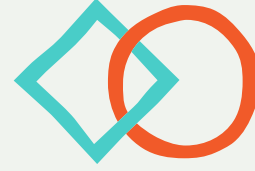




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HEALTH
ENVIRONMENT
AND CLIMATE
TURKEY



BRIEFING:

The Green Deal and Health Benefits in Turkey



1- What is the “Green Deal” Approach?

The Green Deal approach first emerged as US President Roosevelt’s “New Deal” in the 1930s. In recent years, this approach has gained prominence in different parts of the world. In the European continent, the policy set referred to as the European Green Deal is a holistic concept for the well-being of the environment and all species. The European Green Deal “aims to transform Europe into a fair and prosperous society, with a modern, resource-efficient and competitive economy where there are no net emissions of greenhouse gases in 2050 and where economic growth is decoupled from resource use.”¹

Presented by the European Commission in 2019, The European Green Deal provides solutions to the impacts of climate change, the loss of biodiversity and the destruction of forests and oceans.¹ The European Green Deal also aims to protect the health and well-being of its citizens (*healthy planet for healthy people*) and requires sectoral and international cooperation to fully achieve its goals. Although the carbon neutrality of the European continent alone will greatly benefit the environment, taking collective steps will provide wider benefits.



Figure 1. The European Green Deal²

The European Green Deal’s inclusive and fair transformation aims to not only create green jobs but also a modern industry with clean and low-cost energy supply, an important step towards becoming carbon neutral by 2050. Contributing to the preservation of biodiversity, the European Green Deal also aims to guide the transportation sector and food systems towards a just and healthy transition.

Sectoral and international cooperation is key for achieving efficient and long-lasting benefits for people, and the environment. The European Green Deal aims to tackle climate change, which has led to major health impacts, which keep on growing. **The European Green Deal’s health benefits will increase significantly** as it minimizes the destruction of the environment by providing a greener, fairer and carbon neutral solution plan for the environment and societies.

2- The Core Elements of the European Green Deal

To tackle the extensive environmental crisis we are facing, the European Green Deal uses a comprehensive strategy that includes several elements as listed below:

- Increasing the EU's climate ambition for 2030 and 2050,
- Supplying clean, affordable and secure energy,
- Mobilizing industry for a clean and circular economy,
- Building and renovating in an energy and resource efficient way,
- Accelerating the shift to sustainable and smart transportation,
- “From Farm to Fork”: A fair, healthy and environmentally-friendly food system,
- Preserving and restoring biodiversity and ecosystems, and
- Zero Pollution ambition for a toxic-free environment.¹

Climate Neutrality by 2050

The ultimate objective of the European Green Deal is for the European continent to become climate neutral by 2050. This is expected to have direct positive impacts on the environment and humans. This objective, which is set to meet the global objectives of the Paris Agreement, is very particularly important for future generations. This goal also requires a just and social transformation of the European Union's economy.

Fit for 55

“Fit for 55” is a key package of measures to achieve the EU's 2050 carbon neutrality objective. **Fit for 55 aims to implement the EU's 2030 goal of cutting greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55 percent compared to 1990 levels.** Although the EU's determination on this issue is very important, the steps it will take alone will not be enough. Including countries that are not members of the EU but commit to implement national regulations in line with this objective, will bring climate and health benefits.

The “Fit for 55” package includes laws for energy efficiency, EU emissions trading system, renewable energy, energy taxation, CO₂ emission standards for vehicles, regulations for methane emissions, land use and forestry, and a carbon border adjustment mechanism (CBAM). The package includes regulations that directly impact daily life practices and resolute steps can provide very beneficial results in terms of decarbonization and climate action. The package also includes a proposal for renewable energy and aims to increase the current EU-level target of at least 32% of renewable energy sources in the overall energy mix to at least 40% by 2030.³

The carbon border adjustment mechanism (CBAM) is important for Turkey because it is relatively new and because of its practical consequences. According to 2019 data, the trade of goods between Turkey and the EU amounted to approximately 88 billion USD. The same year 49 percent of Turkey's total export trade was with the EU.⁴ The close commercial relations between Turkey and the EU increases the importance of this mechanism's implementation.

