

2023



T Ü R K İ Y E  
**HUMANITARIAN  
ACTION**  
O V E R V I E W



## TÜRKİYE HUMANITARIAN ACTION OVERVIEW 2023

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Türkiye Humanitarian Action Overview 2023 has been prepared by the Turkish Red Crescent Academy, which is the education and research unit of the Turkish Red Crescent Society. It conducts research in collaboration with universities, think tanks, and international organizations in various fields related to humanitarian assistance, including disaster response, migration, social services, volunteering, and humanitarian law. Kızılay Culture and Arts is a platform within the Turkish Red Crescent Academy that organizes cultural, artistic, and scientific activities and publications to raise awareness among the public in the fields of humanitarian aid, disaster relief, and public health.

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# INTRODUCTION

I am pleased to present you the 2023 edition of the Türkiye Humanitarian Action Overview, a new publication of the Turkish Red Crescent Academy that we publish periodically.

The Turkish Red Crescent Academy, which we established to produce knowledge, and data in the field of humanitarian studies and to make this information available to humanity through training and publications, conducts studies to document our humanitarian aid memory. One of these studies is the Türkiye Humanitarian Action Overview that you are holding in your hands.

2023, a year in which we experienced many national and international disasters and emergencies, especially the devastating earthquakes on February 6, left significant marks on our humanitarian aid history. We mobilized as a nation to heal the wounds of the disaster, directing our time, effort, and resources to those in need. However, we have once again painfully recognized the importance of pre-disaster preparedness activities. By learning lessons from past disasters and enhancing our individual and collective resilience, it is possible to avoid disasters or reduce their impact.

Based on this observation, we present to you the Türkiye Humanitarian Action Overview, which we prepared in 2023 to share the lessons and messages learned from the efforts carried out by various organizations with the public and carry them into the future.

As in every year, we have compiled academic analyses in the fields of disaster, migration, public health, international aid, social services and volunteering. We have also included the field studies conducted in these fields in the institutional evaluations section.

I hope that this study, a collaborative effort of humanitarian actors in Türkiye, will serve as a valuable resource for researchers and humanitarian aid professionals by presenting the humanitarian aid activities carried out over the past year from the perspective of those involved and giving voice to the field.

I sincerely thank all academics and institutional representatives who contributed to the Overview.

**Prof. Dr. Fatma Meriç Yılmaz**

President of the Turkish Red Crescent

## CONTRIBUTING ORGANIZATIONS

Just like every work entrusted to its readers after being placed between two covers, we now present the final version of the Türkiye Humanitarian Action Overview to you.

We have prepared this work, which holds a unique place in the humanitarian aid literature and has been produced annually since 2020, with the contributions of academics and humanitarian organizations.

In this Overview, which we have prepared to preserve the memory of Türkiye's humanitarian action in 2023 and to systematically evaluate these developments, we present to you the significant advancements in Türkiye in 2023, especially in the fields of disaster, migration, social services, volunteering, international aid, and public health.

While preparing the Overview, as we do every year, we issued a call for papers to relevant researchers and institutions. We asked the researchers who responded to our invitation to compile and analyze the developments in Türkiye in 2023 within their fields of expertise, and we requested the institutions to present their work from this year and the lessons learned from this work. We have compiled the evaluations of the researchers, international institutions, public agencies and non-governmental organizations that responded to our call for contributions, gathering their data through media and archival scans in the relevant fields, based on the following questions:

- What disasters and humanitarian crises occurred in Türkiye in 2023?
- What are the prominent issues in Türkiye in 2023 related to disasters, public health, migration, volunteering, social services and international aid?
- What lessons have humanitarian aid organizations operating in Türkiye learned from their experiences in 2023?
- How did organizations with different sectoral, organizational and legal statuses intervene in humanitarian crises that occurred in 2023 in Türkiye?

We would like to extend our thanks to all the researchers and institutions who contributed to the Overview.

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# 2023 Humanitarian Action Chronology in Türkiye

## JANUARY

1 5 Elazığ Sivrice Earthquake (4.9)

## FEBRUARY

0 6 Kahramanmaraş Pazarcık Earthquake (7.7)

0 6 Kahramanmaraş Elbistan Earthquake (7.6)

## MAY

0 7 Adana Kozan Floods

1 2 Ankara Etimesgut Floods

2 3 Osmaniye Sakarcalı Floods

2 5 Muş Merkez Floods

2 8 Aydın Koçarlı Floods

3 1 Denizli Floods

## JUNE

0 2 Eskişehir Seyitgazi Floods

0 3 Ankara Floods

0 3 Kastamonu Azdavay Floods

0 4 Amasya Floods

0 6 Samsun Terme Floods

1 8 Manisa Akhisar Floods

## JULY

0 7 Batı Karadeniz Floods (Düzce- Bartın- Zonguldak)

1 0 Ordu Altınordu Floods

1 0 İzmir Aliağa Forest Fire

1 0 Ağrı Taşlıçay Floods

1 0 İzmir Menderes Forest Fire

1 2 Muğla Milas Forest Fire

1 4 Milas Kemikler Forest Fire

1 5 Kahramanmaraş Karacasu Forest Fire

1 5 Osmaniye Kadirli Sumbas Forest Fire

1 6 Gaziantep Dülük Baba Forest Fire

1 6 Hatay Belen Forest Fire

1 6 Mersin Gülnar Forest Fire

1 6 Bolu Göynük Forest Fire

1 6 Çanakkale Forest Fire

1 7 Tekirdağ Malkara Forest Fire

1 9 Gaziantep Nurdağı Forest Fire

1 9 İzmir Urla Forest Fire

2 1 Ağrı Doğubayazıt Floods

2 3 Kahramanmaraş Kazma Bağları Forest Fire

2 3 Bursa Yıldırım Forest Fire

2 4 Kahramanmaraş Dulkadiroğlu Forest Fire

2 4 Manisa Saruhanlı Forest Fire

2 4 Ağrı Doğubayazıt Floods

2 4 Antalya Kemer Forest Fire

2 5 Hatay Kisecik Forest Fire

2 5 Adana Kozan Earthquake (5.5)

2 6 İzmir Bergama Forest Fire

2 6 Kütahya Tavşanlı Forest Fire

2 6 İstanbul Beykoz Forest Fire

2 6 Kırklareli Babaeski Forest Fire

2 7 Bolu Göynük Forest Fire

**AUGUST**

- 0 4 Kahramanmaraş Forest Fire
- 0 6 Serinyol Antakya Forest Fire
- 0 8 Muğla Milas Ören Fire
- 1 0 Kastamonu Pınarbaşı Uzla Village Fire
- 1 2 Bolu Kıbrıscık Village Fire
- 1 5 Bolu Göynük Forest Fire
- 1 6 Hatay Antakya Forest Fire
- 2 1 Şırnak Rüzgarlıdere Fire
- 2 2 Çanakkale Forest Fire
- 2 2 Bursa Yenişehir-Bilecik Osmaneli Forest Fire
- 2 3 Eskişehir Seyitgazi Forest Fire
- 2 5 Diyarbakır Ergani Forest Fire
- 3 0 Kütahya Gedikoğlu çiftliği Forest Fire
- 3 0 Kırıkhan Floods

**SEPTEMBER**

- 0 2 Bursa Mudanya Forest Fire
- 0 2 Kırklareli Karahıdır Forest Fire

- 0 3 Samsun Çarşamba Floods
- 0 5 Kırklareli İğneada Floods
- 0 5 İstanbul Başakşehir Floods
- 1 2 Manisa Soma Forest Fire
- 1 3 Zonguldak Ereğli Mining Accident
- 1 6 Bolu Gerede Forest Fire
- 1 7 Antalya Alanya Forest Fire
- 2 1 Karabük Ovacık Forest Fire
- 2 3 Sivas Yıldızeli Forest Fire
- 2 8 İstanbul Avrupa Yakası Floods
- 3 0 Çorum Merkez Floods

**OCTOBER**

- 0 2 Antakya Floods
- 0 6 Karabük Ovacık Gümüşler Fire
- 0 7 Kastamonu Alpu Village Fire
- 0 7 Burdur Altınyayla Forest Fire

**NOVEMBER**

- 0 5 Aydın Söke Floods
- 1 3 Çanakkale Floods
- 1 9 Zonguldak Ereğli Floods
- 1 9 Adıyaman Vartana Floods
- 2 0 Batman Floods
- 2 0 Avalanche in Erzurum Çat
- 2 6 Trabzon Maçka Forest Fire
- 2 7 İskenderun Floods
- 3 0 Balıkesir Edremit Floods

**DECEMBER**

- 0 9 Zonguldak Landslide
- 1 5 Çanakkale Floods
- 2 9 Hakkari Yüksekova Landslide









# ACADEMIC

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E V A L U A T I O N S

# A Turning Point in Türkiye's Seismic History: The 6 February Earthquakes

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On 6 February 2023, as preparations for the Republic's centennial anniversary were in the top gear across Türkiye's vast geographical landscape, two successive earthquakes plunged the country into another direction, another air - an atmosphere where preparations for a landmark centenary celebration was forced to take a back seat in the social, cultural, and or historical consciousness of the people. These earthquakes originated in the districts of Pazarcık and Elbistan in Türkiye's southeastern province of Kahramanmaraş.<sup>1</sup> Not only was the entire country shaken to its core, the earthquakes (emanating from the East Anatolian Fault Zone), wrought extensive destruction both in eighteen of Türkiye's own provinces<sup>2</sup> and across the border in Syria; the aftermath of the earthquakes would later go on to have far reaching and enduring repercussions on the nation's collective psyche. To paint a vivid picture of the scale of devastation would require an animated yet conscious and ethical comparisons with previous earthquakes in Türkiye. To that end, in terms of loss of life and property damage; the 2023 Türkiye-Syria earthquakes surpass the 1939 Erzincan

and 1999 Izmit earthquakes, becoming the most destructive disaster in the Republic's 100-year history.<sup>3</sup> Given the extensive impact of the earthquakes, conducting thorough assessments either commissioned by government agencies or individual researchers is likely to extend well into the future. In this article, written eleven months after the calamitous event, I will briefly assess, whilst drawing from the latest available data sourced primarily from official channels, how Turkish cities have responded to disasters. Additionally, I will offer my own insights into what measures need to be implemented to mitigate the detrimental effects of earthquake and other catastrophic events threatening Türkiye's wider geographical landscape.

## **The 2023 Türkiye -Syria Earthquakes: A Disaster Greater than the 1999 Izmit Earthquake**

On 6 February 2023, just before the dawn, while many were still fast asleep, an earthquake of Mw7.7 (focal depth = 8.6 km) struck Pazarcık --a district in Türkiye's

southeastern province of Kahramanmaraş --at 4:17 a.m. local time (UTC+03:00). Nine hours later at 3:24 p.m., a second earthquake of Mw7.6 (focal depth = 7 km) struck the district of Elbistan in the same province of Kahramanmaraş. If earthquakes were to speak a language and we were lettered and fluent in that spoken word; perhaps we might have heard it say: "I'm just not done yet," because three weeks later on 20 February, another earthquake rattled the district of Yayladağı in the nearby province of Hatay at 8:04 p.m. These events, collectively referred to as the 2023 Türkiye–Syria Earthquakes, are but part of the greater history of seismic activity in Türkiye. It is critical to emphasize that out of the 269 earthquakes known to have caused loss of life or property in Türkiye since 1900, twenty of these earthquakes registered at magnitudes greater than 7 on the Richter scale.<sup>4</sup> Of these twenty, the three most destructive in terms of fatalities as earlier mentioned are: the 2023 Türkiye -Syria earthquakes (50,783 deaths),<sup>5</sup> the 1939 Erzincan earthquake (32,962 deaths),<sup>6</sup> and the 1999 Izmit earthquake (17,479 deaths).<sup>7</sup>

Figure 1 shows the three most destructive earthquakes, their magnitudes, and the geographical distributions of their aftershocks until 6 May of the same year.<sup>8</sup> In the wake of the 2023 Türkiye -Syria earthquakes, preliminary reports estimating the amount of damage and economic cost of the earthquakes were prepared as expeditiously as possible. This expedited assessment and survey focused solely on the eleven provinces officially declared as disaster zones. However, when updated data revealed that eighteen provinces had in fact suffered damage, it became clear that the figures cited in these preliminary reports had underestimated the extent of the losses incurred. It was due to the updated figures<sup>9</sup> that more provinces were declared disaster zones and thus in a state of emergency.

This state of emergency was declared in the provinces of Kahramanmaraş, Hatay, Gaziantep, Malatya, Diyarbakır, Kilis, Şanlıurfa, Adıyaman, Osmaniye, Adana, and Elazığ after which the provinces of Bingöl, Kayseri, Mardin, Tunceli, Niğde, and Batman were added. Utilizing 2022 TÜİK demographic data<sup>10</sup> preliminary reports recorded that 14,013,196 people across eleven provinces were directly affected by the earthquakes, including at least 1,738,035 migrants who were residing in the earthquake zone under temporary protection status at the time of the disaster.

In its March 2023 report, drawing on data from the eleven provinces initially declared disaster zones, Türkiye's Presidency of Strategy and Budget concluded that the earthquake impacted Türkiye's economy in many ways. Prominent among these was (1) the damage to housing which at 54.9% (1,073.9 billion TRY/56.9 billion USD), comprised the largest proportion of the economic impact incurred by Türkiye's economy, (2) the damage to public infrastructure and service buildings, calculated at 242.5 billion TRY/12.9 billion USD, and (3) damage to the private sector (excluding housing) - specifically the manufacturing industry, energy, telecommunications, tourism, the health and education sectors, small businesses, and places of worship - totaled 222.4 billion TRY/11.8 billion USD. In terms of the macroeconomic impact of the earthquake, losses sustained by the insurance sector and of lost wages amounts to about 2 trillion TRY/103.6 billion USD. In lieu of the burden these losses imposed on the economy, the Presidency of Strategy and Budget has stated that the total economic impact could amount to approximately nine percent of the national income for the year 2023.<sup>11</sup>

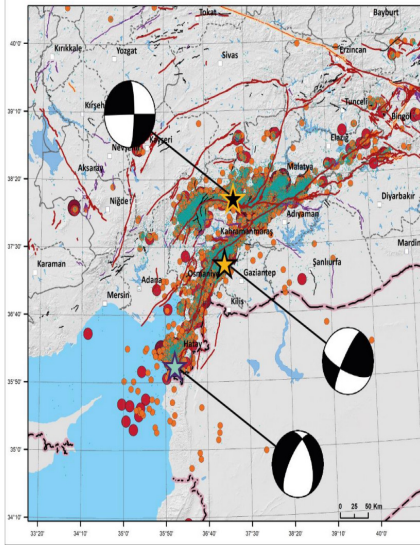


Figure 1: February 6 and February 20 earthquakes epicenters and aftershocks <sup>5</sup>

After completing the appeals process in the earthquake-affected provinces, analysis of the damage assessments and population findings revealed that over 190,000 km2 and 18 million inhabitants were affected, with approximately 260,000 structures either severely damaged or destroyed (see Figure 1 and Table 1). In Figure 2, the provinces of Hatay, Kahramanmaraş, Malatya, and Adıyaman suffered the greatest amount of structural damage. To ascertain the estimated amount of people impacted by the earthquake - on the one hand, an address-based population data for eighteen provinces from 2022 were used. On the second hand, 2023 population data<sup>12</sup> published on 6 February 2024 (exactly one year after the initial earthquakes) provided insight into the number of individuals who had died or were displaced.

Province (First 11+7)	Population 2022	Surface Area (sq km)	Population Density (person/sq km)	Average Household Size 2022	Foreign Population 2022	Population 2023	Population Difference 2022-2023	Structures Destroyed During Earthquakes	Structures Requiring Urgent Demolition	Heavily Damaged Structures	Moderately Damaged Structures	Lightly Damaged Structures
Adana	2.274.106	13.844	163	3.4	15.320	2.270.298	-3.808	31	36	2.970	5.037	39.993
Adıyaman	635.169	7.337	90	3.9	1.852	604.978	-30.191	5.953	2.329	20.201	4.629	38.576
Diyarbakır	1.804.880	15.101	120	4.43	1.728	1.818.133	13.157	45	59	5.478	2.789	48.669
Elazığ	591.497	9.383	70	3.1	4.238	604.411	12.914	58	44	10.693	307	9.869
Gaziantep	2.154.051	6.803	316	3.97	15.567	2.164.134	10.083	4.060	1.994	1.4047	5.524	68.429
Hatay	1.686.043	5.524	289	3.65	5.250	1.544.640	-141.403	13.861	9.037	56.246	13.032	117.053
K.Maraş	1.177.436	14.520	82	3.68	4.547	1.116.618	-60.818	7.396	4.423	35.229	5.987	79.027
Kilis	147.919	1.412	104	3.46	1.676	155.179	7.260	13	29	1.106	486	11.191
Malatya	812.580	12.259	69	3.3	4.844	742.725	-69.855	5.611	1.841	35.726	2.490	52.030
Osmaniye	559.405	3.320	179	3.46	934	557.666	-1739	678	530	9.010	1.094	35.006
Şanlıurfa	2.170.110	19.242	116	5.12	8.242	2.213.964	43.854	707	730	8.093	2.806	120.159
Batman	634.491	4.477	136	4.7	1.033	647.205	12.714	1	0	61	18	909
Bingöl	282.556	8.003	34	3.4	487	285.655	3.099	11	4	1.005	65	883
Kayseri	1.441.523	16.970	85	3.2	20.186	1.445.683	4.160	13	29	1.106	45	4.273
Mardin	870.374	8.780	99	4.4	3.506	888.874	18.500	4	0	272	14	997
Niğde	365.419	7.234	50	3	410	377.080	11.661	0	2	29	25	271
Sivas	634.924	28.164	22	3.1	7.401	650.401	-15.477	9	1	234	23	574
Tunceli	84.366	7.582	11	2.5	397	89.317	4.951	0	0	128	0	167
Toplam	18.326.849	189.955			97.618	18.176.961	-149.888	38.451	21.088	201.634	44.371	628.076

Table 1: Affected Population (2022 and 2023) and Structural Damage by Province<sup>13</sup>

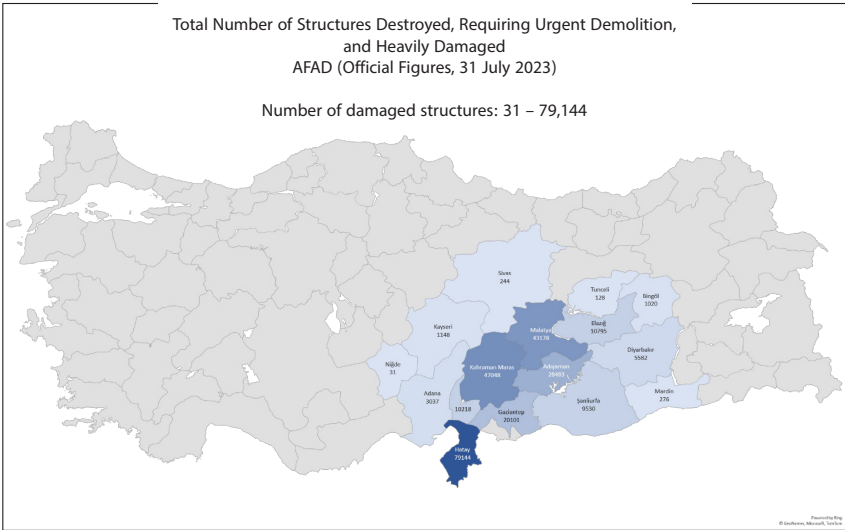
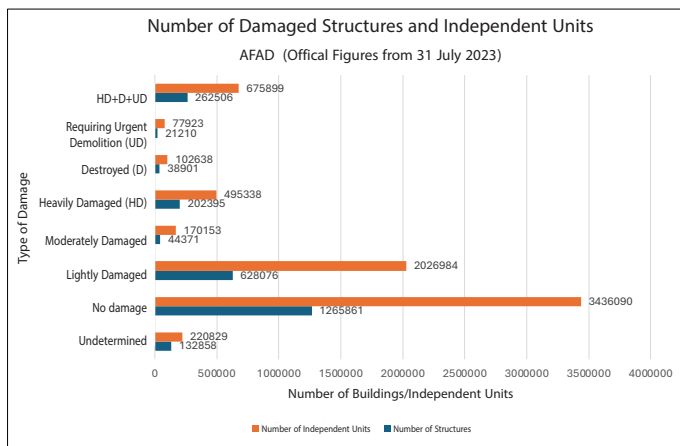


Figure 2 : Number of damaged structures in earthquake-affected provinces (total number of collapsed, urgently demolished, and heavily damaged structures)<sup>14</sup>



Figure 2 illustrates the number of damaged buildings and independent units in the eighteen provinces affected by the earthquakes, as documented in the damage assessment studies conducted by Türkiye's Ministry of Environment, Urbanization, and Climate Change. Considering, however, that many structures also sustained light or moderate damage (see Table 1), the total number of structures affected is indeed higher than what is shown in Figure 2.



*Figure 3: Number of Damaged Structures and Individual Units in the 18 Earthquake-Affected Provinces<sup>15</sup>*

At the risk of continuously rehashing the documented impact of the earthquake, it is important to reecho that it affected a considerably large geographical area. Geologists offered a persuasive explanation as to why this was the case. They acknowledge that the occurrence of earthquakes in the same region within a nine-hour interval contributed to the disaster's magnitude. In the same breath, they pointed out that certain maximum acceleration values recorded in the area exceeded those projected in Türkiye's seismic hazard map. Besides the lapses in projections, the civil engineers noted that non-compliance to prevailing building codes was largely responsible for the severe damage incurred.

In other words, the extensive destruction wrought by these earthquakes revealed two crucial truths that would have otherwise gone overlooked. Firstly, it dispelled Türkiye's

presumption that, despite numerous legal and administrative reforms enacted in the aftermath of the 1999 earthquake, the country was adequately prepared to deal with seismic disasters. Secondly, it demonstrated the country's failure to capitalize on the lessons learned over the past twenty-five years and synthesize them into robust policy and comprehensive governance. In fact, it would be no be out of place to assert that such a catastrophic event with regional ramifications of such great magnitude was foreseeable prior to the 6 February earthquakes.<sup>16</sup> This sentiment is evidence-based as research had suggested, based on historical data, that the presence of a seismic gap along the Eastern Anatolian Fault indicates the elevated possibility of a major earthquake in the near future. Consequently, Kahramanmaraş was designated as the pilot province to implement the Provincial Risk Reduction Plan (İl Afet Risk Azaltma Planı [henceforth IRAP]) initiated in 2019, thereby leading to the first IRAP being developed in this province.<sup>17</sup> Despite the implementation of IRAP, no one anticipated a scenario wherein eighteen provinces would simultaneously be brought to their knees by a disaster of such magnitude. Not only did transportation, electrical, and natural gas infrastructure suffer a complete collapse, facilities critical in facilitating emergency responses, such as hospitals and airports, were rendered largely unusable. The sheer scale of destruction and the severity of the calamity left even Türkiye's Disaster Response Plan (Türkiye Afet Müdahale Planı [henceforth TAMP]), revised in 2022, completely null and void, as it relied on emergency intervention by neighboring provinces.<sup>18</sup>

What is more is that the earthquakes of 6 February revealed Türkiye's responsiveness and capacity to promptly execute essential operations within the first seventy-two hours of a disaster to be inadequate, especially when coupled with inclement weather conditions and wide scale logistical collapse. These shortcomings adversely impacted the functionality of vital infrastructure, such as airports, intercity thoroughfares, and energy distribution networks. In light of the catastrophe that unfolded before the eyes of an entire nation, several recommendations can be made to minimize

the loss of life and property when a future earthquake inevitably strikes: Plans to deal with worst-case scenarios need to be formulated for at the regional level; provinces outside the same fault zone, as opposed to neighboring provinces, should be selected to help provide material support and spearhead relief efforts in the event of a major earthquake; alternative transportation routes that factor in the influence of climatic conditions to allow for unfettered access to disaster-stricken areas need to be identified; and, most importantly, comprehensive preemptive studies and infrastructural projects need to be completed before earthquakes even strike. The events of 6 February and their aftermath offer invaluable lessons whilst sounding the alarm that a similar cataclysmic episode could occur should a major earthquake strike in or around the Sea of Marmara, thus providing an impetus to hasten the implementation of the above recommendations. Immediate revision and updating of IRAPs and, more importantly, TAMP are imperative to address the vulnerabilities exposed by the 6 February earthquakes. Therefore, urban areas at heightened risk of damage must likewise prioritize the implementation of risk-mitigation measures and establish robust budgetary and disciplinary mechanisms to ensure the adherence to and enforcement of these measures.

In drawing the curtains, it has to be noted that the creation of more resilient living spaces and the fostering of more resilient communities in cities that have suffered substantial damage from earthquakes should be of topmost priority for professionals engaged in disaster management. As a result, addressing a host of preemptive challenges that might arise in the wake of a disaster is essential for effective post-disaster urban planning. These include minimizing problems prevalent in temporary shelters, designing sustainable living environments in areas currently under construction, prioritizing the restoration of previous social ties in heavily damaged historic districts, improving connectivity between old and new urban areas with reliable public transportation services, and seamlessly integrating work and residential spaces.

- 1 The Disaster and Emergency Management Authority (AFAD) recorded two earthquakes in Kahramanmaraş, Türkiye on 6 February 2023 at 4:17 a.m. and 1:24 p.m. local time. The first of these earthquakes, centered in Pazarcık, registered a magnitude of Mw 7.7 at a depth of 8.5 km whereas the second, centered further north in the district of Elbistan, measured Mw 7.6 at a depth of 7.6. Following a series of field studies, the preliminary assessment report released by Middle Eastern Technical University's DMAM (22 Feb. 2023) outlined the initial seismological, geotechnical, structural, and social impact of the earthquakes. For further details, see DMAM. (2023, 2 February). *Orta Doğu Teknik Üniversitesi 6 Şubat 2023 Kahramanmaraş-Pazarcık Mw=7.7 ve Elbistan Mw=7.6 depremleri ön değerlendirme raporu* [https://eerc.metu.edu.tr/system/files/documents/DMAM\\_2023\\_Kahramanmaraş-Pazarcık\\_ve\\_Elbistan\\_Depremleri\\_Raporu\\_TR\\_final.pdf](https://eerc.metu.edu.tr/system/files/documents/DMAM_2023_Kahramanmaraş-Pazarcık_ve_Elbistan_Depremleri_Raporu_TR_final.pdf)
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# **Disaster Risk Management and February 2023 Kahramanmaraş Earthquakes: Crisis Management in Elbistan**

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Türkiye's topography is highly susceptible to natural disasters, which, compounded by emergent technological disasters, have resulted in profound human casualties and irrecoverable economic loss. As a result, national security and development initiatives have, since 2023, prioritized outcome- and impact-oriented, disaster-resilient urban-planning and community-building strategies to minimize human and material loss. Yet national and local task forces engaged in disaster risk and crisis management have unfortunately fallen short in implementing action plans aiming to mitigate and prevent risk. The deficiencies observed in post-disaster crisis management, inter-institutional coordination, risk management planning, and urbanization highlight the imperative to adopt an interdisciplinary, holistic, and comprehensive approach in addressing research problems. The year 2023 saw several

ever-present hazards make the transition into full-blown disasters. These include forest fires in Türkiye's southern and western coastal regions, flash flood in the country's north, traffic accidents, CBRN incidents, and the Türkiye–Syria earthquakes of 6 February.

Disaster management is an ongoing, recurring process that demands continual refinement. It encompasses readiness (i.e., risk reduction and prevention), disaster response, and post-disaster recovery efforts. Viewed holistically, this cyclical process is made up of interconnected, interdependent stages as opposed to disjointed, independent phases. Embracing principles of resilience and disaster risk reduction, contemporary approaches involve identifying the potential risks posed by natural and technological hazards followed by the implementation of pre-emptive strategies before disasters even occur.<sup>1</sup>

The majority of these initiatives harness the technological resources available to them. Advances in observational and telecommunication satellites, drone technology, and other technological devices help expedite relief efforts and avoid redundancy. Currently, Türkiye operates eight active satellites in orbit around the earth, five of which are dedicated to telecommunications and three to observations. Risk assessment analyses make use of appropriate satellite images to enhance their depth and scope. For instance, rapid damage assessment following an earthquake is made more robust through the use of high-resolution satellite images. Considering their role in shaping effective disaster plans and intervention mechanisms, the importance of these technologies became ever more evident following the Türkiye–Syria earthquakes.

Three separate earthquakes occurred along the Eastern Anatolian Fault during the month of February 2023. The initial two struck the province of Kahramanmaraş. The first, registering Mw 7.7, struck the district of Pazarcık at 4:17 a.m. local time on Monday, 6 February and the second, registering Mw 7.6, struck the district of Elbistan at 1:24 p.m on the same day. The third earthquake, measuring Mw 6.4, struck the district of Yayladağ, Hatay approximately two weeks later on 20 February at 8:04 p.m.<sup>2</sup> The devastation wrought by these earthquakes was greatly amplified by the proliferation of buildings highly susceptible to seismic activity and ground conditions that exacerbated ground motion. In the forthcoming sections of this chapter, I will analyze

the myriad efforts undertaken by Eskişehir Technical University (henceforth ESTU) personnel deployed to Elbistan's Disaster Coordination Center (henceforth DCC) in the two weeks immediately following the two initial earthquakes that rocked Kahramanmaraş and the surrounding provinces.

Figure 1 illustrates several critical steps necessary for the disaster management loop to be successful. As depicted, completing an impact analysis and mapping of the degree damage incurred are, collectively, the foremost step to be taken.

When conditions restrict intervention capacity, it is of paramount importance that all available human and material resources be wielded as judiciously as possible. To ensure that this happens, a triage is performed during all phases of an intervention. Given that time is of the essence, the search for and rescue of injured people trapped under the rubble of completely or partially destroyed buildings is the first act to be undertaken. Disaster coordination centers are expected to assess the conditions on the ground expediently and without undue delay. Response teams in

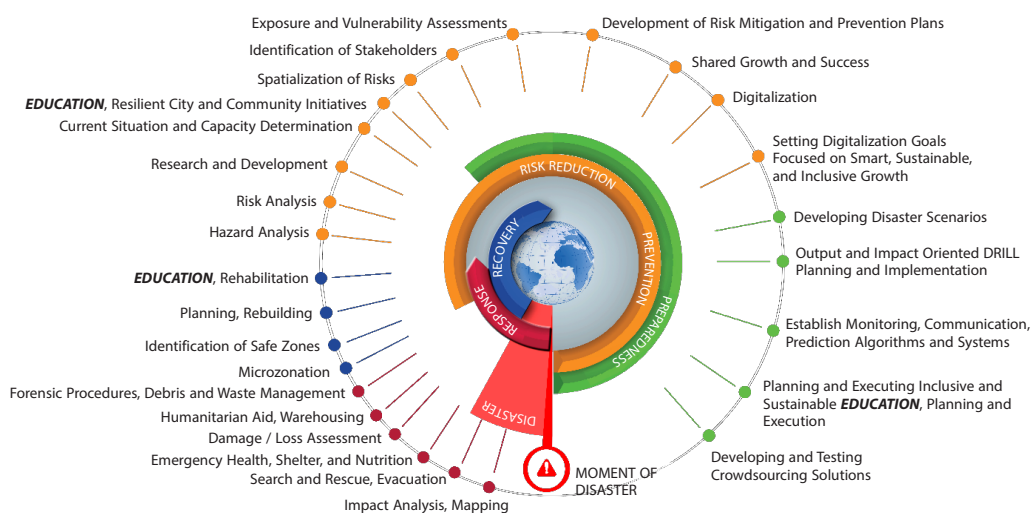


Figure 1 Disaster Management Cycle and Critical Actions

Türkiye's Disaster Response Plan (Türkiye Afet Müdahale Planı [TAMP]) are tasked with carrying out their duties under prevailing conditions, irrespective of their constraints, from the onset of the disaster.

Immediately following the disaster, ESTU mobilized its resources and expertise to commence intervention efforts in accordance to its Directive on Disaster and Emergency Management. Accordingly, ESTU formed a team composed of seven members from the Hasan Polatkan Aircraft Rescue and Fire Fighting Unit and from the university's various departments. Departing from ESTU's İki Eylül Campus with one fire truck and minibus at 11:00 a.m. on Monday, 6 February 2023, this team was to report to the two-person disaster management unit headed by Dr. Muammer Tün, an associate professor at ESTU's Earth and Space Sciences Institute and Department of Earthquake Engineering.

Upon arrival at Elbistan's DCC, the ESTU Search and Rescue Team reported directly to AFAD for duty. Observers identified several hiccups during the intervention phase. The DCC experienced several major issues while registering arriving search and rescue teams and directing them to debris sites. They further noted a pervasive lack of coordination between bodies responsible for assigning duties to these teams and monitoring their progress in real time. The single most critical shortcoming, however, was the absence of any effort to ascertain the precise number and locations of collapsed buildings.

The DCC ESTU Search and Rescue Team found that the ground floor of the specific disaster site to which it had been assigned to work had completely collapsed in on itself. People huddled around the disaster site stated that although several of their loved ones were trapped

under the rubble, they were unable to reach them because of a lack of heavy machinery. Damaged telephone lines and communications infrastructure prevented the team from contacting the DCC to request the necessary equipment to initiate search and rescue operations. Meanwhile, other individuals, themselves with loved ones trapped alive under rubble, conveyed that rescue efforts had begun without the aid of heavy machinery at another disaster site, prompting the team to relocate to that location. Despite team's consistent efforts to keep the DCC abreast of the conditions and developments on the ground, they were unable to establish communications with the center.

Field observations noted communication breakdowns between search and rescue teams and the DCC that not only caused confusion regarding the whereabouts of each team and the severity of injuries sustained by people extracted from under the rubble but also impeded the efficient reassignment of teams to alternative disaster sites. Field conditions further complicated the relay of other critical information, including the precise number of buildings that had collapsed in Elbistan's central districts, in which areas collapsed buildings were concentrated, the number of people requiring rescue at each disaster site, the location of each team, and the identities of those rescued from each site.

In order to expedite search and rescue operations, it was imperative that teams had access to accurate digital maps of the buildings that had been destroyed or suffered damage. Yet, as they lacked the resources to complete these tasks, the ESTU Search and Rescue Team informed the governor in charge of coordinating Elbistan's DCC of the situation and their needs.





Photograph: AA, Berke Bayır

Upon this request, authorities promptly established a Geography Information Systems and Mapping Office within Elbistan's DCC, furnishing it with computers, printers, and other necessarily equipment in addition to a hearty supply of consumable goods. With that, Elbistan's Directorate of Land Management obtained the cadastral surveys of the city and, together with municipality staff, began digitally mapping the area. With access to highly detailed digital maps all located

in a single centralized location, decision-makers were better equipped to manage the chaotic situation in front of them. These maps included the number of collapsed buildings, building codes, geographic coordinates, block-lot information, resident counts, building heights, construction years, and architectural blueprints.

On the second day of the disaster, Elbistan's Police Headquarters provided the DCC a list of collapsed buildings





categorized by neighborhood within the city's central districts that its staff had compiled. Of the 500 total residences destroyed, Elbistan's Kümbet neighborhood bore the brunt of the devastation, with 130 residences wiped off the face of the proverbial map. Still, it was necessary to verify these findings and, once confirmed, produce digital maps before coordinated operations could commence. Accordingly, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) equipped with long-range sensors were deployed over the area to identify which

buildings had indeed been destroyed, as this would expedite search and rescue operations. The coordinated efforts of the Ministry of Environment, Urbanisation and Climate Change, the Directorate General of Geographic Information Systems team, and the UAV team operating under the Ministry of Defense's General Directorate of Mapping produced a series of high-resolution aerial photographs of the city center. An application was submitted to the TÜBİTAK 1002-C Emergency Support Program for Field Studies on Natural Disasters seeking funding to use high-resolution aerial photographs and ground area scanning to pinpoint collapsed buildings, which was promptly accepted. Unfortunately, however, the aforementioned aerial photographs proved to be of no avail, as twenty centimeters (~8 inches) of snow had fallen after the initial earthquakes, effectively camouflaging the buildings that lay underneath. As a result, ESTU's volunteer team set out in vehicles dispatched by the governor of Eskişehir on Thursday, 9 February 2023 to take photographs of all the completely and partially destroyed buildings, as well as those that had sustained severe damage, throughout the fourteen neighborhoods making up Elbistan's urban center. The buildings in these photographs were then correlated with their respective block-lot numbers and geographic coordinates. It cannot be understated how significantly the inability to use digital maps during search and rescue operations hindered teams' otherwise heroic efforts to remove debris and rescue survivors.

The ESTU, Gebze Technical University, and AFAD teams continued working to match the buildings with their geographic coordinates until Sunday, 12 February 2023. This same day they began submitting neighborhood-based reports to the chief prosecutor responsible for overseeing legal procedures in Elbistan.

On the seventh day following the initial earthquakes, statistical reports were published for the neighborhoods of Elbistan that had incurred the highest number of damaged buildings. Specifically, Güneşli recorded 251 completely or partially destroyed buildings, Ceyhan recorded 129, and Kümbet recorded 122. The resulting maps were a major game changer at the DCC. They expedited assessments of the extent of the earthquake's destructive impact, facilitated legal procedures, accelerated debris removal, and streamlined the creation of damage-assessment reports by the treasury.

