



Impact of Higher Education on Employment of Disadvantaged Groups: A Comparative Study between Türkiye and the EU

Yükseköğretimin Dezavantajlı Grupların İstihdamına Etkisi: Türkiye ve AB Arasında Karşılaştırmalı Bir Çalışma

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Abstract: Increasing employment rates, improving working and living conditions, developing human resources for a sustainable employment structure, and fighting against social exclusion are among the fundamental issues covered under the social policy and employment schemes of both the EU and Türkiye. This study provides a comprehensive examination of the employment policies and practices toward disadvantaged groups in Türkiye and the EU. It also highlights the impact of the variations in the definition of the concept of disadvantage across countries on the design and implementation of these policies. The paper recognizes that the common definition of disadvantaged groups refers to individuals with disabilities, ex-convicts, women, and immigrants and proposes to expand this definition to include those who are disadvantaged or become disadvantaged over time due to barriers to labor market access. At this point, it is seen that the difficulties experienced in accessing education create a severe disadvantage for future labor force participation. However, for Türkiye, a growing number of unemployed higher education graduates constitute a relatively new group of disadvantaged people as well. The different practices implemented by the European Union countries in terms of the employment of disadvantaged people have been examined, and it has been observed that disadvantaged people are equipped with the skills for their development both as individuals and as members of society and to access productive employment.

Keywords: Disadvantaged Groups, employment, social inclusion, active labor market policies, Türkiye, higher education, European Union

Özet: İstihdamın artırılması, çalışma ve yaşam koşullarının iyileştirilmesi, sürdürülebilir bir istihdam yapısı için insan kaynaklarının geliştirilmesi ve sosyal dışlanma ile mücadele, hem Avrupa Birliği hem de Türkiye'nin sosyal politika ve istihdam politikalarının temel konuları arasında yer almaktadır. Makale, Türkiye ve AB'de dezavantajlı gruplara yönelik istihdam politikalarını ve uygulamalarını incelemekte, ayrıca dezavantaj kavramının tanımında ülkeler arasında görülen farklılıkların bu politikaların tasarımı ve uygulanması üzerindeki etkisini vurgulamaktadır. Makale, dezavantajlı grupların ortak tanımının engelli bireyler, eski hükümlüler, kadınlar ve göçmenler olduğunu kabul etmekte ve bu tanımın işgücü piyasasına erişimin önündeki engeller nedeniyle dezavantajlı olan veya zaman içinde dezavantajlı hale gelen kişileri de kapsayacak şekilde genişletilmesini önermektedir. Bu noktada özellikle eğitime erişimde yaşanan güçlüklerin ilerleyen süreçte istihdama katılım noktasında ciddi düzeyde dezavantaj yarattığı görülmektedir. Ancak Türkiye için, sayıları giderek artan yükseköğretim mezunu işsizler de nispeten yeni bir dezavantajlı grup oluşturmaktadır. Avrupa Birliği ülkelerinin dezavantajlı konumunda olan kişilerin istihdamı amacıyla hayata geçirdikleri farklı uygulamalar çalışma kapsamında incelenmiş olup, dezavantajlı kişilerin hem birey hem de toplumun bir üyesi olarak gelişmeleri ve istihdam piyasalarına erişmeleri için gerekli becerilerle donatılmalarına yönelik uygulamalara yer verildiği gözlemlenmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Dezavantajlı Gruplar, İstihdam, Sosyal İçerme, Aktif İşgücü Piyasası Politikaları, Türkiye, yükseköğretim, Avrupa Birliği,

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Geliş / Received: 03.04.2024, Revizyon / Revised: 06.05.2024, Kabul / Accepted: 15.06.2024

<https://doi.org/10.32329/uad.1464378>



1. Introduction

As we approach the four-year mark since the COVID-19 pandemic began, it is clear that labor market conditions are on the mend. Job creation is underway, and economic growth is coming back in many economies and European Union Member States. However, long-term economic growth has hit a roadblock, necessitating investments in knowledge, skills, and abilities. A more pressing challenge is the surge in inequality, evident in the sluggish growth of real wages and the widening gap in average wages paid across firms within and across regions. Despite the positive aspects of globalization, there is a prevailing sentiment that the opportunities and benefits have been disproportionately concentrated, leaving many feeling “left behind” and “disadvantaged.”

In recent years, the disadvantaged group notion has been mentioned in the agendas and strategy papers of countries, especially in the European Union (EU), with the effect of international organizations such as the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the United Nations (UN). Related institutions are looking for ways to raise awareness of the issues encountered by marginalized groups and to fight discrimination in the labor market, not just internationally but also nationally. Every country makes a different classification and prioritization by considering its society’s socioeconomic situation.

Different demographic groups have differing employment rates, influenced by various variables, including age, sex, area, ethnic origin, handicap, and education degree. Certain groups have unique obstacles while trying to find, hold onto, and advance their careers. These groups are referred to as disadvantaged groups in the labor market.

