

Investigation of the perspectives of citizens receiving public social assistance during Covid-19 in Turkey

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Abstract

This study was carried out in the first six months of the Covid-19 to investigate the Turkish citizens' thoughts about government-based public social assistance provided by Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundations (SASFs) in Turkey. This research is conducted by 401 people covering a total of 1.344 household members. According to the main results, nearly 75 per cent of those who applied for social assistance belong to low income (unemployed and insufficient income). In addition, 56 per cent of first-time beneficiaries and 71 per cent of pre-pandemic social assistance recipients are satisfied with social assistance during the pandemic process. Without any gender and education differences, public social assistance demand is found at the highest level between the ages of 29-40, and the lowest level is at the age of 65+. Interestingly, satisfaction from public social assistance was differentiated according to the marital status of the beneficiaries receiving social assistance before Covid-19. Further from these, SASFs have caught a self-assessment opportunity to correct their deficiency for future similar situations.

Keywords: citizen, COVID-19, pandemic, public social assistance, Turkey

Introduction

It is the goal of every country to remove their poverty and needy citizens from the effects of income inequality and to support them, to look at their future with confidence. In line with this goal, increased economic and social problems have required a common public institutional support mechanism. Ultimately, public institutional social assistance increasingly began to attract attention from society.

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Although public social benefits are important during the normal flow of life, when life enters an abnormal phase due to unexpected events, achieving the public social benefits timely and sufficiently is essential for the needy citizens. The world has severely experienced the Covid-19 pandemic process which has effects on countries' economies and their public social benefits from the beginning of 2020 (World Health Organization, 2020). The pandemic did not only threaten the health of the public but it is also caused tens of millions of workers to lose their jobs and income. The closed workplaces made people be temporarily or permanently unemployed, impoverished them to need others' support in order to continue their life, at least under humanitarian conditions. In this respect, countries had to implement different support mechanisms during the period of Covid-19 to provide the minimum livelihood for individuals in need. With these multiple effects of the pandemic, more people have become needy and led their states to take faster steps in public social assistance. In this case, preventing social chaos became the primary goal for nations. Besides, learning the citizens' opinions about the public social assistance (level, type, duration) provided during the pandemic process and getting the necessary feedback based on these thoughts will be an important key to ensuring social peace and social justice in the society. Hence, both social policymakers and government-based social support authorities such as The Ministry of Family, and Social Services, and the Ministry of Interior can be obtained to construct a self-check mechanism for ameliorating their systems to reach a fair public social assistance distribution. From this point of view, countries struggling with Covid-19 have announced their precautions which include social protection against the risks posed by the pandemic (The Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions of Turkey / Public Services Employees Union of Turkey, 2020, p. 2; Martin and Roman, 2021; Owiny et al., 2020, p. 15).

Turkey is also experiencing a pandemic period since March 2020 and tries to manage the situation as an urgent problem in a balanced way. Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundations (SASFs)¹ are the only public units that have been appointed by the Republic of Turkey, and they provided social assistance for needy citizens both before Covid-19 and during Covid-19. Municipalities as local units have not been directly authorized for distributing and collecting assistance during Covid-19. Because the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Family and Social Services aim to control an integrated social assistance system, public social help is being sought after. SASFs work for the Ministries of Interior and Family and Social

¹SASFs are established by the state and serve as different from the traditional foundation structure in the world and Turkey. SASFs do not have the authority to act bureaucratically independent. SASFs' rules regarding human resources, salary amounts and even collective bargaining processes with the union are managed by the Ministry of Family, and Social Services General Directorate of Social Assistance. The Ministry of Family, and Social Services, the Ministry of Interior and the General Directorate of Foundations check the activities of SASFs.

Services and are stationed in district governorates. Public social assistance is implemented by 1.003 SASFs located in 81 provinces and 922 districts throughout the centre (Republic of Ministry of Family and Social Policy, 2017, p. 11). These Foundations continued their activities non-stop and operated more intensively through the Covid-19 process. The workplaces have been closed due to the pandemic, causing an increase in unemployment and poverty, and many people had to get public social assistance in Turkey. In this process, SASFs, which serve in all provinces and districts, has been the centre of application for the citizens in need. Thus, within the scope of combating the economic and social effects of the pandemic, public support is provided to citizens in need under the name of „Social Protection Shield” in Turkey.

