

Title: In the first year following the February 6 earthquakes (III): The Current Status of Promised Earthquake-Resistant Housing

Spot: In the aftermath of the February 6, 2023, earthquakes, numerous housing promises were made for the quake-affected regions: What progress has been made as the first anniversary comes in?

The uncertainty about how cities will recover and transition to permanent living continues to loom over everyone affected by the earthquakes. Many people in the earthquake zones are still struggling to live in temporary shelters like containers and tents.

One of the key promises made by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan before the 2023 elections **was addressing the housing issue.**

In March 2023, Erdoğan [promised](#) the delivery of **319,000 houses within a year and the construction of a total of 650,000 houses and village homes.** Additionally, [plans were announced](#) to construct **850,000 independent units, comprising 680,000 houses and 170,000 commercial spaces.**

PHOTO

Unfulfilled housing promises

Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya [announced](#) on February 2 that 46,000 houses would be allocated through a lottery, with the first distribution ceremony scheduled for February 3 in Hatay, attended by President Erdoğan. At the ceremony on February 3, **the lottery for a total of 7,237 earthquake houses,** including 6,572 urban and 665 rural, [was completed](#) in Hatay.

Erdoğan [stated that](#) 40,000 houses under construction would be gradually delivered to their rightful owners, promising the delivery of 75,364 houses by the end of March and a total of 200,000 by the end of the year. **On February 4, the lottery for 10,698 houses took place in Gaziantep.** The lotteries and [delivery ceremonies](#) for **9,289 houses** in Kahramanmaraş on February 6, and for **1,314 houses** in Sanliurfa on February 7, were conducted, followed by the allocation of **7,798 houses** in Adiyaman.

This **totals 36,336 houses whose ownership has been determined through lotteries,** falling short of the [promised](#) 319,000 houses to be completed within a year. Even if the **75,364 houses** promised by Erdoğan are delivered **by the end of March,** it would only represent **24%** of the promised 319,000 houses. Erdoğan [later stated](#) on February 6 that 200,000 houses are expected to be allocated by the end of the year.

The Ministry of Environment, Urbanization, and Climate Change [released](#) the number of houses allocated and prepared for delivery in each city. However, these figures fall short of the targeted and needed earthquake-resistant houses in those cities.

For instance, while 254,195 houses were targeted in Hatay, one of the most needed areas, only 10,418 houses will be delivered by March 2024. This represents **only 4% of the planned** and needed houses in Hatay. **In Kahramanmaraş**, where 112,414 houses are needed, the planned delivery of 19,501 houses by the end of March **will meet only 17%** of the requirement.

A detailed table outlining the planned and delivered houses against the needs of all cities is as follows:

City	Planned number of houses	Houses delivered or to be delivered by the end of March	Percentage of needs fulfilled
Hatay	254,195	10,418	4%
Kahramanmaraş	112,414	19,501	17%
Adıyaman	64,811	6,001	9%
Malatya	103,19	6,672	6%
Gaziantep	41,922	15,160	36%
Osmaniye	20,502	3,638	18%
Adana	21,021	2,408	11,5%
Sanlıurfa	16,782	2,319	14%
Elazığ	20,261	2,736	13,5%
Diyarbakır	21,712	4,500	21%
Kilis	3,361	2,011	60%
Total amount	680,000	75,364	11%

Ratio of Planned [Houses to Houses to be Delivered](#). [Click for the sources](#).

These figures indicate a shortfall in meeting the housing needs across 11 provinces.

The [Presidential report](#) shows that the **11 provinces impacted by the earthquake had a total of 5,649,317 houses**. In the immediate aftermath of the earthquake, over 38,000 buildings were destroyed. Subsequent evaluations identified 518,009 houses as either demolished, urgently needing demolition, or severely damaged. Additionally, 131,577

houses were assessed as moderately damaged. Over time, many buildings initially classified as moderately damaged were reclassified as severely damaged. The Ministry of Interior [responded](#) by issuing guidelines, allowing for the appeal process for buildings considered suitable for reinforcement.

Owners who did not file appeals or who failed to reinforce their buildings within a year were subject to having their properties demolished. As a result, the count of houses designated for demolition has been steadily increasing. However, precise figures for these numbers are not easily accessible from public sources.