In literature, the definition of disadvantaged people and the groups that can be covered under this definition change from source to source. Finding a universal consent definition and an accepted international classification for the disadvantaged group is hard in this context. On the other hand, both in Türkiye and EU member states, women, disabled persons, migrants, youth, elderly people, minorities, and long-term unemployed people are mainly covered under the definition of disadvantaged group, and specific policy actions are designed for them. Regardless of the source of their disadvantages, these people also have various difficulties in the labor market and being a part of socio-economic life due to physical and social barriers, which also make them disadvantaged. In socio-economically developed countries, employment-oriented studies can reach all segments of society, covering disadvantaged groups without being limited to poor people. It is seen that social welfare states produce different employment policies for women, young, elderly, disabled people, migrants, long-term unemployed people, minorities, and many disadvantaged groups in line with the needs of these groups to integrate them into society. Türkiye has prioritized the issue by putting these groups on the first lines of the national agenda and then

developing new and specific policies accordingly. At that point, education is one of the main topics for disadvantaged groups, and it plays a crucial role in opening new opportunities for future participation in the labor market.

1.1. What is the definition of “Disadvantaged” and “Disadvantaged Group”?

The definition of “disadvantaged” is common sense in literature. Still, the definition of disadvantaged groups and the issue of who will be included in this definition vary from country to country in line with the socio-economic dynamics of countries. For this reason, it is hard to make a unique definition or classification that is well-accepted at the international level for disadvantaged groups.

European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) defines disadvantaged groups as “groups of persons that experience a higher risk of poverty, social exclusion, discrimination and violence than the general population, including, but not limited to, ethnic minorities, migrants, people with disabilities, isolated elderly people and children.” (EIGE, 2016). According to the definition of ILO, “disadvantage refers not just to economic factors, such as income poverty, or lack of experience in and poor understanding of the formal job market, but also social factors such as gender, racial, ethnic or migrant background, and geographical isolation with poor access to quality education and job opportunities.” (ILO, 2011). The common characteristics of disadvantaged groups are their marginalized position in society and high risk of poverty due to lack of access to political, economic, and social opportunities. The disadvantaged groups encounter significant difficulties participating in economic, social, and cultural life everywhere.

The employment rate for different countries provides information about the socio-economic conditions of individuals of specific age groups with access to livelihood through paid jobs as employees, self-employed people, or family workers. The employment rate also constitutes a significant indicator concerning data on the living standards of individuals in a given country. It also shows how much a government can mobilize human resources for economic purposes (EUROSTAT, 2021).

In Türkiye, disadvantaged groups are defined as “groups requiring a special policy” in the National Employment Strategy published by the Ministry of Labour and Social Services (MoLSS) in 2014. In the National Employment Strategy, women, youth, disabled people, and long-term unemployed individuals are identified as the main categories of people who will be given priority in service provision through the design and implementation of targeted policy actions (MoLSS, 2014).

In the EU, the disadvantaged groups are broadly defined to include groups of people who are exposed to high risk of poverty, discrimination, and social exclusion, including, but not limited to, migrants and asylum seekers, isolated elderly people, ethnic minorities, people with dis-

abilities and women, youth and long term unemployed persons (EIGE, 2016). The attempts to address the challenges to the employment of disadvantaged people date back to 1997 when the EU member states aimed to establish a set of shared targets and objectives for developing and implementing an employment policy to create more and better jobs around Europe (European Commission, 2021). Alongside employment policy, debates on eliminating social exclusion have been at the core of social policy design and implementation in the EU (Daly, 2006). There is no consensus among policymakers and scholars on the conceptualization of social exclusion due to difficulties in adopting a comprehensive view with a unique definition, which accounts for the social, economic, political, and cultural components affecting its origins and consequences (Silver, 1994). Countries with strong welfare systems aim to implement policies that address socio-economic reasons that result in challenges limiting participation in the labor force and increasing the negative impact of unemployment on disadvantaged groups.

The reasons behind high levels of unemployment among disadvantaged groups are multifaceted. Most disadvantaged groups remain in the informal sector because employers refrain from formally employing them since they are concerned about securing uninterrupted productivity. On the other hand, disadvantaged groups are unaware of their current rights and do not know how to reach and use them. Therefore, disadvantaged people face social exclusion not only due to labor market challenges but also due to pre-employment access barriers. All these barriers can be classified under four main headings: difficulties in accessing fundamental rights which constitute the basis for securing decent living conditions before accessing employment; barriers in accessing labor market services; subjective deprivation affecting labor market behavior and social prejudices experienced within the labor market dynamics alongside family oriented discrimination, especially for women.

1.2. Social Exclusion & Social Inclusion

Social exclusion is a concept that has been at the center of social policy since its conceptualization in the early 1970s by a French policymaker, Rene Lenoir, to refer to the various groups that appeared to be margins of French society. With the increased studies of academicians over time, the concept of social exclusion has become the most essential element of EU social policy due to social problems that all member states encounter (Daly, 2006). Lenoir used this concept to pay attention to the expanding economy, which was getting harder to include certain groups such as disabled persons, single parents, drug addicts, marginal persons, and other social misfit persons. According to his estimations, one in ten French individuals would be overlooked by the economic and social policies of the country as a result of economic development. Even though the social exclusion notion was tried to be defined by many scholars from their theoretical perspective, it was quite challenging to make a unique and comprehensive definition with a holistic view due to its connections

with social, economic, political, and cultural dimensions (Silver, 1994).

