



Extended Abstract Proposal

Progress Toward Universal Health Coverage in the Transformed Health System of Türkiye in 2001-2021 as a Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 3) with a Global Landscape

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Abstract

Purpose: This article aims to comparatively evaluate the development of universal health coverage in Türkiye over the years, which is targeted to be achieved with the completion of health reforms carried out under the Health Transformation Program between 2003-2013. Aiming to inform health policy processes, the descriptive comparative analyses shed light on the developments over the past two decades in achieving health service coverage and financial protection, both in Türkiye and globally.

Method: Using the country-level data published by the WHO covering the years 2000-2021, the development of universal health care coverage in the Turkish health system over the years, compared to global trends, was examined through international comparative descriptive analyses. Data from 2000 to 2021, published by WHO on SDG 3.8.1 Service Coverage Index, UHC SCI, related to health service provision and SDG 3.8.2 on catastrophic out-of-pocket health expenditures concerning financial protection in access to health services are used.

Findings: The findings reveal significant progress in universal health coverage during Türkiye's Health Transformation Program (2003-2013), which comprehensively restructured the country's health system and specifically aimed to achieve universal health coverage nationwide. However, progress stalled in the later years following this reform program. The notable progress, especially between 2000 and 2015, was driven by all UHC SCI subindices of health service coverage. The lack of further improvement in the index scores in the post-reforms years serves as a warning.

Globally, there have been significant improvements in the expansion of health care coverage compared to the deterioration of financial protection over the years; however, the progress in health service coverage has stagnated in recent years as well. In light of the SDG UHC indicators on universal health coverage of the Sustainable Development Goals, it is clear that the recent trends in global values of the indicators regarding both health service coverage and 'catastrophic' out-of-pocket health expenditure are alarming.

Progress in health service coverage globally in the 2000s has slowed down in subsequent years. The global average value of the SDG 3.8.1 UHC SCI index indicator representing service coverage as a single



score value was 45 points out of 100 in 2000, reached 65 points in 2015, and increased by only three points between 2015 and 2019 to 68 points. In line with such a global trend, Türkiye's UHC SCI index value, which was 57 points in 2000, increased to 76 points in 2015. The fact that the country's index score did not progress in subsequent periods, and even started to decline by one point between 2019 and 2021, is a warning.

Besides, the financial difficulties arising from the need to pay out-of-pocket for health services have not diminished worldwide. The global average value of 'catastrophic' health expenditures, defined as the percentage of the population whose out-of-pocket health expenditures exceed 10% (25%) of the household budget, regarding SDG 3.8.2 about financial protection, has reached 13.5% (3.8%) in 2019 with a continuous increase from 9.6% (1.9%) in 2000. In contrast, in Türkiye, the percentage of the population whose out-of-pocket health expenditures exceed 10% (25%) of the household budget was 6.0% (1.1%) in 2000 and 4.2% (0.7%) in 2019, which is below the average of all country income groups.

Originality and Significance: As a result of the comparative descriptive analyses in the article, the changes in health service coverage and financial protection in the country's health system over the years are illuminated in comparison with country groups globally. The findings of the study have the potential to serve as an input to health policy design processes nationwide and globally. Türkiye's health system transformation in terms of universal health coverage within the framework of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda has been examined. When Türkiye's HTP reforms were completed in 2013, successful progress in the transformed Turkish health system was made in reaching universal health coverage (UHC) as targeted by the reform program, but the continuity of the monitoring and design process of health policies is required for the strengthening and continuation of the gains. If there are still obstacles that citizens face in accessing the health services they need, health-related policies should be constantly reviewed, and new practices should be developed for the changing health needs of society. For this, it is essential to monitor and assess the current situation and progress in universal health coverage in the country's health system. In this respect, as one of the Sustainable Development Goals, universal health coverage in the Turkish health system like in all countries in the world offers a new vision that can further accelerate the evaluations of developments in UHC in the country's health system over the last two decades, in addition to help designing new health policies for strengthening and reinforcing the progress in UHC over years.

Keywords: Türkiye's Health System Transformation Program 2003-2013 (HTP), universal health coverage, SDG 3, health system review and assessment

JEL Classification: I10, I13, Q01

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