

The Trajectory of Decent Work in Türkiye: A Review with Gender-Oriented Statistics

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ABSTRACT

The concept of decent work, as outlined in the 1999 ILO Conference, rests on four pillars: employment, social protection, workers' rights, and social dialogue. Globally, in developed countries, only a fortunate minority benefits from legal regulations that guarantee working conditions and wages. Furthermore, alongside other employment issues, almost all countries struggle with gender discrimination in the workforce.

In this study, we delve into the progress of decent work over the past two decades, utilizing selected indicators, and critically assess the current situation through a gender lens. The findings reveal that Turkish labour markets have fallen short in promoting decent work over the past two decades, with significant disparities between genders. The analysis of statistical indicators suggests a positive, but insufficient, improvement in indicators related to employment opportunities, child labour, equal opportunity and treatment in employment and social dialogue. Decent working time, stability and security of work, cases of fatal occupational injury seem to be stable. On the other hand, indicators related to adequate earning and productive work, social security, and non-fatal occupational injury all showed a decline.

Keywords: Decent work, Gender, Labour market, ILO, Türkiye

Introduction

In today's world, "having a job" constitutes the crucial point of individuals' bond to social life. The qualities of the job play a decisive role in shaping an individual's position in society within the confines of this connection. The transformation of labour into a mere cost factor has not only weakened human capital—the most important resource of society—but also led to the proliferation of jobs that inadequately respect human dignity. Despite various institutions addressing this negative development and creating an ongoing agenda, achieving the desired goal remains challenging

Within the scope of this study, examining decent work through the lens of gender equality can be attributed to two key driving forces. The first stems from the ILO's approach, while the second arises from the limited number of studies conducted in this context within Turkey.

As outlined in the International Labour Organization's (ILO) objectives, the absence of components defining decent work poses a societal challenge affecting everyone in society, regardless of gender. Furthermore, beyond economic factors, social and cultural influences place women's positions in the labour market at a distinct level. Consequently, the realms of decent work and gender equality intersect both in the labour market and in social life. This intersection is underscored in the ILO's 2009 report, 'Gender Equality at the Heart of Decent Work'. Issues such as women's lower participation in the labour market compared to men, diminished wages, lower-status jobs and engagement in temporary and precarious work render women more vulnerable than men in the labour market (ILO, 2009).

A review of the literature reveals a substantial body of research on employment in Turkey, exploring various facets of gender and equality (Toksöz, 2007; Toksöz & Memiş, 2018; Dedeoğlu, 2000, 2007, 2009). However, studies specifically focussing on decent work context are quite limited, except for those conducted in recent years. Existing research mainly comprises conceptual frameworks, some field studies, and sector-specific investigations (Kapar, 2007; Günaydın, 2015; Aca & Akdamar, 2022). It is also seen that thesis studies have recently focussed on this issue (Şahin, 2014; Tüzünkan, 2015; Saruhan, 2017; Şimşek, 2019; Öztürk,

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2022; Aslan, 2022; Çolakoğlu, 2022; Peker, 2023). Notably, studies addressing gender equality within the context of decent work, i.e., those examining both phenomena together, are scarce. A detailed examination of women's access to decent work in Turkey is provided in the literature, both globally and nationally (Dedeoğlu & Gökmen, 2021). Furthermore, Çiftçi (2023) noted this scarcity in their article analysing the relationship between gender equality and informal employment in Turkey.

Therefore, to comprehensively understand the labour market in Turkey, it is crucial to analyse two Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): decent work and gender equality. Decent work stands out as one of the four goals specific to gender, among the 17 SDGs, encompassing six distinct criteria (UN 2022).

This study aims to illustrate the intersectionality of decent work and gender in Türkiye within this context. Leveraging statistical data aligned with decent work indicators, the research delves into the similarities and differences between women and men. First, the concept of decent work will be elucidated, followed by an examination of the relationship between decent work and gender indicators.

Decent Work and Gender Equality: Concept and Indicators

The concept of decent work is referred to by various names in the literature, such as human dignity-compliant work, respectable work, proper work, and suitable work (Işığışık, 2005, p.3). The concept is rooted in the transformations within labour markets shaped by deregulation, the expansion of the informal sector and the contraction of union organization. These changes unfolded within the economic landscape influenced by neoliberal policies and globalization after the 1980s. Beyond merely expanding employment opportunities, there arose a need to implement measures safeguarding employees from the social risks associated with work (Günaydın 2015, 124). As social and economic changes reshape the nature of work on a global scale, precarious forms of employment are becoming increasingly prevalent. This trend, observed across all countries, not only diminishes the prevalence of decent work but also perpetuates the protection of only a fortunate minority in the market and, additionally, exacerbates discrimination against women (Günaydın, 2015, p. 124; ILO, 2019). Within this framework, decent work emerges as a tool to ensure equality and assumes a fundamental role in the pursuit of sustainable poverty reduction (ILO 2013).

Initially introduced by the ILO in the report of the 87th Labour Conference in 1999, the concept of decent work is delineated through four essential elements: employment, social protection, workers' rights, and social dialogue. The 18th International Conference of Labour Statisticians, in 2008, adopted ten key indicators pertaining to these strategic pillars. These indicators include employment opportunities, adequate earnings and productive work, decent working time, the harmonization of work, family, and personal life, elimination of undesirable work, stability and security of work, equal opportunity and treatment in employment, a safe work environment, social security, and social dialogue along with employers' and workers' representation (ILO 2013).

Decent work encapsulates people's aspirations in their professional lives, encompassing elements such as fair income, job security, social support for families, improved opportunities for personal growth and social integration, and employment opportunities that enable individuals to freely express concerns, organize, and participate. It exerts a profound impact on the lives of both women and men, ensuring equality of opportunity and treatment, thereby contributing to sustainable development through the collective efforts of both genders. However, comprehending the intricacies of labour markets necessitates a nuanced understanding of the distinctions between men and women. Gender roles, biological differences, and their consequences in working life are pivotal considerations in the pursuit of decent work (ILO 2009, 1).

When considering the underlying principles and indicators upon which decent work is based, the connection of the concept with gender equality becomes evident. While the indicators of gender equality or inequality may vary, the fundamental indicators can be classified as health, representation in parliament, education, and labour force participation (Kavas, 2018). Conceptually, gender equality, much like in decent work, signifies the freedom for both women and men to develop their personal abilities and pursue their preferences without being constrained by commonly accepted norms, rigid gender roles and biases. The expression "equality is work" underscores the significance of women's participation in the labour market (UN Women, 2011). At the same time "decent work has different meanings for different categories of people". Unemployed, young unemployed, elderly, children, adults, and women constitute different categories. Within these categories, economically active women have relative positions compared to economically active men (Bescond et.al. 2003: 205). Therefore, it is necessary to analyse these relative positions between men and women based on statistics.

Decent Work in the Context of Gender with Indicators in Türkiye

The systematic generation of data on a comprehensive array of statistical indicators on decent work, facilitating timely and reliable estimations, holds paramount importance in delineating the state of decent work within a specific economic context. This process enables the discernment of deficits in decent work, specifying the affected areas and demographic groups, and facilitates

the formulation of appropriate policies. In alignment with the four strategic objectives of decent work, the ILO outlined substantive elements of the decent work agenda and associated statistical indicators in 2008. The decision was made to gather both main and additional statistics from countries, ensuring a gender-based approach, with provisions for additional statistics in subsequent data collection efforts. This study employs main decent work indicators to scrutinize the substantive elements of decent work, encompassing areas such as employment opportunities, adequate earning and productive work, decent working time, work that should be abolished, stability and security of work, equal opportunity and treatment in employment, a safe work environment, social security, social dialogue, and the representation of workers and employers (ILO 2013, 14-18).

In the following section, the situation of decent work in Turkey will be explained with the help of graphs of four main indicators through a gender lens.

