

## **Problems and Preferences of Health Services Users, Alternative Health Models in Turkey from the Perspective of Transformation of World Health Systems**

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### **Project summary**

Today the most important problem in the foreground of welfare state arguments is health care expenditures with its continuously increasing fiscal burden. The demographic structure has changed especially with the rise of old-aged population and the costs have risen with the technological and pharmacological developments. The attempts to restructure the system and reduce the costs have come to be the main issue of health care system reforms. In Turkey, debates on reforming the health care gained pace in 1990s, and today the government has included the implementation of these reforms in its main action program. What is aimed with the health system reforms is on the one hand, the implementation of a model that covers the whole population and on the other hand, reducing the burden on the social security system and transforming the welfare state structure in line with trends seen in various parts of the world today. What comes out of all these debates is the obvious need for policy research, which would analyze the validity of assumptions lying behind the existing reform attempts as well as evaluate the alternative models for developing effective health services.

In the scope of the twofold study of ours, as a first step literature will be surveyed with the aim of examining the various models of transformations in health care systems within the framework of the welfare state crises and the reform attempts in the world. As a second step, a qualitative research will be conducted to explore the utilization of health services by low, middle and high-income groups. The research aims to provide alternative ways for an effective and desirable health system in the context of Turkey from a comparative perspective and to contribute to the policy making process in a time when the reform efforts are on the current agenda. The research results will be presented and discussed in a workshop in which specialists from Europe and other countries will participate.

### **Aim of the project**

Since early 1990s, the World Bank and the World Health Organization have been developing policies and supporting Turkish governments in order to put a reform program into practice aiming to restructure the social security and health systems in Turkey. Health care reforms have gained priority among the governments' welfare state reforms not only in Turkey but also in other countries. However, Turkey's social security problems specific to its system have made its problems in health sector more visible. Since the foundation of the Turkish Republic, health care system has had various changes. However, as those changes reflect the emerging needs of various periods, a complex, fragmented and multi-centered system has evolved in time. The attempts, which have started in early 1990s to apply a radical reform process in Turkey's health sector, gained momentum in last government period.

With the reform attempts the debate on health care system has been spreading. For instance Turkish Medical Doctors' Association (TTB), which is opposed to the reforms introduced by the government, claims that those reforms aim at retreating the social responsibility of the state in health care and redefining its role in the health system merely as a standard setting and planning agency. Besides, it is observed that, with the implementation of the government's

reform package there would be a budget contraction on health expenditures and a large number of people would remain excluded from the coverage of the health insurance system. (Soyer, 2003)

Though the public health services raise the health care burden on the state for a great deal, the state can provide more effective health services under that framework. However, decreasing share of preventive health services in the health care budget; deterioration of the public health organizations and the personnel; and the lack of a concrete attempt to encourage public health services within the reform package portray a very discouraging picture from the “social health” point of view. The report called “Health Care Systems in Transition” examining the situation of the health sector in Turkey by year 2002 emphasizes that, a health policy, which undermines preventive health services and favors curative services, is far from solving Turkey’s health problems. On the contrary, it is more possible for it to cause a significant decrease at the workforce in basic health services.

There are rapid transformations in Turkey’s health system. For instance, by a recent legislation, hospitals and other health care facilities of SSK<sup>1</sup> have been transferred to the Ministry of Health; draft legislations regulating the workings of the General Health Insurance scheme and the “without premium payments” scheme with respect to health insurance of the low income citizens have been prepared; and the law on the pilot implementation of the “family medicine” model has been put into effect. In addition, although the Green Card scheme, which is a social assistance mechanism providing free health care services to the poor, started to cover the medicine expenses of the outpatient services since January 2005, it could not be implemented successfully, hence making use of health services continues to be a problem for the citizens that are out of the social security system.

It is apparent that all those debates and problems have to be taken into account. In this context, it becomes even more important to reconsider the health care system in Turkey within the framework of the recent trends in health care system transformations around the world, and to provide alternative models through a research taking into account the problems and preferences of the health services users.

This qualitative research aims to collect the stories of families and persons regarding their utilization of health services and to understand the points where the system includes or excludes its users. In the course of this research, we will explore why health care is not perceived as a “citizenship right” but as a “paid service”; the effects of such perception on people’s behaviors; and the significance of this reform process for different income groups. In line with the data obtained, health care system in Turkey and its transformation will be evaluated from the point of view of users. Besides, an inventory of “best practice” in Turkey and in other countries will be gathered. The main objective of this research is to provide effective health care models, which would make universal coverage possible in Turkey.

In summary, the research aims to look at the health reform attempts through investigating different practices and trends at the health sector around the world, and from that perspective it intends to provide alternative health system models appropriate for Turkey.

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<sup>1</sup> SSK stands for Social Insurance Institution, and it is an insurance scheme for private sector employees and blue-collar workers working in the public sector.