



The Aging Readiness & Competitiveness Report

TURKEY

Overview

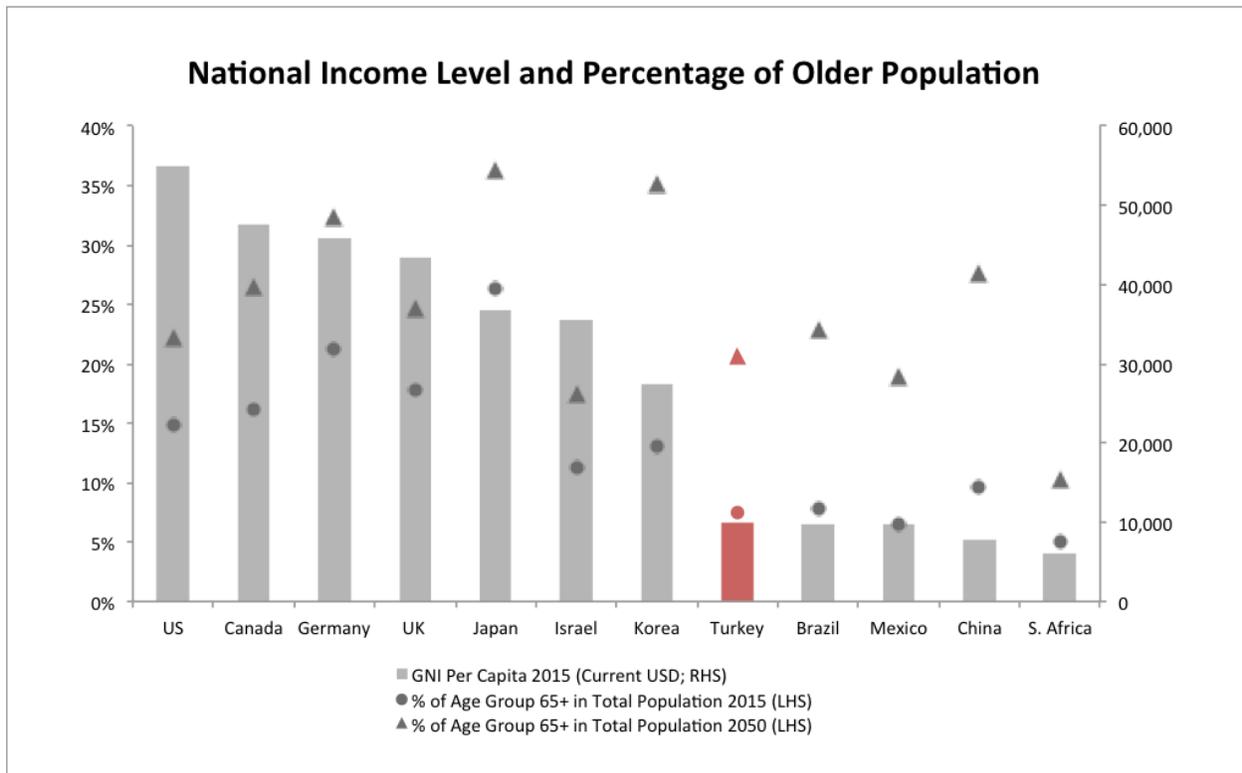
Turkey's population age 65 or older will more than triple by 2050, aging at the second-fastest pace among OECD countries, and is projected to become an "aged" society within two decades.¹ In addition to expanded life span, declining fertility rate is a primary contributor to the fast-aging population. From 2010 through 2015, the average birth rate per Turkish woman was 2.1, compared to 4.07 three decades ago. It is projected to reduce by another 17 percent through 2050.²

¹ UN Population Prospects 2015.

² Ibid.

With a median age of just 29.8, the second lowest in the OECD,³ Turkey is expected to enjoy several more years of "demographic bonus," when the ratio of the population ages 0 through 14 and 65 or older to the working-age population will continue to decline. This trend will reverse around 2025. While awareness of this demographic shift is gaining traction in the country, it has yet to become a priority for the Turkish government, which has been grappling with other imminent issues, including geopolitical and national

³ Ibid.



(Sources: OECD, United Nations, World Bank)

security risks, economic slowdown, youth unemployment, and social stability.

The absence of aging issues on the government's top agenda is particularly evidenced in negligible efforts to tap productive opportunity among older adults. Although the ongoing gradual increases in pensionable age will help to boost economic participation among older adults, employment support for this group is limited. Similarly, older Turkish adults' usage of the Internet is among the lowest in OECD, with a significant divide from the general population, and they have limited access to training opportunities.

Nevertheless, the Turkish government has acknowledged the social and economic impact of the aging population, and it has strived to improve the social safety net and to increase community support for aging in place. Having achieved universal healthcare coverage over the past decade, the government is increasingly focused on the quality of care services. However, more work is warranted in order to accommodate a healthy aging population. While the government is seeking to rely on family-centered care to meet with rising needs for care services for older people, the growing unmet need from the older middle-class population remains an issue.



Community Social Infrastructure

A shift toward a nuclear family structure in Turkey is leaving more older adults living independently, but traditional family ties remain strong and continue to enable aging at home. Emphasizing the family's central role in caring for older adults, the government has also elevated community service support, mainly through projects undertaken by municipalities. However, accessibility of physical infrastructure remains an obstacle to older adults' easy and safe mobility.

Social Connection

Family structure is changing in Turkey as a result of the industrialization and urbanization of the economy. From 2006 through 2013, multigenerational households dropped from 16.6 percent of the total number of households to 13.1 percent.⁴ Along with the shrinking family size is the increasing number of older people (age 65 or older) living alone, which more than doubled from 2007 through 2015 and rose from 12.9 percent of the older population to 21.7 percent.⁵

Despite this demographic shift, families are central in the Turkish society. According to Kuzeyhan Ozdemir, former President of

the Turkish Seniors Association (TURYAK), “In Turkey, older people are traditionally very important to, and valued by, their families. They were typically living with their children or in nearby houses. While the living arrangements in urban areas especially have been changing in recent decades, family relationships remain very strong, particularly in rural areas.”⁶ Even in urban areas, where families are more likely to be nuclear, children often

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live close to their older parents to allow them to better provide care. A 2013 study found that if urban households are defined based on residential units

⁴ Turkish Statistical Institute. Statistics on Family 2014.

⁵ Turkish Statistical Institute.

