

Flooding ravages central Europe

Our correspondents
5 June 2013

Large areas of Germany and other regions in Europe have been hit by the worst floods since the so-called “flood of the century” in 2002.

After days of continuous rain, the situation in many areas is desperate, with people struggling to cope with a deluge. In Germany, the states of Saxony, Bavaria, Thuringia and Saxony-Anhalt are particularly badly affected.

In Passau, Bavaria, the water level of the Danube River has reached 12.50 meters, the highest in 500 years. From above, the city of Passau, where three rivers meet, looks like an ocean. After days of torrential rain, the waters of the flooding Danube combined with those of the rivers Inn and Ilz, leaving many houses only accessible by boat.

The inhabitants of the city face a disaster. Many people have been without power in Passau since Sunday. On Monday, the drinking water supply was turned off due to the risk of contamination. Large parts of the old town and smaller villages on the Inn were evacuated because of the rising water level and emergency shelters set up.

On Saturday, a dam broke in Rosenheim, leading to the Mangfall River flooding into the Oberwöhr district. More than a thousand people had already left their homes. “This is a disastrous development,” a spokesman for the Rosenheim crisis team said. The dam suddenly broke at one point. “We never expected that”, he said.

A disaster alert was raised on Monday in the German counties of Freising, Landshut and Straubing. The situation was extremely tense in Deggendorf, too, where high water levels were expected.

On Sunday night, state Prime Minister Horst Seehofer commented on the situation in Bavaria. “Maybe we will see a development that could lead to a flood the likes of which has never been seen before”, he remarked.

Passau, like other areas in Bavaria and Germany, has always been prone to flooding due to its location. However, the authorities were unprepared for the extent of the current floodwaters. The federal and state governments only established a staff to deal with the crisis after the situation was well advanced.

The people of Saxony are also fighting a desperate battle against the floods. In Grimma, Eilenburg and Wurzen alone, 13,000 people had to leave their homes on Monday. In Leipzig, the county authorities declared a red alert. Within a day, the water level had risen in Leipzig by more than one meter. In Thuringia, about 2,500 people were evacuated on Monday.

The flooding in Saxony caused Volkswagen to temporarily stop production at its plant in Zwickau. The morning shift on Monday was cancelled, according to a company spokesman. Although the plant itself was not directly affected by the floods, many roads in the region, some of the suppliers and numerous employees were hit.

The town of Jeßnitz near Bitterfeld is also surrounded by water. In the district of Central Saxony, a few thousand inhabitants had their electricity cut off. In Eilenburg, the town centre had already been evacuated. About 7,000 people were affected, according to a spokesman. In many places, schools remained closed on Monday.

In Thuringia, the authorities proclaimed a disaster. In Gera, residents were urged to seek shelter on Monday night. The small town of Gößnitz was completely evacuated on Sunday, and parts of Greiz were submerged.

The situation is dramatic in other European countries too, particularly in the Czech Republic. Six people were killed in the floods and four are missing, according to police. More than 7,000 people were evacuated in the central and northern districts of Bohemia. In Jarom?? in the north, a bridge collapsed

under the pressure of the water.

In the capital, Prague, where the Vltava River rose to record heights, some people have already had to leave their homes in the suburbs. The flooding was expected to peak on Tuesday. According to media reports, more evacuations are being prepared. On Monday, the Prague Metro largely halted operations through the city's historic downtown area.

On Sunday evening, the Prime Minister of the centre-right Czech government, Petr Necas, proclaimed a state of emergency. Cabinet ministers assembled in the capital for an emergency meeting.

In Austria, the floods killed two people and four more are still missing as of the writing of this article. In Lower Austria, reports indicate that the situation is as bad as the flood of 2002.

Numerous towns on the rivers Inn, Salzach and Danube have been severely affected. Population centers such as Schärding (on the Inn) or Melk (on the Danube) are flooded. In Schärding, on the Bavarian border, the Inn broke through protection barriers and 500 people had to leave their homes. In the Tyrol on Monday night, a train was derailed due to an avalanche of mud and debris burying the tracks.

In Poland, floodwaters have been rising, especially in the southwest of the country. In Lower Silesia, numerous tributaries to the Oder and the Neisse burst their banks and several roads were impassable on Monday and closed to traffic.

In Basel, Switzerland, the government crisis team called on people not to approach the immediate vicinity of the river Rhine. In several sections of the river, shore protection structures were created and sandbags piled high. Shipping between Rheinfelden and Kembs in France has been halted since Saturday. In Alptal, several houses had to be evacuated because of an impending landslide danger.

In Germany, Chancellor Angela Merkel travelled to the flood areas on Tuesday to assess the situation. With an eye on the general election later in the year, she is trying to exploit media coverage to give the impression that she supports those who have been inundated by the floods. The federal government, however, will impose the financial burden of the disaster overwhelmingly on the population. With flood damage running into the billions, the government has promised aid of just €100 million.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact