



# **Gendered Dynamics of International Labour Migration:**

## **Skilled Female Migrants in Istanbul**



**UKRI GCRF Gender, Justice & Security Hub  
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**in collaboration with  
KADIR HAS UNIVERSITY**

**Gendered Dynamics of International Labour Migration:  
Skilled Female Migrants in Istanbul**

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**Abstract**

The first part of our research aims to investigate the gendered dynamics of labour migration of skilled (university graduate) more highly educated migrant women working and living in Istanbul, along with their experiences in urban space. This project further focuses on the drivers and processes of migration and urban life (home, work, socialising) experiences in both countries of origin and Istanbul of skilled women who have migrated to Turkey to live and work from countries in both the Global North (high economic welfare level) and Global South (middle and low economic welfare level) (Solarz, 2020, Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2020, Garcés-Mascareñas 2018) in the context of gender inequalities.

The significance of this project is that it contributes to analyses of the Global North-to-South and South-to-South skilled female labour migration from a gender perspective, which has emerged as a relatively new and burgeoning trend in migration studies in recent years. Among these trends, skilled female migration, particularly to countries in the Global South, has been largely ignored. Although this phenomenon has become widespread in Turkey as an upper-middle-income country, Turkey's potential in the context of its intake of skilled migration has yet to be included in the global literature. This project helps reveal the importance of skilled female employment in Istanbul by revealing that the migration flows from the Global South to Turkey do not only include international asylum seekers, refugees, less skilled male workers, and by emphasizing the socio-cultural accumulations and economic potentials of Istanbul as a global city. Another significant value of the project is to map migrant women's experiences in private and public spaces, as well as their mobility networks in the city, in order to reveal how gender inequalities are spatialised and how they reproduce urban space, which will contribute to urban studies focusing on Istanbul.

Based on empirical fieldwork and qualitative analysis, this socio-spatial research employs an interdisciplinary approach combining ethnographic methods, participant observation, in-depth interviews and urban studies approaches. Furthermore, it uses urban mapping of anonymous information concerning the use of public space with an analytical account of gender-based discrimination encountered in public spaces and sexual harassment experienced by migrant women, as well as their opportunities to access public facilities and places and mobility in Istanbul.

## **1. Introduction**

This project<sup>1</sup> investigates the gender dynamics<sup>2</sup> that shape migration and re-settlement processes, urban life and spatial experiences of skilled (OECD, 2002) migrant women working and living in Istanbul. It aims to reveal discriminatory practices that skilled female migrants face, contrary to the common wisdom that they are unproblematic and privileged in the context of gender. It also aims to contribute to the design of new urban and legal policies to improve their living conditions and seeks legislative solutions by cooperating with international and national non-governmental and labour organizations. Other objectives include:

- Developing a systematic understanding and conceptualisation of how economic and socio-cultural factors interact in gender-based international labour migration;
- Highlighting global South-to-South and North-to-South migration processes and migrant women's experiences, which constitutes a gap in the extant literature;
- Deepening the understanding of the Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) available in 180 countries, which suggests that women migrate due to economic factors as well as in response to discriminatory practices;
- Providing a deeper understanding of the transformation of gender-based practices in urban areas;
- Contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

### **1.1 Where and how are women positioned in the labour market in Turkey?**

According to the Turkish Statistical Institute (TUIK) Address Based Population Registration System (ADNKS) 2020 data, although 49.9 per cent of Turkey's population is composed of women, it has been observed that women's labour force and employment participation rate is less than half that of men. According to the results of the household labour force survey in 2019, the rate of employed people aged 15 and over is 45.7 per cent in Turkey, while this rate is 28.7 per cent for women and 63.1 per cent for men (TUIK, 2021). İlkkaracan (2012) attributes the fact that women's participation in employment was quite low from the 1950s to the 1980s due to the fact that men were accepted as the head of the family and the patriarchal structure was settled. Although the rate of women's participation in employment has been increased since the late 1980s, when the neo-liberal market discourse became widespread, women's participation in employment in non-agricultural areas has still

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<sup>1</sup> This research has been supported by the United Kingdom Research Innovation Global Challenges Research Fund within the Gender, Justice and Security Hub and carried out in Turkey, Iraq, Lebanon and Pakistan. Within the scope of the project, in-depth interviews were conducted and completed between July 2020 and June 2021 with migrant women working in various sectors (home and care, sex work, trade and professional sectors) in Istanbul. The effects of the Covid-19 outbreak in Turkey on migrant women are also included in the scope of the research. Eighteen of the 36 in-depth interviews (28 individuals + 8 (I)NGOs) involved skilled migrant women.

<sup>2</sup> Gender dynamics, which affect women's existential life practices, can be listed as such: patriarchal culture, conservative social patterns, domestic discrimination and violence, marriage-divorce and custody problems, unequal division of labour and workload in the household, unpaid care work, status in the workplace, pay-gap, discriminatory behaviours, sexual harassment, restricted spatial access and public life.

been quite low. While some highly educated women occupied important positions in employment, women's marital status and motherhood significantly restricted their participation in employment. Similarly, a recent study by KOÇ-KAM (2019), based on 2018 data, showed that the leading reason for women not being able to participate in employment is due to work at home. In the same study, when the distribution of women working outside the home in paid and registered jobs is analysed, it is seen that the service and sales group comes first for employing females. This is followed by jobs requiring qualifications, skilled agriculture, forestry and aquaculture, professional occupations and other occupational groups respectively. According to the Turkish Employment Agency's Labour Market Report (2019), education, human health and social work activities within professional occupational groups are predominantly filled by women.

According to İlkkaracan's (2016) labour market research in Istanbul, the two sectors in which women and men have an almost equal presence are the manufacturing industry and wholesale and retail trade. Other sectors in which women are predominantly present are accommodation and catering services; finance and insurance, administrative and support services; professional, scientific and technical services; human health and social services and education.

However, the difference in status and the barrier to promotion, which is only one of the gender inequalities experienced by women in the working environment in Turkey, emerge when the male-female composition of the individuals working in managerial positions is examined: 14.7 per cent of managers are women and 85.3 per cent are men (KOÇ-KAM, 2019). Another inequality experienced by women in employment markets is the gender wage gap. Research (2020) conducted in partnership with ILO and TURKSTAT shows that in 2018, the gender pay gap in Turkey was 15.6 per cent. It has also been determined that this difference increases as women get older or the level of education decreases, and it is higher in those working in informal settings. Similarly, Tekgüç, Eryar, and Cindoğlu (2017) state that women with low education are exposed to a higher wage gap than those with higher education, and they also revealed that women with higher education in the public sector experience higher wage gap inequality, although they are more qualified than men.

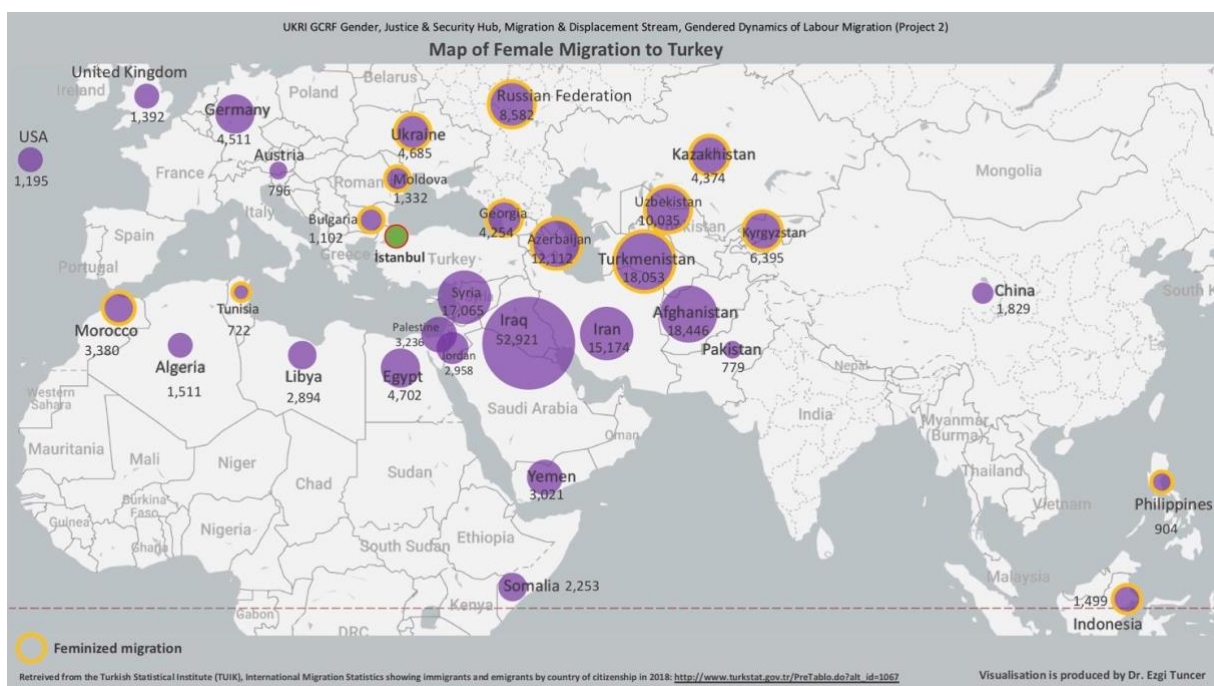
## **1.2 Who are the migrants settling in Turkey and which sectors have they been involved in?**

Turkey has been a country of emigration from the early 1960s to the 1970s and sent a large number of workers to Western and Central European countries, especially West Germany (Kirişçi 2003). However, in the last few decades, Turkey has become more of a transit route to Europe for irregular migrants from South and Southeast Asian countries. Particularly from 2010 to 2013, political upheavals in Arab countries and the ongoing civil war in Syria led to an increase in the number of irregular migrants and asylum seekers from Middle East and North African countries (İçduygu & Aksel 2012, 20; İçduygu 2013, 5). Since the early 1990s, Turkey has also become a destination country for irregular labour migrants, especially from the former Soviet Union and Eastern European countries. With this in mind, and as İçduygu and Aksel (2012, 25) stated, it can be said that there are two types of irregular migration in Turkey. The first is transit migration, especially from Middle Eastern countries such as Iraq, Iran and Syria, and South Asian countries such as Afghanistan and Pakistan, and the second is shuttle feminized labour migration, mostly from former Soviet Union countries, as well as from Moldova and Bulgaria to Turkey. Circular migrants mostly work in the luggage trade, shopping, tourism, entertainment, home-care, agriculture, and ready-to-wear sectors.

On the other hand, there is a regular migrant population in Turkey who enter Turkey through legal procedures and have residence and/or work permits. These migrants from different backgrounds can be classified as Turkish-European citizens and their children (Euro-Turks), retirees, highly-skilled workers and students. In addition to these, there are also lifestyle migrations, family-marriage and student migrations (İçduygu & Aksel 2012, 33; Kaya 2015, 16-21).

Although Turkey's international migration policy is more focused on its accession to the European Union (EU), it can be said that a liberal visa regime has been implemented; it facilitates the employment of qualified and highly skilled international migrants in Turkey by developing bilateral agreements that are not EU-oriented (Bertan-Tokuzlu 2007; Kaya 2017; Sönmez Efe 2017; Kaya 2019). Therefore, the International Labour Law has facilitated work permit applications (Rittersberger-Tiliç 2015). With the “Turquoise Card for Qualified Foreigners”, candidates who have academically accepted studies at international level, stand out in a scientific, industrial, and technological field of national strategic importance or have made or are expected to make significant contributions to the country's economy can now apply on their own (Kaya 2017). EU citizens are also granted certain privileges in the application process. In the field of science and education, it is seen that international scientists and teachers mostly work in universities and language schools in big cities (Kaya 2017). Second-generation Turkish migrants, who are mostly highly skilled, generally work in low-qualified positions in Istanbul and other major cities "to seek alternative lifestyles, to work or study in international companies, tourism sector, IT sector" (Kaya 2017).

According to the current statistical information obtained from the General Directorate of Migration Management, 4.8 million foreign nationals live in Turkey and 1,179,119 of them have a residence permit. Istanbul, on the other hand, is the city with the highest foreign population (610,328) among Turkish cities, and the city that receives the highest rate of international migration. This can be explained by the transformation of Istanbul into a global city (Sassen, 1991) towards the end of the 1980s, when transnational flows intensified (Keyder, 2006). Today, Istanbul is a city with global opportunities, which is mentioned in the Globalization and World Cities (GaWC) global cities list, together with cities such as Moscow, Vienna, Seoul and Lisbon, and where highly skilled transnational workers prefer to live. Therefore, our research focuses on the urban space and life of Istanbul.



