

ICMPD Working Paper 06

Hunger for education and career meets real life impediments – the employment situation of young women of Turkish origin in Austria

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Abstract

While women with migration backgrounds play a crucial role for European labour markets, they face considerable challenges with regard to their labour market integration and mobility. In Austria as well as in other European countries, women of Turkish origin have one of the lowest labour market participation rates compared to women in general, but also compared to other immigrant groups. This paper combines quantitative and qualitative approaches to exploring the main problems faced by migrant women for accessing the labour market. We conclude that migrant women face particular disadvantages due to their social status, care responsibilities as well as discrimination.

Keywords: Migrant, Women, Gender, Employment, Education, Discrimination

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Introduction

While women with migration backgrounds play a crucial role for European labour markets, they face considerable challenges with regard to their labour market integration and mobility. In Austria as well as in other European countries, women of Turkish origin have one of the lowest labour market participation rates compared to women in general, but also compared to other immigrant groups. In public and political discourse, factors related to culture or ethnicity are often all too easily used as an explanation for this difference. However, such explanations do not take into account the heterogeneity of women of Turkish origin as well as the complexity of (female) life realities and the way interactions with external factors limit employment opportunities of migrant women.

This paper starts with a statistical analysis of the employment rates of migrant women aged 18 to 54 in Austria. We applied logistic regressions in order to estimate factors influencing the likelihood of being employed. The analysis is based on data derived from the Austrian *Mikrozensus* for the year 2011, which includes the Austrian Labour Force Survey. Part one of this paper shows to what extent the factors of origin and gender influence employment likelihoods after considering other factors such as age, education and family situation.

The second section adds some flesh to the bones of the statistical analysis by reporting results from qualitative interviews with migrant women from Turkey as well as women born in Austria to parents of Turkish origin (second generation). Based on the interviews, factors influencing employment aspirations and careers will be discussed by highlighting the main driving forces leading to lack of paid employment of women of Turkish origin. The final section concludes the analysis. The paper is based on the findings from a study carried out by the International Centre for Migration Policy Development in 2012 for the Austrian Ministry of Interior.¹

Social structural factors influencing employment propensities – statistical evidence

Employment remains one of the key factors for integration into European societies, most notably due to the fact that employment is one of the most important remedies against poverty. Consequently, lack of employment is one of the European indicators on social exclusion and poverty.ⁱⁱ

Generally throughout the European Union (EU), women are less likely to be employed than men. Furthermore, foreign born persons (immigrants) show lower employment rates compared to native born people. The lower employment rates among immigrants in EU countries are mainly due to the lower employment participation of women. Furthermore, among immigrant women, it is primarily women born outside the EU who show lower employment participation (Eurostat 2011).

Slightly more than 15 percent of the Austrian population are immigrants, most of whom were born in a country of former Yugoslavia, followed by the largest group of immigrants from one single country, Germany. These groups are followed by persons born in Turkey who make up some 168,000 persons, of whom 47.4 percent are women. Based on data from the Austrian Labour Force Survey (LFS) 2011, there are some estimated 110,000 persons who were born in Austria to parents born in Turkey (second generation). The Turkish second generation is comparably young, with an average age of 15 years. In addition, there are an estimated 30,000 native born persons, who have one Austrian and one Turkish born parent.

In the following analysis we look at first generation immigrant women aged 18 to 54. This entire group accounts for some six percent of the Austrian total population, while women born in Turkey in this group account for some one percent of the Austrian population. This age group was selected because this age period is crucial for labour market participation in Austria. In this age group around 85 percent of men are employed, whereas only 77 percent of women work in paid employment. The persons who are not employed are usually not active at the labour market and thus are either not searching for employment and/ or are not available for employment.

Generally, migrant women show much lower labour market participation rates, where around 65 percent of migrant women are in paid employment compared to 80 percent native born women in the same age group. Also in this group we can say that the low employment rate is mainly because of low employment participation of women born outside the EU and more particularly women born in Turkey. However, population groups of different origin are differently composed regarding age and family structures as well as educational background. The following analysis explores to what extent lower employment

participation of immigrant women remains after controlling for factors such as family situation and education as well as age. It should however be noted that differences in employment rates among women by origin also remain for the second generation. The employment rates of second generation women aged 18 to 54 are similar to those born abroad.

