

# Watching the “Donors’ Conference for the People of Turkey and Syria”

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The devastating double earthquakes affecting 11 provinces in Turkey on February 6 have been recognized as the most destructive in recent memory. At the time of writing, more than 48,448 people in Turkey<sup>1</sup> and 7,259 people in Syria<sup>2</sup> have been killed, while approximately 13.5 million people are affected. The earthquake has been followed by thousands of aftershocks, with around 500 earthquakes per day after February 6.<sup>3</sup> After the early hours of the first earthquakes, Turkey’s disaster management agency (AFAD) determined the impact of the earthquake as Level 4 according to the National Disaster Intervention Plan, thus mobilizing the nation’s entire capacity. The Agency also contacted the EU’s Emergency Response Coordination Center (ERCC) through Turkey’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs to ask for international assistance.<sup>4</sup> This note provides background information on the international response to the disaster, focusing on Turkey. The NGO response is not included in this analysis.

The earthquakes affected a large area of the country and overwhelmed the capacities of local disaster response teams. The disaster heavily affected infrastructure, with many city centres unable to get electricity, and mobile communication was dis-

rupted. Three airports in the most affected cities of Kahramanmaraş, Hatay and Gaziantep became non-operational due to damage<sup>5</sup>, significantly hampering the relief efforts. Four major highways linking affected cities with the rest of the country were closed to transportation due to damage.<sup>6</sup> The relief response in the crucial first hours of the disaster was quite insufficient, reportedly due to the damage to infrastructure and adverse weather conditions. Early in the morning, social media was already flooded with calls for help for people under rubble. While national urban search and rescue (USAR) teams were responding to the disaster, international support also started to arrive in the country. The first international teams that arrived were reportedly from neighbouring Azerbaijan and Greece.<sup>7</sup> By the 5th day after the earthquakes, on February 10, 38 international teams had been sent to Turkey. When one considers the fact that, according to the UN-affiliated International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG), there are 56 globally recognized heavy/medium USAR teams around the world,<sup>8</sup> a significant portion of the global response capacity was mobilized for Turkey, matching the magnitude of the disaster.

- 1 CNN Türk, “40. gün! Depremde ölü sayısı ne kadar oldu, güncel yaralı sayısı kaç? Hangi ilde kaç bina yıkıldı, kaç kişi öldü?,” 17 Mart 2023, <https://www.cnnturk.com/turkiye/38-gun-depremdede-olu-sayisi-ne-kadar-oldu-guncel-yarali-sayisi-kac-hangi-ilde-kac-bina-yikildi-kac-kisi-oldu>.
- 2 Reliefweb, “Syria/Turkey Earthquakes Situation Report #7, March 8, 2023,” <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/syriaturkey-earthquakes-situation-report-7-march-8-2023#:~:text=The%20death%20toll%20from%20earthquakes,Turkey%20and%207%2C259%20in%20Syria>.
- 3 “AFAD,” Deprem İstatistikleri, accessed March 6, 2023, <https://deprem.afad.gov.tr/event-statistics>.
- 4 AFAD, “Kahramanmaraş Pazarcık’ta Meydana Gelen Deprem Hk. Basın Bülteni-2,” March 6, 2023, <https://www.afad.gov.tr/kahraman-maras-pazarcikta-meydana-gelen-deprem-hk-basin-bulteni-2>.

- 5 AFAD, “Kahramanmaraş-Pazarcık’ta Meydana Gelen Deprem Hk. Basın Bülteni-4,” March 6, 2023, <https://www.afad.gov.tr/kahraman-maras-pazarcikta-meydana-gelen-deprem-hk-basin-bulteni4>.
- 6 AFAD, “Kahramanmaraş-Pazarcık’ta Meydana Gelen Deprem Hk. Basın Bülteni-7,” accessed March 7, 2023, <https://www.afad.gov.tr/kahraman-maras-pazarcikta-meydana-gelen-deprem-hk-basin-bulteni7>.
- 7 “Azerbaycan’dan gelen kurtarma ekibi Kahramanmaraş’ta,” Ensonhaber, February 6, 2023, <https://www.ensonhaber.com/gundem/azerbaycandan-gelen-kurtarma-ekibi-kahramanmarasta>; “O anda yıkıldım ve ağlamaya başladım..” Kurtarma ekibinin anlattıkları Yunanistan’ı sarstı!, Hürriyet, February 18, 2023, <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/dunya/o-anda-yikildim-ve-aglamaya-basladim-kurtarma-ekibinin-anlattiklari-yunanistani-sarsti-42221771>.
- 8 INSARAG, “Dashboard – INSARAG,” accessed March 7, 2023, <https://www.insarag.org/iec/dashboard/>.

