

Policy options for stronger, more equitable student outcomes in Türkiye

In 2021, an OECD team undertook analysis of Republic of Türkiye's data from two international assessments – the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA)'s Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS). The analysis aimed to understand how student performance in Türkiye has evolved over time and whether factors related to student background – such as gender or socio-economic background – are associated with performance. This policy perspective uses the findings from the PISA and TIMSS analysis to identify policy options to help Türkiye to raise performance and improve equity.

This policy perspective provides suggestions for Türkiye to create a stronger policy focus on overcoming obstacles for more equal opportunities for students. It provides suggestions across five policy areas:

- Policy area 1. Equitably expanding participation in pre-primary education
- Policy area 2. Ensuring quality provision of pre-primary education for children of all backgrounds
- Policy area 3. Creating more inclusive schools
- Policy area 4. Distributing resources to help schools compensate for disadvantaged backgrounds
- Policy area 5. Ensuring that open schools provide a supportive learning environment for students

All the variables used in the analysis are described in full in the OECD analysis “Student Achievement in Türkiye” published in 2022.

Overview of recent progress

Türkiye has made vast progress over the past two decades in facilitating access to education and improving outcomes for many groups of children and young people

The increase in school participation, especially at the upper secondary level in Türkiye, has been swift. The enrolment rate of 15-19 year-olds in education increased from 40% in 2005 to 69% by 2019 (OECD, 2021^[1]). In particular, the increase in the participation of girls at school has been rapid. The first time that Türkiye participated in PISA in 2003, girls were underrepresented, presenting only 45% of the PISA sample (which is designed to be representative of the overall in-school student population). The share of 15-year-old girls has progressively increased over PISA cycles, to reach 49.6% in PISA 2018 (OECD, 2019^[2]).

Türkiye's achievements in expanding enrolment stand out internationally because they have been achieved at the same time as strengthening outcomes. The average performance of 15-year-olds in mathematics has increased by 30 score points since 2003 and by more than 40 score points in science since 2006 (OECD, 2022^[3]). The increase in performance has brought Türkiye closer to the OECD average (OECD, 2019^[2]).

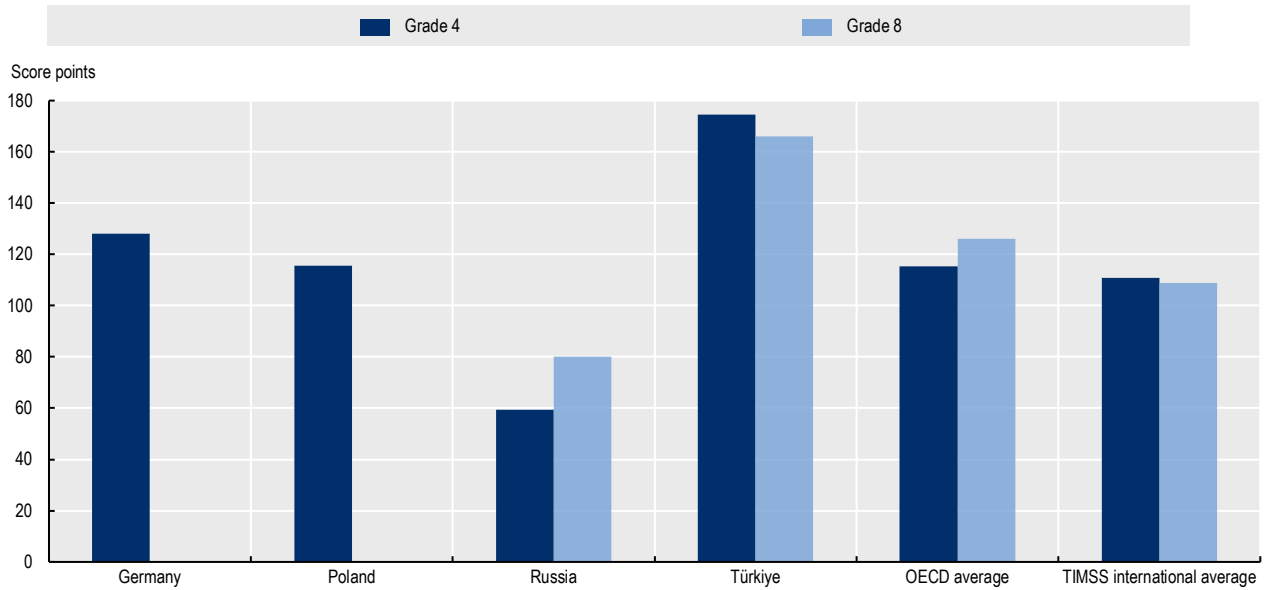
Inequities start early and persist throughout the system

While the system has been able to achieve rapid and significant gains, a considerable share of students still do not achieve basic minimum skills – Level 2 or above as measured by PISA. In 2018, just over a quarter (26.1%) of 15-year-olds in Türkiye performed below Level 2 in reading and over a third (36.7%) performed below Level 2 in mathematics (OECD, 2019^[4]).

Students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, attending schools rural areas or smaller towns and who speak a language other than Turkish at home are at greater risk of lower performance (OECD forthcoming)¹. In Grade 4, students with few resources at home score 174 points lower in mathematics than those with many resources at home, and 166 points lower in Grade 8 (Figure 1). At 15, the difference in performance between students attending schools in rural areas and towns compared with those in cities is 46 points in reading, double the average difference across the OECD (Figure 2).²

¹ See Annex for a description of the PISA and TIMSS variables used in this analysis.

Figure 1. Difference in performance between students with “many” and “few” resources in mathematics in Grades 4 and 8, TIMSS 2019



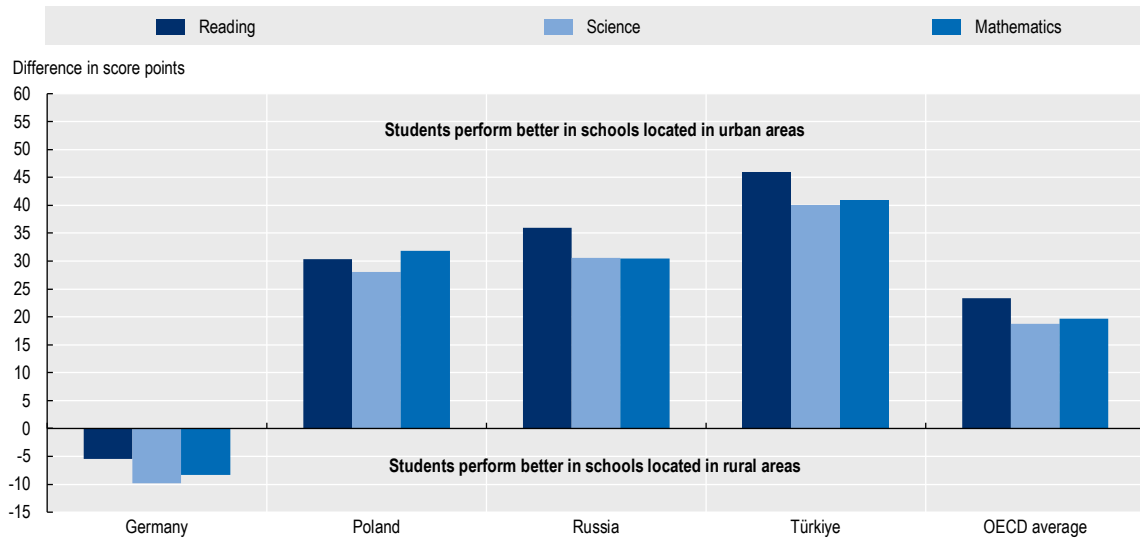
Note: Students with many resources perform better than those with few resources.

This policy perspective draws on analysis in the OECD report *Student Achievement in Türkiye: Findings from PISA and TIMSS international assessments*. This report selected a number of benchmark countries, whose performance was reported alongside Türkiye’s throughout the report. The benchmark countries help to contextualise Türkiye’s performance and provide more specific insights on country-level performance than international averages. The benchmark countries in the report are – Germany, Poland and Russia and were selected in 2020. This report was sent for comments to the Education Policy Committee at the OECD between 29 April and 20 May 2022. It should be noted that the Russian Federation no longer participates in the work of the Committee.

Source: IEA (2020^[5]), *TIMSS 2019 International Results in Mathematics and Science*, <https://timssandpirls.bc.edu/timss2019/international-results/> (accessed on 21 May 2021).

Figure 2. Performance by school's location, PISA 2018

Difference in performance between urban areas and rural areas/small towns



Source: OECD (2021^[6]), "PISA: Programme for International Student Assessment", <https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/data-00365-en>.

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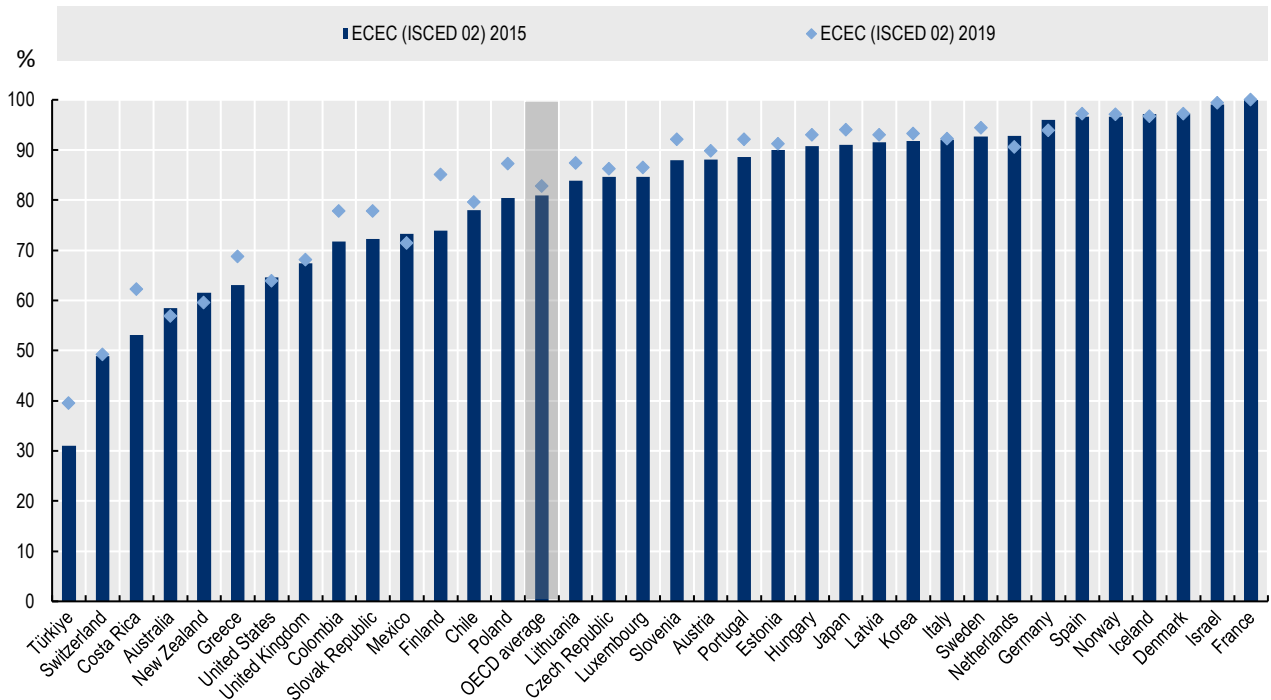
- Policy area 1. Equitably expanding participation in pre-primary education
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Policy area 1. Equitably expanding participation in pre-primary education

Policies supporting equity are most effective when they start early, before children enter formal schooling (OECD, 2017^[7]). Pre-primary education can provide a wide range of benefits for young children ranging from improved school readiness and academic achievement, to enhanced social and emotional skills.³ In Türkiye, ensuring that all children access high-quality pre-primary education before they start school can help to reduce inequities at the school level. Pre-primary education has been a consistent priority in Türkiye's education policy in recent years.⁴ Despite national policies focused on increasing pre-primary attendance and growth in recent years, participation in Türkiye remains the lowest across all OECD countries (Figure 3).

⁴ Unless otherwise stated, the text refers to ISCED 02 or pre-primary education (covering ages 3-5 years) since this is the level where the vast majority of Turkey's public policies are focused (ISCED classifications).

