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February 2nd to February 12th 2024

Highlights

- During the initial week of February, the Chilean Meteorological warned of extreme temperatures (35 °C – 38 °C) in the central-southern region of Chile.
- In the early hours of February 3rd, SENAPRED convened the Risk and Disaster Management Committee (COGRID). Due to the magnitude of the fires in the Valparaíso Region, the Government of Chile declared a State of Constitutional Catastrophe for 2 provinces within the Valparaíso Region.
- On February 3rd the Ministry of Health decreed a Health Alert for the Valparaíso Region.
- Over 56,000 hectares have been ravaged by fires in the central and southern regions of Chile, affecting natural reserves, critical infrastructure, and threatening residential areas.
- The Government of Chile has reported substantial evidence regarding the intentional nature of the fires in Valparaíso.
- The Ministry of Social Development and Family (MDSF) announced the initiation of the Basic Emergency Form (FIBE) application in the affected area of the Valparaíso Region. So far, February 6,600 FIBE have been distributed in the Valparaíso Region.
- The Government of Chile has established Early Aid Committee with the aim of providing various resources to affected individuals (see Social Protection).
- Initial international aid has been reported from Mexico, the European Union, the United States, the Latin American Development Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, and UN Agencies.
- On February 11th, the Government of Chile announced the establishment of the Reconstruction Committee.
- On February 8th UNICEF initiated a private fundraising campaign to assist children and adolescents affected by the fires in the Valparaíso Region.
- The response plan will be based on ongoing needs assessment and will prioritize joint actions with the Municipality of Viña del Mar in technical areas such as child protection, education and social protection.

Emergency: Wildfires in Chile

Humanitarian Flash Note No. 1

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Situation on figures



121 active fires in the central-southern region of Chile



15 fires currently being fought



56,225 H consumed from February 2nd to February 12th



3130 affected children in Viña del Mar until February 12th



6,974 houses with some form of damage



1,270 individuals in shelters



131 deceased



4 health care facilities affected



4 educational establishments destroyed

General Overview of the Humanitarian Situation

General Context

From February 2nd to February 12th, Chile has faced a series of devastating wildfires that have affected the central-southern regions: Valparaíso, O'Higgins, Maule, Ñuble, La Araucanía, and Los Lagos. The CONAF has reported that fires in Chile during the summer season have consumed 56,225 hectares to date, spanning forest, agricultural, rural, and urban sectors in the central and southern regions of the country.

The most affected area by the fires has been the well-known and touristic Valparaíso Region, where approximately 14,824 hectares and 6,974 residences have suffered different degrees of damage (SENAPRED, February 12th). Children and adolescents are among the most affected by this crisis only in Viña del Mar over 3000. Many have been forced to leave their homes and are in shelters with their families or under the care of friends and relatives, which can bring new protection risks. The interruption of basic services and the loss of family members, housing, and ecosystem can have a significant impact on their physical and emotional well-being in the short, medium, and long term.

In response to the magnitude of the wildfires in the central region, the Government of Chile declared a State of Emergency and Catastrophe for two provinces in the Valparaíso Region. Additionally, the Ministry of Health declared a Sanitary Alert. This declaration led to the closure of routes to allow access for emergency teams and the implementation of a curfew in the affected region, along with the mobilization of extraordinary resources by the Chilean government to address the emergency. The curfew extended until February 14th, focused on Viña del Mar and Quilpué. From January 29th to February 12th, 88 alert messages for evacuation were activated by the SAE, 47 of which were for the Valparaíso Region. Furthermore, the Government of Chile announced its request to the European Union to conduct an external investigation into the functioning of the SAE alerts, aiming to determine if the system provided necessary assistance given the high number of fatalities in the fire-affected areas.

The scale of the wildfires caused disruptions in water, electricity, and telecommunication services, made necessary the urgent opening of emergency shelters for families, including children and adolescents. The total number of shelters established by the Government of Chile and local authorities reached 29 facilities for various purposes: accommodation, food distribution, space for animal care, collection of provisions and materials, support space for firefighters and volunteers. The number of affected individuals in the Valparaíso Region amounts to 13,351, with 1,270 being sheltered in the prepared spaces (according to the latest FIBE report).

On February 10th, the Chilean Firefighters reported that the fire in Valparaíso was 90 per cent under control, allowing for the entry of social and infrastructural aid into the devastated area. As reported by the Ministry of Public Works, around 440 trucks and machines from various regional public services and municipalities are currently operational. The removal of debris is estimated to reach 50,000 tons. Within a few days of the wildfires being contained, the Superintendence of Electricity and Fuels (SEC) informed that telecommunication, water, and electricity services are successfully being restored by responsible companies.

As of February 12th, the Legal Medical Service reported that the total number of deceased remains at 131 individuals. Among them, 83 bodies have been identified, and 58 bodies have been handed over to their families. Two of the identified bodies are a 14-year-old girl and a 17-year-old teenager.

