



EUROPEAN SOCIAL POLICY NETWORK (ESPN)

Social protection and inclusion policy responses to the COVID-19 crisis

Turkey

Fikret Adaman, Dilek Aslan, Burçay Erus, Serdar Sayan



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion
Directorate D — Social Rights and Inclusion
Unit D.2 — Social Protection

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B-1049 Brussels



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The European Social Policy Network (ESPN) was established in July 2014 on the initiative of the European Commission to provide high-quality and timely independent information, advice, analysis and expertise on social policy issues in the European Union and neighbouring countries.

The ESPN brings together into a single network the work that used to be carried out by the European Network of Independent Experts on Social Inclusion, the Network for the Analytical Support on the Socio-Economic Impact of Social Protection Reforms (ASISP) and the MISSOC (Mutual Information Systems on Social Protection) secretariat.

The ESPN is managed by the Luxembourg Institute of Socio-Economic Research (LISER) and APPLICA, together with the European Social Observatory (OSE).

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SUMMARY

Between Monday 3 February 2020 and Sunday 18 April 2021, the total number of confirmed COVID-19 cases per 100,000 people was 6,740 for the EU-27 as a whole; in Turkey, it was 5,490. The total number of deaths per 100,000 people was 151 for the EU-27, versus 45 in Turkey.

As to the economic impact of the COVID-19, although the economy contracted sharply in the second quarter of 2020 with a fall of 8.7% in GDP, thanks to expansionary policies and expanded and subsidised credit, a growth rate of 5.4% and 5% followed in the third and fourth quarters respectively. Due to the ban on laying off employees and the fall in labour force participation, the unemployment rate stayed relatively constant.

Turkey adopted temporary lockdown measures, often excluding those in the workforce. Restrictions on the mobility of those who are 65 or older and those who are 20 or younger were in place from March 2020 to June 2020 and from November 2020 onwards. Similarly, lockdowns during weekends and national holidays were in place in March-May 2020 and from November 2020 onwards. These restrictions put a heavy burden on businesses and employment, especially in service sectors.

To deal with the social and economic costs of the lockdown measures, the most important policy to support employment has been the short-time work allowance (covering 3.2 million individuals at its peak) and cash support to those on unpaid leave (covering more than 1 million individuals at its peak). Other than these, additional social assistance payments have been limited to a one-time payment of 1,000 TRY (€124) to 6.3 million households. These three policies had a cost of 50.1 billion TRY (€6.22 billion) in the period April 2020 to March 2021.

There have been no policy measures regarding unemployment and sickness benefits, and only very small-scale local policies regarding housing. Healthcare access was granted to those indebted for earlier premiums, and for those on unpaid leave the government took over the premiums. Leave for parents was granted to women in the public sector with children younger than 10.

Most of the policy measures were new but are not expected to have a lasting effect on the social protection system.

A number of policies indirectly supported employment by providing cheap credit to businesses and delaying or cancelling dues and taxes.

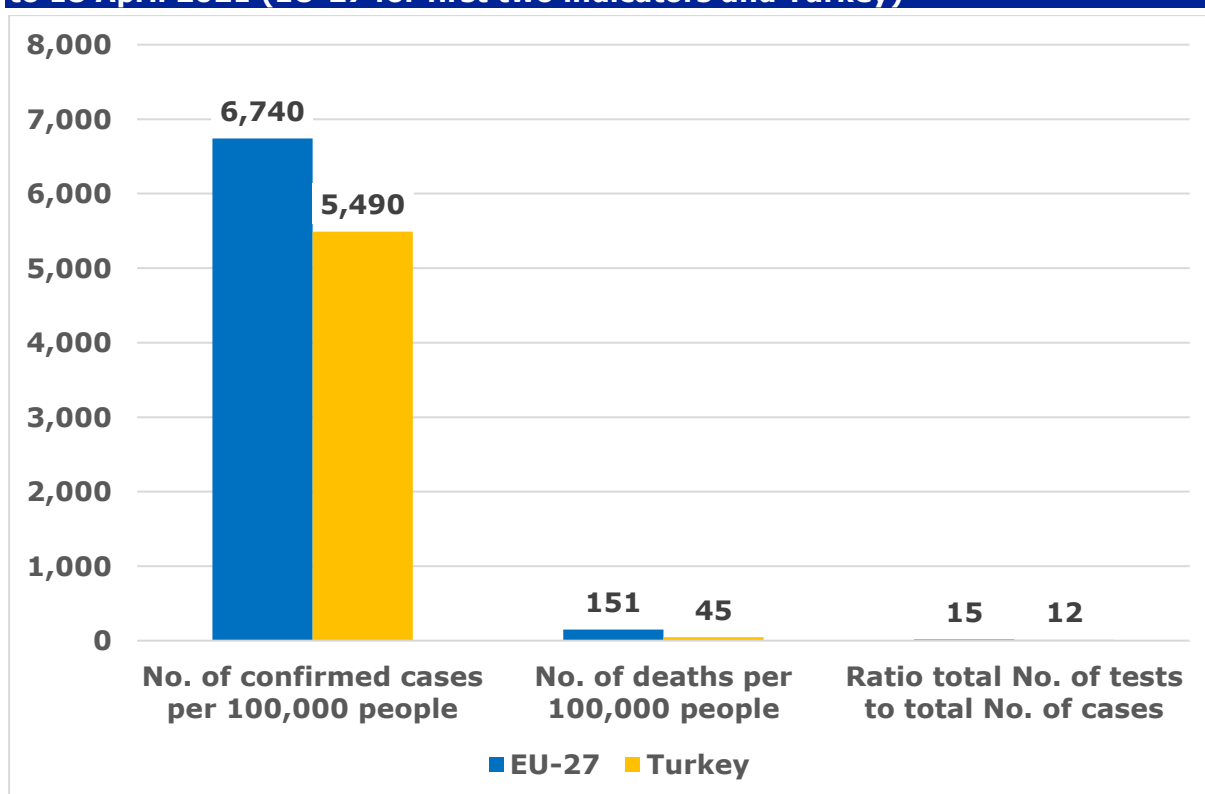
Policies failed to cover unregistered employees as well as refugees and non-Turkish people under protection. Policies restricting mobility (of older people in particular) are another serious issue with potential problems in the future.

1 TRENDS OF THE PANDEMIC AND SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACT¹

1.1 Epidemiological situation

During the 63 weeks considered for these three indicators (from Monday 3 February 2020 to Sunday 18 April 2021), the total number of confirmed COVID-19 cases per 100,000 people was 6,740 for the EU-27 as a whole; in Turkey, it was 5,490. The total number of deaths per 100,000 people was 151 for the EU-27 versus 45 in Turkey. The ratio of the total number of COVID-19 tests conducted to the total number of confirmed cases was 15.3 for the EU-27 and 12.0 for Turkey.

Figure 1: Total numbers of COVID-19 cases and deaths for 100,000 people & ratio of total number of COVID-19 tests to total number of cases from 3 February 2020 to 18 April 2021 (EU-27 for first two indicators and Turkey)

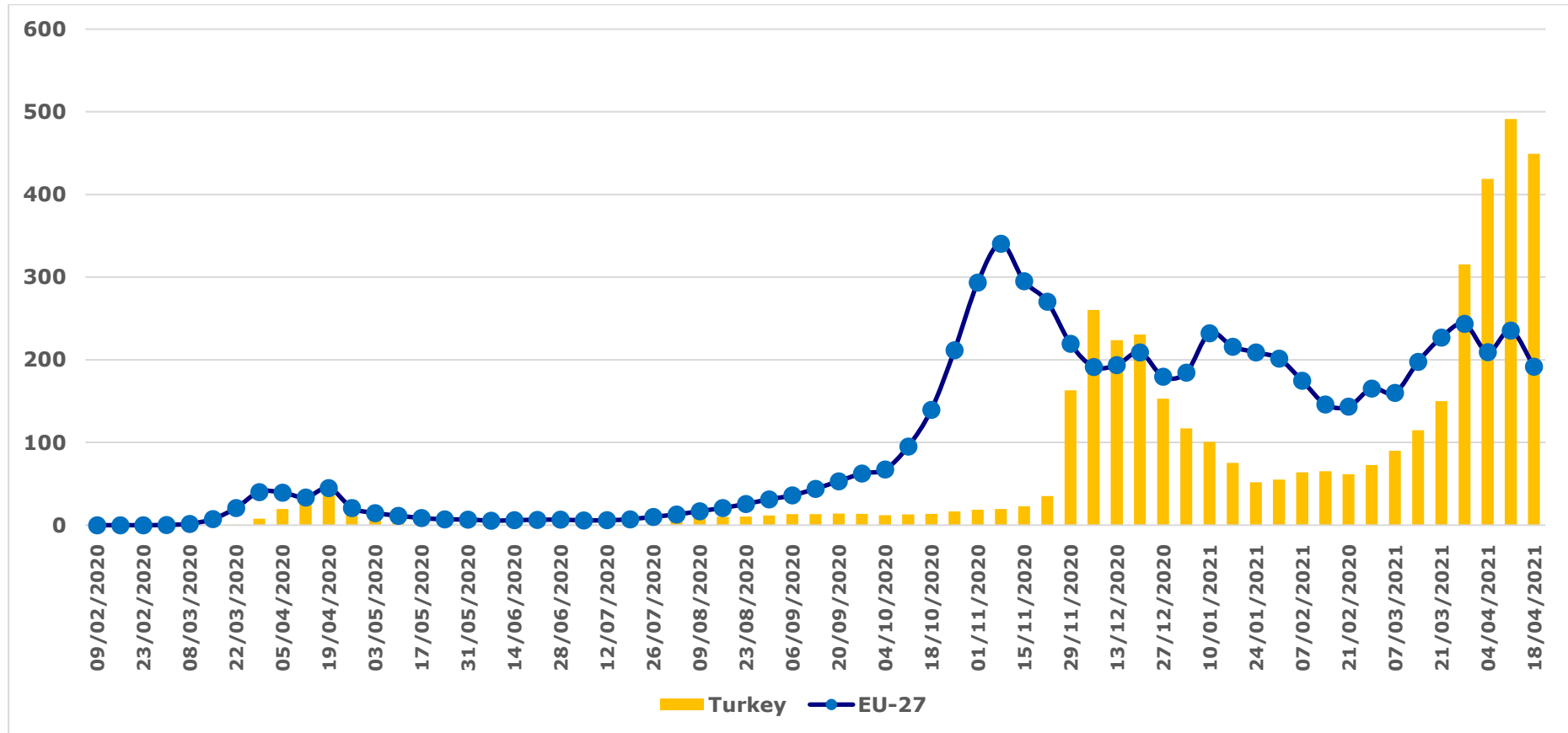


Source: Our World in Data (OWID) online database on COVID-19 - downloaded 26 April 2021.