The first regression model tests whether the differences by gender and country of birth remain after controlling for age (18 to 24, 25 to 34, 35 to 44 and 45 to 54), level of education (low, medium, higher and high)ⁱⁱⁱ, marriage status (married or not), number of children in the household (0, 1, 2, 3, 4 or more) and federal district (the nine Austrian Bundesländer). The second model estimates the regression models for women and men separately and, in order to see whether women from Turkey indeed face lower employment chances compared to other groups of immigrants and native-born women, it additionally includes different groups of country of birth. Also the third and last model looks at migrant men and women separately, and includes length of residence as another factor influencing opportunities for employment.^{iv}

The first model shows that one important factor for being employed is age, where the age group 18 to 24 shows the lowest likelihood to being employed. Additionally, education increases employment prospects. Persons with low education are predicted as being least often employed. Generally, being married increases employment participation. It should be noted however that the second and third model which are divided by gender show that this effect will only remain significant for men. While persons in this age group with one child are not significantly less likely to be employed, all persons living in a household with two children or more are less likely to earn money from paid employment. Finally, the first model clearly shows that women in general are indeed less likely to be employed compared to men and that immigrants are less likely to be employed compared to native born persons. In addition, Model 1b adds an interaction term of country of birth and gender proving that being a migrant woman further lowers employment rates. This means that besides lower employment participation of women and of immigrants in general, the factors of gender and immigration interact and add to lower labour market participation.

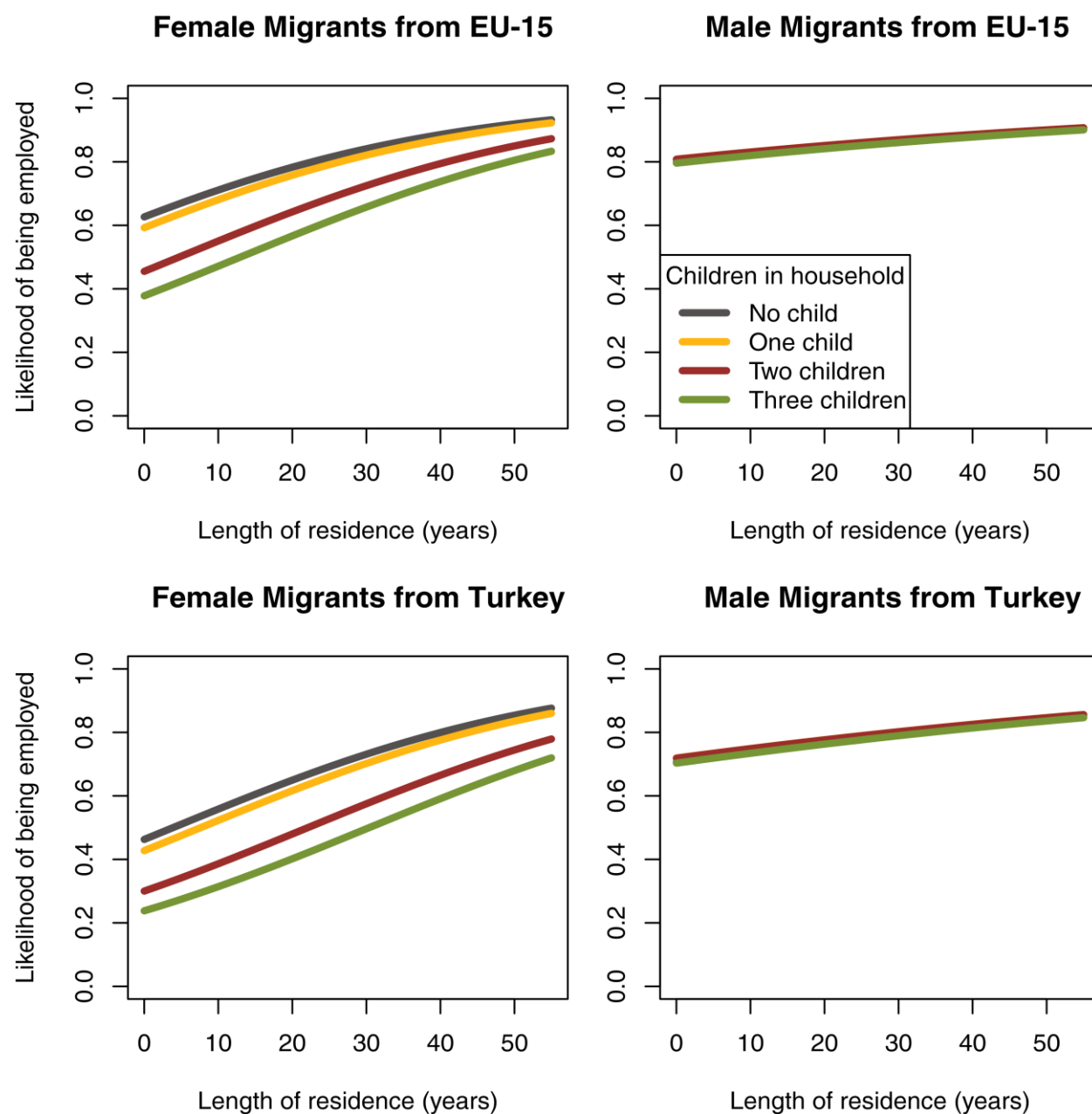
The second model considers women and men separately and adds different countries of origin to the model. The first interesting observation is that being married positively impacts on men's employment participation, but not on women's. On the other hand, living in a household with children only negatively impacts on labour market prospects of women, where the more children a household has, the lower the employment chances for the woman. Living in a household with one or two children even increases labour market integration of men compared to men without children in the household. Only men in households with four children or more have lower employment prospects. Additionally, country of birth shows different patterns by gender. Compared to native born women, all groups of migrant women show lower employment rates. While employment participation of women from former Yugoslavian countries is

