



# ***EFFECTIVE SOCIAL ASSISTANCE PROVISION AND SOCIOECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT IN THE LIGHT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC***



***POLICIES AND  
PROGRAMS AGAINST  
THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC  
IN TÜRKİYE***

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## PREFACE



The most significant global predicament of the 21<sup>st</sup> century since World War II, COVID-19, had grave impacts on all social fields, especially healthcare, society, and the economy. Mass casualties and rapid impoverishment of societies have been the most grievous consequences of the pandemic. Healthcare systems in impacted countries have struggled with managing the pandemic. Production, distribution, and supply chains have weakened considerably at national and international levels.

As of March 2020, the Republic of Türkiye rapidly implemented measures to prevent the spread of pandemic and mitigate the pandemic's consequences. Social isolation measures, medical interventions at the community level, and measures to ensure the continuation of industrial, service, and agricultural production were all implemented vigorously throughout the pandemic.

The Republic of Türkiye responded quickly to the impoverishment of and most devastating implications on society that came with COVID-19 and launched social protection policies and programs as of March 2020. COVID-19 pandemic-related health services are provided to everyone in the country as a public service without discrimination. Tax, social insurance and debt incentives, and social support programs were introduced for both the employee and employer.

The Republic of Türkiye put into effect the largest and most effective social assistance programs in the country's history against the COVID-19 outbreak with the Emergency Decision taken by the Presidency regarding the social assistances on April 9<sup>th</sup>, 2022. At the same time, it

structured new social assistance programs that cover all social segments at risk of poverty, especially those in need, against the adverse effects of COVID-19.

Equipped with the technical capacities provided by the Integrated Social Assistance Information System (ISAS), regarded as an exemplary social assistance information system in the world, and through the Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundations (SASFs) widespread in every province and sub-province, Türkiye, introduced social support programs and identified within three weeks an additional three million people in temporary need of assistance besides the 3,5 million beneficiaries already in the system receiving social assistance. Indeed, the shock sensitive nature of the social assistance system of Türkiye plays a significant role in successfully amplifying the social assistance base within such short notice to reach more people.

I would like to take this opportunity to underline that the dedicated efforts of the Ministry of Family and Social Services to eliminate the negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic were carried out under the decisive and effective leadership of our President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank His Excellency President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan on behalf of our Ministry and our country.

Also, I would like to thank all members of our Ministry, particularly our colleagues in the provincial organization and the Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundations, who worked selflessly on the field, without regard to shifts, as part of the "Economic Stability Package Phases I, II, and III," " Biz Bize Yeteriz Türkiyem, I, II," and "Full Lockdown Social Support Program," all implemented as emergency measures upon our President's approval throughout the first pandemic in the Republic of Türkiye's history.

The Ministry of Family and Social Services strived to minimize the impacts of the pandemic through social protection programs covering social assistance and social services programs launched during the outbreak in line with its vision *"to reach out to every single individual for efficient service to lead social development in Türkiye."* We have supported and continue to support our citizens through the social assistance programs introduced by our Ministry in the aftermath of the pandemic.

On the other hand, I firmly believe that member states of the Organization of the Islamic Cooperation (OIC), active worldwide in pursuing a healthy and prosperous society and humanity, should assume vital roles in such global crises. Türkiye supports policies and cooperation toward social development and social empowerment for all Islamic countries as outlined in the 38<sup>th</sup> Session of the Council of Ministers of the Standing Committee for Economic and Commercial Cooperation of the OIC, which aims to enhance collaboration on social policies between Islamic countries.

We are the representatives of states that feel responsible for and do not back down from the humanitarian task of replacing poverty with prosperity and war with peace at home and worldwide. Our religion, Islam, contains many hadiths and sunnahs that will guide us in this sacred duty. When our Master, the Prophet, would send his ashab on duty, he would advise, "Do not hinder good deeds. Make it easy, not difficult. Bear good news, not hatred. Be compliant in affairs." We are guided by this advice when setting the principles and tools for our humanitarian aid.

For this reason, as the OIC, we must work together to strengthen Islamic countries against all global economic and social crises. We do not simply aspire but aim to cooperate on social development between Islamic countries by establishing strategies, policies, and programs that touch people's lives. I would like to take this opportunity to invite every Islamic country to cooperate closely in global economic and social crises, as well as in global disasters and emergencies.

Minister of Family and Social Services

Derya YANIK

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Law No. 3294, dated June 14, 1986, combined the concept of the social state and solidarity—a founding principle and the cultural code of the Republic of Türkiye, respectively—founded the Social Assistance and Solidarity Encouragement Fund, and continued to operate in a legal framework reporting to the Prime Ministry. In the following years, the Ministry of Family and Social Policies was established to gather social assistance and social services under a single roof to work on all vulnerabilities, including poverty, to develop new strategies. In this way, the link between social services and social assistance have been strengthened to help the most vulnerable groups of the society.

The establishment of corporate integrity boosted the efficiency of social assistance and services, while the increasingly influential social state gained an effective immunity against regional and global vulnerabilities. While the economic stagnation following the COVID-19 pandemic called for quick measures against the disruptions in the production processes, Türkiye has experienced the advantages of entering the pandemic process with a strong and responsive to shocks social assistance system, chose to support its citizens in a socioeconomically vulnerable condition and launched into a rapid programming period.

On April 9, 2020, State of Emergency Decision was taken regarding the social assistances in Türkiye. Therefore, “state of emergency” was evaluated for the households, which have been determined by the Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundations (SASFs) as periodically needy and not able to meet the basic needs due to COVID-19 pandemic, and their social assistance needs were met. This decision made the coverage of social assistances expanded.

Türkiye overcame the initial shock with the "Economic Stability Package Phase-I" implemented in response to the global pandemic to support the most vulnerable groups who regularly receive assistance, namely children, women, persons with disabilities, and the elderly, in cash transfers. The program reached 2.122.483 households and, by 1.000 Turkish lira per household, a total of 2.122.483.000 Turkish lira were transferred in cash. Then "Phase-II" was launched with a supply-side oriented approach to provide additional support to all households receiving continuous assistance from SASFs over the last year within the scope of Law 3294. One thousand lira was paid to each of the 2.090.554 households for a total of 2.090.554.000 Turkish lira. "Phase-III" received applications on the e-Government Gateway and applied a set of initial assessment criteria for the SASFs to identify citizens with periodical needs. One

thousand lira was paid to each of the 2.409.472 households for a total of 2.409.923.000 Turkish lira, highlighting Türkiye's shock-sensitive policies and assistance system. Payments within the scope of this Phase, were deposited into the branches of Turkish Post and Telegraph Organization (PTT) on behalf of needy citizens or their bank accounts by taking pandemic precautions into account.

The persisting pandemic required the implementation of new policies, in addition to the existing assistance, and a "full lockdown" upon the approval of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. A top-up precautionary assistance of 1.100 Turkish lira per household was paid to 2.015.100 households who may experience temporary difficulties during this period, adding to a total of 2.216.610.000 Turkish lira.

The "Biz Bize Yeteriz, Türkiyem I, II" campaigns were launched to nurture a sense of solidarity, restore the degrading social morale, inject some positivity in the days of the pandemic, and collect resources to provide additional assistance to citizens in need. In the first phase, 1.000 Turkish lira were paid in cash to 133.572 households, totaling 133.572.000 Turkish lira. In the second phase, 1.949.129.000 Turkish lira were paid to 1.949.129 households by 1.000 Turkish lira each.

Thus, 11 billion Turkish liras assistance (top-up payments) have been paid to 7,2 million single households by the Ministry of Family and Social Services from the beginning of the pandemic.

One of the methods followed during the pandemic was to increase the amounts of social assistances. Indeed, Türkiye has taken a step forward protecting vulnerable groups who are probable to be affected mostly by the pandemic, by increasing the amount of certain social assistance programs.

In addition, resources are regularly allocated as "periodical share" in every month by using Social Assistance and Solidarity Fund to SASFs, which are the local practitioners of social assistance programs in Türkiye, for carrying out social assistance activities. The amount of the periodical shares, which are transferred to 1.003 SASFs in 81 provinces every month, have been increased to urgently intervene the citizens who are in a difficult situation due to COVID-19 pandemic and additional periodical shares have been transferred. Thus, rapid solutions have been provided for citizens, who are negatively affected by the pandemic, by strengthening the social assistance system, whose information substructure and human resources are powerful, in terms of financial resources.

In addition to helping its citizens whether the pandemic with minimal economic losses through cash transfers, Türkiye also carried out numerous programs to address vulnerable groups within the scope of social services, such as "psychosocial support services," "psychosocial support guidelines," "the impacts of the pandemic on the family," "family social support programs," and "family social support lines," to stabilize social psychology.

Furthermore, within the scope of the coronavirus measures, Vefa Social Support Groups formed under the coordination of governorates and district governors to meet the needs of people aged 65 and over and those suffering from chronic illnesses. It also procured and delivered all necessities, from pensions to food, medicine, and hygiene products, to millions of households. Vefa Social Support Groups, consisting of public officials and volunteers, reinforced the sense of social solidarity.

In addition to policies geared toward Turkish citizens, Türkiye also considered the refugees currently hosted in Türkiye due to regional developments and provided social assistance within the scope of the EU's Facility for Refugees in Türkiye.

To minimize the pandemic's negative impacts and prepare for the post-pandemic world, the government provided incentives, including a return to employment and additional employment incentives, and implemented funding and insurance premium supports.

Upon the realization that new programs are called for following the assessment of post-pandemic data, the Ministry of Family and Social Services worked to establish the "Temporary Poverty Programs," "Household Visits Mobilizations," "Cash+ Programs," and "Shock-Sensitive Social Assistance and Social Service Mechanisms" (Business Intelligence and Data Warehouse). The Ministry continued to support Turkish citizens through the "Early Action Mechanisms and Vulnerability Risk Analysis Study," "Developing Social Assistance and Social Service Management in Disaster and Emergency Situations," "Türkiye Family Support Program" and other new social assistance programs.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

ADEM	Family Support Center
BAG-KUR	Social Insurance Institution for Tradesmen and Craftsmen and Other Self-employed
BBY I	Biz Bize Yeteriz Türkiyem I
BBY II	Biz Bize Yeteriz Türkiyem II
CCT	Conditional Cash Transfer
DGF	Directorate General of Foundations
DGIT	Directorate General of Information Technologies
DGSA	Directorate General of Social Assistance
D-PPI	Domestic Producer Price Index Change Rate
EU	European Union
Fund Board	Social Assistance and Solidarity Encouragement Fund Board
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GHI	Global Health Insurance
HDI	Human Development Index
IBAN	International Bank Account Number
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
ISAS	Integrated Social Assistance and Information System
ISKUR	Turkish Employment Agency
IT	Information technology
KADES	Women's Emergency Support Application
MERNIS	Central Population Administration System
MoFSS	Ministry of Family and Social Services
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PTT	Turkish Post and Telegraph Organization
SASEF	Social Assistance and Solidarity Encouragement Fund
SASF	Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundations
SHCEK	Social Services and Child Protection Agency
SODAM	Social Solidarity Center
SOYBIS	Social Assistance Information System
SSC	Social Service Centers
SSI	Social Security Institution
TUBITAK	The Scientific and Technological Research Council of Türkiye
TurkStat	Turkish Statistical Institute
UNDP	United Nations Development Program

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Starting as a health crisis, COVID-19 soon became a global incident that influenced the global economy as much as World Wars I and II, the Great Depression of the 1920s, and the Global Financial Crisis of 2008. On the other hand, the COVID-19 pandemic proved that countries worldwide are somewhat socioeconomically fragile in global disasters and emergencies. A global pandemic of this extent caused global production, circulation, and consumption chains to deteriorate economically, individuals to lose employment and income security, and access to many public services, including healthcare and social protection, to be challenged.

The COVID-19 pandemic took the lives of over six million people around the world, and according to the World Bank, the global economy contracted by 3,3 percent. According to ILO reports, employment loss in the global economy was 114 million in 2020 and 100 million in 2021. While global unemployment was 187 million before COVID-19, it increased to 220 million in 2020 and 2021 and decreased to 205 million in 2022 due to the economic recovery. The loss of employment and income was the most significant impact on individuals and households from the events mentioned above and other such economic implications triggered by bans and closures during the pandemic.

Undoubtedly, the most fundamental consequence of these socioeconomic effects was the increase in neediness and inequality worldwide. While global poverty had decreased gradually over the past ten years after the efforts within the scope of Sustainable Development Goals, COVID-19 reversed the trend. The World Bank estimated that the number of people in extreme poverty was one billion in 2010 and would drop to 641 million by 2019. However, with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of people in need worldwide is estimated to have increased by 70 million to 713 million in 2020. Although the rate of people in need in the world decreased partially in 2021, the decreasing trend halted due to the global implications of another regional crisis, the Russo-Ukrainian crisis.

### **1) The Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Global Social Structure**

#### **Increasing Regional Inequalities**

The socioeconomically disadvantaged countries and disadvantaged regions within countries were the areas worst affected by the bans during the COVID-19 pandemic. Inadequate infrastructure, governance, and social conditions in these countries or regions increased

socioeconomic inequalities. Any interventions to this end should encompass regional differences.

### **Increasing Structural Inequalities**

The COVID-19 pandemic increased the socioeconomic inequalities between groups in society. The diminishing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on disadvantaged groups (e.g., women, children, the elderly, and persons with disabilities and chronic conditions) have exacerbated neediness, income inequalities and intergenerational disparities. Therefore, the programs to be implemented against the COVID-19 pandemic's negative consequences should be based on social inclusion.

### **Increasing Health Inequalities**

Health systems globally have been exposed as neither prepared nor sufficient against such a pandemic, and existing health systems and interventions proved insufficient in protecting public health. Accordingly, it became clear that health systems should primarily focus on protecting public health.

### **Increasing Unemployment and Changing Employment Market**

The increase in unemployment due to the COVID-19 pandemic has questioned the inclusiveness and protection of social security mechanisms. The pandemic pressured the employment market to adjust working relations, and the necessity of developing inclusive and protective measures for the employment market was highlighted.

### **Increasing Awareness of Education and Vocational Skills**

The withdrawal from formal education and vocational training following the pandemic's onset made it difficult for individuals to enter the employment market, exposing individuals deprived of formal education and vocational training to socioeconomic inequalities. The necessity of establishing different mechanisms to enable individuals' access to all types of education was acknowledged.

### **Emphasis on Social Solidarity**

The COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns proved social relations and solidarity to be socioeconomic forces at a national level. The principle of solidarity and relevant interventions reflected a national reaction against the increasing inequalities and social resistance against the pandemic. In this context, governments recognized the need to improve local and civil initiatives.

## **Cooperation between Public Institutions and Civil Society**

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted that public intervention alone is insufficient to govern such emergencies and disasters but requires civil society organizations to be involved. In this context, governments recognized the necessity of organized civil society initiatives.

The above findings proved that countries and societies cannot be protected by traditional and existing socioeconomic policies in the face of a global socioeconomic crisis or natural disaster and must develop early warning systems and early action mechanisms to deal with socioeconomic or natural emergencies and disasters.

This report covers Türkiye's experiences against COVID-19 Pandemic and its counter-actions regarding socioeconomic strengthening, primarily through programs and measures in scope of the social assistance and social services. It also shows the changes and transformations in the social protection system against the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **2) Social Assistance and Socioeconomic Strengthening Policies and Mechanisms Developed by Türkiye Against the COVID-19 Pandemic**

As of March 2020, Türkiye started to create a holistic combat plan against the COVID-19 outbreak in the fields of health, social assistance, social service, and employment. The State of Emergency Decision was taken by the Presidency regarding the social assistances on April 9, 2020. Therefore, “state of emergency” was evaluated for the households, which have been determined by the SASFs as periodically needy and not able to meet the basic needs due to COVID-19 pandemic, and their social assistance needs were met. This decision made the coverage of social assistances expanded.

The following section provides a summary of the programs in these areas. These programs will be discussed in detail in the later sections.

#### **a) Social Assistance Programs**

Social assistance programs created against the COVID-19 pandemic were carried out in three phases under the Pandemic Social Support Program. The Social Support Program, announced as the **Economic Stability Package**, contained three-phase modules created by the Ministry of Family and Social Services (MoFSS) to maintain the supply-side approach adopted during the social assistance process and reach out to disadvantaged groups and people in need.

### **Economic Stability Package (Pandemic Social Support Program) Phase I Assistance:**

The evaluations following the public disclosure of the **Economic Stability Package** on March 18, 2020, concluded that children, women, persons with disabilities, and the elderly would be the most affected by the circumstances, and aids prioritized these groups. Accordingly, the Economic Stability Package (Pandemic Social Support Program) Phase I Assistance was adopted upon presidential approval, dated March 27, 2020. These funds reached 2,122,483 households by April 4, 2020, starting as of April 1, 2020.

The Economic Stability Package (Pandemic Social Support Program) Phase I provided, as of April 1, 2020, cash assistance were provided to the households receiving monthly allowances or periodic central social assistance under Law No. 3294 on the Encouragement of Social Assistance and Solidarity or Law No. 2022 on Pensions for Turkish Citizens who are aged over 65, needy, vulnerable, and living alone (Periodic Cash Assistance to Widowed Women, Periodic Cash Assistance to the Families of Soldiers in Need, Assistance to Orphans, Assistance to Children of Soldiers in Need, Conditional Cash Transfer for Education, Conditional Cash Transfer for Health, Multiple Birth Assistance, Periodic Cash Assistance to Tuberculosis, and SSPE Patients Suffering from Psychosocial or Financial Losses). The ultimate purpose was to protect disadvantaged groups, who are needy, including children, persons with disabilities, the elderly, orphans, and widowed women, from the negative consequences of the pandemic period. Within the scope of this program, **2.122.483** households were paid 1.000 Turkish lira each, totaling **2.122.483.000 Turkish lira**.

### **Economic Stability Package (Pandemic Social Support Program) Phase II Assistance:**

The Economic Stability Package's (Pandemic Social Support Program) second phase maintained the supply-side oriented system in social assistance, as in the first phase, and determined the priority groups most vulnerable to the pandemic period. Presidential approval for the Economic Stability Package Support Program (Pandemic Social Support Program) Phase II Assistance was obtained on April 9, 2020. The cash payments were then concluded gradually. Within the scope of this program, **2.090.554** households were paid 1.000 Turkish lira each, totaling **2.090.554.000 Turkish lira**.

### **Economic Stability Package (Pandemic Social Support Program) Phase III Assistance:**

Unlike Phases I and II of the Pandemic Social Support Program, Phase III, carried out by the MoFSS with funding from the Social Assistance and Solidarity Encouragement Fund,

provided additional assistance to citizens who may have periodical needs during the pandemic period.

At the pandemic's height in April 2020, an online application platform was designed on the e-Government Gateway to prevent individuals from personally visiting the SASFs to reduce the risk of contact. The application period for the Pandemic Social Support Program Phase III was launched on April 20, 2020, through the e-Government Gateway. The applications were subjected to the pre-evaluation criteria determined by the MoFSS. The passing applications were forwarded to the SASFs for final evaluation and decision by the SASF Board of Trustees. Within the scope of Phase III, as of May 31, 2022, a total of **2.409.923.000 Turkish lira** was paid to **2.409.923 households** whom the SASFs considered to be in periodical need. Phase III applications via the e-Government Gateway were terminated as of May 11, 2022.

#### **Full Lockdown Social Support Program:**

In line with the resolutions passed in the presidential cabinet meeting under the chairmanship of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan on April 26, 2021, a complete lockdown was introduced between April 29 and May 17, 2021. In this context, with President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's approval, assistance worth 1.100 Turkish lira was provided within the scope of the Full Lockdown Social Support Program for each household considered to be in periodical need due to the pandemic. The MoFSS was authorized to carry out due regulations and activities. Within the Full Lockdown Social Support Program's scope, 1.100 Turkish lira were paid to **2.015.100** households, totaling **2.216.610.000 Turkish lira**.

#### **"Biz Bize Yeteriz Türkiye" National Solidarity Campaign**

In addition to the Pandemic Social Support Program, the **"Biz Bize Yeteriz, Türkiye" National Solidarity Campaign** was launched under President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's leadership to reinforce the sense of social solidarity in Türkiye and lend a hand to households in need through the support gathered. The presidential approval, dated June 30, 2020, authorized the MoFSS to use the campaign's donated funding.

Donations collected as part of the campaign were distributed to those in need in two phases: "Biz Bize Yeteriz, Türkiye I" and "Biz Bize Yeteriz, Türkiye II." During the first stage, 1,000 Turkish lira was paid to **133.572** households, totaling **133.572.000 Turkish lira**. Then, in the second stage, **1.949.129.000** Turkish lira was paid to **1.949.129** families via 1.000 Turkish lira each.

## **b) Social Service Programs**

To alleviate the COVID-19 pandemic's psychological effects on citizens, the MoFSS and Social Services provided psychosocial support through the Provincial Directorates of Family and Social Services and the Social Service Centers (SSCs) to all citizens affected by the pandemic, especially to those who lost a relative, the elderly, persons with disabilities, and those who already benefit from the social service models provided by the MoFSS. These services include "Psychosocial Support in Disasters and Emergencies during the Pandemic," "Handbook on Psychosocial Phone Support in Disasters and Emergencies," "Potential Impacts of Pandemic on Family in Family Consultancy Basic Training Programs," "Vefa Social Support Groups," "Family Social Support Program," and "ALO 183 Social Support Line."

## **c) Socioeconomic Empowerment Policies**

A series of measures have been developed in agriculture, employment, and social security within the framework of social protection policies against the adverse socioeconomic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Agricultural Industry**

COVID-19-related large-scale problems were not observed in Türkiye's agricultural industry. The decisive factors were that the onset of the pandemic coincided neither with the sowing nor the harvesting period of seasonal products and that the pandemic did not spread across the entire agricultural workforce. On the other hand, national and local regulations against the pandemic, the exemption of the agricultural workforce from restrictions, and the lack of problems in input supply prevented disruptions to agricultural operations.

Türkiye's main agricultural policies during this period were as follows:

- Financial support for small and medium-sized enterprises
- Free movement of farmers and seasonal agricultural workers
- Import and export measures for the agricultural and food trade
- Facilitating the passage of food transport vehicles across borders
- Bringing farmer support payments forward and postponing farmer debts
- Creating incentives, regulations, and interventions for the food market
- Establishing the "Agriculture and Forestry Academy" portal that provides technical and educational support to farmers

## **Employment Incentives**

Türkiye established many comprehensive policy measures to reduce the impact of COVID-19 pandemic restrictions on employment.

### **Employment programs and regulations implemented against the COVID-19 pandemic included:**

- 1) Career Days and Virtual Employment Fairs
- 2) Incentives
  - a) Return to Employment Incentives
  - b) Additional Employment Incentives
  - c) Normalization Support
  - d) Additional Employment Financing Support
  - e) Insurance Premium Incentives for the Food and Beverage Industry
  - f) Additional Incentives for Employment
  - g) Incentives for Women, Youth, and Those with Vocational Qualifications
- 3) Activities Within the Scope of Short-Term Employment Allowances
- 4) Activities Within the Scope of the Social Benefit Programs
- 5) Activities Within the Scope of Job Seeker Registration and Public Recruitment

Process

#### Passive Labor Market Policies

- a. Short-Term Employment Allowances
- b. Cash Wage Support
- c. Unemployment Benefits

## **Social Security**

Türkiye established a series of measures, including debt restructuring and postponement, to mitigate the problems which could be triggered by the COVID-19 restrictions on the social insurance system.

- 1- Social Insurance Premium Payment Deferrals
- 2- Debt, Receivables, and Execution Restructuring in Social Insurance Transactions

## 1) ECONOMIC IMPACTS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND CORRESPONDING MEASURES

The COVID-19 crisis was a health crisis with economic, social, and political implications. Therefore, while the crisis was most influential on social problems and expenses, it exacerbated the need to increase social costs, the resulting economic crisis only worsened the resource problem. The most significant consequence of the pandemic, without a doubt, was exacerbating and spreading the neediness globally. The COVID-19 restrictions and quarantines significantly affected the employment market, with increasing unemployment and decreasing income and job security being the most notable consequences. Disruptions in food production and supply chains, particularly, restricted the access to food by those in need. The pandemic caught healthcare, education, and social security industries off guard as well.

The pandemic had varying effects on different social groups. Disadvantaged or vulnerable communities, namely the elderly, persons with disabilities or chronic illnesses, children, women, inhabitants of rural areas, and those not in the social insurance system, were the groups most affected by the pandemic. Countries primarily targeted these groups in their social assistance programs against the COVID-19 pandemic's negative effects.

