

An Overlook Over The Declining Fertility Rate In Turkey

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Abstract

Turkey has emerged economically as one of the most powerful country in Eastern Europe and Western Asia, with increasing influence in regional politics. Calling itself as a model of Muslim style democracy, the Turks now face a novel problem that Western Europe and Japan have long contended with: A falling fertility rate. This article consists of three sections. First, substantial information and statistics about Turkish demographic is given. Second, reasons of decreasing fertility rate are mentioned. Lastly, its possible consequences are examined. As a result of the research, it is understood that if Turkey does not take any serious measures to increase the fertility rate of Turkish people, it seems that Turkish people may become a minority in its own country within another generation.

Key Words: *Fertility rate, demography, minority group, Turks, Kurds.*

Türkiye'deki Doğurganlık Oranının Düşüşünün İncelenmesi

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Öz

Türkiye, bölge politikasında artan etkiyle birlikte ekonomik anlamda Doğu Avrupa ve Batı Asya'nın en güçlü devletlerinden biri olarak ortaya çıkmaktadır. Yönetim biçimini Müslüman Tarzı Demokrasi Modeli olarak adlandıran Türkiye, řu an alışılmıřın dıřında Batı Avrupa ve Japonya'nın uzun yıllardır uğrařtığı bir sorun ile karşı karşıya: Doğurganlık oranının düşmesi. Bu çalışma üç bölümden oluşmaktadır. Birinci bölümde Türk demografisi hakkında önemli bilgi ve istatistiklere yer verilmiştir, ikinci bölümde doğurganlık oranının düşüş sebeplerinden bahsedilmiştir ve son bölümde ise bu durumun muhtemel sonuçları incelenmiştir. Bu araştırmanın sonucunda anlaşılmıştır ki; Türklerin doğurganlık oranını arttırmak amacıyla herhangi bir önlem alınmaz ise bir sonraki nesilde Türkler kendi ülkelerinde azınlık olabilirler.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Doğurganlık oranı, demografi, azınlık grup, Türkler, Kürtler.

Introduction

Turkey's fertility rate has been slowly decreasing since the 1990s. The fertility rate has decreased to 2.05 in 2011. In 2001, it was 2.37 and 3.08 in 1990. Turkey is one of the slowly ageing countries in the world. In 2014, Turkey ranked 113rd with 2.08 among 223 countries. If the existing trend in decreasing fertility rate continues, Turkey is likely to face Europe's fate in 15 years. Decreasing fertility rate not only causing ageing population but also making a threat that Turks might be minority in their own country within next generation.

Several reasons have contributed to decrease the fertility rate. Those are; access to higher education, be a large number of people live in the moderate poverty line, the emergence of globalization, and the difference between East side of Turkey and West side of Turkey.

The government is trying to increase the number of fertility rate by offering small incentives. Plus, president Erdogan always makes call to families to give more births. Yet, apparently it does not help to increase numbers.

With this study, we aim to examine the demographic changes in Turkey.

1. Information about Turkish Demographic

Officially, the population of Turkey is 79,814,871 as of 1st January 2016. Turkey population is equivalent to 1.07% of the total world population. Turkey ranks number 19 in the list of countries by population. The total land area is 769,295 km² (297,026 sq. miles). 71.6 % of the population lives in urban and the median age in Turkey is 30.2 years. (<http://www.worldometers.info/world-population/turkey-population/> , 18.01.2017).

The majority group is Turks with the percentage of 75. The biggest minority group is Kurds around % 17. No accurate up-to-date figures are available for the Kurdish population, because the Turkish government has outlawed ethnic or racial censuses. An estimate by the CIA World Fact book places their proportion of the population at approximately 18%.

(Central Intelligence Agency, 2011). Another estimate, according to Ibrahim Sirkeci, an ethnic Turk, in his book *The Environment of Insecurity in Turkey and the Emigration of Turkish Kurds to Germany*, based on the 1990 Turkish Census and 1993 Turkish Demographic Health Survey, is 17.8%. (Sirkeci, 2006). Other estimates include 15.7% of the population according to the newspaper *Milliyet*, (<http://www.milliyet.com.tr/turkiyede-kurtlerin-sayisi--magazin-873452/> , 15.10.2016) and 23% by Kurdologist David McDowall. (McDowall, 2006: 504).