Visual 1. Map of migrations to Turkey. Based on 2018 international migration statistics provided by the Turkish Statistical Institute (TUIK), which includes the distribution of residence permits in Turkey by nationality and population. The numbers matching the countries show the numbers of women migrating to Turkey. Countries that predominantly women migrate to are specifically mentioned within the scope of "feminized migration" (Produced by Visual Ezgi Tuncer).

According to the Foreign Work Permit Statistics (2020) of the Ministry of Labour and Social Security, General Directorate of International Labour Force, the total number of migrants working in Turkey is 123,574 and 41,853 of them are women. While the number of migrant women and men working in

Turkey was almost equal in 2011, the number of migrant women working until 2016 was much higher than the number of migrant men working in Turkey. However, there has been a steady decline in the number of migrant women working since 2016.

The vast majority (36,852) of the migrants working in Turkey are high school graduates and are considered skilled workers. The next largest group is university graduates who are considered highly-educated (23,721). The largest migrant groups working in Turkey are, respectively, Syrians, Turkmen, Georgians, Uzbeks, Iranians, Kyrgyz, Russians, Azerbaijanis and Ukrainians. Working migrant groups, where the number of women is significantly higher than that of men, emigrated from Indonesia, Philippines, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Ukraine. Domestic services, the manufacture of clothing and textile products are the leading sectors in which migrants predominantly work, followed by sectors such as accommodation, education, human health services, wholesale and retail trade, food and beverage service activities.

## **2. An Overview of Gender-Based Labour Migration: A Critical Reading of International and National Literature**

The prominence of women in international labour migration has brought the concept of "feminization of migration" to the literature. Bastia and Piper say that in the literature, female immigrants were once predominantly described as "associational migrants" or "trailing wives" following their spouse or partner (Piper and Roces 2003, 10, Bastia and Piper 2019, 16). In these narratives, women appear largely as "singular wives in male-dominated expatriate communities" (Kofman, 2006, 287). Today, however, women are recognized as "primary migrants who move on their own to new countries in search of work and new opportunities" (Piper and Roces 2003, 10, cited in Bastia and Piper 2019, 16). According to Kofman (2019), although the feminization of migration is pronounced as a dominant and current trend, she says that migrations began to become feminized in Europe and settler societies in the early 20th century. She states that this figure has risen globally from 46.7 per cent in 1960 to 49.6 per cent in 2005 and warns us that feminization is not linear but rather complex and dynamic, given the critical differences between regions.

The phenomenon of feminization of migration refers not only to women's independent routes, but also to a gender-based understanding of the entire migration process and the reproduction of the gender-based division of labour at every step during and after migration. A gender perspective and awareness in migration studies has been possible after discussions on whether the existing theories and concepts in the literature are sufficient to understand the new context that shapes global migration. In this context, the lack of a gender perspective in the analysis of migration impulses, practices and experiences in the country of origin has been questioned by feminist literature (Lutz, 2002, Kofman, 2015, Dedeoğlu, 2020, Akis, 2012, Biehl & Daniş, 2020).

It is possible to say that among the studies that centre gender in the international labour migration literature, the interest is concentrated on certain basic sectors. The first of these is the care sector, which is organized at a global level, appears as one of the most fundamental areas for migrant women's labour studies both in the international literature (Hochschild, 2000) and in the Turkish literature. In particular, the Turkish literature focuses on the loss of rights and harsh working conditions of migrant women working in the care sector (Akalın, 2007, Daniş, 2007, Toksöz and Ünlütürk Ulutaş, 2012). In addition, migrant women's labour in sectors such as textiles, tourism, agriculture, and the agency of migrant women, their relations with their families, their social networks in the countries they settled and their relations with the host communities were investigated (Parrenas 2001, Morokvasic, 2004, Pearson and Sweetman 2019, Kofman, 2019).

Within this general framework, we see that the studies on the labour migration of highly skilled women are quite limited in both the international literature and the Turkish literature. There are different

reasons behind the invisibility of women in skilled labour migration. The most basic of these is the duality of “economic man and socio-cultural woman” established between male and female migrants and its continuous reproduction. This dichotomy attributes higher qualifications to men and assumes that women are less skilled. For example, the work and career experiences of skilled migrant “white, corporate employee” men have been widely covered in international literature (Beaverstock 1996 in Kofman 2005, 149). Similarly, Kofman (2009) argues that the neglect of skilled women's migration in the global literature is due to the fact that female migrant workers are mostly perceived as unskilled. However, women constitute a significant part of the skilled migration flows, which necessitates a reconsideration of the above-mentioned dichotomy, namely the distinction between skilled male and unskilled female migration. This reminds us once again of the necessity for a gender perspective when trying to understand the migration of skilled women. What shapes skilled women's migration? In what ways can skilled migrant women be positioned outside of this duality?

Another reason why skilled women's migration is not covered enough in the literature is the controversial status of the definition of “skilled” attributed to migrants. This ambiguity requires reintroducing the gendered division of labour: men who hold professional roles in technology and/or science are defined as highly skilled, while women are only defined by teaching or caring. These areas, on the other hand, appear as ‘immanent’ to women's femininity. This is exactly why it is paired with women as “women's work” and seen as semi-skilled rather than skilled jobs (Kofman, 2006). On the other hand, the qualifications of migrant women should not be considered as a homogeneous. Qualification is defined and scored differently especially within the framework of migration policies and official processes in the countries of residence. In addition, qualifications are experienced as a dynamic process for women, especially within the framework of the gender-based division of labour and the inequalities it brings. The fact that qualified men are the primary candidate for immigrants in applications, which is also a reason for the invisibility mentioned above, and that women, although equally qualified, are part of the migration processes through family reunification, puts them in the process of deskilling (Kofman 2005). However, this is not a permanent and fixed process, for women, de-skilling can be followed by reskilling processes. This research also aims to make the differentiated labour processes of skilled migrant women visible by proposing to deal with the processes of deskilling in a dynamic way.

In the global literature, the gender-related dynamics of skilled women's migration and their visibility, as well as the migration patterns in which it occurs, gain importance. In this context, studies of skilled migrant women's labour are mostly based on migration patterns from the Global South to the Global North. Reverse migration, in other words, from Global North to Global South and/or from Global South to Global South, is emerging as a relatively new phenomenon (Bastia and Piper 2019). This phenomenon has brought about a critical rethinking of the concept of ‘centre’ in the context of decolonization (Fiddian-Qasimiyeh 2020). The dynamics behind the Global North-South and Global South-South migration seem to play a direct role in shaping the skilled labour migration that takes place in these paths. While migration from the Global South to the Global North follows a course from underdeveloped countries to developed countries, Global North-South migration has been discussed recently. Faced with the risk of devaluation of its economic, social and cultural capital within the precarious labour market, the middle class (Vaughan Whitehead, 2016) has taken action in the opposite direction. Part-time employment, falling wages, short-term or temporary contracts have also led to the futurelessness of the middle classes in the broadest sense (Ranci et al. 2021).

In this context, the “precarariat” conceptualized by Standing (2011), the restricted employee rights that have become dominant in the Developed Global Northern countries seem to include flexible labour force working with short-term and temporary contracts (Casas-Cortes 2014 in Şenses, 2020). In other words, the precarization process they experienced in their own countries can be counted among the reasons for these groups to migrate.

Compared to other migrant groups, skilled migrants have more mobility opportunities due to their social and cultural capital. But at the same time, family and social relations, lifestyle or economic opportunities that are thought to be obtained in the country of immigration also shape skilled labour migration. In this context, it does not seem possible to say that the academic and intellectual potential of Turkey, as one of the countries having both Global North-South and Global South-South migration flows, has been adequately evaluated in terms of skilled labour migration and its analysis based on gender. Our research fills the gap by contributing its original findings of Turkey-Istanbul to international literature.

## **2.1 Studies on Skilled Female Migrants in Turkey**

It can be said that the migration literature in Turkey mainly focuses on the participation of migrant women in dangerous, low-paid and status jobs that require less skill (Toksöz and Ünlütürk Ulutaş, 2012). Due to the bias that assumes that skilled female migrants experience migration and its subsequent processes without problems, studies on the reasons and processes of migration of skilled migrant women, and their work and living conditions in Turkey are relatively rare in the local literature. This research project, however, focused not only on their work experiences but also on their home and living conditions, local relations, and urban space experiences. Therefore, we anticipate that this research will make an important contribution to labour migration studies in Turkey-Istanbul.

Among the existing studies, Pusch (2013), for example, examined the migration motivations, labour market integration, socio-cultural networks and transnational status of skilled German citizens of Turkish and German origin in Istanbul. Karcı Korfaı and Acar (2018), in a comparative study conducted in Edirne and Istanbul, focused on migration from Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) to Turkey and provided important clues about the different positions of skilled migrant groups in Edirne in the labour market. They state that the most visible categories of Central and Eastern European migrants in Edirne are IT workers, entrepreneurs and students who are well integrated into the city due to their dual citizenship and permanent stay. Both studies contribute to the literature on labour migration to Turkey by providing examples of the Global North-South migration route. However, these studies focus on the experiences of a certain group of migrants in their business environment and differ from the focus of our research in terms of a gender perspective and lack of spatial context.

In the current literature, it has been revealed that the social and cultural capitals of skilled migrants are rendered invisible after migration, and as a result, highly skilled migrant women have become unskilled. For example, Sert (2016), based on interviews with migrants with university degrees in Istanbul, draws attention to the nature of the deskilling of migrants working formally or informally with lower wages, intertwined with insecurity in the labour market. Özbey (2017), on the other hand, compares Georgian migrant women with local women's labour based on their position in the labour market in Hopa. The research reveals that well-educated and white-collar professional Georgian migrant women migrated to the Black Sea Region to work as seasonal workers in agricultural production, sales people in local shops, dishwashers in restaurants, cleaners in hotels/houses, as well as daily/maintenance workers or sex workers. Gökmen (2018) also drew attention to a similar phenomenon in the tourism sector. He states that highly skilled Eastern European women work as masseuses, entertainers, waiters, tour operators and guides in Antalya, Marmaris, Fethiye and Bodrum.

In recent years, there has been a particular focus on Syrian women entering the labour market through low-skilled jobs. Ünlütürk-Ulutaş and Akbaş (2020), however, draw attention to the fact that the qualifications, educational level and cultural capital of women do not have a place in academic discussions. They list the reasons why this skilled workforce is not included in skilled local labour force as follows: it takes too long to obtain a work permit; the lack of linguistic skills and cultural qualifications and the complexity of the diploma equivalence processes. For these reasons, Syrian



women, who are computer engineers, physics teachers, and medical students, are starting to work in unskilled jobs, unregistered and with low wages. This phenomenon, conceptualized as the "devaluation of migrants" (Schmidtke, 2013), is also an example of "brain waste" (Reitz, 2013 cited in Ünlütürk-Ulutaş & Akbaş, 2020).

Cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1999, 2007), which is defined by features such as linguistic skills, cultural awareness, knowledge, aesthetic preferences, and knowledge of educational life, stands at a key point in terms of understanding the processes of de-skilling of skilled migrants. For example, skilled Iranians who came to Turkey with the desire for a better life have been able to develop strategies for survival during and after migration, due to the forms of economic, symbolic, cultural and social capital they have (Kalaylıoğlu Akis, 2016). Such a conceptual framework is also suitable for understanding the processes of precariatization mentioned above, the forms of capital devalued by the middle classes in their home countries.

Our project reveals the mechanisms by which skilled migrant women are included in the labour market, what kind of skills they can maintain, and what kinds of processes of deskilling and/or reskilling they go through. In other words, our research focuses on the variable, transitive nature of labour migration. However, it is also aimed to make visible the experiences of migrant women who continue their professional careers in the local labour market. In this way, it is thought that the project will contribute to the recognition of the existence of the developing skilled female labour migration in Turkey-Istanbul. Most of the existing studies however, have focused on the experiences of skilled women who either come from the countries of the global north or the global south. In this project, a comparative reading is made by covering two different migration routes.

### **3. Research Questions**

- In the context of Global North-to-South and Global South-to-South skilled labour migration, why do women decide to leave their home countries? How do the driving forces differ between the two different migration waves? How effective are gender-based inequalities, oppression and violence, as well as precarization, lifestyle change, marriage, family ties in the formation of labour migration flows?
- How do gender inequalities affect the living conditions of skilled migrant women working and living in Istanbul in their work and home environments? How do the life experiences of women coming from different migration routes differ according to the use of their cultural capital? How does the transitive formation of labour migration, which includes processes such as maintaining skills, deskilling and reskilling, occur in the example of Istanbul?
- How do gender inequalities affect skilled migrant women's use of public space, their urban mobility, and their access to public amenities? How are gender inequalities spatialized? How do the urban space experiences of women coming from two different migration routes resemble and differ? How can migrant women's right to the city be read in the context of gendered dynamics?

