Rebuilding Lives: Empowering People Affected by Earthquake

A FOCUS ON ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES

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Report on ARSA Association's Activities in Providing Services to the Earthquake Survivors in Turkey

This report provides an overview of the project titled "Rebuilding Lives: Empowering People Affected by Earthquake - A Focus on Asylum Seekers and Refugees", which has been funded by the Turkish Philanthropy Funds and conducted by the Afghan Refugees Solidarity Association (ARSA). The project aimed to provide assistance and support to individuals who were adversely affected by the earthquake in Turkey. Throughout the implementation of the project, a total of 3,267 individuals were able to benefit from the various services and initiatives offered. Additionally, 983 case management sessions were conducted, 700 cash card support was provided, and services were extended to individuals residing in 50 different provinces. Furthermore, as part of the shelter support, 380 families received financial assistance to cover their rent for a period of two months. This report presents a comprehensive overview of the project's achievements, challenges, and the positive impact it has had on the lives of asylum seekers and refugees in earthquake-affected areas.

The devastating earthquake that struck Southeastern Turkey on February 6th caused widespread damage, resulting in over 50,000 fatalities and more than 100,000 injuries. Additionally, the Afghan refugee and migrant community, consisting of nearly 400 families residing in the affected 11 provinces, also experienced significant loss and injury, with nearly 100 reported casualties.

In response to this crisis, ARSA Association has been actively engaged in providing assistance to the affected population over the past three months. The following are the key activities undertaken by our organization:

- Rent support
- Distribution of Shopping Vouchers
- Comprehensive Service Provision
- Case Management
- Remote Assistance and Digital Solutions
- On-site Support

- **Rent Support:** We are pleased to announce that we have successfully provided two months' rent support to 380 affected families. Our initiative aimed to alleviate their immediate financial burden and assist them in securing temporary shelter. We worked diligently to identify vulnerable households in need, collaborated with local communities and social service organizations, and prioritized families facing eviction or homelessness. This support has provided much-needed stability and relief during these challenging times.

- **Distribution of Shopping Vouchers:** To address the immediate needs of the earthquake victims, we distributed 700 shopping vouchers from well-known chain stores which have lots of brunch in earthquake affected area. These vouchers empower individuals to purchase essential items, providing a measure of comfort and support during these challenging times. The distribution process was executed with great care and efficiency to ensure that recipients could access the resources they needed promptly. We coordinated with the chain stores to provide a wide range of essential products, including food, clothing, and other crucial items, to cater to diverse needs and preferences.

- **Comprehensive Service Provision:**

A total of 3,267 individuals have benefited from ARSA's services during the past four months. We have extended our outreach efforts to locate and assist earthquake victims across all 50 affected provinces within Turkey. Our comprehensive approach ensures that the affected individuals receive vital humanitarian and livelihood support tailored to their specific needs.

- **Case Management:**

Throughout this period, we have meticulously handled 983 case files, ensuring proper documentation, follow-up, and timely provision of services to those in need.

- **Remote Assistance and Digital Solutions:** Recognizing the importance of remote support, we have utilized online platforms and banking services to deliver essential aid to the affected individuals. This approach enables us to reach a larger population efficiently while prioritizing their safety and well-being.

- **On-site Support:** ARSA personnel have made physical visits to Antakya, Kahramanmaraş and Malatya where we have personally distributed cash assistance cards to further alleviate the financial burden faced by the earthquake survivors.

Evaluation Process of the Project

As ARSA, we made meticulous efforts to facilitate housing rental payments for eleven cities affected by the earthquake on February 6th. It was a challenging process as these individuals had lost their homes and many were forced to migrate to other cities. We created an online registration form containing several questions about the earthquake-affected people during the initial stages of our work.

Announcements were made through our active ARSA network and strong social media pages nationwide, reaching out to individuals residing in eleven cities (Adana/Adıyaman/Diyarbakır/Gaziantep/Hatay/Kahramanmaraş/Malatya/Kilis/ Şanlıurfa/Osmaniye and Elaziğ) or those who had relocated from these cities to different parts of Turkey. Detailed information was collected during the registration process, and a dedicated phone number was established solely for providing information to earthquake survivors. In order to ensure people's comfort, WhatsApp and Telegram accounts were also created.

To prevent any fraud or misuse, individuals were required to call this number and confirm their earthquake-affected status by submitting their identification photo and basic information. We established several verification mechanisms for greater transparency: 1) Application documents (identity verification from earthquake-affected areas or migration administration permit if they had relocated), 2) Phone interviews with earthquake survivors, 3) Discussions with landlords, 4) Collaboration with the migration administration to verify the three or two-month travel permits, 5) Home visits by the ARSA network in the field.

First phase: In this phase, the identities of applicants were checked to determine if they belonged to earthquake-affected areas. An online registration file was created, listing their names and information based on the cities of origin, and codes were assigned to their documents within the same Excel sheet.

Second phase: In this stage, all individuals who filled out and submitted the online form were thoroughly reviewed. 346 families from 50 different provinces applied for registration by online and 130 cases by phone. Our caseworkers and file handlers evaluated the cases, conducted interviews, and completed missing information that was not provided in the form.

