



EVOLUTION OF TURKISH FEMALE MIGRANTS IN GERMANY: ONCE GUEST WORKERS, NOW GERMAN CITIZENS?

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Although it is not possible to talk about a comprehensive concept of migration in the literature, based on the history of humanity, it is possible to define the phenomenon of human migration as something that happens from one place to make better living conditions.¹ Starting from the 1990s, Germany has been one of the most common destinations for migrants in the world² As of 2022, approximately twelve million German residents have foreign nationalities, and Turkish migrants lead the list with two million.

¹ O'Reilly, Karen. "Migration Theories: a Critical Overview." *Routledge Handbook of Immigration and Refugee Studies*, by Anna Triandafyllidou, Routledge, 2016, pp. 25-32.

² "Top 25 Destinations of International Migrants." *Migrationpolicy.org*, 22 July 2021, ACCESSED 18 August 2021, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/charts/top-25-destinations-international-migrants>



Women account for roughly half of the total Turkish migrants. It is evident that there is a difference in the motives of alone female migrants and the females who migrated with their families. Data collected by Karaca show that Cologne leads the list for the number of Turkish female migrants.³ The majority of them is married and does not have sufficient knowledge of the German language. The common reason for their migration to Germany is marriage and family unification, according to interviews made in 2015 by Karaca with women migrated starting from 90s.

At the beginning of the 1950s, the unemployment rate decreased in the Federal Republic of Germany; at the same time, the demand of workers increased. There was a flow of immigrant workers, and employers expressed the intention to recruit them legally. After a recruitment agreement between Turkey and Germany, the first Turkish migrants reached Germany on 31st October 1961.

At first, they were accepted as Gastarbeiter (guest workers), but then most of them settled in Germany permanently. The language barrier was a common obstacle for all migrants. In this first stage, approximately forty women migrated to Germany to find a job. At that time, Turkish newspapers were busied with the 1960s coup. Therefore, there are not too many articles related to migration. However, in the state controlled, currently pro-AKP "Aksham" newspaper, there are nine articles dealing with the topic of Turkish women migrants. All indicate they had higher possibility of finding a job in Germany than in their own country. In the 1970s, many Turks decided to migrate for political reasons.; indeed, political violence became a severe issue in Turkey, and the "low-level war" forced many Turks, especially women to migrate to Germany.

Until the end of the 1970s, the immigrant female workforce in Germany was employed in more industrial capitalist initiatives as

³ Karaca, N. and Erol Karaca. "The Future Expectations and Laboration of Migrant Women From Turkey in Germany." (2016).



labourers. In 1973, approximately 80% of Turkish immigrant women was employed in the manufacturing industry. From the 1980s, family unification was the crucial pull factor for female migrants. Religion and cultural differences have always been barriers for Turkish female migrants to integrate into German society. The women who migrated for family reason had more challenges to find a job because of their language barriers and lack of qualifications. According to Cagla Ulutash (2013), most of them migrated from rural areas with lower educational attainment and they worked as care workers which they found with the help of other Turkish migrants.⁴ In the middle of the 2010s, after the failed coup and Erdogan's new constitutions, migration escalated once again. This time pull factor was the lack of political freedom. Prejudices and discrimination against women skyrocketed, and this represented a push factor for female migration.

The theory of the global care chain is an essential category for the increasing feminization of migration at a global level. Since the first decade of the twenty-first century, the demand for care workers has skyrocketed. Care workers are involved in physical and emotional activities, since they look after the member of private households, nursing, counselling, educating them.⁵

Although female care workers from Eastern European countries in Germany have a considerable presence in the care chain, the role of Turkish female immigrants is also noteworthy from several points of view. According to Ulutash's (2013) research, there were prejudices against Turkish female migrants: they were considered a shy, non-flexible, uneducated workforce. Therefore, their

⁴ Ulutash, Çağla. "Almanya'Da Göçmen, Kadın Ve Temizlikçi Olmak." *Çalışma Ve Toplum*, vol. 2, 2013, doi:<https://www.calismatoplum.org/Content/pdf/calisma-toplum-1474-e60e7cc7.pdf>.

⁵ Helma Lutz and Ewa Palenga-Möllnbeck . "Global care chains." *Routledge Handbook of Immigration and Refugee Studies*, by Anna Triandafyllidou, Routledge, 2016, pp.227-230.



employment rate was lower if compared to other workers from Eastern Europe. After the 1990s, the newly accepted policy of the German government was to prevent the migration of unskilled workers. It exceeded the number of sham marriages.

Although all female care workers decide to migrate to fulfil the dream of a prosperous life, they initially lived in highly adverse conditions. They could not achieve the living and working conditions they dreamed of. While describing the post-migration period, most women emphasized the negative conditions they had to endure, such as poverty, domestic violence, and pressure from their fellow compatriots and relatives living in the same neighbourhood. Many women have always had the intention to return to Turkey.

The care chain is a socially contradictory concept, and the dynamics behind their choice have evolved throughout the years. The same applies to Turkish female immigrants employed in this domain in Germany. Some scholars identify this process as a "win-win" concept because migrants transfer the hard currency to their families. However, this concept neglects the social costs for the family of migrants and even for the host family.

Over the last sixty years, migration and integration have been the most popular and spoken topic in Germany. It is undeniable that Germany is a country of immigrants. Although male Turkish workers were predominant among the most populous immigrant group in Germany, nowadays, female workers account for almost half of Turkish migrants. Besides well-known economic factors, recently, political repression was also a push factor for Turkish female migrants. The majority of these female migrants was lack of qualifications and had language barriers. Therefore, they could only get care worker jobs with the help of networking with other Turkish migrants. Furthermore, due to sham marriages, the number of Turkish female migrants did not decrease although some restrictive policies by the government of Germany.