¹Except if otherwise specified, the indicators presented in Sections 1.1 and 1.2 were calculated by the ESPN Network Core Team on the basis of data coming from two data sources: Our World in Data (OWID: <https://ourworldindata.org/coronavirus-source-data>) and the statistical office of the European Union (Eurostat: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat>). These indicators were calculated for all the 35 ESPN countries for which data were available. All of them are presented in Annex B of the following report: Isabel Baptista, Eric Marlier, Slavina Spasova, Ramón Peña-Casas, Boris Fronteddu, Dalila Ghailani, Sebastiano Sabato and Pietro Regazzoni (2021), *Social protection and inclusion policy responses to the COVID-19 crisis. An analysis of policies in 35 countries*, European Social Policy Network (ESPN), Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. This report also provides additional explanations on the data sources used and the calculation of the indicators. In addition, Annex B of the report provides the country results related to all ESPN countries included in the two international data sources used (see Tables B1.1, B2.1 and B3.1 for Figure 1, Table B1.2 for Figure 2, Table B2.2 for Figure 3, Table B3.2 for Figure 4, Tables B4.1, B4.2 and B4.3 for Figure 5, Table B5 for Figure 6, Tables B6.1-3 for Figures 7a-c, and Tables B7.1-3 for Figures 8a-c). The full report and its various annexes can be downloaded [here](#).

In the last week of observations (from Monday 12 April 2021 to Sunday 18 April 2021), the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases per 100,000 people reached 191.8 for the EU-27. In Turkey, it was 449.1.

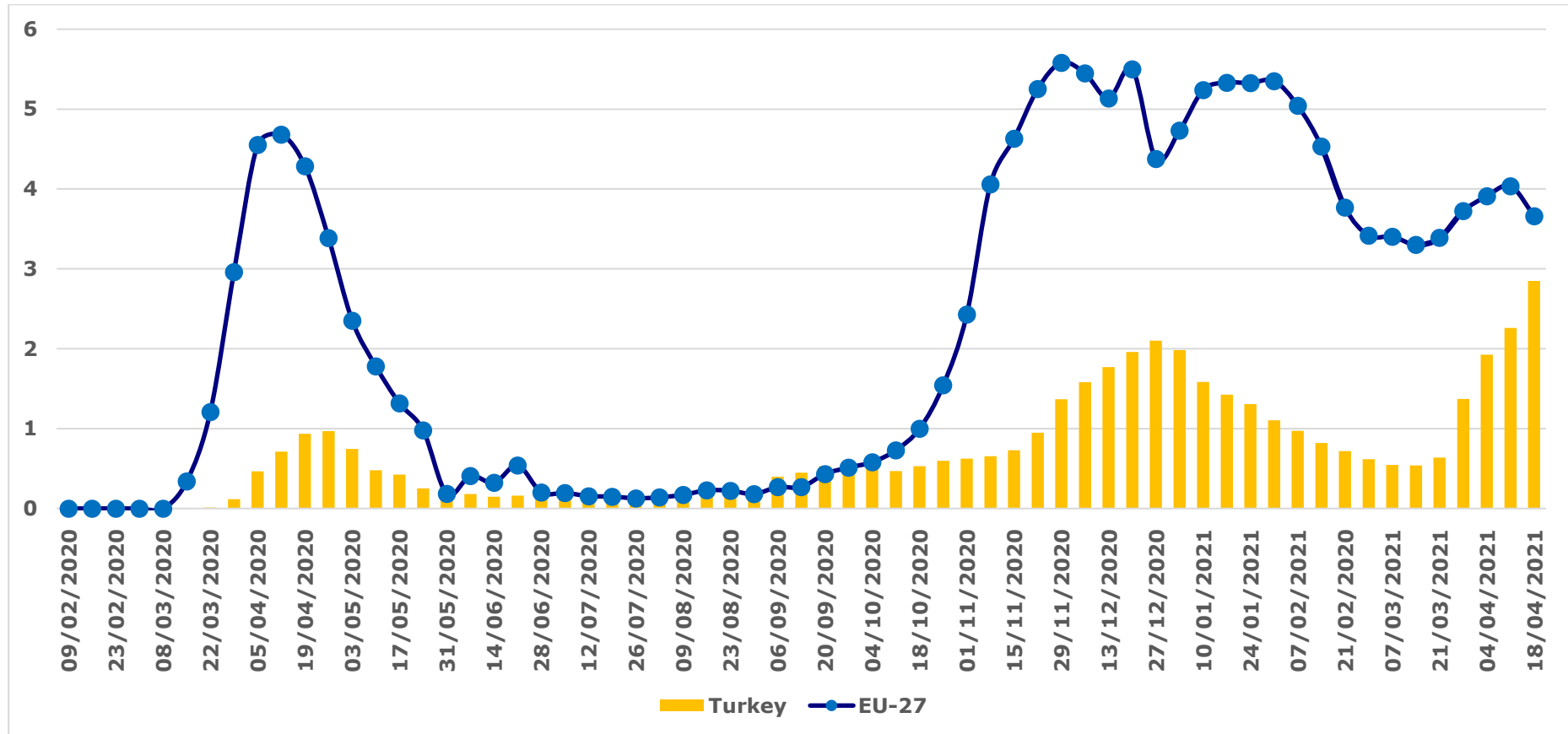
Figure 2: Weekly evolution - Number of confirmed COVID-19 cases for 100,000 people from 3 February 2020 to 18 April 2021 (EU-27 and Turkey)



Source: Our World in Data (OWID) online database on COVID-19 - downloaded 26 April 2021.

In the last week of observations (from Monday 12 April 2021 to Sunday 18 April 2021), the number of COVID-19 deaths per 100,000 people reached 3.66 for the EU-27 as a whole. In Turkey, it was 2.85.

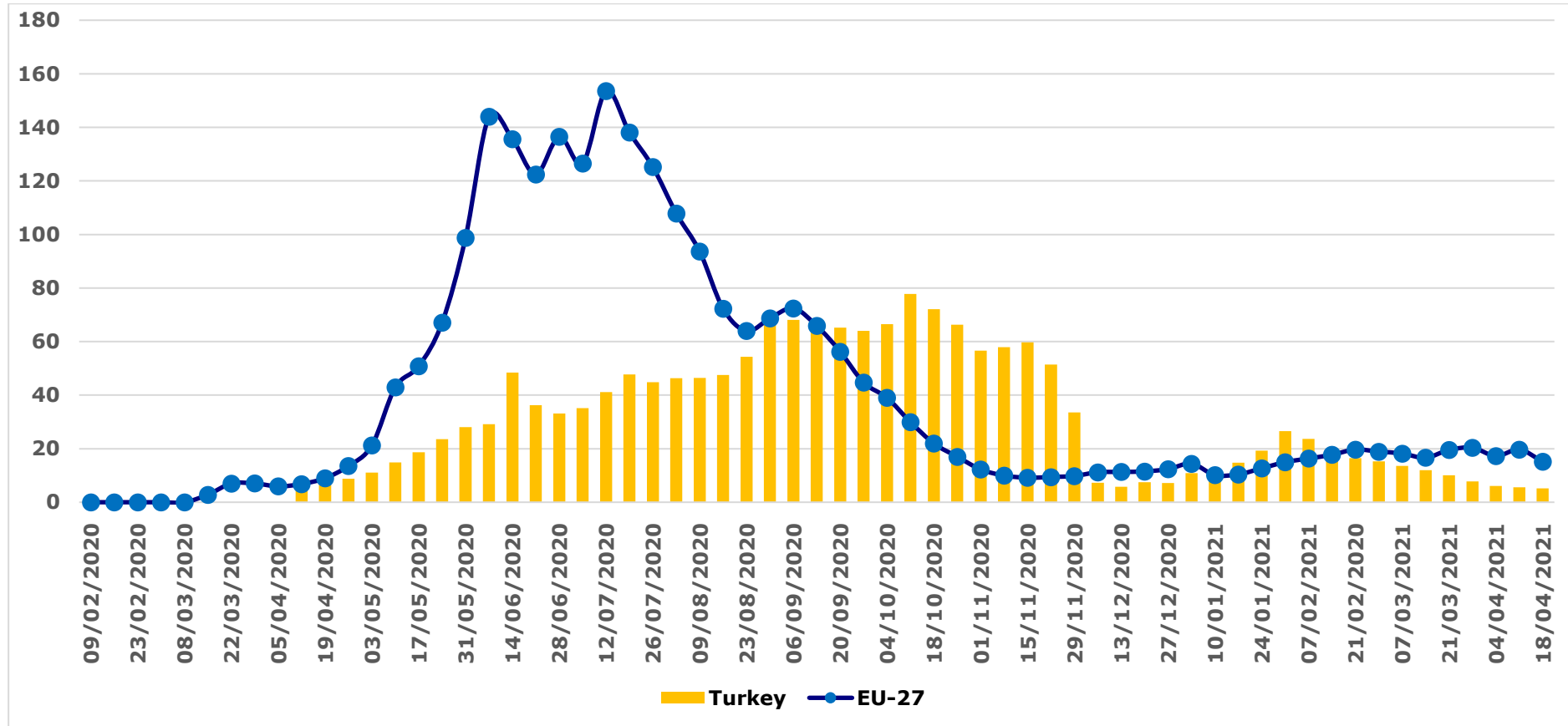
Figure 3: Weekly evolution - Number of COVID-19 deaths for 100,000 people from 3 February 2020 to 18 April 2021 (EU-27 and Turkey)



Source: Our World in Data (OWID) online database on COVID-19 - downloaded 26 April 2021.

