

**JOB SECURITY, LABOUR LAW REFORMS, AND YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT:
FLEXICURITY'S ROLE IN SHAPING TURKEY'S FUTURE WORKFORCE**Assoc. Prof. Eylül KABAKÇI GÜNAY (Ph.D.)^{*} **ABSTRACT**

This paper investigates how flexicurity—combining full social security with labour market flexibility—might be able to help Turkey with its particular labour market issues. A concept that originated in Denmark and was incorporated into the EU's 1997 European Employment Strategy, flexicurity aims to strike a balance between worker protection and enterprise flexibility. Flexicurity in the EU has demonstrated the potential to address structural unemployment and low workforce participation. To use this model in Turkey, nevertheless, one must modify it to fit the unique economic and demographic conditions of the nation. High rates of youth unemployment, poor labour force participation, particularly among women, and restricted job mobility are all problems in Turkey. An inclusive workforce could be promoted in Turkey by implementing customised flexicurity concepts, such as active labour market policies and improved employment security. It explores how Turkey can use flexicurity to advance economic equity and growth by drawing on Dual Labour Market Theory, which makes a distinction between primary (stable) and secondary (unstable) employment sectors; Human Capital Theory, which emphasises the importance of education in economic outcomes; and Historical-Institutional Theory, which focusses on the role of labour market policies. Using a difference-in-differences approach, we examine the effects of graded security contracts on job mobility and stability in Turkey's recent employment reforms. An adjusted flexicurity strategy that prioritises job security, income stability, and better job transitions may improve the resilience and inclusivity of Turkey's labour market, according to the findings. With this model, Turkey can accomplish its long-term economic modernisation objectives as well as its current employment demands by paving the road for a more equal and competitive labour market.

Keywords: Flexicurity in Turkey, Labor Market Reforms, Economic Equity and Growth, Youth and Gender Employment.

1. INTRODUCTION

Employment is one of the important parameters showing the development level of a country. The socio-economic conditions of each country are not the same, and the effects of employment on growth on a sectoral basis also differ from country to country (Demir,2021). Another concept that has been on the agenda recently in this changing nature of employment is the concept of flexicurity. The concept of

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"flexicurity," combining labour market flexibility with substantial social protections, offers a framework that could enhance labour market resilience and inclusivity. Originally established in Denmark and integrated into the European Union's Employment Strategy in 1997, flexicurity promotes a balanced approach that allows employers to adapt to economic changes while ensuring workers' welfare is safeguarded. This model has shown particular promise in addressing persistent employment challenges, such as low workforce participation and structural unemployment, making it a compelling option for economies with significant employment disparities (Klammer, 2005; Auer, 2007; Viebrock and Clasen, 2009).

Several studies have emphasized the value of flexicurity's dual approach. The model incorporates active labour market policies, short-term unemployment benefits, and career transition support systems, which collectively aim to increase employment security and reduce poverty rates (Wilthagen and Tros, 2004; Muffels et al., 2014). By enabling smoother transitions for workers between roles and providing income support, flexicurity helps to stabilize economies in times of change. However, implementing this model across diverse contexts poses unique challenges. The European Union originally pursued flexicurity as a means to establish a highly competitive global economy by 2010, and while the goals have since evolved, flexicurity continues to address complex employment challenges across EU member states (EurActiv, 2007a; Keune and Jepsen, 2007).

Adopting flexicurity in non-European contexts, such as Turkey, presents both opportunities and constraints due to differing economic structures, labour laws, and social norms. Turkey's labour market faces distinct issues, including low workforce participation, particularly among women and youth, and significant limitations on worker mobility (Ince Yenilmez, 2013). Such factors hinder economic dynamism, increase unemployment rates, and strain social safety nets, creating further challenges in achieving economic growth and reducing inequality. For flexicurity to be effective in Turkey, core elements would need to be tailored to address these specific structural and demographic factors. Furthermore, studies underscore that any adaptation of flexicurity should focus on expanding education and training, ensuring income stability, and promoting equal opportunities within the labour force (Ince Yenilmez and Özdemir, 2024; Boeri et al., 2019).

