



## **SUMMARY:**

# **YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT AND YOUTH NEEDS IN TURKEY**

**September, 2024**

The views regarding the research findings in this document belong to the participants themselves and do not reflect the corporate views and approach of Esas Sosyal and Sia Insight.



## INTRODUCTION

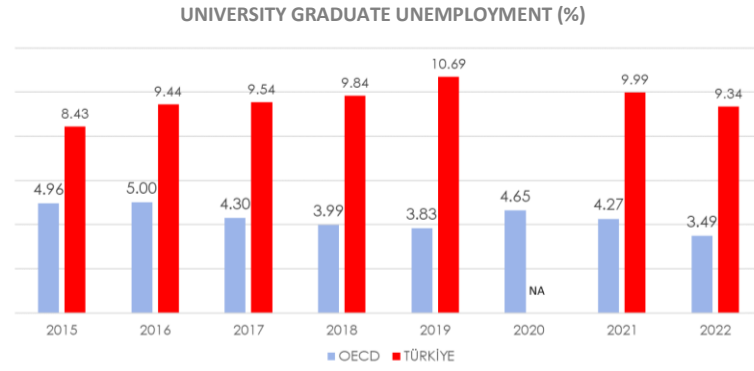
Esas Sosyal, the social investment unit of Esas, one of Turkey’s leading investment companies, has been making sustainable and measurable social investments in the field of “youth employment” since 2015, with the aim of contributing to the development of the country.

Based on extensive field research and a strategic approach to social impact, Esas Sosyal implements solution models for new graduates who lack equal opportunities in employment during their school-to-work-transition and support them in starting their careers as well-equipped and confident individuals – *so far has reached 1,450 young people from 81 provinces in Türkiye.*

Esas Sosyal mobilizes an ecosystem of 4,500 individuals around its mission, including young people, corporates, civil society organizations, mentors, human resources professionals, and academics to offer comprehensive and in-depth support to young people. This approach allows all the key stakeholders to actively engage with the programs and ultimately leading to a long-lasting social change.

Working with a research-focused approach, Esas Sosyal has been utilizing various methods –including household surveys, focus groups, secondary data analysis, and social impact assessments– since its inception. The latest research, conducted in collaboration with SIA Insight, focuses on understanding youth unemployment and employment needs in Turkey. This study highlights the challenges faced by educated unemployed youth from less preferred universities in entering the job market.

## BACKGROUND



In Turkey, the highest unemployment rate is among university graduates, with 1 in 4 young graduates unemployed according to 2023 data, which is approximately 2.7 times the OECD average<sup>1</sup>.

While preventing unemployment among university graduates is important, studies have shown that

not all young people have equal opportunities. Doors that open for graduates of Turkey's top universities are not accessible to those from less preferred universities.

Esas Sosyal conducts research to better understand the situation and needs of these young people. According to research conducted with IPSOS, young graduates from less preferred universities experience longer periods of unemployment—averaging 13 months<sup>2</sup>. A demographic study conducted with Bilkent University also shows that many of these young people are the first generation in their families to have a university degree, often come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and rely on scholarships to pursue their education<sup>3</sup>. After facing a long period of unemployment following graduation, they are often compelled to accept less-desirable positions; working in low-paying jobs that sometimes lack social security benefits. Therefore, it is crucial to continue conducting up-to-date studies to provide equal opportunities for youth and develop solutions to their needs.

## RESEARCH PROCESS

Research is conducted with young people studying in 2-year and 4-year programs at state universities in Anatolia and recent graduates who are unemployed. It explored the employment needs, unemployment status, perceptions and expectations of young people regarding the job market.

**The process involved two stages, qualitative and quantitative.**

**Qualitative Stage:** From December 15 to 27, 2022, the study was completed through 11 focus group discussions with participants from 9 cities (Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir, Konya, Adana, Trabzon, Mersin, Sakarya, Eskişehir).