Meanwhile, on February 8, the European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen announced that the European Commission and the Swedish Presidency of the EU were planning to organize a “Donors’ Conference for the people of Turkey and Syria”. This initial announcement referred to the effort to raise “resources in support of the early recovery and relief.”<sup>9</sup> In disaster management, relief primarily refers to the immediate basic needs of people such as food, health and shelter.<sup>10</sup> Early recovery, on the other hand, implies the notion that relief efforts need to pay attention to a long-term development perspective. More recent announcements indicate that the EU is moving towards a reconstruction effort. When Olivér Várhelyi, the Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement, visited Turkey on February 22, he stated that the EU “will help to mitigate not only the immediate effects but also the mid-term and long-term effects of this earthquake.”<sup>11</sup> This shift suggests that the initial statement by President von der Leyen was made at a time when the scale of the disaster was not clear. Indeed, the first remarks from the Commission referred to an earthquake in Gaziantep rather than the actual epicentre of Kahramanmaraş.<sup>12</sup>

## What is a donors’ conference?

Donors’ conferences or pledging conferences are diplomatic and often publicly broadcasted events where donors promise specific amount of funds for a response to a disaster or similar humanitarian or development challenges. The pledges made at these conferences are promises and may or may not reflect actual transfers of funds. In-kind donations such as goods may also be pledged.<sup>13</sup> This outline can be elabo-

rated with reference to the ongoing UN flash appeals (FA) for the Turkey/Syria earthquakes.<sup>14</sup> According to international norms, all countries are expected to report their humanitarian funding in a timely, transparent and harmonized manner. One platform for reporting this data is the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs’ Financial Tracking System (FTS). Donors can enter and get their data published on this platform. To ensure timeliness, data can be published even before all the details about how and where the funds will be spent are available. The FTS refers to three types funding status. Pledges are nonbinding announcements; commitments are signed contracts for funds and paid status refers to the actual transfer of funds/goods. The FTS has various parameters for analysis. Currently, the FTS indicates USD 457 million of humanitarian funding for Turkey, part of which is for the earthquakes. Most of this funding is being channelled through international NGOs and institutions. Out of these 176 flows, one is destined to a Turkish NGO (the Association for Solidarity with Asylum Seekers and Migrants, ASAM) and the other 2 are for the Turkish government. See table.

The table shows that Saudi Arabia committed to provide in-kind donations to Turkey a few days after the earthquakes (Feb. 9), and flows took place on March 14. Given the news reports about in-kind donations from Saudi Arabia, we can conclude that this flow includes shelter materials sent on March 14. We will see that the amount and date will be updated as more goods arrive from Saudi Arabia.<sup>15</sup> It is also remarkable that only two countries preferred to provide funding directly to the government.

Source	Destination	Funding status	Decision date	Flow date	Amount
Germany	ASAM	Commitment	20/02/2023	20/02/2023	\$103,430
USA	Turkey (government)	Commitment	08/02/2023	08/02/2023	\$1,500,000
Saudi Arabia	Turkey (government)	Paid Contribution (in-kind donation)	09/02/2023	14/03/2023	\$3,981,289
Total Humanitarian Funding in 2023 (including funding for earthquake response)					\$457,557,577

9 European Commission, “Donors’ Conference for the People of Türkiye and Syria,” February 8, 2023, [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip\\_23\\_708](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_23_708).

10 Camillo Boano, “Post-Disaster Recovery Planning: Introductory Notes on Its Challenges and Potentials,” in *Disaster Management* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 191–210.

11 European Commission, “Statement by Commissioner Várhelyi in Türkiye,” February 22, 2023, [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/statement\\_23\\_1181](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/statement_23_1181).

12 European Commission, “Türkiye and Syria: Statement on the Earthquake by High Representative Borrell and Commissioner for Crisis Management Janez Lenarčič,” February 6, 2023, [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/statement\\_23\\_622](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/statement_23_622).

13 Richard A. Meganck and Richard E. Saunier, *Dictionary and Introduction to Global Environmental Governance* (Earthscan, 2012).

14 Flash appeals are calls by the UN to collect funds for specific disasters. An FA was launched for Syria on February 14 and for Turkey on February 16. These are separate from the EU Donors’ Conference.

