



Humanitarian Responsibility Knows No Limits: AFAD and Türkiye's Global Outreach

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"Big thank you to AFAD and its officials who graciously answered our questions, and special thanks to Mr. Tuncay Güven for facilitating this process."

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Introduction

On August 24, three trains mobilised by the Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD) embarked on a [journey](#) to bring upwards of 1,500 tonnes of aid to Afghanistan. On August 25, a ship carrying 23 truckloads of aid was [received](#) by Lebanese authorities at the Port of Tripoli in the country's north amidst an ongoing and unprecedented social and economic crisis. On August 28, AFAD established an ["air bridge"](#) to provide 10,000 tents, 50,000 food parcels, along with hygiene materials and baby food, to Pakistan in response to a humanitarian crisis caused by major flooding. AFAD personnel were also dispatched to the region to coordinate the distribution of aid materials and to assist in the establishment of tent cities.

This is not the first time AFAD has offered such humanitarian support to countries in need. In fact, AFAD is an institution that was established in 2009 to mitigate disasters and minimize disaster-related damages, plan and coordinate the post-disaster response, and promote cooperation among various government agencies. AFAD's outreach is also not limited to a particular geography. In line with Türkiye's

priority of providing humanitarian assistance, AFAD performs as an institutional body of coordination that unites several official organizations and NGOs in times of crisis to mitigate the adverse effects of natural and human-induced disasters. AFAD works with the slogan "We are in our country for our people, we are beyond our borders for humanity" with several success stories. This paper seeks to examine how institutionalized practices of disaster and risk management are carried out by AFAD as a single official body of disaster management, both domestically and globally. After examining AFAD according to three criteria stipulated by UNDP as a way of evaluating institutional performance and success, the main emphasis will be then given to AFAD's global reach, and success stories as a part of the post-disaster response in this context will be mentioned. In order to better understand the subject, excerpts from a written interview with AFAD officials will be incorporated into relevant sections. The organization of the paper is as follows: (I) Historical Background and Institutional Structure, (II) AFAD: Institutionalized Forms of Disaster Management, (III) AFAD Wherever it is Needed, and (IV) Concluding Remarks.



Aftermath of the earthquake in Turkey's Izmir. (Halil Fidan - Anadolu Agency)

Historical Background and Institutional Structure

Before 2009, there were a number of institutions and organizations dealing with disaster management such as the Ministry of Interior General Directorate of Civil Defence (SSGM), Ministry of Public Works and Settlement General Directorate of Disaster Affairs, and the Prime Ministry General Directorate of Disaster and Emergency Management. The fact that more than one institution was responsible for the structure of the disaster and emergency management, while some areas of responsibility and duty were left unattended, often caused confusion in authority and responsibility in practice. As a result of intensive efforts to solve these problems, with Law No. 5902 dated 29 May 2009 in the Official Gazette on 17 June 2009 the Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency was established and the way for a single-handed, more effective management was paved. With Presidential Decree No. 4 published on 15 July 2018, AFAD was affiliated with the Ministry of Interior. Its main function is [defined](#) as "to prevent disasters and minimize disaster-related damages, plan and coordinate post-disaster response, and promote cooperation among various government agencies". In this sense, a new disaster management model has been put into practice, and with this model, priority has been given to "Risk Management" over "Crisis Management".

The institutional structure of the AFAD is closely related to its function in terms of a broad organizational capacity to

reach throughout the country. There are currently 81 provincial branches and 11 search and rescue units listed under the institution. Organizations in the Turkish provinces are managed on the basis of provincial directorates. AFAD also gives priority to organizational coordination with public institutions, universities, local authorities, the Turkish Red Crescent, the private sector, international organizations, and other NGOs. The Planning and Risk Reduction Department, Response Department, Relief Department, Civil Defence Department, Earthquake Department, Personnel and Support Services Department, Education Department, Foreign Relations and International Humanitarian Aid Department, Strategy Development Department, and Legal Consultancy constitute the main units of AFAD. In addition, subject-based sub-committees such as the Disaster and Emergency Board and the Turkish National Seismology and Earthquake Physics Commission are also included in the organizational structure of AFAD.

In short, the central understanding of disaster management was rearranged, and some of the authorities and responsibilities were shifted to local governments. Central administration is mainly responsible for planning, standard setting, resource transfer, training and inspection, while local administrations are responsible for the implementation of the tasks under disaster and risk management in a coordinative manner.

AFAD: Institutionalized Forms of Disaster and Risk Management

Comprehensive changes and transformations in disaster management in Türkiye raise questions about how governance and disaster management are interrelated when it comes to AFAD's domestic and international activities. Accordingly, AFAD is a salient example through which we can observe the institutionalized forms of disaster and risk management that have seen numerous successes both domestically and internationally.

