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The situation of women in Turkish petroleum industry¹**Özlem ATAY²**

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The situation of women in Turkish petroleum industry

Abstract

The research aims to highlight the underrepresentation of women in the Turkish petroleum industry. The number of women in senior leadership positions in all industries around the world is significantly less than men. However, unlike other industries, this gap is one of the widest in Oil, Gas and Mining with only 18.6% the share of women in senior leadership positions. Unfortunately, there has been no major hopeful improvement in this regard over the years. Qualitative data analysis from interviews and document analysis using the “Case Study Method” (Yin, 2018) were undertaken in this paper. According to the findings of this research, support for personal development and education, implementation of mentoring and development programs, creating more flexible working conditions and comfortable working spaces can increase the number of female workers in Turkish petroleum industry.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Introduction

Energy is an indispensable requirement in all areas of social life and economic activities. There is an intense dependence on petroleum and natural gas in energy consumption in the world. Petroleum, especially as the main energy source of many sectors, has the largest share in the world's primary energy consumption, and as of 2021 data, it met 31% of the world energy demand and natural gas met 26.9% (BP, 2022, p. 12). Today, it is clear that as an energy source petroleum is at the centre of the countries' economic development. The petroleum industry is a large and integrated sector consisting of national and multinational enterprises based on crude oil production and processing (refining) operations. There are 11 domestic and foreign crude oil production companies and five refineries, four refineries within TÜPRAŞ and Star İzmir refinery within Socar operating in Türkiye. TPAO is Türkiye's largest oil production company achieving over 80 percent of the domestic production and the largest industrial public sector company in Türkiye by asset size and equity. The research aims to portray the place and role of women in the Turkish petroleum industry and to highlight the underrepresentation of women in the industry.

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

Historically, female labour force participation are low throughout Türkiye, however female labour force participation in the petroleum industry is even lower. The physical nature, the risks and dangers of the work cause women's employment to be limited in the petroleum industry. Unfortunately, there has been no major progress in this regard over the years. TPAO, being the largest domestic petroleum production company, is chosen as a case study for female labour force participation in Turkish petroleum industry because it reflects the profile of the Turkish petroleum industry.

Method

Qualitative data analysis from interviews and document analysis using the “Case Study Method” (Yin, 2018) were undertaken in this paper.

Conclusion

According to the findings of this research, support for personal development and education, implementation of mentoring and development programs, creating more flexible working conditions and comfortable working spaces can increase the number of female workers in Turkish petroleum industry.

Keywords: Gender Equality, Turkish Petroleum Industry, Case Study Method, Women in Senior Management

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the historical process, women have participated in various economic activities according to the conditions and characteristics of each period. Since the 19th century women's education and participation in working life has been increased, with the rapid development of industrialization and the transition from traditional agricultural society to urban society. Women's increasing participation in working life has made economic, social and cultural contributions. Over time, women have found opportunities to work in industry and service sectors that provide higher wages and employment than low-paid jobs. The Republican Era,

which started in 1923, was a turning point in the employment of women in Türkiye. While female labour force was initially concentrated in sectors such as agriculture, food and textile, since the 1950s, with the urbanization and industrialization process in Türkiye, women's employment rates began to increase in health, tourism, industry and service sectors. Turkish women's participation in business life has been increased and women have begun to find employment opportunities in almost every sector with national and international laws and regulations. Despite all these developments, the labour force participation rate of women in Türkiye is still low compared to international standards. Although women constitute almost half of Türkiye's population, the labour force participation rate among females is 34.2% and among males is 71.1% for 2022 (The World Bank, 2024.) The main reasons for low labour participation rate for Turkish women can be summarized as the economic crises, high unemployment rate, low level of education, caregiving responsibilities, heavy household chores and insufficiency of childcare units (Karabıyık, 2012, p. 235; Tatoğlu, 2022, p. 23). Additionally, according to nationwide Household Labor Force Survey in 2Q22, %47.5 of the women respondents declared the household chores as the main reason for not being in the labour force (Tatoğlu, 2022, p. 7).

