



Perceptions of Turkish Academic Women on the Glass Ceiling in Times of Crisis

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores how the perception of barriers to women's academic careers has been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic in Türkiye. We examine the status of academic women in Turkish universities. The overall participation of women in academia in Türkiye is high relative to other European countries (around 50%); however, at the more senior levels (professors, Deans or Rectors) the proportion of women falls to around a third, pointing to a glass ceiling in Turkish academic careers (Turkish Higher Education Council, 2025a).

Turkish academic women were accepted to the Faculty of Higher Economics and Commerce School for the first time in the 1932–1933

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academic year (Çakır and Arslan 2018, p. 266). During 32 years between 1914 and 1946, the number of academic women in universities and colleges increased rapidly, and the rate of academic women was found to be 13.9% in 1946 (Köker 1988, p. 123). By 2025, this rate has reached 47%. A combination of historical, social and economic factors may explain the higher representation of Turkish women in professional positions. Women entered academic employment through a set of principles—secularism, republicanism, populism, statism, reformism and nationalism—introduced by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of Turkish Republic (Healy et al. 2005, p. 252f). Zeytinoğlu (1999) and Kandiyoti (1997) noted that academic careers were historically and socially constructed and sex-typed as “safe” and “proper” choices for graduate women in Türkiye. Women were encouraged to take up professional employment, as opposed to entrepreneurial or commercial careers, as it was considered harmonious with the potent image of “respectful Turkish woman”. This ideology effectively demarcated women’s careers in “safe”, “secure” and “esteemed” forms of professional employment (Healy et al. 2005, p. 253).

After the Presidential Circular dated March 12, 2020, and numbered 2020/2 was shared with the public, Turkish Higher Education Council published a COVID-19 information note for universities on 13.03.2020. In this statement, various directions were included on how academics, administrative staff and students can fulfil their responsibilities during the COVID-19 crisis. The chapter focuses on the consequences of the pandemic on careers of women in Turkish Higher Education (HE) management in a culture of extensive family commitments and traditional gender roles. In Türkiye, elderly parents of married couples live usually with their children, surrounded by their grandchildren. During the pandemic, academic women were expected to take care of all family members and at the same time teach research and fulfil all their academic responsibilities.

The shift to working at home during the pandemic increased social, domestic and childcare responsibilities. Gouthro (2006) and Makura (2022) found that the home environment negatively affected the professional activities of academic women. Nurumal et al. (2023) found that work-family conflict, techno-stress, flexible working hours, unbalancing personal and work life issues, anxiety dimensions affected job satisfaction. These dimensions are valid for Turkish academic women too. Özkanlı and Korkmaz (2000a, b, c) found that academic women seem to be more

disadvantaged than their male colleagues are. According to a report of UN Women, the pandemic had severe social and economic consequences for women. Although the pandemic period represented challenges for everyone, it is argued to have even more challenging aspects for women (UN WOMEN 2020). Therefore, we are interested in the extent to which the pandemic situation might add another layer to the glass ceiling already in place. To explore this in this chapter, we explain the concept of the glass ceiling; we consider the experiences and impact of the COVID-19 crisis in higher education; we also explore potential consequences from a gender perspective. To contribute to this perspective, the study highlights women's representation in academic leadership and structural gender inequalities. By focusing on the perceptions of academic women during this period of crisis, the research provides empirical basis for evaluation of the concept of glass ceiling. In particular, it is useful to consider the ways the crisis influences women's experiences and how they make sense of them.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Women managers are subject to a gendered division of labour in that they are often responsible for what are perceived as “feminine” tasks such as equity, administration and staff support (Yeatman 1995). There is also the issue of whether the designation of a leadership role changes, perhaps ever so subtly, if a woman is appointed to the position (Neale and White 2004). Research suggests that one of the main barriers for women in universities is the dominance of masculine styles and cultures. It has been suggested (Collins and Singh 2006; Priola 2007; Thomas and Davies 2002) that the traditional university workplace is inherently patriarchal where power and authority largely rest with men. Men generally hold top positions and consequently are able to control the workplace and maintain masculine values and norms (Collins and Singh 2006). The literature indicates that discipline base, career mobility, other care responsibilities, experience outside academia, the process of appointment to senior management, masculine symbolic image of management and gender stereotyping may impact on the chances of women becoming senior university managers (Bingöl 2014; Brandt 2011; Bagilhole and White 2005, 2006, 2007; Carrington and Pratt 2003; Husu 2000; Linková et al. 2021; Neale and Özkanlı 2010; Neale and White 2004; OECD 2006; Özkanlı 2007; Özkanlı et al. 2009; Peterson 2015; Rees

