



## Enhancing the Professional Skills Development Project (MESGEP): An Attempt to Facilitate Ecological Awareness

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Concepts change at an incredibly fast rate for human beings and more specifically in the world of education and whence for society. To cite an example, there exist conceptualizations ‘issued’ such as Industry 4.0 or University 5.0. The very standpoint here arguably directs the focus to andragogy “at the brink of the post-anthropocene” (Wallin, 2017) in a rather inevitable fashion. Integrating the salient elements of the notion post-anthropocene into andragogy of Vocational Education and Training (VET) and ensuring the ‘sustainability’ of learning and teaching related practicum in this regard is deemed essential considering “growing ecological awareness in the era of the Anthropocene could also productively influence all spheres of life-ecology, economics, education, politics and the social sphere—in the interest of sustaining the planet” (Le Grange, 2019, p.1). In this direction, this paper intends to discuss the optimal means through which the VET given to the marginal groups in Türkiye as part of a project entitled “Professional Skills Development Project (MESGEP)” can be enriched towards raising an awareness about the climate crisis and about the other ecological issues awaiting to be confronted. It is hoped that with the new amendments to made to the available curricula, the individuals as the participants of the project can gain more consciousness about ecological crises and adopt the relevant skills. Thereupon, it is thought that educating disadvantaged groups in this way will not only point to equal opportunity in education but also attempt to alter the previously held belief, which pinpointed environmental pollution is indeed an externality of education.

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### Introduction

Today, it appears that knowledge-based economies have started to emerge. This surely has caused the labor force to become more qualified and novel skills to be created and referred to (Affero & Razali, 2013). The fact that the labor force has incomparably higher knowledge and skills compared to the past years has made it mandatory to keep it constantly updated allowing for the ways for it to renew itself in a sustainable fashion (Fazekas & Field, 2013). From this point of view, to have international-level qualifications and to compete in the global market, the vocational labor force in Türkiye, as is the case for most of the other

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countries of the globe, should be of high quality, continuous and accessible. Within this frame of reference, the field of education that is effective in developing labor force of such nature is vocational and technical education. Vocational education not only meets the need for a qualified labor force, but also has this essential function in raising socioeconomic conditions and ensuring social justice (Lukas, 2013; World Bank, 2019). In this respect, with its societal aspects, vocational education is closely related to all segments of society, in particular to those requiring particular policies or disadvantaged groups. With vocational training services, it becomes possible to benefit equally from vocational training opportunities within the lifelong learning approach.

The solution to unemployment, which indeed constitutes a significant problem in Türkiye, is through assuring widespread and quality vocational education. At the same time, rapidly changing technological knowledge, production methods and developments in business life force those who are already with a profession to constantly renew their knowledge and skills and even change their profession (Özer, 2018). These reasons lead to implementing and disseminating endeavors of varying sort that will provide the unskilled labor force with knowledge and skills and give them a profession. As a matter of fact, with the lifelong learning approach, it becomes essential for employees to progress in their professions, to adapt to scientific and technological advancements, and for those who plan to shift their profession to acquire new professions with programs suitable for their interests and desires (OECD, 2014; 2017). So as to be able to warrant and maintain social welfare in Türkiye, to enhance the quality of the professional labor force, and to enable all segments of the society to take an active role in the development of the country a “*Professional Skills Development Project (MESGEP)*” has been implemented (URL-1, 2023). MESGEP project aims to provide young unemployed, disadvantaged groups with professional skills, along with those who wish to alter their profession with a different one taking into account their own interests and abilities. The project also intends to help gain vocational qualifications by boosting the existing skills of individuals to higher levels, and to improve the quality standards of managers and teachers in vocational and technical education institutions (MESGEP, 2013a). The fact that the project attempts to offer skills that will transform the lives of various groups requiring the planning and application of special policies, such as disabled people, convicts, migrants, and orphans, and women victims of violence, carries a unique role and thusly value. This is simply, and firstly, due to the fact that the welfare and happiness of individuals and societies depend on each individual receiving education in line with their interests and abilities (Wheelahan & Moodie, 2016). The MESGEP project, which targets a change in the lives of many, particularly the members of disadvantaged groups, struggles to remove the barriers that prevent them from participating actively in economic and social life enabling them to hope for the future. This hints at the fact that the project owns a structure that paves the way for multidimensional development. The project works toward developing the vocational skills of individuals in line with their interests, wishes and needs and to create an awareness of social responsibility.