The CBAM also includes incentives for non-EU producers to reduce their carbon emissions. This is expected to directly affect production practices in Turkey. The CBAM will also create additional costs for products that will be sold by countries where CO₂ emissions are not priced or are relatively low priced. Initially, the CBAM will apply to carbon-intensive sectors such as cement, aluminum, iron and steel and electricity generation sectors. **Considering the trade volume of the EU, the CBAM will contribute to the reduction of global emissions.** In 2020, The Turkish Ministry of Trade underlined that the implementation of the CBAM should allow sufficient time to ensure that small and medium-sized enterprises in particular adjust to the new regime and preserve their competitive edge.⁴

Farm to Fork – Agriculture

The European Commission’s Farm to Fork Strategy is one of the key factors to achieve the EU’s climate neutrality by 2050 target. One of the important goals of this strategy is to reduce pesticide use by 50 percent by 2030 and increase organic farming practices by 25 percent. Carbon farming, which can contribute significantly to the EU’s climate neutrality target, is also included in this strategy. The strategy supports practices that help capture CO₂ from the atmosphere and store it sustainably in soil or biomass. The main objectives of the Farm to Fork strategy are:

- Ensure sufficient, affordable and nutritious food within planetary limits,
- Halve the use of pesticides and fertilizers and sales of antimicrobials,
- Increase the amount of land devoted to organic farming,
- Promote more sustainable food consumption and healthy diets,
- Reduce food loss and waste,
- Combat food fraud in the supply chain,
- Improve animal welfare.⁷



Figure 2. The Farm to Fork Strategy⁹

The Just Transition Mechanism

The European Union’s Just Transition Mechanism aims to ensure that regions highly dependent on fossil fuels and carbon-intensive industries transition to clean energy.⁶ **The motivation at the heart of The Just Transition Mechanism is “to leave no one behind”.** Achieving climate neutrality by 2050 will be more challenging for some member states than for others because some are more reliant on fossil fuels, or have carbon-intensive industries that employ significant numbers of people. The Just Transition Mechanism includes financial and technical support developed to ensure that these people, who are likely to be excluded from the system, have a secure future and thus fair and decent jobs and live in healthy environments. Just transition efforts should also include a health perspective.

Biodiversity



Biodiversity is the backbone of life and it is vital in providing people with food, clean air and water. **Biodiversity is also crucial in keeping nature's balance and prevents the spread of infectious diseases.**¹⁰ Achieving the objectives of the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, which is a key element of the European Green Deal, will have positive impacts on nature and humans. The main actions of the Biodiversity Strategy are as follows:

- Creating protected areas that cover at least 30 percent of the EU's land and sea area,
- Restoring degraded ecosystems by 2030 through a series of specific commitments and measures,
- Allocating €20 billion per year to protect and promote biodiversity through EU funds and national and private funding.¹⁰

Green Recovery

The COVID-19 Pandemic has clearly shown that we need to do more than return to the "old normal" to preserve environmental and human health. **We can no longer afford to return to the "old normal" because normal means fuelling the climate crisis.**¹¹ Recovery from the pandemic must be achieved through "Green Transition", with an approach that puts our health and our planet's health at the heart of recovery. The European Green New Deal and the Green Transition share the same point of view.

The World Health Organization (WHO) developed a COVID-19 recovery roadmap in line with a healthy and green transition. Protecting and preserving nature leads the list of WHO's "Prescriptions for a Healthy, Green Recovery". Others include investing in essential services in healthcare facilities, ensuring a quick and healthy energy transition, promoting healthy and sustainable food systems, building healthy, liveable cities and finally, stopping funding polluters.¹²

3- A Green New Deal for Turkey? Turkey's Green Deal Action Plan



In 2021, Turkey also introduced a Green Deal Action Plan. The Action Plan was prepared by the Ministry of Trade and in collaboration with other relevant ministries. The Green Deal aims to tackle the present and future negative impacts of climate change, with an approach that focuses on people and ecosystems. Therefore, Turkey's Green Deal Action Plan should embody and place importance not only to financial issues such as trade and economics but also to actions regarding biodiversity, just transition, and zero pollution.

