

# TONGA: Volcanic Eruption

## Situation Report No. 1

As of 25 January 2022

This report is produced by OCHA Office of the Pacific Islands (OoP) in collaboration with humanitarian partners. It covers the period from 22-25 January 2022. The next report will be issued on or around 28 January. [Previous updates on the crisis (OCHA Flash Updates #1 – 6) can be found on ReliefWeb.]

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Ten days on from the violent eruption of the Hunga Tonga Hunga Ha'apai underwater volcano, the Government of Tonga continues to provide relief in the most-affected islands while assessing damage and needs.
- The complete results of the Government-led initial damage assessments will be released around 28 January.
- Upon the request of the Government and preliminary assessment of needs, the Pacific Humanitarian Team is providing and mobilizing targeted assistance on the ground and remote support. Priorities include telecommunications, logistics capacity, access to clean water, non-food items and support with further needs assessment.
- Significant deliveries of NFIs on their way to support the response, arriving with HMAS Adelaide.
- Tonga's key challenges continue to be access to safe water, ash clearance and ensuring food security.
- Air operations challenged by ongoing presence of ash.
- Telecommunications service providers in Tonga - Digicel and the Tonga Communications Corporation (TCC) - have restored some services including voice, SMS, and limited internet services.
- Tonga effectively coordinating its response to the volcanic eruption and resulting Tsunami – early warning saved lives.

### TONGA: VOLCANIC ERUPTION



The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

**85K**

affected people  
Source: NEMO

**84%**

of the country's population  
affected  
Source: NEMO

**1**

Field hospital swept away  
Source: NEMO

**85%**

of agricultural households  
affected nation-wide  
Source: FAO

## SITUATION OVERVIEW

Ten days on from the violent eruption of the Hunga Tonga Hunga Ha'apai underwater volcano, the Government of Tonga and humanitarian partners (the Tongan Red Cross Societies, INGOs, donors and UN agencies) are carrying out initial damage assessments and providing urgently needed humanitarian assistance to people in need.

Communication lines are gradually being re-established and initially hard to reach areas are being visited by assessment teams.

The Government of Tonga and humanitarian partners report that the entire population of Tonga (approx. 105,000 people) have been impacted by the ash and the tsunami and that about 84,000 people (some 84% of the population) have been directly affected. At the height of the crisis, some 3,000 people had to seek shelter on higher grounds, either with relatives

and friends or in evacuation centers. The vast majority have returned home by now. At least 62 people originally from Mango Island were initially evacuated to Nomuka Island and on 21 January to Tongatapu.

Because of a well-functioning early warning system and successful preparedness activities having been carried out in the past, only three people are confirmed to have died.

Initial assessment data indicate that about 240 houses have been damaged or destroyed. Some 100 houses have been damaged or destroyed on Tongatapu and 50 houses on 'Eua alone. As access to some of the remote islands still proves a challenge, the numbers could still be rising.

The United Nations Satellite Centre (UNOSAT) has released on 20 and 21 January [additional preliminary assessment reports](#) that analyze damage in three islands: Nomuka (total population of 239 people) and Fonoifua (total population of 69 people) in the Ha'apai division and 'Eua (total population of 4,903 people) in the Eua division. Large areas of the country have been covered with ash.

The main issue on the humanitarian side is access to safe water. On Tongatapu, ground water and clean rainwater are safe to drink. However, many water reservoirs have been contaminated and need to be cleaned. Information from Ha'apai's main island indicates that the ground water is unsafe for drinking due to saltwater contamination.

The other concern is food security; the impact on agriculture is still to be established (damage to plants by ash covering huge areas). More than 85% of the population of Tonga was active in agriculture, including forestry and fishery.

Tonga remains COVID-free. The Government operates strict COVID protocols and requests all international support to Tonga be delivered in a contactless manner. Relief supplies, except water, have to undergo a 72-hour quarantine.

Shipping relief items from abroad remains a challenge. Although the international airport is operational since last week, the still existing ash and dust causes problems for airplane engines. In addition, the capacity for unloading and storing relief items is also limited. For the time being, there is a restriction of two flights per day. The port in Nuku'alofa is also being used and has already welcomed ships carrying relief items. As regards facilities and infrastructure in the outer islands, more information is still needed.

