

TURKONFED



**CONNECTING
BUSINESS**
INITIATIVE



**BEST PRACTICES
FROM THE TURKISH
PRIVATE SECTOR**

AUGUST 2021

**IMPACT OF THE
COVID-19
PANDEMIC
ON WOMEN AND
GIRLS**

THE IMPACTS OF COVID-19 ON FEMALE EMPLOYEES AND WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS

Study 1: The Impact of COVID-19 on Female Employees: Corporate Responses, Good Practices and the Way Forward

A research survey was carried out from March to June 2020 by TÜSIAD, TÜRKONFED and UN Women Turkey, aiming to understand the possible impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the private sector from a gender perspective. More than 300 Turkish businesses operating in a wide range of sectors and regions participated to this research. The main outcomes of the survey were:

- **The two most frequent challenges reported by employees were related to work-life balance and domestic violence issues.** A large difference between women and men is observed in this respect. Women reported challenges including longer working hours due to remote work from home, anxiety, psychological stress and exhaustion, as well as limited access to communication and information technologies at home.
- **Enterprises with a higher percentage of female employees tended to do a better job of ensuring female representation in their COVID-19 response teams.** The rate of women employees on the response teams correlated with their share of overall workers in the enterprise. Shifting to remote work from home was observed at a higher rate among the enterprises with higher rates of women employees.
- **Most surveyed enterprises (76%) reported that they took overall measures to reduce the stress of their employees and improve their overall well-being** since the advent of restrictions imposed during the COVID-19 crisis. However, only 26% of surveyed businesses took gender-specific measures specifically for women employees.
- Despite the challenges identified with regard to the gendered impacts of pandemic, few enterprises took action. The actions that did take place included:
 - Three enterprises are collecting data about domestic violence: one enterprise reported taking a prevention measure, twelve enterprises consulted with internal stakeholders, and six enterprises consulted with external stakeholders about the topics related to domestic violence.
 - 28 enterprises are collecting data about work-life balance: three enterprises are taking prevention measures, 26 enterprises are consulting with internal stakeholders, and four enterprises are consulting with external stakeholders about the topics related to work-life balance.
- **The greater the share of women employees in a business, the *less likely* that business was to receive state subsidies and incentive opportunities provided by economic support packages.**

TÜSIAD, TÜRKONFED and UN Women Turkey constructed an equality index using the survey findings. The index is composed of criteria including commitment to the equality principles, cooperation in actions for equality and equal representation in executive positions. By analyzing the equality index, the researchers found that enterprises that adopted gender-specific strategies or measures prior to the pandemic were also more likely to adopt gender-specific measures to respond to the pandemic. The efforts made in cooperation with partners, other enterprises, the government, or civil society organizations (CSOs) to achieve gender equality were also key contributing factors.

Study 2: The Impact of COVID-19 on Women Entrepreneurship

Another piece of research was conducted by TÜRKONFED during March 2021 to understand the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on independent women entrepreneurs; 198 women entrepreneurs from different regions of Turkey participated. Data was obtained through an online survey asking how the participants were affected by the continued COVID-19 pandemic, including their future predictions and expectations. The main outcomes of the survey were:

- **More than 84% of women entrepreneurs stated that they were negatively affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.**
 - While 28.3% of the 198 businesses participating in the survey declared that their turnover decreased in 2019, this rate increased 2.5 times to 74.2% in 2020.
 - Hotels and eateries, sectors in which women often work, remained closed for long periods. As a result, only 2.6% of companies operating in the accommodation and catering sector were able to increase their turnover in 2020. This rate was 41% in 2019.
- **Barely a quarter (23.7%) of women-led businesses stated that they had made a profit in 2020.**
 - The ratio of enterprises that declared loss in wholesale-retail trade, accommodation and catering and education sectors is over 50%.
- **Female business owners had to stop their business activities for long periods and stated that they had not benefitted from temporary working allowance either.**
 - 69.7% of women entrepreneurs declared that their activities have stopped, albeit temporarily (between 9-16 weeks), since the outbreak began.
 - Not even half the female entrepreneurs (45.5%) surveyed benefited from the short-time working allowance.
 - When participants of the survey were asked about their economic situation, 49.5% declared "very difficult". However, 32.3% of the women that said they had great difficulties stated that they did nothing to overcome these difficulties.
- **The vast majority of women evaluated the economic support or incentive packages applied as "not enough" (at the rate of 69%).**
 - 34 women-led businesses out of 198 (17.2%) declared that they did not make any efforts to combat the pandemic, neither individually nor through the state.
- **More than half of women entrepreneurs contacted for this survey stated that they would likely only be able to keep their businesses open for another year, if the pandemic continuous.**

