

Mayotte

Mayotte cyclone: health services in ruins as rescuers race to reach survivors

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Medical supplies airlifted to French Indian Ocean territory after Cyclone Chido leaves hundreds feared dead

The worst cyclone to hit [Mayotte](#) for 90 years has devastated the French Indian Ocean territory's health services, leaving the hospital severely damaged as rescuers raced to find survivors and family members searched for news of their loved ones.

"The hospital has suffered major water damage and destruction, notably in the surgical, intensive care, maternity and emergency units," the French health minister, Geneviève Darrieussecq, told [France 2](#) on Monday, adding that "medical centres were also non-operational".

Video

Cyclone Chido laid waste to many of the territory's shantytowns, with [hundreds believed dead](#). The powerful cyclone caused extensive damage to Mayotte's airport, cutting off electricity, water and communication links when it battered France's poorest territory on Saturday.

The official death toll on Monday morning was 20, according to the local TV station Mayotte la Première. However, Mayotte's prefect, François-Xavier Bieuville, also told the broadcaster that he expected the final death toll to reach "close to a thousand or even several thousand" and that it was the worst cyclone to hit the islands since 1934.



Videos of the storm showed metal shacks folding like cardboard in the ferocious wind and roofs collapsing inwards into flooded houses.

Ambdilwahedou Soumaila, the mayor of Mayotte's capital, Mamoudzou, told Agence France-Presse the storm "spared nothing". "The hospital is hit. The schools are hit. Houses are totally devastated," he said.

The French president, Emmanuel Macron, said late on Monday that he would declare a day of national mourning, and visit Mayotte in the coming days. "This is about dealing with emergencies and starting to prepare for the future," he wrote on X.

The country's interior minister, Bruno Retailleau, landed in Mayotte on Monday morning, with 160 soldiers and firefighters reinforcing 110 already deployed.

"Don't panic," he told a meeting of officials. "I'm counting on you ... When you feel discouraged, when you are tired, remember that we are here ... Each and every one of you is committed to this, to this French ideal."

Chido carried winds of at least 140mph (225km/h) when it reached Mayotte, which lies between Mozambique and Madagascar. At least a third of the territory's 320,000 residents live in slums, where shacks were flattened by the storm.



About 100,000 people are undocumented migrants, according to France's interior ministry. They are mainly from the Comoros, whose closest island is about 43 miles away. That is making it hard to establish how many people have been affected

Ousseni Balahachi, a former nurse, said some people did not dare venture out to seek assistance, "fearing it would be a trap" designed to remove them from Mayotte. Many had stayed put "until the last minute" when it proved too late to escape the cyclone, she added.

A [Facebook group](#) for relatives searching for news of their loved ones had 13,000 members by Monday evening as people posted desperate pleas for information.

"Everything is destroyed," Zaya Toumbou, who was competing as Miss Mayotte in the Miss France beauty pageant on Sunday, said on her Instagram stories. She had been trying to get in touch with her relatives all day as the pageant's final unfolded and finally got a message from her father on Sunday night: "I lost everything."

"The situation is chaotic," said Ben Ahmada, a logistics manager in mainland France, whose family in Mayotte called him on Monday morning after two days with no network to say they had survived.

"They are cut off from the world, so they have no news; they have no information; they have no networks; they have no water; they have no electricity; they have nothing to eat. It's a disaster."

A satellite image shows Mamoudzou after the Cyclone Chido swept through Mayotte. Photograph: Maxar Technologies/Reuters

A first aid plane reached Mayotte on Sunday carrying 3 tonnes of medical supplies, blood for transfusions and 17 medical staff, according to authorities in La Réunion, another French Indian Ocean territory, about 870 miles from Mayotte, which is serving as a logistics base for the rescue operation.

Two military aircraft were expected to follow the initial aid flight, while a navy patrol ship was also due to leave from La Réunion.

The regional Red Cross organisation PIROI pledged its support, while the EU chief, Ursula von der Leyen, said the bloc was “ready to provide support in the days to come”.

The head of the World Health Organization, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, said the WHO “stands ready to support communities in need of essential healthcare”.

Chido is the latest in a string of storms globally fuelled by the climate crisis, according to experts. The “exceptional” cyclone was super-charged by particularly warm Indian Ocean waters, meteorologist Francois Gourand, of the Météo-France weather service, told AFP.



The cyclone landed in Mozambique on Sunday, where officials said it had resulted in three deaths.

“Many homes, schools and health facilities have been partially or completely destroyed,” the UN children’s agency Unicef said.

Two people were killed in Malawi as the storm barrelled through the country on Monday, according to the local TV station MBC.

The UN humanitarian agency, Ocha, said the cyclone’s remnants could also bring heavy rains to Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Southern Africa suffered its [worst drought in at least a century](#) earlier this year, with 27 million people struggling to feed themselves until the next harvest due in April.

Rachel Savage Southern Africa correspondent and agencies

Agence France-Presse and Reuters contributed to this report

P.S.

- The Guardian. Mon 16 Dec 2024 20.45 CET:
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/dec/16/mayotte-cyclone-health-services-in-ruins-with-death-toll-feared-to-reach-thousands>

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