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# A PARADIGM SHIFT IN THE PARTICIPATION OF DISADVANTAGED GROUPS IN DIGITAL GOVERNANCE: IS WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION A GOAL OR A MEANS?

Mehmet Ölmez<sup>1</sup> and Bülent Bayrak<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Associate Professor, Ph. D., Inonu University, Malatya OSB MYO, ORCID: 0000-0002-1462-1241,  
olmez23@hotmail.com

<sup>2</sup>Dr. Malatya Treasury Office, Audit Coordination Directorate, ORCID: 0000-0003-1056-8866,  
ardadoruk3588@gmail.com

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Corresponding Author: Mehmet Ölmez  
(olmez23@hotmail.com)

## ABSTRACT

Management science is undergoing a rapid transformation from traditional management approaches to today's and tomorrow's digital governance models. Along with this transformation, groups known as "disadvantaged groups" in society, such as women, people with disabilities, immigrants, children, and ex-convicts, have also increased their participation in public policies. This increase, alongside the development of digital governance, has led to criticism that the participation of disadvantaged groups in public policies has become a means to an end rather than an end in itself. The study examined whether the participation of women, a disadvantaged group whose social impact is increasing and becoming more visible within the digital governance process, in social life and public policy, and their thoughts and actions, are for humanitarian and democratic purposes or as a populist tool. To this end, a literature review was conducted on the concepts of traditional governance, digital governance, paradigm, disadvantaged groups, women as a disadvantaged group, participation in social life, and public policies, and document analysis, one of the qualitative research methods, was used. In this regard, digital governance has played an important role in the formation or direction of public policies concerning disadvantaged groups that are marginalized from society or perceive themselves as marginalized from society. It can be said that initiatives targeting women have increased the visibility of these groups in the digital sphere, but the actual impact of this participation on decision-making processes remains open to debate. It is observed that women's participation in social life and public policies generally remains symbolic, failing to create the desired impact in daily life and decision-making processes. This situation suggests that participation is being used as a populist tool rather than for democratic and humanitarian purposes, raising questions about the extent to which participation is genuine and effective.

**KEYWORDS:** Digital Governance, Paradigm, Disadvantaged Group, Public Policies.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The digital transformation brought about by technology encompasses the transition to a digital world in every area, from work life to social life, and from individual activities to social activities. Each passing day brings new discoveries and developments in technology, adding a more digital dimension to life than the day before. This digital transformation has also brought about one of the most significant changes in societies' approach to participation. The concept of participation has changed shape as a result of technology's intervention in every area, becoming more intense and effective. This paradigm shift in the understanding of participation means that instead of physically participating in social activities or simply participating by voting in elections, people now develop social relationships through tablet computers and smartphones; following political, economic, and social changes; receiving services, expressing opinions, or submitting complaints using the digital applications of public institutions; sharing on social media platforms and commenting on shared content.

In societies, it is desirable for every group, every class, and every individual to live together with as equal rights and opportunities as possible, and for this to be achieved and sustained. However, this situation cannot always be realized due to economic, social, and physical conditions. Women, who are among the disadvantaged groups, have been the segments most affected by these negative conditions in societies. Increasing digital presentation and participation opportunities plays a significant role in minimizing the disadvantages women face. So, are these digital opportunities sufficiently available to women, and can women's participation be brought to the desired level? Ensuring women's participation in the social sphere and public policies has regressed from being an important goal on the path to becoming a successful and developed society to being a tool used by public administrators to protect their current positions and interests. The positive paradigm shift from governance to digital governance is witnessing a negative paradigm shift due to the regression in the perspective on women's digital participation.

## 2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

It is useful to explain the basic concepts that guide the research, namely digital governance, paradigm, disadvantaged groups, women, and participation in social life and public policies.

### 2.1. Digital Governance

Technological innovations have provided stakeholders who benefit from public services with new opportunities to control certain bureaucratic, political, and administrative structures. In this context, public administration reform tools are shifting from a new public administration approach that emphasizes competition and incentives to digital governance, which prioritizes the integration of holistic services for citizens and brings significant changes to government administration (Idzi and Gomes, 2022). "Digital governance, in its simplest form, is rethinking services, data, and institutions as a whole. More comprehensively, digital governance is an approach that makes services offered to citizens more accessible, understandable, and simpler; reduces duplication by using common modules instead of separate processes for each institution; and manages data responsibly by keeping it secure, purpose-limited, and up-to-date. It is not correct to view digital governance solely as an inter-institutional technical integration. It is a comprehensive public architecture built on a common language, common processes, and ethical principles" (Engin, 2025: 311).

Digital governance is concerned with the use of the internet to offer stakeholders alternatives for organizing themselves and developing new avenues for participation, and it is considered an intermediate period in the transition to digital age governance. Digital governance, which is considered to have developed in four stages—organization-focused e-government, citizen-focused e-government, organization-focused e-governance, and citizen-focused e-governance—represents a development that emphasizes the impact of technologies on governance as a more advanced stage of e-government and e-governance. Digital governance, based on information and communication technologies (ICT) and big data, optimizes managerial decisions and policies by integrating complex data analysis, data modeling, data optimization, and visualization applications into government activities and management processes. Digital governance, which has an impact on strengthening government capacity, also has the effect of increasing the legitimacy, transparency, and responsiveness of good governance. Digital governance, which will attempt to solve the reflection of complex and dynamic challenges that exist in reality in the digital environment, requires a holistic approach that addresses fundamental questions and issues related to democracy, in addition to infrastructural problems. Some

academics and scientists emphasize that digital governance is an important tool for achieving sustainable development goals, but that there are significant gaps between the goals and capacity. Thanks to the speed and focus brought by technology, digital governance addresses problems in terms of their benefits, harms, and effects rather than cause-and-effect relationships. Focusing on minimizing undesirable outcomes, digital governance must develop new tools for the system to perceive the effects of these outcomes and respond to them (Engvall and Flak, 2002).

