

RURAL NEETS IN TURKEY



2009/2019
OVERVIEW

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report describes the situation of rural Youths Neither in Employment, nor in Education or Training (NEET) aged between 15 and 34 years old, over the last decade (2009–2019) in Turkey. To achieve this goal, the report portrays indicators of youth population, youth employment and unemployment, education and NEETs distribution. Since the urban/rural distinction is not clear in Turkey, the overtime change in the status of the Rural NEETs cannot be analysed.

The adopted statistical procedures across the different selected dimensions involves descriptive longitudinal analysis, using graphical displays (e.g., overlay line charts) as well as the calculation of proportional absolute and relative changes between 2009 and 2013, 2013 and 2019 and 2009 and 2019. These time ranges were chosen to capture the indicators evolution before and after the economic crisis that hit European countries. All data was extracted from Eurostat public datasets, in addition we also used the statistics provided by the Statistical Institute of Turkey, in addition to some academic works.

The analyses show that Turkey has an ageing population, and that the share of the youth in the population declined over years. The relatively younger population of Turkey has previously always been accepted as an advantage, but this advantage has disappeared with declining birth rates. The transition to a new administrative system in 2012 prevents a detailed analysis of the situation of rural NEETS. However, the available data shows that there is a significant gender gap and the lower levels of female labour force participation has led to the emergence of the NEETs as a gendered problem.

YÖNETİCİ ÖZETİ

Bu rapor, Türkiye’de son on yılda (2009-2019) 15 ila 34 yaşları arasındaki Ne İstihdamda ne de Eğitimde veya Öğretimde (NEET) bulunan kırsal gençlerin durumuna odaklanmaktadır.

Rapor, bu hedefe ulaşmak için genç nüfusu, genç istihdamı ve işsizliği, eğitim ve NEET’lerin dağılımına ilişkin göstergeleri içermektedir. Türkiye’de kent / kır ayrımı net olmadığından; Kırsal NEET’lerin durumundaki fazla mesai değişikliği analiz etmek mümkün değildir..

Analizler, Türkiye’nin yaşlanan bir nüfusa sahip olduğunu, nüfus içindeki gençlerin payının yıllar içinde azaldığını gösteriyor. Türkiye’nin nispeten genç nüfusu her zaman bir avantaj olarak kabul edildi, ancak bu avantaj, azalan doğum oranları ile ortadan kalktı. 2012’de yeni bir idari sisteme geçiş, kırsal NEETS’in durumunun ayrıntılı bir analizini engellemektedir. Bununla birlikte, mevcut veriler, önemli bir cinsiyet farkı olduğunu ve kadınların işgücüne katılımının daha düşük seviyelerde olması NEET’lerin toplumsal cinsiyete dayalı bir sorun olarak ortaya çıkmasına yol açtığını göstermektedir.



1. INTRODUCTION

Turkey is a Middle Eastern country whose membership application to European Union has been “in progress” since 1987. Turkey is always in-between Europe and Asia, the West and East. It is both developed and developing, and the gap among the regions in the country is also enormous. Migration—internal and external; child labour; gender related inequalities; Kurdish issues and polarised politics constitute continuous political, economic and social problems in Turkey and which have multi-layered effects on youngsters’ current and future wellbeing.

Turkey has 12.95 million people aged 15–24, 15.6 % of the total population of 83.15 million. The country hosts 4 million refugees, the highest number in the world. 3.6 million of these refugees are registered Syrians under temporary protection status.

In this national report of Turkey, the general context for the youth—legislation and agencies, policy and employment, the education system and the administrative structure will be elaborated. EU funded projects are also listed.

The data analysis in the report includes population pyramid age; gender and urban/rural divides. Thus, there is a methodological and definitional problem of ‘rural’ in the data in Turkish case. The data presented in the report shows that Turkey has the highest NEET ratio among the OECD countries and the gender gap among the NEETS is striking. Although there is a chronic high unemployment rate among the Turkish youth, gender and seasonal variations are important to elaborate upon. Regarding education, despite improvements, school drop-out scores are significantly high in comparison with EU and OECD countries. Poverty/social exclusion and intersectionality are important factors to analyse in order to understand the current situation and to develop effective social policies.



1. GENERAL CONTEXTUALISATION

Legislation and Agencies

The base for the youth policies of Turkey is the provision of the Constitution of Turkey, article no. 58 which defines the relationship between youth and the State. According to this article, the State has a praetorian role, saving youth from different threats, from alcohol and narcotics to separatist ideologies. However, it doesn't include any provision about their rights, and it is thereby a unidirectional and paternalistic relationship, a style which dominates almost every sphere of state-society relationships in Turkey. The major agency which is responsible for conducting youth policies is the Ministry of Youth and Sports, established in 1982 and its structure has been revised several times. Responsibilities of the Ministry are defined as: developing policies supporting the personal and social development of youth; providing opportunities for the fulfilment of their potentials; and, opening avenues for active participation of youngsters to every aspect of social life. The ministry has its local branches, organised at the provincial (NUTS3) and district levels (NUTS4). For 2020, the budget of the Ministry was defined as 19 billion TLs and more than half of this budget was composed of transfers to households and "Treasury Transfers". As the Ministry oversees the organisation of sport activities at amateur and professional levels, its focus on youth employment is highly limited.

Other ministries of the central government have some responsibilities within the domain of youth policies. The National Employment Agencies (İŞKUR), a branch of the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Services, was established in 1946 and it has the responsibility of solving employment problems of youngsters. The İŞKUR organises training activities for youngsters in order to facilitate their entry into the job market and supports entrepreneurship in the country through specific incentives. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the İŞKUR class had the responsibility of channelling government funds to beneficiaries. (İŞKUR, 2011)

The National Agency of Turkey is a specifically established organisation dependent on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It has the responsibility of coordination of the youth and education programs of the European Union and its organisation at the national level. The National Agency has the role of coordination of the Erasmus and Erasmus+ Programs in Turkey.



The youth in Turkey is also under the jurisdiction of different bureaucratic bodies. The Ministry of National Education is in charge of coordination and organisation of educational activities, including the vocational training system. The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry conducts its own programs to empower young farmers. The Higher Education Council of Turkey acts as a coordinator of the higher education institutions and is composed of public and foundation (aka private) universities. Moreover, the university and other centrally organised exams are organised by the Measuring, Selection and Placement Centre, another autonomous institution.

Beyond this, many duties are assigned to municipalities, such as construction of dormitories for youngsters and supporting their sport activities. Similarly, the City Councils, newly established bodies targeted at empowering local participatory practices have duties aimed at supporting the youth, specifically by forming “Youth Assemblies”.

Major Documents

The youth in Turkey are the subject of different policy documents. The Eleventh Development Plan of the Presidency of the Republic of Turkey forms the umbrella document for the policies to be pursued during next five years. The plan has a specific section allocated to youth and it targets to reduce youth unemployment (target no. 116), equipping youngsters with new skills to facilitate market entrance (target no. 210), improving the inclusivity of society (target no.536), providing decent jobs to women and youngsters (target no. 539), and raising children and youngsters as individuals who have humanitarian and moral values (target no. 544). The youth unemployment is perceived as a problem to be solved with the cooperation of the central and local authorities, and a new body for development of youth policies (the National Youth Council of Turkey) has been provisioned. The İŞKUR will have the responsibility of developing new training programs and incentives with cooperation of civil society organisations (the Presidency of Turkey, 2019). The Plan also has a supportive document prepared by a large group of experts and policy recommendations which are linked to this document (the Ministry of Development, 2019).

The Development Plan does not have a binding function. However, all national and local government agencies must prepare their own strategic plans in accordance with its pro-



visions. Hence, the strategic plans of the Ministry of Youth and Sports, the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Services and the Ministry of National Education have specific sections allocated to the policies concerning the youth. The plan of the Ministry of Youth and Sports is highly general, however, the MoFLS's plan has specific policy proposals to solve the unemployment problem and the situations of NEETs (The Ministry of Youth and Sports, 2019). Agencies such as İŞKUR have already composed their own strategic plans. Like other documents, attracting NEETs to employment is among its specific targets (İŞKUR, 2019).

Youth Policy and Employment Measures

As stated above, unemployment has been perceived as the most important problem of youth and specific targets have been put in place within the official documents.

The Eleventh Development Plan (the Presidency of Turkey, 2019) notes youth unemployment reaching up to 35% as the most important problem, and links it to the worsening global economic environment (p.16). It also emphasises on the necessity of equipping youngsters with the professional skills required in the labour market (p.36). Ongoing digital transformation and technological developments are perceived as opportunities for vulnerable groups and youth (p.137). Developing local policies are put among the priorities of the local administrations (p.146). NEETs are among the specific target groups of the Plan, and it proposes the development of incentive plans to increase the participation of them in the labour force and employment. According to the plan, a training needs analysis will be carried out to identify occupational areas for them. The plan makes provisions to conduct short-term certification and diploma programs in innovative areas (p.161). These actions will be conducted by the İŞKUR, KOSGEB and civil society organisations (p.162).

