

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is the Executive Summary of the *Evaluation of the Emergency Social Safety Net programme*, covering the period January 2018-March 2020. The evaluation was launched by the European Commission’s Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO) in June 2020. The work was undertaken by ICF with support of Ankey Consulting and finalised in April 2022.

### *Objectives and scope of the evaluation*

The aim of the evaluation was to provide a retrospective assessment of the second phase of the Emergency Social Safety Net programme (referred to as ESSN-2), covering the period between January 2018 and March 2020, presenting the evolution of the programme compared to its first phase of implementation and assessing the extent to which it had achieved its objectives. In addition, this evaluation has identified potential learning elements relevant for the third implementation phase of the ESSN, and, more broadly the further development of EU humanitarian cash policy, as well as future Safety-net programming.

### *Methodological approach*

The evaluation was designed to respond to a specific set of evaluation issues and questions, as articulated in the Terms of Reference (ToR). A variety of research tools and sources of information were used to build a rich and comprehensive evidence base for this evaluation covering a wide range of stakeholders. This included documentation review, data analysis, social media analysis, key informant interviews (KII), focus groups and workshops. In total, the evaluation team reviewed approximately 150 documents and seven monitoring databases of indicators related to the ESSN. ICF also performed a social media analysis to understand perceptions about the programme amongst end beneficiaries and other stakeholders. In addition, the evaluation team engaged with over 70 stakeholders through a series of individual and group telephone interviews.

### *Overview of the ESSN*

The ESSN was established in September 2016 through a collaborative agreement between DG ECHO, the World Food Programme (WFP), the Turkish Red Crescent (TRC), and the Government of Turkey (GoT), as a means of supporting humanitarian social assistance by delivering monthly multi-purpose cash transfers to socio-economically vulnerable refugees in Turkey. The primary objective of the ESSN is to save lives and protect livelihoods in emergencies by improving the living conditions of the most vulnerable refugees through predictable and dignified support addressing basic needs. The programme established four main objectives and a series of activities as outlined in **Error! Reference source not found..Error! Reference source not found.**

**Table 1. ESSN objectives and activities**

Objectives	Summary of activities
Provision of monthly basic needs assistance to vulnerable households through multi-purpose cash transfers	Operational aspects of the cash transfer, such as reviewing the adequacy of the transfer values, sensitisation, identification of beneficiaries through, for example, Household (HH) verification visits, identification and referral of protection cases (complementary role), and contracting of financial service and implementing partners
Developing capacity of national partners	Capacity-building activities such as operational support to Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundations (SASF) staff

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	through the provision of translators or vehicles, as well as the development of a programme exit strategy <sup>1</sup>
Efficient and effective coordination of the humanitarian response	Coordination activities, such as setting up the joint management cell (JMC) and Technical Working Groups (TWGs)
Monitoring, evaluation and learning	Preparation of Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) studies and assessments, such as the Comprehensive Vulnerability Monitoring Exercise (CVME) and the Post-Distribution Monitoring (PDM)

Source: DG ECHO (2021) SingleForm 2017/00972/FR/01/01

The eligibility for the ESSN-2 was based on six demographic criteria that had been revised by the end of ESSN-1, to reduce inclusion and exclusion errors. In addition, three important improvements to the ESSN were introduced in 2018: the SASF Discretionary Allowance, the Severe Disability Allowance and the Turkish (TK) Outreach and Referrals teams. See **Error! Reference source not found.** for a summary of the timeline.

By March 2020, i.e. the end of the ESSN-2, approximately 1.7 million direct beneficiaries were targeted under the programme<sup>2</sup>. The total budget for ESSN-2 was €1,006,797,949, with actual expenditure totalling €1,001,333,538 (99%).<sup>3</sup>

Throughout the ESSN-1 (first phase of the programme) and ESSN-2 (second phase of the programme that started in January 2018 and ended in March 2020), the programme's framework and main implementing partners remained the same, namely the WFP and the TRC, in collaboration with the GoT.