Third phase: All landlords were contacted to confirm the authenticity of the rented properties, banking information, IBAN, and the amount of rent paid.

Fourth phase: After successfully completing the previous steps, the names and phone numbers of all individuals were sent to our volunteers and representatives in the 50 cities to visit their homes, verify their identities and addresses, and provide us with updates. A new Excel sheet was created, classifying people based on the cities they moved to.

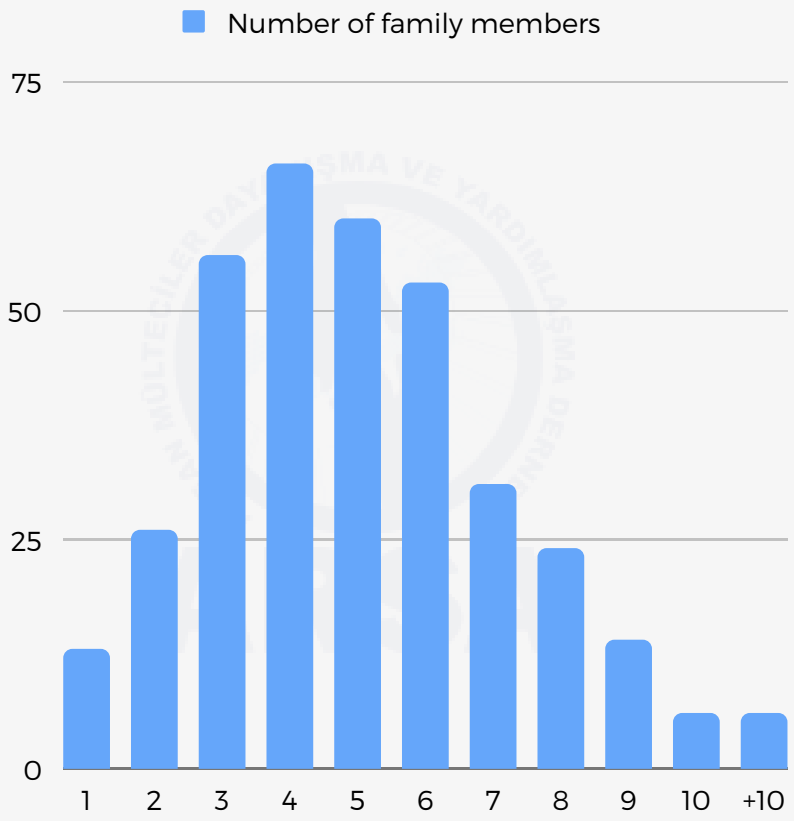
Fifth phase: After receiving approval from our representatives in these 50 cities, it was time to make the rental payments. Two months' rent was transferred to the landlords' bank accounts, as per the approved tenancy agreements.

Sixth phase: After the rental payments were made, all receipts were numbered, filed according to the family code, and then sent to the tenants. This ensured that they possessed an acceptable document and would not encounter any issues with their landlords.

Rebuilding Lives:

Empowering People Affected by Earthquake
A Focus on Asylum Seekers and Refugees

Figure 1: Distribution map of earthquake victims who benefited from this project



In our survey of 346 participants, we asked them to indicate the number of family members they had. The responses were as follows: 13 participants reported having 1 family member, 26 participants had 2 family members, 56 had 3 family members, 66 had 4 family members, 60 had 5 family members, 53 had 6 family members, 31 had 7 family members, 24 had 8 family members, 14 had 9 family members, 6 had 10 family members, and 6 had 11 family members.

Figure 2: The chart represents the distribution of family sizes reported by the participants in our survey. It gives a clear overview of the various family sizes and the corresponding number of participants within each category.

During our survey of earthquake survivors, we collected data on the cities where their ID cards were issued. Out of the 380 project beneficiaries, the distribution by city is as follows:

- Hatay: 76
- Adana: 72
- Malatya: 66
- Elazığ: 59
- Gaziantep: 54
- Kahramanmaraş: 33
- Adıyaman: 16
- Diyarbakır: 3
- Şanlıurfa: 1

These numbers provide insights into the representation of earthquake survivors from different cities in our survey.

