Digital Convergence
USP 2030

Linking social protection and public employment services (PES) through system interoperability

Country case study: **Türkiye**

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Acronyms

ALMP	active labour market policy/programme
DCI	Digital Convergence Initiative
ILO	International Labour Organization
İMD	Job and Vocational Counsellor (İş ve Meslek Danışmanı)
ISAS	Integrated Social Assistance System
İŞKUR	Türkiye İş Kurumu (Turkish Employment Agency)
MoFSS	Ministry of Family and Social Services
SASF	Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundation
SADG	Social Assistance Directorate General
SGK	Sosyal Güvenlik Kurumu (Social Security Institution)
TL	Turkish lira
TÜBİTAK	Türkiye Bilimsel ve Teknolojik Araştırma Kurumu (Scientific and Technological Research Council of Türkiye)

Executive summary

This case study examines how Türkiye has strengthened coordination between social protection and public employment services (PES) through digital interoperability. It focuses on one main use case: Enabling the transition from social assistance to employment: Referring employable beneficiaries to public employment services. This case study contributes to a broader analytical report, *Linking Social Protection and Public Employment Services (PES) Through System Interoperability*, produced under the Digital Convergence Initiative (DCI), which examines how digital interoperability between social protection systems and PES can improve service delivery and labour market outcomes.

Use case: Enabling the transition from social assistance to employment: Referring employable beneficiaries to public employment services

Türkiye links social assistance to PES through interoperability between the Integrated Social Assistance System (ISAS) and the information system of the public employment service, Türkiye İş Kurumu (İŞKUR). Beneficiaries who are able to work are identified within ISAS and referred to İŞKUR, where they can access counselling, training, and job placement support. The system relies on structured data exchange between institutions to support referrals and coordination. Information on beneficiaries is shared between social assistance institutions and employment services, while participation in employment programmes is recorded to enable follow-up. These exchanges are based on regular data transfers combined with clearly defined institutional roles and local coordination mechanisms. In addition, social workers at local branches of the Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundation (SASF) play an important role in identifying beneficiaries and facilitating outreach and referrals.

Overall, this approach has enabled the systematic referral of social assistance beneficiaries to employment services and strengthened coordination between institutions. It has improved the identification of individuals with work capacity and increased participation in employment programmes. However, its impact on employment outcomes remains limited, reflecting the significant labour market barriers faced by many social assistance beneficiaries and constraints on service capacity.

Looking ahead, recent reforms aim to address key limitations in outreach and coordination. The introduction of the Household Support System in 2024 expands İŞKUR's approach from individual profiling to a household-based model, targeting households without employed or retired members and with limited engagement in social assistance or employment services. Using administrative data from multiple institutions, the system identifies eligible households and links them to counselling, training, and employment

programmes, while monitoring participation. It also introduces a more two-directional referral process between social assistance and employment services, addressing gaps in the previous one-directional model. Further progress will depend on strengthening real-time, two-way data exchange between ISAS, İŞKUR, and other institutions to enable more coordinated case management and improve employment outcomes.

1 Background

Türkiye has undergone significant economic and social transformation over the past two decades, marked by rapid urbanization, structural change, and expanding access to public services. The country became an upper middle-income economy in the mid-2000s and has achieved significant progress in the reduction of absolute poverty in recent years. However, relative poverty (measured at 50% of median income) remains high at 13.5% (Dansuk 2025).

Labour market indicators have shown a steady upward trend over the past decade. In 2023, the labour force participation rate stood at 53.3% (compared to 50.2% in 2014), with a striking gender gap: 71.2% among men compared with only 35.8% among women (Ministry of Labour and Social Security 2025). This disparity reflects persistent structural challenges, including care responsibilities disproportionately carried by women, limited access to affordable childcare and traditional gender norms influencing labour-market decisions (ILO 2025).

The unemployment rate decreased from almost 14% in 2019 to 7.9% in 2024, with approximately 2.8 million people unemployed. In particular, the youth unemployment rate (covering the 15–24 age group) improved significantly, falling from 25.2% in 2019 to 15% in 2024. Young women face particularly difficult labour-market conditions, with an unemployment rate of 23.2% (Ministry of Labour and Social Security 2025; Dansuk 2025).

One of the main challenges Türkiye's labour market is facing is the persistently high level of informal employment. Although informal work has declined substantially over time – from more than 50% in the 2000s to 26.1% in 2023 – it remains a significant structural obstacle to improving job quality and extending social protection coverage. Informal employment remains concentrated in agriculture, where 80.6% of workers are employed informally, compared with 16.6% in non-agricultural sectors. An analysis of informal employment by gender revealed that female workers have a disproportionally higher rate of informal employment than male workers (Ministry of Labour and Social Security 2025).

One of the most significant challenges in the labour market is the long-term shift in the composition of the workforce over the past two decades, which has been unfavourable to labour. According to data from the Social Security Institution (Sosyal Güvenlik Kurumu, SGK), the share of minimum-wage earners is around 50%, a trend identified as a major contributor to persistent poverty. In addition, a critical challenge concerns the relationship between price levels and wage levels. Data from the Turkish Statistical Institute shows that between 2002 and 2025, growth in the real wage index consistently lagged behind growth in the real price index. This undermines the effectiveness of poverty alleviation policies and increases the proportion of the population at risk of poverty.