The main objective of MESGEP is to plan and contribute to implementing vocational training activities presented to individuals necessitating the use of special policies. In this context, 35 pilot provinces were first identified, and it was organized to identify and group the project target group in the said provinces numerically, to determine the interests and expectations of the target group and to spot the urgent needs of the sector in the pilot provinces in question (MESGEP, 2013b). With MESGEP, the target groups were classified under two categories. These groups are entitled “*individuals with special needs*” and “*other disadvantaged groups*”. Whilst the former group includes the orthopedically, mentally, visually and hearing

impaired, the other disadvantaged groups are composed of convicts/ex-convicts, migrants, orphans in need and women who have left their homes due to domestic violence. With the MESGEP project, vocational courses were designated for groups requiring special policies at the provincial level, the existing curricula were developed, education and training environments were revised, and in-service training of the relevant teachers was designed. Alongside these, employment opportunities for groups requiring special policies are elevated supporting them to become self-sufficient, productive and peaceful individuals.

### **More into the Professional Skills Development Project (MESGEP)**

In this era, the education and employment of groups requiring special policies in professional life is amongst the priority issues in Türkiye and actually for the other developing countries of the world. Due to the differences in physical, social, and mental characteristics of groups requiring special policies, they may sometimes experience problems while forming a workforce in society (Çiğdem, 2019). National and international work is carried out in the related field to improve the quality of life and labor force opportunities of groups requiring special policies. MESGEP project is one of these projects. Within the scope of the MESGEP project, 35 pilot provinces were first selected. Vocational training services were planned and implemented for eight disadvantaged groups in these cities. To this end, the following targets were determined first:

- (1) Identification and categorization of the target group in the pilot provinces,
- (2) Determining the interests and needs of the target audience,
- (3) Identifying the prioritized and urgent needs of the sector in the provinces where the target group is located.

With the MESGEP project, groups requiring special policies are divided into two groups called “*individuals with special needs*” and “*other disadvantaged groups*”.

The first group consists of the following individuals:

- Orthopedically disabled
- Mentally disabled
- Visually impaired
- Hearing impaired.

“Other disadvantaged groups” contain:

- Convicts/former convicts
- Migrants
- Orphans in need
- Women who have left their homes owing to domestic violence.

One of the methods used to facilitate the participation of groups requiring special policies in professional life and to expand employment areas in Türkiye is the compulsory employment quota. With this method, businesses of a certain scale must employ a certain proportion of disadvantaged individuals. With this regulation, private enterprises with 50 or more employees in Türkiye are obliged to employ 3% of their staff and public enterprises are obliged to employ 4% of their staff with special needs. In addition to these regulations, public enterprises have to employ 2% ex-convicts (URL-2, 2023). When the studies in the literature



are analyzed in this direction it seems that most employers stated that they hire disadvantaged individuals adopting a humane approach. Although this is a positive achievement for disadvantaged individuals, it is not a systematic path to be inclusive.

Further, nowadays the global level of competition has forced employers to turn to a more efficient workforce. When evaluated vis-à-vis disadvantaged groups, it is clearly seen that new and adequate vocational skills must be acquired to take part in this competitive environment. With the MESGEP project, several arrangements have been made in education and training to support the inclusion of groups requiring special policies in the labor force (MESGEP, 2013b).

Organizing Educational Environments in a Way that People with Special Needs can Benefit From: These individuals who think educational environments are not suitable for them are mainly people who have difficulty hearing. Expecting this problem to be solved immediately is recognized as the right of these individuals.

Curriculum Development for Disadvantaged Groups: It is not considered very much appropriate to prepare a separate program for disadvantaged groups. Instead, differentiated and innovative methods can be utilized in line with the needs of individuals using the right techniques. Because it is not enough to solely equip disadvantaged groups with vocational skills and let them enter business life. From this perspective, new modules should be added to the current curricula of vocational courses, considering individuals' characteristics.

Preparation of Individualized Education Programs: Disadvantaged individuals have different learning speeds and styles from other individuals. For this reason, it is deemed necessary to prepare and disseminate individualized education programs suitable for disadvantaged individuals.

Identification of Job and Occupational Areas for Disadvantaged Individuals: Although disadvantaged individuals are secured by law to an extent, this is sometimes not just enough. Employment quotas and employment obligations can solve problems up to a certain point. For disadvantaged individuals to be able to compete with other individuals professionally and technically it is vital to identify the fields of work and occupations in which they can compete.