### **4. Methodology**

Based on empirical fieldwork and qualitative analysis, this research has an interdisciplinary methodology using ethnographic (sociological) and urban studies (spatial) research methods. This qualitative research draws upon the ethnographic method using tools such as participant observation and in-depth interviews, but it also includes urban analysis and mapping work, which examines public space uses, access and mobility opportunities in the city.

Urban theory requires that spatial form and social processes in the city be read together. In terms of disciplines, this means combining two important research and educational traditions. Therefore,

another methodological approach in this project can be called “building a bridge between those who have the sociological imagination and those who are endowed with the geographical imagination” (Harvey, 2003). The emphasis that space cannot be separated from society, and that society cannot be separated from space, and that these two form a spiral structure, an intertwined network, has been revealed in the comprehensive studies of Henri Lefebvre (1974, 1991). Space is both the production of society and a mechanism that constantly transforms it.

In the national literature, however, there are few studies in the field of social sciences that focus on the city from a gender perspective, and studies that relate to urban theory and include spatial reproductions. Some existing studies were concerned with the problems of visibility and mobility in public space, which developed inversely with the rise of insecurity and fear of sexual harassment-violence felt by women in public and urban spaces. For example, Tuncer (2014), in his research focusing on women's daily experiences of public spaces in Ankara between the years 1950-1980, revealed that women can use the city with more limited opportunities and limited spaces than men, and that cities are planned and managed with masculine and sexist perspectives. Therefore, she argued that women's participation in public life is secondary compared to men. Oğuz (2015) conducted a study on the inadequacy and increase of urban mobility and opportunities for women from Turkey who have immigrated from Berlin and women who have immigrated from various cities of Anatolia to Istanbul Kartal. Lordoğlu (2016), on the other hand, focused on the security concerns experienced by single Turkish women living in three different neighbourhoods (Kadıköy, Bağcılar, Sarıyer) with different class and cultural characteristics in the city and the coping strategies of women in their daily lives. In these studies, it was found that Turkish women experience insecurity and fear in urban spaces due to verbal and physical abuse, violence, patriarchal pressure and control, and thus they are restricted in terms of access to public facilities, use of space, mobility potential and public visibility. Since urban management policies dominated by masculine understanding are not egalitarian, democratic and inclusive, the common point reached in most of the studies is the need to defend the right to the city, which should be considered together with gender equality.

This project, on the other hand, re-discusses the concept of the right to the city in the context of gender equality by investigating the use of public spaces, their mobility potential and the access to public facilities of highly skilled migrant women. Henri Lefebvre (1968/1996) was critical of the gentrification and conversion of historical centres into consumption centres, which collapsed under the pressure of capitalist industrialization. The expulsion of marginalized groups and the working class from urban centres deprived them of some spatial and vital rights. He argued that the city belongs to everyone. According to Lefebvre, the right to the city is a renewed, equal right to urban life for all inhabitants of the city. Kofman (2018), however, invites feminist theorists to redefine the concept in a more inclusive and gendered field through the critique of the gender perspective that Lefebvre left open in his conceptualization of the right to the city. Lefebvre did not mention the problems of spatialization, which is the production of masculine thought, while suggesting that the dominant policies constituting urban space should be reviewed. The fact that cities provide equal use, access and right of movement to everyone should be reconsidered, especially in the public life of women, which is restricted by fear of security and patriarchal pressures. Therefore, our research attempts to discuss and expand the concept of the right to the city once again through the experiences of skilled transnational migrant women in public spaces.

However, mapping and spatial-visual representation narratives have not been produced in most of the urban research mentioned above, nor conducted from a gender perspective. In this project, an online and interactive mapping study was carried out. In other words, spatial analysis, visualization and mapping studies (Lucas, 2016) that oral and written narratives lack were included in the scope of the research. In the context of public space use, the areas of use and mobility of skilled migrant women in the city, as well as their sexual harassment experiences, were obtained, analysed and presented through an online map study, anonymously and within the framework of ethical rules.

Please see:

<https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/edit?hl=en&mid=1jqZrOpST1iQU2sVZPgWH1L7gZ2lqcZdn&ll=41.04575185361902%2C28.93735235877744&z=12>

A comprehensive review of the literature covering international and national migration and gender studies, migration statistics of residence permit holders and the legal framework, and in particular The Social Institutions and Gender Index-SIGI provided the preparation of a semi-structured interview schedule based on four themes. SIGI profiles were first developed by the OECD in 2009, and the most recent edition was published in 2019. It uses global gender data to measure and analyse different forms and degrees of gender discrimination. While discussing the complexity of migration drivers, we used the infrastructure of SIGI profiles when designing our interview questions, especially in the second theme, to gain a deeper understanding of gender-based migration. Inequalities such as discriminatory practices, forced marriages, gender-based violence, and stigma due to marital failure push some women to leave their countries in addition to economic factors.

Themes of interviews:

- **Process of migration:** Reasons and processes of leaving their home countries, reasons for choosing Turkey/Istanbul and settling in Istanbul, conditions of entry to Turkey, first impressions.
- **Drivers of migration and experiences of gender inequality in the country of origin:** Marriage, maternity experiences, divorce and custody issues, domestic division of labour, domestic violence, work experiences, behavioural discrimination in the workplace, pay and status gap, maternity leave, women's positions and problems in legal, financial, civil, familial and cultural matters, their use of public space and leisure time activities and habits in their countries.
- **Individual and biographical experiences of home and work in Istanbul:** Work experiences, choices, employment channels, working conditions, rights and permissions, discriminatory attitudes at work, choices of neighbourhood, experiences in their home environment, relations with neighbours and local networks, relations with the local diaspora/expats, settlement processes and comments.
- **Uses of public spaces and opportunities for mobility:** leisure activities, social networks, use of public spaces in Istanbul, activities, means of transport they use, problems experienced in public space, cases of physical and verbal sexual harassment, behavioural discrimination, dress codes, mobility area, unsafe places in Istanbul, street use at night.

The impact of the Covid-19 outbreak in Turkey on migrant women is also included in the research.

In Istanbul, we started conducting in-depth interviews in July 2020 and accessed 28 migrant women working in a variety of sectors such as domestic and care sectors, sex, textile and trade in addition to professional sectors until June 2021. In this paper, we focus on the analysis of 14 interviews with skilled women working in professional sectors and four interviews with skilled women who experienced deskilling and have been working in the domestic and care sector.

The majority of our participants are upper-middle income academics, teachers, coordinators, editors, translators and NGO workers, aged between 22-42 years, who mostly migrated from North America, Europe and the Middle-East and have stayed in Istanbul between 2 and 15 years. Four of our interviewees are low-middle income domestic and care workers aged between 42-63, who migrated from the former Soviet Union and have stayed in Istanbul between 4-10 years. While the majority of

them have full-time positions with work permits providing them social security and access to healthcare, others with part-time, daily or temporary positions only have short-term residence permits. In addition, a few of them have dual citizenship. Although most of the interviewees were accessed through researchers' academic and social network in addition to snowball sampling, a few interviewees have hesitated to be interviewed due to their legal status and preferred to use pseudonymous names. We were therefore first introduced and had short conversations before our interviews. Trust has been the key to accessing the women. After introducing the purposes and scope of this research, interviewees gave their verbal consent to participate. Five of 18 interviews were conducted face to face while Covid-19 restrictions in Istanbul allowed us to meet in outdoor public spaces. Others were conducted via online communication channels which has eased the difficult process of meeting in Istanbul as a large, dense global city. Since all participants have been used to using technological tools, meeting online has become more efficient in terms of having a quiet, safe and intimate environment despite the artificial atmosphere of virtual meetings.

No	Age	Nationality	Level of education	Previous Occupation	Current Occupation	Marital Status	Stay TR	Legal Status
03	29	US	BA in Communication	Media / TV	Real Estate Agent	Single	5 y	WP
13	24	US	3 years of college in Social Sciences	Gym Coach, Receptionist	English Teacher	Single	4 y	WP
15	29	US	BA in Theatre	Cocktail Waitress, Barista, Nanny	Actress & Coordinator & Dubbing Artist	Married TR	6 y	Dual Citizen
16	40	US	BA in Communication	Supermarket Manager	Chief Copy-Editor	Married TR	15 y	Dual Citizen
09	40	UK	MA in Translation Studies	Interpreter, Translator & Waitress	Academic	Single	13 y	WP
04	42	FRA	PHD in Architecture	Researcher & Consultant	French Language Teacher	Separated TR	3 y	Family Visa
26	33	FRA & CANADA	PHD in Anthropology	TA & Researcher	Academic	Married FR	5 y	RP
14	38	LB & UK	Post-Doc in Sociology	INGO Program Manager	Academic	Married TR	5 y	WP
17	32	LB & UK	Post-Doc in Sociology	INGO Worker	Academic	Partnership	6 y	WP
12	37	ARMENIA	MA in Sociology	INGO Worker	Academic	Single	2 y	RP
28	40	SYRIA	BA in Eng. Lit.	Teacher, Bank Employee	Teacher, Radio Host	Single	6 y	TR Citizen
05	40	SYRIA	BA in Eng. Lit.	English Teacher	Translator	Single	5 y	RP
06	22	IRAN	3 years of college in Journalism	Web Designer	Undergrad Student & NGO Worker	Single	3 y	Student Visa
27	30	IRAN	MA in Computer Engineering	Web Programmer	Web Programmer	Married IR	5 y	RP
1	42	GEORGIAN	BA in Finance	Media / TV	Daily Cleaner	Single	10 y	RP

21	63	GEORGIAN	BA in Teaching	Teacher	Live-in Child Care-giver	Widowed	9 y	RP
22	49	TURKMEN	BA in Russian Lit.	Editor	Live-in Caregiver	Separated	7 y	RP
25	48	UZBEK	BA in Teaching	Teacher	Live-in Child Care-giver	Married UZ	4 y	RP

## 5. Gendered Dynamics of Labour Migration of Skilled Women in Istanbul, Turkey: Qualitative Analysis of Interviews and Original Findings

General features of our interviewees show quite an interesting variety which can be discussed roughly in four subgroups having intersections and transitions:

- US citizens who had their BA degrees at the US universities and mostly worked in various precarious jobs in the US, then became well-paid English teachers, coordinators, editors in Istanbul.
- Those who followed academic paths, completed their masters and/or PhD degrees in North America, the UK and other European countries while working as researchers, teaching assistants, consultants, translators, (I)NGO workers, then have been mostly hired by universities with full-time academic positions in Istanbul.
- Others had their BA degrees in the Middle East, in their home countries, and practiced their professions in proper jobs, then had to continue their professions in Istanbul.
- Those who had their BA degrees in the FSU countries and worked as teachers, journalists, coordinators in TV Channels, then became domestic workers in Istanbul.

Following this stratified composition within our interviewees, we'll analyse interviews regarding drivers and the process of migration, experiences of gender discrimination in their home countries, experiences in Turkey, public access and spatial mobility in Istanbul and also the impact of the Covid-19 outbreak in Turkey.

### 5.1 Drivers and the Process of Migration

Most migrant women from the US had difficulties in pursuing their career in the early years of graduation, and therefore had multiple, low-paid precarious jobs such as being a nanny, waitress, gym coach, receptionist, barista, supermarket manager, which were unrelated to their education/professions and required overwork. Precarity is one of the main reasons, however, it is not the only driver that triggered these women to leave their home country. Although one of these women had a well-paid job in the media sector and a high-quality of life in Los Angeles, she pointed out other significant reasons to migrate.

*"I've always felt like there has to be more to life than just money and I felt like there is more of wanting to connect with people, wanting to experience more of a fulfilled lifestyle rather than a materialistic life... My dad was a great person in his own foundation. But I think somewhere along the line it became too much for him, he needed to rely on other substances to provide stability. Unfortunately, it ended in a very drastic way. After his death, my family was torn apart. Then money got involved, so the family started fighting over money. For me, I kind of got this idea that there is more to life than just money... I was just seeking another foreign country because I almost admired how people were so culturally close, family bonds or family is first and its unity." (Personal Communication, October 2020).*

Some of them had weak family bonds or lost one of their parents due to alcohol or drug addiction, which also awoke them to seek a life-style change. In addition, as independent individuals, these women had the power and cultural capital to move alone. Having American passports and

undergraduate degrees from the States also gave them a privileged mobility. Some of them named themselves travellers since they had already been in many parts of the world before. For most of them being English native-speakers has been an advantage to become English language teachers in most of the non-English speaking countries after getting a teaching certificate.

