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Information bulletin no. 2

Europe: Extreme winter weather

 International Federation
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

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The situation

Severe winter weather and extreme temperatures as low as – 30 degrees Celsius in some areas affected much of Central, Southern and Eastern Europe, including Turkey and Greece in the first two weeks of January 2017.

Homeless people, asylum seekers, refugees in camps and Internally Displaced People (IDPs) are among the most vulnerable.

In Greece, freezing temperatures and fresh snow have affected many parts of the country, including the Aegean islands. The Greek government has dispatched a navy ship to Lesbos in order to temporarily accommodate between 200 to 300 migrants on a voluntary basis. Approximately 50 people have moved into the ship. On 12 January, the government requested the support of all partners for additional items for Samos and Lesbos, such as mattresses, bunk beds, blankets, tents, heaters and other relief items). The Hellenic Red Cross has offered support to the government with some of these items, which are part of the IFRC stocks in-country.

In Serbia, 2,000 migrants living in warehouses and abandoned houses near the main train station of Belgrade are the most affected by the cold. Another 5,000 to 6,000 refugees are living in government established camps. Conditions in the camps are better, with greater access to non-food items (NFIs). However, these refugees are still vulnerable, particularly to cold-related health issues. Many live in unheated tents. At least six migrants across Serbia have died due to the cold weather since the beginning of January 2017.

In the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, heavy snow and low temperatures have affected several areas including Skopje, Negotino and Kavadarci. Many villages were cut off by high snowdrifts and blocked roads.

At least three migrants in Bulgaria and one in Greece have died.¹ In Albania, the extreme winter conditions have impacted almost all areas in the country with frozen roads and causing the deaths of six people so far.

According to weather forecasts, snow is expected to hit again northern Greece, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and southern Serbia in the next few days. Temperatures are also forecasted to drop again at the end of the month.

The cold wave has impacted populations across Eastern Europe. In Ukraine and Belarus, colder weather is expected to continue with reduced snowfall. Below find map with the forecast for the region.

Red Cross and Red Crescent action

National Societies across Europe are working to provide warm clothes, hot food, blankets and first aid to people affected by the severe cold weather. In Greece and the Balkans, teams are assisting both the local population (homeless, vulnerable people, stranded motorists) and asylum seekers and refugees who have already endured months in harsh conditions.



Volunteers from the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia providing relief items to the affected people. Source: *The Red Cross Society of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*

¹ [ACAPS- Serbia Winterisation for Refugees 14 January 2017.](#)

The IFRC Regional Office for Europe is in contact with some 20 National Societies responding to the severe weather. The following section contains key highlights on the recent response from Greece, Serbia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Albania and Belarus.

The **Hellenic Red Cross** with support from the IFRC team and PNSs in the country, as well as in coordination with other humanitarian organizations, including NGOs and UN agencies) started distribution of emergency winter kits in camps already in October 2016 in the Attica region and northern Greece prior to winter weather setting in (thermal blankets, sleeping bags, rain coats, leggings, winter socks, warm hats, gloves, scarf and long sleeve fleece top). The Hellenic Red Cross focused on distributions in seven accommodation centres (camps) in the mainland as well as in several shelter facilities on the islands to address among others the immediate winter needs of the vulnerable people. More specifically, the National Society is actively working together with the camp authorities in Kordelio and Cherso to provide support to the heating of the warehouse site. Additionally, in Lavrio, improvement of shelter facilities have been supported by the Luxembourg Red Cross and the IFRC will provide fuel for hot water. The Hellenic Red Cross have increased presence in Moria, Lesvos in order to provide additional support including first-aid and distribution of heaters to families living in containers. In Lesvos, since 5 January 2017, 1,500 blankets have been distributed to those in need. In Samos, the situation remains dire, as hundreds of people are still living in tented accommodations. One of the key challenges on the islands is the overcrowding and congestion not allowing proper winterization activities. Recently, there has not been snow fall, but there have been low temperatures along with rain. The Red Cross is particularly concerned about new drops of temperatures in the coming weeks that might worsen the current conditions of the migrant population living in the camps.

