

## INTRODUCTION

# Special dossier editor's introduction Gender, care, and work in Turkey: from familialism to neo-paternalism

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The concerted efforts in recent years to change the division of care responsibilities currently shouldered by women and the quest to establish a new balance among providers of care—the family, the market, and the state—have topped the social policy agenda in many contexts. These attempts are based on the well-established fact that women's caring responsibilities profoundly affect their labor market participation. Feminist researchers have modeled the welfare states as to their response to meet the care needs of families. Lewis's (1992) male breadwinner model in which women bear the sole responsibility for domestic tasks and child care, and remain outside labor markets presents the most widespread model of care in the world. However, it was later modified to include variations of the one-and-a-half breadwinner and dual earner household models. In Sainsbury's (1994) model, welfare states are typologies, whether they support women as wives, mothers, or workers. Orloff (1993) sets the criteria to evaluate the gender welfare regime according to whether it enables a woman to move out and set up her own home. In addition, Jensen (1997) suggests a focus on care, rather than on work/welfare, and makes distinctions between three sets of questions: Who cares? Who pays? How much is provided? These various models all have a focus on the relationship between the structure of the welfare state and women's paid work, and explain the role of the state in determining women's economic activities.

More recently, gender analysis has focused on how increasing rates of female employment have affected care and welfare regimes worldwide. For example, Esping Andersen (2002) analyzes the “new gender contract” that has emerged in post-industrial societies in which women-friendly policies and child-centered social investment strategies have resulted in the disappearance of housewifery as well as institutional developments in labor market regulation and social policy. He also acknowledges that traditional gendered roles which assign women the bulk of unpaid care work both reflect and influence the level of female employment, but public provision of care has the power to tilt the balance of this gendered division. No doubt, women typically spend disproportionately more time on unpaid care work than men. On account of gendered social norms that view unpaid care work as a female

prerogative, women across different regions, socio-economic classes, and cultures spend a significant part of their day on meeting the expectations set by their domestic and reproductive roles. This is in addition to their paid activities, thus creating the “double burden” of work for women. How society and policymakers address issues concerning care has important implications for the achievement of gender equality: they can either expand the capabilities and choices of women and men, or confine women to traditional roles associated with femininity and motherhood (Razavi 2007).

This Special Dossier on Gender, Care, and Work in Turkey presents an overview of the gender analysis of the relationship between women’s care responsibilities and work practices, and also an account of how welfare state policies and care regimes affect the role of women and gender in the labor market. The Turkish welfare state has traditionally rested on the ideal of women’s main societal role being that of mothers and wives because the family is an important source of security for the vast majority of the population. This, in turn, has resulted in women’s overwhelming involvement in caring activities and their remaining outside the labor market activities on which the recent welfare reforms of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) have been vested. The “cash-for-care” benefit scheme directed at women has generated a neo-paternalist care regime in which women’s traditional roles have been protected and perpetuated by the government. Rewarding women’s domestic care activities not only turns them into informal workers for the government but also helps to fill the gap in institutional care services for children and the elderly, even in times of high demand for social care services. The cash-for-care scheme also boosted the statistics on women’s labor force participation as the government recorded them as employed in the service sector (Toksöz 2016). Therefore, Turkey’s neo-paternalist care regime has ended up keeping women in the domestic sphere as the main care providers while recording them as employed, albeit on informal terms.

### **The care regime in Turkey: from familialism to neo-paternalism**

Turkey’s care regime rests upon a classic case of a familial care system in which women are the main providers of unpaid family-based caring activities. While the foundation of the Turkish Republic was a giant leap for women in terms of gaining citizenship rights, it meant little in changing the idealized role of women as mothers and wives. In the public space, women were accepted as equal to men, thanks to revolutionary Republican reforms, but they were also seen as devoted mothers and wives responsible for educating the next generation of nationalists at home. Although the Kemalist understanding of equality was based on the sameness of men and women, upper- and middle-class women championed the rights gained and thus helped to consolidate the power of the Kemalist regime through their access to professional occupations (Öncü 1981). This manifested itself in low female labor force participation rates and other structural inequalities between women and men. The women question, or achieving gender equality, was delegated to modernization and development processes through which more women would become better educated and cut ties with their rural “uneducated” backgrounds.

Most of the population who lived in rural areas and engaged in agricultural production did support the familial care regime of the country thus generating little

demand for institutional care as families were formed on a multi-generational base and lived in extended households. Low female employment rates in urban areas also provided another layer of support for the familial care regime. What the early Republic did was to help modernize the population through mass compulsory public education, starting with children aged seven and older. Women mostly remained in charge of domestic care activities in both rural and urban areas with little or no public services provided, especially for early years child care. After the 1950s, trends in urbanization and industrialization attracted some women into productive sectors such as textiles and food manufacturing, which overlapped with a period of protection for women as workers in the 1960s and 1970s (Makal 2012). The period ushered in the regulations that established workplace nurseries, the restriction on pregnant and breastfeeding women's working hours, and bans on women's work in certain occupation such as mining (Kapar 2015). However, all this meant little in terms of changing the familial care regime of Turkey, instead helping to perpetuate women's caring roles in the domestic domain.

