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Information bulletin Portugal: Forest fires

 International Federation
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

Date of issue: 19 June 2017	
Date of disaster: 17 June 2017	Point of contact (name and title): Diana Araújo – Cooperation Responsible at International Department, Portuguese Red Cross Phone: +351919569031 E-mail: cooperacao@cruzvermelha.org.pt
Host National Society: Portuguese Red Cross (PRC) with 204 staff and volunteers actively involved in responding to the disaster	
Other partner organizations involved in the operation: local authorities including civil protection, armed forces, firefighters, INEM	

This bulletin is being issued for information only, and reflects the current situation and details available at this time. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) is not seeking funding or other assistance from donors for this operation. The Portuguese Red Cross will, however, accept direct assistance to provide support to the affected population through its national appeal (see details below).

The situation

Deadly forest fires starting on Saturday, **17 June 2017** in the village of Escalos Fundeiros has swept through central Portugal **killing at least 62, injuring 62 and displacing some 200 people to date**. The blaze is thought to have been caused by a lightning that struck a tree at around 2 p.m. on the 17th in a dry thunderstorm. Within a few hours, the flames have rapidly spread from the **municipality of Pedrogão Grande** to Castanheira de Pêra e Figueiró dos Vinhos and further along four fronts surrounding several villages, killing and injuring civilians and destroying houses and roads. Many people have burned to death in their cars and on the road after becoming trapped by the flames on the road between Figueiro dos Vinhos and Castanheira de Pera. Others have died from smoke inhalation. To date, 18 people have been taken to hospitals in Lisbon, Porto and Coimbra, five of them – four firefighters and a child – seriously injured.

Portuguese authorities have evacuated the district emergency plans and national contingency plan in the night of the 17th and requested international assistance from the **EU's Civil Protection Mechanism** for aircraft support. Spain has dispatched two and France sent three water-bombing planes on Sunday morning to help the Portuguese fire service contain the fires. **Portugal's Social Welfare Department** is providing social support for the displaced through 400 social welfare officials, assisted by the Portuguese Red Cross (see further details below). Dozens of people who fled their homes have been taken in by residents of nearby municipalities. Four shelters have also been established and are run by Social Welfare.

According to the latest (morning of 19 June) data of the Portuguese Civil Protection, more than **800 personnel** (firemen, INEM, civil protection, Red Cross and Armed Forces) are currently combating the fires in the affected areas in the district of Leiria assisted by **350 vehicles and ten aircrafts**. The death toll is expected to rise as many are still missing and the flames continue to spread. Three days of **national mourning** has been declared until Tuesday.



Portuguese Red Cross staff and volunteers are providing a range of services including psychosocial support to those affected and displaced by the forest fires. Source: Joana Bourgard / Rádio Renascença

The forest fires happened amid **severe heatwave** with temperatures reaching 40 °C in some areas of the country over the past days. On 15 June 2017, a **heat and fire alert** had already been issued by the Portuguese Civil Protection in response to the hot weather forecast for 16-18 June. Portugal, like most of southern Europe is prone to forest fires in the dry summer months. This blaze is the country's **worst forest fire in more than half a century**.

Red Cross and Red Crescent action

The Portuguese Red Cross has immediately activated their branch network across the country on 17 June to assist all people affected and in need. A total of **204 staff and volunteers** have been deployed from 27 branches and local structures. A total of **40 ambulances, three logistics units, two dead body management vehicles** and **one healthcare clinic** have been mobilized. PRD staff and volunteers are providing a range of services including with **evacuation, health care** (mainly transferring patients to hospitals and first aid) and **psychosocial support** as well as **distribution of masks**. They are also ready to start distributing **relief items including water, food, beds and blankets** as required. Fifty medical health emergencies outside the affected area were also responded to by the PRC's ambulance services.