Over the past 15 years, Türkiye has considerably strengthened its social protection systems. Social insurance programmes tied to employment, administered by the Ministry of Labour and Social Security, cover approximately 89% of the population. Social assistance programmes[1] cover 21% of the population, including both those outside the scope of social insurance (11%) and an additional 10% of vulnerable individuals such as persons with disabilities, caregivers, and others in need of non-contributory support. To bridge these two pillars, push and pull factors are employed that facilitate the shift of social assistance beneficiaries into the contributory social insurance system (Rahbari 2025).

Türkiye's policy framework deliberately links social protection and labour market policies: The recently adopted Labour Market Policy 2025–2028 emphasizes that it is crucial for Türkiye to adopt an employment-oriented approach in its social assistance policies, encouraging labour-market participation, supporting vocational training and skills development, and pursuing a more effective strategy to reduce unemployment.

A key enabler of this approach is the Integrated Social Assistance System (ISAS) (▶ see Box 2). Established in 2010, ISAS serves as a central e-Government platform that digitizes and streamlines all previously paper-based processes in social assistance management. ISAS also facilitates linkages to labour market services (Rahbari 2025).

1 An analysis of the social assistance system and expenditure trends identified three key areas of stress: (1) low overall coverage of social assistance and only moderate coverage of poor and vulnerable populations; (2) relatively low benefit adequacy, limiting the ability of social assistance programmes to significantly reduce poverty and inequality; and (3) the limited overall impact of social assistance transfers on poverty and inequality, as evidenced by their relatively small contribution to closing the aggregate poverty gap and their negligible effect on inequality (World Bank 2023).

2 Enabling the transition from social assistance to employment: Referring employable beneficiaries to public employment services

2.1 Introduction

The Ministry of Family and Social Services (MoFSS) administers a broad and diverse portfolio of non-contributory social assistance programmes, including child- and family-oriented benefits, disability and old-age assistance, education- and health-related transfers, and various forms of in-kind support for vulnerable households. In total, more than 50 different cash and in-kind schemes (delivered either as lump-sum payments or regular instalments) are implemented, most of them financed by the Social Assistance and Solidarity Fund (SASF). The majority of programmes are poverty-targeted, with means-testing carried out by the SASFs (▶ see Box 2 and Section 2.2) (ESCAP 2024).

As part of its exit strategy from social assistance, Türkiye has, since 2010, introduced policy reforms targeting the approximately 18% of beneficiaries deemed capable of working. These reforms aim to support their transition to employment and inclusion in contributory social insurance by referring them to the Turkish Employment Agency, Türkiye İş Kurumu (İŞKUR) (Rahbari 2025). Individuals are considered to be capable of working when they meet the following conditions simultaneously: (1) they live in a household that has received regular cash social assistance at least once in the past year; (2) they are between 18 and 55 years of age; (3) they do not receive a pension;

and (4) they do not receive social assistance for the home care of a disabled relative. Women who satisfy these criteria, but are responsible for the care of a child of primary-school age or younger, are classified by the foundation as unemployable and are, therefore, not registered in the İŞKUR system. Those assessed as employable are registered with İŞKUR and referred to suitable labour-market integration activities (OECD 2024).

Various practices have been implemented to increase the employability of social assistance beneficiaries and strengthen the social assistance-employment link. Besides referring them to İŞKUR through ISAS, various additional pull factors in the form of benefits funded by the SASF are being offered to support them during job search and transition to the labour market (OECD 2024), including the following:

- **Job guidance assistance:** A transfer provided up to three times per year to cover expenses such as transportation, health-related costs, or a headshot photograph required for job applications and commuting to work. The amount may not exceed 10% of the net minimum wage (between 0 and 1,700 Turkish lira [TL] in 2024). The exact amount is determined by the SASF based on its assessment, and applications may be rejected according to the SASF's evaluation.

- **Assistance for starting work:** A lump-sum payment provided to social assistance beneficiaries who take up employment (6,667.50 TL in 2024).

- **Priority access to in-kind assistance:** Beneficiaries who secure regular employment are given priority for heating, education, and food assistance.

If a social assistance beneficiary takes up employment through İŞKUR under the employment incentive programme, the social assistance benefit continues for 12 months, even if the household's per capita income rises above one-third of the net minimum wage during this period.

Conversely, push factors are employed to ensure compliance with labour market programmes. If an employable social assistance beneficiary refuses to cooperate with activation efforts, sanctions apply. Specifically, regular cash assistance is discontinued for one year if, without a justifiable reason, the individual refuses vocational training, active labour market programmes (ALMPs), or a job offered by İŞKUR for the third time. This determination is reported via the İŞKUR system and recorded in ISAS. Actions that may trigger this sanction include: (1) not attending a job interview following a referral; (2) rejecting a job offer; (3) failing to start or continue a placement within the Public Workfare Programme; or (4) refusing to participate in an assigned on-the-job training or a vocational training programme (for further information on specific ALMPs, ▶ see Box 1) (Dansuk 2025).