This report explains the social support programs implemented against the COVID-19 pandemic. The following section details Türkiye's relevant programs in this field over the last two years.

### a) Social Support Programs Against the COVID-19 Pandemic

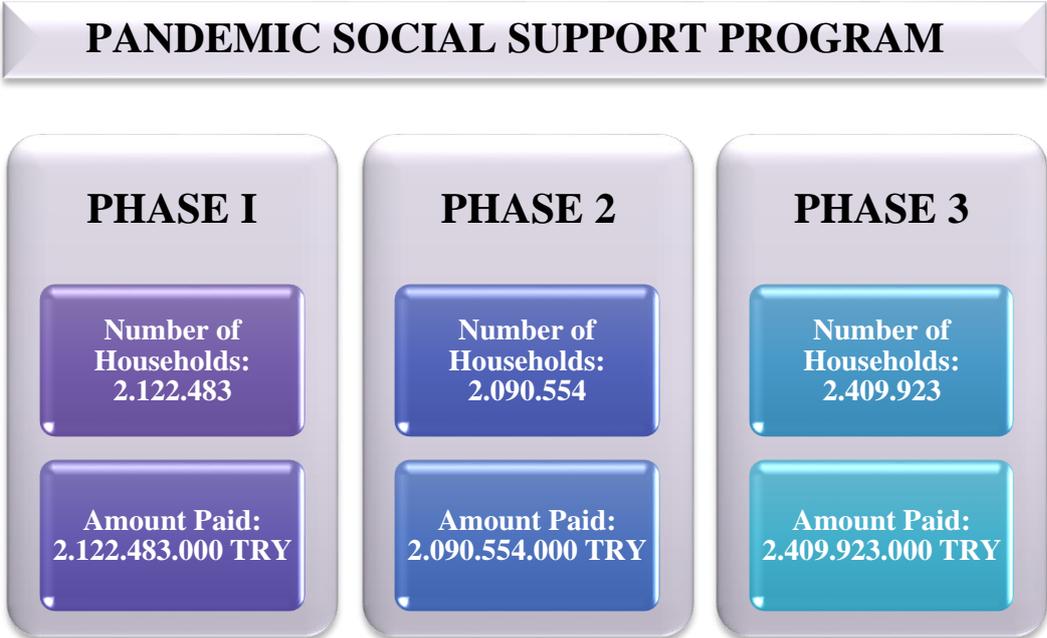
Within the scope of the Pandemic Social Support Program (Phase I, II, and III), 1.000 Turkish lira cash assistance was approved for households assessed by the SASFs as being periodically needy and unable to meet their basic needs in due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Due efforts were launched as soon as March 11, 2020, when the first case emerged in Türkiye, and supports on the social assistance aspect were realized by the MoFSS. In line with the State of emergency Decision taken by the Presidency regarding the social assistances on April 9, 2020, “state of emergency” was evaluated for the households, which have been determined by the SASFs as periodically needy and not able to meet the basic needs due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and their social assistance needs were met.

Families currently supported by SASFs regularly constituted the Phase I beneficiaries. The Phase II beneficiaries were the households that received temporary assistance in the recent year within the scope of the Law No. 3294.

Phase III, on the other hand, aimed to support all citizens in meeting their periodical needs hindered by the pandemic, and applications were collected online via the e-Government Gateway as of April 20, 2020, to enable fast and easy access to help. Any citizen who was a registered user on e-Government could apply to receive assistance. Details on the components of the assistance are provided in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Pandemic Social Support Program and Its Phase**



**(1) Pandemic Social Support Program (Phase I)**

The first stage of the Pandemic Social Support Program, Phase I, was implemented between April 1–5, 2020, and addressed all households receiving regular assistance from the SASFs. This phase of the program addressed the following groups:

- Conditional Cash Transfer for Education, Health, Maternity, and Postpartum
- Multiple Birth Assistance
- Assistance to Widowed Women
- Assistance to Orphans

- Assistance to the Families of Soldiers in Need and Assistance to Children of Soldiers in Need
- Assistance to Tuberculosis and SSPE Patients Suffering from Psychosocial or Financial Losses
- Pension for the Elderly, Persons with Disabilities, and Relatives of Those with Disabilities

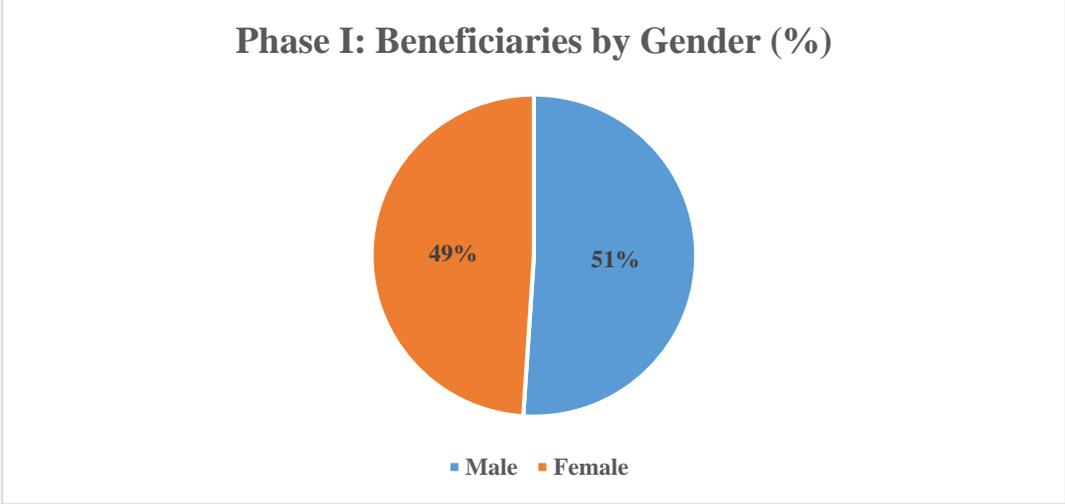
Within the scope of this program, **2.122.483** households benefitting from the above assistance programs were paid 1.000 Turkish lira each, totaling **2.122.483.000 Turkish lira**.

**Map 1: Number of Households per Province That Received Assistance within the Scope of the Pandemic Social Support Program (Phase I)**



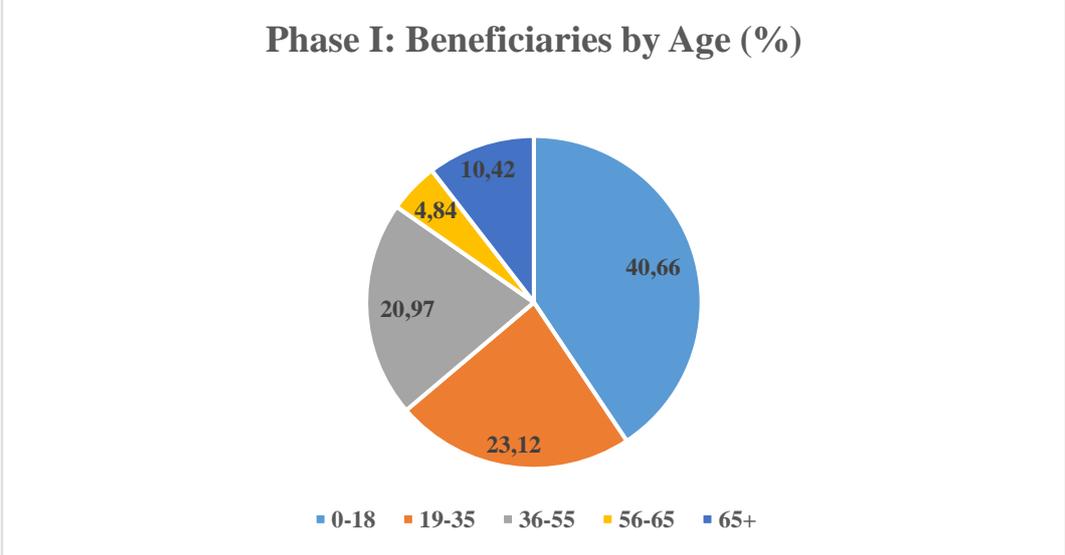
**Demographics Based on Beneficiary**

**Figure 2: Gender Distribution of Beneficiary<sup>1</sup> within the Scope of the Pandemic Social Support Program (Phase I)**



The gender distribution of beneficiaries in the households covered by the Pandemic Social Support Program (Phase I) indicated a 49 percent female and 51 percent male distribution among beneficiaries.

**Figure 3: Age Distribution of Beneficiaries within the Scope of the Pandemic Social Support Program (Phase I)**

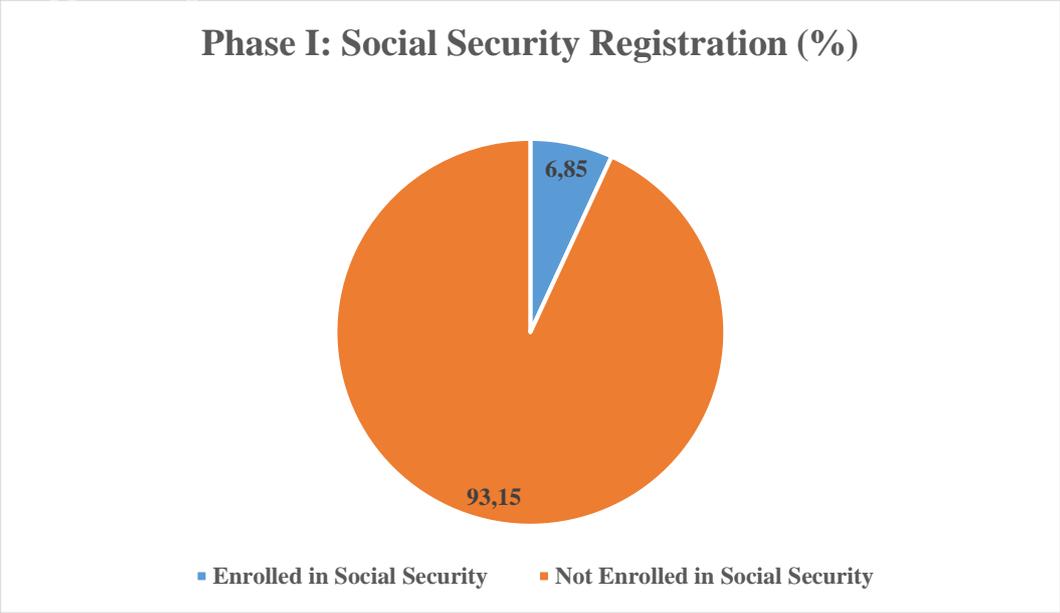


The age distribution of beneficiaries in the households covered by the Pandemic Social Support Program (Phase I) indicated that as for the beneficiaries, 40,66 percent were 0–18, 23,12 percent were 19–35, and 20.97 percent were 36–55.

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<sup>1</sup>Beneficiaries are the household members who benefit from the social support program.

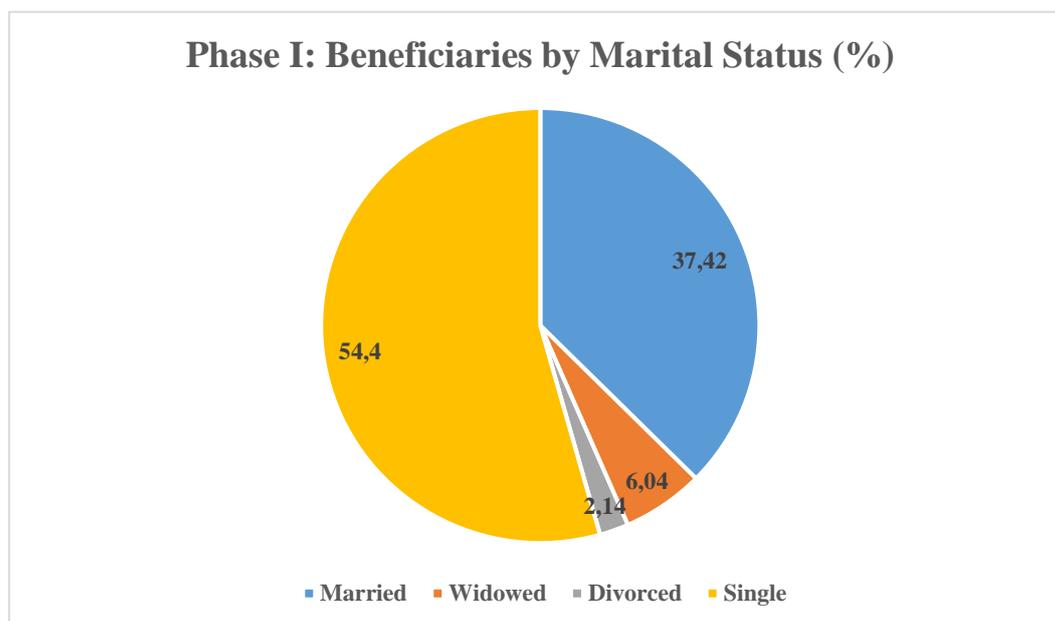
**Figure 4: Social Security Registration of Beneficiaries within the Scope of the Pandemic Social Support Program (Phase I)**



Social security registries of beneficiaries in the households covered by the Pandemic Social Support Program (Phase I) indicated that 6,85 percent of beneficiaries had at least one person in their home enrolled in social security and 93,15 percent of beneficiaries had no social security.

Furthermore, to reduce social mobility and contact between people to eventually prevent the spread of the COVID-19 given the rapid contagion of the virus and to protect the health and safety of individuals, as well as the public order, payment plans, including for households registered in the ISAS and receiving regular assistances, were carried out before receiving individual applications to the SASFs, which have already prioritized the disadvantaged groups readily in correspondence with the SASFs. Thus, households within the scope of Phase I were comprised of those which receive regular social assistances and whose neediness have already been determined.

**Figure 5: Marital Status of Beneficiaries within the Scope of the Pandemic Social Support Program (Phase I)**



The marital status of beneficiaries in the households covered by the Pandemic Social Support Program (Phase I) indicated that 37,42 percent of beneficiaries were married, and 54,4 percent were single.

## **(2) Pandemic Social Support Program (Phase II)**

The second stage of the Pandemic Social Support Program, Phase II, was launched on April 19, 2020, and addressed all households receiving temporary assistance from the SASFs over the last year within the scope of Law No. 3294. This phase of the program addressed the following areas:

- Heating assistance
- Food assistance
- Financial assistance for educational materials
- Soup kitchen
- Shelter assistance
- Assistance for household appliances
- Co-payment assistance
- Health assistance
- Student accommodation, transport, and food assistance
- G0 premium payment support within the scope of Article 60/c-1 of Law No. 5510

- Beneficiaries who receive home care support within the scope of Law No. 2828
- Applications received through the Open-Door application of the Ministry of Interior
- Beneficiaries whose unemployment allowance by Turkish Employment Agency (ISKUR) was terminated

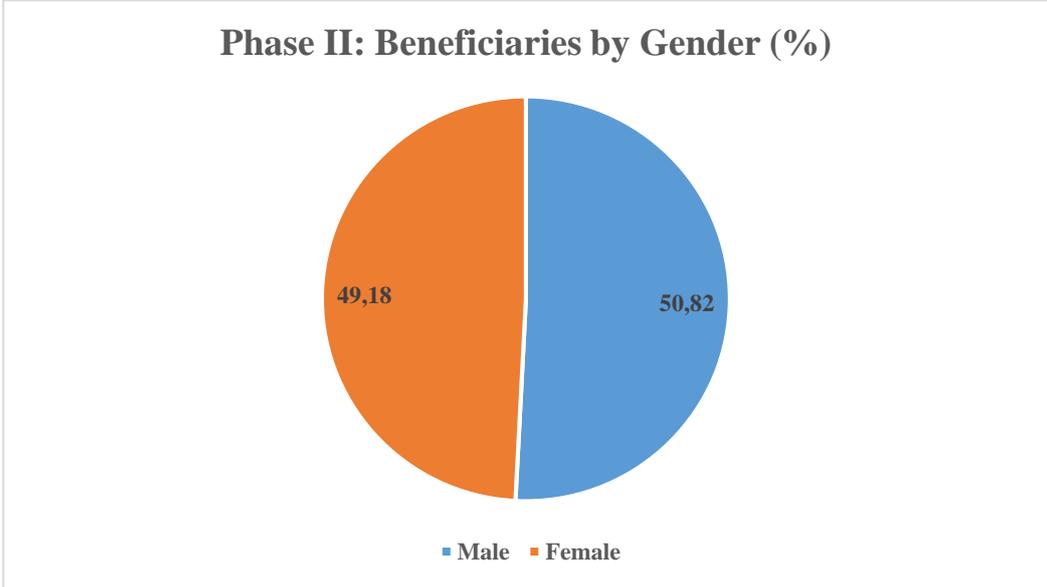
Following the assessment, **2.090.554** households were paid 1.000 Turkish lira each, totaling **2.090.554.000 Turkish lira**.

**Map 2: Number of Households per Province That Received Assistance Within the Scope of the Pandemic Social Support Program (Phase II)**



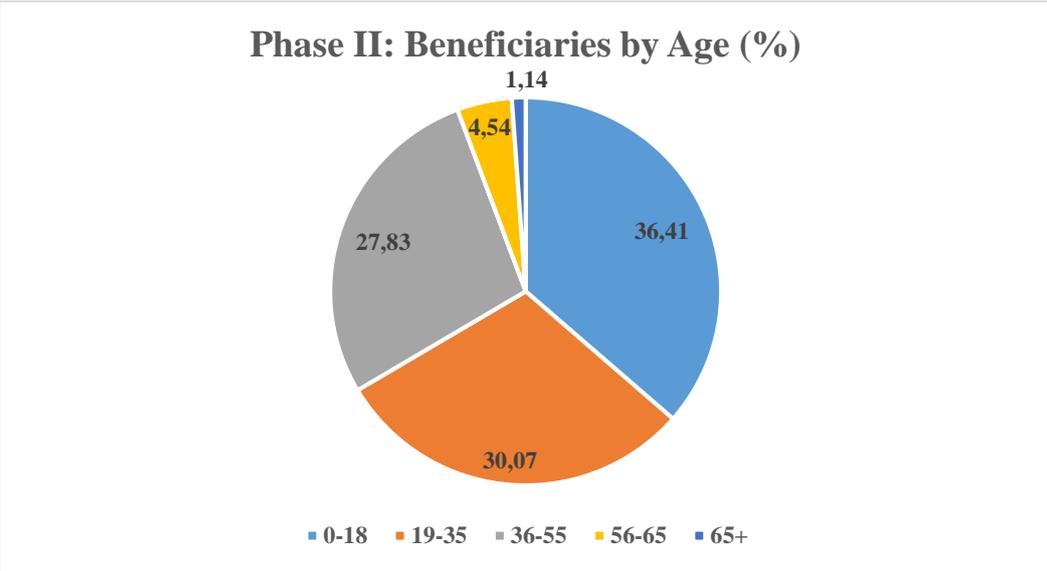
**Demographics Based on Beneficiaries**

**Figure 6: Gender Distribution of Beneficiaries within the Scope of the Pandemic Social Support Program (Phase II)**



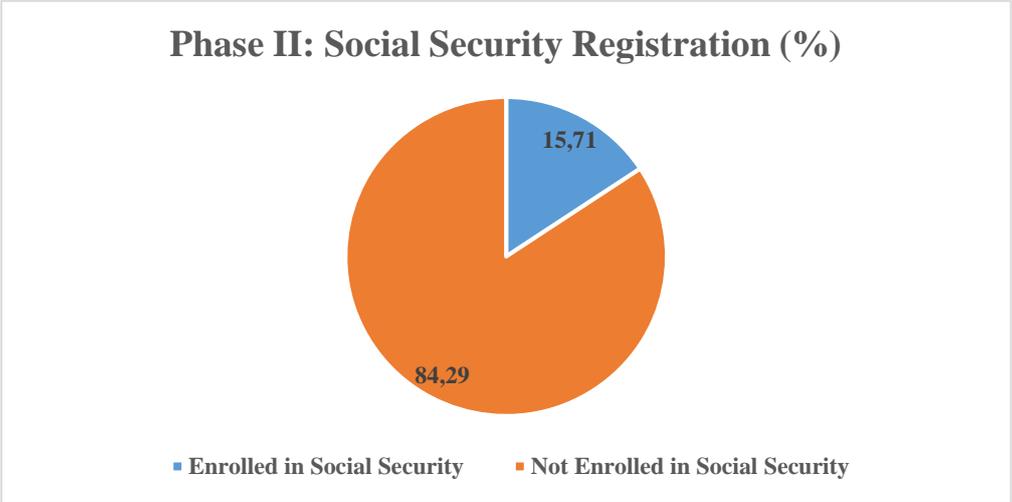
The gender distribution of beneficiaries in the households covered by the Pandemic Social Support Program (Phase II) indicated a 49,18 percent female and 50,82 percent male distribution.

**Figure 7: Age Distribution of Beneficiaries within the Scope of the Pandemic Social Support Program (Phase II)**



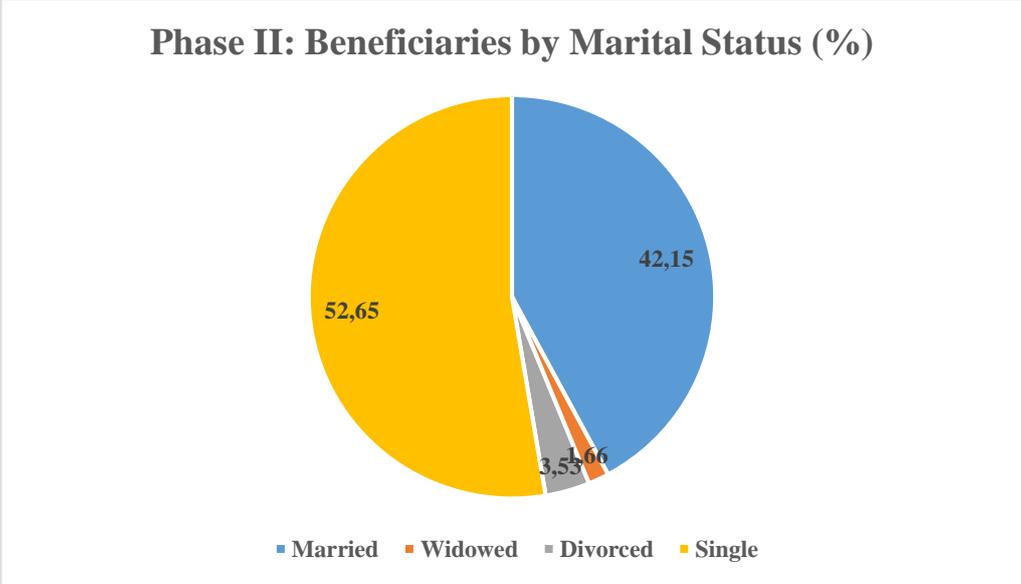
The age distribution of beneficiaries in the households covered by the Pandemic Social Support Program (Phase II) indicated that 36,41 percent were 0–18, 30,07 percent were 19–35, and 27,83 percent were 36–55.

**Figure 8: Social Security Registration of Beneficiaries within the Scope of the Pandemic Social Support Program (Phase II)**



Social security registries of beneficiaries in the households covered by the Pandemic Social Support Program (Phase II) indicated that 15,71 percent of beneficiaries had at least one person in their home enrolled in social security and 84,29 percent of beneficiaries had no social security. As irregular social aids within the scope of Law No. 3294, including Phase II, can be granted to households covered by social security as well, the resulting rates were compatible with the expected outcomes.

**Figure 9: Marital Status of Beneficiaries within the Scope of the Pandemic Social Support Program (Phase II)**



The marital status of beneficiaries in the households covered by the Pandemic Social Support Program (Phase II) indicated that as for the beneficiaries, 42,15 percent were married, and 52,65 percent were single.

### **(3) Pandemic Social Support Program (Phase III)**

Phase III applications were launched on the e-Government Gateway on April 20, 2020. Following a preliminary assessment, a total of **2.409.923.000 Turkish lira** was paid as of May 31, 2022, to **2.409.923 households** whom the SASFs considered to be in periodical need. Phase III applications via the e-Government Gateway were terminated on May 11, 2022.

The program proceeded as follows:

- Phase III applications received via e-Government were first subjected to pre-selection criteria by the Integrated System.
- The Integrated System assigned applications that passed the pre-selection to the local SASFs in the applicant's registered area of residence.
- Following a comprehensive assessment by the SASFs, the Boards of Trustees of the Foundation's grant rights, and the rights ownerships were registered on the Integrated System.
- Payment lists were regularly created by our Ministry in line with the rights ownership decisions in the Integrated System and delivered the benefits to the beneficiaries via their Post and Telegraph Organization (PTT) or bank accounts.

