

# Comparative Analysis of Cash-Based Assistance Programs: Insights from Türkiye and Colombia

## Nakit Tabanlı Yardım Programlarının Karşılaştırmalı Analizi: Türkiye ve Kolombiya'dan İçgörüler

Edvina BIHORAC\*

Ali POLAT\*\*

### Abstract

This study evaluates the cash-based humanitarian assistance programs implemented in Türkiye and Colombia, examining the social and economic impacts and challenges of these approaches. It seeks to evaluate the effectiveness of these programs in managing migration and crises, and to explore how experiences from different contexts contribute to each other and to international humanitarian aid policies. Türkiye's model offers a centralized and extensive support mechanism for Syrian refugees, while Colombia has developed more flexible, community-focused solutions for Venezuelan migrants. Although both countries' programs have been successful in addressing basic needs, issues such as social integration, financial sustainability, and coordination remain significant challenges. The study offers policy recommendations based on the experiences of both countries. It suggests that Türkiye enhance the participation of local actors and diversify funding sources, while Colombia develop long-term financing strategies and strengthen coordination mechanisms. The study proposes strategic solutions in the form of actionable policy recommendations to these problems and presents key findings regarding the potential of cash-based assistance in crisis management.

**Keywords:** Cash-Based Assistance, Türkiye, Colombia

### Özet

Bu çalışma, Türkiye ve Kolombiya'da uygulanan nakit temelli insani yardım programlarını değerlendirerek bu yaklaşımların sosyal ve ekonomik etkilerini ve karşılaştıkları zorlukları incelemektedir. Çalışma, bu programların göç ve kriz yönetimindeki etkinliğini değerlendirmeyi ve farklı bağlamlardan edinilen deneyimlerin birbirine ve uluslararası insani yardım politikalarına nasıl katkı sağladığını araştırmayı amaçlamaktadır. Türkiye'nin modeli, Suriyeli mültecilere yönelik merkezi ve kapsamlı bir destek mekanizması sunarken, Kolombiya ise Venezuela'dan gelen göçmenler için daha esnek ve topluluk odaklı çözümler geliştirmiştir. Her iki ülkenin programları da temel ihtiyaçları karşılama konusunda başarılı olsa da sosyal uyum, finansal sürdürülebilirlik ve koordinasyon gibi konular önemli zorluklar olarak varlığını sürdürmektedir.

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\* Lisansüstü Öğrenci; Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt Üniversitesi, ORCID: 0009-0005-8026-208X, edvina.bihorac@gmail.com

\*\* Prof. Dr.; Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt Üniversitesi, ORCID: 0000 0001-6041-5003, alipolat@aybu.edu.tr

Çalışma, her iki ülkenin deneyimlerinden hareketle politika önerileri sunmaktadır. Türkiye için yerel aktörlerin katılımının artırılması ve finansman kaynaklarının çeşitlendirilmesi önerilirken, Kolombiya'nın uzun vadeli finansman stratejileri geliştirmesi ve koordinasyon mekanizmalarını güçlendirmesi gerektiği vurgulanmaktadır. Bu çalışma, söz konusu sorunlara yönelik uygulanabilir politika önerileri sunarak nakit temelli yardımların kriz yönetimindeki potansiyeline dair önemli bulgular ortaya koymaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Nakit Tabanlı Yardım Programları, Türkiye, Kolombiya

### Introduction

Cash-based assistance programs have increasingly become a preferred method for delivering rapid and effective support to vulnerable populations during crises. These programs are particularly significant in addressing complex and prolonged emergencies. Unlike traditional in-kind assistance, cash-based interventions involve lower logistical costs and provide beneficiaries with the flexibility to address their unique needs. Moreover, these programs contribute directly to local economies, generating positive outcomes for both migrant populations and host communities (Çetinoğlu & Yılmaz, 2021).

This study aims to conduct a comparative analysis of cash-based assistance programs implemented in Türkiye and Colombia, focusing on their social and economic impacts, modes of operation, and the challenges they encounter. Both countries have faced similar crises in recent years, including large-scale migration movements, economic volatility, and natural disasters. Türkiye has emerged as the host to the largest refugee population globally due to the Syrian crisis, while Colombia has managed significant migration flows stemming from the Venezuelan crisis (OECD, 2023; World Bank, 2024).