2005; Thanacoody et al. 2006; van den Brink et al. 2006; Woodward 2007). Schein (2007) acknowledges, “Barriers to women in management exists globally and the higher the organisational level, the more glaring the gender gap”. Gender stereotyping such as “men are culturally identified as dominant, independent, competitive and more capable of leadership; whereas women are identified as submissive, dependent, caring and more suited to domestic tasks and child rearing” is also highlighted (Diodati 2022).

The Glass Ceiling

Introduced by Ann Morrison in the 1980s, the concept of “glass ceiling” has been used to define the challenges and obstacles that a working woman faces, which eventually restrict her potential and obstruct her from reaching the pinnacle (Al-Manasra 2013; Rahman and Islam 2019). The concept of glass ceiling was examined in 1987 by Morrison et al. by “Cracking the Glass Ceiling: A Phenomenological Study of Women Administrators in Higher Education” and the obstacles that women face in work life are explained (Jarmon 2014, p. 20). Over time, the concept has been expanded to include race, age, custom, gender and other identity-based limitations (Hoobler et al. 2009; Morrison et al. 1987). The glass ceiling relates to women’s access to hierarchical positions as well as their access to revenue and prestige. It refers to the presence of invisible barriers that prevent women from rising to the top positions in a career (Cotter et al. 2001). These barriers consist of gender-based social norms, institutional practices and unconscious biases. Factors such as socialisation, male managers’ expectations and attitudes about stereotypes and family responsibilities of women (Van Vianen and Fisher 2002), role conflict, stereotypical judgments, lack of guidance and lack of communication network (Bertrand et al. 2018) contribute to the glass ceiling.

A “Glass Ceiling Effect” can be encountered in many areas from the private sector to public institutions, including the academy. Multiple societal role expectations, personal preferences and perceptions, organisational culture and policy, lack of mentors, inability to participate in informal networks, gender discrimination and bullying, education level and cultural characteristics play important roles in the formation of glass ceiling effect (Öztürk and Şimşek 2019, p. 496). The glass ceiling in academia is manifested in the underrepresentation of women academics

in senior management positions such as Rector and Dean. Despite the increase in academic women's participation in HE, their presence in decision-making bodies is still limited, which is explained by factors such as masculine organisational cultures, lack of mentoring, gender stereotypes and informal networks dominated by men (Özkanlı 2007; Neale and Özkanlı 2010). These dynamics trigger hierarchical inequalities even in disciplines where women are numerically well-represented, resulting in limited career progression beyond a certain academic level.

Although the glass ceiling has been extensively studied, few studies focus on the glass ceiling in Turkish HE: Most of the research focuses on the Western context. This chapter aims to address this gap by examining how Turkish academic women perceive the glass ceiling before and after COVID-19 pandemic. To gain insights into the glass ceiling at Turkish HE management, it is useful to explore perceptions of Turkish academic women on the glass ceiling as a barrier to their participation in leadership. Within the scope of glass ceiling, role conflict and crisis management, we investigated the obstacles that academic women face in transitioning to senior management positions. Using a comparative survey, this study offers a perspective on whether crises have reinforced gendered barriers in HE management.

METHOD AND DATA SOURCES

The findings presented in this chapter provide a comparative analysis of how the perceptions of female academics who participated in a survey at two different times have changed over time. This repeated participation provides an important opportunity to assess the impact of contextual changes, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, on women academics' experiences of the glass ceiling. The survey was developed by one of the authors (Atay) after a comprehensive literature review. Ethics approval was secured before conducting our survey. We measured the perceptions of female academics about the glass-ceiling syndrome. The data of the first survey were collected in 2018. The second survey was applied to the same research sample in 2022. In the second questionnaire, questions were added to measure the change in the perception of the glass ceiling due to the pandemic.

