

# COVID-19 and the Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN) and Conditional Cash Transfers for Education (CCTE) programmes

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This document was developed alongside others in the SPACE series (all available [here](#)).

# INTRODUCTION

1. FCDO Turkey commissioned SPACE to assess the impact of COVID-19 on the principal cash vehicles active in Turkey: Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN) and Conditional Cash Transfers for Education (CCTE) programmes, both funded by the EU through the EUR 6 billion Facility for Refugees in Turkey (FRiT) programme and managed by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and UNICEF respectively.
2. For reasons of time, the learning exercise was divided into four key areas of investigation: i) Impact/Disruption caused by COVID-19; ii) Adaptations in programming; iii) Coordination and iv) Future Direction/Alignment with Government of Turkey (GoT) social protection approaches. SPACE interviewed key non-governmental stakeholders involved in delivering both the ESSN and CCTE. A standard set of questions were developed with the input/approval of FCDO Turkey, and these were adjusted depending on the institutional home of the interviewee.
3. The first and second set of questions sought to ascertain to the degree to which the ESSN and CCTE had been affected by COVID-19, and what preventive/remedial measures partners had introduced to maintain operational functionality. This is especially important given the scale of the ESSN and CCTE, relations between the GoT and EU, and links between humanitarian cash transfers and the government led social protection system.
4. The third and fourth set of questions bundled together issues of coordination, specifically IFRC's relationship with other ESSN stakeholders, and its position within the wider coordination framework. These set of questions also considered the future of the ESSN and CCTE, and the relationship/influence of the ESSN on GoT social protection policy and programming.

# BACKGROUND

5. A spike in COVID-19 cases hastened Turkey into lockdown in the middle of March 2020 with the authorities closing offices, shops and schools, banning gatherings and introducing restrictions on movement. This affected the population in its entirety including the lives of refugees receiving cash support through the ESSN and CCTE programmes. Between them the ESSN and CCTE provide cash payments to 2.1m Syrian refugees every month.<sup>1</sup>
6. Lockdown occurred at a potentially precarious time for the humanitarian ecosystem in Turkey with IFRC taking over the management of the ESSN from WFP in April 2020. (WFP issued its final cash payment in March 2020). Though both IFRC and WFP were approaching the end of a comprehensive handover period, and though the role of the TRC and the functioning of the Kizilaykart payment platform continued unaffected, the worsening COVID-19 crises posed a risk to the systems and procedures underpinning the ESSN.
7. Turkey's pre COVID-19 economy was already experiencing a degree of turbulence with unemployment rising, particularly among low skilled workers active in the informal sector. A deteriorating economic situation heightened fears that communities would be drawn into greater competition over resources and opportunities and risked inflaming tensions between the Turkish host population and the 3.6m Syrian refugee community. While refugee coping strategies have yet to be fully assessed, there are fears that COVID-19 will deepen levels of debt, prompt the sale of the few remaining household assets, and dissuade parents from returning their children to school in the new

<sup>1</sup> Though caseload figures fluctuate and have since increased, this figure comprises 465,231 children who received CCTE cash payments in May 2020 and 1.71m recipients of ESSN cash payments in June 2020. Syrian refugees constitute roughly 90% of the ESSN's monthly caseload with the balance made up of Afghan, Iraqi and other nationalities. CCTE payments are made every two months

academic year. (Paragraph 21 below provides some initial sample evidence of the impact of COVID-19 on refugee households).

