

# **Ready to Respond: How Türkiye's Social Protection Can Withstand the Next Shock**

An SRSP Readiness Assessment Report for Türkiye

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# Introduction

Social protection systems worldwide are increasingly expected to be **shock-responsive** – capable of anticipating and swiftly responding to crises such as natural disasters, conflicts, economic shocks, and pandemics. The COVID-19 pandemic underscored this imperative: emergency social protection measures reached 1.7 billion people globally, demonstrating the life-saving impact of shock-responsive systems<sup>1</sup>. Countries that had robust social registries and delivery infrastructure in place prior to the pandemic managed to scale up support more effectively, highlighting the value of **proactive investments** in system preparedness<sup>2</sup>. Likewise, climate change is driving more frequent and severe hazards, and the international community has recognized social protection as a key tool for climate resilience – at the 2023 COP28 summit, nations set a global target to achieve *adaptive social protection for all* in order to buffer the poorest against climate-related shocks<sup>3</sup>. These global developments reinforce the urgency for countries to strengthen social protection as a frontline response mechanism in times of shock.

In **Türkiye**, recent events have vividly illustrated both the critical need and the potential for a Shock-Responsive Social Protection (SRSP) system. Over the past decade, Türkiye’s social protection institutions have been tested by **multiple large-scale shocks**: a protracted refugee influx, economic volatility and high inflation, the COVID-19 health emergency, and most recently the **devastating earthquakes of February 2023**. Each of these crises placed extraordinary stress on existing programmes and highlighted gaps in coverage and coordination for the most vulnerable. At the same time, they offered lessons in resilience. For instance, during the 2023 earthquake response the government – in collaboration with UNICEF and other partners – channeled *emergency cash transfers* through the national social assistance system, avoiding the creation of parallel mechanisms. This joint design not only improved efficiency, but also **strengthened the shock-responsiveness of national programmes**<sup>4</sup> by building on established delivery channels. Such experiences underscore the rationale for this assessment: to analyze how well Türkiye’s social protection system is equipped to **absorb and respond to major shocks**, and to identify strategic improvements to make the system more agile, inclusive and resilient in the face of future crises.

This report serves as an **assessment** of Türkiye’s readiness to operationalize shock-responsive social protection, with three interrelated objectives. First, it evaluates the current capacity of Türkiye’s social protection policies, programs, and delivery systems to anticipate and respond to different types of shocks. Second, it examines the **institutional and coordination mechanisms** in place – across government agencies, humanitarian actors, and financing arrangements – to integrate crisis response within the social protection framework. Third, it identifies gaps and opportunities for enhancing SRSP, providing actionable recommendations aligned with international best practices and recent national reform initiatives. To achieve these objectives, the study adopted a **mixed-methods methodology**. It combined analysis of available data on social protection (including shock-related expansions and emergency cash transfers) with qualitative insights from stakeholder consultations at national and provincial levels. Relevant policy and program documents were reviewed, and case studies – notably the 2023 earthquake social assistance rollout – were analyzed to ground the findings in real-world response experience. This approach ensured that the assessment is evidence-based and context-specific. The resulting introduction sets the stage for government and partners to **engage in dialogue** on strengthening Türkiye’s social

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2025/04/07/historic-expansion-in-social-protection-in-past-decade>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> [https://webapps.ilo.org/static/english/reports/flagship/world\\_social\\_protection\\_report\\_2024-26/Chapter%2002.html#:~:text=change"%20%28UN%202015%29,seven%20thematic%20adaptation%20targets%2C%20including](https://webapps.ilo.org/static/english/reports/flagship/world_social_protection_report_2024-26/Chapter%2002.html#:~:text=change)

<sup>4</sup> UNICEF Türkiye, Country Office Annual Report 2023

protection system, ensuring it can protect vulnerable children and families when shocks strike, and contribute to a more resilient and equitable future for all.

The remainder of the report is organised in a **modular architecture** that mirrors UNICEF’s Social Protection System Readiness Assessment Tool<sup>5</sup> as well as the building blocks of a shock-responsive system and allows readers to move easily between big-picture diagnosis and granular operational detail.

- **Executive Summary & Key Findings** distils the headline messages for senior decision-makers: the system’s comparative strengths, critical gaps, and a prioritised action agenda.
- **Module 1 – Risk & Context Mapping** looks outward, synthesising data on hazards, poverty, displacement and macro-economic pressures to set the risk-informed baseline against which SRSP must perform.
- **Module 2 – Evidence Base** drills into the distributional impacts of recent shocks and reviews the state of data and analytics that underpin targeting, monitoring and financing decisions.
- **Module 3 – Policy, Legislation & Finance** assesses the enabling environment, from legal mandates for emergency scale-up to the fiscal instruments available for rapid disbursement.
- **Module 4 – Programme Design** evaluates whether core cash and in-kind programmes have the flexibility (eligibility rules, transfer adequacy, conditionalities) to expand vertically or horizontally when crises hit.
- **Module 5 – Delivery Systems** analyses the digital and human infrastructure—registries, payment channels, grievance redress—that determine speed, accuracy and accountability in an emergency rollout.
- **Module 6 – UNICEF & Partner Readiness** reflects on internal operating procedures, surge capacity and partnership frameworks to ensure UNICEF can add value without creating parallel systems.

Each module begins with **Key Findings** and ends with a concise **Gap Matrix** that links identified weaknesses to feasible remedies, sequenced over short-, medium- and long-term horizons. These feed into the final **Recommendations & Implementation Roadmap**, which bundles actions into short- and mid-term timelines so that government and partners can allocate responsibilities and monitor progress. A set of **Annexes** provides methodological notes, interview protocols and alignment matrices with UNICEF’s 2019 *Programme Guidance on Strengthening Shock-Responsive Social Protection Systems*, ensuring full transparency and enabling readers to replicate or update the analysis in future cycles.

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<sup>5</sup> UNICEF, User Guide: Social Protection System Readiness Assessment Tool, 2020

# Executive Summary & Key Findings

Türkiye's social protection (SP) system is strong and broadly institutionalized, yet requires targeted reforms to become fully shock-responsive. **Key strengths** include:

- **Extensive coverage:** Türkiye has a mature SP system with nationwide reach. The Ministry of Family and Social Services and over 1,000 local Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundations deliver cash and in-kind aid to millions.
- **Advanced digital infrastructure:** A unified management information system (ISAIS) and national ID/e-government platform enable instant registration, eligibility checks and electronic payments across provinces. This digital backbone allowed rapid scaling of aid (for example, online apps and automated vetting during COVID-19) and fast delivery of 2023 earthquake relief to affected families.
- **Disaster response capacity:** Türkiye's Disaster Management Presidency (AFAD) is well-equipped with hazard mapping and logistics, backed by a national Disaster Reserve Fund under the Ministry of Finance. In practice, the government leveraged these assets in crises – e.g. in February 2023 it delivered one-off grants (TRY 10,000 per household) to 1+ million quake-affected families via the existing SP network – rather than creating parallel systems. This coordination of SP and DRM strengths has already boosted efficiency.

Despite these advantages, the SRSP assessment identifies **critical gaps**:

- **Legal and policy triggers:** No law or SOP currently **automatically** expands benefits in declared emergencies. Emergency top-ups and eligibility waivers rely on ad-hoc decisions.
- **Coordination void:** MoFSS (social assistance) and AFAD (disaster response) lack a standing joint mechanism or clear protocols. After shocks, collaboration has been reactive rather than pre-arranged.
- **Financing fragility:** Shock-response funding is largely one-off. There is no dedicated SP contingency fund or insurance trigger. Emergency transfers (like post-quake payments) have been financed by extraordinary budget reallocations, risking delays if fiscal space is constrained.
- **Data and targeting:** Socioeconomic data are rich, but **siloes**. Disaster impact data are not yet integrated with the social registry, slowing the identification of newly needy households. As a result, some families in devastated zones may be missed or assisted late.
- **Inclusivity:** Certain vulnerable groups fall outside national SP. Millions of refugees and unregistered migrants rely on parallel schemes (e.g. the EU-funded ESSN) rather than permanent programs. In past shocks, emergency aid was “one-size-fits-all” (per household), without child-specific top-ups or disability accommodations. In sum, children, seniors, the disabled and informal workers face risk of exclusion in crises.

**Priority Action Agenda:** To address these gaps, the report recommends a phased agenda around four pillars:

- **Governance & Coordination:** Establish formal inter-agency SRSP governance. For example, create a MoFSS–AFAD task force or SOPs so that in an emergency, AFAD's damage assessments feed directly into SP planning. Amend legal frameworks to pre-authorize emergency SP scale-ups (e.g. tying triggers to disaster declarations). Such agreements will move response planning from ad-hoc to systematic.

- **Financing & Sustainability:** Develop dedicated shock-response financing. Short-term: ring-fence a contingency line within the Social Assistance budget or Disaster Reserve Fund for emergencies. Medium-term: explore contingent credit (e.g. CAT-DDO) or parametric insurance for rapid cash influx. Anchor SRSP financing in multi-year budgets (e.g. an “Emergency SP Reserve”) to ensure predictability.
- **Delivery & Data Systems:** Leverage and extend Türkiye’s advanced MIS for shocks. Key steps include linking ISAIS with AFAD data (develop an emergency “module” in ISAIS for rapid registration), and ensuring interoperability so officials can quickly cross-check affected areas against social registry data. Expand the social registry to all at-risk households (pre-register in disaster-prone zones) to minimize exclusion. Pilot anticipatory actions by integrating hazard forecasts with SP triggers (for example, pre-positioning cash to vulnerable farmers ahead of drought forecasts) to move from reactive to proactive response.
- **Programme Design & Inclusion:** Make SP programmes more **child- and caregiver-sensitive**. Embed shock-responsive features such as household composition top-ups, school-conditionality waivers during disruptions, and links to psychosocial or childcare services. Strengthen routine child benefits (like CCTE) and elderly/disabled allowances so they can flex in crises (for example, automatic bonuses or temporary eligibility extensions). Simultaneously, extend formal coverage to underserved groups – learn from the ESSN experience to integrate refugees and migrants into SP. By adjusting benefit rules and outreach (e.g. translators, mobile enrollment units), ensure that all affected populations, especially children, women and the elderly, receive both cash and care support.

Each of the above points is reflected throughout the report’s findings. Implementing this agenda – in close partnership with government and aligning with national strategies – will make Türkiye’s SP and DRM systems more agile, inclusive and child-sensitive when the next shock hits.

# Module 1: Mapping of Social Protection and Emergency Response Systems

## Key Findings:

- **Established System:** Türkiye has a well-established social protection system with nationwide coverage, anchored by the Ministry of Family and Social Services and a network of 1,000+ Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundations (SASFs). These deliver a range of cash and in-kind assistance programs to millions of vulnerable citizens.
- **Shock Response Experience:** Recent crises have tested this system. The influx of Syrian refugees (since 2014), the COVID-19 pandemic (2020), and the devastating 2023 earthquakes all prompted large-scale emergency support, revealing both the system's strengths (e.g. rapid rollout of cash aid) and gaps (e.g. ad-hoc parallel mechanisms).
- **Humanitarian Linkages:** A substantial humanitarian cash program – the EU-funded Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN) for refugees – operates in parallel to government programs. Additionally, UNICEF's Conditional Cash Transfer for Education (CTE) for Refugees, although smaller in scale, plays a significant role at the intersection of humanitarian and development efforts. While there are some linkages (e.g. data-sharing with the Red Crescent), integration of these humanitarian initiatives into the national system remains limited, underscoring the need for better coordination between social protection and disaster response agencies.

**Social Protection Landscape:** Türkiye's social protection system is robust and institutionalized. The Ministry of Family and Social Services (MoFSS) oversees a wide array of social assistance programs delivered through SASFs in every province and district. These programs include unconditional cash transfers for the elderly and people with disabilities, conditional cash transfers for education and health, child and family support services, and various in-kind assistance schemes. The **Integrated Social Assistance Information System (ISAIS)** underpins these interventions – a nationally unified management information system linking over **1,000 local offices** and containing socio-economic data on over **30 million citizens**<sup>6</sup>. This extensive coverage means that nearly all poor and many near-poor households are registered, creating an up-to-date “poverty inventory” that can be leveraged in times of crisis. Indeed, social protection in Türkiye is not a fragmented patchwork but a **cohesive network reaching vulnerable groups at scale**, which is a strong foundation for shock responsiveness.

**Disaster Response Structure:** In parallel, Türkiye has a well-defined disaster and emergency management structure led by the Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD) under the Ministry of Interior. AFAD coordinates immediate relief efforts (search and rescue, shelter, etc.) when disasters strike. At the local level, provincial governors and crisis coordination centers lead emergency response, often working with municipalities, SASFs, and the Turkish Red Crescent (Türk Kızılay). However, **institutional linkages between the social assistance system and the disaster response system are mostly informal**. Notably, AFAD-led responses have integrated existing social assistance components, such as rental support for earthquake-affected households with relatively pro-poor targeting. Nonetheless, there is no permanent mechanism that automatically channels or scales up social protection support during emergencies – instead, cooperation has occurred on a **case-by-case basis**. For example, during winter floods or regional disasters in the past, some SASFs provided extra assistance to affected families, and local officials coordinated with AFAD, but these practices were not guided by a formal framework.

