



How 'social' is Turkey?

blickwechsel
Contemporary Turkey Studies **Türkei**
A Programme by Stiftung Mercator



Universität Bielefeld

Working Paper No. 1

Kerem Gabriel Öktem

**Turkey's Social Assistance Regime in Comparative Perspective:
History, Administrative Structure, Programmes and
Institutional Characteristics**

2018

This paper is the first working paper of the research project 'How "social" is Turkey? Turkey's social security system in a European context'. The project is part of the programme 'Blickwechsel. Contemporary Turkey Studies', funded by Stiftung Mercator.

The author would like to thank Cansu Erdoğan for extensive support in conducting primary research, and Lutz Leisering and Burcu Yakut-Çakar for in-depth feedback on earlier versions of the paper.

Abstract

Long regarded as a residual area of modern welfare states, social assistance is now increasingly studied by comparative welfare state researchers. Seen by some scholars as the ‘foundation’ of social citizenship, social assistance policies are particularly important whenever social insurance systems provide only incomplete protection against social risks. This is typically the case outside of what we call the classic welfare states with incomplete (de-)commodification, significant informality in labour markets and weak social insurance coverage. This coverage gap was partially filled by social assistance schemes that proliferated in the Global South during the last two decades. Guided by the principle ‘just give money to the poor’, the rise of social cash transfers is regarded as an ‘entitlement revolution’ in the Global South.

Standing at the intersection of Northern welfare states and the Global South, Turkey is among these countries where social insurance coverage remains incomplete and thus social assistance could play a significant role. Yet, despite a long history of poor relief and social assistance policies stretching back to the mid-19th century, the policy area had long been neglected. Social assistance used to be delegated to local administrations, which provided irregular, less programmatic in-kind benefits. However, over the last four decades, Turkey has gradually built a sprawling social assistance regime that today covers a significant share of the poor.

This paper provides an overview of Turkey’s complex social assistance regime. Through exploring the development of the different programmes, it aims to understand the main characteristics of the social assistance regime and situate the case in comparative context. The paper starts with a brief overview of the history of social assistance in Turkey, going back to the late Ottoman era. After introducing the key institutions providing social assistance in Turkey today, we explore all existing social assistance programmes in terms of their key institutional characteristics. Focussing on legal foundation, eligibility criteria, benefit levels and coverage we follow the development of these programmes from their inception until today. Based on the findings of this in-depth study of all programmes, we conduct an analysis of Turkey’s social assistance regime. We identify four key features of the regime: complexity, fragmentation, stratified benefits and unequal social rights. Building on these findings, we then situate the case in a comparative context. A comparison of Turkey’s social assistance regime with typologies developed for the Global North and the Global South reveals that Turkey does not really fit any of the categories developed in Northern comparative welfare state research. Instead, it shares key characteristics of social cash transfers in the Global South.

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1. Introduction

Long regarded as a residual area of social policy and modern welfare states, social assistance has increasingly come to the centre of attention of comparative social policy and welfare state research. Seen by some scholars as the ‘foundation of social citizenship rights’ (Bahle et al. 2011:2) social assistance, i.e. ‘benefits and services [that] guarantee a minimum [...] level of subsistence to people in need, based on a test of resources’ (Eardley et al. 1996: 1), is particularly important whenever social insurance systems and other programmes provide only partial protection against social risks. This has been relevant on a larger scale outside of classic welfare states, where commodification of labour is incomplete, informality is substantial and thus social insurance coverage remains less than universal (Gough 2004). It is in this context that social cash transfers, with social assistance as the main variety, proliferated in the Global South during the last two decades. Guided by the principle ‘just give money to the poor’ (Hulme 2014), these transfer amount to what some call an ‘entitlement revolution’ (Leisering 2018).

Standing in-between Southern European welfare states and those in the Global South, Turkey’s welfare state rests on incomplete social insurance coverage: only 40 per cent of the working age population actively contributes to the pension system, and even fewer contribute to sick pay and unemployment insurance programmes. As a result, a large part of the population remains unprotected by the social insurance system in the event of old age, sickness and unemployment. In theory, a significant part of the population could thus benefit from social assistance policies.

Over the last four decades, Turkey has built a social assistance regime that does cover a significant share of the people who are not covered by social insurance. Especially since around 2000, changes have gained pace in this policy area. Whereas in earlier times poor relief was mostly delegated to local administrations, which mainly provided irregular in-kind benefits, there is now a complex system of nearly a dozen regular social cash transfer (SCT) and a few in-kind transfer programmes for specific segments of the poor managed by the central government. Although official data on this policy area are sometimes difficult to interpret, it makes sense to look at government reports to understand the scope of the social assistance regime: According to the Ministry of Family and Social Policies more than 3 million households receive some kind of social assistance (ASPB 2016). This would mean that more than ten million people of a population of roughly 75 million are beneficiaries of social assistance policies. Moreover, according to the Ministry of Development, social assistance expenditure today surpasses 1 per cent of GDP (Kalkınma Bakanlığı 2017: 124).

This paper provides a comprehensive overview of Turkey’s elaborate social assistance regime. It aims to answer key questions related to the programmes that make up the regime, as well as the regime as a whole: What social assistance programmes exist today in Turkey? What entitlements to benefits exist under these programmes? What are their conditions of access, what benefits do they pay and how many people do they cover? When were the programmes created and how did they develop until today? Based on an analysis of these questions we aim to make sense of the social assistance regime: What are key features of the regime? Finally, we aim to put the case into comparative perspective: Does Turkey fit

any of the typologies of social assistance systems developed in comparative welfare state research? Or does it fit patterns of social assistance found in the Global South?

With this analysis, we aim to go beyond the literature on social assistance in Turkey in several ways. Following pioneering works on the policy area by Ayşe Buğra (Buğra and Keyder 2003, Buğra 2008), research on social assistance has been proliferating. Yet, there does not appear to exist a comprehensive overview of the regime, neither in Turkish nor in English. Studies on Turkey's welfare regime mostly mention the policy area in passing, without providing an in-depth institutional analysis the policy area (Buğra and Keyder 2006, Dinç 2009, Grütjen 2008, Aybars and Tsarouhas 2010, Eder 2010, Soto Iguaran 2011, Dorlach 2015). Moreover, the focus of the literature appears to be on certain key programmes (Gök 2000, Buğra and Keyder 2003, Esenyel 2009) and in particular on political aspects of the benefit distribution of these programmes (Aytaç 2014, Yörük 2012). Existing overviews of the social assistance regime focus on the contemporary situation and usually discuss the more prominent social assistance programmes (Yılmaz and Yakut-Çakar 2008; Dodurka 2014; Urhan and Urhan 2015, Metin 2011, Ünlütürk Ulutaş 2017). A number of recent studies also explore the situation of social assistance beneficiaries in-depth to understand the relationship between beneficiaries and the state (Kutlu 2014, Saygı Doğru 2016). There are also very insightful studies on the history of poor relief in Turkey, yet they either cover only relatively short periods (Baytal 2009, Düzgün 2009, Özbek 1999 and 2006) or do not systematically focus on institutional characteristics of the regime (Buğra 2008). Thus, a growing number of studies provide key insights on social assistance in Turkey. Yet, there still appears to be a lack of historically grounded analysis of institutional characteristics, generosity and scope of the regime and its components. Therefore, it is unsurprising that a comparison of the Turkish social assistance regime with other regimes that is grounded in such an analysis also appears to be lacking.

The paper aims to fill this gap in the literature. It starts with a brief description of the history of social assistance in Turkey. This includes the first beginnings of modern social assistance policies in the late Ottoman Empire, with its indigent benefit policy (*muhtacin maaşı*). The section also covers the early Republican era, which exhibits a surprising continuity in terms of the approach of the central government towards poor relief and social assistance. This historical overview ends in 1975 before the establishment of the first major social assistance programme by the central government, the social pension for elderly and disabled.

After this introduction into the history of Turkey's social assistance regime, section 3 provides an introduction to the administrative structure of social assistance in Turkey. The administrative structure of Turkey's social assistance regime used to be confusingly complex with different ministries and directorates in charge of different policies. This complexity has been somewhat reduced with the establishment of the Ministry of Family and Social Policies in 2011, which is in charge of most social assistance policies. However, some peculiarities still exist. In particular, two idiosyncratic institutions, the Fund for the Encouragement of Social Cooperation and Solidarity (SYDTF) and the affiliated Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundations (SYDV), continue to be cornerstones of Turkey's social assistance regime. Section 3 mostly focuses on the contemporary situation, but also provides some information on now-defunct institutions, which used to be crucial in providing social assistance.

In Section 4, we depict all social assistance programmes that exist in contemporary Turkey today. Based on primary research on statutes, i.e. laws, decrees and regulations, as well as official reports, we discuss

who is included in these policies, how many people benefit from them and how much benefits are paid to the poor. Thus, we explore generosity, scope and institutionalization of the programmes. Furthermore, we trace how these characteristics have changed since the inception of these programmes. Whenever possible we generated standardized data on benefit levels and coverage. The selection of programmes broadly follows Weible's definition of social cash transfers in that they are 'publicly financed programmes, which are non-contributory, and provide non-repayable, and regular benefits in cash, (mainly) to national citizens, addressing persons considered poor or vulnerable, designed to contribute to general subsistence, that is, for free, untied use, and mostly involving a means test and a self-sufficiency test' (Leisering 2018). The programmes are discussed in chronological order, based on the date of their establishment, and include the Indigent Benefit (*Muhtaç Aylığı*), Social Pensions (*65 Yaş Aylığı*); the Schoolchildren Grant provided by the Ministry of Education; the social assistance programmes of the SYDTF; the In-kind and Cash Support (*Ayni ve Nakdi Yardım* – now rebranded as the Economic and Social Support Programme (*Sosyal ve Ekonomik Destek Hizmeti*)); Student Grants; the social cash transfer for the home care of severely disabled family members (*Evde Bakım*) and finally the Education Support (*Eğitim Yardımı*) of the General Directorate for Foundations (*Vakıflar Genel Müdürlüğü*).

Based on the findings of this study of the development of these social assistance programmes over time, we will try to make sense of Turkey's social assistance regime in Section 5. We show that the regime has become quite elaborate, given the sheer amount of social assistance programmes that exist today. While this regime provides extensive coverage to a significant share of the poor, it also has substantial entitlement gaps that leave parts of the population unprotected. Moreover, the regime provides stratified benefits and the degree to which it provides social rights is highly unequal across programmes. We thus identify four key characteristics of Turkey's social assistance regime: complexity, fragmentation, stratified benefits and unequal social rights.

Building on this characterisation of Turkey's social assistance regime, Section 6 reflects on how the case can be understood in a comparative context. In the comparative literature, Turkey used to be seen as having a rudimentary social assistance regime typical of Southern European OECD members (Eardley et al. 1996; Gough 1997). However, given its elaborate structure and the extensive coverage it provides, the regime can no longer be accurately described as rudimentary. Yet, it is unclear which, if any, model of social assistance or minimum income protection it now fits. In section 6, we discuss the case first in the context of typologies developed for Northern welfare states and then also look at how Turkey compares to Southern social assistance regimes. Long neglected by researchers, social cash transfers in the Global South have become prominent over the last decades and scholars have started to categorize programmes (Leisering et al. 2006, Barrientos 2013), as well as countries in terms of what system of social cash transfers to the poor they have installed (Leisering 2018). The comparison reveals that Turkey does not really fit any of the categories developed in comparative welfare state research, but that it shares key characteristics of social cash transfers in the Global South.

2. History of Social Assistance and Poor Relief in Turkey

In this section, we briefly sketch the history of social assistance policies in Turkey. This covers both, the late Ottoman Empire era (until 1923), in which first steps towards providing social assistance to the poor

were taken made, and the early Republican era (1923-1975), which broadly continued the approach of the late-Ottoman era in this policy area.

2.1. The Beginnings of Social Assistance in the Late-Ottoman Era

Social assistance policies are usually understood as ‘the range of benefits and services available to guarantee a minimum (however defined) level of subsistence to people in need, based on a test of resources’ (Eardley et al. 1996: 1). Historically, providing ‘subsistence to people in need’ was not necessarily seen as an area requiring government intervention. In the Ottoman Empire, this issue was traditionally dealt with through charitable foundations (*vakıf*). These foundations were ‘endowed with vast incomes by the Ottoman sultans, members of the imperial family, and high state officials’ (Özbek 1999: 6) and catered to the needs of the poor, mostly in urban areas.

This tradition of charitable foundations has been and continues to be hugely influential, both in public discourse and governmental policies regarding poverty and social assistance in Turkey. Some political groups in Turkey see these foundations as the embodiment of Ottoman or Islamic welfare stateness. They believe that ‘in Islam, foundations are the backbone of social solidarity’ and that ‘the notions of social justice and of the welfare state, which people try to realize today, are the basis of [Islam]’.¹

In the nineteenth century, the role of the state and charitable foundations in the caring of the needy began to change. As part of its goals of modernization and centralization, the Ottoman Empire created a central administration for charitable foundations, the Ministry of Endowments. Historians argue that after coming under state administration, charitable foundations ‘lost their relative independence and their capacity to care for the needy within the course of the nineteenth century’ (Özbek 1999: 8). At the same time, the state administration took on a more active role in caring for the poor. One important policy in this regard was the indigent benefit (*muhtacin maaşı*). Although initially there were no foundations of this policy in terms of laws or regulations, it appears that under this policy, the state made regular payments to persons in need. Among such ‘persons in need’ were families with twin children (*tev’em maaşı*). The policy appears to have begun in the mid-nineteenth and probably varied from area to area in terms of breadth and depth of the payments made (Düzgün 2009). Still, it can be regarded as the precursor of social assistance in Turkey.

In the early twentieth century, the state created a legal regulation for this policy. This regulation from 1910 defined the criteria, under which people could benefit from the program: to be citizen of the Ottoman Empire; have no source of income; have no relatives, who have to provide for the person in need; and to be old, disabled or an orphan. It is difficult to ascertain, how many people were covered through this programme at that time. Data from the Ministry of Finance from 1910 shows that in 1910 only around 250 persons received indigent benefits. It is entirely possible that thorough historical research would unearth more beneficiaries. However, given the fact that the Ottoman Empire’s

¹ Quote from Turan Öztürk, politician of the centre-right Motherland Party (which ruled the country from 1983-1991) during the parliamentary debate on the general budget in 1987 (TBMM Tutanak Dergisi Dönem: 17 Cilt: 34 Yasama Yılı: 4, 40’nci Birleşim 13.12.1986: 144). The discourses surrounding social assistance policies will be covered in-depth in a separate working paper.

population at that time was around 20 million it is probably safe to say that the programme remained marginal and reached only a fraction of the poor (Özbek 2006: 31-34; Öztürk 1993).

In the late Ottoman Empire local administrations also played an important role in poor relief. Laws and regulations on the role and duties of local administrations defined municipalities as being responsible for caring for the poor. There is evidence that in the mid-nineteenth century it was common for municipalities to put aside 2.5 per cent of their income to support the poor and make regular transfers to them. This ratio reflects an Islamic rule (*zekat*), according to which people should put aside 2.5 per cent of their wealth to help those in need. Overall, it seems local administrations played a more important role in helping the poor than the central state. Again, exact numbers to back up this claim are not easy to find. To quote just one figure, in 1915 monthly payments to at least 660 people in poverty were made in Istanbul, a city with a little less than 1 million inhabitants at that time (Özbek 2006: 34-36).

To conclude, the beginnings of Turkey's social assistance regime stretch back to the nineteenth century. Although it is probable that the state made some kind of supportive payments to the poor even in earlier times, it is in the nineteenth century that these social assistance policies became more coherent and state-centred. While the reach and generosity of these policies pale into insignificance when compared to modern programmes, their mere existence signifies that caring for the poor became part of the function of the central state (Özbek 2006: 36).

2.2. Social Assistance in the Early Republican Era

The Republic of Turkey was founded in 1923 on the principle of breaking with the Ottoman past. However, in crucial respects the young Republic inherited important aspects of the late Ottoman era. This credo of historians of modern Turkey is to some degree also applicable to our policy area. It appears that no major new social assistance programmes were launched until the 1970s. Instead, the central state continued its small social cash transfer to the destitute and largely put municipalities and local administrations in charge of poverty relief, or left it even to the voluntary sector.

To some degree the General Directorate for Foundations (*Vakıflar Genel Müdürlüğü*, VGM), which is the successor of the Ottoman Ministry for Endowments, continued to care for the poor. Although the law, which defined the functions of the General Directorate for Foundations, did not include any reference to poor relief until it was revised in 1956, the budget of the institution consistently showed that money was being put aside for the poor. For instance, the VGM administered food banks for the poor (*imaretler*). More importantly, the VGM paid monthly benefits to the destitute and the blind (initially: *muhtacin, amalar ve saire maası*; later: *muhtaç ve körlere yardım* and now *Muhtaç Aylığı*). This programme was apparently a continuation of the indigent benefit programme of the Ottoman Empire and continues to this day. As we will discuss the programme in more detail in section 4, it suffices to say here that throughout the Republican era only a fraction of the poor benefitted from this program.

As during the late Ottoman Empire, local administrations and municipalities appear to have played a more important role than the central state in terms of poverty relief. This was despite the fact that in 1936 the Ministry of Health was rebranded Ministry of Health and Social Assistance and that this ministry created a General Directorate for Social Services that was supposed to 'ensure the social protection of poor people, who are unable to work' in 1963 (Law No. 225 §1 b). Thus, one scholar of that time

concluded that: “With regard to social assistance the Ministry [of Health and Social Assistance] rather shows the way and lets the local administrations and municipalities do the real work” (Dicleli 1946: 121).

The Law on Municipalities from 1930 defined among the functions of municipalities numerous issues related to the poor (Law No. 1580 §15). Among these were to protect lone kids, mentally disabled and people affected by disasters or accidents; to support poor families with twins (as in the Ottoman *tev'em maaşı*) and poor orphans with in-kind and cash transfers and to take care of disabled without relatives to build and administrate shelters for the poor; to create and administrate support funds for the poor. Again, it is not at all clear in how far the municipalities really fulfilled these functions. Yet, we can conclude that the central state aimed to put municipalities in charge of policies related to poverty relief.

In addition to the functions defined by the Law on Municipalities, municipalities and local administrations were also in charge of supporting poor families of military recruits. According to a law passed in 1941, when compulsory military service for men was 40 months, local administrations had to provide in-kind and cash support to families of recruits, in case these families fell into poverty due to lack of earnings during the compulsory military service (*Asker Ailelerinden Muhtaç Olanlara Yardım Hakkında Kanun*). In how far this support programme in practice really worked remains unclear. A second assistance programme from 1948 provided seeds to poor farmers (*Muhtaç Çiftçilere Ödünç Tohumluk Verilmesi Hakkında Kanun*). Given that the overwhelming majority of the population were farmers at that time, this programme had potentially important effects. Yet, again, in how far the programme really made an impact in the lives of the rural poor remains unclear.

Overall, one can conclude that social assistance was not a priority policy area of the early Republic.² As during the late Ottoman era, interventions of the central state in this field remained marginal. Instead, local administrations were put in charge of providing for the poor – and it is unlikely that they fulfilled this function in a sufficient manner. In the absence of a coherent state-based poor relief system, civil society organisations, such as the Red Crescent (*Kızılay*), the Child Protection Institution (*Çocuk Esirgeme Kurumu*) or the Association of Philanthropists (*Yardım Sevenler Derneği*) played an important role in providing for the poor. These institutions were formally non-state actors, but were de facto closely connected to the state, particularly during the single party era (1923-1946). During the early Republic social assistance and poor relief were thus in some sense outsourced to the voluntary sector (Bugra 2008: 128-155).

3. Administrative Structure of Turkey's Social Assistance Regime

In this section, we provide a short introduction to the institutional and organizational structure of Turkey's social assistance regime. The organizational structure of Turkey's regime used to be confusingly complex. Different ministries and directorates were in charge of different policies and often had overlapping aims. This complexity has been somewhat reduced with the establishment of the Ministry of Family and Social Policies (*Aile ve Sosyal Politikalar Bakanlığı*, ASPB) in 2011, which today administers most social assistance programmes. However, other organizations continue to play a role. The section

² Note that some scholars would disagree (Baytal 2009).

focuses on the contemporary situation and briefly introduces the Ministry of Family and Social Policies, the Fund for the Encouragement of Social Cooperation and Solidarity (*Sosyal Yardımlaşma ve Dayanışmayı Teşvik Fonu*, SYDTF), the General Directorate of Foundations (*Vakıflar Genel Müdürlüğü*, VGM), the Ministry of Education and the role of local administrations. We do not discuss the role of voluntary organizations providing poor relief, although a substantial part of the poor receives benefits from these organizations, in particular from religiously motivated associations (Göçmen 2014).

3.1. Ministry of Family and Social Policies

The foundation of the Ministry of Family and Social Policies in 2011 can be considered as a milestone in the development of Turkey's social assistance regime. The administrative and program-level fragmentation of the policy area had long been a point of criticism. Moreover, parts of the bureaucracy had long called for a unification of the regime (Devlet Planlama Teşkilatı 2001: 67-70). While fragmentation on the program-level has, if anything, increased since an attempt at unification in 2004 failed (the *Sosyal Yardımlar Yasa Tasarısı*), the unification of the administrative structure has to some degree been achieved with the establishment of the ASPB. The ASPB took over several key institutions providing social assistance in Turkey. The core mission of the ministry is gathering the existing social assistance programmes and social services under a single roof. According to the decree, which established the Ministry (KHK 633, §2 f), the mission of the ministry is to provide benefits for those who are in need of social assistance and protection; to coordinate the national policies and strategies to combat poverty; and to coordinate state institutions, organizations and civil society in that regard. The ministry has various directorate generals and departments among which particularly the Directorate General of Social Assistance and the Directorate General of Child Services play an important role in providing benefits.

The Directorate General of Social Assistance (*Sosyal Yardımlar Genel Müdürlüğü*) is one of the most important departments of the ASPB in terms of providing social assistance. Among its key functions is to develop and coordinate poverty reduction and social assistance policies. It is charged with using the income of an extra-budgetary Fund, the Fund for the Encouragement of Social Cooperation and Solidarity (*Sosyal Yardımlaşma ve Dayanışma Teşvik Fonu*). The administrative affairs of the Fund had been under the control of the Secretary-General of the Fund (*Fon Genel Sekreterliği*) from 1986 to 2004. Upon the suggestion of the World Bank a General Directorate (*Sosyal Yardımlar ve Dayanışma Genel Müdürlüğü*, SYDGM) was created for the Fund in 2004, to increase institutional capacity in the field of social assistance.³ With the creation of the ASPB, this Directorate was transformed into the Directorate General of Social Assistance. The Directorate is in charge of key policies. Among them are conditional cash transfers, the social cash transfer for widows and other smaller in-kind and cash transfers.

The Directorate General of Child Services (*Çocuk Hizmetleri Genel Müdürlüğü*) is the second important provider of social assistance. One of its key functions is to provide and coordinate social services for children. The Directorate used to be a separate institution, called the Social Services and Child Protection Institution (*Sosyal Hizmetler ve Çocuk Esirgeme Kurumu*, SHÇEK). This institution had been created during

³ Cf. Report of parliamentary commissions (*Sosyal Yardımlaşma ve Dayanışma Kurumu Başkanlığı Teşkilât ve Görevleri Hakkında Kanun Tasarısı ve Sağlık, Aile, Çalışma ve Sosyal İşler ile Plan ve Bütçe Komisyonları Raporları* 2004: 2).

military rule in 1983 to improve public child protective services and develop the social services sector. After surveying existing public social services and concluding that they were 'insufficient in terms of quality and quantity' the administration argued in 1982 that it was 'necessary to create a new institution for social services in alignment with the concept of the "social welfare state"'.⁴ According to the 1983 law that created the institution (Law No. 2828 §1), it had the goal to 'provide social services to families, children, disabled, old aged and others, who are in need of protection, care and support'. In line with this, one of the functions of the institution was to develop services and programmes that would provide in-kind and cash support for people and families in poverty, who were unable to fulfil their basic needs and continue their lives on the most basic level (Law No. 2828 §9 d). Based on these goals, the institution started a social assistance programme in 1986. The Directorate General of Child Services continues to run this program, which is focused on children, who are in need of protection, under the name of Social and Economic Support.

3.2. The Fund for the Encouragement of Social Cooperation and Solidarity (SYDTF) and the Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundations (SYDV)

Established in 1986, the Fund for the Encouragement of Social Cooperation and Solidarity (SYDTF) is a peculiar institution of Turkey's social assistance regime. It enables the provision of social assistance, which is carried out through the parastatal Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundations (SYDV) that have been established in all districts in Turkey. While the Fund was initially created to provide irregular in-kind and cash benefits, it has over time become ever more geared towards regular cash transfer programmes. Today, the Fund is the financial source of many social cash transfer programmes, such as conditional cash transfers, the social cash transfer to widows or the cash transfer to orphans. The budget of the Fund surpasses that of many ministries (Urhan and Urhan, 2015: 247), hovering around 0.2 per cent of the country's GDP.

The general expenditure guidelines of the Fund are decided by the Fund Committee (*Fon Kurulu*). The Fund Committee is headed by the Minister of Family and Social Policies and is composed of the undersecretaries from the Ministry, the Ministry of Family and Social Policies, the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Finance and the heads of the Directorate General of Social Assistance and the Directorate General of Foundations (KHK 633 §34). The minutes and decisions of the Fund Committee are not public and therefore it is somewhat difficult to explore the workings of the Fund. Furthermore, it is an extra-budgetary fund meaning that it is independent from the government budget and is not subject to parliamentary scrutiny. Hence, one cannot trace its workings in parliamentary debates and decisions. The Fund has diverse sources of revenue, but is mainly financed by the central state.

The Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundations (*Sosyal Yardımlaşma ve Dayanışma Vakıfları*) are parastatal or government operated non-governmental organizations that were established to distribute the income of the fund based on the guidelines set out by the Fund Committee. However, they also have some room for discretion, based on what they perceive as local priorities and necessities. In general,

⁴ Cf. Report of parliamentary commissions (*Sosyal Hizmetler ve Çocuk Esirgeme Kurumu Kanunu Tasarısı ve Millî Eğitim, Bütçe - Plan ve Sağlık ve Sosyal İşler Komisyonları Raporları 1983: 7*).

they are supposed to provide in-kind and cash support to people in need. There are around 1000 foundations in Turkey (there is a foundation in each district). The foundations are governed by a Board of Trustees and are headed by the governors of the respective district. The Board consists of high level bureaucrats of the district, the local mayor and some philanthropists.

Decisions made by the foundations might differ from one foundation to another (Yılmaz and Yakut-Çakar 2008: 3). Hence, local foundations enjoy some discretionary power. Since the supervision and tracking of the Fund is undertaken by the Directorate General of Social Assistance of the Ministry of Family and Social Policies, it can be asserted that there is a de facto and invisible hierarchical relationship between the directorate general and the foundations (Urhan and Urhan 2015: 245). The foundations can thus generally be seen as parastatal organizations.

3.3. General Directorate of Foundations

The Directorate General of Foundations (*Vakıflar Genel Müdürlüğü*) was founded in 1920. Today, it has numerous tasks such as providing social assistance, coordinating the donations, carrying out (restoration) projects in the fields of tourism, history etc. and inspecting the foundations along the lines of national development policies. It is the successor of the Ottoman Ministry of Endowments.

Initially, the law regulating the VGM initially made no reference to its social assistance functions. In fact, the law regulating the VGM passed in 1938 did not contain any reference to social assistance or poor relief, let alone any reference to specific programmes. Still, the yearly VGM budget laws of the era list poor relief expenditures such as food banks. A new law defining the functioning of the VGM, issued in 1956, created a special directorate in the VGM that was responsible, among other things, for charitable work (*Hayır İşleri ve Mülhak Vakıflar Müdürlüğü*, Law No. 6760). In 1984, a decree re-defined the workings of the VGM. In this decree the directorate was re-named Directorate for Charitable Work and Social Services (*Hayır İşleri ve Sosyal Hizmetler Dairesi Başkanlığı*, KHK 227). With these changes, the profile of the VGM as an institution providing social assistance became clearer. Although its programmes, such as the Indigent Benefit or its Education Support are comparatively small, their continued existence shows that social assistance is provided through quite different channels. Therefore, the unification of social assistance under the ASPB has not been completed.

3.4. Ministry of Education

At first glance, the Ministry of Education might appear as an unlikely provider of social assistance. However, the Ministry has administered a social cash transfer to poor schoolchildren for a long time. First devised in 1973 and implemented in 1976, the Schoolchildren Grant provides regular cash benefits to “ensure that successful schoolchildren, who are poor, can continue their education to the highest level” (Law No. 1739 §8).

3.5. Local Administrations

Traditionally, local administrations have been deeply involved in the provision of poor relief in Turkey. This resembles the historical situation found in Europe (Bahle et al. 2011). As explained above, the Law on Municipalities from 1930 included a long list of social assistance and poor relief functions of municipalities. Thus, the central state delegated social assistance partly to the local administrations,

even though the municipalities not necessarily fulfilled all functions set out in the law. This approach has broadly remained intact in the new Law on Municipalities from 2005 (Law No. 5393). Here, social services and social assistance are described as being among the functions and responsibilities of municipalities (Articles 14 and 38). Moreover, provision in the form of “social services and social assistance to low income earners, the poor, indigents, disabled” are explicitly mentioned in the list of possible municipal expenditures (Article 60).

In practice, local administrations have indeed taken over more and more social assistance functions. According to critics, this involvement in helping the poor allows municipalities to foster clientelist relationships and ensure re-election (Urhan and Urhan 2015: 258). Arguably, social assistance provided by municipalities tends to focus on non-rights based, irregular in-kind and cash benefits. Nevertheless, benefits provided by municipalities are quite extensive (usually regardless of the party affiliation of the local mayor) and should not be discounted. In terms of overall expenditure, they are estimated to constitute around 5 per cent of the overall public expenditure on social assistance (Kalkınma Bakanlığı 2017: 124), with one important spending item being transfer to poor families of military recruits (Toprak and Şataf 2017: 80-81). Moreover, in terms of coverage, it is likely that they reach far more than 5 per cent of all beneficiaries of public social assistance in Turkey. However, in this paper we focus only on social assistance that is either provided by the central state or is regulated on the level of the central state and therefore do not discuss the in-kind and cash transfers provided by municipalities.

4. Social Assistance Programmes in Contemporary Turkey

In this section, we describe the main social assistance programmes that exist today in Turkey. This analysis is based on primary legislation, i.e. statutes, whenever such legislation exists and is publicly available. Where primary legislation is not available, we relied on official reports and secondary literature. We discuss the programmes in chronological order by their inception. Moreover, we discuss the Fund for the Encouragement of Social Cooperation and Solidarity and the programmes that are based on the Fund in a separate subsection. The reason for this is that these programmes share certain features (e.g. eligibility criteria), so it makes sense to collect them under a single subsection.

Throughout this part, the focus is on institutional characteristics, generosity and scope of the programmes. This means that we try to understand what groups or categories among the poor are entitled to benefits through these programmes (eligibility criteria), what benefits they receive through these programmes (benefit levels) and how many people benefit from these programmes (coverage). Regarding coverage, two issues need to be clarified. First, we differentiate between legal coverage and actual receipt of benefits. The former is captured in the analysis of entitlements, whereas the latter is captured in the analysis of beneficiary numbers. Second, there are overlaps between the programmes. Thus, it is possible for beneficiaries to receive benefits from more than one program. So, overall coverage numbers are lower than the separate coverage data for the programmes suggest. In sum, the analysis combines a focus on entitlements that social assistance programmes entail, as well as their institutionalization and implementation. Finally, we will also trace how these factors have changed, from the inception of the respective programmes to this day.

4.1. Indigent Benefit

The General Directorate for Foundations (VGM) has been administering a small social cash transfer programme for a long time. We have been able to trace the programme to 1929, but it is likely that it has been in existence since the beginning of the Republic. This social cash transfer, which was initially referred to as the benefit for the blind and disabled poor, and was then rebranded as Indigent Benefit (*muhtaç aylığı*), is quite possibly a continuation of the Ottoman Empire's indigent benefit programme (*muhtacin maaşı*). Although the VGM's social cash transfer never reached more than a fraction of the poor, it is still a significant program: until 1976, it was apparently the only social cash transfer by the central state and provided regular and at least in some years surprisingly high monthly benefits to its beneficiaries. To this day, it continues as a separate programme administered by the VGM, despite all aims at streamlining and unifying Turkey's social assistance regime.

It is difficult to understand the legal foundations of the Indigent Benefit during the early Republic. By all accounts, there was no separate law for the program. However, in some yearly budgets of VGM (e.g. Law No. 1486 D-Cetveli), we find a special remark, which makes a reference to the 1925 general budget law. Thus, it is possible that the legal foundation for this programme was laid then. In any case, through the yearly VGM budget laws we are able to trace key characteristics of the program, such as eligibility criteria, benefit levels and beneficiary numbers.

Over time, the legal foundations of the programme were solidified. In 1984, the center-right Motherland Party (*Anavatan Partisi, ANAP*) government issued a decree that re-defined the workings of the VGM. In this decree, the Directorate for Charitable Work and Social Services was given the function to provide monthly benefits to the indigent, disabled and blind, insofar it had the means to do so (KHK 227 §13 f). In this way, the Indigent Benefit was made an integral part of the responsibilities of the VGM. Six years later, in 1989, the ANAP government issued a regulation on Food Banks and the Indigent Benefit (*Başbakanlık Vakıflar Genel Müdürlüğü Muhtaç Aylığı ve Vakıf imaret Yönetmeliği*) which specifically defined who could benefit under what conditions from the program.⁵ This regulation was superseded by a regulation on Foundations in 2008 (*Vakıflar Yönetmeliği*) passed by the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP*) government that included a section on the Indigent Benefit program⁶.

4.1.1. Eligibility Criteria

The first references to the programme in the VGM budget laws from 1929 onwards describe the programme as a 'benefit for the destitute, blind and so on' (*Muhtacin, amalar ve saire maaşı*, from 1944 onwards: *muhtaç ve körlerin maaşı*) pointing to the special status of the blind in this program. The budget laws between 1929 and 1943 explicitly state that those, who earn more than the benefit amount, are not eligible. This means that the poverty line specified by the programme was pegged to the benefit amount. This peg was discontinued between 1944 and 1948. In these years, the poverty line defining eligibility was only half the benefit amount.

Between 1949 and 1968 there are no clear descriptions in the VGM budgets. However, in some years there are references to the programme in parliamentary debates. For instance, in the report of the 1954

⁵ *Başbakanlık Vakıflar Genel Müdürlüğü Muhtaç Aylığı ve Vakıf imaret Yönetmeliği, Resmi Gazete No. 20386.*

⁶ *Vakıflar Yönetmeliği, Resmi Gazete No. 27010.*

Budget Commission it is stated that indigent benefits go to those poor, who have no source of income, have no relatives, who are required by law to take care of them, and who are either old and disabled or orphans.⁷ Presumably these eligibility criteria were in place in most of this time period and were possibly not applied to the blind as these were described as a special category.⁸

In 1989, the ANAP government issued a regulation on the Indigent Benefit, which specified the workings of the programme in more detail. According to the regulation, the aim of the programme was to provide regular payments to the destitute, the blind and the disabled. Moreover, the regulation also contained a separate programme to provide one-time in-kind or cash transfers to people, who are sick or for some other reason in need. The regulation stated that in order to benefit from the cash transfer one's income had to be below the level of benefits provided by the cash transfer. The programme had two target categories: 1) the disabled, the blind and the unemployed and 2) orphans. The first group had to be unable to live their lives without the help of others, not receive any kind of social security benefits and not have any relatives that had to take care of them. Moreover, their income and wealth had to be below the benefit level they would receive through the Indigent Benefit. In contrast, orphans simply had to be 'in need'. People above the age of 65 were ineligible for the benefit.⁹

In 2008, the conservative AKP government led by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan reformed the Indigent Benefit through a new regulation. In terms of eligibility criteria, two significant changes were made. First, the blind and the unemployed were no longer mentioned among the potential target groups. Second, beneficiaries of social pensions (for the disabled) were no longer explicitly excluded from receiving indigent benefits.

4.1.2. Benefit Levels

In the early Republican years, benefit levels remained mostly steady and were rarely changed. Instead of a definite benefit level, parliament set a maximum benefit amount between 1929 and 1954. This amount was 3 lira per month until 1943 and 6 lira per month until 1953. While benefits were thus quite stable in nominal terms, they fluctuated a lot in real terms due to inflation. To understand the development of real benefit levels, we divide the maximum benefit levels of the Indigent Benefit to the per capita GDP. Note that the benefits that people received were in all likelihood lower. For instance, in 1954 the parliamentary budget commission noted that benefit levels varied between 2.5 and 6 lira.¹⁰ So, the figure below should not be taken at face value. Still, one cannot but conclude that, at least until the Second World War, real benefits appear remarkably high.

⁷ *Vakıflar Umum Müdürlüğü 1954 yılı Bütçe kanunu lâiyhası ve Bütçe Komisyonu raporu: 70.*

⁸ From 1969 to 1972, references to the same eligibility criteria are found in the VGM budget laws. From 1973 on the formulation in the VGM budget omits a reference to the relatives.

⁹ Only two small modifications were made to the 1989 regulations. In 1997, a clause, according to which only Turkish citizens could benefit from the program, was shelved. In 2006, a clause was added, according to which disabled children, whose parents fulfil the criteria of the program, are also eligible for the monthly benefits (presumably indicating that disabled children were not eligible before).

¹⁰ *Vakıflar Umum Müdürlüğü 1954 yılı Bütçe kanunu lâiyhası ve Bütçe Komisyonu raporu: 9.*

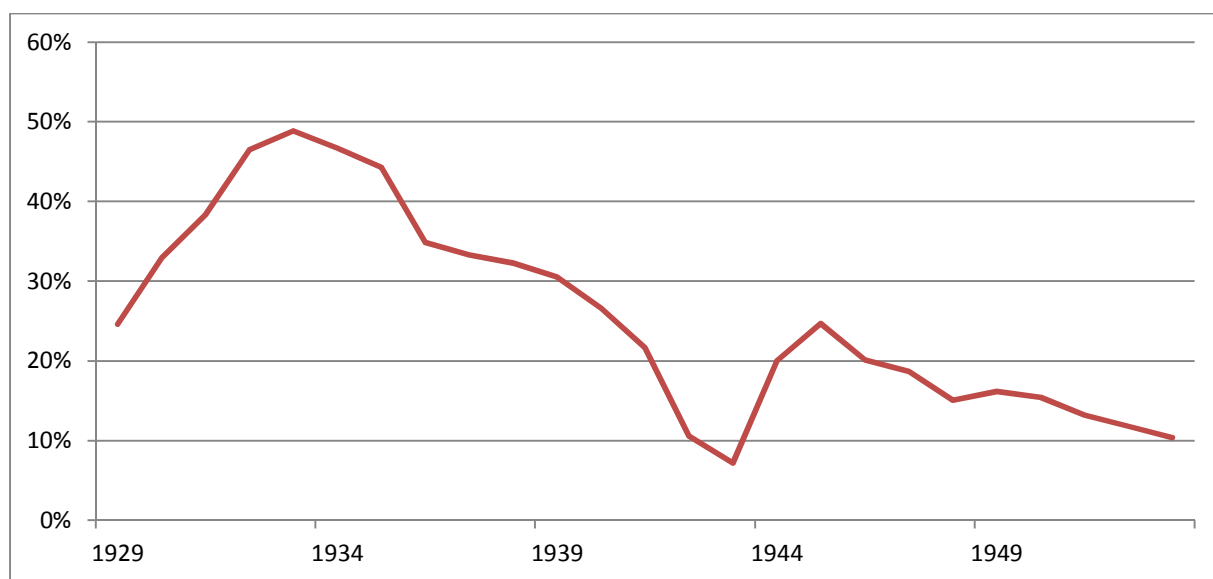


Figure 1. Maximum benefit levels of the Indigent Benefit as a proportion of per capita GDP (1929-1953)

Source: Own calculations based on information provided in VGM budget laws and parliamentary debates. GDP per capita is based on data provided on the website of the Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK).

From 1954 onwards, both parliamentary debates and VGM budget laws specify clear benefit levels (instead of maximum benefit levels). Moreover, nominal benefits are more frequently increased in this period. The figure below shows how real benefit levels developed as a proportion of per capita GDP.¹¹ After a considerable increase of benefit levels in 1954 by the Democratic Party government inflation again eroded real benefits. This pattern is repeated in the 1960s and 1970s with remarkable nominal increases in the mid-1960s (by the Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, CHP*) government) and mid-1970s (by a caretaker government) being quickly reversed through inflation.

Real benefit levels reached their lowest levels in the 1980s, during military rule and the centre-right ANAP government. From 1990 onwards, benefit levels recovered and no longer eroded by inflation. The reason for this is that in 1989, benefit levels were tied to the development of civil servant wages (*taban aylık katsayısı*), which usually translated into stable benefits in real terms. In 1998, nominal benefits were doubled by a centrist-coalition government (composed of the ANAP, the Democratic Left Party and the Democratic Turkey Party) and remained remarkably steady during the 2000s under the AKP government.

¹¹ Another indicator measuring real benefit levels would be replacement rate. Here, one would divide benefits to some average wage, such as the average production worker wage. For social assistance programmes in Turkey, replacement rates show broadly similar trends as benefits as a share of per capita GDP. Therefore we do not present them here separately.

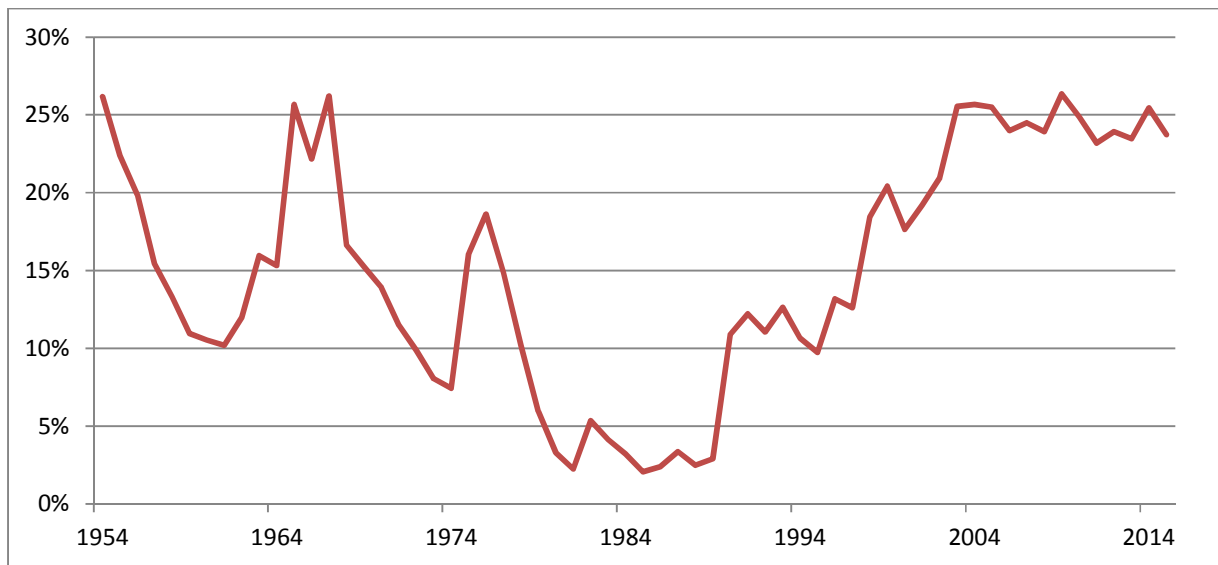


Figure 2. Benefit levels of the Indigent Benefit as a proportion of per capita GDP (1954-2015)

Source: Own calculations based on information provided in VGM budget laws, parliamentary debates and the regulations governing the Indigent Benefit program.

4.1.3.Coverage

Data on beneficiaries and coverage of the Indigent Benefit programme are difficult to find. For the period 1929-1948, we do not have actual beneficiary numbers. Still, based on the information in the yearly VGM budget one can deduce a minimum beneficiary number. In the yearly budgets until 1948 it is stated how much money is allocated to the programme and how high the maximum benefit amount is. Dividing the earmarked amount to the maximum benefit amount provides us with an estimate for the minimum number of beneficiaries. Assuming that not all beneficiaries received the maximum benefit amount, the real beneficiary number would be higher. Our results show that in most years, the estimated maximum beneficiary number is between 250 and 500. In the 1954 budget commission, it is mentioned that there are 500 beneficiaries of the program. Given that no change in the allocated budget occurred between 1948 and 1953, we can assume that in these years coverage did not change much. Thus, the data indicates how marginal the programme remained in the single party and early multi-party era.

For the period 1962-2001 we also do not have actual beneficiary numbers. However, from 1969 onwards the budgets define the number of recipients that are supposed to benefit from the programme in the given year. This is confirmed in the 1989 regulation, which explicitly states that the beneficiary number is to be defined in the budget law each year. For the years 1962-1968 we can infer the numbers from parliamentary debates. Therefore, we can provide an estimate of the number of beneficiaries of the program.¹² The figure below clearly shows that coverage remained very low between 1000 and 4000 beneficiaries. Interestingly, the increase to 4000 occurred immediately prior to the introduction of social

¹² Yet, note that the real number of benefits deviates from these figures. For instance, in 1991 the estimated coverage is 1000, but the real number of benefits was only 615 according to Öztürk (1993: 84).

pensions for elderly and disabled and was not immediately reversed when social pensions were introduced. Overall, the programme thus remained marginal in terms of scope (to put the number in perspective: Turkey's population was around 29 million in 1969 and 65 million in 2001).

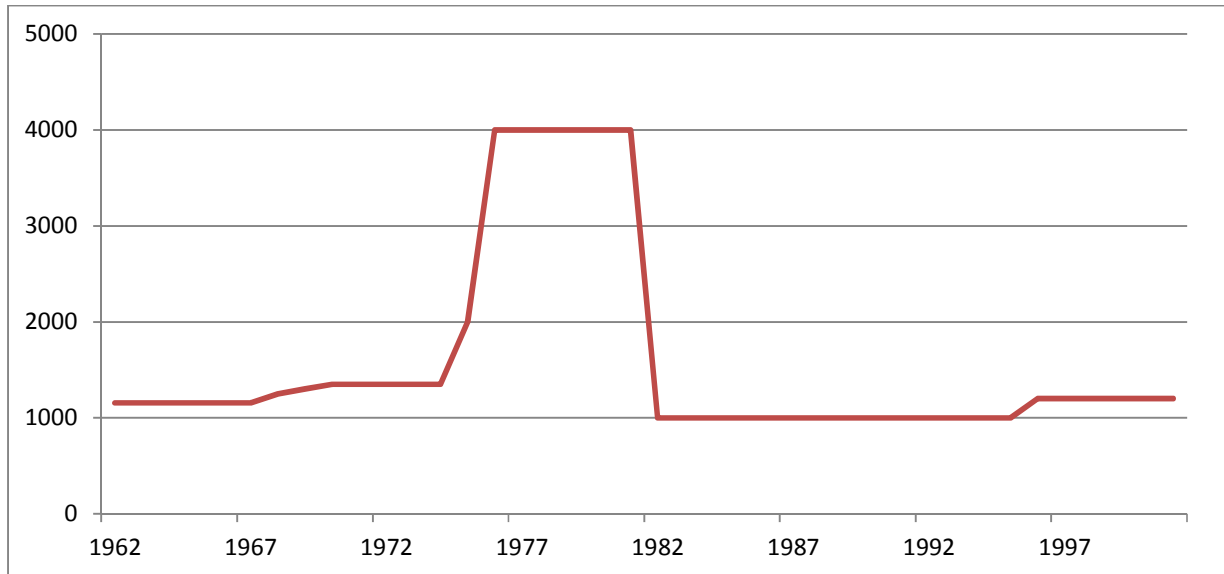


Figure 3. Estimated beneficiary numbers of the Indigent Benefit (1962-2001)

Source: Estimate based on information provided in VGM budget laws and parliamentary debates.

For the years since 2003 the real number of beneficiaries is available through reports of the VGM and other government agencies.¹³ The figure below shows that the number of beneficiaries increased in the 2000s to nearly 5000. Overall, this shows that despite the increase in benefit levels in recent years, the programme has remained marginal in terms of its scope up to this day. Effectively, it continues to provide benefits only to a fraction of the poor.

¹³ With the 2008 regulation, the responsibility to define the number of beneficiaries was shifted from the budget law to the VGM itself.

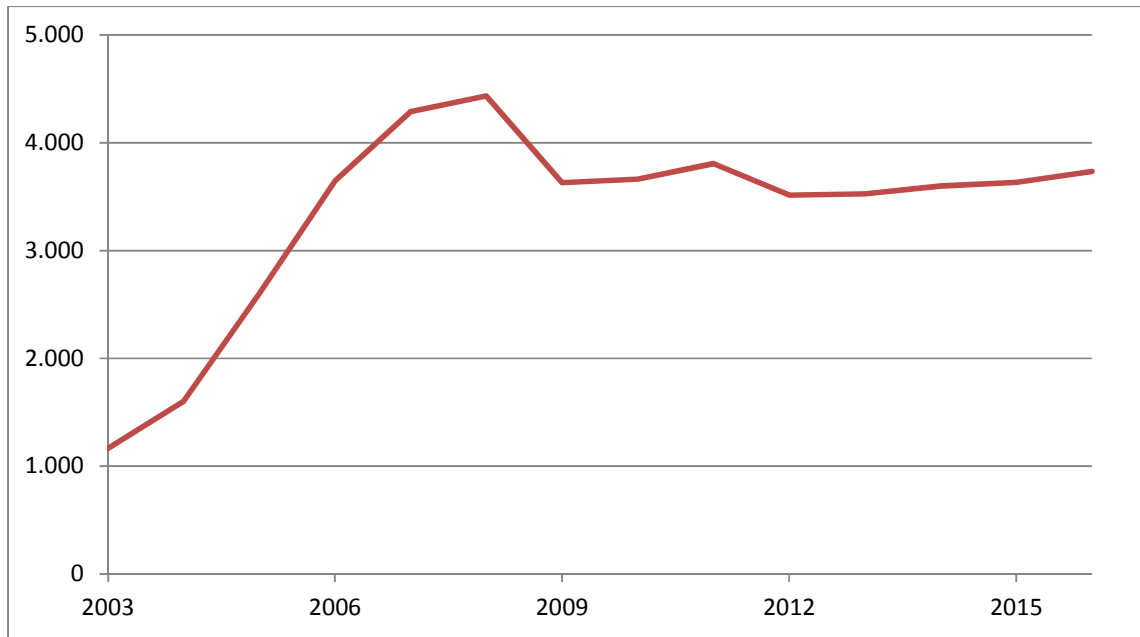


Figure 4. Number of beneficiaries of the Indigent Benefit (2007-2016)

Source: VGM Faaliyet Raporları 2007-2016 and various Yearly Programmes of the State Planning Organization (Devlet Planlama Teşkilatı).