According to The Global Gender Gap Report 2023, women are poorly represented in Oil, Gas and Mining industries, as 22.7% of the workforce, where they account for less than one-quarter of workers. Women continue to be outnumbered by men in senior leadership positions across all industries. However, unlike other industries, this gap is one of the widest in Oil, Gas and Mining with only 18.6% the share of women in senior leadership positions. Unfortunately, there has been no major hopeful improvement in this regard over the years. The research aims to portray the place and role of women in the Turkish petroleum industry. The research also examines the situation of white, blue, and grey-collar women workers in the Turkish petroleum industry.

1. Turkish Petroleum Industry

Petroleum, especially as the main energy source of many sectors, has the largest share in the world's primary energy consumption, and as of 2021 data, it met 31% of the world energy demand and natural gas met 26.9% (British Petroleum (BP), 2022, p. 12). Today, it is clear that as an energy source petroleum is at the centre of the countries' economic development. The petroleum industry is a large and integrated sector consisting of national and multinational enterprises based on crude oil production and processing (refining) operations. There are 11 domestic and foreign crude oil production companies and five refineries, four refineries within TÜPRAŞ and Star İzmir refinery within Socar operating in Türkiye.

Petroleum exploration, production and processing (refining) in Türkiye also started during the Republican Era, with Türkiye Petrolleri Anonim Ortaklığı-Turkish Petroleum Corporation (TPAO) established in 1954, an integrated organization covering all activities of the petroleum industry (exploration, production, transportation, refining, petro chemistry and distribution) in Türkiye. Because of the transformation in the Turkish economy after 1980, affiliated companies of TPAO were privatized and the integrated structure of TPAO changed. Nevertheless, TPAO has tried to carry out activities in all fields within the limits of the investments and opportunities determined by the state since its establishment.

When Türkiye's total oil and natural gas production data is evaluated, TPAO maintains its leading position in the sector. 75% of crude oil production (19.8 million barrels) and 75% of natural gas production (308 million m³) in Türkiye were achieved by TPAO in 2022 (TPAO, 2022, p. 52).

Unfortunately, only 7% of Türkiye's oil consumption and 1% of natural gas consumption is met by domestic production. However, it is possible to discover new oil and natural gas fields because of ongoing and future exploration efforts. Actually, TPAO announced that a new natural gas reserve of 405 billion m³ was discovered in the Tuna-1 field in the Western Black Sea in 2020. Following this discovery, TPAO carried out an additional discovery of 135 billion m³ in the Amasra-1 well in 2021, increasing the total amount of discovered natural gas reserves to 540 billion m³ (TPAO, 2022, p. 54). Moreover, there was an oil discovery in the Şehit Esmâ Çevik-1 exploration well drilled on May 10, 2021 on Gabar Mountain in Şırnak province. Oil in place in the field is determined as 345 million barrels, while the recoverable reserves are calculated as 154 million barrels oil. Following the oil discovery, drilling operations were completed in six wells as of the end of December 2022, producing 7,698 barrels/day of oil. In line with the goal of reducing Türkiye's dependence on oil and gas, these discoveries will create new opportunities for both TPAO and the Turkish economy.

2. Female Labour Force Employment in the Turkish Petroleum Industry

The Turkish constitution guarantees that women and men are equal, and enjoy equal rights. However, this legal understanding has not fully infused to all the interstices of Turkish society, including employment. Despite a gradual improvement in awareness of gender equality in Türkiye, protective legal provision against gender discrimination is still rudimentary (Özkanlı and Özbilgin, 2002, p. 154). According to the 2023 Global Gender Gap Report, which is published by World Economic Forum, unfortunately Türkiye dropped five places in the rankings, from 124th to 129th among 146 countries in the light of four criteria: economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival and political

empowerment. The ranking of Türkiye is even worse in economic participation and opportunity sub index, being 133rd among 146 countries (World Economic Forum Global Gender Report, 2023, p. 11, 17). Moreover, Türkiye is the last in the Global Gender Gap Index rankings by region (Table 1).