The total number of applications received through the e-Government Gateway within the scope of Phase III was **22.469.364**. Deducting the re-applications of citizens whose applications were initially rejected, the **number of individual applications equals 16.022.730**.

**Figure 10: Pandemic Social Support Program Implementation Flow Chart**

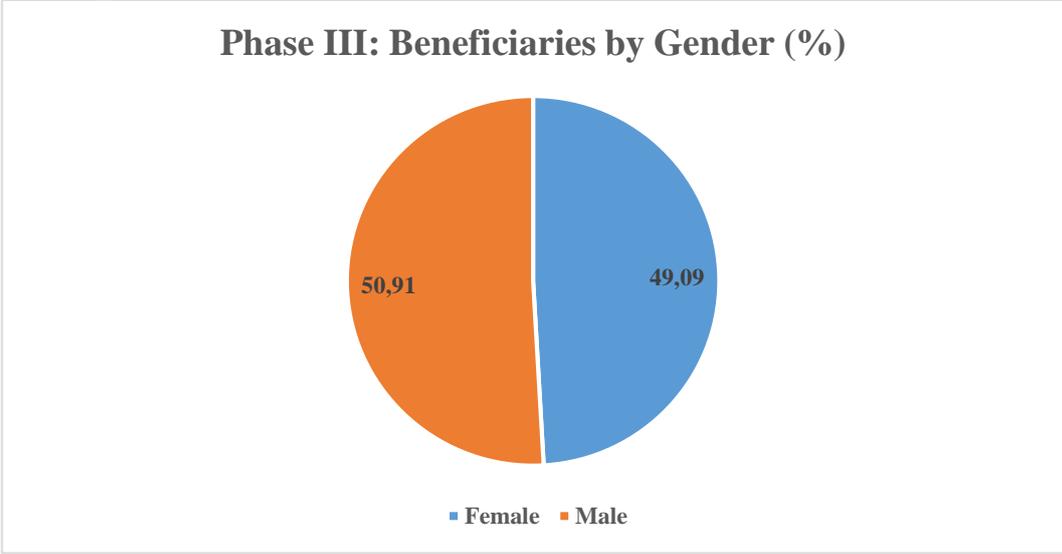


**Map 3: Number of Households per Province That Received Assistance within the Scope of the Pandemic Social Support Program (Phase III; payments prior to December 31, 2020)**



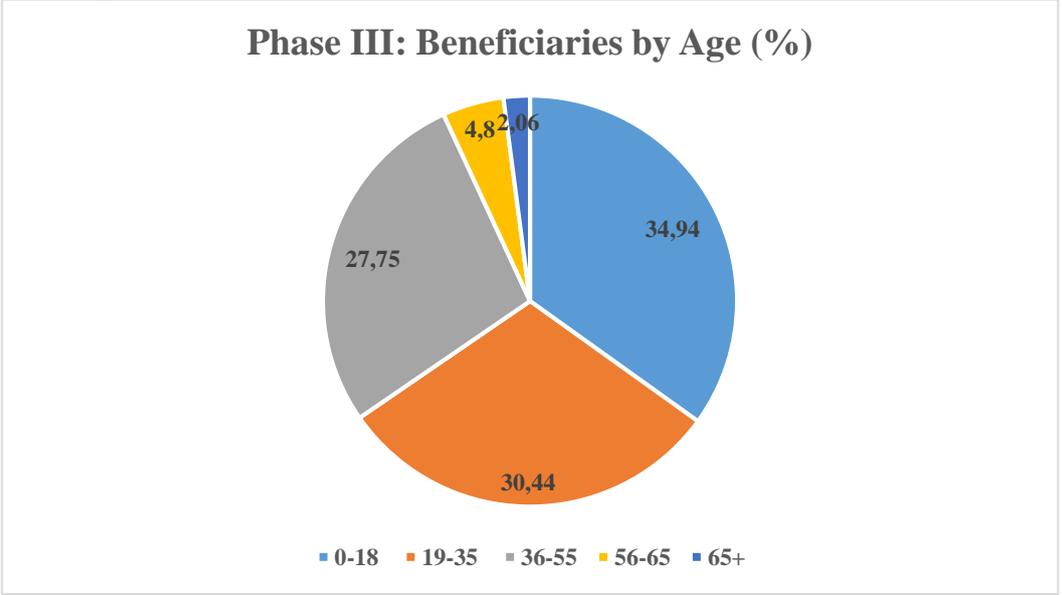
**Demographics Based on Beneficiaries**

**Figure 11: Gender Distribution of Beneficiaries Within the Scope of the Pandemic Social Support Program**



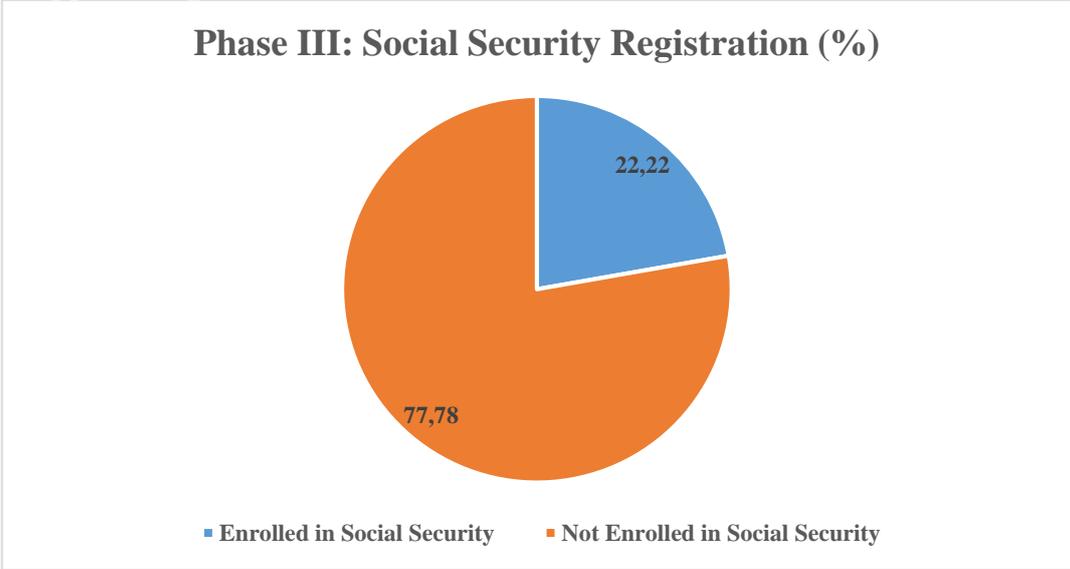
The gender distribution of beneficiaries in the households covered by the Pandemic Social Support Program (Phase III) indicated a as for beneficiaries, 49,09 percent were female and 50,91 percent were male.

**Figure 12: Age Distribution of Beneficiaries Within the Scope of the Pandemic Social Support Program**



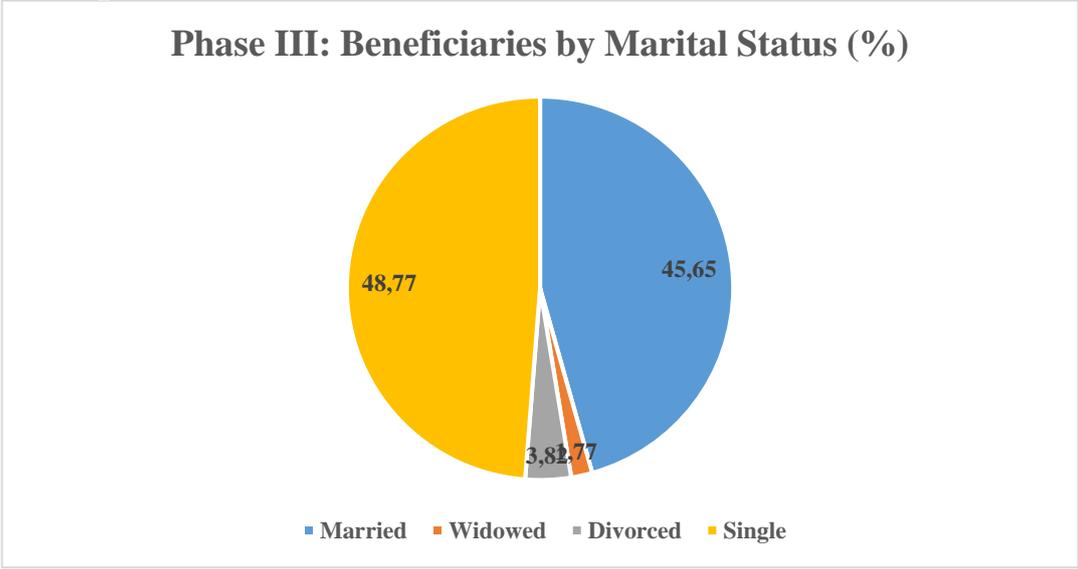
The age distribution of beneficiaries in the households covered by the Pandemic Social Support Program (Phase III) indicated that as for the beneficiaries, 34,94 percent were 0–18, 30,44 percent were 19–35, and 27,75 percent were 36–55.

**Figure 13: Social Security Registration of Beneficiaries within the Scope of the Pandemic Social Support Program**



Social security registries of beneficiaries in the households covered by the Pandemic Social Support Program (Phase III) indicated that the percentage of individual who had at least one person in their household enrolled in social security was 22,22 percent.

**Figure 14: Marital Status of Beneficiaries within the Scope of the Pandemic Social Support Program**



The marital status of beneficiaries in the households covered by the Pandemic Social Support Program (Phase III) indicated that as for the beneficiaries, 45,65 percent were married, and 48,77 percent were single.

As indicated in this report, Phase I and Phase II covered payments to households who were needy under Law No. 3294 and/or Law No. 2022 before the pandemic. However, the pandemic negatively affected many industries globally. It caused many individuals/households on a social security program or a regular job/income with no or few prior applications to a SASF to fall into temporary neediness due to the pandemic. Therefore, the recipients of Phase III payments appeared to be a new and distinct target group. Since they were entitled to assistance payments due to the adverse effects of the pandemic, the ratio of social security registries among beneficiaries and rights owners was expected to be relatively high compared to other groups.

#### **(4) Biz Bize Yeteriz, Türkiyem I**

Biz Bize Yeteriz, Türkiyem National Solidarity Campaign by the MoFSS aimed to unite the state and the nation in helping the people in need due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Donations collected within the scope of the Solidarity Campaign were granted in groups of "Donations," "Zakat," and "Zakat al-Fitr." The donation campaign consists of two different assistance components. The part of the donations consisting of zakat and zakat al-fitr was grouped under Biz Bize Yeteriz Türkiyem I and targeted beneficiaries of the below assistance programs:

- Assistance to the Families of Soldiers in Need
- Assistance to Children of Soldiers in Need
- Assistance to Orphans
- Assistance to Women Whose Husbands are Dead

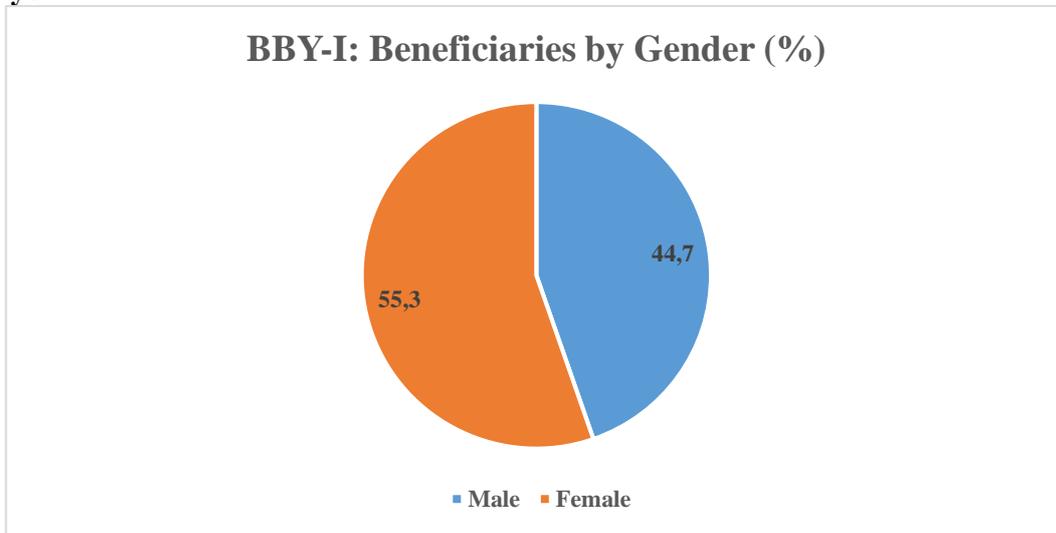
Within the scope of this program, **133.572** households benefitting from the above assistance programs were paid 1.000 Turkish lira each, totaling **133.572.000 Turkish lira**.

**Map 4: Assistance Payment Distribution per Province Within the Scope of Biz Bize Yeteriz Türkiyem I**



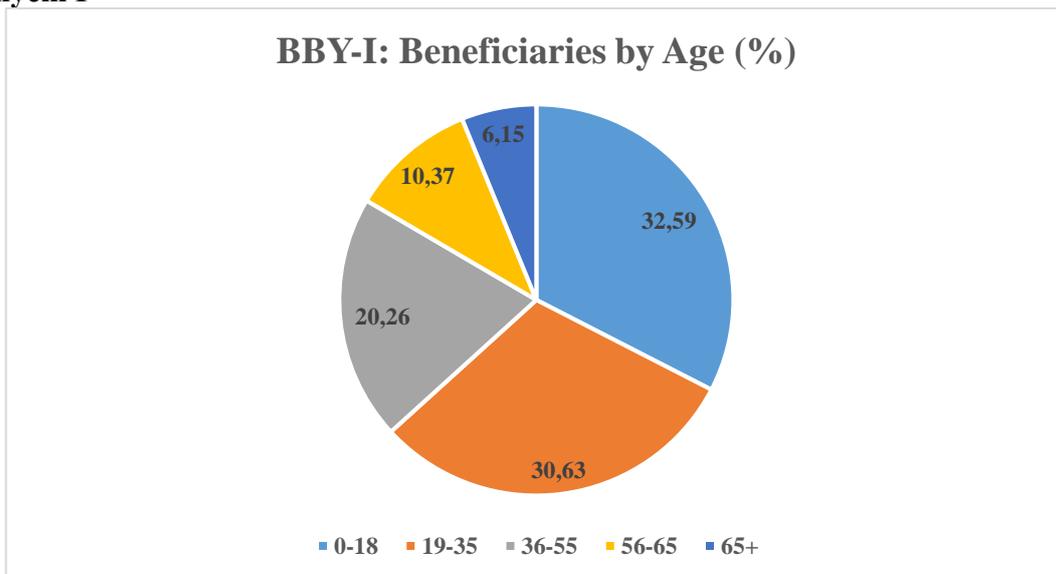
## Demographics Based on Beneficiaries

**Figure 15: Gender Distribution Beneficiaries within the Scope of Biz Bize Yeteriz, Türkiye I**



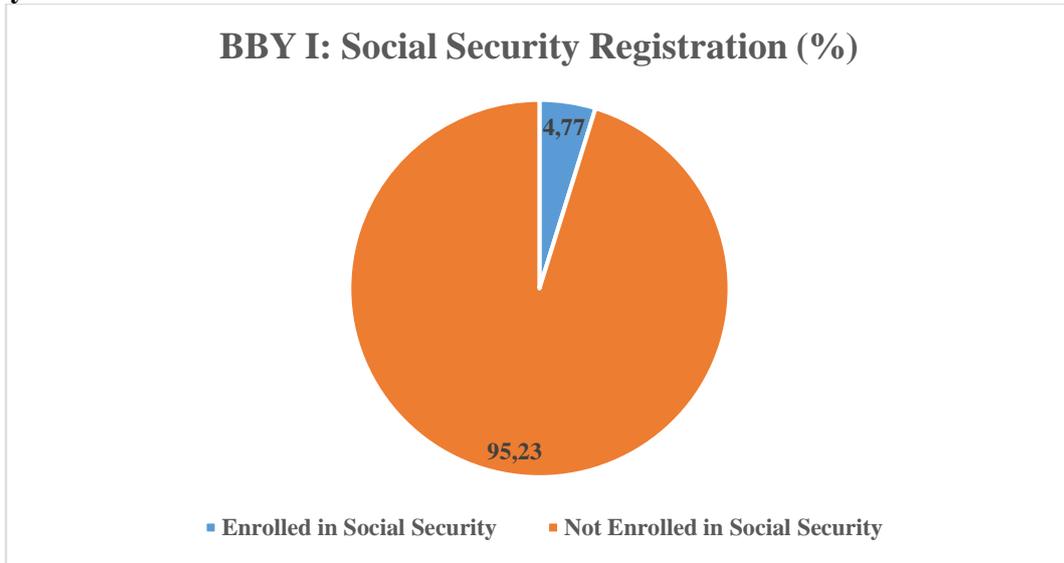
The gender distribution of beneficiaries in the households covered by Biz Bize Yeteriz, Türkiye I indicated as for beneficiaries, 55,30 percent were male, and 44,70 percent were female. As the assistance programs covered by the Biz Bize Yeteriz, Türkiye I payments were mainly female-oriented, it was an expected outcome to have female-weighted Biz Bize Yeteriz, Türkiye I beneficiaries.

**Figure 16: Age Distribution of Beneficiaries within the Scope of Biz Bize Yeteriz, Türkiye I**



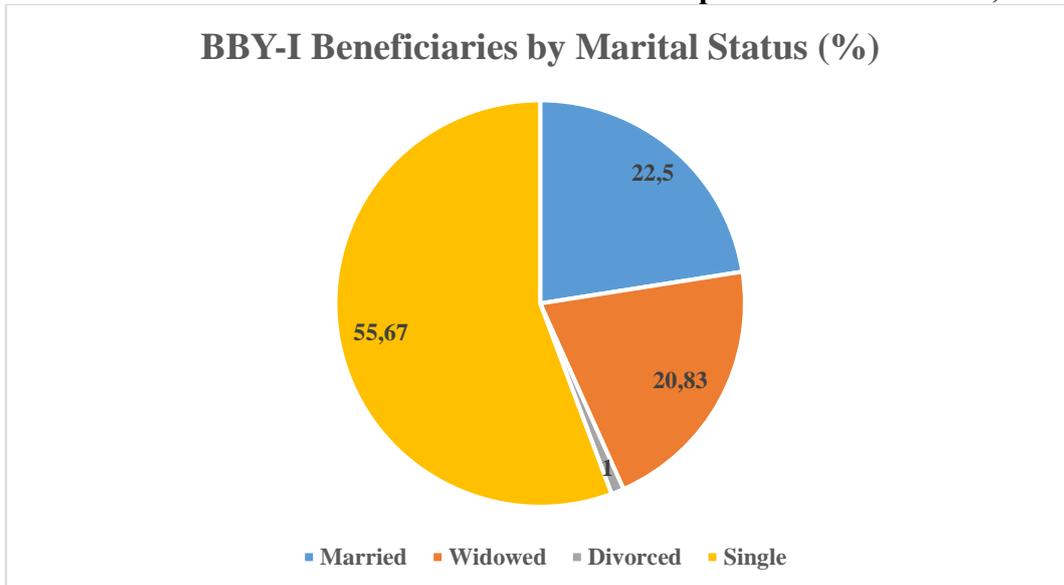
The age distribution of beneficiaries in the households covered by Biz Bize Yeteriz, Türkiye I indicated that as for the beneficiaries, 32,59 percent were 0–18, 30,63 percent were 19–35, and 20,26 percent were 36–55.

**Figure 17: Social Security Registration of Beneficiaries within the Scope of Biz Bize Yeteriz, Türkiye I**



Social security registries of beneficiaries in the households covered by Biz Bize Yeteriz, Türkiye I indicated that the percentage of individual who had at least one person in their household enrolled in social security were 4,77 percent.

**Figure 18: Marital Status of Beneficiaries within the Scope of Biz Bize Yeteriz, Türkiye I**



The marital status of beneficiaries in the households covered by Biz Bize Yeteriz Türkiye I indicated that as for the beneficiaries, 55,67 percent were single, and 22,50 percent were married and 20,83 percent were widow. Considering that the rights owners targeted by the Assistance to Widowed Women and Assistance to Orphans programs covered by Biz Bize Yeteriz Türkiye I, it was expected that certain part of beneficiaries would be women who had lost their spouses.

#### **(5) Biz Bize Yeteriz, Türkiye II**

Biz Bize Yeteriz Türkiye II Funds, created under the "donations" category within the Solidarity Campaign, reached out to those in need. Biz Bize Yeteriz Türkiye II re-evaluated applications received before June 15, 2020, within the scope of Phase III on the e-Government Gateway. These applications were again subjected to Phase III preliminary criteria, yet the applicants who received assistance within the scope of Phase II were not eliminated. Instead, those who received home care allowance were. Applications that passed the preliminary elimination by the system were assigned as of July 14, 2020, to SASFs to assess neediness. Within the scope of Biz Bize Yeteriz Türkiye II, **1.949.129** households considered by the SASFs to be in periodical need without the ability to meet their basic needs due to the pandemic were paid 1,000 Turkish lira each as of December 31, 2021, totaling **1.949.129.000 Turkish lira**.

Of the Phase III applications received as of April 20, 2020, **9.028.440** applications received via the e-Government Gateway on or before June 15, 2020, were shortlisted by the system within the scope of Biz Bize Yeteriz Türkiye II. No separate applications were collected for Biz Bize Yeteriz Türkiye II.

**Figure 19: Biz Bize Yeteriz Türkiyem Campaign**



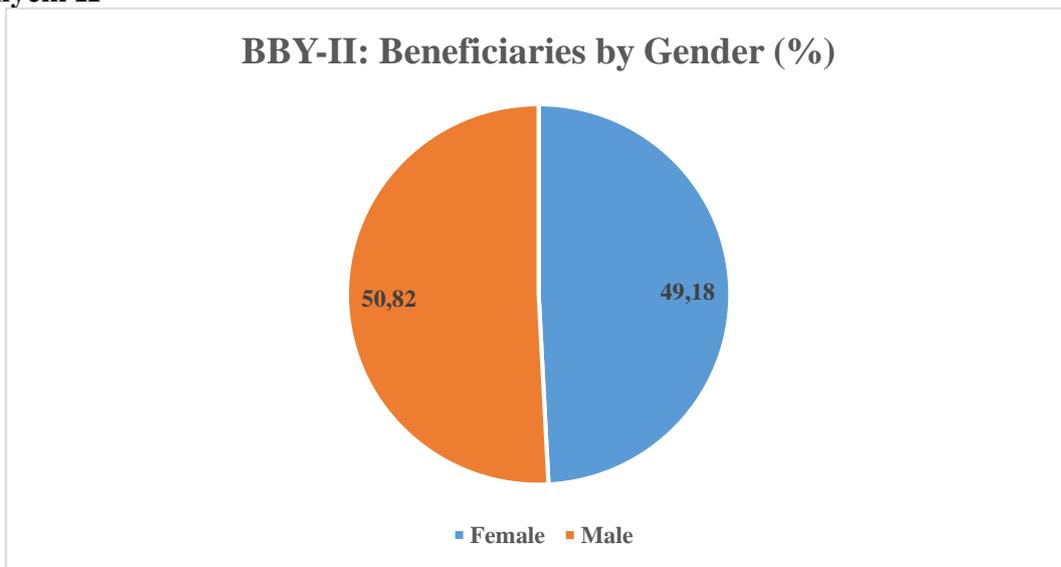
**Map 5: Number of Households per Province That Received Assistance within the Scope of the Pandemic Social Support Program– Biz Bize Yeteriz Türkiyem II (payments prior to December 31, 2020)**



A literature review on poverty affirmed that women were more actively involved when receiving aid or applying for assistance. The perception that men "should make a living" is perceived as "the loss of masculinity" when men are unemployed or lack a regular job or income. This mentality could cause them to avoid any situations of social visibility, including face-to-face applications for assistance. From this perspective, it was observed that the electronic application system within the scope of the Pandemic Social Support Program (Phase III) reduced such anxiety for men, and the tendency to apply for help increased. In conclusion, the lack of face-to-face applications in this assistance program eliminated labeling concerns, and more men applied to the program than ever registered in the literature.