2.2 Institutional arrangements

Social assistance in Türkiye is centrally overseen by the **Social Assistance Directorate General (SADG) under the Ministry of Family and Social Services.** The majority of social assistance programmes are managed within this unit. Hence, it has played an important role in reducing fragmentation across the sector. The SADG also operates and maintains ISAS (▶ see Box 2), oversees system management and hardware infrastructure, and coordinates social assistance-related issues across ministries, including the development of data-sharing agreements (MoFSS and World Bank 2017).[2]

The delivery of social assistance is carried out through the nationwide network of **SASFs**, which function under the authority of provincial and district governors. Each SASF is governed by a Board of Trustees, which serves as the Foundation's main decision-making body. The Board brings together key local public authorities and community representatives, typically including the provincial or district governor as chair, relevant local line-department officials, and selected representatives of civil society. Social workers carry out household assessments and home visits to verify eligibility for social assistance benefits, identify "employable" individuals, and refer cases to the Board of Trustees for a final eligibility decision. Once approved, the SASF refers eligible beneficiaries to İŞKUR through ISAS, monitors their participation in activation programmes, and oversees compliance with employment-related obligations (see details in ▶ Section 2.3).

İŞKUR operates a nationwide network of provincial and district offices and an advanced digital platform for managing jobseeker profiles, employer services, ALMPs, and unemployment insurance benefits. Social assistance beneficiaries receive tailored services through this system, including job and professional counselling, which provides guidance on job search and occupational pathways, as well as access to vocational training and other ALMPs delivered by İŞKUR to support skills development and labour-market integration. Details of İŞKUR's institutional capacities are provided in ▶ Box 1.

2 The MoFSS initially contracted the Scientific and Technological Research Council of Türkiye (TÜBİTAK) to develop ISAS. Until 2020, TÜBİTAK was also responsible for maintaining the system and developing new software modules. Since then, the MoFSS's internal IT department has taken over full responsibility for ongoing software development and daily system maintenance.

Box 1. Türkiye's Public Employment Agency (Türkiye İş Kurumu, İŞKUR)[3]

Türkiye's Public Employment Agency, İŞKUR, maintains a nationwide network of offices and service points to deliver employment services across the country. As of 2024, its operational footprint includes 81 Provincial Directorates and 79 District-Level Service Centres. These offices constitute the core structure through which İŞKUR delivers job placement, career counselling, vocational training referrals, and activation programmes.

Beyond these formal offices, İŞKUR also operates 2,225 local service points, established in collaboration with municipalities, SASFs, and local chambers of commerce and industry. These smaller service points extend İŞKUR's outreach to subdistricts and remote communities, offering access to registration and basic employment services without the need to travel to central offices.

İŞKUR delivers a broad range of services aimed at enhancing employment, supporting jobseekers and employers, and facilitating transitions in the labour market.

The main tasks of İŞKUR include:

- **Job placement and intermediation:** İŞKUR matches jobseekers with vacancies in the domestic and international labour markets and supports employers in recruitment processes.

- **Career and vocational guidance:** İŞKUR offers personalized counselling to jobseekers, career development services, labour market information, and skills profiling. Tailored services are available, particularly for vulnerable groups, for example, a dedicated Job Hunting Model for youth not in education, employment or training (NEET), Job Coaching for persons with disabilities, and Job Clubs offering both theoretical and practical guidance to support individuals facing specific barriers to (re-)entering the labour market.

- **Active labour market programmes:** İŞKUR designs and implements a wide range of ALMPs to enhance employability and support labour market integration, particularly for disadvantaged groups. These include: (1) Vocational training and on-the-job training: Participants receive a daily allowance, general health insurance, and coverage for occupational accident and disease premiums. Employers are required to hire trainees for at least twice the duration of the training upon completion. (2) Public works programmes: These programmes offer short-term employment and basic skills development for unemployed individuals, particularly in times of high unemployment. (3) Labour Adjustment Programme: This programme facilitates the transition of unemployed individuals, especially women, youth, and vulnerable groups, into the labour market by combining part-time work assignments in public

3 Based on İŞKUR (2025)

institutions with training in soft skills, job search, and employability. Participants receive a daily wage equivalent to the net minimum wage and are covered by short-term social insurance. (4) Employment subsidies: Employers hiring unemployed individuals who meet specific criteria can benefit from premium, tax, or wage subsidies. Targeted incentives are available to encourage the employment of women, youth, and recipients of unemployment benefits.

- **Passive labour market programmes:** İŞKUR administers a range of income support schemes for insured workers facing job loss or reduced income, including: (1) Unemployment benefits: paid to eligible individuals who have lost their job involuntarily, financed through social insurance contributions, (2) short-time work allowances: which provide wage compensation to employees whose working hours are temporarily reduced or suspended due to economic down-turns, helping employers retain their workforce during crises, and (3) half-time working allowance: which supports working parents after childbirth or adoption by compensating for reduced working hours. The allowance is paid for a defined period depending on the number of children and is available to insured employees following maternity or paternity leave.

