

A field report on the ‘6 Şubat’ Earthquake

Shuhei KIMURA

A field report on the ‘6 Şubat’ Earthquake

Shuhei KIMURA

1. Introduction

The ‘once-in-a-century’ disaster (*yüzyılım feraketi*) was caused by two big earthquakes that hit the Southeastern part of Türkiye on 6 February 2023. It caused severe damage to a wide region of Türkiye and Syria. In Türkiye, more than 50,000 people were killed, and approximately 38,000 buildings were destroyed in 11 provinces (AFAD 2023).

From 16 to 29 August 2023, I conducted short-term field research on the recovery process from the ‘6 February’ disaster in Türkiye. I had two research questions: First, what did those who experienced the 1999 Marmara Earthquake (‘17 August’) do for the affected people in the early phase of the disaster? Second, how did the recovery process progress in the affected areas? On the day I arrived in Istanbul, anniversary events of ‘17 August’ were held in various places, and the phrase ‘from 17 August to 6 February’ was widely heard. This was an important opportunity for Turkish society to review what they had learned from the Marmara earthquake.

On 19 and 20 August, I interviewed several members of Mahalle Afet Gönüllüleri Derneği (MAG) in Istanbul and Yalova about their experience during their search and rescue activities in the affected areas in the first days after the disaster. From 21 to 27 August, I visited the affected areas including Adana, Gaziantep, Hatay, and Kahramanmaraş to observe the progress of rehabilitation after the disaster and interview disaster survivors, volunteers, non-government organisation (NGO) workers, and municipal officers.

As a rough assessment, I indicate the following three points: First, considering the unexpected magnitude of the earthquake, the primary cause of damage for the ‘6 February’ earthquake was the same as that of the ‘17 August’ earthquake: the existence of low-quality buildings and the socio-political mechanism that allowed such buildings to be built.¹ We should once again remember the famous word

¹ In this regard, the role of local authorities in issuing building permits is crucial. The mayor of Erzin was covered by the media, claiming that he prevented the collapse of a single building by not issuing permits for illegal construction. However,

of Deprem Dede: '*Deprem öldürmez, bina öldürür*'. Second, the Disaster and Emergency Management Authority (AFAD) provided relief and recovery work in an integrated manner, much more effectively than former organisations. However, its mechanism did not work sufficiently well in some areas because of the extent of the damage. Third, the differences in the speed and effectiveness of recovery activities I observed this time would become increasingly significant within the affected areas. It is necessary to closely monitor recovery policies and activities to avoid leaving vulnerable people behind.



Figure 1. Central district of Antakya, Hatay. Photo by the author. 23 August, 2023.

2. Emergency responses in the immediate aftermath of a disaster

As aforementioned, the AFAD is responsible for emergency responses to disasters. After the '17 August' earthquake, Türkiye's public disaster response system was reformed into one like Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), centralised organisation. The Directorate General for

others doubt the importance of the local municipality. Mr. V, one of the officials from the Adana Metropolitan Municipality, indicates problems with the current law to prevent illegal construction: first, fines are minimal to sufficiently prevent it; and second, demolishing an illegal building is time-consuming as it requires a decision by a court. Mr. V implied that it was not the municipality but the citizens who should be blamed for their lack of risk awareness and profit-seeking.

Emergency Management (TAY) was established and reformed into the AFAD in 2009. During this process, the organisations formerly in charge of disaster response, the Ministry of Public Works' Disaster Directorate General, Civil Defence Directorate, and TAY, were closed. In 2018, the AFAD was reorganised as an agency under the Ministry of Interior.

In principle, when a disaster occurs, the provincial branches of the AFAD in the affected areas conduct rescue operations, distribute relief materials to those affected, set up tent towns (*çadır kent*), and subsequently construct temporary housing blocks (*konteyner kent*). Subsequently, some tent dwellers return to their homes if safe; however, others who lost their homes shift to a container in a temporary housing block. Temporary housing blocks work as aid distribution points, as those living there are to be officially aided with supplies. During this period, the AFAD demolishes buildings that were heavily damaged by the disaster and constructs permanent housing. According to interviews that we conducted in Kahramanmaraş and Gaziantep provinces, AFAD's orderly support system for the affected people appeared to function well. By the time of this interview, they claimed that there were no more families who had to live in a tent in their provinces. However, this linear plot can discard a range of real-life problems and risk leaving out people with such problems.

