

POVERTY IN TURKEY IN TERMS OF SOCIAL POLITICS

Seher CESUR KILIÇASLAN (*)
Toprak IŞIK (Erdal KILIÇASLAN) (**)

Abstracts

This study aims to examine poverty and the situation of the poor in Turkey. As such, it shall also evaluate methods of combating poverty. According to the calculations of the Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK), in Turkey in 2007, approximately 0.54% of the population was living below the starvation line, which only includes food expenses, while 18.56% was living below the poverty line, which includes both food and non-food expenses. When we take the figure of 70 586 000, obtained in the 2007 census, to be the population of Turkey, then according to TÜİK's this study on poverty, there are 380 000 people in Turkey living below the starvation line. Taken from a historical perspective, in Turkey, the poor have been helped to a large extent by religious institutions and waqfs and/or by private philanthropy. Until the mid-1980s and even today, successive Turkish governments have tended to deal with the field of welfare, within traditional solidarity mechanisms.

Keywords: *Poverty, Poverty in Turkey, State Aid, Fight against Poverty, Turkey.*

Sosyal Hizmet ve Sosyal Politikalar Açısından Türkiye’de Yoksulluk

Öz

Çalışmanın amacı, Türkiye’deki yoksulluğu ve yoksulların durumunu incelemektir. Bu kapsamda yoksullukla mücadele yöntemleri de değerlendirilecektir. Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu’nun (TÜİK) hesaplamalarına göre, 2007 yılında Türkiye’de fertlerin yaklaşık % 0,54’ü sadece gıda harcamalarını içeren açlık sınırının, %18.56’sı ise gıda ve gıda dışı harcamaları içeren yoksulluk sınırının altında yaşamaktadır. 2007 yılında yapılan nüfus sayımında elde edilen 70 586 000 kişilik Türkiye nüfusu dikkate alındığında, TÜİK’in bu yoksulluk araştırmasına göre, Türkiye’de 380 000 kişi açlık sınırının altında

*) Yrd. Doç. Dr., İstanbul Arel Üniversitesi Sosyal Hizmet Bölümü
(e-posta: scesurkilicaslan@arel.edu.tr), orcid.org/0000-0002-0046-2534

**) Bağımsız araştırmacı/yazar (e-posta: toprakisik@yahoo.com), orcid.org/0000-0003-3835-793X

yaşamaktadır. Tarihsel perspektiften incelendiğinde ülkemizde yoksullara yardımın, büyük ölçüde dini kurum ve vakıflarla ve/veya hayırsever bireysel girişimlerle gerçekleştirildiği anlaşılmaktadır. Türkiye’de hükümetler ise 1980’li yılların ortalarına kadar ve hatta bugün, sosyal yardım alanını, daha çok geleneksel dayanışma dinamikleri içerisinde ele almıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Yoksulluk, Türkiye’de Yoksulluk, Devlet Yardımı, Yoksullukla Mücadele, Türkiye.*

Introduction

Turkey is a large, strategically important, middle-income country, one of the founder members of the OECD, a G20 member, and a candidate EU member state (Demir Şeker and Jenkins, 2015, p. 401). Its economic success has been hailed as a ‘source of inspiration for a number of developing countries’ (The World Bank, 2015, p. 3).

Spurred on by the information given in the general framework sketched out in the section below, “Poverty as a Global Problem”, this study focuses on Turkey. Our aim has been to look at poverty in present-day Turkey in the light of selected data, and to analyse the fight against poverty. We have also discussed unequal income distribution and unemployment, inasmuch as they are both sources of poverty.

As state aid constitutes the main thrust in the fight against poverty, we have placed special emphasis on state social policies, examining state aid and touching upon the relationship of the fight against poverty with politics. In addition, we have also tried to identify the differences of opinion between worker’s organisations, such as Türk-İş, and government bodies.

Poverty as a Global Problem

Poverty is an issue, which has existed since the beginning of the human history. Poverty is not only a problem for less-developed countries but also a problem for both developing and developed countries because of the ongoing rapid globalization trend for last quarter of a century (Ilıman and Tekeli, 2016, p. 206).