In the last week of observations (from Monday 12 April 2021 to Sunday 18 April 2021), the number of COVID-19 tests per new confirmed COVID-19 cases was 15.2 for the EU-27. In Turkey, it was 5.2.

Figure 4: Weekly evolution - Number of COVID-19 tests per new confirmed COVID-19 case from 3 February 2020 to 18 April 2021 (EU-27 and Turkey)

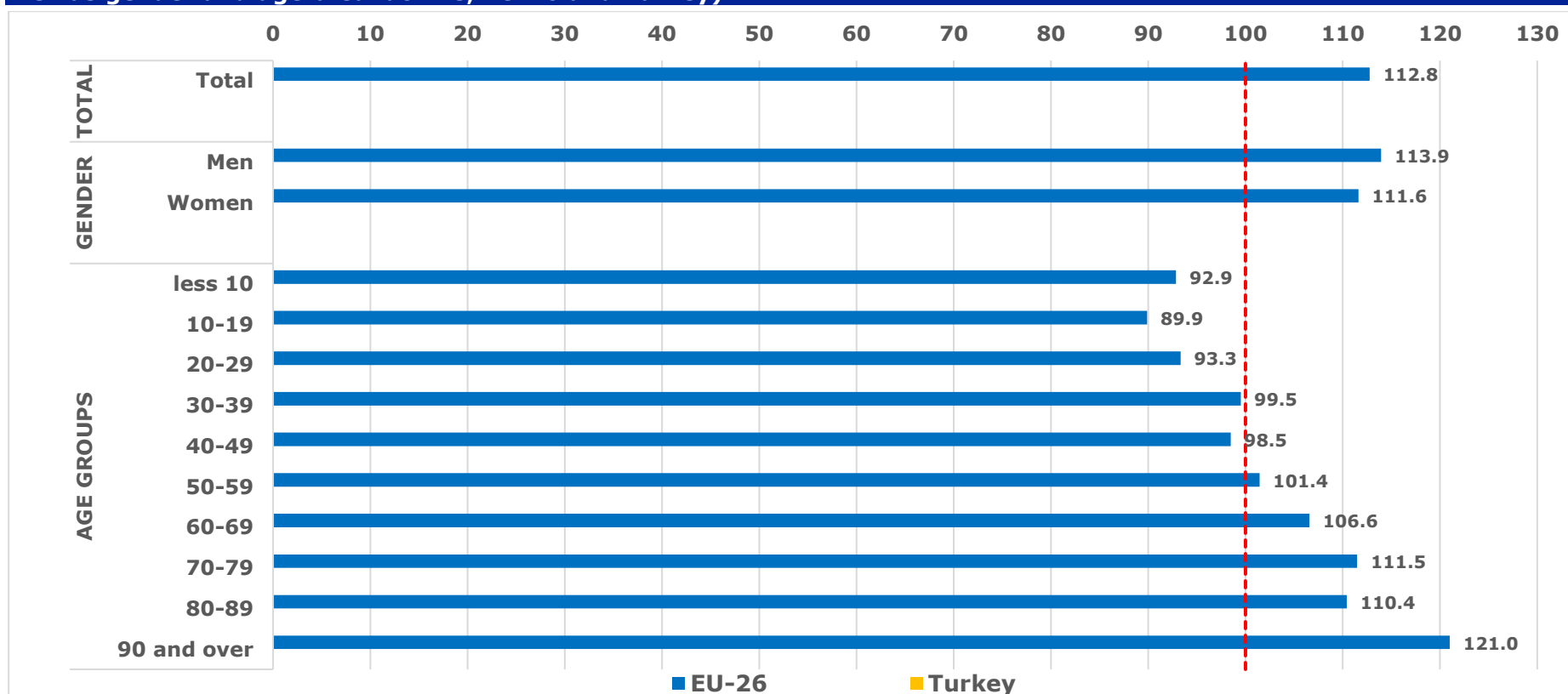


Source: Our World in Data (OWID) online database on COVID-19 - downloaded 26 April 2021. Full quote for these testing data: Hasell, J., Mathieu, E., Beltekian, D. et al. (2020). "A cross-country database of COVID-19 testing". *Sci Data* 7, 345 (2020) (<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41597-020-00688-8>).

1.2 Economic and (un)employment situation

The excess mortality ratio for 2020 is the total number of deaths (without distinction of causes) in the year 2020 expressed as a percentage of the previous 4-year (2016-2019) annual average of the total number of deaths. For the EU-26 average (no data for Ireland), the ratio of the total population is 112.8% while it is not available in Turkey. For the EU-26, it is 113.9% for men and 111.6% for women. In Turkey, these gendered ratios are not available. Excess mortality is higher among older age groups. For those aged 90 years and more it reaches 121.0% for EU-26 and it is not available for Turkey.

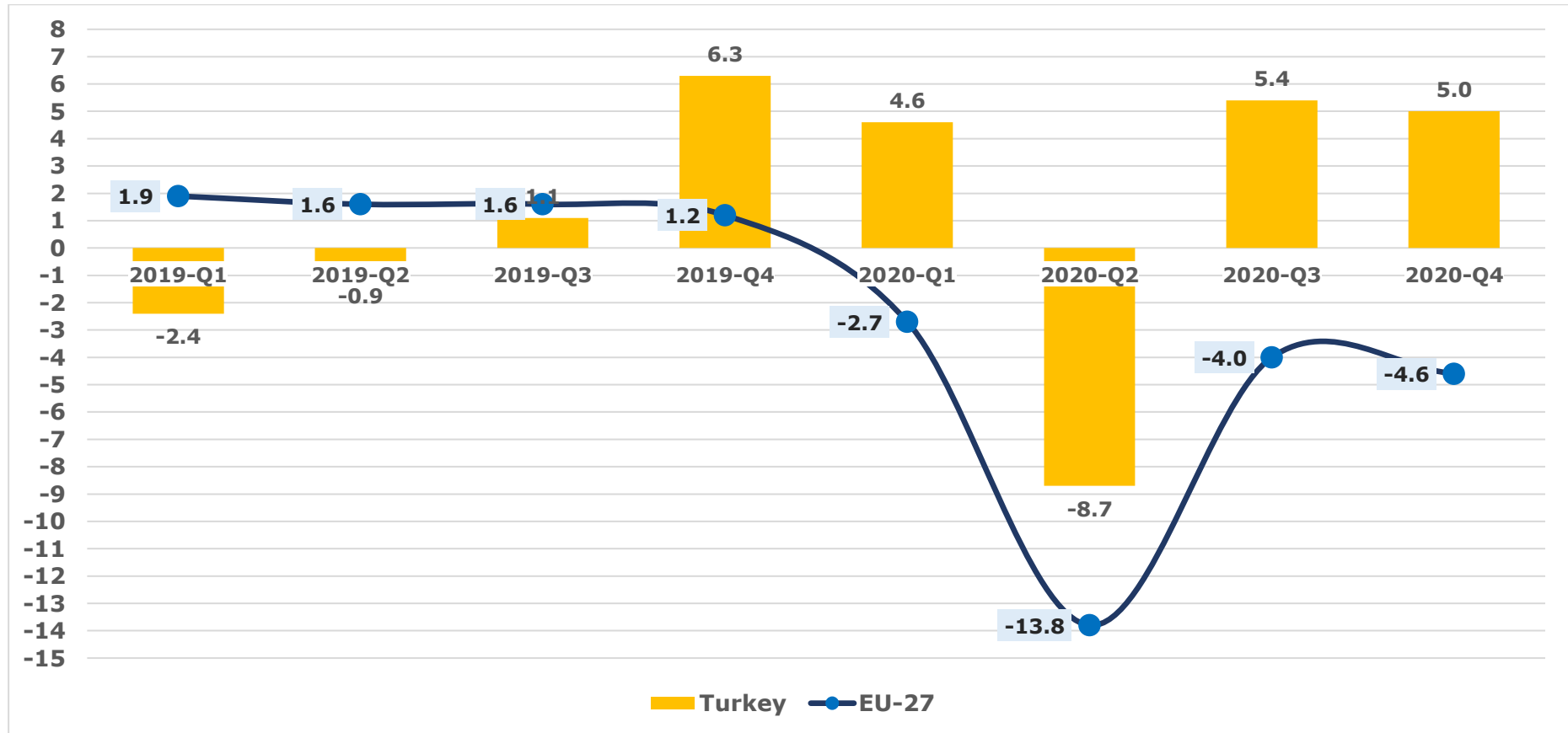
Figure 5: Excess mortality - Total number of all deaths in 2020 as a percentage of the 2016-2019 annual average (total as well as gender and age breakdowns, EU-26 and Turkey)



Source: Eurostat - indicator [DEMO_R_MWK_10__custom_560457] Deaths by week, sex and 10-year age groups - downloaded 26 April 2021. For Bosnia and Herzegovina: Agency for statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina (data received upon request on 19 April 2021).

In the EU-27, GDP in the fourth quarter (2020-Q4) of 2020 fell by 4.6% compared to the fourth quarter of 2019 (2019-Q4). In Turkey, there was an increase of 5.0% for the same period.

