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Information bulletin

Bulgaria: Extreme winter conditions & floods

 International Federation
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

Information Bulletin n° 2
GLIDE numbers CW-2012-000006-BGR ; FL-2012-000019-BGR
21st February 2012

This bulletin is being issued for information only, and reflects the current situation and details available at this time. The Bulgarian Red Cross Society, with the support of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), has determined that external assistance is still not required, and is therefore not seeking funding or other assistance from donors as it was mentioned on 9th February 2012 in the Information Bulletin n° IB090212BG.

Summary

Following the strong cold wave that hit Bulgaria in the first days of February 2012, i.e. two weeks ago, and caused severe difficulties for the residents across the country, the general situation is gradually improving now with a steady rise of temperatures up to minus two degrees Celsius.

There is a state of alert in view of a possible flooding in the areas with significant snowfall, especially in regions close to rivers, river banks and dams. Preventive measures are being taken by municipalities and state authorities, namely constant monitoring of water level, cleaning of river beds and repairing the damaged dikes.



Family home damaged by extreme winter conditions
Photo: Bulgarian Red Cross

All roads are unblocked and road traffic is getting back to normal for the current winter conditions. All border crossing points are open, including the ferry traffic on the Danube between Bulgaria and Romania.

The Bulgarian RC continues its efforts to provide support and assistance to the affected population and in particular to the most vulnerable groups (e.g. elderly people, families with children, families with low income, families of the people who passed away in the disaster and others). A detailed needs assessment is still being carried out as well as the assessment of damages. The Bulgarian RC participates in both processes run by joint commissions. In Bisser, the worst affected village, a large number of houses have been damaged and many are beyond repair. Infrastructure in the village is also seriously affected, in particular electricity and water supply as well as roads.

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The situation

Following the strong cold wave that hit Bulgaria in the first days of February 2012, i.e. two weeks ago, and caused severe difficulties for the residents across the country, the general situation is gradually improving now with a steady rise of temperatures up to minus two degrees Celsius.

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There is still an officially declared state of emergency in the following three districts with an overall number of five affected municipalities

- Haskovo district, municipalities of: Harmanli, Svilengrad and Lyubimets; Number of people affected: more than 37 000.

- Sofia district, municipality of: Slivnitsa; Number of people affected: 9 681.

- Vidin district, municipality of: Boynitsa. Number of people affected: 1 341.

The most affected areas are:

- Haskovo district, municipality of Harmanli, the flooded village of Bisser and the next village of Leshnikovo; Number of people affected in the two villages: 1009.

- Stara Zagora district, municipality of Galabovo, the flooded villages of Obruchishte, Musachevo, Iskritsa, Madrets and Mednikarovo. Number of people affected in the five villages: 3 704.

The worst affected populations are situated in the flooded regions, living near dams and river dikes at risk of further flooding, and in particular the evacuated households. Particularly vulnerable groups across the country include homeless people, lonely older people and people in various settlements without access to food supply or without electricity.

Red Cross and Red Crescent action

A) Bulgarian RC Response to Floods

The Bulgarian RC is in constant contact with local authorities in all locations, actively participates in the assistance activities which are being conducted and closely follows the development of the situation. This is a detailed description of the rescue activities:

- One local team (Bulgarian RC Haskovo district branch) consisting of 7 people staff and volunteers was deployed; responsibilities include emergency assistance to the affected population (NFA, hot drinks and drinking water) coordinating efforts with local authorities and providing support to local authorities in establishment of distribution points and support systems on the spot.
- One national team (Bulgarian RC Headquarters) consisting of 4 people, paid staff members; responsibilities include methodological support to the local team and assessment.
- One neighbouring team (Bulgarian RC Smolyan district branch) consisting of 2 people; responsibilities include support to field work of the local team and share expertise and experience.
- One mountain rescue team consisting of two rescuers and one rescue dog – deployment on two occasions; responsibilities include search and rescue for the missing due to the floods, together with police and official authorities.
- One psycho-social support team consisting of two Bulgarian RC volunteers - professional psychologists trained for crisis intervention and three locally recruited school psychologists from a neighbouring municipality, Harmanli; responsibilities include provision of psychological first aid and psycho-social support and counseling to the affected. There is also a psychological first aid and psycho-social support station which is still operating. Till now, 22 people have received support to recover from the traumatic event. Amongst these are 12 women, 6 men and 4 children.

15,000 litres of mineral water and one truckload of food items were distributed in the affected area.