The sheer magnitude of the '6 February' disaster prevented the scenario from working as planned. First, unsurprisingly, the distribution of relief and supplies in the immediate aftermath was not conducted as planned. Many organisations and individuals distributed aid on their own, outside the AFAD's centralised system. This not only created confusion, but also compensated for the inadequacy of support by the AFAD. Second, in Hatay, where majority of the overall deaths occurred, the damage was so severe that the pace of recovery lagged far behind other provinces. Even at the six-month mark, many people continued living in tents, and thus, the percentage of people living in temporary housing complexes was relatively low (see the cases in Section 4). This meant that temporary housing blocks could not function as aid distribution points, resulting in many people not receiving assistance. Third, it was probably unexpected for the AFAD that many people refused to demolish their heavily damaged houses and filed court cases, which prevented the smooth removal of damaged buildings. These aspects should be considered during future disasters.

An example of an appropriate emergency response I observed was in İslahiye, one of the most severely damaged districts in Gaziantep. According to Bilal, the head of a temporary housing block, the governor (*kaymakam*) of the district, was in command from the beginning, in collaboration with the AFAD. Since the central area of Gaziantep City was not severely damaged, the Gaziantep Greater Municipality also channelled its strength to help İslahiye. Thus, it could receive prompt and continuous support (*hızlı seri yardım*) for water and food. With support from other institutions such as police and *jandarma*, the relief

supplies were well distributed, and the problem of basic needs (*temel ihtiyaç*) was over by the end of the third day of the disaster. Moreover, the rescue activities were conducted without any problems (*sıkıntı olmadı*) and no more missing bodies (*kayıp ceset*) were found.



Figure 2. Container market in Kahramanmaraş. Photo by the author. 25 August, 2023.

In contrast, my interviewees at Hatay reported that the scene was chaotic in the immediate aftermath of the disaster. Ali, a journalist from a local newspaper in Samandağ, said that no relief, including army and police, came for four days after the disaster. Local people themselves attempted to rescue people under the rubble (*enkaz altında kalanlar*) without generators, winches, and shovels (*kepçe*), however, these attempts were not always successful, and many people ‘died before their eyes’ (*göz önünde gitti*). They faced infrastructure-related (*altyapı*) difficulties: major roads were damaged by the quake and flooded with vehicles, which caused severe traffic jams and made it difficult to reach the most damaged areas. Özden, a volunteer worker we met in İskenderun, told us that in the aftermath of the earthquake, it took 8 hours to reach Antakya from another province, which normally takes 1.5 hours. Public institutions (*kamu*) could not respond to the needs of the affected people. A Defne resident in his 60s confessed that he spent the first four days outside without any support and then he was ‘forced to take food and water from a local market’.

Under these circumstances, networks of aid groups were spontaneously created outside the AFAD's control. Many organisations and individuals attempted to come to the area and distribute aid on their own. Locals supported them as volunteers. Ms. N, a person from Antakya, told us that she had applied to work as an AFAD volunteer since she had an AFAD certificate; however, as the application process was complicated, she quit and joined a voluntary aid group. Tülin, an influential female civic activist in Serinyol, distributed aid supplies sent by trucks (*tır*) from home and abroad to local villages with the help of approximately 300 young people. According to Tülin, a lack of coordination was certainly a major issue: different people brought and distributed different items at different times. Although a coordination governor (*koordinasyon valisi*) was officially appointed and worked in the affected areas, they were transferred on rotation within a short period. For Tülin and others, it was time-consuming to re-establish communication with each of the new governors from the beginning when one arrived at her/his post.