Employment Opportunities

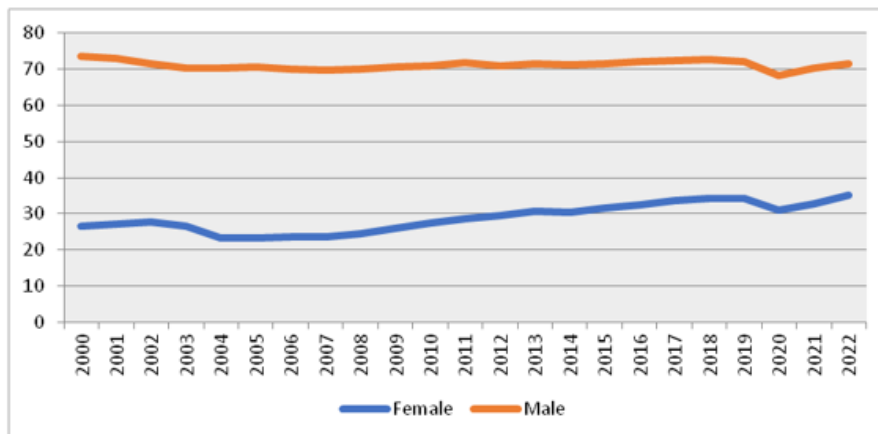
The key metrics used to evaluate employment opportunities are the labour force participation rate (LFPR), employment rate (ER) and unemployment rate (UR). While the ER holds greater significance in many countries as an indicator of employment opportunities, in the case of Türkiye, a gender-specific analysis should prioritize the LFPR.

The strides made in enhancing women's social roles during the early years of the Republic witnessed a decline with the advent of multi-party politics in the 1950s. Consequently, women found themselves relegated to the background, following an alternative trajectory of social development (Kaymaz 2010, 350). This shift has resulted in a significant gender disparity in labour force participation rates within Türkiye.

The labour force dynamics during the Republic's early years markedly differ from the contemporary scenario. As per the 1950 census, male labour force participation stood at 95.5%, while the corresponding figure for females was 81.5%, indicating negligible distinctions between genders. However, by 1965, the impact of education became evident, with male participation declining to 91.8%, whereas female participation plummeted dramatically to 56.6% (Hamurda 1974, 32). This downward trajectory in female labour force participation persisted, reaching its nadir at 23.3% in 2007, marking the lowest level in the Republic's history. Nevertheless, excluding the pandemic period, a gradual upturn in this rate has been observed since that year.

A comprehensive historical analysis reveals that the agricultural sector plays a pivotal role in shaping women's participation in the labour force. The high participation in the 1950s was attributable to women's engagement in agriculture and their roles as unpaid family workers. Subsequently, a decline ensued due to reduced agricultural employment, women's disengagement from agriculture, industrialization policies, and migration to big cities. The substantial decrease in labour force participation is attributed to women's challenges in securing viable employment in cities, despite their integral role in rural agricultural production relations (Karabıyık, 2012, 1297). Unquestionably, women's participation in the labour force is strongly linked to their education and skill levels. Women with poor literacy and skills encounter limited employment opportunities in urban settings. As a matter of fact, women's LFRPs rise in tandem with higher educational attainment. Other factors that have a detrimental impact on labour force participation are the fact that working outside the home is against cultural values, as well as the unfavourable conditions of the labour market (Tansel, 2002, 4-6). Additionally, gender-based labour division serves as another substantial factor shaping women's participation in the labour force (Sağlık 2021, 265).

Figure 1. Labour Force Participation Rate (2000-2022)

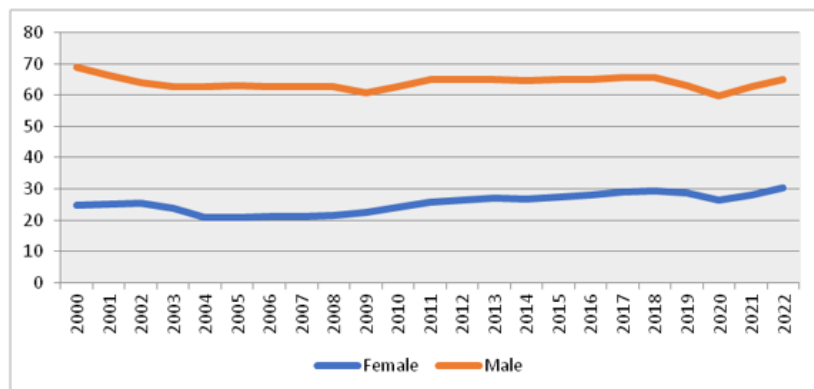


Source: TURKSTAT, 2023a

Women's LFPR climbed consistently from 26.6% at the beginning of the period to 35.1% at the end, far beyond the male LFPR. Although it does not eliminate the gender gap, one of the main reasons for this increase in labour force participation rates is the increase in women's educational attainment (Karabıyık, 2012, 1295). In the National Employment Strategy, the goal was to raise women's labour-force participation rates to 41% by 2023, however the result has fallen far short of this goal (ÇSGB, 2013). These statistics indicate that 65% of women are out of the labour force by 2022.

Regarding the concept of decent work, employment rates, which serve as a crucial metric for assessing job opportunities, have not reached satisfactory levels. In 2000, the employment rate stood at 46.7%, which experienced a steady decline until 2009. Subsequent to this year, the rate exhibited an increase, reaching 47.5% in 2022, with a continuous upward trend, excluding the pandemic era. Türkiye's employment rate in the first quarter of 2023 was 53.9%, notably lower than the OECD average of 69.6% (OECD 2023). This comparatively low rate, especially compared with industrialized nations, signifies a constrained capacity of the economy to generate new employment opportunities in recent years.

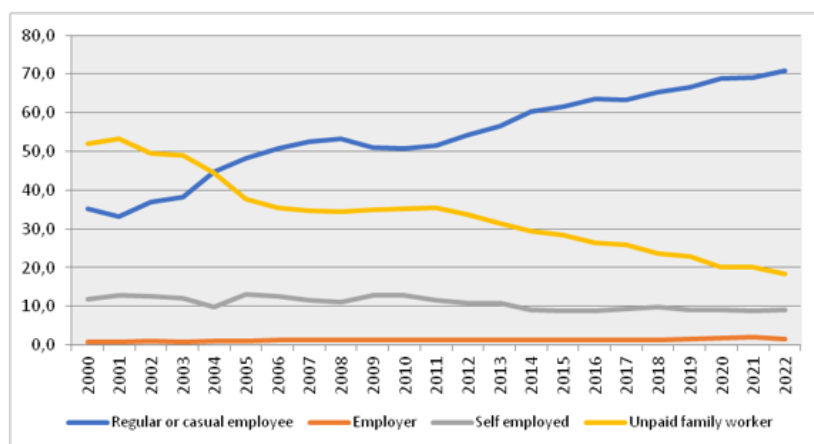
Figure 2. Employment Rate (2000-2022)



Source: TURKSTAT, 2023a

Examining employment opportunities through a gender lens reveals a discernible gender disparity. While it is expected that there might be a noticeable gap between the employment rates of men and women in many countries, excluding some developed nations (Ghai 2003, 116), the observed gender gap in Türkiye is notably more substantial. Throughout the entire period, the employment rate of men consistently exceeded that of women, and this difference tripled during the 2004-2008 period. Although the gender gap in the employment rate declined to 34.6 per cent by the end of the period, Turkey still has the highest gender gap among OECD countries (Dedeoğlu and Gökmen, 2021, 12).

Figure 3. Employment Status of Women (2000-2022)



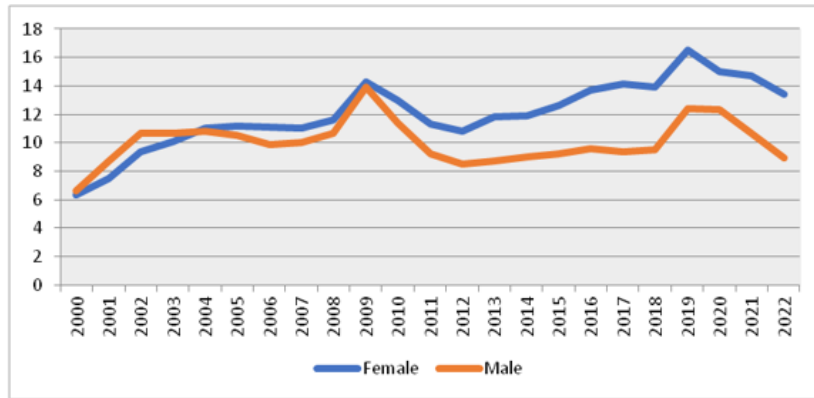
Source: TURKSTAT, 2023a

A noteworthy aspect of women's employment is the evolution of their employment status. Over time, there has been a positive shift as the proportion of paid employees has increased, accompanied by a decline in the percentage of unpaid family workers. This trend signifies a positive development. In addition, the prevalence of employers and self-employed individuals among women remains relatively low and stable. The elevation in women's educational attainment emerges as one of the primary factors contributing to the surge in paid work for women. Concurrently, sectoral transformation has played a role in augmenting paid

female employment, with the expansion of the service industry widening the spectrum of available job opportunities for women. As a matter of fact, 59% of women were employed in the service sector in 2019. In addition, gender roles cause women and men to be concentrated in certain sectors and occupations. This gender-based sectoral and occupational segregation affects the quality of women’s employment, particularly the gender wage gap, informal work, and part-time work. (Dedeoğlu and Gökmen, 2021, 50-53).

