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Youth Poverty in the Framework of Amartya Sen's Capability Approach



Beril Baykal ¹  

¹ Kocaeli University, Faculty of Political Sciences, Department of Labor Economics and Industrial Relations, Kocaeli, Türkiye

Abstract

In its most basic sense, poverty is the lack of income to meet the basic needs of individuals. Today, the economic approach may not be considered sufficient to define and explain poverty. Amartya Sen's Capability Approach is an approach that explains poverty multidimensional beyond income inadequacy. Youth are among the groups most affected by poverty, which is a multidimensional concept beyond income inadequacy. Studies on youth poverty are new and insufficient in terms of quality and quantity. In this context, the aim of this study is to try to explain youth poverty within the framework of Amartya Sen's Capability Approach and to reveal the situation of young people in EU countries and Turkey. In the data on youth poverty in the EU and Turkey, indicators affecting the capabilities of young people such as participation, employment and unemployment, education and training, health and well-being, the digital world and social exclusion were used. Most of the data on these indicators are taken from EUROSTAT and TURKSTAT data. As a result, it is seen that young people in Turkey are more deprived than young people in the EU in almost all indicators and lag behind in terms of capabilities.

Keywords

Youth poverty · Capability approach · Social exclusion

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-  2025. Baykal, B.
-  Corresponding author: Beril Baykal berilbaykal81@gmail.com



Youth Poverty in the Framework of Amartya Sen's Capability Approach

The phenomenon of poverty has been one of the world's most important social problems both in the past and today. Different disciplines have evaluated the phenomenon of poverty from their own perspectives and put forward various definitions and criteria. Different disciplines such as economics, sociology, anthropology, social policy and political science define and analyse poverty with their own unique approaches. Traditional definitions of poverty, in which the economic dimension is predominant, define poverty as the inability of an individual's total income to meet the minimum level of food, clothing and other items necessary for his/her biological survival. Modern definitions are more inclusive, considering factors such as social exclusion, access to education and health services, quality of life and human rights. Therefore, new definitions now include deprivation, inadequate use of public services and social exclusion in addition to income inadequacy. Research and analysis of poverty and inequality are based on approaches that consider these dimensions into account. The most widely used of these approaches is Amartya Sen's "Capability Approach". Within the framework of this approach, which sees poverty not only as a lack of income but also as a lack of the capability to lead a decent life, young people are among the segments most affected by this deprivation.

Due to structural and economic problems, neo-liberal policies, discrimination and uncertainties surrounding the transition from childhood to adulthood, young people are vulnerable and disadvantaged despite poverty. In this context, youth poverty prevents young people from accessing the best conditions and causes individuals to face certain problems as they step into adulthood, and this process occurs under unfavourable conditions. Especially in developing countries, several young people living in absolute poverty intensify the problem, making youth poverty a global problem. In addition, youth poverty should be considered a permanent problem throughout the world, including in developed economies.

When studies and research on poverty are considered, it is seen that studies on youth poverty are insufficient and started especially in the mid-20th century. Considering the importance of the subject, these studies are insufficient in terms of quality and quantity. In this context, the aim of this study is to explain youth poverty in the context of Amartya Sen's Capability Approach and to present data on youth poverty in the European Union and Turkey. For this purpose, first, Amartya Sen's capability approach will be explained and the relationship between youth and poverty will be emphasised. Then, with the help of EUROSTAT and TURKSTAT data, data on the indicators that are determined within the framework of the capability approach will be presented.

Amartya Sen's Capability Approach

There are different approaches to explaining and measuring poverty in the literature. These approaches include monetary poverty, capability poverty, social exclusion poverty, and participatory poverty. The monetary approach is a goods- or utility-based approach. This approach uses an absolute income threshold calculated by placing a monetary value on the minimum amount of goods that a family or individual needs to survive. Thus, monetary poverty is defined as a family or individual income below the poverty line. In the social exclusion approach, poverty is a person's relative deprivation or lack of access to certain goods or services that others in society have. In the capability approach, poverty is defined as when a person lacks or is unable to develop the capabilities needed to achieve a certain level of functioning. Last, the participatory

approach emphasises that the poor themselves should be involved in defining what it means to be poor (Laderchi et al., 2003).

Amartya Sen, one of the economists who has made significant contributions to the literature on poverty and development, has approached the problem of poverty from a different perspective in the context of capacity deprivation in his studies since the 1980s. Amartya Sen's approach to the problem of development and poverty also forms the theoretical basis of the concept of human development defined in the Human Development Report published by the United Nations Development Program in 1990. Amartya Sen put forward the capability approach by stating that approach that address poverty only in its economic dimension are not sufficient to explain poverty. Poverty with its economic dimension is generally defined as not having enough income to provide the minimum needs necessary for survival. The capability approach defines poverty as being deprived of the basic capabilities necessary to live a life worth human dignity. Approach emphasises the freedom of the individual instead of income and utility and focuses on what people can really do or be. The basic claim of the capability approach is that in order to understand how well a person is doing, it is necessary to look at the kind of life they lead and what they have achieved in terms of beings and doings (Sen, 1999; Sen, 2000; Sen, 2001; Sen, 2004).

The capability approach is based on two concepts: capabilities and functioning. According to Sen, functionings are actions and situations that individuals value in their lives, such as adequate nutrition, being healthy, being happy, self-respect, participating in social life, etc. (Sen, 1993; Sen, 2001). The approach emphasises that certain functionings such as being happy, acting freely, making choices, respecting oneself, being healthy, having adequate nutrition, and going out in public without embarrassment are intrinsically important. According to Sen, functionings are the constituent elements of a person's being and are characteristics of both doings and beings. (Sen, 1985). Capability, in its most basic sense, is an individual's ability to do a thing. The existence of the limits of an individual's capabilities are skills such as being able to read, speak, ride a bicycle or walk. According to Sen, capability is "the ability to achieve valued functionings" (Sen, 1993: 49). Therefore, capability refers to the different combinations of functionings that an individual can achieve, and an individual's capability expresses the freedom of the individual. Capabilities show how an individual transforms his/her resources into functionings. For example, an individual who voluntarily fasts or goes on a hunger strike has the ability not to be peckish but chooses to be peckish (Sen, 1985; Sen, 2001).

