



# EMERGENCY SOCIAL SAFETY NET (ESSN) PROGRAMME BEYOND ASSISTANCE: PERSPECTIVES OF REFUGEES ON SOCIOECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION ANALYSIS REPORT | OCTOBER 2023



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# MAIN FINDINGS

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My husband earns the minimum wage, so sometimes we have to cut back on our food and drink. What makes it hard is that I do not even have the emotional support and solace I would normally receive from my family. My family lives in İzmit, and I cannot visit them anymore because of the transportation costs that we cannot afford. It would cost me TRY 3,000 to visit. We have had to let go of a lot of things in life because we cannot afford them. We cannot go to the Bazaar and buy anything or everything we need. Even our children know this now. We go together to A101, I try to quickly go by the chocolate and snacks aisle so he does not ask me for biscuits and chocolate that I cannot buy anymore because I have to prioritise. My kids have stopped asking me to buy them chocolate or snacks, they even look at the prices of these items and say that they are too expensive. Even our little children understand how expensive life is.

**Female, İstanbul, ESSN recipient**

**Imagining life without assistance:** The majority of the participants are not able make concrete plans to gain economic independence in the future. Without ESSN, they are likely to resort to less favourable coping strategies, such as cutting back on needs, prioritizing expenses, sending kids to work, relying on debt, and asking relatives for financial support.

**Protracted vulnerabilities:** While acknowledged for providing some relief, ESSN transfer value falls short amid rising living costs. Recipients who once found the ESSN sufficient for rent and utilities, now struggle to meet basic needs. Non-recipients, earning unstable salaries below the minimum wage, also cut back on essential needs.

**Perspectives on formal employment and assistance:** Participants prefer formal employment over assistance as it would provide economic stability and fringe benefits. Yet for certain demographic groups, such as women with kids and older people, the ESSN is considered the most reliable source of income, given their challenges in obtaining/accessing formal employment.

**Needs for economic independence:** ESSN target group has a desire for economic independence, but they face obstacles such as lack of capital to start their own businesses, irregular low-paying jobs, limited job opportunities, and uncertainty about their future in Türkiye. Participants offered several suggestions to address their problems such as providing loans for small businesses, creating secure job opportunities, and addressing the ambiguity around future plans.

**Experiences with socioeconomic empowerment courses:** The majority of participants are not able to attend socioeconomic empowerment courses, primarily due to existing employment and time constraints, along with a lack of awareness about Türk Kızılay's course offerings, health issues, and age. While recognizing the advantages of such courses, participants proposed improvements, including referrals to job opportunities, increased course availability in diverse locations, reimbursement for travel costs, stipends, and night-shift options.

**Source of information for employment opportunities:** Social networks were the primary source for job information, with a reliance on relatives, neighbours, and friends. Social media, Türk Kızılay Community Centres, Türk Kızılay Service Centres, 168 Kızılay Call Center, ASAM, ISKUR, and informal channels also play significant roles for providing information.

**Suggestions to improve the ESSN:** Participants provided several suggestions to improve the ESSN, including reconsidering criteria, lowering the necessary threshold for disability eligibility, increasing the transfer value, providing a new form of assistance for rent, and more frequent top-ups.

# STUDY BACKGROUND

The regulation on Work Permits of Foreigners under Temporary Protection provides refugees [1] in Türkiye with legal protection and allows them to apply for work permit to participate in the formal labour market and benefit from vocational training and employment assistance from the Turkish Employment Organization (ISKUR). Despite regulatory efforts to ensure refugees' right to work, there are significant challenges in effectively integrating refugees into the labour market, especially within formal employment.

