



Examining the functioning of public social assistance system: The case of Antalya

Kamu sosyal yardım sistemi işleyişinin incelenmesi: Antalya örneği

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ABSTRACT

Social assistance had become a key policy tool worldwide in alleviating poverty and reducing hunger. However, many authors highlighted that implementing social assistance programs has been facing many obstacles. This research examined Turkey's public social assistance system in the districts of Antalya. A face to face survey was conducted with 100 households functionally selected from Konyaaltı town Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundation (SASF) beneficiary list, and 10 administrators responsible for districts and municipalities' social assistance and services. Descriptive statistics were used to examine the perception of beneficiaries on the assistance system and varieties of assistance programs they benefited from. Due to the findings it was seen that the municipalities mostly provide in-kind assistance and use different criteria for evaluating social assistance applications. However, it was seen that municipalities do not have a common system in monitoring social assistance. In addition, it was seen that foundations provide cash and in-kind assistance and use a common criteria in evaluating the applications for social assistance within a common monitoring system. There is no common social assistance system where all public institutions are included, and all social assistance can be monitored country wide. Accordingly, "social assistance and income ratio of the households can not be determined accurately. The same household might receive different assistance from various resources and their level of need for social assistance is not known. Accordingly, the total value and amount of social assistance provided to beneficiaries cannot be calculated accurately. In addition, there are various types of social assistance and their follow-up is difficult. Accordingly, it is required to simplify the types of social assistance and an integrated "social assistance monitoring system" including all public and other relevant institutions should be developed country wide.

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ÖZ

Sosyal yardımlar, dünya çapında yoksulluğu ve açlığı azaltmada kilit politika araçları haline gelmiştir. Ancak, çoğu yazar sosyal yardım programı uygulamalarının pek çok engel ile karşı karşıya kaldığını belirtmiştir. Bu çalışmada, Türkiye'de uygulanan kamu sosyal yardım sistemi, Antalya ili Konyaaltı İlçesi örneğinde incelenmiştir. Antalya ili Konyaaltı İlçesi Sosyal Yardımlaşma ve Dayanışma Vakfı sosyal yardımlarından yararlananlar listesinden gayeli olarak seçilen 100 hane ile ve 10 ilçenin sosyal yardımlardan sorumlu olan vakıf ve belediye yöneticileriyle yüz yüze anket yapılmıştır. Yararlanıcıların; sosyal yardım sistemi algısını ve yararlanılan sosyal yardım çeşitlerini incelemek için tanımlayıcı istatistikler kullanılmıştır. Araştırma sonuçlarına göre; az sayıda belediyelerin sadece aynı yardım yaptığı ve sosyal yardım başvurularını değerlendirmede birbirlerinden farklı kriterler kullandığı görülmüştür. Dolayısıyla, belediyelerin kendi aralarında, sosyal yardımların izlendiği ortak bir sisteme sahip olmadıkları belirlenmiştir. Buna karşın, vakıfların çoğunun aynı yardım sağladığı, sosyal yardım başvurularının değerlendirmesinde ortak kriterler uyguladığı, ülke genelinde uygulanan tüm vakıf yardımlarının ortak bir sistemden izlenebildiği görülmüştür. Ülke genelinde tüm kamu kurumlarının dahil olduğu ve tüm sosyal yardımların izlenebildiği bütünlük bir ortak takip sistemi bulunmamaktadır. Bu nedenle, hanelerin "sosyal yardım ve gelir oranları" doğru olarak belirlenememektedir. Aynı hane, farklı kaynaklardan farklı yardımlar alabilmekte, sosyal yardım muhtaçlık düzeyi doğru olarak saptanamamaktadır. Sonuç olarak, Türkiye'de sosyal yardımlardan yararlananlara yapılan toplam yardım değeri ve miktarı tam olarak hesaplanamamaktadır. Ayrıca, ülke genelinde uygulanan sosyal yardım çeşitleri çok fazla olup takibi zordur. Sosyal yardım çeşitlerinin sadeleştirilmesi, ülke genelinde tüm kamu ve ilgili diğer kurumların dâhil olduğu bütünlük bir "sosyal yardım izleme sisteminin" oluşturulması gerekmektedir.

1. Introduction

During the period 1990-2015 eradicating poverty and reducing the proportion of hungry people living with less than \$ 1 per day become one of the Sustainable Goals for Development. Accordingly, the implementation of social protection programs gained importance rapidly in many developing countries while about 2.1 billion people benefit at least from one of the social protection programs worldwide (Black and White 2003; Lowder et al. 2017).