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<sup>6</sup> [https://www.opml.co.uk/sites/default/files/migrated\\_bolt\\_files/poster-turkey.pdf#:~:text=%EF%83%A0%20it%20is%20integrated%20with,4500%20concurrent%20users%20with%20instant](https://www.opml.co.uk/sites/default/files/migrated_bolt_files/poster-turkey.pdf#:~:text=%EF%83%A0%20it%20is%20integrated%20with,4500%20concurrent%20users%20with%20instant)

**Key Shock Experiences:** Mapping recent shocks in Türkiye illustrates how the social protection and emergency systems have responded, sometimes jointly, sometimes in parallel:

- **Syrian Refugee Influx (2014–present):** Hosting 3.7 million Syrian refugees pushed Türkiye to expand support beyond its citizens. The government, with EU funding and Turkish Red Crescent implementation, established the **Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN)** – a cash transfer program that has reached over 1.5 million refugees with monthly assistance<sup>7</sup>. While ESSN is a humanitarian program, it leveraged elements of the national system (e.g. national ID numbers for refugees, some data exchange with ISAIS) and demonstrated the capacity to deliver cash at scale via prepaid cards. However, refugees have remained mostly outside the national social assistance schemes. This parallel structure, necessitated by legal and financing constraints, highlights a **gap in the system’s inclusiveness** during shocks affecting non-citizens, even as it showcases an effective large-scale cash delivery mechanism.
- **COVID-19 Pandemic (2020):** The economic shock of COVID-19 prompted an unprecedented expansion of social protection to protect households. The government rapidly launched a **three-phase Emergency Social Support programme**. In Phase 1, about **2.1 million low-income families** already receiving assistance were given an extra one-time cash transfer of TRY1,000<sup>8</sup>. Phase 2 extended the TRY1,000 support to **2.3 million additional families** not covered in Phase 1. A Phase 3 opened applications to any family in need, ultimately reaching a total of around 6 million households nationwide with emergency cash. Notably, this scale-up was enabled by the existing ISAIS registry and e-government portals – people applied online and were verified through the system<sup>9</sup>. At the same time, other social protection measures kicked in, such as **short-term work allowances** to preserve jobs and **additional support for pensioners**, indicating a whole-of-system response. The COVID-19 experience underscored the **importance of a strong routine system** – countries with robust social protection were able to respond faster and more effectively<sup>10</sup>. In Türkiye’s case, its digital databases and payment infrastructure allowed a swift rollout, although **refugees were not eligible for the government’s cash aid**, requiring separate humanitarian assistance<sup>11</sup>.
- **2023 Earthquakes (February 2023):** The massive twin earthquakes in south-eastern Türkiye affected 11 provinces and over 14 million people, including 1.7 million Syrian refugees<sup>12</sup>. The government’s response included **extraordinary social assistance measures**. Within weeks, more than **1 million affected families received a TRY10,000 emergency cash grant per household** as immediate relief<sup>13</sup>. Additionally, families whose homes were destroyed were provided a **TRY15,000 relocation grant** to cover moving costs, and monthly rent support of TRY3,000–5,000 was made available for those displaced. These payments, funded by the government’s emergency budget, were disbursed largely outside the routine social assistance programs – coordinated by AFAD and local authorities – but many **SASF offices played a role in identifying and registering beneficiaries for these one-off supports**. In parallel, humanitarian agencies stepped in: for example, the Turkish Red Crescent and WFP temporarily extended their cash assistance programs (normally for refugees) to also support tens of thousands of Turkish citizens in the quake zone<sup>14</sup>. UNICEF, for its part, worked with MoFSS to design a child-focused cash support program for affected families (see Module 6). These efforts, while lifesaving,

<sup>7</sup> <https://cash-hub.org/resources/cash-in-turkiye/#:~:text=Cash%20in%20Türkiye%20Via%20the,themselves%20how%20to%20cover>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.dailysabah.com/business/economy/turkey-to-support-workers-taking-unpaid-leave-provide-cash-aid-to-23m-more-families#:~:text=families%20hit%20financially%20by%20the,will%20benefit%20from%20this%20support>

<sup>9</sup> World Bank, Deep Dive into the Ecosystem for the Delivery of Social Assistance Payments, Türkiye Case Study, 2022

<sup>10</sup> World Bank, Discussion Paper no. 2509, 2025

<sup>11</sup> World Refugee and Migration Council, Improving Syrian Refugee Inclusion in the Turkish Economy, 2021

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.developmentanalytics.org/social-policy-analysis#:~:text=March%202023%20>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.invest.gov.tr/en/news/news-from-turkey/pages/turkish-government-introduces-earthquake-recovery-measures.aspx#:~:text=137%2C000%20in%20hotels>

<sup>14</sup> WFP, Türkiye Annual Country Report 2023

occurred via special arrangements rather than automatic expansions of existing programs. The earthquake response exposed **strengths (political will to use cash transfers, local presence of social service infrastructure) and weaknesses (no pre-agreed mechanism to scale up national programs, limited interoperability between humanitarian and government systems)**.

**Implications:** The mapping reveals a **social protection system with high coverage and delivery capacity**, as well as a parallel humanitarian safety net for refugees. In recent shocks, this capacity has been utilized to deliver support quickly – demonstrating that **social protection can help families prepare for, cope with, and recover from shocks**<sup>15</sup>. However, the reliance on ad-hoc measures and parallel channels also indicates that shock response in Türkiye is **not yet fully systematized**. The absence of formal protocols to expand social assistance in emergencies, and the separation of refugee support, are key gaps. Going forward, closer integration of the disaster response machinery (AFAD and others) with the social protection system will be critical so that future shocks can trigger a more **predictable, coordinated response** using the strengths of existing programs and delivery systems.

## Module 2: Data and Evidence for Shock Responsiveness

### Key Findings:

- **Rich Socioeconomic Data:** Türkiye’s social protection system benefits from extensive data on households. The Integrated Social Assistance Information System holds data on over 30 million citizens, capturing poverty status and demographic details nationwide. Regular household surveys (e.g. income and living conditions, labor force) and a national electronic ID system further contribute to a rich evidence base on vulnerability.
- **Risk and Hazard Data Gaps:** Despite strong socioeconomic data, data on **disaster risk and climate vulnerability** are not fully integrated into social protection planning. Türkiye has detailed seismic risk maps and meteorological data, but these are managed by disaster management agencies (e.g. AFAD) with little systematic linkage to the social protection registry. This siloed data landscape makes it difficult to **anticipate who and where** the most vulnerable to shocks are, before a crisis hits.
- **Analysis and Early Warning:** There is no routine use of predictive analytics or early warning triggers within the social protection system. While early warning systems exist for floods, fires, and other hazards, these are not yet connected to social assistance decision-making. Strengthening the **data sharing and analytical capacity** – for example, overlaying poverty data with hazard maps – is a priority to enable proactive, shock-responsive interventions.

**Socioeconomic Data Strengths:** Türkiye’s ability to identify and assist vulnerable households rests on a strong data foundation. The ISAIS social registry is a cornerstone: it consolidates information from **16 different government databases** (civil registry, tax, employment, education, health, etc.) to build a comprehensive profile of each applicant household<sup>16</sup>. This interoperability means that eligibility for social assistance can be determined quickly and accurately – a feature that proved invaluable during COVID-19 when millions applied for emergency aid online. The system’s coverage (data on over **31 million**

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<sup>15</sup> UNICEF, 2019

<sup>16</sup> [https://www.opml.co.uk/sites/default/files/migrated\\_bolt\\_files/poster-turkey.pdf#:~:text=%EF%83%A0%20ISASS—launched%20in%202009%20and,economic%20data%20of](https://www.opml.co.uk/sites/default/files/migrated_bolt_files/poster-turkey.pdf#:~:text=%EF%83%A0%20ISASS—launched%20in%202009%20and,economic%20data%20of)

**individuals** and growing<sup>17</sup>) indicates that not only current beneficiaries but also many past applicants and potential beneficiaries are recorded. In practice, this functions as a **dynamic national registry of the poor and vulnerable**, updated continuously through local SASF offices and e-government applications. Besides administrative data, Türkiye conducts regular surveys (such as the Household Income and Expenditure Survey<sup>18</sup> and the Survey of Income and Living Conditions<sup>19</sup>) which provide evidence on poverty, living standards, and the impacts of shocks. During and after the 2020 pandemic, for instance, special surveys and studies were carried out to assess COVID-19's socio-economic impacts, giving policymakers data on who lost incomes and needed support. Overall, **the availability of data on people's needs is a strong point** – it enables mapping of vulnerability with a high degree of granularity (by location, age, gender, etc.), which is crucial for shock response planning.

**Hazard and Climate Data:** On the other hand, data about **shocks themselves – natural hazards and other risks – are handled separately**. AFAD maintains databases on disaster risks (for example, seismic hazard maps identifying earthquake-prone zones, and databases of past disasters and damage assessments)<sup>20</sup>. The meteorological service produces early warnings for extreme weather, and climate change projections exist for longer-term risks like droughts. However, these rich datasets are not linked with the social protection information systems. There is currently **no integrated platform** that overlays hazard exposure with the social registry or poverty maps. For example, while it is possible to geographically pinpoint the poorest districts using ISAIS or survey data, and separately to see which districts lie on major fault lines or flood plains, these data are not routinely combined to guide preparedness. This gap was evident in the 2023 earthquakes: although authorities knew which provinces were high-risk seismic zones, social protection programs had not pre-planned any special coverage or contingency for those areas. **Post-disaster data gathering** was needed to identify affected households (e.g. via on-the-ground registration for the TRY10,000 payments), rather than being able to instantly query how many poor families lived in the impacted neighborhoods before the quake. The absence of pre-crisis linking of social data with hazard data delayed the identification of beneficiaries in the crucial first days.

**Early Warning and Trigger Mechanisms:** Globally, best practice in shock-responsive social protection emphasizes using **early warning systems and risk indicators** to trigger timely support<sup>21</sup>. In Türkiye, there are early warning systems for certain hazards (for instance, flood alerts, heatwave warnings, and even nascent earthquake early warning technology), but the social protection sector does not have protocols to act on these warnings. For example, if heavy snowfall or a flood is forecast for a particular region, there is no automatic process to temporarily expand or adjust social assistance in that region ahead of the shock. Similarly, drought monitoring exists (important for agricultural livelihoods), but social assistance programs are not yet designed to scale based on early drought warnings. **Predictive analytics** – such as identifying households likely to fall into poverty after a shock – are in early stages. Some academic and pilot projects (often with donor support) have begun to explore this, using existing survey data to simulate shock impacts. For instance, just after the 2023 earthquakes, UNICEF supported a rapid simulation of poverty impacts on children to inform cash program design<sup>22</sup>. This kind of analysis,

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> <https://data.tuik.gov.tr/Bulten/Index?p=Household-Consumption-Expenditures-2023-53801&dil=2>

<sup>19</sup> <https://data.tuik.gov.tr/Bulten/Index?p=Income-and-Living-Conditions-Survey-2021-45581&dil=2#:~:text=The%20mean%20annual%20household%20disposable,to%20previous%20year%20in%20Türkiye.&text=In%20Türkiye%2C%20the%20mean%20annual,to%2037%20thousand%20400%20TL.>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.preventionweb.net/news/new-turkish-accelerometric-database-and-analysis-system-launched-turkish-disaster-and>

<sup>21</sup> OPM, Towards shock-responsive social protection: lessons from the COVID-19 response in six countries, 2021

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.developmentanalytics.org/social-policy-analysis#:~:text=business%20case%20that%20demonstrates%20the,cash%20transfer%20scenarios%20interactively%20by>

however, is done reactively and on an ad-hoc basis, rather than being a built-in capacity of the social protection system.

**Data Sharing and Governance:** A contributing factor to these gaps is the **institutional separation of data systems**. Privacy and data protection rules in Türkiye are strict (for good reason), but they can complicate inter-agency data sharing in the absence of formal agreements. The ISAIS system has begun to open up in limited ways – for example, it was **piloted to share certain data with the Turkish Red Crescent and municipalities via the e-government portal**, which is promising for humanitarian collaboration. But a systematic protocol for sharing social assistance data with emergency agencies (and vice versa, sharing disaster impact data with MoFSS) has yet to be established. Currently, when a disaster strikes, **a lot of data collection happens manually or through separate systems**: AFAD might register disaster victims through its own platform, NGOs might do needs assessments, and only later might that information be cross-checked with the social assistance beneficiary list. Establishing agreements to allow **real-time data exchange** – for example, enabling AFAD to quickly see how many social assistance recipients live in an affected area, or allowing MoFSS to receive lists of households identified by humanitarian assessments – would significantly speed up shock response targeting.

In summary, **Türkiye has a strong foundation of socio-economic data to build on, but needs to bridge the information gap between social protection and disaster risk knowledge**. By integrating data on risks and climate vulnerabilities into social protection planning, the government could move from a reactive stance to a more proactive one – identifying areas and populations most **at risk before a shock strikes**. Additionally, investing in analytics and early warning trigger mechanisms within the social protection system (for instance, automatic flags in the MIS when certain thresholds like drought indices or price spikes are reached) would enable a faster, evidence-based response. In the context of rising climate risks and economic volatility, closing these data and evidence gaps is essential for a shock-responsive social protection system.