Dissemination of Job and Vocational Counselling Services: Job and vocational counselling has an essential place in determining the employment rate since it is known that the target group that cannot receive adequate counselling services constitutes approximately one-fourth of the total labor market. Studies should be initiated to train specialists in job and vocational counselling and meet their needs.

Disadvantaged Groups' Entry into Professional Life after Receiving Education: The line of literature portrays that disadvantaged groups become a part of the labor market at later ages. The main reason behind this is not surprisingly their disadvantages. In this regard, disadvantaged groups should be backed up to enter into business life right after getting education.

Positive Discrimination: When disadvantaged groups are delved into, it is observed that women have lower employment opportunities in almost all the fields. A study conducted by the World Health Survey recently have determined that merely 53 percent of disabled men and 20 percent of disabled women are employed. This implies that, priority policies should be

decided on for general education and vocational training to escalate the employment rates of disadvantaged women.

*Establishing Co-operation with Enterprises:* It is known that enterprises open up job vacancies for groups requiring special policies. However, it is not found sustainable. It is eminent to raise more awareness and inform the enterprises of this.

### **Protection of the Legal Rights of Groups in Need of Special Policy**

In Türkiye, the rights of groups requiring special policies are guaranteed by national and international laws. Accordingly, the Constitution of the Republic of Türkiye emphasizes in Article 10 that everyone is equal before the law and that the state has obligations, especially in realizing equality between women and men. Apart from this, with Article 48, all individuals gain the right to work and make contracts in any field they wish. Article 50 of the Constitution stipulates that no one shall be forced to work in jobs unsuitable for their age, sex, and strength. Particularly, minors, women and those with physical and mental deficiencies are specially protected regarding working conditions. As can be seen, groups requiring special policies are protected by numerous constitutional rights. At the international level, the employment rights of all disadvantaged groups viz. people with special needs, are protected. *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights* announces that everyone has the right to work, to choose the work of their own free will, to work under fair and favorable conditions, to demand equal pay for equal work, and to be reimbursed at a level that will warrant a decent living for themselves and their family. *The European Convention on Social Rights* protects the right of persons with disabilities to independence, social integration, and participation in social life. This convention was prepared to take necessary measures to ensure the orientation, education, and vocational training of disabled people (MESGEP, 2013b).

### **Vocational Training of Groups in Need of Special Policies**

Vocational training of groups requiring special policies is analyzed under six titles. These are vocational training for people with disabilities, individualized training programs, convicts/ex-convicts, migrants for security reasons, orphans in need and women who have left their homes because of domestic violence.

#### ***Vocational training of groups in need of special policy***

The placement of people with disabilities in appropriate jobs and making sure that they are permanent are among the critical issues that remain up to date today. Disabled people experience main problems in terms of job placement. These problems cluster under these:

- (1) Pre-employment preparation (education, vocational training, and rehabilitation),
- (2) Job search process and job placement,
- (3) Problems encountered during working life.

A fair number of studies examine the problems of vocational training and employment of disabled individuals (Karataş, 2001; Keating, Medrich, Volkoff & Perry, 2002). Although the developments in science and technology in the last 20 years have facilitated the transition process of disabled individuals to work life, there are still many ongoing problems. One of the key issues in this respect is job training programs for disabled people. Vocational training programs for the disabled should be handled as a whole (Baran & Cavkaytar, 2007). In this framework, preparation for work, evaluation of the performance of the disabled individual,



gaining appropriate skills, appropriate job placement, sustainability of the job, monitoring and evaluation steps should gradually be integrated into the program. In Türkiye, vocational training for disabled people is conducted in vocational schools affiliated with Republic of Türkiye Ministry of National Education (MoNE).

Students attending vocational schools gain theoretical knowledge, be a part of applied vocational training, and culture courses. At the same time, technical skills are also gained through these courses. Individuals with disabilities carry out their cultural and vocational training in a complete manner. These trainings are given one day a week at the centers. Skill training is given in enterprises four days a week. Students already placed in a job are subject to monitoring and evaluation by coordinator teachers after school. As part of vocational education, there are also vocational high schools for the hearing, orthopedically and visually impaired. With the development of information technologies in recent years, the knowledge, skills, and competence levels of individuals rather than disability groups are taken into consideration more in vocational training and job placement. Today, technologies developed especially for the visually impaired can eliminate many disabilities (MoNE, 2018a).

