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# UN WOMEN BRIEF ON EARTHQUAKES IN TÜRKİYE: IMPACTS AND PRIORITIES FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS

## Background

On February 6th, 2023, Türkiye was struck by two significant earthquakes that resulted in widespread devastation in the Southeast region of the country. Thousands of aftershocks followed. The earthquake affected 11 provinces with a population of around 14 million (16.4% of the total population of the country). Over 48,000 people lost their lives, and over 100,000 have been injured making it the deadliest such disaster since the country's founding 100 years ago and one of the deadliest worldwide during this century. Thousands of buildings have suffered serious damage, including schools and health care facilities and other public infrastructure such as roads, airport, ports, oil terminals, electricity lines, water provision and sewage. Estimated 2.7 million people have left the affected region and migrated to other parts of the country.

## Position of women in the affected region before the earthquake

Women and girls make up half of the population of the affected 11 provinces. 54% of the population over 60 years old are women,

and 8% of the 3.5 million households are **female-headed** with at least one child.<sup>1</sup> Prior to the earthquakes, an estimated 7.9 percent of females and 5.9 per cent of males in Türkiye were living with **disabilities**. However, this figure is expected to rise significantly in the aftermath of the disaster. As Türkiye hosts the largest **refugee** population in the world, around 1.74 million refugees (Syrians under Temporary Protection and International Protection Applicants and Status holders) live in the 11 provinces impacted by the earthquakes approximately half of which are women and girls.<sup>2</sup>

Women are underrepresented in **political decision making** in the affected provinces – only 2 out of 135 mayors (11 provincial and 124 district) are women. The ratio of women municipal councilors is around 10%.<sup>3</sup> Women's **labor force participation rate** in the affected region is lower than the rate in in Türkiye as a whole, and there is a significant gender gap between women

1 Turkish Statistical Institute, The Results of Address Based Population Registration System, 2022 and Türkiye Family Structure Survey, 2021

2 [Türkiye Earthquakes Flash Appeal, 2023](#)

3 Women in Türkiye, Ministry of Family and Social Service General Directorate on the Status of Women, 2021

and men in labour force participation and employment.<sup>4</sup> 6 of the 11 affected provinces were among the lowest female employment rated provinces across Türkiye.<sup>5</sup> Lower access to labor force and employment indicates lack of social security and benefits. Ministry of Education data reveals that institutional childcare services are limited in the region. This coupled with traditional gender norms indicate high involvement of women in **unpaid care and domestic work**. Agriculture is one of the main sectors in the region. Almost all women employed in the **agriculture** sector work as unpaid family worker (78.7%; 20.2% for men), thus are deprived of social security benefits, health insurance, trade union rights and subject to poor working conditions and low wages.<sup>6</sup>

According to the latest official data on **domestic violence against women**, the affected regions have a relatively lower rate of reporting to authorities and higher level of acceptance in case of violence.<sup>7</sup> Among the 3 regions where the earthquake-affected provinces are dispersed, the rate of early marriages is significantly above the national average.<sup>8</sup> Six provinces affected by the earthquake (Kahramanmaraş, Hatay, Gaziantep, Diyarbakır, Kilis and Şanlıurfa) are among the 21 provinces with the highest rates of marriages below 18 years of age and are prioritized by Ministry of Family and Social Services efforts to combat early marriages through local action plans. In the affected provinces, **divorce, alimony and custody** are among the most common cases before family courts<sup>9</sup>, which are inherently considered as violence against women (VAW) risks.<sup>10</sup> Criminal courts in five of the affected provinces (Adana, Diyarbakır, Gaziantep, Malatya and Şanlıurfa) adjudicate higher proportions of **sexual assault, sexual harassment and child sexual abuse** cases, compared to other provinces in their regions.<sup>11</sup> This data is indicating a pressing need for strong focus on prevention, risk mitigation and support services for different forms of violence against women and girls (VAWG) in the response.



Many has left the cities affected by the earthquake to be settled in other provinces. Credit: UN Women/Özge Ergin.

## Impacts, needs and priorities of women and girls

UN Women has carried out a number of assessments and consultations since the earthquakes as well as contributed to UN inter-agency assessments. The results reveal that women and girls have been affected in severe ways, and there is a real risk of deepening of the pre-existing inequalities. Women and girls face particular **challenges in term of access to essential services and vital relief items, to remain safe and to cover their basic needs for appropriate shelter, hygiene and sanitation, healthcare and protection**. This is particularly acute for women with specific needs such as those who are pregnant and breastfeeding, who are single and single mothers, with disabilities or from rural areas.