Other than volunteer groups, some municipalities provided support to the affected people on their own (i.e., separate from the AFAD). Some people told us about the shortage of staff and the inadequacy of the local branches of both the AFAD and Kızılay. Contrarily, the local municipality knew the local communities well and had sufficient manpower to distribute aid supplies. Among the public institutions that did remarkable work in the aftermath of the disaster was the Adana Sosyal Dayanışma ve Yardımlaşma Vakfı (SDYV). In collaboration with private companies with expertise in managing stock, SDYV stored, classified, coded, and distributed relief supplies to communities in need, rapidly and accurately.

Mr. H, a municipal officer in Arsuz, remarked that in the aftermath of the earthquakes, 'even the government was under the rubble (*Devlet bile enkaz altında*)'. Thus, they worked 'without sleep', leaving their family in safer places. The governor's office and the local municipality in Arsuz created a coordination centre in a large warehouse, where supplies from outside the affected areas were stored. They classified, sorted out, recorded, and delivered (*sınıflama, ayırma, kayıt, paylaşım/dağıtım*) the goods to the people. Mr. H believes that Arsuz was the first to begin this process in Hatay. The governor assigned each official a regional area of responsibility (*sorumlu bölge*). Apart from the AFAD, they distributed food and tents to 38 neighbourhoods (*mahalle*) through neighbourhood heads (*muhtar*). In addition to the officials, individual volunteers (*bireysel gönüllü*) and employees of private companies carried relief supplies together.

Mr. H recalled that the first public support to arrive at Arsuz were officials from Sakarya. They came displaying a flag that said, '[since we were disaster survivors too,] we know what you feel (*sizi anlarız*)'. They were busy distributing the supplies until the end of March. Similar to Tülin in Serinyol, Mr. H said that aid was not well coordinated; on some days, there was a large surplus; on other days, there was a severe shortage.

As an attempt to coordinate different actors in the affected areas, if controversial, UN-OCHA held weekly meetings (*haftalık toplantı*) with approximately 20-25 aid groups (both international and Turkish groups). In addition, many groups and individuals reported using WhatsApp, such as Ms. N, a volunteer at an international NGO. At an earlier stage, social media played a significant role in communicating information about affected areas and coordinating activities. People captured pictures and videos of their current situations using their smartphones and shared them on social media. WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook were the most used, whereas Twitter was not used as much.



Figure 3. The AFAD's Kahramanmaraş branch, Kahramanmaraş. Photo by the author. 25 August, 2023.

3. Search and rescue: the case of MAG

Mahalle Afet Gönüllüleri (MAG, Neighbourhood Disaster Volunteers) is a Turkish NGO (*sivil toplum kuruluşu*) formed after the '17 August' earthquake. It is a network of neighbourhood volunteer groups that conducts relief work in their neighbourhoods immediately after a disaster. In its 20-year history, MAG members have been involved in road accidents, forest fires, building collapses, and other disasters in cooperation with public institutions such as fire and civil defence departments. They consider

themselves as experienced disaster volunteers; however, in recent years, the AFAD has changed its rules such that everyone must be certified by the AFAD to work as volunteers at disaster sites. MAG members decided not to claim AFAD certification, which affected their participation in search and rescue activities after the '6 February' disaster.

As soon as the major earthquakes hit southeastern Türkiye, the MAG members discussed via WhatsApp and decided to reach the area. In Yalova, they contacted the local branch of the AFAD, which helped 12 members (seven male and five female) reach the affected areas by plane. In hindsight, it may not have been the best decision to board the plane instead of the bus, because they had to leave behind their search and rescue equipment. After landing in Kayseri, they went to Kahramanmaraş and became involved in rescue activities for a week, taking instructions from AFAD. They worked together with the local people to rescue people out of the rubble.

