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TÜRK KIZILAY

SSN

SOCIAL SAFETY NET *Programme*

1ST ROUND OF FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION (FGD) REPORT

MAY' 24

KIZILAYKART
Cash Based Assistance *Programmes*

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TABLE OF CONTENT

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

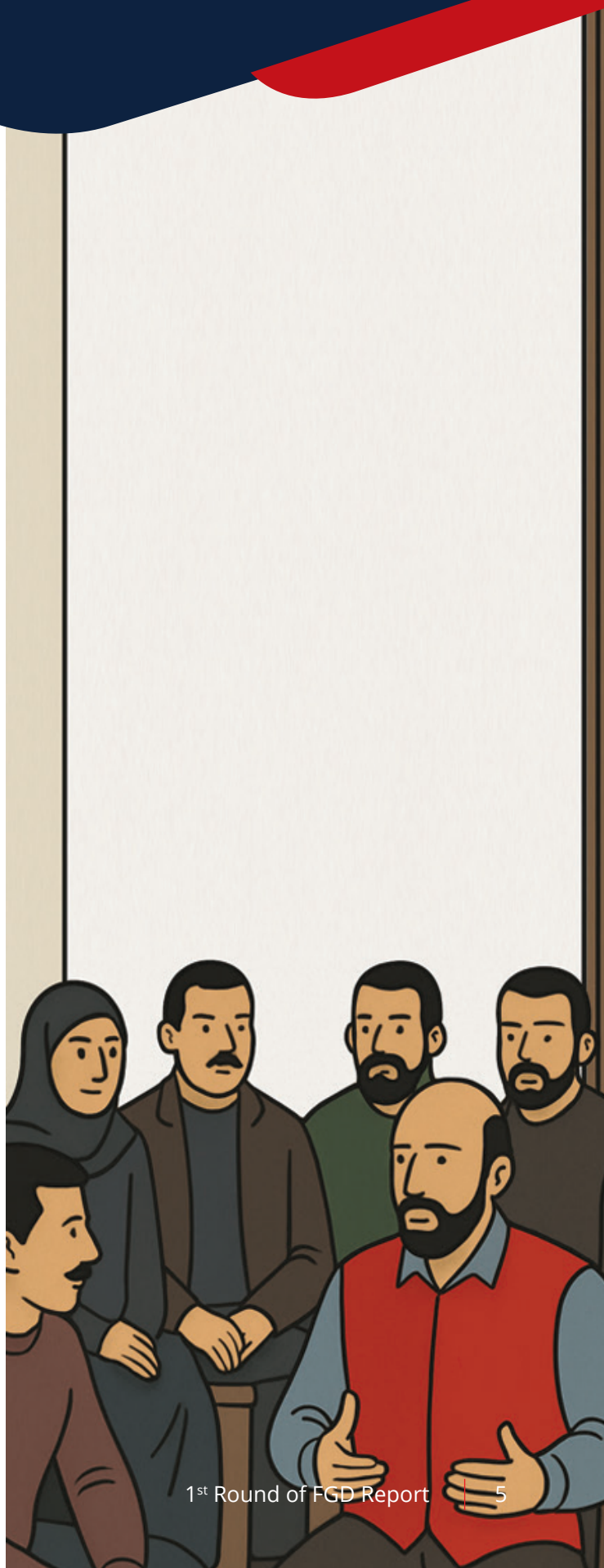
C-ESSN	**Complementary Emergency Social Safety Net**
ESSN	**Emergency Social Safety Net**
FGD	**Focus Group Discussion**
M&E	**Monitoring and Evaluation**
NGO	**Non-Governmental Organizations**
PDMM	**Provincial Directorate of Migration Management**
SSN	**Social Safety Net**
SuTPs	**Syrians under Temporary Protection**
TRC	**Turkish Red Crescent (Türk Kızılay)**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study aims to conduct a series of Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) to deeply explore community perceptions and reactions to the recent criteria adjustments which is exclusion the group of males age from 18 to 59 years. Additionally, it seeks to broadly evaluate the effectiveness of the gender adjusted dependency ratio from the perspectives of both beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries. Besides the exclusion of males from the project, increased transfer value of the cash assistance and its impact on beneficiaries is deeply evaluated.