Turkey's fertility rate has steadily decreased from 1990 to 2011. In 1990, the fertility rate was %3.08. It decreased to %2.45 in 2000. Then it decreased to %2.05 in 2011. After Turkey opened its door to Syrian refugees, it increases to 2.14% in 2015. Granted, the fertility rate has been increased the last few years, nevertheless the problem is not solved because fertility of Turkish people did not increase. It continues to decrease. The fertility of Syrian and Kurds increased which means the nightmare continues for Turkey. You can see the historical fertility rate of Turkey below.

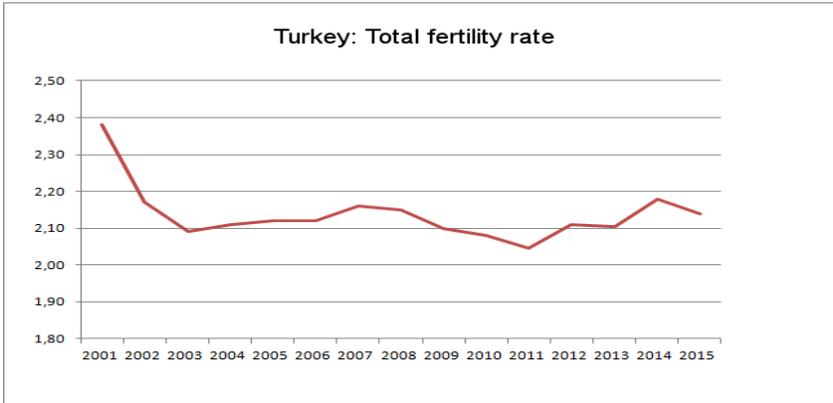


Figure 1: Total fertility rate of Turkey (Turkish Statistical Institute)

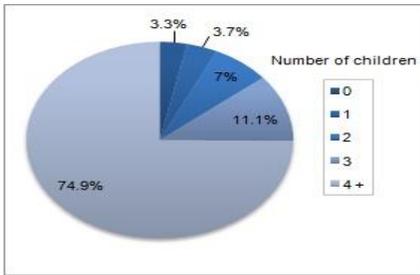
Why Turkey's Fertility Rate Decreases

Reasons for the decline in fertility rate as follows: After 1990s the education level is increased in Turkey. What I mean is the access to higher education for women is expanded. Women become more conscious and they

do not want to depend on men. They would like to be independent financially, economically and socially. This is the reason why they focus on their careers.

According to the results of the Population and Housing Census, while the proportion of ever married and illiterate women at the age of 15 and over who have four or more live births is 74.9%, this proportion is 4.8% for high school and equivalent graduates in 2011. The proportion of higher education graduated women who don't have any live birth is 22.9%; the proportion of them who have four or more live births is 1.9%. (Turkish Statistical Institute, 2014).

Proportion of Illiterate Women by Number of Live Born Children, 2011



Proportion of High School or Equivalent Graduated Women by Number of Live Born Children, 2011

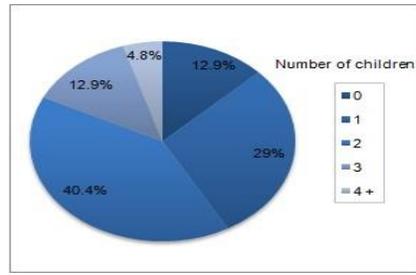


Figure 2: Proportions of numbers of live born by illiterate and literate women (Turk-Stat, Population and Housing Census, 2011)

In the circumstances, the number of the birth they give is steadily decreasing and looks like will decline in long term as well.

The second reason is the rising the household incomes. %20 of Turkey's population -that is approximately 16 million people- live on the moderate poverty line. (<http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/how-many-millions-of-people-living-in-poverty-in-turkey-.aspx?pageID=238&nid=68172> , 13.12.2016). People who live on the moderate poverty line refused to have children. They are conscious that they are not able to give a better future to their children.

