

EU FACILITY FOR REFUGEES IN TURKIYE: HUMANITARIAN AND DEVELOPMENT ACTIONS

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Abstract

Since 2011, Türkiye officially hosts around four million refugees. On March 18 2016, the European Council and Türkiye signed the European Union (EU)-Türkiye Statement aimed at stemming the influx of irregular migration via Türkiye to the EU. The aim of the study is to examine the financial support program developed within the scope of the EU-Türkiye Statement, which focuses on managing irregular migration and financial aid. The Facility for Refugees, a main component of the EU-Türkiye Statement, consists of an EU budget of €3 billion and EU Member States contributions of €3 billion. More than 100 projects have been implemented in Türkiye with the funds provided under the Facility. In the study, financial aid will be evaluated in terms of humanitarian and development actions.

Key words: European Union, European Union budget, Türkiye, Refugee crisis, EU funds.

JEL: H11, H53, H83

Introduction

Türkiye is a very special country located between the west and the east. Its coastline with three seas and its neighbors in the northeast, east, and southeast are the factors that reinforce its special position. To put it more clearly, the geography of Türkiye is a bridge over the ancient migration routes of human history. For this reason, Türkiye is sometimes the first and sometimes the last stop of great migrations throughout history. Of course, it is possible to talk about the sociological, economic, and political derivatives of this historical reality. In the study, first of all, Syrian migration, which is a current example of this historical reality, will be touched upon. Afterward, as mentioned above, Syrians crossing into Europe because of Türkiye being considered a transit country for immigrants

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will be evaluated in the context of the Agreement Between the Republic of Türkiye and the European Union on the Readmission of Persons Residing Without Permission. The main emphasis of the study is the financial role of the European Union in financing activities aimed at increasing the survival and adaptation levels of Syrians residing in Türkiye. In this context, the humanitarian and development assistance transferred to Türkiye in two tranches within the framework of the facility for refugees in Türkiye will be examined, and where and how the funds coming to Türkiye are used will be analyzed.

Türkiye and the refugee crisis

With the Syrian civil war, millions of people had to leave their homes. Human mobility originating from Syria has continued since the war started in 2011. Türkiye has been managing the process by taking humanitarian concerns into account from the very beginning. In this context, as of today, 3,288,755 Syrians live in Türkiye (Goc Idaresi Başkanlığı, 2023). Türkiye does not qualify immigrants from outside Europe as refugees due to geographical reservations to the 1951 Geneva Convention (Law No. 359 of 29/08/1961 on the Ratification of the Convention Relating to the Legal Status of Refugees, signed in Geneva on 28 July 1951, Article 1). Instead, there is a legal definition that describes temporary protection status for Syrians residing in Türkiye. Temporary protection status, as the name suggests, indicates a temporary situation. This context is also a reflection of the Turkish State's view of immigrants. Because the expectation is that the events in Syria will end, and Syrians will return to their homeland. However, in one way or another, a significant Syrian population has continued to live in Türkiye for 12 years.

In transactions with temporary protection status, the Foreigners and International Protection Law No. 6458 (LFIP) and the Temporary Protection Regulation No. 6883 (TPR) issued in relation to this law are decisive. The issue of non-refoulement is arranged with LFIP Article: 4 as *“No one within the scope of this Law may be sent to a place where he or she would be subjected to torture, inhuman or degrading punishment or treatment, or where his life or freedom would be threatened because of his race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.”* (LFIP No. 6458 Article: 4). With this article, Türkiye has declared in advance that it approaches the issue of Syrian immigrants by prioritizing human values. In addition, by creating a secondary protection with Article 63 of the LFIP regulated it as follows, *“Those who do not qualify as refugees or conditional refugees, but are returned to their country of origin or country of residence; a) He will be sentenced to death penalty or the death penalty will be executed, b) He will be subjected to torture, inhuman or degrading punishment or treatment, c) He will face serious threats to his person due to indiscriminate acts of violence in situations of international or domestic armed conflict, A foreigner or stateless person who cannot benefit from the protection of his or her country of origin or residence due to such a threat, or who does not want to benefit from it*

due to the threat in question, is granted secondary protection status after the status determination procedures.” (LFIP No. 6458 Article: 63).