One way to assess the overall performance of disaster and risk management is through a comparative assessment of AFAD's institutional and organizational qualifications with

the existing international norms that take disaster and risk management as a part of governance and risk reduction management. In this regard, AFAD's performance reflects the principles of good governance and effective disaster management. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) [describes](#) the three pillars of Disaster Risk Reduction as public awareness, political will, and sufficient capacity. By examining the organizational and institutional performance of AFAD according to these criteria, we can develop a better understanding of how the relationship between good governance and risk management is reflected on a performative basis.



(Zafer Göder- Anadolu Agency)

Public Awareness

Considering the risk management-oriented activities of AFAD, its public awareness activities are aimed at building a society that is conscious of disaster and disaster risk, producing informative content for online platforms, warnings about predictable weather events such as heavy rainfall, and volunteer projects. For instance, within the scope of the “Disaster Ready Türkiye” project, AFAD aims to promote a culture of disaster preparedness and create social awareness in all segments of society, starting from the individual level. People from all segments of society are informed theoretically and practically with the training held in the Disaster and Emergency Training Centre. In addition to the content of the online platform, AFAD publishes books, articles, magazines, brochures and posters. Technical information and general knowledge about disasters are provided to readers through these publications, which can be easily accessed on AFAD's official [page](#).

Political Will

Regarding the relationship between AFAD's risk-oriented disaster management vision and the political will, which is the second of the principles mentioned by UNDP, it is seen that the policies and resource allocation for the functioning of the institution are realized effectively. AFAD, which has a budget of 2.08 billion TL for 2021, plans to establish new earthquake warning and preliminary damage estimation system stations and navigation system stations in 2022. In line with these new projects, AFAD continues its activities with an increasing budget compared to previous years, according to the [2021 Performance Program](#). The shift from disaster management to risk management is one of the major points of the policy-making aspect of effective disaster management in compliance with the principles stipulated by the UNDP. In that regard, policies are developed in line with the need for being prepared for the risks of disasters. Such a strategy reduces the potential

risks associated with the difficulty in managing disasters and helps create a well-informed populace. As a result, search and rescue teams can pursue their activities more effectively.

AFAD also works in coordination with other public institutions to design or assist disaster-related projects. For instance, AFAD provides assistance to sustainable urban development projects that aim to reduce disaster risk as much as possible. AFAD provides the necessary support in policy-making processes in urban planning in metropolises such as Istanbul where millions of people live close to fault lines. It works in close cooperation with other institutions on the technical infrastructure of urban transformation plans for risky regions. The policy shift towards risk management is, therefore, maintained by strong communication between AFAD and other relevant institutions and organizations and constitutes an important part of AFAD's overall institutional performance. In this context, centralization policies in combination with localized branches have significantly improved the ability to act quickly in times of natural disasters and crisis.

Sufficient Capacity

The issue of sufficient capacity is the third fundamental dimension of disaster risk reduction as underlined by the UNDP. AFAD has a total of 699 personnel (558 permanent and 141 temporary) based in Ankara and 7,081 personnel spread throughout 81 provinces. A total of 1,203 vehicles are registered in the inventory of AFAD. In addition to the number of available personnel and vehicles, coordination and cooperation are also two major aspects of the sufficient capacity factor for disaster risk reduction. Tierney (2012) states that disaster governance is a process of transformation from hierarchical and bureaucratic forms of government to decentralized and localized forms of governance. Accordingly, the establishment of AFAD in 2009 indicates this important shift for two main reasons. First, the localization of branches in 81 provinces led to the creation of an effective mechanism dealing with risk reduction and disaster management. Although the consolidation of disaster management structures under the umbrella of AFAD in 2009 seems like increasing centralization at first glance, this issue was eliminated with a high-coordinated way of localization in all provinces (Işık et al., 2012). Moreover, potential communication breakdowns between local and central bodies were prevented by establishing coordinated communication networks. Thus, the establishment of a single central body of organization in combination with localized patterns of coordination produced a “golden formula” to increase overall capacity. Second, the



(Halil Fidan - Anadolu Agency)

shift from disaster management to risk management also increased the level of sufficient capacity by bringing new factors and techniques into the decision-making and implementation processes. In a system of disaster management, the capacity to conduct necessary projects is limited to the post-disaster period. However, a risk management system offers a more comprehensive outlook and new techniques to calculate disaster risks, thereby redressing the post-disaster equilibrium. Taking these two points into account, it can be stated that AFAD created a "golden combination" of centralization and localization. Through the Türkiye Disaster Risk Reduction Plan (TARAP), the Provincial Disaster Risk Reduction Plan (IRAP), and the Disaster Risk Reduction System (ARAS), different methods can be used in disaster hazard and risk analysis, and the results have been shared.