8. The ESSN and CCTE are part of the EU funded Facility for Refugees in Turkey (FRiT) programme. In July 2020, the EU Council and Parliament agreed to an additional EUR 485m (outside of the Facility) extending both programmes until the end of 2021.<sup>2</sup> To date, the EU has allocated some EUR 1.85 billion to the ESSN and EUR 157.5m to the CCTE. Through distinct programming entities, the ESSN and CCTE 'piggyback onto existing national systems'<sup>3</sup>. The ESSN offers a degree of conceptual, administrative and financial distinction from the national social welfare system, whereas the CCTE is an extension of the national programme using the same design, targeting criteria etc. For the CCTE the sole difference is the payment mechanism and protection outreach component.
9. As part of the Turkey-EU deal the ESSN and CCTE are subject to the vicissitudes of political manoeuvring and at some levels the relationship between the GoT and EU remains strained. By the end of 2021 ECHO will have supported the ESSN for five years and COVID-19 has further complicated pre-existing challenges in integrating the refugee caseload into the Turkish social protection system. With interviewees suggesting that full integration now appears less likely for a variety of financial and political reasons<sup>4</sup>, it may be a timely moment to start planning for a different payment modality and shift financial responsibility from ECHO's humanitarian remit to DG NEAR's more developmental mandate in advance of the anticipated end of ESSN III in December 2021.<sup>5</sup>
10. In keeping with findings detailed in the UN's global HRP for COVID-19 and recent OCHA analysis<sup>6</sup>, COVID-19 disproportionately impacted the refugee caseload in Turkey. Significantly, refugees are heavily represented in informal sectors of the economy, notably construction, cleaning and waste management and were therefore among the first to lose jobs due to COVID-19. Women refugees in both formal and informal employment were strongly represented in the textile sector and are likely to have been unequally affected by COVID-19. A joint IFRC/TRC Impact Assessment conducted in April 2020 suggested that the living conditions of refugees heightens their susceptibility to COVID-19. The Assessment suggested that 71% of ESSN recipients live in poor quality accommodation; 12% have insufficient access to hygiene, water and sanitation, and 17% live in crowded conditions<sup>7</sup> (See paragraph 21 below for more details).

## IMPACT/DISRUPTION OF COVID-19

11. As elsewhere, COVID-19 has had a profound effect on Turkish society and its economy with 6,209 deaths registered as of 27/08/20<sup>8</sup>. The GoT was quick to introduce strict lockdown measures that directly affected operational aspects of the ESSN and CCTE. Measures included: introducing social distancing protocols which limited household/home visits, preventing the elderly and people under 20 from leaving home, inhibiting the movement of others, (GoT workers and TRC volunteers were broadly exempt and granted special permission to travel within and between cities), and closing schools and transferring to online educational platforms as of mid-March 2020.
12. The onset of the lockdown coincided with the end of a comprehensive handover process culminating in the transfer of ESSN Lead Agency management responsibilities from WFP to IFRC and it is worth

<sup>2</sup> The UK did not contribute to the additional EUR 485m

<sup>3</sup> A direct quote lifted from the WFP ESSN Evaluation, OPM/DA April 2018

<sup>4</sup> A number of interviewees highlighted statements in the media linking the macroeconomic impact of COVID-19 on Turkey's economy to the refugee caseload. Similarly, other interviewees pointed to longstanding, underlying tensions between host and refugee communities in certain regions. The potential politicisation of the refugee caseload and the implications therein were cause for concern

<sup>5</sup> As of October 2020, the ESSN 4 contract had yet to be signed

<sup>6</sup> The Cost of Inaction, OCHA, June 2020

<sup>7</sup> <https://media.ifrc.org/ifrc/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2020/05/Emergency-Social-Safety-Net-ESSN-Monthly-Report-April-2020.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html>

noting that IFRC/TRC were able to action April's payment to 1.7m people on time and in full. A number of interviewees indicated that the principal reason the ESSN was able to withstand the challenges of lockdown, and continue to function without impediment, was the strategic and operational continuity offered by the TRC. With WFP having issued its final cash payment in March 2020 interviewees highlighted the value of an extensive six-month handover process, as well as a solid operational platform provided by robust systems and procedures.

