

# TURKEY: COUNTRY SUMMARY

May 2021

This country summary is part of a larger [resource set](#), providing practitioners with examples of different approaches to linking CVA and social protection.

## OVERVIEW

### Emergency Context

- **The world's largest refugee population**, with 3.6 million Syrian nationals and approximately 320,000 of other nationalities. Over 98 percent of refugees live outside of camps.
- **High rates of poverty and vulnerability among refugees** – a [2020 WFP](#) report estimated that 45 percent of refugee households lived in poverty, 7 percent were living in extreme poverty, and 39 percent suffer from multidimensional poverty. Although registered refugees may apply for work permits, most registered refugees work informally and irregularly.
- **The COVID-19 pandemic has led to an economic downturn**; refugees have lost their jobs and incomes, [causing poverty and vulnerability to increase](#). The economic contractions, partially caused by the pandemic and coupled with the rising needs of the national and refugee population, are putting a strain on Government capacity.
- **A robust legal framework for extending rights and services in national systems**, including social protection, to refugees based on the 2013 Law on Foreigners and International Protection and the Temporary Protection Regulation.

### Social Protection Context

- A well-developed national social protection system comprised of 4 pillars: universal health insurance (contributory but Government pays the contributions for those below a certain income threshold), non-contributory social assistance, contributory social insurance, and social services.
- **Social assistance is a significant segment** of the social protection system. Between 2005 and 2013, the Government launched several programmes, including providing support to vulnerable groups (e.g., female-headed households), flagship conditional cash transfer programmes for education and healthcare, and social pensions for the elderly and persons with disabilities.
- The Government has **a state of the art single-registry** housed in the Ministry of Family and Social Services (MoFSS) known as the [Integrated Social Assistance Information System \(ISAIS\)](#). This harmonized digital platform handles application/registration, eligibility determination, payments, and M&E for all social assistance programmes. Leveraging the National ID system, ISAIS can cross-check applicant information across data from 22 other public institutions. It also links to various financial service providers for payments. The Turkish Red Crescent (TRC) and the Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundations (SASF) provide implementation support for cash and in-kind assistance, including handling applications and conducting household assessments.
- **Backed by a solid legal and policy framework**, the Turkish social protection system allows non-citizens to access support. For instance, the Law on Social Assistance and Solidarity allows foreigners legally residing in Turkey (an ID starting with 99 and a registered address being the prerequisites) to access social assistance through existing infrastructure and processes. Refugees are eligible to apply for various social assistance programmes, most of them cash-based. To minimize exclusion errors, the SASF allowance practices were designed and introduced to the Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN) Programme with the aim of meeting basic needs of vulnerable individuals. The Regulation on Work Permits of Refugees under Temporary Protection allows legally registered refugees to obtain work permits, thereby allowing refugees to access formal employment and the social security system (unemployment, disability, retirement insurance). The [Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan \(3RP\)](#) for Turkey aligns with the country's [11th Development Plan \(2019–23\)](#). Cash transfers have been a part of the refugee response since 2012.

## Relevant Social Protection Programming

### Conditional Cash Transfer for Education (CCTE)

**Objectives:** To encourage enrolment and improve school attendance of children. Started in 2003.

**Coverage:** Over 2.5 million children are enrolled under the CCTE receiving cash transfers which includes 1 840 304 Turkish children (May 2021 data) and 695,556 non-Turkish children (May 2021 data) benefitting from the CCTE for Syrians and Other Refugees

**Programme Components:** Provides bi-monthly cash support to families with children enrolled in public primary, secondary school, or high-school education. Different amounts are provided based on level of education and gender.

**Administrative set-up:** Ministry of Family and Social Services (MoFSS) Services (MoFSS implements the CCTE in partnership with the Ministry of National Education (MoNE). The education management information system (E-OKUL) tracks and verifies attendance and links to the ISAIS for compliance monitoring.

**Eligibility /Targeting Mechanism:** The CCTE was designed as a programme that would be open to all nationals and foreigners provided that: all family members are registered in Turkey, the family has no regular income, no member of the family receives social security, and the family must have at least one school-going child.

From 2017 the CCTE for Syrians and Other Refugees Programme has been implemented as an extension of the National CCTE Programme, which includes foreign children of school-age residing in Turkey, in a partnership among the MoFSS, the MoNE, the TRC, and UNICEF.

Unlike the National CCTE Programme, the CCTE for Syrians and Other Refugees Programme is comprised of two components, namely the Cash Transfer Component and the Child Protection Component.