By directly involving community members in the evaluation of these criteria adjustments, the SSN Programme aims to meet the needs of the most vulnerable groups more effectively, ensuring that the assistance is delivered equitably and resonates with the realities of those it seeks to support. This participatory approach not only enriches the programme's understanding of its impact but also fosters a stronger sense of trust and engagement within the community. The study is based on eight FGDs conducted in March 2024 with 36 female and 28 male recipients from five provinces, namely İstanbul, Ankara, Gaziantep, Konya and Kilis. Data collection and reporting was undertaken by Türk Kızılay.

The key findings and main recommendations of this report are presented below.



Key Findings

- The respondents were partially aware of the full eligibility criteria for receiving cash assistance. The majority numbers of respondents were informed about a reduction in cash assistance, primarily through SMS, social media, and informal networks. The rationale behind the readjustment in eligibility criteria was predominantly seen as a motivations for men in this age group to seek employment and increase their self-reliance.

- Most of participants viewed the exclusion of males aged 18-59 from cash assistance negatively, noting a significant decline in the adequacy of cash assistance in meeting their basic needs due to economic challenges in Türkiye. Participants also highlighted a need to adjust their coping strategies. Female participants provided detailed accounts of the challenges faced, including increased debt and the need for austerity measures, while male participants spoke of the necessity for secondary employment and voiced concerns over the criteria adjustments.

- Addressing those barriers was suggested by participants, through the potential expansion of new job opportunities, enrolment in language and vocational training courses, and revision of project criteria.

- Despite some female participants view the increase in transfer value positively for affording housing cost, the majority of participants reported no substantial improvement in their circumstances following increased transfer value. According to that the assistance now barely covers food necessities rather than cost of rent as it did in the past.

- Almost half of the male participants, emphasized on the need to revise the eligibility requirement to include overlooked vulnerable households such as those with health problems, while more than half of the female participants were confident in the current project's eligibility process.

- Households with a large number of children were ranked as the most vulnerable by the participants, followed by households with disabled members as the second most vulnerable, and single-parent families as the third most vulnerable.

INTRODUCTION

Social Safety Net (SSN) Programme is designed to provide cash-based assistance to most vulnerable households, aiming to enhance the resilience of vulnerable populations. Keeping in mind the nature of vulnerability and the varied dynamics of the populations it serves, the programme engages in regular vulnerability measurement assessments and criteria adjustment as needed and periodically as part of programmatic quality, accountability and transparency.

A recent adjustment to these criteria has been the exclusion of males aged 18-59 from eligibility for the household assessment. The study is motivated by the critical need to understand how such adjustments in eligibility criteria resonate with the community, especially in light of the potential impact on household support dynamics and perceptions of equity within the programme's framework. The exclusion of a specific demographic group raises questions about the criteria's alignment with the realities of the target population, the adequacy of assistance provided to households in meeting their basic needs, and the broader implications for social cohesion and gender dynamics within the affected communities. Along with that, the impact of the increase in the transfer amount after exclusion of men from the project on household dynamics is discussed in detail.

This FGD seeks to bridge potential disparities between programme implementation and community expectations, fostering a transparent, participatory dialogue to enhance community engagement and trust. Through this process, the SSN Programme underscores its commitment to inclusivity and responsiveness, striving to ensure that its mechanisms for identifying and supporting vulnerable populations accurately reflect their needs and circumstances.

