

**EDUCATION MONITORING REPORT
2014-15
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**



**EDUCATION
REFORM
INITIATIVE**



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Education Reform Initiative (ERI) was launched in 2003 with the aim of improving education policy processes and outcomes in Turkey towards the ideal of “Quality Education for All” through research, advocacy and training. Policy recommendations developed by ERI aim at realizing all girls’ and boys’ right to and rights in education in Turkey and contributing to human, social and economic development of the country. ERI also attempts to serve as an example as to how policy dialogue should be conducted within a contemporary democratic framework by bringing together concerned civil society groups and relevant state agencies to catalyze an innovative collective thought process for education reform policy.

December 2015



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	<i>İDEV, Ankara</i>				



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Education Reform Initiative (ERI) has published the eighth report in its series of *Education Monitoring Reports*, through which it continues to produce objective, evidence-based, comprehensive evaluations regarding education policy in Turkey. ERI thus aims to promote and contribute to evidence-based policy-making processes in education.

Education Monitoring Report 2014-15 is the product of several data collection and experience-sharing processes. Throughout the year ERI has consulted with officials from the Ministry of Education (MoNE) and other stakeholders, visited schools, and consistently monitored current education policies and practices. Furthermore, ERI has reviewed MoNE's *Journal of Announcements (Tebliğler Dergisi)*, analyzed data published by MoNE and other institutions in light of the questions put forth by the report. The desk review and data analysis were complemented with an experience-sharing event held in Istanbul, an opportunity to get teachers' and school administrators' opinions about the current state of education in Turkey. In addition, the consultation meeting held in Ankara, with the attendance of various stakeholders in education, brought the draft report up for discussion. Verbal and written comments received were incorporated into the following revisions and the report was finalized.

The report addresses major recent developments in education under five chapters: governance and financing, students, teachers, content of education, and learning environments. Topics covered include private school vouchers; the transformation of private tutoring centers; levels of access to pre-primary, primary, and secondary education; Syrian children's access to education in Turkey; teacher appointments and transfers in 2014; the 2014 results of Teaching Field Knowledge Test; developments regarding religion in education; distribution of high school students by program type; up-to-date statistics on school facilities; and a review of the current state of school safety, cafeterias, and school counseling services.

Education plays a critical role in improving children's well-being, both for the present and the future. Ideally, a quality education system provides equal opportunities for all children, including the most disadvantaged, and holds the potential to eliminate prevailing inequalities. Along these lines, where does Turkey's education system stand? Do all children have access to education? Who are excluded from the education system? Are we able to provide children a quality education?

Turkey has made great strides in access to education over the past ten years. We see that enrollment rates are on the rise at every level, especially in primary education with a net enrollment ratio of 95% or above since 2007. Despite all these developments, however, certain groups of children are consistently excluded from the education system, or are unable to attend school regularly, even if they are enrolled. For instance, a significant portion of children with disabilities, working children, children of seasonal migrant agricultural workers and Syrian asylum seekers are unable to attend school regularly, if at all.

During the 2014-15 school year, the number of children receiving special education services was 1,935 at the pre-primary, 215,400 at the primary, and 41,770 at the secondary level. This suggests that children with special needs have particularly limited access to pre-primary and secondary education. As per Turkstat's *Population and Housing Census 2011*, 2.3% of the 3-9 and 15-19 year-old individuals have at least one disability, which means that about 70,000 preschool-age and 120,000 high school-age children have at least one disability. According to these figures, only 2.7% of children with disabilities can access early childhood education. Pre-primary education is not only compulsory for children with disabilities by law, it is also critical for early diagnosis and intervention. Therefore we need to ensure that children with disabilities are able to access early childhood education.

Children with disabilities who are able to attend primary and middle school end up being excluded from formal education once they reach high school.

Among high school-age children with disabilities, only 35% have access to formal education. While there are about 100-120 thousand special education students in primary and middle schools, the number drops down to 41 thousand in high schools, which means that children who are able to attend primary and middle school end up being excluded from formal education once they reach high school. Among students with disabilities who are able to continue their formal education through secondary education, the proportion of those who are mainstreamed in regular classrooms is much lower compared to the primary level. In secondary education, while the number of mainstreamed students decreases, there is an increase in the number of students attending special education schools. This indicates that high schools are not ready for mainstreaming yet.

The majority of Syrian children in Turkey do not have access to education, which is their fundamental right. According to the latest data provided by the Disaster and Emergency Management Authority (AFAD), there are more than 1.7 million Syrian asylum-seekers in Turkey,¹ half of whom are children.² It is estimated that 70% of school-age children are unable to attend school.³

Working children are yet another group that has difficulty accessing education. As of 2012, 2.9% of children aged 6-17, in other words almost 450 thousand children were employed while also attending school. About half of the children in this age group (nearly 7 million children) took on household chores on top of keeping up with school.

Working children tend to face more disadvantages compared to their peers. The literature shows that working children, due to their workload, are unable to attend school regularly, devote as much time to studying and social activities as their peers, and face a higher risk of dropping out of school. Consequently, working impacts students' school achievement negatively. Furthermore, not only hours spent at work outside the home, but also doing household chores takes a toll on students' school attendance and achievement.

