addressed indirectly under the heading of "social services," with no budget allocated to specialized areas such as "native-language service."
- **Lack of Mechanisms and Mapping:** There is no transparent dataset on how much demand is received in which language at existing solution centers.
- **Shortage of Specialist Staff:** In the majority of centers where municipalities provide services, the number of Kurdish-speaking psychologists, sociologists, and social work specialists is critically insufficient.

- Lack of Multilingual Materials: Kurdish-language brochures, web content, and similar materials explaining the mechanisms to apply to in cases of violence are not produced.

Legislation and Strategy Alignment Table

Reference Document	Basis / Rationale	Link to Policy Recommendation
Istanbul Vision 2050	"Equitable and just city" vision, inclusive social services	Linguistic accessibility is a technical standard that complements the city's social justice goal.
IMM Local Equality Action Plan (YEEP)	Making urban services accessible for vulnerable groups	Native-language service is an implementation requirement of the YEEP.
Law No. 5393 on Municipalities	Art. 13 rights of local citizenship (hemşehrilik); Art. 14 obligation to provide shelters	Freeing services of linguistic barriers is a requirement of the law on local citizenship.
Law No. 6284	Art. 1/2-a international standards and the prohibition of discrimination	Failing to provide guidance in a language the person understands violates the law's principle of effective protection.
Regulation on the Procedures and Principles of Public Services	Principle of equality before the law and facilitation of access	The language barrier should be minimized as an administrative deficiency.
UN Women "Safe Cities for Women"	Right to access public services and justice without fear	Native-language support is a mechanism for women's access to justice.

Reference Document	Basis / Rationale	Link to Policy Recommendation
CEMR (European Charter for Equality), Art. 11	Combating multiple discrimination, accounting for minority needs	The demand for native-language service is part of the principle of “equality within diversity.”
Women's Empowerment Strategy Document (2024-2028) / SDG 5	Strengthening institutional capacity and accessibility	The national action plan emphasizes the capacity to “reach all women.”

Table 11: Legislation and Strategy Alignment Table

Concrete Solutions

The recommendations developed in light of the field findings and legislative analysis are grouped into four complementary axes.

A. Institutional Capacity and Multilingualism in Service Units

- **Employment of Specialist Staff:** Making it mandatory to employ Kurdish-speaking social work specialists and psychologists at all Women's Counseling Centers, particularly in neighborhoods with a dense Kurdish population.
- **Central Interpreter Support:** Establishing a 24/7 “Video/Voice Interpreter Pool” so that all units can draw on this support whenever needed.
- **Staff Training:** Periodically organizing “Multicultural Case Management” and “Native-Language Service Rights” training for all staff in anti-violence units.

B. Digital Access and Communication Model

- **Multilingual Communication Kits:** Producing information materials covering Law No. 6284, shelter rights, and emergency assistance lines in Kurdish and making them available on digital platforms.
- **Inclusive Solution Center:** Activating Kurdish-speaking operator support for violence reports on the Alo 153 line and municipal support lines.
- **Interactive Service Map:** Creating a comprehensive digital map showing the language capacities of anti-violence units and integrating it with existing maps.

C. Participatory and Neighborhood-Focused Solutions

- **Local Cooperation:** Establishing a direct communication mechanism, focused on case follow-up and fieldwork, between local associations organized by Kurdish women and IMM's Women's units.
- **Native-Language Awareness Sessions:** Holding sessions at venues such as Neighborhood Houses and İSADEM locally, with Kurdish-language moderation support.

D. Strategic Planning: A Standalone Target and Indicators

It is recommended that, in municipalities' 2025-2029 Strategic Plans, rather than treating the language barrier as an indirect element under the heading of "social services," the heading "Linguistic Inclusiveness and Native-Language Access in Service Provision" be defined as a standalone strategic target.

