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Youth Unemployment in Czechia and Türkiye

A Comparative Analysis: Structural Drivers, Demographic Shifts, and Policy Responses

CZECH YOUTH ASSOCIATION

YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT IN CZECHIA AND TURKIYE: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Executive Summary

This report compares youth unemployment in Czechia and Türkiye — two economies that sit at opposite ends of the same demographic and structural spectrum. Czechia, an EU member state since 2004, faces a contracting working-age population and some of the lowest unemployment rates in Europe, yet struggles to fill vacancies as its youth cohort shrinks. Türkiye, by contrast, holds a substantial demographic dividend — a youth population share of 14.9%, well above the EU average of 10.7% (TÜİK, 2025) — but has been structurally unable to convert that dividend into stable, formal employment for its young people.

The comparative data show that headline unemployment figures have recently converged (Türkiye at approximately 14.8%, Czechia at 8.4% as of May 2026), but this convergence conceals a much sharper divergence in disengagement: Türkiye's NEET rate (22.9–23.3%) runs more than double Czechia's (10.1%). Gender gaps compound this picture in both countries, though through different structural mechanisms. In Türkiye, young women face unemployment and NEET rates roughly twice those of young men due to structural exclusion. For Czechia, a disaggregated 15–24 gender breakdown of the NEET rate could not be located in official statistics — a data gap this report flags rather than papers over. What general-population data does show (ČSÚ, 2026: 3.8% unemployment for women versus 2.9% for men) points to a much narrower gap than Türkiye's, and qualitative evidence suggests that whatever youth-specific gap exists is shaped substantially by Czechia's exceptionally long paid parental leave policies, which temporarily shift young mothers out of the active labor force, rather than by the structural exclusion seen in Türkiye.

Structurally, Czechia's export-oriented, VET-integrated manufacturing economy converts education into employment efficiently but is constrained by a shrinking supply of young workers; Türkiye's rapidly expanded higher-education system has outpaced the domestic economy's capacity to absorb graduates, producing overqualification, informality, and skilled-youth emigration. On the policy side, Czechia's EU Youth Guarantee benefits from external co-financing and independent auditing that Türkiye's İŞKUR programs — domestically funded and internally reported — currently lack, a methodological gap that limits, rather than disproves, any claim about the Turkish programs' effectiveness.

The report concludes that neither country's youth labor market outcome can be explained by policy design in isolation: Czechia's challenge is demographic sustainability, while Türkiye's is the conversion of economic growth and educational investment into secure, formal employment. Targeted recommendations for both countries are presented in the closing section.

1. Introduction

1.1 WhyCompareCzechiaandTürkiye?

Youth unemployment remains one of the most persistent policy challenges across Europe and its neighboring economies, but it manifests in strikingly different forms depending on a country's demographic structure, industrial base, and institutional context. Czechia and

Türkiye offer a particularly instructive comparison precisely because they represent near-opposite conditions within a shared European policy space: Czechia is a long-standing EU member with an aging population and acute labor shortages, while Türkiye is an EU-candidate country with one of Europe's youngest populations and comparatively volatile macroeconomic conditions. Placing these two cases side by side makes it possible to ask a sharper question than "which country has higher youth unemployment": namely, how do demographic pressure, industrial structure, and institutional design interact to produce very different youth labor market outcomes, even when headline unemployment rates move toward convergence.

This comparison is also timely from a policy-learning perspective. Czechia's EU Youth Guarantee framework and Türkiye's İŞKUR programs represent two distinct governance models — one embedded in multi-level EU co-financing and external audit, the other domestically funded and administered — and comparing their design and available outcome evidence offers transferable lessons for both EU member states and candidate countries managing youth labor market transitions.

Beyond its purely macroeconomic dimension, comparing the youth labor market dynamics of Czechia and Türkiye holds substantial political and institutional significance. As a long-standing EU candidate state, Türkiye’s alignment with European labor market standards remains a critical metric within accession-adjacent policy discourse. Comparing a candidate state to an established EU member state like Czechia—which successfully integrated into the single market following its 2004 accession—provides valuable empirical insights into how EU institutional mechanisms, such as the Youth Guarantee and structural funding, shape employment outcomes. Furthermore, this comparative framework is directly relevant to cross-border labor mobility and migration dynamics. As demographic pressures and wage disparities drive young professionals and skilled workers from candidate countries toward the EU internal market, understanding the structural push factors in Türkiye alongside the pull factors and persistent vacancies in Czechia illuminates broader patterns of human capital flow across the European continent.

1.2 Defining Youth Unemployment: Metrics and Data Sources

This report follows the internationally standard ILO/Eurostat definition of the youth unemployment rate: the share of unemployed individuals — those without work, currently available to work, and actively seeking employment — within the youth labor force (the sum of employed and unemployed individuals), rather than within the total youth population. This distinction matters because it excludes young people who are neither working nor searching for work (e.g., students not seeking a job), a group captured separately by the NEET indicator.

Two primary metrics anchor the analysis:

- **Youth unemployment rate (15–24):** The core metric used throughout this report, sourced from the Turkish Statistical Institute's (TÜİK) Hanehalkı İşgücü İstatistikleri (Household Labour Force Statistics) for Türkiye and from the Czech Statistical Office (ČSÚ) / Eurostat harmonised series for Czechia, both following the shared ILO methodology that in principle makes the two countries' 15–24 figures directly comparable.

- **NEET rate (Not in Employment, Education, or Training):** used to capture disengagement beyond active jobseeking. Eurostat's standard NEET monitoring series — including EU Youth Guarantee reporting — is built on the 15–29 age band, while TÜİK's headline NEET releases use 15–24. Where this report draws on Eurostat/EU Youth Guarantee NEET data, the 15–29 basis is stated explicitly rather than treated as equivalent to the 15–24 figures used elsewhere.

Two further sourcing conventions apply across the report. First, official statistical-agency figures (TÜİK, ČSÚ, Eurostat) are always presented as the primary reference point; where an alternative or critical calculation is cited — most notably DİSK-AR's broader "idle labor force" measure for Türkiye, which incorporates discouraged workers and underemployment — it is identified explicitly as an alternative estimate rather than merged with the official series. Second, the report's primary observation window is the ten years from 2015 to 2025/2026, supplemented where relevant with longer historical series (e.g., ILO-modeled estimates back to 1991) to contextualize recent trends against each country's longer-run pattern.

To ensure analytical clarity before examining empirical trends, it is essential to define how youth labor market indicators are formally operationalized. The youth unemployment rate measures the proportion of economically active individuals aged 15 to 24 who are without work but actively seeking employment. Mathematically, it is calculated by dividing the number of unemployed young people (the numerator) by the total youth labor force (the denominator, which consists of both employed and unemployed youth), expressed as a percentage. Crucially, full-time students and inactive youth who are not seeking work are excluded from both the numerator and the denominator. For instance, in a given period where a country records 300,000 unemployed youth out of a total youth labor force of 1,500,000, the resulting youth unemployment rate is 20.0% (300,000 / 1,500,000 × 100). This metric fundamentally differs from the NEET rate, which evaluates the entire youth population regardless of labor force participation, thereby capturing both unemployed and economically inactive individuals.

1.3 Report Structure

Following this introduction, Section 2 (Macroeconomic Profile and Labor Market Context) establishes the demographic and macroeconomic backdrop — Türkiye's youth dividend versus Czechia's aging workforce, and each country's growth and baseline labor market indicators. Section 3 (Comparative Data Analysis) presents the ten-year unemployment trend, NEET comparison, and gender disparities in detail. Section 4 (Structural Drivers and Root Causes) examines the educational, sectoral, and institutional mechanisms behind these patterns. Section 5 (Policy Responses) evaluates the EU Youth Guarantee in Czechia against İŞKUR's programs in Türkiye using a standardized comparative framework. Section 6 closes with Key Findings, Challenges, and targeted Recommendations for policymakers in both countries.

2.Macroeconomic Profile and Labor Market Context:

To comprehensively grasp the structural dynamics of youth unemployment in Czechia and Türkiye, it is analytically imperative to examine the foundational economic and demographic structures that operate in the background. Rather than viewing youth joblessness as an isolated labor market phenomenon, one must contextualize it within the broader macro-level paradigms of both nations—where demographic transitions, capital accumulation processes, and historical integration trajectories continuously shape the operational framework of national labor markets

The two countries represent sharply contrasting economic paradigms: Czechia operates under the pressures of an aging population, structural labor shortages, and high industrial demand, whereas Türkiye exhibits a dynamic youth demographic dividend hampered by macroeconomic volatility, structural underemployment, and labor market segmentation.

2.1. Demographic Divergence: Türkiye's Youth Dividend vs. Czechia's Aging Workforce

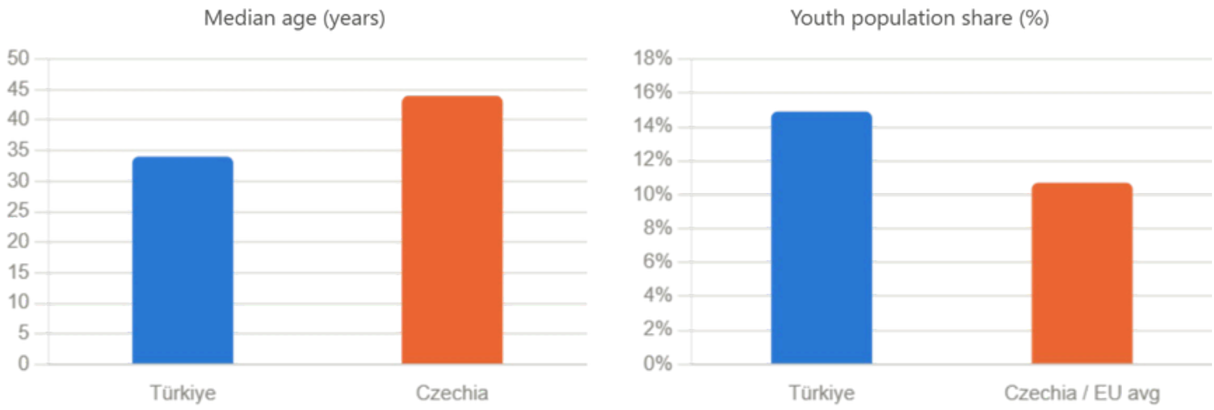
A direct comparison of demographic structures reveals fundamentally divergent labor supply pressures. According to TÜİK (2025), the youth population aged 15–24 in Türkiye accounts for 14.9% of the total population (approximately 12.7 million individuals), sitting well above the EU average of 10.7%. While this young demographic profile, with a median age of 34, theoretically offers a significant 'demographic dividend,' it generates immense supply-side pressure that the formal economy struggles to absorb. Furthermore, the domestic labor market dynamics in Türkiye are heavily compounded by the presence of a massive Syria-origin population under temporary protection. This external demographic influx has significantly expanded the pool of low-skilled, informal labor, intensifying downward pressure on wages and amplifying entry-level job competition.