This study aims to compare the satisfaction of the public social assistance beneficiaries before Covid-19 (regular beneficiaries) and recipients receiving social assistance for the first time after Covid-19 (first time beneficiaries). Thus, it is aimed to evaluate how both groups perceive the government’s performance in public social assistance and how this may affect the needy citizen’s trust in the government during the pandemic process. In the frame of this research, we have concentrated on explaining the situation of public social assistance’s issue in the following literature part: i) the economic and social effects of Covid-19 in the global term, ii) country examples, iii) the situation of Turkey with public social assistance, iv) studies belonging to accessible country examples related to the trust of citizens about social benefits. Meanwhile, this study carries importance in terms of evaluating citizens’ perspectives and expectations of public social assistance under extraordinary situations, such as the Covid-19 pandemic. This study also provides a self-assessment opportunity for SASFs, which is a crucial tool in delivering public social assistance to citizens in need. This paper is the first study examining social assistance recipients’ own experience with public social assistance in the Covid-19 process in Turkey.

1. Literature

The Covid-19 pandemic, which seriously affects the world, threatens human health and deeply affects the countries’ production, trade, employment, and therefore all their economic parameters. In this aspect, the pandemic has increased the number of people impoverished by economic and social problems (Londoño-Vélez and Querubin, 2020). By adding new ones to current patients with Covid-19, the importance of social welfare programs fighting with negative effects of the pandemic has increased. During Covid-19, one of the main points for the needy citizens has been social assistance, which is an important social policy tool for mitigating the consequences of poverty (International Labour Organization, 2020a). In this process, many people had to receive social assistance such as cash transfers, food, in-kind,

education, health, etc. (United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, 2020, p. 7).

Different support mechanisms have been implemented by the countries during the period of Covid-19 to ensure the minimum livelihood for individuals in need (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2020, p. 2). In this process, many countries around the world determined new social assistance policies and implemented programs. Welfare regimes and social security systems undoubtedly have a decisive influence on the measures taken. For example, in countries with Continental European and Scandinavian welfare regimes, it is striking that social assistance measures have not been given weight. In this sense, Germany, France and Switzerland form the first group; for the second group, Sweden, Denmark and the Netherlands seem to focus on strengthening their social insurance and labour market institutions rather than social assistance. On the other hand, some steps are taken regarding social assistance in countries with liberal welfare regimes (America, England, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand) and Southern European (Spain, Portugal, in some cases Italy). However, social assistance is also placed on the agenda in Latin American (Argentina, Colombia, Brazil, Peru, Bolivia, Jamaica, El Salvador) and Asian countries (Singapore, Taiwan, South Korea, Indonesia, India, Hong Kong) where poverty reduction strategies are implemented (Gentilini *et al.*, 2020a, p. 2; Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2020, p. 7; Kutlu, 2020). To reduce the negative effects of the process, each country has developed many applications, especially for its citizens in need during the pandemic period (Dafuleya, 2020, p. 251). The priority is to reach clean water and food for the poor countries. When the level of development has increased, the type and amount of social assistance have differed (Gerard *et al.*, 2020, p. 1). For example, in China, as the first country in which the Covid-19 pandemic has been seen, depending on the prolongation of the pandemic process, low-income people have been troubled with economic difficulties (Acikgoz and Gunay, 2020, p. 521). Compared to other countries, the implemented government programs have been limited for citizens who have economic difficulties (Devonshire-Ellis *et al.*, 2020, p. 1). The content of social benefits under Covid-19 varies at the local level. For example, in China, temporary aid amounting to 3.000 RMB (Renminbi) has been given to immigrants quarantined in Wuhan, and 500 RMB and 300 RMB have been given to urban and rural ‘dibao’² recipients respectively in Hubei province. Also, more than 13,000 people have been supported by temporary assistance with 30 million RMB cash transfers in Hubei. On the other hand, in Shenzhen province, the amount of cash transfers covered by

² China's Minimum Livelihood Guarantee (Dibao) Scheme is described as the most important social assistance program which is financed by the government budget in China. In general, “Dibao” offers lower benefits than unemployment insurance, pension, and minimum wage (Golan *et al.*, 2014, p. 2; Qian, 2014, p. 2; Yumurtaci, 2017, p. 287).

temporary assistance in China varies between 2 and 18 times the dibao threshold, depending on the situation of the recipients (Gentilini *et al.*, 2020b, p. 88).

In Australia, where the pandemic spread in the early period, \$750 one-time cash transfers have been paid to 6.5 million seniors, veterans, and low-income people as a part of social assistance to increase the income security and demand in the first package (International Labor Organization, 2020b, p. 8). Within the scope of the second package, the Australian government has announced an allowance of \$330 per fortnight to the recipients who receive jobseeker payments, youth allowances, parental payments, and other forms of payment. The government has also announced a one-off relief payment (to casual workers and low-income groups) of \$250 for individuals and \$1.000 for families who require self-quarantine (Gutwein, 2020, p. 1).

