



*Sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11):
which models and policies to enhance the cooperation
and partnerships between France and Turkey?*

Delivering for the Future: A Franco-Turkish Alliance for the 2030 Agenda

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Abstract

France and Turkey are failing to meet their SDG 11 targets. Urgent action is needed to reduce economic disparity, decrease air pollution, and overcome the lack of safe and satisfactory housing in their respective cities. Greater involvement from civil society and the private sector is also required. Three policies can accelerate efforts to improve co-operation and forge stakeholder partnerships. These are:

- *Create 2030 Accelerator Zones and a Peer-to-Peer Learning Platform, to tackle intercity economic disparity.*
- *Implement SDG 11 Urban Laboratories, to improve housing quality and availability.*
- *Host an annual Activism for Air Quality conference, encouraging mobilisation by French and Turkish citizens against air pollution.*

Introduction

France and Turkey have made positive strides in implementing the 2030 Agenda. Yet, they have further work to do in order to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and meet their national targets. Currently, both countries will not reach any of the 17 goals by the ten-year deadline. This includes their objectives for SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities, which aims to “make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable” (United Nations, 2015). This SDG has 10 indicators and 15 specific targets including indicator 11.6, which examines the per capita environmental impact of cities; and target 11.3.2, which focuses on the proportion of urban population living in slums or inadequate housing. This policy white paper shall outline the current SDG 11 state of play in France and Turkey, before providing three policies that can improve collaboration and deliver results.

Rationale for Change

The SDG 11 indicators for both countries are disappointing. France, for example, has nearly 3 million people inadequately housed, with growing social and geographical segregation (France Voluntary National Review, 2016). In Turkey, rapid urbanization has resulted in an insufficient number of decent housing units; traffic congestion; a lack of safe infrastructure, and environmental degradation (Republic of Turkey, 2016). Both countries must accelerate progress and enact change. As the UN Secretary-General has said, “It is abundantly clear that a much deeper, faster and more ambitious response is needed to achieve our 2030 goals” (United Nations, 2019). Therefore, the time to act is now.

To provide solutions, a whole-of-society approach is needed. This includes expanding governmental involvement via a ‘bottom-up’ approach, with local and regional authorities actively participating. It also means energising businesses and civil society; making cities sustainable through creating business opportunities and safe housing; building resilient economies, and investing in urban spaces. Yet, there is a lack of private sector and civil society engagement in Turkey (Turkey Voluntary Review, 2019) and four million French SMEs are not aware of the SDGs (Comite 21, 2018). This shows the need for greater stakeholder collaboration in and between both countries, to power their SDG initiatives and achieve success.

France & Turkey: Dual interests, dual challenges

Both France and Turkey have recognised that cities are integral to modern societies and instrumental to achieving the SDGs. This is reflected around the world, with an agglomeration of economic and social activity in central hubs transforming urban living. But it has also created severe challenges. These include economic divergence and increased air pollution, which are both prevalent in France. According to the OECD, despite France having 39% of its population living in urban areas of more than 500,000 people (much lower than the 55% OECD average), cities account for 52% of national GDP (OECD, 2018a). Since 2000, they have accounted for 73% of GDP growth (idib). This has led to increasing segregation amongst poor and rich cities, and a growing urban-rural divide, negatively affecting SDG indicator 11.A.

Another challenge in France concerns SDG indicator 11.6, and the adverse per capita environmental impact of cities, such as the level of air pollution. For example, the cities of Lille and Marseille have witnessed growing populations and an increase in air pollution, resulting in them being among the most polluted cities in the OECD (OECD, 2018b). The damage in Marseille is so severe that 50% of schools have “unsafe levels of air pollution” (RFI, 2018). Consequentially, France urgently needs to reform and accelerate its SDG 11 efforts, in order to improve the quality of life in its urban areas.

