

**THE TREND IN POVERTY RATES FROM THE PERIOD OF  
ECONOMIC CRISES IN 2000 AND 2001 UP TO NOWADAYS IN  
TURKEY: A FIELD RESEARCH REGARDING ABSOLUTELY POOR IN  
ANKARA\***

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**- Abstract -**

The analysis of poverty problem in the framework of economic developments and social policies applied after the economic crisis which occurred in 2000 and 2001 in Turkey constitutes the aim of this study. In this context, the reflection of positive progress in the economic indicators of Turkey, especially in the period of 2002-2007 on poverty problem, which is one of the most important problems in the social field, is analysed according to poverty statistics of Turkish Statistical Institute (Turkstat).

The field research constitutes one of the most important chapters of this study. The direction of the change which occurred in the living conditions of the absolutely poor after the economic crisis in the beginning of 2000s is tried to be determined by the field research. The field research was implemented in eight counties of Ankara by using the survey technique, which is one of the quantitative research methods. In the end of the research field, we got some findings which indicate the existence of a relatively improvement in the living conditions of the absolutely poor. However, from the findings of the field research, it is understood that the poor people highlight unemployment, being uneducated and unregistered employment for the causes of their poverty and also, it is seen that they highlight the solution of unemployment problem to struggle against poverty.

**Key words:** *Poverty, economic crises, social policy*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

What is poverty? Who are the poor? These are the questions most frequently asked during the discussions about poverty. Homeless people sleeping under the arches, pensioners counting out the pennies in the supermarkets, the fear of the debt collector, the queues for benefit... there is no doubt that these are the different appearances of poverty. In fact, describing poverty is easier than defining poverty. (Oppenheim, Harker, 1996:7)

When the studies about poverty are reviewed, it is seen that the discussions regarding what poverty is and who poor are trace back to Adam Smith and the discussions regarding the fact that the poverty can not be explained just by the absence of minimum income (absolute poverty) gain importance in the course of the time. When people move away from the starvation threat, the problems related to a convenient income and opportunity distribution become more important. In this case, the definition of poverty undergoes a change towards "quality of life" thought, which indicates a condition that the poorest people in society should maintain their lives not only physically but also socially. (MacPherson, Silburn, 1998:1,2)

In Turkey, most of the studies regarding poverty have started by 1990s. In this process, the fact that the poverty problem has taken a predominant place on the international agenda and its effects on the Turkish academic community has an important role along with the internal dynamics of Turkey. The beginning of the date of Turkish Statistical Institute to publish the statistics regarding poverty is 2002, which is after the economic crises in 2000 and 2001.

This study aims to analyse the poverty problem in the framework of economic developments and the social policies applied after the economic crisis which occurred in 2000 and 2001 in Turkey. In this framework, the poverty problem is evaluated firstly from the point of view of its place on international agenda. After that, the tendency on poverty rates in the period of 2002-2009 is analysed. To identify how the implementations within the context of struggle against poverty reflect on the lives of the poor, to question the beliefs of the poor regarding the causes of their poverty, and to inform the politicians about what the priority policies are regarding coping with poverty; a field research aiming at the absolutely poor in Ankara was implemented as part of this study. In the last part of this study, the findings that we get from the field research implemented in eight counties of Ankara are evaluated.

## **2. POVERTY ON INTERNATIONAL AGENDA**

In the last quarter of the 20th century, it is seen that the discussions about poverty have focused on the discussions about globalization. In a study regarding this topic, it is stated that the globalization of poverty in late of the 20th century is an unprecedented fact in the world history. This case is explained as “global oversupplying system which is based on unemployment and minimizing the labor costs throughout the world”. (Chossudovsky, 1999:29) As a result of increased production and its expanding worldwide by coming to pieces, goods and services markets also gain a global characteristic. In this process, the gap between the economies which have capability and mobility to open out to global markets and the economies which do not have this capability and mobility widens. Increasing poverty and the rising inequality of income distribution both in and between countries are the reflections of this case in the social field. In connection with these developments, it is seen that the poverty problem has began to take an important place on the agenda of international organizations since the middle of 1990s. The effects of structural adjustment programmes on poverty are evaluated by the international organizations like United Nations, OECD, and ILO.

