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Information bulletin

Europe Region: Flash floods

 International Federation
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

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Host National Societies: Albanian Red Cross, Belarus Red Cross, Croatian Red Cross, Hungarian Red Cross, Kazakh Red Crescent, Red Cross of Montenegro, The Red Cross of Serbia, Romanian Red Cross

This bulletin is being issued for information only and reflects the current situation and details available at this time.

The situation

Thousands of people have been affected by floods in Europe and Central Asia in March after heavy rainfall combined with a rapid rise in temperatures saw snow and ice thaw quickly. There have been severe temperature deviations below average this month and a major disturbance coming from the Atlantic. Meteorological models determine that another wintry spell can happen by the end of March, accompanied by disruptive snowfall for North-Western and Central Europe. Snow and flood alerts are issued for 12 countries, with the Balkans and Southern Europe at highest risk. Higher temperatures will continue to rise and more heavy rain is expected throughout the next week, putting thousands more people at risk across the region.

Red Cross and Red Crescent teams are responding or ready to respond to ongoing and impending emergencies.

Albania

Since 2 March, Shkodra prefecture has been affected by extensive flooding caused initially by the melting of the fallen snow due to warm winds and gradually increasing temperatures. Intense rainfall over subsequent days, combined with the increase in discharge from hydro power plants (HPP) in the Drin cascade, have worsened the flooding situation. The floods have been spreading, covering 4,800 ha of agricultural land cutting off 160 houses and fully flooding 40 homes. The villages of Obot and Shirq, in Ana e Malit and Dajç administrative units, respectively, are in the most difficult situation.

The situation worsened on 19 March, affecting even the suburban areas of the city of Shkodra, where 25 people were evacuated by military and police, and accommodated in a high school dormitory. The deterioration of the situation was caused by the discharges of HPPs Fierzë, Koman and Vau Deja, as well as the high amount of precipitation in Shkodra area, particularly in its northeast. Authorities increased the amount of compulsory discharges in order to reduce pressure on dams, as water levels are at an almost critical level. The villages of Velipoja



Image 1. Croatian Red Cross rescue team evacuating residents from a home affected by heavy flooding. *Photo: Croatian RC*

and Trushe, and most of the villages of Dajč are faced with drinking water shortages due to the absence of the water pumping system.

Belarus

On 19 March, the first floods were reported by the Belarusian authorities, local media and Belarus Red Cross branches, with 316 flooded houses reported to be flooded in three regions of the country. According to information provided by hydro-meteorological agencies, rapidly-increasing volumes of water are observed across the entire country. The rise of water levels amounts to 10–200 cm per day, depending on the district.

The Ministry of Emergencies predicts that 140 villages and towns, as well as community farming projects will be affected by floods in a total of 43 districts. In addition, 70 road segments and 15 bridges, and at least 6,600 garden cottages are estimated to be flooded in the next two weeks. The level of rivers is rising, with ice still covering the rivers Western Dvina, Dniepr, Berezina, Sozh, as well as the Vileiskoe, Chigirinskoe, Zaslavskoe, Soligorskoe, Krasnaya Sloboda water storages, and the lakes Drivyaty, Naroch, Chervonoe. With the melting of ice, significant increases of water levels are expected. Snow is still on the ground in some districts, reaching up to 20 cm. As of 21 March, it was also snowing, which will further worsen the situation with thawing. The daily water-level fluctuation in the rivers is on average 12 cm. In many rivers, the level of water is already above bottom land. Rivers Pripyat, Sluch and Ubort will reach the crucial level of water within a few days. The most critical areas are the ones near village Chernichi, in Gomel region. 1,356 houses have been fully or partially flooded.

Croatia

Heavy rains and a sudden rise in temperatures has caused rapid snow thaw, particularly in the mountainous areas, and triggered a number of flood-related problems in several areas of Croatia. The situation is most difficult in Kupa and Sava basin and in the area near Gospić. Due to the enormous efforts of all protection and rescue stakeholders, it seems that a major disaster will be avoided. So far, 150 houses have been flooded in different areas (50 in Gospić area), and 7 houses have collapsed as a consequence of land-slides in Hrvatska Kostajnica, with 23 evacuated persons accommodated at a local hotel. Based on weather forecasts, the affected areas will remain on alert for at least one more week before the situation is normalised.

