EDUCATION MONITORING REPORT
2011
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
Education Reform Initiative (ERI) was established in 2003 at Sabancı University with the aim of improving education policy processes and outcomes through research, advocacy and training.

ERI attempts to serve as an example as to how policy dialogue should be conducted within a contemporary democratic framework by bringing together concerned civil society groups and relevant state agencies to catalyze an innovative collective thought process for education reform policy.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Turkey still lacks a comprehensive education strategy.

The need for a medium term plan to develop and implement education policies persisted in 2011. Following his appointment as the Minister of National Education in 2011, Mr. Ömer Dinçer’s strategy meetings on teacher policies and vocational and technical education were valuable efforts that could respond to the need for a holistic strategy. However, Turkey’s education policies continue to suffer from the absence of a thorough study which designs and monitors policies and strategies among different components of education with wide participation.

The anticipated problems associated with the lack of a comprehensive education strategy have become more apparent with the new 4+4+4 compulsory education bill.

Neither the high-level policy documents nor the ruling party’s election manifesto included a legislative proposal on the “4+4+4” compulsory education system. Moreover, the legislative proposal drafting process was neither participatory nor data-based. Effective shortly after its first appearance on the public agenda, the Primary Education and Education Law no. 6287 brought about changes in the school starting age and primary schools, introduced new programs and elective courses at the lower secondary level and made upper secondary education compulsory. While fundamentally altering the educational system, it also caused uncertainty. This unplanned alteration not only jeopardizes progress made in the education sector but also creates significant challenges in the areas of governance and financing for MoNE.

The restructuring of Ministry of National Education by the decree law no. 652 is among one of the most significant developments of 2011. The restructuring simplified the central administration structure and was aimed at enhancing coordination among different units within the central administration. However, such simplification without empowering local administrations and delegating authority carries risks.

Before the decree law no. 652, there was consensus that MoNE’s education governance model impeded the efficiency of educational services. As the most solid attempt observed over the years to improve the education governance model, the restructuring of the Ministry in a broader sense had three goals: to enhance coordination within the central administration; to build institutional capacity to constitute policies and allocate resources in line with international trends; and to establish a system which allows for performance audits.

The law includes carrying out activities to further enhance coordination within the central administration, reducing the number of service units within MoNE, establishing similar Directorate Generals under all service units, and merging Directorate Generals who perform in similar areas under the same Deputy Undersecretary, which are indeed positive developments. Sufficient and qualified human resources are vital for these Directorate Generals to serve their purpose, as well
as further clarification on the roles and responsibilities of central and local administrations along with schools.

With the decree law the number of executive officers at the central administration was reduced from 320 to 80. However, such simplification of the central administration, if carried out without building capacity at the local administration level and delegating authority first, will likely cause delays in decision making and hinder the Ministry’s operations.

Despite the decree law no. 652, MoNE’s organizational structure still remains very centralized and is likely to deteriorate due to a lack of precision in delegating authority to local administrations and a lack of process planning. Avoiding this would depend on rapidly clarifying the delegation of authority among the central administration and other stakeholders.

The development of education policies that rest on pedagogy-focused research requires the central administration to prioritize its activities more towards research and development rather than following international trends.

A closer look at developments during the enforcement of the decree law suggests that the Ministry monitors international trends very closely. When the Department of Education Research and Development (EARGED) was closed down, all service units within the Ministry assumed duties regarding education research and development. However, MoNE still lacks capacity to create policies that will tremendously improve the education system in a short period of time. Therefore, there should be more focus on research and development activities within the central organization to develop education policies that rest on pedagogy-focused research.

One of the most important components of the restructuring of MoNE is the performance-based auditing system. Success of such a system is very much related to the way performance criteria are determined and the level of reliability of the methods employed in evaluating performance. It is also important that post-audit procedures are identified through transparent and participatory processes.

Performance-based auditing systems are amongst the most discussed policy options in many countries. With these systems, it is assumed that an increase in the level of accountability within the education system could improve the quality of education. The success of a performance auditing system in Turkey depends on the following conditions:

• Performance criteria are determined in a way that will improve the education system;
• The methodology to be used in evaluating the performance of individuals and institutions is chosen by the stakeholders in a reliable manner;
• Post-audit procedures are determined by prior consultations among stakeholders.

