



# LISTENING TO THOSE WE HELP

A REVIEW OF FINDINGS FROM  
OCTOBER 2020 TO MAY 2021



Funded by  
the European Union



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## **TURKISH RED CRESCENT (TÜRK KIZILAY)**

### **The largest humanitarian organization in Türkiye**

The Turkish Red Crescent (Türk Kızılay) is the largest humanitarian organization in Türkiye, to help vulnerable people in and out of disasters for years, both in the country and abroad. Millions of people currently receive support through our programmes in cooperation with the Government of Türkiye. We are supporting vulnerable people impacted by disasters and other groups in need of humanitarian assistance.



## **THE "KIZILAYKART"**

The Turkish Red Crescent is a humanitarian cash leader in Türkiye and has the well-established "Kızılaykart", which allows them to provide millions of people cash assistance through a debit card. The Kızılaykart initially provided cash assistance to Turkish citizens and has now transformed into a large-scale cash-based assistance platform that has integrated refugees into the existing national social assistance network, providing different programmes such as education, basic needs, vocational training and language courses in order to meet the needs of vulnerable people. The Kızılaykart implements the largest cash programme in the world and the largest in the European Union's history, the Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN).



## **THE INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF THE RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT SOCIETIES (IFRC)**

### **The world's largest humanitarian network**

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) is the world's largest humanitarian organization, reaching 150 million people in 192 National Societies, including Turkish Red Crescent (Türk Kızılay), through the work of 13.7 million volunteers. Together, we act before, during and after disasters and health emergencies to meet the needs and improve the lives of vulnerable people. The IFRC has been leading large-scale cash programmes for decades in response to a broad spectrum of disasters around the globe, including its largest programme ever – the ESSN in Türkiye with Turkish Red Crescent.



# SUMMARY

## BACKGROUND

Türkiye hosts the world's largest refugee population, 4 million asylum seekers of which 3.5 million are Syrians. The Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN) provides regular monthly cash assistance through a debit card, or Kızılaykart, to 1.5 million vulnerable refugees (defined as people living under temporary protection and international protection in Türkiye). The cash programme is funded by the European Union (EU) and implemented by the Turkish Red Crescent (TRC) and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) in close cooperation with the Ministry of Family and Social Services (MoFSS). Every month, each family member receives 155 Turkish Lira, enabling them to decide for themselves how to cover essential needs like rent, transport, bills, food and medicine.

As part of the ESSN, IFRC and TRC regularly conduct qualitative and quantitative research to explore the target group's experiences, satisfaction levels and to gather recommendations to help improve response and inform the humanitarian sector in future decision making. From October 2020 to May 2021, two consecutive large-scale satisfaction and feedback surveys were carried out, reaching approximately 1,200 ESSN applicants.

### **Instrumental in moving the ESSN programme forward, Satisfaction and Feedback Surveys aim to:**

- Evaluate the applicants' knowledge and understanding of the programme.
- Identify the main channels of communication used with the programme and understand the reasons behind these choices.
- Gather recommendations on how to improve the programme.

Some of the key findings from the Satisfaction and Feedback Survey II conducted in April 2021 include:

- 1** More than 90 per cent of the ESSN applicants experienced no problems during the application process or cash transfers.
- 2** 83 per cent were satisfied with the information provided during the application process.
- 3** 81 per cent preferred to receive short messages to learn more about the programme.
- 4** The respondents preferred to call 168 Kizilay Call Center to discuss sensitive issues.
- 5** More than half of the applicants (55 per cent of recipients, 64 per cent of non-recipients) did not know who the programme donor is.
- 6** 54 per cent of the respondents do not know about the eligibility criteria.
- 7** 16 per cent believed that the programme personnel were disinterested in their needs.
- 8** The general feedback and suggestions for improvement focused primarily on increasing the amount of assistance available and making the eligibility criteria more inclusive.

To complement and enrich these survey results with qualitative data, a fourth round of Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were held between April and May 2021 on the theme of ESSN Satisfaction, reaching 75 respondents from six cities across Türkiye, through 14 FGD sessions. 52 per cent of respondents were male and 48 per cent were female. Sixty per cent of the respondents were benefiting from the ESSN programme. The remaining 40 had applied to the programme but were not accepted or were no longer provided with assistance since they did not meet the criteria due to demographic changes over time.

# KEY FINDINGS

## Knowledge of the ESN programme

**Programme goals generally well understood:** Most of the respondents perceive the main programme goal to be humanitarian assistance provided to people in need to cover their daily living expenses, such as rent and bills. Other goals mentioned include to provide support to people with disabilities or assistance for employment and education.

**Less understanding of EU as a donor:** Four out of ten respondents, consisting primarily of men, mentioned that they knew or had heard of assistance provided by the European Union. However, more than half of the respondents did not know who the donor was. These findings are fully consistent with the survey results. A third of the respondents reported that it is of no consequence to them to know about the donor. On the other hand, about the same per centage of respondents indicated that it is important for them to know who is helping them.



**Sixty per cent of the respondents are unaware of the donor**

*ESSN Satisfaction and Feedback Survey II, April 2021*

**Less understanding of eligibility criteria:** The respondents do not have a clear understanding of the programme eligibility criteria or the reasons for ineligibility and instead interpret them based on their own personal experiences. However, some commonalities between the criteria and the respondents' interpretations were observed. The most mentioned eligibility criteria is being a family with a high number of dependents (1.5 or more dependents per working age individuals). The respondents described this criteria as having three or more children. Other criteria mentioned were being widowed (single women aged 18–59 with no other adults in the family, and single mothers or single fathers with at least one child under the age of 18), having a disabled or an elderly person over the age of 60 in the household and having children under the age of 18. When asked what could make people ineligible for the programme, almost half of the respondents answered, “when one of the children turns 18,” while one-third of them said “when an address change is not reported.”



