



This project is funded by the European Union

ARISE – Action for Reducing Inequalities in Education



Policy Brief: Turkey

CURRENT SITUATION

In Turkey, the number of students enrolled in formal educational institutions (K-12), was 16,658,076 in the academic year of 2019-2020.¹ According to Education at a Glance 2019, Turkey has the lowest proportion of public resources allocated to educational institutions in comparison to the OECD average and other countries included in the analysis.² Despite this lowest proportion, the spending of educational institutions comes overwhelmingly from public resources that constitute 75% of the entire educational spending in Turkey.³ In the last ten years, the number of teachers has increased substantially by 57.8% whereas the number of students at all education levels has increased only by 13%.⁴ As shown in Figure 1, the net enrollment rate of students, with minor exceptions in some years, has increased gradually since 2012.⁵

Figure 1: Net Enrollment Rates of Turkish Students at all Levels

Education Level	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Pre-primary (Ages 3-5)	26.6%	27.7%	32.7%	33.3%	35.5%	38.5%	39.1%	41.8%
Primary	98.9%	99.6%	96.3%	94.9%	91.2%	91.5%	91.9%	93.6%
Lower secondary	93.1%	94.5%	94.4%	94.4%	95.7%	94.5%	93.3%	95.9%
Secondary	70.1%	76.7%	79.4%	79.8%	82.5%	83.6%	84.2%	85.0%

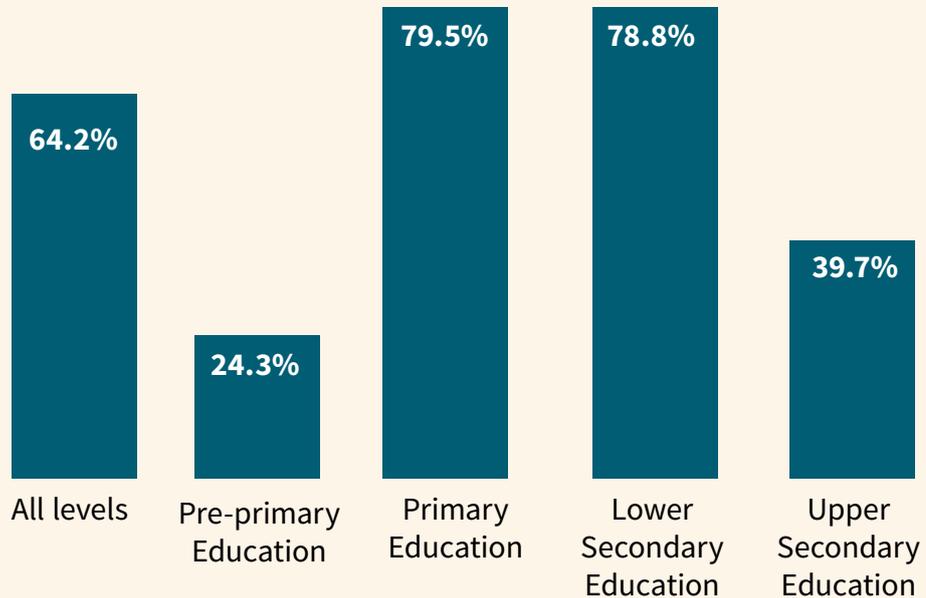
1 This number constitutes those students enrolled in formal education institutions, excluding those in open education institutions.
 2 OECD, 2018.
 3 Korlu, 2020.
 4 Koyuncu & Düşkün, 2020.
 5 Arık & Ergün, 2020.





Figure 2: Net enrollment rates of Syrian children under temporary protection in Turkey

NET ENROLLMENT RATES OF SYRIAN CHILDREN IN TURKEY



As far as the net enrollment rates of specific groups are concerned, the Turkish Ministry of National Education (the MoNE) releases data only on Syrian children holding Temporary Protection Status in Turkey. The total population of school-aged Syrian children in Turkey is 1,197,124 while the net enrollment rate of Syrian children in Turkey remains at 64.2%. This rate stands at 24.3% for pre-primary education, 79.5% for primary education, 78.8% for lower secondary education, and 39.7% for upper secondary education level.⁶ In short, the number of Syrian children that are out-of-school rises up as they get older.