The AKP's rise to power in 2002 has dramatically changed the relationship between lower-class women and the government. The main policy agenda of the AKP has rested upon pious mothers whose integration into the AKP regime is made possible through welfare aids that rewarded women's domestic caring activities. Termed by Kandiyoti (2010) as 'citizenship through entitlements', lower-class women with rural backgrounds practice a new sense of citizenship that gives them access to cash transfers through exercising their womanly duties at home. Within the framework of the AKP's welfare and gender regimes, provisions of care services have been built on the concepts of "mission" and "restoration" frequently voiced by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan before and after presidential elections. In the last decade the government has particularly focused on family policies, situating women within the confines of the familial domain and as major actors of reproduction, familial production, and care provision (Acar and Altunok 2013). While women are usually confined to unpaid and informal jobs in the labor market, within the home they are portrayed as solely responsible for domestic care activities. Women's care responsibilities in the private sphere have also turned into a policy response by the AKP government which introduced the cash-for-care scheme to support women in caring for elderly and/or sick family members from 2016. The scheme has extended to cover almost 700,000 women as carers. Some recently adopted policies, such as "granny salaries" or "caregiver/nanny incentives," seem to place value on women's unpaid care work but they also confirm the familial approach. Our argument is that the public funding used for the promotion of traditional gender roles prevents the development of institutional and quality services.

For the first time women's unpaid domestic care services have been rewarded with regular monthly payments and recognized as a societal service. This alliance between the conservative policies of the AKP government and women from the poorer strata of society has been based on the perpetuation of the ideal model of pious Sunni Muslim women. The AKP's call out for women to support the party and its conservative societal imagination has been based on the trade-off between the welfare assistance directed at women and women's electoral support which ends up enforcing the neo-paternalist care regime. Here, significantly, the neo-paternalist care regime refers to the perpetuation of women's domestic care activities while rewarding them with the cash-for-care scheme in which they become informal workers for the

government. This not only keeps women fully engaged in caring roles but also places a burden on them to fill the gap in institutional care services for children and elderly, even in times of high demand for social care services.

Through this system, women uphold the conservatism and Islamic aspect of what the AKP government envisioned for Turkish society, but they have also discovered a new aspect of their citizenship that is packed with entitlements if they practice their motherly and wifely caring duties. However, the women's citizenship that the AKP promotes is not one based on the exercise of individual freedoms and equality, but is formed around the acceptance of *fitrat*<sup>1</sup> and women practicing their traditional roles within the confines of their homes. Ideal female citizens are those who prioritize their caring and domestic roles in exchange for access to welfare aids. The neo-paternalist care regime based on protecting and rewarding women's traditional roles has helped the AKP government to consolidate its power through the alliance with lower-class women who receive welfare entitlements due to their role as care providers and mothers. The AKP government has also utilized the neo-paternalist care regime to reinstall traditional male privilege, which was significantly eroded with Kemalist reforms after the foundation of Turkish Republic. Kandiyoti (2010, 175) describes the AKP government's impact as one of 'masculinist restoration': "Republican reforms did roll back the rights men enjoyed under *şeriat* legislation and that reintroducing these rights as an article of faith would restore male privilege de jure rather than just de facto, as is currently the case."

### Connecting work to care

The gravity of discussions on gender, care, and work in the Turkish context are set against a backdrop of a lack of affordable public care services—especially for pre-school children—and internationally comparative low rates of female employment. This cursory outcome shows us intersecting and crosscutting relations between women's care roles and employment practices in which women's care responsibilities not only determine whether women are in employment or not but also the type of work women undertake in the labor market. Caring for family members may push women into the most vulnerable positions of informal employment, such as domestic workers, home-based workers, or contributing family workers. Most notably, more women who live with care recipients are employed in the informal sector compared to those who do not have care responsibilities at home. Women also tend to leave the workforce after having children and the likelihood of labor force participation declines by nearly half after the first pregnancy for low-skilled women in urban areas. Consequently, care responsibilities are a key determinant of women's low participation in the labor force and therefore a major contributing factor to gender gaps in employment in Turkey.

The critical shortages of institutional care services in the areas of early child care and education (ECCE) and elderly care as well as the unaffordability of private care services for the majority of the population are critical for many families in a society with an growing aging population, rising female employment, and urbanization. The

<sup>1</sup> An Arabic word that is usually translated as "original disposition," "natural constitution," or "innate nature." *Fitrat* is accepting of God's guidance and nature of being.

service gap has been filled by the neo-paternalist care regime. To give one example, the state of the institutional structure of ECCE services is highly complicated and heavily bureaucratic, with limited services offered to children under the age of five. The Ministry of National Education (MoNE), the biggest public service provider in the country, offers care services to children between the ages of three and six; however, the majority of service recipients have been five-year-old children in preschool classes (Dedeoğlu et al. 2021). Alternatively, private sector services remain limited in outreach due to their high cost for the vast majority of population. All in all, as of 2019, the number of children enrolled in preschool institutions is 3,335,269, meaning that only 37 per cent of children in the 0–6 age group, most of whom are five-year-olds, benefit from care services (MoNE 2019). The limited capacity of child care services has a lasting effect on women's employment practices in Turkey.

