DISCUSSION PAPER

Youth not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET): Current Policies and Improvements in Türkiye

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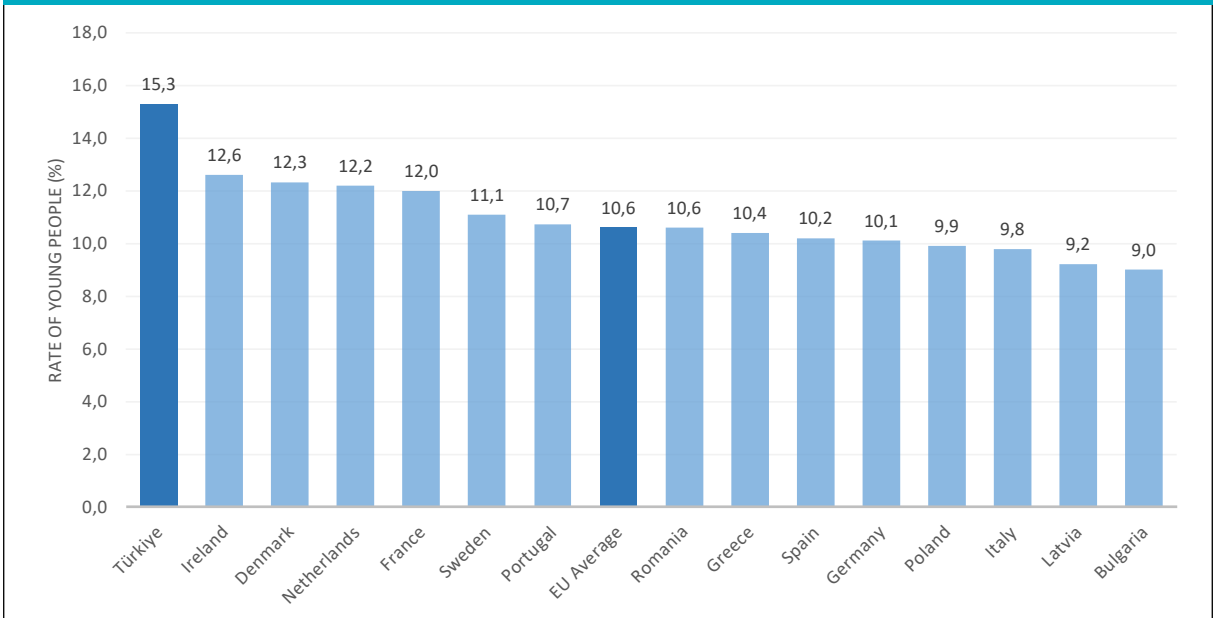
The future of countries is closely related to the quality of the human resources they train and their ability to adapt to today's rapidly changing conditions. In this context, human capital has become the most valuable resource to increase the competitiveness of countries on a global scale. The increasing importance of human capital has resulted in further investments to be made to train more qualified human resources over time (Aghion et al., 2009). In other words, global investments to improve access to and the quality of education, especially after the World Wars, have grown continuously (Aghion, 2009).

Youth and young adults are among the most significant social groups in terms of sustainable economic development (OECD & ILO, 2014). The economic and social integration of youth and young adults who have completed the compulsory education period is the key to sustainable national development. Thus, youth and young adults are considered as the future of societies and their qualifications have an impact on the future of countries. In Figure 1, the rate of the young population in the total population of the European Union countries as of 2021 are given.

Figure 1: Youth Population Rates in Countries in the European Union and Nearby Regions



Source: TURKSTAT (2021) and Eurostat (2021)

As seen in Figure 1, the young population continues to represent a significant part of societies in the EU and neighboring countries. When considering all EU countries, the young population between the ages of 15-24 constitutes 10.6% of the total population, while this rate is well above the EU countries in Türkiye. As of 2021, the 15-24 age group in Türkiye constitutes 15.3% of society. According to the estimations made by TURKSTAT, the rate of young population in Türkiye will continue to decline gradually, but even in 2080 it is expected to be 11.1%, above the current EU average (Turkstat, 2018). In this context, Türkiye's policies on youth employment and education, will be very decisive in terms of national development since it has an abundant youth population opportunity.

Evaluating the economic and social integration of this group due to its vital role in sustainable development (Filmer-Sankey & McCrone, 2012). Although "youth unemployment" and "labor force participation", which have been significant indicators and used for many years, are limited in representing the holistic integration of the group. In fact, these indicators consider entering the labor market and employability as the main performance factors. However, as young people's period in education is grows globally, the sharp boundaries between education and employment are weakening, and the rates of job change and turnover also faces a significant increase. (Bowers, Sonnet, & Bardone, 1998; Roser & Ortiz-Ospina, 2016). Therefore, more inclusive indicators are needed to assess the integration of this group.

The Emergence of the NEET Indicator

The NEET index, which was first developed in the United Kingdom in 1988, was an answer to this search and the frequency of use increased greatly (Furlong, 2006; Holmes, Murphy, & Mayhew, 2019). The age range of NEET, which only reported the status of young people between the ages of 16 and 18 in education or employment at the time of its development, has been expanded over time (Holmes, Murphy, & Mayhew, 2019). NEET is determined as the proportion of individuals in the specified age range who neither continue their education nor enter the labor market. Therefore, when calculating the NEET index, equal weight is given to continuing education and transitioning into employment. NEET is therefore more inclusive than indexes that prioritize labor market transition when assessing youth integration.

NEET, which covered a much more limited and youthful group in the years it was developed, has started to be used to cover a wider age range over time (Holmes, Murphy, & Mayhew, 2019). There are significant differences in the calculation of NEET today, both in terms of age range and the way it is defined (Eurostat, 2022; OECD, 2022; Turkstat, 2022). For example, while the age range of NEET is evaluated between 15 and 29 in Eurostat, the official statistical channel of the European Union, the NEET calculation is evaluated between the ages of 16 and 24 and between the ages of 15 and 29 by the OECD (Eurostat, 2022; OECD, 2022). The Turkish Statistical Institute also takes into account the age range of 15 to 24, which is used more frequently, similar to the EU, in the calculation of NEET (Turkstat, 2021).

NEET was developed with a view to prioratize young people's continuing education and transition to the labor market in order to maximize economic and social integration. The development of this perspective is based on studies to present significant improvements in economic and social outputs as the years of education increase and the transition to the labor market is achieved (Blaug, 1972; Psacharopoulos & Patrinos, 2018). With the adoption of NEET over time, its application domain has expanded as it took into account the development and evaluation of many policies directed at the target group.

The Problem of Youth Integration and the Risks of NEET

The main reason why youth and youth integration have become a priority for countries is the fact that this group is of critical importance for sustainable development and the difficulties experienced in the last 15 years (Amendola, 2022; OECD, 2016a). Indeed, high NEET rates indicate that a large group is not involved in the employment and education process, which contributes significantly to economic and social welfare. The number of NEETs looking for employment and education but not being able to find either, reduces the efficiency of education investment on an individual and a national scale.