1 <https://www.afad.gov.tr/EN/IcerikDetay1.aspx?ID=16&IcerikID=747>

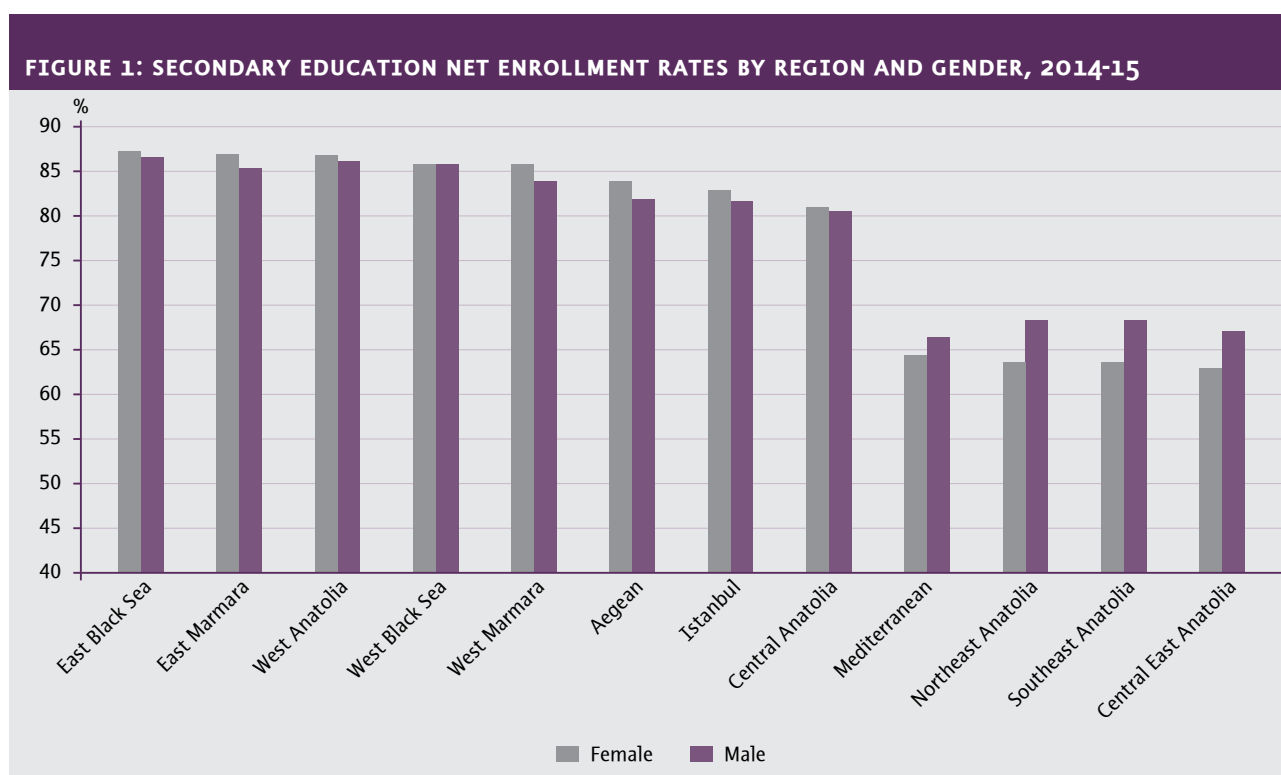
2 AFAD (2013). *Syrian refugees in Turkey, 2013 field survey results*. Ankara: AFAD.

3 OCHA, UNDP and UNHCR (2014). *Regional refugee and resilience plan 2015-16 Turkey*.

Children of seasonal migrant agricultural workers are another example for this. Seasonal migration greatly impacts these children’s lives and education experiences. According to a recent study,⁴ half of the children interviewed (18 years or younger) who work in the fields have already dropped out of school; 57% of those who are in school cannot attend regularly. Even when children do not work in the fields along with their families, their schooling is still disrupted. Among children who do not work in the fields, 21% have dropped out and 43% cannot attend school regularly. As the students get older, they are more likely to drop out of school. Moreover, the drop-out rate is higher for females than males, in all age groups.

In Turkey, children’s access to education is largely monitored through enrollment rates. However, it should be noted that we cannot solely rely on this indicator to get the full picture.

In the 2014-15 school year, access to pre-primary education was on the rise. In primary and middle school, there was a decrease of respectively 3.3% and 0.2% in net enrollment rates. Secondary education net enrollment rate went up from 76.7% to 79.4%. While it is important to monitor enrollment rates, it should be noted that this indicator alone does not help fully understand access to education. In order to analyze it more thoroughly, we need to go beyond enrollment rates; and for that we need more detailed data to be made public. For instance, information such as attendance and dropout rates, the number of active school-age students in distance education, the results of the Transition from Primary to Secondary Education (TEOG) exam and student placements in secondary education, the number of children with disabilities in integrated classrooms aggregated by type of disability, and the number of students receiving conditional cash transfers for education would complement enrollment rates in providing a more detailed picture. Making these data available to the public will allow a better understanding of the quality of education offered and the impact of current policies in Turkey.