As a result of these two surveys, it can be stated that the pandemic affected female employees and women entrepreneurship in significant ways. This data serves to reveal inequalities, their root causes and consequences also in a longer run – it can guide the actions of the private sector in Turkey in their COVID-19 response and recovery. The following section presents some of the work done so far by the different enterprises in Turkey.

BEST PRACTICES FROM TÜRKONFED COMPANY MEMBERS TO ADDRESS THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON WOMEN

Many TÜRKONFED member companies have taken gender-specific actions in response to COVID-19. Below is a selection of practices that have been documented so far.

Connected Women & Next Generation Call Center – Vodafone Turkey

Company Name	Vodafone Turkey
Project Description	<p>Vodafone Turkey implemented the "Connected Women" project and the "Next Generation Call Center" project during the pandemic period. The "Connected Women" project aims to ensure the inclusion of women over the age of 18 in the digital society and to include women who have received information technology training in the workforce. It is aimed that approximately 12 thousand women will benefit from the project. As women have less access to digital devices needed in a pandemic situation, this type of actions enables women to continue working and to keep their jobs.</p> <p>The "New Generation Call Center" project also offers individuals who have been away from working life in the society for some reason the opportunity to earn income by working independently of a location. Here, employees can determine their working hours and how much they work per day. In this process where digitalization is at the forefront, it is aimed to bring women's participation in employment to the fore with the projects developed. This type of actions become particularly relevant in the special circumstances of the pandemic, due to the quarantines and changed circumstances in the work-life balance – as women have suffered the most job losses, these actions can help to improve women's employment.</p>

flex@work – Procter & Gamble Turkey

Company Name	Procter & Gamble (P&G) Turkey
Project Description	<p>P&G Turkey implemented the "flex@work" project during the pandemic, allowing employees to determine their own working hours.</p> <p>In a situation of pandemic, where parents and children are at home and children possibly requiring home-schooling, this type of actions may help the women to keep their jobs.</p>

Engineering Girls of Turkey – Limak Holding

Company Name	Limak Holding
Project Description	<p>Limak Holding has been implementing "The Engineer Girls of Turkey" project for 5 years to ensure that men and women have equal conditions in different economic fields. With this project, 430 young engineer women were reached. In addition, Limak Holding is the first Turkish company to adopt the UNDP Equality Seal Programme. Within the scope of this project, Limak Holding aims to develop and adopt a gender-sensitive approach and to implement the relevant global standards at the corporate level.</p> <p>In a pandemic situation, providing equal conditions and gender-sensitive approach, this type of actions enables women's voices to be heard and their realities to be accounted for when the company is assessing and developing its COVID-19 response.</p>

Women Energy in Shell – Shell Turkey	
Company Name	Shell Turkey
Project Description	<p>Shell Turkey launched the "Women Energy in Shell" project in order to increase female employment in a male-intensive industry. With this project, they will employ 1000 women every year and 5000 women at the end of 5 years. With the project, it is aimed to increase the number of female employees at fuel stations.</p> <p>As the pandemic has hit hardest to the economic sectors in which women are over-represented, this type of actions may help to increase female employment and offer alternative work for women who have lost their jobs during COVID-19.</p>

