



## **Linkages between humanitarian cash assistance and social protection:**

### **Lessons learnt from the Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN) in Türkiye**

# Linkages between humanitarian cash assistance and social protection: Lessons learnt from the Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN) in Türkiye

The value of bold National Society leadership has been a key learning Türk Kızılay (Turkish Red Crescent/TRC) has learnt in working with the Government of Türkiye (GoT), international donors, partners and other humanitarian actors in Türkiye. The leadership committed jointly to help meet the needs of refugees coming to Türkiye as a result of the Syria crisis. TRC leadership also led the successful institutionalisation of cash-based social assistance across multiple programmes via TRC's [Kızılaykart Cash-Based Assistance Programmes Platform](#) ('Kızılaykart Platform'). It is this leadership from TRC which has enabled the success of the programme and the lessons presented here, that have been central to that success.

## Learning from working with the government

### Development of a nation-wide integrated single registry

- All ESSN applications are digitised and consolidated into the Integrated Social Assistance Information System (ISAIS), or Bütünleşik Sosyal Yardım Bilgi Sistemi, an e-government system that electronically integrates and facilitates all steps related to the management of social assistance.
- Applications are received through the Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundations (under the auspices of the Ministry of Family and Social Services) and TRC Service Centres.
- The GoT adapted ISAIS to handle ESSN application processes and distinguish them from other applications for numerous social assistance programmes and assess eligibility, including verification of required documents; as a result, ESSN applicants and beneficiaries are integrated into the same registry as Turkish applicants and recipients of social assistance.
- TRC's own system, Göçmen, is integrated not only with ISAIS, but also with the Central Civil Registration System called MERNİS (Merkezî Nüfus İdare Sistemi), which belongs to the Ministry of Interior. This allows Göçmen to retrieve very comprehensive data and carry out detailed data verification. In addition, Göçmen allows connection among other data tools that TRC uses, regardless of whether they were developed by TRC or purchased (TRC Case Tracking System, Oracle etc).
- An added benefit of integration with a wide variety of systems and automation of processes is elimination of human error, optimization of costs and minimization of risks. Another advantage is the fact that this represents layers of verification and cross-checks.



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### **Commitment to transparency, accountability and auditing**

In working alongside the GoT, TRC is committed to delivering a programme which upholds high standard of transparency accountability and auditing. Processes to upload these standards include:

- Rigorous checks are carried out automatically through the Göçmen system which was developed by the TRC. In addition, TRC has its own audit cycles, while it undergoes joint audits with partners, as requested by the donors. Manual calculations are minimised, and pre- and post-payment system checks made to ensure transparency, accountability and auditability for the Kızılaykart Platform's programmes, including the ESSN. TRC has data sharing protocols signed with MoFSS to govern all activities including personal information and its sharing/management bilaterally.
- No personal information is shared with non-governmental stakeholders by TRC as per the National Law on Protection of Personal Information.
- In order to enable program partners to conduct certain verification exercises prior or after the payments, TRC Kızılaykart masks the personal information and creates a "Unique ID" which serves as a unique identifier for each beneficiary in the system and this allows all program stakeholders to keep track of beneficiaries for required controls, as part of programmatic accountability. This process ensures robust and responsible data management.

### **Learning from working with partners**

#### **Preventing duplication of assistances**

- Kızılaykart Information Exchange Mechanism, which is a tool/cross-checking service designed by TRC, has been made available for all humanitarian actors in Türkiye and allows organizations to ensure that their beneficiaries are not already receiving assistance from other programmes under the Kızılaykart Platform. It is well recognized and widely used by many organisations in Türkiye.

#### **Active membership and contribution to cash coordination mechanisms**

- The Kızılaykart Platform attends the coordination meetings where national and international NGOs and governmental institutions are present with a country-wide coverage. Under the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP) coordination body, TRC & IFRC co-chair the ESSN Task Force and Basic Needs Working Group Task Force meetings in four provinces to disseminate the up-to-date information regarding the cash programmes.
- These platforms are used to exchange information, received direct and indirect feedback from the field and pinpoint areas for improvement, allowing for complementarity, but without duplication.



### Working with private sector partnerships

The following programme elements have been key to TRC's work with private sector partnerships:

- The scale of the programme has enabled favourable terms to be negotiated with Halkbank, the Financial Service Provider which services the Kızılaykart Platform and provides the Kızılaykart (debit card), favourable terms include no fees charged to TRC or recipients of cash assistance. The bank's role combines the benefits of corporate social responsibility with access to a new large-scale market. The processes and conditions are outlined in a bilateral protocol.
- Different tools and methods are used to timely and accurate transfer of assistance and to provide data security through transfer process.
- An integration system is set up through File Transfer Protocol in order to provide data transfer between the systems of two institutions. Alongside the Göçmen system, the SAP and banking system are also integrated in order to transfer the payment orders to FSP with a transparent, trackable and accountable motivation.