The SENAPRED reported the distribution of hygiene kits for infants, children, women, and men; bottled water; food rations; and tools for debris removal. Additionally, the National Youth Institute (INJUV) informed the mobilization of over 1,000 volunteers to support debris removal and the collection of goods and food in shelters, particularly in the Valparaíso Region.

UNICEF has verified the availability of the Government of Chile of material resources for the initial response in Viña. However, coordination issues among different public entities hinders the smooth delivery of supplies and services to affected individuals. This underscores the need for stronger basic responses in WASH, Protection, and Security, among

the most crucial aspects, especially as families have already begun rehabilitating their spaces independently. UNICEF's response has initially been to support the Undersecretariat for Children in the generation of tools for the registration of data on people in shelters. In a second instance, we have coordinated with the Municipality of Vina del Mar, specifically with the Department of Attention to Priority Groups, which coordinates the response in the territories, and with whom we gathered information for the CPRA. From this assessment, which we will share with the national and local protection system, we will orient actions in child protection, education and social protection as required, in addition to considering the other needs that the assessment will reveal.

Nutrition

Pertaining to food security and availability, authorities have not alerted to any lack of supplies from the onset to the containment of the fires. Through an agreement between the National Board of Scholarships and Aid (JUNAEB) and SENAPRED, the Chilean government has provided emergency food rations. To date, approximately 10,000 daily rations (breakfast, lunch, afternoon tea, and dinner) have been distributed to over 2,500 beneficiaries in the regions of Valparaíso, O'Higgins, Maule, and La Araucanía, including firefighters and volunteers.

Currently, rations are only being allocated to shelters in Valparaíso. Shelters in other regions have already been closed. Additionally, in the Valparaíso Region, alongside the Presidential Palace of Cerro Castillo, 25 educational establishments are providing daily food rations to nearly 3,000 individuals.

As of February 7th, the NGO Red de Alimentos has identified 12,688 individuals in need of food and hygiene items (10,092 in the Valparaíso region and 1,170 in the O'Higgins region). The support provided to date includes 62,011 kilograms of food and essential items for 7,725 beneficiaries (1,375 of whom are firefighter volunteers). Furthermore, ADRA Chile is distributing over 800 daily food rations in Viña del Mar.

Health

The wildfires in Chile have had a significant impact on the population health. In the Valparaíso Region, three Family Health Centers (CESFAM) and one Emergency Primary Care Service (SAPU) have been affected. To date, it is reported that these services are being repaired. The Government of Chile has strengthened teams focusing on mental health and has reinforced personnel and supplies for emergency services. Constant monitoring of needs and an evaluation of the response are maintained by the Ministerial Regional Services and Health Services. On February 3rd, the Ministry of Health announced the declaration of a Health Alert for the Valparaíso Region due to the health risk caused by the emergency provoked by fires in the provinces of Marga-Marga and Valparaíso. This measure involves transferring health personnel from other dependencies to the affected area, acquiring goods, services, and equipment and hiring necessary qualified personnel for the emergency, coordinating a national aid network between public and private providers, provisionally authorizing rapidly implemented hospitals, such as field or modular hospitals, among other measures. According to official reports, 34 patients remain with severe burns in hospital centres. SENAPRED has reported 1,105 injured people (February 11th). Also of concern, according to authorities, is that some deceased individuals could be foreigners without registration in the country.

WASH

The wildfires in Chile damaged the drinking water system in Valparaíso, resulting in localized water cuts in the most affected communities. ESVAL water company has activated emergency taps in the disaster area, providing safe access to drinking water for the affected population. Moreover, ESVAL has announced a freeze on charges for its service to all customers whose homes are within the fire-affected areas in Viña del Mar and Quilpué, encompassing more than 9,000 families.

Furthermore, the Chilean Government reports ongoing efforts to restore water access, including the installation of 120 water supply points and 33 tanks. Additionally, in coordination with the Ministry of Public Works, 128 public taps have been installed free of charge. ESVAL will also set up an additional 45 tanks for safe water access, coordinated by SENAPRED with the SIS and municipalities. Families will need refillable containers for water transportation and storage.

In the most affected areas, SENAPRED, following UNICEF guidance, suggests the installation of sufficient toilet facilities for the affected communities in coordination with the Regional Presidential Delegation, municipalities, and neighborhood boards. This deployment will adhere to international standards, ensuring safety, lighting, and dedicated services for children. The Chilean Government estimates a need for approximately 1,500 emergency sanitation services in the affected area of Valparaíso.

The Ministry of Women and Gender Equity has distributed 1,500 hygiene kits for women, girls, and impacted adolescents in the recent fires affecting the Valparaíso Region. These kits include essential items such as sanitary towels, wet wipes, hand sanitizer, and toilet paper.