The long-term risks posed by the growth of the NEET group are examined in different categories. Firstly, the inability of young individuals to enter the workforce despite their qualifications poses a significant risk (Gadsby, 2019). Prolonging the unemployment process accelerates skill obsolescence, reduces graduate motivation, and may result in quitting job seeking (ETF, 2015; Powell, 2021). Inclusion in the long-term NEET group may result in young individuals being forced to accept jobs that do not align with their skillset, exacerbating skill mismatch and subsequently reducing their earning potential. (World Bank, 2015; Quintini, Martin, & Martin, 2007). Considering that the labor market is rapidly transforming, the longer the period of staying in the NEET group, the more difficult it is to adapt to this transformation. This may lead to the growth of the "passive NEET" group, which is the most difficult subgroup to return to education or employment (Hutchinson, Beck, & Hooley, 2016; Kieselbach, 2003).

The biggest risk of long-term NEET member is the social exclusion of young people who want to continue education or employment. The fragility of individuals who stay away from education, which is a small-scale model of society, and who cannot make economic gains, also increases (Pemberton, 2008; SEU, 2004). Numerous studies have demonstrated that this demographic exhibits lower levels of well-being and a higher likelihood of engaging in negative behaviors when compared to their peers (Gariepy et al., 2022). For this reason, the NEET group is considered to be more vulnerable to low income and social exclusion in the long run (World Bank, 2015).

Factors Affecting Inclusion in the NEET Group

The prominence of NEET in determining education, social and economic policies has also increased studies focusing on the factors affecting the inclusion of young people in the NEET group (Holmes, Murphy, & Mayhew, 2019; Filmer-Sankey & McCrone, 2012). The identification of such factors plays a crucial role in pinpointing young individuals who are at a higher risk of being classified as NEET and devising appropriate mechanisms for their support. The results of studies group the factors determining inclusion in the NEET into two clusters as "personal/demographic characteristics" and "school-related characteristics" (Holmes, Murphy, & Mayhew, 2019; Filmer-Sankey & McCrone, 2012).

Personal and demographic characteristics encompass a range of factors such as caring responsibilities, young parenthood, physical or psychological disorders, economic disadvantage, lack of permanent residence, unemployment, insufficient professional skills, and residing in areas with high unemployment. These conditions are known to increase the likelihood of young individuals being classified as NEET. Moreover, existing literature suggests that the probability of NEET status is further exacerbated when an individual experiences multiple such factors simultaneously (Holmes, Murphy, & Mayhew, 2019; Filmer-Sankey & McCrone, 2012). What needs to be emphasized here is that young people often have no control over these personal/demographic characteristics. Therefore, the recommendations highlight policies to encourage education and employment for these groups, recognizing that young people with these personal and demographic characteristics are more likely to be involved in NEET (European Commission, 2018; OECD, 2016a).

School-level indicators are non-participation in education, long-term and chronic absenteeism, low achievement, negative behaviors, and the absence of risk monitoring policies (Holmes, Murphy, & Mayhew, 2019; Filmer-Sankey & McCrone, 2012). As a result, students who are persistently absent, exhibit low academic achievement, and have disciplinary issues are at a higher risk of being classified as NEET. The absence of policies to address these students' needs has further contributed to the rising NEET rates. Unlike personal and demographic characteristics, school-level factors such as these can be mitigated through appropriate education and social policies. Therefore, the *"Global Policies for Reducing NEET Rates" discussed in the following sections* were developed mostly to improve school-level indicators.

Increase in NEET Rates with Changes in the Labor Market and Effects of the Pandemic

One of the reasons why NEET is on the agenda so frequently all over the world is the economic contraction experienced globally as of 2008 (Görkey, 2020; OECD, 2016a). This shift resulted in a reduction in the demand for labor, while simultaneously leading to a transformation in the nature of such demand. In this period, a global decrease in demand began in almost all sectors, and the spread of digitalization and automation accelerated (OECD, 2016a; Özer & Perc, 2020; Perc, Özer, & Hojnik, 2019). As a result of these, "the most educated youth group in history" has started to face a major integration problem due to economic contraction and transforming labor market demands (OECD, 2016a). According to a 2015 profiling study conducted by the World Bank, the NEET group comprises around 40% of the global unemployed population, with their unemployment rate being four times that of adults (World Bank, 2015).

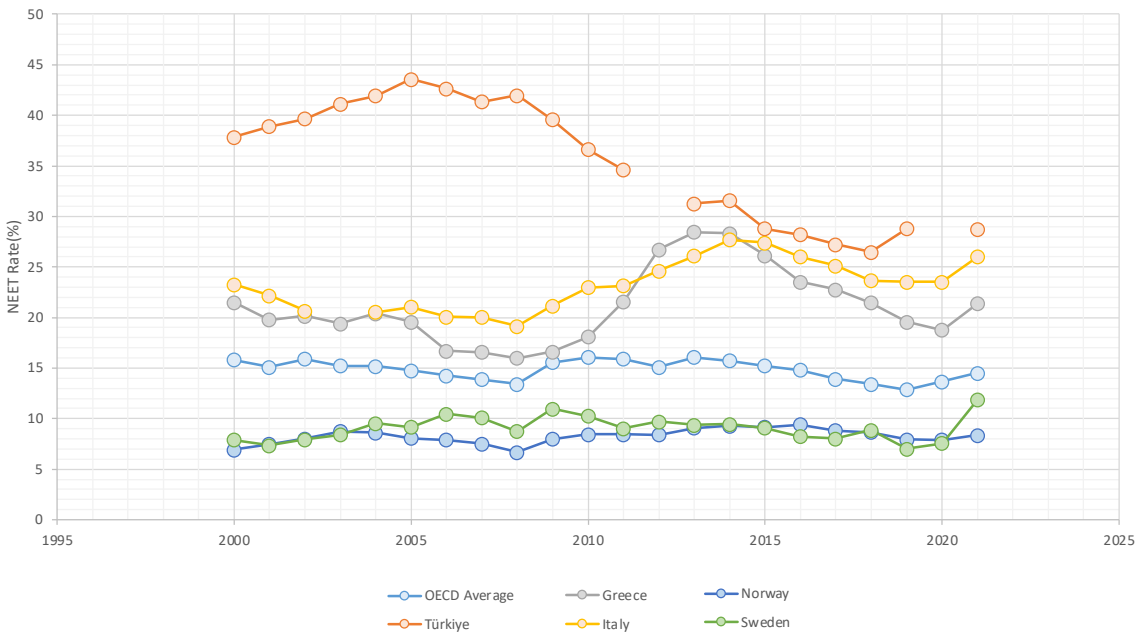
Another key factor in the higher NEET rates is the "Covid-19 epidemic", which became a global crisis in 2020 (ILO, 2021). In addition to the estimated $12 trillion loss (Ajmal, Khan, & Shad, 2021) in the global economy in the last two years, the pandemic has caused many people to experience job losses, a major contraction in the labor market, and employment problems that vary with respect to sectors. According to the results of predictive study conducted by Tamesberger and Bacher (2022), the scale of youth unemployment in the European Union region during the epidemic period increased from 2.8 million to 4.8 million; The NEET group has expanded from 4.7 million to 6.7 million, indicating a worrisome trend. Studies conducted during the pandemic have further revealed that the economic challenges brought forth by the crisis have significantly increased the probability of young individuals being classified as NEET. Additionally, the degree of increase varies among different subgroups (Aina et al., 2021).

