

# WOMEN AND THE WELFARE STATE REGIME OF TURKEY

*Turkey's dramatically low female Labor Force Participation (LFP) rate of 30 percent is a salient challenge, particularly considering the increase of female LFP rates at both the EU and OECD level. However, women's LFP is a complex issue as it ensues from a combination of economic, cultural, and social factors. Considering the interplay between the labor market and social policies, this article examines Turkey's welfare state, focusing on the country's family policies and social security system.*

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**C**onsidering Turkey's efforts to promote gender equality as part of its economic and political goals, its dramatically low female Labor Force Participation (LFP) rate of 30 percent is a salient challenge to be faced. More importantly, this rate has on average been decreasing since the 1980s.<sup>1</sup> These facts demonstrate the problematic situation in women's access to paid work in Turkey and are particularly striking, given there is a general increase in the female LFP rate at both the EU and OECD levels.

Women's LFP is a complex issue as it ensues from a combination of economic, cultural, and social factors. Numerous studies have been conducted in order to understand the factors affecting women's employment decisions in Turkey. Urbanization and the consequent decrease in agricultural employment, the low education level of women, and other socio-cultural conditions are frequently cited as factors affecting women's employment.<sup>2</sup> In addition to these factors, the welfare state regime is a variable that reflects the state's deliberate social policies, and can play a significant role in changing attitudes and the institutional arrangements which characterize labor markets.<sup>3</sup> Thus, apart from economic, social, and cultural conditions in a given country, the state can alter the balance between employment and "staying at home" with "women-friendly" social policies to challenge the existing patriarchal attitudes and minimize the opportunity costs for women's employment.<sup>4</sup>

The distribution of the three pillars of welfare (by state, market, and family) determines whether family policies perpetuate women's economic empowerment or not, and are likely to determine the welfare of individuals at the micro-level.<sup>5</sup> However, at the macro-level, the relationship between state, market, and family is more complex as the correlation can potentially shape the labor market.<sup>6</sup> Put differently, social policies and the labor market are interdependent institutions.<sup>7</sup> As a result, the distribution of welfare through social policies, and whether the social risks are absorbed through the family are important factors affecting individuals' economic choices.

1 Meltem Dayıođlu and Murat G. Kırdar, "Determinants of and Trends in LFP of Women in Turkey," *State Planning Organization of Turkey and World Bank Welfare and Social Policy Analytical Work Program Working Paper*, No.5 (Ankara: Middle Eastern Technical University, 2009); "Female Labor Force Participation Rate," *The World Bank Data-bank*, <http://data.worldbank.org/country/turkey>

2 Dayıođlu and Kırdar (2009); Erol Taymaz, "Growth, Employment, Skills and Labor Force," *State Planning Organization of Turkey and World Bank Welfare and Social Policy Analytical Work Programme Working Paper*, No.6, (Ankara: Economic Research Center, Middle East Technical University, 2010); Glay Gnlk-Şenesen and Şemsa zar, "Determinants of Female (non) Participation in the Urban Labour Force in Turkey," *METU Studies in Development* Vol.25, No.4 (1998), p. 312.

3 Gosta Esping – Andersen, *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990).

4 Gosta Esping – Andersen, *Why We Need a New Welfare State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

5 Esping – Andersen (1990), p. 139.

6 Gosta Esping – Andersen, *Social Foundations of Post-industrial Economies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 36.

7 Esping – Andersen (1999), p. 149.

Specifically, the family's key role in absorbing social risks causes the household to carry the principal responsibility for an individual's welfare. Policies can be designed in such a way that they can either diminish or increase an individual's welfare dependence on the family. In particular, some countries' models can be clustered as "defamilializing" models, which mitigate the burden on the family through defamilializing active family policies, such as in the Scandinavian states. In the case of these "social-democratic" models, active family policies usually include public care services or subsidies given in return for institutional care, and thus parents find themselves in an environment more convenient for participating in the labor force.<sup>8</sup> However, active family policies may also be designed in a manner that explicitly assigns the welfare responsibility to the family, i.e. through familialistic policies, which include generous parental leave policies and direct and indirect transfers for care, as in the case of many "conservative" welfare states in Europe.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, if family policies covering these three policy areas, i.e. parental leaves, transfers for care, and public care provisions, are undeveloped or lacking, then they can be considered as passive family policies.<sup>10</sup> Like familialistic policies, passive family policies also negatively affect the degree to which women (as the –stereotypically– primary caretakers of the family) can achieve economic independence, since there is no option other than the family –except private care services– for maintaining the welfare of family members.

