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## **The Double Crisis of Production and Social Reproduction in the Turkish Clothing Industry and the Authoritarian Neoliberal Management**

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**The Double Crisis of Production and Social  
Reproduction in the Turkish Clothing Industry and the  
Authoritarian Neoliberal Management**

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 The Clothing Industry as a Scene of Double Crisis

The textile and garment manufacturing in Turkey is a leading sector of the country's overall industrial production. Historically, textile and garment manufacturing helped drive the country's industrialization and integration into global markets. According to the latest official industrial statistics, the clothing industry accounted for around 11% of total manufacturing value in the country and employed 1,238,403 people in 2023 (TurkStat, 2024a). Moreover, the industry is highly export-oriented, accounting for 11.78% of total exports in 2024 (TurkStat, 2024b). Turkey is also the 7<sup>th</sup> largest exporter of apparel and textile products in the world in 2024, and the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest to the EU (İHKİB, 2024). All in all, the industry's importance to the country's economy is indisputable.

However, despite its continuous importance, the clothing industry has been the scene of a double crisis in recent years. The above statistics, which illustrate the industry's vitality and success, have been in decline. Important figures from sectoral institutions and enterprises are pointing out the severity and the distinction of the current crisis on the production side. In a retail event in October 2025, Abdullah Kiğılı, chairman of an important garment brand, stated that a “major disaster” is on the way as the domestic production of the textile and ready-to-wear sectors is substantially decreasing and may even stop entirely within 6 months. Like his counterparts in the industry, he blamed rising input costs and high borrowing rates for this picture and further stated that the government had sidelined the industry in its economic policy-making (*Kiğılı Yönetim, 2025; Major Disaster Awaits, 2025*).

Meanwhile, sectoral NGOs working closely with employees point out in their reports the social side of the crisis, exposing the precarious conditions and low wages workers endure (Demir & Boyacı, 2025; Göçer, 2022; Ünlütürk & Öngel, 2023). The life struggles of workers are further intensified as the crisis on the production side has led to layoffs, bankruptcies, and the relocation of production in the sector. The job losses in the sector became so dire that, in the latest employment monitoring bulletin of The Economic Policy Research Foundation of Türkiye, the clothing industry was ranked as the sector with the highest job losses in 2025 (TEPAV [Economic Policy Research Foundation of Turkey], 2025). Since clothing manufacturing is one of the few sectors in Turkey with substantial female employment, problems in the sector

significantly affect social reproduction capacities. While the over-exploitative production structure in the industry was already stretching women's social reproductive capacities, the crisis in the production side is intensifying the social reproduction crisis experienced by the sector's female workers and their families.

This thesis asks: How does the double crisis of production and social reproduction intensify, despite being harmful to all stakeholders? The main finding of the thesis is that the production crisis was triggered by the economic policy choices of the authoritarian AKP (Justice and Development Party) government, whose concerns over regime survival created rigid priorities that determined its policymaking. In this economic agenda, the clothing sector is seen as traditional and in need of transformation; hence, instead of trying to stop the decline in production capacity, it focuses on slowing the unemployment released by the crisis while incentivizing sectoral transformation. Moreover, instead of protecting labor from the destructive effects of this dissolution, the government uses family policies to absorb the shock to its regime and shift the cost of support mechanisms onto households. Also, gender roles emphasized by the conservative family policies are designed to exclude female labor from work. This provides another tool for AKP to soften the employment decline and navigate the industry's dissolution without resolving the production or social reproduction crisis.

I aim to analyze sectoral data and policies through a social reproduction lens to expose the gendered dimension of the issue. Even though the social reproduction literature provides an extensive understanding of the exploitation of women by capital and the externalization of social reproductive value, the role of the state in this relation appears limited, serving merely as a mediator that always sides with capital. Although this holds true, in an authoritarian, conservative, neoliberal regime like the AKP, the state can assume a more dominant role, in which the government's own survival strategies can clash with capital's interests and harm capital's capacity to reaccumulate. In such cases, the government still uses family and labor policies to subsidize capital but persists in economic policy choices that harm capital, for the sake of its own survival. Therefore, I am contributing to the social reproduction literature by adding an authoritarian neoliberalism layer, showing the dominant character the state can assume in regulating capital and the social reproduction of individuals in accordance with the government's priorities.

## 1.2 Methodology and Analytical Framework

To answer the question of how the crisis in both the production and social reproduction in the clothing sector intensifies, this thesis uses a triangulated qualitative case study design, which entails descriptive analysis of secondary quantitative data, qualitative content analysis of the sectoral reports and publications, and qualitative document analysis of state policy through ministry documents. I analyze these sources using a mixed, critical political-economy analytical framework that draws on the social reproduction perspective and authoritarian neoliberalism theory. The analytical framework is particularly inspired by Melda Yaman's (2024) work, which uses the social reproduction perspective to analyze family policies and shows that they are used as political and economic tools by neoliberal governments. She also analyzes economic policies to expose their gendered impacts. Authoritarian neoliberalism theory helps at the macro level of my analysis by showing that, although the state under a neoliberal regime is a capital-friendly institution, the government controlling the state apparatus can assume a dominant role in regulating the economy and society. Moreover, when an authoritarian government consolidates its power amid a threat to its rule, its policymaking directly reflects its rigid priorities for regime survival. This is useful for seeing how AKP's economic policies interacted with the clothing industry and triggered the current crisis the sector is facing. The mixed analytical perspective is then used to examine the family policies as coping tools in the hands of the conservative neoliberal government to soften the shock of the crisis.

The first body of evidence used in this thesis shows the production and social reproduction crises in the sector. The industry's performance statistics from official data sources are triangulated with data and interviews with industry leaders from various newspaper articles and press releases from industrial associations and unions to demonstrate the decline in the industry's performance and expose the effects of current economic policy on the industry. On the social side, data on labor informality and the gender wage gap are gathered from the International Labor Organization (ILO) database, which draws on the Household Labor Force Survey (HLFS) conducted by the Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK). To provide further insight into workers' material deprivation, the average monthly nominal earnings data from the same source are compared with the official minimum wage, hunger, and poverty thresholds published

by TÜRK-İŞ (Confederation of Turkish Trade Unions) (TÜRK-İŞ, 2025a). Furthermore, to expose the erosion in real wages, this thesis contextualizes nominal earnings relative to the inflation rate over the years, using data from TÜİK and ENAG (Inflation Research Group, 2025) (an independent group of academicians and economists). This is done to better understand the deteriorating material conditions of the sector's workers, alongside the reliability issues with the TÜİK inflation statistics. A comparison of these indicators also shows how the authoritarian government can bend economic reality to mask problems in order to secure regime survival.

In the second evidence group, policy documents from the Ministry of Treasury and Finance are examined to show the priorities of the current authoritarian neoliberal government. The 2024-28 Strategic Plan, 2025 Performance Program, and 2026 Budget Presentation all show the economic urgencies for the government in its effort to perpetuate its rule, but they also show the determination to maintain these priorities and related policy choices over the years. The documents are analyzed to trace the current economic policy that clashes with the capital's interests and triggered the industry's crises, as well as the ongoing will to continue implementing this economic program. They are also analyzed to see the importance assigned to the struggling clothing sector via the incentive programs mentioned. Investigating the New Incentive Program revealed the conditional importance of the sector to current economic governance, which dictates a digital or green transformation for it. The lack of preventive measures for the dissolving sector in these documents, other than the Employment Protection Program, demonstrated that the government is interested in softening the creative destruction of the industry rather than restoring the lost capacity of its traditional production.

To show the link between the production-side crisis in the industry and social reproduction in the family institution, the last evidence group, family policy, was analyzed through the lens of economic regulation. Family Youth Fund, funded by the Ministry of Treasury and Finance at a time of high commitment to austerity. This Fund and its respective aid program are analyzed as tools to substitute for the rights-based public welfare regime with private family care, which also absorbs the shock created by the crisis. The primary focus is on the policy called "Support for Young People Getting Married," (SYPGM) introduced during the crisis, while no other action appears in the ministerial documents to support the sector's workers during the hard times. By reviewing this program's target population and comparing it with demographic data on

female workers, the study shows how the government's encouragement of young women to marry and take on the heavy social reproduction burden at home is affecting the sector's workers. Publicly available official data sources (TÜİK and ILO) provide an aggregate view but lack the specific cross-tabulation of age and marital status within the clothing sector. Therefore, findings from the fieldwork in the existing literature (Dedeoğlu, 2010; Uçak, 2025) are utilized to address these data limitations. Finally, President Erdoğan's speech at the launch of the "Family Year 2025," which the SPYGM is a part of, and the content of the mandatory training courses, are analyzed as a discursive text that lays bare the ideological justification for using the family institution as a shock absorber during times of socio-economic crisis.

