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# TURKEY: INTEGRATION OF THE SDGs INTO A NATIONAL SETTING FOR LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND



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## INTRODUCTION

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have set the global framework until 2030 for equitable, inclusive and sustainable development for all people. In this regard, Turkey is committed to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and to a better future for all, having translated the SDGs into its national policy documents, primarily the Eleventh National Development Plan (NDP) and its legal framework. Moreover, Turkey is among the few countries submitting its second voluntary national review (VNR) report to the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development.

With an average annual growth rate of 5.5 percent<sup>104</sup> in the last two decades, Turkey has been able to extend increased prosperity towards all in society through an inclusive development pathway. Correspondingly, to demonstrate the particular emphasis on policies for providing equal opportunities to vulnerable people, Turkey reported on progress for women, children, youth, the elderly, persons with a disability and refugees in a separate chapter in its second VNR report.<sup>105</sup>

## ALIGNING NATIONAL POLICIES WITH THE SDGs

“Sustainable development” has been part of the national policy agenda of Turkey since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in 1992 and was first introduced in the Seventh NDP in 1996.<sup>106</sup> In this regard, robust policies implemented for the prosperity of the people and achievements vis-à-vis the Millennium Development Goals culminated in a strong infrastructure and institutional capacity along with multi-level awareness of the path towards the SDGs.

104 Government of Turkey, Presidency of Strategy and Budget, “Turkey’s Second VNR 2019, Sustainable Development Goals: Strong Ground towards Common Goals”, 2019.

105 United Nations, Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform, <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/vnrs/>

106 Government of Turkey, Presidency of Strategy and Budget, “Turkey’s Second VNR 2019, Sustainable Development Goals: Strong Ground towards Common Goals”, 2019.

By the virtue of the commitment to a sustainable world and the approach of responsible development for the coming generations, Turkey has taken steps to incorporate the SDGs into its policy documents including NDPs, sectoral and institutional strategies, thematic programmes and international cooperation frameworks with an integrated approach.

In the context of Turkey, NDPs, which are the fundamental planning documents designating long-term macropolicies, are prepared by the Presidency of Strategy and Budget under the Presidency of the Republic of Turkey on behalf of the Government and are adopted by the Turkish National Assembly. Accordingly, they are mandatory for public institutions and advisory for the private sector, civil society organizations (CSOs) and international partners. They define the policies to be set and the transformations that will be realized in the economic, social and cultural sectors to lead all stakeholders for the next five years.<sup>107</sup>

To provide an integrated policy framework, Turkey adapted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to its national context and development priorities with the Eleventh NDP in lieu of a specific SDG policy document. In this regard, the SDGs were mainstreamed in the Eleventh NDP through five main pillars: “stable and strong economy”; “competitive production and efficiency”; “qualified human, strong society”; “liveable cities, sustainable environment”; and “rule of law, democratization and good governance”.<sup>108</sup>

As a product of an inclusive policy design process, the Eleventh NDP was prepared with a participatory and inclusive approach. In this context, in order to exchange opinions about the future policies of Turkey, 75 special expert commissions and working groups on each policy area were organized with the participation of representatives of public institutions, CSOs, media, the private sector, academia, international organizations and local actors. Additionally, through regional consultations, 12,000 people were engaged in the policy design process. Furthermore, the expectations of 19,000 participants concerning the priorities of the development plan were received via an online citizen survey.<sup>109</sup>

As the 2030 Agenda states the importance of “cohesive nationally owned sustainable development strategies, supported by integrated national financing frameworks”,<sup>110</sup> connections between the plan, programmes and budgets were strengthened in the Eleventh NDP and accordingly, policies, measures and institutional and legal arrangements envisaged were associated to the budget.<sup>111</sup>

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107 Government of Turkey, Ninth Development Plan, 2006.

108 Government of Turkey, Eleventh Development Plan, 2019.

109 Government of Turkey, Ministry of Development, List of 11th National Development Plan Special Expertise Commissions, 2018.