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In sum, family policies cannot be isolated from women's employment status. Welfare state models with either familialistic policies, which actively aim to strengthen the family's caring function, or passive family policies, which compel the family to absorb social risks, aggravate women's care responsibilities and create a gender-based inequality of opportunities in terms of their access to paid work. This is mostly because of today's omnipresent male breadwinner–female homemaker ideology. Due to existing gender norms, such as the explicit assignment of family care to women, the devaluation of family care compared to employment by keeping it unpaid, and the exclusion of different family unit arrangements (homosexual and/or

8 Esping – Andersen (1999), p. 61.

9 Esping – Andersen (1999), p.84.

10 Esping – Andersen (1999), p.51.

*“In Turkey, the public social expenditure as a percentage of GDP is 12.8 percent according to the data for 2009, and the OECD average is 22.1 percent.”*

unmarried couples), familialistic policies and passive family policies are usually gendered in practice.<sup>11</sup>

In addition to the degree of gender-bias in family policies, social security systems also have the potential of “gendering” social policies, by recreating gender roles within the family. Social security systems do this by emphasizing the “dependent”

and “weak” status of women. Specifically, when pension and healthcare insurance schemes define entitlement according to family status, women can easily access benefits through their husbands’ or fathers’ employment, thereby losing their incentive to achieve economic independence.<sup>12</sup> Thus, social security systems may intervene in gender relations in any welfare state model, and should be evaluated from this perspective. Accordingly, this article aims to examine Turkey’s welfare state, focusing on the country’s family policies and social security system in the framework of the theoretical discussion above.

Taking the three pillars of family policies stated above into account (the length of leave policies, the transfers and rights attached to care-giving, and the public provision of care), Turkey can be categorized as a model that maximizes the family’s caring function. Turkey falls under this category due to its passive family policies, primarily because its leave policies and cash transfers attached to care-giving are not citizenship-based such as those in the Scandinavian states. In other words, social rights do not rely on citizenship but are restricted to certain groups –usually to civil servants in the case of Turkey– or target people in need. Thus, social rights in the country are not universal, nor are they generous. This is revealed in the amount of public social expenditure. In Turkey, the public social expenditure as a percentage of GDP is 12.8 percent according to the data for 2009, while in France, the pioneer among OECD countries in this area, this percentage is 32.1 percent, and the OECD average is 22.1 percent.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, the public provision of care in the country is very limited.

Even though there have recently been some attempts for active family policies in the country, Turkey can still be considered to be a model with passive family policies.

11 Sigrid Leitner, “Varieties of Familialism: The Caring Function of the Family in Comparative Perspective,” *European Societies*, Vol.5, No.4 (2003), p. 353–368.

12 Diane Sainsbury, *Gender, Equality, and Welfare States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

13 “Aggregated Data,” *OECD Social Expenditure Database (SOCX)*,

[http://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?datasetcode=SOEX\\_AGG](http://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?datasetcode=SOEX_AGG)

Hence, social risks are largely absorbed by the family.

A closer look at maternity and parental leave policies, which enable parents to suspend their LFP to care for their children, reveals the fact that familialistic policies have remained limited in this area. This situation results from the continuing lack of universal parental leave policies and the short duration of maternity leaves in Turkey.