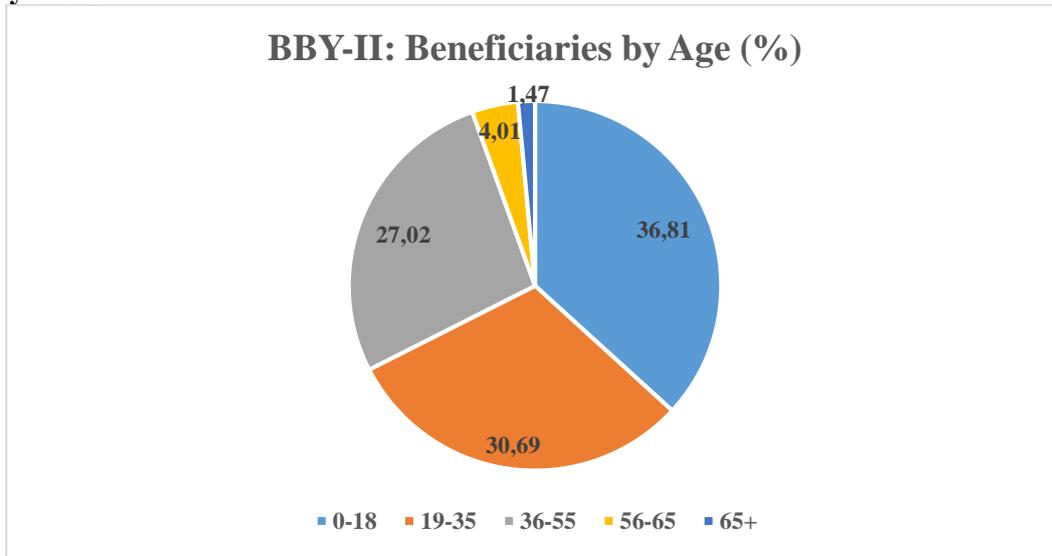
### Demographics Based on Beneficiaries

**Figure 20: Gender Distribution of Beneficiaries within the Scope of Biz Bize Yeteriz Türkiye II**



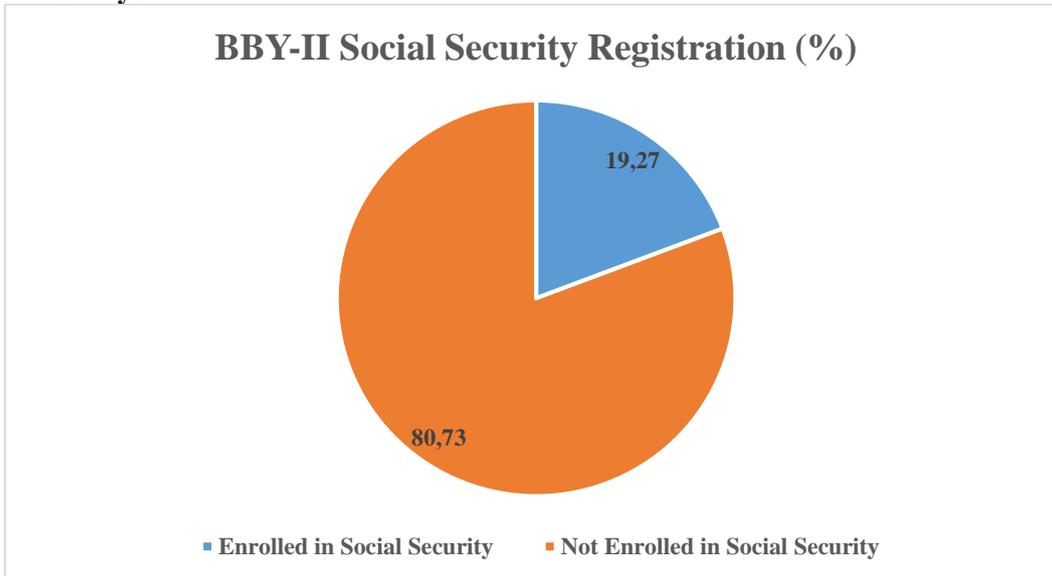
The gender distribution of beneficiaries in the households covered by Biz Bize Yeteriz Türkiye II indicated as for beneficiaries, 49,18 percent were female, and 50,82 percent were male.

**Figure 21: Age Distribution of Beneficiaries Within the Scope of Biz Bize Yeteriz, Türkiye II**



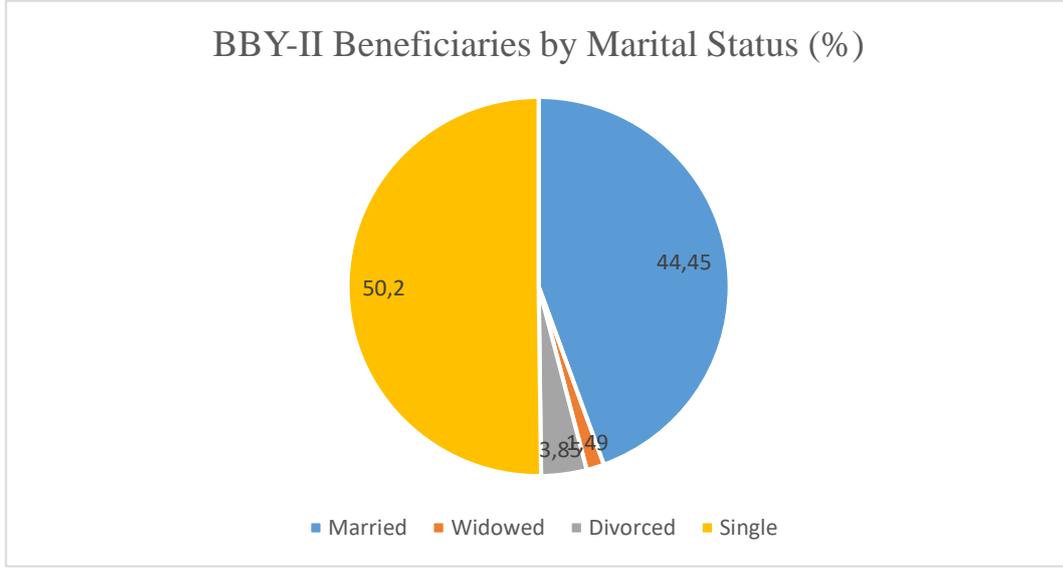
The age distribution of beneficiaries in the households covered by Biz Bize Yeteriz, Türkiye II indicated that as for the beneficiaries, 36,81 percent were 0–18, 30,69 percent were 19–35, and 27,02 percent were 36–55.

**Figure 22: Social Security Registration of Beneficiaries Within the Scope of Biz Bize Yeteriz Türkiye II**



Social security registries of beneficiaries in the households covered by Biz Bize Yeteriz, Türkiye II indicated that percentage of beneficiaries who had at least one person in their home enrolled in social security were 19,27 percent.

**Figure 23: Marital Status of Beneficiaries within the Scope of Biz Bize Yeteriz Türkiye II**



The marital status of rights owners and beneficiaries in the households covered by Biz Bize Yeteriz Türkiye II indicated that as for the beneficiaries, 44,45 percent were married, and 50,20 percent were single.

#### **(6) Full Lockdown Social Support Program**

In line with the resolutions passed in the presidential cabinet meeting under the chairmanship of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan on April 26, 2021, a complete lockdown was introduced between April 29 and May 17, 2021. In this context, with the approval of President Erdoğan, it was decided to provide assistance worth 1.100 Turkish lira within the scope of the Full Lockdown Social Support Program for each household considered to be in periodical need due to the pandemic. The MoFSS was authorized to carry out due regulations and activities.

In this context, a top-up assistance payment of 1.100 Turkish lira was approved for households included in the Biz Bize Yeteriz Türkiye II payment lists as of April 29, 2021, and in the Pandemic Social Support Program (Phase III) from June 15, 2020, to April 29, 2021. Payments to those who continued to meet the rights ownership criteria were made on May 5, 2021.

#### **Benefits of the Full Lockdown Support Program:**

- **Based on Current Data:** Including those already assessed by SASF within the past year to be in periodical need in the payment lists allowed the program to be based on the most recent data.

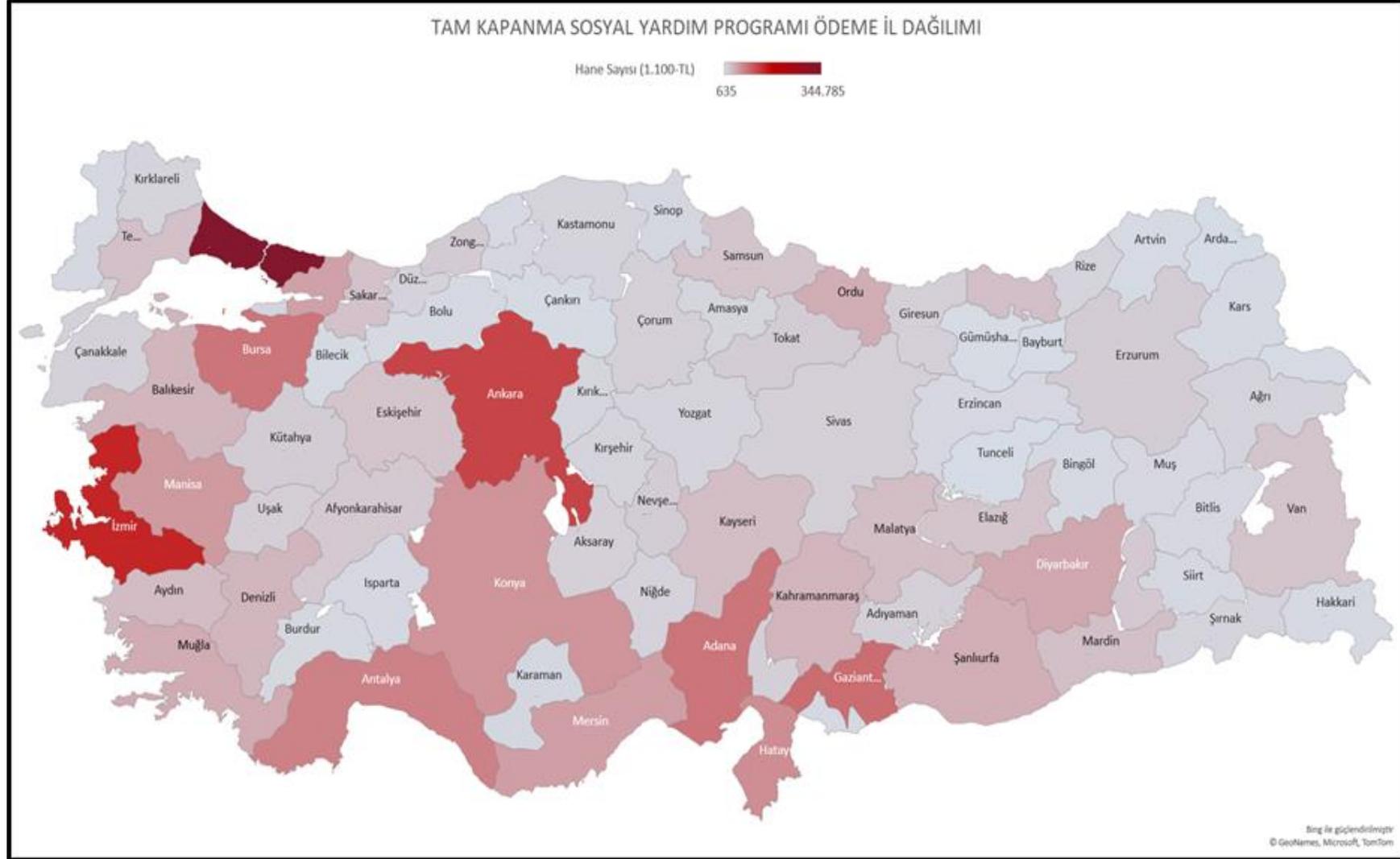
- **Promptness:** The lack of renewed applications and SASF evaluations accelerated the process, and assistance reached beneficiaries before the full lockdown was implemented on short notice.
- **Predictability:** Since the current number of eligible households was known, the highest cost predictability was provided.
- **Compliance with Pandemic Measures:** Since the application and evaluation stages would not be repeated, physical contact was minimized, and the risk of infection was reduced.

Given the urgency of assistance as the full lockdown was initiated and as the up-to-date information on all households granted rights by the SASFs within the last year were registered on the ISAS, central assistance payments were carried out without additional applications and repeated SASFs evaluations for rights ownership to those whose continuous compliance with the criteria were affirmed through inquiries on the SSI, Turkish Employment Agency (ISKUR), Central Population Administration System (MERNIS), and other databases. No separate applications were collected through SASFs or via the e-Government Gateway.

The Full Lockdown Social Support payments were transferred to the international bank account numbers (IBANs) if the rights owners had provided an IBAN in their name during their previous application to the Pandemic Social Support Program (Phase III) via the e-Government Gateway. If the rights owners had not provided an IBAN in their name, then their Full Lockdown Social Support payments were either transferred to their PTT account cards, if they hold one, or to their registered address via PTT or Vefa Social Support Groups.

Within the Full Lockdown Social Support Program's scope, 1.100 Turkish lira were paid to **2.015.100** households, totaling **2.216.610.000 Turkish lira**.

**Map 6: Number of Households per Province That Received Assistance within the Scope of the Full Lockdown Social Support Program**



## **(7) Facility for Refugees in Türkiye Additional Payment for COVID-19**

Türkiye's rapid and effective expansion and increase of social support programs during the COVID-19 pandemic were closely related to the previously tested system. There have been mass migrations to Türkiye since 2011 due to the Civil War in Syria. Foreigners fleeing their countries to take refuge in Türkiye resort heavily to the social benefits of the MoFSS. Law No. 3294 on the Encouragement of Social Assistance and Solidarity stipulates that these assistance by the MoFSS Directorate General of Social Assistance (DGSA) are to be provided to anyone in need currently living in Türkiye without regard to their country of origin. Therefore, refugees in the country could actively benefit from these assistance programs. The relevant provisions in the law and the execution of these provisions show the inclusiveness of the Turkish social support system. The social assistance provided through the 1.003 SASF operating in every province and district of Türkiye enabled accessible social assistance to all residents of the country and reflected the system's prevalence and inclusiveness. Furthermore, the MoFSS central organization rapidly completed the assistance process thanks to the ISAS used by both the stakeholders of the social support system and the 1.003 SASF, and the right people were targeted for the assistance. These features were all tested first by foreigners taking refuge in Türkiye and the rapid integration of refugees into the social security system proved the system's shock resistance. Subsequently, pandemic assistance was provided rapidly to the public without further need to test the capacity.

In addition to the support provided for the needy citizens of the Republic of Türkiye during the pandemic, further support was provided to the beneficiaries of the Social Cohesion Assistance and Conditional Cash Transfer for Education for Foreigners provided for by the EU funds led by the DGSA.

### **(b) Measures in Social Services During the Pandemic**

Within the scope of the pandemic measures, Vefa Social Support Groups formed under the coordination of Governorates and District Governorates to meet the needs of people aged 65 and over and those who suffer from chronic illnesses. It also procured and delivered all necessities, from pensions to food, medicine, and hygiene products. In this context, monthly allowance payments for the elderly and persons with disabilities, granted within the scope of Law No. 2022 were delivered to the beneficiaries' homes by the Vefa Social Support Groups during the curfew periods.

The disability status of persons who benefited from the disability pension under Law No. 2022 were determined based on reports by health boards issued by hospitals authorized by the Ministry of Health. One measure during the pandemic was the temporary incapacity reports, as issued by health boards, expiring as of or after January 1, 2020, to be assumed extended up to December 31, 2022, upon the Ministry of Health's approval due to the increasing number of cases and the crowds in the healthcare service locations. Meanwhile, the MoFSS will continue to pay the disability pensions within the scope of Law No. 2022, according to the expired and extended disability reports issued by the health boards.

To alleviate the psychological effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on citizens, the MoFSS provided psychosocial support through the Provincial Directorates of Family and Social Services and the SSCs to all citizens affected by the pandemic, especially to those who lost a relative, the elderly, persons with disabilities, and those who already benefit from the social service models provided by the Ministry.

Psychosocial support services were provided to those who had lost a loved one, either face to face or by phone calls when face-to-face contact was not viable, by 582 professionals who had been trained on "Psychosocial Support Services in Emergencies and Disasters during the Pandemic" within the framework of rules set by the Ministry of Health and the Provincial Council of Public Health.

During periods when face-to-face consultancy services could not be provided due to the pandemic, services were sustained through technological means. In this context, family counseling applications were collected via e-Government. Approximately 10.000 applications have been responded to through the e-Government Gateway since 2020. Meanwhile, Basic Training programs were organized on Family Counseling. These training programs also included the possible effects of the pandemic on the family.

Family Social Support Program (ASDEP) staff also participated in the Vefa Social Support Groups established in the provinces to provide the necessary services to those in need of social service and assistance during the pandemic. Three thousand four hundred seventy-eight ASDEP staff have reached out to 1.9 million households since early 2020 to provide necessary guidance and consultancy. In addition, the SSCs provide effective social services under a single roof, and 57 new SSCs have been opened across Türkiye since early 2020, increasing the total number to 390.

Guidance and consultancy services are provided 24/7 through the ALO 183 Social Support Line from the Call Centers of the MoFSS. It takes calls regarding services for families, women, children, the elderly, and persons with disabilities, relatives of martyrs, veterans, and relatives of veterans. The ALO 183 Staff was trained for Psychosocial Support Services on the Phone to provide Turkish citizens and non-Turkish beneficiaries with psychosocial support for any problems that arose or may have arisen during the pandemic. Furthermore, the "Guidelines for Psychosocial Support on the Phone in Disasters and Emergencies" was prepared for the use of ALO 183 personnel.

### **(1) Programs for the Elderly and Persons with Disabilities**

The MoFSS Directorate General of Services for Persons with Disabilities and The Elderly is responsible for coordinating the implementation of national policies and strategies, carrying out social services and assistance for the persons with disabilities and the elderly, and taking measures to ensure the professional rehabilitation of the disabled so that persons with disabilities and elderly individuals can actively participate in social life and without discrimination against all kinds of obstacles, neglect, and exclusions.

While the COVID-19 pandemic affected everyone, it created additional risks and consequences for some population groups, including persons with disabilities and the elderly. Therefore, persons with disabilities and the elderly were considered the priority target in the COVID-19 precautions, and such measures were implemented immediately.

In Türkiye, activities were carried out with great sensitivity due to the dynamic nature of the pandemic, just as they were globally. Policies and services toward the elderly and persons with disabilities were carried out in a development-oriented, rights-based, and inclusive manner despite the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the same vein, the 2030 Barrier-Free Vision Document, prepared collectively by all parties, including non-governmental organizations, as a roadmap comprising all policies and services toward persons with disabilities, was announced by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan on December 3, 2021, United Nations' International Day of Persons with Disabilities.

Reflecting Türkiye's vision as an inclusive society where persons with disabilities fulfill their potential as equal citizens, the 2030 Barrier-Free Vision Document is a high-level policy document that aims to create a holistic framework for mainstream services and services for persons with disabilities. It also seeks to ensure that persons with disabilities completely and effectively benefit from mainstream policies, programs, and services, enhance the visibility of

disabilities, and involve persons with disabilities more actively in the policymaking and implementing processes regarding issues about themselves. The Barrier-Free Vision will be implemented in a series of three-year action plans.

Circular No. 2013/8 on the Monitoring and Evaluation Board for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was revised to bring together all ministries, related public institutions, and senior representatives of the two confederations of authority operating in the field of disabilities to ensure strong national coordination on the rights of persons with disabilities. The new circular, published in the Official Gazette No. 31678, dated December 3, 2021, aimed to alter the Board into a mechanism that represents CSOs in compliance with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and is more actively present in the presidential system. With this new arrangement, the Board could develop solutions for the problems of disabled individuals and establish cooperation and coordination between institutions. Preparations for the Board's first meeting are still ongoing.

Preparations also continue for the 2030 Aging Vision Document, which, as a reference on aging contributed by all relevant stakeholders, will guide all policies, programs, and services on aging in Türkiye. This document aims to encourage active participation in the aging process at any age, strengthen the rights of the elderly, develop new service and support models for the elderly through a right- and social-inclusion-based approach, strengthen intergenerational solidarity, and create a new vision with a family- and community-focused strategy. The 2030 Aging Vision goals are to significantly contribute to the socioeconomic empowerment of the elderly despite the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The independent participation of persons with disabilities and elderly individuals in social life gained more importance during the COVID-19 period, and accessibility practices to support this continued without interruption. The year 2020 was dubbed the "Year of Accessibility" by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan with the motto "Accessible Türkiye, Barrier-Free Life." Subsequently, the Accessibility Awards Ceremony was held on March 22, 2021, to raise awareness regarding accessibility and encourage good practice examples for all sectors. Examples of best practices were awarded in nine categories.

In addition, measures for persons with disabilities and elderly individuals living in care institutions were implemented in line with the presidential cabinet decisions and the recommendations of the Ministry of Health and the Scientific Committee. The persons with disabilities and elderly individuals living in care institutions were prioritized for vaccination,

which was initiated as of February 2021. During the COVID-19 pandemic, it was decreed that the income requirement for the free-of-charge residential care services offered to residents in need of care or in economic difficulties in nursing homes, elderly care, and rehabilitation centers affiliated with our Ministry be postponed for three months.

Including care for persons with disabilities and elderly individuals and various sociocultural activities, services in the care centers were not limited to primary care and rehabilitation services. Pre-COVID-19 practices, such as mutual visits between institutions caring for persons with disabilities and summer camps for disabled persons, were sustained in the post-COVID-19 period.

In addition to advancing the sociocultural activities of the pre-COVID-19 period in nursing homes more effectively into the post-COVID-19 period, efforts continue to ensure that the elderly contribute to society by participating in social and economic life. In this context, activities, such as Bocce tournaments, the Digital Spring Project, and digital and financial literacy programs, are being expanded to help nursing home residents improve their capacities, spend their leisure time more productively, and bring them up to date with the digital transformation process. In addition to the annual Bocce Tournaments, digital and financial literacy training was provided to 572 elderly individuals in 18 provinces. Within the scope of the Digital Spring Project, six Digital Spring Rooms were built in five nursing homes in cooperation with Turkcell İletişim A.Ş. Efforts to extend these activities are continuing.

Elderly individuals are also provided with educational opportunities within the framework of educational programs tailored to the needs of individuals aged 60 and over as part of a next-generation academic structure internationally known as the university of the third age and the 60+ Refreshment University in Turkish universities. Diversification and expansion of such educational programs are supported as part of the lifelong learning approach and active and healthy aging. The protocol signed in 2021 assigned the execution of the project to the Directorate General of Services for Persons with Disabilities and The Elderly, and efforts were launched to spread lifelong learning programs nationwide.

Another factor that strengthened the participation of persons with disabilities and the elderly individuals in social life in the post-COVID-19 period was the right to free travel for the disabled, veterans, and relatives of martyrs. The MoFSS provided free travel income support in this context. The right to free travel significantly impacts individuals with disabilities and the

elderly, particularly in the post-COVID-19 era, in terms of participation in every aspect of social life, from education to health, business, and access to services.

As for the persons with disabilities and elderly individuals who live within their social environment, accessible, informative material compliant with the needs of different disability groups throughout the COVID-19 pandemic was prepared. Furthermore, the day life centers, whose numbers increased in the post-COVID-19 period, continue to offer short-term day care services, as well as social and cultural activities and consultancy services.

Efforts to minimize the effects of COVID-19 by empowering disabled individuals socioeconomically in the post-COVID-19 period continued with the strengthening of practices regarding their participation in employment. With that in mind, the Disabled Public Personnel Selection Exam for recruiting persons with disabilities as civil servants was carried out on April 24, 2022. New regulations were introduced to eliminate any shortcomings in the Sheltered Workplace practice that is in place to support the employment of individuals with mental and psychological disabilities, whose employment would be challenging in the private sector. The number of individuals with disabilities employed in sheltered workplaces decreased from eight to five, and the rate of employees with disabilities was reduced from 75 to 50 percent. Sheltered Workplace Centers were established as new structures that include common-use areas to facilitate operations and help multiple sheltered workplaces cooperate on specific activities. These arrangements have enabled to open more sheltered workplaces to include individuals with mental and psychological disabilities in working life and to contribute to their participation in social life as independent individuals who earn their own income and have a say in their lives.

To assess COVID-19's impact in OIC member countries and share cross-country experiences regarding practices toward the persons with disabilities and elderly persons in this process, a meeting on "The Effect of COVID-19 on Elderly Persons and Persons with Disabilities in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation Member States" was organized on December 23, 2020, through the cooperation of our Directorate General and OIC.