the most similar to Austrian born women, it is especially women from the new EU countries, Turkey and other third countries which demonstrate significantly lower employment rates. Among men aged 18 to 54, migrants from EU-15 and EU-10 countries do not show significantly lower employment propensities, while male immigrants from Bulgaria and Romania as well as from countries outside the EU do so.

Finally, model three compares immigrant women and men and adds length of residence as a predictor variable. Compared to the reference group of immigrant women from EU-15 countries, it is only women from Turkey and other third countries (except former Yugoslavian countries) who demonstrate significantly lower likelihoods of being in employment. *Length of residence* has an influence on the likelihood of being employed for both men and women but is particularly strong for women.^v Figure 1, below shows the estimated employment rates for low educated women and men aged 35 to 44 in Vienna born in EU-15 and Turkey by length of residence and number of children in the household. It clearly shows the differences in the estimated employment participation of migrant women from Turkey, the strong influence of having children as well as the extremely low employment chances in the first years after immigration.

To sum up, migrant women, in particular women from Turkey and other countries outside the EU, indeed have to deal with lower chances of being employed. The lower chances can partly be explained by issues related to education, age, family situation and length of residence. However, there are still further unexplained differences after accounting for the factors included in the regression. This unexplained difference can also be attributed to unobserved phenomena which are difficult to include in the statistical analysis, most notably discrimination against migrants. As the qualitative analysis in the second part of this paper shows, discrimination might be one explanation but is only indirectly indicated by this statistical analysis. The next section will go more in depth to identify reasons for a lack of employment among immigrant women from Turkey.

Figure 1: Predicted likelihoods of employment of immigrants from EU-15 countries and Turkey aged 35 to 44 with low educational attainment in Vienna by number of children in the household and length of residence



Source: own calculations based on Mikrozensus 2011, Statistics Austria, no weight applied, consecutive interviews deleted.

Capturing Turkish migrant women's experiences

Reasons for lack of employment among migrant women are manifold. This section sheds light on how young migrant women of Turkish origin perceive their employment, education and family situation. Drawing from interviews with young Turkish migrant women of both the first and second generation, we will highlight how their personal and social life worlds impact the way they navigate through their working lives, and how they deal with the various factors influencing their diverse living situations and realities. The analysis is based on 20 qualitative interviews with women of the first and second generation in Austria aged 20 to 40 years.

All of the interviewed migrant women's educational and occupational biographies were characterised by the fact that they did not experience classical employment careers, i.e. uninterrupted employment following education, but rather experienced "detours" and "disruptions". Such "detours" in their biographies were mostly due to the migration experience, lack of support by their family or other people around them, and discrimination they experienced. Some "disruptions" shaped and influenced the women's employment and education careers at a very early stage, in which especially parents but also teachers have played a crucial role. Despite their current educational and occupational situation, all women interviewed agreed upon the high value of education and qualification. Having a good education, in their views, also implies higher social status and recognition in society. This is perceived to be especially important, as educated migrant women can also serve as role models for young immigrants. Furthermore, education also leads to a certain amount of independence for women, since higher educated women more easily get a good job and can "*stand on their own feet*" – as some women put it. At the same time, women who, for a variety of reasons, did not receive a good education, stressed the importance that at least their daughters and sons should have the chance to receive the education they want, wherever they want to pursue it.