The research focuses on identifying the perceptions of the glass ceiling among academic women in Türkiye and investigating the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on these perceptions. In this study, the perceptual

effects of institutional and individual changes during the pandemic on women’s career progression and access to leadership positions are analysed in detail. In this context, 14 questions were asked to the respondents to measure their perception of the glass ceiling and the impact of the pandemic on this perception.

However, due to cost and time limitations, it was not feasible to reach to the entire population. Therefore, statistical results were obtained using the convenience-sampling method to represent the population (Atkinson et al. 1995, p. 798). Seventy-seven academic women from various private and public universities’ Faculties of Economics and Administrative Sciences and Educational Sciences, replied to the questionnaire. We used SPSS programme to analyse the data. A reasonable sample size was determined by considering the central limit theorem, which states that the minimum number should be 30 (Mascha and Vetter 2018). Consequently, the comments on the results obtained in the study were limited to the study group to ensure statistical accuracy.

Socio-demographic Characteristics of Survey Population

Table 11.1 shows the distribution of the sample group according to academic title.

Table 11.2 provides a detailed list of demographic characteristics, marital status, number of children and spouse education status. The majority of the sample is married. Regarding the number of children, a significant portion of participants has one child followed by those with no children and those with two children. In terms of spouse education status, the highest educational attainment among spouses is a PhD, followed by

Table 11.1 Participant title

<i>Participants Title</i>	<i>Total</i>	
	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>
Prof. Dr	26	34
Assoc. Prof. Dr	16	21
Assist. Prof. Dr	9	12
Dr. Lecturer	11	14
Research Assistant	15	19
Total	77	100

Source Survey conducted by the authors

Table 11.2

Participants' marital status, number of children, spouse education status

<i>Marital status</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>
Single	15	20
Married	56	70
Divorced	6	10
Total	77	100
Number of children	Participant	%
1 child	38	49
2 children	18	23
No child	21	28
Total	77	100
Spouse education status	Participant	%
High school	1	1
Two-years degree	2	3
University	25	32
Master degree	6	8
PhD	28	36
<i>Sub Total</i>	<i>62</i>	<i>81</i>
Single	15	19
Total	77	100

Source Survey conducted by the authors

a university degree with smaller percentages holding a master's degree, a two-year degree or a high school diploma.

Table 11.3 shows the administrative roles that the participants currently or previously held. Accordingly, 40 respondents do not currently hold any administrative position. The number of participants who have not held administrative positions before is 27.

Context: Women in Turkish HE

To complement the survey data, secondary sources that reveal the distribution of women academics at various levels and their presence in senior management positions were used. Data on the current statistics of Turkish academic women were obtained from the Turkish National Statistics Institution and the Turkish Higher Education Council. Statistical data of Turkish Higher Education Council show that the rate of academic women decreases as they move to senior administrative positions. Our results are also in line with Aksoy's findings. According to Aksoy (2018), the

Table 11.3 Current and previous administrative tasks

<i>Current Administrative Tasks</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>
I have no administrative duties now	40	46.5
Rector, Vice Rector	0	0
Dean, Vice Dean	2	2.3
Head of Department, Deputy Head of Department	11	12.8
Faculty/School Administrative Board Member	9	10.5
Institute Director, Deputy Institute Director	5	5.8
University Senate Representative	4	4.7
Department Chair, Assistant Chair	12	14
Appointment Commission	1	1.2
Course Coordinator	1	1.2
Quality Coordinator	1	1.2
<i>*Some participants have more than one administrative role</i>	86	100
<i>Previous Administrative Tasks</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>
I have never had administrative duties before	27	27.3
Rector, Vice Rector	2	2.02
Dean, Vice Dean	17	17.2
Head of Department, Deputy Head of Department	11	11.1
Faculty/School Administrative Board Member	11	11.1
Institute Director, Deputy Institute Director	7	7.07
University Senate Representative	8	8.08
Department Chair, Assistant Chair	4	4.04
Appointment Commission	8	8.08
Course Coordinator	0	0
Coordinator	0	0
Quality Coordinator	4	4.04
<i>*Some participants had more than one administrative role</i>	99	100

Source Survey conducted by the authors

promotion of female academics to senior management positions is less than expected due to the glass ceiling.