Finally, the temporary status is regulated, with Article 91 of the law as follows *“Temporary protection may be provided to foreigners who have been forced to leave their country, who cannot return to the country they left, and who come to our borders or cross our borders in large numbers in order to find urgent and temporary protection. (2) The admission of these persons to Türkiye, their stay in Türkiye, their rights and obligations, the procedures to be followed when they leave Türkiye, the measures to be taken against mass movements, the cooperation and coordination between national and international institutions and organizations, the institutions and organizations that will work in the center and the provinces. The determination of the duties and powers of the organizations is regulated by the regulation to be issued by the President.”* (LFIP No. 6458 Article: 91).

In order to ensure the mutual harmony of the host society and foreigners in line with the legal attitude, the Department of Harmonization and Communication was established under the General Directorate of Migration Management, and a Harmonization Strategy Document and National Action Plan were created to determine the road map of harmonization activities. “Social Cohesion” is the first component of the action plan in question and is *“the ability of immigrants to develop a common sense of belonging by being included in the society they live in culturally, socially and economically, mutual recognition of differences within the framework of intercultural interaction, consultation and social dialogue, maintaining respect and ensuring coexistence”* it is defined as (Goc Idaresi Başkanlığı, 2020: 12). Within the scope of this plan, some targets have been set for immigrants to live their lives in good conditions in Türkiye. In the plan, social cohesion was determined as the 1st strategic priority. In line with this priority, influencing the current perception in the host society towards immigrants and migration in a way that will contribute to increasing the adaptation of immigrants, ensuring acceptance, and encouraging the two communities to live together has been stated as a strategic goal (Goc Idaresi Başkanlığı, 2020: 21). In the plan, the education of immigrants, their access to health services and social services and also social aids and their participation in labor markets are listed among the strategic priorities (Goc Idaresi Başkanlığı, 2020: 21-27).

Undoubtedly, serious economic resources are required to achieve all these goals. Our study focuses on those economic resources originating from the European Union. As stated above, Türkiye is not only a destination country but also a transit country. This location makes Türkiye a very important partner in terms of protecting the borders of the European Union. There is already an agreement between Türkiye and the European Union on the Readmission of Persons Residing Without Permission, which was signed in Ankara on 16 December 2013 and approved by Law No. 6547 dated 25/6/2014. According to this agreement, third-country citizens who unlawfully violate the borders of the European Union can

be sent back to Türkiye in cases listed in Article 4 of the agreement (Agreement Between the Republic of Türkiye and the European Union on the Readmission of Persons Residing Without Permission, Article: 4). It also contributes to the protection of the borders of the European Union by controlling uncontrolled exits from Türkiye's borders. The main motivation behind this relationship, which is based on a bilateral consensus, is that the European Union stands against the influx of immigrants, especially from the Middle East, and wants to keep these people in Türkiye. As a concrete indicator of this desire, it provides financial support to projects that will positively affect the quality of life of Syrians in Türkiye.

European Union support to refugees in Türkiye

On 18 March 2016, the European Council and Türkiye reached an agreement to prevent irregular migration from Türkiye to the European Union (European Commission [EC], 2016a). According to the EU-Türkiye Statement, all new irregular migrants arriving on the Greek islands via Türkiye as of 20 March 2016 will be returned to Türkiye as of 4 April 2016, and for every Syrian returned, a Syrian registered in Türkiye will be resettled in the EU (European Commission [EC], 2016b). In line with the agreement, Türkiye has agreed to take all steps to host refugees. To financially support refugees in Türkiye, the European Commission established the Facility for Refugees in Türkiye, a main component of the EU-Türkiye Statement, by Commission Decision of 24 November 2015 (European Commission [EC], 2022: 6).

The Facility Steering Committee has been established to ensure coordination, complementarity and efficiency of assistance. The Steering Committee provides strategic guidance and is chaired by the European Commission, which is composed of representatives of EU Member States. Türkiye has an advisory role. Decisions are taken by assessing the needs and following the procedure of the financing instruments mobilized (European Commission [EC], 2023c).

