



# East Asia and the Pacific – El Niño

ECHO CRISIS FLASH N° 1

**Period covered:**  
1 April – 4 May 2016

**Time of validity:**  
12:00 (Bangkok)

**ECHO Field Office:**  
Bangkok - Thailand

**Number of people affected:** 4 million severely affected (Mongolia, PNG, Timor- Leste, Vietnam)

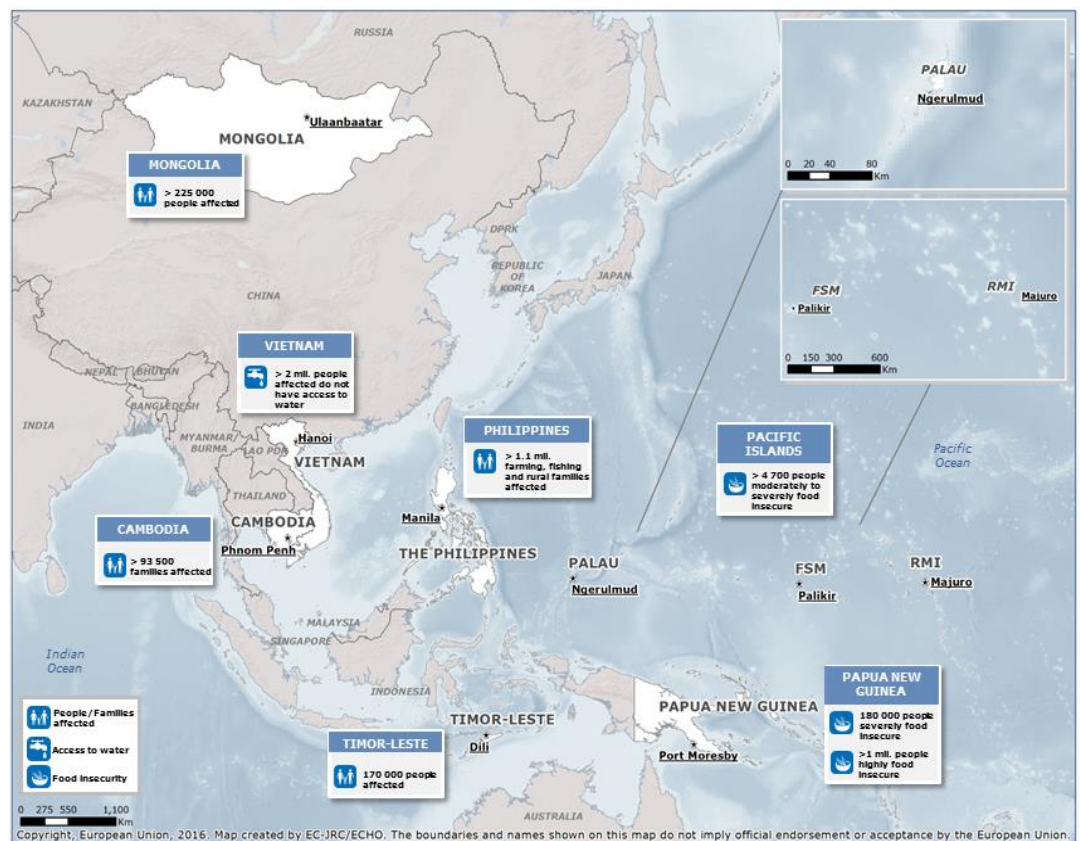
**Number of refugees and/or internally displaced persons (IDPs)**  
N/A

**Number of dead:** N/A

**Number of missing:**  
N/A

**Number of wounded:**  
N/A

## 1. Map



## 2. Situation

The cumulated effects of El Niño have exacerbated humanitarian needs in some countries of East Asia and the Pacific over the past months. Serious consequences triggered by drought - and cold waves, in some cases - have affected in particular:

- Mongolia
- Papua New Guinea
- Timor Leste
- Vietnam

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The Philippines, Cambodia, the Republic of Marshall Islands, Palau and the Federated States of Micronesia are also suffering from drought. The situation in these countries, and others in the region could further deteriorate in the coming months.

A brief situational update on the four most affected countries is offered below.

## **Mongolia**

El Niño effects are seen mainly through prolonged periods of drought, followed by very severe winters (a phenomenon referred to as 'dzud'). This combination has a devastating effect on nomadic communities, whose livelihoods and existence largely depend on livestock. The dry summers result in lesser hay production, insufficient to feed the livestock; when followed by an extremely cold winter (down to -50° Celsius) it causes many deaths among the weakened livestock, leading in turn to a food security crisis. The most affected provinces are in the eastern and western parts of the country, in particular Sukhabaatar, Uvs, Zavkhan, Arkhangal and Bayan Khongor.

The UN reports that 41% of the country's herder population is seriously affected by the dzud (225 000 people), leading to loss of income and food insecurity; these, in turn, have forced many herder families to migrate to Ulaanbaatar. The HCT estimates that nearly 860 000 animals (camels, horses, cows, sheep and goat) have perished. Since the last ECHO Crisis flash (12 February) there has been a sharp increase in livestock deaths.