NEET Rates in the World and Türkiye

The global developments mentioned in the previous sections have caused significant changes in NEET rates over the years. Figure 2 shows the average change in NEET rates in selected OECD countries over the last 20 years.

As seen in Figure 2, NEET rates decreased continuously from 2002 to 2008, but started to increase after 2008 and reached a peak in 2013 and 2014. In this context, the negative effects of the economic contraction experienced after 2008 have become clearly felt among young people. In addition, Figure 2 reveals that as of 2021, NEET rates also show significant differences among OECD countries. For instance, Northern Europe and Continental European countries, especially Norway and Sweden, have relatively low rates. While Türkiye is the country with the highest NEET rates, it is above the OECD average along with Greece and Italy.

Figure 2: Change in NEET Rates in Selected OECD Countries: 2000-2021 (15-29 Years)

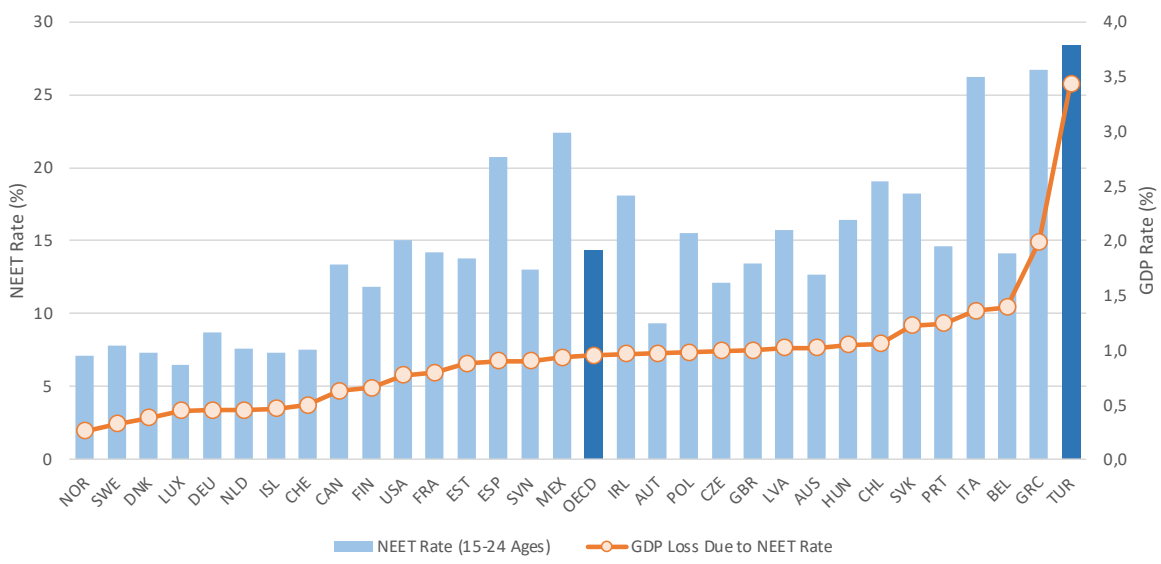


Source: OECD official NEET statistics for ages 15-29.

Another point worth mentioning is that high NEET rates have been observed in Türkiye for a long time. As seen in Figure 2, NEET rates in Türkiye have been consistently above the OECD average in the last 20 years, varying between 26.5% and 43.6%. Additionally, Figure 2 reveals is that NEET rates in Türkiye decreased by nearly 14% between 2006 and 2018. Even though Türkiye's NEET rate is higher than the OECD average in 2021, a significant reduction has been achieved compared to 20 years ago. In addition, the change in NEET rates in Türkiye differs from the global trend that has increased since 2008. While NEET rates had increased in most of the countries shown in Figure 2 as of 2008 (the increase was more pronounced in Greece and Italy), NEET rates continued to decline in Türkiye. This factor may be attributed to several factors, including the rise in education rates across all levels in Turkey and sustained growth in the labor market. Finally, while NEET rates tend to rise between 2019 and 2021 in other OECD countries, a partial decrease is observed in Türkiye. Among the reasons for this situation are *"Steps Taken by the Ministry of National Education in* Türkiye *to Alleviate NEET Rates"* , which is discussed in the following sections.

The inability of young people to contribute to development due to their lack of employment or education also causes economic losses on a national scale. A predictive study showed that the economic loss due to NEET corresponds to between 0.9% and 1.5% of the total gross domestic product (GDP) of OECD countries and reached approximately 560 billion dollars (OECD, 2016a). It is also worth to noting that Türkiye, which has the highest NEET rate among OECD countries, is evaluated as the country with the greatest loss due to NEET. As shown in Figure 3, the cost of not participating in education and employment for the NEET group in Türkiye is 3.8% of GDP, which is the highest in the OECD (OECD average is about 0.9% of GDP).

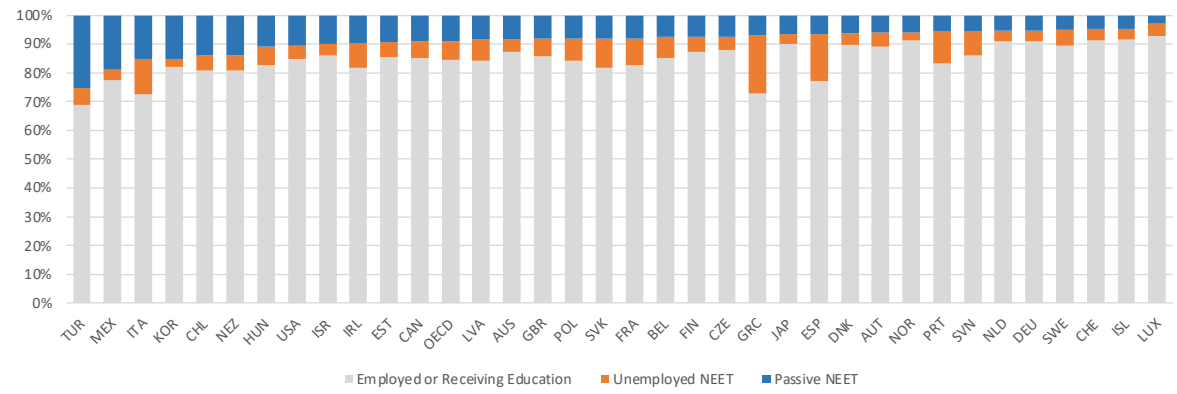
Figure 3: NEET Rates and Corresponding GDP Rates in OECD Countries



Source: OECD (2016) data.

The OECD study has revealed a notable discovery: Türkiye boasts the highest rate of passive NEETs among OECD countries (OECD, 2016a). As evidenced in Figure 4, the NEET rate of individuals without any education or employment seeking is exceeds 25% in Türkiye, significantly surpassing the OECD average of 9%. Among the closest countries to Türkiye are Mexico, Italy, and Korea, with their respective "passive" NEET rates of 19%, 15%, and 14%.

Figure 4: Unemployed and Passive NEET Rates in OECD Countries



Source: Compiled from OECD (2016a) data.