The Facility is the largest humanitarian financial assistance program the EU has ever funded. It also covers the needs of refugees who arrived in Türkiye before 2015 (European Commission [EC], 2017). The Facility aims to ensure that aid reaches refugees living in Türkiye in a fast, efficient, and effective manner. The program mobilizes European Union financing instruments as humanitarian and/or development assistance. In this context, in addition to the needs of refugees, the needs of the host community are also taken into consideration (European Commission [EC], 2015: 4). It can be said that the main objectives of the Facility are as follows (European Commission [EC], 2018):

- Supporting the economic integration of refugees, including them in the active labor force,
- Ensuring quality learning for all school-age refugees and providing lifelong learning opportunities for all,

- Improving the health status of refugee populations by supporting the health system in responding to the needs of refugees as well as host populations,
- Ensuring equal access of refugees to social services; promoting social cohesion,
- Improving municipal services providing water and sanitation conditions for refugees and host communities,
- Supporting authorities in the field of migration management and combating irregular migration,
- Taking measures to reduce gender-based violence,
- Providing timely, adequate and appropriate humanitarian assistance.

Evaluation of assistance to refugees in Türkiye within the framework of humanitarian and development assistance

The Facility is implemented in two tranches: humanitarian assistance and development assistance. In the first tranche of the Facility (2016-2017), a budget of EUR 3 billion has been prepared. This amount consists of EUR 1 billion from the EU budget and EUR 2 billion from EU Member States. An additional EUR 3 billion was provided for the second tranche of the Facility (2018-2019), bringing the total amount of the Facility to EUR 6 billion (European Commission [EC], 2021: 2-3). Regarding EU budget resources, out of EUR 1 billion from the 2016-2017 EU budget, EUR 250 million was mobilized in 2016 and EUR 750 million in 2017. Of the EUR 2 billion from the 2018-2019 EU budget, EUR 550 million was mobilized in 2018 and the balance was mobilized in 2019 (European Commission [EC], 2022: 6).

While 98% of the amount committed under the first tranche was disbursed to the projects, this rate was 74% for the second tranche. The projects under the first tranches were completed in 2021. The projects under the second tranches will be completed by 2025. The projects are mostly implemented by international organizations with global experience in the field, such as UN Specialised Agencies, the Red Cross, or the International Organisation for Migration.

Considering the uncertain future of the Syrian crisis, it can be stated that interventions under the second tranche have progressively shifted towards socio-economic support activities and the generation of opportunities for livelihoods. The second tranche allocated €1.04 billion for humanitarian assistance and €1.9 billion for development assistance (European Commission [EC], 2022: 8).

Humanitarian assistance and development assistance are not substitutes for each other, but have a complementary function (Altay & Aslanpay Ozdemir, 2022: 419). Humanitarian assistance focuses on supporting the most vulnerable refugees through projects in areas such as protection, health, education, and basic needs. Development assistance concentrates on health, education, municipal infrastructure, migration management, and socio-economic support (European Commission [EC], 2023b).

As can be seen in Table 1 in the period 2016-2017, a total of 74 projects were implemented, 48 of which were humanitarian assistance and 26 of which were development assistance. 4 of the development assistance projects were implemented by Turkish institutions and 42.68% of the total development assistance disbursements belong to the projects implemented by these institutions. In 2018-2019 period, a total of 41 projects were implemented, 24 of which were humanitarian assistance and 17 of which were development assistance. 4 of the development assistance projects were implemented by Turkish institutions. 66.95% of the total development assistance disbursements were made to the projects of these institutions.