## Module 3: Readiness of Policy, Legislative and Financial Frameworks

### Key Findings:

- **Policy Commitment:** Social protection is a cornerstone of Türkiye’s national development policy, but explicit integration of **shock response** in these policies is recent and nascent. While various strategy documents acknowledge disaster risks and the need for emergency support, there is **no dedicated national policy or plan** that fully articulates how social protection should respond to covariate shocks (e.g. natural disasters, pandemics).
- **Legislation and Mandates:** The legal framework for social assistance (Law No. 3294 and related regulations) provides broad mandates to assist the poor and those affected by “emergencies,” offering some basis for shock response. The disaster management law empowers AFAD to coordinate emergency aid. However, **legal clarity on coordinating these mandates is lacking** – for example, no law or decree explicitly assigns responsibility for shock-responsive social protection or establishes protocols for scaling up programs during crises.
- **Financing Arrangements:** Financing for shock response relies on ad-hoc budget allocations and external assistance. Türkiye does not have a pre-arranged **contingency fund or insurance mechanism** dedicated to social protection in emergencies. In recent shocks, the government mobilized significant funds (e.g. reallocation of budgets, emergency credits) to finance one-off payments and aid, and international donors contributed (especially for the refugee response and

earthquake relief). The lack of dedicated financing instruments (such as contingency budgets, disaster funds, or Catastrophe DDOs) means that funding a rapid scale-up of social protection is not guaranteed in advance – a major gap in preparedness.

- **Coordination and Governance:** There are some existing coordination bodies for social policy and for disaster response (e.g. provincial disaster boards), but **routine coordination between social protection and disaster management authorities is weak**. Lines of communication often depend on personal contacts or emergency task forces formed after a crisis begins. A more formal coordination mechanism – for instance, including MoFSS in national disaster planning and vice versa – is needed to ensure a unified SRSP approach.

## Policy Framework and Strategy

Türkiye’s overarching policy vision recognizes social protection as vital for reducing poverty and inequality. Social protection features in the national development plans<sup>23</sup> and the government’s programs for work<sup>24</sup>, emphasizing coverage of vulnerable groups and efficiency of delivery. However, **until recently, these policies seldom addressed shock responsiveness explicitly**. Disaster response has been traditionally seen as the realm of humanitarian relief and civil protection agencies, separate from social programs. This began to shift after the experiences of the past decade. The protracted refugee crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic prompted policymakers to discuss “shock-responsive social protection” and resilience. In 2016, with the launch of the ESSN, Türkiye joined global conversations on linking humanitarian cash assistance with social protection. Still, **an explicit government policy on Shock-Responsive Social Protection (SRSP) remains to be yet developed**. There is no single policy document or strategy that outlines how the social protection system should prepare for and respond to large covariate shocks, nor targets for coverage or service levels during emergencies. The absence of a dedicated SRSP policy means responses have been largely **reactive**, driven by high-level political decisions in the moment of crisis rather than by pre-existing plans.

That said, certain **policy instruments do provide entry points** for SRSP. The National Disaster Response Plan (TAMP), managed by AFAD, includes a section on “Donation and Aid Coordination” which mentions cooperation with social assistance foundations for relief distribution. More positively, the National Climate Change Adaptation Strategy and Action Plan (2024-2030)<sup>25</sup> acknowledges the role of social protection in climate adaptation, albeit broadly. UNICEF’s global framework stresses that effective SRSP requires embedding shock response into social protection strategies<sup>26</sup>. **Policy readiness, therefore, is currently moderate** – the intent and recognition are emerging, but concrete plans and guidelines are still lacking. High-level advocacy continues to be needed to cement SRSP in the policy agenda, ensuring it remains a priority in the post-disaster reconstruction discourse.

## Legislative and Regulatory Framework

On the legislation side, **the building blocks for SRSP are partly in place** but require strengthening. The Social Assistance Law No. 3294 (enacted in 1986) empowers the state to assist those in financial need “for any reason,” which implicitly covers disaster-affected populations. It was under this broad mandate that the government justified cash aid to millions of new beneficiaries during COVID-19, for example. Additionally, Law No. 7269 on Public Calamities (dated 1959, with amendments) establishes the state’s responsibility to provide emergency relief (food, shelter, urgent cash, etc.) after disasters. It is under this law and the authority of AFAD that post-disaster cash payments (like the TRY10,000 earthquake aid)

<sup>23</sup> [https://www.sbb.gov.tr/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Twelfth-Development-Plan\\_2024-2028.pdf](https://www.sbb.gov.tr/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Twelfth-Development-Plan_2024-2028.pdf)

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.sbb.gov.tr/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Medium-Term-Program-2024-2026.pdf>

<sup>25</sup> [https://iklim.gov.tr/db/english/icerikler/files/Uyum\(1\).pdf](https://iklim.gov.tr/db/english/icerikler/files/Uyum(1).pdf)

<sup>26</sup> UNICEF, 2019

were delivered. However, these laws **do not specify mechanisms for cooperation** – the social assistance law does not detail how to act in a disaster, and the disaster law does not mention using social protection systems. The result is a fragmentation in mandates. In practice, MoFSS and AFAD must issue **temporary directives or protocols** during each crisis to define roles – for instance, a joint circular was reportedly issued after the 2023 earthquake to outline how SASFs would help register affected families for emergency payments. Such workarounds are functional but not institutionalized.

Regulatory flexibility is another aspect of readiness. Shock-responsive systems often require temporarily relaxing certain rules (e.g. waiving means-test requirements or documentation for quick aid). Turkish regulations have shown some flexibility: during COVID-19, the government suspended conditionalities (since schools and hospitals were closed) so that beneficiaries of conditional cash transfers continued receiving support uninterrupted. Also, means-testing rules were loosened for the pandemic aid – people could self-declare lost income. These adjustments were made via emergency decrees. A concern is that **not all needed regulatory changes are foreseen in advance**. For example, initially refugees were not legally eligible for any of the government’s COVID-19 social aid; only later was additional aid mobilized for them through different channels. A more *shock-aware legal framework* could proactively address such issues (for instance, giving the Cabinet authority to extend certain social assistance to non-citizens or above-income-threshold families during a declared disaster). Another legal piece relevant to SRSP is data protection law – strict privacy rules can, if not managed, slow down data sharing in crises. Clear legal grounds for inter-agency data sharing during emergencies (while protecting privacy) would facilitate faster identification of beneficiaries. However, **Türkiye’s laws enable emergency aid in broad terms, but they stop short of providing a clear blueprint for leveraging social protection in emergencies**. This lack of pre-defined triggers or targeting adaptations reflects a broader governance challenge: the system remains fundamentally reactive rather than anticipatory, constrained by legal ambiguity and siloed institutional mandates. While data protection concerns are valid, their operational impact is magnified by the absence of shared mandates, formal coordination structures, and pre-agreed protocols. There is scope to support new legislation that explicitly assign roles, define scalable “disaster benefits,” and sets funding norms – all of which are essential for institutionalizing SRSP.

## Financing Mechanisms

Perhaps the most significant gap in readiness is **pre-arranged financing for shock response within the social protection system**. The cornerstone of Türkiye’s social protection financing is the Social Assistance and Solidarity Promotion Fund<sup>27</sup>, established in 1986 under Law 3294. This Fund serves as the primary financial source for the vast majority of social assistance programs, including conditional cash transfers, allowances for widows, orphans, and various targeted support schemes. According to Law 3294, the Fund’s primary revenue sources include transfers from other funds as determined by Presidential decree, allocations from the general budget, fifty percent of traffic fine revenues, fifteen percent of advertising revenues from the Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK), and various donations and charitable contributions<sup>28</sup>. In normal times, these budgets are planned annually and executed for routine needs. When a major shock occurs, the government so far has relied on emergency budgetary measures: supplemental appropriations, budget revisions, or diverting funds from contingency lines in various ministries. For example, to finance the large-scale COVID-19 cash transfers, the government reallocated budgetary resources and drew on the unemployment insurance fund for certain labor-market measures<sup>29</sup>. In the 2023 earthquake, a massive relief and recovery package was announced – including cash aid, housing support, and subsidized loans – funded by a combination of budget

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.aile.gov.tr/sygm/genel-mudurluk/sosyal-yardimlasma-ve-dayanismayi-tesvik-fonu/>

<sup>28</sup> <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/download/article-file/2095916>

<sup>29</sup> Bakir C. (2020). The Turkish state’s responses to existential COVID-19 crisis. *Policy & society*, 39(3), 424–441. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14494035.2020.1783786>

reallocations and new external loans. However, **none of these funds were pre-positioned specifically for social protection scale-ups**. There is no dedicated disaster social assistance fund comparable to those in some other countries (for instance, countries that maintain “national disaster funds” or reserve accounts for emergency welfare payments).

At the time of the earthquake, Türkiye did not have an active contingent credit (e.g. a World Bank Catastrophe Deferred Drawdown Option) that could be immediately drawn for social support<sup>30</sup>. This meant a heavier reliance on ad-hoc donor funding and public appeals. Indeed, international donors, including the EU, United Nations, and World Bank, mobilized substantial grants and loans after the quake – a reflection that **ex-post financing came through, but with some delay and uncertainty**. On the refugee front, the ESSN cash program is entirely externally financed (over €1 billion from the EU since 2016), which is a unique situation and not embedded in the national budget. While this has brought in massive resources, it also means support for refugees is contingent on donor decisions rather than domestic fiscal commitment.

Global lessons from COVID-19 highlight the importance of having **financial buffers and instruments** for shock response – many countries increased social protection spending by 30-40% virtually overnight in 2020<sup>31</sup>, something only possible with either reserves or rapid financing mechanisms in place. Türkiye’s ability to pour money into earthquake relief (estimated over \$32 billion<sup>32</sup>) shows the political will to finance shocks, but doing so required emergency laws and debt. A more **proactive financial setup** could include: (1) a contingency budget line within MoFSS that automatically activates upon disaster declaration, (2) agreements with the Ministry of Finance for budgetary flexibility to increase social assistance ceilings during crises, and (3) exploring disaster risk financing tools (insurance, Cat DDOs, etc.) that explicitly allocate funds for scaling cash transfers or public works when triggers are met.

In summary, **financing readiness** in Türkiye lies in the **execution of emergency social** spending, even though pre-arranged mechanisms are limited. Turkey’s fiscal capacity as an upper-middle-income country has enabled substantial emergency spending in practice. However, improving readiness will not only require new financial instruments but also stronger **advocacy to treat social protection as essential crisis** infrastructure with pre-agreed budget triggers and dedicated funding. An often overlooked dimension is the role of **subnational governments**. During recent disasters, including the 2023 earthquakes, many municipalities and provincial administrations mobilized in-kind and cash support through their own local resources, complementing central-level efforts. According to some estimates, approximately 30 metropolitan municipalities allocated an average of just 3-5 percent of their budgets to disaster response, indicating both an emerging role and a financing ceiling. Incorporating these local contributions into national SRSP planning could unlock an underexplored layer of fiscal resilience and delivery capacity, especially if mechanisms for vertical coordination, co-financing, and surge support are formalized. Taken together, advancing SRSP financing in Türkiye will require building on existing fiscal strengths while institutionalizing multi-tiered, risk-layered, and trigger-based funding arrangements that can support timely and inclusive responses in future crisis. Encouragingly, the inclusion of “shock-responsive social protection” in global climate finance dialogues (e.g., COP28’s adaptation targets call for **“adaptive social protection for all”**<sup>33</sup>) could open new funding avenues. Türkiye could tap into climate funds or resilience loans to bolster its SRSP financing. For now, the reliance on reactive funding is a **critical vulnerability** – without guaranteed funds, even the best plans cannot be executed rapidly.

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<sup>30</sup> <https://www.disasterprotection.org/blogs/better-is-possible-how-the-world-bank-can-rise-to-meet-climate-and-crisis-risk#:~:text=Better%20is%20possible%3A%20How%20the,in%20principle%2C%20be%20pre>

<sup>31</sup> World Bank, 2025

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.dailysabah.com/business/economy/turkiye-earmarks-billions-for-quake-reconstruction-costs-this-year>

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.social-protection.org/gimi/ShowNews.action?id=26261>

## Coordination and Institutional Arrangements

Effective shock-responsive social protection requires strong **coordination across government** – notably between the social protection sector and the disaster risk management (DRM) actors, as well as with humanitarian partners. In Türkiye, institutional coordination has room to improve. On paper, there are some coordination platforms: AFAD leads the **National Disaster Management Coordination** through committees that include line ministries, the military, NGOs, etc. In practice, however, **social protection representatives have not been central in disaster coordination**, and vice versa. For example, prior to the 2023 earthquakes, social assistance officials were generally not regular participants in provincial disaster preparedness drills or contingency planning meetings – these tended to focus on search-and-rescue, infrastructure and immediate relief. As a result, when the earthquake hit, integrating social assistance into the response (like leveraging the SASFs for cash distribution) had to be figured out on the fly. Stakeholders have noted that existing social policy coordination forums seldom discuss disaster scenarios, and existing disaster committees do not routinely include MoFSS at a planning level. This **siload approach** is a missed opportunity.

During the refugee crisis, some coordination mechanisms did emerge – for instance, the ESSN program is guided by a task force co-led by government and EU/Red Crescent, and a **Cash Working Group** under the refugee response coordination was established to align humanitarian cash with national systems. Lessons from that experience point to gradually improving trust and information-sharing (e.g., joint vulnerability assessments). However, these were parallel to the core government systems.