⁶ Interview with Kuzeyhan Ozdemir, former President of the Turkish Seniors Association. May 2017.

rather than on families, or as networks of kinship ties, they are overwhelmingly nuclear in most major cities in Turkey, but family ties across residential lines are very strong, with proximate living offering a popular alternative to inhabiting a shared residence.⁷ Another study in 2016 led by Dr. Emine Ozmete, Head of Ankara University Center on Aging Studies Implementation and Research, also found that nearly 85 percent of Turkish ages 20 to 54 believe they should take care of their older parents when they need it.⁸

Promoting Active Aging

Despite these strong family ties and respect for elders, negative stereotypes around aging are prevalent in Turkish society. Older adults are often viewed as dependents needing care rather than as vibrant contributors who add social value. Leading civil societies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have been working to change this and to help establish positive perceptions of aging. When the 65+ Elder Rights Association, a civil society group, organized its first short films competition to raise awareness about the role of older people in Turkey in 2015, the submissions it received had mostly focused on themes of physical

⁷ Duben, A. (2013). Generations of Istanbul families, the elderly, and the social economy of welfare. *New Perspectives on Turkey*, 48, 5-54. doi:10.1017/S0896634600001874.

⁸ Personal correspondence with Ayse Karda, Vice Undersecretary of Turkish Ministry of Family and Social Policies, and Dr. Emine Ozmete, head of Ankara University Center on Aging Studies Implementation and Research. May 2017.

“Older people should be considered as a combination of social, financial, and cultural values instead of the biological concept of being old. Our main goal is to not just give benefits in cash but also encourage an active life of the older population.”

– Cosgun Gurboga, Head of the Elderly Care Services Department in the Ministry of Family and Social Policies

aging, sickness, death, and depression.⁹ Having hosted two competitions in 2015 and 2016, the association aims to promote images of healthy, experienced, and productive older adults. Both amateurs and professionals are welcomed to participate with five- to ten-minute films ranging from fiction to documentaries, and winners receive cash prizes.¹⁰ Another program with a similar objective is the Distinguished Senior Citizens initiative, which was first introduced by the Turkish Seniors Association in 2012. Each year, the organization recognizes individuals age 60 or older who have been professionally successful and active in social activities, and there have been more than 50 recipients of the award since its inception.¹¹

⁹ Interview with Gulustu Salur, Cofounder of 65+ Elder Rights Association. September 2016.

¹⁰ <http://yaslihaklaridernegi.org/blog/2016/04/07/65-yasli-haklari-dernegi-2-kisa-film-ve-kamu-spotu-yarismasi-2016/>.

¹¹ <http://www.turyak.org/en/senior-citizens.html>.

Witnessing the growing share of older people in the population, the Turkish government is also increasingly focused on cultivating positive perceptions of “aging” across the society and supporting social engagement and independent living of older people. Cosgun Gurboga, Head of the Elderly Care Services Department in the Ministry of Family and Social Policies, contends, “Older people should be considered as a combination of social, financial, and cultural values instead of the biological concept of being old. Our main goal is to not just give benefits in cash but also encourage an active life of the older population.”¹²

One approach the government has taken is to promote sports that have low risks of injury among older adults to help them stay physically healthy and socially connected, such as bocce. In April 2016, the Ministry of Family and Social Policies held a bocce tournament in Antalya, with 160 players from nursing homes in 31 cities attending. The General Directorate of Services for Persons with Disabilities and the Elderly under the Ministry of Family and Social Policy has also been working to draft the country’s first Active Aging Strategy (2016–2020), which will outline specific actions that are aimed at promoting social and economic participation and independent living of older adults, as well as responsible

¹² Interview with Cosgun Gurboga, Head of the Elderly Care Services Department in the Ministry of Family and Social Policies. September 2016.

implementing agencies. The Ministry expects to launch the Strategy in 2017.¹³

Supporting Aging in Place

There is near-universal preference for aging at home in the Turkish society.¹⁴ Almost 100 percent of older Turks are aging at home, with fewer than 0.5 percent residing in care institutions as of 2015.¹⁵ A survey conducted by the Prime Ministry in 2010 indicated that only 4 percent of the lower, 5 percent of the middle, and 8 percent of the upper classes expressed a wish to live in a non-domestic institution for older care.¹⁶

Municipalities are playing the leading role supporting aging at home and in communities. Muratpaşa of Antalya, the first in Turkey to join the WHO’s Global Network of Age-Friendly Cities and Communities in 2014, has been a leader

¹³ Personal communications with staff at the Ministry of Family and Social Policies. January 2017.

¹⁴ Duben, A. (2013). Generations of Istanbul families, the elderly, and the social economy of welfare. *New Perspectives on Turkey*, 48, 5-54. doi:10.1017/S0896634600001874.

¹⁵ The Turkish Statistical Institute. Elderly Statistics 2015. (Note: A total of 23,132 individuals lived in nursing homes as of November 2015, around 0.36% of the population age 65 or older.)

¹⁶ Duben, A. (2013). Generations of Istanbul families, the elderly, and the social economy of welfare. *New Perspectives on Turkey*, 48, 5-54. doi:10.1017/S0896634600001874. Original info from “Assessment of Expectations Regarding Old Age in Turkey,” Prime Ministry General Directorate of Family and Social Research Prime Ministry (2010).

in such efforts.¹⁷ To develop and reinforce community connections, the municipality has opened two coffeehouses where older adults can socialize, and it has established three social centers in neighborhoods of different income levels, which host social activities such as painting, dancing, and reading. It also operates a day-care center that provides daily social rehabilitation services for Alzheimer’s disease patients and caregiving consultancy for their family members.