In the context of social assistance in Argentina, the National Social Security Administration paid a special lump-sum payment of up to \$47 or an amount equivalent to the monthly non-contributory benefit for more than 9 million people. Also, school feeding support is provided under the name of in-kind assistance. In Brazil, R\$3 billion is allocated to 1 million families under the “Bolsa Familia Program” and as an in-kind assistance school feeding is also applied (Gentilini *et al.*, 2020a, p. 7; Paiva *et al.*, 2020, p. 1). Moreover, 4 million low-income families who do not have any jobs have been supported with 500 million dollars of cash transfers in Iran (Gentilini *et al.*, 2020c, p. 62). As an example, from South Asia, in India, the government of the ‘Kerela’ region provided food support for 300 thousand children studying in 33115 rural childcare centres. The government of Uttar Pradesh has made payments to relieve poor workers who lost their jobs due to Covid-19 (Gentilini *et al.*, 2020a, p. 11). In Italy, childcare vouchers (for people who not to take any parental leave) and one-time cash transfers have been applied during Covid-19. The value of childcare vouchers (for under 12 years old children) is around 600 Euro. This amount rises to 1.000 Euro for healthcare professionals (Gentilini *et al.*, 2020a, p. 13; International Labour Organization, 2020c, p. 3).

In Germany, which is also in the socio-economic struggle with Covid-19, employers’ social insurance premiums which should pay for employees must be paid by the Federal Employment Agency. Thus, it is aimed to encourage short-term work in the pandemic. In this process, contracted workers will also be entitled to a short-term work allowance (The Federal Government, 2020; The Local, 2020).

In England, the most well-known income support application has been a job retention scheme. With this plan, the state covered 80 percent of the salaries of those who were unable to work due to the pandemic, according to the hours they could not work. A maximum of 2500 pounds of salary support was given per month (SRM Business Consulting, 2020).

In Ukraine, the government has introduced one-off cash assistance to pensioners. In this case, pensioners with a salary of less than 5000 UAH were provided with a support of 1000 UAH (35 USD) (United Nations, 2020, p.11). Also, The Parliament of Ukraine has approved a new law due to the spread of Covid-19.

The law allows for the payment of partial unemployment benefits to employees of small and medium size enterprises and retention of their jobs during quarantine with salaries that should be no less than two thirds of the base salary (United Nations, 2020, p.16).

In Romania, the measures have aimed to help reducing the financial difficulties faced by households during the Covid-19 pandemic. The main measures can be listed as follows: Providing technical unemployment benefits that can be supported by the Unemployment Insurance Budget, giving parents free paid days for childcare in case of temporary closure of educational institutions, and enabling individuals to use an e-mail as the main communication tool with the social assistance-related authorities (KPMG, 2020).

As an example, from Asia, South Korea, on the other hand, provided cash assistance under the name of emergency disaster relief to families belonging to the middle and lower-income groups who were adversely affected by Covid-19. It is planned to give a total of 9.1 trillion Won (approximately 7,4 billion dollars) to 14 million households at once (Key Business Issue, 2020). In Turkey, according to data from “The Ministry of Family, and Social Services”, around 2.318.000 households received regular social assistance before Covid-19 via “The Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundations” channel. All kinds of food aid, fuel aid, shelter aid, cash support, education/stationery aid, disaster relief, income-generating project support, elderly pension, disabled pension, disabled relative pension, aid to family and children of the needy soldier, orphan aid, spouse aid, a wide range of social and economic supports for all kinds of needs, including women aid, chronic disease assistance, multiple birth benefits, general health insurance premium support, and employment assistance are provided by “Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundations” to poor and disable persons (Namal *et al.*, 2021). For these groups, who receive regular help through foundations, social assistance payments have been continued during the pandemic process.

Along with pre-Covid beneficiaries, more than 6 million people have taken benefits during pandemics. In this context, the number of people provided by social assistance has increased by approximately two and a half times with Covid-19. In detail, 6 billion 183 million 633 thousand Turkish Liras were granted (TRY 1.000 support for each household) to 6.183.633 households under the name of Social Protection Shield (Phase 1-2-3 social support program) since April during Covid-19 (Yildizalp Ozmen, 2020). However, under the campaign “We’re Enough us My Turkey”, 819.292.000 TRY were paid to 819.292 households with the support of citizens support (See Table 1).