Education

As of February 12th, the Ministry of Education (MINEDUC) has not reported significant changes in the use of educational establishments as shelters and collection centers. Thus, 29 educational establishments in the regions of Valparaíso, O'Higgins, La Araucanía, and Los Lagos remain available to support emergency efforts. Of these, 17 are in the Valparaíso Region, 5 in O'Higgins, 4 in La Araucanía, and 3 in Los Lagos. Specifically, 12 educational establishments function as shelters with meal distribution, 4 solely as shelters, 3 as operation centers for brigades and meal distribution, 8 solely as operation centers for brigades, 1 as a pet shelter with meal distribution, and 2 as collection centers. Additionally, the "Open Schools" program continues at the Cerro Castillo Presidential Palace in the Valparaíso Region, providing comprehensive care and support to children and adolescents affected by the fires. Six more spaces will be added to this program in the coming days.

UNICEF, along with UNESCO, has requested all available information from MINEDUC (even preliminary) regarding affected educational establishments and students (preferably disaggregated by age group and gender). This data will help assess the impact and inform potential actions. UNICEF can assist in monitoring the conditions of educational establishments at the start of the school year and strengthen timely psychosocial support to support the educational processes of children and adolescents.

MINEDUC reports that of the 7 educational establishments damaged by the fires in the Valparaíso Region, 3 have been repaired, while 4 have suffered total damage. The enrollment in these 7 establishments totals 1,056 children and adolescents. According to the Directorate of Public Education (DEP), MINEDUC regional ministry professionals are conducting on-site damage assessments to issue official reports. The start of the school year in March raises concerns about the refurbishment plan for establishments used as shelters.

Child Protection

In addition to the risk of physical and mental health impacts, children and adolescents are also vulnerable to being separated from their primary caregivers. From visits to some shelters in Viña del Mar by UNICEF Emergency team, hundreds of children are staying with their families in spaces provided by the Government.

UNICEF has proposed joint monitoring of the situation of children in the affected areas and, at the request of the Undersecretary for Childhood, will provide technical assistance for data collection and analysis, at both situational, individual, family, and shelter levels. Additionally, support will be provided for the implementation of Child-Friendly Spaces or other forms of safe environments where children can play, socialize, and express their feelings to mitigate the impact of the crisis in community spaces where the State response may not be reaching.

The Ministry of Women and Gender Equity announced measures to ensure the safety and well-being of affected women and girls, including training in shelters to prevent gender-based violence.

The Chilean Government has designated the Cerro Castillo Presidential Palace (Valparaíso Region) as a safe and child-friendly space for children up to 13 years old affected and/or victims of the fires; six similar aids will be implemented in the same region, through the "Open Schools" program, which is part of JUNAEB's programmatic offering to provide recreational activities for children during vacation seasons.

Social Protection

The Ministry of Social Development and Family has mandated the application of the FIBE in affected areas, allowing for the collection of information on individuals or families affected by emergencies. The form gathers information, declared by a person aged 18 or older in the affected family group, on home location, family group composition and characteristics, identification of special needs, existence of networks and participation, information, and assessment of housing damage. The government reports that for the implementation of FIBE, there are over a thousand accredited officials deployed in the communes of Viña del Mar, Quilpué, La Calera, Valparaíso, San Antonio, Santo Domingo, Quillota, and La Cruz (Valparaíso Region). The FIBE application began on February 7th.

As of February 11th, the Government reported that 6,600 FIBE have been completed. Additionally, the first payments of the Recovery Bonus have been made to 1,930 affected households; next week, the delivery of 6,500 bonuses is estimated. Along with these announcements, the Chilean Government, through President Boric, announced the introduction of the "Emergency Family E-Wallet," which consists of a bonus for affected families to purchase construction materials, amounting to \$1,900 in a single payment.

The Chilean Government announced the establishment of the Early Aid Committee, led and coordinated by the Undersecretary of the Interior. This entity, composed of various ministerial portfolios and public services, aims to assist the affected population through economic, social, and local economy support measures within 30 days (Early Recovery and Aid Plan). Among the most notable aids is the delivery of the "Recovery Bonus," which will be distributed to affected families in

Cross-Sectoral

The emergency situation required a multisectoral response with a focus on childhood. UNICEF's Emergency and Monitoring and Evaluation teams are deployed in the area for coordination actions and needs assessment, which will identify high-risk areas and respond with specific requirements for children and adolescents. An effective information system is crucial for monitoring the situation and adapting interventions. UNICEF can facilitate this process, working with national and local governments to ensure the visibility of children and adolescents in humanitarian contexts. Additionally, considering Prevention of Sexual Abuse and Exploitation (PSEA) measures and Accountability to the Affected Population (AAP) are recommendations that UNICEF is providing to government counterparts it is supporting.

Security in the affected area is a high priority for the government, which has deployed technical and professional support for this, with day and night surveillance by land and air. However, there are places that are difficult to access that do not have these resources and where complex situations have arisen due to disputes over land that has been destroyed.

Humanitarian access is not restricted, however, it is recommended to take precautions and coordinate with local authorities for field deployment.

UNICEF Emergency Team



Zonas de afectación por incendios, Región de Valparaíso, febrero 2024.

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