The MoYS have limited responsibilities of developing these policies. In its strategic plan, it aims to develop entrepreneurship programs in its Youth Centres and Youth Camps with the cooperation of other institutions (pp.68–69).

The MoFLSS also has some responsibilities towards to youth employment. Developing specific regional programs targeting youth, women and the disabled is one of these responsibilities (p.52). The MoFLSS plans to develop an information system for attracting NEETs to the labour market with the cooperation of other ministries and agencies. (p.52).



The İŞKUR has specific targets and policies addressing the employment problem of youth and the situation of NEETS. Among these responsibilities are: conducting a profiling analysis of NEETs; conducting skills and talents research; developing matching mechanisms; improving the quality and the content of training programs; and, providing consultancy services.

In addition to these planned activities, İŞKUR has some active incentive programs to encourage employment of youth, such as subsidising social security payments for a period from 2 to 5 years depending on age, previous employment and attendance to training services of İŞKUR. İŞKUR also conducts active employment policies such as vocational training courses, professional training incentives, on the job training programs, public work programs, entrepreneurship programs through KOSGEB and projects for the disabled (İŞKUR, 2020). The Ministry of Treasury developed some incentives for young entrepreneurs such as tax waiving and in cash donations of about 4000 Euros (Goksen et. al., 2017).

The Education System of Turkey

Similar to the domain of youth, the education system of Turkey is also multi-headed and under the jurisdiction of separate agencies. The MoNE has the responsibility of conducting educational activities at the central and local level. The education system has been divided to five different stages, and the MoNE has the control of the first four stages in addition to education for the individuals with specific needs. They are as follows.

1. Pre-school.
2. Primary school (1-4th grades), the General Directorate of Basic Education, the Ministry of National Education.
3. Lower Secondary (5-8th grades), the General Directorate of Basic Education and Secondary Education & the General Directorate of Religious Education (Religious educations).
4. Upper Secondary (9-12th grades), the General Directorate of Secondary Education, the General Directorate of Vocational and Technical Education and General Directorate of Religious Education.
5. Higher Education (University), the Council of Higher Education (EURDYCE, 2020).



Non-formal education is under the responsibility of the MoNE, through the General Directorate of Apprenticeships and Non-Formal Education, which conducts adult education and training activities through Adult Education Centres. The İŞKUR also organises trainings for different segments of society. The Chambers of Commerce, private enterprises and other private institutions are other agencies providing non-formal education, but all of them are under the supervision of the MoNE (European Committee on Regions, 2020). Compulsory education in Turkey lasts 12 years, starting at 6 years old (56 –60 months) and is divided to three different stages: primary school, secondary school and high school.

The Administrative Structure of Turkey

The Republic of Turkey is a democratic, secular and social state governed by the rule of law (Article 2 of the Constitution). The Turkish State is an indivisible whole with its country and nation (Article 3 of the Constitution).

The administrative system is organised in a two-tier structure composed of central and local government. The central government is composed of central bodies (ministries and agencies) and their local branches appointed by the central government. The local administration is organised into three different and autonomous types of local government which are locally elected: special provincial administrations, municipalities and villages.

The country is composed of 81 (NUTS3) provinces and 957 districts (NUTS4). The governors of provinces and sub-governors of districts are appointed by the Ministry of Interior. Additionally, there are currently approximately 1,394 municipalities and 18,247 villages. The municipalities are organised into several categories: metropolitan municipalities (30 overall); province capitals (51 overall); district municipalities (519 in metropolitan municipalities, 400 in other provinces); and, town municipalities (394). Each district also hosts its municipality, while many small settlements are organised as town municipalities. Mayors of these municipalities are elected via popular vote.



Municipalities consist of several neighbourhoods, each of which has its own basic administration consisting of a headman (muhtar) and an assembly of aldermen. The latter are elected for a five-year term and have an advisory function. Villages represent the smallest form of local administration in rural areas and usually have a population of 150 to 5,000 inhabitants. The local administration of a village consists of a headman (muhtar) and an assembly of aldermen (European Committee on Regions, 2020b).

Child Labour and Entrance to the Labour Market

According to the legal regulations in Turkey, any person under 14 years old is regarded as a child and their employment is strictly prohibited. A child worker is a person between 14 and 15 years old and a young worker is someone who is over 15 but has not completed the age of 18. Child workers and young workers may be employed in light work, “that will not prevent their success at school” and the preparations to be made for the choice of profession, or participation in vocational training. With a change in the regulations, children under the age of 14 may be employed in in arts, culture and advertising activities that do not impede their physical, mental, social and moral development and when their attendance as school has been ensured (the Ministry of Labour and Social Security, 2017).

EU funding specifically for Youth sector and Non-formal Education

The EU coordinates its efforts for improving the situation of the youth in Turkey through the National Agency. Erasmus+ is the umbrella program of different efforts such as the mobility of individuals, international cooperation between actors, support for policy innovation, Jean Monnet activities and sports activities. The last official figures showed that 45 000 individuals in 1417 projects benefited from mobility programs in higher education, vocational education and training, school education, adult learning and youth learning, costing for a total grant amount of 83.96 million Euros.

The most important program conducted by the İŞKUR (with the support of the EU as part of the **Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA)**) was the “Improving Youth Employment Program” (2009–2013) which targeted the improvement of the human resources of



the country during the pre-accession process. The program was covered 44 provinces (NUTS3) and the total volume was 23 million Euros. The program supported 127 different projects in these provinces, and was composed of entrepreneurship trainings, personal development trainings, ICT courses, vocational trainings in specific sectors such as tourism, textile, and furniture.

Another program conducted by the İŞKUR is the “Promoting Youth Employment in Sectoral Investment Areas (PYE-2)” (2013–), with a budget of 26 million Euros, targeting 43 relatively underdeveloped provinces. The program objective has been defined as “delivering effective active labour market measures to increase the employability and entrepreneurship of young people while promoting their integration into labour market”.

Turkey recently launched a new program “Labour Market Support Program for Young People Not in Employment Education or Training (NEETs) (NEET PRO)” in summer 2020, with a budget of 17 million Euros. As the first program specifically targeting NEETs, its objective is defined as “to increase employability and labour force participation of NEETs by providing comprehensive and holistic active labour market measures”. Actions under the program can be vocational trainings, entrepreneurship training programs, on the job trainings, generic and soft skills trainings and improving qualification of NEETs to meet the local labour market needs (İŞKUR, 2020b).

Main Political Challenges

Youth in Turkey faces with many different challenges in the political and social domains. They include:

1. Political Instability;
2. Macroeconomic Instability, regional disparities;
3. Gender Inequality;
4. Problems of Education System;
5. Othering;
6. Syrian Refugees.



2. METHODOLOGICAL NOTE

Definition of Urban and Rural areas

In Turkey, the definition of rurality continuously changed and different criteria have been employed to distinguish between rural and urban areas. In 1924, the major criteria was population, and settlements having a population lower than 2000 have been defined as rural and settlements with 2000–20 000 individuals were “kasaba”. Having a population greater than 20 000 was accepted as a threshold for being defined as a city, in other words an urban place. Over time, TURKSTAT combined the first two categories and put a threshold of 20 000 in order to be defined as a city. This categorisation had administrative outcomes: villages are governed by “mukhtars” and are subject to different legal structures. This distinction was generally accepted.

However, in 2012 the government reformed the administrative structure of Turkey and declared 30 provinces having a population higher than 750000 individuals as the Metropolitan Areas. All villages in these provinces have been transformed to neighbourhoods (urban units) and the rural population of Turkey declined to 8% from 23% in one night. Following this administrative change, the previously accepted distinction based on population size lost its meaning and TURKSTAT has not yet developed an alternative measurement to be used in academic works. All statistics are still being produced by using the above discussed and invalid categorisation. TURKSTAT still uses the administrative categorisation.

On the other hand, there are some attempts to develop alternative and better measurements of rurality as a part of the harmonisation of policies with the EU. The classification is mainly based on clustering of square kilometre grid cells inhabiting fewer than 300 persons and land use in 2006. Based on this new classification, 794 districts (LAU1) are classified as thinly populated while 55 are having intermediate population and 121 are densely populated. Distribution of population in these district groups is 40.0%, 7.2% and 52.8%, respectively. Geographically, thinly populated areas which will be regarded as rural covers 90%, intermediate areas cover 4% and densely populated areas cover 6% of Turkey.



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However, this newly applied categorisation is not yet used by TURKSTAT and available statistics are based on the previously defined administrative distinction. Hence, as EUROSTAT fails to provide many statistics based on urban/rural distinction, for the main indicators presented in this report, we choose to use TURKSTAT data.