NEMO and humanitarian partners on the ground have been carrying out relief distributions (NFIs such as kitchen and household kits, hygiene and dignity kits, tarpaulins, tents, shelter tool kits, but also water and food rations) in Tongatapu and in the Ha'apai Island group.

The Pacific Humanitarian Team is scaling up the support based on the request from the Government and based on the assessment of needs.

## HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE

### Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

#### Needs:

- Approximately 50,326 people from 8,388 households need WASH assistance.
- **Water Supply:** Water supply is essential. Access is a challenge for families who rely on rainwater tanks as their main water source. Key needs for water supply include clean water, rainwater tanks, collapsible containers, water purification tablets, water filters, water testing kits and desalination plant.
- **Sanitation:** Affected communities need toilets (portable toilet), garbage bags and rubbish bins for cleaning.
- **Hygiene:** Affected people need WASH and dignity kits, wheelbarrows and shovels to help with community clean up, rainwater tank cleaning, hand sanitizers and gloves.

**60K**

litres of water distributed  
by NEMO

#### Response:

- HMNZS Aotearoa has provided bulk water supplies. An estimated 250,000 liters of bulk water supplies is on board Australia's HMAS Adelaide.
- UNICEF, the Secretariat of the Pacific Community, the World Health Organization, Massey University, Auckland University and ESR are developing Q&A Fact Sheets that explain the safety and water quality of drinking water contaminated by volcanic ash.
- **Water Supply:** Together with the Tonga National Youth Council, cluster partners have provided a desalination unit for about 5,000 people. Additional units will follow. More than 10,000 people will receive buckets with lids, jerry cans, portable field-testing kits and other supplies carried by HMAS Adelaide.
- NEMO and partners have distributed 60,000 litres of water in Tongatapu alone since the crisis emerged;
- **Sanitation:** Cluster partners are consulting Field Ready, an engineering NGO based in Fiji, on design and retrofitting of emergency latrines to be sent to Tonga.
- **Hygiene:** About 1,000 WASH and dignity kits for 1,000 families will arrive in Tonga on 26 January. The kit contains soap, sanitary pads and other hygiene supplies.
- **Technical Support:** The Cluster is planning to embed a WASH Cluster Coordinator Support Role in the line ministry to support the Tonga WASH Cluster Coordinator with coordination and operations. The terms of reference for this function is being developed.

### Gaps & Constraints:

- Although voice communication has improved, SMS and internet restoration remains limited.
- Most partners are relying on government support to ship supplies to Tonga. The alternative is to charter a flight.
- The construction of emergency latrines need personnel.
- Assessments are underway to gather more data to better understand the impact on WASH.

## Logistics

### Response:

- DFAT and MFAT have established a flight corridor to support the transport of relief items from Australia and New Zealand to Tonga. **Seven combined military flights have arrived in Tonga since the response operations began.** The Ports Authority of Tonga has assessed and notified that the Port is safe to receive commercial shipping lines. Military vessels are permitted to berth while routine commercial shipping lines still need to receive confirmation.
- The HMAS Adelaide is due to arrive in Tonga on 26 January carrying 79,000kg of humanitarian aid. A Mobile Storage Unit donated by WFP will be used to immediately increase wharf storage space after its 72hr quarantine period.
- An Expression Of Interest for humanitarian cargo is being organized by the Fiji Government to support Tonga with emergency relief items.
- Cargo, air service, and shipping service working groups are being established with Government, humanitarian partners, and private sector to improve inputs on prioritizing humanitarian relief items and finding the most efficient transport corridor into Tonga. WFP acts as the focal point for coordination between Government and the humanitarian agencies/private sector. On the ground support is also given by the UN RCO Coordination Specialist. This will improve the coordination and capture information on the assistance already provided to Tonga and existing gaps.
- Requests for priority relief items and logistics assistance from multiple government entities and humanitarian agencies are being channeled by the Government of Tonga and partners on the ground.

**>90T**

of relief items expected to land in Tonga on 26 January

### Constraints:

- The ash on the runway continues to cause constraints to aircrafts arriving in Tonga and it is not safe for jet engine planes to land. Humanitarian Charter planes have not been able to land yet due to safety issues. Only two military flights per day can land due to handling capacity on the ground.
- Challenges to communication on the ground continue to impact clear understanding of current permissions on commercial ship arrivals, clearances, and warehousing capacities.