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Theoretical Framework: Social Reproduction Perspective and Authoritarian Neoliberalism

The co-occurrence and interaction of the production and social reproduction crises are not coincidental, but an unsurprising outcome of the built-in contradictions in a society organized around capitalist relations. In capitalism, conditions affecting production and social reproduction processes, and these processes themselves, are tightly integrated despite their spatial separation (Arslan, 2022; Bhattacharya, 2017; Fraser, 2016). Behind this integration lies capital's dependence on these two processes to sustain itself in its pursuit of profit: production of products, and (re)production of labor to produce them (Bhattacharya, 2017; Fraser, 2017; Harvey, 2015; Vogel, 2013). On the production side, we see capital's dependence on labor to produce surplus value that capital appropriates for its own reproduction (Harvey, 2015, Chapter 5). To ensure this capital uses various strategies to keep labor's value low and maximize its profits. In what appears to be a fair transaction of wages for "productive" hours, capital divides tasks and invests in technologies to minimize the required skill for production, alienize and fragmentate the workforce along the lines of gender, race, and ethnicity to have more control over them, lower their bargaining power and reduce wages, rendering each worker disposable and substitutes for each other (Federici, 2021, pp. 17–18; Harvey, 2015). As a result, the value that labor creates per hour in the workplace exceeds the wage it receives. With the difference, the bigger the better, capital can then reproduce itself and accumulate indefinitely (Harvey, 2015).

However, labor, as a “unique commodity” that underlies any value creation, needs to be reproduced as well. Unlike other commodities necessary for production, labor is produced outside the market through social reproduction processes (Bhattacharya, 2017; Federici, 2021; Fraser, 2017; Harvey, 2015). The low wages and externalization of the unpaid labor of social reproduction by capital mean that people’s capacities to maintain themselves and other members of the household are stretched. This creates the contradiction that undermines capital accumulation as it relies heavily on the existence of exploitable labor power (Fraser, 2016, 2017).

Social reproduction is the sum of activities and processes that produce and maintain human life on a daily basis. It encompasses the biological production, physical, mental, and emotional maintenance, and socialization of people (Bhattacharya, 2017, pp. 6–7; Federici, 2021, pp. 11–12; Fraser, 2017, p. 23; Harvey, 2015; Mezzadri, 2019, p. 37; Vogel, 2013, p. 149). Hence, it is, but not limited to, making and remaking of labor and labor power, and it is necessary for workers to be ready for the next day’s shift (Federici, 2021; Mezzadri, 2019). Since capital depends on labor to create surplus value for its own reproduction, it relies heavily on the social reproduction of the labor force outside the market mechanism. The reason that reproductive activities happen in a separate place is not accidental but stems from the capital’s pursuit of maximizing the amount appropriated from the surplus value (Fraser, 2016, 2017). The wage received by the laborer for the hours spent on producing the commodity is to be spent on sustaining that labor power. However, this wage does not correspond to the full value produced by the laborer, nor does it equal all the costs incurred to sustain them (Harvey, 2015, p. 178; Vogel, 2013, p. 149). Activities of care to reproduce labor, such as cooking, cleaning, and educating, require additional labor power; thus, the person performing them produces more value. Yet, since this happens outside the workplace, this value is invisible, obscured, and taken for granted. Spatial difference, then, provides capital with a way to externalize the social reproduction activities on which it heavily depends for its accumulation (Federici, 2021; Fraser, 2017). This further means that social reproduction not only provides the capital with its “unique commodity” to create value, but also has a direct role in the amount of surplus value appropriated by it through the creation of more surplus value (Federici, 2019; Mezzadri, 2019).

This spatiality of reproduction can take different forms (through migration), occur in different places (e.g., schools and dormitories), and does not require a kin-based household with a gendered division of labor (Bhattacharya, 2017; Harvey, 2015; Vogel, 2013). However, the mortality of human beings suggests that the workforce is necessarily created biologically, and this creates the foundation of women's oppression in a capitalist society (Vogel, 2013, p. 150). The time and labor taken to birth and care for a child take away from the value produced by women in the "productive" realm from the perspective of capital. Therefore, capital, needing to minimize its effect on surplus value, reinforced the family as an institution that organized through the division of labor in the household. This organization that assigns the male member with material provision for the female during the time of procreation occurred as a historical phenomenon in the capitalist societies and was institutionalized into the family to ensure a stable and cheap labor power for the capital while granting male supremacy and causing female oppression (Federici, 2021, p. 14; Fraser, 2016; Vogel, 2013, pp. 151–152).

The historical separation of reproduction in the private sphere and production in the public sphere provides a condition for recognition of the value created by each. When the value created by the latter in the workplace is recognized as productive and rewarded with a wage, the former is unaccounted for and receives no material reciprocation, as the value created remains hidden in the domestic sphere (Federici, 2021; Fraser, 2016; Mezzadri, 2019). This way, women, who dominantly perform social reproduction, are subordinated to a lower position in society regardless of their participation in the so-called "productive sphere" (Federici, 2021, pp. 14–15; Vogel, 2013). This subordination translates into the gender wage gap and segregation of women in the low-paying and precarious positions in the realm of production (Arslan, 2020, 2022; Federici, 2021, p. 15). This shows how socio-material conditions that burden women with reproductive duties are (co)constituting their conditions in the productive realm (Arslan, 2022). Hence, in cases where women are themselves laborers, capital exploits them in two different spaces: women produce value in the workplace and at home, where a substantial part of the former and the entirety of the latter are appropriated by capital through market relations and externalization, respectively. While this pattern of exploitation is consistent throughout capitalist history, it may take a different guise as each form of capitalist accumulation relies on a different organization of production and reproduction processes, e.g., housewifization in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the welfare state in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Arslan, 2022, p. 1897; Fraser, 2016). In the last and

current era of financialized capitalism, a two-earner family that encourages women's participation in the labor market is promoted, while the family institution and the division of labor within is endorsed through neoliberal family policies, to compensate for the cut in the state's public spending (Fraser, 2016, 2017; Yaman, 2024, pp. 4–5, 7).

Just as the regimes of accumulation, the manifestations of the contradictions of capitalism can take different forms across historical and geographical contexts. Mezzadri argues that in the Global North, the externalization of social reproduction costs and the facilitation of the two-earner family model of neoliberalism led to the privatization of care, while in the Global South, this model increased informality for women (2019). Informality in this context serves the neoliberal two-earner family and the externalization of social reproduction services. It integrates women who are in need and have limited work options due to the heavy burden of social reproduction in the labor market, while subsidizing capital directly through wage cuts and free social reproduction (Mezzadri, 2019, p. 38). Similarly, Arslan illustrates how the material limitations imposed by neoliberal transformation forced women to enter the “productive” realm and obliged them to do so under precarious conditions (Arslan, 2020, 2022, p. 1904). Through the ever-increasing range of flexible employment forms in neoliberal capitalism, women could be recruited into the productive realm without being released from their domestic responsibilities, which became more necessary with the state's cuts to social welfare policies. Due to the patriarchal regime that enforces reproductive duties and their relatively new presence in the labor market, the majority of female labor in the developing countries, which also constitutes the majority world, have been confined to informal employment in its most precarious and low-paying forms (Arslan, 2020; Mezzadri, 2019).

This shows how feminization came with increased informality and is a direct result of the promotion of cheap labor as a competitive advantage for light manufacturing, e.g., clothing, as a development strategy in the neoliberal era. Therefore, in the Global South, a cheap workforce is constantly manufactured, and capital uses informality and relocation of production to control labor and ensure low cost whenever the comparative advantage is lost (Arslan, 2020, pp. 169, 173; Federici, 2021, p. 18; Mezzadri, 2016, pp. 18–24). The resulting fragmentation of production across the world and the intense price competition not only provided conditions for the expansion of informal labor as we know it but also broadened the concept of informalization

with the deterioration of labor conditions for the existing formal labor (Arslan, 2020, p. 168; Mezzadri, 2016, p. 25). Furthermore, through sweatshop regimes, capital uses existing geographical and socio-economic divides to reproduce labor's vulnerabilities. This way, the patriarchal norms that render women's "productive" work less valuable are used to manufacture women as cheap labor and further increase their exploitation in the workplace (Mezzadri, 2016).

