

Responding to the Türkiye-Syria earthquakes

ETI briefing | March 2023

Introduction

On Monday 7 February, two earthquakes of 7.8 and 7.5 magnitude struck south-eastern Türkiye and north-western Syria. Ten different Turkish cities (Adana, Adiyaman, Diyarbakir, Gaziantep, Hatay, Kahramanmaras, Kilis, Malatya, Osmaniye, and Sanliurfa) and five Syrian governorates (Aleppo, Idlib, Lattakia, Hama and extensive Damascus) have been directly impacted. According to the [latest figures](#), the death toll across both countries has now surpassed 51,000. Essential services, including electricity, gas, water, transportation, and communication are severely damaged in each country. Challenging weather conditions including snowfall and low temperatures have impeded rescue operations and posed additional risks to life.

Based on member survey data we understand that Türkiye hosts suppliers to all three sectors of ETI company membership; apparel and textile (A&T); food fishing and farming (FF&F); and general merchandise (GM), with none sourcing from Syria. The regions affected are home to farms, factories, steelworks, mines, and ports supplying international brands and large groups of seasonal agricultural migrant workers who harvest a range of different commodities. The aftermath is likely to prompt mass disruption and migration which will undoubtedly affect all of Türkiye for some time. Business has a role to play in recovery and support to affected workers and communities as part of the response process.

This briefing sets out ETI's expectations of ETI members and responsible businesses sourcing from Türkiye, in line with the ETI Base Code, the [UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights \(UNGPs\)](#), and our [Human Rights Due Diligence \(HRDD\) Framework](#).

Our expectations for responsible business

We expect ETI members and other responsible businesses sourcing from affected areas to:

Adhere to the ETI Base Code and apply the UNGPs

The [ETI Base Code](#) still applies during humanitarian crises; we expect members to adhere to the ETI Base Code to the greatest extent possible across their supply chains.

Equally, the responsibility of business to respect international human rights, undertake due diligence and mitigate risks as set out in the UNGPs, remains.

[ETI's HRDD Framework](#) also remains applicable; we expect ETI company members and responsible businesses to use the framework to prevent, manage and mitigate human rights abuses in their own operations and supply chains:

01. Assess actual and potential human rights risks

- Review country risks post-earthquakes, including considering different risks in different regions.
- Map affected supply chains and services and prioritise.
- Identify risks to all workers by sector, nature of work, type of worker, employment relationships and new labour market dynamics.
- Review HR systems, contracting and recruitment of affected workers and vulnerable groups.
- Assess workers' ability to access rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining, particularly under force majeure.
- Rank workers risks by severity to workers and degree of responsibility.
- Identify direct and indirect causes and impacts post-earthquakes.
- Analyse the data, identify next actions and process.

See Table 1 for key risks ETI company members and responsible businesses should consider.

To facilitate human rights due diligence in Türkiye:

Establish contact with local suppliers

Companies should contact their Turkish suppliers as soon as possible, with the understanding they may have been affected either directly or indirectly, through friends and family. Approach affected suppliers with sincerity. Let them know you are here for them, to support as/ when needed. Don't make them relive the trauma by describing how awful it is.

Enquire about the implications on the full supply chain locally, as sites beyond first tier may also be affected. Please be aware that even those with headquarters sitting outside of the impacted regions, may be affected. For example, garment suppliers in Türkiye often have multiple sites, with headquarters in Istanbul and factories in other regions such as the affected south-east. Where suppliers cannot be reached, explore alternative avenues. For example, FF&F companies should consider contacting UK or EU-based importers of Turkish produce as a route into their FF&F supply base in Türkiye.

Collaborate to assess actual and potential risks

With your supplier, identify the risks to workers and their business. Using the ETI risk table as guidance, ask key questions to properly assess this dynamic situation:

- How have workers been directly or indirectly affected by the impact of the earthquake?
- Are facilities safe for workers to return to or to resume work? What measures have been taken to assess the safety of facilities? What actions are being taken to cope with continued aftershocks?

- How will this impact business operations? How will it affect your ability to resume production/services based on any impact on workers not returning?
- Enquire about circumstances along the supply chain (For example, the impact on tier 2 fabric mills or farms.)

Engage with additional stakeholders, such as trade unions, NGOs, and other companies, to further develop understanding of risk to workers and businesses along the supply chain.

02. Identify leverage, responsibility, and actions to be taken

- Assess scale and scope of responsibility, including direct and indirect labour rights.
- Assess leverage with suppliers, agents, and contractors.
- Review Türkiye sourcing strategies and purchasing practices.
- Establish benchmarks and rules for monitoring improvements or termination with suppliers post-earthquakes.
- Review supplier capacity to manage new labour risks.
- Review policies and procedures to enable workers to access their right to organise and bargain collectively, particularly under force majeure.
- Identify opportunities for collaborative action in Türkiye and relevant supply chains.
- Review corporate decision-making and accountability, policies, and systems to new manage risks.