- The development of an integrated system between 168-Kızılay Call Center and Halkbank call center for the beneficiaries to receive banking service without going to bank. This way, the calls that are related with banking system are transferred to HalkBank call center from 168-Kızılay Call Center. The calls that are replied by HalkBank are regularly reported to TRC and followed up, the related call center reports are shared with donors regularly.

### Establishing reporting mechanisms with financial service providers

- Based on the protocol signed between the financial service provider and the TRC, the financial service provider established a reporting platform. This platform allows the following of financial processes related to the assistance given to the beneficiaries and the reports to donors to be made within the framework of accountability. Only officially authorized TRC employees can access this report, and the controls determined within the scope of the projects are carried out through the data on the platform.



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## Learning from the Turkish Red Crescent (Türk Kızılay)

### Ensuring in sufficient capacity for programme implementation

In order to enable the delivery of the ESSN programme, the TRC prioritised capacity building in the following areas:

- Rapid increase in human resources and development of the organisational capacity needed for implementation of the ESSN, offering competitive employment conditions to attract and retain appropriate profiles. Staff profiles were rapidly needed in technical areas such as data management, M&E, banking, and/or finance. These profiles and the competencies needed, were both recruited and developed through TRCs comprehensive capacity building strategies including continuous training and exchange programmes.
- Capacity support to the GoT and its relevant structures in terms of translators, social examiners (e.g. analysts), vehicles, support staff and general technical support.
- Development of TRC Service Centres, these multifunctional centres were established to facilitate application, re-application, household visits and verification and referrals among other topics. At some of the 9 of these TRC Service Centres, mobile Halkbank branches were set up in response to recognising the high density of recipients in these regions and to mitigate crowds and potential social cohesion concerns at the existing Halkbank branches. This supplementary measure was possible due to a special arrangement between the financial service provider (Halkbank) and TRC, where the Halkbank staff comes to the TRC SC in the periods of card distribution and provide these services at the above mentioned TRC premises.

### Prioritising timeliness and strong coordination

Before each new monthly payment cycle, the control mechanism of predetermined steps aligned with a mutually agreed calendar is triggered and run between the programme's stakeholders. This ensures a set of timely processes and mutual approval flow from the beginning of every month through strong coordination. The robustness of this system is demonstrated by the fact that ESSN payments were made on time every month.

The operating environment drastically changed since mid-March 2020 due to COVID-19. However, the implementing partners have maintained their operations without disruption in the face of COVID-19, by adapting and aligning them with the preventive measures implemented across the country. The assistance was delivered without a single delay, despite lockdowns, restrictions and strictly remote working. In addition, the robustness and flexibility of the ESSN mechanisms have even allowed for a cash transfer which was completed early before the full 18-day lockdown in April 2021, before it started, in order to prevent deepening vulnerabilities of the individuals in need. Moreover, the ESSN programme reallocated its existing resources to provide a vertical extension in form of additional cash assistance.

## Developing targeting criteria

A decision was taken at the outset of the ESSN to adopt demographic targeting criteria to facilitate successful implementation and then progressive and timely scaling of the programme. This was based on identifying household and individual characteristics which served as best proxies for household poverty, vulnerability, and inability to meet basic needs. Ongoing studies which encompass all stages allow the programme to constantly improve over time, taking into account the continually changing conditions in the country.

### ESSN targeting criteria (2017 to July 2021):

- single females;
- households with a single parent
- households with elderly people above 60
- households with four or more children
- households with a high dependency ratio
- households with at least one disabled individual (having valid disability health report with at least a 40% disability rate)

### Investing in exclusion error mitigation measures – via a discretionary allowance

Within the ESSN a complementary mechanism was responsively developed to decrease exclusion errors and reach vulnerable households who may have been excluded by the programme's demographic targeting criteria, known as the 'SASF<sup>1</sup> discretionary allowance'. The scheme provides each SASF office with a quota calculated as 10% of the total applications received. Relevant applications are reviewed to identify vulnerable households who may need assistance but did not originally match the demographic criteria. These households' vulnerability is verified through an additional vulnerability assessment, and then submitted for approval for inclusion into the ESSN by a Board of Trustees.

### Supporting referral and transition to livelihoods opportunities

The ESSN programme has established an internal referral mechanism with the TRC Community Centres under the Community Based Migration Programme, providing connections to livelihoods services offered at the Centres.<sup>2</sup> This has allowed a socio-economic empowerment component to be added to the ESSN Programme. Many studies have been carried out to provide insight into the socio-economic conditions of the ESSN beneficiaries. Not only profiling, but also referral to vocational courses takes place regularly.