However harmful they are, these social-reproductive contradictions do not immediately erupt in crises and can be muted and maintained to a point where the damage that capital's material pursuit causes to social and natural resources becomes overt and destabilizes the whole system (Fraser, 2017, p. 103; Harvey, 2015, pp. 15–16). When they do turn into crises by interacting with and being aggravated by other crises (e.g., economic, political, and environmental), the state intervenes to relieve the pressure stemming from these contradictions. With the help of state authorities, then, capital applies temporal-spatial fixes (Fraser, 2016, 2017; Harvey, 2015). The cases of the institutionalization of the family and the invention of the family wage during the eras of liberal and state-led capitalism, respectively, were examples of such fixes (Fraser, 2016, 2017). In the neoliberal era, too, family policies have been designed and widely used by governments not only to regulate society but also to manage economic relations and crises within it. Hence, the governments use family policy as a buffer to soften the crisis and temporarily mute the underlying contradictions (Yaman, 2024). Yet inherent contradictions remain, guaranteeing a future crisis of a different kind, requiring another temporal fix (Harvey, 2015, p. 17). In the neoliberal era of capitalism, the capital's overexploitation of labor at work and at home engendered a social-reproductive contradiction. Furthermore, material deprivation of the laborer is deepened as the cost of reproduction is fully externalized onto them due to disinvestment from public and corporate provision of social welfare (Federici, 2019, p. 56; Fraser, 2016, 2016; Harvey, 2015, pp. 178–179; Mezzadri, 2019, p. 38). These, together with the ongoing economic crisis and instability created by neoliberal policies, have evolved into a care deficit (social reproduction crisis), in which workers lack sufficient material and social resources to reproduce and care for themselves and others (Fraser, 2016, 2017).

All this is said, the state is not just a passive protector of capital's interests that regulates the social sphere for the sake of its accumulation, it is a stage for power struggle between different parties: the political elite, capital groups, and the bureaucracy (Akçay, 2021, pp. 82–83;

Bruff, 2014, p. 119). The struggle or alliances among them can alter the form of the state and determine the mode of accumulation and regulation (Akçay, 2021). In the financial accumulation regime, the state was restructured by the neoliberal government's authoritarian strategies in response to the inability of the neoliberal regime of accumulation to create consent following devastating, concurrent economic crises of capitalism (Bruff, 2014, pp. 115–116). Neoliberal governments utilized the crisis for their political rhetoric, concealing the fault of the neoliberal system with a moralizing narrative targeted at individuals and the previous state form, and consolidated austerity measures and their political power (Bruff, 2014, pp. 121–122). Moreover, neoliberal governments altered the mode of regulation to a depoliticized, technocratic one by legal and constitutional restructuring to insulate economic policymaking from any popular demands and social dissent to ensure the continuity of their neoliberal rule (Akçay, 2021, pp. 84–85; Bozkurt-Güngen, 2018, p. 220; Bruff, 2014, pp. 121–122). This insulation strengthened the state; however, it also increased its fragility, as it lost legitimacy and became the target of public dissent for its role in the concurrent crisis of neoliberalism (Bruff, 2014, pp. 124, 126). Hence, merging with the economic crisis caused by disruptions to the mode of accumulation, the crisis of the state, e.g., political challenges like popular uprisings, conflict within the power bloc, created the structural crisis, and some authoritarian regimes, like AKP in Turkey, coped with this crisis by resorting to the consolidation of authoritarian rule and re-politicizing economic policymaking (Akçay, 2021). This consolidation is a deliberate strategy of the political elites to secure their power and positions, and the resulting economic policy directly reflects their priorities and survival strategies (Akçay, 2021, p. 81; Göbel, 2011, p. 177). Under such consolidated authoritarian regimes, the political elite has significant control over the state apparatus, society, and other actors from the power bloc, including the capital. Hence, when the government's survival strategy clashes with the interests of a capital group, the former prevails, as it has consolidated power and uses it to maintain control.

## 2.2 Contextualizing the Social Reproduction Contradiction and the Clothing Industry Before Neoliberal Transformation in Turkey

The Turkish Republic was founded in a geography where capitalist social relations arrived late. Therefore, the political elite had to organize the state before organizing the market in line with the capitalist social organization (Sancar, 2004, p. 6). Since nation-building was always

a higher priority than the market rationale for policymakers, capital logic did not always hold, to the point that it hindered the country's industrialization (Bugra, 2007). Therefore, industrial job opportunities were quite limited. Nevertheless, urban poor women could find employment in traditionally female-dominated industries such as textiles, especially in the factories of State-Owned Enterprises (Dedeoglu, 2015; Makal, 2010, pp. 24–27; Sağlık, 2021, pp. 267–269). However, due to the prevalence of the strong male breadwinner model, their labor market participation was restricted due to competition from men and fluctuated based on the availability of male labor (Bugra, 2007; Dedeoglu, 2015; Makal, 2010; Sağlık, 2021). Whenever the reserve army of male labor became available, like due to urban migration after the 1950s, women were sent back to their primary place of exploitation, home, and the rural women who migrated were also confined to the domestic sphere in the cities (Bugra, 2007; Dedeoglu, 2015; Makal, 2010; Sağlık, 2021). Meanwhile, industrial employment was portrayed as a national duty to be performed by male citizens, who were obliged to provide for their households (Bugra, 2007, p. 40).

Due to the limited resources in the young republic, which inhibited the formation of distributive and rights-based public provision, the women's confinement to the domestic sphere was seen as necessary. For years, the state's social policy consisted of first keeping poverty out of cities by confining it to rural areas, then allowing informal housing on the outskirts of cities, and inducing the benevolence of wealthy individuals and private entities (Bugra, 2007). The Turkish state did not allocate sufficient resources to internalize part of the social reproduction burden from women; thus, it dumped it on their shoulders and confined them to the household (Dedeoglu, 2015, pp. 9, 11). Accordingly, throughout the years, Turkish women's way of being a good citizen was depicted as first and foremost, being a good mother. Her main civic duty was to raise good citizens through social reproduction and basic socialization (Cin, 2017, pp. 52–53; Emiroğlu, 2022; Kandiyoti, 1987; Sancar, 2004; Şerifsoy, 2004; Tatlı, 2008, p. 40). Therefore, regardless of their contribution in national industry's development through their labor in the core sectors like textile, the lack of resources in the republic meant that their domesticity and social reproductive activities were more valuable in order to compensate for the lack of public social provision (Bugra, 2007; Buğra & Yakut-Cakar, 2010, p. 529; Dedeoglu, 2015, pp. 9, 11).

The decades of inward-oriented state-led industrialization and economic development achieved inadequate results. By the 1970s, industry was still dependent on the export of foreign technology and intermediate goods to produce basic commodities for domestic needs, and its exports consisted mainly of agricultural products (Memiş, 2020, pp. 275, 277). Regardless, the clothing industry, whose reliance on basic technology, a cheap and abundant workforce, and domestically available raw materials, continued to grow, especially during the import substitution industrialization era between 1960-80 (Bulut, 2023). Nevertheless, the country's state-led capitalism faced recurring crises of high inflation, foreign debt, and currency shortages, all of which were exacerbated by the global economic crisis and domestic and global political turbulence. As a result, by the end of the 70s, neoliberalism emerged as a solution for policymakers (Memiş, 2020).

### 2.3 Neoliberal Transformation with a Conservative Authoritarian Twist

Consequently, in 1980, a structural adjustment program was implemented to start the neoliberal transformation. Accordingly, Turkey opened its economy and moved to an export-oriented industrialization and development strategy. In the country's integration into the global economy, labor-intensive textile and garment industries took the leading position (Dedeoğlu, 2022, p. 113; Yaman, 2024, p. 9). Under this new regime, industrial products replaced agricultural products as the primary exported goods, not because of increased private-sector investment, but because of the effect of state-owned enterprise privatization on efficiency (Bulut, 2023, pp. 1547–1548). Hence, employment opportunities in the formal sector remained limited after the neoliberal transformation, especially amid ongoing urban migration. The abundant male labor in cities created little incentive for employers to challenge their conservative norms against hiring women (Buğra & Yakut-Cakar, 2010, p. 528). As a result, the feminization of labor did not take the form of the dominant employment of women in certain industries, as in Asian countries (Arslan, 2020, p. 174). Rather, in the face of neoliberal pressure on real wages and increased urban unemployment, it became a synonym for increased precariousness as women found jobs in the informal parts of the industries, like textile and garment, to contribute to the declining family income (Arslan, 2020; Dedeoğlu, 2010, 2022, p. 8). Moreover, this sudden transition to neoliberalism, together with an unstable political environment, exacerbated economic

vulnerabilities and led to subsequent destructive crises, the most severe in 2001 (Akçay, 2021; Bozkurt-Güngen, 2018; Dedeođlu, 2010, p. 7; Memiř, 2020; Yaman, 2024).