With the Human Development Report 1997, United Nations had a wider viewpoint related to both the definition and the approach to the thought of poverty. In this framework, poverty is not defined just as income poverty. It is also defined as a deprivation and it is examined in terms of some deprivations like knowledge and living conditions. In the Human Development Report 2010, it is emphasized that the human development paradigm still has a great importance for twenty years, since the year 1990, in which Human Development Report was first published. (UNDP, 2010:iv)

ILO’s approach regarding reducing poverty is stated in the information brochure “Decent Work and Poverty Reduction Strategies”, which was published in 2007. In this brochure, development strategy based on employment, comprehensive social security networks, and social transfers are emphasized as the measures to reduce poverty. (ILO, 2007:1)

World Bank, one of the implementers of structural adjustment programmes, published World Development Report 2000/2001 with the heading “Attacking Poverty”. This report recommends actions in three areas: expanding economic opportunities for poor people; strengthening the participation of poor people in political processes and local desicionmaking; reducing poor people’s vulnerability to ill health, economic shocks, policy-induced dislocations, and natural disasters. (World Bank, 2000:vi) World Bank continues to show an interest in poverty

problem in other World Development Reports after 2000/2001. In World Development Report 2005, for example, a good investment climate, which provides opportunities and incentives for firms, is emphasized to invest productively and to create new jobs for reducing poverty and improving the living conditions. (World Bank, 2004:1) World Development Report 2007, headed as "Development and the Next Generation", indicates that the developing world's 1.3 billion young people ages 12-24 are its next generation of economic and social actors. In this report it is stated that making sure that these young people are well prepared for their futures as workers, entrepreneurs, parents, citizens, and community leaders has great importance for poverty reduction and economic growth. (World Bank, 2006:26)

### **3. THE TREND IN POVERTY RATES IN TURKEY**

In Turkey, there are several structural factors which have effects on poverty, like the inequality of income distribution, the problems arisen from social security system, unemployment, unregistered employment, the fact that the education system does not meet the requirements of labor market adequately, economic crises, strong family ties and social solidarity. However, across these factors, the economic crises which are experienced in quick succession since the beginning of 1990s have increased the visibility of poverty. Since the external financial liberalization in 1989, the priority in Turkish economy has tended to financial sector from manufacturing sector. In this way, Turkish economy has moved towards a new stage in globalization process. In this process, short term speculative capital inflow has caused some instabilities like appreciation of TL, rise in the short term external debts, high consumption, high interest rates, decline in the investments of productive sector, and rise in the foreign trade deficit, which fuel economic crises. (Yentürk, Çimenoğlu, 2005:126,127) In fact, the economic crises which occurred in 2000 and 2001 were the results of such a process. In 2001, Turkish economy shrunk almost 6% and unemployment rate, which was at 7,4% in 1999, rose at 10,3% in 2002. In this process, poverty became a serious problem as a result of its effects in the social field. However, there is a common belief in society regarding the effects of economic crises were alleviated to some extent by the strong family ties and social solidarity, and the crises did not cause a social explosion. (Doğan, 2003:86) This case is also stated at the World Bank Report which indicates the existence of the strong social solidarity in Turkey to regenerate the social relations. (World Bank, 2003: 33)

After the economic crises, in the period of 2002-2007, Turkish economy grew 6,8% annually on average. Growth rate began to slow down during 2007-2008;

economy shrank 4,7% in 2009, because of the global economic crisis which occurred in 2008. Table 1 shows the trend in poverty rates by the poverty line methods during this process. From Table 1, it is seen that food poverty and the rate of people who are under the poverty line which is used for international comparisons and determined as 1\$, 2,15\$ and 4,3\$ per capita per day decreased in the period of 2002-2009. According to the poverty line method which is based on food and nonfood expenditures, poverty rate of individuals has followed a floating progress since 2002. The poverty rate according to poverty line method which is based on the food and nonfood expenditures rose at 28,12% in 2003, which was 26,96% in 2002. The rate mentioned above, declined in the period of 2003-2006 and were of nearly the same standing in 2006, 2007, and 2008. The poverty rate which is based on food and nonfood expenditures rose nearly one point from 2008 to 2009.