Czechia, in contrast, is navigating the macroeconomic constraints of an aging workforce. With a median age of approximately 44 years, the demographic reality structurally restricts the pipeline of new entrants. As a result of this contracting working-age population, Czech employers face a structural deficit of domestic labor across nearly all sectors, placing a premium on activating every available young cohort and embedding persistent labor shortages across industries (European Commission, 2025).

The population growth rate in Türkiye began to slow rapidly in 2020 and declined to its lowest level in history, reaching 1.1 per thousand in 2023 (TÜİK, 2024)

Czechia joined the European Union in 2004 as part of the Eastern Enlargement, rapidly achieving political, sociological, and economic integration through the adoption of the *acquis communautaire*. As a direct result of this structural integration, youth unemployment experienced a significant decline, dropping from the 20% levels observed at the time of accession to the 8% band in recent periods (World Bank, 2024). When viewed from a comparative perspective, Türkiye's trajectory during the same period reveals a stark contrast. In 2004, Türkiye started from a nearly identical baseline, with youth unemployment hovering around 19.7%. However, the 2008 global financial crisis acted as a defining stress test for both nations. For Czechia, the crisis caused only a temporary setback; the economy quickly rebounded thanks to its deep integration into European manufacturing networks and the safety net of EU structural funds. Türkiye, on the other hand, saw its youth unemployment rate surge past 25% in 2009 and struggle to permanently recover, remaining trapped in a volatile 18–25% corridor for the next decade.

Figure 2.1: Median Age and Youth Population Share in Czechia and Türkiye



Source: TÜİK, 2025; European Commission, 2025.

Thisdivergence highlights a crucial lesson: while Türkiye has made ongoing efforts to harmonize its labor laws with EU standards on paper, legislative changes alone are not enough. Without the genuine industrial job demand, macroeconomic stability, and strict outcome auditing that accompanied Czechia's EU accession, legal reforms struggle to translate into permanent, formal jobs for young people (World Bank, 2024; Toksöz, 2006).

In contrast, Czechia is experiencing the economic consequences of an aging society. The national working-age population (aged 15-64) has experienced a steady contraction, declining from 7.4 million in 2010 to 6.86 million in recent monitoring periods (European Commission, 2026). As a result, Czech employers face a structural deficit of domestic labor across nearly all sectors, placing a premium on activating every available young cohort and integrating foreign workers to maintain productive capacity (Cedefop, 2024; European Commission, 2025).

2.2. GDP Growth Patterns and Labor Absorption Capacity

Economic growth trajectories dictate how effectively national economies absorb new entrants into the labor market. Türkiye has demonstrated resilient domestic output, with real GDP growth projected by the OECD at 3.1% in 2026 and 3.8% in 2027 (OECD, 2026). However, macro-level growth in Türkiye has frequently exhibited characteristics of "jobless growth," —driven primarily by credit expansion and domestic consumption rather than high-productivity industrial output— where GDP expansion fails to generate a sufficient volume of formal, high-quality jobs required to absorb the large annual influx of young job seekers (Toksöz, 2006; OECD, 2025)

Conversely, Czechia's export-oriented, highly industrialized economy has undergone macroeconomic moderation, with GDP growth reaching 2.6% in 2025 before slowing to an estimated 1.8%–1.9% in 2026 under the weight of energy price shocks and external demand fluctuations (European Commission, 2025; OECD, 2026) Despite modest output growth, Czechia's labor market remains exceptionally tight. Over 80% of Czech enterprises report acute difficulties in recruiting workers with suitable qualifications, making skills shortages—rather than a lack of job creation—the primary constraint on industrial expansion (European Commission, 2025) The persistent labor scarcity in Czechia, which is particularly acute in sectors like construction and heavy manufacturing, cannot be attributed solely to domestic demographic decline. It is heavily exacerbated by intra-EU labor mobility dynamics. Despite a highly functioning vocational education pipeline, a notable segment of the young, qualified

Czech workforce—ranging from skilled tradespeople to engineers—opts to emigrate to neighboring economies such as Germany and Austria. Driven by the pursuit of significantly higher wages and stronger purchasing power across the border, this continuous outmigration drains essential technical talent from the domestic economy, leaving key industrial sectors structurally understaffed despite near-full national employment.

Furthermore, this domestic labor bottleneck is exacerbated by broader European institutional rigidities. Stringent EU regulatory frameworks and dense bureaucratic compliance processes often stifle agility in new, innovation-driven sectors. Consequently, entrepreneurial capital and emerging tech ventures are increasingly incentivized to relocate to more flexible or heavily subsidized markets, such as the United States or China. This regulatory burden not only constrains Czechia's structural transition but also significantly diminishes the wider European Union's capacity to generate dynamic, knowledge-intensive employment in the face of global technological competition (Draghi, 2024)

Furthermore, the relationship between macroeconomic expansion and labor absorption reveals a profound structural dichotomy between the two nations. While Türkiye exhibits resilient real GDP growth—projected at 3.1% in 2026 and 3.8% in 2027 (OECD, 2026) — this macroeconomic expansion frequently manifests as 'jobless growth' coupled with worsening income distribution. Economic growth in Türkiye has historically been driven by sectors with low labor-to-capital ratios or high volatility, failing to translate into a proportional generation of formal, high-quality jobs for young market entrants. Despite rising aggregate output, the fruits of growth are unevenly distributed, leaving the youth vulnerable to precarious wages or informal arrangements. In contrast, even during periods of moderate GDP growth, Czechia's export-oriented manufacturing model maintains a continuous labor demand, ensuring that economic expansion directly converts into broad-based employment opportunities for new graduates (European Commission, 2025; Cedefop, 2024)

Furthermore, while Czechia manages regional labor flows and human capital formation dynamics to offset domestic shortages (Mara & Landesmann, 2022), it simultaneously encounters structural shifts where local labor markets struggle to absorb young graduates, risking the loss of human capital through skill mismatches and outward mobility.

2.3. General Labor Market Trends: Official Metrics vs. Critical Alternatives

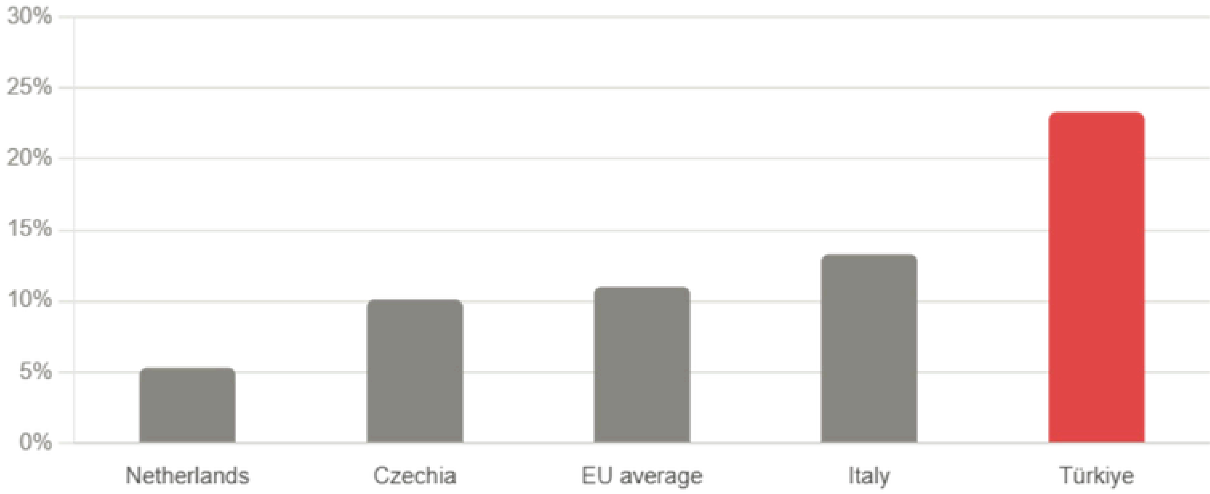
The divergence in macroeconomic realities is clearly visible in baseline labor market indicators. To ensure analytical clarity, official statistical releases must be evaluated alongside critical alternative calculations.

Czechia consistently records one of the lowest harmonised unemployment rates in the OECD and EU, fluctuating between 2.8% and 3.3% for the general labor force (Eurostat, 2026; ČSÚ, 2026). The general employment rate for the 15-64 age group stands high at 75.3% (ČSÚ, 2026). Job mobility in Czechia remains low (around 1.5% quarterly transition rates), indicating high employment stability for existing workers but tight entry conditions for young first-time job seekers (European Commission, 2026).

In Türkiye, official narrow metrics released by TÜİK indicate a seasonally adjusted general unemployment rate of 8.2% and an official youth unemployment rate (15-24 age group) of 14.8% as of May 2026 (TÜİK, 2026).

Recent micro-level data from BETAM (October 2025) precisely quantifies this geographical divide for the 2.35 million young people classified as NEET (19.9% overall in 2023). While the NEET rate in the economic hub of Istanbul represents the national floor at 12.8%, it surges dramatically in peripheral regions, reaching 28.3% in Middle East Anatolia and peaking at 31.5% in Southeastern Anatolia.

Figure 2.2: NEET Rate Comparison across Selected European Economies



Source: Eurostat, 2026; TÜİK, 2025 .

However, labor economists and trade union research centers argue that narrow definitions fail to capture the full structural strain of the Turkish labor market. According to alternative calculations by the Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions Research Center (DİSK-AR) based on TÜİK raw data, the broadly defined "idle labor force" rate (âtıl işgücü)—which incorporates time-related underemployment, discouraged workers, and potential labor force —reached 30.1% in early 2026, representing over 12.1 million individuals (DİSK-AR, 2026). This wide divergence between the official narrow rate (8.2%) and the broad underutilization rate (30.1%) underscores that a significant portion of Türkiye's workforce, particularly youth, is trapped in underemployment, inactivity, or unregistered informal work.

Relying solely on national macroeconomic aggregates obscures profound internal regional disparities (NUTS-level variations) that shape the youth labor market in both countries. In Türkiye, the youth unemployment crisis exhibits a stark geographic divide. While economic hubs in the Marmara region (notably Istanbul) offer a higher concentration of formal, service-based employment, peripheral regions in Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia suffer from severe deficits in industrial investment and formal job creation, driving much higher local NEET rates and triggering heavy internal migration. Czechia's remarkably low national youth unemployment rate masks a similar internal divergence. While the capital region of Prague operates at near-full employment — sustained by a concentration of high-value services and technology sectors, and a poverty and social exclusion risk rate of just 7.9% — historically industrialized peripheral regions tell a different story: Ústí nad Labem and Karlovy Vary continue to grapple with higher structural unemployment, lower educational attainment, and a slower transition to knowledge-based economic activity, while Ústí nad Labem and the Moravian-Silesian region report the highest social-exclusion rates in the country (21.5% and 14.9%, respectively), driven by long-term unemployment and lower educational attainment (European Commission, 2023). Therefore, even in a high-performing European labor market, regional bottlenecks persist, isolating specific youth cohorts from the broader national economic success.

