

Mind the Gap in Turkish Labor Market

Meltem Ince Yenilmez*

Abstract: The feminist theory equally focuses on the concept that the efforts of women are underrated. Nevertheless, this concept is not an appropriate analytical tool to checkmate the gender gaps in the labor market in Turkey. This is owing to the fact the contributions of women to their households are not undervalued but that these women are perceived to have predetermined roles already and discouraged from trying to break through the barrier. Bridging this gender gap is vital for diverse reasons. It can help tackle poverty due to the direct and interrelated contributions to the welfare of the household. It also improves the position held by women as they can now take part in family decisions and making sure that primary income is used for necessities such as health care and children's education. Besides analyzing the characteristics fissures, and cracks in employment in Turkey, this paper will also uncover the principal drivers of gender inequality in employment. Therefore, it looks in particular at the main drivers of the gender gap in employment in Turkey and is necessary towards finding the best policies that can transform the Turkish labor market into a more inclusive setup while promoting gender equality.

Keywords: determinants of gender equality, women's employment, opportunities and challenges

INTRODUCTION

On-going debates discuss gender disparity in labor market participation and economic opportunities. There are perceived gaps in economic opportunities for men and women; and this has significant impacts on labor productivity and earnings. Owing to these incidents, the type of job has brought about significant differences in human capital.

In truth, when one assesses the number of women as against men across industries, fields, professionals, firms, and sectors, it is impossible to overlook the gaping hole between men and women's

* Meltem Ince Yenilmez (✉)
Yasar University, Izmir, Turkey
e-mail: meltem.ince@yasar.edu.tr

jobs. Therefore, this gap shows that evolving economic development and restructuring of avenues of employment is not enough to disrupt the gender segregation witnessed. By evaluating global data, it is easy to see that women dominate lower impact jobs and work in or manage small establishments. In Turkey, the ratio of employed women is far less than that of men. Statistics released in 2014 shows that out of every four women in Turkey, only one is employed. And there is segregation of women in the labor force. Most women are found in low paying and low-skilled jobs like textile and agriculture. Gender inequality in Turkey's employment is responsible for the underutilization of women in the labor force. Although there has been a considerable rise in women's employment, there is still a serious need for a policy that will ensure an equal opportunity role for both male and female in the work environment. There are many contributing factors to the skewed involvement of women in the labor force. The gender difference in employment role and the social role of women contributes to the imbalance in the labor force. There's also an unfair job requirement set by employers and the lack of required qualifications of the unemployed women play a significant role in the low population of women in labor force. The gender difference in labor force has its social, economic, political and cultural contributing factors. Addressing these issues should involve a constant effort and creation of policies that will eliminate the gender bias in workplaces.

In the informal sector, the situation is even worse as women in this sector are primarily over-represented among unpaid family workers. On a general note, women rarely rise to powerful positions in the labor market. Over the years, there have been several misconceptions about women in leadership. Most of these women are seen as arrogant, disrespectful, pushy and stubborn whereas men who occupy the same capacity are regarded as being ambitious with excellent leadership skills. Other assumption view women as subordinates to men who would not do well when asked to lead. The social belief of women's role being in the bedroom has done little to help them in developing the leadership qualities necessary to succeed. Another assumption is that women often follow other's opinions at the expense of what they feel is right thus making them unfit to lead. Once people feel a leader is not in control, they mostly ignore their decisions. Also, women are known to prefer an inclusive and collaborative style of leadership, further contributing to the view that they are not confident of ruling on their own. Another contributing factor to the low involvement of

women in leadership is the social role of women being the primary caregivers in families and the other household responsibilities that are expected of them. In our society, women are required to put the needs of their family above that of their careers and ambitions. According to research, women who make it to the top of their career are usually unmarried, without children or focused on their career before starting a family. As a result, companies believe that women will most times place their family over their careers and in return limit the responsibilities given to women. To be at the top of one's career, there are moments one need to do overtime at work or at home – this, however, conflicts with women's social role at home – thereby making it difficult for women to create a healthy work/life balance. Networking plays a crucial role in a professional's journey to the top. Networking is the backbone of any business but women's role limits them from participating in these networking activities. Also, most networking activities such as clubbing and golf are male-oriented.