Global Outreach

In addition to these three principles set by UNDP, there is another important point we should consider in the context of disaster and risk management in general and with regards to AFAD in particular: protecting the most vulnerable. Türkiye has played host to more than 3 million refugees

since the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War in 2011. In this regard, AFAD has made great efforts to provide coordinated control of refugee flows and psychosocial assistance to incoming families. The physical, social and psychological needs of Syrians have been met in 21 shelters established by AFAD for Syrian refugees who have migrated since 2011.¹ It is expected that 100,000 briquette houses will be completed by AFAD by the end of the year in Idlib. Every stage of the Idlib Briquette House Project is [inspected](#) by the Ministry of Interior, General Directorate of Civil Society Relations and AFAD. No public funds were used in the project, which was realized with the financial support of eleven NGOs and associations under the coordination of AFAD. By the same token, Myanmar, Somalia, Afghanistan, and Arakan² are only a few places where AFAD conducted several humanitarian assistance projects to alleviate poverty, water scarcity, and famine. Natural disasters, war, famine, water scarcity, and refugees should not be taken as events whose effects are limited to the regions where they occur. In the context of common responsibility, it is of great importance that each country meets on the common denominator of humanitarian concerns. It is precisely for this reason that we must consider the level of global outreach when evaluating an organization's effectiveness in disaster and risk management.

As underlined above, the institutional and organizational capacity of global outreach becomes a key criterion as a sign of success, when evaluating the performance of AFAD as an official body of humanitarian assistance and coordination.



¹ As of March 2018, Temporary Accommodation Centers were [transferred](#) to the General Directorate of Migration Management of the Ministry of Interior by the decision of the Council of Ministers.

² Arakan, or officially Rakhine State, is a state of Myanmar where the Muslim-majority Rohingya people have faced persecution.

For more on this, we can examine further some of the places in which AFAD has carried out humanitarian assistance projects as part of its overall capacity of global outreach.

■ Every year, 26,000 tons of flour is sent to Palestine and distributed in the region through UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

■ Our "6th Goodness Train" to Afghanistan departed on Wednesday, 24.08.2022 and is expected to arrive in Tourgundhi, Afghanistan on 7-8 September. Then, the distribution processes on site will be carried out.

■ Our "3rd Goodness Ship" voyage to Lebanon departed on Wednesday, 24.08.2022 and was welcomed by the delegation headed by AFAD President on Thursday, 25.08.2022, and humanitarian aid materials were delivered to the Lebanese authorities.

■ The AFAD team was sent to the region in order to meet the humanitarian aid needs that emerged after the flood disasters that occurred as a result of heavy monsoon rains in Pakistan and caused the death of many people. Our activities have started here.

■ In Bangladesh, a hospital is operated by a permanent AFAD team and a Ministry of Health team of approximately 30-34 people, and activities are continuing to meet the shelter and other humanitarian aid needs of Rohingya refugees.

■ Immediately after the outbreak of the Ukraine crisis, AFAD teams went to the region and started to work in the field of humanitarian aid, which is still continuing.

■ Apart from these, humanitarian aid is provided upon the emergency call from countries after disasters in the world.

* Excerpted from our written interview with AFAD officials.

AFAD Wherever it is Needed

'Charity Train' to Afghanistan

In August 2021, with the Taliban's seizure of Kabul, Afghanistan experienced a deep economic crisis as a result of internal turmoil. In this geography, where the scope of drought has also increased, serious challenges have arisen with regards to Afghan people's access to food, water, and basic services. In Afghanistan, more than 90 per cent of the population has been [suffering](#) from some form of food insecurity since last August. Under the coordination of AFAD, 11 NGOs and humanitarian aid associations came together to support the 'Charity Train' initiative³. As part of this initiative, six humanitarian aid trains have been sent to Afghanistan thus far. Along with the 6th expedition consisting of 3 trains, 7,177 tons of humanitarian aid materials [sent](#) by 17 trains aim to alleviate the suffering of 1.25 million Afghans, particularly women, children, and the elderly.



(Mehmet Kaman - Anadolu Agency)

³ Turkish Red Crescent, Türkiye Diyanet Foundation, İHH, Deniz Feneri, Beşir, Hayrat, Sadakataşı, Hüdai Association, Yedi Başak Humanitarian Aid Association, Anda, and Umuda Koşanlar are among the supporters of 'Charity Train' to Afghanistan.

AFAD in Lebanon

In October 2019, in the wake of unprecedented protests against rampant graft and corruption, Lebanon began a rapid descent into a historic economic meltdown and financial liquidity crisis. The increasingly dire social situation in the country has been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic and the massive explosion at the port of Beirut in August 2020 that killed hundreds, wounded thousands, and destroyed the country's main grain storage facilities. Moreover, the crisis has seen access to basic food materials worsen due to the high level of inflation. Since March 2021, under the coordination of [AFAD](#), several Turkish NGOs have sent humanitarian assistance to Lebanon in order to help mitigate the impacts of the ongoing crisis on the lives of the Lebanese. Under the coordination of AFAD, Türkiye started to send humanitarian aid including food and medicine to Lebanon under the name of "Charity Ships". In total, more than 2,000 tons of humanitarian aid was delivered to 135,000 families with 3 ships in 2022. On August 25, the 4th ship that carried more than 500 tonnes of food was sent by AFAD.