Table 1. Social protection shield and payments under Covid-19 in Turkey

	Turkey	Number of paid households	Amount (TRY)*
Social Support Program (Household)	1 st Phase	2.111.254	2.111.254.000
	2 nd Phase	2.316.010	2.316.010.000
	3 rd Phase	1.756.369	1.756.369.000
We're Enough is My Turkey	Household	819.292	819.292.000
		Total	7.002.925.000
		7.002.925	

Source: The Ministry of Family, and Social Services (2020a)³; Central Bank of the Republic of Turkey⁴; It was compiled by the author(s) with the data obtained from the Press Office of The Ministry of Family, and Social Services.*According to data obtained from Central Bank of the Republic of Turkey: 1\$=6,84 TRY (July 24th, 2020).

The scope of the support has been extended by allowing everyone to apply to the 3rd phase instead of the first two phases, except for those who receive only Turkey Business Agency's (ISKUR) short-time working allowance and unemployment benefit. On 14 July 2020, the following letter was sent to "Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundations", which started the distribution of assistance collected within the scope of "We're Enough us My Turkey". Turkish Post (PTT) has primarily authorized the distribution of benefits. Also, social assistance (in-kind and cash) has been delivered to the households by "The Fidelity Social Support Groups" which were assigned to distribute social benefits during the Covid-19 process (Karakas, 2020, p. 553; Republic of Turkey Ministry of Interior, 2020, p. 1). As of 22 July 2020, within the scope of the Social Protection Shield, over 7 billion TRY has been paid to citizens in needy positions under social assistance in Turkey (Republic of Turkey Ministry of Family and Social Policy, 2017, p. 1). The ways of applying to SASFs for social assistance within the scope of Covid-19 are listed as CIMER (Presidential Communication Center), Open Door (Ministry of Interior Application Center), Pandemic Social Support Pre-Application, Application to the Governorate and District Governorate, the e-mail address of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Petition to Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundations - Personal Application Foundation search, Call Center-184 (Phone line), the Application to the Ombudsman (for complaints). As compared to the social assistance of the countries experiencing the pandemic process, it was observed that cash transfers are common. In addition, ensuring additional payments, often on a one-off basis comes to the

³ The Ministry of Family, and Social Services (2020a), Minister Selcuk Discussed the Agenda at the AA Editorial Desk (retrieved from <https://www.ailevecalisma.gov.tr/tr-tr/haberler/bakan-selcuk-aa-editor-masasi-nda-gundemi-degerlendirdi-1/>).

⁴ Central Bank of The Republic of Turkey (2020), Exchange Rate (retrieved from https://www.tcmb.gov.tr/wps/wcm/connect/tr/tcmb+tr/main+menu/istatistikler/doviz+kurla ri/gosterge+niteligindeki+merkez+bankasi+kurlari).

forefront in some the countries such as Argentina, Australia, and Turkey. While practices aimed to increase the scope of existing cash plans are common in Brazil, Italy has been focused on improving the benefits and making them more dynamic. The public social assistance varies by region in China during the pandemic period and this situation creates a difference compared to many other countries. While the social benefits have been given to people in Australia and Argentina, it has been seen that these supports have been given to households in Iran, South Korea, and Turkey. According to our search, no detailed empirical studies addressing the satisfaction of needy citizens with social assistance in countries experiencing a pandemic process were found. However, in China, where the pandemic has started, and in Australia, where the effects of the pandemic have been observed at an early stage, citizens' perspectives on the benefits of the state during the pandemic process have been discussed in general dimensions (without specifically focusing on social assistance). In China, beyond the studies evaluating the satisfaction of the needy citizens with social assistance, the benefits offered by the government to support the daily needs of the citizens have been evaluated by the citizens within the scope of satisfaction study. This study was conducted on 19.816 citizens from 31 provinces. 67% of the participants stated that the government has been successful in meeting daily needs during the Covid-19 process. On the contrary, younger and more educated citizens have been less satisfied with government performance during the pandemic (Wu, 2020, p. 1).

According to the results of the research conducted by the social research company "Insightfully" on 1.060 registered voters, approximately 75% of respondents are satisfied with the government's response to the Covid-19 crisis in Australia. In the framework of the survey results, Australians stated that the government should focus on maintaining or increasing social distancing, deadlock, financial support and incentive measures, and protecting people's health. Only 61% of the 18-34 age group stated that they were satisfied with the measures of the state regarding the pandemic, since young people aged between 18-34 have been affected by job losses while the pandemic. Young people expressed the low level of support of Liberal-National governments as the main reason for this situation. On the other hand, the level of satisfaction with the government's policies regarding the pandemic is at the level of 83% for citizens aged 55 and over (Hanrahan, 2020, p. 1). As of May 2020, according to the "Eurobarometer" survey, which has been conducted on 21.804 people, the dissatisfaction level is high for Italy, Greece, and Spain in the European Union (EU). Especially Italians are the most dissatisfied people with public institutions' support, although they have been supported by the EU funds. According to the report, six out of ten people in the EU stated that they are not satisfied with the state's public institutions in the Covid-19 process (European Parliament, 2020, p. 2).