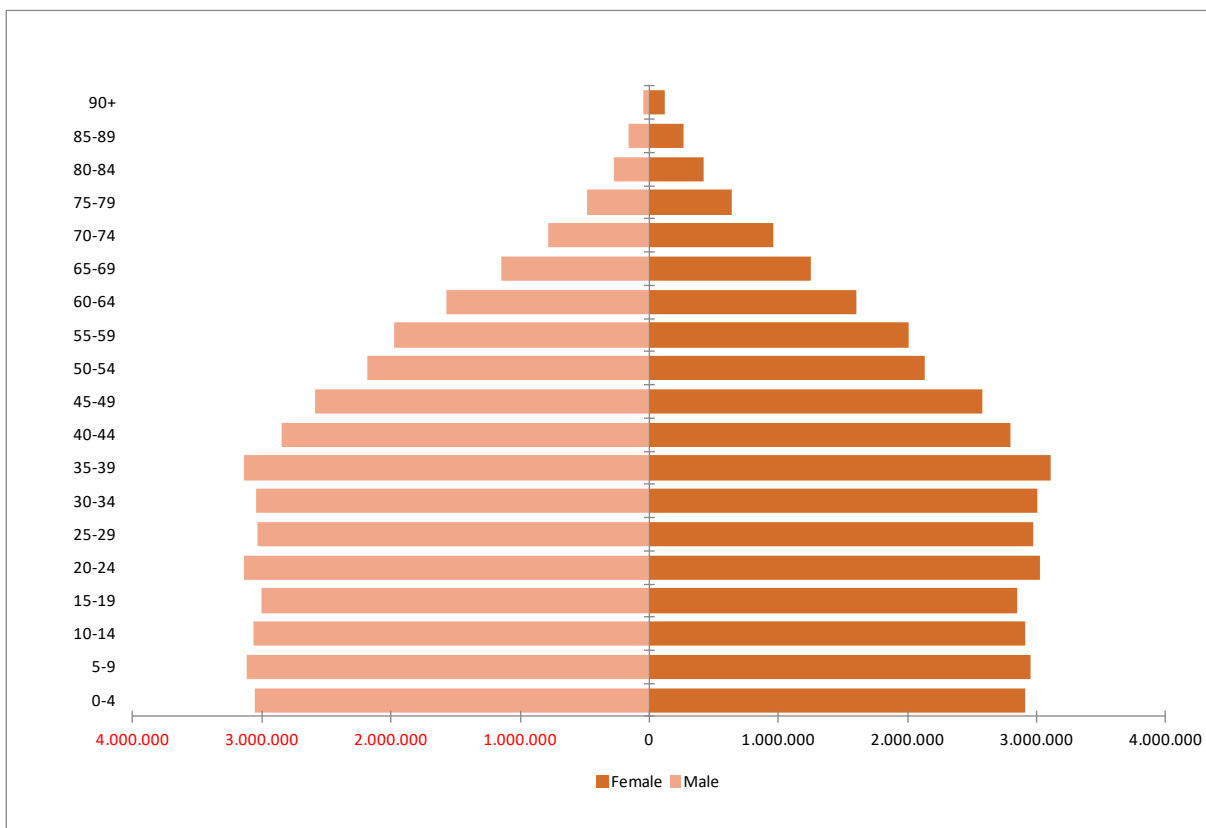


3. DATA ANALYSIS

3. 1. Population and youth population

According to the last official statistics, Turkey has a population of 83 million, putting it among the most populous countries in Europe. As presented above, a significant portion of this population is relatively younger. The total number of individuals under 29 years old is about 39 million, forming almost half of the population (46%). Meanwhile, the percentage of youngsters is 23% with a total number of 19 million. Gender distribution is almost equal.

Chart 1. Population Pyramid (2019)



Source: Eurostat (Ifsa_pgauws) - extracted on 12.5.2020



The same official statistics using the above discussed urban/rural divide shows that 93% of the population lives in the urban areas (77 million). However, this figure is highly misleading as it based on an administrative division, instead of sociological or spatial considerations. According to these figures, the percentage of youngsters living in urban areas is 23%, with a sum total of 18 million. As observed above, gender distribution is almost even.

According to the official statistics, only 7% of the population of Turkey lives in urban areas (6 million). Out of this population, 21% is classified as youngsters (15–29 ages old) and as the above figures show, the percentage of males is relatively higher, especially within the 15–24 age brackets (700 000 vs. 584 000). Reasons for this gap are numerous and migration to urban places because of marriage is one of them.

Table 1. Ratio of youth population by age subgroups and absolute and relative change in Turkey by age groups (2009–2013, 2013–2019 and 2009–2019)

	2011	2015	2019	Absolute Change / Relative Change (2011–2015, pp)	Absolute Change / Relative Change (2015–2019, pp)	Absolute Change / Relative Change (2011–2019, pp)
15–19	8.5	8.4	7.8	-0.1 / -1.2	-0.6 / -7.1	-0.7 / -8.2
20–24	8.5	8.1	8.0	-0.4 / -4.7	-0.1 / -1.2	-0.5 / -5.9
25–29	8.7	8.1	7.7	-0.6 / -6.9	-0.4 / -4.6	-1 / -11.5

Source: Source: Eurostat: yth_demo_O20 – data extracted in 05.05.20

Table 1 above shows that the share of the youth population in Turkey declined slightly over-time with a percentage of 8.2% between 2011 and 2019 in the youngest age bracket (15–19). This decline is also observed in other age brackets (20–24 and 25–29), indicating an ageing population. The young population of Turkey seemed to have a demographic advantage for a while, however this advantage will have disappeared within couple of years.

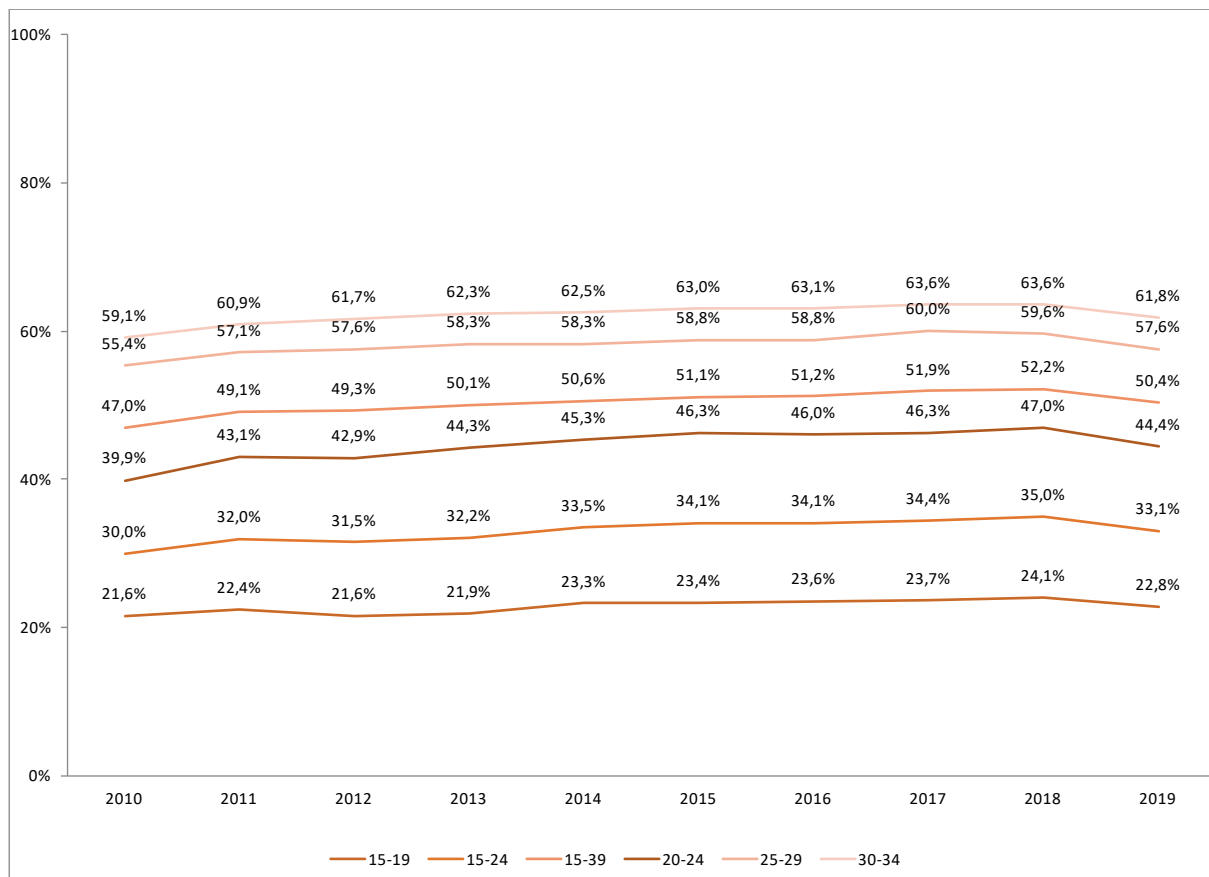


3. 2. Employment and Unemployment

3. 2. 1. Youth employment

Chart 2 presents long term employment trends among Turkish youth, according to different age brackets. As it is observed, the long term variation is relatively small for every age bracket and for this decade employment rates have remained almost static. The highest employment ratio is observed in 30-34 (61%) and 25-29 (58%) age brackets, whereas only 23% of those in the 15-19 age brackets are employed. Similarly, the employment ratio of the 20-24 age bracket is relatively low, a figure fluctuating between 40 – 45%.