3. ComparativeData Analysis

3.1 Ten-YearTrend: YouthUnemployment,2015–2026

Over the past decade, youth unemployment in Türkiye and Czechia has moved along structurally different paths, even though both countries have recently converged on a modest improvement.

In Türkiye, the 15–24 unemployment rate has historically been high and volatile: since 1988 it has averaged around 18.5%, peaking at an all-time high of 27.0% in August 2019 and hitting a record low of 11.0% in September 2000 (Trading Economics/TÜİK series, 2026). The post-pandemic years reinforced this volatility — TÜİK recorded a youth unemployment rate of roughly 20% in April 2022, with a pronounced gender gap (23.7% for young women versus 18.1% for young men) (TÜİK, 2022). By the most recent annual TÜİK releases, the rate stood at 16.3% in 2024 and eased to 15.3% in 2025 (TÜİK, Hanehalkı İşgücü İstatistikleri, 2025), before ticking up again on a seasonally adjusted monthly basis to 14.4% in April 2026 and 14.8% in May 2026 (TÜİK, 2026). It is worth noting that DİSK-AR, the research arm of the DİSK trade union confederation, calculates a broader unemployment measure that also captures discouraged workers and the underemployed; on this wider definition, youth unemployment is reported to have risen by roughly 10 percentage points since 2002 (from about 26% to about 36%) (DİSK-AR, 2026)

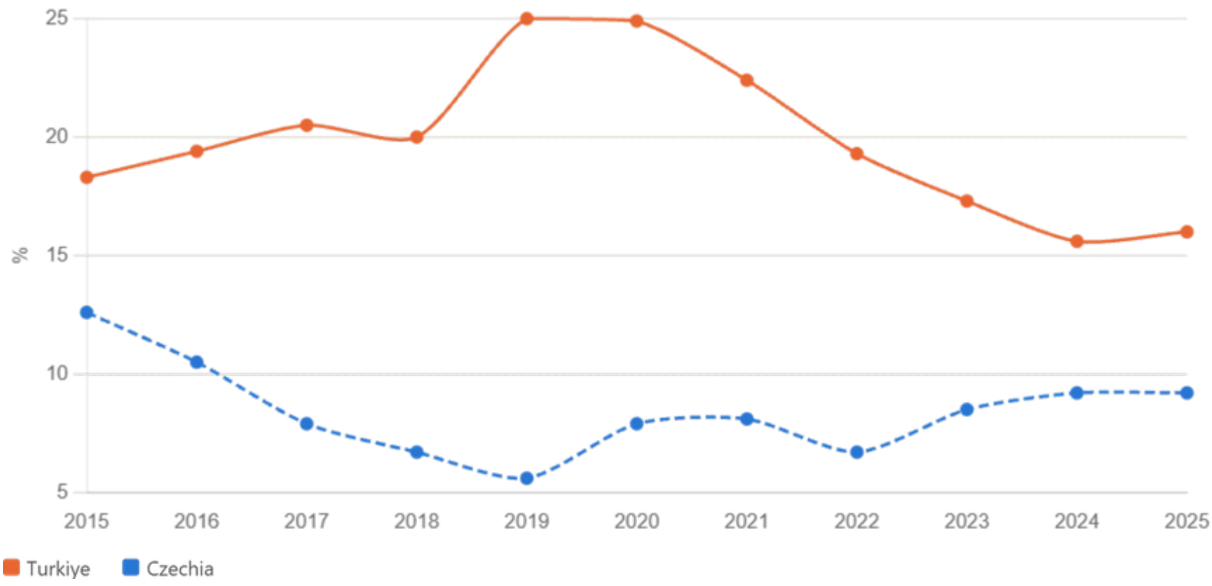
To understand the volatility in Türkiye’s youth unemployment trendline, it is essential to contextualize the sharp statistical spikes in 2018–2019 and 2020–2021 within their respective macroeconomic triggers. The abrupt rise in youth unemployment during the 2018–2019 period was heavily driven by the Turkish currency crisis, which triggered severe contractions in labor-intensive sectors such as construction and retail that traditionally absorb young entrants. Before the labor market could fully recover, the COVID-19 pandemic introduced a secondary shock in 2020–2021. Pandemic-induced lockdowns disproportionately devastated the service and hospitality sectors, where youth employment is heavily concentrated. Because many young workers in these sectors operated informally or on temporary contracts, they were the first to be laid off and the least likely to benefit from state-sponsored short-term work allowances, resulting in an immediate surge in the jobless rate.

Czechia's trajectory has been comparatively low and stable, consistent with its position as one of the EU's lowest-unemployment labour markets. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit in 2020, the country inevitably faced disruptions, with its NEET rate temporarily rising from 9.8% in 2019 to 11.0% in 2020 (European Commission, 2023). However, Czechia managed to quickly contain this shock through EU-backed interventions. By utilizing the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) and the Operational Programme Employment Plus (OPZ+), the government kept its Youth Guarantee initiative active even during the strict lockdowns (MoLSA, 2021) Labour offices swiftly adapted by shifting their counseling, retraining, and education services to online and telephone platforms, ensuring that young people remained connected to the labor market (Eurofound, 2021; OPZ+ Implementation Records, 2020). Thanks to this rapid institutional response, the negative trend was reversed: the NEET rate fell back to 10.1% by 2023 (European Commission, 2023) , and youth unemployment steadily eased to 8.4% by May 2026 (ČSÚ/Trading Economics, 2026) Youth unemployment stood at 10.6% in August 2024 (Eurostat/ILO country profile, 2024) and, per Trading Economics' compilation of Czech Statistical Office (ČSÚ) data, eased further to 8.4% by May 2026, down from 9.6% the previous month (ČSÚ/Trading Economics, 2026). The general (all-age) unemployment rate in Czechia was just 3.3% in February 2026, with the Czech Statistical Office noting a "gradual growth" trend in unemployment despite the broader economic recovery (ČSÚ, 2026) — a reminder that even Czechia's low youth-unemployment figures sit against a backdrop of slowly rising joblessness overall. Notably, the youth employment rate (25.5% in 2023) was the one indicator in the Czech labour market that fell *below* the EU average, even though male and female employment rates were both above it (European Commission country report, 2023) — a sign that Czechia's low youth unemployment partly reflects low youth labour-force participation (extended schooling, later labour-market entry) rather than universally easy job access.

Conversely, the trajectory of Czechia's youth labor market cannot be fully analyzed without recognizing its 2004 accession to the European Union as a definitive structural breakpoint. EU integration rapidly assimilated the Czech manufacturing base into broader Central European and German supply chains, driving a sustained demand for technically skilled labor. This transition transformed the domestic labor market from one grappling with post-socialist restructuring to a highly export-driven engine. Over the subsequent two decades, this integration not only steadily depressed baseline youth unemployment but also institutionalized the systemic labor shortages visible today, as the continuous demand for industrial output outpaced the demographic supply of new young workers entering the market.

While headline rates capture the volume of unemployed youth, the duration of unemployment reveals a deeper structural divergence between the two countries. In Türkiye, unemployment spells for young people are chronically prolonged, meaning youth are not merely transitioning between jobs but are stranded outside the formal economy for extended periods. This prolonged detachment significantly increases their likelihood of eventually accepting informal, unprotected employment just to secure a subsistence income *(Toksöz, 2006)*. Conversely, in Czechia, youth unemployment is predominantly transitional. The national long-term unemployment rate fell to a mere 0.8% by June 2024. While continuous efforts are still required to integrate the remaining long-term unemployed back into the workforce *(EURES, 2024)*, the vast majority of Czech youth experience only brief periods of joblessness before absorption into the formal sector.

Figure 3.1 — 10-Year Youth Unemployment Trend (15–24), 2015–2025



Source: World Bank, 2026.

3.2 NEET Rates:

The NEET indicator captures a wider disengagement from the labour market than unemployment alone, since it also includes young people who are not job-seeking. Here the gap between the two countries is closer to a structural gulf than a statistical nuance. A closer examination of NEET rates disaggregated by educational attainment reveals a striking structural contrast between the two countries. In Czechia, the NEET demographic is predominantly composed of early school leavers and individuals with only lower-secondary education; those who complete tertiary or advanced vocational education are almost immediately absorbed into the workforce (Eurostat, 2026). In contrast, Türkiye exhibits a paradoxical trend where tertiary education does not reliably insulate youth from becoming NEET. A significant proportion of the Turkish NEET population consists of university graduates, reflecting the structural skill mismatch and over-education problem discussed earlier. This high incidence of tertiary-educated NEETs underscores a fundamental inefficiency in the labor market, where advanced human capital remains idle due to a lack of high value-added job creation.

At the EU level, the 15–29 NEET rate fell from 15.2% in 2015 to 11.1% in 2024 and 11.0% in 2025 (Eurostat, 2026). Czechia entered this period from a favourable position: at the launch of the EU Youth Guarantee in 2014, its 15–29 NEET rate was 12.1%, below the EU average of 15.7%, and it fell further to a low of 9.5% in 2018 (European Commission, 2023). The pandemic interrupted this progress—the rate rose to 11.0% in 2020 and 11.4% in 2022—before falling back to 10.1% in 2023. Czechia had set a national policy target of cutting the NEET rate from 11% (2020) to 9% by 2030 under the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan, and national reporting indicates this target was already met by 2024.[1]

[1] While finalized Eurostat data confirms a 10.1% NEET rate for Czechia in 2023, preliminary national strategy documents report that the 9% target was achieved by 2024. This variance reflects the standard methodological delay between real-time national policy monitoring and finalized annual Eurostat aggregates.

Türkiye's NEET rate is markedly higher and moving in the opposite direction. Using TÜİK's 15–24 series, the NEET rate rose from 22.9% in 2024 to 23.3% in 2025 (TÜİK, Hanehalkı İşgücü İstatistikleri, 2025). Using the *18–29* age band *(age-group flag: this figure is not directly comparable to the 15–24 or 15–29 series above)*, UNDP/TÜİK data for 2021 put the NEET rate at 37.5% — meaning more than one in three young Turkish adults in this wider band were neither working nor studying (UNDP Türkiye, 2021). Independent commentary situates Türkiye among the countries with the highest female NEET burden globally: TÜİK- based analysis notes that against a global 15–24 NEET rate of 20.4% in 2024, Türkiye's own 15–24 rate was 22.9%, with a striking gender split — 43% of young Turkish women versus 17% of young men classified as NEET in some estimates (secondary analysis of TÜİK data, 2024/2025).[2]

Türkiye's NEET rate is not just high domestically; it positions the country as the absolute outlier within the OECD. While the OECD average for the 18–24 age group sits at 14.1%, Türkiye's rate surges to 31.3%—more than double the OECD benchmark (TEDMEM, OECD EAG 2025). Furthermore, the core crisis is that the NEET rate consistently eclipses the official youth unemployment rate (15%), highlighting that the primary issue is total labor market disengagement rather than active joblessness (BETAM/TEDMEM).