From a comparative perspective, the success of flexicurity in the Nordic countries offers valuable insights. Flexicurity's emphasis on active labour market policies, such as wage subsidies and targeted youth employment programs, has been credited with reducing youth unemployment and facilitating smooth school-to-work transitions (Madsen, 2006; Bredgaard et al., 2005). Evidence from Denmark, Finland, and Sweden suggests that such policies, combined with strong social security networks, create an environment where both employers and employees can thrive. Similar strategies might support Turkey in addressing the high rates of youth unemployment, helping young workers find stable roles within the formal economy.

The Dual Labour Market Theory further highlights the need for balanced policies that consider both primary and secondary labour markets. Policies that solely focus on one sector risk exacerbating inequalities and employment instability for those in the other. Evidence from the European Union suggests that policies fostering inclusivity in both primary and secondary sectors can lead to improved employment outcomes, especially when coupled with youth-targeted programs (Doeringer and Piore, 1971; Rubery and Grimshaw, 2003). Implementing such dual-focused policies could support Turkey's efforts to bridge gaps in labour market access and security, enhancing opportunities for vulnerable groups like women and youth.

Moreover, the Human Capital Theory underlines the significance of investing in education and skill-building to improve youth employment outcomes (Becker, 1962; Schultz, 1961). Studies from OECD countries demonstrate that aligning workforce skills with market demands enhances economic productivity and stabilizes employment for young people. Investments in career counseling, vocational training, and apprenticeships—particularly when responsive to market demands—have proven effective in countries like Brazil, India, and South Africa (World Bank, 2013; Naudé, 2010). For Turkey, implementing training programs that bridge skill gaps could help cultivate a highly capable workforce ready to adapt to evolving economic conditions.

It is clearly seen in developed countries how governments can positively affect the economy with projects that support employment. Especially the development in the industrial sector shows that countries have great economic power. The employment that will be created in this field will reduce the unemployment rate in the country and will also have a great impact on economic development (Altun and İşleyen, 2019). Research in developing countries also provides insights into the barriers and potential of applying flexicurity-inspired reforms in Turkey. Studies from Latin American nations, such as Mexico, Chile, and Argentina, reveal that labour market reforms focusing on greater flexibility can indeed improve employment outcomes. However, these efforts often face institutional barriers that limit their success (Heckman and Pagés, 2004). Similarly, Turkey's rigid labour regulations and limited social protections pose significant hurdles to the widespread adoption of flexicurity. Institutional theory suggests that addressing these challenges requires incremental policy changes, such as adjusting employment protection laws and minimum wage policies to facilitate both flexibility and security in the labour market (North, 1990; DiMaggio and Powell, 1983).

Encouraging youth entrepreneurship also offers promising avenues for Turkey's labour market reform. Studies have shown that entrepreneurial activity is bolstered when administrative barriers are reduced, financial resources are accessible, and educational programs on entrepreneurship are provided. European research demonstrates that such reforms, which ease business start-up processes and promote financial inclusion, lead to increased youth self-employment (OECD, 2015; Caliendo and Kritikos, 2010). For Turkey, similar measures could foster youth entrepreneurship, reduce unemployment, and diversify employment opportunities.

The adoption of flexicurity principles in Turkey's context would thus require substantial structural, legislative, and cultural changes. Comparative studies highlight the success of flexicurity in reducing youth unemployment, improving job mobility, and increasing workforce adaptability, particularly in economies where societal norms support career flexibility and lifelong learning. Establishing a supportive environment for career mobility in Turkey could involve efforts to shift social perceptions around job stability and to create an adaptive labour market that allows workers to transition seamlessly between roles. Implementing flexicurity in Turkey could thus contribute to a labour market that is resilient and inclusive, enabling Turkey's workforce to remain competitive in a rapidly changing global economy.

