

Engaging with External Partners; Experiences and Perspectives of the Turkish Statistical Institute (TurkStat)

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Abstract

As indicated in the European Statistics Code of Practice, maintaining cooperation with academic institutions and international bodies has a significant influence on the effectiveness and credibility of a statistical authority. Furthermore, academia and international bodies are pivotal stakeholders in addition to government authorities, with academia generating academic products based on statistical outputs and international bodies making vital decisions and implementing projects for the betterment of the global community. Consequently, fostering collaboration, considering their specific needs, and engaging in joint projects contribute significantly to elevating the quality of statistics and bolstering the credibility of statistical offices.

The Turkish Statistical Institute (TurkStat) has placed considerable emphasis on fostering interaction with the leading international, regional organisations such as UNECE, OECD, the World Bank, ILO, UNICEF, UNFPA, SESRIC, and more. Recognising the reciprocal nature of these relationships, TurkStat has actively pursued a two-way dynamic interaction. TurkStat, with the aim of strengthening relations based on partnership and mutual trust, has become increasingly receptive to collaboration activities in many statistical areas. To formalize and structure these cooperative efforts, TurkStat has signed memoranda of understanding and working plans with numerous international and regional organisations, providing a robust framework for cooperation and streamlining collaboration processes.

In addition to the collaboration activities with international organisations, TurkStat has strengthened its ties with universities. Within this framework, TurkStat sponsored various congresses, and its staff actively participated by delivering presentations on diverse subjects, fostering partnerships with the scientific community. Moreover, TurkStat extended its hospitality to university communities, hosting them at its premises to introduce new statistical trends, introduce the organisation, and attract interest. Additionally, TurkStat played a role in promoting statistical literacy by disseminating the "Indicators of 100 Years" and "Statistical Literacy" products developed by TurkStat, to further support statistical literacy.

This paper aims to present TurkStat's experiences in collaborating with academia and international and regional organisations, share the perspectives related to quality, its achievements, and coordination efforts. The focus will encompass TurkStat's initiatives aimed at bolstering the credibility of statistical information, providing more comprehensive and qualified statistical data, enhancing statistical literacy, developing professional competence of TurkStat personnel, and strengthening relations with external partners. The first section of the paper will provide overview of TurkStat's collaborations with international and regional organisations. Secondly engagements with academia and tools will be elaborated. The concluding section will outline major achievements.

Keywords: Cooperation, International Organisations, Academia, Quality

1. Introduction

TurkStat's recently published Strategic Plan for the 2024-2028 period reflects its commitment to a comprehensive and forward-thinking mission. At the core of this mission lies a careful evaluation of the needs and priorities of national and international stakeholders. Recognizing the imperative of evolving alongside the social landscape, TurkStat proactively identifies emerging needs and implements strategies to ensure equitable access to official statistical information for all stakeholders. This commitment underscores TurkStat's unwavering dedication to promoting transparency, facilitating

evidence-based decision-making, and increasing public trust in statistical outputs (TÜİK, 2024). With this perspective, TurkStat places great emphasis on fostering a global statistical system characterized by cooperation and coordination, in line with its mission and the principles of the European Statistics Code of Practice (ESCoP).

Central to TurkStat's five-year vision is the aspiration to become a leading institution in data governance. This vision revolves around enhancing decision-making and policy-making processes across various governmental and international levels by bolstering the relevance, accessibility, and quality of data (TÜİK, 2024). TurkStat's passion extends beyond data management leadership to encompass enriching decision-making capabilities and policy frameworks comprehensively.

Emphasis is also placed on facilitating access to statistical data and encouraging informed interpretation of these data among citizens. With this vision, TurkStat acts with the awareness of the need to strengthen dissemination initiatives, improve accessibility and understanding of official statistics, support statistical literacy and raise awareness about the importance and applicability of such data.

The main theme of this paper is cooperation with international organizations and academia, guided by the provisions set out in Principle 1bis of the ESCoP. In this context, Indicator 3 of this Principle underlines the obligation for statistical authorities to constantly promote and develop cooperation at various levels involving academic institutions and relevant international organisations, organizations deemed appropriate.

