



Attitudes to the Aid Response to the February 2023 Türkiye Earthquake

Social Media Monitoring

May 2023

To support the earthquake response in Türkiye and Syria, Insecurity Insight is conducting ongoing social media monitoring to understand perceptions and key concerns around the aid response in these countries and contribute to the development of communication strategies in response to community feedback.

Summary

Based on Twitter social data from provinces affected by the 6 February earthquake in Türkiye, this research brief explores the main social media sentiments concerning local and international organisations operating on the ground based on opinions expressed between 20 March and 20 April 2023. It finds that social media discussions related to the aid sector tended to gravitate heavily around the contested response to the crisis of the Turkish Red Crescent (Türk Kızılay). Although the ensuing public fallout may have contributed to the Turkish Red Crescent's blood supply emergency, there appears to be no evidence that the crisis surrounding the local humanitarian organisation has resulted in a crisis of confidence in the wider aid sector in Türkiye.

Context

Discussions on social media concerning the humanitarian response in south-eastern Türkiye following the earthquake quickly concentrated on the Turkish Red Crescent after it was publicly revealed that the organisation had [sold shelter tents to charity organisations](#) in the days immediately following the earthquake. With the country gearing up for upcoming elections, the debate rapidly took a political turn, with a number of opposition figures [criticising](#) the Red Crescent – which historically enjoys [close ties](#) to the Turkish state centred in Ankara – and its leadership. At the same time, a number of other allegations concerning the aid organisation's practices surfaced in media reports, including accusations that the organisation [sold second-hand goods](#) it received through donations in 2019 and 2020, and that in 2019 a Red Crescent subsidiary company [sold contaminated bottles of water](#). To further sour the acrimonious debate, in March a real estate developer who was also a Red Crescent branch head in Adıyaman province was [arrested](#) on suspicion of manslaughter resulting from deficient housing construction, while in April an Istanbul court found the Red Crescent [guilty of manslaughter](#) after having accidentally provided a patient with HIV-contaminated blood during a blood transfusion.

Methodology

The brief is based on public social media data collected with the use of AI-powered software. This software is fed Boolean search queries designed to collect social data based on key terms and associations. The data is then downloaded and manually cleaned and classified.

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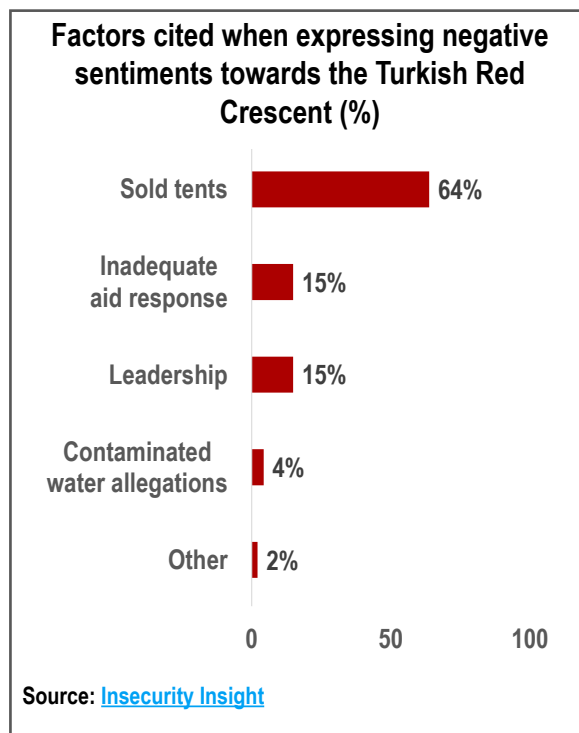
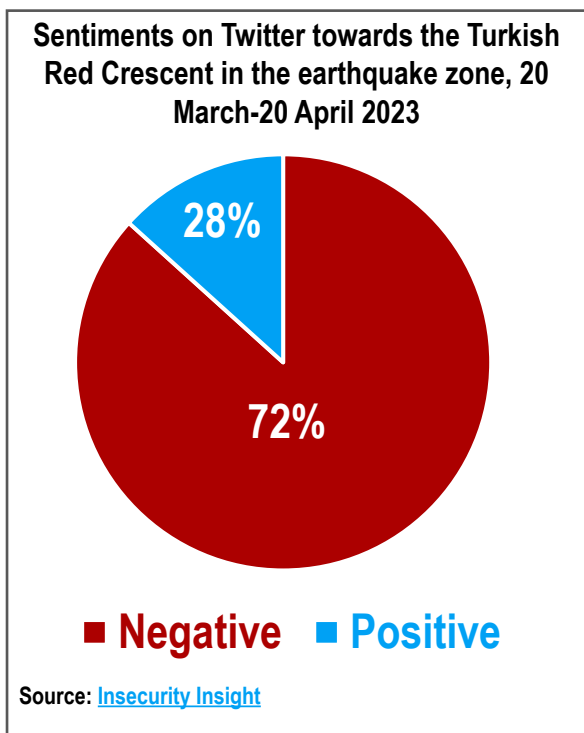
Data was collected for a 32-day period from 20 March to 20 April 2023. It was collected from all the 13 provinces impacted by the earthquake: Adana, Batman, Diyarbakır, Elazığ, Adıyaman, Gaziantep, Hatay, Kahramanmaraş, Kilis, Malatya, Mardin, Osmaniye and Şanlıurfa. The public social data was extracted from Twitter, and includes posts and replies. Following a manual cleaning process, ethnographic analysis techniques were used to examine the data. The final database for this brief consisted of 323 relevant Twitter posts and comments.