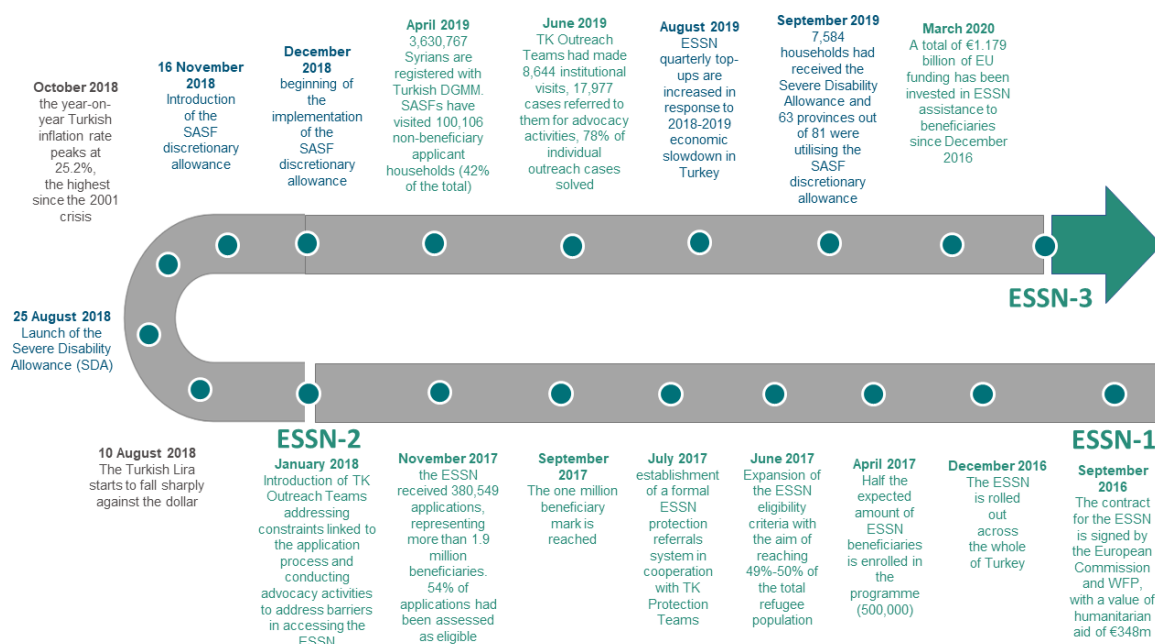
<sup>1</sup> Exit strategy refers to the process of moving from emergency to rehabilitation and development. In the context of the ESSN, the exit strategy would entail reducing the dependence of beneficiaries on humanitarian assistance (and funding) by DG ECHO, towards them being supported by other donors, including DG NEAR and the GoT, in terms of accessing employment, receiving livelihoods assistance and protection.

<sup>2</sup> WFP (2017) Single Form 2017/00972/RQ/01/03

<sup>3</sup> WFP (2020) ESSN-2 Final Report, Financial Annex

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**Figure 1. ESSN Timeline**



Source: ICF elaboration, based on WFP, OPM (2018) Evaluation of the DG ECHO funded Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN) in Turkey, November 2016-December 2017, and WFP, OPM (2020) ESSN Mid-Term Review 2018/2019

## Key findings and conclusions

Overall, the evaluation found that the ESSN was relevant, coherent, effective and efficient with noticeable improvement compared to the first implementation phase, ESSN-1. Nonetheless, the ESSN-2 was negatively impacted by the challenging economic context, and several existing shortcomings persisted.

**Error! Reference source not found.** below provides an overview of selected indicators using data collected at the end of ESSN-1 and the start of ESSN-2 (baseline), and at the end of ESSN-2 (end-line).

**Table 2. Evolution of key ESSN Indicators**

Indicator	ESSN-2 Baseline	ESSN-2 Final	Evolution	Source
<b>Demographic Indicators</b>				
Nationality	Syrian: 90.6% Iraqi: 6.5% Afghan: 2.2% Iranian: 0.2% Other: 0.5%	Syrian: 88.9% Iraqi: 6.8% Afghan: 3.5% Iranian: 0.2% Other: 0.6%	Slight changes	ESSN-1 Final Report, ESSN-2 Final Report
Gender of HH head	Men: 83% Women: 17%	Men: 83% Women: 17%	No change	CVME 2, CVME 5
Average HH size	5.8 members	5.7 members	Decrease	ESSN Application Data
<b>Reduction in vulnerabilities</b>				

