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Neo-liberal Policies and Poverty:

Effects of policies on poverty and poverty
reduction in Turkey²

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INTRODUCTION

This study discusses the impacts of neo-liberal policies on poverty in Turkey, focusing particularly on employment and agriculture. Regarding the former, the worldwide development of neo-liberal policies has been very efficient for the labor market realization of the 'Post-Fordist regulation method' of capitalism and flexible specialization, a distinctive feature of this method. Regarding the latter, neo-liberal policies in the agricultural sector developed from the policies of liberalization in the agricultural products trade as liberal regulations policies and a reduction in state support for agriculture replaced the developmental approach to agriculture. Neo-liberal policies have been powerful, therefore, in both these areas. On the one hand, they have caused the growth of unorganized and unemployed mass labor, and on the other, they have impoverished rural populations, resulting in a rapid migration from rural to urban areas, leading in turn to the emergence of mass poor populations in big cities. This has not been only a quantitative (statistical, proportional) explosion of poverty, but also a qualitative one: the poor masses have different characteristics to those of past. Thus it is that poverty has been able to find a place for itself on research agendas and in World Bank programs. Policies have been developed towards the aim of poverty reduction that are quite different to those of the past, because the new poverty is qualitatively different to that of the past. Indeed, the new poverty reduction policies have themselves largely been based on neo-liberalization.

In Turkey, similarly to most other countries, neo-liberal economic policies have been introduced and maintained during recent years (specifically, since the period of military rule following the 1980 coup and the governments of Turgut Özal from the mid 1980s, which instituted various fiscal and market reforms and began the dismantlement of much of the centralized economic system that had been in place). This study, therefore, will look first at neo-liberal policies generally in respect of poverty reduction, with particular regard for the experience of developing countries, before going on to discuss the case of Turkey, the way that Turkey has been implementing neo-liberal policies, with particular regard for the areas of employment and agriculture and the effects of this for poverty in the country.

THE NEO-LIBERAL APPROACH TO POVERTY

The essential proposals of neo-liberal policies which intend various macro-economic and institutional changes can be summarized thus:

- Removal of state price intervention in product and factor markets,
- Liberalization of foreign trade: abandonment of quotas and reduction of duties,
- Privatization of public economic enterprises,
- Liberalization of finance markets, promotion of direct foreign capital investments and external financial flows,

- Extension of privatization in social services provision (education, health, etc),
- Expansion of tax base with the help of tax rate reductions,
- Market determination of interest rates,
- Emphasis on competitive exchange rates,
- Deregulation of the economy,
- Regularization of property rights,
- Ensured flexibility of labor markets.

These policies were designed mostly with regard to the interests of international capital and put into practice with IMF prescription and structural adjustment programs. Approaches developed by the World Trade Organization, it might be added, do not contradict this framework.

With the implementation of these policies, the idea went, the removal of price intervention would create efficiency in the allocation of resources, and trade liberalization would lead to increases in foreign trade – and therefore in production – on the basis of comparative advantages. Direct and indirect foreign investments would enable both productive capacity increase and support to current deficit financing. Also, via the privatization of public enterprises, services would be provided more effectively and efficiently (importantly, they would not be a burden to the budget). The combined effects of the new measures, it was argued, would benefit all sections of society, including the poor. In essence, poverty would be reduced as an effect of increased total prosperity resulting from increased economic activity. The implementation of neo-liberal policies would reduce poverty directly, most obviously through higher employment resulting from the raised demand of economies liberated both internally (removal of state controls) and externally (removal of trade barriers). Poverty would also be reduced more indirectly, through the various mechanisms of the ‘trickle down’ effect. The poor, furthermore, would also be major beneficiaries of the improved (privatized) services.

The results, however, have rather failed to meet these expectations, as can be seen by looking at the first of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals, developed roughly during the effective time period of neo-liberalism. The first Target on poverty (MDG 1.A), related to a minimum income level (originally \$1 dollar a day, adjusted in 2008 to \$1.25, PPP), is expected to be reached, just about. This success is somewhat superficial, however, due in main measure to the explosive development of China, previously an extremely impoverished country with an immensely restricted economy. Outside the east of Asia, the picture is less bright. Strikingly, for example, in the fifteen years between 1990 and 2005 the Southern Asia region saw a reduction of just 20% in the numbers of people earning less than \$1.25 a day, even though this area is dominated by India, a country that experienced phenomenal economic growth during that period.

The first Millennium Development Goal has three components, related to

employment and hunger as well as to financially measured poverty. While progress toward the poverty goal can be given a positive spin, this is rather difficult in the case of employment (1.B) and hunger (1.C). Regarding the latter, the FAO reports the worldwide proportion of 'undernourished persons' for 2010 at 16%, the same figure as in 1990.³ Figures for this had begun to look promising through the first half of the 1990s, but the story since then has been one of a steady rise, a loss of the earlier gains made. A recent sample assessment of thirty developing countries prepared by the UN Development Project, therefore, shows only eleven to be on course to meet the MDG poverty and hunger targets. The story regarding employment is similarly bleak, with near zero progress over the last decade (UNDP: 8).

Employment has always been the stepchild of development, and the elephant in the room of poverty. Introduced as an MDG only in 2008, employment continues to be under-represented (it receives just one mention in the 2010 UNDP report, for example).⁴ The three UN MDG reports produced since the inclusion of employment *have* given proportionate space to the subject, and the coverage (outlook, analysis, etc) has been universally negative. Ignoring specific reference to the recent crisis, various aspects reported on are of note here. In terms of macro-economics, employment figures may mean little without reasonable productivity, of course – and in developing countries this remains low, 'a bad sign for future job-creation.' From the perspective of the poor, income may be gained from work, but employment does not necessarily mean an escape from poverty: low-paying jobs lead to the concept of the 'working poor'; also, working conditions may not be good, leading to concepts of 'vulnerable employment' ('unstable, insecure jobs'). Finally, future prospects are depressing: 'Full employment remains a distant possibility' (UN 2008: 8-9; UN 2009: 8-10; UN 2010: 9-10).

PROBLEMS WITH THE NEO-LIBERAL APPROACH

There are various reasons why neo-liberal policies have failed to deliver as hoped on the problem of poverty. Firstly, according to Stiglitz stability policies supported by tight fiscal and monetary controls has provided neither growth nor stabilization. In fact, high volume capital movements has caused frequent crises, exposing countries (especially developing ones) to new risks. Secondly, the liberalization of foreign trade, in practice has tended to mean the removal of barriers in developing countries but maintenance of these barriers in developed countries, which has given birth to an (even more) unfair international market. Then, these new fiscal and market conditions have led to unemployment and

³ <http://www.fao.org/hunger/en/>

⁴ The original UN Millennium Declaration did not even mention employment in its third chapter on 'Development and Poverty Eradication' (UN 2000), and the subsequent emergence of the eight MDGs from the UN Millennium Project did not initially include employment: 'Goal 1', to 'Eradicate Poverty and Hunger' (as it continues to be known), had just these two specified Targets (UNMP 2005: xiii).

unrecorded work. Finally, privatization has caused price rises in public services and reduced competitiveness. In short, neo-liberal structures and policies have tended to operate to the benefit of developed as opposed to developing countries, and, broadly speaking, at the expense of the poor. Giving the lie to any pretension that the reduction of poverty was ever intended as a primary aim of neo-liberalism, the IMF and Washington consonance has consistently ignored these social and political dimensions of the new approach (Stiglitz 2009: 283-86, Shafaeddin 2010).

Setting aside the East Asian countries that have been narrated as success stories as a result of neo-liberal policies, other concrete achievements arising from neo-liberalism are difficult to find. In terms of raw numbers, a quarter century and more of ever-increasing global neo-liberalism has left us with figures that continue to show huge numbers of people and still horrendously high population proportions living in extreme poverty (Table 1). And even where statistically clear improvements are evident – in the so-called success stories, for example, or in the overall reduction of the depth of poverty (the average income level of the near billion people still officially below the world poverty line) – arguments contending that these have resulted specifically from neo-liberal policies are hard to accept – if for no other reason than because of the enactment of other, sometimes plainly anti-neo-liberal, policies, such as active governmental intervention in economies.⁵

Table 1: Regional poverty headcount ratio in 2005, at \$1.25 and \$2 a day (PPP)

Region	2005 Poverty headcount ratio(% of population)	
	\$1.25 a day (PPP)	\$2 a day (PPP)
East Asia & Pacific	16.8	38.7
Europe & Central Asia	3.7	8.9
Latin America & Caribbean	8.2	17.1
Middle East & North Africa	3.6	16.9
South Asia	40.3	73.9
Sub-Saharan Africa	50.9	72.9

Source: World Bank, Development Research Group⁶

⁵ Most obviously (at the macro level for economic development), the Chinese under-valuation of the yuan, facilitating its export-driven growth.