## Emergency Telecommunications

### Response:

- Both international and domestic communications were severely interrupted by damage sustained to the undersea communications cable by the eruption on 15 January 2022.
- Both telecommunications service providers in Tonga - Digicel and the Tonga Communications Corporation (TCC) - have restored some services including voice, SMS, and limited internet services.
- The Asian Development Bank made available basic internet access via its backup satellite link at its office in Nuku'alofa for responders.
- University of South Pacific (USP) is collaborating with ETC to deploy VSAT internet connectivity at the USP campus in 'Atele, Nukualofa to support Tongan Government efforts as well as the wider humanitarian community. USP's VSAT equipment is currently in transit from Fiji on its way to Tonga.
- ETC is deploying critical communications equipment to ensure government and responders have access to communication tools to coordinate the response. This connectivity will bridge the communications gap for government and responders, until the undersea cable is restored.
- ETC is deploying three portable satellite data terminals (BGANs) to Tonga for internet connectivity and voice services which can support assessments or a limited number of users. Télécoms Sans Frontières is supporting the response with SIM card credit to equip the three portable BGAN satellite terminals.
- ETC has dispatched three WFP satellite phones which will be credited with free airtime from Iridium. The UN's International Telecommunications Union (ITU) is assisting in coordinating with Iridium for free airtime.
- Six satellite phones are being shipped to Tonga by ITU to be used by Tongan Government staff supporting the response.

5

priority island groups  
identified by Tongan  
Government for  
connectivity services

### Constraints:

- There are substantial logistical challenges in reaching remote and outlying areas of Tonga with existing assets to assess damage and assist affected populations, as well as shipping communications equipment internationally by air or sea.
- Severely damaged communications systems have hampered capacity to conduct rapid assessments and impacted on establishing communication with NEMO.
- Tonga has very strict COVID-19 protocols that need to be adhered to, include a three-day quarantine for incoming communications equipment.

## Protection

### Needs:

- A total estimate of people in need of protection is not yet available. Assessment data, once available, will be analyzed which may provide an initial estimate.
- There is confirmed need for Psychological First Aid and Psychosocial Support for affected children and families on Tongatapu and 'Eua.
- Affected children require recreational kits in child-friendly spaces.
- Affected women, including those living with disabilities or heading households, need dignity kits.
- Persons living with disabilities require assistance devices. The Pacific Disability Forum is looking to provide them.

### Response:

- Cluster members are providing 50 recreational kits for child-friendly spaces (on board HMAS Adelaide) and an additional 50 additional recreational kits (to be shipped by the Government of Fiji around 29 January 2022).
- UNICEF is looking to engage a coordinator for WASH, Health, Child Protection, Education and Communications for Development (C4D) response activities for the emergency response - seeking personnel already in-country, if available.
- UNFPA team members deployed with multi-disciplinary team (Tongatapu, 20 January) for psychosocial support (PSS) and dignity kit distribution.
- UNFPA is supporting the Ministry of Health with PSS specialist on deployment.
- UN Women is re-programming funding to Talitha Project (primary prevention in emergencies, awareness of services, key messages, advocacy, risk mitigation, social norm change).

- UN Women is re-programming funding to Gender-based Violence service providers including Women and Children's Crisis Centre (mobile and static counselling, national helpline, awareness, outreach), Family Protection Legal Aid Centre (justice/legal services).
- IOM is providing advisory and technical support to NEMO in relation to displacement and evacuations.

#### Gaps & Constraints:

- Communication with members remains a challenge and is limited. Key protection partners need phone credit and satellite phones.
- Assessment teams require training and capacity-building.

## Food Security

#### Needs:

- 4,241 people in need of immediate food assistance for the next four weeks.
- Full picture of impact on agriculture assistance for crop, livestock and fisheries is slowly emerging.
- Government of Tonga has requested non-food items including kitchen sets, wheelbarrows, shovels and non-perishable food.
- Initial damage assessment results are expected to be shared with Food Security cluster leads on 28 January or early next week.