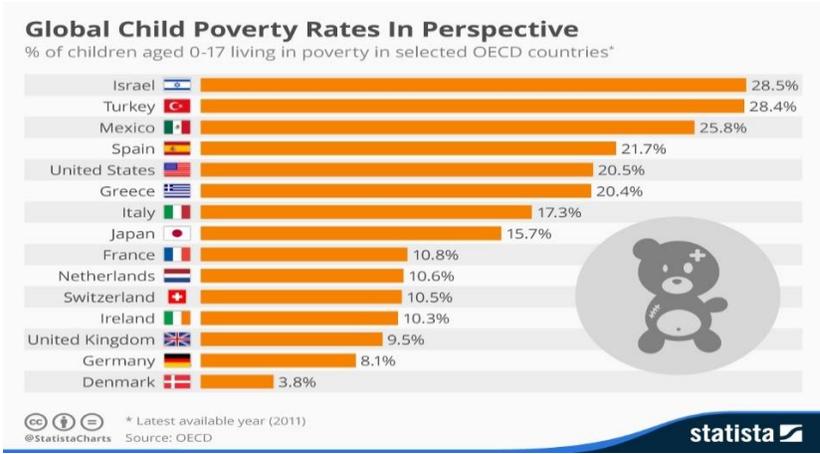


Figure 3: Global child poverty rates (Statista)

Also, the youth unemployment rate of Turkey is steadily increased. It reached to %17.4. (Trading Economics, 2016). The priorities of young people are now changed.



Figure 4: Turkey youth unemployment rate (Statista)

Third reason is the emergence of globalization. Before 1990s, only rich people had access to technological tools. Today, it has changed. Everyone regardless of their social status have access to anything. Within globalization, the awareness in Turkey has been raised.

The lastly, the gap between East and West of Turkey. West of Turkey is developed and the education level is very high. On the other hand, East of Turkey is not developed as West of Turkey and the education level is lower there. Access to higher education for women is available in the eastside of Turkey but because of the family structure of Kurds, Kurdish girls marry earlier and have many children as much as they can.

According to Turkish government statistics, the average Kurdish woman in Turkey gives birth to about four children, which is more than double the rate for other Turkish mothers. (Ghosh, 2012). The fertility rate in the west side of Turkey is around %1.5; On the other hand, the fertility rate in the east side of Turkey is approximately %3.5.

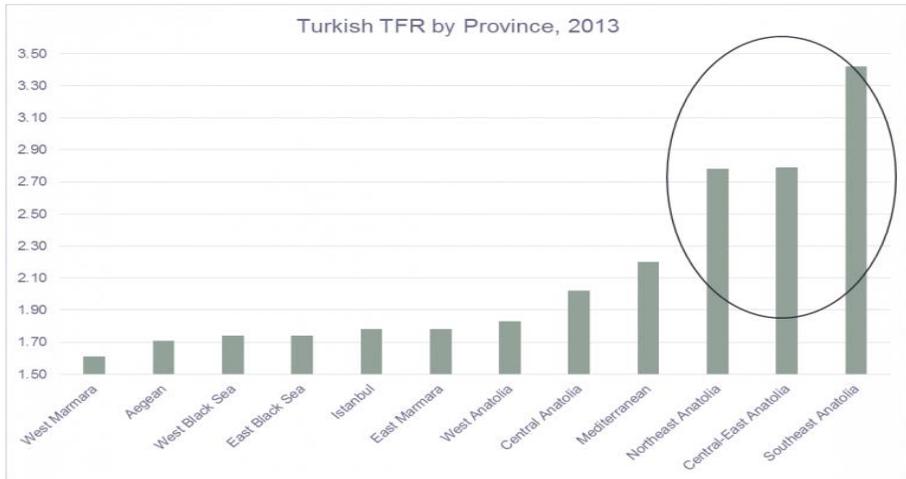


Figure 5: Turkish FTR by province (Asia Times)

Possible Consequences

Turkey is facing a demographic time bomb-Kurds, who tend to be concentrated in the country's impoverished southeast and are generally poorer and less educated, could conceivably outnumber Turks within about 30 years should this present patterns persist. The Kurdish community of Turkey, which represents at least 18 percent of the country's overall population and dominates the south-eastern region, has such a high birth rate.

