

Alert Note

Floods, Bahía Blanca (Buenos Aires), in Argentina, March 11, 2025

Completed by: Forum ACT Argentina

Date completed: March 12, 2025

Forum: Forum ACT Argentina

Type of emergency: Floods

Date of emergency (if quick-onset): March 8, 2025

1. The nature of the emergency

On March 7, 2025, the town of Bahía Blanca, located in the southern part of Buenos Aires Province, Argentina, experienced a severe hydrometeorological event that led to widespread flooding. Within a few hours, approximately 350 millimeters of rainfall accumulated, submerging over 70% of the area, as reported by the municipal mayor.

Bahía Blanca's geographical vulnerability is exacerbated by its location in the lower basin of the Napostá stream. The heavy rainfall, combined with the overflow of both the Napostá stream and the Maldonado canal, resulted in extensive flooding. The situation is further compounded by the fact that, in January 2024, the city was already affected by a severe storm with strong winds and heavy rainfall, leaving many residents still recovering from its consequences. The disaster has also severely impacted agricultural and livestock sectors, with nearly 2 million hectares under water and significant financial losses for rural producers.

2. The impact and magnitude of the emergency

According to the 2022 census, Bahía Blanca has a total population of 334,505 inhabitants. The municipal mayor estimates that approximately 70% of the population—about 234,154 people—has been affected by the flood. At this time, no age segmentation data is available. Official sources estimate that around 90,000 homes have been directly impacted by the flooding, and in the town of General Cerri, some residents remain stranded on rooftops.

The overflow of the Napostá stream and the Maldonado canal has severely impacted the population living in proximity to these waterways, as well as critical infrastructure, including the destruction of several bridges. Floodwaters have entered nearby fields, homes, businesses, churches, and shops, reaching the city center and affecting the agricultural and livestock sectors in Bahía Blanca, Ing. White, and General Cerri. This has had a considerable impact on the livelihoods of the affected population.

As of now, approximately 1,500 people have been evacuated, with 1,296 currently housed in Evacuation Centers. Relief efforts, coordinated by the national government, involve the armed forces, police, volunteer firefighters, and local rescue groups, and are still ongoing. To date, 16 fatalities and 94 missing persons have been reported. Additionally, small rural producers in the city's horticultural belt remain isolated due to access difficulties, preventing them from receiving assistance.

Initial estimates from the Municipality indicate that the cost of repairing the damage is approximately \$400 million.

Classes are suspended until Thursday, with a possible extension. Of the 232 assessed schools, 56 suffered severe damage, 75 moderate or minor damage, and 101 require disinfection and accessibility improvements. The National University of the South has suspended classes until March 28, while non-formal education spaces, such as youth orchestras and community centers, have also sustained damage. Several areas of the city remain without electricity or internet access, particularly in General Cerri and Ing. White. The flood has also severely damaged transportation infrastructure. Of the eight bridges along the Napostá stream, six have been destroyed. Given that Bahía Blanca is home to a petrochemical complex, the risk of chemical exposure has increased, and the situation is currently being evaluated by the Government of the Province of Buenos Aires.

As Argentina enters the autumn season, temperatures are expected to drop, with the likelihood of additional rainfall in the coming winter months. This raises concerns about an increase in respiratory illnesses. Furthermore, the large volumes of stagnant water have heightened the risk of a dengue outbreak. The ongoing economic crisis in Argentina has exacerbated social tensions at the local level,

increasing concerns about the mental health of the affected population and the potential for social unrest. The disruption to economic activities and livelihoods is expected to place additional strain on families. Protection risks are also emerging, including concerns about gender-based violence and barriers to healthcare access for migrants, as reported by the Director of the main local hospital. These issues require continuous monitoring and response.

Due to challenges in food preparation, there has been a sharp increase in the price of gas cylinders (*jugas*), reportedly due to price speculation by vendors. While food prices have not yet shown significant increases, restricted access to the town via peripheral routes raises concerns about potential shortages of essential goods and raw materials, which could lead to price hikes in the near future.

3. Local and national capacity

In the city, 46 community-led food distribution points have been established, managed by local organizations, clubs, churches, community kitchens, and development societies.

Local and national solidarity efforts have been mobilized. At the municipal level, authorities are working to coordinate support systems for the affected population while addressing infrastructure, health, and education challenges. Humanitarian organizations such as Caritas Argentina (Bahía Blanca Diocese) and the Argentine Red Cross are actively responding, providing essential resources such as water, food, and clothing. Additionally, self-organized volunteer groups have emerged to support their communities. The Salvation Army, present in the area, is assessing needs and coordinating with its headquarters to distribute food, hygiene products, and clothing.