As we conclude our analysis of Elbistan's response during the first week of the earthquake, the following points must be duly considered:

- It is crucial that the Disaster Information Management, Assessment, and Monitoring Group provide authorized users with 1/1000-scale digital disaster impact maps that are compatible with Türkiye's National Geographic Information System, alongside smart city data layers, within the first twenty-four hours of a disaster.
- Since the use of digital maps that contain real-time data enhances response effectiveness, it is imperative that geographic information systems and remote sensing solution techniques be improved upon, such as by incorporating real-time offline and online server services, and made more widespread.
- Real-time images collected by unmanned aerial vehicles and satellites should be made readily available to all authorized individuals. Local personnel should be trained in how to process, analyze, assess, and interpret this data using the latest software and hardware.
- Decision-makers should be made aware of the importance of developing and leveraged to implement resilient city and community strategies that prioritize disaster risk management.
- Comprehensive policies should be formulated to address both immediate and long-term outcomes. These include restricting the development of areas prone to earthquakes, enforcing regulations that prohibit the construction of earthquake-vulnerable buildings, fostering community resilience through crowd sourcing, and identifying vulnerable social groups.
- A stronger focus should be placed on developing crowd sourced systems that can be utilized in disaster risk management and crisis response. Awareness at the local level should be increased and multidisciplinary capacity-building efforts should be integrated into resilient city and community strategies.

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# Integrated and Systemic Risks

## Seda Kundak

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An earthquake registering Mw 7.7 struck Kahramanmaraş's Pazarcık district at 4:17 a.m. local time on Monday, 6 February 2023. This was followed by numerous aftershocks and a second devastating earthquake registering Mw 7.6, struck the same province's district of Elbistan nine hours later at 1:24 p.m. Then, a mere two weeks later on 20 February, another earthquake registering Mw 6.4 rattled Hatay's district of Yayladağı at 8:04 p.m., already one of the most affected provinces by the initial two earthquakes, thereby greatly exacerbating the scope of devastation. The various disruptions and confusion that hampered Türkiye's response to the February 2023 earthquakes underscore the urgent need of adopting a holistic approach while conducting risk analyses and undertaking damage mitigation works.

The most destructive earthquakes during the Republic of Türkiye's 100-year history prior to 2023 were, respectively, the 1939 Erzincan and 1999 Izmit earthquakes. However, the February 2023 earthquakes—known internationally as the 2023 Türkiye–Syria earthquakes—surpassed these two previous events both in the extent of area they affected and in the magnitude of loss of life and property they caused. The similarities and differences in the effects of these earthquakes highlight the necessity for develop-

ing more robust preventative measures and crafting more comprehensive disaster intervention plans.

### Time

The majority of risk analyses either neglect to take into account time altogether or relegate it to a position of secondary importance. Just as time can refer to seasonal or meteorological conditions, it is also an important variable for assessing daily activity patterns. The harsh winter conditions that accompanied the Erzincan earthquake of 27 December 1939 and the February 2023 earthquakes significantly complicated disaster response efforts, resulting in more urgent and dire situations compared to the otherwise catastrophic Izmit earthquake of 17 August 1999. Moreover, the 1939 Erzincan earthquake struck at 1:57 a.m., the 1999 Izmit earthquake at 3:02 a.m., and the 2023 Türkiye–Syria earthquakes at 4:17 a.m., catching much of the local populations, many of whom were still fast asleep in their homes, completely off guard. These three earthquakes coincidentally occurred at a similar time during the day, at the wee hours of the morning, reminding us that future earthquakes can always strike at similar times. Taking a step back and looking a bit more broadly at the most destructive earthquakes of the twenty-first century,



we find that the 2004 Sumatra earthquake struck at 8:58 a.m. local time, the 2010 Haiti earthquake at 9:53 p.m., and the 2008 Sichuan earthquake at 2:28 p.m.

Urban activity likewise spikes during certain times of the day, with different parts of a city experiencing more or less traffic depending on specific daily events. Transportation arteries see significantly higher levels of traffic on weekdays before noon, made up largely of individuals on their

way to work or school. Traffic again rises in the afternoon when students are released from school, reaching its peak when workers set out on their return trip home for the evening. Come the weekend, however, we observe surges of vehicle traffic and human activity around recreation areas, shopping centers, cultural venues, and restaurants. The intensity of this activity does depend largely on the weather and prevailing seasonal conditions. Traffic between cities, for instance, is particularly high during summer months



Photograph: AA, Ayhan İçen

and holidays, periods that similarly coincide with a substantial influx of tourists. While domestic tourists may be aware of the risks associated with the areas they visit, their foreign counterparts often lack such knowledge. Furthermore, language barriers place foreign tourists in an even more precarious situation should a disaster strike.<sup>1</sup>

Another issue affected by time is the updating of census and land use data. Advances in information and remote sensing technologies allow specialists to compile and analyze detailed reports that would have only come into existence after weeks, if not months, of tedious field surveys in the last century. Databases must be kept as up to date as possible so that alternative intervention plans may be developed in accordance to ever-changing urban and regional risk levels.

### **Root Causes**

Analyses of disasters' root causes demonstrate that problems extend beyond issues of structural integrity, encompassing political, economic, and social dimensions. Mitigating risks and instilling a culture of disaster preparedness require sustained, long-term efforts. Moreover, whether specific regulations have their intended effects often becomes apparent only in the aftermath of a major catastrophic event. Regrettably, however, adherence to mandated regulations may not always be prioritized in contexts where competing societal demands drown out calls for building disaster-resistant cities and policies follow a more populist trajectory. In order to pinpoint the exact root causes of a specific disaster requires one to discuss causal relationships in light of how such concepts as informal makeshift settlements, immigration, and regional disparities have evolved over time.

Urban risks in Türkiye include problems stemming from land use decisions, rapid urbanization, retroactive zon-

ing amnesty and the high-risk structures permitted to remain standing as a result, and current building inspection regulations. For instance, Istanbul's current population of sixteen million people has increased at a rate higher than the national average since the 1980s (see Figure 1). The growing disparity can be attributed to the wider variety of work and educational opportunities that Istanbul offers its inhabitants, largely unavailable in the other parts of Türkiye from which they had emigrated. The flow of immigrants that caused Istanbul's urban population to grow by roughly 250% during the 1980s greatly strained the city's already stressed housing situation. Türkiye's larger cities had already experienced a rise in informal makeshift settlements and unlicensed buildings in the 1950s, many of which avoided government repossession following retroactive zoning amnesty schemes. The construction of residential dwellings and urbanization initiatives following the 1999 Izmit earthquake failed to consider all of the country's socioeconomic groups, thereby reinforcing the link between poverty and vulnerable structures.

Adana, Gaziantep, Diyarbakır, Şanlıurfa, and Hatay—cities affected by the 2023 Türkiye–Syria earthquakes reveals—all experienced a surge of immigration starting in the 1970s as investments in Türkiye's industrial infrastructure were incentivized. Urban growth slowly ate more and more away from the agricultural, pasture, and forest areas of these cities. After the year 2000, cities began a process of urban revitalization and transformation to improve public services and utilities and to rehabilitate collapsed urban infrastructure and areas in which unlicensed buildings had proliferated. As a result of these efforts, this period corresponded with a profound increase in urban sprawl and vertical growth.<sup>2</sup>

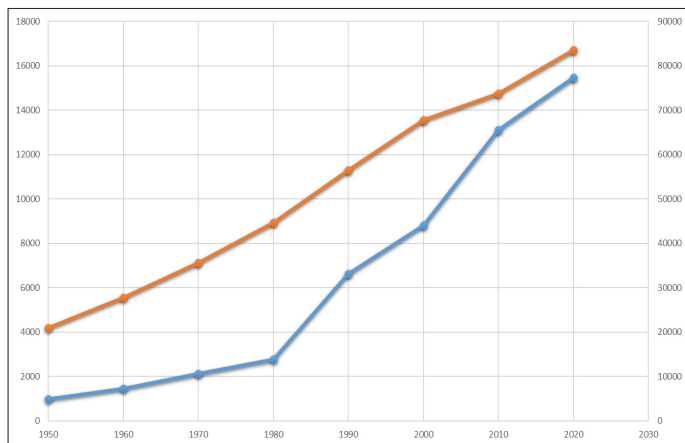


Figure 1 Population increase in Türkiye (orange) and Istanbul (blue) from 1950 to 2020

### Cascading Impacts

Studies exploring cascading disasters attempt to predict the potential aftermath of future disasters based on past events. To this end, experts conduct in-depth analyses on factors believed to trigger the initial effect that will unleash a successive chain of events as well as on the vulnerabilities of elements that could be affected by these factors. These analyses not only aid in forecasting how the aftermath of future disasters may pan out but also foreshadow of any potential hiccups during disaster responses and the logistics that support them. While cascading disaster analyses help experts untangle complex webs of effects precipitated by natural disasters, their utility extends well beyond disaster response systems by helping urban planners determine metrics to use while creating effective plans for residential areas exposed to natural hazards.<sup>3</sup>

Natural hazards can cascade into both natural and human-induced disasters. Not only can earthquakes trigger

tsunamis, landslides, or other natural disasters, they can instigate fires or explosions in industrial facilities and urban environments. Given this dual-faceted nature, urban and regional risk analyses should be conducted as part of broader integrated hazard analyses, as this will allow for the development of more effective multifactorial response scenarios that take into account the meteorological and temporal considerations discussed above.

### Systemic Risks

Systemic risks refer to the negative effects resulting from the degradation or complete collapse of multiple interconnected systems following a disaster. The COVID-19 pandemic serves as a salient case study for understanding such systemic risks. The measures taken to bring the pandemic's spread under control caused severe disruptions in global production and supply chains. The reason COVID-19 had such profound global effects was because the networks linking countries and cities to one another have grown and merged together to unprecedented levels via globalization. While these networks facilitated the exchange of goods produced in different parts of the world, they also had the potential to amplify local problems by spreading them across vast geographical areas. The underlying causes and effects of global crises demonstrate just how critical systemic risks truly are.

The 1999 Izmit earthquake wrought widespread destruction on Kocaeli, one of Türkiye's leading industrial centers, which had the adverse affect of driving up prices and disrupting production throughout the entire country. Consequently, the mid- and long-term effects of the 2023 Türkiye–Syria earthquakes are therefore predicted to have similar repercussions. Disasters' systemic effects on tem-



porary and permanent migration are yet another issue that should be examined, as it is estimated that roughly five million individuals affected by the 2023 earthquakes relocated to Ankara, Antalya, Mersin, and other provinces in Türkiye.

### Organization

In addition to the countless legal regulations that were put into effect in the aftermath of the 1999 Izmit earthquake, Türkiye founded the Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD) in 2009. Soon thereafter in 2012, AFAD prepared the country's first national-level response plan, Türkiye's Disaster Response Plan (TAMP). While this plan did indeed increase Türkiye's national capacity to stage coordinated responses, several gaps remain in its implementation at the local level. The discrepancy between this top-down disaster response system and the local means to bring these plans into fruition has resulted in efforts having largely remained on paper without being translated into reality. Consequently, local governments cannot be considered full participants in the disaster response system. Indeed, the governments of most small and medium-sized communities struggle to fund municipal projects, let alone those necessary to ensure the smooth executing of disaster response plans.

### Conclusion

Earthquakes not only inflict massive physical damage to residential areas but also trigger widespread systemic shocks by disrupting highly interconnected urban networks. The fact that cities and urban systems are comprised of dynamic structures necessitates that studies conducted in this field take into account time-dependent trends and changes.

While the legal regulations enacted and organizational models developed in the aftermath of the 1999 Izmit earthquake played a crucial role in defining risk mitigation and disaster response procedures, the collaborative milieu in which multiple stakeholders can collectively engage in research and development to produce and implement solutions has yet to manifest its full potential.

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# 2023: The Year of the Wildfire in Türkiye and the Wider World

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Wildfires have caused serious ecological, economic, and social repercussions throughout the world in the last decade or so. As such, 2023 became known as the year that harrowing disasters wrought widespread destruction unto various regions of the earth. Canada experienced the most devastating wildfires since her founding,<sup>1</sup> in which 18.5 million hectares (5.1% of the country's total forested area) were consumed by flames as of November 2023.<sup>2</sup> During

the same period, wildfires ravaged an area of roughly 1.2 million hectares of American woodlands.<sup>3</sup> Europe was not spared of its share of wildfires, with Spain losing 83,937 hectares, France 22,075 hectares, Portugal 31,000 hectares, Italy 62,201 hectares, and Greece 129,332 hectares in November alone. Greece suffered particularly significant losses of life and property as a result of these fires.<sup>4</sup>



Photograph: AA, Çiğdem Münibe Akyanak

The number of wildfires and total area of wooded land incinerated by these fires in Türkiye in 2023 largely resemble figures from previous years. Türkiye has maintained official statistics for forest fires since 1937. Over the eighty-seven years from this year until November 2023, Türkiye experienced a total of 1,398 fires that accounted for 21,573 hectares of damage. This averages to 20.9 hectares of charred land per incident. That said, however, the year 1988 saw significant advancements in Türkiye's organizational and technical capacity to combat fires. In the last thirty-five years since these improvements, a total of 2,186 wildfires resulted in 14,722 hectares' worth of land affected (see Figure 1),<sup>5</sup> translating to an average of 6.4 hectares of burned area per incident.

ten hectares, 3.5% between ten and fifty hectares, 0.6% between fifty and one hundred hectares, 0.5% between 100 and 500 hectares, and 0.2% more than 500 hectares. These figures resemble long-term data.<sup>7</sup> Of the wildfires that caused more than 500 hectares' worth of damage in 2023, however, two fires that erupted in close proximity to each other in Çanakkale, Türkiye on 16 July 2023 and 22 August are of particular significance.

These two fires were analyzed using remote sensing and geographic information systems. Differenced Normalized Burn Ratio (dNBR)<sup>8</sup> indices were used to determine burn severity. To this end, pre- (14 July 2023) and post-fire (5 and 30 August 2023) Sentinel-2 satellite imagery for the

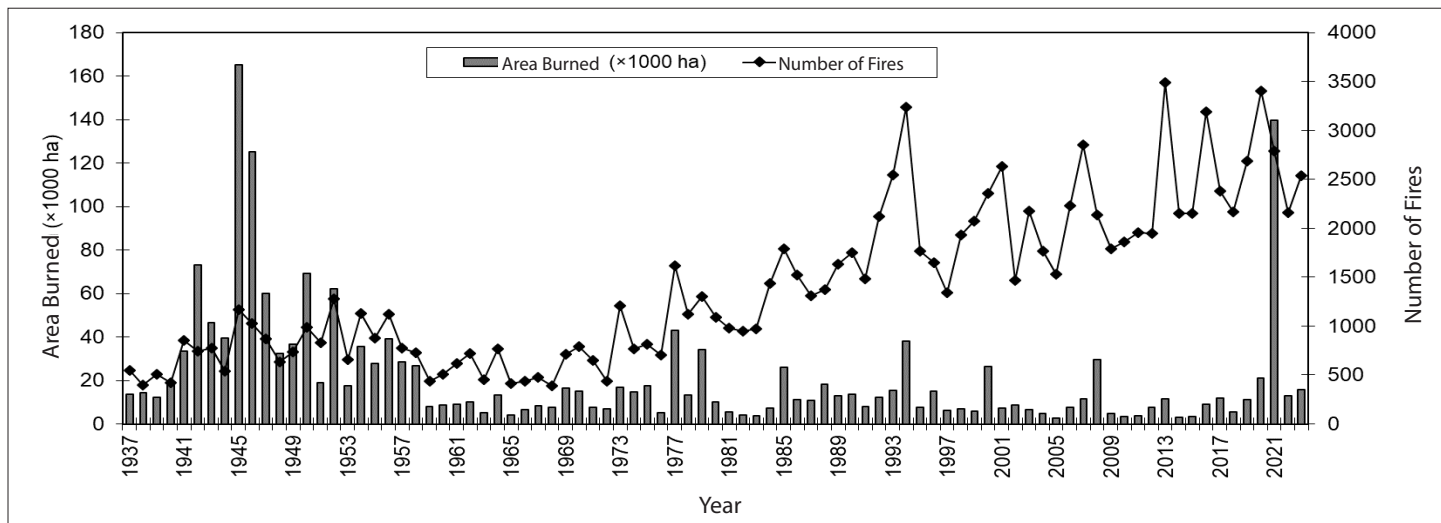


Figure 1 Number of wildfires and amount of area burned in Türkiye between 1937 and 2023 (2023 data as of November)<sup>6</sup>

Based on 2023 figures, a total of 2,539 wildfires decimated 15,616 hectares of land between 1 January and 15 November 2023. Of these fires, 75.3% affected less than one hectare of woodland, 19.9% between one and

affected areas were compared to determine the magnitude of wildfires and how much combustible organic material was consumed.<sup>9</sup> Temporal data for the fires were monitored using satellite data obtained from NASA's Fire Information for Resource Management System (FIRMS).<sup>10</sup> The analyses found that the fire starting on 16 July 2023



raged for roughly three days and affected 2,754.7 hectares of land (agricultural, forested, and other areas). In terms of burn severity, 60.6% of the burned area was classified as low, 33.7% as moderate, and 5.7% as high. Notably, none of the areas affected experienced very high levels of burn severity (see Figure 2a). The fire that began on 22 August 2023 also lasted for approximately three days and affected

3,419 hectares of land (agricultural, forested, and other areas). With respect to burn severity, 23% of the burned area was classified as low, 30.2% as moderate, and 25.7% as high, and 21% as very high (see Figure 2b).

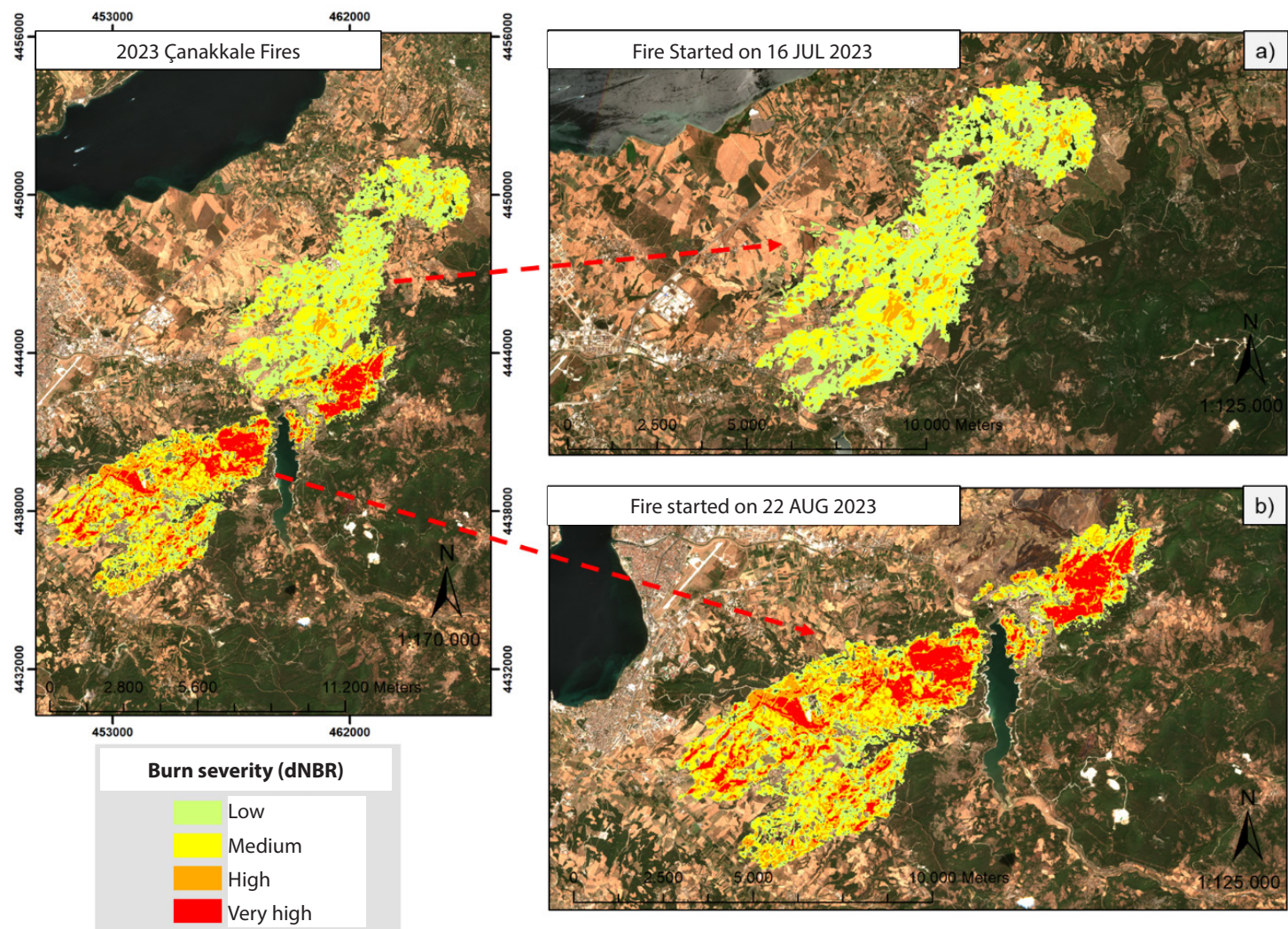


Figure 2 Differenced Normalized Burn Ratio (dNBR) for wildfires that occurred in Çanakkale, Türkiye in 2023



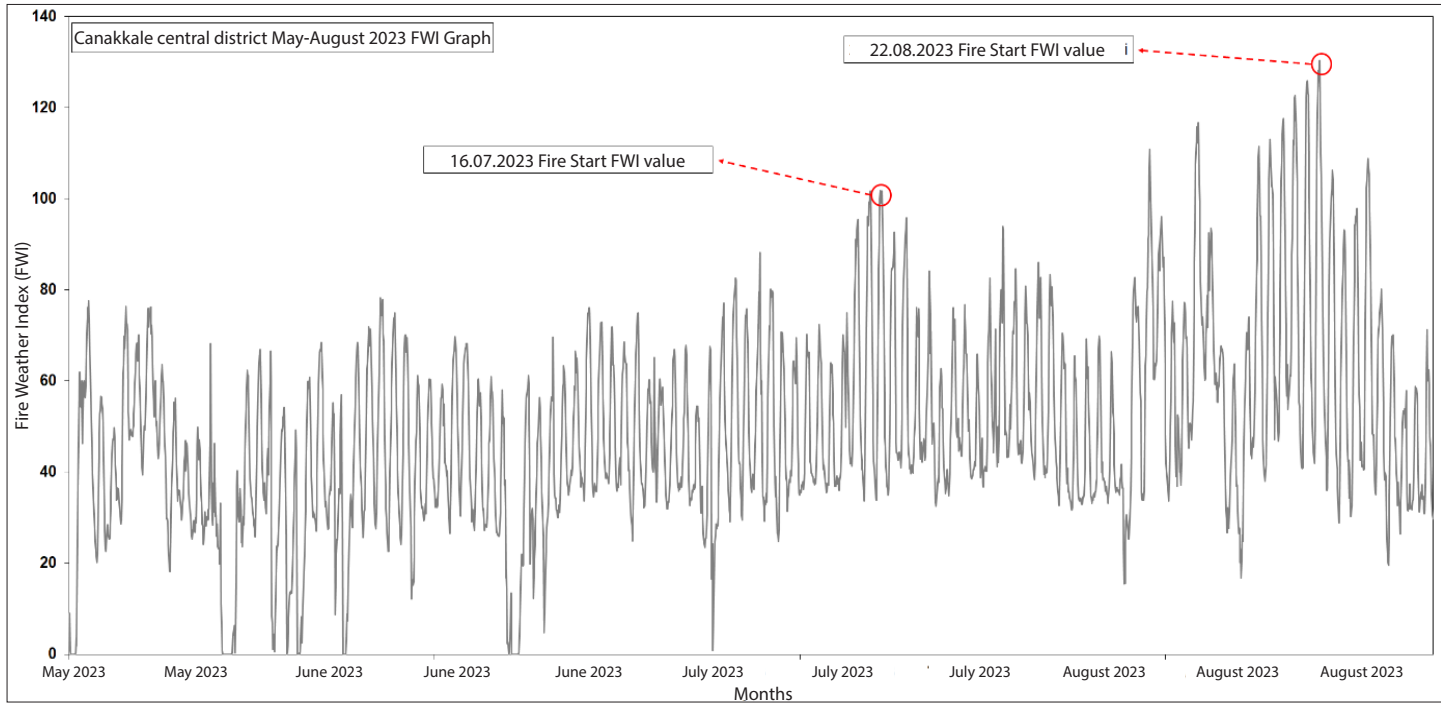


Figure 3 Fire Weather Index for Çanakkale's central districts (1 May–31 August 2023)<sup>12</sup>

The northeasterly Poyraz wind exacerbated the severity of the fires by decreasing the relative humidity of the air in the region. The drop in relative humidity and persistent winds had the effect of rapidly drying extant dead surface material, thereby increasing the risk of spontaneous combustion. Türkiye's online Fire Weather Index (FWI) system reported FWI values of 99 and 123 on 16 July and 22 August, respectively (see Figure 3),<sup>11</sup> indicating an imminent risk of spontaneous combustion. The high temperature, low relative humidity, and exceptionally strong winds in the days leading up to 22 August depleted moisture from organic materials and caused significantly elevated FWI values. This, coupled with higher quantities of combustible surface material compared to the first wildfire, contributed to the second wildfire's markedly higher burn severity level.

Land-based efforts were coordinated with aerial fire suppression operations were throughout 2023 in Türkiye. A total of 124 aerial vehicles—one hundred helicopters and twenty-four airplanes—were deployed over the year, marking a 17% increase in the number of aerial vehicles used during fire suppression operations compared to 2022. Aerial vehicles dropped 106,377 metric tons of water during 2023, representing a 52% increase from 2022. An additional ten unmanned aerial vehicles took part in early detection and fire monitoring operations during 2023. Land-based fire suppression efforts involved 2,453 first responder vehicles, 1,560 water tenders, and 786 heavy machinery units. In terms of manpower, 22,053 firefighters were deployed and an additional 119,000 volunteers received training in wildfire suppression.<sup>13</sup>

### Causes of wildfires in Türkiye

The four primary causes of wildfires are arson, human negligence, natural phenomena such as lightning, and unknown causes. A significant portion of fires whose causes are unknown can nevertheless be attributed to various human activities, such as campfires, escaped debris burning, and discarded cigarette butts.<sup>14</sup> Of the wildfires originating in Türkiye between 1997 and 2022, 9% were attributed to arson, 46% to human negligence, 11% to natural phenomena, and 34% to unknown causes. These figures indicate that humans were responsible for 89% of all cases. When focusing in specifically on the areas burned, however, we observe that 19% were burned as a result of arson, 51% as a result of human negligence, 2% as a result of natural phenomena, and 28% as a result of unknown causes,<sup>15</sup> meaning that a colossal 98% of wildfires affecting Türkiye's forests were a result of human activity.

Recent statistics on wildfires reveal a notable uptick in fires originating from electrical lines compared to previous years, with 17%, 27%, and 19% of forested areas incurring damage as a result of fires along power lines in 2020, 2021, and 2022, respectively.<sup>16</sup> As such, power lines passing through forests should be well maintained, combustible materials should be kept away from near power lines and transformers, and operational audits should be performed.

### Firefighting operations

The fight against wildfires is a three-tiered endeavor. The taking of prevention and preparedness measures prior to a wildfire constitutes the first two tiers. As the name implies, prevention measures aim to prevent wildfires from starting altogether. Preparedness measures, on the other

hand, seek to mitigate the extent of damage caused by wildfires when they do occur. The final tier involves the response strategies aimed at suppressing and extinguishing active wildfires.

By aiming to prevent wildfires from igniting altogether or minimizing their occurrence, prevention measures serve as the first line of defense against wildfires. Proactive prevention is the most effective strategy in the fight against wildfires. Since the overwhelming majority of wildfires in Türkiye are a result of human activity, with negligence being the most common cause thereof, the single most important safeguard is to conduct awareness-raising campaigns targeting residents living in wildfire-prone areas that seek to educate them about the causes of wildfires and what they can personally do to prevent their occurrence. Given this, public institutions, universities, the private sector, and civil society organizations should collaborate with one another to ensure that all the necessary steps are taken in this regard.

Preparedness measures are the second major bulwark against the threat of wildfires, as they seek to mitigate the damage and negative ecological and economic effects they cause. Safeguards generally include regulations governing the responsible management of combustible organic matter in fire-prone areas, such as roadsides, agricultural areas, and residential zones adjacent to woodlands. Fires originating near to forested areas have the potential to spread into forests themselves. Combustible matter should be disposed of systematically with proper oversight after fire risk analyses are conducted in such areas. Plans should include tree pruning to prevent vertical overgrowth and the cleanup of organic ground debris in designated areas.

Fire preparedness measures also involve managing combustible matter originating from residential zones near forested areas. As seen in the catastrophic wildfires that occurred in Türkiye in 2021, the damage caused to several villages and urban homes was not a direct result of the original fires reaching these areas. On the contrary, the damage to these areas was caused by smoldering arboreal debris and embers carried by the convection column and wind that fell onto these areas and started new fires.<sup>17</sup> Though the fire did not directly reach homes and businesses, small pieces of burning bark and tree branches from the main fire landed on building roofs in nearby residential areas, causing homes and businesses to burst into flames and lives to be lost. Caution must therefore be exercised when selected building materials in fire-prone areas, especially those adjacent to woodlands. It is likewise crucial to reduce the amount of combustible matter found around homes and to use fire-resistant plant species while landscaping in residential zones. Indeed, all landscaping efforts should take into account areas' susceptibility to wildfires. This includes the planting of trees and other vegetation throughout cities and around homes. Forest restoration and rehabilitation efforts should focus primarily on cultivating and ensuring the continuity of native species.

Suppression methods constitute the final tier in the fight against wildfires. Wildfire suppression efforts in Türkiye rely predominantly on direct interventions, such as land-based and aerial operations that utilize water to extinguish the fires. Recent advances in technology, combined with the dedicated work of all firefighting personnel and heightened public awareness, have significantly enhanced the effectiveness of wildfire management. Considerable funds have been allocated from the national budget for aerial vehicles and other firefighting equipment. Never-

theless, it is crucial to acknowledge that fire suppression operations alone do not eliminate the wildfire threat. Resources and attention dedicated to firefighting should also be directed toward prevention and preparedness efforts.

Wildfire management plans outline prevention and preparedness measures and firefighting methods to combat wildfires. Developed with input from all stakeholders, these long-term plans cover all aspects of wildfire management and are specially tailored for the unique needs of individual regions. Such plans are commonplace in countries like the United States, Canada, and Australia, in all of which wildfires pose serious threats. Similar plans are now being implemented in fire-prone regions of Türkiye,<sup>18</sup> building upon pilot programs previously conducted in different parts of the country.<sup>19</sup> However, issues have been noted in the creation, oversight, and implementation of these plans. Furthermore, the content of plans should be updated to incorporate modern technologies and to take into account the evolving realities of specific regions. As such, comprehensive workshops led by field experts should be organized to formulate and promulgate appropriate standards for the development and implementation of wildfire management plans. The significance of this cannot be overstated, as projections indicate a decrease in rainfall and a rise in temperatures as the ongoing climate crisis continues to escalate. Consequently, these shifts will likely result in prolonged droughts across the Mediterranean basin, including Türkiye. If these scenarios do indeed materialize, areas that already experience frequent wildfires may observe an increase in both the frequency and number of such incidents. Similarly, regions where wildfires were once relatively uncommon but that contain an abundance of combustible matter will likely see larger, more destructive wildfires in the future.<sup>20</sup>

### Strategies for combating future wildfires

Wildfires are an inextricable and natural part of the Mediterranean basin's ecosystem—including Türkiye. Nevertheless, changes in land use, human migration patterns, and forestry practices have altered the properties of combustible organic matter,<sup>21</sup> thus precipitating a shift in the region's wildfire portfolio. The climate crisis, the impacts of which have become increasingly felt in recent years, has resulted in short-term anomalies in weather patterns, affected the typical behavior of wildfires, and intensified the destructive power of wildfires. Large-scale, highly destructive wildfires have had profound ecological, economic, and social consequences, many of which were made manifest during the fires that engulfed large swaths of Türkiye's Aegean and Mediterranean basin in July and August of 2021.<sup>22</sup> The loss of life, evacuated residential areas, and numerous homes, tourist facilities, and agricultural areas that succumbed to these fires are but one aspect of these consequences. While long-term statistics place 2023 well within the normal threshold, necessary precautions against wildfires should be put into place in order to ward off potentially larger disasters that, given the new realities discussed above, could easily rear their head in the near future.

The following recommendations can therefore be made:

- The same amount of resources and attention allocated to fire prevention and suppression should be afforded to developing prevention and preparedness measures to prevent wildfires from occurring in the first place and to reduce the amount of damage wrought by fires that do occur.
- Fire management plans should be developed, implemented, and improved upon in areas prone to wildfires. Emerging technologies should be integrated into these plans and the unique needs of each area should be taken into consideration to bolster their effectiveness even further.
- Expensive ground-based and aerial systems equipped with state-of-the-art technologies have become indispensable in fire detection, monitoring, and suppression operations. Since it is imperative that the individuals charged with operating these systems do so effectively, technical personnel and staff must undergo specialized training tailored for firefighting operations. Despite such training, however, the desired level of effectiveness was not always achieved. As such, standards for all personnel involved in wildfire management, including pilots deployed in aerial fire suppression operations, need to be developed, regular training instituted, and audit systems put into place. This will not only prevent unnecessary loss of life and property but also enhance the effectiveness of firefighting operations.
- Fire danger rating systems equipped with the latest technologies can assist firefighting professionals make decisions pertaining to pre-fire planning, fire suppression, and post-fire operations. It is thus imperative to develop computer-based decision support systems that can be integrated into extant fire prevention and suppression endeavors.
- Despite Türkiye's susceptibility to wildfires and the substantial financial investment in firefighting efforts, there is a dearth of researchers in academia and the public sector studying wildfires. As such, research on wildfires should be allocated special funds and be supported through diverse government-sponsored programs. Moreover, universities should partner with the public sector both to train new researchers in wildfire studies and to ensure the practical application of research findings.

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# International Migration in 2023 and its Reverberations in Türkiye

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International migration has had a profound impact on Türkiye over the last decade. Regional conflicts, foremost among which being the Syrian Civil War, and widespread instability have triggered numerous waves of forced migration into Türkiye. In addition to economic growth, the various work, investment, and education opportunities offered by Türkiye have attracted many more to relocate to the country voluntarily. The number of regular migrants hosted by Türkiye reached 4.6 million by the end of 2023. This total included 3.2 million Syrian nationals with temporary protective status, 1,113,761 foreign nationals living in Türkiye with residence permits, and 262,638 nations of other countries with international protective status.<sup>1</sup>

Official figures from 2023 show a decrease of 200 thousand residence permits compared to the previous year. While the number of Russian and Ukrainian nationals legally residing in Türkiye fell by approximately thirty percent toward the end of 2023 following the crisis that embroiled both countries. Meanwhile, the number of Syrian nationals with temporary protective status decreased by roughly half a million over the previous two years. Factors contributing

to this decline include repatriation to Syria, the acquisition of Turkish citizenship, and relocation to third countries. As of 2023, a total of 600 thousand individuals were reported to have voluntarily returned to Syria, including forty to forty-two thousand returnees following the Türkiye–Syria earthquakes of 6 February 2023. An additional 238 thousand Syrian nationals were granted Turkish citizenship.<sup>2</sup> While the number of Syrians resettled to third countries from Türkiye through various programs exceeded sixty thousand in 2023,<sup>3</sup> the number of individuals applying for international protection during the same year dipped to around nineteen thousand—a forty-percent decrease compared to the previous year. Afghans (13,068), Iraqis (2,776), and Iranians (1,416) constituted the top three applicant nationalities, respectively.