Looking forward, establishing a **formal coordination mechanism for SRSP** is essential. This could be a dedicated working group or task force that meets regularly (in peace time) to bridge the social assistance and emergency management agendas. It should clarify roles: e.g., MoFSS would focus on targeting and delivering emergency cash to households, while AFAD would handle broader relief and logistics, and both would share data. Development partners like UNICEF, WFP, and the Red Crescent should be included, given their operational experience and resources for emergency cash programs. Improved coordination also means **joint preparedness planning** – for example, developing contingency plans together, aligning trigger criteria, and conducting simulation exercises (a recommendation echoed in UNICEF’s guidance<sup>34</sup>). By doing so, Türkiye can ensure that when the next shock occurs, its social protection system and disaster response apparatus act in unison rather than in parallel. Coordination is fundamentally a governance issue – it requires political will (e.g., a mandate from the Presidency or Prime Minister’s office instructing collaboration) and practical tools (like interoperable systems and joint protocols as discussed). The **current institutional readiness is moderate to low**, with coordination largely informal, so strengthening this area will greatly enhance overall SRSP readiness.

## Module 4: Readiness of Programme Design for Shock Response

### Key Findings:

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<sup>34</sup> UNICEF, User Guide: Social Protection System Readiness Assessment Tool, 2020

- **Coverage and Inclusion:** Türkiye’s social protection programs cover a broad segment of the poor and vulnerable population under normal conditions, which is a strength for shock response. However, certain groups affected by shocks – notably the “newly vulnerable” who are not traditionally poor, and non-citizens – may fall outside existing eligibility criteria. Program rules currently **do not automatically expand coverage** to include those temporarily in need due to a shock.
- **Benefit Adequacy and Flexibility:** Routine benefit levels (e.g. monthly stipends for poor families, disability aid, etc.<sup>35</sup>) are often low and designed for chronic poverty relief, not for meeting large shock-related needs. The system has shown it can provide **one-off emergency top-ups** (as seen in COVID-19 and earthquake responses), but this is done case-by-case. There is no built-in mechanism to adjust benefit amounts or waive conditionalities in an emergency, although such adjustments have been implemented through ad-hoc directives.
- **Key Program Shock-Responsiveness:** Some social assistance programs have features that aid shock-responsiveness – for example, the presence of an **unconditional emergency assistance scheme**<sup>36</sup> via SASFs that can give urgent cash grants, and the nationally scalable Conditional Cash Transfer for Education (which was extended to refugees). Yet, most programs lack explicit design elements for shocks (e.g. contingency enrollment quotas, trigger-based variable benefits). The **lack of predefined shock-response components** in program design means scalability relies on administrative improvisation rather than ready-to-activate design features.

**Coverage of Affected Populations:** In normal times, Türkiye’s flagship social assistance programs target the chronically poor – households identified via means-testing, often with categories like families with children, the elderly, or people with disabilities. The coverage is substantial: for instance, the Conditional Cash Transfer for Education (CCTE) reaches hundreds of thousands of low-income children; the Old-Age and Disability Allowances reach many of those demographics; and various family assistance programs collectively cover millions. This extensive coverage among the poor provides a base for shock response – many of the most vulnerable households (who are often hardest hit by shocks) are already enrolled and can be quickly assisted through existing channels. During the 2023 earthquakes, for example, a significant share of the impacted families were already beneficiaries of one or more social assistance programs (given that the Southeast region had high poverty rates pre-disaster). Those families continued receiving their regular benefits, which provided a small buffer, and they were also among the first to be reached for extra emergency aid through SASFs. However, **covariate shocks create new affected groups** that the routine system does not usually serve. Middle-income households whose livelihoods are destroyed by an earthquake, or formal sector workers who lose jobs due to a pandemic, are typically not on social assistance rolls. In Turkey, such groups had to be reached by exceptional measures – e.g., special unemployment pay for furloughed workers, and one-off cash to families irrespective of income in the disaster zone<sup>37</sup>. Because social assistance programs did not have a provision to include non-poor affected households, the government had to set up parallel schemes. This indicates a design gap: **eligibility criteria are inflexible** under shock conditions. There is no temporary category of eligibility like “disaster-affected household” in the social assistance regulations that could allow even a higher-income family to receive short-term help. The burden fell on separate channels (AFAD or donor-funded programs) to aid those people. But, if disaster loss data from AFAD could be systematically matched to the social assistance registry, newly affected households could be flagged and onboarded more quickly. Incorporating more inclusive, shock-specific eligibility provisions (for instance, geographic targeting of everyone in a disaster area, or categorical inclusion of households facing sudden income loss) would make program coverage more responsive.

<sup>35</sup> <https://www.aile.gov.tr/sygm/programlarimiz/sosyal-yardim-programlarimiz/>

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> <https://www.invest.gov.tr/en/news/news-from-turkey/pages/turkish-government-introduces-earthquake-recovery-measures.aspx#:~:text=137%2C000%20in%20hotels>

Refugees and other non-citizens remain another *excluded group* in most national programs. With nearly 4 million refugees, shocks in Türkiye often impact them as well (as seen in the earthquake, where 1.7 million Syrians lived in the affected provinces<sup>38</sup>). Currently, refugees are **not eligible for national social assistance by law**, except for some services and the refugee-specific ESSN program. Thus, from a design perspective, the national system cannot scale to include refugees in emergencies without a policy change or special arrangement. In practice, humanitarian programs filled this gap (ESSN provided extra payments to refugee families during COVID-19, and post-quake humanitarian cash targeted refugees alongside nationals through separate programs). While effective, this parallel approach underscores that **vulnerability criteria in Turkish programs are tied to citizenship status**, a rigidity that limits a truly inclusive shock response. Bridging this would require policy reform or at least contingency plans (e.g. MoFSS and humanitarian agencies agreeing that in a disaster, refugee assistance will align with citizen assistance amounts and timing).

**Benefit Levels and Duration:** The adequacy of benefits in shock situations is a concern. Regular social protection benefits in Türkiye are relatively modest – for example, the CCTE provides a stipend per child in school (around TRY90–130 per month depending on grade, in recent years), and the social assistance disability allowance is a few hundred lira monthly. These amounts help alleviate chronic poverty but are not designed to cover the **acute losses from a shock** (like the total loss of a home or income). Recognizing this, authorities have tended to issue **one-off emergency payments or top-ups** in crises: 1,000 per family in the pandemic<sup>39</sup>, 10,000 in the earthquake<sup>40</sup>. The **lack of an automatic top-up mechanism** means each time, a new decree and budget is required to grant these extra funds. Some countries build into their programs a variable benefit that can increase upon a shock trigger (for instance, an extra two months of payment automatically disbursed during a declared emergency). Turkish programs currently lack such trigger-based scalability in benefit value. Another aspect is duration of support. For shocks with prolonged impacts (e.g. households displaced for months, or long economic recessions), one-off aid may not suffice. After the quake, the government’s initial 10,000 was a one-time grant; subsequently, more support (like continued rent assistance) was provided but again through separate schemes. During COVID-19, after the three rounds of cash, there wasn’t a systematic continuation for those still unemployed – instead, different instruments (like a short-term work allowance for formal workers, and community benefit programs for informal ones) were deployed. This patchwork approach could leave gaps for those needing longer recovery time. **No social assistance program in Türkiye is currently designed to automatically extend or modify its duration in response to shocks.** Beneficiaries of regular programs keep getting their benefits (which is good), but new caseloads or enhanced benefits aren’t pre-defined beyond immediate relief.

On a positive note, program rules have been made *temporarily flexible* under pressure. Conditional cash transfers, by design, require school attendance and health check-ups. During the pandemic and after the earthquake (when schools were closed for weeks in affected areas), the government waived these conditions to ensure families still received the cash. This demonstrates a shock-responsive practice. Such flexibilities, however, were **not written into program SOPs beforehand** – they were reactive decisions. Institutionalizing these shock-responsive rules (e.g. a guideline that “upon official disaster declaration, all conditionalities in affected areas are suspended and payments continue”) would codify good practice and reduce confusion.

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<sup>38</sup> <https://www.developmentanalytics.org/social-policy-analysis#:~:text=On%20February%206%2C%202023%2C%20Türkiye.for%20different%20cash%20transfer%20options>

<sup>39</sup> <https://www.dailysabah.com/business/economy/turkey-to-support-workers-taking-unpaid-leave-provide-cash-aid-to-23m-more-families#:~:text=Around%202.Zehra%20Zümrüt%20Selçuk%20said%20Tuesday>

<sup>40</sup> <https://www.invest.gov.tr/en/news/news-from-turkey/pages/turkish-government-introduces-earthquake-recovery-measures.aspx>

**Shock-Responsive Features in Key Programs:** Some core programs could serve as vehicles for shock response if tweaked. The **SASF discretionary assistance** (funded by the Social Assistance Fund) is essentially an emergency assistance scheme that local foundations can use to help people in crisis on a case-by-case basis. In normal times, it might cover, say, a family whose house burned down or urgent medical travel needs. This mechanism could be scaled in a disaster – by injecting extra funds into it and setting simplified approval criteria, the government did use SASFs to channel a portion of quake relief (they processed applications for the 10k grants). However, without prior expansion protocols, the surge of demand can overwhelm local offices. Some SASFs in the earthquake region had to process tens of thousands of requests rapidly, highlighting the need for surge support (human resources, mobile teams) as part of design.

The **Conditional Cash Transfer for Education (CCTE)** program offers another interesting example: it has both a national component (for Turkish citizens) and a refugee component. This program’s design was adapted to include refugee children in 2017 – effectively a shock response to the refugee influx by tweaking a national program. That experience shows the potential for shock-responsiveness: the targeting criteria were adjusted (refugee status recognized as eligible), and the delivery modality was adjusted (using the Kızılay pre-paid card for refugees). It stands as a **successful model of an existing program expanded to a new population in crisis**. Learnings from CCTE could inform future shock-responsive design, such as having modular eligibility that can be turned on for different groups, and using existing payment infrastructure in new ways.

Similarly, the **Unemployment Insurance Fund and short-term work scheme**, while part of social insurance rather than assistance, were used to cushion formal workers during COVID-19<sup>41</sup>. By policy design, those instruments had trigger conditions (like if a workplace temporarily closed due to force majeure, the fund would pay a percentage of wages for up to 3 months). Those conditions were invoked for the first time nationwide during COVID-19, supporting millions of formal employees. This indicates that **where programs have built-in shock triggers (even if rarely used), they can scale effectively**. Social assistance programs lack an equivalent, but could incorporate ideas like emergency public works programs (cash-for-work) that activate after disasters to provide income and rebuild infrastructure.

In conclusion, the **design readiness of Türkiye’s social protection programs for shocks is partial** – the system has demonstrated adaptability, but mainly through **improvisation rather than upfront design**. Programs are strong in reaching their intended chronic target groups and can maintain support to them through crises, but they are not yet agile enough to capture all who need help or to immediately boost support levels without new decisions. Improving design readiness could involve: introducing **contingency clauses** in program manuals, creating “emergency benefit” add-ons that lie dormant until needed, ensuring **vertical expansion** (increasing benefit size for existing beneficiaries) and **horizontal expansion** (adding new beneficiaries) are pre-planned for key programs, and making eligibility rules more shock-sensitive (e.g. recognizing transient poverty). A key opportunity in this context is geographic targeting – a powerful mechanism for horizontal expansion during localized disasters. While emergency declarations often define affected provinces or districts, current eligibility rules do not automatically include all residents in those areas. Institutionalizing geographic triggers into program rules could enable temporary, inclusive eligibility for all households in a shock-affected area, regardless of their pre-crisis income or registration status. This approach would allow for rapid coverage expansion without the need for complex means-testing in the immediate aftermath.

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<sup>41</sup> Ateş, S. (2021)

# Module 5: Readiness of Administrative Systems and Service Delivery

## Key Findings:

- **Digital Delivery Systems:** Türkiye’s social protection administration is highly digitized and centrally coordinated, which greatly facilitates shock response. The Integrated Social Assistance Information System (ISAIS) enables instant enrollment, payment, and monitoring updates across all provinces. Payment delivery is largely electronic (through banks or the post office), allowing rapid disbursement of cash transfers even in challenging circumstances.
- **Human Resources and Local Presence:** The nationwide network of Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundations provides local outreach and case management capacity in every district. During shocks, this local presence is invaluable for needs assessment and last-mile delivery. However, **capacity can be overstretched** when caseloads spike, and staff may themselves be disaster-affected (as seen in the earthquake zone). Surge staffing and operational continuity plans are areas for improvement.
- **Interoperability and Data Sharing:** Administrative systems in social protection are well-integrated internally and have some links to other systems (e.g. civil registry, health, education). Notably, ISAIS is interoperable with 16 databases for verification<sup>42</sup>. Yet, connectivity with **disaster management systems and humanitarian platforms is limited**. Establishing protocols for interoperability (for example, sharing beneficiary data with relief agencies under agreed safeguards) would enhance responsiveness.
- **Grievance and Accountability Mechanisms:** The social assistance system has existing grievance redress channels (phone hotlines, e-government portals, and SASF offices handling complaints). In crises, these channels faced overwhelming demand, and accessibility was hampered (power outages, displaced people, etc.). Strengthening feedback mechanisms – including contingency communication plans and outreach to ensure affected people can voice needs – is needed to maintain trust and transparency during shock responses.