The National Government has deployed the Armed Forces (Army, Naval Prefecture, and Gendarmerie) for logistical and security support. The Ministry of Human Capital has announced shipments of mattresses, food, and school supplies, though their arrival status remains uncertain. However, national policies have significantly reduced funding for emergency response. For example, while ARS 20 billion (approximately USD 23 million) is needed for hospital repairs, the Ministry of Economy has committed only ARS 10 billion (approximately USD 11.5 million), reflecting broader budget cuts affecting emergency and disaster response efforts. Additionally, Decree 888/2024 eliminated the Emergency Aid Fund, along with funds for school scholarships and native forest conservation. Meanwhile, the Government of the Province of Buenos Aires is assessing measures to support the affected population.

Notably, Argentina's humanitarian sector remains limited, with fewer than 10 humanitarian organizations operating in the country. The International Humanitarian Network of Argentina (RHIA)—which includes UN agencies, the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, the Argentine Red Cross, Caritas Argentina, ADRA, CISP, and the ACT-Argentina Forum—has not been activated by the National Government and has not convened since 2023.

Relations between the National Government and the United Nations System remain tense, particularly due to the administration's rejection of the 2030 Agenda and climate change-related policies.

Although Argentina has a National Risk Management and Humanitarian Response Plan (SINAGIR), the current administration has not implemented it. Additionally, the defunding of public works and the lack of federal co-participation funds have left the Province of Buenos Aires without sufficient resources to manage the current emergency effectively.

4. Key needs and gaps

The solidarity of national civil society has mobilized resources, including clothing, household cleaning supplies, and non-perishable food. Motivated by media coverage and religious organizations—including Catholic Church parishes, FAIE (Argentine Federation of Evangelical Churches), the Salvation Army, ADRA (Adventist Development and Relief Agency), the Argentine Red Cross, and Caritas Argentina—various groups have launched donation campaigns. Additionally, soccer clubs have opened their facilities as collection centers, facilitating the transfer of donations to Bahía Blanca.

A Solidarity Train departed for Bahía Blanca, carrying 1,200 tons of food, clothing, and other essential supplies in 11 wagons filled with public donations. This initiative, led by Red Solidaria, is supported by railway unions La Fraternidad, Unión Ferroviaria, Unión Personal Superior Ferroviario, and Sereneros.

The Argentine Red Cross has activated an international DREF (Disaster Relief Emergency Fund) request for 450,000 Swiss francs to support Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) and Health interventions.

Additionally, the organization is assessing the possibility of launching an international appeal through the IFRC (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies).

The Salvation Army is mobilizing personnel and volunteers to the disaster area, reinforcing its local presence and providing food, clothing, hygiene supplies, and other essential aid.

The Municipality of Bahía Blanca has launched an online volunteer registration form to coordinate actions with individuals willing to offer their time in solidarity.

Several critical needs **are not currently being addressed** by response efforts:

- Health Sector: There is an urgent need for psychosocial support, particularly to address trauma caused by the disaster. Preventive measures against dengue and respiratory infections must also be implemented. Additionally, migrant populations face potential exclusion from healthcare services, while people with disabilities and older adults require special attention due to heightened vulnerability.
- Protection Sector: Gender-based violence (GBV), child abuse, and mistreatment may increase in the disaster-affected areas. Furthermore, there are concerns about discrimination against the LGBTQ+ community, which should be actively monitored and addressed.
- Education Sector: There is a need for psychosocial recovery programs and academic support for children and youth. However, no organizations have yet taken responsibility for addressing this gap.
- Productive Sector: Small-scale producers require economic recovery support, including assistance in restoring local infrastructure to resume economic activities.
- Environmental Considerations: The environmental impact of the disaster has not been addressed, despite its potential to exacerbate existing vulnerabilities in the affected communities.

Please indicate if you are considering:

	Indicate your intention with an X below
Rapid Response Fund (<i>intended for small and medium scale emergencies</i>)	X
Appeal (<i>intended for large scale emergencies</i>)	

5. Forum Capacity and members intention to respond

ACT Member	Geographical focus	Sectors of expertise and expertise
CREAS	General Cerri Eng. White Bahía Blanca	Protection (Gender Based Violence, GBV, prevention), Food Security and WASH
Hora de Obrar Foundation		
SEDI		

6. Potential responses

The ACT Argentina Forum will provide emergency response, with CREAS serving as the operational and coordination lead. The response will be implemented in Bahía Blanca over three months, focusing on Protection (Gender-Based Violence prevention), Food Security and WASH, in collaboration with local churches affiliated with FAIE and other ecumenical and local partners.

CREAS has extensive experience in emergency response, having implemented a Rapid Response and Pandemic Mitigation Project and actively supporting livelihood promotion through its Small Projects Fund. The Protestant Foundation Hora de Obrar specializes in a comprehensive approach to ecosystem restoration, utilizing nature-based solutions while also promoting livelihood development among yerba mate producers (yerbateros). Additionally, the foundation manages Climate Justice projects and undertakes initiatives to strengthen Disaster Risk Management (DRM).

SEDI focuses on livelihood promotion through a community-driven, gender-sensitive approach. The organization has also developed Rapid Response mechanisms to ensure the provision of food and essential supplies during the COVID-19 pandemic, while actively engaging in DRM initiatives.