In this regard, it is of great significance that the pilot study by the Directorate of Counseling and Auditing is carried out in a transparent manner.

The system of Primary Education Institutions Standards (İKS) introduces a self-assessment mechanism for primary education institutions. While this is of great importance, standards should be simplified and the role of İKS within the education governance and auditing system should be clarified.
İKS, which became effective in 2011, could potentially contribute to the level of accountability and evaluation in the education system, as well as the quality of education. İKS defines minimum standards that all primary education institutions should adhere to and it is designed as a comprehensive practice that includes a self-assessment mechanism. However, it could be perceived of as a performance auditing system and create distrust among stakeholders. It can be seen that the high number of standards and indicators, along with a convoluted process for gathering data, causes delays in its reporting phase. For instance, schools have not yet been able to receive reports on the data collected in June 2011 during the 2011-2012 academic year. In brief, İKS is valuable because it introduces a self-assessment mechanism based on standards for the first time; yet to what extent it will be used remains unclear.

Ambiguity remains around covering the costs of education reform, as well as preventing deterioration of the quality of education.

While public spending on education has increased at a flat rate, spending as percentage of GDP has not increased despite GDP growth. In other words, albeit becoming more prosperous, Turkey has not opted to allocate more resources to public spending on education. More importantly the government does not have any plans to increase public spending on education as a percentage of GDP to the level of 5 %, the OECD standard, or to 6 %, the level UNESCO suggests for developing countries. On the contrary, initial and proposed appropriations in the 2012 Budget Justification suggest that the government plans on reducing public spending on education as a percentage of GDP.

The failure of new regulations and decisions to rely on a national education strategy and the lack of a comprehensive analysis of their expected public finance outcomes carries risks for education financing. Both ERI and the Economic Policy Research Foundation of Turkey (TEPAV) estimated that the cost of the education system envisioned by the 4+4+4 compulsory education bill would equal or exceed MoNE’s total budget. Therefore the quality of education, already suffering, faces the risk of further exacerbation in the presence of other priorities such as expanding quantity.

It is striking that the per student spending rate has stabilized or declined despite an increase in overall education spending. With an increasing number of students at the secondary level, particularly in vocational and technical education, per student spending remains steady or decreases. This is because of the extension of secondary education to four years, a rapid increase in the number of students, and most importantly, the organization of public education finances. Currently the Ministry allocates budgets on the basis of Directorate Generals within the central organization, instead of estimating public spending per student, causing a decrease in per student spending.

Expansion of pre-primary education for the 36-72 and 48-72-month age groups has been significantly slow. There has been a decrease in enrollment rates for the 60-72-month age group in 58 provinces, despite MoNE’s policy target to reach 100% access in these provinces. There is an urgent need to review policies, initiatives and efforts to expand pre-primary education.

MoNE has made expanding access to pre-primary education a policy priority in recent years and has implemented numerous comprehensive projects in order to increase participation. Starting from the 2008-2009 academic year pilot programs aimed at reaching 100% access for the 60-72 month age group were gradually implemented in various provinces. The Strengthening Pre-School Education Project, launched in 2009 by MoNE with technical support from UNICEF and financial contributions from the European Union, aims at increasing both quality and access in pre-primary education services. However, enrollment rates progress very slowly and there has been a decline in enrollment for the 60-72 month age group in pilot provinces, despite the increased efforts.

In the 2011-2012 academic year, net enrollment rates for the 36-72 and 48-72 month age groups grew slightly. On the other hand, despite the proliferation of provinces with the 100 % access goal, the net enrollment for the 60-72 month age group went down to 65.69 %, a 1.21 percentage point decrease. In addition, access to school at this level is characterized by profound disparities among provinces. This slow progress in pre-primary education expansion can be explained by the following: 1) challenges caused by the re-structuring of MoNE; 2) inadequate physical infrastructure (or lack of physical capacity); 3) lack of adequate alternative community-based service models to support institution-based service models; 4) the fact that pre-primary education is not free; 5) lack of a comprehensive and balanced approach to pre-primary schooling.