Unemployment rates constitute another dimension of employment possibilities. In 2022, while the overall unemployment rate in Türkiye was 10.4%, women faced a higher rate of 13.4%, as opposed to males with 8.9%. Notably, between 2000 and 2003, female unemployment remained below that of male unemployment, and even the overall unemployment rate. However, since 2004, the unemployment rate for women has exhibited a gradual increase, consistently surpassing male unemployment. This trend persisted in 2009, a year when unemployment rates were closely aligned. In the years following 2009, the unemployment rate gap between men and women started to widen gradually.

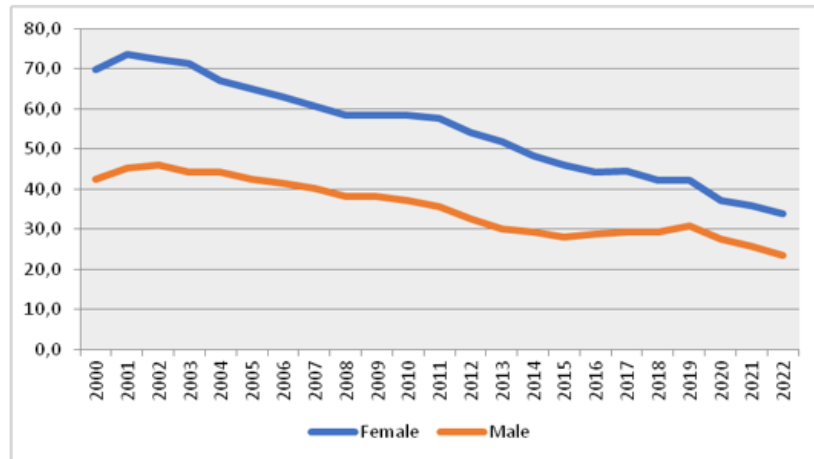
Figure 4. Unemployment Rate (2000-2022)



Source: TURKSTAT, 2023a

The elevated unemployment rate in Türkiye, coupled with limited employment opportunities within the formal sector, has fostered a substantial potential for informal and precarious employment (Şahin and Develi, 2021, 398). The informal employment rate, which fluctuated between 50-53% in the first half of the 2000s, receded to 26.8% by 2022. This trend, shared by both genders, denotes a decreasing trajectory, accompanied by a gradual reduction in the significant disparity between the informality rates of women and men during the first half of the 2000s. The pronounced prevalence of informality among women can be primarily attributed to engagement in agricultural employment. Almost all women working as unpaid family workers in the agricultural sector lack social security coverage (Şahin and Develi 2021, 395). Even in 2022, the informal employment rate for women in the agricultural sector stands at 90.1% (TURKSTAT 2023a). From this perspective, one of the most significant challenges to realizing the objective of decent work is the prevalence of the informal sector. In fact, increasing employment opportunities in quantitative terms alone is insufficient; the jobs created must also be of acceptable quality (Kapar, 2004, 187-193).

Figure 5. Informal Employment (2000-2022)



Source: TURKSTAT, 2023a

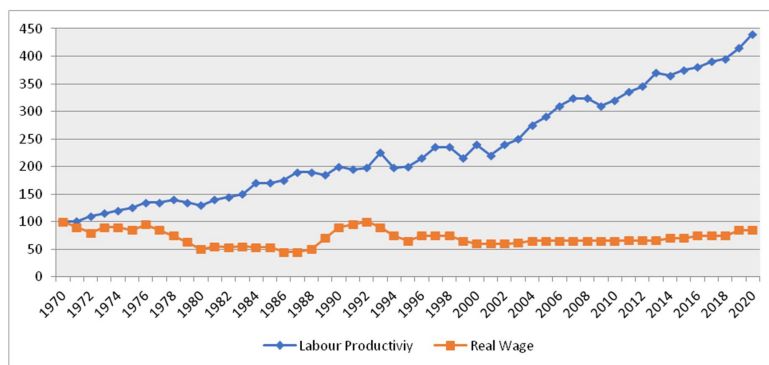
Employment opportunities, which are the first determinant of decent work, are also guaranteed in Article 49 of our Constitution. According to the article, the state is obliged to take all kinds of measures to raise the living standards of employees, improve working life, and protect its employees. The ability of every person who has the desire to work to find a job under free competition conditions depends both on his/her own skills and experience and on the job opportunities available in the current market conditions (Palaz, 2005, 483). Throughout the analysed period, employment opportunities for both genders remained restricted, with women facing a relative disadvantage compared to men. Despite policy initiatives aimed at enhancing women's employment, particularly in the preceding decade, a notable improvement in this unfavourable structure has yet to materialize.

Adequate Earning and Productive Work

The primary objective of employment is to secure income for the well-being of individuals and their families. Main indicators within this domain include the low pay rate and the working poverty rate. Traditional economic policies typically prioritize employment and growth over income distribution, particularly in the short term. However, an increase in real income stands out as a pivotal determinant of effective economic policy, particularly over the long term (Yılmaz and Karataş 2023, 161).

An analysis of wage trends in Türkiye reveals a widening gap between labour productivity and real wages since 1970, signalling that wage earners are receiving an insufficient share of economic growth. Despite the continual rise in the proportion of wage earners in the workforce, the unaltered share of wage earners in the domestic product since that time serves as a notable indicator that overall wage levels have diminished, exacerbating poverty (Yılmaz and Karataş 2023, 177).

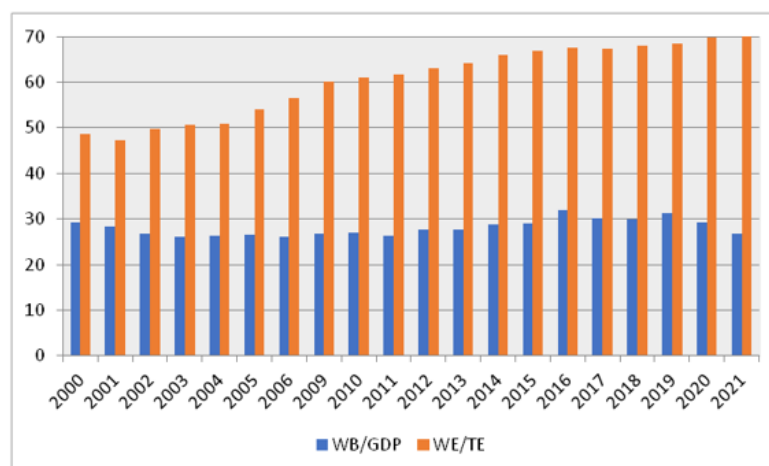
Figure 6. Labour Productivity and Real Wages (1970-2020, 1970=100)



Source: Yılmaz and Karataş; 2023, 167

The indicators of income inadequacy include the share of wage payments in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and the proportion of wage earners in total employment. Figure 7 illustrates that although the share of wage payments in GDP experienced a slight increase from 2012 to 2016, it commenced a subsequent decline, reaching 26.9% in 2021, marking the lowest rate within the specified period. In contrast, the proportion of wage earners in employment has consistently increased. Consequently, despite the continual growth in the number of wage earners over the years, the share of wage earners in national income has exhibited minimal change and has, in fact, declined over time.

