

# 18. Turkey: Steps for the Implementation of the SDGs

**IZZET ARI**

Head of Department of Environment and Sustainable Development  
Ministry of Development, Turkey

## INTRODUCTION

The concept of sustainable development has a long history in Turkish development policies.<sup>78</sup> It has been reflected in legislation, policy documents including national development plans, sectoral strategies and action plans. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) offers an ambitious framework that urges countries to take action to further sustainable development issues at all levels.<sup>79</sup> This new global agenda provides a unique opportunity for governments to increase their efforts to realize sustainable development. Turkey closely followed and contributed to the international processes on the SDGs throughout the Open Working Group and intergovernmental negotiations. Turkey is one of the 22 countries that presented voluntary national reviews during the first high-level political forum.<sup>80</sup> In this forum, Turkey basically focused on the initial steps taken to implement the SDGs.<sup>81</sup>

Turkey aims at realizing the SDGs in line with its national policies. In this regard, the Ministry of Development, as the national focal point on sustainable development, develops policies and guides the implementation on this issue. In order to do so, the Ministry initiated a stocktaking analysis on the SDGs in early 2017.<sup>82</sup> This study identified the existing situation of Turkey as regards the SDGs through an in-depth analysis of past and current policies, programmes and projects as well as legislation in order to further SDG implementation. It is expected that the stocktaking analysis will provide important inputs for national development policies.

---

78 Ministry of Development, 'Turkey's Sustainable Development Report, Claiming the Future', Ankara, 2012.

79 United Nations, 'Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development', General Assembly, A/RES/70/1, October 2015. <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>.

80 United Nations, 'High-level Political Forum 2016: Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform', 2016, <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf/2016>.

81 Ministry of Development, 'Report on Turkey's Initial Steps Towards the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development', 2016.

82 SDGs-Turkey, Sürdürülebilir Kalkınma Türkiye, 2017, <http://www.surdurulebilirkalkinma.gov.tr/#top>.

## TURKEY'S STEPS FROM MDGs TO SDGs

The SDGs replaced the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) adopted during the Millennium Summit in 2000. Turkey has made significant progress in achieving the MDGs over the last 15 years, particularly on reducing poverty, increasing the quality of education, addressing inequalities, reducing maternal and infant mortality rates and increasing environmental sustainability and access to basic services (MoD, 2010).<sup>83</sup> Between 2010 and 2015, Turkey accelerated its efforts to achieve the MDGs.<sup>84</sup> Turkey reached the MDG targets in the area of maternal and infant health, registering sharp reductions in infant, under-five and maternal mortality rates with ease by the year 2015. Under MDG 8, Turkey has considerably increased its official development assistance to developing countries.

During the MDG process, the Ministry of Development also was the primary institution that coordinated responsibilities for integrating, monitoring and reporting progress on the MDGs. Turkey demonstrated its full engagement to the global intention made by the world leaders in the Millennium Summit by aligning the MDGs with its national development priorities. Turkey's first MDG report contributed significantly to the country's development policies and provided valuable input for the 9th National Development Plan (NDP). Despite not being able to reach the same level for each Goal, Turkey has advanced in all MDG indicators, particularly in the area of social development. The 2010 MDG report significantly demonstrated Turkey's progress with regard to the achievement of these development goals.<sup>85</sup>

Building upon the MDG experience, Turkey is determined to continue this success in achieving the SDGs with the same pace and path. Given its mandate, the Ministry of Development plays the key role in coordinating the implementation of the SDGs as it did during the MDG process. A task force composed of experts from all sectors was established within the Ministry for integrating the SDGs into all key public policies. Through the guidance of the task force, the SDGs are reflected in policies, programmes and implementation of all public institutions. The success of the task is highly correlated with the active involvement and ownership of all relevant institutions having responsibility to achieve the SDGs. This requires strong and effective cooperation and coordination among all stakeholders.