Previous investigations revealed that approximately 800,000 Syrians were working in the informal sector, while 45 per cent of Syrians under temporary protection and other individuals seeking international protection were living below the poverty line, with 39 per cent considered multi-dimensionally poor [2]. According to the findings of the Post Distribution Monitoring (PDM - 16), unskilled labour, characterized by informality, is the main income source for ESN recipients and non-recipients, while ESN assistance constitutes the second main source of income for ESN recipients [3]. According to the results of the Second Intersectoral Vulnerability Survey (IVS - II), the main factors preventing refugees from accessing job opportunities and formal employment include, but are not limited to, language barrier and a lack of necessary skills and qualifications [4]. In this regard, vocational and skill development training interventions are essential for increasing refugees' chances of developing the necessary set of skills and securing formal employment.

Although there are numerous efforts to design such interventions, limited is known about refugees' experiences on and perspectives toward these programmes. According to a recent and comprehensive livelihoods investigation by IFRC and Türk Kızılay, refugees displayed a lack of motivation for participating in such programmes, as they placed a higher priority on earning income and did not consider them effective in obtaining employment [5]. Given the importance of vocational and skill development training interventions in providing opportunities to develop the necessary skills and awareness for employability, it is crucial to understand the experiences of refugees in such programmes. Furthermore, this livelihoods assessment was conducted before the Kahramanmaraş earthquakes, which severely affected the socioeconomic conditions of individuals.

Vocational and skill development training courses offered by Türk Kızılay Community Centres provide an important medium to offer socioeconomic empowerment opportunities to refugees in Türkiye. In this regard, it is important to understand the experiences of ESN recipients and non-recipients who participated in such programmes to understand successful practices and challenges. In addition, given that vocational and skill development interventions could be even more critical after the devastation of the earthquake, the proposed Focus Group Discussion (FGD) explored the following points with participants from the earthquake-affected area and non-affected area:

## Aims and Objectives

The current FGD explored:

- The needs and expectations of ESN recipients regarding the efficiency of vocational and skill development interventions, including the information provided by ESN communication channels.
- The role of ESN Programme on the socioeconomic empowerment of ESN recipients.
- Successful practices and potential areas for improvement that can inform the future of ESN.

[1] In this study, refugee is referring to persons who are under international protection or temporary protection according to the Law on Foreigners and International Protection. Herein the term is used to refer to their legal status.

[2] 3RP. (2022). Turkey Country Chapter 2021-2022. p. 39. Accessed on 13 July 2023.

[3] IFRC and Türk Kızılay. (2023). Capturing the resilience of refugees in Türkiye amidst pre-disaster struggles. p. 7. Accessed on 25 July 2023.

[4] IFRC and Türk Kızılay. (2022). Living on bare minimum: An exploration of the vulnerability of refugees in Türkiye. p. 30. Accessed on 13 July 2023.



[5] IFRC and Türk Kızılay. (2022). ESN Livelihoods Pathways Study.

# METHODOLOGY

## Sample Demographic Characteristics

For the FGDs held in August-September 2023, respondents were selected among ESSN recipients and non-recipients. Of the 76 respondents, 37 were women, and 39 were men. 41 participants were ESSN recipients. As for nationality, all participants were Syrians under Temporary Protection.

Respondents were randomly assigned to four subgroups based on gender and eligibility conditions. In total, 12 sessions were conducted, and FGDs were held face-to-face in Adana, Ankara, İstanbul, and Malatya. Considering the sample characteristics, the findings of the current FGD do not fully represent the overall refugee population in Türkiye.

 37 Females  
 39 Males

 12 Sessions

 4 Locations

Table 1. Number of participants per city

Adana	22
Ankara	13
İstanbul	20
Malatya	21

## Data Collection and Analysis

Monitoring and Evaluation staff of IFRC and Türk Kızılay developed the questions for the FGDs. Before data collection, IFRC organised a session to discuss questions with field staff who participated in the data collection. FGDs were held face-to-face, and expert moderators from IFRC and Türk Kızılay carried out the discussions with observers from Türk Kızılay at the Türk Kızılay Community Centres in Adana, Ankara, İstanbul, and Malatya. The discussions were carried out in Arabic, the native tongue of the respondents. Staff from IFRC and Türk Kızılay transcribed the reports using the notes taken during the discussions. IFRC and Türk Kızılay Monitoring and Evaluation staff then analysed and reported these transcriptions.