Sen explains the differences between functionings and capabilities as follows: Functionings are an achievement, capabilities are the ability to achieve. While functionings are directly related to living conditions, capabilities are the freedom to achieve different combinations of functionings. Sen (1987) stated that individuals must have these freedoms in order to survive and not fall into poverty. Although capability and functioning are two independent concepts, they are closely related to each other. Capability gains meaning as the sum of the functionings that an individual can achieve, and although it is evaluated within the framework of functionings, functionings are also components of capabilities. When evaluated in terms of freedom, the concept of capability comes to the fore. For example, while a wealthy but dieting individual and a starving individual in Africa are in the same functional situation in terms of eating and nutrition, the situations of these two individuals differ in terms of capabilities. While it is the wealthy individual's own choice to be malnourished, the malnutrition of the individual in Africa is compulsory due to lack of access to food. Another important aspect to be considered in the approach is the distinction between goods and services and their functioning. What is important for the welfare and happiness of individuals is the transformation of goods and services into functionings. According to Sen, the real benefits and welfare of

goods and services can be calculated through the capabilities one possesses. Different capabilities can lead to different benefits, and the lack of capabilities is a serious obstacle to the transformation of what one has into benefits. Sen tries to explain this with the bicycle example. Accordingly, owning a bicycle may not necessarily mean deriving utility from it. The main feature of a bicycle that contributes to human life is not the materials it is made of or its shape, but the fact that it provides faster and less tiring transportation than walking (Sen, 2001).

At this point, Sen mentions five factors that are important in transforming resources into capabilities. In terms of utility: personal characteristics, social characteristics, environmental characteristics, differences in relational perspectives and intra-family distribution. Personal characteristics are related to physical condition (disability, illness, etc.), age, gender, intelligence, skills, etc. Individuals' personal characteristics are decisive in the transformation of goods and services into functionings and they differ. Income cannot compensate some of them. For example, if an individual has a physical disability or does not know how to ride a bicycle, the benefit that a bicycle provides to the individual, i.e., its transformation into a function, will be limited. Or a sick individual may need more money to reach the same level of well-being as a healthy individual and may not enjoy the same quality of life even if they have the necessary income and medical treatment. Again, two individuals may have the money to buy books, but if one of them is visually impaired, they will not be able to function in the same way. The second factor is social characteristics such as public policies, educational arrangements, prevalence of crime, social norms, discrimination, and hierarchical structure. There may be social or even legal norms that prohibit or make it difficult for a woman to ride a bicycle alone. Therefore, in such a situation, the functionalization of the bicycle for a woman living in that society will be either limited or impossible. Environmental factors include climate, diseases, pollution, and geographical structure. This will affect the relationship between income and well-being. For example, the heating and clothing needs of poor individuals in cold climates will not be the same as those in warm climates, or the prevalence of certain diseases such as AIDS in certain parts of the world will significantly alter the quality of life of individuals living there. Differences in relational perspectives include differences in being poor in a developed and developing country. As Adam Smith noted, the utility of goods and services may vary across communities according to customs and traditions. Accordingly, if individuals with the same income level have different social environments and different networks of relationships, the benefits they receive from goods and services will differ. Finally, intrafamily income is earned by one or more individuals in the household, and the distribution of this income within the family varies. There may be disproportionate use of income within the family in favour of some family members and to the detriment of others. This may be related to the different needs of individuals, but may also be related to gender or age. Many studies have shown that women in particular receive a smaller share of family income. For example, the family may emphasise the male child and this may result in high rates of disease, malnutrition, low educational attainment, etc. in girls (Sen, 1985; Sen, 1992; Sen, 1999; Sen, 2001).

According to Sen, although it is important to provide utilities, the main goal is not to increase utilities, but to increase capabilities. In other words, it is important whether the ends (a long and healthy life, a humane life, etc.) can be achieved through the means rather than the means (incomes, resources, etc.). Within this perspective, Sen defines five different types of freedom: political freedom, economic freedom, social freedom/social opportunities, transparency and protective security (Sen, 1999: 58-60). These freedoms contribute to the ability to live free. Political freedoms refer to civil rights, freedom of political expression, freedom of control, an uncensored press, and freedom of choice. Economic freedoms refer to opportunities for individuals to engage freely in economic activities (production, consumption, exchange). The exercise of

these freedoms depends on the resources available, prices and the way markets work. Social freedoms are the freedom and capacity to enjoy social opportunities and public services. Enjoying these freedoms allows individuals to live better and participate in economic and political activities. For example, lack of education can be a significant barrier to participation in the labour market and can lead to a lack of capabilities. Or, despite free state education services, the inability of girls to study indicates a lack of capabilities as a lack of freedom of education. Transparency safeguards are the existence of a transparent social structure in terms of information and access to information. These safeguards play an instrumental role in preventing corruption, fiscal irresponsibility, and underhanded dealings. Protective security means creating a social safety net to prevent vulnerable individuals from falling into irreversible misery, starvation and death. Despite a well-functioning economic system, some individuals may face severe deprivation due to material changes that adversely affect their lives. Protective security includes arrangements such as unemployment benefits for the unemployed and income support and social assistance for the poor. According to Sen, these instrumental freedoms can further strengthen individuals' capabilities by directly increasing them (Sen, 1999).