To share information and experiences with OIC member countries on practices that will encourage the persons with disabilities and the elderly individuals to benefit effectively from healthcare and social services, especially during and after COVID-19, the "Workshop on the Healthcare and Social Services Policies for the Independent Living of Persons with Disabilities" was organized between February 8–10, 2022.

## **(2) Programs Developed for Women**

During the COVID-19 pandemic's peak, the fight against violence continued through preliminary injunctions and family courts, Violence Prevention and Monitoring Centers under the MoFSS, women's shelters, and specialized law enforcement units.

The Women's Emergency Support Application (KADES) was developed with the Ministry of Interior and the MoFSS' cooperation to provide effective and rapid intervention for women who are victims of violence or at risk of violence. The system forwards emergency alerts to the 155-156 Call Center 24/7 and transfers the closest law enforcement unit on the scene as soon as possible. Violence Prevention and Monitoring Centers also step in when necessary.

SMS notifications containing information about the Violence Prevention and Monitoring Centers, ALO 183 Social Support Line, and KADES were sent to violence victims who had previously applied to law enforcement units or had an injunction within the scope of Law No. 6284 to Protect Family and Prevent Violence against Women.

During the pandemic, the central and provincial organizations of the MoFSS, non-governmental organizations, and other relevant units held continued consultations regarding the level of violence against women, possible precautions, and current/potential crises and solutions thereof. They monitored the process 24/7 and promptly intervened when necessary.

As of March 2020, victims of violence calling the ALO 183 Social Support Line can reach the relevant support personnel without waiting in line by pressing the "0" button. In May 2020, WhatsApp services were initiated for victims of violence.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, additional measures have been taken to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in women's shelters, which are the leading institutional mechanisms in the fight against violence against women.

In this context, the utmost attention was paid to ensuring the hygiene of the organizations. During admission, health checks of women and their accompanying children were performed, and collaboration with health institutions was established when necessary. Training on important points of attention during the pandemic was organized, as well as efforts to raise the motivation of personnel.

Separate units were created in women's shelters where social isolation can be ensured. If an isolation unit could not be established in women's shelters, social facilities, dormitories,

or similar locations belonging to public institutions and organizations within the scope of Law No. 6284 were used for quarantine purposes for at least 14 days.

In 49 provinces, 71 additional facilities were used for accommodation purposes within the scope of the COVID-19 precautions.

The Directorate General on the Status of Women launched the "Research on Violence Against Women in Türkiye in terms of Prevention, Intervention, and Policy and the Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic."

## **c) Employment and Social Security Measures**

### **(1) Employment Services and Incentives**

#### **(a) Career Days and Virtual Employment Fairs**

Career days bring together the organizations and institutions that operate locally with educated and qualified young people on the verge of their careers. These activities help young people learn about the sectors and companies, act as a mediator for employment, assist them in career planning, and facilitate employer access to a qualified workforce.

In this context, presentations and seminars were held on subjects such as İŞKUR services, job hunting skills, points to consider when drafting a career plan, and employment and on-the-job training opportunities for young people. In 2021, more than 20.000 people attended 13 career days. Career days brought together large masses and were restricted due to COVID-19. However, virtual employment fairs introduced a solution to this matter. Since 2019, we have organized five virtual employment fairs, with more than 400 companies and 1.150.000 people participating in these fairs.

#### **(b) Incentives**

Various employment incentives have been implemented, briefly discussed below, to eliminate the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the workforce.

#### **Return to Employment Incentive**

The **Return to Employment Incentive** was implemented to ensure that the citizens who lost their jobs between January 1, 2019, and April 17, 2020, returned to work. This incentive stipulated that employees who lost their jobs, whether registered at Social Security Institution (SSI) or not, between January 1, 2019, and April 17, 2020, could apply to their last place of employment or to the place of environment where they worked without noticing the SSI. If the employer recruited the employee and provided them with active work, the employer

would receive a **premium payment support** of 53,67 Turkish lira per day. If the employer put the employee on unpaid leave, the employee would receive a **Cash Wage Support** of 47,70 Turkish lira. If the employer refused the return to employment application, the employee would receive **temporary workforce assistance** of 41,74 Turkish lira. The assistance payments were sustained until the end of the termination ban, introduced within the scope of the temporary Article 10 of Law No. 4857.

### **Additional Employment Incentive**

Within the scope of combating unemployment, the Additional Employment Incentive was implemented to protect and increase employment. The Additional Employment Incentive provided employers with premium payment assistance if additional employees on insurance were recruited and assigned active work between January 2019 and April 2020, in addition to the lowest number of employees during the previous months/periods. The employer premium payment assistance was the number of days of premium payment by 53,67 Turkish lira if the recruit was on active work. If the employee were put on unpaid leave, the employee would receive a **Cash Wage Support** of 47,70 Turkish lira. The assistance payments were sustained until the end of the termination ban, introduced within the scope of the temporary Article 10 of Law No. 4857.

### **Normalization Support**

With the normalization of the economy in the June 2020, Normalization Support was implemented to encourage the return to regular weekly working hours in workplaces.

Within the scope of the Normalization Support, premium payment assistance was provided to employers if employees on insurance, who had applied before July 1, 2020, to benefit from the Short-Term Employment Allowance or Cash Wage Support due to force majeure concerning the COVID-19 outbreak, returned to their usual weekly working hours at the same workplace.

This incentive offered social security premium payment assistance for the employers for a period of six months starting from the month following the end of the Short-term Employment Allowance/Cash Wage Support, no later than June 30, 2021, equivalent of the premium amount to be calculated based on the lower earnings limit.

### **Additional Employment Financing Support**

For the March 2021 period, private businesses with less than 50 employees were provided incentives to cover the minimum wage insurance premiums for a maximum of five of the insured employees they recruited between July 1, 2021, and June 30, 2022, or the employees who were on Cash Wage Support and switched to their normal working hours. The incentive amount was provided to the mentioned businesses by deducting from the interest of the loan provided with the guarantee of the Credit Guarantee Fund or from the profit share balance.

All premiums (1.876,50 Turkish lira) that were calculated based on the lower earnings limit for each policyholder's premium were paid by deducting from the interest or the dividend amount of the loan that was used from the state banks before June 30, 2022, with the guarantee of the Treasury-supported Credit Guarantee Fund. The support period for all insured was 12 months.

### **Insurance Premium Incentive for the Food and Beverage Industry**

All premiums calculated based on the lower earnings limit of each insured employee (1.341,56 Turkish lira) for the months of April and May, provided that the policyholders declared in the withholding and premium declarations for the March 2021 period were employed in the private company in question between April 1, 2021, and May 31, 2021, were provided for the companies operating in the food and beverage services industry.

### **Additional Incentives for Employment**

The following was carried out within the scope of the "Additional Incentives for Employment," which will continue to be implemented until the end of 2022.

- For businesses operating in the manufacturing or IT industry, all premiums, for the amount of earnings up to 13.344 Turkish lira that the premiums were based on (1.876,50 Turkish lira to 5.004 Turkish lira), of each additional insured employee were covered on the condition that the amount did not exceed the multiplication of premium payment days of the insured with the daily gross minimum wage during the relevant period.
- All premiums (1.876,50 Turkish lira) calculated over the lower earnings limit subject to premium for each additional insured person employed in workplaces operating in other sectors were covered. The incentive period, up to 12 months under normal conditions, is 18 months for women, young people, and persons with disabilities.

## **Incentives for Women, Youth, and Those with Vocational Qualifications**

For the private sector employers who hired unemployed persons within the scope of the "Incentives for Women, Youth, and Those with Vocational Qualifications," which will be implemented until the end of 2022, the employer's share of the social security premium payments up to the upper earnings limit that was the basis to premium (1.025,82 to 7.693,65 Turkish lira) will be covered for 24 to 54 months.

The "Incentives for Women, Youth, and Those with Vocational Qualifications" and the "Additional Incentive to Employment" implementation periods were extended until the end of 2022.

### **(c) Activities Within the Scope of Short-Term Employment Allowance**

Resolution No. 31 of the Board of Directors of ISKUR, dated March 19, 2020, stipulated that the applications consequent to COVID-19 would be evaluated within the scope of force majeure arising from emergency conditions caused by external effects. These applications were terminated by Resolution No. 51 of the Board of Directors of ISKUR, dated June 30, 2020. During this period, employers applied to Short-Term Employment Allowance through e-mail.

Presidential Resolution No. 3228, dated November 30, 2020, introduced a provision regarding the applications prompted by COVID-19 to be redirected as of December 1, 2020, as new applications as force majeure arising from emergency conditions caused by external effects. Within this scope, Resolution No. 119, dated December 1, 2020, of the Board of Directors of ISKUR approved receiving new applications for December. In the new period, employers now apply for Short-Term Employment Allowance online through e-Government.

### **(d) Activities within the Scope of the Social Benefit Program**

During the pandemic, necessary adjustments were completed to receive public and private sector applications and Social Benefit Program applications through the electronic environment and introduced the electronic application system to citizens.

To support the Ministry of Health's vaccination activities, calls for drivers were met through the Social Benefit Program.

### **(e) Activities Within the Scope of Job Seeker Registration and Public Recruitment Process**

During the COVID-19 pandemic, applications for public employment announcements that often cause busyness in ISKUR service points were received online via e-Government,

through [esube.iskur.gov.tr](http://esube.iskur.gov.tr), or through ALO 170 (Workplace and Social Security Communication Center). A guideline was created and shared with the public to facilitate the application process.

The processes related to the employment of workers with disabilities in Türkiye fall under the mandate of ISKUR. Accordingly, the temporary disability reports of those seeking to benefit from our services were extended ex officio due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The extension continued throughout the pandemic.

Job seekers can register with ISKUR through the institution's e-branch. However, individuals wishing to register in the **disabled, ex-convict, wounded in a struggle with terrorism, or priority groups** previously needed to submit relevant documents concerning their status to ISKUR service points for approval. Following COVID-19, the obligation to personally apply to ISKUR branches was abolished, allowing job seekers to upload their documents via e-branch.

#### **(f) Passive Labor Market Policies**

In 2020 and after, following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the effective and efficient performance of the passive employment programs implemented by ISKUR to support the unemployed, employees, and employers under challenging times has become more critical. These passive employment programs help millions of employees, employers, and unemployed individuals. The existing programs were effectively implemented during this process, and many new practices were quickly introduced.

The following transactions were carried out between March 2020 and May 2022:

- Within the scope of the Unemployment Benefit, 13,4 billion Turkish lira for approximately 2 million people,
- Within the scope of Cash Wage Support, 14 billion Turkish lira for 3,1 million people,
- Within the scope of Short-Term Employment Allowance, 36,7 billion Turkish lira for 3,8 million people.

During the pandemic, short-term employment assistance, which was already in effect at the time, was implemented intensively and effectively. Cash Wage Support was introduced as a new program to meet the labor market's needs, aiming to minimize the pandemic's adverse effects.

Furthermore, many new practices, such as normalization support, additional employment incentive, additional incentive for employment, and sectoral support, were introduced to support employees and employers.

During this period, existing practices, such as unemployment benefits, wage guarantee funds, and part-time work after childbirth and adoption, were continued meticulously.

### **Short-Term Employment Allowance**

Short-term employment was frequently applied, particularly when the labor market was deeply impacted. The program, last implemented nationwide during the global economic crisis in 2009, contributed to the protection of employment, providing income support to an unprecedented number of beneficiaries during the pandemic.

Technological and legal improvements during the pandemic contributed to the practice's efficiency, increasing its effectiveness. The initial decision was to collect short-term employment applications within the scope of COVID-19, given the negative impacts of COVID-19 on the labor market. Applications were thus classified until June 30, 2020, when the published presidential decree affirmed the continuation of the scope during December 2020 and January 2021.

While the short-term employment applications were previously submitted in a physical environment, the system was adjusted to collect applications via electronic mail to the e-mail address of the ISKUR department concerning the employer. Applications were submitted online during this process.

The legislative change made the Short-Term Employment Allowance entitlement conditions more flexible for workers within the scope of COVID-19. With these amendments, the following changes were implemented:

- The allowance entitlement requirement to have paid premiums for 600 days in the last three years was reduced to 450 days, and the condition of being subject to a labor contract for the last 120 days was reduced to 60 days.
- Employers benefiting from Short-Term Employment Allowances were prohibited, excluding exceptions, from laying off workers.

Legislation was also amended, for the fast and efficient operation of the system, to ensure that Short-Term Employment Allowance for COVID-19 was paid by the employer's statements, that conformity assessment was made later by labor inspectors reporting to the

Department of Guidance and Inspection, and that overpayments and wrongful payments arising due to employers' inaccurate statements were collected from the employer with the legal interest rate.

Later, the president was authorized to partially or completely extend the COVID-19 related Short-Term Employment Allowance partially or entirely until June 30, 2021. Following the authorization, gradual extensions were introduced until the Short-Term Employment Allowance reached June 30, 2021, when it was terminated.

It was also noted that the payments made would not be offset from the unemployment benefit period specified initially.

### **Cash Wage Support**

To alleviate the economic and social impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, Cash Wage Support was introduced by a legislative regulation to be paid by the Unemployment Insurance Fund and ISKUR to those who were put on unpaid leave during the termination ban or those who could not benefit from the unemployment benefit despite being unemployed. The program boosted the inclusiveness of passive labor programs that are a part of being a social state.

Workers whose employers gave unpaid leave during the termination ban that was put into effect on April 17, 2020, and workers whose employment contracts were terminated through no will or fault of their own yet who were not entitled to unemployment benefits could apply and benefit from the Cash Wage Support during their unpaid leave or unemployment.

Launched on April 17, 2020, for three months in line with the termination ban, the Cash Wage Support was extended until June 30, 2021, through numerous presidential decrees upon legal authority, given the impacts of the pandemic. As of June 30, 2021, the termination ban and, subsequently, the Cash Wage Support was terminated.

Cash Wage Support was also granted to workers recruited later than December 1, 2020, within the scope of the Return to Employment Incentive or Additional Employment Incentive, both launched during the pandemic, and put on unpaid leave by their employees.

In compliance with another legislative regulation in April 2021, in businesses operating in the food and beverages industry that were subject to restrictions during the Ramadan period, workers who were not granted the current Cash Wage Support despite being involved in an employment contract in March 2021 and being put on unpaid leave, were granted Cash Wage Support for April and May 2021.

## **Unemployment Benefit**

Unemployment benefits are payments made to policyholders who lose their jobs through no malice or fault of their own, despite their willingness, ability, health, and qualifications to work on the condition that they meet specified premium payment and application conditions. Paid throughout six, eight, or ten months depending on the number of days paid in premiums over the last three years, unemployment benefits substantially alleviated the negative social and economic impacts of unemployment during the pandemic.

## **(4) Social Security Measures**

A series of premium deferral on the field of social security have been implemented in order to ease the effect of COVID-19 pandemic;

Due to the force majeure announced by the Ministry of Treasury and Finance for the retail, shopping mall, iron-steel, automotive, logistics-transportation, cinema-theatre, accommodation, food-beverage, textile-apparel and event-organization sectors, with the decision of the Board of Directors of the Institution dated March 26,2020 and numbered 2020/188, premiums to be paid in April, May and June 2020 were postponed for six months each until the end of October, November and December 2020, respectively.

As a result of the decision of the Ministry of Internal Affairs to impose a curfew as of March 22,2020 for employers over the age of 65 and employers with chronic illness, the Ministry of Treasury and Finance stated that these people are in a state of force majeure as of March 22,2020 until the ban is lifted, in accordance with the decision taken by the Board of Directors of the Social Security Institution (SSI), the payment period of the premium debts that will accrue from March 22,2020 to the end of the ban, has been postponed until the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> day following the end of the ban.

Pursuant to the Law on Reducing the Impact of the New Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic on Economic and Social Life and Amending Certain Laws published in the Official Gazette dated April 7,2020 and numbered 31102, March, April and May premium payments of metropolitan municipalities, municipalities and their affiliates have been postponed for three months.

Except for those that have the risk of going into statute of barred, transactions regarding administrative fines have been postponed.

No debt notification has been made for corporate receivables that are not enforced, except for those that have the risk of going into statute of barred.

In order to alleviate the economic burden that the COVID-19 pandemic may cause for employers and insurance holders included in the social security system and to strengthen effective socio-economic status, the deadlines for March, April and May 2020 premiums have been postponed for six months each for real person 4/b insured persons who operate on their own behalf (repealed BAG-KUR insurance) and insured and private sector employers who employ 4/a insured (repealed SSK) in the workplaces of taxpayers located in sectors that are considered force majeure by the Ministry of Treasury and Finance, and 4/b (repealed BAG-KUR) with the decision of Board of Trustees of SSI dated March 26,2020.

The insured, who are covered by the curfew due to being over 65 years old or due to a chronic illness, are allowed to pay the insurance premiums accrued during the force majeure period until the end of the 15th day following the end of the curfew.

Pursuant to the Presidential Decision no. 2279 published in the Official Gazette dated March 22, 2020, and no 31076, and the Presidential Decision no. 2480 published in the Official Gazette dated April 30, 2020 and no. 31114, the execution proceedings have been suspended and it has been decided not to carry out any new enforcement proceedings except for the time-barred receivables.

Moreover, in order to reduce the debt burden to SSI of employers and insured persons, who are in economic difficulties due to the pandemic, Law No. 7256 on Restructuring of Certain Receivables and Amending Certain Laws, which allows employers and insured with premium debts to restructure their debts for August 2020 and previous periods and pay them in cash or in installments according to their demands, entered into force by being published in the Official Gazette dated November 17,2020 and no. 31307. Receivables within the scope of restructuring are updated with D-PPI (Domestic Producer Price Index Change Rate) instead of delay penalty and late fee, 90% of the D-PPI amount applied to the original premium in advance payment, within two installments, provided that the first installment is paid. If 50% of the original premium and the D-PPI amount applied to the premium is paid, the remaining 50% of the D-PPI amount is also deleted. Employers and the insured who do not prefer the cash payment method are given the opportunity to pay their restructured debts in 18 equal installments and with fixed term options up to 36 months.

In addition, with the Law No. 7256; 4/b (repealed BAG-KUR) insured have been given the opportunity to restructure their insurance periods that were suspended according to previous laws. Debts were written off and the debtor's service periods were suspended. Therefore, all premium debts of our 4/b (repealed BAG-KUR) insured prior to November 1, 2020, have been cancelled.

Due to the continuation of the pandemic process, debts to the public was restructured once again with the Law No. 7326 on Restructuring of Certain Claims and Amending Certain Laws, which was published in the Official Gazette dated June 9, 2021 and no. 31506 in the name of effective socio-economic empowerment, contributing to the alleviation of the ongoing economic difficulties of employers and the insured. With the Law No. 7326, the debts to the Social Security Institution of the employers and the insured for April 2021 and previous periods have also been structured, allowing them to be paid in cash or in installments. Receivables within the scope of restructuring are updated with D-PPI (Domestic Producer Price Index Change Rate) instead of delay penalty and late fee, 90% of the D-PPI amount applied to the original premium in advance payment, within two installments, provided that the first installment is paid. If 50% of the original premium and the D-PPI amount applied to the premium is paid, the remaining 50% of the D-PPI amount is also deleted. Employers and insured who do not prefer the cash payment method are given the opportunity to pay their restructured debts in 18 equal installments and with fixed term options up to 36 months.

Similar to the practice in Law No. 7326 and also Law No. 7256; The 4/b (repealed BAG-KUR) insured has also been given the opportunity to revive by structuring the insurance periods that have been suspended according to previous laws. However, if 4/b (repealed BAG-KUR) insured, who have premium debts as of April 30,2021, do not pay or restructure their debts, their premium debts are deleted, and their debtor service periods are suspended. In this way, all premium debts of 4/b (repealed BAG-KUR) insured prior to May 1,2021 have been cancelled. The insured or beneficiaries have not suffered any loss of rights in terms of their insurance period, as they can regain these suspended insurance periods upon their request in later periods.

## **2) CONCLUSION: DEVELOPMENTS AND ESTABLISHED PROGRAMS FOLLOWING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

The COVID-19 pandemic has proven that social protection programs worldwide need to be revised. It has been revealed that the needy people and the social groups at risk of neediness do not have sufficient protection in such extraordinary situations and that new inclusive programs should be developed for new types of neediness (temporary poverty and poverty in disasters/emergencies) that are not covered in the existing social protection programs.

The pandemic highlighted the following issues:

- What is needed in disasters and emergencies,
- What types of programs should be developed,
- How to deliver social protection services and aid to those in need,
- Increasing the human resources in the social protection area, both in qualitative and quantitative terms,
- Improving the organizational structure at both central and local levels,
- Increasing budget opportunities,
- Digitizing social protection programs.

However, a more important point that arises in disasters and emergencies is the necessity of considering sectoral and institutional collaborations in such extraordinary situations. In other words, interventions in such cases should be holistic and involve the cooperation of sectors, such as employment, education, healthcare, social assistance, social service, and rural development. Within this scope, cooperation between public institutions and public and non-governmental organizations must be improved. The following sections introduce new programs and improvements that Türkiye developed during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **(a) Temporary Neediness Programs**

The most crucial experience Türkiye gained during the pandemic was the social groups above the neediness line, yet at the risk of neediness, heading below the neediness threshold in such disasters, leading to periodical neediness. The existing social protection programs (social assistance, social service, and employment) proved insufficient in responding to these emergencies. Türkiye's most significant advantage in responding to the pandemic was the social

assistance system and the entire public sector's advanced digital infrastructure. Thanks to this infrastructure, Türkiye was able to create the above-mentioned new social assistance programs that cover both the existing and potential needy communities in a very short period.

### **(b) Household Visits Mobilizations**

To examine what has changed in the field after COVID-19 in Türkiye, the changing conditions of the existing beneficiaries, and the working conditions of those in the area of social assistance, and take the necessary measures in advance against possible disasters and emergencies, the Household Visits Mobilization was launched in August 2022 to the households registered in the ISAS benefiting from the regular and temporary assistance program as well as any household benefiting from the social service programs. The household visits are to be completed by the end of 2022. This mobilization will identify the problems within the social assistance and social service system and suggest measures to address them.

### **(c) Establishment of Cash+ Programs**

Within the framework of the Cash+ program, the importance of an integrated social protection system led by the MoFSS was highlighted, and efforts to this end were initiated. A working group was established, including representatives of the Directorates General of the MoFSS, with the DGSA assuming the group's secretariat. This working group will work to strengthen the link between social assistance and social services per the Eleventh Development Plan prepared by the presidential government. Accordingly, a system will be set up to transition into the Social Assistance Plus period. Citizens who benefit from social assistance will have access to the other public services they need.<sup>2</sup>

### **(d) Shock-Sensitive Social Assistance and Social Service Mechanisms**

#### **(Business Intelligence and Data Warehouse)**

Another program that will be developed following COVID-19 is the Business Intelligence and Data Warehouse applications that contain shock-sensitive social assistance and social service mechanisms. The MoFSS has started to develop these two applications for effective data analysis and problem identification.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.sbb.gov.tr/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/OnbirinciKalkinmaPlani.pdf>

### **(e) Early Action Mechanisms and Vulnerability Risk Analysis Study**

The Early Action Mechanisms and Vulnerability Analysis Study allows for the detection of risks of emergencies and disasters in advance and preparation for such situations. The Early Action Mechanisms approach and Vulnerability Risk Analysis studies, which have surfaced in the world over the last decade, have improved the response power of social protection programs under extraordinary conditions to existing communities in need and those at risk.

### **(f) Improving Social Assistance and Social Service Management in Disasters and Emergencies**

Following the COVID-19 pandemic and natural disasters in Türkiye (especially the floods caused by climate change), the Disaster and Emergency Management Authority was established within the DGSA. The Authority aims to implement a systematic intervention program to manage in-kind donations and warehouses in disasters and emergencies. It also focuses on improving social assistance and social service management in disasters and emergencies. In this context, early intervention mechanisms will be developed by establishing social assistance warehouses in certain provinces and creating human resources.

### **(g) Integration of the Family Information System and the Integrated Social Assistance Information System (ISAS)**

The main problem in the social protection system in Türkiye was the inability to coordinate social assistance and social services. The Family Information System was established in 2022 by switching social services to a digital system in the Directorate General of Family and Community Services under the MoFSS. The objective is to ensure coordination between social assistance and social services by integrating the Family Information System and the ISAS. This way, households needing social assistance would also have their social service needs met simultaneously. Therefore, households/families in need or at risk of poverty would get access to the social assistance and social services they need from a single point of contact with a holistic approach. The integration of these two information systems, and social assistance and social services, have been completed.

