

THE WORK EXPERIENCES OF REFUGEE WOMEN
AND GENDER RELATIONS

exigency negotiation change

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Exigency, Negotiation, Change: The Work Experiences of Refugee Women and Gender Relations

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report, in focusing on paid work, work regimes and social networks, aims to understand the changes in gender norms and relations that have been sparked by the work experiences of Syrian women who are in the process of being resettled in Turkey. One objective of this study is to grasp how the change in paid work and gender relations has affected the lives of refugee women and whether these embody a source of empowerment and resilience. Another objective is to reveal the tension women experience in the process of displacement and resettlement, as well as how the space for patriarchal negotiation is shaped.

This research is based on 48 semi-structured, in-depth interviews conducted with Syrian women working in paid jobs in Izmir, Gaziantep and Mersin. Approximately 26 percent of the women are 18–25 years old, 38 percent are 26–35 years old and 26 percent are 36–45 years old. Among the interviewees, 16 work in public institutions or NGOs; 4 found employment through various projects designed for providing employment opportunities for refugee women; 8 work in the service sector; 2 work in the textile sector; and 4 are self-employed. Additionally, 10 women do piecework jobs

from home, and finally, one woman works as a waste collector. 59% of the interviewee women are married, 29% are single, 6% are divorced, 4% are widows, and 2% are separated from their spouses. 16 of the 48 women had prior work experience before being forced to leave their homes in Syria.

Almost all the interviewees expressed that they had begun working due to the financial challenges they faced in Turkey, and out of “exigency”.

Many women stated that they had not worked prior to migrating because of Syria’s relatively easier living conditions and prevalent gender norms, suggesting that it is not appropriate for women to work outside the home. With worsening financial circumstances in Turkey accompanying the migration process, women started to work out of necessity. Majority of the interviewees, especially those who had no prior work experience or desire to be employed, have faced adverse reactions from their circles. Nevertheless, poverty and hardship, which most Syrians have experienced, facilitated the normalization of women’s employment

and the participation of the interviewees in the labor force.

Social networks play a crucial role in enhancing the opportunities for women to find employment.

The existence of family and other social connections is a significant factor in the migration process and, specifically, in choosing a city in which to settle. Although these relationships are essential components of social networks, women usually stray beyond the social and physical boundaries of these networks to find jobs. While piecework jobs can be accessed through somewhat more proximate relationships, such as neighbors and family members, jobs outside of home compel women to leave their neighborhoods. Additionally, NGOs working with asylum-seekers and migrants turn to be nodal points to establish relationships and expand networks for migrants and non-migrants alike. Women seize on the chance to socialize as well as receive information about job opportunities by attending courses, training and other activities.

Due to working conditions and work regimes, women can only meet their daily needs through wage labor.

Women typically work at precarious, temporary and low-paid jobs from which retirement is almost impossible, and earned income is spent solely for the benefit of the household. We identified four types of work: 1) employment at NGOs or public institutions; 2) self-employment; 3) employment in jobs such as beauty salon, small stores and garment industry; and 4) employment through piecework jobs performed from home. The common feature of all these jobs is that they do not provide a safe future for the women.

Syrian women frequently encounter discrimination and racism in the workplace.

Syrian women are paid lower wages than Turkish workers, face verbal harassment, and experience direct instances of mobbing in the workplace. In some workplaces, their employees ask Syrian women to hide the fact that they are Syrian, and in others, women may prefer to conceal their nationality as a precaution. Self-employed women also face challenges in maintaining jobs due to racism, other forms of discrimination, and financial and bureaucratic obstacles.

Although some women receive financial and in-kind assistance, in addition to their earned income, such forms of aid are limited and irregular.

One-fourth of the women we interviewed stated that they received no financial or in-kind assistance to supplement their earned income. Other interviewees noted some degree of mutual support between close family members, albeit in small amounts. In addition to the constraints of support mechanisms between family and friends, assistance received from civil society and public institutions is reported to be limited and insufficient.

As much as women's participation in paid work stimulates empowerment and resilience, it also produces new burdens and risks.

Women's engagement in paid work relationships raises challenges for the ones who, according to patriarchal gender norms, are obligated to care for their homes and families. Women are compelled to work harder to fulfill their domestic responsibilities on top of their paid work. The most crucial obstacles preventing women from working are childcare and home maintenance. On the other hand, women's participation in paid work makes

men, traditionally deemed to wield domestic power and authority, feel inadequate in the fulfillment of their duties as the head of the household, and anxious about losing their masculinity. Women, thus, engage in gender-based labor to cope with the emotional and mental hardships their spouses go through and to ease tension at home.

Women's dreams for the future are limited to those of their children.

The conditions of work and employment of Syrian women do not allow them to save money for the future, develop new skills, or expect retirement or insurance. Interviewees expressed that they work to provide a better education for their children. Also shaping their desire to settle in a third country are dreams of better conditions for their children and hopes for their futures.

The majority of women expressed their satisfaction from the transformation of gender relations after migration, which they associate with living in Turkey.

Leaving the physical boundaries of their homes, for either paid work or meeting other needs, accompanies a departure from

relational norms. Women are worried that moving back to Syria might result in the reversal of this change. Women also suggested that men want to return to Syria to preserve pre-migration norms and relations.

Despite all the difficulties, women stated that going out of the home and working in paid jobs turned out to be a very important gain for them, and that they are empowered.

Having a say in their own lives; learning the possibility and alternative ways of establishing relations; experiencing this new situation are signs that the women are going through a change and gaining resilience.

Marked by contradictions and ruptures, this process will undoubtedly continue in the next generation.

INTRODUCTION

In the nine years since turmoil erupted in Syria, approximately four million Syrian nationals have settled in Turkey. Despite all the tension and conflict, Syrians, now integrated into Turkish society, are set apart by their legal status. According to official figures regarding the Syrian population in Turkey, approximately 3.6 million have temporary protection status, 110,000 have residence permits, 100,000 people have acquired Turkish citizenship and unknown thousands more live as unregistered (i.e. undocumented) migrants.¹ This process, that is a result of the en masse migration of those who are displaced by war, has brought about many problems ranging from employment relations to family structure, from conflict to solidarity. These problems unfold at various societal levels and require national and international policymaking.

Researchers have produced numerous academic publications regarding this instance of mass migration (Özden, 2013; İçduygu, 2015; İçduygu & Şimşek 2016; Baban et al. 2017; Erdoğan, 2018). Despite the extent and scope of these studies, our knowledge on the subject is, arguably, still limited, superficial and incomplete, considering complicated and multi-dimensional structure of migration and its multigenerational impacts. The majority of studies that concentrate on Syrian migrants have the tendency to address them as a homogeneous group and the issue of migration as a monolithic phenomenon. This inclination in the existing studies results in overlooking the complexity of migratory flows and the diversity of migrant groups. A considerable body of research has examined “Syrians” as a uniform group, neglecting to grasp various traits such as age, gender, class, ethnicity and legal status as explanatory variables.

Notwithstanding the abundance of research on Syrian refugees, those which study women or approach the subject from a perspective of gender are quite rare. While the NGO reports that focus on Syrian women have provided descriptive data on the subject, these reports offer an essential starting point for anyone wishing to engage in more in-depth analyses of migration issues (UN Women, 2018; KADEM, 2018; HÜNEE, 2019).² In addition

¹ Syrians living in Turkey are not entitled to refugee status in the scope of the 1951 Geneva Convention. Nevertheless, this report uses the term “refugee” to describe them, because they came to Turkey as a result of mass forced migration. For statistical information on Syrians under temporary protection and who have residence permits, see <https://www.goc.gov.tr/gecici-koruma5638> [Last accessed on 10 April 2020]; <https://www.goc.gov.tr/ikamet-izimleri> [Last accessed on 10 April 2020]

² For a comprehensive list of recent studies on women and migration, see the list of publications prepared by Alphan Akçin on behalf of the Association for Migration Research. <https://gocarastirmalaridernegi.org/tr/yayinlar/okuma-listeleri/141-gar-okuma-listeleri-goc-ve-kadin> [Last accessed on 10 April 2020]

to these reports, a limited number of academic studies examine Syrian women—who make up half of Turkey’s Syrian population³—from a gender perspective.⁴

We emphasize on the work experiences of Syrian women who are engaged in paid work, utilizing a gender perspective and challenging the homogenization of a massive group whose social class, migration history and place of origin has been ignored and who has been categorized under the uniform label of “Syrians”. By having paid work, work regimes and social networks at the center of the research, this report aims to understand the changes in gender norms and relations that have been instigated by the employment experiences of Syrian women as they settle in host communities. An objective of this study is to grasp how entering the paid work and change in gender relations have affected the lives of refugee women and whether these embody a source of empowerment and resilience. Another objective is to reveal the tension which women experience in processes of displacement and resettlement, as well as how the space for patriarchal negotiation is shaped.

Theoretical overview of labor markets in the context of forced migration

During the preparatory phase of the project, we took into consideration the intersectionality of the labor market, the legal status and refugeehood. Resilience, Work and Gender in the (Turkish) Migratory Context (2019), the literature review conducted by İlhan Zeynep Karakılıç, Lülüfer Körükmez and Cavidan Soykan, identified two main threads in the literature on labor force participation and the integration of migrants. One line of research highlights the structural obstacles on the macro level, while the other underlines the human capital of migrants at the micro level. The first body of research, by concentrating on migration policies, legal regulations such as work permits and legal status, and labor market structures argues that migrants can be integrated into local economies only through marginalized, temporary, low-paying and exploitative work (Portes 1995, Sassen 1995 and 1998; Mingione 1998). The second line adopts a micro-level approach and investigates elements such as personal skills, levels of education, previous work experiences, linguistic skills, time of migration, age and migratory history (Becker, 1964; Chiswick and Miller 2002). For instance, Betts et al. (2017) contend that refugeehood constitutes a specific institutional framework which engenders both opportunities and challenges for the economic lives of

³ Data from the Directorate General of Migration Management show that 1,651,342 of the 3,587,588 Syrians in Turkey are women, corresponding to 46 percent of the entire Syrian population in Turkey. <https://www.goc.gov.tr/gecici-koruma563> [Last accessed on 10 April 2020]

⁴ For some research in this field, see Kivılcım & Baklacioğlu, 2015; Barın, 2015; Coşkun, 2016; Akpınar, 2017; Küçükşen, 2017; Özudođru, 2018; Özden and Ramadan, 2019; Biehl and Daniş, 2020

forced migrants and they claim that the capacity of the individuals can shape institutional structures by turning challenges into opportunities for themselves and others.

However, neither of these threads can fully account for the multidimensionality of labor and work experiences that emerge as a result of a complex process as forced migration. Neither addressing solely the legal and socioeconomic restrictions nor the skills, qualifications and resources of migrants, that is to say their agency, would be thoroughly explanatory. Precarious, temporary and low-paying labor, which has been globally demanded under neoliberal capitalism, is met in Turkey by Syrian and non-Syrian migrants. On account of their social and legal vulnerability, migrants and refugees are compelled to work in such jobs (Erdoğan and Ünver, 2015; Tümen, 2016; Erol et al., 2017; Özgüler, 2018; Korkmaz, 2019).

As indicated above, Syrians are not a monolithic group, and as such, their legal status becomes a matter of significance in labor processes. The legal status and rights of all migrant groups determine the resources that they will have access to or be deprived of, as well as the extent of their freedom (Şimşek, 2018). In a context that is largely defined by uncertainty, such conditions impact the daily lives of Syrian women much to the same degree that they influence their work experiences.

This report is divided into four sections. The first section presents the research methodology, sampling, and demographic characteristics of the women we had interviews with. The second section, titled “Women’s Labor Market Experiences in Migratory Context”, discusses the factors that facilitate and restrict women’s participation in the labor force. Contrary to approaches that assess migratory movements as discontinuous, one-off events and that dehistoricize migrants, this section focuses specifically on labor and demonstrates how refugees’ pre-displacement culture, class and work experiences are intimately linked to their experiences of resettlement. The next section, “Gender and Resilience”, delves into how women’s paid work experiences create new tensions and changes in their household relationships and social circles. This section also addresses the long-term impacts of paid work and the expectations refugee women have for the future. Lastly, in the “Policy Recommendations” section, we outline a series of gender-oriented recommendations based on the research findings and, more importantly, the problems that interviewees articulated.

METHODOLOGY

In this study, we adopted a qualitative research method and conducted semi-structured, in-depth interviews in Mersin, Gaziantep and Izmir in June–October 2019. All the interviews were conducted by female researchers accompanied by female interpreters. While some parts

of the interviews were in Turkish and, rarely, in English, when the Syrian women struggled to express themselves in these languages, the interpreters assisted with Arabic translations. The presence of an interpreter becomes inevitable to overcome language barriers when the interviewer and interviewee did not speak the same language. Although this interpretation might raise ethical and methodological questions, we developed specific strategies in this field research to overcome such problems.