15 Omar Allothmani, “Saudi Arabia Sends New Aid Plane to Quake Victims in Türkiye,” March 14, 2023, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/saudi-arabia-sends-new-aid-plane-to-quake-victims-in-turkiye/2845391>.

Donors' conferences are organized with the input and participation of countries affected by disasters or other situations. Donors' conferences proceed on the basis of damage, loss and needs assessments, the methodology of which has been developed by the United Nations since the 1970s. These assessments are also published a few days prior to the conference. Donors' conferences often convene a few weeks after the disaster.

The EU has convened many donors' conferences in the last decades. Recent conferences include the International Donors Conference in Solidarity with Venezuelan Refugees and Migrants in 2020 and the High-Level International Donors' Conference for Ukraine in 2022. Donors' conferences are not necessarily hosted by the European Council presidency, but often by governments that have an interest in the country.

The initial estimate of the earthquakes' damage, according to World Bank, was USD 34 billion.<sup>16</sup> More recent estimates of the damage, by UNDP Turkey, raises the costs to more than USD 100 billion.<sup>17</sup> The EBRD, similarly, estimates that reconstruction would require more than USD 100 billion. A final estimate is expected to be announced ahead of the Donors' Conference. It should be noted that damages are calculated according to estimated costs of replacing or repairing assets at prices before a disaster. Losses are "changes in economic flows resulting from the disaster," while the needs assessment reflects replacement costs after the disaster.<sup>18</sup> Damage, loss and needs can be different. Needs can be higher if a "build back better" principle is adopted and reconstruction seeks to provide better infrastructure or services. Post-disaster inflation may increase replacement costs.<sup>19</sup> The flow of funds and sudden increases in demand for construction materials can contribute to inflation. Needs can also be lower if there has been significant emigration from the area or some costs have been covered by private parties. Recent reports suggest that around 2 million citizens out of 13.5 million inhabitants left the affected provinces and moved to other cities following the earthquakes.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, the provinces were hosting around two million refugees. After the earthquakes, they have been allowed to "evacuate" to other cities (except İstanbul) by applying to evacuation units, but they have not been provided with any housing by public authorities in their destination.<sup>21</sup>

Pledges for Turkey and Syria could be around USD 50 billion. If this amount is raised, it would be one-third of the amount that the US transferred to Europe under the Marshall Plan, over the four years between 1948 and 1951 (around USD 150 billion in current prices).<sup>22</sup> To compare, Afghanistan received USD 72 billion between 2002 and 2018.<sup>23</sup> The annual total of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's Development Assistant Committee (OECD DAC) aid was USD 162 billion in 2020 and USD 185 billion in 2021. Within this, total aid disbursements for housing reconstruction were USD 525 million and USD 407 million, respectively, indicating that reconstruction constitutes only a tiny fraction of OECD DAC disbursements.<sup>24</sup> In the case of the Indian Ocean tsunami in December 2004, which killed around 225,000 people in Southeast Asia, the damages and losses were estimated at USD 4.5 billion. The donors' conference in January 2005 saw USD 5.1 billion in pledges. The 2022 floods in Pakistan led to USD 31.1 billion in damages and losses, and the needs were estimated to be USD 16.2 billion.<sup>25</sup> The donors' conference held in January 2023 for the floods exceeded expectations (of USD 8 billion in pledges), recording USD 9 billion in pledges. However, Turkey's deteriorating relations with the Western world may limit donor pledges, despite recent good-willed disaster diplomacy. Actually, the EU's statements indicate that there are already some expectation-management efforts. In his February 22 visit to Turkey, Commissioner Várhelyi stated "we stand ready to meet this challenge and of course we will not be able to cover all of it, but we want to cover a significant part of it."<sup>26</sup> It is not clear what amount the Commissioner had in mind. At the time of this statement the World Bank's early "direct damage" assessment figure of USD 34.2 billion was not available publicly. However, JPMorgan's calculation of direct cost was USD 25 billion, and was reported on February 16.<sup>27</sup>

16 World Bank, "Earthquake Damage in Türkiye Estimated to Exceed \$34 billion: World Bank Disaster Assessment Report," February 27, 2023, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2023/02/27/earthquake-damage-in-turkiye-estimated-to-exceed-34-billion-world-bank-disaster-assessment-report>.

17 "BM: Depremlerin Türkiye'ye maliyeti 100 milyar doları geçecek," *euronews*, March 7, 2023, <https://tr.euronews.com/2023/03/07/bm-depremler-in-turkiyeye-maliyeti-100-milyar-dolari-gececek>.

