



South African Red Cross Society

Situational Report

17 January 2026



Table of Contents

Executive Summary	3
Climate Change Realities in South Africa	3
Rainfall Extremes.....	3
Flood Risk Outlook	4
Disaster Overview	4
Limpopo	5
Gauteng.....	6
Kwa-Zulu Natal	6
Mpumalanga	7
North West.....	7
Free State	8
South African Red Cross Society Response	8
Escalating Needs Beyond Current Capacity	10
Conclusion.....	11

Executive Summary

The South African Red Cross Society (SARCS) is a leading humanitarian organization committed to alleviating human suffering and strengthening community resilience across South Africa. Guided by the Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (Humanity, Impartiality, Neutrality, Independence, Voluntary Service, Unity, and Universality), SARCS provides support to vulnerable communities through disaster management, health and community care, first aid and psycho-social support training, road safety education, and sustainable development initiatives. With a national footprint spanning all nine provinces and 51 active branches, SARCS operates at the frontline of humanitarian response, delivering timely assistance where it is most needed.

SARCS also maintains a close working relationship with the South African Weather Service (SAWS) to monitor weather-related hazards and support rapid disaster response. Through this collaboration, SARCS receives forecasts and impact-based warnings that inform branch-level preparedness for floods, storms, and other climate-related emergencies.

Climate Change Realities in South Africa

Rainfall Extremes

South Africa's climate is changing in line with global and regional projections that point to an increase in extreme weather events. Scientific studies show that recent devastating floods, including those in KwaZulu-Natal, have been made significantly more likely and intense by human-induced climate change, with attribution analyses indicating that rising global temperatures have increased both the probability and magnitude of extreme rainfall events. Eastern coastal regions of Southern Africa, influenced by adjacent warm ocean currents, experience enhanced atmospheric moisture and instability, which further intensifies rainfall and elevates flood risk. Research also indicates substantial warming of regional ocean waters, increasing moisture availability for storm systems and amplifying rainfall intensity.

Within this context, climate change in South Africa is increasingly associated with more frequent and severe climate-related extremes, including floods, droughts, and heatwaves. In 2025, heavy rainfall and flash flooding in parts of KwaZulu-Natal, Northwest, Mpumalanga, Gauteng, and other provinces resulted in loss of life, displacement, and infrastructure damage, particularly in flood-prone and informal settlements that had not fully recovered from previous disasters. Furthermore, according to the IFRC Risk Watch for January 2026, flood risk in Limpopo, Mpumalanga, Gauteng, Free State, Northwest, and KwaZulu-Natal is consistent with a five-year return period event, indicating a heightened likelihood of damaging floods occurring within a short recurrence cycle.



Figure 1: Risk Watch for Floods Africa Region - Monthly Update

Flood Risk Outlook

Recent observations indicate that rainfall during the October–December 2025 and January–March 2026 periods has already exceeded typical seasonal norms in several provinces, including Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, Mpumalanga, Limpopo, North West, and the Free State. Above-average rainfall on already saturated soils increases the risk of surface water accumulation, flash flooding, and associated hazards, particularly in areas with limited drainage capacity.

Analyses from the South African Weather Service identify 12 January 2026 as the beginning of a high-risk period for above-normal rainfall and potential flooding. This heightened risk is expected to persist throughout the January–March period, posing ongoing threats to lives, infrastructure, and livelihoods. Given existing soil saturation and elevated dam levels, even moderate additional rainfall could trigger significant flooding and displacement, particularly in already vulnerable communities.