The primary focus of Türkiye’s humanitarian efforts in 2023, including those dealing with migration, revolved around the emergency response and recovery operations undertaken to relieve the massive devastation wrought by the Türkiye–Syria earthquakes. While the epicenter of the first two earthquakes was in Türkiye’s Kahraman-

maraş province, both Türkiye and Syria suffered staggering losses, with a combined death toll of fifty-eight thousand across both countries. Considering that roughly fifty percent of Türkiye's Syrian population living in the country under temporary protection resided in the eleven provinces affected by the earthquakes, roughly 1.8 million of the total sixteen million affected individuals were either Syrian refugees or migrants of other countries.<sup>4</sup>

The earthquakes inflicted severe psychological trauma upon Türkiye's immigrant and native populations, leaving many displaced, their sources of livelihood destroyed, and their access to basic public services, including education, seriously disrupted. To facilitate the movement of Syrian refugees living in the earthquake zone, authorities temporarily suspended the domestic travel restrictions placed on them and introduced legislation allowing them to travel to Syria and return unhindered within six months. However, subsequent studies examining the situation of refugees and immigrants living in the affected region revealed that their status had only become more precarious as a result of the social and economic hardships they experienced following the disaster. Already displaced individuals lost their homes once again, faced ostracism as a result of mounting disinformation and hate speech, and were impeded from accessing information and essential public services. All of these factors only heightened the need for sustainable protective measures.<sup>5</sup> Immigrants from Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, and Somalia reported facing social tension, difficulties finding work and housing, and rising rent prices after the earthquakes.<sup>6</sup>

Immediately following the earthquakes, volunteers from throughout Türkiye and the greater world poured into the earthquake disaster zone, where they took part in search and rescue, emergency assistance, and relief operations led

by AFAD, the Turkish Red Crescent (henceforth TRC), and other humanitarian organizations. Having been completely devastated by the earthquakes, the affected areas' social networks and economies needed to be rebuilt from the ground up. As such, organizations and individuals from all segments of society and walks of life pooled their resources to see to the housing, educational, healthcare, psychological and financial needs of all those affected, including those of refugees and immigrants. The Turkish government, joined by various UN agencies, the EU, the IFRC, and domestic NGOs, spearheaded a coordinated, multi-pronged humanitarian response. The following is a non-exhaustive list of the projects that were part of this response:

- **Collective Kindness**—Provided cash assistance to help the most vulnerable households among migrant and local populations meet their basic needs [World Food Programme (WFP), IFRC, TRC].
- **Children First**—Provided families with children under the age of eighteen a one-time cash transfer [UNICEF, Turkish Ministry of Family and Social Services, TRC].
- **Refugee Protection, Community Outreach and Solutions in Urban Areas Project**—Provided protection services to people affected by earthquakes [UNHCR, Association for Solidarity with Asylum Seekers and Migrants (ASAM)].
- **Evidence-based humanitarian response to people affected by earthquakes in Kahramanmaraş and Hatay provinces of Türkiye**—Provided integrated protection and basic water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) services to local and migrant communities, including people with disabilities [International Organization for Migration (IOM), EU].

- **Child, Adolescent and Family Support Hubs**—Provided protection and psychosocial support services to children and families affected by the earthquakes (UNICEF, SGDD).
- **WFP Early Recovery by SES**—Provided earthquake survivors employment opportunities (WFP, ASAM).
- **Facilitating Access to Education for Earthquake Survivor Children** (Turkish Ministry of Education, Taipei Economic and Cultural Mission in Ankara, ASAM).
- **Empowerment Program with Local Support**—Provided micro-grants to support projects developed by communities affected by the earthquakes (Support to Life, Center for Disaster Philanthropy).
- **Rebuilding Lives: Empowering People Affected by Earthquakes**—Provided humanitarian and financial support to 400 Afghan refugee and immigrant families living in the earthquake disaster zone (Turkish Philanthropy Funds, Afghan Refugees Solidarity Association).

Efforts to stem irregular migration were another major issue on Türkiye's 2023 immigration policy agenda. An excess of 247 thousand irregular migrants were apprehended in 2023, a figure similar to the previous year. Topping this list were migrants from Afghanistan, followed by those from Syria. In addition to enhancing border security by building walls, electro-optical surveillance towers, and thermal camera outposts, mobile immigration patrols were deployed throughout Türkiye's cities were increased to identify irregular migrants living with expired visas or residence permits. By December 2023, mobile immigration checkpoints had been established in all of Türkiye's metropolitan cities. Of the roughly 143 thousand irregular migrants identified by

these checkpoints, forty-seven thousand were moved to immigration detention centers to prepare them for their eventual deportation.<sup>7</sup> Efforts continue to be taken to curb migrant smuggling and human trafficking, both of which, in addition to being major sources of irregular migration, pose significant threats to human safety worldwide. Government-led operations ended in the arrest of more than ten thousand migrant smugglers in 2023, the highest figure in the past decade. Türkiye's coast guard report that more than fifty thousand irregular migrants were rescued and 152 migrant smugglers indicted as a result of their maritime operations. Beyond this, 211 instances of human trafficking were identified.

In line with Türkiye's Strategy Document and National Action Plan on Irregular Migration 2021–2025, several projects were launched to enhance border governance, root out irregular migration at its source, expedite voluntary repatriation, and foster international collaborative initiatives. These include:

- **Enforcing Capacities for Application of Alternative Measures to Detention in Türkiye (ENACT)**—Provided technical support to the Presidency of Migration Management and Provincial Directorates of Migration as they attempted to implement alternative measures to detention [Presidency of Migration Management, International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD)].
- Agreements were signed to create an electronic readmission case management system to expedite the safe and humane repatriation of Pakistan nationals living in Türkiye [Presidency of Migration Management, National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA)].



- **Establishment of Assisted Voluntary Return Coordination Centres in Türkiye (RETOUR Project)**—Inaugurated the Voluntary Return Coordination Centre in Istanbul [Presidency of Migration Management, ICMPD].

Moving on to regular migration in Türkiye, efforts are underway to develop systematic, data-driven policies, strengthen institutional capacities and inter-agency cooperation, restructure the national asylum system, and support migrants' social and economic integration. These works involve key actors, such as Türkiye's Presidency of Migration Management and TRC, as well as the IOM, UNHCR, ICMPD, local governments, and domestic NGOs. The following is a non-exhaustive list of projects either initiated or ongoing in 2023:

- **Reinforce Effectiveness of National Asylum Procedures in Compliance with International Standards and National Legislation** (Presidency of Migration Management, UNHCR),
- **Strengthening Analysis and Operational Capacity to Improve the Regular Migration Policy Framework in Türkiye** (Presidency of Migration Management, ICMPD),
- **Agricultural Employment for Refugees and Turkish Citizens through Enhanced Market Linkages Project**—Conducted as part of TRC's Socio-economic Empowerment Program (TRC, World Bank, Agricultural Credit Cooperatives of Turkey); Support for Transition to Labor Market Project (World Bank, EU),
- **Promoting Decent Work for Syrians Under Temporary Protection and Turkish Citizens**—Aimed to facilitate access to the formal labor market (International Labour Organization, Türkiye's Ministry of Labour and Social Security),
- **Increasing Capacity of Municipalities on Migration Data Management Project**—Supported fifteen pilot municipalities in their efforts to improve data-driven policies (RESLOG Turkey, Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation).

The year 2023 also saw Türkiye play an increasingly active role in shaping the agenda on international migration. As part of Türkiye's efforts to develop bilateral and multilateral migration agreements, the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) organized venues where multiple stakeholders could discuss and share information on effective migration management. Notable projects included the Vienna Migration Conference, which sought to develop sustainable solutions to global displacement,<sup>8</sup> and **MAGNET: Migration Management Authorities Networking Event**, which aimed to enhance multi-actor operational cooperation in migration management (Presidency of Migration Management, ICMPD).

Alongside traditional methods for managing regular and irregular migration, new practices that externalize migration processing became increasingly widespread around the world. One notable example of such practices was the establishment of Safe Mobility Offices in South and Central American countries that cater to individuals seeking humanitarian protection and other legal migration pathways to the USA, Spain, and Canada. Albeit temporarily halted by the Albanian Constitutional Court, the Italy–Albania Deal sought to allow Albania to house up to thirty-six thousand migrants arriving in Italy by sea while

their asylum applications were processed. This deal, like the controversial Tunisia–EU memorandum that sought to prevent irregular migration into Europe, is anticipated to be a focal point in next year’s discussions on how the EU’s New Pact on Migration and Asylum will shape international migration trends. The most significant development toward the end of 2023 was the forced displacement of approximately 1.8 million Palestinians as a result of Israel’s indiscriminate carpet bombing and intensification of the sixteen-year unlawful blockade of the Gaza Strip following Hamas’ 7 October attempt to break the inhumane siege imposed on ordinary Gazans by the Israeli state.<sup>9</sup> This ever-deepening humanitarian crisis and potential forced displacements are expected to remain at the very fore of next year’s discussions on migration.

As for Türkiye, the post-earthquake era has highlighted the importance of implementing development-oriented migration policies that aim to enhance migrants’ resilience toward crises, that facilitate their ability to become self-sufficient, and that lead to their long-term socioeconomic empowerment. It is therefore important to implement mechanisms that, like the Türkiye Compact proposed by the UN Development Programme,<sup>10</sup> not only promote new employment opportunities for migrants and local communities but also increase socioeconomic inclusivity.

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# Public Health in Türkiye—2023

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Türkiye experienced several watershed events in public health in 2023, some yielding positive and others negative outcomes. The earthquakes that struck on 6 February 2023, centered in Kahramanmaraş's Pazarcık and Elbistan districts, respectively, rattled ten other surrounding provinces, leading to what would become dubbed the disaster of the century. These two earthquakes left an excess of 50 thousand people dead, 120 thousand injured, 2 million homeless, and 5 million internally displaced. Coming closely on the heels of the COVID-19 pandemic, this catastrophe constituted the most significant public health challenge to Türkiye in 2023. According to the Risk Management Index (INFORM), earthquakes rank among the foremost risks for the country, with a potential earthquake in the Marmara region posing a potentially existential threat to Türkiye's most populous city of Istanbul and public health at large.

Emergency situations, disasters, accidents, injuries, and both communicable and non-communicable diseases have resulted in untold numbers of deaths, disability, and healthcare expenditures in 2023. On the other hand, however, new health policies, screening programs, and government-funded initiatives aimed at preserving and improving health have had a positive impact on public health in Türkiye. Nevertheless, non-communicable diseases remain the leading cause of death in Türkiye, in line with global trends. Coronary heart disease, cerebrovascular diseases, cancer, and chronic respiratory diseases make up roughly eighty-five percent of all deaths in Türkiye. Given its global impact, the COVID-19 pandemic reaffirms the continued importance of communicable diseases in public health.

## Disasters and Emergencies

### *Earthquakes*

The two earthquakes measuring Mw 7.7 and 7.6 that struck Kahramanmaraş at 4:17 a.m. and 3:24 p.m. on 6 February were the two most impactful events of 2023 in Türkiye. These earthquakes and their aftershocks left 50,783 dead, 107,204 injured, and 301 thousand buildings either destroyed or damaged. The 2023 Parliamentary Investigation Commission Report submitted to the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye estimated the total damage to be 148.8 billion USD, corresponding to %9 of Türkiye's GDP for 2023. The first of these two earthquakes was the most powerful to strike Anatolia since the 1668 North Anatolia earthquake and the strongest in the history of the Turkish Republic. Then, a mere two weeks later, two more earthquakes of Mw 6.4 and 5.8 struck Hatay's districts of Defne and Samandağ on 20 February, leaving 6 people dead and another 562 injured.<sup>1</sup>

### *Floods*

Türkiye experienced a total of 8,279 weather- and climate-related natural disasters between 2010 and 2021. The most prevalent of these were storms, accounting for 2,645 incidents, followed by severe rainfall and floods with 2,486 incidents. Given Türkiye topographical conditions, floods continue to pose a significant public health risk to the country's inhabitants. For instance, the 2023 Turkish floods of 15 March resulted in 17 deaths in Şanlıurfa and 4 in Adıyaman while an additional 3,154 individuals suffered damage to their residences, businesses, vehicles, and personal belongings. Several months later during the initial days of Cyclone Daniel in September 2023, flood claimed the lives of 6 people in Kırklareli and 2 in Istanbul.<sup>2</sup>

### *Wildfires*

Türkiye's Minister of Agriculture and Forestry reported that 1,022 wildfires occurred in the first seven months of 2023, resulting in 6,900 hectares of damaged land. Of this area, 5,800 hectares were destroyed in just 18 wildfires, 17 of which occurred in July.<sup>3</sup> More recently, the 26 October wildfire in Kastamonu's Tosya district left 47 homes uninhabitable.<sup>4</sup>

### *Global Warming and Climate Change*

Surpassing the previous record set in 2016 for hottest eleven-month average temperature by 0.13°C, 2023 found itself as hottest calendar year on record. The EU's Copernicus Climate Change Service announced that November 2023 had set a global record for the hottest November ever recorded, with an average surface air temperature for the month at 14.22°C, which exceeded the 1991–2020 temperature average by 0.85°C.<sup>5</sup>

According to data from the Turkish State Meteorological Service, Türkiye experienced its warmest December in the past fifty-three years in 2023. The lowest temperature, –21.3°C, was observed in Van, while the highest was recorded in Sinop at 27.4°C. The average nationwide temperature for December rose 3.5°C, increasing from 4.8°C between 1991 and 2020 to 8.3°C in December 2023.<sup>6</sup>

### *October–December 2023, Israel's War on Gaza*

Since 7 October, Israel has subjected Palestine's Gaza Strip to an incessant carpet bombing campaign that has killed at least 37,765 people, injured or maimed at least 86,429, and trapped countless others under the rubble of destroyed buildings, many of whom are presumed dead. On 13 October, Türkiye sent eight cargo planes full of medication, medical



consumables, medical equipment, and generators. Then, after receiving the necessary permissions, fifty-one containers full medical supplies and emergency generators, along with twenty fully equipped ambulances, departed from İzmir's Port of Alsancak on 10 November on a cargo ship bound for Occupied Palestine. Gaza's sole hospital specialized in treating cancer, the Turkish–Palestinian Friendship Hospital, itself built by Türkiye, was hit during an Israeli airstrike. The hospital has since been illegally seized by the Israeli army and used as a military base during its continued attack on the civilian population of Gaza. With the hospital no longer able to provide lifesaving services, the Turkish government began transporting cancer patients to Türkiye for continued treatment. In addition to the Syrian Civil War, the Russo-Ukrainian War, and the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War, all of which have affected Türkiye in terms of food supply, communicable diseases, and migration, Israel's war on Gaza is a particularly precarious situation with the potential to embroil the wider region in instability and unrest.<sup>7</sup>

## Communicable Diseases

### New Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19)

Statistics published by Türkiye's Ministry of Health reveal that 102,174 people died from COVID-19 related complications as of March 2023, after which month no new data was published. A total of 43,801 new cases and 231 deaths were reported in January, 15,811 new cases

and 95 deaths in February, and 31,054 new cases and 85 deaths in March.<sup>8</sup>

### Influenza

The COVID-19 pandemic had a profound impact on global health and social life from 2020 to 2021. Measures like mask-wearing, physical distancing, enhanced hygiene practices, improved ventilation, and reduced social mobility implemented during the pandemic also contributed to a decline in influenza cases. As these measures were relaxed, however, influenza cases began to increase globally. Outpatients complaining of flu-like symptoms (e.g., fever, fatigue, muscle aches, headaches, coughing, and respiratory distress) to their family physicians tested positively for influenza at increasing rates beginning in October and peaking in December. This trend is expected to decrease gradually from January to April 2024.<sup>9</sup>

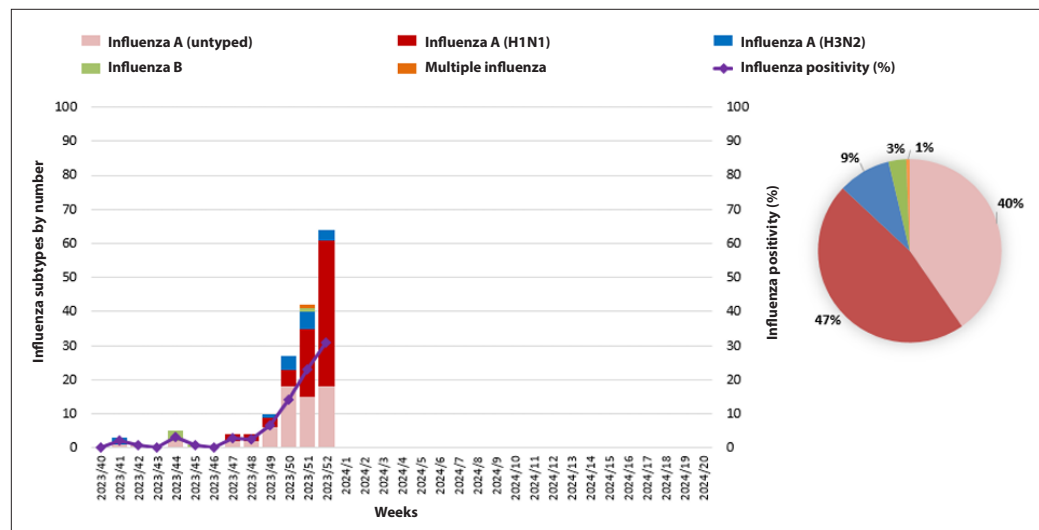


Figure 1 Outpatients Testing Positive for Influenza at Family Clinics<sup>10</sup>



Photograph: Sergen Sezgin

### **HIV/AIDS**

The rise in HIV positivity poses a critical challenge in effective infectious disease management in Türkiye. From 1985 until 8 November 2023, 39,437 HIV-positive cases and 2,295 AIDS cases were confirmed through HIV screening. Of these cases, 81.5 percent were men, 18.5 percent were women, and 16.1 percent were foreign nationals of either gender. A total of 1,728 new cases were reported between 1 January 2023 and 8 November 2023, including 1,677 HIV-positive and 51 AIDS cases. Among

these, 84.2 percent were male, 15.6 percent were female, and 11.6 percent were foreign nationals of either gender. Individuals aged 25 to 29 exhibited the highest number of positive cases. An upward trend in HIV-positive cases has been observed in the last decade, rising from 3,220 in 2016 to 5,591 in 2022. Public awareness campaigns, public service announcements, community health education, and efforts to enhance health literacy are needed to reverse this trend.<sup>11</sup>



## **Accidents and Injuries**

### ***Traffic Accidents***

Türkiye's Traffic Statistics Bulletin for December 2023 reported a total of 555,668 accidents over the year, resulting in 2,984 fatalities and 354,323 injuries. Drivers were found to be at fault in 249,776 incidents, pedestrians in 25,340 incidents, vehicle issues in 3,148 incidents, road conditions in 940 incidents, and passengers in 1,754 incidents. While running red lights resulted in 7,030 fatal or injury-causing accidents, alcohol use was found to be a factor in 1,712. Excessive speed resulted in 2,208 accidents and illegal parking in 1,247. Official accident figures show that traffic accidents caused 167 deaths in Ankara, ninety-seven in Bursa, 157 in Istanbul, and 125 in Izmir.<sup>12</sup> Though mostly preventable, traffic accidents continued to be a leading cause of death and disability among adolescents and young adults in 2023.

### **Addiction Prevention and Intervention Efforts**

An integral partner in the fight against addiction, Türkiye's Green Crescent significantly expanded its efforts in 2023. The inauguration of two new Green Crescent Consultancy Centers this year brought the total number of centers to 107, ensuring nationwide accessibility to their services across all provinces. Additionally, two 40 bed rehabilitation centers were opened in the provinces of Bursa and Diyarbakır. The Green Crescent organized numerous educational workshops, events, and competitions throughout 2023 as part of its efforts to prevent addiction in Türkiye. Among these was the Türkiye Addiction Prevention Program, in which 14 million students and 3 million adults received education on addiction prevention. Another was the Intervention

to Addiction at School Training Program, the Green Crescent, which provided assistance to 6,380 students who either had used or were currently using tobacco, alcohol, or narcotics. These programs effectively supported students in completely quitting or reducing their use of addictive substances. Under the Green Crescent Life Skills Training Program, 264 facilitators were trained to lead workshops teaching students how to refuse addictive substances, make effective decisions without succumbing to peer pressure, and manage their emotions. A total 115 thousand students participated in these workshops over the course of this program. Additionally, 110 nationwide sports clubs ran programs to promote healthy lifestyles among young people and to deter them from using addictive substances.<sup>13</sup>

## **New Developments**

### ***Family Dentistry***

'The Community "Family Dentistry" application was launched as a pilot program in Eskişehir, Karabük and Kırşehir provinces in 2022 and is expected to be widespread in 20 provinces in 2024. In this context, it aims to prevent and control tooth decay and risk factors before health problems arise. As a result of the application, approximately 10,000 children were reached in 42 family dentistry units. It is aimed to gradually implement the application in 81 provinces by the end of 2028, covering the entire population. In this context, it has become possible to facilitate access to services and to conduct regular dental check-ups for children between the ages of 0-12. Families who were informed about the applications participated in oral and dental health awareness training.<sup>14</sup>

The family dentistry practice is expected to make a very



positive contribution to the oral and dental health of the society with the oral and dental health services currently provided by 131 Oral and Dental Health Centers, 32 Oral and Dental Health Hospitals / Training and Research Hospitals and 820 State Hospitals under the Ministry of Health with 9,950 units and 11,588 dentists in a total of 983 units.<sup>15</sup>

### ***Hıfzıssıhha-Türkiye Vaccine and Biotechnological Product Research and Production Center***

Vaccine production is a vital preventive healthcare service for all nations, crucial for immunization against infectious diseases. The COVID-19 pandemic brought to light the importance of not only domestic vaccine production but also the availability of medical supplies for public health, as evinced by reports of countries seizing masks and disinfectants to protect their own citizens. These and other events underscored the need for national self-sufficiency in vaccine production.

A significant step forward in this regard is the establishment of the Hıfzıssıhha-Türkiye Vaccine and Biotechnological Product Research and Production Center at the end of 2022, spearheaded by Türkiye's Ministry of Health. Situated near Ankara Esenboğa Airport, this state-of-the-art facility spans 50 thousand square meters and is equipped with advanced smart building technology. As its name implies, this center was designed to develop and produce a wide range of vaccines and biotechnological products. As the largest facility of its kind, it will serve as a hub for the development of vaccines and genetic products, such as the Turcovac COVID-19 vaccine and various inactivated, mRNA, intranasal, and adenovirus vaccines.<sup>16</sup>

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# Social Policies in Türkiye in 2023

## Emrah Akbaş

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The events of 2023 highlighted the need for Türkiye to prioritize disaster-, migration-, and family-related issues in its social policies. While social policies in Türkiye have historically centered on child welfare, education, and health, it has become increasingly evident as we approach the country's centennial anniversary that disaster and migration issues must be at the heart of social policies. As such, I intend to evaluate Türkiye's social policies in 2023 in this chapter, focusing particularly on those related to disasters, migration, and family.

### Disasters

Türkiye experienced a truly harrowing disaster when, on 6 February 2023, two powerful earthquakes struck the province of Kahramanmaraş. What otherwise should have been a time of jubilee and festivity, the hundredth year of the Turkish Republic quickly soured, becoming a year gripped by anguish after what would be dubbed the disaster of the century. Yet many a lesson may be gleaned as the dust from this disaster settles. For indeed it is incumbent on us to learn all that we can from the mistakes we made leading up to, during, and in the aftermath of any and all such destructive disaster.

It is crucial that we comprehend the depth of the physical, emotional, and psychosocial impact wrought by this calamity in order to minimize the number of lives lost, deliver the appropriate aid to disaster victims in a timely manner, and initiate long-term recovery operations whenever the next disaster inevitably strikes. The Türkiye–Syria earthquakes, as they are known in the international literature, served as a poignant reminding of our need to develop social policies prioritizing, first and foremost, effective post-disaster recovery.

Social policies are instrumental both in minimizing communities' vulnerability to natural and human-induced disasters and in increasing social resilience against them. By strengthening individuals, groups, and society as a whole at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels, social policies are a key component in disaster management. Since social policies must include strategies aimed at increasing overall social resilience, they should promote educational initiatives, awareness-raising campaigns, and investments in safe infrastructure.





Photograph: AA, Eyrim Aydın



As traditional support systems like the family, society, and vocation continue to be eroded in the modern era, individuals are deprived of valuable social support, which has in turn caused vulnerability to disasters to surge. Social policies are therefore expected to take into consideration the fact that many individuals are alone, if not outright helpless, in the face of crises. Yet neoliberal economic policies and the erosion of the welfare state have given birth to policies that no longer aim to empower individuals and society. Still, social policies continue play an important role in disaster management, from mitigating damage caused by disasters to organizing post-disaster recovery operations.

Disaster expert Renos Vakis asserts that well-developed social protection systems should complement all risk management strategies. Preexisting social protection systems able to coordinate state, non-state, and private sector actors can both augment and operate alongside emergency response mechanisms during unexpected natural disasters. These systems should be built on robust analysis and information frameworks that facilitate policymakers in identifying the risks faced by different groups and that function as an integrated part of extant emergency management strategies.

The earthquakes that rattled Türkiye in 2023 highlighted the crucial role civil society played in disaster management. An extraordinary collective civic response to the disaster occurred throughout the country immediately following the February earthquakes. Indeed, civil society was instrumental at every level of response efforts, ranging from the provision of psychosocial services to active participation in urban reconstruction projects.

### **Migration**

At the end of 2023, Türkiye hosted 3,199,927 Syrians under temporary protection, had apprehended 254,008 irregular migrants, and received 19,017 applications for

international protection. These three groups are central to social policy in Türkiye. In the absence of formal policies and institutional practices for migrant integration, civil society has stepped in to fill this gap with its own activities that help facilitate integration, often utilizing international funds to support their efforts. TRC's activities in this regard are particularly noteworthy, as they positively influence public attitudes toward integration. As of 2023, the TRC operates nineteen community centers across the country, each of which plays a crucial role in the integration of migrants. These centers provide various support services, educational opportunities, and social venues that expedite the integration process. Key activities at TRC Community Centers include:

*Language Education:* Language barriers constitute major obstacles to immigrants as they attempt to adapt to their new host culture. The language education programs offered by community centers afford newly arriving individuals the opportunity to develop their Turkish language skills so that they may communicate with the native population more effectively.

*Vocational Training and Employment Services:* Immigrants must have vocational skills so that they can contribute to the local economy. Community centers provide vocational training and employment services to migrants so that they may do just this.

*Social Services:* Community centers provide immigrants whatever social services they might need depending on their own personal situation.

*Intercultural Education:* The activities run by community centers promote intercultural awareness and fostering diversity in Turkish society by creating venues in which native and immigrant populations can come together and share their cultures with one another. This not only helps

immigrants adapt to their new environment but also fosters a more democratic native community.

*Social Activities and Engagement:* Community centers coordinate various social activities that help immigrants adapt to their host society and build more robust social networks.

*Legal Support:* In addition to informing them of their legal rights, community centers provide valuable legal support to immigrants when necessary.

TRC Community Centers play a vital role in facilitating migrants' integration both into Turkish society at large and into the specific cultural fabric of the individual cities in which they reside. These centers promote social inclusivity and cohesion by fostering environments that embrace cultural diversity. Beyond their role in supporting migrant communities, TRC Community Centers help cultivate a more inclusive societal mindset and underscore the importance of dynamic and decentralized social policies that take into consideration the unique realities of individual contexts.

Through these community centers, Türkiye has made extraordinary efforts to meet the day-to-day needs of one of the world's largest refugee communities. As of September 2023, Türkiye had distributed around seven billion out of the approximately ten billion euros allocated by the EU to refugees since 2011.

Türkiye made significant strides in fostering a more inclusive, equitable, and democratic society for migrants and other marginalized groups throughout the year. In January, for instance, Türkiye adopted a new Strategy Document for Roma Citizens covering the years of 2023 to 2030 and an action plan for 2023 to 2025. These initiatives seek to address the challenges faced within Roma com-

munities, to improve their quality of life, and to expedite their integration into Turkish society through education, employment, housing, healthcare and social services.

## Family

Türkiye's Ministry of Family and Social Services convened the 8<sup>th</sup> Family Council on 26 October 2023. The year's theme, "Our Family is Our Future in Türkiye's Centennial," underscored Türkiye's enduring commitment to maintaining family-centered social policies into the country's second century. Some of the topics discussed during this council included:

- Population and Demographics: Rethinking the Family in an Aging World
- Environment and Climate: How Families Can Respond to Potential Crises
- Family and Law: Interinstitutional Collaboration
- Digitalization and the Family: A Crisis or an Opportunity?
- Social Development and the Family: Equity in Social Welfare
- Life Cycle and Family Resilience: Suggestions for Strengthening Families

The topics of the Family Council indicated that, in addition to family-centered social policies, several important issues reflecting Türkiye's new realities were part of the agenda. Being home to an aging population meant that forthcoming social policies would address the needs of this demographic and, as such, would seek to enhance this age group's quality of life and to develop support systems for them. Since elderly individuals would be encouraged to play an active role in society, this meant that healthcare services, social securi-

ty, the pension system, housing, infrastructure, education, public awareness, social participation, and assisted-living programs would need to be retailored to take into account their specific needs and challenges.

Speakers noted that social policies dealing with climate and the environment would focus on sustainability, combating climate change, the efficient use of natural resources, and ways to ease society's adaptation to new realities. These policies typically espouse a sensible, equitable, and inclusive approach to environmental challenges. Social policies clearly aimed at strengthening family and community resilience against potential environmental and climate-related threats, promoting environmentally friendly practices, and leaving a more sustainable world for future generations will concentrate on green energy policies, environmental and climate justice, environmental education and awareness, and green employment.

Digitalization has had a profound impact on family life, creating both opportunities for those adept at harnessing its benefits and problems for those unable to adapt. While digitalization certainly does improve communication, provide educational and learning opportunities, boost career prospects, offer entertainment options, and enhance connectivity, it also has the potential, particularly when misused, to produce a range of crises within families. These include growing concerns over privacy and security as well as digital addiction, conflict, and divide. Promoting deliberate and informed digital practices goes a long way in helping families navigate and adapt to this evolving landscape.

Both the content of the aforementioned Family Council and other social policy agendas for 2023 underscore the primacy of family-related in Türkiye. Alongside efforts to preserve traditional educational values and strengthen existing family support programs, the year witnessed a

heightened emphasis on using morality to address emerging challenges to the family's foundational role in society.

Tightened monetary policy and increased taxes had an adverse impact on families in 2023. Job losses, financial hardships, housing issues, and hurdles to accessing educational and healthcare services placed considerable strain on families. Rising stress and anxiety, difficulties balancing work and personal life, and communication problems among family members significantly eroded family resilience and cohesion. Existing social support and solidarity networks likewise began to deteriorate. That said, however, the family-centered nature of Türkiye's social policies does not always mean that they actually strengthen families. The view that regards the family as an entity, if not a partner, responsible for helping to support the social welfare system and for shouldering the effects of economic crises ultimately harms the wellbeing of families. Considering this, Türkiye is in real need of social policies that actually strengthen families. As such, greater emphasis should be placed on promoting values inside the family and implementing corresponding social policies that bolster family assistance and benefits, enhance education and childcare support, provide child allowances, guarantee universal healthcare services, offer family counseling and support services, promote a balance between work and personal life, and address domestic violence.

Whatever the case, it must be reiterated that policies supporting families during crises can accelerate economic recovery and strengthen social resilience.



# Global International Aid: Türkiye in 2023

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While 2023 was initially welcomed in Türkiye with jubilation for her centennial anniversary, the year quickly witnessed a dramatic reshuffling of geopolitical dynamics and international power balances that would precipitate numerous crises around the world.<sup>1</sup> Yet it was in this tempestuous environment that Türkiye's geostrategic location and foreign policy would demonstrate just how important of a position she holds in the region. Inspired by the Turkish Model for Development Cooperation, Türkiye harnessed the power of foreign aid, vital both for achieving sustainable peace and fostering regional development, to help her realize her centennial vision.

International aid was overshadowed by the numerous natural disasters, pandemics, regional wars, and other global humanitarian crises that characterized 2023. The efforts taken to respond to such large-scale issues necessitated a reevaluation of the existing relationship between donor and recipient countries and led to a call to develop of a new model for international aid. The inadequacies of the prevailing international aid paradigm and mechanisms used to respond to global crises were the impetus for this call to develop an entirely new approach to aid policies. The international system's capacity to endure extreme pressure was fur-

ther tested by Russia's invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, all while the socioeconomic wounds caused by the global COVID-19 pandemic remained largely unhealed. The ensuing Russo-Ukrainian War triggered a food, energy supply, political, and military crisis whose reverberations would be felt worldwide and particularly in underdeveloped and developing nations, which, when combined with the lingering effects of the pandemic, greatly beleaguered the international aid system in 2023.

For her part, Türkiye adeptly maintained diplomatic relationship with both belligerent parties throughout the war, which would eventually earn her global recognition for her skillful navigation of the crisis. Türkiye's strategic geopolitical position forced her to take steps toward bolstering regional and global security, a feat she achieved with remarkable success. Though institutionally integrated into the Western system, Türkiye has abstained from joining her Western counterparts in imposing unilateral sanctions on Russia, opting instead to follow a policy of principled neutrality that does not recognize Russia's annexation of Crimea. Türkiye's efforts to act as a benevolent power continued unabated throughout 2023, spearheading initiatives to assist underdeveloped, primarily African countries that, despite not taking sides in

the conflict, have suffered adverse effects from the ongoing war. Mediated by the UN, Türkiye's efforts led to the signing of the Black Sea Grain Initiative in July 2002, an agreement that enabled a total of thirty-three million metric tons of grains and other foodstuffs—including barley, wheat, soy, peas, corn, and sunflower oil—to be safely delivered to forty-five countries across three continents until Russia's unilateral withdrawal on 18 July 2023.<sup>2</sup> The grain shipments to Africa, the Middle East, and Asia helped alleviate the food crisis afflicting millions of people and, according to UN data, led to a twenty-percent decrease in global food prices.<sup>3</sup> Following Russia's withdrawal from the agreement, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan began engaging in one-to-one meetings in what has come to be dubbed leader diplomacy. These meetings would result in one million metric tons of grain being processed into flour and distributed at no cost to six African countries via Türkiye.<sup>4</sup> In addition to helping alleviate the detrimental effects of the Russo–Ukraine crisis on vulnerable groups, these actions solidified Türkiye's position as a proactive humanitarian actor adept at leveraging diplomacy to address a broad spectrum of humanitarian issues. Türkiye's role in the Black Sea Grain Initiative can be considered a form of indirect aid.

Alongside diplomacy, such as the summits held in Antalya and Istanbul, Türkiye played an instrumental role in supporting the delivery and distribution of humanitarian aid in Ukraine. AFAD and TRC kitchens distributed free meals to thousands of people in need in Lviv, Borodyanka, and Chernihiv; the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA) supported the restoration of universities and schools; and civil institutions coordinated with one another to ensure that an excess of 100 Turkish aid trucks reached Ukraine safely.<sup>5</sup> Türkiye's embassy in Ukraine performed above and beyond what was expected of her, acting as a disaster response hub, shelter for displaced individuals, soup kitchen, and logistics center.

The Türkiye–Syria earthquakes, one of the deadliest in modern history, were yet another incident that left its mark on 2023. The two earthquakes (Mw7.7 and 7.6, respectively) struck the districts of Pazarcık and Elbistan in Türkiye's southeastern province of Kahramanmaraş on 6 February. An area of 108,812 km<sup>2</sup> (67,613 sq mi) in Türkiye, encompassing eleven provinces, sixty-two districts, and 10,190 villages, was affected—not to mention the extensive damage that befell Syria. Nearly 11,500 professional search and rescue teams from ninety countries and various international organizations were joined by 270,000 civil servants, including an untold number of volunteers from Türkiye, in post-earthquake humanitarian operations. Türkiye employed her accumulated wealth of international humanitarian experience within her own borders this time around, spearheading post-disaster shelter, food provision, and healthcare initiatives.

The Türkiye–Syria earthquakes were important in Türkiye's ability to adapt her international humanitarian experience to the domestic level. Within the first seventy-two hours, known as the golden hours, following the initial earthquake, numerous government-affiliated units and NGOs engaged in search and rescue operations, emergency medical services, and the provision of shelter, food, heating resources, and clothing.<sup>6</sup> As such, eighteen thousand TRC personnel—of whom fourteen thousand were volunteers—took part in humanitarian operations across ten provinces. Five soup kitchens, 199 mobile kitchens, eighty-six distribution trucks, five mobile bakeries, and twenty-one field kitchens were deployed to help alleviate food shortages in the disaster zone. Collectively, these efforts resulted in the distribution of 5.6 million hot meals, 1.2 million bowls of soup, six million liters of water, 6.1 million loaves of bread, and 3.5 million items of assorted provisions were distributed to earthquake victims.<sup>7</sup> IHH Humanitarian Relief Foundation deployed a 3,359-per-

son team who collectively delivered 6,959 boxes of water, 3,469 food packages, 9,765 hygiene kits, 2,169 boxes of various food items, 5,380 cans of food, and 1.4 metric tons of potatoes to the earthquake zone. Various NGOs and state institutions, including TÜGVA, the Ensar Foundation, Beşir Association, Ahbap, the Turkish Bakers Federation, and Deniz Feneri, channeled their resources into relief efforts to mitigate devastating effects of the unfolding humanitarian catastrophe as much as possible.

The year was mired by deadly conflicts and disasters across the globe. The conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces and Rapid Support Forces that erupted on 15 April 2023 impacted millions of civilians. While several diplomatic missions evacuated the country, Turkish NGOs and the Njala Turkish Hospital continued to provide food and medicine assistance to the public. Elsewhere, in Morocco, a devastating Mw6.8 earthquake struck the Atlas Mountains on 8 September, claiming over three thousand lives. In response, AFAD, TRC, the Türkiye Diyanet Foundation, IHH, and other organizations immediately initiated search and rescue operations and provided temporary housing for the surviving victims. Then, a mere two days later on 10 September, Cyclone Daniel hit Libya's east coast, precipitating a new humanitarian crisis that would embroil large swaths of North Africa. Resulting floods caused the death of roughly 11,300 people.