However, in Istanbul, the governor was reluctant to send them to the affected areas. They asked an old acquaintance from the AFAD Istanbul branch, and he helped 15 members, those from Zeytinburnu and Kağıthane, to reach the affected area by plane at midnight, on the day of the earthquake. They witnessed a chaotic situation. Officials, including the coordinator governors, could not control the situation. They began working early the next morning in Nurdağı, where the situation was 'very horrible'. It was extremely cold. Despite having prepared for it, their fingers were freezing. They witnessed that 'people were freezing to death (*insanlar donarak öldü*)'. Men performed rescue operations, and women provided first aid. It was emotionally difficult for them when local people reached out to them saying, 'My family is under the rubble, help them', and someone they did not know contacted them through social media saying, 'I obtained your address from one of your friends, but my friend is still waiting for rescue in such and such a place, please help her'. The first two days they had limited food and nowhere to rest. They built a fire outside to rest. They made bonfires to avoid the cold. Among the many difficulties they faced were toilets. They could not find a clean toilet; therefore, they attempted to use the toilet as little as possible. They worked in Nurdağı for five days, then Antakya for six days before returning to Istanbul. Antakya was more severely affected than Nurdağı. In Antakya, a cement company allowed them to base their activities.

This experience once again made them realise the importance of the education they received at the MAG and the significance of MAG activities. After the '6 February' disaster, the number of people in Istanbul and elsewhere who have offered to receive MAG education has increased. MAG members expect that people's awareness will continue to grow.

Another important aspect that should not be overlooked is that some members complained of psychological trauma. One member stated:

After returning from the affected area, I could not sleep until 3 or 4 a.m. We heard the cries of women and children in the area. This was ringing in my ears. After returning, when I drive my car, I am often worried that something may happen or that a building may fall on me.

Psychological support is required not only for the survivors but also for rescuers.



Figure 4. A MAG's container in Yalova. Photo by the author. 18 August, 2023.

4. Support from outside the affected areas

After the earthquake, various groups worked to support the survivors. Some NGOs were active in the area before the earthquake. International organisations, local (Turkish) NGOs, religious organisations, and individual volunteers rushed to the affected areas. I suspect that there were hundreds of groups at

peak; however, many of these groups appeared to stop their activities in the areas before my visit.

Here, I report on the activities of congregations (*cemaat*) of the Alevi and Armenian Orthodox Churches. According to my interlocutors, the houses of worship of the Alevi (*cemevi*) and the churches of the Armenian Orthodox outside the affected areas worked as hubs for transporting supplies that believers brought from their homes to the affected people. The administrators of these institutions delivered these goods to houses of worship or churches in the affected areas. Their support was effective and reliable, as the suppliers and recipients shared a common faith. The representatives of Eriklibaba Cemevi in Istanbul went to Hatay with supplies and food, and the cook served many meals to the affected people, which were well received. People in Vakıflı, where an Armenian church stands, believe that their village was the first community in Samandağ to receive aid from outside after the earthquake. They could even share surplus aid supplies with neighbouring communities.



Figure 5. The church in Vakıflı, Hatay. Photo by the author. 22 August, 2023.

Although some groups attempted to make urgent interventions, others were committed to more sustainable activities, obtaining material support from other resourceful organisations. The following are two cases of organisations that possess physical bases for their activities: However, it is noteworthy that although they have issues sustaining their activities, a large proportion of the group members are volunteers and do not receive any (or sufficient) income for their participation in the activities. They cannot predict how long the support from other organisations would continue.

Case 1: A supporting base in Tomruksuyu

Yusuf was involved in rescue activities in the aftermath of the earthquake. A few days later, he felt the need to coordinate external support. Along with two relatives and a person from Istanbul, whom Yusuf had met on the second day of the earthquake, he established a hub of volunteers and supplies, including food, healthcare goods, and hygiene products. Dividing the districts of Antakya, Samandağ, and Defne into small zones, they distributed goods in teams of 3 or 4 volunteers. According to Yusuf, approximately 100 volunteers worked with them. These volunteers helped them travel back and forth between the zones and their homes in Istanbul, Izmir, and Adana.

They moved to their current locations after the third earthquake on 20 February. The land belongs to the Ministry of Youth and Sport (Gençlik ve Spor Bakanlığı), and was planned to be used as a tent town or a temporary housing complex. However, the local people preferred to set up tents in their own gardens; therefore, this place remained vacant. After obtaining acceptance from the local *muhtar*, they began using this place. First, two tents were established. As their activities expanded, the number of tents also increased. They provide sociopsychological, health, and educational support to local children. In addition, one of their psychologist friends organised events (*etkinlik*) and plays (*oyun*) to care for the children's psychological wounds. Although they are not legally allowed to provide the same education as schools, they can hold vocational courses, art workshops, events for children and women, and so on. With the registration of approximately 1,000 children, they continue their activities.