**Table 1: The poverty rates of individuals according to poverty line methods, TURKEY**

Methods	Rate of poor individuals (%)							
	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Food Poverty (starvation)	1,35	1,29	1,29	0,87	0,74	0,48	0,54	0,48
Complete poverty (food and nonfood)	26,96	28,12	25,60	20,50	17,81	17,79	17,11	18,08
Below 1\$ per capita per day	0,20	0,01	0,02	0,01	-	-	-	-
Below 2,15\$ per capita per day	3,04	2,39	2,49	1,55	1,41	0,52	0,47	0,22
Below 4,3\$ per capita per day	30,30	23,75	20,89	16,36	13,33	8,41	6,83	4,35
Relative poverty based on expenditure**	14,74	15,51	14,18	16,16	14,50	14,70	15,06	15,12

Source: TURKSTAT, Results of 2009 Poverty Study, (Accessed) <http://www.tuik.gov.tr>, 06.01.2011

\*\*It is based on the 50% of equivalised median consumption expenditure.

The fact that the poverty rate which is based on food and nonfood expenditures showed a declining tendency in the period of 2003-2006 can be explained by the high economic growth and relatively low food inflation in this term. In Turkey, food inflation was under the consumer price index till the middle of 2007 and had

a role to curb the general price index. The slowdown in economic growth and the rise in food prices in connection with the global food price shock brought about a stop in the declining trend of poverty rate, which continued till 2007. How do the increases in food prices effect food expenditures, which have the biggest share in the budget of the people defined as the first 20% quintiles ordered by consumption expenditure? The answer of this question takes place in a study which uses household budget survey. In this study, the change in real expenditures is calculated by adjusting the nominal food expenditures of the people defined as 20% quintiles according to consumer price index and the number of households. To the results of this study, food expenditures increased 25% in the period of 2003-2006 in parallel with the declining trend in poverty rates; food expenditures declined 2% in 2007 and rose 1% in 2008. (Gürsel, Altındağ, 2010:1-5) The consumption basket composition of reach and poor people are different from each other. In the budgets of poor people, expenditures like food and housing take an important place. Conversely, these expenditures correspond to a more limited part of the reach people's budgets. Consequently, the more the inflation is high in the compulsory expenditures the more the poor people are effected by this case. (Gürsel, Altındağ, 2010:2) Increasing unemployment rates as a result of global economic crisis along with the increasing food prices from the middle of 2007 brought about nearly a 1 point increase in the poverty rates in 2009 as compared with the previous year.

After the economic crises in 2000 and 2001, social benefits have played an important role to struggle against poverty in Turkey. Turkey's social security legislation has a lot of laws and institutions which are based on these laws, regulating the social benefits and services field. In connection with this case, the criteria to benefit from the social aids is not clear enough to avoid subjectivity. (Arıcı, 2005: 1) Among the institutions in social benefits and services, General Directorate of Social Assistance and Solidarity has an important place and implements its activities through the foundations of social assistance and solidarity. While the resource allocated to the periodic aids from Social Assistance and Solidarity Promotion Fund was 96.613.000 TL in 2002; it reached 538.449.000 TL in 2010. (SYDGM, 2011:77) The percentage of "social benefits and payments without social contributions", which is among the public sector social expenditure items, in gross domestic product reached 0,71% in 2009, while it was 0,24% in 2002. ( DPT, 2010)

To support the structural adjustment programme after the economic crises in 2000 and 2001, Turkey signed Social Risk Reduction Project Loan Agreement in September 14, 2001 with the World Bank. With this agreement, social benefit

system is aimed to be strengthened; the negative effects of the reform programme on society are aimed to be reduced. With this agreement took effect in November 28, 2001, 500 million \$ derived from World Bank allocated to the use of General Directorate of Social Assistance and Solidarity.

The aim of Social Risk Reduction Project is to develop effective policies to struggle against poverty problem becoming more important after the economic crises and to strengthen the institutional capacity of public institutions which implement these policies. SRRP consists of 4 components: Quick help, Conditional cash transfers, Local enterprises, and Institutional development. Within the context of conditional cash transfers, the families who do not register their children for school, who can not send their children to school, and who can not take their children to health care organizations regularly or the pregnant who can not procure their health controls regularly by reason of poverty are aimed to be supported economically. Thus, a regular social benefit system is intended for the poor people to improve the basic health and education services. (DPT, 2007:30,31) SRRP, which was put into effect in 2002, ended in March 31, 2007. Project support within the context of local enterprises component and the health and education benefits within the context of conditional cash transfers component in SRRP have been continued through the resources of Social Assistance and Solidarity Promotion Fund since March 31, 2007.