*"We ran on welfare when I was a baby. When I was 3, we went to Asia, then South Asia, South Arabia, Iraqi- Kurdistan, China and Cambodia, all for economic reasons. My dad actually became a teacher. The money you make as a teacher abroad is a lot and the cost of living in another country is low. Then my parents got divorced after 20 years of marriage while I was 16 and it's kind of made everything very strange. I was like 'I don't want to go to school'. So, I started working in Cambodia then my father sent me back to America to live with his sister. I did 3 years of college in 2 years then I think I just burnt out. My best friend and I did backpacking in Greece, Italy, and Spain. Then I did my certification program to teach English." (Personal Communication, September 2020).*

Some tried European countries at the beginning, however, wages and expenses did not always match and they experienced difficulties to survive. Therefore, they searched teaching positions in a non-European zone and found many opportunities in Turkey, which was also attractive for being a part of both Europe (opportunities) and the Middle East (experience). Although they had no relatives and friends in Istanbul, after getting accepted for teaching positions, they settled down with the help of school administrations and acquaintances.

Since one of them has a Turkish mother living in Florida, she migrated to Turkey to search for her roots. She had a part of her family in Istanbul so she got her cousin's help to start a life at the beginning.

*"A part of me had always wanted to live in Turkey at some point in my life. I was 24 years old and I had no boyfriend, I had no real job. I said if it is not now, then when!" (Personal Communication, October 2020).*

One of them followed her Turkish partner, not to get married but to take a chance to change her life since she was stuck with her stable job and life. Although she was invited by her boyfriend and met his family, she chose to stand on her own two feet, got a job and lived alone in the initial years.

*"He asked me to move to Turkey. He asked at least to come over and I said 'Okay'. What do I have to lose? Because really there wasn't much to do. There weren't many job opportunities. I have studied for four years. I was just going to go anyway and why not now." (Personal Communication, October 2020)*

Skilled women from both the North and the South, who followed academic paths and had their masters and/or PhD degrees in the UK, the US, Canada, France and other European countries, and therefore were used to travelling a lot, also had similar and combined reasons to leave their home countries or the last country they lived in. These are the difficulties for finding permanent positions at universities or institutions, overloaded work in corporate-universities, competitive, negative academic environments, lack of work/life balance, having multiple jobs to live, worsening economic and political conditions in their home countries in addition to the desire for a life-style change, as well as following their Turkish partners.

Meanwhile Turkey has been a beneficial choice in terms of getting scholarships, finding full/part-time teaching and/or postdoctoral positions, doing fieldwork and research on hot topics, pursuing their professions and attaining a higher standard of living than they might be able to in their countries of origin. A British interpreter and translator who was living sort of an extension of a student life and working in multiple jobs, won a scholarship from the European Parliament and chose Turkey. After that she preferred to work in Istanbul since foreigners are paid more in schools and universities compared to natives and are valued. A French architect, who could not find a job after getting her PhD in Paris, preferred to follow her Turkish husband, who wanted their daughter to get closer with his

family and the Turkish culture, which later provided her a better quality of life. Similarly, a Lebanese academic, who had to leave her country due to the Lebanese civil war, and had her education partly in Lebanon but mostly in the UK and France, preferred to move to Turkey with her Turkish partner to concentrate on writing her PhD dissertation, although she had a well-paid position in an international NGO in Lebanon. After she got her PhD degree, she found a well-paid post-doc position in one of the pioneer universities in Istanbul, which unexpectedly allowed her to maintain her profession in Turkey. An Armenian academic, who did an Erasmus master's programme in three different European countries, returned to Armenia Overworked at an NGO, she was also not pleased since she could not maintain her profession and find a permanent, well-paid work.

*"So, these things kind of drained me and I wanted a big change. Suddenly, there was this announcement of the Hrant Dink Foundation. They were doing this Turkey-Armenia Young Fellows Exchange Program... I thought why not. Let me apply to this and go somewhere that no one will find me. I wanted the big break of everything that I used to do and kind of a very fresh restart." (Personal Communication, September 2020)*

Other academics said that they mostly preferred to work in academia in Turkey since it still has a positive, enthusiastic environment compared to the ones in the UK and North America which are extremely competitive and have a lack of work/life balance. A Lebanese and British academic added also her satisfaction with the prestige, wage and lifestyle that she had in Turkey:

*"Although I had that option to go back to Lebanon or to the UK, I actually liked being here (Istanbul), I liked the lifestyle here. So, it was more of a choice. Yes, in the UK there are opportunities but it was just not a positive academic environment. People seemed overworked which doesn't justify the amount of money you earn, also the prestige that you might have. It also continues to be a very expensive country. The cost of life is extremely high. It is not worth living... I would say basically by summer of 2013, when Gezi was ongoing, which kind of made my mind like I wanted to live here." (Personal Communication, September 2020)*

A Canadian academic, who did her masters in the US, and taught in California while she was doing her PhD in Canada, speaks of her hope with academia in Turkey:

*"Since we have good training, we can help build good universities in Turkey. Of course, there are good universities but there are also things that can be built in a different way, not like established universities in the US where you don't necessarily have that enthusiasm. Not to say that Turkish people cannot do it but there is always value in international, globalizing places or potentially rings of scholars who are working in other regions of the world. I mean for us our research is also an ethical commitment." (Personal Communication, April 2021)*

Most of these interviewees had some problems with their families, after they decided to move to Turkey. Since Turkey is known as a predominantly Muslim populated country, particularly American and French families were concerned about the religiously conservative environment in Turkey. In addition, unstable political conditions in Turkey, particularly the coup in 2016 and terrorist attacks in 2015 and 2016, made families concerned about their daughters' decision. Only some Lebanese and Armenian parents were not concerned about Turkey.

*"I was one month in and the coup happened in 2016. Then the attacks at the Atatürk Airport happened. Then it was kind of like 'Oh what is going on? Should I go home now?' Then recently there have been threats about kidnapping Americans. Having a message is one thing but having a message in the consulate and then the embassy shutting down is another thing. It is a bit frightening. But still I felt at home and secure." (Personal Communication, October 2020)*

The drivers and the process of migration for skilled women from Syria are completely different from the others. The war in Syria left women unemployed who had well-paid jobs related to their

professions such as education, finance and web design. Although they had a high quality of life, starting from 2011 conflicts, political pressure and destruction of cities left no choice but to leave the country. For the ones who had no possibility to go to Europe or North America, Turkey had been the most suitable country to enter since in the early years of the war, Turkey applied an open border policy for displaced Syrians.

*"Actually, I used to have a normal life in my hometown. After the war started, I lost my job, I lost my money and my individual life. The situation there wasn't safe and secure at all. There was no water, no internet, no electricity but bombs. My dad encouraged me to go to Turkey because I didn't have any other options. After the war, almost all the Arab countries issued a visa for Syrian people. So, first from Aleppo, I had to go to Damascus to take a flight to Lebanon. Then I took a flight from Beirut to Adana. Then I went to Gaziantep by bus to join my siblings." (Personal Communication, November 2020)*

On the other hand, for skilled women from the FSU countries, particularly from Georgia, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, the most significant reason to migrate is the economic collapse in their home countries after the fall of the Communist regime. All interviewees had professional jobs such as working for a TV company, as a teacher and journalist. They either became unemployed since companies went bankrupt, schools were shut down for economic reasons or had low wages which forced them to migrate to get a job to support their families and children's education. They also joined the existing feminized path of circular migration to Turkey since it was one of the most sufficient countries in terms of opportunities in addition to its proximity, although one of them had also migrated to the US and Russia to work before. Having family members or relatives who came to Istanbul earlier and helped them to find a job, however, is another primary reason to temporarily move to Turkey.

*"My older brother and his family had already migrated to Turkey. My brother called me and said "Why don't you move here? You can easily find a job here and can live with us." I couldn't stand being unemployed and decided to move to my brother's. Turkey is the best neighbouring country to find a job. Where should I have gone? Azerbaijan, Armenia, Russia? They are all similar to Georgia. I did not consider going further than this." (Personal Communication, July 2020)*

## **5.2 Experiences of Gender Discrimination in the Country of Origin**

Gender inequality remains one of the most persistent problems worldwide. North America and European countries have less discriminations and restrictions according to both SIGI country profiles and narratives of our participants. On the other hand, Iran, Syria and Lebanon have very high scores and Armenia, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan have relatively high scores in SIGI country profiles, indicating that gender inequality, discriminations and restrictions are quite prevalent in all areas of life for the disadvantaged parts of the population including women and LGBTQI+ individuals, as demonstrated by our participants. A lot of LGBTQI+ individuals had left Lebanon for this reason and as well as others. One of our participants, a Lebanese professional woman, left from Lebanon since she could not express her sexual identity and had to hide it to in order not to be caught.

*"LGBT people, who wanted to have a partner and a child and couldn't register for marriage, were the first ones to go." (Personal Communication, October 2020)*

*"If you are gay in Lebanon, you will get caught. You can't face going to prison. I am in a relationship with a woman. So, living here, even if it is not socially accepted, at least it is not an issue. In Lebanon, it is a very small country and everybody knows each other. It is very easy for a person to end up after meeting with somebody to hear 'I know your relatives Mr. X'. So, here, I have more of a sense of anonymity about those things." (Personal Communication, September 2020)*

The driver of migration is obviously discriminatory political and social pressures of an Islamic regime and rules, particularly on women and LGBTQI+ individuals, when it comes to Iran. Well-educated



professional women had to leave due to oppressive implications of the state, which restricted their civil rights, freedom of thought and right to the city. Many were being tracked through social media posts, surveilled, tortured or put into prison due to taking part in protests against the hijab and headscarf or even only for being young, university students demanding gender equality. Since Turkey, as one of the closest neighbouring countries, does not require visas for Iranians and the language (Turkish) is easy to learn, particularly for those coming from the northwest region of Iran, most preferred to migrate to Turkey. They entered Turkey either through the territorial border or by plane without problems. All were strongly supported by their parents to move on.

*"We were searched by state guards even at a book-reading event. I received threats such as 'We'll do this or that to you'. Many of my friends were arrested. Following the increase in political pressure, I suddenly decided to come to Turkey. It was a decision taken one night. I immediately left Iran. Turkey didn't want a visa. It was cheaper to move here than to go to Europe." (Personal Communication, December 2020)*

As a hidden driver to migrate, gender discrimination in the home environment has come to the fore. A Turkmen woman, who has the traditional mindset of gender roles where the husband should be the head of the household earning a living for his family, suffered from taking his role over. She complained since her husband had not earned enough and has sent her abroad to work whereas an Uzbek woman, who experienced domestic violence and had been under the rules of her husband and pressure of her mother, became free after she had migrated to Turkey.

*"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 does not force himself for more. I am still married, but actually we are separated." (Personal Communication, March 2021)*

*"I was 19 years old when I got married. It was an arranged marriage. My mom wanted it. We lived together for a year, then we separated. Then I lived with my mother for 6 years. Then my mother forced me a little bit. I was very afraid of my mother. That's why we made peace again. He has beaten me but how should I say this? I did not tell anyone because such things are seen as normal and I was afraid of my mother. Whatever happened, happened at home. You do what your husband says." (Personal Communication, April 2021)*

In addition, regarding domestic violence, the Armenian academic pointed out that mothers-in-law and sisters-in-law were also the source of psychological violence since married couples used to live with their parents and siblings for economic reasons in Armenia.

*"I know that they were subjected to psychological violence not by their husbands directly but by other family members like mother in laws, sisters of husbands if they live in families etc. So, some of my friends went to live separately because of this psychological pressure." (Personal Communication, November 2020)*

A Syrian skilled migrant woman, who left the country due to war and difficult conditions, also escaped from her husband who did not approve of getting a divorce. Similarly, to Lebanon and Iran, in Syria civil/legal marriage is the religious marriage (*imam nikahı*) with Islamic rules and where the husband has the authority to prevent his wife leaving the country.

*"I ran away. Even though I was honest with him, he didn't believe that I am going to take this step. I didn't tell him the date I was planning to travel to Turkey." (Personal Communication, November 2020)*

All interviewees from both the North and the South observed or experienced gender inequality, particularly in terms of the household responsibilities and discriminatory attitudes in work environments. Most of the migrant women from the North defined that their parents, the previous

generation, had traditional gender roles which brought unequal division of labour and responsibilities in the household even if mothers also worked outside home. In their generations, this has become much more equally practiced since couples both work outside the home and have become more sensitive to gender equality. A British academic said:

*"Frankly, it's a classic division of labour. My mother did the majority. The burden of housework is higher for women in general. In some places or with new generations, let's say middle, upper-middle class, it is changing. But for my mother's generation, or where the working class dominates the population, the workload at home is on the shoulders of the women." (Personal Communication, November 2020)*

Even though the Canadian academic has an equal division of labour at home in terms of household responsibilities, her career and income stayed behind her husband since the primary parent had to be mostly the mother, which also causes gender inequality in the first place. A Lebanese academic, however, interpreted that her mother made a choice, left her career and stayed at home to raise her children.