# 12K

agricultural households  
estimated to be affected

#### Response:

- FAO has allocated \$300,000 of Special Fund for Emergency and Rehabilitation Activities (SFERA) funding from Belgium for immediate support to Tonga's Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Forests (MAFF) and Ministry of Fisheries (MoF) to respond to the damages to the agriculture and fishery sectors following the volcanic eruption and tsunami.
- In addition, \$54,000 SFERA Needs Assessment revolving funding has also been committed by FAO.

#### Gaps & Constraints:

- Details of agriculture, including fisheries, impact of volcanic eruption and tsunami are still pending.

## Shelter

#### Needs:

- Pacific Shelter Cluster is awaiting the initial damage assessment results from NEMO to obtain a more accurate picture of damages and shelter needs in Tonga.

#### Response:

- Emergency Shelter and NFI Cluster, which is led by NEMO, is active and has been conducting assessments and distributions in Tongatapu, Ha'apai and Eua from 16 January 2022.
- The Cluster and its humanitarian partners have been working in partnership with the Safety & Protection Cluster for distributions.

#### Gaps & Constraints:

- Communication with the Tonga Shelter Cluster Lead, NEMO, and Tonga's in-country shelter agencies is a challenge due to disruptions in telecommunications.

## Health & Nutrition

#### Needs:

- The medical needs and state of infrastructure in remote areas still needs to be established.
- Affected communities require nutrition supplies.

**Response:**

- A field hospital was set up by the Ministry of Health on Nomuka as the health centre was washed away by the tsunami. The main hospital at Pangai, Princess Fusipala Hospital, remains operational.
- WHO is supporting frontline medical teams from the Ministry of Health with medical supplies and is also providing technical advice and support to the environmental health team which conducted water testing, and food and hygiene support;
- Cluster partners are planning to procure nutrition supplies.
- UNICEF is planning to conduct Nutrition in Emergencies training.

**Gaps & Constraints:**

- Health care workers need Nutrition in Emergencies training and nutrition assessment screening equipment.
- According to the nutritional screening exercise, more nutritional supplies may be needed for the longer term.

## GENERAL COORDINATION

The Government of Tonga is leading the response to this emergency. The National Emergency Management Office (NEMO) is coordinating efforts and has activated the National Emergency Operations Centre, District Emergency Operations Centres and the national cluster system. NEMO reports to the Cabinet's National Disaster Council chaired by the Prime Minister.

Under the leadership of the UN Resident Coordinator, the Pacific Humanitarian Team, a network of UN agencies, INGOs, and the Red Cross Movement has been supporting the Government of Tonga in its response. Members of the PHT on the ground have assisted in assessments and data collection. Regional clusters are liaising with their respective national cluster counterparts in carrying out the humanitarian response. OCHA is working with NEMO regarding coordination.

Providing remote support to Tonga, combined with the damage of communication systems, still poses a formidable challenge in assisting the government-led relief effort and to establish in detail the humanitarian needs.

## FUNDING

Various donors have given financial assistance, such as Australia, New Zealand, Japan, the United States, China, Norway, the European Union as well as the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank.

Australia, New Zealand and Japan provided relief supplies by air and sea (including from humanitarian agencies such as UNICEF and others) during the first ten days after the natural disaster.

On 21 January, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) issued a two-year [Emergency Appeal](#) of CHF2.5 million (USD2.7 million) to assist 17,000 people across the country. The Tonga Red Cross Society will support affected households with water, sanitation and hygiene, health, emergency shelter, essential household items, basic needs, livelihoods, and protection, gender and inclusion.

UNICEF is appealing for USD 2.7 million to provide lifesaving support to children and their families in Tonga.

The Ministry of Finance has identified a bank account "Government of Tonga General Development Account" to receive all donations made in support of the response to the volcanic eruption and tsunami.

Following a request for assistance on 18 January, the EU is coordinating with France via the EU Civil Protection mechanisms to deliver relief items to Tonga. DG ECHO is also contributing EUR200,000 (\$227,000) to IFRC. All humanitarian partners, including donors and recipient agencies, are encouraged to inform OCHA's Financial Tracking Service (FTS - <http://fts.unocha.org>) of cash and in-kind contributions by e-mailing: [fts@un.org](mailto:fts@un.org)

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