

Kahramanmaraş Earthquakes and Civil Society

Observation Notes I

16 February 2023



Civil society organisations (CSOs) continue their work with increasing responsibility in reducing the losses caused by the Kahramanmaraş Earthquakes that occurred on 6 February 2023 and in addressing the urgent needs that arise. As Third Sector Foundation of Turkey (TUŞEV), we will compile information on the trends and developments in the aftermath of the earthquake in civic space by publishing periodical observation notes, and share recommendations for CSOs to maintain their activities in the short, medium and long-term in an effective manner.

Civil Society Organisations

CSOs working in the field of humanitarian aid get organised quickly and competently, and continue their activities ranging from emergency search and rescue efforts to the provision and coordination of basic needs.

CSOs, depending on the areas they work on (such as education, children, health, youth, disabilities, human rights, women's rights, LGBTI+ rights, migrant rights, animal rights, etc.) are able to quickly identify the needs of the groups they work with, both with their professional staff and with the support of their volunteers, and devise solutions and implement them with their resources.

CSOs transfer their expertise to the field they work by using methods such as information production and dissemination, monitoring and reporting.

Networks, platforms and monitoring committees are set up in order to act in coordination on issues that arise after the earthquake and require expertise.

It should be noted that both the employees and volunteers of CSOs operating in the provinces affected by the earthquake, as well as the groups they focus on, are among those directly affected by the earthquake. Strengthening and supporting these organisations operating locally is of great importance in the rehabilitation and reconstruction process.

Professional groups such as health care professionals, lawyers, engineers, architects, miners and construction workers, social workers and social scientists are working intensively to transfer their expertise on the disaster site through their own professional organisations, trade unions or networks they have established.

It is observed that innovative donation methods that have been on the agenda of civil society organisations for a long time (for example, donating with crypto money) have been possible for a limited number of organisations after the earthquake.

It is expected that individual and corporate donations will be of great importance for CSOs in this period as well as in the coming period, therefore, open communication to be established in accordance with the principles of transparency and accountability in this regard will gain importance. It is also expected that regular donation may become widespread as a result of the trust-based relationship that individuals will establish with the CSOs they are associated with.

Individuals

Participation in volunteer-based activities is increasing.

Individual giving practices are increasing and becoming more diverse. It is observed that individuals become more demanding about the effectiveness, transparency and accountability of the organisation to which they will donate.

The public administration undertakes communication initiatives for the aid and donations are collected by AFAD (Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency) and Kızılay (Turkish Red Crescent). While it is seen that public institutions collect significant amounts of donations, a significant group of donors are turning to CSOs.

Donations are not proportionately distributed among CSOs working in the field, and some CSOs stand out in donor preferences.

Individuals implement initiatives such as preparing websites, developing software, and producing listing tools within their expertise in order to respond to the needs in the earthquake zone. In addition, the number of organisations using their own resources and expertise to provide in kind support is also increasing in the region.

Individuals use all available communication means to meet all kinds of needs that arise after the earthquake. They also refer their friends and relatives to the activities of initiatives and civil society organisations where they can be influential.

International Philanthropy and Grantmaking Organisations

International philanthropy organisations are in communication with their partners and stakeholders in Turkey about addressing the urgent needs arising after the earthquake and supporting civil society.

It is observed that diaspora giving has become more effective and widespread.

Some international grantmaking organisations are able to act in a flexible way in the accreditation processes they carry out.

The importance of grantmaking organizations' ability to quickly take decisions in a flexible manner and to increase their resources is becoming more apparent for the organisations operating in the field and for meeting the related needs.

It is thought that national and international grant-making organisations may play an important role to meet urgent needs as well as to plan their support for rehabilitation activities that will be implemented in the medium and long term and to evaluate potential collaborations that can be established for these activities.

Private Sector Organisations

Private sector organisations share their resources and opportunities in coordination with public institutions and organisations to meet urgent needs after the earthquake, increase the capacity of search and rescue activities, and address emergency housing and hygiene needs.

There are some private sector organisations that directly engage with CSOs and share their resources and opportunities to meet their needs after the earthquake.

Among the private sector organisations, there are those who use the donation matching method in order to involve their employees in corporate support efforts.

It is observed that there are some organisations that have initiated employment programmes for those who come from the earthquake zone, albeit in limited numbers.

Recommendations

It is of great importance for civil society organisations to continue to operate in the fields they specialize in and to be able to work more effectively by strengthening their capacities currently and in the medium and long term. As a result of the monitoring activities we have carried out, we believe that the following recommendations should be taken into account and implemented especially by the relevant public institutions:

- The legal regulations concerning CSOs, especially the law on the collection of aid, are restrictive and far from being able to respond to the needs of the day and should be revised to **provide a more enabling environment** for civil society, in a way that is dynamic and able to respond to urgent needs. Furthermore, restrictive practices regarding aid and donations made from abroad should be eliminated and the necessary facilitation should be provided to civil society organisations in this area.
- It is important to review and make the needed changes in the tax legislation related to foundations and associations and incentives for increasing individual and corporate giving and to regulate them in a way that covers the entire civic space, not just public institutions and specific CSOs.
- Continuous communication and cooperation should be maintained with **civil society organisations operating locally**, especially in and around the earthquake zone or other CSOs who support these local organisations to learn more about their priority needs and provide the support they request.
- There should be **effective** and indiscriminate **cooperation** with all CSOs specialized in meeting the needs of vulnerable groups affected by earthquakes; and the official information and statistics requested by these organizations should be shared with transparency.

- Long-term relations with CSOs should be developed to include those CSOs that will work in the field in case of disasters in the coordination of disaster response.

- Public sector should relate to civil society as **equal stakeholders** as a principle, and participation and cooperation mechanisms should be developed in order to ensure that this relationship can be actively maintained.

- The State of Emergency declared in the earthquake zone has brought back to the agenda the problems experienced in the field of fundamental rights and freedoms, especially in the civic space, during two years after 2016. The State of Emergency should not cause restrictive practices in the civic space, and this space should be regulated by laws, not by State of Emergency decrees. The State of Emergency should not be extended, and the necessary steps should be taken as soon as possible to return to normalcy.