

Solidarity with the victims of the earthquake in Türkiye and Syria

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One of the worst earthquakes in the Turkish-Syrian border region left devastating damage on 6 February. An estimated 27 million people living in the region have been directly affected and many thousands have lost their lives.

The earthquake hits a region that is already structurally disadvantaged. War, high inflation and displacement have impacted the region in recent years. We mourn the loss of at least 40,000 lives linked to the earthquake and extend our condolences to the many more who have been injured or lost their homes. UNI Europa extends our solidarity to all peoples in Türkiye and Syria.

We are proud of the swift response of the Turkish trade union movement in providing aid and shelter to those in need. We welcome the practical solidarity by trade unions and in workplaces across Europe by assisting in the relief, aid, and reconstruction efforts, particularly through the collection of clothes and other goods for the disaster region. We call upon affiliates to continue and join these efforts and appeal to them to contribute to the UNI Solidarity Fund to help support the relief efforts.

We also welcome the action by many companies in our sectors that have been quick to donate money and make their infrastructure available to support the aid and relief efforts, often in cooperation with their workforces and unions. Joint action shows the strength of social dialogue in such a situation; this should be continued, and we call upon other companies to adopt such an approach.

We call for a ceasefire of all hostilities in the region while humanitarian efforts are ongoing.

The people of the affected region have a long history of migration to the rest of the European continent, from the first guest workers to the most recent migration of Syrian refugees. Workers originating from Türkiye are one of the largest constituencies within the European labour movement. Across the European continent, the trade union movement was a central pillar in the 2015 welcoming efforts of Syrian refugees, in particular assisting them to integrate into the labour market.

The earthquake affects our trade union colleagues of Turkish and Syrian descent in other European countries. There have been videos circulating on social media of workers breaking down in workplaces because they do not know whether their families are dead or alive. There have been numerous reports of workplace accidents due to workers experiencing psycho-social stress.

Unions can play a crucial role in sensitising management to the health and safety risks that the earthquake and the aftermath have triggered among their workforces. Workers should be able to take breaks or pauses if they feel that they can no longer maintain health and safety standards. Extra leave should be granted for them to travel to the disaster region to take care of their families, bury the dead and help in the rescue effort.

We call upon companies to implement such measures in cooperation with their unions.

We call upon the European Union and national governments to provide financial support for the relief effort and the subsequent reconstruction in the affected region. Aid must reach all those affected regardless of race or ethnicity.

Funds must ensure and enhance the compliance with trade union, and social rights as well as democratic principles. Peace and dialogue must be at the centre of the reconstruction efforts.