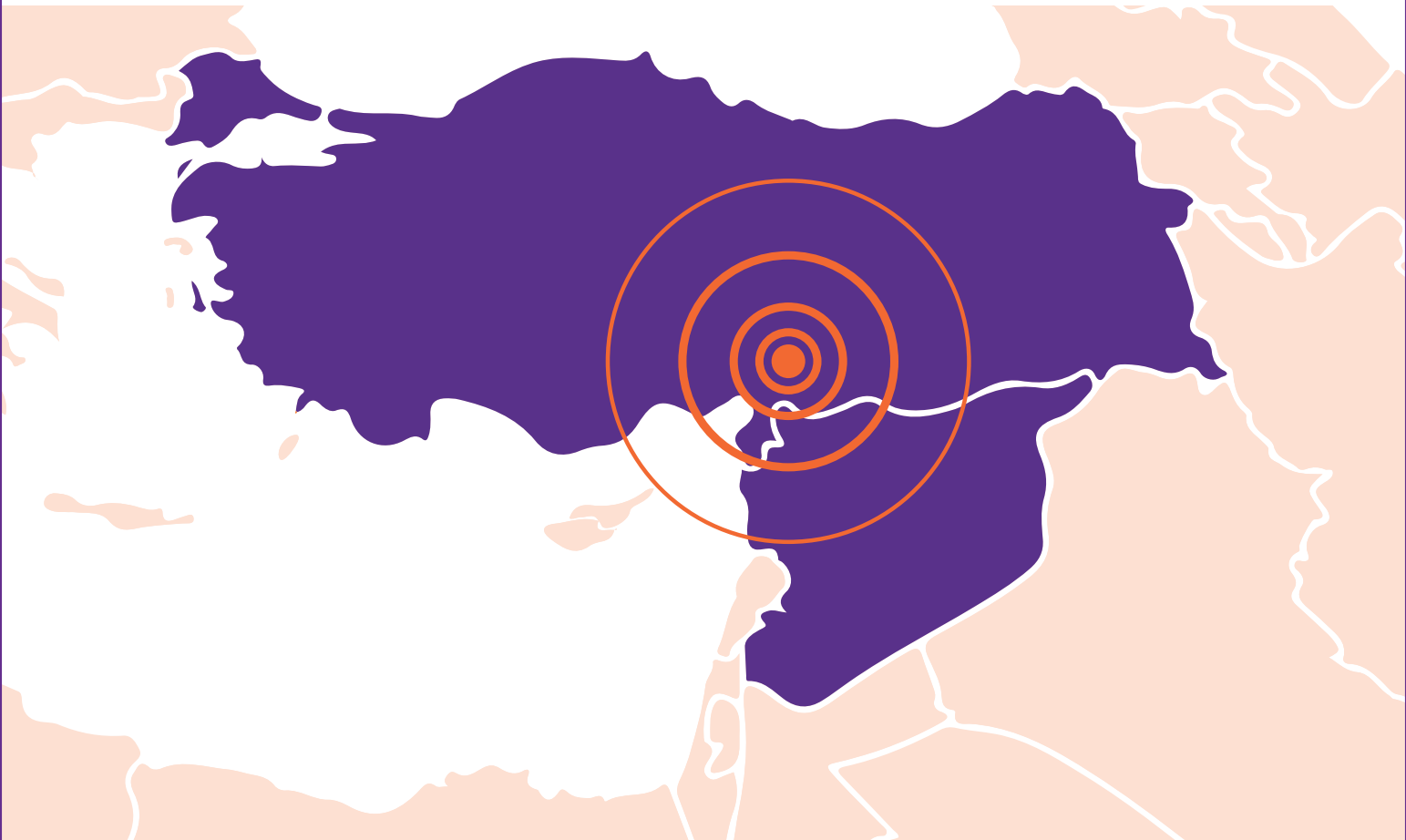


DEVASTATING EARTHQUAKE AFFECTS GEM'S BENEFICIARIES/TEAM IN SYRIA & TURKEY



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Guardians of Equality Movement

On 6 February at 4:17 AM, a -7.8magnitude earthquake centred in Gaziantep, Turkey heavily impacted Southern Turkey and Northern Syria. This earthquake was followed by other large-scale earthquakes throughout the day, causing more than 6,000 buildings to crumble. The aftermath of these earthquakes has left thousands dead and injured, with these numbers continuing to increase each hour. With the Guardians of Equality Movement (GEM) headquartered in Gaziantep, our staff and beneficiaries have been highly affected by this earthquake. Civilians and families in Gaziantep are sleeping in cars and shelters in the freezing cold without reliable food, water, and fuel sources. Thousands are still stuck under the rubble, sending messages for rescue teams to save them, and children are being pulled from collapsed buildings more than 72 hours later.