Burchardt addresses social exclusion through five dimensions, which are directly related to each other. According to him, individuals should participate in consumption, savings, production, political, and social activities, not be a subject of social exclusion. Among them, consumption activity is the critical component of social exclusion because this dimension refers to being able to consume, at least up to a minimum level, the goods and services that are accepted by the society in which they live. In other words, it links with poverty or deprivation notions that are accepted core reasons for social exclusion. The second important aspect among the dimensions is productive activity, such as engaging in economically and socially valued activities such as paid work, education and training, or retirement. It also should be noted that this activity covers different stages of the life cycle. Therefore, even though students or trainees will not be productive immediately, they will prepare for the labor market. In terms of retirement, they will reap the benefit of their previous labor market activities. As a result of participation in productive activity, individuals contribute to the country's economy and society; otherwise, they may be seen as a drain on resources (Burchardt et al., 1999).

One of the well-rounded definitions of social exclusion was made by the European Commission. According to the Commission, "social inclusion is a process whereby certain individuals are pushed to the edge of society and prevented from participating fully by their poverty, lack of basic competencies and lifelong learning opportunities, or as a result of discrimination. This distances them from jobs, income, education, training opportunities, social and community networks, and activities. They have little access to power and decision-making bodies and thus often feel powerless and unable to control the decisions that affect their day-to-day lives." (European Commission, 2004). The definition highlights insufficient income and challenges in accessing material resources, which trigger social exclusion. In other words, individuals can be excluded from society due to a lack of essential needs necessary to maintain standard living conditions such as housing, health insurance, employment, social relations, etc. (Dean, 2016).

The main reason academicians have taken the social exclusion issue into consideration as of the 1980s with increasing importance can be associated with socio-economic changes in the world. The milestone of this concept was urban poverty, which was at the center of debate (De Haan, 2000). Although poverty is assumed to have existed throughout history for various reasons such as illness, disability, or natural disasters, the concept of poverty has evolved to a new direction that has never been seen before. This new type of poverty can easily trap people due to changing labor market conditions, an inevitable result of globalization and post-industrialization processes. With the evolution of industrialization, only those with specific competencies in terms of education and skills

could be included in the labor market. Re-shaped labor market conditions caused high levels of structural unemployment, low-paid and insecure jobs, a gap between women and men in the labor market, and also a paying gap in household incomes. All these changes were seen during the recession process or in declining economies in specific regions and growing economies (Atkinson, 2000). The relationship between growth and employment changed due to new methods promoting less labor-intensive production. While the economic growth figures increased, the employment rate decreased, with a reverse correlation indicating jobless growth. Besides, there have been changes in the political arena with the weakening role of the welfare state and social linkages, which have been crucially important in constituting solidarity within society. Therefore, individuals who could not meet the new requirements of growing economies and had to be excluded from the labor market encountered social exclusion, covering more than income poverty or material deprivation (Atkinson, 2000).

Some academicians advocate that there is no difference between social exclusion and poverty (Atkinson, 1998; Abrahamson, 2005). According to them, social exclusion is somehow a synonym word to define poverty; therefore, it is not accepted as a new notion. However, social exclusion covers the concept of poverty and refers to the socio-economic breakdown of the whole society with a broader approach (Berghman, 1995). In other words, while poverty is settled on an individual model directly related to living conditions, social exclusion is mainly based on social integration and solidarity. Four main systems hold social linkages together. These are the labor market promoting economic integration, the welfare state system defining what can be evaluated under social inclusion, the family and community system facilitating interpersonal integration, and the democratic and legal system enabling civic integration. Failure of one or more of them triggers the breaking of social bonds (Berghman, 1995). Within this framework, it can be said that the concept of social exclusion is not an outcome but a dynamic process focusing on not only deprivation but also social relations, processes, and institutions to determine underlying reasons for deprivation and exclusion with a holistic approach (De Haan, 2000).

In other respects, social exclusion can also be described as the deprivation of fundamental social rights such as housing, education, and employment, which are necessary to have a decent standard of living (Room, 2001). As seen from the different approaches, every individual can be a part of social exclusion during his life due to multiple factors triggering each other. For instance, even a person with a good educational background and professional working career can encounter long-term unemployment during an economic crisis and be socially excluded from the group. Alternatively, a woman, after giving birth, is automatically trapped in social exclusion not only economically but also socially. If she is not equipped with rich competencies, it becomes harder to implicitly be a part of the labor market and social life.

Over time, the concept of social exclusion has become a guide for developing social policy actions to define various groups whose bonds are loosened with the rest of society and their integration into society again. The European Union has always been in a leadership position with its decisive actions to spread the concept of social exclusion and cover it within the context of EU social policy (Berghman, 1995).

European Union has started to combat poverty and social exclusion through different tools since Delor's Presidency between 1985 and 1995. Adopting the "Resolution Concerning a Social Action Programme" can be assumed as a starting point to find solutions for the employment problems confronting certain vulnerable categories (Haar, 2009). The member states welcomed this concept and policymakers mainly because poverty was insufficient to explain the new dynamics of changing social and economic conditions. In the 1990s, several initiatives were implemented in the EU to combat social exclusion. In treaties such as Maastricht, Amsterdam, and Nice, as well as within the framework of structural funds, combating social exclusion was addressed as a commitment (De Haan, 2015). In addition, Member States also agreed to coordinate their policies through an open method of coordination by combining joint objectives, issuing national action plans, and defining common indicators to promote effective policies for an ambitious social policy (Council of the EU, 2004).