Women's intra-household care burden is one of the main reasons behind women's low employment rates in Turkey. In this Special Dossier, Çisel Ekiz Gökmen examines the relationship between women's care burden and employment prospects and status in Turkey, and shows that the time women spend caring for dependent household members and access to care services are the most important factors influencing women's likelihood of employment in Turkey. The limited hours of care offered by mostly MoNE pre-school classes—usually half-day classes—has a lasting effect on women's employment. As Ekiz Gökmen calculates, benefiting from informal child care services increases the employment probability of women approximately twenty-seven times, while benefiting from formal child care services increases it two times and informal adult-care services, 2.6 times. Ensuring the accessibility of institutional care services improves women's employment status by enabling women's transition from part-time to full-time jobs, and from unskilled to professional jobs.

Women's care responsibilities not only affect their employment rate but also contribute to the gender wage gap in the labor market. Hayriye Özgül Özkan Değirmenci, focusing on the motherhood wage penalty, shows that non-mothers (in the 25–44 age span) who are mostly more university-educated women, as a whole, work in higher-paid jobs and that mothers in the younger age cohort have a higher wage loss than mothers in the older age cohort. This is attributable to the fact that they spend time on child-rearing when they could be investing in a career. Women with access to public sector employment do better than their counterparts in the private sector. The sectoral division between the public and private sectors is particularly warranted since the public sector has more family-friendly working conditions to attract women to work and the age earning profiles are different in these two sectors. There is no wage loss (and even a wage premium!) for mothers working in the public sector. It might be due to more generous maternity leave and job protection policies, along with ever-increasing wage trajectories observed in this sector during the time window. The highest penalty is 6.1 percent for university-educated mothers in the younger age cohort (25–34). This is about the loss of the gains associated with the steeper portion of the experience profile.

In addition to child care services, the lack of institutional elderly care services in Turkey has opened up a new way of commodification of care, as Reyhan Atasü Topcuoğlu highlights in her article. The concept of distorted commodification of care in which women do not end up being burdened with familial elderly care responsibilities as well as the cash-for-care scheme generate a shadow economy of women

who provide paid care services being classed as informal workers. She also shows that disability care allowances directed to women as care givers involve an incredible mix of tasks, including nutrition, lifting and lowering, bathing and body cleaning, night care, drug monitoring, blood pressure monitoring, catheterization, and hospital follow-ups. In the cash-for-care scheme, all these activities must be done by women with no assistance. Most women carers in the scheme have no training related to care and simply run off a feeling of devotion to the family; they have “learned to live with” having no time of their own.

Özge İzdeş Terkoğlu and Emel Memiş focus on a generation of women caught up in a care responsibility trap, in which women are burdened by both elderly care and the care of their young children. This is what they call a “sandwiched generation” which has recently emerged in Turkey. İzdeş Terkoğlu and Memiş demonstrate the negative and significant impact of being an caretaker of the elderly on participation in the labor market and on working hours, which is more severe for sandwiched generation women. Having elderly care responsibility, at the same time, can be an opportunity for women to share the child care burden: if the elderly cared-for do not require too much assistance and care, then they can support their children by helping them with household chores or looking after their grandchildren, thus enabling the labor market participation of the sandwiched generation women. This indicates a strong correlation between women’s economic participation and changes in their domestic roles and responsibilities. The study also points out that inter-female, intergenerational care support along women’s life cycles may support the ways in which they mediate between their worker and carer roles.

There is no doubt about the tremendous and multidimensional effect of care on women’s work in the Turkish context. A way forward can be built only on the elimination of practices that reinforce women as sole caregivers in the household. The 3R approach adopted by the United Nations to “Recognize, Reduce and Redistribute” unpaid care work is a call to reframe care work in a given society. The strategy is interpreted as redistributing unpaid care labor between women and men in the household, as well as its transfer from the private (the household) to the public sphere, and its redistribution through wage labor. This approach aims to support women’s participation in the workforce (as well as in the public sphere, including education and politics) by easing the time constraints associated with unpaid care work.

It is vital in the Turkish context to adopt a 3R strategy to recognize, reduce, and redistribute unpaid care work, first in the public sphere and then, secondly, to support women’s move into the world of paid work through increasing the availability of affordable public care services for children, the elderly, and the disabled. Recent research has shown that public expenditure to develop the services infrastructure supporting the care economy creates hundreds of thousands of new jobs, especially in the social care services sector and where the sectors buy intermediate inputs, especially for women (İlkkaracan, Kim and Kaya 2015). It is vital to foresee the development of social care services in quantity and quality as two priority intervention areas, as well as the regulation of work life balance and improvement in gender equality.

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