Figure 3. Enrolment in pre-primary institutions 2015 and 2019

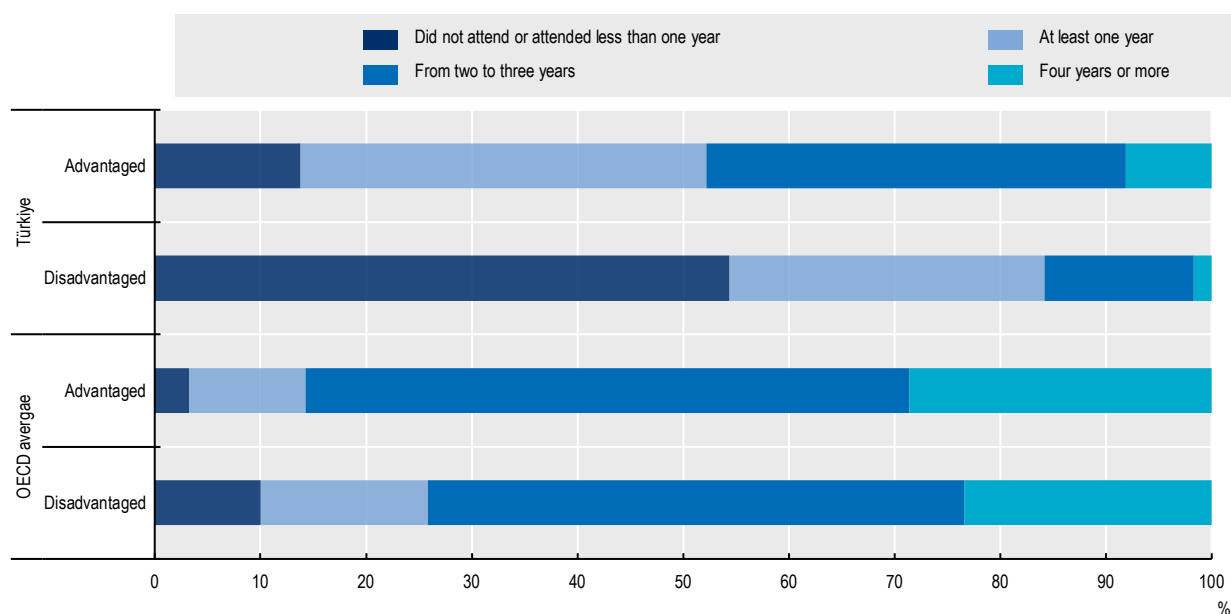


Source: (OECD, 2020^[8]), "Education Database: Enrolment by age", *OECD Education Statistics* (database), <https://doi.org/10.1787/71c07338-en>.

Participation in pre-primary education in Türkiye is also highly correlated with students' socio-economic background. Data from PISA about 15-year-olds who participated in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)⁵ around a decade earlier shows that in Türkiye, 54% of students with disadvantaged backgrounds did not participate in ECEC or attended for less than one year compared to only 14% for advantaged students (Figure 4). This policy area suggests policies that Türkiye may wish to consider to support its national objectives of increasing participation in pre-primary education.

⁵ This work uses the definition of ECEC that is used by the PISA assessment. It covers a similar period of early childhood development and care that is used by the UNICEF Europe and Central Asia office with the term Early Childhood Development, which refers to "the continuous process of acquiring skills and abilities from conception to the age of school entry across the domains of cognition, language, motor, social and emotional development which helps individuals to think, solve problems, communicate, express emotions and form relationships. It is also considered the foundation of health, learning, productivity, well-being and the foundation for future capital formation."

Figure 4. Duration ECEC by socio-economic background (PISA 2018)



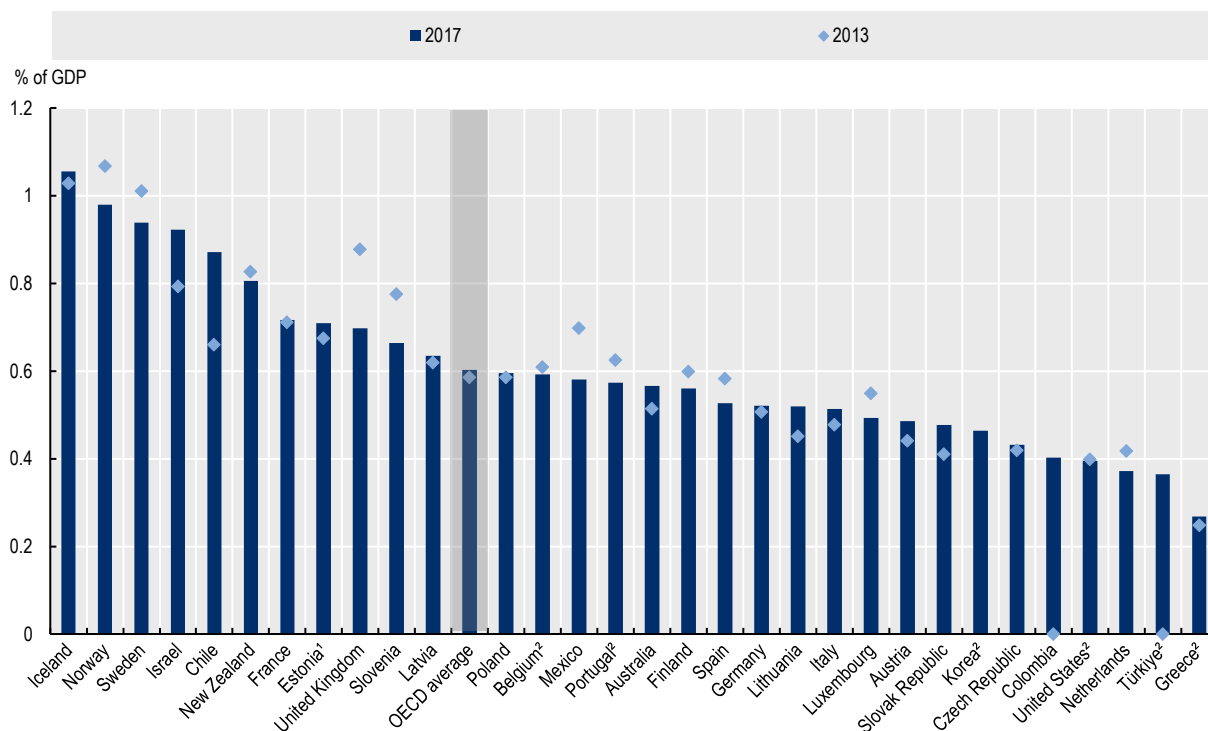
Source: (OECD, 2021^[9]), "PISA: Programme for International Student Assessment", *OECD Education Statistics* (database), <https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/data-00365-en>.

Increasing public spending

Achieving any expansion in pre-primary participation will require public investment. Türkiye's low participation in pre-primary education is matched by the lowest public spending across the OECD (Figure 5). One important step towards achieving the country's goals in pre-primary education would be to increase public investment so that the sector has the necessary investment to expand high-quality, affordable provision.

Figure 5. Expenditure on all children aged 3 to 5 enrolled in early childhood education and care (ISCED 0) and primary education as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (2013 and 2017)

Public and private institutions



Note: 1. Year of reference 2014 instead of 2013.

2. Excludes ISCED 01 programmes.

Countries are ranked in descending order of expenditure as a percentage of GDP in 2017.

Source: (OECD, 2020^[8]), *Education at a Glance 2020: OECD Indicators*, Table B2.4. See Source section for more information and Annex 3 for notes, <https://doi.org/10.1787/69096873-en>.

Ensuring that all children receive a full year of pre-primary education before they start school

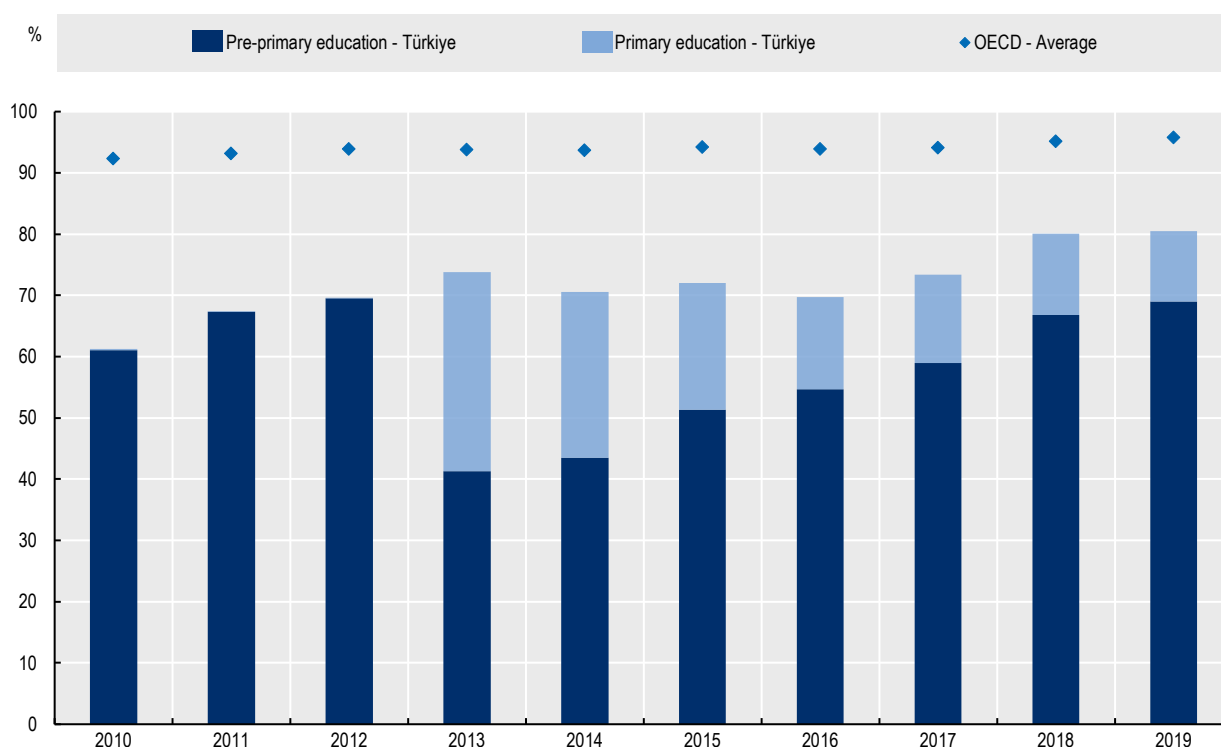
The Presidential Annual Programme and other recent policy documents aims to achieve universal participation in pre-primary education for five-year-olds in 2022-23. This goal follows a similar trend in a number of OECD and non-member countries in recent years where one or more years of pre-primary education have become compulsory (OECD, 2021^[11]).

In Türkiye, children start school at 5.5 years so achieving universal participation in one year of pre-primary should lead to an increase in participation among children aged 5. In 2019, 80% of five-year-olds in Türkiye were either enrolled in primary or pre-primary education (OECD, 2020^[8]). This figure represents a significant increase (33%) since 2010 - the greatest rise across all OECD countries (Figure 6). The country's rapid expansion in the availability of pre-primary classrooms, often attached to schools, has contributed to this achievement (Batyra, 2017^[10]).

However, the enrolment rate of five-year-olds in Türkiye remains the lowest across the OECD and 20% of five-year-olds are still not enrolled in either pre-primary or primary education. National analysis also shows

that five-year-olds attend different types of pre-primary education. Children from higher income families are more likely to be enrolled in pre-primary education while those from less advantaged backgrounds attend free, public primary schools⁶. Pre-primary education, with their specific resources, pedagogy and staff preparation are likely to be more adapted to the needs of very young children. If Türkiye is to achieve universal enrolment in one year of pre-primary education it will need to ensure that children from the most vulnerable households are able to access pre-primary education. In particular, it will be important to investigate the barriers that prevent some disadvantaged households accessing pre-primary education, such as supplementary fees tied to school meals and educational materials.

Figure 6. Enrolment rates of five-year-olds by level of education in Türkiye



Source: (OECD, 2020^[8]), "Education Database: Enrolment by age", *OECD Education Statistics* (database), <https://doi.org/10.1787/71c07338-en>.