**Digital Infrastructure and MIS:** Türkiye’s administrative systems for social protection are among the most advanced globally, and this proved to be a major asset in recent shock responses. The **Integrated Social Assistance Information System (ISAIS)** is the backbone: it is a centralized MIS that manages all core processes – applications, registration, eligibility scoring, approval, payment orders, case management, and monitoring – for all major social assistance programs<sup>43</sup>. Because it’s centralized and online, officials at any SASF or ministry office can access up-to-date information. When COVID-19 forced in-person offices to close, the system’s digital capabilities allowed the government to launch an online application for emergency cash through the national e-government portal. Applicants filled a form that fed directly into ISAIS; the system automatically checked each application against multiple databases (income, assets, etc.) to identify those not already receiving assistance<sup>44</sup>. This automation enabled quick processing of millions of applications – a task that would have been impossible with paper-based systems. Furthermore, ISAIS is connected with payment systems: it generates payment lists that are sent to banks (primarily state bank Ziraat and the Post Office (PTTBank)), with payments then loaded to individuals’ bank accounts or PTT cards<sup>45</sup>. This level of integration – *from beneficiary data to payment* – meant that once emergency aid was approved, funds could **reach people within days electronically**, even if movement was restricted.

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<sup>42</sup> [https://www.opml.co.uk/sites/default/files/migrated\\_bolt\\_files/poster-turkey.pdf](https://www.opml.co.uk/sites/default/files/migrated_bolt_files/poster-turkey.pdf)

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> World Bank, 2022

<sup>45</sup> [https://www.opml.co.uk/sites/default/files/migrated\\_bolt\\_files/poster-turkey.pdf#:~:text=%EF%83%A0%20ISASS%20is%20also%20linked,for%20a%20case%20referral%20system](https://www.opml.co.uk/sites/default/files/migrated_bolt_files/poster-turkey.pdf#:~:text=%EF%83%A0%20ISASS%20is%20also%20linked,for%20a%20case%20referral%20system)

During the 2023 earthquakes, the digital system again played a key role. Though some local SASF offices were damaged, neighboring provinces' staff could access ISAIS to assist in registration of affected households. The government set up an online portal specifically for earthquake victims to apply for assistance, leveraging the existing e-government infrastructure rather than needing a new platform. One challenge encountered was **connectivity**: power outages and internet disruptions in the disaster zone initially hindered digital processes. The government responded by deploying mobile service centers and using generators to get systems back online, as well as allowing applications to be taken on paper and later digitized. This highlights that while the digital MIS is powerful, **business continuity plans** are needed to operate in low-connectivity environments (e.g. offline data collection tools that sync later). In general, however, Türkiye's e-government prowess (with over 67 million citizens having e-government accounts<sup>46</sup>) provides a strong foundation for SRSP delivery. It allows for remote application and enrollment – critical when physical access is limited – and can interface with national ID verification to reduce fraud.

**Local Delivery Capacity:** The human element of delivery is the network of Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundations (SASFs) – one in every district (over 1,000 in total). These foundations are semi-public entities chaired by the local district governor and staffed with social assistance officers, case workers, and volunteers. They are the frontline for identifying needs, collecting applications, conducting household assessments (through home visits in normal times), and responding to inquiries. In a disaster scenario, SASFs essentially become **local emergency relief bureaus for social support**. For instance, after the earthquakes, SASFs in less-affected districts of the region took on displaced families from harder-hit areas, enrolling them for emergency aid and coordinating with central authorities. The strengths here are evident: there is an **existing institutional presence in every community**, so the government does not have to create a new outreach mechanism in a crisis – it can task the SASFs to pivot to emergency mode. However, the capacity of these offices is geared toward routine caseloads. When volumes increase dramatically (tens of thousands of new applicants in a short time), bottlenecks occur. Staff might be insufficient, and in the quake some SASF buildings and staff were themselves victims – tragically, this reduced capacity right when it was most needed. The government did dispatch additional personnel from other regions to assist (an important practice to institutionalize: a **surge staffing roster** for emergencies).

Moreover, the quality of services (like case management or follow-up) can suffer under crisis strain. People reported some confusion in the earthquake's aftermath about where to register (AFAD centers vs. SASF offices) and delays in processing due to sheer workload. To address this administratively, clearer standard operating procedures for SASFs in emergencies could be developed – e.g., simplified registration (no full means-test, just basic info collection), one-stop helpdesks combining multiple aid inquiries, etc. It's also worth noting that SASFs collaborate with other local actors: during the refugee response, SASFs worked alongside NGOs in some provinces to refer vulnerable refugees to ESSN or other aid. In disasters, partnerships with local NGOs and community leaders can extend reach, but these need pre-existing relationships and protocols.

**Interoperability and Information Sharing:** As noted, ISAIS is already interoperable with many government systems (civil registry for demographics, social security for income data, etc.). One significant interoperability achievement is that **all individuals in ISAIS are linked via the national ID number (TC Kimlik No)** – this unique ID enables matching records across databases quickly. So when a person applies, the system can pull their family information, employment status, property records, etc., almost instantaneously. This greatly reduces inclusion errors (ineligible people) and speeds up targeting, which is extremely valuable in emergencies when time is of the essence. Another aspect is the ability to

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<sup>46</sup> <https://www.dailysabah.com/turkiye/turkiyes-e-government-gateway-sees-strong-user-approval-in-2024-survey/news>

avoid duplication: if multiple agencies are providing aid, a shared ID system helps ensure the same household isn't inadvertently paid twice or missed entirely. Türkiye's use of the national ID across government services is a strong enabler for such coordination.

However, outside the government sphere, **data sharing is more limited**. For example, in the refugee ESSN program, there was an initial challenge of ensuring a refugee household wasn't receiving both ESSN and a similar national benefit – eventually solved by assigning foreigners an ID number (99... series) and the Red Crescent coordinating with MoFSS to cross-check lists. In the future, if humanitarian agencies like the UN or NGOs roll out emergency cash in a disaster, having a mechanism where they can cross-check with the ISAIS database (without violating privacy) would be ideal. The Privacy Law currently restricts open sharing, but one solution could be a controlled “interoperability hub” managed by MoFSS where external providers submit ID numbers to check if those individuals are already receiving assistance (yes/no response). Some groundwork is in place: as the OPM case study noted, ISAIS was **testing data sharing with the Turkish Red Crescent via the e-government portal**<sup>47</sup>. Expanding on this to formalize humanitarian-government data exchange in emergencies would reduce gaps and overlaps in assistance.

**Payments and Delivery Mechanisms:** The method of delivering cash or in-kind support is crucial during crises. Türkiye's social assistance payments are mainly cash transfers delivered through bank accounts or the postal system. Beneficiaries typically withdraw funds at ATMs or PTT offices using their ID. In normal times this system works efficiently and transparently, and it was largely resilient during shocks. Even under curfews in COVID-19, electronic payments meant money reached people; those who couldn't go out (like elderly) were serviced by local authorities or PTT home delivery. In the earthquake, many bank branches and ATMs were destroyed or without power. The response involved quickly mobilizing **mobile banking units and PTT trucks** to pay out cash in tent camps and temporary shelters<sup>48</sup>. Security and liquidity had to be managed (moving lots of cash into the region). Thanks to existing agreements, PTT, which has a mandate as a payment agent, coordinated closely with AFAD and MoFSS to distribute the 10k grants. This underscores the benefit of having a **flexible payment network** – PTT offices are present even in smaller towns and can operate in disaster conditions more readily than commercial banks. Additionally, the government leveraged digital finance: some people were able to receive funds into their bank accounts and use debit cards in other cities if they evacuated, rather than needing physical cash pickup in the affected zone.

**Accountability and Feedback:** Transparency and accountability mechanisms are part of the administrative readiness. Türkiye has a social assistance hotline (the 144 line) and an integrated social assistance database that logs complaints and resolutions. During crises, these mechanisms see surges. For instance, calls to the hotline spiked during the pandemic with people inquiring about the status of their TRY1,000 support application. The Ministry set up additional call center capacity, but at peak times many callers still faced long waits. Similarly, after the earthquake, affected citizens who applied for aid or who hadn't received it tried to get updates or appeal for more help. Ensuring these **grievance redress systems scale up** is important. Potential improvements include deploying emergency toll-free lines specific to the disaster, or partnering with local governments and NGOs to set up help desks in shelters that feed information back to the central system. Equally important is the proactive dimension of communication. In crisis situations, misinformation can spread rapidly, and people may not know what support is available, how to apply, or where to get help. Beyond receiving complaints, social protection authorities should have mechanisms for timely outreach and information dissemination – for example, using SMS alerts, social media, and radio to inform people of new aid schemes, changes in procedures, or

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> <https://e-export.ukrposhta.ua/en/the-designated-postal-operator-of-turkiye-turkish-ptt-corporation-has-shared-an-update-about-the-postal-services-after-the-february-2023-earthquake/>

clarification on eligibility. Two-way communication, both listening and informing, builds trust reduces confusion, and enables more equitable access to support during emergencies. Importantly, grievance mechanisms provide a check against exclusion errors – for example, a family that didn’t get the intended aid can lodge a complaint and be investigated. Maintaining this function in the chaos of a disaster can be challenging, but it’s key for equity.

Another aspect of accountability is **monitoring and evaluation**. In routine operations, MoFSS monitors program performance and financial flows through ISAIS with real-time dashboards. In shocks, additional monitoring is needed (e.g., tracking the distribution of emergency funds, mapping which communities have/haven’t been reached). The administrative system was able to report numbers – such as how many families got the 10k – relatively quickly, which is a positive sign of information management. More granular monitoring (like by neighborhood, or by vulnerability category) could help identify any pockets of unmet need. Integrating simple disaster impact indicators into the MIS (for example, a flag on beneficiary records indicating “house damaged” or “displaced”) could allow more tailored follow-up support later.

In summary, **administrative readiness is one of Türkiye’s strong suits** in SRSP. The investments in digital systems, unified registries, and broad financial inclusion (most adults have bank or PTT accounts) pay dividends when scaling up or out in an emergency<sup>49</sup>. The key enhancements moving forward are about resilience and interoperability: ensuring the system itself remains operational under extreme conditions, and ensuring it can interconnect with partners and adapt to sudden policy tweaks. Additionally, human resource preparedness – having trained staff and backups to implement the technical tools – is vital. The earthquake showed that even the best system needs people to run it, and those people need support (both material and emotional) when they are also affected by the crisis. Strengthening administrative preparedness plans, including **backup sites, surge teams, simplified procedures, and collaborative networks**, will solidify Türkiye’s capacity to deliver an effective social protection response no matter what shock arises.

## Module 6: Readiness of UNICEF Country Office and Partners

### Key Findings:

- **Strategic Positioning:** UNICEF Türkiye has established itself as a key player in social protection, especially in child-sensitive programming and emergency cash assistance for vulnerable families. Prior to recent shocks, UNICEF’s focus was primarily on refugee support (e.g. the CCTE program) and social service systems strengthening. The 2023 earthquake response tested UNICEF’s internal preparedness, prompting a rapid shift to humanitarian cash programming. This highlighted the need for **pre-existing contingency plans and agreements** with the government for shock responses targeting children.
- **Technical and Operational Capacity:** The country office has strong technical expertise in social policy and an operational presence in the field (through implementing partners). During the earthquake, UNICEF leveraged these to design a cash transfer program for affected children within weeks<sup>50</sup>. However, implementation was limited by funding and coordination hurdles. The experience revealed that while UNICEF staff are capable and knowledgeable, **internal**

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<sup>49</sup> World Bank, 2025.

<sup>50</sup> UNICEF Türkiye, Humanitarian Situation Report No. 6, 2023

**procedures (e.g. for large-scale cash ops) and surge staffing** were areas to bolster for future crises.

- **Coordination and Advocacy:** UNICEF has been effective in convening and advising partners on SRSP (e.g. participating in the Cash Working Group). In sudden emergencies, UNICEF’s advocacy for linking humanitarian cash with the national system proved influential, but internal readiness to lead by example (through its own program rollout) could improve. Ensuring the Country Office has **pre-arranged partnerships (with government, Red Crescent, financial service providers)** and flexible funding for immediate response will increase its readiness to support or complement the national social protection system in shocks.

**UNICEF’s Role in Social Protection:** In Türkiye, UNICEF traditionally worked on areas such as child protection, education, and migration – with social protection as a growing portfolio in recent years. One flagship initiative has been the **Conditional Cash Transfer for Education (CCTE) for Refugees**, launched in 2017 in partnership with the Ministry of Family and Social Services and the Turkish Red Crescent. Through this program, UNICEF helped extend a national social assistance scheme to cover refugee children, reaching over 700,000 children at its peak. This gave UNICEF invaluable operational experience with cash transfers, large-scale data management, and coordination with government systems. It also established trust: UNICEF is seen by the MoFSS as a reliable partner that respects government systems and priorities. Leading up to 2023, UNICEF’s social policy team also engaged in evidence generation (such as social protection system assessments – including this SRSP assessment – and studies on child poverty) and advocacy for inclusive policies. However, **the Country Office did not have a dedicated, standing shock-response cash program** for Turkish citizens. Its humanitarian responses were relatively limited (Turkey being an upper-middle-income country with strong government capacity, UNICEF often played a supportive role in localized emergencies).