*"Household responsibilities are very equal, even taking care of the children. We rotate who picks the children up from school etc. My husband got his PhD before me, so he's more advanced. It's just that he's had a permanent position for longer than me. He is just more stable and secure." (Personal Communication, April 2020)*

*"There are general societal expectations. The expectation for women remains like 'you should marry, you should have children'. But actually, my mother has never complained. She studied finance and then she became a restaurateur. But she said 'I couldn't have worked, I had you guys because I wanted to be a mother.' So, that was her choice." (Personal Communication, September 2020)*

On the other hand, the French academic was more successful than her husband who could not complete his PhD on time and financially stayed behind his wife, which made things worse at home.

*"I did not face physical but psychological and emotional violence. After the birth of my daughter, my husband became another person. He was horrible. He didn't defend his PhD these days while I had a very good job and salary. He was not so young and I think he wasn't happy with his life." (Personal Communication, December 2020)*

Similarly, the Uzbek teacher had various kinds of domestic violence since she is more educated, had a better job and income while her diabetic husband could only work as a guard. She had all the domestic and financial burden on her shoulders.

*"Everything was very difficult in this regard. I was getting up at 5:30 in the morning. We had two cows. I was taking care of them. Then I was preparing breakfast. I would wake up the children, feed them, dress them, and send them to school. Then I was leaving the house. Then I was teaching at school. I was coming home at about 2-3 in the afternoon. Same things again. Cook, clean, shop etc." (Personal Communication, April 2021)*

Unlike others, a Syrian professional woman explained that in terms of household responsibilities her mother made it equal between her daughters and sons and had a pretty equal division with her husband as well. Similarly, a Turkmen woman appreciated her husband for taking over the burden of the household and children while she became the breadwinner and came to Istanbul alone to work.

*"Actually, I can consider my family as an exception unlike other average Syrian families. I wasn't obliged to prepare food for my brothers. My mom told them 'if you are hungry, go to the kitchen and prepare food for yourself.' While my mom was sleeping, my dad didn't wake her up to make food for us. He used to prepare breakfast when we were kids." (Personal Communication, November 2020)*

*"My husband is a very nice person. He's a number 10 father. He gives so much love to his children. So, he raised them with love. For example, when I was sick, he could cook for them, make tea, and take care of me. He could also clean the house." (Personal Communication, Mart 2020)*

The Armenian academic drew attention to the changing gender roles in the FSU countries in her parents' generation, where women have more job opportunities while men could not adopt the capitalist system after the fall of the socialist economy.

*"I think because of the big shift from Socialism and the way the economy works in the country, many Armenian men in the age of 50-60 couldn't survive. I know, not only in the case of my father but also my friends' parents' fathers, they couldn't survive as flexible as women. So, women took a big hit even if they are low skilled or don't have skills, they kind of survived. My father has higher education in engineering, my mother does not have it but she was managing. She was able to find jobs faster than my father after this shift happened from Socialism. So, I think women, like most of post socialist cultures, are more flexible." (Personal Communication, November 2020)*

Most of our participants both from the North and the South experienced discriminatory attitudes in their workplace in various types such as unequal manners and treats, not being taken seriously, pay gaps and inappropriate sexual comments. An American professional said:

*"The other job I had was marketing but I hated it. It was completely male dominated. There was a bit of inappropriateness on the part of my supervisor. He did have sex with a co-worker on a job and he told me that at the office aloud. I was very uncomfortable because she worked in the office as well. So, I think I quit maybe a month or 2 after that." (Personal Communication, September 2020)*

While the British academic links the pay gap with the class issue in the UK and claims that middle class women get less than men, the Iranian professional links this issue with gendered roles in the family. Since women are not seen as the head of the household, they can only help the family income. Both Lebanese and Armenian academics remark that young female academics have gone unnoticed although they were the ones who contributed the fieldwork, developed content and originality of the work. Old men have been more respected in their workplaces. In addition, mostly men get managerial positions and higher salaries. Another Lebanese academic also added that there is regional discrimination tied to class difference in workplaces. A Syrian professional experienced religious pressure by her female supervisor.

*"The principle there was really religious. Whenever she met me, she asked me to cover myself. Sometimes by a joke or sometimes by saying it seriously... I used to smile and say 'Inshallah, I am thinking about it.' You hired me and you already knew that I am not covered." (Personal Communication, November 2020)*

Unsafe environments, particularly at night, create fear, limit women's mobility and bring dress codes in public spaces as mentioned in British academic's narrative:

*"There are opinions like 'You wouldn't wear it' when there is an incident of harassment or rape. If you are going to come back alone home, there are thoughts like 'let me wear something more'. Some of the more dangerous areas, like 'I don't walk through that park', especially in the dark, you pass during the day but I was not passing through the streets without night light. There were also places where I said 'I shouldn't go to that bar' but very few." (Personal Communication, November 2020)*

Some of our participants from the South had verbal, physical and sexual harassment on the streets or in public transportations and most also had limitations in terms of using public spaces and dress code. Lebanese women explained that shared taxis and other public transportations are mostly seen as potential places to be physically close to women and even to touch them. They had self-control systems between friends to watch each other's safe accessing home late in the evening such as giving

a ring after entering home. Foreign women, particularly blonde, tall ones, mostly draw too much attention from men and had to experience sexual verbal and physical harassment. Even a disgraceful incident happened in an Uber taxi where a female British diplomat was raped and killed. Most parts of Beirut as a multicultural city, however, are not problematic for women's public mobility and socialising. Women have been very present in public spaces, nonetheless, due to limited sectors socially accepting women, it is less possible to see women working publicly.

*"I have been followed to my building once. And then there was a guy who masturbated behind me. And then another case; someone followed me on the street in another neighbourhood. Both of them are relatively socially privileged neighbourhoods. The other men also did the same thing, like I could see him in his motorbike. In both cases, they were on their motorbikes and also touching themselves." (Personal Communication, October 2020)*

A Syrian professional experienced patriarchal pressure once, to put on a hijab to be able to go to the old city core in Aleppo. She did not feel comfortable enough to dress in revealing dresses so that she self-censored herself to feel safer. Once, she even had a verbal and physical sexual harassment in a shopping area in Aleppo. She also felt more comfortable while spending time alone at a cafe in the Christian area of Aleppo, however, in other Muslim areas she was conceived as if she was seeking a quarrel.

*"Once my dad asked me to put on a hijab when I wanted to go to visit some family members in the old city. He refused and he said 'I am not going to take you uncovered like this. If you want to go to this place, you should be covered.' I said fine. I did it once because I didn't want him to be embarrassed." (Personal Communication, November 2020)*

In Iran, there are certain places that women cannot go such as stadiums. They can exercise and swim in closed areas during women's hours. It's completely forbidden for women to use motorbikes and bicycles and they have to cover all parts of their bodies which are ruled and controlled by the state. In addition, unmarried females and males cannot meet in public spaces.

*"They say 'it is not possible for two opposite sexes to be friends'. We were actually doing it illegally." (Personal Communication, December 2020)*

In Turkmenistan women cannot get driver's license and have limited job options, therefore they have been less visible in public spaces. A traditional dress code exists and one cannot wear revealing dresses. Whereas in Georgia, women have been present in almost every sector and have no limitations in terms of education, public access and clothing.

*"In Tbilisi, more women are working and you can see them in shops, in streets, in every kind of place. There are no restrictions for women in Georgia. Most women have an education, can work outside home, wear whatever they like, go wherever they want. I had many male childhood friends. They were able to stay in my room, even in my bed while my family was at home. It was really normal. We were only friends." (Personal Communication, July 2020)*

An Uzbek professional had experiencing severe oppression from both her husband and her mother which limited her social life. She was not allowed to attend either family meetings or social events with her colleagues. She had to wear a headscarf while visiting her husband's relatives and her mother.

*"He wouldn't let me do work at home. Sometimes if I couldn't finish my work at school, I would bring it home, and he didn't want me to do that. He said 'you're a housewife at home'. He didn't even send me to my mother's house alone. When there was an event like a wedding, he didn't want to come, so I couldn't go either. If I insisted, I would go. But I never went so that there would be no fighting, I would not be upset, and my children would not be upset. I put up with it. Since I was afraid of my mother, I put up with everything that my husband did." (Personal Communication, April 2021)*

Migrating to Turkey meant finding a new place to settle down for some whereas for others Turkey has been just a country abroad to work for a few years to support their families and save earnings. Experiences of work and public-private space of professional migrant women differ a lot according to their positions and income in Istanbul.

### 5.3 Experiences in Istanbul

#### - Work Environments

Most of the migrant professionals from the US used their language advantage to become a native English teacher as the first and easiest way to enter the professional sector and to set up their lives in Istanbul. They started either at summer schools of universities and English language centres or had remote interviews and were accepted for teaching positions at schools or kindergartens before entering Turkey. Although, all first got teaching certificates to become a teacher, only one continued teaching since she already had experience although she could not complete her undergrad degree. Others quit teaching since it was not suitable for them or to maintain their careers. After getting familiar with the environment in Istanbul and establishing a supportive international network, they started to work in television channels, newspapers, media or real estate agencies however, teaching has always been a safe zone / a golden ticket.

*"Teaching was kind of all I knew in Turkey. I started to work at the kindergarten school. Then I started kind of like miss my career. I didn't want to go back to the States and there was an opportunity at a tv channel here. I started to work there but it didn't work. I decided to resign and then I went back into teaching because that's all I knew." (Personal Communication, October 2020)*

Although teaching language is a highly demanded well-paid job for foreigners in Istanbul, two of them had problems with having work permits while they were teaching at private schools. They were under pressure of either getting caught or having less salaries in order to have a work permit. Therefore, they either quit their jobs or started home-schooling out of working hours to reach a satisfactory earning.

*"There were issues with legal status. They weren't necessarily providing you a work permit. Then there was an instance, a kind of an investigator came to the school and that's where I was no longer comfortable. So, I resigned." (Personal Communication, October 2020)*

*"It is a lot more corrupt here. At least in America, there are laws to protect you. So, when the ministry of education came to control, I would have to leave the school or hide. We had an agreement in summer when they agreed to do my work permit. But about a month later, they said 'your work permit costs this much money. So, we are going to take it out of your salary and we are not able to pay you your full salary.' (Personal Communication, September 2020)*

The Mexican-American professional had an unusual teaching position once through her international circle where she became a live-in Spanish teacher at a summer house of an upper-income family having a son. Although there was a Filipina child-caregiver, who was also supposed to take care of all the domestic work, the Spanish teacher was also expected to look after the child from time to time in addition to her full-time teaching responsibility from Monday to Sunday. Her position differed from the nannie's in terms of working hours and wage however, hierarchy in the family, such as having dinner separately, was applied to both.

*"There was one night we went out for dinner. The dad said something in Turkish that 'Look, I have two nannies and my wife gets up to feed the child'. I was so upset. I just looked at him and smiled. I was like 'yeah, I am not going to feed your child because he is 6 years old and he can do it by himself'. But I was still like excuse me! I at least said things. But the nannies didn't say anything. I was only a teacher but in ways they always carried on into me taking on the nanny role." (Personal Communication, October 2020)*

Another American chief copy-editor, who formerly had worked for two days a week as a freelancer, got a full-time position at the newspaper. She has been getting paid full-time even though she works four days a week, however she faced gender-based discrimination at work.

*"I wouldn't support myself and the children. I make around 5.000 TL every month which is like a decent salary but with 2 children, it is very difficult to manage it. I had a conversation once with the manager about it. I said 'I have kids and my husband also works a lot. I'm also responsible for the household'. Then he said 'Why do you work?' I said 'What?' If I had been a man, he would never ask that. That is very sexist." (Personal Communication, October 2020)*

Some expressed that since they were seen as hypersexual and enthusiastic as Americans, they commonly had sexual harassment in their work environments. They were also belittled as they are foreigners and cannot understand Turkish culture and background.

