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Information bulletin no. 3

Europe: Extreme winter weather

 International Federation
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

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The situation

A period of exceptionally cold and snowy winter weather occurred in the first half of January 2017 in Eastern, Central and Southern Europe, including Turkey and Greece.

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

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.

In Italy, response to the extreme winter conditions has been made even more difficult as a result of the earthquake as of last week, and several avalanches as a consequence. *A separate Information Bulletin will be published on the response activities of the Italian Red Cross.*

The cold wave has impacted populations across Eastern Europe, in Ukraine and Belarus as well.

National Societies across Europe are working to provide warm clothes, hot food, blankets and first aid to people affected by the severe cold weather.

According to the current forecasts, the weather conditions considerably improved compared to the first two weeks of the year, however, low temperatures are expected to remain all around Europe.

Red Cross and Red Crescent action

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 **Italy, Spain, Greece, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Belarus.**

Since 18 January, the **Italian Red Cross** has been working continuously, 24 hours a day, to reach the villages and towns isolated by heavy snow and rescue those who are reported missing. A special team of experts has been set up to support the coordination of local operations. Some 1,000 Italian Red Cross staff and volunteers have been mobilized, and a total of 165 vehicles deployed, including 70 specifically dispatched to areas affected by the extreme snow and weather conditions.

The **Spanish Red Cross** has been conducting various activities in the provinces where emergency alert was issued due to low temperatures and/or snowfall. The Social Emergency Units (SEUs) are targeting homeless people, who are gravely excluded from general assistance, through providing overnight accommodation in own or institutional facilities, distributing blankets, clothes and hot drinks and assessing the number and condition of affected people. Together with the local Immediate Emergency Response Units (IERU, or ERIE in Spanish), the SEUs are also providing resting zones and shelter in the coldest hours and items of basic necessities. The IERU's Provisional Shelter, Search and Land Rescue Teams are on stand-by for emergency situations. Guidelines and recommendations are being disseminated to the public over social media, primarily on Twitter (via @CRE_Emergencias).



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*

The **Hellenic Red Cross** with support from the IFRC team and Partner National Societies (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 Greek government has dispatched a navy ship to Lesbos in order to temporarily accommodate between 200 to 300 migrants on a voluntary basis. So far, approximately 100 people have moved into the ship.

The Hellenic Red Cross focused on distributions in seven accommodation centres (camps) in the mainland to address among others the immediate winter needs of the vulnerable people. Already in preparation for the winter in November 2016, the Hellenic Red Cross with the support of the IFRC conducted emergency winterization in Cherso and Softex Kordelio. This included providing winter layers for tents and insulated pallets for flooring. In Kordelio, heaters were also provided to the tents and containers with regular refuelling with kerosene. The National Society is actively working together with the camp authorities in Kordelio 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.

In the shelter facilities located on the islands, the Hellenic Red Cross distributed additional winter items like blankets, socks and winter clothes to those affected (among others. in Lesbos and Samos). The Hellenic Red Cross has increased presence in Moria, Lesbos in order to provide additional support including first-aid and distribution of heaters to families living in containers. In Lesbos, since 5 January 2017, 1,500 blankets have been distributed to those in need. In Samos, hundreds of people are still living in tented accommodations, the National Society distributed blankets to them to address the immediate winter needs of the vulnerable people. 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 the 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 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. A DREF operation is being prepared to ensure humanitarian assistance to some 1,381 people affected by extreme winter conditions to provide food and hygiene items to those in need.

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. The 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 launched 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.

A separate Information Bulletin will be issued on the Italian Red Cross's response to the extreme winter conditions.

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: [Electricity cut, water pipes frozen – harsh realities of camp life during winter in Greece](#)
- [Serbia: photos](#)
- [Greece: 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.



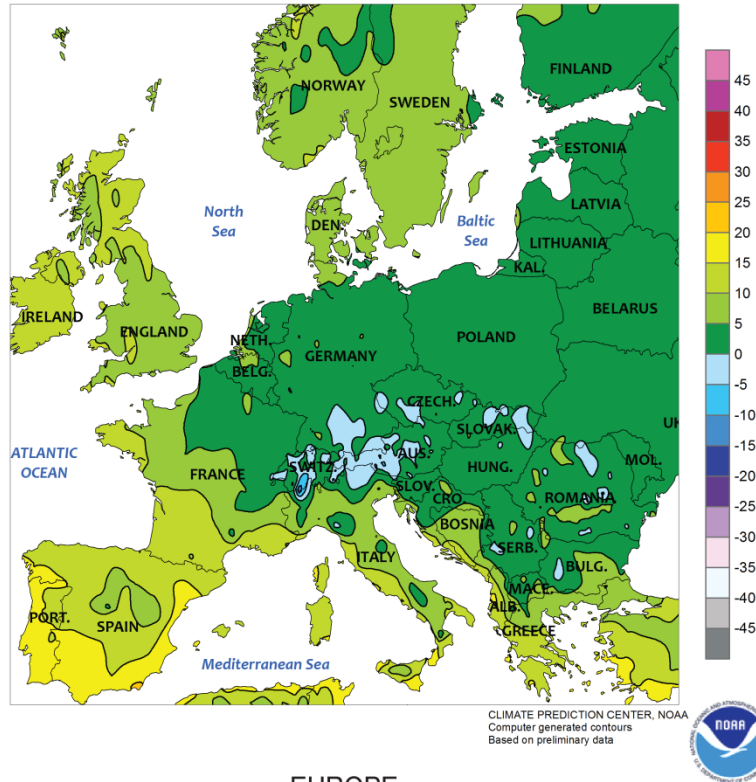
Enable **healthy**
and **safe** living.