⁶ At: <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.DDAY> and <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.GAP2/countries><http://data.worldbank.org/topic/poverty>.

Neo-liberal economists emphasize that rises in public expenditure increase budget deficits, and this leads to high inflation, currency devaluation and high interest rates and currency devaluation. Therefore, they desire to reduce public expenditures. The literature, however, offers very little in the way of evidence showing that public expenditure rises to increase interest rates and exclude the public sector thereby achieving, or that excluding the public sector achieves efficiency with respect to exchange rates (McKinley 2003). Similarly, neo-liberals defend the contention that productivity in the public sector is low and can be increased through privatization, again in spite of only slight empirical evidence in support of this (Boratav, 2003).

On the other hand, these policies clearly have had a negative impact on poor, weak and marginal populations, because they bring increased economic inequality. With the foreign trade and financial reforms, national industries have deteriorated and employment opportunities and the number of small producers decreased; small farmers, poor rural populations and food security have been influenced negatively; and privatization, budgetary cuts and labor market destabilization have led to low wages, losses of workers' rights and reductions in their bargaining power. The problem of increasing inequalities that even the biggest, most quickly developing economies of China and India have to face (Angang et al. 2003; Ghosh 2010). In fact, as well as making access to basic services more difficult, rising prices associated with the neo-liberal policies of privatization, budgetary cuts and other regulations are argued to have actually increased poverty in countries as diverse as Hungary, Mexico, the Phillipine's, etc (SAPRIN 2002).

This current era, in which the employment of neo-liberal policies has become the dominant approach, has seen also a surge in the tendency to globalization. And in this globalized economy, the use of alternative or replacement (substitute) production factors has increased exponentially, relative, that is, to technological development and the characteristics of demand. Thus, even though there certainly has been an increase in overall investments and growth, the labor market has not been able to benefit from the development. On the contrary, the increase of possibilities for substitution can lead to a reduction of workers' income and static, even decreasing employment (EAF 2010). Briefly, stabilization policies have not managed to maintain growth and stability, the work-force has not flowed through trade liberalization from low-productivity to high productivity as anticipated, and unemployment in developing countries worldwide has grown (Stiglitz, 2009: p.283-86, Shafaeddin, 2010).

The most important effects of neo-liberal policies relevant to agriculture have come with WTO agreements accompanying these policies. With these agreements aiming at foreign trade liberalization in the area of agricultural products, the levels of tariffs for these have gradually been decreasing. Concordantly, agriculture support systems in developing countries have been modified: specific (nationally determined) product support has been decreased and direct income support systems have become prominent, funded in some countries by the World Bank. The dismantlement of tariff walls and reduction of

product supports have made the agriculture of developing countries vulnerable to that of developed countries and led to uncertain futures for farmers' incomes.

In developed countries, on the other hand, such trade liberalization measures have not been taken in the area of agricultural products. Their protection of their own agriculture producers has consequently continued at a much higher rate than that of developing countries, leading the protection reduction in developing countries to cause their own farmers' produce to be over-priced in world markets. These conditions also have caused developing countries' farmers to reduce production in areas where they cannot be competitive, or to change products. And when circumstances like the ambiguity of natural conditions, decreasing loan opportunities due to public fund reduction, increasing input costs – especially energy costs – are added to the liberalization policy of leaving the price determination of agricultural products to the market which itself is combined, moreover, with the role of international monopolies and supermarket chains in foodstuff price determination, it is quite manifest why traditional small agriculture producers have had difficulties in maintaining economic viability and continuing their capacity to operate.

Unsurprisingly, these conditions have caused small farmers to seek for new alternatives for survival, with a significant proportion (hundreds of millions of people worldwide) leaving their villages and migrating to cities. The concepts of 'deruralization' and 'depeasantization' have emerged. Waiting for the mass of poor people flowing from village to city was, again, more poverty: the already sizeable urban poor population has been further increased with the influx of these migrant peasants.

Through the neo-liberal policies process, which may lead to growth but does not tend not to provide employment, poor peasants have been added to the increasing population of the unemployed, and in social contexts of damaged (local, family) support networks. In this way, while poverty had already existed in rural areas, a new, large mass, poor population emerged in urban areas. This has been the birth of a poor urban community with its own, novel characteristics. The dependency on unskilled labor for economic growth decreased as the (increasingly automated) production system no longer needed such a mass, tending instead to require a (semi-) skilled workforce. Thus arose the idea that economic growth alone could not save this community from poverty. This concept was termed 'New Poverty', although other names were also given to it, such as 'marginalization' and 'underclass' (Işık & Pınarcıoğlu 2001: 70, 72; Buğra & Keyder 2003: 19-20).

The new understanding of poverty has brought with it new strategies to the problem. Promoting neo-liberal policies through and from the 1980s, the World Bank now started to pay special attention to poverty. It is remarkable at a time when the relationships between poverty and labor markets and labor productivity and the redistribution of wealth were being stressed less, poverty itself was entering global discussion and policy forums in radical new ways. And it is also remarkable that these included qualitative issues in the social and

political fields of development discourse. For example, it is quiet striking that in the second half of the 1990's the World Bank laid stress on good governance, equality, gender discrimination and social development. Doubts are raised concerning the persuasiveness of this World Bank discourse, however, in the light of its efforts to adopt a neo-liberal economic model and failure in respect of pro-poor projects (Şenses 2009: 687-88:). Ultimately, this approach works to absolve state and society from responsibility and ascribe the causes of poverty instead to the poor themselves – from which it follows that the solution to poverty must be found by those individuals and groups trapped in it (with assistance from non-govermental organizations that receive little state support).

The prevailing method by which to reduce poverty of increasing income generally through rapid growth is supported with monetary assistance. State cash aids have been made dependent on various pre-determined conditions, such as registering children for school, or regular physical examination for newborn babies, small children and pregnant women. Clearly, such programs cannot be regarded in terms of citizenship rights, especially insofar as the application procedures to determine who will gain assistance sometimes themselves deter people from seeking it.

Another, privately funded example of monetary assistance supporting the current poverty reduction approach of neo-liberalism is the much vaunted practice of micro-credit, which has been successful in Bangladesh (and for which its creator, Muhammed Yunus, was awarded with Nobel Peace Prize). Even this, however, has not been implemented as a system of interest-free loans, but rather, as high interest rate loans. Moreover, it is a credit system which assumes the presence of entrepreneurs in the poor community, again, like the world's economies, waiting to be liberated (in this case by access to small scale venture capital). In fact, entrepreneurs are relatively scarce as a resource in poor community, and the success of such an approach remains rather peripheral to the main picture that poverty presents. The neo-liberal approach here, in fact, amounts to little more than simply saying, 'Here, we have granted you opportunity, go save yourselves!'

In the struggle against poverty, an approach that expects results only from economic policies, regards poverty as a temporary result of economic conjuncture and identifies it merely with lack of employment seems now to be quite invalid (Buğra & Keyder, 2003:12). On the other hand, neo-liberal globalization has imposed major restrictions on governments' implementing pro-poor national economic policies precisely in conditions where these policies are most needed (S.A.M. 2004). Economic development alone is not adequate for poverty reduction, as has been determined by international development institutions, and for a decade now (UNDP 2000: 42). Even experts at the World Bank are stressing that new social protection understanding needs to be introduced in place of pro-poor growth policies and the approach of making the poor well-supported supplemented by direct support to those in need.

One of the distinctive characteristics of permanent poverty, and a major reason

for it, is its intergenerational transmission, a characteristic that cannot be reduced by economic policies. Researchers agree that a leading carrier of intergenerationally transmitted poverty is inadequacy of human capital (Yaqub 2000, Hulme 2001, Carm et al. 2003, S.A.M. 2004). If a family is poor, naturally they cannot allocate sufficient resources for their children's nutrition, health and education needs, so the next generation will be disadvantaged in the fight to escape poverty (even to the extent that they can conceive of and attempt this). If the quality of labor force cannot be improved and if the society cannot make use of manpower resources, lasting poverty is inevitable.

