


## Letter to the Editor

**Cite this article:** Ulutaşdemir N and Kulakaç N. The great destruction – Turkey in the earthquake of the century: A health sector perspective. *Disaster Med Public Health Prep.* 18(e78), 1. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1017/dmp.2024.61>.

**Keywords:** earthquake; Turkey; health sector perspective

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# The Great Destruction – Turkey in the Earthquake of the Century: A Health Sector Perspective

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Located in a seismically active region, Turkey has experienced damaging earthquakes. However, disaster data for Turkey demonstrates that despite the low number of earthquakes, they are the type of disaster that causes the highest loss of life, and property.<sup>1</sup>

Two earthquakes of magnitude Mw 7.7 and Mw 7.6 with epicenters at Pazarcık (Kahramanmaraş) and Elbistan (Kahramanmaraş) struck Turkey on February 6, 2023, at 4:17 AM and 13:24 PM, respectively.<sup>2</sup> Ten regions in the country were affected, causing a week of national mourning and a 3-month state of emergency. The earthquake caused the death and injury of 10s of thousands of citizens in this region. Local people had to deal not only with 2 significant earthquakes but also with a variety of difficulties brought on by the harsh winter conditions. At the time of writing this article (February 20, 2023), the death toll from the earthquake in Turkey had surpassed 42 000, making it the deadliest disaster in national history.<sup>2</sup> After the earthquake, a fire broke out in Iskenderun harbor, and it was brought under control by sea, land, and air intervention. Primary, secondary, and high schools were suspended for 2 weeks. In universities, education was switched to online education, except for the departments with practical courses. With the effect of aftershocks, the number of injured increased in proportion to the area and population density affected by the earthquake, resources decreased, and the need for intervention in the field increased due to the earthquake's impact on health delivery centers.<sup>2</sup>

Access to emergency health care has been difficult due to transportation and infrastructure damages in the health system. In addition to emergency health crisis management such as allocation of health services, construction of temporary health facilities, provision of medical/surgical equipment, control, and preparation/ distribution of relief items including sanitation, water, shelter, and food, as well as clothing, and psychosocial support, are among the important issues to be addressed in the aftermath of the earthquake in country.<sup>3</sup>

The search and rescue activities were carried out with great devotion after the earthquake by Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (Turkish: Afet ve Acil Durum Yönetimi Başkanlığı, also abbreviated as AFAD), non-governmental organizations (NGOs) under the supervision of AFAD, and National Medical Rescue Teams (Turkish: Ulusal Medikal Kurtarma Ekibi, also abbreviated as UMKE) consisting of medical personnel as activity partners. In addition, search, and rescue teams from many countries around the world participated in the activities. The Turkish nation will not forget their self-sacrificing contributions.

After the earthquake, 1 of the most urgent issues for the survivors and the earthquake victims who were rescued from the rubble and treated was the lack of housing. The houses in the region were unusable or inaccessible for security reasons. Given the harsh winter conditions that exacerbated the shelter crisis, and the size of the population in need of assistance, the population demanding to be evacuated from the region had to be resettled in other provinces, and relief and support activities have begun across the country.<sup>3</sup> As a result, it appears that recovery from a catastrophe of this size, which occurred in 10 provinces in eastern Turkey, will take a very long time.

## References

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