Both countries have developed innovative cash transfer mechanisms to address large-scale migration and crises such as natural disasters. Türkiye's Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN) stands out as one of the world's largest humanitarian programs, providing conditional and unconditional support for Syrian refugees, alongside other complementary cash-based assistance programmes, most of which are integrated into the Kızılaykart Platform. Colombia's ADN Dignidad program, on the other hand, delivers unconditional cash transfers to meet the basic needs of Venezuelan migrants, similar to a variety of other smaller cash-based assistance programmes.

In this context, Türkiye's Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN) and Colombia's ADN Dignidad programs serve as critical case studies in evaluating the effectiveness of cash-based assistance. The ESSN program adopts a comprehensive structure, incorporating both conditional and unconditional cash transfers, whereas ADN Dignidad exclusively provides unconditional aid (Jeong & Trako, 2022). Both programs are designed to meet the essential needs of migrants while fostering social integration. Nonetheless, substantial differences exist between them in terms of implementation mechanisms, funding structures, and operational efficiency.

By examining the experiences of Türkiye and Colombia, this study seeks to offer policy recommendations for enhancing the efficacy of cash-based assistance programs. Furthermore, it underscores the broader contributions these programs can make to

global humanitarian aid frameworks. Through a comparative analysis of the two countries, the study elucidates both shared characteristics and critical distinctions, providing insights for more effective humanitarian practices.

## **1. Background**

### **1.1. The Socio-Economic Context of Türkiye**

Türkiye's socio-economic landscape over the past decade has been profoundly shaped by large-scale migration and economic crises. Since the onset of the Syrian Civil War in 2011, Türkiye has become host to millions of refugees. As of 2024, Türkiye accommodates approximately 4.1 million refugees, primarily from Syria, making it the country with the largest refugee population globally (UNHCR, 2024). This situation has placed significant pressure on public services, including healthcare and education, necessitating the restructuring of social protection systems. Despite the refugee crisis, Türkiye's economic growth has shown resilience over the past decade despite external pressures. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated unemployment rates and deepened economic inequalities (OECD, 2023).

In addition to the Syrian crisis, Türkiye frequently faces natural disasters, including earthquakes, floods, and wildfires, which adversely impact both local populations and refugee communities. To address these challenges, Türkiye has expanded its humanitarian assistance programs, notably introducing innovative cash-based mechanisms such as the Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN). The ESSN has established a comprehensive social protection network aimed at meeting the basic needs of refugees and promoting their social integration (Çetinoğlu & Yılmaz, 2021).

### **1.2. The Socio-Economic Context of Colombia**

Colombia has been grappling with a substantial influx of migrants resulting from the economic and political crises in Venezuela. The migration flow, which began in 2014, reached its peak in 2018, and as of 2024, Colombia hosts approximately 3 million Venezuelan migrants (Vogel, n.d.). To manage this crisis, the Colombian government has implemented humanitarian assistance programs such as the Resettlement Program and ADN Dignidad. However, challenges related to insufficient funding and program coordination have limited the effectiveness of these efforts (IMPACT, 2024).

Colombia's socio-economic context is further influenced by natural disasters, including tropical storms, floods, and landslides, as well as internal displacement caused by conflicts. While the country has extended its social protection systems to accommodate the needs of the migrant population, the sustainability of these systems hinges on adequate funding and technical capacity (Jeong & Trako, 2022). Although the ADN Dignidad program has been effective in addressing basic needs, it has faced challenges in achieving long-term economic and social integration goals.

The socio-economic contexts of Türkiye and Colombia highlight the critical factors shaping their respective cash-based assistance programs. These contexts underscore the necessity for both countries to develop innovative and sustainable solutions to support migrant populations.

## 2. Types Of Cash-Based Programs

### 2.1. Türkiye's Programs

Türkiye's cash-based assistance programs are designed to address the needs of both refugees and disadvantaged local communities. Among these, the Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN), funded by the European Union, stands out as the most prominent initiative. Recognized as the largest humanitarian assistance program globally, the ESSN has supported approximately 1.8 million refugees as of 2024 (Çetinoğlu & Yılmaz, 2021). The program provides monthly cash transfers to households, enabling them to meet their basic needs. By integrating both conditional and unconditional components, the ESSN ensures flexibility and accountability.

