

Earthquake in Istanbul shows millions at risk

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25 April 2025

Wednesday's 6.2 magnitude earthquake in the Marmara Sea, off the coast of Istanbul's Silivri district, dramatically revealed the city's complete unpreparedness for a major earthquake that threatens the lives of hundreds of thousands of people.

Scientists have long warned that an earthquake of more than magnitude 7 is expected in the region. A similar warning was issued for the Turkish-Syrian border region of the country. On February 6, 2023, two major earthquakes centred on Mara? officially caused more than 50,000 deaths in Turkey. The death toll in Syria was over 8,000.

According to data from the Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD), Wednesday's earthquake, which occurred at a depth of about 7 kilometres and lasted 13 seconds, was felt strongly in Tekirda?, Yalova, Bursa and Bal?kesir as well as Istanbul. After the earthquake, nearly 200 aftershocks were recorded, the largest of which was 5.9.

Although there was no serious destruction or loss of life, the aftermath of the earthquake was marked by mass panic, the collapse of the communication infrastructure, the inadequacy of gathering areas and the paralysis of transportation. All of this is clear evidence that the policies of the government of President Recep Tayyip Erdo?an and all the parties of the capitalist order, which ignore the warnings of scientists and prioritize profit, put millions of working people in danger.

After the earthquake struck at 12:49pm Turkish time, people took to the streets in many parts of Istanbul. As people rushed out of their buildings, they struggled to find safe places to gather. Most went randomly to open spaces or risky areas. In the panic, there were incidents of people jumping from heights, resulting in more than 150 injuries.

Thousands flocked to parks, gardens and beaches, and many people spent the night outside. Residents of

Avc?lar were particularly worried. "It is a miracle that Avc?lar survived this earthquake without a building collapsing," one person told *NOW TV*. The scene was similar in Esenyurt, a district of 1 million people, where many people grabbed their pets and a few belongings before fleeing to green spaces by the roadside.

The Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality, headed by Ekrem ?mamo?lu (Republican People's Party, CHP), who was unlawfully arrested and imprisoned last month, announced in 2021 that 200,000 buildings would suffer moderate to severe damage in a future earthquake considered likely to hit Istanbul, and that around 3 million people could be affected.

Despite this colossal threat to the lives of millions, the Erdo?an government and the bourgeois parties refuse to mobilise state resources to quickly evacuate the threatened people to safe shelters and rebuild the city with earthquake-resistant structures.

The Socialist Equality Group calls for the expropriation of the ill-gotten wealth of billionaires, acquired through the exploitation of workers and financial speculation, and the use of these resources for the rapid implementation of a massive public works programme.

In the midst of the ongoing cost of living crisis, rents in metropolitan areas like Istanbul have skyrocketed. Many working people are forced to live in cheaper old and risky buildings. Millions living on pensions or inadequate wages are unable to move despite the earthquake risk because safe housing has become unaffordable.

Projects carried out by the government and local authorities in the name of "urban transformation" only serve to further enrich the wealthy. While apartment blocks and shopping malls are built in high-rent areas, those living in poor neighbourhoods are either pushed further out of the city or abandoned to their fate. As safe housing becomes a privilege, millions of people go

to bed at night in fear.

One of the most frequently mentioned problems after the earthquake was the lack of gathering places. One earthquake survivor summed up the situation by saying, “There is a serious lack of gathering places in Istanbul”. Residents of Avcılar said that there were very few safe open spaces where they could go.

After the Marmara earthquake in 1999, most of the 470 assembly areas identified in Istanbul were opened for development over time. Today, more than 300 of these areas are used as shopping malls, residential or business centres.

Another major problem was the collapse of communications infrastructure. One person told *NOW TV*: “The phones went down immediately... We couldn’t reach anybody. The internet went down, the networks went down. We waited for a long time.”

According to experts, the earthquake was not the major Marmara earthquake that had been expected. Geoscientist Prof Dr Naci Görür said on his social media account that the earthquake occurred on the Kumburgaz fault. “This is not the major earthquake we expected in Marmara,” Görür said, stressing that such earthquakes increase the stress on the fault line and can trigger a major rupture. Görür said the magnitude of the expected earthquake would be above 7 and warned the authorities and the public once again.

According to *Cumhuriyet*, German seismologist Oliver Heidbach also emphasised that the risk for Istanbul remains. “There can never be complete relief for Istanbul. We are expecting a strong earthquake in this region and it is already long overdue”.

Turkey has experienced two major destructive earthquakes in the last quarter century: The Marmara earthquake on 17 August 1999 and the Maraş earthquake on 6 February 2023. According to official figures, more than 17,000 people died in 1999 and hundreds of thousands were left homeless. New building regulations were issued, a so-called “earthquake mobilisation” was declared and taxes were imposed. But in reality, the Maraş earthquakes of 2023 made it painfully clear that the central and local governments had taken no action.

According to a calculation by the newspaper *Evrensel*, “the total amount of taxes and excise duties enacted in Turkey to finance earthquake expenditures exceeded 15 trillion liras [about 500 billion US dollars]

in 2024 monetary value”. However, this huge amount of money has not gone into building earthquake-proof cities and infrastructure, but into banks, corporations and more armaments.

The government also introduced additional taxes after the 2023 earthquakes. However, two years on, many of the government’s promises of rapid housing delivery and social support have not been fulfilled. In many regions, construction has either not started or completed buildings have been delivered with inadequate infrastructure. Access to the most basic rights, such as shelter, sanitation, health and education, remains a serious problem. Thousands of earthquake victims are still struggling to survive in container cities.

The ruling class and all its parties are indifferent to the fact that earthquakes and similar natural phenomena threaten millions of people. This shows that there is no other way out than for the working class to mobilise and take matters into its own hands. The social wealth created by the workers must be used to build socialism, a social system in which people all over the world can live in safety and health. The April 23 earthquake should be seen as a stark warning.



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