Corporate Responsibility to Respect Human Rights in Times of Crisis: Earthquakes in Türkiye

Armed conflicts, global pandemics and crisis resulting from natural disasters, such as earthquakes, floods, wild-fires - all these cases cause serious damage to various human rights, including the right to life, right to live in a healthy environment, right to security; while also having negative impacts on business and labour market, paving the way for severe violations such as irregular employment, precariousness, child labour and modern slavery.

Hence, all of these types of crises necessitate a **heightened human rights due diligence** (HRDD) to identify potential and actual human rights risks as well as on the impact of specific emergency context, by going beyond the HRDD mechanism described under the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs).

Earthquake Poses a High-Risk Context that Requires Heightened HRDD

Earthquakes affecting Türkiye and Syria have shown a significant incapacity of public actors, stemming from various reasons such as lax implementation of construction regulations, pointing to allegations of corruption and lack of inspections.

In addition to the general human rights related risks in supply chains, context-specific risks due to the earthquake point to the need for businesses to conduct heightened HRDD in their supply chains passing through earthquake affected regions:

- **Precariousness, illegal and unfair labour conditions** and **modern slavery** risks at the suppliers' level due to the pressure of meeting order deliveries,

- **Occupational health and safety risks** due to the unknown status of the suppliers' facilities/workplaces in terms of resistance to the earthquake,

- **Child labour** risk due to the aggravating economic conditions and suspension of the school attendance requirement for children in the affected regions,

- **Environmental risks** affecting the livelihood in the region, including employees of the suppliers, due to improper waste management and hazardous substances resulting from the collapsing buildings.

Race to the Bottom

Lacking/insufficient capacity of suppliers (due to destructed/damaged facilities or loss of workforce) leading to **failure to meet the orders of delivery**

Termination of supply relationship

Unfair labour conditions including sudden **dismissal of employees**

Efforts to meet delivery deadlines

- **Irregular employment**
- **Modern slavery**
- **Child labour**
- **Indecent working conditions**
- **Increase in irregular sub-contracting**

Heightened risk of **lack of transparency and traceability** in supply chains in different sectors

Failing to meet HRDD requirements

What Should Businesses Do?

Conducting **human rights risk assessment** through their supply chains by considering specific **high-risk contexts** and local aspects,

Establishing a **heightened HRDD mechanism** in line with the localised context that would respond to the emergency situations, including grievance and monitoring mechanisms assigned specifically to emergency situations,

Organising **independent audits** to check the resistance of facilities/workplace buildings to the earthquake in line with the relevant legal and technical conditions, take the required measures for ensuring resistance and continue regular audits and controls to maintain the earthquake-resistant status of the buildings,

Providing the required **support to the suppliers and business partners** to take the necessary measures to ensure the resistance of their facilities, and monitoring them regularly,

Extending order delivery **deadlines** for the suppliers and other business partners from the earthquake-affected region,

Establishing **contingency plans** and keeping a **contingency reserve** for preserving human rights compliance in emergency situations and asking their suppliers to do the same,

Adopting a **prospective approach**, taking into account not only immediate risks but also mid-term and long term ones,

Engaging with a **wider range of stakeholders** (including unions, NGOs, human rights experts) to understand the local and high-risk context.