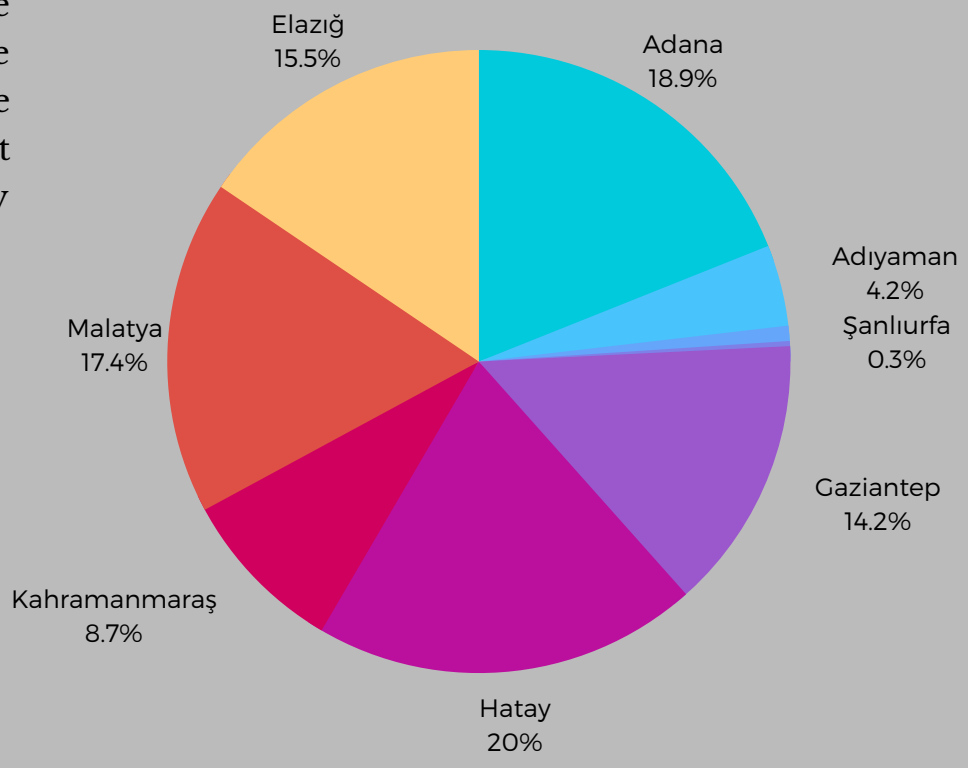


Figure 3: The chart shows the distribution of earthquake survivors based on the cities where their ID cards were issued.

During our survey of earthquake survivors, we inquired about the extent of damage to their houses. Out of the 346 participants, 205 respondents answered affirmatively, indicating that their houses were highly damaged. On the other hand, 140 participants reported that their houses were not significantly affected by the earthquake.

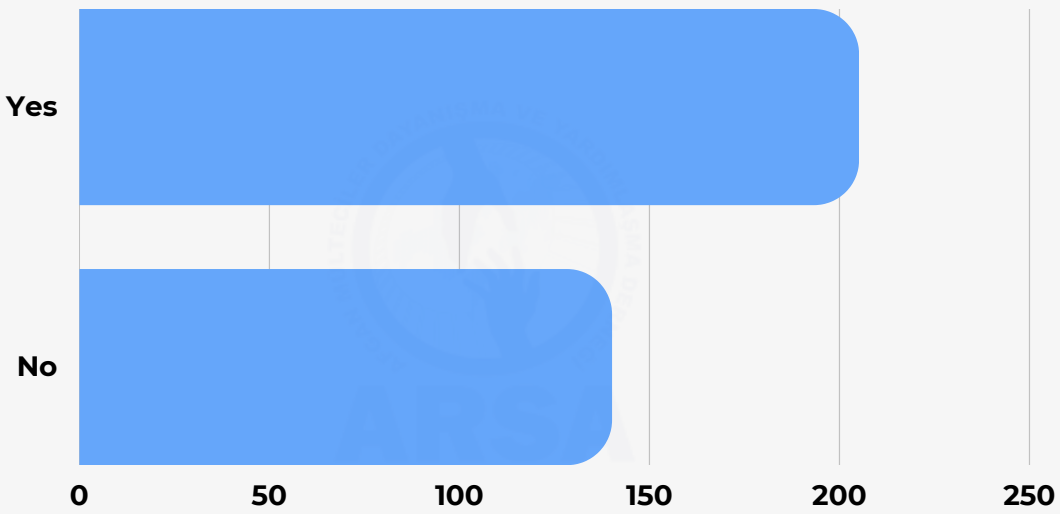


Figure 4: The provided chart offers a comprehensive overview of the responses provided by earthquake survivors regarding the extent of damage to their houses.

During our survey of earthquake survivors, we sought to understand whether they continue to reside in the same house they inhabited prior to the earthquake. Out of the 346 participants, 206 respondents indicated that they have remained in their pre-earthquake homes. However, it is important to note that 140 participants reported that they have had to relocate to a different residence.