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Indicator	ESSN-2 Baseline	ESSN-2 Final	Evolution	Source
HH living below Minimum Expenditure Basket (MEB)	74.5% <sup>4</sup>	54.8%	Decrease	ESSN-1 Final Report, ESSN-2 Final Report
Main income source	ESSN assistance: 48% Non-agricultural casual labour: 25% Skilled work: 22% Other: 6%	ESSN assistance: 53% Unskilled worker: 22% Semi-skilled work: 17% Skilled worker: 3% Other: 5%	No change	CVME 2, CVME 5
Median debt	350 TL	1820 TL	Increase	ESSN-1 Final Report, ESSN-2 Final Report
Use of coping strategies <sup>5,6</sup>	No coping: 17% Stress: 75% Crisis: 35% Emergency: 6%	No coping: 12% Stress: 43% Crisis: 37% Emergency: 8%	Increase	CVME 2, CVME 5
<b>Access to basic needs</b>				
Food consumption groups	Acceptable: 95% Borderline: 4% Poor: 1%	Acceptable: 98% Borderline: 2% Poor: 0%	Increase	CVME 2, CVME 5
Housing quality: good or acceptable housing	47%	23%	Decrease	CVME 2, CVME 5
<b>Wider integration into society</b>				
Multi-dimensionally poor households	69%	43%	Decrease	CVME 2, CVME 5
Illiterate HH head	15%	21%	Increase	CVME 2, CVME 5
School absence for more than a year	27%	22% <sup>7</sup>	Decrease	CVME 2, CVME 5

<sup>4</sup> This value refers to the ESSN-1 Baseline (September 2016), rather than the ESSN-2 baseline (January 2018). This is because the measurement of the MEB changed between ESSN-1 and ESSN-2.

<sup>5</sup> Baseline sums to more than 100% in CVME 2 but not CVME 5. This represents a change in the grouping of beneficiaries by coping strategy over the different phases of the CVME survey.

<sup>6</sup> Coping strategies refer to tactics used by households to compensate or attenuate a situation of food insecurity. The indicator used was the Reduced Coping Strategies Index, which is a proxy indicator that includes specific consumption coping strategies. Higher values indicate a stronger reliance on coping strategies and therefore suggest worse food security levels.

<sup>7</sup> In the case of CVME 5, this indicator was changed to measure the proportion of those absent from school for more than a semester. Therefore, these two values are not directly comparable.

Source: ESSN-1 Final Report, ESSN-2 Final Report, WFP (May 2018) CVME Round 2, WFP (June 2020) CVME Round 5.

### *Relevance*

The ESSN-2 capitalised on the lessons learnt and weaknesses identified in the ESSN-1 to make progress in terms of covering the most vulnerable refugees. Compared to the previous phase, the share of refugees benefiting from the ESSN-2 increased significantly, and by end March 2020, the ESSN-2 was covering more than 1.7 million refugees. The targeting approach was further improved, through the introduction of two key changes in 2018: the SASF Discretionary Allowance and the TK Outreach and Referrals teams.

These efforts, together with the changes in the eligibility criteria in October 2017, led to some progress in the targeting of beneficiaries and in ensuring that cash transfers reached the most vulnerable registered refugees. However, while the SASF Discretionary Allowance was effective in identifying the poorest HHs, its slow, weak and uneven uptake across SASF offices and provinces limited its impact (only 30% of the total quotas had been used by end March 2020). The main reasons were: (a) the lack of SASF resources to carry out HH visits, (b) the rigidity of the selection criteria to enrol a previously excluded vulnerable HH onto the ESSN-2, and (c) the sub-optimal approach to assign quotas across SASF offices.

Regarding the ability of the programme to identify and address the specific needs of particularly vulnerable groups, some progress was made in the ESSN-2 compared to the ESSN-1. The gender sensitivity of the programme improved over time and under the ESSN-2, the WFP took several steps to ensure gender mainstreaming into the design, implementation, and monitoring of the ESSN activities. Nevertheless, some shortcomings persisted, as needs assessments and the programme design did not fully address gender-specific needs nor did they explicitly include other types of vulnerabilities – such as minors (which were about 60% of the beneficiaries), LGBTI<sup>8</sup>, refugees with chronic illnesses.

Another key change introduced in 2018 was the Severe Disability Allowance, an allowance which was introduced to specifically address the needs of HHs with a member with a severe disability as these HHs have increased costs caused by the care for the disabled family member. The Severe Disability Allowance was a successful mechanism to adjust the transfer value to ESSN HH beneficiaries with severely disabled members and reduce the disparities between those HHs and the average ESSN HH beneficiary.