To facilitate collaborative human rights due diligence in Türkiye, leverage:

Existing networks

National industries typically function with established networks between companies and suppliers across the country. Make use of these when responding in an emergency context. For example, the garment industry in Türkiye is very interconnected, and despite fierce competition, there is a lot of collaboration across businesses. Directly impacted sites may be unable to engage with companies in the early stages, but those in surrounding regions could have valuable insights.

Multiple tiers

Similarly, different tiers of your supply chain may be less impacted and able to offer information on hard-to-reach suppliers. For example, FF&F processors outside of the affected region may be easier to reach than growers or coops closer to the epicentre, and vice versa. Engage with different tiers and with other stakeholders, such as trade unions, NGOs, and other companies, to build understanding of risks and develop support mechanisms collectively.

03. Mitigate risk and remediate workers

- Take immediate steps to mitigate human rights risks post-earthquakes.
- Provide remediation for workers (avoiding further harm).
- Identify and act on changes to working practices post-earthquakes.
- Enable workers to access their right to freedom of association and collective bargaining, particularly under force majeure.
- Provide training and capacity building on worker-management communication and negotiation during crises.
- Engage / collaborate with others (eg other companies, trade unions, government agencies, NGOs, experts, multi-stakeholder initiatives) on crisis response.
- Establish / revise emergency-sensitive grievance and remediation systems.

Companies should work with suppliers to take action to mitigate risks identified and prevent negative impacts on workers, for example:

- Ensure workers are not unfairly penalised and consider ways to put additional support mechanisms in place.
- Agree changes that address increased health and safety concerns, including building safety.
- Ensure workers can access due wages and agree what is to happen with outstanding production, placed orders, work in progress and goods at port.
- As far as possible, take action to mitigate risks to workers in deeper tiers of the supply chain.
- Work collaboratively with suppliers and other stakeholders to mitigate risks and develop support mechanisms collectively.

See Table 1 for key risks ETI company members and responsible businesses should consider.

04. Monitor, review, report and improve

- Track post-earthquake mitigation and remediation actions.
- Review crisis-response decision-making, responsibility, and accountability - (especially at senior levels).
- Review relevant information sources and systems – ensure evidence is credible, verifiable, and relevant.
- Analyse the data, identify next actions and crisis-response process.
- Analyse evidence, learn lessons, prioritise next actions and long-term risk prevention and earthquake resilience.
- Communicate internally and with business partners on enhanced human rights due diligence during crises.
- Report publicly on steps taken to respect human rights and prevent modern slavery post-earthquake.
- Build partnerships and collaborative action in Türkiye and relevant supply chains.

Recovery from earthquakes and aftershocks of this scale and magnitude takes time and must be thought about in the long-term. We expect ETI members and responsible business to work with their suppliers and other stakeholders, including trade unions and NGOs, to monitor, review and report on the steps taken to improve your response, HRDD and overall impact on Türkiye's recovery.

ETI members and responsible business should consult lessons, advice, and resources on and from responsible business during crises. See Table 1 for a full list of risks to consider. [ETI's enhanced expectations](#) as set out during the COVID-19 pandemic also have relevance here, particularly in relation to purchasing practices and buyer-supplier relationships. We also encourage ETI company members and responsible businesses to consult [Fair Labour Association's guidance](#), including a check-list for suppliers resuming production.

Table 1: Key risks and considerations for companies sourcing from the Türkiye-Syria earthquakes affected areas

RISK	DESCRIPTION	SPECIFIC CONSIDERATIONS
Health and safety	<p>Factories, production facilities, warehouses and other buildings in the affected areas may not be safe to restart production and/or may need re-assessment to ensure they remain safe amid aftershocks. Air quality may also be significantly affected due to dust and debris from collapsed and damaged buildings.</p> <p>There have been over 9,900 aftershocks since the first earthquake hit, including two 6.4 and 5.8 magnitude quakes on 20 February. Questions have been raised over the extent to which poorly enforced building standards have increased the death toll in Türkiye. A coordinated approach to building inspection, reconstruction, equipment, and safety will be important going forward and requires the involvement of qualified expert advice.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If the building is in an earthquake affected area, a structural assessment may be necessary to ensure structural safety by a competent service provider. • Where possible, ensure precautions are taken to reduce risk of further damage and injury in the event of aftershocks. For example, large and heavy objects should be kept at low heights. • Ensure all necessary certification and approvals are received before business resumes. • A review of services should be undertaken to ensure security of water, electricity and effective safe functioning of equipment, heating and ventilation and other services before production or use resumes. • A review of occupational health and safety provisions should be undertaken taking into account good practices for an earthquake prone area. • All staff should be briefed on necessary actions in the event of further aftershocks or earthquakes, ensuring emergency exit procedures are in place and practiced.
Worker absence	<p>Workers may be absent if they or their families have been directly or indirectly affected; are involved in relief efforts; are injured or traumatised by the earthquake.</p> <p>Women workers in particular are likely to bear the increased responsibilities of unpaid care, including caring for children, older people and those injured.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worker absences should not be penalised. • Efforts should be made and sufficient time allowed to trace workers and for them to contact employers. • Return to work plans should be developed to accommodate the readjustment to work.