Sustaining Global Policies to Alleviate NEET Rates

Mitigating NEET rates is on the policy agenda of many countries, especially the European Union (European Commission, 2020; ILO & SIDA, 2019; Tamesberger & Bacher, 2020). Reducing NEET rates, which has been on an upward trend since 2008, with the Covid-19 pandemic at the end of 2019, has become one of the "2030 Sustainable Development Goals" (ILO & SIDA, 2019). Furthermore in order to compensate for the impact of the pandemic on this large group, the European Commission introduced the "Youth Unemployment Support: Bridge to Jobs for the Next Generation" proposal with a budget of 22 billion Euros in July 2020 (European Commission, 2020; Tamesberger & Bacher, 2020).

Within this framework, global institutions such as the ILO, OECD, and World Bank provide data-driven recommendations. These recommendations and what has been done in line with the recommendations are briefly summarized (European Commission, 2018; ILO, 2015; Mawn et al., 2017; OECD, 2016a).

I. How to Reach NEET Group and Track at School

As mentioned in the previous sections, NEET represents a very heterogeneous group of young people. Thus, it is very critical to evaluate in detail the demographic characteristics, socioeconomic and educational backgrounds of young people included in the NEET group in studies at the national level. In this context, the first suggestion is to contact young people to determine their needs and their demands for employment and participation in education (European Commission, 2018; ILO, 2015). Upon reaching the NEET cohort, a range of policies may be implemented to activate these subgroups.

International organizations suggest that interventions in the education process are more effective, and the support provided during the education process is beneficial both in the transition to education and employment (European Commission, 2018; ILO, 2015; OECD, 2016a). Developing mechanisms for continuous monitoring of students' educational participation and the main achievement indicators is among the proposals. Studies have shown that monitoring mechanisms increase achievement and employment opportunities (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2001; UNICEF, 2019).

Various policies are pursued to incentivize students to pursue further education or seek employment upon graduation. For instance, in the Netherlands, Lithuania, and England, education tracking systems utilize databases from various states and regions to promote these goals (European Commission, 2018). Tracking systems provide administrators with information about students who exceed their absenteeism threshold. The system used in the UK creates a "vulnerability score" for students by using many of the previously mentioned demographic features. A committee consisting of different stakeholders meets every month to discuss interventions for students with high vulnerability scores.

Besides monitoring, another crucial element is vocational guidance. In Austria, participating vocational guidance programs at the primary education level is compulsory. Students participate in this program at 64 career planning centers in the country, and their career orientations are determined according to their interest and achievement levels. In Finland, career guidance is offered to students who have completed secondary school under the Career Start Programme. For young people likely to be included in the NEET group, personal planning and orientation programs lasting between 20 and 40 weeks are available (European Commission, 2018).

Volunteer students in Luxembourg help the local government reach out to students who leave education early. Students reached within the scope of the study called "Local Action for Youth" are provided with personal guidance in various institutions (European Commission, 2018). In the Netherlands, regional coordination centers collect data from schools and directly contact young people leaving education. The centers developed to provide young people with the necessary social assistance collect data about these students and monitor their participation in education and employment. Within the scope of the Legnano Youth Project in Italy, databases of many public institutions and NGOs were combined to form a common data pool. This common pool has greatly accelerated the identification and outreach of particularly inactive NEETs (European Commission, 2018).

II. Raising Awareness

Another recommended step after reaching out to the NEET group is to increase their awareness of education and employment opportunities. The practices of countries are in the form of informing using different media platforms,

distributing printed materials, participating in various festivals-fairs and working with groups that are in close contact with young people (European Commission, 2018).

Various social media platforms and computer games, including YouTube, are used in Portugal to provide educational and employment opportunities. A media campaign has been carried out in Slovenia, in which Facebook and mobile applications have been used effectively, to inform the NEET group since 2014. In Sweden, teams of career experts and municipal experts are tasked with finding unemployed youth and informing them about the opportunities available. The local offices (Mission Locales) established in France are meant to identify the needs of young people between 16 and 25 years of age and to offer guidance. More than 1.2 million young people have benefited from 444 offices established in 2013 (European Commission, 2018).

III. Providing Multiple Support

Policies aimed at the NEET cohort entail a multifaceted process that involves generating awareness, establishing outreach initiatives, providing training opportunities, and fostering employment prospects to encourage their reintegration into society. Meta-analysis studies suggest that multi-faceted support can reduce the NEET population (Mawn et al., 2017). To put it concretely, although it is critical to reach the NEET group and inform them about opportunities, the impact has been determined to be extremely limited without employment-oriented programs. Therefore, the education and employment opportunities provided should be directly related to employment (Mawn et al., 2017). However, in this case, significant improvements are made in the transition of NEET groups to education and/or employment.

Measures Adopted by the Ministry of National Education to Alleviate NEET Rates in Türkiye

Over the past few years, the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) has taken a comprehensive approach towards the link between education and employment, conducting significant research aimed at mitigating NEET rates. Education policies that emphasize equal opportunity in education, the strengthening of the relationship between VET and the labor market, increasing participation rates in school and supporting disadvantaged students have contributed significantly to lower NEET rates. This section discusses the MoNE policies and their effectiveness in reducing NEET rates.

Strengthening Apprenticeship Training

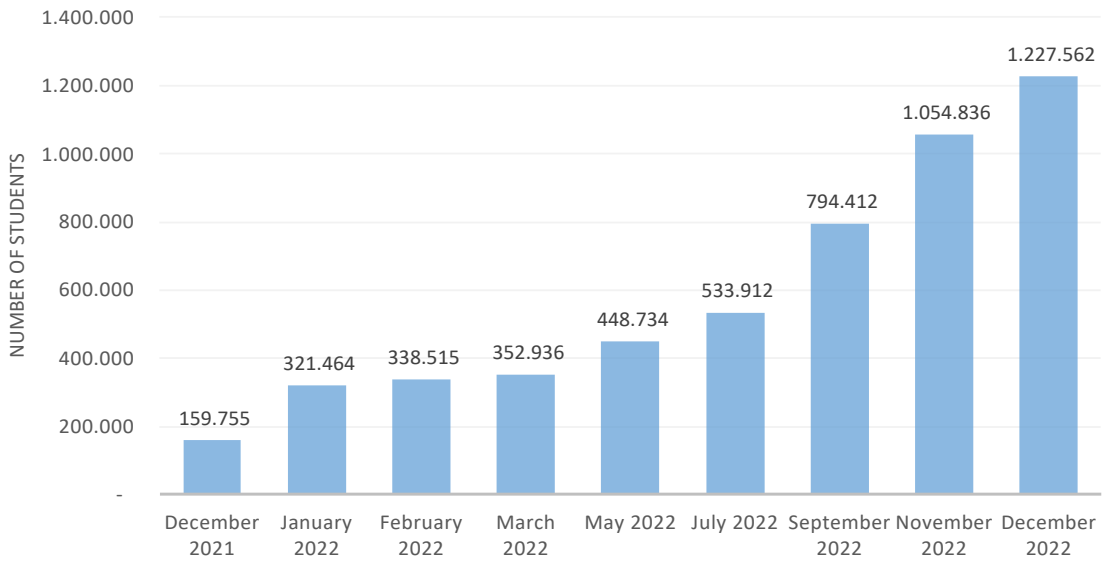
Apprenticeship training has a critical importance in meeting the need for craftspeople and masters in the labor market (Lerman, 2019; Ryan, 1998). Apprenticeship education, conducted at vocational education centers (VTCs), is an immersive form of instruction that empowers students to gain hands-on experience and cultivate professional skills in genuine business settings through application-oriented training sessions (Özer, 2019a, 2019b). The skills acquired directly in the labor market enable students to learn the structure and expectations of the labor market directly. Employers also have more responsibility to ensure that students have the expected skills. This mutual interaction increases the employability of students and contributes to the training of the workforce. In fact, according to a 2019 study conducted by the MoNE, nearly 88% of apprenticeship-trained students secured employment, with approximately 75% of these individuals securing positions within the institutions where they received on-the-job training (Özer & Suna, 2020). These findings are also consistent with global examples of the high employment rates provided by apprenticeships (Cahuc & Hervelin, 2020; ILO, 2012).