However, evaluating this massive disengagement requires methodological nuance. According to BETAM's advanced calculations, when informal education, self-study, and unpaid domestic care activities are factored in, a baseline 35.5% NEET metric effectively drops to 19.4%. This adjustment is critical; it suggests that a significant portion of "idle" youth are not entirely passive but are engaged in unrecorded human capital development or invisible domestic labor.

To fully appreciate the divergence between Czechia and Türkiye, their respective youth disengagement rates must be situated within the broader extremes of the European framework. Youth unemployment and NEET rates are not uniform across the EU; rather, they reflect a spectrum of institutional efficiency. At the highly efficient end of the spectrum, countries like the Netherlands and Sweden consistently report youth NEET rates below 6.0%, supported by flexible labor markets and highly integrated welfare-to-work transitions *(Eurostat, 2026)*. Czechia, with its 10.1% NEET rate, sits comfortably within this upper-middle tier, outperforming the EU-27 average of 11.0%.

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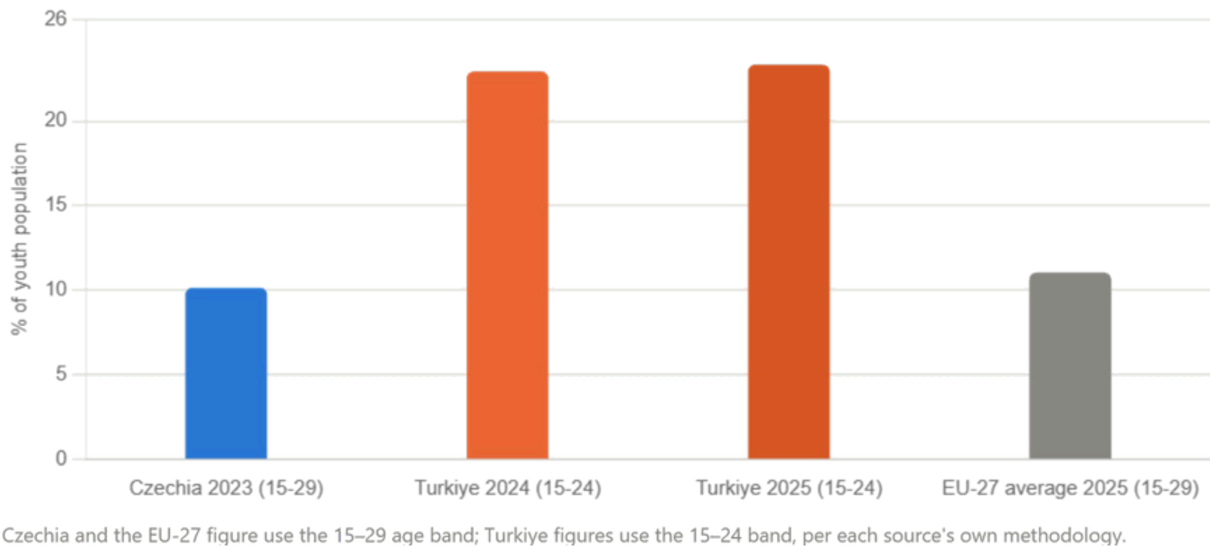
[2] This 43%/17%figureis a secondaryestimate; theheadlinestatistic usedinthis reportisTÜİK's own NEET gender gap (30.1% women / 16.2% men, 2024; 30.9%/16.3%, 2025), reported in the Comparative Data Analysis section.

Conversely, Southern and Eastern European economies such as Italy and Romania represent the lower end of the institutional spectrum, struggling with NEET rates frequently exceeding 15.0% to 19.0% due to rigid labor markets, regional economic divides, and delayed school-to-work transitions. Türkiye's NEET rate of 23.3% places it significantly outside even the lowest-performing EU member states. This contextualization demonstrates that Türkiye's youth labor market crisis is not merely a standard developmental lag, but an extreme outlier within the broader European economic area, requiring structural interventions far more aggressive than standard EU integration protocols.

Figure 3.2 — NEET Rate Comparison, with EU-27 Benchmark



Source: TÜİK, 2025; European Commission, 2023; Eurostat, 2026.

3.3 Gender Disparities in Youth Labour Market Outcomes

Gender gaps are present in both countries but differ sharply in magnitude and in the mechanism driving them.

In Türkiye, the gender gap in youth unemployment has been persistent across the decade: 23.7% for young women versus 18.1% for young men in April 2022 (TÜİK, 2022), narrowing only slightly by 2024–2025 to 22.3% (women) versus 13.1% (men) in 2024, and 22.1% versus 11.7% in 2025 (TÜİK, Hanehalkı İşgücü İstatistikleri, 2025) — meaning the female rate has held almost twice as high as the male rate throughout. The NEET gender gap is even wider than the unemployment gap: in 2024, 30.1% of young Turkish women were NEET versus 16.2% of young men, rising slightly to 30.9% versus 16.3% in 2025 (TÜİK, 2025)

The magnitude of this gender gap is globally exceptional. While the average female-male NEET gap across the OECD is a mere 1.5 percentage points, Türkiye's gender gap spans approximately 19 to 20 points, making it roughly 13 times the OECD average (TEDMEM, OECD EAG 2025). The root causes of this disparity extend far beyond structural occupational segregation into deep socio-demographic realities. Recent findings by BETAM (October 2025) reveal that 36% of female NEETs are married, compared to only 4% of male NEETs. This stark contrast underscores how early marriage and traditional domestic care roles systematically intercept young Turkish women, locking them out of both education and the formal workforce long before economic shifts can affect them

This disparity is partly driven by structural differences in the sectors where young people find employment. Young Turkish women in employment are disproportionately concentrated in services (69.5%) relative to young men (52.4%), who are more evenly spread across industry (36.6%) and services (52.4%) (TÜİK, Hanehalkı İşgücü İstatistikleri, 2025). Broader labour-force participation data reinforce the same pattern: in one national dataset, young women's youth unemployment rate exceeded young men's by at least 10 percentage points across the entire period examined among higher-education graduates specifically, despite improvements in post-pandemic labour-market integration for this group.

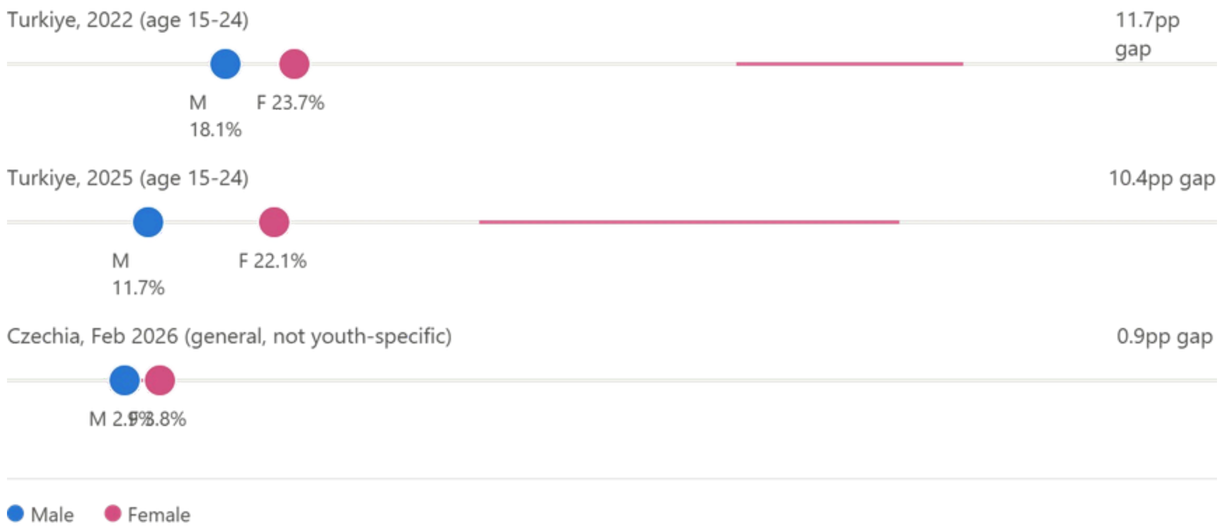
While the statistical gender gap in youth unemployment and NEET rates is evident, its root cause is deeply tied to occupational segregation. The extreme concentration of employed young Turkish women in the service sector (69.5%) directly exacerbates their vulnerability to unemployment. The service sector, particularly its informal segments, is inherently more sensitive to economic downturns and localized demand shocks compared to industrial production. Because young women have limited access to the manufacturing and heavy industry roles that often offer more stable or formalized employment, any contraction in the service sector disproportionately pushes them out of the labor force entirely. Consequently, this narrow occupational pathway not only restricts initial labor market entry but also accelerates the transition of young women into the NEET category during periods of economic instability.

Turning to Czechia, the general gender gap in unemployment is relatively narrow in absolute terms, with rates standing at 3.8% for women and 2.9% for men as of February 2026 (ČSÚ, 2026). However, this aggregate figure reflects broader working-age dynamics rather than youth-specific patterns. A clearer picture of structural labor market integration emerges through standardized. Eurostat metrics indicates working-age employment rates of 68.2% for women and 81.6% for men, alongside a youth employment rate of 25.5% that remains below the European Union average for both genders (European Commission country report, 2023).

While the youth unemployment rate highlights the gender gap among active job seekers, it structurally obscures an even deeper disparity: the baseline labor force participation rate (LFPR). Because unemployment metrics strictly exclude individuals who have stopped looking for work or who are culturally/structurally confined to domestic roles, the official 22.1% female youth unemployment rate in Türkiye only captures a fraction of the exclusion. According to official 2025 figures, the labor force participation rate for young Turkish men stands at 60.1%, whereas for young women it plummets to a mere 34.3% *(TÜİK, 2025)*.

This massive participation gap indicates that the primary hurdle for young Turkish women is not merely finding a job once they enter the market, but entering the labor market in the first place. Early marriages, a severe lack of affordable institutional childcare, and traditional gender roles systematically lock young women into economic inactivity. Consequently, focusing solely on the unemployment rate severely underestimates the scale of female economic disenfranchisement in Türkiye. In contrast, while Czechia faces temporary female disengagement driven by exceptionally long paid parental leave—which lasts up to three or four years and temporarily shifts mothers into the inactive category—this represents a state-subsidized demographic policy rather than the permanent, structural labor market exclusion observed in the Turkish context.

