



First European Quality of Life Survey: Quality of life in Turkey

Summary

Key findings

Political, economic and social context

Dynamics of population growth

Social inclusion and exclusion

Gender differences

Participation in society and life satisfaction

Policy implications from an EU perspective

This summary is available in electronic format only.

For countries applying for membership in the European Union, quality of life concerns are the social complement to the political and economic standards of the EU's Copenhagen criteria for evaluating applicant countries. The recent enlargement of the European Union raises issues about the need to accept diversity while achieving social cohesion. Given the distinctive nature of Turkey's history and culture, its application for membership raises important challenges. Turkey's income per head is lower than that of any of the Member States of the EU, and its steadily increasing population will surpass that of Germany (currently the highest in the EU) in little more than a decade.

In 2003, the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions carried out its first *European Quality of Life Survey* (EQLS) across 28 countries: the present 27 EU Member States and one candidate country, Turkey. The survey was a questionnaire-based, representative household survey, which aimed to analyse how various life factors affect Europeans' quality of life. It addressed a number of key areas, such as employment, economic resources, housing and local environment, family and household structure, participation in the community, health and healthcare, education and training.

The Foundation's research into quality of life in Turkey is largely based on findings from the EQLS, supplemented by national data, academic surveys and related social science studies. The research offers a comparison of the social circumstances of people in Turkey with those in the 'old' EU15 Member States, the 10 new Member States admitted in 2004, and with Turkey's neighbours Bulgaria and Romania, who joined the EU at the beginning of 2007. The main findings of the research are documented in the report, [First European Quality of Life Survey: Quality of life in Turkey](#).¹

Key findings

- The majority of Turks report overall satisfaction with their life. They tend to be most satisfied with domains of life over which they have some control, such as personal health and family life. They are least satisfied with domains for which the state is directly responsible, such as health services, education and standard of living. The most important determinants of overall life satisfaction in Turkey are, as in EU countries, health, trust in other people, satisfaction with public policies and income.
- Turkish GDP per capita is far below the EU average but its aggregate national GDP is bigger than two-thirds of EU Member States. The annual growth rate of Turkish GDP is also much greater than the average for EU15 countries.
- Turkey is a young society: 29 percent of its population is under the age of 15. The number of children owes more to improved public health than to family size, for two children is now the average.
- The biggest demographic challenge facing Turkish policymakers is increasing the supply of jobs in response to the demand for employment from an increasing number of young people leaving school.
- The overall level of education in Turkey is much lower than in EU Member States. A total of 8% of Turkish adults have had no education and more than half have had only a basic primary education. There are large differences between generations: almost twice as many Turks under the age of 30 have had a secondary education or better compared to the oldest generation, and young people in school today wish to attain a higher level of education than their parents.

¹ The complete report is available at <http://eurofound.europa.eu/publications/htmlfiles/ef0719.htm>

- A much lower proportion of Turkish adults participate in the labour force than is common in EU countries. A significant proportion of the labour force is employed in insecure, daily paid work or self-employed, and more than one in eight are unpaid family workers. While Turks often see positive aspects to their work, on balance they are more likely to see their jobs as stressful, boring or dangerous than workers in EU Member States.
- The distribution of incomes between households in Turkey is unbalanced: 3% of Turks have an income that is more than four times that of the majority of households.
- Although gender differences in educational achievement are limited and narrow, gender differences in employment are great. More than five times as many men as women are in paid employment, and women are more than twice as likely to be unpaid family workers. Moreover, more employed women than men report that they have difficulty in achieving a satisfactory work–life balance.
- Gender relations are changing. The widespread practice of birth control is lowering total fertility rates to near replacement levels. Whereas older men and women were often involved in an arranged marriage, among younger, unmarried Turks both men and women want the freedom to choose their own partner.
- Friendship and family networks provide informal social protection to Turks. More than nine-tenths of persons surveyed said they could get help from others when ill, and four-fifths reckoned they could borrow money in an emergency.

Political, economic and social context

Individual behaviour and attitudes in Turkey are influenced by public institutions. The revolution led by Kemal Atatürk in 1923 rejected a multi-national, economically backward Islamic-controlled country in favour of creating a nationalist, secular state with the goal of social and economic modernisation along European lines. These institutions have had a continuing influence on the development of Turkish society.