**Emergency Preparedness Planning:** Globally, UNICEF’s guidance on shock-responsive social protection calls for country offices to undertake preparedness actions, like developing contingency program designs and mapping potential beneficiary groups<sup>51</sup>. In Türkiye, prior to the February 2023 earthquake, some preparedness steps were in place but mostly scenario-specific. For example, for refugee influx or potential new displacement from conflicts, UNICEF had plans on how to scale up support. But for a large natural disaster affecting mostly Turkish citizens, **contingency plans were not fully developed**. There was no ready-to-launch cash assistance project in the drawer for an earthquake scenario, nor pre-signed agreements with government to activate one. This meant that when the earthquakes struck, the Country Office had to design and negotiate a new program on the fly. Impressively, within the first month UNICEF and MoFSS co-designed a **child-focused emergency cash transfer program aiming to reach 300,000 affected households with children**<sup>52</sup>. This design leveraged the social assistance infrastructure and included a “cash plus” element of linking recipients to child protection services. To identify the most vulnerable households, UNICEF made use of a special government dataset matching families with children who were already below poverty line and those whose assets were damaged by the earthquake.

**Operational Capacities and Partnerships:** One of UNICEF’s strengths is its field presence and partnerships. In the earthquake zone, UNICEF had long-standing relationships with provincial social services, local NGOs, and community networks through its child protection and education programs. This facilitated rapid assessments of needs and allowed UNICEF to integrate into the on-ground coordination led by AFAD and the UN. The Country Office quickly deployed additional staff and mobilized surge support (both internally and via standby partners) focusing on logistics, cash programming, and monitoring. Still, **operational readiness for cash distribution** can be enhanced. For example, identifying

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<sup>51</sup> UNICEF, 2020.

<sup>52</sup> UNICEF Türkiye, 2023

and vetting financial service providers ahead of time would save precious days. In 2023, because the plan was to use government channels, UNICEF did not need its own payment contractor; but if a scenario arose where government systems are overwhelmed or not reachable, UNICEF might opt to deliver cash through banks or mobile money on its own. Having those contracts pre-arranged (or at least scoped) is part of preparedness. Likewise, training more staff in the practicalities of humanitarian cash assistance is advisable – UNICEF Turkey had a few HCT-experienced staff from the CTE project, but scaling to a humanitarian cash program required additional orientation for many.

Coordination-wise, UNICEF effectively played a convening role post-quake: actively participating in the cash coordination group under the UN response and advocating that humanitarian cash align with or complement the government’s efforts. This was important to ensure coherence and avoid parallel systems. The government welcomed UNICEF’s technical advice on targeting and child-sensitive approaches. **Advocacy and policy dialogue are clear strengths of the Country Office** – for instance, pushing for the inclusion of women and children in emergency assistance criteria, and highlighting the need for psychosocial support alongside cash. These contributions influenced program design by both government and other agencies. However, one gap observed is that UNICEF’s own visibility as a responder could be higher if it had had a flagship intervention rolling out faster. Donors and government look to UNICEF for leadership on children’s needs in crises; delivering tangible assistance early on solidifies that leadership.

The **internal procedures** of UNICEF, like any large organization, can sometimes slow rapid response (e.g. requirements for assessments, targeting frameworks, monitoring plans). The Country Office navigated this by using simplified protocols under Level 2 emergency activation, but identified areas to streamline further. One lesson was to maintain an up-to-date “**response options analysis**” as part of preparedness – essentially pre-analysed choices of how UNICEF could respond under different scenarios (cash, in-kind, through government, through partners, etc.), so that when needed, the leadership can quickly decide and activate one.

**Moving Forward – Strengthening Readiness:** To improve UNICEF’s readiness to support shock-responsive social protection in Türkiye, several steps are being taken or proposed. First, UNICEF is working on a formal **MoU with the AFAD** that would allow channelling of emergency cash through national systems in future crises. This kind of agreement would clarify roles, data sharing, and accountability for any funds UNICEF provides to government for shocks, ensuring quicker activation. Second, the Country Office is expanding its **contingency fundraising** – engaging donors now (in peace time) to secure commitments or flexible funds that can be repurposed immediately if a disaster strikes. Third, on the programmatic side, UNICEF is helping the government develop its SRSP strategy (as noted in Module 3), which in turn reinforces the case for Government-UNICEF collaboration when an emergency comes. Internally, capacity building is underway: more staff are being trained on humanitarian cash transfers, emergency preparedness procedures are maintained and regularly updated, and a roster of surge personnel is being established.

UNICEF’s global commitments, such as the Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action, include providing cash assistance where feasible. The Türkiye office is contextualizing these to the national system – meaning in practice, **UNICEF will seek to use and strengthen Turkey’s own social protection channels** rather than create parallel ones. This aligns with global best practice and the localization agenda, and in Türkiye’s case, it’s very feasible due to the maturity of government systems. The readiness of the UNICEF Country Office, therefore, is increasingly about being a catalyst and technical support for the government’s shock response, while also filling critical gaps for children that might be outside the government’s immediate reach (for example, support to refugee or unregistered children, or specific child protection services).

In conclusion, UNICEF Türkiye’s current readiness to support shock-responsive social protection is **moderate but improving rapidly**. The lessons from the pandemic and especially the 2023 earthquake have been a wake-up call to formalize and invest in preparedness. By anchoring its emergency response plans within the national social protection framework, UNICEF can ensure that when the next shock occurs, it is not only responding with speed and efficiency, but also reinforcing the national system’s capacity to protect all children. This dual role – as an immediate responder and a long-term system-strengthenener – is at the heart of UNICEF’s value add, and with enhanced readiness, the Country Office will be well positioned to fulfill it in future emergencies.

#### **Box 1: The Care Economy and Social Protection**

UNICEF Turkey and partners emphasize building an **inclusive, accessible care ecosystem** that spans early childhood through old age. Türkiye’s leaders note that a “growing elderly population, significant care demands for children, and persistent gender inequalities in care work call for immediate and innovative action”. As Deputy Minister of Family and Social Services Sevim Sayim Madak explains, with a “family-centered, rights-based, and inclusive approach, we are building a more accessible, sustainable, and robust care ecosystem for everyone – from children to older persons ... from individuals with disabilities to women.”. In practice, this means linking social protection with early childhood and social care services: for example, UNICEF’s Social Policy team is collaborating with Early Childhood Development/Education teams to integrate child care support and family services into SP programmes.

Social protection – especially cash benefits and community care services – is key to **continuity of care after shocks**. When disasters strike, schooling, nutrition and even basic care routines are often disrupted. As one analysis notes, a disaster “can disrupt schooling, nutrition, and care, potentially altering a child’s life trajectory”. Shock-responsive SP (e.g. emergency cash grants, school-fee waivers, subsidized childcare or home visits) helps families maintain caregiving and safeguard children’s well-being. Notably, **demand for care spikes after shocks**: parents may lose childcare when schools close, elders may lose informal support, and psychosocial needs grow. UNICEF’s **Public Finance for Children (PF4C)** approach calls for public budgets to explicitly fund care services (childcare centers, home-based support, etc.) as part of SP system strengthening. Embedding PF4C in SRSP planning – for instance, earmarking emergency cash for households with young children or seniors – ensures care continuity in crises as well as in normal times.

## Key Findings and Gap Analysis

Türkiye faces recurrent large-scale shocks – notably major earthquakes, mass displacement from regional conflicts, and an increasing frequency of climate-related events like floods and wildfires<sup>53</sup>. The assessment of Türkiye’s shock-responsive social protection (SRSP) system reveals several strengths and systemic gaps:

- **Legal and Policy Frameworks:** The current legal framework does not explicitly mandate or facilitate the rapid expansion of social assistance during emergencies. There is no dedicated provision in social protection or disaster laws for automatically scaling up benefits or coverage when a disaster is declared. This lack of an *enabling legal framework* can slow down emergency support, as ad-hoc decrees or political decisions become necessary for each crisis. Global best practice indicates that clear legal mandates are crucial – a country’s legislation and strategic plans determine which risks and populations are covered and thus shape the system’s capacity to respond to shocks. In Türkiye, the intent to use social protection in emergencies is present in strategy documents, but formal protocols (e.g. allowing emergency top-ups or temporary eligibility waivers) remain under-developed.
- **Institutional Coordination:** There are gaps in coordination between the Ministry of Family and Social Services (MoFSS), which manages social assistance, and the Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD), which coordinates disaster response. Roles and responsibilities for delivering shock-responsive social protection are not clearly delineated across agencies. In practice, collaboration has been largely reactive. For example, after the February 2023 earthquakes, MoFSS led the social assistance response and worked with AFAD to deliver emergency cash aid, but this was done under crisis pressure rather than a pre-established mechanism<sup>54</sup>. There is currently no permanent inter-agency task force or protocol ensuring that MoFSS’s social assistance network is systematically integrated into disaster preparedness and response planning. Global experience shows that without formal coordination arrangements (backed by policy or law), effective SRSP implementation is hindered when separate agencies each operate in silos.
- **Targeting and Data Systems:** Türkiye has a strong social assistance infrastructure, including an Integrated Social Assistance Information System (ISAIS) that manages applications, payments, and a database of around 11 million households (over 42 million individuals) with socio-economic information. This provides a valuable backbone for identifying vulnerable populations. However, leveraging these data for shock response is still a challenge. Targeting mechanisms for routine social assistance (which rely on poverty and demographic criteria) may not quickly capture people *made vulnerable by a sudden shock* (e.g. families whose homes were destroyed by an earthquake or livelihoods lost overnight). There is a gap in linking disaster impact data with the social registry. Although Turkey’s national systems are ostensibly built with flexibility to adapt to shocks, in practice there is room to improve real-time data sharing between MoFSS and AFAD. For instance, after a disaster, there is no automated process to cross-check affected households against the social assistance beneficiary list or to rapidly enroll newly affected families who were not previously in the system. This can lead to *exclusion errors* (people in need not reached) or delays in delivering aid.
- **Financing for Shock Response:** Financing mechanisms for scaling up social protection during shocks are ad hoc. In the event of disasters, the government has relied on emergency budget

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<sup>53</sup> <https://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/293891520536187983/SSLF18-Nuts-and-Bolts-1-Turkey.pdf#:~:text=What%20kind%20of%20shocks%20does,Economic%20Shocks%3A%20In%20the%20past>

<sup>54</sup> <https://www.invest.gov.tr/en/news/news-from-turkey/pages/turkish-government-introduces-earthquake-recovery-measures.aspx#:~:text=To%20date%2C%20more%20than%20one,5%2C000>

allocations and solidarity funds, rather than a pre-arranged contingency financing strategy for social protection. For example, following the 2023 Kahramanmaraş earthquakes, the government provided a one-off payment of TRY 10,000 (approx. \$532) to each affected household, reaching over one million families, and additionally provided relocation grants of TRY 15,000 and monthly rental support of TRY 3,000–5,000 for those who lost their homes<sup>55</sup>. These measures – while massive in scale and crucial for immediate relief – were funded through extraordinary budget measures. Türkiye does maintain a Disaster Reserve Fund under the Ministry of Finance (in addition to AFAD’s own budget) which can be used for post-disaster recovery<sup>56</sup>. However, this fund is not specifically earmarked for social assistance scale-ups, and its use is dependent on high-level approvals. There is no dedicated financing instrument (such as a standing contingency fund or insurance trigger) that automatically channels resources into social protection programs when a shock hits. This gap in *predictable, sustainable financing* risks delays or shortfalls in assisting affected populations, especially for prolonged or recurrent crises.

- **Child Sensitivity:** Current social protection responses in Türkiye do not systematically account for the unique needs of children during shocks. Regular social assistance programs have some child-focused elements (for instance, a conditional education grant for poor families, and humanitarian programs like the CCTE for refugee children), but emergency assistance is generally one-size-fits-all. In past shocks, cash relief has been delivered per household without adjustments for household size or child-specific vulnerabilities. There is limited coordination between cash assistance and services that protect children (such as psychosocial support or education continuity). This is a concern because crises can have *devastating long-term impacts on children* if their needs are not met – for example, a disaster can disrupt schooling, nutrition, and care, potentially altering a child’s life trajectory<sup>57</sup>. International best practice calls for “child-sensitive” social protection in emergencies, ensuring that transfer amounts, targeting, and complementary services are designed to safeguard children’s well-being. In Türkiye’s SRSP landscape, this approach is still nascent; social protection programs do not yet include, for instance, emergency child grants or built-in waivers for school attendance requirements during disasters. As a result, children in affected families may be inadvertently overlooked in the rush of general aid distribution.
- **Inclusion of Vulnerable Groups:** There are challenges ensuring all vulnerable groups are covered by shock-responsive social protection. Notably, refugees and those under temporary protection – a significant population in Türkiye (around 4 million Syrians, among others) – have largely been supported by parallel humanitarian mechanisms rather than the national social protection system. When the Syrian refugee crisis escalated, Türkiye lacked an existing safety net scheme to cover non-citizens, prompting the creation of the donor-funded Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN) in 2016<sup>58</sup>. The ESSN, implemented through the Turkish Red Crescent with EU funding, has been *aligned* with government systems (using the same application offices, national ID numbers, and payment infrastructure as MoFSS programs)<sup>59</sup>. This alignment demonstrates the potential for inclusion – the program mirrored Türkiye’s social protection system and reached over 1.5 million refugees efficiently by leveraging existing institutions<sup>60</sup>. However, refugees remain mostly outside the permanent national schemes and rely on external financing. Similarly, other groups such as informal workers, migrants without registration, or people with disabilities sometimes fall through the cracks. During COVID-19, for instance, some

<sup>55</sup> <https://www.invest.gov.tr/en/news/news-from-turkey/pages/turkish-government-introduces-earthquake-recovery-measures.aspx>

<sup>56</sup> [https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2022/12/building-financial-resilience-to-climate-impacts\\_31c6ce93/9e2e1412-en.pdf#:~:text=The%20Disaster%20and%20Emergency%20Management,States%20Capital%20Fund%20Extraordinary%20events](https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2022/12/building-financial-resilience-to-climate-impacts_31c6ce93/9e2e1412-en.pdf#:~:text=The%20Disaster%20and%20Emergency%20Management,States%20Capital%20Fund%20Extraordinary%20events)

<sup>57</sup> UNICEF Programme Guidance: Strengthening Shock Responsive Social Protection Systems, 2019

<sup>58</sup> European Commission, Shock-Responsive Social Safety Nets, 2025

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

informal urban workers received emergency support, but those not registered in any database were harder to reach. In disaster responses, assistance has primarily targeted those with documented losses (e.g. homeowners, registered residents), which may exclude the most marginalized (like informal renters, seasonal workers, or undocumented persons). In sum, **inclusion gaps** persist – both in terms of population coverage (who is eligible) and effective access (ensuring outreach and accommodations for those with disabilities or mobility issues during relief). Addressing these gaps is essential for an equitable SRSP system.

