

REPORT

ZERO WASTE IN TÜRKİYE'S CLIMATE DIPLOMACY

ABDULMENAF TURAN, DİLEK AĞA, ÇAĞLA VURAL

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Zero Waste Project was launched in 2017 under the patronage of First Lady Emine Erdoğan and has since been implemented by the Ministry of Environment, Urbanization and Climate Change. The Project produced measurable results in its first eight years. According to the Ministry's statement of 30 March 2026, the national recovery rate rose from 13 percent in 2017 to 37.53 percent in 2025. Between 2017 and 2025, 90 million tons of recyclable waste were processed and 365 billion Turkish lira was contributed to the economy. In addition, 217,000 buildings and facilities were brought into the Zero Waste Management System, and 28 million people received awareness training. According to the Ministry, over the same period 270 billion kilowatt-hours of energy and 2 trillion liters of water were saved, the felling of 613 million trees was prevented, and approximately 180 million tons of greenhouse gas emissions were avoided. The Ministry has set recovery rate targets of 60 percent for 2035 and 70 percent for 2053.[1] All of these figures are based on Ministry data. The Project has also featured in the assessments of institutions such as

1 "Sıfır Atık ile 90 Milyon Ton Atık Geri Dönüşüme Kazandırıldı", Sıfır Atık, 30 March 2026, accessed 19 October 2026, https://sifiratik.gov.tr/kutuphane/haberler/sifir-atik-ile-90-milyon-ton-atik-geri-donusume-kazandirildi.

the World Bank, the European Environment Agency and the OECD. These assessments are examined in detail in the section "External Assessments", together with the Climate Investment Funds case study on the Near Zero Waste program in Türkiye.

Alongside these domestic results, the Project has also achieved significant gains in the multilateral arena. In March 2021, the Türkiye office of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) gave its first Global Goals Action Award to the Zero Waste Project. On 14 December 2022, the United Nations (UN) General Assembly adopted resolution A/RES/77/161, which proclaimed 30 March the International Day of Zero Waste. The draft resolution submitted by Türkiye was co-sponsored by 105 countries. At the first commemoration of the Day, held at the UN General Assembly on 30 March 2023, Secretary-General António Guterres announced that the UN Secretary-General's Advisory Board of Eminent Persons on Zero Waste would be established and invited Emine Erdoğan to chair it. The Advisory Board was formally established on 12 April 2023, held its first in-person meeting in Istanbul on 1 November 2023, and completed its three-year term in April 2026. However, no decision on the Board's future status has yet been made public (see "Three Forward-Looking Observations"). The UN Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) Regional Office for Eastern Europe and Central Asia has also opened in Istanbul. The Global Zero Waste Declaration of Goodwill was first signed by Secretary-General Guterres and Emine Erdoğan at the 77th UN General Assembly in September 2022 and was opened for signature worldwide at the 78th session. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan became the first individual signatory of the Declaration at the Turkish House in New York in September 2023, and further endorsements were added at the 79th General Assembly.

This report argues that Zero Waste serves Türkiye in two dimensions. On the one hand, Zero Waste is the operational foundation of the country's transition to a circular economy and spreads environmental awareness across society. On the other hand, it is the most institutionalized component of Türkiye's climate diplomacy at the international level. Türkiye will assume the presidency of the 31st Conference of the Parties (COP31) to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), which will convene in Antalya on 9-20 November 2026. In the presidency process as well, Türkiye is putting Zero Waste forward as one of its priority themes.

INTRODUCTION

Climate diplomacy has entered the mainstream of middle powers' foreign policy strategy in the decade since the 2015 Paris Agreement. The UNFCCC Conferences of the Parties, climate finance negotiations, just energy transition partnerships and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development have together created an institutional setting. This setting offers visibility and influence to many states of different sizes as well as to the large economies that have historically emitted the most. For middle powers, what distinguishes the climate agenda is that it is one of the few fields in which a state with limited material capacity can gain influence well beyond its size through agenda setting, coalition building and mediation. The literature on Türkiye's foreign policy options also finds the country's geographical and diplomatic positioning suited to this role. Vural and Baysal[2] put forward a three-level model of climate diplomacy capacity that covers macro-level facilitation in multilateral negotiations, sectoral-level conciliation in the just energy transition, and micro-level technical facilitation in transboundary disputes. This report treats that model as a framework that can

2 Çağla Vural and Başar Baysal, "Türkiye's Climate Diplomacy Potential: A Three-Level Capacity", *SETA Focus*, 17 March 2026, accessed 19 October 2026, https://www.setav.org/en/turkiyes-climate-diplomacy-potential-a-three-level-capacity.

be tested against individual policy instruments, and asks which of Türkiye's policy instruments best realizes this capacity and how it does so.

In the climate policy literature, energy systems and emissions pricing attract most of the analytical attention, while waste management and circular economy reform have received comparatively little recognition as instruments of foreign policy. Yet waste reduction is a citizen-facing, regulation-based policy area in which middle-income countries can demonstrate concrete implementation at a cost far below the fiscal burden of transforming their energy systems. In its case study of the Near Zero Waste program implemented by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), the Climate Investment Funds[3] presents the program under the heading of "monetizing waste" and describes it as a program that "aimed to inspire wide replication". Building on that emphasis, this report argues that a model implemented under such fiscal conditions is also accessible to other developing economies and offers a directly transferable implementation reference for states in a similar position. The report's central argument is that this little-recognized policy area has become the most institutionalized instrument of Türkiye's climate diplomacy at the international level.

Türkiye's climate policy framework was put in place within a short period. The country signed the Paris Agreement in April 2016, ratified it in October 2021,[4] and announced its 2053 net zero target at the UN General Assembly in September 2021, ahead of COP26 in Glasgow.[5] The Updated First Nationally Determined Contribution was submitted in April 2023,[6] and Climate Law No. 7552 was adopted on 2 July 2025 and entered into force the same month.[7] Within this structure, Zero Waste occupies a distinct

3 Climate Investment Funds, *Near Zero Waste in Turkey: Moving Toward a Circular Economy by Monetizing Waste* (Climate Investment Funds, 2019), 4.

4 "Paris Agreement, Chapter XXVII.7.d", United Nations Treaty Collection, Status of Treaties, accessed 19 October 2026, https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=XXVII-7-d&chapter=27; "Türkiye: Status of Ratification, Paris Agreement", United Nations Climate Change, accessed 19 October 2026, https://unfccc.int/node/61221.

5 World Bank, *Türkiye Country Climate and Development Report* (Washington, DC: World Bank Group, 2022), 25.

6 Republic of Türkiye, *Türkiye Updated First Nationally Determined Contribution*, submitted to the UNFCCC, April 2023.

7 İklim Kanunu (Climate Law), Law No. 7552, *Resmî Gazete*, Issue 32951, 9 July 2025, accessed 19 October 2026, https://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2025/07/20250709-1.htm; "Restoring the Lost Balance on Land and Sea: Turkey's Climate Law", *Politics Today*, 30 September 2025, accessed 19 October 2026, https://politicstoday.org/restoring-the-lost-balance-on-land-and-sea-turkeys-climate-law/.

place, because the Project, launched in 2017, predates the ratification of the Paris Agreement, the announcement of the 2053 net zero target, the updated nationally determined contribution and the Climate Law by four to eight years.[8] Over this period, the Project built up the eight years of implementation experience set out in the section "The Domestic Transformation, 2017-2025" and also secured multilateral institutional gains at the UN level. The first of these gains is a UN General Assembly resolution.[9] The resolution proclaimed 30 March the International Day of Zero Waste and set no end date for the Day. To these was added the Advisory Board, established by the UN Secretary-General and chaired by First Lady Emine Erdoğan, while at the national level the Zero Waste Foundation was set up as a quasi-public body that has raised the Project's international visibility.

The report's central argument is that Zero Waste forms the operational foundation of the country's transition to a circular economy and carries a system-level reform into citizens' daily lives through regulation-based practices. Zero Waste is also the most institutionalized component of Türkiye's climate diplomacy at the international level, and this position rests on concrete diplomatic, economic and mitigation outcomes. Taken together, these two dimensions make Zero Waste a policy of Turkish origin that enjoys an institutionalized base of support within the UN and that Türkiye has brought to the fore in its COP31 presidency process. The report first sets out the conceptual framework of Zero Waste. It then examines domestic performance over 2017-2025 and traces how the policy was carried into the UN system. It goes on to read the resulting diplomatic capital through the three-level capacity model of Vural and Baysal[10] and the soft power framework of Wasylina.[11] It then examines how this accumulated experience has been used in the COP31 process. The conclusion summarizes the report's central argument and sets out three forward-looking observations and four policy priorities.

8 Gökçe Nur Şafak and Selçuk Denek, "An Analysis of the Zero Waste Project from the Perspective of Public Value", *İçtimaiyat* 10, no. 1 (2026): 6.

9 United Nations General Assembly, *Resolution 77/161: Promoting Zero-Waste Initiatives to Advance the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, A/RES/77/161, 14 December 2022, accessed 19 October 2026, https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3998545.

10 Vural and Baysal, "Türkiye's Climate Diplomacy Potential".

11 Ellen Wasylina, "Green Diplomacy: The Soft Power Axis of Türkiye's Public Diplomacy", in *Türkiye's Public Diplomacy Ecosystem: A Reflection on Evolving Practices*, ed. Oğuz Güner (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2025).

THE CONCEPT OF ZERO WASTE AND THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY

Defining Zero Waste

The term zero waste rests on an established order of priorities in international waste policy. Article 4 of the European Union (EU) Waste Framework Directive (2008/98/EC) establishes a five-step hierarchy that ranks waste management options in order of environmental preference.[12] Prevention sits at the top of the hierarchy, followed in turn by preparing for reuse, recycling and other recovery methods including energy recovery, with disposal as the least preferred option. In its 2019 case study of Türkiye's Near Zero Waste program, the Climate Investment Funds reproduces the same hierarchy under the labels of prevention, reuse, recycling, energy recovery and disposal.[13] In terms of this hierarchy, zero waste denotes the target state in which prevention and recovery are maximized and disposal approaches zero. Zero waste is therefore an end state for waste systems before it is the name of a program.

12 Directive 2008/98/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 November 2008 on Waste and Repealing Certain Directives (Waste Framework Directive), OJ L 312, 22.11.2008, Article 4(1).

13 Climate Investment Funds, *Near Zero Waste in Turkey*, 6, Figure 1.

In carrying this end state into its own practice, Türkiye has remained faithful to its technical core. The Ministry of Environment, Urbanization and Climate Change defines the Zero Waste Project as the prevention of waste at source, its separation by type, its accumulation in temporary storage areas, and its transfer to licensed companies for recycling.[14] The European Commission's 2019 progress report on Türkiye likewise states that through its zero waste management approach, Türkiye has adopted a strategy that promotes the efficient use of natural resources, reduced landfilling, and increased recycling and reuse.[15] Salihoğlu et al., writing in the literature on Türkiye's transition to a circular economy, describe the Zero Waste Project as the leading project of the country's effort to reduce plastic waste pollution and raise recovery rates.[16]

The Project rests on a long body of legislation extending from public sanitation to environmental protection. The earliest examples, the General Public Health Law No. 1593 of 1930 and the Municipality Law No. 1580, required cities with populations above fifty thousand to clean public spaces and process waste. Article 56 of the 1982 Constitution then defined the right to live in a healthy and balanced environment as a shared duty of the state and the citizen. The Environment Law, published in the Official Gazette on 11 August 1983, introduced waste into legislation as a legal category, and the first Regulation on the Control of Solid Waste was issued in 1991. From the early 2000s, the process of alignment with the EU acquis also produced a series of strategy documents, among them the 2014-2017 National Recycling Strategy and the 2016 National Environmental Approximation Strategy for the EU acquis. The Zero Waste Project was launched in 2017 and acquired its legal basis through the 2018 amendments to Article 3 of Environment Law No. 2872, the 2019 Zero Waste Regulation, and the establishment of the Turkish Environment Agency in 2020. The Project therefore constitutes the latest stage of this long legislative accumulation.[17]

14 M. E. Birpınar and E. Gürtepe, "The Road to Zero Waste: Case of Türkiye", in *Zero Waste*, eds. K. Yenigün, A. Turan and T. Çamaş (Ministry of Environment, Urbanization and Climate Change, 2022), 25-55.

15 European Commission, *Turkey 2019 Report*, SWD(2019) 220 final (Brussels, 29 May 2019), 93; Güray Salihoğlu, Şule Turhan, Gaffar İhsan İpeker and Nezih Kamil Salihoğlu, "Circular Economy in Turkey", in *Circular Economy: Recent Trends in Global Perspective*, eds. Sadhan Kumar Ghosh and Sannidhya Kumar Ghosh (Singapore: Springer, 2021), 529-530.

16 Salihoğlu et al., "Circular Economy in Turkey", 537.

17 Şafak and Denek, "An Analysis of the Zero Waste Project", 5-7.