The AKP came to power under these harsh economic circumstances by winning the 2002 elections and consolidated the neoliberal regime in the country (Arslan, 2022; Dedeođlu, 2010; Yaman, 2024). Using the liberalization spirit of the time, both in political and economic realms, the first through the EU accession process and the second through the IMF stand-by agreement, AKP enhanced its power against the military and judiciary bodies that acted as a checks and balances system for the previous governments (Akçay, 2021, p. 84; Bozkurt-Güngen, 2018, p. 229). The government adopted neoliberal policies from the IMF program, attracted abundant liquidity from international markets, and created a new regime of capital accumulation. With this dependent financialization accumulation, the government could pursue a developmentalist strategy that relies on the construction sector and increased domestic consumption through credit expansion to drive economic growth, which laid the groundwork for the AKP's consolidation of power (Akçay, 2021, pp. 83–85; Bozkurt-Güngen, 2018, p. 229; Çavuřođlu & Strutz, 2014, p. 141; Orhangazi, 2024, pp. 3–4). With this power, the government advanced its neoliberal and conservative agenda by undermining labor's position vis-à-vis capital and using family policy to stabilize society.

Re-regulating the labor market and weakening labor's position in it were among the pillars of AKP's agenda from the very beginning (Akçay, 2021; Arslan, 2020, 2022; Bozkurt-Güngen, 2018). Through enacting the successive labor laws as early as 2003, AKP provided the legal ground for precarious working conditions and informalization through flexible and temporary labor relations, legalized subcontracting relations, easier cancellation of employee contracts, unregulated overtime work, and weakened job security (Akçay, 2021, p. 86; Arslan, 2020, pp. 169–170, 2022, pp. 1899–1900; Bozkurt-Güngen, 2018, p. 230). Also, these new legal adjustments allowed the government to maintain structural barriers to unionization, render collective agreements almost impossible, and expand its power to suspend strikes, further eroding labor's position (Arslan, 2020, pp. 170–172; Bozkurt-Güngen, 2018, p. 232). Consequently, increased precariousness and diminished bargaining power not only guaranteed cheap and disciplined labor for capital accumulation but also provided greater control over the workforce (Arslan, 2020, p. 169), laying the foundation for authoritarian rule (Akçay, 2021;

Bozkurt-Güngen, 2018). This control effectively prevented societal opposition to the destabilization caused by neoliberal policies, which previous governments encountered as a constraint on advancing the neoliberal agenda (Akçay, 2021; Bozkurt-Güngen, 2018). Therefore, AKP could demolish the SOEs with ease (Akçay, 2021, p. 86; Yaman, 2024, p. 14), further disciplining labor by placing many formally employed workers in the reserve army of labor. The result of these policies is an example of neoliberal informalization, marked by the precariousness of formal labor and the increase in informal labor, blurring the line between the two (Arslan, 2020; Bozkurt-Güngen, 2018, p. 231; Mezzadri, 2016).

Increased precariousness and informality affect women the most, as their position in the market is deemed inferior due to the patriarchal regime. Although already in existence, this regime gained an Islamic dimension with AKP, which puts tradition, religious belief, and family at its center, and sees home as the “natural locus” of women where she can assume her primary role of sacred motherhood (Arslan, 2020, p. 175, 2022, p. 1901). This conservative patriarchal ideology is evident in the party’s politics and the rhetoric of its politicians (Arslan, 2020, pp. 174–177, 2022, pp. 1900–1903; Buğra & Yakut-Cakar, 2010, pp. 530–531; Yaman, 2024). The government aims to amplify and exploit the inferior social and material conditions of women as a subsidy for capital, and also uses the family institution as a social stabilizer to absorb the shock of austerity and privatization policies (Yaman, 2024). Arslan defines this as a two-bird-in-one-stone situation, where the traditional gender roles emphasized by the family policies ensure the increased appropriation of the social reproduction value, while their reinforced vulnerabilities by these policies legitimize their employment under more flexible, precarious, and informal conditions in the labor market, rendering women as cheap labor themselves (Arslan, 2020, p. 178, 2022, p. 1902). This is also evident in the transformation of social assistance schemes under AKP rule. The new welfare regime was mainly designed to substitute publicly provided care with family care, position women as “deserving poor,” and create a trade-off between working and receiving social aid (Buğra & Yakut-Cakar, 2010, pp. 530–532), further contributing to the informalization of female labor. The dependency created by the gendered welfare regime of AKP is, therefore, a mechanism to exclude women from employment and limit their contribution to the household budget to the welfare they receive. These irregular, in-kind, or conditional cash transfers were targeted to women to substitute for the lack of publicly provided care with the family care that women would perform for free (Buğra & Yakut-Cakar, 2010, pp. 520, 530).

With the help of the policies that control labor and family, AKP's rule has been establishing authoritarian power since it first came to power. In the first 11 years of rule, its conservative neoliberal agenda enabled the party to enhance its rule through controlling labor, utilizing family institutions (Arslan, 2020, 2022; Yaman, 2024), and restructuring the economy to become insulated from politics and any opposition from society (Akçay, 2021; Bozkurt-Güngen, 2018). However, in the following years, as the authoritarian rule faced political and economic challenges, the government re-politicized the economy by dismantling the autonomy of independent regulatory institutions in its efforts to address the structural crisis and enhance its political power. In the literature, the turning point is shown as 2013, the Gezi protests, during which AKP's Islamic national corporatism and developmentalism were first challenged by a mass movement comprising diverse groups in society (Akçay, 2021; Bozkurt-Güngen, 2018; Çavuşoğlu & Strutz, 2014). The same year witnessed a severe shock to the era's debt-driven financialization accumulation regime, triggered by a contractionary shift in the US Federal Reserve's monetary policy. This resulted in a capital accumulation crisis and successive economic contraction (Akçay, 2021; Orhangazi, 2024). Furthermore, these were exacerbated by political challenges, i.e., the first electoral defeat in 2015, the attempted military coup in 2016, and foreign policy disputes with the US in 2018, resulting in a dire currency crisis and high inflation (Akçay, 2021). The resulting structural crisis jeopardized the continuity of the government, leading the government to step up its process of authorization, taking control of economic regulatory bodies, and changing the political system to a "Turkish presidential regime", becoming the almost unchallengeable authority (Akçay, 2021, pp. 92–94; Bozkurt-Güngen, 2018). Therefore, since 2013, especially since 2018, macroeconomic policy choices directly reflect the government's strategies that prioritize regime survival.

This is evident in the frequent turnover of leadership in macroeconomic policy departments and the subsequent changes in policy direction between 2018 and 2024 (Orhangazi, 2024, p. 4). Between these years, the Turkish economy struggled with an interest-exchange rate spiral, as economic governance intervened to address currency instability, inflation, high firm indebtedness, and recession (Akçay, 2021, pp. 88–91; Orhangazi, 2024). However, "policy zigzags" did not stabilize the currency nor accelerate stagnant growth; this led to a major disruption in AKP's development strategy (Orhangazi, 2024, p. 20). As a result, economic policy changed radically in 2021 to a non-orthodox program that argued that low inflation could be

achieved only through low interest rates. The government insisted on lowering the policy rate despite skyrocketing inflation and a devaluation, in the name of growth through increased imports and export substitution (Orhangazi, 2024, pp. 4–8). The burden of these policies fell on wage earners as real wages plummeted and poverty deepened (Orhangazi, 2024, pp. 9–10). When these policies brought the economy to the brink of a balance-of-payments crisis, a new program was announced before the 2023 general elections. Hence, economic governance and policy shifted once again to a more conventional approach. This latest economic program aims to increase capital inflows to fix the foreign exchange deficit and curb hyperinflation through higher interest rates and austerity policies, while also maintaining pressure on real wages and the advantageous position of capital in surplus value extraction (Orhangazi, 2024, p. 14). The government’s endeavor to resolve the foreign exchange deficit and prevent a balance of payments crisis has led to the current program, which pressures domestic industries like clothing manufacturing, which still heavily relies on imports, and connects the world markets through cheap commodities.

### **3 EMPIRICAL OVERVIEW OF THE DOUBLE CRISIS**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

Before going into the empirical outlook of the double crisis, some concepts need clarification. In the literature, textile is often used as an umbrella term to encompass all processes from fabric production to the garment as the final product. But it is often observed that, even within the same source, the same term is used to refer only to fabric production. The focus of this work is textile and garment manufacturing, given their enmeshed nature in both the literature and in real life. However, for clarity, I will use “clothing industry” to refer to the combined manufacturing sector for textile and garment products. When a distinction is necessary, I would refer to them as their respective sectoral categories: textile and garment manufacturing.