Disaster Overview

The cumulative impact of successive and increasingly intense weather events has reached crisis levels, causing widespread destruction and compounding pre-existing vulnerabilities in flood-prone and low-lying communities. For many affected households, repeated exposure to flooding has exhausted coping mechanisms, eroded livelihoods, and left families with no capacity to recover without external assistance. Joint rapid assessments conducted by the South African Red Cross Society and the District Municipalities reveal that a significant number of families have lost all household possessions, including food stocks, household items, and personal items. Key impacts recorded by the SARCS branch and provincial teams in KZN, MP, LP, GP, and NW to date include the following:

Limpopo



- SAWS has issued a Red Level 10 weather warning for Limpopo and Mpumalanga
- Prior to the Red Level 10 alert, SAWS had already issued Orange Level 9 and Orange Level 6 warnings for disruptive rainfall across parts of eastern and central Limpopo, signifying high risk of flooding of roads, settlements, mudslides, soil erosion and danger from fast-flowing watercourses.
- The inclement weather has materialised in the form of persistent heavy rainfall, affecting several areas within the Vhembe District, and resulting in significant damage to homes, roads, and other critical infrastructure.
- SARCS disaster teams have reported infrastructure damage includes the road between Hlengani and Lombard Matiyane, as well as the Makuleke Bridge, which have sustained notable damage.
- SARCS disaster teams have also confirmed that the road between Maphophe and Botsoleni was flooded, leading to one reported injury. In Makhado, strong winds and heavy rainfall resulted in roofs being blown off and several houses collapsing. Damage to road infrastructure in this area has been reported to the relevant government departments.
- In Musina, damage to road infrastructure has been reported, with immediate reconstruction initiated at the cut-off bridge over the Mutale River in Mutale B village.
- The Nkotswi Bridge has overflowed, rendering it impassable and preventing residents from crossing to the other side. Additionally, three people were trapped in Gwakani on Sunday, 11 January 2026, due to rising water levels.
- Thulamela Municipality has recorded a high number of affected households. Damage has been reported at the Tshidumbi Bridge, which connects Shayandima to Itsani, as well as in Tshipako, Thenzhani, Muraga, and Gondeni Sekstroom. Further assessments are ongoing, although access challenges continue to limit assessment coverage in some areas.
- The South African Red Cross Society (SARCS) has activated its National Response Team (NRT), as well as Provincial and Branch teams, to support assessment and response activities. SARCS volunteers are actively conducting assessments in affected areas and have recorded the following household-level impacts:
 - Musina: 103 damaged households
 - Collins Chabane Municipality: 100 damaged households
 - Makhado: 25 damaged households
 - Thulamela Municipality: 300 damaged households
- In Giyani, Mbalula severe flooding has resulted in the complete destruction of 42 houses, forcing the evacuation of 86 residents who have lost their homes and possessions.
- Still in Mba-lula, one child remains missing following the flooding incident that occurred yesterday. Search and rescue operations are ongoing, with local authorities and emergency services actively engaged.
- The Limpopo Provincial Government declared a state of disaster in multiple districts and mobilised multidisciplinary teams to assist with rescue efforts, restore services and help displaced families. Officials warned residents to avoid crossing flooded rivers and to follow SAWS and disaster management guidance [Limpopo Provincial Government on challenges posed by the recent heavy rainfall and flooding | South African Government](#)
- South Africa's President Cyril Ramaphosa planned visits to flood-hit areas in Limpopo to assess the situation and support relief efforts as the province continues to deal with ongoing destructive rain and flooding.

Gauteng



- The South African Weather Service (SAWS) has escalated warnings for Gauteng in January 2026, including severe thunderstorms and flash flood risk across the province.
- These warnings indicate heightened risk of heavy rain, strong winds, lightning, hail and flooding, especially in low-lying and poorly drained areas.
- SARCS disaster management teams and provincial advisories have listed Johannesburg, Tshwane, Ekurhuleni, Rand West City, Mogale City, Midvaal, Lesedi, Emfuleni and Merafong City as areas vulnerable to flooding and storm impacts during heavy rainfall events.
- One death and significant community impacts were reported from severe thunderstorms in Gauteng in late 2025, with hail, flooding, strong winds, structural disruptions, and traffic issues noted in Tshwane, Johannesburg, and surrounding areas ([One person dead following hail, flooding amid severe thunderstorms in Gauteng | News24](#))
- City of Tshwane emergency management warned of 100–150 mm rainfall accumulations with flood threats for *low-lying precincts, river banks, and floodplains*, prompting advice to evacuate to higher ground in vulnerable zones ([South Africa: City of Tshwane Warns of Potential Flooding As Rain Pours - allAfrica.com](#))