Vulnerable groups in the Hellenic population are also badly affected by the adverse winter conditions; especially homeless and elderly, whom the Hellenic Red Cross is actively supporting through distributions of warm clothes, hot meals and first aid provision. So far, more than 600 vulnerable people have been assisted by street work activities and first aid services. The winter cash program is addressing 800 beneficiaries with services provided by the Hellenic RC Samaritans and Nursing and Social Welfare volunteers.

The **Red Cross of Serbia** headquarters and branch teams are distributing food items, hygiene parcels, blankets, mattresses and warm clothes to the local population in the municipalities of Vranje, Vladicin Han, Crna Trava and Aleksinac. In total, 210 families received family food parcels (each weighing 25 kilograms and containing canned food, tea, soups, and ready meals), and monthly family hygiene parcels in the total weight 6.5 tons.

The relief items are being dispatched to affected families in cooperation with the municipal headquarters for emergency situations. The soup kitchen programme continues to distribute food for the homeless and vulnerable people. The Red Cross of Subotica has been taking care of the homeless since 22 December 2016. It has provided beds, blankets, personal hygiene items, tea and three cooked meals a day. Between 22 December and 13 January, 253 homeless people were cared for by RC branch. In addition, the Red Cross of Serbia alerted 22 members of national team for snow-extreme winter conditions rescue and evacuation from Belgrade, Kraljevo, Aleksinac, Uzice and Bela Palanka. The National Society continues the delivery of hot meals, hot drinks, blankets and clothes in migrant camps across the country and for those stranded at the border with Hungary.

The **Red Cross Society of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia** has conducted rescue operations and has been distributing relief items to the people affected by the cold weather. The National Society has been responding to the needs of the homeless people around the country in cooperation with the social welfare centres (SWC). People living in inappropriate conditions in dormitories are being assisted by the Ministry of Labour. Red Cross branches have distributed essential relief items (such as 510 blankets, 255 food packages and 255 hygiene parcels among others) to homeless people on the streets and in affected villages. Further distributions are planned to deliver additional 600 blankets, 100 thermoses for homeless people, 300 food packages and 300 hygiene parcels) to those in need.

Relief items including food, blankets and hygiene kits, have been distributed by the **Albanian Red Cross** in the most affected areas such as Peshkopi, Bulqiza, Kukes, Puka, Skhodra, Mirdita and Pogradec from the National Society stocks. Relief items have been dispatched partly in cooperation with the Army Helios Units. To date, 260 families have received standard relief packages. An additional 240 families will receive a standard relief package this week. The standard relief package contains blankets, hygiene kits and food items. Besides the above, the National Society has distributed 300 blankets in the social centres in the capital of the country, Tirana.

From 5 January the **Belarus Red Cross** has been focusing vulnerable groups, such as homeless. The National Society set up 107 warming stations at the sites of mass-gatherings such as churches, open-air public transport stops. Of these, 83 warming stations were arranged at Belarus Red Cross regional and district branches, eight were Red Cross tents with heating canons and power generators, and 16 vehicle-based mobile points which also delivered assistance to the places where homeless usually gather, which include dump sites and glass bottle buy-back centres. Hot meals, tea, warm clothes and blankets were distributed to the most affected homeless people were. Belarus Red Cross also supplied meals, blankets and bedlinen to seven state-run temporary shelters for the homeless as the number of people seeking refuge in these shelters has doubled and the authorities requested for Red Cross assistance. A DREF Operation is being prepared to ensure humanitarian assistance to 41,500 people affected by extreme winter conditions to provide hot meal, tea and shelter to those in need.

The IFRC will generate further support to the members and will seek contributions, should that be necessary.

Communications and media

The IFRC Regional Office for Europe's communications team has been closely monitoring the situation and produced the following materials for use by all National Societies:

- **Web story:** [Emergency teams on the ground as freezing temperatures grip Europe](#)
- [Key Messages](#)
- **Press release:** [Red Cross issues warning over severe winter weather in Europe](#)
- Emergency winter response in Europe - [Photos](#)

Contact information

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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 (NGO's) 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.