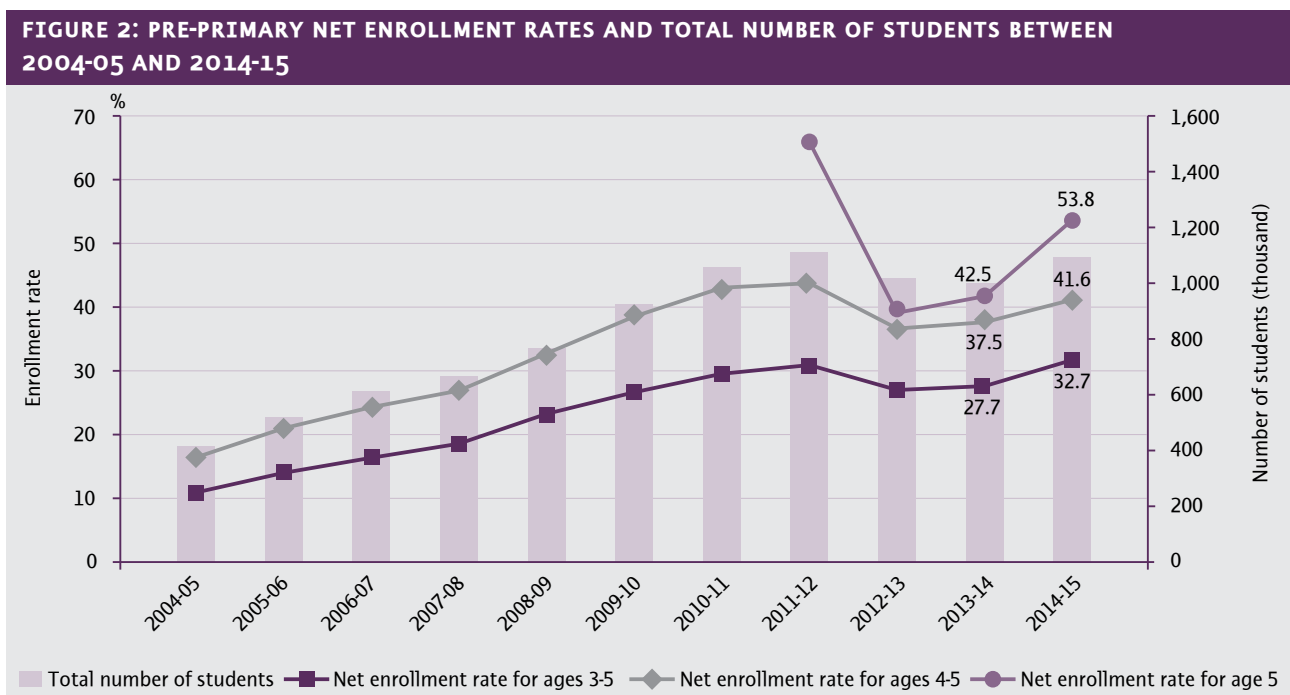
4 Uyan Semerci, P., Erdoğan, E. and Kavak, S. (2015). *Seasonal agricultural work in Turkey: Survey report 2014*. Istanbul: Support to Life.

The transition to the “4+4+4” system has disrupted improvements in pre-primary education. Now, three years into the new system, both the number of students and enrollment rates have started to increase and approach those of 2011-12. Despite these improvements, MoNE has scaled down its target for pre-primary enrollment.

As of the 2014-15 school year, net enrollment rate for the 4-5 age group has reached 41.6%. MoNE’s *Fiscal Year 2015 Performance Plan*, published in November 2014, states that a net enrollment rate of 43% was aimed for this group by 2014-15. MoNE’s previous target was to reach 70% in the year 2014. However, the target had been determined before “4+4+4” was enacted and the primary school starting age was lowered to 66 months; therefore, it needed updating. Although the new target (43%) seems nearer to current access levels and more realistic, it still falls behind the target set by the *Tenth Development Plan* (70%) published in 2013, that is, after “4+4+4” was already implemented. The scaling down of the target suggests that pre-primary education is no longer a priority for MoNE.

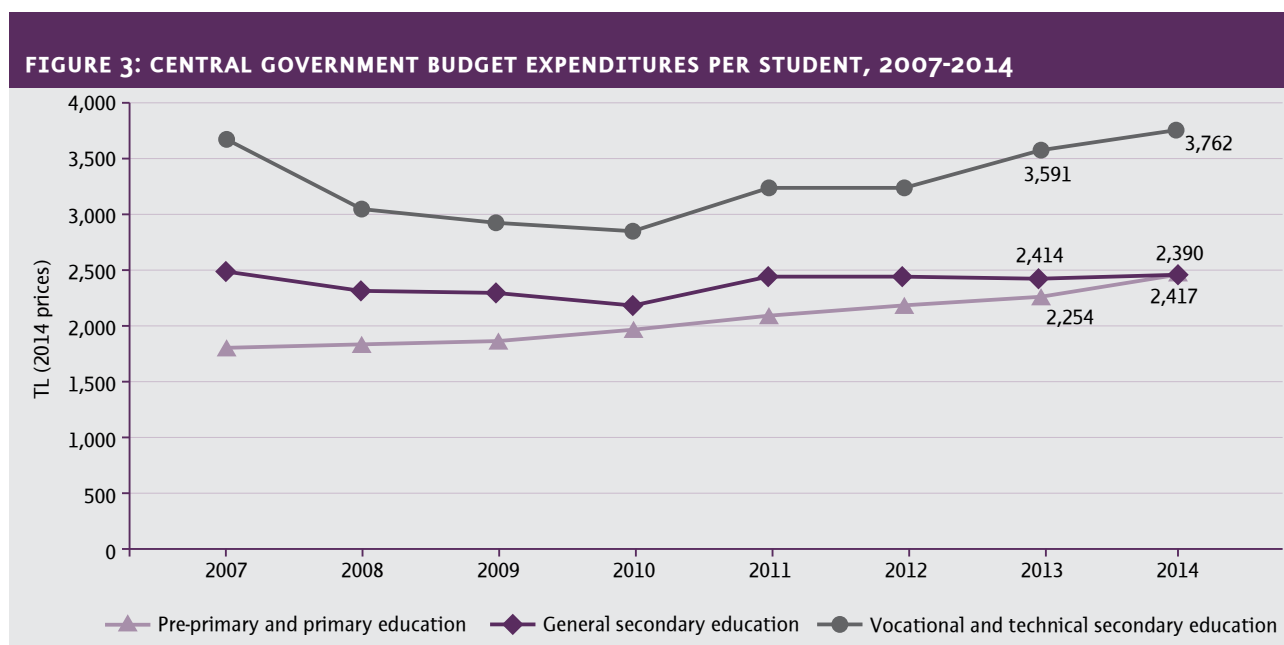
Number of students enrolled in pre-primary and secondary education is on the rise. This is partly due to the increase in the number of students attending private schools. More and more families are turning to private schools. A possible explanation for this is that, families are losing trust in the public education system and those with financial means are choosing to send their children to private schools.

The bylaw change that came into effect in summer 2013 has made it easier for children of 60-68 months to enroll in pre-primary education. For the past two years this has reflected positively on pre-primary figures. Five year-olds have predominantly been directed towards pre-primary education; thus, the number of students enrolled in pre-primary education has risen dramatically.