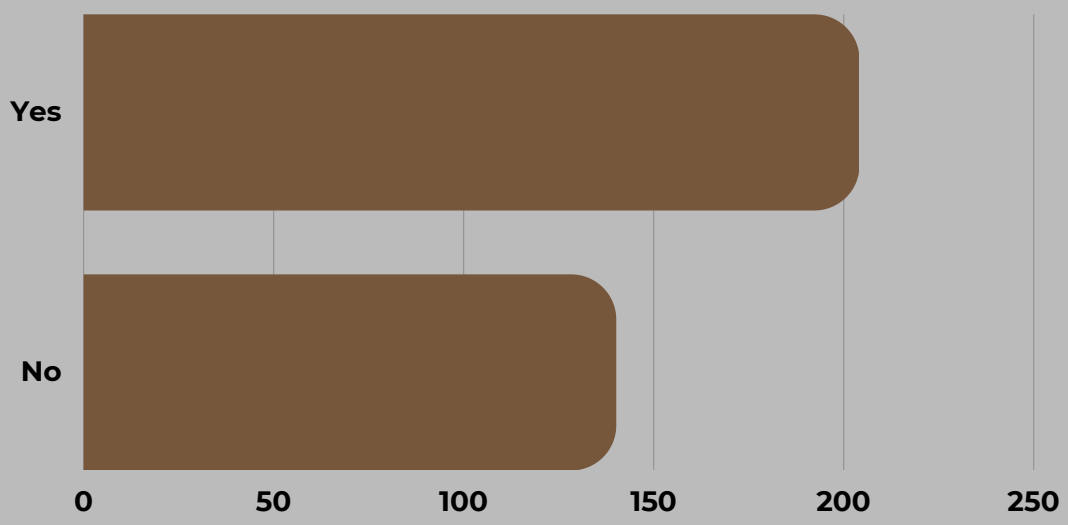


Figure 5: The chart provides an overview of earthquake survivors' housing situation, indicating whether they still live in the same house or have moved to different accommodations.

We asked earthquake survivors, "If you went to another city, do you live in your relative's house or did you rent a house?" The responses from earthquake survivors regarding their living arrangements in another city are as follows: out of 225 participants, 25 stated that they stay in a relative's house, while 200 participants mentioned that they have rented a new house.

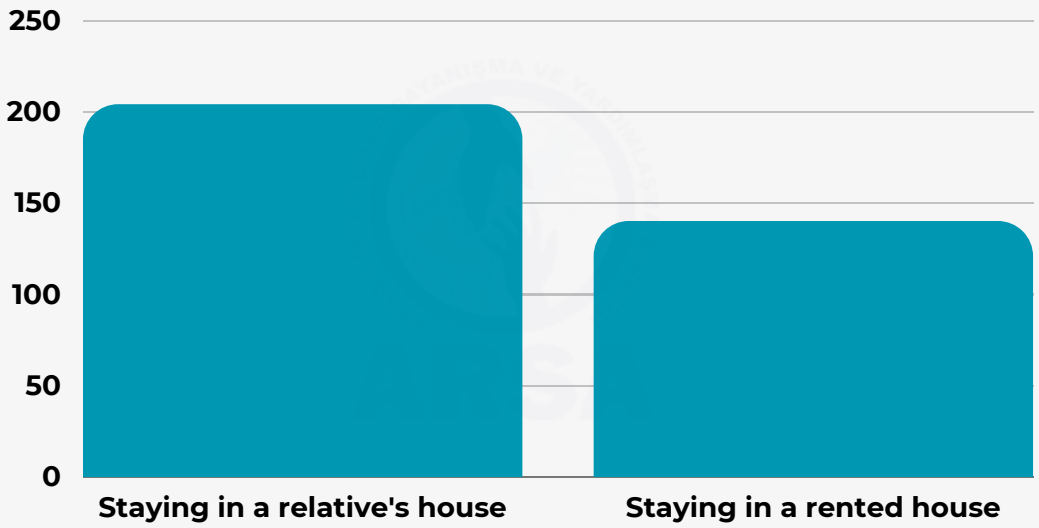


Figure 6: The provided chart offers insights into the current housing and shelter situations of earthquake survivors, reflecting their responses and choices.

During our survey of earthquake survivors, we carefully examined the impact of the earthquake on families, specifically in terms of the loss of family members. Out of the 339 participants, it was disheartening to learn that 44 respondents experienced the tragic loss of their loved ones during the earthquake. On a more positive note, the majority of participants, totalling 296 individuals, reported that their family members remained safe. This data sheds light on the profound emotional toll experienced by some families while also highlighting the resilience and fortunate outcomes for many others.

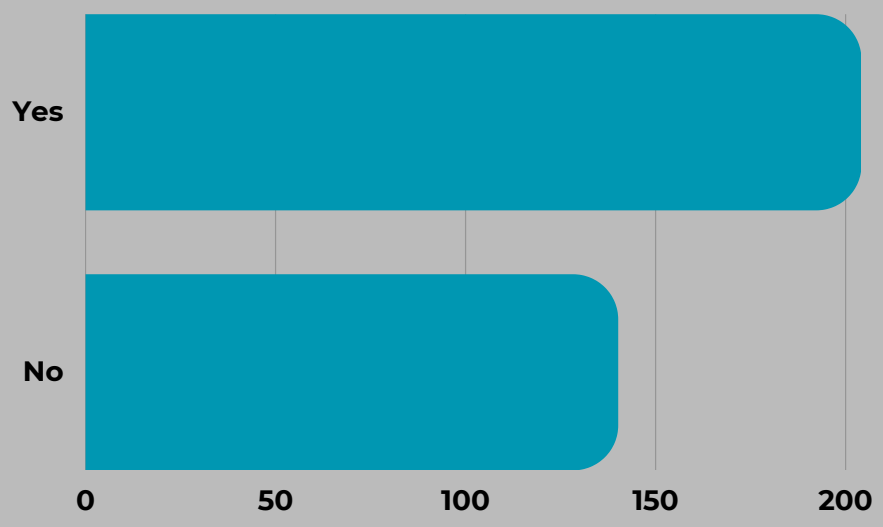


Figure 7: The provided chart offers a visual representation of the impact of the earthquake on the surveyed survivors in terms of the loss of family members. It illustrates the division between those who tragically lost their loved ones during the earthquake and those who were fortunate enough not to experience such devastating loss.