### ***Individualized education programs***

The education of individuals with disabilities and the skill areas they need differ from those of other individuals. This situation has indirectly led to the need for the preparation of Individualized Education Programs (IEP). Thanks to IEPs, the occupational options of individuals with disabilities have increased, and individuals with disabilities can make their own choices and freely choose their occupational decisions without depending on anyone. As a result, the understanding of placement in occupations suitable for their performance levels or physical characteristics has developed, and their qualifications have been brought to the forefront in job placement. In the World Disability Report (2011), it was emphasized that individuals with disabilities should receive training such as peer education and guidance in addition to the training they receive in vocational institutions.

### ***Vocational training of convicts/ex-convicts***

There are some problems in returning to everyday life for those sentenced for different reasons, who have been in prison, and those who have been released after their sentence. In addition to problems such as adaptation to society, regaining self-confidence and respect, a significant difficulty is the issue of having a job. Because without having a job, economic income cannot be obtained. It is challenging for ex-convicts to find a job in society compared to other individuals. Because employers may at times hesitate when offering a job to an ex-convict. However, among the essential duties of the social state is to provide employment and social security rights to convicted individuals (Koçak & Altun, 2010).

Vocational training has an essential place in the socialization of convicted individuals. With vocational training, individuals can gain knowledge, skills, attitudes, and work habits. Aside from this, the recidivism rate of individuals who gain vocational qualifications decreases, and these individuals can adapt to society more quickly. In Türkiye, there are a number of course programs for convicts in penal institutions to improve their vocational training (Betam, 2010). Vocational courses such as natural gas and sanitary installation, carpentry, textile, blacksmithing and greenhouse cultivation can be easily provided in penal institutions. Moreover, it is also possible for individuals whose conviction period has expired to do some professions with short-term vocational training courses. Some laws have been enacted in Türkiye to reintegrate convicts into society and contribute to the vocational labor force.

Accordingly, workplaces employing 50 or more workers must use a certain proportion of convicts.

### ***Vocational training of those who migrate***

In Türkiye, people working in many fields have had to migrate due to the lack of security in their region. In a study conducted by Aksoy (2006), it was declared that the number of those who migrated on account of terrorism was 87.5 per cent. Accumulated literature depicts that individuals who migrate for security reasons experience significant problems in cities, ranging from social cohesion to unemployment. Together with this, these problems become more diverse with the addition of economic problems and unemployment (MESGEP, 2013b). These migrants, who generally migrate to big cities and have to live in environments they have never lived in before, are far from social interaction, have not received adequate education services and do not have the professional qualifications required for business life. In big cities, job fields mostly prefer qualified and specialized individuals. That said, people who cannot keep up with this situation have had to work in temporary and unqualified jobs. This is a major obstacle in ensuring vocational qualifications and creating the demanded labor force. In this sense, a variety of courses and applied vocational trainings are offered by MoNE to provide lifelong learning and vocational qualifications. Public education centers, continuing education centers, lifelong learning and vocational development courses try to complete the vocational training of unqualified individuals.

### ***Vocational training of women and orphans in need***

It is among the duties and responsibilities of the social state to protect individuals whose spouses have died or got divorced and orphans who have lost their fathers. Accordingly, the state implements legal regulations for such women and orphans and tries to bring these individuals back to society. Within the scope of social security practicum, vocational training programs are offered to women and orphans (MESGEP, 2013a). These groups must gain a place in society and meet their economic needs. Municipalities, public education centers, non-governmental organizations and lifelong learning centers can open short, medium, and long-term vocational training courses for these disadvantaged groups to ensure professional development and gain professional qualifications.

### ***Vocational training for women leaving home due to domestic violence***

In Türkiye, women's participation in social life and active participation in the labor force is one of the main problem areas. The employment situation, generally counted as a problem for women, becomes more complicated when violence is involved. Violence here points to the attitudes and behaviors that result in physical, sexual, economic or psychological harm between family members such as children, spouses and close relatives.

