

P R E S S E M I T T E I L U N G

Children sleeping in cars as too scared to go inside while freezing conditions hinder aid to Türkiye and Syria earthquake zones

Istanbul, 7 February 2023 – Freezing temperatures and damaged roads and airports are making it difficult for aid agencies to reach thousands of children and their families in desperate need of assistance following Monday’s devastating earthquakes, said Save the Children.

More than 8,500 people are estimated to have died in southern Türkiye and northwestern Syria and many thousands are injured with the numbers continuing to rise. People are still trapped in the rubble after earthquakes, with the first of 7.8 magnitude striking near Gaziantep in the early hours of Monday while people were asleep.

Save the Children has launched a humanitarian response to help people in the affected regions, as survivors desperately need assistance such as shelter, blankets, food and medical treatment. About 23 million people, including about 1.4 million children could be impacted by the earthquakes, according to the World Health Organization.

In Türkiye about 5,775 buildings collapsed in 10 cities, according to the latest figures. The disaster triggered many emergencies regarding access to heating, electricity, aid, clean water and communication services, and has left children terrified.

Mustafa* 41, from Gaziantep, said:

“I woke up to the sound of the TV falling to the ground. I quickly rounded my five children and family and left the building. We are currently staying in prefabricated containers where there are over 20 children and their families who need support. We don’t have access to gas, electricity and basic utilities. All of us are distraught. My cousin’s son is too scared to be in closed areas and will now only sleep in the car.”

Save the Children is particularly concerned about people already displaced and living in camps in northwest Syria after nearly 12 years of conflict. There are close to 3 million internally displaced people in northwest Syria with 1.8 million living in camps across the area affected by the earthquakes.

In northwest Syria, Save the Children is working closely with partner organisations to assess the scale of the damage to provide support that children desperately need as the situation becomes clearer.

Kathryn Achilles, Advocacy Media and Communications Director for Save the Children Syria, said:

“It is incredibly cold in Syria right now. We are extremely concerned that many people, including children, could still be trapped under rubble. Others are still homeless and making do with what they can, including sleeping in cars. We are particularly worried about children sleeping outside in freezing temperatures.”

“The scale of the devastation means that everyone living in the affected area is impacted. This includes Save the Children’s local partners and their families. When people whose job it is to deliver humanitarian aid are also affected, it makes it even more challenging to get much needed help to the region. This is on top of damaged roads across Türkiye and Syria, getting help to affected areas is incredibly difficult. The international community needs to do all it can to support local humanitarian actors.”

In Türkiye, Save the Children is working to assess needs and has established a response team which will be supporting the national emergency response across the region, in close coordination with the government and key stakeholders. Save the Children's teams on the ground are planning to support affected communities with winterization and emergency kits, including blankets and winter clothing.

** Name changed to protect identity*

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Über Save the Children

Im Nachkriegsjahr 1919 gründete die britische Sozialreformerin und Kinderrechtlerin Eglantyne Jebb Save the Children, um Kinder in Deutschland und Österreich vor dem Hungertod zu retten. Heute ist die inzwischen größte unabhängige Kinderrechtsorganisation der Welt in rund 120 Ländern tätig. Save the Children setzt sich ein für Kinder in Kriegen, Konflikten und Katastrophen. Für eine Welt, die die Rechte der Kinder achtet, in der alle Kinder gesund und sicher leben sowie frei und selbstbestimmt aufwachsen und lernen können – seit über 100 Jahren.