By the end of 2021, MoNE started to take concrete steps to strengthen apprenticeship training. The most relevant of these steps is the regulation made in Vocational Education Law No. 3308 at the end of 2021. Within the framework of this regulation, the wages of craftspeople who have successfully completed the 11th grade have been increased from one third of the minimum wage to half. In addition, the wages received by the students during their apprenticeship training began to be covered by the state, and wage responsibility was taken from the employers (Özer, 2022a, 2022b). Social awareness programs were performed to increase the impact of the improvements,

and the provincial organizations of the MoNE took an active role in promoting the regulation.

These arrangements made by MoNE have led to a huge increase in the social demand for apprenticeship training. As seen in Figure 4, the number of students receiving apprenticeship training has increased from 159 thousand to over 1 million 200 thousand in a period of approximately one year. This large increase has led to a similar increase in the proportion of apprenticeships in upper-secondary VET education. As a matter of fact, while apprenticeship education constituted approximately 5% of upper-secondary VET education in December 2021, this rate reached approximately 47% a year later. This is significant as it underscores the increasing popularity of apprenticeship education, which boasts an exceptionally high employment rate.

***Figure 5:* Number of Students Receiving Apprenticeships in Vocational Training Centers: December 2021-2022**



Vocational Skills for Young Adults

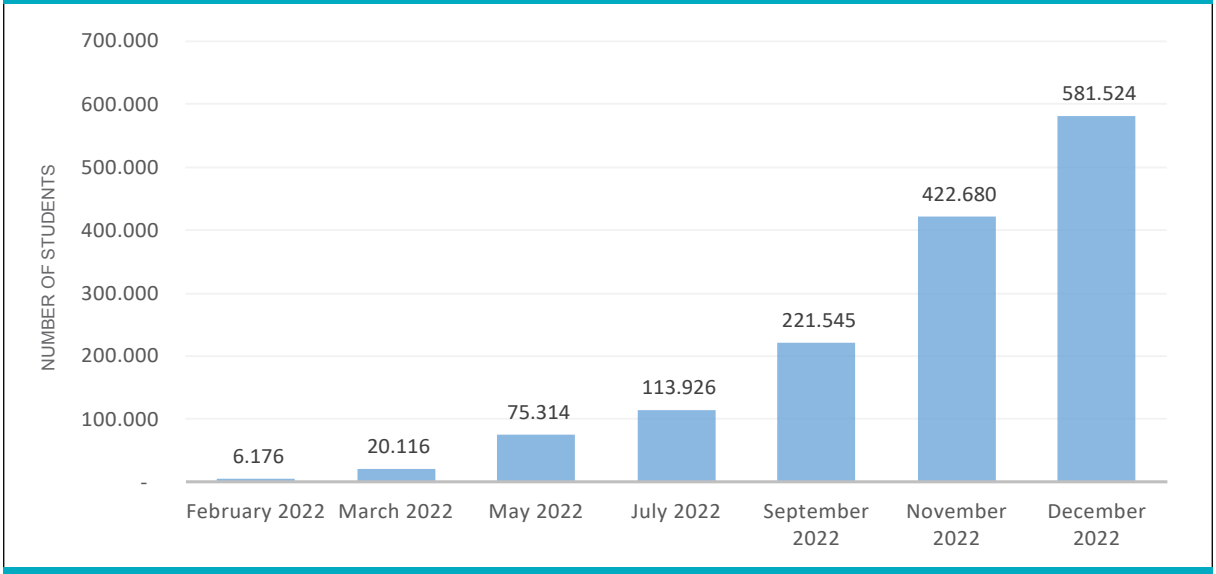
As mentioned in the previous section, the generally accepted age range of the NEET group falls between 15 to 24 and 15 to 29 years. This range also includes young adults who have completed compulsory education in Türkiye. Therefore, policies to mitigate NEET rates need to be structured to include young adults. MoNE has recently taken several steps to emphasize the development of skills among adults, which is discussed further in this section.

a. Vocational Training Center Skill Development Program

One of the key steps taken by MoNE to encourage the vocational education of adults is the Vocational Education Center (VTC) Skill Development Programs. The aim is to utilize the adaptable and career-driven nature of apprenticeship education in the vocational training of adults. For this purpose, adults are provided with vocational skills through short-term courses lasting 6 to 8 months. The only condition for participation in the program is secondary school graduation, which also increases the inclusiveness of the program. Therefore, this program is a mechanism by which young adults in the NEET group can acquire skills in their fields of interest and increase their employability.

The program's employment-oriented and short-term focus has led to high demand among adults in a short period of time. As seen in Figure 6, the number of participants in the program announced in February 2022 increased rapidly and reached over 580,000 by the end of the year. This huge demand also clearly demonstrates the need for adult skill development mechanisms.

Figure 6: **Number of Students Participating in the Vocational Training Center Skill Development Program: February-December 2022**



An exemplary feature of the VTC Skill Development Program is the even distribution of demand among adults of different genders and educational levels. A study conducted on the participation data in the first four months of the program revealed that the majority of the participants, who were largely within the 18-26 age range, were either classified as NEET or were in close proximity to this group. (Özer & Suna, 2022). Another striking finding in the same study is that 42% of the participants were women, and gender balance was largely achieved in different age groups. The VTC Skill Development program has the highest gender balance among vocational training programs in terms of female participant rates (Özer & Suna, 2022). Thus, the VTC Skill Development program also contributes to alleviating the relatively high rates of female NEETs.

Another key contribution of the program is the participation of adults of different education levels. The aforementioned study indicate that approximately 19% of the participants in the first four months graduated from higher education programs. In addition, gender balance was preserved and even increased in this group. In summary, the VTC Skill Development program soon became a mechanism that the NEET group effectively used, providing gender balance and diversity in education levels.