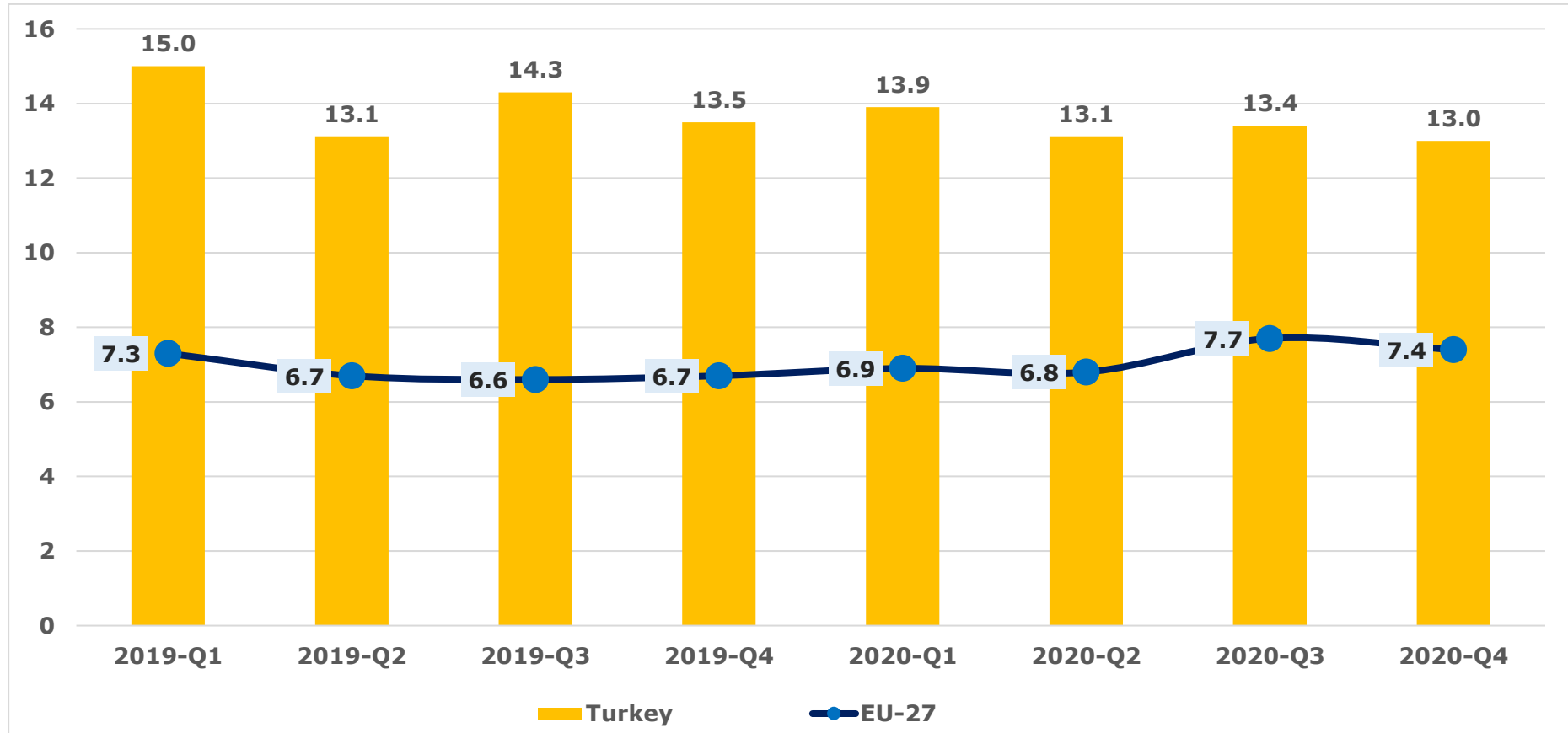
Figure 6: Gross Domestic Product at market prices, Chain-linked volumes prices adjusted, Percentage changes in quarter compared to same quarter in previous year (2019-2020, EU-27 and Turkey, %)



Source: Eurostat -GDP and main components (output, expenditure and income) - indicator [NAMQ_10_GDP__custom_507806] - downloaded 26 April 2021.

In the fourth quarter of 2020 (2020-Q4), the unemployment rate in the EU-27 for people aged 15-64 years is 7.4%. In Turkey, it is 13.0%.

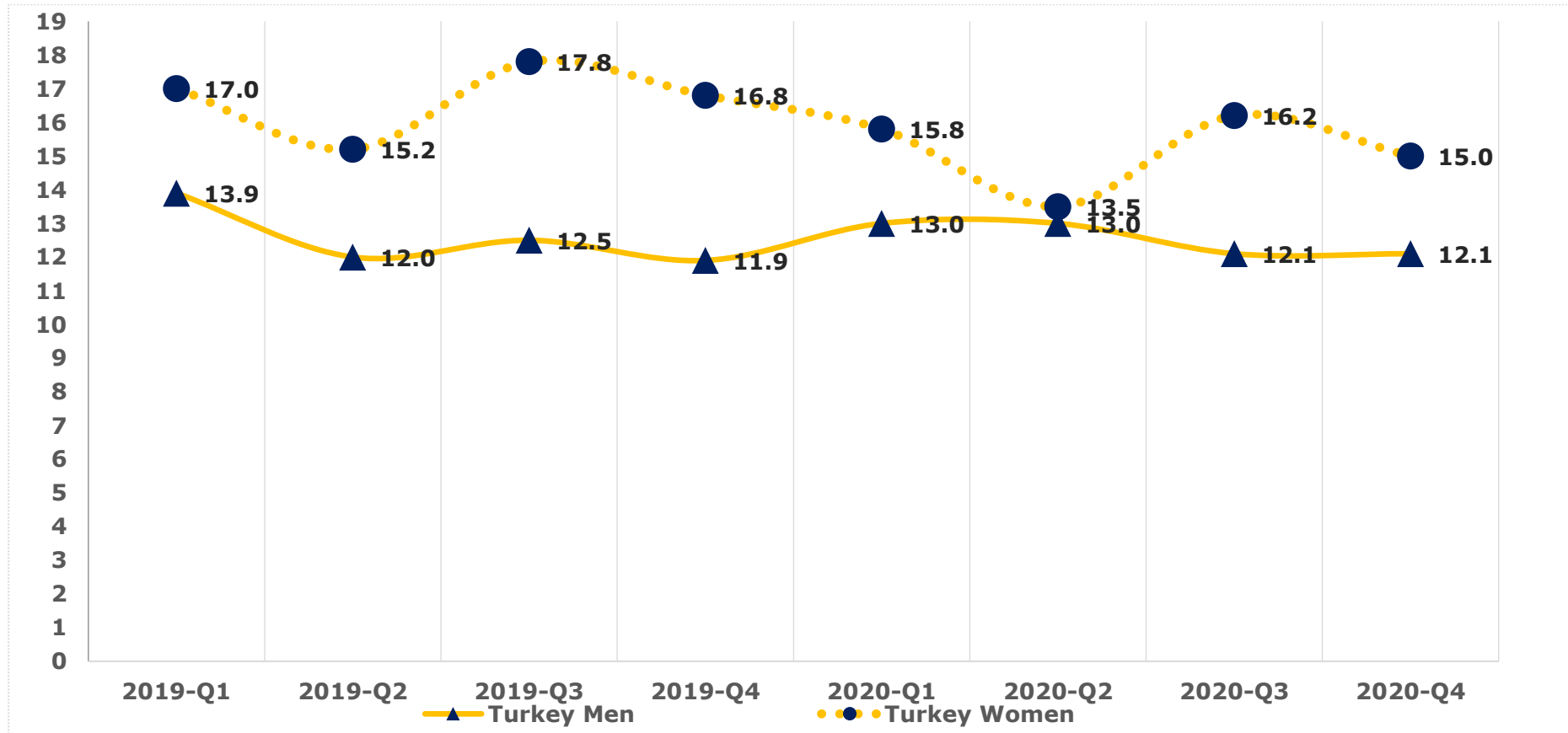
Figure 7a: Seasonally-adjusted unemployment rate, quarterly data, total population aged 15-64 (2019-2020, EU-27 and Turkey, %)



Note: Laying off employees is not allowed in Turkey since March 2020.
 Source: Eurostat LFS - indicator [lfsq_urgan] - downloaded 26 April 2021.

In the fourth quarter of 2020 (2020-Q4), the unemployment rate in the EU-27 for people aged 15-64 years is 7.1% for men and 7.7% for women. In Turkey, these figures are 12.1% and 15.0% respectively.