**54 per cent did not know the eligibility criteria. Data is collected before C-ESSN.**

*ESSN Satisfaction and Feedback Survey II, April 2021*

## Programme communication methods

**Call center and social media top channels used to access general programme information:** The most used information channels as reported by the respondents are the 168 Kızılay Call Center and social media, due to their affordability, ease of use and speed. The official ESN/Kızılaykart Facebook account and the YouTube channel stand out as the most mentioned social media channels. These are followed by the TRC Service Center (preferred mostly by male respondents) and informative short messages. Additionally, many participants reported using multiple communication channels to learn about the programme. These findings slightly differ from the ESN Satisfaction and Feedback Survey results as reflected in the figures provided below:



Of those respondents who have applied to the ESN programme, 81 per cent rely on SMSs for up-to-date programme information. As a second choice, 68 per cent of recipients and 49 per cent of non-recipients prefer the TRC's 168 Call Center.

*ESN Satisfaction and Feedback Survey II, April 2021*

**Reliance on official Kızılaykart channels to access to eligibility criteria information:** The respondents primarily use Kızılaykart official communication channels (inclusive of 168 Kızılay Call Center, TRC personnel, brochures, informative SMSs and the official website), followed by social media and other people to source information on eligibility criteria. Two-thirds of the respondents obtained this information from social media platforms or their social circles, indicating that their social networks play a major role in information exchange. It also suggests that they are exposed to possible misinformation. It would therefore seem pertinent to further evaluate the effectiveness of current communication channels and explore the use of additional ones.

When asked for **recommendations on how to best deliver eligibility criteria information**, the FDGs results reveal that one-third of the respondents (predominantly male) suggested using social media (Facebook and YouTube) while other one-third (predominantly female) proposed extending the use of SMSs, since they do not trust or have access to the internet.

**TRC Call Center a trusted channel for communication tools, feedback and complaint mechanisms:** Two-thirds of the respondents reported that they have never given negative feedback or complained. They said that it often worked smoothly, they did not experience any problems and they were satisfied with how the personnel treated them. Additionally, the 168 Kızılay Call Center is the primary communication channel for four respondents who gave feedback to report an ATM problem and to check the identity of the TRC Kızılaykart personnel who visited them at home. The high preference for the 168 Kızılay Call Centre for feedback and complaints is consistent with the results of the ESN Satisfaction and Feedback Survey II.

When the respondents were asked about their **recommendations for communication tools, feedback and complaint mechanisms**, their suggestions included (i) provision of technical support for the 168 Kızılay Call Center to enable faster and

better response or the creation of alternative hotlines, (ii) development of an interactive WhatsApp network that is active 24/7, (iii) placement of suggestion boxes in official institutions for anonymous complaints and feedback, and (iv) ensuring pathways for them to communicate their complaints and feedback directly through social media channels<sup>1</sup>. The respondents also suggested that the official websites of Kızılaykart should be clearly distinguishable and that there should not be any unofficial pages operating on behalf of Kızılaykart to prevent people from being exposed to misinformation on social networks.

#### **High level of satisfaction with programme and approach by TRC staff**

Nearly 30 per cent of the respondents indicated that they were satisfied with all stages of the programme and that everything was running smoothly. One of the main factors behind this satisfaction was the TRC Service Center personnel who were described as polite, respectful and result-oriented. Only four out of seventy-five respondents complained that the personnel did not provide sufficient information, seemed disinterested and exhibited a bad attitude. Other factors behind this high satisfaction were linked to the initial news of being accepted into the programme, the instance of withdrawing cash from the ATM and the smooth registration/application process.

When asked about the least satisfactory stages of the programme, 21 respondents noted rejection or ineligibility, while others complained that they saw no results upon objecting to the rejection decision and that the programme personnel were unable to come up with a solution; however, these answers can be interpreted as dissatisfaction with the application status rather than with the programme itself. A small number of respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the lengthy address registration process, whereas others mentioned waiting two to three months to find out their application status, the forming of crowds during registration, the inconvenient location of the TRC Service Center, the COVID-19 procedures taking too long while updating information, the tedious renewal of ATM cards and certain individuals requesting bribes for favorable treatment in the process as other sources of dissatisfaction.

<sup>1</sup> YouTube, Facebook, etc; complaints and feedback received from Facebook and Website is responded within 24 hours



Of the applicants, 96 per cent did not experience any problems during registration. Of all beneficiaries, 95 per cent are satisfied with the use of ATMs and 91 per cent confirm that the programme personnel attend to their needs.

*ESSN Satisfaction and Feedback Survey II, April 2021*



Only 30 per cent of the respondents had recommendations to improve the programme. Of these individuals, 38 per cent were recipients, while 72 per cent were not.

*ESSN Satisfaction and Feedback Survey II, April 2021*

## Applicants' recommendations on the ESSN programme

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**Re-valuating the eligibility criteria:** When the FGDs respondents were asked to provide suggestions on potential programme improvements, most mentioned re-evaluating the eligibility criteria and making it more inclusive for those who cannot currently benefit from the assistance. They argued that every household has expenses, regardless of the number of children and that households outside the scope of the programme are also experiencing serious financial troubles due to the pandemic. Other recommendations included accepting families with two children and maintaining the assistance for households with someone who has turned 18 if that person is still attending school or ceasing the provision of assistance only for the person who has turned 18.

**Increase household visits:** In addition, some respondents advocated for an increase in the number of household visits, claiming that they are essential to evaluate the vulnerability of households.