Table 1. The Global Gender Gap Index Rankings by Region

Eurasia and Central Asia		
Country	Rank	
	Regional	Global
Moldova	1	19
Belarus	2	41
Armenia	3	61
Kazakhstan	4	62
Ukraine	5	66
Georgia	6	76
Kyrgyzstan	7	84
Azerbaijan	8	97
Tajikistan	9	111
Türkiye	10	129

(World Economic Forum Global Gender Report, 2023).

Education level, marital status, birth rate, child care, dependent family care, household income, rural-to-urban migration and the proportion of employment in the agricultural sector were determined as main factors affecting women's employment and labour force participation in Türkiye (Yıldırım and Doğrul, 2008; Dayıoğlu and Kırdar, 2010; Kılıç and Öztürk, 2014). Another reason for women's low participation in the work force is the inadequate essential mechanisms for providing vocational and technical training to women, even though the labour law gives equal rights (Özkanlı, 2001, p. 129).

Table 2: Turkish Labour Force Status by Gender Between 2014-2022

Turkish Labour Force Participation Rate (%)		
Years	15+ Male (%)	15+Female (%)
2014	71,3	30,3
2015	71,6	31,5
2016	72	32,5
2017	72,5	33,6
2018	72,7	34,2
2019	72	34,4
2020	68,2	30,9
2021	70,3	32,8
2022	71,4	35,1

(TURKSTAT Statistics Data Portal, 2024)

As can be seen from the Table 2, the rates of female labour force participation is low throughout Türkiye over the years, however female labour force participation in the petroleum industry is even lower (Table 3).

Table 3: Turkish Petroleum Industry's Labour Force Status by Gender in 2023

Company Name	Women	%	Men	%	Total
TÜPRAŞ (Refinery)	638	13%	4400	87%	5038
STAR (Refinery)	101	9%	1055	91%	1156
TPAO	574	16%	3048	84%	3622
GÜNEY YILDIZI	25	2%	1027	98%	1052
AME	9	7%	116	93%	125
ARAR	9	9%	94	91%	103
DIXSTONE	12	14%	76	86%	88
TEMI	14	16%	72	84%	86
TBNG+CRBV	12	17%	59	83%	71
ÇALIK	7	21%	26	79%	33
PARK PLACE	3	17%	15	83%	18
MARSA	3	30%	7	70%	10
İPEK ENERJİ	1	33%	2	67%	3
TOTAL	1408	12%	9997	88%	11405

(Derived from Human Resources Department managers of given companies, 2024)

Turkish petroleum industry consists of 11 domestic and foreign crude oil production companies and a total of 4 refineries within TÜPRAŞ and the Star İzmir refinery within Socar, currently. Women comprise only 12 % of work force in Turkish petroleum industry in 2023 (Table 3). The data in Table 3 were collected by individual interviews with human resources department managers of companies in Turkish petroleum industry. TPAO, TÜPRAŞ and Star's employees together constitute approximately 90 % of Turkish petroleum industry's work force. A brief information and labour force statistics of the Turkish petroleum industry's three biggest companies are as follows:

TPAO is the biggest crude oil production company, covering 80 % of the crude oil production in Türkiye. TPAO has demonstrated a commitment to improving gender equality. TPAO's Strategic Plan includes gender equality as a fundamental principle. TPAO's senior management are committed to increasing the representation of women workers, because they believe that women make an important contribution to the company.

Table 4: TPAO’s Labour Force Status by Gender in 2023

TPAO Number of Employees (2023)	Women	%	Men	%	Total
Number of Employees	574	16%	3048	84%	3622
Managerial Position	68	21%	255	79%	323
White Collar	361	26%	1039	74%	1400
Blue Collar	213	10%	2009	90%	2222

(Derived from TPAO Human Resources Department manager, 2024)

TÜPRAŞ is Türkiye's largest industrial enterprise and leading refiner, operating four refineries with a total refining capacity of 30 million tonnes of crude per year, which is 70% of Türkiye’s current refining capacity. TÜPRAŞ signed the United Nations Women’s Empowerment Principles (WEP) in 2017 and declared to the stakeholder’s company's commitment to become an inclusive workplace in the energy industry. Furthermore, TÜPRAŞ established “Diversity, Equality, and Inclusion Committee” in 2021 to systematize and plan the activities to create a diverse and inclusive workplace at TÜPRAŞ. Through this committee, TÜPRAŞ aims to maintain and develop a business environment that supports diversity, equality and inclusion (TÜPRAŞ 2023 Integrated Annual Report).