# FINDINGS

## Imagining life without assistance

The majority of participants are not able to make concrete plans to gain economic independence in the future. They are likely to resort to several coping strategies in the absence of ESSN.

When asked about how they would meet their expenses if they were not receiving ESSN, most participants mentioned that they would start working. Further investigations indicated that all participants who mentioned starting to work were women taking care of children at home.

“ If I did not receive ESSN, I would leave my young kids with neighbours and start working in apricot orchards because I would have to do so.  
**Female, Malatya, ESSN recipient** ”

“ I will be forced to leave my children alone at home and work. Yet this could have a negative impact on their education.  
**Female, Adana, ESSN recipient** ”

An equal number of participants noted that in the absence of the ESSN, they would cut back on their needs, further prioritize among expenses, and send their kids to work. In addition, participants mentioned that without the ESSN, they would rely on debt and ask relatives for financial support. Altogether, these answers highlighted a tendency to solely rely on negative coping strategies in the absence of the ESSN. Finally, a limited number of male participants highlighted that without the ESSN, they would be forced to take on an additional job or work extra hours to support their family.



“ I used to work before, but due to my health situation, I cannot work anymore, and my husband also does not work. If there is no assistance, we will be forced to get the children out of school and send them to work.  
**Female, Adana, ESSN recipient** ”

“ I would have to cut back on a lot of things and just buy the most basic things, and maybe even less. We absolutely cannot skip rent – paying the rent is our most important priority as refugees.  
**Male, İstanbul, ESSN recipient** ”

To gain insight into the challenges affecting socio-economic independence, participants were asked about their needs for economic security and independence. A significant number of participants expressed the need for capital to start their own businesses. Further discussions brought to light that participants often work in irregular jobs with lower pay. Some participants shared that they are obliged to work on jobs that are below their qualifications due to the lack of capital and opportunity to pursue other options. Consequently, they suggested creating opportunities that would offer loans to help them establish their own businesses.

“ Instead of courses, why don't you open an office to support people with running small and medium-sized enterprises? You could give them a loan without interest which would serve as their capital. Do this only with people who have professional experience. If you do this with 50 people and each person hired 10, you would have affected 500 people.  
Male, Ankara, ESSN recipient ”

“ I would like to work as an industrial designer. If someone could give me TRY 200,000, I would start my own business, pay the 200,000 back, and generate an income not only for myself but for the people I employ. This will have a ripple effect on all the people who work for me.  
Male, Ankara, ESSN recipient ”

Alongside the need for capital to establish their own businesses, most participants discussed the necessity for sustainable jobs with regular payments to achieve economic independence. As mentioned earlier, engaging in irregular jobs with lower pay increases the ESSN target group's reliance on assistance and debt. Furthermore, participants expressed that job opportunities are limited, reducing their chances of employment. Given the circumstances, participants emphasized the need for job opportunities that would provide secure positions with regular and fair compensation.



“ Job opportunities with decent salaries so that a person can be self-sufficient without needing to borrow money.  
Male, Adana, ESSN recipient ”

“ I have concerns about repatriation to Syria, if there are no such concerns, we may enhance our jobs and may be able to settle down.  
Male, Adana, non-ESSN recipient ”

An important aspect demotivating participants for making concrete plans for financial stability is the ambiguity surrounding their future in Türkiye. Participants expressed concerns about the current economic conditions in Türkiye due to global economic condition and the possibility of repatriation to Syria. Some participants also shared that they are planning to move to a third country to seek other opportunities. Consequently, they suggested that before working on their financial independence, they should know where they would be for the rest of their lives.



In addition, some women participants noted the need for home-based work opportunities to achieve financial independence. They expressed that if they were provided with opportunities to participate in the workforce from home, such as equipment like sewing machines or to courses that about home-based jobs, they might be able to contribute to the family economy.

“

We are all in the same boat. The ESSN is not enough. My rent is TRY 3000, I would need at least double the amount I receive from the ESSN to cover the rent. It would be great if we could have courses to help improve our skills so we can work from home.