The first humanitarian aid to Libya was delivered through the Turkish Ministry of National Defense. A team of 360 personnel made up of members from AFAD, AKUT Search and Rescue Association, Türkiye's Ministry of Health, the Turkish Coast Guard, and firefighting brigades was transported to the crisis area aboard the Turkish Navy's TCG Sancaktar and TCG Bayraktar ships.<sup>8</sup> A total of 122 ambulances and rapid intervention vehicles along with three field hospitals and food, shelter, and sanitation supplies were dispatched to support the team's humanitarian efforts in the area.<sup>9</sup>

The Middle East was the epicenter of the world's most profound humanitarian crisis of 2023. Israel's ongoing assault of the Gaza Strip in Occupied Palestine has left the entire area's healthcare infrastructure in complete ruin and 2.3 million people starving and without access to clean water. As the time of writing, more than thirty-nine thousand Palestinians—roughly sixty percent women and children—have been mercilessly killed in Gaza by Israeli forces since 7 October. The World Health Organization has reported that one child is killed every ten minutes, describing this situation as “humanity's darkest hour.”<sup>10</sup> Hamas and Israel agreed to a four-day tragically ironic humanitarian pause on 24 November, which concluded on Friday 1 December after having been extended by three days. Israel has continued its inhumane assault



Photograph: AA, Esra Bilgin



on the Gaza Strip and her mostly civilian inhabitants unabated until the time of writing this article since then.

The prisoner exchange deal that took place during the so-called humanitarian pause led to the release of eighty-one Israeli prisoners from the Gaza Strip and 240 Palestinian prisoners from Israeli prisons.<sup>11</sup> The two hundred aid trucks and four fuel tankers allowed entrance into the strip during the pause were some of the rare aid to reach since the beginning of Israel's 7 October aerial and land-based bombardment that, as the International Court of Justice has opined, plausibly amount to the genocide of the Palestinian people in Gaza. For her part, Türkiye has provided supplies to build shipping container cities, mobile bakeries, and field hospitals to help meet the water, food, and shelter needs of the Palestinians in Gaza. Israel's ongoing illegal blockade of the Gaza Strip has, however, acted as a major impediment to the entrance of vital humanitarian aid. Türkiye has also continued to take diplomatic steps toward a lasting peace in support of the two-state solution based on 1967 borders.

While Official Development Aid statistics for 2023 have yet to be published, the amount of international aid donated by Türkiye is projected to exhibit a downward trend. Türkiye was, however, among the most generous donors of aid from 2017 to 2021.<sup>12</sup> Official Develop Aid rose from 0.04% of Türkiye's GDP in 2003 to 0.54% in 2015 and then 1.14% in 2020. This figure fell to 0.96% in 2021, second only to Luxembourg's 0.99% and still significantly higher than the UN's 0.7% goal. The costs associated with the Türkiye–Syria earthquakes, however, caused the normal flow of international aid to be redirected inward.

In summary, 2023 not only witnessed the deepening of humanitarian crises but, according to UN figures, was also the first year since 2010 to experience a decline in global humanitarian aid donations. The UN managed to collect only thirty-five percent of its \$56.7 billion appeal for the

year.<sup>13</sup> Given that the economic cost of major disasters in the first half of 2023 alone totaled \$195 billion across twenty-five countries,<sup>14</sup> the extent to which UN humanitarian expenditures can effectively address humanitarian crises around the world is debatable.

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# Post-Disaster Volunteer Work: An In-Depth Review of 2023

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Volunteer efforts are given the most airtime immediately following a disaster. This heightened attention, along with compelling images of human suffering, drives a surge in individuals volunteering their own services to help their fellow man. Communities in disaster-stricken areas are particularly vulnerable and require urgent assistance. This acute need sparks a powerful sense of responsibility in volunteers to rebuild affected areas and help alleviate the trauma wrought by the disaster. When it comes to post-disaster relief efforts, volunteers typically participate in essential services, such as distributing food and supplies, clearing debris, providing emotional support to disaster victims, and assisting with medical and rescue operations. It goes without saying that volunteers play a crucial role in recovery and rehabilitation efforts. This phenomenon can be attributed to various factors. Feelings of solidarity intensify and a unified spirit takes hold immediately after a disaster, which leads to a spike in people volunteering offering their assistance in relief efforts. People are moti-

vated to offer whatever form of aid and assistance they can upon witnessing the extensive destruction caused by the disaster. Another important factor is that the media makes frequent appeals for volunteers and encourages individuals to donate their time and skills to relief efforts. Finally, the upsurge in solidarity and compassion precipitated by the disaster precipitates brings out the best sides of people, who come together to provide both material and moral support to each other in the face of such difficult hardships. This is evident not only in the stories of countless volunteers who have worked selflessly to bring hope and stability to disaster-stricken communities but also in the extant corpus of literature that corroborates volunteers' crucial roles in rehabilitation efforts.<sup>1</sup>

Research has found that volunteers not only bridge the gaps left by official response efforts and support the subsequent long-term recovery activities.<sup>2</sup> It is also important to remember that volunteers may not have had prior



Photograph: Cevahir Buğu



knowledge of post-disaster volunteer work and may have therefore only coincidentally found themselves involved in voluntary relieve and recovery efforts.<sup>3</sup> This underscores the need for proactive outreach and education to attract potential volunteers. The literature also discusses how volunteers can strengthen a country's emergency management capacity, specifically in risk communication and early warning systems.<sup>4</sup> This highlights the importance of utilizing volunteers to maximize humanitarian access and the reach of relief efforts in high-exposure areas. Various studies have examined the roles played by volunteers in disaster response operations, including in healthcare settings. Specialized volunteers, such as nurses, bring valuable knowledge and skills that support disaster response initiatives.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, volunteers have been shown to be able to address a wide range of needs for affected individuals. For instance, volunteer psychiatrists have proven effective in providing psychological support to survivors after disasters.<sup>6</sup> That said, however, one must acknowledge that the presence of volunteers can present potential challenges to post-disaster responses. While volunteers are undoubtedly invaluable assets, unaffiliated or "spontaneous" volunteers who appear at disaster sites can unwittingly impede response efforts.<sup>7</sup> It is therefore important to clearly outline volunteers' roles, responsibilities, and required training to ensure that they are able to participate in response operations effectively.<sup>8</sup> In short, while volunteer work both during and after disasters is indeed an indispensable component of emergency management, ensuring volunteer participation through proactive social outreach, proper training, and clear job descriptions, as well as providing volunteers with ongoing supporting as they work in the field, will go a long way to help maximize the effectiveness of long-term recovery efforts.

The need for aid and assistance generally intensifies immediately following a disaster. Volunteers bolster post-disaster recovery initiatives by bringing valuable resources and innovative techniques to the table. They not only participate in search and rescue operations, administer medical aid, distribute supplies, and provide victims emotional support but also assist in reconstruction efforts. None of these would be as effective if volunteers were not generous with their time, skills, and energy. Unburdened by bureaucratic restrictions that can delay official responses, volunteers often find themselves able to mobilize more quickly and provide immediate assistance to affected communities. Indeed, it is their flexibility and ability to adapt to rapidly changing situations that make volunteers invaluable assets in the field.

While volunteer work tends to focus more on response efforts than on disaster mitigation, preparedness, or recovery, it should by no means be confined to the response phase alone.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, it is crucial that volunteers realize their potential in all phases of emergency management, including mitigation, preparedness, and recovery. Communities can benefit of volunteers' unique perspectives, skills, and expertise when they are involved at the early phases of emergency management. Volunteers can play a crucial role in disaster risk reduction by raising public awareness and encouraging people to attend workshops on how to reduce the risks posed by disasters. They can conduct community surveys to identify vulnerabilities and weak points, help design and build more resilient infrastructure, and establish early warning systems to minimize potential risks.

As it pertains to preparedness, volunteers can assist in developing and implementing emergency plans, conducting drills and simulations, and disseminating important information to the public. During the recovery phase, volunteers

can support affected individuals and communities by joining cleanup and reconstruction efforts, providing emotional support, and helping restore crucial services and infrastructure. Volunteering in disaster management operations benefits not only disaster victims but also volunteers themselves.<sup>10</sup> Through their involvement, volunteers acquire valuable skills and experience that will have a lasting impact on personal and professional lives. The difference that they make in the lives of others instills in them a profound sense of satisfaction and fulfillment. The work carried out by volunteers during such times of great need can foster a sense of unity and resilience in communities, as individuals from all walks of life come together to support one another. Indeed, the potential of volunteer work at each phase of emergency management must not only be recognized but also properly leveraged in order to improve community resilience and increase the effectiveness of disaster response efforts.

In sum, the work of volunteers is vital to every phase of emergency management, whether it be disaster mitigation, preparedness, response, or recovery.<sup>11</sup> Involving volunteers in every phase of the process not only cultivates a stronger sense of unity and resilience within communities but also provides them access to a broader range of skills and expertise that can be used to create more robust emergency plans.

### **Volunteer Work in the Wake of the Türkiye–Syria Earthquakes: Social Solidarity and Reconstruction Efforts**

Earthquakes are indisputably the most destructive type of natural disaster facing the Republic of Türkiye. The Global Seismic Hazard Map indicates that ninety-two percent of Türkiye lies on active fault lines. Although the country is also prone to flooding, landslides, avalanches, and wildfires,

the destructive impact of earthquakes far surpasses that of all other events. The country's location on active seismic zones means that Türkiye will continue to experience earthquakes throughout her future, with at least one event measuring between Mw 5 and 6 occurring on average annually. In addition to causing significant economic loss, Türkiye experiences the third highest number of earthquake-related fatalities globally. While efforts to minimize the impact of earthquakes continue unabated, Türkiye has yet to fully integrate volunteers into every phase of the disaster management process despite the benefits doing so offers.

Volunteer work in 2023 was concentrated in Türkiye's southeastern provinces following the series of catastrophic earthquakes that struck Kahramanmaraş and Hatay. Countless state and non-state organizations—both domestic and international—rushed to the disaster area following the Mw 7.7 and 7.6 earthquakes centered in Kahramanmaraş on 6 February 2023. Despite this, however, the sheer magnitude of these earthquakes, aptly dubbed the Disaster of the Century (i.e., *Asrın Felâketi*) in Turkish, quickly overwhelmed public resources and manpower, thus necessitating a general mobilization of the nation's population. Volunteers, both affiliated and unaffiliated with specific organizations (i.e., spontaneous volunteers), made up the lion's share of people who responded to this call. Prior to 6 February, Türkiye's Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (known by the acronym AFAD) employed a total of 624,000 volunteers, 35,409 of whom were deployed in earthquake zones.<sup>12</sup> This number more than doubled to 1,390,000 immediately following these earthquakes,<sup>13</sup> as people eagerly sought to volunteer in whatever capacity they could. While the greater majority of these volunteers were in fact public servants,

members from every segment of society took part in civilian search and rescue efforts alongside more than eleven thousand professionals arriving from ninety countries.

Volunteers worked tirelessly to set up temporary shelters, distributed essential supplies, and provided support to afflicted families. Volunteers sorted, packaged, and loaded food, water, and clothing onto trucks, which they then personally delivered to earthquake victims. This spirit of solidarity was so profound that ordinary citizens opened their homes to displaced families. As part of the campaign “Let My House Be Your Home” (i.e., *Evim Yuvaran Olsun*), for instance, charitable individuals welcomed earthquake victims into their homes and supported them until they secured permanent housing. As a result of this and other grassroots initiatives, a total of 1,327,915 earthquake victims found accommodation in different types of homes throughout Türkiye. Volunteers played a central role in providing earthquake victims psychosocial support, helping them cope with the trauma and stress of having lived through such a catastrophic disaster. They mentored students preparing for exams, helped clear debris and environmental hazards, and partook in reconstruction efforts. The Third Sector Foundation of Türkiye (known by the acronym TÜSEV) shared its observational notes on earthquakes to support individuals and NGOs engaged in disaster relief efforts.<sup>14</sup> Likewise, both AFAD and TRC enhanced their digital systems to integrate volunteers into disaster management activities more effectively.

TRC launched its Digital Volunteerism project in July of 2023, focusing initially on psychology and later expanding to include education and communication. This project provided a platform for qualified professionals to share their expertise in these fields. Experienced volun-

teer psychologists offered free online therapy sessions to earthquake survivors as part of this project. In addition to this, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) released a catalogue in March outlining proposals for the 2023 Post-Earthquake Recovery and Reconstruction Project.<sup>15</sup>

Held annually on 5 December, International Volunteer Day focused on earthquakes this year. TRC honored individuals who went above and beyond the call of duty during post-earthquake relief efforts by displaying acts of kindness with Red Vest International Volunteer Awards.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, Türkiye’s National Volunteer Committee, Ministry of Youth and Sports, and various other organizations centered their activities on earthquake-related themes for International Volunteer Day.

Disasters, especially earthquakes, shaped volunteer activities throughout 2023. Specialists unanimously agree that volunteers are integral to the success of any disaster management plan relies and that their exclusion undermines its effectiveness. The real challenge, however, lies in determining how to appropriately integrate volunteers into disaster management before, during, and after a disaster. Given the cultural context, decision-makers in Türkiye are recommended to devise and implement long-term strategies that specifically address this issue. The February earthquakes not only reaffirmed that volunteering is a core value in Turkish society but also highlighted the need to formalize it so as to take full advantage of the benefits it offers.



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# INSTITUTIONAL

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E V A L U A T I O N S



# Türkiye: A Beacon of Hope and Solidarity in Times of Crisis

**Mahmut Aslan**

Director of Strategy Development, Ministry of Family and Social Services

Türkiye's Ministry of Family and Social Services (henceforth MoFSS) is committed to improving the welfare of our country's people, both at the individual and family level, by delivering social services to every segment of society. In pursuit of this mission, MoFSS aims to drive social change by developing and implementing equitable, demand-driving policies that proactively address social risks before they rear their head—holistic policies that specifically target the improvement of well-being for individuals, families, and society as a whole through comprehensive and collaborative programs.

To achieve these goals, MoFSS provides rights-based social services, operates various assistance programs, and implements targeted policies that address the everyday needs of the average person. These efforts are purposefully designed to protect and improve the welfare of families, children, women, persons with disabilities, the elderly, people living in poverty, the next of kin of fallen soldiers, and veterans.

Environmental change has exacerbated the devastating material loss and emotional trauma wrought upon individuals and families by disasters. As a nation, we faced unprece-



Photograph: AA, Rauf Mantas

dentedly catastrophic disasters in 2023. In addition to social and economic support systems, psychosocial services play an instrumental role in mitigating the long-term destructive impact of disasters on individuals and communities and facilitating their empowerment in the aftermath.

Based on the experiences gained from domestic disasters, Türkiye's Ministry of the Interior's Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD) developed Türkiye's Disaster Response Plan (TAMP) to respond more effectively to disasters. TAMP outlines the roles and re-

sponsibilities of teams and coordination units involved in emergency response operations and establishes principles for interventions before, during, and after disasters. Encompassing ministries, private sector entities, NGOs, and individuals involved in emergency response operations, TAMP assigns MoFSS two core responsibilities during such events.

MoFSS is responsible for identifying and addressing the needs created by wildfires, earthquakes, floods, and other disasters to ensure the community's safety and welfare. As such, the ministry oversees the management of material donations and distribution logistics, and provides psychosocial support.

MoFSS is also responsible for overseeing 1,003 Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundations as part of its donation management and logistics operations. These foundations, in collaboration with Provincial Directorates of Family and Social Services, form volunteer Disaster Emergency Social Assistance teams. These teams collect and sort in-kind donations at designated collection centers and ensure that disaster victims receive essential social assistance—including food, clothing, and shelter—without undue delay.

As part of its psychosocial support responsibilities, MoFSS is tasked with delivering disaster victims with psychosocial services designed to mitigate long-term psychological trauma, support their return to everyday life, and equip them to manage similar events in the future.

Restoring the affected area to its pre-disaster conditions, compensating for the damage incurred, and reestablishing societal normalcy are crucial objectives in the post-di-



saster phase. Psychosocial support teams play a key role by empowering disaster victims to overcome trauma, regain a sense of normalcy, and actively participate in their community's recovery. These teams work intensively to facilitate individual resilience, foster community solidarity, and support the reestablishment of social cohesion. The services provided aim to deliver effective long-term effective solutions that focus on recovery, development, self-sufficiency, and strengthening social bonds. Ensuring the effective and sustainable delivery of these services is central to obtaining lasting solutions. The ultimate goal is to address the destructive impacts of disasters, facilitate healing, promote development, restore self-sufficiency, and enhance social connections.

The two earthquakes that struck Türkiye's province of Kahramanmaraş on 6 February 2023 wrought massive destruction onto approximately fourteen million people across eleven provinces—not to mention across the border in Syria. The fact that these two earthquakes occurred mere hours apart greatly exacerbated the severity of the crisis. In response, central and regional units were swiftly mobilized to provide aid and assistance to the affected areas.

A total of 2,610 individuals receiving services in government-run residential care institutions—including children's homes, rehabilitation centers, women's shelters, and nursing homes—were relocated to safe areas.

MoFSS established a team of 1,300 Disaster Emergency Social Assistance volunteers to manage donation centers and distribution logistics.

MoFSS took the following immediate actions to support those affected by the February earthquakes:

- Allocated ₺1.85 billion to Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundations to aid earthquake victims.
- Established seventy-two national and sixteen international donation centers to accept and distribute in-kind donations made by individuals and organizations.
- Set up 206 social markets within the earthquake zone and ninety-four additional markets in provinces outside the affected zones.
- Deployed fourteen mobile social markets within the earthquake zone.
- Set up twenty-seven tents to provide essential clothing and care items to women and children.
- Coordinated 487 flights to deliver in-kind donations.
- Dispatched more than thirty-seven thousand aid trucks to in-kind donation centers.

Immediately upon deployment, psychological support teams began identifying needs, providing psychological first aid, and holding individual consultations in hospitals, tent cities, and other places where earthquake victims had taken shelter. By the end of 2023, these teams had provided psychosocial support to 4,123,247 individuals both within and outside of the disaster zone. The professionals involved in these efforts received comprehensive training prior to deployment and were assigned supervisors during the course of the program to maximize the effectiveness of the services they provided.

Women's cooperative workshops were set up in designated areas within disaster zones where women could improve their skills, earn money to help support their fami-



lies, and stay occupied so as to help them keep their minds off the distress caused by the earthquakes.

AFAD collaborated closely with Türkiye's Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Health, and Ministry of National Education to help children who had lost their parents in the earthquake or had been separated from their families amidst the ongoing chaos. MoFSS established a 24-hour hotline to handle reports, requests, and notifications about missing children. The ministry used its official social media accounts to keep the public abreast on rescued children whose next of kin were unknown, children whose identities were unknown, children unable to communicate, and children confirmed dead in the disaster. MoFSS established records for 1,912 children separated from their families in the ministry's Disaster Management Child Module. Of these, 1,874 children were successfully reunited with their families or relatives following verification of their identities, six received specialized child services, one was treated at a hospital, and fifteen were placed in institutions managed by MoFSS. Unfortunately, sixteen children were confirmed deceased after further investigation. In light of the above, the whereabouts of all 1,912 unidentified children were accounted for.

MoFSS systematically monitors and identifies the risks and needs of those children affected by the earthquakes through its Orphan and Vulnerable Child Services Units and the Safe the Children Teams.

MoFSS organized a team of 120 sign language interpreters to facilitate faster communication with hearing-impaired individuals. This team worked on the ground both to address their specific needs and to coordinate with teams from partner organizations.

MoFSS opened six Rest Houses to help reintegrate individuals with disabilities into society and resume their daily routines. These centers were designed to foster high-quality social interactions and provide engaging leisure activities.

MoFSS signed cooperation protocols with various NGOs to address the needs of earthquake victims, provide psychosocial support services, conduct activities for children and adolescents living in temporary shelters, and establish child- and family-friendly centers in disaster areas.

MoFSS played an active role in mitigating the impact of the Türkiye–Syria earthquakes and, by means of its extensive regional network and qualified personnel, effectively addressed the resulting damage and facilitated recovery efforts. The ministry continues to support earthquake victims through ongoing field operations.

# Rebuilding After the Earthquakes: New Homes and Ongoing Recovery Efforts

**Ömer Bulut**

President, Housing and Development Administration (TOKİ)

One-third of Türkiye's territory lies on an active earthquake fault zone, placing a large majority of the nation's population lives in areas under serious threat of earthquake. Several Turkish cities are, in fact, among the highest-risk areas for earthquakes worldwide.

In the last quarter century, Türkiye endured a series of devastating earthquakes, namely, the 1999 Izmit earthquake, the 2011 Van earthquakes, the 2020 Elazığ and Aegean Sea earthquakes, and, most recently, the 2023 Türkiye–Syria earthquakes. These earthquakes inflicted billions of liras' worth of financial losses and rendered hundreds of thousands of homes completely uninhabitable.

Türkiye's eastern province of Van was struck by two powerful earthquakes in 2011, each measuring approximately Mw 7.2—one on October 23 in the northern district of Erciş and the other on November 9 in the southern district of Edremit—resulting in the destruction or severe damage of 48,689 homes, workplaces, and farming

infrastructure. In response, a protocol between Türkiye's Housing Development Administration (TOKİ) and the Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD) facilitated the installation of 22,576 temporary containers to house displaced individuals. The construction of permanent housing commenced shortly thereafter, leading to the construction of 17,500 earthquake-resistant homes, numerous social facilities, and a combined total of thirty primary, middle, and high school buildings within ten months.

Less than a decade later, on 24 January 2020, an earthquake of Mw 6.8 centered in Elazığ's district of Sivrice inflicted significant damage across several of Türkiye's eastern provinces, with Elazığ and Malatya bearing the brunt of the destruction. Damage assessment reports recorded 15,382 homes to have been either destroyed or severely compromised. Reconstruction efforts commenced promptly after the earthquake, resulting in 32,852 new homes, including

5,450 village houses complete with farm buildings, to be delivered to those displaced in Elazığ and Malatya.

Then, on 30 October of the same year, an earthquake of Mw 6.6 struck the Aegean city of İzmir, resulting in 116 fatalities severe damage to or complete destruction of 4,556 housing units. This disaster served as the impetus for urban reconstruction initiatives that culminated in the construction of

5,061 new homes, of which 4,602 were allocated to people who had been displaced by the earthquake.

The Türkiye–Syria earthquakes of 6 February 2023 underscored the need to provide disaster victims emergency shelter and assistance as soon as possible. In the immediate aftermath of the first earthquake, Türkiye’s Ministry of Environment, Urbanisation and Climate Change mo-



*76 thousand earthquake houses were delivered with the participation of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.*



bilized teams to compile comprehensive damage assessment reports in order to accelerate both reconstruction and recovery efforts. Upon compiling these reports, the ministry began identifying appropriate sites for new permanent housing and surveying land for potential future development.

TOKİ contracted specialized firms to drill at selected sites within the region so that they could begin conducting soil surveys. These operations, closely monitored by university and ministry specialists, culminated in more than 150 separate soil analyses. To guide the soil surveys and ensure their effectiveness, comprehensive micro-zoning, geological, geophysical, and geotechnical reports were compiled before setting out on these efforts.

While selecting sites, TOKİ avoided locations with high groundwater levels or soil prone to liquefaction, opting instead for areas with stable terrain, such as those with rock-formed or limestone foundations. Specialists conducted geological, geophysical, geotechnical, hydrological, seismotectonic, and morphological studies based on areas' topographical characteristics. These studies provided valuable data for planning projects that adhered to prevailing laws and regulations on construction in earthquake-prone areas.

TOKİ's housing units are designed to fit harmoniously with cities' sociological, cultural, and demographic fabric while respecting local architectural styles. Buildings are limited to three to four stories and are constructed in designated areas close to the city center. Naturally, comprehensive ground surveys and soil analyses are completed before beginning construction.

TOKİ held closed bidding sessions to award contracts for the construction of approximately 112,030 housing units across the eleven provinces affected by the Türkiye–Syria earthquakes. At the time of writing, construction was underway for 3,191 units in Adana, 4,629 in Adıyaman, 6,278 in Diyarbakır, 2,587 in Elazığ, 19,281 in Gaziantep, 31,654 in Hatay, 19,576 in Kahramanmaraş, 1,854 in Kilis, 14,636 in Malatya, 11,507 in Osmaniye, and 4,469 in Şanlıurfa. A total of 36,735 units were scheduled to be delivered in these areas by the end of 2023.



*Gaziantep Islahiye Earthquake Houses*



*Hatay Payaş Earthquake Houses*

TOKİ enforces height restrictions on buildings and employs advanced earthquake-resistant construction techniques. This includes integrating spread footings, tunnel formwork carriers, and high-strength concrete into building designs. A two-tier oversight system led by private consultants and TOKİ engineers monitors each stage of the construction process and inspects the materials and

workmanship used to ensure that the highest standards of quality and safety are met. In short, we at TOKİ have gone the extra mile not only to construct more resilient cities but also to provide new homes and a return to normalcy to those individuals displaced in the recent earthquakes.



*Kahramanmaraş Elbistan Earthquake Houses*



*Malatya Earthquake Houses*

# Weather-Related Disasters in Türkiye for 2023

**Volkan Mutlu Coşkun**

General Director, Turkish State Meteorological Service

Natural disasters are, essentially, normal natural phenomena that, if not for their impact on human life, would not be considered disasters in the first place. The UN defines natural disasters as events that seriously disrupt the functioning of a community or society and that result in substantial damage to property and loss of life.<sup>1</sup> Beyond the sometimes substantial loss of life and property, natural disasters often displace millions of people, further exacerbating the economic damage to nations.

Weather-related disasters make up a significant portion of natural disasters. These include wildfires, agricultural pest invasions, droughts, desertification, rising lake and sea levels, avalanches, and floods—all of which are closely linked to weather conditions. Disasters directly caused by weather include rainfall, severe local storms, tropical storms, storm surges, extreme winter conditions, frost, and freezes. Collectively, natural disasters that are either directly or indirectly related to meteorological conditions are classified as meteorological or weather-related natural disasters.<sup>2</sup> An increasing number of weather events of un-

precedented intensity, impact, and duration have struck various parts of the world—some of which had never seen such disasters prior—in recent decades. These disasters pose significant threats not only animal and plant life but also the socioeconomic development of human societies in the areas they strike. The World Meteorological Organization's (WMO) 2021 *WMO Atlas of Mortality and Economic Losses from Weather, Climate and Water Extremes* report that between 1970 and 2019, extreme weather-, climate-, and water-related events resulted in 11,072 natural disasters worldwide. Given that these events caused 2,064,929 fatalities and approximately \$3.6 trillion in economic losses, the immensity of their destructive impact cannot be understated.<sup>3</sup>

According to the Emergency Events Database (EM-DAT), weather-, climate-, and water-related extreme weather events caused fifty percent of all recorded disasters (including technological disasters), forty-five percent of fatalities, and seventy-four percent of economic losses during the period in question.<sup>4</sup>



**Global Weather-Related Disasters and their Impact (1970–2019)**

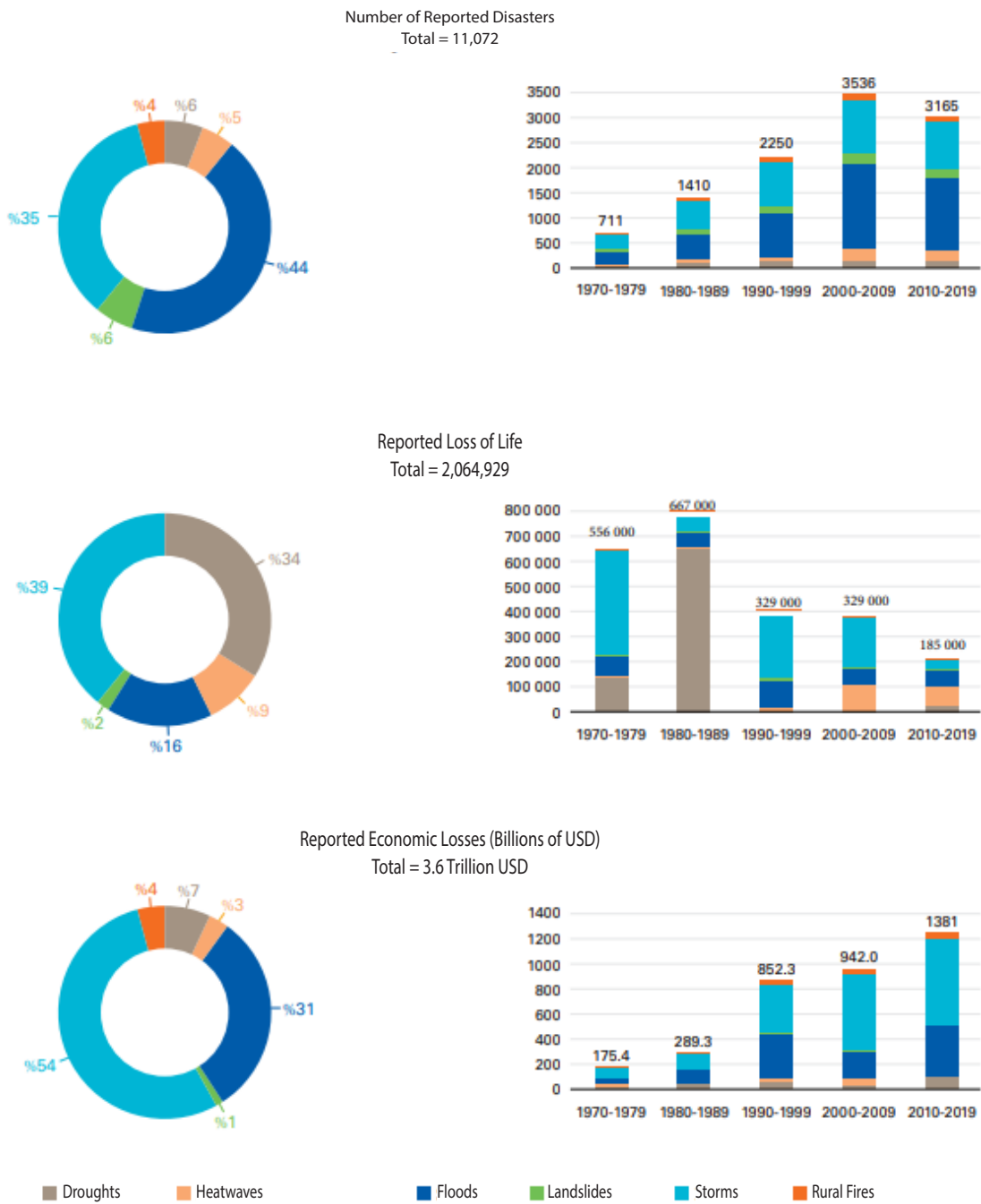
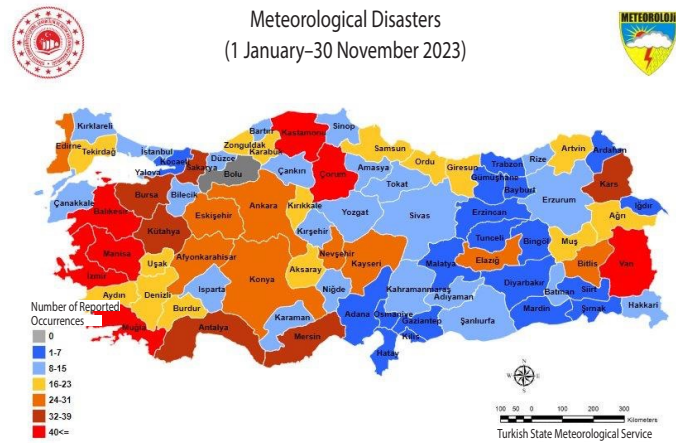


Figure 1 Number of Weather-Related Disasters and Economic Losses (1970–2019)

### Weather-Related Disasters in Türkiye

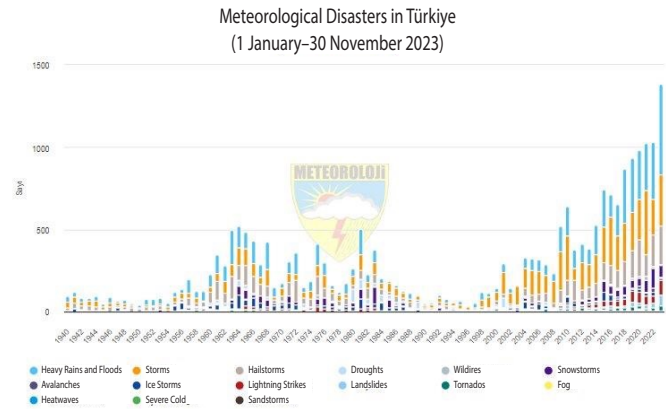
With the exception of tropical storms and active volcanoes, Türkiye is susceptible to most of the natural disasters that occur around the globe. Like climatically diverse regions of the world, Türkiye frequently encounters weather- and climate-related disasters, such as droughts and floods that inflict significant loss of life and property.<sup>1</sup>

Figure 2 Weather-Related Disasters in Türkiye by Province (1 January–30 November 2023)



The highest number of weather-related disasters occurred in the provinces of Muğla, İzmir, Manisa, Balıkesir, Kastamonu, Çorum, and Van in 2023. The Black Sea, Central Anatolian, the Aegean, Marmara, and Eastern Anatolian regions experienced a high frequency of such disasters.

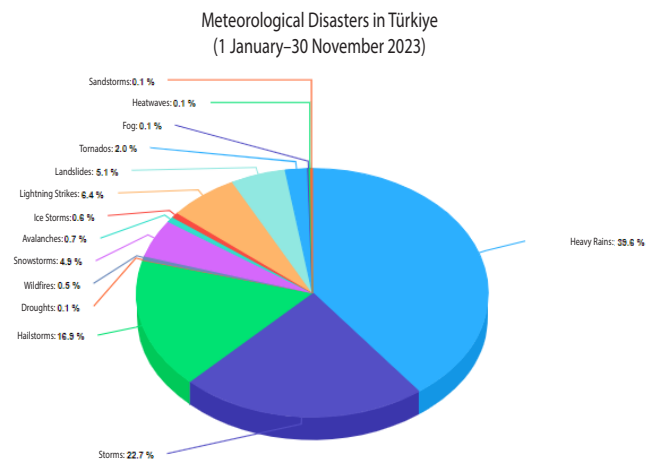
Figure 3 Weather-Related Disasters in Türkiye by Year (1940–30 November 2023)



The number of weather-related disasters increased significantly between 1940 and 30 November 2023. A total of 1,385 weather-related disasters occurred between 1 January and 30 November 2023 alone.

Heavy rains and floods were, at 39.6% of all incidents, the most common type of weather-related disaster in 2023, followed by storms at 22.7%, hailstorms at 16.9%, lightning strikes at 6.4%, landslides at 6.4%, and winter storms at 4.9%.

Figure 4 Weather-Related Disasters in Türkiye (1 January–30 November 2023)

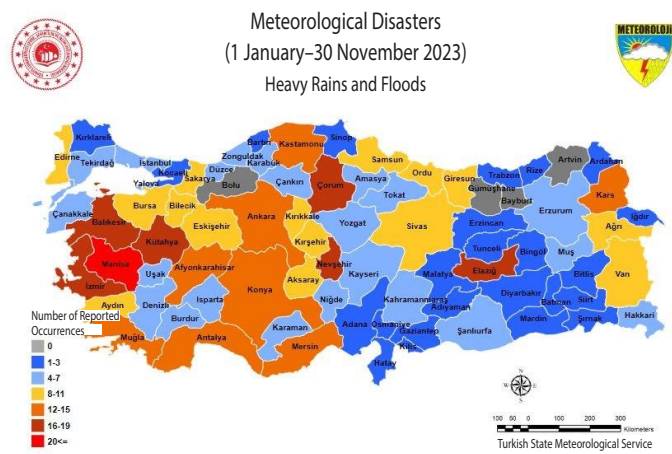


**Weather-Related Disasters**

This section offers a detailed analysis for the most frequent occurrences of heavy rains, floods, storms, hailstorms, lightning strikes, landslides, and winter storms across **Türkiye**’s provinces in 2023.

**Heavy Rains and Floods**

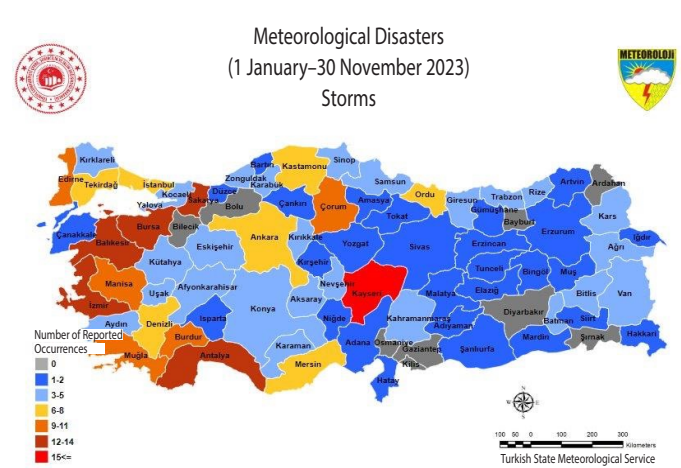
*Figure 5 Heavy Rains and Floods in Türkiye (1 January–30 November 2023)*



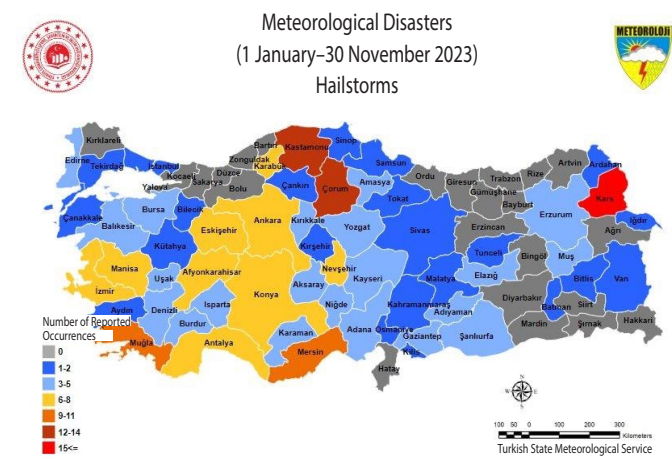
Manisa experienced the highest number of heavy rains and floods in 2023, followed by Izmir, Balıkesir, Kütahya, Nevşehir, Çorum, and Elazığ.