In the framework of the approach, poverty is not only an economic problem and a matter of inequality (Sen, 1983), but also the inability to maintain a minimum capability to participate in society (Sen, 1981). Therefore, the capability approach defines poverty as "capability deprivation". In this context, according to Sen, poverty does not refer to "deprivation in meeting basic needs" but rather to "lack of basic capabilities necessary to achieve an acceptable level of living" (Sen, 1993: 109). Accordingly, as an individual's alternative gains diversify, his/her capabilities increase, which protects the individual from falling into poverty. When the opportunity to make free choices that will increase one's capabilities disappears, individuals become vulnerable to poverty. On the other hand, individuals' acquiring new acquisitions and increasing their capabilities raise their standard of living, increase their income level and productivity, and have significant effects in lifting individuals out of poverty. In this context, especially women, youth, the disabled, and minority groups are more disadvantaged to capability acquisition and enhancement. Even if these disadvantaged groups have the capabilities, they may face obstacles in having functionings such as equal opportunities in education, access to health services, and inclusion in work life.

Youth and Poverty

Youth, which is a critical transition period in the lives of individuals, is the period of stepping from childhood to adulthood and is a development process that is completed with the realisation or reaching a certain level of identification, autonomy and responsibility. In this framework, having economic independence, adopting a system of values in accordance with social values, acting in accordance with social roles, starting a family, being responsible, and having a job that generates income and can meet the needs of both oneself and one's family are important elements of this development process (Gökçe, 1971: 20). In this period of development and transition, which is an important period for both the individual and the society that plays an important role in the process of participating in social life, individuals should be prepared for adulthood in the best possible conditions.

During adolescence, the individual goes through a process in which there is uncertainty about the future and he/she cannot be fully independent while trying to find his/her place in society. In this process, young people may face some obstacles and problems both socially and economically. While social problems are adaptation, discrimination, social exclusion, inadequate access to health and education, inequality of opportunity, nutrition and housing; economic problems are unemployment, poverty, lack of knowledge and



skills required by the labour market, etc. (Gökçe, 1971: 20). In this context, poverty is a source of all these problems and a problem that negatively affects the transition period.

Although there is no generally accepted definition of youth poverty in the literature, youth poverty is defined by considering the concepts of youth and poverty together. When looking at the concept of "youth," there is no international consensus on the definition, and the definitions in the literature generally limit the period biologically to a certain age range, and the limitation varies from society to society. Internationally, the age group 15-24 is used as the standard definition of youth. In some countries, this age group has been expanded to include 15-29 and sometimes 15-34 age groups. The education process and socio-economic conditions of countries are determinative in determining the age range (Yeşil & Orhan, 2023). However, today, only biological age is no longer a sufficient criterion in definitions; social and psychological criteria are also valid (Murat, 1995). In this sense, even if the beginning of the youth period is accepted as biological age, the process is also supported by social and psychological factors such as completing education, entering a job/profession, gaining economic independence, independent residence, living as a couple or starting a family (Galland, 2001), spiritual development, and reaching the status of being an adult. The Turkish Ministry of Youth and Sports (2018) has also stated that not only biological factors but also sociological factors should be taken into consideration in the definition of youth, and has recognised individuals between the ages of "14 and 29" as youth.

The concept of poverty, like the concept of youth, does not have a generally accepted definition. Poverty is handled in different ways in terms of its economic, social, cultural and political dimensions; therefore, different approaches emerge in poverty definitions. According to the first definition made in 1901 by Rowntree, poverty is the situation where an individual's total income is insufficient to meet even the lowest level of food and clothing, which are the minimum requirements for a healthy and productive life (Rowntree, 1901 cited in Şenkal, 2021: 17). According to Şenses (2006), poverty is a situation in which individuals do not have sufficient and regular income to meet their basic needs. Şenses sees poverty as a situation in which individuals do not have sufficient resources for their needs, remain below the absolute minimum welfare level and are unable to purchase the goods and services necessary to live (Şenses, 2006: 61). The World Bank (WB) defines poverty as the deprivation of individuals in meeting vital needs such as food, shelter, education and health (World Bank Development Report, 2000: 1).

Although definitions generally emphasise income, it is not a sufficient approach to address poverty only from an economic perspective. As mentioned earlier, in recent years, Amartya Sen's capability approach has become one of the most widely used approaches to explain and understand poverty and inequality. Amartya Sen has put forward the theory of the deprivation of capabilities by stating that approach that address poverty only with its economic dimension are not sufficient to understand poverty. According to Sen, poverty is being deprived of the basic capabilities necessary to live a life worth human dignity. Accordingly, poverty is the inadequacy of capabilities including health, education and freedom, democracy, etc., which are indicators of the freedom to lead a life worthy of human dignity (Sen, 2000; Sen, 2001).

The capability approach, which is at the basis of the human development paradigm, emphasises extent to which individuals are able to achieve the capabilities they value, such as working, being productive, having an income, being educated, engaging in politics, living in love and respect, expressing their thoughts freely, being able to travel, and living a healthy, safe and dignified life free from violence as a basic human development criterion. It defines individuals who cannot have these capabilities as poor. In this approach, income level is one of the factors affecting real poverty, that is, the lack of capabilities. A low and insufficient

income is a reason for a poor life. According to the capability approach, the relationship between income and capabilities is affected by factors such as age, gender and social roles, illness or disability, and place of residence. These factors reduce the individual's ability to earn income and make it difficult to transform income into capabilities. In particular, older, younger, disabled or disadvantaged groups may need more income to gain the same functions (Sen, 1999: 127-128, Sen, 2000).

In this context, it is possible to state that young people are disadvantaged when family, education, health, employment, social relations, etc. are considered. If young people cannot obtain basic 'capabilities' such as education, health and income, which are important for their development as individuals, they face obstacles in accessing other capabilities and development/welfare inputs cannot be used effectively by young people. For example, a young girl who cannot go out at night does not have the opportunity to realise her right to "live freely" or a young woman who cannot work without the permission of her father/husband cannot exercise her freedom to work. Laws or legal regulations do not always provide to the same extent the capabilities that young people are interested in and find valuable, such as education, being healthy, living an independent life, gaining economic independence, participating in sports, artistic and intellectual activities and travelling. Deprived of these capabilities, young people must continue their lives in a more unfavourable position compared to adults (Aydınlıgil, 2006).