The first difficulty that any scientific treatment of poverty encounters is that there is no agreed-upon definition for poverty. It may briefly be described as a state of deprivation where the basic needs necessary for survival cannot be met (Aile ve Sosyal Politikalar Bakanlığı, 2010, p. 233). An approach that does make it easier to define and identify poverty is to determine who is poor based on the amount of financial resources that they have at their disposal per day, whereby extreme poverty has long been defined as living on or below \$1.25 a day, but the World Bank’s adjustment now sets the poverty line at \$1.90 a day (The Quardian, 2015).

In 2012, 12.7 % of the world's population lived on or below \$1.90 a day (The World Bank 2016). The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund's Global Monitoring Report 2015/2016 stated that this figure was now 9.6 %. Although this does represent a decline compared to previous years, there are still 702 million people living in absolute poverty. Close to half of the population of the world does not have sufficient access to food, drinking water, education, employment and health facilities (Öztürk and Çetin, 2009, p. 2668 quoted in Incedal, 2013).

It is clear that poverty is one of the most pressing issues of our times. For a more liveable world, it is imperative to think about poverty, to study it academically and to develop methods to combat it. The lives of the poor and the rich, or indeed of the hungry and the overfed, are intertwined in time and space; this is an anomaly that is beyond the scope of this paper.

In *More Equality*, Herbert J Gans tries to account for the persistence of this anomaly by claiming that poverty, in general, benefits those who are not poor, and, in particular, benefits the rich and powerful. The poor are those who, for low pay, are willing to do the temporary, dirty, dangerous and despised jobs that exist in every economy. According to Gans, without low-paid work, many industries would not have been able to preserve the structure that they have today (Oktik, 2008, p. 41).

Another point that Gans draws attention to is how poverty provides employment opportunities for a fast-growing sector: in order to help the poor or to protect society from the poor, there have arisen job opportunities for many people, such as social workers, psychologists, doctors and police officers (Oktik, 2008, p. 41-42).

Poverty and Poverty Studies in Turkey

In Turkey, as in many developing countries, poverty has for many years been one of the most serious problems that the country has faced; however, the subject has not been adequately studied, and economic and social policies designed to solve the problem have not been implemented. Even in the Five-Year Development Plans, which hold a particularly important place in Turkey's development process, there was very little mention of poverty. More than one observer has ascribed this neglect to the belief that economic growth and social solidarity will somehow magic poverty away (Şenses, 2008, p. Önsöz). The "benefits" of poverty that Gans drew attention to as well as the cost of the fight against poverty may plausibly have contributed to the lack of interest in poverty during the development process.

Turkey is a large, strategically important, middle-income country, one of the founder members of the OECD, a G20 member, and a candidate EU member state. Its rapid economic growth during the 2000s can be hailed as one of the success stories of the global economy. However, there is relatively little detailed information available about poverty trends in Turkey and their relationship to economic growth, especially in the late 2000s when macroeconomic growth rates fell (Demir Şeker and Jenkins, 2013).

Until the 1990s, there had been no serious studies of poverty in Turkey. Since then, however, studies and field studies aimed at measuring poverty, especially through the use of consumption and income data, and at determining poverty profiles have gained importance. According to a 1998 study, 5.6 % of households, 8.4 % of the population (4.60 % in urban areas, 11.82 % in rural areas) in Turkey cannot meet minimum food expenses. Taking basic necessities into account, 19.3 % of households, 24.38 % of the population (21.73 % in urban areas, 25.40 % in rural areas) do not have sufficient income (Doğan, 2014, p. 49-50).

The year 2002 was a turning point for poverty studies in Turkey. It was the year when the Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK) started to carry out Household Budget Surveys and began reporting the poverty line and the poverty rate regularly each year. It is therefore possible to say that since 2002, the most comprehensive data on poverty in Turkey has been provided by TÜİK. The Household Budget Surveys have established the number of individuals with a daily income of \$1, \$2.15 and \$4.30 (İncedal, 2013, p. 47). The definition and classifications of poverty below are those used by TÜİK and are important when evaluating its data.

“Poverty: when individuals are not able to meet their basic needs. Poverty may be defined in two ways, the narrow sense and the broad sense. While poverty in the narrow sense refers dying of hunger and not having a roof over one’s head, poverty in the broad sense refers to lagging behind the general level of society, even though one may have sufficient facilities such as food, clothing and housing to maintain one’s existence” (TÜİK, 2015a).

