



Brazil

Heavy rains have devastated homes and infrastructure across Rio Grande do Sul state, leading to severe flooding, displacement of families, heightened risk of illness, and the largest disaster in the state's history. More than 400 cities are underwater.



Compounded risks

The recent rains in Rio Grande do Sul have not only left a trail of devastation but also endangered the safety of dams in the region. Four of them are now in a state of emergency, which means an imminent risk of rupture, according to state authorities.

Additionally, the risk of landslides is one of the main warnings, given the continuation of heavy rains. With more than 130 municipalities already affected, the stability of the terrain is compromised, requiring urgent measures to protect nearby communities.

Context

Brazil's Rio Grande do Sul state has been battered by heavy rains, leading to the overflow of rivers and streams and flooding across urban and rural areas. More than 400 cities are underwater in a state the size of Ecuador. Levees and dikes continue to break and more heavy rains are predicted. At least 873,000 people are directly affected, including 129,000 people who have been displaced from their homes. Even at this early stage, 83 fatalities have been confirmed, and a reported 111 people are missing. The flooding is considered the largest natural disaster in the state's history.

Cities have suffered extensive damage to roads, bridges, homes, businesses and other infrastructure. The heaviest impacts of the disaster have been felt in Porto Alegre, Santa Maria, Caxias do Sul, Pelotas, Passo Fundo, Canoas, and Rio Grande. Damage to the power grid has led to widespread blackouts, which affect the operation of hospitals, schools, health centers, and other public services.

The need for shelter is urgent, given the shortage of space, mattresses, and essential items, as well as lack of access to clean water and hygiene supplies. Several areas are expected to remain without water and electricity for an extended period, and the situation is likely to worsen in the coming week given the forecast of severe floods for the coastal cities of Pelotas and Rio Grande.

CRS and Caritas Brasileira share years of close coordination and outreach in some of the most challenging contexts in the country. Priorities for previous emergency support have included cash assistance, which allows families to meet their diverse and urgent needs, and also helps to support the local economy. *Photo by Thomaz Felipe for CRS*



Priority needs

Urgent needs include food, shelter, medical care, access to clean water, sanitation and the restoration of essential services, like water supply and electricity. The reconstruction of damaged infrastructure, such as roads and bridges, is also crucial to ensure access to isolated areas and facilitate rescue and assistance efforts for victims.

CRS/Caritas Brasileira Response

CRS is supporting Caritas Brasileira, a long-time and seasoned partner, as it seeks to provide urgent, life-saving assistance, and to meet the needs for long-term recovery. Priorities for support include the following:

- **Shelter**
Provision of shelter supplies, bedding, tarps and other key materials for emergency protection from the elements, as well as equipment and support for shelter providers to care for those who have taken refuge.
- **Food and essential supplies**
Cash assistance and/or direct distribution of food and critical items.
- **Water, sanitation and hygiene**
Hygiene kits and supplies for families to maintain hygiene and sanitation, information to prevent illness, and access to clean water.
- **Long-term rebuilding, recovery**
Long-term rebuilding: Support for families to repair and rebuild their homes and for communities to restore their infrastructure.

The unique role of Caritas

Local Churches, communities and organizations are often the first to respond in times of emergency—and sometimes the only responders with access to people in need. Like in Brazil, CRS' Caritas partners are able to pivot and build off years of programming and established relationships to respond in ways that are relevant, trusted and effective.

The approach of CRS is grounded in the dignity of the person, and the holistic needs they face. We recognize that being displaced in a moment of crisis can change the trajectory of people's lives, and have ripple effects that last years. Marginalized individuals and groups—including women, children, older adults, people with disabilities, and minority religious or ethnic groups—often face heightened risks and barriers to accessing support in times of crisis.

With the increased frequency and complexity of emergencies, CRS has been expanding our support to Caritas and local partners in their leading role to assist communities. This support has included a dynamic partnership and impactful programming with Caritas Brasileira.

CRS will continue to support Caritas Brasileira to meet the most urgent needs in this major emergency, and prepare for a long-term response that will assist families and communities through their full recovery.