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Gendered Dynamics of International Labour Migration:

Migrant Domestic and Care Workers in Istanbul

Dr. Zeynep Ceren Eren-Benlisoy and Dr. Ezgi Tuncer

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Gendered Dynamics of International Labour Migration: Migrant Domestic and Care Workers in Istanbul

Dr. Zeynep Ceren Eren-Benlisoy, Post-Doc Researcher
&
Dr. Ezgi Tuncer, Co-Investigator
Associate Professor at Kadir Has University, Department of Architecture

The aim of this report is to understand and analyse the living and working conditions of migrant domestic and care workers in Istanbul through several themes, such as drivers for migration, living/working experiences and practices, and migrant women's spatial mobility in the city. Based on migrant women's own narratives, this report also discusses the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on the employment of domestic and care workers. It contributes to a better understanding of South-South migration for which there have still been relatively few studies of the dynamics and migration patterns. This report is based on the Gendered Dynamics of International Labour Migration project funded by the UKRI Gender, Justice and Security Hub.

The report seeks to avoid a perspective that sees migrant women only as victims of the process of migration and therefore, has a perspective that highlights women's agency and brings their voices to the fore. While women's subject positions are understood within structural conditions (such as the labour market, national regulations on visas, work/residence permits, gendered drivers of migration that effect their decisions to leave their countries of origin and so on), their strategies to cope with the working and living conditions are taken into consideration.

Its findings draw on 12 in-depth interviews conducted in Istanbul as well as two branches of IMECE, the union of domestic workers. Thus, based on original data gathered for the project and rich feminist literature on working conditions and experiences of migrant domestic/care workers (MDW) in Turkey, this report contributes to the existing literature on South-South migration, transformation of welfare states

and care regime(s), stratification of the care market in Turkey based on gender and nationality, as well as migrant women's agency from a feminist perspective.

The report is composed of five main parts. The introduction gives a brief overview of the care regime and the welfare state as well as legal framework for MDWs in Turkey. This is followed by a section on the Methodology. The third part of the report concentrates on the act of migration and women's work experiences and practices from a gender perspective. This part also includes women's coping strategies in response to their experience and explores agency. The fourth part concentrates on their public access and spatial mobility before the Covid-19 outbreak. Finally, the report concludes with the main findings of the projects.

1. Introduction

Domestic and care workers have been the nexus of the global care economy and the feminization of migration. As an upper-middle income country in the Global South, Turkey is a state where "care" has always been a "family" issue enhanced by the robustness of patriarchal systems, neoliberal restructuring of the welfare state and social politics. While family implicitly refers to "women" who are considered as responsible for the burden of domestic work and care, it leads them hitherto being excluded from the labour market or to buy these services from the care market which has been highly commodified. Hence, daughters and mothers have been seen as the only responsible people to take care of their elders and children. However, from the 1990s upper-middle income families started to hire women from the former Soviet Union (FSU) countries, mostly live-in caregivers.

The association of domestic and care labour with women has also enhanced the informal employment of migrant workers in homes, while idealizing their labour as domestic and care workers (Özer 2012, 47; Üstübici 2011). Hence, the "care gap" refers to domestic and care services done by migrant women while upper-middle class professional women in Turkey participate in the labour market. Compared to native-born women, there are 17% more migrant women in services (personal/social services) in Turkey (Kofman and Raghuram 2009).

Regarding work permits for domestic services, they comprise 18.2 per cent almost one-fifth of all work permits issued in 2017. Registered workers comprise only a minority among those working as care-givers. Among migrant women with work permits, Georgian women rank first, followed by women from former Soviet Republics in Central Asia, such as Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. However, one should note that registered workers comprise only a minority among those working as caregivers (Toksöz 2020).

1.1. The Care Regime and the Welfare State in Turkey

During their 21-year period of uninterrupted rule since 2002, AKP (Justice and Development Party) governments have strengthened the placement of social state obligations mainly on the shoulders of women under the guise of 'family' which leaves women with two basic options. Women either withdraw from the labour market and be responsible for care at home, or they take advantage of (rather) limited public facilities, and hand over care to 'other women' (mostly grandmothers) or turn to privatised care services (migrant/local care givers, kindergarten) while keeping their position in the labour market. This transformation of the welfare state also coincides with the replacement of women from FSU countries, who today form the majority of live-in workers, within the local female workforce. As local female

workers turn their hand to daily jobs (mostly cleaning), a small percentage of them remain as live-in workers.

Turkey has many similarities to Southern European countries in that is has a rudimentary welfare regime, a family business based informal economy and the like, with its differences such as its increasing surplus labour force (Buğra, 2014). As mentioned above, the welfare regime is family-cantered in Turkey, which expects the family – due to the gender division of labour – this means women, to care for children and the elderly while providing very limited care services. Atasu-Topcuoglu (2021) defines the characteristics of the care regime in Turkey as composed of a limited welfare state, large shadow economy, rigid gender roles regarding care, patriarchal backlash, Islamization and neoliberalism. In accordance with these, the outcomes are invisibility the devaluation of care work, precarious working conditions, lack of basic workers' rights and deepening class and gender based inequalities. In a similar way, Toksöz underlines the adoption of the export-led growth policies in line with the global economic restructuring leading Turkey to be a "trading state" with flexible visa policies. Such flexibility also contributes to deepening the informal economy and employment which is already a basic feature of the economic structure in Turkey.

Within this context, domestic services have always been an unregulated area of work falling out of the scope of the Labour Law. From the 1990s, migrant women started to provide domestic services, particularly to care for the sick, the elderly and children in Turkey. Similar to European countries, the majority of female migrants in the domestic and care sectors in Turkey are from former Eastern Bloc countries who have had detrimental experiences from the post-communist transitions in Russia: Moldova, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Bulgaria, Romania, Georgia, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Higher wages, a flexible visa system, geographical proximity and migrant networks, together with the rigid visa regulations of the European Union has influenced their choice to work in Turkey, while circular migration is the main characteristic of this migration (Toksöz, 2020).

1.2. Legal Framework of Migrant Domestic and Care Workers

Migrant workers' integration in the labour market has been regulated on the basis of laws in Turkey, such as Law no. 4817 Work Permits for Foreigners (2003) and Law no. 6735 International Labour Force Law (2016) which are the two main laws that form the legal framework for integration to labour markets. However, the care sector has been seen as an exception in the current laws that leave the migrant working as domestic workers and live-ins. In addition, employment of the MDWs has been realised outside the scope of the Labour Law that leaves MDWs without legal and social protection. As stated before, the majority of the workforce works informally and irregularly without work permits. It does not only effect women's current working conditions (lack of social security rights, informality, precarious working conditions etc.) but also shapes their future as it risks their retirement in their countries of origin. In this context, MDWs in Turkey share the same work experience with the local women working as domestic and care workers. As IMECE (2020) states informality in the care sector has been the main challenge that the Union fights against.

Working in the sector for significant years does not appear to contribute to women's retirement in their countries of origin. Toksöz (2020) draws attention to the lack of bilateral agreements, the lack of which prevents women from transferring their social security achievements to their countries of origins. Therefore, women have to face risky and ambiguous old ages as there is no social protection for them.

Moreover, the Turkish government's recent withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention[1] has had a negative impact on migrant women regardless of the sector they work in. As stated below by Eren Keskin[2], the Convention applied to all women in Turkey regardless of their legal status to combat violence against women. It is safe to say that the lack of such a powerful legal tool has increased the gendered vulnerabilities of the migrant women.

> *The Istanbul Convention applied to all women living in Turkey. It didn't matter if they were a Turkish citizen or not. Articles 60 and 61 of the Convention are entirely for migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking women. Let me give you an example: let's say that a woman was subjected to violence by her husband in Syria and fled to Turkey, this convention stipulates that women fleeing violence be granted refugee status. In reality though, (…) there are no safe conditions stipulated under Article 59 of the Convention for refugee women existed in Turkey and no protective measures were taken for women subjected to violence. (…) We did not see the Istanbul Convention being implemented in a single lawsuit. But the women's movements own the Istanbul Convention and are aware of its importance. At least it worked as a preventive mechanism and gave us a justification.*[3]
>
> Eren Keskin

2. Methodology

In Turkey, we started conducting in-depth interviews in July 2020 and reached a saturation point with 40 individual and 10 (I)NGO interviews in June 2021. Our interviewees included professional migrant women, domestic and care workers, sex workers, textile and trade workers living and working in Istanbul. Istanbul has been a significant hub for migrants in a historical and contemporary context, as well as being a very dynamic metropolis with opportunities in the in/formal job market and established migrant networks of diverse urban groups.

Semi-structured in-depth interviews and participant observation were conducted. We were therefore first introduced to and had short conversations before our interviews with migrant women. Trust has been the key to accessing the women. After introducing the purposes and scope of this research and ensuring anonymity, interviewees gave their verbal consent to participate.

The majority of migrant workers whom we interviewed in lesser skilled sectors are live-in caregivers (eight women), aged between 23-63 years, who mostly migrated from Turkmenistan, Georgia and Armenia, and have stayed in Istanbul between 3 and 20 years. While the majority of them have short-term residence permits (10 women), only two of them have work permits and social security tied to it (except for a Turkish citizen), which enables them to access free healthcare; two of them are irregular workers.

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[1] Turkey's President Erdoğan issued a decree pulling Turkey out of the Istanbul Convention (official known as the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence**)** on March 2020. Adopted in 2011, the Istanbul Convention establishes the protection, prevention, prosecution and ultimately the elimination of all forms of violence against women, including domestic violence and specific measures for the protection of migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking women (https://thegenderhub.com/publications/the-istanbul-convention-an-interview-with-eren-keskin/).

[2] Eren Keskin has been a well-known lawyer since 1984 dealing with political cases, violence against women and disappearances in custody.