4.1.4. Conclusion

The Indigent Benefit programme of the VGM is the oldest social cash transfer in Turkey. However, throughout the Republican era it has remained a small program, reaching only few poor. While the target groups of the programme have changed from the poor and blind to the disabled and orphans, it has never provided support to more than 5000 people in any given year. Therefore, we can conclude that the goal of the programme was never to reach all people in the respective target categories. Instead, the number of beneficiaries was mostly defined by budget constraints. Still, its small size does not mean that it has been insignificant. For roughly 50 years, it was the only social cash transfer programme administered by the central state, making it historically and symbolically important. Moreover, real benefit levels have been quite high in the 1930s, mid-1960s and since the late 1990s.

4.2. Social Pensions for the Elderly and Disabled

In 1976, a centre-right government under the leadership of Süleyman Demirel's Justice Party introduced social pensions for the elderly and disabled.¹⁴ The programme has remained one of the cornerstones of

¹⁴ In fact, social pension had been an election promise of the centre-left CHP in 1973 and was included in the coalition protocol it signed with conservative National Salvation Party (*Milli Selamet Partisi*, MSP) as part of a call for a comprehensive social assistance system (TBMM 2015: 587 and 611). Yet, the CHP-MSP government failed to implement it during its short term in power in 1974.

Turkey's social assistance regime, as it provides regular cash benefits to more than one million people and constitutes one of the most important items of the social assistance budget. Expenditure amounted to around 0.6 per cent of GDP in 1978 and hovered around 0.2 per cent in recent years. Whereas it was initially devised as a programme for the elderly, over 40 years it has more and more shifted its focus on the disabled.

Interestingly, a few years before the social pension was launched, a separate non-contributory pension had been introduced. In 1968, legislators passed a veterans' pension law, which guaranteed all Turkish participants of the independence war (1919-1923) a monthly pension (Law No. 1005). From 1966 onwards, numerous MPs had written draft laws for this group of around 10.000 people. By that time, the veterans had become elderly and many of them were no longer able to earn their means of living. Initially, the government had designed this veterans' pension as a social assistance programme that would only provide benefits for poor veterans in need of support. However, after massive criticism from opposition MPs, which attacked the idea of a means-test as stigmatizing for the veterans of the independence war, the programme was changed into a universal programme for this group.¹⁵ Thus, this special group among the elderly had already been protected by a non-contributory pension before 1976.

The social pension programme is probably the most institutionalized social assistance programme in Turkey. It is governed by a separate law called the 'Law on Providing Benefits to Turkish Citizens above 65, who are in need, powerless and lone' (*65 Yaşını Doldurmuş Muhtaç, Güçsüz ve Kimsesiz Türk Vatandaşlarına Aylık Bağlanması Hakkında Kanun*) that has been implemented through a separate regulation. Initially administered by the now defunct civil servants' social security organisation (*Emekli Sandığı*) and then the Social Security Institution (*Sosyal Güvenlik Kurumu, SGK*), it is now controlled by the Ministry of Family and Social Policies. Thanks to the institutionalized nature of the program, it is possible to trace the development of eligibility criteria, coverage and benefit levels in-depth.

4.2.1. Eligibility Criteria

Given the long history of the programme it is no surprise that eligibility criteria for social pensions have seen many reforms. Initially, in the draft legislation they were only devised for the elderly. Still, in the parliamentary debate on the law, various MPs from the government and the opposition proposed to include also the disabled into the program. This is reflected in the name of the law, which does not make any reference to the disabled, but only defines the elderly as a target group. In the law, however, the eligibility criteria for the elderly and the disabled are separately specified.

When the law passed in 1976, the criteria, which elderly had to fulfil to receive benefits, were quite strict. They had to be at least 65; had to have no-one, who is by law required to take care of them (i.e. be 'lone'); provide a doctor's report issued by a hospital showing that they were unable to work; prove that they were economically in need; receive no social insurance benefits; not be in receipt of alimony or be able to claim alimony and be a Turkish citizen. If one had an income (or were potentially able to generate an income) above the benefit level of the social pension, one was ineligible. For couples, the spouse's income was also taken into account (Law No. 2022 §1). Spouses were not eligible for separate pensions; instead couples received a single pension with a higher benefit level. Taken together, these criteria

¹⁵ Millet Meclisi Tutanak Dergisi, Dönem 2, Cilt 23, Toplantı: 3, 29'uncu Birleşim 19.1.1968: 480-500.

meant that if they were applied strictly only those elderly, who were dirt poor, physically unable to work and had no relatives to take care of them, would be able to claim benefits – if they managed to obtain a doctor's report from a hospital. Accordingly, opposition MPs voiced their concern in parliament that virtually no elderly would be able to receive benefits.

The eligibility criteria for the elderly were indeed interpreted quite strictly in the first regulation issued on the law in late 1976. However, immediately after the law was first implemented in March 1977 and just prior the 1977 general elections the regulation was revised and eligibility criteria were softened. For instance, regarding alimony it was clarified that having relatives, from whom one could potentially claim alimony, would not result in being ineligible.¹⁶ Thus, it appears that the criteria were not implemented as strictly as the law initially suggested.

Regarding the disabled, the law differentiated between severely disabled and not severely disabled. The severely disabled were defined as those, who were unable to live their lives without the help of others. The not-severely disabled were eligible for benefits only if they had not found proper employment. This meant that they had to apply to the public employment agency to obtain a document which showed that proper employment could not be found for them. Yet, this requirement was dropped in mid-1977. Differentiating between severely and not severely disabled was done through a report by three doctors. A regulation in 1978 specified how the doctors should rate the degree of disability. Moreover, the first regulation stated that not-severely disabled children were excluded from claiming benefits. An additional regulation in 1978 clarified that also severely disabled children were ineligible. Therefore, only adult disabled could receive benefits.

Eligibility criteria were severely tightened with a new regulation issued by the military junta in 1983. The regulation provided a long list of groups, who were not considered lone, i.e. not eligible for old age pensions. For instance, married women, whose husbands were not "imprisoned, missing or mentally ill" were declared ineligible for benefits. This also reflected a gendered perspective on social protection inherent in some passages of the social pension law, according to which husbands were primarily eligible for benefits, because they were the head of the family (*aile reisi*). The 1983 regulation also made it far more complicated for potential beneficiaries to obtain a doctor's report and to claim benefits. Finally, it included a clause according to which all beneficiaries' cases would be re-evaluated based on this new and stricter regulation within six months. Overall, it seems that the changes in the 1983 regulation were meant to exclude more poor people from receiving benefits and to ensure that fewer non-poor people illegitimately claimed benefits.¹⁷

Over the last two and a half decades, eligibility criteria for social pensions have been gradually softened. In 1992, a centrist coalition led by Demirel made significant changes to the social pension law. Among other things the reform abolished the requirement for old aged that they had to be unable to work to obtain benefits. This meant that the elderly no longer had to obtain a doctor's report to claim benefits

¹⁶ Moreover, regarding the doctor's report it was specified (in 1976 and an additional regulation in 1977) that the elderly would not have to get their report from a proper hospital if there was no such hospital in their place of living. Importantly, the regulation also made it easier for applicants to prove that they were in need.

¹⁷ In 1987, a small change was made regarding the doctor's report. For the old aged, it was made easier to obtain such a report. Moreover, a new regulation was issued that changed how disability was rated, i.e. how severely disabled and not-severely disabled were differentiated.

(Law No. 3783). A new regulation issued in 1994 implemented the reform and also made other small changes that generally loosened eligibility criteria. In 2005, in a bipartisan initiative the governing centre-right AKP and the opposition centre-left CHP passed a law on the disabled, which brought significant improvements for the disabled. This included changes to social pensions, which made families with disabled children (below 18) eligible for cash benefits (Law No. 5378 §25).

In 2013, several far-reaching changes, that were heatedly discussed in the public, were made to the eligibility criteria (Law No. 6495 §73). First, the requirement of being lone, i.e. that there is no one, who is by law required to take care of the claimant, was dropped. Second, the poverty line, which defines whether the claimant is 'in need', i.e. poor enough to receive benefits, was changed. Whereas before, the poverty line was based on the benefit level, it was now set to one third of the net minimum wage. This meant that benefit levels and poverty line were separated. Third, the receipt of disability pensions for not-severely disabled adults was again linked to not having been given employment by the public employment agency. Fourth, in computing whether the income was below the poverty line, the household's income was now taken into account. Previously only the claimants' income (and the spouses' income in case the claimant was married) had been taken into account. Considering that a significant part of the population lives in extended families this issue has potentially important implications. The change effectively meant that elderly and disabled without own income could be made ineligible for benefits if they live together with family members with a job. In 2016, this change was partly reversed. In computing whether the claimant was poor enough to receive benefits, the household approach was dropped for the elderly. Instead, only the claimant's (and if applicable the spouse's income) was taken into account, as it was the case before 2013 (Law No. 6704 §1).

4.2.2. Benefit Levels

From the outset, benefit levels were based on a formula that included an indicator that was used to determine civil servants wages. The goal was to ensure that benefits would not be eroded by inflation, which was quite high in the mid-1970s. At the time of the passing of the law in parliament the benefit formula translated into 540 liras per month for old aged and disabled. In the case of couples, who both fulfilled the eligibility criteria, the head of the family (*aile reisi*) received 1.5 times this amount, 810 liras per month. Immediately, this benefit level was ridiculed by some opposition MPs as being far too low to ensure a decent living standard. However, with hindsight one can see that this benefit level was quite remarkable and was, by some accounts, never again reached in real terms. It took only a few years for inflation to erode benefit levels of social pensions. This becomes clear if one looks at the development of benefits as a share of per capita GDP.

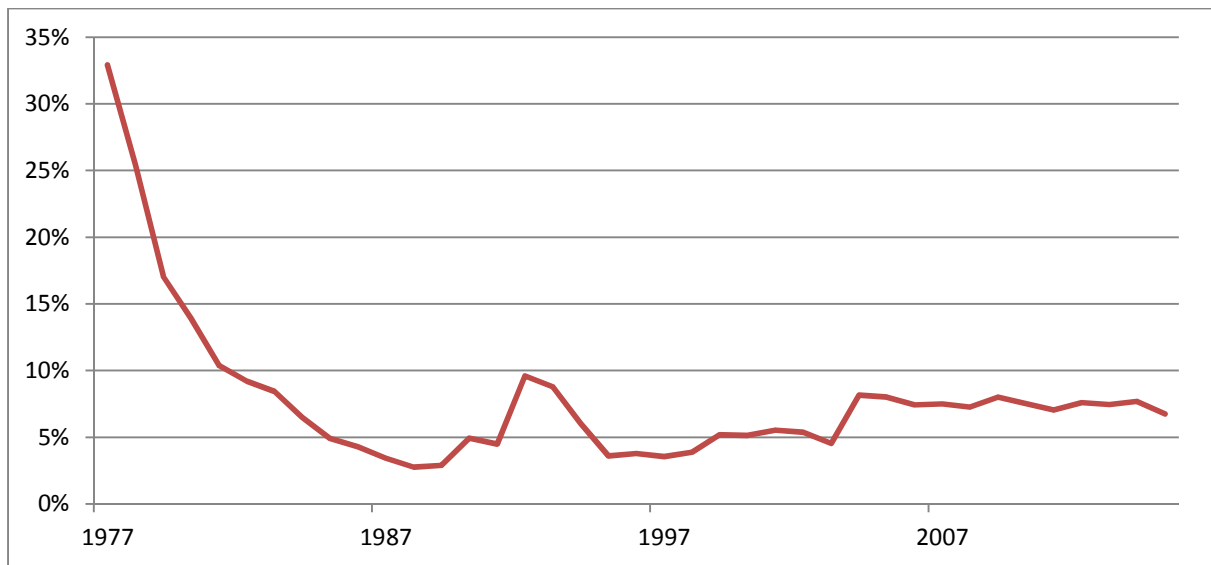


Figure 5. Social pensions for the elderly as a proportion of per capita GDP (1977-2016).

Source: Own calculations based on information provided in Law No. 2022 and various budget laws.

The figure above shows how benefit levels for social pensions developed over time in real terms. In 1977, benefits were around one third of the per capita GDP. However, they swiftly decreased. Until 1989, successive governments did not make any changes to the way benefits were computed. At its lowest point in the late 1980s, social pension replacement rates thus stood at around 3 per cent. Only by 1992, the new centrist government led by Demirel made significant changes to the benefit formula. A few months after coming to power it tripled nominal benefits. Still, in real terms this increase was short lived, due to the high inflation of the 1990s.

This trend was reversed in 2004, when the AKP government doubled nominal benefits. Moreover, in 2005 it changed the way couples' pensions were computed. Instead of receiving 1.5 times the benefit of the amount of singles, couples now received two separate pensions in case they both fulfilled the benefit criteria. Additionally, the 2005 reforms set disability pensions at a higher level than old age pensions. Severely disabled now received three times the amount of old age pensioners. Disabled adults and families with disabled children received two times the amount of old age pensioners. After the increases seen in 2004 and 2005 real benefits remained stable until today at around 7 per cent of the per capita GDP for the elderly, 14 per cent for disabled and 21 per cent for severely disabled. Whereas this represents a marked increase over the 1980s and 1990s, particularly for the old aged this is still low by comparative terms.

In 2016, the benefit ratios of old age and disability pensions were changed again. Benefits for old age pensions were increased, while they remained unchanged for disability pensions. Now, pensions for severely disabled are 2.25 and pensions for disabled and families with disabled children 1.5 times the amount of pensions for old aged.

4.2.3.Coverage

For 40 years, social pensions have been providing benefits to a significant share of the poor in Turkey. As the figure below shows, coverage swiftly increased in the first years of the program's implementation. From slightly more than 400.000 in 1977 beneficiary numbers climbed to 900.000 in 1983. This increase probably reflects both, the gradual implementation of the programme and the loosening of the eligibility criteria. The increase was reversed with the new and stricter eligibility criteria in late 1983. Beneficiary numbers fell from 900.000 in 1983 to around 600.000 in 1989. From 1990 onwards, the reach of social pensions increased again. Particularly the 1992 and 2005 reforms lead to increased coverage. Today, more than 1.300.000 people receive social pensions in Turkey.

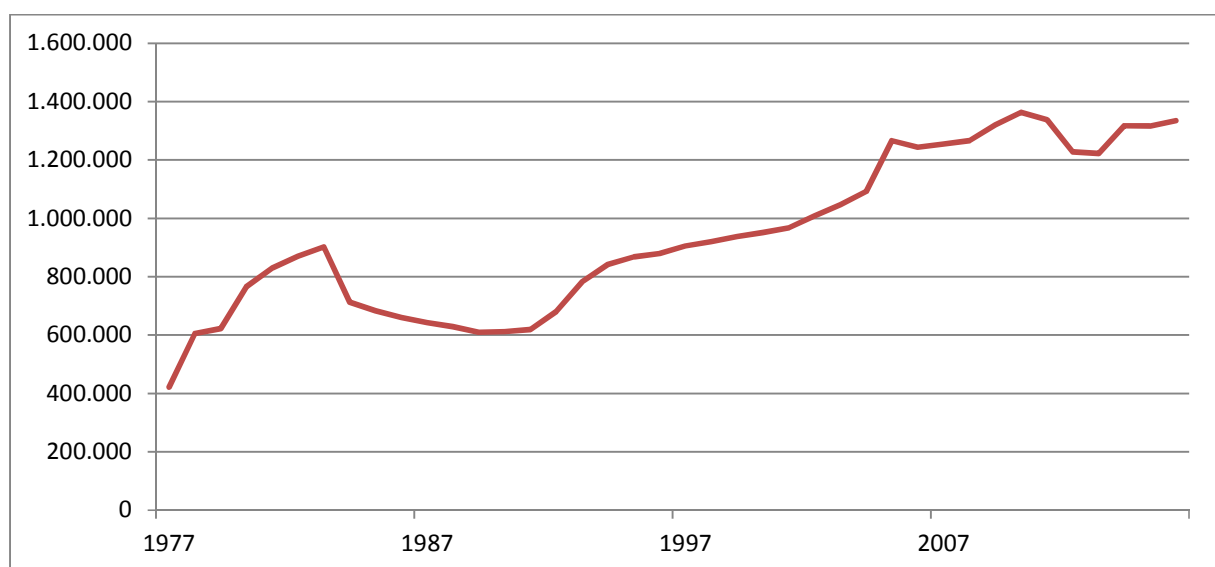


Figure 6. Number of beneficiaries of social pensions (1977-2016).

Source: Data from *Emekli Sandığı*, ASPB and SYDGM.

Disaggregating beneficiary numbers based on target group - elderly, disabled, severely disabled and (since the 2005 reform), families with disabled children - allows us to get a better understanding of the developments over time. After the increase in coverage until the early 1980s, we see how the 1983 reform led to a decrease; particularly in the number of old age pensioners. From 1990 to 2005 beneficiary numbers increase for all beneficiary groups. In 2005, the strong increase in old age pensions is mainly the result of an administrative change: whereas earlier couples receiving social pensions were counted as one beneficiary, from 2005 onwards couples receive two separate pensions. From 2006 onwards, we find that the number of old age pensioners decreases, while the number of disability pensions increases. This is likely to be a result of the 2005 reform, which increased disability pensions to two and three times the level of old age pensions. Thus, the reform made it meaningful for old and disabled pensioners to receive benefits under disability instead of old age status. Another reason for the decrease in old age pensioners in recent years is the introduction of a separate social cash transfer programme for widows in 2012. Given that the benefit level for the cash transfer for widows was higher than that for old age social pensions, it is likely that many elderly widows switched to this new program.

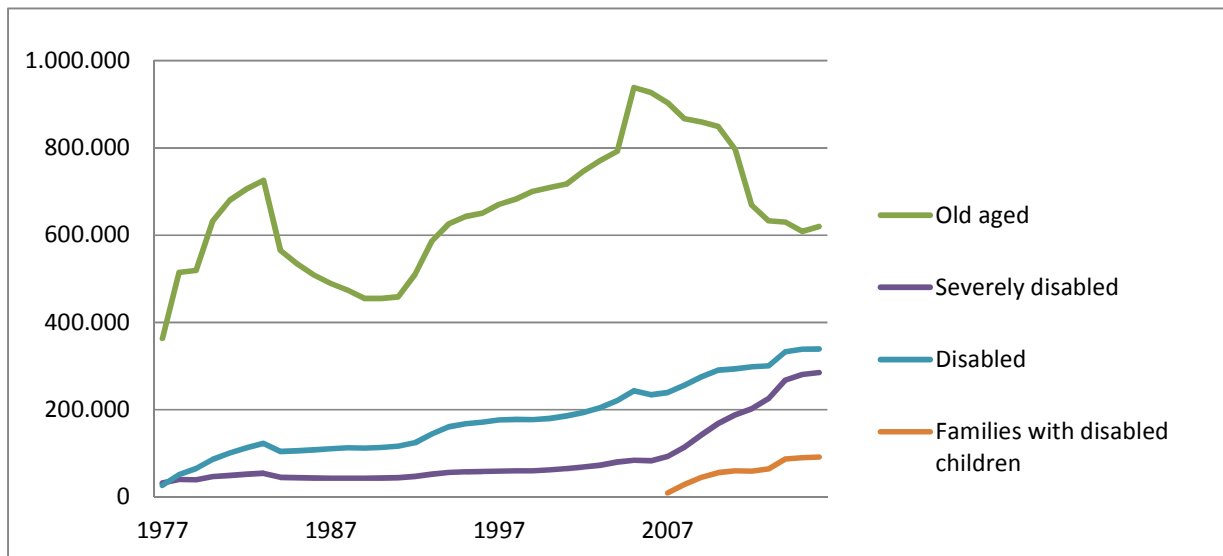


Figure 7. Number of beneficiaries of social pensions by category (1977-2016).

Source: Data from *Emekli Sandığı*, ASPB and SYDGM.

Overall, the disaggregated beneficiary figures show how social pensions have become more and more focussed on providing disability benefits. In the beginning most beneficiaries received old age pensions. In 1978, more than 500.000 beneficiaries received old age pensions, whereas only 40.000 disabled and 50.000 severely disabled were covered through social pensions. By 2016, the number of old age pensioners had increased only to a little more than 600.000, but the number of beneficiaries receiving disability pensions and pensions for severe disability massively increased to 280.000 and 330.000. Moreover, in 2016, 90.000 families with disabled children received social pensions. Thus, the share of old age pensioners among all recipients of social pensions fell from 86 per cent in 1977 to 46 per cent in 2016.

In addition to differentiating according to the category of pensioners, it is also fruitful to look at gender differentiated beneficiary numbers. Unfortunately, such data is only available for the period between 1984 and the first half of 2007.¹⁸ In the section above, we hinted at the gendered nature of the social pension law, which implicitly assumed that primarily men would receive pensions and until 2005 did not provide separate pensions for wives. However, the gender differentiated beneficiary numbers clearly show that primarily women benefitted from social pensions. Even though we counted couples' pensions under pensions for men (because that is what the law implicitly assumed), far more women received old age social pensions than men. Regarding disability benefits, the picture is the reverse. Far more men received disability pensions than women. The exact reason for these trends is difficult to unearth. Broadly speaking these beneficiary numbers might reflect perception of need and deservingness in

¹⁸ Moreover, there are minor deviations from the numbers provided in other sources. Yet, the overall trends are clear.

society. The fact that the numbers differ so much according to gender would then reveal the gendered nature of perceptions of need and deservingness in society.

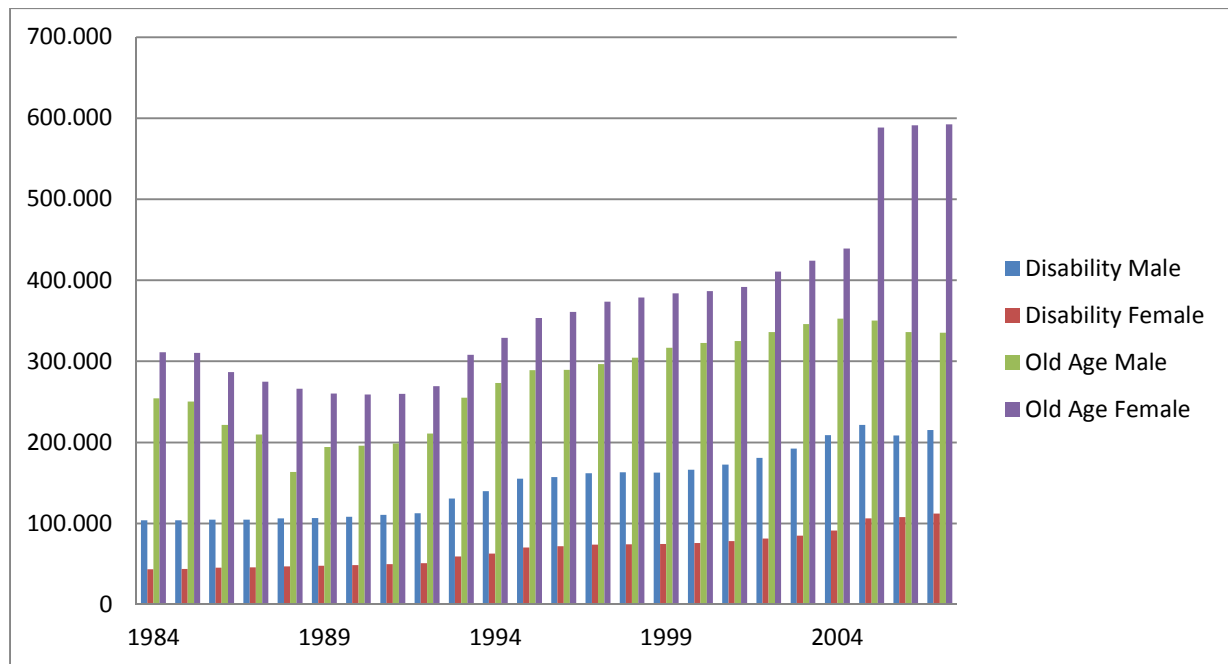


Figure 8. Number of beneficiaries of social pensions by gender and category (1984-2007).

Source: Data from *Emekli Sandığı*,.

In any case, looking at the beneficiary numbers it is clear that the number of social pension recipients massively increased over four decades, from around 400.000 to 1.300.000. However, this massive increase occurred against the backdrop of a huge population increase. To put the beneficiary numbers into perspective, it makes sense to compare them to the whole potentially eligible population. It is difficult to do this with disability figures, as the number of disabled is not known. Still, it is possible to compare the number of old age beneficiaries to the number of elderly. The figure below shows the share of over 65 year olds receiving old age pensions through the social pension program.

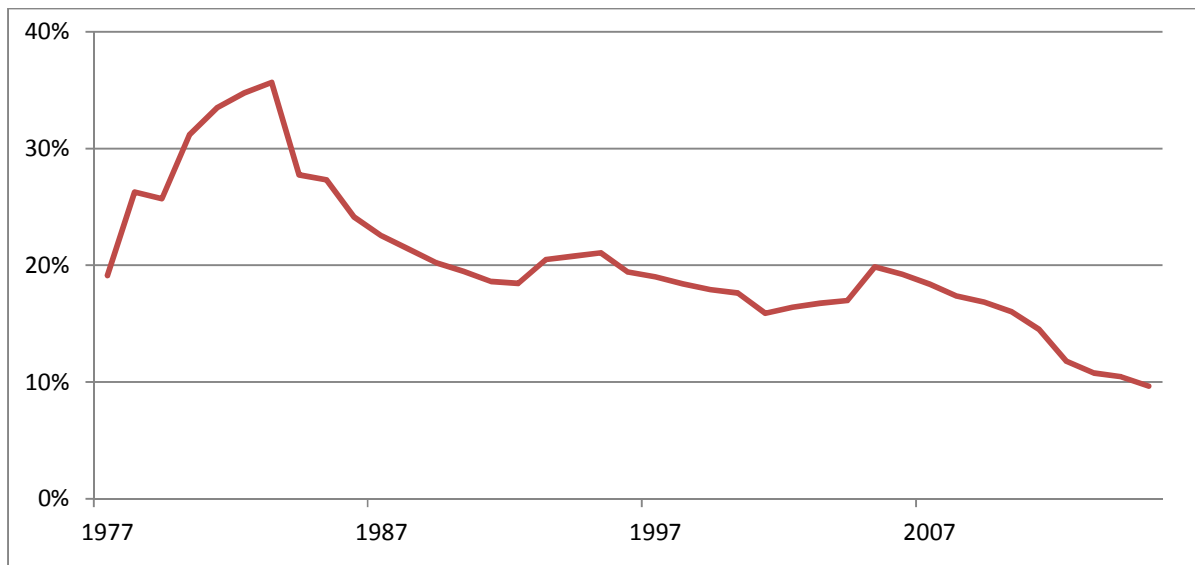


Figure 9. Share of over 65 year olds receiving social pensions for the elderly (1977-2015).

