

Alert

Romania

Support to cold snap affected people in South – East Romania

Geneva, 13.01.2017

1. Brief description of the emergency and impact

The arctic conditions from the beginning of January 2017 have already claimed lives across Europe. Conditions remain tough and constitute a small-scale, local emergency in south-eastern Romania¹. The severe winter weather hit Romania a week ago, when it started snowing heavily and temperatures dropped consecutively to -25 degrees Celsius. However, the crisis has reached a critical level only in the past 24 hours, hence the release of the alert at this time. Snowfall, combined with powerful winds caused the situation to deteriorate resulting in real danger for many rural communities.

The cold snap claimed lives of many elderly people dying of hypothermia. 40,000 are affected by the weather and cut off by the blizzards in the South and East of Romania and in need of some form of humanitarian assistance. People have been trapped for more than a week inside their houses leaving many with no access to food, water and medicine. The heavy snow sealed off towns and hundreds of villages, leaving them without electricity and unheated homes as well as making communication with affected people a serious challenge. Additionally, around 2,700 schools nationwide are closed down, 64 roads and highways, railways and boat traffic is shut down or traffic is restricted.

Meanwhile, authorities are also warning of flooding, when the snow thaws and breaches dams. In addition, meteorologists predict that it will continue to snow in the South and East of Romania during the next week.

Currently, the Ecumenical Association of Churches in Romania, AIDRom, is finding that access to the affected regions is difficult. As soon as this becomes possible, a nationally coordinated major action of crisis phase assistance is anticipated to be implemented in the affected area, where AIDROM will join in.

2. Why is an ACT response needed?

AIDRom wishes to reach within the shortest time possible those communities that may not be as frequented by aid agencies as other severely affected communities and which receive regular attention and assistance from the media and state authorities due the very high severity of the situation.

¹ Affected regions are under a Code Orange which constitutes the level of emergency stand-by used by help and rescue authorities: above Code Orange is Cod Red, which already means disaster preparedness and intervention

3. National and international response

Authorities proclaimed a state of emergency and have slowly started to reach some villages. The Ministry of National Defence is monitoring the situation in the country and has 4,000 troops and 1,000 technical means ready for emergency action in support of local and central public authorities.

The response from the Government and State institutions to this emergency has been good, however the needs are such that they have been unable to meet all the various needs of the affected population in a timely manner. The Government's Operative Committee for Emergency and Crisis Situation started urgent distribution of drinking water, food and non-food supplies from the national reserves.

An Appeal has been made through the national media to NGO's and volunteers to help and assist in response activities as much as possible. Several public institutions and companies from various parts of the country have already started collecting food, warm clothes and medicines.

4. ACT Alliance response

ACT member AIDRom Emergency Unit is on standby on the field with 2 staff members for an initial evaluation of needs, with a further back-up team of 4 to reach the affected areas once permission has been granted by the National Emergency Authorities. AIDRom Emergency Unit is ready to deploy within the next few days to the most affected counties to carry out a needs survey and to distribute food and NFIs which will be handed over to the rural community crisis teams or church based partners².

5. Planned activities

ACT Alliance member AIDRom, is on standby to reach affected areas to carry out a rapid needs assessment and response activities through the ACT Alliance Rapid Response Fund (RRF). It is aimed to alleviate the human suffering of the victims and mitigate the effects of the extreme weather on the isolated small rural communities through the distribution of food parcels and water as well as NFIs. At present it is assumed that about USD 30.000 is required for the planned activities.

6. Constraints

Access to many affected regions is still difficult at the moment, but local and county authorities are working to re-establish road access to all affected areas.

Any funding indication or pledge should be communicated to the Head of Finance and Administration, Line Hempel (Line.Hempel@actalliance.org) and Senior Finance Officer, Lorenzo Correa (Lorenzo.Correa@actalliance.org).

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² Please note that AIDRom has a limited reserve fund earmarked for emergency purposes. Usually, when an emergency occurs, these funds are used for the immediate intervention of a team of 4-6 persons to the calamity areas, in order to evaluate the situation and to carry out a needs assessment. Meanwhile, intervention hardware from the technical resource of the Emergency Unit are transported and distributed/placed in function (sleeping bags, mattresses, water pumps, home dehumidifying equipment, power generators, tents, etc.). For large scale humanitarian intervention and response AIDRom is always relying on the international goodwill channels.