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Despite the Labor Law of 2003 that extended maternity leaves from 12 to 16 weeks, Turkey remains in the group of countries that have a short duration of maternity leave.<sup>14</sup> Likewise, in Turkey, maternity leave benefits correspond to 66 percent of the average salary received in the year prior to the leave, whereas this percentage is higher in the majority of OECD countries.<sup>15</sup>

Turkey’s preparation of a draft law on parental leave for both civil servants and other employees in 2005 has considerable importance, precisely because it was dropped. The draft law included generous rights for parents, such as an unpaid, non-transferable leave<sup>16</sup> of up to 12 months for workers and a transferable leave for civil servants.<sup>17</sup> However, in 2011, a different version of the law came into force; it is more limited in content than the draft that was dropped as it introduces a right to parental leave exclusive to civil servants.<sup>18</sup>

In light of the 2011 amendment, there is slight progress toward active family policies, thereby increasing the expectations from the family concerning its childcare function, even though it is a privilege reserved only to one occupational group in the labor force – civil servants. Besides the parental leave policies, the recent discussions about the maternity leave policy indicate that there may be an increase in the duration of maternity leaves from four to six months.<sup>19</sup> If this policy change is put

14 Law No.4857, <http://www.mevzuat.adalet.gov.tr/html/1243.html>

15 “Parental Leave Replacement Rates,” *OECD Family Database*, <http://www.oecd.org/els/familiesandchildren/46804683.pdf>

16 If parental leaves are non-transferable and on equal terms for men and women, mothers and fathers can both take equally long parental leaves but cannot transfer this right to each other. Thus, non-transferable parental leave enables, and compels them to assume equal responsibility and to allocate equal time for their children’s care.

17 Kılıç (2010), p. 175.

18 Law No.6111, <http://www.mevzuat.adalet.gov.tr/html/388.html>

19 *The Ministry of Labour and Social Security*,

<http://www.csgeb.gov.tr/csgebPortal/csgeb.portal?page=haber&id=basin570>

into effect, this will strengthen the trend toward active, familialistic family policies in the country.

Although there is movement toward increasing the familialistic dimension of the welfare system, inasmuch as the existing program for civil servants is unpaid and transferable between parents, it has a tendency to develop into a gendered model. This is because with a transferable parental leave, the system does not challenge existing gender stereotypes, as when leaves are transferable, the care function is usually “transferred” to women. Moreover, keeping the parental leave unpaid devalues family care in relation to employment. The results of a Eurobarometer survey implemented in EU countries, in which 42 percent of male respondents mentioned “insufficient financial compensation” as the primary reason discouraging fathers from taking parental leave, exemplify how critical this criterion can be to encourage fathers to take a parental leave.<sup>20</sup>

A second important pillar of family policies is the transfers given to the family for caring support. Turkey does not have a regular transfer scheme in this area, as family allowances are provided only to civil servants, and there is no tax deduction policy.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, the need-based social assistance programs in return for child-care introduced in the last decade, such as conditional cash transfers (CCTs) and the “Return to the Family” project, along with cash benefits in return for the home care of the elderly and disabled introduced with a new law, should be underlined.

Both “Return to the Family” transfers and CCTs that reward parents for their caring activities create a tendency to replace institutional care with family care.<sup>22</sup> CCTs are based on two tiers: Conditional Education Transfers (CETs) and Conditional Health Transfers (CHTs). CETs are transfers given per child to the poorest six percent of families on a regular basis, as long as their children continue their primary education.<sup>23</sup> Regarding CHTs, regular transfers are provided to poor families on condition that they follow the routine health checks of their children between the ages of zero and six.<sup>24</sup> The second example, the “Return to the Family” project implemented by

20 *Eurobarometer Survey 59.1*, 2003,

<http://info1.gesis.org/dbksearch19/SDesc2.asp?ll=10&notabs=1&af=&nf=1&search=&search2=&db=E&no=3904>

21 Daniel Grütjen, “The Turkish Welfare Regime: An Example of the Southern European Model? The role of the State, Market and Family in Welfare Provision,” *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, Vol.7, No.1 (2008), p. 117, <http://www.turkish-policy.com/images/stories/2008-01-turkey/DanielGrutjen.pdf>

22 Berna Yazıcı, “Social Work and Social Exclusion in Turkey: An Overview,” *New Perspectives on Turkey*, No.38 (Spring 2008).

23 “Şarhlı Eğitim Yardımları,” *The Ministry of Family and Social Policies*,

<http://www.sosyalyardimlar.gov.tr/tr/html/528/Egitim+Yardimlari>; The monthly rates of Conditional Education Transfers are as follows: 30 TL for male primary school students, 35 TL for female primary school students, 45 TL for male secondary school students, 55 TL for female secondary school students.