In this context, youth poverty can be defined as the situation where young people do not have sufficient income to meet their basic needs and are deprived of the basic capabilities necessary to live a life worthy of human dignity.

It is important to analyse youth poverty within the framework of Amartya Sen's capabilities approach, which emphasises the importance of individuals having the freedom and capability to live a fulfilling life and participate fully in society. Sen's capability approach addresses poverty in the context of a lack of basic human capacities and thus takes a broader view of poverty. Sen, who opposes definitions that describe poverty in terms of the amount of income, has dealt with poverty in the context of "capability" and sees the concept of capability as the ability to avoid situations that no one would want, such as hunger, illness, lack of education, and poor living conditions. In addition, Sen does not accept that development is only realised through concepts such as the development of industry, growth of the economy, increase in employment, development of technology and increase in per capita income, and states that what is important is to expand people's freedom. Therefore the approach recognises that youth poverty is not only caused by limited financial resources but also by a lack of access to quality education, health services, employment opportunities, social participation, and other basic capabilities necessary for individual development. It also emphasises the importance of addressing the structural barriers and inequalities that limit young people's ability to escape poverty.

Youth Poverty in the European Union (EU) and Turkey

The study revealed the dimensions of youth poverty in the EU and Turkey within the framework of Amartya Sen's capability approach. Youth poverty is not only about income deprivation but also about the limitations on young people's capabilities to fulfil their potential. In this context, Sen's approach provides a tool to examine and suggest solutions to the constraints young people face in key areas. Although Sen mentions the importance of capabilities, he argues that they cannot be subject to a predetermined list. Therefore, the indicators have been identified in line with the basic explanations of the capability approach. These indicators are participation in society, employment and unemployment, education, digital life, health and well-being, and social exclusion.

In line with this purpose and indicators, although the data on the youth population in the EU and Turkey generally include data on individuals between the ages of 15-24, in some indicators data on young people between the ages of 15 - 29 and 18 - 24 in others could be reached. While it is more possible to access these data on youth in the EU, it is not possible to access some data in Turkey because statistics are based on households. Therefore, most of the data will be taken from EUROSTAT, OECD, TURKSTAT and TURKSTAT's "Youth in Statistics 2021 and 2022" Report. In addition, Habitat's Youth Wellbeing Report will also be used. However, in both the EU and Turkey, it is not possible to access up-to-date data on youth statistics on some indicators.

General Overview

An analysis of the change over the years shows that the youth population has been declining in both the EU and Turkey since 1990. TURKSTAT's population forecasts predict that this decline will continue. Nevertheless, Turkey has a younger population than the EU. In fact, this advantage of Turkey's young population is defined as a "demographic window of opportunity". According to EUROSTAT data, the number of young people between the ages of 15 and 29 in the EU is approximately 73 million, while in Turkey this number is approximately 20 million. According to OECD 2022 data, the youth population rate in Turkey is 22.2%, while this rate is 15% in the EU.

In terms of poverty, EUROSTAT calculates youth poverty by taking into account the share of young people living in households with an equivalent disposable income below 60% of the national median equivalent disposable income compared to the total population (EU Youth Report, 2012: 277). In Turkey, data on youth poverty are determined by the Turkish Statistical Institute by calculating the income per individual based on the number of individuals living in the household. In other words, family income is taken as the basis for measuring youth poverty. TURKSTAT uses the "60% criterion of equivalent household disposable median income" to calculate youth poverty (Statistics on Youth, 2021). In this context, when general data on youth poverty are analysed, the poverty rate among young people in Turkey is higher than that in the EU. According to EUROSTAT 2022 data, while the poverty rate of young people (18-24) is 21.7% in the EU, this rate is 23.9% in Turkey. When analysed by gender, the poverty rate for young women in Turkey in 2021 is 29.7%, while this rate is 25.1% for young men. The average for the EU is 23.1% for young women and 21.5% for young men. Poverty rates are higher for women in both Turkey and the EU.

According to the TURKSTAT Statistics on Youth 2021 report, while the poverty rate among young people aged 15-24 is 26.7%, this rate is 23.3% among young people aged 15-29. In addition, according to the Habitat Youth Wellbeing Survey (2023: 10 - 11), although the average income of young people is in the range of 3000 TL-9000 TL, the income range that young people state that they need is 9000 TL -18000 TL. Accordingly, 80% of young people experience relative deprivation, that is, they try to live on less than the income they need. In the research, young people drew attention to the low wages and stated that they live with debt. Accordingly, while 61% of young people defined themselves as middle class in 2017, this rate decreased to 4% in 2023. Furthermore, 17% of the youth interviewed had credit card debt, 15% had installment debt and 14% had personal loan debt. This deterioration in the economic situation of young people increases the sense of relative deprivation among them (Habitat Youth Wellbeing Survey, 2023: 10 - 11).

Participation in the Society

Participation in society is the relationship established with society members who come together and work for creating a more livable society (Gottlieb, 2006: 2). From a societal perspective, participation is

defined as partnership, shared values and activities, while from an individual perspective, it is defined as the individual's ability to participate in society (Beckley, 2006: 130). Social participation activities include relationships and interactions with family members, relatives, friends or coworkers, interactions that span the social sphere, and contributions to society (Herzog et al., 2002: 593; Glass & Balfour, 2003: 313). The most prominent forms of social participation include occupational and social roles, social activities such as seeing/meeting friends, participating in social/artistic activities, and group/team work (Berkman et al., 2000: 849).