Hungary

On 17 March, a wave of extreme cold weather and precipitation over the north-eastern part of Hungary led to heavy snowstorms and snow blockades on the roads of Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén, Hajdú-Bihar, Heves, Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg counties. Tidal rain caused slippery road sections in several locations. Firefighters have been alerted to more than three hundred locations over a few hours and hundreds of interventions took place in subsequent days. Due to a wire break, 31 settlements of five counties, with a total of 32 thousand consumers, stopped receiving electricity. Service providers have been working on repairing the disruption for days. The National Meteorological Service issued a level-three (red) warning to some areas of Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén, Hajdú-Bihar, Heves, Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg counties. Trucks and passenger cars drifted off the slippery roads, while trees broke cables and fell down closing the roads. Due to the intense snowing, the authorities closed for a short time a section of the M3 motorway and the 36th highway in full width. The weather is slowly getting better, and temperatures are expected to increase in the next weeks, but, in some parts of the country, snowing is still expected.

Kazakhstan

Three days of heavy rain and melting snow have caused flooding in East Kazakhstan Region. Flooding has affected the regional capital, Oskemen, and the districts of Ayagoz, Glubokoe, Kurshim and Ulan. People are at a loss, without property, and have been forced to leave their homes. According to the latest data, 176 houses of the city of Ayagoz have incurred damages, with 32 being completely destroyed. More than 130 people have been left without a roof and were placed in the evacuation centre at a boarding school in Ayagoz. The total number of affected people is 600.

Montenegro

According to the information received from the Hydro Meteorological Institute of Montenegro, floods are likely to happen in the area of Ulcinj and Lake Skadar (Podgorica and Bar), with predicted strong south winds, snow thaw and the sea level rising, with an anticipated rainfall of 300 liters per m². Rescue services are already alerting local populations in the potentially-affected communities to evacuate cattle, food and machinery, and to move household

items to higher floors, if possible. Depending on water release from the Albanian side (which is a high probability), the flow of water could be more than 1,500 m³ / sec. In this case, river Bojana will not be able to accommodate these quantities of water, and floods are inevitable. According to predictions, Saturday will be the most critical day.

Romania

Rain and melting snow have caused flooding in Romania over the last few days. As of 15 March, Romania's Department for Emergency Situations (Departamentul pentru Situații de Urgență – DSU), said that 12 houses had been severely damaged, with over 400 others flooded to some extent. Flooding has also damaged bridges, water supply and commercial premises. Some of the worst of the flooding has been reported in the counties of Covasna and Brașov in the Transylvania region. On 14 March, seven people were rescued after they had been left isolated by flooding in areas around Șercaia and Mândra in Brașov county. Late on 14 March, DSU officials decided to evacuate around 300 residents from 130 houses in the village of Căpeni, Covasna County. Around 40 people have refused to evacuate. Romania's National Institute of Hydrology and Water Management (INHGA) issued orange warnings for stretches of the Olt river in central areas of the country, and the Neajlov, a tributary of the river Argeș. Code-yellow warnings are in place for southern stretches of the Olt and Argeș, and also the Mureș, Târnava Mare and Târnava Mică rivers in north central areas. Romania is facing some heavy snowfalls (yellow and orange codes). The past week has seen some floods but nothing major, only some fields and roads were covered in water.

Serbia

4–12 March saw snow thaw resulting in flooding in the southern and central part of Serbia. In southern Serbia, and, in the central part of the country, in municipality of Krusevac (Djunis), a total 180 households were affected by floods. Floods were caused by snow thaw due to higher temperatures. In general, most of the municipalities successfully defended their territory from flooding. Major rivers did not cause any problems, with all flooding being caused by tributaries. More snow and rainfall is expected.

Red Cross and Red Crescent action

Albanian Red Cross has, through its Shkodra Branch, conducted a needs assessment with the authorities, and mobilized its volunteers to monitor, gather information and distribute relief items. On 12 March, 50 standard relief packages were distributed for 50 Roma families located in the severely-affected neighbourhood of Ajasëm. On 15 March, standard relief packages were distributed to support 35 families of Shirq village, which is among the worst-affected localities. Albanian Red Cross is also supporting people who are accommodated in the dormitory of the high school "Arben Broci". Other support includes transporting evacuated children to school, providing nappies for babies and medical equipment for elderly and disabled people forced to leave their homes.

The information collected from Shkodra branch indicates needs for food and non-food items, such as blankets and hygiene items for the affected families, including for the evacuated. So far, the government has provided assistance in the form of 100 beds and 18 tents, made available to the municipality of Shkodra to provide accommodation for families in need of evacuation across the administrative units. Food, drinking water and food for livestock has been provided by the emergency structures as well. According to an announcement by the General Director of Civil Emergencies, the flooding situation in Shkodra is expected to get worse.