*"As a woman, I've had some issues as well. I used to have like intermingles, unisex kind of interaction with everyone. Turkish men are not accustomed to having a woman be openly friendly without thinking that it is something else. That ended up as a big disaster. I wouldn't call it sexual harassment but my manager was taking advantage of his position to get closer with me." (Personal Communication, October 2020)*

*"I mean, well. People that I work with. I guess because they heard my Turkish accent. So, they felt that I am a foreigner. They were trying to flirt with me or make fun of me." (Personal Communication, October 2020)*

Most academics from both the Global North and Global South have found part or full-time teaching positions with work permits or earned post-doc scholarships in English taught universities which commonly ensured satisfactory conditions in terms of assurance, working hours, wages and work/life balance. For some academics, teaching English has always been a side option as well. In addition, the French architect, who had her PhD in Paris, had some troubles with entering academia in Turkey since her English or Turkish was not been sufficient enough to teach and also the procedure of getting the equivalence of her diploma has been tedious. Therefore, she became a French teacher in Istanbul which provided her a better quality of life and a less stressful, comfortable working environment although she could not have work permit.

*"I had to go to the ministry to ask for equivalence for my license and diploma. This procedure takes more than one year and costs a lot. Lots of French teachers don't have my level. It is true. But having good relations with my students made me happy. I am so comfortable now even if I work illegally. I don't have a retirement plan. I don't have social security. It is not good but, I really feel free. Teaching French is very easy for me." (Personal Communication, December 2020)*

Some also got several research funds from Turkish institutions and conducted their research in-between part-time teaching positions as well as completed their dissertations remotely. Their academic life provided them flexible working hours and the initiative to organise their own schedules, however they felt insecure since they did not have a regular income and work permit although they had social security and healthcare insurance tied to it through their Turkish husbands. Most did not experience any kind of discriminative practices and unequal attitudes towards them in academia in Turkey however, some experienced difficulties with the expectation of having a certain level of knowledge about Turkey.

*"It is not discrimination particularly against me but one thing I have struggled and difficulty that I had in Turkey is that I often find that it's hard to be a social scientist who hasn't worked on Turkey. I think there is certain expectations. They expect people already have done research on Turkey." (Personal Communication, April 2021)*

Other professional female migrants from Syria and Iran have been working as translators, radio hosts, NGO workers and web programmers in Istanbul. While the two from Syria were working as English teachers in their home countries, they either could not find the right opportunity to maintain their professions in addition to having bad experiences at interviews or voluntarily changed their carriers.

*"I applied for a small Syrian school to work with them as a teacher. But the difficulty was because of their Islamic view and I am not covered. I had another interview with a man establishing a local Syrian organization. He told me that they were preparing their office, so he said let's do it at a cafe. Then he tried to take advantage of me verbally. I am sorry to say but they got this idea that all Syrian women are prostitutes." (Personal Communication, November 2020)*

One of them started to work as a freelance translator and has recently started to teach English to NGO workers however, she has not been satisfied with the job she had.

*"It is not a career that I can build my future on. I can't even get the chance to get the bonuses or the to go ahead to a better position. I don't have those kinds of opportunities. I also want to have a work permit somehow. Most of the skilled Syrian women that I know are still working for NGOs or working as freelancers. Actually, we can't use our skills or talents." (Personal Communication, November 2020)*

Another Syrian professional was hired as an English teacher and a coordinator at a Canadian based Syrian international school in Istanbul which was later shut down by the government. Although she worked without a work permit at the beginning, then she was chosen to become a Turkish citizen as she is one of the skilled Syrian professionals under temporary protection which provided her both work and permanent residence permits. After being unemployed for six months, she chose not to continue teaching, instead becoming a radio host at a media production company.

*"My friend knows the executive manager of the radio. When they were planning to open that radio, they were looking for people to work there. I told the manager of the radio that it was my dream from childhood to be a speaker. Now, I have a program there." (Personal Communication, May 2021)*

One of the Iranian professionals has managed to maintain her professional web programming, since she enrolled in a master's programme in Istanbul and became a research assistant in computational engineering at first which then provided her a network and the possibility of entrance to her profession in Turkey. She worked without a work permit and also learned that there is a pay gap between foreigners and natives at her workplace. Another Iranian professional could not work in her previous profession, web designing, and had to work for an NGO without a work permit while at the same time continuing her education at a university.

Professional women from the FSU countries experienced deskilling due to the lack of economic capital and knowledge to enter professional sectors in Turkey, language barrier, the urgency of having an income and the ease of entering the domestic and care sector which has already been established in 30 years as a circular migration path. Most of them do not know English but Russian, though also learned Turkish after a few years of working in Turkey. The majority of them found jobs through their family members, relatives or friends, had job arrangements before entering Turkey and directly started to work as live-in caregivers. However, none of them have work permits and social security covering a retirement plan. Only one, the Georgian professional has tried to find jobs in different sectors including professional ones and worked as dishwasher and waitress at the beginning, nevertheless she became a daily cleaner which is not an issue for her.

*"In my first weeks, I searched for a job in clothing stores in Osmanbey where I live now. Many of them were looking for a sales assistant who can speak Russian. I applied many of these stores but they never called me back. My job satisfies me now. I do not seek another kind of job. People generally say that it is a pity that I have a good education but work as a daily cleaner. They say you can find other jobs. They*

*send me some places or call some friends to find a proper job for me but nothing changes. They only speak about it. I try but it is not easy.” (Personal Communication, July 2020)*

Live-in caregivers do not have specified working hours and a job definition which means they. Work from early in the morning until late in the evening. Although they have breaks during the day and resting time in the evening, living in the workplace, particularly without a private room, makes it difficult to have leave from work. All only have one day off during the week and some have monthly summer breaks if possible. Since they not only take care of children or elders but they also deal with all the housework such as cooking, cleaning, tidying and grocery shopping. Particularly live-ins send all the money they earn to their families to provide their children the opportunity of having education or to set up a fully furnished apartment for their sons before getting married.

The majority of live-ins experienced bad behaviours and troubles at their work places related to their salaries and workloads. A Turkmen live-in caregiver had problems with her salary in one of her jobs that she found through an agency. The employers constrained her since they seized her passport. Moreover, an Uzbek live-in child-caregiver have been threatened to be reported, detained and abandoned by their employers.

*“The female boss was very problematic. She was obsessed with cleaning. I was constantly nervous. She was leaving the house at 6 am that morning, so I was getting up at 05:30. I could not enter my room until 11-12 pm. I was bathing the children and putting them to sleep. Then I was tidying, cleaning. It was 12 o'clock until I entered my room and went to bed. I was taking the boy to the toilet at 2 am. That's why I didn't sleep until 2 am. I was getting up at 05:30 in the morning. When I said I was going to quit my job, they said 'We'll report you to the police'. They wouldn't let me go out either. I could not complain to anyone. I was scared. Then, after my sister called and warned them, they kicked me out of the house at 7 am on a very cold February day. They also gave half of my salary.” (Personal Communication, April 2021)*

*“I entered such an agency once, but the family was very difficult. They had two children. They treated me like a servant or slave. They were giving orders. After a month, I asked for my salary and they said, 'work for another week, then you will get your salary.' So, I called the agency. I told them that this family took my passport when I first came to their house and they did not give me both my passport and my money. The next day they gave me both of them. Then of course I left. After that, I never looked for a job through agencies. I accepted jobs that I trusted and recommended by familiar people. When you apply to agencies, you don't know who you'll work for.” (Personal Communication, March 2021)*

#### **- Home Environment and Domestic Space**

There is a significant difference among American professionals in terms of tactics of emplacement. The women who identified as travellers are also the ones who could not speak Turkish, therefore did not set up strong relations with locals and preferred to stay in their international/expat environments. Others, who have kinship ties or migrated for marriage/love, have much stronger attachments with the city and culture. They usually learn and use Turkish up to a degree and have more local connections through their Turkish husbands however, it is still hard for some, to relate to local women.

*“I would say most of my friends are American or British journalists, people I met at the TV company. Honestly, I feel like I live in my own little bubble.” (Personal Communication, October 2020)*

*“Not many Turkish friends. My Turkish is not quite well, I can understand but cannot speak and we have our international circle.” (Personal Communication, September 2020)*

*“Two years ago, I felt pretty lonely, I felt like I didn't really relate to Turkish women. If I did make Turkish female friends, it was through my husband. Usually, I found that the conversation was always about*



*men. Like 'Oh, I can't wait to get married. Oh, this guy. Oh, that guy.' I was just so bored." (Personal Communication, October 2020)*

As most of the foreigners preferred to live close to Taksim-Istiklal street, which has been the historical core of cultural, intellectual, leisure and entertainment activities, most ended up living in the Cihangir neighbourhood, which is one of the quarters of predominantly upper-middle income secular democrats and has more individuals living alone or with their partners without marriage. Therefore, most expats, particularly single ones, prefer to live, shop and meet in Cihangir however, most firstly rented apartments in Tarlabası, Fındıklı, Nişantaşı, areas that are also close to Taksim. There is another preferable quarter on the Asian side, Kadıköy center, which has become more popular particularly after the Gezi Park protests in 2013, since the Taksim<sup>3</sup> area had been intentionally restricted, repressed, emptied.

The two, who have married Turkish men and have dual citizenships, have relatively different experiences in their domestic spaces regarding the division of labour or the cultural context they are embedded in. Particularly, the American copy-editor who has two children and lives in Gaziosmanpaşa, a relatively conservative, middle income area, had to adapt herself to Turkish traditions, culture and expectations since she has been living in the same building with her husband's family and relatives.

*"15 years ago, Gaziosmanpaşa was very difficult to live for a foreigner woman. People are very conservative in this area. They always stare at you. My husband is also very traditional, very conservative. It is very difficult to maintain your own identity... I did not work for many years and was surrounded by him and his people and his family and the Turkish culture. I just wanted to get along. I just wanted to get liked. As a woman, I had to adopt a lot of behaviours that I didn't like." (Personal Communication, October 2020)*

In addition to these, she also expressed that she has been accepted as a homemaker to take care of the children and all the housework as a bride and therefore, they have had unequal division of labour at home even after she started to work. She also had severe problems in terms of maintaining her individual life and identity where she interprets this as an emotional violence.

*"Especially women are really pressured to adopt the gender role. You are really pressured with this idea, serving people, making sure that you take care quietly, all of the invisible work like housework, the children, cooking, all of those things. My husband has no concept of maintaining the tasks and raising children. He just left that to me. Helping was to hand out the children upstairs to her mother. It is the same with housework. I have spent 15 years turning my husband into a normal human being." (Personal Communication, October 2020)*

The other married American professional has a similar problem with her Turkish husband regarding division of labour at home notwithstanding his religious and political identity.

*"He was spoiled growing up like most Turkish men are. So, he had no idea how to do anything, like how to clean his room, because his mom did it for him. Now he's working really hard on it. Like he understands that this is a problem that he grew up with. And so, he's trying to be better. So, we're getting there. It should be equal." (Personal Communication, October 2020)*

Most academics also preferred to live in secular environments such as Kurtuluş, Şişli, Teşvikiye, Nişantaşı, Gümüştuyu, Beşiktaş, Etiler. However, one of the Lebanese academics chose to live in Kocamustapaşa, a relatively conservative area close to Fatih, since it has an Armenian community

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<sup>3</sup> Moreover, it has recently been turned only into a kitsch, touristic shopping area served for Gulf tourism, particularly through the erection of a giant mosque at Taksim square as the spectacle and symbol of Islamic power against Republican ideology.

clustered around the Surp Kevork Church and a mixed group of university students which makes it easier to rent an apartment.

*"We were lucky because they are usually willing to rent to students because the hospital is close. So, they agreed to rent to foreigners in this area and also it is a good and central area. That's why I liked it. Since the neighbourhood has a lot of Armenians, when you say that you are Lebanese, it wasn't a problem and they were saying 'Aaa, yes. We also have relatives and families there.'" (Personal Communication, September 2020)*

Another Armenian academic also chose to stay close to the Armenian community in Kurtuluş and has rented an apartment owned by one of the Armenian foundations. However, the issue of being a foreign woman living alone has brought some sort of surveillance and curiosity.

*"I chose it because of safety first of all. I have this fear of going to the agencies and finding a house by myself. The security and the workers and the guy who takes care of the building are nice and say 'hello' all the time. But I also know that they really follow me and check me out like if I have visitors or not. It is still strange for a foreigner woman living alone and they know that I am from Armenia." (Personal Communication, September 2020)*

There are other reasons to choose specific neighbourhoods as well. For instance, the French architect particularly wanted to live close to the French primary school where her daughter has been enrolled. Since her workplace is also in the same area, her daily life has been limited with the same circle however, she has been highly pleased with the life she has and the apartment she has been living in.

*"I don't have any relationships with my neighbours. Just there is a grocer here that I go to almost every day. But I like my neighbourhood. It is really close to my job, to Taksim, to the sea. It is perfect for me. I think this is a big part of my happiness here. The flat is really perfect. I live in a 113 m2 apartment, in France I used to live in a 45 m2 apartment with my daughter and my husband. We have a great quality of life here." (Personal Communication, December 2020)*

The British academic, after living with her American roommate and hosting expat friends in Tarlabası and Gümüşsuyu, chose to move to Kuzguncuk alone since she wanted to have a relatively quiet life far from Taksim and more Turkish friends to host to learn the language.