Source: Own calculations based on beneficiary numbers from *Emekli Sandığı*, ASPB and SYDGM. Data on the population above 65 is taken from the website of TÜİK.

The figure indicates how important social pensions have been in the last 40 years. In the early 1980s, around one in three elderly received social pensions. Over time this share slowly decreased. Yet, even today around one in ten old aged receives social pensions. The decrease in the share of elderly receiving social pensions can be explained through several factors. As described above, within the social pension program, some elderly beneficiaries opted for disability instead of old age pensions after the 2005 reform increased disability benefits. Moreover, since 2012 old widows started to receive benefits through a separate program. A final factor is that the social insurance system, which has been gradually implemented from 1945 onwards, started to mature. Thus, an ever increasing share of the elderly started to benefit from social insurance pensions. This development can be traced in the figure below, which shows the proportion of old age pensioners in each pension program.

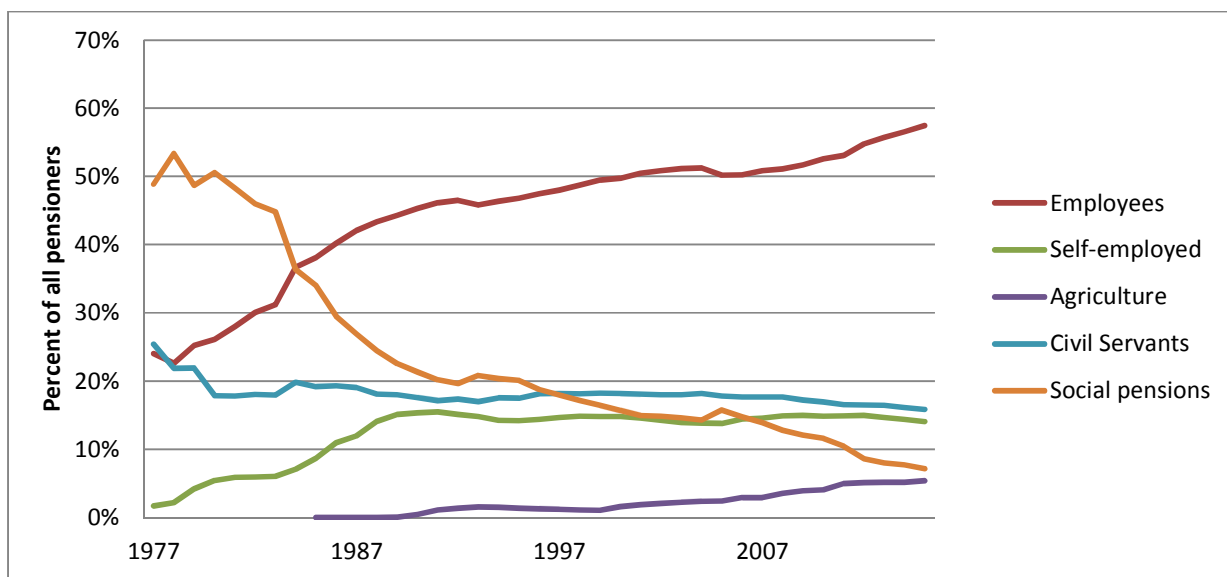


Figure 10. Share of old age pensioners by pension programme (1977-2016).

Source: Own calculations based on data on the number of old age pensioners, provided by *Emekli Sandığı*, SSK (the now defunct Social Insurance Institution (*Sosyal Sigortalar Kurumu*) for private sector employees), *Bağ-Kur* (the now defunct social insurance institution for self-employed), SGK, ASPB and SYDGM.

When social pensions were first introduced, every second old age pensioner was receiving social pensions. This shows how crucial social pensions have been in closing the coverage gap of social insurance-based pension systems. Over time, the importance of social pensions has gradually decreased. However, today still nearly 10 per cent of old age pensioners are provided benefits through the social pension program.

4.2.4. Conclusion

Overall, we can conclude that social pensions have been and continue to be a cornerstone of Turkey's social assistance regime. In fact, the programme is probably the most institutionalized and rights-based social assistance programme in Turkey. Social pensions provide benefits to a significant proportion of the poor, who are excluded from the regular social insurance system. While in the beginning the programme was mostly focussed on the old aged, particularly since 2005, it has become more and more disability centred. Although real benefit levels never quite recovered from their initially high levels, they at least stabilized during the last decade. Moreover, eligibility criteria have also been somewhat loosened in the last 30 years, so that today more than one million people are eligible for and receive social pensions in Turkey.

4.3. Schoolchildren Grant

In Turkey, there has been a long tradition of providing grants to poor schoolchildren, who are successful in school. In some respects, these grants serve as a functional equivalent to conditional cash transfer focussed on schoolchildren. Surprisingly, this is rarely mentioned in the literature. In 1973, the basic law

on national education (*Milli Eğitim Temel Kanunu*) included a provision under the heading equality of opportunity, according to which the state was to “ensure that successful schoolchildren, who are poor, can continue their education to the highest level through free boarding schools, grants, credit and necessary means of support” (Law No. 1739 §8). This provision was put into practice with a regulation issued in 1976 that focussed on middle- and high school children.¹⁹ In 1982, the programme was further institutionalized with a new law that was implemented with a regulation in 1983.²⁰ This law is still in effect and continues to be the basis for the Schoolchildren Grants provided by the Ministry of Education.²¹

4.3.1. Eligibility Criteria

From the onset, the target group of the Schoolchildren Grant has been poor and successful children. The programme never aimed to provide grants to all children, who fulfil the eligibility criteria. Instead, the number of grants has been limited by the Ministry of Education, and beneficiaries are selected through a special exam. In the 1976 regulation that first set up the program, only middle and high school children were included. The regulation defined poverty through a special threshold, according to which the per capita income in the family of the respective child had to be below twice the level of the charge for public boarding schools. This translated into a poverty threshold that has consistently been higher than the poverty thresholds set by other social assistance programmes. Success in school was measured through the previous year’s grade. Moreover, the child had to be recommended for the grant by her teachers. Finally, the regulation also specified some behavioural conditions, such as not having been punished by school. Special conditions applied to children in child protective services.

The reform of the grant programme in 1982 and 1983 made five significant changes to the eligibility criteria. First, the scope was broadened so that children in primary school were also included. Second, the poverty line was doubled from twice to four times the level of the charge for boarding schools. The poverty line was thus set far higher than in other programmes, thereby allowing a targeting beyond the very poor. Third, a good grade in the previous year and a recommendation by teachers were no longer necessary. Fourth, the behavioural requirements were softened. Fifth, special conditions previously applied to children in child protective services were broadened to children, who had no proper school in their place of living, as well as children of teachers. Finally, the 1983 reform also made the criteria, according to which the number of grants would be decided, more transparent.

¹⁹ *Temel Eğitim İkinci Kademe ve Orta Öğretimde Burs, Parasız Yatılılık ve Diğer Sosyal Yardımlar Yönetmeliği, Resmi Gazete No. 15590.*

²⁰ Law No. 2684 and *Milli Eğitim Bakanlığına Bağlı İlkokul, Ortaokul, Lise ve Dengi Okullarda Burs, Parasız Yatılılık ve Sosyal Yardımlar Yönetmeliği, Resmi Gazete No. 18245.*

²¹ In addition to the Schoolchildren Grant, the Ministry of Education also provides cash transfers to a small share of those families who sent their children to private schools (*Millî Eğitim Bakanlığı Özel Öğretim Kurumları Yönetmeliğinde Değişiklik Yapılmasına Dair Yönetmelik, Resmi Gazete No. 28450*). We do not study this transfer as a social assistance programme for two reasons: 1) It is tied to the payment of school fees (Additional §1 (1) and 2 (7)) and thus has the character of a subsidization of school fees and 3) Even though the selection procedure appears to take family income into account, the programme does not focus on the poor. This is unsurprising given that, in a country with free public education, the poor would rarely opt for paying fees to private schools.

Over the years the regulation was reformed a couple of times. One of the more important changes occurred in 2004, when children from grade 1 through 5 were excluded from obtaining grants. In 2008, the regulation was re-written from scratch.²² With this regulation the poverty line was reduced from four times to three the level of the charge for boarding schools. This change was reversed in 2016, when the regulation was again written from scratch. A second important change of the 2016 reform was that fifth grade students were made eligible for Schoolchildren Grants. Beyond these changes, however, the eligibility criteria of the Schoolchildren Grant have mainly remained intact. Therefore, the programme continues to define its target group in terms of need (poverty) and merit (success in school).

4.3.2. Benefit Levels

Data on benefit levels for the Schoolchildren Grant is patchy until 2002. Until 1983, regulations do not contain references to the benefit amount. Thus, it is possible that there were no standardized benefit levels before 1983. From 1983 onwards, the law and the regulations at least mention that the specific benefit amounts for the Schoolchildren Grant will be decided by the cabinet. We found only one such decision from 1988, which tied benefits to an indicator used to compute civil servants wages and translated to 10.500 liras at the time of the decision. To compare, this is significantly higher than the benefit level of social pensions in that year. In the parliamentary debates on the yearly budget law in 1989 it is stated that the benefit used to be far lower, around 700 liras per month.²³ This would indicate that governments between 1983 and 1988 did not adjust benefit levels to keep up with inflation. For the years after 1989, we do not know when and to what degree benefits were adjusted by governments.

For the period since 2002, we could find yearly benefit levels. Based on this data we can say that benefit levels have been regularly adjusted in the last 15 years and have reached a decent level. The figure below shows that the benefit level increased even when measured as a share of the per capita GDP until 2009. Since 2009, benefits have been rather stable at 7 per cent of the per capita GDP.

²² *İlköğretim ve Ortaöğretim Kurumlarında Parasız Yatılılık, Burs Ve Sosyal Yardımlar Yönetmeliği, Resmi Gazete No: 26932.*

²³ TBMM Tutanak Dergisi Dönem: 18 Cilt: 20 Yasama Yılı 2 44'ncü Birleşim 16.12.1988: 799.

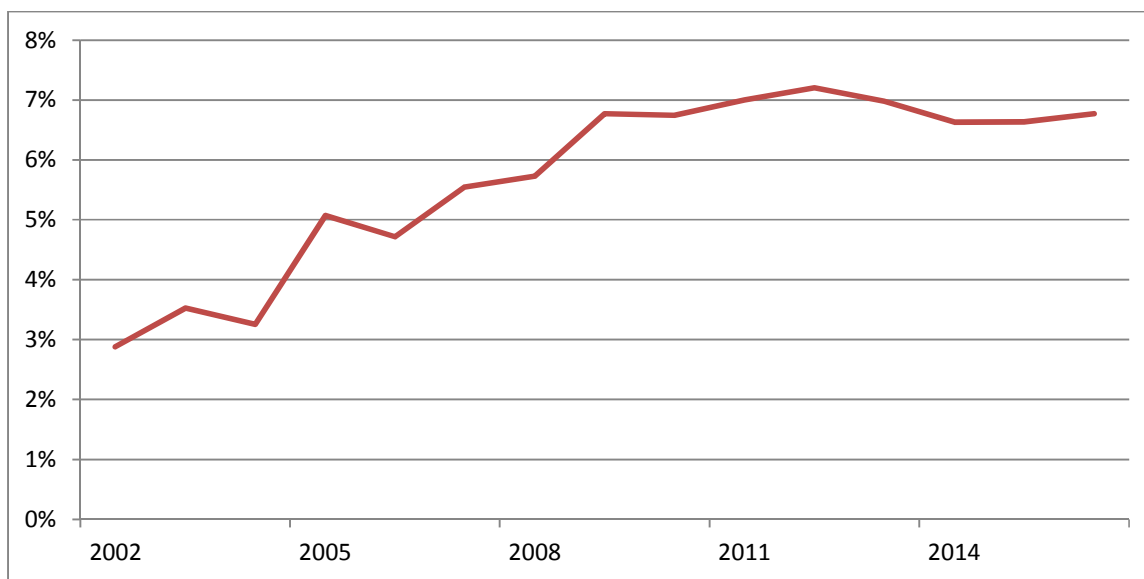


Figure 11. Benefit level of the Schoolchildren Grant as a share of GDP per capita (2002-2016).

Source: Own calculations based on data provided in reports of the Ministry of Education (*Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı Bütçe Raporu*) from various years.

4.3.3.Coverage

Data on beneficiary numbers of the Schoolchildren Grant are only available for the period since 2002. Overall, coverage has strongly increased in the last 15 years. In 2002, around 110.000 children received the Schoolchildren Grant. By 2016, this number increased to 255.000. This increase is all the more interesting, as it occurred after primary schoolchildren were made ineligible for benefits in 2004. However, to keep these numbers in perspective, only around 2 per cent of middle and high school students benefit from the Schoolchildren Grant.

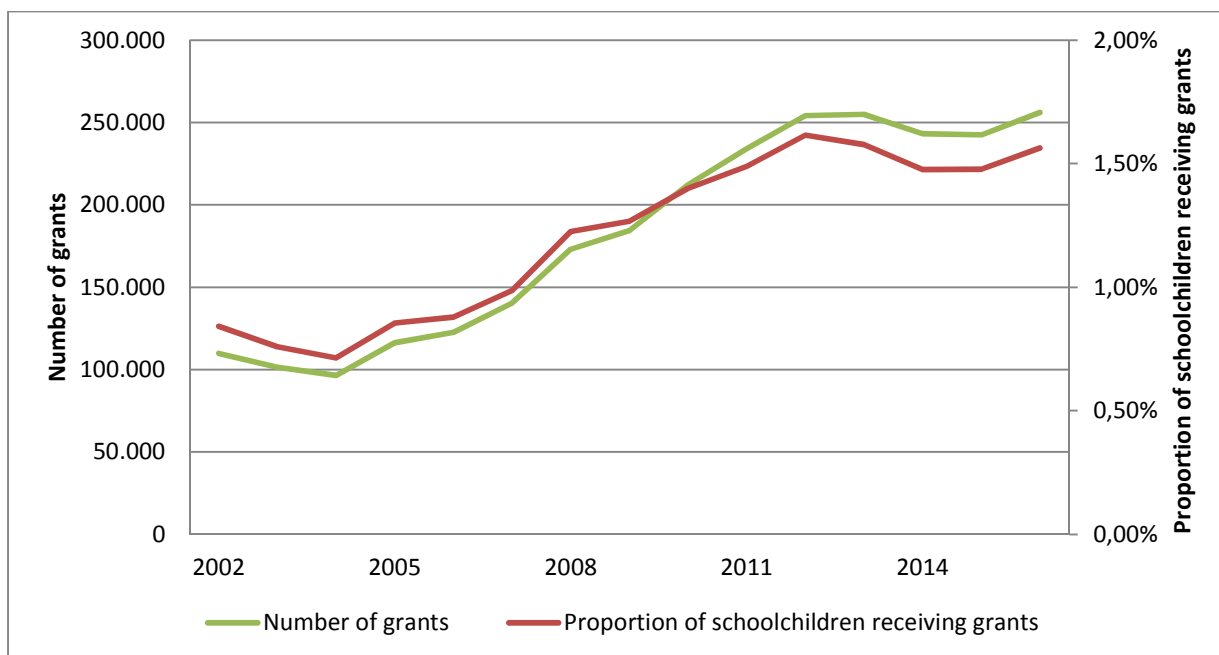


Figure 12. Beneficiaries and coverage of the Schoolchildren Grant (2002-2016).

Source: Own calculations based on beneficiary numbers provided in *Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı Bütçe Sunuşu* and *Faaliyet Raporu* from various years. Data on the number of schoolchildren is taken from the website of TÜİK.

4.3.4. Conclusion

The Schoolchildren Grant provided by the Ministry of Education is one of the oldest social assistance programmes in Turkey. In some respects, it works as a functional equivalent to conditional cash transfers, as it provides regular cash benefits to ensure that poor schoolchildren can continue their education. However, in contrast to CCTs, which only take into account school attendance, the Schoolchildren Grant also ties benefits to being a successful pupil. In that respect it is more restrictive and thus it is no surprise that coverage is far lower than for CCTs. Still, given the decent benefit level one should not underestimate the significance of the program.

4.4. Programmes under the Fund for the Encouragement of Social Cooperation and Solidarity

The Fund for the Encouragement of Social Cooperation and Solidarity (SYDTF) was established in May 1986 by the centre-right ANAP government headed by Turgut Özal. Initially, the fund was mostly geared towards providing irregular in-kind and cash benefits. Comparing the law governing the SYDTF with social pensions, the government argued that “the very aim of this law is to provide aid on-the ground without facing any bureaucratic obstacles and to ameliorate problems at short notice.” Moreover, it would “provide not only financial, but also in-kind aid.” In this view, social pensions provided “limited monthly

benefits, which are fixed or may increase if the respective parameters increase. However, [the SYDTF] does not offer monthly benefits that are continuous and within limits.”²⁴

These mostly irregular benefits provided by the SYDTF were quite extensive, reaching around 100.000 persons per months in the late 1980s according to information provided by government MPs in parliamentary debates. The fund’s income and expenditures exceeded around 0.4 per cent of GDP in the mid-1990s and fluctuated around 0.2 per cent of GDP in recent years (Yay 2014: 69-71). Yet, particularly in the first decade of its existence, the budget of the Fund was regularly transferred to other institutions for non-social assistance related purposes (Gök 2000; Metin 2011: 191). Social assistance benefits provided by the Fund were both, in the form of in-kind and cash transfers. In the first year of the Fund’s existence, for instance, around three-fifths of the beneficiaries received in-kind transfers, whereas two-fifths received cash transfers, according to information provided in parliament. In terms of expenditure, this distribution was reverse, with three fifths of the Fund’s spending consisting of cash transfers and two fifths consisting of in-kind transfers.²⁵ Over the years coverage steadily increased to a few million persons per year. By 2001, the number of beneficiaries reached more than 9 million (Bugra and Keyder 2003: 55), although this figure quite possibly includes double counting, due to the irregular nature of the assistance provided.

In the 2000s, the SYDTF changed its focus, as it increasingly started to provide regular in-kind and cash benefits. This change in the fund’s approach is closely connected to the World Bank’s Social Risk Mitigation Project, which was launched in 2001 against the backdrop of a deep economic crisis and a structural adjustment program. Started during the term of the centrist coalition government headed by Bülent Ecevit’s Democratic Left Party, the World Bank project focussed on providing immediate benefits to poor people, ensuring the institutional development of social assistance institutions in Turkey, establishing a conditional cash transfer programme and supporting local initiatives, such as income generating projects. For this project the World Bank choose to work most closely with the SYDTF (Loan agreement of the Social Risk Mitigation Project 2001). Thus, it is no exaggeration to claim that the institutional transformation of the SYDTF is connected to the Social Risk Mitigation Project.

Today, the fund administers most social assistance programmes in Turkey. Some of these programmes are solely based on decisions made by the board of the SYDTF and do not have separate legal foundations. In this section, we will discuss these social assistance programmes established by the SYDTF. As these programmes are all based on the law governing the SYDTF, it can be assumed that the eligibility criteria of the programmes overlap. Therefore, we will start with a discussion of the eligibility criteria set out by the law governing the SYDTF. In the second part, we will provide a short overview of the most important in-kind transfers on food, fuel and housing. In the third part, we discuss the different social cash transfers that are based on SYDTF Fund Committee decisions: conditional cash transfers; a SCT for widows; a SCT for families of military recruits; and a SCT for orphans. Note that given the tenuous legal foundations of the programmes and the extra-budgetary nature of the SYDTF it is somewhat difficult to find accurate information on the institutional characteristics of the programmes. In fact, the Fund Committee decisions, on which the social assistance programmes are based, are not publicly

²⁴ TBMM Tutanak Dergisi Dönem: 17 Cilt: 29 Yasama Yılı 3 111’nci Birleşim 28.5.1986: 511.

²⁵ TBMM Tutanak Dergisi, Dönem 18, Cilt 16, Yasama Yılı: 2, 18’nci Birleşim 27.10.1988: 140-145.

available. This section thus mostly relies on official reports, which summarise information on the programmes.

4.4.1. Eligibility Criteria

Even though it is difficult to understand the concrete eligibility criteria guiding the programmes administered by SYDTF, we can generally assume that they are based on Fund Committee decisions, which in turn are based on the law of the SYDTF. Therefore, we have to look at how the potential beneficiaries of the SYDTF are described in the law (the accompanying regulation does not specify this further) and how this description has changed over time.

Initially, the SYDTF had the aim to support citizens in need and thus ensure that the income distribution was fair. For this purpose, the SYDTF was supposed to support two different target groups: 1) people, who are economically in need, are not covered by social protection and do not receive any social protection benefits (including social pensions) and 2) people, who could be made useful, productive members of society through a temporary, small support or education (Law No. 3294 §2). These descriptions show that the SYDTF had a dual approach. Activating people, who were close to the poverty line, and supporting the poorest members of society.

In the following years, some small changes were made that increased the number of people who could potentially receive support by the SYDTF. In 1989, in the context of a refugee flow from Bulgaria to Turkey, the ANAP government added a clause to the law that not just citizens, but also migrants could be supported through the SYDTF. Moreover, beneficiaries for social pensions were, in principle, made eligible for support through the SYDTF (Law No. 3582 §1 and §2). In 1997, a conservative government headed by Necmettin Erbakan passed a decree according to which the SYDTF could support disabled people's medical expenditures, even if these persons were covered by social protection (KHK 572 §17).

In 2012, the AKP government made important changes to the SYDTF law that expanded the scope of the SYDTF and that clarified who could be considered to be in need (Law No. 6353 §17). In addition to making disaster victims, relatives of martyrs and veterans eligible for SYDTF support, the reform also specified that people, who were protected by social security and people, who received social protection benefits, could in principle be supported by the SYDTF if their household per capita income was lower than one third of the net minimum wage. This meant that people in formal employment could receive benefits from the Fund. Moreover, with this reform established a clear poverty line, according to which the Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundations (SYDV) could decide, whether a person is in need. Presumably, this poverty line is being used today in all social cash transfers, which have been created by the SYDTF Fund Committee, to decide whether applicants are eligible for benefits.

In 2016, the same government made a potentially significant change to the SYDTF law by linking the receipt of benefits to the participation in active labour market policies (Law No. 6704 §11). If any person living in the same household as the beneficiary, did not participate in active labour market policies that they were invited to or did not accept employment offers of the public employment agency for three times, the beneficiary would be barred from obtaining SYDTF cash transfers for one year. Thus, with the 2016 reform, activation policies, which were already in the spirit of the SYDTF law in 1986, explicitly entered the social assistance regime. However, whereas in 1986 activation had been framed positively,

without reference to conditionality, the 2016 reform for the first time made conditions of continued benefit receipts explicit.

4.4.2. In-kind transfers

Through the SYDTF and the SYDV numerous in-kind transfers are made to poor households. This has been the case since the beginning of the SYDTF.²⁶ The most significant of these are food and fuel benefits. In the public debate, these benefits are succinctly summarised and sometimes ridiculed as coal and noodles (*kömür ve makarna*). However, these in-kind transfers do provide significant benefits for the recipients and should not be brushed aside easily.

Food benefits have apparently been provided since the beginning of the SYDTF, although it is difficult to find comprehensive data for the late 1980s and early 1990s. Today, they are usually provided prior to the two big Muslim religious festivities. Around 600.000 families receive these food benefits. This represents a decrease compared to earlier years. For instance, in 2008-2009 more than two million households received food benefits (SYDGM 2010: 105). In these years, food benefits were one of the most important spending items of the SYDTF. Since then, their relative importance, both in terms of scope and spending has somewhat waned.

Fuel benefits, in the form of the provision of coal, have probably also been provided since the early times of the SYDTF. For instance, in 1997 around 500.000 people received heating support through the SYDTF (Bugra and Keyder 2003: 54). These benefits have increased in importance since the World Bank's Social Risk Mitigation Project which provided funding to increase the provision of heating support (World Bank Turkey-Social Risk Mitigation Project Information Document 2001: 6). Moreover, they were expanded in the early years of the AKP government and thus have become a trademark of the government. Over the last two years, around two million families received fuel benefits each year. Hence, this in-kind transfer likely reaches more people than any other in-kind or cash transfer program.

In addition to food and fuel benefits SYDV also provides several other in-kind benefits. Some of these are or have been subsidizations of health and education expenditures that would normally be shouldered by the respective ministries and thus might be considered as health or education policies and not social assistance policies in a narrow sense. Finally, through the SYDTF some form of housing support is provided. This housing support does not constitute a rent assistance programme as is common in European welfare states. Instead, housing support in Turkey is provided for renovation of houses or flats in dire situation, inhabited by poor people. The programme is narrower in scope and only provides support to around 20.000 households per year. To conclude, through the SYDTF a number of in-kind transfers is provided. Particularly food and fuel benefits are quite broad in scope and reach many poor families.