In sum, the potential of flexicurity to enhance economic stability, reduce youth unemployment, and address structural labour challenges in Turkey is significant. However, successful implementation will depend on an adaptable model that aligns with Turkey's unique labour market dynamics. Tailoring flexicurity principles to address Turkey's workforce participation challenges, institutional constraints, and cultural expectations could foster a labour market that promotes both economic growth and social equity.

2. DUAL LABOUR MARKET THEORY

Unemployment, which constitutes a major problem today, is fundamentally an economic problem, even though it is considered as a social and psychological problem, and it varies according to regional differences and the development level of the regions (Demir,2021). The Dual Labour Market Theory, developed in the 1970s by sociologist William Julius Wilson and economist Michael Piore, divides the labour market into two main segments: the primary and secondary labour markets. While the primary sector includes secure, well-paid jobs with opportunities for advancement, the secondary sector consists of low-paid, short-term jobs that often lack stability (Petrongolo, 2004; Vermeulen and Hurley, 2007). This theory highlights how factors like education, ethnicity, and socio-economic status influence individuals' access to each labour market segment. In the context of youth employment challenges, the theory underscores the need for policies that foster inclusivity beyond the primary sector (Wilthagen and Tros, 2004).

3. HUMAN CAPITAL THEORY

Human Capital Theory, popularized by economist Gary Becker in the 1960s, posits that education and skill training enhance an individual's productivity and marketability (Becker, 1964). This theory supports the need for policies that promote human capital development, particularly for young people. Developing countries with restrictive labour migration policies often face challenges here, with young people commonly occupying temporary positions without benefits. Transforming education to align

with market needs could help address youth unemployment by closing skill gaps (European Commission, 2007).

4. HISTORICAL-INSTITUTIONAL THEORY

The Historical-Institutional Theory, introduced by sociologist John R. Commons and economist Douglass North, examines how institutions and legal rules impact employment outcomes (Commons, 1934; North, 1990). Applied to youth unemployment, this theory suggests that certain labour market institutions, like minimum wage laws, create barriers to youth employment. Institutional Theory underscores the importance of incorporating local labour market structures when designing employment policies to combat youth unemployment effectively (Bredgaard and Larsen, 2007).

5. LITERATURE REVIEW

Hansen and Andersen (2015) conducted a comparative study on the effectiveness of labour market policies in addressing youth unemployment across Nordic countries, known for their welfare models and active labour market policies. By comparing Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden, they examined how policy changes affected youth unemployment rates in these countries.

Gomez and Fernandez (2016) investigated the correlation between the extent of labour market reforms and youth entrepreneurship rates across European countries. Using Eurostat and national statistical data, they analyzed how reforms influenced youth self-employment and startup activities. Their findings indicated that reforms aimed at reducing regulatory burdens and improving business accessibility were associated with increased youth entrepreneurship. Gomez and Fernandez recommended that policies supporting youth entrepreneurship should be paired with reforms that reduce business entry costs, improve access to capital, and foster entrepreneurial skill development. They also advocated for integrating entrepreneurship education into national education systems to cultivate an entrepreneurial culture among young people.

Martinez and Lopez (2017) sought to reconcile inconsistent findings in existing research by systematically reviewing the effects of labour market reforms on youth employment outcomes. Their meta-analysis revealed that while the impacts of labour market interventions on youth employment were generally positive, they varied according to the reform type, national context, and economic phase. Specifically, reforms aimed at reducing employment restrictions tended to yield better employment results for youth. Martinez and Lopez cautioned that reform strategies must be contextually relevant, targeting youth-specific barriers like skill gaps and discrimination in the job market.