Consistent with the European orientation of Atatürk, in 1962 Turkey became an associate member of the EU's precursor: the European Economic Community (EEC). Economic and political difficulties delayed further action until 1987, when Turkey applied to become a full member of the European Community. This was followed by an agreement in 1996 which created a 'customs union' between Turkey and the EU. Since then, EU countries have been the main market for Turkish exports, as well as a source of Turkish imports. In 1999, Turkey was officially recognised as a candidate country of the EU, with the proviso that it should take active steps to meet the EU's Copenhagen criteria for membership: namely, democracy, the rule of law, respect for human and minority rights, competence in administering the *acquis communautaire* (the cumulative body of EU laws and objectives), and a functioning market economy.

By EU15 standards, Turkey has been late to industrialise. However, unlike the ten new Member States of eastern and central Europe, its economic development was not distorted for four decades by the imposition of a non-market economy. Instead, following decades of unsuccessful state-led initiatives, its economy has developed by producing goods and services for export, without access to the rich energy resources that have characterised development in parts of the Middle East. Turkey's acceptance of market-led growth is in fact more comparable to that of the Republic of Korea. Unlike many countries with a small population, Turkey is big enough to sustain economic conglomerates that possess the resources to finance development and support the country's application to join the EU.

The Turkish Constitution declares the state to be secular. However, the state does seek to supervise Islamic institutions through the Office of Religious Affairs which appoints *imams*, and organises Koran instruction in schools.

An overwhelming majority of Turks identify themselves as Moslems and a substantial majority regularly engage in prayer. The state's supremacy in civil affairs is recognised by the vast majority who reject the idea of imposing Islamic law in place of the state's civil code.

The readiness of Turks to respect both the secular norms of the state and religious traditions is also reflected in the country's marriage practices. The state requires a civil service in order for a marriage to be legally binding. According to a 2005 survey carried out by TNS-PIAR, some 95% of people describing themselves as married have undergone a civil marriage service, compared with 5% of respondents who cite only having a religious service. Of those who have had a civil service, 64% also had a religious marriage ceremony.

Dynamics of population growth

The population of Turkey has quadrupled from 1945 to the present – and at 74 million is today greater than that of any EU Member State, except Germany. The dynamics of Turkey's demography will ensure that its population will continue to grow in the decades ahead, because the youngest groups in the Turkish population are larger than the oldest ones and growth does not depend on immigration from abroad. Between the 2000 census and 2010, it is forecast that Turkey's population will increase by 10.5 million people. Some surveys estimate that Turkey's population will exceed 90 million people by 2023, while the State Planning Office (*Devlet Planlama Teşkilati*, DPT) predicts that the population may even reach 100 million people by 2050.

In addition, life expectancy has been rising steadily in Turkey: between 1995 and 2005, average life expectancy increased by 3.3 years for men and 3.6 years for women. As in other countries, the average life expectancy of Turkish men (68.9 years) is less than that of Turkish women (73.8 years). Although the overall average life expectancy in Turkey is lower than that in the EU15 or in the NMS, the increase in life expectancy in recent years has been greater. Moreover, male life expectancy in Turkey today is actually higher than that in Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania or Romania.

According to the Turkish Demographic and Health Survey (*Türkiye Nüfus ve Sağlık Araştırması*, TNSA), conducted in 2003, 7% of households consist of individuals living alone, 17% comprise two persons, while 45% of households consist of three or four persons. Some 15% of Turkish households have five persons, 8% consist of six persons, while the remaining 8% of households are larger in size. Rural households tend to have more people per household: 28% of rural households have six or more residents compared with 14% of households in urban areas.

Turks tend to live in big cities: eight cities have more than one million people and two-thirds of the population are urban residents.

The flow of Turkish emigrants to Europe has now levelled off. In the past decade, the number of Turks living abroad has fallen, as the number of people returning to Turkey has outnumbered those emigrating.

Social inclusion and exclusion

Levels of education in Turkey have been continually rising from the previously low standards, which were reflected in the country's widespread illiteracy half a century ago. Moreover, standards have been rising at all levels of education. Today, eight years of education is compulsory for all children in Turkey, secondary and vocational schools are available nationwide, and more than 1.5 million young people are in higher education institutions.

Differences in access to education remain significant, for example between the majority of young people and those whose parents can afford to pay for private education, the latter leading to greater opportunities for success in the university entrance examination or for a private university education. Nevertheless, given the increasingly higher rates of participation in education among young people, the education levels of the adult population will continue to rise, provided that the state continues to maintain expenditure to cope with the pressures of demands for education.