In light of increased needs, the HCT updated the Dzud Response and Preparedness Plan on 25 April (total requirement USD 14.27 million; current gap: USD 7.91 million), for an estimated duration of 12 months.

## **Papua New Guinea (PNG)**

Assessments conducted by the World Food Programme (WFP) in partnership with PNG's National Disaster Centre identified 180 000 people as severely food insecure (mostly in the Highlands and the Western province) and an additional 1 311 000 people in a state of high food insecurity.

The PNG Disaster Management Team published (18 April) an El Niño Response Plan, elaborated by the government in collaboration with humanitarian partners, worth USD 37.07 million (approx. EUR 32.6 million; current gap: USD 29 million) for 3-6 months to address critical needs in food assistance (main component), nutrition, health, WASH, agricultural recovery and early recovery. The target are the 180 000 severely food insecure people.

## **Timor Leste**

The government and the HCT estimate that around 170 000 people are severely affected by drought, in particular in the east and south west, including the municipalities of Baucau, Viqueque, Lautem and Covalima. Assessments indicate that needs relate mainly to food security (lack of sufficient food, and seeds for next planting season), water (for consumption and irrigation), health (diseases relating to use of unsafe water) and to some extent education (stopping of school feeding programmes, lack of water in schools).

The most affected and vulnerable people are resorting to negative coping mechanisms such as: sale of livestock and other assets, skipping meals and migrating to urban centres (Dili) in search of work. A recent ECHO mission (mid-April) confirmed these findings. A response plan was issued by the HCT in April 2016, aiming to cover needs estimated at USD 25 million (actions considered for 3-12 months).

## **Vietnam**

El Niño has caused the most severe drought in 90 years, in 39 out of the 63 provinces the South-Central, Central highlands and Mekong Delta regions. Significant impact on safe water sources, agriculture production and livelihoods are reported. The situation has been worsened by saltwater intrusion in the Southern Central and Mekong Delta regions, as the rainy season came later and ended earlier, leading to a reduction in the Mekong River upstream flow. Saltwater intrusion, reported as far as 90 km inland, is expected to continue to impact agriculture production and access to drinking water at least until the end of June. On 15 March the government requested international partners to support its efforts to address the drought and salt water intrusion. An inter-agency (UNs, INGOs and government) rapid assessment was conducted between 21-24 March in six most affected provinces, highlighting priority areas in water supply and storage, food security, nutritional support and increased surveillance of potential disease outbreaks. On 26 April the government and the UN launched an Emergency Response plan for 2016/2017, outlining both a humanitarian (3-5 months) and a recovery component (until mid-2017) for a total of USD 48.5 million (current gap USD 40 million).

Drought emergencies have been declared in 18 provinces. An estimated 2 million people do not have regular access to water for daily use. Over 1.75 million people have lost their income due to the drought. Lack of clean water increases the risk factor for disease outbreaks; an increase of common infectious diseases has already been reported in some affected communities and there has been an increase in the severe acute malnutrition (SAM) rate (1.9-2.1 %) in three drought-affected provinces.

ECHO missions conducted in 20-22 April in two of the most affected provinces (Gia Lai in central highland and Soc Trang in Mekong Delta) confirmed urgent humanitarian needs, primarily regarding access to safe water and livelihoods, given the wide spread destruction of crops.

### **3. Assistance**

#### **Mongolia**

Several UN agencies, international and national NGOs and the Red Cross are assisting the government's response efforts. All actions are coordinated through the HCT, which closely monitors the activities of various thematic clusters. Most of the funding has so far been provided by the CERF (United Nations Central Emergency Response Fund), ADB (Asian Development Bank), Red Cross, USAID (United States Agency for International Development) and European countries. The assistance mainly focuses on livelihoods and food security, but the WASH, nutrition and protection clusters are also involved in the response. While most of the current activities are of a short term nature (addressing immediate needs) plans for early recovery are being drafted. ECHO has allocated EUR 460 000 for emergency assistance to dzud affected vulnerable communities, most of which for food security. The EU supports various partners in the country for agricultural work, a crucial element for recovery activities after the dzud.

#### **Papua New Guinea**

The government has approved some USD 78 million to address food insecurity. The CERF has allocated USD 4.74 million (approx. EUR 4.18 million) for food and nutrition interventions. Support has also been received from USAID, DFAT (Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade), New Zealand and other international partners. ECHO has contributed EUR 1.3 million for building the resilience of the most drought-affected communities and DEVCO is finalising a resilience intervention plan. The WFP is finalising an EMOP for emergency food assistance to the 180 000 people classified as severely food insecure.

#### **Timor Leste**

The IFRC has launched a DREF operation, to support the Timor Leste Red Cross with the provision of emergency WASH and food assistance, to which ECHO contributed EUR 98 000. The Government, supported by the HCT, is finalising an action plan (est. approx. EUR 23 million) for short and medium term actions. DEVCO is finalising a resilience intervention plan to support food security and livelihoods.