Turkey faces the same challenges, with the country having the highest regional disparity among 30 comparable OECD countries, and the highest average level of city air pollution (OECD, 2018c). However, the country’s greatest problem is a lack of safe settlements and satisfactory housing. This is important, as housing is essential to satisfy basic needs such as shelter. Yet, according to the latest figures, Turkish houses are overcrowded, with an average of half a room per person being available in North-eastern Anatolia, and 8% of houses not providing basic facilities such as an indoor flushing toilet (OECD, 2020).

In highlighting these three problems, the two countries face similar challenges in making their cities safe, resilient, and sustainable. Yet both have the same interest in overcoming them. Therefore, it is essential that they co-ordinate their policy solutions and implementation efforts. In addition, through expanding their engagement with civil society and the private sector, Turkey and France can benefit from greater knowledge and expertise. This is currently severely lacking, but the situation can improve by executing the following policy recommendations.

Solutions aligned to the SDGs

Policy Recommendation 1: Create 2030 Accelerator Zones and a Peer-to-Peer Learning Platform, to tackle intercity economic disparity.

Aligned to SDG Indicator 11.A, the creation of 2030 Accelerator Zones is a place-based industrial policy, focused upon improving the economic competitiveness of disadvantaged cities. This is done through incentivising private sector investment via tax credits. Yet, investments must meet compulsory SDG 11 criteria such as air quality standards, alongside ensuring universal access to public spaces. The Peer-to-Peer Learning Platform can help share best practice; improve bilateral business engagement, and the circulation of case studies. Hosted by the French InterMinisterial Representative for Sustainable Development and available online at www.agendafrance2030.gouv.fr, this policy requires minor amendments to current regulation, and aligns public finances to the 2030 Agenda. It can be achieved through refining the €47 billion 'Investment in the Future' programme and €5.7 billion 'Research Tax Credit' in France, and inserting SDG criteria into 'Technology Development Zone' regulations in Turkey. Turkey can also share its experience successfully implementing public-private partnerships. If implemented, this policy can be transformational, and bring both countries closer to their SDG 11 targets.

Policy Recommendation 2: Implement SDG 11 Urban Laboratories, to improve housing quality and availability.

Turkey and France possess a wealth of human capital, specialising in providing innovative solutions to complex challenges. SDG 11 Urban Laboratories can harness these skills through providing inter-and intra-country capacity building, and support entrepreneurs tackling SDG 11.1. Co-financed by the French Ministry for Housing and Turkish City Councils, these Urban Laboratories can help companies navigate national and local planning regulations in both countries. They can also educate citizens and support civil society efforts to deliver solutions to overcrowding and poor quality housing. Drawing upon Turkey's 'Integrated Urban Development Strategy and Action Plan' and the mandatory requirement of civil society to be involved in urban planning throughout its 68 City Councils, Urban Laboratories can encourage social housing production that delivers net zero emissions; supports renewable energies, and is rooted within communities. Through encouraging co-operation, the SDG 11 Urban Laboratories will benefit solution-orientated companies and civil society groups; cities who implement changes to lower emissions and increase the quality of housing; and the whole of society through creating safe and sustainable communities.

Policy Recommendation 3: Host an annual Activism for Air Quality conference, encouraging mobilisation by French and Turkish citizens against air pollution.

Clean, high quality air is essential for human life. As environmental issues become increasingly salient, both countries need to do more in reducing air pollution. A systems approach is needed to collaborate across multiple actors, and mobilise citizens to pressure authorities, companies and individuals to change their behaviour. This can be achieved through demanding Climate Citizen Assemblies, and encouraging greater involvement in the planning process by civil society organisations. In addition, through using funding from the French Breathable Cities initiative, both countries can host an annual Activism for Air Quality conference. This can raise awareness of air pollution as a critical public policy challenge, and encourage French and Turkish citizens to mobilise for change. In doing so, France and Turkey can ensure that ‘no-one is left behind’, and that future generations will breathe clean air.

Looking Ahead

Implementing these policy recommendations requires strong leadership, substantial resources, and resolute political will. Yet by forming an international partnership and deepening collaboration between government, business and civil society, France and Turkey can seize the opportunity to achieve their national priorities, and deliver the 2030 Agenda.

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