Comparing the rise in the number of students by school type (public/private) is remarkable; there has been a 26% increase in the number of students enrolled in private pre-primary institutions in a year, while the rate is merely 7% for public institutions. A similar tendency towards private schools is observed in secondary education, as well. While the number of students attending private schools in general secondary education saw a 17% increase, public schools experienced a 9% decline. While enrollment in private vocational and technical secondary education institutions went up by 35%, there was only an 8% increase in public school enrollments.

Starting from the 2014-15 school year, MoNE has extended the voucher program to cover all private schools. Hence, it would not be wrong to say that current policies and practices also support families' increasing preference towards private schools. During the 2014-15 school year 528.6 million TL was allocated for vouchers.



While the method used for determining the students to receive vouchers may benefit students from low-income families, the overall practice falls short of enabling these students to enroll in private schools. After all, the offered amounts are well below what private schools in Turkey charge on average in fees. For instance, vouchers for primary and secondary education range from 3,000 to 3,500 TL. However, as of September 2014, the average enrollment fee is 13,219 TL for private primary schools and 15,979 TL for high schools. Therefore, even if the families receive support from the state, they still end up having to pay a significant amount of the private school fees themselves. In this sense, the voucher program does not serve the most disadvantaged group and needs to be redesigned in order to include children from low-income families.

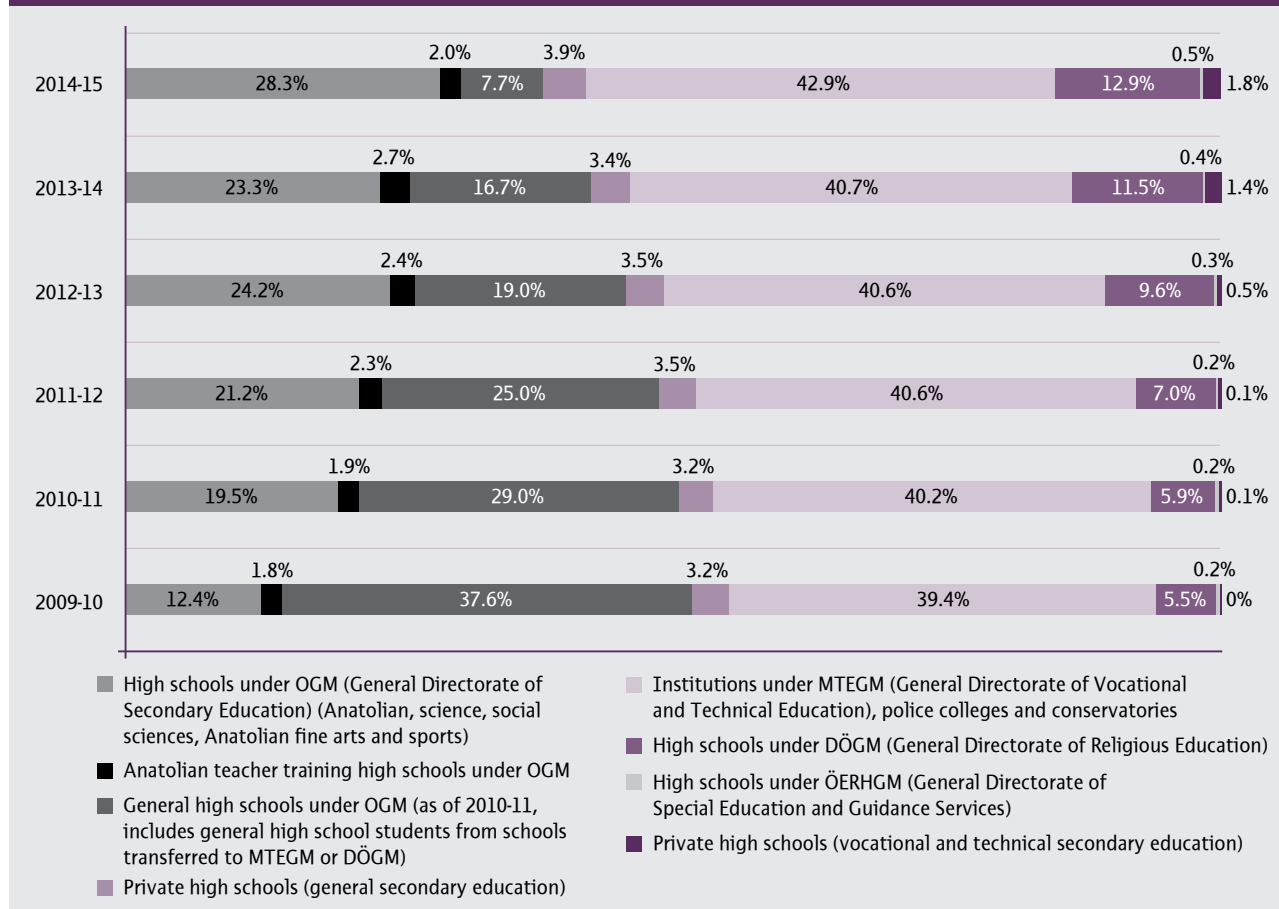
Children from poor families are predominantly concentrated in lower-quality schools. Our education system not only fails to tackle existing inequalities in society, but also perpetuates them.

Socioeconomic status not only determines whether one can attend private school or not, but also affects the type of public school attended. In secondary education, children from low-income families are predominantly concentrated at public vocational schools. Children from the highest socioeconomic quarter, on the other hand, mostly attend science high schools and Anatolian

high schools.⁵ Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2012 results indicate that secondary education programs differ in quality of education offered. Most science high school and Anatolian high school students tend to demonstrate higher levels of proficiency. On the other hand, 90% of vocational school students perform in the two lowest proficiency levels. In other words, children from low-income families are more likely to enroll in schools which are considered lower in quality and which demonstrate lower levels in learning outcomes. Consequently, the vicious cycle of inequality and poverty becomes harder to break.