24 “Şarhlı Sağlık Yardımları,” *The Ministry of Family and Social Policies*, <http://www.sosyalyardimlar.gov.tr/tr/>

the Ministry of Family and Social Policies, aims to maintain childcare services in a family environment in return for cash transfers. This program targets children who are separated from their families due to economic deprivation and residing in public dorms and kindergartens.<sup>25</sup> As for the third policy area, the only condition of allowances given in return for the home care of the elderly and disabled is being below a certain income level, and thus, this policy implies a significant source of income for the family of the disabled person.<sup>26</sup>

Hence, although Turkey has no universal, citizenship-based familialistic policy in this area, the new needs-based social assistance schemes have a dimension that increases the expectations from the family regarding childcare. The gendered implications of these programs, however, further complicate the issue. In accordance with the needs-based character of the transfers, women are specifically targeted, as they are not expected to participate in the labor market.<sup>27</sup> For instance, the direct payment of CCTs to mothers may positively affect their empowerment within the household; nevertheless, the fact that mothers are also responsible for enacting the principal conditions, i.e. meeting the education and health needs of their children on a regular basis in return for these transfers, it actually consolidates the traditional gendered divisions between labor and care work.<sup>28</sup>

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In other words, non-employed women who fulfill the conditions of CCTs simultaneously feel that they receive this social assistance in return for complying with their “already existing” familial “responsibilities”. In addition to child transfers, families who receive cash benefits for the care of their disabled and elderly relatives turn the existing law into a new source of income for family members, amongst whom women usually fulfill the caring function. This tendency in social assistances can lead to a feminization process of social assistance.<sup>29</sup> In short, the recent programs

<http://527/Saglik+Yardimlar> ; The monthly rate of Conditional Health Transfers is 30 TL.

25 *Childcare Services Department of the Ministry of Family and Social Policies*, <http://www.cocukhizmetleri.gov.tr/tr/html/99/Bakim+Hizmetleri+Daire+Bsk/>

26 “FAQ,” *The General Directorate of the Care for the Elderly and the Disabled, the Ministry of Family and Social Policies*, <http://www.ozurluveyasli.gov.tr/tr/html/169/SSS#35> ; In order to be eligible for this transfer, the average monthly family income per person has to be below 2/3rds of the minimum wage.

27 Ayşe Buğra and Burcu Yakut-Çakar, “Structural Change, the Social Policy Environment and Female Employment in Turkey” *Development and Change*, Vol.41, No.3 (2010).

28 Kılıç (2010), p. 173.

29 Ayşe Buğra and Çağlar Keyder, “Poverty and Social Policy in Contemporary Turkey,” *Boğaziçi University Social Policy Forum* (2005), <http://www.spf.boun.edu.tr/docs/WP-Bugra-Keyder.pdf>

are potentially orientated toward a gender-biased model in addition to their familialistic touch, as was in the case with maternity and parental leaves.

A third important pillar of family policies is the public care provisions that relieve the family from care responsibilities. They may include both the public provision of childcare and home-help services for the elderly and disabled.<sup>30</sup> Turkey does not have a strong commitment to this area, and the lack of public childcare provisions seems to be a crucial factor affecting women's LFP decisions, even in the high-skilled labor category. For low-skilled women, it becomes an even more important factor in their decisions due to the high opportunity cost of working in their category.<sup>31</sup>

The public provision of daily childcare in Turkey is at a very low level and is almost non-existent for children under three years of age. The childcare institutions in the country consist of *crèches* and daycare nurseries, which fulfill the care needs of children aged between zero and six, and the answer to a parliamentary question denotes their situation: the total number of *crèches* and daycare nurseries is less than 1700 and they are private.<sup>32</sup> Besides, the quality and dispersion of the existing care institutions demonstrate a high level of inequality between regions.<sup>33</sup> There are also other institutions targeting pre-school aged children, such as kindergartens, but they provide education rather than to children and therefore should be evaluated more as pre-school educational institutions rather than care institutions.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, their number is only 2916, and 1669 among these are public but not free of charge.<sup>35</sup>

Taking these into account, the fact that the enrollment rate of children between the ages of three and five in Turkey is the lowest among OECD countries does not seem

30 Leitner (2003), p. 366.

31 Aran et al., "Recent Trends in Female Labor Force Participation in Turkey," *State Planning Organization of Turkey and World Bank Welfare and Social Policy Analytical Work Programme Working Paper No.2*, (Ankara: World Bank and State Planning Organization of Turkey, 2010).