13. Though the ESSN and CCTE payments were not interrupted, the implications of COVID-19 on institutional functioning have been significant. The Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Services (MoFLSS), as well as other parts of the State apparatus, shifted to online platforms, and public sector infrastructure, such as Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundation (SASF) offices, were obliged to temporarily close if positive COVID-19 cases were identified. As a result, systems that were disrupted by the closure of public offices and the switch to online platforms, specifically those linked to enrolment, registration and monitoring services, experienced early teething problems. Importantly, TRC service centres remained operational throughout April and May 2020 and continued to support the SASF in accepting and screening applications from refugees. Though TRC home visits were reduced in line with social distancing protocols, outreach was maintained, and cases of concern highlighted through referral and call centre contact.
14. Aside from a short period, TRC volunteers were able to maintain household visits. However, the verification process requires TRC/SASF teams to enter homes and spend time with the family and TRC assessed this as an unnecessary risk to the household. To address this, alternate remote monitoring processes, such as the distribution of tablets that allowed households to input information were put in place. Necessary changes to well established verification processes may have exacerbated the hardship faced by a small number of households looking to access the ESSN however, accurately quantifying this is difficult as is determining the metric to assess any temporary increase in household vulnerability. Interviewees considered the ESSN monitoring system sufficiently robust as to have not been unduly impacted by the temporary interruption to service.
15. Restrictions imposed due to COVID-19 also prompted the closure of schools in March 2020. The closure of educational facilities raised particular concerns since CCTE payments are conditional on an 80% level of attendance and attendance is automatically monitored by the Integrated Social Assistance Information System (ISAIS). With all children, including refugees, unable to attend school, the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Services (MoFLSS) decided to waive attendance as a condition for CCTE payments with agreement to reconsider the situation at the start of the new academic year in September 2020.
16. TRC, the MoFLSS and Ministry of National Education (MoNE) provide source data used in CCTE monitoring, supplemented by Third Party Monitoring (TPM). TPM is conducted in quarterly cycles by an external provider with the next planned cycle scheduled to coincide with the start of the new academic year in September 2020. The Child Protection component of the CCTE programme is predicated on household visits and these were temporarily suspended during lockdown. As a consequence of lockdown, UNICEF anticipated a surge in both domestic violence, and violence against children. This was partly confirmed by an increase in indirect references to SGBV made by those calling UNHCR's counselling hotline. Though UNHCR was unable to conduct household visits during lockdown, information mined through the counselling hotline continued to be shared with the relevant authorities responsible for investigation and case management. In June 2020, UNHCR's 42 hotline operators received the highest ever number of monthly calls. In addition, TRC's 168 Call Centres continued to operate smoothly, receiving calls and complaints, providing support and/or referring them on as appropriate.
17. None of those interviewed highlighted a gender dimension (though, as indicated above, a number of interviewees noted the likely corollary between lockdown and a surge in domestic violence) or pointed to the disaggregated impact of COVID-19 on women - at least women and children receiving cash payments through the ESSN and CCTE<sup>9</sup>. As reported, the informal economy employs a high percentage of refugees (of both genders) and appears to have been disproportionately impacted by

<sup>9</sup> Persons with responsibility for gender were interviewed as part of the process

COVID-19. This said, interviewees highlighted the inclusive nature of both programmes with the ESSN providing cash transfers to 47% of the total Syrian refugee population in country. It is worth noting that single headed households (usually women) and households with an eligible disabled person are automatically targeted for enrolment in the ESSN at the application stage. 881,502 were women representing 51.3% of the ESSN's total caseload. However, pre-pandemic women headed households (about a third of all refugee households) were "more vulnerable to poverty and abuse as they are less able to find work and are perceived to lack a 'protector'. They have higher incidences of negative coping mechanisms, such as reducing adult consumption to allow children to eat and child labour<sup>10</sup> and this is likely to have been exacerbated because of COVID-19. 78% of those receiving ESSN payments also benefit from CCTE transfers and in May 2020, the CCTE provided cash support to 465,231 students (payments are made to the head of household) with a marginally higher number of girls receiving cash payments. UNICEF is currently conducting an economic survey to determine the impact of COVID-19 on children and households. However, given the already increasing prevalence of child marriage (mostly girls) and child labour (girls and boys) in the refugee population pre-pandemic, driven by poverty and the perceived protective benefits<sup>11</sup>, it is likely that this will have worsened. Moreover, while women typically bear most of the burden for home schooling, Syrian mothers are often hampered in the help they can offer given the language barrier. A number of interviewees also voiced concern that the issue of crowding in schools - following the influx of refugee children into the State education system - might be weaponised by opportunistic politicians and used to stoke tension between refugee and host communities.