One of the distinctive qualities of new poverty is that this poverty mass exists within a multi-dimensional framework of exclusion (social, economic, political, spatial, cultural). Exclusion has become widespread under a variety of forms to which not only are the poor in developing countries exposed, but also those in developed countries. The groups at most risk of being exposed to social exclusion are children, old people, women, disabled people, migrants and those with alternative sexual and religious preferences (Adaman and Kayder, 2006). And it is, of course, the poor among these groups that are most excluded, and these groups who are most disproportionately represented among the poor and excluded. 'The excluded' has come to represent a class of people, like the 'underclass', except that the reference here is to development. Sections of society are excluded in the developmental rush.

Table 2a: Average annual real income change of households in OECD countries, mid-1980s to mid-90s (ordered by lowest income group)

Country	Lowest	Mid	Highest	Median	Average
Italy	-1.3	0.5	1.5	0.6	0.8
New Zealand	-1.1	-0.5	1.6	-0.6	0.3
Turkey	-0.6	-0.7	1.4	-0.8	0.9
Norway	-0.3	0.3	1.0	0.4	0.5
Canada	0.3	-0.2	-0.1	-0.2	-0.1
Greece	0.3	0.1	0.1	0.3	0.1
Germany	0.4	1.4	1.6	1.2	1.4
Sweden	0.5	0.9	1.2	0.9	0.4
Britain	0.7	2.0	4.3	1.9	2.8
Mexico	0.7	1.2	3.8	1.1	2.6
Japan	0.8	1.8	2.1	1.8	1.9
Finland	0.9	0.9	1.0	0.8	1.2
France	1.0	0.5	0.1	0.5	0.3
The Netherlands	1.1	2.7	3.9	2.8	3.0
Belgium	1.2	0.5	1.2	0.4	0.8
USA	1.2	1.0	1.9	1.0	1.4
Denmark	1.3	0.9	0.8	0.9	0.9
Luxemburg	2.3	2.5	3.0	2.4	2.7
Austria	2.5	2.7	2.8	2.8	2.7

Ireland	4.0	3.0	2.9	3.2	3.1
Spain	4.4	3.2	2.4	3.2	3.0
Portugal	5.7	6.5	8.7	6.2	7.3

Note: Lowest = bottom 20%, Highest = top 20%, Mid = sum of the middle three 20% groups
Source: OECD 2008

Table 2b: Average annual real income change of households in OECD countries, mid-1990s to mid-2000s (ordered by lowest income group)

Country	Lowest	Mid	Highest	Median	Average
Austria	-2.1	-0.5	-0.4	-0.6	-0.6
Japan	-1.4	-1.0	-1.3	-1.0	-1.1
Turkey	-1.1	-0.5	-3.2	-0.3	-1.9
Germany	-0.3	0.5	1.3	0.6	0.7
USA	-0.2	0.5	1.1	0.4	0.7
Mexico	-0.1	-0.1	-0.6	0.2	-0.4
Canada	0.2	1.2	2.1	1.1	1.4
Czech Republic	0.4	0.6	0.7	0.5	0.6
Denmark	0.6	0.9	1.5	0.9	1.1
France	0.9	0.7	1.0	0.8	0.8
Hungary	0.9	1.2	1.0	1.1	1.1
New Zealand	1.1	2.2	1.6	2.3	1.9
Belgium	1.4	1.3	1.7	0.2	1.5
Sweden	1.4	2.2	2.8	2.2	2.3
Luxemburg	1.5	1.5	1.7	1.5	1.6
Finland	1.6	2.5	4.6	2.5	2.9
The Netherlands	1.8	2.0	1.4	2.0	1.8
Italy	2.2	1.0	1.6	1.0	1.3
Britain	2.4	2.1	1.5	2.1	1.9
Greece	3.6	3.0	2.7	2.9	2.9
Norway	4.4	3.9	5.1	3.8	4.3
Portugal	5.0	4.1	4.4	4.2	4.3
Ireland	5.2	7.7	5.4	8.2	6.6
Spain	5.2	5.1	5.0	5.5	5.1

Note: Lowest = bottom 20%, Highest = top 20%, Mid = sum of the middle three 20% groups
Source: OECD 2008

Social exclusion: The exclusion of individuals/groups from society because of poverty, resulting in generalized deprivation, discrimination and the impossibility of joining communal life. Reduced or no access to education opportunities and activities from which to earn a living, and prevention from inclusion in social and environmental networks. Little, or no participation in decision-making processes, feelings of weakness and lack of self worth, and inability to make decisions in daily life.

Economic exclusion: Lack of access to the labor market, unemployment and/or poor access to loan/credit opportunities and other financial services.

Political exclusion: The inability to exercise citizenship rights, especially political and legal ones, and prevention of direct or indirect participation in political life.

Spatial exclusion: The problematic or lack of access to certain places or inability to make proper use of them.

Cultural exclusion: The inability to participate in communal and cultural life as desired.

Looking at the results of neo-liberal policies from the 1980s and 1990s, when neo-liberal policies became effective, it is apparent that overall inequalities in income distribution increased in OECD countries (Table 2). It is, however, Turkey, significantly the only OECD economy (other than Mexico) for which relevant figures are available that is regarded as not developed, which has been affected most negatively by this inequality growth, both overall and in terms of both its low- and middle income classes

TURKEY'S EXPERIENCE

It is generally accepted that poverty emerged as a fact in the world with the industrial revolution, since which it has taken various specific forms, such as poverty in countries with newly gained independence. In Turkey, until the 1980s when neo-liberal policies were adopted, there were various problems of poverty like regional differences, the poverty of working people, unequal working conditions for women, helpless old people, orphans, the poverty of disabled people, etc.

Until the 1980s, family/community solidarity – through connections based on extended family and locality networks (between relatives, and among people migrating from the same village) – was the resource from which poor people most benefitted. Poverty was largely rural, and it was out of sight. It became visible in cities with urban migration during this period. If the specific situations of the old, disabled and orphaned are disregarded, then poverty was seen as a temporary situation. During and after the 1980s, neo-liberal policies, as summarized, were instigated in Turkey. The conditions shaped through the implementation of these policies gave new, different characteristics to poverty in Turkey. Policies for poverty reduction showed parallelism with neo-liberal policies aimed at preventing poverty. Behind these policies, there was the support of the World Bank.

In the following, I first outline the introduction of neo-liberal policies in Turkey and discuss the effects of these policies on conditions of employment with particular regard for poverty, both generally and on the rural population, and then suggest various evaluations of poverty in Turkey.

THE NEO-LIBERAL TRANSFORMATION IN TURKEY

Introduction of Measures

The first step in the introduction of neo-liberal policies in Turkey was taken with the stabilization measures declared on 24th January 1980. A few months later, a three year stand-by agreement was signed with the IMF, and these measures begun to be put into practice. However, there was a strong trade union movement and public opposition which prevented the proper implementation of the neo-liberal policies. On 12th September 1980, the army organized a military coup and took power. Opposition movements were suppressed through force, and political parties and trade unions closed. This led to the easy implementation of neo-liberal policies. These policies were enacted step by step in the following years, when firstly generals and then the political parties active in this military constitutional order were in power. In 1981, the fixed exchange rate system was gradually abandoned and the daily exchange rate set by the Central Bank. In 1983, import restrictions were loosened and restrictions on currency exchange establishments freed up. After a while, the foreign exchange regime was altered and citizens allowed to obtain foreign currency for personal use. Various arrangements were made giving incentives for foreign investments. Meanwhile, conjunctural fluctuations increased, in both frequency and intensity.

In 1988, new stabilization measures were declared because of the speculative fluctuations in exchange rates and high inflation. More radical regulations were made including free exchange rates in the markets, foreigner operations in Istanbul Stock Exchange in end of month and short term capital movements. In 1992, new economic measures were declared, including widespread privatization of public enterprises. In 1994, an economic crisis occurred, a stand-by agreement was signed with the IMF and new stabilization measures were taken. In 1996, the Customs Union Agreement was signed with EU. In 2001, Turkey again went through a financial crisis and took stabilization measures. Following its recovery from this severe crisis, Turkey's economy grew in a stable way until 2008, when it was hit by the global financial crisis and subsequent economic slowdown. During this period of economic neo-liberalization, financial crises and stabilization measures were witnessed, along with robust economic growth outside the crisis periods.