Progressively introducing a legal entitlement for 3-4 year-olds

While participation among 3-4 year-olds in Türkiye has more than doubled over the last decade, from 10% in 2010 to 25% in 2019, it remains far below the OECD average (83% in 2019) (OECD, 2021^[11]). Participation rates for this age group also remain below the national objective set out in Türkiye's Ninth Development Plan for 2014-2018 that the pre-primary enrolment of 3-5 year-olds should reach 70% ((n.a.), 2013^[11]). Other recent policy documents including the Eleventh Development Plan and the Presidential Annual Programme have emphasised the importance of expanding the participation of 3-4 year-olds in pre-primary education (Türkiye Ministry of National Education, 2021^[12]). Türkiye's national objective to increase participation across this age group was accompanied by a law requiring that pre-primary

⁶ Pre-primary education includes both public and private provision. While the educational costs of public pre-primary institutions are free for households, there are supplementary costs associated with meals and provision of educational materials (see p. 10 "Taking steps to ensure that supplementary pre-primary costs are affordable for all").

institutions admit 3- and 4-year-old children if capacity is available. However, research suggests that these institutions continue to cater primarily for five-year-olds (IBRD, 2015^[13]). The limited public provision for these ages means that for children aged 3-4, it is mainly private providers who provide places, which are associated with far higher average costs (Batyra, 2017^[10]).

As Türkiye starts to move towards universal participation in one year of pre-primary education it might re-consider how the duration of pre-primary education can be progressively increased. Across OECD and European countries, the use of legal entitlements⁷ have been an effective catalyst to encourage participation of 3-5 year-olds in pre-primary education. Most OECD and European countries already guarantee a place in a publicly-funded pre-primary setting from the age of three or even earlier (OECD, 2020^[8]). In the future, Türkiye might consider extending the ambition set out in the Ministry of National Education's Strategic Plan (2019-2023) by introducing a legal entitlement to pre-primary education for 3-4 year-olds.

The availability of provision for 3-4 year-olds was a barrier to Türkiye achieving its goal of expanding participation of this age group over 2014 - 2018. Introducing a legal entitlement to a pre-primary place for younger children would create the pressure to provide more places for this age group. Such an entitlement need not be compulsory but simply provide the right for all children of this age group to attend pre-primary education. Given the challenges in supply, the entitlement could be introduced progressively by hours or region, and prioritise the most disadvantaged households (see below). Poland, a country which has seen a rapid expansion in ECEC participation in recent decades, used a similar approach (see Box below)

Increasing pre-school attendance in Poland

In 2005, with an enrolment rate of 38%, the enrolment of 3-5 year-olds in ECEC in Poland was the lowest among OECD countries, after Türkiye. The government introduced measures focused on providing progressively more entitlements for children to pre-primary places alongside controlling costs and lowering the age when compulsory education begins.

In 2011, ECEC became compulsory for five-year-olds. Following this, in 2013 the Polish Parliament amended the School Education Act (*Ustawa o systemie oświaty*, 2013) to provide all four-year-olds with the right to participate in pre-primary education starting in September 2015 and facilitate access to all three-year-olds starting in September 2017. The amendments to the School Education Act also limited the fee paid by parents for each hour of pre-primary education beyond the five free compulsory hours to PLN 1 (USD 0.30), with earmarked grants to local governments from the state budget to cover additional costs. Over the same period, primary education at age 6 became compulsory for those born in the first half of the year in 2014 and in starting in the 2015/16 school year, it became compulsory for all six-year-olds.

Together these policies helped Poland to achieve one of the most rapid increases in pre-primary enrolment over the past decade. In 2019, 87% of 3-5 year-olds in Poland were enrolled in ECEC. A rate which is comparable to many other OECD countries with high rates of pre-primary enrolment and slightly above the OECD average of 83%.

Source: (OECD, 2015^[14]), *Education Policy Outlook: Poland*, <https://www.oecd.org/education/POL-country-profile.pdf> (accessed on 21 May 2021); (OECD, 2021^[11]), *Education at a Glance 2021: OECD Indicators*, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/b35a14e5-en>

⁷ A legal entitlement is a right to a pre-primary place for a child and his/her family. Countries can provide a legal entitlement without making attendance compulsory so children may attend ECEC, but families may choose other options (OECD, 2020^[8]).

Ensuring that some hours of pre-primary education for 3-4 year-olds are free, and prioritise the most disadvantaged households

In order to support equitable participation among 3- and 4-year-olds, alongside introducing legal entitlements for these age groups, Türkiye should consider making at least some pre-primary provision free of charge for households across both public and private institutions. The majority of OECD countries provide some free hours from the age of 3 (OECD, 2020_[8]). The availability of free access for 3-5 year-olds has contributed to participation rates which are fairly close across different income levels for 3-5 year-olds in a number of OECD countries (OECD, 2020_[15]).

Given the costs associated with providing entitlements to free provision and the current gap in supply for pre-primary provision in Türkiye, especially among 3- and 4-year-olds, the country could introduce the right to free pre-primary education progressively in order to be able to meet the new demands on the system. For example, a limited number of hours could be provided free at first. When Poland first introduced the right for 3- and 4-year-olds to a pre-primary place, five hours per week were provided free of charge, while the cost of additional hours was regulated (see Box above).

Türkiye already provides free access that is conditional based on certain conditions such as family income. Türkiye might consider reviewing its current model and considering if it might be expanded or targeted. Free access conditional on household background can help to ensure that the most disadvantaged and hardest to reach children are prioritised. This is important to ensure that pre-primary education is not regressive by resulting in well-off families accessing pre-primary education first (Unicef, 2019_[16]).

Taking steps to ensure that supplementary pre-primary costs are affordable for all

In Türkiye, the educational costs of pre-primary education in public pre-school institutions are free (OECD, 2020_[17]). However, families can be required to pay for meals and other educational materials (OECD, 2020_[17]). The government exempts the most disadvantaged families from paying these fees and in 2018/19, 32% of children in pre-school paid no fees. Under the Central Nursery Classrooms for Bussed Education programme children from rural areas are also provided with supervised transportation to pre-primary institutions which can help to overcome the logistical and financial costs of transportation. However, in the past, research has found that actual pre-primary school fees in Türkiye can vary widely by location and institution. In 2015, the World Bank found that while the provincial and district guidelines for monthly fees were 100 TL, the median cost of full-time public pre-primary provision was 300 TL and 700 TL per month for private providers (IBRD, 2015_[13]). Consideration will need to be given to the supplementary costs that may be charged to families to ensure that they respect official government guidelines in all settings and to ensure that the costs of private provision are affordable for all households.

Continuing efforts to diversify provision

While Türkiye now has a large network for pre-primary classrooms for five-year-olds, more places are needed for 3- and 4-year-olds. Public provision enables governments to directly control the costs of pre-primary provision, although direct provision can be expensive for the government to provide and lengthy to build (OECD, 2020_[15]). Across the OECD, many countries combine a diversity of approaches to ensure adequate, affordable supply. In Australia, Ireland, Japan, Korea and New Zealand, at least 75% of children attend private pre-primary institutions (OECD, 2021_[11]). Research by the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) also highlights how diverse provision combining public, private and community sectors can help countries to provide comprehensive universal pre-primary education that caters to the needs and circumstances of all families and children (Unicef, 2019_[16]).

In its Ninth Development Plan Türkiye recognised that diversifying provision could help the country to meet the scale of its supply needs ((n.a.), 2013_[11]). Reflecting this ambition, there has been a steady increase in the share of 3-5 year-olds attending private settings, increasing from 12% in 2013 to 17% in 2019 (OECD,

2015_[18]) (OECD, 2021_[11]). Türkiye is also exploring other models, such as piloting a home-based early childhood care and education service model as part of a project with UNICEF (UNICEF, 2020_[19]). The Mobile Teacher Model also transports pre-primary teachers to areas where there is no pre-primary provision to provide free-of-charge provision to children living in these areas (OECD, 2013_[20]). However, the private sector reportedly faces stringent infrastructure requirements (IBRD, 2015_[13]). These requirements create a barrier for private providers to enter the market and for those that do, drive up costs for families, contributing to inequalities in pre-primary participation (IBRD, 2015_[13]) (Bank, 2013_[21]).

In order to enable the private sector to become an effective partner to expand pre-primary places in Türkiye, the government should consider reviewing the infrastructure regulations for private providers. While ensuring a suitable environment for young children is important, greater emphasis might be put on ensuring the quality of interactions and developmental support while ensuring that any infrastructure requirements are reasonable and appropriate (Bank, 2013_[21]).

Considering policies to ensure that private provision is accessible for all families

At present, the high costs of private provision contribute to inequities in participation and constrain private sector growth by reducing demand. The experience of other OECD countries highlights policies that Türkiye might consider to ensure that private provision is accessible for all families:

- Providing high public investment to keep private child-care costs low for families.
In many OECD countries where a high share of children attend private pre-primary education, the vast majority of funding remains public. For example, in New Zealand where 99% of children attend private institutions, public funding still accounts for 80% of total expenditure (OECD, 2021_[11]). Such a high level of public funding contributes to all children being able to receive 20 hours of fully subsidised pre-school each week (OECD, 2016_[22]).
- Capping household contributions
Korea has recently increased its ECEC provision through an extensive system that combines public and private providers. In order to ensure that private provision is affordable, the government provides direct subsidies to providers and generous child-care benefits for parents. This has been enabled by a ten-fold increase in public funding since the early 2000s (OECD, 2020_[15]). Japan also subsidises private ECEC centres and caps household contributions to ECEC and Finland also caps fees for households (OECD, 2021_[11]).
- Drawing on resources from the business sector and foundations
In Japan, while private expenditure on ECEC is high, not all these costs are born by families. Private expenditure comes from a variety of sources including households, foundations and the business sector. Employers and corporations can be important providers or funders of early childhood services. In the Netherlands, companies above a certain number of employees are expected to pay a third of the costs of child-care places in accredited centres for the young children of their employees. In Korea and Mexico, firms employing a certain quota of young women are required by law to establish an on-site day care centre or subsidise child-care and early education expenses for their employees. While in France, Italy and Belgium, employers pay a levy to support local child-care costs. In other countries, e.g. Australia, Ireland and the United Kingdom, builders are expected to include in their costs for housing estates, the construction of appropriately-designed crèches and schools (OECD, 2006_[23]).

Türkiye might consider how it could support all families to access private institutions in these ways, for example, by providing publicly subsidised places in private institutions, capping the costs of private provision for families and requiring the private sector to provide some financial investment in pre-primary education.

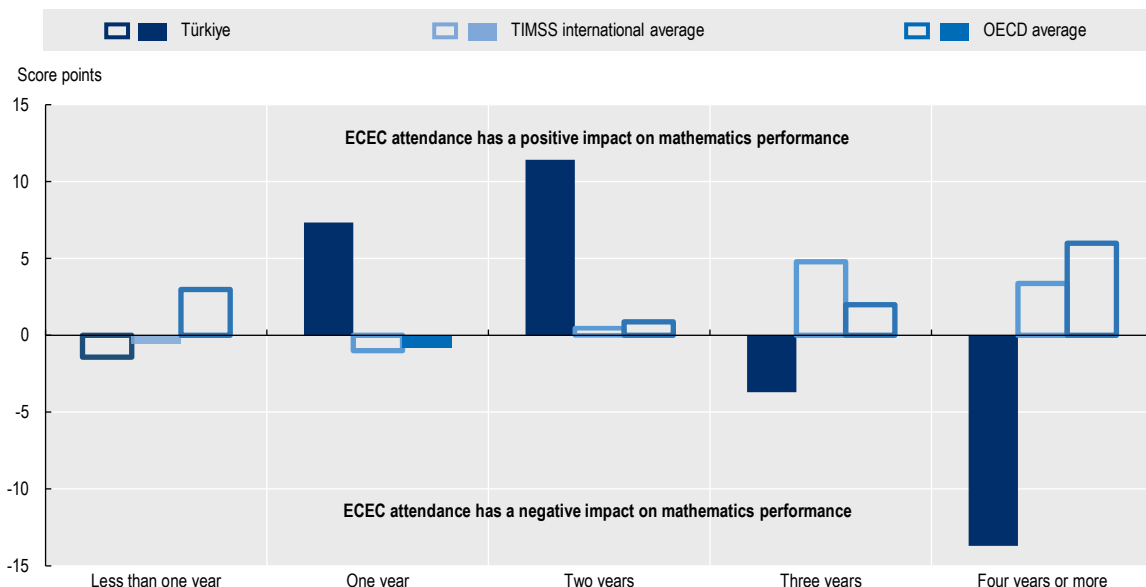
Policy area 2. Ensuring quality provision of pre-primary education for children of all backgrounds

While the potential positive benefits of pre-primary education are widely established, the quality of provision determines how far those positive benefits are realised. Research shows that low-quality ECEC can be associated with little benefit on the development of children or even have detrimental effects (Britto, Yoshikawa and Boller, 2011^[24]) (Howes et al., 2008^[25]). Of particular concern for Türkiye as it strives to enhance equity is that while children from disadvantaged backgrounds stand to benefit the most from pre-primary, they are also generally at greater risk of not being able to obtain quality pre-primary services (OECD, 2006^[23]) (OECD, 2011^[26]).