Objectives

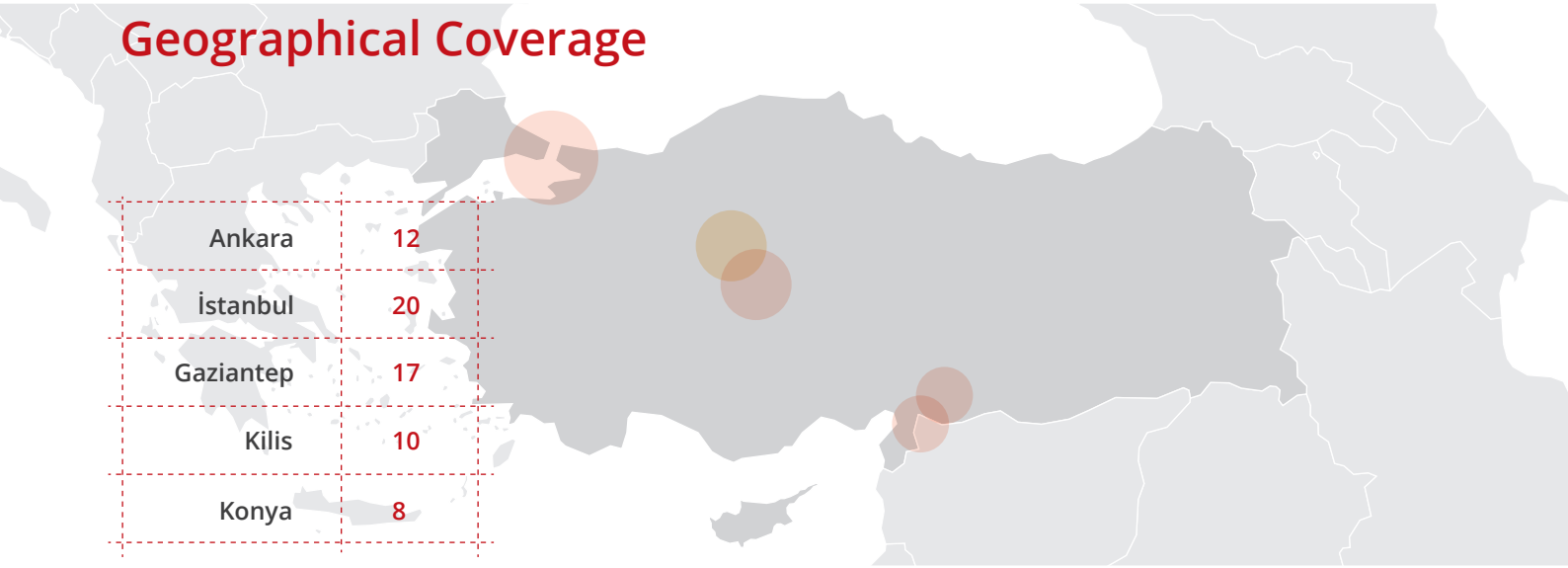
- To gauge community perceptions and understanding of the recent adjustment in vulnerability criteria, specifically the exclusion of males aged 18-59 from household assessments.
- To explore the impact of this criteria readjustment on household dynamics, and community perceptions of fairness and equity.
- To collect community feedback on the overall vulnerability criteria used by the SSN Programme, identifying areas for improvement.
- To understand community's perspective on increased Transfer Value as well as its impact on households.
- To strengthen community engagement and ownership over the SSN Programme through participatory feedback mechanisms.

METHODOLOGY

Sample and Demographic Characteristics

In March 2024, for the focus group discussions (FGDs), participants were chosen from amongst recipients of both ESSN and C-ESSN, including men aged 18 to 59 who had been excluded from the project in October 2023. Of the 67 respondents, 36 were women and 28 were men. The vast majority of the participants were elementary school graduates, while the rest were either middle school graduates or illiterate. Additionally, 75 percent of the participants were over 30 years old. As for nationality, all participants were Syrians under Temporary Protection. Participants were randomly selected based on gender and eligibility criteria from both the C-ESSN and ESSN projects. Along with that, all the participants experienced the impacts of the recent adjustments in the eligibility criteria. In total, eight sessions were conducted in-person, and FGDs took place in Ankara, İstanbul, Gaziantep, Kilis and Konya. Given the sample characteristics, the results of the current FGD do not fully represent the entire refugee population in Türkiye.