Digital governance, considered an evolved form of e-governance (Engvall and Flak, 2002), can be defined as a rapidly changing socio-technical system, a whole of digital activities where social, cultural, economic, political, and technological factors come together. In a broader sense, digital governance is defined as the creation and implementation of standards and policies for the appropriate use, development, and management of the information environment in which networking and electronic communication take place (Sarıtürk, 2023). According to another understanding, it is an undeveloped public administration paradigm that may require new strategies involving unique challenges, the role of citizens, the replication of government services, and an understanding of forms of collaborative production (Idzi and Gomes, 2022).

Digital governance, which involves transferring public services to digital formats, enables governments to collect large amounts of data on stakeholders' daily activities, interactions, and transactions, and to use this data as insight for extracting, analyzing, and shaping services. Thus, while creating a more agile and functional public administration on the one hand, the quality of services provided to citizens is improved on the other, and the efficiency of public policies is strengthened, evolving the management approach towards digital age governance (Angın, 2025, p. 161). Although the US, UK, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand, and Scandinavian countries are at the forefront of this progress, it is known that this progress is not homogeneous among governments and that digital governance in the public sector lags behind that of the private sector in terms of technology and culture. According to the OECD, this digital governance paradigm, which entails certain risks and challenges that require governments to be prepared, also leads citizens to demand new governance strategies from governments. In states that fail to meet these

expectations, problems such as a decline in trust in governments and institutions and a disconnect from new social and technological realities may arise (Idzi and Gomes, 2022).

## 2.2. Paradigm

In general terms, a paradigm is defined as a way of perceiving that shapes one's view of events or a set of beliefs that governs one's perception. In this sense, paradigms are understandings that bear the traces of the era in which they emerged and shape the era in which they exist. Paradigms can influence every area, from science to production, economics to quality of life. In his 1962 book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Kuhn first introduced the concept of paradigm, defining it as the patterns of thought accepted by scientists in a given period that determine how scientific problems are approached (Anasız, 2022). According to Kuhn, who stated that the importance of the paradigm stems from the desire to find the source of the difference between social scientists and natural scientists, mature and accepted scientific knowledge enables the establishment of a paradigm and, thus, specialized research (Öztürk, 2012).

In his 1969 addition to *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Kuhn emphasized that the concept of paradigm has two meanings: "disciplinary matrix," meaning all the connections accepted by a scientific community, and "exemplarity," meaning something more specific and considered a subset of the first meaning. Kuhn stated that the disciplinary matrix includes symbolic generalizations, models, and values, while the exemplarity meaning can be explained as concrete puzzle solutions for scientific activities that scientists and students who want to advance in the field of science encounter while practicing their professions (Öztürk, 2012).

A paradigm is a perspective accepted by many scientists that guides and develops recommendations for solving specific problems. The acceptance of a paradigm and its preference during the solution phase can have positive effects, such as the detailed examination of the phenomenon in focus, but it can also have negative effects, such as the neglect of other paradigms or principles that may be more useful (Göksoy, 2019).

## 2.3. Disadvantaged Groups

Groups or social structures that are unable to fully and adequately benefit from the services and opportunities provided by the state due to the social prejudices they face; that face systematic discrimination and exclusion in society and are

“othered” are defined as disadvantaged groups (Yüksel, 2024). UNESCO defines disadvantaged groups as people who are less integrated into society economically and socially due to their gender, economic status, ethnic origin, language and religious differences, or political status (Aykurt, 2020). The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) states that people with disabilities, children, isolated elderly people, ethnic minorities, the poor, and people who are victims of social exclusion, discrimination, and violence constitute disadvantaged groups (Şenel, 2025). The Icelandic Human Rights Center considers the elderly, children, women and girls, refugees and asylum seekers, stateless persons, internally displaced persons, minorities, migrant workers, indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities, HIV-positive persons and AIDS patients, Roma, and LGBT members to be disadvantaged groups (Yüksel, 2024). Ife, on the other hand, describes disadvantaged groups as people who are oppressed due to various structural problems; he emphasizes that structural problems cause social problems and that social problems push various groups to the margins of society, causing them to experience integration problems (Aykurt, 2020).

One of the segments most affected by the differences between what is intended and what is implemented, which has become apparent with digital governance, is the so-called disadvantaged groups, who are actually labeled with the negative connotation of “disadvantaged,” as if normal people are advantaged but these groups are disadvantaged. Ultimately, it could be argued that referring to them as “less advantaged” groups instead of “disadvantaged” would be more humane and dignified.

For disadvantaged groups, integration and active participation in social life are the most important requirements. Disadvantaged groups that can adapt to their environment and actively participate in the natural flow of society can leave their disadvantaged status behind and feel satisfied with life (Türkoğlu and Bayar, 2022). However, to achieve this, all elements of urban life must be brought to an efficient point that is easily accessible to disadvantaged groups.

Many factors in a society can cause disadvantage. The historical past, cultural values, perspectives on life, and democratic and political orientations of societies can influence the causes of disadvantage. In this context, situations of disadvantage, which can sometimes arise due to ethnic origin, gender, or reasons that cannot be changed, can also arise at

times due to reasons such as work life, financial means, and educational status, within the framework of individuals' lifestyles and personal preferences (Yüksel, 2024).

