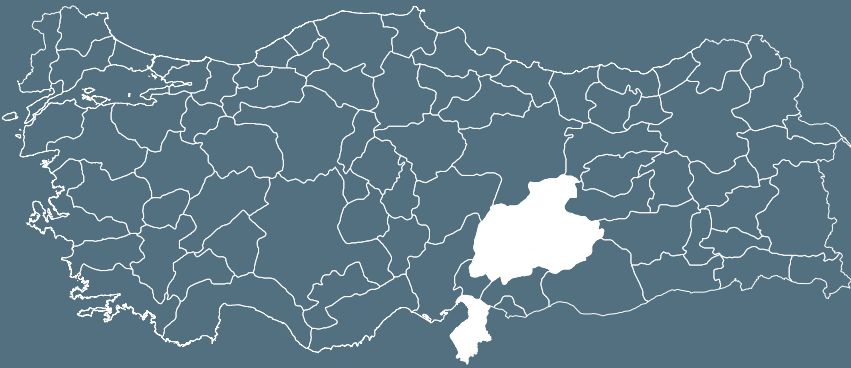


"We constantly worry,  
we are always on  
edge."

Perceptions of the earthquake  
response in Türkiye

Türkiye • July 2023 • Executive summary



GROUND TRUTH  
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# Background

The two earthquakes which struck southern Türkiye and northwest Syria on 6 February 2023 have had devastating consequences. In Türkiye alone, over 50,000 people have died and a further 100,000 have been injured.<sup>1</sup> The damage to buildings and key infrastructure has left millions displaced and resulted in widespread disruption to supply and services. The affected area spans a wide and diverse environment made up of 11 provinces. Türkiye also hosts the largest refugee population in the world, and over 1.7 million of the 14 million people registered in the most impacted provinces are refugees, the majority of whom are Syrians living under temporary protection status.

The Government of Türkiye has led the response to the earthquakes, which is coordinated through the Presidency of Disaster and Emergency Management (AFAD) and the Turkish Red Crescent (TRC). The national response has been informed by the National Disaster Response Plan, initially drafted in 2014, and revised in 2022, which sets out responsibilities, mandates and activities for all emergencies in Türkiye.<sup>2</sup> Local actors have been at the forefront of the response, including local authorities, Turkish NGOs, local civil society organisations, and advocacy groups. The international humanitarian community supported the government in providing immediate assistance to the affected population. OCHA's flash appeal, which ended on 24 May 2023, was underpinned by three key considerations: ensuring the response was as local as possible and as international as necessary; upholding a people-centred approach that included mainstreaming protection, enhancing accountability to affected people, and ensuring sensitivity to vulnerabilities; and utilising cash and voucher assistance wherever feasible.<sup>3</sup>

# Introduction

An independent process of listening to and amplifying the voices of communities is vital for the response to meet overwhelming and diverse needs. Shortly after the earthquake, we launched a qualitative research project to support humanitarian responders design, implement, and evaluate programmes based on the views of affected people. Through this study, we sought to understand how accountable the humanitarian response in Türkiye is to people's needs, priorities, and expectations; and how aid can be more responsive to the unfolding needs of the affected population in Türkiye. We also explored how international actors can effectively support and engage with the localised response.

In adopting a qualitative research approach, our findings in this report do not seek to represent the perceptions of the affected population across the response. Instead, we highlight key issues and experiences of individuals across different parts of the affected area, which can also serve as a platform for further research. We divide our findings among the following key themes: community priorities; participation and feedback; information; access and safety; fairness and inclusion; and localisation.

This executive summary provides a brief overview of the key findings and recommendations from our research project. To read our full findings report, please visit our [project page](#).

## Acknowledgements

Thank you to the people in Türkiye for taking the time to speak with us and share your views.

This project is possible thanks to generous funding from the H2H Network's H2H Fund, which is funded with UK aid from the British Government and Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC). Thanks also go to our core donors, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation.

We would like to extend our thanks to our partners TK-APS, whose commitment, expertise, and responsible data collection and analysis have been instrumental to this project's success.