## Recommendations for Strengthening Türkiye’s SRSP System

To build a more shock-responsive, child-sensitive social protection system in Türkiye, a combination of **short-term** quick wins and **medium-term** systemic reforms is recommended. These actions prioritize improved inter-agency coordination (especially between MoFSS and AFAD), legal and policy updates for emergency response, integrated data systems, sustainable financing, and inclusive, child-focused program design. The recommendations are organized by timeframe:

### Short-Term Priorities (1–2 years)

1. **Formalize MoFSS–AFAD Coordination:** Establish a dedicated coordination mechanism for shock response involving MoFSS, AFAD, and other key actors (e.g. Ministry of Interior, Turkish Red Crescent, Ministry of Finance). This could be a working group or task force that meets regularly to plan and prepare for emergencies. Develop **Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)** or a memorandum of understanding clarifying each institution’s roles in disaster response – for example, agreeing that MoFSS will use its social assistance delivery network to channel cash assistance, while AFAD provides overall incident coordination and beneficiary lists from disaster assessments. Having a standing coordination platform will ensure smoother inter-agency communication when a crisis strikes, rather than improvised collaboration. It also builds trust and information-sharing practices in advance. *International best practice emphasizes that such institutional arrangements should be in place before disasters; where separate agencies have distinct mandates, formal agreements are needed to enable joint action*<sup>61</sup>. In the next year, UNICEF and partners can support the government in drafting these SOPs and facilitating inter-agency workshops to cement roles and relationships.
2. **Develop Child-Sensitive Emergency Protocols:** Integrate **child-focused measures** into shock response plans. In the immediate term, this means ensuring that any emergency cash transfer program considers household composition (with adequate support for families with children) and links to services for children. For instance, MoFSS can prepare guidelines that in a disaster, households with children receive an additional top-up or that age-specific needs (like baby food, school materials) are accounted for through complementary in-kind support. Existing social protection benefits that target children – such as the Conditional Cash Transfer for Education (CCTE) – should have *flexibility during crises* (e.g. temporarily waiving school attendance conditions or providing a one-time bonus to help families keep children in school after a shock). Coordination with the Ministry of Education and child protection services is vital: if an earthquake disrupts schooling, the social protection response could include transportation

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<sup>61</sup> HelpAge International, Designing Adaptive and Shock-Responsive Social Protection, 2024

stipends or digital learning grants for children. These protocols can be developed and tested within 1–2 years. Applying a child-sensitive lens will help ensure that when the next shock occurs, children’s well-being (education, nutrition, psychosocial health) is protected alongside basic household needs<sup>62</sup>.

3. **Legal Preparedness for Scalability:** Initiate reforms in the legal and regulatory framework to enable emergency expansions of social protection. In the short term, the focus can be on **regulatory changes and contingency plans**. For example, MoFSS can draft an emergency by-law or amendments to the Social Assistance Law that authorize it to rapidly *expand coverage or increase transfer amounts* in response to officially declared disasters, without needing separate legislative approval each time. This could include setting criteria for triggering such expansions (e.g. disaster declaration by AFAD or a certain magnitude of event) and defining the duration and financing sources for emergency assistance. Likewise, review disaster management regulations to formally incorporate social protection as a first-line response modality for relief (cash assistance as a complement to in-kind aid). These legal tweaks will institutionalize the practices that were used in an ad-hoc way in 2023. Embedding them in law ensures predictability and faster response. Evidence from other countries shows that when social protection programs have broad coverage and clear legal mandates, they can be scaled up more easily to reach disaster-affected groups<sup>63</sup>. Türkiye can draw on international examples (for instance, the Philippines’ Disaster Response law that allows use of a contingency fund for cash transfers) to craft its own provisions. Within 1–2 years, a basic legal authorization for emergency cash transfer scale-up should be in place, providing the MoFSS the *agility* it currently lacks.
4. **Enhance and Link Data Systems:** Leverage Türkiye’s robust social registry and information systems for shock response by implementing data integration and interoperability measures. In the short term, priority steps include:
  - **Interoperability between ISAIS and AFAD data:** Establish a secure data-sharing agreement so that disaster impact data (e.g. lists of households assessed by AFAD as affected, or geospatial data on affected areas) can be quickly cross-referenced with the ISAIS social assistance database. This would enable, for example, generating a list of all poor or vulnerable households in a quake-affected district from ISAIS, to be prioritized for assistance. Conversely, if AFAD collects information on victims, that data should feed into social protection databases for follow-up support. Technical teams can create an API or interface to allow controlled exchange of information while respecting privacy. This effort should also extend beyond **post-disaster impact matching** to support **risk-informed planning** during the prevention and preparedness phases. For instance, **AFAD’s hazard risk maps** – which highlight areas of high seismic, flood, or wildfire exposure – can be overlaid with social protection registry data to create **socially informed risk profiles**. These risk overlays can help identify where socially vulnerable populations are concentrated in hazard-prone areas, improving geographic targeting of preparedness investments and estimating potential contingency financing needs.
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  - **Shock-response module in ISAIS:** MoFSS should update the Integrated Social Assistance Information System (ISAIS) to include a “disaster response module.” This module can allow rapid registration of *new* beneficiaries during emergencies (even if they were not previously receiving social assistance) and flag existing beneficiaries who are in affected zones. Simplified enrollment forms and remote data entry via mobile devices can be introduced for use by field workers in disaster areas. Turkey’s ISAIS already manages applications and payments electronically nationwide<sup>64</sup>, so building an extension for

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<sup>62</sup> UNICEF, Programme Guidance: Strengthening SRSP Systems, 2019

<sup>63</sup> HelpAge International, 2024

<sup>64</sup> <https://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/293891520536187983/SSLF18-Nuts-and-Bolts-1-Turkey.pdf>

emergency use is feasible. In the next two years, a pilot could be done where, say, provincial social assistance offices in a flood-prone area test an emergency enrollment workflow in ISAIS.

- **Unified Social Registry Expansion:** Continue expanding the coverage of the social registry to include more at-risk households *before* crises happen. Outreach drives in disaster-prone regions (earthquake fault zones, floodplains) can register households' socio-economic details in ISAIS even if they are not current beneficiaries. This “pre-registration” improves readiness to assist them later. By integrating these efforts, Turkey can maximize the use of data for targeting shock aid, reducing exclusion errors and speeding up response.
5. **Establish a Contingency Financing Mechanism:** Create dedicated financial arrangements for shock-responsive social protection to ensure funds are available quickly when needed. In the short term, the government can set up a **ring-fenced contingency fund or budget line** for emergency social assistance. For example, a portion of the existing Disaster Reserve Fund or the annual social assistance budget could be earmarked as an “Emergency Social Protection Reserve.” This reserve should be easily accessible by MoFSS upon a disaster declaration, allowing immediate disbursement of cash benefits (to be replenished later by supplemental budgets or donor contributions). In parallel, engage with international financial institutions to arrange contingent financing instruments. Options include a World Bank *Catastrophe Deferred Drawdown Option (CAT-DDO)* or similar credit line that the government can draw on post-disaster, specifically to finance social protection responses. Another avenue is to explore sovereign parametric insurance for extreme events, where payouts could finance cash transfers. While these instruments may take time to negotiate, initial discussions and planning can occur in the next 1–2 years. The goal is to move from unpredictable, one-off funding towards **pre-planned financing** for SRSP. This approach has precedent: countries like the Philippines have annual disaster response funds and quick-disbursing reserve accounts<sup>65</sup> that can fund relief programs. By adopting a similar model, Türkiye would be able to sustain assistance (beyond the first one-off payments) and support longer-term recovery needs without always awaiting emergency reallocations.

To ensure predictability and scale, these financing mechanisms must be anchored in multi-year fiscal planning, with dedicated SRSP budget lines reflected in national spending frameworks. Embedding SRSP financing into a medium-term expenditure strategy, backed by parliamentary oversight, can institutionalize sustainability and insulate preparedness investments from short-term political or fiscal volatility.

6. **Pilot and Scale Early Actions:** Pilot innovative shock-responsive interventions on a small scale to build evidence and refine approaches. For example, Türkiye could run a **simulation exercise** or a controlled pilot of an anticipatory cash transfer for an impending shock (such as providing cash to vulnerable farmers before an expected drought, or to flood-prone communities at the start of the flood season based on early warnings). This should include not only the cash transfer but also evaluation of delivery systems and bottlenecks. In the short term, conducting a *simulation drill* for an earthquake scenario involving MoFSS and AFAD can help test the coordination, data systems, and delivery mechanisms under realistic conditions. Such exercises will highlight operational bottlenecks and train staff in their roles, thereby improving readiness. International partners (UNICEF, WFP, etc.) can support these simulations technically and financially. To maximize long-term impact, simulation exercises should be linked to sustained capacity-building efforts across both social protection and disaster risk management sectors. This includes joint trainings, cross-sector learning labs, and the development of SRSP modules within existing staff

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<sup>65</sup> OECD, Building Financial Resilience to Climate Impacts, 2022

training curricula (for example, for SASF officers, AFAD responders, and municipal administrators). **Learning-by-doing** through pilots will build the confidence and capacity of institutions, paving the way for scaling up successful measures.

## Medium-Term Actions (3–5 years)

1. **Institutionalize SRSP in National Policy and Law:** By the 3–5 year mark, Türkiye should have fully institutionalized shock-responsive social protection in its policy framework. This means integrating SRSP into the next national development plans, social protection strategy, and disaster management plans. A dedicated *policy document or strategy* on Adaptive Social Protection could be developed, outlining the vision, objectives, and coordination structure for SRSP. On the legal side, pursue more comprehensive legislation if needed – for instance, amending the Social Assistance and Solidarity Law to include provisions on disaster-response transfers, or enacting a new law that formalizes an **Adaptive Social Protection mechanism** (as some countries have done for climate shock responses). These legal provisions should set clear triggers (e.g., a disaster affecting X number of people activates SP scale-up), outline financing sources, and ensure inclusion of vulnerable groups in emergencies. By embedding SRSP into law, the government signals intent and provides authorities the mandate to act without hesitation. Importantly, the legal framework should guarantee that *no vulnerable group is left out* during shocks – for example, it could explicitly allow assistance to non-citizens in disasters, empower local administrations to assist unregistered persons when needed, or expand to people who ended up in poverty as a result of the shock. Such policies and laws create an enabling environment so that the practices developed in the short term become a sustained part of the system.
2. **Strengthen and Expand Child-Sensitive Social Protection Programs:** Over the medium term, Türkiye should bolster its social protection system with programs and design features that are **sensitive to children’s needs**, which can then be scaled during crises. This could involve introducing a universal or targeted child benefit as part of the national social protection floor – even a modest child grant (for example, an allowance for families with young children) would provide a platform to build on in emergencies. If a universal child benefit is not immediately feasible, another approach is to broaden eligibility and increase benefit amounts in existing child-focused schemes (like the education grant) over time, so more children are covered before a crisis. Additionally, invest in *program design improvements*: ensure that benefit levels consider the cost of children’s necessities, and that delivery mechanisms (payment schedules, collection points) are accessible to caregivers. By 3–5 years, any new child benefit or expanded scheme should have shock-responsive elements built in – for instance, the ability to deliver an extra payment to all beneficiary children in disaster-affected regions, or temporarily expand to new child beneficiaries if poverty spikes. Alongside cash programs, complementary measures like **school feeding, childcare support, or fee waivers** can be planned as part of the SRSP toolkit for protecting children. The medium-term aim is a social protection system where children are both a priority in routine times and automatically protected in bad times. This will significantly reduce the risk of shocks derailing children’s development, aligning with UNICEF’s global framework that sees shock-responsiveness as integral to a strong, child-sensitive social protection system<sup>66</sup>.
3. **Integrated Information Systems and Early Warning Linkages:** Build a fully integrated information infrastructure that connects social protection with disaster risk management and other databases by year 5. This means achieving interoperability not only between MoFSS and AFAD data (as in the short-term step), but also integrating **early warning systems** and climate/disaster risk analytics into social protection planning. Concretely, Türkiye could develop a centralized platform or data hub that draws data from meteorological services (for forecasts), AFAD’s

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<sup>66</sup> UNICEF, 2019.

disaster risk maps, and the social registry. With this in place, *predictive or trigger-based responses* become possible – for example, if forecast models predict an extreme cold wave, the system could flag poor households in the affected provinces and pre-arrange a winter cash assistance before the cold wave peaks. Over the medium term, the country can pilot **forecast-based financing for social protection**, where certain thresholds (rainfall levels, earthquake intensity, etc.) auto-trigger aid distributions. Achieving this requires not only tech integration but also protocols agreed in advance with meteorological and emergency agencies. By the end of 5 years, Türkiye should be in a position where disaster data and social data “talk” to each other seamlessly, enabling faster identification of who needs help. This will make the SRSP system more adaptive and preventive, rather than purely reactive. (Notably, global trends encourage combining shock-responsive social protection with anticipatory action approaches<sup>67</sup>, and Türkiye can become a leader in this space given its strong institutional capacities.)

