



## **European network of legal experts in gender equality and non-discrimination**

### **FLASH REPORT**

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| <b>Country:</b>                   | Turkey  |
| <b>Title:</b>                     | Impacts of COVID-19 measures on women in Turkey   |
| <b>Date:</b>                      | 03 July 2020  |
| <b>Expert:</b>                    | Kadriye Bakirci   |
| <b>Context</b>                    |   |
| <b>Issue at stake:</b>            | Impacts of COVID-19 measures on women in Turkey   |
| <b>Grounds of discrimination:</b> | Gender  |
| <b>Field of application:</b>      | Violence against women, Employment, All fields  |
| <b>Source:</b>                    | National legislation  |
| <b>Applicable law:</b>            | Act No. 7244 on Reducing the Effects of Covid-19 Epidemic on Economic and Social Life and Amendments to Some Laws; Act No. 7242 on Amendments to Execution of Penalty and Security Measures and Some Laws |

### **Content**

#### **IMPACTS OF COVID-19 MEASURES ON WOMEN IN TURKEY**

The Turkish government has introduced measures to slow the spread of the COVID-19 starting from March 14, 2020. In summary, schools, universities, cafés, theatres, gyms, cinemas, performance centers, concert halls, wedding halls, music halls, beer halls, taverns, hookah lounges, internet cafes, all types of game centers, amusement parks, pools, Turkish baths, saunas, spas, shopping malls, barbers, hairdressers and beauty salons were closed. In addition, restaurants were no longer allowed to serve food at their tables, and only allowed to offer takeaway and delivery services. All scientific, cultural, artistic and similar meetings and activities were postponed. Citizens 65 years of age and older who were not employed were banned from leaving their homes. A travel ban covering 31 of Turkey's 81 provinces, international travels and a general stay-at-home order for those under 20 years of age who are not employed was announced. Around 90 thousand inmates were released from prison as a virus containment measure. Although partial curfews were imposed such as on weekends, no general stay-at-home orders were issued. While the public were called on to stay in as much as possible, many workers in different sectors had to continue to travel for work. Turkey has been easing off restrictions since June 1.

#### **PERSONAL IMPACT ON WOMEN**

**Increase in unpaid house and care work:** In Turkey, women do five times as much unpaid house and care work as men.<sup>1</sup> Self-isolation measures overburden women with unpaid house and care work as more family members spend time at home. As schools switched to distance learning, most parent's care responsibilities increased, and the responsibility often falls on women. When daycare facilities close and the parents

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.keiq.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Calisma-Zamani\\_KEIG-Bilgi-Notu-1.pdf](http://www.keiq.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Calisma-Zamani_KEIG-Bilgi-Notu-1.pdf).

need to work, the responsibility falls on grandmothers—who are in the risk group. For women who also need to work from home, this also means increased working hours.

**Increase in domestic violence:** Although there are insufficient numbers of systematic studies, preliminary data shows that there are increased cases of violence against women.<sup>2</sup> Reports of child abuse to a non-governmental organisation specialising in its prevention have doubled since the coronavirus outbreak.<sup>3</sup> No data is available in relation to abuse and neglect of the elderly and disabled.

**Risk for safety of women:** The release of violent male prisoners due to the pandemic poses an increased risk to women. Some released prisoners pose a threat to women who have been victimised by them, some of them were involved in violence against women in the public domain<sup>4</sup> and some were involved in domestic violence.<sup>5</sup> No data is available in relation to cyber-violence.

## INEQUALITY AND ECONOMIC IMPACT ON WOMEN

**Female healthcare workers:** In Turkey, women make up 50 % of all doctors, 70 % of all healthcare workers (such as cleaners, laundry, catering) and 100 % of all midwives. This occupational segregation disproportionately affects women when health systems are overloaded due to the crisis.

**Increase in bullying against private sector teachers and university lecturers:** Women comprise 56 % of teachers at all levels of education in Turkey. Since schools and universities have resorted to online teaching, private school teachers and private university lecturers are complaining about bullying by students and their parents. They allege that they are under unbearable pressure, with parents and students constantly complaining that the online method of teaching is just a cosmetic solution and complaining about the technical problems which have been experienced during online teaching.<sup>6</sup>

**Increase in unemployed female workers:** 42,2 % of women employed in Turkey work in the informal (unregistered) sector as carers, domestic workers, seasonal workers and unpaid family workers without any social protection. Women working in the informal sector have been hit by the crises first and losing their jobs and income. Since they are not registered, they cannot benefit from any measures taken to protect workers.

Women-led micro, small and medium size enterprises (e.g. hairdressers, beauty salons) and those occupations where women are over-represented (e.g. retail sector, tourism, food and accommodation services, bath, spa sectors) are affected by closures, cuts and lay offs. Women also lost their jobs or incomes in feminised sectors (e.g. the textile sector) where supply chains have been disrupted.

**Measures taken to protect women and (female) workers:** The government took measures to protect women and the workers in general: Female prisoners with children of six years and younger, prisoners requiring special care or over 65 years of age were released, and placed in confinement in their own accommodation.

Paid leave was provided for civil servants aged 60 years and older, pregnant civil servants and civil servants with chronic illnesses. No such order exist for the private sector. Public institutions were ordered to provide for alternating and flexible schedules and to enforce

<sup>2</sup> <https://doi.org/10.17986/blm.2020.v25i.1408>.

<sup>3</sup> <https://english.alaraby.co.uk/english/news/2020/4/21/turkish-man-kills-daughter-after-coronavirus-prison-release>.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.milliyet.com.tr/gundem/kusadasinda-saldiriya-ugrayan-mudur-konustu-pesini-birakmayacagim-6222358>.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.sozcu.com.tr/2020/dunya/cani-baba-dunya-basininda-cezaevinden-cikti-kizini-doverek-oldurdu-5767080/>.

<sup>6</sup> <http://univder.org/2020/05/30/salgin-bahanesi-ile-universite-ozerkligine-bir-darbe-daha-vurulamaz/>.

remote working if possible. Private sector followed this practice for jobs which did not require employees to be at the workplace.

Employers were prohibited from dismissing employees during the pandemic. This measure, opened the door for employers to send employees on unpaid leave for up to six months without terminating their contracts. Employees who took unpaid leave received approximately EUR 153 per month from the Unemployment Insurance Fund.

The government eased short term employment allowance requirements for the employees who lost their jobs after March 15. Employees, who have worked 600 days in the past three years, and employed in the last 60 days prior to the application are entitled to short term employment allowance (three months of financial assistance) from the Unemployment Insurance Fund, if the businesses for which they worked are forced to close. The government reduced the qualification requirement to 450 days employment.

A minimum wage support scheme has been further implemented. Also approximately EUR 130 per month allocated to two million low-income families.

Bank credit support for all companies and additional credit opportunities were provided for the small and medium-sized enterprises. In some sectors of the economy, including the textile and garment industry the payment of quite a large number of taxes has been postponed due to 'force majeure'.

The coronavirus pandemic has raised the specter of a dramatic spike in unemployment among women in Turkey, but only a section of those who satisfy the minimum requirements are slated to receive support. Unfortunately, the pandemic has deepened pre-existing inequalities. Even the limited gains made in the past decades are at risk of being rolled back.