The central government has also stepped up efforts to support aging in place, introducing the Elderly Support Program (YADES) in 2016 to fund projects by municipalities that provide community and home-care services to older adults. The program is operated by the Ministry of Family and Social Policies and will provide grants up to TRY 1.1 million (approximately USD 350,000) to approved projects.¹⁸ In fiscal year 2016–2017, the government has budgeted TRY 4.125 million (approximately USD 1.31 million) to fund five projects out of a total of 15 proposal submissions, in cities of Sakarya, Kayseri, Trabzon, Kahramanmaras, and Sanliurfa.¹⁹ In Sanliurfa, for example, the municipality is aiming to achieve a range of targets within one year, which include renovating 125 houses that are in poor condition, providing

home healthcare services to 600 older adults, delivering food packages to 200 older adults in need, and organizing various cultural and social events.²⁰

Physical Infrastructure

Like their counterparts in many countries, older Turks are eligible for free access to public transportation, although access is still limited. Since 2014, people age 65 or older and those with disabilities have been allowed to use certain transportation free of charge or at discounted fares. They have free access to buses, metros, and ferries within urban areas, and only need to pay half the price of fares for intercity trains and maritime transportation, with certain exceptions (e.g., touristic, recreational, and shuttle services).²¹

While the government’s new transportation subsidy aims to encourage social participation among older adults, accessibility – of not just public transport but also other public spaces – remains an issue that inhibits safe mobility. In 2005, the Turkish government first introduced the Disability Law, which requires public buildings, open spaces, and public transportation to ensure accessibility for people with disabilities.²² However, it lacks effective enforcement at the local level, resulting in persistent mobility barriers for people with disabilities. Nearly four in ten

¹⁷ <https://extranet.who.int/agefriendlyworld/network/muratpasa/>.

¹⁸ <http://www.dailysabah.com/nation/2016/04/21/active-aging-offers-new-lifestyle-for-seniors>.

¹⁹ http://eyh.aile.gov.tr/data/573580f6369dc51604397ce9/Bakan_destek-tutar-onayi21122016.pdf.

²⁰ <http://ajansurfa.com/tr-tr/haberler/11750/yadesle-ulu-cinarlara-ulasilacak>.

²¹ <http://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2014/03/20140304-3.htm>.

²² <http://www.mevzuat.gov.tr/MevzuatMetin/1.5.5378.pdf>.

people with disabilities in Turkey are age 65 or older.²³

In the 2011 Eurobarometer survey, public transportation was selected by 55 percent of Turkish respondents and ranked as the number-one area that required improvements to become more age-friendly.²⁴ In addition, the latest-available survey data by the Turkish Statistical Institute in 2010 show that nearly 67 percent of Turkish with disabilities reported that sidewalks, pedestrian paths,

²³ Turkish Statistical Institute. Population and Housing Census 2011. http://www.turkstat.gov.tr/PreTablo.do?alt_id=1047.

²⁴ <http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/yearFrom/1974/yearTo/2016/search/ageing/surveyKy/1002>.

and crossings are not suitable for their use, and 55 to 66 percent of them were unsatisfied with accessibility of public buildings, business facilities (e.g., shops, stores, restaurants), and their residential buildings. According to Gulustu Salur, Cofounder of 65+ Elder Rights Association, “Today, few buildings, including hospitals and clinics where older adults most often visit, have ramps, and many have steep steps that are difficult for them to ascend independently. Even inside new building that have installed elevators, oftentimes getting to an escalator requires walking up seven to ten stairs.”²⁵

²⁵ Interview with Gulustu Salur, cofounder of 65+ Elder Rights Association. September 2016.

Productive Opportunity

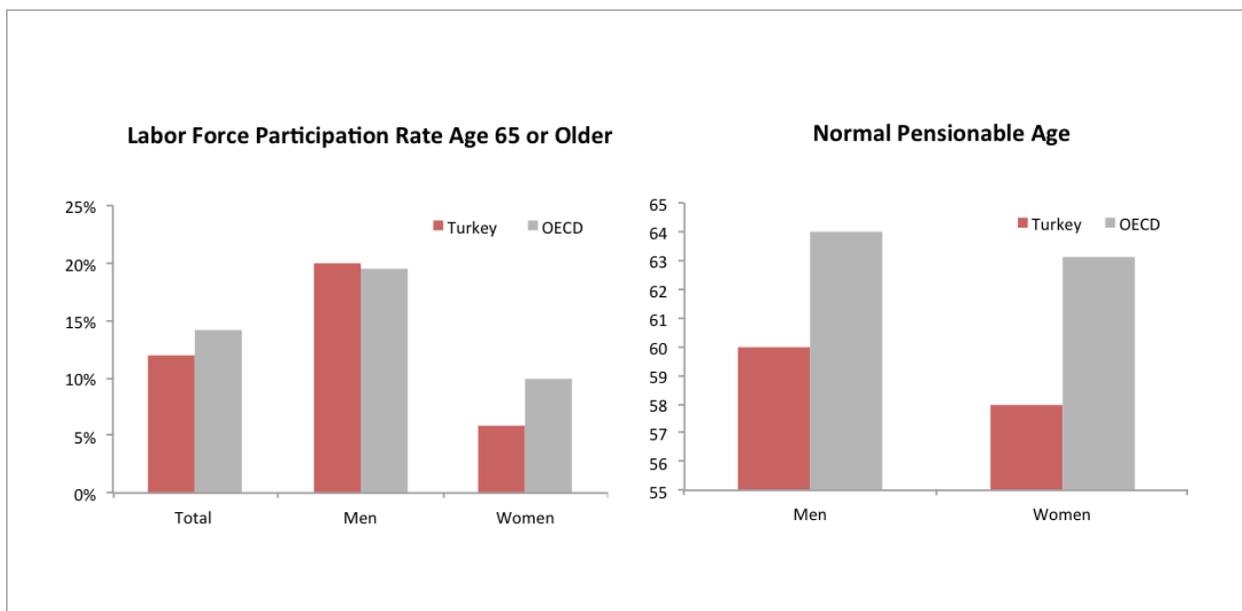
The large gender disparity in the labor force, due to Turkish women retaining the central role in managing household responsibilities, has been a main obstacle to tapping the productive opportunity in Turkey's older population. A push by the government to encourage families to have more children could further exacerbate this issue. As a society grappling with rising youth unemployment, economic engagement for older adults has not been elevated to a public policy priority, although ongoing gradual increases in the pensionable age are expected to boost participation in the labor force.

Labor Force Participation of Older Adults

The labor force participation (LFP) rate of older adults in Turkey is well below the OECD average.²⁶ In 2015, 11.9 percent of Turks age 65 or older were working or actively looking for jobs, compared with the OECD average of 14.1 percent. Turkey's low older-age LFP is mainly due to limited economic participation by older women. As of 2015, the LFP of Turkish women age 65 or older was only 59 percent of the OECD average.²⁷ This is primarily a result of the societal norm

²⁶ OECD Statistics.

²⁷ Ibid.