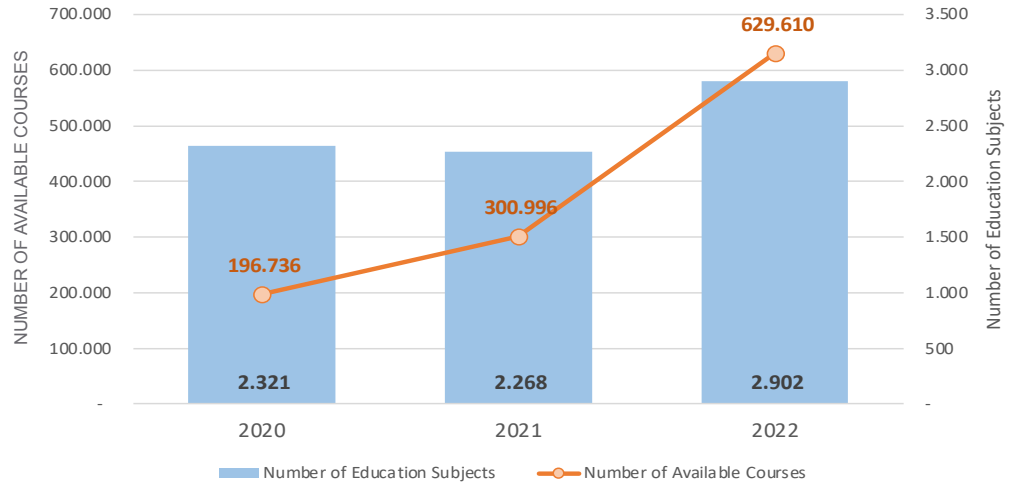
Public Education Courses

Public education courses have been the main source of education within the scope of lifelong learning in Türkiye for many years. Although institutions and adult education courses have traditionally provided ample resources for skills development, studies have shown that adults in Türkiye tend to make limited use of these opportunities for lifelong learning. (Eurydice, 2021; OECD, 2016b; Özer & Suna, 2022). Moreover, international large-scale studies, especially PIAAC and PISA, show that there is an extensive development area in adult skills in Türkiye (Eurydice, 2021; OECD, 2016b).

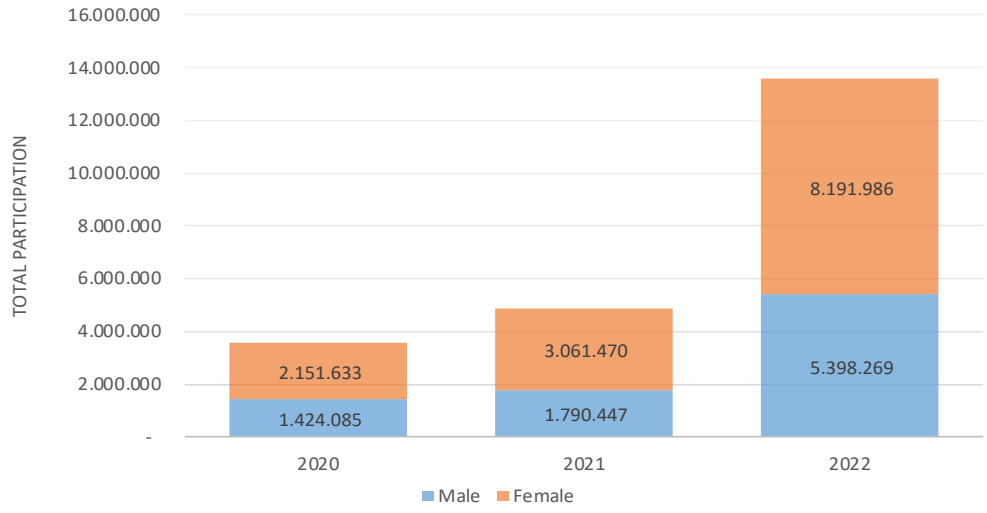
In 2021, MoNE prioritized enhancing the accessibility and quality of Public Education Courses by taking into account the feedback of adult learners and upgrading the facilities of public education centers (PBCs). Provincial and district organizations play an active role in promoting popular courses for adults. Figure 7 shows the number of courses opened in Türkiye in the last three years, the variety of courses and the change in total participation.

Figure 7: Increase in Participation and Inclusivity of Public Education Courses: 2020 to 2022

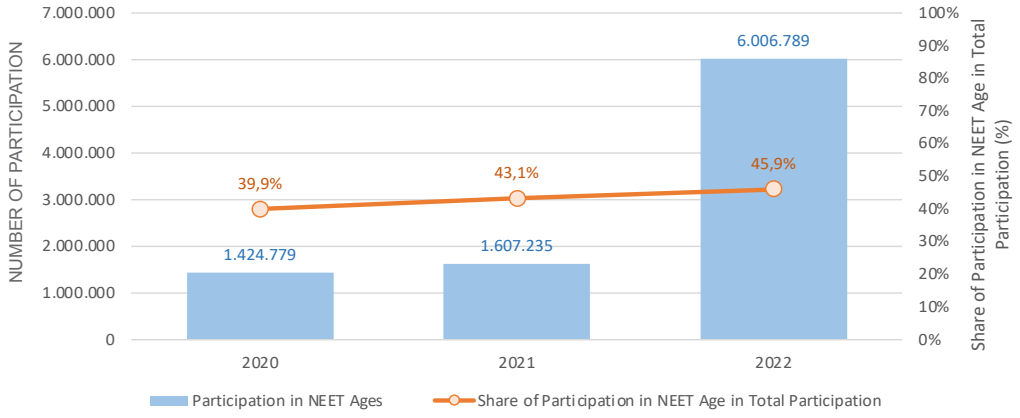
a. Number of Courses Offered and Diversity of Education Fields



b. Total Number of Attendance to Courses by Gender



c. Number of NEET Age Group Attendance to Courses



According to Figure 7, there has been a significant increase in the number and variety of public education courses, particularly in 2022. This can be attributed to MoNE's increased consideration of adults' feedback and efforts to improve the infrastructure of public education centers. As a result, more adults are participating in these courses. The increase in participation marks a major step forward for the Turkish government's development in adult education, as highlighted by the OECD and Eurydice. Another factor that Figure 6 reveals is the increase in rates of adults in the NEET age group in 2022. While 39.9% of the total participants were in the NEET age group in 2020, this rate increased to 45.9% in 2022. Moreover, while the total participation in the courses has been increased, the high female representation in previous years has continued to be ensured. In other words, the rate of females in PECs in the last three years is relatively high and is over 60%. The skills acquired in the courses therefore have the potential to contribute to closing the large gender gap in the current NEET rates.