Figure 3.3 — Gender Gap in Youth Unemployment



Source: TÜİK, 2022, 2025; Czech Statistical Office (ČSÚ), 2026.

4. Structural Drivers and Root Causes

To move beyond aggregate statistics, it is necessary to examine the underlying structural mechanisms that perpetuate youth unemployment and disengagement in Türkiye while constraining labor supply in Czechia. The divergence between the two economies is not merely cyclical; it is rooted in deep structural drivers concerning educational alignment, industrial integration, and human capital utilization.

4.1. Skills Mismatch, Educational Systems, and Human Capital Absorption

A primary driver of youth labor market friction is the structural misalignment between educational outputs and industrial demands. In Czechia, the educational architecture is tightly integrated with its export-oriented manufacturing base through structured vocational education and training (VET) frameworks, ensuring a steady pipeline of technical skills into the labor market (Cedefop, 2024). However, even within this structured environment, the inability of the domestic economy to fully absorb specialized talent at higher levels triggers localized shifts, forcing industries to rely on structured labor in auxiliary sectors.

The efficiency of Czechia's youth labor absorption is heavily anchored in its Vocational Education and Training (VET) system, though this system is currently undergoing critical modernizations. Despite limited historical work-based learning experiences—with only 15.2% of recent VET graduates having such exposure compared to the EU average of 66.0% — the employment rate for recent VET graduates in Czechia remains exceptionally high at 85.7%. To sustain this and prevent future skill mismatches, national policy has set a key objective to ensure that at least 60% of VET graduates gain direct work-based learning experience by 2025. Initiatives like 'Kompetence 4.0' are currently aligning these educational programs with emerging industry requirements, particularly in green and digital skills, to maintain the long-term employability of young technical graduates *(European Commission Country Report, 2026)*.

While Czechia's Vocational Education and Training (VET) system is highly effective at ensuring immediate post-graduation employment, contemporary educational analyses reveal structural vulnerabilities within this architecture, particularly regarding "early branching." The Czech system forces students into specific vocational or academic tracks at a very early age (typically around 15). While this early specialization serves the immediate needs of traditional manufacturing, it inherently restricts tertiary educational attainment; a significant portion of the youth cohort is permanently diverted away from university-level education *(European Commission, 2026)*.

As the global economy increasingly demands higher-order cognitive adaptability over rigid technical skills, this early sorting mechanism risks creating a workforce that is highly skilled for today's factories but poorly equipped for tomorrow's knowledge economy. If industries pivot rapidly due to technological disruption, these narrowly trained young workers may lack the broad academic foundation necessary for rapid re-skilling, exposing the Czech labor market to future structural friction.

Conversely, Türkiye suffers from an acute structural "skill mismatch" and systemic over-education relative to industrial demand. The rapid expansion of higher education without a parallel upgrading of industrial complexity has created a massive surplus of university graduates for whom the domestic economy generates insufficient high-tech, knowledge-based employment (Toksöz, 2006). As observed in comparative regional analyses of human capital depletion, when national economies fail to absorb educated youth through meritocratic institutional frameworks, young professionals experience severe professional devaluation and a profound sense of wasted intellectual investment. This systemic failure converts educational attainment into a catalyst for frustration rather than an asset for secure employment.

The structural skill mismatch in Türkiye is systematically quantified by institutions such as TEPAV, which highlights a profound disconnect between the proliferation of university degrees and the actual absorptive capacity of the economy. This over-education phenomenon is not uniformly distributed across disciplines; it is particularly acute in the social sciences, humanities, and certain engineering fields where the supply of graduates heavily outpaces industrial demand (TEPAV, 2023). Consequently, a significant surplus of graduates is forced either into protracted unemployment or into lower-tier service sector roles that do not require tertiary education, exacerbating professional devaluation and placing downward pressure on wages for non-graduates.

This mismatch persists even in the most dynamic urban centers. In Istanbul, where the overall 18–29 youth unemployment rate is 13.6%, university graduates face a nearly identical unemployment rate of 13.7%. Alarmingly, only 59.5% of these graduates manage to secure employment in their actual field of study. This proves that metropolitan expansion alone cannot resolve systemic over-education if industrial complexity does not evolve to demand specialized knowledge.

4.2. Sectoral Structures, Informality, and Labor Market Segmentation

The sectoral composition of employment dictates both job quality and vulnerability to macroeconomic shocks. Czechia's integration into the Central European manufacturing supply chain following its 2004 EU accession structurally anchored its workforce in formal, high-productivity industrial sectors (World Bank, 2026; European Commission, 2025). The nation's robust vocational education and training (VET) system effectively aligns young graduates with the technical demands of these industries (Cedefop, 2024). However, this highly industrialized structure has recently generated its own unique bottlenecks. Rather than struggling with job creation, Czechia currently faces a persistently tight labor market characterized by acute labor shortages. A rapidly aging population means fewer young cohorts are entering the workforce, leaving companies struggling to fill vacancies in key manufacturing and engineering sectors (European Commission, 2025). Consequently, the structural challenge in Czechia is not a lack of opportunities for the youth, but rather a demographic deficit that forces industries to aggressively compete for a shrinking pool of young talent.

In contrast, Türkiye's labor market is heavily burdened by structural segmentation and informality. A significant proportion of young workers—particularly new entrants and young women—are absorbed by low-productivity service sectors or unrecorded informal arrangements that offer minimal social security, sub-minimum wages, and zero legal recourse (TÜİK, 2026; DİSK-AR, 2026). This segmented architecture traps youth in precarious employment cycles, preventing smooth transitions from education to stable careers and explaining why aggregate GDP growth in Türkiye fails to translate into broad-based formal job creation for the younger demographic.

In the absence of sufficient formal, high-productivity employment, a substantial portion of Turkish youth is absorbed by the informal sector and the rapidly expanding platform-based gig economy. Driven by immediate income needs, young workers increasingly turn to courier services, digital delivery platforms, and uncontracted service roles. While these alternatives provide temporary financial relief, they offer almost no social security, career progression, or formal skills development, effectively trapping young people in precarious, low-productivity cycles and masking the true extent of structural youth underemployment (ILO, 2022).

Conversely, Czechia's response to severe labor scarcity is increasingly characterized by capital-intensive structural adaptations, specifically through investments in automation and Industry 4.0 technologies. Rather than relying on a surplus of cheap entry-level labor, Czech manufacturing sectors are forced to integrate advanced robotics and digital production systems to maintain export competitiveness despite a shrinking workforce (Cedefop, 2024). This technological shift demands a higher baseline of technical proficiency from young entrants, simultaneously reinforcing the value of the national VET system while permanently reducing the economy's reliance on low-skilled labor.

Finally, the cost of formal employment creates a structural barrier for youth in Türkiye that does not exist to the same extent in Czechia. In the Turkish labor market, high payroll taxes applied to the minimum wage significantly inflate the cost of formal hiring. This heavy financial burden directly encourages employers to rely on informal employment to reduce labor costs, trapping young, inexperienced entrants in a cycle of unregistered work (Toksöz, 2006). Both workers and employers recognize that these high non-wage costs must be mitigated to stimulate formal job creation. In stark contrast, the Czech labor market is characterized by a shrinking working-age population and high demand for labor, which naturally drives up starting wages and incentivizes companies to offer formal, secure contracts to attract whatever young talent is available.

Looking beyond current sectoral distribution, the impending wave of global technological disruption—driven by artificial intelligence, Industry 4.0, and the green economic transition —acts as a massive structural driver redefining youth employability in both nations. According to global competitiveness frameworks, the rapid integration of automation fundamentally accelerates "skills obsolescence," wherein the competencies young people acquire in traditional educational settings become redundant before they even enter the workforce (Draghi, 2024).

In Czechia, automation is largely embraced as an existential necessity. Confronted with a shrinking youth cohort and severe labor shortages, the Czech industrial base must automate to survive. Consequently, the pressure on the Czech youth is to rapidly acquire advanced digital and green skills to manage automated systems, rather than perform manual assembly. In Türkiye, however, automation presents a severe structural threat. A labor market already burdened by a surplus of young, underutilized workers relies heavily on low-cost, labor-intensive manufacturing and services to absorb employment. If global supply chains force Turkish industries to automate to remain competitive, the domestic capacity to generate entry-level jobs for low- and medium-skilled youth will collapse, further inflating the NEET and long-term unemployment rates.

4.3. Institutional Paralysis and the Root Causes of Youth Emigration

Beyond immediate economic metrics, the structural stagnation in peripheral labor markets is profoundly exacerbated by institutional governance. As highlighted in contemporary critical literature on regional labor dynamics, when state institutions rely on patronage, clientelism, and opaque economic structures rather than transparent meritocracy, young individuals are stripped of institutional trust, compounding the effects of an already constrained labor market (Mara & Landesmann, 2022).

In Czechia, the primary structural vulnerability is an aging workforce that threatens the long-term sustainability of its export-driven economic model. Because the domestic supply of young workers is insufficient to meet industrial demand, Czech institutions do not face the challenge of youth emigration or brain drain. Instead, national policy is heavily directed towards two adaptive strategies: accelerating industrial automation to reduce labor dependency, and systematically integrating foreign workers to alleviate critical labor shortages (European Commission, 2025). This institutional stability provides young Czechs with high predictability and secure career pathways.

