



Information Note for CSW 68 Sessions through the Association for Struggle Against Sexual Violence

Systemic Challenges of Sexual Violence in Turkey: A Call for Inclusive Collaboration and Gender-Sensitive Disaster Management

Association for Struggle Against Sexual Violence (CŞMD) in Istanbul, Turkey has been conducting preventive-protective, awareness-raising, and advocacy activities, as well as post-sexual violence support and counseling since 2014. The aim is to reduce sexual/sexualized violence and its impact, and to transform rape culture into a culture of consent.

This fact sheet pertains to the February 6, 2023, earthquakes in Turkey and the resulting rights violations experienced by women, girls, LGBTIQ+ people, people living with HIV, migrants, and sex workers. The violations relate to social protection systems, access to public services, and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and empowerment of women and girls. These issues will be reviewed at CSW68.

1. Current Situation

Civil society organizations monitor rights violations in Turkey with limited resources and share the data obtained with the public. This is due to the fact that public institutions, including ministries, do not share data with each other or public. The Ministry of Family and Social Services has failed to establish rape crisis centers¹, sexual violence support and solidarity centers, which were committed to be established since 2016 and to include women and girls with disabilities and people subjected to human trafficking. This failure not only violates the rights of survivors of sexual violence but also hinders the achievements of gender equality.

Poverty is a harsh reality for many women, girls, and LGBTIQ+ individuals in Turkey. It directly limits their access to public services. In cases of domestic sexual abuse resulting from poverty, women may not report the perpetrator to judicial authorities if the perpetrator is a husband or other male

¹ Kadına Yönelik Şiddetle Mücadelede IV. Ulusal Eylem Planı (2021-2025), (ENG: IV. National Action Plan on Combating Violence against Women (2021-2025)), p.98. <https://www.aile.gov.tr/media/82082/kadina-yonelik-siddetle-mucadele-iv-ulusal-eylem-planı-2021-2025.pdf>

breadwinner, due to the insufficient financial assistance provided by the state to the woman or girl child. Additionally, the current government does not support women's employment. This situation forces women and girls to remain in their homes, where they are often subjected to violence. Vulnerable groups have limited access to prevention, intervention, and protection measures.

According to the poverty data of the Deep Poverty Network, an organization working in this field in Turkey, women living in poverty marry at a young age for economic reasons. They are unable to exercise their right to education, work due to caregiving responsibilities, access health services, contraceptives, and menstrual products, and seek justice when subjected to violence.²

2. A Year After the February 6, 2023, Earthquakes

On February 6 and 20, 2023, two earthquakes centered in Kahramanmaraş affected ten provinces. While the full extent of the damage is not yet clear due to the lack of transparent and disaggregated data sharing by public institutions, some information has been made available. The earthquakes resulted in violations of several human rights, including the right to life, shelter, non-discrimination, access to health services, and access to goods and services.

2.1. Data Announced by Government Agencies³

On February 6, 2023, the Pazarcık (Mw: 7.7) and Elbistan (Mw: 7.6) earthquakes were strongly felt in Kahramanmaraş, Hatay, Adıyaman, Malatya, Gaziantep, Diyarbakır, Şanlıurfa, Kilis, Osmaniye, Adana and Elazığ. A state of emergency was declared in these provinces.

- 50,783⁴ people lost their lives and 115,353 people were injured due to the earthquake.
- The total population of these earthquake-affected provinces was 14,013,196 people in 2022. The population affected by the earthquake represents 16.4% of the country's total population.

² Derin Yoksulluk Ağı, Kadın Yoksulluğu Hakkında Bilgi Notu ve Talepler, (ENG: Research on Women's Poverty by Deep Poverty Network), <https://derinyoksullukagi.org/raporlar/kadin-yoksullugu-hakkinda-bilgi-notu-talepler/>

³ These data were obtained from the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Environment, Urbanization and Climate Change, AFAD and the Presidency of the Republic of Turkey, Presidency of Strategy and Budget.