The data from PISA and TIMSS provides some insights on the association between students' learning outcomes and their earlier attendance of ECEC. Internationally, attending ECEC is positively associated with performance, and this is the case in Türkiye. However, since in many countries, students from advantaged backgrounds are more likely to attend ECEC and for longer periods, part of the positive impact of ECEC is associated with students' socio-economic background (OECD, 2021^[27]). Across all OECD countries, accounting for students' socio-economic status results in the benefits in performance associated with ECEC attendance falling. In Türkiye, accounting for students' socio-economic results in much of the positive associations between ECEC attendance and performance disappearing. After accounting for students' and schools' socio-economic status, ECEC attendance is only positively associated with mathematics performance when children attended ECEC for one year in PISA and one and two years in TIMSS (Figure 7).

Figure 7. ECEC attendance and performance in mathematics after accounting for socio-economic status (TIMSS 2019)

Change in mathematics performance for every extra year of ECEC attendance (compared to not attending ECEC) after accounting for students' and schools' socio-economic status



Note: Note: The regression controls for students' and schools' socio-economic status to avoid an upward bias since this is positively correlated to both ECEC attendance and students' performance. Fully coloured bars represent results that are statistically significant at 95% level of significance while bars with a coloured border represent results that were not found to be statistically significant.

Source: (IEA, 2020^[28]), TIMSS 2019. Retrieved from Boston College, TIMSS & PIRLS International Study Center website: <https://timssandpirls.bc.edu/timss2019/international-results/> (accessed on 21 May 2021).

The TIMSS and PISA data do not provide insights as to why ECEC appears to have a negative impact on performance once socio-economic status is accounted for in Türkiye. One possible explanation is the quality of the country's ECEC programmes. In Türkiye, the vast majority of ECEC that children attend is pre-primary education under the responsibility of the Ministry of National Education. Participation rates in 0-3 (ISCED 01) ECEC are very low and quality may be variable. The fact that ECEC programmes appear to have a positive impact for longer in the more recent TIMSS data might suggest that quality is improving, especially in pre-primary provision that is the responsibility of the Ministry of National Education.

Ensuring that new monitoring frameworks promote both structural and process quality

Monitoring can play an important role in ensuring quality across early childhood services (OECD, 2019^[29]). Monitoring quality is particularly important as systems expand and diversify types of provision to avoid that quality falls or varies across different settings (Unicef, 2019^[16]). Türkiye already has an established system for monitoring its pre-primary centres. In 2018, a majority of ECEC setting leaders reported receiving inspections at least once a year (OECD, 2020^[30]). Türkiye is currently developing new standards for its pre-primary schools. This is an opportunity to review national standards to ensure that they are used to promote quality pre-primary education across the country's existing classrooms and in new institutions as they are established.

The concept of quality in ECEC is multidimensional and includes curriculum and pedagogy; quality standards, governance and finance; family and community engagement; monitoring and data; and workforce developments (OECD, 2021^[27]). Türkiye already monitors a number of the dimensions of quality through its monitoring frameworks, which currently include structural features of quality such as child-staff ratios, minimum space in pre-primary education and workforce composition (OECD, 2019^[29]).

Research shows that it is children's daily interactions through their ECEC settings - with other children, staff and teachers, space and materials, their families and the wider community - that shape the quality of ECEC they experience (OECD, 2021^[27]). Together, these interactions are known as process quality. Internationally, the OECD's research shows that monitoring process quality tends to be uneven across countries (OECD, 2019^[29]). Türkiye's external monitoring of the curriculum framework currently covers some types of children's interactions, notably between children and the materials in the pre-primary setting and between pre-primary staff and children. However, other types of interactions that are not monitored by current frameworks include interactions between pre-primary staff and parents, between parents and children and between children and their communities (OECD, 2019^[29]). Given the importance of the quality of interactions to child development, Türkiye might consider how its monitoring framework can help inspectors and pre-primary staff to use diverse monitoring methods and tools for the measurement of all types of interactions.

Responding to the interests and needs of children from disadvantaged backgrounds

Pre-primary education is an opportunity to provide greater support for children from disadvantaged backgrounds and break down the inequities that appear in early childhood and persist throughout schooling. Pre-primary centres can support children from disadvantaged backgrounds by tailoring pedagogical approaches to their needs and preferences (OECD, 2019^[29]). The OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) Starting Strong Survey identified children from socio-economically disadvantaged homes⁸ and children whose first language is different from the language(s) used in the

⁸ Children from homes lacking the necessities or advantages of life, such as adequate housing, nutrition or medical care

ECEC centre as some of the groups of children who may particularly benefit from specialised attention related to their differences (OECD, 2019^[29]).

In Türkiye, a comparatively high share of pre-primary centre leaders (30%) report that their centres include 11% or more children from socio-economically disadvantaged homes (OECD, 2019^[29]). The share of children from disadvantaged backgrounds in pre-primary education is likely to grow as participation increases and becomes more equitable. A further 19% of leaders in Türkiye report that their centre includes 11% or more children whose first language is different from the language(s) used in the centre (OECD, 2019^[29]). The data from TIMSS shows that the differences in performance between students from disadvantaged backgrounds are significantly higher than the OECD average (Figure 1). While the share of students who do not speak Turkish at home is relatively small, in Grade 4 TIMSS students who do not speak Turkish score 116 points in mathematics lower than those who do, compared to 26 points lower on average across OECD-participating countries (OECD, 2022^[3]). Addressing the needs of these students earlier on by ensuring that they can access high-quality pre-primary education might help to reduce some of the inequities in the education system later on.

The OECD TALIS Starting Strong survey highlights a number of ways in which Türkiye already adapts pedagogy and resources to children’s differences, including:

- A high share of staff in Türkiye (70%) report that children sometimes playing with toys and artefacts from cultures other than the main culture “to some extent” or “a lot” in their centre⁹ (OECD, 2019^[29]).
- Staff working in centres with 11% or more children from socio-economically disadvantaged homes are more likely to have higher educational attainment than their colleagues in centres with a lower proportion of disadvantaged children (OECD, 2019^[29]).

Türkiye might consider further policies to adapt pre-primary education more specifically to the needs of children from disadvantaged backgrounds and those who do not speak Turkish at home, and their families. As part of efforts to achieve more equitable ECEC participation, Chile provides personalised support to disadvantaged families and comprehensive services for socially vulnerable children (see Box below).

⁹ Please refer to (OECD, 2019^[29]), *Providing Quality Early Childhood Education and Care: Results from the Starting Strong Survey 2018*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/301005d1-en>.

Adapting ECEC to meet the needs of disadvantaged families in Chile

Chile has seen a considerable expansion of ECEC over the past decades. From 2005 to 2013, participation in ECEC more than doubled for three-year-olds (from 23% to 51%) and almost doubled for four-year-olds (from 42% to 83%). However, coverage of ECEC continues to be highly uneven in Chile, with lower participation rates in rural and lower income areas. Efforts to increase coverage of ECEC include a national strategy focussing on rural, urban or low-income neighbourhoods. The Chile Grows with You programme (*Chile Crece Contigo*) was designed to provide personalised support to families from disadvantaged backgrounds and offer comprehensive services for socially vulnerable children from birth to school entry. The programme refers at-risk children to ECEC centres, refers parents to services to enhance parenting skills and offers targeted grants for children from the 60% most socio-economically disadvantaged households in Chile, in collaboration with Chile's social protection system (*Chile Solidario*). To maximise ECEC access for families from disadvantaged backgrounds, Chile has extended opening hours in some ECEC centres funded by some providers. Chile is also encouraging year-round availability of services.

Source: (Bertram et al., 2016^[31]), *Early Childhood Policies and Systems in Eight Countries Findings from IEA's Early Childhood Education Study*, <http://eces.iea.nl> (accessed on 21 May 2021); (Chile, n.d.^[32]), ¿Qué es Chile Crece Contigo (ChCC)? | Chile Crece Contigo, <https://www.crececontigo.gob.cl/acerca-de-chcc/que-es/> (accessed on 21 May 2021); (OECD, 2015^[33]), *The ABC of Gender Equality in Education: Aptitude, Behaviour, Confidence*, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264229945-en>; (OECD, 2017^[34]), *Education in Chile*, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264284425-en>; (OECD, 2019^[29]), *Providing Quality Early Childhood Education and Care: Results from the Starting Strong Survey 2018*, <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/301005d1-en.pdf?expires=1645092686&id=id&accname=ocid84004878&checksum=896C097BF27E4D37AB603103118E42FA> (accessed on 21 May 2021); (Peralta, 2011^[35]), *Early childhood Education and Public Care Policies in Chile: A Historical Perspective to Analyze the Present*

Considering the needs of new pre-primary centres that are not attached to primary schools

A large share (63%) of Türkiye's pre-primary education centres are located within a primary school (OECD, 2020^[30]). In contrast, in the other countries surveyed by TALIS Starting Strong, the vast majority of pre-primary centres were located in standalone buildings (OECD, 2019^[29]). Co-location of pre-primary and primary schools has a number of benefits, especially for children's transitions into primary school. Physical integration reduces disruption for children since they do not have to move locations when they start school and facilitates the sharing of information about individual students, classes and activities across staff (OECD, 2017^[36]). Staff in Türkiye's co-located pre-primary centres might also benefit from pedagogical and professional support in terms of sharing ideas and practices with staff in the primary schools.

As Türkiye expands its pre-primary network with greater provision for 3-4 year-olds, and through private sector provision, it may not be physically possible to co-locate such a high share of pre-primary centres with schools. New standalone centres might be more isolated than many of the existing co-located settings. The Ministry of National Education might provide standalone centres with greater support for staff in terms of pedagogical practices and professional coaching. Consideration should also be given to ensuring a smooth transition for children in standalone centres when they move to primary school such as the opportunity to visit their new primary school and for pre-primary staff and primary staff to share information about children

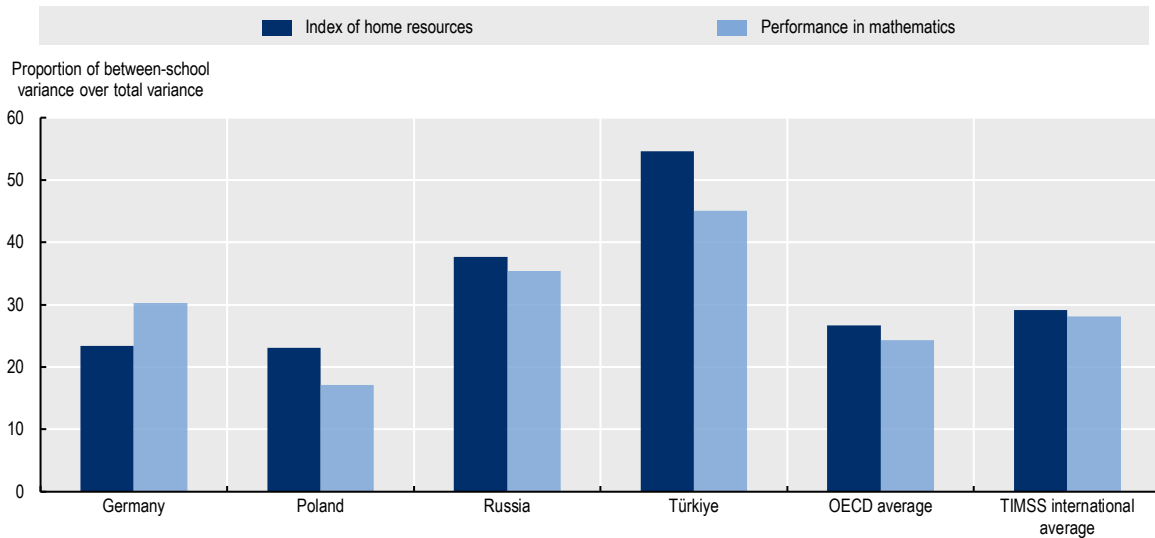
which may occur more easily in co-located centres. Having a curriculum frameworks for pre-primary and primary education that are aligned in terms of goals and address transition issues is also important to ensure smooth transitions (OECD, 2017^[36]).