“Absolute Poverty: when a household or an individual falls below the minimum welfare level that would enable it to survive. Identifying absolute poverty therefore requires establishing individuals’ minimum consumption needs necessary for survival. The absolute poverty rate is the number of those who fall below this minimum welfare level expressed as a percentage of the total population” (TÜİK, 2015a).

“Relative Poverty: when an individual or household is below a certain percentage of the average welfare level of society. According to this, an individual or household with an income and expenditure below a certain line as compared to the general level of society is described as poor in a relative sense. As a measure of welfare, either the consumption or the income level may be chosen, depending on the purpose” (TÜİK, 2015a).

“In addition, TÜİK also calculates various poverty lines that are of particular use in international comparisons. In this context, the values of \$1, \$2.15 and \$4.30 per person

per day at current purchasing power parity have been defined as poverty lines” (TÜİK, 2015a).

Table 1. Individual Poverty Rates by Poverty Line in Turkey, 2002-2015:

Poverty Line	Individual Poverty Rate (%)													
	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007 ⁽²⁾	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Turkey														
Less than \$2.15 per person per day⁽¹⁾	3.04	2.39	2.49	1.55	1.41	0.52	0.47	0.22	0.21	0.14	0.06	0.06	0.03	0.06
Less than \$4.30 per person per day⁽¹⁾	30.30	23.75	20.89	16.36	13.33	8.41	6.83	4.35	3.66	2.79	2.27	2.06	1.62	1.58

(1) The following have been used as the equivalent of \$1 based on purchasing power parity: 0.618 TL for 2002, 0.732 TL for 2003, 0.778 TL for 2004, 0.830 TL for 2005, 0.921 TL for 2006, 0.926 TL for 2007, 0.983 TL for 2008, 0.917 TL for 2009, 0.990 TL for 2010, 1.004 TL for 2011 and 2012, 1.100 TL for 2013, 1.200 TL for 2014, 1.240 TL for 2015.

(2) As of 2007, new population projections have been used (TÜİK, 2014; TÜİK, 2015a; TÜİK, 2016a).

“Financial Poverty: when an individual or household is faced with serious financial difficulties; it is defined as the percentage of those who cannot afford at least four of the following nine items: unexpected expenses, a one-week holiday away from home, household bills, a meal containing meat, chicken or fish once every two days, home heating requirements, a washing machine, a colour television, a telephone, or a car” (TÜİK, 2015b).

Table 2. Financial Poverty Rate in Turkey, 2006-2015:

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Financial Poverty Rate (%)	60.4	58.8	57.7	56.7	59.4	57.9	55.0	43.8	29.4	30.3

(TÜİK, 2015b; TÜİK, 2016b).

In the first aspect, by looking at the statistics in the tables above it is possible to say that there has been a decrease in poverty rates. However, these statistics will be interpreted in more detail to conclude about the poverty in Turkey.

Unequal Income Distribution and Poverty

Poverty arises from the unequal distribution of economic value that appears independently of the scarcity or abundance of the amount of goods and services produced in a society (Yılmaz, 2006, p. 19 quoted in İncedal, 2013). When we look at the state's anti-poverty policy in Turkey through the years, we do not find policies aimed at regulating income distribution. The belief that economic development would make income inequality disappear by itself may have played a role in this. This belief is supported on the theoretical plane by the Kuznets Hypothesis, which claims that in the course of growth, inequality in income distribution first increases and then decreases once a certain level of income per capita has been reached. Fields, however, argues that there is no systematic relationship between growth and inequality, and that just as inequality in income distribution may decrease in the course of growth, it may also increase (Şenses, 2006, p. 150 quoted in İncedal, 2013).

The first known study on income distribution in Turkey was conducted in 1933 by the Conjunctural Evaluation Department of the Ministry of Trade; it looked at the families of workers and civil servants living in Ankara and Istanbul. After that, in 1938, there was a survey covering twenty provinces. This was followed in 1953 by an admittedly more scientific income survey (Karluk, 2005, p. 77 quoted in Çalışkan, 2010), while the first study of income distribution to cover the whole of Turkey was by the State Planning Organisation (DPT) in 1963. There were further countrywide studies of income distribution in 1973 by the DPT, and in 1987 and 1994 by TÜİK, or the State Statistical Institute (DİE) as it was then known (Şahin, 2007, p. 581 quoted in Çalışkan, 2010).

