

Alert note**Fires in Chile – February 2024****Completed by:** Cristian Muñoz, IELCH**Date completed:** 5th of February 2024**Forum:** ACT Forum Chile**Type of emergency:** Fires**Date of emergency (if rapid onset):** 1st of February 2024**1. The nature of the emergency**

As of February 5, 2024, a mega wildfire has devastated approximately 26,000 hectares¹. The affected areas include the provinces of Valparaíso and Marga Marga in the Quinta Región, where over 15,000 homes have been completely damaged². By February 5, the current death toll stands at 122, with 372 people reported missing. It is anticipated that these numbers may rise.

The combination of high population density in challenging terrains, prolonged drought, and soaring temperatures in Chile has greatly facilitated the rapid spread of wildfires. This situation is further compounded by the challenges in accessing affected areas and the limited capacity of Chilean institutions and emergency services to contain the fires effectively³. UN Chile has reported that this prolonged heatwave commenced in January 2023, which has created the perfect conditions for the escalation of forest fires in this region of the country⁴.

2. The impact and scale of the emergency (please include your source of information)

This is a medium-scale emergency due to the following:

- As of February, 372 individuals are reported missing, and it is anticipated that this number will increase. 122 people have lost their lives due to the fire. Furthermore, a total of 40,000 individuals have been significantly and comprehensively affected by the destruction of homes⁵.
- It has been estimated that affected residences in the Valparaíso region are up to 12,000 in Viña del Mar and 2,000 in Quilpué. Affected people would exceed 38,000 (approximately 31,000 people in Viña del Mar and around 7,000 people in Quilpué)⁶.
- Besides the loss of lives and the devastation of residences, schools, and natural spaces, the impact extends to two ecologically vital areas: the La Campana-Peñuelas Biosphere Reserve, acknowledged as one of Chile's ten biosphere reserves, and the Viña del Mar Botanical Garden, a key green sanctuary in the region⁵.
- Severe impacts have been identified on critical infrastructure such as homes, businesses, vehicles, recreational spaces, places of worship, and educational facilities, among other aspects, being damaged or destroyed.
- The population affected is facing considerable mental health challenges as a result of the loss of human and animal lives, the upheaval of their livelihoods, and the complete or partial destruction of their environment, surroundings, and homes.
- Long-term solutions will be contingent upon political decisions by the Chilean government, while immediate and urgent measures surpass the current capacity of the government. This is evidenced by the significant involvement of private and civic organizations providing assistance to affected families.

3. Local and national capacity

¹ <https://reliefweb.int/report/chile/chile-incendios-forestales-2024-sistema-de-naciones-unidas-reporte-de-situacion-no-1>

² <https://www.france24.com/es/minuto-a-minuto/20240205-chile-en-duelo-por-112-muertos-busca-m%C3%A1s-y%C3%ADctimas-y-combate-incendios-forestales>

³ https://www.eldiario.es/internacional/incendios-valparaiso-son-mayor-tragedia-terremoto-2010-dice-gobierno-chile_1_10893385.html

⁴ <https://chile.un.org/es/227052-chile-incendios-forestales-2023-reporte-de-situaci%C3%B3n-n5>

⁵ https://www.eldiario.es/internacional/incendios-valparaiso-son-mayor-tragedia-terremoto-2010-dice-gobierno-chile_1_10893385.html

⁶ <https://reliefweb.int/report/chile/chile-incendios-forestales-2024-sistema-de-naciones-unidas-reporte-de-situacion-no-1>

The central Government has declared a "state of catastrophe" and implemented a curfew in the affected provinces. These measures aim to streamline assistance efforts, mobilizing firefighting and rescue teams, healthcare professionals, and the distribution of material aid. The state of catastrophe also enhances control of active fire outbreaks⁷. Both the Central Government and Municipalities, responsible for governing affected communities, are pooling all available resources to address immediate needs. Ministries of Environment, Defence, Housing, and Health are prioritizing their actions during this critical period, with future strategies being outlined.

Regarding governmental planning, the SENAPRED (National Service for Disaster Prevention and Response) is currently in the assessment and design phase of measures. It focuses on urgent priorities such as identifying affected and deceased individuals, the total number of destroyed homes, and among others. On the other hand, the Executive Power has convened COGRID (Disaster Risk Management Committee), led by the Interior Minister, to plan and finance institutional urgencies which will include mitigation and reallocation measures.

The government has introduced early aid packages for wildfire victims in Valparaíso, accessible through the Basic Emergency Form (FIBE)⁸. Benefits include recovery bonuses for home damage, reception bonuses for housing displaced individuals, monetary transfers for moderate damage, and provision of temporary housing. In addition, national authorities have set up 19 emergency shelters and 8 storage centers to support the affected population⁹.