²⁶ TBMM Tutanak Dergisi Dönem: 18 Cilt: 2 Yasama Yılı 1 22'nci Birleşim 16.2.1988: 447-453.

4.4.3.Social Cash Transfers

4.4.3.1. Conditional Cash Transfer

Conditional Cash Transfers (CCTs) were started as a part of the World Bank's Social Risk Mitigation Project. The CCTs was explicitly mentioned in the grant agreement signed in August 2001. The pilot programme only began in 2003 in several districts and on a national level the programme was only implemented in 2004 by the AKP government. In 2007, the World Bank project was finished and the government decided to continue the CCTs with the fund's own resources. The programmes have been widely seen as a success story, as they provide regular cash benefits to poor families with children.

Turkey's conditional cash transfers closely follow the World Bank CCT model. There are two administratively separate CCTs: one education support programme for school age children (*Şartlı Eğitim Desteği*) and one health support programme for small children and pregnant women (*Şartlı Sağlık Yardımı*). To obtain benefits through the health support program, pregnant women have to deliver their baby in a hospital and go to regular medical check-ups before and immediately after birth. Moreover, they have to continue with medical check-ups as long as the child reaches the age of 6. To obtain benefits through the education support program, children have to be at least 6 years old and go to school.

CCTs are generally targeted towards the poorest segment of society. Initially, in the World Bank project, the programme was "targeted to the poorest 8 per cent of the population" (World Bank Turkey-Social Risk Mitigation Project Information Document 2001: 5). In more recent reports, it is mostly stated that the programme is targeted to the poorest 6 per cent of the population (SYDGM 2010: 33). Presumably, the programme now uses the benchmark set by law governing the SYDTF according to which people, whose per capita household income is below one third of the net minimum wage, are poor enough to be eligible for benefits.

4.4.3.1.1. Benefit Levels

Benefit levels in Turkey's CCT are highly stratified based on age and gender of the child. In general, benefits are higher for girls and increase with age. There are seven different benefit categories, with only partly overlapping benefit levels. These categories are: pregnant women, who go to medical check-ups before and after birth; birth benefit (one-time); 0-6 year old children; girls in primary and middle school; boys in primary and middle school; girls in high school; boys in high school. Benefit levels for each group vary between 35-75 Turkish Lira (around 9-19 US-\$), which is very low compared to other social assistance benefits. However, in case of families with many children the sum of all benefits could become substantial. The figure below shows how the benefit levels have developed since the introduction of the programme in 2004.

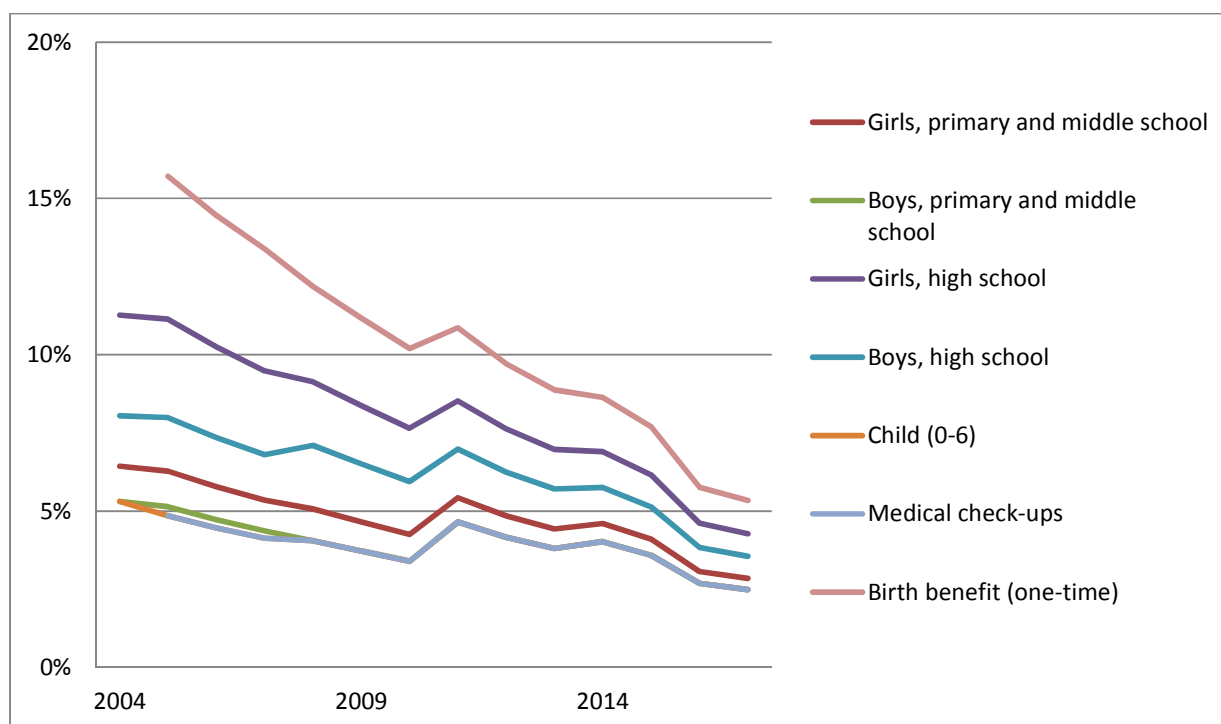


Figure 13. Benefit levels of conditional cash transfers by category as a share of the net minimum wage (2004-2017)

Source: Own calculations based on data from SYDGM, ASPB and Esenyel (2009).

The minimum wage is a good reference point for understanding the real value of social assistance benefits. In Turkey, around a third of all employees earn the minimum wage. This makes it an important reference point for many people. The figure above clearly shows how benefit values have decreased compared to minimum wage levels. Whereas the highest monthly benefit used to be more than 10 per cent of the net minimum wage in 2004, it is now below 5 per cent. Thus, it is clear that benefits are not just low, but that they have been effectively decreasing over the last decade.

4.4.3.1.2. Coverage

Administratively Turkey's CCT's are split into two different programmes: a health support programme and an education support program. Beneficiary numbers are compiled on the level of these programmes. Standardized and differentiated beneficiary numbers for these programmes are apparently not available for the whole time period.²⁷ Moreover, based on our analysis of expenditure, coverage and benefit level we believe that the available beneficiary numbers include double counting of beneficiaries. The reason for this is probably that in a given year a beneficiary can change benefit category. For instance, a woman is likely to receive both, benefits for birth and for medical check-ups, in the year she

²⁷ For the education component data availability is as follows: between 2003 and 2009 only aggregated numbers, between 2011 and 2014 years only differentiated numbers and between 2015 and 2016 both are available. For the health component only aggregated numbers are available for 2003 and 2012, while only differentiated numbers are available between 2013 and 2016.

gives birth. Due to the non-availability of standardized beneficiary data over time, the figures below should be taken with a pinch of salt. Yet, it is still valuable to look at how beneficiary numbers have evolved over time.

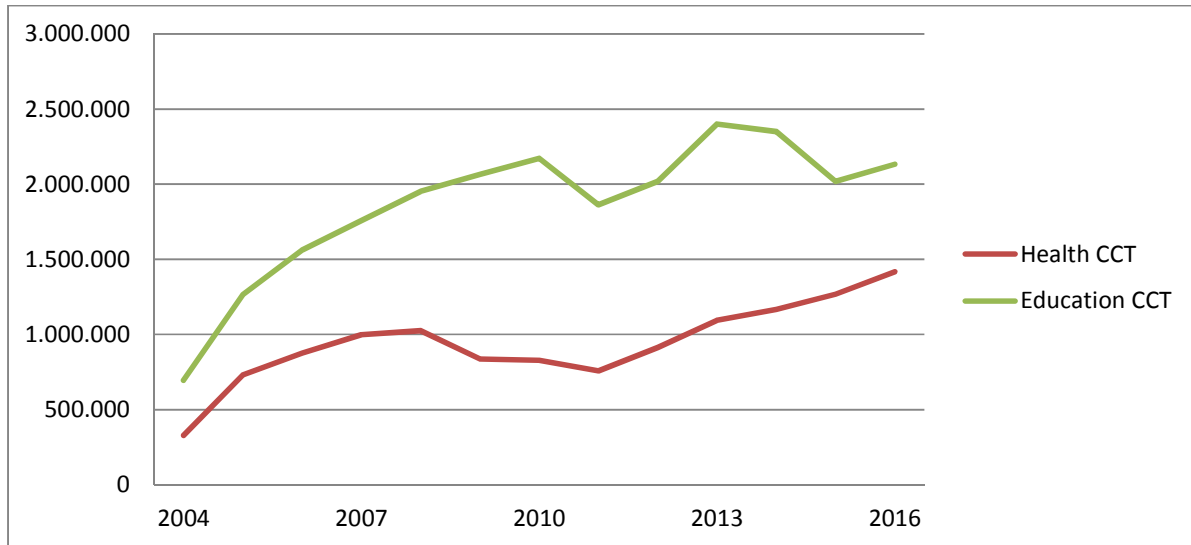


Figure 14. Numbers of beneficiaries of conditional cash transfers by category

Source: Data from SYDGM and ASPB.

The figure above shows that how rapidly CCTs increased in scope from 2004 to 2007. From 2008 onwards they have probably stayed roughly on the same level. The health component reaches more than a million beneficiaries, whereas the education component reaches around 2 million. Therefore, it is probable that the total number of children covered through CCTs is around 3 million. Data on the number of households receiving education and health support benefits is also provided for some years. Here, we can estimate that around 1 million households benefit from the education component and less than 1 million households benefit from the health component. Based on this we estimate that the number of families receiving any kind of CCT is below 2 million. Overall, it is likely that if we take all CCTs as a single program, it would constitute the cash transfer with the highest number of beneficiaries.

The CCTs thus provide benefits to a significant share of the poor. However, they also have a large target group. If we compare the number of children receiving benefits under the education component of the CCT to the number of children in this age group, we find that in 2016, around 13 per cent of all schoolchildren were covered by the CCT. Moreover, if we take the CCT as a single programme and divide the number of beneficiaries (without correcting for double counting) to the overall number of children in Turkey, we find that in 2016 around 16 per cent of all children were covered by CCTs. Even if we account for inaccuracies of the data and for the fact that the fertility rate is likely to be higher for poorer families, this would still mean that more than the poorest 6 or 8 per cent of the population are, in fact, targeted by the CCTs. Despite the low benefit levels it is thus clear that the programme has a very broad reach compared to other transfer programmes.

4.4.3.2. Social Cash Transfer to Widows

In recent years, several small cash transfers have been launched. The first of them was the social cash transfer for widows, which was established in 2012. This programme was based on a research project run by the Boğaziçi University, which started in 2009 and looked at the possibilities of supporting divorcees and widows (Özar et al. 2011). The programme first started to pay benefits in 2012 and continues to this day. The benefit level was set at 250 Turkish Lira and has not changed until today. Initially this benefit level was quite high, at least when compared to other social assistance policies. For instance, until very recently benefits for the old age component of the social pension programme have been below 250 liras. However, as inflation has been close 10 per cent in recent years, the real value of the widow cash transfer has significantly decreased since the programme was launched.

The social cash transfer to widows reached around 230.000 women when it was first launched. In 2016, the number of beneficiaries increased to close to 300.000. In comparison to social pensions and conditional cash transfers this number might appear to be low. Still, considering that the social cash transfer to widows targets a very specific group of women, it is no surprise that it has fewer beneficiaries. Moreover, one should not assume that all of these widows were unprotected before. On the contrary, it is likely that before 2012 many widows above 65 received benefits through social pensions before. Thus, the social cash transfer for widows primarily benefitted widows below 65.

4.4.3.3. Families of Military Recruits

In 2013, a small cash transfer for families of military recruits was launched. In Turkey, military service continues to be compulsory for all men. Particularly for poorer families, the military service of their son(s) can cause a significant loss of income. In fact, already in the 1940s this issue was conceived of as a problem by the state. As described in section 2 above, in 1941 a law had been passed which charged municipalities with supporting families of recruits, in case these families fell into poverty. It is not known in how far this law from the 1940s played a role in the creation of the cash transfer for families of military recruits. Yet, the fact that a social assistance policy in connection to the military service had already been established in the 1940s is noteworthy.

The SYDTF started to pay benefits through the cash transfer for families of military recruits in March 2013. The benefit level was set at 250 liras per months and has not been changed until today. As in the case of the widow cash transfer, real benefits have therefore significantly decreased since the start of the program. In terms of coverage, the cash transfer for recruit families initially reached 50.000 families. This number has been somewhat increased to around 75.000 in 2016. Compared to other social assistance programmes, this cash transfer thus has remained rather small. However, considering that the number of recruits is only around 300.000 to 400.000, one can say that a considerable share of recruit families is being covered by the cash transfer.

In 2015, another small social cash transfer was launched that complemented the cash transfer to recruit families. This cash transfer was targeted to children of military recruits. The benefit level was set at 100 lira per month and has not changed. Given that most men in Turkey do their military service before getting married and having children, it is no surprise that the scope of this programme is quite small. In 2016, only around 6.000 children were supported through this cash transfer.

4.4.3.4. Cash Transfer to Orphans

Orphans have had a special place in Turkey's social assistance regime for a long time. Orphans and half-orphans had already a special status under the late Ottoman era indigent benefits. In the early Republican era, the law on municipalities specifically charged local administrations and municipalities to take care of them. Furthermore, orphans have also been target group of the Indigent Benefit of the VGM since 1989. Yet, in 2015 a separate social cash transfer to half-orphans and orphans was launched by the SYDTF. Under this cash transfer children, whose mother and/or father has deceased, receive 100 lira per month. In 2015, 35.000 children received this benefit. This number increased to around 50.000 in 2016.

4.4.4. Conclusion

The Fund for the Encouragement of Social Cooperation and Solidarity has become one of the main vehicles of social assistance in Turkey. Even though it was explicitly launched with the aim to provide irregular in-kind and cash transfers, it has over time become more and more focused on providing regular benefits. This gradual, but pervasive change in the orientation of the Fund can be partly traced to an intervention of the World Bank in 2001. This World Bank programme strengthened the institutional capacity of the Fund and implemented a conditional cash transfer. Perceived as successful, this CCT was followed by several smaller cash transfer for widows, families of military recruits and orphans. With these cash transfers and with the continued in-kind (heating and food) and irregular support mechanisms, the Fund continues to be a key factor in Turkey's social assistance regime.

4.5. In-kind and Cash Support (Social and Economic Support Programme)

Immediately after the creation of the Fund for the Encouragement of Social Cooperation and Solidarity, the ANAP government created a new social assistance programme, called the In-Kind and Cash Support (*Ayni ve Nakdi Yardım*), in September 1986. This programme was administrated by the Social Services and Child Protection Institution (*Sosyal Hizmetler ve Çocuk Esirgeme Kurumu*, SHÇEK). This institution had been created by the military junta in 1983 to further institutionalize public child protective services and develop the social services sector.

The In-kind and Cash Support programme was created in 1986 through a regulation²⁸ to provide in-kind and cash support for people and families in poverty, who were unable to fulfil their basic needs and continue their lives on the most basic level. While it was thus framed as a general support programme to people in poverty, in practice it is likely that it mostly focussed on children in need of protection. In terms of its approach, it was designed to be more flexible than social pensions. At the same time, the support was more entitlement-based (i.e. specifying eligibility conditions and benefit levels) than the Fund for the Encouragement of Social Cooperation and Solidarity, which had been created only a few months earlier. As is clear from its name, the programme included both, in-kind and cash transfers. Moreover, both temporary and permanent support was possible under the programme. The In-kind and Cash Support programme was re-branded as the Social and Economic Support Programme (*Sosyal ve Ekonomik Destek*) in 2011 and is now run by the Ministry of Family and Social Policies.

²⁸ *Sosyal Hizmetler ve Çocuk Esirgeme Kurumu Aynî ve Nakdî Yardım Yönetmeliği, Resmi Gazete No. 19235.*

4.5.1. Eligibility Criteria

From the onset, the In-kind and Cash Support had multiple target groups. In the initial regulation, six different target groups were specified. This makes it arguably difficult to comprehend who was actually eligible for benefits – and who was not. Three of these target groups related to children, which SHÇEK deemed to be in need of protection. Supporting these children was thus an alternative to providing institutional care to these children. The other three target groups were persons, who for some special reasons, such as natural disasters or sickness, were deemed to be in need. Being in need was not linked to a definitive poverty threshold, but was just defined as being unable to provide for the basic needs of themselves and their families.

The six target groups were described as follows: 1) Families, who left their children to SHÇEK due to poverty, and who could take back their children, in case they were supported. 2) Children, who were deemed to be in need of protection by SHÇEK, but who could not be placed in institutional care. 3) Families, who fell into poverty due to natural disasters, and people, who are lone and unprotected because they lost their relatives. 4) People, who were temporarily unable to provide for the basic needs of themselves and their families, because of an extraordinary disaster, sickness or an accident; and people in life threatening circumstances that need surgery. 5) Children, who left child protective services due to their age. 6) Students, who encountered financial problems that leave them unable to continue their studies. Among these six different target groups, the regulation specified that children in need of protection and their families, as well as disabled and elderly would have priority.

In 1993 and 1997, some additions were made to the target categories of the programme. These changes even increased the diversity of the target groups. In 1993, middle and high school students were added to target category six. Furthermore, families, who would be able to care for their children and disabled family members in case they received social assistance, were established as a seventh target category. In 1997, poor relatives of people, who were covered by social insurance, but who were unable to fulfil their dependants' basic needs, were also made eligible for benefits.

In 2005, the regulation for the In-kind and Cash Support was significantly changed by the AKP government. Among the changes was a clarification that priority would be given to children in need of protection and other beneficiary groups would be supported according to the availability of funds. Moreover, the 2005 reform also brought minor changes to the target categories. Poor elderly were added to target category four. University students were made ineligible and primary school students were made eligible for support. Finally, dependants of people with social insurance coverage, who had been made eligible in 1997, were dropped from the list of beneficiary groups. One year later, in 2006, families with disabled family members, which had been eligible for benefits in 1993, were dropped from the target groups.

In 2011, the programme was reformed and re-branded as the Social and Economic Support Programme (*Sosyal ve Ekonomik Destek*).²⁹ The new regulation again specified that priority would be given to children in need of protection and other beneficiary groups would be supported according to the

²⁹ Sosyal Hizmetler ve Çocuk Esirgeme Kurumu Ayni ve Nakdi Yardım Yönetmeliğinde Değişiklik Yapılmasına Dair Yönetmelik, Resmi Gazete No. 27906.

availability of funds. Poor elderly, who had been part of target category four, were made ineligible. However, elderly between 60 and 65, who were not yet eligible for social pensions, were made eligible for support under the programme. Moreover, target categories two and seven, which both concerned children, who would not have to be taken care of by child protective services, if they received economic support, were merged.

In 2015, the regulation of the programme was re-written from scratch.³⁰ Among other things, the new regulation re-defined the target groups of the program. The focus remained on children, who were deemed to be in need of protection by child protection services due to their poverty. Supporting these children was again seen as an alternative to providing institutional care to these children. Moreover, the regulation specified that children, who were previously taken care of by child protective services, would be able to receive benefits after the age of 18 only in special circumstances. Finally, the elderly between 60 and 65 were made ineligible for benefits. To summarise, given the long list of target groups, it remains difficult to understand who has been eligible for benefits in this programme. Yet, it is fair to assume that the focus of the programme has been children in need of protection.

4.5.2. Benefit Levels

The In-kind and Cash Support programme initially allowed for both, temporary and permanent support of the poor. Between 1986 and 2011, cash payments were capped by a maximum benefit level (*emsal yardım miktarı*; later: *sosyal yardım miktarı*). This maximum benefit level was tied to an indicator connected to civil servants' wages, probably to ensure that benefits would not be eroded by inflation. A standard benefit level was initially not defined. Moreover, in many cases, people did not receive monthly support payments, but instead were supported through irregular payments. Thus, the figure below should be not understood as the regular benefit level.

³⁰ Sosyal ve Ekonomik Destek Hizmetleri Hakkında Yönetmelik, Resmi Gazete No. 29284.

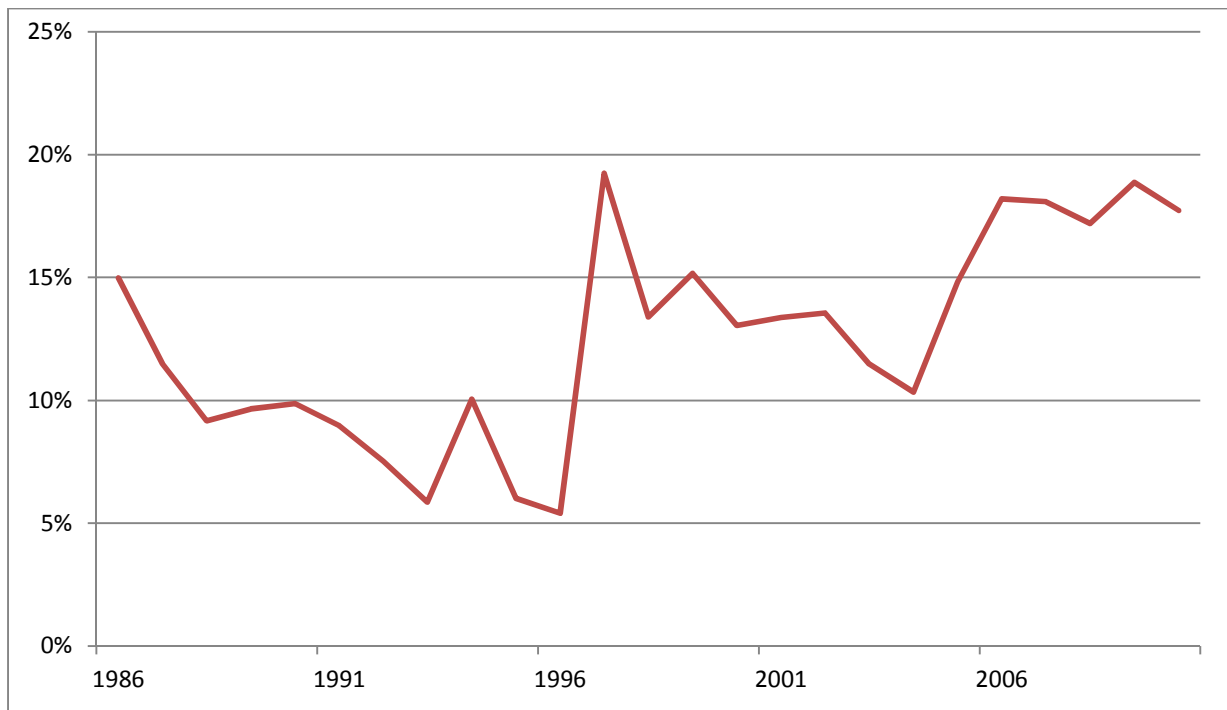


Figure 15. Maximum benefit level of the In-kind and Cash Support as a proportion of per capita GDP (1986-2011).

Source: Own calculations based on information provided in the regulation governing the In-kind and Cash Support.

The figure above shows that the maximum benefit level of the In-kind and Cash Support programme was quite decent, when it was first defined in 1986. However, it was not adjusted until 1993 and thus maximum benefits decreased from 15 to 6 per cent of per capita GDP. An increase in the maximum benefit level in 1993 by a centrist coalition government led by Demirel was short lived, as inflation again eroded benefits.

In 1997, a centre-right government led by Erbakan changed the benefit formula used for to calculate the maximum benefit level. This not just led to an increase in the real value of the maximum benefit, but also proved to be more stable in spite of continued high inflation. In 2005, the maximum benefit level was again increased and remained at close to 20 per cent of per capita GDP until 2011.

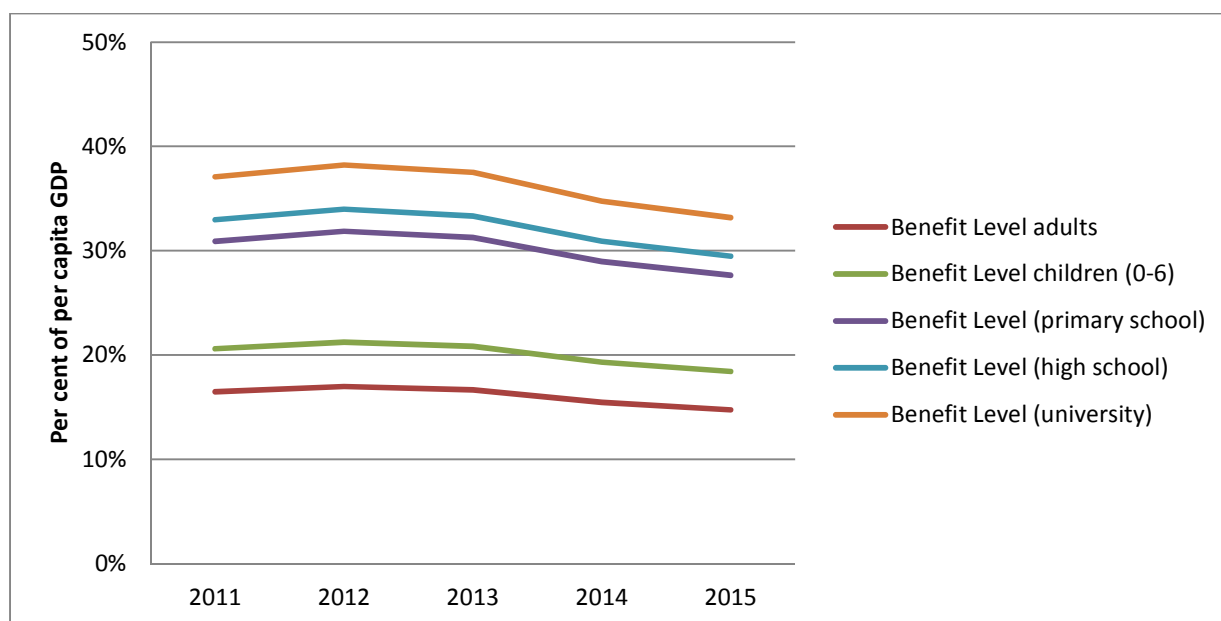


Figure 16. Benefit Levels of the Social and Economic Support Programme by category as a proportion of per capita GDP (2011-2015).