[3] https://thegenderhub.com/publications/the-istanbul-convention-an-interview-with-eren-keskin/

2.1. Introduction of the Participants

Name	Country of Origin	Age	Education	Occupation in TR	Occupation in CoO	Legal Status	Marital Status	# of Children	Duration of Stay
Irine	Georgia	42	BA in Finance	Daily Cleaner	Working for a TV Channel	Residence Permit/No Work Permit	Single	none	10 years
Naz	Turkmenistan	42	High School	Domestic worker and child care-giver	Agricultural Producer and Labourer, Cook	No Work/Residence Permit	Married on paper	4	8 years
Areknazan	Armenia	56	2-year-university degree	Live-in Elderly Care giver	Homemaker	Residence Permit/No Work Permit	Divorced	1	13 years
Mavie	Turkmenistan	23	High School	Live-in Child Care giver	Student and part-time worker at restaurants	Student visa / residence permit	Single	none	4 years
Ani	Armenia	60	High School	Live-in Elderly Care giver	Homemaker	No Work/Residence Permit	Married	4	More than 7 years
Faye	Philippine	53	BA in Finance	Child Care giver	Factory worker	Turkish Citizen	Married	1	30 years
Natiya	Georgian	48	High School	Live-in Elderly Care	Agricultural and Bakery Worker	Work and Residence Permit	Divorced	2	12 years
Nanuka	Georgian	63	BA	Live-in Care giver	Teacher	Residence permit/ No work permit	Widowed	3	9 years
Sahire	Turkmenistan	30	High School	Childcare giver, Cook	Homemaker	Residence permit/ No work permit	Married	2	3.5 years
Pakize	Turkmenistan	49	BA	Live-in Care giver	Journalist	Residence permit/ No work permit	Separated	3	7 years
Mihrinaz	Turkmenistan	42	High School	Live-in Cleaner	Trade	Residence and Work Permit	Single	none	15 years
Dilferah	Uzbekistan	48	BA	Live-in Childcare giver	Teacher	Residence Permit/No work permit	Married	3	4 years

Psedoynm names are used in the report due to anonymity.

- Women are mostly from former Soviet Union countries (five women from Turkmenistan, three women from Georgia, two from Armenia and one from Uzbekistan), except from one woman from Philippine.
- Except for two women in their 20s and 30s, the rest ages between 40-60.
- The number of women from a rural origins is six (Natiya, Naz, Sahire, Dilferah, Irine (her parents), Mavie), while there are six women with urban origin.
- They are relatively well educated, six have high school degrees, while the rest have BAs in different programmes, in addition to one woman with a 2-year university degree.
- Eight of them work as live-in care givers, while the others are employed as daily cleaners or childcare givers.
- Their occupational status in their country of origins is diverse from white-collar jobs (journalist, media professional or teacher) to homemaker, agricultural or factory worker.

- The majority of the women (10) have residence permits (mostly short-term residence permits), while there are only three women who have work permits with social security and therefore, access to health services. Two of them are irregular workers.
- There are four married women while the rest are composed of divorced (two), separated (two), single (three) and a widow.
- The majority have children (1-4).
- The women have mostly been in Turkey for a long duration - the longest period is 20 years, while 3 and half years in Turkey is the shortest.
- There is only one woman who has previous migration experience- Pakize who worked as a babysitter in both the US and Russia.

2.2. Limitations of the Study

Some potential interviewees whom me met for interviews were afraid of getting caught for not having work permits and being deported and decided not to be interviewed. In addition to this, Armenians in particular have always had fears due to the hostile attitudes of extremely nationalist Turks/the nationalist Turkish State against them. For example, we could not interview Armenian women MDWs who are employed at houses taking care of our own relatives due to the above-mentioned fears.

Another limitation was the pandemic. Only two of the 12 interviews were conducted face to face when Covid-19 restrictions in Istanbul allowed us to meet in outdoor public spaces. Others were conducted via online communication channels which has limited our intimacy since they had to talk from their employer's apartment in addition to the artificial atmosphere of virtual meetings. Furthermore, some potential interviewees, whom we met in public spaces before the second partial lockdown in Istanbul, did not want to do an interview online. On the other hand, most of the interviewees thanked us since they had the chance to talk about their stories of migration.

3. Migration, Employment and Spatial Mobility: The Case of MDWs in Istanbul

3.1. Drivers for Migration

I came to Turkey in 2016. All I wanted was to run away from my father. Also, to make a living financially. I also wanted to be an obstetrician, it was always my dream, to study medicine. With the money I saved. I'm trying to save money myself. I am thinking of applying to schools this year or next year.

Mavie, Turkmen

Economic reasons have been the mainstream understanding behind migrant women's choice to migrate. Within this context, the economic collapse, shrinking job market as well as high unemployment rates in the countries of origin are underlined in the literature. The economic difficulties related to international conflicts/tensions, as occurred in the Georgian migrant women' case, are among the drivers of migration. For instance, fleeing war in their countries of origin and migrating to Turkey to reach a third, safe country is another reason behind migration, as has been the case of Iraqi Christian transit migrant women (Danış 2007). Our interviewees also state that the Russian-Georgian Separation of 2006 and the War of 2008 between Russia and Georgia led to severe hunger and unemployment in the country.

The Russian war took place in 2006. Russia and Georgia separated. It was a huge blow then. There was a restriction on bread. We couldn't find anything. There was a great hunger. Schools were also terrible then. I had a lot of trouble then. We were hungry without money.

Natiya, Georgian

In line with the general literature, to secure and support their families, especially their children, migrant women start working as domestic and care workers whose aim is to send remittances back to their families in their countries of origin. In some cases, women are from families with irregular work and/or unemployed; members not being able to work due to health issues or members who are too young to work. Finally, women point to "solid achievements" of those who migrated earlier and invested back in their countries of origin. Those achievements can be seen as motivations for others to migrate.

Those who are in Turkey to work used to send money from Turkey, it was not too much but you would see that the families left behind were building houses, sending their kids to school, buying a new car. It is not possible to send your children to school in Turkmenistan or provide them a good education. If you have money, you can do that. If you do not, then it is not possible.

Pakize, Turkmen

However, economic difficulties are not the only reason leading to migration. In spite of being limited, there are some studies in the literature that focus on non-economic reasons as drivers of migration. For instance, women may flee unemployment/irregular employment, abuse, alcoholic husbands and/or violence in their marriage (Ünlütürk-Ulutaş 2010, Dinçer 2015). In other cases, elderly women from extended households in Armenia step forward for migration as younger and married women are primarily assigned to reproductive work (Teke Lloyd 2019). Young women also migrate in order to secure the livelihood of their households and to provide a better life for their own children and for themselves (Keough, 2003) (this is a standard economic reason). Filipina women have migrated not only because of economic difficulties, but also due to the gender discrimination they face in the labour market and to escape constraining marriages (in the Philippines, you are not allowed to divorce except if the reason is physical violence) and women's dominant role as the main breadwinner (Parrenas 2001 in Ünlütürk-Ulutaş 2010). How gender discrimination has been intertwined with economic difficulties in our research will be detailed in the next sub-section.

3.1.1. Experiences of Gender Discrimination in the Country of Origin

Migrant women in this research generally describe their previous lives in their countries of origin in a negative way that is characterised by gender discrimination, hardship and challenges for women to return (except Irine who finds her previous life satisfactory).[4] For instance, Georgian women frequently highlight early/unregistered marriages, while Turkmen women draw attention to gendered inheritance patterns

[4] We are aware of the fact that our sample is limited to understand deeply the differences between women' narratives when they evaluated their previous lives in their countries of origin. Nevertheless, the differences can arise from class- or rural-urban origins. For instance, Irine with an urban origin, high education and white-collar working experience states that she had a better social and work life, besides a comfortable life as a woman. Faye (urban origin, high education and white-collar employee in Philippine) says that she could have found a job there in Philippine but not a one in high position. We also come across rather secular and modern narratives (girls taking their education without thinking twice, easily socializing, choosing whom to marry) of their previous lives yet one should note that they still contain gender division of labor at the household without exception.

that favour men. There are two Turkmen women who explicitly talked about the fact that they were raped in Turkmenistan in addition to domestic violence, after which they were forced to marry the men who raped them to "clean the family honour". Arranged marriage has also been mentioned, even though its extent varies from one country to another. Women draw attention to social pressures on divorced women in their countries of origin.

> *My high school years were not so much spent going to school and reading. I was constantly working all night. There was a lecture until noon, I was washing the dishes in the restaurants in the afternoon, I was cooking, I was a waitress. Whatever it is. My father is a person who carries what is in the house outside. My mother and I were constantly forced to support the household. My father was not working very much. He was getting the money we earned. There was constant violence in the house. It is… If there was nothing he wanted at home, my father would beat my mother in front of my little sisters. We were trying to protect each other, so that nothing would happen to my mother. Even now we are working on it.*
>
> *Mavie*, Turkmen

Others stressed that marriage was a breaking point in their lives at which they had to withdraw from education, work and social life. For instance, Naz says her marriage was socially confining as well as economically exploitative therefore, positively describes her life before marriage. Likewise, Dilferah talks about her restricted social life.

> *(Social life) What is it after all?* [When you are married] *You stay at home, you take care of the cow, you look after the chickens. We also have a garden at home, you take care of it. Tomatoes, peppers, you do not go and buy them in the market, so, you need time to look after them (the plants). We don't have a washing machine; you wash by hand. Then, there is laundry every day. You don't understand how time passes. There is no gas, you burn wood, you bake bread in the tandoor, how time flies, you do not understand. I did not used to go and see a neighbour or friend. We used to do that when we were girls in my father's house. My life was beautiful there in my father's house.*
>
> *Naz*, Turkmen

> Talking about her leisure time, meeting her friends outside or going to social events alone:
>
> *No, because my husband would not allow it. He didn't even send me to my mother's house alone. He was not involved in such things before, but ... We were going out together before. I was wearing what I wanted, ate what I wanted, I could go wherever I wanted; but when I was with him. When there was fun, he didn't want to come, so I couldn't go either. Our relatives were having weddings, but I could not go to any of them.*
>
> *Dilferah*, Uzbek

Regardless of national origin, each of the interviewees talk about rigid gender division of labour in the household and its unequal burden on women. According to the women's narratives, gender division of labour in the households refers to patriarchal family structures in which dictator-like fathers/husbands have power and control over women who generally overwork.[5]

3.2. Process of Migration

[5] Women stress the change they have observed in the countries of origin in terms of gender discrimination. They say there is more opposition to early marriages compared to the past or more women have started working outside the home. Mavie says "Too many families have also been somewhat changed and developed, as they have worked in foreign countries for years. Nowadays they are saying no to early marriage because their perceptions are wider."