**Storms**

*Figure 6 Storms in Türkiye (1 January–30 November 2023)*



Kayseri experienced the highest number of storms in 2023, followed by Antalya, Izmir, Balıkesir, Bursa, and Sakarya.



**Hailstorms**

Kars experienced the highest number of hailstorms in 2023, followed by Kastamonu and Çorum.

*Figure 7 Hailstorms in Türkiye (1 January–30 November 2023)*



Lightning

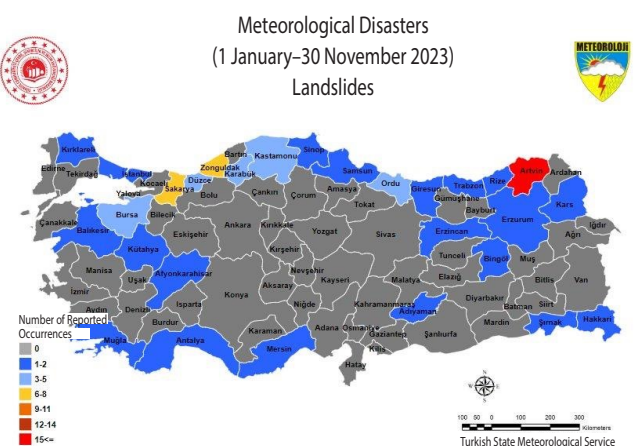
Figure 8 Lightning Strikes in Türkiye (1 January–30 November 2023)



Muğla experienced the highest number of confirmed lighting strikes in 2023.

Landslides

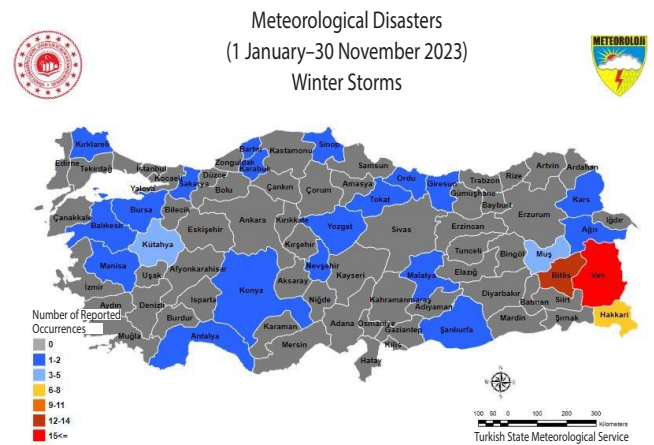
Figure 9 Landslides in Türkiye (1 January–30 November 2023)



Artvin experienced the highest number of landslides in 2023, followed by Sakarya and Zonguldak.

Winter Storms

Figure 10 Winter Storms in Türkiye (1 January–30 November 2023)



Türkiye’s eastern provinces of Bitlis and Van recorded the highest number of snow storms in 2023.

## Conclusion

Weather-related disasters have been a constant throughout human history and will remain so for the foreseeable future. The extensive human and material losses they incur pose significant challenges to sustainable development. What sets weather-related disasters apart from other natural disasters like earthquakes and volcanic eruptions is that the natural events leading up to them can often be predicted. Accordingly, providing timely and clear warnings is crucial for effectively managing and mitigating their impact.

Türkiye's General Directorate of Meteorology coordinates closely with international, regional, and national organizations as part of its disaster risk reduction efforts. It prepares meteorological warnings aimed at mitigating the adverse effects of weather events, minimizing damage and losses, and disseminating the information that the public and decision-makers need to take appropriate preventative measures. Since 9 February 2019, these warnings have been incorporated into the meteoUYARI system, ensuring they are readily accessible to both the public and government officials.

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- 3 World Meteorological Organization (WMO). *Atlas of mortality and economic losses from weather, climate and water extremes (1970–2019)* <https://wmo.int/publication-series/atlas-of-mortality-and-economic-losses-from-weather-climate-and-water-related-hazards-1970-2021> (Accessed: 19 March 2024).
- 4 CRED & UNDRR. (2020). *Human cost of disasters; an overview of the last 20 years (2000-2019)* <https://www.undrr.org/publication/human-cost-disasters-overview-last-20-years-2000-2019> (Accessed: 19 March 2024).

# Türkiye's National Medical Rescue Team (UMKE) in 2023

**Şükrü Yorulmaz**

Ministry of Health, General Directorate of Emergency Health Services

Known by the acronym UMKE in Türkiye, the National Medical Rescue Team began 2023 with the simple expectation of conducting drills and expanding its volunteer base. This all changed on 6 February when, at 4:17 a.m., the first of a series of earthquakes now referred to internationally as the Türkiye–Syria earthquakes struck south-eastern Türkiye, impacting an area of more than 500 km<sup>2</sup> (310 mi<sup>2</sup>) and unleashing the most catastrophic disaster in the nation's recent history. In response, UMKE mobilized fifteen thousand of its volunteers to assist the victims affected by these earthquakes.

Disasters have increased in frequency and severity over the past several decades, both globally and domestically, largely due to climate change. Türkiye is not only highly prone to earthquakes—evidenced by the Elazığ and İzmir events—but also experiences widespread wildfires that ravage extensive woodlands and recurrent floods that beleaguer the Black Sea coastal basin. The plethora of disasters faced by all of humanity, including Türkiye, highlights just how vital disaster preparedness is in confronting these both natural and human-induced disasters like war and industrial accidents. This realization only reaffirms the responsibility

UMKE teams carry in humanitarian aid operations.

The existence of effective healthcare services is essential wherever people live—let alone in disaster zones. Under the auspices of Türkiye's Ministry of Health, UMKE teams strive to be present wherever healthcare services are needed. Regardless of the conditions or locations, we provide emergency medical and rescue services to those affected by disasters and emergency situations, offering life-saving medical services to high-risk populations worldwide and supporting local health systems during their times of need. Even in the face of major disasters, we ensure that all UMKE personnel adhere to the rigorous standards our training programs seek to instill in them and are able to adapt accordingly as conditions evolve.

The potential for disasters to occur at any time and in any location, including the most remote, hard-to-reach areas, underscores how integral the ability to execute a rapid response is to post-disaster operations. Indeed, it is during the acute phase of disaster response—a brief window of opportunity measured in mere hours where lives can be saved and the spread of life-threatening diseases can be



controlled—that rapid deployment is most critical. With its team of experienced volunteer health personnel, robust and ready-to-deploy logistical infrastructure, and DST EMT 2 certification, UMKE has earned a reputation for providing swift and reliable healthcare services.

The Pazarcık and Elbistan earthquakes, measuring Mw 7.7 and 7.6, respectively, impacted 13.5 million people across eleven provinces. Over fifty thousand people, including

448 healthcare professionals, lost their lives during these earthquakes and their aftershocks. The number of people suffering injuries, some of which were very severe, exceeded 100,000. Despite the difficulties posed by damaged infrastructure and harsh weather conditions, UMKE teams coordinated with other official agencies to successfully evacuate 51,665 sick and injured individuals to hospitals standing by throughout the country. Of this total, 2,580 were evacuated by air, 48,758 by land, and 327 by sea.



Photograph: AA, Adsız Günebakan

When Türkiye issued a level 4 appeal in response the February earthquakes, medical teams from abroad quickly mobilized and arrived at Türkiye on the third day of the disaster to assist in the response. From day one, 1,810 ambulances, 245 UMKE medical rescue vehicles, sixteen air ambulances, and 15,883 UMKE and healthcare personnel were deployed in the earthquake zone. A total of 176 emergency response units were set up in the first hours following the earthquakes to serve earthquake victims. Finally, thirty-four field hospitals, operated by twenty-three international EMTs, treated a total of 590,468 patients.

These UMKE-established field hospitals—equipped with fully operational surgical theaters and mobile tomography devices—continued providing life-saving healthcare services well beyond the departure of international EMTs from Türkiye forty days after the earthquakes. In addition to providing medical rescue services in the field among uncleared debris and operating field hospitals, UMKE teams also conducted village surveys during the acute phase of the disaster, ensuring that medical and other essential care reached the earthquake victims in those areas.

After the aforementioned training exercises proved to have a positive impact on worker motivation and discipline during emergency response operations, UMKE collaborated with WHO and several international mobile laboratory teams in Rapid Response Mobile Laboratory (RRML) exercises between 19 and 22 June. Similarly, UMKE took part in an international EU MODEX medical exercise between 17 and 22 September 2023 in the western Turkish city of Çanakkale. Joining UMKE were the European Civil Protection Pool (ECPP), AFAD, and several other national organizations, as well as representatives from Portugal, Germany, Romania, and Poland.

During the EU MODEX exercise, UMKE teams were dispatched to Derne, Libya to deliver medical relief to flood victims there. UMKE established emergency response units in the immediate disaster zone while its emergency medical and rescue teams assisted local residents and other rescue personnel impacted by the ongoing disaster. UMKE also set up two field hospitals in areas that, although not directly affected by the floods, experienced severe damage to their healthcare infrastructures to ensure the uninterrupted provision of essential medical services.

UMKE was part of the AFAD-coordinated response to the September flood inundating parts of Kırklareli. UMKE worked in conjunction with national search and rescue teams and provided emergency medical services to individuals throughout the area affected.

UMKE teams sent fully equipped field hospitals, ambulances, and service vehicles to the Gaza Strip to assist Palestinian civilians injured by Israel's relentless assault on the entire population and played a critical role in evacuating cancer patients to Türkiye for continued treatment.

As their numbers continue grow, UMKE volunteers remain dedicated to ensuring nationwide preparedness against future earthquakes and work tirelessly both in Türkiye and abroad to support disaster victims.



# Compulsory Earthquake Insurance—TCIP in 2023

## Selva Eren

General Manager of Türk Reasürans A.Ş. and TCIP

Known in Turkish by the acronym DASK, the Turkish Natural Catastrophe Insurance Pool (TCIP) was established in 2000 in response to the 1999 Izmit earthquake. Since its inception, TCIP has worked diligently to restore a sense of normalcy in the wake of natural disasters. The year 2023 was challenging for all of Türkiye, as the catastrophic earthquakes leaving deep, partially unhealed wounds in the nation's soul. Despite the profound shock this cataclysmic event had on the entire country, TCIP mustered all of its strength, resources, and expertise to respond to the needs of those affected, devising several innovative solutions to support the recovery process.

In line with our maxim “earthquakes will pass and life will go on,” our organization supports everyday people on their road to recovery after earthquakes. TCIP has been responsible for issuing and managing Compulsory Earthquake Insurance policies since its establishment. In a country prone to earthquakes like Türkiye, TCIP is dedicated to encouraging all residents to prepare for such events, thereby ensuring a safer future for the entire nation.

We prioritized paying out claims to policyholders without undue delay. The groundwork laid prior to the disaster ensured that we were both operationally and financially prepared to manage the disaster as it unfolded. The entirety of our Ankara-based personnel, in addition to several teams from Istanbul, came together at Ankara's Emergency Management Center to begin operations immediately following the earthquake. Using damage appraisals made by Türkiye's Ministry of Environment, Urbanisation and Climate Change, we processed claims for properties that had been destroyed, that required immediate demolition, or that suffered severe damage, issuing the first damage payments within twenty-four hours of the first earthquake—well before receiving notifications from policyholders. The TCIP Truck and a damage assessment unit were dispatched to the affected areas the same day to expedite operations and portable container officers were set up to provide earthquake victims access to personalized assistance.

In response to this catastrophic disaster, we implemented new procedures to alleviate the burdens on those affected by the earthquakes. For the first time in its history, TCIP introduced an advance payment program that enabled di-



saster victims to access funds immediately upon filing a damage claim without having to wait for the assessment process to conclude. We also introduced new provisions for lightly damaged properties, which comprised a significant portion of claims filed. Under this program, we paid fifteen percent of the insured amount to policyholders without requiring any deductible on their part. We also offered those participating in the program the option to have a certified valuer reevaluate their properties upon request. For mortgaged properties, the Banks Association of Türkiye created procedures allowing for collective processing, thereby eliminating the need for claimants to file individual consent forms and allowing policyholders to receive up to fifty thousand TRY in damage compensation. As time passed, we identified policyholders who had not received the payments to which they were entitled because of incorrect contact information. To remedy this, we coordinated with Türkiye's Digital Transformation Office and e-government administrators to add a TCIP payment code service to Türkiye's official e-government portal.

We settled approximately 600,000 claims verified by Türkiye's Ministry of Environment, Urbanisation and Climate Change within four months of the earthquakes. We paid a total of 35 billion TRY in compensation to policyholders by January 24 and continue to process and settle incoming claims as quickly and equitably as possible.

As we continue to support those affected by the most recent earthquakes in their recovery, we remain committed to securing a bright future for all of Türkiye through engaging and innovative projects. Since 2014, for instance, the Earthquake-Resistant Building Design Competition has provided civil engineering and architecture students the opportunity to gain hands-on experience in designing

and modeling earthquake-resistant buildings. This competition similarly helps to raise awareness about earthquake engineering, encourages students to specialize in this field, and enhances society's collective understanding of earthquake-resistant structures. This year's finale will take place at Hasan Kalyoncu University in Gaziantep, one of Anatolia's most beautiful cities.

We also updated Compulsory Earthquake Insurance plans. Effective 1 January 2024, all policies will be calculated using the latest valuation assessments and will include inflation protection provisions. Coverage amounts will be adjusted monthly in accordance with the inflation rate and will not require any additional premium payments.

In response to the increasing frequency and severity of natural events in recent decades, TCIP has taken the necessary steps to fulfill its responsibility of offering effective disaster protection to all homeowners in Türkiye. This includes expanding coverage to encompass all forms of natural disasters, with a particular focus on floods. Compulsory Disaster Insurance will be introduced in July, providing homeowners with complete coverage for all natural disasters under a single policy.

We encourage all homeowners to insure their properties through TCIP, reinstate any lapsed policies, and update existing coverage plans to ensure that they are financially protected from all forms of natural disasters in the upcoming year.

# A Year of Solidarity: Parallel Emergencies, One Red Pillar

**Jessie Thomson**

IFRC Head of Türkiye Delegation

Indeed, 2023 was an unprecedented year for the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) in Türkiye. We embarked on the year with a focus on transitioning the Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN) program, our largest cash program in the world, and quickly found ourselves in the midst of a large-scale emergency response operation following the 6 February earthquakes in southeast Türkiye.

## **Stronger Together**

The earthquakes in Türkiye and Syria were the worst in modern history and resulted in devastating outcomes. The Turkish Red Crescent (TRC) was on the frontlines of the response; within half an hour their soup kitchens across the affected provinces became operational, and the IFRC Secretariat and its members quickly sprang into action to support TRC's operation.

As a membership organization made up of 191 national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies around the world, we are, in our very DNA, as local as possible, and as global as needed. This was the very definition of the response to the earthquakes in Türkiye—when TRC called for assis-

tance, the IFRC Network answered its call.

The IFRC immediately issued two million CHF from the Disaster Response Emergency Fund (DREF) and within days, IFRC launched an Emergency Appeal that was quickly revised up to 400 million CHF in support of TRC's response.

In parallel, countless Red Cross and Red Crescent national societies from all over the world rushed to help their sister national society and affected communities, sending planes loaded with relief items, participating in search and rescue efforts, helping with assessments in the field, and launching domestic appeals.

The response from the IFRC network was a powerful reminder of our ability to reach scale and impact through collective action, providing further confirmation that we are truly stronger together.

## **Closing the ESSN Chapter**

In parallel to the large-scale earthquake response, the ESSN program continued, staying the course on the provision of



cash assistance to the most vulnerable refugees, responding to new shocks, and advancing efforts to make the transition to a locally led social safety net program of the future.

Over the last three years, together, with the support of the European Union, the IFRC and TRC have taken humanitarian cash programming to new levels, providing inspiration and learning to others in the IFRC network

and beyond through production of learning resources,<sup>1</sup> peer-to-peer exchange and contribution to advancement of tools. The ESSN has become a best practice example both locally and globally, advancing the CVA and social safety net agenda.

In 2023, following the devastating earthquakes that struck in February, TRC and IFRC not only continued to pro-



Photograph: AA, Evrim Aydın



vide essential cash assistance without delay but also provided additional support to both refugees and the host community in earthquake-affected areas.<sup>2</sup> The program's adaptability to navigate these challenges and shocks is a testament to a proven shock responsive model under the ESSN and the dedication and collaborative spirit of all partners involved.

Moreover, part of the IFRC's mandate is capacity building and strengthening at local levels. Throughout IFRC's tenure, we have invested in the capacities of our national partners, particularly Turkish authorities and TRC. We prioritized the development of technical expertise humanitarian analysis, CVA, monitoring, assurance and learning mechanisms, thereby ensuring the continuous improvement for those we serve.

In addition, the IFRC and TRC worked together to tackle harmful stereotypes about refugees through public communication across the EU and globally, through campaigns like #PowertoBe, #PowertoShare and the refugee-owned and generated Storytelling Project.

## Looking Ahead

As we reflect on more than twelve years since the Syrian crisis began, we acknowledge that we are at a critical turning point. Many who sought safety in Türkiye have spent more than a decade alongside their Turkish brothers, sisters, and neighbors. Yet many of those neighbors now find themselves displaced, having lost everything—a heartbreaking and prescient reminder of our common humanity.

Both the protracted nature of the Syrian refugee crisis and the ongoing recovery from the February 2023 earthquakes require us to fully integrate our humanitarian as-

sistance with longer-term programming efforts. Together, the IFRC and TRC are working tirelessly to create self-sufficiency for the people we support, referring individuals to income-generating and livelihood programs, improving job creation, and facilitating job placements that can ultimately allow people to support themselves and their families in the long run.

As the world turns its attention to disasters elsewhere, we cannot forget about the significant humanitarian needs that remain in Türkiye, both for refugees facing yet another year of exile and earthquake-affected households still grappling with the devastating loss of loved ones, homes, and businesses.

Our work is not done and the IFRC will stand alongside TRC for the months and years ahead to continue our efforts toward alleviating the suffering of the people we serve and to be a beacon of hope for communities as we rebuild and recover together.

1 Learning Resources from ESSN are available online on - <https://cash-hub.org/resources/cash-in-turkiye/>

2 Türk Kızılay. (2023). Collective Kindness Project, a Cash Assistance Model for Earthquake Victims is Launched. <https://www.kizilay.org.tr/Haber/HaberArsiviDetay/7308>

# 2023 Perspective of the United Nations Resident Coordinator's Office in Türkiye

**Babatunde A. Ahonsi**

UN Resident Coordinator in Türkiye

## Current Situation

The operational work of the UN in Türkiye in 2023 experienced significant shifts following the devastating earthquakes that struck the southeastern provinces on 6 February 2023. The widespread and multifaceted impact of these earthquakes severely undermined the progress made thus far to achieve sustainable development goals in the region.

The earthquakes inflicted extensive damage across eleven provinces: Adana, Adıyaman, Diyarbakır, Elazığ, Gaziantep, Hatay, Kahramanmaraş, Kilis, Malatya, Osmaniye, and Şanlıurfa. The disaster affected fourteen million Turkish citizens and 1.8 million migrants, refugees, and Syrians under temporary protection (SuTP).

## Action Undertaken

Following the earthquakes, the UN and its partners (INGOs, NGOs) initiated immediate response operations through OCHA, in close coordination with Türkiye's Min-

istry of Foreign Affairs, relevant ministries, AFAD, TRC, and local authorities. A Flash Appeal for 1 billion USD, launched on 16 February 2023 to support the government-led relief efforts, was funded for 540.8 million USD.

A Humanitarian Country Team comprising UN entities, government representatives, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (IFRC and TRC), and I/NGOs was established to ensure dedicated and coordinated support. Supporting this team was an intersectoral coordination hub in Gaziantep along with four hubs in Adıyaman, Hatay, Kahramanmaraş, and Malatya.<sup>1</sup> By May 2023, we provided assistance to 5.4 million people in the affected provinces.

The Turkish government, in collaboration with the UN Country Team, the World Bank, and the EU, formulated the *Türkiye: Earthquakes Recovery and Reconstruction Assessment Report (TERRA)*.<sup>2</sup> This comprehensive report offers an in-depth analysis of the disaster's financial impact, estimating total damages and losses at 103.6 billion USD.<sup>3</sup>

In July 2023, the UN Country Team in Türkiye developed a recovery framework together with its partners. This framework emphasizes the humanitarian-development nexus to ensure continued support to the government's Earthquake response following OCHA's departure in mid-August 2023. Aligning with government and local partner priorities, the UNSDCF 2021–2025, and the 3RP, it focuses on addressing ongoing humanitarian needs, supporting economic recovery, revitalizing social services and development, and promoting resilience and sustainability.

As a complementary and advisory body to the UN Country Team Plus (UNCT+), an Area-Based Coordination Team (ABC Team) was established in Gaziantep to coordinate UN activities in support of the government's response, to enhance inter-agency coordination efforts, and to foster collaboration. This team includes representation from the Local Humanitarian and INGO Forums<sup>4</sup> and operates through hub-level coordination in Adıyaman, Hatay, Kahramanmaraş, and Malatya.

A comprehensive approach is necessary to effectively advance resilience and create sustainable solutions within the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. This involves integrating Disaster Risk Reduction, embracing the Building Back Better strategy, and prioritizing the Leave No One Behind principle—all of which are in alignment with Türkiye's Vision 2030.

- 1 The following sectors were established: education, emergency shelter/non-food items; food security and livelihoods; health and nutrition; protection; temporary settlement support; water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH); multipurpose cash and social protection; early recovery and debris removal; logistics; and emergency telecommunications.
- 2 ReliefWeb. (2023). *Türkiye Earthquakes Recovery and Reconstruction Assessment*. <https://reliefweb.int/report/turkiye/turkiye-earthquakes-recovery-and-reconstruction-assessment>
- 3 The damage analysis was conducted by social sectors (housing, education, healthcare, employment, environment), infrastructural sectors (water and sanitation, municipal services, energy, transportation, communication), and economic sectors (agriculture, mining, manufacturing industry, tourism). TERRA designates Disaster Risk Reduction as a key principle for resilient, inclusive, green, and sustainable earthquake recovery. Emphasizing the application of Build Back Better, it highlights the need for resilient infrastructures and inclusive decision-making, particularly for high seismic-risk areas. The *Leave No One Behind* SDG principle is deemed essential throughout all phases of emergency relief, recovery, and reconstruction.
- 4 Protection, economic empowerment, healthcare, education, DRR and environment, WASH, shelter, TSS, basic needs, CBI, WEHA, PSEA, AAP, DITI, an Earthquake Solutions and Mobility Analysis Team (ESMAT), and aInformation Management Working Group (IMWG).



# Türkiye in 2023: Insights from UNHCR

## Angela Li Rosi

The UNHCR Representative in Türkiye

The number of people forced to abandon their homes has reached an all-time high. By the end of June 2023, an alarming 110 million people worldwide had been displaced by persecution, war, human rights violations, and severe disruptions to public order. In a similar vein, the global refugee population rose to 36.4 million by mid-2023, up three-percent increase (+1.1 million) from the end of 2022. Yet this figure hides an even more bitter reality, as it predates Israel's attack on the Gaza Strip—the latest, and potentially the most precarious, escalation in an already volatile global landscape that threatens us all.

Seventy-five years after the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which, in its very first article, sets out that “all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.” Nevertheless, violations of human rights, international humanitarian law, refugee law, and other international legal norms are on the rise around the world. Disregard for the basic rules of war—for international humanitarian law—is quickly becoming the norm rather than the exception. The consequences of this grim reality have been devastation, displace-

ment, and anguish for the millions forced from their homes. While each new crisis seems to eclipse the last, pushing it into dangerous obscurity, the scars of each one remain ever present.

Since 2014, Türkiye has hosted the world's largest refugee population, with over 3.5 million refugees and asylum-seekers benefiting from a robust legislative framework, more than 3.2 million of whom are Syrians under temporary protection. Whereas two percent or so of this population resides in Temporary Accommodation Centers, the vast majority is integrated in Türkiye's *eighty-one* provinces, living alongside host communities in urban, peri-urban, and rural areas. Türkiye's legal framework is complemented by a policy of inclusion and harmonization, ensuring that refugees and asylum-seekers have access to public services at the national, provincial, and local levels.

Türkiye's inclusive humanitarian policy for people in need of international protection has, for more than twelve years, shaped the country's immediate response to crises. This policy was evident in the country's swift

reaction to the devastating February earthquakes that affected fifteen million people across eleven provinces. Among those impacted were 1.74 million refugees living side by side with Turkish citizens in the same buildings that collapsed.

Since day one of the emergency, UNHCR has supported *Türkiye's emergency response as part of a broader inter-agency effort*. At the request of the Turkish government, UNHCR delivered nearly three million core relief items—tents, mattresses, and kitchen sets—to authorities for distribution among affected communities, including refugees and local host populations. These supplies have helped improve living conditions and support early recovery. We likewise provided targeted assistance to individuals with specific needs, helping them access essential services like documentation and social protection.

That said, however, earthquakes' residual effects continue to pose significant challenges, particularly for vulnerable groups who are often the hardest hit and slowest to recover. The latest inter-agency protection needs assessment from August 2023 highlights the widespread impact on both refugees and host communities. Over eighty percent reported a worsening financial situation, while ninety percent indicated that they were unable to cover all of their monthly expenses and basic needs. These findings suggest that without reliable livelihood opportunities, coupled with multi-purpose cash assistance and comprehensive social assistance in the interim, many households are likely to face a food crisis. As reducing food expenditure and intake are already among the top three survival strategies adopted across households struggling to meet end's meat, many individuals may face health problems.

Sustained support for Türkiye is vital. This support includes meeting the immediate humanitarian needs of those affected by the earthquake and playing an active role in recovery, reconstruction, and development efforts to help rebuild lives. In the face of this extraordinary disaster, UNHCR calls upon the international community to show the people of Türkiye the same generosity they have extended in hosting millions of refugees—an extraordinary act of solidarity in line with the Global Compact on Refugees. The second Global Refugee Forum, set to take place in Geneva in December 2023, provides an opportunity for nations to announce concrete pledges, evaluate progress, share insights, tackle future challenges, and explore ways to strengthen burden and responsibility sharing in line with the Compact's objectives.

# FAO's Emergency Response Approach: Earthquake Response in Türkiye

**Viorel Gutu**

Subregional Coordinator, Central Asia and FAO Representative for Türkiye

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) is a specialized agency of the UN dedicated to eradicating hunger, improving nutrition, boosting agricultural productivity, enhancing the sustainable management of natural resources, and raising the standard of living of rural populations. FAO translates these objectives into actionable strategies through various means. For instance, the current Strategic Framework (2022–2031) seeks to support Türkiye's vision for 2030 by transforming agrifood systems into more efficient, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable models. This initiative, known as the “Four Betters,” focuses on fostering Better Production, Better Nutrition, a Better Environment, and a Better Life so as to leave no one behind (FAO, 2023). By implementing these four pillars, FAO aspires to rid the world of hunger, promote sustainable development, and ensure food security for all.

## **FAO's Emergency Response Approach**

FAO is globally recognized for its expertise in preventing and managing emergencies. As part of its mandate to

end hunger, FAO supports nations struggling with acute food insecurity. As a preventive mechanism, FAO monitors food security, agricultural conditions, and economic stability in crisis-prone areas and uses this information to issue early warnings to avert potential food crises and to guide policymakers in their decisions. FAO provides immediate support to affected communities during emergencies by distributing agricultural equipment and other items. These efforts help farmers resume agricultural production as soon as possible and earn a living.

FAO's efforts extend beyond immediate relief to building long-term resilience. This includes educating farmers in sustainable agricultural practices, encouraging crop and income diversification, and establishing community-based early warning systems to mitigate the losses incurred by future emergencies. Furthermore, FAO integrates its emergency responses with longer-term development initiatives aimed at recovery and the reconstruction of agricultural systems and promoting sustainable agricultural practices.



FAO works in close partnerships with governments, other UN agencies, NGOs, local authorities, and communities to ensure more comprehensive, better coordinated responses. The organization similarly plays a key role in gathering evidence on acute food insecurity, analyzing its root causes, and formulating lasting solutions. As co-founder of the Global Network Against Food Crises (GNAFC), co-leader of the Global Food Security Cluster, and host of the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), FAO is instrumental in addressing global food crises and preventing famine.

### **FAO in Türkiye**

Türkiye became a member of FAO in 1948 and established her first country office in 1982. A quarter of a century later, this office was transformed into the Subregional Office for Central Asia in response to the growing partnership between FAO and the Turkish government. Since its inception, FAO-Türkiye Office has supported Turkish agriculture and rural communities through capacity-building projects, technical cooperation, and policy dialogue. These efforts cover various sectors, including crop production, livestock, fisheries, forestry, the agrifood industry, and rural development. The office plays a key role in strengthening community resilience and economic stability in crisis zones.

### **FAO's Earthquake Response Efforts in Türkiye**

FAO Türkiye has, since 2011, supported the Turkish government's response to the Syrian Refugee Crisis through its Syrian Refugee Resilience Program and by co-leading the Economic Empowerment Sector under the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP). Drawing on its extensive experience, FAO Türkiye mobilized its human, technical,



and financial resources to mount a massive, multipronged response to the earthquakes that struck Kahramanmaraş on 6 February 2023. As part of our work, we helped affected communities maintain their agricultural production while complementing government-led efforts.

In collaboration with Türkiye's Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MoAF), FAO Türkiye conducted three assessments immediately following the earthquakes—*Türkiye: Initial Assessment on Possible Impacts of the Earthquake in 11 Provinces*,<sup>1</sup> *Türkiye: Agriculture sector needs assessment for earthquake-impacted provinces*,<sup>2</sup> and *Rapid geospatial assessment after the earthquake in Türkiye in 2023*<sup>3</sup>—to identify damage, loss, needs, and priority areas for intervention. Based on their findings and the *Türkiye Earthquakes Recovery and Reconstruction Assessment (TERRA)*, FAO formulated the *Türkiye: Earthquake response and recovery plan 2023–2026 (ERRP)*.<sup>4</sup>

The ERRP outlines a comprehensive framework for FAO's short-, medium-, and long-term earthquake response efforts, with the primary objective of maintaining food access and availability through restoration and improvement of agrifood systems and rural livelihoods. Spanning thirty-six months and backed by a 112 million USD budget, this plan aims to benefit 700,000 individuals and over 850 businesses in the affected area. Its three outcomes are to (i) restore agrifood systems, including supply and value chains, (ii) revitalize the agricultural labor market, and (iii) empower rural communities for sustainable development. The ERRP seeks to mainstream women's empowerment, disaster risk reduction, earthquake-resilient rebuilding, stronger private sector engagement, and climate-smart, nature-based solutions.

To respond to the needs of the agrifood sector and its workers, on the one hand, and to achieve the outcomes of ERRP, on the other, FAO Türkiye secured funding from the governments of Norway, Sweden, and Germany and FAO's Technical Cooperation Programme – Emergency Assistance. Furthermore, funds from the EU and the government of Japan, allocated as part of the aforementioned 3RP, were redirected to support these efforts. These funds allowed FAO Türkiye to plan and implement a series of initiatives aimed at meeting both immediate and long-term recovery needs.

#### Support Activities Completed (February–December 2023)

- Provided 100 portable motorized knapsack sprayers and fifty chainsaws to 150 farming households.
- Distributed 340.8 tons<sup>5</sup> of animal feed to 1,085 livestock producers.
- Distributed 192.75 tons of fertilizer to 905 farming households.
- Delivered 2.5 tons of cotton seed to fifty farming households and 175 bags of maize seed (to 125 farming households).
- Provided 70,200 tomato seedlings to seventy-five farming households.
- Provided 100 milking machines and twenty milk storages and cooling tanks to 180 livestock producers.
- Delivered 310 pheromone traps to 155 farming households.
- Provided unconditional cash transfers of 75 USD per household member to 1,843 farming households (totaling 7,543 members).

- Delivered two food processing machines to one women-led cooperative.
- Provided conditional cash support of 18.50 USD per day for three months to 300 individuals participating in cash-for-work programs aimed at rehabilitating community assets.
- Provided climate smart production and disaster resilience training to 900 farmers.

#### Planned Support (December 2023–June 2024)

- Provided thirty tons of fertilizer to 120 farming households.
- Provided 190 milking machines to 190 farming households.
- Delivered twenty-one food processing machines to three women-led cooperatives.
- Provided conditional cash support of 24 USD per day for three months to 300 individuals participating in cash-for-work programs aimed at rehabilitating community assets.
- Provided climate-smart inputs and equipment and climate smart and disaster resilient production training to 660 farmers.
- Supported six farmer unions and cooperatives with capacity development and provision of machinery, equipment, assets, and other inputs.
- Provided vocational training to fifty individuals to enhance their employment prospects and meet the skilled labor needs in the affected area.

- Finalized three assessments—(i) a value chain analysis for dairy, aquaculture, and horticulture subsectors, (ii) a forestry impact assessment, and (iii) a participatory rural appraisal—in collaboration with MoAF and local partners to guide future responses.

FAO will continue to support Türkiye in her response efforts, especially the recovery phase, throughout 2024. We remain committed to using all of our resources to eradicate hunger, improve nutrition, boost agricultural productivity, promote sustainable resource management, and raise living standards for rural populations.

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- 1 FAO. (n.d.). *Türkiye Initial Assessment on Possible Impacts of Earthquake in 11 Provinces*. <https://www.fao.org/3/cc4779en/cc4779en.pdf>
  - 2 FAO. (2023). *Türkiye Agriculture Sector Needs Assessment for the Earthquake-Impacted Provinces*. <https://www.fao.org/3/cc6884en/cc6884en.pdf>
  - 3 FAO. (2023). *Rapid Geospatial Assessment after the Earthquake in Türkiye in 2023*. <https://www.fao.org/3/cc6875en/cc6875en.pdf>
  - 4 FAO. (2023). *Türkiye Earthquake Response and Recovery Plan 2023–2026*. <https://www.fao.org/3/cc5910en/cc5910en.pdf>
  - 5 This and all subsequent instances of tons refer to metric tons.



# Türkiye's Actions in Humanitarian Aid: An Overview of 2023

## International Organization for Migration (IOM)

**Gerard Karl Waite**

Chief of Mission, IOM

The earthquakes that struck southeastern Türkiye in February 2023 triggered a crisis that would have deep implications for the entire nation. We at IOM mourned the loss of three of our own colleagues, and many more of our team members and their loved ones were directly affected. Nevertheless, our team demonstrated remarkable resolve in the face of this disaster. We were able to continue our life-saving efforts without experiencing major hang-ups thanks to the Turkish government's strong leadership and the swift response from IOM donors and member states to our appeal for assistance. In the first nine months following the earthquakes, we delivered more than thirteen million shelters and non-food items to the areas affected in both Türkiye and Syria through our cross-border humanitarian aid program. Our efforts have only intensified as we continue to move forward, albeit with a shift in focus toward long-term recovery to support impacted communities.

Our activities in the field and recovery efforts are grounded in IOM's Migration Crisis Operational Framework (MCOF), which promotes comprehensive, holistic, and inclusive responses through its humanitarian-development-peace nexus. In our work, we focus on seeing to the needs of two of the most vulnerable groups—migrants and displaced individuals—as they seek to regain a sense of normalcy in the face of ongoing crises. We believe, moreover, that migrants will play a key role in recovery ef-



Photograph: AA, Ömer Alven

forts, working hand in hand with local communities to rebuild the places they themselves have come to call home.

IOM is actively involved in six key sectors. As co-chair of the *Temporary Settlements Support* (TSS) sector within the Inter-Sector Coordination Group, we work in close coordination with our partners on camp coordination and camp management (CCCM) to ensure that communities affected by the earthquakes have access to essential services. We work with authorities to respond to people's *shelter* needs, facilitate access to *health* services, and increase support for *water, sanitation, and hygiene*. We also provide *mental health and psychosocial support* to help displaced individuals deal with the risks they face and meet their *protection* needs. IOM employs its Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) to collect and analyze data in order to implement data- and evidence-driven responses.

The robust supply chain and logistics network we have built after nearly a decade of humanitarian work in south-eastern Türkiye enabled us to deliver aid to affected area immediately after the earthquakes. By November 2023, we had supplied more than two thousand portable containers, provided shelter to more than 5,100 people, supported more than 35,200 people through cash-based assistance programs, offered more than fifteen thousand with psychosocial support, and delivered first-tier health services to more than 2,900 individuals.

