

# Evren Özlu - General Manager, Boehringer Ingelheim

## Turkey

---



***Agility is of paramount importance and the COVID-19 pandemic has engendered huge changes in market dynamics***

---

31.08.2021

Tags: [Turkey](#), [Boehringer Ingelheim](#), [Strategy](#), [Africa](#), [MEA](#)

---

*Evren Özlü, General Manager of Turkey and Sub-Saharan Africa at Boehringer Ingelheim, discusses the company's double-digit growth in the last year, and its leading position as one of the fastest growing pharmaceutical companies in Turkey across Human Pharma and Animal Health. Özlü highlights diabetes and specialty care as the main drivers of Boehringer Ingelheim's success and explains their recent and upcoming investments in localization and clinical trials.*

### **Can you briefly introduce your career in the pharmaceutical industry after more than 25 years working with companies such as Boehringer Ingelheim, Abbott and Roche?**

I started my career in the healthcare industry in 1994 and have spent the last 27 years working for different multinationals including Roche, Abbott, and Boehringer Ingelheim.

During my 11-year tenure at Boehringer Ingelheim, I have held several leadership positions, including Sales and Marketing Director as well as Head of Marketing for the Middle East, Turkey and Africa (META) region. I'm currently the General Manager for Turkey, overseeing in-country operations of the company; a role that has expanded in the last year, placing the Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) region within my remit.

**From a strategic point of view, how do you reconcile the differences between Turkey, a country that enjoys a strong healthcare infrastructure and where over 95 percent of the population is covered by the public healthcare system, with the reality of some Sub-Saharan countries?**

Both sub-regions provide different sets of challenges and opportunities. My colleagues and I work diligently within each market to provide specific solutions that deliver on our mission of creating value through innovation. We aim to make equally significant contributions to healthcare in Turkey and Sub-Saharan Africa by focusing on diseases which are yet to be adequately addressed. We innovate to make breakthrough therapies and life-enhancing improvements available to patients and to provide advanced, preventive animal healthcare. While we strive to achieve our objectives primarily by organic growth, we also seek to forge strong partnerships and alliances with local stakeholders, such as government entities, healthcare institutes and medical societies, to ensure success.

**Before discussing the specificities of the Turkish market, can you explain how the fact that Boehringer Ingelheim is a privately-owned company allows you to put in place a strategy that is not beholden to short-term results?**

As a family-owned company, Boehringer Ingelheim has always planned in generations – a policy we have sustained since our foundation in 1885. Our passion for healthcare for more than 130 years comes from believing in the value of our work beyond its commercial potential.

We focus on long-term performance rather than being driven by short-term profits and we hold ourselves to the highest standards of excellence. We aspire to continuously set new benchmarks in healthcare innovation across our two business areas, human pharmaceuticals and animal health, by developing solutions to address unmet medical needs. We aim to make significant contributions to healthcare and focus on diseases which are yet to be adequately treated and we invest in research and treatments accordingly.

For instance, in 2020, R&D investments in the Human Pharma business amounted to EUR 3.28 billion, equivalent to 22.8 percent of net sales. In parallel, we currently have around 100 active projects across all phases of the research process. Our goal is for 75 percent of these projects to deliver the first molecule in their active ingredient class or in a new therapeutic area, and for more than half of these projects to have breakthrough potential.

**You mentioned in a recent press release that the 2020 results were very positive for the affiliate, growing 54 percent and ranking within the top 15 in Turkey. Can you explain what drove this performance?**

As General Manager, one of my primary objectives was to organize and deploy our teams efficiently to execute our new product launches, and in doing so, grow our presence, footprint, and reputation within the country.

Agility is of paramount importance and the COVID-19 pandemic has engendered huge changes in market dynamics, as across all industry sectors. We have successfully navigated the challenges through our corporate mindset of flexibility and have responded to the drivers of change through experimentation, implementation of the most effective solutions as standard operational practice in the new normal. We took prompt action to shift our activities from face-to-face to digital interactions to maintain operations and ensure business continues despite the unprecedented pressures faced. Our omni-channel digital engagements were conducted through websites and applications that what have put to the service of our stakeholders to provide uninterrupted advisory service. This approach has enabled us to navigate the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and secure double-digit growth in 2020, but more importantly continue to serve our customers and patients through unprecedented times.