*"The house in Tarlabası was beautiful, we were very social, people were always coming and going, but English was always spoken at home. Since my goal was to learn Turkish, I said "I'll find Turkish friends". It is not like I do not like the expats but it is true that the majority do not come to learn the language, they are not included in the culture. They stay with very small groups ... I'm also used to small towns. It has a grocer, a greengrocer and a butcher. Somehow, it's like a town on its own, but still Istanbul. That's why I like Kuzguncuk." (Personal Communication, November 2020)*

The French architect and her Turkish husband separated after the year she migrated to Turkey however, she had to stay married to keep her rights tied to her family visa and to not lose the custody of her daughter. She also suffered from not having intimate connections with Turkish women. Similarly, the Armenian academic felt unwelcomed, excluded and lonely since friendships with Turkish people could only be superficial. In addition, the Armenian community in Turkey did not let her in since she's still an outsider.

*"I began to have some Turkish friends. But after a while, they were not very available for me. I realized that I was just a 'French period' for them like an exotic experience. After that, it was finished. I was really disappointed." (Personal Communication, December 2020)*

*"I make easier contacts with Armenians than the local ones. I am Ermenistanlı (from Armenia) and yabancı (foreigner). Sometimes even there is a language barrier. Some Armenians here don't speak*

*Armenian. Turkish people are very nice, very responsive. But when it comes to something extra like sharing some interest or going somewhere or socializing, it doesn't work. They are also very careful. I think it's not because I'm Armenian. But people they might have some concerns."* (Personal Communication, September 2020)

On the other hand, a Lebanese academic felt more comfortable with the local community in Istanbul since it did not have a class distinction as it has in Beirut. In addition, another Lebanese academic also had a more comfortable home environment in Istanbul however, she still has to hide her sexual identity up to a certain degree.

*"I felt like, in Turkey, the middle-class is much stronger. It was more of a middle-class circle of educated people. I found myself better in this kind of class structure, let's say, where there is more Social Security, where people are not, you know, running for money so much. So, socially, in all the places where I've lived, I felt the most comfortable in Istanbul."* (Personal Communication, October 2020)

*"You can hold hands; nobody gives you a weird look about that. But you're not going to kiss in public. So, there is a sense of something being hidden. But we haven't had a problem in that kind of sense. But I am pretty certain that our neighbours know. I also don't tell everyone that I'm in a relationship because I don't want it to be added to the label as a 'foreigner'."* (Personal Communication, September 2020)

All professionals from Syria and Iran firstly settled down in predominantly migrant, relatively conservative neighbourhoods in the south-west of the city such as Esenler, Başakşehir, Avcılar, Beylikdüzü and Küçükçekmece. One of them, however, rented an apartment in Cihangir at the beginning since it was recommended as one of the safest neighbourhoods for a single foreign woman. She had an active social life mostly with a mixed international circle in addition to having Turkish lessons enough to build local relations however, she experienced some sort of a racist discrimination in her home environment.

*"I was completely refused, excluded. Once, I went to a dance school to take some salsa lessons, but a Turkish girl didn't accept to talk with me. They used to be nice but when they asked where I was from and when I answered as 'from Syria' that was it."* (Personal Communication, November 2020)

Another Syrian professional living in Fatih felt home on the contrary, since it has mostly become a Syrian neighbourhood with an ethnic street market and many restaurants in addition to an Islamic urban scene and everyday life of covered women. Iranian professionals however, have been concerned about the conservative politics of the ruling party which gradually transformed Turkey into a moderate Islamic republic. For this reason, two of them have moved from Başakşehir to Bakırköy and Bahçelievler.

*"To be honest, I used to think that Turkey was like we see in the movies or in TV series. I didn't think that I would see women wearing hijab in Turkey. I was shocked when I came and see people wearing hijab. Then, I liked this very much. Non-hijab women also have the same mentality that we have in Syria. We are very much alike. I found myself in a society that is not very different from ours. In Fatih, you see a lot of Syrians."* (Personal Communication, May 2021)

*"I feel insecure every day when anti-democratic moves proliferate. How is it different from Iran? Now there is a difference, but what will happen in the future? These are very important concerns. I don't want to live another migration story. What will happen in the future if Turkey resembles Iran? I'm worried."* (Personal Communication, December 2020)

Professionals from the FSU countries, all with residence permits, lived where they found a job in Istanbul which has not been their choices. Live-ins worked and lived in Bostancı, Kadıköy, Acıbadem, Fulya, Nişantaşı, Bayrampaşa and Kartal however, they did not have relations with locals and the neighbourhood itself. The Georgian daily cleaner however, lived in Şişli and became familiar with her

neighbours and the locals in her home environment although she had some bad experiences with one of her neighbours.

*"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. He hesitates from his wife. This man started to call me every day a while ago. He found different excuses to call me. At the end, one morning, I could not 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." (Personal Communication, July 2020)*

#### - Public Space and Spatial Mobility in Istanbul<sup>4</sup>

All interviewees have been fascinated by Istanbul's beauty as a global city and also felt included since it has both European and Middle Eastern cultural patterns.

*"Istanbul seemed great to me. Its size impressed me at first and it's beautiful of course; especially Bosphorus." (Personal Communication, November 2020)*

*"We really like İstanbul as a city. That's the main reason we stayed for so long. I really loved here." (Personal Communication, April 2021)*

Most of the American professionals have not been highly mobile in the city since they have mostly stayed and socialized in secular environments such as Beşiktaş, Kadıköy, Moda, Cihangir, Şişli, Nişantaşı and did not feel comfortable in conservative areas such as Fatih, Eminönü, Ümraniye, Gaziosmanpaşa which brought the pressure of having self-censoring dress and behavioural codes and limited their mobility in public spaces. This also reproduces pre-existing socio-spatial segregation between secular and religiously conservative communities in Istanbul.

*"I have always been very self-conscious in more conservative areas. There were times I was alone and I was like 'Maybe don't wear this next time because what you thought was right. You are uncomfortable and you don't feel good.'" (Personal Communication, September 2020)*

*"Ümraniye is like my least favourite place in İstanbul. I mean, I can just tell because I started seeing a lot of covered women. I became the weird one there. And then I started getting the look, you know. I just don't like being in places where I'm looked at in general. Fatih, Eminönü... all in those places, I always feel singled out and I don't like it. It also just makes me sad to see so many covered women. I don't like being around that either." (Personal Communication, October 2020)*

Two of the American professionals who firstly rented apartments in Tarlabası<sup>5</sup> felt insecure, particularly when they walked home alone at night and did not feel comfortable if they wore shorts. They have mostly been verbally assaulted or followed by Turkish men not only in Tarlabası but also in Cihangir, Kadıköy and Nişantaşı. Moreover, some of them were sexually harassed in public spaces or in taxis.

*"I did get attacked on the street walking home one time. It was like 3 in the morning and it was raining. I was walking with my umbrella. A man, I didn't see his face because he had his hood up as well, he grabbed me. I screamed very loudly and I hit him with the umbrella." (Personal Communication, September 2020)*

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<sup>4</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/March\\_2019\\_Istanbul\\_mayoral\\_election](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/March_2019_Istanbul_mayoral_election)

<sup>5</sup> Tarlabası is a historical neighbourhood in Taksim where low-income internally displaced Kurds, Gypsies and transgender people have lived however, majority of this area evacuated, renovated and gentrified through an urban transformation project.

*"I was mugged on the street. A man came up to me, he hit on me and he was like 'where you going pretty lady? What are you doing tonight?' and I was like 'no, no please go away' and then he grabbed my purse and then I tried to grab it back. So, he threw me on the floor and I have a scar on my knee from it. That was bad. And that was in Cihangir, right in front of my apartment. Another time, a taxi driver tried to hold my hand and asked me to kiss him. And that was my fault because I sat in the front by myself. I asked him to stop the car. The list goes on, those are only two examples." (Personal Communication, October 2020)*

On the other hand, the American professional who lives in Gaziosmanpaşa has a restricted mobility where she can only socialize with her husband, children and family in the same area. She experiences traditional Turkish male dominance and oppression severely limiting her right to use public spaces and socialize.

*"It was a battle to be able to go out and have lunch with my friends, have fun with myself, and have my time. It felt like I was still in the town where I am from. Our children have not always been his priority but as a woman, they were supposed to be my priority. On top of that, I also had male friends both married or single. That was also a big problem for him. I was supposed to feel guilty about taking time even to work. He always asked 'why is that taking so long, why are you staying late?'" (Personal Communication, October 2020)*

Most of the academics are highly mobile in Istanbul not only for excursions; discovering new places; social gatherings at restaurants, cafes and bars; activities such as visiting exhibitions and local markets, shopping, hiking, dancing, exercising along the seaside but also to conduct their fieldwork. Only two of them have relatively restricted mobility since they prefer to stay in their home environments. For instance, the British academic has a certain work-home routine from Kuzguncuk to Bebek and meets her Turkish friends frequently in Kadıköy and sometimes in Beşiktaş. the French architect stays in the limits of Beyoğlu and meets her friends mostly in Cihangir and Beşiktaş although she likes going big city parks such as Maçka and Yıldız.

Particularly the women with roots in Lebanon are more open to one of the conservative areas, Fatih, to meet their Arab friends and to have Arabic food. However, they also have dress codes in such areas. In addition to this, one of them feels more secure in İstanbul than she did in Beirut. They also have some specific, regular places to meet such as a cafe playing live music and film screenings in Taksim. Likely, Armenians have a list of "safe places" where they can talk in their native language without any hesitation. In addition, they meet at churches every Sunday for breakfast and socialising, particularly in Kurtuluş, Kumkapı and Aksaray.

*"Here, there is a lot less harassment. I know that men look but it is still a lot less visible. There is a lot less verbal kind, they try to hide it a little bit more. For instance, in my neighbourhood, because living here for a very long time, they know us, so I think we are a little bit more conscious of it, of what we are doing on the street. But overall, I would say there is less of this sense that you have to censor yourself here. On the street, I don't have to be as alert that someone is going to say something or you are going to hear something you don't want to hear." (Personal Communication, September 2020)*

Although most of them feel insecure while walking on the streets at night, the Canadian academic felt the opposite since Istanbul streets have mostly been alive during the night. Most of them did not experience any kind of harassment in public places however, the Armenian academic had an unpleasant moment in a cab.

*"I felt really secure at night. In İstanbul, there is always someone out. I also don't go out super late. I never came back at 5 am when I am too drunk. Maybe that's why I feel that way. I would do some acting in the first year. Sometimes, I used to come back at 11-12 pm. Even in the cab, I always felt safe. Maybe it was my luck." (Personal Communication, April 2021)*

*"I am trying not to return home after 11 or midnight. I have to walk by myself. Though I live in a safe neighbourhood, I am not comfortable being outside at night hours and coming back alone. Even using taxi...I would rather walk than using taxi. Drivers ask questions that you don't want to answer. They put slow, lounge music and look at you. So, you just want to get out of the car." (Personal Communication, September 2020)*

Syrian professionals had support activities and social gatherings with their ethnic communities in the early years however, they have not lasted since the majority of them left Turkey and migrated to the US, Canada, Europe and Arab countries such as Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Tunisia although some, still having close female friends prefers to meet at home.

*"We used to have a gathering for Syrian people called 'Saturday gatherings'. There is a specific place in İstiklal Street. We used to meet once a week there to have tea together, to know what is going on, what is new regarding the laws for the Syrians. We used to speak about Syrian issues." (Personal Communication, November 2020)*

Both Syrian and Iranian professionals are actively using the city in their leisure time for activities such as live music and dance events, concerts, gastro tours, camping, touristic sightseeing, cultural meetings, walking and exercising. They commonly spend their time in historical city cores such as Taksim, Karaköy, Eminönü, Gülhane, Samatya, Nişantaşı, Kadıköy, Üsküdar, Çengelköy and at the south-west seaside such as Bakırköy, Küçükçekmece, Avcılar and Beylikdüzü as well. Most however, have experienced sexual harassment, stalking and bad behaviours in public spaces or on public transportation. Most felt insecure and adopted dress codes and self-censoring tactics in specific locations in Istanbul such as Fatih, Aksaray, Tarlabası, Başakşehir, Esenler, Bağcılar.