Two young Syrian women working professionally as translators accompanied us as interpreters in Gaziantep and Mersin. A young woman with an extensive background teaching Turkish to Syrian women was our interpreter in Izmir. Before the interviews, the interpreters were informed about any ethical and methodological issues as well as the confidentiality of the interviews, which would potentially include sensitive information. Because the interpreters were young women, the interviewees were relatively comfortable speaking with them about private and sensitive topics.

To avert the possibility of loss of meaning or semantic shifts which might be caused by translation, we expanded questions, and repeated similar topics of conversation in different stages of the interviews. While the majority of women could easily understand Turkish and follow the interview, they had difficulties in expressing themselves in Turkish. The interviewees were therefore able to keep track of the interview questions and what the interpreters relayed back to us.

The interviews were recorded if permitted by the interviewees. In other cases, we took notes during the interview and transcribed them afterwards. As a group of three researchers, we conducted the research and analyzed the interviews together. In order to protect their privacy, names of the Syrian women mentioned in the report are anonymized.

We conducted every step of the field research, from planning to writing the findings, with the guidance of feminist research principles and sought to avoid hierarchical, authoritarian and directive relationships as much as possible. In this respect, our priority was to adopt a research approach proposed by Ece Öztan and Setenay Doğan (2015:103) and entailed “going beyond a simple call for ‘focusing on women’ ... to investigate mechanisms, processes and discourses through which women ... are rendered invisible”. We adopted, in our methodological approach, the four points that Öztan (2015: 277) highlights as the main characteristics of feminist research: “1. Acceptance of a feminist perspective and focusing on gender relations. 2. As opposed to traditional scientific methods, the importance attached to everyday life and personal experiences. 3. Refusal of hierarchy between the researcher and the researched. 4. Integrating women’s emancipation and elimination of gender inequalities into

research objectives.” Although we cannot claim to have implemented a fully developed feminist methodology in this research, we certainly adopted a feminist perspective during the analysis. We considered the experience, agency and subjectivity of our female interviewees in the context of displacement, resettlement and employment. Throughout the research, we pursued an approach which advances that, “[i]n order to not reinforce the unequal social position of women and protect their subjectivity, it is important to produce knowledge and narrate victimizations without confining them to a ‘victim’ identity” (Gönül, 2020: 84).

While we used snowball sampling during the field research, we noted the diversity of the interviewees in legal status—undocumented, residence permit holder, temporary protection status holder, or Turkish citizenship holder—sector of employment and age. We made initial contact with the interviewees through personal connections, NGOs and interpreters in their respective cities. To preclude a concentration of interviews around certain networks, we established connections as diverse as possible through which to contact interviewees. Notably, some of the women we contacted declined to be interviewed, not due to the subject of the study, but because they could not get permission from their husbands, while others decided not to participate due to the time constraints imposed by their demanding work schedules.

Below, we presented the demographic distribution of the women we interviewed during the field research. Before providing this data, we must stress that the sampling in this study does not claim to be generalizing or representative. As noted above, the Syrian population in Turkey is diverse in terms of both demographic characteristics and personal biographies. As such, research of this scale cannot fully grasp the full breadth of the experiences of Syrian women engaging in paid work. Given that the objective of this research is to understand the paid work experiences of women during processes of resettlement from a qualitative perspective, this study does not intend to represent or generalize. Nevertheless, employing this qualitative approach enabled us to observe the gender-based problems that refugee women endure and to develop policy recommendations to alleviate these problems.

Sample

We conducted interviews with 48 Syrian women, 16 each in Gaziantep, Izmir and Mersin, in the scope of this research (For more detailed information about the interviewees, see the Appendix). Approximately 26 percent of the women were 18–25 years old, 38 percent were 26–35 years old, and 26 percent were 36–45 years old.

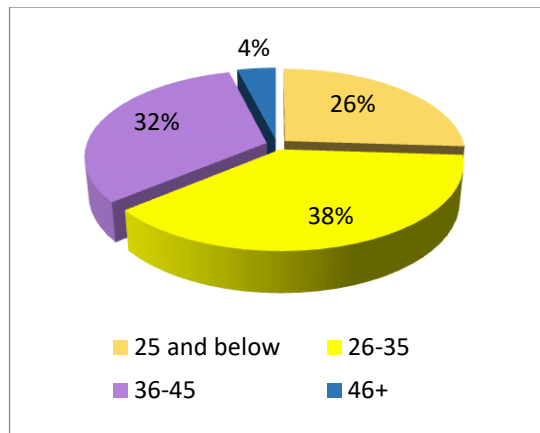


Chart 1 Age range of interviewees

Chart II presents the distribution of the women we had interviews with by marital status. Fifty-nine percent are married, 29 percent are single, 6 percent are divorced, 4 percent are widows, and 2 percent are separated from their husbands.

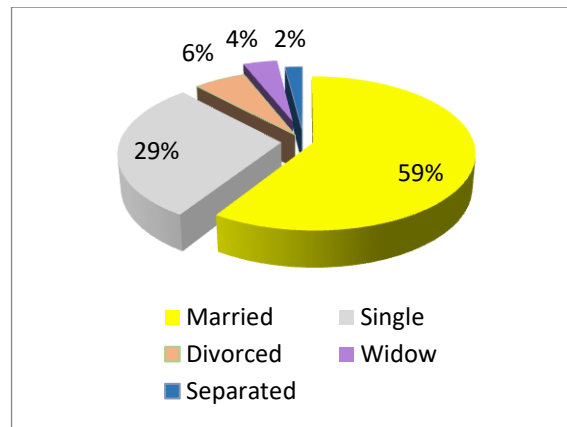


Chart 2 Marital statuses of interviewees

Nearly half the interviewees came to Turkey in 2014 and 2015. As seen in the Chart III, this distribution is consistent with the distribution of Syrian mass migration by year.

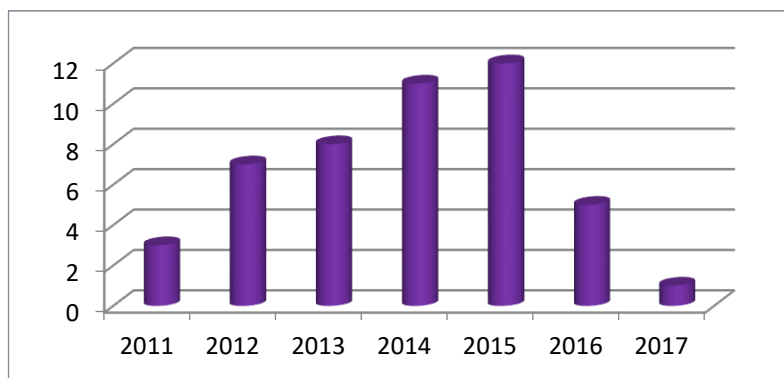


Chart 3 Distribution by year of arrival in Turkey

Finally, out of the 48 women, 14 work at NGOs—of whom four work part-time and 10

work full-time—10 perform piecework jobs, and 8 are employed in the service sector in occupations such as shop assistants and hairdressers. Among the 48 women, 11 are the only income-generating members of their households, and five of these women are compelled to work because their husbands are unemployed. Eight women are single and live with their families, where their fathers are the primary income-generators. While 23 women contribute to their household income together with their husbands, six do so with their siblings or children. In the families of women where men contribute to the household income, two men work at NGOs and five engage in commercial activities between Syria and Turkey. Others work in construction, garment industry, agriculture, or other small-scale production sectors.

Sector	N
Public institutions	2
NGO (part-time)	4
NGO (full-time)	10
Self-employed	4
Piecework	10
Service sector	8
Textiles	2
Waste collector	1
Employment training program	4
Private tutoring	3

Table 1 Distribution of interviewees by sector

Research field: Three cities

The field research for this study took place in Gaziantep, Mersin and Izmir, places that host large populations of Syrian refugees. These three cities were selected because of their prominence as host communities for Syrian refugees and because they feature a range of urban contexts that harbor diverse socioeconomic, political and cultural characteristics.

The cities were selected based on distinctions in the resettlement of the Syrian population. Izmir is an exit and transit center for various migrant groups seeking to move to Europe. When this research was conducted, approximately 140,000 registered Syrian people were living in Izmir. The District of Basmane, a migrant neighborhood in Izmir, hosts many Syrian workplaces as well as platforms and NGOs that support migrants. As of September 2019, almost 400,000 registered Syrian people were living in Gaziantep. This city is the first point of arrival for migrants coming from Aleppo and is an important hub for Syrian businesses as well as NGOs working on issues of women’s and human rights. Gaziantep is

also the most developed industrialized city in Turkey's border region. Finally, the population of Syrians registered under temporary protection in Mersin, a cosmopolitan city with a diversity of religious and ethnic groups, was as high as 200,000 as of June 2019. As they did in Gaziantep, Syrians established connections in Mersin in trade and tourism long before 2011. Educated middle- and upper-class Syrians traveled to Mersin for trade or tourism and were thus somewhat familiar with the city.

Each of these cities has a sui generis economic character. Foreign trade is the backbone of economic activity in Izmir. This economic activity combines with agriculture in the inland districts, and with tourism in the coastal areas. Accordingly, the province's main economic activities are trade, industry, tourism and agriculture.⁵ Textiles and garments, food, alcoholic beverages, tobacco and animal feed are the most important industries. Additionally, iron and steel, petroleum chemicals, motor vehicles, footwear and fertilizers, all of which are produced for internal and external markets, are key industries. Important economic activity in Gaziantep is intertwined with the metal, plastic and machinery industries, which in turn develop around textiles and food. Businesses operating in the footwear, leather and artificial leather industries have grown continuously since the Gaziantep Shoemakers Industrial Site was opened in 2000. These sectors are largely composed of small workshops and small-scale industrial enterprises.⁶ Lastly, economic activity in Mersin revolves around an agricultural production center and an industrial port, through which agricultural products are sold to internal and external markets. Besides agriculture and trade, Mersin also has well-developed petroleum chemicals and machine industries.

Although we do not have detailed information on the labor force participation of each city, the labor force participation rate of women differs substantially by region, as Table II shows below. This rate is 32.2 percent in the Adana-Mersin region, 24.5 percent in the Gaziantep-Adıyaman-Kilis region and 39 percent in Izmir.

⁵ <http://www.izto.org.tr/tr/izmir-ekonomisi> [Last accessed on 15 April 2020]

⁶ <https://gso.org.tr/tr/genel-sayfa/gaziantep-sanayisi/sanayi-yapisi-53.html> [Last accessed on 19 April 2020]

Labor force participation for women aged 15 older	Turkey	Adana, Mersin (TR62) Women+ Men	Adana, Mersin (TR62) Women	Gaziantep, Adiyaman, Kilis (TRC1) Women+ Men	Gaziantep, Adiyaman, Kilis (TRC1) Women	Izmir (TR31) Women+ Men	Izmir (TR31) Women
2019	53	49,5	32,2	47,5	24,5	56,1	39

Table 2 Labor force participation

Source: This information was obtained from the Turkish Statistical Institute Labor Force by Regions Statistics 2020⁷

Similar to other big cities, Mersin, Gaziantep and Izmir have previously hosted previous migration flows and have witnessed the migration of internally displaced Kurdish populations. The migration of Syrians has added a new layer to the waves of migration these cities previously received. As is the case throughout Turkey (Baban et al., 2017), we can also consider that migrants in all three cities have been integrated into the informal economy as part of the cheap labor force. Migrants' and women's participation in the formal economy therefore remains somewhat limited, and they are instead employed as a cheap source of labor force under harsh working conditions.

⁷ <https://biruni.tuik.gov.tr/medas/?kn=102&locale=tr> [Last accessed on 19 April 2020]

WOMEN'S LABOR MARKET EXPERIENCES IN THE CONTEXT OF MIGRATION

The resettlement of forcibly displaced persons due to war, conflict and environmental disaster is a complex and challenging process. For migrants, one of the most pressing problems in the post-migration period is finding paid employment in the host country. As much research has shown, Syrians in Turkey struggle to access regular, secure and well-paid jobs to sustain their lives (Baban et al., 2017; İçduygu and Diker, 2017; Dedeoğlu and Gökmen, 2011). This problem becomes more pressing for women because of gender norms and relations, and the gendered structure of the labor market.

Understanding pre-migration work experiences and gender relations is essential in grasping the impact of working conditions and labor force participation in the post-migration context. Such an inquiry not only helps us to understand paid work experiences in Turkey but also sheds light on the ruptures and continuities of gender norms and relations.