Vocational high schools, which are considered poorer in quality according to the results of PISA 2012, make up a significant part of secondary education. The number of students enrolled in vocational and technical education out of the overall number in secondary education increases every year. The 40.7% share of high schools under the General Directorate of Vocational and Technical Education has reached 42.9% as of the 2014-15 school year; a total of 1,810,990 students attend these schools. MoNE has taken important steps towards improving the quality of vocational education. *Turkey's Vocational and Technical Education Strategy Paper and Action Plan (2014-2018)* was approved by the Higher Planning Council in 2014. This document provides the necessary roadmap for the improvement of vocational and technical education quality. It is essential that the steps laid out in this document are implemented.

FIGURE 4: DISTRIBUTION OF STUDENTS IN FORMAL SECONDARY EDUCATION BY SCHOOL TYPE BETWEEN 2009-10 AND 2014-15



⁵ Oral, I. and McGivney, E. (2014). *Türkiye eğitim sisteminde eşitlik ve akademik başarı: Araştırma raporu ve analiz [Equality and academic achievement in Turkey's education system: Research report and analysis]*. Istanbul: ERI.

Religion in education is yet another issue that stands out in the education agenda of 2014-15. In 2014, the European Court of Human Rights, after its 2007 Hasan and Eylem Zengin ruling, has once again found Turkey to have violated the European Convention on Human Rights through the Religious Culture and Ethics course.

Despite all the changes made in the Religious Culture and Ethics (RCE) curriculum since 2007, the course in its current state still bears elements of its original “religious education” approach. Under the decision of the European Court of Human Rights regarding the RCE course, Turkey has been obliged to implement an exemption mechanism whereby no one is forced to publicly announce their beliefs. Yet another alternative is to structure the course in the framework of “education about religions” with a pluralistic, objective, and critical curriculum, rather than “religious education”. Such a course, ideally offered as an elective, would have the potential to encourage the coexistence of different sects, faiths, religions, and beliefs—including atheism—on a basis of mutual understanding and respect.⁶

In order to learn and grow, children need safe and well-equipped schools and learning environments as much as they need academic support.

Each year, millions of children, teenagers, and adults spend a large portion of their time in school. Turkey has set clear standards as to the physical requirements that schools need to meet; however, in reality, many schools may fail to meet them. The substandard or inadequate infrastructure affects students negatively. For instance, while there is a significant decrease in the number of students per classroom throughout Turkey, in some regions classrooms are still more crowded than Turkey’s average. Overall in middle schools, the number of students per classroom in Turkey is 34, going up to 42 in Southeast Anatolia and 44 in Istanbul. The rates of last year were, 62 and 54 respectively, which clearly indicates the significant effort MoNE is making in order to increase the number of classrooms. It must be noted that, while there is an increase in the number of classrooms, the number of middle schools has actually decreased. This may indicate that in order to tackle the shortage of classrooms, different school facilities (storage, teachers’ room, music room, etc.) might have been turned into classrooms.

Following the passage of “4+4+4”, in response to the classroom shortage encountered with the increasing number of students, many schools began to have double shifts. In double-shift schools, resources have to be shared by a larger number of students. The method also has negative impacts on children’s school arrival and departure times, as well as their recess times. Two recent studies⁷ indicate that double-shift schooling may have adverse effects in various aspects. For instance, because the first shift starts very early, students tend to miss the first lessons, leading to absenteeism and lost instructional contact time.⁸ Due to changes in school hours, more and more students complain about missing out on breakfast or lunch.⁹

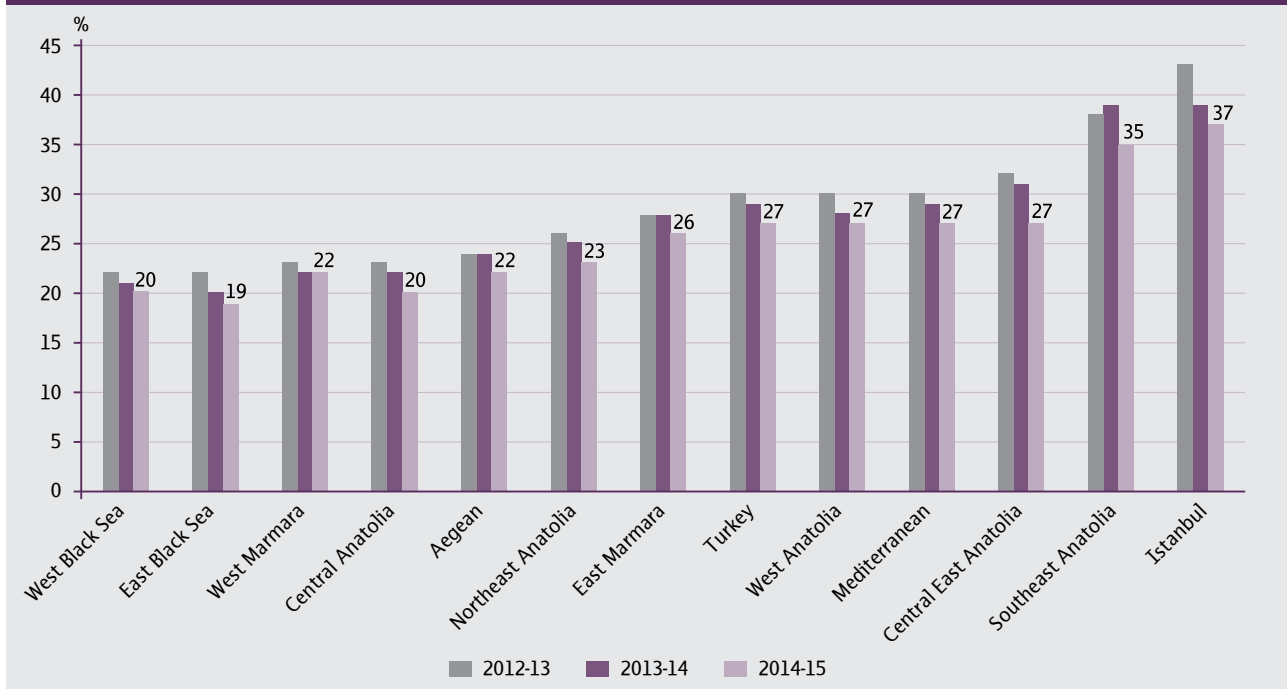
6 Tüzün, I. (2014, September 27). Zorunlu din dersi ve AİHM karar [Compulsory course in religion and the ECHR decision]. *Al Jazeera Türk*.