Whether the existing growth rates in pre-primary enrollment make it possible to reach the enrollment targets set by the 60th Government Action Plan and MoNE’s Strategic Plan of 2010-2014, remains unknown. Regardless, there is a need for specific interventions to boost pre-primary enrollment. Programs that are sensitive to disparities among provinces and regions and that reinforce the quality and diversity of pre-school service models could be among such interventions. In fact, rendering MoNE’s policy initiatives on expansion of pre-school education services to target disadvantaged provinces and families could yield significant gains in social equality. High quality pre-school education programs could be pivotal in overcoming socioeconomic inequalities. Also, despite the expansion of the 100 % access pilot program, there is still a need for studies to evaluate the quality of services offered. Finally, reaching MoNE’s target of 100 % enrollment by the end of 2013 for the 48-60-month age group, set along with the changes made to the primary school starting age, has become even more significant.

There has been progress in access to primary and secondary education. However, persistent inequalities among regions and gender disparities still remain as major issues in access to secondary education.

Concurrent to the efforts made by policy makers to facilitate access to primary education, the net enrollment rate increased to 98.67 % in 2011-2012 from 98.41 % in 2010-2011. While the net enrollment in secondary education increased by 1.3 percentage points to reach 67.37 % in the 2011-2012 academic year, disparities among provinces persisted. For instance, the net enrollment is highest in Bilecik, Bolu, and Rize with the respective rates of 90.75 %, 90.28 % and 89.72 %.

However, it drops to 37.77 % in Şanlıurfa, 33.91 % in Muş and 32.13 % in Ağrı. There has also been some progress with regards to gender equality. The female net enrollment ratio increased from 63.68 % in the previous year to 66.14 %, moving towards the secondary school average. However, stark differences between female and male net enrollment rates still exist in many provinces.
**ENROLLMENT RATES IN SECONDARY EDUCATION**

Source: Data provided by MoNE in May 2012.

Evaluation of participation in primary and secondary education should not be confined to enrollment ratios. Absenteeism rates, class repetition rates and rates of those leaving school without a diploma should also be taken into consideration. However, as such data was not shared by MoNE for 2011-2012 school year, it has not been possible to conduct a thorough evaluation of school participation in Education Monitoring Report 2011.

Absenteeism has an impact on student participation in education and consequently its quality. Previous analyses revealed that issues of student absenteeism, class repetition and dropping out are very common in secondary education in Turkey. In fact, while 80% of primary school students continue on to secondary education, a significant portion of these students drop out of school during the 9th or 10th grades. This suggests a deficiency of internal productivity at the secondary level. Thus, making secondary education compulsory requires closer attention.

In accordance with one of the key principles of good governance, transparency, MoNE should continue to share data on student absenteeism, class repetition, and dropouts. We strongly believe that this would lead to independent, objective, evidence-based evaluations of Turkey’s education system, paving the way for improvement.

MoNE’s early detection and prevention tool for student absenteeism, Gradual Absence Management System (GAMS), which became operational at the beginning of the 2011-2012 academic year, requires more pertinent and applicable content, as well as a more comprehensive approach to the issue of absenteeism.

The development of the GAMS to detect and monitor at-risk students is of great significance for early detection and prevention of student absenteeism through customized solutions. The most remarkable feature of GAMS is that it re-conceptualizes student absenteeism via numerous categories, making it possible to identify different student needs and tailor interventions.
However, the problems encountered during GAMS implementation have raised questions regarding its pertinence and applicability to prevent student absenteeism. A substantial increase in the workload of GAMS’s administrators, concerns over the reliability of the data collected via questionnaires, and potential damage to the privacy of students due to the nature of the data collected and its easy access are some of the problems that occurred during its implementation. Therefore it is crucial that the concerns raised by GAMS’s administrators are addressed and the system is continually strengthened.

Another problem area regarding GAMS is that it addresses absenteeism and tailors its interventions predominantly on the basis of individual and family characteristics. However, many other factors contribute to a student’s sense of belonging at school, including school/class size, the existing academic performance measurement systems, safety within and around the school, lack of quality of the educational system and incompetency of teachers, cumbersome school curriculum and its failure to realize students’ diverse abilities, lack of capacity of schools to attract parents and students, and transportation challenges. All of these may contribute to a student’s attendance decision, and so GAMS should complement its risk assessment tools, which are mostly based on individual and family background, with factors that affect one’s sense of belonging to a school.

The compatibility between the goals and existing practices of the Every Child Succeeds Project is debatable.