Pre-migration paid work experience: “The man should do the working”

Abu-Assab (2017: 18) remarks that, for women, Syria before the war “seems to have been comparatively and relatively better than elsewhere in the region”. She also highlights the limited scope of the literature on gender equality for that period. Moreover, Abu-Assab underlines that, due to a lack of attention for factors such as political contexts, sectarianism and “state feminism”, the qualitative indicators of women’s labor force participation are misleading and that women’s labor force participation in Syria should not be seen as an indicator of women’s rights and gender equality (2017: 17–18).

Similarly, Charles and Denman (2012) contend that a considerable segment of women are excluded from public life and labor markets in Syria, and that class and geographical location are important determinants for women whose freedom is comparatively less restricted. Middle- and upper-class women living in large cities, such as Aleppo and Damascus, had far more opportunities than women living elsewhere. Although there is a negligible gap between male and female education attainment, women could not adequately utilize their education in the pursuit of employment. In summary, education is a widespread element among Syrian women but is viewed as an opportunity to find a husband of a higher socioeconomic status and become a “more desirable housewife”, as women maintain traditional domestic roles. According to a UNHCR report, men represent 80 percent of the Syrian labor market (cited in Charles and Denman 2012: 205).

Seventeen of the women we had interviews with reported that they had performed income-generating jobs in Syria, while 31 indicated that they had no previous work experience. Some women had worked in professions such as teaching and nursing, while others were employed in precarious and low-paying jobs such as agriculture and piecework.

All the interviewees stated that, due to traditional gender norms, Syrian society does not approve female employment. However, they also said that besides class-based and regional differentiation, these norms also differ between generations.

“In Aleppo, for example, there are some districts, and going to those districts is thought to be disgraceful. There are some districts, and you can find freedom in those neighborhoods. I mean, it depends on the district... In shanty towns where there are many children, children do not get any education. They don’t let their children get education. They give birth to so many children so that they work, make money and contribute to the expenses. But in other districts, people are to get education. Father goes to work, mother goes to work, children go to school. But not everywhere...” (Reyan, 33, Izmir)

Moreover, the interviewees stated that life in Syria was relatively more affordable than in Turkey, therefore not compelling women to contribute to the household income. Yadenur had previously never been employed and her husband worked as a tailor before they were displaced. She recounted the situation in Syria:

“First of all, women would not work. Second, there was no such thing as rent. It was forbidden for women to work. Men do the working. You should continue serving your husband and children at home.” (Yadenur, 35, Izmir)

Women who had experience in paid work in Syria pointed to the gendered dynamics of work regimes and expressed that they worked in “women and children only” environments. Habibe (35) worked as a speech therapist for nine years in Syria and previously taught Quran and Arabic courses from home. She stated that she had to work after entering Turkey, since her ex-husband was “irresponsible” and neglected to sustain his household. She discussed the working conditions in Syria:

“[In Syria], we were working, our working hours were short. It was 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. and everyone was girl, there was no boys whatsoever. You would deal with small children, not even the families.” (Habibe, 35, Izmir)

Siham (35) worked as a nurse in Aleppo. After coming to Mersin, she first worked in some workshops and later started working as a babysitter. During the three and a half years she spent at this job, she worked some days from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. She compared the working conditions in Turkey and Syria:

“We work for very long hours. Extremely long. No to taking a day off, do whatever you want to do but on your off day. For example, we work in Syria, we get off the work early and when we ask for permission, they say OK. In Syria, it is maximum 10 hours. We would go to hospital at 8 a.m. and leave at 2.30 or 3 p.m.” (Siham, 35, Mersin)

Rihab studied education and worked as a primary school teacher for six years in Damascus. She highlighted the positive aspects of working before coming to Turkey:

“I went to university in Homs, and then I worked as a primary school teacher for six years. I was paid a generous salary. I had long breaks. It was really easy to work, back then.” (Rihab, 34, Mersin)

We learned during the interviews that the critical threshold for the working lives of women is marriage. Jawahar (26), whom we met in Mersin, said that it is not a problem in her family for a woman to work. But she added that a husband’s refusal to allow his wife to work means the end of aspirations for employment. Before getting married, Lamia worked for two years as an Arabic teacher at a primary school in Syria but had to quit her job after she got married. Today, she teaches Arabic lessons again as a volunteer at an NGO.

Women whose families do not disapprove of their working, or do not intervene in the conditions of their work, express that, though it varies by region, they still generally feel social pressure. Elvan, who had worked as a civil servant in Syria, noted that she could only go to work and that any outside socialization was not possible for her:

“My father and brothers were not oppressive, but society was. In Syria, I couldn’t go to buy groceries. All of these were done by my brothers and my father. I would just go to work and come home.” (Elvan, 44, Gaziantep)

The findings of the research on why Syrian women decide to begin working and how their families and broader social circles react help us to understand changes in gender norms.

Entering paid work: Exigency

Almost all the interviewees stated that they started working due to financial difficulties in Turkey and “out of exigency”, to meet their basic needs. In a social order that frames the duties and primary responsibilities of women as childcare and household maintenance, women’s engagement in paid work has sparked new tensions. Women whose husbands or parents do not allow them to work outside the home choose instead to do piecework jobs from home, something that six interviewees reported doing. Wages generated by these jobs are not enough to cover household expenses but still contribute to the household income. Migrants

frequently resort to asking for institutional or financial support from relatives in third countries when employment does not generate sufficient income. However, these mechanisms are limited, as the report will discuss later on.

Though piecework jobs are irregular, low-paying and physically taxing, they allow women to engage in paid work while simultaneously maintaining their traditional roles (Uçar, 2020). Hanım (33, Antep) assembles slippers from home as a piecework job, with which she has the opportunity to do household chores, and her husband “keeps his mouth shut”. She piles sacks of slippers in a room of her home, asking for help from her children and, sometimes, her neighbors. The production of slippers involves volatile substances, which can be highly risky for children’s health. Nevertheless, Hanım makes 25 Turkish liras for every 600 pairs of slippers she assembles every two days. Linda (42, Mersin) also does piecework jobs in Mersin and said that, as long as it is in a “proper” place, her husband has no problem with her working. In fact, he supports it. His support is why she can sell her homemade wares at souvenir fairs, which are usually visited by Syrians.

Women employed outside of their homes can start working after receiving the approval of their parents or husbands. When women live in neighborhoods heavily populated by their relatives, friends, or other Syrians, their paid work can trigger social pressures (HPG, 2017: 18). Gossip and mechanisms of pressure are understood to be more intense, especially in the early phases of migration. But it has also been reported that in the face of mounting financial difficulties, the number of women who begin working paid jobs is growing, making women’s employment increasingly normalized. İlkay, who had not engaged in any income-generating activity in Syria, recounted the process:

“[When we were in Syria], we would sit at home. We were comfortable—that was how we lived. Here, we are forced to. We work out of necessity. Needs and helplessness forced us to work. At first, we were ashamed of working in front of our relatives. ‘A woman doesn’t work!’ But now, it is getting normal both for us and for them. They all started letting their daughters work. In the beginning, a relative would come and [say] ‘You are working, your husband is sitting at home!’ Now it is all normal. No one gossips about it.” (İlkay, 37, Izmir)

Another obstacle for women working outside of the home is getting permission from their husbands or parents to work in mixed-gender workplaces. Convincing husband and parents can be quite challenging, because working in a mixed-gender setting, conflicts with

conventional gender norms, and due to the possibility of harassment⁸ in the workplace and on the streets. After getting divorced, Habibe and her 15-year-old son moved in with her parents and brother, who was the income-generating member of the family. After her brother got married and moved out, she became the only income-generating member of her household.

“I work out of necessity. My parents, especially my father, had not given their consent for me to work. But our financial situation got so bad, tutoring students did not pay enough. I was economically forced to work, and my father got convinced. Thank God, I work in a very decent place.” (Habibe, 35, Izmir)

One way women avoid the risk of harassment and abuse, as well as that of gossip and social pressure, is to work where their male relatives work. As such, they are assured security both in the workplace and while commuting. However, job type and income are usually the main determining factors for women who overcome these restrictions and work outside the home and in mixed-gender workplaces.

To conclude, the losses and challenges that arise during periods of displacement and resettlement and the necessities of survival imposed by changing conditions transform conventional gender norms and instigate a process of adjusting to the “new normal” (CARA, 2020:1).

Although it is driven by an “exigency” posed by the conditions, women’s participation in paid work either for earning a living for the household or for contributing to the household budget, inevitably impacts gender relations, roles and performances.

Migrant networks and gender: Venturing out

Because resources that migrants may have utilized before migrating, such as diplomas, practical skills and experiences, are de-qualified in the host community (Sert, 2016), social networks gain significance. Social networks are defined as the entirety of personal connections between individuals who are members of the same community, relatives, acquaintances, or friends. These networks include not only personal links but also institutional relations (Vasta, 2004) and, therefore, encompass the relationships between migrants as well as those between migrants and non-migrants.

There is a rich literature that focuses on the form, content, and facilitating and restraining impacts of social networks in the process of finding a job (Akyiğit, 2016; Kalaylıoğlu, 2015; Daniş, 2010; Faist, 2003; Portes & Sensenbrenner, 1993). In this fieldwork

⁸ For an analysis of Syrian women’s experiences of harassment and gender-based violence, see Baklacioğlu 2017, and Herwig 2017

which conducted in three cities, we explored the facilitating and restraining impacts of social networks, particularly in the process of searching for work.

In cases where migrants access to the labor market and employment opportunities are unregulated or insufficiently supported, migrants are compelled to rely on social networks. The problems Syrians face in finding paid employment in Turkey highlight the importance of understanding the networks on which migrants depend in order to earn a living. But social networks are not neutral constructions; not everyone in a social network is equal, nor is their access to intra-network resources. In other words, many factors such as age, gender, ethnic and religious identities, and migratory histories are decisive in these networks. Based on these dynamics, individual positions within networks differ and are shaped by power relations.

In the interviews we conducted during this research, we observed not only the role and importance that finding paid work represented for women but also the prominence of gender in these networks.

The physical and social boundaries of networks

Almost all the women we had interviews with expressed that they arrived in the city where they currently live through connections with family or friends, networks that would prove influential in the resettlement process in these cities. All the migrants live in neighborhoods populated mostly by Syrians, and most choose to live near their relatives and friends. While many Syrians cluster in impoverished areas where they can find cheap rent prices, some Syrians settle in middle-class and relatively well-off neighborhoods. In any case, there is arguably a spatial concentration that strengthens migrant networks. This physical proximity is also reflected in the social relations of migrants. Accordingly, all Syrian women we had interviews with stated that, outside their families, they mostly socialize with their Turkish and Syrian neighbors. The facilitative and restrictive effects of these networks are apparent in the process of finding a job.

Considering that the resources on the networks created by similar groups are scarce, the possibility of accessing useful information about job opportunities is quite low for women whose networks are confined to neighborhood and relatives. Accordingly, women articulated during the interviews that they learned about job opportunities from their social circles and acquaintances. That said, conflicts and asymmetrical power dynamics in close relationships can weaken bonding networks.⁹ In groups of Syrians in which patriarchal gender roles and

⁹ Putnam (2000) separates the capital that migrants use while integrating into the newly arrived host society into

relationships are dominant, the chance is slim that a woman will break the physical and social barriers of her community and access job opportunities. Thus, as women gain greater access to existing information and opportunities through their close relationships, they have a greater chance of entering the labor market.

Crossing barriers

Geographical segregation and unequal access to job opportunities emerge due to the concentration of refugees in certain neighborhoods, resulting in the confinement of refugees to certain sectors. A lack of familiarity with the economic and social geography of the post-migration city also leads to mobility restrictions for migrants. These restrictions are more noticeable for women due to gendered expectations (Joassart-Marcelli, 2014: 825). According to a UN Women report (2018), 40 percent of Syrian women are able to leave home no more than once a week.

“For example, in our society, husband rules over the wife. No going out. No letting anyone in. He is the man; you are the woman. As a woman, you have to be inferior.” (Emine, 29, Izmir)

For women who have conventionally been restricted to domestic spaces and relationships, the ability to access job opportunities by overcoming physical and social limitations entails crossing barriers in gender relations.

Since it is difficult to find paid employment within migrant communities and because jobs can be found through social networks, weak networks are essential in accessing employment opportunities (Johnson et al., 2019:5). Weak networks emerge from relatively low-intensity relationships that are established by numerous people with distinct backgrounds (Granovetter, 1973). In other words, weak networks represent loose and vague relationships between individuals who are in different social systems.