7 Gürkan, G., Koyuncu, F., Şaşmaz, A. and Dinçer, M. A. (2014). *Temel eğitimin kademelandirilmesi sürecinin izlenmesi [Monitoring the process of regrouping grade levels in primary education]*. Istanbul: ERI; Köse, A., Uçkardeşler, E. and Dinçer M. A. (2014). *Devam Oranlarının Artırılması Teknik Destek Projesi: Şanlıurfa-Mardin-Van-Muş illerinde devamsızlık durum analizi [Technical Assistance for Increasing Attendance Rate of Children: Situation analysis regarding student absence in the Şanlıurfa, Mardin, Van and Muş provinces]*. Unpublished situation analysis report prepared as part of MoNE’s Technical Assistance for Increasing Primary School Attendance Rate of Children Project.

8 Köse et al., 2014.

9 Gürkan et al., 2014.

FIGURE 5: NUMBER OF STUDENTS PER CLASSROOM BY REGION IN PRIMARY EDUCATION, BETWEEN 2012-13 AND 2014-15



The quality and conditions of private school facilities should also be taken into consideration. For instance, although “basic high schools”—former private tutoring centers recently turned into schools—constitute a limited part of private schools in 2014-15, how will their learning environments fare?

According to the current legislation, basic high schools can implement double-shifting. Tutoring centers included in the transformation program are required to renovate their school buildings to meet the criteria set by MoNE by the end of the 2018-19 school year. However, the buildings which do not meet these criteria will still be available for use until the end of 2018-19. Areas such as the teachers’ room, P.E. hall, and library in these buildings are allowed to remain smaller than other private schools’ until 2018-19. The requirement for private schools overall to have a schoolyard of at least 250 m² will not apply for institutions on the transformation list until 2018-19. Similarly, these institutions will be exempt from fulfilling the requirements regarding stair width, disabled access ramps, elevators, ceiling height, hallway width, and water tanks set out by the directive. Having substandard facilities and no schoolyards, combined with double-shift schooling will significantly restrict opportunities students can enjoy at basic high schools. We see that the transformation of private tutoring centers has compromised the quality of learning environments provided to children.

Another problem in the education system is the insufficient hours and resources allocated to counseling services. In some schools there are no counselors at all; in others, the number of students per counselor is quite high. As of November 2014, there are 27,798 practicing school counselors in Turkey.¹⁰ Considering that about 17.3 million students are enrolled in formal education in Turkey, the number of students per counselor would be nearly 650. For a sound

¹⁰ Aktaş Salman, U. (2014, November 14). Öğrencinin rehberi yok [Students have no counselors]. *Al Jazeera Türk*.

counseling and guidance service, the number should actually be around 200-250. MoNE is aware of the shortage of school counselors; a significant portion of teacher appointments in 2014 were carried out in the counseling field. However, the school counselor shortage continues, and it is essential that MoNE continues to address this issue.

Teacher quality is one of the most significant issues on Turkey's education agenda. Quality teachers play a critical role in the academic performance of students. Positive student-teacher relationships reinforce students' sense of attachment to school. In recent years, policy makers and implementers in Turkey have become more aware that teacher quality and quality of education are strongly related. Nevertheless, we are falling behind in taking the necessary steps towards progress in teacher policies.

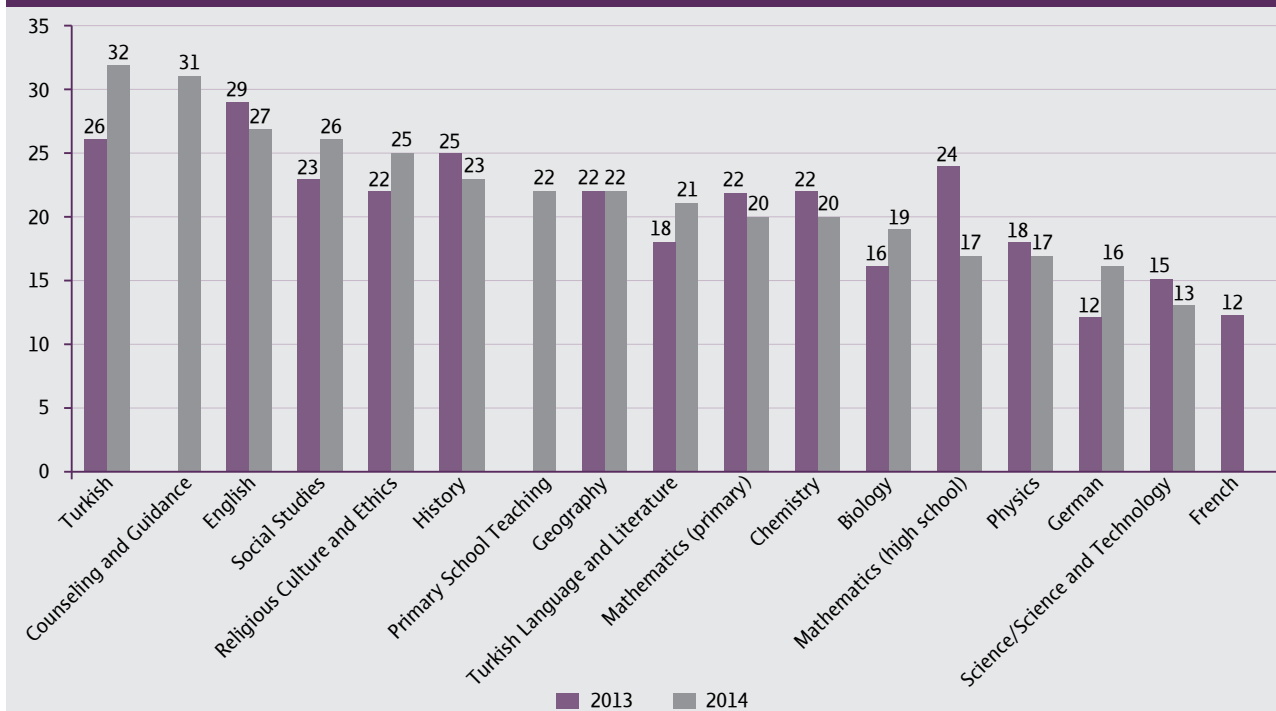
Overall in Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, school principals report that lack of qualified teachers hinders their school's capacity to provide instruction; 10% believe this is the case due to a lack of qualified language teachers, 15% of qualified mathematics teachers, and 3% of qualified science teachers. In Turkey, these percentages are respectively 27%, 31%, and 28%. Therefore, one in every three or four schools in Turkey suffers from a lack of qualified teachers, which significantly disrupts delivery of a quality education. Shortage of qualified teachers constitutes a major challenge in education policy.