(Source: OECD Statistics)

that women play the central role in taking care of the family, particularly children and older parents. As a result, most women tend to stay outside the labor market or exit it early. The Justice and Development Party (AKP) government's calling for every family to have at least three children and the provision of financial incentives to encourage this are likely to constrain women's economic participation further.

Low educational attainment and a lack of necessary skills also constrain the participation of older adults in Turkey in the labor force outside of traditional sectors. In fact, nearly three-quarters of economically active older Turks were employed in

the agricultural sector as of 2015,²⁸ disproportionately higher than the share of older adults living in rural areas at less than 40 percent.^{29 30} Among the 12 countries in this study, Turkey has the lowest average years of total schooling across all age groups above 20 through 24, including the older population.³¹ As of 2015, around 41 percent of Turks age 65 or older were illiterate or had not completed elementary school, and only 16.2 percent had a junior high-school or further education.³²

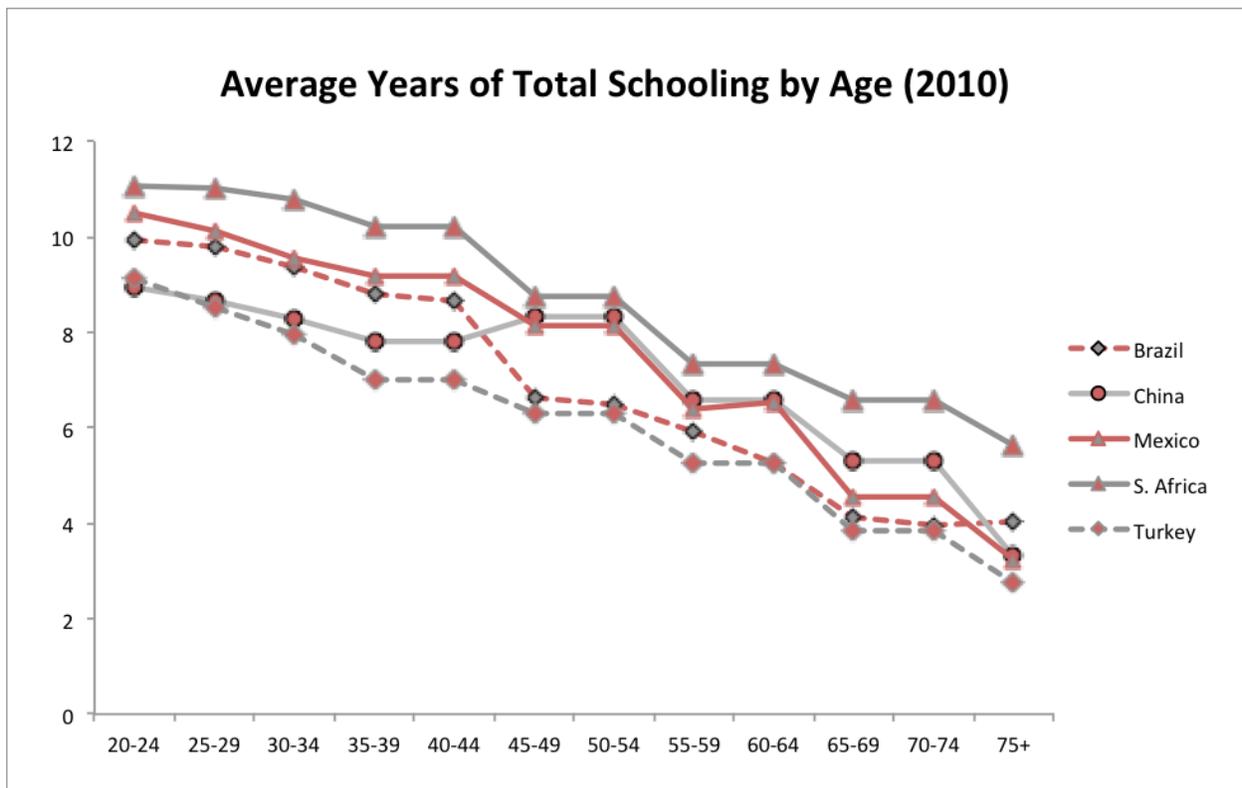
²⁸ Turkish Statistics Institute (2016). *Elderly Statistics 2016*. <http://www.turkstat.gov.tr/PreHaberBultenleri.do?id=24644>.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ UN Population Aging and Development Database 2014.

³¹ Barro R. & J.W. Lee (Feb. 2016). Educational Attainment for Total Population 1950-2010.

³² Turkish Statistics Institute (2016). *Elderly Statistics 2016*.



(Source: Barro R. & J.W. Lee)

Accessing education also has barriers. Thirty percent of respondents in a 2011 Eurobarometer survey reported that they had witnessed or personally experienced discrimination in access to education and training due to older age; in comparison, only 11 percent of respondents from 27 EU countries reported the same.³³

Concern over youth employment dominates the government's policy agenda. The young population age 15 through 24, accounting for 16.4 percent of the total population in 2015,³⁴ has an unemployment rate dramatically higher than the general population, and it has surged in recent years amid the economic slowdown. As of November 2016, Turkey's youth unemployment reached 24 percent, the highest since March 2010 and nearly doubling the general unemployment rate.³⁵ According to Cem Duyulmus, an expert on Turkey at the Strategic and Service Policy Branch of Employment and Social Development Canada, "With the largest youth population in Europe and increasing youth unemployment that threatens social stability, Turkey's employment policies give priority to the youth over the older population."³⁶

³³ <http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/yearFrom/1974/yearTo/2016/search/ageing/surveyKy/1002>.

³⁴ <http://www.turkstat.gov.tr/PreHaberBultenleri.do?id=21517>.

³⁵ Turkish Statistical Institute. Labor Force Statistics. http://www.turkstat.gov.tr/PreTablo.do?alt_id=1007.

³⁶ Interview with Cem Duyulmus, Policy Analyst at Employment and Social Development Canada's Strategic and Service Policy Branch. September 2016.