Collaborating with international organizations and universities is crucial for making sure our statistical work meets the needs of users, as highlighted in Principle 11: relevance of the ESCoP. Additionally, working with universities relates to Principle 7: Sound Methodology relevance of the ESCoP includes going to conferences, sharing researches, and teaming up with other researchers at academic events.

In accordance with its comprehensive mission and vision, TurkStat actively carries out cooperation activities with international and regional organizations as well as academic institutions. The main purpose of this paper is to explain with a few examples these collaborative initiatives aimed at strengthening the reliability of statistical data, facilitating the dissemination of comprehensive and high-quality statistical data, promoting statistical literacy, and the development of TurkStat personnel, and to reveal their importance, achievements and harmonization activities undertaken for effective coordination. The first part of the paper will provide a comprehensive overview of TurkStat's cooperation initiatives with international and regional organizations, followed by a detailed description of relations with academia and the tools offered to promote statistical literacy. Finally, the notable achievements that emerged from these collaborative efforts will be summarized.

2. Cooperation with International and Regional Organisations

As delineated in Principle 1 of the United Nations Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics (UNFPOS), official statistics highlights the vital role of official statistics in guiding evidence-based decision-making across governmental policy domains and in guiding the informed choices made by

individuals in society. At this point, the interaction between National Statistical Institutes (NSIs) and international organisations operates bidirectionally. On one hand, the NSIs provide statistical data to international organisations and actively participate in discussions within global forums. Conversely, international organisations offer support in terms of technical capacity enhancement and offer guidance on the adoption of standards and methodologies (UN-DESA, 2022).

In line with UNFPOS, adopting the principles set in the ESCoP and its mission, TurkStat supports the development, production and dissemination of statistics at both regional and global levels. With this perspective, TurkStat remains committed to collaborative work, driving progress and encouraging meaningful partnerships that transcend borders and pave the way for a more connected future. In the following section, TurkStat's collaborations with some of these organizations will be briefly summarized to highlight their compatibility with its own perspective.

2.1. Collaboration with International Labour Organization (ILO) Office for Türkiye

In 2020, a Cooperation Protocol was formalized between TurkStat and ILO Office for Türkiye, aiming to improve the quality of statistical analyses on the gender wage gap and to develop a new methodology for the official calculation of the gender wage gap relied on various data sources including Household Labour Force Survey, Structure of Earnings Survey and administrative records to foster improved working conditions for women. Within the framework of this protocol, a dedicated working group was established, and numerous technical meetings were held. Consequently, a comprehensive report was prepared and announced during a webinar titled "Report on Measuring the Gender Wage Gap: Case of Türkiye," marking a significant milestone in efforts to raise standards of statistical analysis (ILO, 2020).

2.2. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with World Bank (WB)

On August 2020, TurkStat signed a MoU with WB, symbolizing a noteworthy achievement in their partnership. The primary objective of this document is to facilitate joint efforts aimed at enhancing the statistical capacities of third countries. At the behest of WB, seeking to bolster technical assistance efforts in statistical domains for third countries alongside TurkStat, the MoU was formalized, delineating the parameters of collaboration. The overarching goal of the MoU is to leverage TurkStat's extensive expertise and adherence to international statistical norms and standards to assist third countries in fortifying their statistical infrastructure and systems. This will be achieved through a spectrum of collaborative activities, including but not limited to, workshops, and conferences (TÜİK, 2024).

2.3. Establishment of a MoU and Ongoing Collaborative Initiatives with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

The MoU between TurkStat and UNICEF Türkiye Office signed in August 2019 signalled their shared dedication to enhancing statistical data on children's well-being. This collaboration led to the ratification of the first Rolling Work Plan (RWP) in June 2020, aimed at improving the monitoring of children's situations in Türkiye and advocating for evidence-based policy interventions tailored to children's needs (TurkStat, 2021). This commitment extended into subsequent RWPs for 2021-2022 and 2023-2024, all

aligned with strategic priorities like the 11th Development Program and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

In response to the demand for child-related data, TurkStat and UNICEF initiated various activities under successive work plans. These efforts focused on enhancing data quality, fostering collaborations in children's statistics, and promoting statistical literacy among children.