The ESSN-2 also provided a limited degree of flexibility to adapt to changing and evolving needs on the ground, which were collected regularly from beneficiaries and other stakeholders through various means. The ESSN-2 did not have an embedded mechanism to provide immediate cash support to help beneficiaries cope with unexpected and temporary contingencies and shocks (such as illness, loss of job, death of a HH member). The changes to the quarterly top-ups introduced to minimise the effect of the devaluation of the Turkish Lira and of the increasingly high inflation, while relevant, were considered to be overdue and insufficient to fully compensate the loss of purchasing power.

### *Coherence*

The design of the ESSN-2 was in line with DG ECHO's strategy in Turkey over the evaluation period; it continued to be the EU's main humanitarian programme in the country, allowing the EU to address the basic needs of refugees and persons under international protection in Turkey, in close cooperation with local partners and national authorities.

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<sup>8</sup> These considerations were to some extent pre-empted by the political context.

Helped by the various coordination mechanisms existing under the ESSN-2 management structure (i.e., Steering Committee, ESSN Task Force, Joint Management Cell and technical working groups) and the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP) coordination mechanism, the WFP and the TRC worked closely together throughout the evaluation period and cooperated with other actors on the ground, including national authorities and other local partners implementing refugee assistance in the country. The management approach under the ESSN-2 – which featured close cooperation between the WFP and the TRC and the strong involvement of national authorities – worked well and supported decision-making, although it generated certain operational challenges for the WFP.

In terms of results, ESSN-2's operations were overall coherent with and complementary to the results of other similar assistance programmes in Turkey and with existing national social assistance programmes. Certain measures adopted at the end of the ESSN-1 and under the ESSN-2 led to an improvement in the degree of alignment with national social assistance programmes and collaboration between DG ECHO and DG NEAR, although room for further improvement was identified. This was mostly linked to the remaining issues around protection referrals and the slow progress towards the exit strategy and the link with integration and livelihood programmes in the country.

The alignment of the ESSN-2 with the humanitarian principles improved compared to the baseline. Potential tensions with the principle of independence (as a result of the strong dependency on the GoT) were the only ones that remained under the ESSN-2, but they were deemed justified. Similarly, the alignment of the ESSN-2 with DG ECHO's relevant policy and thematic guidance (i.e., on cash transfer policies, protection, gender mainstreaming and the consideration of the specific needs of persons with disabilities) improved during the evaluation period and was deemed to be overall satisfactory. Nonetheless, certain room for further alignment could still be observed, notably in relation to gender mainstreaming.

### *Effectiveness*

The ESSN-2 was effective as it provided a critical mass of funding with over €1.2 billion, reaching an unprecedented number of beneficiaries (1.7 million), and enabling a 50% coverage of refugees in Turkey. Most of the ESSN-2 outputs were overall effectively implemented on the ground and most of the expected results, identified in the Theory of Change, were achieved. The programme contributed to stabilising and improving the living conditions of the most vulnerable out-of-camp refugee HHs, despite the recent inflation resulting in a decrease of the purchasing power. However, as a result of the economic crisis, the transfer value and quarterly (increased) top-ups became insufficient to cover the basic needs of beneficiaries.

The ESSN-2 had positive (but rather limited) impacts on the ability of beneficiaries to access health, education, and protection services. However, specific objectives and targets of ESSN-2 to help the most vulnerable beneficiaries and lift them out of poverty were not fully achieved. As shown above in Table 2, a number of targets set initially were missed, including the acceptable food consumption score of ESSN-2 beneficiaries, the debt levels experienced by ESSN-2 beneficiaries and the number of ESSN-2 beneficiaries living below the MBE. Also, limited progress was recorded in contributing to social cohesion as well as progressing towards an evolution of the ESSN into wider livelihood programming and into employment.

The visibility and communication activities of the ESSN-2 helped to generate a high level of ESSN-2 awareness amongst the refugees. However, the ESSN-2 awareness amongst Turkish citizens, authorities and local actors was low, leading to negative perceptions and tensions with the refugees. The monitoring and evaluation activities were extensive and comprehensive, identifying important lessons for DG ECHO.