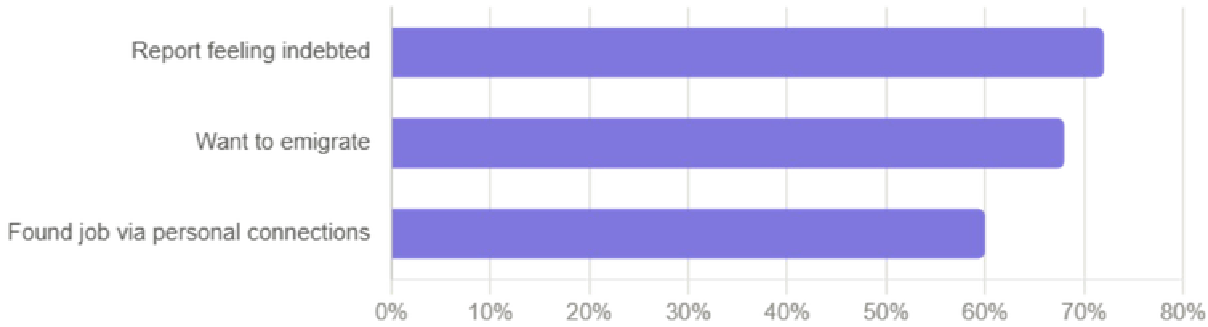
In Türkiye, macroeconomic volatility, currency depreciation, and the erosion of institutional predictability have compounded the pressures of youth unemployment and the expansion of the NEET phenomenon—often referred to colloquially as 'ev genci' (home-bound youth) — (TÜİK, 2025)

Furthermore, in the specific context of Türkiye, this structural attrition is deeply intertwined with severe macroeconomic volatility and long-standing labor market rigidities (UNDP, 2025). As documented in empirical labor market studies, the widespread prevalence of informal employment and the limited capacity of the formal sector to generate quality jobs create an environment of economic insecurity, leading to institutional distrust and dissatisfaction with social protection frameworks (Toksöz, 2006). Concurrently, a severe job-skill mismatch affects university graduates, as nearly 40% work in fields unrelated to their qualifications, causing a sharp decline in career expectations and a rising rate of hopelessness among educated youth (TEPAV, 2024). Consequently, rather than remaining in a volatile domestic labor market characterized by precarious conditions, an increasing proportion of qualified young professionals opts for emigration, driving a persistent cycle of structural brain drain (Mara & Landesmann, 2022; TEPAV, 2024)

Rather than enduring an institutional environment where career mobility is disconnected from talent, an unprecedented wave of educated youth opts for individual emigration—triggering a structural brain drain that strips the nation of its critical human capital and locks both domestic industries and public sectors into a persistent cycle of underperformance (Mara & Landesmann, 2022).

The socio-economic scarring effects of being NEET—what the Istanbul Chamber of Commerce (İTOSAM) identifies as the cascading sub-problems of youth disengagement—extend far beyond mere income loss, fundamentally damaging the social contract. A comprehensive 2025 study by Istanbul Bilgi University and TÜBİTAK, surveying 2,403 youth across 29 provinces, paints a stark picture of these sub-problems: 54% of respondents remain completely outside the labor force, and a staggering 72% report being severely in debt.

Figure 4.2: Socio-Economic Scarring and Emigration Intentions Among Turkish Youth



Source:IstanbulBilgiUniversity / TÜBİTAK,2025.

Furthermore, the survey highlights a profound breakdown in meritocracy, with 60% of employed youth stating they secured their jobs through personal connections and nepotism rather than formal application processes. This lack of institutional fairness directly destroys youth optimism. According to joint research by Habitat and İnfakto, while 50% of working youth maintain a sense of hope for the future, this figure plummets to a mere 16% among active job seekers. Consequently, the ultimate structural consequence of these intertwined sub-problems—debt, lack of meritocracy, and hopelessness—is mass outward mobility. Driven by this structural despair, 68% of the surveyed youth express a concrete desire to emigrate, draining the nation of its future demographic dividend (Istanbul Bilgi University / TÜBİTAK, 2025).

The domestic friction in Türkiye's labor market has increasingly translated into a measurable brain drain. Confronted with high youth unemployment, wage erosion, and precarious working conditions, a growing demographic of highly educated young professionals is emigrating. Recent analyses indicate a sharp rise in the outmigration of engineers, medical professionals, and software developers seeking better economic stability and meritocratic institutional frameworks abroad, predominantly in Western Europe. This depletion of human capital directly undermines Türkiye's long-term capacity to transition toward a high-value, knowledge-based economy.

In Czechia, emigration presents a fundamentally different structural challenge. Despite near-full domestic employment and robust VET pipelines, there is a documented trend of intra-EU outmigration among young Czechs relocating to neighboring economies such as Germany and Austria. This movement is primarily driven by wage differentials rather than unemployment; young professionals and skilled tradespeople leverage the EU's freedom of movement to secure higher compensation in more affluent labor markets (European Commission, 2023). Consequently, this outward mobility exacerbates the already acute labor shortages within Czechia's domestic industrial base, forcing employers to navigate a persistently tight labor supply.

4.4. Labor Laws and Employment Regulation

The regulatory environment surrounding hiring, dismissal, and social protection forms a final structural layer beneath the sectoral and educational drivers discussed above, and it operates on markedly different logics in each country.

In Czechia, labor law reform in recent years has been shaped by "flexicurity" debates — the policy trade-off between labor market flexibility and worker security — but these debates have been driven primarily by concerns linked to older workers and working families rather than youth specifically. Government flexicurity proposals brought forward in 2016–2017 focused on general employment conditions rather than youth-targeted provisions, and the one measure that was ultimately enacted (a one-week paternity leave, effective February 2018) was family- rather than youth-oriented (EACEA Youthwiki, Czechia labour market integration chapter, n.d.). Where Czech regulation does intersect with youth specifically, it does so indirectly: students up to age 26 (28 for doctoral students) benefit from reduced social-security and health-insurance obligations when self-employment is a secondary activity, easing the transition into part-time or freelance work alongside study (EACEA Youthwiki, n.d.). Taken together, this suggests that Czech labor law is not a significant independent driver of youth outcomes in either direction — it neither actively disadvantages young workers nor contains dedicated youth-activation levers, leaving the demographic and sectoral dynamics described in Sections 4.2–4.3 as the dominant forces.

In Türkiye, by contrast, employment protection legislation (EPL) is itself identified as a structural factor shaping labor market outcomes — and one where formal-sector rigidity and informal-sector precarity reinforce each other. Severance pay obligations and dismissal procedures are widely viewed by employers as burdensome, and the OECD has specifically recommended loosening employment protection legislation as part of a broader activation-oriented reform package — alongside expanding the scope and generosity of unemployment insurance, strengthening İŞKUR's placement and counselling capacity, and engaging private-sector job placement providers (OECD Economic Surveys: Türkiye, 2025). This framing implies a specific mechanism connecting labor law to the informality problem already discussed in Section 4.2: because formal dismissal is costly and complex, employers facing a young, growing labor supply have an incentive to hire informally rather than absorb that cost — meaning rigid EPL and high informality are not separate problems but two sides of the same regulatory gap. Compounding this, Türkiye's spending on unemployment and related social benefits stood at just 1.4% of GDP, against a 5.6% OECD median (OECD, 2025) — the lowest level in the OECD — meaning that for young workers who do lose formal employment, the safety net available to cushion the transition is comparatively thin. Labor law reform has had more traction on the participation side: a decade of reforms lifted female labor force participation (ages 15–64) from 33.8% in 2013 to 40.9% in 2023, though this remains well below the OECD average, which rose from 62.5% to 66.7% over the same period (OECD Economic Surveys: Türkiye, 2025).

Czechia's labor law framework is largely neutral with respect to youth outcomes, operating in the background of a demographically-driven tight labor market, while Türkiye's employment protection and social insurance architecture is itself a contributing mechanism behind informality and weak safety-net coverage for young entrants — not merely a passive backdrop to the demographic and sectoral pressures already described.

The legislative frameworks governing labor in both countries further institutionalize these market disparities. In Türkiye, youth employment is regulated under Labor Law No. 4857, which, while establishing baseline protections such as minimum wage and severance pay, introduces rigidities that can deter formal hiring. The cost of compliance, combined with high employer social security premiums, often disincentivizes the formal recruitment of inexperienced youth, inadvertently pushing them toward the informal sector or temporary internship arrangements that lack long-term security.

Conversely, the Czech Labour Code (Act No. 262/2006 Coll.) operates strictly within the parameters of the EU Working Time Directive. This integration ensures robust occupational health and safety standards, stringent limits on working hours, and clear regulations on fixed-term contracts for young workers. While these EU-aligned mandates increase the immediate administrative and financial cost of labor, they guarantee a highly regulated, secure entry into the workforce, sharply contrasting with the precariousness that characterizes the informal segments of the Turkish youth labor market.

The regulatory environment in both countries inadvertently fosters a "dual labor market" architecture—a system divided between well-protected insiders (typically older, permanently contracted workers) and precarious outsiders (young entrants on temporary contracts or in informal roles). In Türkiye, high severance pay mandates and rigid dismissal regulations for permanent contracts heavily disincentivize employers from granting formal insider status to unproven young workers, pushing them into the precarious outsider tier (OECD, 2025).

Furthermore, this precarity is exacerbated by a severe lack of collective bargaining power among the youth. In both countries, trade union membership is heavily concentrated among older workers in traditional sectors. Czechia, for instance, reports one of the lowest trade union density rates in the OECD, hovering around 10%. Without union representation to negotiate equitable entry wages, secure transition mechanisms, or protection against arbitrary dismissal, young workers in both Türkiye and Czechia are left to navigate the labor market as atomized individuals, absorbing the brunt of macroeconomic volatility and regulatory gaps.

5.PolicyResponsesandGovernment Initiatives

5.1.Introduction:TheComparative EvaluationFramework

To evaluate the active labor market policies (ALMPs) of Czechia and Türkiye beyond mere descriptive summaries, this section applies a standardized comparative evaluation framework based on established ALMP evaluation literature. (Caliendo & Schmidl, 2016; OECD, 2019). Rather than presenting isolated national overviews, both policy architectures—the EU Youth Guarantee in Czechia and the employment programs of the Turkish Employment Agency (İŞKUR) in Türkiye— are systematically assessed across five core criteria drawn from International Labour Organization (ILO) and European Commission monitoring standards:: (1) Design and Target Population, examining eligibility parameters and age demographics; (2) Delivery Mechanism, analyzing institutional implementation and administrative agility; (3) Funding and Scale, evaluating budgetary provenance, GDP share, and external co-financing; (4) Coverage and Take-Up, assessing the proportion of the eligible NEET population reached; and (5) Outcome Evidence, distinguishing between self-reported administrative metrics and independent impact evaluations. By applying this uniform grid, the comparative analysis establishes an empirical standard for policy effectiveness before examining country-specific data.

To move beyond national-level abstractions, the practical efficacy of these policies is best understood through localized implementation. In Czechia, the Labour Office's intervention in structurally disadvantaged areas, such as the post-industrial Moravian-Silesian region, highlights a targeted approach. Here, regional labor offices actively collaborate with local automotive and technology clusters to re-skill young people transitioning out of traditional heavy industries, providing highly subsidized, sector-specific training that directly matches local enterprise needs. Conversely, in Türkiye, İŞKUR's provincial implementation often centers on mass industrial hubs like Bursa or Gaziantep. Through initiatives such as the Vocational Training and Skill Development Cooperation Protocol (MEGİP), provincial İŞKUR directorates partner with local chambers of commerce to place youth directly onto factory floors. However, while the Czech regional model heavily emphasizes deep re-skilling for a changing economy, the Turkish provincial application often functions primarily as a mechanism for rapid job placement in existing low-to-medium tech manufacturing roles.