Figures as of Feb 8. From CNN live updates.



General Information

These earthquakes have had a devastating effect especially given that these areas have been the heart of the Syrian refugee crisis throughout the years. Millions of Syrians have faced displacement throughout these areas, and this crisis will further exacerbate displacement amongst Syrian communities. According to media sources, there have been over 8,574 deaths and 50,000 injuries in Turkey alone. In Syria, there have been a reported 2,530 deaths and over 3,700 injuries throughout the governorates of Aleppo, Idlib, Hama, and Latakia. On 6 February, the Syria Civil Defense (White Helmets) declared Northwestern Syria a 'disaster area' following the earthquakes and announced their emergency response to the catastrophic situation. Northwest Syria already suffers from a lack of resources, shelter, security, and severe weather conditions. The White Helmets are working tirelessly to rescue families and children from under the rubble in Northwest Syria, but the necessary aid is unavailable.



Aid Resources Are Not Reaching Syria

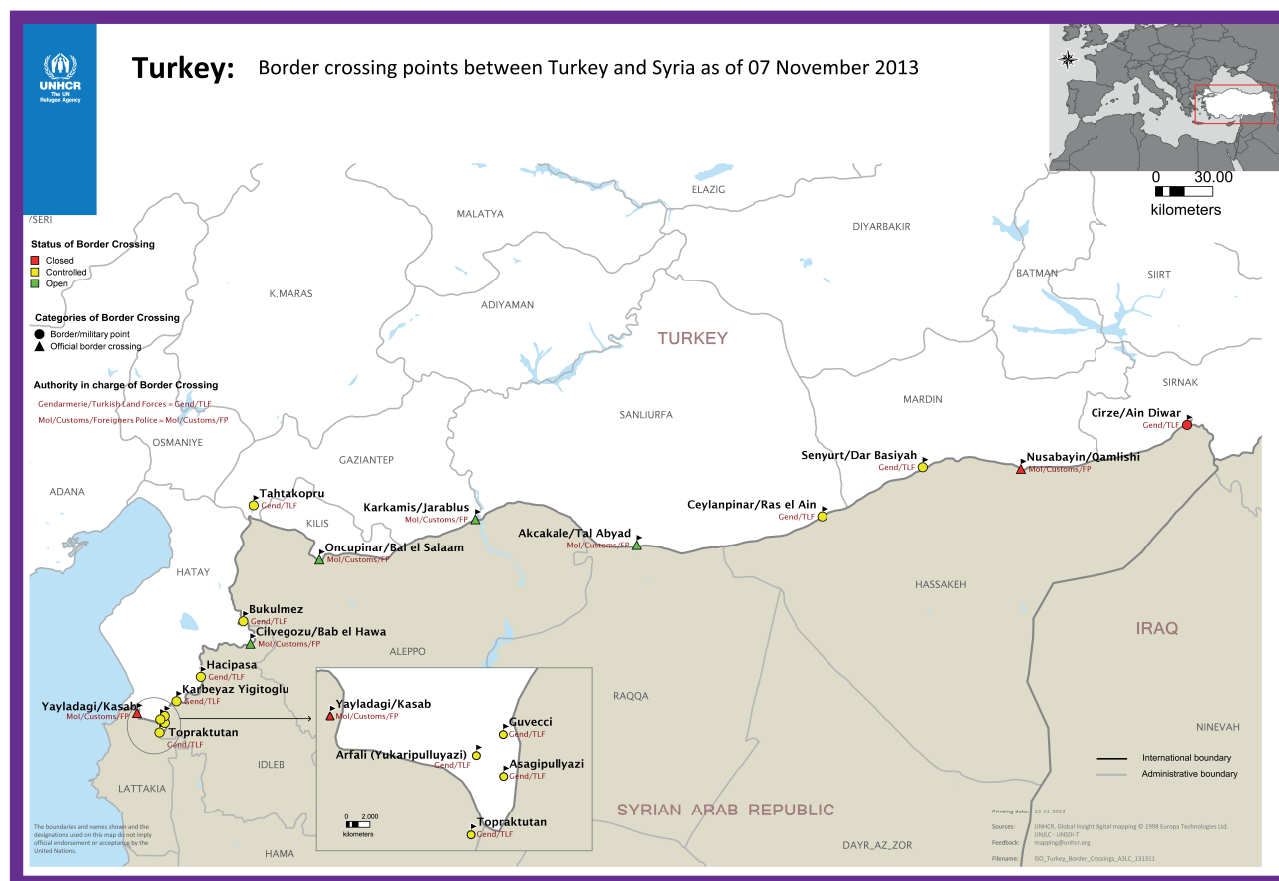
This earthquake has only added to Syrian's suffering, with rescue and humanitarian teams in opposition and regime-held areas not having the capacities or resources to respond to such a disaster. Turkey has been the backup humanitarian line for Northern Syria in case of emergencies over the years but is now in a state of emergency. International aid and rescue teams have been sent to Turkey to provide assistance, but Syria is not receiving the same type of assistance due to a lack of accessibility, security, and disruptions in supply chains throughout the country. Even the death toll and injury numbers reported are most likely inaccurate due to the lack of resources.