- **Employer services:** These services engage directly with employers to identify labour needs, promote İŞKUR services, and facilitate targeted recruitment, including support for employing disadvantaged groups.

- **Employment events and job fairs:** İŞKUR organizes local and national events to connect jobseekers and employers, with a focus on priority sectors and regions.

- **Labour market analysis and statistical services:** İŞKUR produces, analyses, and publishes national and local labour market data to inform employment policy and practice.

These institutional arrangements are underpinned by an **Action Plan on Linking the Social Support System to Employment and its Activation**, which was adopted in April 2010, followed by a **cooperation protocol** between the MoFSS and İŞKUR in February 2012. These measures aimed to incentivize job search, facilitate access to employment and training opportunities, and promote productive participation in society, helping social assistance beneficiaries become and remain self-sufficient. With the aim of clarifying the definition of duties between institutions and strengthening cooperation in the field, the **Protocol on Directing Social Assistance Beneficiaries to Employment** was signed between the two institutions in April 2018.

Türkiye's strategic commitment to linking social assistance with employment promotion is also firmly embedded in its key policy frameworks, including the **Twelfth Development Plan 2024–2028**, which sets out explicit goals to link social assistance systems with active and passive labour market programmes, aiming to transform social assistance into a mechanism that not only provides financial relief, but also fosters labour force participation among those capable of working. Complementing this, the **Medium-**

Term Programme 2025–2027 outlines planned revisions to the social assistance system to increase opportunities to transition into employment. Enhancing the linkages between social assistance and employment policies is also prominently anchored in the National Employment Strategy 2025–2028.

2.3 Legal framework

Türkiye's modern social assistance system is grounded in the Social Assistance and Solidarity Encouragement Law No. 3294 (1986). The law's purpose is to assist citizens who are "in poverty and need", specifically those not covered by any social security scheme and not receiving a pension/income from such schemes. Law 3294 aims to provide aid to the destitute and to "reinforce social justice" by redistributing resources. It established the national Social Assistance and Solidarity Fund to finance dedicated programmes. The law also mandated creation of the SASFs in every province and district. The law covers a range of needs-based supports (e.g. food, fuel, education grants, etc.), and subsequent regulations or Fund's Board decisions have created additional programmes under its authority.

Law No. 6704, dated 14 April 2016, introduced new provisions making certain social assistance benefits conditional on participation in ALMPs. The Law amended Law 3294 by adding Additional Article 5, which established two key measures to link social assistance with the labour market (ESPN 2016):

- Mandatory İŞKUR registration and activation: The law provides that "employable" (see above) members of households that received at least one regular cash assistance payment from the Social Assistance and Solidarity Fund in the past year (and whose household falls under the poverty threshold for General Health Insurance premium support) shall be registered with İŞKUR. Critically, the law also imposes a sanction for non-compliance: any employable beneficiary who refuses to participate in training or turns down a job offer three times will have their cash social assistance terminated for one year.

- Employment incentives for hiring beneficiaries: The law also created a wage subsidy programme to encourage employers to hire social assistance beneficiaries. According to Additional Article 5, if a person from a needy household (one that received regular cash aid in the past year) is employed in a private-sector job after being registered with İŞKUR, the government will cover the employer's share of the social security contributions for that employee for one year. This social insurance contribution support is calculated on the basis of the minimum wage (the lower bound of contributory earnings) and is paid by the MoFSS on behalf of the employer. The incentive also comes with conditions to prevent abuse: the employer must be from the private sector and must be increasing their workforce (hiring the beneficiary as an additional employee above the previous year's average employment) and must have no outstanding social security debts or fraud findings. If an employer is found to have undeclared workers, they become ineligible for the subsidy for one year.

- Notably, the legal reform of 2016 answered longstanding policy discussions: the National Employment Strategy 2010–2014 had already emphasized linking social assistance with employment and pilot initiatives were already initiated before the law came into force. Law 6704 eventually provided the statutory authority to enforce participation and impose penalties for non-participation.[4]

Following Law 6704's mandate, a comprehensive implementing regulation was promulgated, entitled the **Regulation on the Employment of Social Assistance Beneficiaries**. This regulation details the conditions and processes for the referral of beneficiaries to jobs/training and the social security subsidies. With this regulation in force, the activation policy became operational as of 1 January 2018, after giving time in late 2017 for outreach and system setup. Based on the regulation, a Circular on the Procedures for Directing Social Assistance Beneficiaries Towards Employment was issued in 2019.

2.4 Operational workflow

The operational workflow is as follows.

Step 1
Social assistance application

For all social assistance programmes, applicants complete a standard application at their local SASF office or online. The application standardizes declaration-based data, allowing it to be easily integrated with different databases and verified. The application includes questions pertaining to the registrant's household, including employment information, household composition, property ownership, and social conditions. As part of the application process, citizens are required to submit a signed consent form to allow institutions to review their social and economic information (MoFSS and World Bank 2017).

Step 2
Assessment of household information

When a citizen's application is completed at his or her local SASF office, a socio-economic profile is generated in ISAS by linking datasets from various institutions through the citizen's unique national ID number. The profile contains information about the household's financial status, including the applicant's self-reported household income and working status, as well as property, agricultural land, livestock, and vehicle ownership.