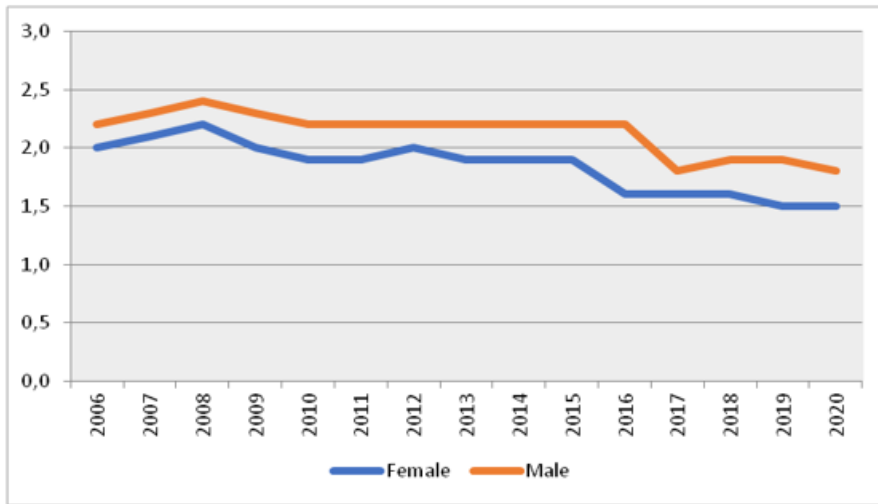
Figure 7. Share of Wage Bill in GDP and Share of Wage Earners in Total Employment (2000-2006 and 2009-2021)



Source: Toksöz; 2008, 21 and TURKSTAT; 2023b

Examination of the correlation between average monthly wage incomes and the minimum wage reveals that the convergence of average wages towards the minimum wage indicates a generally low level of wages. Notably, in Türkiye, there is a discernible trend of average wages progressively approaching the minimum wage, to the extent that the minimum wage is nearly becoming synonymous with the average wage. In 2005, the average wage stood at 2.2 times the minimum wage; however, by 2020, this ratio had diminished to 1.7. A gender-specific analysis paints an even more concerning picture, highlighting that for women, the average wage is in closer proximity to the minimum wage (Çelik, Beyazbulut, Kandaz 2022, 31-32).

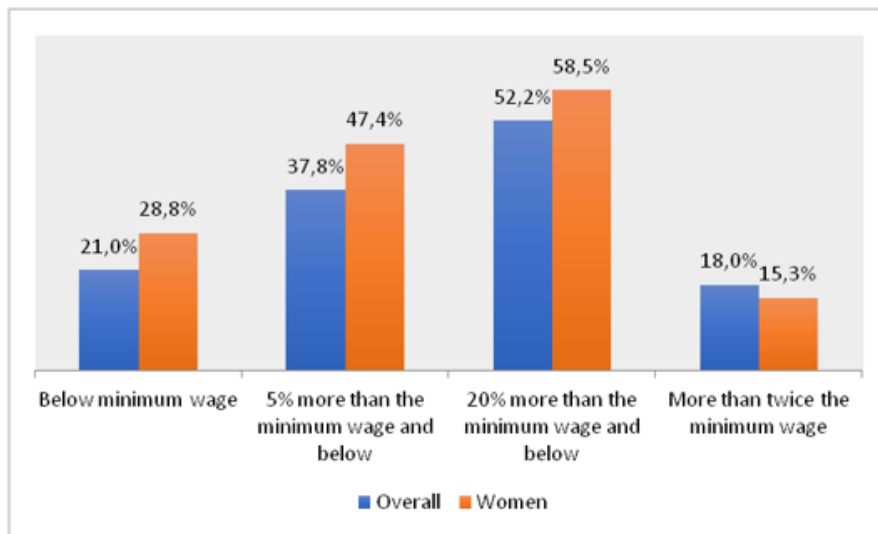
Figure 8. Ratio of monthly average wage to minimum wage (2006-2020)



Source: Çelik, Beyazbulut, Kandaz; 2022, 32

Furthermore, based on the Central Bank of the Republic of Türkiye’s (CBRT) 2021 inflation report, 42.8% of workers in non-agricultural sectors earn the minimum wage or less, calculated as an average for the period 2017-2019. This rate is notably higher within specific sectors, with 50% in industry, 53.9% in construction, and 39.1% in services (TCMB 2021, 53). In stark contrast, the European Union (EU) average by sector is a mere 4% (Çelik, Beyazbulut, Kandaz 2022, 35). As of 2021, over half of all workers receive wages equivalent to the minimum wage or less, and this rate is disproportionately higher for women. Specifically, 28% of women earn less than the minimum wage, whereas 58% earn wages within a 20% margin above or below the minimum wage. It is noteworthy that earning 20% above the minimum wage for the given period equates to 3,390 TL, a figure significantly below the poverty line.

Figure 9. Minimum Wage Coverage and Wage Levels in General and Women (2021) (Percent)

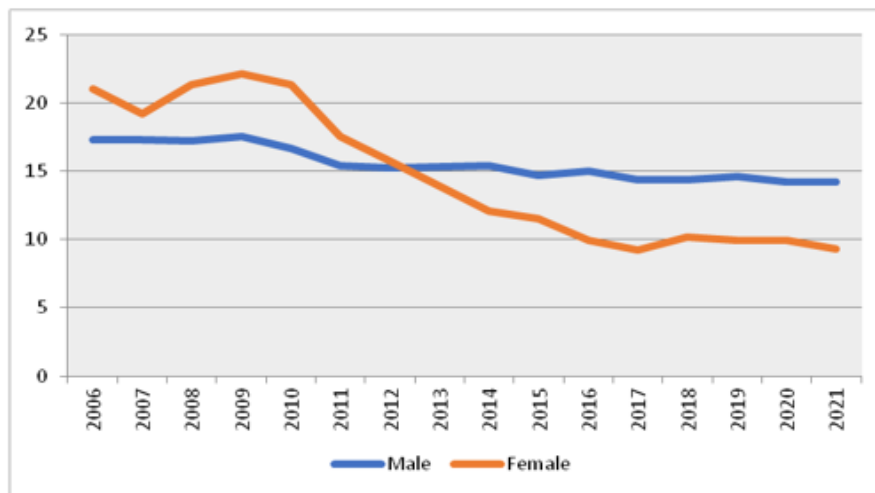


Source: Çelik, Beyazbulut, Kandaz; 2022, 42

While employment stands as the foremost decisive factor in averting poverty, a considerable number of individuals today find themselves engaged in low-paid occupations that fall short of lifting them out of poverty (Kapar 2004, 195). The escalation of unemployment rates, coupled with the labour market's inability to furnish an ample number of good job opportunities, compels individuals to seek employment in precarious sectors. The expanding prevalence of precarious employment further intensifies the issue of working poverty. Particularly in Türkiye, the substantial presence of seasonal work and unpaid family workers in the labour force emerges as a primary determinant of working poverty, perpetuated by low and irregular income. Furthermore, a study by Savran on women working as domestic workers shows that these women are mostly irregularly employed, paid below the minimum wage, excluded from the social security system, and therefore defined as an irregular and underpaid labour force. In fact, one of the important reasons for this situation is the low level of wages in Turkey. The wages of the middle-class employers that these women usually work for are not sufficient to increase the wages of their employees and cover their insurance expenses (Savran, 2007, 15).

Women, in comparison to men, face a more precarious situation concerning adequate earning and productive work, constituting another crucial indicator of decent work. Notably, women's poverty stands out as a significant and pervasive issue in Türkiye (Kart and Öngör, 2023, 21 from Ecevit, 2021, 68).