2. Method

This research is carried out with data obtained from the Ministry of Family, and Social Services, and the data coming from our survey analysis. The survey (questionnaire method) is used to collect data on social assistance recipients. The questionnaire has been applied simultaneously to those who have started receiving social assistance before Covid-19 and during Covid-19. The first Covid-19 case in Turkey appeared in March-2020. These survey data were collected in July-August 2020 period.

Out of 19 questions, 7 are aimed to determine the basic demographic and socio-economic status of the participants, and 12 questions are related to the type and characteristic of assistance and satisfaction. The participants were asked to rate their satisfaction on a three-point scale (Yes-No-Partially). The survey has been sent via the internet to SASFs which is located in different provinces in Turkey and one month has been given to SASFs for completing the questionnaire by citizens. During this month, we worked on SASFs who returned to us. Participation in the questionnaire has based voluntary. Besides, the survey application is carried out either by telephone or face to face. In this study, two main problematic subjects are investigated with the help of a questionnaire. These subjects are as follows:

1. Has or has not the income decrease that occurred for individuals due to losses suffered by national economies after Covid-19 been eliminated through social assistance and has participant satisfaction been achieved? What are the participant's thoughts about social assistance performance when they made a comparison between before and during the Covid-19 period?
2. According to demographic and socio-economic variables, are there any differences between the satisfaction levels of individuals receiving social assistance?

Direct or indirect income support for the needy is especially important for economies with a high poverty rate and low purchasing power parity. The Republic of Turkey is also one of the eastern European countries with such characteristics. Therefore, conducting the research in Turkey may provide important and exemplary contributions to the fight against the neediness caused by Covid-19.

In the population of 1.344 recipients of social assistance, the sample size is calculated to be 388 participants for a 98% confidence interval with a 5% error margin (Krejcie and Morgan, 1970). A total of 410 questionnaires were obtained from the participants. 401 of these questionnaires were found valid, the rest were not included in the evaluation, being considered invalid. The valid survey rate is 97,8%. 98 of the questionnaires were obtained by telephone and 24,4%, the rest, were obtained face-to-face (75,6%).

The main criterion for determining the statistical techniques to be used in research is to decide whether parametric tests or non-parametric tests will be used in the analysis. To use parametric tests, it is necessary to test whether or not some

assumptions are met. One of these assumptions is the normal distribution assumption (Wells and Hintze, 2007). In our study, the distribution is not obtained exactly in the form of a bell curve which hinders the final decision making (Demir et al., 2016, p. 133). So, the data does not normally distribute and inferential analysis is made with non-parametric tests. In this context, the research is designed in cross-sectional and quantitative research designs. Descriptive and inferential methods are used together in the analysis. Frequency, percentage, and averages are used as a descriptive method, and Mann-Whitney U and Kruskal-Wallis H tests are used as an inferential method.

3. Results

Our study has been carried out on 401 people covering a total of 1.344 household members (public social assistance is given at the household level in Turkey. Public social assistance demand is found at the highest level between the ages of 29-40, and the lowest level is at the age of 65+ (see Table 2).

In terms of education level, the highest demand for public social assistance comes from primary school graduates, and it is understood that the demand is at the lowest level among those who are literate and have a university or higher education degree. When the demand for public social assistance is analysed in terms of marital status, the highest rate has been calculated for married participants. Social assistance request is placed at the lowest level for married participants whose spouse is in prison. According to the income status of participants, the highest rate belongs to the group with no income. On the other hand, when the participants, taking public social assistance, are evaluated in terms of the number of individuals living in the household, the demand for social assistance increases as the number of individuals increases.