Table 5: TÜPRAŞ’s Labour Force Status by Gender in 2023

TÜPRAŞ Number of Employees (2023)	Women	%	Men	%	Total
Number of Employees	638	13%	4400	87%	5038
Managerial Position	43	19%	189	81%	232
White Collar	513	35%	960	65%	1473
Blue Collar	125	4%	3440	96%	3565

(Derived from TÜPRAŞ Human Resources Department manager, 2024)

Socar Türkiye has also signed the Women’s Empowerment Principle (WEPs) – a joint initiative of UN Women and the UN Global Compact. Star Refinery declared its support the rights of women to equality and freedom in the business world and in all segments of society. Company’s human resource policies are based on a principle of equal opportunities, according to which they are endeavouring to increase the ratio of women in employment in every field.

Table 6: Star’s Labour Force Status by Gender in 2023

Star Number of Employees (2023)	Women	%	Men	%	Total
Number of Employees	101	9%	1055	91%	1156
Managerial Position	21	14%	131	86%	152

(Derived from Star Human Resources Management department manager, 2024)

The distribution of women's employment in the Turkish petroleum industry varies according to crude oil exploration-production and processing (refining) processes. Crude oil production is

generally carried out in remote and difficult geographies, namely deserts, forests, the extremely hot equator and cold northern pole regions and in the offshore areas. Employees have to work for long periods in these difficult conditions. Chemical wastes, gas emissions, mud, spills, explosions, fires and work accidents that threaten the health of employees are frequently seen during crude oil production. Transportation difficulties, health risks and social isolation create stress for employees. In addition, there are social and political risks that petroleum industry may always face, such as conflicts among local people, ongoing wars in crude oil production areas and oil production facilities being the target of terrorist attacks. The before mentioned difficulties and risks cause women's employment to be limited in the petroleum industry (O'Rourke & Connolley, 2003, p. 595-596; Koçman, 2022, p. 98-99).

Another factor affecting female employment is the need for qualified labour in the petroleum industry. The low level of education of female employees and lack of vocational training are factors that restrict job opportunities for women in the industry. In addition, frequent economic crises in Türkiye and privatizations in the petroleum industry have played a major role for the changes in female employment in Türkiye over the years. There is still much work to be done making petroleum industry an attractive one for women to work and supporting women for their career.

3. Research Methodology

Qualitative data analysis from interviews and document analysis using the “Case Study Method” (Yin, 2018) were undertaken in this paper. TPAO is chosen as a case study because it is Türkiye's largest oil production company having 70 percent of the whole industry workers. After TPAO General Directorate Approval was obtained, all data were collected and face-to-face interviews were held. In-depth interviews with TPAO's nine women senior managers were conducted between March and April 2024. Each participant's oral consent was obtained before the interviews. The confidentiality of the interviewees has been maintained in all references to the interviews. These interviews were in Turkish and were conducted using the questions from the questionnaire of Özkanlı and Korkmaz (2000), which received Ethics Committee Approval. After the interviews, we transcribed the notes and translated into English.

3.1. TPAO At A Glance

TPAO, one of the major players of Türkiye's economy, was established in 1954 to engage in hydrocarbon exploration, drilling, production, refining and marketing operations. TPAO was an integrated oil company until 1983, but currently operates as a national oil company engaged in hydrocarbon exploration and production.