18. At the time of this review, the ESSN provided cash support to 1.7m of the 3.6m Syrian refugees in Turkey. While not all refugees required or sought ESSN support, applications to enter the ESSN typically exceed those looking to withdraw from the programme, or those who are removed automatically if no longer eligible under the categorical targeting criteria. The economic impact of COVID-19 with the associated loss of employment, particularly in the informal sector, precipitated a surge in applications to the ESSN. 2,885 new requests were received by SASF and TRC centres in June 2020 representing a 242% increase on May's application data (This scale of this increase is partly attributable to a slowdown in applications in the preceding months and is less than 1% of the overall caseload). Simultaneously, the SASF and PDMM (Provincial Departments of Migration Management) were under increased pressure having been tasked by the GoT to provide additional assistance to the domestic caseload of social assistance beneficiaries, leading to some enrolment delays.

## COVID-19 RELATED ADAPTATIONS IN ESSN AND CCTE PROGRAMMES

19. **ESSN expansion** - as the economic, political, and social consequences of COVID-19 became clear, the GoT and its partners, namely IFRC, UNICEF, and TRC, considered the possibility of horizontally or vertically expanding humanitarian cash and social protection caseloads<sup>12</sup>. With preliminary data suggesting a disproportionate impact on vulnerable households, one of the urgent questions government and its partners needed to consider was whether there were sufficient funds available to provide additional support?
20. **Vertical expansion** – the GoT set the ball rolling in April 2020 by allocating a TRY 1,000 top up payment to vulnerable Turkish households already enrolled in the national social protection system.

<sup>10</sup> Rohwerder, B. (2018). Syrian refugee women, girls, and people with disabilities in Turkey. K4D Helpdesk Report. Brighton, UK: Institute of Development Studies

<sup>11</sup> Ibid

<sup>12</sup> **Vertical scale-up** means increasing the value/generosity of humanitarian cash transfers (in effect topping up) to enable recipients, in this case ESSN recipients, to better deal with consequences of an anticipated/unanticipated shock. **Horizontal scale-up** means rapidly and temporarily enrolling new beneficiaries into existing humanitarian cash transfer programmes, so they can better manage the impact of a shock

IFRC/TRC maintained the regular ESSN payment for April and entered into a dialogue with the MoLFSS regarding a top-up payment for ESSN beneficiaries. Given TRC's auxiliary status, they led these discussions in collaboration with IFRC. Strategic and technical alignment between the GoT and cash transfer providers is essential in terms of coordination and coherence but also serves to dampen intercommunal tensions at risk of inflaming due to COVID-19. Perceived tension between refugee and host communities pre-dated COVID-19 and there are concerns that the support provided to refugees may be instrumentalised by opportunistic actors. Equally, there are legitimate concerns that the misalignment of cash support, specifically any difference in transfer values, would risk aggravating social tensions. As such, IFRC and TRC both followed GoT instruction in issuing additional TRY 1,000 cash payments to beneficiary caseloads<sup>13</sup>.