Main findings

An overview of trends on Twitter between 20 March and 20 April 2023 suggests that the majority of public discussions on humanitarian organisations operating in earthquake-affected areas are focused on the Turkish Red Crescent, by far surpassing other major organisations, including UNICEF and the United Nations. Discussions tended to focus on the organisation’s leadership, its commercial and humanitarian practices, and its blood-supply emergency. Furthermore, the majority of social media users – 72% – from the earthquake zone who posted or commented on Twitter regarding the Turkish Red Crescent expressed negative sentiments towards the organisation.

Positive sentiment expressed towards the Turkish Red Crescent often followed partisan lines, with social media users who defended the Red Crescent ascribing criticism to people belonging to the political parties opposing the Justice and Development Party-led government. One user argued the following: “If CHP [opposition Republican People’s Party] and its supporters denigrate an institution or a person, KNOW that the institution has done the right thing. Down with the people who slander the state”. Several users also defended the organisation’s prerogative to conduct commercial activities, including selling shelter tents manufactured by the organisation in its factories.

Negative sentiment can be disaggregated across several elements. The tent-sale saga featured in more than half of the Twitter posts in which negative sentiments towards the Red Crescent were expressed. In many cases social media users accused the organisation of corruption and of prioritising its commercial interests above humanitarian ones. Other important factors cited were poor leadership and an inadequate aid response to the humanitarian crisis.



Impact on the wider aid sector

As the largest aid organisation based in Türkiye, the Turkish Red Crescent is of critical importance to humanitarian efforts in the areas impacted by the earthquake. Nevertheless, to date there are no overt signs that the negative sentiments associated with the Turkish Red Crescent and its operations are producing a reputational ‘spillover’ effect on other international humanitarian organisations on social media platforms.

Nevertheless, these organisations and other humanitarian structures should regularly check their online space for disinformation or misinformation targeting their organisation and personnel.

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- [MSF Ambush in Burkina Faso](#) (March 2023)
- [Massacre of Red Cross Volunteers in South Sudan](#) (March 2023)
- [Wagner Mercenaries in the DRC?](#) (February 2023)
- [Disinformation targeting the WFP in Ethiopia](#) (November 2022)
- [Ebola in Uganda](#) (November 2022)

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