In line with the phenomenon of feminisation of migration, migrant women are generally the pioneers of this journey. There are two categories. Firstly, where their husbands often follow later or stay behind with the children. These migrants are mostly the middle-aged women in many studies with diverse marital status. Secondly, single women who migrate with the help of family, relatives and friends who already migrated to Turkey, through a migrant network. The only exception out of the 12 is the case of Sahire who migrated with her husband.

The reasons behind the preference to migrate to Turkey are diverse: geographical proximity, flexible visa regulations, the availability of jobs for women in the labour market and established migrant networks.[6] As Irine says, "Turkey is the best neighbouring country to find a job". This also shows us the existence of a gendered structure of labour markets in Turkey. While women are associated with care/cleaning, and therefore are mostly employed as domestic/care workers in the labour market, men work as couriers and construction workers. However, we were also told that there are men from Turkic Republics who are employed as care workers for male patients. In this sense, Dilferah's sister-in-law said "Come if you want, there are good jobs for women here" to Difuze or Mavie helping her own mother who takes care of an old person on her off-days are striking examples of gender roles and structures in the labour market for migrant women.

When it comes to the act of migration, the travel and visa costs are financed in several ways: (I) from migrant women's personal savings, (II) prepayment by prospective employers, (III) loans from relatives/lenders and (IV) from employment agencies. While the cost of travel and necessary bureaucratic steps can be guaranteed by the employment agencies on condition of repayment by the employer, the agencies also deduct the costs from the first wage the migrant women receive for their domestic work when they start working. Hence, these agencies provide the poorest women with the chance to migrate, which was previously not possible due to their lack of financial means. After gaining experience, women often arrange their own travel (Toksöz & Ünlütürk-Ulutaş 2012). In addition to these agencies, the role of relatives and/or friends is also important in securing a job. Women either receive the contact information of the prospective employers from their friends/relatives or directly migrate to Turkey to start a job found through their networks (Ünlütürk-Ulutaş 2010).

While all of the migrant women in this research entered Turkey through official channels with necessary visas, their status easily appears to shift from being regular migrants to irregular migrants due to the lack of residence/work permit. Their irregular migration and therefore "(il)legal" statuses form one of the significant determinants of their living and working lives in Turkey, as will be detailed in the next sub-section below. Meanwhile, women's circular and irregular migration between their countries of origin and Turkey is referred to as "settlement in mobility" (Toksöz & Ünlütürk-Ulutaş 2012). However, one should note that "circular migration" has different implications for diverse groups in this research. For example, while it is more valid for Georgian and Armenian groups, the migration patterns of Turkmen women appear to be less circular. High bribes at the entrance to Turkmenistan or expensive costs of travel may prevent women from visiting their countries of origin frequently. As Mihrinaz says while "no one is permanent in Turkey" with future plans in their countries of origin, there are either no frequent or regular

[6] Yet the particular hesitations of Armenians due to the historically established perceptions about Turkey and Turks should be underlined. As Areknazan says "*A relative of ours worked here. She called, said come. You can babysit, you make good money. At that time, I was saying, "God, let me go everywhere in the world, but not to Turkey." I was so scared. No one around me would want to step into Turkey. They said to me, "Have you lost your mind?" Even though I said so, I came without thinking. I needed it so much."*

visits to the home country. It is also stated that in some cases women (such as Irine and Areknazan) turned back to their countries of origin as a permanent plan but there they could not find jobs and had therefore returned to Turkey.

3.3. Experiences in the Host Country: The Stories of Migration

Women's migration stories include their adaptation to the city of Istanbul, people and daily life in Turkey. Istanbul as a huge metropolis was challenging for some as they are from rural areas and do not have previous experiences with international as well as domestic transportation. For instance, Naz says for the first time in her life she travelled by train for a long distance and then took the plane. Her first impression was that Istanbul was too complicated, crowded and big in her eyes.

All of the women who have children underline the change that has affected their motherhood due to their migration to Turkey. Conceptualised as "transnational motherhood" in the literature (Arat-Koç, 2006), these women generally left their children in the care of their mother-in-law or sisters. They talk about their mixed feelings of pride (providing a better life for the children) and regret (leaving them behind and not spending time with them). None of the interviewees talk about hiring someone to take care of the family members left behind but they mentioned regularly sending money to them. Women generally send the money they make in Turkey to their countries of origin for (i) their children's education and well-being (ii) their older children's marriage expenses (iii) investment, mostly buying a house (iv) paying debts and finally (v) supporting their families during the pandemic as family members were unemployed.

Discrimination in daily life has been one of the issues that comes to the fore when women talk about their migration experiences in Turkey. It appears to be seen in two areas: housing[7] and use of public space. Discrimination appears to arise from two overlapping statuses in their cases: being migrant and being women. For instance, Irine says that the locals in her neighbourhood purposely make rude remarks while she passes by. She adds that she had difficulties in finding a flat and she had even been exposed to the abuse of the owner's husband as she was "a single and migrant women". In this sense, housing can be a way for local men to abuse migrant women.

> *My neighbour, living downstairs, is the brother of my landlady. He is old, ugly and married. His wife is a powerful woman and controls him, gives orders to him, like "bring me coffee, go grocery shopping Suleyman!" (she imitates and then laughs). He hesitates from his wife. This man started to call me every day a while ago. (…) At the end, one morning, I was still sleeping and he called me. He said lots of strange things. I could keep myself calm and started to shout at him. I said I know what you want. I swore at him. Then, he stopped calling me and even did not look at me if we came across in the same building. He was trying. He did not clearly tell me what he wanted but it was obvious that he tried to abuse me. If you let men do that they always try and go after you. But if you react, they stop.*
>
> *Irine*, Georgian

Interestingly, as seen in the previous sub-sections, gender-based discrimination has been one of the significant drivers for migration for women in our research. However, the majority of the interviewees state that they have found the extent and intensity of violence against women in Turkey striking, when compared with the high level of gender-based violence in their countries of origin. The femicides or

[7] In our sample, 8 women out of 12 live at their employers' houses as they work as live-in workers. The housing patterns of the rest show diversity. Only one of them lives alone in a flat while the other two share their flat with other migrants. The last woman lives with her family.

targeted killing of women[8] have been the source of fear and anxiety for women especially, which means they pay attention to details like where to go, when to go or what to wear.

Stigmatisation of migrant women working in Turkey is another issue expressed by women that shape their experiences of migration. Stigmatisation may come from the locals as well as their acquaintances, relatives, friends or close family members living in their country of origin. Women from former Eastern Bloc countries who work in the sex industry have led to the stigmatisation of migrants from these countries who do domestic work as "Natashas" (a common Slavic name associated with prostitution in Turkey), as well as to harassment in public areas, such as in the streets (Toksöz & Ünlütürk-Ulutaş 2012).

Another source of stigmatisation comes from their country of origin where women who migrate are perceived as unwomanly and/or morally unfit (Teke 2019). Migrant women are also blamed for social disorder since they are "irresponsible mothers/immoral wives" (Keough 2003, 2006). Similarly, Teke Llyod says that migrant care workers also embody a certain kind of femininity and deservingness. While women should be "clean, literate, docile and hardworking", they also need to have "good ethics", "wear proper clothes" and not be considered "sexually loose" to be recruited. In Akalın's study, motherhood emerges as a part of this so-called deservingness as women with their own children are in high demand by employers for whom such women are "ideal caregivers not only because they have the necessary knowledge, but also for their capacity of ceaseless affect production[9]" (2015, 71).

Women regularly mention the burden of the stigmatisation on their psychology in our research too. For instance, Natiya says that it was even harder in the beginning of her stay in Turkey for her to make eye contact with people, while walking on the streets. She says she was feeling unease as she knew that women working abroad were stigmatized. Similarly Pakize used to have a very limited social life in her first years in Turkey as she hesitated from her "jealous" husband back in Turkmenistan.

> *For example, working women in Turkey are always lurking evil eyes. I've done nothing wrong in my life, but I've heard such things about myself there. At first, I was crying a lot, thinking a lot. I thought I had made a huge mistake. I was saying "why are they saying so much about me?". I always told my husband "Don't believe what people say" and he was saying "I don't believe". But no matter how confident he was, he heard those bad words about me. They think bad things about employees, especially those working in Turkey. (…) I used to have a hard time, I had to think every time I took a step, but it is not like that for young people now. They also live alone, go wherever they want, etc. But it used to be like that. When I first started working in Turkey, in the first few years, I was trying to hide it as if I was doing a dirty thing. I did not want anyone gossiping about me.*
>
> *Ani*, Armenian

The majority of the women blame their husbands/fathers for sending them to work abroad *instead of* themselves. Having referred to the same patriarchal code that stigmatises them in Turkey hardening their lives, they criticise and belittle their husbands for "not being enough male". From diverse countries of

[8] According to Annual Report of We Will Stop Femicides Platform, there were 280 femicides and 217 suspicious deaths of women in 2021. https://kadincinayetlerinidurduracagiz.net/veriler/3005/2021-annual-report-of-we-will-stop-femicides-platform

[9] The concept of affective labor is preferred over emotional labor (Hochschild 2003 in Akalın 2015) due to the importance paid to the body in affect theory. It is more suitable to understand the working conditions of domestic workers as live-in, i.e. non-separation of private and public realms (Akalın 2015)

origin, these women see their husbands as “not a real man”. For them, the breadwinner should be their husbands/fathers but instead they are mostly unemployed, irregularly employed besides spending the money women earned as they wish. In this sense, women themselves reproduce and legitimise the patriarchal codes in the country of destination.

