

**REVIEW OF PROGRESS IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND  
TRAINING REFORM IN TURKEY** **2004**

## 1. OVERALL ASSESSMENT

According to the Turkish State Institute of Statistics, in 2003 the provisional GDP annual growth was 5.9%<sup>1</sup>. The employment rate was very low, 46% in 2002 compared to the EU average (64%). Female participation in the labour market was also very low (26%) compared to EU average (52%). Some 54.4% of all employed women (3,501,000) work as unpaid family workers, representing 69.1% of total unpaid family workers. Based on the above figures it seems that the economic growth of the last year is not reflected by an increase in the level of employment, which, on the contrary, has shown a declining trend during the last three years. This could indicate that employment is probably increasing in the informal sector which, according to the government, represents 50% of the formal sector's GDP, although other estimates are higher. The Household Labour Force Survey data from the third quarter of 2003 indicate that the unemployment rate was 10.3%, slightly decreasing from the previous year (10.6%). The unemployment rate in the non-agricultural sector is 14.6% while unemployment for educated youth (having completed secondary education) is 25.4%.

In 2001 the proportion of GDP allocated to education was 3.7%, comparable to the level in the other two candidate countries (Bulgaria 3.66%, Romania 3.28%), but still well below the EU average of 5%<sup>2</sup>.

The early school-leaving rate<sup>3</sup> was 53.4%, which is very high compared to the EU average of 15.9%. The rate was lower for males (45.5%) compared with females (60.6%). The Household Labour Force Survey for the third quarter of 2003 suggests that there are 948,000 children in the age group 12 to 17 who are presently working, a decrease of 22.3% over the previous year. Some 58.9% of these children work in rural areas and 55.6% of them are males.

The inequality in education due to social background, region and gender is very apparent. For instance, according to the census data of 2000 the female illiteracy rate in Ankara was 7.5%, but the ratio increases to 18.5% in the poorest areas of Ankara.

About 10% of young girls and boys are not enrolled in basic education. In order to improve the participation of girls in education, the Ministry of National Education in cooperation with Unicef started the 'Girls to Schools' or 'Haydi Kizlar Okula' campaign in June 2003. At present the campaign is ongoing in 33 provinces, and families are given a financial incentive to encourage them to send their girls to school. As a result of the activities carried out under the campaign the total share of girl students who have newly enrolled in basic education has risen to 47.8%. The objective is to increase this ratio to 50% by 2006, and thus remove the differences between gender enrolments in basic education.

The lifelong learning participation of the population aged 25 to 64 in 2003 was also very low<sup>4</sup>: total: 1.1%, males: 1.6% and females: 0.7%.

The working group established by the Ministry of National Education to promote participation in lifelong learning introduced in 2002 new regulations aimed at improving the quality of the labour force by introducing an obligation for employers to recruit only staff with a qualification level relevant to their job or to allow workers to participate in training courses. However, the social partners were not consulted on this regulation and did not give their agreement, in particular because it was not combined with any financial incentive. The result is that, for the time being, this regulation has not been applied.

In May 2004 an amendment to the Constitution was introduced with regard to the composition of the Board of the Council for Higher Education. As a result of this amendment the General Staff will no longer be authorised to appoint a representative in the Board. The Council for Higher Education was established under the law for higher education enacted with the Constitution and has broad powers concerning the appointment of rectors and the

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<sup>1</sup> Short country report on latest developments on education, training and employment policies, Turkish National Observatory, November 2003.

<sup>2</sup> Eurostat structural indicators, provisional data.

<sup>3</sup> ETF key indicators database provisional data referring to the third quarter.

<sup>4</sup> ETF key indicators database provisional data.

establishment of faculties. The system is marked by a high degree of rigidity and centralisation as the Council has academic, administrative and financial autonomy. The Minister of National Education represents the higher educational system in the parliament and chairs the meeting of the Council for Higher Education but holds no voting rights.

The same amendment also aimed at generally redefining the role of the Council of Higher Education and eliminating the barriers to entrance to higher education for vocational school graduates. This has led to a heated debate in the country, in particular in relation to Imam-Atip schools, which are classified as vocational schools. Some of the Turkish public and many international observers consider it an attempt to destabilise the country's secularist status. The Turkish president has blocked this part of the amendment and the decision now seems as if it will be postponed to next year. So, for the academic year 2004/05, the entrance examination to higher education rules remain unchanged. This debate has exacerbated the relations between the Ministry of National Education and the Council for Higher Education.