## **Vietnam**

The Government has allocated USD 45 million for drought relief. The government has been pro-active in terms of sending drought alerts, stockpiling rice and providing assistance (mainly water trucking and rice distribution/ compensation for crop loss), however capacities are overstretched due to the scale and impact of the drought. Trucked water has so far reached only 40% of remote communities. While the government has promised compensation schemes for landowners, the landless and small farmers who depend on daily wage work are particularly affected and have not benefited from any cash support; they are resorting to negative coping mechanisms such as reducing the number of meals, migrating to cities in search of alternative work and taking children out of schools.

The IFRC launched a DREF in April (CHF 195 708, approx. EUR 177 927) to support the Vietnamese Red Cross in providing assistance to 17 600 people for safe water, unconditional cash and hygiene/health promotion, to which ECHO contributed EUR 90 000. The USAID have provided USD 50 000 to the Vietnamese Red Cross. The IFRC is considering launching an Emergency Appeal later this month. The UN, INGOs and their local partners have been active in several areas, using internal funds to address immediate needs. The UN is currently conducting further in-depth assessments to determine the food security and nutrition status of affected populations.

Despite the country's good capacity for preparedness and response to natural disasters, the scale and severity of the crisis are challenging the local and international response capacity. The government has requested development donors to re-direct current development programmes to support emergency relief efforts. While there are signs that some donors (ADB and WB) might be able to do this, administrative requirements often take a long time.

## **4. Other information**

### **Cambodia**

The effects of El Niño have been felt through significantly less rainfall, dry spells and delayed or shorter monsoon rains since late 2015. Water shortage has been reported in 18 out of 25 provinces. While the number of affected people is currently not available, the effects of the dry spell are likely to affect 93 503 rural poor households in Cambodia in terms of livelihoods, harvest/food security and health and nutrition status.

Emergency water deliveries have been provided to 18 affected provinces. Cambodia's National Centre for Disaster Management (NCDM) is coordinating the response and authorities have ordered digging of wells to ease water shortages. The HRF in Cambodia

coordinates the response among UN agencies and INGOs, in collaboration with the NCDM. To date, there is no request for international assistance from the government.

CARE, Save the children (STC) and People In Need (PIN) carried out a rapid assessment in Koh Kong province from 4-6 April identifying impact and risks regarding water for domestic use and agricultural purposes, loss of livelihoods and of income due to livestock deaths and lower agriculture yields, increases in water-borne diseases and migration flows. CARE International has allocated EUR 35 000 to CARE Cambodia to support the joint response in Koh Kong, alongside PIN and STC.

## **The Philippines**

El Niño is expected to cause drought in 40% of the territory. According to the government weather bureau, a 60% or more reduction in average rainfall is being registered in 32 provinces, 23 of which are in Mindanao, where prevailing high poverty and long-standing conflicts persist. The other drought-affected provinces are (6) in Luzon and (3) in the Visayas. The Department of Agriculture reports EUR 188 million in crop losses since February 2015. Some 224 800 hectares of agricultural land are severely damaged, affecting about 182 000 farming households. Drying lakes, marsh and other fishing grounds affect some 100 000 fishing households. In total, nearly 1 million people belonging to these vulnerable rural households are directly affected. Several coping mechanisms are noted: selling of livelihood assets, migration to other areas to find work, less frequent and substituted meals and resorting to informal loans with very high interest rates. On 1 April, a protest by 6 000 drought-affected farmers of Northern Cotabato in Mindanao was violently dispersed; 3 farmers died of gunshots and hundreds were injured.

The government developed an Action Plan to address the impact of El Niño in December 2015. Entitled RAIN (Roadmap to Address the Impact of El Niño), it has a budget of EUR 356 million and enumerates mitigation measures to address negative effects of El Niño. However, only 35% of this action plan has been included in the government's budget for 2016. The Department of Agriculture has provided EUR 9.3 million for quick response to support farm production and irrigation. The Department of Social Welfare and Development has provided EUR 12.7 million worth of food and cash-for-work assistance to affected populations, including those in the urban areas and Metro Manila. As of 15 April, 39 local government units (provinces, municipalities, cities, villages) have declared a state of calamity. The declaration normally allows the use of calamity budget and other relief assistance, but the elections' regulations prohibit the disbursement of government funds 45 days before the election (May 9).

The national government has not requested international support, although several local government units and national agencies have made bilateral requests to humanitarian agencies.

**Pacific: Republic of Marshall Islands (RMI), Palau and Federated States of Micronesia (FSM)**

In RMI, an estimated 4 700 people are reported to face moderate to severe food shortage. WASH and food security have been identified by the government as priorities needing international support. A 9-month Drought Response Plan has been developed seeking USD 8.9 million (approx. EUR 7.04 million); the plan is currently only 14% funded.

In Palau, rainfall is expected to be below normal for the next two to three months and the only remaining source of freshwater (Ngerikiil River) is at a critically low level. A Drought Response Plan worth USD 3.2 million (approx. EUR 2.8 million) has been issued.

In FSM, a State of Emergency has been declared in four states, as lack of rainfall resulted in a critical shortage of drinking water.