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan believes that Kurds could become a majority in Turkey within another generation. Erdogan seems to be certain this will happen. ‘If we continue the existing trend, the year 2038 will mark disaster for Turkish people’, Erdogan warned in May 2010. He also had said “One or two children mean bankruptcy. Three children mean we are not improving but not receding either. So, I repeat, at least three children are necessary in each family, because our population risks aging,” at the International Family and Social Policies Summit in Ankara in 2013. (Roberts, 2015).

From my point of view, the Turkish government does not fear of declining its fertility rate, at least it is not their priority problem for now. Ankara fears because Turkish people can be minority group in their own country within next generation. This is the reason why President always suggests Turkish couples to have at least 3 kids. The government currently hands out 300 Turkish Liras for a married couple’s first child, 400 liras for the second and 600 liras for the third to encourage working women to have more children.

Nevertheless, these attempts are not enough to increase fertility rate numbers. The government’s efforts remain incapable.

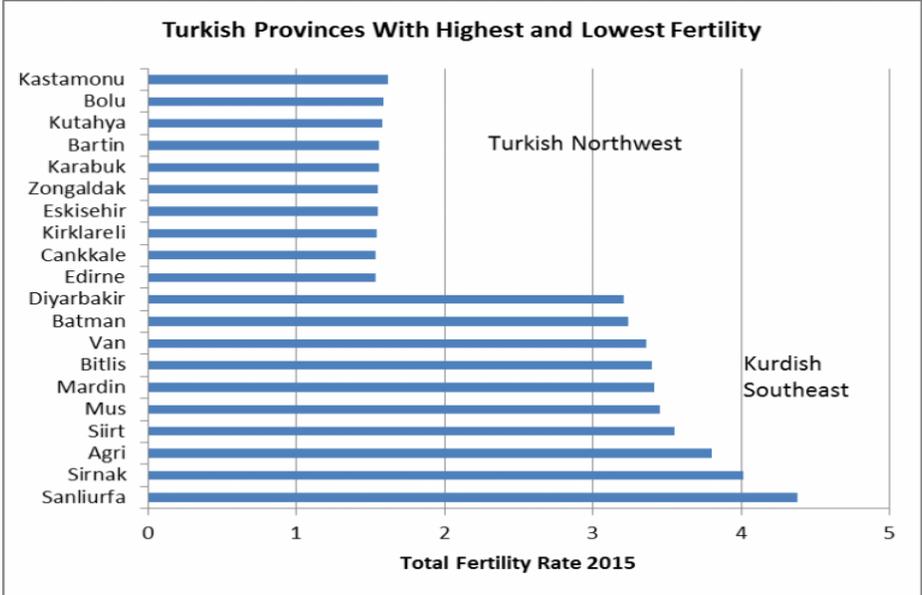


Figure 6: Turkish Provinces with highest and lowest fertility (Asia Times)

Another consequence is the aging population: a decline in fertility, improved longevity and regression in the population growth rate. Turkey is facing the risk of having an aged population in the decades to come. Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK) said that Turkey's elderly population constituted 7.7 percent of the nation's total in 2013. The ageing proportion of the population in Turkey is expected by the U.N. to rapidly increase to 10.2 percent in 2023, 20.8 percent in 2050 and 27.7 percent in 2075, according to population projections, placing it among the group of countries with a population considered by the U.N. to be "too old" by 2023. (<http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkeys-elderly-population-rising-says-report.aspx?pageID=238&nID=79872&NewsCatID=341> , 02.01.2017).

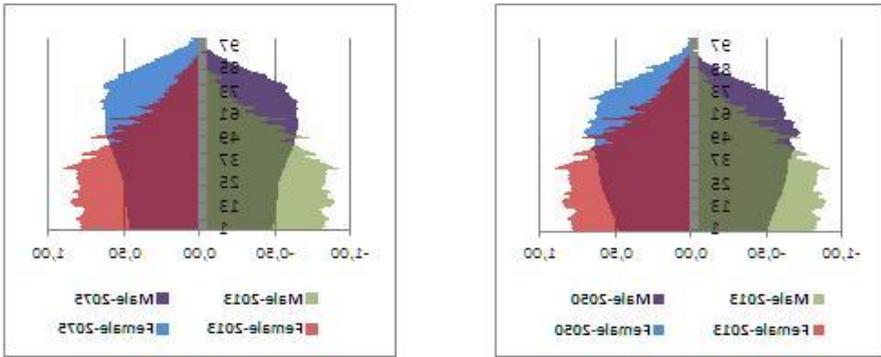


Figure 7: Comparison of age and gender distribution (Turkish Statistical Institute)