What is noteworthy here is that social participation is expressed as a skill that needs to be developed. In the context of Amartya Sen's Capability Approach, the inability to maintain a minimum capability/skill to participate in society, i.e., the inability to participate in social activities, is a cause of poverty. Therefore, the prevention or inadequacy of youth participation in society is a cause of youth poverty.

Youth Participation is defined by the UN as economic participation (work and development), political participation (decision-making processes), social participation (taking part in society and environmental activities) and cultural participation (artistic and cultural activities) (UNDP, 2008). Impeded or inadequate participation in these processes implies a deprivation of capabilities and leads to youth poverty.

According to EUROSTAT 2022 data, the participation rate of young people (15 - 29) in society in the EU is 22.4%, while this rate is 23.4% for women and 21.4% for men. Participation in cultural and sports activities among young people is 85.2%, while the proportion of young people who see family and friends every week is 3.9%. In addition, 58.3% of young people have not participated in artistic activities and events in the last 12 months. Of course, the difficulty of returning to normal life after the pandemic may be a factor in this.

In Turkey, there is no clear data on these variables. However, the participation of young people in these processes in Turkey is quite problematic. The patriarchal structure that continues to influence lifestyles in general and the economic difficulties experienced in recent years have limited the life and wealth opportunities of young people in particular, narrowing their access to capabilities. Therefore, the capabilities of young people in Turkey for individual and social transformation are restricted, and they have difficulties in accessing many of the things they value and care about (Aydınlıgil, 2006).

According to the Habitat Youth Wellbeing Survey (2023: 14), only 9% of young people (18 - 24) in Turkey are engaged in any voluntary activity. The most important problems faced by young people who volunteer are cost and time issues, i.e., they have difficulty in covering their expenses and cannot find the time to volunteer. For the majority who do not volunteer, the most important reason for this is lack of time. In addition, 60% of young people said that they were not interested in volunteering activities, which is a very high rate. Again, 7% of young people are members of an association, sports club or political party.

Employment and Unemployment

In addition to providing young people with an identity and status in social life, employment is an important factor for young people to take responsibility and gain independence. Young people who are not employed cannot gain social identity and status and are also deprived of income (Gündoğan, 1999). Factors such as prolonged education periods, lack of experience, the education received not meeting the requirements of the labour market, and the economic and cyclical situation of the countries affect young people's transition to employment (Calderon, 2004: 65; Işık, 2016: 136) and prevent young people from earning income and participating in consumption. It increases their deprivation and causes social exclusion.

When we look at the employment data of young people (Table 1), the employment rate, which is 49.3% in the EU, is 46.3% in Turkey. While the employment rate of young women is close to that of men in the EU, it is almost half of that of men in Turkey. The fact that young women and men do not have the same capabilities to be employed can be evaluated on the basis of gender. Especially in Turkey, gender stereotypes constitute an obstacle to women's participation in employment.

Table 1
Youth Laborforce in EU and Turkey

15–29 (2023)	EU		Turkey	
Employment	49,7		46,3	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
	46,7	52,5	32,1	60
Unemployment	14,2		14,2	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
	15,4	13,2	22	11,3
Long-term Unemployment	2,4		2,6	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
	2,3	2,5	4,8	1,5
NEET	11,2		25,8	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
	12,5	10,1	36,3	15,6

Based on data from EUROSTAT and TÜİK.

Today, regardless of the level of development, unemployment is one of the most serious problems of all countries. Unemployment not only affects the unemployed individual but also the dependents of the unemployed. Disadvantaged groups are among the groups most affected by unemployment, and it can be said that young people are at the top of these groups. ILO's Global Employment Trends Reports also state that unemployment affects young people the most (Işık, 2016). According to the ILO and the UN, the youth labour force is defined as the population between the ages of 15 and 24 years, employed or unemployed and not in education. In this context, youth unemployment is defined as the young population between the ages of 15 and 24 who are ready to work but cannot find a job at the current wage level and are actively looking for a job (Karabıyık, 2009). The economic and social consequences and problems caused by the unemployment of the youth, which is considered a very important advantage for countries, are of great importance. Whether the cause is structural, economic or individual, the problem of youth unemployment is not only an economic but also a social problem.

In terms of the capability approach, unemployment prevents young people from assuming responsibility and independence in the transition to adulthood and affects their capabilities and thus their freedoms, especially by causing educated young people to remain out of the labour market or out of employment. An analysis of the unemployment data (Table 1) shows that the youth unemployment rate in the EU and Turkey is 14.2%. As in the employment data, while female and male youth unemployment rates are close to each other in the EU, female youth unemployment in Turkey is almost twice as high as male youth unemployment. While long-term unemployment is 2.4% in the EU, it is 2.6% in Turkey. Again, this rate is quite high (4.8%) for young women in Turkey. Marriage, gender roles that impose more unpaid labour on young women, limited

access to productive resources and gender-based discrimination are among the most important reasons that disadvantage young women in labour markets and lead to increased unemployment of young women.

The concept of NEET, which is used to define young people who are neither in education nor in employment, has become an important problem for countries. According to the standard definition established by the European Employment Commission (EMCO) and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in 2020, NEET is defined as young people aged 15-24 who are unemployed and inactive in education. Although the age classification of young people with NEET status differs from country to country, NEET status is generally considered as the active labour force potential in the 15-24 and 15-29 age range (OECD, 2019 cited in Coşkun & Çelik, 2021: 1). These young people, also defined as "Home Youth" in recent years, do not take part in education and active labour market. These young people are at risk as individuals with incomes below the poverty line and lacking the capabilities and freedoms to improve their economic situation.

Despite having a young and dynamic population potential, Turkey has the highest NEET rate among the EU. In 2023 (Table 1), while the average NEET rate in the EU is 11.2%, this rate is 25.8% in Turkey. While female and male NEET rates are close to each other in the EU, the NEET rate for young women in Turkey is quite high at 36.3%. The fact that a significant portion of the young population in Turkey is neither in education nor in employment indicates that the youth potential has not been sufficiently used. When this opportunity/potential is not used enough, youth poverty will deepen and the welfare level of the society will decrease.