The provided data showcases the responses of earthquake survivors regarding the number of family members they lost during the earthquake. Among the 44 participants, 21 reported losing one family member, 15 experienced the loss of two family members, 2 individuals lost three family members, 4 individuals lost four family members, and 1 participants each suffered the loss of five and six family members, respectively. These responses offer a glimpse into the profound and tragic impact the earthquake had on the lives of these survivors and their families.

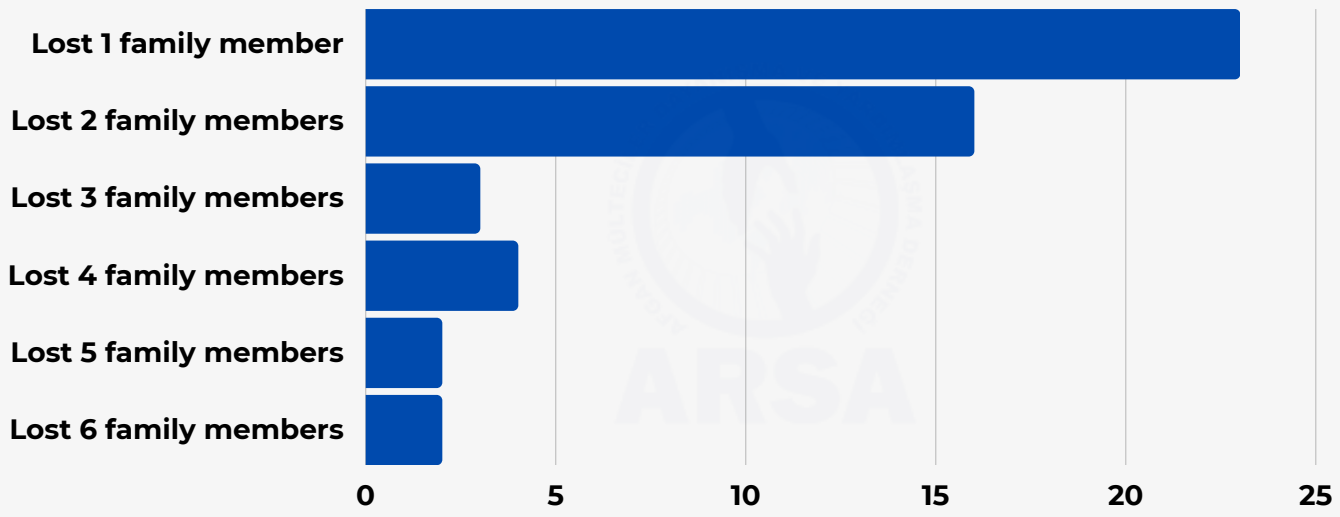


Figure 8: The chart provides a visual representation of the number of family members lost by earthquake survivors during the earthquake.

During our survey of earthquake survivors, we inquired about the number of family members who sustained injuries as a result of the earthquake. Out of the 324 participants, 72 individuals reported that their family members and/or themselves were injured during the earthquake. However, the majority of respondents, 254 participants, stated that they did not experience any injuries related to the earthquake. This information sheds light on the impact of the earthquake on the physical well-being of the participants and emphasizes the significance of addressing the needs of those who have suffered injuries in the aftermath of the disaster.

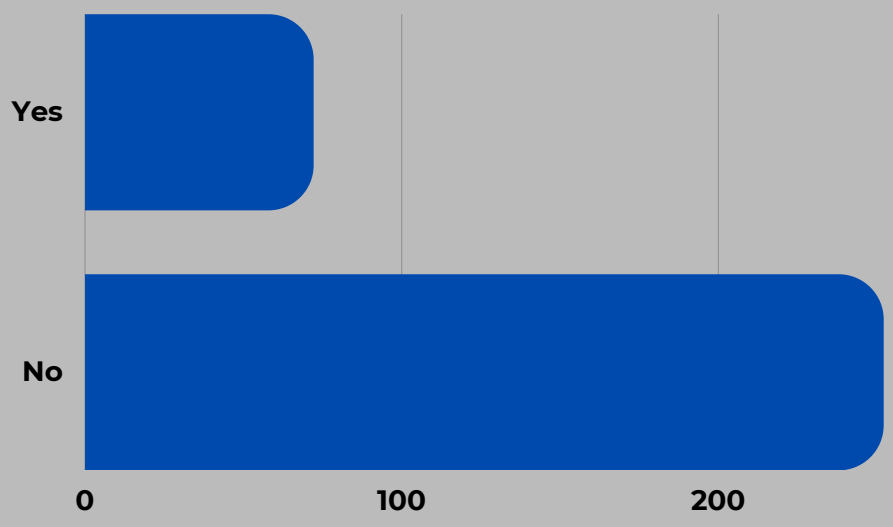


Figure 9: The chart illustrates the incidence of injuries among earthquake survivors and their family members.