**Increase the transfer value:** Another suggestion was to increase the transfer value of the assistance, with many respondents claiming the current amount remained insufficient for small households, especially those with a single person or fewer children while noting the high inflation.

**Additional suggestions:** included facilitating and accelerating the address or phone registration processes, ensuring that the Kızılaykart remains unblocked during the address changing over period and performing phone or address registrations over the official hotlines or the internet to prevent the formation of crowds under the pandemic conditions. Respondents also recommended increasing the number of ATMs to prevent crowds and potential issues while waiting in lines, signing agreements with more banks besides Halkbank, and introducing Arabic language options for banking transactions.



47 per cent of the applicants found it difficult to meet their basic needs with the current amount of assistance.

*ESSN Satisfaction and Feedback Survey II, April 2021*



# RESEARCH METHOD

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The respondents to the FDGs consisted of individuals under humanitarian, temporary or international protection, residing in Türkiye and that had applied to the ESN programme.

The research aimed to:

- Evaluate the applicants' knowledge of the programme's goals, the donor and eligibility criteria.
- Identify the most used channels to access information on the programme, including information sharing, programme updates and feedback and complains mechanisms; and understand the factors behind these choices.
- Detail the underliers of satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the different programme stages.
- Understand the impact of the COVID -19 pandemic on the use of Kızılaykart.
- Gather the respondents' recommendations on how to improve the programme.

## SAMPLE

Participants for the FDGs, held between April and May 2021, were selected among ESN applicants residing in Ankara, Izmir, Istanbul, Hatay, Samsun and Gaziantep. These cities are home to 46 per cent of the total number of Syrians under temporary protection in Türkiye<sup>2</sup>. The respondents consisted of 36 women and 39 men between the ages of 20 and 84. Of the 75 respondents, 43 were ESN recipients. The remaining 32 had applied to the programme but were either not accepted or no longer received assistance as they did not meet the criteria<sup>3</sup>.

Respondents were assigned randomly to 14 groups, based on their beneficiary status, regardless of their city of residence, education status or age group. Discussions were conducted separately for male and female participants. The study sample is not representative of the population under temporary and international protection in Türkiye.

**Respondents by Gender and ESN Beneficiary Status**

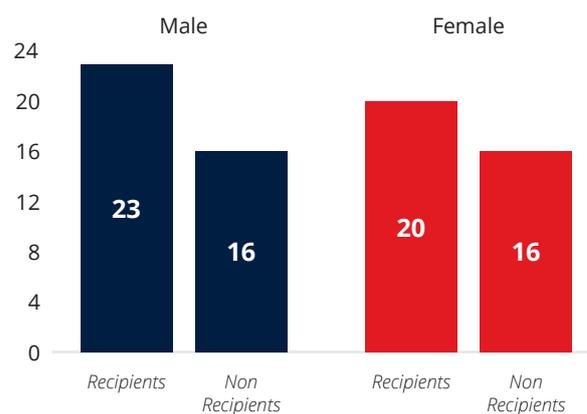


Figure 1

<sup>2</sup> Directorate General of Migration Management, Distribution of Syrians Under Temporary Protection by Province, retrieved from <https://www.goc.gov.tr/gecici-koruma5638>.

<sup>3</sup> Two respondents choose to leave the FDGs session; therefore, the evaluations were based on the opinions of 75 respondents, instead of 77.

### Respondents by City

City	Number of Respondents	Distribution
Ankara	19	25%
Istanbul	14	19%
Izmir	6	8%
Hatay	13	17%
Gaziantep	21	28%
Samsun	2	3%
Total	75	100%

Table 1

### Respondents by Age

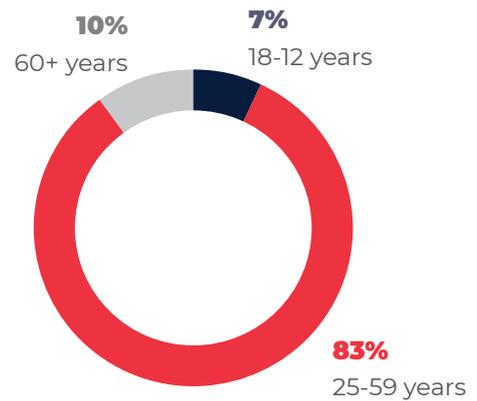


Figure 3

## DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

From June 2020 onwards, FGDs for the ESSN programme have been conducted via video conference with tablets or phones, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This innovative model enables respondents residing in different regions to attend the same FGD session and to do so in a safe manner<sup>4</sup>. The discussions are held online with expert moderators and rapporteurs, after asking permission from the respondents through the 168 Kızılay Call Center. The field teams then go to the respondents' houses to deliver the necessary devices for the discussion, following social distancing rules and all other hygiene requirements.

The reports prepared by the rapporteurs with notes taken during the discussions were cross-checked with the video recordings and transcribed by TRC monitoring and evaluation analysts. These transcriptions were then analyzed and reported jointly by the TRC and IFRC experts, using NVivo software.

## DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF RESPONDENTS

52 per cent of the respondents in the FGDs were male and 48 per cent were female. Sixty per cent of the respondents were benefiting from the ESSN programme and the remaining 40 percent had applied to the programme but were either not accepted or were no longer provided with assistance, since they did not meet the criteria. Other demographic characteristics of the respondents are provided in Table 2:

### Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

#### Respondents by age group

18-24	5%
25-59	84%
60<	11%

#### Respondents by the level of education

Illiterate	8%
Primary school	44%
Middle school	23%
High school	15%
Associate degree or bachelor's degree	10%

Table 2

<sup>4</sup> More details on Turkish Red Crescent "Adapting to New Normal During COVID-19: Remote Focus Group Discussions" accessible in [http://platform.kizilaykart.org/en/Doc/rapor/Remote\\_Focus\\_Group\\_Discussions.pdf](http://platform.kizilaykart.org/en/Doc/rapor/Remote_Focus_Group_Discussions.pdf).