The Conditional Cash Transfer for Education (CCTE), which complements the ESSN, is aimed at encouraging school attendance among children. This program supports the positive role of education in promoting the social integration of refugees (Küçükkaya, 2024). Furthermore, local governments and non-governmental organizations in Türkiye have expanded the impact of these programs through initiatives such as projects aimed at enhancing women's economic independence.

Türkiye's programs are effectively monitored through a centralized data management system. This system ensures beneficiary identification and provides comprehensive data to evaluate the impact of cash transfers. The success of these programs is underpinned by the strong coordination between international donors and the Turkish government (OECD, 2023).

### 2.2. Colombia's Programs

In Colombia, cash-based assistance programs primarily focus on meeting the needs of Venezuelan migrants. ADN Dignidad is a cornerstone program in this context, providing unconditional cash transfers to beneficiaries. The program aims to address basic needs and promote economic integration (Jeong & Trako, 2022). However, the scale of ADN Dignidad is more limited compared to the ESSN in Türkiye, having reached over 350,000 individuals as of 2024 (IMPACT, 2024).

A notable feature of Colombia's cash-based programs is the involvement of local communities in decision-making processes. This approach enhances the flexibility and adaptability of aid to local needs. Community-based participation facilitates a better understanding of local priorities, thereby improving the effectiveness of humanitarian assistance. Nonetheless, the complexity of this approach poses challenges, particularly in terms of coordination between international and local actors. Weak coordination can hinder the accurate delivery of aid and impede the assessment of its impact.

Colombia has also taken significant steps to integrate technological innovations into its cash-based programs. Tools such as digital payment systems, mobile wallets, and biometric verification have expedited the distribution of aid and enhanced transparency. These methods have proven effective in preventing misuse of cash transfers and improving their overall impact.

While ADN Dignidad has successfully addressed immediate needs and contributed to economic development, such as enabling migrants to establish small businesses, the

sustainability of cash-based programs in Colombia remains a challenge. Without consistent donor support, expanding and maintaining these programs will be difficult.

Colombia's cash-based assistance programs are distinguished by their community-centered approach and technological advancements. However, strengthening coordination mechanisms, ensuring financial sustainability, and developing long-term integration strategies are essential for achieving broader impacts.

### **3. Impact Assessment**

#### **3.1. Türkiye**

The Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN) program in Türkiye serves as a remarkable example of the impact of cash-based assistance. The program's most notable success lies in its significant contribution to poverty reduction. Evaluations have revealed that the ESSN plays a critical role in enabling beneficiary households to meet their basic needs, particularly in areas such as food security, housing, and access to healthcare services (Çetinoğlu & Yılmaz, 2021).

The impact of the ESSN on education has been bolstered by the Conditional Cash Transfer for Education (CCTE) program. Designed to encourage school attendance among refugee children, the CCTE has achieved significant success in reducing school dropout rates and child labor (Küçükkaya, 2024). However, its effects on social integration remain limited. While efforts to promote the integration of refugees into society are ongoing, challenges in this domain persist.

Another critical aspect of the ESSN's impact is its contribution to the local economy. By increasing demand for goods and services, ESSN cash transfers have indirectly stimulated economic growth in local markets. Nevertheless, the program's reliance on external funding poses risks to its sustainability (OECD, 2023)

#### **3.2. Colombia**

In Colombia, the ADN Dignidad program has played a significant role in addressing basic needs and fostering social integration. The program has yielded positive outcomes in improving food security, housing, and access to essential healthcare services for Venezuelan migrants. The unconditional nature of ADN Dignidad's cash transfers has provided beneficiaries with greater flexibility and enhanced economic autonomy (Jeong & Trako, 2022).

However, the program's impact on education and employment has been limited. ADN Dignidad does not specifically target issues such as child labor or school attendance rates. Additionally, challenges such as stigma and discrimination against migrants have constrained the program's effectiveness in promoting social integration (Vogel, n.d.).

