

Demographic Development in Turkey

By Steffen Kröhnert

The population development in Turkey, a potential future member state of the European Union, might be of particular interest to Germany. After all, about 1.7 million Turks live in Germany, which was, thereby, the most important destination of Turkish emigration in the past. Out of the countries currently seeking EU membership, Turkey is the only country that has a significant young and growing population at its disposal. In the year 1927, four years after the proclamation of the Turkish republic by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, Turkey was home to merely 14 million people. Turkey was an underdeveloped country with a high birth and death rate. In the following decades the authoritative modernisation of the Turkish state had a significant impact, leading to a classic ‘population explosion’, typical for many developing countries. Until 1990 the yearly natural growth rate of the Turkish population stood almost constantly at over two per cent; only in the 1990s did the growth slow down. Yet, according to the World Bank, with a current yearly growth rate of 1.2 per cent (2008), Turkey lies above the European average.

According to the Turkish Statistical Institute, in 2009 Turkey had 72 million inhabitants – thus quintupling its population since the foundation of the republic. In addition around 3.5 million Turkish citizens live abroad, three million of whom in Europe and 1.7 million in Germany.

Population development in Turkey from 1927 to 2009

Year	Population	Yearly growth rate (in per cent)
1927	13.648.000	---
1930	14.448.000	2,11
1940	17.821.000	1,96
1950	20.947.000	2,17
1960	27.755.000	2,85
1970	35.605.000	2,5
1980	44.737.000	2,07
1990	56.473.000	2,35
2002	65.293.000	1,32
2009	72.561.312	---

(Source: Höhfeld (1995): 201, for the year 2002: Spiegel Jahrbuch 2003, for the year 2009: Turkstat)

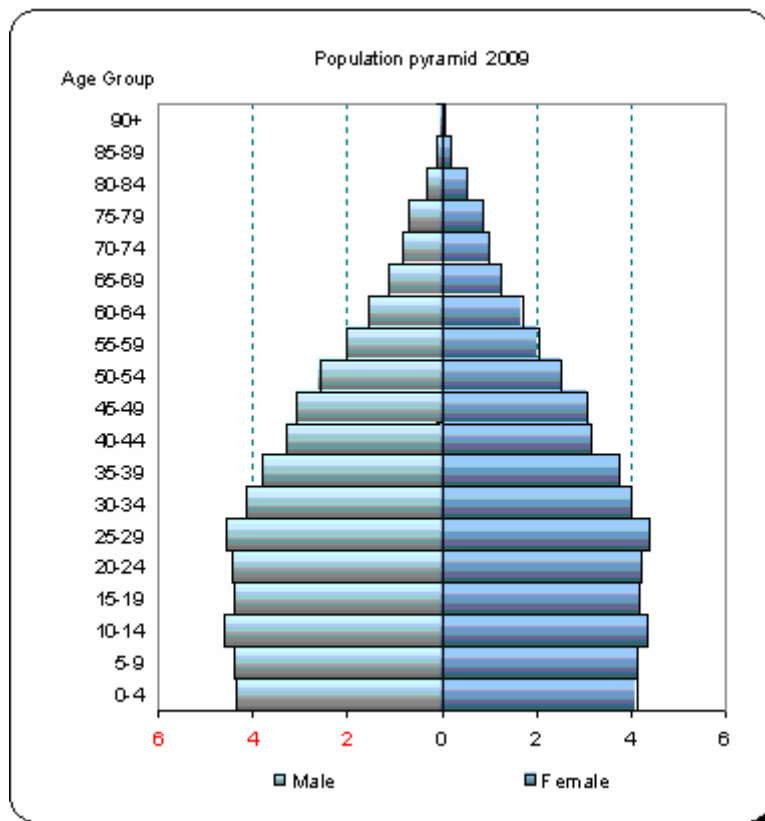
As in many other developing countries, the death rate in Turkey has constantly sunk. If from 1960 to 1965 it stood at 16.4 per mille, the death rate dropped to 5.8 per mille between 2000 and 2005 (UN PopDataBase). According to the World Bank, in 2008 life expectancy for the Turkish population was 69.4 years for men and 74.3 years for women, with an increase of four years alone in the past decade.

Up to the second half of the 20th century the fertility of Turkish women was very high: even in 1960, on average 6.2 children per woman were born. The total fertility rate, however, dropped significantly, amounting to 4.3 children per woman in 1978 and only 2.11 in 2008. Even this figure is still higher than in most other European countries.