21. With rates of COVID-19 infection worsening through April 2020, IFRC and TRC conducted a joint Rapid Impact Assessment to determine what effect COVID-19 was having on ESSN cash recipients<sup>14</sup>. The assessment sampled 468 refugee households and concluded that ESSN beneficiary households were severely and disproportionately affected by COVID-19. 69% of household respondents reported loss of employment, 78% indicated an increase in expenditure and cost of living, and 82% signalled an increase in the level of household debt. More than two-thirds of the 468 households assessed reported that they had lost their jobs due to COVID-19<sup>15</sup>. In a context where household incomes were dropping, ESSN payments (both regular and top up payments) assumed greater significance and some interviewees advocated for an increase in the value of the transfer which, despite high inflation, had remained broadly fixed for a number of years. This resulted in reduced beneficiary purchasing power. ESSN transfers are calculated as a percentage contribution in meeting the cost of the Minimum Expenditure Basket<sup>16</sup>.
22. The ESSN COVID-19 related top up payment of TRY 1,000 per household was divided into two TRY 500 tranches (GBP 57 per tranche). The first of these was paid at the end of June 2020 with the second following a month later. These payments supplemented the normal ESSN payment cycle that provides TRY 120 per person or TRY 600 a month (GBP 66). Top-up payments were based on a maximum of five-person household with no adjustment made for household size. As such, the TRY 500 monthly top up represented 71% of the value of the normal monthly transfer<sup>17</sup>. In addition, quarterly top ups have been designed to mirror similar payments made to Turkish citizens through the national social protection system and are in effect a way to increase the overall transfer value of the ESSN.
23. IFRC were able to provide top up payments to the whole ESSN caseload of some 301,136 households (at an estimated cost of EUR 40m) in part due to favourable exchange rate gains but also in part due to the flexibility of ECHO's operating procedures. The depreciation of the TRY against the EUR provided some fiscal headroom, however, were this not the case IFRC would likely have struggled to match the GoT's approach. Indeed, IFRC approached ECHO in the first instance however, once it became clear that no additional EU/ECHO funding was available, alternate options were explored<sup>18</sup>. IFRC indicated that the slight delay between the GoT top up payment, and that made through the ESSN, was driven both by perception and politics with the domestic GoT top up needing to precede any other top ups. The scale of organising additional payments, albeit with well-established and well-functioning systems and procedures, contributed to the time lag. It is worth noting that WFP actioned a TRY 1,000 top up payment to camp based refugees in April 2020 though interviewees acknowledged that targeting refugee populations in camps is appreciably less

<sup>13</sup> In April 2020, WFP provided a one-off TRY 1,000 top up to 55,777 refugees (11,648 households) across six camps. In May 2020 UNHCR made similar provision to 10,294 refugee households

<sup>14</sup> COVID-19: Impact on Refugees Populations in Turkey, IFRC

<sup>15</sup> '69% of respondents stated that they have lost their jobs due to COVID-19', IFRC COVID-19: Impact on Refugee Populations in Turkey, IFRC ESSN Assessment Report

<sup>16</sup> Prior to COVID-19 the TRY 120 per person per month transfer delivered through the ESSN represented more than one-third of household expenditure. With rising costs, the current value of the transfer is estimated at 29% of monthly expenditure

<sup>17</sup> June 2020 COVID-19 amount TRY 150.568.000,00 Normal payment amount: TRY 211.389.600,00. Total Payment Amount: TRY 361.957.600,00. The COVID-19 top up to normal payment ratio is therefore 71%

<sup>18</sup> It is creditworthy to note that IFRC/TRC were able to provide top up payments to the full caseload without receiving any additional financial resources from the EU

contentious than providing additional support to the majority living within/ among the host community. The ESSN does not target camp-based refugees.

24. **Horizontal expansion** – the increase in ESSN applications received by TRC and SASF offices (referenced in paragraph 18) prompted discussion as to the possible expansion of the ESSN caseload. There was some suggestion this might take advantage of the SASF Discretionary Allowance, which was designed to allow particularly vulnerable refugees, ineligible due to categorical targeting criteria, to enrol in the ESSN. However, household eligibility is determined by a SASF social worker undertaking a home visit and this was not possible due to COVID-19 restrictions. As a result, the possibility of utilising the Discretionary Allowance was quickly discounted due to: i) the lack of additional funding and challenge of rapidly incorporating new beneficiaries into the ESSN; ii) political issues vis-à-vis maintaining a consistent approach with GoT policy and payments; iii) technical challenges relating to targeting criteria and targeting approaches<sup>19</sup>.
25. The ESSN's outreach and referral processes also had to adapt in light of COVID-19. Wearing PPE, TRC response teams continued to deliver Kizilaykart payment cards used in the ESSN programme, as well as other forms of non ESSN support, including basic foodstuffs and hygiene items. TRC instigated a significant outreach programme including calls to recipients under lockdown, remote referrals and case identification for those in need of additional support. IFRC also maintained established lines of communication issuing more than 640,000 SMS' to ESSN recipients in April 2020.