TPAO, as a government institution, is the biggest oil production company, covering 80 % of

the crude oil production in Türkiye. TPAO is a leading company in Türkiye. The main administrative focus is on developing and implementing a policy that provides balance, diversity and equal rights among male and female workers. TPAO’s strategic plan includes gender equality as a fundamental principle. It is the responsibility of TPAO to create equal opportunities for employees from the beginning of their careers and to offer diversity. TPAO’s sustainability report also includes gender equality activities. TPAO’s Sustainability Policy ensures equal opportunities for women in the workplace. The main aim is to increase women’s employment. The percentage of female employees in TPAO reached 20% in 2021–2022. TPAO regards ensuring gender equality in all activities and in institutional culture as strategic initiatives.

As of February 2024, 3,616 personnel were employed in TPAO (Table 7). According to most recent data, while the distribution of white collar employees is %72 and blue collar employees %28 in headquarters, distribution of white collar employees is %39 and blue collar employees is %61 in total. White-collar women employees constitute 26 % of the workforce, however for blue collar women employees it drops to % 10. Low female employment as blue collars is mainly because of difficult working conditions in production fields. While women representation in managerial positions is higher (21%), percentage of female employees in total drops to 16% (Table 8).

Table 7: Number of Employees at TPAO by Region in 2024

Number of Employees by Region	White Collar	%	Blue Collar	%	Total
Headquarters	955	72%	378	28%	1333
Batman	236	17%	1116	83%	1352
Adıyaman	112	19%	464	81%	576
Trakya	80	25%	242	75%	322
Şırnak	11	33%	22	67%	33
Grand Total	1394	39%	2222	61%	3616

(Derived from TPAO Human Resources Management department manager, 2024)

Table 8: Gender Based Distribution of Employees at TPAO in 2024

	Women	%	Men	%	Total
White Collar	361	26%	1033	74%	1394
Blue Collar	213	10%	2009	90%	2222
Total	574	16%	3042	84%	3616

(Derived from TPAO’s Human Resources Management department manager, 2024)

Table 9: Distribution of Employees and Managerial Positions by Gender in 2024

	Managerial Position		Non-Managerial Position		Total	
Women	68	21%	506	15%	574	16%
Men	258	79%	2784	85%	3042	84%

(Derived from TPAO Human Resources Management department manager, 2024)

However, when distribution of employees and managerial positions by gender in different geographical regions is concerned, women representation is much lower especially in eastern parts of Türkiye, which is mainly due to the cultural differences between west and east Türkiye (Table 10). Women are affected by gender discrimination in eastern Türkiye more severely. Where fight against gender inequalities is not accompanied by a parallel development in the employment infrastructure, women's employment rate is rather low. These data show that gender discrimination based on women's employment in the Turkish petroleum industry continues, especially in the eastern regions of Türkiye.

Table 10: *Distribution of Employees and Managerial Positions by Gender in Regions*

	Managerial Position	Non-Managerial Position
Headquarters		
Men	70%	70%
Women	30%	30%
Batman		
Men	97%	92%
Women	3%	8%
Adiyaman		
Men	92%	93%
Women	8%	7%
Trakya		
Men	84%	93%
Women	16%	7%
Şırnak		
Men	100%	90%
Women	0%	10%

(Derived from TPAO Human Resources Management department manager, 2024)

3.2. Findings

In-depth interviews were held with nine women senior level managers, including two presidents, three vice presidents and four managers. All of the interviewees have been working at TPAO for more than 10 years and two of them have been working at TPAO for more than 20 years. All of the interviewees have a university degree or higher (two university graduates, six master's degree graduates and one PhD graduate).

The questions from the questionnaire of Özkanlı and Korkmaz (2000) were asked during the interviews. These questions asked were not only to learn the interviewees' experiences and observations of the industry but also the difficulties they face. The questions asked during the interviews are also about the representation of women in the industry. According to the interviews, most of the women are happy to be in this industry but they would like to see more women workers and leaders. Additionally, most of the participants believe that gender causes

a significant disadvantage for their careers, especially low opportunities for career development and promotion at work. They try to find a way for adapting to the work environments as women in a men dominated workplace. Almost all of the interviewees believed that men have more advantages in work life. Although half of the interviewees were of the opinion that being a female manager was not a disadvantage, the majority of them stated that female managers had to work harder than male managers in order to be accepted. Almost all of the interviewees stated that since they have a helper at home, they can easily carry out their household chores and therefore do not experience role conflict. Male colleagues are occupied with most of the leadership and upper management positions while there is very little recovery in the proportion of female managers over the past years. For instance, there have been no female directors on the board of directors of TPAO since its establishment. Almost all of the interviewees believe still many steps should be taken to draw women's attention to the industry. Consequently, all interviewees believe women are underrepresented in the industry.