Education

Education as a source of human capital is important for both economic and social development. The purpose of education is to serve in every social, economic, and societal field. The aims of education include raising individuals who will benefit the society, guiding and informing individuals, shaping the behaviour of individuals, making individuals ready to join the labour force by providing them with qualifications, reducing inequalities, ensuring development, etc. In today's information society, education, which facilitates the participation of individuals in the labour market and leads them to prosperity, has gained great importance (Çokgezen & Erdene, 2015). In this context, the quality of education affects the employment conditions of young people and may lead to their impoverishment.

A reciprocal relationship between poverty and education. As the level of poverty increases, access to educational opportunities decreases. As the level of education decreases, the level of poverty increases and a vicious circle is entered. Poverty, limited resources, malnutrition, high school fees and inadequate parental education make it difficult to access education and the quality of education decreases (Çokgezen & Erdene, 2015). The UN and the WB also emphasise the importance of education in their efforts to combat poverty.

The capability approach attaches importance to education in the fight against poverty. Accordingly, individuals' freedoms should be increased through education. From this perspective, young people can get the education they need, and they will gain the freedom to realise and take the actions they desire. The capability approach focuses on the fact that the most important goal of education is to increase the capabilities of individuals to live the life they want. At this point, education has two aspects: improving the skills of young people and increasing the opportunities in front of young people, thus increasing their capabilities. In addition to providing individuals with new capabilities, education teaches them values that will enable them to make the right choices about the use of these capabilities. While the individual learns new skills that will increase his/her capabilities through education, he/she also learns values that will enable him/her to use these skills for a good purpose (Saito, 2003).

In this context, according to the EUROSTAT 2023 data for the EU and Turkey, the educational attainment of young people in Turkey is at a lower level compared to Europe. While the rate of young people (15 - 29 year olds) attending secondary education and above is 64.2% in the EU, this rate is 57.9% in Turkey. According to OECD 2022 data, while the rate of youth aged 17-18 attending secondary and higher education is above 80% in the EU, in Turkey this rate is above 80% for 17-year-olds, but falls below 40% by the age of 18. While the increase in this rate in Turkey over the years is a welcome development in terms of raising the educational level of young people and increasing their capabilities, the exclusion of these young people from the labour market is a situation that needs to be considered. EUROSTAT 2023 data shows that the rate of young people (15 - 19 years old) below the primary education level is also higher in Turkey (42.1%) than in the EU (35.8%). The rate of young people (18 - 24 years old) who leave education early in 2023 is 19.5% in Turkey and 9.6% in the EU. While this rate is 11.3% for young men in the EU and 20.1% in Turkey, it is 7.7% for young women in the EU and 19% in Turkey. Although this rate is higher in Turkey than in the EU, it is encouraging to see that this rate has halved in 10 years, i.e., the number of early school leavers has decreased. Education is the reason why young women do not participate in all levels of society at the same rate as men. In 21st-century Turkey, even though women's level of education has increased, it still lags behind men's. Both the patriarchal structure that supports gender stereotypes and regional inequalities can be considered as reasons for this backwardness. It is not easy to access education in every region of the country, especially in rural areas. For young women, this situation is more challenging.

Health and Well-being

One of the most important issues of human life is health. Today, health is not only a subject of medicine but also of social sciences. The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines health not only as the absence of disease or infirmity but also as a state of complete physical, social and mental well-being. Well-being is a positive state experienced by individuals and societies, including quality of life and the ability to contribute to the world. The well-being of a society can be observed through the psychological resilience of individuals, how much they have the capacity to take action and how ready they are to overcome challenges (WHO, 2021: 3, 10). Therefore, in order for a society to build its future, it needs healthy and well-being individuals, young people. Given today's changing and evolving conditions, the chances for young people to improve their health and well-being are higher than ever, yet many lack access to the basic information, quality services and protective environments they need to stay healthy and well.

According to the WHO (2011), the main health and well-being risks for young people are traffic accidents, drowning, violence, alcohol, drug and tobacco use, depression and anxiety, HIV/Aids, HPV, other infectious diseases, early pregnancy and childbirth, obesity, lack of nutrition and physical activity.

Like the WHO, UNICEF considers environmental risks such as unhealthy diets, sedentary lifestyles, mental health disorders, alcohol and tobacco use and air pollution to be the most important problems facing young people today. In addition, infectious diseases such as malaria and cholera kill young people, especially in low- and middle-income countries where health services, water, sanitation, and hygiene facilities are inadequate. The fact that young people in low- and middle-income countries, where the majority of today's youth live, are among the groups most at risk of contracting infectious diseases such as HIV and have the least access to treatment shows how great the risk is. UNICEF also draws attention to the risks faced by young girls such as puberty, early pregnancy and teenage births (UNICEF, 2016). All in all, the deprivation of health and well-being affects the lives of young people and excludes them from education, social and economic opportunities, and deprives them of their capabilities.

Table 2*Indicators of Health and Well-being*

(2019)	EU			Turkey		
Daily smoking	17,1			24,3		
Those who do not consume alcohol	27,9			85,3		
Those who do not consume fruits and vegetables	41,2			42,8		
Disability level (moderate and severe)	9,5			7,5		
Those who never participate in sports activities	30,8			80		
Suicide or self-harm	6			6		
Body Mass Index	Skinny	Normal	Obese	Skinny	Normal	Obese
	2,9	45,8	16	3,8	40,1	21,2

Based on data from EUROSTAT.