Chart 2. Employment in Turkey by age groups (2010–2019)



Source: Eurostat (lfst_r_ergau) – data extracted on 29.04.2020



Table 2. Youth employment (%) and absolute and relative change in Turkey by age groups (2009–2013, 2013–2019 and 2009–2019)

	2011	2015	2019	Absolute Change / Relative Change (2011–2015, pp)	Absolute Change / Relative Change (2015–2019, pp)	Absolute Change / Relative Change (2011–2019, pp)
15–19	22.4	23.4	22.8	1 / 4.5	-0.6 / -2.7	0.4 / 1.8
20–24	43.1	46.3	44.4	3.2 / 7.4	-1.9 / -4.4	1.3 / 3
25–29	57.1	58.8	57.6	1.7 / 3	-1.2 / -2.1	0.5 / 0.9
30–34	60.9	63.0	61.8	2.1 / 3.4	-1.2 / -2	0.9 / 1.5

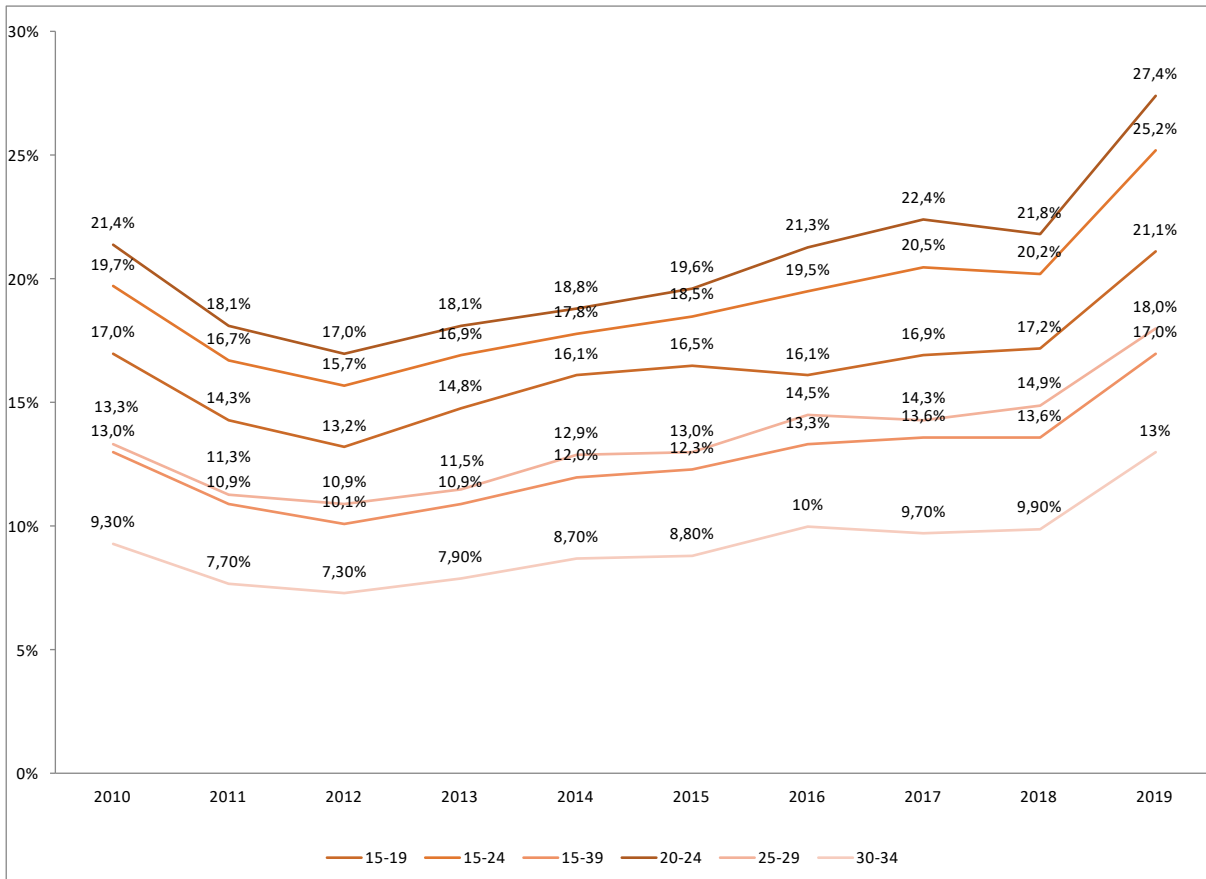
Source: Eurostat (fst_r_ergau) – data extracted on 29.04.2020

Table 2 above presents the overall change of the youth employment in Turkey. It is possible to argue that the employment rates did not change over this time period.



3. 2. 2. Youth unemployment

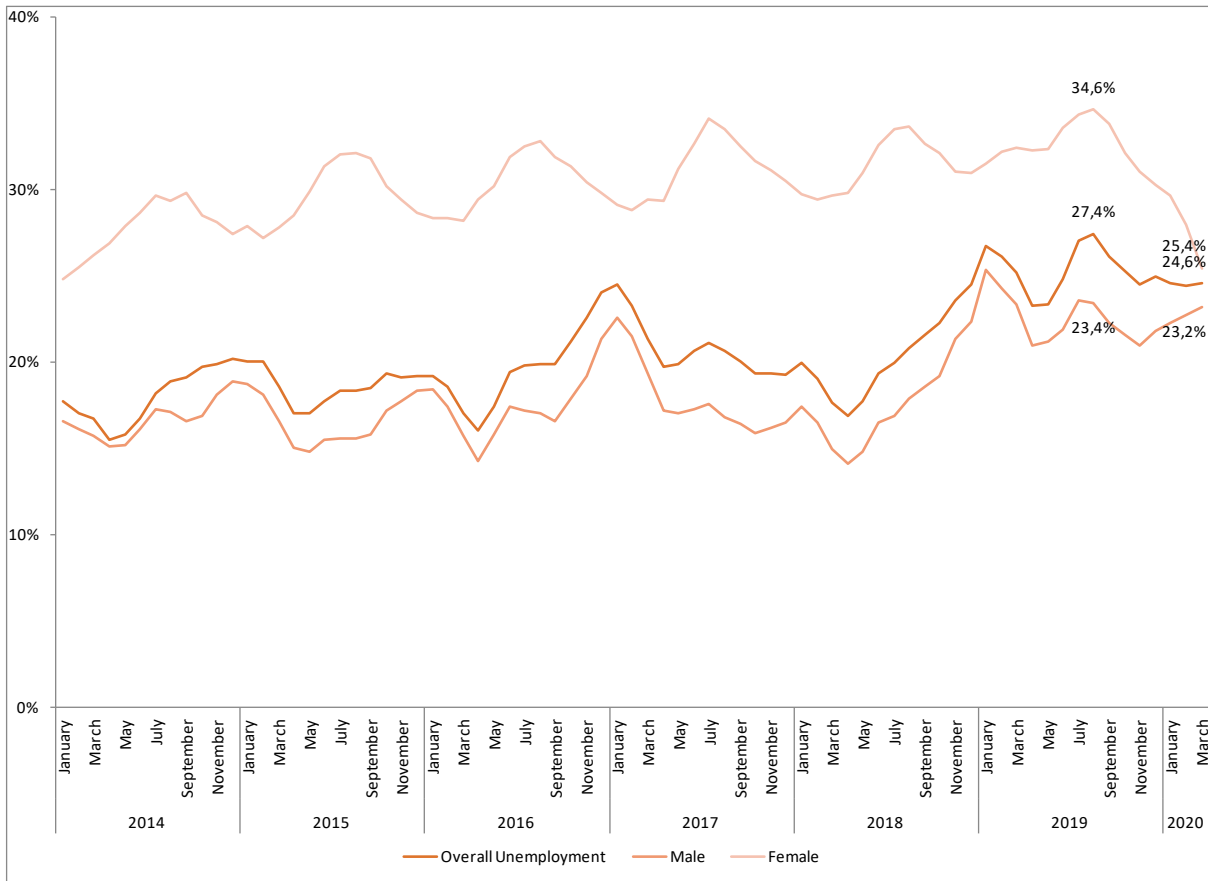
Chart 3. Unemployment in Turkey, by age groups (2010–2019)



Source: Eurostat (fst_r_ergau) – data extracted on 29.04.2020

As the above figure shows, unemployment has become a chronic problem in Turkey, even when ignoring the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. According to official figures, the percentage of those who are unemployed in the 15–39 age bracket increased to 17% in 2019, from 11% in 2011, most probably because of the worsening macroeconomic conditions. The unemployment rate among youngsters also increased: it rose to 21.1% for the 15–19 age brackets and 25% for the 15–24 age brackets. The highest unemployment ratio is observed in the 20–24 age bracket, reaching 27.4%.