Case 2: Dayanışma Gönüllüleri (İskenderun)

Dayanışma Gönüllüleri was organised in the wake of the 1999 earthquake in response to the lack of preparedness of public support for disaster survivors, particularly children. They have continued their activities for more than 20 years. Their policy is to respond to the needs (*ihtiyaç*) of the affected people.

They began their activities in Defne on the second day of the '6 February' earthquake, including hot meal services and rescue operations under the debris. They encountered several dead bodies on the streets (*can pazarı*) in Samandağ. In Defne, they could use a gymnasium to store supplies, including



Figure 6. Tomruksuyu base, Tomruksuyu, Hatay. Photo by the author. 22 August, 2023.

food, cars, phones, generators, and heating (*soba*), for delivery to affected villages. After some time, they established another base in İskenderun on the premises of the *cemevi*. In İskenderun, they were committed to search and rescue, distributing aid supplies, and serving hot meals. At peak, they served two thousand meals at a time. During that period, they told us rather nostalgically; every evening, all the volunteers met over a bonfire and reported to each other what they had done that day and what they would do the next day. This was done to respond to the different needs of different communities.

The current facility was built in front of the abovementioned *cemevi*. The site was provided by a citizen through a two-year contract. To support households, they built a large, prefabricated building with a large, covered dining room, and several washing machines and showers. They also set up consultation centres (*dayanışma masası*) where anyone could drop in, among other facilities.

When the emergency rescue and relief activities were over, they shifted their focus to education.

Eight containers were set up in the base in İskenderun, which were used as a playroom and classroom where hobby classes such as painting or photography classes were held. In addition, they established a playfield where children could play volleyball and football and a gymnasium for indoor exercises. In addition, a basketball court was constructed when we visited the base. For women's empowerment, psychosocial support (*piskososyal yardım*) was continuously provided, and a place for 24-hour baby care (*bebek maması*) was set.

Although the targets in the earlier phase were those living in tents, the current targets were rural villages near the base. They go to the villages and hold assemblies (*toplantı meclis*) to stimulate mutual help (*dayanışma*) among the affected people. They also support them in producing articles that can be sold to generate income (*üretim atolyesi*).

As aforementioned, they believe they should work in response to the needs (*ihtiyaç*) of the affected people. Believing that the survivors should be the primary actors in the recovery of Hatay, they supported the survivors to organise an association (*depremzedeler derneği*).

According to Özden, a volunteer theatre instructor, Dayanışma Derneği was the only one left after other groups involved in relief activities in İskenderun ceased their activities. Although their activities appear impressive, maintaining adequate balance between life and voluntary activities is a significant challenge.



Figure 7. Dayanışma Derneği's tent, İskenderun, Hatay. Photo by the author. 24 August, 2023.

Case 3: Sinesalon Derneği (Defne)

Sinesalon Derneği has a well-maintained facility with Mongolian-style tents in Defne, which is next to a complex of tents and containers. A young female volunteer working there told us that they were financially supported by the Seyhan Municipality and Borusan Holding. Their activities include education for children of kindergarten age, art and drama workshops, film screenings for children of primary school age, and classes for pupils preparing for GSE examinations. We visited only for a short duration but observed that the children enjoyed studying there. According to her, as an education centre, they welcome children not only from the neighbouring tent town but also from the neighbouring *mahalle*, who live in their own houses.



Figure 8. Sinesalon Derneği's base, Defne, Hatay. Photo by the author. 23 August, 2023.

5. Many people continue living in tents

In the immediate aftermath of the earthquake, many people were unable to enter their homes because they were afraid that their homes would collapse if another earthquake occurred. However, they also feared rumours that the houses left unoccupied would be robbed. Therefore, many people decided to stay in front of their homes and set up tents, while others set up tents in an open space that appeared to

have less risk of earthquakes. In either case, because it was cold and rainy, living in the tent was difficult and depressing. Some even claimed that they did not have access to tents. They struggled to obtain one from the AFAD or other organisations, including those from other countries. Some men told us that they stayed near their former homes, leaving their wives and children in the less damaged homes of relatives. There were different routes to housing transition after the disaster.

