

## 4 PRIORITY ACTIONS for Gender Equality in the Earthquake Humanitarian Response

The Regional Gender in Humanitarian Action (GiHA) Working Group for Arab States/MENA<sup>1</sup> is committed to ensure that gender equality is at the core of the humanitarian response to target the specific gender needs of different crisis-affected groups. This Advocacy Note highlights 4 Priority Actions to ensure that gender equality principles are consistently mainstreamed in the humanitarian response after the 7.8 magnitude earthquake which struck southern and central Türkiye and northern and western Syria on 6 of February 2023. According to the OCHA flash updates of NWS 10th April 2023, following the earthquake, 80,401 individuals living across 108 newly established reception centers are in need of a coordinated multi-sectoral response.

Prior to the earthquake, of North-West Syria's population of 4.6 million, about 3.4 million people are living in need, 2.8 million are IDPs and 1.7 million are school-aged children according to<sup>2</sup>. Around 80% of people in need are women (7 million) and children (46 million) living in displacement camps, of whom 7% are female heads of household.<sup>3</sup> The earthquake has aggravated the already dire condition of women and children in Syria. After 11 years of conflict, north-west Syria, which is home to more than 4.6 million people, continues to experience recurring waves of violence and forced displacement and disruptions in the provision of humanitarian assistance.<sup>4</sup>

For the purpose of this Advocacy note, the key priorities identified cover the earthquake response in North-West Syria. The priority actions have been formulated by the GiHA Working Group for Arab States/MENA and informed Syrian women-led organizations. The note also includes lessons learned from other natural disasters on how best to mainstream gender into a humanitarian response.<sup>5</sup> The priority actions are guided by the Policy on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls of the IASC Reference Group on Gender and Humanitarian Action (2017)<sup>6</sup> and its commitments towards the goals of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in humanitarian action.

### 1

Support women's organisations to engage in humanitarian response to the earthquake

Women and girls' voices and perspectives are crucial to effectively meet the needs of those who are the most affected by a humanitarian crisis. Women's organizations are in the best position to conduct consultations with women, adolescent girls and girls to inform humanitarian program design and monitoring mechanisms to advance the joint principle of accountability to affected populations (AAP) in humanitarian intervention. Women's organisations, with their ties to and trust within marginalised communities, can also identify the hardest-to-reach populations for the provision of essential gender-tailored humanitarian aid.

Recommendations to UN humanitarian actors and NGOs:

- › Ensure local women's organisations are actively engaged in cluster coordination mechanisms to inform on the gender needs and priorities in the humanitarian response to the earthquake in North-West Syria.
- › Engage organizations representing women in inter-agency needs assessments, development of joint strategies and work plans as well as monitoring and evaluation to ensure that the humanitarian response to the earthquake in North-West Syria is sensitive to the needs of these specific groups.
- › Facilitate a link between the humanitarian coordination system and women's organizations for risk communication and community engagement messaging on Protection, Food Security, Mental Health and Psychosocial Support, Nutrition, WASH and Health, among others.
- › Facilitate emergency funds to support women's organizations to continue their operations for the provision of humanitarian aid to the most affected population.
- › Commit and diversify adequate funds to women's organizations operating in North-West Syria, who are central to the earthquake response by providing essential and lifesaving services with limited resources to the most vulnerable groups.
- › Ensure that information on how to access humanitarian aid funds is available to local women's organizations.

## 2

Strengthen gender-responsive humanitarian data to inform response and emergency programme design

At the core of designing and delivering gender-responsive programming is having appropriate disaggregation of data and indicators to understand specific needs and impacts. The lack of gender integration in humanitarian response compromises its effectiveness and risks exacerbating pre-existing inequalities. Data generation on gender-age-disability must also inform the humanitarian response, taking the specific needs of different vulnerable or marginalised groups in mind. The knowledge, capacities and agency of women and girls, alongside those of men and boys, are recognised and strengthened in all humanitarian action, with equitable participation in planning and programming.<sup>7</sup>

Recommendations to UN humanitarian actors and NGOs:

- › Ensure all data related to the earthquake response is disaggregated by sex, age, and disability, and include gender/age/disability-sensitive indicators in emergency programme monitoring and evaluation plans.
- › Promote equal participation of women and girls in gender-responsive rapid need assessments, safety audits and community planning for humanitarian response.
- › Coordinate towards consensus in prioritizing gender-integrated assessments to inform gender responsive supply and emergency response design.
- › Review results of needs assessments for service delivery with women's organizations in order to validate and further analyze findings and suggest programme response.
- › Build programme design on the findings of multiagency coordinated gender analysis, including aspects around gender-specific protection concerns.
- › Guarantee gender balance and parity in needs assessment teams and amongst responders

## 3

Address the increased risks of gender-based violence in humanitarian settings

In the aftermath of an earthquake, risks of gender-based violence increase at the same time as core infrastructure and protection mechanisms are disrupted. The humanitarian response should assume that Gender-based Violence (GBV) is occurring and that there are increased risks.<sup>8</sup> Learning from previous earthquake highlights that demands on health services does not prioritize lifesaving GBV response in its triage. Widows and female divorcees, and particularly those who are also displaced, face some of the greatest challenges because they assume the role of head of household while having to confront discrimination, movement restrictions and increased protection risks.<sup>9</sup>