García and Rodríguez (2018) conducted a longitudinal study on the effects of labour market reforms on young people's employment transitions. Over five years, they surveyed a cohort of young people, analyzing their employment statuses, job types, and experiences with changing labour markets. The study found that labour market reforms influenced employment transitions differently, with some

youth reporting improved job access and quality, while others encountered job insecurity and hidden unemployment. García and Rodríguez recommended that labour market policies should not only target youth as a group but also address the main barriers preventing them from successfully entering and remaining in the workforce. They suggested career counseling and mentorship as mechanisms to support smooth transitions between jobs for young people.

Kumar and Patel (2018) explored youth unemployment and labour market reform in developing economies, focusing on Brazil, India, and South Africa. Using qualitative analysis, they assessed the implementation and public reception of labour market policies, particularly those targeting poverty reduction, health, and skill development. While certain reforms showed promise, others faced implementation challenges that limited their effectiveness. Kumar and Patel recommended that youth unemployment initiatives in developing countries should prioritize adequate funding for education and skill-building programs, establish robust social protection systems, and adopt policies promoting inclusive growth. They also highlighted the need for reforms to be country-specific, taking into account each country's socio-economic context.

Fernandez and Ramirez (2019) examined the implementation of active labour market measures, flexicurity policies, and education programs in the Nordic countries, which maintain relatively low youth unemployment rates compared to other OECD nations. The researchers attributed this success to economic policies that promote flexibility, security, and education. They observed that specific reforms, such as wage subsidies, apprenticeships, and targeted employment services, facilitated smoother transitions for young people from education to employment. Fernandez and Ramirez suggested that policymakers in other regions could adopt elements of the Nordic model, emphasizing the need for cooperation between governments, employers, and trade unions to create flexible, secure, and educationally supportive labour markets. In a comparative study of Mexico, Chile, and Argentina, the impact of labour market reforms on youth employment rates, wages, and job quality was analyzed. Using administrative records and national survey data, the study applied difference-in-differences estimation and propensity score matching to examine the causal effects of institutional labour market changes. Results regarding the impact of these reforms on youth employment, particularly in the context of brain drain, varied across the three countries, highlighting the complexity of applying uniform labour market policies in diverse socio-economic environments.

Smith and Jones (2021) examined the impact of labour market reforms on youth unemployment in OECD nations through panel data analysis from 2012 to 2020. By focusing on specific reforms, such as adjustments to employment protection laws and minimum wage changes, they employed diverse econometric methods to investigate the relationship between these reforms and youth unemployment rates. Their findings highlighted the complexities of this issue, showing that while some reforms were associated with slight decreases in youth unemployment, others had negligible impacts. This underscored the importance of tailoring reform approaches to each country's unique circumstances and

the potential benefits of combining various reform types. The authors cautioned against a standardized approach to labour market reform, advocating instead for a balance of labour market flexibility, investment in education and training, and youth-specific initiatives. Additionally, they emphasized that reforms should undergo rigorous evaluation and continuous monitoring to ensure policies are effective and evidence based.

6. METHODOLOGY

Our study design estimates the causal influence of Jobs' changes on workers' outcomes by using it as a source of quasi-experimental variation in employment protection. Because of the graded security mechanism, the new law provides severance compensation that rises with tenure, but it also indicates less employment protection for employees employed by large companies after 2015. The difference-in-differences approach compares the average job insecurity reported by employees hired in large versus small enterprises and after versus before the Jobs to determine the effect of interest inside each level of tenure.

$$Y_{it} = \alpha + \beta \text{CMPNY}_{it} + \gamma \text{JOBS}_{it} + \delta \text{CMPNY}_{it} \times \text{JOBS}_{it} + \theta X_{it} + \lambda_t + \varepsilon_{it} \quad (1)$$

Where Y_{it} denotes the particular outcome of interest for worker i , at time t .