Non-food items were distributed to more than 400 people from the most affected families in the flooded village of Bisser (Haskovo district, municipality of Harmanli): blankets, bed linen, rubber boots, winter gloves,

hygiene materials. Non-food items were provided from the Emergency Stock of the Bulgarian RC's regional warehouse and central warehouse.

5 prefabricated containers were provided as temporary shelter to those people whose property was demolished by the flooding in the village of Bisser. The containers are fully equipped with items from the Emergency Stock of the Bulgarian RC.

The Bulgarian RC established a logistics and distribution system of stations to ensure quality receipt and delivery of goods. A warehouse space has been set up to preserve food items. Local spontaneous volunteers were involved in the distribution process.

Non-food items and food items were distributed to 20 affected people in the village of Leshnikovo (Haskovo district, municipality of Harmanli): clothes, blankets, bed linen, food parcels. The non-food items were provided from the Emergency Stock of the Bulgarian RC.

Non-food items were distributed to three affected families in the village of Iskritsa (Stara Zagora district, municipality of Galabovo): raised inflatable airbeds with pumps, blankets, bed linen, pillows, and pillow cases. The non-food items were provided from the Emergency Stock of the Bulgarian RC, Stara Zagora branch.

More non-food items including disinfectants, shoes and clothes were given to the affected population in the villages of Obruchishte, Iskritsa and Madrets (Stara Zagora district, municipality of Galabovo). The non-food items were provided from the Emergency Stock of the Bulgarian RC, Stara Zagora branch. The food items, water and non-food items are being distributed to more than 2,000 people in the district of Stara Zagora. There is an ongoing assessment, and at this stage it is clear that the district will need dehumidifying driers in order to cope with the situation after the floods.

B) Bulgarian RC Response to Winter Conditions

Though the situation is slightly improving with temperatures rising up to minus two degrees Celsius, the Bulgarian RC is still using its operational capacities at national and local level to meet the needs of vulnerable groups affected by the cold wave and harsh weather conditions.



Distribution of relief items
Photo: Bulgarian Red Cross

Therefore, the Crisis Centre in the village of Bazan (Ruse district, North East Bulgaria) is still functioning at the moment, providing shelter, hot meals and hot drinks to 30 homeless people. The Ruse branch is also running jointly with the local municipality another Crisis Centre situated in the downtown of the city where 24 socially deprived and homeless people find peer support and hot meals.

In the soup kitchen run only by the Bulgarian RC Ruse branch, another group of 50 homeless people receive daily portions of hot meals.

So far more than 3,300 people have received direct assistance (food, hot drinks, shelter, psycho-social support and non-food items) from the Bulgarian RC in the most affected districts – Haskovo, Stara Zagora and Ruse.

C) Bulgarian RC Action To Raise Funds

The Bulgarian Red Cross started raising funds through a national campaign opening a dedicated bank account for the donations on this specific operation. Financial donations are collected through bank transfer, online donations and SMS messages to all mobile telecom operators in the country. The response from citizens is enormous, demonstrating their solidarity with the affected people.

The Bulgarian RC has received a vast number of inquiries and offers from Bulgarian citizens who wanted to help by becoming volunteers or by donating goods (clothes, shelter, and etc.). During one week, more than 30 requests were registered and answered.

In addition to this, a lot of contacts came from Bulgarian citizens living abroad who wanted to learn more about different ways of donating, especially money transfer options, and various systems for transactions of finances.

The Bulgarian RC has launched a national fundraising campaign which will last until 9th March 2012. The results so far are as follows.

- BGN 455,820 (equal to CHF 282,241) has been collected on the dedicated bank account of the National Society (at 16th February 2012 till 17.00 hours). More than 130 000 text messages have been sent to the assistance number 1255 (available with all the three local mobile communication providers), the price per message is 1,20 BGN (0.74 CHF) incl.VAT;
- For the first time in the history of the National Society, a land-line phone number has been opened for those willing to donate not having mobile communication access, the price per one call is 0,99 BGN (0.62 CHF) without VAT;
- There are also donations coming online through websites for collective shopping, and data is still to be processed.
- A number of Bulgarian companies of national and local importance joined the campaign by offering assistance in kind and providing the required goods to the needy population.
- The National Society also received financial support from the international community, for instance OFDA and the Embassy of the People's Republic of China.



Registration of beneficiaries
Photo: Bulgarian Red Cross

Contact information

For further information specifically related to this operation please contact:

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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 Disaster 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.

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

- 1.** Save lives, protect livelihoods, and strengthen recovery from disaster and crises.
 - 2.** Enable healthy and safe living.
 - 3.** Promote social inclusion and a culture of non-violence and peace.
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