# FINDINGS

## KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE ESSN PROGRAMME

### 1. Programme goals and donor

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“

**“It helps many people in need. Most of these people came here from their homeland far away to flee from war and conflict. This programme supports them by alleviating their rent, electricity and water expenses.”**

– Male, Gaziantep, non-recipient

The programme goal most mentioned by respondents was to provide humanitarian assistance to people in need. Respondents also described it as “support for basic living expenses”, such as rent and bills. Many respondents stated that this assistance was well-needed and useful.

Five respondents reported that the programme aims to support people with disabilities, while two respondents stated that it intends to contribute to the applicants’ vocational & language education and to provide employment for young people. On the other hand, four respondents did not know the purpose of the programme.

When asked who funds the ESSN programme, 29 respondents (40 per cent) mentioned that they knew or had heard of assistance from the European Union. Of the respondents with this knowledge, 23 were male and 6 female. Distribution by city shows that the respondents in Gaziantep, Hatay and Ankara, respectively, had the most accurate information.



**More than half of respondents did not have sufficient knowledge of the donor**

“

**“Some Turkish citizens claim that the assistance is provided by Türkiye and that our rents and bills are paid by the Turkish people. However, the money actually comes from the European Union.”** – Male, Samsun, ESSN recipient

On the other hand, more than half of the respondents did not have sufficient knowledge of the donor, while 14 respondents (11 of which were non-recipients) indicated that they did not know the donor at all. Of those respondents who had insufficient information, 30 thought the United Nations was a part of the source of funding, 16 thought the Republic of Türkiye was the funder and other respondents mentioned TRC as part of the donorship.

When asked about the importance of knowing who the donor is, the respondents' answers varied. Women were found to attach less importance to knowing the source of the funding than men. Thirty-two respondents (20 female and 12 male) said that this information is of no consequence to them, and what matters is that they are able to get help, while 27 respondents (17 female and 10 male) said that this information is important and that they would like to know who supports them. The remaining 16 respondents did not share their thoughts on this issue.

Information on the programme donor is available in all notifications made through the various programme communication channels and is accessible to everyone involved in the programme.

However, considering these findings, it may be useful to issue some quick and clear notifications that solely include funding information via social media and SMS, to raise the awareness of ESSN applicants, particularly those who cannot benefit from the programme.

“

**“I honestly have no idea. I don't know who funds the programme or how to load money onto Kızılaykart since I've never used it.”**

– Female, Hatay, non-recipient

“

**“What matters is that we are able to get the help we need. Any kind of help is much appreciated, regardless of where it comes from.”**

– Female, Samsun, non-recipient

## 2. Eligibility criteria

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**Many respondents did not have a clear understanding of the programme criteria or the reasons for ineligibility and instead interpreted based on their own experiences.**

The eligibility criteria cited by most respondents was “having three or more children”. This reveals that the respondents are not aware of the distinction between “1.5 or more dependents per every healthy adult in the family (aged 18–59)” and “having four children”; instead, they treat these two as a single criteria. Other criteria mentioned include being widowed (single women aged 18–59 with no other adults in the family, and single mothers or single fathers with at least one child under the age of 18), having a disabled or an elderly person over the age of 60 in the household and having children under the age of 18. These answers show that the respondents do not have a clear understanding of the programme criteria or the reasons for ineligibility and instead interpret them based on their own experiences.

“

**“Wherever you look, it is right there (referring to the eligibility criteria information). It is on social media platforms like Facebook. You can also learn from other people, like neighbours. If you have at least three children, you will receive a Kızılaykart. When someone has their third child, you don't congratulate them on their baby; you congratulate them on their Kızılaykart.”**

– Male, İstanbul, ESSN recipient

When asked what could make people ineligible for the programme, 41 respondents answered, “when one of the children turns 18,” while 32 respondents responded, “when a change of address is not reported.” These two criteria were the most known reasons for ineligibility. Moreover, 29 respondents cited “the applicant owning property, such as houses, cars or workplaces” or “the applicant working in a formal job (with social security)” as reasons for ineligibility.

A small number of respondents identified other reasons for ineligibility, including failure to meet the dependency ratio due to the number of children in the family (this is often described as having two children), acquiring Turkish citizenship, death of the applicant, absence/cancellation of an official ID card and failure to renew any existing disability reports. A few respondents wrongly believed that “changing your phone number could result in exclusion from the programme.”

Some respondents claimed that the ESN assistance is not ceased when a family member turns 18 if the person continues their education. Additionally, some said that car owners can still benefit from the assistance if the car is cheap, while others claimed that the support is ceased when there are six family members or when a daughter in the family gets married.

“

**“A lot of information is available on this subject (referring to the reasons for ineligibility from the programme). One reason is there must be someone over the age of 18 in the family, and that person must have ownership of a car or real estate. Others include address changes and the acquiring of citizenship. A change of phone number is another.”**

– Male, Gaziantep, ESN recipient

“

**“When someone turns 18, their card is blocked. They used to block the card when a daughter in the family turned 18, but they no longer do this. They block your card as soon as you change your residential address, ID information or phone number. They sometimes stop the support for those who own a car, but this isn’t always the case. They also stop the help if you are financially self-sufficient.”**

– Male, Izmir, ESN recipient



# PROGRAMME COMMUNICATION METHODS

## 1. Access to general programme information

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Most preferred channels for accessing information are:



168 Kızılay Call Center



Social Media

The respondents were asked what channels they use to access programme information. The answers revealed that the most used channels were 168 Kızılay Call Center and social media, respectively. There was no difference between male and female respondents regarding their preferences. These channels were followed by the TRC Service Center (preferred mostly by male respondents) and informative short messages (SMSs).