Family School Program

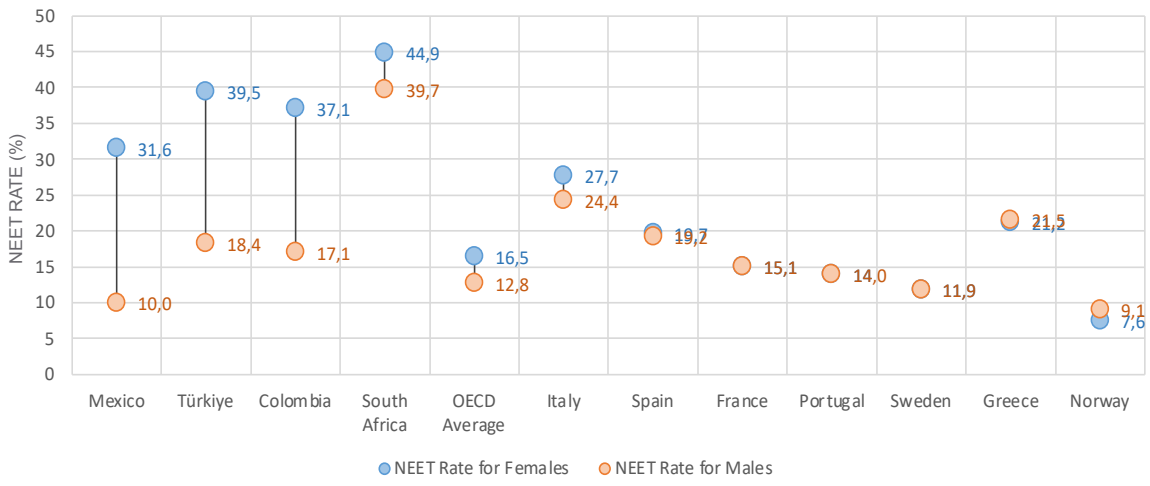
As stated in the previous sections, one of the most effective factors for young people to enter the NEET group is the education level of their families (Holmes, Murphy, & Mayhew, 2019; Filmer-Sankey & McCrone, 2012). In concrete terms, children with a low parental education level are more likely to be in the NEET group after graduation. Thus, family education is an influential factor in children's education or transition to employment, as well as ensuring equal academic opportunities. MoNE launched the "Family School" project in 2022, which offers free education to families in various fields, including literacy skills, communication skills, digital skills, stress management, first aid, and environmental awareness. This program aims to provide families with the necessary skills and knowledge to improve their lives and well-being.

The aim of the project is to increase the interest of families in their children's education while improving their skills through participation in education. Research has shown that children tend to have a more positive attitude towards education when they grow up in a family environment that values and actively participates in education. (Lara & Saracostti, 2019; Topor et al., 2010). In this context, empowering each family member through education supports children's participation in education and employment. By reaching approximately 1 million families in four months, MoNE has effectively expanded its program.

Dissemination of Early Childhood Education

Gender disparities are prevalent in NEET rates across many countries, including OECD countries, where females typically have higher rates than males. This is partly due to the disproportionate burden of child and family care responsibilities that fall on women, as illustrated in Figure 8. In addition, cultural norms and especially the fact that males are more dominant in the demand for transition to employment may also lead to gender gaps.

Figure 8: NEET Rates by Gender in Selected OECD Countries

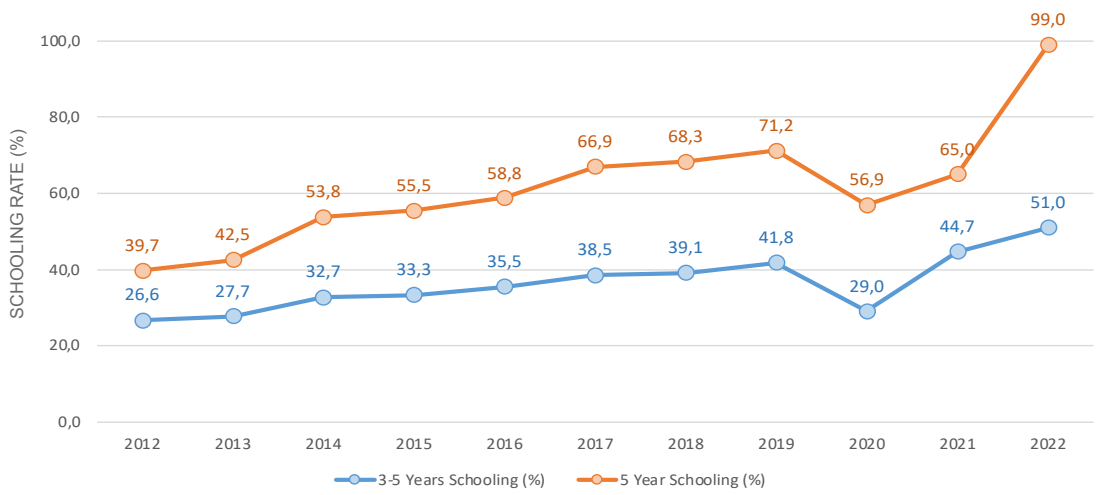


Source: Compiled from OECD (2022) NEET rates for ages 15-29.

Early childhood education (ECE) is extremely helpful for parents with young children who want to pursue education or employment, as it provides them with essential support in balancing family responsibilities with personal aspirations. As it is known, ECE makes a substantial contribution to preparing children for school life and gaining self-care skills (Suna & Özer, 2022). In addition, students participating ECE leads to longer education engagement, greater academic success, and higher rates of employment transition. (Cortazar et al., 2020; McCoy et al., 2017). ECE offers education and employment opportunities for both students and their families - especially young mothers.

Starting in 2021, MoNE ensured the dissemination of early childhood education throughout Türkiye. In just 1.5 years, Türkiye was able to develop a capacity of 6,004 new kindergartens, tripling the total number from 2,782. This has led to a significant increase in enrollment rates, as shown in Figure 9.

Figure 9: Changes in Schooling Rates in Early Childhood Education in Türkiye



Source: Compiled from OECD (2022) NEET rates for ages 15-29.

MoNE provides financial support to disadvantaged students to increase access while building the necessary capacity to expand pre-school education. With annual funding of 500 million ₺, disadvantaged students' access to pre-school education is supported. Thus, MoNE has taken an active step to overcome economic limitations, which are seen as the biggest obstacle to participation in ECE globally.

Early Warning and Tracking System to Reduce School Dropouts

Another determining factor for young people to enter the NEET group is early school leaving and high absenteeism (Holmes, Murphy, & Mayhew, 2019; Filmer-Sankey & McCrone, 2012). In other words, early school leavers and young people who are constantly absent during the education period are more likely to enter the NEET group. Early school leaving is mostly associated with children's home responsibilities and rapid entry into the labor market, and brings with it significant problems in the long run. Children who leave school prematurely do not acquire the skills sufficiently and are mostly face with limited choices on the labor market.

MoNE took an effective step in 2023 to minimize early school leaving and increase access to education. With this step, students who do not to attend school for various reasons are reached individually through local district organizations. Provincial and district organizations of MoNE have the opportunity to reach these students at their residences by using the Central Population Administration System (MERNIS). To further address the issue of high absenteeism among students, e-School is used to identify students who are frequently absent despite continuing their education. This information is then shared with the relevant provincial and district organizations for appropriate action. This proactive approach towards identifying and supporting at-risk students ensures that dropouts are prevented even before they occur. With this step, it is possible to increase primary school enrollment rates, which have already risen to 99% for the first time, and secondary school enrollment rates, which have reached over 95% (Özer, 2022b), and

dropouts due to marginalization are reduced. The system also produced its first outputs in a short period of time. In January 2023, the schooling rate in secondary education increased from 95.06% to 95.97% in just one month. With over 6 million students in secondary education, the rapid improvement in preventing dropouts has significant potential to increase participation rates.

Summer School and Academic Support Programs

Low academic achievement and disadvantaged socioeconomic background are among the factors for entering the NEET group (Holmes, Murphy, & Mayhew, 2019; Filmer-Sankey & McCrone, 2012). Most education systems use various mechanisms to support disadvantaged students and increase their probability of achievement (OECD, 2012). To support students with skills gaps and provide them with individualized education, a range of mechanisms are employed, including remedial education programs, education options outside of school hours, and tailored education support. (OECD, 2012; Özer, Gençoğlu, & Suna, 2021). These supports encourage students who need academic and social support to acquire the skills necessary for continuing education and employment.

