



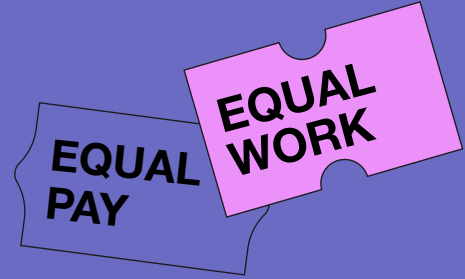
Photo: www.aydinlik.com.tr

**OUR WORK**  
**OUR POWER**

# WOMEN WORKERS

PAID WORK, UNPAID DOMESTIC  
AND CARE SERVICES

MARCH 2025



**Temiz  
Giysi  
Kampanyası**

Adil ve sürdürülebilir bir tekstil sektörü için



# TEAM

## AUTHOR

Damla Uçak

## RESEARCH

Damla Uçak, Ömer Aksoy, Pelin İpek Boyacı, Halime Sancak,  
Funda Bakış, Ayşe Özçelik, Gizem Yücelen

## DESIGN

Ceren Bettemir

## TRANSLATION (Turkish to English)

Nihal Petek Boyacı

## PROOFREADING

Derya Göçer

## GENERAL COORDINATION

Bego Demir

## TEMİZ GIYSİ KAMPANYASI CONTACT

info@temizgiysi.org

## PUBLICATION DATE:

March, 2025



Co-funded by  
the European Union

**This publication was co-funded by the European Union.**

Its contents are the sole responsibility of Clean Clothes Campaign Türkiye and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.

# CONTENT

---

RESEARCH METHOD	1
WAGES AND PAYMENT OF WAGES	2
JOB SATISFACTION	2
GENDER-BASED DIVISION OF LABOR	3
WORKPLACE HARASSMENT	4
WORKER HEALTH AND SAFETY	5
TRADE UNION MEMBERSHIP	6
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	6

---

# WOMEN WORKERS

The increase in women's employment brings along conditions such as unqualified and precarious work, flexible and informal employment, low wages, and the continuation of domestic responsibilities without any decrease.

Based on export data and employment rates, the garment sector in Türkiye stands out with its positive contribution to the economy and is considered as a source of employment for women. However, the increase in women's employment brings along conditions such as unqualified and precarious work, flexible and informal employment, low wages, and the continuation of domestic responsibilities without any decrease. This study presents the responses of women workers interviewed in Istanbul, Batman, Malatya, and Şanlıurfa to questions about their working conditions, domestic labor, and whether they face unequal treatment solely because they are women. Statements from male workers on the sexist division of labor are also included.

## METHOD

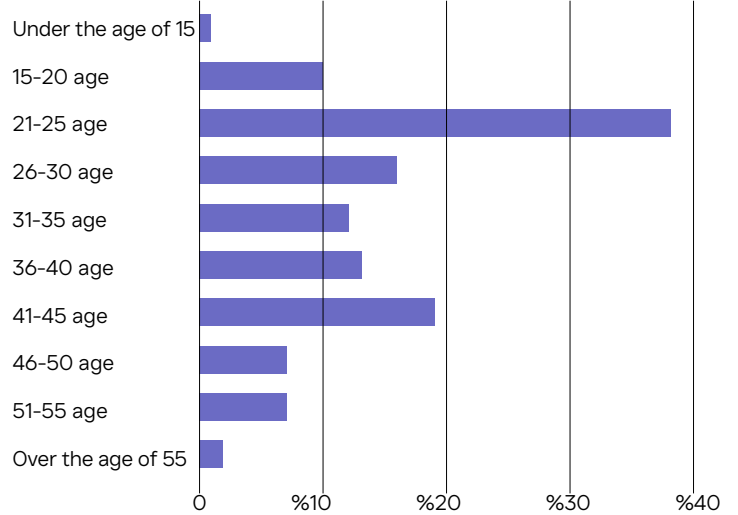
The field research was conducted using two different methods. Half of the interviews were arranged through the "snowball" method to directly observe sector conditions and to easily reach workers. Researchers approached workers randomly during lunch breaks or after work in districts where garment factories are located, asking them a series of questions. The other half of the interviews took place in Tier 1 supplier factories that maintain direct relationships with global brands. To ensure representative sampling, the number of interviewed workers per factory ranged between 3 and 25.