Secondary data from the Turkish National Statistics Institution and the Turkish Higher Education Council show that women's representation in academia has increased significantly since 1932. Currently, women constitute 47% of academics in Türkiye, although their representation in senior management positions is lower.

Türkiye has 204 Higher Education Institutions—129 Public Universities, 75 Foundation Universities currently. Women comprise 47% of academics in Türkiye in 2025. Their representation as full professors is 35% as associate professors is 43%, as assistant professors is 48% and as

Table 11.4 Percentage of female teaching staff by academic title in Türkiye: 2025 and 2018

<i>Academic Title</i>	<i>Public Univ. (%)</i>		<i>Foundation Univ. (%)</i>		<i>Total (%)</i>	
	<i>2025</i>	<i>2018</i>	<i>2025</i>	<i>2018</i>	<i>2025</i>	<i>2018</i>
Professors	35	32	36	31	35	32
Associate professors	42	39	51	45	43	39
Assistant professors	46	42	55	50	48	43
Research assistants	53	50	62	62	55	51

Source Turkish Higher Education Council. Retrieved January 19, 2025, from <https://istatistik.yok.gov.tr>

research assistants is 55% (see Table 11.4). Although it is known that the pandemic process has created some difficulties in the short term, according to the long-term trends, the increase in the proportion of academic women is a result of structural changes. In other words, it is seen that the representation of women in academia has been on a steady upward trend in the end, regardless of the relatively temporary shock of the pandemic.

The ratio of Turkish female professors is much higher than the EU-25 average (Atay 2023). The uniqueness of academia and academic roles is the flexibility of work place and work hours. This often serves as an incentive to motivate women to opt for an academic career (Baruch 2013).

Despite the high representation of women in the professoriate in Türkiye, women are under-represented in senior management, especially at Rector/Vice-Rector and at Dean levels (Neale and Özkanlı 2010; Özkanlı 2010; Yıldız 2018; Yıldız and Vural 2019; Kalkın et al. 2015; Korkmaz 2016).

In 2018, only 4 out of 112 public universities in Türkiye had female Rectors, while 11 presidents of 68 foundation universities were academic women. Currently, the representation of female Rectors is 8% (Turkish Higher Education Management Information System 2024).

Table 11.5 shows the distribution of Rectors of private and public universities in Türkiye by gender in 2025 (Turkish Higher Education Management Information System 2025b). Currently, the number of universities has increased significantly, but the percentage of female Rectors has remained almost same. Despite the high representation of

Table 11.5 Percentage of female rectors in Turkish Public and Foundation Universities (2025)

	<i>Number of rectors</i>			<i>Women rectors</i>
	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>in %</i>
Public Universities	5	124	129	4%
Foundation Universities	11	64	75	15%
Total	16	188	204	8%

Source Turkish Higher Education Council. Retrieved January 28, 2025, from <https://istatistik.yok.gov.tr>

women in the professoriate in Türkiye, women are still under-represented in senior management, especially at Rector Level.

FINDINGS: ACADEMIC WOMEN’S
PERCEPTION ON THE GLASS CEILING

In this section, key findings from primary survey data collected in 2018 and 2022 examine how academic women in Türkiye perceive the glass ceiling, focusing on whether these perceptions have changed during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the survey, 14 questions were asked to the participants (Table 11.6). The answers were tabulated and interpreted. A 5-point Likert scale (1—strongly disagree, 5—strongly agree) was used to examine the perceived glass-ceiling syndrome of academic women and its relationship with the pandemic was shown (Cronbach’s Alpha = 0.756).

One of the most important results is about one-third of the academic women stated that they experienced the concept of “glass ceiling” in academia. Approximately 40% of the sample stated that they have not experienced glass-ceiling syndrome. The undecided group, which constitutes approximately one-fourth of the sample, carries uncertainty in terms of interpreting the results. They may not have a clear idea about the glass ceiling or even if they partially feel the existence of the glass ceiling, they may not be able to define it clearly. The pandemic effect had a very limited impact on these results. Almost 90% of the participants think that the pandemic does not have an effect on their perceptions of glass ceiling that will change their current perceptions.