The Every Child Succeeds Project primarily aims to map competencies of primary and secondary school age population and support students who lag behind their peers through various support mechanisms. Despite its comprehensive project components and goals, the pilot implementation skipped the competency mapping. It solely focused on providing academic support to those in need, thus creating a gap between the project’s predefined goals and implementation. It is also not clear how the project evaluates student success. Financial sustainability and the lack of a time frame appear to be other fundamental issues that MoNE must overcome.

The number of special needs students involved in inclusive education at the primary school level increased by 63 % in 2011. However, there are still very few such students at the secondary level. In addition to the efforts to increase the number of students, steps should be taken to render mainstreaming practices more efficient.

In the 2011-2012 academic year, 238,917 students benefited from special education services. In addition to the 169,711 students in special education institutions, 20,958 are in special education classrooms and 137,893 students in primary and 10,860 students in secondary schools are in inclusive classrooms. While the 63 percent increase in the number of students at the primary level is very important, there is still a high number of students that should be included in inclusive education who are not. Also, the number of secondary school students in inclusive education remains very limited. Additionally, the female-to-male ratio of special needs students is low for all primary and secondary institutions inclusive classrooms, special education institutions and special education classrooms. There is a need for further research to explain these ratios and also for gender-sensitive interventions in the field of special education.

In general, the gradual increase in the number of students in inclusive education is a positive development. However, the difference between regulations and practices remains a significant
challenge. In order to enhance the efficiency of inclusive practices, continuous work should be carried out in the following areas:

• Making inclusion/integration practices more compatible with existing legal arrangements;
• Increasing the efficiency of diagnostic tools to identify students with special needs and enhancing the trust of different stakeholders in diagnostic tools and process;
• Ensuring that inclusion/integration practices are carried out by competent teachers who have experience in such practices, and ensuring administrators are informed;
• Providing sufficient and high quality human resources and support services, the key features of effective inclusion/integration practices;
• Transforming parents into responsive stakeholders who are aware of their children’s needs and who effectively collaborate with schools during the inclusion/integration practices;
• Advancing social inclusion of children with special needs;

The Strengthening Special Education Project (ÖZEGEP) carried out by the Department of Special Education and Guidance Services is a valuable step taken in recent years towards effectively promoting special education through the provision of inclusion/integration education. Developing a “School without Barriers Model” to scale up access to inclusive education in pilot provinces are among ÖZEGEP’s goals.

MoNE recognized the need to focus on teacher policies in order to improve Turkey’s quality of education as a prominent issue. Consequently, the Ministry has launched a process to develop a national strategy with a comprehensive and participatory approach towards teacher policies.

With the participation of representatives from a wide range of fields, the National Teacher Strategy Workshop was carried out between November 18 and 20, 2011 in Antalya. The Workshop provided stakeholders with an opportunity to share their thoughts on teacher policies. Also, the following points were listed as major problems:

• Suitable candidates are not selected to pre-service teacher training programs;
• Pre-service teacher training programs fall short in supporting students to gain minimum competencies required for the teaching profession;
• The selection method used to enter into the profession is not pertinent to the selection of teachers and does not take teacher competencies into consideration;
• New teachers are not adequately supported via pre-service trainings and during their induction periods.

While the National Teacher Strategy Document is still being developed based on problem areas and possible solutions that came to light at the workshop, the document has not been recognized as a roadmap or shared with public. While preparing the action plan based on this strategy, it is crucial that concrete and evidence-based recommendations are proposed. And, in case such recommendations are initiated, the action plan should clearly document how each recommendation would be monitored and evaluated.
With increasingly egalitarian distribution of number of students per teacher among regions, there has been an improvement in student achievement. However, posting teachers with relatively less experience to eastern and rural Turkey impedes the learning process in schools and is correlated with student and teacher absenteeism.

There has been a drastic decline in the number of students per teacher since the second half of the 1990s, particularly in eastern provinces. Concurrently with this decline, the duration of compulsory basic education was extended from 5 to 8 years in the 1997-1998 academic year; the “Norm Cadre” staffing reform was implemented in 1999; the first Examination for Public Officers was administered in 2001; and finally with the centrally administered Public Officer Selection Exam (KPSS) in 2002, “norm” staff were matched to positions. With the decrease of the student-teacher ratio, students’ success in both TIMSS and PISA exams improved. During this same period, the share of women in the teaching profession also increased, and many teachers who were newcomers to the profession, from low or middle-class urban families, started teaching in eastern and rural Turkey. In the first years of their professional lives, these teachers encountered challenging school environments where education and schooling is often interrupted. This resulted in an upsurge in absenteeism for both teachers and students, and exacerbated existing issues in teacher-student relationships. To deal with such problems, policy makers are developing induction programs and professional development trainings, among other methods.