Fifty-two respondents who preferred the 168 Kızılay Call Center to access programme information, stated that using this channel was easier, faster and cheaper than visiting the service centers. Moreover, some respondents preferred the 168 Kızılay Call Center because they believed it was more reliable than other channels.

Thirteen of 31 respondents who used social media to access programme information believed the most reliable channel was the official Facebook page of the Kızılaykart Platform. The respondents who preferred social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, and Instagram<sup>5</sup> explained that they have joined these platforms and groups and learned the information from people who had been through similar processes. Respondents who are illiterate seemed to prefer the official Kızılaykart YouTube channel (created to inform those under international and temporary protection) and other unofficial YouTube channels.

“

**“Communicating with the call center is the way to go. You can speak directly to the party concerned without needing to go through second or third channels. This allows you to get more detailed and accurate information.”**

– Male, Gaziantep, non-recipient

“

**“I don’t know how to read Facebook posts. I’m illiterate, so I visit the service center for information. Occasionally, I listen to informational YouTube videos. But I am often faced with internet connection issues, which affect audio and video buffering. Therefore, visiting the service center is the best option for me.”** –

Male, Gaziantep, ESSN recipient

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<sup>5</sup> The ESSN Programme does not have an official WhatsApp.

Ten respondents (mostly male) stated that they preferred to receive information face-to-face from the TRC Service Center because they were either illiterate, unsure of the reliability of the information on social media or felt unable to solve the problem by calling the 168 Kızılay Call Center. Female respondents mostly preferred social media and the 168 Kızılay Call Center.

Ten respondents indicated that informative short messages are sufficient to access programme information and five of them stated that they can learn information by asking their relatives, friends and children (especially the elderly). Further evaluation of these findings showed that many respondents used multiple communication channels to learn about the programme.



**“I get my information from the service center because the additional payments and other news mentioned on Facebook are not convincing. It is best to head over to the center and obtain information face-to-face. Service center employees even notify us with SMSs when something happens.”**

– Male, Hatay, ESSN recipient

## 2. Access to eligibility criteria information

**Most preferred channels to access eligibility criteria information are:**



**168 Kızılay Call Center**



**Social Media**



**Other people**  
(family, relatives and neighbors)

The ESSN Satisfaction and Feedback Survey II (April 2021) revealed that 56 per cent of the respondents did not have the correct information on the ESSN eligibility criteria. Meanwhile, 91 per cent of the FGD's respondents were satisfied with the information provided on eligibility criteria. These respondents were also asked about their methods for obtaining criteria information. The most preferred methods were consulting with the TRC service centers, social media accounts and other people (family, relatives and neighbours), respectively. Of the 38 respondents who received their criteria information face-to-face, 29 stated that they were able to learn the criteria through the personnel and informative brochures at the TRC Service and Community Centers. On the other hand, 16 respondents used remote information channels such as the 168 Kızılay Call Center, official Kızılaykart website or informative SMSs, describing them as inexpensive, fast and easy to use.



**“I went to the Kızılay Service Center and received a brochure containing all the information on the criteria and conditions.”**

– Male, Hatay, non-recipient

Although the respondents reported that the information gleaned from social media and the social environment is likely to be inaccurate, 31 of them still used these channels to obtain criteria information, while 24 of them received their information through relatives, friends or acquaintances. Since immigrants are known to rely heavily on their strong

social networks, it is understandable that they chose to obtain information on the Kızılaykart criteria from social media platforms or their social circles. However, it is also clear from their responses that they have been exposed to disinformation. These findings suggest the need for further evaluation of the effectiveness of current communication channels and an exploration of which additional and feasible communication methods could be used in light of applicant's preferences to improve the applicants' knowledge and understanding of the programme eligibility criteria.

**“When we searched for the criteria, someone’s YouTube channel came up. They explained the criteria in their video. That’s how we learned about them.”**  
 – Male, İzmir, ESSN recipient

**“I receive my information by calling 168 and providing my ID number. I also check out Facebook and the official Kızılay website.”**  
 – Female, Hatay, ESSN recipient

**“I receive information from Facebook, WhatsApp, siblings, friends, and visitors. I don’t go out very often, and I don’t go to the service centers either. However, I still receive the news somehow.”**  
 – Female, Samsun, non-recipient

### Applicants’ recommendations

Thirty-three respondents, consisting predominantly of men (24 male), stated that social media platforms were their recommended means to obtain information on the programme eligibility criteria. The most recommended social media channels were Facebook and YouTube, respectively.

A third of the respondents consisting predominantly of women (18 female and 7 male) said that short messages were the best method and would therefore recommend extending their use to include information on eligibility criteria. The reasons cited included not having access to or not trusting the information on the internet.

**“Short messages reach everyone. Many people lack internet access, so it is better for them to receive short messages.”**  
 – Female, Hatay, non-recipient

**Preferences of the respondents recommending social media for criteria information**

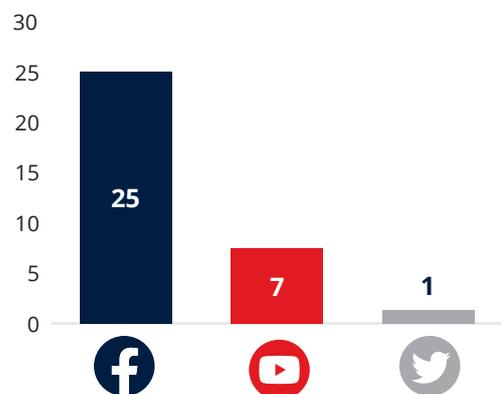


Figure 4

In the programme, the applicants are not informed about programme eligibility via short messages; short messages are only issued if the assistance is discontinued to specify the reason for such action.



