

# Unusual snow kills 4, brings much of Spain to a standstill

January 10 2021, by Aritz Parra

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Neighbours have drinks in the middle of the street during a heavy snowfall in Bustarviejo, outskirts of Madrid, Spain, Saturday, Jan. 9, 2021. A persistent blizzard has blanketed large parts of Spain with 50-year record levels of snow, halting traffic and leaving thousands trapped in cars or in train stations and airports that suspended all services as the snow kept falling on Saturday. Half of Spain is on alert, with five provinces on their highest level of warning. (AP Photo/Bernat Armangue)

A persistent blizzard blanketed large parts of Spain with an unusual amount of snow on Saturday, killing at least four people and leaving thousands trapped in cars or at train stations and airports that suspended all services.

The national weather agency reported that as of 7 a.m., the snowfall in Madrid reached a level unseen in half a century. More than 50 centimeters (20 inches) of [snow](#) fell in the Spanish capital, according to the weather agency AEMET.

The bodies of a man and woman were recovered by the Andalucía region emergency service after their car was washed away by a flooded river near the town of Fuengirola. The Interior Ministry said a 54-year-old man was also found dead in Madrid under a big pile of snow. A homeless man died of hypothermia in the northern city of Zaragoza, the local police department reported.

More than half of Spain's provinces remained under severe weather alerts for Storm Filomena on Saturday evening, seven of them at the highest level of warning. In Madrid, authorities activated a red alert for the first time since the system was adopted four decades ago and called in the military to rescue people from vehicles trapped on everything from small roads to the city's major thoroughfares.

Sandra Morena, who became trapped late on Friday as she commuted to her night shift as a security guard in a shopping center, arrived home, on foot, after an army emergency unit helped her out on Saturday morning.



A woman skis while crossing the Plaza Mayor in Madrid during a heavy snowfall in Madrid, Spain, Saturday, Jan. 9, 2021. An unusual and persistent blizzard has blanketed large parts of Spain with snow, freezing traffic and leaving thousands trapped in cars or in train stations and airports that had suspended all services as the snow kept falling on Saturday. The capital, Madrid, and other parts of central Spain activated for the first time its red weather alert, its highest, and called in the military to rescue people from cars vehicles trapped in everything from small roads to the city's major thoroughfares. (AP Photo/Andrea Comas)

"It usually takes me 15 minutes, but this time it has been 12 hours freezing, without food or water, crying with other people because we didn't know how we were going to get out of there," said Morena, 22.

"Snow can be very beautiful but spending the night trapped in a car



because of it is no fun," she added.

As of Saturday evening, Spanish security services had rescued all the people who were trapped in vehicles—over 1,500, Interior Minister Fernando Grande-Marlaska said.

AEMET had warned that some regions would be receiving more than 24 hours of continuous snowfall due to the odd combination of a cold air mass stagnant over the Iberian Peninsula and the arrival of the warmer Storm Filomena from the south.

The storm is expected to be followed by a severe drop in temperatures in the coming days, the agency said.



People walk during a heavy snowfall in Rivas Vaciamadrid, Spain, Saturday, Jan. 9, 2021. An unusual and persistent blizzard has blanketed large parts of Spain with snow, freezing traffic and leaving thousands trapped in cars or in train stations and airports that had suspended all services as the snow kept falling on Saturday. The capital, Madrid, and other parts of central Spain activated for the first time its red weather alert, its highest, and called in the military to rescue people from cars vehicles trapped in everything from small roads to the city's major thoroughfares. (AP Photo/Manu Fernandez)

Transport Minister José Luis Ábalos warned that "snow is going to turn into ice and we will enter a situation perhaps more dangerous than what we have at the moment."

He added that the priority was to assist those in need but also to ensure the supply chain for food and other basic goods.

"The storm has exceeded the most pessimistic forecasts we had," Ábalos added.

Adolfo Suárez Madrid-Barajas International Airport, the main gateway in and out of Spain, will remain closed at least until Sunday, Ábalos said, after the blizzard bested machines and workers trying to keep the runways clear of snow.