## TOTAL NUMBER OF WORKERS INTERVIEWED

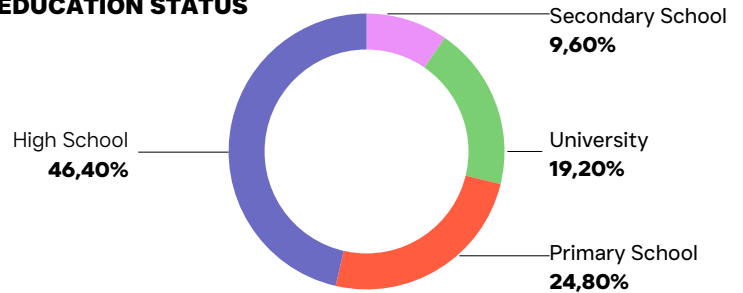
In total, 296 workers were interviewed, of whom 125 were women. In Istanbul, researchers anticipated that it might be easier to approach women, as men often go to Friday prayers during lunchtime. However, it was observed that women typically spent break times on fire escapes rather than heading outside, and those who went out in groups of 5–6 people were more willing to answer questions than women who spent their breaks alone.

Statistical data on the age range, education and marital status of the interviewed women are as follows:

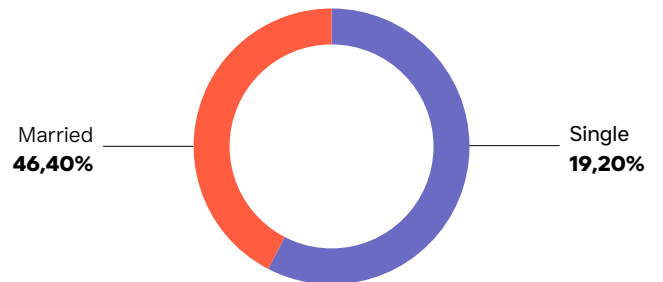
## AGE RANGE



## EDUCATION STATUS



## MARITAL STATUS



*"Our life is textile."*

Berivan<sup>1</sup>, 22, Istanbul

Of the 125 women interviewed, 89 had not worked in any job before entering the garment sector, while 36 of them had worked in various roles – such as house cleaning, hairdressing, agricultural labour, elderly and child care, sales consultancy and cashiering – prior to joining the garment sector.

<sup>1</sup> All worker names mentioned in the quotes within this report have been changed to protect personal data.

## WAGES AND PAYMENT METHODS

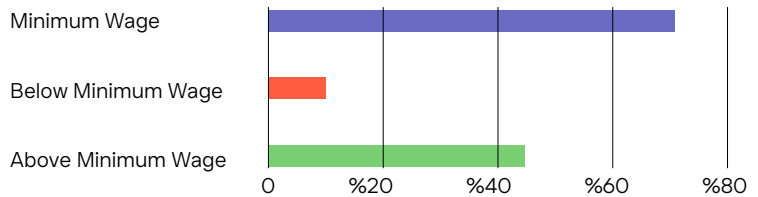
*The minimum is paid via bank transfer and the rest is handed in cash. Of course, we don't want it like this, we want to get full payment through the bank in any case, but they don't do it.*

Sevim, 27, Batman

Among the women interviewed, 104 reported working under social security insurance and 70 stated that they received only the minimum wage. One worker, Selin, 18 years old, expressed that she was paid minimum wage, but was not insured: *"I get minimum wage, but I get this money without insurance. Normally, those who work without insurance get higher wages, but I get low wages and also work without insurance."*

While 20 workers said they are paid entirely in cash, 92 said they receive wages by bank transfer, and 13 receive the minimum wage via bank transfer and the remainder in cash.

### MONTHLY AVERAGE WAGES



## JOB SATISFACTION

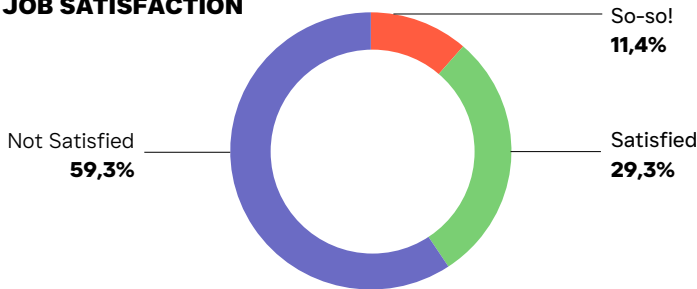
*Well, what can I say! It's a salary anyway, we get it at the end of the month.*

Saniye, 47, Istanbul

*I work not because I am satisfied with my job, but because I have to work. In fact, I constantly make plans to quit my job, and out of desperation I get up in the morning and go to work anyway.*

Bahar, 42, Istanbul

### JOB SATISFACTION



Non-responsive: 2 people

**Note:** Proportional calculations were made considering the number of respondents.

A total of 73 out of 125 women expressed dissatisfaction with their work but felt compelled to continue due to financial necessity or limited options.