Geographical Coverage



Ankara	12
İstanbul	20
Gaziantep	17
Kilis	10
Konya	8

Data Collection and Analysis

Monitoring and Evaluation staff of Türk Kızılay designed the questions for the FGDs regarding focused themes. Before data collection, Türk Kızılay organised a session to discuss questions with field staff who participated in the FGD sessions. FGDs were held face-to-face, and expert moderators from Türk Kızılay carried out the discussions with observers from MoFSS at the Türk Kızılay Community Centres in Ankara, İstanbul, Gaziantep, Kilis and Konya. The discussions were carried out in Arabic language, the native tongue of the respondents. Staff from Türk Kızılay transcribed the reports using the notes taken during the discussions. Türk Kızılay Monitoring and Evaluation staff employed a qualitative content analysis method when reported these transcriptions. Monitoring and Evaluation staff of Türk Kızılay designed the questions for the FGDs regarding focused themes. Before data collection, Türk Kızılay organised a session to discuss questions with field staff who participated in the FGD sessions.

FINDINGS

Awareness of Criteria Readjustment

This section presents the respondent's awareness of the criteria and general understanding of the readjustment of the criteria, specifically the exclusion of males aged 18-59 from the project. According to that, 30 per cent of respondents said they didn't know the eligibility criteria for receiving cash assistance. On the other hand, the remaining participants in the focus group discussion were aware or partially aware of the eligibility criteria. Respondents who were aware of the eligibility criteria generally stated that having many children or elderly people was the most decisive condition for receiving assistance. Following on from this statement, respondents mentioned that the household with a single parent and a disabled person deserves cash assistance. Finally, a smaller number of respondents indicated that the household receiving assistance was the one that didn't have any assets and didn't have an official work permit. However, none of the respondents emphasized the recent criteria adjustment which is the exclusion of the 18-59 age group for males, a change implemented in October 2023.

When I withdrew the money, I learned that I received less than expected. Right after that, my aunt called the Türk Kızılay 168 call center and got information.

Female, Gaziantep

Despite the lack of highlights on readjustment of the criteria, 90 percent of the participants were aware of the reduction in cash assistance. Information about the reduction in cash assistance was received through a number of communication channels, including the 168 Türk Kızılay Call Centre, SMS and Facebook, with the majority of respondents reporting that they were informed via SMS and Facebook content sharing. In a proactive way of engagement, it was noted participants contacted the "168 Türk Kızılay Call Center" to confirm payments after they had made a withdrawal. Many participants, meanwhile, pointed out that after withdrawing money through ATMs, it was realized there was a lack of the amount of cash assistance. Some informal channels such as WhatsApp and TikTok were also other mentioned sources. A small number of respondents stated that they had no information about the cut in cash assistance.

Yes, I heard about it because I received an SMS, but there was also information on Facebook about the reduction in the number of people, which I saw there as well.

Female, Kilis

Based on the interviewees' perception on why the dependency ratio was adjusted, it was perceived that men between 18-59 are either working or available for work. More specifically, it was stated the main purpose behind the adjustment of the dependency ratio was to motivate this demographic, which had been cut off from assistance to look for work. Nevertheless, participants also marked some households had more than one person working and believed that the exclusion of working men from these households was more justified. An additional significant reason was articulated by respondents for excluding this group was the observation that larger families tend to be more vulnerable. This implies a prioritization of households with greater needs or more dependents. The readjustment in criteria, as explained generally by respondents, was also rooted in demographic considerations, specifically excluding men aged 18 and over, based on the information received through SMS from the Türk Kızılay.

> **We received a message saying it was because of demographic differences.**
>
> **Male, İstanbul**

> **I think that payments are no longer made to those who were removed from assistance because they are capable of working and meeting their needs.**
>
> **Male, Gaziantep**

Some male respondents supposed that the project's donors are considering a reduction in funding. Besides that, participants observed an increase in the number of Syrians, leading to the implementation of an exclusion strategy. Lastly, nearly 30 percent of the respondents refrained from expressing any views regarding the recent adjustments in criteria.

> **I think criteria readjustments was carried out due to the decrease in money coming from fund providers.**
>
> **Male, Gaziantep**

It was generally found that participants were not fully aware about the eligibility criteria. A large number of respondents were informed about excluded men aged 18-59 from cash assistance. through SMS, social media, and informal networks, identified as the primary and effective channels. Additionally, a considerable number of individuals only became aware of the reduction in cash assistance when attempting to withdraw money from banks, or after contacting the "168 Türk Kızılay Call Center" Regarding the reason for the recent adjustment in criteria, respondents commonly expressed that the primary purpose of changing the criteria was to incentivize men over the age of 18 to increase their work efforts. The following section gives a deep insight into the respondents' perspectives on this adjustment in criteria as well as the increased amount of transfer value.