When unable to utilize social circles to find work, women looking to earn a living or contribute to their household income wander the streets in search of jobs. Wod (27) is a high school graduate who lives with her mother in Gaziantep and has worked at an NGO for five years. During our interview, which was conducted in English, she recounted how she found a job the day after they arrived from Syria:

“It was really weird and frightening. We walked around on the streets. Everyone talks but you don’t understand a single word. It was really, really difficult. We can

two categories: *bridging* and *bonding*. While *bridging social capital* includes the relationships migrants foster with individuals outside their social circles, *bonding social capital* encompasses the close ties and communication that migrants maintain with family members, friends and other migrants.

... speak English since our childhood. We tried to speak English, but no one could speak English. No one could speak Arabic... We asked everyone, finally we found a job in small places, in workshops. They didn't hire my brothers, they hired me and my mother". (Wod, 27, Gaziantep)

The ability of women typically confined to domestic spaces and relationships to access job opportunities by overcoming physical and social barriers entails transcending the limitations of gender relations.

Similarly, acquaintances and coincidental encounters might also offer an opportunity to find an employment, a situation that Revan's (45) story of finding a job exemplifies. Revan was looking for work due to prevailing challenges in her life. She wanted to ask an organization in Basmane to help her find a job, but when she arrived, she saw that it had shut down. Revan learned that a "stranger" she bumped into worked at a different NGO, and she told this woman that she was not going anywhere until they found her a job. Revan's story exemplifies how the obligations imposed by financial difficulties push women to cross physical and social boundaries. Structural problems and limitations arguably affect the evolution and advancement of female agency.

Institutional relationships are another factor that allows women to cross physical and social barriers. In addition to family and neighborhood networks, for Syrian women the most important social networks are NGOs working with refugees, national and international organizations, and the connections they establish through these institutions. Joining these networks, Syrian women can spend time with other migrants and non-migrants in various activities, improve their labor market position by attending trainings or workshops organized by these organizations, or find jobs at these institutions. In this respect, NGOs not only stand at the intersection of access to social networks but also offer a sector that employs migrants.

Women access NGOs through social networks. Interviewee women state that they can obtain information about NGOs and their activities through their social circles and social media or through spontaneous encounters. Besides, NGOs reach out to neighborhoods where refugees are densely populated and carry out projects, which also facilitate women's access to NGOs.

We observed that factors of cultural capitals such as education and language skills facilitate finding employment at NGOs or in the programs implemented by national and international institutions. For example, women who have a diploma and work experience can find jobs as teachers, interpreters and facilitators at NGOs and their projects. Also, learning Turkish increases the likelihood for women with lower level of formal education to find jobs

at NGOs. Women who can speak Turkish can access jobs such as nursing, housekeeping and cooking. Furthermore, employment programs of institutions often require Turkish language certificates.

Strengthening networks

NGOs that work with asylum-seekers and refugees undertake humanitarian aid, empowerment, integration and social assistance activities. A part of these organizations, particularly those that operate exclusively with Syrians, employ Syrians in limited numbers. In addition to these functions, they offer places for gathering and socialization (Sunata and Tosun, 2018) and serve as a hub to establish personal connections (Özden and Ramadan, 2019, 18). We observed, in each of the three cities where we conducted interviews, that these organizations are pivotal in the expansion of Syrian women's social networks. Apart from attending courses and activities, women also participate in voluntary projects at these NGOs. Participating in NGO activities offers them, on the one hand, a chance to spend time and socialize in a safe space and, on the other hand, opportunities to receive information about and gain access to potential jobs. It is crucial that NGOs take into consideration the values and norms of participants, and that they organize "women-only" events.

However, attending NGO training courses and activities and volunteering are time-consuming tasks. Women who do not have children and are not required to care for sick or elderly family members can set aside more time for these programs. Women with school-aged children can only leave home when their children are in school and have limited time they can spend on these activities.

NGOs can strengthen refugee networks and, thereby, provide migrants with access to resources that are limited, especially jobs. Amal had obtained a degree in physical education in Aleppo before she came to Turkey with her husband in late 2013. In Turkey, she worked in agriculture for a while. But after giving birth to her second child, she realized that she could not remain in such labor-intensive jobs and started looking for other types of work. Connections she established with a faith-based NGO helped her secure a job as a school counselor:

"I heard that there was a Quran center. I wanted to go there, and I did. For a couple of times, I went to study Quran. I heard from the teachers that this place would be made school temporarily. I talked to the head of the school and said, 'I am a physics teacher, I have my diploma with me.' He asked me some questions and said to me 'You are hardworking.' My GPA was very high. He said, 'If school

plan works, we will be in touch.’ I said, OK. Days passed by. I went to Mersin Directorate for National Education. There was a civil servant there, very nice person. He was really nice to Syrians. He said, ‘If a school opens, Insha’Allah, I will call you immediately.’ He put a star next to my name. A couple of months later the school was opened and I started.” (Amal, 30, Mersin)

Working at NGOs or projects run by public institutions is preferable due to the improved working conditions, but some women voiced their experiences of discrimination and ill-treatment in these workplaces as well. Five women who are employed at national NGOs or work jobs in the scope of employment projects at national and international organizations stated that they are not treated the same as their Turkish colleagues. Four women working at an NGO in Izmir noted that they are not included in social activities because they are Syrian, yet they do not draw attention to these problems, since they are afraid of losing their jobs.

Job and working conditions

In order to grasp the changes and tensions that post-migration employment causes in gender roles, we must analyze women’s working conditions. According to Regulation No.6575, issued in January 2016, foreigners under temporary protection can apply for work permits.¹⁰ Nevertheless, foreigners under temporary protection still face difficulties in accessing the formal labor market. Syrians are compelled to accept precarious and low-paying jobs under poor working conditions (Erol et al., 2017), for reasons such as an employer’s reluctance to pay employee insurance premiums or work permit fees, the advantages of low-paying informal jobs in finding employment, and the possibility of losing jobs if they demand insurance from their employer (İçduygu and Diker, 2017:23). All these are rooted in Turkey’s migration policies and labor market. Despite the work permit regulation issued in 2016, the nature of employment for Syrians, similar to that of other migrants, entails jobs that pay low—if any—wages, long work hours, discrimination and unhealthy workplace conditions (Kaygısız, 2017). For women, many of these challenges are amplified. In addition to the wage gap between refugees and non-refugees, refugee women and children receive significantly lower wages (Akbaş and Ünlütürk Ulutaş, 2018).

A UN Women’s study reported that 85 percent of Syrian women in Turkey do not work. Ten percent have regular employment, while 5 percent work seasonal or irregular jobs (UN Women, 2018: 45). The same study also noted that 12 percent engage in income-generating

¹⁰ Regulation No. 6575 on the Work Permits of Foreigners Under Temporary Protection Status. <https://www.mevzuat.gov.tr/MevzuatMetin/3.5.20168375.pdf> [Last accessed on 19 April 2020]

activity from home (Ibid.: 49).

The women we interviewed work in precarious, low-paying and temporary jobs regardless of their education level or prior work experience. Yet, concerning working conditions and wages, our interviewees described to us a work hierarchy that is based on the variation between jobs. We identified four types of work during the research: 1) employment at NGOs or public institutions; 2) self-employment; 3) out-of-home employment, such as hairdressers, shop assistants and garment industry workers; and 4) piecework jobs.

Before identifying the characteristics of each type of employment, we must emphasize that all these categories, including the first one, are marked by temporariness and uncertainty. Syrian women do not work in these jobs to realize themselves or pursue careers. The future is opaque in even the best of these jobs.

The preferable type of work for Syrian women in Turkey is at NGOs, which offer better wages and working hours. But working conditions, job descriptions and wages vary considerably between organizations. While some earn a monthly wage of TRY3,000 for full-time work, others make only TRY1,200 working three hours a day. Some of the interviewees employed at NGOs voiced their satisfaction, not only with their wages and working conditions, but also with the diminished levels of discrimination and ill-treatment compared to other sectors. The most significant source of anxiety for women in this group relates to the temporary and short-term nature of project-based jobs. In other words, while employees at NGOs enjoy comparatively better working conditions, they are still commonly troubled by the precarity and uncertainty of project-based jobs. For example, Semra (38, Izmir) works for the Ministry of Health as a fixed-term interpreter at a public hospital, and her contract is renewed annually. Before this job, Semra had worked at an NGO project for 10 months. Since a project she worked on at an NGO ended, Reyan (33, Izmir), a mother of one, has been employed as a volunteer for eight hours a week at a different NGO. At the time of the interview, Reyan was awaiting a vacancy at the NGO where she volunteered.¹¹ She said that it was a steppingstone to access full-time employment down the road.

Rihab (34), a mother of three, worked as a teacher in Homs before leaving Syria. At the time of the interview, she was working at an NGO in Mersin. She said that the project she was working on was a three-month project and that her previous job had been similarly terminated:

“Unfortunately, it is only three months. It is really good, paying 2,000 liras, but it is going to end. I was working a year ago, and it was closed. I am unlucky. Only

¹¹ “Voluntary” positions are low-paying jobs offered by NGOs to encourage and increase the participation of refugees in NGO-organized programs, training and activities. These positions are not defined as jobs.

one month left [in this work].” (Rihab, 34, Mersin)

Working at NGOs offers a great chance for women who are recent graduates or are still finishing their university education. Jawahar had started her university education in Aleppo and completed it in Mersin in 2018. She recounted that, after graduating, she started working at an NGO where she had volunteered while studying at university:

“First, I worked as an interpreter at the reception. Now, I work as a field worker. I received Turkish CI certificate, and I can work as a certified translator [for Syrians]. I think about starting an MSc in civil engineering in the future, but for now I work here. I love this job. I like helping people. This will continue until April 2020, after that I will think about it.” (Jawahar, 26, Mersin)

Despite their temporary and uncertain nature, jobs at NGO are preferable over jobs elsewhere, because they are better paying, have regular work hours, and offer improved working conditions and a safer working environment. İlkay, who now works on an NGO-funded project, previously worked in the garment industry. She compared her current working conditions in her position to those of her previous job:

“Garment industry is crowded with lots of troubles. It is not comfortable. Institutions are cleaner, more comfortable.” (İlkay, 37, Izmir)

Another group of women is employed without work permits in service sector jobs such as nannies, masseuses, shop assistants and secretaries, which they work at least 10 hours a day, six days a week. These paid jobs are usually associated with extremely harsh working conditions (“you will never stop”, “chop-chop”), shifts stretching up to 12 hours a day, very low wages and ill-treatment. Women working in the garment industry, in particular, stated that they never work less than 10 hours a day and that, in the garment industry, the highest monthly wage is TRY2,000. Some women who fall into this category also noted that they were sometimes unable to receive their wages.

Cihan works as a shop assistant in a store selling clothing and cosmetics in Mersin, but she previously worked in garment industry workshops. She voiced her relative satisfaction with her current job, though she still works 11 to 12 hours each day and had only one day off every 15 days. Kawtar (23) lives with her family in Mersin and is temporarily working as a shop assistant in a clothing store. She said that she does not receive regular wages for this job, that she accepts “whatever the boss pays”. Kawtar was previously employed in textile workshops, where she worked for 12 hours a day, six days a week. She was paid very little and sometimes not at all. This ultimately pushed her to quit and she began looking for piecework jobs to work from home but was unable to find any.

In informal positions, people sometimes do not obtain the actual value of their labor. Women who work in the service sector express that they are paid less than their Turkish colleagues, even though they perform the same job. Gül (35) lives in Izmir and worked as a hairdresser for 15 years in Syria. She has worked at the same hair salon in Turkey for five years. Yet she conveyed that, since she first started working there, she has been paid less than the other employees.

“Last year, I went to Syria for visiting purposes, and she found a new employee in my position. I went for a month and came back. That woman was filling in for me and was paid 600 liras, while I was paid 450 liras. I asked [my employer] ‘Why do you pay her 1.5 times more than me?’ She said, ‘You are Syrian, I won’t raise your salary.’ I had been working for her for four years. I was really depressed because [my employee] was working in a clothing store and I was running the hairdresser. She would come once a week, get the weekly sum and leave. I was taking care of everything in the workplace. ‘You are Syrian, I won’t raise your money!’. At that point I was heartbroken. I grabbed my purse and left. She said, ‘If you want to go, go!’ and I left.” (Gül, 35, Izmir)

Gül said that she called her employer a week later, but her employer refused:

“I demanded what I deserved. I would be OK if she got 650, and I got 500. But I was getting 400, and she was 650!” (Gül, 35, Izmir)

After a year of being unemployed, Gül returned to her previous job, but she is still paid less than her colleagues.