However, the most significant actions regarding social exclusion were taken with the Lisbon Treaty, which came into force in 2009, by adding this issue as one of the objectives of the European Union. It is stated in Article 2 of the Treaty that "the Union shall combat social exclusion and discrimination and shall promote social justice and protection, equality between women and men, solidarity between generations and protection of the rights of the child. It also shall promote economic, social, and territorial cohesion, and solidarity among Member States." (Lisbon Treaty, 2009)

Social inclusion is a fundamental condition for the integration of society and the sustainability of economic success. For this reason, social inclusion is at the top of the issues that play a key role not only in the EU accession process of Türkiye but also in the economic and social progress of Türkiye.

1.3. Active Labor Market Policies

The Active Labor Market Policies (ALMPs) constitute one significant policy option designed to address a major cause of marginalization: unemployment. The OECD describes the ALMP as a tool that enables people access to the labor force and connects them with good jobs by enhancing motivation and incentives to seek employment, improving job readiness, and helping in finding suitable employment and expanding employment opportunities (OECD-Active Labour Market Policies, 2021).

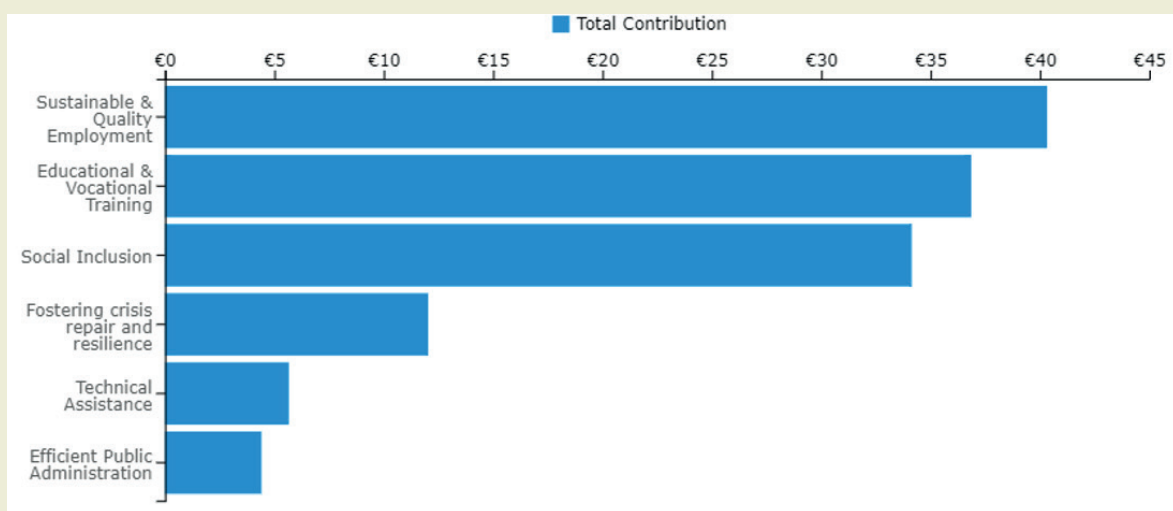
Public employment services play a critical role in the implementation phase of ALMPs. Public employment agencies act as the main contact point in facilitating access to labor markets for diverse groups of disadvantaged people. A well-functioning public employment service requires a sufficient number of staff who are capable of improving the quality of the service within the scope of eliminating discrimination, promoting access to decent jobs and enabling best job matching; collaboration with other public institutions governing health, housing, and other social services; and a well-designed monitoring and evaluation system (European Commission, 2017). Among these requirements for effective implementation of ALMPs, a well-functioning monitoring and evaluation system stands out as the most significant. However, the existing systems for monitoring the effectiveness of the applied ALMPs and other projects for removing barriers to labor market access need substantial improvement in the EU and Türkiye. Showing progress with a strong political commitment to evidence-based policymaking and emphasizing accountability in the monitoring and evaluation culture is essential for increasing the added value of policies/ projects.

In Türkiye, many institutions and organizations such as MoLSS, İŞKUR and MoFSP (Ministry of Family and Social Policies), SSI (Social Security Institution), Governorships and District Governorates, Ministry of Treasury and Finance, KOSGEB (Small and Medium Enterprises Development Organization), Development Agencies, NGOs, Ministry of Education and Universities cooperate to increase the employment of groups requiring targeted policies to support them. However, when the policy field is examined closely, İŞKUR stands out as the most visible institution facilitating disadvantaged people's labor market access. İŞKUR programs are classified under four main headings: vocational training courses, on-the-job training programs, public works programs for the benefit of society, and entrepreneurship training programs.

It should be noted that even though it takes time to see the effects of ALMPs after their implementation period, studies based on microdata show that in the long run, the effect of ALMPs is more substantial than in the short run (Boone & van Ours, 2004).

