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TESEV  
BRIEFS

**Increasing Vulnerability of  
Female Labor Force and  
Deepening Gender Inequalities  
During The Covid-19 Outbreak**

TESEV Briefs aim to share with the public different opinions and recommendations on issues that are under TESEV's working areas.





## Deniz Beyazbulut

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She received her Bachelor's degree from Kocaeli University, Department of Labor Economics and Industrial Relations. She is doing her master's in Labor Economics at the same university. She has been working as a researcher at DiSK Research Center (DiSK-AR) since 2016.

The Covid-19 pandemic has created an unprecedented destruction all over the world. In addition to the great devastation it has created in terms of public health, the pandemic has also triggered deep crises in labor markets. According to the International Labor Organization (ILO), the pandemic has caused a decrease in decent work, growing inequalities and the spread of poverty (ILO, June 2021).

The pandemic has further exacerbated the already existing inequalities that women were subjected to in labor markets. Since the outbreak of the pandemic, women have been experiencing the problems in the labor market more unequally. Female workforce has been more adversely affected by the pandemic than the male workforce, and women have been more withdrawn from paid employment compared to men. With more women withdrawing from employment, the domestic workload in households has increased disproportionately to the detriment of women. Increasing gender-based workload in the household has aggravated inequality. In addition to the increasing domestic workload, working hours have reached unbearable dimensions for wage-earning women. The already existing gender gap in the work life of Turkey has started to deepen with the pandemic.



**Serious reductions that occurred during the pandemic in working hours in the service sector, where women work intensively, caused 1 million 75 thousand job losses in November 2020. In other words, women who were not at work due to the ban on dismissal were categorically seen as employed while they could not actually go back to work.**

This study aims to examine women's unemployment and its course during the pandemic period by making use of Turkish Statistical Institute's (TÜİK's) Household Labor Force Survey data (HIA), reports prepared by the Research Center of the Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions of Turkey (DİSK-AR) on Unemployment and Employment Outlook, and International Labour Organization's (ILO) World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends 2021. In the study, gender inequalities, which have intensified with the increase in women's domestic work and care burdens with the pandemic, will also be discussed.

### **Female Labor Force in the Pandemic: Decreasing Female Employment, Increasing Female Unemployment**

With the pandemic, women's unemployment and loss of employment have become even graver in Turkey. The devastating impact of Covid-19 on female workforce can also be observed in the labor force data. According to the findings of TÜİK, women have withdrawn from the labor market faster than men. While women's unemployment has increased, women's opportunities for employment have rapidly contracted. According to DİSK-AR's study,

"How did Covid-19 Affect Workers?", more drastic changes have emerged in women's work life compared to that of men (DİSK-AR, July 2020).

Women have been experiencing the direct impact of the pandemic due to the agglomeration of labour (horizontal discrimination) in the service sector. According to ILO estimates of employment by economic activity, owing to this adverse effect of pandemic on the service sector, the economic risk level is at its highest in sectors where women work intensively, such as wholesale, retail sale and commerce, accommodation and food services (ILO, 2020). The fact that 59.3 percent of female labor in Turkey is employed in the service sector also shows that female labor is in the economic risk category. Serious reductions that occurred during the pandemic in working hours in the service sector, where women work intensively, caused 1 million 75 thousand job losses in November 2020. In other words, women who were not at work due to the ban on dismissal were categorically seen as employed while they could not actually go back to work.

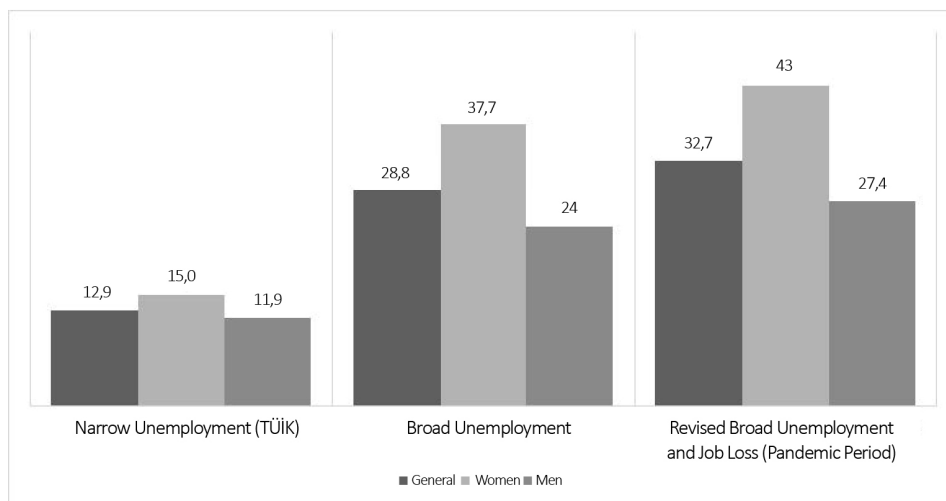
Due to the pandemic, there have also been changes in the working conditions of