“: ... she raised my salary to 500, but I deserve more than that. I made two buns in the morning, and I earned 500 liras.” (Gül, 35, Izmir)

Besides wage inequality, the interviewees frequently articulated discrimination in the quality and quantity of jobs they perform. Especially in the garment industry, workers expressed that they were assigned to unskilled tasks and that the amount of time they were allowed for breaks and their shifts differed from those of their Turkish colleagues. Discriminatory practices were also expected in both informal jobs and at larger institutions, though in different forms.

Some, albeit very few, Syrian women working in Turkey opened their own businesses. Five of the 48 interviewees tried to start their own businesses. When we conducted interviews during this research, only three of five women were able to maintain businesses. The TEPAV report (2018), which focuses on Syrian entrepreneurs in Turkey, points out that discriminatory banking regulations, difficulties in accessing banking systems and loans, and high tax rates represent major hurdles for Syrian small business owners in the service sector. The same

report asserts that potential or existing problems between locals and business owners represent additional obstacles to the expansion of their customer base and, accordingly, the survival of their businesses. Safaa (36), a designer who lives in Mersin, stated that she could keep her officially registered flower shop for only three years because of high tax rates and fluctuating financial turnover. Safaa expressed that the majority of her customers were Syrians, and that her Turkish customers stopped buying from her once they figured out that she was Syrian.

Of the women who were able to keep their businesses afloat, two live in Gaziantep, and one lives in Mersin. As they do not earn sufficient income from these businesses, the two women living in Gaziantep work second jobs at NGOs. Jamila (42), a divorcee with three children, runs a bakery. She previously worked in textile workshops and at restaurants, but these jobs were low-paying with long work hours. She said that she borrowed money from her cousin to open her business and attended entrepreneurship classes offered by KOSGEB (Small and Medium Enterprises Development Organization). The majority of her customers are Syrians, and she receives orders on social media or from previous customers. Yet she still is forced to work at other restaurants when her business struggles. To put it succinctly, Syrian women who open their own businesses can be just as economically vulnerable.

Women who do piecework jobs at home perform day-long, physically and psychologically exhausting, extremely low-paying jobs which mostly jeopardize their health. Piecework jobs such as beadwork, nut sorting, slipper assembling vary according to difficulty levels and rates; nonetheless, income earned through these jobs is far from covering the household expenses. Women carry out these piecework jobs concomitantly with household chores and childcare in order to contribute to household income. Sometimes children help with these piecework jobs.

Nur (33, Gaziantep) started doing beadwork in Syria to cover her expenses before getting married. After she got married, however, she quit, because her husband would not allow her to continue. When she came to Turkey, financial difficulties again pushed her to assemble beadworks again, but she quit once more after giving birth to her third child, because the beads posed a swallowing hazard for young children. Doa (26), who lives in Izmir, receives a commission of one lira per piece she subcontracts in the neighborhood. She was the second link in a chain of subcontracts working this job. She stated that she sometimes does beadwork, and the payment varies based on the quality of her products. She also told us that the last job she got was 10 liras per piece, and she subcontracted it to other women for nine liras per piece, though she struggles to subcontract work paying seven liras per piece. She talked about the work that she subcontracts:

“It’s pity, their eyesight deteriorates, backs hurt, and it does not pay well. Marien works with her children for a month and she is paid 300 liras, this is nothing. It is not enough even for her children. On a single trip to farmer’s market she would spend it all. It doesn’t even cover her rent. And she gets exhausted the entire day. She [finishes] and brings it back to me. With no children whatsoever, I can do only one piece all day. If you work full day, you make less than 15 liras.” (Doa, 26, Izmir)

Women who do piecework jobs expressed that their income is neither regular nor sufficient for maintaining a decent life for themselves and their children and that they cannot earn enough from sales or meet their needs. Hülya (48, Mersin), who produces souvenirs, complained less about the difficulty of the job than the difficulty of selling her products. İbtihal also sells souvenirs, such as homemade dolls and cushions she made with a friend, at fairs and charity sales. She said that she came to Mersin with her four children after her husband died in Syria in 2014 and started making handicrafts:

“A year ago, I started selling what I made. But I earn very little. We rent a small stand and sell them there. In NGO festivals, fairs. I sell it to the Turkish people mostly. Sometimes to Syrians, as well. I make 250 liras at most. It is not enough for anything.” (İbtihal, 45, Mersin)

Income earned from tutoring, yet another precarious occupation, is remarkably inconsistent. Sümeyye (24), who lives in Gaziantep, works as a tutor while studying at university. She tutors students at different grades, ranging from primary school to high school and teaches English to Turkish students and Turkish to Arab students. She makes approximately TRY2,000 a month.

Transnational kinship networks of financial support

Income earned at irregular and low paying jobs falls below the poverty line in Turkey’s economic conditions.¹² Twelve of the 48 interviewees reported that they do not receive any financial or in-kind aid other than the wages of members in their households. They also articulated their struggle to make ends meet, consequently being unable to give aid to anyone

¹² In April 2020, the net minimum wage in Turkey for a family of four was TRY2,324.70. However, in January 2019, the poverty line was at TRY6,758, and the starvation line was TRY1,957 (DİSK, 2020:43–44). The main source of income for the majority (85 percent) of Syrian refugees in Turkey is wages from employment. Contrary to popular belief, the majority of Syrian refugees are not supported fully by in-kind or financial assistance provided by a public institution. Such assistance is a regular source of income for only 6 percent of refugee households, varying significantly. Regarding household income, 6 percent of Syrians reported relying on the financial support of family and friends, and 3 percent reported using savings they brought from Syria. (İNGEV and İPSOS 2017: 2).

else. Other interviewees expressed a relationship of mutual assistance, albeit in small amounts, between close relatives, regularly or during times of hardship. Ten women stated that they receive aid from relatives living abroad. The amount of aid can be anywhere from 200 to 5,000 liras, though it usually ranges between 500 and 1,000 liras. For instance, İbtihal (46, Mersin), a mother of four, sells knitwork souvenirs at various charity sales in the city. Apart from this, the brother of her late husband, who died in 2014, is the primary income-earner of her household, sending her money from Sweden, where he lives. İbtihal said that her brother-in-law usually sends the money via wire transfer but sometimes brings it himself when he travels to Turkey. She noted that he has offered to help them whenever her children are in need. Hülya's family was quite wealthy before the war. Each of her siblings has settled in a different country. Her sister, who lives in Germany, represents her biggest source of support and sends her money each month.

Some women, on the other hand, send money to their relatives. Twenty-two of the interviewees stated that they send money to relatives in Turkey or Syria either by wire transfer or via mutual acquaintances. These transfers are often need-based and irregular. The transfer amount is usually 300–500 liras, though some women send all or a significant portion of their wages to their relatives in Syria. For example, Dalal (38), who works as a secretary in Mersin, said that they send her husband's wages to his relatives in Syria and cover their expenses with the wages she and her two sons earn. Intrafamily aid flows from Western countries to Turkey, and from Turkey to Syria. Money is sent from Turkey to Syria usually through middle persons. These cash flows also hint at family networks with members scattered around the world, and the transnational aspect of intra-network economic resources. Nevertheless, with few exceptions, financial resources circulating through networks are quite limited due to the impoverishment caused by forced migration.

Besides the limitations of support mechanisms between family members and friends, minimal support is received from NGOs or state institutions. Among the women who reported that they received support from NGOs in finding jobs and making friends, only one noted she had received in-kind or financial assistance from an NGO other than the Social Cohesion Assistance, which is distributed through a Kızılay Kart, and she received it only for a year. Therefore, our research shows that women's relationships with NGOs are limited not to receiving assistance but rather to attending courses and activities and joining social networks. However, as mentioned above, this might offer considerable advantages for some people.

GENDER AND RESILIENCE

This section addresses the relationship between gender and resilience regarding the challenging economic and political conditions and legal status that Syrian women face in the context of migration. Specifically, this section focus on how the paid work Syrian women engage in and gender norms transform each other, and focuses on the factors that enhance or constrain the ability of Syrian women to develop resilience.

The literature on female empowerment highlights labor force participation and work as essential factors (Atasü-Topçuoğlu, 2019). Migrants are already disadvantaged on matters of working conditions and wages, and migrant women are paid even less than the migrant men (ibid.). When women who are subjected to double discrimination in the labor market find paid employment, the existing power relations in the household become unsettled and new tensions emerge. The next subsection will focus on how Syrian women negotiate gender relations concerning their paid work experiences. It will discuss these relations along a broad spectrum that includes starting jobs to having a say over their income.

Increasing burdens: I take care of everything!

Women's participation in paid work in an effort to make a living for the family creates challenges in balancing domestic chores and work life. In addition to the problems that impede migrants' economic integration, such as legal barriers or lack of language skills, Syrian women face other obstacles to standing on their own feet. These include gender norms and gender-based violence in the workplace (Durable Solutions Platform and ÍGAM, 2019). The primary problems that working women face are childcare, chores, and household maintenance. A UN Women (2018: 46) study articulates the reasons Syrian women give for not engaging in paid work: not having anyone to look after the children, illness or disability, having members of their household needing care, and household chores.

Social and institutional support is of prime importance for women to start paid work, especially with jobs that are outside the home. In piecework jobs performed from home, women refuse—or take prolonged breaks from—work that might be harmful to their children. For example, women can take a break from jobs that may pose hazards to their children, such as beadwork, until they are older. For women to be employed in out-of-home jobs, either their children must be old enough to care for themselves, or they must find another member of the household, typically a woman, to look after their children. In the interviews, Syrian women

listed grandmothers, young girls at home, or elder daughters as others who can care for young children. They did not mention husbands as responsible for chores or childcare, even when they are unemployed.

Jiyan (39) came to Turkey with her eight children, leaving behind her married daughter, and lives in Izmir. Because her children were young, she stayed at home and performed piecework jobs until a year ago. Starting last year, she began working outside of the home. She can leave her daughters, aged 8, 11, and 12, to take care of themselves since they “are grown enough”. However, it is not always possible for women to find someone to help with childcare. Maysun, who lives in Mersin, said that her 8-year-old son has to stay home alone, since she and her two grown-up children have to work.

Bahriye (42, Gaziantep) simultaneously runs a café with her family and works at an NGO. She said that they opened the café for her husband to work at but that he does not put in much work there, nor does he help with the chores. Despite her serious health problems, Berçin, who is in her 50s, leaves home early in the morning with her young children and grandchildren to collect paper, bottles, and metal from the streets. Describing her fatigue, she said, “You come home, and the chores are waiting for you.” Reyan also relayed the difficulties of balancing chores and work life with phrases women in all three cities frequently used:

“I wake up at 6 a.m. I do the cleaning right after my husband leaves home. Sometimes I have to prepare his stuff, I take my son to school. I cook usually when I come home [from work]. I usually attend to my chores on Saturdays and Sundays”. (Reyan, 33, Izmir)

Dalal got married to her cousin, who is 10 years older than her, when she was 14. She said that she had not work in Syria but found a job in Turkey as a secretary at a Syrian-owned trade firm to contribute to the household income. She was happy with her previous job, though it paid very little, since her working hours left her time for chores, with which her husband and son do not help her. She explained how she spends her day:

“I wake up at 6 a.m. I prepare my children and send them to school. I get ready and go to work. I do shopping [after work]. When I come home, I cook and tidy home. Dinner altogether late in the evening, and then sleep. My husband and sons do not help me with chores. I take care of everything. In our home, man is the lord!” (Dalal, 38, Mersin)

Even when men consent to women’s participation in paid work, women are still expected to fulfill domestic responsibilities. Havaa (43, Mersin), a mother of five, said that her husband does not complain about her work as long as she keeps up with childcare. Hanım

(34), a mother of four, lives in Gaziantep and works a piecework job, which she does from home. She expressed that the nature of her work does not disrupt childcare and that, accordingly, she did not need to ask for her husband's permission.

No matter how early they wake up, or how hard they work on the weekends, women cannot keep up with all the chores as they did when they were not employed. As such, they need help from their mothers, mothers-in-law, grown daughters, or other women. Rihab (34, Mersin) said that her mother-in-law helps her with chores and cooking when she is at work.

Since women are held responsible for earning household income as well as caring for members of the household, they face challenges in balancing different spheres of their lives. When women start paid work, roles that are attributed to women are disrupted. This, in turn, creates new emotional burdens for women. During the interviews, women frequently articulated their anxiety and grief of “failing to fulfill motherhood duties” and “not being able to respond to children's needs”. Some women wish that they did not have to work so that they could care for their families and children and fulfill their traditional roles.