In Türkiye, women are protected by the “*Law No. 6284 on the Protection of the Family and Prevention of Violence against Women*” (URL-3, 2023). Albeit factors such as insufficient social policies that support women's participation in social life and the maintenance of patriarchal family relations have a negative impact on women's involvement in the professional labor force. It is then necessary to figure out women's qualifications and enable them to acquire a profession and participate in social life. Increasing women's employment in the labor market will also significantly contribute to economic growth and poverty prevention. There are many vocational training programs for women victims of violence. These programs include psychosocial development, entrepreneurship, handicrafts, digital



literacy, digital marketing, and vocational qualifications.

### ***Vocational steps toward groups in need of special policies in Türkiye***

Groups requiring special policies are those in society that always need extra effort and are essential to be emphasized sensitively. The first serious step taken towards these groups in Türkiye was released in 2000 with the “*Project for Strengthening Vocational Education and Training System (MEGEP)*”. With this project, which was conducted jointly by the European Union and the Republic of Türkiye, the entire curriculum of vocational and technical education high schools between grades 9-12 was reconsidered, and new forms of training modules were created (URL-4, 2023). With the MEGEP project, improvements were made for the professions required by the age and vocational enhancements were provided to train qualified personnel. In the continuation of the MEGEP project, “*Professional Skills Development Project (MESGEP)*” was implemented in 2013. This MESGEP project aims to provide groups requiring special policy to acquire a profession by taking into account their interests and abilities and to increase these skills to higher levels. In this direction, a needs analysis was performed for disadvantaged individuals. Needs analysis includes migration experience and social support, job search process, skills, and skills tendencies. With the needs analysis, comprehensive studies were carried out in 35 pilot provinces on population ratio, education services, target group, vocational courses, and types of vocational courses for disadvantaged groups. When the needs analysis report is examined, it is understood that the number of groups requiring special policies is relatively high, and they can form an adequate labor force if they are integrated into society. At the same time, it is clearly stated that these groups can meet the labor force that many different professions may need. In addition to these studies, “*Regulation on the Procedures and Principles of Occupational Health and Safety Training of Employees*” (URL-5, 2023) was issued in 2013, and necessary legal arrangements were made to train groups requiring special policies.

In Türkiye, courses and certificate programs have been organized in diverse fields i.e., handicrafts, sports, literacy, computer software, cookery, music, textile within the scope of the General Directorate of Lifelong Learning under MoNE to cater to the professional development of groups requiring special policies (URL-6, 2023). As of 2023, a total of 3772 courses were opened in dissimilar fields, and 2617 of these courses were vocational courses. Again, under the General Directorate of Vocational and Technical Education of the Ministry, textbooks and teaching materials, individual learning materials, curricula, course information forms and certificate programs were prepared for 9-12 grades for vocational education (URL-7, 2023). What is more, the General Directorate of Vocational and Technical Education has initiated important innovations for vocational education by implementing the Education Information Network (EIN), Vocational Material application, My Profession My Life application, and Vocational Education Map applications. With EIN and Vocational Material application, it was tried to meet the educational and material needs of groups requiring special policies. The My Profession My Life application provided supportive services in areas such as vocational guidance and orientation, vocational courses, scholarship and dormitory opportunities, on-the-job training, equipment, and project preparation in vocational education. With the Vocational Education Map, statistics are kept regularly every year, and data e.g., the number of people employed in each city of Türkiye, occupational fields, comparison between fields, and the characteristics of the groups receiving education are shared instantly. This map provides up-to-date information on determining the job fields required by the age and acquiring the necessary skills.



Ministry of the Republic of Türkiye, the Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Services, has implemented the National Employment Strategy (NES), and in this context, action plans have been prepared. Employment-enhancing targets and policies have been determined for tourism, education, labor market, social protection, informatics, construction, health, agriculture, finance, textile, and groups requiring special policies (URL-8, 2023). Many practices, especially development plans, have been unified with the National Employment Strategy, and more concrete steps have been taken. Positive steps have been taken in many areas, such as the participation of disadvantaged women in the labor force, ensuring equality between women and men, improving working conditions, determining vocational training and qualifications to create a qualified workforce, establishing communication channels with employers, and protecting employee rights. The objectives and policies that come to the forefront of the NES are as follows:

**Targets:**

- Women's participation in the labor force will be increased to 41% by 2023.
- Women's unregistered work rate will be reduced to 30% by 2023.
- Open quotas for disabled workers will be filled.
- The long-term unemployment rate will be reduced to 15% by 2023.
- Discriminatory practices faced by employees in business life will be decisively combated.

