

Earthquake Response: Recommendations Regarding Funding Syrian Women's Organisations

On February 6, the strongest earthquake in the region in a century struck north-west Syria and south-east Turkey. The humanitarian crisis is immense, with over 40 000 lives lost to date, and over 25 million people affected in total, including nine million in Syria alone. This enormous crisis hits as Syria is already experiencing the highest level of humanitarian needs since the conflict began, according to the UN.¹

It is crucial that the crisis response from the international community is gender sensitive, listens to the needs and recommendations from women's organisations on the ground, and provides urgent support for them to continue their work.

Current situation for women and girls, and women's organisations in Syria

Even before the earthquake, women's rights organisations in Syria were working in an extremely challenging environment. After 12 years of conflict, the population in Syria is extremely vulnerable. In north-west Syria 90% of people were living below the poverty line and relying on humanitarian assistance. Syria has the highest number of internally displaced people in the world.

Women and girls in Syria have been disproportionately impacted and impacted in specific ways. They are experiencing the double burden of paid and unpaid household-related care work, as well as increased risks of sexual and gender-based violence, food insecurity, and limited decision-making opportunities.²

The earthquake disaster duplicates this vulnerability and these risks, in addition to disrupting livelihoods, safe housing, healthcare and basic infrastructure systems, already under high pressure and with low delivery to vulnerable communities and individuals.

The delivery of humanitarian support and aid is highly affected by the conflict and is politicised by the parties of the war, making humanitarian support work sensitive and dangerous.

Partner organisations to The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation are highly affected by the immense devastation and have experienced both large material losses as well as loss of human life, as staff members and their families have died in the earthquake.

¹ https://www.unocha.org/story/nearly-9-million-people-syria-affected-türkiye-earthquake-un-launches-400-million-funding?_gl=1*kkIkgn*_ga*MTkwMjkwODY3MS4xNjc2NjM4MMDQx*_ga_E60ZNX2F68*MTY3NjYzODA0MS4xLjAuMTY3NjYzODA0MS42MC4wLjA.

² https://www.care-international.org/sites/default/files/2022-08/RGA_NW%20Syria_202208.pdf

Urgent support to Women's Organisations

In all kinds of crisis, women's organisations and women human rights defenders quickly organise to support their communities, and act as first responders to the humanitarian needs. Women's rights organisations usually tend to fill in the gaps of humanitarian agencies and reach vulnerable groups that are left out.

Despite this, humanitarian resources and funding rarely reach these actors, forcing them to use already scarce resources or paying out of their own pockets in responding to the immediate needs of vulnerable groups.

Local women's organisations are uniquely positioned to respond to the specific risks that women and girls in conflict and crisis are faced with. This includes heightened immediate risks of sexual violence and gender-based violence, as well as medium- and long-term risks of increased levels of forced and early marriage as the economic crisis that follows develops.

In response to the earthquake, donors, governments and international institutions need to ensure that their support to people affected by the earthquake is gender-sensitive and provides specific support to local women's organisations, who have expert contextual knowledge, trusted relationships with communities, and are best placed to understand and respond to needs on the ground. It is also important to recognise that the humanitarian and immediate support connects to peace building and the longer-term support in Syria.

Recommendations to the international community: emergency and support in response to the earthquake³

Who to fund:

- Prioritise flexible funding to local, women-led organisations, with flexible emergency funding as they adapt their work to quickly respond to community needs and to the gendered impact of this crisis.
- Increase long-term and flexible funding for women's organisations including through core support, enabling them to use funds in the way that best suits all the operations the organisation runs and respond to emerging crises with existing resources and maintain core functions of teams on the ground.

What to fund:

- Programming supporting women's healthcare needs, including reproductive health.
- Immediate psychosocial support specifically targeting women and children.

³ The recommendations in this brief are based on ongoing and previous dialogue with and input from Syrian organisations that The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation partners with.

- Mechanisms for prevention and response to sexual and gender-based violence, including integrating these into wider humanitarian responses.
- Resources to ensure that shelters for displaced people are set up in a way that is safe for women.
- Resources for self-care and mental health support among local women's organisations' staff, including those facing challenges from caring for children.
- Virtual and online tools for remote work, IT equipment and to cover digital security related costs for women's organisations.
- Costs for logistics, accommodation and/or transportation for women who jointly work to provide humanitarian aid and other types of support to displaced women, elderly and children.
- Programmes directed at strengthening women's economic security activities and livelihoods, including vocational trainings and programmes to increase women's food security.

How to fund:

- Ensure rapid response by greenlighting reallocation of existing funding for programming to pressing humanitarian needs, bypassing lengthy and bureaucratic procedures.
- Deploy and give access to emergency or rapid response funds to local and grassroots organisations.
- Convert/adapt existing grants into general operating grants that can cover core operations and staff salaries.
- Make grant and application processes more flexible and less burdensome, considering that Syrian organisations were already severely strained by the conflict before the earthquake.
- Support a more localised response through the establishment of local institutions, mainly women-led, that have values based on accountability and human rights. The local organisations should be entrusted in finding the solutions to local challenges, so they are able to continue the courageous work they are doing.
- Recognise and utilise women's organisations' leadership in planning and carrying out humanitarian support.
- Ensure that programmes are designed to reach female heads of household, Internally Displaced Persons, widows, adolescents and those with disabilities.

- Ensure all programming includes measures to minimise risks for increasing levels of gender-based violence.
- Earmark specific funds for local women-led organisations at pledging events, and work with local organisations, and international intermediaries with established long-term links with women's organisations, to identify the best modalities through which to disburse funds.
- Put monitoring mechanisms in place to ensure that funding reaches the people in need.

Political actions to take:

- Apply pressure to enable immediate access of humanitarian assistance to all affected areas.