### *EU-added value*

The added value of the ESSN-2 was demonstrated through it achieving significant results in terms of volume and scope: the number of ESSN-2 beneficiaries at 1.7 million and the volume of ESSN-2 funding at €1.179 billion. Both values also represented a considerable increase compared to ESSN-1 and to other donor interventions in Turkey and cash assistance programmes worldwide. The added value was predominantly due to the architecture of the ESSN-2 as a single large-scale intervention and the speed of assistance enabled through DG ECHO. This made the assistance more effective and efficient in reaching a high proportion of refugees (around 50%). The scale of support would have been much smaller without ESSN-2, and much more fragmented, thus leading to inefficiencies and potential gaps and overlaps. The ESSN-2 added value was also resulting from the cost efficiencies achieved, improved partnerships and coordination mechanisms, and offering important lessons for cash assistance in the future.

### *Efficiency*

The efficiency of the ESSN improved from the ESSN-1 to the ESSN-2, with the cost transfer ratio increasing from 85.4% to 88.7%. The efficiency of the programme was similar in comparison to those of cash programmes implemented in other countries, however the ability to directly compare these programmes to the ESSN is limited due to their much smaller scale and beneficiary cohort, and the different financial frameworks of the respective framework partners. The main drivers of increases in cost efficiency were related to economies of scale resulting from the size of the ESSN, and to the increased familiarity with the programme during the second phase of implementation.

Key barriers to further increases in cost efficiency were the continuation of the use of a flat rate mechanism to determine indirect support costs (of max 7% of the total project value), and inefficiencies resulting from the duplication of actions amongst partners. Furthermore, the sufficiency of the ESSN transfer and top-ups in assisting beneficiaries in meeting their basic needs decreased over the ESSN-2 implementation period. This is reflective of the skyrocketing cost of the MEB as a result of sustained levels of high inflation in Turkey during this time. As a result, the adequacy ratio of the ESSN-2 was lower in comparison to other cash-based programmes implemented in the region.

### *Sustainability*

The design of the ESSN-2 did not incorporate a clear exit strategy, and in spite of some progress being made towards a common transition or graduation strategy of the ESSN (with the GoT and the Facility independently outlining a sustainability strategy), by the end of March 2020 negotiations were still ongoing and no strategy had been agreed upon by the parties. These negotiations were difficult, with the GoT insisting on the continuation of EU funding also beyond the ESSN. These challenges did not spill over to other levels, with KIIs reporting close cooperation and good day-to-day collaboration between the ESSN implementing partners and the national and local authorities.

The linkages between the ESSN and DG NEAR-funded projects remained insufficient by the end of the ESSN-2, although some progress had been made compared to the ESSN-1. As in ESSN-1, DG NEAR-funded projects did not specifically target (a share of) ESSN beneficiaries, nor were ESSN-2 beneficiaries screened for their suitability to be integrated in DG NEAR's livelihoods programming, in part due to unresolved data protection issues. One important step was the design of the C-ESSN pilot cash programme<sup>9</sup> that was to eventually take over the support of the extremely vulnerable refugees in Turkey.

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<sup>9</sup> Complementary Emergency Social Safety Net. It is funded by the Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR) and implemented in partnership with Turkish Red Crescent. The main objective is to deliver cash assistance to the most vulnerable ESSN beneficiaries, taking over the support of those beneficiaries.

The ESSN-2 moved towards further alignment with Turkish social assistance policies and systems, with a few differences remaining. This encouraged a higher level of ownership by the Turkish authorities and contributed to facilitating a possible transition of the ESSN into the national system.

### *Recommendations*

Five key strategic recommendations have emerged from this evaluation.

## **1. DG ECHO cash assistance programmes should incorporate better linkages with development programmes**

This evaluation identified areas for improvement for future cash programmes, especially those of a larger scale:

- For crises which from the start are expected to become protracted, DG ECHO should consider adopting a multi-annual programming approach, also allowing for projects to exceed 18 months, as this would provide more funding predictability and allow for a better and more systematic development of an exit strategy and nexus.
- Cash programmes that are likely to last multiple years should, from the start, also include measures to identify, assess and assist beneficiaries to exit the programme (i.e., those who have the highest chance of becoming autonomous), and put in place linkages to livelihoods / integration programming by national or other international stakeholders. This could include some form of conditionality, targeting of beneficiaries, preparatory measures. Very importantly, this also includes making sure that a share of places in livelihoods / integration projects is earmarked for cash beneficiaries and that other forms of social assistance become available to those unable to work.
- Include in the relevant HIPs a clear reference to the need to establish a nexus to development and livelihood programming, as well as to mainstream national assistance programmes if such are available.
- Develop a clear exit strategy, in close consultation and coordination with all relevant stakeholders active on the territory. This strategy is likely to require substantial advocacy and consensus-building to make sure that it is feasible and acceptable. It needs to be reviewed and updated on a regular basis.
- If possible, set aside specific funding for the process of developing the nexus / the implementation of the exit strategy, for all stakeholders involved (including the end beneficiaries to support their transition from cash to social assistance and/or socio-vocational integration support).

## **2. DG ECHO and partners should better communicate information with host communities**

- Further effort should be invested into targeted communication, visibility and outreach activities directed towards the host community – local citizens, communities, and authorities. DG ECHO could require framework partners to include relevant activities in their projects. In the case of the ESSN-2, possibly such communication could have been organised as part of the Turkey Facility overall, in consultation with the Turkish authorities.
- The host community should, directly and transparently, be informed about the support being provided by the EU, its main features, the size of cash and other assistance and the main sources of funding. This would help to clarify the rationale and extent of the support



provided and counteract negative stereotypes and attitudes towards refugees and claims of their beneficial treatment compared to the host community. Due care should be paid to the messaging, so as to not achieve the unintended effect of further acerbating relations and hindering social cohesion.

### **3. Cash assistance programmes should better anticipate shocks and be more shock responsive**

- Due consideration should be given whether future programming should include a shock reserve. This would entail introducing a specific financial allocation put aside from the planned activities to allow the programme to react to sudden shocks and changes in economic context which are beyond the control of the programme. In such circumstances, the reserve could be used to top-up the cash assistance in a rapid and time limited way (i.e., a one-off top-up, possibly spread over a few payments) to allow for a flexible response to unforeseen economic shocks.
- In the case of the ESSN-2, a one-off top-up to make up for the loss in purchasing power may have been more acceptable in the eyes of the Turkish authorities, which were reluctant to agree to a structural increase of the ESSN amount granted, given that Turkish beneficiaries of social protection were not receiving any additional financial support. For future cash programming, the latter could be triggered on indicators (e.g., in relation to the MEB) or inflation indexing mechanism to be agreed during set-up.

### **4. Large DG ECHO cash assistance programmes should better capitalise on economies of scale**

Several options for future cash programmes of such scale could be considered:

- DG ECHO should consider, when a cash programme exceeds a certain value, whether the flat rate of max. 7% could be lowered, for example to the just under 4% that the ESSN-3 appears to be running at.
- Alternatively, a more flexible approach could be considered: rather than imposing a fixed lower share, when inviting framework partners to submit a proposal for a large-scale cash programme, this percentage could be the subject of negotiations to arrive at a share which is considered feasible by both parties.
- DG ECHO could develop additional guidelines on how to reduce indirect costs in case of large cash programmes, based on the lessons learnt as part of the ESSN (including the change of framework partner leading the project, which this evaluation did not have the opportunity to examine).

### **5. Cash assistance programme should pay more attention to certain vulnerable groups**

To further emphasise the gender-sensitivity of the ESSN, some elements could be introduced:

- analysis of gender and age-specific intra-household (HH) dynamics and access to livelihoods,
- analysis of vulnerabilities and needs at individual level (not only at HH level),
- systematic identification and referrals of cases to protection services, and

- support to SASF to ensure systematic translation and gender balance in the teams of social workers to perform household visits.

For future large-scale cash programmes, DG ECHO should:

- Consider whether the Thematic Note on cash policies requires updating, allowing for demographic targeting in similar circumstances.
- Alternatively, reflect on whether framework partners should be asked to adopt a more individualised approach, in spite of the high additional burden this may create. For example, a first demographic targeting exercise could be followed by individualised checks of those ‘at the margins’ of the criteria used, or for those who are in need or vulnerable for other reasons. The introduction of the SASF Discretionary Allowance and the Severe Disability Allowance provide examples of such approach, but future large-scale cash programmes could include this from the start. Also, it will be important to ensure that sufficient capacity (e.g., social / humanitarian workers and other relevant staff) are available to support a more individualised approach.