Supporting professional development of teachers working at public schools via high quality trainings still remains a priority in Turkey.

Considering that more than 750,000 teachers are employed at public schools and each year around 10 thousand teachers retire, it is not surprising that professional development would become a prominent policy discussed at the previously-mentioned conference. Currently, teachers are not supported with regular in-service trainings. However, senior teachers need to be supported via in-service trainings and newcomers via high quality and effective induction trainings.

At the majority of public schools in Turkey, teachers do not benefit from any formal induction training. Also, many experienced teachers do not participate in in-service trainings that MoNE offers. Nevertheless, the quality of those trainings is also contentious. There are issues related to the compatibility of training programs with teachers’ needs for professional development, and such programs are not subjected to impact evaluations. This makes teachers reluctant to participate in professional development programs. On top of this, teachers at public schools struggle to find experienced colleagues to mentor them.
The School Based Professional Development Model has the potential to offer a sustainable and effective solution to the question of professional development. However, putting it into effect is proving to be a long process. Also, to what extent MoNE’s short-term in-service training programs would be more efficient is still ambiguous. These programs aim to reach all teachers in three years largely through distance education.
The School Based Professional Development Model (OTGM) could, to a certain degree, offer solutions to these problems with its potential to support teachers already in service and teacher candidates during their adjustment periods to the profession. The OTGM could allow teachers to customize their own professional development models, and then implement those models through a guided and monitored process.

OTGM is different than existing in-service training models. Instead of providing opportunities for professional development via courses and seminars prepared centrally by MoNE, it introduces a model where development of students and teachers are mutually inclusive and each school develops its own service model based on teachers’ and students’ needs. The initiatives of Teacher Competencies and OTGM were launched within the scope of the Teacher Training component of the Supporting Basic Education Project. Once the Teacher Competencies, which are currently being simplified to allow for monitoring and evaluation, are finalized, OTGM will finally be in effect. However, this may take up to 2-3 years.

It is crucial that professional development activities planned for the summer are both high quality and tailored to meet teachers’ needs. Moreover, the scope of the mentorship program that will be offered to new teachers should include all teachers and its integration into OTGM should be planned as soon as possible.

The National Teacher Strategy Workshop and the views of the Minister of National Education as reported in the media offer hints as to how MoNE will proceed to improve teacher quality and shape its policies on professional development. The Minister’s views imply that teachers will be trained for at least one month. Also, representatives from the Board of Education and MoNE often expressed initiating a mentorship program in order to strengthen guidance services for teachers.

Two points should be taken into consideration regarding these policy initiatives. Firstly, the professional development activities planned for the summer should be of high quality and the programs offered should be tailored to meet teachers’ needs. Secondly, the scope of the mentorship program that will be offered to new teachers should be made available to all teachers and its integration into OTGM should be planned as soon as possible.

International examples of civil society initiatives for successful mentorship programs can provide an example for Turkey regarding the provision of quality professional training. Civil society and public partnerships have so much potential for taking innovative and progressive steps at all levels of professional development. Strengthening these partnerships is fundamental to leading the best transformation of the education system. Education Monitoring Report 2011 overviews examples of mentorship programs from around the world and accordingly draws lessons for Turkey.

Not only are current teachers’ professional status and working conditions very pronounced in the public agenda in 2011, but also the expectations of recent education graduates’ and their assignments have gained a lot of attention. Lately, escalating tensions between teachers and MoNE can be observed.
Working conditions for teachers can be harsh, especially for newcomers who often have to make arrangements for accommodation, security and transportation without any assistance. Also, according to the by-laws, teacher candidates are not allowed to practice on their own, even though it is known that they are assigned to classrooms in schools with only one teacher on duty. Senior teachers also serve in poor conditions that do not comply with the status of the teaching profession. When tens of teachers lost their lives during the earthquakes in Van and Erciş in 2011, it became apparent that teachers not only deal with issues like transportation and school resources, but they may also face life-threatening situations. It should be noted that any meaningful improvement in the quality of education depends on improvement of working conditions of the teaching profession in accordance with its status.