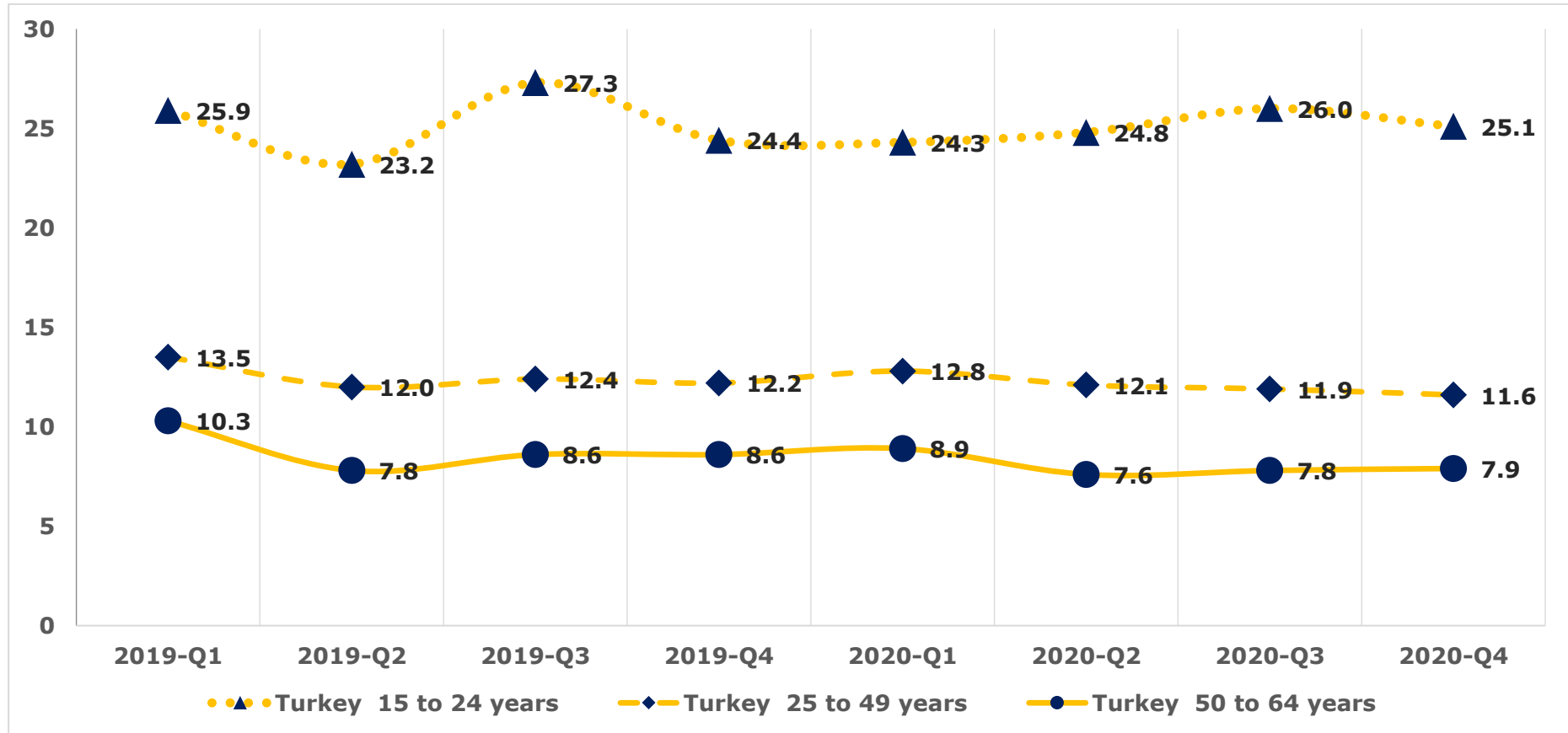
Figure 7b: Seasonally-adjusted unemployment rate, quarterly data, total population aged 15-64 – by gender (2019-2020, Turkey, %)



Note: Laying off employees is not allowed in Turkey since March 2020.
 Source: Eurostat LFS - indicator [lfsq_urgan] - downloaded 26 April 2021.

In the fourth quarter of 2020 (2020-Q4), the unemployment rate in the EU-27 is 16.9% for the 15-24 age group. In Turkey, it is 25.1%.

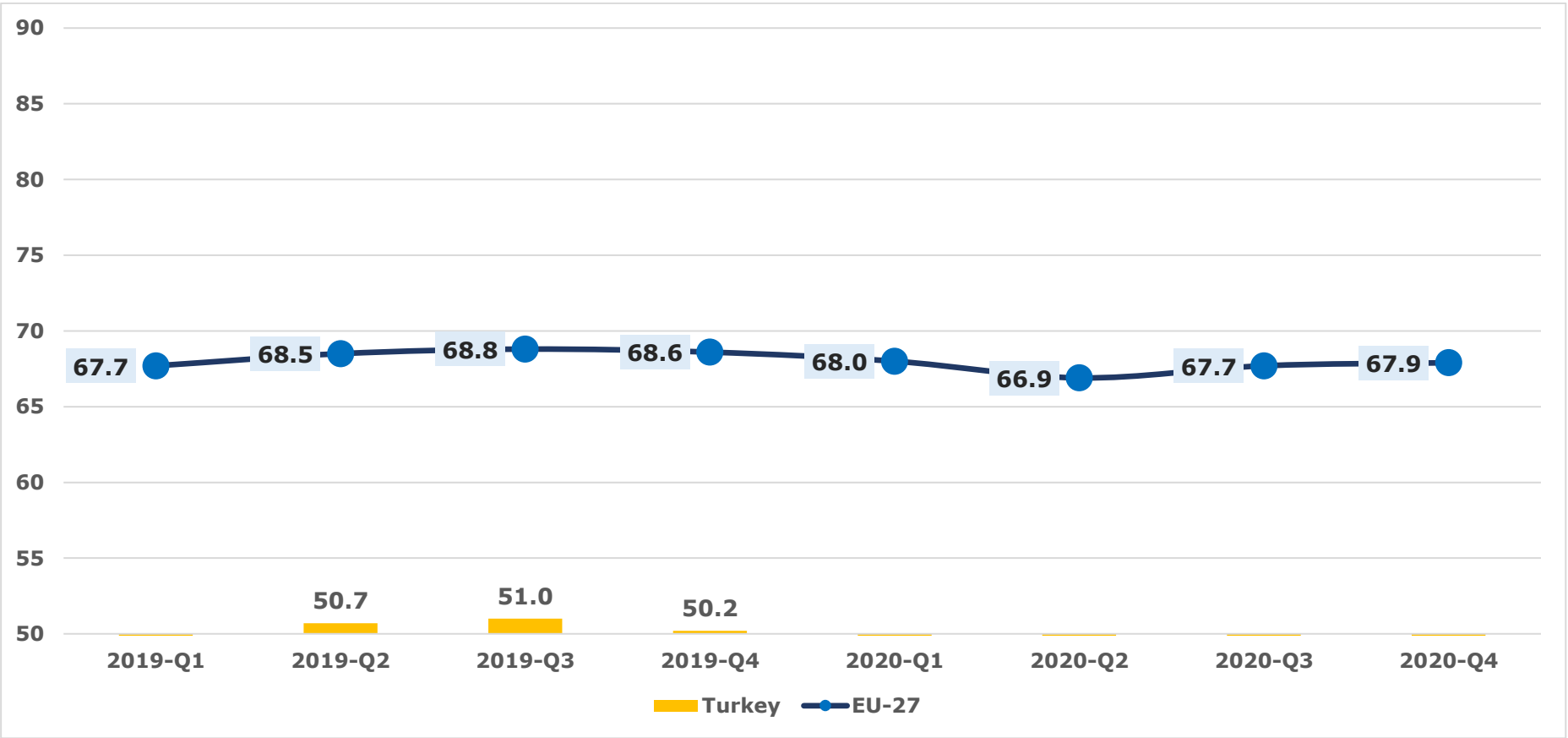
Figure 7c: Seasonally-adjusted employment rate, quarterly data, total population aged 15-64 – by age group (2019-2020, Turkey, %)



Note: Laying off employees is not allowed in Turkey since March 2020.
 Source: Eurostat LFS - indicator [lfsq_urgan] - downloaded 26 April 2021.

In the fourth quarter of 2020 (2020-Q4), the employment rate for people aged 15-64 in the EU-27 is 67.9%. In Turkey, it is 47.7%.

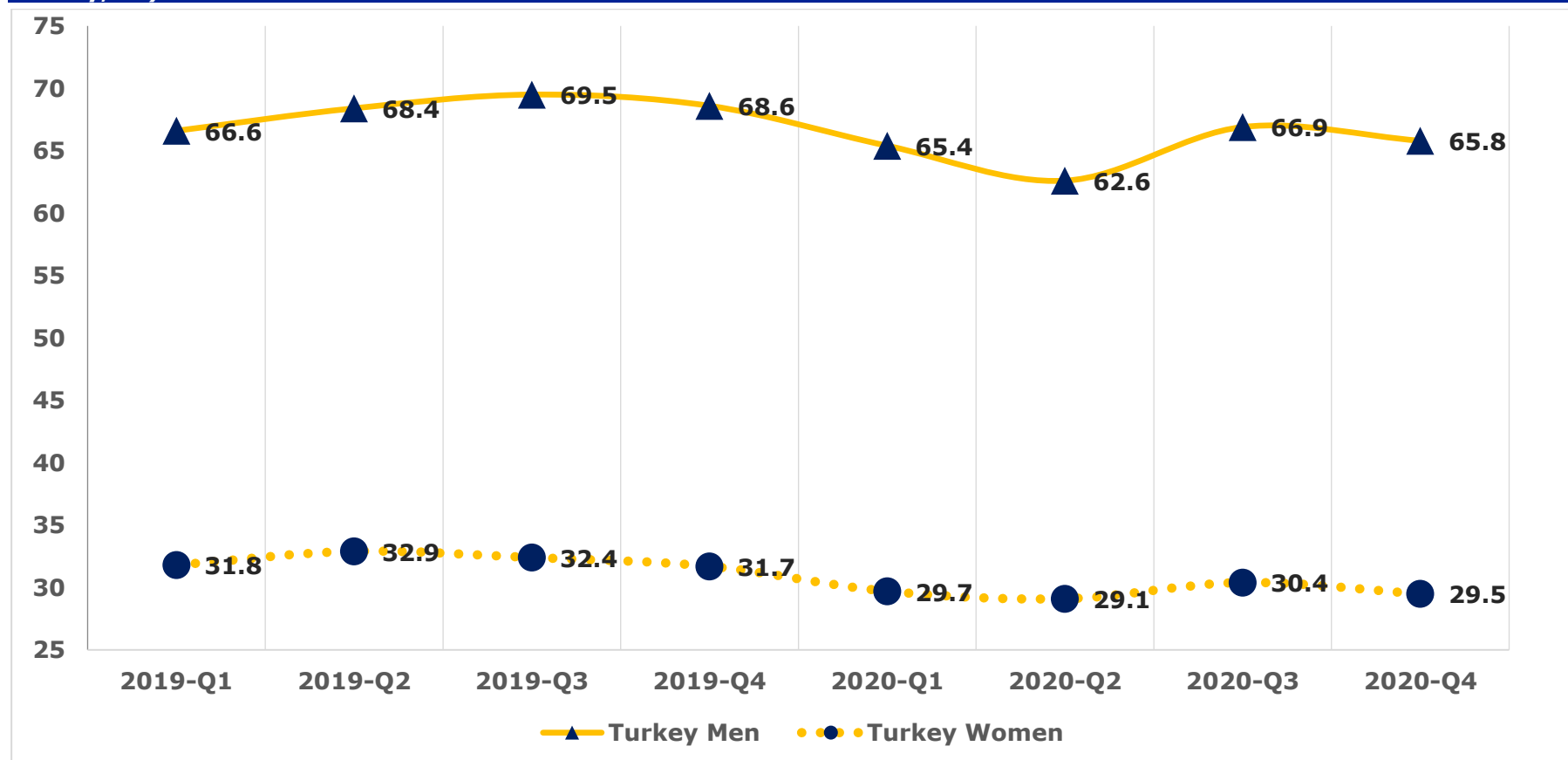
Figure 8a: Seasonally-adjusted employment rate, quarterly data, total population aged 15-64 (2019-2020, EU-27 and Turkey, %)