The Zero Waste Brand and Public Value

Beyond being a regulation-based program, Zero Waste was designed from the outset as a brand that the public could easily recognize. Salihoğlu et al. note that the Ministry also implemented the Project in its own buildings while awareness campaigns were organized across the country (see "Launch and Pilot Implementation (2017)").[18] Şafak and Denek[19] also document the policy commitments that followed from this design. The Twelfth Development Plan (2024-2028) commits to raising citizen awareness and extending zero waste practices to every level of formal education, and the Distance Education Gateway of the Presidency's Human Resources Office provides Zero Waste Management training to public employees. It is not easy for citizens, schools and small businesses to engage directly with circular economy legislation. Zero Waste offers these groups an understandable name that they can readily adopt, and in doing so turns intelligibility itself into a policy instrument.

The peer-reviewed study that most clearly analyzes what Zero Waste produces beyond its waste-volume outputs draws on the public value tradition. Building on Benington[20] and on Candel and Paulsson,[21] Şafak and Denek[22] classify public value into four dimensions. These are the sociocultural dimension (education, awareness, citizen capacity), the political dimension (voluntary participation, multi-stakeholder governance), the economic dimension (value recovered to the economy, sector employment) and the ecological dimension (energy and water savings, greenhouse gas reduction). Based on document analysis, the study concludes that the Zero Waste Project generates public value in each of these four dimensions.[23] This finding provides an academic basis for treating the Project as a system-level reform rather than a cleanup campaign.

18 Salihoğlu et al., "Circular Economy in Turkey", 539.

19 Şafak and Denek, "An Analysis of the Zero Waste Project", 7-8.

20 John Benington, "From Private Choice to Public Value?", in *Public Value: Theory and Practice*, eds. John Benington and Mark H. Moore (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 31-51; as discussed in Şafak and Denek, "An Analysis of the Zero Waste Project".

21 Melissa Candel and Jenny Paulsson, "Enhancing Public Value with Co-creation in Public Land Development: The Role of Municipalities", *Land Use Policy* 132 (2023); as discussed in Şafak and Denek, "An Analysis of the Zero Waste Project".

22 Şafak and Denek, "An Analysis of the Zero Waste Project".

23 Şafak and Denek, "An Analysis of the Zero Waste Project", abstract and 7-11.

The brand rests on a clear legal and institutional infrastructure. The Zero Waste Information System, established in 2018, and the 2019 Zero Waste Regulation are the core elements of this infrastructure (see "The Regulatory Infrastructure").[24] The Turkish Environment Agency was established in 2020 by Law No. 7261 with an explicit circular economy and zero waste mandate, including the development of a national deposit system.[25] The General Directorate of Environmental Management houses a Department of Zero Waste Practices, and a Circular on waste pickers was issued in 2022.[26]

Zero Waste and the Transition to a Circular Economy

Türkiye's choice of the name Zero Waste is not a unilateral rebranding. The full title of the European Commission's 2014 communication is Towards a Circular Economy: A Zero Waste Programme for Europe (COM(2014) 398 final), and this title positions Zero Waste as the operational name of Europe's circular economy agenda.[27] The concept of the circular economy, popularized by the Ellen MacArthur Foundation,[28] is today summarized by that organization in three design principles.[29] These are eliminating waste and pollution, circulating products and materials at their highest value, and regenerating nature. Türkiye's adoption of the name Zero Waste therefore matches both its established use in international policy language and the name the EU gave to its own program. In its March 2024 conclusions on green diplomacy, the Council of the EU also commits the EU to "accelerate the global just and inclusive green transition".[30] The same document addresses the opportunities of the circular economy, resource efficiency and

24 Sıfır Atık Yönetmeliği (Zero Waste Regulation), *Resmî Gazete*, Issue 30829, 12 July 2019, accessed 19 October 2026, https://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2019/07/20190712-9.htm.

25 Şafak and Denek, "An Analysis of the Zero Waste Project", 6-7.

26 Şafak and Denek, "An Analysis of the Zero Waste Project", 6-7.

27 European Commission, *Towards a Circular Economy: A Zero Waste Programme for Europe*, COM(2014) 398 final (Brussels, 2 July 2014).

28 Ellen MacArthur Foundation, *Towards the Circular Economy*, Vol. 1: *An Economic and Business Rationale for an Accelerated Transition* (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2013).

29 "Circular Economy Principles", Ellen MacArthur Foundation, last updated 21 August 2024, accessed 19 October 2026, https://www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/circular-economy-principles.

30 Council of the European Union, *Council Conclusions on Green Diplomacy* (Brussels, 18 March 2024), paras. 2 and 38; Wasylina, "Green Diplomacy", 393, renders the same phrase as "accelerating a global just and inclusive green transition".

the reduction of waste generation. This shows that the field Zero Waste addresses also holds an important place in the EU's green diplomacy.

In sum, Zero Waste performs three functions in the domestic policy sphere. It is a regulation-based target state that follows the priorities of the five-step waste hierarchy established by Directive 2008/98/EC and reproduced in the Climate Investment Funds case study. It is also a behaviorally intelligible, citizen-facing brand whose four-dimensional public value output is documented by Şafak and Denek.[31] In addition, Zero Waste forms the operational foundation of Türkiye's transition to a circular economy. The European Commission[32] recognizes the Project in this capacity, the World Bank[33] counts it among Türkiye's climate commitments, and the Climate Investment Funds[34] frames the separately run Near Zero Waste program in the same circular economy terms (see "External Assessments"). The sections that follow show how these three domestic functions have translated into diplomatic visibility at the international level, taking the three-level capacity model of Vural and Baysal[35] as the benchmark in the section "Zero Waste and Türkiye's Climate Diplomacy Capacity".

31 Şafak and Denek, "An Analysis of the Zero Waste Project".

32 European Commission, *Turkey 2019 Report*, 93.

33 World Bank, *Türkiye Country Climate and Development Report*.

34 Climate Investment Funds, *Near Zero Waste in Turkey*.

35 Vural and Baysal, "Türkiye's Climate Diplomacy Potential".

THE DOMESTIC TRANSFORMATION, 2017-2025

Launch and Pilot Implementation (2017)

The Zero Waste Project was launched in 2017 by the Ministry of Environment, Urbanization and Climate Change under the patronage of Emine Erdoğan, and it was first implemented at the Presidential Complex and the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye before being extended across the country.[36] Salihoğlu et al. note that in the implementation carried out in the Ministry's own buildings, waste was collected separately, food leftovers were sent to animal shelters, and composting units were installed to produce fertilizer. As a result, waste from the Ministry's buildings was no longer sent to landfill sites, and awareness campaigns began to be organized across the country in the same period.[37] Starting implementation in the most visible institutions of the state gave the public a concrete example of how the Project would work.

36 Şafak and Denek, "An Analysis of the Zero Waste Project", 6; Birpınar and Gürtepe, "The Road to Zero Waste".

37 Salihoğlu et al., "Circular Economy in Turkey", 539.

The Regulatory Infrastructure

With the 2018 amendments to Article 3 of Environment Law No. 2872, the Project moved beyond being an awareness movement and acquired a legal basis. These amendments formally adopted the recovery contribution fee and the principles of reducing the use of plastic bags, packaging and single-use materials. Under Article 29 of the same legislation, Ministry incentives were introduced for municipalities, special provincial administrations, institutions, organizations and businesses that establish a zero waste system. Under Article 20, administrative fines were envisaged for those that are obliged to establish the system but fail to do so.[38] The Zero Waste Information System, the data infrastructure that tracks the outputs of participating facilities, was also established in the same year.[39]

The procedures and principles of the Zero Waste Management System were set out in the Zero Waste Regulation, published in the Official Gazette of 12 July 2019 (Issue 30829). The Regulation defined four certification levels (basic, silver, gold and platinum) covering local governments, the other obligated premises listed in Annex 1, and voluntary participants. Implementation guides were published alongside the Regulation.[40]

The regulation that reached most directly into citizens' daily lives in this period was the plastic bag charge, which entered into force on 1 January 2019. The European Commission's 2019 progress report also noted that the scheme had attracted considerable public attention.[41] The scheme is reported to have prevented the generation of 2,844,596 tons of plastic waste between 2019 and 2025.[42]

38 Şafak and Denek, "An Analysis of the Zero Waste Project", 6.

39 Şafak and Denek, "An Analysis of the Zero Waste Project", 6.

40 Şafak and Denek, "An Analysis of the Zero Waste Project", 6; Sıfır Atık Yönetmeliği, *Resmî Gazete*, Issue 30829.

41 European Commission, *Turkey 2019 Report*; Salihoğlu et al., "Circular Economy in Turkey", 529.

42 Ministry of Environment, Urbanization and Climate Change, *2025 Yılı İdare Faaliyet Raporu* (2025 Administrative Activity Report, February 2026), 51, 97; as reported in "Türkiye Prevents 2.8 Million Tons of Plastic Waste Through Paid Bag Policy", *Hürriyet Daily News*, 8 March 2026, accessed 19 October 2026, https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkiye-prevents-2-8-million-tons-of-plastic-waste-through-paid-bag-policy-219724 and "Turkey's Bag Fee Policy Eliminates 2.8 Million Tonnes of Plastic Waste", ScrapMonster, 9 March 2026, accessed 19 October 2026, https://www.scrapmonster.com/news/plastic-recycling/turkeys-bag-fee-policy-eliminates-2.8-million-tonnes-of-plastic-waste-2026-3-9/98639.

The newest step in the legislation is the Deposit Management System (DYS), which closes the packaging waste loop at the consumer level. The legal framework of the system was established by the Procedures and Principles on Mandatory Deposit Management System Practices, published in 2022, while field operations were regulated by the Procedures and Principles on the Designation of Deposit Field Management System Operators of 13 November 2025. Consumers process their returns through the Packaging with Deposit (DOA) mobile application, and all stakeholder flows, from sales and return points through counting and verification to recovery facilities, are monitored through the dbys.gov.tr portal. The system was launched with pilot applications in June 2022, rolled out from Sakarya in February 2025, and moved on 1 July 2026 to the national integration phase covering 81 provinces and 973 districts.[43]

The scale of the system became apparent within a short time. As of the first half of 2026, the number of registered companies placing products on the market had reached 487, the number of registered products 5,258, and the number of products carrying the DYS logo produced since 2023 approximately 76 billion. From the launch of the system to 11 August 2026, the number of packaging items returned reached 161.4 million and the number of registered users 2.9 million. Of the returns, 111.9 million were PET, 26.4 million glass and 23 million aluminum packaging. Of this total, 102.2 million, close to two thirds, were returned in the national integration period after 1 July 2026 alone. In the field, 35 operators have been authorized and 43 counting and verification centers established.[44] These figures show that, in the field of packaging, the Deposit Management System is one of the practices whose results can be tracked in the greatest detail.

The Figures and Their Sources

The figures presented in this section are those of the Ministry of Environment, Urbanization and Climate Change. They were released on 30 March 2026 and reported by Anadolu Agency, Daily Sabah, Hürriyet and TRT

43 Turkish Environment Agency, *Faaliyet Bilgi Notu* (Activity Briefing Note), 11 August 2026 (Ankara: Ministry of Environment, Urbanization and Climate Change, Turkish Environment Agency).

44 Turkish Environment Agency, *Faaliyet Bilgi Notu*.

World. They cover waste collected by municipalities and processed at licensed waste treatment facilities under the Zero Waste Management System, and they are calculated according to the Ministry's own methodology.[45] The most prominent indicator for the eight-year period is the recovery rate. The rate rose from 13 percent in 2017, when the Project began, to 37.53 percent in 2025, nearly tripling.[46] The Ministry has set targets of 60 percent for 2035 and 70 percent for 2053.[47] The recovery rate of 30.13 percent that Şafak and Denek[48] report for 2022 marks an intermediate stage in this rise.

A total of 90 million tons of recyclable waste was processed under the Project between 2017 and 2025. Of this amount, 36.1 million tons were paper and cardboard, 10.2 million tons plastic, 3.5 million tons glass and 9.6 million tons metal. The remaining 30.6 million tons consisted of organic and other recyclable waste. Over the same period, the Project contributed around 365 billion Turkish lira to the economy, brought 217,000 buildings and facilities into the Zero Waste Management System, and provided awareness training to 28 million people. In terms of environmental gains, 270 billion kilowatt-hours of energy (roughly one year's electricity consumption of 54 million households), 2 trillion liters of water (roughly two years of Istanbul's consumption) and 60 billion liters of petroleum were saved. In addition, 390 million cubic meters of landfill space were saved, approximately 180 million tons of greenhouse gas emissions were avoided, and the felling of 613 million trees was prevented. This number is equivalent to about 7 percent of Türkiye's forests.[49] The seven-year totals that the Ministry announced in June 2025 (74.5 million tons of waste and savings of around

45 The European Environment Agency's 2025 country profile on Türkiye notes that the Ministry's recovery rate differs from the Eurostat municipal waste recycling figure because of differences in method and scope (Eurostat reported 12 percent for 2021). The profile also notes that the Ministry of Environment, Urbanization and Climate Change calculates the recovery rate on the basis of data from waste treatment facilities and municipalities, and that TurkStat and the Ministry are developing a methodology to improve these calculations. See European Environment Agency, *Waste Management Country Profile: Türkiye* (March 2025), 4.