In terms of the effects of poverty on educational attainment, relative poverty, and child poverty rate figures continue to be important indicators. 60% of the median equivalized household disposable income is defined as “at-risk-of-poverty-rate” and is widely used as an indicator to show relative poverty.⁷ In 2019, in Turkey, the ratio of those that fell under this category rose by 0.1 points compared to 2018 and reached 21.3%.⁸

As for child poverty in 2019, 48% of the children in Turkey were at risk of poverty or social

exclusion while the average of 27 EU member states stands at 22.2% for the same category.⁹

CHILDREN AT RISK OF POVERTY OR SOCIAL EXCLUSION



PISA 2018 findings show a comprehensive picture of the impact of socioeconomic status (SES onwards) on educational performances. In Turkey, SES is in positive correlation with performances in different subjects. In other words, a better socioeconomic background is more likely to produce better outcomes in PISA performances. Therefore, 11.4% of the variance in reading performance is explained by the SES of children. Similarly, 11.3% and 11% of the variances in mathematics and science performances respectively are explained by SES. Having said that, in Turkey, the effects of SES remain less significant than the OECD average. In Turkey, a one-unit increase in SES leads to an increase in reading, mathematics, and science performances of students by 25, 25, and 23 respectively; whereas in OECD average a one-unit increase in SES leads to an increase of 37, 36, and 36 points for the same subjects.¹⁰

6 MoNE HBOGM, 2020.

7 Eurostat, n.d.

8 TSI, 11 September 2020.

9 Eurostat, 17 December 2020.

10 OECD, 2019.



The share of youth not in employment, education, or training (NEET) is another indicator. It pertains to young persons between the ages of 15 to 24. In Turkey, 13.2% of all 15-19-year-old men are neither enrolled in school, training nor are employed whereas 21.2% of all 15-19-year-old women are out of education, training, or employment. The figures are higher among 20-24-year-old men and women and stand at 22.2% and 44.4% respectively.¹¹

NEET RATE FOR AGE 15-19



NEET RATE FOR AGE 20-24



MAIN PROBLEMS OF EDUCATION IN TURKEY

Regional differences in performance: Monitoring and Evaluation of Academic Achievement (ABIDE in Turkish) and the Student Achievement Monitoring Study (OBA in Turkish) conducted by the MoNE as well as TIMSS and PISA results constitute the main sources to display the regional differences. For instance, according to the TIMSS 2019 results on 8th-grade students, Southeast Turkey has the lowest average in Mathematics performance with a score of 461, whereas East Marmara has the best performance in Mathematics with an average of 511.¹² The findings of these assessments prove that the highest ratio of students that scored at or below the basic level in all academic areas was from Southeast Anatolia, Central East Anatolia, and Northeast Anatolia respectively.¹³ As discussed in the national report, the frequent rotation of teachers is intensified in these regions and could be considered as one of the leading reasons for less successful educational outcomes.

11 OECD, 2020.

12 MoNE, 2020.

13 See ERI, 2019a.

School-based factors affecting the performance of students: With a score of 67% in social inclusion, Turkey ranks 59th out of 78 countries participating in PISA.¹⁴ This low score in social inclusion shows that students from different socio-economic backgrounds are less likely to attend the same schools. This situation generates a stratification among schools based on class as well as achievement in education.¹⁵ Another index, namely variation in students' ESCS (Economic, Social, and Cultural Status) within schools, draws a clearer picture regarding this stratification. Turkey's score, in this index, is 0.94 and shows how students are intensified in the same schools in accordance with socioeconomic backgrounds.¹⁶ Competition for entrance exams is also another problem that reproduces and strengthens already existing school segregation. Students with similar SES backgrounds end up in the same schools.

Child Labour and NEET: Child labor is also another problem in Turkey. According to the latest survey of TSI published in 2020, the number of children between the ages of 5-17 working is 720,000 and this figure only focuses on the child labor outside of the house, thus excluding housework such as cleaning, childcare, and other housekeeping activities. Moreover, the latest survey does not include Syrian children in Turkey who are at work. As the 2020 Parent Survey of Back-to-School-Project delineates, almost 26% of Syrian parents argue that financial barriers are the main reason why their children do not attend school. Similarly, more than 16% of the Syrian parents maintain that their children are working and are therefore out of school.¹⁷ As discussed previously, the number of young people in Turkey who are neither in education, work, or training is higher than the OECD average, especially for females.