The status of the teaching profession and current working conditions of teachers were not thoroughly discussed at the National Teacher Strategy Workshop. Teachers’ professional status, working conditions and teacher candidates’ concerns over their assignments have been prominent issues in the 2011 public agenda, and the tension between MoNE and teachers has recently increased. Teacher candidates’ allegations that MoNE opts to hire substitute teachers rather than create norm staffing put significant pressure on MoNE.

According to official statements in the national media, 50,150 contracted or substitute teachers were hired in public schools in the 2011-2012 academic year. ERI carried out interviews with substitute teachers and revealed the following issues: Substitute teachers without any job security earn on average 7 TL for each class hour; their insurance premiums are not fully paid; they are not entitled to a teacher pass and often encounter problems regarding the payment of their salaries. In addition, they are often tasked with carrying out extracurricular activities without any compensation. In this regard, it could be very well argued that the dual structure of the teaching profession, substitute teachers versus teachers on the permanent staff, negatively impacts the quality of education. A significant share of substitute teachers lack a teaching certificate and they can enter and leave the profession at any time in a given academic year. Moreover, substitute teachers stated that they are not expected to prepare annual programs and underlined the fact that instruction in the classrooms relies entirely on their judgment.

In addition to the urgent need to improve working conditions for teachers, issues with substitute teaching and the status of the teaching profession also require immediate attention. Currently, there appears to be no initiative aimed at tackling these problems, which increases their potential negative impact.

Among the positive developments in educational content in 2011 are the abolition of the national security course and improvement of the primary school curriculum with regards to gender equality. However, an evaluation of the contents of the citizenship and democracy education and religious culture and morality education (RCME) courses had mixed results.

In the 2011-12 academic year, the citizenship and democracy education course was made compulsory and now is offered one hour per week to 8th graders. An evaluation of its textbook, teacher guidebook and student workbook revealed that there has been progress compared to the citizenship and human rights education textbooks studied by 7th and 8th graders before the 2005 curriculum reform. Fundamental to this progress are extensive and overt discussions about discrimination and mechanisms through which students can seek their rights. Also, innovative
activities were recommended and the language used was vastly improved, thus improving the quality of the textbooks.

On the other hand, the way that basic concepts such as democracy and human rights are conveyed within their historical and societal contexts has yet to be developed. Currently, the books do not mention how people gain rights through struggles, some of which are still going on both in Turkey and the world. As a result, it becomes difficult for students to relate the course subjects to the society in which they live. Another shortcoming is that the concept of citizenship is studied from an autarkic point of view. Such a narrow approach to culture impedes the diversity of languages and cultures; consequently obstructing the course’s potential to support the idea that differences exist in peace.

The European Court of Human Rights stated that the RCME curriculum is predominantly based on teachings of a particular religion, namely Sunni Islam, without any non-discriminatory exemption mechanisms. They also stated that it lacks the objectivity and impartiality principles of international human rights law. Following this, the RCME curriculum has been revised twice. The changes made prior to the 2011-2012 academic year were confined to shuffling some chapters and including various additions rather than a comprehensive revision of the previous curriculum. The fundamental change made to the previous curriculum was an expansion of the section on different interpretations in Islam; particularly the inclusion of terminology, practices, and information sources on different beliefs in Islam, namely Alawism and Bektashism. This suggests that pluralism is only embraced within the context of Islam. The course still has elements of “religious education” and “education on religions”. Expressions such as “our religion”, “our holy book Quran”, and “our Prophet” continue to exist both in the curriculum and the textbook, excluding people with different beliefs or philosophical views from the teachings of the course. In addition, a “national unity and integration” approach based on Turkish/Islamic culture and its values are still prominent in the culture and morality components of the course.

The introduction of new elective courses in middle schools and high schools via the new education bill is significant regarding the implementation of human rights education. The practice of these courses should be meticulously monitored at the local level and a zero tolerance policy against discrimination of any kind should be employed by MoNE.