Initially, TurkStat facilitated the involvement of UNICEF in relevant working groups of the Official Statistics Program (OSP), contributing its opinions to various studies in terms of quality and scope.

In November 2022, TransMoNEE meeting in Ankara convened by UNICEF and TurkStat gathered over 120 representatives, including data specialists and policymakers from Europe and Central Asia. The outcomes of the meeting contributed significantly to policy formulation and the development of data collection methodologies to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted challenges faced by children (UNICEF Türkiye, 2022).

Within the framework of the RWPs, UNICEF and TurkStat collaborated on implementing the Türkiye Child Research project. A key milestone was reached in March 2023 with the presentation of primary research results to the public and press, shedding light on various aspects of children's lives serving as a pioneering study in monitoring children's well-being (TÜİK 2024).

Another notable collaboration was the development of the "TÜİK Çocuk" web application, launched for public access on April 23, 2024. It was designed to enhance statistical literacy among children and make statistics more accessible and appealing (TÜİK Çocuk, 2024). This initiative reflected a commitment to advancing statistical education for children and integrating learning with daily experiences.

In September 2023, UNICEF, TurkStat, and the Ministry of Family and Social Services organized a workshop with the participation of key stakeholders from relevant ministries and governmental organizations aimed at maximizing the utilization of administrative sources for data collection on child-related issues. TurkStat experts played a key role in facilitating discussions on various aspects of child-related data, including population dynamics and education, highlighting a commitment to enhancing data collection methods (TurkStat, 2024).

Throughout these studies, high-level visits and technical meetings were conducted to evaluate cooperation activities and develop visionary approaches for future statistical studies. These initiatives were underpinned by a commitment to maintaining the highest standards of quality in statistics, driving advancements in data analysis and interpretation for the betterment of children's well-being.

2.4. Formalized Partnership Agreement with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)

On April 25, 2023, on Türkiye Statistics Day, TurkStat and the UNFPA Türkiye Office formalized a MoU, delineating the framework for their collaborative efforts. The overarching aim of this MoU is to foster cooperation between UNFPA and TurkStat by outlining the parameters of their joint initiatives aligned with their mutual areas of focus. These endeavours are anticipated to center on enhancing data systems and evidence-based policymaking that reflect demographic shifts and social imperatives within

Türkiye. Preceding and subsequent to the signing of the MoU, a series of substantive and technical meetings were convened to deliberate upon the aforementioned collaborative activities (TÜİK, 2024).

2.5. Engagements and Initiatives in Partnership with the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP)

TurkStat experts actively engage with the Data Integration Community of Practice (DI-CoP) team during online meetings convened by the UNESCAP. Within these virtual meetings, they deliver presentations encompassing a diverse range of topics, sharing TurkStat's experiences. Moreover, in conjunction with their contributions to DI-CoP, TurkStat welcomed approximately 50 participants for a study tour on June, 2023. This visit transpired as part of the "Regional Training Workshop on Transition to Register-based Approaches for Population and Housing Censuses," a collaborative endeavour between UNESCAP, various regional and international entities, and the Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries (SESRIC), hosted in Ankara (TurkStat, 2024).

2.6. A MoU with SESRIC

On February 2024, SESRIC and TurkStat formalized their enduring collaboration through the signing of a MoU. This MoU delineates a cooperative framework aimed at bolstering the national statistical systems of member countries within the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). It seeks to harness the technical expertise, knowledge, and perspectives of both institutions to facilitate joint projects. The overarching objective is to enhance the capabilities of member countries, empowering them to address socioeconomic challenges and seize developmental opportunities. Notably, the MoU underscores TurkStat's continued support in fostering the statistical capacities of OIC member countries, a commitment evidenced by its ongoing contributions to SESRIC's Statistical Capacity Building Program (StatCaB) through workshops and training initiatives (SESRIC, 2024).