Note: Laying off employees is not allowed in Turkey since March 2020.
Source: Eurostat LFS - indicator [lfsq_ergan] - downloaded 26 April 2021.

In the fourth quarter of 2020 (2020-Q4), the employment rate in the EU-27 is 73.0% for men and 62.8% for women. In Turkey, these figures are 65.8% and 29.5% respectively.

Figure 8b: Seasonally-adjusted employment rate, quarterly data, total population aged 15-64 – by gender (2019-2020, Turkey, %)

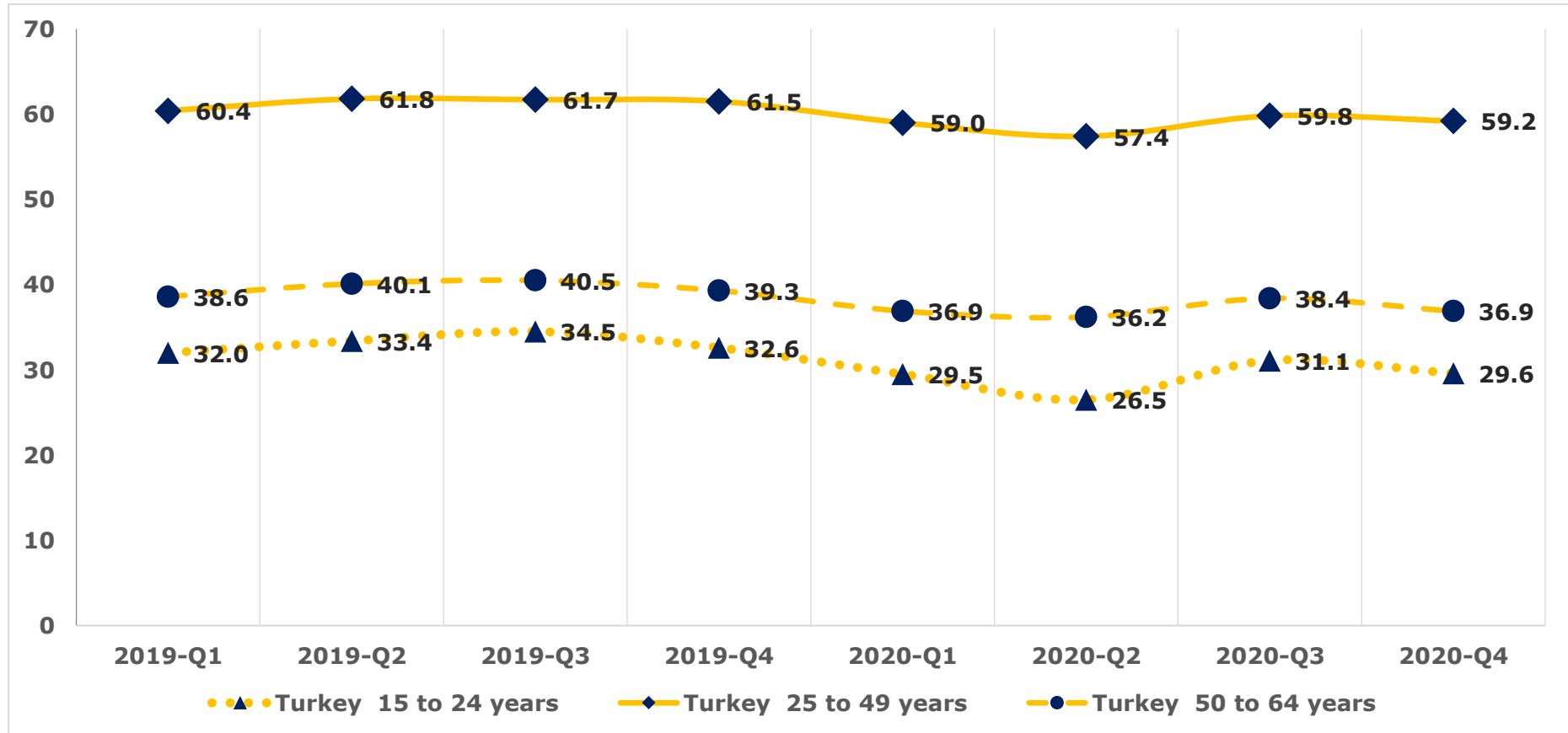


Note: Laying off employees is not allowed in Turkey since March 2020.

Source: Eurostat LFS - indicator [lfsq_ergan] - downloaded 26 April 2021.

In the fourth quarter of 2020 (2020-Q4), the employment rate in the EU-27 is 31.1% for the 15-24 age group. In Turkey, it is 29.6%.

Figure 8c: Seasonally-adjusted employment rate, quarterly data, total population aged 15-64 – by age group (2019-2020, Turkey, %)



Note: Laying off employees is not allowed in Turkey since March 2020.
 Source: Eurostat LFS - indicator [lfsq_ergan] - downloaded 26 April 2021.

1.3 Poverty, inequality and social exclusion situation

Baez and Demirgüç-Kunt (2021), from the World Bank, suggest that, based on their assessment of micro-data on job losses and household consumption to gauge the impact of the pandemic, the crisis may create 1.6 million new poor. They base their claim on the fact that significant variability exists in the effects of the pandemic on the different segments of the population: more precisely, the bulk of the job cuts has been experienced by informal workers, the lower-skilled, and women. Given female workers' high concentration in activities that are highly affected by the lockdown measures, such as hospitality, food and tourism, the authors conclude that female workers have been three times more likely to become unemployed than their male counterparts during the pandemic.

Statements by some NGOs working on social issues corroborate this finding, that the share of those who are having serious difficulties in providing their basic needs has gone up drastically.²

² <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/01/turkey-pandemic-pandemic-expands-poverty-high-inflation.html>

2 SOCIAL PROTECTION AND INCLUSION MEASURES IN RESPONSE TO THE PANDEMIC³

This section provides a brief description of the main measures related to social protection and social inclusion that have been put in place to help mitigate the financial and social distress produced by the economic downturn caused by the pandemic. It is based on readily available data and evidence. For each measure, it provides the following information.

- a) Short description of the measure.
- b) Category: Is it a flat benefit, a conditional benefit, both a flat and a conditional benefit, or neither a flat nor a conditional benefit?
- c) Timing: When did the measure start/end? Has it been extended?
- d) Depending on the category:
 - amount and duration (for flat measures); and
 - range (minimum-maximum), duration and conditionality (thresholds) (for conditional measures).

If the measure is neither flat nor conditional, this is "Not applicable".
- e) Targeted population: what is/are the target(s)? – that is to say, which parts of the population or of the labour force. Where data and evidence are readily available, estimated number of people targeted and/or applicants.
- f) Beneficiaries: What is the number of recipients of the measure (if relevant and available)?
- g) Novelty: Was the measure new or an already existing one that was adjusted?

2.1 Measures related to unemployment benefits

No measures related to unemployment benefits.

2.2 Measures of job protection provided through support to employers, employees and the self-employed

2.2.1 *İşten çıkarma yasağı* (Ban on lay-offs)

- a) Short description of the measure: Firms cannot terminate work contracts unless the employee is at fault. They can, however, put employees on unpaid leave.
- b) Category: Neither flat nor conditional benefit.
- c) Timing: Started in 17 April 2020, and the policy has most recently been extended to 30 June 2021.
- d) Targeted population: Employees of businesses affected by the pandemic. Employees contracted on an informal basis (highly prevalent in Turkey) are unable to benefit from this policy.
- e) Beneficiaries: Not available.
- f) Novelty: New policy.

³ The temporary measures mentioned in this report refer to the situation as of 15 April 2021. Their duration may have been extended since then.