All trains into and out of Madrid, both commuter routes and long-distance passenger trains, as well as railway lines between the south and the northeast of the country, were suspended, railway operator Renfe said.



Firefighters work removing snow from a car during a heavy snowfall in Rivas Vaciamadrid, Spain, Saturday, Jan. 9, 2021. An unusual and persistent blizzard has blanketed large parts of Spain with snow, freezing traffic and leaving thousands trapped in cars or in train stations and airports that had suspended all services as the snow kept falling on Saturday. The capital, Madrid, and other parts of central Spain activated for the first time its red weather alert, its highest, and called in the military to rescue people from cars vehicles trapped in everything from small roads to the city's major thoroughfares. (AP Photo/Manu Fernandez)

The storm had caused serious disruptions or closed over 650 roads, according to Spain's transit authorities, which urged people to stay indoors and avoid all non-essential travel.



More than 100 roads were still impassable almost 24 hours after the storm began dumping snow on the central swathe of the country.

The Spanish government plans to take extra steps to ensure that the country's weekly shipment of the BioNTech-Pfizer coronavirus vaccine on Monday can be distributed to regional health authorities via police-escorted convoys, the interior minister said.

The wintry weather did disrupt the country's soccer league, with some teams unable to travel for games. Saturday's match between Spanish league leader Atlético Madrid and Athletic Bilbao was postponed after the plane carrying Bilbao's team on Friday was unable to land in the capital and had to turn around.



People walk along "El Paseo de la Castellana" avenue during a heavy snowfall in Madrid, Spain, Saturday, Jan. 9, 2021. A persistent blizzard has blanketed large parts of Spain with 50-year record levels of snow, halting traffic and leaving thousands trapped in cars or in train stations and airports that suspended all services as the snow kept falling on Saturday. (AP Photo/Andrea Comas)



A view shows the landscape covered with snow in Rivas in Rivas Vaciamadrid, Spain, Saturday, Jan. 9, 2021. Spain is on high alert Friday as a cold snap is covering with snow much of the country, causing disruptions in road, sea and air traffic while authorities warn that the worst may still be coming over the weekend. (AP Photo/Manu Fernandez)





People walk during a heavy snowfall in Rivas Vaciamadrid, Spain, Saturday, Jan. 9, 2021. An unusual and persistent blizzard has blanketed large parts of Spain with snow, freezing traffic and leaving thousands trapped in cars or in train stations and airports that had suspended all services as the snow kept falling on Saturday. The capital, Madrid, and other parts of central Spain activated for the first time its red weather alert, its highest, and called in the military to rescue people from cars vehicles trapped in everything from small roads to the city's major thoroughfares. (AP Photo/Manu Fernandez)



Frozen laundry hangs on a line outside an apartment window after a heavy snowfall in Madrid, Spain, Saturday, Jan. 9, 2021. Spain is on high alert as a cold snap is covering much of the country with snow disrupting road, sea, rail and air traffic with the capital, Madrid enduring what the city's mayor described as "the worst storm in 80 years." (AP Photo/Paul White)



A passenger plane is seen on the ground of the Madrid airport during a heavy snowfall in downtown, Spain, Saturday, Jan. 9, 2021. A persistent blizzard has blanketed large parts of Spain with 50-year record levels of snow, halting traffic and leaving thousands trapped in cars or in train stations and airports that suspended all services as the snow kept falling on Saturday. (Jesus Hellin/Europa Press via AP)





A view from a highway covered with snow during a heavy snowfall in Rivas Vaciamadrid, Spain, Saturday, Jan. 9, 2021. An unusual and persistent blizzard has blanketed large parts of Spain with snow, freezing traffic and leaving thousands trapped in cars or in train stations and airports that had suspended all services as the snow kept falling on Saturday. The capital, Madrid, and other parts of central Spain activated for the first time its red weather alert, its highest, and called in the military to rescue people from cars vehicles trapped in everything from small roads to the city's major thoroughfares. (AP Photo/Manu Fernandez)