We strive to provide additional support to affected communities, especially in the areas of food security, health-care, hygiene, protection, and winter preparedness.

We had the honor of working with the Turkish Red Crescent (TRC) throughout the entire process. Coordinating with TRC, we set up kitchens equipped with the necessary appliances and utensils to prepare people with much-needed hot meals at a time when food was particularly hard to come by.

As we move into the recovery phase, we have supported early recovery and livelihood initiatives by providing cash and in-kind grants to micro, small, and medium-sized businesses. We have leveraged our global expertise to rejuvenate key sectors of the economy through skills development and job matching programs tailored to the specific needs and realities of Turkish citizens and individuals under temporary protection.

Our current efforts focus on developing durable solutions in the provinces hardest hit by the earthquakes. Three strategic priorities inform our work: (i) addressing displacement and creating the conditions that allow people to return to their cities, (ii) urgently generating livelihoods to support economic recovery in affected areas, and (iii) boosting preparedness against future disasters.

We will continue to increase the positive impact that our initiatives have on affected communities. We intend to achieve this by promoting comprehensive coordination across the sector and assuming key leadership roles within UN agencies.

Since August 2023, IOM has co-chaired both the Area-Based Coordination (ABC) Centers and the UN Earthquake Solutions and Mobility Analysis Team (ESMAT) in Türkiye. These initiatives focus on addressing the challenges presented by post-earthquake humanitarian mobility trends and have enabled us to deliver targeted, needs-based activities in the earthquake disaster zone.

On behalf of IOM, I reaffirm our commitment to supporting the Republic of Türkiye's vision for recovery. Our core belief that safe, orderly, and well-managed human mobility benefits both migrants and local communities will continue to guide us in all of our future endeavors.

# Istanbul Project Coordination Unit (IPKB): “We are Strengthening our Future!”

## Kazım Gökhan Elgin

Director, IPKB

Established in 2006, the Istanbul Project Coordination Unit (known in Turkish by the acronym IPKB) has, as part of the ongoing *Istanbul Seismic Risk Mitigation and Emergency Preparedness Project* (ISMEP), reinforced or reconstructed schools, hospitals, and other public buildings constructed in or before 1999. IPKB has also launched several initiatives to raise public awareness of disasters and to enhance the operational capacity of Türkiye’s Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD) and National Medical Rescue Team (UMKE).

Istanbul is, by dint of her geography, a city highly prone to earthquakes. While earthquakes are unfortunately inevitable, earthquake preparedness can always be improved upon. We at IPKB have taken advantage of innovative technologies and techniques throughout 2023 to this very end.

We adhere to specific parameters to determine whether a building should be demolished and rebuilt or simply reinforced. Should a structure not meet reinforcement

criteria, we proceed with its demolition. In 2023, we reinforced thirty-one schools within an area of 94,930 m<sup>2</sup> (113,535 yd<sup>2</sup>), ensuring they are earthquake resistant and safe for both students and teachers. Of the buildings reinforced, sixteen were primary-middle schools, five were kindergartens, four were high schools, four were service buildings, and two were vocational high schools.





At IPKB, we are dedicated to preparing schools and hospitals in Istanbul to withstand earthquakes and construct innovative, modern, and sustainable buildings. We aim for the schools we rebuild to last for at least one hundred years, to be easily retrofitted with new technologies as they emerge, and to minimize maintenance costs. By incorporating exposed concrete in our building designs, for instance, we are able to significantly reduce the need for regular painting and upkeep expenses. Additionally, the architectural designs we employ optimize natural light and solar heat, thereby helping to keep heating and lighting costs to a minimum.

We completed the reconstruction of all the buildings we had set out to rebuild in 2023. In doing so, we increased the total amount of enclosed area from 42,955 m<sup>2</sup> (51,374 yd<sup>2</sup>) and 240 classrooms to 117,813 m<sup>2</sup> (140,903 yd<sup>2</sup>) and 380 classrooms. Our reconstruction efforts included twelve primary-middle schools, two vocational high schools, one public education center, and one high school. This equaled a net gain of 74,858 m<sup>2</sup> (89,529 yd<sup>2</sup>) in total enclosed area, which in turn allowed for greater student enrollment.

Our reinforcement and reconstruction projects include public administrative buildings. Since many of the buildings housing the agencies forming Çekmeköy's district governor apparatus were found to be at risk in the event of an earthquake, it was decided that all of these agencies should be consolidated into a single facility. Accordingly, we constructed a new 13,000-m<sup>2</sup> (15,548-yd<sup>2</sup>) district governor's complex in Çekmeköy that comfortably accommodates all of these agencies.

Since 2006, we have reinforced or completely rebuilt a total of 1,384 buildings—of which 1,180 were schools or

school-related buildings. The following two tables list the buildings that were reinforced and rebuilt in 2023:

#### *Reinforced Buildings:*

1	Bahçelievler Mehmet Akif Ersoy Middle School—A and B Blocs
2	Bakırköy Nefus Nakipoğlu Special Education Vocational Training Center
3	Beşiktaş Lütü Banat Primary School
4	Beykoz Bozhane Primary School
5	Beyoğlu Hasköy Middle School—A and B Blocs
6	Çatalca Kestanelik Imam-Khatib Middle School
7	Çatalca Ovayenice Örfi Çetinkaya Primary-Middle School
8	Esenyurt Şair Fevzi Kutlu Kalkancı Middle School
9	Fatih Vocational Education Center—A Bloc
10	Bahçelievler Mustafa Nevzat Pisak Vocational Education Center
11	Beşiktaş Levent Vocational and Technical Anatolian High School
12	Beşiktaş Yıldız Ertem Kindergarten
13	Beyoğlu İstiklal Primary School—A and B Blocs
14	Çatalca Dağyenice Zeki Kisbu Primary School
15	Çatalca 75. Yıl Cumhuriyet Primary School
16	Esenyurt Vocational Education Center
17	Esenyurt Tevfikbey Middle School
18	Gaziosmanpaşa Kazım Karabekir Anatolian Imam-Khatib High School
19	Güngören Haznedar Abdi İpekçi Middle School
20	Kartal İhsan Zakiroğlu Middle School
21	Kartal Medine Tayfur Sökmen Primary School
22	Küçükçekmece Zübeyde Hanım Kindergarten
23	Küçükçekmece Menekşe Special Education Kindergarten
24	Silivri Girls Anatolian Imam-Khatib High School
25	Üsküdar İstanbul Stock Exchange Vocational and Technical Anatolian High School—A and B Blocs
26	Kadıköy Münevver Şefik Fergar Primary School—A Bloc
27	Kartal Soğanlık Primary School—A and B Blocs
28	Küçükçekmece Marmara Girls Anatolian Imam-Khatib High School
29	Küçükçekmece Çiğdem Kindergarten
30	Küçükçekmece Yasemin Kindergarten
31	Sultangazi Vocational and Technical Anatolian High School—A and B Blocs, Gymnasium

*Reconstructed Buildings:*

1	Üsküdar Burhaniye Primary School
2	Kağıthane Günebakan Primary School
3	Kağıthane Osman Tevfik Yalman Middle School
4	Beşiktaş Murat Beyaz Primary School and District Directorate of National Education
5	Adalar Büyükkada Public Education Center
6	Bayrampaşa Anatolian High School
7	Beşiktaş Dikilitaş Mehmetçik Imam-Khatib Middle School
8	Beşiktaş Hamiyet Gerçek Primary School
9	Beşiktaş Hüseyin Aycibin Primary School
10	Beykoz Atatürk Primary-Middle School
11	Beyoğlu Imam-Khatib Middle School
12	Kadıköy Anatolian High School
13	Küçükçekmece Şehit Binbaşı Bedir Karabıyık Multi-Program Anatolian High School
14	Üsküdar Şehit Mustafa Cambaz Primary School
15	Eyüpsultan Middle School
16	Sarıyer Alparslan Primary School

The Türkiye–Syria earthquakes reminded us just how important ISMEP’s works are in a city such as Istanbul. We witnessed firsthand how ignoring building regulations—whether in terms of materials or workmanship—led to severe damage to or the complete collapse of structures, and therefore the loss of countless lives, at the slightest tremor. Indeed, construction is the synergy of knowledge and craftsmanship, whether for single-story homes or high-rise buildings.

At this stage, I can confidently say that IPKB has accumulated extensive knowledge and experience in constructing modern, innovative, earthquake-resistant, and sustainable buildings that fit all safety regulations. We published our Sustainability Strategy Guide in 2023 to assist contractors and developers in adhering to the aforementioned criteria as they create new living spaces. Interested readers can find this guide at [www.ipkb.gov.tr/en/](http://www.ipkb.gov.tr/en/).

At the time of writing, we have approximately 120 school projects in Istanbul, all of which we plan to complete within two years. The construction of Ümraniye’s District Governor’s Complex is ongoing and is scheduled to be operational within the year. Similarly, we are nearing completion of Şişli’s District Governor’s Complex, which will be a significant addition to the area’s administrative infrastructure.

Hospital projects remain a top priority for us. We plan to commence work on the Haydarpaşa Siyami Ersek Campus, Fatih Sultan Mehmet Training and Research Hospital, and Kartal Oncology Hospital within the year. Budget research for these projects is, at the time of writing, well underway. Given their complexity and significant financing requirements, we are working to secure the necessary funds through both domestic sources and international financing opportunities. In this regard, we would like to extend our sincere appreciation to Türkiye’s Ministry of Treasury and Finance both for their continued support and for facilitating the acquisition of international loans on our behalf.

# Scouts in Action during Disasters: Search, Rescue, and Humanitarian Aid

## Hasan Dinçer Subaşı

President, Scouting and Guiding Federation of Türkiye

The Scouts have been active in Türkiye since 1910, providing children and adolescents with a uniform education that seeks, above all else, to instill a love for one's nation and to cultivate morally upright, civic-minded individuals.

Scouts around the world take an oath as part of their formal initiation ceremony,<sup>1</sup> meaning that they are both volunteers and oath-bound members of the organization. A scout's promise to fulfill his duty to God and his country and to help others encompasses humanitarian work, including search and rescue efforts, in the event that a disaster leaves their compatriots in need. In taking this oath, scouts commit to constantly improving themselves. Those between the ages eleven and fifteen pledge to always be at the ready. This means that scouts in this age group strive to be prepared for anything—not only physically, mentally, and intellectually but also by honing their knowledge and skills and maintaining their equipment to the best of their abilities. Scouts aged fifteen to eighteen, on the other hand, rephrase this notion to emphasize their duty to serve society.

The Scouts' educational approach predicates self-improvement on serving society. While this may seem unrelated at first, this commitment means that the Scouts is the largest volunteer search, rescue, and humanitarian organization not only in Türkiye but globally. The Scouting and Guiding Federation of Türkiye (henceforth "the Federation") entrusted these responsibilities to its Search, Rescue, and Humanitarian Aid Institute, established in the 1980s, and this institutes subordinate teams.

All of the current 265,000 have received scouts specialized training from this institute. From the age of six, scouts are trained to recognize dangers, to understand the impact that disasters have on communities, to feel comfortable asking for help, and to provide accurate descriptions, instilling in them a keen awareness of their surroundings and a readiness to act at a moment's notice. In addition to rescue training, scouts are equipped with the knowledge and skills to ensure their own safety and that of others, able to navigate natural environments day or night regardless of weather conditions.

<sup>1</sup> The oath is the same worldwide and is recited in the local language: "On my honor I will do my best to do my duty to God and my country and to obey the Scout Law; to help other people at all times; to keep myself physically strong, mentally awake, and morally straight."



Scouts' promise to remain physically strong, mentally alert, and morally upright is their greatest asset in humanitarian efforts. They place no value on publicity or recognition; instead, they are driven by a commitment to serve God, their country, and their community. This dedication empowers them to work tirelessly in disaster zones, even in the absence of supervision and while facing extreme exhaustion. Scouts' exceptional preparedness for disaster response is rooted in a combination of qualities that equip them to handle even the most severe situations. Their widespread presence across the country ensures they are available wherever needed, while their ability to communicate under any conditions and their self-sufficiency in the absence of outside support enable them to operate effectively in times of crisis. Their discipline, hierarchical structure, and team spirit—rooted in their methods and shared worldwide—instill in them with a strong sense of order. Understanding authority and approaching each task with wholehearted commitment further bolsters their readiness for the challenges posed by disasters.

In the event of a disaster, all scouts are expected to head immediately to the disaster zone with whatever gear is necessary for them to mount an effective response even before receiving an official communiqué from the Federation. Scouts who have completed search and rescue training are to report to Türkiye's Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD) while those without such training are to report to the Turkish Red Crescent (TRC) and operate under their direction. As a result, scouts from across the nation began heading to the disaster zone as soon as they learned of the situation. Turkmen scouts from Yayladağı were present at Disaster Emergency Social Assistance (ASYA) warehouses only a few hours after the first earthquake struck at 4:17 a.m. on 6 February. Scouts from Adana trained in rescue operations began sifting through the rubble to free people trapped underneath. Scouts from Türkiye's other provinces were likewise ready

at their posts awaiting further instructions well before the break of dawn. AFAD-certified urban search and rescue teams, equipped with heavy gear, reached debris sites and began rescue operations shortly after the second earthquake struck, searching through the rubble of eighteen buildings within twenty-four hours of their arrival. By the end of the first day, 2,672 fully equipped scouts had arrived at the disaster zone and joined ongoing search and rescue efforts for the next three weeks.

Scout leaders trained in first aid provided emergency health and first aid services both as members of our rescue teams and at our camp site. Scouts employed as healthcare professionals drove distribution vehicles and attended to the medical needs of the disaster survivors they encountered. These vehicles were also used to transport sick and injured people. Scout leaders who served as religious clerics participated in funeral services, handling burial procedures for the thousands of people who had lost their lives in the disaster.

Scouts performed various duties during the first days following the disaster, including directing traffic, collaborating with AFAD coordination centers, and extinguishing tent fires. Given their expertise in setting up tents, scouts were responsible for distributing and assembling the tents that arrived in the area and for organizing tent cities—the majority being set up in Adıyaman and Kahramanmaraş. The Federation's facilities in Kilis and Osmaniye were each converted into tent cities and distribution hubs.

Despite all the challenges, scouts used their skills to set up camps equipped with all essential amenities in the areas where they were deployed. They implemented a rotating watch system to manage these camps and see to the needs of their inhabitants, from cleanliness to handling their own organizational logistics. In addition to assisting thousands of earthquake victims across the eleven affected provinces, the Federation ensured that the needs of every one of its members were adequately addressed. True to the principle

of always being prepared, scouts arrived in the disaster area with their own accommodation and food supplies, which enabled them to begin immediately upon arrival.

The Federation established its headquarters, main tent city, and logistics hub in the Serinyol Forest Nursery in Hatay. TRC warehouses, logistics hubs, and camps were set up in the other affected provinces. This allowed a total of ten thousand scouts, each serving for at least one week, to participate in humanitarian efforts over the period of three months in the earthquake disaster zone.

Drawing on their expertise in child and adolescent education, scout leaders were instrumental in helping children regain a sense of normalcy by including them in traditional scouting exercises. We invited twelve hundred children to our camps, where they engaged in a variety of scouting activities aimed at fostering their psychological recovery. To this end, these children helped make eighty-one thousand seed balls, with those containing cypress seeds to be placed at the graves of those who lost their lives in the disaster. The Federation has similarly committed to ensuring that these children will be able to continue their scouting activities upon returning to their home communities.

### **Distribution**

Scouts played a central role in the distribution of much needed supplies, helping to unload trucks, sort arriving items, and deliver materials and provisions at aid warehouses run by AFAD, TRC, ASYA, municipalities, and NGOs. Scouts operated forklifts, watched over facilities, and carried out various duties at these warehouses around the clock. As a result of their efforts, eight thousand reusable emergency blankets were distributed to disaster victims shortly after the first earthquake. Scouts likewise delivered truckloads of tents, sleeping bags, mats, space heaters, water, flour, rice, canned goods, and other essential items procured by the Federation itself.

To expedite distribution, scouts provided disaster victims with a phone number for submitting requests via text message. Scouts then sorted these requests by location, either supplying requested items from their own tent warehouses or sourcing them from other locations. They consolidated and packed the supplies in one place, after which they loaded them into a single vehicle so that they could be delivered without undue delay. Scouts' efforts in this vein resulted in a total of thirty thousand aid packages being delivered over the course of three months.

Particularly during the initial days following the earthquakes, distribution teams would call ahead to aid recipients' locations to ensure that packages were delivered without interrupting ongoing search and rescue efforts. Scouts also surveyed areas to identify people in need of help, relaying this information to the proper authorities. Instead, scouts focused primarily on providing aid to mountain villages and to more remote communities that lived far from major roads.

Villagers were joined by relatives displaced from larger urban areas, causing small villages, which typically had no more than a hundred residents, to swell to up to two thousand. Since many of the more remote villages suffered from damaged or poor roads, they very often did not receive adequate aid. The inability of many villagers to travel beyond their homes for assistance further exacerbated the direness of the situation at hand. However, thanks to our vehicles' off-road capabilities and our experience navigating rugged terrain, we were able to reach these hard-to-access areas and see to the needs of everyone there. The demand for food, water, hygienic supplies, space heaters, mats, and tents surged significantly following the massive influx of displaced people. Over the next three months, we consistently visited these areas and provided whatever residents needed. In addition to distributing dry food, we gathered spinach from local fields and distributed it to families in need with the villagers' permission.

Scouts likewise played a vital role at ASYA's distribution hubs located in tent cities. In the immediate aftermath of the earthquake, the mix of second-hand and new clothing presented significant logistical challenges. To address this, scouts worked night shifts, quite literally burning the midnight oil following the destruction of electrical infrastructure to sort through incoming donations and ensure that only usable items made it to the people who needed them. Scouts and their vehicles were crucial in transporting essential supplies such as burial shrouds, body bags, and emergency blankets between warehouses in the affected provinces. Scouts who were unable to reach the disaster area supported these efforts by sorting and loading materials brought to aid warehouses in their local towns onto trucks for delivery to the disaster zone.

Zakat and fitra donations entrusted to us from throughout Türkiye were delivered to disaster victims in need. Scouts from across Türkiye were joined by their peers from Azerbaijan, Lebanon, Libya, and Kosovo in the efforts to clear debris. Scouts from Syria, Palestine, Libya, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Egypt living in Türkiye supported us throughout the entire ordeal. Members of the World Scouting Organization, as well as scouts from both Lebanon and Greece, likewise provided invaluable support by sending or personally delivering disaster aid in the form of financial contributions and essential supplies.

### **Communication and Coordination**

The Federation is equipped with radio systems capable of maintaining communications with any part of the world, irrespective of environmental conditions. With thousands of scouts who are themselves amateur radio enthusiasts, the Federation is well-positioned to employ all of its capabilities in this regard to their fullest potential. Scout leaders deployed in disaster zones use a separate radio frequency to maintain communications with one another and their headquarters. Our teams in Istanbul and Konya worked around the clock

to ensure there were no communication interruptions as scout leaders coordinated teams' movements between disaster sites. When the Federation's president and team leaders arrived on the scene shortly after the first quake, they were quickly made abreast of the situation and teams' whereabouts. The communications network allowed them to issue whatever directive was necessary to expedite operations on the ground. Although the Federation possessed two satellite telephones—one in the disaster zone and one in the Federation's Ankara headquarters—they were never needed. Our amateur radio operators and scout leaders who doubled as communications specialists also helped public institutions communicate with one another.

All of the aforementioned measures were carried out were overseen and coordinated by leaders. Every aspect of the support and relief efforts—determining where individuals would be dispatched from, where they would be deployed, and how transportation would be organized—was meticulously planned and executed simultaneously across all provinces within the disaster zone.

Given the frequent occurrence of earthquakes in Türkiye, a catastrophic event of this magnitude was inevitable. Consequently, both emergency response authorities and our organization had made preparations for such a disaster. Our limited budget, however, has prevented us from allocating sufficient funds to training and equipment. With greater support, however, we can increase the number of these unsung heroes in our country and enhance the quality of disaster training in a relatively short period of time.

After each disaster, we hope that meaningful steps will be taken to enhance disaster preparedness and, equally important, search and rescue team training. We honor all those who perished in the most catastrophic disaster Türkiye has experienced in the twenty-first century, including both the scouts and scout leaders who gave their lives in the line of duty—may God of mercy on their souls.



# Humanitarian and Mental Health Support in Türkiye's Earthquake Disaster Zone

**Mevlit Yurtseven**

MD, Head of Alliance of International Doctors (AID)

Natural disasters like earthquakes can have a profound impact on both the physical infrastructure and the mental well-being of individuals and communities. In the aftermath of such events, Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) initiatives are essential in helping individuals cope with trauma, anxiety, and loss.

Earthquakes can trigger a range of mental health challenges, including post-traumatic stress, anxiety, depression, and grief. MHPSS projects are designed to meet the diverse needs of individuals and communities by addressing both immediate concerns and long-term mental health issues. Given the extensive implications of psychological trauma, it is imperative that Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) programs be explicitly designed to cater to the specific challenges that arise in the aftermath of earthquakes. These programs should prioritize community-wide psychoeducation sessions to raise awareness about common trauma responses and the importance of seeking mental health support. Destigmatizing mental

health issues is a critical step in encouraging individuals to seek the care they need.

Successful MHPSS projects actively engage affected communities in a culturally sensitive manner. These initiatives involve collaboration with local leaders, organizations, and community members to tailor interventions to the specific needs and cultural context of the population in question. By implementing culturally sensitive approaches, these projects better equip communities to cope with the mental health issues and psychosocial challenges following traumatic events.

In the aftermath of an earthquake, it is essential to prioritize building community resilience through support groups and community activities. These measures cultivate a sense of solidarity among survivors, reinforcing the idea that they are not alone in their journey to recovery. It is furthermore crucial to acknowledge that mental health recovery is a protracted and complex process. As such, local healthcare

providers should be trained in trauma-informed care to ensure the community has continued access to mental health resources. This capacity-building effort is particularly pertinent in the immediate period after a disaster when the demand for mental health resources is at its peak.

MHPSS projects prioritize capacity building to create sustainable mental health support systems. Local healthcare workers, community leaders, and volunteers are trained to deliver basic mental health support, significantly broadening the reach of available services. This approach not only strengthens the community's ability to meet immediate needs but also empowers them to respond to future challenges using their own resources.

Mental health professionals should be deployed to conduct individual and group therapy sessions with survivors of traumatic events. These sessions offer a safe, confidential venue for survivors to express their emotions, process their experiences, and learn effective coping strategies. It is crucial that these professionals be readily available on-site to provide immediate support to those in need, as their guidance has a direct impact on whether therapy will be successful in aiding survivors on their road to recovery.

Alliance of International Doctors (AID) has demonstrated its commitment to providing humanitarian assistance by swiftly deploying medical teams, emergency relief, and essential supplies to the earthquake zone. Our organization recognizes that healing extends beyond physical injuries to encompass the emotional trauma inflicted by such catastrophic events. By addressing the immediate needs of the survivors and delivering vital relief, AID has laid a solid foundation for the subsequent phases of mental health support.

The Türkiye–Syria earthquakes galvanized AID into swift action. This disaster not only wrought extensive physical devastation but also had a profound psychological toll on affected communities, one manifestation of which being increased rates of PTSD. This propelled AID to adopt a holistic approach to humanitarian action—one that incorporates MHPSS to address the emotional well-being of disaster survivors. This approach is a testament to AID's unwavering commitment to providing comprehensive humanitarian support to those in need.

# Embracing the World with Kindness: How Our Nation's Trust and Support Shaped 2023

**İzani Turan**

Vice President, Türkiye Diyanet Foundation Board of Trustees

Reflecting on 2023, we see a year marked by challenges, yet defined by national solidarity and a determination to prevail. While we entered the year with high hopes and wishes of wellbeing, the earthquakes on 6 February that devastated eleven provinces in southeastern Türkiye and several others in northwestern Syria tested the strength of our resilience. Mobilizing all its resources and manpower, the nation stood as one and proved to the world that we will surely endure as long as we remain united.

The pain and hardships we endured in 2023 will not soon be forgotten, nor will the acts of kindness and sacrifice that followed the earthquake. Inheritors of a rich legacy of compassion from our ancestors, we, the people of Türkiye, have always been committed to aiding the world's oppressed and has, as a result, emerged as the global leader in humanitarian assistance. This unwavering commitment has rightfully earned Türkiye the respect and admiration of nations worldwide. When we faced our own devastating earthquake, support poured in from all corners of the

globe. Our nation embodied the essence of the Hadith describing believers as interlocking bricks supporting one another by sending all that it could to their fellow compatriots reeling after the cataclysmic earthquakes (Sahih al-Bukhari, Book 8, Hadith 128; Sahih Muslim, Book 45, Hadith 83).

Driven by our mission to spread goodness across the world, we at the Türkiye Diyanet Foundation have worked tirelessly to ease the suffering of oppressed people worldwide whilst simultaneously tending to the wounds of our citizens affected by major disasters. Guided by this principle, our Foundation has worked to convey the peace and serenity of Islam, as well as the compassion and noble character of Prophet Muhammad (sav), to every son and daughter of Adam in the world, touching the lives of almost sixty-three and a half million people in 2023 alone.

Entrusted by our nation to act compassionately to those in need wherever they may be, the Foundation played a ma-





Photograph: Mehmet Akif Parlak

major role in responding to the myriad needs of earthquake survivors. Our response encompassed humanitarian aid, search and rescue efforts, food distribution, shelter provision, burial services, and emotional support. We were on the ground immediately after the first earthquake struck Kahramanmaraş and our humanitarian work continues unabated to this day. As of the time of writing, we have dispatched 1,684 trucks and 439 vans of aid supplies and set up 3,678 temporary housing units. We have worked tirelessly to alleviate the suffering of eight million affected individuals since the earthquakes.

As Ramadan approached, the entire nation channeled its goodwill to the earthquake victims in the spirit of the blessed month. Our Foundation directed nearly all of the aid it received to those impacted by the earthquake, both

in the disaster zone and in other cities where they had sought refuge. We delivered charitable donations made by people from throughout Türkiye to more than ten million people during Ramadan. Despite the severe hardships they faced, we worked hard to offer numerous families a taste of Ramadan's peaceful atmosphere by providing them with tents and temporary shelters.

A few months after Ramadan, Eid al-Adha ushered in another wave of charitable giving. In fact, our Foundation experienced an unprecedented level of contributions—a palpable sign of the confidence the entire nation has in the work we do. Our Foundation distributed a total of 745,535 shares of meat from the animals it was commissioned to slaughter for Eid to more than thirty-four and a half million people in Türkiye and abroad, with those living in the

earthquake disaster zone being prioritized. Beyond Eid, we provided nearly one million people with meat from animals donated as charity, including those slaughtered to celebrate a child's birth, to express gratitude for blessings received, and to fulfill vows made.

Despite dealing with our own hardships, the people of Türkiye have remained steadfast in their commitment to assist our oppressed brothers and sisters worldwide. Through donations made by the average citizen, we have provided assistance to over three million people in countries affected by civil war and natural disasters, including Afghanistan, Yemen, and Rakhine. Since 2015, for instance, we have worked to provide clean water to those in need worldwide as part of our *A Drop of Life* initiative. Indeed, it is our Islamic faith that drives us to make a difference in the lives of people throughout the world, and especially in parts of the world, like much of Africa, where water scarcity is so severe that even basic sanitation remains a daily struggle. By drilling wells and building water fountains, we seek to honor the legacy of our ancestors and ensure people have access to clean drinking water. Funded by the generous donations of people across the country, our water projects benefited one and a half million people in 2023 alone and have, over the entire course of our efforts, provided clean water to more than ten million people around the world.

We have provided our Palestinian brothers and sisters enduring relentless attacks by the Israeli war machine with hot meals, food packages, fuel to power hospitals, hygiene kits, shelter supplies, medical equipment and consumables, medicine, and clothes. We deliver these supplies either by sourcing them from within Gaza, by shipping them from Türkiye, or by purchasing them from Egypt.

We aim to increase the two million USD in aid we have thus far delivered.

Our Foundation is likewise dedicated to nurturing knowledge through various educational initiatives. To help cultivate future altruistic leaders, we provided scholarships and educational opportunities to 48,506 students in 2023. Our commitment to fostering education and spiritual growth is evident through our *My Gift is the Qur'an* initiative, which distributed 247,000 Qur'ans, and our *My Gift is a Book* project, which delivered 300,000 books to enthusiastic readers. We furthermore supported eager learners within Türkiye by donating books to school libraries and other institutions across the country.

Throughout the year, our Foundation has diligently worked address the needs of underprivileged people through its ongoing *zakat* assistance program. We similarly support orphans in Türkiye and around the world. In 2023, for instance, we provided care for 4,435 orphans through our *He Remains an Orphan if You Neglect Him* initiative. Our Department of Family and Youth Services, along with 1,003 centers nationwide, assisted over five million people. Committed to aiding anyone in need, regardless of racial, religious, linguistic, or ethnic background, our Foundation continues to bring hope and support both domestically and internationally, demonstrating our nation's steadfast dedication to serving God's creation, whoever and wherever they may be.

# Here until Every Need Has Been Met

## Yahyahan Güney

Specialist MD, Chairman, Board of Directors, Doctors Worldwide Türkiye

Global crises, natural disasters, and human-induced catastrophes following one after another, making 2023 a trying year for everyone. The Türkiye–Syria earthquakes, the Libya floods, and Israel’s ongoing war against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip shook the entire world to its core.

Centered in Kahramanmaraş and wreaking havoc across eleven provinces in Türkiye, the Türkiye–Syria earthquakes on 6 February 2023 marked the most catastrophic natural disaster to hit this part of the world in two millennia. The exhaustion, both physical and psychological, on the faces shows the passionate, if not sometimes silent, struggle to survive. Earthquake victims’ inherent instinct to survive and protect their loved ones helped them make it through the acute period immediately after the disaster. The subsequent phase, characterized by precarity and uncertainty, left them grappling with a deeply challenging psychological state. Rebuilding something from the ground up after it has been destroyed is one of the hardest things for anyone to do, even when one has the support of his community. Yet the damage caused by these now-infamous earthquakes was so massive that entire cities were forced to start anew.

Amid a time of remarkable unity and solidarity in Türkiye, Doctors Worldwide, like so many others who swiftly responded to the earthquake disaster zones, stood shoulder to shoulder on the frontlines of response and recovery efforts. We supported earthquake victims at every step, becoming part of their families and witnessing very difficult and, at time, miraculous moments as we worked tirelessly to help all of our compatriots regain a sense of normalcy in their lives.

We mobilized our many volunteers into medical teams immediately following the first earthquake. Comprising professionals from around Türkiye, these teams were charged with providing urgent care to earthquake victims. Not only were we often times the first to treat people pulled out from under the rubble; we performed live-saving surgeries in severely damaged hospitals. As people dedicated to providing healthcare services, we worked tirelessly to see to the immediate needs of as many sick and injured brothers and sisters of ours as possible.

In addition to the above, we provided much-needed food parcels and hygienic kits to people displaced by the



earthquakes. After the acute phase, we set up health support centers in Kahramanmaraş, Hatay, Adıyaman, and Malatya where we offered primary healthcare services as part of our long-term recovery efforts. We provided earthquake victims with psychosocial support to help them process the emotional impact of the trauma they experienced. Finally, through our annual *Voluntary Qurbani Donation* campaign, we distributed meat from animals we slaughtered to those in the disaster zone as well as to afflicted populations in seventeen other countries facing their own humanitarian crises.

Our work in the earthquake disaster zone highlighted the importance of coordination and proper planning in disaster response efforts. While limited resources, adverse physical conditions, breaks in communication and transportation, and inclement weather complicated the situation, we managed to regain a sense of normalcy sooner than we had expected.

While we were still reeling from the harrowing aftermath of our own earthquakes, floods in Libya and earthquakes in Afghanistan reminded us once more just how utterly destructive natural disasters truly are. As we continued to deliver emergency aid to those affected, the staggering loss of tens of thousands of lives highlighted the urgent need to prepare for even greater crises, both within our own borders and around the world.

Before having fully overcome the blows suffered by the aforementioned natural disasters, we began to witness one of the most profound crises of recent years unfold in Palestine's Gaza Strip. Since 7 October, Israeli attacks have claimed more than forty thousands of lives and left countless others injured. Having been present in Gaza for

years before Israel's most recent assault on the Palestinian people, our team was well positioned to immediately provide emergency healthcare services both in hospitals and on the ground, all while under constant bombardment. Our medical teams treated those who suffered injuries while our mobile units helped distribute life-saving food essentials, hygiene supplies, and baby diapers. Despite the damage to our facilities and the loss of several of our colleagues as a result of the relentless indiscriminate bombing by the Israeli armed forces, we continue to draw on our deep-rooted presence in the region as inspiration to intensify our efforts to heal the scars of war and instill hope in the hearts of an oppressed yet simultaneously courageous population abandoned to its own devices by the majority of the international community.

While 2023 was marked by truly unforgettable images of death, destruction, and carnage, these wars and humanitarian crises remind us of our shared humanity. These events sparked an outpouring of compassion and selflessness that forged an unbreakable sense of unity and solidarity strong enough to overcome even the darkest hour. It was in these shared human experiences and emotions that we were able to find glimmers of solace in the face of such heart-wrenching events, reaffirming in us the profound value of our work and the deep impact that our involvement in the lives of others has on our own life story.

It is our hope that we will have the opportunity to touch the lives of many other people around the world in the years to come.

# The Orphan Foundation: A Snapshot of our Activities in 2023

## Murat Yılmaz

President, The Orphan Foundation

A devastating disaster marked the beginning of 2023 for Türkiye when, on 6 February, two powerful earthquakes struck the southeastern province of Kahramanmaraş, with magnitudes of Mw 7.7 and 7.6, centered in the towns of Pazarcık and Elbistan, respectively. These quakes, followed by thousands of aftershocks, ravaged an area of 100,000 square kilometers (38,610 square miles), spanning eleven provinces across Türkiye's Eastern Mediterranean, Eastern Anatolia, and Southeastern Anatolia regions. More than fifteen million people witnessed what may be one of the most catastrophic events of the last millennium, with a total of seven million children—4.5 million in Türkiye and 2.5 million in Syria—directly affected by the disaster.

From the very first day of the disaster, we at the Orphan Foundation worked tirelessly to distribute humanitarian aid through our coordination centers in Adıyaman and Hatay. We delivered sixty truckloads of supplies to remote villages with the support of nearly 600 volunteers and 150 vehicles. We provided psychosocial support and other social services to over ten thousand children, adolescents, and adults for more than two months in the Turkish provinces of Malatya, Hatay, Kilis, Gaziantep, and Adıyaman, as well as in Babisqa, a village in the Syrian province of Idlib. We distributed toys and books to children living in tent cities to help them cope with their experiences. We

served hot meals to over 125,000 displaced individuals at our soup kitchens in Adıyaman and Hatay, offering foods specially tailored to the tastes of children. We donated ten containers to the container city built in Elbistan through Türkiye's Independent Industrialists and Businessmen's Association (known in Turkish by the acronym MÜSİAD) and provided financial assistance to over a thousand families. The total monetary value of our work, made possible by our generous donors, exceeded 40 million TRY.

The most important lesson this disaster taught us was that Türkiye's construction practices must adhere strictly to regulations, especially given the country's abnormally high risk of earthquakes. Since even seemingly minor compromises to extant regulations can lead to severe consequences in future disasters, it is crucial to ensure that existing structures are resilient and capable withstand such events.

Our Foundation continued to support earthquake victims throughout Ramadan. Our work also extended beyond Türkiye's borders during this blessed month, as we provided over 380,000 people across eighteen countries with iftar packages, hygiene kits, toys, books, clothes, and various forms of charity. A couple of months later, during Eid al-Adha, we distributed seven thousand shares of meat to over 400,000 people in Türkiye—particularly those living in the earthquake disaster zone—and twenty other countries.

As part of our educational support efforts, we distributed backpacks, essential school supplies, and books to approximately eighteen thousand children in twelve countries. We furthermore delivered 7,141 electronic devices, including two thousand tablets, to village schools in Hatay and Adıyaman—two provinces severely impacted by the earthquake.

The Orphan Foundation hosted a workshop on disasters and children at Istanbul's Rami Library on 19 November 2023 to celebrate World Children's Day. The event brought together seventy-seven academics, NGO leaders, and volunteers to discuss disasters, children's rights, and collaboration between NGOs and government agencies during disaster response operations. We also distributed a book containing several key recommendations to bolster disaster preparedness, especially among children, that we made available to the public at this workshop.

In line with our slogan "Warm Love Defies the Cold," we plan to provide winter-specific aid to fifty thousand orphans, disadvantaged children, and their families in twelve countries this year. So far we have provided winter clothes to one thousand children and blankets to six hundred families in Palestine.

Before concluding this chapter, we would like to highlight the atrocities committed by Israel in Palestine and, more specifically, in the Gaza Strip. Subjected to Israeli occupation and brutality for more than seventy-five years, Palestine has, since 7 October, endured some of the most extreme acts of apartheid and genocidal treatment in human history. As the entire world, first and foremost Muslim countries, fails to do anything more meaningful than issue words of condemnation, the Israeli regime feels increasingly more comfortable committing unprecedented acts of barbarity with each passing day. We have witnessed the very documents that enshrine the UN's founding principles trampled multiple times under the feet of relentless Israeli aggression. The *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, the *Genocide*

*Convention*, the *Rome Statute*, the *Geneva Conventions*, and the *Conventions on the Rights of the Child* have, quite unfortunately, been revealed to be no more than a collection of worthless pieces of scrap paper that do nothing to protect people from crimes committed against humanity.