“

**“As mentioned before, the information on Facebook has always been tampered with. There is a lot of false information. That is why I only trust short messages.”**

– Male, Samsun, non-recipient

“

**“Some people are widowed, orphaned, or illiterate. Additionally, some women don’t use phones. I believe forming a women’s group could be effective for informing people; even quick, one-minute home visits. Let’s try our best to reach people with the programme and occasional home visits.”**

– Male, Gaziantep, ESSN recipient

Eleven respondents suggested that household visits, one-on-one briefings and discussions, and even group meetings were potentially viable solutions to share information on eligibility criteria with the illiterate and elderly.

While evaluating these recommendations, it should be considered that household visits have been temporarily suspended and group meetings are held online due to the pandemic. A few respondents noted that the use of mass media, such as billboards and TV, could help raise awareness of the programme criteria. However, this recommendation should be approached with caution from a social cohesion perspective as it may cause issues with the local community.

### 3. Communication tools, feedback and complaint mechanisms

The ESSN Satisfaction and Feedback Survey (April 2021) showed that more than 95 per cent of the ESSN recipients were satisfied with the application and cash transfer stages of the programme, and with the behaviour of the TRC personnel. In addition, they did not experience any problems with the use of ATMs or other components.

When the FGDs respondents were asked about the use of programme communications, including feedback and complaint mechanisms, 58 of them said that they had not provided any feedback or lodged a complaint about the functioning of the programme processes. Only four respondents had complained through formal channels that they could not obtain assistance, while two respondents gave feedback on their issues with the ATMs. The remaining 13 respondents opted not to make any comments on this issue. Therefore, these findings are consistent with previous survey data, which showed that the majority of applicants were satisfied with the efficiency of the processes and the behaviour of the programme personnel.

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**“You get the best results from the 168 Kızılay Call Center. We are yet to experience any problems. Everything is going smoothly.”**

– Male, Hatay, ESSN recipient

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**“I’ve had no reason to complain. The personnel were very well-mannered and treated me well. I visited the center three times. They issued my card right away, and their attitude was very positive.”**

– Male, İstanbul, ESSN recipient

It was observed that respondents who have made complaints or provided feedback considered the 168 Kızılay Call Center as their main point of contact.

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**“When my card broke, I first called the Kızılay for information. They redirected me to Halkbank and set up an appointment. They told me I could pick up the new card on Monday, and I did.”**

– Female, Ankara, ESSN recipient

## Applicants’ recommendations

During the FGDs, the respondents were asked for recommendations in relation to the current communication tools, including feedback and complaint mechanisms. Among their suggestions were provision of technical support for the 168 Kızılay Call Center to enable faster response or the creation of alternative hotlines, the development of an interactive WhatsApp network that is active 24/7, placement of suggestion boxes in official institutions for anonymous complaints and feedback, and shaping official social media channels (YouTube, Facebook, etc.) in such a way that applicants can communicate directly their complaints and feedback to the programme personnel<sup>6</sup>.

Nine of the respondents also suggested that the official websites of Kızılaykart should be clearly distinguishable and that no unofficial pages should operate on behalf of Kızılaykart to minimize exposure to misinformation on social networks.



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**“The call center line gets busy and sometimes requires you to be on hold for long periods of time. We must spend a lot of time and effort to reach to personnel and get help with urgent matters. You can solve this by establishing a few more hotlines (like 168) so that everyone can make a complaint or express their opinions. Most importantly, a secondary Red Crescent channel must be established for us to reach.”**

– Female, Gaziantep, ESSN-recipient

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**“Suggestion boxes could be implemented at Red Crescent service centers. If someone feels uncomfortable issuing a complaint in person, they can use these anonymous boxes.”**

– Male, Hatay, ESSN recipient

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**“All unofficial pages on Facebook must be closed. There should only be one official channel. When you type in ‘Kızılaykart,’ you should only see one page.**

– Male, Hatay, non-recipient

<sup>6</sup> As part of the ESSN programme, individuals in the current modality may contact the programme personnel by sending a message to the official Facebook page.

# SATISFACTION WITH PROGRAMME STAGES

When asked about how satisfied they were with the ESN processes, 28 respondents reported that they were satisfied with all programme stages, and everything was going smoothly. Satisfaction with the personnel ranked second in the top satisfaction factors. Eighteen respondents (16 male, 2 female) stated that the ESN programme personnel, and the TRC Service Center staff, in particular, were polite, respectful, result-oriented, well-mannered and helpful.

These responses were followed by expressions of satisfaction concerning the news of acceptance into the programme and subsequent cash transfers. This included satisfaction with the swift notification of admission via short message, and the happiness experienced when receiving their card or withdrawing cash for the first time. Finally, 19 respondents stated that they were most satisfied with the registration/application stage. They mentioned how this stage was handled smoothly and professionally by helpful personnel.

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**“The Kızılay staff who helped me were very polite and nice. We completed our application comfortably, with the entire process taking only a few minutes.”**

– Male, Gaziantep, non recipient

When asked about the least satisfactory aspects of the programme stages, 21 respondents cited rejection or exclusion as the hardest part. Some respondents complained that, despite the severity of their circumstances, their grievances went unaddressed upon objecting to the rejection decision, and that the programme personnel were unable to come up with a solution.