The above limitations in the access to higher education for vocational graduates were the consequence of regulations enacted by the Council for Higher Education in 1998; the access of vocational graduates to higher education was limited through the introduction of weighting coefficients to the scores they achieved in the entrance examinations, penalising them in comparison to graduates from general secondary education. These new regulations generally led to a sharp decrease in VET participation (49% in the school year 1997/98) and influenced in particular the enrolment in Imam-Atip schools, which fell drastically from 27.5% of total enrolment in VET in 1996/97 to 7% in 2000/01. This implied a reduction by 14% in VET participation (35% on the basis of recent statistics) compared to the school year 1997/98.

Turkish rules concerning the access to higher education are not in line with EU trends, where in general the minimum requirement for securing access to tertiary education is an upper secondary education certificate or its equivalent. The rules applied in Turkey do not ensure transparency and equity of access, which is one of the leading principles of EU education systems. People involved in the system (namely teachers, school principals, inspectors, social partners, institutions and so on) are of the opinion that if the problem of entrance to higher education is not solved in Turkey, enrolment in VET will continue to decline because most of the students and their families see it as the second best option. Many schools are now operating at 40 to 50% of their potential and this represents a vital waste of resources in terms of teachers and buildings, for example.

Considerable increases were observed in the number of vocational graduates in post-secondary education institutions as a result of the possibility for transition from vocational and technical high school to post-secondary education (two years) without examinations (which were introduced in the system in 2001). In the 2002/03 academic year 182,891 students graduated from secondary vocational and technical education schools, and in the 2003/04 academic year 130,275 vocational graduates enrolled in post-secondary education programmes. In parallel, noteworthy increases were observed in the number and capacity of post-secondary education institutions. In the academic year 2003/04 a total of 469 institutions (of which 443 were public institutions) were operational. In order to cope with the sharp increase in enrolment, the Ministry of National Education authorised vocational schools to organise post-secondary training courses. The time available and the resources to train teachers or to supply adequate equipment were sometimes insufficient and the result was that the quality of these courses was on certain occasions questionable and differed very much from region to region.

As regards the transition to higher education for 10% of graduates from post-secondary education (introduced to the system in 2001), it is still unclear how this is going to be put into practice.

The weighting system of the scores in the entrance examination to higher education is an incentive for vocational students to enrol in vocational teacher training faculties, but this leads to an apparent imbalance between the supply and the demand of vocational teacher training. The total supply of vocational teachers exceeds the demand of public and private training providers with the consequence that they face serious employment problems in their profession. A considerable proportion of graduates of vocational and technical education faculties are employed outside the education sector. The Ministry of National Education is potentially the main employer of graduates of vocational teacher training faculties; but while

the number of teachers employed by the Ministry of National Education has been declining for years (on the basis of recent statistics only 5% of vocational teaching graduates are employed by the ministry), the number of vocational teacher training faculties and graduates has constantly and paradoxically become increasingly popular as a path to higher education for vocational school graduates.

In addition, it has been observed that education faculties base their student intake on capacity rather than demand. As a result, while in some areas graduates cannot find employment as teachers, in other areas the Ministry of National Education cannot find graduates to employ (for example, in the field of electronics). In areas where there are teacher shortages the ministry employs the graduates of the nearest thematic topic areas or other faculty graduates as teachers, after necessary pedagogical training.

It is worth mentioning that the faculties fall under the Council of Higher Education, which regulates the supply, whilst the Ministry of National Education, as potential employer, represents the demand. The lack of dialogue between the two institutions jeopardises the efficiency of the vocational teacher training system.

The EU funded programme for 'Strengthening of Vocational Education and Training' started in September 2002 with the aim of assisting the Turkish government, through the Ministry of National Education, in the process of modernising and adapting the VET system to the socio-economic needs of the country and to the principles of lifelong learning. The programme will end in September 2007.

Among its main objectives is the strengthening of the institutional capacity at the national, regional and local levels of public administration, social partners' representatives and companies. This is expected to lead to the establishment of an effective partnership agreement among all institutions and social and economic partners involved in VET, and to the definition of their role and contribution to the reform process. To this end, the programme also includes an innovation fund for projects aimed at stimulating the participation of social partners in the VET reform and development.

Under this programme from the school year 2004/05, from the ninth grade (which is the first year of vocational or technical high school), 105 pilot training institutions will start implementing competence-based modular curricula. Of the total teaching hours only 15% will be devoted to vocational subjects. This will allow students to choose at the end of the ninth grade whether they want to continue in the vocational stream or to move to general secondary education. This represents the most significant innovation aimed at introducing flexibility to the system, as so far the horizontal transition between VET and general secondary education has not been possible. This will be done on a pilot basis but it should be subsequently extended to the rest of the system in order to ensure system-wide implementation and sustainability.