110 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>

111 Government of Turkey, Eleventh Development Plan, 2019.

Turkey published its first VNR report in 2016, one of 22 countries to do so. In July 2019, Turkey presented its second VNR report, prepared under the coordination of the Presidency of Strategy and Budget, at the High-Level Political Forum. The preparatory process for the VNR was grounded in a participatory and transparent approach. A platform for a comprehensive consultation and partnership process included representatives of CSOs, the private sector and local administrations. The contributions of 2,962 people were incorporated in the report. Simultaneously a survey was initiated to capture the recommendations of public institutions regarding integration of the SDGs into national policies. A National SDG Best Practices Database, including 400 projects and models, was established for sharing best practices.<sup>112</sup>

As mentioned above, achievement of the SDGs and consolidation of the endeavour for inclusive development entail the engagement of stakeholders and society at national and local levels. Accordingly, in Turkey the 2030 Agenda attained high-level political ownership at presidential and parliamentary levels. Moreover, various programmes were carried out to build public awareness and mobilize actors and resources.

Corresponding to the work at home, Turkey supports development efforts in developing countries with the perception that leaving no one behind is actually a global issue that is responsibility of the all States. Turkey provided development assistance of over US\$38.7 billion in 2014–2018 and has hosted the United Nations Technology Bank for Least Developed Countries since 2018.<sup>113</sup>

Quality data and evidence-based approaches are key to effective policy design, monitoring and evaluation and to efficient use of resources for development. In Turkey, The Turkish Statistical Institute (TURKSTAT) is the institution responsible for generating reliable and regular data and monitoring SDG indicators. After launching a preliminary set of global indicators, TURKSTAT conducted a data inventory to highlight data gaps and the national capacity for the production of statistics to monitor and report on the SDGs. Subsequently, 218 SDG indicators that apply to Turkey and the responsible institutions were incorporated in the Official Statistics Programme. In 2016, Turkey conducted a Stocktaking Analysis Project to identify the key targets relevant for Turkey, and the gaps and needs regarding these targets. In 2019, a National Sustainable Development Indicator Set of 83 indicators was published.

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112 Government of Turkey, Presidency of Strategy and Budget, "Turkey's Second VNR 2019, Sustainable Development Goals: Strong Ground towards Common Goals", 2019.

113 Government of Turkey, Presidency of Strategy and Budget, 2020 Annual Programme of the Presidency, 2019.

## POLICIES FOR VULNERABLE GROUPS

The principle of leaving no one behind is the key value<sup>114</sup> of the 2030 Agenda. Turkey, with its human-oriented development approach, prepared a separate chapter on leaving no one behind in its second VNR report, to highlight the importance attached to the empowerment and inclusion of those ones who lack the opportunities for a decent life.

Turkey is a country with 82 million people, including 23 million children (0-18 years old), 15 million youth (15-24 years old) and 7.2 million elderly people. Moreover, there are around 3.7 million Syrian refugees and 350,000 people under international protection. This population structure necessitates efficient and inclusive social and economic policies.

Since 2000, Turkey has achieved considerable progress in terms of physical, human and technological infrastructure, corresponding with its high economic growth. Accordingly, inclusive economic and social policies were designed to provide equal opportunities to vulnerable groups; quality, accessible and widespread public services were improved; a more inclusive social security system was designed; and a more efficient social assistance and service system was established. Consequently, as of 2015, absolute poverty was reduced to a minimum of 0.06 percent and the relative poverty rate was reduced to 20.1 percent in 2017.<sup>115</sup> Increased welfare, accompanied by redistribution mechanisms and successful social policies to reduce poverty, penetrated all segments of the society and contributed to the empowerment of vulnerable groups.

Improving the quality of life of people who are at risk of poverty or exclusion and increasing their participation in economic and social life through easy access to opportunities is a policy priority for Turkey. In this context, Turkey has enhanced social policies to reach all segments of society and revised ongoing programmes to be compatible with the special needs of disadvantaged groups.

In order to reduce poverty and disrupt its intergenerational transmission, social assistance programmes targeting low-income families and vulnerable groups were diversified to include in particular education, health, housing and income support. Furthermore, incentives and support programmes including job counselling, entrepreneurship training programmes, subsidies for job searches and application costs, and social security premium incentives at work were implemented to ensure the integration of long-term unemployed beneficiaries of social assistance into the labour market. What's more, all segments of society are provided Universal Health Insurance and the Government covers the cost of premiums for those who do not have the means to pay.

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114 Lucks, Dorothy &, Kalugampitiya, Asela, *Global Evaluation Agenda 2016-2020*, Proceedings from the Fourth International Conference on National Evaluation Capacities 2015, UNDP, June 2016.