Figure 10. Working Poverty (2006-2021)



Source: EUROSTAT; 2024

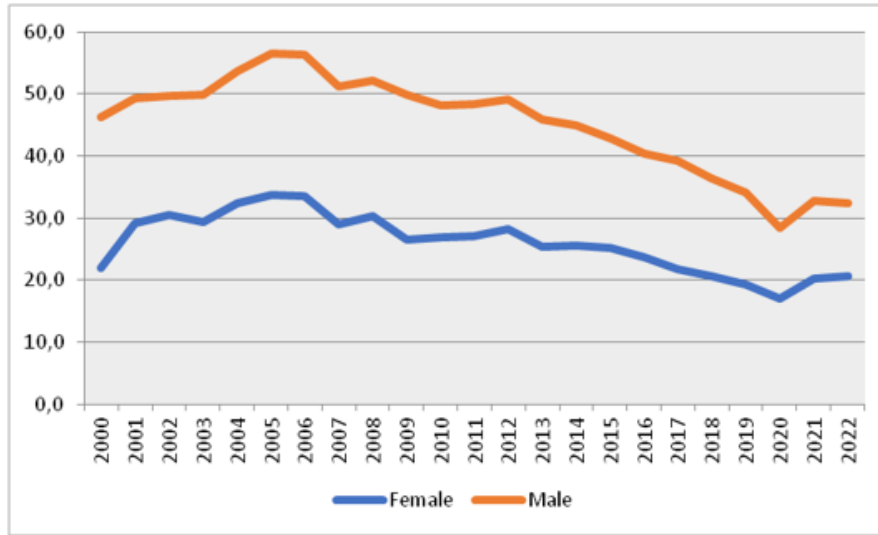
An analysis of working poverty by gender reveals that although working women's poverty was higher than men's poverty at the beginning of the period, it remained below working men's poverty after 2012 and continued to fall. The main reason of this decline is not women's increased access to better jobs in the labour market, but rather their disengagement from agricultural production as unpaid family workers. As previously stated, the proportion of paid work in women's employment has increased. This circumstance has a positive effect on the poverty rate among working women (Dedeoğlu and Gökmen, 2021, 55). Another reason contributing to the gender disparity in working poverty rates is the definition and measurement method used (Kapar, 2023, 284). The conceptualization of working poverty lacks consensus within the literature. It is essential to distinguish between "low-paid workers" and "working poverty" at this juncture. In the assessment of working poverty, primary consideration is given to the total income of the household. Even if a household includes a high-wage worker, the overall income may fall below the poverty line, or conversely, it may surpass the poverty line despite the presence of a low-wage worker (Çavuşoğlu 2012, 24). Since working poverty is calculated at the household level, when the man in the household is employed, the woman contributes to the total household income as a secondary income earner. Even if the woman earns a very low income below the poverty threshold, she appears to have an income above the poverty line due to the income of the man or men in the household and is not counted as working poor in statistics (Kapar, 2023, 286).

Decent Working Time

In Türkiye, the legal working hours stipulate 40 hours per week for civil servants and 45 hours per week for private sector workers. Any work exceeding these hours is classified as overtime, and the law imposes an upper limit on overtime work. According to Article 41/8 of the Labour Law, the total number of overtime working hours cannot exceed 270 hours in a year. However, despite these legal regulations, actual working hours often exceed these limits.

In 2022, statistics reveal that 42.1% of the employed work 40 hours or less, 23.4% work between 41-49 hours, and 28.5% work 50 hours or more (TURKSTAT; 2023a). Notably, nearly one-third of employees work beyond the legally mandated working hours, encompassing overtime. While examining the analysed period, it becomes apparent that the proportion of individuals working over 50 hours in relation to the total employed exhibited a general downward trend for both men and women. However, there was a subsequent increase after a sharp decline during the pandemic period.

Figure 11. Employment with overtime (more than 50 hours) (2000-2022)



Source: TURKSTAT; 2023a

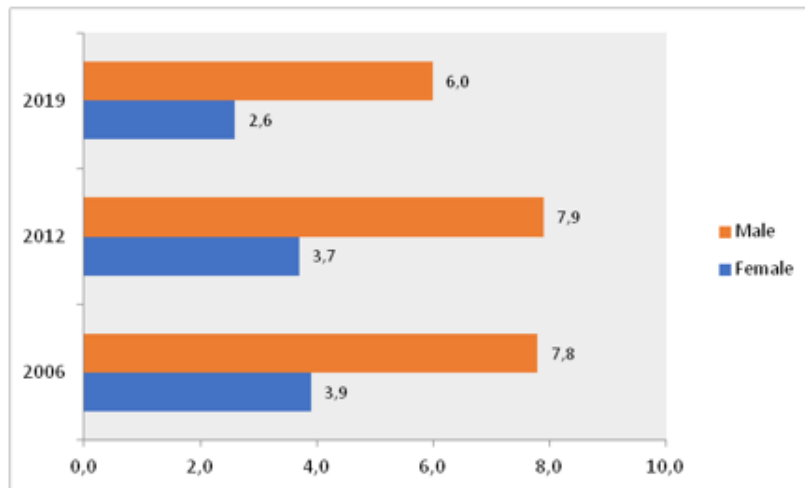
The proportion of women working more than 50 hours is lower than that of men, primarily due to the prevalence of part-time work among women. The rate of part-time work for women fluctuates between 22.6% and 16% from 2014 to 2022. In contrast, for men, this percentage ranges between 6-7% throughout the same period, reaching a peak of 9.2% in 2020, during the pandemic era (TURKSTAT 2023a). While decent working hours may serve as a positive indicator for women, it conceals a backdrop of precarious and irregular work structures (Bursal and Şentürk, 2022, 76).

It is important to acknowledge that for women engaged in home-based work, overtime extends beyond the workplace. According to 2015 time use statistics, working women dedicate 3 hours and 31 minutes per day to household and family care, a duration that is only 46 minutes for working men. Additionally, the time allocated by non-working women for domestic services does not significantly differ from that of working women, standing at 4 hours and 58 minutes (TURKSTAT 2023d), which underscores the significant burden placed on working women. This situation can also be considered as an indicator of time poverty, which is considered as an important component of labour poverty. Working women, who have to make a big trade-off between time poverty and economic poverty, are much more time poor than those who are not in employment (Kart and Öngör, 2023, 25).

While statistical data indicate that women have a relatively better condition in terms of decent working hours compared to men, this cannot be solely attributed to the fact that women work in better jobs than men. In reality, the shorter working hours for women are closely linked to their employment patterns.

Work that should be Abolished

Child labour has been ingrained in the production process in Türkiye, primarily driven by poverty (Kaya and Memiş, 2019, 2544). Although there has been a gradual decline in this phenomenon, it persists, with nearly one million children engaged in employment. As of 2019, 79.7% of these working children fall within the 15-17 age group. Additionally, 70.6% of these child labourers are boys, while 29.4% are girls (TURKSTAT 2023c). Notably, the employment rate is higher for boys, as depicted in the figure below. Although the employment rate for girls has decreased to 2.6%, this still represents 212 thousand children.

Figure 12. Share of Children in Employment (2006-2012-2019)

Source: TURKSTAT; 2023c

Analysing the distribution of working girls across sectors reveals a notable shift over the years. Before 2019, the agriculture sector predominated in terms of child labour. However, in 2019, a significant shift occurred, with the agriculture sector declining in prominence, while the service sector gained weight in terms of child labour.

Figure 13. Child Labour by Economic Activity-Female (2006-2012-2019)

Source: TURKSTAT; 2023c

65.7% of working children are also continuing their education. Interestingly, the rate of girls (66.1%) is higher than that of boys. There are 175 thousand boys and 72 thousand girls who do not continue their education. While 63.3% of working children work as wage earners, 36.3% work as unpaid family workers. Reasons for children to work include helping the economic activity of the household (35.9%), learning a job (34.4%), and contributing to the household income (23.2%). The rate of children working for their own needs is only 6.4% (TURKSTSTAT 2020). In households with wage-earning children, the share of children's income in household income is quite high when the head of the household is unemployed, disabled or out of the labour force due to household chores, or elderly, disabled or unable to work (Kaya and Memiş, 2019, 2562).