⁴ After these data, Murat Kurum, former Minister of Environment, Urbanization, and Climate Change and current candidate from the government party in local elections in 2024, announced that the number of people who died was 150,000. <https://www.odatv.com/guncel/murat-kurum-kafalari-karistirdi-depremde-olu-sayisi-130-bin-120025316>

- About half of the Syrians in Turkey reside in the 11 provinces impacted by the earthquake, with 1,738,035 Syrians under temporary protection. The February 6 earthquakes claimed the lives of over 6,000 foreign nationals, mostly Syrians.
- The total economic cost of the earthquake is estimated to be around 2 trillion TL (74 billion USD). This figure is estimated to represent 9% of the national income in 2023.
- The most significant burden on the Turkish economy resulting from the earthquake was housing damage, which accounted for 54.9% (1,073.9 billion TL) of the total. The second largest damage item was the destruction of public infrastructure and service buildings (242.5 billion TL). Private sector damage, excluding houses, was another important factor, totaling 222.4 billion TL.
- The Ministry of Environment, Urbanization, and Climate Change conducted damage assessment studies and announced that 518,009 houses need to be demolished immediately, while 133,577 houses are moderately damaged, and 1,279,727 houses have minor damage.

Public institutions do not disclose data on the incidence of sexual/sexualized violence cases, shelter problems in the earthquake zone, the supply of sexual health products, access to clean water, the number of missing children, or the accessibility of support for people living with HIV, sex workers, and LGBTIQ+ people.

2.2. Field and Reporting Activities of Civil Society Organizations

2.2.1. Where are the donations collected from the public after the earthquake?

After the earthquake, an aid campaign called "Turkey One Heart" was organized for the earthquake survivors. The fact is that the funds of this campaign were not collected as conditional donations or aid, but as general donations. The lack of a legal requirement that these funds be spent on the earthquake made it difficult to track the money. It was reported that by December 2023, 85 billion of the 115 billion TL donated under the campaign had been collected and that 56 billion TL of the

collected donations had been used for the needs of disaster victims in the earthquake zone through the AFAD (Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency).

On February 2, 2024, Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya announced that a total of 106 billion 728 million TL had been transferred to the earthquake zone after the disaster and 128 billion and 949 million TL had been collected as part of the "Turkey One Heart" campaign. Stating that 79 billion and 263 million TL of these donations have been spent, Mr. Yerlikaya said the donation accounts are transparently monitored and announced every 15 days on AFAD's corporate website and social media accounts. Regarding the nature of the aid, he said that some donors have built container cities, some undertook the construction of permanent housing, and others sent trucks full of humanitarian aid materials.⁵

2.2.2. Status of Women and Girls

According to a field study conducted by Anka Producing Women's Association with women and girls who had to migrate to Mersin after the earthquake⁶, more than 400,000 people initially arrived in Mersin after the February 6 Kahramanmaraş Earthquake, and nearly 180,000 people continued to live in Mersin in the months following the earthquake. At that time, 10,808 of these people were placed in KYK (Credit and Dormitories Institution) dormitories; 5,27 in hostels affiliated with the Directorate of National Education; 2,703 in public guesthouses; 3,118 in youth camps; 43,840 in hotels and apartments; 65,416 in temporary housing; and the rest in municipal fair and cultural centers, neighborhood houses, condolence houses, and djemevis.

Violations of the rights of women, girls, and LGBTIQ+ persons stemming from gender inequality continue to increase in temporary shelters after the earthquake. While the risk of being exposed to violence and sexual abuse increases, the problems in accessing preventive and protective support and sexual and reproductive health services deepen. As a result of the severe and multiple traumas caused by disasters and crises, women push their own needs and experiences related to their

⁵ Uluslararası Şeffaflık Derneği, 6 Şubat Deprem Raporu: Kurumlar, Usulsüzlükler ve Şeffaflık, (ENG: International Transparency Association, Report on Institutions, Irregularities and Transparency after 6 February Earthquake), <https://seffaflik.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/6-Subat-Deprem-Raporu-Kurumlar-Usulsuzlukler-ve-Seffaflik-1.pdf>

⁶ <https://cisuplatform.org.tr/depremden-etkilenernek-mersine-gelen-kadin-ve-kiz-cocuklarinin-cinsel-saglik-ve-ureme-sagligi-hakkina-erisimi/>

traumas into the background and continue to maintain the roles imposed in the family and society, such as caring for family, spouse, elderly, sick and disabled relatives.