4 Before the law came into force, the Ministry launched pilot activation initiatives via administrative circulars: In April 2014, Circular no. 2014/4 was issued to SASFs nationwide. This directive instructed local foundations to identify "employable" beneficiaries – initially defined as adults aged 18–45 in social assistance households – and to refer them to İŞKUR for employment or training opportunities. In August 2015, the Ministry revised its approach with Circular no. 2015/3. This narrowed the focus to beneficiary households with no employed members (i.e. completely jobless households) as the priority group for activation. The adjusted criteria made the programme more feasible by concentrating on those most in need of labour market integration. These circulars were the de facto guidelines until the new law came into effect.

At this stage, the profile is assessed for completeness or for inconsistencies with the self-declared data at registration. If information is missing from the application or if there are inconsistencies in the data, an alert will appear and the application will be frozen until the information is validated. Besides this administrative data, social workers visit the applicant household to check the declared information and observe his/her real living conditions by using the social inquiry form. The eligibility of the applicant is decided by evaluating these two data sources.

Step 3

Identification of employable beneficiaries

Within eligible households, adults aged 18 to 55 who are not pensioners or full-time caregivers are classified as "employable". These individuals are flagged in ISAS and may be referred to İŞKUR for job placement or participation in activation programmes. However, identification as "employable" does not automatically result in registration with İŞKUR. Referral requires the beneficiary's consent, and individuals must actively agree to participate. Job opportunities, vocational training, or other ALMPs must generally be located within the district boundaries (for district municipalities) or within the provincial area reachable by a workplace service vehicle or by no more than two urban public transport connections (for metropolitan municipalities). However, if the beneficiary wishes, participation or employment in another district or province is also possible.

Step 4

Referral and registration with İŞKUR

Once the beneficiary consents, the file is sent from ISAS to İŞKUR's database. These referrals are transferred on a bi-monthly basis. An İŞKUR counsellor reviews the files to confirm whether employment services can be provided for the concerned individuals. If confirmed, this is communicated back to ISAS. The referral is then finalized, and the individual is digitally registered with İŞKUR, without the need for a separate application (MoFSS n.d.).

Step 5

Individual counselling and preparation of activation plan

Upon registration, each beneficiary is assigned a Job and Vocational Counsellor who prepares an individual action plan. This plan outlines the steps needed to improve employability, including participation in job-search support, vocational training, or other ALMP. All records are managed through İŞKUR's integrated digital platform, including the İMD My Page interface used by counsellors.

Step 6

Participation in employment-related programmes

Beneficiaries are directed to appropriate ALMPs such as skills training, on-the-job training, or community-based employment projects. İŞKUR also matches candidates with job openings. All participation is recorded digitally via the iMD and linked to the individual's case profile. Beneficiaries are required to attend interviews and accept suitable offers unless justified otherwise.

Step 7
Monitoring, reporting, and compliance

İŞKUR monitors compliance with activation obligations through its case management system. If a beneficiary refuses a job offer, training course, or other activation measure three times without valid justification, their eligibility for social assistance may be suspended for one year, as per the legal provisions introduced under Law No. 6704. These sanctions are automatically reflected in ISAS.

Step 8
Transition to employment and continued support

If a beneficiary gains formal employment, their status is updated automatically through records of the Social Security Institution (SGK). Certain social assistance benefits may continue for up to 12 months post-employment to support transition and prevent disincentives. In addition, the SASF pays the employer's social insurance contributions on behalf of the beneficiary for up to six months. Further support includes Job Referral Assistance (up to three times annually) and a one-time Employment Start Grant. (▶ see Section 2.1).

Step 9
Graduation or continuation

After 12 months, the beneficiary household's status is reassessed. If eligibility persists, support continues. If household conditions have improved, the individual is considered to have graduated from the social assistance system. The decision is based on updated administrative records and, if necessary, a follow-up social inquiry.

2.5 Key elements of digital interoperability

From the social assistance side, the main information system facilitating the process is ISAS. A detailed description of the system is provided in ▶ Box 2. ISAS facilitates referral to employment services by identifying eligible beneficiaries, making referrals to İŞKUR, monitoring participation and compliance, and flagging non-compliance for sanctions. It also supports the administration of employment incentives and post-placement monitoring (Rahbari 2025).

The respective files for the approach described in ▶ Section 2.4 are pushed from ISAS to İŞKUR. This is not carried out automatically, but actively and in real time (at least bi-monthly), with basic beneficiary information shared to enable service delivery on the employment side. To support this process, a dedicated employment module was introduced within ISAS, which has been operational since 2014 (MoFSS and World Bank 2017).

Box 2. The Integrated Social Assistance System (ISAS)[5]

The Integrated Social Assistance System is a process management and information (informatics) system through which applications from people in need are received, household files are created, and personal data, socio-economic information, and wealth elements are queried from central databases. It retains reports of on-site social examinations regarding the households' socio-economic status, carries out the determination of neediness, issues bank instructions for aid payments, and conducts all automatic accounting actions for these payments electronically. ISAS operates across three main phases of the delivery chain (▶ Figure 1): assess, enrol, and provide/monitor.