Effects: General

In first part of the period during which neo-liberal policies have been followed, for the 17 years until 1997, Turkey's GDP increased by a total of 125.8 percent and its per capita income by 60.6 percent. During following 12 years, while the total increase in national income was another 38.3 percent, per capita income could only manage a 9.6 percent increase, less than 1% annually according to the state Turkish Statistical Institute (TurkStat, *TÜİK*) (Table 3). In other words, while there have been major income gains over the last thirty years or so, the relative benefits of economic growth for per capita income rises declined

dramatically, roughly halving, in fact. While the earlier period (until 1997) saw relative annual average gains in which the per capita income rise that was almost half the total income rise (3.2/6.6), the latter period (until 2009) saw this ratio drop to near a quarter (0.8/3). The prima facie implication would be that the benefit from increased total income for people's income in Turkey has declined over time. (Even) the generalized gains (assumed as) resulting from neo-liberal policies seem to be diminishing.

Table 3: GDP and per capita GDP changes in Turkey, 1980 - 2009

Period	GDP change (%)		Per capita GDP change (%)	
	Total	Annual average	Total	Annual average
1980 - 1997	125.8	6.6	60.6	3.2
1998 - 2006	37.8	4.2	12.5	1.4
1998 - 2009	38.3	3.0	9.6	0.8

Source: TÜİK, www.tuik.gov.tr (calculated from GDP statistics)

At a first glance the slower growth of per capita income appears negative, but a positive development can still be observed. Combining these developments with developments in employment (Table 4), however, gives a clearer insight into the neo-liberal growth process.

Table 4: Employment changes in Turkey, 1980 - 2009

Period	Employment change (%)
1980 - 1997	28.3
1998 - 2006	2.5
1998 - 2009	2.0

Source: TÜİK, , www.tuik.gov.tr (calculated from labor force statistics)

Reading both tables together, it can be seen that the total increase in national income during the first period (to 1997) of 125.8 percent (and per capita increase of 60.6 percent) coincided with an increase in employment at just 28.3 percent. Since 2007, figures have been adversely affected due to the global economic crisis, so it will be more meaningful to refer just to the period before this. Accordingly, while national income showed a 37.8 percent increase (per capita, 12.5 percent) in the adjusted second period, i.e. between 1998 and 2006,

the increase in employment was only 2.5 percent with the crisis, moreover, this increase in employment turned negative and by 2009 the level of employment had fallen to below that of 2006). Any change in employment, of course, needs to be offset against changes in population, which rose by some 15 million (over 25%) in this period. Economic growth has signally failed to create jobs in significant numbers (bearing in mind the contemporaneous rise in population of around 25%). The unemployment rate, meanwhile, stood at around 8 percent during the 1990s and rose to 10 percent between 2000 and 2005 (reaching 14 percent as the economic crisis hit). Focusing just on the current decade (between the 2001 Turkish and more recent world crises), we see little overall change in the official unemployment or growth rates, although there are marked annual disparities between them (Table 5).

Table 5: GDP and unemployment rates in Turkey, 2000 - 2008

Year	GDP growth rate ⁷	Percent change	Unemployment rate (%)	Percent change
2002	6.2	-	10.3	-
2003	5.3	- 14.5	10.5	1.9
2004	9.4	77.4	10.3	- 1.9
2005	8.4	- 10.7	10.3	0.0
2006	6.9	- 17.9	9.9	- 3.9
2007	4.5	- 34.8	10.3	4.0
Average	6.8	- 0.1	10.3	0.0

Sources: TurkStat, 2004-2009a; TurkStat 2008-2009

As these data indicate, employment in Turkey during the recent decades of neo-liberalism has not benefited proportionately from economic growth. Sometimes, dramatic year-on-year changes in growth have contrasted with relative constancy in unemployment, and is this persistence of unemployment, and its long term rise even, alongside the very healthy economic growth that suggests some of the longer term, deeper factors at play in the failure of economic growth to equate to poverty reduction.

One reason for the persistent and increasing levels of unemployment is that because of technological improvements, labor-saving technologies have been playing an increasingly important role in production. Another reason is that certain inputs have become obtained from other countries. This has been

⁷ GDP: Constant Prices Index

realized in two ways: firstly, more foreign inputs are bought from foreign countries (primarily because they are cheaper, (e.g. foodstuffs from China and India), and secondly, with the increase of foreign capital investments in industry, production systems have increased input levels from companies/plants outside of Turkey (primarily from shared suppliers, either the same institutions or a third party, e.g European and East Asian engineering technology imported by the Turkish franchises of international companies). In both cases, domestic employment for input provision is lost, or un-gained.

Considering the income side of the subject, there has been a small per capita income increase relative to fixed prices. However this figure may be misleading taken in isolation as it is necessary to consider the distribution of income (Table 6). This indicates no significant change between 1987 and 2006. Turkey has the most imbalanced income distribution amongst OECD countries. In the 20-year period of neo-liberalism, therefore, there has been no significant improvement of income distribution while national income, population and unemployment have all increased. And this paints the real picture of the poverty of low-income groups.

Table 6: Income distribution in Turkey as a share of the national income (according to household income group)

Household income group	Total share of national income (%)						
	1987	1994	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Lowest 20%	5.2	4.9	5.3	6.0	6.0	5.1	5.8
Second 20%	9.6	8.6	9.8	10.3	10.7	9.9	10.6
Third 20%	14.1	12.6	14.0	14.5	15.2	14.8	15.2
Fourth 20%	21.2	19.0	20.8	20.9	21.9	21.9	21.5
Highest 20%	49.9	54.9	50.1	48.3	46.2	48.4	46.9
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Gini parameter	0.43	0.49	0.44	0.42	0.40	0.43	0.41

Sources: For 1987-2004: Turk-İş, 2007; for 2005-06: TUIK, 2009a.

The unchanging income distribution means that households in the bottom 20 percent income group have continued to live below the poverty line, officially (according to the Turkish Statistical Institute), 17% of the population in 2008.⁸

⁸ The figure given for families in poverty is 14 percent.

Actually, the official figures do indicate huge gains in poverty, with the numbers of the poor as a proportion of the population shown as having dropped by over a third in the six years to 2008 alone 2006 (Table 7). The figures do give cause for concern, however. The poverty figures are based on 4-person families, a measurement system probably open to more complications than a simple one-person system; low income figures (for below \$1, \$2.15\$ and 4.3) are based on PPP equivalences which rose at a rate of less than half that of inflation, suggesting the low income figures might be an under-calculation; the poverty figures are fixed at lira rates that do not follow the PPP equivalences, making the figures for poverty act differently than those for low income; In terms of social exclusion, the prime monetary indicator for this has, like income distribution, remained essentially unchanged during the 2002-8 period. Measured at 50% of the national median consumption expenditure,⁹ the figure for 'relative poverty' has been steady at around 15% of the population. And, in reality, the average available income of these people did indeed turn out to be insufficient for their needs in 2005 as families ran into debt or sold their properties just to finance themselves (Yükseler and Türkan: 105-6).

**Table 7: Individual poverty rate in Turkey,
2002 – 2008(according to purchase base poverty line)**

Method	Individual poverty rate (%)						
	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Food Poverty	1.35	1.29	1.29	0.87	0.74	0.48	0.54
General poverty (food + non-food)	26.96	28.12	25.60	20.50	17.81	17.79	17.11
Below \$1 per capita per day (PPP)	0.20	0.01	0.02	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.00
< \$2.15 per capita per day (PPP)	3.04	2.39	2.49	1.55	1.41	0.52	0.47
< \$4.3 per capita per day (PPP)	30.30	23.75	20.89	16.36	13.33	8.41	6.83
Relative poverty based on expenditure	14.74	15.51	14.18	16.16	14.50	14.70	15.06

Source: TurkStat 2009b

Effects: Rural

Population developments in rural areas are relevant to the direction of rural

⁹ Following the first of the Laeken Indicators as adopted by the EU, 2001.

poverty. Two such developments can be clearly identified in Turkey over recent decades (Table 8). Firstly, while the rural population increased in the three decades until 1980, it decreased thereafter, numerically as well as proportionately. Secondly, huge population losses in rural areas have been occurring since 2000 – five of the seven million people lost to the countryside by 2008 went in the eight years of this decade alone. When looking at the demographical structure of the village, furthermore, it can be seen that those who stayed in their villages tended to be the old, retired and needy, those who could not work. This reveals a picture in which it became more difficult for farmers to maintain themselves in rural areas with agricultural income.