46 "Sıfır Atık ile 90 Milyon Ton Atık Geri Dönüşüme Kazandırıldı", Ministry of Environment, Urbanization and Climate Change, 30 March 2026, accessed 19 October 2026, https://csb.gov.tr/haberler/sifir-atik-ile-90-milyon-ton-atik-geri-donusume-kazandirildi-304434.

47 "'Sıfır Atık' ile Geri Kazanım Oranı Yüzde 37,53'e Yükseldi", Demirören News Agency (DHA), 30 March 2026, accessed 19 October 2026, https://www.dha.com.tr/foto-galeri/sifir-atik-ile-geri-kazanim-orani-yuzde-37-53e-yukseldi-2845450.

48 Şafak and Denek, "An Analysis of the Zero Waste Project", 9.

49 "Sıfır Atık ile 90 Milyon Ton Atık Geri Dönüşüme Kazandırıldı", Ministry of Environment, Urbanization and Climate Change; the figures were also reported by Anadolu Agency, TRT World and Daily Sabah.

256 billion Turkish lira) are lower because they cover a period that ended one year earlier. This study relies on the more recent figures released on 30 March 2026.[50]

Alongside the aggregate figures, separate measurements exist for particular practices and waste types. The data on the plastic bag charge are presented in the section "The Regulatory Infrastructure". For packaging waste, the national recovery rates reported for the reference year 2018 were 63 percent for plastic packaging, 68 percent for metal packaging, 93 percent for paper and cardboard packaging, and 64 percent for composite packaging.[51]

TABLE 1. NATIONAL CHANGE IN THE MANAGEMENT METHODS OF MUNICIPAL WASTE IN TÜRKİYE (2003-2024)

Management method	2003	2024
Waste sent to municipal dumpsites	~16.5 million tons	~3.5 million tons
Waste sent to treatment facilities	~7-8 million tons	~29 million tons
Other disposal methods	~1.8 million tons	Minimal

Source: Zero Waste Foundation Data Center, Research Report-7 (2026). Based on the municipal waste statistics of the Turkish Statistical Institute (TurkStat).

TABLE 2. REGIONAL DISTRIBUTION OF MUNICIPAL WASTE BY MANAGEMENT METHOD (2024)

Region	Sent to dumpsites (thousand tons)	Sent to facilities (million tons)	Other disposal (thousand tons)
Marmara	203	~11.0	~30
Central Anatolia	550	>4.0	~2
Aegean	~300	~4.3	15
Mediterranean	~300	~4.3	<1.5
Black Sea	246	~2.0	~4
Eastern Anatolia	491	~1.2	~28
Southeastern Anatolia	1,450	~1.6	<1.5

Source: Zero Waste Foundation Data Center, Research Report-7 (2026). Based on TurkStat municipal waste statistics. Units are thousand tons for dumpsites and other disposal, and million tons for treatment facilities.

50 "Sıfır Atık Projesi ile 7 Yılda 74,5 Milyon Ton Atık Ekonomiye Kazandırıldı", Anadolu Agency, 5 June 2025, accessed 19 October 2026, https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/ekonomi/sifir-atik-projesi-ile-7-yilda-74-5-milyon-ton-atik-ekonomiye-kazandirildi/3589450; "Sıfır Atık ile 90 Milyon Ton Atık Geri Dönüşüme Kazandırıldı", Ministry of Environment, Urbanization and Climate Change.

51 Ministry of Environment, Urbanization and Climate Change, national packaging data for the 2018 reference year (2022); cited in European Environment Agency, *Waste Management Country Profile: Türkiye*, 4. The Agency's own summary gives 34 percent for composite packaging (p. 2).

External Assessments

This section considers three external assessments alongside the Ministry's data. The first is the Climate Investment Funds case study of the Near Zero Waste program launched in Türkiye in 2015. This program, separate from and earlier than Zero Waste, was implemented by the EBRD with concessional financing from the Clean Technology Fund. By 2019, the direct and indirect emission reductions achieved by the program had reached 500,000 tons of carbon dioxide equivalent per year, five times the original annual target of 100,000 tons. The program's core components included the Türkiye Materials Marketplace platform, which enables the exchange of secondary raw materials between businesses, a study on end-of-waste criteria aligned with the EU acquis, and nine sub-projects.[52]

The second assessment is the World Bank's Türkiye Country Climate and Development Report of June 2022. The report mentions the Zero Waste Project among Türkiye's climate commitments but offers no quantitative assessment of the Project. According to the report, Türkiye listed the Zero Waste Project among its priority instruments in the commitments it announced at the Leaders Summit on Climate in April 2021, and it declared its 2053 net zero target ahead of COP26 in Glasgow.[53] The report identifies the Türkiye Materials Marketplace (the Circular Economy Platform) as part of the country's circular economy infrastructure and notes that the government has prepared a draft Circular Economy Action Plan.[54] The report's most prominent macroeconomic finding is a net economic gain of 146 billion dollars projected for 2022-2040 under its Resilient and Net Zero Pathway scenario.[55] The report does not attribute this gain directly to Zero Waste. However, the Project's place among Türkiye's climate commitments links it to this economy-wide transformation.

The third assessment, the European Environment Agency's 2025 country profile, examines Türkiye in comparison with the EU and contains significant reservations alongside its positive findings. According to the Agency, the

52 Climate Investment Funds, *Near Zero Waste in Turkey*, 4-5.

53 World Bank, *Türkiye Country Climate and Development Report*, 25.

54 World Bank, *Türkiye Country Climate and Development Report*, 48.

55 World Bank, *Türkiye Country Climate and Development Report*, 10; see also 52.

"Zero waste policy" launched several new initiatives to improve waste management, including bio-waste treatment infrastructure, the recovery contribution fee and the deposit-refund system. The recovery contribution fee applies to packaging, electrical and electronic equipment, plastic bags, batteries and accumulators, and tires, while the deposit-refund system covers certain beverage packaging. The profile concludes that these policies are likely to improve the situation once fully implemented, but that their actual effect is not yet clear.[56] According to the Agency, however, waste generation shows "no decoupling from economic growth". The landfill rate, which reached 81 percent in 2021, "remains very high", "whereas the recycling rate remains low". According to Eurostat data, 12 percent of municipal waste in Türkiye was recycled in 2021, against an estimated EU-27 average of 49 percent. The Agency also states that "discrepancies in the reported data make definitive conclusions difficult" and points out that the Ministry's own analysis indicates "different numbers than the data reported to Eurostat by the Turkish Statistical Institute".[57]

Beyond these three assessments, ahead of COP31 Jaime de Bourbon de Parme, Director of the Environment Directorate of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), assessed Türkiye's zero waste policy positively. According to de Bourbon de Parme, many countries can look to Türkiye as a source of inspiration, politically at the government level and culturally at the household level.[58]

Local Government Implementation and Public Value

The legislation on Zero Waste also covers actors at the local level. The Procedures and Principles on the Establishment and Operation of Waste Collection Centers and Zero Waste Practices, in force since 2021, impose obligations on organized industrial zones, shopping malls, airports, office buildings and restaurants. The regulation also gives local governments the responsibility to raise citizen awareness, encourage participation and extend implemen-

56 European Environment Agency, *Waste Management Country Profile: Türkiye*, 2.

57 European Environment Agency, *Waste Management Country Profile: Türkiye*, 2-4.

58 Statement by Jaime de Bourbon de Parme, in his capacity as Director of the OECD Environment Directorate, ahead of COP31; quoted in "Türkiye Global Model for Zero Waste Ahead of COP31: OECD", Anadolu Agency, 31 March 2026, accessed 19 October 2026, https://www.aa.com.tr/en/greenline/climate-change/turkiye-global-model-for-zero-waste-ahead-of-cop31-oecd/1829700.

tation.[59] In addition to the education targets noted in the section "The Zero Waste Brand and Public Value", the Twelfth Development Plan (2024-2028) envisages the launch of pilot Zero Waste programs at selected universities.[60]

Monthly zero waste themes were added to the awareness work in 2026. Under these themes, set by the General Directorate of Environmental Management, each month of the year is devoted to a different topic, and activities are carried out simultaneously in the 81 provincial directorates. The theme for January, for example, was set as Prevent, Reduce, Reuse, while March was declared International Zero Waste Month because of the International Day of Zero Waste on 30 March. According to the Ministry, the aim of the practice is to deliver a common message to all stakeholders, from students to businesses and local governments. Through the monthly themes, awareness work is no longer confined to particular periods but follows a calendar that runs throughout the year.[61]

Henden Şolt's[62] study, which analyzes the 2022 activity reports of the 39 district municipalities of Istanbul, is one of the peer-reviewed studies examining the Project's implementation at the municipal level. The study examines these municipalities' Zero Waste Project implementation data in ten waste categories, namely packaging, glass, clothing and textiles, electronics, batteries, vegetable oil, medicines, tires, motor oil and wood waste. According to Henden Şolt, the Project has the potential to improve the sustainability of urban life and can be regarded as a participatory environmental policy from the standpoint of sustainable urban planning.[63]

Among the peer-reviewed studies that evaluate the Project as a whole, the study by Şafak and Denek[64] discussed in the section "The Zero Waste Brand and Public Value" stands out. The data on awareness training, economic contribution and resource savings presented in the section "The Figures and Their Sources" correspond to the sociocultural, economic and ecological dimensions of public value identified in that study.[65]

59 Şafak and Denek, "An Analysis of the Zero Waste Project", 8-9.

60 Şafak and Denek, "An Analysis of the Zero Waste Project", 6.

61 "2026 Yılı Aylık Sıfır Atık Temaları Belirlendi", Sıfır Atık, 30 December 2025, accessed 19 October 2026, https://sifiratik.gov.tr/kutuphane/haberler/2026-yili-aylik-sifir-atik-temalari-belirlendi.

62 Hatice Burçin Henden Şolt, "Evaluation of the Zero Waste Project in Istanbul District Municipalities from the Perspective of Sustainable Urban Planning", *Sustainability* 15, no. 15 (2023).

63 Henden Şolt, "Evaluation of the Zero Waste Project", abstract.

64 Şafak and Denek, "An Analysis of the Zero Waste Project".

65 Şafak and Denek, "An Analysis of the Zero Waste Project", 7-11.

CARRYING ZERO WASTE INTO THE UN SYSTEM

The 2021 UNDP Türkiye Global Goals Action Award

The UNDP Türkiye office gave its first Global Goals Action Award to the Zero Waste Project for its contribution to Sustainable Development Goal 12, Responsible Consumption and Production. The award was presented to Emine Erdoğan in Ankara on 25 March 2021 by Claudio Tomasi, UNDP Resident Representative in Türkiye.[66]

The timing of the award is also significant. It was given roughly a year and a half before Türkiye submitted its draft resolution to the UN. Türkiye was therefore able to showcase a project honored by a UN agency while seeking support for the draft. As noted in the section "External Assessments", Türkiye's inclusion of the Zero Waste Project among its climate commitments at the Leaders Summit on Climate in April 2021 also gave the Project a place in national climate policy in the same period.[67] The Project was thus carried to the UN General Assembly as an initiative recognized at both the international and the national level.

66 "The First Global Goals Action Award of UNDP Turkey Goes to the Zero Waste Project of the Country", UNDP Türkiye, press release, 25 March 2021, accessed 19 October 2026, https://www.undp.org/turkiye/press-releases/first-global-goals-action-award-undp-turkey-goes-zero-waste-project-country.

67 World Bank, *Türkiye Country Climate and Development Report*, 25.

The 2022 Draft Resolution and the 105-Country Coalition

Türkiye submitted its draft resolution to the Second Committee of the General Assembly on 3 October 2022.[68] The draft was co-sponsored by 105 countries.[69] On 14 December 2022, the UN General Assembly adopted resolution A/RES/77/161, titled Promoting Zero-Waste Initiatives to Advance the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and proclaimed 30 March the International Day of Zero Waste. In its press release No. 56 of 30 March 2026, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs also referred to this resolution as a UN General Assembly resolution led by Türkiye.[70]

The Provisions of Resolution A/RES/77/161

The resolution was adopted on 14 December 2022 at the 53rd plenary meeting of the 77th session of the General Assembly, under agenda item 18(a) on sustainable development. The resolution, bearing the symbol A/RES/77/161, was issued on 20 December 2022.[71]

The resolution provides for the establishment of an advisory board within the UN to support zero waste initiatives, the convening of a high-level meeting, and the proclamation of an international day. Paragraph 1 of the resolution requests the Secretary-General to establish an advisory board for a period of three years. The board is to consist of eminent persons selected on the basis of their knowledge, experience and expertise, in consultation with Member States. Due regard is to be given to gender balance and equitable geographical representation in the selection of members, and the board is to operate "based on voluntary contributions". The board's mandate is to promote local and national zero

68 Recep Şehitoğlu, "The Female Face of Turkish Public Diplomacy: An Analysis of First Lady Emine Erdoğan's Activities Through the Lens of Public Diplomacy", in *Türkiye's Public Diplomacy Ecosystem: A Reflection on Evolving Practices*, ed. Oğuz Güner (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2025), 367.