2.2.2 Kısa çalışma ödeneği (Short-time working allowance)

- a) Short description of the measure: The short-time working allowance scheme compensates employees for lost earnings when their workplace is forced to reduce the workforce (or cut weekly working time) by at least one-third or to suspend production for at least four weeks due to an economic, regional or sectoral crisis.
- b) Category: Conditional benefit.
- c) Timing: The policy was first put in place on 15 March 2020. It was terminated on 31 March 2021, but then restarted on 21 April 2021 for the months of April, May and June 2021. Initially applications were taken up until 30 June 2020, to help out those firms affected by the first round of government-ordered shutdowns. Then came the second round of shutdowns in late November 2020, and new applications were accepted again for the period of 1-31 December 2020.
- d) Range, duration and conditionality: If an application is approved, the Turkish Employment Agency (İŞKUR) will pay workers 60% of their monthly gross pay, up to a maximum of 1.5 times the gross minimum wage for up to three months. To qualify, social security premiums should have been paid for at least 450 days over the previous three years, and the employment contract should have been in place for at least 60 days preceding the application. In return, the employer is required to maintain employment at the same level.
- e) Targeted population: The policy targets full-time and part-time employees of the firms affected by the pandemic. Due to the ban on lay-offs, firms cannot terminate the work contracts of its employees. Employees contracted on an informal basis (highly prevalent in Turkey) are unable to benefit from this policy.
- f) Beneficiaries: The number has varied over time. 1.14 million people (6% of all employees) as of March 2021 (3.2 million people in April and May 2020, 17% of all employees) (İŞKUR, 2021).
- g) Novelty: In place since 2003. An employer facing difficulties in keeping up with wage payments or keeping the workplace open during a crisis may apply on behalf of employees to get part of their wages paid by İŞKUR. Due to the pandemic, the government reduced the minimum number of days for which the social security premiums of employees had to have been paid and expedited the processing of applications, relying solely on employer declarations and without requiring official inspections, which can normally take up to two months.

2.2.3 Nakdi ücret desteği (Ücretsiz izin) (Daily cash support [unpaid leave])

- a) Short description of the measure: Monthly payment to employees who are on unpaid leave.
- b) Category: Flat benefit.
- c) Timing: The policy was implemented retrospectively starting from March 2020 and is still in place. It has been extended until 30 June 2021.
- d) Amount and duration: 39 TRY (€4.80) per day in 2020 and 47 TRY (€5.80) per day in 2021 during unpaid leave.
- e) Targeted population: Employees not covered by the short-time working allowance, who nominally remain in employment (because of the ban on lay-offs) but who are put on unpaid leave. They receive cash support payments from the state equal to 50% of the legal minimum wage.
- f) Beneficiaries: 2.54 million people during the period of April 2020-March 2021 (13.4% of all employees: İŞKUR, 2021).

- g) Novelty: It is a new policy. However, these payments will be counted as part of the unemployment insurance benefit and will be taken into account in future benefits. To provide coverage for unregistered workers, a law eliminated the penalties for reporting previous informal employment. Hence, if an employer rehires on a registered basis an employee who was previously employed but unregistered, that employee will benefit from daily cash support if they are put on unpaid leave upon approval by the Social Security Institution.

2.3 Measures related to sickness benefits and sick pay

No measures related to sickness benefits and sick pay.

2.4 Measures related to health insurance

2.4.1 *Nakdi ücret desteği alanların ve yakınlarının sağlık sigorta primlerinin işsizlik sigortasından ödenmesi (Public health insurance premiums for those on unpaid leave)*

- a) Short description of the measure: The government will pay public health insurance premiums for those who are on unpaid leave and their dependants.
- b) Category: Flat benefit.
- c) Timing: The policy was implemented retrospectively starting from March 2020 and it has most recently been extended until 30 June 2021.
- d) Amount and duration: 88.29 TRY (€10.96) per month per person in 2020 and 107.32 TRY (€13.32) in 2021.
- e) Targeted population: Those on unpaid leave and their dependants.
- f) Beneficiaries: 2.54 million people on unpaid leave and an unknown number of dependants (İŞKUR, 2021).
- g) Novelty: New policy.

2.4.2 *Sigorta prim borcu olanlar için hastane erişimi (Access to public hospitals for those who owe public health insurance premiums)*

- a) Short description of the measure: Those who have failed to pay public health premiums will have access to public hospitals if they pay the premium for the latest month.
- b) Category: Neither flat nor conditional benefit.
- c) Timing: From August 2020 until June 2021.
- d) Targeted population: Those who are indebted for health insurance premiums. Around 4 million people.
- e) Beneficiaries: Not available.
- f) Novelty: Not a new policy. This has been in place frequently in the last five years.

2.5 Measures related to minimum-income schemes and other forms of social assistance

2.5.1 *Sosyal destek programı (Social assistance programme)*

- a) Short description of the measure: A one-time payment to those households in need, once in spring 2020 and once in spring 2021.

- b) Category: Flat benefit.
- c) Timing: April-June 2020, and May-June 2021.
- d) Amount and duration: A one-time payment of 1,000 TRY (€124) in 2020 and 1,100 TRY (€136) in 2021.
- e) Targeted population: Those on social assistance programmes and those who could demonstrate their poverty status.
- f) Beneficiaries: 6.3 million.⁴
- g) Novelty: New policy.

2.5.2 Müzisyenlere destek (Support to musicians)

- a) Short description of the measure: A one-time payment to musicians who have lost their jobs.
- b) Category: Flat benefit.
- c) Timing: December 2020.
- d) Amount and duration: 1,000 TRY (€124) per month for three months.
- e) Targeted population: Registered musicians.
- f) Beneficiaries: 24,522 people.⁵
- g) Novelty: New policy.

2.5.3 En düşük emekli aylığı 1,500 TRY'ye yükseldi (€186⁶) (Minimum monthly pension increased to 1,500 TRY – €186)

- a) Short description of the measure: The minimum retirement pension has been increased to support retirees with the lowest pensions.
- b) Category: Conditional benefit.
- c) Timing: Starting from April 2020.
- d) Range, duration and conditionality: Difference between 1,500 TRY (€186) and current pension if it is less than 1,500 TRY (€186) per month.
- e) Targeted population: Retired people whose monthly pension was below 1,500 TRY (€186).
- f) Beneficiaries: Around 650,000 people (5% of all retirees).⁷
- g) Novelty: Not a new policy. Similar policies have been implemented before.

2.5.4 Biz bize yeteriz (A donation campaign for those in need)

- a) Short description of the measure: A donation campaign organised by central government to provide financial assistance to those adversely affected by the pandemic. There have also been various campaigns run by municipalities in the form of providing necessities (mainly food) to families who found themselves in financial difficulties during the pandemic.

⁴ <https://covid19.ailevecalisma.gov.tr>

⁵ <https://tr.sputniknews.com/kultur/202101081043540360-kultur-ve-turizm-bakanligi-muzisyenlere-destek-programinin-sonuclarini-acikladi>

⁶ At the annual average rate of 8.05 TRY/€ in 2020.

⁷ <https://www.haberturk.com/650-bin-emekli-yararlanacak-haberler-2618626-ekonomi>

- b) Category: Flat benefit.
- c) Timing: April-June 2020 for Biz bize yeteriz; ongoing for municipalities.
- d) Amount and duration: One-time payment of 1,000 TRY (€124).
- e) Targeted population: Those in need.
- f) Beneficiaries: 2 million people.⁸
- g) Novelty: There have been donation campaigns in the past for the victims of natural disasters such as earthquakes, but never with beneficiaries on a national scale.

2.6 Measures related to housing support

2.6.1 100 TRY'ye (€12) kira (Rent for 100 TRY – €12)

- a) Short description of the measure: The municipality of Ankara provides social housing units for 100 TRY (€12) per month, subsidised rates.
- b) Category: Neither flat nor conditional benefit.
- c) Timing: From February 2021 onwards.
- d) Targeted population: Newly-weds and older people in need. 400 housing units for 400 couples.
- e) Beneficiaries: Not available.
- f) Novelty: New policy.

2.7 Leave for parents whose children are unable to attend school or a pre-school service by reason of COVID-19

2.7.1 10 yaş altı çocuğu olan kadın memurlara evden çalışma (Work from home for female government employees whose children are younger than 10)

- a) Short description of the measure: During the period in which primary schools are closed as a part of pandemic measures, full-time female government employees whose children are younger than 10 are given the right to work from home.
- b) Category: Neither flat nor conditional benefit.
- c) Timing: Started in April 2020, in place as long as schools are closed.
- d) Targeted population: Female government employees whose children are younger than 10.
- e) Beneficiaries: Not available.
- f) Novelty: New policy.

⁸ <https://covid19.ailevecalisma.gov.tr>

2.8 Other important temporary social protection/inclusion measures adopted in the context of the pandemic, which do not fall in any of the categories listed in the previous sections

2.8.1 Normalleşme desteği (Normalisation support)

- a) Short description of the measure: For those employees who were on short-time working allowance or unpaid leave but returned to work, social security premiums will be paid by the government.
- b) Category: Flat benefit.
- c) Timing: Started on July 2020. Last extended until 30 June 2021.
- d) Amount and duration: 1,103.60 TRY (€137) per month towards social security premiums to be paid by employer for a period of three months.
- e) Targeted population: Employees.
- f) Beneficiaries: 3.2 million people by March 2021.⁹
- g) Novelty: New policy.

2.8.2 Esnafa destek (Support to small [self-employed] business)

- a) Short description of the measure: Three-monthly payment as well as other additional support towards rents for small businesses. Most of these small businesses consist of self-employed individuals and are particularly vulnerable to the adverse conditions created by the pandemic.
- b) Category: Flat benefit.
- c) Timing: January-May 2021.
- d) Amount and duration: 1,000 TRY (€124) per month for four months and a payment for rent expenses of 750 TRY (€93) in metropolitan areas – 500 TRY (€62) elsewhere.
- e) Targeted population: Businesses affected by the pandemic.
- f) Beneficiaries: 1.3 million businesses had received cash support, and 754,000 rent support, as of 15 January 2021.¹⁰
- g) Novelty: New policy.

2.8.3 Telafi süresi 2'den 4 aya (Employment compensation period increased to four months)

- a) Short description of the measure: The employment compensation period, which is the period in which an extra workload can be asked of employees to compensate for an earlier low workload, is extended from two to four months.
- b) Category: Neither flat nor conditional benefit.
- c) Timing: From March 2020 onwards.
- d) Targeted population: Businesses affected by the pandemic.
- e) Beneficiaries: Not available.
- f) Novelty: New policy.