5.2. Czechia: The EU Youth Guarantee

In Czechia, active labor market interventions for young people are structurally defined by the EU-wide Youth Guarantee framework. The policy's design is explicitly youth-centric and preventative, mandating that all individuals under the age of 30 receive a high-quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship, or a traineeship within four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education. The delivery of these interventions is orchestrated by the Czech Labour Office (*Úřad práce ČR*) across its regional branch network. A notable feature of this delivery infrastructure has been its administrative adaptability; during the COVID-19 lockdowns, labor offices swiftly transitioned counseling, education, and retraining services to remote platforms, leveraging state-backed digital initiatives such as the #NaDalku distance education portal to maintain continuous engagement with vulnerable youth.

Furthermore, the delivery mechanism in Czechia extends beyond traditional state administration by embracing a robust multi-stakeholder collaborative framework. Crucially, active labor market and digital integration policies heavily incorporate non-profit organizations, civil society networks, and academic institutions—exemplified by collaborative platforms like *DigiKoalice*—which actively cooperate with state bodies to reach vulnerable, hard-to-reach NEET youth who might otherwise slip through bureaucratic cracks (European Commission, 2023)

From a financial perspective, Czechia's youth employment framework benefits from substantial external co-financing. The program is heavily supported by European Union resources, specifically through the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) and the national Operational Programme Employment Plus (OPZ+), which insulates national implementation from domestic fiscal shocks. Regarding coverage and take-up, while holistic participation rates as an exact percentage of total eligible NEET youth can be obscured in macro-level administrative figures, proxy indicators confirm high institutional reach among registered young jobseekers. Furthermore, unlike systems relying solely on internal reporting, outcome evidence for Czechia is subjected to rigorous independent auditing, such as evaluations conducted by the European Court of Auditors (ECA) Empirical data demonstrates a positive trajectory: the youth NEET rate fell from 12.1% in 2014 to a low of 9.5% in 2018, and despite a pandemic-induced increase to 11.0% in 2020, it recovered to 10.1% by 2023, allowing Czechia to reach its national 2030 NEET reduction target of 9% well ahead of schedule.

5.3. Türkiye: İŞKUR Programs

In contrast, Türkiye's primary active labor market interventions are centralized under the Turkish Employment Agency (İŞKUR). Unlike Czechia's youth-exclusive framework, İŞKUR's statutory mandate covers the entire population of registered jobseekers—a structural breadth that can constrain the long-term, specialized focus required for effective school-to-work transitions.

Youth-focused interventions operate as sub-programs within this broader mandate, most notably On-the-Job Training Programs (*İşbaşı Eğitim Programları*), vocational training courses, and entrepreneurship subsidies. The delivery mechanism relies on İŞKUR's network of provincial directorates (*İl Müdürlükleri*), which interface directly with private sector employers by offering short-term wage and social security subsidies to encourage trainee placement.

However, a distinct institutional limitation inherent in Türkiye's delivery model is the relative absence of a formalized multi-stakeholder ecosystem. Unlike Czechia, where non-profit organizations and youth civil society networks actively collaborate in outreach, Türkiye's delivery remains predominantly centralized under state directorates. While administrative execution relies heavily on direct state-employer partnerships, youth-focused non-governmental organizations are largely excluded from the formal policy architecture. This structural gap severely restricts the state's capacity to conduct effective outreach toward marginalized, unrecorded, or deeply disengaged NEET populations who never voluntarily register with public employment offices.

Financially, İŞKUR programs operate on a massive scale, funded domestically through the national Unemployment Insurance Fund (*İşsizlik Sigortası Fonu*) and state allocations. As documented in İŞKUR's official annual performance reports (*Faaliyet Raporları*), the agency channels substantial domestic resources to enroll hundreds of thousands of young participants each year. However, assessing the true coverage and take-up rate remains methodologically challenging. Because participant counts are typically reported in absolute numerical terms rather than as a proportion of the overall eligible NEET pool, it is difficult to measure the policy's structural penetration against Türkiye's rapidly expanding demographic base. Crucially, outcome evidence represents the thinnest analytical dimension for İŞKUR. While administrative reports highlight high initial enrollment figures, there is a pronounced scarcity of independent, counterfactual impact evaluations tracking long-term job retention or post-program trajectories. Consequently, high participant numbers cannot be automatically equated with structural program effectiveness, as it remains unverified how many participants transition into permanent formal employment versus returning to NEET status once public subsidies expire.

5.4. Side-by-Side Comparative Evaluation Grid

Table 5.1 — Comparative Evaluation: EU Youth Guarantee (Czechia) vs. İŞKUR Gençlik Programı (Türkiye)

Criterion	Czechia — EU Youth Guarantee	Türkiye — İŞKUR Gençlik Programı
Design & target population	Universal EU-wide commitment: an offer of employment, education, apprenticeship, or traineeship within 4 months of becoming NEET, ages 15–29 (European Commission, 2023)	Targets university students specifically, not the full NEET population; launched February 2025 as part of İŞKUR's active labour market programs (İŞKUR, 2025; ERTV, 2026)
Delivery mechanism	Delivered through the Czech Labour Office (Úřad práce ČR), the national public employment service (European Commission, 2023)	Delivered through İŞKUR provincial directorates in partnership with universities; ~2,350 individual programs implemented across 81 provinces (İŞKUR Gençlik Programı, 2026)
Funding & scale	Co-financed by the European Social Fund alongside the national budget (European Commission, "CZ Youth Guarantee Country Fiche," 2023)	Over 10 billion TL disbursed to approximately 220,000 participants between February 2025 and April 2026 (İŞKUR/ERTV, 2026)
Coverage & take-up	National take-up rate not available — reprorted here via the NEET outcome	Approximately 930,000 applications received against a

Criterion	Czechia — EU Youth Guarantee	Türkiye — İŞKUR Gençlik Programı
	rate as a proxy, not direct enrollment data (data gap, flagged)	250,000-place quota — demand roughly 3.7 times available capacity (İŞKUR/ERTV, 2026)
Outcome evidence	NEET rate (15–29) fell from 12.1% (2014) to a low of 9.5% (2018), rose to 11.4% (2022) post-pandemic, and eased to 10.1% (2023); a national target of 9% NEET by 2030 was reportedly met by 2024, though this claim comes from a different official compilation than the 10.1% figure and should be footnoted rather than reconciled (European Commission, 2023; Czech employment strategy documents, 2024)	No independent post-program impact evaluation (e.g., employment retention after program completion) located in current source set; available data documents participation volume and disbursement only, not effectiveness (İŞKUR, 2025) — flagged as an evidence gap

Source: EuropeanCommission,2023;CzechEmploymentStrategyDocuments,2024;İŞKUR,2025;ERTV,2026.

5.5. Cross-Cutting Structural Observations

A comparative cross-cutting evaluation of Czechia's and Türkiye's active labor market policy (ALMP) architectures reveals fundamental structural divergences that extend far beyond raw participation figures or short-term administrative output statistics.

First, institutional governance and accountability structures dictate the reliability and adaptability of policy delivery. Czechia's youth employment framework operates firmly within a multi-level European governance model. Because its funding is heavily anchored in European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) and the Operational Programme Employment Plus (OPZ+), national implementation is structurally tied to strict EU-wide conditionality, standardized indicator reporting, and independent external auditing by bodies such as the European Court of Auditors (ECA). This external accountability framework compels implementing agencies (such as *Úřad práce ČR*) to maintain high transparency and institutional agility—as evidenced by their swift, structured pivot to digital delivery models like the #NaDalku portal during the COVID-19 pandemic. In contrast, İŞKUR operates under a purely domestic administrative mandate, financed primarily through national mechanisms like the Unemployment Insurance Fund. While this grants domestic policy autonomy, it entirely lacks an equivalent institutionalized external evaluation body. Consequently, oversight remains internal and administrative, precluding the systemic feedback loops that external EU auditing naturally imposes.

Second, the structural persistence of youth unemployment in Türkiye must not be misattributed exclusively to program design flaws or administrative inefficiency. Conflating policy design with broader macroeconomic constraints distorts economic analysis. The persistently high NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) rate in Türkiye is driven by two distinct, interacting macro-structural frictions: a deficient domestic demand for high-productivity formal labor, and a policy framework that adopts a generalized, non-youth-specific mandate rather than a preventative life-course approach. Active employment programs—regardless of how many participants they enroll—cannot single-handedly substitute for structural economic expansion, formal job creation, and macroeconomic stability. When an economy is burdened by chronic inflation, currency volatility, and an oversized informal sector, short-term training subsidies act merely as revolving doors, absorbing participants temporarily without anchoring them in stable, long-term careers.

Finally, a critical methodological disparity emerges regarding outcome evidence and the evaluation of policy effectiveness. The scarcity of independent, long-term counterfactual impact evaluations for İŞKUR programs does not automatically validate the conclusion that Turkish interventions are inherently ineffective. Rather, it highlights a systemic evaluation gap: Turkish programs are significantly less externally scrutinized using rigorous longitudinal tracking (such as multi-year post-program employment retention rates). In the evaluation literature of active labor market policies, high initial enrollment and disbursement volumes are classified strictly as *administrative outputs* rather than *economic outcomes*. Without independent tracer studies and counterfactual controls—standards routinely enforced in EU-co-financed environments—policymakers risk conflating high participant turnover with genuine structural impact, leaving systemic labor market failures obscured beneath high administrative numbers.

Evaluating these policy responses requires translating isolated national budgets into comparable metrics, particularly given Türkiye's macroeconomic volatility. While Turkish active labor market programs allocate billions of liras annually—such as past budgetary announcements exceeding 10 billion TL—the real impact of this funding is severely diluted when adjusted for currency depreciation and converted into a per-participant expenditure in Euro or Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) terms. Consequently, the actual financial investment per young individual in Türkiye remains structurally low, often covering little more than minimum wage subsidies and basic social security premiums for short durations. In stark contrast, Czechia’s youth employment framework, underpinned by European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) allocations, guarantees a stable, high-value investment per participant. Shielded from domestic inflation, this EU co-financing allows for capital-intensive interventions, such as prolonged specialized training and robust digital counseling infrastructure, which require a much higher per-capita financial commitment than the Turkish budget currently sustains.

The divergence in policy design is also distinctly reflected in how these interventions are framed within public and media discourse. In Czechia, the EU Youth Guarantee is largely depoliticized; media scrutiny and public debate typically focus on bureaucratic efficiency and occasional concerns regarding "deadweight loss"—where state subsidies might be funding jobs that the private sector would have created anyway. It is generally viewed as a stable, administrative safety net. In Türkiye, however, active labor market policies are heavily politicized and intensely debated. Independent media, labor unions, and youth organizations frequently criticize İŞKUR’s On-the-Job Training Programs, arguing that they function less as genuine human capital investments and more as state-sponsored avenues for employers to access temporary, cheap labor. In the public consciousness, these policies are often perceived not as stepping stones to stable careers, but as short-term palliatives that fail to address the deeper structural crisis of the "ev genci" (home-bound youth) phenomenon.