### 3.2 Production Crisis

The effects of the new economic policy are evident in the falling trends in sectoral statistics. The Industrial Production Index (IPI)<sup>1</sup> has been on a steady increasing trend since 2010 and peaked after the pandemic for both textile and apparel manufacturing, and started to decrease after 2022. For textiles, the peak was in 2021 with an annual IPI of 100, and for apparel, it was 126.8 in 2022, then fell to 83.6 and 120.9 in 2024, respectively (TurkStat, 2025). Falling in production has continued in 2025, as it was recorded at 80.9 for textiles and 104.1 for apparel in the 9<sup>th</sup> month of the year. This fall is significant not only for its magnitude but also because production in clothing manufacturing has not declined since 2005, except right after the 2008 crisis, which it quickly rebounded from (TurkStat, 2025). Relatedly, the Capacity Utilization Rate<sup>2</sup> in textile and garment manufacturing declined between 2021 and 2024, from 80.5% and 81.6% to 71.6% and 75.9%, respectively (İHKİB, 2025). Together, these two indicate that the Turkish clothing industry is in a crisis of accumulation, in which each year capital finds it harder to expand its own reproduction. Furthermore, after decades, Turkey's global export share for the industry has fallen under 3%, and many employers have been laying off workers, over 300.000 since 2022, and thousands of enterprises have been shut down (İHKİB, 2025; "Turkey's Fabled," 2025; TTSİS, 2025b). Swelling in the reserve army of labor disciplines the workers; however, the shutdowns of the enterprises alarm the capital as well.

At press and sectoral conferences, leaders of the industry's employers' union, manufacturers' and exporters' associations commonly emphasized the severity of the current situation, revealing capital's perception( TGSD, 2024; TTSİS, 2025b). For instance, the head of the Turkish Textile Industry Employers' Union, Seyok, stated that anyone who has been in this sector for over 40 years will agree that many crises have occurred, but none like this (TTSİS, 2025, pp. 14–15). Consensus among industry leaders is that the core of the crisis is the rise in input costs (mainly wages and energy) due to changes in macroeconomic policy after 2022, which led to high interest rates and currency pressures that eroded the global price competitiveness of Turkish textiles and apparel. These, together with lower international demand

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<sup>1</sup> IPI is a volume index that measures the change in physical output produced by industrial enterprises (TÜİK, 2026).

<sup>2</sup> CUR indicates the actual utilization of the physical capacity a manufacturing enterprise have in a given period (TCMB, 2024).

due to the post-pandemic recession, constitute the main reasons for the production-side crisis for the industry's capital holders (“Turkey’s Fabled,” 2025; TGSD, 2024; TTSİS, 2025b). This common emphasis on the input costs increases reveals capital’s reliance on absolute value extraction in the clothing industry. Indeed, Turkish textile and clothing manufacturers rely on proximity to buyer markets, flexible and fast product delivery, and cheap labor as their competitive advantages (Kaya et al., 2019; Uğur, 2004; World Bank, 2019). Therefore, the labor intensity and the simple technological capital required for production (Bulut, 2023) mean that technological advancement alone cannot offset the cost of wage increases through increased productivity, resulting in higher prices and eroded competitiveness in the global market. The lowered competitiveness issue was also highlighted by the commonality of the capital holder’s narrative that high minimum wages erased the limited cost advantage of Turkish clothing vis-à-vis Asian competitors. Capital holders demand that the authorities not only focus on disinflation but also decrease the exchange rate pressures and set the minimum wage in line with the medium-term inflation targets (TGSD, 2024; TTSİS, 2024, 2025; “Turkey’s Fabled,” 2025). This is clearly a demand for increased labor exploitation.

Due to increased input prices, domestic and international retailers are relocating their production to North Africa and Asia, respectively (“Turkey’s Fabled,” 2025; TTSİS, 2025b). Faced with the limits of exploitation due to a change in economic policy, domestic and international capital ensures perpetual accumulation by relocating and exploiting labor's vulnerabilities in a different locality. Until recently, domestic retail brands and international ones alike relied on the cheap, flexible, and fast production from Turkish manufacturers, and the clothing industry’s fragmented organization ensured just that. The fragmented organization of domestic production suggests that not only the labor, but also smaller capital is left behind. The organization of the Turkish clothing industry is in line with the pattern of decentralized production, where producers of varying scales complement each other within a complex network of subcontracting relations (Dedeoğlu, 2022). International and domestic retailers and larger enterprises use these subcontracting networks as a competitive edge in the global market and hold the upper hand over subcontractors in determining production processes (Dedeoğlu, 2022, p. 100; Ünlütürk & Öngel, 2023).

The ‘footloose’ nature of these larger enterprises disciplines smaller capital in their subcontracting networks through the threat of, or actual, relocation (Mezzadri, 2016, p. 21). The key role of subcontracting in the sector is reflected in the distribution of enterprises by size. According to data from 2019, in the textile sector, 69.8% are micro and 20.2% are small enterprises, while in garments, these are 74.3% and 18.7%, respectively (Ünlütürk & Öngel, 2023, p.19). The distribution of employees across these enterprises also reveals the sector’s fragmented organization, as with 27.3% (22.5%) working in micro, 47.4% (47.6%) in small, and 24.7% (29.22%) in medium and large enterprises in textile (garment) manufacturing (TurkStat & ILO, 2024b). Within these subcontracting networks, micro and small enterprises ensure flexibility in supply to larger enterprises by reducing fixed costs and providing access to a new pool of cheap labor from small ateliers and even the living rooms of houses (Dedeoğlu, 2010, 2022). The high division of labor also ensures substantial labor control and absolute labor surplus extraction in micro and small enterprises, where informal employment in the sector is concentrated (Dedeoğlu, 2010, 2022; Demir & Boyacı, 2025; Savaşan & Schneider, 2006; Ünlütürk & Öngel, 2023). Relatedly, the informality rate in the sector is substantial: 21.8% in textile manufacturing and 22.1% in garment manufacturing (TurkStat & ILO, 2024c). This implies that capital pushes exploitation beyond the minimum wage by incorporating and hiding informal employment within wide networks of subcontracting, details of which we will see in the next section.

The flexibility in production necessitates a fragmented organization in the sector, leading to high informality, greater exploitation, and increased vulnerability to external economic shocks. Therefore, the current organization of the industry relies so heavily on labor exploitation that, when macro-economic conditions, i.e., policy, changed to render that exploitation inadequate for further accumulation, the industry found itself in crisis. Therefore, larger capital sees this as a pressure on its profits and flees to survive. As a result, in just 2024, the clothing industry’s formal employment fell by 65,581, and the loss of employment over the course of 3 years reached around 300,000 people (*Major Disaster Awaits*, 2025; “Textile and Garment Industry Lost,” 2025). The loss in the clothing industry’s capacity to provide employment is intensifying, as in the first 8 months of 2025, 114,900 more people lost their jobs (TEPAV, 2025). Given that these are just the numbers from the formal part of the industry, calamity is even

bigger, and with this amount of unemployment caused by the production crisis, the social reproduction crisis of the industry's female workers is also intensified.

### 3.3 Social Reproduction Crisis

Women make up a substantial part of the employment in the clothing industry, 48.2% in 2024; however, they are overrepresented in the informal part (TurkStat & ILO, 2024). In textile manufacturing, informal female labor was 82.3% of all informality and 45.5% of all female labor in the sector, while in the manufacturing of wearing apparel, these rates were 60.6% and 24.7%, respectively, in 2024 (TurkStat & ILO, 2024b). Since informal subcontracting networks overstretch across kin and neighbor networks, especially in the apparel industry, estimates of informality are hard to obtain and are expected to be higher (Dedeođlu, 2010; Göçer, 2022). Many women do not even consider their contribution as work, but rather as helping a friend or the family business, or even hide their piecework from their partners and consider their earnings as pocket money (Dedeođlu, 2010, 2022). This creates the possibility of underreporting in household labor survey results, making their contribution even more invisible. These figures support Arslan's argument that feminization in the Turkish clothing industry occurred through the informal employment of women, and that, for those employed formally, feminization brought increased precariousness, blurring the line between formal and informal work (2020). Micro and small enterprises ensure profits by providing fast, flexible production to retailers by overexploiting (mostly informal) labor. Their focus on absolute value extraction, by minimizing labor costs and increasing hourly production, leads to precarious conditions and overtime work that push workers to the breaking point (Dedeođlu, 2010, 2022; Ünlütürk & Öngel, 2023).