The provided data reveals the impact of the earthquake on the well-being of family members as reported by earthquake survivors. Out of the 72 responses, 46 participants reported that one family member was injured, while 12 participants indicated that two family members were injured. Additionally, 11 participants stated that three family members were affected by injuries. Furthermore, one participant mentioned that four family members were injured, while another participant reported five injured family members. Lastly, one individual shared that six members of their family experienced injuries during the earthquake.

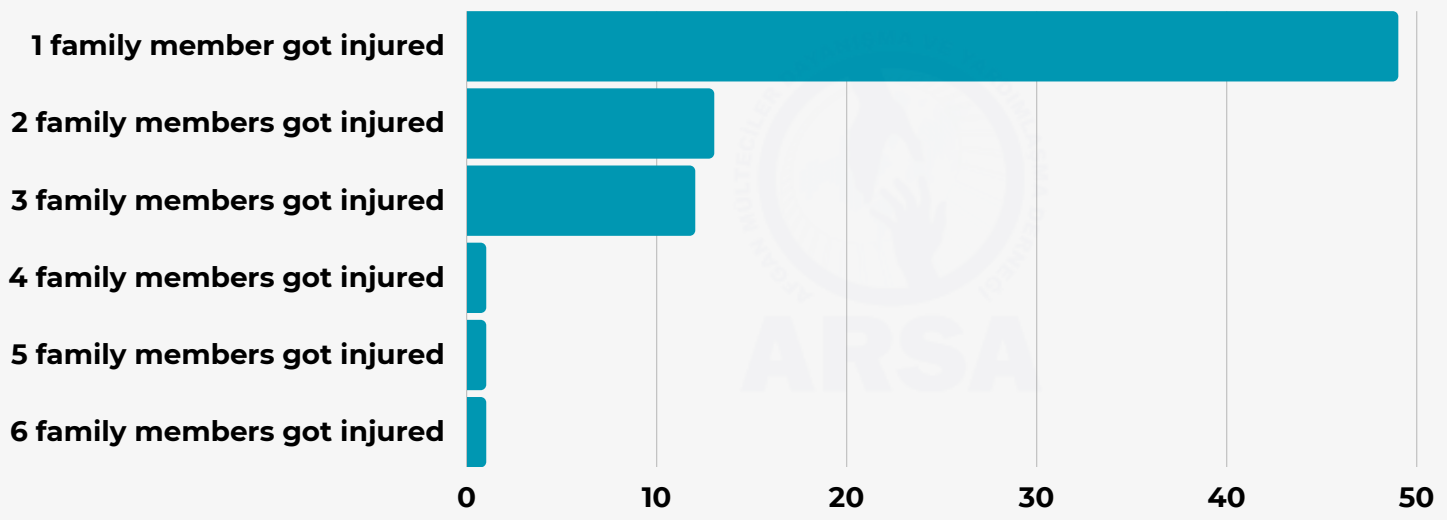


Figure 10: The chart illustrates the number of injured family members during the earthquake.

Among the 346 participants in our survey, 21 individuals reported that their family members and/or themselves became disabled as a result of the earthquake. The majority, comprising 325 participants, stated that neither they nor their family members experienced any disabilities due to the earthquake.

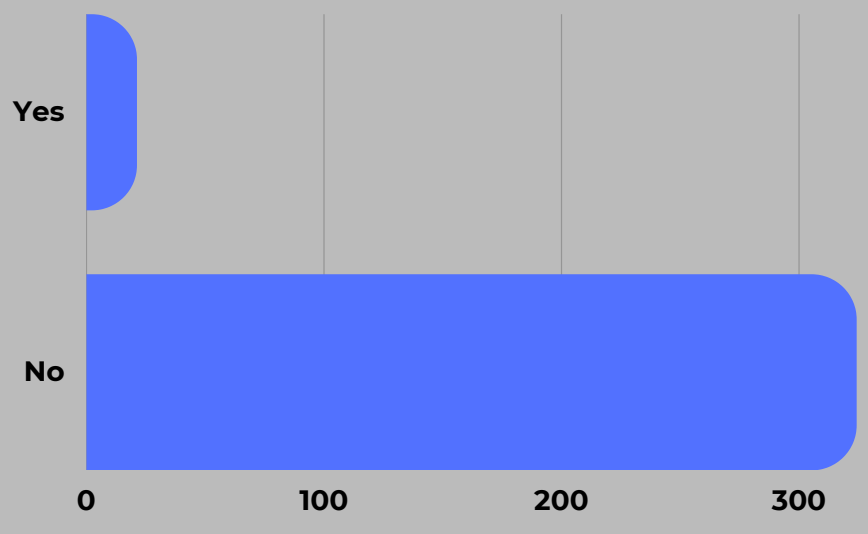


Figure 11: The chart illustrates the incidence of injuries among earthquake survivors and their family members.

