

PROVIDING ASSISTANCE AND LEGAL SUPPORT TO VULNERABLE MIGRANTS IN TURKEY (PALS)

Caritas (FCL) | ASAM

Donors: EC - Humanitarian Aid ECHO | Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Luxembourg

Earthquakes in February 2023

On February 6th, 2023, two earthquakes (EQ) of magnitude 7.7 and 7.6 occurred in Kahramanmaraş. On February 20th, another two earthquakes of magnitude 6.4 and 5.8 occurred with epicenters in the Defne and Samandağ districts in Hatay. The earthquakes caused extensive damage and many casualties in the affected provinces. Hatay is among the affected ones and is where ASAM started its operation. This newsletter focuses on the situation of migrants in Hatay in the aftermath of the earthquakes.



The center of the EQ is shown in Red and the affected provinces in Orange.

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

The number of citizens and migrants directly affected by the earthquakes is more than 9.1 million. The latest official statistics indicate that more than 50,000 persons have died, while unofficial data indicate that the actual death toll could be substantially higher.

In Hatay province, the Antakya and Defne districts were severely destroyed - more than 70% of the buildings were damaged - Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) needs are enormous and urgent in the region.

People were deeply saddened by the several earthquakes and the human and material losses they caused. In addition, they have had to face difficult climatic conditions: a month after the earthquakes, aftershocks continued, and storms and heavy rain severely damaged tents.



ASAM Search and Rescue Team

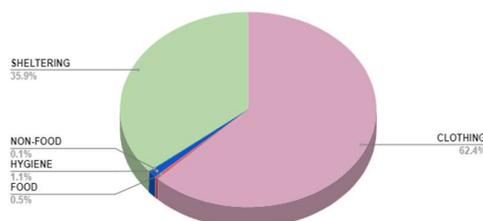
The removal of debris is a continuous process creating constant presence of dust over the city and dumping is done near the living areas, putting the residents in a very difficult situation.

When possible, many families remained next to their damaged buildings and stayed in tents – Informal Tented Settlements (ITS); thousands of ITS have been scattered in every village throughout the province.

ASAM mobilized all its resources and responded from day one to the needs in Hatay province including ASAM's Disaster and Emergency Response Unit with 19 ASAM trained personnel with translators and rescue dogs. ASAM also provided translation support to AFAD and other search and rescue teams when necessary.

Caritas and ECHO agreed to reallocate some budget from PALS project to the earthquake response.

Humanitarian aid item distributed in EQ Zone



PALS – EQR Response

Summary in Numbers

Number of EQ Survivors having their critical needs identified and met through basic assistance (travel/ accommodation/ E-voucher support): **3,459 reached**

Number of EQ Survivor who received information on relevant rights, legal aid, and documentation: **244 reached**

Number of EQ Survivors supported and referred for regularization: **97 reached**

The number of PALS staff deployed to EQ Zone **17 reached**

Number of humanitarian aid items distributed in EQ Zone: **8,428 reached**

ZOOM IN

Earthquake impact on migrants

Refugees and migrants were deeply affected by the earthquakes (EQ). According to the data of the PMM, 1.7 million Syrian nationals under Temporary Protection (SyTP) resided in the affected provinces, making up approximately 50% of SyTPs living in Türkiye. In the Hatay province, the EQs affected more than 350,000 regular refugees and many irregular migrants.

Migrant identity, language barriers, increased discrimination and hate speech amplified vulnerability and exposure, plunging migrants in a state of great uncertainty.

Search and Rescue: The migrants' struggle began during the search and rescue phase. Because there were no interpreters among most of the search and rescue teams sent to the area, migrants had difficulty in being heard. Irregular migrants in particular, were afraid to speak out because of the AFAD, police and military units working in the area, due to the fear of deportation.

Access to aid: It was often impossible to shop anymore. Survivors thus had to rely on relief assistance to meet their basic needs and priority was given to Turkish residents, migrants were sometimes subject to discrimination in accessing humanitarian aid and services.