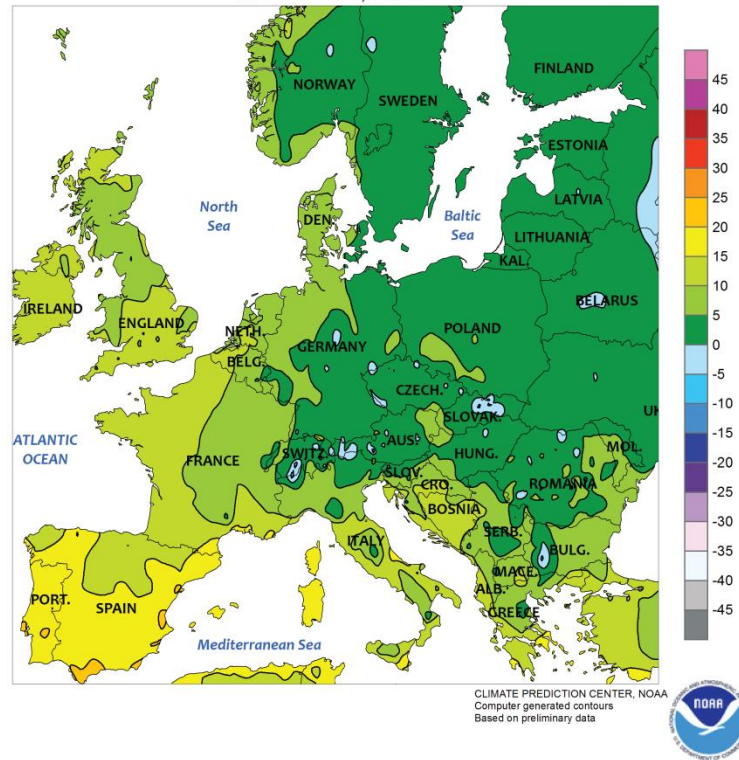
Enable **healthy**
and **safe** living.



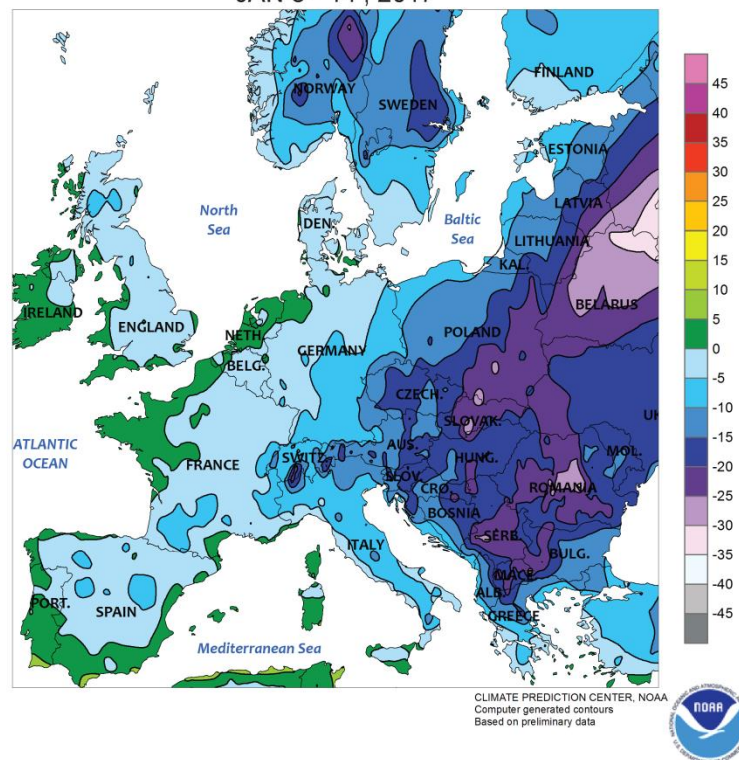
Promote **social inclusion**
and a culture of
non-violence and **peace.**

Annex 1 - Extreme maximum and minimum temperatures between 8-14 January 2017 in Europe

EUROPE
Extreme Maximum Temperature (C)
JAN 8 - 14, 2017



EUROPE
Extreme Minimum Temperature (C)
JAN 8 - 14, 2017



Annex 2 - Extreme maximum and minimum temperatures between 8-14 January 2017 in Eastern Europe