As well as these studies by official state bodies, the studies by Ankara University Political Sciences Faculty in 1968, Merih Celasun in 1978 and 1983 and the study commissioned by the Turkish Industry and Business Association (TÜSİAD) in 1986 are the key studies on income distribution (Şahin, 2007, p. 581 quoted in Çalışkan, 2010).

Starting in 2002, TÜİK published income distribution statistics over four successive years; this was an important step towards alleviating the data deficit. However, since TÜİK discontinued its income distribution surveys in 2005, it has once more become difficult to access data (Çalışkan, 2010).

From 2006, as part of the European Union harmonisation studies, the Income and Living Conditions Survey, a panel survey, has been conducted each year in order to reveal income distribution between households and individuals in Turkey, to measure people's living conditions, social exclusion and income poverty, and to determine their poverty profile. According to TÜİK, this survey aims to produce data on income distribution, relative income poverty, living conditions and social exclusion that can then be compared with European Union countries (TÜİK, n.d.a).

A look at the Gini coefficient shows that there was an improvement in income distribution in Turkey between 1968 and 1987, and a deterioration between 1987 and 1994, while there has been a period of steady improvement since 1994. The Gini coefficient,

which was 0.55 in the 1960s (Koç et al., 2010), fell to 0.43 in 1987, rose to 0.49 in 1994, and shrank to 0.44 in 2002, 0.40 in 2004 and 0.38 in 2005. Although this improvement is a positive thing, it should be borne in mind that a value of 0.38 is still much higher than ideal equality (Çalışkan, 2010).

More important, though, is the fact that simply looking at the Gini coefficient alone, one cannot say whether or not the poor are any better off: in calculating it, the incomes of the richest and poorest sections of the population are important; thus, if the share received by the richest section grows or if that received by the poorest section of the population shrinks, the Gini coefficient will rise, and vice versa. The fall in the Gini coefficient between 2003 and 2005 stemmed from a reduction in the share of income received by the richest 20 %, not from an increase in the share received by the poorest 20 % (Çalışkan, 2010).

Another viable way of determining income distribution inequality is to divide the population into ten-percent and five-percent quantiles, instead of twenty-percent quantiles (Sönmez, 2001, p. 25-26 quoted in Çelik, 2004, p. 60). In Turkey, the share of income received by the poorest 10 % of the population was 1.8 % in 1994, 1.9 % in 2002, 2.3 % in 2003 and 2004, but 2.2 % in 2005, whereas the share of the richest 10 % fell steadily from 40.5 % to 28.7 % between 1994 and 2005. These data show that the positive change in the Gini coefficient stems not from an improvement in the income of the poorest section of the population, but from a reduction in the share of the richest section of the population (Çalışkan, 2010).

A similar result is obtained when the same method is applied to 5 % quantiles: there was almost no change in the share of income received by the poorest 5 % of the population between 1994 and 2005. In the same period, the share of income received by the richest 5 % of the population fell from 30 % to 18.4 % (Çalışkan, 2010).

As can be seen, underlying the improvement in income distribution indicated by the Gini coefficient is the transfer of income from the richest section of the population to the middle section; there is simply no evidence, though, of the poorest section of the population being any better off (Çalışkan, 2010).

In an OECD report based on data from its member states for 2013, a ranking of countries comparing the incomes of the richest ten percent and the poorest ten percent of their populations puts Turkey, with a score of 12.6, fifth from the bottom (Hürriyet, 2015).

Based on all of these data, it is possible to say that income distribution in Turkey still lags far behind the ideal, while whatever inadequate improvement has been observed over the years has not improved the lot of the poor.

Another important organisation that researchs poverty in Turkey is the Confederation of Turkish Trade Unions (TÜRK-İŞ). Its research into the hunger line and the poverty line, which it has conducted regularly each month for the past twenty-nine years, reveals the cost of living for those in work.