18 Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives, "Pakistan Floods 2022: Post-Disaster Needs Assessment," October 2022, <https://www.pc.gov.pk/uploads/downloads/PDNA-2022.pdf>.

19 Wolfgang Fengler, Ahya Ihsan, and Kai Kaiser, "International Experience in Public Financial Management" (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2008).

20 Aydın Hasan, "Deprem göçü 2 milyonu aştı," *Milliyet*, March 2, 2023, <https://www.milliyet.com.tr/gundem/deprem-gocu-2-milyonu-asti-6911143>.

21 İrfan Tatlı, "Deprem Sonrası Göç ve Mültecilerin Yeniden Yerleşimi Meseleleri," *insamer.com*, March 6, 2023, <http://www.insamer.com/tr/deprem-sonrasi-goc-ve-multecilerin-yeniden-yerlesimi-meseleleri.html>.

22 Barry Eichengreen, "Lessons from the Marshall Plan" (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2011), [https://web.worldbank.org/archive/website01306/web/marshall\\_plan.html](https://web.worldbank.org/archive/website01306/web/marshall_plan.html).

23 Thomas Ruttig, "Janus-Faced Pledges: A review of the 2020 Geneva donor conference on Afghanistan," *Afghanistan Analysts Network - English*, November 30, 2020, <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/en/reports/international-engagement/janus-faced-pledges-a-review-of-the-2020-geneva-donor-conference-on-afghanistan/>.

24 "QWIDS - Query Wizard for International Development Statistics," accessed March 9, 2023, <https://stats.oecd.org/qwids/#?x=1&y=6&f=2:262,4:1,7:1,9:85,3:288,5:3,8:85&q=2:262+4:1+7:1+9:85+3:288,231,G74+5:3+8:85+1:2+6:2016,2017,2018,2019,2020,2021>.

25 Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives, "Pakistan Floods 2022: Post-Disaster Needs Assessment," 14.

26 European Commission, "Statement by Commissioner Várhelyi in Türkiye," supra note 11.

27 "JPMorgan Estimates Turkey Direct Quake Damage at \$25 Bln, Expects Rate Cut," *Reuters*, February 16, 2023, sec. Middle East, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/jpmorgan-estimates-turkey-direct-quake-damage-25-bln-expects-rate-cut-2023-02-16/>.

## Possible Scenarios for Fund Management

### Scenario 1

- **Establishing a Multi-Donor Trust Fund for Reconstruction**
  - Managed by World Bank or UN
  - Donors contribute to the fund
  - Governance structure
    - Policy Committee that includes donors and national authorities
    - Funding Committee that includes donors and national authorities
    - Project review mechanisms

### Scenario 2

- **Budget Support for Government**
  - Donors provide finance to Afet Yeniden İmar Fonu (Disaster Reconstruction Fund)
  - Bill currently in Parliament
  - Allows loans and grants from abroad
  - Managed by 6 ministries and the Presidency of Strategy and Budget from the Presidency Office
  - Court of Accounts (Sayıştay) and external audit provided (Article 6)
  - Donors seek to impose conditionalities and engage in policy dialogue

### Scenario 3

- **A mechanism similar to EU FRIT is established**
  - Funds provided by international donors
  - Overall needs and priorities determined jointly by donors and Turkish government
  - Implementation takes place jointly by international partners and Turkish government
  - Monitoring provided
  - Funding flows dependent on policy dialogue

## Understanding aid

There are various definitions and forms of aid. The OECD DAC defines aid as government aid that promotes the economic development and welfare of receiving countries, thus excluding military aid. The OECD uses the term official development assistance (ODA) instead of aid. ODA may include not only long-term development aid but also short-term humanitarian aid. Aid can be provided as grants that do not require repayment or as soft loans which carry lower interest rates compared to commercial banks.

Different organizations use varying terminology for aid data. In general, pledges are the least reliable, as they are only statements. Donors often just indicate a financial amount but do not elaborate whether the pledge is a loan or a grant. Aid “commitments” are firmer as they are written plans and the source and destination of the funding is clearer. When there is an agreement between the donor and the recipient, it becomes possible to refer to contracted funds. When the funds are transferred, they are labelled as disbursed.<sup>28</sup>

