

# **How to Enhance SDG Empowerment and National Evaluation Systems for Sustainable Policy Change: The Case of EU Pre-Accession Assistance to Türkiye**

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## **Abstract**

The paper aims to assess the evolution and interrelation of the elements of Türkiye's administrative absorption capacity including programming, management, implementation and evaluation processes and systems for managing European Union (EU) financial assistance between the 2007-2024 period of Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA). The study will examine these key elements of the administrative absorption capacity by focusing on the incorporation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), evidence-based decision-making and inclusive governance approach within the Turkish context and real examples. The main research question of the study is how to increase the administrative absorption capacity of the EU funds in complementary and consistency with the national funds to ensure sustainable policy change in Türkiye on the road to EU accession via national evaluation systems where the SDGs are better embraced.

Adopting qualitative evaluation and a compare-and-contrast methodology covering the experience of Central Eastern European Countries in their pre-accession period (PHARE Programming) as well as the experience of EU member countries for Structural Funds, the study will make concrete analysis at central, regional and local levels and provide proactive and practical policy recommendations for strengthening evidence-based decision-making, evaluation approach and systems at the country. It highlights the importance of building robust, results-based, and integrated national evaluation systems leaving no one behind.

The findings indicate a need for improvements in Türkiye's capacity to administer and utilize EU funds, particularly addressing evaluation-related perspectives, and underscore the need for the enhancement of national policies and institutional capabilities. However, challenges persist in fully institutionalizing evaluation practices. The study emphasizes overcoming these challenges through innovative and integrated approaches in monitoring and evaluation systems, covering not only the systems for EU funds but also the national policy framework and funding mechanisms. The study also addresses the importance of fostering development cooperation and capacity building to ensure the development of innovative approaches in evaluation mechanisms and effective implementation of evaluation systems. Multilateral and bilateral cooperation will be beneficial in this regard as it promotes the roles of SDGs in synergy with national systems, sharing of best practices and experience. Contributing to equity through disaggregated data, and enabling targeted and inclusive policy interventions aligned with the SDGs is essential.

As a policy-oriented research, the paper recommends a roadmap for strengthening national evaluation systems. The study also highlights the role of technology and integrated monitoring and evaluation systems in streamlining data processes and analysis which will in turn serve to improve the efficiency of evaluation systems, thereby supporting evidence-based planning and decision-making for better management and absorption of financial allocations, including EU funds. By aligning national evaluation systems with the SDGs, Türkiye can enhance its administrative capacity to effectively absorb EU financial assistance and national funds, contributing to sustainable development.