A two-month field study conducted by the Anka Producing Women's Association to identify the sexual and reproductive health (SRH) problems, psychological effects on women, and violations of their rights experienced by women aged 15 and older who were forced to come to Mersin and live in collective spaces after the earthquake revealed that similar problems occurred in all the shelters.

There is no special mechanism or center where women and girls who have been subjected to violence, especially sexual violence, sexual abuse, and psychological violence, and who are facing violations of their rights, can turn to. Women declare that they do not want to have sexual intercourse with their husbands because they do not feel psychologically and physically comfortable, but this is met with cold attitudes and psychological violence by their husbands. Marital rape is very common.

In the earthquake report published by the KAOS GL and May 17 associations, the observations of civil society workers who were on the ground are as follows.

“Cases of sexual violence have increased significantly. Law enforcement officers have become the dominant authority in the area, with unrestricted access to tents. During my time there, there was no support for those who had experienced sexual violence while struggling for basic necessities. Men were present everywhere, and there were also instances of relatives choosing to stay in adjacent tents. In cases of sexual violence, victims often face difficulty reporting the perpetrator, especially if they are related to them. This is particularly true when the perpetrator is a family member such as a husband's brother or father. Victims may find it challenging to speak out about the abuse, even to their families.”

(A.A., Finance Specialist, NGO Worker)⁷

Cases of sexual, economic, physical, and psychological abuse of children through marriage have increased. Girls are more vulnerable to sexual violence and abuse while staying in temporary shelters

⁷ Güzel, Defne (2023), “Bu Konu Her Zaman Kriz”: 6 Şubat Depremlerinin LGBTİ+’lara Etkileri, p. 25, (ENG: “This Issue is Always a Crisis”: February 6 Earthquakes’ Impact on LGBTI+s), <https://kaosgldernegi.org/images/library/deprem-raporu.pdf>

after the earthquake. Girls who cannot continue their education are more likely to be forced to marry due to pressure and coercion under the belief that they will be safe. Similarly, women and girls who lost relatives during the earthquake have been observed to be coerced into marriages due to financial concerns and fear of abuse, in an attempt to 'protect themselves' or due to pressure from family elders. This has made it challenging for girls to access health services, education, social services, and community-based support that safeguard them from early marriage.

According to MEDAK and HERA Digital Health Foundation's report on sexual and reproductive health⁸, women often refrain reporting domestic violence due to cultural norms. This highlights the need for increased efforts to address the root causes of domestic violence and to collaborate more closely with social services and social scientists. In container camps transformed into temporary settlements, vulnerable groups such as women, youth, LGBTIQ+ individuals, people living with HIV, children, the elderly, persons with disabilities, and sex workers are at risk of gender-based violence. Crowded living conditions, insecurity, and poor hygiene, particularly unsafe and unhygienic toilets for women, increase the risk of gender-based violence. Children living in temporary settlements are at an increased risk of experiencing marital abuse. This is due to their lack of education and protection, which makes them more vulnerable to such risks.

According to the report of Mor Çatı (Purple Roof) Women's Shelter Foundation⁹, one of the civil society organizations that visited the area, accessing mechanisms to combat violence in the region has become even more difficult. AFAD officials and other public officials in the tent areas may not have the necessary information to assist women who are victims of male violence. They may not know how to direct women to the institutions they urgently need to reach. It is important to provide these officials with the necessary information to better assist victims of violence. Although two weeks had passed since the first earthquake, the Foundation staff found that the public officials they spoke with were unsure about what actions were necessary or how to follow standard or disaster-specific

⁸ <https://cisuplatform.org.tr/medak-ve-hera-dijital-saglik-vakfi-tarafindan-turkiyede-depremden-etkilenen-illerde-cinsel-saglik-ve-ureme-sagligi-durum-degerlendirme-raporu-2-yayinlandi/>

⁹ Mor Çatı Kadın Sığınma Vakfı (2023), Depremden Etkilenen Bölgede Kadına Yönelik Şiddetle Mücadele Mekanizmaları, (ENG: Purple Roof Women's Shelter Foundation, Mechanisms for Combating Violence Against Women in the Earthquake-Affected Region), <https://morcati.org.tr/izleme-raporlari/depremden-etkilenen-bolgede-kadina-yonelik-siddetle-mucadele-mekanizmalari/>

procedures. While each official emphasized their commitment to taking necessary action, they lacked knowledge about what that action should be.