#### **2.4. Women as a Disadvantaged Group**

The disadvantageous situation of women compared to men has existed since the ancient states and societies of history. Throughout history, from ancient Chinese civilization to ancient Egyptian and Persian civilizations, from ancient Greek and Roman civilizations to the Renaissance, women have always been the disadvantaged element in male-dominated societies, and there has always been inequality between men and women in social life and law (Demir, 2021). The social understanding that supports gender discrimination between women and men has allowed for the formation of certain prejudices with the roles it assigns to women and men and the legitimization of this structure (Angın, 2025, p. 54). Similarly, it is seen that Türkiye also strictly enforces this gender discrimination and that traditions, environmental conditions, and social and economic circumstances are effective in this discrimination. This gender-based inequality creates a differentiation between women and men and, due to women's less favorable access to social resources compared to men, has caused damage to cultural, economic, and political development mechanisms within the social structure. Since the 1970s, this social order has been criticized worldwide, and the understanding that rejects gender discrimination has begun to be supported by sociological values and boundaries (Aykurt, 2020; Engin, 2022).

Gender discrimination causes women around the world to be disadvantaged in social, cultural, political, and economic spheres to varying degrees (Demir, 2021). Stating that sexism involves discrimination and prejudice against women, Zastrow (2013: 611) emphasized that although women constitute the majority of the population in the US, they are considered a minority group because they suffer discrimination in many ways and experience limited access to resources.

Women, who are among the disadvantaged groups experiencing limitations due to the barriers they face in utilizing the general resources of society, are stigmatized because of their status and characteristics in society. This stigmatization confronts women in many areas, primarily in the home and workplace (Demir, 2021). The dissemination of policies by governments to reduce the disadvantaged status of women is also important for development in social life (Demir,

2021). In these studies, the opportunities that governments will provide for participation in these policies are as important as the policies themselves. Women's active participation in public policy processes and an increase in their political representation have the potential to solve the problems not only of women but also of other disadvantaged groups (Yasin, 2020).

### **2.5. Participation in Social Life and Public Policy**

Participation in social life, which can be briefly described as socialization, refers to the process of transforming human resources into well-functioning members of society. Involving a lifelong process of change, participation in social life ensures that all structural characteristics of social life are passed on to new individuals and carried forward into the future. Through social participation, individuals learn to relate the culture of the society they live in, the traditionally accepted distribution of roles in society, the place they can acquire among other individuals, and the requirements of the role they possess with their emotions (Doğan, 2005).

Through social participation, individuals who become suitable members of society learn to live in accordance with the culture of the society to which they belong, to be a socio-cultural being, and to fulfill their obligations accordingly. In this sense, social participation represents the process by which humans, who come into the world as biological beings, acquire a socio-cultural identity (Vatandaş, 2020).

Societies can host happy and peaceful individuals if they provide the necessary minimum conditions for each member. Individuals who cannot find the necessary freedom and social equality of opportunity in society may feel alienated from society in a vortex of social exclusion.

Participation in public administration means that the public has control and a say over the decisions made, using existing decision-making structures and processes. Participation in public policies is important not only as a democratic right that is an indicator of the level of development but also because it can have significant effects on decision-makers. Decision-makers can use public participation as a means of gathering information and testing the validity of that information, as well as obtaining information and opinions on ideas, solutions, and resources that can be used to address complex social issues (O'Faircheallaigh, 2010). In this respect, public participation in public policies has the potential to strengthen the hand of decision-

makers in the face of problems.

Considering that participation processes can serve different purposes for different people, it should not be forgotten that there are different expectations in the implementation of these processes. In addition, various models, recommendations, methods, and tools are being developed by experts and academics in order to design the intensity of public participation. When designing a participatory process, it is necessary to consider the topic to be presented to participants, their interactions, personal characteristics, expectations, the nature of the outcome of participation, and many other personal or social factors (Bobbio, 2019).

Advancing technology has also brought about changes in the management and governance systems of cities. Rapid urbanization and the rapid spread of digital globalization have supported the emergence of a new paradigm in urban governance. Digital governance, based on the widespread use of ICTs, enables local communities to participate directly or indirectly in urban projects. Cities striving to improve their governance with digital data and indicators are undergoing change in order to meet the needs of local communities more accurately, efficiently, and quickly. The most important topics of digital city governance are cooperation, transparency, and participation (Karl and Açıksöz, 2021).

### **2.6. Literature Review**

In his study discussing the transition to digital governance, Özer (2017) states that digital governance, which adds technological opportunities to known governance systems, leads to a new structure within the framework of digitalization and governance, replacing classical management approaches. Citizens no longer see the state as an intermediary between themselves and the information and services they demand from the state, but rather as a structure that can be accessed directly with technological tools. Within the scope of digital governance, attention must be paid to policy production, providing responsive and high-quality public services, becoming a knowledge-based institution, and valuing public services and employees. Özer (2017) also emphasized that digital governance is an approach that supports the use of electronic tools in many processes, from the procurement and regulation of government services to their delivery and the determination of their outcomes, and that it provides significant savings in public costs. Dikeçligil (2010) states that the