In addition to the amendments made on the duration of compulsory education and its structure, the new education bill introduced a variety of new “elective courses” in secondary schools, including learning to read the Quran and the life of the Prophet. While it is argued that the introduction of such religious courses would meet demands of certain segments of society, two major risks associated with this new development should be elaborated on: 1) Considering that the education system fails to equip students with basic skills, it is very important that courses and social activities that could enrich students’ basic skills are offered in schools. Selection of religious courses might reduce the allocation of time and resources to these courses and activities that are fundamental to basic education. 2) Also, students who opt out of the religious courses could be forced to state their religious beliefs and face discrimination by teachers, their peers and parents.

For religious education to represent freedom of religion and conscience, it must be determined with participatory methods, based on students’ and parents’ consent for its implementation and financing. Therefore, it should reflect the diversity of beliefs in society, rather than being offered
The distribution of students among different types of secondary schools has progressed in accordance with MoNE’s policy targets. While the share of students increased in imam-hatip high schools and high schools operating under the General Directorate of Vocational and Technical Education, the share of students in general high schools has decreased.

As of September 2011, the General Directorates of Male Vocational Education, Female Vocational Education and Trade and Tourism Education were merged under the General Directorate of Vocational and Technical Education. It might be a positive development as it paves the way for program diversity instead of school diversity, and for a less fragmented secondary education system. Another positive development was the initiation of the Vocational and Technical Education Strategy and its workshop carried out in February 2012.

In the 2011-2012 academic year, the share of general versus vocational programs in secondary education continued the same trend as we have seen over the last decade. While the ratio of students at academically selective high schools increased from 21.4 percent to 23.5 percent, the ratio of students at general high schools decreased from 29 percent to 25 percent. At imam-hatip high schools, the ratio of students kept increasing at a steady pace and reached to 7 percent, up from 5.9 percent. The share of students studying at institutions of the General Directorate of Vocational and Technical Education also experienced an increase, albeit limited, and reached 48 percent from 46.3 percent.

![DISTRIBUTION OF SECONDARY EDUCATION STUDENTS ACROSS DIFFERENT SCHOOL TYPES, 2011-2012](image-url)
MoNE’s efforts to increase the share of vocational and technical education could yield positive educational outcomes only when each and every child is provided with quality education. However, enhancing the quality of secondary education will remain a challenge unless MoNE’s traditional approach to secondary education is altered.

Policy targets to increase the share of vocational and technical schools within secondary education appear to lack precision and are inconsistent across high-level policy documents. There also appears to be a variety of different opinions and data on international trends in vocational and technical education, especially in the European Union (EU) and OECD countries. It is often argued that the general trend of the share of vocational and technical education in the EU and OECD countries is increasing, so Turkey needs to increase its share up to the level of 50-60% accordingly. While the share of vocational and technical education differs significantly across the EU and OECD countries, there is a common trend, which is allowing greater flexibility in transition between different program types.

The internal audit report titled “The Process of Managing Vocational and Technical Education” has crucial findings which support the argument that quality rather than quantity should be the focus of policies regarding vocational education. The report, compiled in January 2012, is based on a study carried out in 2011 by the Internal Audit Unit of MoNE.

Further plans for secondary education and particularly vocational and technical education should be envisioned to support individuals’ personal development and their active involvement in society. It is very likely that the Vocational and Technical Education Strategy and the Strategic Plan for the 2015-2019 period will include policy targets in these areas. Hence, Turkey needs to more clearly define its policy targets and more comprehensively justify them while maintaining consistency across different policy documents.

The need to employ a quality-focused approach to vocational and technical education overlaps with findings of the Comprehensive Evaluation Note on Girl’s Technical and Vocational Schools prepared by the Koç University Social Policy Center in 2011. The note asserts that these schools have failed to meet expectations for girls’ access to quality education and women’s employment, and rather may serve to reinforce traditional gender roles.

The FATIH Project, primarily designed as a technology project, has the potential to become an efficient and transformative learning project. However, this requires development of high quality learning content and a paradigm change in education.

Established within the context of e-Transformation Turkey, the FATIH Project has a goal to establish technology infrastructure in 40 thousand schools and 620 thousand classrooms between 2011 and 2014. A recent development is the announcement that each student will be provided with a tablet.