69 "Emine Erdoğan: Zero Waste is the Name of a Brand New Era We Are Creating with Hope", Zero Waste Foundation, 17 October 2025, accessed 19 October 2026, https://sifiratikvakfi.org/en/emine-erdogan-zero-waste-is-the-name-of-a-brand-new-era-we-are-creating-with-hope.

70 Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Uluslararası Sıfır Atık Günü Hk." (On the International Day of Zero Waste), Press Release No. 56, 30 March 2026, accessed 19 October 2026, https://www.mfa.gov.tr/no_-56_-uluslararasi-sifir-atik-gunu-hk.en.mfa.

71 A/RES/77/161. The full title of the agenda item is "Sustainable development: towards the achievement of sustainable development: implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including through sustainable consumption and production, building on Agenda 21".

waste initiatives, above all through the dissemination of best practices and success stories. This mandate is to be carried out by building on the work of existing regional and global platforms, the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and UN-Habitat within their respective mandates, and "without duplication" of that work.[72] Taken together, the voluntary funding, the three-year term and the non-duplication requirement show that the board was not designed as a permanent organ. Paragraph 5 of the resolution requests the President of the General Assembly to convene a one-day high-level meeting in New York in 2023, in collaboration with UNEP and UN-Habitat. Paragraph 6, one of the resolution's core provisions, proclaims 30 March the International Day of Zero Waste.[73] Paragraph 8 invites UNEP and UN-Habitat to facilitate the observance of the Day, and paragraph 9 provides that the costs of all activities under the resolution are to be met from voluntary contributions.[74]

The preamble of the resolution refers to numerous international frameworks. These include the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Paris Agreement, the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes, and the New Urban Agenda.[75] The concept of zero waste was thus linked to multilateral commitments in the fields of development, climate, biodiversity, waste and urbanization. This linkage, together with the International Day of Zero Waste, is among the lasting gains that the resolution brought Türkiye. The resolution set no time limit for the Day, whereas the Advisory Board was established as a time-limited body. The question of which structure will take over the Board's functions after the end of its term is addressed in the section "Three Forward-Looking Observations".

The First Observance and the Announcement of the Advisory Board (30 March 2023)

The International Day of Zero Waste was observed for the first time on 30 March 2023 at a high-level meeting convened by the President of the

72 A/RES/77/161, para. 1.

73 A/RES/77/161, para. 6.

74 A/RES/77/161, paras. 8 and 9.

75 A/RES/77/161, preamble.

77th UN General Assembly in the General Assembly Hall, at which Secretary-General António Guterres also spoke.[76] Before the meeting, UN-Habitat Executive Director Maimunah Mohd Sharif visited Türkiye on 24 February 2023. During this visit, Sharif conveyed her condolences for the Kahramanmaraş earthquakes of 6 February and delivered Secretary-General Guterres's personal invitation to Emine Erdoğan to attend the meeting.[77] Emine Erdoğan delivered the opening address of the meeting. According to the Ministry of Environment, Urbanization and Climate Change, this was the first address by the spouse of a Turkish president to the UN General Assembly.[78]

The most notable part of the address concerned the standing of Zero Waste at the UN. Emine Erdoğan said that, as a zero waste volunteer, she was proud and happy to see that the national initiative launched in her country had reached a level that would set an example for the rest of the world and had turned into a strong policy within the UN.[79]

The same address also referred to the Global Zero Waste Declaration of Goodwill. Emine Erdoğan described the Declaration, which she and UN Secretary-General Guterres had opened for international participation, as an important step on the way to the institutionalization of the Zero Waste initiative (see "The Zero Waste Foundation and the Declaration of Goodwill").[80]

At the same meeting, Secretary-General Guterres announced that the UN Secretary-General's Advisory Board of Eminent Persons on Zero Waste would be established, invited Emine Erdoğan to chair it, and expressed his

76 "Zero Waste Day: UN Calls for a War on Garbage", UN News, 30 March 2023, accessed 19 October 2026, https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/03/1135187.

77 "Emine Erdoğan: We Are Determined to Be Part of the Solution to Environmental Issues", Zero Waste Foundation, 3 June 2023, accessed 19 October 2026, https://sifiratikvakfi.org/en/emine-erdogan-we-are-determined-to-be-part-of-the-solution; "Turkish First Lady to Join UN Session on 1st Int'l Zero Waste Day", *Daily Sabah*, 23 March 2023, accessed 19 October 2026, https://www.dailysabah.com/turkiye/turkish-first-lady-to-join-un-session-on-1st-intl-zero-waste-day/news.

78 "Emine Erdoğan Hanımefendi BM Genel Kurulu Sıfır Atık Özel Oturumu'nda Konuştu", Ministry of Environment, Urbanization and Climate Change, 13 April 2023, accessed 19 October 2026, https://ab.csb.gov.tr/haberler/emine-erdogan-hanimefendi-bm-genel-kurulu-sifir-atik-ozel-oturumu-nda-konustu-282696.

79 "First Lady Erdoğan: We Stand Committed to Be a Part of the Solution Regarding Environmental Problems", Sıfır Atık, official English text of the speech delivered in the UN General Assembly Hall on 30 March 2023.

80 "First Lady Erdoğan: We Stand Committed to Be a Part of the Solution Regarding Environmental Problems".

respect and appreciation for the leadership of Türkiye and of Emine Erdoğan on the critical issue of zero waste.[81] After Emine Erdoğan accepted the invitation, the Board was formally constituted on 12 April 2023.[82]

The Structure and Work of the Advisory Board

In line with paragraph 1 of the resolution, the Advisory Board was constituted with twelve members from different disciplines, with due regard to gender balance and equitable geographical representation.[83] First Lady Emine Erdoğan has chaired the Board, with José Manuel Moller, founder and Chief Executive Officer of Algramo, as Deputy Chair. The Board has been moderated by the Executive Director of UN-Habitat, first Maimunah Mohd Sharif and then her successor Ana Claudia Rossbach. The Board's three-year term, which began in April 2023, ended in April 2026 (see "Three Forward-Looking Observations"). Although the resolution did not specify this, the Board was planned to meet twice a year during its term.[84]

The Board held its first meeting online in July 2023 and its first in-person meeting in Istanbul on 1 November 2023.[85] Its fourth meeting was also held in Istanbul, on 18 October 2025.[86] The Board's secretariat has been

81 António Guterres, remarks at the high-level meeting "The Role of Zero Waste as a Transformative Solution in Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals", UN General Assembly Hall, New York, 30 March 2023; "We Are Determined to Be Part of the Solution to Environmental Issues".

82 "Zero Waste is the Name of a Brand New Era We Are Creating with Hope".

83 The number of twelve members does not appear in the resolution and is based on the UN-Habitat record. See "The United Nations Secretary-General's Advisory Board on Zero Waste", UN-Habitat, accessed 19 October 2026, https://unhabitat.org/advisoryboardzerowaste.

84 A/RES/77/161, para. 1; "Zero Waste is the Name of a Brand New Era We Are Creating with Hope"; Şehitoğlu, "The Female Face of Turkish Public Diplomacy", 367; Valeria Giannotta, "Zero Waste: A Movement of Social Responsibility", Anadolu Agency, 15 September 2023, accessed 19 October 2026, https://www.aa.com.tr/en/analysis/opinion-zero-waste-a-movement-of-social-responsibility/2992583.

85 "UN Zero Waste Advisory Board Holds First Meeting in Istanbul", ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability, 10 November 2023, accessed 19 October 2026, https://iclei.org/news/un-zero-waste-advisory-board-holds-first-meeting-in-istanbul/; "UN Zero Waste Board Holds First Meeting in Istanbul", *Daily Sabah*, 1 November 2023, accessed 19 October 2026, https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/un-zero-waste-board-holds-first-meeting-in-istanbul/news.

86 "UN Zero Waste Advisory Board Holds 4th Meeting in Istanbul", *Daily Sabah*, 19 October 2025, accessed 19 October 2026, https://www.dailysabah.com/turkiye/un-zero-waste-advisory-board-holds-4th-meeting-in-istanbul/news; "The 4th Meeting of the UN High-Level Advisory Board on Zero Waste was Held under the Chairmanship of Emine Erdoğan", Zero Waste Foundation, 18 October 2025, accessed 19 October 2026, https://sifiratikvakfi.org/en/the-4th-meeting-of-the-un-high-level-advisory-board-on-zero-waste-was-held-under-the-chairmanship-of-emine-erdogan.

run jointly by UN-Habitat and UNEP. On the occasion of the second International Day of Zero Waste in March 2024, the Board selected three good practices in waste management and announced that these would be disseminated through UNEP's One Planet network. The selected practices were a certification scheme to reduce single-use plastics in the hospitality sector in Spain's Balearic Islands, a program in Nigeria that provides machinery and skills to indigenous women working in cassava production, and a practice aimed at reducing glass waste.[87] In March 2026, the Board announced the 20 Cities Towards Zero Waste initiative and named twenty cities from around the world as the initiative's first leading cities.[88]

The agreement between Türkiye and UN-Habitat on the opening of a UN-Habitat regional office in Istanbul was signed in Istanbul on 14 December 2024.[89] At the International Zero Waste Forum in October 2025, Emine Erdoğan said that they had taken the necessary steps for UN-Habitat, which runs the Board's secretariat with great dedication, to open a regional office in Türkiye, and that she believed Istanbul would become the capital of zero waste.[90] The office opened in Istanbul under the name UN-Habitat Regional Office for Eastern Europe and Central Asia and is operational as of March 2026.[91] In April 2026, UN-Habitat Executive Director Ana Claudia

87 "UN Advisory Board on Zero Waste Outlines Good Practices in Waste Management", UN-Habitat, 27 March 2024, accessed 19 October 2026, https://unhabitat.org/un-advisory-board-on-zero-waste-outlines-good-practices-in-waste-management.

88 "UN Advisory Board Names 20 City Leaders in Zero Waste", UN-Habitat, 27 March 2026, accessed 19 October 2026, https://unhabitat.org/news/27-mar-2026/un-advisory-board-names-20-city-leaders-in-zero-waste.

89 Grand National Assembly of Türkiye, Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Hükümeti ile Birleşmiş Milletler İnsan Yerleşimleri Programı (UN-HABITAT) Tarafından Temsil Edilen Birleşmiş Milletler Arasında Doğu Avrupa ve Orta Asya Ülkeleri İçin Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nde BM-Habitat Bölge Ofisi Kurulmasına İlişkin Anlaşmanın Onaylanmasının Uygun Bulunduğuna Dair Kanun Teklifi (Bill on the Approval of the Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Türkiye and the United Nations, Represented by UN-Habitat, on the Establishment of a UN-Habitat Regional Office in Türkiye for the Countries of Eastern Europe and Central Asia) (2/3487) and Foreign Affairs Committee Report, Report No. 267, 28th Legislative Term, 4th Legislative Year, 3 April 2026, General Justification, accessed 19 October 2026, https://cdn.tbmm.gov.tr/KKBSPublicFile/D28/Y4/T2/DosyaKomisyonRaporunuVerdi/ed516827-477a-4ece-a000-fdb164030a07.pdf; see also "BM-HABITAT, İstanbul'da Bölge Ofisi Kuracak", Anadolu Agency, 29 January 2025, accessed 19 October 2026, https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/ekonomi/bm-habitat-istanbulda-bolge-ofisi-kuracak-/3465668.

90 Emine Erdoğan, remarks at the International Zero Waste Forum, Istanbul, 17 October 2025; quoted in "Zero Waste is the Name of a Brand New Era We Are Creating with Hope", Zero Waste Foundation.

91 "UN-Habitat Official: Eastern Europe and Central Asia Region Offers Vital Opportunities for Advancing Urban Transformation", AZERTAC, 14 March 2026, accessed 19 October 2026, https://azertag.az/en/xeber/un_habitat_official_eastern_europe_and_central_asia_region_offers_vital_opportunities_for_advancing_urban_transformation-4078071.

Rossbach also stated that Istanbul would contribute to the coordination of UN-Habitat's work in the region.[92]

The Zero Waste Foundation and the Declaration of Goodwill

The Zero Waste Foundation was established in 2023 under the patronage of First Lady Emine Erdoğan, with the aim of serving as a center for global efforts in the field of zero waste.[93] A Zero Waste Institute was also created within the Foundation to share best practices and policies in the field of zero waste at the international level.[94] The Foundation is not an institution attached to the Ministry. However, the fact that Emine Erdoğan, who holds the patronage of the Foundation, also chaired the UN Advisory Board over 2023-2026 gives the Foundation a quasi-public role in promoting Zero Waste internationally.

The Global Zero Waste Declaration of Goodwill was first signed by UN Secretary-General António Guterres and Emine Erdoğan at the 77th UN General Assembly in September 2022.[95] At the 78th UN General Assembly in September 2023, the Declaration was opened for individual signature worldwide through a digital platform. On 18 September 2023, at the Towards a Global Zero Waste Movement event held at the Turkish House in New York under the leadership of Emine Erdoğan, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan became the first person to sign the version of the Declaration opened for individual signature.[96]

92 Statement by Ana Claudia Rossbach in her capacity as Executive Director of UN-Habitat; quoted in "UN-Habitat Chief Says COP31 Must Spotlight Cities in Climate Negotiations", Anadolu Agency, 21 April 2026, accessed 19 October 2026, https://www.aa.com.tr/en/greenline/climate-change/un-habitat-chief-says-cop31-must-spotlight-cities-in-climate-negotiations/1829938.