Raising Pensionable Age

While the Turkish government has not made a priority of older adults' employment, it is moving forward with a policy to increase very gradually the pensionable age for public pensions to ensure the fiscal sustainability of that system. Today, Turkey has the lowest normal pensionable age for men (60) within the OECD, together with Luxembourg and Belgium, and its pensionable age for women (58) is lower than any other OECD country.³⁷ The government legislated a reform in 2008 to increase gradually the pensionable age and contribution periods, to avoid upsetting older voters significantly, as they have been an important electoral force in the country.³⁸ According to the schedule, starting in 2008, the minimum contribution periods for the public pension will increase from 7,000 days to 9,000 days by 2028 (approximately a 29 percent increase) at a rate of 100 days per year.³⁹ Further, beginning in 2036, the pensionable age is set to increase by one year annually until reaching 65 for both men and women by 2048.⁴⁰

³⁷ OECD 2015. Pensions at a Glance 2015.

³⁸ Interview with Mehmet Tosun, Chair of the Department of Economics at the University of Nevada. September 2016.

³⁹ <http://www.sgk.gen.tr/ssk/sgk-emeklilik-sartlari.html>.

⁴⁰ http://mevzuat.tbmm.gov.tr/mevzuat/faces/madedetaylari?_afWindowMode=0&_adf.ctrl-state=k7vt7n7nf_4&_afLoop=4876048314943356&psira=55753&_afLoop=11503984244105233&_afWindowMode=0&_adf.ctrl-state=chyjoi7wr_4.

A Broad Agenda for the Older-Age Labor Force

The Turkish government acknowledged the long-term impact of an aging population and outlined a set of high-level objectives in the National Plan of Action on Aging in 2007, which are intended to facilitate increased participation in the labor force. The actions include: eliminating policies that have an adverse impact on working after retirement; providing lifelong learning, educational programs, and on-the-job training to improve employability; and promoting new approaches to the retirement system, such as flexible retirement.⁴¹ Since then, the government has made some progress toward these goals, although slowly. In April 2016, it removed the Social Security Support Contribution (SGDP), which was originally introduced in 1986. SGDP was imposed on pension-collecting retirees who had taken a post-retirement job and had been charged 10 to 15 percent of their wages and pension benefits, hence having been a significant disincentive to labor force participation for older adults.⁴²

One area of real progress is lifelong learning. In 2015, Akdeniz University, a public university in the city of Antalya, launched the first academic program dedicated to older adults, called “Renewal

University.” Targeting people in their 60s or older, the four-year program offers a wide selection of courses, including sociology, psychology, biology, technology, chemistry, agriculture, and medicine. The program is free of charge and assigns no grades. Its goals are to enhance the lives and creativity of the students and to help them stay cognitively healthy. Interest has grown quickly following the program’s trial run in May 2015, with enrollment exceeding 300.⁴³

Little has been achieved in the other areas mentioned in the National Plan, including allowing for flexible or phased retirement arrangements, considered by local experts to be among the most consequential proposals.⁴⁴ Allowing older employees to reduce their working hours gradually or to adopt a part-time schedule as they approach the retirement age would extend the longevity of working life, particularly among women, who tend to exit the labor force early to care for their older family members. According to Duyulmus, “A gradual drawdown of working hours [also] helps to ease the transition to retirement, benefiting both physical and mental health.”⁴⁵

⁴³ <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/09/turkey-senior-citizens-get-their-first-university.html>.

⁴⁴ Interviews with Cem Duyulmus, Mehmet Tosun, and Cosgun Gurboga. September 2016.

⁴⁵ Interview with Cem Duyulmus, Policy Analyst at the Strategic and Service Policy Branch of Employment and Social Department Canada. September 2016.

⁴¹ Turkey State Planning Organization (2007). The Situation of Elderly People in Turkey and National Plan of Action on Ageing.

⁴² http://www.sgk.gov.tr/wps/wcm/connect/SGK+Internet/emeklilik/emeklilikten_sonra/.

However, should the pursuit of flexible retirement move forward, there are concerns over how to preserve income adequacy for low-wage workers. Setting an income floor as part of flexible retirement, however, could inspire backlash from employers. Mehmet Tosun, Chair of the Department of Economics at the University of Nevada, contends, “The [flexible retirement] system may not be applicable for all older adults, especially those who work at jobs with low pay. Instead, it is more suitable for white-collar professionals with high-level earnings, in fields like medicine and

academia.”⁴⁶ To date, the government has done little to move toward such a system, as implementing it would necessitate reforming employment regulations, which would require both fiscal feasibility and political will.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Interview with Mehmet Tosun, Chair of the Department of Economics at the University of Nevada. September 2016.

⁴⁷ Interviews with Cosgun Gurboga, Head of the Elderly Care Services Department of the General Directorate of Services for Persons with Disabilities. September 2016.