Access to evacuation: Migrants were not accepted on evacuation planes and were only able to leave the region by their own means or if they could find a place on evacuation buses. Uncertainty persisted for those who managed to leave the region, often lacking support systems like family members/acquaintances.

The PMM frequently changed its decision on travel permits and PDMMs had different applications for their issuance. This uncertain practice jeopardized migrants' status.

Accommodation and Safe place: Migrants who remained in the earthquake zone struggled to find a safe place to stay after losing their homes: they were sometimes not allowed to enter tent cities.

As of mid-March, Syrian nationals were separated from Turkish citizens and refugees were transferred to a tented camp in Reyhanlı on the Syrian border and to the Sadakataşı camps in Antakya where hygienic conditions remained poor.

Family Integrity: Due to the rapid start of evacuations and frequent changes in travel permits regulations, family members were separated from each other and moved to different provinces. It was also observed that some migrants returned to Syria after it became possible to leave without a travel permit (about 60,000 as of the end of March according to the data of the Ministry of National Defense). This resulted in separation of family members and loss of communication.



ASAM mobile teams in Hatay

Registration: The vast majority of migrants who survived the earthquake lost their ID and necessary documentation for registration (birth certificate, ID from CoO, health documents, etc.) under wreckage. As of March, there was only one PDMM point for identity renewal in the region.

Access to Health: Most hospitals were destroyed in the earthquake zone. Health needs in the region are covered by health facilities set up in tent cities and district centres, field hospitals and mobile health teams carrying medicines. Access to tent cities is restricted for migrants and they are reluctant to approach newly established regional hospitals due to increasing social tension and anti-refugee rhetoric.

Furthermore, migrants who do not have active health insurance and temporary protection status holders who do not have travel permits can only access hospital emergency rooms and migrant health centers in the arrival provinces.

PALS Team – EQR Intervention:

EQ Zone: Immediately after the earthquakes, 17 PALS staff deployed to Hatay and began to provide support in the earthquake zone. Together with psychologists and health trainers working in other ASAM projects, a mapping of the services provided in the region was initiated, existing hospitals were mapped and shared with other partners working in the field. In addition, PALS members, who played an active role in the distribution teams, helped determine the cultural dynamics, beliefs and needs of the region and contributed to the distribution of aid in a need-oriented manner.

Outside EQ Zone: PALS offices were intensively contacted by evacuated EQ survivors, providing them with accommodation, travel support, e-voucher and medical assistance, as well as counselling and guidance on providing the necessary documents to ensure that the asylum procedure was not interrupted.



Caritas and PALS team members met in March in Hatay to observe field activities and assess the needs and consulted on the steps to be taken in the next project period.

PALS Intervention - Messages and words from the Earthquake zone:

Distributions in Hatay / Defne



From Earthquake Survivors:

*"We live in the mountainous areas of Defne. An aid truck came here only the first few days, bringing donations, but we do not know from whom. The distribution was so chaotic that people trampled on each other and only the strongest were able to take the aid thrown from the truck." **Youcef M. – March 2023.***

*"We set up this tent area. My family arrived first, then was joined by relatives and neighbors. When the Syrians arrived, we were worried because they said there was looting. We divided the tent area in two. Now Syrians live here and Turks live there. Since we cannot go to school, we walk around all day. Things are still falling from some buildings." – **Nisan - 12 years old girl from ITS near St Pierre church.***

*"I would like to start by saying thank you. Your teams are going from tent to tent, door to door, offering their condolences and asking us what we need. For the first time, we feel valuable when we receive help. You make us feel that we are together in this destruction. You make us feel like we matter." – **Meryem***

*"We have been living in the tent city for a month with my mother and siblings. I am 10 years old, teachers come here but my mother does not let me go to school. She always wants me to stay with her. But I want to go to my friends and learn." – **Youcef - A child from AHBAP tent city.***

*"We were growing tomatoes in this greenhouse. Our house was badly damaged and we could not find a tent. Tent cities were far away and we could not leave our animals here alone. So, we dismantled the parts of the greenhouse and carried the belongings we could take out of the house. Now we live in the greenhouse. We do not know when and how we will be able to resume production." – **Hasan***