During crises such as earthquakes, women face various risks related to their sexual and reproductive health. These risks include limited access to sexual health services, increased incidence of genital infections and other diseases due to poor hygiene conditions, difficulty in accessing contraceptives, inability to follow up on pregnancy, increased risk of miscarriage and premature birth, menstrual irregularities, and limited access to abortion services. This earthquake in Turkey has resulted in the realization of all these risks.

The number of women and children who have been subjected to gender-based violence in dozens of provinces, districts, and villages is still unknown. They have been left unprotected for days without electricity, communication infrastructure, and safe shelter.

2.2.3. Situation of Migrants

The Migration Research Association's situation assessment report on earthquakes¹⁰ indicates that the provinces with the highest concentration of refugee and migrant populations experienced the most severe effects of the earthquake. Official data shows that 1,738,035 Syrians under Temporary Protection Status (TPS) live in the region, which accounts for 49.64% of all Syrians with TPS in Turkey.¹¹ Nearly half of the Syrians registered with the TPS in Turkey were directly impacted by the earthquake. However, reports by bar associations, civil society organizations, and interviews conducted for this research show that since the earthquake, the Syrian population has been rendered invisible and subjected to serious discrimination in the delivery of emergency aid. Emergency humanitarian assistance is not provided to Syrians in a non-discriminatory and impartial manner.¹² This discriminatory behavior is not limited to official institutions such as AFAD and the Red Crescent, but also extends to civil administration and local governments.

¹⁰<https://gocarastirmalaridernegi.org/attachments/article/311/G%C3%B6%C3%A7menlerin%20Deprem%20Durum%20Tespit%20Raporu.pdf>

¹¹ Directorate of Migration Management. "Distribution of Syrians under Temporary Protection by Province". Available at <https://www.goc.gov.tr/gecici-koruma5638>

¹² Mülteci-Der. February 13, 2023. "Press Release: Attitudes Towards Earthquake Refugees in Disaster are Worrisome!".

For those who remain in cities affected by earthquakes, access to shelter, hygiene, clean water, and psychosocial support remains urgent. Despite these challenges, it was stated that people who continue to stay or are forced to stay in the earthquake zone "have no other place to go or are waiting for their bodies or valuables amidst the rubble". In the earthquake zone, adult men often choose to return to assist with tasks such as relocating women, children, and elderly family members to other cities, typically to stay with relatives. They may also work, wait by the rubble, or protect valuables buried under the debris.

2.2.4. Situation of LGBTIQ+ Individuals, People Living with HIV, and Sex Workers

The EŞİK Platform¹³ of 350 women's and LGBTIQ+ organizations in Turkey, along with the KAOS GL and 17 May Associations¹⁴, and our association¹⁵ have reported that LGBTIQ+ people are facing critical challenges in accessing health services, adequate housing, employment, education, social security, information and communication technologies, and justice.¹⁶ Individuals who openly identified as gay refrained from seeking assistance from help centers due to concerns of discrimination and mistreatment.¹⁷ As a result, many were forced to leave their city of residence.¹⁸ Those who were unable to leave were excluded from food queues and denied entry into tent cities, leaving them with no choice but to seek shelter in dilapidated buildings that were at risk of collapsing.¹⁹ During EŞİK meetings, volunteers expressed concerns about the impact of homophobia and transphobia in two year leading up to the disaster. They also noted that the presence of cult organizations contracted by AFAD in disaster areas created fear:

¹³ https://esik.org.tr/s/2547/i/ESIK_DepremRaporu_TCE_BakisAcisindan_GelecegeNotlar.pdf