The **assessment phase** combines real-time administrative data from 29 institutions and over 120 databases – covering registries such as civil, banking, assets, tax, employment, health, housing, and education – with socio-economic data collected during in-person household visits conducted by (approximately 9,000) social assistance workers across 1,003 nationwide local SASFs. This hybrid model ensures an accurate, up-to-date social registry that supports comprehensive socio-economic evaluations.

During the **enrolment phase** ISAS provides a dynamic and integrated gateway for multiple social assistance programmes. Based on the data stored in the household-based file during the assessment phase it uses proxy-means testing for social assistance programmes and hybrid eligibility assessments for universal health insurance to generate lists of eligible beneficiaries. Based on all of the data, the Board of Trustees makes the final decision on whether the household is eligible for assistance or not.

The **monitoring function** of ISAS combines automated auditing, data analytics, and beneficiary monitoring to support transparency and efficiency. The system flags issues automatically, which are reviewed and audited by an independent board. ISAS also offers powerful data analytics, using information from over 66 million individuals (Turkish citizens and refugees having a national ID number) and geographic information system (GIS) mapping to support programme planning and policy design. Beneficiary monitoring helps identify registration issues and ensures continuous oversight of service delivery and payments.

5 Based on Rahbari (2025) and DCI (2025)

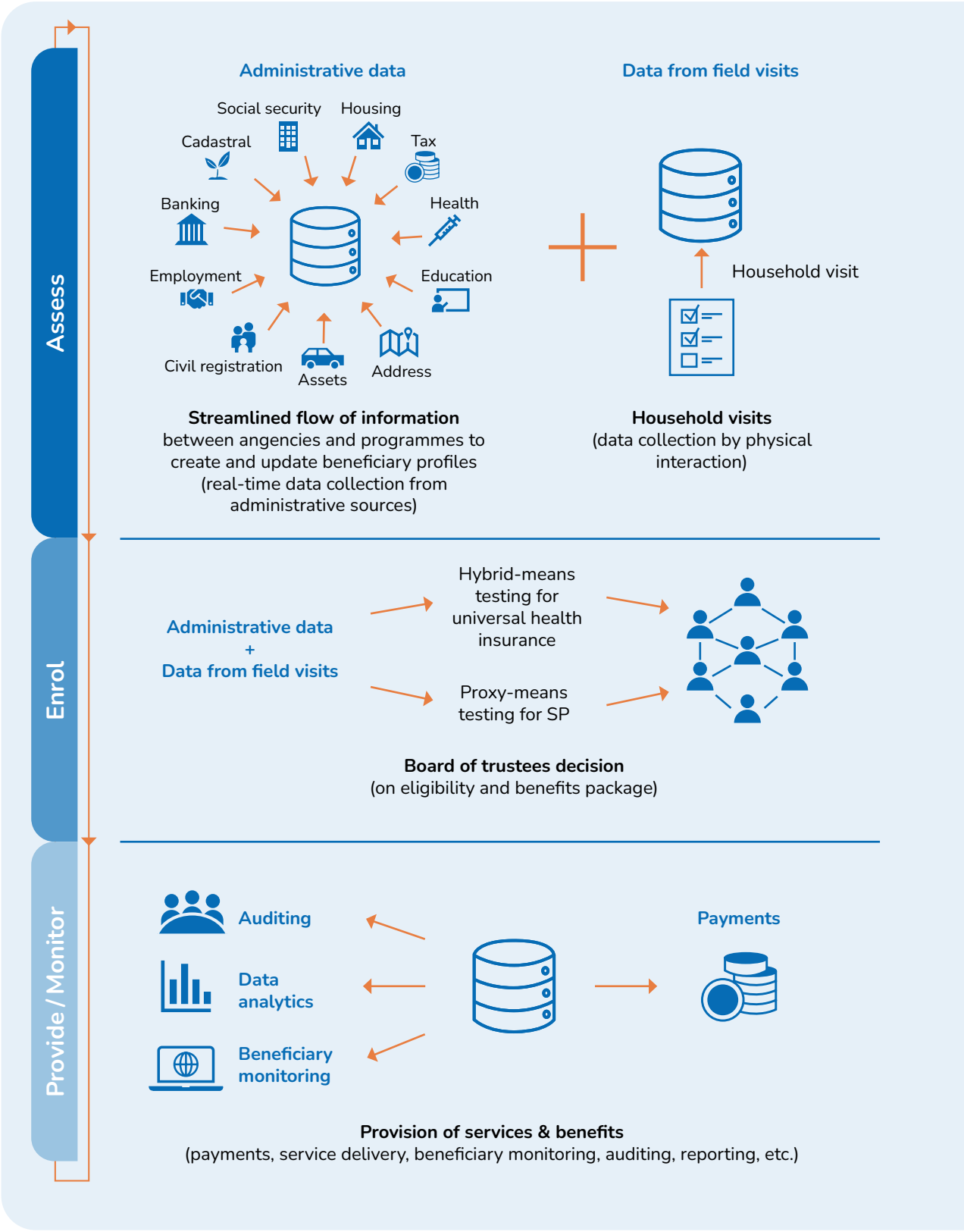

Figure 1.
Three main functions of ISAS

Among the 29 public entities contributing real-time administrative data to ISAS (▶ see Box 2), İŞKUR plays a pivotal role in providing detailed employment-related information. The data shared by İŞKUR automatically and in real-time includes individual registration status with employment services, job seeker status, information on employment and training, as well as records of unemployment compensation (MoFSS and World Bank 2017).