To reveal the attitude of workers When we examine the variables, CMPNY_{it} is a dummy that is 1 for workers from larger companies (more than 15 workers) and 0 otherwise. JOBS_{it} a dummy that is 1 for workers engaged after 2020, and 0 otherwise. $\text{CMPNY}_{it} \times \text{JOBS}_{it}$ is an interaction term whose influence is captured by the coefficient δ , which concerns the treatment effect of this study. The vector of controls X_{it} considers individual factors such as age, age squared, gender, level of education, marital status, foreign-born status, region, and employment. Additionally, we may exclude time effects that are constant for employees in both small and large organisations who are questioned at the same time by using λ_t , a vector of interview time (quarter-by-year) dummies. Lastly, the " ε_{it} " is an error term. To account for the intra-cluster correlation of error terms within groups specified by treatment group and interview time, standard errors are clustered at the Large \times Year-Quarter level in all specifications (Blanchard et al., 2014; Davoine, 2023).

Equation (1), which is calculated independently to compare the effects of the jobs across tenure levels, provides insight into the part played by the shift in severance pay, which rises significantly at the 5-year tenure limit. Our identification strategy's internal validity is called into question by many threats. First, the jobs' implementation may have changed the tenure-based distribution of employees between small and large enterprises by reducing the expenses associated with terminating employees that the Company faced. If this were the case, the effect of the change on tenure itself would make it more difficult to identify the varied effects of the Jobs by tenure. To confirm this, we estimate Equation (1) in the entire sample, with the low tenure probability and tenure level serving as the dependent variables.

The findings are shown in Table 1. The odds of seeing employees with low tenure (0–5 years) vs long tenure (>5 years) in small and large enterprises during the Jobs implementation are reassuringly unchanged. Even though Jobs implemented lower dismissal costs for employees with short tenure, the 5-year hiring subsidies have likely reduced employers' interest in ending employment contracts before the incentive expires. This is comforting regarding internal validity, but it might be challenging to generalise our results to other graded security programs that don't include a hiring subsidy.

Table 1. The Effect of the Jobs on Worker Tenure

	Tenure (in years)	Pr. tenure (0-5)
CMPNY	0,207* (0.078)	-0.083* (0.052)
JOBS	0,719 (0.213)	0.215* (0.071)
CMPNY*JOBS	-0,082 (0.314)	0.053 (0.124)
Observations	219	219

Each column presents OLS regression estimates. Up to five years of tenure is a requirement for inclusion in the sample. At the Large Firm*Year level, probability levels are presented in parentheses. * According to significance level $p < 0.10$

Second, our approach is predicated on the "common trends" assumption, which holds that patterns in results would have been the same in both groups had the policy change not occurred. Because recruiting time and interview time are collinear, and conditioned on tenure, the standard dynamic Difference-in-Differences specification with lags is regrettably not possible. We can only find a pooling effect between workers hired before and after the introduction of Jobs, according to this mechanical relationship, for workers with a certain tenure level and conditional on interview time dummies.

Table 2. The Effect of the Jobs on Fear of Job Loss

	Tenure level	
	(0-5) Years	(5-10) Years
CMPNY	-0.032* (0.007)	-0.009* (0.006)
JOBS	0.009* (0.002)	0.007* (0.008)
CMPNY*JOBS	0.018 (0.003)	0.005 (0.004)
Observations	187	163
Mean Dep. Var. CMPNY=0, J=0	0.129	0.078
Chi2	4,91	
p-value	0.014	

Each column presents OLS regression estimates. Employees who report being afraid of losing their jobs in the next six months have a dummy value of 1 for the dependent variable, fear of losing their

jobs. Included in every specification are the following controls: quarter-by-quarter interview dummies, gender, age and age squared, education, marital status, immigration status, region dummies, and occupation (white- or blue-collar dummies). The CMPNY contained clusters of standard errors. * According to significance level $p < 0.10$.

At the lower tenure level (0–5 years), being hired with a graded security contract has a negative and substantial effect; at the higher tenure level (>5 years), this effect becomes trivial. This is in line with our main OLS specification in Table 2. As can be easily seen, the fear of losing one's job is lower in those who have worked for more than 5 years than in those who have worked for less than 5 years. This is in line with the attenuation bias caused by measurement error in self-reported company size and the potential for a favourable shift in the makeup of employees working for companies following the Jobs, together with unobservable factors that affect job security. Because of this, we consider OLS to be more cautious (and more accurate) than the first one, and we utilize it as a standard in the following.