## CONDITIONAL CASH TRANSFER FOR EDUCATION (CCTE)

26. In line with an additional MoE stipend, UNICEF actioned a TRY 10 per child increase in CCTE payments. This increased to TRY 15 for girls attending high school. The CCTE followed the MoNE's lead and adapted to the closure of schools by distributing 'Learn at Home' kits for refugee children. Learning switched to televisual and online platforms and whilst the majority of refugee households possess a TV, other learning devices such as laptops and phones are scarce. The lack of devices per households encumbers learning when there are multiple children in the family as does the lack of quiet space and/or separate rooms to pursue learning. Language is also problematic. Though Turkish is the language of the classroom, instruction/guidance is easier with a teacher physically present. At home, few refugee parents are entirely proficient in Turkish and therefore unable to support their children with home schooling. Equally, IFRC's Impact Assessment reported that one-third of refugee children enrolled in schools had no access to the online curriculum. Though attendance has been waived as a criterion for receiving CCTE cash payments, the implications on longer-term learning and psychosocial wellbeing have yet to be assessed.

<sup>19</sup> Though no additional EU funds were provided to the ESSN, EUR 15m was allocated from the EU budget (as opposed to the FRIT) to provide support to an additional one million non-ESSN beneficiaries through UNHCR

## Learning Points:

- TRC has remained integral to the functioning of the ESSN offering strategic and operational continuity, as well as an established relationship with the GoT. The role and presence of the TRC contributed to a smooth and effective handover between WFP and IFRC and ensured that the ESSN was able to action payments, including top up payments, on time and in full.
- IFRC, TRC and WFP deserve credit for the comprehensiveness and effectiveness of the handover process.
- With the ESSN (and other humanitarian cash programmes targeting non-Turkish citizens) aligned to the GoT's social protection system, it is reasonable to assume that any adaptive response will be regulated by the pace and direction of the GoT's response to its own domestic caseload. In line with established practice and to ensure consistency, the ESSN and CCTE will continue to shadow national social protection programmes. In response to COVID-19, the ESSN was able to initiate vertical expansion though the process was delayed until the national social protection system actioned a similar disbursement.
- The ESSN was unable to expand horizontally. In part this was due to budgeting constraints, but also the fact that the SASF allowance is focused primarily on correcting exclusion errors rather than promoting greater shock-responsiveness. There is little potential for improving this (the Discretionary Allowance is not without operational challenges) and there was little appetite for increasing the ESSN caseload, even temporarily.
- Though COVID-19 introduced a set of unforeseen challenges TRC and IFRC were quick to adapt and therefore able to maintain outreach and monitoring support. A set of technical innovations were introduced to compensate for challenges re: accessing recipient households. These included remote focus group discussions which took place further to the distribution of personal devices with feedback facilitated/analysed by TRC personnel. The information generated through these discussions enabled TRC and IFRC to identify and, as necessary, refer protection issues of concern. These adaptations/innovations ensured programme continuity albeit with minor trade-offs in terms of the robustness of data gathering processes.
- For the CCTE, waiving the criterion of school attendance allowed cash payments to be maintained as the curriculum shifted online and through terrestrial TV. There remains a degree of uncertainty as to the full reopening of the public-school system (some age groups have returned) and some sort of blended learning that combines online tuition with classroom attendance may be the approach trialled for the new academic year. The appropriateness of applying conditionality for refugee children in such circumstances remains under discussion.

## COORDINATION

27. With IFRC having assumed ESSN Lead Agency responsibility, the management of the mechanism formally sits outside the UN-led 3RP coordination framework (Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan). For 2020-21, the 3RP is appealing for USD 5.3 billion of which \$1.3 billion is sought for Turkey<sup>20</sup>. Some interviewees expressed concern that IFRC's position outside the 3RP risked weakening or undermining the overall approach to coordination though there was no detectable evidence of this. Equally, a number of interviewees pointed to challenges in sharing beneficiary data with Turkish Law prohibiting the sharing of personal data with third parties. Though data protection requirements present specific challenges in the flow of information, it is worth noting that TRC has signed an information sharing agreement with UNHCR vis-a vis their collaborative duplication