SENAPRED is actively collaborating with the United Nations System within the country through the Resident Coordinator's Office. Various agencies, funds, and programs have mobilized their pre-existing capabilities to contribute to the emergency response and support national efforts. At this early phase, field assessments are being conducted to ascertain the needs of the affected population, focusing on mental health, water and sanitation, assistance for children and adolescents, distribution of non-food items, and addressing coordination challenges following the catastrophe¹⁰.

Several civil society organizations and faith-based groups, including the Methodist Church of Chile, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Chile, Baptist Church of Chile, and Salvation Army, have launched aid campaigns for financial assistance, food, hygiene items, construction materials, medications, and more. Community-based organizations and groups such as neighborhood associations, cultural groups, and sports clubs, among others, are actively participating in response efforts as well. Additionally, recognizing the limitations of government services, professional associations, and guilds are providing voluntary services in psychology, veterinary care, architecture, medicine, and education, among others.

4. Key needs and gaps

In this context, primary gaps include access to basic services, critical supplies such as hygiene products, non-perishable food, season-appropriate clothing, and others. Additionally, there are challenges related to mental and emotional health, given the event's magnitude and the existing deficiency in the state's public mental health support capacity. It is expected that private hospitals and clinics and assistance would fill this gap.

Many of the affected individuals resided in unplanned urban settlements, commonly known as "land takeovers" or "camps." A significant portion of these individuals are migrants, some undocumented, facing additional difficulties accessing government services. It is foreseeable that migrants, especially those undocumented, now without their already precarious homes and lacking networks, will need immediate

⁷ <https://reliefweb.int/report/chile/chile-incendios-forestales-2024-sistema-de-naciones-unidas-reporte-de-situacion-no-1>

⁸ Ficha Básica de Emergencias (FIBE), survey conducted by the Government that allows collecting information from individuals or families affected by emergencies.

⁹ <https://cooperativa.cl/noticias/pais/desastres-naturales/incendios-forestales/incendios-forestales-albergues-y-centros-de-acopio-en-region-de/2024-02-03/072858.html>

¹⁰ <https://reliefweb.int/report/chile/chile-incendios-forestales-2024-sistema-de-naciones-unidas-reporte-de-situacion-no-1>

but also medium-term support ranging from critical goods and services to medium to longer-term psychosocial assistance and assistance for economic, social, and political integration in Chile.

During previous crises in Chile, the gender gap widens, especially for disadvantaged women, particularly single mothers facing poverty and precarity¹¹. Comprehensive efforts are essential to mainstream gender in the humanitarian response and implement gender-transformative (stand-alone) programming. Regarding the needs of women and girls, the provision of menstrual hygiene kits emerges as crucial, addressing deficiencies in state capacity. This response presents an opportunity to promote gender justice and uphold equality in the country¹².

Please indicate whether you are considering:

	Indicate your intention with an X below
Rapid Response Fund (<i>intended for small and medium-scale emergencies</i>)	X
Appeal (<i>intended for large-scale emergencies</i>)	

If you indicate an intention to launch an appeal, the secretariat will activate an Emergency Steering Committee meeting within two working days on receipt of this alert.

Capacity details of forum members with the intention to respond are given below.

ACT Member	Geographical focus	Sectors of expertise	Support required	Estimated Budget range
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Chile (IELCH)	Quilpué Valparaíso Viña del Mar	Psychosocial WASH Food/Nutrition	Financial	USD 150,000

5. Potential responses

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Chile (IELCH) has a proven record of humanitarian assistance to populations affected by disasters, dating back to the 2010 earthquake. As an integral part of the Chile ACT Forum, the IELCH collaborated in the management of a USD 1 million fund, effectively addressing the needs of a sizeable portion of the central-southern region. To date, actively engaging with humanitarian funds from ELCA and FLM, the church has maintained a strategic focus on programmatic areas such as gender and migration. Throughout the challenging circumstances brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, the IELCH provided food aid distribution, psychosocial support, hygiene kits distribution, SRHR resources, and legal assistance.

IELCH is seeking to provide emergency response to alleviate humanitarian needs caused by the fires in three sectors: Psychosocial Support, Food Security (involving the delivery of food baskets), and WASH (involving the distribution of hygiene kits and menstrual hygiene kits). An RRF proposal is being drafted with a budget estimate of approximately USD 150,000 for the successful planning and execution of the above activities.

¹¹ <https://www.uc.cl/noticias/por-que-se-profundizo-la-brecha-de-genero-en-la-cuarentena/>

¹² <https://www.elmostrador.cl/braga/2020/06/12/organizacion-que-protege-a-mujeres-en-edad-de-menstruacion-dono-mas-de-2-000-toallas-higienicas-en-tiempos-de-pandemia/>