**Women's and girls' care and domestic work responsibilities have increased significantly**, due to both increased demand for care of children, elderly and disabled people (including injured and newly disabled people) and domestic work (already disproportionately performed by women prior to the disaster)) as well as decrease on the supply side, with damaged/closed schools and hospitals and limited care services (already limited to begin with). The nature of this work has also changed due to the psychological impacts of the earthquake on children and adults, as well as the limitations in equipment and facilities needed to perform household tasks (such as laundry machines and cooking equipment).



Having more female aid workers and frontline responders on the ground is critical. Credit: Milliyet/Ercan Arslan.

It was also found as essential to ensure that women are assisted by other women in a way that is sensitive to their specific circumstances, experiences, and gender roles. Otherwise, women

4 Turkish Statistical Institute, Labour Force Statistics, 2021

5 Diyarbakır, Gaziantep, Adıyaman, Kilis, Malatya, Elazığ - Turkish Statistical Institute, Women in Statistics Report, 2022

6 Diyarbakır, Gaziantep, Adıyaman, Kilis, Malatya, Elazığ - Turkish Statistical Institute, Women in Statistics Report, 2022

7 Turkish Statistical Institute, Labour Force Statistics, 2021

8 Whereas the national average for marriages before 18 is 3.9 %, it is 21.1 % in Central Asia Anatolia with 2 earthquake-affected provinces (Elazığ and Malatya), 18.8 % in Southeast Anatolia with 5 earthquake-affected provinces (Adıyaman, Diyarbakır, Gaziantep, Kilis and Şanlıurfa) and 14.6 % in Mediterranean with 4 earthquake-affected provinces (Adana, Hatay, Kahramanmara and Osmaniye)

9 Ministry of Justice, Directorate General of Judicial Record and Statistics, Judicial Statistics 2021, p. 60, 62.

10 Ministry of Justice, Decree No. 154/2 on Prevention of Domestic Violence and Violence against Women, January 2023.

11 Ministry of Justice, Directorate General of Judicial Record and Statistics, Judicial Statistics 2021, p. 158-159.

are often not forthcoming about their own needs (and only express what is needed for their children and families), which risks their further exclusion and exposure to different risks. In this respect, having **more female aid workers and frontline responders** on the ground is critical, including channeling more funding and responsibilities for the response through local women's organizations.

Based on the joint *Multi-Sector* Initial Rapid Needs Assessment (MIRA)<sup>12</sup> conducted on February 18-24, the reported priority needs, both by female and male key informants (KIs) are: shelter, food security, NFIs, sanitation and hygiene. Overall across respondents, **female-headed households and lactating women** are among the groups most in need across the assessed districts. Concerns for privacy and safety for shelter and sanitation facilities and the emerging issue of sexual violence were reported in 42 of the 120 assessed districts. Based on MIRA as well as field observations and consultations with CSOs, displacement following the earthquakes is resulting in overcrowding, unsafe and unhygienic living conditions in reception centers and shelters, posing an increased risk for women and girls, particularly with regards to unwanted pregnancies, heightened risk for sexually transmitted infections, and violence. Case management support to women and girls has been severely disrupted due to the earthquakes and violence monitoring and prevention centers are overwhelmed with the crisis response. Female key informants in MIRA underlined the urgent need for privacy arrangements, gender-segregated space and proper lighting for shelter and sanitation facilities. Female respondents also highlight that people in their district require specific food items for infants (formula), sanitary pads to be included in standard hygiene kit distributions, maternal, sexual and reproductive health services as well as psychosocial support including specifically for children and survivors of traumatic events. Female KIs considered family, friends, and neighbours as a more trusted source of information than public officials. They prioritized the need for information on mental health and coping with the situation as well on rights and obligations. See Annex 1 for more detailed information on the needs identified by women in MIRA.



Women and children are amongst the most affected after the earthquakes in Türkiye. Photo: UN Women/ Nilüfer Baş.