<sup>20</sup> The Turkey chapter of the 3RP is the principal mechanism through which Turkey and the international community both represent the needs of Syrian refugees and vulnerable Turkish communities, but also mobilise funds on their behalf. 'The 3RP provides a comprehensive strategic response to support the Government's efforts to address the needs of Syrian refugees, host communities, and relevant institutions in line with Turkey's legal and policy framework'. Among other priorities, the 3RP looks to i) support and strengthen national ownership; ii) promote access to national systems and iii) ensure national and local systems are able to cope. Appealing through the 3RP is therefore a visible demonstration of support and solidarity with the GoT's approach to addressing the refugee crisis. That the IFRC appeals outside of the 3RP is entirely consistent with the organisation's principles of independence and neutrality however, it means IFRC may not be fully networked into the information and data flows that underpin the 3RP.



tracking work. A number of interviewees contrasted the status of the IFRC/TRC with that of WFP who were considered an integral component of the 3RP – a fact perhaps evidenced by it being the fourth largest appealing agency through the 2020-21 3RP. WFP continued to co-chair the Basic Needs Working Group (BNWG) until September 2020. Conscious of such concerns IFRC and TRC have proactively engaged with the BNWG and ensured that the ESSN is included as a standing item on the BNWG's agenda. TRC and IFRC co-chair the ESSN Task Force.

28. Throughout lockdown humanitarian cash coordination meetings shifted to online platforms with no discernible impact on how information was shared and/or used. With a caseload totalling 1.7m refugees the sharing of ESSN data is vital and necessary to avoid duplication. WFP's cash programme (which is implemented in partnership with TRC) targets approx. 55,000 refugees living in camps and thus there is limited potential for duplication<sup>21</sup>. On the other hand, UNHCR's cash programme - financed with repurposed funds and delivered through the Turkish Postal Service - has a projected target of 20,000 refugee households and therefore needs to be closely referenced against the ESSN to avoid duplication<sup>22</sup>. TRC have established a 'duplication matrix' that should allow other cash programmes to compare data with ESSN databases without compromising the national data protection regulations. Without actually sharing data, this should allow duplicate entries to be identified and action taken.
29. A number of interviewees commented on the relationship between the IFRC and TRC, and whilst both IFRC and TRC highlighted relationship challenges, they indicated these were unsurprising given the scale of the ESSN, the precarious political and social situation in Turkey, and the fact that COVID-19 derailed a settling in period that would have enabled both organisations to iron out organisational differences and finesse the relationship. In the circumstances the IFRC and TRC were satisfied with their relationship and would continue to address challenges/differences openly.
30. One issue that was highlighted by a number of interviewees centred on the flow of information (aforementioned in paragraph 27 above) and ability of IFRC to perform all the functions previously undertaken by WFP. This is understandable since WFP had cultivated an extensive field presence over the previous four years. By contrast, IFRC neither required a significant pre-ESSN field presence nor proposed replacing WFP's field structure in its entirety. Instead IFRC sought a field presence where appropriate – with a focus on M&E and outreach and referral - while ESSN III is predicated on reinforcing the field-level operational responsibilities of TRC and other local networks.
31. TRC is one of 192 National Societies (NS) that comprise the IFRC. As with other NS, the TRC is an official auxiliary to the State in times of crisis and has had close relations with successive Turkish governments. Some interviewees suggested that the closeness of this relationship risked undermining the ESSN, though no evidence was presented to substantiate this claim. The TRC acknowledged its auxiliary status and the value of a mutually beneficial relationship with the state whilst highlighting a range of humanitarian activities delivered without government engagement.
32. Most interviewees responded positively when questioned on the relationship between IFRC and TRC. Initial doubts/reservations had been assuaged by both the smooth handover and also the evident rapport between IFRC and TRC. ECHO suggested that IFRC - given Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement affiliation - were best placed to build the capacity of the TRC, an important factor if and when management of the ESSN is handed over to the GoT.

<sup>21</sup> In an effort to supplement payments made through the ESSN, WFP has submitted a project proposal to donors though has yet to secure funding. WFP is hopeful that financial support for a longer-term cash programme targeting refugees in camps will be forthcoming

<sup>22</sup> As of end June UNHCR had provided cash payments to 10,294 refugee households. DG ECHO is funding the ESSN and UNHCR and has established minimum coordination criteria so as to avoid payment duplication

33. Localisation: the change in the partnership arrangement of the ESSN has seen a greater emphasis on localisation, and especially building the capacity and responsibilities of TRC. ECHO viewed the relationship between IFRC/TRC and local partners including Halkbank, the MoLFSS, other GoT bodies etc as a positive demonstration of a more 'localised' approach.