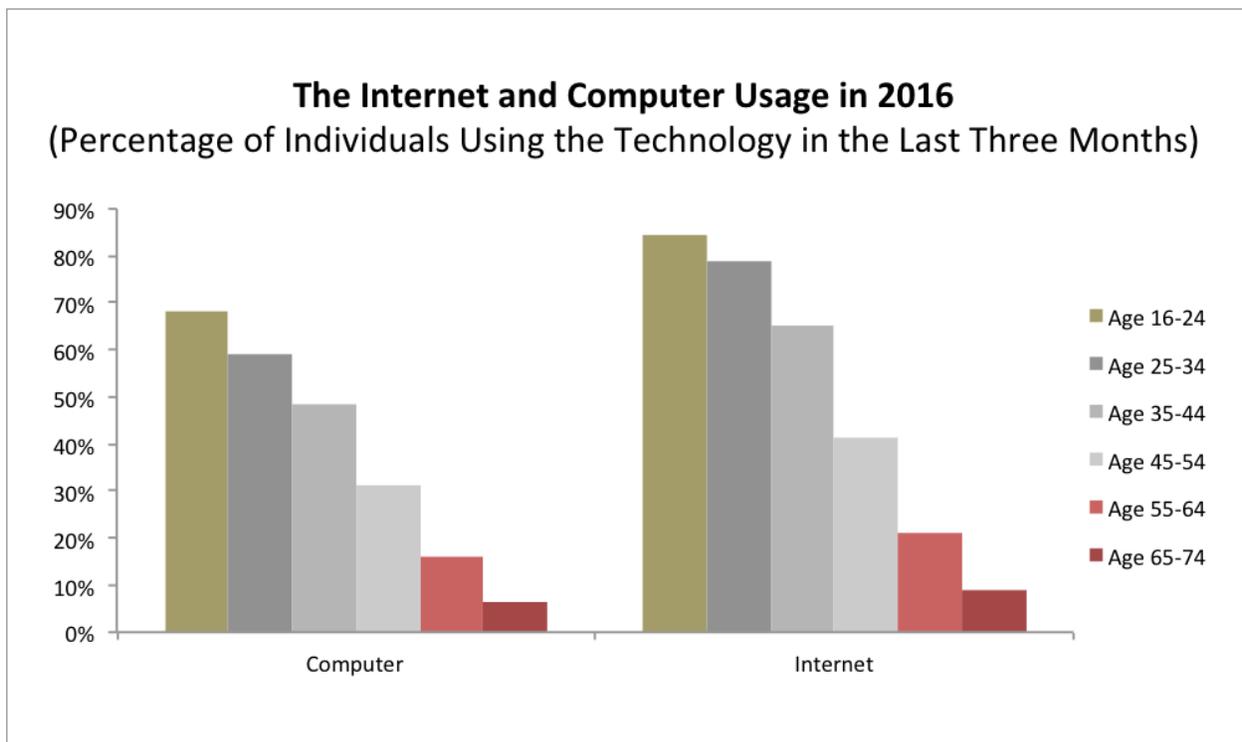
Technological Engagement

Mirroring educational attainment, older adults in Turkey have among the lowest rates of technology adoption, leading to a large digital divide with tech-savvy younger people in the country. While the government has endeavored to address this by increasing access to infrastructure and hardware, the lack of access to training opportunities remains a primary barrier to engaging older adults in the digital era.

The Digital Divide

Turkey's older population has a lower adoption of digital technology and a larger digital divide from the general population than most OECD countries. As of 2016, fewer than 7 percent of Turks ages 65 through 74 used computers, and just 9 percent were online.⁴⁸ According to a 2015 OECD report on science and technology, Turkey had the lowest share of Internet

⁴⁸ Turkish Statistical Institute. Information and Communication Technology Usage Survey on Households and Individuals, 2016.



(Source: Turkish Statistical Institute)

users between ages 65 and 74 among OECD countries, just 10 percent of the OECD average, and the digital divide between the older and younger population on the Internet usage was also among the largest within OECD.⁴⁹

Relatively low levels of technology adoption in Turkey, among both the general and older population, are largely due to lack of training. According to the World Economic Forum's Global Information and Technology Report in 2015, while Turkey ranked number eight out of 143 countries on the affordability of mobile telephony use and broadband subscription, it ranked number 80 on people's skillsets.⁵⁰ This challenge is even more severe among older Turks due to the high illiteracy rate – the percentage of people with no schooling among the age group 60 through 69 more than doubles that of the age group 15 and older.⁵¹

As in other countries, a lack of interest and self-doubt about ability to learn new and seemingly complex technology are main barriers to older Turks' technological engagement.⁵² However, experts contend that the resistance to new technology diminishes once older adults realize its benefits. According to Ozdemir, "While

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– Gulustu Salur, Cofounder of 65+ Elder Rights Association

many older adults show little interest in learning computer skills, they are more eager to learn how to use the Internet and video chat, as they help them to keep in close touch with their children and grandchildren."⁵³ Salur has similar made an observation and notes, "Social media is the most popular among older adults that do use the Internet, partly because it enables them, particularly those with disabilities, to socialize without having to leave their apartments."⁵⁴

Promoting Digital Inclusion

Seeking to harness the potential of information and communications technology (ICT) to drive job creation and economic growth, the Turkish government has been working to promote the diffusion of ICT into society. In 2014, it released the Information Society Strategy and Action Plan for 2015 through 2018, which established an objective to double the

⁴⁹ OECD Science, Technology and Industry Scoreboard 2015.

⁵⁰ World Economic Forum. Global Information Technology Report 2015.

⁵¹ Barro R. & J.W. Lee. Educational Attainment Database (v. 2.1, Feb. 2016).

⁵² Hoffman, Max (June 2016). Turkey's Digital Divides. Center for American Progress. http://umfp.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/CAP_Turkeys_Digital_Divides.pdf.

⁵³ Interview with Kuzeyhan Ozdemir, former President of the Turkish Seniors Association. May 2017.

⁵⁴ Interview with Gulustu Salur, cofounder of 65+ Elder Rights Association. September 2016.

domestic IT market from 2013 through 2018, including measures to reduce the digital divide.⁵⁵

With the goal of raising the Internet usage rate from 48.5 percent in 2014 to 75 percent in 2018, the plan includes actions to address the exclusion of vulnerable groups, including older adults, people with disabilities, and women. Specifically, it aims to increase the Internet usage rate among people age 45 and older from 19 percent in 2014 to 30 percent by 2018. However, the government's measures to reduce the digital divide have mainly focused on accessibility of infrastructure and devices by providing poor families with free limited Internet access, disseminating ICT hardware and software for people with disabilities, and increasing public access to the Internet through public information centers like libraries.⁵⁶

Although the government intends to use public education and information centers to deliver digital training, few training programs are specifically designed for older people that, based on best practices from other countries in this study, yield better results. In fact, older adults are underrepresented among those who attend and benefit from public training programs, and some experts believe that making older adults realize the benefit

⁵⁵ Turkey's Information Society Department (2015). The Information Society Strategy and Action Plan for 2015–2018.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

of technology will help prompt their participation.⁵⁷

While low adoption of digital technology has undermined the market segment's attractiveness for the private sector, leading telecom companies have been working to improve digital inclusion, with an eye to market expansion as well as corporate social responsibility. One notable program is the Internet literacy project "Life Is Simpler with Internet," launched in 2013 by Turk Telekom, a conglomerate, in collaboration with UNDP and the Turkish NGO Habitat Association for Development and Governance. With the help of volunteers, the project provides training on topics including basic Internet use, e-government application, video communication, online banking, and social media, targeting people age 35 or older and hence helping to improve digital literacy of both current and upcoming generations of the older population.⁵⁸ As of 2016, it provided workshops in 50 cities to more than 21,000 participants, with the goal of increasing the number to 30,000 by 2017.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Personal correspondence with Ayse Karda, Vice Undersecretary of Turkish Ministry of Family and Social Policies, and Dr. Emine Ozmete, head of Ankara University Center on Aging Studies Implementation and Research. May 2017.

⁵⁸ <http://www.tr.undp.org/content/turkey/en/home/presscenter/articles/2015/03/12/young-volunteers-bridges-the-digital-divide-in-turkey.html>.