Chart 3. Unemployment in Turkey, by age groups (2010–2019)



Source: Turkstat, Labour Force Statistics – data extracted on 02.11.2020

The above data, obtained from TURKSTAT presents a seasonal variation in the unemployment rate among youngsters (15–24 age group). However, this pattern is not the same for male and female youngsters. Parallel to the overall unemployment ratio, unemployment among males increases during the winter months and declines during the summer. However, female unemployment peaks during the summer, most probably because of increased demand for jobs during the summer months. Nevertheless, the above figure shows that following the economic fluctuation of 2018, unemployment among youngsters increased regularly and reached to 25% among young males. On the other hand, above figure shows a rapid decline during March 2020 in female unemployment; this was as a result of a declined labour force participation ratio.



Chart 5. Urban Unemployment in Turkey, by Months and Gender, age group 15–24 years old(2014–2020)

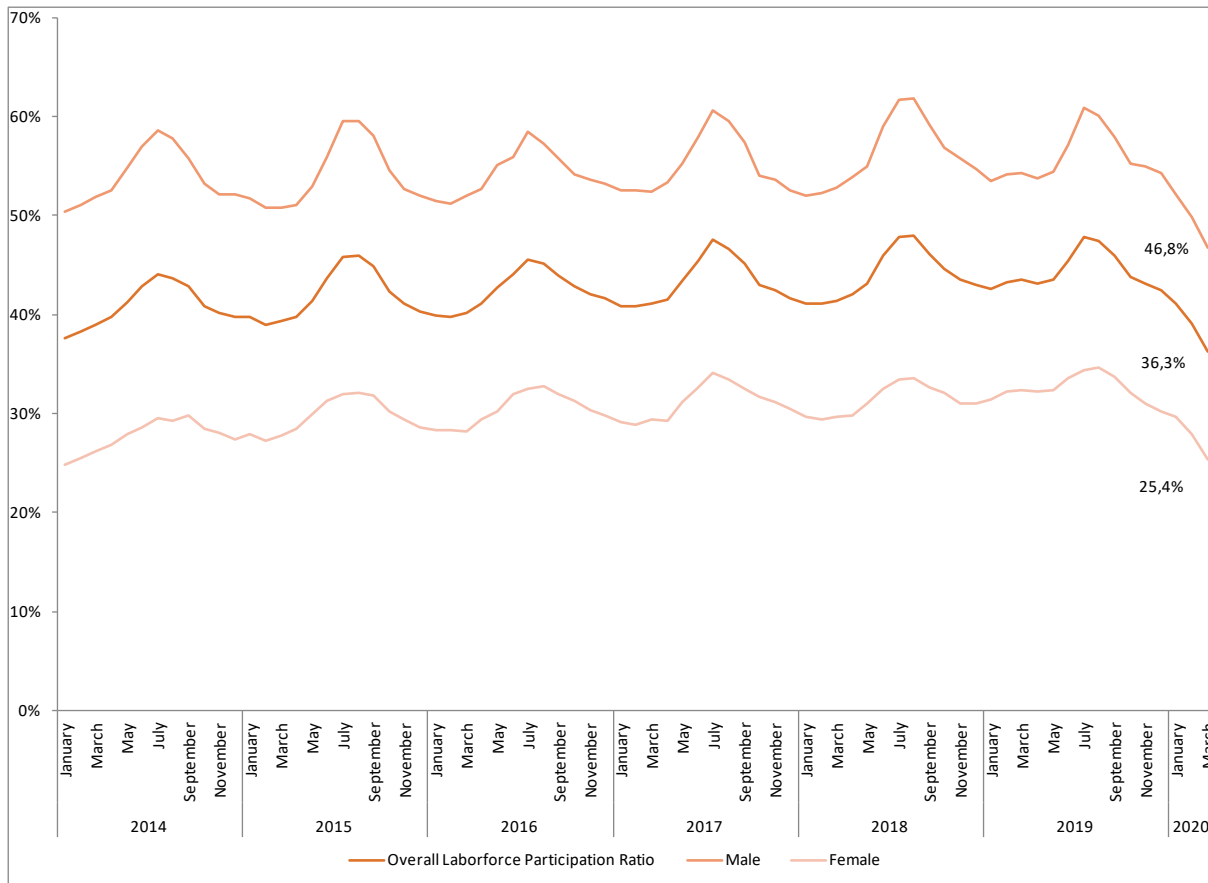


Source: Eurostat (lfst_r_urgau) – data extracted on 27.06.2020

Changes in the urban unemployment rates among the youngsters are presented above. This figure shows that urban unemployment is significantly higher compared to the rest of the country, fluctuating between 20 – 30%. Secondly, female unemployment has a higher average compared to their male counterparts and it has its own seasonal variation, especially during the summer months. Another interesting finding is the peak of female urban unemployment observed during the summer of 2019, almost reaching 45%. Following this peak, female unemployment ratio declined and converged towards the ratio of their male counterparts.



Chart 6. Labour Force Participation Ratio in Turkey, by Months and Gender, age group 15–24 years old (2014–2020)



Source: Turkstat, Labour Force Statistics – data extracted on 02.11.2020

A major factor affecting the unemployment ratio is the labour force participation of youngsters. As the unemployment ratio is calculated based on labour force, fluctuations in the labour force naturally affect it. As presented above, there is a strong seasonality in this ratio during the summer months, as students and other youngsters are starting to look for jobs and during the winter this ratio remains almost stable. A gender gap is also visible in this ratio; specifically, the labour force participation of male youngsters almost doubles the ratio of their female counterparts. Female labour force participation ratio fluctuates around 30%. The first quarter of 2020 showed us a rapid decline in labour force participation meaning that youngsters withdrew from the job market and stopped looking for jobs.



Table 3. Youth unemployment (%) and absolute and relative change in Turkey (2009–2013, 2013–2019 and 2009–2019)

	2011	2015	2019	Absolute Change / Relative Change (2011–2015, pp)	Absolute Change / Relative Change (2015–2019, pp)	Absolute Change / Relative Change (2011–2019, pp)
15–19	14.3	16.5	21.1	2.2 / 15.4	4.6 / 32.2	6.8 / 47.6
20–24	9.0	10.4	14.0	1.4 / 15.6	3.6 / 40	5 / 55.6
25–29	18.1	19.6	27.4	1.5 / 8.3	7.8 / 43.1	9.3 / 51.4
30–34	11.3	13.0	18.0	1.7 / 15	5 / 44.2	6.7 / 59.3

