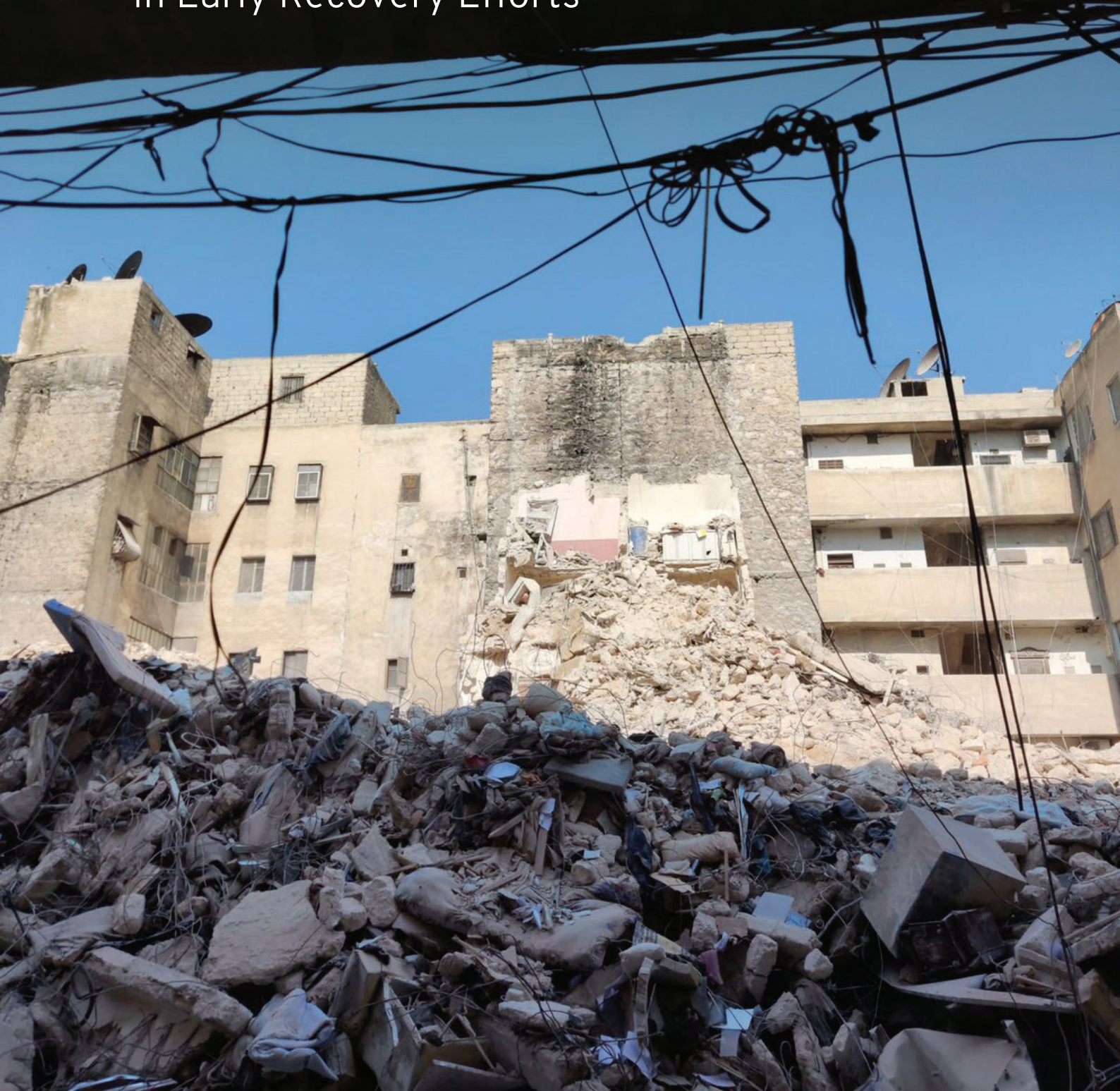




International
Labour
Organization

► ILO Response to the Earthquake in Syria

Embedding Decent Work Principles
in Early Recovery Efforts



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ILO Brief - 15 February, 2023

► Background

The multiple earthquakes which struck Türkiye and northern Syria on 6 February 2023 have resulted in the death and injury of tens of thousands of people, and have caused extensive damage to buildings and infrastructure across both countries. The devastating earthquakes have been described as “one of the biggest natural disasters of our times,” with media reports estimating that up to 37,000 people have been killed so far.¹ As of 14 February, the UN Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) is currently analysing the actual figures of damage and casualties; with the casualty toll expected to rise each day.



Right now, we urgently need electricity.

A mother-of-two young children from Aleppo.