Change in gender relations: Negotiation

The majority of Syrians who live in Turkey and participate in the labor force are men.¹³ However, single incomes are not usually enough to support a household alone. Migrant men struggle to find jobs because of the feminization of the neoliberal labor market and the employment of women for lower wages and under more vulnerable working conditions (Toksöz and Ulutaş, 2012; Dedeoğlu and Ekiz Gökmen, 2020).

When male members of households cannot find a regular job or earn a sufficient income, or when women work in better-paying jobs than men, new tensions emerge in the household. Married women in particular said that their husbands feel ashamed, angry, unconfident, and incompetent when they cannot sustain their traditional roles of masculinity, that is, when they earn the household's living and their wives begin working. Some interviewees expressed that, as a result of these negative sentiments, their husbands behave angrily or become introverted. Semra, who works for the Ministry of Health as a fixed-term interpreter at a public hospital, recounted such a situation:

“I mean, when I started making money, I didn't do anything, but my husband started bothering himself about it. So much distress... He took the exam, but he

¹³ It is quite difficult to estimate migrant employment figures by gender, since migrants commonly work in the informal market. However, some studies report that female participation in the labor force is lower than male participation. (See, Akbaş and Ünlütürk Ulutaş, 2018; Erol et al., 2017; Çetin, 2016.)

failed. We took the same exam, but he failed. 'I wish, I had passed the exam and you hadn't worked, I mean, this thing hadn't happened.' Also, there is this thing, I don't know how to tell... He works in denim sandblasting, so my job is better than his, I make more money. He started to be bothered about this.' (Semra, 38, Izmir)

A young woman living in Mersin also stated that men can react very violently to Syrian women's participation in paid work:

"Men, even when they are poor, do not let women work. Women cannot work because men use violence. Men are very tough, sometimes they shout even at me. I ask if anyone else works in the household, he says 'I already told you that I have my wife, of course she doesn't work.' (Asmaa, 19, Mersin)

Ibtisam works as a shop assistant in a women's clothing store in a neighborhood heavily populated by Syrians. She said that she had never had a job before, because "her father had not let her work". But, since her father knows the owner of this store, he does not say anything. As Ibtisam stated, however, the situation with her mother was more complicated:

"My father doesn't allow my mother to work. But she paints and ornaments wooden crates here. She makes trays and jewelry. Sometimes she goes to fairs. She takes some products there [to sell], leaves them to her friends' stands. But she tells my father that she is going to visit." (İbtisam, 22, Mersin)

Similarly, Amal is a school advisor at a public school in Mersin, while her husband works as a day laborer in the agriculture sector, even though he has a university degree and obtained an MSc in agricultural engineering. When asked about her husband's reactions to earning less money than her, Amal replied:

"[My husband] is happy for me, but he feels sad when he thinks about himself. He is not jealous, but he is sad. Every now and then he says, 'At least you work in your own branch or in something close. You should come and see how weird the people I work with are.' He has to deal with it. I am having troubles, too. I tell him to quit and look for another job but there isn't any job. He is hopeless, so much that he even stopped looking for jobs." (Amal, 30, Mersin)

Social pressure from the relatives and acquaintances represents another source of distress for men regarding their wives' employment. Berfin, who had not had paid employment before she migrated, works at an NGO. She relayed her experiences after starting her job:

"It was a big problem in my circle [of friends]. I mean, in our neighborhood, they told my husband 'How can Berfin go to work by herself?' 'How did you accept this?' 'You are not a man.' But my husband is a math teacher, he is smart. He

turned a deaf ear. They talked for two three months and stopped talking.” (Berfin, 27, Izmir)

Tensions do not entirely dissipate even for women whose husbands support their work. Berfin told us that it took time for her husband to reach this point, but her problems have not totally vanished:

“My husband has changed a lot. He was very angry; he would intervene in everything. But now... he is a bit more relaxed and loving because I am making money. So, he changed... He is having difficulties, but he doesn't show that to me.” (Berfin, 27, Izmir)

The women we had interviews with reported that husbands' attitude start changing as women's participation in paid work in the post-migratory context becomes more widespread and socially acceptable. Havaa (43, Mersin) works as a masseuse at a Syrian-owned hair salon. Her younger daughter and son-in-law, both members of her household, are also employed. Havaa, a mother of five, attended a physiotherapy program at a community college in Syria, and she said that she loves working very much. For her, “Syrian women sit at home and do not do any work. They gossip. Some do not work because they have money. Others do not work because their husbands do not allow them.” Havaa got married when she was 14 and her husband is 17 years older than her. She says that her husband does not complain about her work, as long as she “doesn't neglect the children”:

“My husband doesn't have a job. He was a civil servant in Syria. That's why he cannot work here. (...) My husband doesn't complain about me working. When we were in Syria, he nagged about my work for a very long time. He was reminding me of the children. When I work for short hours, he doesn't say anything against working... With the condition that I take care of the children.” (Havaa, 43, Mersin)

The process of forced migration can bring about drastic changes in gender roles and power relations within families (Indra, 1999). Under these new conditions, the difficulties that men face in earning an adequate income for their households invert traditional gender roles. Men, who have been the heads of households in the structures of traditional gender roles and have thus retained domestic power and authority, are experiencing a loss of control and status (McSpadden, 1999; Daniş, 2007). In other words, men “are subjected to subverting contextual shifts as a result of migration” and have been observed to feel anxiety about losing their masculinity, “which emanates from dislocation of the fields of sovereignty in patriarchal relations” (Bozok, 2019:4). Such dynamics often push them to criticize and pressure women's behaviors and words. The interviewee women frequently stated that their husbands say to

them, “You have a bigger head now,” implying that women have transgressed traditional gender boundaries.

Women have developed various strategies in response to the problems their husbands face. These strategies present a broad spectrum: silence, maintaining household duties and childcare in line with their husbands’ demands, and reasoning with their husbands. Semra noted her exhaustion from working during the day but said that she tries not to upset her husband:

“[When I started working] my life at home didn’t change, but my life outside home did.” (Semra, 38, Izmir)

To cope with the challenges their husbands face as a result of their engagement in paid work, women perform gender-based emotional labor by, for example, being empathetic, maintaining positive interactions, glossing over some incidents, and showing affection. The women expressed that, in an effort to cope with the emotions their husbands display such as anxiety, sadness, and anger, they are compelled to put up with tensions while laboring to keep up with their household chores.

“Also, there will be such a thing, after she got there she started talking back. She is there now, especially after she started working. She has a bigger head now; she is not listening to her husband. Even if your husband is guilty, you are the one to take the blame, because ‘You came to Turkey, you’ve changed. You weren’t like this back there. After coming to Turkey, you’ve changed.’ That’s why you swallow everything... Unfortunately, we turn a deaf ear to some things so that no more problems occur... Women are unfortunately the ones that suffer once again.” (Semra, 38, Izmir)

Another matter of change and, also, of tension is clothing. The dress codes women lived by before migrating have been stretched, particularly for women who have begun working outside the home. This not only incites family and community discussions but also calls for opening of spaces for negotiation.¹⁴ When women who previously wore a burqa in Syria instead begin wearing two separate garments (a headscarf and coat), or when women who previously wore two separate head coverings remove their coat and instead wear a dress and headscarf, or, though rarely, when women stop wearing their headscarves, they explain these decisions to their families and social circles as being “required by the job”. During our interview, Semra articulated a couple of times that she is a devoted Muslim. She considers it very important that her children receive a religious education and dress in accordance with

¹⁴ For the tactics with which Syrian women avoid discrimination by altering ways of dressing, see Sevlü, 2020.

religious principles. She also says that she “really loves wearing burqa”. For a while after she came to Turkey, she continued wearing a burqa, but she ultimately had to remove it because of the requirements at her job.

“But, here, always going up and down the stairs, running around all day, so I took it off for now [laughs]. I don’t know, at work my view of life changed, umm, I suppose I started thinking in more modern way. Really [laughs].” (Semra, 38, Izmir)

Semra narrated how she felt when she started wearing a coat instead of a burqa:

“I felt naked. Look, even in these clothes I feel naked... I have been dressing up like this for a while, but I am still shy. I think that I wasn’t like this, how can I wear that?” (Semra, 38, Izmir)

Semra noted that she hides this change from her social circles. Only her brothers who live in Turkey have seen her not wearing a burqa, and she has not told her father or others in their village:

“If you ask if I would tell them, I wouldn’t. Lest [my father] get upset.” (Semra, 38, Izmir)

Semra underlined that she had changed her way of dressing due to her working conditions and discussed the process with her husband, who prefers that she wears a burqa:

“My husband, I don’t know how to say, doesn’t want. He always says that it would be better if you wore long coat, but then he saw the working environment... You know, maybe when I am commuting... But then I said to myself that after all you are wearing this, what is it that only when I am commuting? People see me here, people see me there, too. Especially now in this hot weather I said enough, I can’t take this anymore. In the beginning I was wearing long coat, I started wearing like this one or two months ago. It is not bearable in the hot weather... But back in the day, I would bear the hot weather and wear burqa. I wouldn’t mind if it was unbearably hot... All these things are good and bad at the same time. A person should not change as much. Now I realize this in myself, and sometimes I ask myself if I will ever go back. But then again, wearing burqa is a part of me.” (Semra, 38, Izmir)

Naturally, Semra is not the only woman who has experienced this change. Efsane said that she started wearing a turban, since she would not dare remove her headscarf all at once. However, she faced interventions in the workplace. It took an entire year before Efsane completely removed all her head coverings, during which she tried to encourage herself and overcome her fears.

“I said, ‘I want my life, I don’t want to be afraid of anybody.’” (Efsane, 25, Gaziantep)

Efsane works at an NGO that she describes as “religious”. She recounted that the first day after she removed her head coverings was challenging and that some people gave her “bad feedback”. Her 45-year-old Syrian manager asked her why she failed to notify him about her decision to uncover her head. Efsane replied, “because of health reasons”. Her manager pressed for an explanation, but he dropped the subject, saying, “It is your private life.” Efsane has gotten over the questioning and negative comments in the workplace, but she has not told her entire family that she has uncovered her head. She said that her father’s family is more “open-minded” but that her mother’s family is more conservative; she guesses that she will have problems with them. When she previously told her mother that she might remove her headscarf, her mother, who works as a doctor in Mersin, replied, “You cannot step into this house ever again.” When she was asked about when she would tell her mother, Efsane replied:

“I think, my mother won’t talk to me for a while, there will be problems. These problems can last for a year... But I take all these risks...” (Efsane, 25, Gaziantep)

Work and resilience: I could give up everything but working!

Resettlement is an extremely stressful process for refugees. Physical and mental health problems can further deteriorate social and economic hardships. Due to gender-related reasons, refugee women can encounter profoundly more difficult situations. Language barriers, low levels of formal education, and an inability to transport existing skills to the new country make women vulnerable in the resettlement process. In certain contexts of the resettlement process, where legal regulations as well as social and economic support mechanisms are insufficient and marred with uncertainty, women are increasingly exposed to gender-based violence.

For instance, differentiation of refugee communities’ gender norms and roles from those of host society as well as the gradual acclimation of female refugees to the norms of the host society may lead to the emergence of new forms of violence against women.

“In general, men are usually jealous... For example, men disturb women, give discomfort to women. If the woman is tired and cannot cook, they pressure her saying, ‘Quit, don’t work, you will [first] cook’” (Yeşim, 44, Izmir)

An extensive literature on how refugee women resist and develop resilience under different socioeconomic conditions (Sossou et al. 2008; Lenette et al. 2012; Omata 2012) shows that, despite the obstacles and difficulties, women are neither passive nor dependent

actors deprived of coping mechanisms and strategies. Syrian women are compelled to shoulder new burdens and cope with new tensions as a result of their participation in paid work. Nevertheless, new fields of change and empowerment have also emerged.

“...woman has become more courageous. She is not afraid that her husband will abandon her or divorce her. She has her own wages. She learns to have confidence in herself.” (Yeşim, 44, Izmir)

Despite all the challenges they face, women repeatedly underlined the freedom and confidence they gained through paid work. Cankurtaran and Albayrak also emphasized these positive feelings in their report titled *From Syria to Turkey: Being a Women* (2019). Habibe, whom we met in Izmir, expressed this situation:

“When we were in Syria, things were like this: women would leave home only when she would visit somewhere. For example, throughout my life in Syria, I never went out to buy bread. Men are responsible from all the household needs, but now in Turkey, working hours are long, and women have started to talk, go out and work, mingle with people.” (Habibe, 35, Izmir)

Amre sells products she makes from home in the scope of an employment program. As she recalled how her husband’s behaviors became more mellow, she said, “So, there is hope that he could change.” She continued, describing the changes her husband went through:

“Are you going to market, to shopping, to marketplace, he would take us there. We would be suffocated, but here we go in and out [do our own job] ... Sometimes I say, I am glad that we did come to Turkey. I mean, women are not valued there. Here, for example, woman, children, everyone is valuable, always given support... Sometimes I say that fortunately I came to Turkey. I met with people. I went out. Back there, there was no such thing.” (Amre, 42, Gaziantep)

Working leads to empowerment not only in earning income but also in enabling refugee women to learn about the rules and mechanisms of the host society and to make friends, potentially driving them to stand up to violence.