According to TÜRK-İŞ research results for March 2017, the amount of expenditure on food necessary for a four-person family to be able to have a healthy, balanced and sufficient diet (the hunger line) is 1 480.76 TL; the total amount of other obligatory expenditure on clothing, housing (rent, electricity, water, fuel), transportation, education and similar needs on top of expenditure on food (the poverty line) it is 4.823,31 TL. The monthly cost of living for a worker living alone is calculated as 1 853.86 TL (TÜRK-İŞ, 2017).

As of January 2016, the minimum wage has been increased by approximately 30 %, in keeping with one of the ruling party's election promises, and is now 1 404.06 TL (Çalışma ve Sosyal Güvenlik Bakanlığı, 2017). In spite of this increase, according to the TÜRK-İŞ study, not even a worker on the minimum wage who lives alone can afford to live on his or her monthly income. Meanwhile, a family with two children and both parents working for the minimum wage has to live on just over half of the necessary income calculated by TÜRK-İŞ (Cesur-Kılıçaslan and Işık, 2016, p. 68).

SOCIAL POLITICS AND POVERTY

The high poverty rates that have plagued Turkey for years have led to politicians continually alluding to the subject in their words and agendas. The AK Party, which has been in power ever since 2002, keeps saying that combatting poverty is one of its three most important goals. It is therefore especially important to assess poverty policies and the state of the poor during the AK Party administration.

The fact that the ruling party has described the fight against poverty as one of its most important goals has also, unsurprisingly, been reflected in welfare programmes. According to data from the Ministry of Family and Social Policies, in 2015 more than three million families received welfare payments from the ministry, of which approximately 2.3 million of these families regularly received welfare (Aile ve Sosyal Politikalar Bakanlığı, n.d.p. 117). When it is borne in mind that the average size of household in Turkey is 3.6 (TÜİK, 2015c), it transpires that in 2015 welfare payments were being made directly to more than ten million people.

State Aid

The Ministry of Family and Social Policies has a power laid down by the laws, and maintains its primary goal, which is poverty reduction as an authorized body. In order to achieve its main task the Ministry is empowered with the special fund called as "Social Aid and Solidarity Promotion Fund" (Ilıman and Tekeli, 2016, p. 221-222).

We can assert that the special fund as social expenditure was spent at the government's discretion in Turkey. Although there are some restrictions on government for using the fund arbitrarily, the political party forming the government can use the fund to maximize its political interests (Ilıman and Tekeli, 2016, p. 221-222).

In Turkey, the first serious development in state aid for the poor was in 1976, when a

law that provided for a monthly cash transfer to the disabled and the over-65s was passed. This law stipulated that the incomes of those who would receive aid were to be below a certain amount and that they were not to have immediate relatives to look after them (Mevzuatı Geliştirme ve Yayın Genel Müdürlüğü, 1976).

The second important development was the passing of the law on the Fund for the Promotion of Social Aid and Solidarity (SYDTF) in 1986 (Mevzuatı Geliştirme ve Yayın Genel Müdürlüğü, 1986). This law provided for the formation of a fund designed to meet the needs of impoverished citizens who were not registered with the Social Security Institution (SGK). In addition, Foundations for Social Aid and Solidarity (SYDV) were set up on a provincial and district level with the aim of organising the distribution of the money collected in the fund to those in need (Dodurka, 2014).

Meanwhile, 1992 saw the introduction of the “Green Card” system, which gave citizens who were not registered with social security and who had an income below a certain level the right to free health care (Dodurka, 2014).

Regardless of how far short all these regulations have fallen of the desired effectiveness, the funds and foundations that have been established have constituted the bases of a publicly funded, organised structure that is the backbone of the efforts in the fight against poverty as implemented in Turkey from 2001 under World Bank leadership (Dodurka, 2014).

2001 was a particularly important year for welfare payments in Turkey. Until then, they represented only a minuscule fraction of the budget. The level of spending since this date has dwarfed that of previous periods (Dodurka, 2014).