EUROSTAT measures the health and well-being of young people (aged 15 - 29) through indicators of smoking and alcohol use, body mass index, fruit and vegetable consumption, level of disability, level of sports activity and suicide or self-harm (Table 2). Accordingly, while smoking is higher among young people in Turkey compared to young people in the EU, alcohol consumption is higher among young people in the EU. Although the consumption of fruits and vegetables is similar, 80% of young people in Turkey do not engage in any sport. The risk of obesity is also relatively higher among young people in Turkey (21.2%).

Digital World

Digitalisation, conceptualised by the Turkish Language Institution as “digitisation” (TDK, 2023), refers to the process of digitising accessible information and existing resources in a way that can be read by a computer (DinamikCrm, 2023). Today, digitalisation has accelerated with the rapid development of information technologies. Thanks to the rapid development of information technologies and especially the internet, individuals all over the world are getting closer to each other, changing the meaning of time and space in the traditional sense and creating a virtual world that can be seen as an almost more effective space. In today's world, where everything changes and transforms at every moment, perceptions and habits change and transform in parallel with technological advances. In the digital world, billions of people living in the world can transmit any information to each other in a very short period of time, express their own opinions, receive the education they want, react to an event or development, carry out joint projects, trade anywhere in the world and follow many developments in the world simultaneously (Şentürk, 2013: 32).

Young people are more directly affected by this situation and adapt more easily to new trends and current practices. As an important part of the digital world, it is important for young people to have the opportunity to use this technology. With this opportunity, young people can increase their own capabilities and freedoms by realising a quick interaction between cultures and societies and by accessing information easily.

According to EUROSTAT 2023 data, the frequency of internet use by young people (16 - 29 years old) in the EU is 96.93%, while this rate is 95.14% in Turkey. In both the EU (82.82%) and Turkey (91.92%), most young people use the internet for social media and messaging. As can be seen in Table 3, in both the EU and Turkey, young people prefer to use the internet for social media, while the proportion of young people who prefer



to use the internet for education is quite low. TURKSTAT's Statistics on Youth Report (2021 and 2022) also contains similar data.

Table 3

Reasons for Internet Use

	EU	Turkey
Social Media	83,01	91,92
E-mail and texting	88,94	60,68
Finding information about goods and services	71,27	81,79
Reading a magazine newspaper	65,60	69,24
Internet banking	67,08	68,31
Purchasing goods and services	24,21	1377
Online education	23,20	13

Based on data from EUROSTAT.

The increasing digitalisation both in the economy and society is affecting the world of work, and this situation is expected to continue rapidly in the coming years. Digitalisation can transform large areas of working life and affect occupations at all skill levels. Digitalisation has significant potential to stimulate youth employment, but to turn this potential into real decent work opportunities, young people need to acquire new skills to keep pace with the digital world (ILO, 2022). In this context, EUROSTAT 2021 data shows that 71% of young people in the EU have digital skills above the basic level, while 50.98% of young people in Turkey have these skills. Considering that we are in the digital age, the digital skills of young people in Turkey need to be increased.

Social Exclusion

It was mentioned that an approach to explaining poverty is the social exclusion approach. Although social exclusion is a phenomenon with a comprehensive and broad explanations in the literature, it was considered as one of the indicators of the capability approach within the scope and aim of the article and was examined in terms of youth poverty within the framework of this approach.

The concept of social exclusion was first used in France in the 1970s for the disadvantaged and those who could not benefit from the social protection opportunities of the state. The use of the concept that emerged in France became widespread both in the European Union and international organisations in the following years and played an important role in social policy studies.

The broad scope of the concept has led to different definitions. While Silver (1994) defines social exclusion as the breaking of social ties, Levitas (2005: 26) defines social exclusion as a phenomenon resulting from poverty and the erosion of civil rights, participation in labour markets, and moral and cultural reasons. Sen (2000) defines social exclusion as inequality and relative poverty, exclusion from the labour market, exclusion from the credit market, and gender-based exclusion. Social exclusion is not only about the absence of material wealth but also about symbolic exclusion, deprivation and lack of participation in basic formal and social institutions. Social exclusion is therefore a phenomenon that emphasises the relationship between the individual and society and the quality of that relationship (Silver, 1994). Young people are among the groups most affected by social exclusion. In EUROSTAT statistics, social exclusion is measured through poverty risk, material and social deprivation, working poverty and housing deprivation. The same

measurements are used in the youth statistics. In this article, social exclusion will be examined through these indicators.

The poverty risk refers to individuals who are at risk of poverty, experiencing severe material deprivation and living in households where the number of employees or jobs is very low (Eurostat Statistics Explained, 2024). The median value of income is usually used in poverty risk measurements. Both the EU and Turkey use 60% of the median income as the poverty risk threshold. Individuals below this threshold have lower incomes compared to other individuals living in the society and fall behind the average welfare level of the society (Aydın, 2019). The proportion of young people (aged 16 - 29) at risk of poverty in the EU is 24.5% in 2022, while in Turkey it is 36.6% in 2021. For men, this rate is 23.9% in the EU and 35% in Turkey. For women, this rate is 25.1% in the EU and 35.8% in Turkey.

Table 4

Vital Needs

Household Level Items	Individual Level Items
Ability to cover unexpected expenses	Have an internet connection
Ability to pay for one week of holiday per year	Worn clothes can be replaced with new ones
Facing payment delays (rent payments, utility bills, other loan payments, etc.)	Be able to have two pairs of suitable footwear (including one pair of all-weather shoes)
Receiving a meal of meat, chicken, fish or a vegetarian equivalent every second day	To be able to spend a small amount of money for himself or herself each week
Keeping the house warm enough	Having regular leisure time activities
Be able to have a car for personal use	Being able to get together with friends/family for a drink/ dinner at least once a month
Ability to replace worn-out furniture	

Eurostat Statistics Explained, 2024

Material and social deprivation is the inability of individuals to meet at least seven of the thirteen items (Table 4) considered as vital needs (Eurostat Statistics Explained, 2024). The OECD defines material and social deprivation as the inability of individuals or households to afford consumption goods and behaviours that are considered normal in a given time and society, regardless of individual preferences (OECD, 2007). The proportion of young people experiencing material and social deprivation is 12% in the EU in 2022 and 32% in Turkey in 2021. While this rate for women is 12.5% in the EU and 33.1% in Turkey, this rate for men is 11.7% in the EU and 30.9% in Turkey. As can be seen, almost one in three young people in Turkey is experiencing material and social deprivation.