Syrians have endured so much pain, loss, displacement, and suffering over the past 12 years due to war, conflict, drought, cholera, and a failing economy. The infrastructure in Northwest Syria was already crumbling due to war and ongoing shelling. Hospitals have been shelling targets by the Syrian regime and Russian forces over the years, making medical services limited to those rescued and causing local residents to fear seeking services there.

For organisations struggling with access between Turkey and Syria, we understand that some border crossings including Bab al-Hawa are impassible due to earthquake damage, however, we have collated a list of other border crossings that may be traversable:

	Turkish Name	Syrian
1	Yayladağı	Kessab
2	Kızılçat	Samira
3	Topraktutan	Yunesiyeh
4	Aşağıpulluyazı	Ein al-Bayda
5	Güveççi	Kherbet Eljoz
6	Karbeyaz (Yiğitoğlu)	Darkush
7	Ziyaret	Al-Alani
8	Bükülmez	Atme
9	Hatay Hammamı	Al Hammam
10	İslahiye	Meidan Ekbis
11	Öncüpınar	al-Salameh
12	Çobanbey	Al-Rai
13	Karkamış	Jarabulus
14	Mürşitpınar	Ayn al-Arab
15	Akçakale	Tall Abyad
16	Ceylanpınar	Ras al-Ayn
17	Şenyurt	Al-Darbasiyah
18	Nusaybin	Qamishli
19	Cizre	Al-Malikiyah
20	Kumlu	Afrin

UNHCR has also published a visual of Borders between Turkey and Syria:



Syrian Refugee Experience Prior to the Disaster

Turkey

Syrian refugees in Turkey prior to the disaster were already experiencing hostile socio-political conditions, including the recent government initiative instituting deportation of Syrians to Syria under the guise of voluntary returns, where Syrians are being coerced into signing voluntary repatriation forms. In fear of this, there was an increase in applications to leave Turkey through crossings into Europe, which are still trapping refugees at the border. The decision for these returns came as the general elections drew closer, with many speculating that President Erdogan started the new initiative as a political strategy to engage systemic xenophobia to boost his re-election campaign. The continuous blame on Syrians for the poor economy in Turkey has been used for political points and has seen a rise in xenophobic attacks against Syrians. Turkey hosts four million Syrian refugees, most are scattered across unofficial camps and cities. Those living in camps are at the mercy of local and grassroots organisations with limited resources. Those living in cities tend to have only limited access to work as the process for acquiring work permits for refugees is highly complicated for employers to navigate. Many who try to find work travel outside of their registered province out of necessity. Once leaving, they are unable to access basic civil services and institutions (hospitals, schools) as they do not formally have "refugee status" under Turkish law.

Under Turkish law, people who have fled persecution from non-European countries are not recognised as refugees. In 2013, it enacted a domestic law on asylum, including the category of “refugees” as those who have fled persecution in a European country. It also includes the category of “conditional refugees,” which applies to people who have fled persecution or violence from countries outside of Europe.

In 2014, Turkey introduced the Temporary Protection System for Syrians, which remains the only form of protection available to them. The system grants Syrians access to public services, such as health and education, but does not grant them the full rights accorded to refugees. This includes a lack of freedom of movement and access to the labour market. For this reason, Syrians have remained economically marginalized in Turkish societies as they are forced to work informally, allowing employers to easily take advantage of them. It has also caused many Syrians in Turkey to live in fear of being discovered for not living in their registered province. Turkish authorities either forcefully send them back to their registered provinces, where fewer job opportunities are available, or in some cases have made Syrians sign forced volunteer forms to return to Syria. These forms are written in Turkish and most times Syrians are not aware of what they are signing.