In 2011, there have been important developments regarding the project’s administration. The Educational Technologies General Directorate (EĞİTEK), responsible for administering the FATIH Project, was renamed the Innovation and Educational Technologies General Directorate (YEĞİTEK) and restructured into seven departments during the restructuring of MoNE. Also, the Science
Fellowships and Grant Programs Department (TUBİTAK) undertook the project’s Steering and Executive Committee, and the involvement of different ministries in the Project further clarified MoNE’s responsibilities. Despite the changes in the project’s administration, the scope of its components remained the same. Due to the delays in its execution, it could be argued that the initial execution plan was incomplete and the inclusion of stakeholders from different areas of expertise to the project was overdue.

The earthquakes that struck the Van Province in October and November 2011 revealed once again how feeble and unprepared Turkey’s education system is in planning and providing education in the face of emergencies. After the earthquake, the curriculum was not customized in accordance with the specific needs of students and teachers, while the public education activities appeared to be overwhelmingly exam-focused.

The earthquakes occurred in Erciş on October 23rd and in the city center of Van on November 9th, 2011, and had immediate and significantly devastating effects on learning environments and the provision of education in the region. Despite the schools’ plans to open following the first earthquake, the occurrence of the second earthquake in the region postponed the start of the academic year until December 5th, 2011. The content of education and how it was conveyed was not customized to meet the specific needs of the people in the disaster region. With the start of the school year, provision of education was focused on preparing students for centrally administered placement examinations at the expense of conducting classes pivotal for student rehabilitation, i.e. music, painting and sports. Also, the school curriculum was planned to be taught for six days each week, seven hours each day. Such activities seriously impeded the post-earthquake rehabilitation of students.

A field study on the impact of the earthquakes on education in Van province was carried out by Istanbul Bilgi University’s Child Studies Unit (ÇOÇA). It shows that teachers encountered problems with accommodation, transportation, finances, assignment and reassignment conditions. Also, while psychological support services were offered to teachers in Van and Erciş, they lasted only three days and whether they had any meaningful impact is debatable. Interviews conducted as part of the same field study reveal that the period immediately after teachers returned to schools is when they needed support the most.

Public distrust of government is one of the most significant issues which emerged during the post-earthquake damage detection and reinstatement work. The fact that classes were being held in schools which were later detected as damaged and consequently evacuated inevitably called the safety of learning environments into question.

The following are priority steps to be taken on emergency-time education, taken from a literature review and fieldwork study in a background paper prepared by ÇOÇA for the EMR 2001:

- Proliferate research and reporting activities on education during emergencies with the purpose of strengthening education practices in such settings.
- Develop a national strategy for education during emergencies by MoNE and Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency that is in line with the standards set by international organizations.
• Render post-earthquake education activities participatory and inclusive for students and teachers.

• Establish organic relationships and maintain coordination with relevant stakeholders, namely civil society organizations.

• Construct earthquake-resistant schools and complete permanent housing facilities for residents and teachers at the earliest possible date.

• Turn schools into empowerment entities for students and their parents. In doing so, mitigate the shortage of guidance teachers and provide teachers with a support mechanism in order to empower them to provide psychosocial care for students.

The returns to education in Turkey are not regularly studied. Yet, the quality assurance framework of MoNE that is to be implemented in the coming years calls for constant research on returns to education. EMR 2011 presents an overview of literature and compiles findings of relevant national and international research on returns to education.

In Turkey, where the demand for education is considerably high, the allocation of more resources to education is conceived of as a necessity for enhancing one’s welfare and social status. Studies show that in Turkey, when all observable variables are controlled, people with primary education attainment compared to those without it earn 47 percent more on average. Similarly, people with secondary education attainment compared to those with only primary education attainment on average earn 29 percent more income, and those with higher educational attainment compared to those with only secondary education attainment on average earn 61 percent more income. Additionally, the analysis of basic data highlight that those who have obtained at least post-secondary education are 25 percent less likely to be unemployed when compared to those with only secondary education.

The positive impact of education is not only confined to individual economic benefits. Studies from Turkey and other countries show that education benefits individuals and society in areas ranging from health, democratic participation, crime and the environment. However, there are disparities among individuals with regards to resources allocated to education and access to quality education. These inequalities remain an obstacle for an individual’s full participation in education.

Monitoring and evaluating education policies and practices is significant for expanding high quality education services to each and every individual with an opportunity to realize their full potential. The quality assurance system that MoNE is currently working on could meet the need to monitor and evaluate the education system. In this regard, indicators on the returns to education could operate as a benchmark of the education system.