In Turkey, several social protection and assistance policies have been pursued, and many organizations and legal adjustments have been implemented. Therefore, the most important institutions and legal structures are as follows:

- a. The Law No. 633 at 2011: Determining the functioning of the Ministry of Family and Social Policies (ASPB),
- b. The Law No. 5510 at 2006: Describing the attribution and the functioning of Regional Directorate of Social Assistance,
- c. The Law No. 3294: Describing the social assistance and solidarity foundations (SASF),
- d. The Law No. 5216 at 2004: Defining the municipalities 'social assistance and services.

In fact, Turkey's social assistance programs are implemented within SASF under the supervision of regional General Directorates of Social Assistance and Solidarity (GDSAS) since 2011. Also, the GDSAS is under the responsibility of ASPB (World Bank 2018).

During the last decades, Turkey's public expenditure allocated to the social assistance programs raised from 25.8 billion Turkish Lira (TL) in 2015 (1.33% GDP) to 32 billion TL in 2016 (1.45% GDP) (ASPB 2014, 2016). Besides, in Turkey the number beneficiaries of social protection programs accounted about 13766000 people with an expenditure of 435.910 million TL in 2018. For instance, in 2018 Turkey accounted about 12.913 million beneficiaries of retired/elderly, widows and orphan assistance programs executed within the scope of social protection (TÜİK 2019).

Up until now social assistance programs have been used as tools to alleviate the country poverty and income inequality. Though, in Turkey rural populations are likely to be low educated while most of them are not registered under health insurance (Dansuk 1997; Saatci and Akpınar 2007). Therefore, during the year 2017, in Turkey the poverty rate was 28.1%, the poverty gap 27.2% and about 0.13% of rural population lived with less than \$ 1.25 per day (TÜİK 2019).

Thus, the main aim of this study is to determine how the social assistance system works in Turkey. Therefore, the study seeks to:

- a. Explore the main social assistance programs executed in the districts of Antalya,
- b. Examine the functioning of the social assistance system in the districts of Antalya,
- c. Evaluate the beneficiaries' perception of the social assistance system.

2. Material and Method

2.1. Material

The main material of this research consists of primary data obtained from face to face surveys of two groups. First group primary data were collected from 100 households, who are beneficiaries of social assistance in the district of Konyaaltı. The questionnaire applied to the beneficiary households includes the sources of information about the existence of social assistance, the channels used for and the obstacles encountered in application for social assistance. In addition, the questionnaire comprised of the delivery mechanisms and types of received social assistance, the beneficiary household's satisfaction level about received social assistance benefits and their perception on the behavior of officers in charge of social assistance programs.

Second group primary was collected from 5 Directors of Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundation and 5 municipal Directors (Konyaaltı, Muratpaşa, Kepez, Aksu, and Döşemaltı) responsible for social assistance programs and services. The information included in the questionnaire comprised the institutional channels in announcing the existence of social assistance programs, the main executed social assistance programs executed within the foundations and the municipalities, the institutional sources of social funding, the management system of social assistance and the relationships between the public institutions executing social assistance.

2.2. Method

With the help of the Direction of SASF of Konyaaltı, a list of households' that are beneficiaries of social assistance programs during the year 2018 was purposely selected. Data were collected only from 100 households from the selected list according to their availability and their willingness to participate in the survey. Additionally, descriptive statistics were used to evaluate the main indicators of the social assistance system and the social assistance system was schematized.

3. Results

3.1. Findings obtained from municipalities and foundations in the districts of Antalya

These findings consist of the types of social assistance programs executed within the districts and by the municipalities and how does the social assistance system work in provinces of Antalya.

3.1.1. Overview of social assistance and type of executed social programs

These findings explored the executed social assistance programs. The main criteria for evaluating the applications, the main strategies and encountered obstacles in executing the assistance were in the scope. Besides management of the social assistance data amongst the institutions and the follow-up of the beneficiaries were investigated.

The findings shown in Table 1 revealed that within the province of Antalya 40% of the SASF executed cash and in-kind assistance and 60% of them executed only in-kind

Table 1. Overview of the Directors responsible for social assistance programs.