Furthermore, number of workers is declining and elderly population is increasing. Turkey will need more workers to support/pay older people on social security, retirement pension and healthcare. Plus, the ageing population will cause to increase in the dependency ratio as well. If the retirements age remains fixed (which is already 60) and the life expectancy increases, there will be relatively more people claiming pension benefits and less people working and paying income taxes. The fear is that it will require high tax rates on the current, shrinking workforce. In another saying, those in work may have to pay higher taxes. This could create disincentives to work and disincentives for firms to invest; therefore there could be a fall in productivity and growth. (Pettinger, 2016).

The consequences of a falling population are not being felt throughout the country yet because two millions Syrian refugees closed the working population's deficient. However, this only helps in short-term. For the long-term, Turkey will feel the consequence of the falling population soon. To solve this problem, Turkey either will get more migrants to close the deficit as Western European countries did or will encourage Turkish family to give more births and increase the fertility.

As can be seen below, there are three possible scenarios for Turkey according to Turkish Statistical Institute (Turkish Statistical Institute, 2013).

Scenario 1 (Basic scenario): Basic scenario shows what will be happen if the existing trend continues. In this scenario total fertility rate decreases in its natural flow and reaches to its lowest value 1.65 in 2050, and then increases after this year and reaches the value of 1.85 in 2075.

Scenario 2: In this scenario total fertility rate projected to increase to 2.11 in 2020 and to 2.50 in 2050 gradually, and then remains stable between the years 2050 and 2075.

Scenario 3: In this scenario total fertility rate projected to increase gradually to 3 in 2050, and then remains stable to 2075.

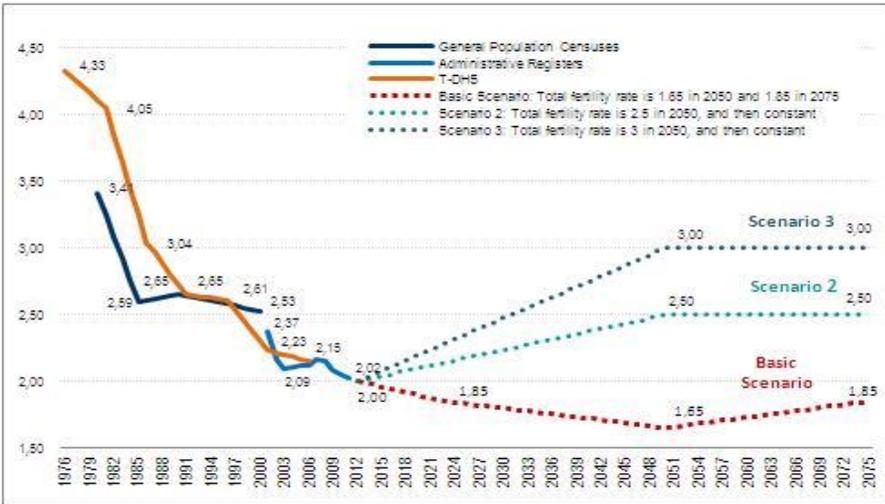


Figure 8: Possible Scenarios for the future of Turkey's fertility rate (Turkish Statistical Institute)

Recommendation:

People who live in Turkey mostly do not know that Turkey is facing such a big problem. The president Erdogan has said and warned several times about this issue and announced that people who give birth, will get small contribution. However, it seems that more encouragement and measures needed to be taken.

Conclusion

To sum it all up, Turkey is facing two problems right now. These are ageing and becoming a minority in their own country. Turkish people think that they can find an alternative solution for the ageing. They can get more migrants and solve the problem as European and Japan as well. However, it seems that there is no alternative solution for the other problem.

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