



Centre-based services and cash assistance to address child labour in Turkey

Photo: Plan International

This case study describes a new approach to centre-based services and cash assistance to address child labour in Turkey.

Background

In Turkey, Social Service Centres (SSCs) provide a broad range of services and support for Turkish citizens and, increasingly, to refugees, particularly Syrian refugees. The SSCs provide child protection and sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) case management, and multiple services and support for individuals who are in need of protection, care and support – the centres also make referrals to other government services including financial assistance. SSC staff include social workers, psychologists, child protection specialists, psychological/guidance counsellors and health personnel.

Centre-based family services and cash assistance to address child labour

In 2016, UNHCR, the provincial government authorities responsible for social welfare and education (namely Provincial Directorate of Family, Labour and Social Services (PDoFLSS) and Provincial Directorate of National Education (PDoNE)), and SSCs in Istanbul initiated collaboration to address the growing problem of child labour among Syrian refugee children. The collaboration aimed to support SSCs to extend their services to a larger group of refugee children and their families.

Awareness-raising was conducted among Syrian refugee families to approach their local SSC for assessment and support. NGOs also increasingly referred Syrian refugee families to SSCs. Social workers and interpreters would then visit the family home to assess the needs of individual children and the family as a whole. They assessed whether the family was eligible for cash assistance and whether children were going to school.

Based on this assessment, two main types of cash assistance were provided to families:

- one-off cash assistance to support immediate needs; and
- monthly cash assistance, supported by educational measures issued by the juvenile court, which makes school enrolment and attendance of the child obligatory.

Challenges

- Families needed to be officially registered residents in districts where they applied to SSCs in order to receive assistance through the SSC. This disproportionately affected non-Syrian asylum seekers as they were more frequently unregistered.
- Many older adolescents of working age (15 years and older) were not willing to go back to school. There were not sufficient opportunities to access vocational training programmes or apprenticeships as pathways to decent work.
- The significant scale of child labour exceeded the capacity of the SSCs in terms of the ratio of social workers to support families. This resulted in a large backlog of cases in the beginning of the project.
- Cash assistance is short-term support. There were limited opportunities for families to access sustainable livelihoods.
- Lack of an integrated database among different state institutions hampered a holistic approach in child protection case management.
- Limited communication and collaboration with key provincial directorates decreased the social impact of the child protection interventions by the SSCs.

Lessons learned

The participating families in the 2016 pilot programme recommended the following:

- Provide higher amounts of cash assistance and for a longer period of time to effectively keep children out of child labour.
- Increase the number of child-friendly spaces, including childcare opportunities, so that parents and caregivers can go to work.
- Provide additional assistance to children to be able to attend school.
- Raise more awareness about education.
- Develop new, tailored strategies for adolescents to build future plans.

Other lessons learned included the following:

- Close monitoring of children's attendance in education is needed within the Department of Education to ensure that children attend school regularly.
- Initially, the centres did not use the same vulnerability criteria for the cash assistance. A lesson learned was to develop harmonised assessment tools and frameworks.
- The transfer value of the economic assistance was quite high, but longer-term sustainable solutions and policies were necessary at the central level to combat child labour through the engagement of relevant stakeholders, as cash assistance was not sustainable.
- Joint training and coordination initiatives between government and non-government actors were important to enhance coordination and collaboration between different actors.
- It was also important to include municipal authorities in the referral mechanism as they were often at the frontline in meeting the needs of urban refugees and could be an important source of additional capacity to carry out individual assessments.
- Stronger links to government employment services, individuals or businesses in the private sector, and NGO livelihoods programmes were needed to ensure that families had better access to employment.

In order to support inclusion of refugee children in SSCs' protection mechanisms, under the leadership of the Turkish government, UNHCR has supported an overall system-strengthening approach since 2017. This approach comprises the following:

- **Personnel support for SSCs:** UNHCR started to support SSCs through the provision of social workers, interpreters, drivers and vehicles in 2017. In 2020, UNHCR was supporting 31 SSCs in Istanbul and 41 SSCs in the Marmara Region.
- **Capacity development:** In order to strengthen SSCs' protection capacity, UNHCR supported PDoFLSS's trainings, targeting social workers who work in SSCs, civil society organisations and local governments. UNHCR supported these trainings by explaining UNHCR's mandate and activities, international protection and refugee law, international and national frameworks on child protection, and UNHCR's specific child protection activities, including best interests procedures.
- **Supervision and coaching training:** UNHCR supported a Supervision and Coaching in Case Management Training of Trainers, facilitated by the Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action and targeting senior personnel in Istanbul PDoFLSS. The aim was to establish a supervision and coaching system in Istanbul PDoFLSS, as a pilot study in Turkey. Following the training, UNHCR facilitated a study visit to Austria to provide the participants with a good practice example from the field and to strengthen PDoFLSS's case management capacity, including child protection activities of SSCs.
- **Coordination meetings and workshops with SSC managers:** UNHCR regularly facilitates meetings and workshops with the participation of SSC managers and other stakeholders to discuss gaps, challenges and opportunities in the field and jointly to decide on ways forward. Officials from other relevant provincial directorates are also invited to these meetings in order to enhance communication and collaboration among them in refugee protection.
- **PDoFLSS-NGO Coordination Meetings:** In 2019, UNHCR supported the PDoFLSS-led coordination meetings targeting NGOs in order to enhance communication and collaboration between non-governmental stakeholders and PDoFLSS's several protection units, primarily SSCs. These meetings were held in order to discover the pathways to achieve complementarity in the field, especially focusing on child protection.
- **Standardised protection materials:** The UNHCR-led Inter-Agency Child Protection Sub-Working Group (CPsWG) created an Inter-Agency Guidance Note on Child Marriages which aims (i) to standardise and provide a holistic individual case response across agencies; and (ii) to consolidate a pool of preventive activities that are sustainable, community-based, effective and targeted in combating child marriages. CPsWG also created and endorsed the Child Protection Specific Risk Assessment and the Case Prioritization Guide, which help to determine the level of urgency for intervention for child protection cases. These documents were brought to the attention of Istanbul PDoFLSS for their possible use by Istanbul SSCs.

More information and resources are available at:

<https://alliancecpha.org>

<https://alliancecpha.org/en/child-protection-hub/child-labour-task-force>