Table 2. Demographic and socio-economic findings regarding the participants

Groups	Frequency	%	Groups	Frequency	%
Gender			Education degree		
Male	194	48,5	Illiterate	48	12
			Literate	34	8,5
			Primary School	137	34,2
Female	207	51,5	Secondary School	70	17,5
			High School	75	18,7
			University and Above	37	9,2
Total	401	100,0	Total	401	100,0
Age			Marital status		
18-28	66	16,5	Single	65	16,2
29-40	130	32,4	Married	195	48,6
			Divorced	65	16,2

41-52	119	29,7	I'm married but I live separately from my spouse	23	5,7
53-64	56	14,0	I'm married but my spouse is in prison for	11	2,7
65 and over	30	7,5	My spouse died	42	10,5
Total	401	100,0	Total	401	100,0
Type of social assistance			Number of children		
Cash	268	66,8	Any	93	23,2
In-kind	98	24,4	1	64	16
Health	100	24,9	2	103	25,7
Education	55	13,7	3	77	19,2
Food	159	39,6	4	23	5,7
Total*	680	-	5 and more	41	10,2
			Total	401	100,0
Total income of the household			Number of people living in the household		
No income	93	23,2	1	55	13,7
Under TRY 2.500	279	69,6	2	68	17
TRY 2.501 and over	29	7,2	3	75	18,7
			4	100	24,9
Total	401	100,0	5	103	25,7
			Total	401	100,0

Note: * The total number is not equal to the number of participants because some participants benefit from more than one social assistance type.

Source: Authors' representation

When we examine the participants according to the type of social assistance that they demand, it is understood that the highest demand is found for cash support (66,8%) and food aid (39,6%). On the other hand, educational assistance (13,7%) and in-kind assistance (24,4%) are exhibited as the lowest demand types. Interestingly, as the number of children increases, the demand for help decreases. Following the demographic and socio-economic data, the thoughts of the people who benefited from public social assistance during the Covid-19 process have been evaluated. The proportion of participants who started receiving social assistance before Covid-19 and accessed regularly the benefits, are higher than the participants who started to get help for the first time during Covid-19.

Meanwhile, the possibility of not having any access to social assistance has been examined in terms of the anxiety of the participants. It is understood that the level of anxiety is more dominant in the participants who started to receive help during the Covid-19 process, while there is no basic anxiety for the recipients before Covid-19. In another question, the satisfaction level of the participants regarding the public social assistance which has been provided in the Covid-19 process has been evaluated. The satisfaction rate of the participants receiving social assistance before

Covid-19 in particular was higher than the satisfaction rate of the participants who received first-time social assistance during the Covid-19 period (see Table 3).

Table 3. Participants' thoughts on social assistance in the Covid-19 process

Beneficiaries receiving social assistance before Covid-19			For the first time beneficiaries of social assistance in the Covid-19 process	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Participants' regular access to social benefits				
Yes	200	60,1	17	25,0
No	64	19,2	24	35,3
Partially	69	20,7	27	38,7
Total	333	100,0	68	100,0
Participants' status of anxiety about the possibility of not having access to social benefits				
Yes	107	32,1	30	44,1
No	144	43,2	16	23,5
Partially	82	24,7	22	32,4
Total	333	100,0	68	100,0
Participants' satisfaction status to social benefits				
Yes	237	71,2	38	55,9
No	35	10,5	14	20,6
Partially	61	18,3	16	23,5
Total	333	100,0	68	100,0
Participants' ability to quickly find the social assistance application point				
Yes	250	75,1	31	45,6
No	40	12,0	17	25,0
Partially	43	12,9	20	29,4
Total	333	100,0	68	100,0

Source: Authors' representation

On the other hand, when the situation of finding the public social assistance application point as quickly as possible is evaluated, it is observed that this rate is higher in participants who started to receive social assistance before Covid-19.

When participants are asked about the reasons for applying for social assistance, it is a primary problem that the participants cannot get along with their current income. Problems with labour relations constitute the secondary reason (see Table 4).

Table 4. Reasons for participants' application to social assistance

	Frequency	%
I'm looking for a job	95	23,7
I got laid off	33	8,2
My workplace did not open although the season started	39	9,7
My workplace suspended my contract	16	4,0
My workplace closed due to a pandemic	44	11,0
I couldn't pay my bills	68	17,0
I can't get along with my current income	214	53,4
I applied because I heard that help would be distributed to everyone	65	16,2

Note: * The total number is not equal to the number of participants because some participants benefit from more than one social assistance type.

Source: Authors' representation

However, when the emotional state is evaluated in detail, there are differences found between the two groups. While people who already bought public social assistance before Covid-19 said that the help gave them a sense of confidence, those who newly started to receive assistance for Covid-19 stated that they experienced a sense of need and shame together while the pandemic.

The relationship between satisfaction and the marital status of participants receiving social assistance is tested. The independent variable of this test is the marital status and the dependent variable is the perception of satisfaction from social benefits. H_0 (Null) hypothesis is formed as "There is no relationship between marital status and satisfaction with social benefits." Test calculation scores are shown in Table 5 (see Table 5).