The Action Plan features 32 objectives and 81 actions under 9 main headings. These headings are: Carbon Border Adjustments, Green and Circular Economy, Green Finance, Clean, Affordable and Secure Energy Supply, Sustainable Agriculture, Sustainable Smart Mobility Combating Climate Change, Diplomacy and Information and Awareness-Raising activities. Although a calendar has been established for these 9 main headings and related actions, Turkey's Action Plan differs from the European Green Deal as it does not set any concrete targets and dates.⁵

Furthermore, the Turkish Action Plan does not feature a heading that corresponds to the EU's Zero Pollution target, one of the key targets of the European Green Deal. The Action Plan only mentions the preparation of a calendar and action plan for the EU's Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control (IPPC) legislation.⁵

The scope of the European Green Deal is so wide that it will impact not only Europe, but all countries that have political, commercial or financial relations with Europe. Furthermore, the Green Deal reaches far beyond economic issues as it is a comprehensive and inclusive approach. However, Turkey focused more on the economic aspects of the European Green Deal and did not develop a roadmap that aligns with the Green Deal's ambitious goals such as zero pollution or carbon neutrality by 2050. If Turkey does not follow through with the EU harmonization and regulatory stages, the country's trade will be adversely impacted by the Green Deal and Turkey will face the inevitable and growing consequences of climate change.

These European Green Deal regulations motivate countries to adopt environmentally-friendly production and limit carbon emissions. Although, at first glance, these regulations might seem to pose a risk for the future relationship between Turkey and its biggest trade partner, the EU, Turkey can take decisive steps to turn this into an opportunity. These steps, which will also contribute to climate action, will lead people to live and work in a fairer and more prosperous environment.¹³

Decisive steps in line with the Green Deal and a parallel approach will greatly benefit us and our planet. The Green Deal will include both climate action and a health perspective and will in the long-term open up a safe space for disease prevention.

4- Health Benefits of the Green Deal



Zero Pollution

The Zero Pollution target is a very important and vital opportunity to remove harmful particles from soil, air and water, which constitute essential life elements.

For a fair and green transition, the EU Green Deal's Zero Pollution Target should be applied to every stage of the production and consumption processes. By phasing out fossil fuels, which are the dominant cause of climate change and the leading cause of air pollution, 99 percent of the world's population can start breathing clean air.¹⁴

Air pollution can directly harm human health by causing aggravated asthma and lower respiratory infection, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), lung cancer and cardiovascular diseases.¹⁵ According to the latest report of the Right to Clean Air Platform, "In 2021, 42,000 people lost their lives due to air pollution in Turkey."¹⁶ **It is important to remember that there are no safe levels when it comes to**

air pollution and that the ultimate goal should be zero pollution.

Soil and water pollution by industrial waste and pesticides is at a level that can directly affect health. Pesticides can cause cancer, Parkinson's disease and Alzheimer's, and have adverse effects on the nervous, endocrine and reproductive systems. **Pesticide poisoning is a global public health problem, and causes approximately 300,000 deaths worldwide each year.**¹⁷

Health Benefits of Fossil Fuel Phase Out and Decarbonization

Our fossil fuel-dependent economy has negative impacts on the environment and on our health. Ending this dependency will ensure a cleaner and healthier environment. According to the 2022 report of the Health and Environment Alliance, "102,601 premature deaths can be prevented if Turkey opts to phase out coal by 2030".¹⁸

Burning fossil fuels also fuels climate change, and also causes other problems besides pollution. For example, the severe heat waves in recent years are a visible result of climate change and can severely affect human health. The most common health effects of heat waves are skin rashes, heat exhaustion, heat cramps, heat syncope, heat exhaustion, and heat stroke. Furthermore, heat waves can also cause conditions that may affect the heart and circulatory system, nervous system and respiratory system and result in death.¹⁹