*"There are some places that I don't feel comfortable. If I want to go to Fatih area, I have to take that into consideration. When I first came to Istanbul, a friend told me about Tarlabası. He said 'Be aware when you go to Aksaray'. I was really careful; I took all the precautions not to face sexual harassment or not to be robbed." (Personal Communication, November 2020)*

*"I was getting out of the metro station in Yenikapı, Kirazlı. I met someone who claimed that he was a policeman. He said 'I saw you and I would like to meet you. I hope that you speak with me for a while then I might ask you for a marriage.' He insisted on taking my phone number. He knew that I was working in a radio station. After one day, I saw him on the street again. He told me 'I need some amount of money.'" (Personal Communication, May 2021)*

*"You face discrimination even on a bus. "Unfortunately, these people came to Turkey. Besides, they even have seats" they say. They pay the same price as you, to go from one place to another. So, racism really goes up after a point." (Personal Communication, December 2020)*

*"I wore shorts on. Some women wearing hijab looked at me in a strange way. They judged me by my that look. It is not a good feeling for me. It was in the subway." (Personal Communication, May 2021)*

The majority of the professional from the FSU countries, had one day off for leisure activities. Although some are more active than others and spend their time doing activities such as walking, shopping, meeting friends, most did not have the chance to discover Istanbul due to both having economic difficulties and the need to have rest on their only off-days. Georgian live-ins, however, meet at a common apartment rented by six women just to have a safe, alternative space and to gather on the same day to emotionally support each other and have some rest. An Uzbek live-in caregiver has fears to go out alone however, her employer helps her and shows her around.

*"Even though I usually have one day off in recent years, I want to stay at home. I have really gotten too tired because of cleaning all the time. If I go outside, I go to Beyoğlu, İstiklal, Cihangir, Beşiktaş even if I*

*do not have many friends. I like walking around, looking at storefronts and shopping. I also like shopping malls. I usually go to Kanyon, Özdilek and Cevahir. Lately, my boyfriend and I went to Princes Islands to a beach.” (Personal Communication, July 2020)*

*“I wander all day. I'm leaving early. I love the ferry. I tour like that. My friends and I are having dinner. We drink tea and coffee. We sit and chat. I love Üsküdar. I love the Bebek sides.” (Personal Communication, March 2021)*

*“I have been working continuously for 4 years but I have never seen Istanbul because I have never been out. I do not like do something alone. I don't want to go out by myself. But we went to the Bosphorus by boat. They also took me cinema, cafes and restaurants. We also go to Kalamış park. I do not know much about this city. I only know how to go and come back from Kadıköy because I sent cargo to my children 2 times.” (Personal Communication, April 2021)*

Similarly, to others, they also have bad experiences in public spaces such as verbal harassments and security controls which made them feel unsafe, meaning they created tactics to survive.

*“In Turkey most of the men, especially older, religious ones look at you as if they are going to eat you. They are really disturbing. They want to take advantage of you, since you are a foreign, single woman. But I don't feel uncomfortable outside or on buses. I learned how to survive here. I go to places where I am comfortable and can wear what I want.” (Personal Communication, July 2020)*

*“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.” (Personal Communication, April 2021)*

#### **5.4 Impact of the Covid-19 Outbreak on Skilled Female Migrants**

All American professionals appreciated Turkey for having a better, accessible healthcare system compared to the US which is one of the key reasons to feel safe in Turkey during the pandemic. When it comes to vaccination however, migrant professionals having work permits had been equally treated as the Turkish citizens while short-term residents had to wait until the end of the priority list in Turkey.

*“Having this health system in Turkey, the social system, if I need treatment, you can afford that. In the States, you have to pay thousands of dollars.” (Personal Communication, October 2020)*

*“I spend the equivalent of \$500 on my health care. It is really good.” (Personal Communication, October 2020)*

One of the American professionals became unemployed just before the pandemic which started in mid-March 2020 in Turkey. During the first partial lockdown from March to June, she started to give online English courses to children which she accessed through her international circle.

*“A week after I quit my job, COVID happened. It was a huge crush. I had no job for like 2 months. But in the meantime, I had always been in touch with my private lessons. I kind of grew... I think, throughout the years I did private lessons with families because it was easy and it was providing a good income. So, I had some savings and I think in a way I always built a pretty good name for myself within the private family circle.” (Personal Communication, October 2020)*

Another American language teacher worked from home during the first lockdown and partially went to the school during the second however, her workload substantially increased since she had to set up basic necessities of online education at her workplace.

*“The communication was terrible. The expectations were unreasonable. They would say to your face that 'You guys are doing such a great job and you guys are amazing'. And then they would call you at 2*

*in the morning and say 'This is not okay; you need to fix this for tomorrow.' And I was like 'I sent this to you 3 days ago, you are checking it now at 2 in the morning and calling me while I am sleeping.' So, it was really toxic. It just got very negative. Basically, every teacher wants to quit." (Personal Communication, September 2020)*

The American professional with two children worked from home however at the same time she had to take care of online education of her children and overloaded housework while her husband kept going to his office and did not participate in domestic responsibilities.

*"Pandemic completely ruined my life. Because of all the independence that I had, that I carefully structured in my life, all of the spaces that I found went away. All of my space was taken away. All of it. I don't have family to visit. The children had school at home. They actually are at home all the time. But yeah, for me, as I said before, I had to fight for every single space that I have with my own in my life. But it is not the same for my husband. He worked because he has his own office." (Personal Communication, October 2020)*

Similarly, academics having children had problems while working from home due to both having children at home all the time and taking care of every educational or cultural activities and also not having caregivers and cleaners for a few months. One of them, the Canadian academic, had also problems with some of the restrictions in Turkey such as partial weekend curfews.

*"I can't stand the weekend curfew. I find it truly absurd. You are not allowed to go out but you are allowed to go to the market in this crowded environment. I suffer more from the policies that I find totally absurd. So, I really annoyed from this weekend curfew and not being able to go to the forest or to the beach in Kilyos to just get some fresh air. I felt like in prison." (Personal Communication, April 2021)*

Although all of the academics worked from home and most did not have economic instability, one of them, the Armenian academic lost her additional teaching job. Since she had her scholarship, she managed her expenses. However, she did not feel secure being in Turkey as a migrant. In addition, working from home has been difficult for many who had small apartments and used to work in social places.

*"I was really taking care of myself not to get infected and it was not a fear of infection but a fear of being alone here. If something happens, I don't have people close enough to ask them to bring me food or to take care of me with the other issues if I am at a hospital etc. That was the biggest fear. I was also fearful because there is no embassy. This is also kind of a political thing. You are a foreigner in another country, if something happens to you, you don't know how it will be dealt with." (Personal Communication, September 2020)*

All professionals from Syria and Iran have been severely affected by the Covid-19 pandemic economically. A Syrian professional had to move out from her apartment since her German roommate left the country and she could not pay the rent which was recently raised. Therefore, she moved to her sister's house and thus lost her privacy. Another had half a salary for months. An Iranian professional lost her job and could not get support from her family since transferring money became much more difficult during the pandemic. Another Iranian professional's full-time position has been turned into part-time.

*"You need to eat regularly, take vitamins. But you have to allocate a budget for all of them. Do I have a budget for this? They say we would give masks but we didn't even get even one mask or the aid packages did not come to us. There are a lot of things that are done for others, but not foreigners." (Personal Communication, December 2020)*

Two of the domestic workers lost their jobs due to the pandemic since one was working as a daily cleaner and the other worked at a café at that time. Since both sectors stopped during partial



lockdowns, they became unemployed but have been economically supported by friends and customers. One of the live-in workers kept her job however, her workload increased since both children and parents stayed at home. When borders were closed due to the pandemic, the Uzbek caregiver was visiting her family and had to stay there for seven months, yet kept her job since she had arranged a temporary, backup caregiver to keep her job safe.

*"I went to Uzbekistan before the pandemic started. I would stay for 3 months and return to Turkey, but I could not return due to the pandemic. Then I came back here. There was a temporary person in my place and she left. At times like this, you find someone else, you get half of her salary." (Personal Communication, April 2021)*

## 6. Conclusion

Precarious working conditions resulting in a lack of future appear to be one of the drivers of migration from North America, but it also appears to be driven by concomitant reasons such as kinship ties, marriage migration and the desire to make a change in lifestyle. In labour migration studies, especially in the context of Global North-South migration, migration impulses have been found to be complex. It seems that precarity in North America as a driver of migration is an important finding that can be included in labour migration studies.

Most do not have teaching experience and pedagogical formation; however, they became English teachers by the advantage of being a native speaker. They mostly got a teaching certificate and started to work in well-paid jobs at schools in Istanbul. They enjoy much higher living conditions than they could have in their home country. They also build a new career and a better reputation. As an example of "upward mobility", we think that this group should also be studied with a larger group of participants. Because in the international migration literature, there are studies on migration and life experiences of native English language teachers (Koh, 2020), but studies on this group, which can be called transnational middle class (middling transnationals), have not yet been discussed in the Turkish literature.

There are also chief-copy editors, coordinators, realtors. Some faced gendered discriminative practices at their workplace since they have been perceived as hypersexual and easily taken. Some have stayed in their international communities, have not related with locals a lot; however, there are some exceptions, who are married Turks or have kinship ties, embedded in life and culture in Turkey. Most have lived and socialised in secular environments and hesitated to go to or felt uncomfortable in conservative neighbourhoods. Most have bad experiences in public spaces or in taxis such as physical or verbal sexual harassment and robbery. All have restricted use of public spaces and have not been highly mobile in the city. Most have created self-censoring dress codes and attitudes. Some had an increased workload at work, and some had the same at home during the pandemic. Only one became unemployed just before the pandemic and used her skill to teach English online.

Our interviewees pursuing their academic careers and job opportunities can be considered as a traveling group who have been on the move for their education. The extreme competitiveness in academia in North America and the UK and the difficulty of finding full-time, permanent positions have led many to seek employment in European, Middle Eastern and North African countries. We anticipate that this situation has the potential to create more challenging conditions, especially for women, and in terms of gender equality. Women are exposed to the risk of being left behind both in their own countries and in business circles in Turkey.

The international validity of the training they received, their publications and competence in teaching in English have placed them in well-paid positions in the Turkish academy. Most preferred to live in secular environments and they have established stronger relations with locals in their home

environments. However, some felt unwelcomed and could not maintain friendships. Lebanese and Armenian academics have ethnic communities and specific places to meet. The Lebanese women are more open to socialising or living in religiously conservative areas since they found Istanbul more secure than Beirut in terms of sexual harassment. Most have been highly mobile in the city although they have felt unsafe walking alone at night. All have dress codes as well, yet most have not experienced bad experiences in public spaces or in transportation.

Although primary drivers of migration of the third group, mostly consisting of Syrians, Iranians and Lebanese were mainly war, conflicts, and political pressures, it has been understood that gender inequalities, violence, and discrimination towards sexual identity that they experienced as a woman in their home countries are the hidden drivers behind their migration. Our interviewees have been working as translators, radio hosts, NGO workers and web programmers in Istanbul. They live in predominantly migrant, relatively conservative neighbourhoods in the south-west of the city however there are significant differences between those with religious and secular backgrounds. Syrians having a religious background liked conservative areas, mostly stayed in their ethnic community supporting each other. Others, particularly Iranians did not feel comfortable, they were assaulted in conservative environments. Some experienced racist, discriminative attitudes in their home environments. They have been actively using public spaces, particularly the south-west seaside of the city. Most however, have experienced sexual harassment, stalking and bad behaviours in public spaces or in public transportation. Most felt insecure and generated dress codes and self-censoring tactics in specific locations in Istanbul as well. All professionals from Syria and Iran have been severely affected by the Covid-19 pandemic economically. They either lost their apartments or jobs and earned half of their salaries.

Although there are many studies in the national literature on domestic and care workers, as well as on de-skilling, there are very few studies that address the experiences of highly skilled women from the former Soviet Union in Turkey from a gender perspective. Deskillling has mostly been studied for those who work in the tourism, entertainment, and agriculture sectors (Özbey, 2017, Korfalı & Acar, 2018). The literature on migrant domestic workers, on the other hand, has ignored the educational levels and skills of these women, who survived upon the circular labour migration between the Former Soviet Countries and Turkey. We agree that one of the reasons for this is the assumption and illusion that highly skilled women come only from countries of the Global North. Most of our interviewees have hard working jobs, and low standard of living conditions and have low-middle income. Most of them are live ins who lived where they found a job in Istanbul. Therefore, most did not have relations with locals and the neighbourhood itself. All only have residence permits. Most experienced bad behaviour and troubles at their workplaces related to their salaries and workloads. Most did not have the chance to discover Istanbul due to both having economic difficulties and the need to rest in their off days. They also have had bad experiences in public spaces such as verbal harassments and security controls. Two of them lost their jobs and one had to work much more during the pandemic.

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