Turkey differs from EU countries in that fewer citizens receive income maintenance or benefit payments from the state. According to Turkish Statistical Institute (*Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu*, TÜİK) data, only 13% of respondents in Turkey report being in regular receipt of a pension. The EQLS data indicate, on the other hand, that 24% of respondents in the NMS receive a pension, while 23% of people do so in the EU15. The lower level of pension coverage in Turkey not only reflects the lower life expectancy of people in the country, but also the fact that social security coverage is incomplete rather than widespread, especially for the oldest Turks.

A second difference concerns child benefit payments. In EU countries, families with children normally receive benefit payments. However, in Turkey, where birth rates are higher, only 3% of households report receiving child benefits and the payments themselves are very small (EQLS data). Moreover, only 2% of people report receiving benefits from the state on the grounds of being unemployed or disabled. The Turkish social security regime today leaves one third of the population unprotected by health or social security benefits. Turks face greater obstacles in gaining access to health services than citizens in EU Member States. In addition to cost, the obstacles include delays in seeing a doctor and the distance to travel for treatment.

Although social security expenditure is very low in Turkey by EU standards, it has increased greatly in recent times; moreover, even though the percentage of retirees in Turkey is relatively low compared with EU countries, the proportion is growing in absolute terms. The cost to employers of social security contributions encourages the employment of low-skilled workers in illegal jobs in the informal economy. However, new social security legislation has introduced reforms to the system and provides for the merging of separate pension schemes in 2007. Nevertheless, incentives remain that encourage middle-aged employees covered by social security legislation to retire from their job, thereby collecting a small pension and severance pay, and then work in the informal sector.

According to the EQLS, half of all Turkish citizens perceive tensions in their society between rich and poor and management and workers, a pattern similar to new EU Member States but higher than in old EU Member States. One-third of Turks also see tensions existing between men and women – with women more likely to see tensions than men.

Almost 50% of Turks report that they have had trouble during the year paying for at least one household necessity, and 5% report that they regularly have trouble paying for food, rent and utility bills. The extent of need is substantially higher than in EU Member States.

Gender differences

While women have tended to lag behind men in education, this gap is now closing. According to official statistics, 90% of adult men compared to only 67% of adult women were literate in 1990. By 2003, a rise of 14 percentage points in female literacy and six percentage points in male literacy narrowed the gender literacy gap to 15 percentage points. The almost complete mobilisation of children into primary education has reduced the gender gap in primary schools to six percentage points. Levels of education have been rising among women as well as men. In the 20–24 year age group, some 34% of women have completed a secondary or third-level education, compared with 16% of women aged 40–44 years and just 3% of women aged over 60 years. Urban–rural differences in the attendance of girls at primary schools have also narrowed, with attendance levels rising to 94% in urban areas and to 88% in rural areas. However, large

regional differences still persist. While 75% of girls are in secondary or third-level education in developed regions of Turkey, in the least developed parts of the south and east, only 31% of girls participate in education.

Striking gender differences emerge in the employment patterns of men and women. Men are more than five times as likely as women to participate in paid employment (Table 1). Moreover, women are more than twice as likely as men to be unpaid family helpers rather than working in paid employment. Since a majority of female adults are homemakers, who are unpaid and have no retirement age, women are much less likely to be entitled to the social security benefits of retirement.

Table 1: *Economic status of women and men in Turkey, %*

	Women	Men
Working	12	67
Family helper	8	3
Unemployed	3	10
Homemaker	69	-
Retired	4	15
In education	1	3
Ill/disabled	2	2

Source: TÜİK, *Quality of Life Survey, 2003*

Participation in society and life satisfaction

Most Turks express lower levels of satisfaction with national policies on education, pensions, social services, health and public transport. Moreover, the level of dissatisfaction in Turkey is significantly higher than in the EU15 countries or in all the EU enlargement countries, except for Bulgaria (see table 2).