115 Government of Turkey, Presidency of Strategy and Budget, "Turkey's Second VNR 2019, Sustainable Development Goals: Strong Ground towards Common Goals", 2019.

Subject to the influx of Syrian people since 2011, Turkey has become the country hosting the highest number of refugees. Turkey, granting “temporary protection” status to the Syrian refugees, has spent approximately \$40 billion to date from the national budget for the well-being of immigrants.<sup>116</sup>

With migration increasing, policies towards immigrants have become integral to the principle of leaving no one behind. Early emergency services including housing, nutrition, health and social protection were transformed into services supporting social and economic cohesion as the Syrian crisis continued and the Syrian population inclined to be permanently in the country. They were given temporary identity cards in order to provide efficient services and to reach each individual. Currently, refugees under both temporary and international protection can utilize public services like Turkish citizens and can participate in the labour market.

In the context of humanitarian and social assistance, the Emergency Social Security Network Programme (ESSN) was initiated in 2016 for the people under temporary and international protection. Approximately 1.5 million people are beneficiaries of the ESSN.<sup>117</sup> Additionally, the Food Card Project is implemented as a social assistance programme for the daily needs of refugees living in Temporary Accommodation Centres. In order to strengthen their resilience, programmes have been designed for social adaptation of refugees.

Access of Syrian children to education is prioritized to ensure that they develop skills, adapt to the host communities, contribute to their country’s development in case of repatriation and finally to avoid that a generation is lost. In Turkey, all children, whether Turkish citizens or not, have the right to education. Currently, 63 percent of the 1.08 million school-aged Syrian children are in education. Syrian children can attend Temporary Training Centres, regular schools or Accelerated Learning Programmes. The online Foreign Students Information System tracks their registration, success and attendance status. What is more, to increase school attendance by refugee children, the scope of the national Conditional Education Assistance Programme has been extended. As of October 2019, under the Conditional Cash Transfer for Education Programme, 445,757 vulnerable refugee children are being provided cash payments.<sup>118</sup>

In “child-friendly spaces” psychosocial and developmental support and creative activities are offered to increase the participation of the migrant children. Moreover, through the social cohesion programmes and activities, platforms for the interaction of migrant and Turkish children and youth are created. In addition, child rights

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116 Government of Turkey, Presidency of Strategy and Budget, 2020 Annual Programme of the Presidency, 2019.

117 World Food Programme, Turkey Annual Country Report 2018.

118 Government of Turkey, Presidency of Strategy and Budget, 2020 Annual Programme of the Presidency, 2019.

committees, made up of children, are participatory and interactive mechanisms that provide an opportunity to the migrant children to have a say in monitoring their rights.

Refugees with a temporary identity card can benefit from all health services without any payment. They can also benefit from 668 Migrant Health Units established to overcome language and cultural barriers for more efficient and accessible health-care services. In addition, the Migrant Health Centres and Women's Health Centres offer services for adolescent, women's and maternal health, gender-based violence and psychosocial support.

Empowering girls and women and ensuring their active participation in social life, education and employment are emphasized in Turkey's policy documents. Within this context, policies and programmes are implemented to enhance women's active and efficient participation in development and to increase female employment. Within the frame of reconciliation of family and work life, the Labor Law was amended to include part-time and flexible working hours following childbirth and parental leave in addition to maternity leave. Active labour-market programmes aim to improve the employability of women including through vocational training, job counselling, social security and tax reduction incentives; women are granted 20 percent more than men under entrepreneurship support programmes. Projects such as "My Mom's Job is My Future" and "Engineer Girls of Turkey" are also initiated with private sector partnerships for the empowerment of women.

As a result of the efforts to increase schooling for girls, the primary school enrolment rate for girls is 98 percent. However, the rate of transition to secondary school is below the target of the compulsory 12 years of education. In this context, to reach this policy target and not leave any girl out of school, there are special programmes aiming to increase the awareness of local opinion leaders, families and professionals such as "Increasing School Attendance Rates Especially for Girls". Similarly, young women who are socioeconomically disadvantaged are supported to improve their literacy skills and informed about women's rights and gender equality within the scope of the "Development Programme for Young Women".