Common complaints were long working hours, low wages, abusive language, pressure to complete the work, required overtime and physical fatigue.

Of the 25 workers who did express satisfaction, 15 said they based it on a workplace environment they described as "least-worst" compared to previous jobs

*I'm okay, the lesser of two evils. There's a lot of dust. Sometimes there's pressure to get the job done, we need to work harder, but I am still satisfied.*

Ceren, 22, Istanbul

*The garment sector is such a sector that I am sure every woman is restless. We see a lot of things.*

Derya, 23, Istanbul

# GENDER-BASED DIVISION OF LABOUR



When asked on gender-based discrimination, women stated that the discrimination does not vary according to gender, but according to the type of work performed. There is a reported wage discrimination depending on the work performed. Male workers carry out relatively heavier work (such as lifting loads). Still some women believed that they receive lower wages than men when they do the same job, or even when they do a more demanding job. Zeynep, 25 years old, said: “Women who do the same job can get lower wages and men can get higher wages. Or a man’s job is easier but he is close to the boss, he gets a higher wage; a woman who does a more challenging job gets a lower wage. These things happen...”, revealing that it is common for men to receive higher wages.

*There are times when I realise that some men get paid more. For example, he is not capable of doing the work I do, but he earns more.*

**Deniz, 33, Istanbul**

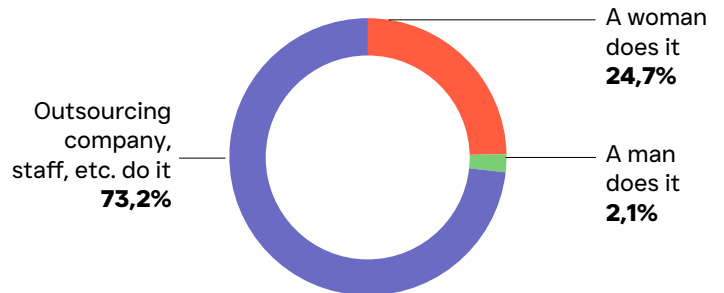
When asked how they spend a day, male workers answered that they come to work early and leave late, that they are tired and fatigued when they get home, and that they are not willing to socialise for this reason. Women stated that their work continues at home. Household and care duties such as preparing children for school, cooking, cleaning, washing dishes, taking care of the elders of the family were listed among the tasks performed before and after work.

*I can’t stand on my feet because I’m so tired. As soon as I get home, I have to cook, do the dishes, clean, and the day ends when I go to bed. The pace of work, to be more precise.*

**Melek, 33, Malatya**

A particularly telling example of the assumption that women are solely responsible for housework comes from Hüseyin (37), who, when asked if he was married, responded: “urgently looking for a wife, the house needs to be cleaned.”

## CATERING AND CLEANING AT THE WORKPLACE



**Non responsive:** 5 people

**Note:** Proportional calculations were made considering the number of people who answered the question.

Another indicator of gender-based division of labour is evident in answers to “Who does the cleaning/meal/tea in the factory?” Only 6 out of 296 workers stated that these jobs are done by men, 72 stated that they are done by women, and 213 gave different answers such as subcontractor company, attendants, cleaners, kitchen staff.

The words of 55-year-old Bekir, who stated that these jobs are undertaken by the workers, “One of our sisters who works here and is available does it.” stand out as a concrete example of gender-based division of labour.

Who does the cleaning/meal/tea in the factory?

