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Information bulletin

Bulgaria: Extreme winter conditions & Floods

 International Federation
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

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9th 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, with the support of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), has determined that external assistance is not required, and is therefore not seeking funding or other assistance from donors at this time.



Bulgarian Red Cross conducting needs assessment in the area affected by floods. Photo: Bulgarian Red Cross

Summary

A strong cold wave hit Bulgaria last week, causing severe difficulties for people across the country. Frost, snow blizzards, gales and temperatures down to minus 30 Celsius have affected the population

and caused interruptions in power supplies and the disruption of communication routes and communications channels, particularly in the north and north-eastern part of the country.

In the last several days, continuous heavy rains in the south of the country also led to an increase of water levels and overflow of rivers, while a dam wall broke and flooded villages, leading to evacuation of the population. In accordance with its role within the National Plan for Civil Protection, the Bulgarian Red Cross is represented in the Emergency Operations Rooms both at national and regional level and is providing assistance to the affected people all over the country.

[<click here to view the map of the affected area, or here for detailed contact information>](#)

The situation

Heavy snowfalls in northern Bulgaria over the past week have caused traffic chaos and the blockade of several main roads in the country. In the southern regions, snow and rains have also led to the overflow of major rivers, while the collapse of a dam near the village of Bisser, caused an entire village to go underwater and forced people to evacuate by boats or other available means. The towns of Svilengrad and Harmanli were also hit by the floods, with 18,130 and 18,950 people affected respectively.

120 people in total were evacuated from the flooded areas in the village Bisser and Svilengrad. 8 people were found dead and others are still missing.

As of 9th February, 11 villages in the flooded region of Haskovo and another 10 in the region of Kardzhali have no power supply. The overall number of settlements without power supply numbers up to 167 and the number of people affected is 35,931.

As the emergency phase and the search and rescue operations continue, a first assessment was conducted by a joint commission in the affected region. 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 water supply and roads.

Water supply is also cut in 12 settlements in Kardzhali region, neighbouring the flooded Haskovo; and in 13 villages in Dobrich region and in smaller locations in Sofia region, due to the freezing temperatures.

Roads within the country are now being gradually opened to vehicles, except for the heavy trucks over 10 tones. There are still large vehicles, trucks, and cars blocked by the snow in the north and north-eastern part of the country. All schools in the country will remain closed till the end of the week. A state of emergency was declared and is active in the regions of Haskovo and Kardzhali (due to the floods in South Bulgaria), as well as Shumen, along with the municipalities of Anton, Pomorie, Kostinbrod and Velingrad.

The worst affected populations are 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 elderly people and people in various settlements without access to food supply or without electricity.

Red Cross and Red Crescent action

Two teams of the Bulgarian Red Cross operate in the flooded areas, distributing mineral water, hot drinks (tea and coffee), snacks, non-food items (blankets, bed linen and hygiene items, etc.) to the affected people. A search and rescue team of the National Society with one trained dog has been deployed and is taking part in the operation along with the Fire Brigade and Civil Protection units. Two psychologists of the Bulgarian Red Cross have also been deployed on Tuesday and are providing psycho-social support to the families of the victims in Bisser and to the evacuated people in Svilengrad.

In accordance with its defined role in the National Plan for Civil Protection, the National Society participates in the Emergency Headquarters both on national and regional level and is providing assistance to the affected population all over the country.

The Bulgarian Red Cross team was deployed to the flooded village of Bisser immediately after the disaster stroke on 6th February 2012. Another disaster response team arrived in the affected area two days later. The Bulgarian Red Cross is conducting needs assessment in the field and operates in the flooded areas, distributing mineral water, hot drinks (tea and coffee), snacks, non-food items (blankets, bed linen and hygiene items) to the affected people. Representatives of the National Society regional branch in Haskovo and the two disaster response teams on the spot are members in the Crisis Management Team, permanently present in the flooded area and led by the Minister of Interior.

The Bulgarian Red Cross assisted 60 people in the most affected village of Bisser by distributing blankets, bed linen, pillows, towels, hygiene materials and clothes. Available quantities of non-food items from the regional warehouse in Capitan Andreevo were dispatched and distributed to the affected residents. In response to the identified needs, 100 pairs of winter gloves, 30 pairs of boots, 100 pairs of socks and 10 winter hats were sent from the Central Warehouse of the Bulgarian Red Cross for distribution in the village of Bisser.

A commission of representatives from the local authorities has been established in order to assess the conditions of the affected buildings. The National Society is also member of the commission. So far 50 houses have been checked, and the process is still ongoing. A truck with mineral water donated by the Bulgarian Red Cross arrived on Thursday, 9th February. The quantities will be distributed by the National Society teams present in the field. Simultaneously, local municipal authorities are distributing food parcels on a daily basis. 13 people with injuries are hospitalised in the nearby town of Harmanli. All evacuated people are accommodated with their relatives and neighbours.

All regional Bulgarian Red Cross branches work in close collaboration with the municipalities and local fire safety and civil protection units to support the most vulnerable population in the areas affected by extremely low temperatures, snow and blizzards.