“That’s why since women have started to stand on their own feet, Syrian men... Men started to be bothered with this. Because in Syria, women can’t talk, even the law stands by men. Here, first words are ‘Are you going to hit me? I will go and file a complaint about you. In Turkey, law always stands by women.” (Habibe, 35, Izmir)

On the other hand, women can also earn respect and status among their relatives when they start making money and supporting their families. Despite all the hardships she faced and the restrictions from family, Ebral (22, Gaziantep) is about to graduate from university and

works at an NGO. Her family insisted that “Antep, Turkey is not a good place. It is dangerous. You can study when we move back to Syria.” But she thought, “A woman who is not a university graduate cannot find a good job” and continued her education. After years of conflict with her family, she said, they finally found common ground. She expressed that her father consults with her about important decisions and that she has convinced him to allow her siblings to continue their education as well. Ebral proudly mentioned her reputation as the “rebellious girl of the family” and said that she has accomplished what she wanted. She now strives for her siblings to follow the same path as her.

Leaving home for work can also appear as an opportunity to avoid domestic duties and an overwhelming atmosphere at home. Emine’s Turkish teacher and Egyptian classmate encouraged her to work outside the home and she recounted her feelings and the experiences of her female friends:

“It is a new life. I don’t have those spasms anymore. I am so busy with work that I forget about my illness. My life has already changed so much... [Women] can get out of depressed moods. For example, I have a very close friend. She was having a serious depression. After she started working her life totally changed. In fact, her husband started to be afraid of her now. ‘She started to work, indeed, at an institution’” (Emine, 29, Izmir)

“No, no, I won’t give up on [work]. What for did I study for six years? Not only for money. I can give up everything but work.” (Amal, 30, Mersin)

However, not all women who have participated in paid work undergo the same processes of change. We observed that job type is the most critical factor in this context. Women who do piecework jobs at home shoulder an additional burden by contributing to both the household income and their children’s needs, but this does not noticeably effect changes in economic status or norms and values. Women who work at small businesses such as textile workshops, restaurants, and small shops are more satisfied than women performing piecework jobs, although to a limited degree. Yet women working at NGOs or public institutions were more outspoken and bolder when expressing the changes that they experienced. Berfin works at an NGO in Izmir and she conveyed what she gained from this job:

“[working women] We talk about it a lot, we say that our lives have changed so much, both economically and emotionally... Previously, we wouldn’t buy anything from the stores, we wouldn’t go to restaurants. But now it is different. We have started going to different places since we started working... In fact, we would be so afraid that we couldn’t cook, we didn’t do the chores. Now, even if there is nothing at home, we can buy take-home foods. We work and we are not afraid. We work in

an NGO and if something happens to us, we can file complaint and get our due. Earlier, my husband was a short-tempered person but now he answers to me. I work [in an NGO] and I know all the legal procedures, that's why he respects me."
(Berfin, 27, Izmir)

In addition to the significance of humanitarian aid provided in times of crises, the importance of both institutional support given to displaced groups and to more disadvantaged groups susceptible to violence is observed in easing their transitions in the resettlement process and helping them build safe lives (Özden and Ramadan, 2019: 46). Refugees who lack institutional support mechanisms and access to support programs are compelled to work under exploitative market conditions and deal with the multidimensional stress induced by this situation. Yeşim, who works at an NGO, provided an informative comparison of those employed at institutions and those working elsewhere, concerning the changes that employment effects in their lives.

"[Women who work in garment industry] of course get empowered. I have not seen it, but they get empowered. However, not like women who are working at the institutions." (Yeşim, 44, Izmir)

Kawtar has no ties with any NGOs and she occasionally works as a sales assistant at a small cosmetics store in an impoverished neighborhood in Mersin. One of her three siblings is disabled, and she highlighted the circumstances of those unable to access such opportunities for change in their lives as she discussed what it is like to be stuck and in need:

"I want to work, but I cannot find any. My mother and I want to work from home, but we cannot find anything. I will not work in the textile ever again. I worked because I had to. So, nobody said a word. Working hours are very long here, you do not have any time to do other things. I had to work because we were in a dire situation at home—out of necessity." (Kawtar, 23, Mersin)

On the other hand, Revan described how empowering the obligation to help one's family is:

"I was a strong woman, now I am even stronger because I have more responsibility. You have to be strong for your children." (Revan, 45, Izmir)

The future: For my children!

Factors that determine the living conditions and thereby gender relations of Syrian women, include poor working environments, diminishing institutional support and an irregular, precarious and exploitative work regime.

When asked about their future, all the women who are mothers articulated their

expectations in relation to their children. In addition to being employed in often exploitative jobs, migrant women can only continue working as long as they are healthy, and they have no opportunities to retire or benefit from a pension. Yet their current income is barely sufficient to cover everyday expenses for their families, making it unrealistic to save money for the future or expect change. It does not appear possible, especially for women who do piecework jobs at home, that their income would affect or strengthen their future dreams. This is why the chance of securing a quality education for their children and, thus, offering them a better life shapes almost all of their future dreams. Amal (30, Mersin) has a son who is four and a half years old and a daughter who is one-year-old. She said they have already started saving money for their education. Rihab spoke in similar terms about her children:

“I work for my children. I do whatever I can so that they can do whatever they want.” (Rihab, 34, Mersin)

Rihab’s words arguably apply to all interviewees who are mothers. This attitude is particularly widespread among middle-class Syrians. Bahriye (41, Gaziantep) said that her daughter’s education is paramount and that she made an agreement with her daughter not to get married at a young age. When we asked about her future dreams, Hülya brings up the topic of her children, like other middle-class Syrian women:

“As [my children] grow up, our dreams get smaller. My only dream is to raise my children so that they can stand on their own feet.” (Hülya, 48, Mersin)

Their frustrations about their education having been interrupted push some women with daughters to attach particular importance to their daughters’ education. Two of Nur’s (33, Gaziantep) three children are girls who are old enough to attend primary school. Nur, while expressing the importance of her daughters’ education, told us that she offered a bit of advice to her daughters: “Have your own business. Have confidence in yourselves. Don’t trust anyone else.” For Nur, a key aspect of her daughters’ education is her desire for them to learn the difference between “halal and haram”, which guides her preference for them to study at religious vocational high schools (İmam Hatip Lisesi).

When discussing where they dream about living in the future, Syrian women answer again in reference to their children and the changes they have experienced. An important factor in the possibility of returning to Syria seems to be that their children’s education will be interrupted and that they do not speak Arabic. Some families register their children in private Arabic courses, just in case they return to Syria. Moreover, the desire for a better future for their children also shapes the wish or hope of some to move to a third country.

“Right now, our children have not received any education. I want them to complete

their education, get education. For example, my husband was a teacher in Syria. I would like him to be a teacher again—it would have changed our lives completely. We are registered for going to Europe, waiting for our turn, we want to go. If we can, it will be much more comfortable for the children. They have been working for how many years! They have been working since they were very young. When they grow up this will be such a big burden for them! They are under such a big responsibility. They haven't lived anything so far; they haven't had a life.” (İlkay, 37, Izmir)

Bahriye (41, Gaziantep) said that the pre-war Syria was different from Turkey but was still beautiful. But they have no plans to return, because of their children's education. Bahriye's younger daughter said, “If we return, there is no future for us!”

The majority of the interviewees stated that the changes they have experienced personally are closely linked to their living in Turkey and that they do not plan to going back to Syria. They expressed that returning to Syria would reverse everything they have gained and that they do not want to be stuck at home ever again. Amre came to Turkey with her family in 2013. She thinks that it would be difficult to readjust to previous traditions back in Syria:

“Some people are here for 10 years... It is very difficult, you see, you have gone out, studied, got used to, attended the courses, worked in jobs. I mean, all of a sudden, they put you back in the house! No, no way, it's too difficult.” (Amre, 42, Gaziantep)

Many women mentioned men's willingness to return to Syria, which is driven by the desire to return to the previous order. Emine does not want to return to Syria:

“First of all, the war hasn't ended. Second of all, I don't want to go back to older customs and traditions. If I go back to Syria, I won't work. I loved working, and I will work” (Emine, 29, Izmir)

Emine noted that her family had broken with traditions, saying, “[If we return,] customs and traditions will return, too.” She added:

“Men want to go back to traditions, customs because, for example, judging by my own family, my mother has broken away from the traditions, customs and she got accustomed to it. But my father, brothers didn't... their lives haven't changed as much. Their customs, traditions remained the same as in Syria. But we did break away from these traditions. And we don't want to let this go.” (Emine, 29, Izmir)

Similarly, Berfin (27) does not want to go back to Syria since she is afraid that this change in gender relations will reverse

“It makes me happy that [my daughter] will have a better life than we’ve had. We didn’t have a life in Syria. Customs, traditions, everything is forbidden, everything is disgraceful, everything is a sin. But here she goes to school and everything is for her. And, at school, she behaves just like Turkish children, she is no different.”
(Berfin, 27, Izmir)

Ibtisam also said that she does not want to move back to Syria and is doing much better in Turkey:

“I feel freer here. People are more relaxed here, they are freer. In Syria I wouldn’t be able to dress like this. Here, no one interferes. My family interferes with my clothing a bit, especially my brother. But he says ‘Okay’ with this much [she shows her skinny pants and tunic, and her headscarf done in a way that is fashionable among young Syrian women] ... My father always reminds us that we will go back. But my brother and I don’t plan to return. I want to get married and stay here.” (Ibtisam, 22, Mersin)

Amre, one of the women who noted that men occasionally threaten her with returning to Syria, mentioned a conversation she had with her husband:

“Godspeed him... [my husband] sometimes [says], ‘I will take the girls to Syria. I will take my family back.’ Goodbye. I don’t want to go. He can go if he wants to. Whenever he gets angry, he says, ‘I will take you back to Syria’. Go, here is the door! Go wherever.” (Amre, 42, Gaziantep)

Women who wish to return to Syria said that they long for their families and country, and that Syria is where they are settled. Asmaa (19), who lives in Mersin, expressed her desire to return even though they have nothing left in Syria. Efsane, who lives in Gaziantep, said that she might want to return for engaging in commerce there:

“Let’s say the war is over. I would go [to Syria], I go for business. I go there as a businesswoman. I mean, I would work in the food sector. I would think about opening a factory... I would think about opening a small enterprise. But covering my head, uncovering my head, that’s not how I would go. If my mother pressures me, then I wouldn’t go.” (Efsane, 25, Gaziantep)

In the face of countless challenges they must address, Syrian women endeavor to survive with help from personal connections, opportunities, and institutional mechanisms of support. Just as close relationships, such as family and friends, relatives, and acquaintances can be important support mechanisms for women, they can also be sources of coercion and violence. Women facing the imperatives of economic survival create new spaces of negotiation and mechanisms of resistance to avoid the oppressive physical and social boundaries drawn by gender norms. Of course, women who have developed coping mechanisms, who have opened

spaces for negotiation, and who have discussed gender roles in their close relationships and broader social circles have gained empowerment and resilience. But attaining such characteristics is not a linear process; it harbors ruptures and reversals (Lenett et al., 2012). The experiences of Syrian women exemplify this process.

That said, overcoming hardships requires less individual “success” when there is social and economic support. Existence of comprehensive and supportive policies, state-led support mechanisms, and the open, egalitarian and inclusive social atmosphere of NGOs, civil initiatives and refugees are undoubtedly crucial for the empowerment and long-term resilience of all refugees.

Young women

As of March 2020, 800,000 Syrian youth aged 15–24 lived in Turkey. According to research by the Hacettepe University Institute of Population Studies, 12 percent of Syrian women aged 25–49 get married before their 15th birthday, while 38 percent get married before they turn 18 (HÜNEE, 2019). The same research reveals that, in Syrian households, the rate of women who have not completed primary school or any level of education is 40 percent, the percentage of women who have only completed primary school is 37 percent, and the rate of women who have completed education beyond the primary school level is 22 percent. However, these statistical trends should not conceal the diversity of level of education among the Syrian people. Many women place great importance on the education of their daughters and sons and see education as the primary purpose of their lives.