¹⁴ Güzel, Defne (2023), "Bu Konu Her Zaman Kriz": 6 Şubat Depremlerinin LGBTi+'lara Etkileri, p. 25, (ENG: "This Issue is Always a Crisis": February 6 Earthquakes' Impact on LGBTi+s), <https://kaosglderneqi.org/images/library/deprem-raporu.pdf>

¹⁵ <https://cinselsiddetlemucadele.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Hatay-Rapor.pdf>

¹⁶ How will the problems of LGBTi+ earthquake victims be solved? There are no tents, houses or food: There is solidarity, struggle, Bianet, February 25, 2023, <https://m.bianet.org/biamag/diger/274772-cadir-ev-gida-yok-dayanisma-mucadele-var>

¹⁷ February 14, 2023, <https://kaosgl.org/haber/marasli-trans-kadin-depremede-ece-sana-gucleri-yetiyor>

¹⁸ Kadın İşçi, March 10, 2023, <https://www.kadinisci.org/guncel/depremden-kurtulan-lgbtiller-katmerli-ayrimcilikla-bogusuyor>

¹⁹ Evrensel, February 15, 2023, <https://ekmekvegul.net/gundem/depremin-ardindan-ayrimcilik-buyuyor-depremede-lgbtiler-neler-yasiyor>

"The challenges encountered by LGBTIQ+ individuals in the earthquake-affected region begin with obtaining basic necessities such as food and shelter. Our trans friends with open identities, particularly trans women, report difficulties in accessing aid trucks and distribution centers. In addition to the earthquake, they are also at risk of experiencing further violence in these areas."²⁰

In shelters, only a limited variety of medicines can be provided. PReP²¹ medicines that prevent HIV transmission, HIV medicines, ART²², and hormones that are vital for the transition process of trans individuals cannot be provided. It has been observed that health personnel may not be able to meet the unique needs of LGBTIQ+ individuals or may not have the necessary awareness to refer them to appropriate units. Access to healthcare is problematic for those in need, as only painkillers are provided for dental health problems and the social service unit is searching for a pharmacy on call for scabies. Psychosocial support tents were not available in every shelter, and in tent cities where they were provided, accessing personnel was difficult. LGBTIQ+ individuals faced challenges accessing food areas due to a lack of measures to prevent stampedes in temporary shelters. Additionally, they encountered difficulties meeting their restroom needs as access to available toilets was limited to mosque facilities, which were often overcrowded. The hygiene kits only included diapers and menstrual hygiene products, which resulted in the neglect of hygiene and self-care needs of LGBTIQ+ individuals.²³

To assist LGBTIQ+ people who were unable to obtain necessary support following the earthquake, a support network was created with the help of employees from various civil society organizations working in this field.²⁴

Those living with HIV encountered challenges in obtaining medication after the earthquake, and individuals who were at risk of exposure were unable to receive an HIV test. Önder Bora, an activist

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ It is a medicine taken before sexual contact to reduce the risk of HIV transmission.

²² ART has led to a reduction in HIV-related morbidity and mortality in every country. It can also stop HIV transmission.

²³ Temporary Shelters After Earthquake <https://bianet.org/haber/depremde-hayatta-kalan-lgbti-lar-raporu-yayinlandi-275492>

²⁴ Earthquake Solidarity Founded, <https://bianet.org/haber/lubunya-deprem-dayanismasi-kuruldu-yalniz-degilsin-lubunya-274124>

from the Pozitif-iz Association, stated that people living with HIV faced challenges following the earthquake because hospitals in many cities were unable to provide services, and health centers were destroyed:²⁵

"In the initial days, accessing medicine was a challenge. Some individuals' medication was buried under the debris. People living with HIV were unable to attend routine check-ups during this time. Due to the need to reside with numerous individuals in tents or other communal areas, the confidentiality of those people was compromised. Concealing their diagnosis and medication became more difficult. The use of medication has become increasingly challenging and maintaining medication in optimal conditions had been impossible due to weather and living conditions."

Sex workers, especially trans women, were either denied access to shelters or forced to live in unsafe environments, leaving them vulnerable to threats. Additionally, the earthquake left sex workers in a precarious economic situation, forcing them to work under difficult conditions. Despite the right to shelter, sex workers were unable to access equal rights.