*One of our sisters who works here and is available does it.*

**Bekir**

# HARASSMENT AT WORKPLACE

*Instead of helping and protecting the harassed woman, they terminated her job.*

**Aysel, 48, Malatya**

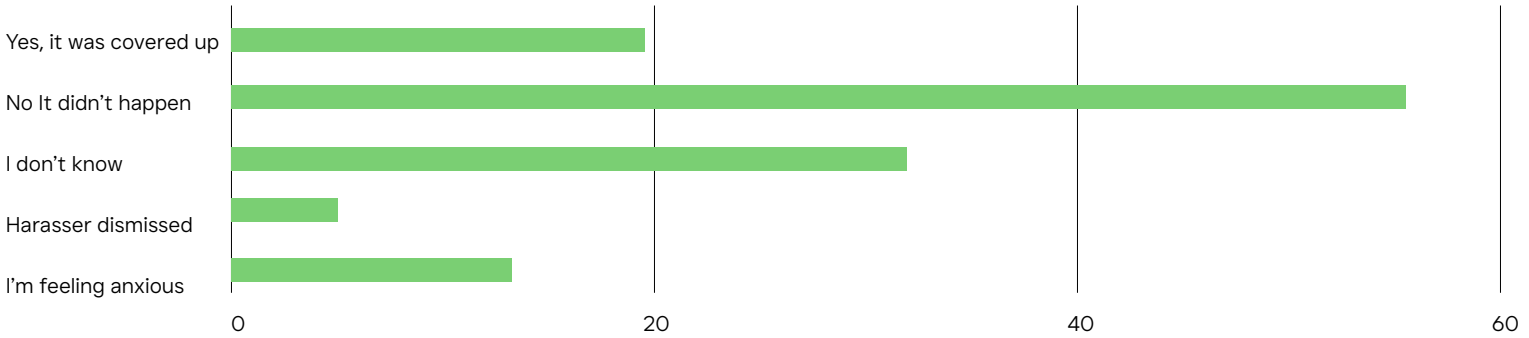
Asked whether harassment occurred and how it was resolved, 40 women said it did not occur, 4 were uncomfortable answering, 8 claimed not to know, and 19 said it had happened but was covered up.

Among these 19, 5 reported that the offender was dismissed, while 4 cited verbal harassment by foremen that was commonly ignored. However, in Bahar's words, "Swearing is also a form of harassment, some swearing is very sexist."

*Where I work, we're like brothers and sisters. I used to work somewhere else. The boss said, 'Come to the hotel!' I didn't go. He had to pay me 1500 tl, He didn't give it to me because I didn't go. This happened 3 years ago.*

**Havin, 26, Syrian**

## HARASSMENT AT WORKPLACE



**Non responsive:** 4 people

**Note:** Proportional calculations were made considering the number of people who answered the question.

**OUR  
LABOUR  
OUR  
POWER**



# OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

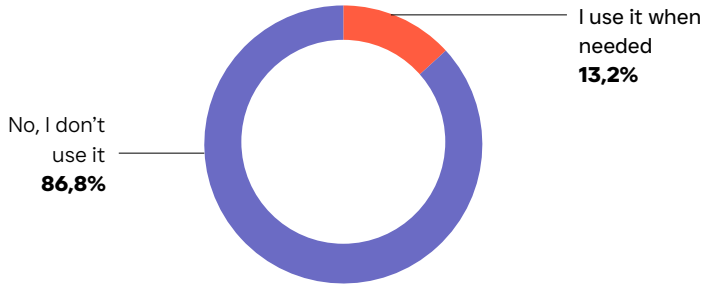
*I use headphones just to listen to music.*

**Bengü, 22, Istanbul**

*We used a mask, and that was covid time!*

**Macide, 42, Istanbul**

## EQUIPMENT UTILISATION



**Non responsive:** 4 people

**Note:** Proportional calculations were made considering the number of people who answered the question.

When asked about occupational health problems, 16 women stated that they did not have any problems, while the remaining 109 women listed many health problems. Among these, the most common problems are lumbar and back pain.

*I have stomach discomfort. We inhale a lot of dust. The paint and dust from the pants come out of our nose and throat. We have a lot of back and foot pain because we are in a fixed standing position. It is very difficult to stand, especially during menstruation.*

**Seher, 42, Malatya**

None of the 125 women said they consistently use protective equipment. This is the case even under heavy dust. While 105 workers stated that they do not use protective equipment, 16 workers stated that they use protective equipment only when necessary.

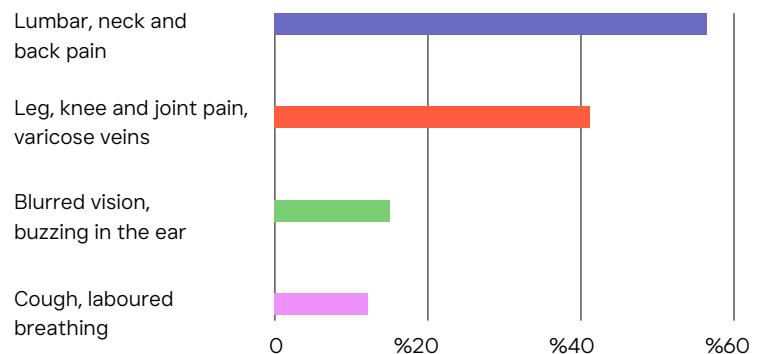
While 471 of the women had received occupational health and safety training and participated in fire drills, 21 of them had not participated in any of them. 89 of them stated that the working environment was extremely hot and 59 of them complained that no precautions were taken against the extreme heat.