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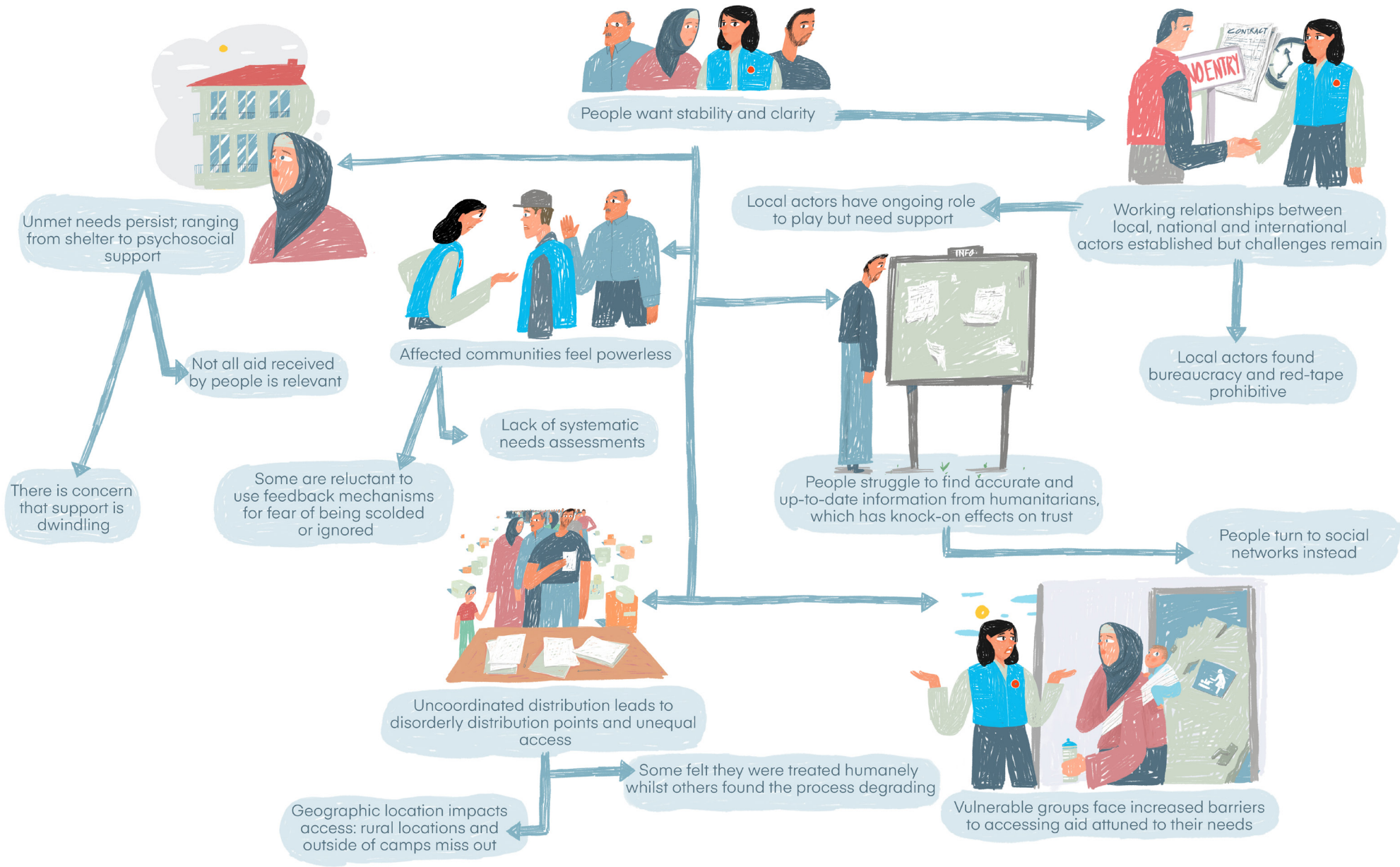
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TK-APS



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<sup>1</sup> OCHA. April 2023. "[Türkiye Humanitarian Needs and Response Overview – Interim Update.](#)"  
<sup>2</sup> AFAD. Updated February 2022. "[Türkiye National Disaster Response Plan \(TAMP\).](#)"  
<sup>3</sup> OCHA. February 2023. "[Flash Appeal: Türkiye Earthquake \(February – May 2023\).](#)"



A variety of factors mean communities do not feel they are getting what they need, when they need it most.