32 *Parliamentary Question No.6213*, [www.tbmm.gov.tr/d24/7/7-6213sgc.pdf](http://www.tbmm.gov.tr/d24/7/7-6213sgc.pdf)

33 "Türkiye'de Çocuk Bakım Hizmetlerinin Yaygınlaştırılmasına Yönelik Bir Öneri: Mahalle Kreşleri," [A Proposal on Extending the Child Care Services in Turkey, Neighborhood Kindergartens], *Boğaziçi University Social Policy Forum* (Istanbul: Boğaziçi University, 2009), <http://www.spf.boun.edu.tr/docs/MAHALLE%20KRESLERI%20-%20ARASTIRMA%20RAPORU.pdf>

34 The institutions targeting pre-school aged children can be summarized under two categories: daily childcare and pre-school institutions. Daily childcare institutions only include *crèches* and daycare nurseries. *Crèches* and daycare nurseries are defined as private institutions providing care, protection and nutrition of children aged between zero and six. Pre-school institutions, i.e. pre-primary education institutions, consist of kindergartens and nursery classes. Kindergartens stand for schools founded for the education of children aged between 37-66 months. Nursery classes are classes opened within the structure of formal and non-formal education institutions for the education of children aged between 48-66 months. For further information: "Okul Öncesi Eğitim Kurumları Yönetmeliği," [Regulation for Pre-school Education Institutions]; "Özel Kreş ve Gündüz Bakımevleri ile Özel Çocuk Kulüpleri Kuruluş ve İşleyiş Esasları Hakkında Yönetmelik," [Regulation Concerning the Foundation and Operation Principles of Private Chrèches, Daycare Nurseries, and Private Child Clubs], *Mevzuat Bilgi Sistemi*, <http://www.mevzuat.gov.tr/>

35 "Number of Schools, Students, Teachers and Classrooms in Education Institutions by Level of Education," *TÜİK*, [http://www.tuik.gov.tr/VeriBilgi.do?alt\\_id=14](http://www.tuik.gov.tr/VeriBilgi.do?alt_id=14)

surprising. While this enrolment rate of children is 23 percent in Turkey, the OECD average is 77 percent according to the data for 2008.<sup>36</sup> This implies a welfare system in which policies lessening the burden on families through state provisions have been excluded.

Recently, there have been attempts in form of private-public partnerships supported through private funds, such as the project “Mom’s Work - My Future” aiming for 10 *crèches* and daycare nurseries to be built in 10 organized industrial zones in Turkey. The emphasis of the project on childcare as a factor in women’s employment and the coordinating role of the state relying on this argument can be seen as a positive approach to improving women’s

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future prospects. However, this remains a limited initiative, for now, and will only be able to reach 1500 children in total by the end of the project, i.e. in four years.<sup>37</sup> No long-term strategy or a comprehensive public policy in this area is proposed. Likewise, constituting a support mechanism for mothers in form of public subsidies for private institutional care in *crèches* and daycare nurseries has lately been brought to the agenda. Nonetheless, at the moment, the government appears to be in favor of a limited, need-based rather than a comprehensive and universal transfer scheme.<sup>38</sup> Time will show whether these ideas will be put into practice. Only when the terms of such possible “women-friendly” policies are fully defined and evaluated, it can be decided whether this positive approach will actually be strengthened, cause an institutional change in the long-term social policy path of the country, and guide the state to add defamilializing elements to its welfare system by including publicly supported institutional childcare in its responsibilities, regardless of families’ income or employment status. For this reason, the evaluations in this analysis have rather focused on the policies having been continuing for a significant time period and being reflected on the long-term strategies of the government.