In the EU, the Treaty on the European Union (TEU) and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) constitute the legal basis of social and employment policies. Even though the common objectives of the EU and its Member States in the social policy and employment policy fields are described in Article 151 of the TFEU, the EU has only limited competence when it comes to social issues. The EU has been working on social issues throughout the European integration process with a series of legal instruments such as the EU laws (treaties, directives, and regulations), non-binding soft law measures (such as opinions, recommendations, communications, non-legislative resolutions, notices, guidance documents or statements of administrative priorities), funds and tools to coordinate better and monitor national policies. The EU also encourages countries to share best practices on social inclusion, poverty alleviation, and pensions with the open method of coordination as a soft law instrument. Within this framework, countries whose labor market practices/projects were supported by the European Social Fund (ESF) and selected by the Directorate General of Employment, Social Affairs, and Social Inclusion as best practices among EU countries are announced on the European Commission website (European Commission, 2021).

In terms of financial resources, ESF aims to improve employment opportunities, strengthen social inclusion, fight poverty, promote education, skills training, and life-long learning, and develop active, comprehensive, and sustainable inclusion policies under the tasks entrusted to the ESF by the TFEU (Official Journal of the EU, 2013). Many tailor-made programs were funded within the scope of



Graphic 1. ESIF 2014-2020: Total Budget by Theme for European Social Fund

Source: European Structural and Investment Funds, (EUR billion)

the ESF to promote employment and social inclusion and combat poverty. The total amount used within the scope of this fund for the years 2014-2020 was 133.4 billion Euros. The budget allocation of the ESF according to themes is shown below (TABLE 1).

As shown in TABLE 1, approximately 34% of the total amount was spent on social inclusion, and 40% of the total amount was used for sustainable and quality employment.

In addition, according to the implementation progress of the ESF, the planned decided and spent amounts increase yearly. However, despite the increase in the budget, some funds are not used, and the highest disbursement rate is in 2021, with 61%. Such an observation suggests that the funds' absorption capacity needs to be increased to reach more people.

1.4. Barriers to Access to Labor Market

In the literature of labor relations, various groups such as youth, women 15-29 years olds young who are neither in employment nor in education or training (NEETs) or training disabled people, elderly people, asylum seekers and migrants, disabled persons, ethnic minorities, ex-convicts are accepted as disadvantaged. The employment of disadvantaged groups seems a common problem in many countries. These groups encounter different barriers to accessing, remaining in, and maintaining within the labor market (Barrett, 2010). Over time, there has been growing interest and efforts in the EU and non-governmental organizations to develop facilities to increase the participation of disadvantaged groups in the workforce (Pagan, 2007). Both in the international arena and in national institutions, different ways and options are sought to increase awareness of the problems encountered by disadvantaged people and combat discrimination in the labor market (Dedeoğlu, 2012).

Countries that adopt the social state approach prefer putting into practice the best possible effective policies, which

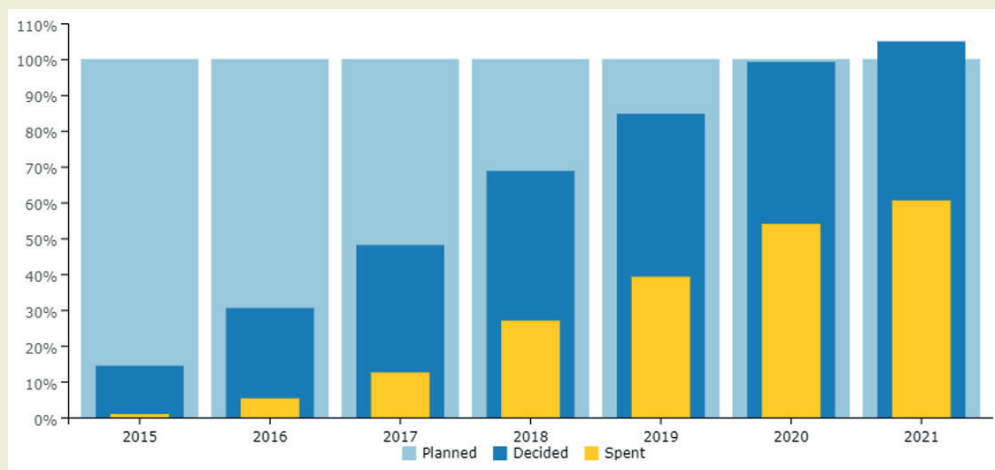
are also convenient to the socio-economic dynamics of the country to understand the dynamics of unemployment and address the severe effects of this problem. Within this scope, it is essential to establish, implement, monitor, and determine the effectiveness of employment policies for especially disadvantaged groups. Most individuals in these groups either work informally without any social security or are not preferred in the labor market by the employees, considering that they cannot obtain sufficient output. On the other hand, they are unaware of their current rights and how to reach and use them. Therefore, disadvantaged people are exposed to social exclusion not only because of difficulties in the labor market but also because of barriers to access to the labor market. All these barriers can be classified under the main four headings: difficulties in accessing fundamental rights, which is the main requirement before employment to live in decent conditions, barriers to access the labor market services, deprivation of rights access to the labor market, and lastly social prejudices resulted from not only labor market but also family oriented.