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**“I must say that the Kızılay Service Center is something else. They know how to treat everyone, from children to adults. Say you want to change your phone number: they will take care of it right away. They treat us like family. When they see you outside the service center, they ask how you are doing, regardless of who you are.”**

– Male, Gaziantep, ESN recipient

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**“All processes are carried out smoothly. Especially the first stage. They inform and guide everyone in the appropriate manner. We handed over our paperwork, and the staff were very helpful. Needless to say, I was over the moon about being accepted into the programme.”**

– Male, Gaziantep, ESN recipient

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**“The hardest part is that that we apply for assistance multiple times but we constantly face rejection.”**

– Female, Ankara, non-recipient

Another important finding was the dissatisfaction expressed by 15 respondents towards the address and identity registration process. Province-based evaluation of the findings revealed that seven people from Gaziantep share the same dissatisfaction. Regarding the problems experienced, the respondents stated that the address registration process is tedious, takes too long, causes the formation of large crowds and that the Kızılaykart is blocked for two to three months when they opt to change their place of residence.

Other complaints - mentioned by only a few - included waiting two to three months to find out their application status, the forming of crowds during registration, the inconvenient location of the TRC Service Center being too far, the COVID-19 procedures taking too long to update their information and the tedious renewal of ATM cards.

## THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON SPENDING

When asked about the impact of the pandemic on their use of Kızılaykart during the FGDs, 29 out of 45 ESSN recipients responded that there had been no change in the way they used Kızılaykart. While some respondents addressed the use of Kızılaykart in relation to expenses such as rent, bills, and food, the subject was also addressed in relation to potential issues with transfers, including withdrawal from the ATMs.

Seven Kızılaykart holders (predominantly female) did mention there were changes in the way they used their cards. They referred to rising prices, which caused the assistance amount to be insufficient. Additionally, their spending planning has changed with the pandemic conditions and the assistance has become their main source of income, following unforeseen unemployment. Among the respondents who cited no change in their use of the Kızılaykart, two of them stated that they believed the transfer amount was insufficient. One thing to consider regarding the sufficiency of the transfer amount is that six out of the seven FGDs were held before the increase in the assistance (monthly aid per capita rose from 120 TRY to 155 TRY).

One respondent reported that the rise in assistance amount came just in time, describing it as “additional income” that was necessary, explaining the changing economic conditions as follows:

Overall, these comments show that the pandemic did not significantly affect the ways in which Kızılaykart is used. However, the ensuing economic difficulties, which affected spending and purchasing power, were commonly reported by the respondents.



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**“The current pandemic restrictions have put my job and income on hold. I have no other income; Kızılaykart is all I have.”**

–Male, Gaziantep, ESSN recipient

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**“It’s not what it used to be. The amount was more satisfying before. The situation was better. Now it’s much worse. With inflation, living conditions have become really challenging. Back then, 120 TRY was enough. Now it’s not. People are unable to make ends meet. Everything has become so expensive.”**

– Female, İstanbul, ESSN recipient

# APPLICANTS' RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE ESSN PROGRAMME

## Re-evaluate the programme eligibility criteria

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When asked for their improvement suggestions, 27 respondents recommended re-evaluating the programme eligibility criteria. These views were shared by almost the same number of recipients and non-recipients. Respondents recommended that the criteria should be more inclusive, acceptance into the programme should be made easier and the programme should cover everyone under protection. They argued that every household has expenses, such as rent and bills, regardless of the number of children and that the households outside the scope of the programme are also experiencing serious financial troubles due to the pandemic.

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**“I think everyone who has a temporary protection identity document or a family register should benefit from the assistance. I believe it should be provided to everyone, regardless of any criteria such as having children, elderly people or children over the age of 18 in the family.”**

– Female, Hatay, non-recipient

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**“Small families of three or four, in particular, are struggling. A family of four is trying to get by, just like a family of seven. However, while families of seven benefit from the Kızılaykart, families of four can't. Both families have to pay rent, though.”**

– Male, Gaziantep, ESSN recipient

13 respondents recommended accepting families with two children into the programme and six respondents recommended not cutting off the support to households with someone who has turned 18 if that person is still attending school. They stated that school-aged children would otherwise be required to get jobs. Another recommendation was to cut off the support solely for the person who has turned 18, while the rest of the household continues to benefit from the assistance.

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**“The assistance should not cease when a child turns 18, as many young people this age opt to continue with their education. Many families are in the same situation. When children can no longer benefit from the support, they are forced to drop out of school and get jobs.”**

– Female, İstanbul, ESSN recipient

## Increase the number of household visits

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The respondents also had recommendations in relation to household visits. Thirteen respondents (nine male, almost the same number of recipients and non-recipients) advocated for an increase in the number of household visits, claiming that they are essential to evaluate the vulnerability of households. One respondent requested the removal of the disability percentage criteria<sup>7</sup>.

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**“Instead of giving more to cardholders, it would be better to expand the service to support those with no card. Some people benefit from it even though they don’t need it, which prevents the assistance from reaching others in need. I think household visits should be made mandatory. Families benefiting from the Kızılaykart should be visited at home to ensure their need for the card is justified.”**

– Male, Hatay, non-recipient

## Increase the amount of assistance

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Eight respondents recommended increasing the amount of assistance<sup>8</sup>. Many respondents claimed that the assistance remained insufficient for small households, even with a single person or fewer children, noting the high inflation.