For **out-of-school children**, defined as children that have not been enrolled in formal education for three or more years, the Accelerated Learning (ALP) Programme was developed. The programme aims to prepare them for re-integration into the formal education. These children are also eligible to apply for the CCTE for Syrians and Other Refugees Programmes.

Applications to the programme are screened using the ISAIS and attendance data is also obtained to monitor adherence with conditionalities. Key operations for non-Turkish children are primarily undertaken by the TRC with some support from UNICEF. The TRC carries out extensive data verification activities, manages the relationship with the financial provider, distributes cards, provides sensitization activities, etc. UNICEF conducts data verification so that data sets may be compared. The subsequent transfers are executed by TRC. The TRC follows up with Child Protection activities in accordance with the national CCTE Programme. Refugee children residing in Turkey benefit from the CCTE for Refugees Programme.

**Delivery Mechanism:** Within the scope of the CCTE for Syrians and Other Refugees Programme, funds are transferred through Kizilaykarts, which function as a debit card. The recipients of the assistance can withdraw cash from ATMs or use them with point-of-sale (POS) devices.

## Timeline of Key Social Protection and CVA Developments

**2012:** TRC and WFP initiated a [food e-voucher programme](#) for refugees in camps leveraging the TRC's cash card, called the Kizilaykart

**2015:** EU-Turkey Joint Action Plan (JAP) was activated at the EU-Turkey Summit in Brussels.

**2015:** The Cash-based Interventions Technical Working Group (CBI-TWG) was formed to provide a more coordinated and harmonized approach to cash-based interventions.

**2015:** WFP and TRC developed a pilot [Off-Camp Programme](#) providing e-food vouchers to Syrians living outside of camps.

**2015/16:** [The First Stage Needs Assessment for Syrians under Temporary Protection in Turkey](#) was conducted to guide FRIT's (see below) response. NGOs assisted refugees with vouchers for food.

**2016:** In line with the JAP, the [EU Facility for the Refugees in Turkey](#) (FRIT) became operational in 2016. The [2016 FRIT concept note](#) recommends the Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN) programme as the "main vehicle for humanitarian assistance".

**2016:** UNICEF conducted a feasibility assessment on using the national social protection system to deliver cash support to refugees.

**2016:** [Emergency Social Safety Net](#) for refugees based on a demographic targeting model was launched under the FRIT initiative by WFP and TRC.

**2017:** A [Workshop](#) convened to discuss the challenges households faced in accessing the ESSN and proposed ways to support ESSN ineligible refugee households. This led to the SASF Discretionary Fund (see below)

**2017:** UNICEF, TRC, MoFSS and MoNE launch the [Conditional Cash Transfer for Education for Refugees as an extension to national flagship CCTE](#) programme under the FRIT initiative.

**2017:** ESSN Protection Component introduced to support households requiring protection interventions.

**2018:** the SASF Discretionary Allowance was introduced as a tool to address exclusion errors

**2019:** Kizilaykart incorporates three livelihoods programmes – Adult Language Training Programme (UNDP and MoNE), Vocational Course Incentive Project and the Vocational Training Incentive Project (this benefit extends to Turkish citizens)

**2020:** As of April 2020, IFRC took over from WFP and continued the ESSN programme in partnership with the Turkish Red Crescent.

**2021:** Introduction of the Complementary ESSN (C-ESSN) project, directly managed by the MoFSS, which aims to provide assistance to the most vulnerable households who were benefitting from the ESSN Programme, but who cannot be referred to livelihoods, by transferring them to the C-ESSN Programme.

