

ONE IN EVERY FOUR CHILDREN IS POOR

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Abstract

One in every four children in Turkey cannot satisfy their basic needs such as nutrition, heating and clothing. Even though there has been considerable improvement from 2006 to 2010, there are still 4.6 million children living in material deprivation. Stark regional differences in terms of child poverty also persist. Child poverty in the eastern regions is especially troubling. 40 percent of all children living in the Southeast are poor. Apart from growing up under serious material deprivation, these children will also face economic, political and moral problems such as inequality of opportunity and income inequality. On a different note, children growing up under poverty will also have detrimental effects on economic development. More and rigorous research on this topic is indispensable for designing effective policies to fight child poverty.

One in every four children in Turkey suffers from material deprivation

Although adult poverty may be a transitory state, child poverty is likely to persist a lifetime and may even get transferred from one generation to the next. Therefore child poverty needs to be defined, recognized and systematically fought in all countries.

Given that child poverty is a multi-dimensional problem, there are various measures that try to quantify it. In this research brief, we will focus on material deprivation and three different basic needs as a measure of it. We define these basic needs to be nutrition, heating and clothing. Households that cannot satisfy any of these basic needs are defined to be poor; persons who live in poor households are defined to be poor. Unlike some other measures of poverty that depend on income and reflect inequalities in income distribution, material deprivation is a measure of absolute disadvantages.

Table 1 Material deprivation, 2006 and 2010

	2006		2010	
	Number of poor children (in 000)	Share of poor in all children (%)	Number of poor children (in 000)	Share of poor in all children (%)
Material deprivation	6,735	34.7	4,583	24.4
Nutrition	13,395	69.1	12,577	66.9
Heating	8,770	45.2	7,585	40.3
Clothing	11,669	60.2	7,665	40.8
Total number of children	19,392		18,800	

Source: Micro data of Survey of Income and Living Conditions, SILC, 2010; Betam calculations

We use the Survey of Income and Living Conditions 2006 and 2010 to study material deprivation, as measured by access to basic needs of nutrition, heating and clothing, of children between the ages of 0 and 15. The variables used are the ability to “eat meat, chicken or fish every other day”, “keep home adequately warm” and “afford new (not second-hand) clothes” respectively. Children who live in households that do not have the ability to meet any of these basic needs are defined to be poor

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children. According to this definition, 4.6 million children, i.e. one in every four children, are materially deprived (Table 1).

When we look at the basic needs separately, we see that 40.3 percent of all children who live in Turkey live in households that cannot keep their homes adequately warm and 40.8 percent of children cannot afford new clothes. 12.5 million children are not able to consume meat, chicken or fish every other day, i.e. their nutritional needs are not met. Given that two out of three children do not have access to main sources of protein, we can conclude that these children cannot have a healthy diet.

There have been significant improvements from 2006 to 2010. Share of materially deprived children decreased from 34.7 percent to 24.4 percent. Looking at the components of material deprivation, it is clear that the improvement stems from the clothing item. The share of children who cannot afford new clothes fell from 60.2 percent to 40.8 percent. One can guess that this striking improvement is a result of the decrease in the relative price of textiles. There has been some improvement in heating and in nutrition, albeit smaller.

Child poverty is worse in the east

Data points to stark regional differences. Measures of child poverty by regions are provided in Table 2. An overview reveals that child poverty deepens as we move from the western to the eastern regions. West Marmara, Aegean, East Marmara, West Anatolia, Central Anatolia and West Black Sea are regions in which child poverty rates are below the Turkey average. West Anatolia (13.6 percent) and Central Anatolia (15.5 percent) are the regions with the lowest rates. On the other hand, Istanbul and Mediterranean regions are very close to the average. High influxes of migration may be a reason.

One in every three children is materially deprived in East Black Sea and Northeast Anatolia. However, child poverty is more widespread in Southeast Anatolia. 42.1 percent of children who live in Southeast Anatolia are materially deprived. To reiterate, 1 million 200 thousand children in Southeast Anatolia cannot meet their basic needs as measured by nutrition, heating and clothing.