Significant progress was made by Turkey with regard to children mortality rate, an important indicator for the socio-economic development: if in 1965 166 babies out of 1.000 died, in 2008 the figure fell to only 20. Nevertheless, the infant mortality rate lies above the Western European level – between ten and fifteen per mille.

The high fertility and the sunken mortality rate in Turkey during the past decades have shaped the age structure of the population: in 2005 28.5 per cent of all Turks were younger than 15 and up to today the age structure of the Turkish population has pointed to a classic pyramid form.

Age Structure of the Turkish Population



(Source: Turkstat)

In accordance with the uneven economic and socio-economic development of the country, substantial regional disparities in the population development are present in Turkey. In the underdeveloped regions in the East (Mid- and Eastern Anatolia, Black Sea region) still twice as many children per woman die as in the developed Western regions, including the wider area around Istanbul. In 1993 a total fertility rate of 2.0 was calculated for the Western part of Turkey, in contrast to the 4.4 rate for the Eastern part. In 2000 the highest birth rates were found in the Sirnak Province (7.1), Hakkari (6.7) and Siirt (6.1). This generates social disruptions, for the highest population growth and the largest share of the younger population are found precisely in the agrarian, economically underdeveloped provinces in Eastern Turkey.

Marriage Patterns

Marriage and the institution of the family are still of high significance in Turkey. Traditional union formation patterns still largely prevail. In rural regions an early marriage secures the patriarchal structure of relationships and reduces the risk for a woman of losing 'honour' and, as a result, civil rights. In Turkey, 'honour' is a central value which strongly determines gender relation. In the first quarter of 2010 the average median age at first marriage was 26.1 years for men, 22.7 for women (Turkstat). Thus, the median age at first marriage is gradually increasing also in Turkey: back in 1975 women married on average with the age of 20.4. Discrepancy between metropolitan areas and the rural provinces are also found here. In the underdeveloped regions of Eastern Turkey numerous marriages are performed that override the legal age limit of 15 years for women and 17 for men. This is only possible if the wedding takes place in the form of a solely religious ceremony through the Imam instead of a civil

ceremony. Because a significant number of these early marriages are not statistically recorded, the official median age at first marriage in the Eastern provinces is higher than in reality. As a result of the high social significance of marriage as an institution, divorces play a lesser role: even the ten million Metropolis Istanbul registered in 1994 only about 6.000 divorces (with a third of Istanbul's population, Berlin experienced 8.000 divorces in the same year), whereas in the Southeastern provinces official divorces almost never take place. Nevertheless, the Turkish Statistical Institute reported for Istanbul 20.679 divorces in 2006 and 30.773 divorces in the first quarter of 2010 – an enormous rise over a short time span.

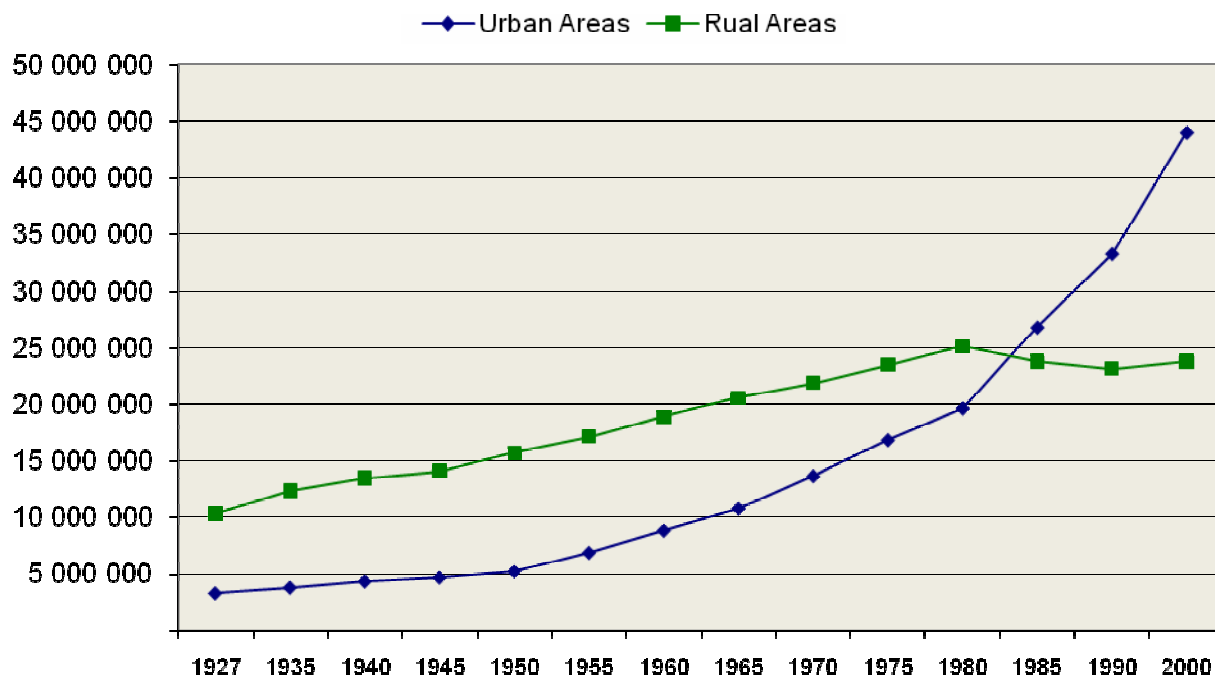
Spatial Population Dynamics and Urbanisation

