6.5 million young people in Türkiye not in employment, education or training

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The May 2026 labour force statistics, released by the Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜ?K) June 30, announced that the official unemployment rate had remained “stable” at 8.2 percent. Among young people aged 15–24, however, unemployment rose by 0.4 percentage points in a single month, reaching 14.8 percent. Among young women, the figure stands at 21.8 percent. Yet these official figures conceal a worse reality.

Calculations based on the same institution’s data show that in the last quarter of 2025, fully 6.5 million of the 24.1 million people in Türkiye aged 15–34 were both cut off from education and unable to find a job.

The calculation of the unemployment rate in Türkiye rests on dubious criteria tailored to the goals of President Recep Tayyip Erdo?an’s government. Above all, the size of the labour force—the sum of the employed and the unemployed—is kept low relative to the working-age population. Under the criteria for being officially counted as unemployed in Türkiye, those who work in temporary jobs for a few days, those who have not applied to the employment agency within the past month, the chronically unemployed and those who have given up hope of finding work are not counted as unemployed.

As a result, the labour force participation rate in the country is only 52.8 percent, far below the International Labour Organization’s (ILO) global average of 61 percent and the European Union’s 75.8 percent. According to TÜ?K’s May data, only 35.3 million of the working-age population of 66.5 million are counted as part of the labour force. The number of those in employment is 32,463,000, and the employment rate is 48.5 percent. In other words, while one out of every two people of working age is not working, the official statistics put the unemployment rate at 8.2 percent!

The rate that must be considered for unemployment in Türkiye is “broad-defined unemployment.” According to calculations by D?SK-AR, the research centre of the Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions of Türkiye (D?SK), broad-defined unemployment in Türkiye stood at 31 percent in May 2026. According to data for the first quarter of 2026, broad-defined unemployment among young people is 36 percent—7.3 percentage points above the EU-27 average of 28.7 percent (based on 2025 annual data). This rate stood at 26 percent in 2002, when Erdo?an’s Justice and Development Party (AKP) came to power. Despite a quarter-century of propaganda about a “growth miracle,” it has risen by 10 points.

Numerous independent studies point to an explosion in the number of young people who are “not in employment, education or training” (NEET). According to the Ankara Chamber of Industry’s (ASO) “Lost Potential” report, one out of every four young people aged 15–29 (25.9 percent) is neither studying nor working; among young women, this figure rises to 36.5 percent. According to an analysis by Bahçe?ehir University’s research centre BETAM, Türkiye ranks first among European countries by a wide margin, with a rate of 22.9 percent in the 15–24 age group. According to figures from the education think tank TEDMEM, the rate in the 18–24 age group is 31.3 percent—more than double the OECD average of 14.1 percent.

Worldwide, in its 2026 report, the ILO, while projecting that global unemployment will remain steady at 4.9 percent (186 million people), acknowledges that the global “jobs gap”—those who want to work but cannot find a job—will reach 408 million, that 2.1 billion workers will labour informally, and that some 300 million workers will live on the edge of absolute poverty, on incomes of less than $3 a day. The global youth unemployment rate has risen to 12.4 percent, nearly three times the adult rate. One in five young people worldwide—roughly 260 million—are NEET, and in low-income countries this rate climbs as high as 27.9 percent.

In China, the world’s second-largest economy, youth

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unemployment reached 17.8 percent in mid-2025. In the European Union, narrowly defined youth unemployment stands at 15.2 percent, while broadly defined youth unemployment—including the underemployed and discouraged workers—is 28.7 percent. In the United Kingdom as well, 1 million young people aged 16–24 (12.5 percent) are NEET, and young people from the lowest-income households are 3.5 times more likely to fall into this status than those from the highest. The lifetime earnings loss of these young people is estimated to reach £300,000, and 124,000 young people face homelessness.

The assault on jobs is being extended through the growing use of artificial intelligence in production. The World Economic Forum estimates that 92 million jobs will be wiped out by 2030 because of AI. In the German auto industry, the destruction of 90,000 jobs is planned by 2030, while US companies announced 1.1 million layoffs in 2025 alone.

As Karl Marx explained in *Capital*, the reserve army of labour is not an accidental byproduct of capitalist accumulation but its lever: the mass of the unemployed is an instrument for depressing workers' wages and holding the entire class under control. Today, the ruling classes are preparing to impose an even deadlier role on the masses of young people: that of cannon fodder in imperialist wars.

The same powers that have already caused the deaths of hundreds of thousands of young Ukrainians and Russians in the war provoked by NATO gathered in Ankara for the alliance's July 7–8 summit to plan new wars in which millions more young people will die. They discussed diverting resources away from education, health care and job creation toward greater rearmament and war, and financing this through social cuts. The NATO powers reaffirmed their pledges to raise military spending to 5 percent of gross domestic product.

In Germany, the new military service law that came into force on January 1, 2026 subjects all men turning 18 to compulsory screening and provides for the activation of conscription if "voluntary" enlistment proves insufficient. The aim is to expand the army to 260,000 soldiers and to triple military spending by 2029. France, Italy and Belgium are expanding their military service programs, while the Scandinavian and Baltic countries are reinforcing conscription.

Opposition to militarism and war is growing among young people. In Germany, high school students in more than a hundred cities have staged school strikes against conscription, declaring, "We will not be cannon fodder." Polls in Germany show that only 16 percent of young people would be willing to take up arms in the event of war. This reflects an awareness that any coming war would be an imperialist and unjust war waged in the interests of the ruling class.

In Türkiye, which possesses NATO's second-largest army, military spending was increased by 7.2 percent over the previous year, and by 94 percent over the past decade. This is the spending of a ruling class that is part of the US-led NATO alliance, that has aided and abetted 35 years of imperialist aggression in the Middle East, and whose expenditures rest on collaboration with these predatory powers.

Young people, robbed of a future in education and in work and being groomed for war, cannot accept such a future. The same objective conditions that are driving the ruling classes to attack social rights and toward war and dictatorship are also fuelling radicalization within the working class and among youth.

A decent job and a secure future is a fundamental right that cannot be guaranteed under the capitalist profit system. The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), youth movement of the Sosyalist E?itlik Partisi – Dördüncü Enternasyonal (Socialist Equality Party - Fourth International), calls on young people and students to turn to the working class—the only social force capable of carrying out the socialist transformation of society, in which the economy will be based not on private profit but on the needs of society. Contact us to build the IYSSE among students and young people in Türkiye and internationally.

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