Academic and social support is also extremely critical to cope with the negative effects of Covid-19 pandemic on students. As it is known, the this period brought many problems such as learning losses, decrease in well-being and life satisfaction, and disruption of school routine (Özer et al., 2020). As mentioned in the previous sections, the pandemic also caused the NEET group to grow. In many countries, especially European countries, practices such as providing remedial education outside of school hours, extending the course period, and expanding academic support programs are carried out in order to compensate for these shortcomings (UNESCO, UNICEF, World Bank, World Food Program, & UNHR, 2021).

In a significant move to combat the effects of the pandemic and reduce NEET rates, MoNE launched the Summer School Program in 2022. The free summer school program for public school students, aimed at reducing both the NEET rate and the negative impact of the pandemic. This innovative program effectively utilized the extensive resources of Science and Art Centers (BİLSEM), reaching approximately 1 million students across various fields, including art, mathematics, Turkish, and foreign languages.

Another step taken for the same purpose is to expand the scope of Remedial Education & Support Programme in Primary Education (İYEP) and Support and Training Courses (DYK), which have been implemented for years and have become the support programs of MoNE. Since 2021, the target group of IYEP has been shifted from 4th grade to 3rd grade, enabling earlier identification of learning deficiencies." Along with the grade levels applied to the DYK program, the number of courses within the scope of DYK has been increased. Its purpose is to increase the effectiveness of programs designed to compensate for learning deficiencies and provide academic support to students.

Enabling Vocational Education in the Integration of Migrant Students

Studies on the NEET group show that immigrants are more likely to enter the NEET group due to the socioeconomic disadvantages and integration problems (Holmes, Murphy, & Mayhew, 2019; Filmer-Sankey & McCrone, 2012). Increasing migration movements on a global scale also increase the importance of policies regarding the education of immigrants and their transition to employment. In other words, the responsibility of education systems is growing for the rising number of immigrants to receive a qualified education and to find a place on the labor market.

When global policies applied to the education of immigrants and their transition to the labor market are examined, it is seen that VET comes to the fore (Joen, 2019). As practical skills and language skills are less decisive in learning, VET provides substantial opportunities for immigrant students (Joen, 2019; Özer, Suna, & Numanoğlu, 2021). On the other hand, recognition of the vocational skills that immigrant students are likely to have is among the advantages of VET. Especially in continental European countries, many projects are implemented to promote the transition to vocational training for immigrants (Joen, 2019).

Türkiye has become one of the countries hosting the highest number of immigrants in the 11 years after the Syrian civil war that started in 2011. As of 2022, it hosts 3.6 million Syrian refugees, of which approximately 1 million are of school age. In addition to the PICTES program, which has been implemented for many years for the education of immigrants, MoNE has been using VET more effectively since 2020. The SEUP project, which encourages the transition of immigrants to upper-secondary VET, and especially the IMEP projects, which support the transition to apprenticeship education, have started to be implemented. In the last two years, 68 thousand students participated in the SEUP project and more than 9 thousand students participated in the IMEP project (Özer, 2022b).

Overview

The decisions made by young people after completing their mandatory education have a significant impact on the future of their nations. As a result of studies intensified in the 1990s, the orientation of young people towards education and employment is seen as a way to grow their individual earnings and increase their social integration. Furthermore, countries are also focusing on creating opportunities for young people who do not pursue education or employment (NEET) due to personal or environmental reasons, and providing them with options to choose from based on their preferences.The reason why countries place such great importance on the NEET population is the rapid decline in employment opportunities for young people who have been out of education or employment for an extended period. Rapidly transforming technology makes the labor market more demanding, and competition among individuals increases in most economies. As a result of the universalization of education, young people become more selective in terms of employment and may experience the negative effects of being in the NEET group for a long time. Furthermore, the fact that these young people are more likely to experience physical and psychological problems and even social exclusion contributes to the development of policies for these young people.

Despite a notable decrease from the 40% NEET rates of the early 2000s, Türkiye still has one of the highest NEET rates among both EU and OECD countries, with the 15-29 age group currently hovering around 30%. It is also worth to noting that Türkiye has one of the highest youth ratios among EU and OECD countries. The modeling studies have demonstrated that even after 60 years, Türkiye will remain one of the youngest societies, emphasizing the importance of the education and employment policies for the country's young population in yielding long-term benefits.

The cultural norms in Türkiye may also play a role in the current NEET rates, as a significant proportion of the NEET group is in a "passive" position, and there is a large difference between male and female NEET rates. Thus, it is likely that some individuals in the NEET group did not voluntarily choose to pursue education or employment. Nevertheless, it is critical to create the necessary opportunities for young people who want to pursue education or employment within the NEET group. After the Covid-19, additional difficulties have arisen, especially in the transition of young people to employment.

In recent years, MoNE has been following policies that enable the education system to establish stronger relations with the labor market while supporting the skills of students. Strengthening apprenticeship training, implementing vocational training center skill development programs that young adults and enriching lifelong learning activities are concrete examples of employment-oriented skills training programs for the NEET group. In this context, MoNE has started to implement support programs similar to the vocational skills programs for youth and adults (Özer & Suna, 2022) offered in Greece, Norway, Romania, England and Sweden.

As emphasized by international institutions, raising social awareness is as significant as developing these programs. Through the work of provincial and district organizations, effective use of social media and digital platforms was ensured by MoNE to promote the aforementioned programs to target groups. These steps serve the same purpose as the teams and offices used in France and Slovenia to reach NEET groups. Similar to the use of different digital platforms and areas in Portugal, young adults are reached through MoNE's online accounts and "My Profession is My Life" platforms.

Research suggests that effective results can be achieved through steps taken in the education process to guide young people towards education and employment, especially when monitoring mechanisms are established. In January 2023, MoNE implemented a monitoring system that made it possible to reach all out-of-school students, resulting in a significant increase in secondary education enrollment from 95% to 96% in a short period of time. The use of this system provides important opportunities to prevent early school leaving, one of the most important determinants of being included in the NEET group and to inform young people out of school about available opportunities.

In order to support the orientation of all students towards education or employment, MoNE increased the scope of academic support programs and implemented the free summer school program for the first time. In addition, it started to implement the "Family School" project in order to increase the education level and participation of families in education. It is essential that these steps are taken to encourage disadvantaged students who are more likely to belong to the NEET group to pursue education or employment.

A distinguishing feature of initiatives by MoNE is that they are not targeted at a single stakeholder, region or group. As demonstrated in the study by Mawn et al. (2017), NEET group orientation to education or employment can be maximized with multidimensional support. Therefore, to obtain concrete results from policies for the NEET group, programs suitable for the target group must go hand-in-hand with informing and monitoring the group. The number of participants in the study also indicates that the NEET age group is informed about the programs in question and has a high demand. The continuation of these policies with the support of stakeholders from the public and private sectors has the potential to contribute significantly to the gradual alleviating of NEET rates.

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