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Investing in rural people in **Türkiye**

The Republic of Türkiye occupies a unique geographical and cultural position at the crossroads of Europe and Asia. Türkiye has a total land area of 78 million hectares and a population of 85 million. It is estimated that the country is currently hosting more than 3.5 million refugees. About one third of the land is arable, and 17.3 per cent of the population lives in rural areas, but this share is declining. Türkiye has the largest agricultural economy in Europe and is a regional hub for the production, processing and export of food to large European and Middle Eastern markets. Türkiye's agriculture and food industry sector employs about 20 per cent of the workforce and contributes about 7 per cent to GDP.

Since the formation of the modern state of Türkiye in 1923, the economy has grown rapidly. It is a mixed economy, with the private sector playing a dominant role. Türkiye is an upper-middle-income country with a young population. In 2002, gross national income was US\$2,490 per capita, which had increased to US\$13,110 by 2023. There are wide disparities in income between the more prosperous, industrialized parts of the country in the west and south-west, and the less developed provinces in the rest of Türkiye. The social sector is facing challenges, such as poverty, unemployment and inequality. The proportion of the population living below the national poverty line in 2023 is estimated at 15.6 per cent.

Eradicating rural poverty in Türkiye

IFAD supports the Government of Türkiye's poverty reduction efforts, which prioritize the development of economically depressed regions. In terms of rural development, Türkiye's Twelfth National Development Plan (NDP, 2024–2028) envisions the



country as an environmentally friendly, disaster-resistant, technologically advanced and prosperous nation, with a focus on fair income distribution, consistent growth and a strong economy. The NDP aims at: (i) stimulating the rural economy, (ii) ensuring sustainable natural resource management, (iii) enhancing the quality of life to maintain population levels in rural areas; (iv) achieving sustainable development that aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), (v) ensuring resilience to the effects of climate change, (vi) transitioning the economy to low carbon, and (vii) fostering social justice with a focus on environmental protection. In remote areas, particularly in mountainous regions, the lack of physical and social infrastructure, such as schools and hospitals, drinking water and irrigation, exacerbates the isolation of rural people.

IFAD's strategy in Türkiye

Türkiye is IFAD's largest recipient of financial assistance in the Europe and Central Asia subregion. Since 1982, IFAD has invested in 11 agricultural projects and programmes, benefiting around 1.5 million people, for a total cost of US\$698 million, of which US\$251.84 million is IFAD financing. Investments supported by the Fund contribute to narrowing regional disparities and introducing innovations, such as matching grants benefitting poor households, solar-powered irrigation systems, adapted integrated pest management practices, production in greenhouses, and natural resource management initiatives.

IFAD investments in Türkiye contribute to reducing rural poverty in the upland areas of the country. IFAD's strategy focuses on improving the access of productive poor people to markets, strengthening climate change resilience and consolidating agricultural value chains.

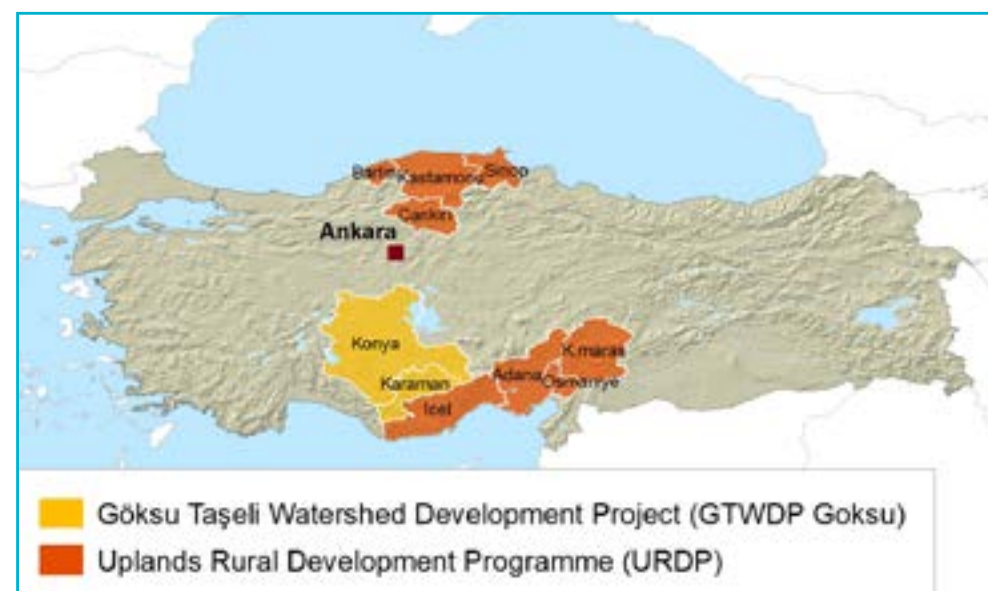
Projects are designed to support farmers, especially those with limited resources, moving from subsistence farming to more commercial farming. With support, farmers can improve the quality and consumer appeal of their products, and make farming a viable business.