> *Now I do not want to condemn my husband, because he is the father of my children no matter what. He was working for a while, but if he was a man like a man, he wouldn't have sent me here.*
>
> *Natiya, Georgian*

> *My husband also wanted it. ‘Wherever you go, go and work. Your son wants to have an education,’ he said. But my husband is not going anywhere. He is pleased with the money he earns. Now, he works as a driver which is just enough for food. He doesn’t bother for more. He does not force himself. So, what would he say to me?*
>
> *Pakize, Turkmen*

3.4. Working Conditions and Practices

This part consists of three sub-sections through which migrant women’s working experiences and practices are explored before and after the pandemic. While the first sub-section “General Findings on Employment” elaborates on women’s primary working experiences (whether in the care market or not), their particular ways of finding a job and general problems at work. The second sub-section “Diverse Impacts of Covid-19” discusses the impacts of the pandemic on their working experiences and practices with reference to the access to health services and social assistance, border entrapment and changing working conditions during the pandemic. Finally, the third and last sub-section “Women’s Agency and Coping Strategies” concentrates on how they cope with these problems. The final sub-section also involves evaluations of IMECE (the Union of Domestic Workers) as well as of Eren Keskin on collective action and organisation of migrant domestic workers and their legal limbo.

3.4.1. General Findings on Employment

Women can move from one sector to another, even though they were employed as domestic and care workers at the time of research. Among them, there are women who used to be agricultural labourers harvesting tea (that is especially valid for Georgian women), café workers, dishwashers, waitresses, bakery and/or textile workers. It is seen that the first jobs they took have the tendency to be a negative experience for the inexperienced migrant women with limited language skills. Women mention that language barriers in the beginning hit them the most. Many women say that they learnt Turkish in their first jobs from their employers and not being able to express themselves was an obstacle for not getting used to their new lives here in Turkey too. The new-comers also have difficulties in quitting their jobs as they do not know how to do this as their lives are isolated, and living in the houses in which they work, separates them from their limited networks.

> *When I said I was going to quit my job, they said 'We'll report you to the police'. I was scared. They wouldn't let me go out either. They were saying, 'You can get the virus'. I could not quit for one and a half years. I could not complain to anyone. Because I was afraid. So, I had a hard time at my first job. After my sister came to Turkey, “Get out of it, don't be afraid. Insist on getting off your job” she said. They kicked me out of the house at 7 am on a very cold February day. They also gave half of my salary. They said, “We bought you medicine”. They also got my phone line. Then they threw me out. There was an employee at the security, he helped me. He gave me his phone. I called my sister. 'They kicked me out' I said. The weather was also very*

cold. Since I never went out, I didn't have any clothes either. I stayed outside wearing very thin clothes. Then my sister came and took me. Then Özge (current employer) got this job for me. "Let me try it, if I can't work, I'll go home", I said. I said, "if it's hard, I'll go back to my country". Because I was too tired.

Dilferah, Uzbek

There are certain ways to find jobs in the care market: (I) migrant network (including relatives, acquaintances and so on), (II) networks of previous employers and finally (III) the agencies. While the first two methods are generally more effectively used as the stay of the migrant women gets longer, agencies could be the initial means to enter the job market in many cases. In one of the few studies conducted on the problems of women migrant domestic workers with private employment agencies, Yıldırım says these "unlicensed companies" are known for harassment, abuse and sending the workers to unsafe workplaces, seizure of the passport and/or high fees cut from the wages of the workers (in some cases equal to seven months' worth of wages) for their services (Yıldırım et. al, 2017). On the other hand, Toksöz and Ünlütürk-Ulutaş (2012) point to the importance of trust between firm and client, the loss of which leads a firm to lose clients. In line with the literature, our interviewees also underline the detrimental role of the agencies in their working experiences, apart from a few positive experiences. Those who have positive experiences state that they select reliable agencies via asking friends and/or appreciate the agencies for providing formal ways to enter the country.

Due to the informality of the work, migrant women are devoid of basic workers' rights, such as insurance, work permits or retirement. In our research, 10 women have residence permits (mostly short-term residence permits), while there are only three women that have work permit with social security and therefore, access to health. Two of them are irregular workers. Women generally say it is easier to obtain a residence permit than a work permit. Women themselves may not be willing to get it as the insurance payment is deducted from their salaries due to the employers' arrangements. Even if they accept such a thing, they may still feel hesitate "to ask" about it from their employers. Likewise, none of the women mention retirement except for Irine who says she does not know her rights.

I started working in a pound shop in Küçükyalı, in Bostancı. I worked there for 1 year. Then my residence permit was issued. But I did not have a work permit and they were coming from the finance department to check the shop. They were hiding me. We were in fear. 'Run, hide on the 2nd floor.' they said. They applied for a work permit, they helped, but it was really difficult. That's why I had to quit that job.

Natiya, Georgian

Having a work permit makes all the difference. When you go to a private hospital, you pay part or half of the fee. When you go to public hospitals, it's free. It is easier to reach hospitals. It is also easier to travel to and from my country when I have a work permit. If there is a residence permit only, it becomes very troublesome. I wanted to (talk about it with my employers), but then they pay less than my salary. They take the insurance money from my salary. Our insurance is 850 TL.

Sahire, Turkmen

The literature commonly points to precarious working conditions attached to domestic and care labour (Senses 2020). While working long hours with ambiguous job definitions and less vacation time—in some cases only one day off per month (Danış 2007) —they are paid less than national domestic workers and not always on time besides paying high fees to the employment agencies. Akalın (2010) mentions the flexibility that characterises job definition, working hours, control and even the context of the household chores that are all at the employer's sole discretion. For this reason, it is common to be hired as a caregiver who functions as a housewife in the end. She further says that women domestic workers are expected to

be the perfect housewives “who makes everything possible and ready for everyone at home at any time” (Akalın 2007, 223). In line, women in our research state that they are responsible for “everything”. These expectations engender intensive exploitation of domestic and care workers. The employing household seeing the migrant domestic women “as a family member” leads women to create “fictional kinship ties”, which may also conceal the power relations in which they live and work. For instance, Mavie says she hesitates to ask for her insurance to her employers. As they do not raise the issue either, Mavie keeps working as non-insured.

National and international feminist literature on migrant domestic workers in Turkey has also focused on the particularities of home as a workplace. For instance, while Stevano criticizes the understanding of home in neoclassical economics as a “black box” home, she defines it as a sphere where not only care labour but also power relations are embedded (Stevano 2021 in Kabeer et. al) Ünlütürk-Ulutaş and Kalfa (2009) stress that home, as an isolated and private place, is open to violations of workers’ rights due to its informal and unregulated state. It hides harassment and the pressure workers experience, as happens in cases of women who are locked in the houses where they work as live-in domestic workers or when their employers confiscate their passports. Therefore, these women’s informal and unregulated working conditions also determine their living conditions. In addition to increased control on labour processes at home by the employers (such as not being allowed to talk on the phone, installed cameras in every room to monitor the workers, controlling wages, i.e., not giving it directly to the worker but sending to her country of origin without informing her about the changing rates), there are also cases in which exploitation of the worker is mixed with gender oppression. In Mavie’s example, her employer asked her to leave because she saw her as a “threat to her femininity”.

> *There were cameras everywhere, only not in the toilet and not in my room, but everywhere else. The baby was sitting on the floor in the living room, there were pillows, I was going to put him to sleep after lunch. I took some clothes for a week with me. I put all of my clothes in the washing machine. Not everything dried out the next day. My bra was still wet, so I couldn't wear it on. I was just wearing a T-shirt. I bent over and my breasts, my belly were visible on the camera. The woman was watching it with her husband. She told her husband that I don't want this babysitter at home anymore. She said, 'Your breasts were in the middle, we were not at home, when we went to work, you were lying half naked in the living room.' I said, ‘It didn't take even a minute and a half'. We talked like that, but the woman did not give concrete reasons. She said she didn't want to continue with me.*
>
> *Mavie*, Turkmen

Akalın (2010) points to the socio-spatial organization of the new luxury building complexes that are in high demand by the middle and upper classes in Istanbul. She explains that the flats are already designed to employ a live-in domestic worker with an extra floor hidden from the rest of the house. This architectural plan makes a never-ending shift possible, as well as hiding away domestic workers when their labour is not needed. In sum, as Ünlütürk-Ulutaş and Kalfa (2009) point out, under different working conditions, a house turns into a home, workplace, workcamp and/or even a prison for these women. The particularities of “home as a workplace” – long working hours, the lack of private place, no clear job definition, heavy work burden, the lack of privacy – especially for those who do not have a private room while working as live-in, are underlined by our interviewees too. In addition to this, not getting the previously agreed salary is another major problem stated.

Studies on MDWs in Turkey also mention misbehaviour and sexual violence by employers. Toksöz & Ünlütürk-Ulutaş state that a female migrant domestic worker faced humiliating questions during her job interview, such as “Do your feet stink?” “Do you wash out well after defecating?” “Do you have a boyfriend and do you think about bringing him here if you do?” and “Do you eat much?” (Toksöz & Ünlütürk-Ulutaş

2012, 98). Ünlütürk-Ulutaş (2010) mentions that domestic migrant women mostly complain about ill-treatment from their employers[10] such as using separate kitchen equipment and dining tables. In line with the literature, Irine says that when the employer put Irine's plate and spoon separately while setting the table, she decided not to work there anymore as she felt insulted. The others working as live-ins underline the difficulty of not having a separate room or bed too. Due to the patriarchal code that ignores the essentiality of reproduction labour, the domestic and care services provided by migrant women are devalued as low-skilled and low-status jobs. For example, Irine says she frequently comes across with such expressions by the employers "It is a pity that you are doing this with your education." Mavie feels humiliation since the employers "judge you by looking at your clothes you are wearing."

The male employers appear to take advantage of the home as a private workplace and women's vulnerable migrant status (working irregularly and/or without work permits or confiscating their passports, when it comes to sexual violence[11]. Mavie talks about her discomfort regarding the husbands of the employers at home.