⁵⁹ <https://www.turktelekom.com.tr/hakkimizda/medya-merkezi/basin-bultenleri/sayfalar/hayat-kolay-ile-digital-dunya.aspx>.

Healthcare and Wellness

The lifespan and healthspan of older Turkish adults have improved significantly over the past decade, thanks in part to the country's establishment of universal healthcare coverage and ongoing efforts to improve the quality of care. While the government is seeking to meet the rising care needs of the aging population through family-centered care, there are significant gaps in meeting the needs of the middle-class aging population.

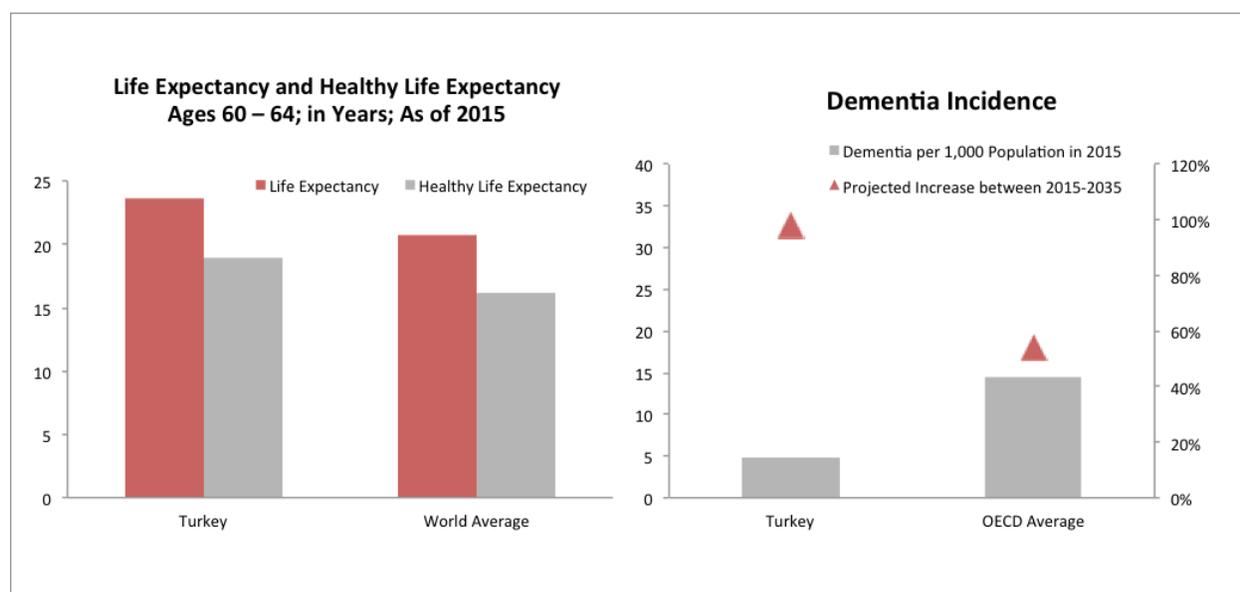
Healthcare Improvements

Compared with a decade ago, Turkey has made strides in extending the average lifespan, as well as the healthy life expectancy of its population. As of 2015,

an average Turk ages 60 through 64 was expected to live 1.5 years longer than a decade ago and to have 1.1 more years of healthy life. However, improvements in healthy life expectancy have lagged somewhat. For those aged 60 through 64, the gap between lifespan and healthspan increased by 0.4 years from 2005 through 2015, leading to a rising need for care among the older population.⁶⁰ Around 90 percent of those aged 65 and over have a least one chronic disease, and nearly one-quarter have three or more health issues.⁶¹ Although dementia is less

⁶⁰ Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (2016). Global Burden of Disease Study 2015.

⁶¹ Turkey 2015–2020 Health Aging Action Plan and Implementation Program.



(Sources: OECD, Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation)

prevalent in Turkey than in other OECD countries, due to the relatively younger population, the prevalence per 1,000 is expected to double to 9.5 over the next two decades.⁶²

The improvement in lifespan and healthspan is partly a result of the government's impressive reforms to its healthcare system over the past decade, achieving universal healthcare insurance coverage while reducing private health expenditures.⁶³ As a result, government spending accounted for more than three-quarters of Turkey's national healthcare expenditures as of 2013, a 16 percentage point increase from 2000. During that period, the household out-of-pocket healthcare spending almost halved.⁶⁴

The establishment of the family medicine system, a central component of these reforms, particularly benefits older adults. Turkey introduced a family medicine system in 2005 and had expanded it nationwide by the end of 2010⁶⁵ in an attempt to prevent lifelong health issues by encouraging individuals and families to build a regular relationship with a selected physician. Visits to family medicine practices are fully subsidized by the government and free of charge to patients.⁶⁶ Dr. Nazmi Bilir, Professor of

Public Health at Hacettepe University, contends that "older adults, who tend to suffer the most from persistent and repetitive health issues, could be the greatest beneficiaries." However, he also notes that "as family medicine physicians often focus more on childcare, maternity, and pregnancy, instead of older adults, particular effort is needed from the physicians to get older adults involved to enable them take the most advantage of this system."⁶⁷

Having achieved its goal of expanding coverage, the Turkish government is paying greater attention to quality of medical care. Public health experts consider the polypharmacy reform, which was introduced by the Ministry of Health in 2014, to be particularly important for older adults.⁶⁸ The reform aims to tighten regulation of prescription drugs and to curb overuse of medicines. People between ages 55 and 74 are the country's largest medicine consumers,⁶⁹ and painkillers, antibiotics, and constipation drugs account for 40 to 60 percent of older patients' intake.⁷⁰ As older patients tend to use multiple medicines, they are vulnerable to potential serious side effects and could particularly benefit from this reform. Under the new system,

⁶² OECD (2015). Health at a Glance 2015.

⁶³ <http://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMp1410433>.

⁶⁴ OECD Health Statistics Turkey. <http://www.oecd.org/els/health-systems/oecd-health-statistics-2015-country-notes.htm>.

⁶⁵ <http://www.nber.org/papers/w21510.pdf>.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Interview with Dr. Nazmi Bilir of Hacettepe University. September 2016.

⁶⁸ Interview with Dr. Nazmi Bilir of Hacettepe University and Gulustu Salur, cofounder of 65+ Elder Rights Association. September 2016.

⁶⁹ <http://www.istanbulsaglik.gov.tr/w/sb/tekd/belge/5b.html>.