In the context of marital status, the average ranks for both those who received social assistance for the first time in the Covid-19 process and those who received social assistance before Covid-19, are found at different values. This difference is not statistically significant at 95% significance level ($\alpha=0,05$ error margin) in participants who received social assistance for the first time with Covid-19 ($p=0,837>0,05$). These findings require acceptance of the H_0 hypothesis. Accordingly, it is possible to say that there is no statistical relationship between the satisfaction of the two groups mentioned in Table 5, who received social assistance for the first time in the Covid-19 process. For the participants who already got social assistance before Covid-19, the differences between the rank averages of the groups are statistically significant at a 95% significance level ($\alpha=0,05$ error margin) ($p=0,031<0,05$). These findings require rejection of the H_0 hypothesis. In this context, it can be said that there is a statistical relationship between the participants who fell into need before Covid-19 and requested public social assistance. According to this relationship, the satisfaction of the participants who are married, live

separately or whose spouse is in prison is higher than those recipients who are single, divorced, or whose spouse died.

Table 5. Marital Status and Social Assistance Satisfaction Comparative Relationship Between Groups

For the first time beneficiaries of social assistance in the Covid-19 process							
Marital Status	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	Mann-Whitney U	Wilcoxon W	Z	p
Single, divorced or spouse has died	36	34,9	1257				
Married, lives separately, or spouse imprisoned	32	34,0	1089	561	1089	-0,206	0,837
Beneficiaries receiving social assistance before Covid-19							
Single, divorced or spouse has died	136	156,1	21229				
Married, lives separately, or spouse imprisoned	197	174,5	34382	11913	21229	-2,160	0,031

Source: Authors' representation

The relationship between satisfaction with public social assistance and the household income of the participants were tested. The independent variable of the test is household income, and the dependent variable is the perception of satisfaction from social benefits. H_0 (Null) hypothesis is shaped as "There is no relationship between household income and satisfaction with social benefits." Test calculation scores are shown in Table 6.

Table 6. Relationship between household income and satisfaction with social assistance

Household income	N	Mean rank	Kruskal Wallis H	df	p
No income	93	202,8			
Up to TRY. 2.500	279	204,8	6,539	2	0,038
TRY 2.501 TRY and above	29	157,7			

Source: Authors' representation

The average ranks of the participants are obtained at different values for the three income groups which are demonstrated in Table 6. These differences are statistically significant at 95% significance level ($\alpha=0,05$ error margin) ($p=0,038<0,05$). These findings require rejection of the H_0 hypothesis. In this case, there is a relationship between household income and social assistance satisfaction. In general, as income increased, satisfaction from public social assistance decreased.

Discussion and conclusion

The effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on health, which have influenced the world since December 2019, have created significant pressures on economic and social life in a short time. Especially in the field of social benefits, the governments aimed to look for new social protection prescriptions for those who were in needy positions before the process and for those who have become unemployed due to the effects of the pandemic. The fact that the economic and social conditions of each country are not similar and countries have different welfare systems have been the main factor in determining the capacity and scope of the benefits. In this context, while protective measures targeting working life in continental European countries are applied directly, public social assistance has become at the forefront for the country regions such as Latin America, Asia, and South America. Although China is the first country to experience the pandemic process, it has been observed that the assistance is scattered and differed from region to region. On the other hand, in Australia, where the first wave of the pandemic was early, cash transfers primarily covered the low-income groups and provided support for both individuals and families. In countries such as Argentina, Brazil, and India, school nutrition support is preferentially given during the Covid-19 process. On the other hand, in Iran, where the pandemic is seriously experienced, family-based public social assistance targeting low-income families is dominant. Similar to Iran and Australia, public social assistance has been distributed to the needy citizens in Turkey in different phases since March 2020.

In line with the state's support for social assistance, social solidarity campaigns among citizens are also helped to reach more needy households and generate a cash support pool which carries Turkey in a distinguishing place from others. Although public social assistance provided during a pandemic is an important support for citizens in need, it is important to evaluate the effectiveness of social assistance through the eyes of the citizens who receive its benefits. Despite this importance, it has been observed that any specific studies, which investigate the pandemic process satisfaction of citizens with public social assistance have not been carried out. According to our survey, especially, before and during Covid-19, the 29-40 age group has been mostly applied to public social assistance. For this age group, the main reason for applying for public social assistance was the high unemployment rate, the low level of decent work, the precarious work and unregistered employment,

and the size of the informal sector. In detail, there was a relationship between household income and social assistance satisfaction. In addition, 56 percent of those who received social assistance for the first time were satisfied with the benefits. On the contrary, six out of ten people in the EU stated that they are not satisfied with the state's public institutions in the Covid-19 process.