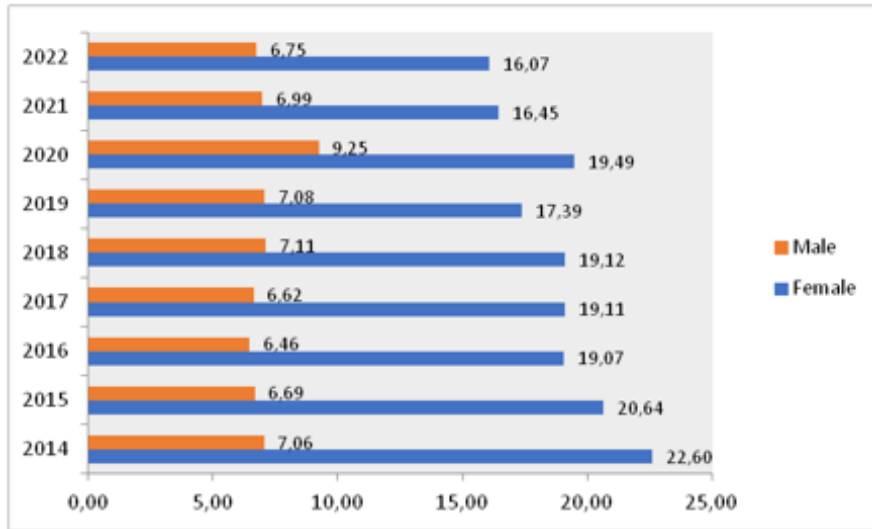
Stability and Security of Work

As previously discussed in the section on employment opportunities, informal work, a significant contributor to job precariousness, is prevalent in Türkiye, and the incidence of informal work is higher among women than among men. Job security and continuity are challenging for individuals employed in the informal sector. In the formal sector, job security is only assured for workers with at least six months of seniority in workplaces employing thirty or more individuals under an indefinite-term employment contract (Labour Law, Art. 18). However, given that more than 60% of employment in Türkiye is within small and

medium-sized enterprises, a substantial portion of workers lack job security. There is no discernible gender difference when examining the distribution of employment by firm size (TURKSTAT 2023a). Consequently, the absence of job security is considered a general issue rather than a gender-specific problem.

Another critical factor influencing job continuity is the prevalence of part-time work. As depicted in the figure below, part-time employment rates are significantly higher for women than for men.

Figure 14. Part-time Employment (2014-2022)



Source: TURKSTAT; 2023a

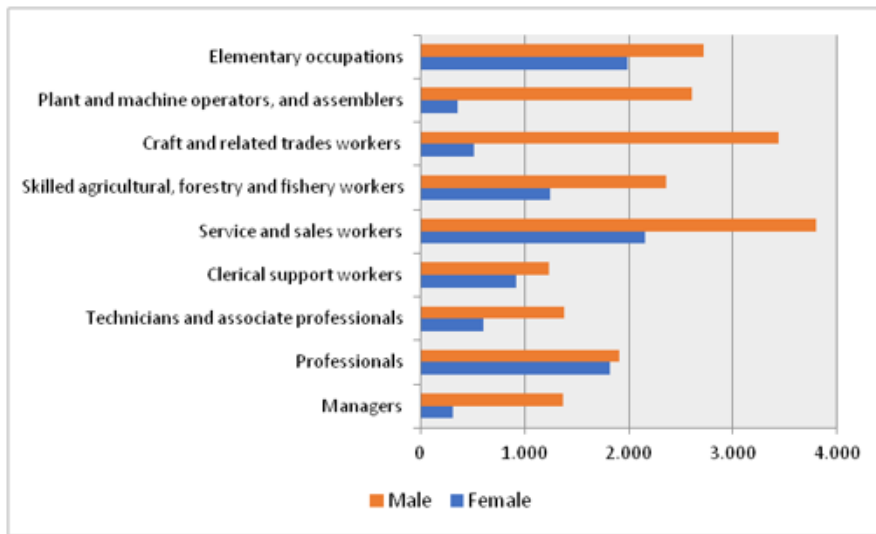
While the rate of part-time work among women has shown a decline over the years, 16% of women still engage in part-time employment, compared to a rate of 6.75% for men. This can be attributed in part to women opting for part-time work due to household responsibilities and, in some cases, considering their income as supplemental.

According to a 2017 study conducted by DISK, irregular/temporary paid work is more common among women than men. 23.8 per cent of women are involved in subcontracted work, work through private employment agencies, and paid irregular employment. While this rate is 20.4 per cent in general average, it is 18.9 per cent for men. Women are more precariously employed than men. This situation leads to women being more disorganised in working life, lower wages, and deepening poverty (DISK, 2018, 4-5).

Equal Opportunity and Treatment in Employment

Women's employment is often viewed as a "reserve labour force," occupying predominantly low-paid, precarious, and low-skilled positions with limited opportunities for professional advancement (Aşkın, 2015, 44). An analysis of the occupational distribution of employed women reveals that one-fifth of them work in jobs that do not require qualifications, compared to 13% for men. Until 2020, the number of women in jobs not requiring qualifications gradually decreased. However, post-2020, there has been an upward trend, marked by a significant increase in female employment by 1,628 thousand people, with 27.8% being employed in roles that do not necessitate qualifications (TURKSTAT 2023a). This increase is believed to be linked to the losses in real wages caused by high inflation during and after the pandemic period. Additionally, women who previously chose not to work are entering the labour market, particularly to contribute to household income. Consequently, there has been an observed increase in women's labour force participation after 2020.

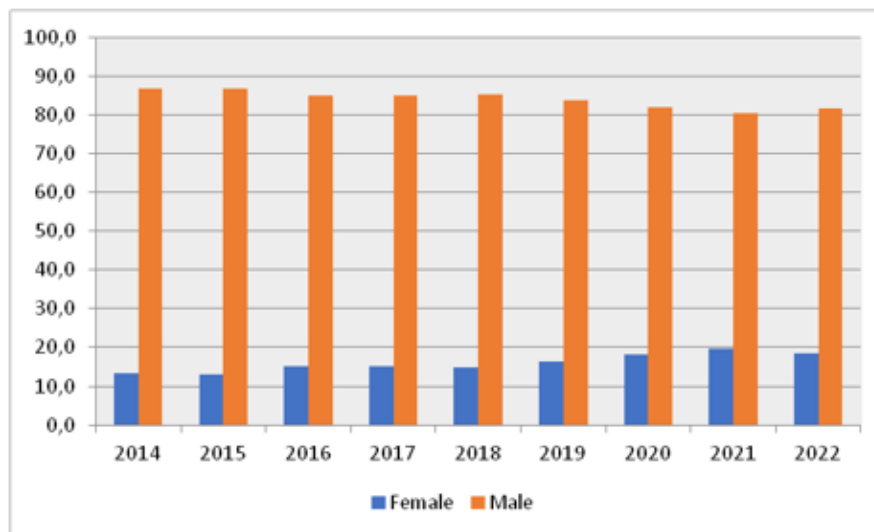
Figure 15. Employment by occupation (2022)



Source: TURKSTAT; 2023a

According to gender roles, women are primarily employed in care professions and jobs that are described as socialized types of housework. The fact that women are employed in low-status, low-paid jobs that are seen as an extension of their domestic activities, leads to horizontal discrimination of women in the labour market (Aşkın, 2015, 54-55). Figure 14 illustrates occupational segregation based on gender. A balanced gender structure is observed only in the categories of professionals and clerical support workers, whereas substantial differences exist between men and women in other occupational groups. Although the percentage of women in managerial positions within female employment has shown an increase over the years, a considerable gap persists compared to men. In 2021-2022, 109 thousand men were promoted to managerial roles, whereas this number stood at only 2 thousand for women (TURKSTAT 2023a). This stark contrast illustrates the vertical stratification of occupations. According to a study of 142 nations by the ILO, women are overrepresented in "Clerical, service, and sales workers" and "Elementary occupations". This is particularly true in developed economies, but in contrast, there is a modest relative overrepresentation of women in the highest paid occupational group "Managers, professionals, and technicians" in these countries (ILO, 2016, xiii).