Social reproduction crisis arises in the sector due to the gendered exploitation at work, low pay, and non-stop domestic burdens because the production is organized to consolidate the very gendered social dynamics that it relies on to have cheap labor, while also reinforcing informality to deem female labor even less valued and invisible (Dedeođlu, 2010, 2022). The gender wage gap is consistent over the years, and in 2024, women in the sector were paid 15% less than men (TurkStat & ILO, 2024a). The differences in tasks serve to legitimize the pay disparity and support the male-breadwinner model, as the pay is contingent upon skill level (Dedeođlu, 2010, pp. 20–21). Hence, the job assignments reflect social gender roles, as women dominate the jobs that are deemed low-skilled, e.g., casual work, sewing helper, packing and

quality control, while men overcrowd the high-skill jobs of foreperson, ironing, cutting, and advanced sewing machine operator (Dedeođlu, 2010; Ünlütürk & Öngel, 2023). Another factor that affects the wage is seniority, and due to care burdens, women employees often lack this quality (Dedeođlu, 2010; Göçer, 2022; Ünlütürk & Öngel, 2023). Women's working years are often interrupted by marriage and childbirth. In factories and workshops, young, unmarried, or divorced women work in clothing manufacturing. However, for married women with dependent children, maintaining employment in a factory and workshop setting becomes very difficult due to increasing social reproduction duties. Moreover, the lack of care facilities and problems with maternity leave practices in factories and workshops, along with limited access to public childcare facilities, all contribute to lower seniority rates among female employees (Dedeođlu, 2010, 2012; Ünlütürk & Öngel, 2023).

Dedeođlu's fieldwork (2010), findings of which she highlighted as still relevant to the current state of the sector in her later work (2022), shows the work cycle for female employees in the sector. Her fieldwork in Istanbul reveals that 39% and 28% of the female workshop workers are aged 16-20 and 21-25, respectively. Young female workshop workers whose lives are not yet interrupted by marriage can later find employment in factories, as reflected in their 47% share in the 21-25-year age group, compared with 6% among workers under 20 in factories. Also, single women outnumber married women by 53% in factories and 56% in workshops. Accordingly, in both workshop and factory settings, the 26-30 age group accounts for only 12% of the female workers, indicating the effect of marriage on women's employment. For the factory, the 31-40 age interval increases to 29%, and for the workshop, to 16%, showing that for some women whose social reproductive duties became relatively lighter, returning to work is a possibility. The ones who cannot return to employment become home-based pieceworkers, as 34% and 27% of the female workers in this group are aged 31-40 and 41-50, respectively. The marriage rate is higher in the home-based category with 67% (Dedeođlu, 2010, pp. 11-12). In another fieldwork in 4 cities in Eastern Anatolia, among big clothing manufacturing enterprises, she stated that the majority of the women are between the ages of 17 and 25, and they only work until marriage, as there is an implicit layoff agreement between employers and employees upon marriage that has become the norm in the region (Dedeođlu, 2012, p. 11). Lastly, the 2025 Clean Clothes Campaign fieldwork in Istanbul supports the pattern of young female workers in the clothing industry (Uçak, 2025). According to fieldwork, around 48% of female workers are between 15

and 25 years old, with 38% in the 20-25 age group. In the next interval, 26-30, the percentage falls to around 15% and continues decreasing until the ages of 41-45 with 19% (Uçak, 2025). These fluctuations demonstrate the same work-cycle pattern observed in women, as reported by Dedeođlu.

Hence, women's positioning in the production mainly depends on the amount of social reproduction duties they need to perform; in other words, socio-material conditions of social reproduction create the conditions at work for women (Arslan, 2022). At the same time, domestic burden does not free them from paid work because of the low wages and material deprivation among the working class in the country. AKP's economic policies led to the erosion of real wages, as the official minimum wage has not been protected against inflation over the years. Since the 2018 economic crisis, the minimum wage has become the standard pay for the working class nationwide and serves as a ceiling in the industry (Arslan, 2022, p. 1912; Ünlütürk & Öngel, 2023, p. 15). Although the official minimum wage has always been slightly above the hunger threshold (see Table 1), for the first time, it was declared to be below this threshold. For 2026, the official minimum wage is 28.075 TL, while the hunger threshold is 30.143 TL (TÜRK-İŞ, 2025b). Therefore, material deprivation among sector workers means that multiple incomes are needed in a household (Göçer, 2022, p. 28; Ünlütürk & Öngel, 2023). Hence, when women leave work due to increased domestic responsibilities, they continue to contribute to the family income as pieceworkers at home (Dedeođlu, 2022). If their burden is reduced by divorce or the children becoming less dependent, women tend to return to work in workshops or factories (Ünlütürk & Öngel, 2023). Consequently, the women must work because material deprivation limits their social reproduction capacities, but their domestic duties make them more vulnerable in the job market, forcing them to work in more precarious conditions, with less stability and lower pay.

**Table 1: Comparison of Average Nominal Earnings and Minimum Wage Against Hunger and Poverty Thresholds with Official and Alternative Inflation Rates, 2015-2025**

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Average monthly nominal earnings – Total (₺)	1199.5	1436.1	1575.9	1809.6	2232.8	2536.3	3162.8	5404.6	10981.3	20126.2	N/A
Average yearly nominal earnings- Female (₺)	1068.1	1290.7	1411.4	1613	2056.2	2341.9	2939.6	5075.3	10088.5	18272.6	N/A
Official Minimum Wage (Gross) (₺)	1201.50	1647	1777.5	2029.5	2558.4	2943	3577.5	5004	10008	20002.5	26005.5
Hunger Threshold (₺)	1385	1432	1608	1941	2163	2590	4013	8130	14431	21083	30143
Poverty Threshold (₺)	4512	4665	5238	6322	7045	8436	13073	26485	47009	68675	98188
Year on Year inflation rate (TÜİK) (%)	8.81	8.53	11.92	20.30	11.84	14.60	36.08	64.27	64.77	44.38	30.89
Year on Year inflation rate (ENAG) (%)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	36.72	82.81	137.55	127.21	83.40	56.14

*Note:* Nominal earnings data is extracted from the International Labour Organization and is for textile, apparel, leather, and footwear manufacturing workers, as it is the most specific sectoral data available (TurkStat, ILO, 2024). Official minimum wage data is from a Clean Clothes Campaign report (Demir & Boyacı, 2025). Living Thresholds data are calculated for a family of four by the Türk-İş (Confederation of Turkish Trade Unions TÜRK-İŞ, 2024). Year on Year inflation data refers to the month of December. TÜİK data are the official government inflation statistics (TurkStat, 2025). Alternative inflation data from ENAG (Inflation Research Group, 2024) are provided to better understand the pressure on real wages, as TÜİK data is deemed biased.

The social reproduction crisis is further intensified in the most precarious parts of the fragmented production network due to blurred lines of production and social reproduction. In male-owned workshops, female family members of the owners contribute by helping with actual production, cleaning, and maintaining the workshops, and by networking to sustain an abundant pool of female workers, often without pay (Dedeoğlu, 2010). This pool of female labor consists of neighbors, friends, and relatives who work in workshops or as home-based piece workers, with extensive reciprocal connections. Women help each other to meet the ever-growing demand and flexibility needs, take care of each other's children, and help with domestic chores (Arslan, 2022; Dedeoğlu, 2010, p. 15, 2022, pp. 107–108). They work under heavier conditions, longer hours for lower pay, without stability and social security, compared to the formal part of the industry (Arslan, 2022; Dedeoğlu, 2010, 2012, 2022; Ünlütürk & Öngel, 2023). Workplaces are located in shanty neighborhoods near the residences of female labor to overcome women's immobility and keep the disparity between domestic and work life to a minimum (Dedeoğlu, 2022). As a result, women's production and reproduction activities merge, and their times bleed

into each other as these women constantly produce value for capital's appropriation (Mezzadri, 2016, 2019).

Overall, this exploitative nature of the clothing industry causes a social reproduction crisis for women who work formally and informally. Low wages, long hours of work, and precarious workplace conditions overstretch women's capacity for social reproduction. The intensification of the production crisis and sectoral dissolution disproportionately impacts women in the sector due to the gendered division of labor. Women are structurally vulnerable not only because of the crisis but also because they mainly occupy the low-skilled roles and are overrepresented in the informal part of the sector. Since the male-breadwinner model that prevails in the industry positions women's earnings as secondary, women are the first to be discarded by employers who see male earnings as the primary source of a family's survival (Dedeođlu, 2010, 2022). Therefore, loss of employment immediately translates to a social reproduction crisis for women who are the sole or primary earners of the household, but also for male-led families, necessitating multiple incomes to get by. For those who keep their employment, swelling in the reserve army of labor erodes job security and bargaining power of the workers, which is already lower for female workers in the industry. Especially in the informal parts of the industry, where SMEs rely on absolute value extraction for accumulation, plummeting orders from upper tiers intensify exploitation and increase precariousness, through the common practice of forced overtime work, ensuring losses are compensated by higher per capita output and lower unit costs (Dedeođlu, 2010, p. 21). While the production crisis is intensifying the social reproduction crisis by decreasing the already low stability, bargaining power, and economic security of female labor, the persistence of the production crisis is not merely due to market fluctuations but is the outcome of the government's priorities and policy choices that render the clothing sector expendable.

