



The Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN)

Helping Refugees in Turkey

What is the ESSN?

ESSN is a multi-purpose cash transfer scheme providing monthly assistance through debit cards to over one and a half million of the most vulnerable refugees in Turkey.

Those receiving assistance decide for themselves how to cover essential needs like rent, bills, food, and medicine.

The ESSN is the largest humanitarian aid programme ever funded by the European Union. Currently worth over one billion euros, it is funded under the Facility for Refugees in Turkey.

What are the objectives?

- help vulnerable refugees to meet their basic needs;
- Reduce or stabilize families' use of coping strategies such as sending children to work instead of school;
- reduce or stabilize household debt and help families regain financial control and independence;
- enhance national crisis response capacities.

Who receives assistance?

Registered families living in Turkey under international protection or temporary protection can apply to ESSN.

ESSN selects those most in need, such as large families, the elderly, single females, single-headed households, and people living with disabilities.

Those employed with a valid work permit or who own registered assets in Turkey are not eligible to receive assistance.

What has been achieved so far?

Since the announcement of the ESSN in September 2016, the programme has successfully scaled up nationwide and features:

- Assistance to close to 1.7 million people by September 2019, following an initial pilot in October 2016 and nationwide roll-out in November 2016.
- Periodic top-ups introduced in August 2017 to support smaller families that do not benefit from economies of scale. These top-ups were increased as of August 2019.
- Monthly top-ups introduced in August 2018 to support people living with severe disability who need a caretaker.
- Premium accountability to affected populations: 12.5 million information SMSs sent; 1.4 million query / complaint calls answered by the TRC/Kizilay call centre, 80,184 [Facebook](#) followers.
- Synergies with the UNICEF Conditional Cash Transfers for Education (CCTE) programme.
- Coordination with other refugee assistance programmes in various sectors (e.g. basic needs, protection, livelihoods etc.)

WFP has projected and measures how the ESSN will impact those it assists:

- Monitoring analysis demonstrated improvement in outcomes among assisted people compared to their situation before they started receiving the ESSN. The trend reversed during the second half of 2018, with deteriorating results brought on by the economic recession and the eroding purchasing power; this deterioration affected food consumption, coping strategy, debt and expenditure results. However, most results are worse for refugees who do not receive the ESSN, which suggests that the assistance is preventing a further deterioration in living standards.

How does it work?

Each eligible family receives a card like this. The card can be used at ATMs or to pay in shops. Every month, it is topped up with 120 Turkish Liras for each member of the family. Families also receive periodic “top-ups”. Refugees with severe disability receive an additional monthly top-up payment of 600 Turkish Liras.



What other support is there?

The Government of Turkey has welcomed more refugees than any other country, providing them with services such as healthcare and education.

The Government's response is supported by the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan, which includes WFP's food assistance to families living in camps, UNICEF's conditional cash transfers for education (CCTE) using the ESSN card, language or vocational trainings, and more. The plan coordinates the response to maximise assistance to those in need.

Why multi-purpose cash?

Cash empowers people to manage their families' priorities and needs with a degree of choice and independence. Up to 82 percent of assisted women take part in most decisions relating to the use of assistance.

Turkey's markets function well, so multi-purpose cash allows recipients to make the most of the little money they have. This form of assistance is cost efficient: at least 87.5 percent of all ESSN funding ends up in the hands of those in need. Cash also supports the local economies where it is spent.

Who does what?

In an unprecedented approach, WFP and Turkish Red Crescent (Kizilay) implement the ESSN from shared Joint Management Cell (JMC) premises in Ankara.

WFP provides oversight and technical support and plays a key role in coordinating Basic Needs assistance with other responders in Turkey.

Kizilay manages the delivery of the programme nationwide, working with the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Services (MoFLSS) and its welfare centres, which process applications for the ESSN.

The Ministry of Interior's Directorates General for Migration Management (DGMM) and Population and Citizenship Affairs (DGPC) are responsible for ID issuance and address registration respectively; both are ESSN prerequisites.

ECHO, the EU agency funding the ESSN, and the MoFLSS co-chair the ESSN Governing Board, providing strategic direction for the ESSN programme.

What comes next?

ESSN embodies Grand Bargain commitments made at the World Humanitarian Summit, including increased cash assistance and support for national responders. It established a sustainable and nationally-integrated system to support refugees over the long term. Lessons learned from the unique approach and scale of ESSN will help design assistance elsewhere in future.

ECHO, WFP, Kizilay and the Government of Turkey are working together to design the evolution of the ESSN. To inform this, WFP completed a profiling exercise exploring the potential capacity of ESSN beneficiaries to engage in the labour market. In partnership with local authorities, the civil society and UN agencies, WFP has started mapping livelihood programmes available to refugees, that is programmes that can help them become self-reliant. In addition, WFP itself is developing self-reliance programmes.

In Turkey, cash assistance reaches non-Syrian refugees too

[Shaheeda](#), from Afghanistan, is 28 years old. She and her husband have three children. The family made a tough journey from Kabul through Iran before crossing into Turkey in June 2018.

Occasionally Shaheeda heard people say things that indicated they thought she did not care enough about the welfare of her children but, she says, "back home I worked in a paediatric hospital. I know how to care for children. It is not that I do not understand what they need, but just that we couldn't afford to provide for them. All my children are underdeveloped, the eldest one is very weak and small for his age but now none of us goes to bed hungry. I thank everyone who is involved in giving us this help." Thankfully the family found out about the ESSN. It has proved to be a lifeline.



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