93 "Zero Waste is the Name of a Brand New Era We Are Creating with Hope".

94 "Zero Waste is the Name of a Brand New Era We Are Creating with Hope".

95 "Zero Waste Goodwill Declaration", Zero Waste Foundation, accessed 18 June 2026, https://sifiratikvakfi.org/en/declaration-of-goodwill.

96 "President Erdoğan Signs 'Global Commitment to Zero Waste for the World, Our Common Home' in New York", Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye, 18 September 2023, accessed 19 October 2026, https://www.tccb.gov.tr/en/news/542/149488/president-erdogan-signs-declaration-of-goodwill-for-global-commitment-to-zero-waste-for-the-world-our-common-home-in-new-york; "President Erdoğan Signs Global Zero Waste Declaration of Goodwill in New York", Directorate of Communications of the Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye, 18 September 2023, accessed 19 October 2026, https://www.iletisim.gov.tr/english/haberler/detay/president-erdogan-signs-global-zero-waste-declaration-of-goodwill-in-new-york.

During the 79th UN General Assembly in September 2024, new signatories joined the Declaration through Emine Erdoğan's initiatives. These signatories included Oluremi Tinubu, wife of the President of Nigeria, Najat Maalla M'jid, Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General on Violence against Children, Lucrecia Peinado, wife of the President of Guatemala, Mirela Becirovic, wife of the Chairman of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Prindon Sadriu, spouse of the President of Kosovo. Jeffrey Sachs, President of the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network, which spans 2,000 universities in 150 countries, is also among the Declaration's supporters.[97] Azerbaijan's accession to the Declaration was announced during the 2025 International Zero Waste Forum by Muhtar Babayev, Special Representative of the President of Azerbaijan on Climate Issues. Babayev described his country's accession as the greatest demonstration of being part of an important global initiative and moving toward a clean future.[98]

The attendance figures of the events organized by the Foundation show its international influence. The 2025 International Zero Waste Forum, organized by the Zero Waste Foundation together with the Ministry of Environment, Urbanization and Climate Change, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, UNEP and UN-Habitat, brought together participants from 104 countries and 118 international partner organizations. Mayors, ambassadors and senior representatives of international organizations such as the UN, UNEP and UNDP also attended the Forum.[99] The Global Zero Waste Awards, the Foundation's own award program, were announced in New York during the International Day of Zero Waste celebrations.[100]

97 Şehitoğlu, "The Female Face of Turkish Public Diplomacy", 368-369.

98 Muhtar Babayev, remarks at the opening session of the International Zero Waste Forum, Istanbul, 17 October 2025; quoted in "Uluslararası Sıfır Atık Forumu İstanbul'da Başladı", Anadolu Agency, 17 October 2025, accessed 19 October 2026, https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/gundem/uluslararasi-sifir-atik-forumu-istanbul-da-basladi/3719442.

99 "Zero Waste is the Name of a Brand New Era We Are Creating with Hope".

100 "Zero Waste is the Name of a Brand New Era We Are Creating with Hope".

ZERO WASTE AND TÜRKİYE'S CLIMATE DIPLOMACY CAPACITY

Türkiye's Climate Policy Framework

As noted in the Introduction, Türkiye's main steps in the field of climate policy were largely taken after 2021. Türkiye signed the Paris Agreement in April 2016, ratified it in October 2021, and announced its 2053 net zero target ahead of the COP26 Summit in Glasgow.[101] The Updated First Nationally Determined Contribution was submitted to the UNFCCC in April 2023.[102] This was followed by Climate Law No. 7552, adopted on 2 July 2025 and in force since the same month. The Law established the legal framework for the 2053 net zero target and provided the legal basis for Türkiye's first Emissions Trading System.[103] In November 2025, Türkiye submitted its Second Nationally Determined Contribution, which contains its 2035 targets.[104]

101 World Bank, *Türkiye Country Climate and Development Report*, 25.

102 Republic of Türkiye, *Türkiye Updated First Nationally Determined Contribution*.

103 İklim Kanunu (Climate Law), Law No. 7552; "Restoring the Lost Balance on Land and Sea".

104 Republic of Türkiye Directorate of Climate Change, "Türkiye Submits Its Second Nationally Determined Contribution to the United Nations", iklim.gov.tr, News No. 4640, 10 November 2025, accessed 19 October 2026, https://iklim.gov.tr/en/turkiye-submits-its-second-nationally-determined-contribution-to-the-united-nations-news-4640.

The Zero Waste Project, by contrast, was launched in 2017,[105] four years before the ratification of the Paris Agreement and the 2053 commitment, six years before the updated nationally determined contribution, and eight years before the Climate Law. This early start allowed the Project to accumulate the implementation results presented in the section "The Domestic Transformation, 2017-2025" and allowed that record to serve as the basis for the UN resolution and the institutional structures discussed in the section "Carrying Zero Waste into the UN System". In this respect, Zero Waste is the clearest example among Türkiye's climate policy instruments of a long implementation record combined with an institutional counterpart at the UN level.

One of the recent studies linking Türkiye's environmental diplomacy to the concept of soft power is by Wasylina.[106] Wasylina examines Türkiye's green diplomacy as "a strategic component of its soft power approach, aimed at building a positive international image, fostering goodwill, and enhancing its influence through environmental sustainability efforts".[107] This report, for its part, argues that the effect of green diplomacy depends on domestic implementation and international institutionalization advancing together. For this reason, Zero Waste, which Wasylina discusses among Türkiye's domestic environmental policies, is treated in this report as the principal example of that strategy.

Soft Power and Türkiye

Whether a domestic reform is taken up internationally depends on the networks and institutional presence that a country has previously built in its foreign relations. Vural and Baysal[108] set out the soft power foundations Türkiye possesses in this respect. These foundations include the extensive development cooperation network built in Africa over the past twenty years, together with networks in Central Asia and Southeast Asia, institutional presence in the cultural and educational fields, a global position in humanitarian aid, and an active role in regional organizations. In the authors' words, "the vast majority of African countries are among the par-

105 Şafak and Denek, "An Analysis of the Zero Waste Project", 6.

106 Wasylina, "Green Diplomacy".

107 Wasylina, "Green Diplomacy", 394.

108 Vural and Baysal, "Türkiye's Climate Diplomacy Potential".

ties most affected by the climate crisis yet least heard in the negotiations. The bilateral relationships Türkiye has established with these countries and its cooperation on multilateral platforms create a strong foundation for assuming a facilitating role in climate negotiations".[109] Wasylina[110] reaches a corresponding conclusion at the regional scale. According to the author, Türkiye "can and has used Green Diplomacy at home, bilaterally and multilaterally, to demonstrate its leadership and engagement in constructive Green Diplomacy in Mediterranean Sea basin".[111] This assessment, which focuses on Türkiye's environmental diplomacy across the Mediterranean, complements the broader African and global multilateral engagement documented by Vural and Baysal. Taken together, the two studies reveal a consistent line of green diplomacy that extends to both the regional and the global level.

Circular economy reforms are mostly discussed with reference to the fiscal and regulatory conditions of OECD countries. The OECD's own survey data on circular economy governance, for instance, were collected predominantly from cities and regions in Europe.[112] Implementation in a middle-income country such as Türkiye, however, shows that these reforms can also deliver results under fiscal conditions closer to those of developing countries. As noted in the Introduction, this report regards Türkiye's experience as a model that developing countries can adapt more easily than examples from high-income countries.[113] Emine Erdoğan's speeches also support this positioning, stressing Türkiye's low historical contribution to the climate crisis alongside the country's active participation in the solution.[114] The result is a discourse that rests on successful domestic implementation and stands close to the climate justice demands of developing countries.

The third dimension of the soft power reading draws on Turkish academic literature on Türkiye's climate communication. In one of the stud-

109 Vural and Baysal, "Türkiye's Climate Diplomacy Potential".

110 Wasylina, "Green Diplomacy".

111 Wasylina, "Green Diplomacy", 405.

112 OECD, *The Circular Economy in Cities and Regions: Synthesis Report* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2020).

113 See the Introduction. On the Near Zero Waste program, see Climate Investment Funds, *Near Zero Waste in Turkey*, 4.

114 Erdoğan, remarks at the International Zero Waste Forum, 17 October 2025; quoted below in the section "Zero Waste in Official Discourse".

ies in this field, Keleş[115] examines Türkiye's official statements during the COP28 process through framing theory. According to Keleş, climate change is used in Türkiye's public diplomacy strategy as "a component of reputation management through the media instrumentality of science diplomacy".[116] Keleş also identifies the recurring positive themes in Türkiye's official climate communication. These themes include the loss and damage fund, climate finance, global adaptation goals, greenhouse gas emissions, medium-term plans, the regional activity center, the common regional framework, the value of women in working life, marine protected areas, and mitigation strategy.[117] In this report's assessment, Zero Waste corresponds most closely to mitigation strategy among these themes.

The Three-Level Capacity Model and Zero Waste

Vural and Baysal[118] examine Türkiye's climate diplomacy capacity at three levels. These are macro-level facilitation in multilateral negotiations, sectoral-level conciliation in the just energy transition, and micro-level technical facilitation in transboundary environmental disputes. The authors present the model as an assessment of Türkiye's potential in this field and as a set of recommendations for strengthening technical capacity. Vural and Baysal's study does not refer to Zero Waste. Applying the model to a single policy instrument and matching Zero Waste to the three levels is therefore this report's own choice. This subsection examines the diplomatic gains that Zero Waste provides Türkiye at each level and shows that the Project's most pronounced contribution lies at the macro level.

At the macro level, Zero Waste has brought Türkiye a series of institutional gains in the UN system and in areas linked to it. The first is the International Day of Zero Waste, proclaimed by resolution A/RES/77/161 and observed every year on 30 March.[119] The second is the Advisory Board,

115 Özlem Tuğçe Keleş, "Climate Change as a New Communication Tool in the Context of Science Diplomacy", in *Science Diplomacy for Global Challenges*, eds. Muzaffer Şeker and Mürsel Doğrul (Ankara: TÜBA, 2025).

116 Keleş, "Climate Change as a New Communication Tool", abstract.

117 Keleş, "Climate Change as a New Communication Tool", 266.

118 Vural and Baysal, "Türkiye's Climate Diplomacy Potential".

119 A/RES/77/161, para. 6.

chaired by Emine Erdoğan, which held its first in-person meeting in Istanbul on 1 November 2023.[120] The third is the support of the 105 countries that co-sponsored Türkiye's draft resolution. The resolution was adopted without a vote at the 53rd plenary meeting of the General Assembly on 14 December 2022.[121] The fourth is the Zero Waste Foundation, which plays a quasi-public role in promoting Zero Waste internationally. The Global Zero Waste Declaration of Goodwill (see "The Zero Waste Foundation and the Declaration of Goodwill") and the UN-Habitat Regional Office for Eastern Europe and Central Asia, operating in Istanbul since March 2026, are also among these gains.[122] According to Vural and Baysal,[123] "Türkiye assuming a facilitating function in processes such as narrowing contested language in draft texts during COP negotiations, designing the finance architecture, and establishing monitoring and reporting mechanisms can be assessed as a realistic objective".[124] The international recognition and network of relationships that Zero Waste provides can contribute to Türkiye taking on such a role. Whether this accumulated experience will translate into an actual facilitating role in the negotiations is addressed in the section "Three Forward-Looking Observations".

At the sectoral level, Vural and Baysal focus on the just energy transition. According to their study, Türkiye holds a distinctive position in this field as a country that both uses fossil fuels and is rapidly increasing its renewable energy investments.[125] The authors also note that Türkiye is in a position to develop concrete conciliation proposals drawing on its own experience in areas such as workforce transformation, reskilling, grid capacity investments and standards alignment.[126] Zero Waste is related to this field not directly but through the circular economy and resource efficiency. The Project's contribution at this level, as noted in the section "Soft Power and Türkiye", is to show that circular economy reform can be implemented un-

120 "UN Zero Waste Advisory Board Holds First Meeting in Istanbul", ICLEI.

121 A/RES/77/161; Wasylina, "Green Diplomacy", 395.

122 "UN-Habitat Official: Eastern Europe and Central Asia Region Offers Vital Opportunities for Advancing Urban Transformation".