Source: Own calculations based on information provided in the regulation governing the In-kind and Cash Support.

In 2011, the benefit structure of the programme was completely changed. Instead of maximum benefit levels, the regulation now specified regular benefit levels. Moreover, these benefit levels were differentiated according to education level and age of the beneficiaries. For adults, benefit levels remained on the same level as the maximum benefit level had been before 2011. For small children, who are not yet in school, the benefit level was increased to 25 per cent above the benefit level for adults. For primary school children, who are the single most important group of beneficiaries as of 2016 (ASPB 2016: 77) the benefit was increased to 87.5 per cent above the benefit level for adults. Benefits for middle and high school children were increased to twice the amount of adults. Finally, benefits for university students were increased to 125 per cent above the benefits for adults. This differentiated benefit structure has remained intact to this day, even though some minor changes were made with the 2015 regulations. All benefits are tied to the development of civil servants' wages. Thanks to this, real benefit levels have remained stable between around 15 and 35 per cent of per capita GDP, depending on the age and education level of the beneficiary.

4.5.3.Coverage

Coverage data for the In-kind and Cash Support programme remains somewhat patchy. For the years before 2001, we could not find any data on the number of beneficiaries. However, it is possible to provide a rough estimate on coverage by comparing expenditure and benefit levels of the programme with data for other social cash transfers. It makes sense to use the Indigent Benefit of the VGM for this comparison, because both programmes have a roughly similar size. In the 1990s, maximum benefit levels for the In-kind and Cash Support were somewhat below standard benefit levels of the Indigent Benefit of

the Directorate for Foundations. Moreover, in most years expenditure levels of the In-kind and Cash Support were higher than expenditure levels of the Indigent Benefits. Therefore, we can conclude that the In-kind and Cash Support should have had a higher number of beneficiaries, compared to the Indigent Benefit. Considering that only around 1000 people received the Indigent Benefit in the 1990s, it is thus probable that the In-kind and Cash Support had a few thousand beneficiaries.

This rough estimate is supported by data we have for the late 1990s. For instance, in 1999, 11.000 people received support through the programme (Devlet Planlama Teşkilatı 2001: 59). This number steadily increased from 2004 onwards, reaching 35.000 by 2010. Moreover, the proportion of beneficiaries receiving permanent as opposed to temporary aid also increased in the same period, from 15 per cent in 2006 to 51 per cent in 2011. The programme also became more child-centred with the proportion of beneficiaries, who are children, increasing from 40 per cent in 1999, to 60 per cent in 2006 to 97 per cent in 2011.

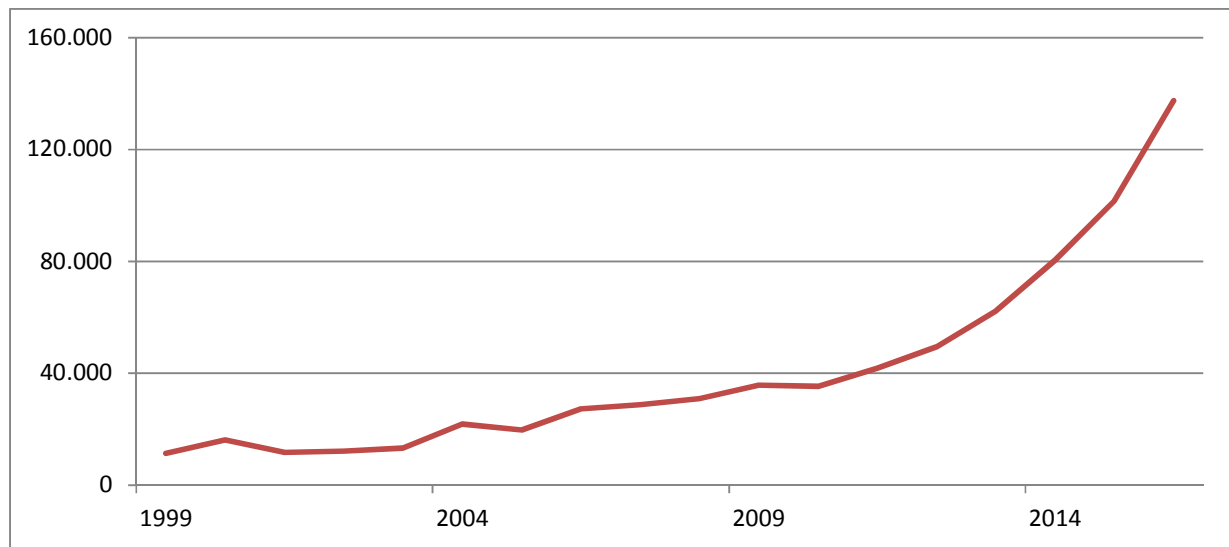


Figure 17. Number of beneficiaries of the In-kind and Cash Support (2001-2016)

Source: Data from ASPB, SHÇEK and State Planning Organization (Devlet Planlama Teşkilatı).

Since the re-branding of the programme as the Social and Economic Support in 2011 the programme has rapidly increased in size. By 2016, the programme had around 137.000 people beneficiaries. About 110.000 of them were children, who were deemed to be in need of protection by child protection services. Detailed data for 2014-2016 shows that only few of the beneficiaries were elderly between 60 and 64 or people affected by disasters or accidents. Hence, we can conclude that particularly over the last decade the In-kind and Cash Support (Social and Economic Support) programme has increased in scope and has become more and more child centred.

4.5.4. Conclusion

In the first 25 years after its creation in 1986, the In-kind and Cash Support (Social and Economic Support) was a small programme with confusing array of different target groups. The fact that it

remained small despite the high number of potential beneficiaries shows that it did not aim to cover all potential people in the target categories. Instead, it seems that coverage was restricted in accordance with restrictions in the budget of the administering institution (Law No. 2828 §9 d). From 2011 onwards, this situation gradually changed. Coverage rapidly increased within a few years and the programme became more child-centred. Yet, despite these changes in scope and focus the programme continues to have a very diverse set of potential target groups.

4.6. Student Grants

Both the state and private institutions, such as foundations, have been paying grants to university students for a long time (*Yüksek Öğrenim Bursu*). From the 1960s onwards, numerous ministries and general directorates passed regulations that specified which students would receive grants under what conditions. However, these grants were mostly not focussed on poor students only. The involvement of the state in this policy area appears to have become more systematic and more focussed on the poor from 1989 onwards, when the SYDTF started to pay grants to university students (SYDGM 2007: 80). Although the legal foundations of this practice remain unclear, it seems that providing student grants was one of the key functions of the Fund.

In 2004, the AKP government made a significant reform to the Student Grants system. A new law gave the Institution for Higher Education Credit and Dormitories (*Yüksek Öğrenim Kredi ve Yurtlar Kurumu, KYK*) the right to provide Student Grants and banned all other institutions from providing such benefits (Law No. 5102 §2). This meant that Student Grants were centralized and put under the administration of the KYK. To this day, the KYK remains the central institution providing Student Grants.

4.6.1. Eligibility criteria

The eligibility criteria for Student Grants have traditionally not been fully transparent. Instead, institutions providing these grants have in many cases remained in charge of deciding under what specific conditions benefits are provided. However, regulations did contain information about who would be ineligible for benefits. Thus, we can at least partially trace the eligibility criteria of Student Grants. The main finding is that these grants have not solely been geared towards poor students. Instead, merit as measured through success in education, and other factors have also been important.

From 1989 until 2004, the SYDTF appears to have been the main provider of Student Grants. Due to its extra-budgetary nature, the criteria, under which it provided Student Grants, remain somewhat opaque. In general, benefits provided through the SYDTF were geared towards those, who are economically in need, not covered by social protection and do not receive any social protection benefits. An auditing report from 2006 further specified that in addition to the poor, Student Grants were also targeted towards children of martyrs (i.e. security forces, who died doing their work, and civilians killed in terror attacks), the disabled, and children in child protective services (Devlet Denetleme Kurulu 2006). Information on other eligibility criteria, such as success in education, could not be found for this time period (SYDGM 2007: 80).

Since 2004, the KYK is the main provider of Student Grants. In general, the KYK states that “successful students, who are in need” are given grants (KYK 2017: 42). Unfortunately, these two principles are not spelled out in too much detail. The regulation specifying the workings of the Student Grant system only

states (since 2008) that the KYK would take into account both, the social and economic situation of the student as well as her grade in the university entrance exam (and, if applicable, her grades in university).³¹ Thus, one can clearly see that the twin pillars of merit and need are crucial for the provision of Student Grants.

While neither the law nor the regulation governing the Student Grant programme of the KYK defines under what conditions one has a right to receive Student Grants, the regulation does specify certain conditions, under which a student becomes ineligible. For instance, until 2015 students, who had an income that corresponds to the minimum wage or more, were ineligible for benefits. Moreover, students, who have surpassed the regular education duration, are also ineligible. In addition to these criteria, students who receive benefits can also have their benefits cut under certain circumstances.³² For instance, students who are deemed to be ‘unsuccessful’ by their university would have their benefits cut. Additionally, being expelled from the KYK’s dormitories or being convicted of a crime would also result in end of benefits. Finally, grants can also be cut if the student participates in ‘anarchical and terror events’. These anarchical acts are defined very broad and include student boycotts and even ‘shouting slogans’. In this sense this article, more than anything, illustrates that Student Grants provided by the central state are conditional upon the ‘proper behaviour’ of the student.

4.6.2. Benefit Levels

Data on benefit levels for Student Grants are only available since 2003. For the period before that benefit levels can be estimated by dividing the total budget allocated by the SYDTF for Student Grants to the number of recipients. Still, this estimate would not be more than an educated guess. We estimate (based on the information in Gök (2001) and DDK (2006)) that until 2003 the benefit levels of Student Grants provided by the SYDTF were quite low. Benefit levels for disabled university students were apparently somewhat higher than benefits for non-disabled students. However, overall benefit levels remained modest.

In 2003, right after coming to power the AKP government doubled benefit levels from 45 liras per month to 90 liras. Moreover, under the administration of the KYK, benefit levels were differentiated according to the education status, with graduate students receiving twice and doctoral students receiving three times the amount of undergraduate students. Yet, given that the overwhelming proportion of Student Grants is provided to undergraduate students, we will focus on the benefit levels for this group of students. As the figure below shows, real benefit levels have remained quite stable since 2003 at around 15 per cent of GDP per capita.

³¹ *Yüksek Öğrenim Kredi ve Yurtlar Kurumu Burs-Kredi Yönetmeliğinde Değişiklik Yapilmasına Dair Yönetmelik*, Resmi Gazete No. 26906.

³² *Yüksek Öğrenim Kredi ve Yurtlar Kurumu Burs-Kredi Yönetmeliği*, Resmi Gazete No. 25563; §24-30.

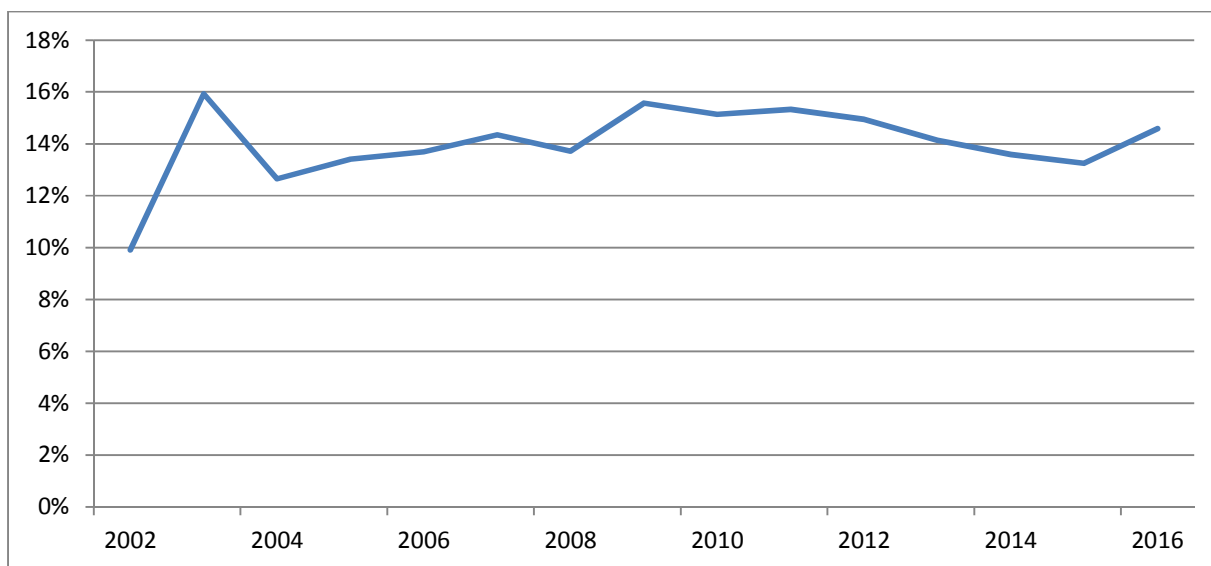


Figure 18. Benefit levels of Student Grants as a proportion of GDP per capita (2002-2016)

Source: Own calculations based on information provided in *KYK Faaliyet Raporu* for various years.

4.6.3.Coverage

It is possible to trace the development of the number of Student Grants provided by the SYDTF and the KYK since 1996. Note that until 2004 the number of Student Grants provided by the state was probably higher than our data suggests. The reason for this is that other institutions ran their own small grant schemes. However, the SYDTF appears to have been the single most important provider of Student Grants in that time, so our data should be close to the real picture. The figure below shows how the number of students receiving benefits has increased from 100.000 in 1996 to around 375.000 in 2016.

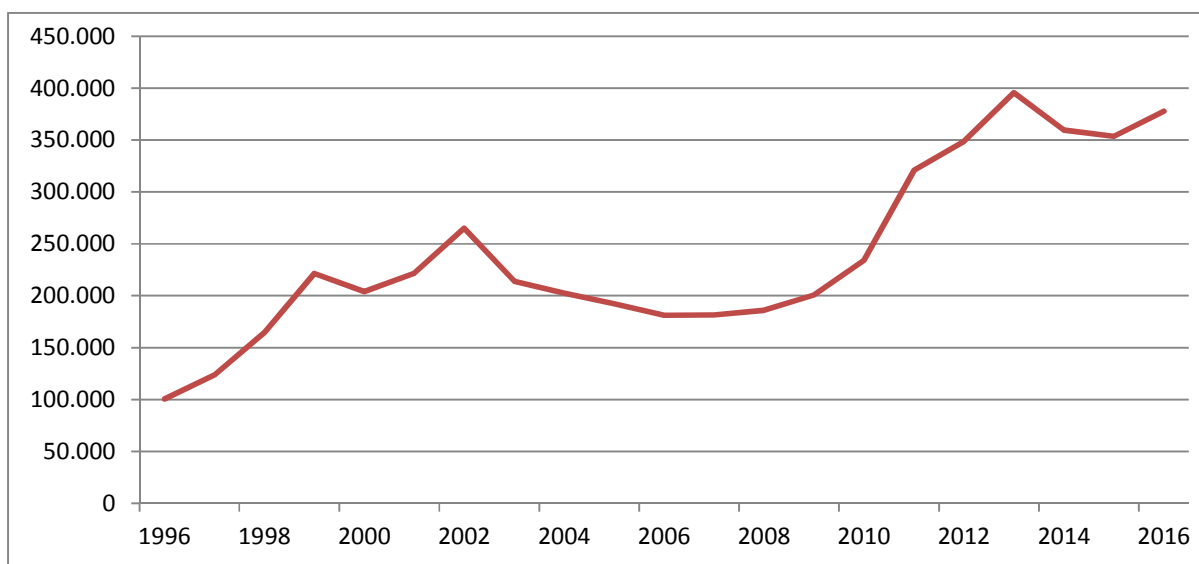


Figure 19. Number of beneficiaries of Student Grants (1996-2016)

Source: Data from Gök (2001), DDK (2006), SYDGM and *KYK Faaliyet Raporu* for various years.

At first glance, this increase over the last two decades looks remarkable. Still, at closer inspection we find that the share of students receiving Student Grants has, in fact, not increased. The reason for this is the continuous massive increase in the number of university students in Turkey. The figure below provides an estimate of the share of university students receiving grants. In the late 1990s the share of recipients among students nearly doubled from 8 to 15 per cent. Since 2002, however, coverage strongly decreased from 14 per cent in 2002 to 5 per cent in 2016. Thus, the Student Grant programme clearly has not kept up with the continuous growth in Turkey's higher education system.

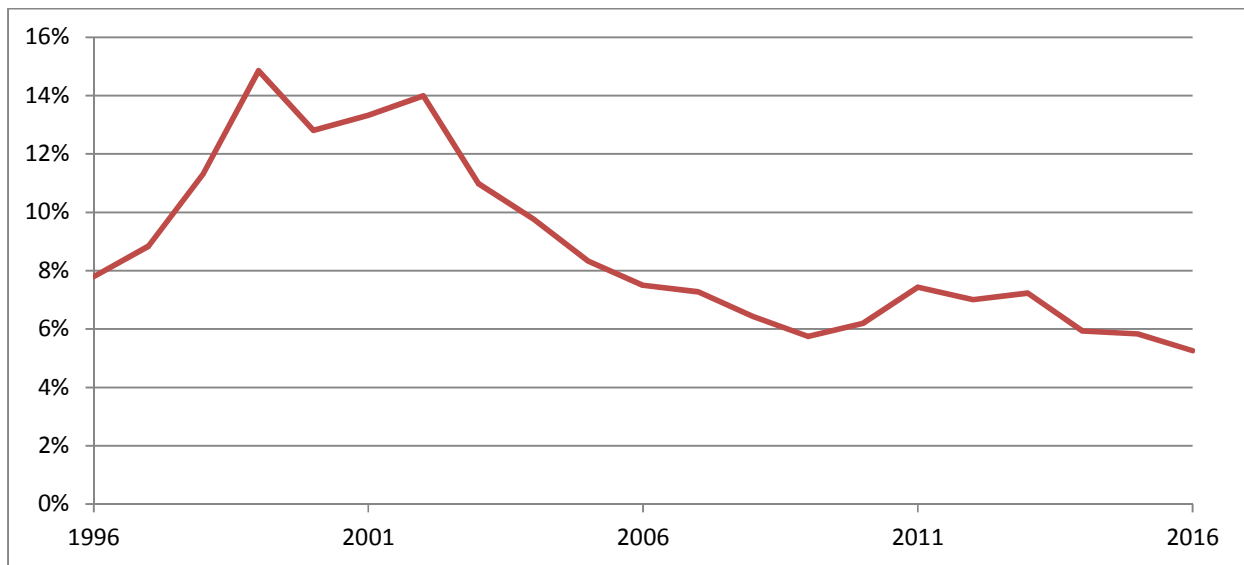


Figure 20. Proportion of university students receiving Student Grants (1996-2016)

Source: Own calculations based on beneficiary numbers provided by Gök (2001), DDK (2006), SYDGM and *KYK Faaliyet Raporu* for various years. Data on the number of university students is taken from the website of TÜİK.

4.6.4. Conclusion

For the past two decades Student Grants have provided support to a significant number of university students. Moreover, benefit levels have been decent at least since the early 2000s. Yet, these Grants only reach a relatively small fraction of the target population. Today, only around 5 per cent of university students receive grants. Moreover, Student Grants are attached to certain behavioural conditions. This mix between social and non-social goals in the eligibility criteria makes their status as rights-based social assistance benefits debatable.

4.7. Social Cash Transfer for the Home Care of Disabled

In 2005, the AKP government and the opposition CHP in a bipartisan initiative passed a Law on Disabled (Law No. 5378). This law brought far reaching changes to the disabled in many regards. Among other things, it regulated care services for the severely disabled. It defined that, in addition to institutional facilities, the care of disabled could also be done at home. In 2006, a regulation that implemented the changes regarding the care of disabled specified that people, who cared for their disabled family

members at home, would receive support payments.³³ In 2007, a reform it was clarified that these home care payments would be only be made to poor families. Thus, a social cash transfer for the home care of disabled was created.

4.7.1. Eligibility criteria

The home care cash transfer is directed towards families with severely disabled family members. The degree of disability necessary to be eligible for benefits is defined as being unable to continue one's life without the care of others. Relatives, who receive the support payments, need to be taking care of their disabled relatives full time. When the programme was first launched, a family member could only receive a support payment for the care of one disabled family members. However, in late 2007 rules were changed so that support payments for the care of up to two disabled family members are paid. The term relative is defined quite broadly in the respective regulation and includes the larger family. In late 2007, the definition was even broadened to include, for instance, the spouses of cousins.

In order to be eligible for payments, the per capita income of the household has to be below two-thirds of the net minimum wage. Thus, the poverty line is set twice as high as in some other social assistance programmes, such as social pensions. Moreover, in case there is more than one severely disabled person, who needs to be taken care of, the per capita income threshold is set at a higher level. This means that in contrast to other social assistance programmes the home care payments are not just directed at the extremely poor.

4.7.2. Benefit Levels

Benefit levels for the home care programme have been quite high compared to the benefits of other social assistance programmes. The first regulation on the home care programme in 2006 tied benefit levels to the level of the net minimum wage. This illustrates that the program, which is also framed in terms of a reward for unpaid care work, has an explicitly 'decommodifying' approach. Given that around one third of the employees earn the minimum wage once can clearly argue that home care benefits are equivalent to wage levels. Measured as a share of the per capita GDP, benefit levels hovered around 40 per cent of per capita GDP – the highest benefit of all social assistance programmes in Turkey.

In 2014, a reform in the home care cash transfer slightly decreased the generosity of the program. Instead of the minimum wage, benefits were now tied to the development of an indicator related to civil servants' wages. This resulted in a decrease of the benefit level to around 90 per cent of the minimum wage. Compared to the minimum wage, benefit levels have declined since 2014. By 2017, payments for the home care of disabled were only around 70 per cent of minimum wage. However, benefits remain higher than for other programmes.

³³ *Bakıma Muhtaç Özürlülerin Tesbiti ve Bakım Hizmeti Esaslarının Belirlenmesine İlişkin Yönetmelik*, Resmi Gazete No. 26244.

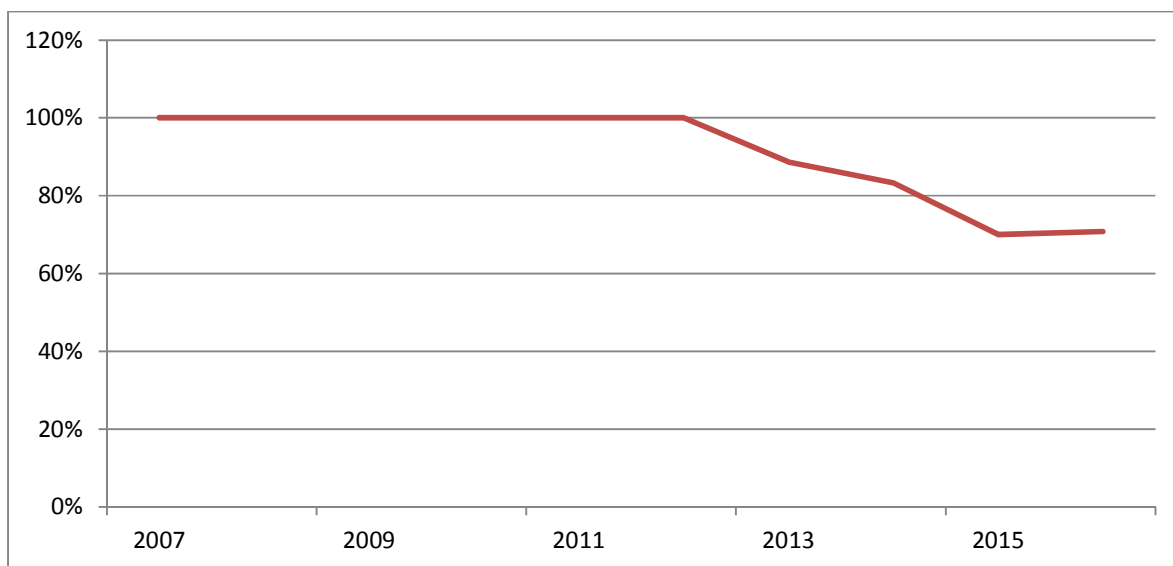


Figure 21. Benefit level of the home care for disabled as a share of the minimum wage (2007-2016)

Source: Own calculations based on information provided in Law No. 2828.

4.7.3. Coverage

Within a few years of its launch, the social cash transfer for the home care of severely disabled family members has reached a large number of families with disabled family members. When it was first implemented in 2007, only 30.000 people received payments for home care. By 2015, this number had increased to more than 500.000. Since then, the number of beneficiaries has levelled off to slightly below 500.000. This means that the programme is smaller than other big programmes, such as social pensions or social cash transfers. However, due to the generous benefit level, the home care programme is the single most expensive social cash transfer in Turkey, with expenditure reaching around 0.2 per cent of GDP.³⁴

³⁴ Unfortunately, there is no data showing the gender distribution of the beneficiaries.