Perception on Equality and Justice

This section, participants shared their opinions on two key adjustments in the project: the exclusion of males aged 18-59 from cash assistance and the increase in the amount of the transfer value. Even if some of the female participants reported that increasing in transfer amount positively, especially highlighting its beneficial effect on affording housing rents, a majority of both male and female participants reported no noticeable improvement in their circumstances in Türkiye's economic fluctuation following the rise in transfer value.

About one-third of female respondents prefer not to comment on the exclusion of men aged between 18 to 59 from the cash assistance program. Conversely, a minority of male participants perceived this exclusion positively, suggesting it might encourage employment among the excluded group of males age 18-59. However, several respondents felt that changes in household conditions were minimal post-criteria adjustments, arguing that the transfer value was already inadequate. As such, the recent policy modifications were deemed inconsequential by some. It's important to note that as readjustment in criteria and transfer value increase occurred sequentially, leading some participants to view the exclusion of male beneficiaries as having a minimal effect.

On the other hand, the majority of the respondents viewed the recent criteria adjustment unfavorably. They noted that, in previous years, the cash assistance was adequate for covering their rent. Currently, due to economic challenges in Türkiye, the assistance barely suffices for food necessities, indicating a significant decline in its value. Even when a single household member qualified for assistance, it previously had a somewhat positive impact on the overall well-being of the family. This situation has resulted in considerable hardship, adversely affecting all family members. Additionally, a small number of respondents highlighted that university students, in particular, were negatively affected by this exclusion. Overall, participants widely considered the recent adjustment in criteria to be a misstep. The subsequent section will delve into more detailed observations on how the increase in transfer value and the alteration in eligibility criteria have influenced household vulnerability.

> **They increased the assistance, but they removed my spouse from receiving assistance, so it made no difference.**
>
> **Female, Kilis**

> **On top of the price increases in the market, rent and bills, the decrease in the number of people receiving cash assistance in our family was not good.**
>
> **Female, Ankara**

Among those who are 18 years old, there are those who continue to study. This should have been taken into consideration.

Female, Ankara

I think making such a decision was not good. Even if men work, I think it was not right for them to be removed because they are in need.

Male, Konya

Impact on Household Dynamics

This section explores the impact of the criteria readjustment on household dynamics which took place in October 2023. Along with that, it was aimed to understand community's perspective on increased transfer value as well as its impact on households.

Exclusion of Males from the Project

A significant number of respondents highlighted that excluding males from the program had a substantial negative impact on household conditions. Coping strategies were a common theme among nearly all participants' responses. Male participants offered general remarks on the criteria adjustments, while female respondents provided deeper insights into the adverse effects of excluding men from cash assistance programs.

Male respondents shared their experiences of having to take up secondary employment or being in search of additional work. Older, above 50 years old, male participants, facing challenges in securing employment either due to age or the lack of stable jobs, indicated staying at home with their children. Male respondents also highlighted over the necessity of working hard for minimal wages within the difficult economic landscape of Türkiye. Moreover, it was suggested that excluding older men from the recent adjustment in criteria might have been a better approach, given their limited job opportunities.

Female respondents shared various perspectives, with a notable portion expressing their willingness to seek employment following the readjustment in criteria, including for some daily or temporary jobs. But most of these women highlighted their inability to work, attributing this primarily to the young age of their children.

We have reduced expenses. One person works in the family. Since there were few people who could work, we cut down on expenses.

Male, Ankara

Yes, I was not working, but when there was a shortage of people, I started to work in daily agricultural labour.