Another consideration is the funding mechanisms. Donors are increasingly concerned about the mismanagement of post-disaster reconstruction funds. In cases where reconstruction needs are very high and the recipient’s financial management capacity or credibility is low, donors may insist on the foundation of multilateral mechanisms like multi-donor trust funds (MDTFs). These are mechanisms to which multiple donors can contribute, and then money can be spent under the management of an organization like the World Bank. The benefit of such a mechanism is to facilitate coordination, increase leverage vis-a-vis the recipient government and reduce the need for separate arrangements with the country, while increasing financial oversight. It has been used in the case of response to the tsunami disaster in Indonesia.<sup>29</sup> In the recent case of Pakistan, MDTFs have been mentioned but the current arrangement includes a policy and steering committee under the Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives. The committee includes government and international development partners and is tasked with the overall guidance of the response.<sup>30</sup> MDTFs can reduce government ownership and reduce local participation, and thus raise questions around the partnership between development actors. Moreover, some donors may refrain from using MDTFs because they prefer a bilateral relationship where they can be more visible and impose more specific conditions. Bilateral aid can be more flexible, tailored to the needs of the recipient government and easier to track. Multilateral aid through international organizations allows greater coordination and reduces the burden of management.

<sup>28</sup> Alinea, “International Donors’ Conference in Solidarity with Venezuelan Refugees and Migrants: Post-2020 Conference Financial Tracking,” 2021, <https://www.alineainternational.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Post-2020-Conference-Financial-Tracking.pdf>.

<sup>29</sup> Wolfgang Fengler, Ahya Ihsan, and Kai Kaiser, “Managing Post-Disaster Reconstruction Finance: International Experience in Public Finance Management,” in *From the Ground Up: Perspectives on Post-Tsunami and Post-Conflict Aceh*, ed. Anthony J.S. Reid, Patrick Daly, and R. Michael Feener (ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, 2012), 79–113, <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/from-the-ground-up/managing-postdisaster-reconstruction-finance-international-experience-in-public-finance-management/62728D8718925B7149D456FC6F5EBFD1>.

<sup>30</sup> Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives, “Pakistan Floods 2022: Resilient Recovery, Rehabilitation, and Reconstruction Framework (4RF),” UNDP, 2022, <https://www.undp.org/pakistan/publications/pakistan-floods-2022-resilient-recovery-rehabilitation-and-reconstruction-framework-4rf>.

## Monitoring and accountability

Disasters are events that can lead to a breakdown in trust toward public institutions. Coordination and resource problems in relief after disasters challenge public perceptions of government capability and credibility.<sup>31</sup> Monitoring and accountability mechanisms may facilitate observation and participation in post-disaster reconstruction processes and help restore public trust.

To improve monitoring and accountability, governments and partners need to agree on a strategic plan to respond to the disaster. An example of this is the Resilient Recovery, Rehabilitation, and Reconstruction Framework (4RF) prepared after the floods in Pakistan in 2022. Such documents lay out a plan for reconstruction and create accountability relations between stakeholders.

Another aspect of monitoring and accountability mechanisms is the availability and accessibility of data. Since the Global Humanitarian Summit in İstanbul in 2016, there is a greater tendency to improve transparency around the quantity

and quality of aid. The UN's FTS allows monitoring of aid flows, as mentioned above. For assistance that goes beyond humanitarian response and is categorized as development aid, the OECD's Creditor Reporting System (CRS) is the main source of information. However, there is a significant lag in CRS reporting (e.g. the 2021 figures were reported in April 2022). There are several initiatives to improve access to data. The International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) brings together governments, international organizations and civil society to improve transparency. Transaction data shared by donors with the IATI are published by Development Initiative (a UK-based organization) in its "Real-time international development finance flow tracker."<sup>32</sup> This tool provides "near real-time data" (a lag of around 3 months). Another initiative is Publish What You Fund. This is a global campaign to increase the transparency of aid and provides tools for "systematic and timely disclosure of relevant information by development finance institutions (DFIs)."<sup>33</sup> In the recent Turkish experience, the EU's Facility for Refugees in Turkey is also providing data on its funding. However, this data does not allow analysis of how intermediary organizations funded by the EU transfer funds to local and national organizations.



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31 Owen Main Podger, "Reconstructing Accountability after Major Disasters," *ADB Governance Brief*, no. 22 (2015).

32 Development Initiatives, "Tracking Aid and Other International Development Finance in near Real Time," Development Initiatives, 2023, <https://devinit.org/data/tracking-aid-international-development-real-time/>.