123 Vural and Baysal, "Türkiye's Climate Diplomacy Potential".

124 Vural and Baysal, "Türkiye's Climate Diplomacy Potential".

125 Vural and Baysal, "Türkiye's Climate Diplomacy Potential".

126 Vural and Baysal, "Türkiye's Climate Diplomacy Potential".

der the fiscal conditions of a middle-income country. The contribution of 365 billion Turkish lira to the economy over 2017-2025 and the 217,000 buildings and facilities brought into the Zero Waste Management System are indicators of this (see "The Figures and Their Sources"). The Zero Waste Foundation has also turned this experience into tools that other countries can use. The Zero Waste Encyclopedia, prepared in Turkish and English, uses a data-driven and comparative approach to examine the years in which countries began their zero waste practices, the progress they have recorded and their future targets.[127] The Sustainable COP31 Framework offers an internationally aligned roadmap covering zero waste management protocols, carbon reduction and offsetting strategies, sustainable logistics and transport planning, environmental standards for event venues, and stakeholder participation mechanisms.[128]

At the micro level, Vural and Baysal focus on transboundary disputes over water, forests and ecosystems. According to the authors, data harmonization, joint monitoring protocols and impartial technical assessment are the key elements in resolving such disputes.[129] Zero Waste offers technical experience that overlaps with these elements. This experience includes the monitoring and reporting infrastructure that has operated through the Zero Waste Information System since 2018 and the Ministry's implementation manuals, such as its guide for municipalities. The study on end-of-waste criteria aligned with the EU acquis, completed under the Near Zero Waste program that runs separately from Zero Waste, also offers a method that can be transferred to other regulatory settings.[130] Under Zero Waste Blue, approximately 325,000 tons of marine litter have been collected since 2019.[131]

127 "Türkiye Releases Zero Waste Encyclopedia Ahead of Hosting COP31", Anadolu Agency, 26 December 2025, accessed 19 October 2026, https://www.aa.com.tr/en/turkiye/turkiye-releases-zero-waste-encyclopedia-ahead-of-hosting-cop31/3781903; "Türkiye Unveils Zero Waste Encyclopedia Ahead of COP31 Climate Summit", TRT World, 2025, accessed 19 October 2026, https://www.trtworld.com/article/c3451f3784f3; "Türkiye Launches Zero Waste Encyclopedia Ahead of COP31", Caspian Post, 26 December 2025, accessed 19 October 2026, https://caspianpost.com/regions/turkiye-launches-zero-waste-encyclopedia-ahead-of-cop31.

128 "Zero Waste Foundation Prepares Framework Document for COP31 Ahead of Türkiye's Hosting", Anadolu Agency, 16 December 2025, accessed 19 October 2026, https://www.aa.com.tr/en/environment/zero-waste-foundation-prepares-framework-document-for-cop31-ahead-of-turkiyes-hosting/3772213.

129 Vural and Baysal, "Türkiye's Climate Diplomacy Potential", micro-level section.

130 Climate Investment Funds, *Near Zero Waste in Turkey*, 4, 16-18.

131 Ministry of Environment, Urbanization and Climate Change, *2025 Yılı İdare Faaliyet Raporu*, 51, 111.

This work gives Türkiye significant technical experience for regional cooperation on marine pollution in the Black Sea and the Eastern Mediterranean.

Other work in the marine field shows the scope of this experience. It includes the 76,944 ship inspections carried out by the Turkish Environment Agency in the waters of Istanbul and Kocaeli over 2023-2026 and the mooring buoy system serving 856 boats in 17 bays in the Fethiye-Göcek Special Environmental Protection Area. In addition, 42 tons of marine litter have been collected from the coasts of Istanbul, İzmir, Mersin and Muğla with four sea sweeper vessels. The Blue Card Tracking System, which is intended to digitalize ship waste processes from end to end, and the Marine Pollution Tracking System are still at the planning stage.[132] At the close of the pre-COP meeting in Fiji, Peter Thomson, the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy for the Ocean, reported that Türkiye had given an assurance that it would work toward an Antalya Ocean Declaration.[133] Türkiye will also be able to raise this experience in the talks in Antalya.

Zero Waste in Official Discourse

Türkiye also defines Zero Waste at the official level as an instrument of climate diplomacy. Murat Kurum, Minister of Environment, Urbanization and Climate Change, made this connection explicit at the Zero Waste for the World, Our Common Home program held at the Presidential Complex in January 2023. According to the Minister, Zero Waste, as a movement in intergovernmental climate diplomacy that guarantees the future of all states and nations, will go down in history in golden letters with the unity shown that day.[134] The Ministry of Foreign Affairs also linked Zero Waste to COP31 in its press release No. 56 of 30 March 2026. According to the release, as the president and host of the conference to be held in Antalya on

132 Turkish Environment Agency, *Faaliyet Bilgi Notu*.

133 "Pre-COP Closing Day Wrap", United Nations Climate Change, 8 October 2026, accessed 19 October 2026, https://unfccc.int/news/pre-cop-closing-day-wrap.

134 "Our Common House, Zero Waste for the World Program was Held at the Presidential Complex", Sıfır Atık, January 2023, accessed 19 October 2026, https://zerowaste.gov.tr/en/library/news/our-common-house-zero-waste-for-the-world-program-was-held-at-the-presidential-complex; "Emine Erdoğan, 'Ortak Evimiz Dünya İçin Sıfır Atık' Programına Katıldı", Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye, 17 January 2023, accessed 19 October 2026, https://www.tccb.gov.tr/haberler/410/142553/emine-erdogan-ortak-evimiz-dunya-icin-sifir-atik-programina-katildi.

9-20 November 2026, Türkiye will also prioritize the Zero Waste approach throughout the COP31 process.[135]

President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan also addressed Zero Waste together with COP31 in his speech to the 81st session of the UN General Assembly on 22 September 2026. Erdoğan described COP31, which Türkiye will host in Antalya, as an "Implementation COP" in which financing commitments are honored, technology transfer is accelerated and promises are turned into concrete steps. He stated that the summit would give particular prominence to climate justice and invited the UN membership to the COP31 Leaders Summit. In the same speech, he said that there are many ways to combat the climate crisis and described the Zero Waste Movement as "the strongest bridge where all these paths meet".[136] This description of Zero Waste as a bridge uses the same language as Türkiye's bridging role discussed in the section "The Implementation COP Framework and Türkiye's Bridging Role".

Emine Erdoğan's speeches over 2023-2025 show that Zero Waste has gained a lasting place in Türkiye's climate diplomacy discourse. At the UN General Assembly on 30 March 2023, Emine Erdoğan emphasized that Zero Waste, which began as a national initiative, had turned into a strong policy within the UN (see "The First Observance and the Announcement of the Advisory Board (30 March 2023)").[137] At the International Zero Waste Forum in Istanbul on 17 October 2025, she stated that although Türkiye's share in the climate crisis is very small, the country is working with all its strength to be part of the solution. In the same speech, she described the Zero Waste Movement launched in 2017 as the clearest indicator of this goal, and she characterized the consensus reached among countries on zero waste as a very meaningful example of the spirit of solidarity within the human family on environmental issues.[138]

135 Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Press Release No. 56.

136 Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, address to the 81st session of the UN General Assembly, New York, 22 September 2026; quoted in "Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan, Birleşmiş Milletler 81. Genel Kurulu'na hitap etti", Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye Directorate of Communications, 22 September 2026, accessed 19 October 2026, https://www.iletisim.gov.tr/turkce/haberler/detay/cumhurbaskanierdogan-birlesmis-milletler-81-genel-kuruluna-hitap-etti. The quotations are the authors' translation of the Turkish text.

137 "First Lady Erdoğan: We Stand Committed to Be a Part of the Solution Regarding Environmental Problems".

138 Erdoğan, remarks at the International Zero Waste Forum, 17 October 2025.

Türkiye's discourse has also been taken up in the statements of international actors. These statements are not analyses assessing the results of Zero Waste but expressions of appreciation for Türkiye's initiative. At the meeting of 30 March 2023, UN Secretary-General António Guterres expressed his respect and appreciation for the leadership of Türkiye and of Emine Erdoğan on the critical issue of zero waste (see "The First Observance and the Announcement of the Advisory Board (30 March 2023)").[139] Muhtar Babayev, Special Representative of the President of Azerbaijan on Climate Issues, announcing Azerbaijan's accession to the Declaration of Goodwill at the 2025 International Zero Waste Forum, stated that "Türkiye is not only a pioneer but also a country that guides the world".[140] Ahead of COP31, OECD Environment Director Jaime de Bourbon de Parme also said that Türkiye is "excellent" in its zero waste policy and that many countries can look to Türkiye as a source of inspiration (see "External Assessments").[141]

Zero Waste and Diplomatic Power

Soft power, as defined by Nye,[142] is a state's capacity to obtain the outcomes it wants through attraction rather than coercion or payment. According to Nye, this capacity rests on a country's culture, its political values and a foreign policy that is seen as legitimate. Wasylina[143] adapts this approach to environmental policy through the concept of green diplomacy and argues that integrating green initiatives into its soft power strategy will strengthen Türkiye's international standing and appeal.[144] As noted in the section "Türkiye's Climate Policy Framework", treating Zero Waste as the principal example of this strategy is this report's own assessment. The concept of soft power, however, does not by itself explain what Zero Waste has brought Türkiye.

139 Guterres, remarks in the UN General Assembly Hall, 30 March 2023; "We Are Determined to Be Part of the Solution to Environmental Issues".

140 Babayev, remarks at the International Zero Waste Forum, 17 October 2025; "Zero Waste is the Name of a Brand New Era We Are Creating with Hope"; "Uluslararası Sıfır Atık Forumu İstanbul'da Başladı", Anadolu Agency.

141 Statement by de Bourbon de Parme; quoted in "Türkiye Global Model for Zero Waste Ahead of COP31: OECD".

142 Joseph S. Nye Jr., *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2004).

143 Wasylina, "Green Diplomacy".

144 Wasylina, "Green Diplomacy", 394.

The report argues that Zero Waste functions as a lasting capacity rather than a temporary message. This capacity rests on regularly recurring measurable outputs and on diplomatic structures that have continuity. The distinction matters, because institutionalized gains allow a domestic policy to acquire a lasting position in foreign policy over time, whereas initiatives based solely on messaging lose their effect unless they are constantly renewed.

The concrete elements of this capacity have been set out in the preceding sections of the report. In the diplomatic field, they are resolution A/RES/77/161, the International Day of Zero Waste, which that resolution proclaimed without any time limit, and the 105 countries that supported the draft resolution. The Advisory Board, which has been chaired by Emine Erdoğan and held its first in-person meeting in Istanbul, and the UN-Habitat regional office in Istanbul are also among these elements. To these can be added the Global Zero Waste Declaration of Goodwill and the positive assessment of the OECD Environment Director (see "External Assessments", "Carrying Zero Waste into the UN System" and "The Three-Level Capacity Model and Zero Waste"). In the economic field, a contribution of 365 billion Turkish lira was made over 2017-2025. In the environmental field, approximately 180 million tons of greenhouse gas emissions were avoided, the felling of 613 million trees was prevented, and 270 billion kilowatt-hours of energy and 2 trillion liters of water were saved (see "The Figures and Their Sources"). Türkiye can cite each of these gains as a concrete example in negotiations and in bilateral talks.

Türkiye's net zero commitment, its nationally determined contributions and its Climate Law resemble the climate policies of many middle-income countries. Zero Waste, by contrast, gives Türkiye a distinctive policy that is institutionalized and branded within the UN. Participation in the forums organized by the Zero Waste Foundation has also grown. The International Zero Waste Forum of October 2025 brought together participants from 104 countries, and 183 countries were represented at the Second Global Zero Waste Forum of June 2026. The next section examines how this accumulated experience has been used in the COP31 process.

THE COP31 PRESIDENCY AND ZERO WASTE

The Institutional Structure of COP31

COP31 will be held in Antalya on 9-20 November 2026. At the COP28 World Climate Action Summit in Dubai on 1 December 2023, President Erdoğan recalled Türkiye's candidacy to host COP31 and, in the same speech, cited the Zero Waste target of a 60 percent recovery rate by 2035.[145] Under the Türkiye-Australia arrangement finalized at COP30 in Belém, Türkiye holds the presidency and hosts the conference, while Australia holds the Presidency of Negotiations. Türkiye describes this arrangement as an example of a more just and inclusive diplomacy in which no country is left behind.[146] Murat Kurum, Minister of Environment, Urbanization and Climate Change, serves as COP31 President, and Chris Bowen, Australia's Minister for Climate Change and Energy, serves as President of Negotiations.[147]

145 Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, address to the COP28 World Climate Action Summit, Dubai, 1 December 2023; quoted in "2053 yılı itibarıyla net sıfır emisyon hedefini gerçekleştirmeyi öngörüyoruz", Republic of Türkiye Directorate of Climate Change, iklim.gov.tr, News No. 4173, 1 December 2023, accessed 19 October 2026, https://iklim.gov.tr/2053-yili-itibariyla-net-sifir-emisyon-hedefini-gerceklestirmeyi-ongoruyoruz-haber-4173.

146 Republic of Türkiye Directorate of Climate Change, iklim.gov.tr, News No. 4598, 2026.

147 "Türkiye Sets COP31 Dates and Appoints Australian Cattle Farmer as Youth Champion", Climate Home News, 14 April 2026, accessed 19 October 2026, https://www.climatechangenews.com/2026/04/14/turkiye-sets-cop31-dates-and-appoints-australian-cattle-farmer-as-youth-champion/; Republic of Türkiye Directorate of Climate Change, iklim.gov.tr, News No. 4598.