İŞKUR and other public institutions can access data from ISAS for specific purposes. This access is governed by formal data-sharing protocols. Institutions do not have direct entry into ISAS; instead, they must submit specific data requests, which are processed in accordance with the established agreements.

2.6 Critical success factors and remaining challenges

Several factors have contributed to the seamless implementation of Türkiye's approach to refer social assistance beneficiaries able to work to employment services:

- Through the approach elaborated in this case study, Türkiye established a **clear "rights and responsibilities" regime**: the needy are offered employment support and financial incentives, but are also obliged to cooperate in moving towards self-sufficiency. Legal provisions, notably under Law No. 6704, specify consequences for repeated non-compliance.

- An **incremental and legally grounded approach to reform** has enabled gradual institutionalization of the social assistance-employment link. Over more than a decade, Türkiye has introduced a layered set of instruments, beginning with the 2010 Action Plan, followed by the 2012 cooperation protocol between the MoFSS and İŞKUR, and culminating in the 2016 legislative amendment and the binding 2017 Regulation. These were complemented by operational guidance such as the 2019 Circular on Referrals. This stepwise reform process allowed sufficient time for adaptation, institutional alignment, and digital integration.

- With support from the MoFSS, the SASFs have adopted the identification and referral of employable beneficiaries as a core routine task. The SASFs have dedicated employment officers who serve as focal points for activation and coordination with İŞKUR. This enables tailored follow-up and ensures that referrals are not merely formal, but part of an **active case management process** from the social protection side.

- For ISAS, the **system's architecture was built iteratively and incrementally** by developing and adding modules that are built to complement and facilitate existing business processes. A modular approach allows developers to detect smaller failures without having them overwhelm the whole system. It also adds flexibility and makes it easier to incrementally increase the complexity of the system by building on top

of existing modules. The development of each module follows a cycle that can be summarized in four phases: (1) design, (2) development, (3) pilot application, and (4) implementation (MoFSS and World Bank 2017). This approach has also been applied for the dedicated employment module.

Despite strong institutional, legal and digital foundations, several challenges remain:

- The rollout of the referral system revealed that digital functionality alone does not guarantee effective implementation. Although referrals from ISAS to İŞKUR were technically seamless, the **PES was not fully prepared to absorb the influx of beneficiaries**. Many of those referred had more complex needs than İŞKUR's typical client base, and the system initially struggled to respond with appropriate measures. This experience illustrates that digital integration, while necessary, cannot compensate for insufficient frontline readiness or service adaptation.

- While ISAS and İŞKUR are digitally linked for referrals, the **current interoperability remains one-directional and limited in scope**. Files can be sent from ISAS to İŞKUR, but real-time updates on beneficiary progress are not systematically fed back into ISAS. This creates a gap in the case management process.

- A further constraint lies in the **limited motivation among some beneficiaries to engage in employment or income-generating activities**. In practice, not all employable individuals agree to be referred to İŞKUR. In some cases, the structure or perceived generosity of social assistance benefits may reduce the financial incentive to take up low-wage or unstable employment, especially when the difference between support and earnings is marginal. To address this, incentive measures have been introduced, such as allowing beneficiaries to retain social assistance benefits for up to 12 months after gaining employment and deferring reassessment until that period ends. This gives individuals time to stabilize their income and adjust to new circumstances. However, despite these efforts, the share of beneficiaries successfully transitioning into formal employment remains modest.

2.7 Results of the approach

ISAS itself has helped transform the delivery of non-contributory benefits. Prior to its introduction, an applicant had to obtain 17 different documents from 12 different public institutions, which could take 15 to 20 days. With ISAS, these transactions are completed within 1–2 minutes, saving time and travel costs to travel to different institutions to obtain the required documents. ISAS has also improved the capacity to identify households and deliver payments (ESCAP 2024). Its digital linkage with İŞKUR marks an important step toward integrated case management, enabling the referral of employable beneficiaries to public employment services. This connection holds potential benefits not only for the income prospects of social assistance recipients, but also for improving efficiency and coordination across public administration.

A significant number of social assistance beneficiaries have been successfully referred from ISAS to İŞKUR, demonstrating the operational effectiveness of the digital linkage between the two systems. In 2019 alone, 153,884 employable individuals were registered in İŞKUR's system by the SASFs via ISAS. Among these, 10,694 were directed to public works programmes, 6,361 were referred to vocational training or other active labour market programmes, and 11,662 were placed in jobs. Additionally, 79,233 individuals benefited from face-to-face counselling services (T.C. Cumhurbaşkanlığı Strateji ve Bütçe Başkanlığı 2023).