Mehmet Özhaseki, the Minister of Environment, Urbanization, and Climate Change, [noted](#) on September 9, 2023, that **680,000 houses and village homes had sustained damage. This figure corresponds to the total housing requirement [identified](#).**

Given this requirement, **the 75,364 houses either delivered or scheduled for delivery by March 2024 represent merely 11% of the total need.** This indicates a significant shortfall in house construction over the year compared to the actual demand.

Additionally, the Ministry of Environment, Urbanization, and Climate Change disclosed that in these 11 provinces, [the total number](#) of houses either under construction or in the tender phase is 307,066. This includes 218,917 by TOKI, 44,275 by the General Directorate of Emlak Konut, and 43,874 by the General Directorate of Construction Works. Therefore, for **373,934 of the 680,000 required houses and village homes, construction or tender processes are yet to begin.**

What is the status of the ongoing construction of houses by TOKI?

Information about the ongoing earthquake-resistant housing projects managed by TOKI (Housing Development Administration of the Republic of Türkiye) is [available](#) on the official website. It provides city-wise details of the projects prepared and initiated by TOKI. The Ministry [stated that](#) TOKI is overseeing the construction of **218,917 houses** in 11 provinces.

However, TOKI's website indicates that the number of planned houses in these 11 provinces is 114,645, with 108,584 of these already having their construction tenders completed. Based on the data, it appears that only **34% of the promised 319,000 houses to be delivered within a year have begun construction.** This also means that **only 16% of the needed 680,000 houses have started construction.**

The construction status of these houses remains "[in progress](#)," with only a minority being fully completed. However, there are houses nearing completion, such as in Kahramanmaraş's Ilica, where the construction of 82 disaster houses is finished. Houses in Afsin, Pazarcık, Dulkadiroğlu, and Goksun are [92% complete](#).

When comparing the planned numbers with those that have reached the tender stage, there's a shortfall. For instance, while 254,195 houses are planned for Hatay, only 31,654 have had their tenders completed and construction begun. The average completion rate of these houses is about 36%. There are 1,969 houses planned but not yet started. The highest completion rate in Hatay is in the Payas district, with 821 houses at 80% completion, while others are between 60-70%.

Overall, TOKI's ongoing projects also lag behind the targets.

Average Completion Rate of Houses Commenced by TOKI

City	Planned Number of Houses and Village Homes	Number of Houses with Projects Prepared According to TOKI's Website	Number of Houses with Completed Tenders and Construction Started	Average Completion Rate of Started Houses	Number of Houses Delivered or to be Delivered
Hatay	254,195	33,623	31,654	36%	10,418
Kahramanmaraş	112,414	21,114	18,988	50%	19,501
Adıyaman	64,811	5,132	4,629	46%	6,001
Malatya	103,019	13,989	13,989	60%	6,672
Gaziantep	41,922	19,171	18,826	46%	15,160
Adana	21,021	3,191	3,191	51%	2,408
Diyarbakır	21,712	5,302	5,240	49%	4,500
Osmaniye	20,502	3,972	3,875	45%	3,638
Kilis	3,361	1,854	1,854	62%	2,011
Sanlıurfa	16,782	4,469	4,469	62%	2,319
Elazığ	20,261	2,828	1,869	45%	2,736
Total	680,000	114,645	108,584	43%	27,224

Source: [TOKI](#), [MoEUCC](#) • As of February 7, 2024.

Why did the promise fail to materialize?

Some experts argue that President Erdoğan's promise was unrealistic from the very beginning. Taner Yuzgec, President of the Chamber of Civil Engineering, opined that [it was implausible](#) for TOKI, which constructed around 700,000 houses in the last 20 years, to build half that number in a single year under current conditions.

According to a [statement](#) by Murat Kurum, the Minister of Environment, Urbanization, and Climate Change during the earthquake period, TOKI constructed 1,170,000 houses between 2003 and 2022. This averages to about 58,500 houses per [year](#). According to

data shared by Anadolu Agency, TOKI [constructed](#) a total of 213,000 houses between 2020 and 2022.

Minister Özhasseki also [acknowledged that](#) it was challenging for TOKI, which typically built 60-70,000 houses per year, to suddenly construct 850,000 structures, and finding reserve areas for construction was difficult. Hence, the promised houses significantly exceed TOKI's historical construction capacity.

Following the 2020 Izmir earthquake, 4,602 houses were constructed and delivered in [2023](#). Similarly, after the Elazığ earthquake in January 2020, 90% of the 24,537 houses initiated were completed by [2022](#). The delivery of 26,000 houses built after the 2011 Van earthquake extended into [2020](#).