women. In the research conducted by DİSK-AR in July 2020, which included members of the the Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions of Turkey (DİSK), it can be seen that working hours of more than half of the women have decreased during the Covid-19 period, 42% of them have experienced wage loss, and their working conditions have changed more than that of men. In the research, it is observed that women did more short-time work compared to men, went to work alternately, were put on paid leave, and switched to working from home. While 27.4% of women stated that they went to work alternately between March 2020 and June 2020, this rate fell to 16.9% for male workers. Similarly, 10.6% of female workers stated that they switched to working from home during the pandemic, while only 2.3% of male workers reported that they switched to working from home

(DİSK-AR, July 2021). One of the most important reasons for the more apparent change in the way women work compared to men during the pandemic is the closure of schools and increased domestic and care services.

The pandemic has significantly increased broad female unemployment. With the effect of Covid-19, broad unemployment among women in Turkey has exceeded 40% percent. During the pandemic period (March 2019 - March 2020), female employment rate has decreased from 30% to 26% (DİSK-AR March 2020). Broad unemployment rate was 28.8% in total in November 2020, with a rate of 24% for men and 37.7% for women. Women's unemployment rate has turned out to be higher than all unemployment categories during the pandemic period.

Chart 1: Unemployment Rates by Gender (November 2020) (Percent)



Resource: TÜİK, HİA. November 2020. Calculated by DİSK-AR.

During the pandemic, more women than men had to withdraw from the labor force. According to data from TÜİK, total labor force decreased by 1 million 406 thousand in the last year, regressing from 32 million 477 thousand to 31 million 71 thousand. The total decrease in labor force was 4.3%. The tendency in labor force withdrawal brought with it a larger reduction in female labor force. In November 2019, a total of 10 million 596 thousand women were in the labor force, of which 1 million 755 thousand were unemployed and 8 million 639 thousand were employed.

Since the outbreak of Covid-19, 867 thousand women have withdrawn from labor force and the female labor force has decreased to 9 million 729 thousand. The decline in the female labor force has been estimated as 8.2%. The number of male labor force participants, which was 21 million 881 thousand in November 2019 decreased by 538 thousand in a year, and became 21 million 343 thousand

in November 2020. In the last year, total labor force decreased by 5.1 percent, with a decrease of 2.5% in the male labor force and a 8.2 % decrease in the female labor force (DİSK-AR, March 2021).

Worldwide, women's withdrawal from labor force has also followed a faster course compared to that of men. According to ILO estimates, women's rate of labor force withdrawal among the total job losses due to the pandemic is 4.3% while the same rate for men is 2.8%.

Exclusion of women from the labor force has further regressed their labor force participation rate, which was already lower than that of men. Women who have lost their jobs and been excluded from labor force due to the pandemic have either given up looking for a job, or become unable to work due to the decrease in their working hours, or the cessation of production, hence paving way for the exclusion of millions of women from labor force.

**Table 1. Distribution of job losses by labor force withdrawal in 2020**

	Labor force withdrawal
Women	4,3
Men	2,8
Total	3,4

Resource: ILOSTAT, ILO modelled estimates, April 2021.