2.7. Technical Assistance Programmes to Partner Countries

TurkStat is committed to developing partnerships with countries around the world and participating in initiatives that transcend borders and promote mutual growth. With this perspective, TurkStat has maintained an extensive record of engagement in international cooperation activities and the provision of technical assistance programs to partner countries for many years. Aligned with the overarching objective of enhancing awareness regarding the services rendered by TurkStat, TurkStat has consistently fortified inter-institutional collaborations globally. TurkStat's experts actively contribute to technical assistance projects conducted by statistical offices of other nations and international organizations. Notably, in 2023, TurkStat had the privilege of hosting esteemed delegations from Azerbaijan, Djibouti, Kyrgyzstan, and Kosovo. During these engagements, TurkStat provided multifaceted support spanning administrative data management, utilization of novel data sources, social and demographic statistics, as well as international trade in service statistics, among other areas of expertise.

3. Enhanced Collaborative Bonds with Universities and Tools

TurkStat places paramount importance on fostering strong and enduring partnerships with scientific institutions and academia. Through a multifaceted approach, TurkStat actively engages in collaborative studies, including joint activities like meetings, workshops and internships. Moreover, TurkStat facilitates knowledge exchange and promotes innovation through various platforms such as conferences, workshops, and task forces, where main developments are thoroughly discussed and explored. By embracing a culture of collaboration with academia, TurkStat not only enhances the credibility of its methods but also fosters a vibrant ecosystem of learning and advancement. With this underlined vision and perspective, some of the studies carried out by TurkStat are briefly summarized below.

3.1. TurkStat Enhances Learning: Connecting with Academia and Schools via Events

The 7th International Researchers, Statisticians, and Young Statisticians Congress (IRSYSC 2023) took place in November 2023, organized by the Istanbul Yıldız Technical University, with the collaborative support of TurkStat. This gathering aimed to foster direct engagement among delegates from diverse backgrounds, including academicians, researchers, and both undergraduate and graduate students. Its mission was to facilitate the exchange of fresh ideas and experiences while guiding future research studies. Notably, 23 representatives from TurkStat delivered presentations, shedding light on the latest developments and ongoing studies in the realm of statistics (TÜİK, 2024).

As part of the New Era in Statistics Program, jointly funded by the European Commission and spearheaded by TurkStat, a training program titled "Fostering Strategic Partnerships Between TurkStat and Universities" took place with the participation of a certain number of TurkStat personnel and academicians from various universities. In a similar vein, the Konya Regional Office engaged in the "100th Anniversary Agriculture Workshop" fostering discussions on the pivotal role of agricultural statistics. Meanwhile, the Gaziantep Regional Office organized an enlightening information session titled "Population Censuses from Past to Present," aimed at students, to provide insights into various aspects including general population censuses and the Address Based Population Registration System (ADNKS). Additionally, the Van Regional Office conducted a promotional session titled "The Importance of TurkStat for Social Scientists - Accessing Data and Data Request Processes" at Yüzüncü Yıl University, enhancing awareness among social science scholars (TÜİK, 2024).

3.2. The Electronic Data Research Center (E-DRC)

The academia is a very important target group that TurkStat actively engages with, recognizing its distinct requirements for statistical data, crucial for both scientific research and the preparation of advanced academic studies. With this aim, TurkStat provides access to micro data in adherence to established legal frameworks, depending on the request of researchers. The analysis of microdata is supported by designated DRC situated both within the central office and across 13 regional offices.

Recognizing the dynamism inherent in technological advancements and evolving research requisites, TurkStat is spearheading the Electronic Data Research Center (E-DRC) initiative aimed at enhancing

the accessibility of microdata. The E-DRC is designed to afford researchers the flexibility of remote engagement, facilitating connectivity to applications and desktop software via standard web browsers, thus obviating the necessity for physical visits to the DRC. A portal has been prepared in E-DRC for examining metadata of the microdata available enabling researchers to select datasets of interest and submit request forms seamlessly (E-VAM, 2024). Within the scope of these developments, a collaborative endeavour has been formalized under the E-DRC pilot project, forging partnerships between TurkStat and esteemed academic institutions such as Hacı Bayram Veli University and Ankara University. This collaborative framework empowers researchers from these institutions to conduct their investigations within the E-DRC ecosystem, fostering adherence to established protocols while fortifying research capacities.