12 MIRA is based on interviews conducted between 18 and 24 February with 466 key informants (KIs) (121 female, 342 male, 3 prefer not to say) in 120 districts within the 11 affected provinces. Only in 59 districts among 120, there were interviews with female KIs. <https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrjoiMzJlYUwNjctMGE2Yi00MmU5LWZyTctNDJiNmMyZGM5MzIzIiwidCl6ImEyYjUzYmU1LTczNGUtNGU2Yy1hYjBkLWQxODRmNjBmZDkxNyIjYmMiOjh9>

In addition, women tend to have fewer **income-generating opportunities** and thus experience increased risk of poverty. Due to relatively low women's employment prior to the earthquake, majority of women have to rely on men's income and social security status and perform unpaid house- and care-work activities. Future livelihood-focused interventions need to prioritize women from all segments, including rural women and those with disabilities, to ensure a more equal recovery. Moreover, women's businesses have suffered significant interruptions and losses. According to a rapid assessment of women entrepreneurs from the disaster area conducted by UN Women and the Women Entrepreneurs Association of Türkiye (KAGIDER)<sup>13</sup> 88% of the entrepreneurs reported that their businesses remain interrupted a month after the earthquake and 50% of them were not able to go back to economic activity due to various reasons including collapsed building and/or damaged equipment. Interviewed entrepreneurs identified the biggest needs as: access to financial resources in the form of grants (25%), human resources (18%) and equipment (16%). The majority (70%) highlighted the increased burden of care responsibilities after the earthquake for children, elderly and disabled people. Half of them asserted that they had products in stock - mainly in Textile (hand-made, gifts etc.) and Food sectors.

Consultations conducted by UN Women with **civil society organizations (CSOs)**, including women's CSOs and humanitarian CSOs as well as a rapid assessment of the impact of the earthquake on women's civil society organizations<sup>14</sup> confirm the above needs and point to additional ones. Specifically, these are:

- More than a month after the earthquake, basic humanitarian needs remain on a large scale and provision of aid remains vital, coupled with empowerment perspective and activities.
- A more nuanced approach to the needs of women is required. Needs of women in rural areas, adolescent girls, women with disabilities, single women and female headed families, pregnant women are in almost all cases neglected.
- CSOs report an increasing number of gender-based violence and harassment. The physical environment in temporary settlements does not correspond to the needs of women and girls; most of the time they are not sufficiently lit, communal spaces for women to socialize are either not present or sufficient. Safety is a concern for all women and girls but especially for single women and female-headed households.
- Psychosocial support for all disaster survivors including those who have been displaced, volunteers and professionals of CSOs who experience secondary trauma should be planned with a long-term perspective. CSOs' psychosocial support should be supported and not be limited to the earthquake

13 During 27 February – 8 March 2023, KAGIDER conducted phone interviews with 73 female entrepreneurs from the disaster area to identify their situation and needs after the disaster. The results will be made available through their website soon.

14 Following the earthquake, UN Women has organized 3 consultation meetings with CSOs including partner organizations and small grantees from various localities supported under its projects. UN Women also conducted an online survey with the participation of 67 CSOs focusing mostly on their response to the earthquake, their priorities and planned activities in medium and long term.

region only, as there is a significant number of persons that have relocated to other regions.

- Women's CSOs based in the region have been severely impacted with several organizations reporting loss of lives of members, injuries, building damage, missing members, and displacement.
- Most of the women's CSOs made significant adjustments on their operations and programs to respond to the current disaster. Their capacity has been stretched as their already limited staff and volunteers work around the clock to respond to the urgent needs of survivors. The most prominent adjustments which were done by CSOs, include increased coordination among CSOs for immediate support (65%); acquisition of materials for immediate support (52%); allocation of funds to new/other priorities (51%); providing remote support for beneficiaries (51%).
- The most prominent challenges faced by CSOs are: lack of funds, lack of supplies/ supply chain, lack of shelter, basic needs and facilities; lack of reliable data to shape programming; limited staff/volunteer pool to organize and implement tasks and transportation.
- CSOs expressed the need for more knowledge on how to communicate with earthquake survivors in a way that prevents secondary trauma. They also underlined language barriers in communication with women whose native language is not Turkish which requires additional translation support.
- CSOs reported challenges in terms of coordination among all active stakeholders in the field, including central and local public authorities and other CSOs. Mapping of service delivery and organizations is needed to prevent overlapping activities and services and for efficient use of funds.



Following the earthquakes, women's and girls' care and domestic work responsibilities have increased significantly. Credit: UN Women/ilkin Eskipehlivan.

