

A collapsed store in Port Vila Source: cedarnews

Magnitude 7.3 Earthquake in Vanuatu – 17 December 2024

UNICEF Pacific MCO*

Vanuatu

Humanitarian Situation Report # 2

Updated on 18 December 2024

Situation in Numbers

40,000 children in need of humanitarian assistance *(UNICEF estimation)*

80,000* people affected. (*Latest GoV estimates)

1. Highlights

- A magnitude 7.3 earthquake struck near Vanuatu's coast in the South Pacific Ocean at 12:51 PM local time on December 17, 2024, followed by several major aftershocks of varying but strong intensities[1]. The most affected is the densely populated capital city of Port Vila, Efate.

- About 80,000 people are estimated to be affected with the government confirming 14 fatalities either from collapsed buildings or landslides. The numbers may rise as search and rescue operations intensifies and expands. Over 200 are reported injured, while many are still missing.

- According to the Government of Vanuatu's (GoV) National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) two major water reservoirs in Port Vila are severely damaged and further assessment of water network is on-going.

- Many buildings have either collapsed or suffered significant damages with several landslides seen around the island. Key roads and bridges connecting the airport and the main seaport are reported to be severely damaged. While the seaport is closed, the airport is operational for incoming humanitarian assistance. Telecommunication networks in most areas are either down or intermittent at best. Only those with Star Link are able to push out vital information out of the country.

- The immediate needs are for life-saving Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) supplies, first aid and health needs and psychological support for affected children and their families.

- UNICEF has already dispatched first aid kits and Interagency Emergency Health Kits (IEHK) to the Vila Central Hospital (VCH) and Vila Mobile Force (VMF) which includes 4 tents, and120 community first aid kits.

- UNICEF has other critical WASH, Child Protection, Health ECD, Nutrition, Education kits and supplies prepositioned in Vanuatu and ready for immediate distribution to reach at least 3,000 people.

- UNICEF Vanuatu field office has a team of 19 staff and consultants and are working with local authorities and partners to assess the extent of the damage and determine response needs.

[1] *The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) reported that the quake was centred 30 KM West of Port Vila, the largest city in Vanuatu, at a depth of 57 KM. This was followed by several major aftershocks of varying but strong intensities. The USGS issued tsunami warnings for parts of Vanuatu, indicating that waves could reach 0.3 to 1 meter above tide level. Lower-level warnings were also issued for nearby Pacific Island countries, including Papua New Guinea, Fiji, and the Solomon Islands. The tsunami threat was subsequently confirmed to have passed.*

2. Situation Overview and Humanitarian Needs

Following a magnitude 7.3 earthquake near Vanuatu's Capital Port Vila around 12:51 PM on 17 December 2024, thousands of vulnerable children and their families need urgent support especially for life-saving Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) supplies, first aid, health, and psychological support.

As of 18th December, NDMO confirmed 14 fatalities either from collapsed buildings or landslides. The numbers may rise as search and rescue operations intensifies and expands. Over 200 are reported injured while many are still missing. According to UNICEF staff on the ground, most injuries are fractures, cuts and traumas related to falling objects and sharp items. GoV estimates over 80,000 people to have been affected by the earthquake. According to NDMO, two major water reservoirs in Port Vila are severely damaged. Assessment of water network is ongoing with affected residents already rationing water.

Many buildings have either collapsed or suffered significant damages. Most buildings including those housing diplomatic missions reported major structural damages. Telecommunication networks in most areas are either down or intermittent at best. Only those with Star Link are able to push out vital information out of the country.

Vila Central Hospital emergency services are being conducted outside the hospital due to concerns for the structural integrity of the hospital. The hospital's operating theatre is not functional, and tents have been set up in front of the hospital to treat the injured as they arrive.

Landslides and damaged road and bridges has blocked access to the airport and the main seaport. While the seaport is closed, the airport is operational for incoming humanitarian assistance.

3. UNICEF in Action

UNICEF has handed 120 community first aid kits to Vila Central Hospital (VCH) and VMF. UNICEF also handed over four large 72m^2 tents to the Health Ministry to be set up as temporary first aid stations.



UNICEF handed over four large tents and 120 first aid kits to the health ministry and VCH

UNICEF's Port Vila warehouse already has prepositioned health and nutrition emergency supplies including IEHK, Midwifery kits, First Aid kits and nutrition therapeutic supplies.