Turkey is currently in the process of preparing its 11th NDP. As the coordinator of the NDP, the Ministry of Development ensures stakeholder involvement in the process. In line with the principle of "no one is left behind", ad hoc committees are established as part of the preparation process (MoD, 2018).<sup>86</sup> A wide range of stakeholders participating in these committees evaluate the current situation and recommend policies for the upcoming NDP. These

---

83 Prime Ministry Undersecretariat of State Planning Organization, 'Millennium Development Goals, Report', Turkey 2010.

84 Ministry of Development, 'Report on Turkey's Initial Steps Towards the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development', Ankara, 2016.

85 Prime Ministry Undersecretariat of State Planning Organization, 'Millennium Development Goals, Report', Turkey 2010.

86 Ministry of Development, Ad-Hoc Committees of 11th National Development Plan, 2018, <http://onbirinciplan.gov.tr/oik-ve-calisma-grubu-listeleri>.

committees refer to the SDGs and related national studies for their own policy recommendations. These concrete steps for nationalizing the SDGs will be followed by integration of the SDGs into other sectoral strategies and action plans.

## MONITORING AND REPORTING

The MDGs proved the importance of thinking through indicators. Therefore, more importance is given to the follow-up and review process based on indicators during the SDG process. However, the SDGs are more complex and broader to measure. The high-level political forum under the auspices of the United Nations Economic and Social Council provides a mechanism for regular follow-up and review to share countries' progress. Indicators are the most essential elements of this follow-up and review mechanism.

Turkey has a strong statistical infrastructure in terms of producing and disseminating indicators.<sup>87</sup> The Turkish Statistical Institute (TurkStat) has the central role for monitoring of SDG indicators. Since 2000, Turkey has been using its national sustainable development indicator set, composed of 132 indicators under 10 categories (MoD, 2016). TurkStat has contributed to the whole global process that was started in 2014 for adopting a global sustainable development indicator list. In Turkey, official statistics are produced and issued by TurkStat and related institutions specified in the Official Statistics Programme. Data compilation, evaluation and dissemination responsibilities of the institutions are also defined in that programme. TurkStat, the official body for the coordination of production and publication of official statistics, is authorized to publish and disseminate the official statistics compiled by related institutions. The Official Statistical Programme is prepared every five years in order to define the principles and standards regarding the production and dissemination of official statistics; and to ensure the production of up-to-date, reliable, timely and unbiased statistical data at national or international levels. TurkStat is planning to coordinate the monitoring process by cooperating with other institutions through the Official Statistics Programme, which will be shaped by the Statistical Council. Thematic working groups composed of TurkStat and other data producing institutions are responsible for conducting the Official Statistics Programme. In 2016, existing working groups for the forthcoming Official Statistical Programme 2017-2021 will address the needs for SDG indicator gaps.<sup>88</sup> Moreover, a new Official Statistical Programme working group which is dedicated to the monitoring of SDGs will be established, in order to operate for a five-year period between 2017 and 2021.

Turkey's first voluntary national review report submitted at the first high-level political forum in 2016 focused mainly on the initial steps taken to implement the SDGs (MoD, 2016). Besides focusing on the policymaking processes and initial steps, the report highlighted the importance of monitoring and indicators. Following the voluntary national review, more

---

87 Ministry of Development, 'Report on Turkey's Initial Steps Towards the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development', Ankara, 2016.

88 TurkStat, Official Statistics Portal, 2017, [http://www.resmiistatistik.gov.tr/misc/Official\\_Statistical\\_Programme\\_2017-2021.pdf](http://www.resmiistatistik.gov.tr/misc/Official_Statistical_Programme_2017-2021.pdf).

than 15 round-table meetings were organized as part of the stocktaking analysis. One of the key findings of these meetings was that there is a need to enhance Turkey's monitoring and evaluation capacity in terms of implementation of the SDGs.

To conclude, capacity-building and training activities are valuable to deepen knowledge and to learn new tools for monitoring and evaluation of the SDGs. The Istanbul National Evaluation Capacities Conference 2017 with its many productive workshops provided opportunities to the participants to broaden the understanding of monitoring and evaluation processes.