3.3. Empowering Careers Through University Engagements

TurkStat, along with its central organization and regional offices, actively engage in numerous career fairs and events hosted by various universities across different locations. These gatherings serve as platforms to showcase TurkStat's initiatives, career pathways, internship opportunities, and publications. In 2023, attendees were introduced to TurkStat's research studies through informative brochures. Moreover, specialized talks on topics like data science, new statistical trends, higher education employment indicators, and statistical literacy were conducted to spotlight these crucial areas. At the conclusion of each event, participants had the opportunity to pose questions, further enriching their understanding of the institution (TÜİK, 2024).

In 2023, TurkStat and Gazi University solidified their collaboration through the signing of a Cooperation Protocol. This protocol opens avenues for joint academic projects, seminars and more, focusing on specific areas of interest. Furthermore, the protocol outlines opportunities for TurkStat personnel to pursue advanced degrees, such as master's qualifications at the University, fostering a culture of continuous learning and skill development within the partnership. TurkStat has also formalized collaborative agreements with both Istanbul Technical University and Istanbul Medeniyet University (TÜİK, 2024).

TurkStat welcomes student communities representing diverse academic disciplines, including but not limited to data science, statistics, and international relations, from various universities to its premises. Here, they are acquainted with the institution and its studies while being presented with insights into career development opportunities within the organization, thereby fostering a forward-looking perspective for their professional life. During university student community visits, TurkStat is eager to share; What TurkStat do, mission and activities; How TurkStat do, methodologies and approaches; Guidance on accessing statistical data; Tips on effectively utilizing statistical information.

Every year, TurkStat warmly welcomes a select group of interns through the Career Door National Internship Program, initiated by the Presidential Human Resources Office. This program aims to inspire budding talents and showcase TurkStat as an esteemed institution for future endeavours. During the summer of 2023, TurkStat had the pleasure of hosting 20 interns from diverse academic backgrounds

(TÜİK, 2024). These interns received comprehensive on-the-job training and gained insights into career management at TurkStat.

3.4. New Tools for Promoting Statistical Literacy

3.4.1. Indicators of 100 Years

TurkStat's commitment to enhancing statistical literacy aligns with its overarching vision and mission, reflecting in multifaceted engagements with external partners aimed at fostering broader understanding and utilization of statistical information. In line with this perspective, on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the foundation of Republic, TurkStat developed a publication titled “Indicators of 100 Years” dedicated to this honouring event. This publication serves as a testament to TurkStat's legacy since its establishment in 1926. A promotional program was organised to launch the publication, drawing participation from esteemed stakeholders, including members of the Statistics Council, institutional leaders, government officials, academicians, members of the press and representatives from non-governmental organizations.

Comprising 22 chapters and nearly 900 pages, the publication delves into various socio-economic and cultural domains, with a particular focus on population dynamics, vital statistics, labour force trends, industrial and commercial statistics, agricultural production, energy consumption, foreign trade patterns, price indices, and national accounts (TÜİK, 2024).

The publication stands as a valuable testament to the evolution of statistical methodologies throughout history, providing profound insights into the economic and social transformations spanning the past century. Its release has not only sparked renewed interest in statistics but has also garnered compliment, particularly within academic circles and social media platforms, where users lauded its utility for scholarly pursuits and expressed appreciation for its comprehensive scope and depth of analysis.

3.4.2. The Statistical Literacy Book

In order to improve the public's understanding of statistical concepts and methodologies, TurkStat takes various initiatives to improve the accessibility of information to different user groups and facilitate their access to this information, thus encouraging widespread and conscious use of information. TurkStat recognizes that the mere dissemination of data through online platforms may not be sufficient to fully inform users, recognizing that additional explanations and contextualization are often needed for a nuanced understanding of statistical information. In this context, TurkStat has launched new tools and approaches to increase the statistical literacy, and one of them is the "Statistical Literacy" book.