1.4.1. Access to fundamental rights

Fundamental rights cover the right to live, the right to health, and the right to education. Not having proper access to fundamental rights brings serious obstacles to participating in socio-economic life. As a fundamental right, education has an important effect on increasing people's employability. Access to the right to education, especially by those in poor conditions, is an important factor in breaking the cycle of poverty.

1.4.2. Access to labor market services

Although regulations are introduced in every country for groups that can be considered disadvantaged in the labor market, the level of disadvantage increases due to the difficulties experienced by many people in accessing existing services. As a chain effect, more support is needed to return people to the labor market when the unemployment period gets longer. Because all barriers keeping individuals away from employment tend to accumulate and,



Graphic 2. ESIF 2014-2020: Implementation Progress (total cost) for ESF

Source: European Structural and Investment Funds

as a result, require more intensive support services. Therefore, in practice, all ALMPs should be tailor-made to each unemployed individual or a small group of unemployed people, together with effective profile techniques analyzing the needs of people in terms of employment and mental and social requirements (European Commission, 2017).

The main problems experienced in access to employment market services can be grouped under three headings: inadequate or absent policies for disadvantaged groups, lack of awareness of existing rights, and physical structural deficiencies.

1.4.3. Social prejudices

Discrimination, often generally related to social structures and cultural norms, is at the core of deprivation. Therefore, anti-discrimination efforts and anti-poverty policies are essential to maintaining successful social integration. Policies that clearly state the prohibition of discrimination based on race, ethnicity, sex, language, religion, political opinion, national or social origin, or other status must be developed.

The existence of certain prejudices in society is one of the most important obstacles to implementing the state's policies and practices for employing disadvantaged groups.

Although the participation rate of women in employment has shown an increase worldwide in the last ten years, the types of employment are limited in certain areas. When the complexity of different factors such as household duties, cultural and social norms, educational background, or personal choices due to the caring obligations of a child or family member occurs, this issue affects the full-time employment of women. As a result, they are more likely to work part-time or temporarily. In addition to this, it is also seen that they are forced to work in unregistered sectors such as house cleaning, babysitting, or unpaid family

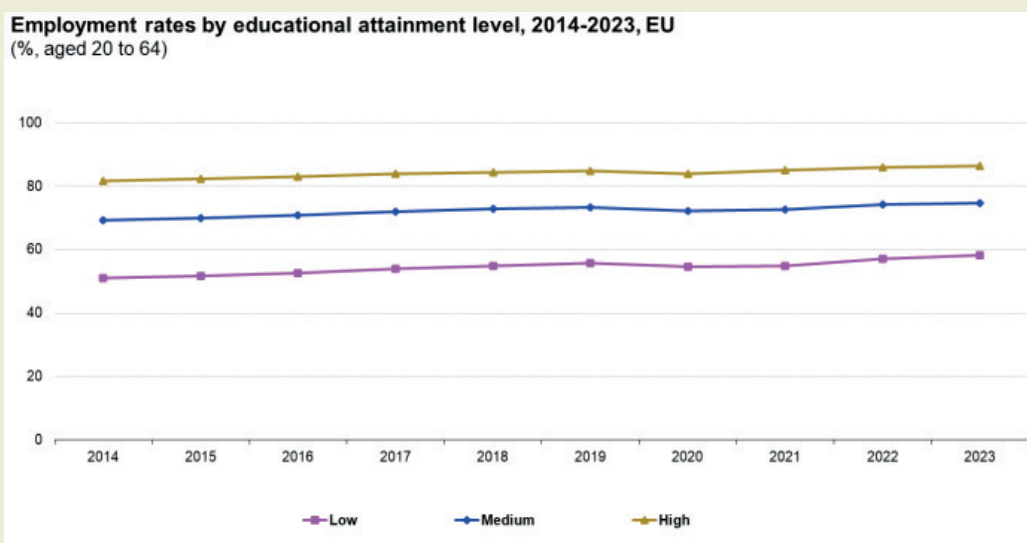
enterprises (Floro & Meurs, 2009). Even though it is seen that gender roles are changing in a direction whereby women and men seem more equal in economic and social life, there are still gender gaps in the labor market due to expectations from women or cast roles in family life. (Leslie, Manchester, Flathery, & Dahm, 2016) Besides, in particular, the attitude and perspective of employers towards disadvantaged people is an important obstacle to accessing services. Research carried out under an EU project named "Improving Social Integration and Employability of Disadvantaged Persons" implemented by the Ministry of Labour and Social Security revealed that employers tend not to employ disadvantaged persons despite incentive subsidies due to any possible inefficiency at work.

1.5. Higher Education - Employment Link for Disadvantaged Groups

Education is one of the most important areas that affect individuals' employability. It can provide access to opportunities, assets, and knowledge that enable someone to flourish rather than just endure. Higher education institutions are among the most essential structures that ensure countries' economic and social development and increase their human capital. While higher education has a positive impact on labor productivity, it also contributes positively to the national economy. In the international arena, approaches are adopted to remove barriers to the participation of disadvantaged groups in higher education and employment (Keskiner; 2022).

One of the most important factors that increase the participation of women and youth from disadvantaged groups in higher education is employment concerns. Young people's career expectations also affect students; decisions to continue higher education (Keskiner; 2022).