The main indicators for social assistance	Public institutions	
	Social assistance and solidarity foundations	Municipalities
a. Executing social assistance programs	40% of the foundation executed cash and in-kind assistance 60% of the foundations executed only in-kind assistance	80% of the municipalities executed cash and in-kind assistance 20% of the municipalities executed only in-kind assistance
b. Income level in selecting the beneficiaries of social assistance programs	Less than one-third of national minimum income (609 TL)	Income level, number of working persons per household, disabilities
c. Delivering more than one social assistance programs to a beneficiary within the household	Yes	Yes
d. Delivering more than one social assistance program to more than one person within the household	Yes	Yes
e. Follow-up of the beneficiaries	Social services and villages counselors	Social assistance and social services
f. Application assessment process	The integrated social assistance system	Villages' counselors and the neighbors of the applicant
g. Sharing data with other institutions situated at the same level	Yes	No
h. The occurrence of fake applications	Yes	Yes
i. The efficiency of the social assistance system in controlling wrong applications	No	No
j. Type of complaints from the beneficiaries	Cutting social assistance, insufficiency of social benefits	Late delivery of social benefits, reject of application
k. Funding sources of social assistance	Intuitions budgets, penalties funding, and charity	Institution's funding
l. Following strategies in determining annual social assistance funding	Determined by the Ministry of Family and Social Assistance Policies	Institution's funding and assistance budget of the previous year
m. Prioritizing criteria in executing social assistance	The density of demand, poverty index	Institution's budgets
n. Common obstacles in executing social assistance	Insufficiency of personals and social funding	

Source; Research data obtained from the directors of social assistance programs.

assistance, whilst 80% of the municipalities executed cash and in-kind assistance and, 20% of them executed only in-kind assistance. In addition, the SASF evaluated the application for social assistance according to the income level of the applicants and the municipalities focused on income level, disability situation and belonging to needy soldiers' families. Moreover, the foundations and the municipalities provided more than one social assistance programs to more than one individual beneficiary and more than one social benefit within the same household.

In fact, within the SASF the applications for social assistance are evaluated through an integrated system (E-Devlet) and the beneficiaries are followed by social services and village counselors.

On the other hand, the applications for social assistance within the municipalities are examined with the help of the village counselors and the neighbors of the applicants and the beneficiaries are followed by municipal social assistance and social services.

Indeed, the foundations follow each other through a common integrated system, while the municipalities lacked an integrated social assistance system. So, it is evidently clear that

the corresponding social assistance system is managed individually.

It was also noted that the SASF and the municipalities encountered misleading applications for social assistance and didn't possess any appropriate mechanism in detecting the fraud.

Most complaints received from the beneficiaries through system were stopped assistance provision, insufficiency of the social benefits in the SASF, the late delivery of social benefits and rejection of applications by the municipalities.

Currently, the annual budget of the social assistance in the municipalities was determined according to the institutional funding and previous year's assistance budget. The assistance funding is determined by the ASPB for SASF.

In executing the social assistance, the SASF mostly focused on the density of demand and districts' poverty index, and the municipalities focused on the institutional budgets. In this regard, the SASF and the municipalities challenged the insufficiency of personals and assistance funding. Furthermore, the perception of Directors responsible for social assistance in the SASF and municipalities was shown in [Table 1](#).

3.1.2. The functioning of the social assistance system

Turkey's social assistance is executed by the SASF and the Municipalities. The criteria applied in evaluating the applications for social assistance (income test, the threshold of income, inspecting visit) differed between the Social assistance and Solidarity Foundations and the Municipalities up until now. In fact, SASF social assistance system is the main social assistance system for the country. It is executed within an integrated system around all districts of Turkey whilst the municipal social assistance system, even electronic one, is not integrated with the country.

Commonly, the social assistance system consisted of 5 steps containing various sub-steps. Firstly, the applicants for social assistance programs are informed about the existence of the assistance programs through various channels. These channels comprised of the living environments, parents and relatives of the applicants, private schools and hospitals, radio and television, village counselors and the social assistance institutions.

After that, the applications for social programs are submitted by the applicants themselves, their parents or relatives, the villages' counselors, and the social assistance institutions.

Then the applications are evaluated by the audit committee of foundations according to monthly income per capita and the average income of the household. Occasionally, the audit committee of foundations led inspecting visits to the applicants' living area to testify the correctness of submitted information.

Accordingly, the applications for social assistance are accepted or rejected and the retained delivery channels of social benefits declared to the selected beneficiaries. These delivery channels encompassed of the post office (PPT), home delivery, bank accounts and prepaid bank cards and differ according to the types of social assistance programs and the institutions.