paradigm, defined as the understanding of science in its shortest form, explains what science should be and how scientific knowledge can be attained, emphasizing that science consists of activities carried out within the framework of problems, research models, and methods predicted within the paradigm. According to Dikeçligil, the paradigm provides the scientific community with a framework for fundamental criteria such as the purpose and function of science, the principles and rules it should follow, what to observe and examine, which questions to ask and how to answer them, the technical tools and equipment to be used, and how to interpret and evaluate the results. In a study by Linos and colleagues (2022), it was emphasized that although digital governance has positive effects in terms of service delivery and quality, it creates significant psychological disadvantages for disadvantaged groups who do not have sufficient confidence and technical skills in the use of information and communication technologies. In their study addressing the concept of poverty from the perspective of disadvantaged groups, Güloğlu and Çepni (2022) base the concept of disadvantage on an individual's limited access to the resources necessary for self-sustainability. According to this study, if a group of people has difficulty accessing resources such as autonomy, responsibility, motivation, self-respect, health, community support, education, and capital, which are accessible to the majority of society, this group is considered disadvantaged. According to Özbaş (2018), a disadvantaged group is a social stratum forced to live with socio-economic, socio-political, socio-cultural, and other impossibilities, along with negativities stemming from inequality and injustice linked to income distribution. In their work reflecting the impact of disadvantaged groups on urban policies, Bulut and Kurt (2020) state that society must have a dualistic participation structure that affects all individuals, such as young and old, women and men, rich and poor, and that democratic formations can survive in this way. This study underscores that children are the most important actors in shaping the future of societies and that this must be taken into account in policy-making. In his study on women's participation in social life, Markoç (2020) states that despite contributing to the household economy, many women are unable to achieve economic independence and complete their social participation, emphasizing that their most important social activities are limited to visiting relatives and friends. This situation causes women

who are physically unable to participate socially to try to participate in the virtual world. The study by Ateş and colleagues (2018) states that increasing the number of services specifically aimed at women and from which women can benefit more, thereby reducing their disadvantages and enabling them to contribute more to society, has an impact on two important policy objectives for central and local government units. It was explained that these goals require the development of a concept of equality in public services by facilitating women's lives through local services and the greater consideration of women's social and individual needs. The same study emphasized that women's low participation in education and working life also affects their participation in all kinds of political activities; it was highlighted that they have not been fully represented in decision-making mechanisms since 1934, when they gained the right to vote and be elected.

### **3. A PARADIGM SHIFT IN THE PARTICIPATION OF DISADVANTAGED GROUPS IN THE DIGITAL GOVERNANCE AXIS**

The use of digital elements such as artificial intelligence, the Internet of Things, big data, cloud computing, and data analytics in governance has added a digital dimension to governance. Activities that stakeholders used to carry out through physical activities have been directed towards technological tools as a result of the digitization of governance, and many processes have been transferred to the digital world. This situation has necessitated that some services and applications, which states previously provided in a more free, uncontrolled, unregulated, and arbitrary manner in the physical environment, be carried out in a more restricted, controlled, regulated, and rule-bound manner with transparency. This reality has highlighted the difference between what is intended and what is done, the difference between governance and digital governance. The differences between what governments wanted to implement and what they actually implemented in the pre-digital governance era have become more apparent since the emergence of digital governance and have been voiced on many digital platforms, especially social media.

Participation systems supported by information technologies create positive effects, such as facilitating access to these systems for disadvantaged groups and eliminating time and space limitations. However, the inability to access

these systems due to socio-economic differences can create inequalities among disadvantaged groups. However, digital governance has complex dynamics as well as positive effects. Digital access inequalities and the digital divide arising from digital governance negatively affect the participation of disadvantaged groups in policy processes, leading to questions about the inclusiveness of participation (Tosun, 2025). Although governance has taken on a digital face, there is a segment of society that experiences difficulties in accessing information and communication technologies, which are the most important elements of this face, to an extent that undermines good governance. This situation, which creates inequality of opportunity in digital access, has given rise to a new disadvantaged group called the “digitally disadvantaged” (Çakıcı and Doğan, 2021).

### ***3.1. Participation of Disadvantaged Groups in Social Life***

Generally speaking, all segments of society, primarily the state, are responsible for taking measures and providing the necessary environments to ensure that disadvantaged groups integrate into the social structure and do not feel disadvantaged compared to others. Even when considering only working life, studies have found that policies implemented for disadvantaged groups, such as people with disabilities and ex-convicts, are insufficient, and that problems arise on both sides in terms of harmonizing with other employees in the workplace (Yılmaz and Çetin, 2025). Another disadvantaged group, the elderly, are also unable to find sufficient happiness in their working lives. While their jobs and work environments should be adapted to suit them, they are faced with demands to adapt themselves to their jobs and work environments. Similarly, immigrants work in agriculture, construction, manufacturing, and service sectors and are heavily exposed to workplace accidents in these environments. Due to the mental health issues they experience, they struggle to adapt to their jobs and work environments. Children, one of the most numerous disadvantaged groups and therefore the group with the most negative impact on society, face violence, work accidents, and situations where they are not given suitable work in a work life where they should not be present in the first place. This not only physically harms children but can also cause irreparable damage to their mental health (Çevik and Özkul, 2022). Similar problems to those experienced in the workplace can arise in many

environments and processes faced by disadvantaged groups.

The Industrial Revolution, which began to influence the world's economic cycle in the second half of the 19th century, brought about significant changes in social relations. The concept of production and production relations changed, and peasants and artisans became part of the poor working class. People living in land-based production areas began to live in large cities where industrial production took place. This change increased the working population and led to working hours rising to as much as 16 hours a day. Struggling with intense working life, this working class also faced negative circumstances such as poverty, disease, old age, malnutrition, and epidemics. As a result, the increase in production brought about by the Industrial Revolution gave rise to many social problems and groups struggling with these problems. When these problems became issues that needed to be resolved by states, the need to improve the living conditions of these groups was recognized. Industrialization and technological development have led humanity to a new worldview with discourses of globalization. Globalization has caused existing social problems to be experienced in more diverse and deeper ways. Contrary to what is often claimed, globalization has increased poverty and social problems rather than the distribution of wealth (Aykurt, 2020). While the world's wealth has ended up in the hands of fewer people, concepts such as poverty, disease, inequality, and injustice have affected more people. As with industrialization, globalization has resulted in an increase in social problems and problematic groups. Not only has the number of disadvantaged groups increased, but new types of disadvantaged groups have emerged, such as cancer patients, SMA patients, and the digitally disadvantaged. Increasing problems and problematic groups have made it necessary for states to take action to solve these problems.