In OECD countries, it has been found that higher education graduation significantly reduces the unemployment



Graphic 3. Employment Rates by Educational Attainment Level, 2014-2023, EU (% aged 20 to 60)

Source: Eurostat

risk of people in the 25-34 age group, but women benefit from this advantage more than men. When the unemployment rate for women is analyzed, it decreases from 9 percent for high school graduates to 6 percent for university graduates.

Another incentive for women to pursue higher education is that it is more difficult for high school graduates to find a job than for men. On average, the unemployment rate of young women with a university degree in OECD countries is 1.4 times higher than that of men. In fact, in Estonia, Poland, Slovenia, and Türkiye, women with a high school diploma are twice as likely to be unemployed as their male counterparts. These studies show that higher education graduation reduces female unemployment by one-third compared to high school graduates (OECD, 2021).

Seskir (2017, p. 331) found that higher education graduation increases the probability of employment by 24% for men and 130% for women.

The trend in employment rates for individuals between the ages of 20 and 64 according to educational attainment level is depicted in the graph. Changes over the past ten years are apparent. The employment rate for those with low levels of education rose by 7.3 percentage points between 2014 and 2023, the most significant change observed during this time. The rate of employed individuals with a medium level of education rose by 5.3 percentage points during the same time frame. On the other hand, the employment rate of highly educated individuals rose by 4.7 percentage points.

A fast development of higher education institutions is seen in many countries; nevertheless, the rates of change and the timing of these expansions vary from nation to nation. This has had a significant and lasting effect on the labor markets and how businesses use workers with advanced degrees. Most of these expansions have been based on the premise that higher education benefits people and society overall, not just in terms of economic outcomes like wages or employment but also for various social outcomes like better health, lower crime rates, and increased well-being.

Higher education graduates are generally less likely to remain unemployed than non-graduates. However, the unemployment rate among university graduates is high in Türkiye. According to the 2022 Higher Education Employment Indicators, while the formal employment rate of bachelor's degree graduates was 71.1% in 2021, this rate increased to 71.7% in 2022. While the registered employment rate for associate degree graduates was 63% in 2021, this rate was calculated as 64.9% in 2022. While the average time to find a first job for bachelor's degree graduates was 13.6 months in 2021, this period was 13.9 months in 2022. While the average time to find a first job for associate degree graduates was 14.8 months in 2021, it was announced as 15.3 months in 2022. (TUIK, 2022, Yükseköğretim İstihdam Göstergeleri).

2. Conclusion

This paper has attempted to analyze the impact of higher education on employment policies for disadvantaged people and policy responses in Türkiye and the European Union. The EU promotes social inclusion in member states and candidate countries to develop solutions based on compromise among relevant parties. The EU encourages member states and Türkiye as a candidate country to establish a consolidated social inclusion mechanism.

Regarding social inclusion, education is one of the main tools that facilitate employability, financial independence, and a sense of belonging to society, especially for disadvantaged people. Helping individuals who are disadvantaged in accessing employment to benefit from the same opportunities as all individuals in finding skills and employment, removing barriers, and facilitating their access are the essential parts of the social state approach. However, to provide an effective service, the main problems in accessing the labor market at the national level should be addressed first, and policies should be developed in this direction by taking measures to overcome also the obstacles created by these problems. At the point of employment of disadvantaged people, the first thing is to categorize them based on gender, age, ethnicity, etc., and then develop policy responses according to this classification. However, instead of making generalizations in such a way, solutions should be developed by addressing the disadvantages experienced in accessing employment and/or deprivation of needs as a barrier to employment. Because not being able to use the rights that enable participation in socio-economic life, not having sufficient income that will also allow participation in social life (employee poverty, unregistered work, etc.), not being able to access fundamental rights (education, health, shelter, etc.), prejudices, existing lack of awareness about services are the main barriers that put people at a disadvantage position in accessing employment.

One of the most important structural barriers to the participation of disadvantaged groups in employment is the problems in education. As mentioned in the previous sections of the study, the number of disabled students in both secondary and higher education is relatively low. This situation creates a significant disadvantage for disabled individuals to enter employment." cümlesi, "This situation creates a significant disadvantage for disabled individuals in entering employment. Education-based barriers include deficiencies in acquiring the skills and competencies required for employment. The main reason for these deficiencies is related to the limited participation of disadvantaged groups in education. Ensuring equal opportunities in higher education and diversifying the student profile are critical for the socioeconomic status of disadvantaged groups. The relationship between higher education and employment is one of the main arguments for social and economic development. While higher education institutions provide individuals with the necessary skills and equipment for the labor market, they also

significantly contribute to raising socially sensitive generations. To increase the employment of disadvantaged people, policies should be implemented to increase educational opportunities, eliminate the discrimination they face in the processes of entering, working, and leaving employment, improve legal procedures, ensure equal pay for equal work, increase social awareness of their rights and opportunities in the labor force and reduce the prevalence of unregistered employment.