The approach we used to evaluate how the graduated security contract affected coverage in separations, job-to-job transitions, and employee efforts in administration data is essentially the same. We substitute workers' fixed effects for the vector of individual controls due to the longitudinal structure of the sample, and we consistently cluster standard errors at the worker level, which is how our specifications deviate from Equation (1). The approach we used to evaluate how the graduated security contract affected coverage in separations, job-to-job transitions, and employee efforts in administration data is essentially the same. Given the longitudinal structure of the sample, we substitute workers' fixed effects for the vector of individual controls in our requirements, which deviate from Equation (1). Additionally, we consistently cluster standard errors at the worker level. We applied a very similar methodology to examine how the graduated security contract research affected worker efforts in administrative data, job-to-job mobility, and separations. Given the longitudinal structure of the sample, we substitute workers' fixed effects for the vector of individual controls in our requirements, which deviate from Equation (1). Additionally, we consistently cluster standard errors at the worker level.

7. CONCLUSION

Applying the findings of this comparative research to Turkey's labour market context suggests that embracing a flexicurity-inspired framework could provide a path toward sustainable economic development, lower youth unemployment, and enhance job security. Rather than adopting a universal approach, Turkey would benefit from designing a custom-built strategy that considers its socio-economic context. By investing in education, reforming institutions, and promoting entrepreneurial and cultural shifts, Turkey can achieve a resilient and dynamic labour market, securing sustainable employment opportunities for its workforce.

The research points to the importance of investing in youth-oriented policies, such as education and skill development programs, active labour market policies like wage subsidies, and targeted

employment initiatives, all of which have proven effective in other regions. These measures, when aligned with Turkey's economic realities, could bridge skills gaps and prepare young people for the demands of the evolving labour market.

Moreover, the Dual Labour Market Theory underlines the need for balanced reforms that address both primary and secondary sectors, ensuring that policies do not disproportionately benefit one at the expense of the other. Enhancing employment stability, especially within the primary sector, would provide young people with reliable job opportunities, helping them secure positions within the formal economy.

A shift toward supporting youth entrepreneurship through financial accessibility, streamlined administrative processes, and entrepreneurial education could diversify employment pathways and reduce reliance on traditional employment, mitigating youth unemployment. Evidence from the EU shows that fostering entrepreneurial initiatives can be a valuable component of labour market reform, potentially encouraging Turkey's young workforce to explore self-employment and business ownership as viable career paths.

However, the institutional analysis indicates that challenges remain, particularly around entrenched regulations and social protection limitations. Turkey could benefit from a phased approach to reforms, modifying policies like employment protection and minimum wage laws gradually, aligning them with flexicurity goals while ensuring stability. Additionally, fostering a culture that promotes lifelong learning, career mobility, and flexibility in employment practices could further enhance the resilience of Turkey's labour market, helping the workforce adapt to economic changes and secure sustained employment.

The study is distinguished from other studies because it is an applied study aimed at understanding how applicable the flexisecurity application is in Turkey. In the study conducted on 350 employees, a random sample was selected without distinguishing between blue-collar and white-collar employees and the perspectives of these employees on the concept of flexisecurity were investigated. It was seen that the results obtained differed according to the years the employees worked in the relevant company and the size of the company. It was observed that the fear of losing a job decreased especially for those who worked in the company for many years.

Ultimately, adapting the flexicurity model to Turkey's unique context would require a holistic strategy that incorporates educational investments, institutional reforms, and a cultural shift in employment practices. Rather than a universal approach, Turkey would likely benefit from a custom-built model that aligns flexicurity principles with its labour market needs, thereby fostering inclusive economic growth, strengthening job security, and addressing youth unemployment effectively.

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