Consequently, the three policy areas –the length of leave policies, the direct cash transfers and the public provision of care– demonstrate that in Turkey, family

36 “Enrolment in Childcare and Pre-Schools,” *OECD Family Database*, <http://www.oecd.org/els/socialpoliciesand-data/37864698.pdf>

37 “Organize Sanayi Bölgelerine Kreş,” [Crèche in Organized Industrial Zones] *The Ministry of Family and Social Policies*, <http://www.aile.gov.tr/html/4925/Organize-Sanayi-Bolgelerine-Kres; Annemin İsi Benim Geleceğim>, <http://anneminisi.org/tr/Anasayfa.aspx>

38 “Kreş Yardımı: Daha Çok Kadının Çalışması İçin Bir İmkan,” [Crèche Aid: Job Opportunities for More Women], *Bianet*, <http://www.bianet.org/bianet/toplum/139898-daha-cok-kadinin-calismasi-icin-bir-imkan>

policies have been “passive”, leaving families, i.e. women, with no other choice than to assume care activities and social protection.

Nonetheless, in the last decade, –as implied above– there has been a slight tendency toward attributing these child, disabled, and elderly care functions to the family through active family policies that deliberately concentrate either on need-based social assistances for home care provision such as the cash transfers (CCTs, Return to the Family Project, home care transfers for the disabled), or on rights exclusive to certain occupational groups such as the parental leave policies for civil servants.

This modest change towards mostly need-based familialistic policies are often pronounced as the first steps of an institutional turn in the country’s welfare regime. Accordingly, this process should be seen as a turn to the family with the aim to mitigate “social burdens” on the state, along with a strong emphasis on “strengthening the family” in the government’s discourses. This is also closely related to the reform pressures from the IMF and the EU; while the former argues that family care may be cheaper than institutional care, the latter points out that in case public institutional care exists it should attain the EU standards. Thus, this institutional turn can be seen as a result of the need of the AKP government to converge the government’s conservative attitude with these reform pressures.<sup>39</sup> As from the day that the AKP came to power, the principal role attributed to the family in providing welfare has also been underscored in their party programs.<sup>40</sup>

Finally, in addition to family policies, Turkey’s social security system intervenes in gender relations, thereby reducing women’s reliance on the market, but simultaneously consolidating their second-earner or caretaker images by emphasizing their “dependent” and “weak” status. Despite some amendments in the last decade that added gender-neutral elements to the existing social security schemes the policies in force still render the social security system gender-biased, as described below.

Gender-differentiated treatment in the policies of survivor benefits and healthcare, which take “dependency” as the basis for entitlements, has historically been one of the significant characteristics of the social security system in Turkey. Both survivor and health insurance systems have provided benefits relying on the recipients’ “dependent” status as spouse, child, or parent of the insured person. Nonetheless, there are sexist differences among these dependent groups, which derive from the assumption that women are dependent on the male head of the family for their livelihood.<sup>41</sup>

39 Berna Yazıcı; “The Return to the Family: Welfare, State, and Politics of the Family in Turkey,” *Anthropological Quarterly*, Vol.85, No.1 (Winter 2012).

40 Ayşe Buğra and Çağlar Keyder, “Turkish Welfare Regime in Transformation,” *Journal of European Social Policy*, Vol.16, No.3 (2006), p. 224.

41 Kılıç (2010), p. 170.

Consequently, this assumption introduces different criteria for the entitlement of men and women as recipients.

It is better to analyze survivor and health insurances under two separate schemes because they differ from each other in some respects. In Turkey, survivor benefits have included benefits such as pensions, marriage bonuses, and healthcare. Specifically, non-employed daughters are allowed to receive those benefits until they marry, whereas sons are not entitled to these benefits after –depending on their education status– 18, 20, or 25 years of age. However, the case of sons has an exception: disabled sons are entitled to the benefit regardless of their age or marital status.<sup>42</sup> Conversely, disabled daughters did not have such an exception before the reform in 2003.<sup>43</sup> Additionally, daughters and widows had been explicitly encouraged to get married through marriage allowances, but the Law on the Social Security Organization and General Health Insurance enacted in 2006, along with a series of amendments that lasted until 2008, restricted this only to daughters.<sup>44</sup>