# Findings and recommendations

## 1) Community priorities: Wide range of unmet needs endure; but shelter is top of the list.

Affected communities still have a great number of unmet needs. These needs are context dependent and range from basic needs to livelihood support. Shelter is people's most common concern: they want stable and secure accommodation. Persisting anxiety and traumas mean that mental health and psychosocial support is vital. A sense that support is waning compounds people's worries over unmet needs.

### Recommendations

- Localise decisions on resource allocation, so the response can meet the diverse needs of different regions and localities more effectively. At an organisational level, humanitarian actors working on the response should ensure that projects are location specific, and decision-making is as regionalised as possible.
- Equip people with up-to-date information, especially regarding future accommodation and financial support or livelihood opportunities. This is increasingly important as some actors finish their projects and leave the earthquake response entirely.
- Expand and accelerate protection work, as the need for mental health and psychosocial support will continue for a long time. This should also be extended to affected people who have relocated from the affected area. Clarify and streamline referral pathways and the roll-out of grief counselling. This includes more systematic support for gender-based violence.
- Use cash and voucher assistance more widely. Shops and markets have re-opened, so this offers people more flexibility and autonomy to meet basic needs, housing costs or education fees.<sup>4</sup>



*Not all aid provided was relevant or suitable to those receiving it.*



There are different situations in each region. Some have been unable to meet even their basic needs, while others have focused on rebuilding their livelihoods and social opportunities.

– Representative from a national NGO



A previous organisation came and assessed the needs, evaluated the situation, and distributed cards. With the card, you could go and collect your aid. Whether you wanted to receive it immediately or the next day or the day after, you could get your aid. This way, we can ensure that everyone receives their aid. People with jobs don't have to leave work and run to get their aid.

– Syrian woman in Malatya

<sup>4</sup> Cash Based Interventions Technical Working Group. July 2023. "Joint Market Assessment Report – May 2023."



## 2) Participation and feedback: People feel they cannot influence decisions

When it comes to participation and influence, people feel powerless. Affected people say they cannot influence the decisions that dictate the assistance they receive. Many said no systematic needs assessments occurred, or that needs assessments were ineffectual when conducted. Insufficient needs assessment coverage has resulted in issues around aid relevance; people have received inappropriate and sometimes unusable items. People hesitate to use available feedback mechanisms; they worry they will be ignored or scolded.

### Recommendations

- Improve coordination of needs assessments across the affected area and make them more systematic. Capacity-development may be necessary to ensure appropriate and comprehensive needs assessments are conducted.
- Undertake comprehensive consultations with community groups including men, women, people with disabilities, older persons. These need to be repeated on a frequent basis.
- Establish community committees in informal and formal camp settings<sup>5</sup> and in communities outside of camps, to facilitate two-way communication with the humanitarian response. Within such committees, community representatives could participate, hear updates, and provide feedback on the response.
- Target greater communications through muhtars (elected neighbourhood heads), as they act as intermediaries between people and authorities.
- Make existing feedback mechanisms more visible and accessible. Many organisations across the response have their own feedback mechanisms, including the national authorities and Turkish Red Crescent.



*People do not know who to voice feedback to.*

“

They should visit each house and ask if anyone is sick, if they have medication, if they lack firewood or water, and list their needs. But there's nothing like that, we haven't seen or heard anything.

– Turkish man in Malatya

“

A coordination centre should be established. Whether it's a district, village, or neighbourhood, there should be a district governor, a muhtar. People come together; their problems are heard. Solutions can be found in a short period, not in one or two months but in three-to-five days.