### **(h) Türkiye Family Support Program (Minimum Income Support)**

The Minimum Income Support program, which is generally in effect in developed countries, has been discussed in Türkiye for many years. The feasibility and effectiveness of this program have been evaluated for years in both public and academic circles. The MoFSS

initiated this program in June 2022 under the Turkish Family Support Program, with the first payments made at the end of July 2022. With the Family Support Program, families in need will be supported monthly with different amounts for four different income ranges determined according to the per capita income in the household. For the first time in Türkiye, without seeking any additional thematic criteria (disability, old age, having a relative in the military, etc.), cash and regular support is provided to our citizens for 12 months, taking into account only income.

With this program which will continue for a year, It is aimed to share the prosperity of Türkiye, which is developing and growing in general, with the citizens alongside with the contribution to the elimination of the socio-economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and to the recovery of citizens after the pandemic.

Studies continue to expand the scope and increase the effectiveness of the Türkiye Family Support Program, which aims to support households in need with payments made in amounts that change gradually according to the income level of the household. In this direction, electricity consumption support and child benefit components have been added to the program.

### **i) National VEFA Program**

This program is a social service project, which is developed to provide essential needs such as house cleaning, and personal care to elder and disabled citizens. The elder and disabled citizens who cannot make personal care or supply their essential needs, the citizens who cannot do their self-care because of their heavy chronic illness, and the citizens who are above 65 years old are getting benefits in their own homes where they live.

It is detected that the positive and effective results of Vefa Projects on elder and disabled citizens. Thus, projects are transformed into national program to make it extended all over the country.

### **j) Natural Gas Consumption Support**

As a necessity of Türkiye's social state mentality, the "Natural Gas Consumption Support" program which application is taken on e-Government Gateway is one of the implemented programs after the COVID-19 pandemic to improve citizens' humanitarian development level.

Within the scope of the program, the amount of support is determined based on the thermal map. The citizens who are households can get a benefit if they are eligible according to application criteria.

### **(k) Providing Saccharimeter Device to Type-1 Diabetes Patients**

This program is implemented to have healthy tomorrows with a human-centered point of view in the social assistance and service field. Under the skin, continuous glucose measurement or a similar device is provided to children between 0-14 ages who live in the beneficiary house, are diagnosed with Type-1 Diabetes and need to use the saccharimeter device for insulin therapy.

### **(l) Death Assistance**

With the aim of supporting needy citizens whose loved one/s passed away, Death Assistance was started to be implemented in 2022 which is another cash assistance program. SASF starts the assistance process according to principals without any waiting for an application, notifies needy citizens and get their permission for application registration.

### **(m) Kindergarten Support**

If needy people who are beneficiaries of the social assistance program register their children between 3-5 ages to a Ministry of National Education-associated kindergarten, the MoFSS pays their obligatory expenses for every child. Payments are done directly to Ministry of National Education, and it is planned that 1 million children go to kindergarten.

### **(n) Transportation Expense Assistance within the Scope of Education Assistance**

With the aim of absorption of round-trip ticket expenses of young people who are under 25 years old and study at a university away from their beneficiary families, this assistance program has been started to be implemented.

## ANNEX 1

### 1. SOCIAL PROTECTION IN TÜRKİYE

#### a) Neediness in Türkiye

The United Nations and the World Bank are the two policy-making organizations that provide a source for poverty studies and different perspectives to explain it. While the United Nations, and especially the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), put forward the deprivation that brings multidimensionality to the concept of poverty and the Human Development Criteria based on it, the World Bank, following a joint strategy with the IMF as a Bretton Woods institution, emphasizes absolute poverty and presents an approach that measures poverty by income level. In the Bretton Woods approach, poverty is defined as income poverty and is usually expressed in monetary indicators, such as per capita income, real wage, unemployment rate, poverty line, and headcount rate. In the United Nations approach, on the other hand, poverty is defined as human poverty and is usually expressed in non-monetary indicators, such as school enrollment rate, literacy rate, life expectancy, and infant and child mortality rates.

For the World Bank to measure poverty by monetary indicators, the daily spending level per capita as the international poverty threshold has been set as **\$1.90** based on purchasing power parity<sup>3</sup>. According to World Bank reports, people whose daily spending is below \$1.90 per day based on purchasing power parity are in **extreme poverty**. Furthermore, considering the differences between countries, the World Bank has identified two more poverty lines. In this context, the poverty line in lower-middle-income countries was determined as **\$3.20** based on purchasing power parity and **\$5.50 in upper-middle-income countries, including Türkiye, also based on purchasing power parity.**

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<sup>3</sup> **Purchasing Power Parity:** A method developed for international price and volume comparisons by eliminating price level differences between countries. In other words, purchasing power parity is a conversion rate that equalizes the purchasing power of different currencies. Expenditures converted into a common currency using this ratio reflect differences in the volume of goods and services purchased, providing comparable data across countries.

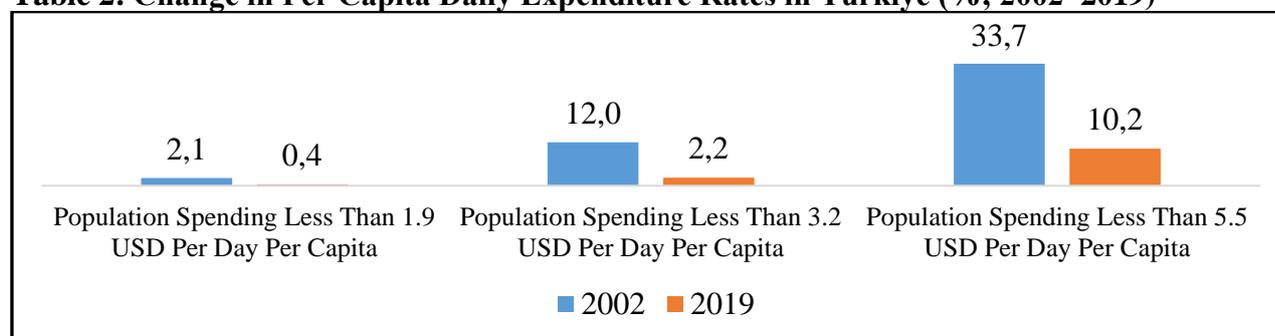
**According to the purchasing power parity, our country's equivalent of \$1 is 2.13.** Source: TurkStat, December 2021

**Table 1: Poverty Rates in Türkiye (%; Absolute Poverty)**

METHODS	2002	2005	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Population Spending Less Than 1.9 USD Per Day Per Capita	2.1	2.3	0.6	0.7	0.8	0.1	0.1	0.3	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.1	0.0	0.4
Population Spending Less Than 3.2 USD Per Day Per Capita	12.0	9.4	5.5	4.6	4.3	4.0	3.2	2.7	2.1	2.4	1.6	1.5	1.4	2.2
Population Spending Less Than 5.5 USD Per Day Per Capita	33.7	24.6	15.7	15.7	15.2	13.1	12.3	10.8	10.0	10.7	9.5	8.7	8.5	10.2

Source: World Bank, April 2021 The World Bank statistics are methodologically based on 2011 purchasing power parity. (2011 SGP: 1, 13468)

\*The World Bank announced the equivalent of 5.5 USD to be 13.7 Turkish lira (including inflation) in 2019.

**Table 2: Change in Per Capita Daily Expenditure Rates in Türkiye (%; 2002–2019)**

Source: World Bank, April 2021 The World Bank statistics are methodologically based on 2011 purchasing power parity. (2011 SGP: 1,13468)

The rate of the population spending less than 1.9 USD per day per capita compared to the 2011 purchasing power parity was 2,1 percent in 2002 and was estimated to be 0,4 percent in 2019. The rate of the population spending less than 5,5 USD per day per capita compared to the 2011 purchasing power parity dropped to 10,2 percent in 2019 from 33,7 percent in 2002.

#### **i. Measuring Poverty in Türkiye (Income and Living Conditions Survey)**

The Turkish Statistical Institute (TurkStat), the official statistical institution, carried out measurements, research, and publications on poverty in Türkiye.

Since 2006, in line with harmonization with the European Union, TurkStat has been implementing the Income and Living Conditions Survey, which uses the "panel survey" method. This survey aims to generate data on income distribution, living conditions, social exclusion, and relative income poverty.

The Income and Living Conditions Survey is an essential resource for compiling information on income distribution, the level and composition of poverty, living conditions, and social exclusion in the country.

Through this annual survey conducted by TurkStat, data that allows comparisons on poverty, income distribution, and similar subjects to be performed at an international level are obtained.

**Table 3: Relative Poverty Rates in Türkiye (%)**

Relative Poverty	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Population Below 50 Percent of Median Income (%)	20.6	18	16.7	17.1	16.9	16.1	16.3	15	15	14.7	14.3	13.5	13.9	14.4	15	14.4
Population Below 60 Percent of Median Income (%)	28.1	25.2	24.1	24.3	23.8	22.9	22.7	22.4	21.8	21.9	21.2	20.1	21.2	21.3	21.9	21.3
Annual Median Income (TRY)	4,702	6,082	6,328	7,044	7,429	8,139	9,030	10,024	11,108	12,492	14,232	15,887	17,784	21,584	24,789	28,069
Monthly Median Income (TRY)	392	507	527	587	619	678	753	835	926	1,041	1,186	1,324	1,482	1,799	2,066	2,339

Source: 2021 Income and Living Conditions Survey, TurkSTAT, May 2022

**Median Income:** Once the income values are sorted from low to high, the value in the middle reflects the median income.

Individuals with an income below a specific value compared to society's overall level are considered relatively poor. According to the poverty threshold, which accounts for 50 percent of equalized household disposable individual median income, the poverty rate decreased by 0,6 points to 14,4 percent in 2021. According to the poverty threshold, which is 60 percent below the median income, the poverty rate decreased by 0,6 points and reached 21,3 percent over the last year.

According to the poverty threshold, which accounts for 40 percent of equalized household disposable individual median income, the poverty rate decreased by 0,4 points to 8,5 percent on a year-on-year basis. According to the poverty threshold, which is 70 percent below

the median income, the poverty rate decreased by 0,3 points and reached 28.7 percent over the last year.

In 2021, while the share of the 20 percent group with the highest income in total income, according to the equivalent household disposable income, decreased by 0,8 points compared to the previous year and became 46,7, while the share of the 20 percent with the lowest income from the total income, it increased by 0,2 points to 6,1. The P80/P20 ratio, which is calculated as the ratio of the income of the richest 20% of the society to the income of the poorest 20 percent, decreased from 8 to 7,6.

**Table 4: Income Distribution in Türkiye**

Individual Income Groups of 20 Percent	Türkiye									
	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Top 20 percent (*)	5.9	6.1	6.2	6.1	6.2	6.3	6.1	6.2	5.9	6.1
Second 20 percent	10.6	10.7	10.9	10.7	10.6	10.7	10.6	10.9	10.6	10.8
Third 20 percent	15.3	15.2	15.3	15.2	15	14.8	14.8	15.2	14.9	15.1
Fourth 20 percent	21.7	21.4	21.7	21.5	21.1	20.9	20.9	21.4	21.1	21.3
Last 20 percent (*)	46.6	46.6	45.9	46.5	47.2	47.4	47.6	46.3	47.5	46.7
Gini Coefficient	0.402	0.400	0.391	0.397	0.404	0.405	0.408	0.395	0.410	0.401
Last 20 percent / Top 20 percent	8.0	7.7	7.4	7.6	7.7	7.5	7.8	7.4	8.0	7.6

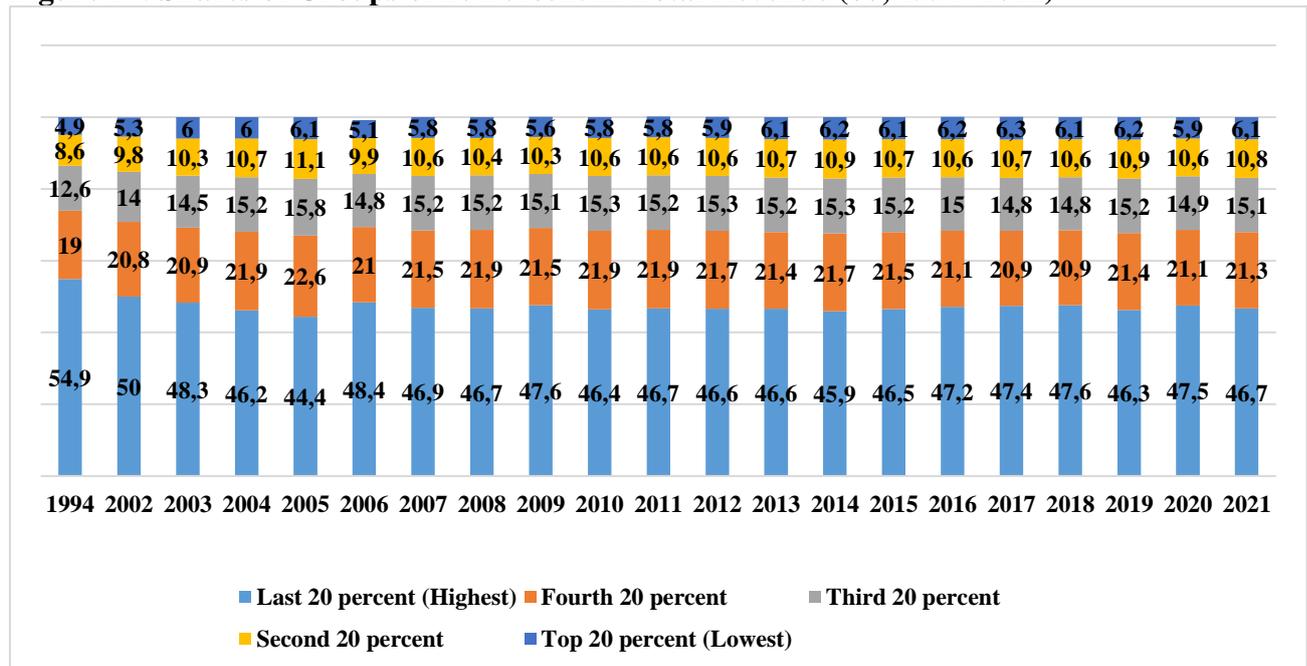
Note: Income reference periods are the previous calendar year.

(\*) Individuals are categorized into five groups, from low to high, according to their equivalized household disposable income.

The "Top 20 percent" represents the lowest income group, while the "Last 20 percent" represents the highest income group.

Source: 2021 Income and Living Conditions Survey, TurkSTAT, May 2022

**Figure 24: Shares of Groups of 20 Percent in Total Revenue (%; 1994–2021)**



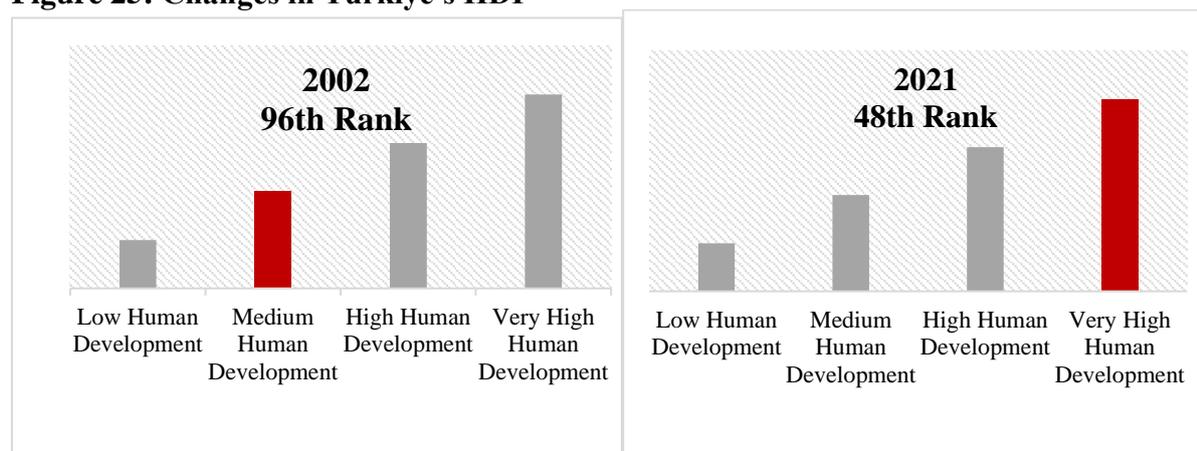
## ii. Concepts Related to Poverty

**Human Development Index (HDI):** Since 1990, the UNDP has prepared Human Development Reports in three main dimensions (a long and healthy life, access to information, and a decent standard of living). The average life expectancy measures the long and healthy life dimension. The lifetime of the adult population in education (average years of schooling) measures the level of knowledge. The total length of time a child at school entry age can expect to receive instruction (expected length of education for children) measures the access to learning and information. On the other hand, the standard of living is measured in terms of Gross National Product per capita converted to international dollars fixed to 2017 using purchasing power parity conversion rates. HDI is a straightforward measurement method used to assess long-term progress in three basic dimensions of human development and to help countries compare to each other as well as possible.

While Türkiye was at the "Medium Human Development" level with an HDI value of 0,670 in 2000, it rose to "High Human Development" in 2009. Ranking 96th in 2002, Türkiye climbed to 48th in 2021 with an HDI value of 0,838.

Türkiye ranked 48th out of 191 countries with 0,838 points in the HDI for the third consecutive time in the **"High Human Development"** category. Türkiye has registered an increase of 40 percent over the past 30 years in the index, a measure of progress in human development.

**Figure 25: Changes in Türkiye's HDI**



Source: UNDP, September 2022

## b) Social Protection System in Türkiye

The Social Protection System in Türkiye consists of **five** main components:

- Social Insurance Programs, which include premium programs, such as health insurance or unemployment insurance, that reduce the risks associated with unemployment, illness, disability, work-related injury, and old age,
- Social Assistance Programs consisting of zero-premium programs that transfer cash or in-kind resources to vulnerable individuals or households who are unable to work or lack adequate support, including single parents, orphans, and vulnerable children, the homeless, and people with disabilities,
- Social Service Programs consisting of services for vulnerable groups of the population, such as children, the elderly, people with disabilities, and women at risk of domestic violence, including a variety of institutional, home, and community-based care services, psychosocial support, and other services,
- Employment Policies consisting of active labor market policies that promote participation in productive employment by directly boosting the access of the unemployed to the labor market through professional training and direct employment creation,
- Additional insurance programs include private insurance, union insurance programs, and various insurance funds.

**Figure 26: Social Protection System in Türkiye**



Within the scope of this report, Social Assistance Programs, a component of the Social Protection System in question, will be examined in detail.

## 1- Social Assistance System in Türkiye

In Türkiye, statist development policies were adopted until the end of the 1970s, and it was thought that the problem of poverty could be eliminated or reduced with economic growth and development policies in the medium and long term. Therefore, no direct intervention policies in the fight against poverty were developed or implemented until those years. The first serious policy adopting the direct intervention strategy regarding poverty in Türkiye was implemented with Law No. 2022, adopted in 1976, on the "Pension Pays for Elderly Turkish Citizens Who Are of 65 Years of Age or Over, in a Dependent Capacity with No Relatives and No Financial Income." Following Law No. 2022, whose target group is relatively limited, in 1982, the Ministry of National Education was tasked with providing scholarships and free boarding services to needy students. In 1983, the former Social Services and Child Protection Agency (SHCEK) was tasked with providing in-kind and cash support to those in need. In 1984, the Directorate General of Foundations (DGF) was authorized to provide various social assistance activities to fulfill the purpose of becoming a Foundation. Eventually, in 1986, Law No. 3294 on "Encouragement of Social Assistance and Solidarity," which concerns all citizens in poverty and need, including a broader program, was adopted. In the following years, the "Green Card" practice, which allows individuals to benefit from health opportunities free of charge, was added to the policies developed within the approach of a direct fight against poverty in Türkiye. Article 2 of the Constitution of the Republic of Türkiye contains the following provision: *"The Republic of Türkiye is a democratic, secular, and social State governed by the rule of law; bearing in mind the concepts of public peace, national solidarity, and justice; respecting human rights; loyal to the nationalism of Atatürk; and based on the fundamental tenets set forth in the Preamble."* As evidenced by this specified provision of the Constitution, the notion of a social state was clearly emphasized in the 1982 Constitution. The notion of a social state was first introduced in the Turkish Constitution in 1961. The preamble of the 1982 Constitution affirms *"The understanding that it is the birthright of every Turkish citizen to lead an honorable life and develop his material and spiritual resources under the aegis of national culture, civilization, and the rule of law, through the exercise of the fundamental rights and freedoms set forth in this Constitution, in conformity with the requirements of equality and social justice."* The Republic of Türkiye clearly adopts the social state approach, as evidenced in the provisions of the Constitution of the Republic of Türkiye. Various institutions and organizations were assigned different authorities and duties to fulfill this constitutional duty.

**Table 5: Legal Development Process of Social Assistance Programs**

<b>TIME FRAME</b>	<b>ACTIVITY</b>
<b>Prior to 1986</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Law No. 2022</li><li>• Charitable aid was carried out in the framework of solidarity stemming from the Ottoman-era Foundation culture.</li></ul>
<b>1986–2004</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The 8th President, Turgut Özal, established the first SASF in rural areas based on the traditional Foundation structure with a flexible approach.</li><li>• In the center, transactions were carried out by the General Secretariat of the SASF affiliated with the Prime Ministry.</li></ul>
<b>2005–2011</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A corporate structure was created by establishing the DGSA and Solidarity.</li><li>• Systematic Social Assistance Programs were established.</li><li>• Specialists were recruited.</li><li>• Efforts to establish a strong informatics infrastructure were launched.</li></ul>
<b>2011–2018</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Social assistance and service units were gathered under the Ministry of Family and Social Policies.</li><li>• Social assistance activities, previously carried out by various public institutions, were overtaken by the DGSA.</li><li>• DGSA was linked to the Ministry of Family, Labor, and Social Services.</li></ul>
<b>2018–2021</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The DGSA was linked to the Ministry of Family and Social Services upon Presidential Decree No. 73, dated April 21, 2021.</li></ul>

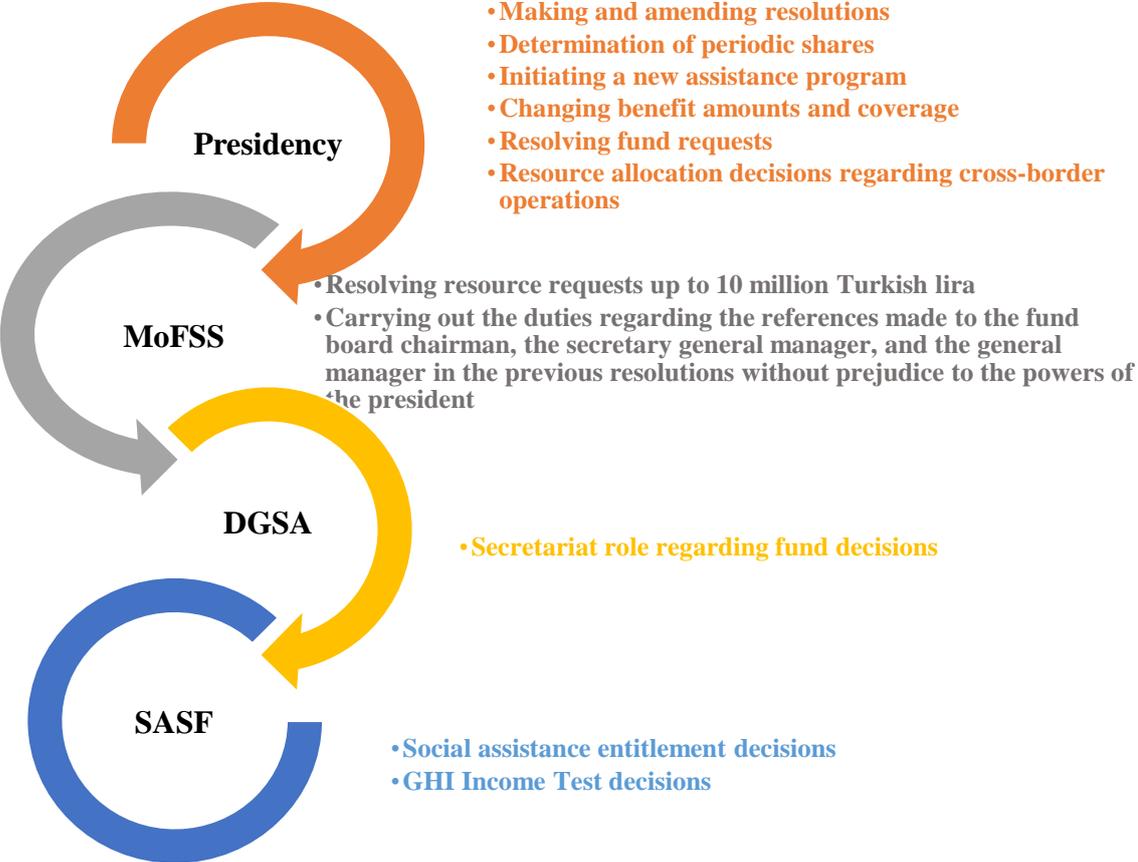
#### **a) Corporate Structure of the Social Assistance System**

Because Türkiye is a social state governed by the rule of law, as stated in the Constitution of the Republic of Türkiye, social policies aimed at eliminating imbalances in income distribution and supporting those in poverty are of great importance in strengthening social solidarity and maintaining social peace. The DGSA, located within the central organization of the MoFSS, coordinates the SASF operating throughout Türkiye. Rather than directly participating in the implementation of activities, the Directorate General carries out policy and strategy development, coordination between SASFs, and monitoring and evaluation activities for social assistance. The SASF have a provincial/district-based administrative structure. Foundations in provinces/districts within governorates/district governorships display an independent legal structure with a legal entity status of private law.