Belarus Red Cross will provide a total of 7,500 people with assistance (including relief distribution and psychosocial support) in six regions, through to April. At present, disaster response teams are deployed to assess the needs of the population. The overall coordination of the response and preparedness to the floods rests with the Ministry of Emergencies. The Ministry's emergency units are currently pumping water out from flooded roads. Belarus Red Cross is participating in the regional steering committees on preparedness and response to floods, which enables the National Society to monitor closely the situation at the local level and respond when required. Humanitarian support, transportation, and psychosocial support are needed. A DREF request is currently being filed with IFRC.

Croatian Red Cross has been actively participating in all stages of the combat against floods. In preparing for floods, the CRC Intervention Teams (IT) have been helping the most vulnerable by moving the furniture and other household items to higher ground. Water rescue teams have been visiting isolated villages on a daily basis, distributing medication, food and water. Psychosocial support teams are constantly providing support to 23 persons (land-slide victims). Continued needs assessment is carried out, with an assessment of recovery needs (dehumidifiers, disinfection items) currently underway. On a daily basis, around 80 staff and IT members are attending to around 500 beneficiaries in different areas of Croatia. Besides IT members, significant quantities of CRC equipment have been deployed to affected areas (water pumps, generators, etc.) The CRC has distributed initial cash support to land-

slide-affected beneficiaries, and has launched a national emergency appeal in order to cover basic needs. All the neighbouring CRC Intervention Teams are on standby for deployment if needed.

Hungarian Red Cross is on standby. From the beginning of March, HRC started to prepare for possible floods – they have performed control of stocks, maintenance of equipment, assessment of the availability of staff and volunteers, coordination with authorities, etc.

Kazakh Red Crescent has provided evacuees with water, food, warm clothes and blankets and psychosocial support. KRC provided assistance to vulnerable groups of citizens whose houses had been completely destroyed or affected by floods in the city of Ayagoz. The victims were given assistance bank cards to which monetary assistance was transferred. In the first round, on 16 March, 158 people from the most vulnerable categories of citizens received assistance. In the second round, on 19 March, 410 people received assistance, representing the following vulnerability categories: pensioners living alone, single mothers, large families with low income, and disabled people. These funds will help people survive the first and most difficult days of the crisis and meet their primary needs – including in food, sanitary and hygiene and kitchen accessories, bedding, medicine, and clothing. 122 families (568 people) have received help altogether, with a total of KZT 17,040,000 (appx. CHF 50,400).



Image 2. Kazakh Red Crescent responding to the emergency caused by floods. *Photo: Kazakh RC*

Kazakhstan's Committee on Emergency Situations reported that a team of over 1,000 people using boats, vehicles and pumps were responding to the situation. As of 12 March, 400 people had been evacuated, many of those in the district of Ayagoz, where severe flooding has damaged over 40 houses. Rescues were carried out in Kurshim District after flooding from the overflowing Kurchum (Kurshim) River washed away a bridge. Around 42 houses have also been flooded in the area. Residents of the village of Topterek were isolated and rescuers from the Eastern Regional Airborne Operative Rescue Team together with the Kurshim District Emergency Department and local police service helped deliver supplies and carry out rescue operations. Flooding has also damaged eight buildings in Oskemen, two in Ulan district and over 50 in Glubokoe.

Red Cross of Montenegro participates in the work of Crisis Headquarters, both at national and local level, and all the staff and volunteers in the potentially-affected communities are on standby.

The Red Cross of Serbia has been fully involved in the response to floods from the beginning of the emergency, participating in the Operational Team of the Republic Emergency Headquarters for preparedness and response in case of floods. RCS HQ has supported local Red Cross branches engaged in providing help to effected people in five municipalities. NDRT members have been alerted and engaged locally in Priluzje village (Vucitrn municipality) and Bela Palanka. Red Cross branches in Doljevac and Prokuplje have participated in the evacuation of 92 people affected by floods, and prepared shelters for evacuated people. In Prokuplje, Red Cross volunteers ran play activities for all evacuated children. The Red Cross branch in Bela Palanka engaged local NDRT members and received equipment for early recovery of 20 flood effected households. Three mud pumps, five submersible pumps and one generator was sent to support early recovery of the affected people. Between 4–12 March, the Red Cross of Serbia distributed 40 hygiene parcels, 900 food parcels and 2,066 litres of bottled water.

Romanian Red Cross has prepositioned food and hygienic parcels as a preparatory measure.

Communications

National Societies and IFRC have been working to highlight the response efforts across social media and mass media channels. IFRC is continually sharing updates through its [Europe Twitter account](#) and media outreach is planned. IFRC is also advising the public on simple steps people can take to prepare for flooding, and on what to do if flooding happens in their neighbourhood.

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**.