

Deadly blizzards lash Europe, air travel disrupted

March 1 2018



Paris awoke under a blanket of snow

Heavy snowfall and deadly blizzards lashed Europe Thursday, forcing airports to cancel or delay flights around the continent, as a deep freeze gripped countries from the far north to the Mediterranean beaches in the

south.

The snowstorms, unusual for much of Europe at this time of year, left roads blocked, thousands of drivers stranded and schools shut, with weather agencies predicting the biting cold would continue in parts of the region at least through Thursday evening.

The death toll Europe-wide continued to climb to more than 50, as another three people perished in Poland, taking the number of victims there to 21, most of them rough sleepers.

There have also been six deaths in the Czech Republic in recent days, five in Lithuania, four each in France and Slovakia, three in Spain, two each in Italy, Serbia, Romania and Slovenia, and one each in Britain and the Netherlands.

One of the Spanish victims was a 39-year-old homeless man who had been sleeping in an abandoned truck.

"Those most at risk of cold-related illness include elderly people, children, and people who have chronic diseases or physical or mental limitations," the World Health Organization said in a statement, adding that the poor, the homeless and migrants were often hardest hit.



Children in Glasgow enjoyed the snow

The Siberian cold front—dubbed the "Beast from the East" in Britain, "Siberian bear" by the Dutch and the "snow cannon" by Swedes—on Thursday forced Geneva airport to close for several hours in the morning, with temperatures plunging in Switzerland to nearly minus 40 degrees Celsius (minus 38 Fahrenheit) at higher altitudes.

Scotland's Glasgow airport remains closed until at least 1500 GMT, and Edinburgh airport said several airlines have decided not to fly because "they do not have the critical mass of staff needed to run operations securely".

Snow also forced the cancellation of all flight operations at Dublin airport with services not expected to resume until Saturday at the earliest.

Several flights to Malaga in southern Spain were diverted because of strong winds.

Some people enjoyed the cold, with families taking children and pets out to play.

But many who took out their ice skates discovered the waters were not frozen enough.



Rough sleepers were among the most vulnerable

A 74-year-old man who fell through the ice on a pond near Bruges remained in hospital in critical condition Thursday, a Belgian TV channel reported.

'Cemetery of trucks and cars'

The mercury also dropped below freezing across southern Europe.

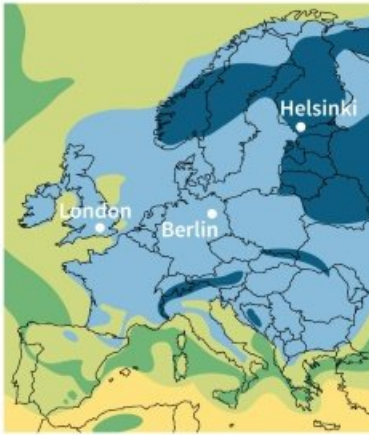
Snowfall in northern Italy forced the cancellation of 50 percent of regional trains, while in the city of Naples, schools were shut.

In normally balmy southern France, beaches in Nice were blanketed in a thick layer of snow.

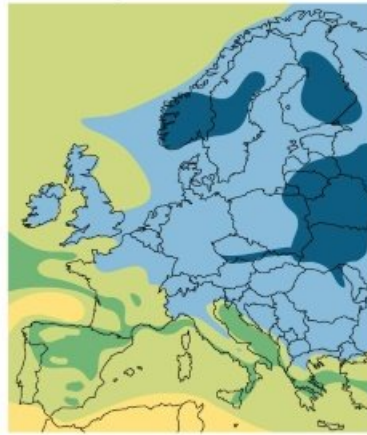
Near the city of Montpellier, around 2,000 drivers were stranded on a motorway, causing anger from those sitting behind the wheel for hours on end.

Freezing Europe

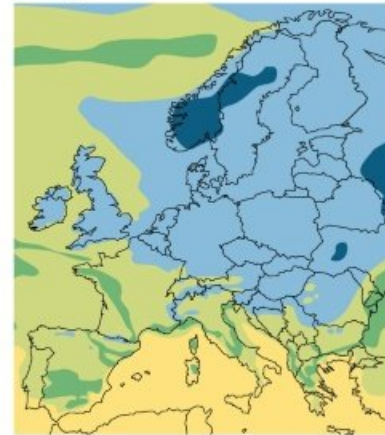
Wednesday Feb 28



Thursday March 1



Friday March 2



Temperatures forecast for 10:00 CET

20-25°C 10-15 0-5 -5 to -10 -15 to -20

Source: Sat24.com

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Temperatures are expected to rise in parts of Europe from Friday

"The motorway looks like a cemetery of trucks and cars," tweeted Anthony Jammot, describing an "apocalyptic" 24 hours in his car with two young children and no information or help from local authorities.

In Paris, which awoke Thursday under a blanket of snow, authorities continued operating emergency shelters for the city's roughly 3,000 homeless.

Demanding more efforts to keep people off the streets, around 30 local officials spent the night near the city's Gare d'Austerlitz train station as temperatures dipped below zero.

"We can't keep considering the homeless just another part of the scenery," Greens lawmaker Ali Id Elouali said.

In Germany, the national homeless association urged shelters to open during the day and not just at night.

"You can die of cold during the day too," its chief Werena Rosenke warned.



The beach on the Mediterranean city of Nice was covered by snow.

Authorities are also urging people to look out for elderly relatives and neighbours after a French woman in her nineties was found frozen to death outside her retirement home.

No spring amulets

Europe's cold snap comes as the Arctic experiences record-high temperatures, prompting scientists to ask if global warming may be playing a role in turning things upside down.

The unusually cold weather has also impacted local customs, as the first spring month began.

In Romania, people were marking the day without the amulets they traditionally exchange.

In the capital Bucharest, where it has been snowing since Monday with temperatures hovering around minus 10 degrees Celsius, sales of the "martisor" good luck charms have plummeted along with the temperature.



A red alert warning was extended for swathes of Britain Thursday

Florists have also suffered, as the amulet is often given with a bunch of flowers.

"The 1st of March is the most important day of the year for us, where we sell the most flowers," florists' association president Adrian Dinca told AFP.

burs-ser/boc

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