

# Flooding in Germany and Belgium leaves over 100 dead

**Elisabeth Zimmermann****15 July 2021**

Severe thunderstorms and heavy rainfall have led to severe devastation and at least 93 fatalities so far in the German regions of Rhineland-Palatinate (50) and North Rhine-Westphalia (43). At least nine people have also been killed in Belgium.

The actual death toll could be much higher. According to reports, 1,300 people are currently missing. On Friday morning, the Interior Minister of Rhineland-Palatinate, Roger Lewentz (Social Democratic Party), said, “One must say at present, while clearing basements we keep coming across people who have lost their lives in these floods, so I can’t say anything at all about the number where we will end up in the end.” It is a catastrophe, he said, and the situation remains dramatic.

After days of rain, the levels of the Rhine, Ruhr, Moselle and other small rivers and streams rose. Some of them turned into raging rivers and flooded entire towns and cities. In some cases, the water rose so quickly that residents were unable to escape to safety.

The district of Ahrweiler in the Eifel region of Rhineland-Palatinate was particularly hard hit. The town of Schuldei has been devastated. Four houses were swept away by the water, many more have been damaged and are in danger of collapse.

The typically small Ahr, a tributary of the Rhine, became a raging torrent due to the rain. Hundreds of houses along the riverbed were damaged. At least 19 people died in the Ahrweiler district. More than 30 people are still missing. It is not yet known whether they have travelled or found accommodation elsewhere, or whether they, too, were swept away.

Many people had to hold out for hours on the roofs of their houses until they could be rescued from the air. Power outages and disruption of phone networks exacerbated the situation for those affected. Relatives, friends and acquaintances have had difficulty finding out what has happened to their loved ones. At times, even the

emergency phone line numbers were unreachable.

There were either no warnings from the authorities or they came so late that the residents could not get to safety in time.

One affected person from Ahrweiler told the WSWS that he and his family were warned only two hours before the floods. The sandbags they received contained no sand. Due to the approaching flood it was too late for them to find sand themselves. Within a short time, the basement and the lower area of the house were completely flooded.

While the German weather service warned of renewed heavy rain in many areas, thousands were evacuated. In the Ehrang district of Trier, 2,000 people were evacuated, including from a hospital and a retirement home.

At least 20 fatalities have been reported so far from the Cologne-Bonn area in North Rhine-Westphalia. Several people died in flooded basements. In Cologne, firefighters found a 72-year-old woman and a 54-year-old man in a basement flooded with water. In the Euskirchen district alone, there were 15 deaths. Three more fatalities were reported by police from Rheinbach.

The Steinbach Dam is located near the town of Euskirchen. It is threatening to overflow, endangering numerous towns in the vicinity.

There were also numerous fatalities in Solingen and in the Unna district. The cities of Hagen in the Ruhr region and Wuppertal in the Bergisches Land region are badly affected. In the Hochsauerlandkreis district, virtually the entire town of Altena is flooded. In Altena, a firefighter involved in rescuing people died. He was swept away by the floods. Another firefighter lost his life during an operation in Werdohl.

Neighbouring Belgium was also affected by the flood. The army has been deployed in four out of 10 provinces to participate in evacuations and search and rescue operations. Nine people have been confirmed dead so far, all in the east of the country near the German border. One

person was killed in the town of Eupen, five in Verviers, and one in Pepinster.

There were numerous evacuations in the province of Limburg, including the border town of Roermond, where 5,000 residents were reportedly brought to safety. Further south in Maastricht, thousands of people were also evacuated. The Belgian National Water Authority warned of record flooding of the Meuse River, which would inundate large parts of the province of Limburg with nearly 900,000 inhabitants.

Authorities have also issued an evacuation order to inhabitants of the city of Liege, which, as of 2013, had a population of over 195,000 people. They urged those “who still have the possibility of evacuating to do so if they find themselves in a zone floodable near the Meuse” river.

The peak of the flooding is not expected until Friday morning. The flood in Liege has been caused in part by the malfunctioning of the Monsin dam bridge in the town. First built in the 1930s, it has been under construction for a year, and only two of the gates out of six are currently operational. This meant the dam was unable to release a sufficient quantity of water, which instead flooded the centre of the town.

There are major fears that a construction crane in the area will be pulled away by the flooding, and that if it falls it could cut a power cable which powers multiple water pumping stations. The power distributors preventively cut the current in this line on Thursday.

The Wallonian water association warned the population not to consume tap water, “even boiled,” in seven communes of the Wallonian region. The electricity and gas networks are experiencing “disturbances on an unprecedented scale,” Resa, the main energy distributor in the province of Liege, announced.

The immense extent of the damage and the high number of fatalities, which will certainly increase in the following days, have several reasons. It is a result of the climate crisis created by capitalism, which leads to increasingly stark weather fluctuations—extreme heat and drought on the one hand, extreme rain and flooding on the other. At the same time, it is a result of decades of neglected and dilapidated infrastructure.

In recent years and decades, insufficient or no investment has been made in dam safety and flood protection, despite the fact that severe flooding has occurred repeatedly. Instead, hundreds of billions of euros have been given to corporations and banks, and spending on the military has increased enormously in Germany and

throughout Europe.

The same politicians who are responsible for this policy are now feigning sympathy. The Minister President of North Rhine-Westphalia and CDU candidate for chancellor, Armin Laschet, is travelling to Altena and Hagen on Thursday, to hold out the prospect of financial aid from the state. These are familiar empty promises. Many people are still waiting for promised aid from previous disasters.

The SPD Minister President of Rhineland-Palatinate, Malu Dreyer, also visited Bad Neuenahr-Ahrweiler, which was particularly hard hit, together with Federal Finance Minister and SPD candidate for chancellor Olaf Scholz. Scholz, who cut his holiday short, expressed his shock at the “tremendous destruction wrought by nature.”

As a sign of mourning, Dreyer announced that flags on public buildings in Rhineland-Palatinate would be flown at half-mast on Friday. “The damage of this disaster is unprecedented,” she said. Many people had lost everything and, unfortunately, the number of dead was also rising. “A first glimmer of hope in this dire hour,” however, was the promise by the federal government to quickly help the affected people. She thanked Scholz “for the strong signal of solidarity.”

Where the solidarity of Scholz and the entire ruling class really lies is well known. In the course of the so-called Corona bailout packages, hundreds of billions were transferred to the accounts of big corporations and the super-rich, which are now to be squeezed out of the working population. The military budget has also been increased by more than €10 billion in the last four years alone and is set to rise further after the federal elections in September.



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