**Table 8: Rural and urban population in Turkey,
1950 – 2008 % figures rounded to one decimal place**

Census Year	Population				
	Total	Urban	%	Rural	%
1950	20 947 188	5 244 337	25.0	15 702 851	75.0
1960	27 754 820	8 859 731	31.9	18 895 089	68.1
1970	35 605 176	13 691 101	38.5	21 914 075	61.6
1980	44 736 957	19 645 007	43.9	25 091 950	56.1
1990	56 473 035	33 326 351	59.0	23 146 684	41.0
2000	67 803 927	44 006 274	64.9	23 797 653	35.1
2008	71 517 100	53 611 723	74.9	17 905 377	25.1

Source: General Population Census, 1927-2000, In 2008, the Address Based Population Registration System (ABPRS) was used: Urban population = city/subcity centre populations; rural population = village/semi-village populations

Privatization is one of the most prominent of neo-liberal policies accelerating this loss in agriculture and fall of the rural population. Uncertainty in agricultural product prices has increased because of privatization, the sale and commercialization of public enterprises that have processed agricultural products, solved the problem for farmers of marketing these products, and supplied inputs to agriculture. The resulting uncertainty has created problems that cannot be controlled by farmers, especially considering lack of irrigated land, which constitutes barely 30 percent of the total area used for agriculture, which makes farmers particularly dependent on good, reliable weather.¹⁰ And 80

¹⁰ Much of Turkey is dry and/or on significant inclines (soil erosion is a major ecological problem on the Anatolian peninsula), so farmers are particularly susceptible to rainfall variability. A lack of rain, combined with relatively high input prices can cut margins and make earnings especially difficult to predict, both of which, over time, act as reasons for farmers to abandon agriculture.

percent of planted areas are full with crops.¹¹

The prices of agricultural products have been increasing much more slowly than those of agricultural inputs over the last couple of decades, notwithstanding occasional years that favored farmers. The previous agriculture support system has effectively been transformed into direct cash support with the help of the neo-liberal foreign trade policy, WTO agreements and support from the World Bank. These supports have meant a ready income for farmers who did not or could not want to take risks (some farmers have been enabled to just rent out their land with this income). In this way, the support system has not achieved its goal and even contributed to the rural-to-urban migration.

The difficulties faced by agriculture in the neo-liberal period and the migration to the cities partly resulting from these have contributed to the impoverishment of the countryside and the development of urban poverty. Regarding the former, the changing demographics referred to above in particular have led to a continuing high level of rural poverty. In contrast to the positive trend in poverty reduction reported overall, rural poverty has remained consistently high during the current decade, steady at about 35% of the (rural) population. This comparative increase is shown also by a 50% rise in relative poverty for rural areas between 2002 and 2008 (TurkStat 2009b). Regarding the latter, the development of urban poverty, the population moving to the cities from an agriculture base has contributed directly to urban poverty reaching massive proportions.

In order to assess the scale of this contribution, it is instructive to consider the population figures for the period following the introduction of neo-liberal policies. Given that the population generally has been rising fast, the seven million reduction in the rural population represents a mass exodus, some abroad, to other countries (especially Germany), but most to the big cities in Turkey. Of these – perhaps six million people – there is no particular reason to assume poverty rates lower than the recent one-third average, which translates to a ballpark figure of some two million poor people entering the urban environment from the countryside just in the years 2002-08 alone. In fact, the failure of the rural population to rise by something like the national average, 60% for this period should also be taken into account here. This would imply a predicted rise in the rural population since 1980 of some 15 million people, suggesting another five million poor people entering the cities. Whatever the exact numbers, the effects of neo-liberal policies on agriculture in contributing to people leaving their villages have clearly operated as a major factor in the evolution of urban poverty in Turkey.

Special mention should to be made here of a specific reason for the exodus from the countryside in Turkey, the forced emigration (displacement) of Kurds by the Turkish state. In order to re-take control of the rural Southeast from the insurgent PKK employing guerilla tactics, the Turkish military effectively

¹¹ Total land area: 783,562,000 km²; land used for agriculture: around 18 million hectar

emptied large parts of the countryside in the Kurdish dominated area during the mid-1990s to 2000s. Local villagers were forced to evacuate their villages and, essentially, move to the major cities, either directly, or more often, via their nearest towns (which of course could not support the influx economically, especially with much of the local agricultural base decimated, and thus operated as a staging post for the second stage city migration). The number of these internally displaced between 1996 and 2005 has been estimated at around a million (between about 950,000 and 1,200,000), notwithstanding an official number of a little over 350,000 (Tezen and Koç 2006; Dağ 2006).¹² These people generally lost their property as well as their livelihoods, mostly without compensation, and the severance of their financial (economic) ties with the rural areas from which they came was then the cause of further poverty. This thus represents a particularly impoverished, poorly organized and highly excluded large influx of people into urban areas.

FROM ROTATION POVERTY TO PERMANENT POVERTY

Until the 1980s, people migrating to the cities in Turkey mostly met their housing needs by building shanty houses (*gecekondu*). This approach to the problem of accommodation made a contribution to the accumulation of capital through a lowering of labor costs. Generally built illegally on public land, these houses are typically quickly erected, low quality dwellings creating impoverished neighborhoods of a temporary yet indefinite nature with poor infrastructure and services, like the French African *Bidonville* or Brazilian *Favela*.

As time passed, the *gecekondu* population increased and this increase that made the occupants an important swing voter group. This group was also able to penetrate political parties and municipalities to some extent through various connections. A significant number managed to improve their standard of living with the help of the increase in employment and job opportunities in the growing, urban economy. Until 1980, extended family loyalties and locality (hometown/village) solidarity could provide sheltering, job and aid when needed to newcomers, who were thus able to improve their conditions in a shorter period than would otherwise have been the case. This situation both gave the idea that poverty was temporary and offered hope to those following. And as the earlier arrivals started to prosper, or at least maintain themselves, and be replaced at the bottom of the ladder by the newcomers, to whom they passed on their poverty, as it were, a new term was coined, 'rotation poverty'.

By the 1980s, *gecekondu* land had attained value and the owners of these houses had acquired, in essence, property. The *gecekondu* house-owners were receiving urban ground rents. These rentable areas started to attract more attention than in the past, from municipalities, private construction companies and investment companies, and the state developed policies which would prevent further

¹² The same official figures also claim that about a third (approaching 140,000) of the displaced returned to their villages, another figure generally disputed.

building there. Business centers, shopping centers and housing estates began to be built on these lands. Now, accommodation became a high cost problem for newcomers, the latest in the tidal wave of rural-to-urban migrants. As a result of these developments, the *gecekondu* concept began to change in the first years of the 1980s, and distinctions like 'gecekondu landlord' and 'gecekondu tenant' began to emerge. New migrants to cities could not find any land to build on. Newcomers lacked the increased financial capacity necessary to construct a dwelling, or acquaintances who could help them on this road. No longer would it be possible for newcomers to construct or easily access new shanty house building in the big cities.

The second important problem awaiting newcomers after that of accommodation was that of employment. The urban poor who had previously worked for the state or local authority in official jobs with low wage salaries but job security began gradually to disappear. In the framework of neo-liberal policies, the downsizing of the state in the economy has been one of the reasons for the increase in unemployment since the 1980s. When the state has downsized, employment in the public sector has been restricted and real wages have decreased, causing general economic slowdowns, often with crises, resulting in rises in unemployment. Those that did manage to find employment have been disadvantaged by low wages. One of the main reasons for the lower wages was the impairment of the labor unions, again in line with the basic tenets of neo-liberalism. In 2006, just 13.3 percent of the Turkish workforce was employed according to collective labor agreements – as compare with over %70 in most EU countries (Candaş, s.70)

In this period, the prominent growth sectors in the expanding Turkish economy mostly operated in the exports market, meeting demand fluctuations with flexible production systems. Employment practices in these sectors depended on the use of informal labor, Women and children especially were employed in temporary jobs and for scab work on a casual, often piece-rate basis, without insurance or contracts or any recognized rights. Other factors accounting for the inadequate increase in employment include the extension of working hours enabled by the employer's market in labor relations itself contextualized by the free market ethos of neo-liberalism, as well as the privatization of nationalized industries, as a neo-liberal policy. So, even though the economy grew, it did not offer sufficient opportunities for people to escape poverty.