**You have said that the company brought you back from Dubai to execute an intense product launch phase. How challenging has that experience been in Turkey?**

Preparation is key when it comes to product launches within the pharmaceutical industry, and such level of preparedness requires time and effort. In addition to preparation, we have to demonstrate agility, adaptability and be quick on our feet to navigate complex and rapidly evolving market conditions.

We are proud of our portfolio of innovative products and global network of supportive organizations, including affiliated agencies, that are always on-hand to ensure smooth and successful execution of launches.

Additionally, the pharmaceutical market in Turkey boasts a solid infrastructure and is well regulated. While launching the products, it is very important to understand the needs of your key stakeholders, specifically those of our governmental stakeholders. Closely understanding their

requirements enables us to be ready to respond to requests or requirements and adapt our approach in case of environmental change and challenges. With this approach, we launched five new treatments in the past five years, with a strong pipeline of new indications and products.

**To better understand the launch process you have explained, what is your focus in terms of therapeutic areas in Turkey? How does it differ from the global portfolio?**

The two main therapeutic areas for Boehringer Ingelheim in Turkey are diabetes - which we categorize under 'metabolism' - and specialty care, which encompasses rare diseases such as idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis (IPF) and scleroderma - interstitial lung disease. Diabetes in particular will continue to be a focus area for us in Turkey, given its high and growing prevalence.

We see tremendous potential within the Turkish market, especially considering the size of the population - around 85 million - and the country's demographic trends. There is increasing awareness of disease areas among the wider public, as well as a desire at a policy level to implement comprehensive healthcare coverage for over 95 percent of the population. This is particularly encouraging, as 10 percent of the population is expected to be over the age of 65 in the next few years. Moreover, a recent report by IQVIA projects that Turkey is set to become the 14th largest pharmaceutical market in the world.

We will continue to invest further in Turkey, as we strongly believe in the bright future of the market. Based on the country's registration timelines and activities, the next five years will see us introducing products in line with our organization's global investment and portfolio.

We are currently focusing on new treatment modalities developed from research and clinical trials and are committed to localization through increasing investment in local manufacturing and by utilizing national talent where possible.

**From a leadership perspective, what are the necessary traits to be a successful country president in Turkey considering the high number of Turkish nationals leading multinational companies in the country?**

I believe that a strong set of values is fundamental to anyone in a position of leadership. My framework of ethics is my North Star, guiding me through any opportunity or challenge. I am blessed to work with Boehringer Ingelheim - an organization that has given me such a solid sense

of purpose and one that has enhanced my strong values.

This, along with agility, ambition, innovation and resilience, and the support and backing of a strong global and regional network, is what helps me navigate complexity.

Ultimately, the overriding principle is to truly care about creating value and positive impact for humans and animals, and to have their best interests at heart.

**Talking about ambition, what are your aspirations with Boehringer Ingelheim and beyond?**

What motivates me personally is the ability to learn and grow, both professionally and as an individual. I relish the challenges that enable me to dig deep to deliver the solutions that can provide the very best healthcare for our customers in my sphere of operations and to play a role in enabling all members of the community to enjoy a better standard of life.

I look forward to a future that presents more opportunities for more strategic roles within the Boehringer Ingelheim family and to contribute to its mission and ambitions across different regions.

**Is there a final message you would like to convey to our audience about Turkey and the potential of its healthcare market?**

Turkey is a unique and rapidly emerging market. It is also a market where executives can broaden their experience and cultivate their skills and capabilities, making it a great platform to grow one's career. I truly believe in the future of the country and the opportunities it will continue to present for the pharmaceutical industry. I look forward to a promising future of growth for Turkey and for Boehringer Ingelheim.

[See more interviews](#)