**Female, Ankara, ESSN recipient**

“

I wish I had a device that I could produce at home without leaving my children alone. I would like to buy a sewing machine, work at home and contribute to the home economy.

**Female, Malatya, ESSN recipient**

A limited number of participants mentioned the need for Turkish citizenship to maintain financial independence. They expressed that Turkish citizenship would enable them to travel between cities to seek other opportunities and secure formal employment. Finally, a few participants expressed that they are not able to work due to health conditions, age and childcare responsibilities; thus, ESSN is the only source of financial stability for them.

“

As I have children without a breadwinner in the household because I am a widow and then a divorced woman, I need assistance to sustain my life and we do not have anything other than assistance.

**Female, Adana, ESSN recipient**

Overall, the great majority of the participants are not able to make concrete plans to gain economic independence in the future. They noted that in the absence of the ESSN, they would resort to several coping strategies, such as cutting back on needs, prioritizing among expenses, sending kids to work, relying on debt and asking relatives for financial support.



## The role of the ESN on expenditures

**Despite transfer value falling short, the ESN provides a degree of relief to recipients. However, non-recipients find themselves more vulnerable, leading them to resort to various coping strategies.**

The majority of ESN recipients noted that, while the Programme provides some support for their expenses, the current transfer value falls short. They mentioned that ESN used to cover their rent, but given the current economic conditions, its impact on their lives is now minimal. Further discussions revealed that participants predominantly use the ESN to partially cover rent and utility expenses, followed by children's needs for school and clothing, and other basic needs such as food and transportation. This finding aligns with previous FGDs indicating that the ESN target group tends to prioritize rent and utilities over other expenses.



We didn't benefit much from the ESN because, when we received it a few years ago, it was worth TRY 1,000 and back then, a kilo of sugar cost TRY 3. Now, its value is almost negligible. We mostly use it to pay our electricity or water bills.

**Male, Adana, ESN recipient**



The ESN removed a big burden from my shoulders, I have four kids, and raising them in such circumstances is extremely difficult. To be honest, the ESN's contribution was better before but after the inflation it became very limited. Previously my house rent was TRY 700 so the ESN could cover it, sometimes I use it or the top-ups for schools' expenditure like stationary.

**Female, İstanbul, ESN recipient**

While ESN provides some relief for recipients, non-recipients mentioned that they struggle to cover their expenditures with their salary, which is generally unstable and lower than the minimum wage (TRY 11,402 as of July 2023) [6], forcing them to cut back on basic needs and prioritize their spending. Additionally, they are unable to buy clothes when the need arises; instead, they try to save money to purchase clothes only before Eids, as it is a cultural practice to buy new clothes, especially for children, during that time. Some participants further discussed the challenges they face in sending their kids to school, as it involves additional costs such as purchasing stationary, school uniforms, transportation to school and providing pocket money for children to buy snacks from the cafeteria. In addition, a participant mentioned that because of transportation costs, they avoid visiting their family members living in a different city, adding an additional emotional aspect to the difficulties they experience.



It depends on the amount of money my husband earns each month. I cannot always buy everything we need, so I prioritize. I never buy chicken or meat, and I cannot afford fruits and vegetables for my children. My husband does not always work, so we only spend money when he does. Otherwise, we do not buy anything. We can barely make ends meet. The last time we had meat was during Eid. I have two children who go to school, so now we have to buy them notebooks, pencils, and other stationery. I don't know how we're going to afford it. Last year, I had to borrow money to buy these things because if you do not, the children get discriminated against.

**Female, İstanbul, non-ESN recipient**

“ My husband earns the minimum wage, so sometimes we have to cut back on our food and drink. What makes it hard is that I do not even have the emotional support and solace I would normally receive from my family. My family lives in İzmit, and I cannot visit them anymore because of the transportation costs that we cannot afford. It would cost me TRY 3,000 to visit. We have had to let go of a lot of things in life because we cannot afford them. We cannot go to the Bazaar and buy anything or everything we need. Even our children know this now. We go together to A101, I try to quickly go by the chocolate and snacks aisle so he does not ask me for biscuits and chocolate that I cannot buy anymore because I have to prioritise. My kids have stopped asking me to buy them chocolate or snacks, they even look at the prices of these items and say that they are too expensive. Our little children even understand how expensive life is.