At present, even though social policies for the employment of disadvantaged groups are among the most debated issues in the framework of social inclusion, it is only focused on grouping people according to their status, and in line with this, grouping policies are developed to ease their accession to the labor market. However, it would be better to define disadvantaged groups not based on the people's status but on their needs. Therefore, within the scope of the study, instead of directly identifying a "disadvantaged group," the barriers that cause disadvantages while accessing the labor market were defined in three main categories: access to fundamental rights, access to labor market services, and social prejudices. The article emphasized that the point of view should be changed, and policies should be carried out to solve the common problems of these groups without focusing on specific groups.

In the implementation phase of ALMPs, especially for disadvantaged people, public employment services and their qualities play a crucial role in integrating disadvantaged people into socio-economic life. Because they are assigned as the primary contact point to address the unemployment problem of people from diverse, disadvantaged groups. The most essential among them is to have a well-functioning monitoring and evaluation system to increase the effectiveness of applied ALMPs, especially for disadvantaged people. Showing progress with a strong political commitment to evidence-based policymaking and accountability in the monitoring and evaluation culture is important to increase the added value of policies/ projects.

Economic prosperity and social inclusion should show progress together to realize the ideal of the European project. To realize this progress, the European Social Fund (ESF), Employment and Social Innovation Programme (EaSI), and EGF (European Globalization Adjustment Fund) are the main financial instruments used for promoting employment and social inclusion, helping people get a job or a better job, integrating disadvantaged people into society and ensuring fairer life opportunities to all people, guaranteeing education opportunities and adequate social protection, combating social exclusion and poverty and improving working conditions. When the whole picture was evaluated holistically, it was seen that the EU has a comprehensive and holistic view of social policy and employment and tries to take into consideration all challenges that the Union can face in the future while developing new policies with a strong link set up between all relevant actors. Besides that, it is seen that the EU tries to cover all people and their problems with

the new initiatives within the scope of social policy and employment.

Employability and education are closely associated. Education can raise a person's potential in the job market by improving human capital and demonstrating competencies. It has been explained in terms of individual qualities that boost one's chances of finding work. Colleges and universities are assessing the match between education and the workplace as a significant emphasis on employability in higher education policies and practices worldwide. Higher education-acquired information, skills, and attitudes are thought necessary for graduates to be employable in the twenty-first century. Nonetheless, opinions on employability's place in higher education vary; some consider it the main objective, while others consider it to be only one component. The correlation between education and employability is intricate and diverse, as education is a vital component in equipping individuals for the workforce.

In Türkiye, the quality of vocational training of women and youth is improved through active labor force programs, and their vocational training skills are enhanced through on-the-job training. In addition, entrepreneurship courses and KOSGEB incentives enable them to start their businesses. Legal regulations have paved the way for disabled people to work in the public and private sectors; however, when the relationship between the number of applications and job placement rate is analyzed, it is seen that the implementation has not had the expected effect. The job placement rate is at very low levels. As the long-term unemployed constitute 50% of the unemployed in the EU, it is seen that the necessary measures are taken sensitively by the Council of Europe, both with the guidance reports prepared by the member states and the council resolutions issued for implementation at the Union level, while in Türkiye, despite the statistics, long-term unemployment is not seen as a fundamental problem.

In summary, it is considered that the following topics should be focused on in the coming period to increase the employment of disadvantaged groups while supporting them during high school education;

- Develop policies that focus on income generation,
- Improve education and training and work towards enabling young people to complete their education and acquire skills to make them more competitive in the labor market,
- New buildings and urban infrastructure should be constructed with the disadvantaged (especially the disabled and elderly) in mind, and the scope should be expanded over time,
- Ensuring greater participation of disadvantaged groups in higher education,

- Diversification and standardization of employment opportunities,
- Strengthening monitoring mechanisms and statistical infrastructure,
- Raising awareness on access to employment opportunities,
- Introducing ways to benefit from existing services,
- Increasing the awareness of existing rights,
- Auditing a practice or policy and determining its effectiveness,
- Increasing Coordination between service providers,
- Enhancing the cooperation network and service delivery capacities of local actors
- Well-planning of opening/closure of university departments
- Conducting regular statistical analysis to determine the capacity and quota of higher education institutions according to job finding period and employment rates of graduates to decrease qualification mismatch in NEETs with higher education degrees.
- Evaluating employer expectations and public and private sector representatives to eliminate labor market skills mismatch, especially for NEETS with higher education.

We must make educational investments and guarantee that everyone has the chance to achieve if we want to lessen inequality and encourage social integration. This entails funding early childhood education, making

high-quality elementary and secondary education accessible, and increasing access to higher education. It also entails funding initiatives like mentorship programs and scholarships assisting underprivileged children.

In summary, disadvantaged groups' access to higher education and their participation in the labor market as well-equipped individuals are of great importance for the socioeconomic development of countries. Ensuring equal opportunities in higher education and diversifying the student profile are critical for the socioeconomic status of disadvantaged groups. The relationship between higher education and employment is one of the main arguments for social and economic development. While higher education institutions provide individuals with the necessary skills and equipment for the labor market, they also greatly contribute to raising socially sensitive generations.

Research Ethics

Ethics committee approval is not required.

Author Contributions

The author(s) accept responsibility for the entire content of this manuscript and have approved its submission.

Competing Interests

The author(s) declare that there are no conflicts of interest.

Research Funding

Not reported.

Data Availability

Not applicable.

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