

www.ifrc.org  
Saving lives,  
changing minds.

## Information bulletin Hungary: Snowstorm

 International Federation  
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

### Information Bulletin n° IB160313HU 16<sup>th</sup> March 2013

This bulletin is being issued for information only and reflects the current situation and details available at this time. The Hungarian Red Cross is grateful for the immediate cross-border assistance by the Austrian Red Cross, and it is coordinating its actions with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC). Beyond the already received assistance, the Hungarian Red Cross is not seeking any external support or funding at this stage.



Thousands of people got stranded on the M1 between Budapest and Vienna during the blizzard on March 14/15. Austrian Red Cross sent a convoy with relief across the border while Hungarian Red Cross established temporary shelters, evacuated people stuck in busses, cars and trucks, and provided relief. The Kovacs-family in the picture had spent 22 hrs in their car before being rescued and brought to a shelter in Tatabanya. **Photo:** Lasse Norgaard, IFRC, 15<sup>th</sup> March 2013, Tatabanya, Hungary

**Summary:** The suddenly returning severe winter weather in March paralysed almost half of Hungary by 15<sup>th</sup> March 2013. Authorities issued red alert for seven counties, and orange alert for many others, on 14<sup>th</sup> March due to continuous snowfall and snowstorms. Several thousands of people have been stranded on the highways M1 and M7 due to the deep snow and the strong winds that caused snowdrifts and blockages. The Hungarian Red Cross staff and volunteers were immediately on the scene, assisting those trapped on the highway with blankets, hot tea and food. The Red Cross is part of the joint rescue effort by the police, military forces and National Disaster Management Directorate.

[<click here for detailed contact information>](#)

## The situation

Heavy snowfall, violent wind gusts and ice paralysed the normal life in Hungary on Friday, 15 March 2013. The extreme snowing started on Thursday countrywide causing traffic halts and accidents over the past 24 hours and left thousands of people without electricity and basic services. In the western part of the country, 57 villages with over 13,000 inhabitants were cut off from the outside world on 15<sup>th</sup> March 2013. Massive snowdrifts blocked off 160 roads and disrupted five railway lines. The storm also left hundreds of thousands of people without electricity.

Authorities issued red alert for seven counties, and orange alert for many others, but no state of emergency has been declared by the State Authorities.

The motorways of the North- and South-West part of Hungary and also in the North-East regions were blocked off by the snowdrifts up to 3 metres in some areas and were closed by the government.

More than 5,700 cars were stranded on the roads and nearly 20 trains were stuck between stations. A severe snowstorm compounded by strong gusty winds forced over 10,000 people to spend the night in their cars or roadside buildings after being stranded on a major Hungarian highway the M1. Among the stranded were children and pregnant women.

Many local roads became impassable, and a lot of villages were cut off from the outside world in the counties of Somogy, Fejer, Zala, Komarom-Esztergom, Tolna, Gyor-Moson-Sopron, Borsod-Abauj-Zemplen, Szabolcs-Szatmar-Bereg and Veszprem. Also more than 20,000 households have been without power in the county of Szabolcs-Szatmar, where unusually strong gusts of wind, icy lines and fallen trees cause power failure.

The Hungarian Red Cross staff and volunteers were immediately on the scene, assisting those trapped on the motorway with blankets, hot tea and food. The Red Cross is part of the joint-rescue effort by the police, military forces and National Disaster Management Directorate. There were about 8,000 emergency workers out on the roads. However access to the affected people remained difficult due to snowdrifts and ongoing violent gusts of wind. Rescuers used tanks and bulldozers to clear the roads. They also had to cut across guardrails to allow vehicles to leave the jammed highway on makeshift roads.

## Red Cross and Red Crescent action

The Hungarian Red Cross immediately mobilized its volunteers and disaster rescue and response teams and deployed them to the severely affected sites all over the country to provide assistance to the more than 20,000 affected persons. Some 200 volunteers of the disaster teams and 40 staff of the local branches have been on duty on the roads, at the trains stuck on the rails and other venues to help people and distribute blankets, hot tea and food for them. The Management of the Hungarian RC and the Head of Disaster Management (DM) is liaising with the National Disaster Management Directorate and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. The Hungarian RC set up a crisis room at the National Headquarters (NHQ) and started to develop an action plan. A toll free helpline with the call number 1359 was opened 15<sup>th</sup> March to raise funds in support of the affected population.

The Austrian Red Cross offered immediate assistance to its sister National Society, the Hungarian Red Cross. An Austrian RC convoy to support Hungarian RC and Governmental responders on the snow chaos has been formed and gathered in the marshalling area of the motorway border-crossing Nickelsdorf around midday on 15<sup>th</sup> March 2013. A snowplough of Austrian ASFINAG (road-management) has also been integrated.



Austrian Red Cross vehicles were deployed to Hungary on M1 motorway, to provide support to people stranded on the motorway due to the snowstorm. **Photo:** Austrian Red Cross

The Operative centre of Austrian Red Cross reported at 02:17 on 16<sup>th</sup> March 2013, that the team reached Tatabanya without any further potential beneficiaries found. In coordination with Hungarian Red Cross Crisis centre it was decided to stand down Austrian Red Cross alerts and get the teams back to Austria. The total number of Austrian RC intervention included:

- Deployment of 138 colleagues and 51 cars from Austrian Red Cross (Regions Burgenland, Lower Austria and Vienna)
- Distribution of blankets, tea and cold meals to an estimated 800 people on the highway M1 between Győr (km 115) and Tatabanya (km 56) with the focus on kilometers 110 to 98.
- About 18 medical interventions were made, some of them in coordination with public Hungarian rescue service.

The Disaster Management Coordinator and Communications Coordinator from the IFRC Europe Zone is present in the crisis team of the Hungarian Red Cross, and have issued a press advisory about the situation. Also the IFRC was participating in the assessment of the situation carried out by the National Society.

Hungarian Red Cross special unit equipped with hovercraft and a six-wheel vehicle intervened with 17 technical search and rescue actions, saving a total of 38 people with two life-saving interventions and one baby-delivery intervention.

Hungarian Red Cross local branches were providing active support in different parts of the country. At some places temporary shelters were opened in schools, railway stations and other public facilities. More than 8,000 people had to take refuge in heated buildings set up by the disaster agency for stranded travelers. In close cooperation with the local Disaster Management Committees hot tea, hot food, blankets were distributed. Also Red Cross staff and volunteers provided support to people stranded on the motorways due to blockages or accidents.

## Contact information

**For further information specifically related to this operation please contact:**

- **Hungarian Red Cross Society:** Brigitta Safar, Disaster Management Coordinator; phone: +36 70 933 8088, email: [brigitta.safar@voroskereszt.hu](mailto:brigitta.safar@voroskereszt.hu)
- **IFRC Europe Zone:** Alberto Monguzzi, Disaster Management Coordinator, phone: +36 1 8884 505, email [alberto.monguzzi@ifrc.org](mailto:alberto.monguzzi@ifrc.org)
- **IFRC Geneva:** Christine South, Operations Support, Phone: +41.22.730.4529, email: [christine.south@ifrc.org](mailto:christine.south@ifrc.org)

## 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.

[www.ifrc.org](http://www.ifrc.org)  
Saving lives, changing minds.



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.
-