Policy area 3. Creating a more inclusive school system

In Türkiye, there are large differences in student background and performance between individual schools at lower and upper secondary levels of education (Figure 8 and Figure 9). The variation in both student background and performance between schools in Grade 4 and at 15 is higher in Türkiye than the OECD average and selected benchmark countries (OECD forthcoming). The high variance in performance and social economic background between schools reflects concentrations of low performers and students from disadvantaged backgrounds in some schools, and higher performers and more advantaged students in other schools.

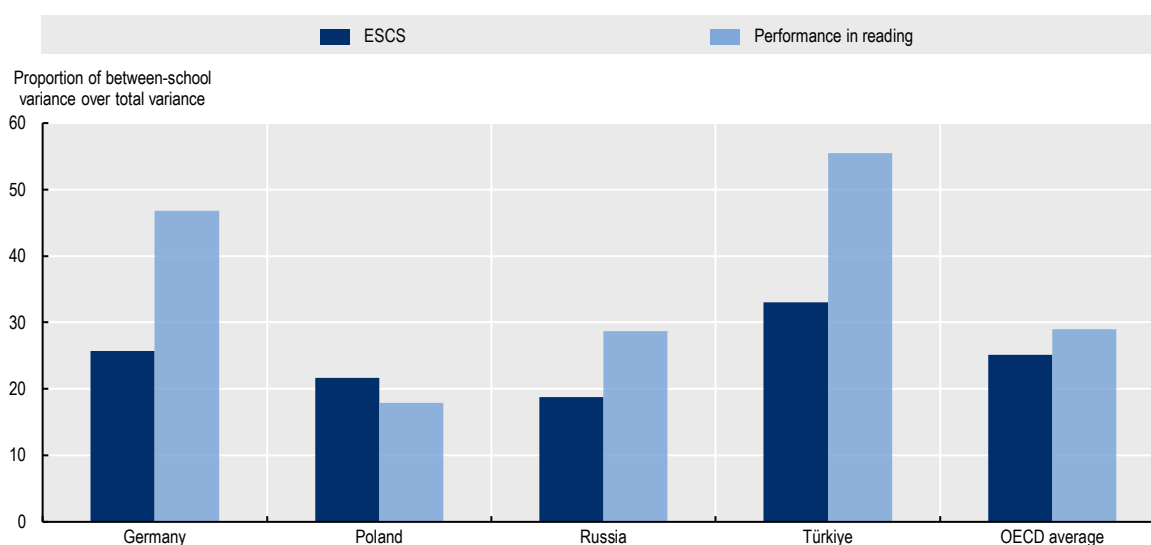
Schools that concentrate students from disadvantaged backgrounds and low-performing students are a challenge to achieve equitable learning outcomes nationally. Schools and teachers are often not equipped with either the training or resources to meet the needs of many disadvantaged, low-performing students when they are concentrated together (OECD, 2016^[37]). Low-performing students also are not able to benefit from the positive peer effects of being in the same classroom or school as higher-performing peers from whom they can learn. As a consequence, disadvantaged, low-performing schools can reinforce inequities (OECD, 2012^[38]). This policy area focuses on how Türkiye can achieve greater equity across schools so that all students, regardless of their background, are able to achieve good results.

Figure 8. Variation in mathematics performance and home resources between schools, Grade 4, TIMSS 2019



Source: IEA (2020^[39]), *TIMSS 2019 International Results in Mathematics and Science*, <https://timssandpirls.bc.edu/timss2019/international-results/> (accessed on 21 May 2021).

Figure 9. Variation in reading performance and economic, social and cultural status (ESCS) between schools, PISA 2018



Source: OECD (2021^[6]), "PISA: Programme for International Student Assessment", <https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/data-00365-en>.

Reconsidering school entrance policies with a view to promoting equity

One way that Türkiye can seek to improve equity is to reduce the concentration of disadvantaged, low-performing students in particular schools. A wide body of evidence points to the negative effects of struggling students being grouped together (Burke and Sass, 2013^[40]). Low performers require more of the teacher's time and tend to be more disruptive, with the consequence that there may be less learning time for all students (Lavy, Paserman and Schlosser, 2012^[41]). Grouping together low-performing students also means that they cannot develop social networks with, and learn from, higher-performing students. In contrast, high performers do not seem to be negatively affected by the presence of low-performing students in their class (OECD, 2019^[42]).

At the lower secondary level in Türkiye, the large differences in student background and performance between schools occurs before selective school entrance policies are in place. Entrance to lower secondary school in Türkiye is automatic, based on the family's home address. International research suggests that in education systems where students are assigned to schools on the basis of where they live, a concentration of disadvantage within a particular school is often the result of residential patterns (OECD, 2016^[37]).

At the upper secondary level, the data from PISA provides greater detail on the differences in student performance and student background across different types of upper secondary schools in Türkiye. At the top, are the Science High Schools with an average performance of 592 score points in mathematics, compared to the Multi-Programme Anatolian High Schools at the bottom, with an average performance of 376 score points (OECD, 2019^[4]). The PISA data also shows that there are wide differences in the social background of students across the different types of upper secondary schools. In the highest performing Science High Schools, almost half (45%) of the students are from an advantaged background. While in the lowest performing Multi-Programme Anatolian High Schools, 41% of students are from a disadvantaged background (Figure 10).

At the upper secondary level, the differences in student background and performance between schools are partly linked to selective school entrance policies. In recent years, Türkiye has taken important steps

to improve the quality of vocational education provision to help raise its prestige and make it a genuine choice for all types of students (see Box below). Türkiye has also taken some steps to create more diverse schools and reduce pressure on students by making the national examination that was used for selection into upper secondary school (“high schools” in Türkiye) optional. By allocating students to upper secondary schools based on academic performance, this examination resulted in the over-representation of students from disadvantaged backgrounds in lower performing upper secondary schools since students from disadvantaged backgrounds perform lower on average.

Strengthening vocational education and training in upper secondary education in Türkiye

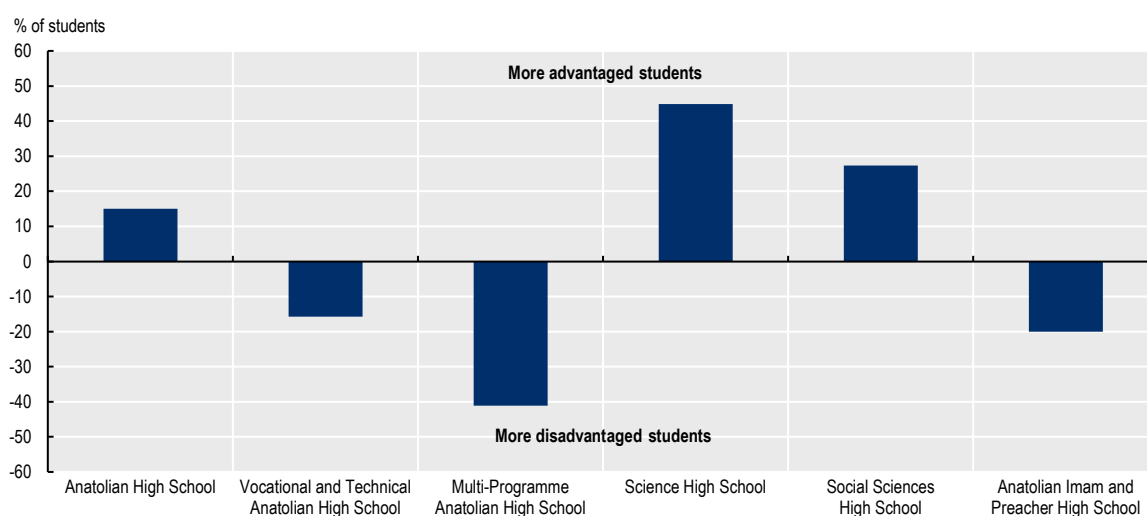
In recent years, the Ministry of National Education has undertaken a series of measures to strengthen vocational education and training schools in Türkiye including:

- Providing students with more flexible, individualised teaching programmes, for example, new practice-based training programs have been introduced; and students can take optional courses in Grade 12 related to the field they want to study in tertiary education. Course choices have also been simplified and consolidated.
- Ensuring that the curriculum in vocational and technical upper secondary schools reflects labour market needs by conducting a labour market survey and strengthening links between the curriculum and future professions.
- Increasing provision of teacher professional development in vocational and technical fields. For example, in 2019, 18 004 vocational and technical teachers received training, in 2020, 46 582 administrators, teachers and other staff received training, and in 2021, 70 434 administrators and teachers received training.
- Strengthening links with Research and Development (R&D) by establishing 52 R&D centres in vocational and technical upper secondary schools across 25 provinces. The theme of the 2019-2020 Academic Year has been determined as "patent, utility model, brand and design year" in vocational and technical education. 1 655 patent, utility model, design and trademark applications were made and 366 of these applications were registered.
- Increasing practical training by providing students in vocational and technical Anatolian upper secondary schools with on-the-job training programs provided by the Turkish Employment Agency free of charge over during their summer holidays. The helps students to increase their knowledge, skills and experience about professions they are interested in for the future.
- Supporting the development of students’ digital literacy by strengthening and enriching with content and activities on new technologies in professional fields.

Source: ((MoNE), n.d.^[43]), <http://mtegm.meb.gov.tr/www/ic-kontrol/icerik/2029> (accessed on 21 May 2021); (Özer, 2021^[44]), *New Steps Taken to Strengthen Vocational Education in Turkey*, (CANBAL et al., 2020^[45]), *A New Step for Paradigm Shift in the Vocational and Technical Secondary Education in Turkey: The Revision of Education Programs*, www.dergipark.gov.tr/eibd (accessed on 21 May 2021).

Since 2018, students have only been required to sit the examination to attend the most competitive Social Sciences and Science High Schools, as well as some in-demand courses in vocational schools and project schools. For all other schools, student placement is based on a combination of area of residence and prior school performance, (Kitchen et al., 2019^[46]). However, when schools are oversubscribed, the deciding factor is a student’s performance in lower secondary school. This is likely to result in students from disadvantaged backgrounds continuing to be overrepresented in the lower performing upper secondary school types in the future.

Figure 10. Share of students from advantaged and disadvantaged backgrounds by upper secondary school type, PISA 2018



Source: OECD (2021^[6]), “PISA: Programme for International Student Assessment”, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/data-00365-en>.

Review how the residential-based system for school entrance can be adjusted to create more mixed schools

Türkiye might consider policies that deliberately aim to create more diverse schools, both in terms of student performance and student background. Türkiye’s residential-based system for allocating students to schools is common across many OECD countries and ensures that students attend schools to which they can easily commute. However, such systems can reproduce the same patterns of socio-economic grouping that are present at the residential level and risk resulting in the grouping together of students from disadvantaged neighbourhoods in disadvantaged, low-performing local schools (OECD, 2018^[47]). Achieving greater social diversity in schools might be supported by redrawing the school geographical zones with the specific aim to integrating advantaged and disadvantaged residential areas (OECD, 2010^[48]). If national research finds that residential segregation is leading to differences in school composition, public policies to create more diverse residential areas can be implemented but these will take many years to impact school composition.