Due to the inadequate access to better opportunities, the perceived gender gap reinforces institutional and labor market failures. For instance, women prefer to work in jobs with flexible working arrangements to be able to combine work and their domestic responsibilities. These working arrangements, which are primarily informal or part-time, carry significantly lower earnings than formal and full-time jobs. With the higher number of women working in such positions, there is decreased motivation to become active participants in the labor market. Therefore, women mainly specialize in nonmarket work than market work, which deepens the segregations in time use, access to inputs, market, and institutional failures that traps women in lower-paying positions. To break out of this trap, there must be interventions to lift time constraints, improve women's access to productive jobs, and correct market and institutional failures.

In Turkey, family units are perceived to have men as breadwinners and representatives of their own family. The perceived role is also seen as a prestigious position and held high socially. On the other hand, women are perceived as managers, caretakers, or organizers of all household functions. This position may be valued if the household runs smoothly. Therefore, many women face intense pressure to eliminate their search for formal employment or higher education. Nevertheless, the limited opportunities for women in the labor market are a significant concern not only for Turkey but the world at large because it leads to substantial adverse effects and can hinder any country from

reducing poverty and attaining sustainable growth. It is therefore not surprising that the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) Programs place women empowerment and gender equality as one of its primary goals. These obstacles to growth are also the reason why many nations around the world are changing, structuring, and aligning policies to tackle the issues of gender inequality.

This paper examines the extent, structure, nature, and characteristics of the prevalence of the looming gap between the number of women against men Turkey's labor force, and reasons for its existence. The goal is to develop strategies towards bridging the gender gap in the Turkish labor market. Bridging this gender gap is vital for diverse reasons. As said earlier, it can help tackle poverty due to the direct and interrelated contributions to the welfare of the household. It also improves the position held by women as they can now take part in family decisions and making sure that primary income is used for necessities such as health care and children's education. Secondly, gender equality, in terms of employment, has to be enhanced based on the internationally recognized standpoint that every individual is deserving of the same opportunities. This is from the perspective of fundamental rights.

So, gender equality sits as the most significant development challenges across Turkey. Over 78.3 percent of women around the globe are killed, whereas the women's employment ratio was just 51.9 percent. In Turkey, 65.7 percent of men are employed, while over 28.9 percent are women. Therefore, the women working actively as part of Turkey's economy are just 33.5 percent, which is lower than the worldwide average of 48.7 percent. Nevertheless, during the year, women in Turkey have witnessed social exclusion due to employment choices and jobless rates, which can also trigger the currency crisis that had begun in August 2020. Additionally, analysts predict that the employment to dependency ratio will be abnormally high by the end of the year. Therefore, this paper looks in particular at the main drivers of the gender gap in employment in Turkey and is necessary towards finding the best policies that can transform the Turkish labor market into a more inclusive setup while promoting gender equality.

BARRIERS TO WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Diverse works of literature outline demographic factors, globalization, political systems, economic development, cultural and social norms, education, and availability of infrastructure, macroeconomic factors,

perceptions, and expectations as primary factors influencing gender equality in employment. Current evidence points to the fact that development is positively affected by an increase in female labor participation.

Studies, lectures, and discourses have tried to assess the reasons why female labor participation usually takes a plunge before rising as economic development improves. Boserup (1970) provides insights that during the early stages of development in any country, men tend to displace women in the labor force because they already have the knowledge and skills to take on better positions. Nevertheless, this phenomenon may also take a different shape; bringing about the establishment of another focus on the effects of income and substitution. Therefore, when development occurs, the unearned income in the household rises; and that reduces the motivation for women to work outside the home. These negatively affect the growing revenues grossed by women and leads to a condition called “income effect,” which means that households with higher income provide more avenues for leisure for the women.

On the other hand, the substitution effect works in the opposite direction such that when female wages rise, more women are motivated to enter the labor market (Goldin 1995; Bloom et al. 2009; Tam 2011). Niemi and Lloyd (1981) also provide a different insight into the independent and positive impacts on female labor force participation brought on by inflation. Therefore, the effects of increasing inflation will not significantly affect and negatively the lower earnings of women as opposed to their counterparts (Cardoso 1992).