## 4 POLICY ANALYSIS

### 4.1 Why Does the Production Crisis Intensify?

In the Ministry of Treasury and Finance (MTF)'s Strategic Plan (2024a), priorities of the current economic program are codified. In the Minister's Message section, it is stated that

ensuring price stability, improving current account deficit, accumulating reserves, and enhancing fiscal discipline are the core priorities of the economic program (2024a, p. 5). In the Performance Program for 2025, the Minister states determination in following this economic program and underlines the continued priorities (MTF, 2025, p. 3). Accordingly, in the Medium-Term Programs presented in these documents, these priorities are linked to policies of disinflation, appreciation of the TL, selective credit, import limitations, and austerity measures (MTF, 2024a, 2025). There is a strong emphasis on the Ministry's programs for transforming industry and shifting exports from traditional goods to new, high-tech, and value-added production. In this regard, it has been stated that these specific areas will be supported through a treasury-backed guarantee system and Eximbank to facilitate the real sector's access to credit, and the importance of selectivity of support in the real sector has been emphasized (MTF, 2024a, p. 35, 2025, pp. 29, 22). Moreover, the predominant position of macroeconomic discipline for foreign capital attraction in the purposes section for the year 2025 program (MTF, 2025, pp. 28–29) signals that conditions will remain disadvantageous for the clothing industry, which relies on abundant credit, imports of intermediate goods and machinery for production, as well as a competitive currency, for capital accumulation.

What exacerbates the situation is that the clothing manufacturing sector is viewed by authorities as a traditional, labor-intensive industry in need of transformation. The incentive mechanisms were altered to reflect this selective support. In the Budget Presentation for 2026, the only support mechanism for the struggling sector was the Employment Protection Program in Labor-Intensive Sectors. The Minister announced that the 2500 TL insurance premium support to SMEs in the clothing sector, with the condition of keeping their employment (KOSGEB, 2025), will be increased to 3500 TL, and larger enterprises will also be eligible in 2026 (Şimşek, 2025, p. 50). However, given the big discrepancy in wages between Turkey and competitive countries (in August 2025, it was 755 vs. 100-200 USD (TTSİS, 2024, p. 14)), 3500 TL (around 80 USD) support is unlikely to keep the producers who have the capacity to move the production overseas. The Minister also stated that, to keep the current account balance sustainable, more selective, focused incentive programs are being applied to prioritize high-technology products and industries (Şimşek, 2025).

Under the new investment incentive regime that took effect with the 2025/9903 Presidential Decree, support for the clothing industry is limited to regional or sectoral transformation (2025). If the sector is not in less-developed areas or does not agree to move to these areas, i.e., the Southeast region, it is excluded from key benefits such as tax reductions, worker social security premium support, and interest rate reductions. On the other hand, for the green and digital transformation investments between 12-50 million TL, the sector can receive more support without being spatially restricted (Decree No.9903, 2025, Art. 8(8), Art. 9(1)(a)). The lack of mechanisms to support the struggling clothing manufacturing industry in this new incentive program shows that the sector's survival is not a priority; instead, creative destruction is facilitated. All in all, the determination on this economic agenda and the new industrial regime suggest that the dissolution of the industry will continue, inevitably intensifying the social reproduction crisis through lay-offs and shrinking job opportunities. However, rather than intervening to restore production capacity or provide a safety net for workers, the AKP adopted a different crisis management strategy of reinforcing the family institution to absorb the shock.

## 4.2 Family Policy as a Crisis Management Tool

Reinforcing women's inferior social position with family policies has been a core strategy of AKP, which aims both to ensure capital's externalization of social reproductive services and to soften the shock of economic crisis. That is why, amid an intensifying crisis in the clothing sector that led to the dissolution of an important industry, rather than implementing policies to ease the effects of the dissolution and support the sector's employees, the government once again clung to the family policy. This is evident in the government's declaration of 2025 as "The Family Year" (MFSS, 2025). This program is designed to absorb the shock coming from the economic crisis in general, and the crisis in the clothing sector in particular, and allow the government to continue pursuing the current economic policy despite the crisis. Doing so places the cost of crisis management on families, specifically women, the primary caregivers, intensifying their social reproduction crisis by adding the burden of survival. The core aid program under the Family Year is the "Family and Youth Fund," a direct example of such a mechanism that helps cope with the instability that a crisis like the dissolution of the clothing sector can cause. The vitality of the fund is evident in the budget figures in the Ministry of Treasury and Finance's Performance Program for 2025, where austerity measures are listed, fiscal discipline is highlighted, and a

commitment to demand-side restrictions is noted (MTF, 2025). Amid the lack of a special support program for the dissolving sector's workers, in the cost table of the Performance Program, we see that the ministry transferred 897.473.804 TL in 2024, and increased the budget for 2025 almost 7 times to 6.107.368.000 TL (MTF, 2025, p.105).

In November 2023, Law no. 7474 established the Family and Youth Fund under the Ministry of Treasury and Finance, which came into effect in 2024. The purpose of the fund is stated as “supporting and strengthening the family institution, and protecting the youth from social risk” (MTF, 2024b). The project that this fund is established to finance is called “Support for Young People Getting Married” (SYPGM), and it's run by the Ministry of Family and Social Services (MFSS). On the project's website, it is stated that the family, as the core unit of society, should be supported and reinforced, as its power and problem-solving ability guarantee social peace and stability (MFSS, 2024c). As the name suggests, the program is designed to incentivize young people to get married. Accordingly, eligibility is granted to Turkish citizens between the ages of 18 and 29, who have no property ownership, whose income as a couple in the last six months does not exceed 2.5 times the minimum income, and who agree and commit to the training and consulting services of the ministry (MFSS, 2024a). Within the scope of the program, an interest-free loan of 150,000 TL is offered, with a 48-month term and a 2-year grace period.

Another program for the Family Year is the training program for families, which is mandatory for the SYPGM; its content offers insight into the Fund's and Program's aims. The broad category of training programs includes pre-marriage training, media, law, and economic training related to the family institution, as well as post-marriage training (MFSS, 2024b). In the training content used for the project, family institution arises in two forms, egalitarian or traditional, based on how the three core responsibilities are distributed in the household: housework, childcare, and financial provision. While in the former, these responsibilities are shared, in the latter form male is the breadwinner and the leader of the family (Canel & MFSS, 2011, pp. 43, 97; MFSS, 2011, pp. 14–15). Even though it is highlighted that, as long as the parties are happy with their roles, no model is better than the other, there is no mention of a model in which a woman is the sole breadwinner and is exempt from domestic work. Hence, women can either share domestic duties with their partners or bear the entire burden themselves.

Moreover, in the section listing possible conflict points in marriage, specific advice is listed for working women on balancing their work and domestic responsibilities, while no such advice was given to men (Canel & MFSS, 2011, p. 66). Moreover, the family's self-sufficiency is also often highlighted in the training content. Families are advised to be prudent, frugal, and efficient in managing their limited financial resources (Şarлак & MFSS, 2011). They are instructed to avoid credit and debt products unless for investment purposes, and instead solve problems by pooling family resources, sticking together, and appealing to MFSS social aid programs when necessary (Canel, 2011, p. 27; Şarлак & MFSS, 2011, pp. 26, 27, 31, 34). Overall, the training materials underline the sanctity of the family and its role in a functioning society as a problem-solving and survival mechanism for individuals.

## **5 BRINGING THE THEORY AND POLICY TOGETHER**

### **5.1 Functionality of the Family Year for the Government**

In the Neoliberal era, family policies are not just policies that aim to regulate society. They do not stand in isolation and are not designed to affect only a country's social organization. This is not to say that their influence over other aspects of life, i.e., economic, happens by coincidence or solely through interaction. Rather, family policies are one of the tools governments use to regulate the economy by determining how much of the value produced outside the market is appropriated by capital and who produces that value. As Yaman stated, in this context, family policies are a product of neoliberal policies (Yaman, 2024). In addition, during crises, neoliberal governments use the family institution as a shock absorber to protect their rule by promoting it as a safety net for households. In this way, the costs of crisis management and survival are shifted to families. The AKP government has been the master of using such policies in economic management, as it used a family-centered narrative and support programs to first consolidate neoliberal transformation and then to cope with perpetual crisis throughout its governance (Yaman, 2024). This is why it is essential to analyze “Support for Young People Getting Married” through this perspective and understand how it serves as a tool to cope with the current situation in the clothing industry.