Female, Kilis

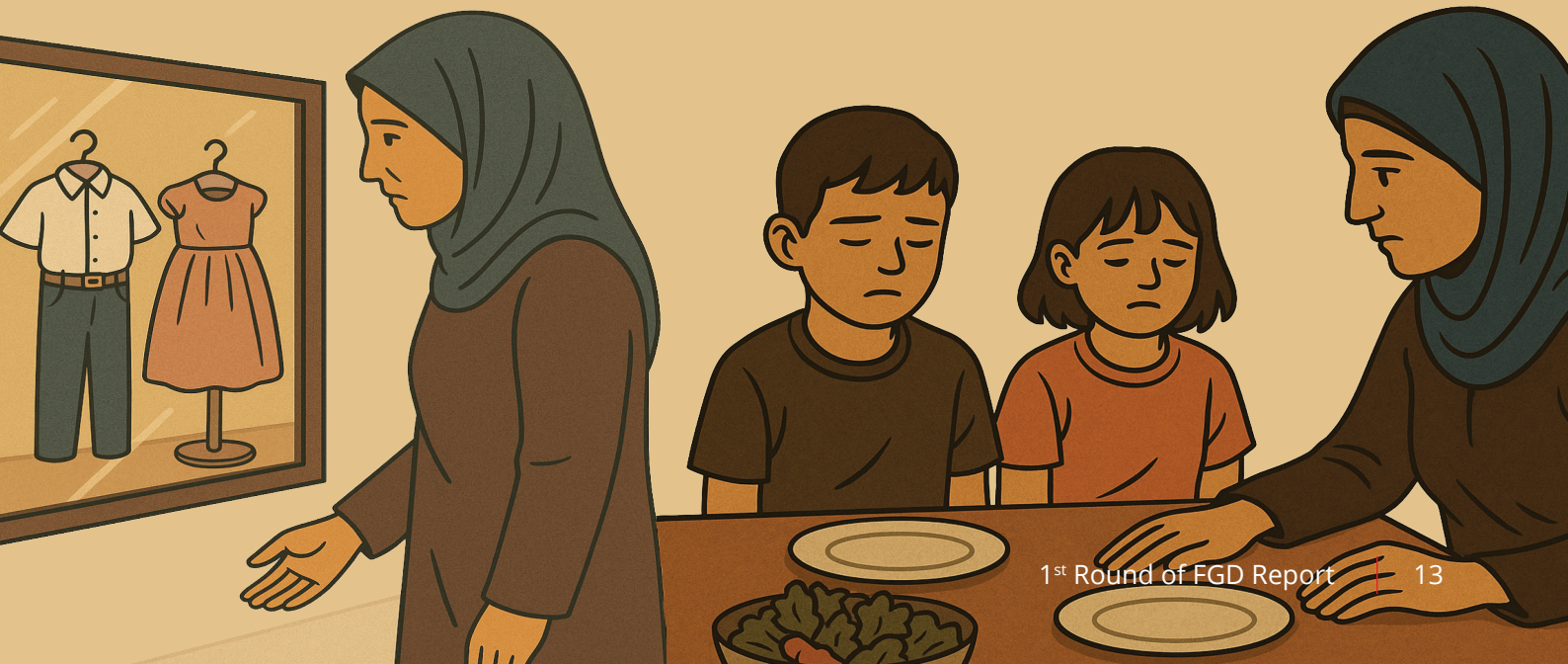
One major issue noted related to the increased debt levels compared to prior years stemming due to the high rental costs in Türkiye. It was indicated by many respondents that they were only to cover their monthly bills and a few even resorted to selling personal belongings to repay their debts. Besides, regarding the restriction of expenditures on basic needs, most participants indicated they only spent what they needed on food during their visits to the market or bazaar, and could not afford to buy chicken or meat.

> **I'm thinking of working, but there are no job opportunities. I can't find a solution. I started to sell my existing belongings. For example, this month I had to take my daughter's earring out of her ear and sell it.**
>
> **Female, Kilis**

Within this context, it was seen that participants' tightening measures extended beyond food, affecting their energy and education expenditures as well. Indeed, some participants expressed that they were considering taking their children out of school due to their lack of financial means and higher school fees. Overall, both female and male participants highlighted a reduction in spending on basic necessities. This adjustment was primarily attributed to a cut off in cash assistance received by households with the rising costs of various expenditure items, such as rent, utilities, and food.