Consider setting specific targets for social diversity in schools

Türkiye might also consider setting specific targets for social diversity, and to monitor this across schools. In Nijmegen, the Netherlands a central subscription system is used to assign students to primary schools, which includes the requirement that each school has 30% of students from a disadvantaged background. All the primary schools have agreed on a central subscription system based on the distribution of students in different categories. In the event of oversubscription, priority is given to siblings and children who live nearby. Subsequent priority is given to either students from advantaged or disadvantaged backgrounds, in order to reach the required balance, by lottery system (OECD, 2012^[38]). For upper secondary school selection, to promote diversity across all types of schools in Türkiye, students might be grouped according to socio-economic group (or an appropriate proxy), with places offered to the highest performing students within each category of socio-economic group. Selective schools in Chicago (United States) and some in England (United Kingdom) operate similar policies to promote diversity (Kitchen et al., 2019^[46]).

In the long term, Türkiye might want to consider creating more a comprehensive, flexible model for upper secondary education. Creating schools that bring together greater diversity in terms of types of programmes, curricula and student performance would avoid concentrating together low-performing students and potentially reinforcing inequities, and contribute to improving average performance and equity nationally.

Policy area 4. Distributing resources to help schools compensate for disadvantaged backgrounds

While all students benefit from high-quality, supportive schools, students from disadvantaged backgrounds stand to gain in particular (OECD, 2017^[7]). This policy question explores how school resources in Türkiye are currently distributed and provides suggestions for providing more, and more effective, support to disadvantaged schools.

Targeting financial resources to students with the greatest needs

One way to support equity in education so that all students do well, regardless of their background, is to provide students from disadvantaged backgrounds and their schools with additional resources to compensate for the different levels of support and preparation that students receive at home and at earlier levels of education. Countries can do this by designing mechanisms that allocate funding which recognises the different needs of students and their schools. There are two main approaches that countries take to do this:

- Additional funding in the main allocation mechanism for particular schools, for example, by including weighting to systematically allocate additional funding to certain categories of students and schools.

In the Flemish and French Communities of Belgium the main allocation mechanisms for operating grants and staff allocation to schools include weightings for student socio-economic characteristics, special educational needs and school location. Similarly, the provision of dedicated grants (the direct payment of educational staff salaries) takes into account students' socio-economic characteristics and special educational needs. In Chile, the main block grant for general education is allocated with a funding formula that incorporates different weightings for students from highly disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, for schools in rural or highly isolated areas and for special educational provision (OECD., 2017^[49]).

- Targeted funding in one or a series of different grants external to the main allocation mechanism. In the Flemish and French Communities of Belgium there is also additional targeted funding (allocated as a restricted block grant to school providers) for specific student groups, including students from disadvantaged backgrounds, newly arrived immigrants and refugees. In Chile, central authorities also allocate earmarked grants to school providers for students with special educational needs and from disadvantaged backgrounds and a salary complement for teachers working in “difficult schools” either due to their geographic location, marginalisation or extreme poverty. The calculation of these earmarked grants is also based on a funding formula (OECD., 2017^[49]).

In Türkiye, the school funding formula is based on the number of personnel and students, school type and infrastructure (Kitchen et al., 2019^[46]). However, there is no mechanism to account for differences in students' needs across different schools, or to account for the different context of schools, such as those in more rural and isolated areas. Türkiye might draw on examples of other countries' funding mechanisms – such as in Chile or the Flemish and French communities of Belgium - which aim to recognise differences in student needs and provide schools with specific resources to meet those needs. Additional resources

need to be matched by accountability to ensure that the resources are used in ways that best benefit students and their learning (OECD., 2017_[49]).

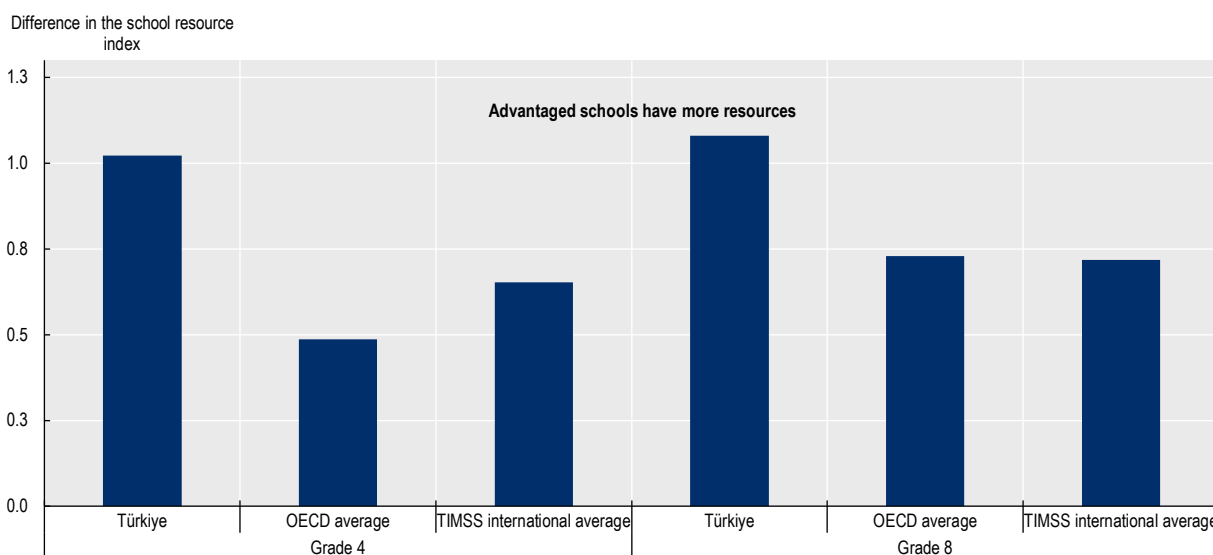
Directing material resources to create high-quality educational environments in all schools

One of the keys to breaking the complex relationship between disadvantage and low achievement is to provide all students with an inspiring, supportive and high-quality-learning environment. As well as directing more financial resources to disadvantaged schools, Türkiye should consider how it can equip disadvantaged schools with more material resources and support to help their students.

High-quality educational resources are an important dimension of a quality education. Across PISA, schools that report fewer resource shortages tend to perform higher (OECD, 2020_[50]). Across Türkiye as a whole, schools seem to have the resources that they need for learning, with few schools on average reporting a high level of resource shortages. However, the relationship between educational resources and performance is complex and one of the preconditions for resources to positively impact student achievement is that they are provided where they are needed the most in sufficient quantity (OECD, 2020_[50]). In Türkiye, at both the lower and upper secondary levels disadvantaged schools report greater resource shortages than more advantaged schools. While this is the case across OECD countries on average, the magnitude of the difference in resource shortages between advantaged and disadvantaged schools in Türkiye is higher than the OECD average (Figure 11 and Figure 12). Disadvantaged schools in Türkiye report fewer material resources. They also have lower teacher-student ratios (OECD forthcoming).

Figure 11. Difference in the shortage of educational resources between advantaged and disadvantaged schools, TIMSS 2019

Difference in instruction affected by shortage of educational resources between advantaged and disadvantaged schools



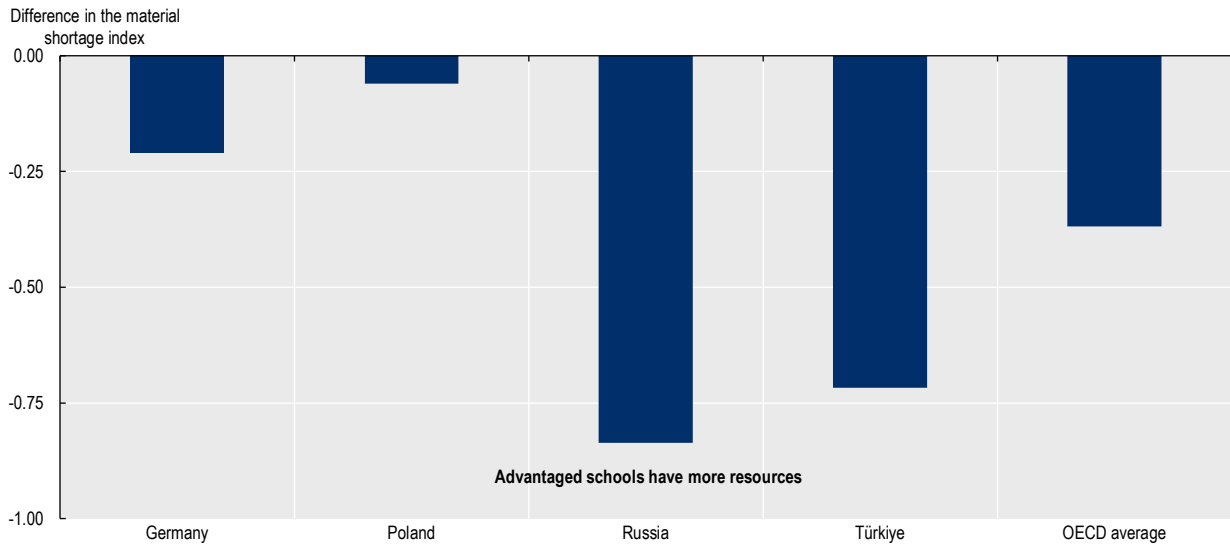
Note: The lower the index the higher is the shortage of resources. The scales for grades 4 and 8 differ.

Instruction in disadvantaged schools is affected more by shortage of resources

Source: IEA (2020_[39]), *TIMSS 2019 International Results in Mathematics and Science*, <https://timssandpirls.bc.edu/timss2019/international-results/> (accessed on 21 May 2021).

Figure 12. Difference in material shortage between advantaged and disadvantaged schools, PISA 2018

Difference in the average index of principals' views on material shortage, between advantaged and disadvantaged schools



Note: Disadvantaged schools experience material shortage more than advantaged schools.

Source: OECD (2021^[6]), "PISA: Programme for International Student Assessment", <https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/data-00365-en>.

The guiding principle of equality in education policy in Türkiye tends to lead to policies where all students receive the same level of support. For example, all students in Türkiye receive free textbooks, regardless of their families' income and level of need (Türkiye Ministry of National Education, 2021^[51]). Policies that direct resources by accounting for students' and schools' situations might be a more efficient use of resources. In practice, this might mean that greater educational resources would be systematically provided to schools where there is a high share of students from a low socio-economic background or prioritise such schools. In 2021 for example, Türkiye launched a new policy to create a library in all schools (Ministry of National Education (MoNE), n.d.^[52]). This policy could begin by prioritising disadvantaged schools for the creation of libraries.

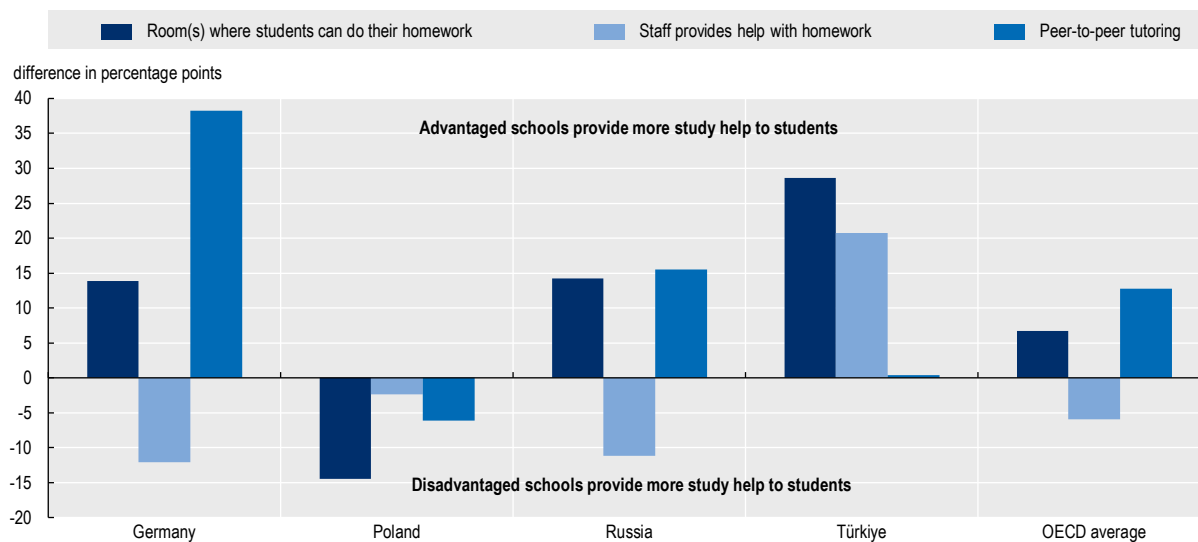
Creating additional support for learning and development in disadvantaged schools

Türkiye might also consider the extra-curricular activities that are provided in schools. Extra-curricular activities are all the activities that take place beyond the normal curriculum and might focus on academic subjects, for example personalised instruction for struggling students. Extra-curricular activities can also include non-academic activities such as opportunities to engage in arts, music or sports. These activities can support the students' broader development and well-being including their socio-emotional skills like working in groups and persistence which are also important for school success (Farb and Matjasko, 2012^[53]), and help to off-set academic pressures.