#### **4. FIELD RESEARCH REGARDING ABSOLUTELY POOR IN ANKARA**

##### **4.1. The aim of the field research**

The aim of the field research is to try to identify the positive/negative change in the living conditions of absolutely poor in the framework of the effects of economic crises, positive progress in the economy and the leading social policies to struggle against poverty in the process begins from the year 2000 to nowadays. In other words, we try to determine whether the poverty deepened or not. We also try to question the beliefs of poor about the causes of their poverty, which has a key role to supply the politicians with guiding information regarding what the priority policies are to cope with poverty.

##### **4.2. Questions that we look for the answers**

Do the economic crises make a difference in subsistence strategy of poor people?

- Do the economic crises cause poor people to change their houses frequently?

- Do the economic crises have effects on the decisions of poor people to migrate to another place?

Do the goods in poor households and the years which they get these goods indicate an improvement in the living conditions of the poor?

What are the indicators regarding education levels and the working conditions of poor people?

How do the poor explain the reasons of their poverty? What are the measures that poor people emphasize to cope with poverty?

#### **4.3. The method of the field research**

In this field research, survey technique, one of the quantitative research methods, was used.

#### **4.4. The population and the sample of the field research**

The population of the field research consists of the people who dwell in eight metropolitan counties of Ankara and benefit from the conditional cash transfers provided by Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundations. The sampling method of the field research is stratified sampling method, which guaranties the subgroups in the population to be represented in the sample. (Neuman, 2007:153) By this method, the number of the households which the survey is conducted is detemined as 618 in 8 counties.

#### **4.5. Data collection tools**

A questionnaire, which is drawn up according to the aims of this study, is used as a data collection tool. Because most of the respondents in this field research are not well-educated the questionnaires are filled in by professional survey takers through face-to-face interview method. The field research was conducted synchronously at 618 households in 8 counties, which constitute the provincial centre of Ankara, in April 15-May 30, 2010, after the pilot scheme during the first week of April.

#### **4.6. The limited horizon of the field research**

In this field research, the concept, absolute poverty, based on minimum subsistence level, is used. In this framework, people who constitute the subjects of the field research are the absolutely poor who can not meet their minimum requirements and receive conditional cash transfers from Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundations.

This field research is limited by the counties which constitute the provincial centre of Ankara and show the characteristics of urban poverty. These counties are; Altındağ, Mamak, Etimesgut, Çankaya, Keçiören, Sincan, Yenimahalle and Gölbaşı

#### 4.7. The findings of the field research

The significant findings that we got from the field research are as the following:

##### 4.7.1. The characteristics of the households

Proportional distribution according to the education level of household head : Primary school graduate:%72,2 Literate but not graduate from a school: %6,8 Illiterate : %12,8	The rate of the households in which a household member migrate to another place since 2000 is %12,5 Among the reasons of migration to another place the rate of “unemployment/financial problems” reason is %3,9
The rate of “gecekondu” (slum) among the house types: %66,3	The rate of people living in the same houses for more than 10 years+since they migrated to this town is %42,9 Among the reasons for people living in their houses for shorter periods;
The ownership rate of television, washing machine and refrigerator is %92,6 on average The period 2003-2007 took place on the top to get these goods: %38,3	The rate of “renting failure+financial problems” is %11,3 The rate of “insufficiency of the houses” is %39,1

As it is seen from the table above, the education level of the poor people is low. The term of 2003-2007 which shows a stability in economic growth sticks out for the poor to get some goods like washing machine, refrigerator and television. The responses of poor people to the migration question asked in connection with the economic crises show that there is not a strong tendency to migrate. The existence of stability conditions of poor about the living period in their houses is another result which stands out.

#### 4.7.2. The working position of household head

The rate of the households which household heads do not work:%71,4
The rate of the households which household heads work: %28,6 The rate of household heads who are casual laborers and who work temporarily/part-time /seasonal: %71,8
The rate of households in which household heads have health insurance: %88 The rate of the household heads who have health insurance via green card is %92,2
The rate of household heads who haven't been working for more than 3 years: %74,9 The rate of household heads who are not working but looking for a job is %82,9 The rate of household heads who are looking for a job for more than 3 years is %70,2

As it is seen from the table above, in the households, almost three-fourths of the household heads does not work. Almost all of the household heads have health insurance via green card. In three- fourths of the household heads who do not work, the term of unemployment is more than 3 years. Among the household heads who do not work and look for a job, the rate of people who look for a job for more than 3 years is 70,2%, which is a considerably high rate.