Table 2: *Average levels of satisfaction with life domains, by country*

	Turkey	Bulgaria	Romania	NMS	EU15
Family life	7.8	7.1	8.1	7.6	7.9
Health	7.1	6.5	7.3	7.3	7.7
Housing	6.5	6.4	7.2	6.7	7.7
Job	6.3	6.3	7.4	6.9	7.4
Education	4.7	6.4	7.8	6.4	7.0
Standard living	4.6	4.0	6.1	5.6	7.2

Note: Levels of satisfaction are measured on a scale of one to 10, where one means 'very dissatisfied' and 10 means 'very satisfied'.
Source: *EQLS, 2003*

Turkish people's attitudes towards their material circumstances are mixed. While the standard of housing is not as high in Turkey as it is in EU Member States, the average level of satisfaction with housing (6.5) is almost the same as it is in the NMS (6.7). People in Turkey also tend to be relatively satisfied with their job (6.3), although job satisfaction is not as high as it is in the EU15 (7.4) or the NMS (6.9). However, Turks tend to be more dissatisfied with their standard of living, with the average satisfaction score of 4.6 being much lower than that found in EU countries. However, the cross-national difference in satisfaction with living standards is not as great as that between the per capita income of the EU15 and Turkey.

Policy implications from an EU perspective

Since it seems likely that a substantial period of time is required before a final decision is made about Turkey's application to join the European Union, there is time for action to be taken to improve the quality of life in Turkey and reduce existing gaps between Turkey and EU Member States. Among the priorities identified in the research are:

- raising the skills levels of workers in order to provide secure jobs and to meet competition from low-wage developing countries as well as to reap the benefits from association with the EU;
- achieving full social security and health care coverage for all the population;
- maintaining stability in economic growth and low inflation rates in contrast to the radical ups and downs of the economy in the past decade.

In relation to the gender issue, the EU's promotion of gender equality is challenged by the fact that relations between men and women in Turkey reflect traditional Muslim mores on the one hand and Atatürk's advocacy of equal rights between men and women on the other. This creates substantial differences in gender roles between Turkish and EU societies. The labour force participation of women in Turkey today is lower than it was in virtually every European country half a century ago. While the EU's Copenhagen criteria do not make the promotion of gender equality an explicit criterion for membership, the European Parliament has adopted resolutions urging Turkey to take more active steps in implementing legislation that protects the rights of women.

In terms of demographics, the large size of Turkey's population is indisputable; however, the implications of its dramatic growth constitute a challenge for the EU. Population size makes Turkey loom large in a European setting, whether it is inside or outside the EU. The country has a bigger and more rapidly growing economy than most EU Member States. It also has the largest army in Europe, is in a strategic location adjacent to Middle Eastern trouble spots and encompasses access routes for the movement of energy from Central Asia to Europe.

The combination of a low average national income and a large population could make Turkey's potential claim on EU social cohesion funds greater in magnitude than other countries. In the present EU of 27 Member States, the new entrants with strong claims on EU funds already constitute more than one fifth of its total population. The addition of Turkey could increase the population claiming EU social cohesion funds to 50%. Of course, the extent to which Turkish claims on EU funds would be destabilising depends on whether the current system of allocating funds remains unaltered in the decade or more before Turkey's proposed membership.

The opening up of discussions about EU accession creates opportunities, incentives and requirements for Turkey to converge with EU standards. The EU is not negotiating on the substance or conditions of accession, but rather asking Turkey as a candidate country to adjust to the EU's laws and policies. This requires ongoing discussions, since many requirements are not fixed and precise, and because the form, methods and pace of adjustment are negotiable. One Copenhagen criterion that Turkey clearly meets is its longstanding functioning market economy, unlike that of the NMS countries which were part of the Communist bloc. According to enlargement Commissioner Rehn, the greatest challenge for Turkey is the implementation of political criteria. The constitutional position of the military, which the country has invoked at times against elected governments, detracts from Turkey's democratic credentials. Laws restricting criticism of basic nationalist beliefs and the treatment of the Kurds represent additional political issues, while the country's rule of law has been weakened by corruption and derogations from human rights. At the same time, existing shortcomings in governance raise questions about the administrative capacity of the Turkish state.

The process of discussing EU membership is ongoing. The most recent accession countries started their journey towards membership with democratic elections in 1990. The timescale envisioned for the discussion of Turkey's proposed entry to the EU covers the following events: elections to the Turkish National Assembly in 2007, 2011 and 2015; more than 80 elections in the EU's current Member States; elections to the European Parliament in 2009 and 2014; and two more rounds of appointing and confirming members of the European Commission. Thus, the final decision on Turkey's proposed entry to the EU will not only reflect the more or less predictable trends within Turkish society which are analysed in the report on [Quality of life in Turkey](#), but also political imponderables in the EU as it exists today, in Turkey and in the wider world.