Table 2 Material deprivation of children by regions, 2010

	Child poverty as measured by access to basic needs		Turkey	
	Number of poor children (in 000)	Share of poor in all children (%)	Number of children (in 000)	Population (in 000)
TR1 Istanbul	736	24.5	3,008	12,692
TR2 West Marmara	125	20.0	627	3,085
TR3 Aegean	408	19.7	2,075	9,289
TR4 West Marmara	283	17.4	1,627	6,691
TR5 West Anatolia	219	13.6	1,610	6,726
TR6 Mediterranean	554	23.6	2,342	9,055
TR7 Central Anatolia	159	15.5	1,030	3,739
TR8 West Black Sea	171	16.8	1,019	4,385
TR9 East Black Sea	173	29.3	590	2,496
TRA Northeast Anatolia	215	30.0	715	2,101
TRB Central East Anatolia	340	26.0	1,307	3,603
TRC Southeast Anatolia	1,201	42.1	2,851	7,481
Turkey	4,583	24.4	18,800	71,343

Source: Micro data of Survey of Income and Living Conditions, SILC, 2010; Betam calculations

Children living in Southeast Anatolia are at a disadvantage

The regional distributions of access to each basic need are provided in Table 3. 66.9 percent of children living in Turkey cannot eat meat, chicken or fish every other day. Even in the most privileged regions, such as Istanbul (57.4 percent) and Central Anatolia (55.6 percent), more than half of the children cannot satisfy their basic nutritional needs. In Southeast Anatolia, 80 percent of children cannot.

In Turkey, 40.3 percent of children live in households that cannot heat their homes adequately. Even though the share of children in such homes are lower in the western regions, in Istanbul, Central East and Southeast Anatolia, almost half of the children live in homes that are not adequately heated.

Moreover, 40 percent of children cannot replace their old clothes with new ones. This is more common in Mediterranean, East Black Sea and Central East Anatolia. In Northeast Anatolia and Southeast Anatolia, more than half of the children cannot afford new clothes.

Table 3 Child poverty rates by basic needs and regions, 2010

	Nutrition		Heating		Clothing	
	Number of poor children (in 000)	Share of poor in all children (%)	Number of poor children (in 000)	Share of poor in all children (%)	Number of poor children (in 000)	Share of poor in all children (%)
TR1 Istanbul	1,726	57.4	1,484	49.3	1,169	38.9
TR2 West Marmara	405	64.6	166	26.5	215	34.4
TR3 Aegean	1,316	63.4	647	31.2	659	31.8
TR4 West Marmara	1,007	61.9	578	35.5	569	35.0
TR5 West Anatolia	1,115	69.2	455	28.2	360	22.4
TR6 Mediterranean	1,650	70.5	884	37.7	1,060	45.3
TR7 Central Anatolia	572	55.6	299	29.1	321	31.2
TR8 West Black Sea	740	72.6	326	32.0	326	32.0
TR9 East Black Sea	405	68.8	234	39.7	260	44.2
TRA Northeast Anatolia	506	70.8	275	38.5	398	55.7
TRB Central East Anatolia	842	64.4	652	49.9	586	44.8
TRC Southeast Anatolia	2,292	80.4	1,584	55.6	1,741	61.1
Turkey	12,577	66.9	7,585	40.3	7,665	40.8

Source: Micro data of Survey of Income and Living Conditions, SILC, 2010; Betam calculations

Conclusion and policy implications

Even though Turkey has enjoyed sizeable increases in per capita income and some decline in poverty, there are still many children who suffer from material deprivation. Apart from growing up under serious material deprivation, these children will also face economic, political and moral problems such as inequality of opportunity and income inequality. On a different note, children growing up under poverty will also have detrimental effects on economic development. It is now widely accepted that the education level of the labor force in Turkey is well below that of some countries that have managed to catch up with the developed world. Moreover, we also know that the quality of education in Turkey is the second to lowest among OECD countries. If Turkey aims to catch up with countries such as South Korea by 2030, it needs to implement a thorough education reform. However, the efficiency of any education reform will be dubious when one in every four children is materially deprived.

Therefore, we need to extend and deepen research on poor children to pave the way to designing effective social policies to lift them out of poverty. The research on material deprivation should focus on nutrition and heating. We need to further analyze the importance of not having access to a main protein source every other day and whether vegetable proteins are readily substitutable for animal

proteins. Meanwhile, we need to start thinking about cash transfer policies targeting protein weaknesses in Turkey.

Note that the decrease in children who live in inadequately heated homes has been limited even though the distribution of free coal is an arguably widespread social policy in Turkey. There may be a couple of reasons why. Distribution of free coal may not be well-targeted. Increases in the relative price of natural gas may force households to limit their consumption of natural gas. Lower income households may not be investing enough in insulation. More research may shed light on how coal aids should be designed.

More generally, research on poverty and the fight against poverty should be declared priority policy axes by the Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey and the Ministry of Development.