> *Everywhere I went to work, I had problems due to men, and husbands of women. The people I worked with in Kartal were a young family. The woman had no jealousy, but the man had disturbing attitudes, phrases, words and so on. I could not make it for 2 months there either. His looks were very disturbing, for example. I also felt negative energy on me as he came and grinned and laughed. My muscles were tense. That's why I was clumsy. He would say "prepare something" and hold my hand and wait near me. I said, 'Mr. Volkan, you get out, I'll prepare and bring it.' That's why he used to tell me 'You are a ready answer girl'. It is not because of my ready responsiveness, but because I want to prepare it easily. I was also anxious when he was with me. I did not experience physical abuse, but there were disturbing words and glances.*
>
> *Mavie*, Turkmen

The physical complaints of women as "occupational diseases" should also be noted here. Herniated discs and backache due to lifting heavy bedridden patients/elderly and deep cleaning are common. Regular exposure to cleaning chemicals leads to respiratory diseases. Women also talk about their psychological problems that have arisen especially from working as live-ins. In this sense, an isolated life causes severe psychological detriment, such as "feelings of loneliness, missing children back home, abstinence in order to save as much as possible, and undertaking even the most disrespected work despite having a good educational background" (Toksöz & Ünlütürk-Ulutaş 2012, 96).

When asked how they evaluate their stay as MDWs in Turkey overall, the majority feel satisfied with their work experiences, while mentioning the hardship and difficulties as summarized above in detail. Although "the good old days" in Turkey in terms of low rates of dollars/euros are generally more appreciated, the economic gains women achieved are inevitable in many cases. Women proudly talk about how they are able to afford the marriage/education expenses of their children or how they built a new house for the family. Women also feel that they have achieved something difficult in many aspects and therefore, feel empowered. To overcome the difficulties of living in a foreign country and earning money while experiencing precarious working conditions and being in a legal limbo strengthens women.

[10] Women give the examples of torture also, despite not having experienced this first-hand. For instance, a friend of Natiya who was working as a live-in asked her for help to run away from the house she was employed in because she was forced to eat food for cats.

[11] There are other examples of sexual harassment at work as women move from one sector to another in the labour markets in Turkey. For example, Irine complains about the cook at the restaurant she had to work with before she started working in cleaning saying "try to take advantage of you, since you are a foreign, single woman".

Then I said to myself "Naz, if you don't do this [keep working]*, you will destroy yourself". If you don't work, you will ruin your life." So, there is no place to go back. I can't go there* [Turkmenistan]*. If I return, I will go back to my old self again. I was like 'work elsewhere, you succeed, you can do it. (…) They (people in Turkmenistan) do not want women to leave Turkmenistan since they know that women would awake (raise consciousness). It would open their mind, if they came here. They see little bit life here. That is why our people don't want women to be wake up (open-minded), so they don't want women to see anything (new, different). They say this is very bad, the woman who leaves, sorry to say that, they are bitch. (…) I am glad I came because I can support my children' education. I do not want them to be in my position in their lives. I want them stand on their own feet. Both for my daughter and my son. They say in Turkmenistan that do not let the girls get education, just let them marry. That's all. As if girls are not human beings. I said no. I will support my daughter's education' as well as my son'. If Allah allows (they will be educated people). There was no one from the family who supported me to continue my education.*

Naz, Turkmen

I stayed away from my children for years, but I had them all educated. I'm proud of it now. They all found a job. They are making good money now. But I always sent them what I earned. I did not get anything for myself. I've always worked as lived-in. It used to be difficult in the past. But now I am proud of what I did. As a woman, I kept a huge family together and they lived very well thanks to me. That's what I am proud of. I used to have a hard time, I had to think every time I took a step. When I first started working in Turkey, in the first few years, I was trying to hide it as if I was doing a dirty thing. I did not want anyone gossiping about me.

Ani, Armenian

3.4.2. Diverse Impacts of Covid-19[12]

Violations of workers' rights in a global sense have been pointed out by domestic workers unions and associations from the start of the Covid-19 pandemic.[13] From house confinement, limited/lack of access to social assistance, job loss to increased work burden, "the risks and rights violations are particularly severe in the case of international migrant domestic workers because their rights are further circumscribed by immigration law and practice. In the periods of lockdowns, MDWs were often caught between different degrees of lockdown in their home and host countries, leaving many w/out jobs and in legal limbo" (Kabeer et. al 2021). Likewise, the mainstream literature focuses on the impacts of Covid-19 on the future of migration systems and the experiences of migrants as they confront the loss of employment, lack of access to healthcare and social security, and being entrapped without assistance in the country they are living (Asis 2020; İçduygu, 2020). Relatively little attention has been given to the impact of Covid-19 on migrant lives within a broader gender analysis of its impact in different countries (Foley and Piper 2020, UNDP-UN Women 2020) or the gendered dimensions of the pandemic (Kabeer, Razavi and van der Meulen Rodgers, 2021).

The impacts of Covid-19 should consider the diversity of MDWs in terms of migrant status, nationality, duration of stay and the reasons behind their migration in Turkey. As a result of not being provided with separate statistics for migrants by the Ministry of Health, the accurate number of migrants, who have

[12] The first case of Covid-19 in Turkey was announced on March 11, 2020. In the first phase of the outbreak, the Turkish government declared only a partial lockdown by implementing 3- 4-day curfew every weekend. Precautions, such as social distancing in public spaces and wearing masks, were highly encouraged in the initial months. International borders were closed, flights suspended, and mobility of both Turkish citizens and migrants was restricted. After a period of gradual normalization during the summer, in late November 2020 Turkey had another partial lockdown.

[13] Domestic Workers: Frontline Care Workers at Risk, https://www.wiego.org/domestic-workers-frontline-care-workers-risk, Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO), last checked 06.11.2021.

been infected and/or died from Covid-19, remains unclear (Özvarış et. al 2020). In addition to this, vulnerable groups such as refugees, migrants or IDPs are not protected by special programmes provided by the Turkish government and the Ministry of Health has failed to provide consistent information for migrants who have been affected by the disease.

After the Covid-19 outbreak erupted in Turkey, circular and transit mobility mostly stopped in the spring of 2020. Diverse sectors occupied by migrant workers such as tourism, agriculture and care were highly affected. MDWs were one of the most severely affected female groups in the country in the initial months of the pandemic. Many interviewees, particularly Turkmens, could not visit their families during the outbreak. On the other hand, Armenian migrant workers have been helped to return to their home countries by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Armenia.[14]

i. Access to Health Services

Turkey's healthcare infrastructure is one of the examples of a globally underfunded, understaffed and privatized healthcare systems (Kayaalp and Burhan Isik 2020). Within this system, regular migrants have to submit a private health insurance policy valid at least for a year to obtain a short-term residence permit. However, despite having these policies, they mostly have to pay the full amount for all health services in hospitals. Many of our interviewees, who only have residence permit but do not have work permits and social security, confirmed that these health insurance policies often do not cover basic medical needs.

> *I used to have work permit in my previous work where I was a live-in child-caregiver. My employers paid my full salary and paid for social security as well. Therefore, I was able to go to state hospitals and pay nothing or if I went to private ones, I only paid a small amount.*
>
> *Mihrinaz*, Turkmen

Substantial legislation on the recognition of testing and treatment for Covid-19 as an "emergency condition", which assigned state and some private hospitals to provide these to anyone regardless of their legal status, has been a means for migrants to access healthcare free of charge. However, there have been problems with irregular migrants in terms of registration and hospitalisation since they do not have health insurance to be able to be recognised and integrated into this system (Özvarış et.al. 2020). Özkul (2020) notes that irregular migrants, asylum-seekers and refugees are at high risk of being deported and removed from their unsecured workplaces or rented houses in case of any diagnosis. Therefore, many migrants avoided accessing hospitals. In addition, testing positive for Covid-19 has been a speculative source of fear of being stigmatized and deported.

ii. Access to Social Assistance

Vulnerable groups, including MDWs, are not protected by special programmes provided by the Turkish government and the Ministry of Health during the pandemic. The Union of the Domestic Workers (2020) says that migrant domestic workers could not benefit from the social assistances provided by the government and International Domestic Workers Federation (IDWF) due to their irregular status. As they do not have an official bank account/work permits, women could only randomly get in kind assistances. Being unable to access unemployment benefits or emergency response measures as well as not having

[14] http://www.agos.com.tr/tr/yazi/23910/ermenistan-turkiye-den-yardim-talebimiz-yok ("We do not need any help from Turkey")

alternative employment because of travel restrictions have been globally experienced too (Kabeer et. al 2021).

The majority couldn't apply for unemployment pay or the short-term working allowance provided by the government due to the informal nature of their work as well as to their irregular migrant position. IMECE Istanbul says the economic support services were only provided to registered workers excluding the informal ones. While some members of IMECE got financial help from the International Domestic Workers Federation, it was not the case for the MDWs due to their irregular status. As they could not provide an official bank account with a valid ID, they could not benefit from international support. IMECE Antalya says that is why the MDWs could only get personal aid and food packages in an irregular way.