**Female, İstanbul, non-ESSN recipient**

Overall, discussions revealed that although ESSN supports recipients with certain expenses such as rent and utilities, children's needs, and other basic needs, most of the participants think that the impact of the transfer value remains limited. Nevertheless, non-ESSN recipients are in an even more vulnerable position as they do not earn stable and sufficient salaries that would help them cover their expenditures. They are forced to cut from their needs and prioritize among expenses.

## Perspectives on formal employment and assistance

**Most of the participants prefer formal employment over assistance. However, ESSN remains an essential source of income for some groups such as women with children and older individuals.**

Participants expressed varying opinions about their preference between the ESSN and formal employment. The majority noted that, if given the chance, they would choose formal employment over the ESSN. They emphasized that formal employment would provide a sustainable work environment and a stable income. In addition, participants discussed the additional benefits of formal work, such as being registered in the government system, health insurance, regular payments and availability of off days. There were also concerns raised about the potential termination of the ESSN support with the change in targeting criteria.

“ Given that the assistance is subject to being cut any moment, I would choose a sustainable job and in case I got fired I might have social insurance.

**Male, Malatya, ESSN recipient**

“ My husband has SGK because it is safer. When you work informally, you don't have insurance, no days off, no entitlements and they kick us out as soon as they hear that the police are coming.

**Female, Ankara, non-ESSN recipient**

“ If you are formally employed, you definitely receive your salary at the end of the month. Working informally means that employers will sometimes take advantage of you. This has happened to me before. It happened once in 2017, once in 2019 and once three months ago - I have lost TRY 16,000 to employers. When you have a work permit, you have rights and entitlements that no one can take from you.

**Male, Ankara, ESSN recipient**

Nevertheless, participants who faced the following challenges expressed a preference for the ESSN over formal employment: The most frequently cited reason for choosing the ESSN was being responsible for childcare. Many women participants shared that caring for their children prevents them from applying for jobs or from working formally. Additionally, some participants mentioned health problems as a barrier to work, while others highlighted that they are not able to work due to older age. A few participants also pointed limited availability of job opportunities and the inadequacy of the minimum wage as contributing factors. They elaborated that there are not enough opportunities for everyone, especially for women with kids, and the minimum wage would not make much of a difference in their lives. Finally, one participant shared that they rely on the ESSN because they cannot secure a job due to language barrier.

“

I prefer the ESSN because it's a guaranteed income. I cannot always work because of my disc so I can't keep a stable job. I have tried to work, but as soon as I missed a day, I was laid off. If I could work one day and stay at home the next, it would be great. I take medicine for the pain and can't wake up easily because of the side effects of the medicine. I would prefer the ESSN because at least it helps us pay the rent and the bills.

**Female, Ankara, ESSN recipient**

“

For us men, it might be easier to find a stable job. But what about the women? What about women who have 4 - 5 children to take care of? They need the assistance. Some people will always need the assistance because of their conditions.

**Male, Ankara, ESSN recipient**

In essence, the majority of participants expressed a preference for formal employment over assistance as it would provide stability in terms of regular payments and offer fringe benefits such as health insurance and days off. On the other hand, for certain participants such as women with kids and older people, ESSN is the most reliable source of income.



## Source of information for employment opportunities

**Social networks, social media, Türk Kızılay Community Centres, Türk Kızılay Service Centres and 168 Kızılay Call Center are important sources of employment opportunities, along with other institutions such as ASAM and ISKUR.**

The majority of the participants shared that they use their social networks, including relatives, neighbours, former colleagues, and Syrian and Turkish friends, as the preferred source of information on employment opportunities. Social networks are preferred among the target group because they are perceived as reliable sources of information on working conditions, salary scale, and the attitude of potential employers toward employees.