Nevertheless, Sakellariou (2011) also presents additional insights on the fractures in female-male participating in the labor force within rural societies, citing that deviations in profile (demographic data) and educational fulfillment of the population influence the inequality between man and woman participating in the economic. Therefore, increments education and literacy levels witnessed contribute to the growth and expansion of the female labor force participation. Patacchini et al. (2012) who observed systematically, that increase in the level of education, also support these views and diminishing effects of fertility choices can positively affect women’s participation in the labor market with significant differences witnessed in different institutional and welfare settings across EU countries. Concerning Turkey, there have been some policies and changes done over the last

decade to reduce gender inequality and provide opportunities for women to participate in the Turkish labor market. Nevertheless, the growth within this period is still low in comparison with other developed EU countries.

In other works of literature related to women employment in Turkey, education has become an essential factor that influences the female labor participation in Turkey (Er 2013; Önder 2013; Kılıç and Öztürk 2014; Inan and Aşık 2015). Therefore, it is crucial to analyze women's employment with respect to the perceived gender inequality in education and how it influences the growth of female labor participation. Tansel (2001) has previously evaluated the rate of female involvement in Turkey through time-series evidence of cross-provincial determinants. He discovered that female education strongly and positively affects female labor participation. He equally found there were regional disparities in female labor force participation. According to his results, Central Anatolia, Southeast Anatolia, East Anatolia, and the Mediterranean, had lower rates of female participation than Marmara while the Black Sea had higher rates of female participation. Nevertheless, Aegean and Marmara had almost the same (in the participating female labor force). In a different study by Rankin and Aytac (2006), it was observed that the gender differences in schooling depend primarily on the level of urbanization across provinces on a macro-structural level.

Beyond education, Turkey's reluctant growth in female labor participation may also be influenced by the patriarchal family beliefs that remain dominant in Turkey. According to Caner et al. (2016), reforms fail to increase the participation of females in schools, even with the perceived reduction in school dropout rates across the country. The study used data from 1998 to 2003 from the Turkish demographic and Healthy surveys to observe the effects of the 1997 education reform. They equally noted that even in cases where the mother's views on gender roles were expressed, the reductions in school dropout rates were almost the same for girls and boys.

A different study by Filiztekin and Karahasan (2015) also provides insights into the spatial dimensions of gender inequality in education in Turkey. This study used district-level data from 1990 to 2020, and findings indicated that different societal segments had varying levels of improvement. They also confirmed the theory, and the rural populations negatively affected female education. Therefore the female population and rural population were observed as the most

disadvantageous individuals leading to the highest spatial spillovers as observed among these significantly unequal groups of the society. At some point in the past decade, the government in Turkey embraced secularism and began enacting policies and changing curriculums to boost gender equality in educational systems across the country (Çimen and Bayhan 2018).

The TUIK Research in 2018 provides data on literacy levels in Turkey as 3.5 percent, men, over 15 as illiterates whereas, 6.8 percent of women in the same group are illiterates. Therefore, one in every ten women in Turkey is illiterate with educational attainments for women diminishing after elementary school, which further confirms the gender gap in educational accomplishments and opportunities. Another research in 2017, further highlights that for every 100 Turkish women holding a college degree, there are over 158 Turkish men with similar degrees. Nevertheless, the TUIK research equally highlights that the majority of women in the urban areas have at least a high school degree, whereas only 18 percent in the rural areas have comparable degrees.

Women's participation in labor markets is widely acknowledged as a necessity for development. Unfortunately, for Turkey, there have been regular fluctuations in the years past. In 1990, 34 percent of women participated in the labor market, but these rates decreased to 30.6 percent in 2000 and to 25.4 percent in 2004. In 2009, the rates increased to 26.1 percent and had so far expanded to 34.9 in 2019. Nevertheless, it is also important to note that over 91.2 percent of women who participated in the labor market have access to social protection.