In Türkiye, disadvantaged schools offer less study support in the form of staff to help students with their homework and a room for quiet study than advantaged schools (Figure 13). These kinds of support could be particularly beneficial for students from disadvantaged backgrounds because they may not have their own room and a desk at home, or help from adults or other families members for their schoolwork. Similarly, advantaged schools in Türkiye tend to offer their students far more opportunities to engage in extra-curricular activities like art or music, than disadvantaged schools (Figure 14).

Figure 13. Schools providing study help by the school’s socio-economic status, PISA 2018

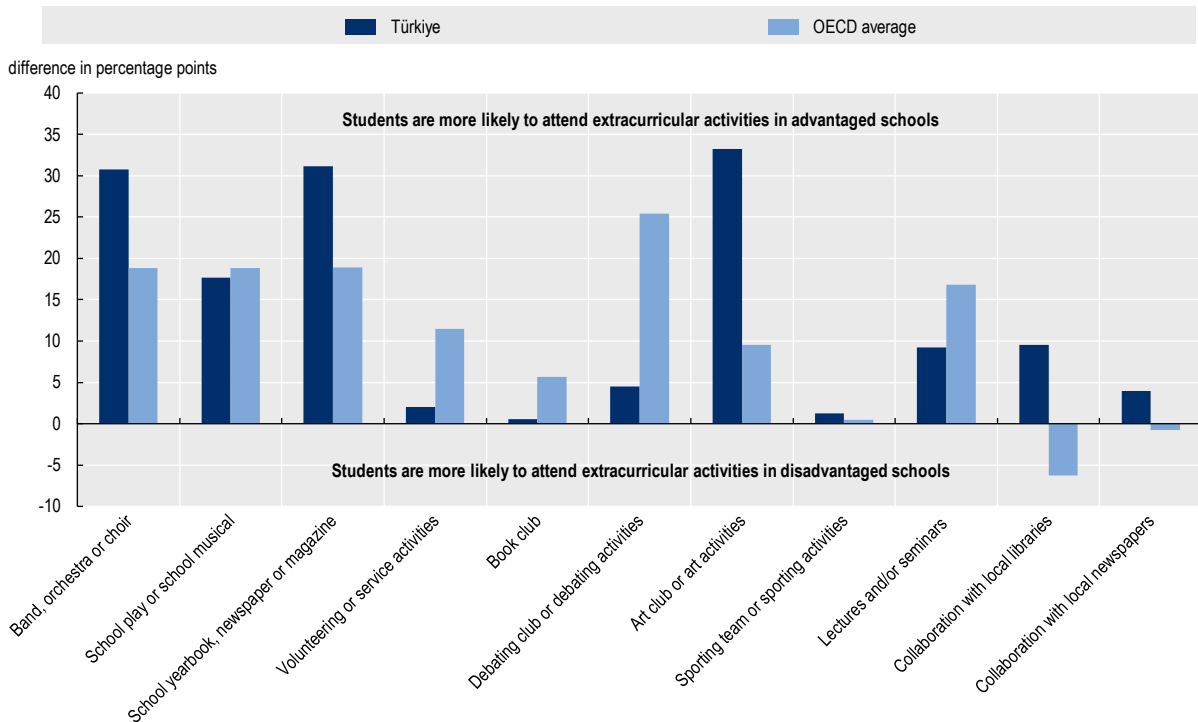
Difference in the percentage of students whose principal reported that the school offers study help between advantaged and disadvantaged schools.



Source: OECD (2021^[6]), “PISA: Programme for International Student Assessment”, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/data-00365-en>.

Figure 14. Extra-curricular activities by socio-economic status, PISA 2018

Difference in the percentage of students whose principal reported that the school offers the following activities to students between advantaged and disadvantaged schools.



Source: OECD (2021^[6]), "PISA: Programme for International Student Assessment", <https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/data-00365-en>.

Türkiye has already recognised the additional support that disadvantaged schools need to raise performance and reduce inequities. Over 2021, and as of 2022 the Ministry of National Education introduced two projects – 1 000 Schools in Vocational Education and 10 000 Schools in Basic Education - both of which identified schools with lower levels of student performance, high rates of student absenteeism, grade repetition, drop-out and disciplinary problems. The project provided additional support for these schools including greater support for school leaders and teachers, improvements to physical infrastructure of schools, academic and personalised support to students in acquiring basic skills, and personalised support for students' families (General Directorate of Vocational and Technical Education, 2021^[54]).

A full evaluation of the project would help to establish which elements were effective and might become mainstreamed to provide continued and consistent support – rather than being linked to a time-bound project. Developing policy that systematically recognises the needs of students from disadvantaged backgrounds and schools and provides greater support, especially in the early years of schooling before negative outcomes such as drop-out, disciplinary problems, low attendance and low performance become widespread, would be an effective use of resources. In France, a country with high levels of inequity in student performance, schools in disadvantaged areas have been identified with sustained policy focus for over a decade (see Box below).

Priority education, France

Priority education (*l'éducation prioritaire*) aims to counteract the impact of socio-economic inequalities on educational achievement. Priority education areas are defined geographically and cover around 20% of the country's school population. Schools in priority education zones are supported through a range of supports including pedagogical, educational and human resources, for example:

- Class sizes in the first two years of primary school have been cut in half, to 12 students per class
- The most disadvantaged families are supported through initiatives like the provision of a free breakfast at school for all children and financial support to families

Teachers are supported to in place innovative pedagogies that respond to children's' specific needs and supported to communicate with families. Teachers in priority education zones also receive additional financial remuneration.

Source: (Ministère de l'Education Nationale, n.d.^[55]), L'éducation prioritaire (Priority education) <https://www.education.gouv.fr/l-education-prioritaire-3140> (accessed on 21 May 2021)

Policy area 5. Ensuring that open schools provide a supportive learning environment for students

In Türkiye, students can pursue their education through distance learning courses in the open school system. Open schools enable students to continue their education in formal education institutions when they cannot attend a physical upper secondary school for various reasons. Reasons for attending an open upper secondary school include: being over 18 years which means that students can no longer enrol in physical upper secondary schools; students who are required to repeat a grade more than once; students who are expelled from physical upper secondary schools; and married students (Internal Auditing, 2020^[56]).

The open school system starts in lower secondary education although only 3.4% of lower secondary students attend open lower secondary schools (Official Statistics Programme, 2018^[57]). With the transition to upper secondary school the number increases. In 2018/19, 24.60% of upper secondary students were enrolled in open upper secondary schools. The open schools provide students with an important alternative pathway to complete their compulsory education. This policy area discusses some of the ways that the open schools in Türkiye might be designed to better support student achievement and equity.

Identifying the types of students who attend Open High Schools and their needs

Open upper secondary schools ("Open High Schools" in Türkiye) upper secondary schoolgroup together a range of very different students with very different needs. They provide a second-chance programme for adults of all ages to complete upper secondary education. They also serve young adults below the age of 18 who have fallen behind in school and are required to repeat more than one grade, or students who have significant behavioural difficulties and have been expelled from school. Finally, some high performing students choose to voluntarily leave their upper secondary schools and enrol in open upper secondary schools so that they have more time to prepare for their university entrance examinations. The needs of each of these groups are clearly very different – while a mid-career adult may have to juggle family and work responsibilities – 15-year-old students who are struggling in school needs focused, personalised support to enable them to succeed.

At present, the open school system does not seem to distinguish between these different categories of learners, and there seems to be limited data on the different profiles of learners attending open upper secondary schools. As a first step towards meeting the needs of these different learners, Türkiye should aim to collect information on questions such as:

- The share of learners of school-age that attend open upper secondary schools as a share of the overall population of school-age learners in Türkiye.
- The profile and distribution of school-age learners in open upper secondary schools between struggling learners and high performers who have left a physical upper secondary school to prepare for their university entrance examination.
- The share of adult learners who are returning to the open school system with the objective of completing their upper secondary education.

Enhancing monitoring of learning in the open school system

There is currently limited information about the learning levels of students in the open school system. Students in open upper secondary schools are not covered by Türkiye's own national assessment, ABIDE or international assessments such as PISA because PISA only samples students attending physical schools. Data from the university entrance examination in 2020 shows that 3.4% of students from open upper secondary schools received a place in tertiary education but without more information about the placement rates over time or the profile of these students this information alone is not sufficient to provide a perspective for monitoring or quality purposes.

Türkiye should consider how the learning of these students can be monitored. This could combine a variety of approaches such as sampling in the national assessment, greater use of different types of student assessment throughout the open school programme, greater use of data to understand student profiles, and more monitoring of completion of upper secondary education. Simple measures such as the level of online engagement and the share of returned work or completed modules could also help.

Providing struggling learners in Open High Schools with more support

The students who enter open upper secondary schools after having fallen behind in school will need personalised, focused support to improve their learning and increase their confidence. Internationally, evidence about what works for low-performing students emphasises the importance of an individualised and focused approach (OECD, 2016^[37]). There is a risk in Türkiye that students in open schools do not receive this level of support. In Türkiye's open school system, there are no physical schools or teachers, students learn through materials at home, by video or online. Türkiye should consider how some of its most vulnerable learners can receive greater support and guidance through its open schools. Türkiye could centre its approach on research which has identified several characteristics of successful second-chance programmes:

- focus on individualised teaching methods;
- flexible and needs-based curricula;
- holistic assessment approaches;
- small classes with low student-teacher ratios;
- multi-professional teams supporting learners;
- welcoming learning environments;
- partnerships with mainstream education institutions, local communities and employers (OECD, 2021^[58]).

Türkiye can also draw on the experiences of other OECD countries with alternative programmes that meet the needs of learners who cannot attend physical schools. In New Zealand, *Te Kura*, formerly The Correspondence School, provides distance and face-to-face state education for *ākonga* (learners) from early childhood to certification of upper secondary education. Learners can be enrolled with *Te Kura* for a variety of reasons including: geographical isolation; high health needs; learning support needs; young adults; adults; young parents and non-enrolled students, including those who are excluded or expelled. *Te Kura* provides an example of how distance learning can be designed to provide a personalised, supportive learning environment that blends digital learning with some face-to-face contact (see Box below).

Te Kura, New Zealand

Te Kura's (The Correspondence School) central priority is on engaging *ākonga* (learners) back into education and responding to their individual well-being needs.

Assessment

Te Kura can show ongoing gains in student engagement levels across the school. *Te Kura* learners' achievements are monitored and recorded in different ways, including through achievement in New Zealand's national upper secondary certificate – the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA), as well as in processes such as the share of students returning work for assessment online.

Digital learning tools

At the centre of *Te Kura*'s provision for its *ākonga* is personalised learning and a curriculum that is tailored to their pace, interests, and readiness to learn. “*My Te Kura*” is *Te Kura*'s online teaching and learning platform. It allows *ākonga* and staff to communicate, teach and learn in a virtual environment asynchronously and synchronously. It is a repository of over 26 000 learning objects. Digital tools also include “*My Korowai*” which is an online environment where Learning Advisers get to know *ākonga*. “*My Korowai*” includes spaces for sharing personal information, goals and interests, learning to learn activities and learner and teacher reflections. For upper secondary students in Years 11 to 13, engagement with *My Korowai* is very high (over 85% in 2020).

Face-to-face events

Te Kura also provides *Huinga Ako* (learning group meetings) which help to provide positive experiences and increased engagement opportunities in education, for *ākonga* and their *whānau*. *Huinga Ako* and other event days provide *ākonga* with connection to *Te Kura* and opportunities to engage and learn from each other.