After the August 17, 1999 Marmara earthquake, which damaged over 18,000 buildings in Kocaeli, Sakarya, Istanbul, Duzce, and Yalova, the construction of over 42,000 permanent houses was [commenced](#). In Bolu, Kocaeli, and Istanbul, all planned houses were completed within a year; in other provinces, 90% of the targeted houses were [finished](#) within the same timeframe.

What will the cost of these houses be?

The issue of entitlement caused prolonged uncertainty in the region. Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya [stated](#) that 441,567 eligible recipients were determined after the ownership process began in May. According to regulations, homeowners with severely damaged or demolished homes are eligible for new housing projects, but tenants [do not have this right](#).

These houses will not be free. Owners of completely demolished or heavily damaged homes **will be [indebted](#) based on the cost. The government will cover 60%** of the payment, while the remaining **40%** will be borne by **the citizens**. The repayment process for the houses was [announced](#) to [be over 20 years, interest-free, with a two-year grace period](#).

According to the Presidential report, the construction cost of the houses, excluding land value, is [estimated](#) at 608.3 billion TL (about 32.2 billion USD), with village homes costing approximately 192.7 billion TL (about 10.2 billion USD).

On February 11, 2023, the Ministry of Environment, Urbanization, and Climate Change [announced](#) that the **unit cost** of buildings in the earthquake zone would be **6,825 TL for** apartment-style buildings. Later, **Ahmet Akin, the Deputy Chairman of the Republican People's Party**, [reported](#) that TOKI's tender prices for construction costs per square meter reached **as high as 18,000 TL**.

However, rising construction costs and economic [uncertainty](#) are causing concerns among recipients about the debts they will face. According to a [report](#) titled "**Sustainable**

Workforce Recovery in the Earthquake Region: Needs and Opportunities," published by the Economic Policy Research Foundation of Türkiye in July 2023, the reconstruction cost of the region could reach 150 billion USD over a five-year period.

Selected locations for residential reconstruction: Challenges and controversies

The construction sites for earthquake houses in the affected areas were [regulated](#) by **Presidential Decree No. 126**, published on February 24, 2023, which [expedited the process](#). According to this decree, construction could proceed in areas where soil surveys yielded suitable results. This decree also opened up pasture and forest lands for construction.

The decision to build a portion of the earthquake-resistant houses on agricultural lands [has ignited significant debates](#). In Hatay, lawsuits were filed against the decision to open up olive groves and agricultural lands for construction through "urgent expropriation" for earthquake houses. In a case initiated by the Hatay Bar Association in Dikmece Village, the court [issued](#) a stay of execution against the TOKI housing project. **Lawyer Ecevit Alkan from the Hatay Bar Association** stated to **Teyit** that despite claims of unsuitable soil conditions, TOKI houses were being built in places like Dikmece. According to Alkan, soil survey reports are insufficient for constructing houses on "living" lands like agricultural fields.

Inal Buyukasik, President of the UCTEA Chamber of Civil Engineering in Hatay, agrees on the need for quickly constructed permanent houses. He suggests that providing quality temporary shelters like prefabricated homes could have been an interim solution, allowing for comprehensive urban planning and creating earthquake-resistant areas.

Moreover, the construction sites for these houses are generally located far from city centers. In a region already grappling with transportation issues, the remote location of these new houses poses additional challenges.

Teyit's visit to the TOKI construction site in Samandağ

In January 2024, **Teyit**, with the support of the Buradayiz Hatay Association, visited the ongoing TOKI housing construction in Samandağ, one of the most affected districts. Access to the [construction site](#) in Hıdırbey Neighborhood was difficult due to damaged and muddy roads.

According to information from site officials and shared by the [Hatay Governorship](#), the Hıdırbey TOKI Disaster Housing Units consist of 73 blocks and 424 apartments. [TOKI data](#) shows that 11% of the construction is complete. Teyit's observations on-site confirmed that only four buildings are currently rising in the construction area.

The houses are scheduled to be completed by August 14, 2024. However, site officials indicated to Teyit that the completion might be delayed by three months, as the current muddy and challenging working conditions of the ground are hampering progress.

A notable concern in the area is the surrounding orange trees. The impact of the construction activities on these trees remains uncertain.