### Learning Points:

- IFRC's position outside of the 3RP allows a degree of independence from the established humanitarian architecture: 'collaboration with' is being emphasised over 'coordination by' the UN-led coordination structures such as the BNWG.
- The change in partnership arrangements may see a more streamlined ESSN programme and potential for easier implementation. The localisation agenda is likely to have been advanced by the change in the ESSN's Lead Agency (and accelerated by COVID-19) and was already deeply embedded within the CCTE.

## FUTURE DIRECTION/ALIGNMENT

34. The impact of the ESSN on government thinking around the national social protection system is hard to assess but is likely to be limited. No doubt all partners have benefitted and grown through the experience, however, there is no indication that the individual-focus and fragmented GoT system is likely to change to a household/unified system characterised by the ESSN. In contrast, the CCTE was practically a carbon copy of the GoT education support programme (originally designed with World Bank support) with little change expected in terms of overall design. Of note however is the probable adoption of the child protection component of the CCTE into the GoT system in the future.
35. Discussions on a transition strategy for the ESSN have focused on two potential options. The first of these suggests that the most vulnerable households (those with little chance of securing employment and becoming financially self-sufficient), would continue to receive cash support as a direct grant from DG NEAR routed through the MoFLSS (this would continue to be funded through the FRIT). Graduation - in the sense that refugees would, over time, be able to secure formal employment and thereby contribute to national social protection schemes through the payment of taxes etc - remains the ambition for the second option which focuses on households with a greater opportunity to work. DG NEAR might continue to fund a livelihoods support programme that enables refugees to enter the formal labour market.
36. COVID-19 has shifted the ever-fluid political landscape in Turkey. The GoT is understandably concerned at the political consequences of growing unemployment, and with a domestic agenda front and central, longer-term social protection programming for refugees has been relegated in importance. A number of interviewees even highlighted the fact that the term 'graduation' (a concept/goal underpinning the ESSN) appears to have been airbrushed from the ESSN's lexicon. Given the uncertainties of the post COVID-19 economic environment, the hoped-for integration of refugees into the formal labour market has become a less realistic proposition and may have been one of a number of reasons the EU chose to extend the ESSN and CCTE for a year.
37. The 2020-21 EU Humanitarian and Implementation Plan (HIP) was recently approved with EUR 485m allocated to extend the ESSN and CCTE through to the end of 2021. What happens thereafter remains unclear. The current ESSN III programme ends 31/03/21, so ECHO is obliged to tender for a nine-month management extension through to the end of the year. ECHO expects to receive proposals from interested partners from September 2020. The process is open, and proposals will not be solicited.

38. The relationship between the GoT and EU through to the end of current FRiT funding is also crucial. Over the lifetime of the ESSN this relationship has been tense and the implications of COVID-19 and perceived EU vacillation as to future support for the refugee caseload is unlikely to improve matters. ECHO appears keen to recuse themselves from administering/funding any continuation of the ESSN beyond its current projected end date, suggesting that other EU funding streams are better suited to the multi-year nature of the programme. A 'Direct Grant' extended by DG NEAR and offering reimbursement to the GoT has been mooted as a possible successor to the ESSN with an external partner, such as IFRC, UNICEF etc providing technical assistance support.

### Learning Points:

- The ESSN and CCTE may not influence tangible changes in the government's social protection systems beyond the adoption of the child protection component, however, the overall ownership of both programmes is significant and a positive outcome of partner collaboration.
- It is unlikely that a 'cliff edge' scenario, whereby the entire ESSN and CCTE caseloads are suddenly set adrift from any support, will occur. The extension of ECHO's involvement in ESSN III and the CCTE buys time for a comprehensive planning exercise to determine how vulnerable Syrian refugees can best be supported. This will inevitably be informed by EU/Turkey politics but should not preclude the opportunity for appropriate and responsible planning.

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