Recommendations to UN humanitarian actors, local and international NGOs:

- › Ensure women's and girls' safety and safe access to GBV services and assistance, with specific focus on displaced widows and female divorcees.
- › Ensure that referral pathways are disseminated, to contribute to the identification of barriers to care for displaced women and girls.
- › Promote safe and accessible women and girls-centered Complaint Feedback Mechanisms (CFM)
- › Integrate of GBV and SEA risk mitigation across the humanitarian response and emergency programming and ensure necessary actions are taken to mitigate, prevention, and respond to SEA risks in programmes and operations.
- › Promote accountability to uphold a zero-tolerance policy for SEA by humanitarian workers and ensure that necessary actions are taken to mitigate, prevention, and respond to risks in programmes and operations

## 4

Support women's and girls' safe access to essential services and humanitarian aid

Learning from previous earthquakes highlighted the risk of women and adolescent girls not being systematically consulted in the design of transit centers and/or temporary shelters.<sup>10</sup> As such, it is important to secure women's and girls' needs in the design of gender-tailored safe spaces, transit centres and temporary shelters. Challenges around ensuring safe and accessible toilets and washing facilities and the availability of appropriate and adequate hygiene or 'dignity' kits have been an ongoing focus across the region pre-earthquake, particularly for women and girls, people with disabilities and Syrian refugees.<sup>11</sup> In earthquake-affected areas in Syria, the severe strains on households' livelihoods and food security have led an increasing number to resort to negative coping mechanisms, such as taking children out of school, child labor, early and forced marriage.<sup>12</sup>

Recommendations to UN humanitarian actors and NGOs:

- › Ensure access to shelter and temporary safe spaces and that these are designed taking specific needs of women, girls and people living with disability in account and includes safe, segregated and lit WASH facilities.
- › Create education opportunities and recreational activities for displaced adolescents to prevent child marriage and child labour.
- › Ensure life-saving sexual and reproductive health support to pregnant women and girls.
- › Distribute Hygiene and Dignity Kits, including specific items for privacy/mobility such as scarves, as well as menstrual hygiene supplies, and ensure that these kits are informed via collective needs assessments.
- › Establishing gender-tailored humanitarian services in women's and girls' safe spaces in camp settings (e.g. GBV case management and referrals, psychosocial support, referral to sexual and reproductive health services, access to women's and girls' information on their human rights, access to safe cash for work for women-particularly for female headed marginalized households, etc.).
- › Ensure the locations of safe spaces are informed by consultations with women and girls themselves and in coordination with key stakeholders to ensure protection and service referrals.
- › Consider QR codes for any supply distribution to enable both tracing as well as outreach to solicit feedback and women-safe complaints on the supplies and aid distributed.<sup>13</sup>

# ENDNOTES

- 1 The Regional Gender in Humanitarian Action Working Group for Arab States/MENA is led by UN Women Regional Office for Arab States and co-led by OCHA. The Brief was prepared by the members of the Gender in Humanitarian Action Working Group for Arab States/MENA. The GiHA Working Group recognises the support of UN Women, UNICEF and Oxfam in drafting the Advocacy Note.
- 2 <https://www.unicef.org/media/112346/file/2022-HAC-Syrian-Arab-Republic.pdf>
- 3 UN OCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview (December 2022). Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/syrian-arab-republic-2023-humanitarian-needs-overview-december-2022>
- 4 <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/northwest-syria-factsheet-31-january-2022>
- 5 IASC, Gender Handbook for Humanitarian Action (2018). [https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/2018-iasc\\_gender\\_handbook\\_for\\_humanitarian\\_action\\_eng\\_0.pdf](https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/2018-iasc_gender_handbook_for_humanitarian_action_eng_0.pdf)
- 6 <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/policy-gender-equality-and-empowerment-women-and-girls-humanitarian-action-november#:~:text=This%20Policy%20is%20a%20framework,preparedness%2C%20response%20and%20recovery%20efforts.>
- 7 Policy on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls of the IASC Reference Group on Gender and Humanitarian Action (2017): <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/policy-gender-equality-and-empowerment-women-and-girls-humanitarian-action-november#:~:text=This%20Policy%20is%20a%20framework,preparedness%2C%20response%20and%20recovery%20efforts.>
- 8 For more information kindly see: <https://arabstates.unfpa.org/en/publications/overview-gender-based-violence-risks-2023-syria-earthquake-response-0https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/syria-earthquake-protection-briefing-note-donors-humanitarian-leadership-and-humanitarian-actors-16-march-2023>
- 9 CARE, Rapid Gender Analysis Policy Brief: Türkiye & Northwest Syria Earthquake Response (2023): <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/98892>
- 10 For more information kindly see: <https://gbvaor.net/sites/default/files/2020-02/IRC-WGSS-Toolkit-Eng.pdf>
- 11 CARE, Rapid Gender Analysis Policy Brief: Türkiye & Northwest Syria Earthquake Response (2023): <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/98892>
- 12 CARE, Rapid Gender Analysis Policy Brief: Türkiye & Northwest Syria Earthquake Response (2023): <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/98892>
- 13 A learning from the Nepal Earthquake by UNICEF innovation – the use of QR Codes – within the WASH Response (2021). <https://www.unicef.org/rosa/media/12986/file>