2.2.5. Human Rights Violations During the Intervention Process

During the disaster period, the relationship between the conservative policies implemented by the state and various religious organizations and communities not under state supervision was brought to the forefront, particularly regarding children. The Directorate of Religious Affairs has a budget 4.5 times²⁶ larger than AFAD²⁷, a state institution tasked with disaster response. This Directorate issued a fatwa²⁸ stating that there is no obstacle to marriage between earthquake victims' children and their adopters, even though this contradicts the Turkish Civil Code. State institutions have not taken any legal action regarding this situation. Additionally, two civil society organizations filed a criminal complaint regarding the fate of approximately 60 children in the earthquake zone who were placed in community homes. The Ministry of Family and Social Services confirmed that the children

²⁵ Problems for people living with HIV, <https://9koy.org/deprem-hiv-pozitif-bireyleri-de-vurdu.html>

²⁶ <https://www.dogrulukpayi.com/dogruluk-kontrolu/diyanet-isleri-baskanligi-nin-2023-icin-ongorulen-butcesi-35-milyar-910-milyon-653-bin-tl-mi>

²⁷ <https://www.sozcu.com.tr/2023/ekonomi/diyanetin-butcesi-afadin-4-5-kati-7589028/>

²⁸ <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/siyaset/diyanetin-evlatlik-aciklamasina-ilahiyatcilerden-sert-tepki-2053618>

were taken in by religious foundations.²⁹

Turkey is known for its high levels of poverty. During disasters, the most vulnerable groups, who are at the bottom of the social hierarchy and already disadvantaged, face even greater challenges. In the disaster area, discrimination is particularly prevalent against women, refugees, children, and LGBTIQ+ people. This discrimination puts women and girl refugees at an increased risk of violence and abuse. Even a Syrian child who was rescued from the rubble was found to have been subjected to abuse.³⁰ Limited access to rights has increased the risk of sexual violence against these groups in the region. In addition, the aid provided by the public was only coordinated through AFAD, and it did not reach the people in the earthquake zone even after two weeks³¹. It is known that only provincial municipalities close to the government were contacted by the Presidency in the first hours of the earthquake³². This violated the state's obligation to protect people without discrimination, and the government lost its legitimacy for civil society.

Public authorities failed to implement sufficient security measures in the disaster area to prevent cases of sexual violence.

3. Our Demands and Suggestions

- a) The Turkish government should promptly provide transparent, sourced, and disaggregated data on all the issues mentioned in this briefing paper.
- b) Given that Turkey is prone to earthquakes, the government should collaborate with civil society to implement gender-sensitive disaster planning.
- c) NGOs, public institutions, and local governments working in the field should prioritize the identification and monitoring of pregnant women and new mothers, as well as their needs, to ensure access to healthy food and services.

²⁹ <https://www.evrensel.net/haber/482693/bakanlik-depremzede-cocuklarin-ihh-mensubunun-evinde-oldugunu-dogruladi>

³⁰ <https://www.bianet.org/bianet/diger/274896-enkazdan-cikarilan-cocuga-hastanede-cinsel-istismar>

³¹ <https://www.diken.com.tr/17nci-gunde-kahramanmarasli-depremzede-cadir-bulamiyoruz/>

³² <https://www.yenicaggazetesi.com.tr/erdogan-deprem-olan-adana-hatay-ve-mersinin-chpli-belediyelerini-aramadi-626740h.htm>

- ç) Protection mechanisms should be developed for girls who are at higher risk of experiencing sexual abuse and violence, particularly through forced marriage during times of disaster and crisis. Safe environments should be provided for girls in these situations, where they are less likely to encounter perpetrators of violence. If necessary, they should also receive psychosocial support.
- d) People living with HIV should have anonymous access to medicines without fear of stigma or discrimination. Efforts should be made to ensure routine check-ups for these individuals.
- e) Humanitarian aid and support activities should be developed to be inclusive of LGBTIQ+ people, and safe and welcoming environments should be created for them while maintaining confidentiality.