And today, as Gaza is being wiped off the face of the map, half of those killed by Israel are children! There is not a single child—or even adult—in Gaza who does not need psychological support. Every right promised to children under the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* is being crushed under the boots of the occupying forces. Even unborn Palestinian children have not spared from Israel's ongoing genocide.

Can we not open a humanitarian corridor for the children of Gaza—children who have been suffocating under Israel's inhumane blockade by air, land, and sea for seventeen years? Indeed, this is the question that the world's eight billion people must answer. We owe at least this much to these charred and maimed children, many of whom have been left motherless and fatherless.

The Orphan Foundation has been actively involved in many efforts to address the hardships faced by Palestinians both within their homeland and in the diaspora through a range of initiatives. Over the past three years, we have supported 1,974 orphans in the Gaza Strip via various sponsorship programs. This figure rises to 2,300 when the aid we have delivered to Palestinian camps in Lebanon is included. We conduct at least four campaigns in the region each year, focusing on Ramadan, Eid al-Adha, education, and winter assistance. Since 7 October, we have assisted more than 100,000 individuals, with a particular focus on families with orphans and disadvantaged children in our aid efforts. Our initiatives, valued at 500,000 EUR as of 8 December 2023, encompass cash distribution, food packages, powdered milk, hot meals, hygiene kits, diapers, blankets, clean drinking water for settlements, and fuel for hospitals.



# The Changing Face of Addiction: A Century of Struggles and Successes

## Mücahit Öztürk

Prof., Dr., President, Green Crescent

The Green Crescent has, since its founding more than a century ago, dedicated itself to help people overcome their addictions. Whereas the core nature of addiction has remained unchanged, the ways in which it manifests itself has evolved over the years. We have all witnessed a rise both in the number of people struggling with addiction and in the variety of addictions that plague society. Today, the Green Crescent deals with alcohol, nicotine, narcotics, gambling, and, more recently, technology addictions. We have grown into a large family with 120 branches, 578 district representatives, 107 consultation centers, two rehabilitation centers, and 110,000 volunteers across Türkiye's eighty-one provinces, along with a presence in 97 countries. Indeed, our commitment to combating addiction across Türkiye and the world remains as strong as it was on day one.

As our founder, Ord. Prof. Dr. Mazhar Osman, aptly put it, we are an institution with “no other ambition than ensuring the happiness of mankind.” We work tirelessly to this end and will continue to do so for as long as there is breath in our lungs. We have, as a result of our scientifically and evidenced-based prevention and awareness-raising efforts, had the opportunity to reach an increasingly wider audi-

ence. At the forefront of our work are Türkiye Addiction Prevention (known in Turkish by the acronym TBM) programs, through which we are able to touch the lives of approximately ten million students and three million adults each year in order to ensure that future generations are both healthy and free from addiction. In 2023, we launched workshops tailored specifically to teachers and guidance counselors at Türkiye's Maarif Foundation Schools to elevate our addiction-prevention efforts onto the international stage. This initiative included organizing TBM practitioner training workshops at Maarif Schools in the Republic of North Macedonia in August 2023, where participants who successfully completed the workshop were certified as official TBM practitioners. We likewise extended this training to national Green Crescent societies affiliated with the International Federation of the Green Crescent.

In partnership with Türkiye's Ministry of National Education, we launched the School-Based Addiction Intervention Program (known in Turkish by the acronym OBM), the first and only program of its kind in the country, to prevent risky behaviors such as smoking, alcohol use, substance abuse, and excessive internet use from developing

into costly, difficult-to-treat addictions. We organized OBM trainer workshops for ten thousand counselors and psychologists and held one-on-one interviews with 5,458 students aged thirteen to eighteen in state schools. We are working to make this program more robust and expand its reach across the country so that it effectively complements TBM's established prevention methods.

Developed by a team of specialists, the Green Crescent Life Skills Program seeks to equip adolescents with the

skills and confidence needed to resist behaviors that could lead to addiction. Teachers and guidance counselors facilitate help students understand the nature of addiction, educating them on how to lead a healthy life, and assisting them in integrating these principles into their daily routines. Through this program, adolescents learn to refuse addictive substances, manage stress without the need of such substances, and make informed decisions so that they may lead fulfilling lives free of addiction.



In addition to prevention and awareness campaigns, the Green Crescent is actively involved in addiction intervention programs. Since their establishment in 2015, the 107 Green Crescent Counseling Centers (known in Turkish by the acronym YEDAM) located throughout Türkiye and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus provide free psychosocial support to individuals and families affected by addiction to help them regain a sense of normalcy. YEDAM's call center crossed an important milestone when, in September 2023, it received its one millionth call.

Our efforts to stem the tide of addiction continue on multiple fronts. We use the arts, sports, and other activities attractive to young people to raise awareness of the dangers of addictions. One notable example in this regard is the annual International Green Crescent Cartoon Contest. Last year's contest, the seventh of its kind, featured a total of 1,901 cartoons submitted by 1,130 people from sixty-eight countries.

Another such example is our annual Green Crescent Bicycle Tour, which takes places simultaneously in more than fifty Turkish provinces and various countries worldwide. Each year, thousands of cyclists ride both to raise awareness of the benefits of good health and to embody these principles in their own lives. Last year's eleventh annual event saw an impressive turnout, with twelve thousand cyclists participating in Türkiye alone.

More than ten thousand students and four thousand teachers participated in the 2023 Interscholastic Debate Tournament that we organized in partnership with Türkiye's Ministry of National Education, Debate and Oratory Association (Münazara ve Hitabet Derneği), and Vakıf Katılım Bank.

Another of our awareness-raising initiatives is the annual Healthy Ideas Short Film Competition. Since its inception in 2015 until the most recent seventh competition held in 2023, a total of 5,660 films have been submitted by aspiring film makers from around the world.

We will remember 2023 most notably for the Türkiye–Syria earthquakes that shook the entire nation to the core on 6 February. In addition to being a powerful force in the fight against addiction, the Green Crescent is committed to working with all parties interested in strengthening social solidarity. In partnership with the Turkish Confederation of Employer Associations (known in Turkish by the acronym TİSK) and TUMOSAN—Türkiye's leading motor industry and trade company—we launched the *My Club is the Green Crescent Truck* project in the eleven provinces of Türkiye affected by the earthquakes. Through this initiative, we have helped more than 350,000 children cope with the trauma of the disaster, expedite their adaptation process, and support their personal growth.

Our foremost responsibility today, just as it was yesterday, is to broaden our fight against addiction and serve humanity so that every one of us can enjoy a brighter, healthier future. As a frontrunner in addiction prevention both on the national and international stages, we, on behalf of all the professionals and volunteers affiliated with the Green Crescent, reaffirm our commitment to using our wealth of experience and expertise to achieve an even greater impact on individual communities and society as a whole.



# Charting a Roadmap to the Future: Development and the Habitat Association

**Sezai Hazır\***

President, Executive Board, Habitat Association

Habitat Association has, since its founding thirty years ago, worked to promote sustainable development, enhance social capacity, and support impactful projects through robust partnerships with other organizations, including NGOs like itself, in today's digital age. Together with our more than seven thousand volunteers, our association has served roughly five million people across all of Türkiye's eighty-one provinces, with a presence in villages, cities, education, entrepreneurship, sustainability, and social equality.

Marked by growing global instability, insecurity, inequality, and moral decay, today's world has become a breeding ground for social decline and economic uncertainty. Given this somber trajectory, creating a sustainable system and fostering opportunities for public, private, and civil society partnerships is of paramount importance. Individuals, institutions, and societies must all be able to adapt to these rapidly changing times—times plagued by increasingly complex social issues and security issues. We found

that urban resilience—the capacity of a city's inhabitants to adapt to abrupt and unexpected changes—was lacking in areas directly or indirectly affected by the earthquake.<sup>1</sup> The Türkiye–Syria earthquakes that struck Kahramanmaraş on 6 February 2023 exposed, once again, the glaring deficiencies in Türkiye's urban resilience.

Impacting eleven provinces in Türkiye and several more in Syria, the aforementioned earthquakes affected twenty-three million people. Initial estimates puts the total damage at 84.06 billion USD—70.75 billion USD in housing damages, 10.4 billion USD in national income, and 2.91 billion USD in lost workdays—and more recently at 104 billion USD.<sup>2</sup> An effective response to a disaster of this magnitude can only be mounted through the coordinated efforts between the public, private, and civil sectors. Only through such close collaboration can an effective strategy be developed to aid affected populations, to repair the damages incurred, and to rebuild beleaguered societies. Local governments, the private sector,

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\* During the design of this project, we sadly received the news of the passing of Mr. Sezai Hazır. We extend our deepest condolences to his family, loved ones, and the Habitat Association family, and may he rest in peace.

and civil society institutions mobilized their resources and manpower to undertake search and rescue operations. The Habitat Association, in partnership with EnerjiSA and Viveka, helped to expedite search and rescue operations in Hatay one day after the initial earthquakes by mapping affected areas and deploying heat-sensitive drones to locate individuals trapped beneath the rubble. Following the conclusion of emergency search and rescue operations, we worked with public institutions and civil society organizations to provide shelter, food, water, and essential healthcare services to those affected by the ongoing disaster.<sup>3</sup> Our association, in collaboration with the Business Council for Sustainable Development Türkiye, furthermore partnered with the Wilo Group to have water purification devices installed in twelve villages in Hatay to solve the crisis of clean drinking water.

By identifying damaged structures and formulating a comprehensive roadmap to guide subsequent efforts, we have transitioned into the medium-term phase of the disaster response. Efforts over the next one to three years will concentrate on rebuilding infrastructure, providing psychosocial support to affected individuals, and launching assistance and incentive programs to stimulate employment and kick-start economic development.

Following the Türkiye–Syria earthquakes, we at the Habitat Association reassessed all of our ongoing projects and redirected all of our resources to support those in the earthquake zone. We devised short-, medium-, and long-term strategies to foster recovery and growth in the earthquake zone, closely coordinating with local organizations and project partners to shore up an effective response to



the diverse needs and demands of different target groups. We first performed detailed needs analyses for children, adolescents, parents, teachers, business owners, and entrepreneurs. We then sprang into action, transforming designated safe zones into community centers in Hatay, Kahramanmaraş, Adıyaman, Malatya, and surrounding provinces hosting displaced individuals. Together with our partners, we likewise established workspaces for all individuals and business owners requiring such facilities.

Together with Meta, the Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Türkiye (TOBB), and the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), the Habitat Association opened *Station Adana*. With support from Türkiye's Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD), the Habitat Association, alongside the Turkish Enterprise and Business Confederation (TÜRKONFED) and the Federation of Industrial Associations (SEDEFED), established the container city KASABA in Hatay. To promote local growth, the Hatay Metropolitan Municipality partnered with GEN Türkiye, TOBB, ICC Türkiye, the Habitat Association, and the Women Entrepreneurs Association of Turkey (KAGIDER) to open *Station Hatay*.

In partnership with the Vodafone Turkey Foundation, the Habitat Association set up container classrooms in Adıyaman, Kahramanmaraş, Hatay, and Malatya as part of its ongoing the *Coding Tomorrow* project. These classrooms support social reintegration through technology-focused education for children aged seven to fourteen. We also dispatched mobile education vehicles to rural areas without schools to provide underserved children with science and coding kits.

Hundreds of young people in the earthquake zone attended Habitat Summer Camps organized in collaboration with local governments and private businesses. These camps provided training to increase awareness, workshops to develop soft skills, and engaging social activities to promote community development and personal development. To further revitalize the socioeconomic life of the areas affected, the Habitat Association provided local businesses, small and medium sized enterprises, and entrepreneurs with grants and mentoring programs. Through the Women's Cooperatives Support Program *From Labor to Basket*, the Habitat Association delivered 390,000 TRY worth of machinery, equipment, supplies, and raw materials to thirteen women's cooperatives. Additionally, capacity-building initiatives, such as idea marathons, brought awareness programs and workshops aimed at enhancing local resilience to the earthquake zone. The *Fazlan Vitrinde* (i.e., Your Excess on Display) campaign promoted sustainable fashion by collaborating with Heartish, Swatchloop, Bangu, and Organic Sisters Toys to repurpose waste garments from the disaster zone into bags, toys, and new clothing ideas.

As Türkiye completes her centennial year, we at the Habitat Association promise to continue its work with unwavering determination and commitment, fully embracing our responsibility to act as a driving force for transformation, future progress, social impact, and sustainable development.

1 ARUP. (2014). *City Resilience Framework*. The Rockefeller Foundation.

2 TÜRKONFED. (2023). *Kahramanmaraş Depremi Afet Ön Değerlendirme Durum Raporu*.

3 Kadioğlu, M. (2011). *Afet Yönetimi Beklenilmeyeni Beklemek, En Kötüsünü Yönetmek*. Istanbul: Marmara Municipalities Union Publications.



# Building Resilient Communities: Türkiye and Japan's Partnership in Disaster Solidarity

**Aylin Çelik Korkut**

Program Manager, Japan International Cooperation Agency

The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) has played an active role in Türkiye well before the establishment of the agency's office in the country. Specialists from Türkiye were invited to Japan in 1959 to participate in disaster risk reduction (DRR) workshops. Since then, JICA has been instrumental in building disaster-resilient communities in Türkiye through a range of activities, such as by organizing workshops, dispatching specialists, and setting up technical collaboration initiatives. This partnership has facilitated the continuous sharing of knowledge and experiences between Türkiye and Japan—two nations that have dealt with devastating earthquakes and other disasters throughout their long history.

Before the full extent of the destruction wrought by earthquake to strike Kahramanmaraş early in the morning on 6 February 2023 could even be grasped, a second one struck in the early afternoon, leaving millions displaced and homeless. A total of eleven provinces in Türkiye suffered unparalleled amounts of damage in what would

become known in the country as “The Disaster of the Century.” Immediately following these earthquakes, JICA ramped up response efforts, fast-tracking post-disaster reconstruction efforts and expanding its disaster awareness campaigns.

## **Response to the Türkiye–Syria Earthquakes**

Given the severity of the still-unfolding situation, the Japanese government promptly dispatched one of its Japan Disaster Relief (JDR) search and rescue team to Kahramanmaraş. Led by Türkiye's Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD), this 72-member team meticulously coordinated with international counterparts to mount a remarkable two-week search and rescue mission. Despite harsh winter conditions, the rescue workers worked tirelessly with other international search and rescue teams, playing a vital role in locating survivors and delivering urgent assistance to those trapped under the rubble.

The earthquakes caused severe disruptions in the national healthcare system, further exacerbating the already catastrophic impact on the millions of people directly affected. While several hospitals in the disaster zone sustained such extensive damage that they were rendered nonoperational, healthcare facilities in less-affected areas experienced an overwhelming influx of patients displaced from the more severely impacted regions. To support Oğuzeli State Hospital in Gaziantep after its main building was made unusable by the earthquakes, Türkiye's Ministry of Health coordinated with JDR's healthcare team to establish and operate an emergency field hospital. The joint efforts heroically undertaken by Turkish and Japanese healthcare

workers earned the admiration of the local population and increased their trust in the healthcare system.

Teams of experts specializing in engineering and sociology arrived at the disaster zone one month following the earthquakes. Upon arrival, these teams visited local organizations and government authorities to share their observations and experiences from Japan so that, together, they could mount a more effective response could expedite the return to normalcy. Indeed, the efforts of these teams not only laid the groundwork for new financial and technical cooperation between our two countries but also refined the scope and objectives of existing projects so that the amount of support reaching the affected region would increase.



Photograph: AA. Müzahîm Zahid Tüzün

### Earthquake Preparedness and Reconstruction Efforts

In November 2022, JICA and the Union of Municipalities of Türkiye (known in Turkish by the acronym TBB) signed a project agreement on capacity development for local municipalities in DRR and waste management to come into effect in March 2023. Initially designed to improve municipalities' earthquake risk reduction capacity and zero waste initiatives, the project was subsequently broadened to address specific needs in earthquake-affected areas, including seismic retrofitting, debris management, and innovative urban planning.

After working with the General Directorate of Construction Works, a subsidiary agency of Türkiye's Ministry of Environment, Urbanisation and Climate Change (MoEUCC), JICA specialists assisted in adapting seismic retrofitting techniques to comply with Turkish regulations in order to strengthen the structural integrity of a well-known public building. MoEUCC's Directorate General of Environmental Management organized workshops where Japanese practices and regulations on debris management and recycling were reviewed and discussed, thereby equipping attendees with advanced strategies and insights for improving local practices.

Following a joint recommendation by MoEUCC's General Directorate of Spatial Planning, the Union of Municipalities of Türkiye (TBB), and JICA, Kahramanmaraş was selected as the pilot city for implementing innovative reconstruction planning. Collaborative initiatives with the mayor's office are in progress to transform Kahramanmaraş into a resilient, smart, and sustainable city while safeguarding its rich historical heritage. The new vision and blueprints for the city are expected to be completed and unveiled to the community by the first quarter of

2024. As part of this project, specialists from MoEUCC, TBB, and municipal directorates attended three separate workshops in Japan focused on post-disaster seismic retrofitting, waste management, and urban redevelopment.

Bursa Metropolitan Municipality launched a project aimed at making the city more disaster resilient in 2023. Given Bursa's vulnerability to earthquakes, the city is actively working to bolster its earthquake preparedness. A JICA team has conducted urban risk assessments, mapped liquefaction zones, and assessed buildings' earthquake resilience to support the city's ongoing efforts. Drawing on Japan's extensive experience and insights on earthquake resilience, the team aims to reinvent Bursa into a more robust city capable of withstanding future disasters.

### Final Word

Given our shared fate as two peoples highly exposed to natural disasters, Türkiye and Japan have forged a mutual relationship based on mutual support and trust. Building on lessons learned from the 1995 Great Hanshin-Awaji earthquake and the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami, the Japanese people are apt to volunteer their expertise and services in DRR, search and rescue operations, humanitarian aid, and medical support with their Turkish counterparts. The exchange of knowledge and experience will not only strengthen disaster management and preparedness in both countries but also bolster community resilience and further strengthen the diplomatic partnership between our two nations as we commemorate the centennial anniversary of this partnership in 2024.

This amicable partnership will not only serve as a source of motivation for both countries during their times of need but also help advance their long-term sustainability goals and set an example for other nations of the world to emulate.



# Navigating Crises in an Age of Disasters: Localizing Response Strategies in Türkiye

**Sema Genel Karaosmanoğlu**

Director, Support to Life

As a whole, 2023 saw a sharp escalation in humanitarian crises—not only in sheer number but also in severity. Türkiye experienced one of the most devastating catastrophes when, on 6 February, two powerful earthquakes struck the southeastern province of Kahramanmaraş. Natural disasters, exacerbated by climate change, war, and armed conflict have displaced millions of people throughout the world and increasing the demand for global humanitarian relief. This has, in turn, underscored the urgent need to develop more efficient, cost-effective, and accountable aid systems.<sup>1</sup>

Localization means that local actors and affected communities play a more central role and assume greater responsibility in humanitarian responses. The localization of aid efforts has gained importance among members of the international community in recent years. Agreed upon at the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit, the Grand Bargain outlines concrete goals and commitments designed to foster more effective, more locally driven humanitarian responses.<sup>2</sup> These commitments seek to increase account-

ability, acknowledge local capacities, and strengthen local leadership over time. Despite these lofty goals, however, the transition toward a more effective, comprehensive, and accountable aid system—one that incorporates the localization of humanitarian aid—has progressed more slowly than expected.<sup>3</sup>

Unfortunately, affected communities and local actors have not been meaningfully included in the decision-making processes of international humanitarian and development ecosystems. Important steps still need to be taken to localize humanitarian aid efforts. The Grand Bargain highlights three key actions to be taken:

- Ensure adequate financing for effective local responses.
- Expand support for locally led initiatives.
- Integrate affected communities in decision-making processes dealing with humanitarian work.

The Grand Bargain also advocates for national reference groups to be formed so as to facilitate greater local actor engagement.<sup>4</sup>

The humanitarian system must move away from a centralized, command and control, one-system-fits-all approach to an ecosystem of diverse actors, where frontline responders receive adequate and timely resources. NGOs of the Global South, World Humanitarian Summit, 2016<sup>5</sup>

Given the growing importance of localizing humanitarian aid, Support to Life has, throughout 2023, amplified its localization efforts at global, national, and especially local levels. We built on our existing Strengthening Local Leadership Program, which provides micro-grants and supervisory support to communities affected by forest fires and floods. This program was expanded to include communities affected by earthquakes and allows them to identify

their own needs and develop solutions they deem tailored to their personal circumstances. We likewise supported local communities in taking the lead on early recovery, repairs, and resilience-building efforts in Hatay, Kahramanmaraş, Adıyaman, and Malatya—the provinces hardest hit by the Türkiye–Syria earthquakes.

In addition to supporting affected communities in directing their own responses and DDR efforts, our advocacy for increased localization through national-level networks and platforms played a pivotal role in shaping the structure of humanitarian aid in Türkiye in 2023. Established under Support to Life’s leadership in 2016, the Localization Advocacy Group (LAG) and the Refugee Council of Türkiye (known by the Turkish acronym TMK) demonstrated that humanitarian aid can indeed be effectively managed by local actors and launched initiatives advocating for this approach. Then, when UN OCHA opened a logistics center to help coordinate the response to

the Türkiye–Syria earthquakes, Support to Life and local NGOs launched the Turkish Local Humanitarian Forum (LHF) to facilitate increase local involvement in the decision-making processes of this body.

The purpose of these networks is to demonstrate that local actors can indeed deliver humanitarian and development responses in Türkiye more effectively and with greater accountability. Operating under the secretariat of LAG and TMK, the National Reference Group (NRG) brings local NGOs, donors, UN agencies, and in-



ternational NGOs together through dedicated working groups. To date, the NRG has concentrated on developing strategies to improve the quality of partnerships, streamline funding mechanisms, and strengthen the role of local actors in coordinated humanitarian efforts.

Türkiye has become a global leader in localizing humanitarian aid. At the forefront of these efforts, Support to Life has worked to keep this issue on the national agenda, organized key parties, brought Türkiye's local developments onto the global stage, and advocated for localization on the wider scale. The majority of Support to Life's localization efforts during 2023 focused on the following four areas:

- **Creating grassroots awareness and support mechanisms:** We organized various events to raise awareness and increase support for the localization of humanitarian aid in Türkiye.
- **Increasing the visibility and potency of local capacity:** We carried out capacity-building efforts on the institutional level to ensure that local actors may play a more active role in humanitarian responses. We likewise mapped local NGOs and community-led civil organizations working in the earthquake zone.
- **Strengthening local partnerships:** We created opportunities to bolster collaboration between local actors, international organizations, donors, and other key stakeholders.
- **Access to financial and technical support:** We organized venues that brought together local NGOs, donors, and international organizations to improve access to aid grants.

Localization efforts have gained considerable momentum following the devastating earthquakes that shook the entire nation in 2023. These efforts have primarily focused on increasing the visibility of local capacity, transforming how humanitarian work is conducted, and equipping communities with the knowledge and skills required to create their own viable solutions to the challenges they personally face in their everyday lives. As this approach takes deeper root, we have begun to see the first signs of communities affected by disasters collaborating with civil society, local governments, the private sector, and other local entities throughout Türkiye. This has led to the increasingly more meaningful involvement of local actors in post-disaster recovery, risk mitigation, and disaster preparedness. NGOs such as Support to Life committed to core humanitarian principles have played an essential role in this success. Indeed, our commitment to creating a more robust civil society, civil space, and humanitarian aid system only grows stronger as our efforts continue to yield increasingly promising results.

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- 1 Agenda for Humanity: 5 Core Responsibilities, 24 Transformations, <https://agendaforhumanity.org>
  - 2 ODI Policy Brief, [https://cdn.odi.org/media/documents/ODI-Are\\_we\\_there\\_yet-Localisation-policy-brief.pdf](https://cdn.odi.org/media/documents/ODI-Are_we_there_yet-Localisation-policy-brief.pdf)
  - 3 The Grand Bargain in 2022: An Independent Review, June 2023, Overseas Development Institute, [https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/sites/default/files/migrated/2023-08/HPG\\_report-Grand\\_Bargain\\_2023\\_master\\_rev.pdf](https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/sites/default/files/migrated/2023-08/HPG_report-Grand_Bargain_2023_master_rev.pdf)
  - 4 <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/2021-07/%28EN%29%20Grand%20Bargain%202.0%20Framework.pdf>
  - 5 <https://www.icvanetwork.org/uploads/2021/08/Topic-Six-Grand-Bargain-Explained-ICVA-Briefing-Paper.pdf>



# A Year Shaped by Disasters

## Okan Tosun

President, ANDA Association

As 2022 was drawing to an end, many believed that the string of the increasingly stressful years—marked by the COVID-19 pandemic and its lingering effects, never-ending wars, wildfires, and climate-related disasters—was finally behind us. Yet 2023 turned out to be a year of trials not only for Türkiye but for all peoples of the world. Indeed, 2023 will be remembered as a year when a series of disasters, each one of which would have long-lasting effects, struck one after another. Early in the year, the Türkiye–Syria earthquakes of 6 February, known domestically as the “Disaster of the Century,” shook the conscience of the entire world. These were followed by the Marrakesh–Safi earthquake in Morocco, floods in Libya, and, toward the end of the year, the unspeakable atrocities committed against the Palestinian people during Israel’s latest inhumane war on Occupied Palestine.

Two earthquakes struck two separate districts of Türkiye’s southeastern province of Kahramanmaraş, the first at 4:17 a.m. in Pazarcık with a magnitude of Mw 7.7 and the second at 1:24 p.m. in Elbistan with a magnitude of Mw 7.6. The magnitude and shallow depth of these two earthquakes made them the largest land-based quakes ever recorded.<sup>1</sup> A total of eleven provinces in Türkiye—not to mention several cities in neighboring Syria—experienced rarely seen levels of destruction and loss of life. In total,

50,783 people were reported dead, 115,353 injured, and 37,984 buildings destroyed.<sup>2</sup> Though these numbers are indeed heart wrenching, they could have been significantly worse, as 107,000 people were pulled out from under the rubble of the thousands of collapsed buildings. Government agencies, private organizations, NGOs, and citizens from all walks of life joined hands in the numerous relief efforts organized around the country. Türkiye issued a Level 4 appeal for international assistance, prompting response teams from around the world to arrive in the country and begin life-saving operations.

Some might therefore say that it was providential that ANDA had successfully completed the AFAD Advanced Search and Rescue accreditation exam on 5 February, just one day before the earthquakes. Upon receiving news of the first earthquake the very following morning, ANDA’s Search and Rescue Coordinator instructed our teams to prepare for deployment to the disaster zone and commence rescue operations. Our teams mobilized all of their equipment and manpower and made their way to the disaster zone. Humanitarian aid distribution teams stationed in Syria went to Hatay while search and rescue teams in Adana began working throughout the province to save as many lives as possible.

ANDA's search and rescue teams took part in rescue operations throughout the provinces of Hatay, Adıyaman, Gaziantep, Adana, Osmaniye, Kahramanmaraş, Malatya, Şanlıurfa, and Diyarbakır from the moment they arrived in the disaster areas. To streamline communication and emergency efforts, an 18-person crisis coordination center was set up at the association's headquarters, and a logistics support team was assembled with the help of hundreds of ANDA volunteers.

The first seventy-two hours following an earthquake are critical for rescuing survivors, leaving a short window of opportunity for rescue teams to save as many people as possible before they succumb to extended exposure. Accordingly, we ramped up our rescue efforts to maximum capacity during this period, deploying a total of 1,293 search and rescue workers—27 in Adana, 55 in Osmaniye, 124 in Kahramanmaraş, 77 in Malatya, 185 in Diyarbakır, 514 in Hatay, 224 in Gaziantep, 85 in Adıyaman, and 12 in Şanlıurfa.

The sheer magnitude of the affected area and the scale of the destruction required search and rescue teams to work long hours of overtime. During this period, we began aid

distribution operations to prevent the situation from further deteriorating. Our crisis coordination center worked with branches stationed throughout the country to load and dispatch trucks carrying a wide range of essential goods—blankets, clothing, tents, non-perishables, and hygiene products—to the disaster zone.

We likewise set up soup kitchens in the affected areas and organized iftar meals during Ramadan. We held events to bring at least some joy to the earthquake survivors and especially to the countless children in the area, many of whom had suffered unimaginable losses, on both religious and national holidays. We established a container city in Hatay to address the burgeoning housing crisis. As schools reopened, we launched a stationery kit campaign to help displaced children return to school with the supplies all they needed free of cost. Then, with the arrival of winter toward the end of the year, we rolled out a campaign to distribute boots, coats, scarves, hats, and gloves in the earthquake-hit provinces so that those who remained in the area had what they needed to stay warm throughout the cold winter months.



Photograph: AA, Hakan Burak Altunöz

While still on the group working tirelessly during the aftermath of these earthquakes, ANDA took part in search and rescue efforts in areas that had suffered flash floods. We were among the first to arrive in the region after the Türkiye–Syria earthquakes and remain committed to easing the hardships experienced by affected communities through our ongoing efforts in the area.

With a strong legacy of humanitarian aid rooted in her history and culture, Türkiye continues to assist both domestically and internationally ever while tending to her own wounds. Türkiye’s stance is crystal clear in this regard; we stand with the oppressed, disadvantaged, and vulnerable people of the world wherever they may be. As a nation, we make no distinction—whether by race, ethnicity, language, religion, or gender—when sending out our humanitarian and rescue teams to even the most remote corners of the globe. Our goal is to deliver much-needed relief to whomever we can reach. In line with this legacy, ANDA took part in search and rescue efforts in Libya following flash floods brought about by Tropical Storm Daniel in October. We dispatched two 15-person teams and provided humanitarian aid to address the urgent needs of the Libyan people, all coordinated through Türkiye’s Disaster and Emergency Management Authority (AFAD).

Another disaster in October that saw ANDA’s involvement was the Mw 6.3 earthquake that struck Afghanistan’s western city of Herat. Having recently endured a series of devastating earthquakes ourselves, we understood the dire plight of those affected and were able to anticipate their needs so as to mount a swift response. To aid those displaced during the disaster, we sent aid items via the 19<sup>th</sup> Goodness Train organized in coordination with AFAD and TCDD Taşımacılık, the government-owned railway company operating Türkiye’s passenger and freight trains.

Toward the end of the year, Israel intensified its brutal, ongoing assault on the Gaza Strip in Occupied Palestine in response to the indigenous population’s attempt to break out of the open-air concentration camp in which they have been pinned up and under the long-standing blockade imposed by Israel. We sent humanitarian aid packages containing food, hygienic products, and medical supplies via an AFAD-coordinated ship bound for Palestine to alleviate as much as possible the absolutely harrowing humanitarian crisis brought about by Israel’s inhumane actions.

A notable rise in global appeals for aid has been seen in response to the increasing frequency and severity of wars, conflict, disasters, and famines around the world, underscoring the growing importance of both humanitarian and search and rescue organizations. In light of this heightened need, ANDA’s search and rescue teams participated in 236 missions coordinated by AFAD in 2023. Our efforts extended beyond search and rescue operations to include supporting orphanages in Syria and Afghanistan, operating a health clinic in Syria, running soup kitchens, conducting food distributions through sacrificial activities, organizing Ramadan events, providing shelter for displaced individuals, and distributing food, hygiene kits, and winter supplies. We at ANDA shall remain steadfast in our commitment to assist those in need and to serve as a vital link in the global chain of goodwill both in Türkiye and around the world.

1 HMB. (2023). 2023 Kahramanmaraş ve Hatay Depremleri Raporu <https://www.hmb.gov.tr/haberler/2023-kahramanmaras-ve-hatay-depremleri-raporu>

2 AFAD. (2023). 06 Şubat 2023 Pazarcık-Elbistan Kahramanmaraş (Mw: 7.7 – Mw: 7.6) Depremleri Raporu [https://deprem.afad.gov.tr/assets/pdf/Kahramanmara%C5%9F%20Depremi%20%20Raporu\\_02.06.2023.pdf](https://deprem.afad.gov.tr/assets/pdf/Kahramanmara%C5%9F%20Depremi%20%20Raporu_02.06.2023.pdf)



# **A Year of Aid and Assistance: From Natural Disasters to Humanitarian Crises**

## **Hüseyin Oruç**

Deputy Chairman, Board of Trustees, IHH Humanitarian Relief Foundation

IHH Humanitarian Relief Foundation has, since its founding more than a quarter century ago, played a central role in humanitarian action around the world. With our humble beginnings in charitable work tracing back to Bosnia and Herzegovina, we have since succeeded in reaching millions of people in 123 nations, including, of course, our home country of Türkiye.

Our foundation has worked diligently to expand our capacity and areas of operations with each passing year. This year was no different. Our efforts have assisted millions of stricken populations either through humanitarian aid, disaster management, human rights, or humanitarian diplomacy—all of whose work is conducted with the utmost professionalism by experienced teams and personnel. One of our top priorities is to strengthen the relationship between these teams, other organizations, donors, and volunteers. To this end, we participate in domestic and international meetings, attend workshops both at home and abroad, and put all that we have learned into practice in the field.

Our experience in disaster management allowed us to dispatch our search and rescue teams immediately after the Türkiye–Syria earthquakes that rocked large swaths of both countries in February 2023. Professional and volunteer groups composed of more than seven thousand altruistic souls worked day and night both to mount an effective response during the disaster’s critical early hours and to coordinate the arrival and delivery of roughly eight hundred semi-trailer trucks’ worth of relief items to individuals and communities in need. Just as we have thus carried out a swift, well-coordinated response through our Reyhanlı and Kilis Coordination Centers, we will continue to stand by all those affected by what we in Türkiye have come to call “The Disaster of the Century” until normalcy has been fully restored.

Our strategically located Tuzla Disaster Management and Logistics Center plays a crucial role in our relief efforts by allowing us to deliver aid swiftly and efficiently to all those in need. We have also intensified on our efforts to train

new volunteers and expand our already extensive relief capacity. As the effects of the earthquake were, given the magnitude of the earthquakes, still relatively fresh during Ramadan, we prioritized Türkiye for receiving aid during this blessed month. Nevertheless, we still worked to assist those in need around the world, reaching 4.7 million people in thirty-seven countries total. During Eid al-Adha only a couple of months thereafter, we distributed meat from the animals we were commissioned to slaughter to more than three million people in forty-eight countries, including Türkiye.

As part of our international efforts, we delivered food, shelter, and medical aid to communities affected by the civil wars in Sudan and Yemen. Our teams took part in search and rescue missions and humanitarian relief after the Marrakesh-Safi earthquake in Morocco and the floods in Libya. We continued to support the ongoing peace process in Bangsamoro, contribute to development efforts in Afghanistan, and work on improving living conditions for displaced Syrians and Rohingya Muslims in their host countries of Türkiye and Bangladesh, respectively. Beyond this, we provided monthly education, healthcare, food, and shelter service to over 133,000 orphans in forty-five countries, including Türkiye, as we have done for years thus far.

We have, following Israel's increased brutality and more stringent blockade against the Palestinians, become a voice for Palestine both domestically and internationally. To draw attention to Israel and those countries complicit in the atrocities it continues to commit on a daily basis, we organized the *Freedom Convoy for Palestine* from Istanbul to the US military base in Adana, attended by hundreds of thousands conscientious individuals.

Our work in the Gaza Strip to help the beleaguered yet ever-resilient population continues with unwavering intensity and dedication.

IHH engages in humanitarian diplomacy by facilitating the protection of civilians in crisis, conflict, and disaster zones; by helping locate missing persons; rescuing captives; and by taking the necessary steps to resolve crises. We proactively seek solutions on all matters affecting human lives, mediate when needed, and work to overcome barriers to humanitarian aid through both formal and diplomatic channels. To enhance the effectiveness of our operations, we work consistently to strengthen our domestic and international relationships so as to maintain a presence on as many global platforms dedicated to humanitarian action as possible.

With the support of our volunteers and donors, we have wrapped up another year of humanitarian work undertaken in numerous countries and of spearheading international efforts in humanitarian diplomacy and human rights. We remain steadfast in our commitment to work toward a world without wars, human rights abuses, military occupations, and humanitarian crises. We pledge to strive in pursuit of these goals with unyielding resolve for as long as there is breath in our lungs.

# A Year in the Shadow of the Türkiye–Syria Earthquakes

**İbrahim Özer**

Director General, Disaster Management and Climate Change, Turkish Red Crescent

According to the INFORM Risk Index that assesses and ranks the risks of humanitarian crises and disasters, Türkiye falls into the high-risk category with a score of 5, placing it 45<sup>th</sup> out of 191 countries.<sup>1</sup> While Türkiye is renowned for her many natural and cultural jewels, she faces significant threats from disasters that could potentially endanger these national treasures. Indeed, the Türkiye–Syria earthquakes of 6 February and other disasters throughout the year highlighted Türkiye’s vulnerability.