Table 1: Number of projects distributed under Facility for Refugees in Türkiye

	2016-17	2018-2019
Humanitarian Assistance	48	24
Development Assistance	26	17
Total	74	41

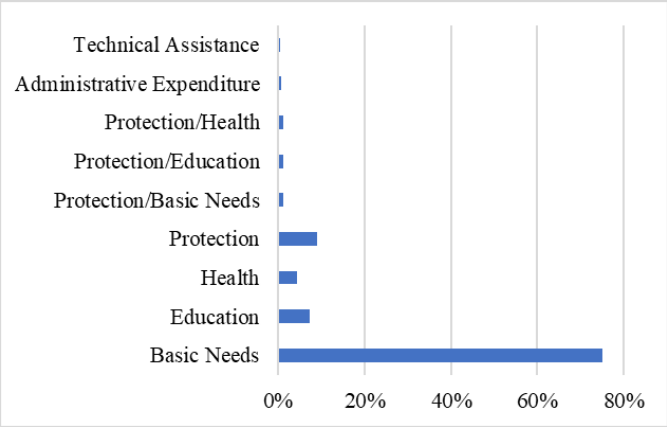
Source: (European Commission [EC], 2023a).

The projects implemented under the Facility respond to important needs of refugees and host communities in Türkiye. For example (European Commission [EC], 2023c);

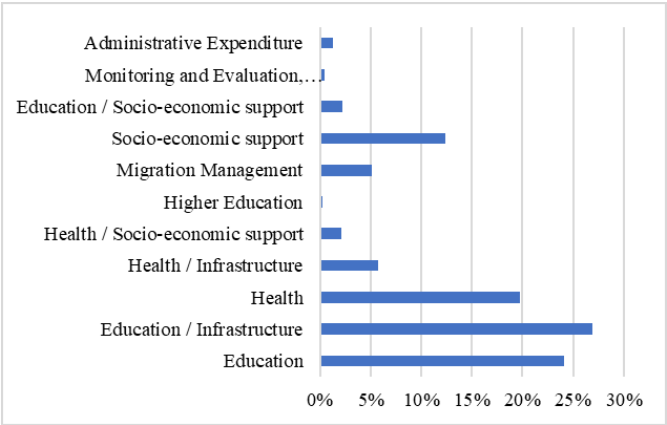
- More than 2 million refugees' basic needs are provided.
- Nearly 770,000 refugee children enrolled in school.
- More than 2.7 million people benefit from protection services funded by the Facility.
- Nearly 230,000 education personnel provided trainings.
- 151 new schools were built to respond to educational needs.
- 105,971 children benefited from compensatory education and 113,986 children received support education.
- Around 30.3 million primary health care examinations were carried out.
- Over 7.9 million refugee children vaccinated.
- 190 facility-supported Migrant Health Centres (MHCs) were operationalized.
- More than 4,000 health care staff were activated.

The distribution of disbursements to projects in the first tranche (2016-2017) and the second tranche (2018-2019) of the Facility is schematized in the graphs. According to graph 1, projects for basic needs were prioritized first and about 75% of the total disbursement was for basic needs. Education, health, and protection each received around 4-9 % of the total disbursement. Graph 3 shows that the amount allocated to basic needs has increased to just over 80 % of the total. Like the previous tranche, less than 10 % was allocated to health, protection, and education.

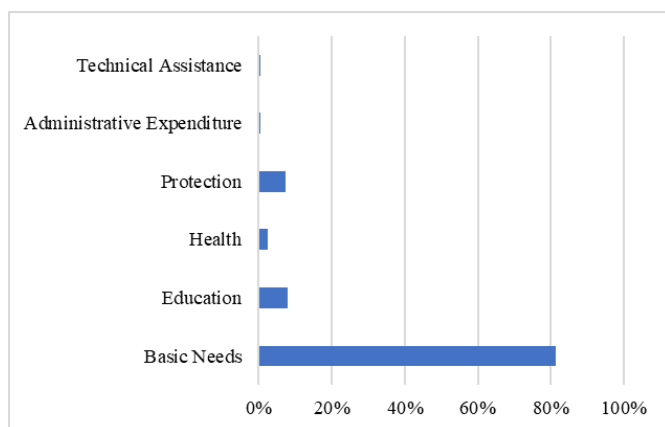
Graphs 2 and 4 show the distribution of financial resources allocated by the EU to projects addressing the long-term needs of refugees in Türkiye. In both graphs, a significant part of the financial resources is utilized in four main areas. These are education, health, infrastructure, and socio-economic support. In both tranches of the Facility, more than 90 % of the total is distributed among these four areas. Since some projects are related to two different areas, they are designed to include both areas in the graphs. In the first tranche, more support was allocated to education and infrastructure, while in the second tranche, more resources were allocated to socio-economic support. On the other hand, in the first tranche of the Facility, unlike the second tranche, funds were allocated to projects related to migration management and higher education, and the amount allocated to these two areas is around 5 % of the total.