The personal experiences and observations shared by the interviewees during the interviews summarized as follows:

Interviewee 1: *“There was a requirement for candidates to be men in the 1990s, so I could not apply TPAO’s scholarship for abroad master's programs although I was just as successful as my male schoolmates.”*

Interviewee 2: *“I was one the first female employees to win TPAO’s scholarship to an abroad master's program and work at TPAO afterwards in the 2000s”.*

Interviewee 3: *“Male employees in the fields treat women very politely, but one of the reasons why women do not prefer the fields is the lack of places for women to stay in the fields and the limited opportunities provided”.*

Interviewee 4: *“I don't have opportunity to work at home after working hours. However, when necessary, I can only work after putting the kids to sleep”.*

Interviewee 5: *“It was difficult while my children were small, but as they grow up, things became easier and I could concentrate on my career”.*

Interviewee 6: *“Since both my husband and I work very hard, we have a live-in caregiver at home, so I can go to work comfortably. However, I am generally the person who takes leave from work in case of emergency, such as illness of the children”.*

Interviewee 7: *“There was a managerial position in Iraq office and I could not apply because they said it was not a place for women”.*

Interviewee 8: *“I was appointed to a managerial position much later compared to male colleagues”.*

Interviewee 9: “I do not prefer to work in the oil field, not only it requires heavy labour but also it has a hypermasculine culture that makes me uncomfortable”.

CONCLUSION and SUGGESTIONS

According to Boston Consulting Group (BCG) and World Petroleum Council (WPC) Energy’s Untapped Reserves Report (2023), although some progress has been made in the representation of women at all levels, the petroleum industry still has a long way to go to achieve gender equality worldwide. Similarly, there is still much to do in Türkiye to attract the female workforce to the petroleum industry, contribute to their development and training and ensure their long-term employment in the sector.

The results obtained in this study are as follows:

- Women are under-represented in Turkish petroleum industry. Women representation is much lower especially in eastern parts of Türkiye and are affected by gender discrimination more severely.
- The female workforce rate in Turkish petroleum industry is generally low in technical (exploration, production and processing) activities, but higher in administrative activities, considering the type of work done and working conditions.
- Difficulties in exploration and production areas and unfavourable natural conditions limit female labour force employment.
- Women representation is much lower in senior management, especially in eastern regions there is none.
- Turkish women who are being in the labour force are more likely to encounter obstacles at work such as temporary and short-term employment, gender inequalities in job opportunities, career development and promotions.
- Women encounter two competitive situations due to their participation in work life: competition in the workplace and gender-based competition. Even though the competitive situation is generally explained as workplace competition, in reality, it should be considered within the scope of gender-based discrimination (Kıroğlu-Bayat and Baykal Parıldar, 2021, p. 746). As a result, men occupy with most of the leadership and upper management positions even though there is very little recovery in the proportion of female managers over the past years.

Suggestions are given below in order to increase the women's labour force participation in petroleum industry:

- Establishing more effective women's platforms, identifying and solving the current and specific barriers faced by women workers in petroleum industry,

- Making more academic research on structural and cultural barriers women workers face while reaching higher levels of management,
- Ensuring the companies to have an objective perspective and a cooperative policy in order to solve the problems identified and revealed in reaching the upper levels of management for female workers,
- Increasing the accessibility of higher level of education specific to the sector's fields of activity and using expertise and in-house training opportunities.
- Entry into the sector should be facilitated through incentive policies, and equality in employment between men and women should be ensured.
- Reducing the conservative perspective on traditional gender roles.

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