> *I did not apply to any help other than that, I did not know if there were any options around. I bought cologne and masks with my own money. In my neighborhood, nobody handed out masks or other hygienic things.*
>
> *Irine*, Georgian

As mentioned in the beginning of this sub-section, Armenians were the exception as social assistance as well as travel assistances was provided by official authorities to help those living in Turkey including MDWs:

> *A church or foundation distributed aid packages during the quarantine. They took people to Armenia on buses. They helped. Now we're waiting for another bus and borders to be opened again.*
>
> *Areknazan*, Armenian

iii. Border Entrapment

The idea and feeling of territorial entrapment differ according to legal status, income, social network and living conditions of migrants. Although some of the MDWs felt secure enough to remain in Turkey, they were left with few alternatives when the government began closing all national borders beginning with Iran in late February 2020. One of our interviewees, an Armenian caregiver who lost her job, said that since she was supported by her friend, she had no reason to leave the country. Another interviewee, an Armenian research fellow, said that the Hrant Dink Foundation established an emergency network at the very beginning of the outbreak and helped irregular, low-paid Armenian workers to leave Turkey via Georgia. An irregular caregiver from Turkmenistan states that she felt more secure living in Turkey compared to living in Turkmenistan since she believed that official measures taken for Covid-19 were sufficient enough. On the other hand, there were women who would like to return to Turkmenistan but it was not possible. For instance, a Turkmen live-in elderly caregiver regrets staying in Turkey:

> *Just before the borders were closed, my sister was returning to Turkmenistan and said 'come with me'. I was working at a cafe and supporting my family and I had to stay. But then cafes were closed and I was unemployed for 3 months. I wish I had gone with my sister. (Then borders were closed) It is still closed. There is no plane. Nobody knows when they will open. A lot of countries were opened in the summer, but the borders of our country are still closed.*
>
> *Pakize*

According to women, the number of those who wished to return to their countries of origin is more than those who wanted to stay in Turkey among the MDWs in general during the pandemic. However, it was not primarily due to the fear and anxiety of a pandemic in a foreign country. As Areknazan states, it was because the job opportunities were limited during the time.

I didn't know there were so many women working here like me. Now it's kind of diminished because they're going back home a lot. Because of the epidemic. They can't get jobs. When this disease came out, everyone wanted to go home.

iv. Changing Working Conditions

ILO Office for Turkey revealed that the Covid-19 crisis has exacerbated the existing problems of domestic workers including, particularly, informal work. Domestic workers, as one of the groups who were socially and economically hardest hit by the pandemic, are at the highest risk of losing jobs and income in the pandemic (ILO 2020a) [15]. Our interviewees mention that they were able to work in the summer as daily workers but the numbers of job opportunities were diminished. The Domestic Workers Solidarity Union (Evid-Sen) (2020) says the union has been in touch with 5,000 women who contacted them about falling into poverty, lacking income, hunger and/or domestic violence. Women working as daily cleaners are hit hardest by the pandemic as they first experience loss of employment to a large extent –especially during the lockdowns, and then their job opportunities decrease.

I could not work during the pandemic. It was economically hard of course but some of my customers, female friends helped me, paid my rent, sent me money for food. Thanks to them. I had some savings also. I was able to keep my flat and even ate a lot (she laughs). I gained so much weight.

Irine, Georgian

On the other hand, those working as live-ins mostly kept their jobs but in changing conditions during the pandemic. Changing working conditions involve the increase on the live-in women's physical and psychological burden due to the increasing number of family members staying at the houses (few exceptions stating less work burden as the employer at home helping), sticked hygienic measures and the lack of mobility/off-days. In particular, the women who are not allowed to leave the house talk about the "burnout", the "house" losing its advantage for saving money and turning into a place for confinement.

Women's experiences during the pandemic primarily appears to be based on their relationship with the employer. For instance, although women have health insurance thanks to their residence permit, it is just a formality. When women get sick and need medicine/treatment/Covid test or protective measures for a strong immune system, their needs are mostly covered either by themselves or by their employers.[16]

Three days after my return [from Georgia], my boss took me to a clinic for precautionary reasons. He paid the test. We saw that I got the virus. My boss provided me a place to stay during my quarantine. The drugs were given while I was there. After some time, my boss to the clinic again, God bless him, then I returned to the house where I worked. For a week, I wandered around with a mask then we hugged each other again.

Natiya, Georgian

[15] The research was supported by unions- Domestic Workers Union for Turkey (IMECE), All Municipal and Public Services Worker's Trade Union (HIZMET-IS) and Domestic Workers Solidarity Union (EVID-SEN)- as well as domestic workers.

[16] Another research gap appears that is "the intersectional dimensions of the crisis, particularly the losses to livelihoods and health by gender, race, class, disability, life course and other markers of disadvantage" (Kabeer et. al: 20).

In addition, the issue of stigmatization, i.e., seeing MDWs as the transmitter of the virus has been another difficulty women had to face during the pandemic. Even though there are women who state they did not experience such a thing as they have a good relationship with their employers based on "trust", stigmatization led to severe house confinements in some cases.

> *There was a lot [House confinement]. There was no problem in grocery shopping because they [the employers] met my needs and brought me anything I wanted. But there was a lot of trouble about taking an off-day. [Then I started to take] A leave every two months! I had to leave the house and come back within 24 hours. I used to cry for two days to force them to allow me to leave, it was only on the third day they used to say "yes".*
>
> *Mavie*, Turkmen

> *No [I haven't experienced house confinement]. They trusted me and they know that I am very clean.*
>
> *Faye*, Filipina

IMECE (2020) states that those who had to stay in the country and kept their jobs were forced to work overtime and were underpaid. As all family members had to be home during the quarantine, live-in domestic workers complained about an increasing work burden without proper breaks. In addition to this, Evid-Sen (2020) points out that they are also seen as a potential vector for the virus. The latter may also lead to discrimination, such as house confinement, verbal abuse or mistreatment. As one of our interviewees, a Turkmen live-in cleaner also suffered a lot from the closure of borders and felt entrapped:

> *I felt like as if I'm a prisoner. While my employers had the chance to go out to take a breath, I was kept at home since they did not trust me as if I'm illiterate. They undervalued me since I work as a cleaner here. If borders were open – still there's no flight to Turkmenistan – I would leave Turkey*.

3.4.3. Women's Agency and Coping Strategies

Studies have questioned the issue of agency in relation to migrant domestic and care workers in Turkey. Aware of the existence of severe exploitation, harassment and diverse forms of violence, these women are not passive victims of migration. While many of them start their journeys for their own and their families' welfare, they struggle and fight against exploitation and harassment through formal and informal networks that they establish among each other (Ünlütürk-Ulutaş 2010). Likewise, the tenacity and courage of the women realised through remittances, their children's education or care of the sick and/or elderly are in contrast to the IOM's discourse about Moldovan women in Keough's studies (2003, 2006). Having focused on women's agency and the power of mobile female subjects, she opposes the IOM's description of "young single women as victims forcibly trafficked and sold into prostitution by criminal networks". While criticizing conventional ideas on migration, migrant women, agency and victims of trafficking, she further asserts that these women hold a certain amount of power and agency in their households both in Istanbul and Moldova, such as information about passports, travelling more generally, maps and mobile phones, and cash-earning.

On the other hand, Armenian domestic workers do not see their migration as emancipatory due to the lack of benefits and protection they are supposed to have as senior women due to the patriarchally extended family (Kandiyoti 1988 in Teke Llyod 2019). In this context, "agency was not perceived in terms of greater mobility but rather their ability to "cash in" on the promised rewards of the "intergenerational contract" or "marital contracts" of their sons (2019, 372). According to Danış (2007), employment of young Iraqi women as domestic and care workers challenges the rigid gender roles in patriarchal Iraqi

society. While women's new role as breadwinners produces tension within Iraqi families, it seems to be tolerated, as the families perceive themselves as in a temporary situation and transitory. Yet, with many having been in Istanbul for more than ten years, Danış argues that the prolongation of their stay can increase tensions within families.

In our research, women's basic rights are at the employers' discreation due to the lack of institutional mechanisms regulating the area of work and therefore, they have to improve the coping strategies. These are individual-oriented strategies that make women's working practices better. They can be summarized as solidarity-based socialization, use of migrant networks, religious channels and social media. Increased personal care was also another coping strategy seen, during the pandemic in particular.

There are studies in the literature that focus on the patterns of migrant women's socialization. For example, on days-off, women often prefer private places to meet, such as at another migrant's home (Yalçın 2015) or in parks to chat or walk. While some women prefer not to be outside, others deliberately avoid talking to each other while in crowded places, wear a scarf or glasses to conceal their identity, or hide their gold teeth (common in former Soviet republics) in order to hide from the police (Ünlütürk-Ulutaş 2010). In our research, women state that they generally gather in rented places once in a while to socialize and relax. Women mention that they use these rented places either to spend the time in between the unemployed periods or to recover when they get sick or need a place to quarantine during the pandemic.

> *I wander all day (on my off day). I'm leaving early. I love the ferry. I tour like that. We are going with my friends; we are having dinner. We drink tea and coffee. We sit and chat. We do not do much sports, but we go for a walk. I love Üsküdar. I went to the Maiden Tower. I love the Bebek sides. (…) I go and stay with my friends. They work during the day and they also rented an apartment. I just stay there on my off day. Then we walk around together.*
>
> *Pakize*, Turkmen

> *We 4-5 Georgian women rented a flat in the same district. We have been spending time there for a long time. I don't feel alienated as I know a lot of people although none of us live there. We only go home once a week. We all have our off-days on the same day of the week. For example, we say 'What are we going to do today?' Georgian food, of course. We collect money, we go, we shop. At the end of the evening, we prepare a nice meal. We both cry, dance and laugh. We return to our homes in the morning. So, we relax. It works very well.*
>
> *Natiya*, Georgian

Belonging to a certain ethnic-religious group and the use of a migrant network based on this belonging usually appears to be a coping strategy for women. Ethnicity and religion draw the social boundaries that determine who is in and out. How and in what ways these have affected women's participation in the domestic and care sectors has been another focus in the literature. Although employers prefer to hire Muslim, Turkish-speaking migrant women—in this case, those from Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan and Bulgaria—migrant women from other ethnic-religious background also find their niches in the labour market. Danış (2007) draws attention to the concept of "niching within the niche", which refers to the emergence of a particular occupational niche of a transit migrant group, i.e., Iraqi Christians in the domestic service sector in Istanbul. Kin- and religious-based networks provide employment opportunities to young Iraqi Christian migrant women. Religious leaders emerge as intermediaries who connect the

Istanbulite Syriacs and Armenians seeking domestic services and young Iraqi Christian women in need of employment. However, solidarity and exploitation exist as two sides of the same coin. While the migrant women easily find jobs in a perceived safe and familiar environment due to these networks, they face longer working hours, less vacation time, and control of their behaviour according to collective norms and values.