Source: Eurostat (lfst_r_urgau) – data extracted on 05.05.2020

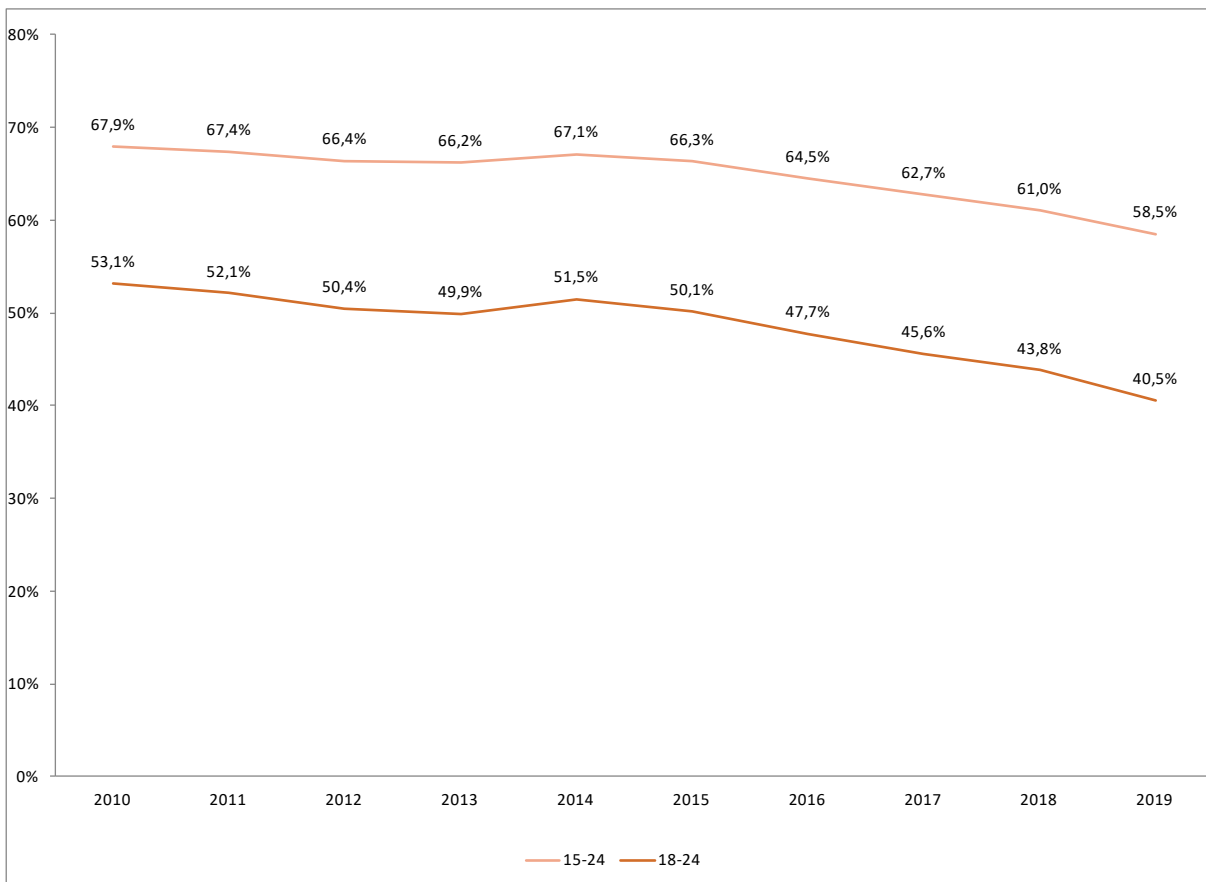
According to Table 3, which presents the absolute and relative change in the youth unemployment in Turkey between 2011 and 2019, unemployment became an acute problem of the youth. The percentage of unemployed youth between 15–19 years old increased to 21% in 2019, up from 14% in 2011, thereby indicating a relative change of almost 50%. Similarly, unemployment increased by 56% in the 20–24 age bracket and 52% in the 25–29 age bracket. These figures shows that many youngsters had to switch to a NEET status as a result of increased unemployment.



3. 3. Education

3. 3. 1. Education attainment

Chart 7. Educational Attainment Less than Primary, Primary and Secondary Education rate (%) in Turkey (2010–2019)



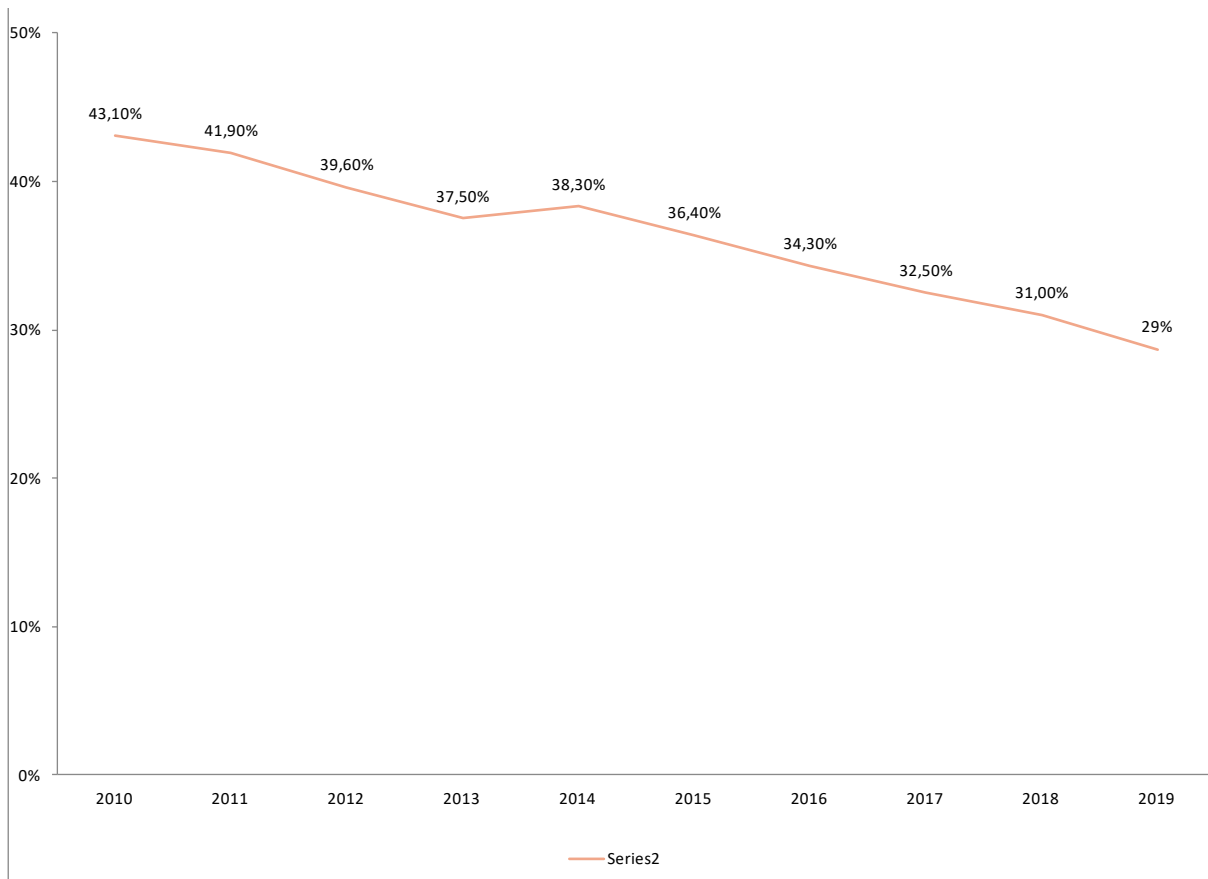
Source: Eurostat (edat_ifse_9913) – data extracted in 27.06.2020

Similar to the good performance to prevent school drop-outs, Turkey's performance on the inclusiveness of the education system is also improving. As presented in the above figure, the percentage of those having less than higher education declined over time, 59% in the 15–24 age brackets and 41% in the 18–24 age brackets. Despite this relative success, these scores are significantly high when considered within the context of EU and OECD countries.



3.3.2. Early school leavers

Chart 8. Early School Leavers rate (%) in Turkey (2010-2019)



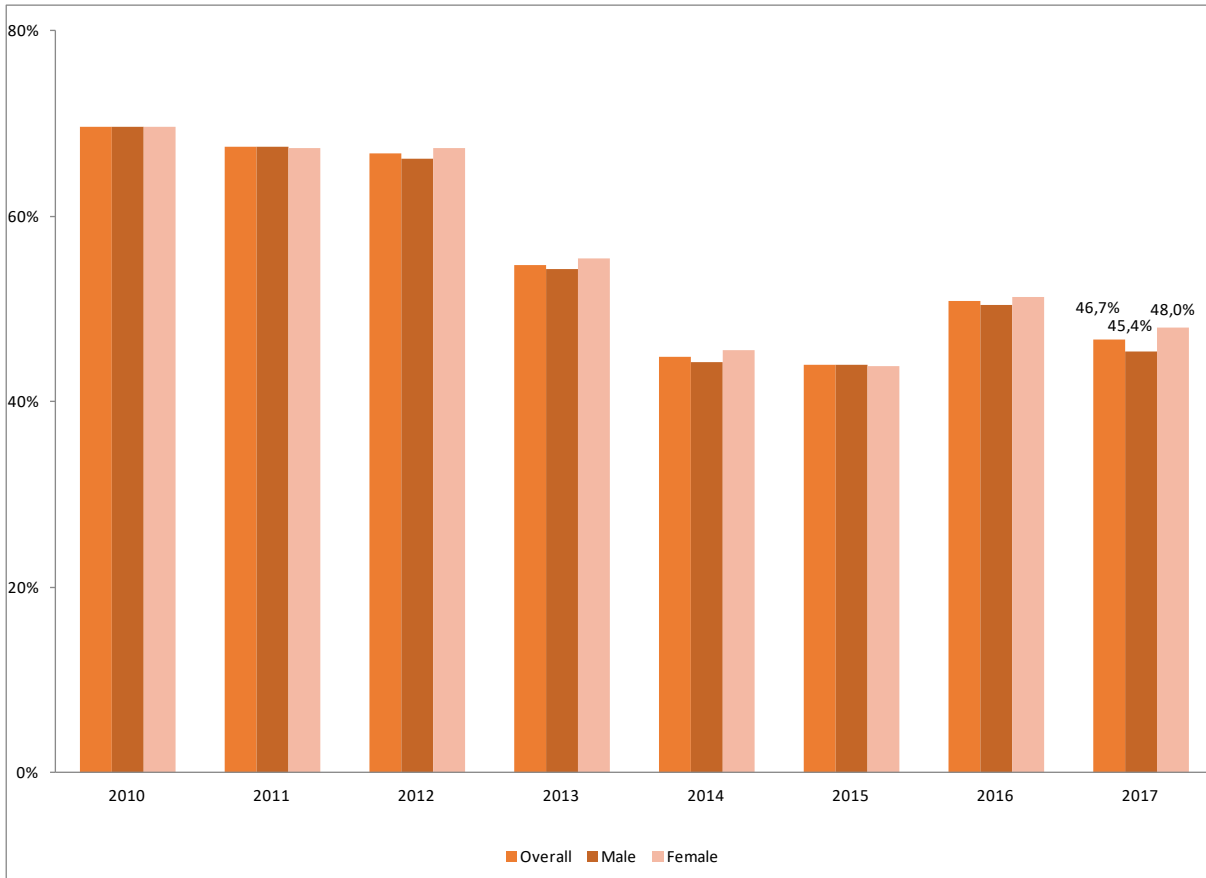
Source: Eurostat (edat_lfs_9913) – data extracted in 05.05.2020