TRC has also demonstrated sector-wide leadership in terms of this ongoing policy priority more broadly, co-chairing a task team for referral and transition to livelihood opportunities which convenes technical experts from across the humanitarian and development agencies working in Türkiye. The task team's work informs policy and develops analysis and recommendations relating to solutions for transitioning vulnerable people under temporary or international protection benefitting from social assistance towards greater self-reliance. Referrals, as well as all cases which require services such as advocacy, sensitization or removing barriers to access to public services, are managed through a tool developed by TRC, the Case Tracking System. The case tracking and follow up is another area in which close collaboration with stakeholders and public institutions occurs.

### Establishing mechanisms to test, review, learn, adapt and exchange knowledge

The ESSN has continuously adapted over the years to improve its impact, acting on the evidence based generated from its rigorous internal and external learning. Learning outcomes from the programme include:

- Development of learning activities such as rotational delegates scheme and CVA Know-How Exchange Programme.
- Close engagement with donors, which has brought about more solid and more dynamic links with the donors.
- ESSN serves as a blueprint for quick social protection adaptations, more flexibility and rapid actions (e.g. vertical and horizontal expansion).
- Within the scope of the ESSN Programme, TRC and IFRC hosted and/or participated in various training, workshops, staff exchanges and have seconded the ESSN personnel to other national societies.
- TRC and IFRC have started to work on creating a global cash-based assistance and payment system by applying the knowledge, experience and program developed within the scope of the ESSN, which has been successfully carried out in Türkiye since 2016, in partnership with the IFRC. The first pilot is carried out in Kyrgyzstan with the Replication of the Kızılaykart Project. With this pilot, it is aimed to experience the applicability of the Kızılaykart Platform in different countries with different substructures.

<sup>1</sup> Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundation – local structures providing support to Turkish citizens and refugees.

<sup>2</sup> Source: '[ESSN Monthly Report December 2021](#)', IFRC and TRC



## Shock-responsive programming – adaptations in the context of COVID-19

Over the course of years, processes were adapted to the changing conditions and constantly enhanced, while the division of labour among the counterparts was finessed, however Covid-19 has served as the driving force behind rapid, major changes and has been a multiplier of vulnerability of the beneficiaries.

### Additional support to lessen the pandemic's socio-economic impacts

- In response to the initial rapid onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, TRC and IFRC successfully conducted a rapid assessment, and then advocated with the Ministry of Family and Social Services (MoFSS) and other stakeholders to agree and implement a vertical expansion to the ESSN by providing additional cash assistance to the 1.7 million refugees within the programme's caseload at that time. These top-ups, benefitting from a reallocation of existing resources, were provided in two monthly tranches in June and July 2020, supplementing the normal ESSN payment cycle.

### Adaptive programming

- A remote Focus Group Discussion modality was effectively developed, using tablets and a digital online platform while respecting physical distancing and other COVID-19-related safety measures.<sup>4</sup> This ensured the possibility to continue to implement this key component of the programmatic monitoring and learning of the ESSN.
- Other remote methods were also increased, such as: SMS notifications to ensure appropriate communication with ESSN recipients; regular informative social media posts, pop-up messages on the website, cards being delivered to elderly beneficiaries' and individuals with disability's homes rather than asking them to travel to collect them in person; distribution of personal protective equipment to staff and refugees in TRC Services Centres and physical distancing; remote advocacy and sensitization activities, outbound calls to identify barriers to entry to access to public services, training of Kızılay 168 Call Centre staff to respond to COVID-19 queries.



Photo: © Nicole Tung / IFRC

<sup>3</sup> Source: '[ESSN Monthly Report April 2022](#)', IFRC and TRC

<sup>4</sup> 'Adapting to New Normal: Remote Focus Group Discussions during COVID-19', Türk Kızılay, May 2021

## Other pre-conditions that influence the success of the ESSN:



**Presence of nationwide financial infrastructure (ATMs etc.)**



**Financial literacy of refugees**



**Privileged humanitarian access of TRC**



**Successful scale up process implemented over the phases of the programme**

## Power of Movement Unity

The TRC's determination to partner with the IFRC and the joint commitment to enhance the positioning of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement globally has been the driving force behind the outstanding success of the ESSN since TRC and IFRC embarked on their partnership together in 2019. The fact that the TRC has been at the forefront of the humanitarian response in Türkiye and its close collaboration with the GoT, local authorities, UN agencies and numerous (I)NGOs has certainly ensured solid coordination and has contributed to the success of the programme.

## Use of Global RCRC Capacity

The use of expertise and technical capacity of different actors within the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement was an important factor that contributed to success. This is an indication of the benefits and effectiveness of joint action among National Societies and the IFRC, and an example to follow for more resource mobilisation and collaborative partnerships in future responses.