## Women Cannot Access Full-Time and Formal Employment

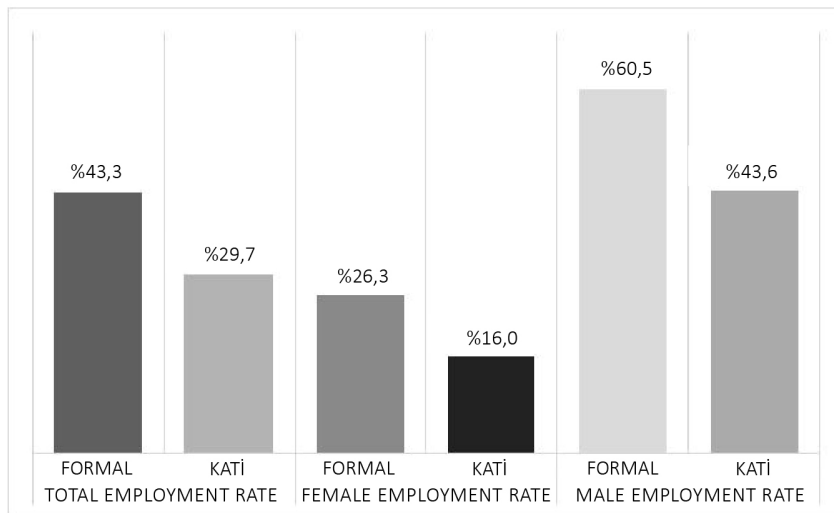
The limited and inadequate financial packages implemented within the scope of the fight against the pandemic,,protecting formal employment and excluding informal employment, caused serious losses on the part of informal workers. Although wage, salaried and casual groups in formal employment, self-employed and unpaid family workers with social security records have compensated their losses with limited and inadequate financial packages, the devastation for informal workers continues (Uysal 2020).

Employment loss during the pandemic has occurred mainly in informal sectors due to the ban on dismissal. According to TÜİK data, as of April 2021, the informal employment rate is 28.4% in total, with a

share of 25.8% for men and 34% for women. DiSK-AR's new employment estimates also reveal the challenges women have faced in accessing formal and full-time employment during the pandemic period. Formal Full-Time Employment was calculated in DiSK-AR's June 2021 report. KATİ represents the proportion of formal and full-time employees in total employment.

While TÜİK announced the total employment rate as 43.3% in the first quarter of 2021, the KATİ rate calculated by DiSK-AR was 29.7%, that is 13.6 points lower. While the formal employment rate for women was 26.3%, KATİ rate was calculated as 16%. While the formal employment rate for men was announced as 60.5%, KATİ was 43.6%. The difference in the KATİ ratio between women and men was 27.6 points (DiSK-AR, June 2021).

Chart 2: Formal and Registered-Full-Time Employment (KATİ) Rate (2021, 1st Quarter)



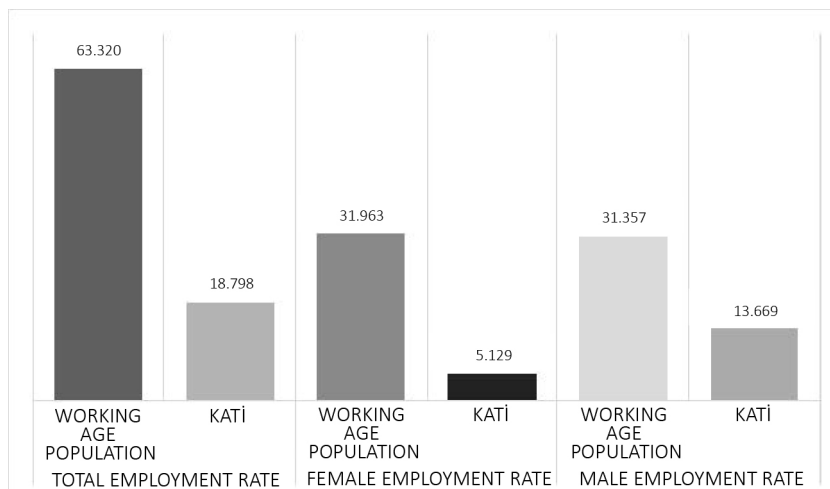
Resource: Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK), Household Labor Force Survey. KATİ rate is calculated by DiSK-AR.

According to DİSK-AR estimates, only 18.8 million of the 63.5 million people of working age are within the scope of formal and full-time employment (KATİ). Of the 32 million women of working age, only 5.1 million are within the scope of formal and full-time employment (Chart 5). This situation reveals the high level of informal employment and underemployment among women.

As can be seen in Chart 1 and Chart 2, less women work in full-time and insured jobs

than men. The high share of informally working women deprived of their basic working rights in employment have been seriously affected by the job and income losses during the pandemic period. The right to work with insurance, which is one of the most fundamental rights in working life, not only deprives women of their social security rights, but also hinders women's right to be a union member and lays the groundwork for a more irregular and precarious working life.

Chart 3: Active Population (15+) ve Formal Full-Time Employment (KATİ) (2021, 1st Quarter) (Thousand)



Resource: Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK), Household Labor Force Survey. KATİ rate is calculated by DİSK-AR.