“ I learn the job opportunities] from Facebook and acquaintances. The source must be well trusted because some employers do not pay after finishing the work and we cannot file a complaint about it.

**Male, Malatya, non-ESSN recipient**

In addition, participants cited that they use unofficial social media pages providing information on job opportunities. Some participants shared that they visit Türk Kızılay Community Centres and call the 168 Kızılay Call Center to receive information. Nevertheless, it is important to note that a couple of participants were not aware that Türk Kızılay provides information on job opportunities. A few participants also shared that they visit ASAM and ISKUR to seek employment opportunities, while only one participant mentioned visiting construction sites to find jobs.

“ I called the Türk Kızılay to seek their support and they advised my husband of attending language course to facilitate his search for jobs.

**Female, İstanbul, ESSN recipient**

“ Türk Kızılay is known for its cash assistance programmes and CTE which supports children. We did not know that they provide such services or that we could get information from Türk Kızılay about jobs.

**Female, Ankara, non-ESSN recipient**

Overall, discussions revealed that social networks, social media, Türk Kızılay Community Centres, and 168 Kızılay Call Center are important sources of information on access to employment opportunities, along with other institutions such as ASAM and ISKUR.

## Experiences and perspectives regarding socioeconomic empowerment courses

**The majority of participants did not attend socioeconomic empowerment courses, mainly due to existing employment and time constraints. Despite participants finding the courses highly beneficial, they suggest areas for improvement.**

The majority of participants shared that they were not able to attend the socioeconomic empowerment courses provided by Türk Kızılay. Further analysis revealed that the most common reason for not attending such courses was being already employed and not having enough time. Participants elaborated that they are not able to take time off easily, and once they take time off, their salaries are cut. Since the whole family depends on that salary, they cannot risk it to participate in courses.

“ I had never considered enrolling in any course due to a lack of time and the fact that I would have to choose between the course and working to support my family.  
**Male, Adana, ESSN recipient** ”

“ The households usually depend on this one person who works. You cannot live if you leave work and go to a course instead.  
**Male, Ankara, ESSN recipient** ”

Another common reason for not attending courses is being responsible for childcare. Particularly, women participants indicated that they are the primary caregivers for their children and cannot leave their kids alone at home. In addition, some participants mentioned that they were unaware that Türk Kızılay provides courses to increase employability. A limited number of participants shared that they did not participate in the course because of their health problems and age.

“ I often visit the Türk Kızılay Community Center, but I had no idea I could get such information there.  
**Male, Adana, ESSN recipient** ”

“ I only attended a training on social cohesion. I would really love to attend the courses, but you cannot go when you have children.  
**Female, İstanbul, ESSN recipient** ”

Discussions showed that individuals who had previously attended courses, participated in programmes organized by Türk Kızılay and other institutions, such as Halk Eğitim, UNHCR, ASAM, and ISMEK. Most individuals participated in language courses, followed by vocational training in areas such as sewing, cooking, nursing, hairdressing, and agriculture. Additionally, a few participants received courses on social cohesion.

“ I participated in language courses at the Türk Kızılay and Halk Eğitim Center because language is an extremely important factor in all aspects of life, particularly in hospitals and government departments.  
**Male, Adana, ESSN recipient** ”



Despite many participants not being able to attend the socioeconomic empowerment courses, the majority of them considered such courses highly beneficial for the ESSN target group. They discussed that these courses help them to learn the Turkish language and offer a unique set of opportunities by providing the necessary skills to find jobs and demonstrate their accomplishments with certificates. A few participants also highlighted that such courses help them to improve their social relationships with other individuals.

While the majority find these courses beneficial, some participants highlighted potential areas for improvement. They suggested that such courses should be linked to job opportunities, and individuals completing the training should be referred to potential employers. Additionally, participants discussed that more training should be available in different locations within the cities, especially in areas where the ESSN target group predominantly resides. In relation to that, they suggested that if it is not possible to provide courses in different locations, at least individuals should be reimbursed for the travel cost. Similarly, some participants noted that they are not able to attend the courses because they avoid losing their daily allowances. Thus, they suggested that courses should provide stipends for attendees. Finally, a few participants suggested providing night-shifts for socioeconomic empowerment courses so that working individuals would have a chance to participate.