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**“We are satisfied with everything, except with the amount paid per capita. We are happy with the Türk Kızılay and their regular payments. They make the payments at the end of every month without delay. It’s just that the amount is not enough.”**

– Male, İzmir, ESSN recipient

## Help to facilitate and accelerate the process for changing/registering addresses

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A small group of respondents complained about how long it takes to register addresses and how the Kızılaykart is blocked during that period. They recommended facilitating and accelerating the address or phone registration processes and continuing the Kızılaykart support during the changeover period. Some respondents stated that their assistance ceased for two to three months due to this process, which left them very vulnerable. They requested for this period of suspension to be removed. A few respondents said that they could not change their address over the fear of having their support terminated. They also recommended performing phone or address registrations through the official hotline or the internet to prevent the formation of crowds under pandemic conditions.

<sup>7</sup> Previously, the minimum disability criteria within the ESSN programme was set at 40 per cent and applicants were required to prove their fulfillment of this criteria with a medical report. However, the disability criteria is being re-evaluated as part of the Complementary Emergency Social Safety Net (C-ESSN) programme as of July 2021.

<sup>8</sup> When evaluating the sufficiency of the support, it is important to note that six out of the seven FGDs with ESSN recipients were held before the recent increase in the assistance (when monthly aid per capita rose from 120 TRY to 155 TRY).

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**“Firstly, I would like the address change to be instantly reflected in the systems at the Kızılay Service Centers. My second request is related to diseases, COVID-19 and curfews. I shouldn’t have to visit the service center to formally change my contact details. I should instead be able to change my number by contacting you over the phone. This would prevent crowding at the service center. As for addresses or any other issue, sending a photo over WhatsApp should suffice. We should be able to change addresses, phone numbers, etc., over an official hotline or the internet.”**

– Male, Gaziantep, non-recipient

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**“It would be great if they were more time-efficient with application forms. The paperwork can be handled much quicker over the internet. Institutions can communicate over the internet for applications. Instead of waiting in line, people should be able to carry out the procedures over the internet.”**

– Female, Ankara, ESSN recipient

## Improve access to ATMs

Kızılaykart recipients stated that they usually don’t experience any problems with the use of ATMs; however, they added that the illiterate, the elderly or the disabled were experiencing issues. The respondents found the ATMs to be user-friendly due to the Arabic language option, the option to use banks other than Halkbank and the security personnel’s helpful manners.

Four respondents recommended increasing the number of ATMs to prevent the formation of crowds and other potential issues, signing agreements with other banks in addition to Halkbank, and implementing an Arabic language option in other banks.

Finally, eighteen respondents stated that they did not have any recommendations for improving the programme and that everything was running smoothly.



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**“I’ve had no trouble with the ATMs. Though from what I hear, the illiterate are having a hard time with them. The bank staff can help them. Or they can receive the money from the Kızılay in cash. There may not always be someone to help. Many people don’t know how to speak Turkish or use the card.”**

– Female, Ankara, ESSN recipient

# CONCLUSION

The FGDs organized as part of this study have provided the ESSN programme with a rich set of complementary qualitative data, that, for the most part, are consistent with the data gathered through the Satisfaction and Feedback survey and therefore reinforce its findings. Key specific findings of these FGDs include:



**Donor recognition:** More than half of the respondents do not know who the donor is and do not consider this information to be important. These findings are consistent with the Satisfaction and Feedback Survey II results.



**Eligibility criteria:** The respondents often did not articulate the correct programme criteria or the reasons for ineligibility; instead, they usually interpreted them based on their own experiences. Even though their versions of the criteria were not fully consistent with the actual criteria, commonalities were observed. This is consistent with the ESSN Satisfaction and Feedback Survey results, where 91 per cent of the ESSN applicants were satisfied with the criteria information provided by the programme personnel, even though 54 per cent did not have the correct criteria information.



**Access to general programme information:** The FGDs demonstrated that the 168 Kızılay Call Center and social media were the preferred channels due to their speed, affordability and ease of use. On the contrary, informative SMSs ranked first among the avenues for obtaining programme information according to the ESSN Satisfaction and Feedback survey results. The survey also revealed that 52 per cent of the applicants preferred to use the 168 Kızılay Call Center to receive up-to-date programme information.



**Access to eligibility criteria information:** One-third of the respondents suggested using social media channels (Facebook and YouTube), while another third recommended short messages to share information on eligibility criteria. These recommendations indicate the need for further evaluation of the effectiveness of current communication channels and an exploration of which additional communication methods could be used to improve the applicants' knowledge of the programme eligibility criteria.



**Communication tools, feedback and complaint mechanisms:** The most-preferred channel for feedback and complaints was the 168 Kızılay Call Center, a result that is consistent with the ESSN Satisfaction and Feedback survey results. Respondent recommendations on this issue included placing suggestion boxes in official institutions for anonymous complaints and feedback, developing channels that will facilitate the direct communication of complaints and feedback to the programme personnel via social media platforms and ensuring that the official Kızılaykart website is clearly distinguished from other websites.



**Satisfaction with programme stages:** 37 percent of the respondents of this study were satisfied with all stages of the programme, with the personnel's attitude identified as a top satisfaction factor. In the FGDs, the respondents mentioned the challenges experienced with address registration and change of residence but stated that all other stages were usually running smoothly. This is again in keeping with the ESSN Satisfaction and Feedback survey results, where 96 per cent of the applicants reported not experiencing any problems during registration and 91 per cent of the beneficiaries believe that the programme personnel look out for the needs of the applicants.



**Applicants' recommendations:** Most of the suggestions for improving the programme were related to re-evaluating the eligibility criteria to make it more inclusive for those who cannot currently benefit from its assistance. They recommended accepting families with two children and continuing the assistance for households with someone who has turned 18 if that person is still attending school or ceasing the provision of assistance only for the person who has turned 18. Another suggestion was to increase the amount of cash assistance. The ESSN Satisfaction and Feedback survey revealed that 47 per cent of the applicants found it difficult to meet their basic needs with the current amount of assistance.