– Turkish man in Kahramanmaraş

“

Direct interaction between people and the authorities can change things, change a lot. But it's difficult for me to have a meeting with a district governor, an official, or someone for a problem. However, a muhtar can meet with the district governor.

– Turkish man in Kahramanmaraş

<sup>5</sup> Camps are often referred to as settlements or sites within the response in Türkiye. 'Formal camp' in this report is used to denote AFAD-run settlements.

### 3) Information: Uncertainty prevails – people turn to friends and family for information

People struggle to find accurate and up-to-date information from humanitarian actors regarding available assistance. Gaps in information and transparency have resulted in diminishing trust in humanitarian actors. People turn to social networks to learn where and when they can access aid.

#### Recommendations

- Increase communication with affected people regarding the role of different organisations within the response and the modalities of assistance available. It is apparent that people did not know what to expect from specific actors.
- Consult with affected communities to understand how they prefer to receive information and communicate with humanitarian organisations. Thereafter conduct regular accountability assessments to ensure that the information shared by humanitarian actors is what people are looking for.
- Improve coordination and communication channels amongst different types of actors working in the response in order to ensure that accurate and up-to-date information is available to all actors, including national authorities, local authorities, civil society actors and donors.
- Share information more effectively using technology and social media, including direct messaging on people's phones. Ensure that communications are available in context-appropriate languages, including Arabic.
- Hold information-sharing sessions in formal camps, informal camps, and within communities. This should also include information regarding available services which go beyond basic needs, such as legal aid or entrepreneurial support.
- Capitalise on the unique role of muhtars and their respective proximity to communities by using them for information provision. Due to widespread misinformation, muhtars can act as a trusted source of reliable information.



An announcement could be made. Now everyone has the internet, everyone has a phone. An announcement can be made on the internet.

– Turkish woman in Adiyaman



To improve, information sessions can be conducted in the camps. Identifying what will be distributed, who will distribute it, and determining needs can lead to more effective progress.

– Representative from a national NGO



*Knowing how to access support can be confusing.*

#### 4) Access and safety: Uncoordinated distributions lead to access barriers

Distribution is poorly coordinated. People described chaotic and crowded distribution points, particularly in the initial stages of the response, which sometimes led to violence and aggression. Where people live strongly influences their ability to access aid. Some people felt humanitarians treated them humanely and politely whilst others felt degraded. People generally felt safe accessing aid, but there are persisting concerns around theft and looting.

##### Recommendations

- Conduct service-mapping of all actors providing services within the response, including those actors which fall outside of coordination structures. Furthermore, existing sectoral-activity mapping (who is doing what where), ought to be expanded to include information on activity timing to allow actors to track gaps and duplication.
- Improve coordination amongst international NGOs and NGOs on a regional basis, so that organisations with similar mandates and projects are dispersed across different areas.
- Increase the usage of registration systems (including name or ID) to improve distribution coverage, and to avoid the perceived injustices of some people receiving lots of aid and others missing out.
- Deliver items directly to those who need them, especially to vulnerable groups. This would foster safety and dignity and reduce the need for people to queue.

“

It would be fairer to provide support based on the home address, house number, and number of family members. Nobody would infringe on anyone's rights, and distribution would be equal for everyone.

– Syrian man in Hatay



*Distributions are sometimes chaotic and undignified.*

## 5) Fairness and inclusion: Unequal struggles to meet basic needs

Many perceived aid distribution to be unfair. Multiple people mentioned favouritism towards personal connections by aid distributors. Some groups face bigger barriers than others accessing the aid they need, including women, people with disabilities, Syrian refugees, LBGTQIA+ and ethnic minorities including Dom and Abdal peoples. Fear and desperation fuel mistrust, and rampant rumours and misinformation further aggravate social tensions.