4. **Sustainable Financing Mechanisms:** In the medium term, move towards **sustainable and risk-informed financing** for SRSP. Building on the short-term contingency fund, by year 3–5 the government should establish a robust financing architecture that might include:
  - **Dedicated Disaster Social Protection Fund:** A permanent fund (or sub-fund under the national Disaster Reserve Fund) specifically for scaling up social assistance in crises. This fund could be designed to accumulate unspent social assistance budget (or a small levy on certain taxes) in good years, and then disburse in bad years. If it provides a domestic resource base for quick action, its effectiveness will depend on strong governance structures, transparent rules for allocation, and public reporting mechanisms to ensure accountability and trust.
  - **Insurance and Risk Transfer:** If feasible, put in place disaster risk insurance for the social protection system – for example, insurance that pays out if an earthquake above a certain severity occurs, ensuring an influx of resources for cash transfers. While Turkey’s existing disaster reserve arrangements<sup>68</sup> provide some cushion, insurance can add an extra layer, especially for catastrophic events that exceed reserve funds.
  - **Donor and Development Partner Agreements:** Work with international partners to pre-arrange financial support that can be activated in shocks. For instance, expand agreements with the EU or World Bank so that in a major crisis, grants or loans can quickly top up the national social assistance response. The aim is to avoid delays like waiting for international appeals; instead, have *pre-approved support* that complements domestic funds. Over time, as fiscal space allows, Türkiye should try to allocate a higher share of its own budget to social protection, building resilience. By the 5-year mark, a combination of these mechanisms should be in place, reducing reliance on last-minute emergency budgeting. This predictable financing will make the SRSP system truly reliable when disaster strikes.
5. **Gradual Inclusion of Refugees and Excluded Groups:** Work towards a more inclusive social protection system so that shock responses can cover *all* vulnerable residents on Turkish soil. In the medium term, explore pathways to integrate refugees (under temporary protection) into national social assistance schemes or at least harmonize assistance levels and mechanisms. This could involve transitioning the ESSN program from a donor-funded humanitarian scheme into a government-managed program with international cost-sharing. Steps may include creating a legal status for refugees within social assistance laws, or piloting the inclusion of a subset of refugee families into a national cash transfer with donor funding channeled through government systems. The long-term objective is a **“one system” approach** where, regardless of nationality or status, those in need during a crisis receive help through the same channels. This will improve efficiency and equity – as seen, the ESSN’s success was partly due to using Turkey’s existing institutional

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<sup>67</sup> European Commission, 2025.

<sup>68</sup> OECD, 2022.

infrastructure<sup>69</sup>. Similarly, ensure other marginalized groups are better covered *before* crises: for example, expand social insurance or assistance options for informal workers (so that shock aid can reach them easily), and maintain updated registries of persons with disabilities and elderly who might need extra support in emergencies. By year 5, Turkey’s social protection system should have widened its coverage and made significant strides toward **universality**, at least for basic emergency support. This inclusive approach aligns with the principle of leaving no one behind and is a sustainable solution for protracted challenges like displacement<sup>70</sup>.

6. **Link Social Protection with Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and Climate Adaptation:** Over the medium term, foster closer integration between social protection programs and the country’s broader DRR and climate adaptation initiatives. This means social protection should not operate in isolation but rather complement efforts such as community-based disaster preparedness, resilient infrastructure projects, and climate adaptation programs. For instance, social protection schemes can incentivize risk reduction by offering cash-for-work on local mitigation projects (like improving drainage to prevent floods) or providing livelihood grants that encourage diversification away from climate-vulnerable agriculture. Additionally, ensure that national DRR strategies recognize social protection as a key tool for post-disaster recovery and risk reduction. By incorporating social protection into climate adaptation plans, Türkiye can access climate finance for strengthening SRSP (many global climate funds now support adaptive social protection). Within 3–5 years, pilot a model where an early action based on a climate forecast (say, distributing heatwave cash grants to the elderly and children during extreme heat alerts) is part of the local disaster management plan. These efforts will build resilience against *slow-onset shocks* (like droughts) in addition to sudden disasters. Ultimately, an adaptive social protection system that works hand-in-hand with DRR will reduce long-term vulnerabilities and disaster impacts on communities.

## Implementation Considerations

Translating these recommendations into action will require careful planning, strong government ownership, and collaboration among stakeholders. Below are key considerations to ensure practical and effective implementation, along with suggestions for sequencing and the role of partners like UNICEF:

- **Government Leadership and Ownership:** It is crucial that the push for an improved SRSP system is led by the Turkish government, with high-level buy-in. Early engagement of senior officials – for example, briefing the Presidential office, the National Disaster Management Board, or the Social Policy Cabinet – can secure the political will needed. Framing SRSP enhancements as part of Türkiye’s commitment to building resilience and social cohesion is likely to resonate. Given recent experiences (earthquakes, refugee influx, COVID-19), there is growing recognition domestically that “business as usual” social protection must become more shock-ready. The recommendations should be presented not as an external agenda but as support to existing government objectives (such as the *2023–2025 Strategic Plan* of MoFSS or AFAD’s disaster plans). Aligning with national vision documents (like Türkiye’s Disaster Response Plan and social development plans) will ease acceptance. **Champions** within key ministries should be identified – for instance, a dedicated unit or deputy minister in MoFSS could champion the social protection reforms, while AFAD’s strategy department could champion data integration. UNICEF

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<sup>69</sup> European Commission, 2025

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

and UN partners can support by providing evidence (case studies from other countries, cost-benefit analyses) to bolster the case in policy dialogues.

- **Operational Feasibility and Sequencing:** Implementing all recommendations at once is neither feasible nor necessary – a phased approach is recommended. In the immediate term (next 1–2 years), focus on *no-regret actions* that are operationally simple and lay the groundwork: setting up coordination forums, drafting SOPs, and conducting training and simulations. These activities have relatively low cost and complexity but high impact on preparedness. Parallely, some quick technical wins like minor upgrades to the ISAIS software (to tag disaster-affected households) can be done with existing capacities. More complex reforms – such as establishing new financing instruments or launching a national child grant – should follow once the basics are in place and after thorough design. A possible sequencing could be:
  1. **Year 1-2:** Formal coordination mechanism launched; SRSP working group operational. SOPs and draft legal amendments prepared. Pilot simulation conducted. Quick data sharing protocol between MoFSS-AFAD tested during a small-scale flood or earthquake (even a planned drill). Contingency budget line included in next year’s budget.
  2. **Year 3-5:** Enactment of legal changes. Rollout of new or expanded programs (child benefit, etc.) with shock-responsive features. Integration of databases and early warning systems completed. Contingency financing agreements (like CAT-DDO or insurance) finalized. By Year 5, conduct a **full-scale simulation** or even respond to an actual moderate shock using the improved system to evaluate performance.

Throughout this timeline, it’s important to periodically review and adjust course. Setting *milestones* and using a monitoring framework (perhaps an SRSP readiness index measured annually) can help track progress. Also ensure flexibility – if a major shock unfortunately occurs during the reform process, the government can apply emerging tools right away (for example, using the draft SOPs in a real event) and learn from them.

- **Capacity Development and Resources:** Building human and institutional capacity is a cornerstone of these reforms. Frontline implementers – such as the staff of Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundations (SASFs) at district level, and AFAD’s provincial coordinators – will need training on new procedures. UNICEF and partners can support the development of training modules on topics like *emergency cash transfer delivery, rapid beneficiary registration, and child protection in emergencies*. Consider establishing a **surge roster or reserve team** within MoFSS that can be deployed to an affected region to reinforce local staff after a disaster (similar to how AFAD deploys search-and-rescue teams). This may involve cross-training social workers and administrative personnel in emergency operations. In terms of infrastructure, ensure that the systems (both technological and logistical) can handle surges: for example, can the payment system disburse to double or triple the usual number of beneficiaries on short notice? It might be necessary to upgrade server capacities or have standby agreements with banks/mobile operators for payment delivery. On the logistics side, equipping local offices with satellite phones, portable generators, or mobile service vans can make a big difference in their functionality post-disaster. Donor funding and technical assistance should be directed towards these capacity and infrastructure needs, as they form the backbone of implementation. UNICEF can advocate for and help channel such support (for instance, through proposing a dedicated capacity-building project to donors interested in social protection or DRR).
- **Inter-Ministerial and Sectoral Coordination:** Effective SRSP implementation will require breaking out of silos. Mechanisms should be put in place for routine communication and joint planning across sectors. One practical step is to integrate SRSP actions into the existing **Türkiye Disaster Response Plan (TAMP)** and the annual disaster preparedness exercises that AFAD leads. Ensuring that MoFSS and SASFs participate in these national exercises will institutionalize their role. In parallel, cross-sector data-sharing protocols should be formalized to enable real-time

coordination across ministries, while embedding robust privacy safeguards to protect sensitive personal data. Another step is establishing data-sharing and referral mechanisms between social services and other sectors: for example, if a family gets emergency cash assistance, social workers can refer any unaccompanied children to child protection services, or families in need of housing to the temporary shelter coordination. At the policy level, a high-level steering committee (perhaps under the Vice President or a coordinating Ministry) could oversee the convergence of social protection, emergency management, and financial planning. This body can resolve inter-ministerial issues (like how to finance a new child grant, or how to legally enable refugee inclusion). The committee should also include the Ministry of Finance – a key player to ensure financing and to institutionalize the budgetary changes. **Local authorities** and municipalities are also crucial: coordination should extend to the local level, linking governors’ offices and municipal social assistance departments into the national framework. By fostering a culture of cooperation and having clear referral pathways, Türkiye can avoid duplication and gaps during responses. The importance of this is underscored by global lessons – where social protection and emergency agencies fail to coordinate, aid can be delayed or groups can be missed. Hence, sustained effort in coordination is not a one-off task but an ongoing governance improvement.

- **Donor Alignment and Humanitarian-Development Nexus:** Many international donors and agencies operate in Türkiye, especially given the refugee situation and recent disasters. It’s important to align their efforts with the government-led SRSP strategy. A coherent **transition plan** should be developed for humanitarian programs (like the ESSN and other cash-based interventions) to progressively integrate with or complement national systems. Donors should be encouraged to use government delivery systems whenever feasible – for example, channeling emergency cash through the national social assistance IT platform or coordinating transfer values and targeting criteria with MoFSS to ensure equity between citizens and refugees. The ESSN has demonstrated that such alignment is possible: it successfully mirrored national social protection systems and worked through government and local institutions<sup>71</sup>. Building on this, future emergency responses (whether refugee-related or natural disaster-related) should seek to **“piggyback”** on national systems rather than create parallel ones. UNICEF, with its dual humanitarian and development mandate, can play a convening role in this nexus. The organization can facilitate donor coordination meetings focused on social protection, ensuring that short-term humanitarian aid is delivered in ways that strengthen (not bypass) national capacities. To support this, a dedicated donor coordination platform could help align funding cycles and program objectives, reducing duplication and enhancing complementarity. Moreover, advocacy with the EU, World Bank, and UN partners should highlight funding needs for the reforms identified – for instance, investing in the social registry expansion or financing a pilot universal child benefit could be attractive to development donors. UNICEF’s strategic role also includes technical assistance: offering expertise on MIS development, grievance mechanisms (important when scaling up grants), and monitoring/evaluation of SRSP interventions. By providing evidence from other countries and robust technical advice, UNICEF can support the government to make informed decisions. Finally, as an advocate for children, UNICEF should ensure that **child outcomes** remain a focus in donor discussions – e.g., encouraging that any shock-response funding has indicators for children’s nutrition, schooling, and protection. Aligning the myriad efforts of donors under a government-led SRSP improvement plan will maximize impact and resource use, and it will reassure the government that external support is reinforcing national systems.

In conclusion, strengthening Türkiye’s shock-responsive social protection system is a multi-faceted endeavor that requires **policy vision, inter-agency collaboration, technical upgrades, and sustained**

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<sup>71</sup> European Commission, 2025

**support.** The recommendations outlined – from legal reforms and data integration to child-sensitive program design and financing solutions – provide a roadmap towards a more agile and inclusive system. Implementing these in a phased manner, with the government in the driver’s seat and partners like UNICEF facilitating, will enable Türkiye to better protect its most vulnerable citizens, especially children, when the next shock occurs. By investing in these measures, Türkiye can become a leader in the region on adaptive social protection, ensuring that no child or family is left unsupported in times of crisis. The end result will be a social protection system that not only alleviates chronic vulnerabilities but also serves as a reliable safety net when people face the worst of events – truly underpinning resilience and rapid recovery for all.

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