

Student Services in Turkey

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The social dimension of the Bologna Process, as a “soft” reform area, has developed rather vaguely and slowly compared to the structural reform areas of the Bologna Process. Provision of student services has been the only clear means for the social dimension. There are certainly a variety of applications concerning the student services in the Bologna Process countries. This presentation aims at providing an overview of student services in Turkey.

Structure and Organisation of Services

Turkey has a centralised public administration system. Functioning of the system supervised and managed by the central organisations, e.g., Council of Higher Education. This structure can partly be seen in the provision of student services.

The Republic of Turkey General Directorate of Higher Education Credit and Hostels Institution (KYK) is the main responsible institution for provision of accommodation services and financial aid for students. KYK was established in 1961 and since 2010 it is affiliated to the Prime Ministry (it used to be under the National Ministry of Education). KYK is mainly financed through the state budget.

The Higher Education Law gives the responsibility of other student service provisions to the higher education institutions. Universities are responsible for providing social services to meet social and psychological needs of students, i.e., health, counselling, accommodation, food, sports and leisure time services. Provision of these services depends on the institutional resources and initiatives.

Types of Student Services

Financial aid

The KYK provides financial support for university students who are citizens of the Republic of Turkey. Loans and grants¹ are available for both undergraduate and graduate students and are distributed² on the basis of merit and need. There are two types of loans: study loan to support daily expenditures and contribution loan to support paying tuition fees. The repayment instalments for these loans start two years³ after graduation and an interest rate is applied. Municipalities, foundations, and non-governmental organisations can also provide financial aid for students.

¹ The grants are provided since 2004.

² These students are eligible for free accommodation as well.

³ In case of master’s studies, repayment starts four years after graduation.

Currently, all applicants can receive study loan and all short cycle and first cycle students (except students from private higher education institutions and secondary higher education programmes) can receive tuition fee loan. Students with physical disabilities, orphans and institutionalised children, children of martyr and war veterans, national sportsmen, and terror victims receive grants unconditionally. The grants are applicable only since 2004 and rather limited number of students is receiving them.

Services for daily matters

Housing

KYK provides dormitories in 80 provinces (out of 81) for all students. In most of the cases, the KYK devolves the management of dormitories to the universities. In addition to the ones devolved by the KYK, almost all universities provide their own dormitories. Provision of private dormitories has become very popular especially after the recent expansion of the system.

Table Coverage and usage of KYK dormitories

	%of 1 st cycle students staying in dormitories	Total Capacity	In use (average)	% of dormitories in use	Monthly payments (€)
2002	12,06	188187			12
2003	10,66	189747			15
2004	10,56	192361			19
2005	10,07	195626			22,5
2006	9,30	200416	159976	79,8%	28
2007	9,00	203731	156856	77,0%	33
2008	9,05	212357	161484	76,0%	37,5
2009	8,25	225113	182.750	81,2%	42

Source: kyk.gov.tr

Table shows that KYK dormitories are available for only around 10% of the students and do not have high demand, despite the low prices. According to EUROStudent III data, 70% of students prefer other alternatives, such as a private shared apartment or staying with family/relatives. This situation indicates the low quality of the service.

Health Services

In Turkey, all students of state universities receive health services from their higher education institutions, either through the medical faculty of the university or the special medical centres for students and university personnel.

Social services

Emotional, social, educational and career counselling should be provided by the universities. Additionally, higher education institutions are responsible of providing social services to meet social needs, such as accommodation, food, and leisure time activities. To this aim, they

are responsible of building reading halls, cafes and restaurants for students, theatres, sport halls and camping sites. Most of the higher education institutions also offer subsidised food services. In addition to this, depending on the regulations of the municipalities, students get subsidised local transportation.

Challenges

Administrative mismatch

Student services are mainly under the responsibility of universities. This situation is not matching with the general public administration system in Turkey. The whole system is planned and controlled with a top-down perspective, except the student services, which would expectably reduce quality concerns of the institutions. Furthermore, current regulations mainly deal with provision of physical environment only without a concern on the quality.

New Universities

In the last 10 years, the number of universities increased from 73 to 165 and 87 of them are opened in the last five years. This tremendous expansion creates doubts on the quality of education and student services provided in these new universities.

Lack of Data and Monitoring

Lack of data is an obstacle both at the national and the Bologna level. In Turkey, it is not possible to reach detailed data on the student services, e.g. capacity of dormitories in total, details of services provided by higher education institutions, etc. At the Bologna level, the EUROStudent survey currently cannot provide comprehensive data. Insufficient monitoring of the services comes in relation to the insufficient data obstacle.

Opportunities

Despite high dependency on national conditions and dynamics for development of relevant policies to support participative equity, it is possible to develop generic guidelines to this end, like it has been done to support the structural reforms on quality assurance and degree structures. EUROStudent survey can be enlarged and improved to inform the policy processes better.

Conclusion

The social dimension has reflection of populations' diversity on the student body as its main goal. This goal addresses to both increasing enrolment rates and inclusion of the underrepresented groups in higher education. Therefore, student services should also be developed, implemented and evaluated considering the fact that underrepresented groups have different and usually bigger obstacles in participation and provision of services tailored for the majority groups would not necessarily help them.

In Turkey, apart from the need-based scholarship distribution and initiatives for improving study conditions of students with disabilities, student services are provided and structured to meet the basic needs of the majority groups.

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