Recognizing that female survivors experience disasters differently with pre-existing inequalities and vulnerabilities further exacerbated in emergencies, **the following recommended actions** have been identified based on available assessments and consultations (MIRA, consultations with government service providers at both central and local level, women's CSOs and women staff of humanitarian organizations, field observations):

- Overall, it is a must to use the post-disaster response and recovery to the crisis as an **opportunity to build back better in a way that is not only more resilient and greener but also more equal and based on participatory and inclusive principles, with women's voices and rights at the center.**
- It is vital that all response activities, regardless of location or sector, must consult women and girls in the design of interventions and ensure equal and needs-based access to information, services and goods, including for women with specific needs such as female-headed households, elderly women, women with disabilities, pregnant and lactating women.
- Immediate recommended actions across the sectors include: privacy arrangements and enhanced safety measures in shelters; gender-segregated bath and latrine spaces; proper lighting for shelter and sanitation facilities; establishment of women-friendly spaces; addressing the need for infant food in food distributions; inclusion of sanitary pads in standard hygiene kit distributions; provision of culturally appropriate clothing and underwear in different sizes as requested by women; provision of maternal, sexual, and reproductive health services; psychosocial support.
- Preventing and responding to all forms of violence against women and girls, early and forced marriages considering the increased risk of violence and disruption in usual service provision and referral systems. Safe spaces for women and girls are needed across the affected region.
- Ensure gender balance among humanitarians on the ground to be able to facilitate greater communication among the impacted women and humanitarian teams, and to be able to assess the needs of women more accurately, and to facilitate women's access to services.
- Ensuring participation of women leaders and women's organizations in all stages of the immediate response and longer-term recovery and reconstruction. This includes gender responsive temporary settlements and container cities to be designed with the participation of and in correspondence to the needs of women and girls, as well as longer-term reconstruction to be done in way that ensures equal participation of women and men in decision-making processes and in all stages of reconstruction.
- The recommendations for the EQ context include the preparation and dissemination of gender-sensitive crisis response action plans, increasing the number of female field workers and volunteers, and organizing right-based informative activities and group sessions.
- Ensuring women's access to cash assistance, funds, and economic opportunities. Rebuilding of women's livelihoods

should be a key priority with targeted support to women's cooperatives and businesses and catalyzing new employment and income generating opportunities for women. Every opportunity should be used to prioritize women-owned businesses and women cooperatives from the disaster area in procurement process of public and private organizations.

- Tailored psycho-social and well-being support not only for the earthquake survivors but also for service providers working in the region, including government staff and CSO staff and volunteers. Programs that target their well-being is essential to prevent burnout.
- Immediate and sustained institutional/core support to women's CSOs directly affected by the disaster to help with rebuilding of premises and infrastructure, staff support, and recruitment of new volunteers, among other needs. Flexible and sustained technical and financial support to women's CSOs (beyond those directly affected) to be able to respond to new and deepened challenges and risks and to engage in policy advocacy in relation to recovery planning and disaster risk management.
- Further support to local women community leaders and initiatives that support them, considering their critical role to reach out to women, especially those from specific groups like refugee women and female-headed households.
- An effective model for coordination at all levels among civil society, public institutions, private sector, international organizations and other stakeholders.



UN Women is actively working with partners on the ground against the devastating impacts of the earthquakes and launched a donation campaign to secure essential supplies for women, girls and their families. Credit: UN Women/Özge Ergin.

- Sensitization of humanitarian aid staff and the women and girl survivors on prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse.
- In-depth sectoral and thematic assessments must utilize inclusive methodologies ensuring gender parity and age representation of respondents and gender sensitive questions in the surveys as per [The Inter-Agency Standing Committee \(IASC\) Policy on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls \(GEEWG\) in Humanitarian Action](#).

## UN Women response

UN Women's response is based on the identified needs and is implemented in close coordination with the Government of Türkiye at central and local level, with civil society, private sector and other UN agencies. The response aims to address both immediate needs, risks and challenges faced by women as well as medium and longer-term needs for restoration of their livelihoods. It addresses women's rights to self-reliance, determination, protection, and agency, to mitigate the risk of widening gender gap. Underpinning all of UN Women's efforts is elevating women's role as leaders and as agents of change rather than beneficiaries of assistance, and advocating for their full participation in the humanitarian and recovery response which needs to be based on their own identified priorities and solutions. UN Women is working to achieve the following results:

- UN system-wide coordination and cooperation capacities for women's empowerment and gender equality in humanitarian action and in the recovery period are strengthened.
- Women and girls affected by the earthquake in selected provinces receive protection services in line with their rights, needs and priorities.
- Women and girls affected by the earthquake have the skills, knowledge and access to opportunities and resources for their livelihoods and leadership.

Visit our [website](#) for more information on UN Women's response and how to support us.