UNICEF's is focused on supporting the government in life-saving interventions that include restoring water supply and distribution of critical supplies and mobilizing partners to support access to safe water and hygiene, nutrition and health services, education, child protection and social protection, including emergency cash transfers if needed.

UNICEF have prepositioned WASH stocks at the Vanuatu warehouse ready to be dispatched, including household WASH kits, collapsible water tanks, water filters with bucket, buckets with lid and tap, water purification tablets, water storage containers, and squatting pans.

As an active and long-term partner of key line Ministries and the Vanuatu NDMO, UNICEF will participate in the rapid assessments in the coming days to collect key information on the needs of children, women, and families.

UNICEF's 19 field staff and consultants working with local authorities and partners to activate coordination mechanisms and to initiate response planning. The UNICEF team in Fiji is providing additional technical and operational support to the response efforts.

Currently, 66 Recreation Kits are prepositioned in the Vanuatu Warehouse and three each are with the Ministry of Justice and Community Services (MoJCS)/Ministry of Youth Development and Sport (MoYDS) in each province of Vanuatu, to support the child friendly spaces activities (mobile/static).

Education team has pre-positioned supplies including tents, school in a box and ECD kits ready for distribution based on damage assessment to support up to 1,000 school children.

Pre-agreed IEC materials on child protection and protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA), developed with the MoJCS and partners are prepositioned and ready to go out (including as part of WASH and health supply distribution as required).

UNICEF will focus on ensuring that children have access to mental health and psychosocial support and that affected populations have access to critical information.

UNICEF is working with the Communication cluster to develop key messages on WASH, Health, Nutrition, Child Protection in response to the disaster and establish a community feedback mechanism. The existing U-Reporters' network will be activated to provide critical feedback from the affected population.

The MoYDS also has a team of trained volunteers who can effectively be used as social mobilisers and handle inquiries from the affected communities. Messaging can be developed for parents responding to their children's distress, based on existing programs and in partnership with local actors, including faith-based organizations.

4. Funding

UNICEF will use flexible internal resources and mobilise funding from the public and private sectors to ensure the most affected children and families are urgently reached with life-saving support. UNICEF has already allocated US$ 125,000 for immediate response.

The initial estimated funding requirement for UNICEF's lifesaving response is approximately US$3,000,000

5. Humanitarian Leadership, Coordination and Strategy

UNICEF leads or co-leads the following clusters/sub-clusters:

- UNICEF, with Save the Children, co-leads the Education in Emergency cluster to support the Ministry of Education and Training lead a coordinated response along with other partners

- UNICEF co-leads the Nutrition sub-cluster together with Ministry of Health. The Nutrition sub-cluster maintains active collaboration with the Food Security and Agriculture cluster.

- UNICEF co-leads the Child Protection in Emergencies sub-cluster. Standard operating procedures (SOPs) are in place with Government to respond to any increase in risks of exploitation and abuse for children. The Child Protection sub-cluster has also been leading efforts on multi sectoral mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) including normalizing activities for children who have been previously exposed to traumatic events such as cyclones.

- UNICEF co-leads the WASH cluster together with the Cluster lead, the Department of Water Resources, coordinating the assessment and information management of the WASH emergency response, and providing crucial financial and technical support to facilitate its implementation. WASH Cluster has standard operating procedures (SOPs) in place for assessments, response planning, immediate and longer-term response.

- UNICEF is also actively involved in supporting the National Disaster Management Organisation (NNDMO) and partners through the Communications and Community Engagement (CCE) sub-cluster.

- The Pacific Humanitarian Team (PHT) has been activated to support response efforts with a coordination meeting organized on evening of 17 December to gather key updates from staffs and partners on the ground and ensure a unified and well-coordinated response.

6. Media

- https://www.rnz.co.nz/national/programmes/middayreport/audio/2018968924/unicef-on-situation-in-vanuatu-after-earthquake
- https://x.com/UNICEFPacific/status/1869122502158696901
- https://www.facebook.com/unicefpacific/posts/pfbid025UJi6DLMmkLRGkrhbSJZWc6pZ144HAacta2jcB3szqHoVR2ZfdityFt8Z51YY7Dnl

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