Those whose homes were not severely damaged by the earthquakes and those who found temporary accommodation, such as relatives' houses, could return to 'live indoors' after a few weeks or so. Those who did not do this were forced to live in tents for several weeks or months. In Hatay, many people lived in tents for six months after the disaster. They were not staying in tents to seek safer living environments. Despite the poor living conditions, they lived in tents because they had no place to live. They were directly affected by heat and rainfall. Living in tents can pose a health risk to dust containing asbestos and vermin, such as rats and snakes. Public institutions failed to provide suitable living conditions and adequate relief supplies to tent dwellers outside official tent towns. Following are examples of tent dwellers.

Case 1: Living in a tent in front of their (damaged) house (Samandağ)

Ali, a journalist who worked for a local newspaper, lived in a tent set up in front of his house. Immediately after the earthquake, he explained that his own house remained standing, and all the houses around him were destroyed. However, he could not live in his house. After sending his children and wife to another safe place, he set up a fabric tent in front of his house and began living there. Later, he received a nylon tent from support. After some time, he called back his wife and children. The tent had no air conditioning and was extremely hot. Snakes, rats, and scorpions were sometimes found around the tents. His wife was afraid of snakes, but she had become accustomed to them.

Many people in Samandağ live in tents, however, no running water is available, and they struggle to obtain safe drinking water. He had to manage with the water brought to them by supporters. He had a child who was six months old at the time of the earthquake and his father was bedridden, but they could not obtain hot water; thus, it was difficult for them to take a shower. Finally, on the day we interviewed him, he received a container to live in.

Case 2: Unofficial tent town near St Pierre Church (Antakya)

Near the church of St. Pierre, which stands on a hilltop in Antakya, there was a tent town with approximately 350 tents. It was not an official tent town, and not a few of the residents were Syrians. Ziya Dođru, the unofficial *muhtar*, estimated that approximately 1500 people were living in the tent town

as probably six or seven people were living in each tent. However, according to Ziya, the authorities told them that they had only one week to close the place and asked them to leave (*kaldırım*). The residents were worried because there was no explanation of where they would go.

Ziya was born in Hacı Ömer Mahalle, across the river from this tent town, and had lived there all his life until the earthquake. He was once the vice president of a social welfare association (*sosyal yardımlaşma derneği başkan yardımcısı*) of his *mahalle*, therefore, he had experience in management. Immediately after the earthquake, he sent his wife and children to relatives and stayed in his *mahalle* with his brother, patrolling the town with a light (*fener*) and gun (*silah*) for a month and a half.

Ziya slept in his car for the first week, and then he obtained a tent and set it up in an open space, the current tent town. At first, he did not know where to obtain the tent. When he saw his friend carrying a tent on his motorbike, Ziya discovered that tents were distributed at the animal market (*hayvan pazarı*). He went there for days but could not obtain one. Ziya asked a young man who knew about working for AFAD to help. The person negotiated and finally provided him a tent from Kızılay and not from the AFAD.

Following Ziya's tent, others began to erect their tents, resulting in what resembled a tent town. Ziya asked the governor (*vali*), but he did not recognise the tent town as an official one (*resmileştirmede*), because the land was owned by the St. Pierre church, not by a public institution. Ziya also asked him about security guards, but the governor did not provide them. However, there was a Special Operations Directorate (*özel hareket*) nearby and personnel visited the tent town irregularly in the evening.

At this site, tents were randomly arranged. Ziya asked people to move out of tents near the entrance to create an open space to make it easier for supporters to come to this tent town. As a leader, Ziya knows about the people living in the tent town; he knows the tents in which those who need special support, such as people with disabilities, the elderly, and babies, live. As Ziya speaks both Turkish and Arabic, he looks after Syrians who do not speak Turkish. However, the younger generation of Syrians speak Turkish.