**Quantitative Stage:**<sup>4</sup> From March 23 to April 25, 2023, the study was conducted in a hybrid format, both online and in-person, with 1,421 young people from 81 target universities across 73 provinces.

1 TÜİK, 2023

2 Esas Sosyal & IPSOS (2015), *Unemployment among University Graduates in Turkey*.

3 Esas Sosyal & Bilkent University (2020), *Higher Education and Employment*.

4 The quantitative stage has been postponed due to the earthquake.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS & INSIGHT

### 1. PRESSING CONCERN OF YOUTH: UNEMPLOYMENT

Young people view employment as the key to holding onto life, which is why unemployment and the fear of not finding a job are among their biggest concerns. Recently, the number of university graduates has increased significantly due to the opening of many new universities; the proportion of university graduates was 13% in 2015 and rose to 24.6% in 2023.

Young people believe that the increase in the number of university graduates in Turkey has led to an increase in educated unemployment. They think that a university diploma has little value unless it is from a "well-known" university. Those studying at lesser-known universities anticipate that they will not find a job for at least a year after graduation, and indeed, the average unemployment duration for graduates is 15 months. This period has increased from 13 months to 15 months compared to before the pandemic.

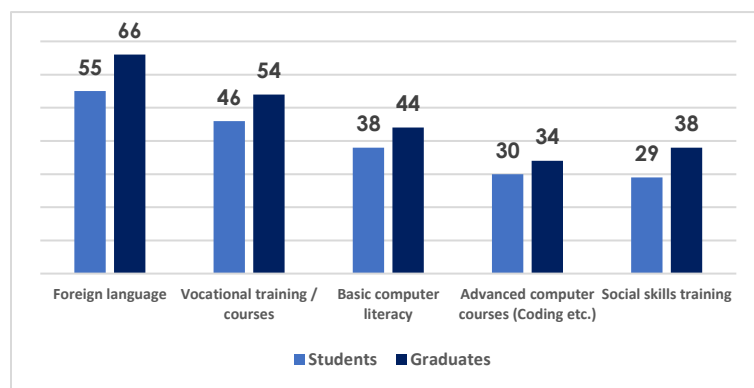
### 2. UNIVERSITY EDUCATION FALLS SHORT IN PROVIDING WORKFORCE SKILLS

Only 1 out of 4 young people feel that their university education is sufficient for their career. The rest find the education provided to be disconnected from the realities of the job market and believe it does not equip them with the skills or competencies expected by employers.

Nearly all of these young people (98%) seek additional external training (such as English, computer skills, coding, etc.) to address this gap. The opportunities provided by the online world make such training more accessible to educated young people.

However, 1 in 2 young people do not participate in activities that would introduce them to the job market and help them develop different competencies, such as entrepreneurship training, idea/project competitions, career days, or school clubs, either because they are not offered or because they are not available through their school's resources.

### 3. ENGLISH IS ESSENTIAL

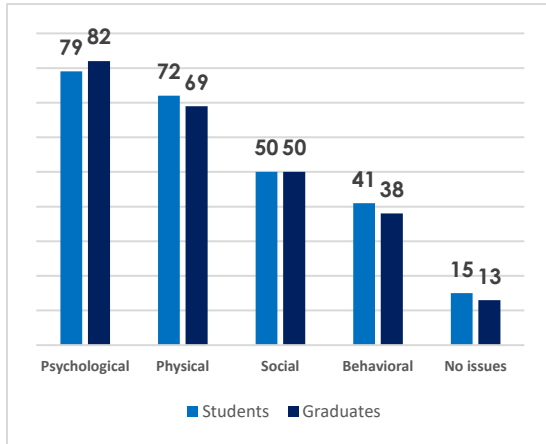


Young people are aware that proficiency in English is a job requirement as fundamental as having a university degree. To address this gap in their education, 55% of students and 66% of young unemployed individuals have participated courses outside of school. On the other hand, 1 in 4 students feels they lack the necessary skills in this area.