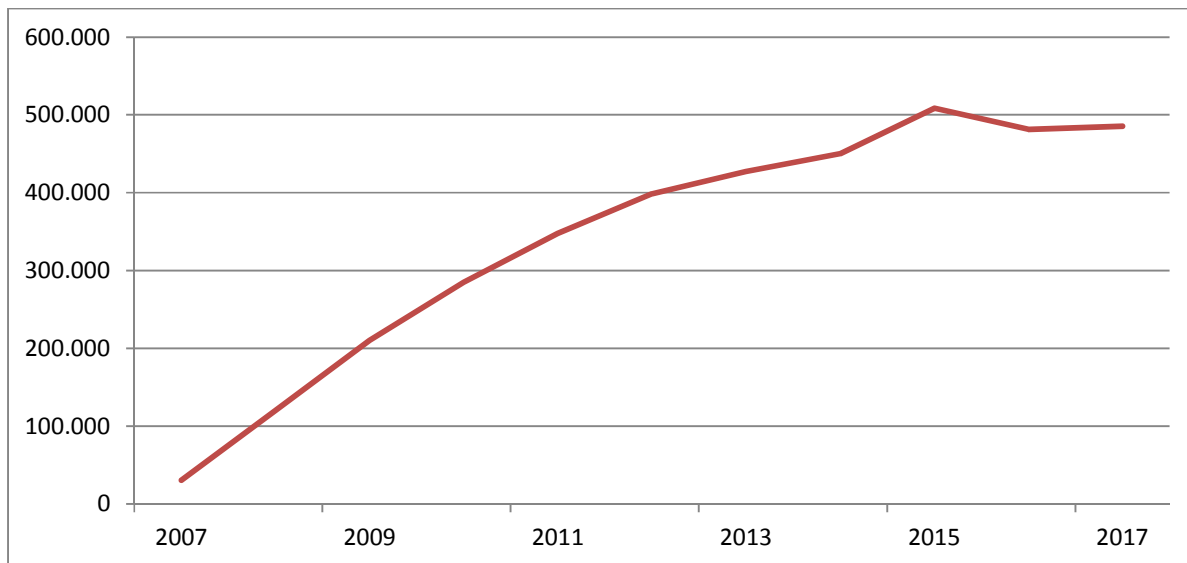


Figure 22. Number of beneficiaries of the home care for disabled (2007-2017)

Source: Data from ASPB.

4.8. Education Support

Since 2006, the VGM is running a small cash transfer to schoolchildren (*Eğitim Yardımı*). The programme is framed as a stipend for poor schoolchildren. However, in some sense it could also be described as a functional equivalent to conditional cash transfers. Initially, it was regulated through a separate regulation passed in late 2006.³⁵ This regulation was superseded by a 2008 regulation on Foundations, that covered the Education Support programme in addition to other programmes of the VGM.³⁶

The Education Support programme is aimed at school children from poor families. The VGM uses an unorthodox procedure to select the beneficiaries. In this procedure, economic status of the family, the success of the child in school and special factors play a role. In this sense, it is not strictly focussed on poor children only. Only one child per family can receive support and it is not possible to benefit from the Education Support if one receives the Indigent Benefit from the VGM or any grants (*burs*), such as the Schoolchildren Grant.

When the programme started in 2006 it had only 5000 beneficiaries. By 2016 this number increased to 15000. Benefit levels have been quite low, particularly if one takes into account that benefits are not paid during holidays. Thus, on average monthly benefits are only 45 Liras. While this is similar to the level of benefits paid by the conditional cash transfer for schoolchildren, one should take into account that in the latter it is common for more than one child per family to receive benefits.

In addition to the grant to schoolchildren, the VGM also started a separate programme for university students in 2013 (*Yükseköğrenim Bursu*). This programme appears to be rooted in an older practice by

³⁵ *Vakıflar Genel Müdürlüğü Burs Yönetmeliği*, Resmi Gazete No. 26283.

³⁶ *Vakıflar Yönetmeliği*, Resmi Gazete No. 27010.

the VGM to provide cash payments to a limited number of university students. This practice was based on a regulation from 1963, which defined according to which criteria the students would be selected.³⁷ A reference to this practice is found, for instance, in the 1973 VGM budget law, where it is stated that 150 university students are given grants. It is very likely that both benefit level and coverage remained very small. Thus, the old programme remained rather insignificant. The new programme is based on a regulation issued in 2013.³⁸ By 2016, it reached around 6000 university students. The benefit level is rather modest at 133 Liras per month. Particularly compared to the regular Student Grants this benefit level is rather low. Curiously, since December 2017 benefits for foreign students are up to twice as high as benefits for Turkish citizens.

Overall, the Education Support has remained a rather marginal program. Its two components are actually equivalents of already existing programmes. The support to poor schoolchildren is similar to the Schoolchildren Grant provided by the Ministry of Education. The support to university students is similar to the Student Grant provided by the KYK. Compared to these similar cash transfers the Education Support has not just far fewer beneficiaries, but also far lower benefit levels.

5. Turkey's Social Assistance Regime

In the previous section, we described the development of all existing social assistance programmes in Turkey. We explored eligibility criteria, benefit levels and coverage figures and traced how these characteristics changed over time. Based on the findings of this in-depth analysis of programmes, we will now explore Turkey's social assistance regime as a whole in terms of its dominant characteristics. Therefore, our focus now shifts from single programmes to the social assistance regime.

Considering the different social assistance programmes discussed in the previous section, the first aspect that strikes the observer is the regime's complexity. There are numerous programmes with sometimes overlapping target groups, administered by different institutions which apply different rules. Moreover, one should not forget that in addition to these programmes there are also irregular benefits provided to unspecific target groups. Therefore, generosity, scope and institutionalization of programmes are highly diverse, eluding simple and clear-cut characterization across the range of programmes. Therefore, in order to make sense of the regime, we maintain that four more general features characterize the regime: its complexity, its fragmentation, its stratified benefits and its unequal social rights.

5.1. Complexity

One of the key characteristics of Turkey's social assistance regime is its complexity. Turkey now has a dozen different cash transfers that can be described as social assistance programmes. These programmes all have separate legislations and thus distinct eligibility criteria and distinct benefit levels. Apart from these programmes there are also in-kind programmes and irregular cash transfers, which we have mostly excluded in the analysis above (Dodurka 2014: 15). Although such complexity might not be

³⁷ *Vakıflar Genel Müdürlüğü Hesabına, Üniversite, Yüksek Okullar ve Meslek Okullarında Okutulan Burslu Öğrenciler hakkında Yönetmelik*, Resmi Gazete No. 11434.

³⁸ *Vakıflar Genel Müdürlüğü Yükseköğrenim Burs Yönetmeliği*, Resmi Gazete No. 28741.

unique to Turkey, it is still a feature that sets the regime apart from that of most other countries. Partly as a result of this complex structure, the social assistance regime has now a decent overall budget of 1.2 per cent of GDP (Kalkınma Bakanlığı 2017: 124) and reaches a significant share of the poor. According to the Ministry of Family and Social Policy, 3 million households or more than 10 million people receive some kind of social assistance. This means that 14 per cent of all households are beneficiaries of social assistance. Moreover, more than 2 million of these households or 10 per cent of all households receive regular social assistance (ASPB 2017: 48). This high coverage rate is not primarily based on high coverage in any single program. On the contrary, as the figure below shows there are a number of programmes with significant numbers of beneficiaries, which probably at least partly complement each other in terms of coverage.

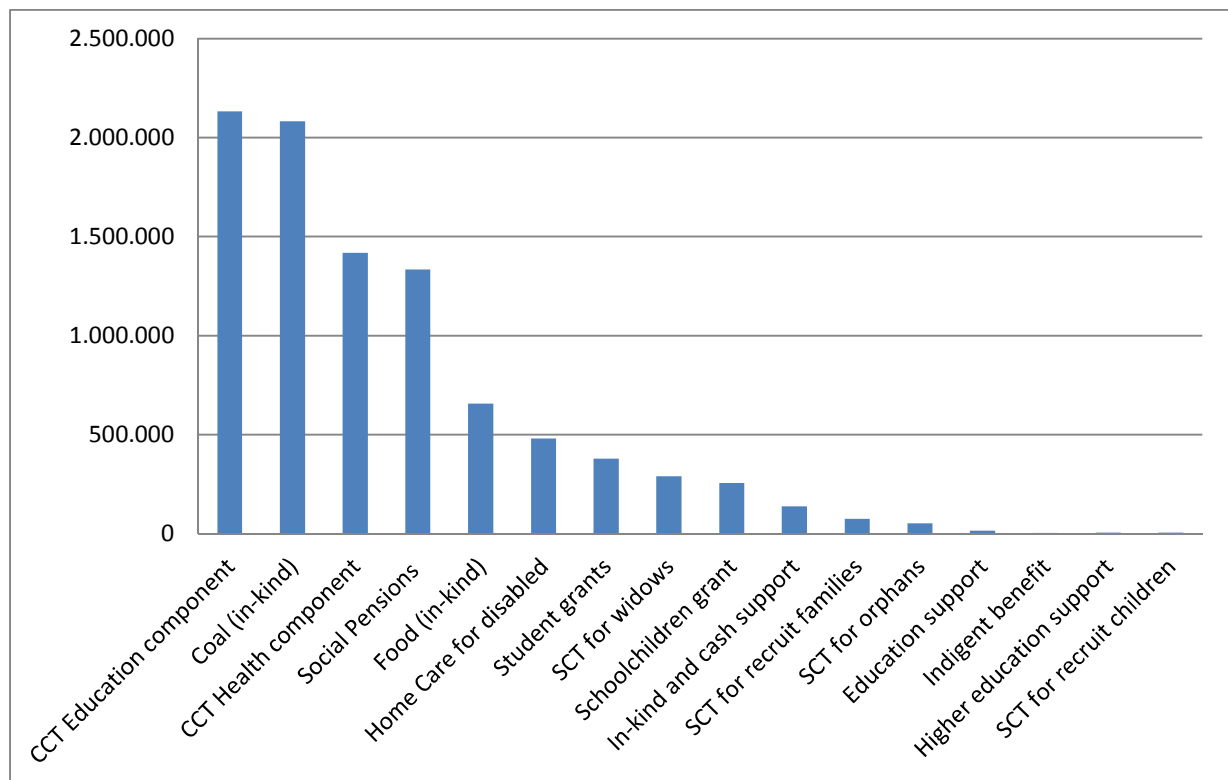


Figure 23. Number of beneficiaries of social assistance programmes (2016)

Source: Estimates based on various governmental reports. Note that data for heating support (coal) and food benefits (from ASPB 2017), are number of households. The figures for cash transfers are the number of individuals. Also, note that the figures for the CCT are very likely to be an overestimation.

Despite this high coverage achieved through numerous different programmes, the regime as such cannot be described as universal in terms of entitlements. While there are different programmes for different target groups, some groups among the poor are not entitled to social assistance benefits. Most importantly, single adults in working age are not covered by the social cash transfers described above, unless they are in a special category, such as being a widow. Single adults in working age would only be entitled to in-kind support or irregular cash support. Poor families, on the other hand, can receive

benefits under different programmes through their children. Therefore, we can conclude that at least for the working age population, there is a preferential treatment of families in relation to single persons. This is unsurprising given that the Ministry of Family and Social Policy explicitly aims to put families at the centre of its policies (ASPB 2017: 3).

5.2. Fragmentation

While Turkey's complex social assistance regime thus combines coverage with non-universal entitlements, it also produces fragmentation. There are two dimensions of fragmentation that need to be pointed out. First, there is fragmentation across programmes. Different programmes target different categories among the poor. Sometimes these segments overlap and in some cases it is also possible to combine benefits. Based on disaggregated and aggregated coverage data it can be estimated that households, which receive social assistance, on average benefit from two to three programmes at the same time. Moreover, combining benefits is not just possible within a household, but also on the individual level. For instance, the Schoolchildren Grant provided by the Ministry of Education, the Education Support provided by the VGM and the CCT provided by the Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundations basically share the same aim and target group: providing support for poor schoolchildren. Whereas it is impossible to combine the Education Support and the Schoolchildren Grant³⁹, there does not appear to be any provision that prohibits benefitting from the CCT and the Grant or the Support at the same time. Yet, how many people actually receive multiple such benefits is not known.

A second dimension of fragmentation is that there are multiple institutions which are in charge of providing social assistance. Thus, separate social assistance programmes are administered by separate institutions and were set up under different legislation.⁴⁰ To a degree, this institutional fragmentation has always existed. With the increase in separate programmes, the degree of fragmentation naturally has tended to increase. However, with creation of the Ministry of Family and Social Policy in 2011 there was some centralization of the social assistance administration. Although, three other major agencies continue to be in charge of social assistance programmes (General Directorate of Foundations, Ministry of Education and the Institution for Higher Education Credit and Dormitories), one should not forget that most programmes, most spending and most beneficiaries are now under the Ministry of Family and Social Policy. Hence, the degree of administrative fragmentation is lower than it would appear at first glance.

5.3. Stratified Benefits

Considering the sheer complexity of the regime and its high degree of administrative and programmatic fragmentation, it is no surprise that stratification looks like a defining feature of Turkey's social assistance regime. This stratification is particularly visible in the benefit levels of different social assistance programmes. As the figure below shows, there are around twenty different benefit levels across the different social assistance programmes. In 2016, benefits varied from 35 Lira per month in the

³⁹ *İlköğretim ve Ortaöğretim Kurumlarında Parasız Yatılılık, Burs ve Sosyal Yardımlar Yönetmeliği*, Resmi Gazete No. 26932; §29.

⁴⁰ Moreover, one should not forget that municipalities and non-governmental organisations and religious foundations also provide social assistance.

health component of the conditional cash transfer and 910 Lira per month for the home care of disabled. Whereas the former is only a fraction of the poverty line, the latter is close to prevalent wage levels in society and thus can be seen, in principle, as having a ‘decommodifying’ approach (Esping-Andersen 1990). These different benefit levels arguably reflect ‘patterns of deservingness’ (Leisering 2018), with some target groups seen as being in need of and deserving more benefits than others.

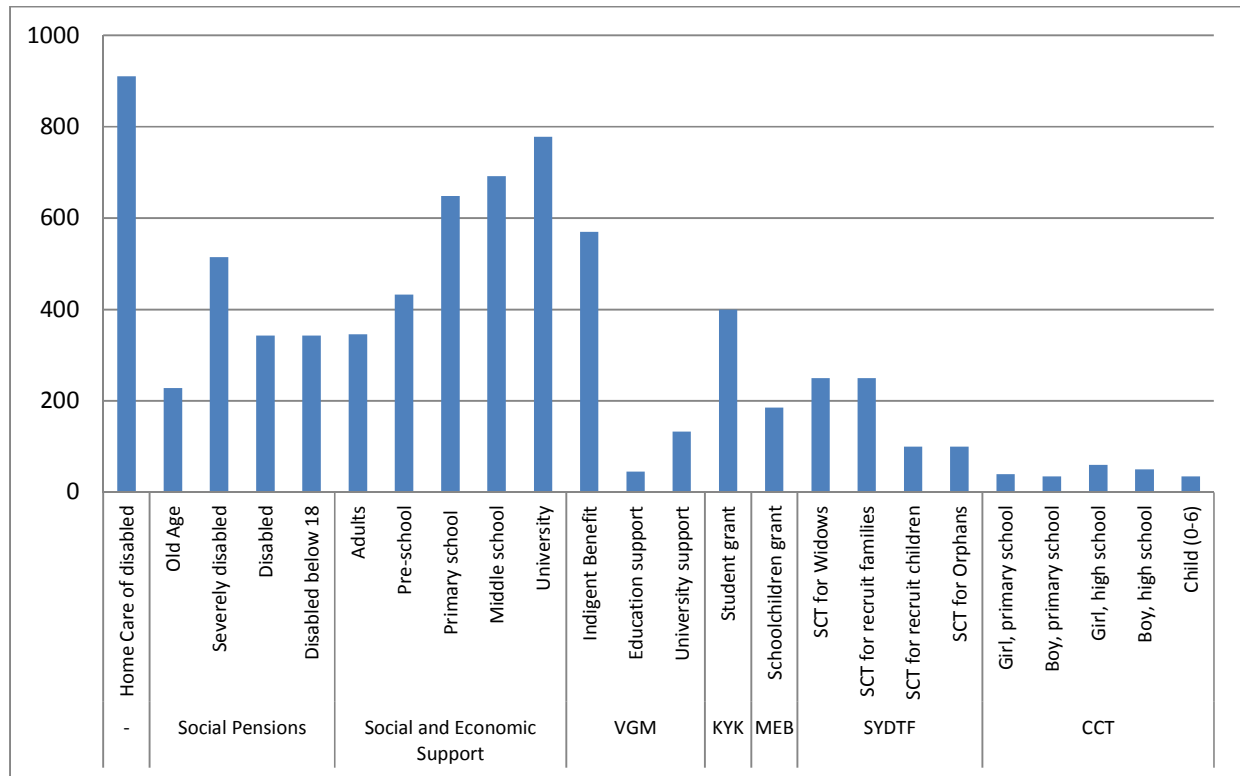


Figure 24. Nominal monthly benefit levels in 2016 according to programme and target group

Source: Own calculations based on various legislations and governmental reports. Note that in 2016, the exchange rate was around 1 € = 3,34 TL.

To better understand the degree of generosity of these varying benefit levels, it is necessary to put the nominal benefit rates into perspective. One of the key functions of social assistance is to ameliorate poverty. Therefore, it is vital to understand in how far benefits are sufficient to overcome poverty. Using the At-Risk-Of-Poverty indicator of the European Union, we computed benefit levels as a share of the poverty line for single households. The results, again, illustrate the stratification of the social assistance regime. Only two groups receive benefits that have the potential to lift them out of poverty: severely disabled (and family members caring for them) and children that potentially need to be taken care of by child protective services. For these groups, the respective programmes (social pensions, home care and social and economic support) provide benefits that would lift the beneficiary out of poverty. Incidentally, the home care of disabled and the social and economic support programme both have a shared aim of ensuring that persons, who would otherwise have to be cared for in institutional facilities, remain with their families. This reflects the ‘conservative’ nature of Turkey’s social assistance regime which is

‘strongly committed to the preservation of traditional familyhood’ (Esping-Andersen 1990: 27). However, one should note that these programmes with high benefits do not necessarily have high coverage. In contrast, programmes with wide coverage, such as the CCT or old age social pensions provide benefits far below the poverty line. In these cases, social cash transfers probably have more of a palliative function and do not really ameliorate poverty.⁴¹

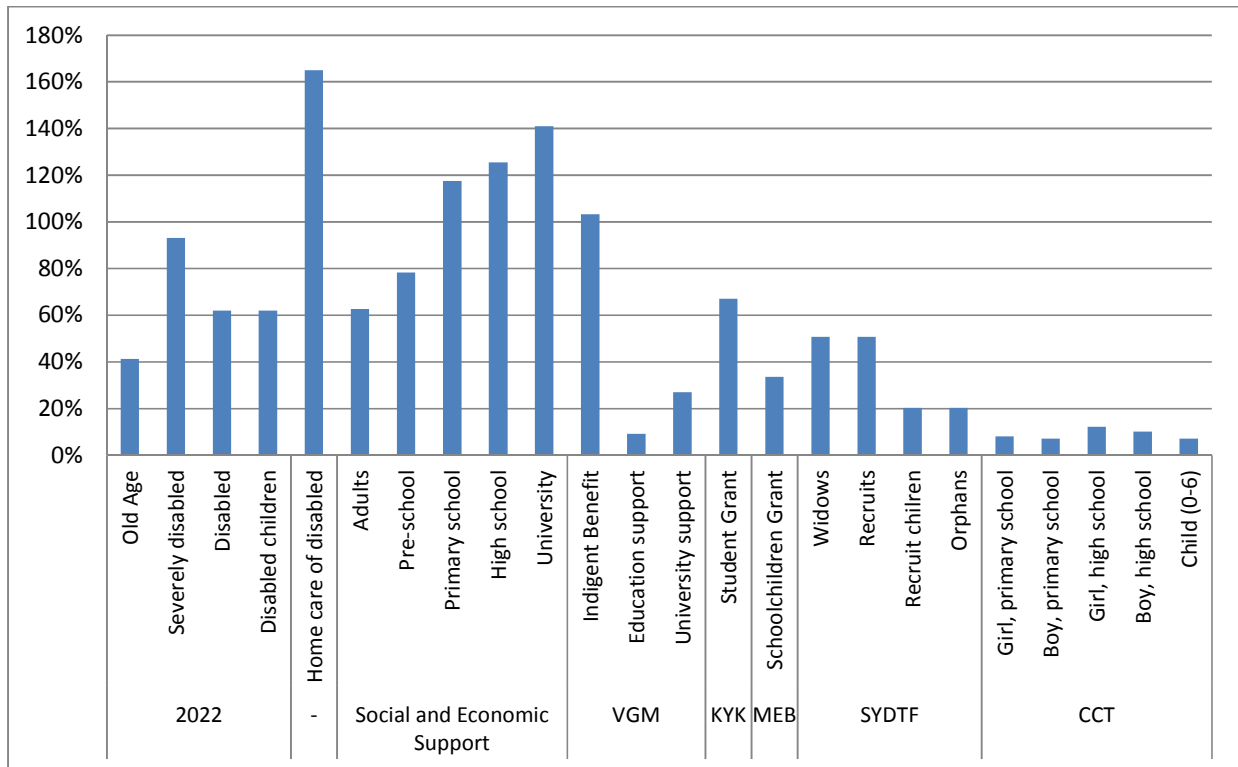


Figure 25. Benefit levels according to programme and target group as a proportion of the At-Risk-Of-Poverty threshold for single households (2015)

Source: Own calculations based on various legislations and governmental reports. Data on the At-Risk-Of-Poverty-Threshold for single households is taken from the website of the statistics institute of the European Union (Eurostat).

⁴¹ It remains an open question in how far these varying benefits have a decommodifying effect. Although social assistance in general is not seen as decommodifying by Esping-Andersen (1990: 22) it is widely assumed as having effects on the decision whether to ‘opt out of work’. Thus, social assistance can in principle be decommodifying. In the case of Turkey, research suggests that while recipients do not see social assistance as a work disincentive, bureaucrats believe the opposite (Saygi Dogru 2016: 173-177). Moreover, with recent reforms that linked benefit receipt to acceptance of work offers by the public employment institutions, the *commodifying* spirit of social assistance (which started with the creation of the Fund in 1986) has been strengthened.

5.4. Unequal Social Rights

A fourth key characteristic of Turkey's social assistance regime relates to the institutionalization of social assistance as a social right (Leisering and Barrientos 2013; Leisering 2018). Although some researchers argue that Turkey's social assistance regime does not provide benefits based on social rights (Kutlu 2014: 240; Ünlütürk Ulutaş 2017: 46), we argue that the situation is more ambivalent. First, there is growing evidence of an evolving 'welfare consciousness' (Marshall 1981: 89) among social assistance recipients, regardless of how the state conceptualizes and provides social assistance (Kutlu 2014: 240). Second, the degree to which social assistance is provided as a social right is highly unequal across programmes. Whereas some programmes can be seen as providing a social right to social assistance, others might be better understood as state-provided charity. To explore the uneven degree to which social assistance programmes provide social rights, we operationalize social rights in four dimensions: 1) legal foundations of entitlements; 2) scope of eligibility criteria; 3) restrictions in beneficiary numbers; 4) automatic benefit adjustments.

A first dimension of the institutionalization of social assistance as a social right is the legal foundation of the entitlements of a given program. Here, we can differentiate between programmes according to whether entitlements are defined in a specific law, in a regulation (by-law) or are left to the decision of the administering institution. It should be straightforward that if entitlements are defined in a law (which is passed by parliament) they are more solid than if they are simply defined in a regulation (which is passed by cabinet decision). Moreover, if decisions on entitlements are completely left to the administering institution, they could most easily be changed. To provide just one example, social pensions are grounded in a particular law that defines entitlements very clearly and leaves only minor details to the regulation. In contrast Student Grants are (since 2004) based on a particular law, which refers to a regulation for specific details regarding the implementation. This regulation, in turn, states that specific issues, such as eligibility criteria, will be decided by the institution that administers the university grant. Therefore, we describe social pensions as being more institutionalized as a social right than Student Grants.

A second dimension of the institutionalization of social assistance as a social right concerns eligibility criteria. Given that Turkey's social assistance programmes are categorical and cater for the poor, economic need and membership in a categorical target group (e.g. orphans) are two obvious criteria for eligibility. However, in some cases there are also non-social eligibility criteria. Most prominently, merit or some form of good behaviour is required to be eligible for benefits for some programmes. To provide an example, to receive social pensions for the elderly one has to be above 65 and be poor. Yet, to receive a Student Grant, it is not sufficient to be enrolled in a university and be poor. Instead, one has to have good grades and not be involved in what is considered to be harmful political activity. It should thus be clear that social pensions are *ceteris paribus* more social rights-based than Student Grants. Based on these two dimensions, legal foundations and eligibility rules, the following table differentiates social assistance programmes according to the degree of institutionalization of social rights.

Table 1. Institutionalization of social assistance as a social right (I)?

	Legal Foundation of entitlements			
		Specific law	By-law / regulation	Decision of administrating institution
Eligibility based solely on need (and inclusion in categorical target group)?	Based on need	Social pensions, Home care for disabled	In-kind and Cash Support	CCTs, SCT for widows, SCT for recruit families, SCT for orphans, Indigent Benefit,
	Based on need and merit			Education Support, Student Grant, Schoolchildren Grant

A third dimension of the institutionalization of social assistance as a social right is whether there are any restrictions on the number of beneficiaries. The most common such restriction would be based on restrictions in the budget of the institution. One example for this is the old regulation on the Indigent Benefit from 1989. Article 40 of the regulation clearly stated that ‘the number of blind and disabled who will receive this benefit will be decided each year in the budget law’. In this case, eligibility is thus only a necessary, but not a sufficient criterion of receiving benefits. Hence, Indigent Benefits at that point in time were less rights-based than, say, social pensions. In contrast, there is no such restriction in the case of the home care for disabled. Therefore, eligibility is not only a necessary, but also a sufficient criterion of benefit receipt.