As well as contributing directly to worsening the workers' conditions and limiting employment expansion, the development of foreign trade also increased the level of technology in the country through easing the import of machinery and new manufacturing methods as never before. Thus, the proportionate value of labor in production systems declined. The kapital-labour combination changed in favor of capital, a change that indicates reduced labour usage relative to economic growth. Again, economic growth has not equated with human gain in a simple way – in this case, it has far outstripped the need to create employment.

This poor community also has to deal with difficulties related to exclusion. The poor are subject to discrimination when employed, promoted and given wages. They work as unpaid family workers, and informally as unwaged labor. Inequalities stemming from gender relationships are another problem to which poor people are subject: gender inequality has made the poverty of women greater.

Table 9: From Rotation Poverty to Permanent Poverty

	Rotation Poverty	Permanent Poverty
House	Building own <i>gecekondu</i>	Tenants of <i>gecekondu</i>
Likely job possibilities	Official jobs (low wages but job security) or informal work, gender discrimination, child labor	Temporary, long working hours, very low wages, more gender discrimination, child labor
Job contract type	Mostly social security, 50% collective contracted	No social security or collective contract, subcontracting
Family solidarity	Strong	Weak
State/municipality social aid	Weak, rare	SYDF, SHÇEK ¹³ ; extended but weak
NGO solidarity	Rare	More than before
Importance of aids	For some, some times	For many, continuous
Social services access	Some difficulties, low	Some difficulties, low
Future expectations	Will escape poverty	Will be in continuous poverty
Social exclusion	Limited	Strong

The expansion of the informal labor market, de unionization and sub-contracting encouraged unregistered employment and the shadow economy. The proportion of workers unregistered and uncovered by social security institutions currently stands at nearly 30% in cities and over 45% overall. A large part of the current unregistered worker population is composed of adults who have recently migrated to cities and have lower level of education. Playing a critical role in poverty, the sector of employment is also important in its reduction.

¹³ SYDF, SHÇEK – see below.

Employment opportunity rises in the industry and service sectors have been more effective than the agriculture sector in reducing poverty. Poverty rates for working people are around 34 percent in the agricultural sector, compared to ten and seven percent respectively in the industrial and service sectors (Table 10). Finding a job and deriving revenue from it do not always translate to an escape from poverty. With wage levels going down, social services commercialized and prices going up, even working groups fall into poverty.

Table 10: Povert Rates By Sector (%)

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Poverty rate among agriculture sector employees	36.4	39.9	40.9	37.2	33.9
Poverty rate among industry sector employees	21.0	21.3	15.6	9.9	10.1
Poverty rate among service sector employees	25.8	16.8	12.4	8.7	7.2
General poverty rate in working population	25.2	25.9	23.2	19.0	15.8

Source: TÜİK, 2006 Poverty Study Results

Nevertheless, groups who do not receive pay for labor such as the unemployed, many or most of the old, the disabled, children, women, young tend to rank in the lowest levels of poverty. The highest rates of poverty are found among unpaid family workers, unemployed people, population outside working age and the chronically ill and permanently disabled. The displaced (forced migrant) Kurds also have been particularly badly hit. Poverty has begun to become a permanent fact of life for many households. Those in a state of permanent poverty have to deal with difficulties related to exclusion. They are subject to discrimination when employed, promoted and given wages. They work as unpaid family workers, and informally as unwaged labor, especially women.

Inequalities stemming from gender relationships are a problem to which poor people are particularly subject: rising gender inequality during the neo-liberal period has made the poverty of women greater. For example, while official employment rates for the second half of the 1990s put women's labor force participation consistently at 55 – 60%, the figures given for the mid-2000s are mostly in the 45 – 50% range. Education, a possible key to escaping from poverty, is less accessible to girls, as shown by the latest employment figures for uneducated females. While the labour force participation rate for males with

higher education is 83.6%, for females it is 70.5%, almost identical to the rate for males not educated to high school 70.7% – but for females in this category, it is just 25.1 % (TurkStat 2010). In fact, half of the girls in the 15 to 19 age group are neither studying nor working (Candaş et al 2010).

The transformation process begun in the 1980s created a huge mass of socially excluded people, and by the 1990s these excluded people were beginning to be defined socio-culturally, as ‘slum dwellers’ (Etöz, 2000: 49, cited in the Council of Urbanization, p.10). The ‘ghetto’ or ‘slum’ *gecekondü* areas where they had established their urban lives became seen as a threaten to the political system, social culture and the existing system as a whole, causing the inhabitants, and especially the most ‘vulnerable’ among them, to be further exposed to social exclusion (Adaman and Kayder, 2006). As emphasized in various researches, with these developments going on since the beginning of 1990s, ‘Poverty’ had become a lifelong concept for some poor groups. And this meant poverty in rotation had ended, and permanent poverty settled.

Table 11: Individual Poverty Rate According to Purchase Base Poverty Line in Turkey 2002-2008 (%)

Methods	Individual Poverty Rate (%)						
	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007 ^(*)	2008
Food Poverty (hunger)	1.35	1.29	1.29	0.87	0.74	0.48	0.54
Poverty (food+non food)	26.96	28.12	26.60	20.50	17.81	17.79	17.11
Per Capita Less Than Daily 1\$ ⁽¹⁾	0.20	0.01	0.02	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.00
Per Capita Less Than Daily 2.15 \$ ⁽¹⁾	3.04	2.39	2.49	1.55	1.42	0.52	0.47
Per Capita Less Than Daily 4.3\$ ⁽¹⁾	30.30	23.75	20.89	16.36	13.33	8.41	6.83
Relative poverty based on spending ⁽²⁾	14.74	15.51	14.18	16.16	14.50	14.70	15.06

(1) According to PPP 1\$ is equal for 2002 year 618,281 TL, for 2003 year 732,480 TL, for 2004 year 780,121 TL, for 2005 year 0.830 YTL, for 2006 year 0.921 YTL, for 2007 year 0.926 YTL and for 2008 year 0.983 YTL used.

(2) Predicted 50% of median value of the equivalent per capita consumption expenditure

(*) Revised according to new population projections

Source: TÜİK, 2009, 2008 Poverty Study Results

SOCIAL AID POLICIES

Practices and Effects

The effects of neo-liberal policies introduced during and following the 1980s had operated against working people the poorer sections of society. A new social policy understanding emerged after 1990 in harmony with the Washington Consensus, but after the 2001 financial crisis in Turkey, the economic growth that recommenced from 2003 did not see unemployment and poverty reduce by similar proportions (Buğra 2008: 199). It was understood that poverty and social exclusion were not problems solvable just through trusting in the labor market and conveying messages about people's personal responsibility to find work. It was clear that the real issue was not at the level of the individual but of the social, and that the solution therefore required an approach based on state policies to be pursued with public funding.

Successive (Ak Party) Turkish governments, initially focusing on economic matters and rather unconcerned about the problem of poverty (like the World Bank), developed various policies that aimed more at the effects than the roots of the problem, reducing the intensity of the symptoms and thus representing an ineffective, essentially false approach. After 2002 two trends became prominent in social policy, 1) a tendency to leaving social issues to charities, combined with 2) an acknowledgement of the need for the state to play a serious role in social support, with measures intended to expand the social security system to all citizens including new arrangements for healthcare (like the green card, entitling people to free state health services) and for old age salaries, etc. This new approach was affected through the following mechanisms in the social support environment:

- Informal civil support networks (family, friends, neighbors),
- Municipality assistance,
- Various non-governmental and religious organizations,
- Government institutions (SYDTF/ SYDVs and SHÇEK).

Family support continues to play a pivotal (traditional) role in Turkish society and be activated especially in times of crises. This does require extended family networks and individuals with the means to support others, however, and a large proportion of the new poor simply lack these family and community ties. Besides, when poverty is permanent, these supports are typically found wanting as the continuity of inter-family support reduces over time. As the recent 2003 UNDP research on poverty underlined, the new poverty, known in Turkey now as 'permanent poverty' is extremely difficult to tackle with communal/family based support alone (UNDP, 2003).

The emphasis of the moderate Islamic governments on religious themes and religious charity approaches to poverty have been regarded as very compatible. Applied through the SYDF and various foundations, however, these policies have been used politically by the government and charitable institutions, to try to win over the poor and those connected to them through the aid given and gain

support for the ruling party. Historically, municipalities, non-governmental organizations and religious foundations have been active in social life and supported the poor, and the mission of these institutions to struggle against poverty only gained in importance during 2000s. The limited resources of the municipalities and charities, however, along with the prominence of political interests in municipalities and corruption in some charities weakened expectations of these institutions. Furthermore, despite the best efforts and continued good work by these local and religious institutions in fighting poverty, hampered by their hierarchical and conservative structures, these kinds of institutions have tended to lack the vision, range and scope and the sheer power which the state can bring to bear in order to embark on an extensive struggle against poverty.