Employee Support Programme – Philip Morris	
Company Name	Philip Morris
Project Description	<p>Philip Morris stated that they observed that the questions on prevention from the disease at the beginning of the pandemic evolved to questions on parent and work ergonomics in time. For this reason, they launched the "Employee Support" program in order to receive feedback from employees and produce quick solutions. In addition, they aim to be a pioneer with the global certificate "Equal Salary Certification", which confirms that men and women pay equal wages for the same job or work of equal value.</p> <p>As the pandemic is increasing the unpaid care work, this type of actions enables women to continue working, while also improving their economic situation due to decent salary.</p>

Other projects	
Project Description	<p>Kibar Holding implemented parental development and play-with-children-at-home applications for employees with children.</p> <p>As the pandemic is increasing unpaid care work that falls mostly to women, this type of actions helps women to work while children stay at home.</p>
Project Description	<p>Ekol Logistics started a series of seminars with Pedagogues and Psychological Counselors in order to support families with children.</p> <p>As the pandemic is increasing the unpaid care work, that falls mostly to women, this type of support enables families and women to balance better in a highly stressful situation.</p>

Recommendations

- Emergency responses teams formed by businesses must equally represent men and women.** The findings of the survey show that there is a need to mainstream response teams, especially in small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

- **Special support packages for women entrepreneurs need to be developed.** The inadequacy of existing economic measures for the pandemic period was a common finding of participants.
- **Women entrepreneurs need to be supported in terms of technology up-take and knowledge.** In this regard, it will be an effective method for professional chambers, non-governmental organizations, and municipalities to offer their existing infrastructure to the service of women entrepreneurs.
- **There is a clear need for free guidance services on the negative effects of the pandemic on women and girls to the enterprises of the municipalities and professional chambers.** Working women experience the negative effects of the pandemic more clearly than men, so guidance materials could help to educate employers and entrepreneurs on how to alleviate the increasing workload and increase the motivation of the employees. The government should further work to increase awareness among women entrepreneurs and employees to equalize the domestic work balance from a gender perspective. This could, for example, be done through more extensive studies.
- **Women entrepreneurs need guidance related to economic incentive packages.** In order to solve these problems, it would be beneficial to explain the support packages that make the conditions for women entrepreneurs more flexible from the government.
- **There is a need to support both employers and female employees in remote working processes to accommodate female work-from-home realities.** This is crucial, seeing how the workload of women working remotely from home has increased more than men, because of the deterioration in work-life balance and stress.
- **Support is needed for SMEs and value chains.** During the pandemic, the rate of support to SMEs has been quite low and women often work in SMEs. Joint efforts should make sure that SMEs have greater access to other types of support and opportunities. SMEs form part of the value chain and their resilience is important from many perspectives.
- **Establishing a dialogue with public agencies, CSOs and other stakeholders with regards to the unpaid care responsibilities of employees is also of vital importance.** Enterprises can offer valuable support to their parent employees in response to difficulties faced in day care services during the COVID-19 pandemic. Resources, training courses and practices, which would support employees in shouldering the domestic and care burden along with workload, should be mainstreamed. It should also be noted that such measures would have a positive transformative effect and reduce many inequalities. Flexible working arrangements should be made so that women can prioritize the safety and well-being of their children. There is also a need for a dialogue and promotion of shared responsibility of unpaid care work between genders.

About

The Connecting Business initiative (CBI) engages the private sector in disaster preparedness, response and recovery by strengthening collaboration with government, international organizations, and other stakeholders. Learn more at connectingbusiness.org or email connectingbusiness@un.org.

The CBI Member Network in Turkey is led by the Turkish Enterprise and Business Confederation (TÜRKONFED) and the Business for Goals Platform. It aims to strengthen the cooperation and collaboration of the private sector, civil society, international organizations and public institutions in emergency preparedness, response and recovery. Learn more at connectingbusiness.org/turkey.

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On the cover: Women workers in a textile factory. © UNDP Turkmenistan.