Finally, the beneficiaries are sometimes visited by the public institution executing social assistance to investigate the evolution of their conditions. Therefore, the social assistance system of the districts of Antalya is outlined in Figure 1.

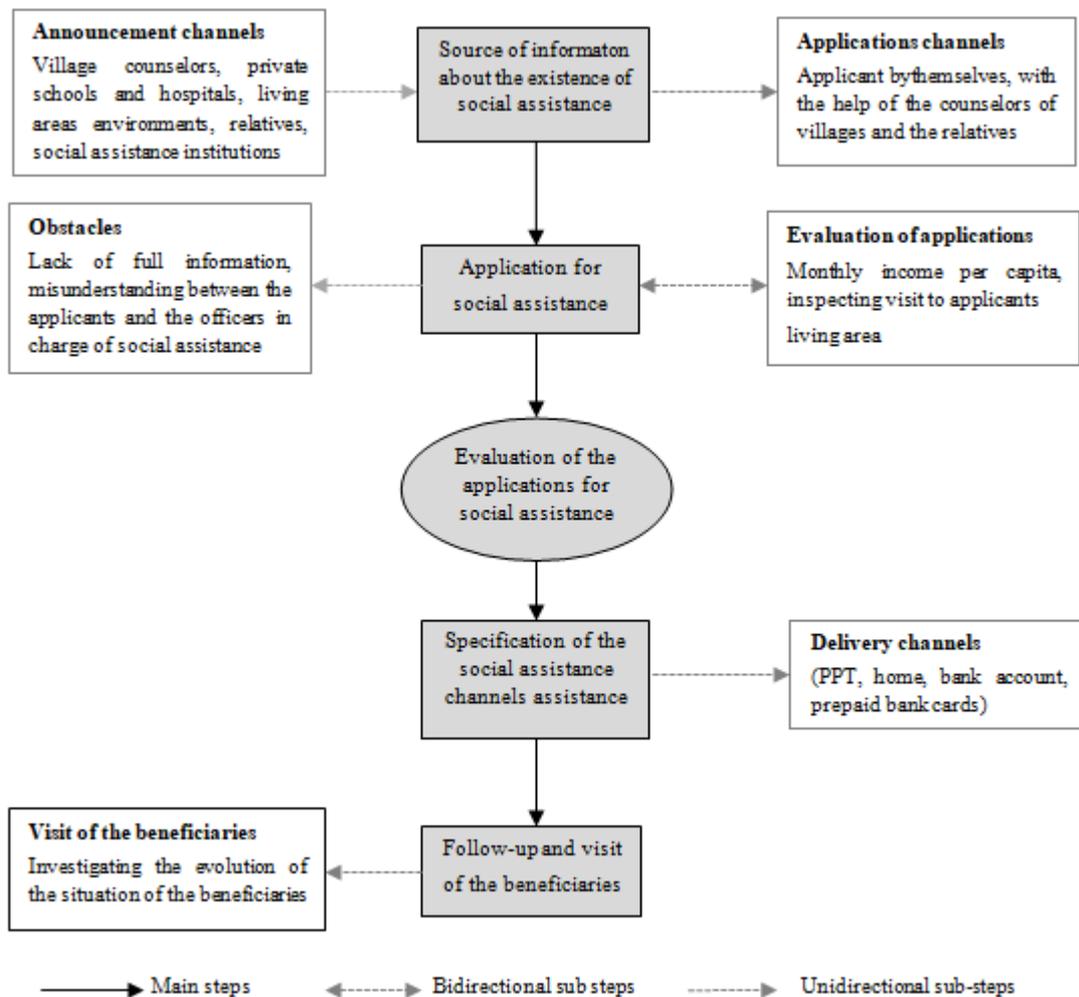


Figure 1. The functioning of the social assistance system. Source; Research data obtained from beneficiaries (n= 100) and directors (n= 10).

3.2. Findings obtained from beneficiaries

In this section, the findings were obtained from 100 beneficiary households and the most important indicators are shown in Table 2. In fact, understanding the main indicators of the social assistance system is important to determine its functioning pattern.

- The findings showed that 48% of the beneficiaries were informed on the existence of social assistance within their living environments, 15% by the villages' counselors, 14% by television, 9% by SASF, 8% by their relatives and 6% by the hospitals.