Two state institutions founded during the 1980s became more prominent in the struggle against poverty, The Social Aid and Solidarity Fund (*Sosyal Yardımlaşma ve Dayanışmayı Teşvik Fonu*, SYDTF), and the Social Services and Child Welfare Foundation (*Sosyal Hizmetler ve Çocuk Esirgeme Kurumu*, SHÇEK). Founded in 1986 under the Social Aid and Solidarity General Directorate (*Sosyal Yardımlaşma ve Dayanışma Genel Müdürlüğü*, SYDGM), a department established two years earlier under the provisions of the wide-ranging and powerful office of the Prime Ministryship (*Başbakanlık*), the SYDTF is funded directly from government revenues (e.g. receiving fixed percentage sums from specified taxes),¹⁴ and works through several hundred local level Social Aid and Solidarity Foundations (*Sosyal Yardımlaşma ve Dayanışmayı Vakıfları*, SYDVs). The objective of the Fund and its related organizational structure was to realize traditional social protection components as well as fortify target groups against social and financial risks. Major tools adopted for this objective are:

- Ad hoc financial aid and public relief (one-off grants and in-kind benefits) to those entitled to SYDTF support (for fuel, food, education, health, and for victims of terror and of natural disasters),
- Project aid to support individuals and families without economic means and unable to participate in production processes, and thus unable to maintain themselves.

The SYDTF and SHÇEK also aim to lessen the effects of social and economic crises and structural adjustment programs on the poor, to reduce poverty and the risk of poverty, to provide employment and to develop infrastructure. These institutions are supported by the World Bank, and, within employment projects, the Fund has allowed micro-credit implementations, establishing a connection between micro-credit implementations and social aid entitlements, and thus used state resources so as to support the micro-credit programs. It is not unusual in Turkey, as elsewhere, for interest loans provided through micro-credit to be used for urgent needs as well as establishing businesses. People using borrowed

¹⁴ The SYDTF budget for 2008 was some two billion Turkish liras, around USD 1.3 billion, although it underspent by some 10% (<http://www.sydgm.gov.tr/tr/html/224/SYDTF/>).

money for their urgent needs in this way are then burdened with interest on their loans.

The SYDTF Solidarity Fund also supports a financial social aid project (a welfare system) for low income families, made dependent on regular checkups for children and regular attendance at school (Conditional Cash Transfer). Detailed information, such as how much support is allocated to how many families/individuals by the Fund under this provision, is unavailable. According to the limited figures given, the Fund spent some 375 million dollars between 1997 and 2001.¹⁵ This relief clearly has great importance in the struggle against poverty, regardless of exactly how it is spent (assuming it is spent on poverty relief, that is).¹⁶ It is, nevertheless, extremely low compared to Turkey's European neighbors (the obvious comparison for a country desiring to accede to the EU), comprising just 0.5 percent of gross domestic product as against 2.8 percent in the EU-15, 2 percent in Greece, and 2.5 percent in Portugal and Spain. The share of these welfare payments made by the public sector on the basis of family income as a proportion of the total SYDTF spending increased by 4.4 points in 2002-2005, to 34.8 percent (Buğra and Keyder 2007: 127-8).

These data do show that transfer incomes are important for poor families, but what is essential is not top-up income or occasional payments, but major, regular public transfers, which in Turkey only take the form of retirement pensions. Welcome as any help may be, the welfare system here is not essential for poor families when viewed from this angle. The social security system in Turkey is highly criticized in the 2003 country report made to the EU, for being ad hoc, underfunded, inefficient and corrupt. Particular importance is attached to the lack of child benefit as a tool to fight poverty. As the country report concludes, the need is 'to address the utmost necessity of reforming the public sphere and to consider macro policies that will help reduce inequalities' (Adaman 2003: 64).

Families and individuals in the lowest 20 percent income group of society face the highest risk of poverty. The consumption spending levels of this group increased by an average of 18.4 percent during the 2002-06 period, with average consumption spending rising above the poverty level by 2005. On the other hand, the share of imperative spending for the lowest income group in 2006 had reached 70.1 percent (reference). This indicates that even if the households in low income groups are deprived of income, they finance themselves through going into debt.

The share of households obtaining complimentary transfer receipts rose from 23.4 percent to 26.7 percent between 2002 and 2006. With this increase, the proportion of poor individuals declined from 28.1 percent in 2003 to 17.8 percent in 2006 (Table 7). As mentioned, however, this positive tendency was not reflected in the relative poverty rate in the same rate. Relative poverty rate

¹⁵ At: <http://www.sydgm.gov.tr/tr/html/224/SYDTF/>

¹⁶ In the context of Turkey's generally unimpressive level of administrative efficiency and reputation for high levels of corruption, this is not a small assumption.

which was 15.5 percent in 2003 rose to 16.2 percent in 2005 and declined to 14.5 percent in 2006. While relative individual poverty rate based on consumption was 14.7 percent in 2002, it rose to 16.2 percent in 2005 and declined to 14.5 in 2006 (Buğra and Keyder, 2007). When these figures are viewed together it is evident that, contrary to what political economists have emphasized generally, neo-liberal policies in Turkey have not caused any reduction in social welfare expenses (or pensions for that matter), as is evident from the absolute spending figures provided by the SYDTF. Therefore, it is stressed, what has really happened is that a fresh 'welfare governance' regime has emerged, i.e. that the present provisions effectively represent the development of an adequate system (Buğra and Keyder 2007). This may appear to be the case when absolute figures are viewed, but this argument must be questioned, from two points of view.

Firstly, in spite of the fact that social aid expenses have increased, poverty is still high. The so-called fresh welfare regime is still missing huge swathes of the population. According to the State Planning Organization, 80.2 percent of the adult population is currently covered by institutional social insurance, which means that 19.8 percent do not have any security, some ten million people (DPT 2010). For the poor who need social protection most, the deficiency of public social expenses is clearly revealed here. Further detail is supplied by a brief focus on vulnerable, at-risk groups.

The lack of a child benefit system has already been noted, which is particularly important in a country with poverty demographics like Turkey. Some 8.5% of 3-4 person families live below the complete poverty line, whereas for households comprised of seven or more the rate is 38.2% (TurkStat 2009b). Put simply, the bigger the household, the greater the risk of poverty. As a result, the proportion of children at risk of poverty in Turkey today is 34 percent, as opposed to the general average of 26 percent, and so thousands of children are working, regardless of its illegality. According to the most recent available official figures (for 2006), 5.9 percent of 6-17 year olds, and 318,000 of 6-14 year olds nearly a third of a million under children between the ages of six and fourteen are employed (State Statistical Institute 1999; cited from SIS: World Bank, 2005 Adaman, s. 54, TurkStat 2007). In 1995-2002, nearly 440,000 children began earning a living even before completing their primary school education. Half of the girls in 15-19 age group in Turkey are neither studying nor working (Candaş et al. 2010). The problem of child labor is linked to education provision and uptake, of course, as a part of social provision. The average education period of Turkish society is six years, compared to ten years in Greece and thirteen in Germany.

Regarding the elderly, the six percent of population age 65 and over depend primarily on their families for care and support. In 2005, 37 percent of the population over 65 lacked a pension of any kind, state or private, notwithstanding the state's statutory obligation here (under Law 2022). Regarding the physically disabled, a survey conducted by the Turkish Statistical Institute has put the proportion of disabled people in the country at 12 percent.

While the illiteracy rate for the general population is 12.9 percent, it is 36.3 percent among disabled citizens. Only 20 percent of disabled people can be active in labor force.

A secondly consideration undermining of the idea of that a fresh welfare regime is operative in Turkey today is that part of the social welfare supports are taken back through taxation. The share which the state has reclaimed from household incomes with taxes is not to be underestimated. In 2005, consumption taxes paid amounted to 70 percent of the total tax income. When the burden of consumption tax on income groups is examined, we find that 23 percent of the lowest 20 percent income group's income is paid to the state in consumption taxes (Gökçen et al. 2008: 42).