People in this tent town receive limited support from the AFAD. According to Ziya, the AFAD once distributed only 25 parcels of supply. This assistance came primarily from foreign countries. A Canadian organisation installed bathrooms. Until then, they had to make holes with shovels to use as toilets. As there was no electricity, it was difficult to use. In addition, they received assistance from Antakya Municipality and the Governor's office. The Antakya Municipality distributes water and supplies. There was a water storage tank. However, as water was not used for drinking, they drank bottled water. The Antakya Municipality also comes to collect garbage but often forgets to do so. When they forget, Ziya calls Belediye to collect the garbage. In the first month, support was provided for evening meals. Moreover, during Ramadan, religious groups bring meals for *iftar*. However, each family in the tent village prepared

its own meals (*kendi imkanlarıyla*).

Daily cleaning is done by themselves; Ziya brooms every day, therefore, the area where Ziya's house was located was clean and tidy. However, the areas that were slightly farther away were not clean.

Ziya said that they had been living with the Syrians in the area since before the earthquake. Ziya also had a Syrian family as tenant in Ziya's flat. The original residents moved to a nearby fashionable (*lüks*) *mahalle* and rented their original houses to others, including the Syrians. However, they had to return to their original houses because they had been destroyed by the earthquakes. Consequently, Syrians living in rented flats were evicted from their houses after the earthquake.

Another concern of the people in the tent town was which school they could send their children to and whether they should change their address to do so. They had no information about the schools, even if it was less than a month before the school began classes.



Figure 9. Ziya's tent town, Antakya, Hatay. Photo by the author. 23 August, 2023.

6. Living in a temporary housing block

After the disaster, large temporary housing blocks (*konteyner kent*) were built in various locations. Although different institutions and organisations, including the AFAD, local municipalities, private

companies, and foreign governments, provided containers and constructed blocks, the AFAD was the only institution responsible for the management of the blocks.

Under the disaster action plan (*afet eylem planı*), teachers were supposed to manage each block on site. Teachers were appointed to each block, together with AFAD personnel, police officers, and official workers (survivors) employed by the AFAD. They maintain lists of block residents, control people entering and exiting the block, and distribute supplies to each block unit.

Case 1: Akarsu (Kahramanmaraş)

We visited a large and well-developed temporary housing complex in Akarsu, comprising 1,700 buildings and five districts (*etap*) created by different entities, including AFAD, Ümraniye Belediyesi (Istanbul) and Gazi Osman Paşa Belediyesi (Istanbul). Its construction began early, with the first district built only two weeks after the earthquake. Of the districts, the one built by Ümraniye Belediyesi appeared relatively easy to live in, with spacious intervals between buildings and asphalt pavement, so that residents do not have to worry about becoming muddy on a rainy day. Several large posters of President Erdoğan were displayed. One manager told us that residents were simply users of the services. Even cleaning was not



Figure 10. A temporary housing block in Akarsu, Kahramanmaraş. Photo by the author. 25 August, 2023.

performed by residents, but by staff hired by the local municipality.

A teacher we interviewed said that he first ran the tent village at another site and had been managing the place since the sacrificial festival (Kurban Bayramı). Several teachers were appointed to this complex, and each district had a person in charge. Managers share the list of residents on Google Drive and maintain proper records of what has been distributed to whom, to avoid inequalities. The office of the local governor was located next to the housing complex.

He informed me that there were 14 temporary housing complexes in Kahramanmaraş at that time, and no one lived in tents anymore. Those entitled to live in temporary accommodation were those whose owner-occupied houses were damaged by the earthquake and could not live there and those who were evicted from their rented houses. According to him, there were no Syrians in the housing complex and Syrians lived in temporary housing for Syrians, which was there before the earthquake.

Case 2: İslahiye

The situation in İslahiye is described in Section 2. We visited a large temporary housing complex for which Emrak Bankası provided containers. More than 1,000 households and 4,000 residents lived in the complex.

