

 Pillar 1.
EDUCATION AND LEARNING

SABANCI FOUNDATION

Philanthropic network memberships: a trigger for climate engagement

- **Country:** Turkey
- **Number of staff:** 23
- **Year of incorporation:** 1974
- **Type:** Corporate foundation
- **Endowment:** Yes
- **More information:** sabancivakfi.org

The Sabancı family established the Sabancı Foundation almost fifty years ago to organise their social responsibility and philanthropic activities. The family's wealth derives from Hacı Ömer Sabancı's successful entrepreneurship when, in the 1920s, he began building one of the largest industrial conglomerates in Turkey. The group now operates in several countries and across diverse sectors, including financial services, industrial, energy, construction and retail. Twenty years after the Foundation was established, the group founded the Sabancı University as an important arm of their philanthropic work, focused on educational, cultural and social development in Turkey. In addition to maintaining the university, since 1947 they have also provided 51 000 scholarships in different knowledge fields.

Sabancı's journey towards engaging climate-related issues forms part of the Foundation's adoption of a more strategic approach to philanthropy. After decades of philanthropic activity, in 2007 the Foundation restructured its grantmaking and decided to focus on three target groups: women, youth and people with disabilities. Since then, more than 180 projects have been supported, including initiatives led by civil society organisations that work to combat child and forced marriage, a recently developed programme to increase women's participation in the Turkish economy¹, the Changemakers programme² and the Zero Project Conference on Accessibility³,

¹ "Young Women Building Their Future," Sabancı Vakfı, <https://www.sabancivakfi.org/en/social-change/young-women-building-their-future>

² "Changemakers," Sabancı Vakfı, <https://www.sabancivakfi.org/en/social-change/changemakers>

³ "Zerocon2022 - accessibility," Zero Project Conference 2022, Zero Project, <https://zeroproject.org/zerocon22>

among other examples.

With the evolution of its new strategic approach, the Foundation felt the need to strengthen the connection between local civil society and international philanthropy by positioning itself as a bridge between international networks and platforms and local organisations. In these international spaces, the Foundation realised how important it was to engage on climate change issues.

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“Our Chairperson is on top of this crisis, and she is very sensitive to climate issues. In her recent philanthropy letter, she mentioned our climate work and committed to continue to respond to the climate emergency.”

– NEVGÜL BİSEL SAFKAN, GENERAL MANAGER OF THE SABANCI FOUNDATION

Joining international climate collaboratives

The Sabancı Foundation has a long tradition of membership in philanthropy support organisations (PSOs). They are founding members of the Third Sector Foundation of Turkey (TÜSEV) and the European Foundation Center’s Disability and Gender Thematic Networks, and a member of the US Council on Foundations (COF). In 2020, Sabancı Foundation became a member of the Governing Board of the European Foundation Centre (EFC). They actively participated in the merging of EFC and DAFNE (Donors and Foundations Networks in Europe) which resulted in the creation of the Philanthropy Europe Association, or Philea, which hosts the European Philanthropy Climate Coalition⁴ – a coalition that leverages philanthropy climate networks in Europe.

As international engagement grew, the Foundation realised that climate was a problem they could no longer ignore. In 2021, they joined the Foundations 20 Platform (F20)⁵ – a network of more than 80 foundations and philanthropic organisations from G20 countries that advocate for joint transnational action towards sustainable development and future-proofed pathways towards solutions to climate and biodiversity crises.

⁴ “European Philanthropy Coalition for Climate,” Philea, <https://philea.eu/how-we-can-help/initiatives/philanthropy-coalition-for-climate/>

⁵ Foundations 20 Platform (F20), <https://foundations-20.org/>

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“When we heard that ‘all foundations are climate foundations’ we were very impressed by this saying. Being a part of F20 accelerated our learning”.

– NEVGÜL BİSEL SAFKAN, GENERAL MANAGER OF THE SABANCI FOUNDATION

The F20 Platform facilitated the Foundation’s deeper understanding of climate-related threats and opportunities. The Foundation surveyed its beneficiaries and the broader Turkish population to gain insight into their climate-related interests and main concerns. The results confirmed that the Turkish population feels that climate change is a critical social issue for the next few years. While the survey was being conducted, Turkey experienced severe wildfires – a pivotal moment in which the country was compelled to confront that the climate crisis was not far in the future.

The Foundation established an emergency fund to address the crisis and supported non-profit organisations and local governments to tackle its impact. This practical experience highlighted how difficult it was to respond to climate emergencies as they were happening. The international and national stimulus encouraged the Sabancı team to build a roadmap that integrates climate into their grantmaking programmes.

Mainstreaming climate into their portfolio

The Sabancı team is experimenting with several tactics to push for more climate action and to increase climate awareness in Turkey. They organised an online seminar to discuss ‘The Role of Philanthropy in the Post-Pandemic World’, which assessed the potential of new approaches, the role of philanthropy regarding climate change and disasters, as well as gender equality and education. The Foundation has held an awards ceremony for the Fifth Sabancı Short Film Competition, themed ‘Changing Climate, Changing Lives’, with the motto ‘Short Film, Long Impact’. They published a book series to educate children about climate change, which the Ministry of Education distributed to over 100 000 public schools and libraries across Turkey. The extent of climate-related projects within their portfolio continues to grow. The Foundation supported the creation of a Turkish chapter of Roots & Shoots⁶ – a global movement led by the renowned scientist Jane Goodall that promotes young people’s

⁶ Roots & Shoots, <https://rootsandshootsturkey.org/>

power. This is helping to expand Sabancı's network of climate experts and young activists in the country.

This climate focus is beginning to extend well beyond Sabancı's philanthropic work to the entire Sabancı group. Each Sabancı company has its own climate commitment and all of them share common values while working on climate issues together. The Sabancı University has opened an academic division focused on climate change – the Istanbul International Center For Energy and Climate⁷ – that helps the Foundation gain more technical and academic knowledge.

There are only a few stakeholders leading climate action on the ground in Turkey, which Sabancı wants to contribute towards changing. The Sabancı Foundation has recently signed the International Philanthropy Commitment on Climate Change and, considering all they have done in just a few years, the potential to grow is enormous.

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⁷ Istanbul International Center For Energy and Climate, <https://iicec.sabanciuniv.edu/>