It is evident that the family background and the attitude towards education within the family play a major role in decisions taken by young women and opportunities they have with regard to their education. Many of the interviewed women experienced that education was not highly valued within their families, and that economic and family related dependencies restricted their personal decisions and options for education.

Depending on the family background and also on the support of the parents, educational paths can be determined at an early stage in life, be it towards a university degree, or aiming at becoming a "good wife" and taking care of the household. The following reflection on consequences thereof for opportunities in Austria was provided by a woman who was only allowed to go to primary school: "*School education was taken from me, and that's why I have these problems, when looking for a job, it's not easy*

for me to find a job, as I haven't been trained in any job. Yes, from my family I would have needed more support."

Aside from lack of support from family, the opportunities for a young migrant woman with a higher education were constrained by structural circumstances in Austria: *"I have learned and learned a lot, and then I came here and it is worthless"*, because her degree was not officially recognized in Austria.

Many examples show that especially migrant women had to resist such obstacles and fight for their plans and aspirations. One of the interviewed women for example threatened her husband to return to Turkey if she could not attend a German course, and another woman, who had a university degree, questioned her labour market service consultant's recommendation to work as a cleaning lady, while one woman preferred to be financially independent and thus took a job as cleaning lady despite her high education. One of the interviewed women consistently followed her aim to graduate from high school and to study at university, despite the difficulties she faced in the Austrian school system, and yet another woman interviewed decided after three years in a job in a supermarket below her qualifications to complete a further qualification according to her interests.

Migrant women of the first generation experience a major disruption in their biography when they arrive in Austria: not only have they left their families and friends, but also a familiar surrounding including supportive social networks. With such networks lacking, and often also lacking language skills and knowledge of the Austrian society, in particular concerning rights and opportunities, they very much depend on their partners and family living in Austria. Many women reported how crucial their partners' and families' support was in the first months and years after arrival, especially for their further labour market participation.

Some women became mothers soon after arriving in Austria. This postponed their first entry into the Austrian labour market for a few years and, in the end, did not make their labour market integration easier. Many women emphasized that it was extremely challenging and difficult for them to simultaneously deal with their migration, their arrival in Austria, the need and pressure to learn German, household obligations and childcare, and possibly also the search for a job.

For women of the second generation, the support of their families was also very important, especially during their school time when they had to take decisions about possible further education and jobs they wanted to follow. In this case, the support of their parents differed based on the social situation of the family as well as in particular the parents' knowledge of the Austrian educational system and their attitudes and esteem of education for girls in general. Young women, especially of the second generation, also consult with their peers and teachers to make their own decisions independent of their

parents' views. However, what they were often lacking in their decision making process were role models for alternative opportunities with regard to education and career options. Many of the young women, especially from the second generation, finally made their way and reached the education, qualification and job to which they had aspired. However, often they reached their goals only at a later age when they knew exactly what they wanted and what was possible for them to achieve. Consulting friends, but also institutions and counseling services proved to be important sources of information.

In many cases the desire and the need to be employed were first of all for financial reasons in order to be independent (from their parents or their partners), but also to ensure the family income. In this respect, family obligations and child care responsibilities continued to be a major issue for young women – which is evidently a challenge for most women, notwithstanding their origin. They find themselves at the intersection of economic realities, social norms and personal wishes and dreams, and have to deal with conflicting roles associated to social norms but also to missing support structures. As one woman put it: *“The biggest problem of an employed woman is the fact that she cannot satisfy the needs of everyone in the household, including her children, spouse and housework.”*

As shown in other studies (e.g. Behrensen/Westphal 2009), their partners' support is crucial for women's successful labour market participation, especially once there are children. All women interviewed agreed that major changes and challenges with regard to gender and family roles and women's possibilities to balance work and family life emerged at the time the first child was born, and not before they were married.^{vi} For women who shared household obligations and childcare with their partners, and who possibly were also supported by their families (often in-laws), it was much easier to successfully participate in the labour market. This need for support from within the family was perceived as especially important, as institutional support structures are often missing, for example sufficient child care for children under the age of three.

One major obstacle for those women who either wanted to or, for financial reasons, had to go back to work after giving birth is the issue of part time work. In order to reconcile their work with their family life, especially child care, many women would prefer to have a part-time job. In many cases though this showed to be very difficult, due to the fact that employers preferred full-time employment, and, particularly for women in low-income jobs, female employees may need more than a part-time job for economic reasons.

Another issue raised in this regard was the challenge of realising the desire for further qualification and occupational advancement for women with children. This was due to a lack of institutional frameworks and the practical difficulty in arranging trainings or additional qualification with family life, but also for economic reasons.