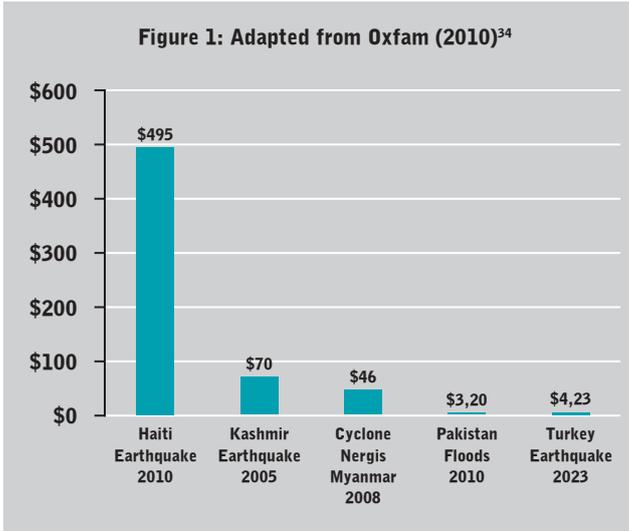
33 Publish What You Fund, "DFI Transparency Tool - World," November 8, 2021, <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/dfi-transparency-tool>.

# Conclusion

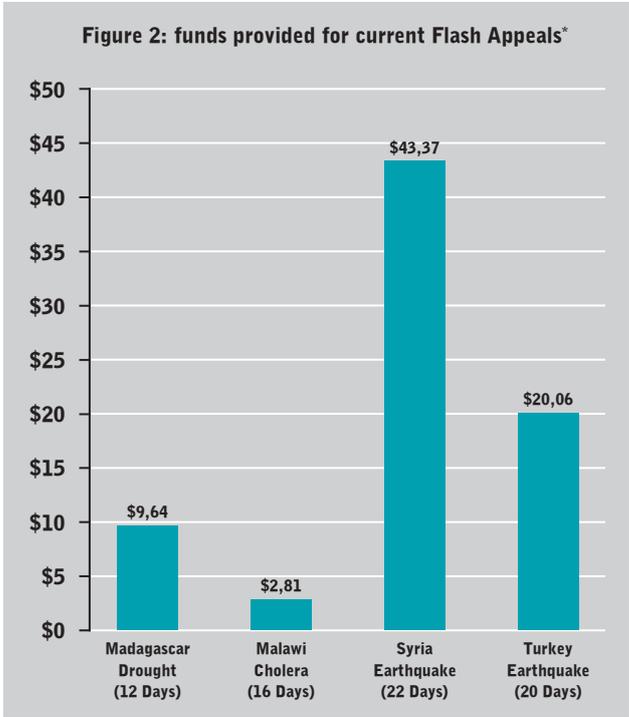
Megadisasters like the Kahramanmaraş earthquakes are events that impact all aspects of society. This note has sought to highlight the international response to the disaster by focusing on its political economy dimensions. Many significant topics such as gender, livelihoods and migration have been left out due to time constraints. This preliminary note highlights that there is an important task for civil society to press for participation in and monitoring of the process to ensure equitable and sustainable outcomes.

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- **Needs assessment:** The financial amount of the needs and its proportion to the annual GDP gives an idea about the extent of finance.
- **Total pledges:** How does the total amount compare to the needs assessment? Here the focus should be on needs rather than just Damage and Loss.
- **Types of aid:** Are the donors announcing whether they are providing loans or grants? Are they providing this bilaterally or multilaterally? Are the funds “earmarked” for specific sectors or uses or do they come with conditionalities?
- **Duration of aid:** Longer durations (e.g. 3 years) allows the government to better plan reconstruction and signals donor’s commitment. Shorter durations complicate recovery efforts and indicate lack of credibility.
- **Institution building:** Do the donors require the establishment of new post-disaster reconstruction institutions? Institutions with special mandates can speed up reconstruction but may reduce local input.
- **Funding mechanisms:** Does the conference announce a Multi-Donor Trust Fund or does it prefer existing institutions? Does it provide direct budget support to the government? How is the oversight of funds designed and what is the decision making for approving plans and projects?
- **What are the accountability mechanisms for aid?** Is there a commitment to publish regular, granular and timely data of aid disbursement? Are the accountability mechanisms designed toward donors or the public?



UN Flash Appeal Funding per person in the first 10 days of the disaster



\* FA funded per person; calculated by author from FTS database according to number of people targeted in the appeal.

<sup>34</sup> Oxfam, “Six Months into the Floods: Resetting Pakistan’s Priorities through Reconstruction,” Oxfam International, July 14, 2014, <https://www.oxfam.org/en/research/six-months-floods-resetting-pakistans-priorities-through-reconstruction>.