⁷⁰ <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/yasli-hastalar-ilac-kullanirken-pembenar-detay-genelsaglik-2061733/>.

patients can only buy medicines that have serious side effects within four days of the prescription date,^{71 72} while previously they could purchase most medicines without any prescriptions. In addition, a patient could not purchase the same medicine again within a provided period unless with a renewal note from a doctor.⁷³

Long-Term Care

The aging population is driving a growing need for professional care services. Since 2012, the Turkish government has more than doubled the number of public nursing homes and rehabilitation centers,⁷⁴ mainly targeting people age 60 or older who are socially isolated or in economic need.⁷⁵ Still, supply has fallen short of demand. As of July 2016, the total of 136 public nursing homes and rehab centers were nearly at capacity of almost 14,000, with more than 7,300 older adults on the waiting list.⁷⁶ In the face of the rising needs, the government has prioritized family-centered care. The AKP's party program explicitly states its intention to "assign priority to family-centered policy"

⁷¹ Interview with Nazmi Bilir, Professor at Hacettepe University's Public Health Department and former head of Ministry of Health's Public Health – Cancer Department.

⁷² <http://www.sgk.gen.tr/genel/sgk-receteleri-kac-gun-gecerli.html>.

⁷³ <http://www.sgk.gen.tr/genel/ilac-raporu-yenileme.html>.

⁷⁴ <http://eyh.aile.gov.tr/haberler/yasli-destek-programi-yades-tanitim-toplantisi>.

⁷⁵ Turkey's Third Review on National Action Plan on Aging. November 2016.

⁷⁶ Interview with Cosgun Gurboga, Head of the Elderly Care Services Department in the Ministry of Family and Social Policies. September 2016.

"Even though the wages are half of the minimum wage, this is a good incentive for caregivers as they are usually women who aren't active in the labor force for various reasons. By providing them some kind of income, policymakers plan to both increase women's labor participation and improve the care and health of the aging population."

– Dr. Nazmi Bilir, Hacettepe University

and provide incentives for "the care in the family of the needy elderly, after reaching a certain age."⁷⁷

The government's support for home-based care is primarily through financial subsidies. The Ministry of Health introduced the Caregiver Service Program⁷⁸ in 2007 to subsidize caregiving for low-income older adults and their families. The program was designed to compensate family members for the financial loss associated with leaving a job to care for an older relative and to create an incentive for women to enter the labor force as external caregivers. Family members or external caregivers dedicating at least eight hours per day to caregiving receive a monthly wage. Those with incomes no higher than two-thirds of the minimum wage are eligible for external caregivers, and for those families living at this limited income

⁷⁷ Akparti. <http://www.akparti.org.tr/english/akparti/parti-programme>.

⁷⁸ <http://www.mevzuat.gov.tr/Metin.Aspx?MevzuatKod=7.5.7542&MevzuatIliski=0&sourceXmlSearch=evde%20bakim>.

level, relatives can receive the subsidy. The monthly wage/subsidy is subject to adjustment every six months and stood at TRY 881 (approximately USD 280)⁷⁹ as of the second half of 2016, or just over half of the minimum wage.⁸⁰ Even though the subsidy is only half of the minimum wage, Dr. Bilir notes that it is “a good incentive for caregivers as they are usually women who aren’t active in labor force” and helps to “both increase women’s labor participation and improve the care and health of the aging population.”⁸¹

However, there is a lack of support for the middle-class aging population, resulting in their growing unmet needs. The government’s support for long-term care – including both the institutional care and subsidies for home care – has mainly relied on a means-tested approach. At the same time, paid care services provided by the private sector tend to target the wealthy population and are not affordable for middle class families. For example, the monthly cost of private nursing homes in Ankara is around TRY 3,527 (approximately USD 1,121) in

2017,⁸² nearly double the minimum wage.⁸³ According to Duyulmus, “The older-age care residencies and services are based on social status of older people that are either for the extremely poor or rich. This creates an issue for the middle-class older people, as they are not offered many affordable service options.”⁸⁴

Promoting Healthy Aging

To accommodate a healthy, aging population, in 2015 the Turkish government released its inaugural Healthy Aging Action Plan and Application Program for 2015 through 2020. The plan aims to provide “accessible, convenient, effective, and active healthcare services” and to meet the special needs of older adults. It sets a broad range of policy targets and the basic framework for implementation, which includes improving home care services, ensuring proper and effective medical diagnosis and treatment, and promoting education and training of geriatrics, among others.⁸⁵ Responsible government agencies have taken actions to follow this plan, but implementation remains an issue. For example, as the plan

⁷⁹ Based on the average conversion rate of 2016: TRY 3.146 = USD 1. <https://www.irs.gov/individuals/international-taxpayers/yearly-average-currency-exchange-rates>.

⁸⁰ <http://www.csgb.gov.tr/home/Contents/Istatistikler/AsgariUcret>.

⁸¹ Interview with Dr. Nazmi Bilir of Hacettepe University. September 2016.

⁸² <https://ankara.aile.gov.tr/duyurular/ozel-huzurevleri-ve-yasli-bakim-merkezleri-2017-yili-ucretleri>.

⁸³ <https://www.csgb.gov.tr/home/Contents/Istatistikler/AsgariUcret>.

⁸⁴ Interview with Cem Duyulmus, Policy Analyst at the Strategic and Service Policy Branch of Employment and Social Department Canada. September 2016.

⁸⁵ Ministry of Health. Turkey Healthy Aging Action Plan and Application Program for 2015–2020.

includes the promotion of recreational activities and sports as a main strategy to prevent chronic diseases, the government has started to install fitness equipment in public parks; however, most people are not aware of their functions and are not using them, hence limiting their impact.⁸⁶

While the action plan demonstrates the government's commitment to ensuring the wellness of older adults, some experts criticize it for failing to sufficiently

⁸⁶ Interview with Dr. Nazmi Bilir of Hacettepe University. September 2016.

emphasize the health of young people, who can begin healthy habits early and carry them into older age. Some experts also express concerns about bureaucratic obstacles to implementation as close interagency coordination is warranted, particularly among the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Finance, and the Ministry of Family and Social Policies, to ensure the fulfillment of the program's goals.⁸⁷

⁸⁷ Interviews with Dr. Nazmi Bilir of Hacettepe University and Gulustu Salur, Cofounder of 65+ Elder Rights Association. September 2016.