### ***3.2. Participation of Disadvantaged Groups in Public Policies***

Public policies are the sum of the goals and activities of public institutions within the strategic plans determined by governments. The participation of every unit of the public in public policies is a requirement of digital governance. Policy planning and implementation that includes disadvantaged groups, which constitute a significant segment of society, play an important role in ensuring social harmony and peace.

Most disadvantaged groups consist of individuals with the potential to participate in the formulation and implementation of public policies. It is important for governments and public institutions to be welcoming and open in assessing this potential. Including disadvantaged groups in public policies can contribute to economic and social development and play a role in raising social welfare to desired levels (Bozatatay and Ayyıldız, 2018). Public policies developed in line with the principles of creating and implementing transparent, effective, accountable, and participatory public policies defined by digital governance, and which also cover disadvantaged groups in society, will strengthen the hand of governments during implementation (Şahnagil, 2017).

There are individual, environmental, social, and managerial barriers to the participation of disadvantaged groups in public policies, as well as impossibilities brought about by technology. This situation, called digital disadvantage, creates a result that prevents the participation factor, one of the most important factors in the success of good governance, from reaching the desired level. It is thought that the transformation brought about by digitalization could deepen the digital participation gap between women and other disadvantaged groups, particularly in developing countries, and further increase discrimination (İpek, 2024).

#### 4. OVERVIEW OF WOMEN IN DIGITAL GOVERNANCE

Despite numerous policies implemented regarding access to digital resources and digital literacy in today's information age, gender inequality remains a serious problem. This situation is more prevalent in Türkiye, where women are underrepresented in public policies despite their high participation in social media and digital technology. Although women use social media and digital technology extensively, their digital literacy and institutional participation are not sufficient for them to fully benefit from innovations in the public sector.

##### 4.1. The General Outlook for Women in Social Life in the World and in Türkiye

The main barriers limiting women's participation in the workforce worldwide are unpaid family work, low-paid and insecure employment, gender-based inequalities in access to education, and lack of social security (Gözüm, 2024). The fact that women in countries around the world and in Türkiye are

forced to juggle work and household responsibilities demonstrates the need for positive discrimination in terms of social protection systems (Kart and Öngör, 2023). The United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) 2024 International Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) report reveals that approximately two-thirds of multidimensionally poor individuals live in households where no one has received at least six years of education. These data show varying rates from region to region. For example, while the rate is 12.8% in Europe and Central Asia, it rises to 70.5% in the Arab States (UNDP, 2024). In this regard, many international organizations provide support to women. World Bank-supported programs encourage women's participation in production processes, enable them to earn income, and contribute to increasing their social participation (Ekinci Hamamcı and Anık, 2020).

*Table 1: Global Overview of Gender Inequality Worldwide.*

Region	Generational Index	Economic Participation and Opportunity Equality	Level of Education	Health and Survival	Political Participation
Central Asia	69,8	71,2	99,3	97,3	11,6
East Asia and the Pacific	69,4	71,6	95,3	95,5	15,3
Europe	75,1	68,4	99,6	96,9	35,4
Latin America and the Caribbean	74,5	65,6	99,6	97,7	35
Middle East and North Africa	61,7	62,4	97,6	96,2	10,5
North America	74,5	76,1	100	97,2	29,7
South Asia	64,6	40,6	95,4	95,5	26,8
Sub-Saharan Africa	68	67,5	85,6	96,8	22,2
World Average	68,1	60,3	95,1	96,2	22,9

*Source: World Economic Forum*

According to the data in Table 1, there are significant differences in global gender inequality worldwide. In North America, the level of education (100%) and economic participation and opportunity equality (76.1%) are at the highest level compared to other countries. In Sub-Saharan African countries (67.5%), it is possible to say that it is above the world average (60.3%) but not at a sufficient level. Furthermore, this table shows that political participation in Central Asia (11.6%) and the Middle East and North Africa (10.5%) countries is well

below the world average (22.9%).

**Table 2: Number of Women Living in Extreme Poverty by Region Worldwide.**

Region	Population (million)	2022 Ratio
Australia and New Zealand	0,1	12,2
Oceania	1	24,3
Europe and North America	3	14
West and Southwest Asia	19	7,3
North Africa and West Asia	20	22,6
Latin America and the Caribbean	20	30,4
Central and South Asia	81	20,7
Sub-Saharan Africa	244	41,2
World	348	9,0

Source: Compiled from UN Women data

The data in Table 2 provides the approximate number of women living in extreme poverty across continents and regions within the global female population in 2022. Accordingly, the region with the highest number and percentage of women living in extreme poverty is Sub-Saharan Africa, while the region with the lowest number and second-lowest percentage of women living in extreme poverty is Australia and New Zealand. Globally, approximately 9 out of every 100 women struggle with extreme poverty, which is a very high rate. For someone who cannot even afford to feed themselves, participating in social life is probably not very feasible.