Kwa-Zulu Natal



- The South African Weather Service (SAWS) has issued multiple severe thunderstorm warnings from Yellow Level 2 to orange Level 9 for KwaZulu-Natal
- In early 2025, heavy rainfall in KZN caused flooding, road accidents and power outages, disrupting major routes like the N2 and N3, and leading to waterlogged urban areas around Durban and other centers.
- Severe rain and flooding from February 19–22, 2025, resulted in at least nine confirmed deaths from floods and landslides in areas such as Adams Mission and parts of Durban, with infrastructure and homes heavily affected ([At least nine dead after severe flooding and landslides hit KwaZulu-Natal \(KZN\), South Africa - The Watchers](#))
- Coastal and urban areas, such as eThekweni (Durban), Tongaat, Phoenix, Verulam and surrounds, have historically experienced severe flooding due to heavy rainfall overwhelming storm water systems and leading to road closures and property damage ([KZN people urged to remain indoors, more heavy downpours expected - SABC News - Breaking news, special reports, world, business, sport coverage of all South African current events. Africa's news leader.](#))
- Following the warning alerts on the 18th of December 2025, the South African Weather Service (SAWS) issued an orange level 5 warnings for damaging winds and possibilities of snowing in parts of KwaZulu-Natal, where damaging winds leading to damage of settlements and infrastructure were expected in many parts of the province. The affected households thus far on the 19th of December 2025 amounts to 441 people affected.
- Over 800 households assessed by SARCS disaster teams have been reported as severely impacted in uMkhanyakude District, KwaZulu-Natal Province, reflecting extensive loss of shelter, household assets, and access to basic services.
- Ongoing seasonal forecasts linked to a **La Niña climate pattern** suggest **above-normal rainfall across much of South Africa**, including KZN thus increasing likelihood of thunderstorms and flooding during the summer ([SA Weather Service urges citizens to heed warnings in face of La\) Niña](#))

Mpumalanga



- At least 19 people have died in Mpumalanga due to flooding and heavy rainfall since November 2025 into January 2026. Most fatalities were linked to drownings from overflowing rivers and damaged bridges ([19 dead in Mpumalanga since November as inclement weather persists](#))
- SAWS has issued extreme rain warnings (Orange Level 6 and then Red Level 10 (the highest alert) for Mpumalanga and Limpopo due to persistent and disruptive rainfall expected to continue.
- SARCS provincial and branch teams have confirmed that 650 households have been damaged across Nkomazi Local Municipality, City of Mbombela, Thaba Chweu, and Bushbuckridge, all within Mpumalanga Province
- SAWS forecasters noted that rainfall totals in parts of Mpumalanga and Limpopo over recent weeks have approached what is usually recorded over a six-month period ([Weather service warns of continued heavy rain across Mpumalanga and Limpopo](#))
- Floodwaters have washed away bridges and made roads inaccessible, severely hampering emergency response capacity and isolating communities ([Weather service warns of continued heavy rain across Mpumalanga and Limpopo](#))
- Bushbuckridge municipality temporarily suspended classes for two days because flooding and heavy rain impaired access to schools.
- Severe weather and flood risk led to closures and evacuations at Kruger National Park (a major tourism site that extends into Mpumalanga) to protect visitors and staff ([Floods force evacuations from South Africa's Kruger National Park; 19 dead in other regions | AP News](#))
- Flooding and storm impacts have damaged infrastructure, with reports of power outages and inaccessible areas, complicating rescue and relief efforts.