In order to appreciate the subject more deeply, it is helpful to consider the proportion of the public resources that is identified for the purposes of poverty reduction and social welfare enhancement. Among the EU-25, nearly 69 percent of social protection expenses are composed of old age health expenses, a figure equivalent to 19.5 percent of GDP. In Turkey, this rate is approximately 90 percent and equal to 8.4 percent of GDP. This indicates that in Turkey, social protection expenses (1 percent of GDP) other than old age and health expenses are pretty much lower than the EU average (8.2 percent of GDP).

**Table 12: Share of Taxation, Social Insurance Contributions
and Public Social Expenditure by GDP (%)**

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Indirect Tax	15.5	16.5	17.1	18.0	17.7
Direct Tax	8.2	8.5	7.9	8.2	7.8
Social Insurance Contributions	5.9	6.5	6.9	6.8	7.6
Total Taxes and Contributions	29.7	31.5	31.9	33.0	33.1
Education	4.4	4.1	4.0	4.0	4.1
Health	4.7	4.8	5.1	5.2	5.2
Social Protection	7.9	9.1	9.1	9.7	9.5
Retirement pensions and Other Expenditure	7.1	8.1	8.2	8.7	8.4
<u>Social Relief and Non-contribution Payment</u>	<u>0.3</u>	<u>0.4</u>	<u>0.3</u>	<u>0.5</u>	<u>0.6</u>
<u>Direct Income Support to Agriculture</u>	<u>0.5</u>	<u>0.6</u>	<u>0.6</u>	<u>0.5</u>	<u>0.5</u>
Total Social Expenditure	17.1	18.0	18.2	18.9	18.8

Source: DPT 2007-10 (2008 Annual Program); TÜİK

If increases in taxes and contributions and increase in public social expenses are compared, it can be seen that the tax premium per GDP increased 3.4 points in 2002-2006, but the share of education expenses went down 0.3 points and the

(combined) share of health and social protection expenses only increased 2.1 points. While the total social expenses increased by just 1.7 points (relative rises of 11.4% and 10% respectively). Provision for education as a share of expenses actually went down, by 0.3 points. The (combined) share of health and social protection expenses increased 2.1 points, but even this rise was only negligibly more proportionately than the general increase in taxes and contributions (an 11.5% increase for income as opposed to 12.3% for health and social protection expenses. These figures demonstrate that public social expenses increased less than taxes and contributions the claim that a new social support regime has been introduced is unsupported by the overall financial data (Yükseler, 2008).

In addition, given that the income share that put aside for social expenses has declined a little on previous figures for an already heavily criticized system, it is only to be expected that services provided in fields like education and medical are poor quality, less than those of other services. Also, a series of organizational/governmental problems in the delivery and presentation of public services has brought about various efficiency losses.

CRITICISMS OF THE SOLIDARITY FUND ACTIVITIES

These following issues are detected in researches on poverty and the activities of the Solidarity Fund system of welfare and social aids (in no particular order):

- Social aids are practiced with favoritism and opportunism; therefore there is political support seeking of administrations and expectations for sustaining these support,
- The Fund is used as a tool of political patronage,
- Foundation activities are not based on the concept of 'social right',
- Support policy does not include an idea of 'citizenship income' (Buğra and Keyder:2004),
- The conditions attached to securing public relief are often humiliating,
- *Solidarity Fund* activities are not based on detailed knowledge relevant to research on the dimensions and profile of poverty (Şenses, 1999 and 2003),
- These activities are subject to some mistakes. For example, supports may be inaccessible poor people while people who are not poor can access them (World Bank, 2002, METU, 2002),
- There is no standardization in the allocation of these supports (METU 2002; Buğra & Keyder 2003; Şenses 1999, 2003),
- The Solidarity Fund is not transparent and accountable (Şenses, 2003),

- When applications are evaluated, staff can behave arbitrarily (Buğra & Keyder, 2003).
- *Muhtars* (village headmen) play a central role, so it is seen as a source of favoritism and partiality in the system (METU, 2002),
- It is clearly assessed to be shameful for young men who are fit for work to demand support from this fund (Buğra & Keyder, 2003),
- The Solidarity Funds do not properly oversee the efficiency of these supports (Şenses, 1999 and 2003),
- Supports are not set up to prevent ambiguities of exclusion.
- Education supports do not seem to be able to generate the conditions for 8-year universal, free education (Buğra and Keyder 2003).

INSTEAD OF CONCLUSION

In the context of poverty and neo-liberalism, it is necessary to establish the issues well. Poverty existed before neo-liberalism with income distribution imbalances, regional imbalances, gender and poverty of minorities, and so on. However, with neo-liberalism, poverty has become more serious and gained permanent characteristics.

Second, when viewed from the historical developmental perspective, employment increased and poverty decreased with economic growth. But now, economic growth does not create employment which will reduce poverty. If poverty and unemployment allowed and even caused by economic growth with advanced technological developments is the focus, it is clear that emphasis must be laid on growth options creating employment and/or a fairer distribution of rewards from the contribution of advanced technology to society.

Third, in the period before neo-liberalism, social welfare regimes in Europe especially were sufficiently wide covering and well-funded to insure individuals against future uncertainties. On the other hand, neo-liberal policies now support people who do not have income earning opportunities or capacities only to the extent that they will not die from hunger, or offer romantic solutions to today' profound structural problems, like the Gramen system.

Fourth, even though, it is possible to argue that there has been an increase in resources used for social support policies in Turkey when looking at the absolute figures, a significant part of these supports are taken back from people through indirect taxes, the dominant taxation approach of neo-liberalism. Furthermore, the criterion of efficiency of these supports must not be money spent but whether and the extent to which they reduce poverty.

Fifth, although studies as aimed at things like trying to find definitions of poverty or methods of measurement have contributed a lot to the struggle against

poverty, it must not be overlooked that one of the main reasons for the poverty is itself built into the solutions, the development approach, that is, assumed by these analyses. This concern cannot be ignored when it goes hand in hand with current approaches that relate the reason for being poor to the poor, and leave the struggle against poverty and poverty reduction to non-governmental organizations. Instead of this, Keynesian policies, at least, which attaches importance to the state in the economy is to be preferred, and policies that regard social aid as a citizenship right should be adopted, as opposed to those which treat aid in terms of charity, or in Islam, '*sadaka*'.

It is entirely unconvincing that the World Bank, which tries to spread and deepen neo-liberal reforms, should now lead the way in poverty reduction and the development of poverty approaches. The current model of progress that includes concerns like human improvement, involves social exclusion in tandem with poverty measurements based on income and consumption. This raises the suspicion that even that the World Bank is really trying to save and deepen neo-liberal reforms. In this framework, the poverty expression of the World Bank deserves to be discussed critically, particularly in the light of stalling and semi-failing initiatives like the United Nations MDGs. Recent poverty reduction in the world has been sourced from poverty reduction in China and also India to a large extent, and it cannot be suggested that these countries have adopted neo-liberal policies totally.

The essential impasses in the neo-liberal approach to poverty becomes quite apparent when a range of interrelated variables and contradictory pairs are considered together, such as employment increase and labor market flexibilization, access to services like education and medical services and the privatization of these services, inclusion of the poor in the financial system with interest payable micro-credit schemes, reduction in tax rates and increase in social aid, reduction in agricultural support and allowing agricultural product prices to be set by the market, etc. When arguing against the neo-liberal discourse, it must be accepted that it does have some positive aspects, which must be appreciated when taking its entirety into consideration, including all these contradictions. The positive aspects of neo-liberalism are contextualized by ideals, policies, measures and counter-effects that work to prevent genuine poverty reduction,

An alternative, broad development strategy which focuses on issues like the structural transformation of foreign trade, industrialization, employment and poverty reduction must go beyond temporary arguments about poverty and palliative solutions. In this framework, if the rapidly decreasing rural population and fading agricultural system are viewed again from the perspective of rural development, there may be potential poverty reduction solutions. Options include, for example, supporting functions for rural areas not only for cultivation but also as living area spaces for the old and retired; the re-configuration of agriculture in ways and products which will create employment without giving up the goal of new methods and fertility; the establishment of industries based on agriculture in rural areas; and the development of urban agriculture.

The Turkish state needs to play a central role in addressing regional imbalances, fiscal policy for income shares, the delivery of education, medical, etc services, and solutions to poverty. While developing policies in this field, it will be helpful to consider the entire range of possibilities, from European social welfare systems to specific national and local conditions, from family ties to non-governmental organizations, in order to make full use of all resources.

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