The following figures show the social assistance system's administrative structure and the decision-making process. The activities regarding the making and distribution of high-level decisions on social assistance were structured by the MoFSS. The social assistance system is

financed through the Social Assistance and Solidarity Fund, established in 1986 by Law No. 3294. The provisions of Decree-Law No. 633 on Certain Regulations in the Field of Social Services regarding the establishment of the Social Assistance and Solidarity Fund Board (Fund Board) have been repealed with Decree-Law No. 703. The duties of the Fund Board were assigned to the president, the Social Policies Board, and the MoFSS by Presidential Decree No. 2018/3. The Fund Board, consisting of the Social Policies Board and the MoFSS under the Chairmanship of the President of the Republic, is the main board where policies regarding social assistance are made.

**Figure 27: Decision-Making Process of Social Assistance**



**Duties of the Fund Board:**

a) Determine and decide on the distribution priorities of the sources gathered in the fund, in line with the social assistance projects and programs to be carried out by the Ministry, the provincial and district SASF, and investment programs,

- b) Delegate authority to the Ministry, when deemed necessary for uninterrupted service performance, on the condition of clearly defining the procedures and principles,
- c) Discuss and decide on the qualifications of the personnel and the criteria regarding personal rights and other such issues for recruitment for the provincial and district SASF,
- d) Evaluate requests and proposals for social assistance from provincial and district SASF and other institutions and organizations,
- e) Propose scientific, social, and cultural programs and projects to raise and support the awareness of solidarity and sharing in society and support the projects.

**The Institution/Authority to whom the Duties and Powers of the Fund Board Are Appointed:**

With Presidential Circular No. 2018/3, the duties *"To determine and decide on the distribution priorities of the sources gathered in the fund, in line with the social assistance projects and programs to be carried out by the Ministry and the provincial and district SASF, and investment programs"* and *"To discuss and decide on the qualifications of the personnel and the criteria regarding personal rights and other such issues for recruitment for the provincial and district SASF"* are assigned to the presidency; the duty *"To evaluate requests and proposals for social assistance from provincial and district SASF as well as other institutions and organizations"* was assigned to the Ministry of Family and Social Services; the duty *"To propose scientific, social, and cultural programs and projects to raise and support the awareness of solidarity and sharing in society and support the projects"* was entrusted to the Social Policies Board of the Presidency; and the task *"To support projects"* was assigned to the MoFSS.

**The revenue of the Social Assistance and Solidarity Fund consists of the following:**

- An amount to be transferred up to 10 percent by the decision of the president from, the funds established/to be established by the laws and decrees,
- Allowances to be included in the budget,
- Half of the Traffic Fines revenue,
- 15 percent from the advertising revenues of the Radio and Television Supreme Council,
- 2,8 percent of the total Income and Corporate Tax collection,
- All kinds of donations, charities, and other revenues.

## 1- Ministry of Family and Social Services<sup>4</sup>

Decree-Law No. 633 on the Organization and Duties of the Ministry of Family and Social Policies determines general provisions regarding the Ministry's establishment, coordination, and services. With Presidential Decree No. 1, the name of the Ministry was changed to the Ministry of Family, Labor, and Social Services. This legal regulation increased the Ministry's duties, powers, and responsibilities. The administrative structure of the Ministry consists of central, provincial, and foreign organizations. The duties and powers of the Ministry are specified in the presidential decree. Provisions relating to the duties and authorities laid down in the decree were established, taking into account the disadvantaged groups that constitute the main field of work of the Ministry. While the Ministry has many duties and powers, those regarding social assistance specified in the 2018 "Presidential Decree on the Organization of the Presidency" are as follows (Presidential Decree on the Organization of the Presidency, 2018):

- "To perform the necessary activities to develop policies and strategies regarding social services and assistance at the national level, to implement them, to monitor their implementation, and to update them according to the new service models created;
- To coordinate the necessary activities for the determination of national policies and strategies to protect the family structure and values against erosion in the social and cultural structure and to transfer them to future generations in a healthy manner; to carry out social service and assistance activities for the protection of family integrity and to increase family welfare; to ensure cooperation and coordination between relevant public institutions and organizations and voluntary organizations in this field;
- To coordinate the necessary activities for the determination of national policies and strategies to protect children from all kinds of negligence and abuse and to ensure their healthy development; to carry out social service and assistance activities for the protection of children; to ensure cooperation and coordination between relevant public institutions and organizations and voluntary organizations in this field;

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<sup>4</sup> The Ministry of Family and Social Services is a ministry responsible for social services and family affairs operating under the Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye. It was founded as the Ministry of Family and Social Policies in 2011. In 2018, it was merged with the Ministry of Labor and Social Security and became the Ministry of Family, Labor, and Social Services. With the establishment of the Ministry of Labor and Social Security on April 21, 2021, the name of the Ministry was changed to the Ministry of Family and Social Services.

- To coordinate the necessary activities for the determination of national policies and strategies to prevent discrimination against women, to protect and improve the human rights of women, and to ensure equal access by women to all rights, opportunities, and facilities in social life; to carry out social service and assistance activities for the protection of women; to ensure cooperation and coordination between relevant public institutions and organizations and voluntary organizations in this field;
- To coordinate the implementation of national policies and strategies, to carry out social services and assistance for the persons with disabilities and the elderly, to ensure cooperation and coordination between relevant public institutions and organizations and voluntary organizations in this field, and to take measures to ensure the professional rehabilitation of the disabled to ensure that the persons with disabilities and elderly individuals participate in social life actively and without discrimination against all kinds of obstacles, neglect, and exclusions;
- To coordinate the necessary activities for the determination of national policies and strategies to eternalize the memories of our martyrs and to protect veterans and relatives of martyrs from all grievance and deprivation; to carry out social service and assistance activities for the veterans and relatives of martyrs; to ensure cooperation and coordination between relevant public institutions and organizations and voluntary organizations in this field;
- To properly and efficiently manage assistance activities toward the groups in need of social assistance and protection; to coordinate the necessary activities for the determination of national policies and strategies against poverty; and to ensure cooperation and coordination between relevant public institutions and organizations and voluntary organizations in this field;
- To monitor international developments and activities in the field of social services and assistance, to contribute to them, and to evaluate them to benefit from them in future activities, to ensure the implementation of the international conventions and agreements we are party to on the matter at the national level,
- To take the necessary measures to realize social justice and social welfare."

As stated in the decree, the Ministry has a wide range of duties and authorities in the social field. The main institutional structure decides on and implements all business, transactions, and resolutions regarding social assistance and service activities.

## **2- Directorate General of Social Assistance (DGSA)**

With Presidential Decree No. 1 of 2018, the Directorate General was restructured as the primary service unit of the Ministry of Family, Labor, and Social Services. Under Article 73 of Presidential Decree No. 1, dated July 10, 2018, the duties of the Directorate General are as follows (Presidential Decree on the Organization of the Presidency, 2018):

- "Coordinate necessary activities to determine national policies and strategies regarding social assistance and the fight against poverty; implement the approved policies and strategies; monitor and evaluate their implementation,
- Take the necessary administrative and financial measures to achieve the objectives and ensure the implementation of Law No. 3294 on the Encouragement of Social Assistance and Solidarity, dated May 29, 1986,
- Collect the revenues of the Social Assistance and Solidarity Fund on time, and ensure that the collected revenues are used on time and in accordance with the needs,
- Investigate, inspect, monitor, and audit the expenditures, transactions, and operations of Foundations established under the provisions of Law No. 3294, take necessary measures regarding any observed issues, and determine the operating procedures and principles of Foundations and criteria for the social assistance programs,
- Pay all kinds of social assistance under the name of allowance, compensation, wages, assistance, or any other name to those who are to be assisted by public resources according to the legislation; process the benefits mentioned above and payments into the database in cooperation with other units and relevant public institutions and organizations; carry out the procedures regarding the monitoring of all kinds of social assistance and payments made by other public institutions and organizations in the database,
- Conduct research and investigations, and prepare and implement projects regarding the fight against poverty and other issues falling within the scope of the Directorate General,
- Observe and assess international developments and practices in the fight against poverty, and put into effect models that are deemed useful for our country,
- Carry out work related to the Social Assistance Information System,
- Work to enrich the culture of social assistance and solidarity and coordinate and support wider assistance campaigns,

- Determine the procedures and principles regarding the income determination tests to be used for qualifying for social assistance and general health insurance, and implement these tests in cooperation with the SASF,
- Perform any other duties assigned by the Minister."

Regarding the fight against poverty, the vision of the Directorate General has been determined as "developing a strategy, identifying social assistance beneficiaries based on objective criteria, and combining all social assistance given based on poverty in a single center; strengthening citizens in poverty and in need with regular social assistance to ensure a fair distribution of income; and getting social assistance beneficiaries who are capable of working to make a living". The Directorate General is also responsible for collecting the revenues of the Social Assistance and Solidarity Fund and spending them appropriately. The Fund was established in 1986 with Law No. 3294 on the Encouragement of Social Assistance and Solidarity. The Fund's administrative affairs were carried out through the Fund General Secretariat, which operates as a unit reporting to the Prime Ministry, from its establishment until December 9, 2004. With Law No. 5263 on the Organization and Duties of the Directorate General of Social Assistance and Solidarity, which was adopted on December 1, 2004, and entered into force on December 9, 2004, upon its publication in the Official Gazette, the General Secretariat of the Fund was included in the organization as a Directorate General subordinate to the Prime Ministry. The Fund Administration has since taken on a more institutional structure. Institutional structuring has been established to ensure the Fund's more effective and efficient operation to provide access to poor segments. Upon closure of the Prime Ministry, all authorities and duties of the Prime Ministry concerning the Fund were transferred to the Presidency of the Republic.

### **3- Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundations (SASF)**

Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundations (SASFs) were established to carry out activities and provide social assistance according to the provisions of the Turkish Civil Code in all provincial and district centers of Türkiye based on the conditions of Law No. 3294 on the Encouragement of Social Assistance and Solidarity. According to the data of the DGSA in 2020, there are 1.003 SASFs active throughout Türkiye. The budget of the Foundations consists of the revenues transferred to the Social Assistance and Solidarity Fund, the revenues obtained from the Foundations' subsidiaries, and other revenues transferred to the budget. Their legal qualifications are in the status of Foundations, and they are institutions with private legal personalities. They are organized in provinces and districts and exhibit an independent

structure. The Board of Trustees, the decision-making body, consists of appointed and elected people. The composition of the Board of Trustees of the SASF was established by Law No. 3294 on the Encouragement of Social Assistance and Solidarity. According to the law, *"The chief of the civil administration is the natural head of the Foundation, and in the provinces, the mayor, the treasurer, the provincial director of national education, the provincial director of health, the provincial director of agriculture, the provincial director of social services and child welfare institution, and the provincial mufti; in districts, the mayor, property manager, district director of national education, senior district officer of the Ministry of Health, district director of agriculture, if any, and district mufti constitute the Board of Trustees of the Foundation. In addition, for each activity period, the village and neighborhood headmen in the province will choose one headman from among themselves with the absolute majority of the attendees at the meeting to be held upon the call of the governor; two representatives are to be chosen from among the managers of the non-governmental organizations established in the province and operating for the purposes specified in this law; two persons from among charitable citizens are to be elected by the provincial council; one member is to be elected by the absolute majority of the participants at the meeting to be held by the headmen of the villages and neighborhoods within the district upon the call of the district governor; one representative is to be chosen from among the managers of the non-governmental organizations established in the district and operating for the purposes specified in this law; and two persons are to be elected by the provincial council from among charitable citizens will also serve on the Board of Trustees. If there are no non-governmental organizations in the province or in the district operating for the purposes specified in this law, a third person to be elected by the provincial council from among the charitable citizens will serve on the Board of Trustees"*. Each SASF makes its final decisions with its own Board of Trustees. The Board of Trustees convenes with the majority of the members and makes decisions with the majority of the attendees' votes. If the votes are equal in decision-making, the chairman's vote counts as two votes. The Board of Trustees' decision determines the beneficiaries, nature, type, and amount of assistance. However, the scope of the Board of Trustees' interference in the Conditional Cash Transfer, elderly and disability pensions, and similar assistance programs are limited as they are carried out centrally and are subject to regular implementation. Because the Fund Board has the authority to determine the amount and beneficiary audience in these assistance programs.

#### **4- Other Institutions and Organizations that Provide Social Assistance Local Administrations**

The social assistance beneficiaries are scattered all over the country. For this reason, it does not seem possible to fully carry out social assistance activities without municipalities' support. Municipalities have also implemented policies within the scope of their budgetary means. The amendments made in the founding laws of municipalities have added social assistance to the main working areas of municipalities. Municipalities can also provide food, fuel, disability, and cash benefits in terms of social assistance. Municipalities have many functions under the social municipality title, such as referral, socialization, and rehabilitation; social control, mobilization, providing social assistance, guidance, and leading; and observation, social protection, and investment. In local governments, besides municipalities, social assistance activities are carried out by special provincial administrations in places outside the activity areas of municipalities. In addition to financial assistance in the form of monetary aid for the protection and sustainability of social peace and order, the municipalities also provide many in-kind aids and social services to facilitate the lives of the poor, if not radical measures to sustain their lives. These aids include opening shops in the city centers where some products are sold cheaper, establishing bread factories, creating playgrounds and entertainment areas where children can spend time, and building soup kitchens and shelters. In addition to social services, municipalities are responsible for figuring out how and with the help of which institution or organization they can solve society's general problems, such as behaving in accordance with social expectations and performing consultancy activities for the disadvantaged segments of society.

#### **Directorate General of Foundations (DGF)**

The Directorate General of Foundations has no authoritative responsibility for new Foundations, such as SASFs, in distributing social assistance. The management and supervision of the Foundations established in the Ottoman and Seljuk periods and whose representatives have not survived are carried out by the DGF. The Directorate General of Foundations provides the allocation of properties and real estate belonging to Foundations to real and legal persons to ensure their participation in business life and generate income. This income also grants scholarships to children of families with insufficient financial standing in primary, secondary, or higher education. In addition, it provides pensions to needy children whose parents have passed and to persons with disabilities over 40 percent and 72 percent, provided they do not have any social security or a regular income. According to DGF records, the number of

Foundations that have survived from the Ottoman and Seljuk eras have been restored and allocated to Foundation service is approximately 52.000. The resources obtained from leasing these Foundation structures continue to be used in solidarity and mutual assistance activities in accordance with the Foundation culture. According to MoFSS data, the amount of assistance for needy students in primary and secondary education and soup kitchen services in 2018 was approximately 70 million Turkish lira. The management structure of the old Foundations is different from the administrative structure of the SASFs, and these Foundations also constitute the core of the SASF.

### **Non-Governmental Organizations**

The founding structure of associations, Foundations, and social assistance activities are included under this heading. Provisions regarding the definition of associations, establishment processes, association bodies, and the functions of association bodies are included in the Turkish Civil Code No. 4721. Associations are defined in the Law on Associations as *"groups of persons with legal personality formed by continuously combining the knowledge and work of at least seven real or legal persons to achieve a specific and common purpose not prohibited by law, other than profit sharing"*. According to Law No. 2860 on Aid Collection, associations can collect aid with the permission of competent authorities to help the needy and perform public services, provided that it aligns with the public interest. As of 2019, according to the Ministry of Interior, Directorate General of Civil Society Relations statistics, there are 5.473 associations operating in the field of humanitarian aid in Türkiye. This figure corresponds to 4,62 percent of all associations operating in Türkiye. The Turkish word Vakıf comes from the Arabic "waqf," meaning to stop, prevent movement, and immobilize. It also means "to give completely." As an economic term, a foundation is defined as "the opportunities and assets gained through personal and institutional work and effort shared voluntarily". The establishment of new Foundations in Türkiye follows the relevant provisions of Turkish Civil Code No. 4721, which entered into force on January 1, 2002. According to the provisions of this law, real and legal persons can establish Foundations if they meet the specified conditions. One real or legal person is sufficient for the establishment of Foundations. However, having legal capacity is not enough for real persons to establish a Foundation. They should be able to act as stated in the Turkish Civil Code, distinguish right from wrong, and not be restricted in exercising legal rights. In other words, they must be fully competent in the legal sense. Legal persons, on the other hand, gain legal personality by being registered in the Foundation registry

and can allocate property for the Foundation. Civil society has become more active in charitable activities, especially following the Marmara Earthquake in 1999. Legal regulations introduced in the field of civil society have helped the spread of NGOs across the country. The existence of religious sensitivity regarding aid in society has also been an essential source of motivation for the increasing number of NGOs. More frequent media appearances, the fight against urban poverty that arises in cities due to migration, and more accessible results in social work enabled NGOs to focus more on social assistance activities. There are many national and local NGOs working in the field of social assistance, with or without public benefit association status. Each NGO provides social assistance within the means of its own budget. Since the government does not register the aid, the amount of aid provided by the social assistance associations and the number of people benefiting from the assistance are unknown.

## **(b) Social Assistance Programs**

### **History of Social Assistance Programs**

The Social Assistance and Solidarity Fund, drawing its strength from the Constitution of the Republic of Türkiye as in "*The Republic of Türkiye is a democratic, secular, and social State governed by the rule of law,*" was established by Law No. 3294 on the Encouragement of Social Assistance and Solidarity, which entered into force on June 14, 1986.

In this context, the first comprehensive social assistance program was Law No. 2022 on "Pension Pays for Elderly *Turkish* Citizens Who Are of 65 Years of Age or Over, in a Dependent Capacity with No Relatives and No Financial Income," dated July 1, 1976. The second significant development was the establishment of the Social Assistance and Solidarity Fund, established in 1986 as a General Secretariat affiliated with the Prime Ministry.

The third development was the establishment of the Directorate General of Social Assistance and Solidarity with Law No. 5263, dated December 9, 2004, in response to the need to develop new strategies and social assistance programs given the impact of social assistance in the fight against poverty and on the hopeful confidence of individuals in need. In 2011, the organization was renamed by Decree-Law No. 633 as the Directorate of Social Assistance (DGSA) of the Turkish Republic Ministry of Family and Social Policies. The DGSA was structured as the intermediary service unit of the Turkish Republic Ministry of Family and Social Services, established by Presidential Decree No. 73, published in the Official Gazette No. 31461, dated April 21, 2021.

The Fund's administrative affairs were carried out through the Fund General Secretariat, which operates as a unit reporting to the Prime Ministry, from its establishment until December

9, 2004. With Law No. 5263 on the Organization and Duties of the Directorate General of Social Assistance and Solidarity, which was adopted on December 1, 2004, and entered into force on December 9, 2004, upon its publication in the Official Gazette, the General Secretariat of the Fund was included in the organization as a Directorate General subordinate to the Prime Ministry. The Fund Administration has since taken on a more institutional structure.

The restructuring of the Fund management as a Directorate General aimed to deliver current social assistance programs more effectively and faster to the citizens who suffer from economic and social deprivation.

As our government's most crucial social assistance organization, the DGSA fulfills the state's social responsibilities by reaching out to citizens in need with national thematic social assistance programs and project support.

**Figure 28: Legal Development of the Social Assistance System**



Along with these institutional developments in social assistance, social assistance programs have also shown significant evolutions. As of 2022, 50 social assistance programs have been created under the social protection umbrella, as seen in the following figures. One of the most critical factors in developing social assistance programs has been the ISAS, which was initiated in 1999 and launched in 2011. The digitization of the social assistance system has

enabled social assistance programs to be effective, time- and cost-efficient, and inclusive. The historical process of the formation of social assistance programs implemented in Türkiye is given in the figure below. The contents of these social assistance programs are detailed in the following sections.

**Figure 29: History of Social Assistance Programs**



## 2- The Scope of Social Assistance Programs

Social assistance provided by all public institutions in Türkiye accounted for 0,38 percent of GDP in 2022 and 1,36 percent in 2021.

Under Decree-Law No. 633 on "Certain Regulations in the Field of Social Services", the Social Security Institution Directorate General of Zero Premium Payments was closed on the effective date of the decree, and the transactions and payments made under Law No. 2022<sup>5</sup> were transferred to the DGSA.

As of 2012, the Green Card practice was terminated with the implementation of the GHI. In line with Decree-Law No. 633 and the "Regulation on the Procedures and Principles Regarding the Determination of Income, Registration, and Monitoring Process within the Scope of GHI" published in the Official Gazette, dated December 28, 2011, GHI Income Test procedures are currently carried out by SASFs on the ISAS. Following the income test, the Directorate General for Social Assistance will make the payments on behalf of the persons the state will cover.

With the payments within the scope of Law No. 2022 and payments of persons covered by the state within the scope of GHI transferred to its authority, the DGSA came to hold the largest share of funds transferred among the social assistance institutions.

### Social Assistance Expenditures (2002–2021)

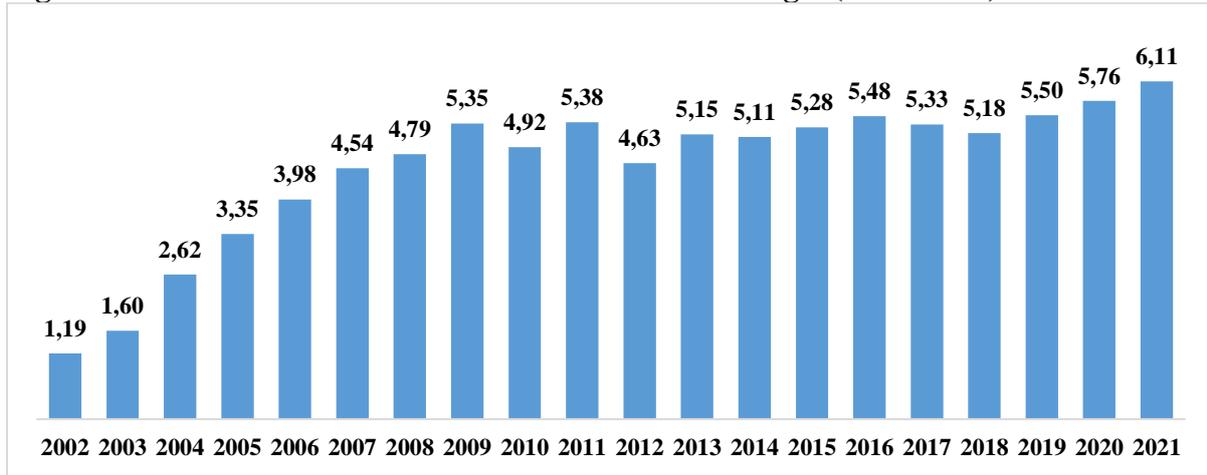
Social assistance expenditures by all public institutions in Türkiye stood at 1,3 billion Turkish lira in 2002. This figure rose to 97,8 billion Turkish lira by the end of 2021 (97.788.064.258 Turkish lira). Of this amount, 60,9 billion Turkish lira is accounted for by the Directorate General of Social Assistance. The general budget's share of social assistance expenditures was 1,19 percent in 2002 and increased to 6,11 percent in 2021.