The main purpose of the Family Year and the SYPGM program is to enhance the family institution's role as a shock absorber for the government during times of crisis. As we have seen, the whole economy has been in perpetual crisis, and the government's determination on the current economic program, to get out of this crisis and maintain its authoritarian regime (Akçay, 2021; Orhangazi, 2024), is the reason why the crisis in the clothing industry was triggered and intensified. Hence, in these hard times, AKP is using its usual tool, the family, to manage the instability and panic in society. This is why President Erdoğan dedicated the year 2025 to policies aimed at enhancing the sanctity of the family institution. As evident from the training modules, the government sees family as a survival mechanism for the individual, in which the resources and strengths of each member are pooled to endure hard times. Accordingly, in his speech at the promotional event of the Family Year, Erdoğan said, "A family is a small society, and a society is a large family." (AK Parti (AKP), 2025). This implies that the solidarity, support, and understanding expected in a family are also expected across society during these hard times. According to this doctrine, hardships can arise, but with support and solidarity within the family, they can be overcome. In the context of the current crisis in the industry, people are urged to stay together to survive as they lose their jobs, their small family workshops close, and their home-based piecework decreases due to plummeting orders.

Moreover, incentivizing increases in family unit numbers warrants the continuity of other key functions of family in neoliberal systems, which are substituting for publicly available social care services and ensuring the continuity of future generations for the labor force (Arslan, 2022; Buğra & Yakut-Cakar, 2010; Federici, 2021; Fraser, 2017; Mezzadri, 2019; Vogel, 2013; Yaman, 2024). AKP's social aid mechanisms are overly family-focused, as evidenced by the name of the ministry responsible for implementing all social assistance programs, the Ministry of Family and Social Services. On the Ministry's website, half of the active social aid programs are categorized under "family," and for other categories, the eligible applicant is stated as "family member" (MFSS, n.d.). The most generous of these is the maternity grant provided to mothers, which increases in amount and becomes monthly after the first child. This stems from neoliberal reasoning that substitutes costly institutionalized public care with a much cheaper approach of providing limited grants to facilitate the free care provided by women in the family and to ensure the reproduction of the working class. In the conservative neoliberalism of the AKP, this takes the form of social welfare not as an individual right but as a right granted to family members for

complying with traditional norms. Hence, for getting married, young couples first receive SYPGM support to get them started, and, by becoming a family, they unlock eligibility for other social aid programs. AKP's social aid system is designed to amplify poor women's dependency, as the burden of social reproduction shifted to households and carried by women, making them rely on their husbands for income and the state for aid (Buğra & Yakut-Cakar, 2010).

## 5.2 Alignment of Family Policies with the Clothing Industry's Female Workforce

Analyzing the SYPGM program through a social reproduction lens reveals the precise overlap between the policy's eligibility criteria and the demographic profile of female workers in the clothing industry. The SYPGM program is aimed at single young people aged 18 to 29 whose combined income is not 2.5 times the minimum wage. Given that in the clothing sector, average earnings have consistently matched the official minimum wage, and women's wages even fall below it, young people in the sector are widely eligible to benefit from the program. We also know that the female labor is young and has high turnover from the fieldwork findings in the literature (Dedeoğlu, 2010, 2012; Uçak, 2025). Women begin their careers in factories and at workshops at a young age. Women who are 25 and under constitute the majority of female workers in workshops and factories. However, as they get married, they tend to leave employment due to increased social reproduction burdens. After the age interval 26-30, there is a decline as women marry in their mid-twenties and assume greater social reproductive duties. As the age at which the interval approaches 40, a slight increase appears, suggesting that some women can return to the workplace if their domestic burden becomes relatively lighter. Married and older women who cannot return to their jobs continue to participate in the flexible production of the clothing industry by becoming home-based pieceworkers. Hence, the SYPGM program creates a strong push factor for young female workers in the industry whose material conditions prevent them from getting married. This is an intervention in the early stages of the work cycle that might otherwise get stuck due to deteriorating economic conditions in the industry and nationwide, thereby delaying the marriage of young people.

Consequently, the marriage incentive program targets a substantial part of the female workers in the industry. In an industry already bleeding out employees, this means 2 things. First, the part of the already unemployed is absorbed via marriage as women leave the workforce for the factories and workshops due to increased domestic burdens. This makes the dissolution

process easier for the government, which showed that its priority is not maintaining the industry's production capacity but transforming the larger, more capable enterprises and allowing the others to slowly dissolve. Combined with the limited impact of the “Employment Protection Support” given to the sector’s employers, the SYPGM program provides another mechanism to soften the otherwise more rigid drop in employment in the industry. Secondly, since the employment opportunities in the industry are becoming increasingly limited due to the layoffs and the swelling in the reserve army of labor, women leaving work due to marriage makes the remaining positions less competitive for men. Decreased competition for men increases their presence in the remaining jobs and serves the male-breadwinner model that aligns well with AKP’s ideology.

The work-cycle pattern in the industry suggests that marriage incentives facilitate the exit of young female workers from the labor force, since they sacrifice their factory and workshop jobs as the burden of social reproduction increases when they become wives and mothers. However, this time, contributing to the family income via home-based piecework or returning to employment once the domestic burden is lessened is harder because the already-existing barriers for married and older women in the industry are intensified by the production crisis, which is eroding job opportunities. Shrinking and relocation of production in the industry mean limited work and increased precariousness in SMEs, where women often find informal, flexible work. For home-based workers, it is harder to get piecework orders because micro and small enterprises depend on orders from larger producers or retailers. Hence, limited work opportunities translate into higher barriers to returning and continuing to work flexibly and at home. Furthermore, given the low skills women have acquired through the tasks they were restricted to in the sector, they are not a fit for the sectoral transformation either. Hence, women’s vulnerabilities in the job market are intensified because of the marriage incentives that push women out of employment at a young age, while the allowed dissolution in their industry interrupts their work cycle. Additionally, for workers who remain employed, increased competition in the job market and the abundant reserve army of labor create the grounds for further deterioration of conditions and increased informality in the clothing sector. All things considered, decreased job stability, harsher working conditions due to reduced bargaining power, and income losses from sectoral dissolution, combined with the shifted cost of crisis management onto households, exacerbate the social reproduction crisis of female workers in the clothing industry.

## 6 CONCLUSION

This thesis has shown that the co-occurrence of production and social reproduction in the Turkish clothing industry is neither a coincidence nor merely a consequence of market fluctuations. Rather, it is the result of the authoritarian neoliberal government's policies, which prioritize regime survival over the clothing industry's continuity. By analyzing AKP's economic agenda through the documents of the Ministry of Treasury and Finance and Ministry of Family and Social Services, this work reveals that the government is determined to manage the dissolution in the clothing industry, which was triggered by its economic policies, rather than restoring its previous production capacity while shifting the cost of the crisis management and the industrial collapse to households.

Consequently, AKP manages the crisis not by preventing dissolution or providing a safety net for employees, but through promoting the family institution as a shelter. The 2025 Family Year and the SYPGM program serve as a shock absorber for the regime against the calamity, designed to mitigate the effects of the production crisis in the private sphere through domestic survival strategies. Structural analysis of the SYPGM program reveals a precise overlap between the eligibility criteria and the demographics of the sector's female workers. By incentivizing marriage for young people, the program intervenes in the work cycle of female workers, where they start early in workshops, move to factories, and leave work as they get married and have children. By offering substantial credit to young people, who are already materially deprived and facing increased instability due to the sector's crisis, the government is facilitating the exit of women from the labor force. Additionally, as the industry dissolves, circulation in their work cycle is blocked. Returning to employment or contributing to family income through flexible or home-based work is becoming harder, further limiting the few options women have. Increased competition for the positions in the industry is hurting women first, as they occupy unskilled, replaceable positions under employers that adhere to the male-breadwinner model. Therefore, economic policy choices affecting the industry and the family policies to cope with the crisis are amplifying women's vulnerabilities. Ultimately, facilitating the "masculinization" of the shrinking workforce.

AKP's economic and family policies combined show how, in a conservative authoritarian neoliberal regime, capital's interest can be sidelined when it clashes with that of the political

elite. Under such a regime, the state does not merely side with the capital but can pick and choose who will survive from the fallout. This is evident in the ministerial documents and the new incentive program that dictates transformation for the clothing sector. However, due to the fragmented organization of production and the prevalence of SMEs that lack the capacity to transform or relocate, these policies leave smaller capital behind. Meanwhile, conservative family policies ensure that the cost of the crisis is paid not by the state, but by women, whose free social reproductive labor ensures the survival of the families through the hard times. Hence, the double crisis is not resolved but merely managed, as the production is abandoned to creative destruction, and the resulting shock is absorbed in the domestic sphere to secure the survival of the current political regime.

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