### The Pandemic has Increased Women's Domestic Care Burden

Since women have had to withdraw from the workforce and employment more than men due to the pandemic, the time they spend at home has increased. The domestic workload has reached a devastating level for women, as the out-of-home service

provision has decreased significantly; the hygiene standards to be complied with, the care of children, the elderly and patients who are sick and need home care have increased (KEİG-Women's Labor and Employment Initiative Platform, 2021).

The United Nations Women's Unit's (UN Women) report published in August 2020



**...various forms of work-from-home have rapidly entered our lives with the pandemic. Under remote working conditions, which differ between women and men, the responsibilities of women at home have increased due to the sexist division of labor, while the concept of limited working hours has started to diminish completely. Women have not only worked in front of the computer/on the phone, but they have also had to simultaneously handle house work of mounting proportions.**

reveals that the large part of the domestic workload that has increased during the pandemic period has been undertaken by women. In the report, it is stated that with the outbreak of the pandemic, the burden of unpaid labor for women have at least doubled compared to that of men. In the report, it is also stated that due to increased job losses and heightened challenges in accessing education opportunities during the pandemic, women have had to meet their own additional care and unpaid domestic labor needs, and it is noted that this situation has given way to the reinforcement of traditional gender roles in households (UN Women 2021). On the other hand, various forms of work-from-home have rapidly entered our lives with the pandemic. Under remote working conditions, which differ between women and men, the responsibilities of women at home have increased due to the sexist division of labor, while the concept of limited working hours has started to diminish completely. Women have not only worked in front of the computer/on the phone, but they have also had to simultaneously handle house work of mounting proportions.

In many countries, the partial closure of schools and nurseries has made it even more challenging for women to participate in the workforce, causing them to spend more time on domestic workloads.

### **Conclusion**

Before the Covid-19, both the high rates of female unemployment, the quality of the restricted sectors and the weight of women among workers deprived of social protection indicated that women's employment would be adversely affected by the pandemic in Turkey, and that it would make it even more fragile in the face of its social and economic impacts (KEİG 2021). Due to the domestic care burden on them, working hours of women have increased and furthermore, job losses have proved to be relatively higher among them. The pandemic that threatens gender equality in the given respects has become a serious problem in regions where gender inequality was already intense. Such regressions can also reverse the social gains that women have struggled to achieve for centuries. Even before the pandemic, women were less likely than men to be employed, work full-time, or take part in



professional occupations. While women are more disproportionately affected by their tendency to withdraw from the workforce as a result of the increased burden of unpaid care work, the pandemic has deepened this divide.

The gender dimension of the Covid-19 pandemic is currently being discussed within policy processes by various institutions (ILO, OECD, UN, UN Women) from a gender perspective all around the world. However, the gender dimension of Covid-19 has not been included in the policy processes in Turkey (KEİG, 2021). The effects of the pandemic on women's employment should be taken into account in policy processes, and social policy measures should be developed for domestic work and care burden, which are among the most challenging obstacles

to women's participation in employment. Considering that women have withdrawn more from the workforce and women's unemployment has increased more during the pandemic, the conditions for them to benefit from unemployment insurance should be improved. Scientific studies should continuously be carried out in order both to understand the inequalities that women face in the labor market in terms of employment, security and income, all of which have been aggravated by pandemic conditions, and to develop policy recommendations in this direction. Such studies will undoubtedly create new avenues for current recommendations, and by drawing attention to the inequalities that have deepened due to the pandemic, can also be used as tools for these inequalities to be taken into account in policy-making processes.

## NOTES

1. Formal and Full-Time Employment (KATİ): DİSK-AR has started calculating alternative employment as of June 2021, following the alternative broad unemployment estimates it has been carrying out for years. Unemployment and employment rates constitute a whole in terms of understanding the developments in the labor market. For this reason, in calculating the alternative employment rate, DİSK-AR aims to examine the nature of the employment rates published by TÜİK. The name of the employment data that DİSK-AR has just started to calculate is Formal and Full-Time Employment (KATİ). The aim of KATİ is to reveal how much of the employment is insured and full-time. With this calculation, the number of full-time and insured workers outside the scope of formal employment and underemployment is determined. KATİ ratio is calculated by the division of formal full-time employment into the non-institutional population aged 15+.

2. Horizontal discrimination: Horizontal discrimination refers to the concentration of women and men in certain lines of work. For example, while automobile and technology sectors are overwhelmingly occupied by men, women are predominantly concentrated in the textile and ready-made clothing sectors (Memiş, E & Özar Ş, (2021).

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