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<sup>5</sup> Types of disability pensions within the scope of Law No. 2022:

- Old Age Pension
- Disability Pension for Persons with a Disability Degree Between 40–69 Percent
- Disability Pension for Persons with a Disability Degree of 70 Percent or Over
- Disability Pension for Persons Who Have a Relative With a Disability Under 18 Years of Age
- Silicosis Pension

**Figure 30: Share of Social Assistance in the General Budget (2002–2021)**



**Table 6: Distribution of Social Assistance Provided by the Ministry of Family and Social Services (2021)**

Department	Percentage (%)
Directorate General of Social Assistance	82.8
Directorate General of Services for the Persons with Disabilities and Elderly	14.5
Directorate General of Child Services	2.7
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100.0</b>

In 2021, the MoFSS spent 73.526.588.924 Turkish lira for social assistance. The DGSA has the largest share in the number of resources allocated to social assistance, with a social assistance expenditure of 60.891.893.050 Turkish lira. The other departments of the MoFSS, the Directorate General of Services for Persons with Disabilities and The Elderly and the Directorate General of Child Services, spent 10.683.999.025 Turkish lira and 1.950.696.848 Turkish lira, respectively, on social assistance.

In 2021, 60,5 percent of the funds allocated for social assistance to meet the needs of citizens in need were used as part of Health Benefits, 23 percent of Disability/Old Age Assistance, 6,9 percent of Housing/Food Assistance, 3,6 percent of Full Lockdown Social Support Program, 3,1 percent of Assistance to Education, two percent of Family Assistance, 0,8 percent of the Pandemic Social Support Program (Phase I, II, and III), 0,1 percent of Project Supports, and 0,05 percent was used in the Biz Bize Yeteriz, Türkiyem Campaign.

## **Social Assistance - Employment Link**

The Social Assistance - Employment Link Cooperation Protocol was signed on April 28, 2010, within the framework of the activities included in the second article of the Action Plan for Establishing and Activating the Social Assistance System and Employment Link, which was accepted by the decision of the Economy Coordination Board, dated April 1, 2010.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, within the scope of legislative work for employment, the Fund Board passed Resolution No. 2015/4, dated July 2, 2015, to establish and activate the social assistance system and employment link. Circular No. 2015/3, dated August 17, 2015, aimed to include the social assistance beneficiaries in the workforce.

Within the long-term anti-poverty strategy of the MoFSS, social assistance is used as a tool to diminish poverty. Of the beneficiaries of the social assistance services provided by the MoFSS, 77 percent are citizens who cannot join the labor market due to disabilities or old age, and 4,8 percent are currently employed citizens. Accordingly, 82 percent of the beneficiaries are people who are not employed due to disadvantages or work status. Furthermore, while the emphasis is placed on educational assistance for citizens receiving social assistance, the employment-friendly social assistance models are not neglected either. Within this scope:

- Since 2010, beneficiaries who are capable of working have been registered at İŞKUR to benefit from employment-promoting activities,
- If the recipient of social assistance attends and succeeds in a job interview, referral support is provided for expenses, such as travel expenses, health reports, and photographs,
- If the people referred to employment are placed in a job, start-up support of one-third of the gross minimum wage is offered,
- Those who work continuously for one year are prioritized in coal, education, and food subsidies.,
- Incentive packages have been created so that the Conditional Education and Health Beneficiaries employed while receiving social assistance continue to receive Conditional Education and Health Benefits for 12 months within three years.

In addition to these efforts, Law No. 3294 was amended in 2012 to enable families in need, despite being on social security and in the labor market, to benefit from social assistance.

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<sup>6</sup> In this context, a cooperation protocol was signed between İŞKUR and SYGM and İŞKUR and SHÇEK on April 28, 2010. Then, a cooperation protocol was signed between İŞKUR and VGM on May 6, 2010.

On the other hand, as of January 1, 2018, if the social assistance beneficiary is employed by private employers, the employer insurance premium shall be paid by our Ministry for one year. For 2021, the employer insurance premium amount of 12,794,876,69 Turkish lira accrued due to the 32.401 social assistance beneficiaries employed by private employers has been paid to the Social Security Institution.

**Table 7: Number of Social Assistance Beneficiaries Referred to Employment**

Year	Number of People
2018	248,315
2019	153,884
2020	129,716
2021	256,391
January 01, 2022–August 31, 2022	90,657

#### **Periodic Share Transfer to SASFs**

Periodic shares transferred to SASFs on a monthly basis are the resources used by the Foundations for their current expenses and urgent needs. The amount to be transferred monthly is determined by the Fund Board every year.

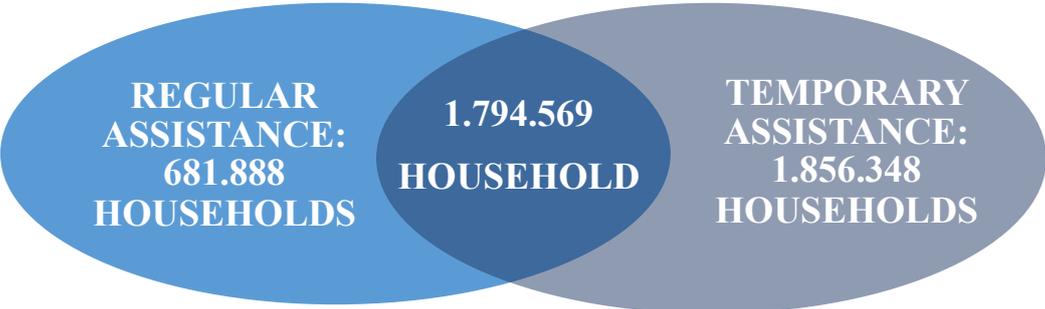
To enable the SASFs to respond urgently to citizens who are in financial difficulties due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the amount of periodic shares sent monthly to the 1.003 SASFs in 81 provinces was increased.

Furthermore, additional periodic shares were sent to the SASFs. Subsequently, the social assistance system, which already has a strong IT infrastructure and human resources, was strengthened in terms of financial resources, and quick solutions were offered to the citizens adversely affected by the outbreak.

#### **Regular and –Temporary Assistance Programs Conducted by the Directorate General of Social Assistance**

In 2021, 5.903.515 households benefited from the social assistance programs, including Pandemic Social Support Programs, carried out by the DGSA, while 4.332.805 families benefited from social assistance, excluding the Pandemic Social Support Programs. In 2021, 681.888 households benefited from regular benefits, while 1.856.348 households received temporary assistance. On the other hand, 1.794.569 households received both regular and temporary assistance.

**Figure 31: Pragmatic Distribution of Social Assistance**



\* The total number of single households benefiting from social assistance is 4,332,805 when the households benefiting from the programs implemented specifically for the pandemic in 2021 are not included. In the figure, households benefiting from the programs implemented specifically for the pandemic are not included in the breakdown of households benefiting from Regular-Permanent assistance. On the other hand, the total number of single households benefiting from social assistance is 5,903,515 when the households benefiting from the assistance implemented in the context of the pandemic are also included.

The DGSA conducts 50 social assistance programs. Since 2003, "regular-inclusive" social assistance programs with basic principles, entitlement criteria, and set amounts have been established, and new services have been developed. Accordingly, 19 regular social assistance programs are carried out, and the funds allocated for regular social assistance constitute 83 percent of the total social assistance resources.

**Categories and Characteristics of Social Assistance Conducted by the Directorate General of Social Assistance (DGSA)**

Social assistance programs run by the DGSA are classified as family assistance, shelter/food aid, disability/elderly assistance, health benefits, educational assistance, and project support. Apart from the social assistance programs, employment and project support are also provided for people who will be useful to society and become productive if a small assistance, education, or training opportunity is provided temporarily.

**Figure 32: Social Assistance Programs in Türkiye**



## 2. INTEGRATED SOCIAL ASSISTANCE INFORMATION SYSTEM (ISAS)

### System Overview

The ISAS has been used by the MoFSS and the SASFs established in every province and district throughout the country within the scope of Law No. 3294 on the Encouragement of Social Assistance and Solidarity. It was created within the scope of a cooperation project with The Scientific and Technological Research Council of Türkiye (TUBITAK) and was developed entirely with national resources regarding human resources and costs.

With the ISAS, where all social assistance processes, from application to payment, are carried out electronically, social assistance practices in Türkiye have shown a significant improvement. The targeting performance in social assistance has increased, the service delivery of social assistance has been improved, and thus the application time, which used to take about 30 days, has been reduced to a few minutes.

The ISAS is currently integrated with 28 different institutions/organizations/units and is one of the world's most comprehensive social policy information systems, acknowledged by the World Bank and the Council of Europe as an example of good practice.

Some of the gains achieved with the ISAS are as follows:

- As a result of data sharing with other public institutions operating in the field of social protection, the service provision for our citizens was improved, and the days-long social assistance application process was reduced to minutes,
- An effective targeting system has been established with the introduction of the system in social assistance,
- All socioeconomic data, social examination reports, and assistance received by individuals were kept electronically on a household basis,
- All processes, from the application to the payment and accounting in social assistance, started to be carried out electronically,
- Integration was made with banks, and online payment was introduced,
- All assistance and income test applications are now being received through the system used by approximately 8.534 active users throughout the country,

- Social assistance beneficiaries are registered in the database of İŞKUR via the ISAS. Thus, "activation" policies are implemented by establishing an employment–social assistance link,
- Repetitive granting of assistance by public institutions was prevented. The workload on the relevant public institutions has been reduced. Social assistance has been provided to those in real need,
- By eliminating the correspondence between public institutions to prevent repetitive assistance, bureaucracy was minimized, contributing to the effective use of public resources,
- A database containing the accurate statistical information required to develop effective social policies was created,
- As of January 2012, the GHI Income Test has been transferred to the system, and the test results are sent to SSI through the system, allowing our citizens to receive healthcare services,
- An important step in terms of "social inclusion" has been taken by removing the bureaucratic burdens on needy citizens,
- A decision support infrastructure has been provided for decision-makers who determine social assistance policies.

In addition, the powerful information system, thanks to the data infrastructure it provided during the global COVID-19 pandemic, made quick decisions, and ensured that social assistance reached citizens immediately. In this context, the ISAS accelerated the evaluation process of 22,4 million (16 million individual applications) social assistance applications received electronically through the e-Government Gateway during the pandemic.

### **Historical Development of the ISAS and Use of the ISAS by the Ministry and SASFs**

In 2009, Social Assistance Information System (SAIS), a software program that helps collect supporting documents for online social assistance applications, was launched. In 2010, the ISAS was developed, building on SAIS to collect and integrate data from different

institutions and to provide additional services, including recording, monitoring, and reporting programs.

With the development of the ISAS, Türkiye has standardized, integrated, and transformed its formerly paper-based social assistance procedures under an electronic system. This allows for verifying personal information in the system through data collected from various public databases and during household visits. The 28 institutions/organizations/units currently integrated with the ISAS are given in Table 12.

**Table 8: Institutions Integrated with the ISAS**

Institutions Integrated with the ISAS					
1	Directorate General of Family and Social Services	11	Directorate General on the Status of Women	21	Directorate General of Agricultural Reform
2	Banking Regulation and Supervision Agency	12	Directorate General of Student Loans and Dormitories	22	Turkish Red Crescent
3	Municipalities (Ministry of Interior)	13	Central Bank	23	Turkish Coal Enterprises
4	Directorate General of Child Services	14	Ministry of National Education	24	Türksat
5	Revenue Administration	15	Ministry of National Defense	25	Vakıfbank
6	Directorate General of Migration Management	16	Directorate General of Civil Registration and Citizenship	26	VGM
7	Halkbank	17	PTT	27	Council of Higher Education
8	Directorate General of Livestock	18	Ministry of Health	28	Ziraat Bank
9	Ministry of Treasury and Finance	19	Social Security Institution		
10	ISKUR	20	Directorate General of Land Registry and Cadastre		

The ISAS, which is integrated with public institutions operating in the field of social assistance, is also combined with the municipalities that provide the most social assistance after the Turkish Red Crescent and SASFs working in the field of social assistance in Türkiye (Table 1). Thanks to the ISAS database, which expands daily with integrations, coordination in the field of social assistance was ensured. At the same time, duplication was prevented, and potential abuses and waste of resources were prevented.

An essential element of successful management and information systems is a clear management structure that allocates responsibilities and protocols among different Ministries. The ISAS achieves such successful management by centralizing management at the national level in the DGSA within the MoFSS and implementing programs at the local level through SASF. Interdisciplinary cooperation has been of great importance in the project's success, as the ISAS integrates data from different public institutions. In this sense, the previously developed Social Assistance Information System (SAIS) laid the foundations for the data-sharing structure of the ISAS. Thus, Türkiye launched a standardized process for providing social assistance based on the functioning of existing social assistance programs at national and local levels.

Within this context, MoFSS, the DGSA, and the Directorate General of Information Technologies (DGIT) manage the database, supervise system management, and provide hardware maintenance services. Centralizing data collection, scoring, and targeting functions ensures consistency in the delivery of social assistance. Moreover, as a high-level public institution, the DGSA can ensure more accessible and more effective coordination between the Ministries to make data-sharing agreements.

SASF receive applications from applicants via the ISAS, create a household file on the system, carry out necessary central inquiries, and conduct on-site household visits to verify this information and evaluate their living conditions. Currently, around 4.000 social inspectors are employed by SASFs for household visits carried out at least once a year on a household basis. This strong presence at the local level brings better oversight and technical uniformity, ensures ownership in local governments, and contributes to local knowledge for grading needs.

## **Rating of Neediness and Determination of Eligibility**

Applicants fill out a standard application form at the SASFs locally for all social assistance programs. The application form standardizes declaration-based data and allows them to be easily integrated and validated with different databases. The application form contains questions on the employment, members, property ownership, and social conditions of the relevant household. Citizens must present a signed consent document as part of the application process so that social and economic information in different institutions can be reviewed. *(Filing an application on e-Government is included in the following text sections. These application and permission steps can be approved on the system in applications made on e-Government. Individuals permit inquiries to be made about them during the application via e-Government.)*

Once an individual's application is completed, the socioeconomic profile is created by combining the data sets from different institutions with their personal identification numbers in the ISAS. The profile includes information on the household's financial situation, the applicant's self-declared household income and employment status, and real estate, animal, and vehicle ownership.

At this stage, the profile should be checked for any deficiencies or discrepancies in the data declared by the person at the time of registration. If any information is missing in the application or inconsistencies are detected in the data, an alert will appear in the system, and the application process will be suspended until the information is verified.

After the application is submitted, the social assistance inspector of the SASFs visits the household. During this visit, the social assistance inspector conducts a survey to verify the information in the citizen's application, collects additional household data, and makes further observations where necessary.

The Board of Trustees determines eligibility for social assistance at the local level based on the information provided by the ISAS and on the evaluations of the inspectors. Based on this information, the Board of Trustees of the SASFs can directly view the applicant's profile on the ISAS and decide on the assistance applications.

Assistance programs carried out by the SASF under Law No. 3294 can be delivered in-kind or in cash. Three methods are used for payments of cash benefits for approved applications. The first of these is the social assistance card. This practice was initiated with the PTT for

citizens receiving regular assistance payments. No fees/commissions or any other expenses are charged for these cards.

The cards are pre-paid debit cards and allow users to do the following:

- They can withdraw their social assistance payments from ATMs without waiting in line at the bank,
- They can pay for food, clothing, and other needs in all stores, markets, or elsewhere.

The second method is payment at home. This option is available for beneficiaries who cannot withdraw their payments due to geographical conditions, weather conditions, illness, old age, or disability. This option is mainly preferred by the elderly and the persons with disabilities, allowing them to receive payment at home in cash, on time, and without any costs.

The third method is transferring the aid into the bank accounts of the beneficiaries receiving temporary cash benefit payments. Beneficiaries can withdraw the social assistance payments deposited into their accounts from bank branches at any time.

The payment methods described above not only reduce beneficiaries' costs of accessing social assistance, such as transportation and bank commissions, but also provide reliability, regularity, and efficiency, thus supporting financial inclusion.

The MoFSS, which cooperated with the PTT in delivering social assistance to citizens within the scope of the Pandemic Social Support Program during the pandemic, also showed flexibility in the new regulations required by the pandemic precautions. In the ordinary course of life, the social assistance process began with the citizens' personal and on-site applications to the SASF. Yet, during the outbreak, applications were collected on the online platform. If the applicant provided an IBAN during the application, the payments were transferred through PTT directly to the IBAN, once approved to be owned by the applicant, within the scope of the Pandemic Social Support Program. This approach prevented crowds and contact in PTT branches prompted by pandemic support payments.

Also, citizens could check their entitlement status regarding the social assistance provided during the pandemic through the "Inquire Social Assistance Information" service of the MoFSS via the e-Government Gateway.

In addition, considering the contributions of the assistance program initiated and successfully implemented during the pandemic to provide fast and effective service within the

scope of today's Digitizing Türkiye vision, efforts for receiving applications to social assistance programs were completed electronically. On October 15, 2021, the online social assistance application service was made live on the e-Government Gateway.

Beneficiaries can make inquiries on e-Government within the scope of the Law No: 6698 on the Protection of Personal Data. The DGSA allows inquiries for requesting beneficiaries. With this permission, 722.315 people made inquiries on the system until June 2022.

Service provision in social assistance has been taken one step further, and a transition has been made to the online assistance application period.

Citizens can apply for social assistance through e-Government during the online social assistance application era with the vision of a Digitizing Türkiye.

Thus, the transportation costs that social assistance beneficiaries have to bear to apply for social assistance have been eliminated, paperwork has been minimized, and the rapid and effective provision of the service has been facilitated.

This also allowed compliance with the social distancing rule during the pandemic.

As of September 21, 2022, 8.685.820 citizens applied for social assistance through the e-Government Gateway.

### **Integrated Social Assistance Information System (ISAS Technical Infrastructure and Implementation Processes**

The ISAS was established in 2010 and has a database of 7TB as of today. The system consists of seven parts:

- Initial Registry
- Compliance Check
- Registry
- Presidency's Communication Center
- Payment
- Case Management
- Monitoring and Evaluation
- Data Management

The system architecture relies on a single database. This database is carried out in two parts: web applications and batch processing. Web applications include the daily running of the

modules developed in the system, access to the data of other institutions, and the processes of use of the DGSA and SASFs. On the other hand, batch processing includes central inquiries performed by the Ministry, payment pre-checks, preparation of payment lists, and statistical data update and preparation processes.

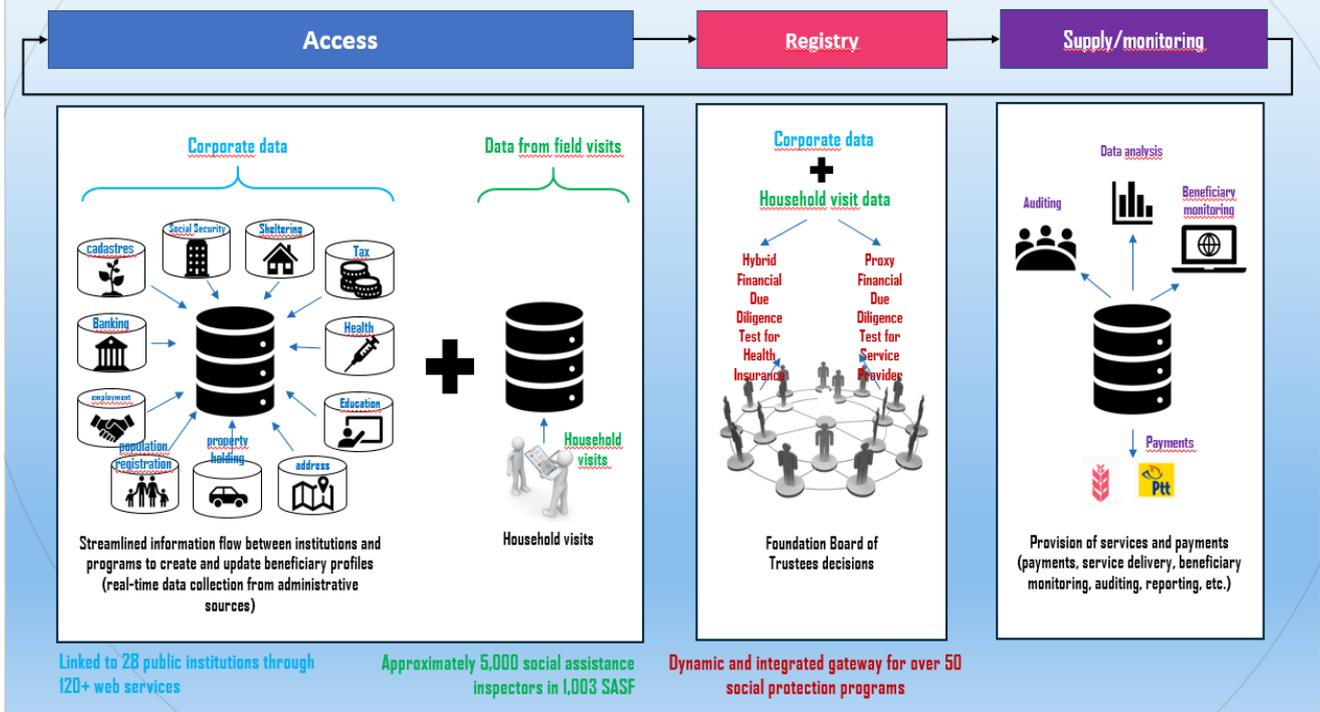
The transaction processes of the ISAS are carried out in three stages:

- Access
- Registry
- Supply/Monitoring

Access is the data collection stage in the system. The data of persons applying for social assistance programs at this stage consists of the data related to these persons in the institutions and obtained during household visits, followed by the verification of this data and the physical and social review of households. The data is obtained from 28 public institutions and 128 web services. The second stage is to determine the eligibility of applicants based on the data collected. At this stage, the eligibility status of the applicants is determined according to a calculation formula (scoring formula) that includes more than 200 criteria regarding poverty, neediness, and vulnerability in the ISAS. A double path is followed for GHI payments. Eligibility criteria are combined with data from the MoFSS and the Ministry of Health. In the third part of the registration phase, a file is prepared for each applicant. This file is then submitted to the Board of Trustees of the SASFs, which includes civil and public representatives in each district. Therefore, the applicant is evaluated by the joint work of both central and local decision-making mechanisms. After the Board of Trustees of the Foundations determines the beneficiary, the preparation of the payments and services to be made to these people, data analysis, inspection, and monitoring of the beneficiary is the third stage of the system, which is the supply/monitoring.

**Figure 33: General Structure of the ISAS**

**What is BSYBS?**



\*BSYBS is the Turkish abbreviation of ISAS

The application process for people needing social assistance (regular assistance) starts with the person's application to SASFs or via e-Government. The application form filled in by the individual is entered in the ISAS by the Foundation personnel. The second stage is for Foundation personnel to visit the applicant's household. At this stage, the SASF staff fill out the Social Review Form. During this visit, the information declared by the applicant is verified, and the physical and social conditions of the household are observed. After this stage, the Foundation staff prepare a file about the applicant's household and submit it to the Board of Trustees. This committee decides what kind of social assistance the applicant will receive and sends the list of individuals who apply to the Foundation and are entitled to assistance to the MoFSS and DGSA.

The SASF will send the lists of persons entitled to social assistance to the DGSA. Since there are two types of regular assistance, the lists are prepared monthly and bimonthly. The beneficiary's information is audited and reviewed by the DGSA and DGIT using the database of 28 different institutions. After this stage, the payment amounts of the finalized beneficiaries are calculated, and payment lists are prepared. This list is sent to the PTT, and the total payment is deposited into the PTT account. The PTT sends an SMS message about the payment to the beneficiaries. The PTT will then send the chart of account activity to the DGSA to verify

whether the beneficiaries have received the payment deposited. Payments not withdrawn for six months are transferred back into the Fund account.

Social assistance payments start with checking beneficiaries' compliance with the terms and updating beneficiary information (Figure 34). Once the DGSA prepares the payment lists, the lists are sent to the PTT. The PTT is a designated intermediary institution for payments. The PTT is responsible for distributing the total payment budget to the beneficiaries according to the lists provided by the DGSA. Payment institutions are Ziraat Bank, Halkbank, and PTT Bank. The PTT or the two other banks will send smart debit cards to the beneficiaries in advance. There are four types of payments: cash withdrawals from the PTT, bank branches, ATMs, and home delivery. The beneficiaries choose one of these four methods to collect their assistance payment. The PTT sends an SMS to all beneficiaries in the payment list that the payment has been made to their accounts. Once the payment is transferred, the PTT sends the updated status of the payments to the DGSA and DGIT every night as a conformity document. The last stage regarding the payments is the cancellation of the payment, which, if any, is notified by the PTT.

**Figure 34: Payment Processes**