“ You personally benefit from these courses. It helps you both mentally and emotionally. We are foreign and alone here - no family or friends so making new friends, leaving the house, seeing and interacting with others helps. Turkish people do not always want to be friend Syrians, so mingling with them at these places helps bring us together. It's much better than staying at home all the time.

**Female, Ankara, ESSN recipient**

“ Thanks to these courses a person can improve his linguistic and professional knowledge, meets new people, and may benefit from their experiences.

**Male, Adana, ESSN recipient**

“ Courses are useful, but we cannot leave work to attend these courses because we will lose our jobs because their timing is inconvenient for us. We would have attended if they had been evening classes.

**Male, Adana, ESSN recipient**

“ There should be more institutions providing these courses and trainings. The ones we know about are very far and arriving at the destination takes a long time, so it is not just about the transportation fees, which they usually pay back, but the time we spend on the road or away from home also matters.

**Female, Ankara, non-ESSN recipient**

In summary, the majority of participants did not attend socioeconomic empowerment courses, primarily due to existing employment and time constraints. Participants, often breadwinners, highlighted challenges in taking time off, as it affected their family's livelihoods. Additionally, responsibilities for childcare were a significant barrier, particularly for women. Lack of awareness about Türk Kızılay's course offerings, health issues, and age were cited as other reasons. Those who attended courses, found them highly beneficial, providing essential skills and certificates. Despite recognizing the advantages, participants proposed improvements, including stronger links to job opportunities, increased course availability in diverse locations, reimbursement for travel costs, stipends, and night-shift options.



## Suggestions to Improve the ESSN

### Participants suggested increasing the amount of transfer value, introducing a new form of assistance for rent and reconsidering the criteria.

When asked for suggestions to enhance the ESSN, participants predominantly focused on criteria-related recommendations. They proposed that families in need of assistance should qualify for the ESSN irrespective of the number of children in the household. Additionally, they emphasized the importance of continuing assistance for men within the working age group. Some participants also suggested lowering the threshold of disability to enhance inclusiveness, while a few others recommended informing the ESSN recipients about criteria changes.



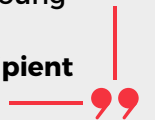
It would be better if the assistance amount was raised. When I was receiving the ESSN, I only had one child. It was all right back then, but now everything is expensive. We can only pay the rent and the bills with what we make. We have to cut back on food, clothes and medicine.

**Female, Ankara, ESSN recipient**



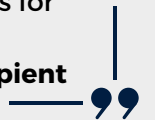
Reevaluate the criteria because they can be unfair to some families when it comes to young people over the age of 18 who desperately want to finish their education.

**Male, Adana, ESSN recipient**



The criteria are very difficult, so that no one can receive the assistance. The assistance should be given to everyone regardless of the number of children. Medicine, diapers for babies and adults are very expensive. When we're sick, we can't get appointments at the state hospitals, because there's no space. Some people who have one child may have more expenses than others who have more than one depending on their circumstances. As for rent, it depends on your luck with what kind of property-owner you have.

**Female, İstanbul, non-ESSN recipient**



Other common suggestions included increasing the transfer value and introducing a new form of assistance specifically for rent expenses. Participants highlighted that while the ESSN used to cover most of their expenses, the current economic conditions have rendered the transfer value insufficient. Consequently, they emphasized that increasing the transfer value or providing additional assistance for rent would significantly impact their lives. In addition, they expressed that top-ups help with their expenses; thus, increasing the frequency of top-ups would have a positive impact.



The payments come on time and the top-ups are good for our needs, whenever you feel suffocated and out of money they come, and sometimes we use them to buy clothes for the kids. But the payments now are not enough even to cover the rent cost, especially after the inflation. Previously, it was fine, and its contribution was much better. What we need from Türk Kızılay is to consider inflation and create a balance between inflation, increasing living expenses and the provided assistance.