A fourth dimension of the institutionalization of social assistance as a social right concern the way benefits are calculated. In some programmes, benefits are just defined as a static number, whereas in other programmes, benefits are calculated in such a manner that there is more or less automatic adjustment of benefits. The latter might be achieved by tying benefits to the development of civil servants’ wages, inflation or minimum wages. For instance, benefit levels of social pensions are calculated using an indicator that is also used in the calculation of civil servants’ wages. Thus, with an increase in civil servants’ wages – which usually occurs each year – social pensions will also increase. In contrast, benefit levels in the social cash transfer for widows are simply set at 250 liras per month and do not change unless there is a reform of the program. Considering that inflation in Turkey is around 10 per cent, the issue of automatic benefit adjustment is quite important. Based on these two dimensions, automatic benefit adjustments and constraints in beneficiary numbers, the following table differentiates social assistance programmes according to the degree of institutionalization of social rights.⁴²

⁴² Note that for programmes where decisions on entitlements and benefit levels are left to the administrating institution, one cannot know for sure how benefits are calculated and whether there are restrictions in beneficiary numbers, because these decisions are usually not transparent.

Table 2. Institutionalization of social assistance as a social right (II)?

	Beneficiary numbers constrained by budgetary decisions?		
		No (or unclear)	Yes
Automatic benefit adjustment	Yes	Social pensions, Home care for disabled, In-kind and Cash Support	Indigent Benefit, Schoolchildren Grant
	No (or unclear)	CCTs, SCT for widows, SCT for recruit families, SCT for orphans	Student Grant, Education Support

Based on these two tables it is possible to understand the degree of stratification within Turkey's social assistance regime in terms of the institutionalization of social rights. Social pensions and the home care for disabled family members can be described as the most social rights-based programmes in the social assistance regime. They are grounded in a specific law, define eligibility based on need (and categorical inclusion) only, do not feature constraints on beneficiary numbers and automatically adjust benefit levels. Student Grants and the Education Support, on the other hand, are only weakly social rights-based. They leave entitlement decisions to the administering institution, contain 'merit' related factors in the eligibility criteria, limit beneficiary numbers and do not feature automatic benefit adjustment.

The majority of social assistance programmes lies in-between these two groups of programmes. They are social rights-based only with regard to some dimensions but not others. For instance, none of the programmes created under the SYDTF feature automatic benefit adjustment. As a result, real benefits in these programmes tend to decrease over time. This is illustrated in the figure below, where we compare the development of real benefits in two programmes of the SYDTF – benefits from the CCT for girls in high schools and social cash transfers for widows – with the development of real benefits in two conceptually similar programmes not created by the SYDTF – the Schoolchildren Grant and Social Pensions for the elderly. In both cases, the programme run by the SYDTF starts with significantly higher benefit levels than the other program. However, whereas social pensions and the schoolchildren grant have stable or even increasing benefits, real benefits of the CCT and the widow cash transfer significantly decrease over time.

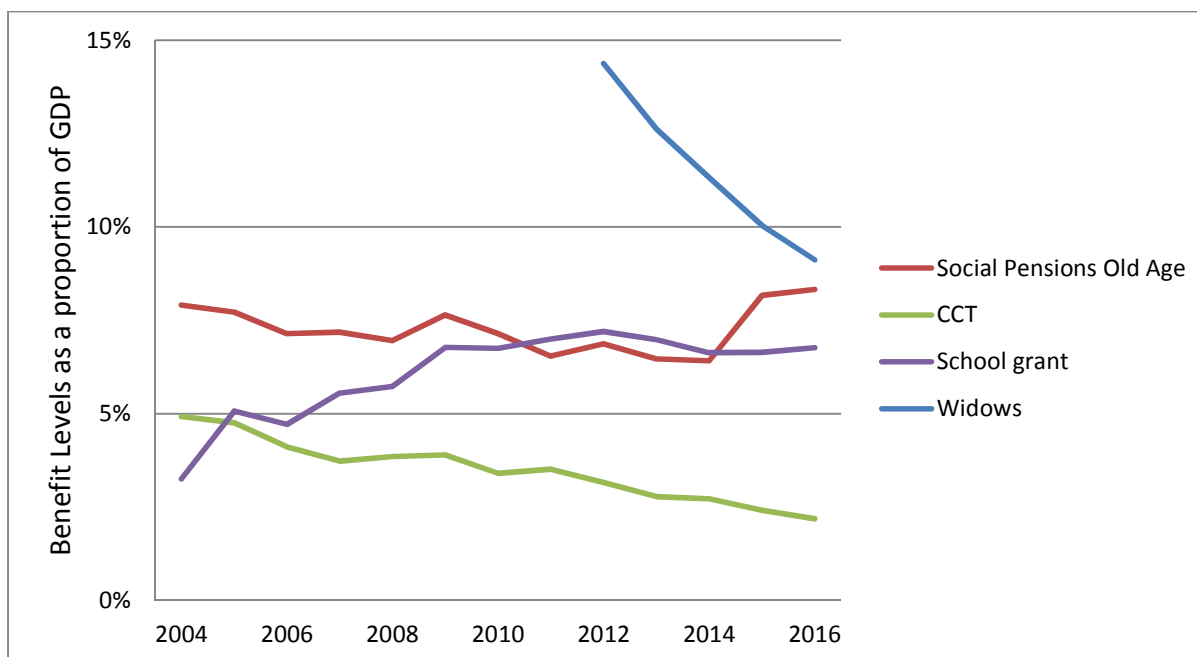


Figure 26. Benefit Levels of selected programmes as a proportion of GDP per capita (2004-2016)

Source: Own calculations based on primary legislations and various governmental reports.

We thus conclude that there is great variation in terms of the degree to which social assistance is provided as a social right in Turkey. Depending on the program, through which they are covered, social assistance beneficiaries not just have greatly differing benefit levels, but also greatly differing entitlements. Beneficiaries of social pensions and the home care for disabled enjoy far more stable social rights, than beneficiaries of other programmes. Particularly, Student Grants and Education Support appear to have more the character of state-based charity (even though the former has a high benefit level). Therefore, we believe that the provision of unequal social rights across programmes is a fourth defining feature of Turkey's social assistance regime.

6. Turkey's Regime in Comparative Context

In the previous section, we identified four key characteristics of Turkey's social assistance regime: a complex structure that ensures broad coverage, but has entitlement gaps; a severe fragmentation across institutions and programmes; stratified benefit levels across programmes and target groups; and unequal social rights provided by programmes. Based on these findings, we will now try to characterise Turkey's social assistance regime in a comparative context. For this purpose, we will first look at the regime in the context of comparative welfare states and then in the context of the Global South.

6.1. In the Context of Northern Welfare States

Until recently, social assistance played a rather marginal role in comparative welfare state research. The first major comparative study of social assistance regimes in developed welfare states was undertaken on behalf of the OECD in the mid-1990s. Based on this work by Eardley et al. a comprehensive typology

of *Social Assistance in OECD Countries* was developed. More recently, Bahle and colleagues developed a new database to compare social assistance systems in Europe. Based on this data, they developed a typology of *Minimum Income Protection in Europe*. In this section, we will first try to put Turkey's social assistance regime into the context of the typology of Eardley and colleagues. Finding that the case does not truly fit the typology anymore, we will turn to the typology of Bahle and colleagues.

6.1.1. Social Assistance in OECD Countries

The first typology of social assistance regimes in the Global North was developed based on a comprehensive study of *Social Assistance in OECD Countries* by Eardley and colleagues (1996). Interestingly, this study was one of the few major comparative studies in welfare state research that included Turkey. Yet, given the changes seen in the last two decades in Turkey's social assistance regime, it is no surprise that its findings no longer apply to the country. Moreover, to what degree they apply to the other OECD countries is open to debate. Still, it is useful to discuss the typology as a first reference point, to see whether the case resembles any of the categories proposed by Gough and colleagues.

Gough and colleagues differentiate between eight different types of social assistance regimes in the OECD countries: 1) selective welfare systems; 2) the public assistance state; 3) welfare states with integrated safety nets; 4) dual social assistance; 5) citizenship-based but residual assistance; 6) rudimentary assistance; 7) decentralized, discretionary relief; and 8) centralized, discretionary assistance.

In their analysis, Turkey was classified by Gough and colleagues in the category of 'rudimentary assistance' (Gough et al. 1997: 36). Here, Turkey was grouped together with the other Southern European OECD countries. In this kind of social assistance regime 'a few categorical programmes beside localized and often non-publicly organized relief provide low benefits and limited coverage' (Bahle et al. 2010: 451). As explained above, over the last decades Turkey developed an elaborate regime that today provides extensive coverage through many different categorical programmes. Therefore, it can no longer be appropriately classified as rudimentary.

'Dual social assistance' (found in France, Belgium and Germany) and 'citizenship-based but residual assistance' (found in the Netherlands, and Nordic countries, except Norway) are both types that rely on a general social assistance scheme. Given that Turkey does not have a general social assistance scheme, it does not fit this type either.

We argue that Turkey also fits neither the 'decentralized, discretionary relief' (found in Norway, Austria and Switzerland) nor the 'centralized, discretionary assistance' (found in Japan). It is true that there is much room for discretion of benefits under the SYDTF. The local Foundations are free to provide irregular benefits as they deem appropriate. However, the main cash transfers, which today represent the core of the social assistance regime, do not contain any room for discretion. For instance, there is no adjustment to living costs. Instead, benefit levels and conditions are uniform across Turkey. Moreover, benefit levels in these discretionary social assistance regimes are rather high, whereas benefit levels in Turkey – although variable – are overall rather low. Therefore, we believe that Turkey does not fit these two types.

‘Welfare states with integrated safety nets’ (found in the UK, Ireland and Canada) are defined by the fact that ‘social assistance is institutionalized nationally, benefits are generous and social rights important’ (Bahle et al. 2010: 451). This clearly does not represent the situation in Turkey. As we explained above, in Turkey benefit levels vary extremely between and within the major programmes. Moreover, the degree to which benefits are provided as social rights varies from programme to programme. Therefore, the country does not fit this type either.

Arguably, there is some overlap between ‘selective welfare systems’ (found in Australia and New Zealand) and Turkey’s regime. In both cases, the regime is dominated by categorical and means-tested programmes. Yet, whereas in Australia and New Zealand social assistance programmes are generous and rights-based, this cannot be said for Turkey’s social assistance programmes. Hence, it would not be appropriate to group Turkey among the ‘selective welfare systems’.

Finally, the United States are categorized as a separate type by Gough and colleagues. Described as a ‘public assistance state’, the regime features ‘extensive categorical but strongly stigmatizing low ‘welfare’ benefits and high work incentives’ (Bahle et al. 2010: 452). This is in some respects remarkably similar to Turkey’s regime, which also features extensive categorical, but low benefits. Moreover, in recent years, work incentives are also becoming increasingly important. The authors argue (Gough et al. 1997: 36) that the United States ‘exhibits an extensive set of means-tested benefits arranged in hierarchy of acceptability and stigma. [...] Benefits are variable, and tend to be low both in comparison with other countries and in relation to domestic poverty lines.’ This does jibe with what we found out about Turkey’s regime. However, in other respects Turkey and the United States are quite dissimilar. For instance, although the receipt of social assistance receipt in Turkey is stigmatizing, is likely to be less so than in the United States (Kutlu 2014). Moreover, in the United States, ‘there are inbuilt earnings disregards and work incentives in every scheme’, while ‘procedural rights [...] are well entrenched’ (Gough et al. 1997: 36) and the system differs across states. Clearly, in these respects Turkey’s regime is quite different and therefore it does not seem meaningful to classify the country as a ‘public assistance state’.

Overall, we therefore conclude that Turkey’s social assistance regime no longer fits into any of the eight types of *Social Assistance in OECD countries*. The type that is most similar to Turkey’s regime appears to be the ‘public assistance state’, which is found in the United States. Yet, even here, differences are too pronounced to classify Turkey in this type.

6.1.2. European Minimum Income Protection Systems

A second important typology of social assistance regimes has recently been developed by Bahle and colleagues (2011: 226-228). In contrast to the typology of Eardley et al., it does not cover the whole OECD but only looks at European welfare states. Bahle and colleagues differentiate between five ‘minimum income protection’ (MIP) systems: 1) Highly differentiated MIP with residual last safety nets; 2) patchy safety nets in rudimentary MIP; 3) Residual citizenship-based MIP; 4) extensively differentiated MIP with insurance substitute functions; and 5) highly institutionalised, extensive MIP with categorical differentiation. Through a cluster analysis based on original data they generated, Bahle and colleagues are able to classify 16 European countries in this typology.

Both, 'highly differentiated MIP with residual last safety nets' (found in Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands, France and Germany) and 'extensively differentiated MIP with insurance substitute functions' (found in Spain, the United Kingdom and Portugal) employ 'categorically differentiated MIP schemes that are supplemented by a general and residual last safety net'. Again, as Turkey's regime does not feature 'a general and residual last safety net', it clearly does not fit into this category.

'Patchy safety nets in rudimentary MIP' (found in Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary and Slovakia) are characterized by 'very low levels of expenditure and low numbers of recipients, both in and above working age'. Clearly, given the high number of social assistance beneficiaries in Turkey and the considerable size of the social assistance budget, Turkey cannot be classified in this type.

'Residual citizenship-based MIP' (found in Denmark, Finland and Sweden) regimes are mainly defined by the fact that social assistance 'plays a residual role due to the extensive protection provided by social insurance and other citizenship-based benefits'. The situation is the opposite in Turkey, where social assistance plays a prominent role, because of the coverage gaps of social insurance.

Finally, 'highly institutionalised, extensive MIP with categorical differentiation' (found in Ireland) is probably the regime that is most similar to Turkey. What is similar in this type and in Turkey is that beneficiary numbers are high, that a significant share of social spending is devoted to social assistance and that there is a high degree of categorical differentiation. However, there is one crucial difference between this type of MIP found in Ireland and Turkey's social assistance regime: Whereas in Ireland benefit levels are high and quite uniform 'across the different categorical schemes', in Turkey benefit levels for major programmes tend to be rather low and vary immensely across programmes and target groups.

Table 3. Minimum Income Protection in Turkey and Europe

	Generosity		Scope		Expenditure	Differentiations
	Average benefit rates in relation to 60% poverty threshold	Treatment of families in relation to a single person	Working age recipients as a proportion of the working age population	Recipients above 65 as proportion of the population above 65	Proportion of social expenditure devoted to social assistance	Number of schemes
Highly differentiated MIP with residual last safety nets	Medium generosity	Low generosity	Medium to high (5%)	Medium to high (6%)	Medium (3%)	High
Patchy safety nets in rudimentary MIP	Medium generosity	Medium generosity	Extremely low (3%)	Extremely low (0.5%)	Extremely low (1%)	Extremely low
Residual citizenship-based MIP	Very generous	Medium generosity	Extremely low (3%)	Extremely low (0.5%)	Extremely low (1%)	Low
Extensively differentiated MIP with insurance substitute functions	Relatively ungenerous	Very generous	Medium (4%)	Extremely high (20%)	Medium to high (3%)	High
Highly institutionalised, extensive MIP with categorical differentiation	Very generous	Medium generosity	Extremely high (13%)	Extremely high (20%)	Extremely high (15%)	Extremely high
Turkey	Very ungenerous	Very generous	Very high	High	Very high	Extremely high

Source: Bahle et al. (2011: 222). Scores for Turkey are qualitative assessments based on our in-depth research of social assistance in Turkey.

To conclude, Turkey does not fit well into the typology of minimum income protection systems developed by Bahle and colleagues. What differentiates Turkey from the five types becomes clearer, when we score Turkey on the dimensions used by Bahle et al. in their cluster analysis. Bahle employ six indicators in four different dimensions: generosity, scope, expenditure and differentiations. Table 3 above shows qualitative scores for Turkey compared to scores for European MIP systems. In terms of generosity, a first striking feature of Turkey is that average benefit rates in relation to the At-Risk-Of-Poverty threshold are far less generous than in European countries. With regard to the second indicator of generosity, the treatment of families in relation to a single person, we find that Turkey's social assistance regime provides far better benefits to families. In terms of scope, it is clear that in Turkey coverage is quite high. Although sophisticated data is not available, we can estimate that both, working age recipients as a proportion of the working age population and recipients above 65 as proportion of the population above 65, are quite high. Concerning the third dimension, expenditure, we find that Turkey, again, scores high. The proportion of social expenditures devoted to social assistance is probably higher than in most European MIP systems. Finally, Turkey also scores very high on the final dimension, the number of social assistance schemes.

Based on these qualitative scores we can conclude that Turkey is in some respect similar to the Irish case ('highly institutionalised, extensive MIP with categorical differentiation'): families are treated more generous than single person households, coverage and expenditure are quite high, and categorical differentiation is extremely high. However, benefits in Turkey are far less generous than in Ireland and in fact also far less generous than in any country included in Bahle's study. Moreover, what also makes Turkey a special case is that it does not have a 'general last safety net' in addition to categorical programmes. If we replicated the cluster analysis conducted by Bahle and colleagues with added data for Turkey it is thus very likely that the country would constitute a sixth type. Therefore, we can conclude that Turkey's social assistance regime does not really fit into the typologies created in the comparative welfare state context.

6.2. In the Context of Social Assistance in the Global South

In the previous section, we have seen that Turkey's social assistance regime does not fit well into the typologies create in the context of comparative welfare states. In this section, we will now discuss whether the case is similar to social assistance regimes found in the Global South. Unfortunately, there are no sophisticated typologies of social assistance regimes in the Global South, comparable to the typologies developed in *Social Assistance in OECD Countries* or *Minimum Income Protection in Europe*. There are two main reasons for this. First, the Global South is simply extremely heterogeneous and thus it is difficult to develop comprehensive and yet concise typologies. Second, despite recent advancements research on comparative social assistance in the Global South is still not as advanced as for the Global North. Instead of comparative analyses of social assistance regimes, the literature on the Global South appears to more preoccupied with country-studies focussing on single programmes. However, based on the pioneering work of Leisering (2018) on social cash transfers in the Global South, we can explore in how far Turkey shares some of the general characteristics of social cash transfers in the Global South.

Leisering argues that the rise of social cash transfers in the Global South constitutes ‘an entitlement revolution’. To understand this revolution he differentiates four dimensions of entitlements: 1) the scope of entitlements, 2) the conditions of entitlements, 3) benefits (levels and standards) and 4) institutionalization. In terms of the scope of entitlements, he finds first and foremost a massive spread of entitlements. At the same time, in most countries, there is a categorical fragmentation of entitlements that reflect orders of deservingness in the respective society. Yet, there are also some non-categorical programmes in the Global South, especially in better-off countries in East Asia and some other countries and in very poor Sub-Saharan countries. Moreover, Leisering diagnoses a selective particularism, in that there is selective emphasis on children, older persons, persons with disabilities and some small groups. In turn this means that non-disabled persons of working age are largely excluded from entitlements to social cash transfers. Additionally, hidden (within-category) exclusions from entitlements are frequent and significant (see for a first analysis Weible 2016), but tend to receive little attention both in the political public and the literature.

With regards to conditions of entitlements, Leisering shows that behavioural requirements, most prominent in the case of conditional cash transfers, are found in nearly one-third of all programmes in the Global South. He also finds that means-tests are employed in four-fifth of all programmes. However, there is a variety of means-tests, such as proxy-means tests or ascribed poverty targeting, applied in different cash transfers (Böger and Leisering 2017). Finally, residence and citizenship are two other common conditions of entitlements.

In terms of the benefits, an important characteristic of social cash transfers in the Global South is that benefit levels are rather low. The emphasis of IOs and domestic governments is on extending coverage, while not much is said about benefit levels. In fact, benefit levels are often below poverty lines. Yet, some programmes, particularly social pensions in some countries, are an exception in this regard. Furthermore, establishing benefit standards, i.e. tying benefit levels to the poverty line or the minimum wage, is also a rare practice in social cash transfers in the Global South. Additionally, benefit levels are not related to lack of resources identified through the means-test.

Finally, regarding institutionalization of social assistance, Leisering argues that there is fairly secure institutionalization in terms of funding and government control. However, in terms of the legal foundations of the programmes, institutionalization is often weak. Moreover, in many cases implementation of the programmes is also less than perfect, giving rise to ‘exclusion errors’ and ‘inclusion errors’. Clientelism, which is pervasive in a number of countries, has found a new playground in the field of social assistance. Overall, Leisering concludes that the ‘political will of securing a minimum’ is absent in many countries, grand rhetoric of inclusion notwithstanding.

Comparing the characteristics of Turkey’s social assistance regime with the description of social cash transfers in the Global South, one finds many common features. The categorical fragmentation of entitlements that reflects orders of deservingness is a key feature of Turkey’s regime. Moreover, Turkey is also a good case of selective particularism. In fact, both, the emphasis on children, older persons and the disabled and the exclusion of working age singles, apply to Turkey. With regard to the condition of entitlements, behavioural requirements are also prevalent in Turkey. They are found, for instance, in the conditional cash transfers, the programme with the highest coverage. In addition, Turkey’s regime features a variety of means-tests, as we have seen. While some of these means-tests (e.g. those

conducted by the VGM) appear to be rather simple and allow for discretion, the means-tests conducted by the Foundations have become more and more complex and institutionalized in recent years (Dodurka 2014). In spite of this institutionalization, scholars still find that clientelism pervades the social assistance regime (Kutlu 2014; Saygi Dogru 2016).

Finally, one can also argue that there is a very uneven ‘political will of securing a minimum’ in Turkey. Benefit levels in many programmes are rather low and, more importantly, they are not tied to certain benefit standards. While some programmes, such as social pensions, do connect benefits to certain standardized indicator, these do not appear to be ‘a socially accepted minimum under which nobody should fall’ (Leisering 2018). The main exception to this rule was the Home Care programme between 2017 and 2014, which set benefits at the level of the minimum wage. Finally, institutionalization in Turkey’s social assistance regime is heterogeneous: whereas some programmes are well institutionalized and well implemented, others lack a clear legal base and are poorly implemented. Taken together, these findings suggest that Turkey’s regime shares many features with social assistance in the Global South.

7. Conclusion

In this paper, we provided a comprehensive analysis of Turkey’s social assistance regime and aimed to view the case in a comparative perspective. The study intended to answer key questions related to the programmes that make up the regime, as well as the regime as a whole: What social assistance programmes exist today in Turkey? What entitlements to benefits exist under these programmes? What are key features of the social assistance regime? Finally, how does Turkey compare to social assistance regimes in the Global North and the Global South?

We started with a summary of the historical development of social assistance in the late Ottoman Empire and the early Republic. This overview revealed that the first modern poor relief programmes were introduced already in the late Ottoman Empire in the mid-19th century. However, social assistance remained a marginal policy area at least until the 1970s, when social pensions for elderly and disabled were introduced. Following this historical overview, we looked at the administrative structure of Turkey’s social assistance regime and showed that today there are several competing providers of social assistance. We then did an in-depth analysis of all social assistance programmes that exist today in Turkey. We explored the key characteristics of these programmes, to understand generosity, scope and entitlements. For this purpose, we looked at their legal foundation, eligibility criteria, benefit levels and actual coverage, and traced how these characteristics changed from the inception of the programmes until today. We showed that the dozen or so social assistance programmes that today exist in Turkey greatly vary in terms of institutionalization, scope and generosity.

Based on the findings of this comprehensive analysis of all social assistance programmes, we then tried to understand the regime as a whole. We showed that among the dominant characteristics of Turkey’s social assistance regime are its complexity, its fragmentation, stratified benefits and unequal social rights. Finally, based on this analysis we compared Turkey’s regime to social assistance in the Global North and the Global South. We started by trying to fit Turkey into typologies developed in comparative welfare state research. However, we found that the case neither fits the typology of *Social Assistance in OECD Countries* (Gough et al. 1997) nor the typology of *Minimum Income Protection in Europe* (Bahle et al. 2011). Although some features, such as broad coverage and categorical fragmentation, resemble the

Irish social assistance system, low benefits levels and high levels of stratification appear to be unparalleled in the context of Northern welfare states.

Our comparison of the Turkish case with social assistance regimes in the Global South, on the other hand, revealed many similarities. Many peculiarities of Turkey's regime are, in fact, fairly common for social cash transfers in the Global South. Especially the particularistic selection of target groups and the strong categorical fragmentation of entitlements, which reflect orders of deservingness, are common to the more elaborate social assistance regimes in the Global South and Turkey. Likewise, the combination of extensive coverage and entitlement gaps in conjunction with overall rather low benefit levels has parallels in some Southern countries. Therefore, we concluded that in terms of its social assistance regime Turkey appears to be overall more similar to the more elaborate social cash transfer systems in the Global South than to European minimum income protection systems.

Our analysis explored the structure of Turkey's social assistance regime and situated it in a comparative context. Yet, it also raises a number of key questions to be studied by future research. First and foremost, why did Turkey build a regime that resembles social assistance in the Global South? The causal configurations underlying the development of social assistance in Turkey remain to be unearthed. A second interesting question relates to the structure of Turkey's social assistance regime: What are the implications of having an elaborate and stratified regime? Does it really matter – both, in terms of societal outcomes and for the situation of the individual beneficiary – that some programmes are rights-based and others are not? Third, how close is Turkey's social assistance regime really to those found in the Global South? Would, for instance, a cluster analysis reveal that it belongs to a certain family of Southern social assistance regimes?

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