Through its network and expertise, the PRC has offered its services in **restoring family links** to the Civil Protection Authority for those who have been separated from their family members while being evacuated or fleeing the blaze. A hotline was created by the Civil Protection Authority for helping reestablish family contacts. The National Society is also providing **assistance with dead body management in the affected areas**, including pre-positioning of **body bags**, as needed.

Resource Mobilization

The Portuguese Red Cross has launched a **national appeal** to support the ongoing emergency activities and raise required funds.

Cash transfers can be done through:

- bank account transfer: IBAN PT50 001000003631911000174 - CÓDIGO SWIFT BBPIPTPL
- online donations: <http://www.cruzvermelha.pt/donativos/donativo-pontual.html>
<https://www.facebook.com/cruzvermelhaportuguesa.sede>

Communications

The Portuguese Red Cross has been active on its website and social media since the start of the disaster, promoting its **national appeal** and informing the public how they can help. The IFRC communications team in Geneva and Budapest has supported social media activity on global channels and is in touch with the National Society counterpart.



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How we work

All IFRC assistance seeks to adhere to the [Code of Conduct](#) for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Disaster Relief and the [Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response \(Sphere\)](#) in delivering assistance to the most vulnerable. The IFRC's vision is to inspire, **encourage, facilitate and promote at all times all forms of humanitarian activities** by National Societies, with a view to **preventing and alleviating human suffering**, and thereby contributing to the maintenance and promotion of human dignity and peace in the world.

The IFRC's work is guided by Strategy 2020 which puts forward three strategic aims:



Save lives,
protect livelihoods,
and strengthen recovery
from disaster and crises.



Enable **healthy**
and **safe** living.



Promote **social inclusion**
and a culture of
non-violence and **peace**.

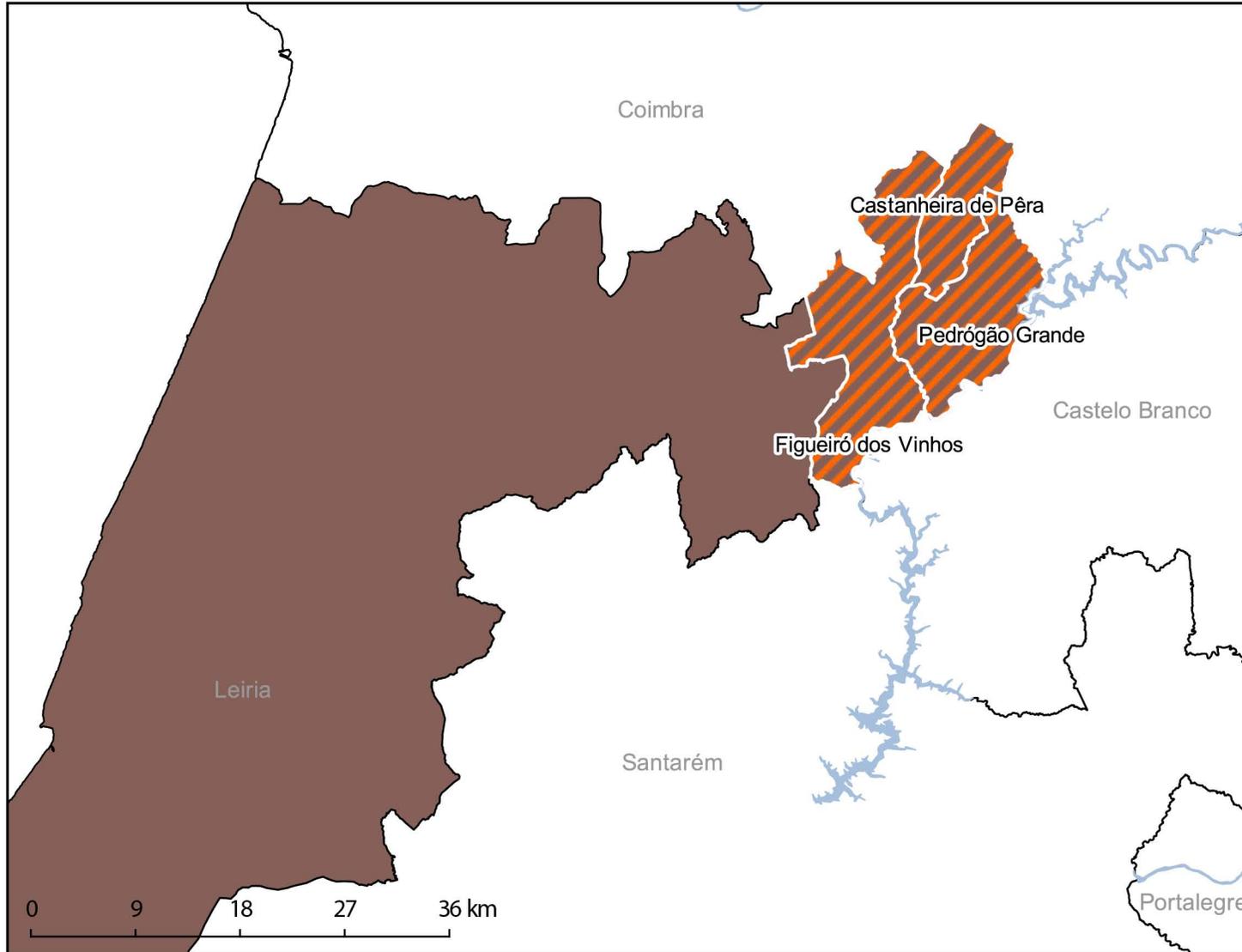
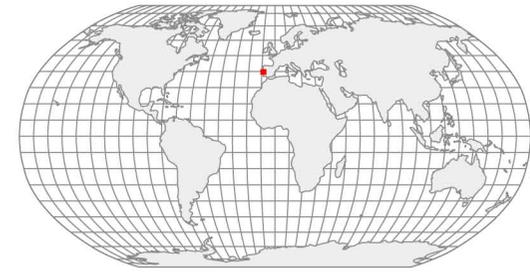