From an economic perspective, ADN Dignidad has positively influenced local markets by enhancing the purchasing power of migrants and stimulating local trade. Nevertheless, deficiencies in reporting and data analysis processes have made it difficult to fully assess the program's impact (IMPACT, 2024).

## 4. Challenges and Limitations

### 4.1. Türkiye

One of the primary challenges faced by Türkiye's cash-based assistance programs, such as the Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN), is the complexity of bureaucratic processes. A large-scale program like the ESSN requires the coordination of numerous local and international actors, which can sometimes result in delays and operational inefficiencies (Çetinoğlu & Yılmaz, 2021).

Another significant challenge is the negative public perception of refugees. The sizable refugee population in Türkiye necessitates substantial efforts to promote social integration. However, certain negative attitudes within the public sphere make it difficult for programs like the ESSN to gain broader acceptance. This creates risks for the long-term sustainability of such initiatives (OECD, 2023).

Financial sustainability is also a critical limitation. The ESSN relies heavily on European Union funding, which creates uncertainties about its future continuity. The limited availability of local resources further increases Türkiye's dependence on international financial support.

### 4.2. Colombia

In Colombia, the most pressing challenge for cash-based assistance programs such as ADN Dignidad is the lack of sufficient funding. These programs are highly dependent on international donors, but the continuity of such financial support is not always guaranteed. This dependency limits the ability of programs to expand and reach more migrants (IMPACT, 2024).

Issues in data management and reporting processes constitute another significant limitation. The weak coordination among different assistance programs in Colombia often hampers effective data sharing. This makes it challenging to accurately track beneficiaries and evaluate the effectiveness of aid distribution (Jeong & Trako, 2022).

Barriers to social integration also pose a critical problem in Colombia. Stigma and discrimination against migrants are evident both in society and the labor market. These challenges hinder the long-term integration of migrants and limit their economic contributions (Vogel, n.d.).

While Colombia's community-centered and flexible approach to assistance improves the adaptability of aid to local needs, it also introduces complexities. Particularly, misalignments between international and local actors can result in delays and inefficiencies in aid delivery.

## 5. Comparative Analysis

### 5.1. Similarities

Türkiye and Colombia represent two notable cases of utilizing cash-based assistance programs to address the basic needs of migrant populations and foster social integration. Both countries rely on international donor support to implement these programs. The Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN) in Türkiye and the ADN Dignidad program in Colombia have contributed to local economies and improved the living standards of beneficiaries (Çetinoğlu & Yılmaz, 2021; Jeong & Trako, 2022).

The density of migrant populations poses a significant challenge for both countries. Syrian refugees in Türkiye and Venezuelan migrants in Colombia constitute the primary beneficiaries of these programs. Both countries have emphasized the registration of migrants and their inclusion in assistance programs. This approach has enhanced the transparency of aid processes and facilitated the delivery of assistance to target populations (UNHCR, 2024; Vogel, n.d.).

The programs in both countries have also generated notable impacts on local economies. Cash transfers have enabled beneficiaries to participate in local markets, stimulating economic activity. Expenditures on basic needs have increased demand for goods and services, thereby supporting local businesses and contributing to economic growth.

## 5.2. Differences

The most significant difference between Türkiye and Colombia lies in the scale and implementation mechanisms of their cash-based assistance programs. Türkiye's ESSN, which supports 1.8 million refugees, stands as the largest humanitarian assistance program in the world. By contrast, Colombia's ADN Dignidad program operates on a smaller scale, reaching over 350,000 individuals (IMPACT, 2024).

In terms of implementation, Türkiye adopts a centralized model, while Colombia emphasizes a community-centered and more flexible approach. The ESSN is monitored and implemented through centralized data systems, such as the Kızılay Card, ensuring regular and transparent distribution of aid. In contrast, ADN Dignidad involves community participation, offering adaptability but introducing challenges in data management and reporting (Jeong & Trako, 2022; Küçükkaya, 2024).

Funding sources also differ significantly. Türkiye's programs are predominantly financed by the European Union, whereas Colombia's initiatives rely on a diverse array of international donors. While Türkiye's centralized model ensures efficient utilization of funds, Colombia's reliance on varied donor support presents greater risks for financial sustainability (OECD, 2023; IMPACT, 2024).

