

Forum: Economic and Social Council

Issue: Measures to overcome growing poverty and social inequality in Turkey

Student Officer: Yi Xin Lee

Position: Chair of Economic and Social Council

Introduction

Recent economic and social developments, combined with the impacts of globalization, have caused a distinct increase in poverty in Turkey. According to the United Nations Development Programme's 2016 Human Development Report, Turkey is ranked at only 71 (out of 175 countries) in terms on the Human Development Index. Turkey, a candidate for membership in the European Union (EU), holds the highest figure of relative poverty among the members of the EU at 23%, according to a study released by the Eurostat.

This overwhelming poverty is also a huge factor causing the deepening social inequality within Turkey. Unemployment rates are steadily increasing, wealth gaps are expanding exponentially, and women are particularly vulnerable due to gender inequality. However, the issue lies in the inherent fact that policies trying to mitigate these impacts are not directly addressing the root causes of this growing complication – status and sector of employment, educational attainment, age groups, and household composition.

Social inequality can be broken down into different types, including political inequality, income and wealth inequality, life expectancy inequality, inequality of treatment and responsibility and inequality of membership. Political inequality is the issue of having no civic equality regarding the law. Income and wealth inequality relates to the primary earnings of individuals. Life expectancy inequality, along with inequality of treatment and responsibility relates closely to the inequalities of opportunities, problems in agency and the general quality of life. Lastly, inequality of membership is a result of discrimination in regarding nations, families and religions.

The topic of reducing poverty and social inequality in Turkey requires a deep understanding of the history of Turkey's relations, the sections in which social inequality occurs, and most importantly, the possible solutions to address the issue. When determining possible solutions, delegates should look at each of the categories previously mentioned and think of appropriate short-term and long-term solutions.

Definition of Key Terms

Poverty

The state of which people's basic needs for food, clothing and shelter are not being met and in which one lacks a usual or socially acceptable amount of money or material possessions.

Absolute Poverty

The condition of destitution and which occurs when people cannot obtain adequate resources (measured in terms of nutrition) to support a minimum level of physical health.

Relative Poverty

The condition of which people do not enjoy a certain minimum level of living standards as determined by the government that vary from country to country, sometimes within the same country.

Social Inequality

The state in which unequal opportunities or rewards exist in a society for people of different social status or position. It has different levels of inequality, regarding political reasons, income and wealth reasons, as well as membership reasons.

Poverty headcount rate

This is the percentage of the population living below the national poverty line. National estimates are based on population-weighted subgroup estimates from household surveys.

General Overview

Status and sector of employment

Agricultural sector

The poverty headcount rate is highest in Turkey among people employed in the agricultural sector, where 27% of the poor in Turkey currently work in. Additionally, 35% of those in the agricultural sector obtain consumption levels below the poverty line. The decline in poverty in this specific sector is oddly slower than other sectors of employment. Moreover, the poverty headcount rate in the agricultural sector is even higher than the poverty rate among the unemployed and inactive people in the country. 43% of those who

are unemployed are in poverty, compared to 45% of those who are employed in the agricultural. This is mainly due to the fact that the amount of profit earned by each farmer is decreasing during time. The interests they earn back are a far cry from what was earned in previous years.

Construction and mining sector

The construction and mining sectors have the second and third highest poverty headcount rates. In the construction sector, 28.5% of those who are employed are in poverty. Additionally, in the mining sectors, in the small percentage of the population who are recruited, the headcount rate among those employed is high.



Figure 1: Workers in the mining sector, showing clearly the dangers of the working area.

Educational attainment

Educational attainment strongly correlates to poverty in Turkey. 84% of the poor in Turkey are either illiterate or have not completed basic education in either primary or secondary school. In Turkey, the compulsory age for education lasts until the age of 12, developing an extreme issue of less children achieving the right amount of education needed for their age. Among the illiterate population, 35% of those who are illiterate and 19% of those who have not completed basic education are under the poverty line. In addition, those who are illiterate have benefited much less from the poverty reduction that took place in 2003 to 2006. Thus, after 2006, those who are illiterate have come to represent a higher percentage in the overall distribution of the poor.

Age groups

The age profiles of the poor in Turkey reveal the dramatically high rate of child poverty in the country. One in four children under the age of 14 and one in five children between the ages of 15-19 years old live under the national poverty line. Turkey has an overall young population with children under 14 making up 29% of the total population in the country. Nevertheless, children also make up 40% of the poor population in the country. The distribution of the poor who are under 19 years of age has increased drastically since 2006.

In comparison, among the elderly, the poverty headcount is only slightly higher than the national average. Approximately 20% of the elderly above the age of 65 are below the national poverty line in terms of consumption. Similar to children, this percentage has increased from 2006.

Household composition

In households where the dependency ratio is high (with a large number of children and few number of adults who are able to support the household) the poverty rate is also high. Among the households in Turkey with three or more children under the age of 6, the poverty headcount rate is around 60%. A substantial share of poor people live in large households. For example, 44% of the poor live in households where there are 7 or more people. While the share of the total population living in such large

households has slightly declined since 2007, the share of the poor living in such households has increased. Using these statistics, one can come to the conclusion that because there are fewer number of adults supporting a larger household, the amount of food, water and other needs each family member receives may be much slimmer than a household with fewer children to take care of.