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Fédération internationale des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge et du Croissant-Rouge
Federación Internacional de Sociedades de la Cruz Roja y de la Media Luna Roja
الاتحاد الدولي لجمعيات الصليب الأحمر والهلال الأحمر

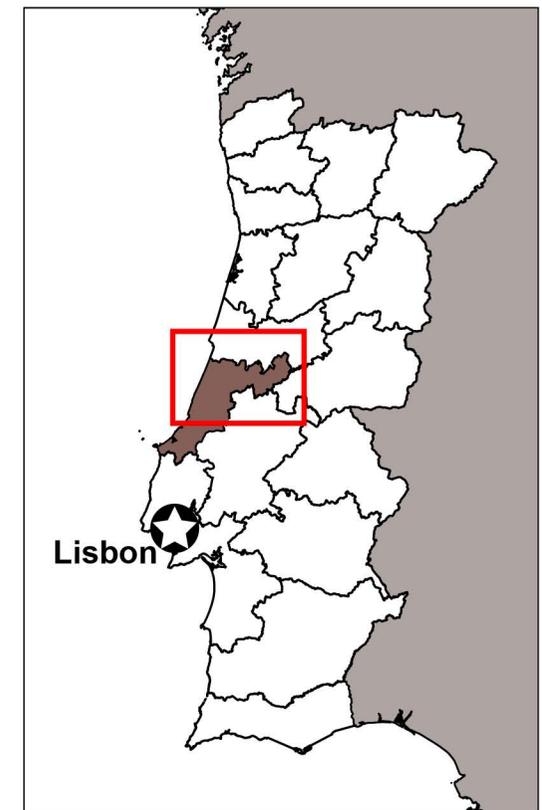
PORTUGAL: FOREST FIRES

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-  Fire-Affected Municipalities
-  Affected District
-  Other District



The maps used do not imply the expression of any opinion on the part of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies or National Societies concerning the legal status of a territory or of its authorities.
Map data sources: GADM, IFRC