Turkey has a good record on fighting against early school dropout and this performance is visible in Chart 8. It was 43% in 2010 and then declined continuously to 29% in 2019. This performance is linked to the increased capacity of the tertiary education sector.



3. 4. Poverty & social exclusion

Chart 9. People at risk of poverty or social exclusion age group 15–24 years old (%) in Turkey, by gender (2010–2017)



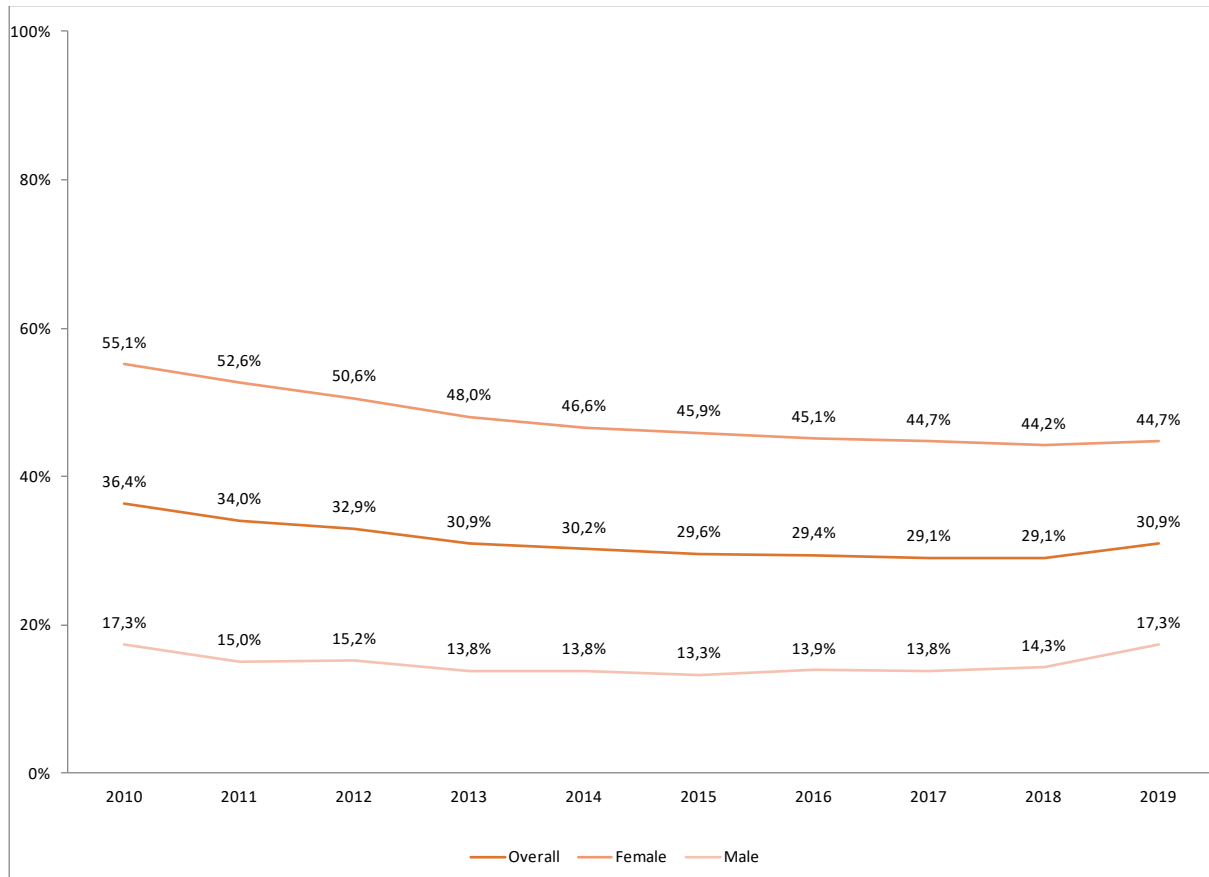
Source: Eurostat (T2020_50) – data extracted in 05.05.2020

The above figure shows the change in percentage of youngsters at risk of poverty or social exclusion in Turkey. This score was almost 70% in 2010 and it declined to 45% in 2014. Despite increases in the following two years, this ratio is less than 50%. However, we do not have access to the recent figures, meaning that available statistics do not reflect the effect of the economic crisis of 2018, and most importantly the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic. We can already speculate that the poverty risk of youngsters will be increased for these three years (2018–2020). The same figure shows that there is no gender gap, that is male and female youngsters have similar ratio of risks.



3. 5. NEETs rate

Chart 11. NEETs ratio, aged 15-24 (%) 2009-2019 (Turkey)

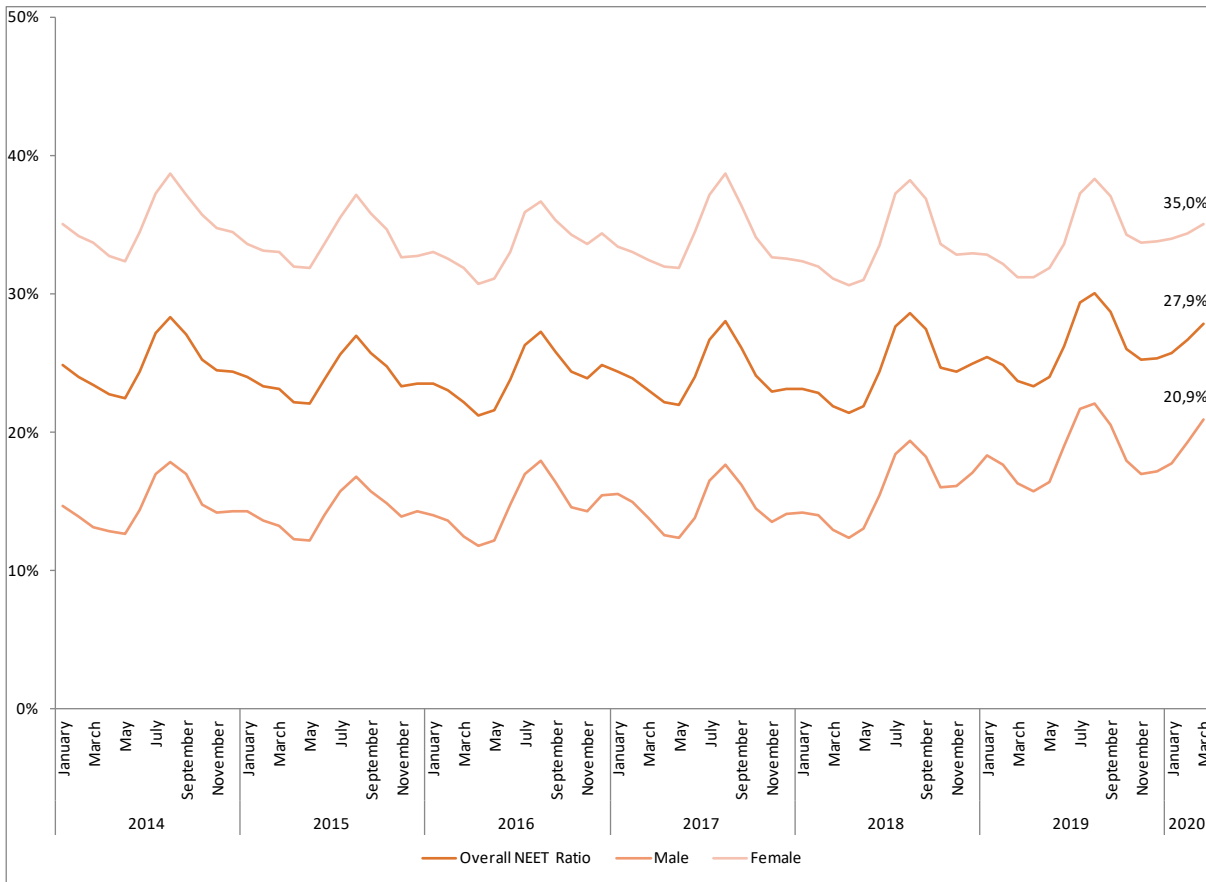


Source: Eurostat (edat_lfse_29) – data extracted in 05.05.2020

It is known that Turkey has the highest NEET ratio among the OECD countries with a ratio moving between 30 - 40%. Chart 11 presents the gender gap among NEETs in Turkey. The ratio of NEETs among males was 17.3% in 2010, it declined to 13.3% in 2015 and it started to increase and became 17.3% in 2019. Meanwhile, this trend was different among females. The NEET ratio was 55% in 2010 and it declined continuously until 2018 when it became 44%. According to this figure, this score is 45% as of 2019. As observed above, gender is the most important factor affecting this particular situation.