**Female, İstanbul, ESSN recipient**





In addition, some participants shared their experiences with Türk Kızılay information channels, such as the Call Center and official social media accounts. The majority expressed contentment with the services received, feeling comfortable reaching out to the 168 Kızılay Call Center for information and following official social media accounts. Nevertheless, a few participants recommended increasing the human resources of the 168 Kızılay Call Center as sometimes they wait for long periods to receive information.

“ I suggest increasing the assistance at least to fully cover the rent cost. Also, not removing the males in their 30s from the payment.  
**Female, Adana, ESSN recipient** ”

“ The top-ups make us so happy. We wait for them and plan what to buy with each top-up. It feels like a gift you give to us. We use the top-ups for anything extra we usually cannot afford.  
**Female, Ankara, ESSN recipient** ”

In essence, participants offered several recommendations to enhance ESSN Programme. They emphasized the need to reconsider criteria, lower the disability threshold, and informing recipients about criteria changes. In addition, they suggested increasing the transfer value, introducing a new form of assistance for rent, and enhancing the frequency of top-ups to cover expenses better. Participants also shared positive experiences with Türk Kızılay's information channels, although a few recommended increasing human resources to reduce waiting times at the 168 Kızılay Call Center.



# CONCLUSION

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In conclusion, the majority of the participants are not able to make concrete plans to achieve economic independence in the future. They are likely to resort to several coping strategies without the ESSN. Both recipient and non-recipient groups face protracted vulnerabilities. Despite the transfer value falling short, the ESSN provides some relief to recipients. However, non-recipients find themselves more vulnerable, leading them to employ various coping strategies.

While participants express a preference for formal employment due to the economic stability and fringe benefits it offers, certain demographic groups, such as women with children and older individuals, perceive the ESSN as a reliable income source. Insufficient capital, irregular low-paying jobs, limited job opportunities, and ambiguity about their future are some of the barriers to socioeconomic empowerment faced by the ESSN target population.

Furthermore, the majority of participants did not attend socioeconomic empowerment courses, mainly due to existing informal employment and time constraints. Despite participants finding the courses highly beneficial, they suggest areas for improvement, including stronger links to job opportunities, increased course availability in diverse locations, reimbursement for travel costs, stipends, and night-shift options. In addition, social networks, social media, Türk Kızılay Community Centres, Türk Kızılay Service Centres, and the 168 Kızılay Call Center are important sources of employment opportunities, along with other institutions.

Lastly, participants provided suggestions to enhance the ESSN, including criteria reconsideration, increased transfer values, and providing additional assistance for specific needs such as rent.



# RECOMMENDATIONS

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## Issue identified

## Suggestion

**Protracted vulnerabilities**



**Ad hoc top ups and increased transfer value** to decrease the reliance on the negative coping strategies.

**Barriers to socioeconomic empowerment**



Providing **loans for small businesses** and **creating secure job opportunities** to overcome barriers to socioeconomic empowerment.

**Challenges with socioeconomic empowerment courses**



**Raising awareness** more on socioeconomic empowerment courses and **referring individuals to Türk Kızılay Community Centres or to 168 Kızılay Call Center** more so that they are referred to livelihood opportunities that match their skills.

**Increased rent expenditure**



Providing **specific assistance for rent expenses** to alleviate the vulnerabilities of ESSN recipients.

## TÜRK KIZILAY (TURKISH RED CRESCENT)

### The largest humanitarian organization in Türkiye

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 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 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 Türk Kızılay.



## THE "KIZILAYKART"

Türk Kızılay is a humanitarian cash leader in Türkiye and has the well-established "KIZILAYKART", which allows to provide millions of people cash assistance through a debit card. The KIZILAYKART initially provided cash assistance to Turkish citizens and later on 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 KIZILAYKART implements the largest cash programme in the world and the largest in the European Union's history, the Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN).