In the areas affected by the harsh weather conditions, 18 regional branches of the National Society have opened distribution points providing hot beverages. In Ruse and Veliko Turnovo, tea and food parcels were distributed to truck drivers, who were forced to park due to the closure of roads. In the areas mostly affected, the municipalities opened crisis shelters to accommodate homeless people. The Bulgarian Red Cross supports those centres with different means: opening a soup kitchen at the centres in v. Bazin, Ruse region and in Nesebar; or providing blankets, sheets, bed linen, and mattresses in Dobrich. The situation is being monitored continuously by the Bulgarian Red Cross Headquarters.

The Bulgarian Red Cross started raising funds through a national campaign, opened a special 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. As of 8th February 2012, the amount donated reached BGN 147,738 (CHF 91,502). An enormous response of solidarity of people from all parts of the country is supporting the most affected at the moment.

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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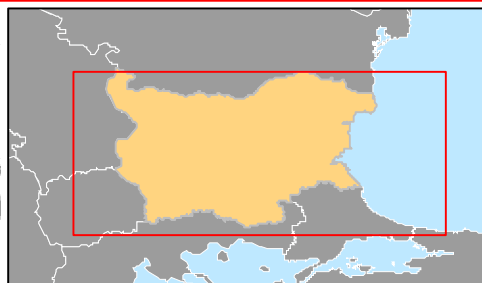
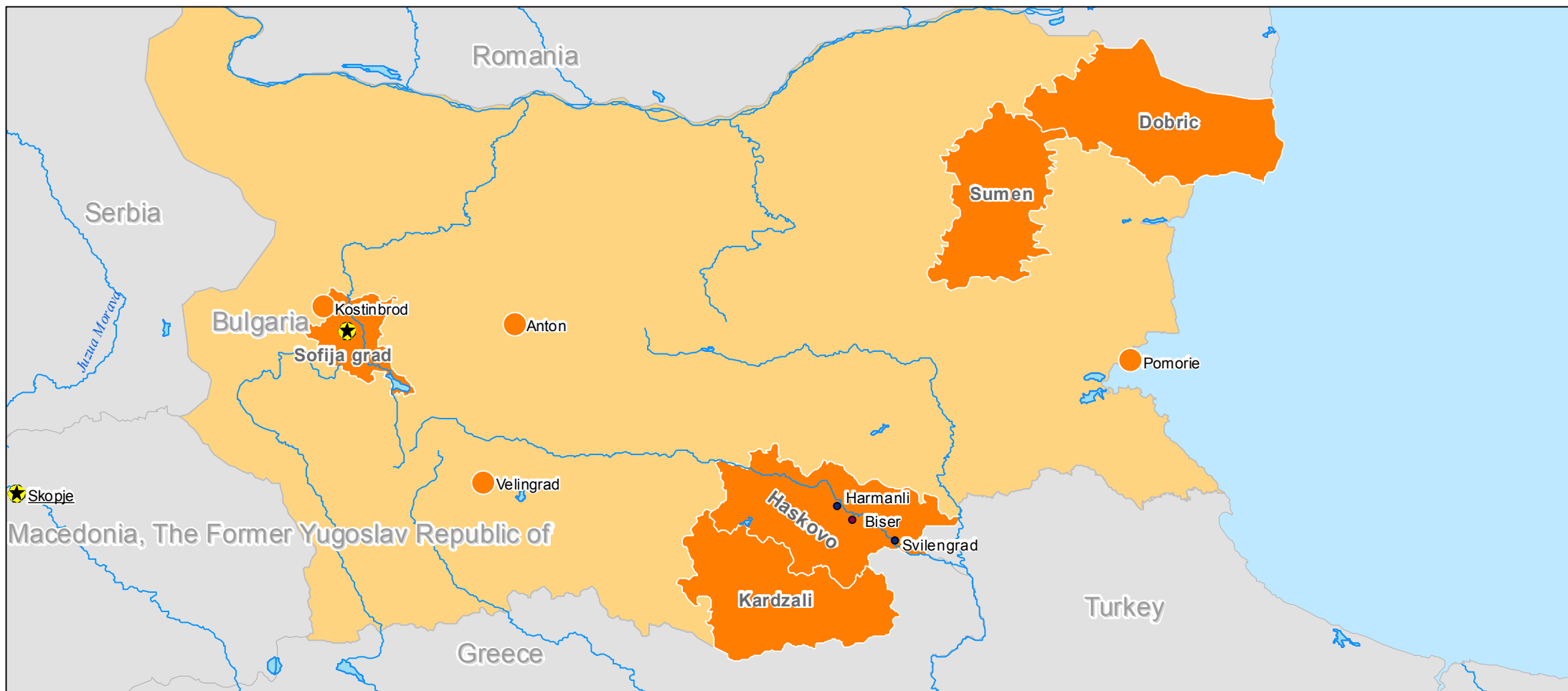


The IFRC's work is guided by Strategy 2020 which puts forward three strategic aims:

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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- Most affected municipalities
- Most affected regions