Approximately half of the academic women with managerial experience believe that they need to work harder than their male counterparts

Table 11.6 Survey results on gendered experiences in academia

<i>Questions</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neither agree nor disagree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly agree</i>
Academic women experience glass ceiling	7.8%	32.5%	24.7%	24.7%	10.4%
The pandemic has caused a change in my perception of the glass ceiling	82.4%	6.2%	5.1%	3.1%	3.2%
In academic life, men have the advantage	3.6%	6.1%	44.2%	35.6%	10.5%
Working from home has disrupted my work and social life balance in favour of work (I had to spend more time on professional obligations than before)	9.10%	32.50%	10.10%	36.30%	12.10%
Being at home all the time has been challenging in terms of work efficiency	7.8%	29.9%	9.1%	38.0%	15.3%
Being at home has always caused role conflict for me	9.1%	38.0%	15.6%	22.1%	15.3%
Female academic managers must work harder than male managers do	6.7%	8.2%	29.8%	41.4%	13.9%
Being a woman is a disadvantage for being a manager	4.6%	6.3%	40.9%	39.5%	8.7%
Being a woman manager creates problems in my relations with my men subordinates	55.3%	15.6%	12.9%	11.9%	4.3%

(continued)

Table 11.6 (continued)

<i>Questions</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neither agree nor disagree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly agree</i>
Being a woman manager creates problems in my relations with my women subordinates	51.3%	12.6%	13.9%	12.1%	10.1%
Workplace harmony among academic women is low	5.2%	11.7%	22,1%	45.8%	15.3%
Workplace harmony between women managers and academic women is high	2.6%	32.5%	31.2%	27.3%	6.5%
Authoritarian tendency of my female managers increased during the pandemic	9.1%	39.0%	35.1%	11.7%	5.2%
Authoritarian tendency of my male managers increased during the pandemic	9.1%	35.1%	33.8%	14.3%	7.8%

Survey conducted by the authors

($\approx 55\%$). The proportion of those who think that being a woman is a disadvantage in management is also similar ($\approx 48\%$). However, it has been observed that female managers perceive problems with their subordinates independent from gender. In other words, the problems they experience with their subordinates are gender-neutral.

Participants think that their work and social life balances have been disrupted during the pandemic process ($\approx 50\%$), being at home all the time causes role conflict ($\approx 40\%$) and working from home has a negative impact on their effectiveness ($\approx 54\%$). These results contain higher rates of gender-based inequality than the results regarding the perception of the glass ceiling. The reason is likely to be the role conflict experience. However, this study did not focus on the effect of role conflict. The

comments in this section are therefore limited to a descriptive analysis of the current situation rather than the causes.

Another interesting result is academic women think the workplace harmony among themselves is low ($\approx 61\%$). Those who think that workplace harmony between female managers and female academics constitutes approximately $1/3$ of the sample ($\approx 34\%$). In addition, the authoritarian tendencies increased during the pandemic. It was observed that the authoritarian tendency shown by male managers (22.1%) was higher than the authoritarian tendency shown by female managers (16.9%). These results are in line with the literature suggesting that authoritarian tendencies increase in times of crisis (Thomson and Ip 2020). In future studies, we are planning to collect more data to understand how authoritarian tendency changes depending on gender.

We examined also, whether participants' perceptions of the glass ceiling differed according to title, spouses' education level, marital status and two disciplines (Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences and Faculty of Education). To determine the suitability of the statements for parametric tests, we used the SPSS programme to examine the skewness and kurtosis values of each statement. Since the skewness and kurtosis values were between ± 2.0 , we applied parametric tests.¹

Table 11.7 shows that factors such as title, spouses education level, marital status and discipline did not create a significant difference in participants' responses on the dependent variable (Reliability Statistics: Cronbach's Alpha 0.756, $N = 77$ Items = 14).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This chapter focused on the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. The research contributes to the ongoing debate on gender-related barriers perceived by female academics and the glass-ceiling effect in Turkish universities. While 35% of the respondents clearly experienced glass-ceiling barriers, a significant proportion of undecided respondents (25%) were able to perceive structural challenges but struggled to identify them. This suggests that more research on the experiences of women academics on gender-based inequality is needed.

