

## Conditional cash programming to address child labour and promote education in Turkey

Photo: Plan International

***This case study describes how conditional cash assistance was used to promote education as an alternative for child labour among Syrian refugee children and vulnerable Turkish children in Şanlıurfa province in Turkey.***

### Background

Since 2011, Turkey has been hosting millions of Syrian refugees. In 2016, through its programmes in Şanlıurfa Province, CONCERN Worldwide identified an increasing number of Syrian refugee children in child labour. A household assessment identified that income poverty formed the main barrier preventing children from attending school and was the main driver of child labour among refugee children. In addition, lack of school transportation and language barriers also formed considerable barriers for refugees to attend school. To respond to these issues, in the 2016/2017 school year, CONCERN Worldwide implemented an education and conditional cash assistance programme which was aimed at increasing school enrolment and preventing child labour among refugee children.

### Conditional cash assistance for education

The programme targeted mostly Syrian children who were working and/or were out of school. Most children were identified and referred to the education programme by CONCERN's Protection team, which provided family case management support, or by referrals from school coordinators or other local organisations. The programme has the following components:

#### 1. Identification of needs

The education cash team would meet with the child and family to assess their needs and explain the support and conditions of their participation in the programme. Financial assistance was initially only provided for one child per family. Where needed, referrals to other services were undertaken in collaboration with the protection team.

## 2. Educational support and cash transfers

Each family received 300 Turkish Lira (about US\$40 per month) conditional on their child's 90 per cent attendance at school. An agreement was signed between the family and the organisation, and a bank account and card was set up to facilitate access to the monthly payment through bank transfers. While financial assistance was conditional on attendance, families were free to spend the money according to their needs and priorities.

In addition to providing cash assistance, the programme encouraged home-learning initiatives. The education cash team met with parents to help them to support children's homework and provided books in the home through a library scheme. To prevent children being drawn back into child labour during summer holidays, the programme encouraged continued learning at Turkish language classes in Temporary Education Centres (TECs). Children enrolled in the programme had to continue to learn over summer by attending the TEC language sessions for 90 per cent of the time during the July and August summer break in order to receive the monthly family cash support.

## 3. Follow-up and monitoring

Once children were enrolled in schools and the family received the cash support, monitoring and follow-up happened:

- Monthly meetings with schools, teachers or administrators took place to monitor attendance rates. Where rates were not 90 per cent, family visits were conducted to discuss and understand the reasons why a child was not attending.
- Regular home visits were conducted every two months to check the welfare of the child and to make sure they were not working. Staff spoke with both the child and family separately, using a set list of questions to provide follow-up and to identify whether children were still going to school.
- The monitoring and evaluation team conducted quarterly post-distribution monitoring meetings with a sample of families to verify that they were receiving their cash transfers on time and to check that children were still attending school. Any discrepancies were followed up on by the education team.

Children's continued participation in the programme was based on their attendance in school. If attendance was interrupted, the follow-up involved certain steps.

- When a child was sick, or they had a protection concern at home, the family was visited by the team. Children were not removed from the programme. When protection needs were identified, children were referred to the protection team for child protection case management or to a separate education fund (managed by CONCERN), which could provide one-off support for specific needs such as assisted devices (glasses or hearing aids).
- When a child dropped out because the financial assistance was not enough for the household or when families preferred children to work, home visits were conducted to find a solution with the family to ensure continued attendance at school and to link them with additional services and the protection team.

## Challenges

- Changes in the national education policy meant that Arabic-Syrian schools were closed down and refugee children had to integrate into Turkish schools. However, language barriers, stigma and the risk of bullying remained key barriers for many Syrian children to attend school. Even if they wanted to, some children did not have access to school due to limited transportation possibilities to and from schools, particularly in rural areas.
- For secondary education, families couldn't choose which school their child attended. If the child was assigned a place in a school far from the child's home and transportation was not available, the child may have returned to work.