Source: (Education Review Office (New Zealand), 2021^[59]), *Te Aho o Te Kura Pounamu*, <https://ero.govt.nz/institution/498/te-aho-o-te-kura-pounamu#download> (accessed on 21 May 2021).

Providing students with greater support so that they can remain in school

As a complement to providing greater support to students once they are in the open school system, Türkiye should also consider what support can be provided so that students remain in physical upper secondary schools until the end of compulsory education. While attending a physical upper secondary school may not be appropriate for all learners, the supportive net of educational and social-emotional support that young adults receive from their teachers and peers at school play an essential role in their development. Young adults who do not attend physical school are at greater risk of not completing upper secondary

education which is associated with a host of negative outcomes across their lifetime for individuals and society overall.

International evidence suggests that early diagnosis and remedial support for struggling students can be an effective policy tool to prevent students from getting trapped in a cycle of low academic performance and disengagement (OECD, 2016^[37]). In partnership with UNICEF, Türkiye has already implemented a remedial programme for students in lower grades and already provides some additional support for students such as training courses with students being able to choose up to a maximum of 24 hours per week of remedial education in grades 8 and 12, and up to 18 hours a week in other grades. Türkiye could also consider what other models might be effective for students in the higher grades, especially towards the end of lower secondary and during upper secondary education when most transfer to open upper secondary schools and drop-out occurs (General Directorate of Lifelong Learning Monitoring and Evaluation Department, 2020^[60]). Türkiye could consider introducing diagnostic assessments to help detect students who are falling behind and provide them with targeted, remedial support to address any gaps. Finland provides an example of student support that is scaffolded to meet different levels of student need (see Box below).

Multi-tier intervention model in Finland

Finland introduced a new Special Education Strategy 2011 provides a three-tiers of support to students at risk of falling behind:

- Tier 1: General support is accessible to all students and includes further in-class differentiation of learning, remedial teaching, co-teaching with specialised education needs teacher and part-time special education support. Organisation of this support is left at the discretion of the classroom or subject teacher.
- Tier 2: A learning plan for intensified support is prepared for students who need additional support. Teachers identify the students at risk through a pedagogical assessment and develop an action plan. The plan is often the same as the Tier 1 support but implemented more intensively. It is left to the school to decide on whether to offer other evidence-based targeted interventions.
- Tier 3: Special support is available when Tier 2 has proven ineffective to meet a student's needs. A pedagogical evaluation is conducted by multi-professional team in the school. The planned actions are specified in an official document the "Individual Education Plan" which has to be monitored and adjusted regularly.

Almost every school in Finland has multi-professional support teams that help teachers implement the multi-tier approach. These teams are led by the school principal and include psychologists, social workers, school nurses, special educators and occasionally speech therapists and medical doctors. In the majority of the Finnish schools, the teams meet weekly or bi-weekly to design and co-ordinate school- and class-level preventative work and general interventions. The team also monitors the situation of each class in the school to identify students at risk of falling behind in their learning. In practice, every class teacher or class supervisor attends the team meeting at least once a year to go into detail through the situation of their class and the individual students in it.

Sources: (Thuneberg et al., 2014^[61]), *Conceptual change in adopting the nationwide special education strategy in Finland*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10833-013-9213-x>; (Ahtiainen et al., 2012^[62]), *Tehostettua ja erityistä tukea tarvitsevien oppilaiden opetuksen kehittäminen 2007–2011. Kehittävän arvioinnin loppuraportti* [Development of Teaching Improved and Special Needs Students 2007-2011. Final report of the development] <http://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/handle/10024/79219> (accessed on 18 July 2022)

Conclusion

While Türkiye has achieved major improvements in participation in education and learning outcomes over the past decade, lifting up the achievement of the country's lowest performers will require targeted, sustained efforts. This policy perspective has presented suggestions across the range of the school system, from pre-primary through to the end of upper secondary education, to direct greater and more effective support to learners in greatest need (Vidal, 2020^[63]).

These measures would be supported by a national policy on overcoming barriers to learning to create a coherent, sustained focus on equity and equality. Central to this policy would be the recognition that students do not enter the classroom with the same levels of development, home support and preparedness to learn, and that adjusting policies in response to different learners' needs can promote fairer, more equitable outcomes.

Orienting the next strategic education plan on equity

When the Ministry of National Education's current strategic document guiding education policy, the Strategic Plan document 2019 – 2023 (Government of Turkey, 2019^[64]), comes to an end, the country should consider positioning equity as a one of the central goals for its new Strategic Plan. The policy documents could draw on the wealth of evidence that highlights the effectiveness of policies that focus resources on those in greatest need to build national consensus around this policy shift (OECD, 2017^[7]).

Türkiye already has some policies targeted to the needs of students from disadvantaged backgrounds – and some of these have been discussed above. However, a strategic, public commitment to ensuring that all students are provided with equal opportunities to learn and progress would pave the way for Türkiye to consistently and explicitly include considerations of learners' background and their needs in decision-making and the use of resources.

A future national policy or plan that focuses on equity might include:

- Creating a measure of student “disadvantage” and using this to orient policy

Many countries have a measure of student disadvantage that is used to inform target setting, monitoring of equity and directing resources. In England (United Kingdom) for example, children's eligibility for free school meals, which itself is based on household income, is used to identify children from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds (Taylor, 2017^[65]). Creating a nationally agreed measure to identify students from disadvantaged backgrounds in Türkiye would provide a starting place for setting national targets, monitoring and directing resources to promote equity.

- Setting targets to reduce disparities, and visibly monitoring and reporting on equity

Türkiye could set progressively more ambitious goals for equity in education. Goals might include participation, for example, ensuring that 50% of 3-4 year-olds from disadvantaged backgrounds attend 1 year of pre-primary education by 2025. Goals might also include performance, for example, reducing the performance gap by 25 score points between students from advantaged and disadvantaged backgrounds in Grade 4 by the next cycle of TIMSS (OECD, 2018^[66]).

Türkiye could build awareness of, and momentum for these goals across the education system through visible monitoring and national reporting. For example, the Ministry of National Education could work with the Turkish Statistical Institute to develop national indicators on equity that are regularly reported on in an annual report on equity and equality.

- Collecting and reporting more disaggregated data.

Disaggregated data helps an education system to pin point students, schools or regions that need more support and those that are examples of good practice. In Türkiye, greater disaggregation of

data for example, by type of students (such as socio-economic background or region or province) and schools would help to target resources to where there is greatest need.

More disaggregated data on students attending the open school system is particularly important in order to understand the different types of students that currently attend the system so that their needs can be met.

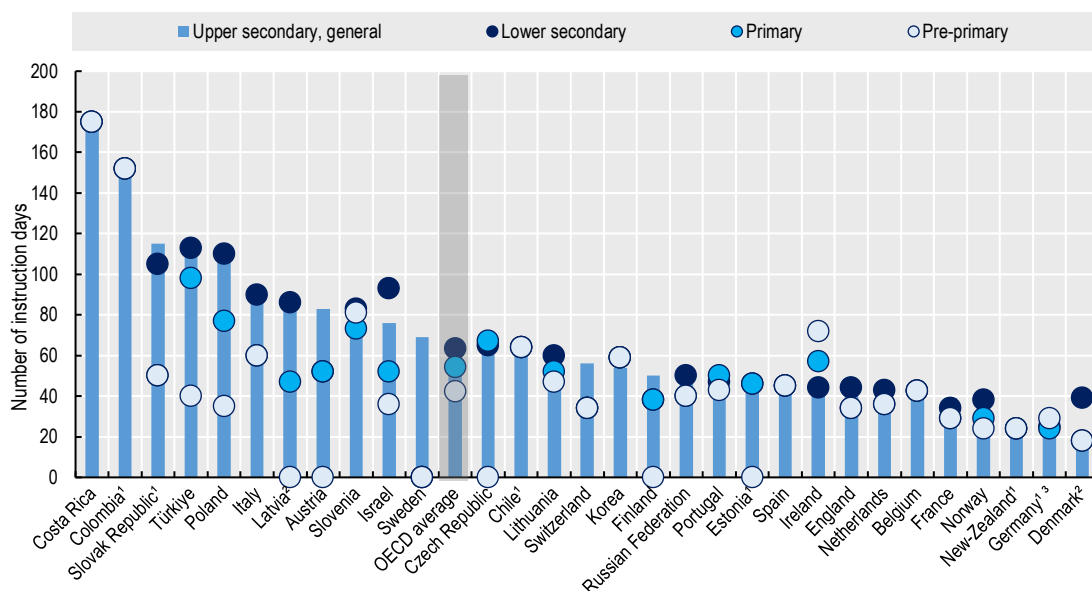
- Undertaking research on the different sources of disadvantage in Türkiye

While there is a wide body of international research about the factors that are associated with lower performance and disadvantage, it would be valuable for Türkiye to undertake national research to develop a national understanding of which groups of students are disadvantaged in Türkiye. This work would build on the analysis of how different groups of students perform at school undertaken by the OECD team (OECD, 2022^[31]). The national work would identify specific groups of disadvantaged students in Türkiye, for example based on certain categories of household income, certain regions or areas and other groups that are not possible to identify through international data. This would enable Türkiye to closely monitor the performance and experience of students from these groups.

Focussing on equity of opportunities following the pandemic

Schools in Türkiye were closed for longer than schools in many countries internationally. Over 2020 and 2021, the number of instruction days when schools were fully closed in Türkiye was 150 days in upper secondary education, compared to 100 days on average across the OECD (Figure 15) (OECD, 2021^[67])

Figure 15. Number of instruction days (excluding school holidays, public holidays and weekends) where schools were fully closed in 2020



Note: 1. Most typical number of instruction days. For Colombia, some schools were fully closed during the period from September to December 2020 while others were partially open in hybrid mode for 65 days". 2. Minimum number of instruction days in 2020. 3. Different school holiday schedules explain the higher number of instruction days when schools were fully closed at pre-primary compared to primary education. Countries and economies are ranked in descending order of the number of days schools were fully closed in upper secondary education between 1 January 2020 and 20 May 2021

Source: OECD/UIS/UNESCO/UNICEF/WB Special Survey on COVID. March 2021

While schools were shut for a long period, students in Türkiye were able to continue their education through a wide range of distance learning opportunities. Türkiye provided students with access to five different types of distance learning solutions when schools were shut, including online platforms (Education Information Network – EBA; Teacher Information Network – ÖBA), take-home materials, television broadcast (EBA TV) and mobile applications (Special Education Mobile Application) (OECD, 2021^[68]) (Özer, 2020^[69]) (Vidal, 2020^[63]). Efforts for continuing education also included strengthening physical and information technology infrastructure, provision of free internet for students and teachers, building teachers' capacity with digital skills, supporting the well-being of children, families and teachers via mental health psycho-social support programs, using technical and vocational education capacity for safe school opening (Özer, 2020^[69]).

One of the major concerns when learning moved online was ensuring that students without digital access were not excluded from learning. Türkiye took steps to target populations at risk of digital exclusion including by making agreements with internet providers to remove internet access barriers, designing learning materials for speakers of minority languages, creating flexible, self-paced platforms, improving infrastructure for learners in remote areas and provision of subsidised devices such as personal computers and tablets (OECD, 2021^[68]).

Türkiye has provided students with targeted support when they returned to school such as remedial measures for different groups of students (OECD, 2021^[68]). However, school closures are likely to have an impact on student learning and well-being, and students from disadvantaged backgrounds are likely to be a greater risk. As children and young adults slowly move back to school, the suggestions put forward in this policy perspective will be more important than ever to help overcome obstacles to learning for all.

Targeted, sustained efforts will help achieve more equitable student performance

While Türkiye has achieved major improvements in participation in education and learning outcomes over the past decade, lifting up the achievement of the country's lowest performers will require targeted, sustained efforts. This policy perspective has presented suggestions across the range of the school system, from pre-primary through to the end of upper secondary education, to direct greater and more effective support to learners in greatest need.

A national policy on overcoming barriers to learning would help to create a coherent, sustained focus on equity and equality. Central to this policy is the recognition that students do not enter the classroom with the same levels of development, home support and preparedness to learn, and that adjusting policies in response to different learners' needs can promote fairer, more equitable outcomes.

For more information

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