¹ A kurtosis value between ± 1.0 is considered excellent for most psychometric purposes, but a value between ± 2.0 is in many cases also acceptable, depending on the particular application (George and Mallery 2016).

Table 11.7 Items and Factors

<i>Item (Dependent)</i>	<i>Factor</i>	<i>Test of Homogeneity of Variances</i>	<i>ANOVA</i>
I think glass ceiling is a fact for academic women	Title	Sig. = ,410	Sig = ,937
	Education level of the spouses	Sig. = ,080	Sig. = ,718
	Marital status	Sig. = ,030	Sig. = ,175
	Discipline	Sig. = ,470	Sig. = ,431

Source Created by the authors

Despite research showing that crises increase gender inequalities, the majority of participants (88.6%) stated that the pandemic did not significantly change their perceptions of the glass ceiling. This result shows that the obstacles faced by female academics continue regardless of external shocks.

The perception that female academics in managerial roles have to work harder than their male colleagues is noteworthy (55%). However, almost half of the respondents (48%) think that being a woman is a disadvantage in leadership positions.

These findings are in line with previous studies (Özkanlı 2007; Neale and Özkanlı 2010) that highlight sexist organisational cultures in academic institutions. In addition, the study also revealed that the challenges faced by female managers with their subordinates were gender-neutral. This suggests that organisational and cultural structures, rather than individual prejudices, may be the root causes of inequalities in the workplace.

Another observation relates to cohesion among female academics. A significant majority of respondents (61%) reported low workplace harmony between women managers and their subordinates in academia. This result is in line with research that suggests that limited leadership positions may lead to increased competition rather than solidarity among women academics (Bagilhole and White 2011). In this sense, more research is needed to explore structural changes that would enable greater collaboration and professional support among women academics.

The study sheds light on management behaviours in academia during the pandemic, revealing that managers' authoritarian tendencies increased regardless of gender. Although male managers (22.1%) showed a higher

proportion of authoritarian tendencies compared to their female counterparts (16.9%), the overall results are in line with the crisis management literature that hierarchical control mechanisms are strengthened in times of uncertainty (Thomson and Ip 2020). Future studies could investigate how different leadership styles affect gender dynamics in academic institutions during times of crisis.

While 50% of the participants stated that they experienced disruptions in terms of work-life balance, 54% said that they experienced a decrease in productivity when working from home. Role conflict was reported by 40% of the participants. These results show that the imbalance between domestic responsibilities and professional responsibilities negatively affects the careers of female academics.

According to our survey data and long-term statistical trends, the COVID-19 pandemic has not significantly changed the representation of academic women in senior management positions. The crisis has not created a significant break in existing gender dynamics, but it has not led to positive change either. Research indicates that women experienced increased pressure in their roles at universities during the pandemic, stemming from their dual roles as employees and caregivers. Utilising a repeated survey of Turkish academic women, the research demonstrates that the perception of the glass ceiling has remained relatively stable during pandemic. However, an escalation in the perception of authoritarian behaviour among superiors is observed. This could also be an indication of increasing pressure on female managers during the pandemic.

In conclusion, while the pandemic has not had a significant impact on the perception of the glass ceiling among Turkish women academics, work-life balance, leadership challenges and existing structural inequalities based on gender remain critical areas that require policy intervention. If the university system is serious about increasing the proportion of women at the senior management level and benefiting from the diversity of experience and talent, the identified barriers will need to be addressed. Implementation of affirmative action policies to improve the conditions of family-work conciliation by developing the protection of women in workplace and by promoting a more involved fatherhood in the family is very important. The improvement of childcare facilities at the workplace, flexible working and the enhancement of leave arrangements for

academic women, changes in the gender structure of the labour market may also be suggested. For future studies, we plan to explore the subject with different dimensions, different sample groups and comparatively with other countries.

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