The reform introduced with the EU funded programme is going to be complemented by a World Bank loan for a secondary education programme (including general and vocational education and training), which has been under discussion since 2002. Close cooperation between the EU and the World Bank has so far ensured complementarity and synergy between the two programmes. However, because of the previously mentioned problems in cooperation between the Ministry of National Education and the Council of Higher Education, the component related to post-secondary education has been removed by the World Bank programme upon specific request of the Council, which is not willing to participate in the reform. This means that it will be difficult to attain one of the key objectives of the reform, namely to postpone the specialisation of vocational students until post-secondary level.

Another EU funded programme for 'The Modernisation of Vocational Education and Training' started in July 2003 and will end in September 2007. The objective of this programme, which is complementary to the previous one, is to strengthen the capacity of Turkish authorities to organise and deliver a modern and efficient system of pre- and in-service teacher training.

New competence-based modular curricula will be developed in order to improve flexibility in the teacher training system. In the framework of this programme, the training standards for vocational teachers will be defined, and subsequently five pre-service and three in-service modular and competence-based curricula will be developed.

During the life of the project, around 20 pilot projects – implemented by vocational teacher training faculties, schools and enterprises – will be supported.

The Ministry of National Education and the European Union ensure synergy and complementarity between the two EU funded programmes. However, the lack of cooperation between the Ministry of National Education and the Council of Higher Education might jeopardise their sustainability.

After a long delay, the Memorandum of Understanding was signed in April 2004 for the participation in the Community programmes Socrates, Leonardo and Youth. A national agency has been appointed to manage the three programmes and the staff continues to remain inadequate, both in terms of number and quality. Also the physical infrastructure seems inadequate for carrying out its appointed tasks.

In order to start familiarising Turkey with the European Employment Strategy, a programme supported by the European Union for the Active Employment Strategy started in October 2003. Its aim is the promotion of a human resource development culture in the country along with the implementation of active employment measures, which are mainly taking place with the financial assistance of foreign donors. The programme ends in March 2006.

ISKUR, as the Turkish Employment Agency and main beneficiary of the above programme, is supposed to become a catalyst in developing this culture and raising awareness of both the public and government opinion on this issue. A National Action Plan for Employment will be developed under the programme, which is providing a fund for implementation of active employment measures, including also the promotion of social inclusion. The call for a proposal of such measures has been launched countrywide and 700 proposals have been received.

At policy level VET is not yet seen in Turkey as an instrument to promote social inclusion for disadvantaged groups and therefore no specific actions have been undertaken in this direction.

In December 2003 the first Preliminary National Development Plan was prepared by the State Planning Organisation as the basis for the financial assistance for economic and social cohesion to be provided by the European Union within the framework of Turkey-EU relations during the period 2004 to 2006. The Plan is based on a mid-term strategy (2004-06), which identifies four development axes towards economic and social cohesion with the European Union, namely:

- enhancing the competitiveness of enterprises;
- developing human resources and increasing employment;
- improving infrastructure services and environmental protection;
- reducing the development differences between the regions, ensuring rural development and reducing the social imbalances due to poverty and income inequality.

The second axis includes the following measures:

- **active labour market policies** (promotion of employment of disadvantaged groups in the labour market, employment of young people and redundant workers, adaptation of employees and entrepreneurs to changing market conditions, creation of new employment fields and of additional sources of income for households in rural areas);
- **reinforcement of the education system** (enhanced links between labour market and education, increased use of information and communication technologies in education, enhancement of lifelong learning opportunities for adults).

A regional development strategy has been created at national level to cover the 26 NUTS II regions. The view is to activate the internal potential of the regions on the basis of a human resource development approach linked to the promotion of local development initiatives, and with the aim of providing a general framework for the four development axes mentioned above. The objective of the framework is to reduce interregional disparities by raising the

employment level and competitiveness of the 12 NUTS II regions targeted as priorities in the scope of the development axes.

The total allocation to axis 2 for the 12 NUTS II regions is of €70 million (€48.5 million from EU assistance and €21.5 million from national public contribution) over the period 2004 to 2006.

## **2. KEY PRIORITY AREAS FOR FUTURE ASSISTANCE**

- Technical advice should be provided in analysing the broader context of higher education in the Turkish educational system within an EU perspective. Such analysis should identify recommendations for future development.
- The procedure for data collection on school dropouts at any level, which was stopped by the Ministry of National Education a few years ago, should be reintroduced. This would permit measuring the effectiveness of the system.
- On the basis of the experience gained so far in the implementation of the EU programmes for education, training and employment, some initiatives linked to the priorities for human resource development (identified in the preliminary National Development Plan) should be launched at regional level. Such initiatives should in particular be aimed at promoting social inclusion.
- Support for institution and capacity building should be provided at regional level to prepare the ground for the implementation of the abovementioned human resource development projects.