- Many of the identified families needed long-term support and sustainable change, for example through job opportunities and sustainable income generation for parents. However, job opportunities were extremely limited in the province, and many participating parents did not meet the criteria for formal employment (such as language certificates, graduated education or training certificates, age and health).
- The programme was not suitable for all families. Children who were transient or moving around for family reunification/temporary protection status, children and families working in seasonal agriculture or families who lived rurally were less effectively reached by the programme. For some children and families who earned a lot of money through working (upwards of 900 Turkish Lira a month), the programme couldn't compete with this level of income.
- Both boys and girls faced barriers to accessing education. While child labour was more common among boys, some families preferred to keep their girls at home for various cultural reasons, including the girl's domestic role in the home, the prospect of marriage and the distance between school and home.
- Many Syrian adolescents of secondary school age had missed many years of education, and for this group, returning to school was challenging, especially as there were no catch-up programmes available, and they were being asked to catch up on content, learn new content and learn Turkish all at once.

## Successes

- Literacy rates were highest for children who had a supportive home environment for learning and books at home.
- Many families highly valued education but were reluctant to send their children to school and withdraw them from work. CONCERN effectively promoted education through offering financial support, but the messaging around the importance of education and the negative consequences of child labour was essential to make parents more comfortable with sending their children to Turkish schools.
- Providing regular one-to-one support to families through home visits helped parents to navigate the education system by facilitating contact with schools, translating school forms, providing additional support for over-aged children entering lower grades of school and following up any problems from the first day of enrolment.
- For the teams, having strong networks with schools and education authorities helped them to support parents through the process.

## Lessons learned

- A review of the programme conducted by a cash specialist after the first year of the programme found that more boys were enrolled in the programme than girls. In addition, while many families would send multiple children back to school after receiving the cash grant instead of just one child, most families chose to send their boys but not girls to schools. A more gender sensitive approach would be needed to mitigate perpetuation of harmful gender roles.
- Strong networks and relationships with education authorities and Turkish schools, school coordinators and TECs have helped to provide a link between "the system" and parents and families engaged in the programme.
- The programme was only open to refugees, but child labour affected both Turkish and refugee children in the targeted communities – positive social cohesion activities were needed in schools to mitigate potential tensions within communities.
- Greater links were needed with other organisations which offer more specialised GBV or child protection services which support migrants' and refugees' access to work and income generation programmes.

- Lessons learned regarding internal coordination of child labour programming within CONCERN included the following:
  - While the programme was designed by the education team at CONCERN, greater partnership with other sectors during design would have been beneficial. For instance, collaboration with the livelihoods team could have provided at-risk families with long-term sustainable employment opportunities after the initial cash transfers to ensure education attendance and attainment beyond the project.
  - It has been helpful that all sectors within CONCERN include child labour in their outreach and are able to refer families they identify to the cash for education programme.
  - Receiving and making internal referrals has been both a strength and a weakness. While very valuable to get support from other sectors, CONCERN did not have a strong focus on child protection, so it did not always have the capacity to provide the required levels of support for more complex cases – for instance, SGBV cases.
  - The education cash team did not make external protection-related referrals but discussed with the protection team how to address the problems identified and worked with them to ensure that support from either the child protection team or an external organisation was in place.
  - The education cash team could oversee most of the caseload, and it carefully handled the challenges presented through the programme. It worked well that the team members had an education background, having worked as teachers in Syria and having gone through child protection case management training to understand the issues affecting families with children in child labour.

## Recommendations

After a project review, the following recommendations were made to change the programme:

- An assessment framework and vulnerability criteria should be developed, and every child who is referred to the programme is assessed, discussed by the team and assigned a vulnerability score. Standard forms should be used to report and record follow-up.
- A cash top-up should be set up for families who send more than one child to school.
- A higher cash top-up should be set up for girls participating in the programme, conducted in line with changes in a bigger nationwide Conditional Cash Transfer for Education (CCTE) scheme managed by the government and UNICEF. This also aims to act as an incentive to mitigate child marriage and encourage girls' education and re-enrolment in school.
- A caregiver/parenting course should be established to engage parents in education and to promote continuous learning in the household. This should be implemented through modules on child labour, child marriage, positive parenting, child development, music/art in the household, developmental games, financial literacy, etc.
- Access to cash transfers should be available for children who have missed more than three years of school and do not have the required academic level to attend formal school, but who do attend an Accelerated Learning Programme (ALP).