

## Africa

# Morocco earthquake: Death toll nears 2,700 as government defends slow response

Search-and-rescue efforts speeding up, but crumbling mud-brick houses reducing the chance of finding survivors

Expand



Men search for missing relatives in the rubble of a house in Douar Thirt village in the Atlas mountains. Photograph: Sergey Ponomarev/New York Times

Mon Sep 11 2023 - 10:54

The death toll from Morocco's deadliest earthquake in more than six decades has risen to almost 2,700 as rescuers race against time to find survivors.

Search teams from Spain, Britain and Qatar were joining Moroccan rescue efforts after a 6.8 magnitude quake struck late on Friday in the High Atlas mountains, with the epicentre 72km (45 miles) southwest of Marrakesh.

The state news agency reported the death toll had risen to 2,681, with 2,501 people injured. Rescuers said the traditional mud-brick houses ubiquitous in the region reduced the chances of finding survivors because they had crumbled.

Among the dead was seven-year-old Suleiman Aytnasr, whose mother had carried him to his bedroom after he fell asleep in the livingroom of their home in a hamlet outside Talat N'Yaaqoub, in one of the worst-hit areas. He had been about to start a new school year.

---

## READ MORE

Morocco earthquake: Survivors feel forgotten by state as they await help a week after disaster



Morocco earthquake: 'We feel like we have been abandoned'



'We were covered in debris': Moroccan earthquake survivors left sleeping outside



Morocco earthquake: Death toll nears 2,700 as government defends slow response



“As she came back, the earthquake happened and the ceiling was destroyed and fell on him,” said Suleiman’s father, Brahim Aytnasr, whose eyes were red from crying. He had spent Monday trying to salvage items from the debris of his house.

Another son, 20-year-old Mouath, had escaped by climbing through a hole in the collapsed kitchen ceiling.



Travel writer Jana Meerman surveys the damage in Marrakesh's historic Medina after a 6.8 magnitude earthquake struck in the High Atlas Mountains. Video: Reuters

After an initial response that was described as too slow by some survivors, search-and-rescue efforts appeared to be speeding up on Monday, with tent

camps appearing in some locations where people were preparing for a fourth night outdoors.

A video filmed by Moroccan outlet 2M showed a military helicopter flying over an area close to the epicentre, dropping sacks of essential supplies to isolated families.

With much of the quake zone in hard-to-reach areas, the authorities have not issued any estimates for the number of people missing.

Roads blocked or obstructed by rocks that tumbled down the steep slopes during the quake have made it harder to access the worst-hit locations. Heavy machinery has been brought in to clear roads, only for subsequent rockfalls to block them again.

*[ Ireland to provide €2m in aid to Morocco as part of relief effort ]*

The harm done to Morocco's cultural heritage has been emerging gradually. Buildings in Marrakesh old city, a Unesco World Heritage site, were damaged. The quake also did huge damage to the historically significant 12th-century Tinmel Mosque.

Residents in Tinmel, a remote village closer to the epicentre where 15 people were killed, said they had been sharing food, water and medicine, but desperately needed tents and blankets to shelter from the cold mountain nights.

The mother of a 15-day-old child said she need milk formula and medicine for her baby.





Created with [Datawrapper](#)

It was the North African country's deadliest earthquake since 1960, when a tremor was estimated to have killed at least 12,000 people, and the most powerful since at least 1900, according to the US Geological Survey.

In a televised statement on Sunday, government spokesperson Mustapha Baytas defended the government's response, saying every effort was being made on the ground.

The army said it was reinforcing search-and-rescue teams, providing drinking water and distributing food, tents and blankets.

King Mohammed VI has not addressed the nation since the disaster. Prime minister Aziz Akhannouch told local media the government would compensate victims, but gave few details.

[ Morocco earthquake: Rescuers race to find survivors as foreign teams join search effort ]

Morocco has accepted offers of aid from Spain and Britain, which both sent search-and-rescue specialists with sniffer dogs, from the United Arab Emirates, and from Qatar, which said on Sunday a search-and-rescue team was on its way. It was yet to accept help from other countries – including France and Turkey.

The European Union said it was releasing an initial €1 million to non-governmental aid organisations in Morocco.

State TV said the government had assessed needs and considered the importance of co-ordinating relief efforts before accepting help, and that it might accept relief offers from other countries later.

– Reuters

[ Majority of Irish holidaymakers in Morocco are away from earthquake site ]



People load aid on to donkeys to transport it to Douar Thirt village in the hard-hit Al Haouz province in Morocco. Photograph: Sergey Ponomarev/New York Times