Efforts to promote social integration also vary. While Türkiye has made strides in fostering the integration of refugees, negative public perceptions pose a challenge to these efforts. In Colombia, stigma and discrimination against migrants remain prominent obstacles to social integration (Vogel, n.d.).

## 6. Recommendations

The cash-based assistance programs implemented by Türkiye and Colombia offer valuable lessons in managing migration crises. To enhance the effectiveness and broaden the impact of these programs, the following policy recommendations are proposed:

### 6.1. Recommendations For Türkiye

**Increased Involvement of Local Actors:** The ESSN program operates within a centralized framework. Expanding the involvement of local authorities and civil society

organizations could enhance the targeted and effective distribution of aid. Furthermore, greater local engagement could contribute to the development of policies that support social integration (Çetinoğlu & Yılmaz, 2021).

**Public Awareness Campaigns:** To counter negative public perceptions, campaigns aimed at raising awareness about the contributions of refugees to society should be implemented. Projects highlighting the positive impact of refugees could accelerate social integration and garner greater public support for humanitarian initiatives (OECD, 2023).

**Diversified Funding Sources:** Given the ESSN's heavy reliance on European Union funding, efforts to identify additional funding sources at both local and international levels should be prioritized. Encouraging private sector involvement through corporate social responsibility initiatives could also enhance the program's sustainability.

## 6.2. Recommendations for Colombia

**Strengthening Data Management and Reporting Systems:** To improve the effectiveness of ADN Dignidad, data collection and analysis processes should be enhanced. A centralized data management system could facilitate beneficiary tracking and better evaluation of the program's impact (Jeong & Trako, 2022).

**Long-Term Financing Strategies:** Ensuring the sustainability of Colombia's cash-based programs requires reducing dependence on international donors. Mobilizing local resources and fostering private sector involvement could support the long-term success of these initiatives (IMPACT, 2024).

**Strengthening Inter-Community Relations:** Education and awareness campaigns aimed at reducing discrimination against migrants should be prioritized. Social projects that strengthen ties between local communities and migrants can promote social integration and enhance societal cohesion (Vogel, n.d.).

## 6.3. Recommendations for Both Countries

**Disaster Preparedness and Response:** Both countries are prone to natural disasters. Integrating disaster preparedness components into cash-based assistance programs, such as systems enabling automatic cash transfers during crises, could improve response capacity (USAID, 2024).

**International Collaboration and Knowledge Sharing:** Türkiye and Colombia could collaborate to share experiences and develop more effective practices for implementing cash-based assistance. Joint efforts in capacity building and information exchange could strengthen the humanitarian systems of both countries (Jeong & Trako, 2022).

**Women and Child-Focused Policies:** Designing cash-based assistance programs to enhance women's economic independence and improve children's access to education could support long-term social development goals (Küçükkaya, 2024).

## Conclusion

The cash-based assistance programs implemented in Türkiye and Colombia represent innovative approaches with significant potential to address humanitarian crises effectively. By comparing the programs in these two countries, this study has identified



their respective strengths and weaknesses. Türkiye, through its Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN), has adopted a centralized model that reaches a vast beneficiary population, while Colombia has implemented a community-centered and flexible approach through its ADN Dignidad program.

Both countries have successfully addressed the basic needs of migrants, supported social integration, and contributed to local economies. However, challenges remain in ensuring sustainability, coordination, and integration. Türkiye faces limitations such as public perception and obstacles such as financial dependency and bureaucratic inefficiencies, while Colombia struggles with issues related to data management deficiencies, funding sustainability, social integration and social stigma.

The policy recommendations provided in this study focus on areas where these programs can be improved to achieve greater effectiveness. These include enhancing disaster preparedness, fostering international collaboration, and implementing targeted policies that prioritize women and children. Türkiye could benefit from delegating more authority to local actors, while Colombia should strengthen its coordination mechanisms and develop long-term strategies for sustainability.

Ultimately, this study demonstrates that the cash-based assistance programs in Türkiye and Colombia offer valuable lessons for designing resilient humanitarian aid systems. By drawing on these experiences, global humanitarian policies can be enhanced to better address future crises. The insights gained from these programs provide a foundation for creating more effective and sustainable solutions to support vulnerable populations worldwide.

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