Figure 16. Distribution of female/male managers (%) (2014-2022)



Source: TURKSTAT; 2023a

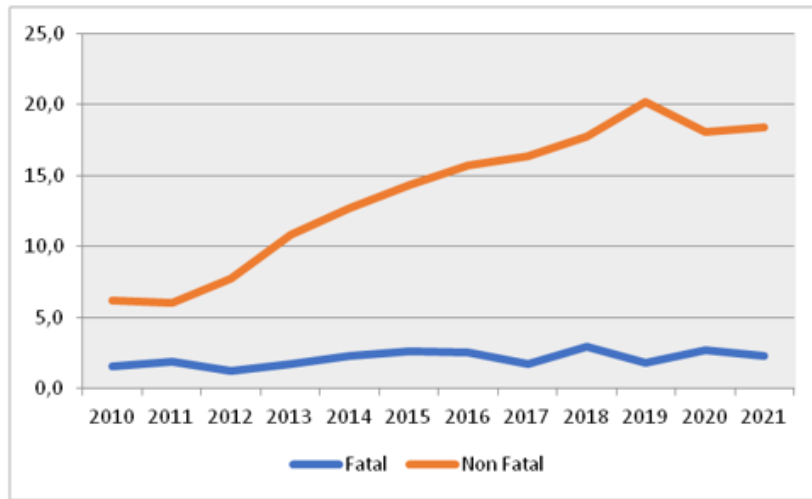
The wage gap serves as another key indicator reflecting equal opportunities and treatment in employment. In 2010, the gender wage gap favoured women's wages (-1.1%) overall. However, when dissected by educational attainment, it becomes evident that men's wages surpass women's wages at all educational levels. The overall favourable indicator for women is attributed to the highest concentration of women in wage employment being in higher education (35.3%). In contrast, men are most concentrated

in primary school and below, constituting 27.4% (TURKSTAT 2015, 83). The rate, which favoured women (-0.4%) in 2014 (TURKSTAT 2019, 148), escalated to 7.7% against women in 2018. Wage discrepancies based on educational levels range from 14.3% (High School) to 28.8% (Vocational High School) (TURKSTAT 2021, 133). According to ILO calculations, the gender wage gap for 2018 stood at 15.6%. When disaggregated to account for the effects of women and men concentrating in different education levels and sectors, this figure was determined as 21.1% (ILO, 2018: 11).

Safe Work Environment

The only positive manifestation of gender-based occupational discrimination is reflected in the statistics on occupational injuries. Data on occupational injuries suggest that female workers are significantly less susceptible than their male counterparts. Throughout the period 2010-2021, the proportion of women in fatal work injuries remained below 3%, and in non-fatal work injuries, it remained below 20%. While fatal work accidents exhibit a more stable trend, the share of women in non-fatal work accidents has gradually increased, reaching 18.4% in 2021. The primary reason for this situation is the exceptionally low rate of female employment in industry and construction—two sectors where occupational accidents are concentrated. Over the reviewed period, female employment remained below 25% in the industrial sector and below 5% in the construction sector (TURKSTAT, 2023a).

Figure 17. Cases of Fatal/Non-fatal Occupational Injury Women (2010-2021)



Source: ILOSTAT; 2023a

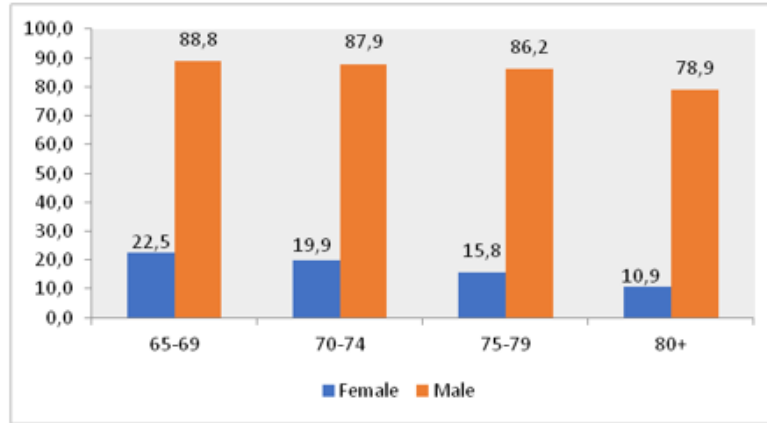
It is essential to note that statistics on occupational accidents solely pertain to registered employees and encompass accidents reported to the institution. Therefore, it is important to recognize that these figures do not account for work accidents in the formal sector that went unreported to the institution and those occurring in the informal sector. Informal sector workers toil under unsafe conditions, and the rate of informal work tends to be higher for women than for men. Particularly, women engaged in domestic work often find themselves in an informal sector with a heightened risk of occupational accidents, and incidents in this sector may not be adequately reflected in the statistics.

Social Security

When delving into the realm of social security, it is crucial to consider that the retirement age in Türkiye varies by gender, different employee groups (4/a, 4/b, 4/c), and the date of insurance. In addition, eligibility for an old-age pension depends on both age and the number of days of insurance premiums paid. Consequently, figures are presented in proportion to the population aged 65 and over, disregarding the aforementioned distinctions. The share of the population aged 65 years and above benefiting from old-age pension is 86.6% for men and 18.2% for women. Upon analysing the distribution by age, it becomes apparent that, while there is minimal change for men, the rate of women receiving old-age pension decreases as they age, with the highest percentage in the 65-69 age range. This pattern aligns with women's labour force participation and employment rates. The death pension serves as a buffer in social security coverage. In fact, the death pension rate for women aged 80 years and above is 53.1% (SGK, 2021). Furthermore, despite a significant decrease throughout the period, one-third of women are still employed informally, leaving them outside the social protection system. While this situation paves the way for women to spend their old age without security by not

having the right to pension and not being able to benefit from health services, it also makes them dependent on third parties or social assistance (Çetinkaya, Yıldırım, 2012, 164).

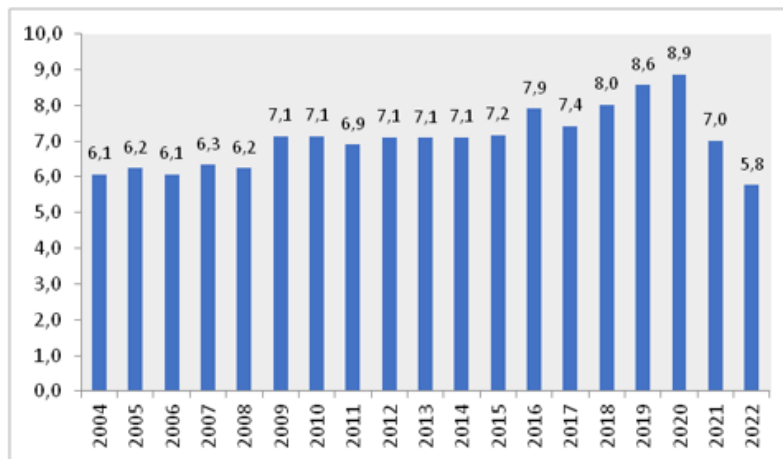
Figure 18. Share of population aged 65 and above benefiting from old-age pension (2021)



Source: SGK; 2021

The proportion of the population aged over 65 receiving old-age pensions is indeed a significant indicator of social security coverage, but it may not singularly determine the presence of decent work. Retirement conditions and pension methods exhibit considerable diversity in Türkiye, and the interpretation of data should consider practices related to borrowing and voluntary insurance. It is essential to recognize that receiving a pension is not solely indicative; it is equally crucial to understand the entitlement conditions for that pension. In certain cases, to qualify for a pension, workers pay their own insurance premiums instead of their employers.

Figure 19. Public social security expenditure (% of GDP) (2004-2022)



Source: T.C. Strateji ve Bütçe Başkanlığı; 2023

Analysing the ratio of pensions to GDP reveals that it remained around 6-7% in the early 2000s and experienced a downward trend after 2020.

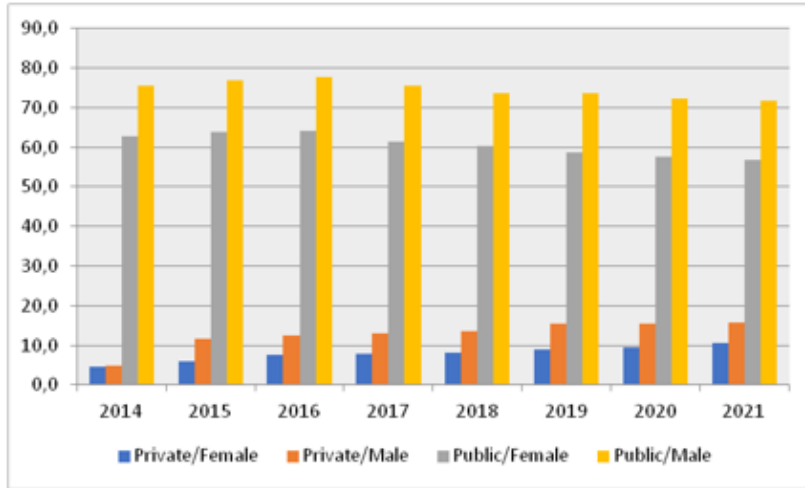
Social Dialogue, Workers' and Employers' Representation

Social dialogue can manifest at both the micro and macro levels. At the micro level, representatives of workers' and employers' organizations, recognized as social partners, collaborate to determine working conditions and circumstances. Conversely, at the macro level, social partners convene to address broader economic and social challenges (Palaz 2005, 493). A micro-level analysis suggests that unionization rates are gradually declining. Although this trend is observed globally, unionization rates in Türkiye are notably low.