North West



- The South African Weather Service (SAWS) has issued Yellow Level 1 & Level 2 severe thunderstorm warnings that include parts of the North West province at times, particularly for heavy downpours, frequent lightning, hail, and strong winds
- National weather outlooks have flagged the North West, along with other interior provinces as at risk for above-normal rainfall, disruptive showers, hail, and thunderstorms during South Africa's summer season, tied to broader climate patterns increasing flood potential.
- Heavy rains and hail late in 2025 caused crop and agricultural losses for farmers in the North West, especially around Ventersdorp, where hail damaged vineyards and reduced expected harvests.
- Farmers reported significant losses to ripe or near-harvest crops, directly linked to storm conditions with heavy rainfall and hail damaging plants.
- Provincial reporting and disaster risk bulletins indicate that the North West Province has seen above-normal rainfall and storm events across parts of the region, which have contributed to localized floods, although detailed casualty or infrastructure statistics specific to 2026 are not yet published.
- Ongoing assessment by SARCS teams have confirmed 87 households damaged in Moses Kotane Local Municipality, Bojanala Platinum District, North West Province
- As a province with extensive farming areas, crop and pasture areas are vulnerable not only to flooding but also to hail, lightning and wind damage, which reduce yields and cause financial loss.
- On the 3rd of January 2025, a lightning strike hit a large crowd of people attending the event, where two people were killed and 150 people were injured and sought treatment at Mathibestad Clinic, with some later transferred to Jubilee Hospital for more serious injuries

Free State



- SAWS has repeatedly issued severe thunderstorm and disruptive rain warnings that include the Free State, often covering parts of the province alongside neighbouring regions. These warnings typically cite heavy downpours, hail, lightning, damaging winds, and potential flooding of roads and bridges.
- Specific impact-based warnings included Yellow Level 2 to Level 4 alerts for heavy rain and thunderstorms, with the possibility of localised flooding, excessive lightning and property damage across central and eastern Free State areas.
- Towns such as Parys and Vredeford have experienced significant rainfall and localised flooding, leading to temporary closures of health clinics and damage to homes due to strong winds and storms.
- In Ngwathe Local Municipality (Fezile Dabi District), flooding from dam overflows and high river levels (Renoster River) in 2025 caused major infrastructure damage, displacement of residents, and water treatment plant failures
- Drainage systems in towns are often overwhelmed by intense downpours; adjacent agricultural land and river systems (
- Rapid assessments done jointly by the South African Red Cross Society (SARCS) and the Mangaung Municipality confirmed that at least 450 households were severely affected and 98 households were damaged in the Wepenaar district.

South African Red Cross Society Response

The South African Red Cross Society (SARCS) has activated its emergency response provincial and branch teams in close coordination with Provincial and District Disaster Management Centres, local municipalities, and community leadership structures. To date, SARCS has reached approximately 42,000 people across Kwa-Zulu Natal, Mpumalanga, Free State, Gauteng, and Northwest with life-saving humanitarian assistance. Current interventions include:



MPHSS session for flood-affected victims in Mpumalanga

- Rapid needs assessments in Kwa-Zulu Natal, Northwest, Gauteng, Free State, Limpopo, and Mpumalanga
- Distribution of hot meals, food parcels, blankets, and hygiene kits to affected households
- Provision of psychosocial first aid (PFA) and mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) to families affected by distress and loss.
- Support for safe evacuations and temporary shelter arrangements for displaced communities
- Household-level dissemination of early warning information to ensure last-mile delivery in high-risk communities

Despite these efforts, pre-positioned emergency stocks are being rapidly depleted, placing significant strain on SARCS' operational capacity and limiting the ability to scale assistance in line with escalating humanitarian needs.



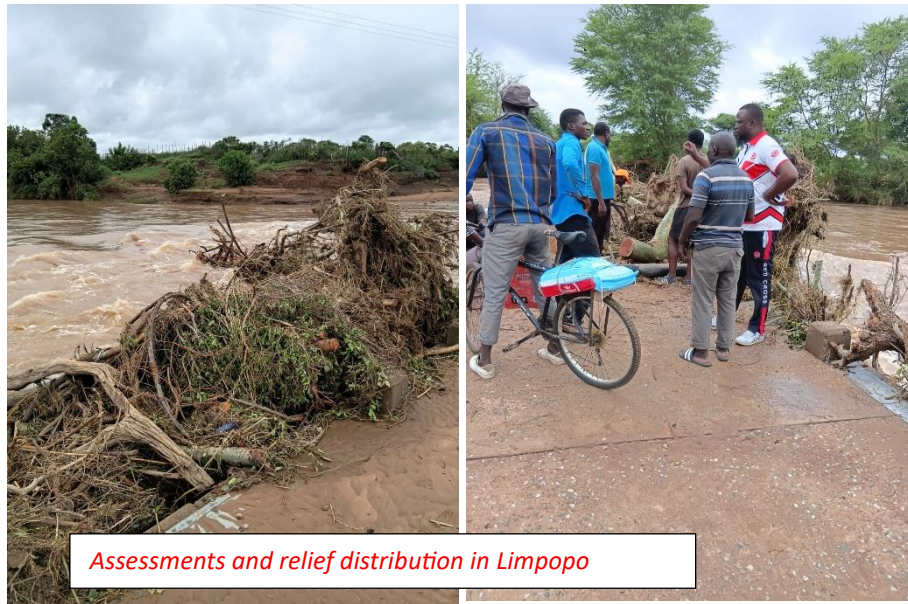
Rapid needs assessments by SARCS in the Kwa-Zulu Natal