The Türkiye–Syria earthquakes had repercussions far beyond the immediate disaster zone. This disaster engulfed the entire combined population of the two aforementioned countries as they rushed to the aid of their embattled and traumatized compatriots. Indeed, the aftermath of the catastrophe demonstrated how important risk mitigation and disaster preparedness is in reducing the negative effects of disasters.

The inevitability of natural disasters underscores the critical importance of pre-disaster preparedness and planning.

Instead of focusing on how to respond once a disaster has struck, we should ask ourselves what preemptive measures can be taken before they do occur. While disasters will invariably cause damage and losses of life, it is possible to minimize these tragic outcomes by investing in disaster preparedness and risk mitigation. Nevertheless, this is not a task that individual organizations can undertake on their own. Since an informed society is one of the most important factors in reducing risks, awareness-building efforts are of critical importance, especially for a country like Türkiye whose vulnerability profile places her at high risk. Given this, the Turkish Red Crescent (TRC) takes its responsibility of raising awareness among society very seriously.

The Türkiye–Syria earthquakes struck Pazarcık and Elbistan—two districts in Türkiye’s southeastern province of Kahramanmaraş—on 6 February 2023. As both quakes registered greater than Mw 7, millions of people across eleven provinces in Türkiye, and many more in neighboring Syria, were either directly or indirectly affected. As with





Photograph:: Cevahir Buğu

every disaster, TRC is adequately equipped to implement state-of-the-art disaster response strategies or mount swift responses through its extensive, highly organized network of volunteers and resources located throughout Türkiye's eighty-one provinces. The earthquakes on this fateful day were no exception, as they brought out the TRC's full potential. TRC coordinated with its various partners to provide millions of meals both to those affected by the disaster and the teams involved in rescue efforts.

TRC designed its systems to consolidate all of its production and distribution operations under a single roof, thereby minimizing the risk of anything falling through the cracks during a disaster of such great magnitude. TRC also launched an AI-driven system that allowed both disaster victims and first responders to use WhatsApp to locate food distribution centers, shelters, and other essential venues. Beyond our primary role in food distribution, we provided shelter, psychosocial support, humanitarian relief, healthcare, logistics assistance, and warehouse management to ensure that no one was left behind.

Following the disaster's immediate aftermath, TRC began making plans for medium- and long-term recovery, focusing initially on building container and tent cities for displaced communities. Thereafter, recovery efforts focused on developing medium- and long-term solutions. That said, however, we continued to see to the needs of displaced individuals even after they had moved into container and tent cities and, so as not to overlook rural communities, conducted regular visits to more of the remote areas to see to it that they were received the care and attention they needed.

### **TRC's Activities on the Ground**

TRC's initial and subsequent efforts in the disaster area include the following:

1. Upon receiving information that an earthquake had struck, we shared what we had learned with domestic and international groups and verified its accuracy with local response centers.
2. We conducted an impact analysis, disseminated information through our internal networks, and kept all relevant parties abreast of the events as they unfolded.
3. The Director General of Disaster Management and Climate Change, the Deputy Minister of Interior, and various ministers arrived at the disaster site to coordinate all field operations locally.
4. Instructions were issued for all tents and blankets stored in TRC warehouses to be delivered to the disaster zone. Warehouse statistics, quantities of tents and blankets at each location, contact persons and their badge numbers, and other relevant information were provided to AFAD.
5. TRC General Managers were assigned to specific provinces within the disaster zone to oversee and coordinate field operations.
6. Our branches in the disaster zone were redeployed to the hardest-hit areas, where they were directed to provincial AFAD centers so that they would be able to make full use of their local networking capacities.
7. Disaster response teams from Adana, Gaziantep, and Osmaniye arrived and immediately commenced operations.

8. Nearby TRC branches and Disaster Management Centers sent catering vehicles, mobile soup kitchens, and several of their staff members to the field.
9. Disaster coordination and support teams were assigned tasks that aligned with their specific areas of responsibility.
10. Primary response and logistics support centers were dispatched to the disaster zone in a well-coordinated manner.
11. NGOs and organizations specializing in food and water distribution were mobilized and directed to the disaster zone.
12. A level 4 incident command center was established and all relevant personnel were called to the disaster operations center.
13. Personnel were assigned to man the AFAD crisis center established to coordinate response efforts.
14. Communication groups were formed where they would be most effective.
15. Reporting systems were set up, communication capacities were assessed, and communication equipment was delivered to places needing them.
16. Once equipment for distributing food, water, and other essential goods was identified, logistics units were alerted to expedite their dispatch.
17. Food and water distribution began at 5:00 a.m. in Gaziantep, 5:30 a.m. in Adana, 6:00 a.m. in Diyarbakır, 7:45 a.m. in Şanlıurfa, 8:30 a.m. in Malatya, 9:00 a.m. in Pazarcık, 10:00 a.m. in Iskenderun, 11:00 a.m. in Antakya, 5:30 in Kahramanmaraş, and 8:30 p.m. in Adıyaman.
18. Registered volunteers were mobilized.
19. A disaster request system was established to process and view incoming requests.
20. A separate disaster incident command center was established in each individual disaster zone. These centers coordinated with members of the Nutrition Platform to ensure that food and water were distributed effectively.
21. Catering vehicles were deployed to designated areas in the field.
22. Aid campaigns were organized nationwide and logistics warehouses were established to distribute essential goods.
23. The Directorate General of International Relations was tasked with coordinating international aid and contacts were made the IFRC.
24. Fourteen team leaders were appointed and twenty-seven district representatives were appointed.
25. Thirteen service units provided comprehensive psychosocial and healthcare services, conducted regular needs assessments, and launched specialized programs in six provinces. We conducted community-based responses and provided cash assistance to households in need.
26. Individuals who shared their locations with TRC's WhatsApp were directed to the nearest distribution centers.



A total of 427,035,023 hot meals were served to earthquake victims and first responders following the Türkiye–Syria earthquakes (Table 1) and 1,054,648 aid items were distributed to affected communities (Table 2).

Food/Consumable Items						
Province	Soup	Hot Meats	Ration and Food Packets	Water	Individual Box Drinks	Bread
Adana	751,800	2,166,447	4,711,60	1,821,496	578,403	1,905,496
Adıyaman	2,171,706	52,096,455	2,886,068	8,435,283	3,022,963	5,224,517
Diyarbakır	1,898,841	7,828,772	331,911	5,354,162	501,775	5,958,868
Gaziantep	2,474,803	37,077,991	2,779,575	6,364,401	3,334,936	15,612,470
Hatay	60,910,38	143,453,492	5,508,541	20,909,481	5,248,539	21,463,731
Kahramanmaraş	2,698,794	111,621,866	4,385,324	15,163,971	2,789,103	15,509,042
Kilis	52,886	1,954,065	234,875	1,168,296	41,696	1,998,869
Malatya	2,239,893	56,328,565	1,105,799	25,555,561	5,068,527	5,866,901
Osmaniye	667,350	10,945,789	1,416,161	2,604,101	1,023,439	3,413,357
Şanlıurfa	1,435,106	3,561,581	788,178	2,701,283	122,295	4,264,760
<b>Total</b>	<b>14,391,179</b>	<b>427,035,023</b>	<b>19,436,432</b>	<b>90,078,035</b>	<b>21,731,676</b>	<b>81,218,011</b>

*Table 1-Food/Consumable Items Distributed by Province*

Non-Consumable Items						
Province	Blankets	Space Heaters	Beds	Fuel for Heating	Household Items	Family Kitchen Sets
Adana	0	4,824	14,848	0	708	545
Adıyaman	1	31,995	3,025	135,974	2,447	220
Diyarbakır	0	13,650	186	60,528	1,674	835
Gaziantep	1,896	66,234	72,971	2,260	13,105	4,086
Hatay	2,854	95,142	45,498	59,708	8,454	5,558
Kahramanmaraş	11	97,759	26,486	58,566	21,889	7,401
Kilis	0	5,110	454	11,937	351	71
Malatya	0	71,889	2,694	71,249	9,532	3,171
Osmaniye	0	1,416	0	0	1	3
Şanlıurfa	0	12,121	0	0	3,321	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,762</b>	<b>400,140</b>	<b>166,162</b>	<b>400,222</b>	<b>61,482</b>	<b>21,890</b>

*Table 2-Non-Consumable Items Distributed by Province*

A total of 125,799 and 189,662 earthquake victims received healthcare and psychosocial services, respectively (Table 3).

Psychosocial Services	People Served	Healthcare Services	People Served
Psychological First Aid	99,657	Check Ups	47,127
Group Sessions	65,024	Medicine Fillings	75,156
Individual Sessions	11,101	X-Rays	997
Workshops/Seminars	6,852	Bandaging	1,351
Mental Health and Psychosocial Evaluations	4,439	Electrocardiograms	117
Employee Support	2,589	Home Patient Care Visits	1,051
Total	189,662	Total	125,799

Table 3-Psychosocial and Healthcare Services

After the Türkiye–Syria earthquakes, a total of 2,487 professional staff members and 56,996 volunteers were active in the field. Together they contributed a total of 667,902 days’ worth of work (439,918 by staff and 227,984 by volunteers). Beyond this, a total of 71,044 people used the mobile showers and laundry services set up as part of water sanitation efforts.

### Other Disasters in 2023

Table 4 lists the other disasters and emergency situations experienced in Türkiye in 2023.

Humanitarian Aid Materials Distributed							
Disaster Type	Number	People Reached	Services Pro-vided	Meals	Water (Liters)	Individual Box Drinks	Snacks and Refreshments
Search and Rescue	16	12,130	74,380	3,900	8,220	35,247	18,643
Winter Storms	40	21,700	58,803	14,132	6,095	17,009	15,452
Earthquakes	3	1,000	5,590	3,300	300	1,270	420
Landslides	2	560	1,740	0	240	750	510
Construction Accidents	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Urban – Wildfires (Re-sponse Teams Sent)	77	61,895	326,744	32,010	58,565	95,880	67,181
Mining Accidents	1	650	3,009	0	240	2,000	529
Industrial Accidents	1	5,200	10,144	5,200	912	3,120	0
Floods	35	23,476	388,413	64,279	89,821	81,361	42,765
Acts of Terrorism	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Transportation Accidents	4	1,175	4,503	175	18	1,512	2,780
Total	181	127,786	873,326	122,996	164,411	238,149	148,280

Table 4-Disasters and Response Efforts in 2023 (Excluding Pazarcık)



Photograph: AA, Mahmut Serdar Alakus

TRC responded to a total of 181 individual disasters spanning eleven different disaster types. As part of these responses, TRC provided 127,786 individuals with different forms of relief, delivering a total of 873,326 services, reflecting the fact that many people received multiple forms of aid. The total amount of food and other consumable items distributed consisted of 122,996 meals, 164,411 liters of water, 238,149 individual box drinks, and 148,280 snacks and other refreshments.

While it is impossible to prevent certain types of disasters (e.g., earthquakes, hurricanes, tsunamis) from occurring, we can—and indeed must—do whatever is in our power to prevent human- and climate-induced disasters take all

the necessary precautions to minimize the long-term effects and damage they inflict on society.

By focusing strictly on human-centric goals, we risk missing the broader picture. Just like individual human beings need protection from external factors, cities must themselves be designed to withstand disasters. Constructing disaster-resilient cities will lead to less destruction, fewer casualties, reduced property loss, and a mitigated impact on national economies.

1 INFORM (2024). *Inform Risk Index*. <https://drmkc.jrc.ec.europa.eu/inform-index/INFORM-Risk/Results-and-data/moduleId/1782/id/469/controller/Admin/action/Results#inline-nav-1>



# Blood Donations: A Continuous Need that Transcends Emergencies

**Saim Kerman**

MD, Director General, Blood Services, Turkish Red Crescent

The Turkish Red Crescent (TRC) General Directorate of Blood Services focuses on developing a high-quality system of extracting, storing, and distributing safe blood. Working in partnership with Türkiye's Ministry of Health, TRC's Blood Services sets annual targets and provides uninterrupted, around-the-clock blood collection services and stem cell donor recruitment.

Shifts in donor behavior following the COVID-19 pandemic and the occasional politically charged suspicion have brought to light the need for a new incentivized donation system. The negative influence social media can have on potential blood donors—even during the recent major earthquake—further complicates this matter. As a result, effectively managing social media's influence has risen to become a top priority for TRC for the foreseeable future.

The most significant event in Türkiye in 2023 was the Türkiye–Syria earthquakes known domestically as the Disaster of the Century during which two powerful earthquakes struck Türkiye's southeastern province of Kahramanmaraş. On 6 February 2023, an Mw 7.7 earthquake struck Pazarcık followed by one of Mw 7.6 struck in Elbistan. Felt strongly in surrounding areas, these earthquakes caused extensive

damage across eleven provinces in Türkiye and affected approximately eleven million people.

A total of 647 of our staff members employed at our four regional blood centers were affected by the earthquake: Six were trapped under debris and two lost their lives. The disaster impacted the close kin of eighty-five staff members who had been working outside the disaster zone when the quakes struck.

The General Directorate of Blood Services deployed 337 staff members for relief efforts, contributing a total of 13,154 person-days of service. General Directorate of Blood Services, we deployed 337 staff members for relief efforts, amounting to 13,154 person-days.

Here is an overview of our blood donor recruitment activities following the earthquake:

- Immediately after the earthquake, alongside our call for blood donations to meet the needs of disaster-stricken areas, we increased the number of staff members present and the equipment capacity of blood donation teams, particularly in fixed locations.



Photograph: Cevahir Buğu

- Türkiye's Digital Transformation Office added a new feature on its e-Government platform to share information about blood donation centers.
- To optimize our blood supply, we sent SMS notifications to O Rh-negative blood donors in the affected regions, asking them to donate blood as soon as possible.
- The nationwide blood donation appeal made by TR-C's President on 6 February 2023, received widespread attention and resulted in a significant increase in donations.
- In our weekly meetings, we assessed stock levels and central laboratory capacities to determine how many blood donations we needed for the upcoming week.

- We monitored daily blood donations throughout Türkiye in real time to ensure that they never exceeded that maximum of fifteen thousand units, as is usual in regular periods.
- We reduced the number of mobile donation teams and encouraged donors to visit regional blood centers, blood donation centers, and blood collection units instead.
- As for blood service units outside the disaster zone, we closely monitored donations and gradually adjusted them to their usual levels, so as to ensure a stable and balanced supply.

We reinforced our blood donor recruitment efforts through targeted communication campaigns throughout our response to the earthquake. TRC's President shared donation figures, emphasizing the need to spread donations across several days to manage blood supplies more effectively.

We increased the frequency of SMS notifications to every ten days and posted thank-you messages to donors on the social media accounts of the General Directorate of Blood Services. Additionally, we tracked accounts posting about blood needs or urgent requests. We also ensured that shared by official TRC accounts reached a broader audience by encouraging people to follow the official announcement platforms.

#### *Şahinbey Municipality Blood Donation Campaign*

In response to the earthquake, we expanded our traditional blood donation campaigns to augment donation efforts in the four affected regions. This initiative was a collaboration between the Governor of Gaziantep, Şahinbey Municipality, and the Eastern Mediterranean Regional Blood Center. The campaign was held between 8 and 9 June

2023 from 8:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. at Gaziantep Democracy Square, with support from the governor of Gaziantep, Gaziantep Metropolitan Municipality, district municipalities, thirty-three local NGOs, the Gaziantep Chamber of Commerce, the Chamber of Tradesmen and Craftsmen, the Chamber of Industry, the Directorate for Organized Industrial Zones and its associated factories, and all schools under the Provincial Directorate of National Education. Over the two-day break, we collected 12,485 units of blood, bringing the total to 38,010 units to date.

#### *Gaza Genocide*

As part of TRC's humanitarian aid campaign for Palestine, we organized the medical supplies requested by the General Directorate of Blood Services. We reviewed our stock and coordinated with suppliers to arrange the delivery of blood bags, apheresis platelet sets, and apheresis devices.

On 21 October 2023, we transferred 1,152 blood bag systems and 160 apheresis platelet sets from Ankara's blood Donation center for shipment. We fulfilled orders for 6,912 blood bags and 5,000 apheresis sets from the relevant suppliers. We delivered 5,000 apheresis platelet sets and one MCS+ apheresis device and equipment. All of these were supplied by our solution partner, Girgin (i.e., company), the Ministry of Health warehouse at Etlik City Hospital, on 8 November 8, with the support of our Central Anatolia Regional Blood Center Directorate.



# International Solidarity in the Disaster of the Century

**Alper Küçük**

Director General, International Affairs and Migration, Turkish Red Crescent

We welcome each new year with hopeful aspirations, wishing for a world in less need of humanitarian aid. While the start of 2023 was no exception, that hope did not translate into reality. On the contrary, the year was marked by numerous crises around the world, including the Türkiye–Syria earthquakes—known domestically as the Disaster of the Century—that rocked our nation. As humanitarian needs soared beyond unprecedented levels, we at the Turkish Red Crescent (TRC) found ourselves working around the clock to fulfill these needs to the best of our abilities. However, the scale of these crises was beyond what any single organization could handle alone. Even with the generous support of our donors and partners, it became clear that an effective response could only be mounted in collaboration with other organizations—a lesson that became only more evident as 2023 progressed.

We face several stark realities as we head into 2024: Humanitarian crises are on the rise globally, yet donations and funding are on the decline. The norms that protect people and the institutions meant to uphold these norms are losing their effectiveness. Let us hope, for the sake of humanity, that our fears are unfounded.

Certain dates hold a special place in our national psyche, some of which evoke intense feelings of sorrow, such as 6 February 2023. It was on this fateful day that an unparalleled amount of destruction and loss of life was wrought upon eleven provinces in southeastern Türkiye. In response to what would be the largest humanitarian crisis of 2023 in the country, civil society and government agencies—particularly the Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD)—launched a nationwide effort to help mitigate the still-unfolding impact of the disaster. TRC played a leading role in this monumental effort from the very offset. Words cannot capture the amount of work involved in organizing a response of this magnitude. The disaster also sparked a global outpouring of kindness, empathy, and determination to assist those people in need. Over one hundred national societies affiliated with IFRC joined forces with us to deliver aid to the victims. Seeing how TRC’s effective response models and reliable systems made a difference in this global effort was truly remarkable. Another moving moment was seeing aid materials arriving from abroad packed in TRC boxes that we had previously sent ourselves. This act of solidarity deeply



touched everyone involved, including myself as both a humanitarian worker and a supporter of TRC.

We organized an international support event to address the humanitarian needs of the region. Hosted by the Dutch Embassy in collaboration with the IFRC, the event brought together ambassadors from around the world to garner support for our ongoing efforts. The event was personally attended by the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Director for EU Affairs, Ambassador Mehmet Kemal Bozay, both of whom reinforced the Turkish government's strong support for it. The presence and moral support offered by ambassadors of countries involved in humanitarian work in Türkiye, along with other high-level international representatives at the event, rekindled our hope for overcoming future challenges.

Nations across the world faced humanitarian crises triggered by a range of factors over the course of the year. The disasters in Afghanistan, Ukraine, Morocco, and Libya—both natural and human-induced—topped TRC's international priorities. The aid we provided to these countries allowed them to meet their most urgent needs, thereby preventing people from falling into complete despair. While reflecting on our humanitarian efforts in 2023, it is important that we remember that TRC has a deep-rooted history of working in these parts of the world. For instance, a field hospital constructed in 1912 by the Ottoman Red Crescent in the eastern Libyan city of Derna treated then-Major Mustafa Kemal, who would go on to found the Republic of Türkiye, after sustaining injuries in nearby Tripoli. A century after this historic event, TRC

volunteers were once again called to Derna—only this time to assist flood victims. Our humanitarian efforts extended well beyond these countries. Through our robust partnerships with international humanitarian organizations, we delivered aid to over eight million people across thirty-five countries throughout 2023.

The ongoing tragedy in Palestine's Gaza Strip has shown just how impotent the world is in taking meaningful action to protect a battered and beleaguered population forced by a brutal occupying nation into a small corner of what amounts to an open-air prison. What is transpiring—streamed to the world in 4k—is a blatant violation of humanitarian law, a disregard for the norms established to protect human life, and a clear demonstration of the utter failure of the institutions expressly established to uphold these norms. How can humanity remain so indifferent to the deaths of tens of thousands of starved, dehydrated, and displaced civilians when the death of just one person in a different context causes such uproar in the international media? How can we stand idly without reaching out to lend a helping hand the more than two million people displaced from their homes? We couldn't, and we didn't! Recognizing the gravity of the situation, we mobilized all of our resources for Palestine and the Gaza Strip. We have been on the ground long before 7 October—the day when Israel upped its barbaric bombardment and blockade over the Gaza Strip—to help the embattled yet ever-resilient people of Palestine and, with strong public support and in coordination with government agencies and civil society organizations, will continue to support them until they are accorded their rights and dignity as fellow human beings. We have delivered aid and worked hand-in-hand with the Palestinian Red Crescent to meet communities'

essential needs. Nevertheless, we are aware that our humanitarian work must be backed up by strong advocacy. As such, the President of TRC, Dr. Fatma Meriç Yılmaz, appealed to the embassies of the permanent members of the UN Security Council, not only reminding them of their historic responsibility to uphold humanitarian law, the rule of law, and human dignity but also urging them to open a humanitarian corridor in the Gaza Strip. This plea marks a key moment in the history of humanitarian advocacy. As long as the crisis in the Gaza Strip continues and as long as there are needs to be met, TRC will remain steadfast in its commitment to the Palestinian people.

The year 2023 has placed immense humanitarian responsibilities on us and has set the stage for even greater challenges in 2024. This is why working closely with stakeholders is essential; it allows for greater access to vulnerable people. The sharp decline in global resources for humanitarian aid contrasting with ever-rising needs highlights the importance of using these resources as efficiently as possible. By remaining true to our mission, we at TRC reaffirm our crucial role in the provision of humanitarian relief so that we may continue to be a source of hope for people in need everywhere.



# Anytime, Anywhere

## Gazi Alataş

MD, Director General for Community Services, Turkish Red Crescent

The devastating Türkiye–Syria earthquakes that struck Kahramanmaraş on 6 February 2023 left an indelible mark on the nation. This catastrophic event, known in Türkiye as the Disaster of the Century, prompted an outpouring of domestic and international support. The Turkish Red Crescent (TRC) was among the first to respond, deploying every resource at its disposal to meet the needs of those affected.

Immediately after the earthquakes, teams from the Directorate General of Community Services made up of social workers, public health experts, and psychosocial support personnel had made their way to the disaster area and were ready to offer whatever assistance they could. Initially focused on providing much-needed food assistance, these teams soon expanded their efforts to cover a broader range of needs based on their areas of expertise, as outlined in Türkiye Disaster Response Plan. Teams distributed food and clothing through social markets and home visits, offered psychosocial support and psychological first aid, and provided primary healthcare services via mobile units. They also ensured access to clean water, hygiene products, and shower and laundry facilities under UNICEF’s WASH program. During the early recovery phase, these teams conducted surveys, focus group discussions, and interviews with various individuals to



Photograph: AA, Seren Sezgin



assess the evolving needs and capacities in the region. These findings were meticulously documented and used by TRC to develop long-term recovery plans.

Cash-based assistance has become increasingly common in humanitarian aid, both during emergencies and in more stable times. According to the 2023 State of the World's Cash report published by the CALP Network, 7.9 billion

USD—twenty-one percent of all humanitarian aid worldwide—was distributed directly to individuals affected by crises through cash or vouchers in 2022. Having been using cash assistance for years, TRC introduced the Esen Card to improve the effectiveness of these efforts after the Türkiye–Syria earthquakes to meet the heightened need. The Esen Card allows beneficiaries to withdraw money deposited by TRC from ATMs or use it as a debit card for





shopping. Distributing these cards in areas where markets have reopened allows those affected to purchase items and services that meet their own personal needs. This not only helps preserve their dignity but also helps the local economy recover. Though initially rolled out in the hardest-hit areas, the Esen Card may be used nationwide for both emergency and regular purchases.

Despite our focus shifting to the earthquake zone, we continued to support all our compatriots in need throughout 2023. During Ramadan, for instance, we coordinated with our local branches to distribute food, cash, and clothing to nearly five million people across the country. Our soup kitchens served hot meals to 48,193 people and food aid reached 569,000 over the course of the year. Beneficiaries received 1,652,616 items of clothes free of charge from our TRC Boutiques. True to our mission to enhance individual and community resilience both in Türkiye and abroad and to alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found, we provided targeted assistance to orphaned children, people with disabilities, new mothers, individuals facing health challenges, children with special needs, and displaced persons.

TRC launched its Scholarship Management System (known in Turkish by the acronym KBYS) in 2023 to streamline and enhance the effectiveness of our cash-based education support programs. This program was initiated to ensure equal opportunities in education for hard-working students facing financial challenges throughout their studies and to help them grow into self-confident, responsible individuals. Following a rigorous selection process involving online applications and video interviews, a total of 2,123 students were awarded regular scholarships in 2023.

TRC continued its first aid training efforts to enhance community resilience throughout 2023, which proved crucial during the aftermath of the Türkiye–Syria earthquakes. We certified 136,155 first aid responders who are now equipped to handle emergencies in their own communities and abroad. We ramped up our public awareness efforts, reaching 280,864 people through first aid seminars and providing 104,192 individuals with workshops and seminars on psychological first aid, an area found to be underrepresented after the Türkiye-Syria earthquakes.

Aligned with our 2030 goal of working toward a society that lives and ages healthily, 151 women health ambassadors who have completed our healthy living workshop are now leading efforts to foster a culture of healthy living across the country.

As the Directorate General of Community Services, we remain dedicated to our mission to safeguard the well-being and safety of our fellow human beings, whether during times of crisis or in everyday circumstances, ensuring ample support anytime and anywhere it is needed.



# Post-Disaster Socioeconomic Recovery: The Turkish Red Crescent's Efforts to Revitalize the Earthquake Zone

İlyas Haşim Çakmak

Kızılay Investment

The devastating earthquakes that struck Türkiye's south-eastern province of Kahramanmaraş on 6 February 2023 served as a powerful reminder of the profound impact natural disasters can have on regional development. These events highlighted the critical need for strong, sustainable socioeconomic and agricultural systems, along with a focus on building psychological resilience within communities to help them navigate crises when they do inevitably occur. While a harsh lesson indeed, this disaster has made it clear that meaningful recovery and development in disaster-stricken regions can only be achieved through social impact investments that uplift both individuals and communities.

We see, especially after such large-scale disasters, that it is no longer possible to rely solely on financial metrics while creating roadmaps for the future. In fact, we have reached a point where we have been forced to completely rethink our approach to the future using projections grounded in deep expertise and acumen. Given this new reality, Kızılay

Investment has dedicated itself to serving humanity through a range of innovative activities since its establishment in 2019. Our mission is to support TRC's humanitarian work by generating sustainable resources through social impact investments and, by astutely implementing this model, to become a global leader in this field.

As TRC's largest and longest-standing supporter, Kızılay Investment is committed to empowering individuals and communities, alleviating disaster- and poverty-related suffering, and eliminating existing or potential disadvantages. At Kızılay Investment, we fulfill a wide range of responsibilities, including disaster preparedness, rapid response and recovery, and supply chain management. We similarly provide essential services like infrastructure, logistics, and shelter—all of these falling within the framework of social impact investment. Designed to promote swift and effective development in disaster-stricken areas, our extensive socioeconomic empowerment programs cover agriculture, food security, health, energy, and education.



Photograph: Cevahir Buğu

We take our stewardship over financial resources with a deep sense of responsibility—a testament of the moral strength TRC has embodied since 1868. In disaster zones and other critical areas, we partner with corporations through social impact investing to implement projects that drive positive socioeconomic change. Our efforts emphasize regional humanitarian aid and sustainable development. We are rapidly moving toward becoming a leader in innovative, holistic humanitarian aid solutions.

We are also proud to announce that we are establishing Türkiye's first impact centers in Gaziantep and Hatay—two key cities for post-disaster recovery. Showcasing a community-based development approach led by experts,

these centers will serve as models both for Türkiye and the wider world. We will continue to promote TRC's values through investments that deliver positive, measurable results. Our achievements so far have not only brought new responsibilities to the table but have also motivated us to deepen our commitment to the future of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

Kızılay Investment will continue to work tirelessly to ensure that TRC has sufficient resources to mount effective humanitarian operations, to meet whatever financial needs the organization may have, and to expand our reach to help all those in need.

# Unforgettable Experiences: A Year of Lessons Learned and Challenges Overcome Together

## Murat Solak

Director General, Communication and Donation Management,  
Turkish Red Crescent

An ominous year indeed, 2023 was etched in our memories as a year of profound sorrow, unforgettable experiences, and invaluable lessons. Despite having entered the year with high hopes and lofty aspirations, the Türkiye–Syria earthquakes of 6 February shook the entire nation to the core. Since love for the homeland is intrinsically tied to helping those wounded and in need, the Turkish Red Crescent (TRC) found itself on the front lines from the very onset of the disaster. Thanks to the support of our dedicated community of volunteers and donors, we harnessed all available resources—ranging from blood donations and monetary contributions to manpower—to assist all those affected by what we in Türkiye have dubbed the Disaster of the Century.

As part of Türkiye’s Disaster Response Plan (TAMP), the TRC provided three hot meals a day to disaster victims and those involved in relief efforts. We dispatched catering vehicles to the disaster zone and mobilized all of our resources

to distribute hot meals, soups, and catered goods. Well aware of the value of a hot meal during a disaster, our workers delivered hot meals to approximately 427,000 people, including those living in some of the most remote areas of the country. As a key partner in TAMP, TRC devoted itself to providing healthcare, shelter, logistics, psychosocial, and communications support, even delivering 2.2 million TRY in cash assistance throughout the acute and recovery phases. Despite a few setbacks in our communications and donation efforts, our teams worked around the clock until every survivor had found a warm home.

Every second counts in the immediate aftermath of a crisis. Even a glass of water can save the life of someone who has been trapped under rubble for days on end. In such life-or-death situations, delivering aid and reassurance becomes essential. To keep disaster survivors informed about TRC’s psychosocial support, cash assistance, container cities, and aid for business owners and farmers,





Photograph: Cevahir Buğu





we kept our toll-free hotline open around the clock. This hotline was also used to field calls by concerned donors wanting to offer assistance and support to their beleaguered compatriots.

Unfortunately, other parts of the world also experienced severe crises. Following Israel's escalation of the ongoing assault and blockade it has imposed on the civilian population of Palestine's Gaza Strip on 7 October, TRC increased the aid it had been providing to the battered yet steadfast people of Gaza. With the support of our vast humanitarian community, we coordinated aid operations with the Palestinian and Egyptian Red Crescent Societies to mitigate the suffering inflicted by the Israeli armed forces. After beginning operations in the Gaza Strip in 1995, TRC eventually established a permanent delegation office there in 2008 along with a liaison in Jerusalem. By September 2023, it had provided essential aid—including food, shelter, medical supplies, and educational resources—to approximately two million Palestinians. The recent escalation of hostilities drove TRC to resume active aid work in the region. To meet the urgent needs of Gazan civilians under relentless bombardment, TRC delivered hot meals, food parcels, shelters, and clothing to the region by air and sea. This aid played a crucial role amid the rapidly deteriorating, inhumane conditions and demonstrated once again TRC's central role in international humanitarian action.

In addition to its other humanitarian work, the Turkish Red Crescent is the only organization dedicated to meeting Türkiye's blood needs. With the help of volunteers, we work tirelessly to collect blood. Every four seconds, one unit of blood is needed in Türkiye, and

the fate of about nine thousand people depends on daily donations. Through our “We Are Closely Connected” campaign, we raise awareness about regular blood donation and invite people to help replenish declining blood stocks. We collect nine thousand units of blood daily at three hundred collection points to meet the country’s needs.

Our most important supporters are our donors. The remarkable increases in 2023—116 percent in cash donations, 606 percent in in-kind contributions, and 77 percent in real estate gifts—are a testament to the Turkish people’s enduring trust in us. The partnerships with leading institutions across Türkiye played a notable role in this increase.

TRC’s efforts this year serve as a roadmap for the future and underscore the importance of humanitarian aid. Our work extends far beyond emergency relief, encompassing long-term rehabilitation and reconstruction. We have been instrumental in raising awareness among disaster victims and the wider public so as to ensure that aid reaches its intended recipients without undue delay.

TRC’s effective communication strategy played a key role in addressing community needs and managing crises during and after disasters. As 2023 demonstrated, establishing a robust communications and logistics network is an absolute must for the rapid delivery of aid during natural and conflict-related crises. In addition to significantly enhancing societal resilience during crises, a culture of giving shifts the focus from profit and loss to social solidarity and equity. Securing the support of donors and volunteers is essential for building a sustainable model of assistance.

As we enter 2024, our communication strategy focuses on building social resilience, strong governance, and institutional trust—all key pillars of TRC’s 2030 strategic plan. By incorporating the experiences and lessons learned over the course of 2023, we aim to make 2024 a year of goodness and charitable acts.

Building on the legacy of the Hilâl-i Ahmer (the Ottoman Red Crescent) that we inherited, TRC stands tall like a sturdy tree with deep roots and branches stretching into all corners of the world. As we celebrate the Turkish Republic’s centennial anniversary, TRC remains a symbol of kindness to those whose lives we have touched, tirelessly working for 155 years to foster compassion, alleviate suffering, and provide both a smiling face and helping hand to those in need around the world.



# Turkish Red Crescent Academy in 2023

## Alpaslan Durmuş

President, Turkish Red Crescent Academy

Our focus in 2023 revolved around the Türkiye–Syria earthquakes and the massive response that would follow. Working side by side with academics, universities, think tanks, UN agencies, and international humanitarian organizations, we strove diligently to assess the damage wrought on that fateful day, identify the needs of those affected by the disaster, and support the coordination of response and recovery efforts.

In the aftermath of the earthquakes, we partnered with Turkish Red Crescent (TRC) field teams to assess and analyze the diverse needs of aggrieved communities. After meeting with survivors to ascertain how satisfied they were with the services rendered, we recorded the experiences, trials, and tribulations of the relief workers who stood at the heart of response efforts. In doing so, we sought to document our disaster response efforts, provide data-driven recommendations to field teams, and evaluate the impact of these initiatives on the lives of those who had suffered so much.

Beyond these efforts, TRC Academy launched 109 cutting-edge training modules to expand our public outreach. We organized orientation workshops to equip everyone involved in disaster response and recovery operations with what they would need to handle not only their responsibilities but also the potentially traumatizing scenes they might encounter in the field. Our distance learning system, bol-

stered by partnerships with various institutions, proved an invaluable asset in our endeavor to make targeted training accessible to broad segments of society and in providing educational content available to anyone with an internet connection. By making all of our training materials available via the Human Resources Office's Distance Learning Portal, for instance, we surpassed fifty thousand registered users on our platform by the end of 2023.

To advance research and collaboration in critical areas, TRC Academy provided scholars working in disaster management, migration, international aid, and volunteering with field access and statistical support. We assisted thirty-six researchers with their data and field access requests while simultaneously strengthening networks among professionals in these fields.

We collaborated with several partners on two TÜBİTAK projects focusing on disasters and developed consortia to apply for various international projects in Europe—particularly those sponsored by Erasmus—and beyond. The Vocational Education and Training Mobility Accreditation grant we were awarded enabled us to support our colleagues' participation in international training workshops that have played a central role in strengthening their professional knowledge and skills.

Since our founding in 2020, our department has been responsible for overseeing TRC’s educational, research, and publication activities. This year, we succeeded in fulfilling this objective by publishing fifteen works, including research series, biographies, oral histories, memoirs, narratives, and art collections. Our diligence in this regard has positioned TRC Culture and Arts Publications as the primary platform for TRC Academy to publish influential cultural, artistic, and scientific works. These publications seek to deepen expertise and raise public awareness vis-à-vis the areas in which TRC is actively engaged. In line with our commitment to allowing to our readers to *download, benefit, archive, and share* whatever our work, all products from TRC Culture and Arts Publications are freely available on TRC Academy’s website. We have authorized anyone and everyone to download these materials and share them in their original, unmodified forms on all digital platforms without having to seek extra permission.

One of the fifteen books we published this year is *Humanitarian Diplomacy: From Theory to Practice*, authored by a team of distinguished academics, diplomats, and humanitarian workers. We signed an agreement with Routledge to publish the English version of this book and have entered the final stages prior to release. We hosted the annual meeting of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Research Consortium (RC3), of which we are a board member in September. This consortium formalized our relationship with the various research institutions within the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and helps us synchronize our own educational and research priorities with those of the international community.

Another of TRC Academy’s goals is to advance humanitarian studies by contributing to academic literature, shaping agendas, organizing national and international gatherings, and supporting events hosted by other institutions. We participated in numerous academic conferences and workshops during where several of our colleagues presented papers on disasters, humanitarian aid, and public health. Building on the partnerships formed during the International Humanitarian Studies Conference, we laid the groundwork for new projects slated for implementation in 2024.

One of the key lessons learned this year is the critical importance of building resilience. The tragic events of the February 6 Türkiye–Syria earthquakes showed us all too clearly that greater resilience at both the individual and societal levels could have lessened the destruction they inflicted on our nation’s people. With this in mind, we will focus on strengthening and expanding our partnerships in education, research, and publications—locally, nationally, and internationally—to enhance resilience-focused research and awareness-raising efforts throughout 2024.







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