In addition to the extremely hot working environment, there are sanitation problems. Sevim, 49 years old, working in Malatya, said, "It is very hot. I have to wash my face frequently and drink plenty of water, but the water we drink is not hygienic and healthy, the water stinks and is often muddy. We buy water from the canteen with our own money, but it is only sold in the mornings." In addition to the problems of heat and sanitation, she also emphasises the lack of free access to clean water.

*I've had insects in my food several times. Hair, bristles... We complained many times, but nothing was done. It was even on the news. It was fine for a week after that, but then insects was on my plate again.*

**Cevriye, 50, Malatya**

## OCCUPATIONAL DISEASES



**Non responsive:** 2 people

**Note:** Proportional calculations were made considering the number of people who answered the question.



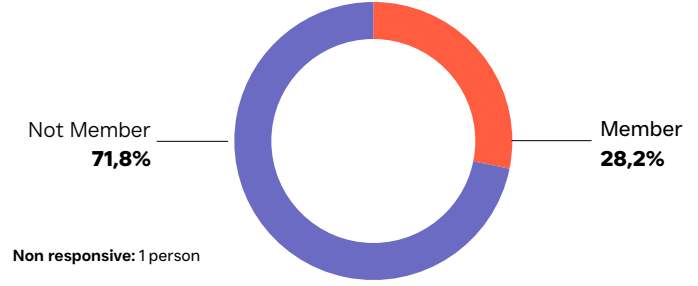
## TRADE UNION MEMBERSHIP

*I want to join a trade union but I am afraid because members are dismissed from their jobs.*

Sevda, 27, Malatya

89 workers stated that they were not union members, while 35 workers stated that they were union members. Surprisingly, 7 of the women who were union members stated that they did not know about their membership. What is worrying is that some were forced to join the union by the boss and were not given the opportunity to join another union.

### TRADE UNION MEMBERSHIP



On the other hand, there are also workers who refrain from union membership for fear of not being hired or losing their jobs. Hacer, 41 years old, summarises the situation as follows: “The first question they ask when I get a job is ‘Are you a member of the union?’ If your answer is yes, they don’t hire you right away. If you become a member later on, you are subjected to mobbing and pressure, and eventually dismissed after being intimidated in some way.”

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The male-dominated system leaves women at a disadvantage in the labour market by holding them responsible for housework and caregiving (for the elderly or children).

The women’s orientation towards the textile sector, the fields they worked in before textile and their statements about domestic labor confirm this conclusion.

To counter this division of labour that exempts men from housework, it must be constantly reminded that housework has no gender. As Maria Mies says, “Men have to learn what women have been doing for thousands of years: caring for life.” Men, “have to learn to run a household, to cook, to do laundry and dishes, to look after children - in short, to do the necessary care chores that women do every day, even if they have a regular job”, just as women have to learn and do.<sup>2</sup>

Another aspect of this sexist culture is harassment. Even a single incident should be taken seriously, and perpetrators must be penalized. Addressing harassment not only disciplines offenders but also helps combat a mindset that normalizes and prevents new cases.

By law, workplaces with more than 150 female employees are required to open day-care centers. This practice reinforces the idea that only the mother is responsible for the care of the



child excludes the fathers from this responsibility. A legislative improvement could be to mandate employers to open day-care centres regardless of gender. However, given that some employers pay workers’ salaries in cash in order to underpay their insurances, resist paying even the minimum wage, and view occupational health and safety measures as added costs, this proposal may not be realistic. To enforce this, the government should increase its inspections, impose deterrent penalties and enact stronger worker rights protections. Enforcing the 8 hour working period may be an important step in that direction. It is observed that all workers, regardless of gender, remain silent against unfavourable working conditions and rights violations due to reasons such as financial difficulties and fear of losing their jobs. This silence can be considered as a long-term consequence of the restriction of trade union rights and policies that protect and favour the employer over the worker. It is of great importance that workers become aware of their rights. Making the women, who are in a disadvantaged position, aware not only of their economic and social rights but also of gender-based approaches is crucial. Critically, this should be done in a way that does not limit women’s identities to family and motherhood, so as to avoid reproducing the very forms of exploitation we aim to eliminate.

<sup>2</sup> MARIA MIES: (2013). “Bilişim teknolojisi... kadınlara karşı yürütülen bir sanal savaş.” *Feminist Politika* (13), p. 25-27.



**Address:** Kemankeş Karamustafa Paşa Mahallesi,  
Halil Paşa Sokak, Ömer Abed Han, Kat 4 No:3-4  
Karaköy, 34425 Beyoğlu/Istanbul, Türkiye

**Phone:** +9 0212 251 99 79 [www.temizgiysi.org](http://www.temizgiysi.org)



Co-funded by  
the European Union