Similar to the results of the Teaching Field Knowledge Test (ÖABT) of 2013, the average number of correct answers in ÖABT 2014 also proved disconcertingly low. 32 correct answers out of 50 questions is the highest average in any field. Pre-service teachers in fields of Turkish, Counseling, English, Social Studies, and Religious Culture and Ethics answered at least half of the questions correctly. In all other fields, the average number of correct answers is below 25. In Mathematics (high school), Physics, German, Sciences/Science, and Technology pre-service teachers answered only a third of the 50 questions correctly.

Throughout the year 2014, National Teacher Strategy Paper has not been published. Moreover, neither Teacher Competencies nor the School-Based Professional Development (OTMG) model was put into practice. Publication of the National Teacher Strategy Paper will provide the road map regarding the future of teacher policies. Putting Teacher Competencies and OTMG into practice will help set the minimum standards for teacher quality and ensure professional development is in line with these standards. Teacher quality has to become a priority in Turkey's education policy agenda and the steps, agreed on by multiple stakeholders, must be taken immediately.

Despite MoNE's efforts to rationalize management of human resources, both the imbalance in teacher demand and supply and the high rate of teacher turnover continued in 2014. Moreover, although MoNE consistently tries to balance teacher placements across Turkey, the gap between regions has not narrowed in years.

FIGURE 6: AVERAGE NUMBER OF CORRECT ANSWERS BY ÖABT FIELDS, 2013 AND 2014



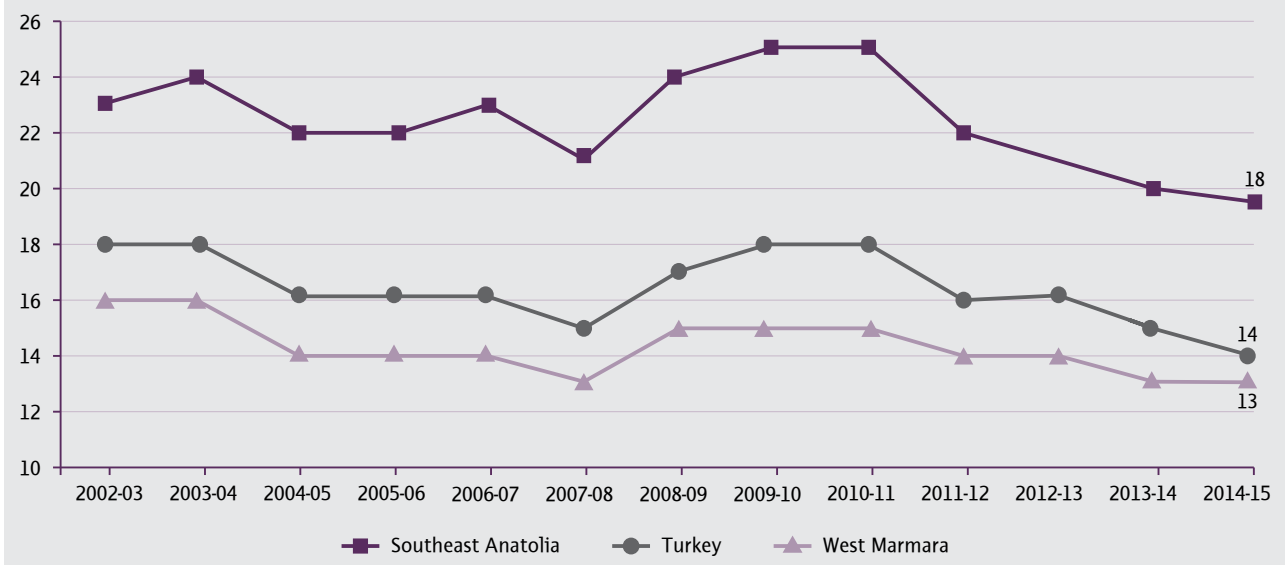
With the approaching general elections of June 2015, in 2014 nearly 50 thousand teachers were appointed and more than 200 thousand pre-service teachers took the ÖABT test with an intention to be appointed to state schools. As MoNE's teacher shortage declines, if the quotas of pre-service teacher training programs are to stay fixed, this will probably further aggravate the imbalance in teacher demand and supply later on. In other words, if the number of individuals that receive university education with the expectation to become a teacher in Turkey stays fixed, and MoNE's teacher demand regularly declines, the current challenges in teacher training and employment will be further exacerbated.