## Annex 1: Additional data from Joint Multi-Sector Initial Rapid Needs Assessment (MIRA) Report per sector:



UN Women is consulting with women humanitarian workers to better address the needs of women and girls affected by the earthquake. UN Women/ İlkin Eskişehvan.

- Among the most vulnerable groups identified are lactating women and female-headed households both by female and male KIs. In addition, female respondents highlight single women in their district as particularly at risk and in need of assistance.
- **Shelter:** Most urgent needs reported both by female and male key informants (KIs) are: additional tents, cash and items for privacy (such as locks, partitions, lights). Female key informants particularly highlighted the lack of bathing facilities, latrines, privacy and safety, and overall insufficient space within shelters in their district. Limited access to privacy in shelters also add to violence against women and girls risks in the settlements. According to an analysis conducted by IOM<sup>15</sup>, pregnant women (present in 39% of the assessed sites) are among the most common vulnerable groups who are sheltering in temporary settlements.
- **Food Security and Livelihoods:** Among female key informants, infant formula is also among the top food items needed in their district.
- **Non-Food Items:** Female respondents identify the same types of NFIs as needed in their respective district, however, women put a greater emphasis on the population's NFI needs in general. Even though sanitary pads are reported as 3rd NFI priority, during the consultations with NGO partners it was noted that women have reservation of sharing their NFI needs with male frontliners. Therefore, the need for sanitary pads for women and as well as the underwear needs might not be adequately captured in MIRA.
- **Water, Sanitation and Hygiene:** For sanitation facilities, the number one challenge cited by respondents is the lack of sufficient number of facilities due to overcrowding, followed by unhygienic conditions of facilities being the top concern for female key informants. This issue is further exacerbated by the lack of hygiene items. Overall data shows a significant

lack of gender-sensitive and accessible WASH facilities across all locations. Female KIs highlighted the lack of support for persons with disabilities in accessing water.

- **Protection:** Female respondents in 20 of the 59 districts in which female KIs were interviewed, highlight inter-household and intergroup tensions/conflicts as emerging protection issues. Increase in violence against women in earthquake-affected regions are reported in the by the women CSOs and humanitarian organizations. Overall protection concerns include: inability to access critical services, criminality, sexual violence, and discrimination in the access to humanitarian aid. Consultations by both UN Women and Protection Sector members, with women-led organizations as well as humanitarian organizations in the field suggest an increase in VAWG, particularly sexual violence (noted as 42 of the 120 assessed districts in MIRA findings), and a decrease in reporting rates. The disaster also disrupted existing case management and referral systems for VAWG, as service providers including Bar Associations (with 1 in every 15 lawyer directly or indirectly victimized by the earthquake)<sup>16</sup> and violence prevention and monitoring centers are heavily impacted and overwhelmed. Both VAWG survivors and responders have added psychosocial support needs.
- **Health:** The data show an overarching need for assistance to affected people to cope with the severe trauma experienced. Respondents particularly request support to help children cope with the trauma. While, top health-related challenges reported as 1) physical access constraints to health facilities, 2) long waiting times at facilities, and 3) lack of medicine; female respondents also highlight the need for first aid trauma care in their respective districts, pointing to women's additional responsibilities as caregivers. Comprehensive health service mapping, with specific focus on the needs of women and girls (for example for sexual and reproductive health care and care for survivors of violence against women and girls), will be required to understand the specific needs by district and concerned group.
- **Education:** Top priorities expressed by both female and male respondents across all affected areas is the need for psychosocial support for children and teachers, followed by the urgent need to repair damaged schools, ensure teachers' and children's safety and establishment of temporary learning spaces Ensuring children's psychological safety and continued access to quality education will be required. This will include preventing particular risks for girls such as early and forced marriage.
- **Access to Information:** Preferred source of information by female KIs was reported as family, friends and neighbours in the first place, rather than community leaders and government officials which are in the first place in male KI's responses. Obtaining information on getting psychosocial support, rights and obligations, and how to register for aid are reported as most useful information to receive by female KIs.

15 IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix. Rapid Site Assessment, findings from the 642 assessed sites as of 6 March 2023.

16 <https://www.barobirlik.org.tr/Haberler/deprem-bolgesinde-incelemelerde-bulunan-tbb-baskani-av-r-erinc-sagkan-ve-yonetim-kurulu-uyeleri-ta-83545>

UN Women Türkiye

Park Oran Ofis Turan Güneş Bulvarı No: 180Y/58

06450, Oran, Çankaya, Ankara Türkiye

[www.unwomen.org](http://www.unwomen.org)

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