Rapid needs assessments by SARCS in the Northwest



Assessments and relief distribution in Mpumalanga



Assessments and relief distribution in Limpopo



Rapid needs assessments in Gauteng

Escalating Needs Beyond Current Capacity

The scale, frequency, and compounding impact of extreme weather events in the October-November-December (OND) 2025 period have placed unprecedented pressure on the South African Red Cross Society's response capacity. Recurrent climate-induced emergencies in Kwa-Zulu Natal, Free State, Mpumalanga, Limpopo, Northwest, and Gauteng, including flooding, severe storms, repeated displacement, and extensive damage to homes and critical infrastructure, have created a protracted humanitarian emergency rather than isolated incidents.

These repeated shocks have disproportionately affected the most vulnerable communities, particularly child-headed households, older persons, and families already living in conditions of chronic poverty. Many households have been impacted multiple times within the year, resulting in the total erosion of coping mechanisms, loss of livelihoods, and deepening protection and psychosocial risks. As a direct consequence of the recent extreme weather events, emergency relief stocks, financial reserves, and operational capacity are under severe strain. Pre-positioned supplies have been rapidly exhausted, response teams are operating at sustained surge levels, and SARCS's ability to scale or maintain

assistance in line with escalating humanitarian needs is increasingly limited. Current demands exceed existing capacity, particularly in:

- Food assistance for displaced and affected households
- Conditional cash vouchers/cards
- Water purification kits
- Water
- Water containers
- PPE (boots, gilets, raincoats, etc)
- Shelter repair, reinforcement, and household support items
- Hygiene and water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) supplies
- Psychosocial support for families experiencing distress and loss
- Education continuity interventions for children affected by flooding
- Mobile classrooms for damaged schools
- Clothing for both women, man and children as well as school uniform
- Transport support
- Psychosocial First Aid (PFA)
- Restoration of family link (RFL)

While SARCS remains committed and active on the ground, urgent external support is critical to prevent gaps in life-saving assistance and ensure that communities receive timely, dignified, and sustained humanitarian aid.

Conclusion

South Africa is experiencing increasingly severe and frequent climate-related disasters, with heavy rainfall and flooding affecting multiple provinces at the same time. The cumulative impact of these events has placed immense strain on vulnerable communities, many of whom have been affected repeatedly and have little capacity left to recover on their own. What is emerging is no longer a series of isolated incidents, but an ongoing humanitarian situation driven by changing climate patterns. The South African Red Cross Society has responded across affected provinces, working closely with government disaster management structures and communities to deliver immediate, life-saving assistance. While these efforts continue, the scale and persistence of the current situation have stretched SARCS's resources and operational capacity. Emergency stocks are being depleted, teams are operating under sustained pressure, and critical needs continue to outpace available resources.

Without additional support, there is a real risk that gaps in assistance will widen, particularly in food security, shelter, WASH, psychosocial support, and protection for vulnerable groups. Sustained investment in response and preparedness is essential so that communities receive dignified support and that SARCS is able to continue responding effectively as conditions evolve. SARCS remains committed to supporting affected communities and stands ready to scale up assistance in partnership with the government and stakeholders as needs continue to emerge.