

What to know about the Morocco earthquake and the efforts to help

September 11 2023, by Sam Metz



People recover a washing machine from their home that was damaged by the earthquake, in the town of Amizmiz, near Marrakech, Morocco, Sunday, Sept. 10, 2023. An aftershock rattled Moroccans on Sunday as they prayed for victims of the nation's strongest earthquake in more than a century and toiled to rescue survivors while soldiers and workers brought water and supplies to desperate mountain villages in ruins. Credit: AP Photo/Mosa'ab Elshamy

An earthquake has sown destruction and devastation in Morocco, where death and injury counts continue to rise after rescue crews dug out people both alive and dead in villages that were reduced to rubble.

Law enforcement and aid workers—both Moroccan and international—have arrived in the region south of the city of Marrakech that was hardest hit by the magnitude 6.8 tremor Friday night, along with several aftershocks. Residents in most places have been provided food and water, and most of the giant boulders blocking steep mountain roads have been cleared. But worries remain about shelter, particularly with forecasts predicting rain early this week.

Here's what you need to know:

WHAT ARE THE AREAS MOST AFFECTED?

The epicenter was high in the Atlas Mountains about 70 kilometers (44 miles) south of Marrakech in Al Haouz province. The region is largely rural, made up of red-rock mountains, picturesque gorges and glistening streams and lakes. The earthquake shook most of Morocco and caused injury and death in other provinces, including Marrakech, Taroudant and Chichaoua.

WHO WAS AFFECTED?

Of the 2,901 deaths reported as of Tuesday, 1,643 were in Al Haouz, a region with a population of around 570,000, according to Morocco's 2014 census. In certain villages such as Tafeghaghte, residents say more than half the population died.



A man walks amid the rubble in front of a damaged mosque in Moulay Brahim in the province of Al Haouz, Morocco, Sunday Sept. 10, 2023. An aftershock rattled Moroccans on Sunday as they prayed for victims of the nation's strongest earthquake in more than a century and toiled to rescue survivors while soldiers and workers brought water and supplies to desperate mountain villages in ruins. Credit: Fernando Sanchez/Europa Press via AP

People speak a combination of Arabic and Tachelhit, Morocco's most common Indigenous language. Villages of clay and mud brick built into mountainsides have been destroyed.

Most of the dead have already been buried. The government reports 2,501 injuries.

WHO IS PROVIDING AID?

Morocco has deployed ambulances, rescue crews and soldiers to the region to help assist with emergency response efforts. Aid groups said the government has not made a broad appeal for help and accepted only limited foreign assistance.

The Interior Ministry said it was accepting search and rescue-focused international aid from nongovernmental organizations as well as Spain, Qatar, Britain and the United Arab Emirates, bypassing offers from French President Emmanuel Macron and U.S. President Joe Biden.

HOW CAN PEOPLE HELP?

Experts say the most direct way to provide aid to those affected in the city of Marrakech and the rural areas in the Atlas Mountains is to donate to organizations that have operations already on the ground. That includes the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, which quickly released \$1.1 million from its [Disaster Response Emergency Fund](#) to support Moroccan Red Crescent relief efforts in the country. It also includes World Central Kitchen, Doctors Without Borders, and GlobalGiving, which created a [Morocco Earthquake Relief Fund](#) and had raised more than \$500,000 as of Tuesday morning.



A cracked wall showing Morocco's flag and a writing in Arabic that reads: " God, the Nation, the King," in the town of Amizmiz, near Marrakech, Morocco, Sunday, Sept. 10, 2023. Towns and villages throughout Morocco's Atlas Mountains are mourning the dead and seeking aid after a record earthquake wreaked destruction throughout the region last week. Credit: AP Photo/Mosa'ab Elshamy

WHY IS MARRAKECH HISTORIC?

The earthquake cracked and crumbled parts of the walls that surround Marrakech's old city, a UNESCO World Heritage site built in the 12th century. Videos showed dust emanating from parts of the Koutoubia Mosque, one of the city's best-known historic sites.

The city is Morocco's most widely visited destination, known for its palaces, spice markets, madrasas and Jemaa El Fna—its noisy square full of food vendors and musicians.

HOW DOES THIS COMPARE TO OTHER QUAKES?

Friday's earthquake was Morocco's strongest in over a century. Although such powerful tremors are rare, it isn't the country's deadliest: Just over 60 years ago, Morocco was rocked by a magnitude-5.8 quake that killed over 12,000 people on its western coast, crumbling the city of Agadir, southwest of Marrakech. That quake prompted changes in construction rules in Morocco, but many buildings—especially rural homes—are not built to withstand such force.



Women cook inside a tent after they were displaced by the earthquake, in the town of Amizmiz, near Marrakech, Morocco, Sunday, Sept. 10, 2023. An aftershock rattled Moroccans on Sunday as they prayed for victims of the nation's strongest earthquake in more than a century and toiled to rescue survivors while soldiers and workers brought water and supplies to desperate mountain villages in ruins. Credit: AP Photo/Mosa'ab Elshamy

There had not been any earthquakes stronger than magnitude 6.0 within 310 miles (500 kilometers) of Friday's tremor in at least a century, according to the U.S. Geological Survey. Northern Morocco experiences earthquakes more often, including tremors of magnitude 6.4 in 2004 and magnitude 6.3 in 2016.

Elsewhere this year, a magnitude 7.8 temblor that shook Syria and Turkey killed more than 50,000 people. Most of the most devastating earthquakes in recent history have been above magnitude 7.0, including a 2015 tremor in Nepal that killed over 8,800 people and a 2008 quake that killed 87,500 in China.

WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

Emergency response efforts are likely to continue as teams traverse mountain roads to reach villages hit hardest by the earthquake. Many communities lack food, water, electricity and shelter. But once aid crews and soldiers leave, the challenges facing hundreds of thousands who call the area home will probably remain.

Members of the Moroccan Parliament convened Monday to create a government fund for earthquake response at the request of King Mohammed VI. Moroccan Prime Minister Aziz Akhannouch said

afterward that the government was committed to compensating victims and helping them rebuild. Enaam Mayara, the president of Morocco's House of Councilors, said that it would likely take five or six years to rebuilt some affected areas.



Residents flee their homes after an earthquake in Moulay Brahim village, near the epicenter of the earthquake, outside Marrakech, Morocco, Saturday, Sept. 9, 2023. A rare, powerful earthquake struck Morocco late Friday night, killing more than 800 people and damaging buildings from villages in the Atlas Mountains to the historic city of Marrakech. But the full toll was not known as rescuers struggled to get through boulder-strewn roads to the remote mountain villages hit hardest. Credit: AP Photo/Mosa'ab Elshamy

Correction note: This version corrects death toll in Syria-Turkey temblor.

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