Chart 12. NEETs rate, aged 15–24 (%) 2014–2020 (Turkey), by Months and Gender



Source: Turkstat, Labour Force Statistics – data extracted on 02.11.2020

Using the data obtained from TURKSTAT, Chart 12 above presents monthly fluctuations in the ratio of NEETs in Turkey, focusing especially on the 15–24 age group. This figure presents the seasonality of these fluctuations. The NEET ratio declines during the winter months and it presents a regular increase during the summer period. According to these statistics, the NEET ratio among this age bracket was 28% in March 2020, presenting a relatively low gender gap between males (21%) and females (35%). We need to remember that this data was collected during the earlier days of the COVID-19 pandemic.



Table 4. NEET rate (%) by age subgroups and by gender in Turkey, including absolute and relative change (2009–2013, 2013–2019, 2009–2019)

		2011	2015	2019	Absolute Change / Relative Change (2011–2015, pp)	Absolute Change / Relative Change (2015–2019, pp)	Absolute Change / Relative Change (2011–2019, pp)
Overall	15–19	22.4	16.3	18.1	-6.1 / -27.2	1.8 / 8	-4.3 / -19.2
Overall	20–24	34.0	29.6	30.9	-4.4 / -12.9	1.3 / 3.8	-3.1 / -9.1
Overall	25–29	37.8	32.7	34.7	-5.1 / -13.5	2 / 5.3	-3.1 / -8.2
Overall	30–34	38.6	35.5	36.1	-3.1 / -8	0.6 / 1.6	-2.5 / -6.5
Male	15–19	14.8	11.2	14.4	-3.6 / -24.3	3.2 / 21.6	-0.4 / -2.7
Male	20–24	15.0	13.3	17.3	-1.7 / -11.3	4 / 26.7	2.3 / 15.3
Male	25–29	20.0	17.7	22.6	-2.3 / -11.5	4.9 / 24.5	2.6 / 13
Male	30–34	15.1	14.3	18.4	-0.8 / -5.3	4.1 / 27.2	3.3 / 21.9
Female	15–19	30.2	21.7	22.0	-8.5 / -28.1	0.3 / 1	-8.2 / -27.2
Female	20–24	52.6	45.9	44.7	-6.7 / -12.7	-1.2 / -2.3	-7.9 / -15.0
Female	25–29	53.4	46.8	46.5	-6.6 / -12.4	-0.3 / -0.6	-6.9 / -12.9
Female	30–34	62.3	56.7	53.7	-5.6 / -9	-3 / -4.8	-8.6 / -13.8

Source: Eurostat (edat_lfse_29) – data extracted in 05.05.2020

As presented in the above Table 4, the NEET ratio in the population fluctuated significantly over-time. Between 2011 and 2019, the ratio of NEETs among the youth aged between 15–19 declined by 19.2% (the absolute decline is 4.3 percentage points). Similarly, the NEET ratio also declined, changing between 9% and 8%. These figures show that the NEET population declined overall.



However, a closer analysis shows that there is a significant gender gap. During this period, the NEET ratio among the young males increased by 15–19 years old with rates changing between 15% and 21%. Absolute figures reached to 17% in the 20–24 age bracket and 23% in the 25–29 age bracket. According to these figures, being a NEET became common place among young males.

On the other hand, the ratio of female NEETs declined over time. In 2011, this ratio was 30% in the youngest age group (15–19) and it declined to 22% with a relative change ratio of 27%. This decline is also observed in older age brackets, with rates changing between 13% and 15%. Despite this rapid change, the gender gap still exists and a significant portion of young women in Turkey are not active in the labour market.

Although Turkey has millions of NEETs, it is recognised as one of the important problems of youth as provisioned within the official documents. However, the number of academic works dealing with this problem is limited. Bilgen–Susanlı (2016) analysed the determinants of the NEET status by using the microdata of the household labour force survey from TUR–KSTAT. The most important determinants are education, gender, and marital status. Not surprisingly, as the level of education increases, the risk of being a NEET decreases and secondary education acts as the threshold. Similarly, females and those who are married have higher tendencies to be a NEET, in comparison with the reference group. When the number of other household members in employment is included in the equation as an indicator socioeconomic status, we observe that it has a negative effect on the risk of being a NEET. The same model shows that, youngsters living in the urban places have lower propensity towards becoming a NEET.

Another academic work conducted by Erdoğan et al. (2017), was based on a field survey that shows female youngsters have higher propensities towards becoming a NEET and moreover that education decreases this risk also increases. This change is most pronounced at the lowest education level. Those who are married have higher scores (3 times higher) compared to single youngsters. Parental education and the economic situation of households are two other factors affecting the propensity of being a NEET, showing that the lower socio-economic status, the more vulnerable people are to this situation. Finally, the ethnic origin of the respondent also matters: Kurdish respondents have 2.5 times higher tendencies.



The same article shows how determinants of being a NEET change according to the gender of the respondent. Age is an important determinant for female youngsters, yet its effect is statistically insignificant for their male counterparts. On the other hand, education is very important for female participants: the propensity of being a NEET is 10 times higher for the lowest education level, compared to the highest category. Ethnic origin has a similar affect, whereas parental education is significant for male participants and insignificant for their female counterparts. Male respondents living in rural areas have higher tendencies.

These different fieldwork research papers show that being a NEET in Turkey is a gendered problem, as presented in the previous descriptive figures. Education and socioeconomic status of family – most probably two interlinked factors – are factors which reduce the risk of being a NEET. The most important finding is that being a NEET is correlated with ethnicity, even after controlling for other variables.



4. CONCLUSIONS

Turkey has a population of 83 million and a significant portion of this population is relatively young. The total number of individuals under 29 years old is about 39 million, forming almost half of the population (46%).

The fact of youth unemployment reaching to 35% is one of the most important problems in Turkey. Moreover, the worsening of the unemployment rate and increase in the vulnerability of those whom it impacts upon is to be expected with the current global and local economic environment due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Although digital transformation and technological developments are perceived as opportunities for vulnerable groups and youth, with the existing gap between the haves and have-nots in Turkey is not narrowing.

The Eleventh Development Plan regards NEETS as one of the specific target groups to develop incentives in order to increase participation in the labour force. The definition of “urban” and “rural” areas is a problem in Turkey. Although there are some attempts to develop alternative and better measurements for rural categorisation as part of the EU harmonisation process, TURKSTAT has not yet used them and EUROSTAT fails to provide many statistics with respect to the rural/urban distinction. According to available official statistics, 93% of the population lives in urban areas: however, this is a highly misleading data. This represents an important challenge for both research and policy development for rural NEETs.

Turkey has the highest NEET ratio among OECD countries. Although there had been a slow improvement-decrease and/or stability in the percentage of NEETs between the years 2018-2020, one can observe a small increase in the year 2019. Thus, the continuous large gender gap should also be noted (e.g., in the year 2019, this ratio is 45% for females and 17% for males). Focused attention on the reasons for this big gap is an urgently needed. According to the findings of the limited research on NEETs in Turkey, gender, parental education, the economic situations of households and ethnicity are the key factors which affect the propensity of becoming a NEET. With the current COVID-19 pandemic conditions, vulnerable groups face further risks all around the world, not only in Turkey. To realise the aim of decreasing the high ratio of NEETs in Turkey requires strict measures and targeted policies that takes into consideration of these current risks.



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6. IMPORTANT LINKS

The Presidency of Turkey, Presidency of Strategy and Budget (2019), The Eleventh Development Plan (2019–2023), http://www.sbb.gov.tr/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/On_BirinciPlan_ingilizce_SonBaski.pdf

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