LGBTQIA+ in Turkey

Although the conditions in Turkey for LGBTQIA+ are less perilous, LGBTQIA+ are still faced with hostility, with Istanbul Pride as an example of the very current volatility. At Istanbul pride +400 ,2022 LGBTQIA+ were beaten by security and police forces and arrested. Those being detained were stripped of their basic rights, some even being prevented from using the toilet. Some were even taken for forensic medical examinations against their will, the experience of which has been described as humiliating and degrading. Although criminalised in Syria, the treatment of LGBTQIA+ in Turkey and in Syria has been described as not so dissimilar; to be open and expressive about one's LGBTQIA+ identity in either place is a risk to health and wellbeing if not life.

Syria

Inside Syria, LGBTQIA+ are not just persecuted by social, cultural, and Religious factions, but by Law. Article 520 of the Syrian Penal Code criminalizes homosexuality condemning those found guilty with prison terms of up to three years, where conditions of imprisonment constitute humiliation and torture, furthering human rights violations. Article 517 suppresses the manifestation of difference and expression of identity, which has been used to target the LGBTQIA+ community, particularly Trans and A-typical gender minorities. Aside from discriminatory regulations, Syrian LGBTQIA+ are subject to persecution from the wider Syrian community where honour crimes and killing are prevalent. The severe threats to well-being and life have created an environment where the LGBTQIA+ communities are unable to come together, and where Syrian LGBTQIA+ voices are quashed. All of this has had a knock-on effect where Syrian LGBTQIA+ IDPs and refugees are limited in access to humanitarian aid, medical services, and other civil services, and a gap in understanding Syrian LGBTQIA+ contexts has been cultivated at all social, cultural, political, and humanitarian levels.



Earthquakes' Impact on Syrian LGBTQIA+

Syrians living in these areas have all been impacted, but as previous crises have shown, those most socially and economically marginalized are always the most negatively impacted. This includes Syrian LGBTQIA+ individuals who already live in vulnerable situations in Syria and after displacement due to their sexual orientations and gender identities. Crises such as this only exacerbate the limited access to services for gender minorities, in particular transgender and A-typical individuals, whose access to services is minimised by social, cultural, and even legal barriers, elevated by the more prominent visual nature of their identities in comparison with other variants of LGBTQIA+ making them easier to be identified by homophobic and militant entities. There is also a risk for known LGBTQIA+ to be discriminated against in terms of aid and rescue efforts. Access to services is also minimised by fear of discrimination from aid distributors; some of our beneficiaries inside Syria are afraid of reaching out to some of the already restricted aid organisations, and some have even expressed concern about receiving aid from specific organisations that they say are known to be homophobic. Additionally, transgender individuals are unlikely to seek medical attention for fear of being identified and persecuted during care provision. Following these earthquakes, LGBTQIA+ individuals whose sexual identities have been exposed, along with those who have previously been targeted by homophobic/conservative/militant entities, are at a higher risk of being captured, tortured, and killed due to a lack of security. This is also the case for LGBTQIA+ activists and supporters working on the ground, including our GEM team.



GEM's Emergency Response

GEM is working to deliver emergency response to our team members in Turkey and Syria who have been stranded in the streets, left homeless, and without aid. We are also working to build emergency response for Syrian LGBTQIA+ victims and activists through urgent cash assistance for those in need of evacuation, temporary accommodation, and essential needs like food, hygiene products, and medical services. Urgent cash assistance will provide flexible support that meets the needs of beneficiaries, especially those with specific security

requirements, and those already at a socio-economic disadvantage. Once these services are mobilised, we will issue an open call for beneficiaries and referrals. GEM also plans to deliver longer-term services in mental health and psycho-social support (MHPSS), particularly PTSD and trauma therapy, understanding that such traumatic experiences will have a detrimental effect on the mental health of victims and survivors, especially those who have had adverse experiences prior to these events.

Partnerships & Resources

To organisations who are looking to assist the Syrian LGBTQIA+ emergency response, we are open to collaboration and partnering to best serve this community as efficiently and quickly as possible. The Head of Development, Jennifer Bailey, is available for enquiries via email: jennifer.b@guardiansgem.org

GEM calls on the global community to provide aid to the victims of these earthquakes by spreading awareness of these events as well as the Syrian LGBTQIA+ perspective, and by contributing to wider humanitarian efforts for emergency response. We suggest donating to one of our Trusted partners:

Choose Love: <https://donate.chooselove.org/campaigns/emergency-earthquake-appeal/>

Or directly to our Emergency Response for Syrian LGBTQIA+ Earthquake Victims Campaign via our website: <https://guardiansgem.org>

or socials: <https://www.instagram.com/guardiansofequalitymovement/>
<https://www.facebook.com/guardiansofequalitymovementGEM>

Please assist us in responding rapidly to the urgent needs of the earthquake victims in Syria and Turkey, in any capacity that you can.