> **Clothes, bills are difficult for us. We went to buy clothes for the children for the Eid al Fit-r,but they were so expensive that we had to return without buying them.**
>
> **Female, Gaziantep**

> **We've started cutting back on the children's expenses. We've completely cut down on food like meat and chicken.**
>
> **Female, Gaziantep**



> We have to cut back on everything, even our bread. We have no other choice.
>
> **Female, Gaziantep**

> While the cost of living has gone up, the cash assistance was reduced. We have to cut costs. I have to cut fees of school, food, fuel costs, I have no other choice.
>
> **Female, Gaziantep**

On the contrary, a segment of participants reported minimal impact on their lives following the exclusion of males from the cash assistance project. This observation was attributed to two main reasons. Firstly, it was not already relied on the cash assistance due to less amount. Instead it has been working for long hours to meet their basic needs who were already employed. Secondly, the simultaneous implementation of two adjustments to the project—an increase in the transfer amount and the exclusion of men—meant that the exclusion did not have a significant change.

In light of these adjustments, participants proposed several solutions to address the challenges posed by the exclusion of males from the cash assistance project. The most common suggestion was for the relevant authorities to create new job opportunities. Many participants, facing a language barrier in finding a job, expressed a willingness to enroll in Turkish language courses to improve their employment prospects or secure better positions. Beyond language courses, there was also an interest in vocational training, particularly among female participants, who showed keenness for jobs in tailoring, textiles, and cleaning. However, a concern was raised about the younger generation's contemplation of illegal means to secure employment abroad, aiming for better positions and wages.

In response to the provision of job and language course solutions, the discussion extended to revisiting the eligibility criteria. Male respondents, in particular, proposed several adjustments, such as increasing the transfer amount, including men aged 45-60 to the cash assistance project again, and incorporating those with employment insurance into the project. They also advocated for different assessments of families considering various factors like health issues and the number of children.

Overall, the respondents emphasized that the negative effects on household vulnerability were not solely due to the exclusion of men from the project but were also severely compounded by rising costs, from food to rent. Consequently, participants, irrespective of gender, expressed a strong desire for employment or better employment opportunities. Furthermore, female participants specifically highlighted the need for childcare support to enable their participation in the workforce. Meanwhile, male participants considered pursuing a second job or extending their working hours to fulfill their financial needs.

Increased Amount of Transfer Value

The boost in transfer value during February 2024 was deemed insufficient by the majority of the respondents. However, a subset of respondents highlighted the positive influence of this increase on household dynamics. Those who found the raised transfer amount adequate shared that it enabled them to settle some outstanding debts, including market purchases, rent, and utilities. Furthermore, a few mentioned that for the first time, the enhanced transfer fully met their household's basic food requirements for an entire month. Despite acknowledging the minimal impact, these respondents appreciated the positive impact brought about by the increased amount. On the flip side, a significant number of participants expressed dissatisfaction with the increment in cash assistance. They predominantly pointed out that the raised cash assistance did not significantly alter their household's financial condition, either for better or worse. Compounding this issue was the exclusion of men from the project, which they believed diminished the overall effect of the increased transfer on household well-being. Amid rising expenses, participants acutely felt the financial strain caused by escalating rents, utility bills, school fees, and market prices. Consequently, it was concluded that the recently augmented assistance amount falls short of addressing the fundamental needs of the households.

As the name suggests, it's assistance; we can't say anything, but this increase covers our expenses for only 1-2 days. It didn't positively affect my debt situation. We used to buy a kilo of olives for 120 TL, now it has become 300 TL.

Male, Konya

With the increase in amounts, there was also an increase in rent and bill amounts. Everything is very expensive in markets. I don't think the increase in amounts has caused any change.

Male, Ankara

Feedback on Vulnerability Criteria

Feedback on the criteria for selecting beneficiaries for the project revealed divided opinions, categorized broadly into positive and negative perspectives. Notably, nearly half of the respondents, particularly men, suggested that the selection criteria required improvement. Accordingly, it was highlighted that some vulnerable households were not included project such as some households with disabled or elderly people, or individuals with health complications. The primary barriers were identified issues related to work insurance and identity card. Additionally, it was claimed that some households furnished inaccurate information to qualify for the project, leading to recommendations for repeat visits to these households.