It is equally important to note that Turkey in 2003 passed an employment law forbidding the differentiation of pay scales by gender. However, these laws were not enforced, and so the gender-based discrimination continued leading to culturally segregated employment opportunities and gender-based lay-offs whenever there is an economic crisis in Turkey.

Naturally, Turkey has also undergone several structural and legal changes over the years, especially concerning its commitment to achieving economic development. These ongoing developments have also helped increase awareness in women about their rights to participate in all aspects of modern society. Nevertheless, many of the reforms undergone by Turkey has failed to provide full cooperation,

and some of the reforms in most recent years lead to further restrictions in traditional gender roles (Köroğlu 2006).

According to Dökmen (2006), gender inequality is an impediment to achieving a truly democratic and modern society. This means that societies with unequal opportunities for men and women to access all aspects of society limit the growth of real democracy. Therefore, Turkey falls within this unfortunate class of societies because family responsibilities, access to education, and participation in labor markets, and politics are not fully granted to women. Thus, Turkish women's labor market has significantly declined over the years and therefore demonstrates an urgent situation that must be addressed. In that regard, the first step to overcoming all impediments to gender equality in education. With education, women will be less eager to procreate unscrupulously and will push for quality healthcare and education for their children. All of these will, in turn, transform the labor force to a more productive outlay and strongly impact on the growth of the economy.

CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Gender inequality is a multidimensional problem and can only be solved by implementing strategies that cut across all macro and micro factors influencing the prevalence of this issue; therefore, suggestions for development require lengthy periods for complete implementation. As a developing country, Turkey must deal with its gender inequality issues to attain growth significantly. Because gender inequality in Turkey has social, cultural, and economic dimensions, reforms, and policies must cut across these dimensions. Time-series evidence over the period 1990 to 2019 suggests that quadratic real per capital GDP increments, increased democracy, higher ICT infrastructure availability, higher prices, and education increase significantly increases gender equality in employment, whereas profound levels of real GDP per capita and higher gross domestic investment lowers it.

Beyond the importance of good governance, women should be trained in entrepreneurship and encouraged to take risks to build businesses and become employers as well. Concerning good governance, the government should also implement policies that can boost investments in human capital and open up better opportunities for women in the workforce. These policies should promote upskilling, practical training, and education for workforces with lower skillsets. By implementing educational reforms and upskilling that augment the

needs of the industry, Turkish women will be motivated to build skills to match working environments and improve their positions tremendously. Governments should also help foster working environments and societies that promote the views of women by enforcing anti-discrimination laws, empowering women, and supporting equal opportunities. Therefore, the Turkish government should institute programs that dialogue with conglomerates to create employment opportunities for women through skills development, planning, and matching. Skill mismatches will also be addressed by improving training programs and closing the gap between vocational and tertiary educational institutions as well as the private sector. Concerning training programs, emphasis should be made initiatives carried out in real-world scenarios to give all existing participants and graduates the chance to be a part of the revolution. The government should also partner with private sectors and other relevant stakeholders to correct institutional policies pertaining to gender equality. This would strengthen the economic position of the country and lead to stronger University-industry connections.

This can be achieved by getting the academic boards, and private sector representatives to work together towards developing curriculums that foster gender equality. These steps will no doubt bring about private sector funding for scholarships, research, and internships. Therefore, the government's efforts will not only increase opportunities for women but also utilize the human capital effectively in Turkey and reform the education curriculum. Other measures should target government expenditure on introducing laws that would establish better investment climates towards formalizing the informal sector.

Besides the above strategies, the government can also enact awareness programs that can be aired on the media to help others become aware of the direct impacts of discriminatory practices on the economy. These programs will help individuals gain better insights on the importance of individual support to help boost the Turkish economy by eliminating gender-based unfair practices in their workplaces. Without implementing all of the reforms and strategies aligned above, the current unemployment rate of women is a time bomb that may disrupt Turkey's seamless economic growth and development in the future.