The consequences of the dynamic growth of population in the East provinces of Turkey cannot be ignored: the underdeveloped regions, based on an agrarian subsistence economy, have not been able to offer any perspectives to the booming number of young people. The continuously diminishing of agricultural land per capita, resulting from the partition of owned land to the legal heirs after every successive inheritance, took away the minimum subsistence means of many people. Between 1950 and 1980 the share of farmers in Turkey possessing little or no land rose from 14 to 32.5 per cent. In the cities, on the other hand, a liberalisation of the economy, which up to the 1950s had been characterised by protectionist economic policies, enabled investments in the private economic sector as well as a rapid flourishing of cities. The road infrastructure network, which reached the rural regions in the sixties, set off a mass movement from the country to the cities. The strong development gap between the industrialised and the rural regions was the motor of urbanisation. Up to today the city growth, prompted by internal migration, has affected a handful of Metropolises. The five biggest Turkish cities – Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir, Bursa and Adana – account for over one third of Turkey's urban population.

The economic centre of Turkey – Istanbul – which had 1.3 million inhabitants in 1961, has transformed today into a megalopolis counting over twelve million inhabitants. Approximately 400.000 migrants from different regions in Turkey settle into the city yearly. In the 1990s, war-like conditions provoked by clashes between the Turkish army and units of the Kurdish Worker's Party (PKK), triggered a massive intraregional movement of refugees from the Southeastern rural provinces to the urban centres of Southeastern Anatolia, including Adiyaman, Diarbakir and Gaziantep. Since 1980 the share of the rural population in Turkey is not increasing, while the cities have to absorb the population growth. Meanwhile, with an average value of 75.5 per cent, Turkey displays a higher level of urbanisation, but with substantial discrepancies between single provinces: it varies between 99 per cent in Istanbul and only 31.9 per cent in the Ardahan Province.

In contrast to the period of industrialisation in Western Europe, the development of cities preceded the industrial development. Between 1950 and 1997 the number of those employed in the industry sector increased by four million, while at the same time the number of urban residents grew by 35 million. The urban labour markets are not able to incorporate the influx of migrants. This leads to high concealed unemployment and to large illegal settlements on the outskirts of the cities (so-called Gecekondus – literally "built over night"). In 2008 an estimated 60 per cent of the population in Istanbul lived in such settlements.

Development of the urban and rural population in Turkey from 1927 to 2000



(Source: Turkstat)

Prospects

The Turkish population will keep growing until 2050 thanks to its age structure. The National Institute for Statistics in Turkey projected a total population of 95.0 million for the year 2050; the UN even predicted 97.3 million. In 2008 up to 50 per cent of the population in single, less developed regions in Turkey was younger than 15 years. In the next decades an enormous share of young people will rush to the labour market and demand a job perspective. Yet the majority of these people are not educated and lack the qualifications required in a developed industrial society. In the last decade there has been a considerable rise in the number of children attending secondary school: if in 2001 a mere 43 per cent of children in primary school (compulsory schooling) continued their education, in 2007 72 per cent of females and 88 per cent of males opted for secondary school. However, despite the substantial progress made in regard to alphabetisation, according to UNFPA in 2005 the proportion of illiterates amounted to 21 per cent for women (five per cent for men).

It is not possible to predict whether the Turkish political and economic development will manage to solve these problems. A large number of unqualified migrants will seek economic opportunities in Turkish conurbations, but also in other European countries. This could pose a big challenge to Germany, which accommodates the largest share of Turks living in a foreign country. Within the framework of the EU accession negotiations, farsighted economic and education policy initiatives should be brought forward.

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