Unionization rate statistics in Türkiye are subject to controversy, with discrepancies between data provided by the Ministry

of Labour and Social Security (MoLSS), international organizations (ILO, OECD), trade union confederations, and independent researchers. These disparities are mainly attributed to varying calculation methods. For instance, the MoLSS calculates the ratio based on the number of workers covered by the Social Security Institution (SSI), whereas the ILO computes the ratio based on the total number of workers employed in both formal and informal sectors. This study relies on official statistics for its assessments.

Figure 20. Unionization Rate Public/Private Sector (2014-2021)

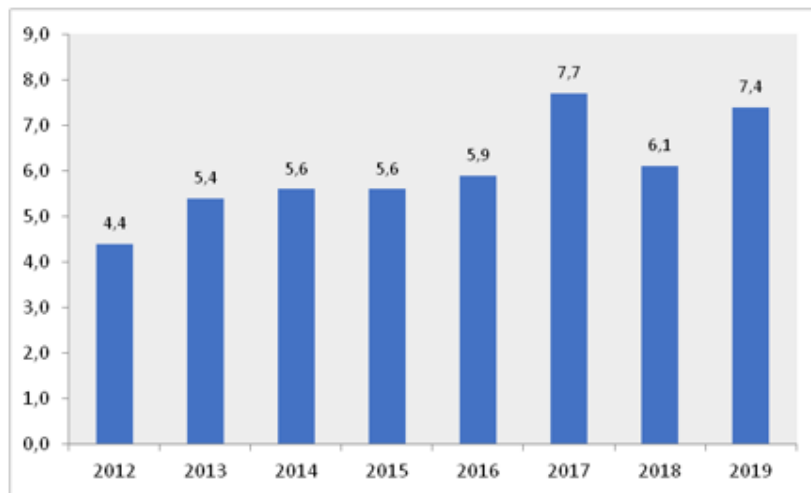


Source: ÇGM; 2022, 2021, 2020, 2019, 2018, 2017, 2016, 2015

The analysis of unionization rates in Türkiye necessitates a sectoral breakdown, revealing significant differences between the public and private sector. As depicted in the figure above, unionization rates tend to range around 10-15% in the private sector, whereas they surpass 55-60% in the public sector. Notably, the unionization rate of women is consistently lower than that of men in both sectors. This discrepancy is primarily attributed to gender-based occupational segregation.

In Türkiye, women’s employment faces significant constraints in industry-dominated sectors such as metal, petrochemicals, and mining, where unionization rates are high. Conversely, in the service sector, characterised by higher female employment, rates tend to be lower. In addition, the prevalence of informal work among women serves as a limiting factor for their access to trade unions. Other contributing factors include women employees’ additional responsibilities outside of work, the historical inadequacy of trade unions in developing policies for women workers, and the perception of trade unions as male-dominated organizations (Beken 2015, 172-173, Seçer, 2009: 30).

Figure 21. Collective Bargaining Coverage Rate (%) (2012-2019)



Source: ILOSTAT; 2023b

The calculation of collective bargaining coverage, akin to unionization rates, relies on the number of registered workers, potentially underestimating the actual figures due to the exclusion of informal workers. The ILO’s calculation, as illustrated above,

indicates a relatively low scope of collective bargaining, the lowest of all European and Middle Asian countries (ILO, 2017: 17). Given the modest increase in both the number of workers and unionization rates over the years, the parallel growth in the scope of collective bargaining is a natural consequence. However, it is essential to consider the disproportionately high unionization rates in the public sector and their impact on the total number of workers covered by collective bargaining.

Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that the expansion of the collective bargaining scope has not kept pace with the rise in unionization rates. This discrepancy, contrary to the basic logic of industrial relations, suggests that some unionized workers remain outside the purview of collective bargaining. Yorgun attributes this phenomenon to the legislative framework, noting that the legislative process in Türkiye tends to restrict the right to collective bargaining and grants rights exceptionally (2013). Additionally, challenges in the authorization determination processes contribute to this outcome (Görmüş 2020, 83).

Conclusion

In this study, we scrutinize the trajectory of decent work development, utilizing the year 2000 as a baseline, and focus on nine fundamental indicators delineated by the International Labour Organization (ILO), with a particular emphasis on gender dynamics. Despite an unfavourable general prognosis for both genders, women appear to lag behind men across most indicators.

Although there has been a marginal uptick in women's employment during the review period, it hovers just above 30%, approximately half of the OECD average (65.8%) (OECD 2022). A noteworthy positive trend since 2004 is the significant surge in women's paid employment, coupled with a decline in unpaid family labour. At the inception of this era, over half of the women were engaged as unpaid family workers, a proportion that diminished to below 20% by 2022. Conversely, the proportion of paid work, initially below 40%, has surged beyond 70%. The informality rate, a notable concern at the study's outset, has witnessed a substantial reduction from 70% to 40%. However, informal employment remains more prevalent among women than men.

The unemployment rates in 2022 underscore a gender disparity, with women experiencing a rate of 13.4%, compared to males at 8.9%. After 2009, the gap widened, emphasizing that unemployment is a more significant challenge for women. In Türkiye, income inadequacy is inherent in the economy, with real wages trailing behind labour productivity, particularly exacerbated since the 2000s. Women's wage levels, which are lower than men's, are gradually converging towards the minimum wage, with nearly one-third of women earning less than the minimum wage by 2021—a poignant indicator of working women's poverty.

Decent working hours exhibited a general downward trend until 2020, followed by an upward trend in the last two years. Although women consistently worked fewer hours than men, this gap gradually closed towards the end of the period. It is possible to say that the low working hours of women stem from their employment patterns rather than decent working hours. In fact, part-time employment, and unskilled labour, which are generally discontinuous jobs, are much more common among women.

Child labour, which is one of the worst forms of labour and should be avoided, persisted throughout the period and declined by only 1-2% by the end. This demonstrates that child labour is a structural feature of Turkish labour markets. At this point, the fact that two-thirds of working children are also pursuing their education is a good sign. This result is greatly influenced by the increase of obligatory education to 12 years. Child labour, on the other hand, was lower among girls than boys (by nearly half) throughout this period.

Regarding the stability and security of work, women are found in a more precarious situation than men, with part-time work, more prevalent among women, doubling or even tripling that of men. Women also exhibit a higher rate of employment in jobs that require no qualifications. Analysing the gender distribution of occupations reveals a notable lag of women behind men, particularly pronounced in certain occupational groups, except for professional occupations. The gender gap in managerial positions, a pivotal indicator of career opportunities, persisted without significant reduction throughout the period. This occupational distribution is also reflected in wage differences. While equal pay for equal work is the norm in Turkey, male- and female-dominated occupational groups are the main cause of wage discrepancies. The fact that women are predominantly employed in professions where career opportunities are more limited, in part-time and precarious areas brings along wage differences.

One notable domain where women exhibit an advantage in terms of decent work is occupational safety. Post-2010, fatal work accidents among women are exceptionally low, though the rate of exposure to non-fatal work accidents is lower than that of men. This is, of course, related to the fields in which women work. The fact that women's employment is legally prohibited in some areas where the risk of occupational accidents is higher (such as underground work) and that women's employment is very limited in heavy and hazardous work are effective on these results.

Social security coverage reflects the consequences of low female labour force participation and widespread informal work among women. In 2021, men aged 65 and above receive old-age pensions four times more frequently than women. Women in this age bracket are eligible for a death pension upon their husbands' demise, and they receive a substantially higher proportion of death pensions than men.

The landscape of female unionization rates presents a negative outlook, with the gender gap widening in the private sector after 2014, while rates in the public sector remain relatively stable.

Over the last two decades, Turkish labour markets have demonstrated limited success in generating decent work, with pronounced gender differences. This condition, which poses a substantial disadvantage in terms of sustainable development, necessitates structural reforms beyond employment policies. This study provides a comprehensive framework for the overall structure of decent work; however, future studies should scrutinize each indicator separately to discern the root causes of the negative structure and formulate realistic, reasonable, and enduring policies to address them.

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