REFERENCES:

- Bloom, David E., David Canning, Günther Fink, and Jocelyn Finley. 2009. "Fertility, female labor force participation and the demographic dividend". *Journal of Economic Growth*, 14 (2): 79-101.
- Boserup, Ester. 1970. *Women's Role in Economic Development*. New York: St. Martin's.
- Caner, Asena, Cahit Guven, Çağla Okten, and Seyhun O. Sakalli. 2016. "Gender roles and the education gender gap in Turkey". *Social Indicators Research*, 129, No.3: 1231-1254.
- Cardoso, Eliana. 1992. "Inflation and Poverty". *NBER Working Papers* 4006.
- Çimen, Canan A., and Sezen Bayhan. 2018. *Secularism in Class Books and Findings of the Gender Equality Report*. Karşılaştırmalı Eğitim Derneği: Elf Publication.
- Dökmen, Zehra Y. 2006. *Toplumsal cinsiyet / Gender*. İstanbul: Sistem Yayıncılık.
- Er, Şebnem. 2013. "Türkiye'de Kadınların İşgücüne Katılım Oranını Etkileyen Faktörlerin Bölgesel Analizi" / "Regional Analysis of Factors Affecting the Female Labor Force Participation in Turkey". *Öneri Dergisi / Journal of Suggestion*, 10, No.40: 35-44.
- Filiztekin, Alpay, and Burhan C. Karahasan. 2015. "Mapping the Educational Attainment in Turkey." In *EY International Congress on Economics II*. Ankara, Ekonomik Yaklaşım Association, No. 285.
- Goldin, Claudia. 1995. "The U-shaped Female Labor Force Function in Economic Development and Economic History." In T. Paul Schultz (Ed.). *Investment in Women's Human Capital*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.
- Inan, Ferida, and Güneş A. Aşık. 2015. "Making Economies Work for Women: Female Labour Force Participation in Turkey." *TEPAV*. https://www.tepav.org.tr/upload/files/1436539353-9.Making_Economies_Work_for_Women__Female_Labour_Force_Participation_in_Turkey.pdf [accessed: 12.05.2020].
- Kılıç, Dilek, and Selcen Öztürk. 2014. "Türkiye'de Kadınların İşgücüne Katılımı Önündeki Engeller ve Çözüm Yolları: Bir Ampirik Uygulama" / "Obstacles and Solutions in Female Labor Force Participation in Turkey: An Empirical Applications". *Amme İdaresi Dergisi / Journal of Public Administration*, 47, No. 1: 107-130.
- Köroğlu, Fatma. 2006. *Okul yönetiminde cinsiyet etkeni ve kadın öğretmenlerin okul yöneticiliği talepleri Bingöl ili örneği / The gender factor in school administration and the demand of female teachers for school administration: example of Bingöl province*. MA Dissertation. Firat University.
- Niemi, Beth T., and Cynthia B. Lloyd. 1981. "Female labor supply in the context of inflation". *The American Economic Review*, 71, No.2: 70 – 75.
- Önder, Nurcan. 2013. "Türkiye'de Kadın İşgücünün Görünümü" / *Woman's View of Labor in Turkey*. *Çalışma Dünyası Dergisi / Journal of Study World*, 1, No. 1: 1-27.
- Patacchini, Eleonora, Angela Cipollone, and Giovanna Vallanti. 2012. *Women Labor Market Performance in Europe:Trends and Shaping Factors*. Brussels: Centre for European Policy Studies.
- Rankin, Bruce H., and Isik A. Aytaç, 2006. "Gender inequality in schooling: The case of Turkey". *Sociology of Education*, 79, No. 1: 25-43. <https://doi.org/10.1177/003804070607900102> [accessed: 11.06.2020].

- Sakellariou, Chris. 2011. *Determinants of the Gender Wage Gap and Female Labor Force Participation in EAP*. Paper commissioned for the EAP Gender Report.
- Tam, Henry. 2011. "U-shaped female labor force participation with economic development: some panel data evidence". *Economic Letters*, 110 (2):140-142.
- Tansel, Aysit. 2001. "Economic Development and Female Labor Force Participation in Turkey: Time-Series Evidence and Cross-Province Estimates". *ERC Working Papers* 0105.
- World Economic Forum. 2018. "The Global Gender Gap Report. http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2018.pdf [accessed: 12.03.2020].