The COP31 process also includes several meetings outside Antalya. The pre-COP meeting was held in Fiji on 5-8 October 2026, and the leaders' event took place in Tuvalu. Part of the preparatory process was thus held in the small island states of the Pacific.[148] The World Leaders Summit is scheduled to take place in Antalya on 11-12 November 2026. In his address to the UN General Assembly on 22 September 2026, President Erdoğan invited the UN membership to the COP31 Leaders Summit (see "Zero Waste in Official Discourse"). In the preparations for COP31, the International Day of Zero Waste on 30 March was also used as an opportunity for public diplomacy. During the 2026 observance, the meetings Minister Kurum held in the United States on 27 March 2026, which included a meeting with UN Secretary-General António Guterres, stood out (see "Diplomatic Contacts ahead of COP31").[149] In its press release No. 56 of 30 March 2026, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs also announced that Türkiye would prioritize the Zero Waste approach throughout the COP31 process (see "Zero Waste in Official Discourse").[150]

The Implementation COP Framework and Türkiye's Bridging Role

SETA's study Toward COP31, dated March 2026, sets out the approach adopted by the Türkiye presidency for COP31. According to the study, Türkiye's vision for COP31 is expressed as "The COP of the Future: The Implementation COP". This vision rests on a narrative in which commitments are no longer sufficient and the need has shifted to concrete, measurable action. COP31 is expected to be built on three core values, namely dialogue, consensus and action.[151] This vision is consistent with the Zero Waste experience. The Ministry, too, reports the Project's eight-year results through concrete and

148 "Türkiye Sets COP31 Dates and Appoints Australian Cattle Farmer as Youth Champion"; "Pre-COP Closing Day Wrap".

149 "Zero Waste and COP31 Diplomacy in the United States", Ministry of Environment, Urbanization and Climate Change, 27 March 2026, accessed 19 October 2026, https://ab.csb.gov.tr/en/news/zero-waste-and-cop31-diplomacy-in-the-united-states-304392.

150 Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Press Release No. 56.

151 SETA, "Toward COP31", *SETA Focus*, 17 March 2026, accessed 19 October 2026, https://www.setav.org/en/toward-cop31.

measurable indicators (see "The Figures and Their Sources"). The emphasis on dialogue and consensus, in turn, matches the multilateral support that Zero Waste gained at the UN through a resolution adopted without a vote.

The same study also addresses Türkiye's bridging role. According to the study, deadlocks in climate negotiations rarely arise from a single issue, and finance and adaptation, technology and trade, and the energy transition and social costs advance in an interconnected way. The bridging role refers to a diplomatic capacity that makes these connections visible and brings forward the points of balance that make progress possible. Türkiye is not among the largest historical polluters in global emissions. This allows Türkiye to adopt a more balanced language in debates on climate justice and burden sharing, and a more comfortable tone when inviting different parties to common goals and implementable solutions.[152] Because Zero Waste was designed as a citizen-facing implementation program rather than a high-ambition pledge, it offers a concrete example of such implementable solutions.

The Zero Waste Foundation as COP31 Participation Infrastructure

On 24 February 2026, the Zero Waste Foundation established the COP31 Digital Coordination Center at cop.sifiratikvakfi.org. The aim of the Center is to ensure the participation of all segments of society, not only states, in the COP31 process.[153] Submissions to the Center's Share Your Idea platform are grouped under thematic headings. These headings are net zero and decarbonization, sustainable cities, waste reduction and resource efficiency, climate justice and inclusion, youth and future generations, nature, land and water, innovation and digital solutions, and global cooperation.[154] Of these, the heading of waste reduction and resource efficiency falls directly within the field of Zero Waste.

152 SETA, "Toward COP31".

153 "Sıfır Atık Vakfı COP31 Dijital Koordinasyon Merkezi'ni Hayata Geçirdi", Anadolu Agency, 24 February 2026, accessed 19 October 2026, https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/gundem/sifir-atik-vakfi-cop31-dijital-koordinasyon-merkezini-hayata-gecirdi/3838821; "COP31 Digital Coordination Center", Zero Waste Foundation, 24 February 2026, accessed 19 October 2026, https://sifiratikvakfi.org/en/zero-waste-foundations-cop31-digital-coordination-center.

154 "Sıfır Atık Vakfı COP31 Dijital Koordinasyon Merkezi'ni Hayata Geçirdi".

The Zero Waste Encyclopedia and the Sustainable COP31 Framework, published by the Foundation ahead of COP31, are discussed in the section "The Three-Level Capacity Model and Zero Waste". The Encyclopedia also provides comparative country-level data on recycling rates, economic benefits, trees saved, greenhouse gas emissions reduced, buildings transformed, target years and projected recycling rates.[155] The Framework, published in December 2025, contains protocols for organizing the conference sustainably as well as mechanisms for stakeholder participation and transparency.[156]

A Youth Climate Champion for COP31 was appointed in April 2026.[157] This attention to youth corresponds to the educational dimension of Zero Waste. Under the Project, 28 million people have received awareness training, and the Twelfth Development Plan (2024-2028) envisages extending Zero Waste to every level of formal education and launching pilot programs at selected universities (see "The Zero Waste Brand and Public Value", "The Figures and Their Sources" and "Local Government Implementation and Public Value").

Diplomatic Contacts ahead of COP31

COP31 President and Minister of Environment, Urbanization and Climate Change Murat Kurum held a series of meetings in the United States on 27 March 2026, on the occasion of the International Day of Zero Waste on 30 March. In these meetings, Kurum presented Türkiye's Zero Waste vision and the COP31 process to civil society representatives in the United States. The Minister also met the UNDP Administrator, the UNEP Executive Director and UN Secretary-General António Guterres. He was accompanied by senior officials of the Ministry and the Directorate of Climate Change.[158] According to the Zero Waste Foundation's statement, the meeting with

155 "Türkiye Releases Zero Waste Encyclopedia Ahead of Hosting COP31"; "Türkiye Launches Zero Waste Encyclopedia Ahead of COP31"; "Türkiye Unveils Zero Waste Encyclopedia Ahead of COP31 Climate Summit".

156 "Zero Waste Foundation Prepares Framework Document for COP31 Ahead of Türkiye's Hosting"; "Zero Waste Foundation Sets Sustainability Framework for COP31 in Türkiye", Türkiye Today, 16 December 2025, accessed 19 October 2026, https://www.turkiyetoday.com/nation/zero-waste-foundation-sets-sustainability-framework-for-cop31-in-turkiye-3211424.

157 "Türkiye Sets COP31 Dates and Appoints Australian Cattle Farmer as Youth Champion".

158 "Zero Waste and COP31 Diplomacy in the United States".

Guterres covered energy security, climate finance, technology transfer and the circular economy. According to the same statement, the program for non-state actors during the visit was led by the President of the Foundation, who also serves as COP31 High-Level Climate Champion. Within this program, private sector and youth-focused solutions were discussed with executives of the UN Global Compact, UNICEF and UNDP. The roundtable held at the Turkish House in New York was attended by more than 80 people, including representatives of the World Bank, the Gates Foundation and the Global Methane Hub.[159]

Climate diplomacy between Türkiye and the EU also intensified in the same period. On 9 April 2026, the Director of Climate Change met the Director for International Affairs and Climate Finance at the European Commission's Directorate-General for Climate Action. The meeting covered the COP31 Action Agenda, adaptation to climate change, the nine thematic priorities of the Türkiye presidency and carbon markets, and the Turkish side asked the EU to take joint leadership on the Action Agenda.[160] Türkiye also took part in the 17th Petersberg Climate Dialogue, held in Berlin in April 2026, as the country holding the COP31 presidency. The Director of Climate Change also met the Deputy Secretary-General of the World Meteorological Organization and officials of the Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage.[161]

The Second Global Zero Waste Forum (Istanbul, June 2026)

The Second Global Zero Waste Forum was held at Istanbul Atatürk Airport on 5-7 June 2026 as the main event of Istanbul Zero Waste Week, which the Governorship of Istanbul and the Zero Waste Foundation ran together on 1-7 June 2026. The Forum was organized by the Zero Waste Foundation under the theme Zero Waste as Climate Action: The Road to Antalya and un-

159 "Türkiye Positioned COP31 Vision at UN Meetings in New York", Zero Waste Foundation, press release, 20 April 2026.

160 Republic of Türkiye Directorate of Climate Change, "Climate Diplomacy Intensifies Between Türkiye and the EU", iklim.gov.tr, News No. 4906, 9 April 2026.

161 Republic of Türkiye Directorate of Climate Change, iklim.gov.tr, News Nos. 4906, 4911, 4927 and 4928.

der the honorary presidency of First Lady Emine Erdoğan. Representatives of 183 countries and more than 120 ministers attended the Forum. According to the organizers' figures, more than 5,000 participants from more than 500 organizations and 247 speakers took part in the Forum. According to Hürriyet Daily News, 5 million people attended the more than 1,500 events held across the city during Zero Waste Week. Participation on this scale roughly five months before Antalya supports the assessment in the section "Zero Waste and Diplomatic Power" that Zero Waste is a lasting diplomatic capacity for Türkiye rather than a temporary message.[162]

The assessment below is based on the Forum's closing bulletin and on the notes the authors took during the sessions.[163] The first theme that stood out at the Forum was the approach of moving from targets to implementation that the Türkiye presidency has adopted for COP31. The high-level sessions voiced the view that the multilateral system now needs finance, working mechanisms and implementable solutions rather than new commitments, plans and declarations of intent. Speakers frequently stressed that considerable progress had been made in bringing different actors together for climate action, but that comparable success had not yet been achieved in implementation. This emphasis is consistent with the Implementation COP vision discussed in the section "The Implementation COP Framework and Türkiye's Bridging Role" and with the assessment in the section "The Domestic Transformation, 2017-2025" based on the measurable results of Zero Waste. Indeed, because Zero Waste presents achieved results rather than future targets, it offers an example well suited to the implementation emphasis of the COP31 presidency.

The second theme that stood out at the Forum was that the transition to a circular economy cannot be achieved by the efforts of states alone. The governance and finance sessions addressed the financing of the circular economy, the shift of zero waste solutions from grant support to growth

162 "Istanbul's Zero Waste Forum Wraps Up with Focus on Circular Economy, Climate Action", *Hürriyet Daily News*, 7 June 2026, accessed 19 October 2026, https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/istanbuls-zero-waste-forum-wraps-up-with-focus-on-circular-economy-climate-action-222983; "Zero Waste Forum in Istanbul Shaped the Road to COP31", Zero Waste Foundation, closing bulletin, 10 June 2026.

163 "Zero Waste Forum in Istanbul Shaped the Road to COP31"; authors' observations, Second Global Zero Waste Forum, Istanbul, 5-7 June 2026. See also Çağla Vural, "Assessing the Zero Waste Forum and the COP31 Process", *SETA Focus*, 23 June 2026, accessed 19 October 2026, https://www.setav.org/en/assessing-the-zero-waste-forum-and-the-cop31-process.

capital, and the role of national governments, cities and the private sector. These sessions recalled that the amount of waste is largely determined at the design, production, supply and logistics stages, and they advocated a multi-actor model in which the private sector also takes direct responsibility in implementation. The President of the Foundation likewise described resource depletion, food waste and climate change as common problems that concern all of humanity and that countries can no longer solve on their own. The sessions stressed that responsibility is shared among all stakeholders and called for the establishment of a continuous and multi-stakeholder international partnership mechanism bringing together countries, cities, research institutions, startups and civil society.

One day of the Forum was devoted entirely to food waste and methane. These sessions addressed the prevention and recovery of food waste together with the reduction of methane emissions and city-level implementation. Because methane is a greenhouse gas that remains in the atmosphere for a short time but has a strong warming effect, reducing food waste was presented as a mitigation route that delivers rapid results. Speakers treated food waste as a matter of justice as well as an efficiency problem. In her opening speech, Emine Erdoğan likewise described food waste as both an environmental and a humanitarian crisis and stated that global hunger could be ended by saving just a quarter of the food that is thrown away.[164] The emphasis on prevention also came to the fore under the heading of the right to repair. The sessions treated the repairability of products, access to spare parts and the extension of product lifetimes as structural climate measures that prevent planned obsolescence and reduce electronic waste. This approach is consistent with the definition of zero waste set out in the section "The Concept of Zero Waste and the Circular Economy", which places prevention at the top of the waste hierarchy. It also makes climate policy more intelligible by linking it to citizens' daily lives.

At the end of the Forum, the organizers announced four outputs. The Road to Antalya Declaration consists of intentions that stakeholders may adopt voluntarily. The City Action Commitments Package contains cities' near-term actions, timelines and support needs, while the Food Waste and

164 "Istanbul's Zero Waste Forum Wraps Up with Focus on Circular Economy, Climate Action".

Methane Action Guide contains scalable interventions and implementation tools that can be applied across the food value chain. The Partnership and Project Pipeline covers implementation-ready partnerships and projects developed through the matchmaking meetings at the Forum.[165] Although these outputs are not binding, they are intended to bring concrete proposals and projects into the COP31 process. In this respect, the Second Forum shows that Türkiye aims to carry Zero Waste to COP31 together with implementation tools. The extent to which these voluntary tools will be reflected in the texts negotiated at COP31 is addressed in the section "Three Forward-Looking Observations".