Another option: The 'On-Site Transformation Project'

In addition to the houses built by TOKI, the Ministry of Environment, Urbanization and Climate Change has [initiated](#) the "On-Site Transformation Project" in earthquake zones. This project offers [loan](#) and [grant support](#) to citizens **who want to rebuild their homes and businesses in the same location.**

To benefit from this project, [participants must relinquish their rights](#) to TOKI houses. As of February 2024, the Ministry [announced](#) that **over 255,000 housing applications** were made for the On-Site Transformation Project.

The project stipulates that the new construction of houses or businesses should be on ground without liquefaction potential, and away from stream beds or fault lines. However, some experts suggest that this project [is being applied](#) even in areas unsuitable for construction, where the earthquake caused destruction.

Locals in the region question the appropriateness of implementing this project on the grounds that experienced destruction and demolitions. [Concerns](#) arise that not every homeowner will have equal access to resources in these constructions, potentially leading to disputes.

"Reserve areas" for on-site transformation

The Ministry reports that the construction of 207,000 houses is [underway](#) in "reserve areas," with construction already started on 50,000 of these.

Following a November 9 [amendment](#) to 6306 '[Law](#) on the Transformation of Areas under Disaster Risk', locations designated as "reserve areas" were expanded. This law aims for urban transformation, enabling existing settlements to be declared as reserve areas and [rebuilt](#).

Ultimately, those who can afford the resulting costs will regain ownership of their property; those who cannot [will lose their rights](#). The difference in value between the demolished structures and new houses will be settled by a debt payment method. The government's grant support of 750,000 TL only covers about half of the average construction [cost](#).

In Hatay, where the law was first implemented, 28 neighborhoods and a 207-hectare area, including specific neighborhoods in Defne, Antakya, and Samandağ, [have been declared reserve areas](#), transferring their deeds to the Treasury.

During **Teyit's** visit to Hatay in January 2024, in collaboration with the Buradayiz Hatay Association, the reserve areas in Armutlu and Elektrik neighborhoods undergoing on-site transformation were observed. The Armutlu neighborhood in Defne district, heavily damaged by the earthquake, is situated near the Asi River, with its underground water level close to the surface.

Photo

Defne district, Armutlu neighborhood, is built in an area traversed by the Asi River.

A concerted effort is underway to rebuild cities through on-site transformations. **Teyit** observed rapid work by heavy machinery in the Armutlu and Elektrik neighborhoods. Partial rubble removal and ongoing excavation indicate the commencement of new construction.

Teyit consulted Inal Buyukasik, President of the UCTEA Chamber of Civil Engineering in Hatay, particularly about the feasibility of on-site transformation in Armutlu, close to the Asi River, and heavily impacted by the earthquake. According to Buyukasik, plans include soil reinforcement for this area.

Many buildings in this region have minor to moderate damage. Residents fear losing their rights with the declaration of "reserve areas." The Hatay Bar Association [warns](#) that over 50,000 people face the risk of losing property rights. Newly added neighborhoods to the reserve area category [suggest](#) that even structurally sound buildings could be demolished for new constructions. The Directorate General for Infrastructure and Urban Transformation Services, overseen by the Ministry, can co-own constructions funded by [public finance](#).

Hüseyin Cihat Acıkalın, President of the Hatay Bar Association, points out to **Teyit** that property rights, next to the right to life, are protected under international treaties and the constitution, but the reserve area declaration is seen as an "intervention in property rights".

In conclusion, while efforts to rebuild earthquake zones continue, **only 11%** of the housing need has been met in the first year, indicating a shortfall in meeting the demands. Furthermore, the "On-Site Transformation Project" and its application in reserve areas remain contentious issues.

Summary

- President Erdoğan promised in March 2023 to deliver 319,000 houses within a year, with a total of 650,000 houses and village homes to be constructed.

- Later, the government announced the construction of 680,000 houses.
- As of February 8, 2024, 36,336 houses were delivered in Hatay, Gaziantep, Adiyaman, and Kahramanmaraş.
- By March 2024, 75,364 houses are planned to be delivered, fulfilling only 24% of the annual promise.
- The 75,364 houses meet only 11% of the total housing need.
- The Ministry's alternative to house construction is the "On-Site Transformation Project," offering financial support to citizens for rebuilding in the same location with the demolished buildings.
- However, the implementation of this project in the areas affected by the earthquake has led to criticisms. In Hatay, the project is also being implemented in areas declared as "reserve zones."
- The amendment made on November 9 to Law No. 6306 on the Transformation of Areas Under Disaster Risk has paved the way for designating certain locations as "reserve areas." Accordingly, the state can now declare existing settlements as "reserve areas" and construct new buildings in their place.