### Recommendations

- Consider the unique needs and barriers of different community groups when designing and implementing aid programmes. There are groups that faces unique cultural and logistical barriers that complicate participation and require tailored programming.
- International actors should partner with local organisations that have specialist knowledge and experience with particular groups. This may require additional capacity development support and more involvement of such organisations in decision-making. Where possible, distribute aid through members of the targeted vulnerable community themselves.
- Establish more comprehensive and rigorous security within camps to respond to women's protection and safety concerns, including increase the number of private spaces for women.
- Humanitarian organisations should hire more women. In order to identify specific needs, and ensure that women are forthcoming with their feedback, it is vital for women to be assisted by other women in a way that is sensitive to their specific circumstances, experiences, and gender roles.
- Continuously listen to communities – not only to understand their concerns, suggestions and questions, but also to identify and address instances of misinformation. Proactively address harmful rumours and misinformation by working with trusted stakeholders and using a range of communication channels.
- Develop strategies for how to address and alleviate social tensions together with representatives of different demographic groups, including host communities and Syrian refugees and/or support local organisations focusing on this work.



*Aid did not always go to those who need it most.*

“

Even after another six months, people will feel the same pessimism, the same uncertainty, the same loneliness, and the same sense of exclusion. It is necessary to erase the traces of these severe traumas. Traumas of individuals with a disability like me, of oppressed and marginalised people, need to be healed and erased.

– *Man with a disability in Hatay*

“

It is necessary to look at groups individually. While there has been progress for some groups, such as with gender and nationality-based discrimination, work for people with disabilities and Doms has not improved at all. Life for people with disabilities is getting worse and worse in the region.

– *Representative from a national non-profit organisation*

“

Mapping should be done according to provinces-districts-rural areas and according to the level of impact (less-medium-highly impacted). Different group distinctions should be made (age, occupation, nationality, gender-based distributions).

– *Representative from a national NGO*

“

In emergency situations, LBGTQIA+ individuals can only trust and rely on their peers; even if an organisation demonstrates sensitivity, this does not eliminate the importance of peer support. In fact, there is a need for LBGTQIA+ organisations and individuals in this field. LBGTQIA+ individuals cannot benefit from services provided by other organisations. Therefore, the presence of an LBGTQIA+ association is important for LBGTQIA+ individuals to access services.

– *Representative from an advocacy organisation*

“

They should work with locals who know the area and the Abdal community well. [...] Understanding the locals is necessary to work here.

– *Representative from a local civil society organisation*



## 6) Localisation: The full potential of localisation has not yet been realised

The response is not fully attuned to local contexts. Local and national NGOs have struggled to break into international actors' trusted circles, and bureaucracy and red tape have hindered them when they have. Local actors have a key role to play in the next stages of the response, but they need support from authorities and donors.

### Recommendations

- Improve partnerships with local organisations who better understand local contexts. This includes increasing funding for local organisations and reducing bureaucracy (where possible), which is a major barrier for local organisations. This is important because the current reliance on volunteers is not sustainable.
- Increase the roll-out of earthquake-specific capacity-development to local partners, particularly where local partners have limited experience in disaster management work, or where they are working in new sectors which were established post-earthquake, such as the water, sanitation and hygiene sector. Field-level capacity development ought to be provided in local languages wherever possible.
- Increase the systematic involvement of local actors within coordination structures to improve outreach and advocacy opportunities, including their representation within working groups and task teams. Public institutions must also acknowledge and empower local actors, creating opportunities for civil society engagement in policy-making processes.

For more information and to see our full findings report, please visit our [project page](#).



National actors sometimes struggled with international bureaucracy.



Simplifying project forms and accelerating processes are necessary. The process of granting funds and implementing work in the field should not be a race. The approach should be clearer and more coordinated. There is an unequal relationship between donors and organisations like ours. We feel the time pressure very clearly when donors receive reports or forms from us. However, we don't receive the funds from the donors on time.

– Representative from a local civil society organisation



There should not be too many procedures or too much paperwork. Sometimes it is necessary to be able to use the budget quickly, but the procedures are lengthy. They do not allow for that. We are obliged to prove to both donors and aid recipients how we use the budget. Donors sometimes want photos, but we cannot arrange them immediately. I understand that this may not be very feasible in terms of accountability, but some things need to be flexible.

– Representative from a national NGO



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