Deadweight Loss and Substitution Effects Evaluating policy effectiveness requires acknowledging the inherent theoretical limitations of Active Labor Market Policies (ALMPs), particularly wage subsidies and short-term training. Empirical evaluation literature frequently highlights that mass hiring subsidies—such as those extensively utilized by İŞKUR in Türkiye—are highly susceptible to "deadweight loss" or windfall effects *(Caliendo & Schmidl, 2016)*.

A deadweight loss occurs when state funds subsidize the hiring of a young worker whom the employer would have hired anyway due to natural business expansion. In such cases, the policy generates zero net new employment; it merely transfers public funds to private corporate balance sheets. Furthermore, these programs often trigger "substitution effects," where employers fire older or unsubsidized workers specifically to hire state-funded youth, churning the labor market without expanding total employment capacity. While the Czech EU Youth Guarantee is somewhat insulated from these inefficiencies through targeted conditionality and rigorous ECA auditing, the mass-scale, domestically funded nature of İŞKUR's employer subsidies makes the Turkish framework highly vulnerable to these structural inefficiencies. This reinforces the conclusion that high administrative participation figures cannot substitute for genuine, demand-driven job creation.

5.6. Bridge to Section 6

These identified gaps in program design, institutional target precision, and independent evaluation frameworks directly inform the targeted policy recommendations presented in Section 6.

6. Key Findings, Challenges, and Recommendations

6.1. Key Findings

The comparative analysis presented in this report reveals that Czechia and Türkiye represent two structurally opposite responses to the same underlying policy question — how to integrate young people into a national labor market — and that neither country's outcome can be explained by policy design alone.

First, the demographic asymmetry functions as the deepest structural determinant of both countries' youth labor market outcomes. Czechia's contracting working-age population (7.4 million in 2010 to 6.86 million in recent monitoring periods) has converted youth employment from a policy challenge into a demographic imperative, compelling employers to actively compete for a shrinking pool of young workers (European Commission, 2026). Türkiye's demographic dividend — a youth population share of 14.9% against an EU average of 10.7% (TÜİK, 2025) — represents the inverse condition: an abundant supply of young labor market entrants that the domestic economy has, to date, been structurally unable to absorb into formal, high-quality employment.

Second, while headline youth unemployment rates show a degree of convergence in recent readings (Türkiye at 14.8% and Czechia at 8.4% as of May 2026), this convergence masks a much wider and more persistent divergence in the NEET indicator — 22.9%–23.3% in Türkiye versus 10.1% in Czechia. This gap indicates that Türkiye's youth labor market challenge is not primarily one of active jobseekers failing to find work, but of a substantially larger share of young people disengaging from both education and the labor market altogether — a distinction with direct implications for the design of any policy response.

Third, gender disparities differ from one another not only in magnitude but in mechanism. In Türkiye, the gender gap in both unemployment (roughly double the male rate throughout 2022–2025) and NEET status (30.9% for women versus 16.3% for men in 2025) reflects occupational segregation and structural barriers to female labor force participation (TÜİK, 2025). In Czechia, the available evidence is comparatively thin and largely non-youth-specific, which itself is a finding: the absence of a disaggregated 15–24 gender breakdown in Czech official statistics constrains this report's ability to draw a symmetrical conclusion, and should not be interpreted as evidence that no such gap exists.

Fourth, the structural drivers operate through opposite mechanisms in the two countries. Czechia's VET-integrated, export-oriented manufacturing base converts educational output into labor demand with relatively high efficiency. It is increasingly constrained by the sheer unavailability of young workers (Cedefop, 2024). Türkiye's higher education expansion has outpaced the economy's capacity to generate knowledge-intensive employment, producing systemic overqualification, informality, and — in its most severe form — emigration of skilled youth as a structural response to blocked domestic mobility (Toksöz, 2006; TEPAV, 2024; Mara & Landesmann, 2022).

Fifth, the policy comparison surfaces an evaluation asymmetry that is at least as significant as any difference in program design. Czechia's Youth Guarantee operates inside a multi-level EU governance structure with external co-financing (ESF+/OPZ+) and independent auditing (ECA), which imposes accountability and generates verifiable outcome data. İŞKUR's programs, by contrast, are domestically funded and internally reported, meaning high participation and disbursement figures — such as the roughly 220,000 participants and over 10 billion TL disbursed under the İŞKUR Gençlik Programı between February 2025 and April 2026 (İŞKUR/ERTV, 2026) — document administrative output rather than verified employment outcomes. This is a methodological gap, not proof of ineffectiveness, but it materially limits what this report — or any external observer — can conclude about the programs' actual impact.

6.2. Challenges

For Czechia, the central challenge is one of demographic sustainability rather than job creation. With over 80% of enterprises reporting recruitment difficulties (European Commission, 2025), the risk is not youth unemployment but an accelerating dependence on automation and foreign labor to sustain the export-oriented industrial model — a transition that, if not carefully managed, could leave sections of the domestic youth population (particularly those without VET-aligned qualifications) without a clear pathway into the tightening labor market. A secondary challenge lies in the absorption of highly qualified young graduates: the same manufacturing-anchored economy that generates strong demand for technical/vocational skills does not necessarily generate equivalent demand at higher skill tiers, raising the risk of localized skills mismatch and outward mobility even within a low-unemployment environment (Mara & Landesmann, 2022).

For Türkiye, the challenges are more numerous and more structurally entrenched. Macroeconomic volatility and currency instability continue to produce "jobless growth," in which real GDP expansion (projected at 3.1% in 2026 and 3.8% in 2027 by the OECD) does not translate proportionally into formal job creation (OECD, 2026; Toksöz, 2006). Informality and labor market segmentation concentrate young workers — especially young women — in low-productivity or unrecorded employment lacking social protection (TÜİK, 2026; DİSK-AR, 2026). A pronounced skills mismatch, with nearly 40% of university graduates working outside their field of study (TEPAV, 2024), compounds a rising NEET rate and contributes to a documented pattern of skilled youth emigration. Finally, the absence of a formalized multi-stakeholder delivery ecosystem — in contrast to Czechia's integration of civil society networks such as DigiKoalice — limits İŞKUR's capacity to reach disengaged NEET youth who do not voluntarily register with public employment offices, and the absence of independent impact evaluation leaves policymakers without reliable evidence on what is actually working.

6.3. Recommendations

For Czechpolicymakers:

1. Expand targeted integration pathways for underrepresented or harder-to-reach youth cohorts, ensuring that a historically tight labor market does not translate into complacency about residual pockets of youth disengagement.

2. Extend the VET-industry pipeline model to higher-skill and knowledge-intensive sectors, reducing the risk of skills mismatch and outward mobility among university-track graduates.

3. Maintain and formalize the multi-stakeholder delivery model (civil society, academic institutions) that proved effective during pandemic-era service continuity, as a template transferable to other EU member states.

4. Develop youth-specific flexicurity measures. Czechia's flexicurity policy debates (2016–2017 reforms, the 2018 paternity-leave measure) have so far centered on older workers and families rather than young people. A dedicated youth flexicurity track — even a modest one — would close a gap the report identifies as a genuine policy blind spot rather than a resolved issue.

5. Address the below-EU-average youth employment rate (25.5%, 2023) as a labor-market-entry issue, not only an unemployment issue. Because this indicator reflects low youth labor-force *participation* (extended schooling, delayed entry) rather than difficulty finding work once job-seeking, targeted measures — structured work-study transitions, expanded apprenticeship placement, or broadening the existing student self-employment/social-security relief (currently available up to age 26, 28 for doctoral students) — could raise participation without contradicting the tight-labor-market narrative.

6. Close the youth-specific gender data gap. This report was unable to locate a disaggregated 15–24 gender breakdown for Czech unemployment, relying instead on general working-age figures. Commissioning or publishing such a breakdown (via ČSÚ/Eurostat) would let policymakers confirm — or rule out — a Czech equivalent of the gender gap documented in Türkiye, rather than leaving the question open by default.

For Turkish policymakers:

1. Establish an independent, longitudinal impact evaluation mechanism for İŞKUR programs — tracking post-program employment retention and formalization rates — to distinguish administrative output from genuine labor market impact, following the EU's external-audit model.

2. Expand youth-specific (rather than general-jobseeker) program design, narrowing eligibility and delivery toward the NEET population specifically, rather than relying on sub-programs nested within a broader mandate.

3. Address the gender gap directly through targeted female labor force participation initiatives, given that the NEET and unemployment gender gaps are structural rather than incidental.

4. Incentivize formalization of youth employment, particularly in services, to reduce the share of young workers absorbed into unprotected informal arrangements.

5. Build institutional multi-stakeholder partnerships with universities, private-sector employer associations, and civil society organizations to extend outreach capacity beyond centralized state directorates — closing the gap with Czechia's DigiKoalice-style model.

6. Pair employment-protection reform with a stronger unemployment safety net, rather than pursuing EPL loosening in isolation. Turkish unemployment/social benefit spending sits at just 1.4% of GDP against a 5.6% OECD median — the lowest in the OECD. Loosening dismissal rules without simultaneously expanding unemployment insurance risks shifting cost from employers onto workers who already have thin safety-net coverage; the OECD's own recommendation packages EPL reform together with expanded insurance and activation services, and this report's recommendation should preserve that pairing rather than treat deregulation as a standalone fix.

7. Invest in labor-market information and career-guidance infrastructure at the point of higher-education enrollment, not only at graduation. With nearly 40% of university graduates working outside their field of study, part of the mismatch originates in enrollment-stage choices rather than post-graduation job search; guidance systems that connect prospective fields of study to labor-market demand data could reduce the pipeline of mismatch before it occurs.

8. Publish a reconciled measure of labor underutilization alongside the narrow unemployment rate. The wide gap between TÜİK's official rate and DİSK-AR's broader "idle labor force" estimate means policymakers and the public are working

from two very different pictures of the same labor market; an official broader-underutilization series (even if TÜİK does not adopt DİSK-AR's exact methodology) would reduce this ambiguity and let policy target underemployment and discouragement, not only open unemployment

Shared lesson across both contexts:

Establish a structured Czech–Turkish policy learning exchange: potentially through existing EU candidate-country cooperation channels, focused specifically on two asymmetries this report identifies: Czechia's independent-audit model for youth programs (which Türkiye currently lacks) and Türkiye's İŞKUR-employer subsidy delivery infrastructure at scale (which could inform Czechia's own employer-side incentive design as its labor shortage deepens).

Policy effectiveness cannot be assessed through participation and disbursement figures alone. The comparison between Czechia and Türkiye demonstrates that external accountability structures — co-financing conditionality, independent auditing, standardized outcome reporting — are not incidental features of the EU Youth Guarantee model but a core mechanism through which policy learning and course-correction become possible.

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