Moreover, the percentage of the population living in households where there is a female household head is only around 8%. The poverty headcount rate is higher in Turkey among female headed households, with 22.3% of people living in female headed households, being below the poverty line. Poverty among female-headed households has also declined less rapidly than male headed households in the time period analysed.



Figure 2: Turkey widow, having to take care of four children, including a baby that she is cradling.

UN Involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is currently in the process of helping developing countries effective through ensuring a greater voice for poor people by expanding access to productive assets and economic opportunities, especially in places like Turkey. It has focused on the multiple factors of poverty in the country and have been effective in focusing media and public interest on problems relating to the issue at hand. It is currently bringing in international expertise and global experience that is applicable to the wide range of issues causing poverty in Turkey.

Examples of the projects that have been implemented already include the “Reduction of Socio Economic Differences in the GAP Region” where women, youth and children living in streets in 9 cities of the GAP region were provided training to develop their social and productive skills in several areas. Another key project includes the “Microfinance Sector Development” where the main objective was to build inclusive

pro-poor and sustainable financial system for all sectors to enhance productivity and empowerment. Raising awareness and sharing information has also been a factor in this project.

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
December 2004	EU leaders agree to open talks in 2005 on Turkey's EU accession.
May 2005	Parliament approves amendments to new penal code after complaints that the previous version restricted media freedom.
June 2006	Parliament passes new anti-terror law which worries the EU and which rights groups criticize as an invitation to torture.
December 2006	EU partially freezes Turkey's membership talks because of Cypriot traffic.

Possible Solutions

One possible solution involves **ensuring the rights and availability of sources of education for girls and women**. A large factor of why poverty rates are decreasing at a drastically slow rate, is due to the fact that many people are illiterate, especially those who are female. Education to girls and women impact the whole of society in the ways of how these girls and women live. A woman's degree of education is linked to the age at which she marries and has children, as in the case of which dependency ratio is high within households, the probability of that family being under the poverty line is very large. It affects women's health and diseases, their economic opportunities, their social standing and general future wellbeing. Educating them can reduce poverty by far in developing nations, if simple skills and literacy are being taught to them frequently. Delegates may want to consider who will enforce this education, perhaps either through NGOs (like Teachers Without Borders) or through the government. At the same time, a potential area for debate would be on the level of education that should be made available to girls and women – basic schooling, or should access higher education be opened up as well?

The second possible solution involves **transparency in government spending**. By creating transparency in government spending of money, government officials will find it much harder to embezzle money or become corrupt. Citizens will be able to accurately assess how well their leaders are leading their country when governments are accountable to their citizens for their action, or inaction, in different areas of the federal budget. Additionally, it allows citizens to analyse clearly the poverty reduction plan and identify if money has been taken away in relation to the issue at hand, which could be a cause of a stagnant economy or job market. Delegates may want to ensure this is encouraged and

monitored within the United Nations, as to provide an incentive for governments to properly follow through with these solutions.

The third possible solution involves **investing in affordable, high quality child care and early education**. The lack of affordable, high quality childcare serves as a major barrier from those under the poverty line and those above it. High quality child care services could be further looked upon by non-governmental organisations and specific government departments that target alongside the problem of child care. An overwhelming factor of poverty in Turkey is made up of just children, making this solutions even more pressing. One year of childcare for an infant costs more than a year of tuition at most states' four-year public colleges. Families sitting under the poverty line who invest their own money for their children spend an average of one third of their incomes. Boosting investments in non-government organisations along with the help of the government could not only lead to the increased help of families obtaining the childcare they need in order to work, but also improve economic mobility of children in Turkey as a whole.

Bibliography

Young A. Poverty, hunger and population policy: linking Cairo with Johannesburg. Geogr J. 2005;171:83–95. doi: 10.1111/j.1475-4959.2005.00151.x. [[Cross Ref](#)]

United Nations Development Programme 2004. Human development report 2004 – cultural liberty in today's diverse world. New York: Oxford University Press; 2004. Available from: <http://hdr.undp.org/reports/global/2004/?CFID=5998135&CFTOKEN=38c4381890438e2e-7A4985D3-1321-0B50-3530CABB95C75D2F&jsessionid=e63052a4ccb03b15177b>. Accessed: September 10, 2007.

World Bank. The world development report 2004: making services work for poor people. Available from: <http://www.worldbank.org/html/extpb/2004/>. Accessed: September 10, 2007.

El-Guindi T, Al Mahdy H, McHarris J. The extent and geographic distribution of chronic poverty in Iraq's Center/South Region. United Nations World Food Programme. May 2003. Available from: <http://www.eldis.org/go/display/?id=13511&type=Document>. Accessed: September 11, 2007.

Poverty reduction and economic growth program of Georgia. Government's Statement. Tbilisi, November 2000. Available from: <http://www.imf.org/external/NP/prsp/2000/geo/01/INDEX.HTM> Accessed: September 11, 2007.

Poverty and its effects on children [in Turkish]. Available from: http://www.0-18.org/sayilar/035_yoksulluk_ve_cocuklar_uzerine_etkileri_2.htm. Accessed: September 25, 2007.