165 "Zero Waste Forum in Istanbul Shaped the Road to COP31".

CONCLUSION

General Assessment

Zero Waste is a policy that produces concrete results for Türkiye in both domestic policy and climate diplomacy. In domestic policy, the Project forms the operational foundation of the country's transition to a circular economy and carries a system-level reform into citizens' daily lives through regulation-based practices. According to Ministry data, the national recovery rate rose from 13 percent in 2017 to 37.53 percent in 2025, and approximately 180 million tons of greenhouse gas emissions were avoided over the same period (see "The Figures and Their Sources"). The Project has also featured in the assessments of institutions such as the World Bank, the European Environment Agency and the OECD (see "External Assessments"). In climate diplomacy, Zero Waste is Türkiye's most institutionalized policy instrument at the international level. Among Türkiye's climate policies, Zero Waste is the only one that has an international day proclaimed by a UN General Assembly resolution, the 2023-2026 chairmanship of an advisory board established by the UN Secretary-General, and the support of the 105 countries that co-sponsored its draft resolution. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has also announced that Türkiye will prioritize the Zero Waste approach throughout the

COP31 process (see "Zero Waste in Official Discourse" and "The COP31 Presidency and Zero Waste").

On this basis, the report assesses Zero Waste as a lasting element of diplomatic power for Türkiye rather than a temporary message. This assessment rests on the fact that the Project's international gains are based not only on reputation but on the concrete institutional outcomes examined in detail in the section "Zero Waste and Diplomatic Power". Indeed, because the resolution set no end date for the International Day of Zero Waste, the Day is the most lasting of these gains. The Zero Waste Foundation's forum of October 2025 drew participants from 104 countries, and 183 countries were represented at the Second Global Zero Waste Forum in June 2026. This increase shows that international interest in Zero Waste widened ahead of COP31.

Three Forward-Looking Observations

The first observation concerns COP31. The summit in Antalya will show whether the gains Zero Waste has achieved at the UN through an international day and the chairmanship of the Advisory Board will also be reflected in the texts negotiated in the UNFCCC process. The presidency's Implementation COP vision brings to the fore policies whose results can be measured,[166] and the Zero Waste Foundation's COP31 Digital Coordination Center facilitates the participation of different segments of society in the process.[167] Minister Kurum's meetings in the United States in March 2026,[168] the intensified climate diplomacy between Türkiye and the EU,[169] and the Second Global Zero Waste Forum of June 2026 (see "The Second Global Zero Waste Forum (Istanbul, June 2026)") are also part of the diplomatic preparations Türkiye has carried out ahead of COP31. For Zero Waste, the concrete return on these preparations will be the inclusion of the zero waste approach, or of related headings such as waste prevention, food

166 SETA, "Toward COP31".

167 "Sıfır Atık Vakfı COP31 Dijital Koordinasyon Merkezi'ni Hayata Geçirdi".

168 "Zero Waste and COP31 Diplomacy in the United States".

169 Republic of Türkiye Directorate of Climate Change, "Climate Diplomacy Intensifies Between Türkiye and the EU".

waste and methane, in the COP31 decisions and in the initiatives under the Action Agenda.

The second observation concerns the future of the Advisory Board. The Board was established on 12 April 2023 for a period of three years under paragraph 1 of resolution A/RES/77/161, and this period ended in April 2026.[170] In her speech at the International Day of Zero Waste event held in New York on 28 March 2026, UNEP Executive Director Inger Andersen also noted that the Board was concluding its three-year mandate and thanked First Lady Emine Erdoğan for her leadership as Chair of the Board.[171] No decision on extending or renewing the Board's term, or on turning it into a permanent structure, has yet been made public, and UN-Habitat continues to describe the Board within its original three-year framework.

The main question, then, is how the representation of Zero Waste in the UN system will be sustained after the end of the Board's term. The most suitable time to renew the term for a second period, or to turn the Board into a permanent structure within UN-Habitat, drawing also on the UN-Habitat Regional Office for Eastern Europe and Central Asia in Istanbul, is the period of Türkiye's COP31 presidency.[172] Although the International Day of Zero Waste continues without any time limit, with the end of the Board's term the continuation of the Zero Waste agenda at the international level currently rests largely on the Zero Waste Foundation's forums and on Türkiye's COP31 presidency. Giving this agenda a UN structure once again during the COP31 process will be an important step toward making the place of Zero Waste in the UN system permanent.

The third observation concerns Türkiye's national climate commitments. The Updated First Nationally Determined Contribution, submitted in April 2023, identifies the Zero Waste Project as a critical element for the 2053 net zero target and sets the target of raising the recovery rate of municipal waste to 60 percent by 2035. However, the contribution does not quantify the emission reductions that the measures in the waste sector will

170 "Zero Waste is the Name of a Brand New Era We Are Creating with Hope".

171 Inger Andersen, "Reducing Food Waste: A Multi-Purpose Solution for Climate and Economic Health", speech, New York, 28 March 2026, United Nations Environment Programme, accessed 19 October 2026, https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/speech/reducing-food-waste-multi-purpose-solution-climate-and-economic-health.

172 "Zero Waste is the Name of a Brand New Era We Are Creating with Hope".

deliver.[173] In its Second Nationally Determined Contribution, submitted in November 2025 ahead of COP30, Türkiye committed to a reduction of 466 million tons of carbon dioxide equivalent for 2035 relative to the reference scenario and to limiting its emissions to 643 million tons.[174] Climate Law No. 7552 has also given a legal basis to the targets set out in the nationally determined contributions.[175] Reporting the emission reductions achieved under Zero Waste separately in the implementation and reporting of the new contribution will therefore make the Project's contribution to Türkiye's 2053 net zero target measurable.

Policy Priorities

The report's findings also point to four priority areas that are expected to come to the fore in the next phase of the Project. The first is disposal infrastructure. Türkiye has achieved a significant transformation in this field over the past twenty years. According to the national series in Table 1, based on TurkStat data, waste sent to municipal dumpsites fell from approximately 16.5 million tons in 2003 to approximately 3.5 million tons in 2024, while waste sent to treatment facilities rose from approximately 7-8 million tons to 29 million tons. The World Bank's 2022 report, based on 2018 data, states that 54 percent of waste is disposed of in sanitary landfills with gas capture, while 45 percent goes to open dumpsites.[176] Although these two data sets, which rest on different periods and methods, cannot be compared directly, both show the importance of bringing open dumping to a complete end. According to the World Bank, reducing open dumping by 50 percentage points by 2035 could cut greenhouse gas emissions from improperly managed waste by 85 percent compared with 2020.[177] Strengthening disposal infrastructure will therefore also deliver a measurable climate gain in the next phase of the Project.

173 Republic of Türkiye, *Türkiye Updated First Nationally Determined Contribution*.

174 Republic of Türkiye Directorate of Climate Change, "Türkiye Submits Its Second Nationally Determined Contribution to the United Nations".

175 İklim Kanunu (Climate Law), Law No. 7552; "Restoring the Lost Balance on Land and Sea".

176 World Bank, *Türkiye Country Climate and Development Report*, 47.

177 World Bank, *Türkiye Country Climate and Development Report*, 47-48.

The second priority area concerns waste imports and the scope of recovery data. Türkiye's recycling sector processes a significant amount of imported waste in addition to waste collected domestically. In 2024, Türkiye ranked first among the destinations of the EU's exports of recyclable raw materials, receiving 12.3 million tons of the 35.7 million tons shipped from the Union.[178] While this reflects the sector's processing capacity, it also makes it necessary to manage imports in line with domestic recovery targets.

Türkiye has accordingly subjected waste imports to strict rules since 2021. The supplementary circular of 18 May 2021 introduced a per-ton guarantee, shipment tracking and Mobile Waste Tracking System (MoTAT) requirements for waste imports. On the same day, the Ministry of Trade banned the import of polyethylene waste, and in July 2021 it made the import of such waste subject to a licensing requirement.[179] The licensing and quota regime, some elements of which date back to the 2020 circular, has been updated every year since then and is now implemented under the Waste Import Practices Circular 2026/1. Under this regime, recovery facilities importing waste must hold an environmental permit and a Waste Importer Registration Certificate, and import volumes are capped at a set proportion of the facility's licensed processing capacity. Imported plastic waste must also be registered in MoTAT before it can leave the customs area.[180] At this stage, the priority should be to reduce waste imports gradually, in line with the growth in the amount of waste separately collected domestically. The recycling sector's raw material needs can then increasingly be met from domestic sources through the Zero Waste system. Reporting domestically sourced and imported waste separately in recovery data, and regularly publishing import volumes and inspection results, will also make Türkiye's regulatory capacity in this field visible internationally. The EU's new waste shipment regulation,

178 "Exports in Recyclable Raw Materials Decreased in 2024", Eurostat, 24 April 2025, accessed 19 October 2026, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/ddn-20250424-2.

179 "Türkiye: The Government Bans the Import of Plastic Waste Following a Greenpeace Report", Global Trade Alert, intervention No. 85923, accessed 19 October 2026, https://globaltradealert.org/intervention/85923-turkiye-the-government-bans-the-import-of-plastic-waste-following-a-greenpeace-report; "Türkiye: The Government Replaces an Import Ban on Plastic Waste with an Import Licensing Requirement", Global Trade Alert, intervention No. 86745, accessed 19 October 2026, https://globaltradealert.org/intervention/86745-turkiye-the-government-replaces-an-import-ban-on-plastic-waste-with-an-import-licensing-requirement.

180 Ministry of Environment, Urbanization and Climate Change, *Atık İthalatı Uygulamaları Genelgesi 2026/1* (Waste Import Practices Circular 2026/1), 2 January 2026, accessed 19 October 2026, https://webdosya.csb.gov.tr/v2/izmir/2026/03/At-k-thalat-Uygulama-Genelgesi-2026-1-20260306155440.pdf.

which has applied since 21 May 2026, tightens the conditions for exporting waste out of the Union and adds to the importance of this transparency.[181]

The third priority area concerns the social dimension of the Project, and in particular waste pickers. The Circular on waste pickers was issued in 2022 (see "The Zero Waste Brand and Public Value"), but the published data focus on the amount of waste collected and contain no information on the situation of those who do this work. Reporting waste pickers' earnings, occupational safety and participation in the licensed system will link the Project to the just transition debates that are gaining importance on the international climate agenda.

The fourth priority area is the future of the Advisory Board, discussed in the section "Three Forward-Looking Observations". Renewing the Board's term or turning it into a permanent structure within UN-Habitat will ensure that the representation of Zero Waste in the UN system continues after the COP31 presidency ends. Steps taken in these four areas will strengthen both the domestic results of Zero Waste and its international standing.

Scope and Limits of the Report

The sources of the data used in the report are identified in the text and in the footnotes. The headline figures rest largely on the numbers published by the Ministry of Environment, Urbanization and Climate Change and are identified in the text as Ministry data. These data have been considered together with the assessments of UN agencies, the World Bank, the OECD and the European Environment Agency, and with peer-reviewed academic studies. New studies examining the results of Zero Waste practices at the provincial level and the implementation of the 2025 Climate Law will deepen this assessment further. The report makes no prediction about the outcomes of COP31 but assesses the institutional and discursive gains that Zero Waste has achieved to date.

181 Regulation (EU) 2024/1157 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 April 2024 on Shipments of Waste, OJ L, 2024/1157, 30.4.2024, accessed 19 October 2026, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2024/1157/oj.

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REPORT

ZERO WASTE IN TÜRKİYE'S CLIMATE DIPLOMACY

ABDULMENAF TURAN, DİLEK AĞA, ÇAĞLA VURAL

The Zero Waste Project was launched in 2017 under the patronage of Emine Erdoğan, wife of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, and has since been implemented by the Ministry of Environment, Urbanization and Climate Change (MoEUCC). Over its first eight years, the project has yielded measurable domestic outcomes. According to MoEUCC data, the national recovery rate rose from 13 percent in 2017 to 37.5 percent in 2025, while 90 million tons of recyclable waste were processed during this period, generating an economic contribution of 365 billion Turkish lira.

The project has also gained international recognition. In 2022, the UN General Assembly proclaimed 30 March the International Day of Zero Waste through a resolution submitted by Türkiye and co-sponsored by 105 countries. Furthermore, Emine Erdoğan assumed the chairmanship of the Advisory Board established by the UN Secretary-General for the 2023–2026 term, and the UN-Habitat Regional Office for Eastern Europe and Central Asia was opened in Istanbul.

This report argues that Zero Waste serves a dual function for Türkiye. On the one hand, the project constitutes the operational foundation of the country's transition to a circular economy; on the other, it provides Türkiye's climate diplomacy with an institutionalized policy instrument. Within this framework, the report examines the project's domestic transformation outcomes, its achievements within the UN system, and the preparations undertaken by Türkiye, which holds the presidency of COP31 to be held in Antalya in November 2026. The report further proposes four priority areas for the next phase of the project: disposal infrastructure, the management of waste imports, the social dimension of the project, and the future of the Advisory Board.

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