The use of migrant networks appears to be a positive experience for the women.[17] They make use of them to find other job opportunities, to have information about the employers, the jobs and the places that they are going to work or the necessary bureaucratic procedures. However, some women also criticize the migrant network as primarily driven by material interests.

> *Turkmens do not help each other. No. (When looking for home/work) everyone runs away. Everyone takes care of himself/herself. You come here from Turkmenistan, so everybody knows that you do not know any person in Turkey. How can you know, you haven't been there before? You see the real face of everyone when you come here. This is such a place; you know the people for real here.*
>
> *Naz*, Turkmen

Women can use religious channels for social assistance as happens in the case of Armenian care workers. During the pandemic, women increased measures for self-protection (not going outside even if available, taking vitamins, etc.) to cope with the changing working and living conditions. Such kind of "self-protection" includes thinking positively and keeping their immune system strong by vitamins, etc., either bought by themselves or their employers. The majority mention that they use social media, such as WhatsApp groups, to check if each other is safe and well. Solidarity appears here as a coping strategy.

> *We are helping those friends. If I cannot hear the voice of that friend even for a one day, I am calling her immediately. I am waiting for her to answer. It's just us. There is no one else to protect us! Are we hungry? Do we have a problem? No one asks. They [the employers] do not care about the rest. Then they blame us. They say you did not do your job well. Sometimes they also take passports hostage just to compel you to work.*
>
> *Natiya*, Georgian

[17] Ethnic and religious affiliation do not always bring advantages to the migrant groups. For instance, Parla (2007) draws attention to women domestic workers from Bulgaria who were not specified as irregular migrants due to the fact that "they are assumed to belong to the category of ethnic "return" migrants" (2007, 157). Parla says ethnic affiliation of Turkish migrants from Bulgaria after the 1990s hides the irregular migration and therefore does not necessarily improve legal, social or work lives of migrants in Turkey who are considered to be "foreigners". That is why Parla suggests that ethnic affiliation is a key dynamic both in describing the present and evaluating the future. Suter (2008) agrees with Parla (2007) on the Bulgarian migrants categorized as legally residing ethnic Turks, while differentiating Moldovan migrants who are considered as those from formerly communist countries who work irregularly. However, Kaşka (2009, 788) adds that Moldovan women who develop strong negotiating power have become more experienced, self-confident, successful migrants. Unlike the migration in 1989 from Bulgaria driven by political reasons, the new movements from Bulgaria having been driven by economic reasons has led to migrants not being embraced by Turkish society. Similarly, Körükmez (2013) takes Armenian women as an example to understand the role of migrant networks. She explains how two groups with the same ethnicity—Armenians from Armenia and the native Armenian population in Istanbul- come together through the former's employment as domestic and care workers in the latter's homes, through church and, finally, through the Armenian community in Istanbul. In a similar way to Danış (2007), Körükmez argues that while ethnicity is significant for allocation of the resources, it is also a source of exclusion and restrictions.

As summarized above, the coping strategies are individually oriented. Despite the women's awareness of poor working and living conditions, it is also stated that women have nothing but each other when they face these conditions in their working lives. For instance, Natiya says, "*What can they do if we complain? Is there such an opportunity*? (for a change in their conditions)." One of the reasons behind that is the lack of institutional/legal mechanisms that protect women in the cases of rights violations. Migrant women are not in collective action/organization in Turkey. The Union of Domestic Workers (IMECE) says, there are obstacles to collective action/organization, such as women's migrant status keeping them in legal limbo and fear of deportation. Not having a written contract or collective bargaining agreement, inadequate official controls on houses as workplaces and employer-friendly laws make migrant domestic workers more vulnerable to exploitation. Fuelled by their illegal status, migrant women are devoid of workers' rights and cannot apply through official channels when necessary.

IMECE also states that the lack of migrant women domestic workers during the struggle for better working condition definitely decreases the collective political power of workers in general. While domestic services are different from other sectors such as manufacturing, construction, and agricultural sectors where high competition among native and migrants exist, there is still partial competition between local women and migrant women regarding the care sector. The division of labour allocates locals mostly to daily jobs as "they have their own families and houses to take care as women", migrant women are found more suitable to work as live-ins. However, the growing anger of the local domestic and care worker women towards migrants has been identified both by IMECE and academic studies (Toksöz, 2020) through which migrant women are blamed for low payments and fewer jobs.

> *Once a migrant woman came over to visit us in the union. She was a friend of our member yet she wanted to make a deal before we started talking, she said, "I do not want my story to be shared in public, even my name!". That's how we met. She was very timid, very nervous and was not expressing herself very well since she was afraid. They [the employers] had confiscated her passport so that she could not quit. We have made that issue public, informed the press without mentioning her name. (…) The big shortcoming is that we don't have contact [with migrants], we don't make policy about it. But [first] those [political] subjects have to step in [the collective struggle], we also need to strengthen our contact with those subjects. Migration is now a vital phenomenon in which there is very serious exploitation.*
>
> IMECE Istanbul

To conclude, the pandemic appears to have deepened the ongoing inequalities and exploitation that MDWs have already experienced in their working lives. In addition to the structural conditions shaping their working as well as living conditions (i.e., working informally outside of the Labour Law without proper permits), other dynamics such as the closing of women's shelters during the pandemic had a negative impact on the MDWs too.

4. Public Access and Spatial Mobility Before the Covid-19 Outbreak

Spatial mobility of migrant women, its determinants and various patterns have been one of the understudied themes in the literature that focuses on MDWs working and living conditions. Due to the pandemic, our research had to concentrate on their experiences and practices before Covid-19. This sub-section concentrates on women's early experiences of use of the city when they first come to Turkey, the particular places and routes they prefer while moving in the city and their experience of using public transportation in Istanbul.

There are several key determinants that shape women's public access and spatial mobility in Istanbul. Firstly, the women are foreigners in a new country without the necessary local knowledge. In this sense, women expressed their hesitation about going out in the beginning. Women mention that the lack of local knowledge in the beginning diminishes their access to public spaces and their spatial mobility. According to them, the language they speak and how they look make them a "foreigner" in the eye of the locals. As will be detailed in the following parts, that sometimes leads to women feeling uncomfortable with the common stereotypes on "foreign women who are hyper-sexual and loose" in Turkey.

Another key determinant is the expensive cost of going out, such as going to cafes and restaurants etc. for these women who "try to save until the last dime". That is why, the majority say that they generally prefer "costless" outdoor activities. They go to the public places in their free times to socialize. These places could be parks and beaches to make picnics. In addition, shopping malls are another option for women who want to spend time in a costless way.

> *Where will I go (on my day off)? It's not my neighbourhood (not familiar with it), I don't have nothing to do outside. Let's say I'm out, where should I go alone when my daughter doesn't come? I don't like walking alone. I was saying, 'I'm going to go out and spend money for nothing, I'd better stay at home'.*
>
> *Ani*, Armenian

> *No (I do not go outside). Let me tell you the truth: we (my friends and I) do not have much money to go to a restaurant. If we go to good places, we have to pay a large amount of money. Although I have it, one of us may not be able to pay for it sometimes. We are very careful about such things. We decide together. We cook at home for ourselves. It is more beautiful.*
>
> *Natiya*, Georgian

At the same time, this does not mean that women do not make use of private places in the city. Women go to the particular restaurants where large social gatherings, i.e., wedding or *sunnet* ceremonies (religious ceremony for the boys) are organized. Although to a lesser extent, women go to the restaurants where they can find the local food. There seems to spatial niches that are determined by ethnic dimensions when locations of the restaurants are considered. For instance, well-known Turkmen and Uzbek restaurants mentioned by women are mostly located in the neighbourhoods of Aksaray, Fatih, Avcilar, Esenyurt, Zeytinburnu and Saadetdere. These restaurants are well-known places as they sell the special local bread called *tandır* which makes them very popular in the eye of migrant women from Turkic countries. On the other hand, Armenian women seem to enjoy Armenian restaurants in the Tatavla neighbourhood where the Armenian population has historically settled. Finally, Faye says that she goes to the Philippine restaurant in Gültepe. In addition to the restaurants, hairdressers are another public place used by MDWs. Again, an ethnic dimension appears to be important, for example women talk about Turkmen hairdressers in Yenikapı.

The places selected for socialization generally are not far away from the places where women live. For example, while 4 Levent, Çeliktepe, Sanayi Mahallesi and Avcılar are stated as migrant neighbourhoods especially for Turkmen and Uzbek population, the rented flats used by Georgian and Armenian migrant women are in Küçükyalı (Georgian, Armenian), Osmanbey (Georgian), Samatya (Armenian). The other neighbourhoods mentioned by women are away from these places due to women's personal ties with the local population. For instance, from time to time, Areknazan stays in Bostancı where she has been hosted by a Turkish friend of hers, or Faye lives with her Turkish husband and her son in Mecidiyekoy.

Other determinants of MDWs spatial mobility are composed of working experience, personal ties and relations to one's country of origin and religious practices. First of all, working experience seems to both give an opportunity to women to be mobile in the city and to make them trapped in their work places. For instance, Mihrinaz says "I worked on both sides of Istanbul. I can say that I saw 70% of Istanbul. I can easily walk around Istanbul; I know most of the locations." Some of the women also mention that as they travel with their employers in the holidays, they could find the chance to get familiar with other parts of Turkey.

> *When I worked with Aysun Abla, we went to Safranbolu together. Her grandmother was there. I was also there with a boyfriend. How many times we went to Safranbolu. I liked it. It's such a beautiful place. When I worked with this Russian family, we went to Fethiye. We stayed at the hotel. It's such a beautiful place that I can't tell. Idyllic. Here we went to Büyükada, Kınalıada.*
>
> *Pakize*, Turkmen

However, employers may restrict their mobility too. For instance, when Dilferah wanted to quit her first job in Turkey due to the overwhelming workload and permanent bullying at home, the employers forced her leave the house very early in the morning. She said that she did not know that she must have had a card for public transportation as her mobility was quite restricted while working. In other words, the experience itself could lead women to either have local knowledge of the city through accessing spatial mobility or leave them knowing nothing but only the neighbourhood where they work.