Bilal, a schoolteacher, was appointed by the local governor (*kaymakam*) to work there when the construction of the complex began 10 days after the earthquake. The complex was built on a land that had been a wheat field. After levelling the land, containers were set up, and beds and other furniture and fixtures were installed with substantial care to ensure that each container had the same facilities. Each unit was handed over to the survivors after they signed the documents (*evrak*). Personal items (*kişisel*), such as crockery, belong to the residents and can be taken with them when they move out, however, large pieces of furniture (*demirbaş*), such as air-conditioners and washing machines, must be left behind when they move out.

Families that were affected by the disaster and had to temporarily move out of town but wanted to live there were brought to this complex by the AFAD by car. When they arrived at the complex, Bilal had been informed in advance of the day of their arrival. He welcomed approximately 40 families.

Although Bilal himself believes that there is no private life (*özel hayat*) in the containers, simply living an artificial life (*yapay bir hayat*), some people are happy with their lives there. He supposes that this is partly because people who live there do not have to pay for electricity and water (however, at the time of the interview, a water meter had been installed, and from then on, they would have to pay for water).

Bilal believes that the mental state of its inhabitants is poor. People fear poverty (*yoksulluk korkusu*) and attempt to obtain more supplies than required. People line up in the social market (where they can

buy whatever they want with the 500 TL that the AFAD provides them) from the midnight before, while there is only so much you can buy with 500 TL. The general sense of morality appeared to be impaired (*genel ahlak bozuldu*). People of faith would be more religious when they were struck by a disaster, he supposes, but that did not happen.

Permanent housing (*kalıcı konut*) was under construction then and would be provided two months later. However, only 1,600 houses had been built, which was insufficient for all households living in temporary housing complexes in İslahiye.

Schooling was an issue in the complex. According to Bilal, approximately 600-800 pupils live there, and there are insufficient schools for them to attend. Pupils would go to private (*müstakil*) schools in pickup cars (*servis*).



Figure 11. Inside of a container, Samandağ, Hatay. Photo by the author. 22 August, 2023.

Case 3: Gastronomi Evi (Samandağ)

There was a temporary housing complex with approximately 120 containers near Gastronomi Evi. This was the first temporary housing block to be visited. There was a gate at the entrance guarded by police officers. One must explain the reasons and obtain permission to enter. After passing through the gate, one must stop by the managers' container. We met the managers (*görevli*), who were affected people employed by the local municipality. Many lived outside the complex because the municipality employed people with more difficult living conditions.

People whose dwellings are identified as heavily damaged (*ağır hasar*) can apply for temporary housing. They apply to AFAD, are placed on the list, and are then allocated to a container. However, as in other towns, there are insufficient containers in the area. An older woman showed us the interior of her container. It was a small, but relatively clean space equipped with a kitchen, two beds, air-conditioning, and a washing machine. The residents also receive relief supplies from the AFAD.

Leyla, a manager, said that there was considerable gap in support between those living in this complex and those living outside of it, such as herself. As a manager, she distributed Kızılay relief supplies to the residents of the complex, but she herself did not receive any supplies from them. Her family obtained a container through donations (*hibe*) and set it up near their home. She claimed that no support comes to them; AFAD has distributed water to them, but personal care (*kişisel bakım*) and hygiene items are always short.

She added that she was the only person who could earn money in her family at that time, for three months. She has four children who want to go to school. The eldest daughter has been accepted to university and will begin this autumn; however, she does not have sufficient money. The support from the government was only about 10,000 TL. Even before the earthquake, she had been issued a green card (*yeşil kart*) because she did not have sufficient income. Leyla was at a loss as to what to do.

7. Other concerns

These are the details of the recovery process I observed during my visit. Finally, I provide a brief list of some other concerns that I have not been able to discuss in detail in this paper, namely (1) the health hazard of dust (*moroz*) from debris, (2) the consequences of migration of those affected, and (3) the impacts on living conditions of seasonal agricultural workers.

Dust, particularly dust containing asbestos, from buildings is a major problem. Demolition work should be conducted with water; however, we observed that dust continues to rise in many places. In addition, debris dumps are generally exposed to open air. At the Samandağ coastal debris dump, the hauling of