Despite an overall decrease in teacher shortage in Turkey, shortages still prevail in certain regions. In order to make up for the discrepancy between regions, on their first assignments majority of new teachers are appointed to eastern regions where the shortage is severe. However, a big part of the teacher transfers and reassignments are from these regions towards the west. As a result, teachers are appointed to eastern regions for brief periods of time, often moving away to different regions soon after. Teacher turnover affects students' academic achievement and attachment to school. According to a recent study¹¹ conducted in Mardin, Muş, Şanlıurfa, and Van provinces, average student absenteeism is 40% higher in primary schools where teachers work for an average of 0-4 years, compared to those where teachers' average term is 5-8 years. In middle schools, a shorter average term of teachers has twice the effect on student absenteeism.¹²

¹¹ Köse et al., 2014.

¹² Ibid.

FIGURE 7: NUMBER OF STUDENTS PER TEACHER IN SECONDARY EDUCATION, BETWEEN 2002-03 AND 2014-15



In summary, as of 2014-15, some improvement has been observed in access to education, but unfortunately this improvement does not encompass all children. Children from disadvantaged groups still face major challenges in accessing and regularly attending school. Children from low-income families do not seem to enjoy equal opportunities or equal quality of education as their peers. Parents with sufficient financial means, on the other hand, increasingly gravitate towards private schools. Our education system not only fails to tackle existing inequalities in our society, but further accentuates them.

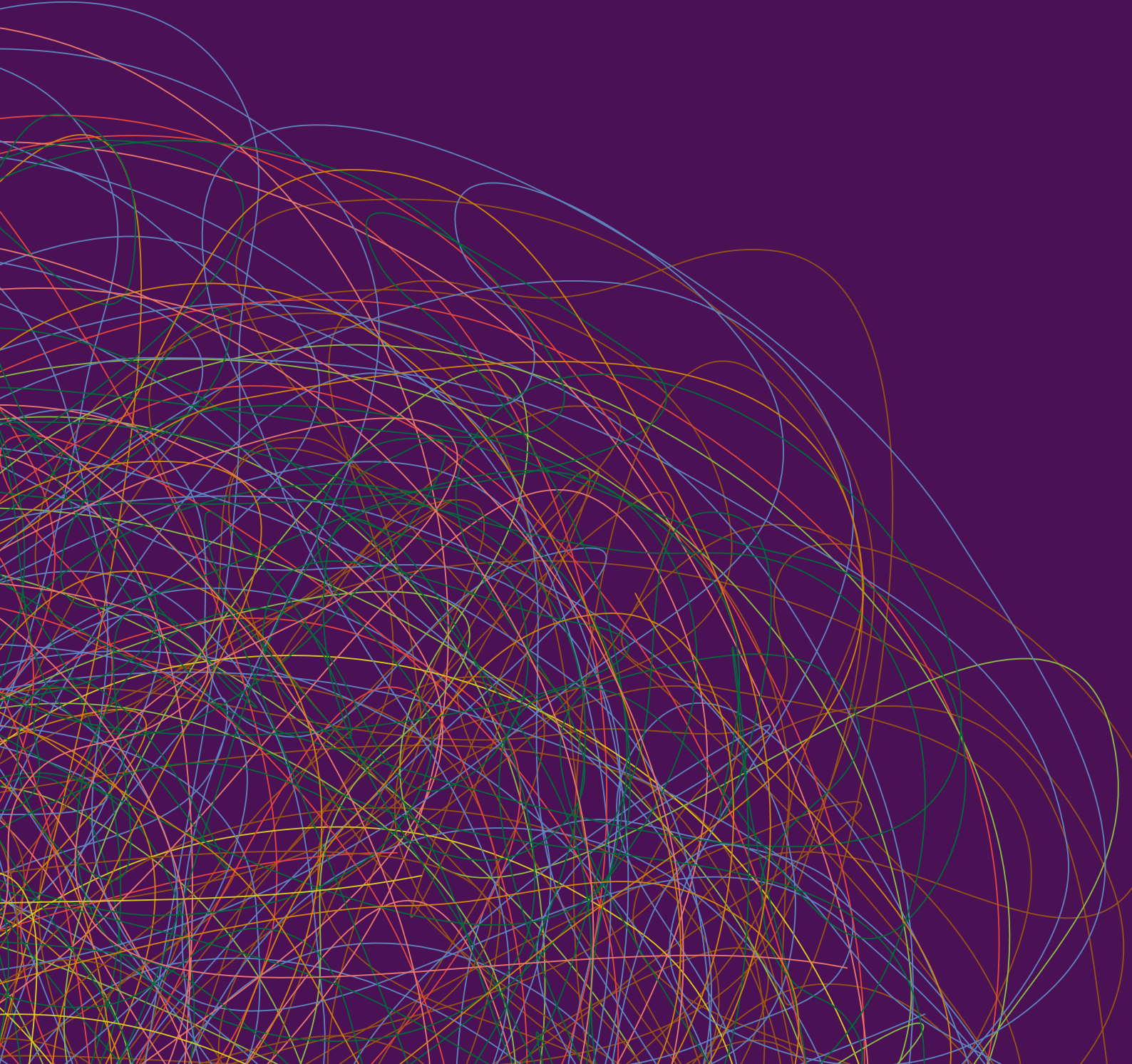
MoNE has been identifying challenges in the education system and taking important steps in developing solutions to overcome them. Among the highlights of 2014-15 were the publication of the Vocational and Technical Education Strategy Paper and the start of the Promoting Gender Equality in Education Project. Nevertheless, 2014-15 has been strikingly similar to the previous years in that neither the publication of the much-labored-over National Teacher Strategy Paper, nor the implementation of the Teacher Competencies project, or the OTMG model went underway. MoNE's continued determination will be essential for these to be completed.

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