#### 4.7.3. Living conditions

The years, poor people most widely-got into dept and received benefits are as follows: 2008, 2009, 2010
Among the benefits apart from conditional cash transfers, the poor people most widely-received "fuel support" (85,6%), "food support" (49,7%) and "education support" (25,4%) from Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundations
The period which poor people benefit from "fuel support"and "food support" is considerably long; (4-10 years: %57,9; %58,4)
The rate of the people who receive support from institutions/organizations apart from Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundations is 85,8%; among these institutions the share of the metropolitan municipality is the highest: 95,1%

The period of receiving supports is too long for more than half of the poor in the context of field research. This case indicates the role of the benefits which have a

key role for the poor to live on; on the other hand it indicates a process which has negative effects on the poor to mobilize and develop their productivities.

#### 4.7.4. The opinions and the future expectations

The rate of the people who rely on the efforts of the government to cope with poverty problem in the last 10 years is considerably high: %90,5
The rate of the people who think that they are exposed to social exclusion by their relatives/neighbours/friends is 25% on average
The rate of the people who intend to migrate to their hometowns or to other places within a few years because of the financial problems: 12,9%

In most of the households, in the context of the field research, the people rely on the efforts of the government to cope with the poverty problem after the economic crises in 2000 and 2001. In connection with this case, the migration tendency of the people within a few years because of the financial problems is considerably low.

#### 4.7.5. The opinions of the poor regarding the causes of their poverty and the measures necessary to cope with poverty

The opinions of the poor regarding the causes of their poverty				The opinions of the poor regarding the measures necessary to cope with poverty (From the most important to the least important)	
Causes	I agree (%)	I don't agree (%)	I have no idea (%)	The measures which are necessary to cope with poverty	(%)
Unemployment	90,5	4,4	4,7	Create job opportunities	76,1
Uninsured work	90,6	2,8	6,6	Opening courses to find job	49,2
Being Uneducated	87,2	5,8	7,0	Incentives to set up business	43,0
Low wage	82,8	3,9	13,3	Regular assistance including food, cleaning materials etc.	44,5
Insufficient benefits	31,4	47,9	22,7	Regular cash assistance	44,7

In the households, the poor highlight the reasons “unemployment”, “uninsured work” and “being uneducated” as the causes of their poverty. In connection with this case, among the measures which are necessary to cope with poverty, the

choices “create job opportunities”, “opening courses to find job”, and “incentives to set up business” are in the first three rank.

#### 4.7.6. The results of chi-square tests

In the following results, we find out a statistical relationship between the variables at 5% statistical level ( $P=0.000 < \alpha =0.05$ ):

- While the education levels of the household heads raise, the rate of the people who are unemployed for more than 3 years decreases
- The rate of people who have positive future expectations regarding coming five years is higher for the people relying on the government efforts about coping with poverty; as compared with the rate of people not relying.
- Support expectation of the people who work is lower than the support expectation of the people who do not work

### 5. CONCLUSION

When the poverty rates in the period of 2002-2009 are investigated, it is seen that the poverty rates tend to rise after the terms of economic crises. The poverty rate, which was 28,12% in 2003, was in the declining trend till 2006 and remained at the same level in 2007 and in 2008; it rose again in 2009 by the effect of global economic crises.

In the end of the research field, we got some findings which indicate the existence of a relative improvement in the living conditions of the absolutely poor. The findings which are related to the existence of stability conditons of the poor about the living period in their houses; the sticking out of the term of 2003-2007 for the poor to get some goods like washing machine, refrigerator and television; the belief in the government policies against poverty and the belief which does not indicate the conditons worse than today in the future expectations support our evaluation about the relative improvement in the living conditions of absolutely poor. However, from the findings of the field research, it is understood that the poor highlight unemployment, being uneducated and unregistered employment for the causes of their poverty and also, it is seen that they highlight the solution of unemployment problem to struggle against poverty. In the high economic growth term of Turkey, the insufficiency of job creation and the high unemployment rates require the implementation of economic and social policies to be in coordination to struggle against poverty.

There are some efforts which are aimed at bringing together the disorganised institutions in social security system without contributions. On this way, the

efforts regarding establishing a common data base among these institutions have a significant role. Besides these efforts, considerable steps are taken to determine objectively the people who receive supports. Concluding these efforts as soon as possible and providing the poor with minimum income assurance are unavoidable for the efficiency of social security system.

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