**Table 3: Poverty Rate Among Women in Türkiye (%), 2010–2025.**

Year	Total	Urban	Rural
2010	22,4	12,1	36,5
2013	20,1	10,4	33,8
2016	18,7	9,8	30,2
2019	17,5	9,2	28,9
2022	16,9	8,7	26,8
2025	16,8	8,3	25,9

Source: TÜİK, *Income and Living Conditions Survey (2010–2025)*

Looking at the data in Table 3, we see that the regions where Türkiye’s poor female population lived between 2010 and 2025 have been evaluated. While 9 out of every 100 women in the world population are classified as extremely poor, in Türkiye, 19 out of every 100 women have been living in poverty over the last fifteen years. This reveals that women in rural areas in Türkiye are more disadvantaged. Because women in rural areas are more likely to face poverty, unemployment, and limited educational opportunities, all of these factors contribute to women's lack of participation in digital governance initiatives.

**Table 4: School Enrollment Rates by Gender in Türkiye (%), 2015–2025.**

Academic Year	Elementary School		Secondary Education		Higher Education	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
2015-16	96,2	96,3	84,1	85,3	42,8	5,1 <sup>4</sup>
2018-19	96,8	97	86,7	87,4	47,4	4 <sup>4</sup>
2020-21	97,5	97,6	89,1	89,3	50,6	8,2 <sup>4</sup>
2024	97,9	98	91,5	92,1	55,3	1,7 <sup>5</sup>

Source: Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK) and Ministry of National Education (MEB) “Education Statistics”

As shown in Table 4, the enrolment rates for both male and female populations in primary and secondary education in Türkiye are close to each other and remain at a fairly high level. At the tertiary education level, enrolment rates are again similar for both genders, but only about half of the current population is enrolled. Considering that the level of education is directly proportional to the right to participate and the level of participation, it is clear that the female population that has not received tertiary education may negatively affect their level of participation, particularly in political participation.

**Table 5: Female and Male Labor Force Participation Rates (%) in Türkiye, 2010–2025.**

Year	Female (%)	Male (%)	Informal Employment (%)	Informal Employment Share in Women's Employment (%)
2010	27,6	70,5	44	58
2013	30,8	71,3	42,1	55,2
2016	32,5	71,6	40,3	52,4
2019	34,4	71,7	36,9	49
2022	35,2	70,8	34	46,5
2025	36,7	70,1	32,8	44,2

Source: Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK), *Labor Force Statistics, 2025.*

According to the data in Table 5, women's participation in the labor force has continued to increase over the past 15 years. Labor force participation, which plays an important role in social participation, also influences the social participation of the female population. Considering that the female labor force participation rate in OECD countries is 67.32% (OECD, 2025), it is evident that the female labor force participation rate in Türkiye remains quite low. This table shows that

women are often expected to prioritize family responsibilities over participating in the labor force.

**Table 6: Mobile Internet Usage by Gender - 2021 (%)**

Country/Region	All Individuals	Female	Male
Albania	72,2	71,2	73,2
Armenia	66,5	67,2	65,8
Azerbaijan	81,1	78	84,2
Belarus	85,1	85,7	84,2
Bosnia and Herzegovina	73,2	69,3	77,8
Georgia	72,5	71,9	73,3
Kazakhstan	85,9	84,9	87,1
Serbia	78,4	76	81,8
Türkiye	77,7	72,1	83,3
Ukraine	70,1	68,2	72,4

**Source: International Telecommunication Union (ITU), Gender ICT Statistics.**

According to the data in Table 6, in many low- and middle-income countries, including Türkiye, the overall internet usage rate among women is below the general average. This situation indicates that the gender gap in mobile internet usage continues to a significant extent in low- and middle-income countries. According to TÜİK 2025 data, the internet usage rate in Türkiye among individuals aged 16-74 was approximately 89% in 2024 and increased by three percent to 91% in 2025. By gender, the Internet usage rate in 2025 was determined to be approximately 94% for men and 88% for women. The same data shows that in terms of digital governance, e-government usage was 82.8% for men and 69.5% for women. Furthermore, the rate of purchasing goods or services or placing orders online by gender was 59.1% for men and 52.3% for women (TÜİK, 2025). Patriarchal norms in Turkish society hinder women's digital empowerment, and cultural expectations often limit their ability to pursue and participate in ICT careers.

According to GSMA (2020) data, the gender gap remains widest in South Asia at 51%, while Sub-Saharan Africa has the second-largest gender gap at 37% (GSMA, 2020). Since 2018, the number of countries offering online information and services targeting different population groups, such as youth, older adults, persons with disabilities, migrants, and people living in poverty, has increased by 11%; for women, such services are currently available in 151 countries (UN DESA, 2020). However, if these systems are not designed and managed in a gender-sensitive manner, they will become a means to an end. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has had a profound impact on the world of work over the past 10 years. While reducing job opportunities in some

sectors, it is creating new jobs in some new areas and causing a transformation in employment patterns. Over the next 20 years, 180 million women's jobs are expected to be automated, but women are 30 to 50 percent less likely than men to use the internet to increase their income or participate in public life (CUTS International, 2018). In the European Union, the ICT sector has grown by 50.5% over the past 15 years, showing a more than ninefold increase in employment (EUROSTAT, 2021). However, women make up only 18.5% of ICT professionals in the EU (EUROSTAT, 2021). Overall, women continue to be heavily disadvantaged. Globally, women's share of artificial intelligence professionals is quite low at 4.26% (OECD.AI, 2026). The same is true in Türkiye. Only 4.17% of professionals working in the field of artificial intelligence technologies in Türkiye are women (OECD.AI, 2026).

Women have shown progress in female entrepreneurship alongside digital transformation; however, it is noted that businesses owned by women selling on e-commerce platforms tend to be small-scale enterprises with limited growth potential and low profit margins. For example, the average sales revenue of companies led by women on Alibaba is 18% lower than that of companies led by men (World Bank and World Trade Organization, 2020).