Wages	Workers may have difficulty accessing and receiving wages in humanitarian crises where their needs are greater than ever.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Steps should be taken to ensure wages reach workers, and efforts should be made to expediate payment during humanitarian crises. • Wages should be paid at least in accordance with Turkish law, but preferably at full rates supported by buyers. • Compensation should be provided to workers while work is suspended due to force majeure.
Purchasing practices	Business disruption is very likely due to the earthquake and aftershocks. This may affect production schedules, logistics in and from the region, future commitments, and costs, among other aspects.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussions with suppliers should identify the short medium- and longer-term impact of the earthquake. • This should include a review of financial due diligence and identification of support needed for the supplier. • Plans should be jointly developed that consider any disruption and that establishes new schedules, delivery plans, payment terms etc. • Existing orders should not be cancelled unilaterally. • Payments for goods received should be advanced. • Consideration of payment for goods in production should be considered to support suppliers. • Buyers should adopt a flexible approach to support suppliers to re-establish full production, without applying penalties or discounts.
Working environment	As factories and producers are able to start to work again, they may feel pressure due to a number of factors to get back up to full production quickly or recover for delayed orders.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning with suppliers should be undertaken to avoid pressure or undue overtime for workers. • Care should be taken to ensure that the workers do not feel under pressure or harassed. • Flexibility should be exercised particularly for women workers with unpaid care responsibilities.
Assistance and grievance	Managers, supervisors, workers and their families and friends may be directly or indirectly affected by the earthquake and need practical humanitarian assistance, or subsequently psychosocial support. For example, workers or	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suppliers should be supported to make sure that they have suitable emergency-sensitive, on-site, and third-party reporting mechanisms for workers to raise any issues in their own language.

	<p>their family members may be injured or worse, they may have lost their loved ones, homes, access to transport, childcare or other support and resources, such as identification papers or bank cards.</p> <p>A state of emergency has been declared in Türkiye, it will be important to consider whether workers and human rights have been suspended (and for how long); as has been the case in Türkiye previously, where ICCPR and ECHR requirements for declaring state of emergencies have not been followed and rights have been heavily curtailed.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suppliers should be supported to identify relevant local services for all employees that can help with basic amenities as well as psychosocial support. • Buyers should consider direct support to local service providers to meet needs of workers and local communities during this period.
Representation	<p>Trade unions play a vital role in representing workers and addressing concerns that they might have and facilitating effective social dialogue.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with suppliers to identify relevant trade unions for the supplier and sector. • Establish contact with trade union representatives to ensure effective collaboration when addressing issues. • Reach out to relevant international trade union global federations for advice guidance and collaboration. • Do not discriminate against trade union representatives attempting to represent workers.
Gender	<p>Caring and family support roles can often place different demands on men and women. This can be accentuated in an emergency response context.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special attention in all aspects needs to be paid to the gendered impacts of the earthquake and its aftermath. • Any investigations and statistics should take gender into account. • Mitigation actions should also take account of gendered needs, special provisions for care givers, pregnant and breastfeeding mothers should be made, for example.
Vulnerable groups	<p>Existing vulnerabilities and inequalities are often exacerbated in crises leaving them more exposed to exploitation. Particular consideration should be given for those in</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special attention in all aspects needs to be paid to the impacts of the earthquake and its aftermath on existing and emerging vulnerable groups; such as internally displaced people.

	<p>situations of heightened vulnerability: from women and girls, children and youth, to older people, people with disabilities, ethnic and religious minorities, sexual and gender minorities as well as migrants, internally displaced people and refugees.</p> <p>For example, many refugees, particularly Syrian refugees, live in Türkiye some of whom may work through unauthorised subcontracting. This makes workers invisible within the supply chain, with either difficulty accessing or no social security.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Any investigations and statistics should take existing vulnerabilities of workers and communities into account.• Mitigation actions should also take account of the needs of those in situations of heightened vulnerability.
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Additional links:

[European Association for Earthquake Engineering](#)

[Example earthquake checklist for buildings](#)