Refugees and asylum seekers need to obtain an official travel permit, called "yol izni" in Turkish, from the Provincial Directorate of Migration Management to travel or migrate to different cities in Turkey. Out of the 346 data entries, 125 submitted their travel permit while 93 did not. It is important to note that the majority of refugees and asylum seekers who applied for financial aid did not have a travel permit. This is likely due to the fact that many of them were in emergency situations and either stayed in the same city or moved to a different city without waiting for their travel permit to be issued. Obtaining a travel permit can be a lengthy process and, in many cases, refugees and asylum seekers are forced to move quickly due to safety concerns or other urgent needs.

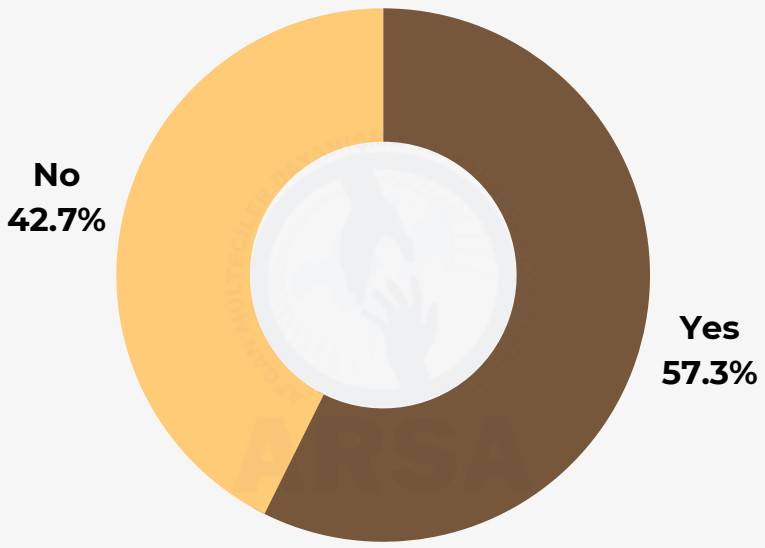


Figure 12: The chart illustrates the number of injured family members during the earthquake.

Kahramanmaraş & Hatay

ARSA, comprising a team of four dedicated personnel, embarked on a visit to the earthquake-affected areas of Hatay and Kahramanmaraş. Along the way, we bore witness to the devastating impact of the earthquake, with severely damaged buildings, scattered debris, and ongoing efforts to clear the wreckage. During our insightful journey to Kahramanmaraş and Hatay, one of our employees diligently documented her valuable observations:

"Upon our arrival in Hatay's Ovakent, the situation was even more distressing. Ovakent, a neighbourhood with a population of approximately 8,000, suffered a tragic loss of 80 lives due to the earthquake. The collapsed houses and walls had not been fully cleared, leaving behind a scene of destruction. To provide shelter for the earthquake victims, a tent city had been established, guarded by gendarmerie and Provincial Migration representatives. With the impossibility of returning to their homes, the majority of the affected individuals were forced to reside in these tent cities. While some had sought refuge in other cities, a partial return had begun.

The most pressing issue in the tent city and the surrounding neighbourhood is the critical shortage of water and hygiene facilities. The region has endured a water crisis for approximately 15 days, leading to significant challenges in terms of nutrition and cleanliness. During our stay, we were graciously hosted by the neighbourhood's community leader, whose house had suffered minor damage. Unfortunately, his wife sustained a broken arm and bruises from the impact of the earthquake. The community leader expressed their profound shock and described the catastrophe as unprecedented in their experience."

"After breakfast, accompanied by the village headman, the community leader's son, and the community leader himself, we paid visits to the families who had lost their loved ones in the earthquake. As a gesture of support, we presented them with shopping cards, introducing our organization and informing them about the rental assistance we would provide. Many families had endured the tragic loss of multiple relatives, while the remaining survivors resided in the tents. Most of the deceased either perished while attempting to exit the buildings or were struck by collapsing street walls after managing to escape.

Following our visits to the bereaved families, we toured the tent city, where a playground had been set up at the entrance. Children joyfully played there, seemingly oblivious to the magnitude of the disaster.."

"Given the region's dire need for support, every form of assistance carried immense significance. Notably, the children swarmed around us upon noticing the shopping cards. Realizing that our distribution process required a more organized approach, we engaged in conversations with the community leader and the village headman, requesting their assistance in distributing the cards to those in need.

Upon our arrival in Kahramanmaraş, we encountered numerous partially standing buildings along the streets, with very few remaining intact. The extent of damage was evident everywhere. However, what struck us was the gradual return to normalcy. People were waiting at bus stops in front of severely damaged structures, and the streets were bustling with pedestrians. Many individuals had already salvaged belongings from windows, doors, and personal belongings of the affected buildings. Positioned in front of the AFAD tent established in the center, we distributed shopping cards to designated individuals. Once again, a crowd gathered around us, demonstrating the immense importance of any assistance received. Having completed our card distribution, we embarked on our journey back".

Malatya

After our visits to Hatay and Kahramanmaraş, ARSA's team continued its mission by heading to the earthquake-affected areas of Malatya. This journey allowed us to bear witness to the profound impact of the earthquake on the region. During our time there, we visited a tent city and a mosque, where we conducted essential focus group sessions with the resilient earthquake survivors, conducting a thorough needs analysis.