⁹ <https://covid19.ailevecalisma.gov.tr>

¹⁰ <https://ticaret.gov.tr/haberler/bakan-pekcan-gelir-kaybi-ve-kira-destegine-2-milyondan-fazla-esnaf-ve-sanatkar>

2.8.4 80 yaş üstüne evlere servis (Home delivery to people aged 80 and above)

- a) Short description of the measure: Home delivery of necessities (such as food and medicine), by governmental agencies as well as by some municipalities, to people aged 80 and above living alone.
- b) Category: Neither flat nor conditional benefit.
- c) Timing: From March 2020 onwards.
- d) Targeted population: Older people.
- e) Beneficiaries: Not available.
- f) Novelty: New policy.

2.8.5 Emekli maaşları eve (Retirement pensions delivered at home)

- a) Short description of the measure: Retirement pensions are delivered at home.
- b) Category: Neither flat nor conditional benefit.
- c) Timing: From March 2020 onwards.
- d) Targeted population: Retired people.
- e) Beneficiaries: Not available.
- f) Novelty: New policy.

2.8.6 65 yaş üstüne maske ve kolonya (Free delivery of masks and disinfectants to people aged 65 and above)

- a) Short description of the measure: Free delivery of masks and disinfectants (by governmental agencies as well as by some municipalities) to those aged 65 and above.
- b) Category: Neither flat nor conditional benefit.
- c) Timing: In April and May 2020.
- d) Targeted population: People aged 65 and above.
- e) Beneficiaries: Not available.
- f) Novelty: New policy.

2.8.7 Tarım arazilerinden alınacak kiralar ertelendi (Postponement of rents on public land used in the agricultural sector)

- a) Short description of the measure: Rents on public land used in agriculture are postponed for a year.
- b) Category: Neither flat nor conditional benefit.
- c) Timing: In April 2020 for a full year.
- d) Targeted population: Farmers.
- e) Beneficiaries: Not available.
- f) Novelty: New policy.

2.8.8 Düşük faizli borç (Loans with reduced interest rates/concessionary loans)

- a) Short description of the measure: The interest rates on loans to be used by consumers and producers have been reduced by public banks.

- b) Category: Neither flat nor conditional benefit.
- c) Timing: From April 2020 onwards.
- d) Targeted population: People at large.
- e) Beneficiaries: Not available.
- f) Novelty: New policy.

3 SOCIAL PROTECTION AND INCLUSION RESPONSES TO THE CRISIS: OVERALL ASSESSMENT AND POSSIBLE GAPS

This third section briefly considers three aspects: the expected cost of the social protection and inclusion measures put in place by the country (Section 3.1), the impact of these measures on the social protection system and on social inclusion policies (Section 3.2), and the possible remaining gaps in the social protection system and in social inclusion policies (Section 3.3). It concludes with Section 3.4 on debates and recommendations.

3.1 Expected cost of social protection and inclusion measures

As a result of the fact that Turkey has not introduced any measures related to unemployment benefit and has banned lay-offs of employees, the number of individuals on unemployment benefit and, in turn, overall spending on unemployment benefit, has fallen substantially. There were 200,015 people on unemployment benefit in March 2021, compared with 682,362 people a year earlier (İŞKUR, 2021).

Measures for job protection have a large cost which is paid to a large extent from the funds accumulated for unemployment insurance. From April 2020 to the end of March 2021, short-time working allowance payments amounted to 31.6 billion TRY (€3.85 billion, 0.7% of 2019 GDP) and cash support payments to those on unpaid leave reached 10.2 billion TRY (€1.27 billion, 0.2% of GDP) (İŞKUR, 2021). Payments to small businesses started in late January 2021, and the total size of the payments is as yet unknown.

There have been no measures regarding sickness benefits, and the costs of measures related to healthcare access, namely premium payments for those on unpaid leave, are not known. Among social assistance measures the main item is the one-time payment of 1,000 TRY (€124) to 6.3 million households, at the cost of 6.3 billion TRY (€0.78 billion, 0.14% of GDP). Another 2 billion TRY (€0.25 billion) was raised and distributed in the donation campaign. The housing support scheme was locally organised: its cost is not known, but must have been quite small. Finally, the policy of leave for parents whose children are unable to attend school or a pre-school service by reason of COVID-19 did not result in additional costs that we are aware of.

To summarise, putting the major items together, 50.1 billion TRY (€6.22 billion) was spent from April 2020 to January 2021 on COVID-19 measures, corresponding to about 1.16% of 2019 GDP. There were also indirect support mechanisms, such as forfeited taxes and other collectibles as well as delayed payment measures, but the size of the costs in these areas is not known.

3.2 Impact on the social protection system and on social inclusion policies

Measures taken by the government have been rather temporary and will probably not reshape social protection policies as a whole. That being said, the adverse effects of the pandemic will probably persist in the long run and will require new policies of social assistance and job protection. Alas, to the best of our knowledge, there seem to be no plans yet outlining the measures to be taken in the aftermath of the pandemic.

It should further be noted that short-time working allowance payments and cash support payments count as unemployment insurance benefit to employees. According to the initial design, after the pandemic, employees were supposed not to receive the unemployment insurance benefit should they lose their jobs, short-time working allowance being a substitute for unemployment benefits. But due to employees' (and unions') strong objections, the government decided to reverse the decision and the employees' right to unemployment benefit after the pandemic will thus not be affected.

Another point to note is the earlier attempts to establish a minimum-income policy in Turkey. The pandemic may provide a suitable environment for greater engagement on that

issue. But increasing budget deficits and a lack of availability of necessary funds are likely to be major obstacles.

3.3 Remaining gaps in the social protection system and social inclusion policies

The most important gap in the policy response relates to unregistered employees. There exists no support mechanism for these individuals other than a one-time payment to those in need. Acknowledging this issue, the government lifted penalties for reporting and registering those who were previously employed without being registered. We are not aware of any statistics regarding the impact of that policy.

Refugees and non-Turkish people under protection (namely Syrians) are also particularly vulnerable. While this sizeable population (of around 4 million) is already struggling with difficulties, there have been no policy measures specifically addressing them with regard to the pandemic. Furthermore, those who came to Turkey through illegal ways are likely to refrain from going into health centres, even if they become infected with COVID-19, due to the fear of deportation. This not only is a concern for the people concerned but will increase the spread of the pandemic and threaten the health of everyone.¹¹

An equally pressing issue is the difficulties faced by older people. Their isolation has been intensified by partial bans specifically targeting those older than 65, especially restrictions on their mobility at certain hours of the day. This increased the need for caregiving, but in practice that made them more prone to catching the disease due to increased contacts. At times when the capacity of hospitals was insufficient, care for COVID-19 patients at home has proved to be difficult and resulted in adverse conditions among older people. Restrictions imposed during the pandemic have also worsened the conditions of those with certain chronic diseases as well as psychological problems, and restricted access to healthcare providers has probably caused further health problems with adverse consequences to be observed in the future. Finally, there are some reported cases where older people have been treated aggressively when they failed to follow the lockdown procedures.

One should also consider that no new measures related to sick pay and sickness benefits have been implemented during the pandemic. As some COVID-19 patients require prolonged treatment and care, their need for compensation in terms of sick pay and sickness benefits should be recognised. Failure to do that would inevitably bring about unfair treatment across the population.

The last point to mention is the fact that Turkey is prone to frequent earthquakes and that created further risks during the pandemic, which indirectly increased the cost of the social protection system.

3.4 Debates and recommendations

With rather limited resources to handle the adverse outcomes of the pandemic, most public discussion has focused on the measures against COVID-19 or the lack of them. We are not aware of any discussion extending to the future of social protection and inclusion initiatives.

Criticisms have been centred around the following seven issues (see e.g. Aşık and Sayan, 2020).

1. The overall magnitude of assistance is not sufficient to keep those in need above the poverty threshold.
2. The measures have been ad hoc and patchy, bringing about high transaction costs, in the form of the operational costs of implementing too many policies (including

¹¹ See e.g. <https://www.dw.com/tr/pandemi-döneminde-türkiyede-göçmen-ve-mülteciler/a-53098563>.

the determination of the target population) that are designed mostly independent of other policies.

3. Unregistered employees have been left outside some of the assistance schemes.
4. Support to small business has been rather limited.
5. The psychological effects of unemployment have not been properly addressed.
6. Refugees and Syrian people living in Turkey have not been considered within the pandemic context.
7. The adverse psychological effects of lockdown (especially for older people) have not been taken care of.

Suggestions and discussions have evolved around these issues. However, as mentioned above, the attention of most people, as well as institutions, has been focused on the prevention of the pandemic, most notably on the vaccination programme. That said, some have questioned the issue of informality in Turkey with reference to measures to handle the adverse outcomes of the pandemic, suggesting that new measures, which also incentivise registered employment, need to be developed (see e.g. Kara, 2020). Others have argued that a universal basic income scheme needs to be seriously considered and should be implemented as soon as possible to deal with the ad hoc and patchy nature of the current assistance programme (see e.g. Seçkiner Bingöl, 2020). Some others have suggested that the employment-related costs of small business that have been hit most adversely by the pandemic should be partially shouldered by the government (Aşık and Sayan, 2020). With regard to the psychological effects of unemployment, some others have suggested that with an increased need for caregiving some unemployed people could be trained and employed in that area (Aşık and Sayan, 2020). Civil society organisations, in particular, have underlined the humanitarian requirement to explicitly consider the problems of refugees and Syrian people living in Turkey within the pandemic context (see e.g. Akay-Ertürk, 2020). Finally, some have suggested that restrictions on older people should be reconsidered and policies to address their isolation should be developed (see e.g. Ekici, 2020).

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