## EXAMPLES OF CVA PROGRAMME LINKAGES

- The Turkish Red Crescent, in partnership with WFP, initiated the first CVA programme for refugees in Turkey in 2012. **The food e-voucher** programme provided food assistance to camp-based refugees through the TRC's innovative platform, which consists of CVA programmes, but also includes various other services, such as protection (**Kizilaykart**). The TRC initially developed the Kizilaykart to provide cash support to Turkish citizens. The Kizilaykart is a multi-wallet system used to provide sectoral and multisectoral support, including basic needs, education, livelihoods, and protection.
- As part of its COVID-19 response, WFP aligned the transfer value of its one-off top-up to the in-camp food e-vouchers with the amount provided by the Government to vulnerable Turkish households **under its emergency** response plan. Similarly, the ESSN provided 1000 Turkish Lira (TRY) as a COVID-19 top up to all ESSN recipients.
- **The Turkish Red Crescent (TRC) and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent (IFRC) currently manage the Emergency Social Safety Net** (WFP and TRC implemented the first phase of the ESSN (2017–2019)). The ESSN is a **multipurpose, unconditional monthly cash transfer targeting six different demographic categories of vulnerable immigrants** living under temporary protection and international protection, most of whom are Syrian refugees living outside of camps. The six targeting demographic categories (i.e., criteria) are households with four or more children, households with a dependency ratio greater than 1.5, households with a single parent and children, households with one or more persons with a disability, single females, and lone older adults (60 years and older).
- **In 2021, the transfer rates were as follows:** ESSN monthly assistance transfer in Turkish Lira: 155/person/month; Disability top ups: 600/HH/month; Quarterly top-ups: 600 for 1–4 person households; 300 for 5–8 person households; 100 for 9+ person households.
- Designed to be a longer-term cash transfer programme, the **ESSN aims to foster the self-reliance of refugee households**. Households receive the **Kizilayhart debit card**, which can be used to withdraw funds at ATMs or used in shops to cover basic needs. While the ESSN leverages different aspects of the national social protection assistance system, the programme's design responds to the humanitarian needs of refugees. There is no equivalent national programme.
- The ESSN relies on **SASFs for enrolment and verification**, as this is their role in the national system. In areas with large refugee concentrations, TRC service centres perform these functions alongside the SASFs to reduce the burden on the national system. TRC also handles all **grievances and complaints about the ESSN and the CCTE** (see below) through the 168 TRC Call Centres which provides service in 5 languages. **The ESSN leverages the ISAIS for determining the eligibility of refugee households**, though modifications were needed to reflect better the situation of refugee households.
- The **ESSN Task Force**, which sat under the **Basic Needs Working Group (BNWG) until the end of the ESSN-3**, in order to **support and coordinate linkages with other humanitarian programmes**, is now organized jointly with the IFRC. However, updates related to the ESSN-4 Programme are still shared during relevant Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP) meetings. For instance, the Kizilaykart Platform Information Exchange Mechanisms allows other CVA actors to cross-check their recipient lists against the ESSN to reduce overlaps in targeting.
- In 2017, the **SASF Discretionary Allowance** was introduced to address exclusion errors, by integrating vulnerable households previously excluded from the ESSN; this tool includes an assessment process by SASF staff with HH visits and a questionnaire that ranks HHs into categories. Selected HH are then enrolled in the ESSN.
- In 2021, the **Complementary ESSN (C-ESSN) project**, managed by the MoFSS, was introduced for the most vulnerable households on the ESSN Programme, those who were not eligible to be referred to livelihood programmes, but who would, instead be transferred to the C-ESSN Programme.

- In 2017, **UNICEF launched the Conditional Cash Transfer for Education for Syrians and Other Refugees in partnership with the MoFSS, the MoNE,** and the Turkish Red Crescent to extend the national flagship CCTE programme to formally registered school-age refugee children. As of May 2021, the CCTE for Refugees has supported nearly 700,000 refugee children, implementing the CCTE cash component nationally and the child protection component in the 15 provinces with the highest incidence of refugees.
- **The design of the CCTE for refugees was aligned with the national CCTE to minimize social tensions between refugees and Turkish citizens:** it follows the same transfer value, the same payment frequency and the same conditions as the national programme. However, the national programme was not designed to meet the specific needs of refugee children. UNICEF and TRC, therefore in consultation with CCTE partners, **introduced programme variations to better respond to the challenges and needs faced by refugee families.** A lumpsum transfer is given at the beginning of each semester to cover some additional school-related expenses which includes a motivational top up for older children to retain them in education. In addition to those enrolled in public schools, refugee children enrolled in Temporary Education Centres, and **Accelerated Learning Programmes** are also eligible for the cash transfer.
- SASFs (and TRC service centres) accept applications for the CCTE for refugees, and information is verified using ISAIS and TRC's Göçmen System. Like the national CCTE programme, **payments are conditional on 80 per cent attendance,** which translates to absenteeism up to four days per month. UNICEF worked with the MoFSS and the MoNE to develop a management information system to track attendance and link it with ISAIS.
- **The CCTE for refugees also shares common administrative structures with the ESSN,** such as the payment platform, a unified call centre/helpline, helping to reduce duplication and streamline assistance. There were initial concerns that the different payment schedules of the ESSN (delivered every month) and the CCTE for refugees (paid every two months for ten months of the school year) would confuse recipient households. However, monitoring results have shown a strong understanding of the CCTE payment frequency.