One particular aspect, already suggested by the statistical analysis, became very evident in the qualitative interviews with migrant women of Turkish origin: discriminatory experiences based on their origin and religion, which they encountered throughout the time spent in Austria. Discrimination and racist attacks are experiences women associate directly with their difficulties in labour market participation. This was true for women of both the first and the second generation and occurred at public places, school, during job searches, when dealing with different institutions and authorities, and/ or at work. It is especially women wearing a headscarf who reported difficulties and many experiences with such attacks. They reported difficulties with finding a job or even only an internship according to their qualifications. The women were often shocked by anti-Muslim sentiments they experienced in public. All interviewed women of the first generation wearing a headscarf experienced racist verbal attacks and discrimination, which they attributed to wearing the headscarf. Most of them found it especially difficult to react and to defend themselves, especially during the first years after arrival, as the following example shows:

“I was always socializing with people, with men as with women, I sold goods (note: in Turkey). People were very satisfied with me and my work. But when I arrived here, things were different. I came here and it was a shock (...). I didn’t know before, that xenophobia was so widespread here. That people have prejudices against women wearing a headscarf, I didn’t know that, I didn’t know about this HATRED.”

To put it bluntly, according to interview responses, it seems that women of Turkish origin experience that wearing a headscarf disadvantages or excludes them from certain fields of professions, especially those including customer contact. Some women mentioned that they were advised by their counselor at the Austrian Unemployment Service to remove their headscarf when applying for a job, “to have better chances”. At job interviews, women were again advised to remove the headscarf at the work place, as it might bother future clients or patients and they might face racism and discrimination. As a result, women can either follow the advice and take off the headscarf, or they can continue to wear a headscarf, accepting that this may mean that they may not find a job or have to take a job for which they are over-qualified. One of the interviewees did in fact choose to take off her headscarf, as she did not want to be further restricted in her professional and personal life. She was tired of being confronted with prejudices and expectations both from the Turkish community as well as from Austrian society.

Women of the second generation reported having experienced discrimination from their early years at school as well as while searching for an apprenticeship or an internship during their education. Insufficient language skills are another reason for discrimination. For instance, during their job search, some women experienced that due to their German skills, their qualifications and work experience were not taken into account at all when looking for a job. Other women who had very specific job aspirations

were told by their counsellor at the Austrian Unemployment Service that, due to their language skills, they could only find a job as cleaning ladies in Austria, if anything.

Conclusions

Women of Turkish origin have lower chances of gaining paid employment in Austria. The situations women of Turkish origin face with regard to their labour market integration are very diverse. They are shaped and characterised by the intersection of gender, ethnicity, migration and class (see also ENoMW & EWL 2012, Farrokhzad et al. 2011, Färber et al. 2008). Our analysis shows that particularly factors such as age and length of residence in the country, as well as those factors related to social background and education, the family situation, and (lack) of support by family members and partners play a crucial role for labour market participation of migrant women. As for most women independent of their origin, child care responsibilities hamper access to the labour market. In addition, the migration experience presents a biographical interruption in the women's careers, and is also often accompanied by deskilling, which is partly due to the difficulty of having qualifications recognised. Thus, for several reasons migrant women are not able to follow classical pathways to employment. Often migration and having children take place at about the same time, which makes entry into the labour market even more difficult. Finally, it must be highlighted that discrimination against women of Turkish origin is an important factor limiting access to the labour market, especially for women wearing the headscarf. Thus, labour market policies need to consider the gender dimension and the diversified needs of migrant women.

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ⁱ The study was coordinated by Christina Hollomey and Sabine Klinglmair, and applied multiple methods including literature review, statistical analysis, and qualitative interviews with experts, practitioners and young women of Turkish origin.

ⁱⁱ The indicator on persons living in poverty includes households with low work intensity, defined as persons living in a household with less than 20 percent employment duration within a year (Antuofermo/ Di Meglio 2012).

ⁱⁱⁱ Low means primary education or less, medium means vocational training or high schools without graduation, higher means high school graduation and high means post secondary education.

^{iv} A table including the detailed coefficients and model summary measures can be obtained upon request from the authors. The first model includes 31,378 observations, the second model 16,250 and 15,128, respectively and the third model 2,895 and 2,295.

^v Initially we also added an indicator of whether or not the highest level of education was completed in Austria or before immigration to Austria. This variable does not remain significant once length of residence is included in the model.

^{vi} This is also supported by the statistical analysis, where being married makes no difference in the employment participation, but having children does.