► ILO Syria Response

Around 4.6 million people in north-west Syria are estimated to be affected by the earthquakes as of 13 February. According to a report by OCHA, more than 1,700 buildings have been destroyed and more than 5,700 buildings have been partially destroyed. Aftershocks are reportedly continuing in north-west Syria, continuously forcing people to flee their homes.



A damaged neighbourhood in Jableh

When the earthquake happened, it was as if someone moved our neighbourhood from beneath us. These buildings are old and with the earthquake, many of the walls and ceilings collapsed. People are sleeping outside their homes and in parks; they are sleeping in mosques.

Resident of the town of Jableh, Syria.

¹ Reuters (2023) “Turkey earthquake rescuers work through night as hopes fade for survivors”

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Disasters such as the earthquake have severe implications on the world of work. Livelihoods are weakened or even destroyed, businesses interrupted and workplaces damaged. People lose their jobs and sources of income. This can also lead to an exacerbation of other decent work deficits. For instance, practices of suspected child labour in rubble removal activities have been reported in the affected areas by media sources.² Child labour is not a new phenomenon in Syria. Years of conflict and economic hardship have compelled many families to send their children into employment to support their family income.³ According to an ILO report on ‘vulnerabilities to child labour,’ there is more evidence that links “natural disasters with a heightened risk of child labour, as the households affected are forced to turn to their children’s labour as a negative coping strategy.”⁴

In addition, debris and rubble removal works without proper safety measures also subject workers to a number of Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) risk factors, such as exposure to hazardous objects, unsafe working conditions and work-related accidents.



Destruction in Aleppo

“I used to work as a taxi driver, but now, with this situation, I am not working. I have a seven-year-old child, and there are no schools at the moment (...) We need all types of support.”

Resident of Bustan Al-Zahra in Aleppo, whose home was devastated in the earthquake.

This new emergency took place at a time when the humanitarian crisis in Syria had reached a record level, with 12.1 million people food insecure and 6.7 million people internally displaced⁵. Even before the earthquakes, the UN, along with humanitarian partners, assisted some 2.7 million people every month in northwest Syria via cross-border air deliveries on a regular basis. Despite the continued humanitarian support, resources flowing to Syria continued to decrease.

It has thus become clear that it is no longer a viable option to only address imminent humanitarian needs without establishing a sustainable solution. It is a shared vision now that it is increasingly important to integrate resilience building into collective humanitarian efforts.

² BBC (2023). “No tents, no aid, nothing: Why Syrians feel forgotten” Accessed on 13 February 2023.

³ ILO (2020-2021) *Adopting a Multi-Sectoral Approach to Fighting Child Labour and Addressing Multiple Vulnerabilities in two Governorates of Syria*

⁴ ILO (2022), *Vulnerabilities to child labour*

⁵ Syrian Arab Republic | World Food Programme (wfp.org)

Employment-intensive infrastructure rehabilitation

The *employment-intensive* approach links infrastructure development with employment creation, poverty reduction and local economic and social development.

*In such a humanitarian context that requires a viable solution, one of the suitable instruments that the ILO can apply is the **employment-intensive** approach. The approach aims to combine efforts to rehabilitate destroyed infrastructures with an immediate decent job creation scheme, and a longer-term objective of skills development and employability enhancement as well as improvement of working conditions. As such, the ILO interventions in the aftermath of the earthquake aim to ensure human security from an early recovery angle.*

Guided by ILO's **Employment and Decent Work for Peace and Resilience Recommendation (No. 205)**, the ILO will implement an **emergency employment scheme** in Aleppo. Through its employment-intensive investment (EII) approach, the ILO offers ways to restore the livelihoods of people in affected communities through short-term and mid to long-term objectives. In the short-term, wage payment schemes serve as an immediate income security measure to vulnerable people affected by a crisis. In the long term, rehabilitated infrastructure and individual skills built through the EII approach become assets that stimulate the local economy and generate local multiplier effects.

As such, ILO's emergency employment scheme differs from various cash-for-work initiatives due to its special focus on training, productivity and decent working conditions.

The ILO proposes the following five concrete actions in Aleppo



Rapid needs assessments

To orient engineering designs to maximize job creation/income generation potentials (i.e. labour intensity) while meeting community demands



Community contracting

To mobilize local communities as a viable empowered contractor to implement the proposed activities



Solid and liquid waste removal/separation and materials recovery

To complement the ongoing early recovery operations of the other agencies



Small-scale public infrastructure recovery and repairs

To serve local population with the provision of basic services



Skills development and employability enhancement

To embed decent working principles from the onset of the recovery process, paving the ways for more longer-term decent work promotion