Indicator No.	Performance Indicator	Target (2026–2029)
PI 1	Number of specialist staff (psychologists, social work specialists) able to provide Kurdish-language service	At least 1 specialist in every Women's Counseling Center
PI 2	Share of multilingual (including Kurdish) informational materials produced, as a proportion of the total	Min. 30%
PI 3	Share of staff trained in “Multicultural Case Management and Linguistic Rights”	100% of unit staff
PI 4	Utilization and satisfaction rate of women whose native language is not Turkish with anti-violence mechanisms	Annual increase and periodic measurement
PI 5	Share of shelters and counseling units providing native-language support, as a proportion of all units	100%

Table 12: Performance Indicators and 2026–2029 Targets

Priority and Structural Recommendations

In addition to the solution axes above, five priority recommendations emerge directly from the study's findings and can be implemented in the short term. These recommendations aim to directly answer the justifications municipalities frequently give, such as “no demand,” “responsible unit unclear,” and “no resources.”

1. Language-Data Recording to Test the “No Demand” Claim

Municipalities' most frequent justification — “there is no demand for Kurdish-language service” — ignores the fact that the language barrier prevents applications from occurring in the first place; demand is disregarded because it has been rendered invisible. To

break this vicious cycle, it is recommended that women's counseling centers and social support units systematically record the preferred language of applicants (with attention to personal data protection and on an anonymous basis). This would allow the need for native-language service to be demonstrated with objective data and make the "no demand" narrative verifiable.

2. Making Native-Language Service Capacity a Staffing and Procurement Criterion

Leaving native-language service dependent on individual initiative is the most fundamental point of fragility. To overcome this, it is recommended that municipalities explicitly include a "Kurdish/multilingual service capacity" criterion in social-service staff vacancy announcements and service procurement specifications. This would turn native-language service from a favor dependent on an individual into an institutional standard.

3. Scaling Up the Bağcılar Model as a Good Practice Example

The findings show that only one municipality (Bağcılar) has employed dedicated staff for this purpose. This experience is not an abstract goal but a concrete model with proven feasibility. It is recommended that the Bağcılar example (including creating positions, budgeting, and service-delivery processes) be turned into a good-practice guide and shared with other municipalities.

4. Expanding and Standardizing the IMM Emergency Assistance Protocol

Field interviews found that Kurdish-language support is provided under the Emergency Assistance Protocol signed with IMM, to which 19 municipalities were party as of the date of this report. It is recommended that this already-functioning mechanism be

expanded to cover municipalities not yet party to it, and that the native-language (particularly Kurdish) support standard be explicitly written into the protocol text.

5. Annual Native-Language Service Scorecard and Transparency

To strengthen accountability, it is recommended that municipalities share basic data on their native-language service capacity (languages of applicants, number of specialist staff, multilingual materials produced) with the public and civil society once a year. This transparency both enables progress to be monitored and creates a positive incentive mechanism among municipalities.

Conclusion and Call for Cooperation

Violence against women is a problem that fundamentally threatens women's lives and hinders their participation in social life; it requires a joint and determined struggle at both the societal and local level, through multifaceted, holistic, and inclusive plans and policies. It is important that the gender-equality perspective be built multilingually into all plans and initiatives carried out by local governments, so as to ensure women's inclusion in every sphere of urban life.

Native-language support is the most fundamental threshold facilitating access to rights. Rather than this service being scattered among existing activities, it needs to be recognized as one of the municipality's main policy axes. As Kadın Zamanı Derneği, we would like to state that we are ready to build a structural solution partnership with all municipalities in planning this standalone target, tracking its indicators, and implementing it in the field.

REFERENCES

The following legislation, strategy documents, and sources were reviewed in the course of this study:

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- Law No. 5018 on Public Financial Management and Control.
- Law No. 5216 on Metropolitan Municipalities.
- Law No. 6284 on the Protection of the Family and the Prevention of Violence Against Women.
- 4th National Action Plan for Combating Violence Against Women (2021–2025), Ministry of Family and Social Services.
- Women's Empowerment Strategy Document and Action Plan (2024–2028).
- Family Protection and Strengthening Vision Document and Action Plan (2024–2028).
- European Gender Equality Strategy (2020–2025).
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).
- Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention).
- Twelfth Development Plan (2024–2028).
- Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), United Nations (2015–2030).
- Istanbul 2050 Vision Strategy Document.
- Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality Local Equality Action Plan (YEER).
- CEMR – European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life.
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