AFAD in Syria

Humanitarian aid projects carried out in Syria under the coordination of AFAD are quite large-scale. For ten years, food, medicine, temporary residence, including briquette houses, and financial assistance cards have been provided to Syrian civilians. According to the [Global Humanitarian Assistance Report](#), Türkiye was the largest donor country in the world in 2018 with an official humanitarian aid of \$8.39 billion. The coordination and cooperation of AFAD have been effective in successfully undertaking this humanitarian responsibility. AFAD also works closely with foreign humanitarian aid agencies to alleviate natural and human-induced disasters. For instance, AFAD [signed](#) a joint humanitarian relief project agreement with the Qatar Red Crescent Society (QRCS) to build a residential village for displaced Syrians in Al-Bab City, Aleppo, with a total budget of \$3.3 million.

AFAD in Yemen

Since the outbreak of a civil war in 2015, Yemen has seen a dramatic rise in poverty, economic deterioration, and large-scale material losses. 15.6 million people have fallen into extreme poverty and more than 34,000 families, the majority of whom were IDPs fleeing conflict zones, lost their homes, incomes, and livelihoods, according to the 2021 UN Yemen [Report](#). In response, AFAD worked closely with other official agencies and NGOs specialized in humanitarian relief in order to alleviate the humanitari-

an plight in the country. Within the scope of the "Be hope for Yemen" humanitarian aid [campaign](#) launched in 2019, AFAD delivered 7,000 food parcels, 640 sleeping sets, 850 blankets and 1,000 school bags to people in need. In 2009, in cooperation with the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA), AFAD [delivered](#) humanitarian aid to 3,100 families in Yemen's Hadramout and Marib regions.

AFAD in Somalia

Due to the famine, hunger and water scarcity caused by the drought in east Africa, the people of the region, especially Somalia, continue to face the prospect of a prolonged human tragedy. In order to meet the humanitarian aid needs, several humanitarian assistance projects were carried out under the coordination of AFAD. In 2021, AFAD, in cooperation with the Turkish Red Crescent, [delivered](#) humanitarian aid to 20,000 people in the Jubaland region of Somalia, a region that has been particularly hard-hit by severe drought and poverty. AFAD's activities in Somalia include search and rescue. After a bomb attack in Mogadishu in 2017, an AFAD team in coordination with other official agencies and TRC was [sent](#) to Somalia to support search and rescue activities.

AFAD in Ukraine

After the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine War, humanitarian aid prepared by Türkiye under the coordination of AFAD has been delivered to the Ukrainian people. A total of 43 humanitarian aid trucks and 1 mobile kitchen truck have been sent to L'viv, Borodianka, and the Siret Border Gate between Romania and Ukraine. A total of 750 family tents, 26 general purpose tents, 11,620 blankets, 1,890 beds, 1,640 pillow-sheet sets, 141 sleeping bags, 15,000 Disaster and Emergency Bags, 100,000 ready meals, 4,536 food parcels, 583,619 food materials, 52,820 hygiene kits, 103,203 hygiene materials and diapers, 308,000 diapers, medicine and health equipment have been sent on the aid trucks sent so far.



(Alex Nicodim - Anadolu Agency)

Concluding Remarks

Since its establishment in 2009, AFAD has proven successful in providing search and rescue activities, together with humanitarian assistance projects in coordination with other official organizations and NGOs. It has performed as one of Türkiye's helping hands around the globe. AFAD improved its own organizational capacity to carry out institutionalized forms of risk management in line with public awareness, political will, and sufficient capacity. In addition, AFAD's peculiarity is clearly reflected in several humanitarian assistance projects and activities beyond Türkiye's borders. One additional way of evaluating the performance of disaster management is to assess the capacity of global outreach. In this context, from Syria to Somalia, AFAD succours any country whenever an urgent

need arises. Today, humanitarian concerns should be the primary concern in natural disasters and other crises. Every moment of crisis, regardless of its initial cause, brings about negative effects such as loss of life and material damage, and is especially hard on the most vulnerable. With this awareness, the effective coordination capacity of AFAD enables many teams to act quickly in a coordinated manner, rather than having a number of teams coming to disaster areas separately. AFAD will continue to carry out its projects in order to address humanitarian whenever and wherever it is needed. Moreover, it has proven to be resilient and successful in the actualization of disaster and risk management by exceeding the geographical boundaries of its own country.

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