A similar, gender-specific treatment in the healthcare system occurred until various amendments were made in the last decade.<sup>45</sup> As with the case of survivor benefits, until the Law in 2006, the daughters of an insured person had been entitled to health insurance depending only on their marital and employment status, while sons encountered age limits or criteria such as disability and destitution. Similarly, husbands could not be entitled to the health benefits of their insured wives, although wives were insured automatically.<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, in the case of a divorce or unemployment, widows and daughters could be re-entitled to these benefits.<sup>47</sup>

It is important to assess these gendered elements of the social security system in Turkey, which constitutes an important pillar of the –historically gendered– welfare system of the country. In this context, the presumed basis for entitlements to benefits, and gender positions in these entitlements have critical importance.<sup>48</sup> An entitlement system, in which women are dependent on an explicitly assigned male breadwinner, reinforces the existing gender norms rather than acting as a positive discrimination mechanism, because it consolidates their role as the family-care taker and housewife; whereas the breadwinning role after the marriage continues to be explicitly assigned to husbands. Also, social security policies taking labor as the basis for entitlements take the traditional gender roles into account. In addition to

42 *Law No. 5510*, <http://www.mevzuat.adalet.gov.tr/html/27054.html>

43 *Law No. 4956*, <http://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/>

44 Kılıç (2010), p. 170; *Law No. 5510 and 5754*, <http://www.mevzuat.adalet.gov.tr/html/27054.html>

45 *Law No. 5510*, <http://www.mevzuat.adalet.gov.tr/html/27054.html>

46 *Law No. 506*, <http://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/>

47 Kılıç (2010), p. 171.

48 Azer Kılıç, “The Gender Dimension of Social Policy Reform in Turkey: Towards Equal Citizenship?,” *Social Policy and Administration*, Vol.42, No.5 (2008).

women being allowed to take earlier retirement than men due to the burden of their family responsibilities, if female workers get married and decide to leave the job market, they are reimbursed through severance payments.<sup>49</sup>

Several amendments in Turkey's social security system in the last decade may suggest a movement toward a "universal breadwinner" model, where women and men join the labor market under the same conditions.<sup>50</sup> However, without the necessary improvements in working conditions and labor regulations in the areas such as workplace nurseries, breastfeeding rights, and benefits for working mothers, which would enable working women to reconcile their work and family life, the current trend does not appear to be promising in terms of gender equality.<sup>51</sup> Unless the burden on women in the absorption of social risks is reduced, this trend will only cause a deterioration of social rights and leave women in a more vulnerable position against social exclusion and poverty.<sup>52</sup>

The absence of regular generous family policies implicitly leaves families –in practice, women– with no other option than the increased burden of absorbing social risks. Along with all the gendered elements among social policies, it is appropriate to label the Turkish welfare state as gender-biased. The tendency toward familialistic policies in the last decade demonstrated especially through need-based cash benefits given in return for care or leave rights - restricted to civil servants for now- suggests that the Turkish welfare system has been evolving into a model which explicitly ascribes social care and protection functions to families. This also overlaps with the conservative discourse of the government.<sup>53</sup> Yet, it remains to be seen whether the negative situation of the female employment in the country will cause a u-turn toward defamilializing policies through state-supported institutional care in the near future.

In conclusion, at this point, the welfare state regime in Turkey is not favorable in terms of women's access to paid work and that this can play an important role in fate of women's economic empowerment. It is also apparent that short-term interests may conflict with the long-term strategies of social policies, as can be seen in the case of Turkish reforms, which are affected by both the government's conservative attitude, and the indispensability of the EU accession process.<sup>54</sup>

49 Kılıç (2008), p. 495; *Law No.1475*, <http://www.mevzuat.adalet.gov.tr/html/474.html>

50 Nancy Fraser, "After the Family Wage: Gender Equity and the Welfare State," *Political Theory*, Vol.22, No.4 (November 1994).

51 Grütjen (2003), p. 125.

52 Fraser (1994).

53 Buğra and Keyder (2006), p. 225.

54 Kılıç (2010).