Despite these structural advances, outcomes of the activation approach remain limited. Only 13.81% of working-age social assistance beneficiaries were able to sustainably transition into employment. A significant share of employable individuals either refuse referrals or discontinue jobs shortly after starting. Consequently, the cost-benefit ratio of the approach remains modest, as relatively low employment outcomes are achieved despite substantial administrative and operational investments (Rahbari 2025).

Integrating women into the formal labour market remains a significant challenge. This is especially true for women with care responsibilities and low or no qualifications. The limited achievements of the approach in this field highlight the need for a more comprehensive approach that creates more inclusive and supportive work environments for women to significantly increase their participation in the labour market and advance gender equality (ILO 2025).

2.8 Way forward

To further increase the effectiveness of existing approaches, Türkiye introduced the Household Support System in 2024 as an expansion of İŞKUR's existing portfolio of employment services (▶ see Box 1). While İŞKUR has traditionally operated on the basis of individual profiling, this new initiative adopts a household-based approach to reach people living in households without sustainable livelihoods. The aim is to improve access to income-generating opportunities among households that fall outside the reach of standard activation measures (İŞKUR 2025; Rahbari 2025).

The new approach specifically targets households that do not include any employed or retired members, do not receive regular social assistance above a certain threshold, and have not previously engaged with İŞKUR services in the past year. To identify and reach these households, İŞKUR draws on administrative data through institutional partnerships with the SGK (Sosyal Guvenlik Kurumu, the government health care programme), the MoFSS, and the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Once households are identified, they are offered career guidance and linked to relevant training, job matching, or labour-market programmes. Their participation is also monitored to support longer-term follow-up (Rahbari 2025).

Since its start in September 2024, İŞKUR has significantly expanded its outreach and service delivery under the Household Support System. Between September 2024 and April 2025 a total of 1,996 individuals from targeted households participated in active labour market programmes, while 47,294 individuals took part in labour adjustment programmes designed to support transitions into employment. Additionally, 50,491 individuals received individual employment and career counselling. In total, more than 64,000 households benefited from the activities of the programme (Dansuk 2025). Further details are provided in Table 1.

It is noteworthy that significantly more women (43,884) than men (22,063) have participated in the Household Support System. However, despite this higher engagement, a larger number of men were ultimately placed in employment (7,306 men compared to 4,713 women). This disparity underscores persistent gender inequalities in Türkiye's labour market (▶ see Section 2.7) and points to the need for additional strategies to promote formal employment opportunities for women. These include, for example, expanding access to affordable childcare services, strengthening legal protections against discrimination, enhancing women's knowledge of labour rights, and supporting their participation in workers' organizations (ILO 2025).

Table 1. *Participants in the Household Support System September 2024 to April 2025*

Activity	Women	Men	Total	Households
Job placement	4,713	7,306	12,019	10,901
Participation in vocational training or on-the-job training	1,199	797	1,996	1,954
Participation in public workfare programme	3,452	1,186	4,638	4,636
Participation in labour adjustment programme	34,520	12,774	47,294	47,126
TOTAL	**43,884**	**22,063**	**65,947**	**64,617**
Provision of counselling	26,289	24,202	50,491	41,926

Source: Dansuk (2025)

Gaps in the one-directional referral process from the social assistance system to public employment services have become increasingly evident, particularly in the lack of operational coordination between frontline institutions and the absence of real-time data exchange between ISAS and İŞKUR systems. These shortcomings were among the key factors driving the introduction of the Household Support System by İŞKUR. The new approach marks the start of two-directional referrals: İŞKUR can now request information on eligible beneficiaries from ISAS and can also refer individuals to SASFs for additional support. This represents a shift in the way vulnerable groups, who are not formal jobseekers and often excluded from conventional employment services, are identified and supported through more integrated and responsive service delivery.

To support this more dynamic model, there is a clear need to further develop ISAS with real-time, two-way interoperability, especially between İŞKUR, SGK, and other relevant institutions. Such integration would enable coordinated case management across employment and social protection systems, with the potential to significantly improve employment and income protection outcomes.

3 Conclusion

Türkiye's experience demonstrates how digital governance, institutional coordination, and integrated service delivery can enable strategic transitions from social assistance to sustainable livelihoods, accompanied by transitions into contributory social insurance schemes. A combination of push and pull factors is actively employed to support this shift (ILO and IPEA 2025).

On the push side, employable beneficiaries are required to register with İŞKUR and participate in labour activation measures such as job search assistance and vocational training. Social assistance design features reinforce these efforts, for example, beneficiaries may retain certain benefits for up to 12 months after entering formal employment, helping to reduce the risk of income volatility.

On the pull side, Türkiye offers a range of targeted incentives to make formal employment more accessible and appealing. These include Job Guidance Assistance and Employment Start Assistance to defray upfront costs, as well as a wage subsidy scheme that covers employer social security contributions for hiring social assistance recipients. Together, these measures create a more coherent and supportive environment for movement into the formal labour market and the contributory social protection system.

At the centre of this transition is ISAS, which not only digitizes and streamlines benefit delivery, but also enables a whole-of-government approach, linking poor and vulnerable households with employment services, skills development opportunities, and long-term pathways toward self-reliance.

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