In fact, by 2001, it had also become unambiguously clear that poverty that in the past could have been combatted with traditional methods of solidarity had become a permanent problem requiring urgent intervention. Underlying this was slum clearance and the spread of low paid, precarious and illicit jobs due to increased flexibility in the labour market (Buğra and Keyder, 2003, p. 19 quoted in Dodurka, 2014). Therefore, when the government did finally introduce the necessary regulations and increase the funds available for the poor, it may only have been acting out of desperation, as the problem had already reached insupportable dimensions (Cesur- Kılıçaslan and Işık, 2016, p. 68).

In 2004, the General Directorate for Social Aid and Solidarity attached to the Office of the Prime Minister was founded; as well as organising the distribution of the aid collected in the SYDTF, it was also charged with researching poverty in order to develop policy proposals. Later, this general directorate, under the name of the General Directorate for Social Aid, was attached to the Ministry of Family and Social Policies, which was founded in 2011 (Dodurka, 2014).

Today, state-supported social services and aid activities are planned and implemented in large measure by the Ministry of Family and Social Policies. The annual activity reports that the ministry publishes each year reveal the financial dimensions of the aid.

The 2015 report specified that 3 017 969 families received welfare payments (Aile ve Sosyal Politikalar Bakanlığı, nd.).

Welfare Payments in TÜİK's Income Calculations

Injustices in income distribution are considered among the possible factors of deteriorating social peace. Social welfare, at this point, serves as a functional safety measure (Zengin, et al., 2012, p. 133).

In TÜİK's publications on the subject, financial assistance to households from other people or organisations is defined and grouped as below, and counted as a component of household income (TÜİK, 2008, p. 18):

“Non-refundable (transfer) incomes: non-refundable transfers from the state, private institutions/organisations or other individuals/ households made within the income reference period (payments in the form of retirement pensions, old-age pensions, unemployment benefit, non-refundable scholarships, regular payments in cash or in kind etc.) They can be divided into two groups”: (TÜİK, n.d.b).

“a) Social transfers: non-refundable payments in cash or in kind that households receive from the state or from various institutions/ organisations in the income reference period either to meet some of their needs or in case of their being confronted with some risks due to financial problems (family-child benefit, housing benefit (rent etc.), other welfare payments made to poor households)” (TÜİK, n.d.b).

“b) Inter-household transfers: non-refundable payments in cash or in kind that households receive regularly from other individuals or households” (TÜİK, n.d.b).

When assessing the share of total income received by the poor, it should be remembered that payments that fall under these headings are also included.

The Safety-Net Effect of the Traditional Social Structure and Its Costs

In the social structure of Turkey, kinship ties are particularly important and they play a decisive role in the socialisation process. The material and moral support that different generations offer each other is perpetually switching back and forth over the different periods of life: young people enjoy the support of their older relatives until they are sufficiently mature, when they take responsibility for their elderly relatives who need help. This structure provides the opportunity to furnish traditional solutions for potential social support and security problems (Aksan, 2015, p. 122-123).

When discussing poverty in Turkey, almost everyone, from the man or woman on the street to the researchers themselves, knows this and takes it into account. The saying, “No one dies of hunger,” which is widely used when confronted with financial problems, is

to some extent rooted in the belief that poverty will never reach the point of starvation. Indeed, although poverty is a problem that persists unto this day in Turkey, there has almost never been widespread hunger (Aksan, 2015, p. 122-124).

Nevertheless, individuals who are subsisting solely thanks to traditional aid networks also face significant pressures. Ever-increasing solidarity creates dynamics that limit individuals' economic, social and cultural freedom. Those who continually receive help may even be excluded from their social milieux. For example, a woman who receives alms, described by Islam as an obligation incumbent upon rich Muslims, may be upset when her alms-giving relatives do not deign to visit her home during Ramazan Bayramı. Those who receive support from their relatives pay an emotional price due to this bond of help (Aksan, 2015, p. 122-124).

It is extremely understandable that the poor prefer to receive aid not from their relatives or social milieux but from the state: there is no possibility that the state will make them pay a social and emotional price in return for the aid that it gives. Indeed, a study by Aksu Bora on poor women showed that these women preferred to get help not from individuals, but from the state (Aksan, 2015, p. 124).