- Additionally, 64% of the beneficiaries applied for social assistance by themselves, 21% with the support of their relatives, 12% with the help of the village counselors and 3% with the support of SASF.

- Then, 88% of the beneficiaries applied for assistance programs without any obstacles and 12% amongst them faced some difficulties such a lack of full information and misunderstanding with the officers responsible of social assistance.

- On the other hand, 22% of the beneficiaries were visited during evaluation of their application, 32% during some social events and 46% amongst them were not visited.

- Definitely, 71% of social assistance was delivered in cash though PTT, 12% in cash at home, 13% was delivered in cash through bank accounts and 3% by prepaid bank card.

- Finally, 99% of social assistance was delivered at an accurate time while 70% of the beneficiaries of SASF social assistance were satisfied.

4. Discussion and conclusion

The SASF and the municipalities are the main public institutions executing the social assistance through cash and in-kind assistance. But, according to the data of TÜİK (2019) in during the year 2018 Turkey the amount of cash social

assistance accounts two time (2.06) the expenditure of in-kind assistance.

In addition, the findings showed that most of the beneficiaries of social assistance were informed about the existence of social assistance through informal channels (neighbors, private schools). Accordingly, Nilüfer (2011) indicated that the shortage of official channels on the existence of social assistance could limit the use of social benefits and, therefore a restricted group of people could benefit from many social assistance programs. The findings indicated that most of the applications for social assistance were self-targeted so that the applicants applied to social assistance themselves. This could be to reduce the occurrence of fake applications and increase the efficient use of social funding. Previously Leite (2014) mentioned that the allocation of social benefits to selected population groups ensured the governments that the poor access to social programs and services.

The results showed that most of the beneficiaries were not followed neither during the evaluation of their applications for social assistance nor in the follow-up of their social conditions. This could favor the beneficiaries to profit from many social assistance programs and sustain their beneficiary status. Within the SASF the evaluation of applications for social assistance is based on monthly income per capita or a monthly income of the applicants' household. For this, the socio-economic situation of the applicants is verified through an integrated system (E-Devlet). In addition, the application is examined through an integrated social assistance system that encompasses all the country's SASF.

Though, in the municipalities, the evaluations of the applications for social assistance are based on income per capita, the disability status and the number of working people in the applicant household. This evaluation is conducted with the help of the neighbors of the applicant and the village's counselors. The municipalities lack reliable criteria in evaluating the application for social assistance and are not integrated within a social assistance system.

Table 2. Main indicators of the social assistance system.

Main Indicators (%) [*]			
a. Institutional sources providing social assistance	e. Behaviors of the officers responsible for social assistance		
Districts	89	Good	93
Municipalities	11	Bad	7
b. Main channels informing the existence of social assistance	f. Timely delivery of social assistance programs		
Village counselors	15	Accurate time delivered	99
Hospital	6	Late delivered	1
Environment (neighbors, private schools)	48	g. Types of delivery of social assistance	
Social assistance and solidarity foundation	9	Cash at the Post office	74
Televisions	14	Cash delivered at home	12
	8	Bank account	13
Relatives (Father, children)		Prepaid bank card delivered at home	1
c. Channels in applying for social assistance		h. Follow-up of the beneficiaries	
Village counselor	12	Evaluation of the application	22
Themselves	64	Social visit	32
Relatives	21	Never	46
Social assistance and solidarity foundation	3	i. Satisfaction level of the beneficiaries	
d. Obstacles in applying for social assistance		Satisfied	70
Never face any obstacles	88	Not Satisfied	30
Facing obstacles	12		

Source; Research data obtained from beneficiaries (n= 100). ^{*}Total number of households is 100, so the frequency and the percentage are the same.

This lack of inter-institutional integrated social assistance system (between the municipalities) and inter-institutional (municipalities-SASF) could allow individuals to benefit from more than many social benefits.

Likewise, Gough et al. (1997) and Göçmen (2014) highlighted that the variety of Turkish institutions executing social assistance complicated the management of the assistance system and beneficiary data. Additionally, Zengin and Öztaş (2009), and ASPB (2016) reported there is a lack of social assistance that is shared data between public institutions and non-governmental organizations.

According to the research findings, the country lacks an integrated social assistance system to follow-up all the beneficiaries and types of executing public social assistance programs. This could allow the household or individual to benefit from many social assistance programs. Yet, until now there is a lack of researches that estimated the total of social assistance per beneficiary so that there is an urgent need to simplify the country's social assistance system.

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