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Centre for Research on the
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DISASTER STATISTICS IN EUROPE

Floods, droughts and storms: a major threat for European countries

"Europe suffers significantly from disasters in both human and economic terms. Among them, European Union countries have chalked up major losses due to climate related disasters in the last decades and have already faced major storms and severe winter conditions since January this year" said today the Belgian WHO collaborating Center for Research on Epidemiology of Disasters (CREd) in a joint press conference with the Secretariat of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR).

In the past 20 years, 953 disasters killed nearly 88,671 people in Europe, affected more than 29 million others and caused a total of 269 US\$ billion economic losses. Compared to the rest of the world, economic loss per capita is high in Europe partly because it is very densely populated.

Italy and Germany have recorded major economic damages mainly due to floods and storms. In the last two decades, Spain had the highest number of victims among all European countries and Russia, the highest numbers of disasters (120 disasters).

Floods and storms in Europe account respectively for 40 per cent and 33 per cent of the total economic damages for the period 1989-2008. "Floods and storms explain part of the economic losses as weather related disasters have devastating effects on infrastructures which have on average, a higher value in Europe than in Asia or Africa" says Professor Debarati Guha-Sapir, director of CREd. "The trend will probably continue to rise as floods and storms are expected to become more frequent and severe in the future in Europe."

In January this year, storm Klaus affected southern Europe (France, Spain and Italy), causing at least 25 deaths and over 750 million US\$ of estimated economic damages. Final costs and losses from the cold wave are still unavailable.

“Systematic monitoring of disaster impact in Europe is very weak making it difficult to really estimate the full cost of these events. Much remains to be done for improving data standards that are common across the European region” added Professor D. Guha-Sapir.

“Storms, floods and heat waves are major threats to Europe, and it is urgent to invest in disaster risk reduction policies to adapt to climate change. These investments are the best governments can make to protect their most vulnerable populations and avoid huge economic losses in the future” says Margareta Wahlstrom, Assistant Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction.

Last week, the European Commission announced two Communications related to disasters: A Community approach to reducing the impact of natural and manmade disasters within the European Union (EU) and a strategy for supporting disaster risk reduction in developing countries. The proposed approach at the community level focuses on establishing a community level inventory of existing information and best practices, developing guidelines on hazard and risk mapping, linking actors and policies throughout the disaster management cycle with more training and awareness raising, improved access to early warning systems and more efficient targeting of community funds.

"We must do all we can in order to reduce natural disasters impacts by being prepared as best as we can. The proposal is a first step launching a long term process for community action in the field of disaster risk reduction" said European Commissioner for Environment Stavros Dimas.

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