Turkey's demographic profile, with 39.2 percent of the population comprising children and youth, requires investment in human capital and policies for improving the well-being of the young population. Within this framework, increasing the access of the child and youth population to quality public services has become the core of the public policy agenda. Since 2008, all children are covered by the Universal Health Insurance and can benefit from health-care services, including prenatal care, early childhood tracking programmes, immunization and nutrition support, free of charge. As a measure to support maternal and infant health, under the Conditional Cash Transfer for Health Programme, since 2002 poor expectant mothers receive payments for medical examinations during pregnancy and delivery at a health-care institution. Mothers in poor families receive payment for the regular medical examination and vaccination

of children under the age of 6 years. As of September 2019, a total of 1,008,147 people utilized the conditional health support.<sup>119</sup>

Adolescent- and youth-friendly health-care services are provided at Youth Counselling and Health-care Service Centres and at Centres for Healthy Life. To support adolescents and young people in this sensitive and special period of their lives, youth, particularly the most vulnerable, are informed on sexual and reproductive rights and services; and programmes to improve the services provided by psychological advisers and counsellors at schools are implemented in cooperation with CSOs and other partners.

Education is not only an instrument for the well-being of children and youth but also provides them the opportunity to explore and realize their potential. The Turkish Constitution acknowledges education as a fundamental right and prohibits depriving individuals of this right. Accordingly, in Turkey, compulsory education for 12 years and optional higher education are provided free of charge.

Corresponding to its increased importance at global level, Turkey has emphasized early childhood care and education in the Eleventh NDP and in the 2023 Education Vision document. Targeting that each child has at least one year of preschool education and a 100 percent preschooling rate by 2023, special measures are envisaged to increase access of children in disadvantaged conditions. These measures include a compulsory 3 percent quota in private early childhood care and education centres for the children of poor families; free educational materials; nutritional support; special curricula for schools with high numbers of children of seasonal agricultural workers and children under temporary protection; free preschool education for children with disabilities; alternative and flexible early childhood education models like mobile schools; summer nursery classes; and the mothers' support programmes.

Acknowledging the role education plays at providing equality of opportunity and paving the way for chances of a better life, services are delivered to minimize the disadvantaged situations of the children, for example transport for children who live in sparsely populated and dispersed settlements to central schools, or boarding schools for children living in rural areas or in poor families. Remedial education programmes are implemented for students who lag behind their peers in academic achievement and/or are at risk of dropping out. For children with special educational needs and disabilities, inclusive education is provided in mainstream schools. Accordingly, for children with disabilities, the Government meets the costs of special rehabilitation and education services in private educational institutions, meals and transportation.

Institutional care, foster family and adoption services are delivered for children who are deprived of parental care. These services are designed and provided in line with the principles of "the best interest of the child" and "family care, care by own family in

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119 Government of Turkey, Presidency of Strategy and Budget, 2020 Annual Programme of the Presidency, 2019.

priority". Families in economic difficulties are financially supported by the Social and Economic Support Programme to ensure that children can live with their families. Since 2017, with the School Support Project, these children are also engaged in social, cultural, artistic and sporting activities. Children under temporary or international protection may also benefit from institutional care services, the Social and Economic Support Programme and School Support Project. Moreover, specialized child support centres provide care and psychosocial support to children abusing substances, children driven to crime or victims of crime and unaccompanied foreign children.<sup>120</sup>

Turkey is committed to ending child labour, and adopted the National Programme for the Elimination of Child Labour in 2018 in line with the priorities of International Labour Organization conventions No.138 and No. 182. Accordingly, 2018 was declared as the Year against Child Labour. Some of the actions against the worst forms of child labour were the establishment of provincial child labour units across the country, mobile teams to detect children in the streets and projects for children in seasonal agriculture.

The active and efficient participation of youth in social life is an important means to empower them. In addition to the public scholarship programmes, free higher education and public dormitories, children and young people can participate free of charge in the activities and programmes of youth centres and camps. These youth centres and camps also provide platforms for the integration of children and young people from different socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds, including ones under international or temporary protection.

## CONCLUSION

Turkey has taken significant steps in aligning the national and global agendas and has made considerable progress in many policy areas, especially in inclusive and pro-poor policies. However, turning the 2030 Agenda into reality requires the continuous efforts of all stakeholders, including the Government, academia, civil society, the private sector and all segments of society. The success of this endeavour also depends on the establishment of the right linkages between policy, planning and budgeting as well as coherence and cooperation among institutions and sectors at national and local levels.

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120 Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Services; Child Services Bulletin (April-June), Turkey, 2019.