

**Research Project**  
**How “social” is Turkey?**  
**Turkey’s social security system in a European context**

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Abstract:

Social security and welfare state are key institutions of Western post-war societies, absorbing 20-30% of GDP and shaping basic social structures like labour markets, socio-economic inequality, gender, and the relationship between state, markets and civil society (Castles et al. 2010; Leibfried/Mau 2008, Esping-Andersen 1990, T.H. Marshall 1950). Social policy is about fundamental normative understandings of society, constituting a social contract and underpinning social cohesion. Moreover, social policy may impact on a country’s international economic competitiveness. At the level of the European Union, the notion of a “social Europe” is seen by some as an essential element of Europeanization and the “European model” (Kaelble/Schmid 2004). As a pre-accession country that has graduated to the ranks of upper middle-income countries, Turkey is increasingly exposed to Europeanization pressures. Standing between Europe and Asia, Turkey remains at the intersection of the developing world and advanced industrialized countries, and has not conventionally figured in comparative welfare state research which centres on either advanced or developing countries.

The project brings together leading social policy researchers from Germany and Turkey in order to put Turkey on the map of comparative welfare state research, and to broaden the scope of Turkish studies in Germany. The project uses state-of-the-art theories and quantitative as well as qualitative research methods to a) locate Turkey’s experience in the field of social security in the broader world of welfare states (Work Package 1) b) to trace

specific social policies and their political and ideational backgrounds in four key areas of social security (Work Package 2) and c) to depict the overall shape of the Turkish welfare state and explain its rise (Work Package 3). Academically, the case of Turkey will also enrich existing data and refine conceptual tools of comparative welfare state analysis, and add to the more recent global research on middle income countries (for welfare statism beyond its European origins see Gough/Therborn 2010; Gough 2008). In particular, the project inquires whether Turkey is a welfare state in a strict sense.

Outside academia, the project aims to contribute to a better understanding of Turkey's society, economy and politics in Germany. There is a dearth of knowledge on Turkey's social policy in German academia and public. Although the country declared itself a welfare state in the 1961 Constitution, and more than a third of all government expenditure is spent on social provisions, such as healthcare and pensions, popular imagination in Germany would not normally associate Turkey with welfare statism. But besides political and civil rights, the state of social rights in Turkey, too, is a crucial factor for the accession process of Turkey to the EU and for German-Turkish relationships. Can Turkey relate to the European family of welfare states and to "social Europe"?

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