In commemoration of the centennial anniversary of the Republic, TurkStat undertook a novel initiative by crafting the "Statistical Literacy" book. The book aimed to foster a comprehensive understanding and accurate interpretation of statistics generated within the purview of the OSP, thereby catering to users across diverse proficiency levels without necessitating specialized knowledge or training. Published as an open-source document accessible via the website in 2023, the book serves as a pivotal resource for a broad spectrum of stakeholders, including policymakers, journalists, academics and

students, who routinely engage with statistical information through press releases, research findings, discourse forums, newsletters, and reports. (Canpolat, 2023, pp.1-4)

Organized into fourteen substantive chapters, the book delves into numerous critical topics such as how administrative registers are used in the production of statistics, basic labour force indicators and their interpretation. Concluding with a compendium of additional resources aimed at increasing statistical literacy, this book excels as an indispensable reference guide for users and decision-makers alike. TurkStat has not only facilitated informed decision-making, but has also made significant contributions to improving statistical literacy among a diverse user base.

3. Accomplishments Realized Through Collaborative Endeavours

TurkStat's engagement with international and regional organizations has yielded substantial achievements, driven by its strategic collaboration and forward-looking approach. Positioned as both a candidate country for the European Union and an important player in the global statistical system, TurkStat has achieved concrete results in various fields. By meeting the data requirements of international organizations committed to creating meaningful change and supporting decision-making on a global scale, TurkStat has not only improved its statistical capabilities but also strengthened its position as a key advocate of sound governance frameworks. In addition, TurkStat has played an important role in supporting the sustainable development of statistical offices and has actively contributed to the development of internationally comparable statistical methodologies, standards and techniques. In addition to these, TurkStat has gained a more advanced statistical system. Additionally, TurkStat's efforts to enhance the credibility of official statistics through targeted branding initiatives and the adoption of best practices in data dissemination have ensured the consistent provision of high-quality data to its international partners.

TurkStat's engagement with academic institutions and academics have been effective in increasing its reputation and reliability as a provider of public good. By embracing effective international cooperation and promoting statistical literacy, TurkStat has not only strengthened its position, but also served as a catalyst in the development and use of powerful statistics. This determination has not only enriched TurkStat's knowledge base but also nurtured a workforce characterized by modernity, participation, self-confidence and innovation. Through international exchanges, TurkStat staff have gained invaluable knowledge on various tools and methodologies and fostered a culture of innovation within the institution. In addition, TurkStat's interaction with the academic community attracted the attention of the young generation and contributed to the sustainability of human resources for the future. Statistical literacy tools developed by TurkStat have not only improved the perception of official statistics, but also encouraged discovery in new research areas, broadened the horizons of knowledge and encouraged greater use of official statistics. As a result, TurkStat continues its determination to improve the quality and accessibility of statistical data and ensure its validity and reliability for all stakeholders.

4. Conclusion

TurkStat's Strategic Plan for the 2024-2028 period embodies a proactive and inclusive approach towards fulfilling its mission of providing reliable statistical information to national and international stakeholders. The strategic plan underscores TurkStat's dedication to promoting transparency, evidence-based decision-making, and public trust in statistical outputs. By prioritizing cooperation and coordination with international organizations and academia, TurkStat aims to enhance the relevance, accessibility, and quality of its data. This commitment not only strengthens decision-making processes but also fosters statistical literacy and awareness among citizens.

Besides that, TurkStat's vision of becoming a leading institution in data governance is centered on enriching decision-making capabilities and policy frameworks. By collaborating with international organizations and universities, TurkStat ensures that its statistical work remains relevant and methodologically sound, as outlined in the ESCoP.

In conclusion, the paper highlighted TurkStat's collaborative initiatives with international and regional organizations, revealing joint efforts aimed at strengthening the provision of reliable data and promoting a sustainable global statistical system that enables evidence-based policy-making in an increasingly digital environment. Additionally, TurkStat's partnerships with academia are explored, emphasizing the importance of academic research and promoting statistical literacy.

In essence, TurkStat's demonstrated commitment to fostering partnerships with diverse stakeholders and nations underscores its dedication to enhancing global governance systems. Furthermore, its openness to structured engagements with academia not only elevates its profile but also positions TurkStat as an attractive employer. Ultimately, TurkStat's emphasis on forging partnerships with various groups, including users, and its proactive stance in adopting innovative methods underscore its relentless pursuit of quality and effectiveness in serving its mandate.

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