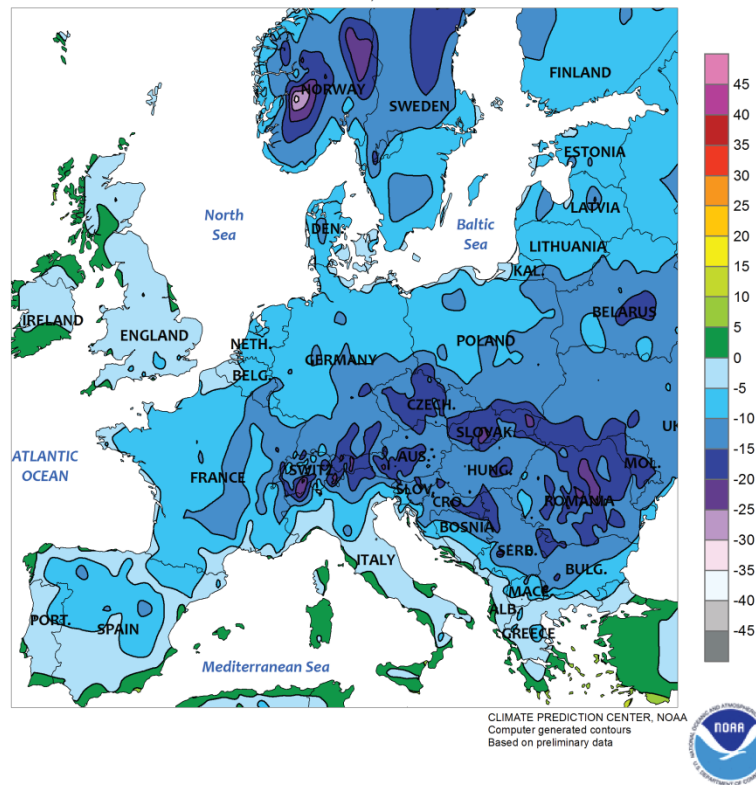
Promote **social inclusion**
and a culture of
non-violence and **peace**.

Annex 1 - Extreme maximum and minimum temperatures between 15-21 January 2017 in Europe

EUROPE
Extreme Maximum Temperature (C)
JAN 15 - 21, 2017

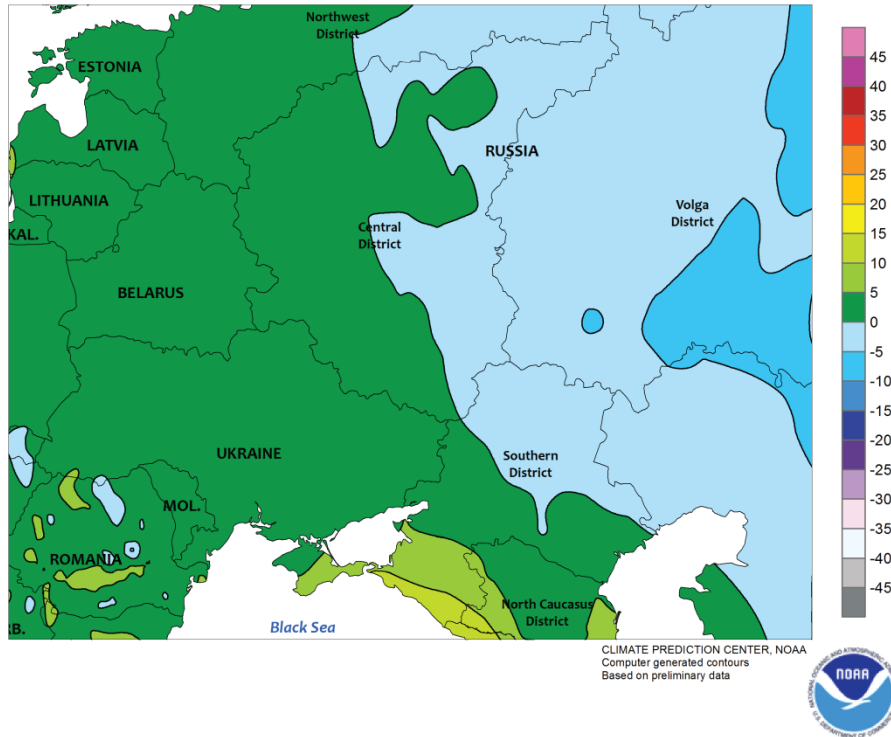


EUROPE
Extreme Minimum Temperature (C)
JAN 15 - 21, 2017



Annex 2 - Extreme maximum and minimum temperatures between 15-21 January 2017 in Eastern Europe

EASTERN EUROPE
Extreme Maximum Temperature (C)
JAN 15 - 21, 2017



EASTERN EUROPE
Extreme Minimum Temperature (C)
JAN 15 - 21, 2017