In our study, an interesting situation has been encountered regarding the marital status and satisfaction from public social assistance in the context of those who received assistance before Covid-19 and those who started to receive support during Covid-19. The reason for the significant relationship between marital status and social assistance satisfaction among those who started receiving social assistance regularly before the pandemic is considered to be an extension of the roles that society places on gender. In this case, it might be said that traditional roles based on gender may be important factors in determining the financial situation of families in Turkey (Yilmaz, 2018, p. 60). In households that have started to receive social assistance before Covid-19, women often do not work outside of the household or they work for low wages. Interestingly, for divorced women or those having an imprisoned husband, accessing public social assistance is more important than the amount of social assistance.

Apart from marital status and income level, the inability to analyze satisfaction levels according to more specific criteria such as gender and age is due to the narrow sharing of data sets from institutions. The reason for this was the reduction of the number of employees in SASFs due to pandemic measures and the quarantine of institutions at intervals. In this study, it was an obstacle and limited the examination data in more detail.

Meanwhile, those who started to receive social assistance before Covid-19 are more satisfied (more than 70 percent) with the content and institutional structure of the social benefits offered during the pandemic period than those who already started to receive assistance with Covid-19. It is thought that those who were in need before the pandemic experience a high level of satisfaction, depending on the continuation of the aids in the process. On the other hand, those who started to get support during the pandemic are thought to be less satisfied with the economic, social, and psychological pressures caused by being new, and the unexpected decrease in their living standards. The assistance given to this group made them embarrassed and drop them into the feeling of neediness. However, they thought that social assistance provided in the pandemic process is effective only in alleviating the effects of neediness.

On the other hand, there is a close relationship between the income of the household and meeting the expectations regarding social assistance. In this context, it is possible to say that the satisfaction gained from social benefits decreased in those whose household income is above the minimum wage. So, it can be said that public authorities might have aimed to increase the living standard rather than reduce the effects of neediness with social benefits in households with income above the

minimum wage. The fact that social assistance is generally based on households hinders the improvement of the standard of living of individuals. Because only the basic needs of the households can be met with household-based benefits. To prevent unjustified sharing which occurs in household-based benefits, the focus should be on person-based social assistance. Also, instead of household-based 1.000 TRY social assistance, each applicant should be granted gradual assistance depending on his/her neediness or score in Turkey. Furthermore, the estimated completion time for Covid-19 is uncertain, so regular assistance should be provided to those in need (by checking whether they are in need or not) without re-applying at each phase.

Although efforts are made to progress rapidly in public social assistance provided to needy citizens in the pandemic process, it is also seen that there are some problems. In this context, in extraordinary situations such as a pandemic, it is possible to list the things that the state should do to reach social assistance quickly and to protect the welfare of the citizens in Turkey:

- Social assistance provided by other institutions, organizations, municipalities, and NGOs should be recorded by using the web-based program called “SASF’s Integrated Assistance System”. Thus, the possibility of unjustified assistance for the same person by different organizations would be prevented by this double-check system,
- The type and amount of public social assistance should be determined separately for special groups (children, disabled people, elderly, etc.) that need to be protected in crises,
- Citizens should be guided quickly in accessing public social assistance during crises,
- Public social assistance applications should be understandable and citizens should be notified about the reasons why they are not eligible for public social assistance. Thus, people who do not carry eligibility conditions for social assistance applications should be prevented from repeatedly applying to SASFs. In this way, the workload of the foundation employees can be reduced and the transactions of the real needy people can be completed as soon as possible,
- Social assistance should be individual rather than per household,
- For improvement of social assistance amount, type, and accessibility, the satisfaction of citizens receiving social assistance should be measured periodically with surveys. The participation in these surveys should be voluntary basis and confidential. In this context, problems related to the type and content of aids should be determined and new regulations should be implemented as quickly as possible.

Because, if the sudden development and emergence of the pandemic process occur, making such evaluations might be difficult. So, it is important to examine the quality and effectiveness of social assistance on the citizens to improve the assistance and processes related to the next step. Moreover, evaluating the thoughts of the

citizens about the practices in a pandemic or other emergencies will also allow each country an opportunity to make a self-assessment.

Similar research by other countries can facilitate a benchmarking approach for public welfare system improvements and the sustainability of social welfare in exceptional cases. In this respect, we realized that with the help of some specific studies related to public social assistance and its providers, we can easily develop further policies about public social assistance and renovate the structure of government-based institutions in terms of operation.

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