One indicator of social exclusion is working poverty. The concept, which is generally defined as the situation where working individuals are poor in terms of disposable net income, tries to explain why individuals are poor despite working. Although there is no consensus on the type of poverty to be taken as a basis for definition, the WB's absolute poverty criteria are used in developing countries and relative poverty criteria are used in EU countries (Erdoğan & Kutlu, 2014). According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), all employees living in a poor family are considered as the working poor, but this scope has been widened in different studies. Accordingly, all employees living in a poor family, all full-time employees working in a poor family, all family members living in a poor family where at least one person works, and all individuals living in a poor family with at least one full-time employee can be considered as working poor (Gündoğan, 2007).

In the context of youth poverty, working poverty is an important issue. Young workers are twice as likely as adult workers to live in extreme poverty; namely, young workers live or work on less than US\$ 1.90 per day



(ILO, 2022). In particular, young people working in precarious and low-paid jobs experience poverty more. According to EUROSTAT data, while the rate of working poverty among young people in the EU is 8.8% in 2022, this rate in Turkey is 10.9% in 2021.

Housing deprivation is another indicator of social exclusion. Housing, which provides shelter against natural phenomena and health hazards arising from the environment, is important for all stages of human life. According to the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, "Everyone has the right to food, clothing, housing and medical care for the health and well-being of himself and his family." The Declaration considers the right to housing together with fundamental human rights and states that the right to housing combines with other rights to provide the individual with the necessary standard of living (Yeşil & Orhan, 2023).

The concept of housing deprivation refers to inadequate housing. Housing deprivation can be defined as homelessness where an individual does not have access to a minimally adequate dwelling (Busch-Geertsema et al., 2016: 125; homelessness and living on the street or in temporary shelters (Amore, 2016) or living in the homes of friends (Brousse, 2004: 6) because they do not have a home of their own (Hick & Srephens, 2022).

The traditional definition of housing deprivation used by EUROSTAT is that housing-deprived individuals are those who live in a dwelling that is considered overcrowded and who also suffer from at least one of the other conditions of housing deprivation. Other conditions include a leaky roof or rotting window frames or floors, lack of a bathroom or shower and flush toilet for the sole use of the household, or lack of electricity/darkness. Accordingly, while the rate of housing deprivation among young people in the EU is 6.9% according to 2020 data, this rate in Turkey is quite high at 28.2%. This shows that about one-third of the young people in Turkey live in overcrowded households and in housing with poor conditions. Considering the youth unemployment rates, poverty rates and high rents in Turkey, it is likely that young people have problems accessing housing. While it has become largely impossible for a young person who does not have any income other than financial support from the family or wage income to own a house by saving from the wages he/she earns by working (Yeşil & Orhan, 2023), it also becomes difficult for him/her to live in a house with good conditions.

Conclusion

In the world and in Turkey, the share of the young population in the total population is considerable. Countries with a high youth population have a demographic advantage because the well-educated young population ensures development and progress. In addition, it is essential for societies that want to develop and prosper that young people live in a healthy environment, develop freely in the fields they want and are predisposed to, take initiative, and participate in society and the economy. At the same time, young people have expectations from the societies in which they live, such as a good education, a good job and a decent life.

The youth period, which is the transition period of an individual to adulthood, is a period in which individuals' energy and willingness to spend are intense, and at the same time, the desire to receive education and work is high. However, in this period of low income, youth poverty is a prominent problem.

This study attempts to explain youth poverty in the context of Amartya Sen's capability approach and to present the general situation of youth poverty in the EU and Turkey with data. In the context of the capability approach, it is revealed that youth poverty is an important problem in both the EU and Turkey. EUROSTAT statistics also show that young people in the EU and Turkey are deprived compared to adults in terms



of participation in society, participation in employment, education, health and well-being, digital life and social inclusion. Young women in particular are more disadvantaged than men in all these indicators. While the data for young women and men are closer in the EU, they are quite different in Turkey. This situation shows that gender roles and stereotypes are still valid for young women and inequalities have not been overcome. Therefore, women and men do not have the same capabilities. In all indicators analysed in the study, Turkey's data are quite unfavourable compared to the EU.

When evaluated in the context of the capabilities approach, it is seen that young people in Turkey are more disadvantaged and deprived of capabilities and therefore poorer than young people in EU member states in terms of social participation, employment, education, health and well-being, digital life and social exclusion. In this process of deprivation, the deprivation of young people from capabilities such as education, employment, social participation, health, and digital life reduces their functionality and thus deepens their poverty. At this point, societies that set out with the goal of development and growth should aim to increase the capabilities of young people while combating youth poverty.

Limitations

The lack of a standardised definition and measurement of youth poverty is one of the limitations of the study. Therefore, the lack of consensus on who should be included in the scope of youth poverty and which indicators other than income should be included limits the collection of and access to data on the situation of young people in the world and in Turkey. Another limitation of the study is the lack of up-to-date data on some indicators, especially in Turkey.

Ethics Committee Approval: Publicly available data from the websites of EUROSTAT, TURKSTAT and OECD were used. Therefore, ethics committee permission was not obtained.



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Author Details	Beril Baykal (Assoc. Prof. Dr.) ¹ Kocaeli University, Faculty of Political Sciences, Department of Labor Economics and Industrial Relations, Kocaeli, Türkiye  0000-0002-0769-459X  berilbaykal81@gmail.com
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