Another dedicated staff of ARSA, attentively documented our journey to Malatya:

"I would like to share our noteworthy visit to Malatya. Following our visits to Hatay and Kahramanmaraş, the ARSA team embarked on a journey to the earthquake-affected areas in Malatya. During our exploration, we were confronted with the sobering impact of the earthquake, particularly when we visited a tent city and a mosque where we conducted focused group sessions with the resilient survivors to conduct a comprehensive needs analysis."

"Malatya, in comparison to the other regions we visited, exhibited relatively lesser damage caused by the earthquake. However, remnants of half-demolished shopping centres and abandoned shops served as poignant reminders of the disruptions in the local community. With the guidance and support of a prominent community leader, we had the privilege of engaging in insightful conversations with the earthquake survivors, facilitating a deeper understanding of their challenges.

Our discussions primarily centred around the pressing issue of housing. Several survivors expressed the difficulties they encountered, including being evicted from their temporary shelters after a certain duration. Additionally, some survivors shared their frustration regarding the availability of tents, stating that despite their availability, they were not allocated to those in need. Efforts were made to communicate their requests to AFAD, yet they highlighted the presence of disorganized communication channels and unprofessional conduct among the Turkish Red Crescent, AFAD, and the local municipality, which ultimately hindered the distribution of requested tents."

"The earthquake survivors acknowledged the fair distribution of humanitarian aid items, such as blankets and food parcels, without discrimination between Turkish citizens and themselves. However, they highlighted a sense of disparity when it came to the allocation of tents. They pointed out instances where one tent was provided for a family, but the size and capacity of the tents proved insufficient for larger families comprising 7-8 members.

Another significant concern that emerged during our discussions revolved around the escalating rental prices in the earthquake-affected areas. Survivors shared instances where landlords demanded three months' rent for the period they were unable to occupy their rented premises due to the earthquake. The surge in rental fees was striking, with rates ranging from a minimum of 4,000 TL to a maximum of 12,000 TL, as opposed to the pre-earthquake range of 700 TL to 3,000 TL.

During our interactions with the earthquake survivors, we also identified a crucial need for long-term psychosocial support. Many shared their emotional struggles and the toll the disaster had taken on them and their families. Addressing their psychological well-being is a priority for us. We are committed to establishing comprehensive support programs that prioritize their mental health, facilitating their journey towards healing and resilience."

"Within the tent city located in Taştepe, initial reports indicated a delay in the installation of essential facilities such as toilets and bathrooms. However, later installations were made available. Nonetheless, the survivors expressed their concern over the lack of disability-friendly and elderly-friendly provisions. In terms of laundry facilities, only two washing machines were designated for the entire tent city, and one of them had fallen into disrepair over time. Despite the provision of a once-a-week laundry schedule, the bathrooms lacked electricity, requiring occupants to take turns using them.

In conclusion, our visit to Malatya allowed us to gain valuable insights into the challenges faced by the earthquake survivors. We conducted comprehensive case management, documenting the physical, mental, social, and legal issues experienced by individuals and their families. As ARSA, we remain committed to addressing these challenges and providing ongoing support to help the survivors rebuild their lives."

Observations during our visit to the field:

- The affected regions still require substantial financial and moral support due to the challenging living conditions. Currently, only up to four people can be accommodated in tents. The rising temperatures and the region's hot climate add to the people's concerns. Immediate action is needed to address crucial needs, particularly regarding water and hygiene.
- The education system in the affected areas is unable to function effectively as intended.
- The prospect of the region's prompt recovery and reconstruction appears unlikely at this time.
- Witnessing the events firsthand has deepened our awareness. Additionally, it highlighted the insufficient level of earthquake and disaster preparedness within the country.
- It was both heartening and remarkable to observe the gradual return to normalcy among the people. Their resilience in resuming social activities amidst the debris and severely damaged buildings was intriguing to us, who were affected from a distance and still grappling with our own concerns.
- The opportunity to provide assistance and personally listen to people's problems has left a positive impact on us. It has heightened our sensitivity to the needs of others.

In conclusion, the project titled "Rebuilding Lives: Empowering People Affected by Earthquake - A Focus on Asylum Seekers and Refugees" has been successful in providing crucial assistance and support to individuals impacted by the devastating earthquake in Turkey. Through the efforts of the Afghan Refugees Solidarity Association (ARSA) and generous funding from the Turkish Philanthropy Funds, a total of 3,267 individuals have benefited from the various services and initiatives offered.

The project's comprehensive approach addressed the immediate and long-term needs of the affected population. Rent support was provided to 380 families, ensuring they had safe and stable housing for two months. Additionally, the distribution of shopping vouchers helped alleviate financial burdens, ensuring individuals had access to essential items. Case management sessions and remote assistance provided personalized guidance and support, helping individuals navigate challenges and rebuild their lives.

Despite the challenges faced, the project team exhibited resilience and dedication, ensuring the project's success. By extending services to individuals in 50 different provinces, the project had a wide-reaching impact, benefiting a broader segment of the refugee and asylum seeker population. The achievements of this project stand as a testament to the power of philanthropy, community engagement, and strategic interventions, offering hope and a pathway towards a brighter future for those affected by the earthquake.

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