Flexible working systems found in online workplaces, which have emerged with the digitalization of today's business and daily life, are considered important for the integration of women into private and social life. However, the proportion of female employees in global companies such as Apple (23%), Google (20%), and Microsoft (17.5%) (UNESCO, 2019) is considered insufficient. However, in digital life, the feminized profiles of voice assistants in particular reinforce the stereotype that women are men's assistants (UNDP, 2021).

Gender equality and participation in digitalization require structural and transformative changes that encompass every aspect of digital governance and every actor in the digital ecosystem. In this sense, it is clear that women's participation in digitalization processes is not limited to their access to digital tools and employment opportunities in these areas and their work with low profit margins. According to these data, women's participation is seen merely as a tool.

#### **4.2. Women's Participation in Public Policy Around the World and in Türkiye**

In the modern world, the widespread use of

technology has led to an increase in the use of digital communication tools. This proliferation has brought about change and transformation in various areas of society, from communication to education, and from social life to public life. The question arises as to whether the proliferation of digital

technologies has enabled women, like all individuals in society, to acquire a new social identity, to participate more freely and easily in any social agenda, and to be represented more actively and to a greater extent.

**Table 7: Percentage of Women Represented in National Parliaments.**

Rank	Country	Elections	Number of Seats	Number of Women	%
1	Rwanda	2024	80	51	63,8
2	Cuba	2023	470	262	55,7
3	Nicaragua	2021	91	50	55
4	Mexico	2024	500	251	50,2
5	Andorra	2023	28	14	50
6	United Arab Emirates.	2023	40	20	50
7	Costa Rica	2022	57	28	49,1
8	New Zealand	2023	123	57	46,3
9	Bolivia	2023	130	60	46,2
10	Iceland	2024	63	29	46
11	Monaco	2023	24	11	45,8
12	Australia	2025	151	69	45,7
13	Finland	2023	200	91	45,5
14	Ecuador	2025	151	68	45
15	Sweden	2022	349	157	45
16	South Africa	2024	398	177	44,5
17	Cape Verde.	2021	72	32	44,4
18	Norway	2021	169	75	44,4
19	Spain	2023	350	155	44,3
20	Denmark	2022	179	78	43,6
54	Portugal	2025	230	77	33,5
65	Poland	2023	460	144	31,3
77	United States	2024	432	125	28,9
89	China	2023	2977	790	26,5
121	Saudi Arabia	2024	151	30	19,9
<b>122</b>	<b>Türkiye</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>593</b>	<b>118</b>	<b>19,9</b>
136	Russian Federation	2021	450	74	16,4
138	Japan	2024	465	73	15,7
140	Hungary	2022	197	30	15,2

Source: IPU (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2025).

The study examined data on women's access to and use of digital technologies in their efforts to achieve digital empowerment in public policies.

The data in Table 7 shows that the number and proportion of female parliamentarians in the most recent parliamentary elections in countries around the world is quite low, including in many developed countries. In this table, Rwanda ranks first in the world with 51 of its 80 members of parliament being women, representing 63.8%. Countries such as Cuba, Mexico, the UAE, New Zealand, and Iceland are in the top 10. In these countries, the representation rate of women is higher than that of men. Hungary ranks last in the same table with a rate of 15.2%. Türkiye ranks 122nd in this table and has a rate of 19.9% with 118 female members of parliament out of a total of 593 members of parliament as of the 2023 elections. According to the data for the countries in the table,

the average number of female members of parliament is 32.4; it is seen that many “economically” developed countries, including the USA, China, Russia, the Republic of Korea, and Türkiye, have a number of female members of parliament below the world average.

**Table 8. Percentage of Women in Management Positions by Region Worldwide (%).**

Bölge	2015	2024
North Africa and West Asia	11	12,2
Central and South Asia	12,7	12,7
Sub-Saharan Africa	29,3	29,8
East and Southeast Asia	31	33
Latin America and the Caribbean	38,9	37,7
Oceania	37,3	37,8
Europe and North America	36,8	38,9
World	<b>27,2</b>	<b>28,3</b>

Source: Compiled from the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals Report 2025.

According to the data in Table 8, when women in

managerial positions around the world are broken down by continent and region, it is seen that Oceania, Latin America and the Caribbean, and

Europe and North America have a higher proportion of women managers than other regions of the world.

**Table 9: Number of Members of Parliament by Gender and Representation Rate in Parliament in Türkiye.**

Year	Total Number of Members of	Male	Representation Ratio	Female	Representation Ratio
1935	399	381	95,5	18	4,5
1950	487	484	99,4	3	0,6
1965	450	442	98,2	8	1,8
1977	450	446	99,1	4	0,9
1983	399	387	97	12	3
1987	450	444	98,7	6	1,3
1991	450	442	92,8	8	7,2
1995	550	537	97,6	13	2,4
1999	550	527	95,8	23	4,2
2002	550	526	95,6	24	4,4
2007	550	500	90,9	50	9,1
2011	550	471	85,6	79	14,4
2017	539	464	86,1	75	13,9
2018	600	496	82,7	104	17,3
2022	579	479	82,7	100	17,3

Source: Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK), Gender Statistics, 2022.

Table 9 shows the representation rates of women in parliament in Türkiye between 1935 and 2022. While women had a representation rate of 4.5% in

1935, this rate rose to 17.3% in 2022. Furthermore, this table shows that women's representation was below 1% between 1950 and 1980.