In the academic year of 2019-20, the net enrollment rate of 3-to-5-year-old children in pre-primary education is only 41.8%. Although enrollment rates for pre-primary education have been on the increase, they still lag behind the

14 PISA, n.d.

15 Ibid.

16 MoNE & Ministry of Industry and Technology, 2018.

17 Inter-Agency Coordination Turkey, n.d.



previous objectives and the OECD averages. The importance of early childhood education and its relationship to socioeconomic status, both as a contributing factor and as a factor affected by it, is increasingly acknowledged.¹⁸

PROMISING POLICY EXAMPLE

Teacher-based Policy: Despite recent measures taken to reduce teacher rotation,¹⁹ comparatively more frequent rotation of teachers in certain regions exacerbates the educational performances of children especially in rural and less developed regions, which in turn becomes one of the major reasons behind the clear-cut regional differences in students' educational performances. For that reason, in 2019, the MoNE launched a new project targeting teachers in villages. The project is conducted in collaboration with Sabancı Foundation and KODA (Village Schools Transformation Network), which works with teachers in rural areas, supports their social lives, and improves teachers' professional competence at village schools. The primary objective of the project is to reach 7,000 teachers working in multi-grade classrooms in villages and improve the professional skills of teachers.²⁰

School-based Policy: The MoNE introduced the School Profile Assessment plan in March 2019.²¹ The School Profile Assessment plan seeks to reduce inequalities between schools, ensure a holistic improvement of the school system throughout the country, and contribute to a data-driven decision-making process.²² The Assessment consists of monitoring, evaluation, and support stages, and focuses on 1) academic achievement, 2) social, sports, and cultural

activities, 3) projects, 4) institutional capacity,²³ through evaluating approximately 50 indicators.²⁴ After a school's profile is determined, an action plan for improvement will be created and implemented by school principals and teachers, with "improvement teams" joining them later.

Social Policies: There are certain social aids targeting students with low SES such as Conditional Cash Transfer for Education (CCTE), free transportation services, free school meals, as well as support for boarding students including accommodation, allowance, clothing, and stationery. CCTE is provided for families with low SES, on the conditions that the parents do not have paid jobs and their children are to enroll and attend school regularly. 1.7 million families benefited from the CCTE and 93.5 million TL were paid for beneficiaries in September 2020.²⁵ In partnership with the Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Services (the MoFLSS), the MoNE, Turkish Red Crescent (TRC), and UNICEF, the CCTE program was extended to cover school-age refugee children in Turkey in 2017.²⁶ The latest figure in November 2020 shows that 631,278 Syrian children benefited from the CCTE program.²⁷ In addition to the CCTE program, 1,152,520 out of the above-mentioned number of students (16,658,076) benefited from transportation services and free school meals;²⁸ 278,896 students at the primary and secondary level received a monthly scholarship of 307.3 TRY; 328,141 boarding students received support for accommodation, allowance, clothing, and stationery.

18 Batyra, 2017.

19 Since 2016 September, the MoNE commenced implementing the program of contracted teachers with which newly appointed teachers have to work under contracts -with fewer rights in comparison to permanent teachers- in their first three years and get to become a permanent teacher in their fourth year. In these four years, teachers do not have the right to request to be appointed somewhere else (see ERI, 2019b).

20 MoNE, 26 December 2019.

21 MoNE, 13 March 2019.

22 MoNE, 2019.

23 Ibid.

24 MoNE, 13 March 2019.

25 Republic of Turkey Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy, 19 October 2020.

26 Korlu, 2020.

27 Inter-Agency Coordination Turkey, 2020.

28 Currently, all students, regardless of economic conditions, who are eligible for free transportation and boarding services receive free school meals. A subsidized category for free school meals without benefitting from transportation and boarding services does not exist.



RECOMMENDATIONS

New intervention plans and policies are required to solve the problem of the high number of students who are out-of-school in secondary education level in comparison to other levels. This is especially critical for the net enrollment rate of Syrian refugee children, which shows a clear-cut drop in secondary level.

More specific data is needed on children from vulnerable ethnic groups such as Roma and Afghan as well as on those children that are working and/or whose parents and families are seasonal agricultural workers. The scope of data should also be extended to cover children with special needs and disabilities etc. since it would be a necessary reference point for future intervention policies. In addition to that, inclusive policies both at macro and micro levels are crucial to unravel the push and pull factors leading children to leave education early or not attending at all.

A more focused and targeted outlook is needed to overcome the problem of regional and school-level differences in the education performances of students. A more equalized environment among schools is also bound to decrease the level of competition in the entrance exams for secondary schools. Needless to say, this would also prevent the intensification of children with similar socioeconomic backgrounds in the same schools.

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