In contrast to these viewpoints, more than half of the participants in the focus group discussions were of the opinion that the beneficiary selection process was executed correctly and reliably by the project. Female participants, in particular, indicated that their acquaintances were included in the Social Safety Net (SSN) project, reflecting their confidence in the project's ability to identify the rightful beneficiaries. Participants observed that the beneficiaries genuinely needed cash assistance, emphasizing that the project prioritized elderly individuals, those with disabilities, or health problems, which was evident from household visits.

> **I wish everyone would receive it, some families do not receive assistance despite having no one employed. In some families, even if there are one or two employed members, they receive assistance; families without any employed members should also receive it.**
>
> **Female, Kilis**

> **I am very pleased that this assistance is given to needy families with children. I think it's a proper decision that the criteria take into account especially children and elderly individuals and provide eligibility.**
>
> **Female, Gaziantep**

To gain deeper insight into the participants' view on the vulnerability criteria within the project, they were asked to rank target vulnerable groups from most to least vulnerable. The consensus identified households with numerous children under the age of 18 as the most vulnerable. Following this, households with disabled individuals were deemed the second most vulnerable, with single-parent families, particularly those headed by women, ranking third. The fourth group comprised households dealing with chronic illnesses, and the last identified were households with more than one non-working individual. This classification illuminated the participants' perception of vulnerability, ranging from most to least vulnerable.

In summary, participants viewed households with multiple children as the most vulnerable, succeeded by those with disabled individuals and single parents. The confidence in the beneficiary selection process by the project was mixed. While over half the participants believed in the integrity of the selection process, others suggested a reassessment of both the process and criteria.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This focus group discussion aimed to understand the community's perception and understanding of the recent adjustment in vulnerability criteria, particularly the exclusion of males aged 18-59 from household assessments. Besides, this report explored the impact of the increased transfer value on beneficiaries. Overall, the aim was to analyse in detail the impact of these recent adjustments in the project on the dynamics of the household. Accordingly, the following three main issues were highlighted by the participants;

Firstly; the exclusion of men from the project, compounded by rising living costs, has increased household vulnerability significantly. Participants expressed a need for jobs or better employment opportunities, with females also needing childcare support to enter the workforce, and males considering or already working additional jobs to cope. Besides that, both male and female participants described reducing expenditures on basic needs, including food and utilities, and even considering withdrawing children from school due to rising costs and decreasing amount of cash assistance. On the other hand, some participants reported minimal affected from the exclusion of males from the assistance program because they were already employed or because the adjustments occurred rapidly and concurrently with increasing transfer value amount.

Secondly; the majority of participants held a negative view about the increase in cash assistance value. They felt that despite the increase, it didn't significantly improve their household situation. The positive impact of the increase was overshadowed by rising costs and the exclusion of working-age men from the project.

Participants highlighted that rising costs in rent, utilities, school fees, and market prices significantly offset the benefits of the increased transfer value. The assistance amount, even after the increase, remains insufficient to cover the basic needs of the household.

Lastly, despite some reservations, a larger portion of the participants trusted the selection process, believing it successfully identified those in genuine need. On the other hand, the other part of participants who feel that the process could be improved to ensure no vulnerable households are overlooked.

The findings highlight crucial areas for improvement and reconsideration. Firstly, there's a clear need for initiatives that can facilitate employment opportunities for both men and women. After reduction of cash assistance in household, female beneficiaries, in particular, expressed a desire to participate more in the labour force. However, they also need vocational and language training in order to find a job. Accordingly, the incentive top-up payments could be used to support the attendance of language or vocational courses. Secondly, despite the increase in transfer value, the feedback suggests that it remains insufficient against the backdrop of rising costs. Accordingly, it could be reconsidered increases in cash assistance that align with the actual rise in living costs. Besides, it could be explored other forms of support, such as educational grants for male university students who are affected by the recent exclusion.

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