The interviews conducted in the scope of this study allowed us to observe the perceptions, expectations, and attitudes that young women and mothers have regarding girls. The high number of mothers who attach significance to their daughters’ education indicates a change in gender roles. Twenty-six percent of the interviewee women were younger than 25, and nine were university students or recent graduates in Turkey.

University education embodies a significant opportunity for young women to gain independence, but families that still maintain traditional gender norms usually insist that their daughters attend university where they live. Both immediate and extended family members can impact the educational prospects of young women. Amre (42, Gaziantep) said that her sister-in-law stopped her daughter from moving to another city to attend a university, as her extended family members were involved in all family decisions.

Mothers expressed during the interviews that they want their daughters to get married,

not when they are young, but after they complete their education. Although marriage remains an important norm, university study inevitably delays marriage. Young women care about their education in order to gain independence and postpone marriage despite objections from their families. Meryem (26) came to Turkey by herself in 2014 to pursue a university education, and she graduated from Gaziantep University in 2019. She said that her father pressures her to get married. Meryem recounted that when her mother says, “Enough. There is no end to study, you’ll become a spinster,” she replies, “I can be a spinster, but I won’t remain uneducated.”

Young women who have completed their university education stated that it is out of the question that they would quit their paid jobs after marriage merely because their husbands would not allow them to continue working. Women who dream of advancing their careers in Turkey, Syria or elsewhere stress that they did not labor to complete their education just to sit at home.

CONCLUSION

Employing a gender perspective, this report addresses the participation in paid employment and work experiences of Syrian refugee women in Mersin, Gaziantep, and Izmir, three cities where they have settled. A main objective of this study was to present the connection between labor force participation and gender relations in the process of resettlement for refugee women. To that end, we sought to explain how the long-term impacts of engaging in paid work prompted empowering and restricting dynamics as women became more resilient. Another objective was to analyze the strategies that refugee women utilize in this process, how they transform patriarchal power relations, and how they negotiate gender roles.

Before proceeding to the research findings, we must underline that refugee women vary immensely by class, age, ethnicity, and personal background. Given this diversity and range of differences, the research findings must appear not as generalizations but as a means of understanding the mutually transformative impacts of gender and resettlement process.

A central finding of the research was that the primary reason for Syrian women's participation in paid work is exigency. Most of the women we had interviews with stated that they began working as a result of pressing economic difficulties. Only young and educated women emphasized the relevance of other reasons in this decision. We observed that, when they started working, all the interviewees faced a process of negotiation in which they had to convince, and obtain permission from, their male family members. This negotiation process was based on factors such as working at or outside of home, maintaining the domestic responsibilities that are traditionally attributed to women, working conditions, and workplace safety.

Gender norms are negotiated by opening a space for negotiation in household power relations, and this negotiation extends outside the house through paid work in the context of forced migration. Refugee women join new networks, breaking the physical and relational boundaries that are constructed around the home. Women thus choose to look for jobs by wandering around the streets, contacting NGO networks, or pursuing coincidental encounters. Syrian women's class positions before being displaced, work experiences, levels of education, and other skills including language are as instrumental in engaging in paid work as gender relations are. These qualifications prove to be advantageous for finding employment, mainly in the positions that national and international NGOs and other organizations create for refugees.

It is difficult for Syrian refugees to find a secure and regular job, regardless of legal status. These processes become even more complicated when refugees only have temporary protected status. This situation compels Syrian refugee women to accept irregular and precarious jobs and to work for long hours under poor conditions. All the interviewees worked in irregular jobs. The women who worked at NGOs on institutional projects have relatively better job and working conditions, yet these jobs are still fixed-term and based on project timelines, the aftermath of which is uncertain. Women whose participation in paid work is restricted to the home due to traditional gender norms are compelled to do piecework, low-paying, physically exhausting and emotionally draining jobs.

Notwithstanding these severe working conditions, women's participation in paid work engenders a change in household power relations, which corresponds to a new, distressing factor for women and, at times, a source of violence. Since they are expected to maintain domestic responsibilities as they did before, working women wake up very early to finish household chores, labor on the weekends, or transfer domestic responsibilities to other women in the household. Moreover, when women break barriers erected by traditional gender roles and become breadwinners, male family members feel as though they have lost their status and are "falling from masculinity". This situation can fuel domestic tensions that women need to cope with and causes new forms of emotional labor for women.

Despite all these difficulties, women expressed that leaving house and working in a paid job is a significant achievement, and they feel empowered. Having a voice in their own life decisions, learning about potential and alternative ways of establishing relationships and experiencing these new conditions all suggest that women are effecting changes in gender norms and relations and are becoming resilient. Although their jobs do not offer a promising future or a chance of retirement, women view these challenges as an important investment in their children's education and future. This could be interpreted as a partial change in traditional roles and the passage of resilience to future generations.

Finally, we must highlight the decisive nature of the generational gap between Syrian women regarding topics such as paid work, domestic relations, and the future. Mothers wish for their daughters a future in which they receive education and do not get married as early as they did. They also accept more flexible behavioral and dress codes for their daughters. All these changes indicate that gender roles have changed, though not completely. Young women and girls have already started negotiating with their mothers about their future and the age at which they will get married. Young women who are university students or recent graduates have strengthened their hands in this negotiation process and assumed a decisive position in

gender relations.

As Syrian refugee women endeavor to survive in the face of the challenges and risks they encounter in the resettlement process, they are also laying the foundation for gaining long-term resilience. This process, though stressful and emotionally exhausting, creates a rupture in gender-based power relations.

Syrian refugee women strive to overcome difficulties such as war, displacement, loss of loved ones, economic hardships and legal uncertainties, and to build a regular and secure life for themselves and their families. Before concluding this report, we feel obligated to emphasize the outstanding effort, determination and power of these women.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The field research provided clues regarding the necessary steps in laying the foundations of cohesion and integration, and helped us develop policy recommendations based on its findings.

The first recommendation pertains to the importance of developing policies not for the general category of “Syrians” but by noting various differences between refugees. Moreover, it is also imperative to identify and preserve local and contextual needs.

Second, a community interpretation program should be established to support the strong foundations of the cohesion and integration between refugees and the rest of Turkish society. With such a program, Syrian refugees will have access only to accurate information about the structures that are crucial for their survival in Turkey—society, the economy, legal regulations, education and healthcare. Citizens of Turkey, as the members of a society that hosts refugees, will also have the chance to get acquainted with Syrian refugees, their social and individual characteristics, and the hardships they have been experiencing. This organization will help establish a dialogue based on mutual understanding between refugees and host communities.

New programs can be devised based on outputs from the dialogue process and can be structured in different formats to be implemented at the municipal and neighborhood levels in order to develop a new and more inclusive mutual understanding of social cohesion. Thus, a widespread public discourse can counter the exclusionary, marginalizing, and hostile anti-Syrian language that festers in society.

Legal status is decisive in many fields and especially in women’s ability to access the labor market and work regime. For women to secure safer working conditions and resist discriminatory practices, the state must provide—and strive to amass public acceptance for—

legal status for the Syrian population in Turkey.

Syrian refugees have notably faced a slew of challenges, ambiguities and disadvantages when trying to obtain work permits. As such, procedures for obtaining work permits should be more transparent and codified so as not to place additional burdens on employers and not to place such processes at their disposal or discretion. Moreover, public officials should remember that refugees are paid very little, and they should not limit their access to social assistance for childcare or paid sick leave to those with work permits.

International organizations should be more encouraging and supportive of rights-based approaches for Syrian women. It is also crucial that these organizations, in coordination with women's organizations in Turkey, create sources of legal information that Syrian women can easily access and appeal to in instances of discrimination, violence or sexual abuse, particularly in the workplace.

All stakeholders who interact with Syrian refugees in Turkey must strive to eliminate the obstacles preventing women and girls from pursuing basic or vocational education and to develop special support programs designed to meet various needs identified in line with this purpose.

Widespread Turkish language classes for women with little formal education should be offered to minimize the impact that not speaking Turkish has on their access to better job opportunities and to harmonize with their labor participation. For example, language courses could be held at locations to which women can easily venture without leaving their neighborhood or which includes a daycare center where women can leave their children. Such courses would help women advance toward integration into Turkish society and, by improving their employment conditions, finding more secure jobs.

Women employed at NGOs and other institutions predominantly work in project-based jobs that are irregular and insecure. Bearing this in mind, officials should enact new regulations to ensure the sustainability and reliability of project-based jobs.

New platforms, such as marketing websites, should be created for women who work from home through which women can sell their own products. Moreover, women should have access to social media marketing strategy training.

Young women should be supported in their pursuit of a university education, programs should bring together recent graduates and high school students, and the transfer of experience and fostering of solidarity should be encouraged.

Ensuring gender equality, in addition to the contributions of women, requires the active participation of men. To that end, Syrian men should also have access to—and be encouraged to participate in—gender programs.

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APPENDIX: LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

Name	Age	Marital statuses	Number of children	Year of arrival in Turkey	Profession	City
Asmaa	19	Bekar	-	2015	STK çalışanı	Mersin
Rihab	34	Evli	3	2016	STK çalışanı	Mersin
Safaa	36	Evli	-	2011	esnaf	Mersin
Khlood	41	Evli	4	2013	Kendi ürünlerini satıyor	Mersin
İbtihal	45	Dul	4	2015	Kendi ürünlerini satıyor	Mersin
İbtisam	22	Bekar	-	2013	Tezgahtar	Mersin
Havaa	43	Evli	5	2014	Masöz	Mersin
Hülya	49	Evli	2	2013	Kendi ürünlerini satıyor	Mersin
Suad	20	Bekar	-	2015	Kendi ürünlerini satıyor	Mersin
Siham	35	Bekar	-	2012	Çocuk bakıcısı	Mersin
Dalal	38	Evli	3	2014	Sekreter	Mersin
Jamila	42	Boşanmış	3	2015	Pastaneci	Mersin
Jawahar	26	Bekar	-	2014	STK çalışanı	Mersin
Kawtar	23	Bekar	-	2013	Tezgahtar	Mersin
Cihan	26	Boşanmış	4	2016	Tezgahtar	Mersin
Amal	30	Evli	2	2013	Rehber Öğretmen	Mersin
Berçin	50	Evli	8	2014	Atık toplayıcısı	İzmir
Berfin	27	Evli	2	2014	STK çalışanı	İzmir
Emine	29	Bekar	-	2016	STK çalışanı	İzmir
Habibe	35	Boşanmış	1	2015	Konfeksiyon işçisi	İzmir
Lamia	32	Evli	2	2014	STK çalışanı	İzmir
Marien	29	Evli	3	2015	Parça başı	İzmir
Revan	45	Dul	3	2015	STK çalışanı	İzmir
Reyan	33	Evli	1	2014	STK çalışanı	İzmir
Semra	38	Evli	4	2013	Hastanede Tercüman	İzmir
Doa	26	Evli	-	2016	Parça başı iş	İzmir
Yadenur	35	Evli	5	2012	Parça başı satış	İzmir
Yeşim	44	Evli	4	2015	STK çalışanı	İzmir
Gül	35	Evli	4	2014	Kuaför	İzmir
Jinan	39	Ayrı	8	2013	Fırın çalışanı	İzmir
İlkay	37	Evli	4	2015	Fabrika çalışanı	İzmir
Fatma	22	Evli	-	2016	Üretici kooperatif çalışanı	İzmir
Nural	20	Bekar	-	2013	STK çalışanı	Gaziantep
Rafiye	23	Bekar	-	2012	Özel ders	Gaziantep
Meryem	25	Bekar	-	2014	STK çalışanı	Gaziantep
Amre	42	Evli	5	2013	Yemek satışı	Gaziantep
Elvan	44	Bekar	-	2014	STK çalışanı+Esnaflık	Gaziantep
Hanım	33	Evli	4	2014	Parça başı iş	Gaziantep
Betül	30	Evli	5	2015	Parça başı iş	Gaziantep
Beyza	35	Evli	5	2011	Parça başı iş	Gaziantep
Ayşe	37	Evli	5	2015	Parça başı iş	Gaziantep
Bahriye	41	Evli	2	2015	STK çalışanı+Esnaflık	Gaziantep
Sümeyye	24	Bekar	-	2012	Özel ders	Gaziantep
Efsane	23	Bekar	-	2012	STK çalışanı	Gaziantep
Resmiye	22	Evli	-	2017	Özel ders	Gaziantep

Evril	22	Evli	-	2011	STK alıřanı	Gaziantep
Wod	27	Bekar	-	2012	STK alıřanı	Gaziantep
Nur	33	Evli	3	2012	Para bařı iř	Gaziantep

THE WORK EXPERIENCES OF REFUGEE WOMEN
AND GENDER RELATIONS

exigency negotiation change

Lülüfer Körükmez
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