Heatwaves have been intensifying and are creating wildfire conditions. In recent years, wild fires have been ravaging forestlands in Turkey. **Heat waves, combined with prolonged regional droughts, have been linked to the increasing frequency and intensity of wildfires.** Higher temperatures can increase the frequency, severity and size of wildfires. Wildfire impacts extend far beyond the forest ecosystem in the form of air pollution. The European Green Deal provides many climate action benefits as well as health benefits.

5- Recommendations to the Health Sector



1. Including the health sector

The European Green Deal addresses important issues such as air, soil and water pollution, biodiversity, the just transition mechanism, climate neutrality and circular economy. Health stakeholders should participate in public consultations and underline the importance of the health perspective.

2. The benefits of a healthy planet

Health stakeholders should raise awareness that living in a clean environment is crucial from a health perspective. They should underline **the importance of limiting the impacts of global warming in the prevention of diseases.**

3. Zero Pollution and its importance from a health perspective

Chemicals in the soil, air and water directly impact health. Health professionals should advocate for Zero Pollution and communicate their demands to decision makers.

4. Ending fossil fuels use and investments

The European Green Deal represents an opportunity for both EU member countries and non-EU countries. **Ending fossil fuel investment and use will greatly benefit public health.** Health professionals should pursue efforts to engage the public.

5. Just Transition and the health perspective

The implementation of the Just Transition Mechanism needs to take into account the health burden. Health stakeholders should work towards this goal.²⁰

6. Climate change and health

There is a comprehensive body of evidence regarding climate change and its impacts on the environment and health. Health professionals should share these evidences and materials published by the WHO at every opportunity.

6- Policy Demands from Decision Makers



1. Determine a clear target and date in line with the EU Green Deal

The EU Green Deal addresses our health as well as the health of the planet and has the capacity to provide the necessary vision and guidance to non EU-countries. The action plan prepared by the Ministry of Trade is an important step in the process of harmonization with the European Green Deal. However, decision makers should set more concrete targets and dates. This requires a cooperation between all levels of the bureaucracy.

2. Include health professionals

Prioritizing health requires including health professionals in all levels of the decision making mechanism for prioritizing health.

3. End fossil fuel subsidies

Stop subsidizing new fossil fuel plants and fossil fuel use as they increase the impacts of climate change. The Paris Agreement's target to limit global warming to 1.5 °C is the guiding principle and **plans to reduce emissions by 2030 can be developed.**

4. Subsidize pesticide-free agricultural practices

Support agriculture and farmers with the Farm to Fork strategy. Pesticide use is extremely harmful and should be significantly reduced, farmers should be provided with necessary training and financial support.

5. The Just Transition Mechanism should be meticulously implemented

The Just Transition target requires considering all parties and leaving no one behind. Provide a healthy and clean future to those who will be affected by the transition.

6. Take action to achieve the Zero Pollution target

The Zero Pollution target date is 2050 and it is too late. We need to take urgent action for pollution-free air, soil and water as well as toxic-free manufacturing processes in line with Zero Pollution vision.

7. Implement all components of the Green Deal with the same determination

During the harmonization process, show the same effort to implement the Just Transition and Zero Pollution concepts as you do for economic concerns. Issues such as biodiversity, the Chemicals Strategy for Sustainability, clean, safe and affordable energy should not be ignored.²¹

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The Environment, Climate and Health Cooperation Project will continue until July 2023 and aims to:

- Establish a collaborative platform on the environment and climate change for all health professionals.
- Organize online trainings, provide mobile training seminars and courses for medical students on the environment and climate change with a public health perspective.
- Create a dialogue between health professionals in Turkey, professional organizations, non-governmental organizations and think tanks in Europe.
- Produce environmental, climate change and health content, briefs and training materials directed to health professionals.



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