**Policies:**

- Women's Informal employment will be prevented, and labor force participation rates will be increased.
- The youth unemployment rate will be reduced.
- Labor force participation rates of disabled individuals will be increased.
- Improved policies will be produced by sharing data between institutions.
- Legal regulations on discriminatory practices will be implemented.

***Making innovative additions to the existing vocational and technical education curriculum***

The 21st century has brought many innovations, technological applications and new opportunities that shape our lives. With this being said, this change and transformation has led to the emergence of new skills, new needs, and applications (Hoeckel, 2008). Millions of new sets of data are produced daily, and unlimited content can be prepared with artificial intelligence applications. This undoubtedly affects education services. Digital applications, innovative software and many other innovations have been made available for educational services. Vocational and technical education has an essential place in these education areas. Because vocational and technical education provides the qualified labor force that society needs. While providing educational services, the processes should also be associated with many new concepts that have entered our lives and individuals should be well prepared for life. Some of these concepts are climate change, Anthropocene age and sustainability.

The concept of the Anthropocene is expressed as the human age. This age is associated with the fact that humans started to interact with nature, and over time, the influence of humans began to affect and change nature more and more (Erginsoy, 2022). The impact of the Anthropocene era accelerated with the transition of humans to the Industrial Revolution.



People started to affect nature biologically, chemically, physically, and geologically with the Industrial Revolution and started to change it over time. In the 21st century, rapid population growth, accelerated consumption of natural resources, overuse of air, soil, and water resources, decrease in biodiversity, increase in radioactive wastes and environmental problems are some of the effects of humans. These actions bring along the problem of climate change. The increase in global temperature has led to the melting of glaciers, and carbon and other biogeochemical cycles have led to a decrease in biodiversity. As a result, it has become difficult for the world to be healthy for future generations. These results show that humanity has reached a critical point in its relations with its environment. Although humans are seen as independent drivers of global change, earthquakes, tsunamis, cyclones, and many similar natural events show that this power is sometimes in the hands of nature. For this interaction between human beings and the world to progress in a positive direction, arrangements can be made through education (Ruddiman, 2007). Improvements can be made, especially in vocational and technical education, essential in providing a qualified labour force to society.

In Türkiye, improvements have been made in vocational and technical education with the MESGEP project and framework curricula have been prepared. Improvements have been made in areas such as information technologies, industrial automation, chemistry and metallurgy technology, and renewable energy technologies at 9th, 10th, 11th and 12th grade levels. However, it is seen that improvements have not yet been made in areas such as nature conservation, mining technology, health services, sustainability, design technologies, environmental education, recycling, and waste management. In addition, it has been determined that teaching materials focus on introductory courses (mathematics, science, Turkish) and are insufficient in subjects involving human-nature interaction. In contrast to these results, many certificate programs are opened by the General Directorate of Vocational and Technical Education. These programs include awareness-raising programs such as digital skills, fisheries and aquaculture technology, and food and agriculture control. Thousands of courses are opened annually by the General Directorate of Lifelong Learning to integrate groups requiring special policies into society and take part effectively in the Anthropocene era. Among these courses, it is seen that courses such as cultivation of open-seeded plants, disaster awareness, conscious tree cutting, waste management, ecology and ecological literacy and sustainable agricultural practices are opened. However, these courses are entirely voluntary. Some measures need to be taken to popularize these courses and increase the participation of groups requiring special policies.

### ***Positive outcomes of the arrangements within the scope of adult education***

In Türkiye, the General Directorate of Lifelong Learning regularly prepares monitoring and evaluation reports (URL-9, 2023). In the 2022 report, information on course type, education status, course areas, vocational and technical education courses, courses according to age ranges, courses for disabled and disadvantaged groups and courses for foreigners are presented. The core values of the monitoring and evaluation report include ensuring lifelong learning, implementing permanent understanding, voluntariness, relevance to need, planning, continuity and being open to innovation. According to this report, 60.30 per cent of the courses opened in Türkiye were attended by women and 39.70 per cent by men. In addition, 3.418.012 people participated in vocational and technical training courses. These figures are pretty high. People who want to be trained in vocational and technical fields constitute a serious labor force. At the same time, it is stated that 995.583 people participating in the courses are illiterate. This situation clearly shows an essential obstacle in providing vocational qualifications. When the courses for groups requiring special policies are analyzed,

it is seen that a total of 20.997 courses were opened, and 77.322 people received training from this service. At the same time, the rate of education received by persons under temporary protection in Türkiye in 2022 was determined as 3.535.898 (URL-9, 2023). In this regard, it is once again seen that the number of people in the 25-64 age range who directly affect the labor force is relatively high and how important it is for them to receive adequate education on climate change, sustainability and the requirements of the Anthropocene era. Many national and international projects have been implemented in Türkiye in recent years. These projects are as follows:

#### National Funded Projects:

- Our Work Is Clean Project
- Distance Education Project for Lifelong Learning
- Digital Is My Business Project
- The Secret Is in The Workshop Project
- Türkiye Anti-Addiction Education Project
- Zero Waste and Recycling Project.

#### Internationally Funded Projects:

- European Adult Learning Agenda-6 Project
- Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in Europe
- Social Integration and Life Course Program
- Socioeconomic Empowerment and Sustainability Program
- Increasing Employability in The Renewable Energy Sector Project
- Adult Education Erasmus+ Accreditation
- Lifelong STEM Teaching

As can be seen, many projects are implemented every year within the scope of adult education. Great financial and administrative efforts are made to educate adults, who number in millions. Adult education and the complete training of groups requiring special policies provide positive contributions to all countries of the world, especially Türkiye (MoNE, 2018b). Raising awareness of society, using natural resources with awareness, and preferring renewable energy in production and consumption is of great importance in human and nature interaction. These improvements can also reveal positive results regarding climate change, sustainability and creating a qualified workforce. Considering Türkiye in particular, Türkiye's dense youth population, high labor force potential, the increasing number of groups requiring special policies in the country, the high number of foreign nationals and asylum seekers in the country due to its strategic location makes it necessary to take more conscious and more systematic steps on these issues.

To support the lifelong learning of groups requiring special policies, disadvantaged groups and groups that constitute an unqualified labor force despite being outside these groups and to produce a qualified labor force, a series of procedures must be fulfilled. These procedures are suggestions, and it is foreseen that positive outputs can be obtained when they are fulfilled. Accordingly, the actions to be taken are as follows:

- Determining the rates of the missing labor force by ensuring regular data sharing every year and the cooperation and coordination of different ministries (Ministry of



Family, Labor and Social Affairs, Ministry of National Education, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Ministry of Industry and Technology).

- Regular monitoring of groups requiring special policies in Türkiye and ensuring their permanent and sustainable participation in the labor force.
- To examine vocational and technical education curricula at regular intervals and revise them realistically on the issues required by the Anthropocene era.
- Ensuring centralized follow-up of the courses opened in vocational and technical education and ensuring certification in cooperation with the Vocational Qualifications Authority to ensure professional qualifications in this field.
- Implementing mentoring practices in the education of groups requiring special policies and providing adequate counselling services in the process of finding a job.
- Experts should examine vocational and technical education curricula in the field. Accordingly, 21st-century skills in business areas demanding a qualified labor force should be identified, and new generation skills needed should be defined.
- Ensuring that monitoring and evaluation activities are spread across the whole country in addition to the 35 provinces selected as pilots.
- Supporting curricula with practices rather than theoretical knowledge to create a society aware of the possible dangers awaiting Türkiye and the world in the future (global climate change, thirst, food insufficiency, epidemics).
- Considering the number of people mentioned in the monitoring and evaluation report, it is seen that the number of groups requiring special policies, the number of people taking courses across the country and the number of foreign nationals are considerable. When this situation is managed positively, it is seen that the number of qualified labor force needed can be met to a great extent.

### **Recommendations for the Stakeholders**

As a result of MEGEP and MESGEP projects in Türkiye, a monitoring and evaluation report is prepared regularly every year by the General Directorate of Lifelong Learning. Considering the results of this report for 2022, some suggestions have been made within the framework of vocational and technical education, disadvantaged groups, groups requiring special policies, climate change, sustainability and the requirements of the Anthropocene era. Firstly, it would be helpful to make a general evaluation.