**Table 10: Percentage of Women Running for and Elected as Mayors in Türkiye's 2019 and 2024 Local Elections.**

	Candidacy				Election			
	2019 Total Female Candidates	2019 Percentage (%)	2024 Total Female Candidates	2024 Rate (%)	2019 Total Female Presidents	2019 Percentage (%)	2024 Total Female Presidents	2024 Rate (%)
Metropolitan Municipality	33	10,8	94	12,8	3	10	5	6,7
Municipality	634	8	1624	11,5	1	2	6	1,8
Total	667	18,8	1718	24,3	4	12	11	8,5

Source: Supreme Election Board (YSK), 2024 Data.

With the development of today's technology and innovations, women's platforms are increasing and women's participation in democracy is progressing effectively. Women's activity, especially in NGOs, is rapidly increasing. The increase in the number of women's platforms today goes beyond equality and freedom to a different dimension in terms of participation, transparency, and fair and participatory governance. From this perspective, women's roles and responsibilities are increasing, particularly in governance, primarily in universities, local administrations, and many other areas (Olmez and Öztürk, 2025:350). However, when considering the data in Table 10, which reflects the last two local elections in Türkiye, it is seen that although the number of female candidates and elected women for metropolitan mayor and mayor positions has

increased, their overall proportion among candidates and elected officials has decreased.

When the data in Table 10 on women's participation in local government is analyzed, it is seen that in 2019, only 1 mayor was a woman among 634 female candidates, while in 2024, only 6 women mayors were among 1,624 candidates. In local government, institutional barriers, gender bias, and discrimination are considered to be the main reasons why women take on fewer leadership roles. This table shows that women competing for leadership in local government face biased gender resistance. In Türkiye, many public institutions, especially local governments, must take into account the existence of a patriarchal culture that hinders women's managerial development. These data show that women in local government in Türkiye are

often excluded from decision-making processes in the context of digital transformation, which significantly hinders their managerial and participatory development.

### 4.3. Discussion

Based on data obtained from research, it is evident that women's participation in digital governance is insufficient worldwide. It is possible to say that the digital gender gap in the public sector in Türkiye is not only due to technology, but also based on institutional, political, and socio-cultural structures that reflect Türkiye's cosmopolitan lifestyle trends. Türkiye's laws targeting disadvantaged groups, which began with the EU harmonization process in 2005, are not at the desired level for women's participation in social and public policies. Even when women are explicitly named as the target group in agreements and regulations related to international organization support and public policies, they have generally been secondary beneficiaries of these policies.

Future research should focus on gender-specific interventions addressing the challenges women face in the public sector. Studies should determine the effects of women's digital literacy programs on their participation in the economy. Research should particularly focus on cultural barriers that hinder women's digital empowerment in countries like Türkiye, where patriarchal norms are deeply entrenched. In particular, studies on women's NGOs within the scope of university-industry collaboration should analyze their role in increasing digital empowerment for women and emphasize how these collaborations can be better coordinated to develop sustainable solutions.

## 5. CONCLUSION

From a broad perspective, every society has a group of disadvantaged individuals. Unlike people who live in a normal, comfortable environment with every opportunity, anyone who has to live with a factor that can negatively affect any aspect of their life is a disadvantaged person. This is true for everyone who sometimes has to struggle with natural conditions, sometimes has to live with physical disadvantages, and sometimes has to endure social shortcomings. Moreover, if there is a disadvantaged group, it means there is also an advantaged group. Therefore, for these groups who have to live with certain difficulties in part or all of their lives, it may be more appropriate to use the term "less advantaged" instead of "disadvantaged," which carries a sense of negativity and deficiency.

It is also known that disadvantaged groups, despite their large numbers, have little influence in the formulation and implementation of public policies. The state must use all the tools of digital governance to improve the adaptation and living conditions of disadvantaged groups. Adopting governance policies not as a tool containing populist rhetoric, but as a means to "achieve better and more beautiful things" will make disadvantaged groups important actors in digital governance.

Some women, who are already disadvantaged because they are women, also have to struggle with poverty. Considering that poverty itself is a disadvantage, it is not very realistic to expect people who are both women and poor to need social or political participation or to expect social or political participation behaviors from them. Similarly, despite being one of the first countries in the world to grant women the right to vote and be elected, with a literacy rate of 97.8%, Türkiye has a very low number of female members of parliament.

Particular attention should be paid to strengthening the implementation of existing legislation on gender equality and planning financing for additional investments in digital governance participation in preparation for the long-term perspective. More research is needed to assess the long-term effects of women's participation in public policies and to investigate the role of public-private partnerships in promoting digital inclusion for women in other developing countries.

The biggest problem in developing countries is the huge gap between their rhetoric and promises and their actions and practices. The existing gap between what should be and what actually is demonstrates a paradigm shift in policies targeting disadvantaged groups; improving the living conditions of disadvantaged groups has become a tool for populist rhetoric rather than an end in itself. Regulations aimed at accepting women as an important part of social life are like a competitor running in one lane of a race, while the work and practices carried out in this area are like another competitor crawling in the other lane of the same race.

Digital governance has brought many opportunities. Among these is the facilitation of participation in social and political life by bringing them closer. However, this form of governance requires technological investment and economic power. The inability to meet individuals' digital needs can cause them to lag behind in terms of participation. Women are the largest and most

influential group among these disadvantaged groups. In an age where science, knowledge, and access to information have advanced so much, the failure to provide women with the desired level of social and political participation opportunities

indicates that a culture aiming for more democratic conditions and human development has gradually turned into a culture of “making regulations for the sake of making them and not implementing them” and a tool for protecting the existing comfort zone.

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