Women's personal ties and relations are another determinant shaping their mobility in the city. Almost all of the women state that they frequently send packages to the loved one in their countries of origin. It could be money, gifts, new/second-hand clothes/shoes or small household equipment. There are different mechanisms established by the migrant communities to send these in formal and informal ways. For example, women who want to send money go to small sweat shop-like places where they find Turkmen or Uzbek people with proper bank accounts in Turkmenistan or Uzbekistan in the migrant neighbourhoods mentioned above. Women mostly use this channel as an intermediary and give these people money. In return, people send from their accounts the same amount of money to the recipients living in Turkic countries. On the other hand, other gifts, clothes/shoes or equipment are formally sent by long-road truck for which women go to terminals with their packages.

Religious practices shape women's mobility in the city too. While Armenian women visit churches in Kumkapı, Aksaray, Yenikapı and Beyazıt, Faye sings at the Philippine church at Harbiye. Moreover, women can be mobile in the city to see each other as they work in different places in Istanbul. Finally, hosting family members who come to Turkey to visit is another reason for women to get mobile and familiar with the city.

However, maybe the most important determinant that shapes women's mobility is their migrant status. Whether they have a legal status or not directly effects their (im)mobility in the city. Combined with migrant women's legal vulnerability, their socialization tends to be confined to very rare meetings with friends due to the lack of days off or fear of being spotted and interrogated by police. Being spotted and threatened with both deportation and sexual harassment by the police, with the demand for a bribe appears to increase migrant women's fears in Turkey. Women seem to have their own coping strategies to deal with their irregular status and mobility. Not going out too much, "not wandering out", travelling only "from home to work, from work to home" and shopping from nearby places to their home are some

of those strategies. However, women also take each other's identity if they look alike to use at security check points. These fake IDs make it possible for the women to be mobile in the city.

> *(Living illegally) My passport has expired, they (the authorities) do not give a residence permit without a passport, you have to renew it. We have to go to the country to renew. You can enter Turkmenistan but there is no exit from there. I have two children studying, who will send them money (if I cannot go back to Turkey)? So, I stayed here like that (illegal). I'm always (nervous).*
>
> *Naz*, Turkmen

> *Yes (I have bad experiences in the public transportation). The police caught me twice. I came across the police on the subway both times. In Yenikapı. The police are there all the time. A female police officer stopped me. I heard from someone before and I put 200 TL in the passport. Then she left me. Once again, I had a ticket when they stopped. I showed the ticket. They're asking if you've identity card. I said 'I don't have an identity card but I have a passport'. When I first came to Özge's, I worked illegally. I didn't have an ID at that time. Later, on my way back to Uzbekistan, I paid a fine for being a fugitive. If I didn't pay, they would deport me for 1-2 years.*
>
> *Dilferah*, Uzbek

Regardless of their legal status as migrants, women state that they are always careful about their appearances. What to wear while going to certain place has always been a priority for women. They say that they have their opinions about the places and whether they are suitable for women and/or migrants. When these two identities, i.e., being woman and migrant, intersect, it may cause feeling discomfort in public as well as private transportation. For instance, the "curious taxi drivers" annoy women as they keep asking questions. When this is the case, women generally scold the drivers or fall into silence. Being sexually abused on the crowded public transportation, such as buses or metro lines as well as on the streets is a common experience of the women when they are out.

> *Sometimes I get very angry with them (Turkish men). I say like 'pervert!'. Most of the time it happens on the busses, in the metro and so on. Sometimes they touch you and they act like they didn't touch you. They pretend like that. Especially when it is crowded.*
>
> *Faye*, Filipina

> *It happened a lot on the bus. There are men with such bellies. In the summer, you get on the bus with many people, they try to get too close or touch your back. It is not clear whose hand is where, whose hand is holding what. There were a lot of disturbing things at that time. In fact, there were many days when I said 'What are you doing, can you pull your hand?' I have had such things in the summer. It doesn't happen to Turkish women, but it doesn't matter whether it is Turkish or foreign, men are disgusting. But young children do not do that. Mostly older, pot-bellied, bearded, hairy men do this.*
>
> *Mavie*, Turkmen

The male dominance of public space in Turkey, especially at nights appears to disturb women, therefore, they feel hesitant to stay out late. Women pay attention to the visibility of men in daily life as the majority of occupations dobe by men, as Irine says: "Here, mostly men are working in every kind of shop. Hairdressers are men, cooks are men, taxi and bus drivers are only men. I only saw a few women working in shops which also seemed odd to me." In this sense, fear of femicides is another common issue raised by the women too. In fact, the issue of femicides in Turkey is one of the sharpest differences for the

majority of the migrant women, when they compare their countries of origin with Turkey in terms of violence against women.

This section reveals that women's spatial mobility experiences seem to be shaped by not only their working patterns and migrant status but also by gender dynamics. When women are mobile in the city, they pay attention to gender codes that regulate what to wear, where to walk or to what time to stay outside is appropriate for a woman. It does not mean that women avoid being on the streets or participating to public life. For instance, some of them state that they enjoy the events in the public places like festivals or taking a ferry on the Bosporus. They are again mobile when they host their family members/friends from their countries of origin to show them the city. However, it is also clear that women have a *selective* mobility in the sense that they always protect themselves due to their double vulnerability of being women and ir/regular migrant.

5. Conclusion

This report focuses on the gendered dynamics of labour migration in the case of migrant domestic and care workers in Istanbul. Based on women's own narratives, this report interrogates several themes such as drivers of migration, living/working experiences and practices and migrant women' spatial mobility in the city. The impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on the employment of domestic and care workers are discussed. Women workers' coping strategies to deal with the (changing) working and living conditions are taken into consideration, as this report prioritized women' agency with the aim of making their voices visible. It also pays attention to their spatial mobility, the use of the city and access to public transportation. Based on original data and feminist literature review on care sector and migrant domestic/care workers in TR, this report contributes to the existing literature on the change of the welfare state and care regime(s), stratification of the care market in Turkey based on gender and nationality, as well as migrant women's agency from a feminist perspective. It also contributes to the area of South-South migration in which the number of studies that elaborate on the dynamics and migration patterns within the Southern countries has still been limited.

Drivers of migration have been primarily defined as economic in the literature on migration. Even though the aim for a financially better life for a migrant and her family in the country of the origin appears to be the dominant motivation for women to migrate, this has not always been the case when women's gendered experiences are considered. Women's narratives reveal that some experienced discrimination, being exposed to a heavy and unequal work burden based on gender division of labour and the lack of right to work as well as domestic violence. This provides a deeper understanding of women's migration that reflects a combination of economic and gender dynamics.

On the other hand, the inferior position of domestic and care work shaped by a rudimentary welfare regime and its status outside the scope of protective regulations (Toksöz 2020) seem to be verified in our case too. The majority work without a work permit leading them to being employed without basic social security. This is not the only issue since informal work prevents women from transferring their social security achievements for their retirement to their countries of origin. Within the framework of informality, lack of standards on the MDW's working and living conditions, the particularities of "home" as a workplace and privileged position of employers seem to reinforce the inequalities and vulnerabilities of women's work experience. In addition, no control over employers' practices appeared to continue during the pandemic.

Foley and Piper (2020) note that gender inequalities are likely to be made worse by Covid-19 and disproportionately impact migrant women. Likewise, Kabeer et al. (2020) argue that the pandemic has not only increased the care burden of women without making their labour valuable and visible. Whilst our research highlights that Covid-19 has deepened and intensified the ongoing vulnerabilities and discriminatory experiences of migrant domestic and care workers in Turkey whose coping strategies are rather limited and individually oriented, it also reveals the differential and unequal impact stratified by migration status and the relationship between employee and employer. This leads to worsening working practices and experiences in some cases with despising attitudes towards women considered as "transmitting the virus", increasing work burden [the employers spend more time at home and hygiene measurements] and prison-like house confinements. However, in other cases, women, especially live-in care-givers feel protected as their needs are met by the employers. During times of unemployment, some women rely on friends or employers financial support.

While women's subject positions are understood within the structural conditions (such as labour market, national regulations on visas, work/residence permits, gendered drivers of migration that effect their decisions to leave their countries of origin and so on), their strategies to cope with the working/living conditions are taken into consideration. In this sense, the report avoids seeing migrant women only as victims of the process of migration, it acknowledges women's agency and brings their voices to the fore. As stated before, women's work as domestic and care workers have been predominantly identified by informality of the sector. It is shared by the local workers too. However, when women's migrant identity adds another level to informality, these two seem to shape their coping strategies to deal with the working and living conditions before and after pandemic. In this sense, migrant women's coping strategies are rather limited and mainly individual-oriented rather than collective action. As stated by IMECE, it decreases the collective power of the workers in general. Women appear to turn to their own networks to solve their problems, such as changing jobs, socialization or access to local knowledge.

The analysis of women MDWs' spatial mobility, use of the city and their access to public transportation reveals that these are gendered and rather limited. The determinants behind women's spatial mobility and various patterns appear to be "fear of being a female foreigner, expensive costs of spending time outside, women's personal ties and relations, religious practices, working conditions as well as migrant status (regular/irregular). Regardless of any of these, all of the women pay attention to gender codes and are anxious about the femicides and violence against women as they feel threatened in the streets. In this sense, it is safe to argue that gender inequalities are spatialized and accordingly are experienced by the MDWs living and working in Istanbul.

To conclude, the limited provision by the state seeing care as the responsibility of the family and neoliberalization/privatization of the care sector go hand in hand with informality in Turkey. Lacking basic workers' rights and social security also shapes MDWs working experience yet being migrant overlaps with that. In other words, not covered by the Labour Law, like the local women workers, only deepens the inequalities that migrant women workers face as they are both migrant and women. In this sense, their coping strategies are not based on collective action but rather individual-oriented and limited. However, in spite of the precarious labour positions in the care sector, their desire and will to better their and their family members lives as well as to leave behind the patriarchal relations and ties become crystal clear when women's gains and achievements from their employment are considered.

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