In Türkiye, a total of 454.170 general courses and 174.019 vocational and technical education courses were opened in all fields in 2022. In these courses, 10.166.316 people participated in general courses, and 3.418.022 people participated in vocational and technical training courses. These rates constitute approximately 20% of Türkiye's 25-64 age group population, including the labour force. Regarding improving the labor force capacity, 20% corresponds to a substantial proportion. Although this rate is not to be underestimated, it can turn into an enormous labor force if it is directed healthily and correctly. At the same time, 60.30 per cent of the participants in the courses in Türkiye are women, and 39.70 per cent are men. This situation shows how high the participation rates of women in vocational and technical education are. At the same time, it clearly expresses the rate of support that women will give to the labor force when it is implemented. In Türkiye, at present there are a total of 1.104 general courses and 2.578 vocational and technical training course programs in 75 different fields within the scope of lifelong learning. These results reveal that the labor force waiting to be directed towards vocational education is quite dense. Thousands of books are transferred to digital media every year to increase the quality of vocational and technical education, and individuals are supported economically with material support applications. It is aimed to

make these practices sustainable. Within the scope of lifelong learning, public education centers are the most common organs of the ministries working in the field. Public education centers nationwide organize training and courses in many different subjects. However, while providing these services, public education centers sometimes experience difficulties creating educational environments suitable for the programs and increasing the quality of education. Improvements need to be made in this regard. In Türkiye, maturation institutes have started to be established as a research and development study to disseminate vocational and technical education and ensure the employment of groups requiring special policies. The number of these institutes has been increased to 30 as of 2022. In maturation institutes, it is aimed that especially disadvantaged groups receive vocational training in various fields and accordingly carry out production and training activities. As a result of the general evaluation, the following suggestions can be made to researchers:

- (1) Cooperation and workshops should be organized regularly at regional, national and international levels to solve the problems of groups requiring special policies, disadvantaged groups and groups needing lifelong learning.
- (2) In cooperation with the Ministry of National Education, the Council of Higher Education, the Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Policies and the Ministry of Industry and Technology, vocational and technical education programs should be periodically checked and re-evaluated in accordance with the requirements of the age.
- (3) Researchers should examine the problems that cause loss of labor force, conduct regional and national surveys on this issue and present their results in the light of scientific basis.
- (4) It is necessary to prepare educational content suitable for all segments of society to raise awareness and to make presentations on mass platforms by taking into account the widespread effect of this to raise awareness.

The second group to be suggested after the researchers are the policy makers. Suggestions for policymakers are presented below:

- (1) While determining the country's policy, it is necessary to identify the missing labor force and establish incentive practices and wage policies to bring it to life in many fields, such as education, tourism, agriculture, industry, construction, health, and alike.
- (2) In cooperation with the Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Policies and the Ministry of Industry and Technology, innovative vocational and technical education practices should be implemented, and groups requiring special policies should be included in these policies.
- (3) Whilst preventing labor force loss, it is essential to establish adequate support mechanisms not only for material improvements but also for psychosocial support, spiritual counselling, mentoring, finding a job, ensuring job retention, and ensuring they are sustainable.
- (4) While determining and implementing policies, good examples should be identified at the national and international levels, cooperation should be established, and their results should be evaluated comparatively at the global level. Only in this way will the reflections of the results obtained be qualified.

After researchers and policymakers, the last stakeholder group to be recommended is educators and curriculum developers. Recommendations for educators and curriculum developers are as follows:



- (1) While determining training programs and curricula, the needs analysis study carried out in 2013 and first implemented in 35 pilot provinces with the MESGEP project should be spread throughout the country. With the needs analysis study, the needs of all segments of society, course areas, creation of innovative courses, determination of the missing labor force, and determination of the occupational areas needed on a province and district basis can be provided.
- (2) Training programmes should be carried out in Türkiye and countries similar to Türkiye in many respects and the countries of the European Union. In this regard, taking only developed countries as an example is not enough. Instead, it will be more effective to determine the existing workforce well and to renew the training programs according to the needs.
- (3) Educators and curriculum developers should listen to the opinions of all stakeholders in the program development process, provide a diversity of views and especially the opinions of individuals who need courses and training should be frequently included.
- (4) It is necessary to ensure that educators are vocational and technical education experts. In this regard, cooperation should be established by MoNE, Council of Higher Education (CoHE) and the Vocational Qualifications Authority, and certification should be ensured.
- (5) In Türkiye, training is provided through open education, open high schools, vocational open education, vocational and technical education high schools, public education centers and maturation institutes. However, these trainings are often conducted independently and autonomously from each other. In this regard, implementing centralized practices to monitor the activity at certain stages and ensure their management from a single source can be considered an important issue.

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