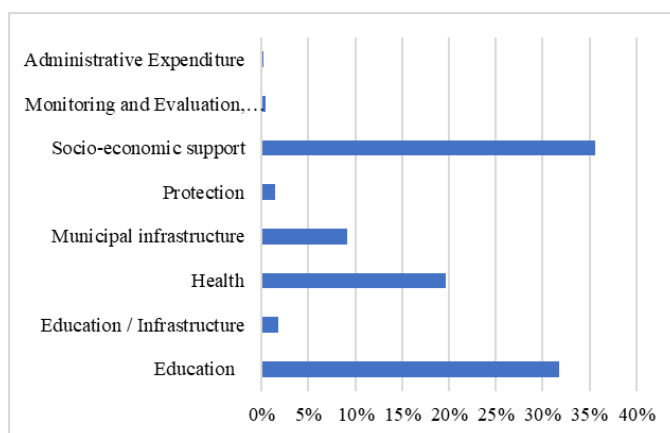
Graph 1: Humanitarian Assistance, 2016-2017



Graph 2: Development Assistance, 2016-2017



Graph 3: Humanitarian Assistance, 2018-2019



Graph 4: Development Assistance, 2018-2019

On 6 February 2023, two major earthquakes in south-east Türkiye and along the Syrian border killed more than 50,000 people and damaged and destroyed more than 230,000 buildings. Many refugees were also affected in the earthquake zone and humanitarian needs remain high. The main priorities are: access to psychosocial support; primary health and education services; water, sanitation and hygiene; shelter (European Commission [EC], 2023d).

Also, the EU provides cash assistance through the Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN), the EU's flagship humanitarian aid program, to meet the daily needs of refugees in Türkiye (European Commission [EC], 2023d). More than 1.6 million refugees receive around €20 per person per month. In addition, they receive additional support on a quarterly basis to cover basic needs such as rent and food. Registered refugees using debit cards are recognized and regularly monitored (Avrupa Birliği Türkiye Delegasyonu, 2020).

Conclusion

In 2011, thousands of people sought refuge in Türkiye following the political crisis in Syria and the ensuing civil war. For the refugees arriving in Türkiye, there was a need to provide urgent needs such as protection, shelter, and security and then to improve their living conditions.

The European Union reached an agreement with Türkiye in 2016 to stem the flow of irregular migration and committed to provide Türkiye with a total of €6 billion in financial aid in two tranches in exchange for Syrian refugees to stay in Türkiye.

It was agreed that the financial assistance would be provided through the facility for refugees in Türkiye. A total of 115 projects were implemented under the Facility in 2016-2017 and 2018-2019 tranches. The projects were implemented in two different areas: humanitarian aid and development assistance. The projects aim to respond to the basic needs of the host country and refugees; provide basic education and health services; provide social protection needs; improve water and sanitation conditions; and establish effective migration management.

Although the Facility has made significant contributions to the harmonization process of refugees, it is seen that the steps taken are not sufficient for Türkiye. The refugee crisis has caused huge costs for Türkiye, especially in social and financial terms. Considering the costs, taking the following steps will be quite beneficial for the process:

- Projects orientated towards refugees and host communities should be continued,
- Close cooperation should be established between the government and humanitarian assistance and development assistance,
- There should be a transition from humanitarian assistance to development assistance,
- Lack of communication on financial assistance should be overcome,
- Alternatives for further support for refugees in Türkiye should be considered,
- In the context of the refugee crisis and the financial burden, Türkiye should plan and coordinate for the future.

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