#### 4. JOB SEARCH IS AS DIFFICULT AS FINDING A JOB

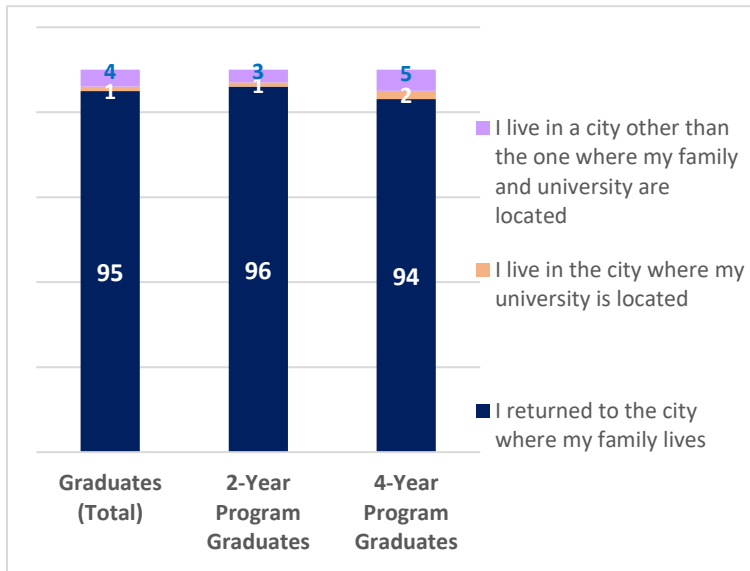
Young people find job searching and applying for positions challenging. 4 out of 10 find job advertisements confusing and 1 in 4 unemployed graduates, who have been jobless for an average of 15 months have never had an interview before. Additionally, 4 out of 10 young people feel insecure due to their lack of experience with job interviews.

#### 5. UNEMPLOYMENT IMPACTS YOUNG PEOPLE’S MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH



Young people's feelings of unhappiness, hopelessness, and anxiety have continued to rise. Because of the fear of unemployment and being jobless, 8 out of 10 young people experience psychological issues, and 7 face physical problems. Psychological issues are described as despair, lack of confidence, anxiety, depression while physical problems are most commonly reported as insomnia, stomach/intestine disorders, and hair loss. Additionally, 1 in 2 young graduates who are unable to find a job struggles with integrating into social life due to the emotional state caused by unemployment.

#### 6. METROPOLS ARE LOSING THEIR APPEAL



Due to the pandemic, increased economic concerns, and the challenging conditions of metropolitan life, young people are increasingly preferring smaller cities, especially if their families do not live in the metropolis. In 2022, almost all young people (95%) who studied in a city different from where their family resides returned to their family’s home after graduation. Additionally, 2 out of 3 students who studied away from home expect to return to their family’s residence after graduation.

## **7. YOUNG PEOPLE NEED GUIDANCE FROM INDUSTRY EXPERTS**

6 out of 10 young people studying at or graduating from lesser-known universities expect the private sector to play a guiding role in helping them understand the business world and facilitate their transition into employment. Compared to previous years, support from the private sector is now more highly valued. There is a particular emphasis on collaboration between institutions; university-private sector partnerships, and the inclusion of private sector professionals in training programs are desired.

## **8. STUDENTS IN 2-YEAR PROGRAMS SEEK MORE SUPPORT**

Young people studying in 2-year programs have more limited access to resources, making them more inclined to seek out and utilize every available educational and employment opportunity.

## **CONCLUSION**

The research shows that unemployment among diploma-holding youth continues to be one of the most pressing issues in our country. Particularly with the increase in the number of university graduates, young people graduating from less preferred universities in Anatolia need more equal opportunities in the job market. As Esas Sosyal, we support young people in transitioning from school to work, helping them start their careers as more skilled and confident individuals through our solution models. We continue to work towards the growth of the Esas Sosyal ecosystem to ensure that the educated young generation in Turkey remains productive and hopeful for the future. Stakeholders joining the Esas Sosyal ecosystem can become part of social change, inspire young people, and increase social impact.