

Executive Summary

This review of national education policies in the Republic of Turkey takes place at a critical point in the nation's history. An improving economy, greater governmental continuity, and a more stable social environment, coupled with the extraordinary challenge of Turkey's candidacy for EU accession, provide an unprecedented opportunity for a new phase of education reform.

Over the past decade, Turkey has pursued a striking education reform agenda focused on implementing eight-year basic and compulsory education and dramatically increasing the participation of girls at the primary education level. A challenge remains to close the gap in participation between boys and girls. The nation must now complement the drive for increasing enrolments and participation with efforts to improve quality. For Turkey to reach the levels of educational attainment and performance of the most advanced countries in Europe and OECD, the Republic must undertake sustained, multi-year, systemic reforms of the education system.

This report summarises the social, economic and policy context in Turkey and its position compared to other OECD countries and the review team's principal observations and findings from analysis of information, visits to schools, and meetings with education officials and stakeholders. Six major themes frame the observations, findings, and recommendations of this review: social inclusion; equity; quality and accountability; human resources; financing and efficient use of resources; and leadership, organisational structure and governance.

The report outlines a number of specific actions that Turkey should take in education reform over the next decade to move the nation forward. These include:

- expanding access to early childhood and care, including extending universal access to pre-school education to all children from three to five years of age;
- narrowing the remaining differences in participation in primary school of girls and students from certain regions;
- improving the quality of primary education, including reducing class sizes, reducing the number of double-shift schools and improving student/teacher ratios;

- implementing new curricula at every level of the system, including substantial investments in professional development, new textbooks, and other instructional materials;
- designing and implementing new student assessments and examinations;
- increasing the number of students, especially girls, who successfully make the transition to secondary education;
- increasing the capacity of secondary education to accommodate growing demand and significantly improving the quality of general high schools and vocational and technical high Schools;
- increasing services to students with special needs to levels comparable to those in other OECD countries;
- investing in significant improvements in the quality of human resources – teachers, school principals, guidance counsellors and administrators at every level of the system;
- sustaining efforts to increase budgetary support for education and diversifying sources of revenue;
- accompanying increases in resources with efficiencies, especially at the secondary level;
- undertaking fundamental reforms in the role, mission and functions of the Ministry of National Education, including significant decentralisation to provincial and school levels.

The imperative of social inclusion serves as an overarching theme for the review. Turkey must recognise education reform as a fundamental element of its social, economic, health and other related initiatives to improve the well-being of its people, address remaining issues of human rights and strengthen the nation's competitive position in the global knowledge-based economy. The nation's economic competitiveness depends fundamentally on a far stronger link between education and the rapidly changing labour market.

Chapter 1 provides information on context and the comparative perspective. Chapter 2 focuses on early childhood education and primary/basic education (up to grade 8). Chapter 3 concentrates on secondary education, including general secondary, vocational and technical education, and apprenticeships. Chapter 4 addresses several cross-cutting issues. Chapter 2, and 3 and and 4 each contain a list of recommendations, some pertaining to all levels of the education system. The conclusion, in Chapter 5, includes a compilation of all the recommendations.