Discussion

In Turkey at the beginning of the 2000s, it was realised that poverty was a problem that required urgent intervention. Since then, there have been noticeable increases in the amount of the aid that the state gives to the poor. Nevertheless, TÜRK-İŞ calculations based on the current minimum wage show that even the employed are obliged to live in poverty (Cesur-Kılıçaslan and Işık, 2016, p. 69).

In March 2017, TÜİK announced that the unemployment rate in Turkey among those who are fifteen and over was 11.7 % (TÜİK, 2017). In 2002, the same figure was 10.3 %. Indeed, the statistics show that there has been no improvement in unemployment rates since 2002; in fact, they show a deterioration (TÜİK, n.d.c). This is a major drawback in the struggle against poverty. Another sign that there has not been sufficient progress towards a solution for poverty is the share of income received by the poorest percentiles of the population. In 1994, the share of the country's total income received by the 20 % of the population on the lowest income was 4.9 % (Yükseler, 2004). This rate was 5.3 % in 2002 and 6 % in 2003. Later, it fell as far as 5.1 % in 2006 and was 6.4 % in 2014 (TÜİK, n.d.c).

While interpreting these percentages, it is also necessary to take into account that since 2002, state aid to the poor has increased. Indeed, when comparing transfer incomes as a percentage of total income in 2002 with 1994, it is seen that there was a significant increase. The percentage of transfer incomes was 10 % in 1994, while in 2002 it was 17.5 % (Kuştepelı and Halaç, n.d.). In 2015, the same figure was 20 % (TÜİK, 2016a). Welfare payments are, of course, made to lower income groups; therefore, it is the effect of welfare payments that underlies the trifling increase since 2002 in the percentages

above (Cesur-Kılıçaslan and Işık, 2016, p. 69).

In Turkey today, a large section of the population can only survive thanks to welfare payments. State help for those in need is, of course, necessary in the struggle against poverty; however, if poverty is to be eradicated, increased employment and improved working conditions are also required. High unemployment rates and an insufficient minimum wage are the actual reasons why the share of total income received by the poor has not increased (Cesur-Kılıçaslan and Işık, 2016, p. 69).

Conclusion

Looking at present-day Turkey, we see that poverty remains a pressing concern. While statistics doubtlessly play an important role in scientific analyses of poverty, researchers have no other choice but to use data from TÜİK. As there is political pressure on TÜİK, an official body, there are frequently claims that their data do not reflect reality. For example, Siddik Ensari, who was president of TÜİK between 1996 and 1998, questioned its analyses of poverty in an article published in 2010. According to Ensari, in 2007 there was not, as shown by TÜİK's calculations, 0.48 % of society, i.e. approximately 300 000 people, below the hunger line, but at least 3 000 000 people. Ensari stresses the fact that he used TÜİK's own data in his calculations (Ensari, 2010). When experts can obtain wildly differing results from the same data, it shows just how open the subject is to manipulation, independently of whose methodology is correct. There is an urgent need for much more survey-based poverty research that is independent of official bodies, as the current situation is woefully inadequate (Cesur-Kılıçaslan and Işık, 2016, p. 69).

In Turkey today, just as in the past, the provision of equality in income distribution is not given the importance that it requires. However, the state has realised that it must help the poor and has accordingly started to do so. Indeed, the lives of the poor have been dependent on aid from the state for a considerable period of time.

Welfare payments, far from enabling the poor to live with a modicum of dignity until such time as poverty may be eradicated, are seen to act so as to perpetuate poverty. When thinking of the place that state aid permanently occupies in the Turkish political agenda, it is possible to conclude that, rather than being aimed at a solution, the aim of state aid is to garner political support from the poor. Helping the poor has not reached the goal of eradicating poverty and the subject has become open to political exploitation. The economic and political steps that will bring about the eradication of poverty urgently need to be taken (Cesur-Kılıçaslan and Işık, 2016, p. 69).

It is a well-known fact that unemployment and poverty go hand in hand. They should therefore be tackled together, for without major economic developments to increase employment, it is a given that there will be no definitive solution to the problem of poverty. Another major cause of poverty is unequal income distribution. The Gini coefficient and the large difference in the share of national income received by the poorest and the richest sections of society show that Turkey has long been plagued by this problem. Therefore,

we should remember that the fight against poverty in Turkey is conducted in the shadow of high unemployment rates and unequal income distribution.

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