## Entry Points

The Turkey experience demonstrates the critical role humanitarian CVA actors may play in linking to and adapting national systems and programmes to provide humanitarian relief to refugees, and also highlights the critical role of national government and national systems in influencing the response. Although Turkey had a robust legal framework for extending access to national social protection programmes to refugees under temporary protection, several bottlenecks initially limited refugee access in practice. **Humanitarian CVA actors were instrumental in testing innovative approaches and adaptations** to extend coverage to refugee populations. Additionally, **leveraging the existing systems such as the SASFs, ISAIS and the Kizilaykart allowed new programmes to go to scale quickly.**

Despite the ESSN reaching 1.8 million extremely vulnerable individuals, there are still **unmet needs for those households deemed ineligible for ESSN support.** Needs among these households have become especially acute with the continued impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. COVID 19 has increased economic vulnerability, but the situation is slowly normalizing now. There is a strong need to link humanitarian response with development opportunities, and to concentrate the humanitarian response on vulnerable and marginalized groups. Humanitarian CVA actors can provide complementary cash assistance to vulnerable and newly vulnerable households, and promote linkages between CVA and other basic and social services. And, by tapping into the existing coordination structures and existing working relationships already in place (via the engagement between the Basic Needs Working Group, the ESSN Task Force, Winterization Task Force, etc.,) and cross-checking beneficiary lists, duplication of efforts can be minimized.

Humanitarian actors can also play a critical role in **supporting refugee households to obtain assistance through the national system.** For instance, through raising awareness of the SASF Discretionary Allowance and supporting the application process or referrals to other relevant programmes. The Government has also designed **an exit strategy for the ESSN,** which focuses on transitioning refugees from social assistance to the formal labour market, this "Exit Strategy from the ESSN Programme" was developed by the Vice President FRIT Office in cooperation with Directorate General of International Labour Force (DG ILF)/MoFSS in 2018. However, it could not be initiated due to protracted Covid-19 pandemic and insufficient supply and demand factors in the livelihood sector.

Humanitarian actors can also **support active labour market programmes or vocational training that supports refugees with skills initiatives to obtain formal employment.** They can also raise awareness among employers about the process for hiring registered refugees. These efforts may require increased coordination with the Livelihoods Working Group.

## Key Resources

AIR (2020) [Programme Evaluation of the Conditional Cash Transfer for Education \(CTTE for Syrians and other Refugees in Turkey: Final Evaluation Report](#)

Barca (2017) [Integrating data and information management for social protection: social registries and integrated beneficiary registries – Turkey Case Study](#)

Facundo Cuevas, P. and Aysha Twose (June 19 2019) [Turkey's safety net for refugees: The largest humanitarian cash assistance program in the world](#) World Bank Blog

IFRC and TRC (2021) [Emergency Social Safety Net \(ESSN\) Issue 12: March 2021](#)

Key Aid Consulting (2020) [Cash Assistance: How to Design Influences Value for Money](#)

Little, Simon, Calum McLean, and Elayn Sammon (2021) [COVID-19 and the Emergency Social Safety Net \(ESSN\) and the Conditional Cash Transfer for Education Programme](#)

Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Services (2018) [Exit Strategy from ESSN Program](#)

Seyfert, Karin (November 2018) [Insights from our evaluation of the world's largest humanitarian cash transfer.](#) OPM Blog

Turk Kizilay (2021) [Syria Crisis Humanitarian Relief Operation](#)

Turk Kizilay (2020) [Livelihood Transition of the ESSN: Capacity Mapping and Understanding of Potential](#)

Turk Kizilay (2019) [Emergency Social Safety Net \(ESSN\) Programme Technical Analysis Report: Transition from Basic ASSISTANCE TO Livelihoods Opportunities](#)

UN (2020) [COVID-19 Socio-Economic Impact Assessment Report](#)

UNICEF (2019) [Approaches to Providing Cash Bases Assistance to Meet the Needs of Children in Protracted Crises – Lessons from Turkey](#)

WFP (2018) [Evaluation of the DG ECHO funded Emergency Social Safety Net \(ESSN\) in Turkey](#)

WFP, TRC, EC, NOR Cap (2018) [Lessons Learned Exercise: Emergency Social Safety Net \(ESN\) Task Force Coordination in Turkey](#)

WFP, TRC, OPM, Development Analytics (2020) [ESSN Mid-term Review 2018/2019](#)

World Bank (2020) [Children on the Move: Progressive Redistribution of Humanitarian Cash Transfers among Refugees](#)

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