Two key strategic objectives guide IFAD's engagement in Türkiye:

- Enhance market access for productive poor smallholder farmers
- Mainstream sustainable natural resource management in upland agricultural production and increase climate resilience.

IFAD seeks to bring about more sustainable use of natural resources, promote climate-smart strategies and leverage opportunities from the growing involvement of farmers organizations and the private sector in agriculture.

Ongoing operations



Göksu Taşeli Watershed Development Project (2015–2025)

The Göksu Taşeli Watershed Development Project is implemented in 11 districts of the Konya and Karaman provinces in Central Anatolia. It targets 32,000 households, consisting of productive smallholder farming households, poor households as well as nomadic communities, most of which are engaged in producing fruit and field crops, raising small ruminants and investing in establishing greenhouses and irrigation facilities. Total project costs are US\$25 million, of which IFAD financing accounts for US\$18.29 million.

The goal of the project is to reduce rural poverty by supporting economic diversification. The project is aimed at increasing farmers' incomes through improved agricultural production and marketing activities, and strengthening resilience to climate shocks. The project also focuses on improving the living standards of transhumant pastoralist families in the Taurus Mountains by improving natural resource management.

The expected project outcomes are:

- increased farm productivity and production
- higher prices for products produced by smallholders
- adoption of climate-resilient natural resource management practices.

In 2021, the project provided mountain-dwelling herders with caravans – offering improved living conditions marked by comfort, hygiene and safety.

For goat shepherd **Zekeriya Karaer**, the arrival of the caravan represented a pivotal moment that determined whether he would continue or abandon the longstanding farming tradition. Faced with the responsibility of supporting his family amid escalating animal feed costs and the unforgiving conditions of the mountains, he contemplated seeking alternative employment. However, the introduction of the mobile shelter in 2021 changed everything.

“We used to live in tents where dust, insects and even snakes posed constant threats, instilling a sense of fear. Snow would seep in as well,” reflects Zekeriya. “But now, thanks to the caravan, we can sustain our farming practices while enjoying significantly enhanced comfort.”

With the newfound stability afforded by the caravan, Zekeriya has been able to rear healthier and larger goats, fetching prices 20 per cent above the market average for his livestock. Additionally, the family capitalizes on surplus milk production by making cheese and yogurt to sell.

With grazing expenses slashed by a third and dairy output on the rise, the family's financial prospects have improved considerably. “It feels like a dream, like a true home,” Zekeriya marvels.



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The **agriculture and food industry** sector employs about 20 per cent of Türkiye's workforce and contributes about **7 per cent to GDP**.

Türkiye is a **regional hub** for the **production, processing and export of food** to large European and Middle Eastern markets.

Uplands Rural Development Programme (2017–2027)

The programme is designed to increase economic opportunities for poor smallholder farmers in the uplands of Türkiye. It aims to enhance their prosperity and resilience by connecting farms and agribusinesses and integrating them into more profitable economic clusters while making sustainable use of natural resources and increasing the climate-adaptive capacity of smallholders. The programme also aims to mobilize private financial resources to support agribusiness development and improve access to financial services. The total programme cost is US\$104.51 million, of which US\$62.88 million is IFAD financing.

The activities currently involve eight provinces in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Western Black Sea regions, where farmland and pasture are mostly more than 600 metres above sea level and where most forest villages are located. The programme aims to target around 47,400 households, including some transhumant pastoralist families. Target groups include economically active poor people who are producing at semi-subsistence level and those with potential to produce more, as well as transformation drivers (suppliers, traders and agribusinesses).

Expected outcomes of the project are:

- development of value chains in economic development clusters
- higher quality and prices for products produced by smallholders
- adoption of climate-resilient natural resource management practices.

Sevim Şahin, aged 28, is married with two children. She oversees the milking process at her family business. She finds fulfilment in rural life and the care of animals, a passion shared by her family, who are also involved in animal husbandry.

During the winter months, she collects an average of 45 litres of milk per day, a figure that rises to 200 litres during the summer. “We all have a stake in the earnings derived from milk production,” she explains.

Before the establishment of the Mescit milk collection centre, facilitated by a project initiative, the family would convert milk into cheese and yogurt for sale at local markets. Sevim acknowledges that this was an arduous endeavour, its returns less than satisfactory. However, with the advent of milk collection centres, their income from milk sales has substantially improved, eliminating losses attributed to spoilage.

“My family have managed to settle their debts and now we are planning for future business expansion”, she added.



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IFAD is an international financial institution and a United Nations specialized agency. Based in Rome – the United Nations food and agriculture hub – IFAD invests in rural people, empowering them to reduce poverty, increase food security, improve nutrition and strengthen resilience. Since 1978, we have provided more than US\$24 billion in grants and low-interest loans to fund projects in developing countries.

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Investing in rural people

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