Two men walk slowly in the middle of a street after a heavy snowfall in Madrid, Spain, Saturday, Jan. 9, 2021. Spain is on high alert as a cold snap is covering much of the country with snow disrupting road, sea, rail and air traffic with the capital, Madrid enduring what the city's mayor described as "the worst storm in 80 years." (AP Photo/Paul White)







A cow grazes during a heavy snowfall in Bustarviejo, outskirts of Madrid, Spain, Saturday, Jan. 9, 2021. A persistent blizzard has blanketed large parts of Spain with 50-year record levels of snow, halting traffic and leaving thousands trapped in cars or in train stations and airports that suspended all services as the snow kept falling on Saturday. Half of Spain is on alert, with five provinces on their highest level of warning. (AP Photo/Bernat Armangue)



People walk past the Cibeles monument, left, in front of the City Hall during a heavy snowfall in downtown Madrid, Spain, Saturday, Jan. 9, 2021. A persistent blizzard has blanketed large parts of Spain with 50-year record levels of snow, halting traffic and leaving thousands trapped in cars or in train stations and airports that suspended all services as the snow kept falling on Saturday. (AP Photo/Andrea Comas)



A woman skies past the Cibeles monument in front of the City Hall during a heavy snowfall in central Madrid, Spain, Saturday, Jan. 9, 2021. An unusual and persistent blizzard has blanketed large parts of Spain with snow, freezing traffic and leaving thousands trapped in cars or in train stations and airports that had suspended all services as the snow kept falling on Saturday. The capital, Madrid, and other parts of central Spain activated for the first time its red weather alert, its highest, and called in the military to rescue people from cars vehicles trapped in everything from small roads to the city's major thoroughfares. (AP Photo/Paul White)





A man runs crossing the Plaza Mayor during a heavy snowfall in Madrid, Spain, Saturday, Jan. 9, 2021. An unusual and persistent blizzard has blanketed large parts of Spain with snow, freezing traffic and leaving thousands trapped in cars or in train stations and airports that had suspended all services as the snow kept falling on Saturday. The capital, Madrid, and other parts of central Spain activated for the first time its red weather alert, its highest, and called in the military to rescue people from cars vehicles trapped in everything from small roads to the city's major thoroughfares. (AP Photo/Andrea Comas)





People walk under a heavy snowfall in Bustarviejo, outskirts of Madrid, Spain, Saturday, Jan. 9, 2021. A persistent blizzard has blanketed large parts of Spain with 50-year record levels of snow, halting traffic and leaving thousands trapped in cars or in train stations and airports that suspended all services as the snow kept falling on Saturday. Half of Spain is on alert, with five provinces on their highest level of warning. (AP Photo/Bernat Armangue)



A man slips and falls crossing the street during a heavy snowfall in central Madrid, Spain, Saturday, Jan. 9, 2021, prompting a red weather alert and military assistance to rescue people trapped in cars. An unusual and persistent blizzard has blanketed large parts of Spain with snow, freezing traffic and leaving thousands trapped in cars or in train stations and airports that had suspended all services as the snow kept falling on Saturday. (AP Photo/Paul White)





People walk during a heavy snowfall in downtown Madrid, Spain, Saturday, Jan. 9, 2021. A persistent blizzard has blanketed large parts of Spain with 50-year record levels of snow, halting traffic and leaving thousands trapped in cars or in train stations and airports that suspended all services as the snow kept falling on Saturday. (AP Photo/Andrea Comas)



A man pulls a child on a sleigh, during a heavy snowfall in Bustarviejo, outskirts of Madrid, Spain, Saturday, Jan. 9, 2021. A persistent blizzard has blanketed large parts of Spain with 50-year record levels of snow, halting traffic and leaving thousands trapped in cars or in train stations and airports that suspended all services as the snow kept falling on Saturday. Half of Spain is on alert, with five provinces on their highest level of warning. (AP Photo/Bernat Armangué)





A woman tries to remove the snow from her car during a heavy snowfall in downtown Madrid, Spain, Saturday, Jan. 9, 2021. A persistent blizzard has blanketed large parts of Spain with 50-year record levels of snow, halting traffic and leaving thousands trapped in cars or in train stations and airports that suspended all services as the snow kept falling on Saturday. (AP Photo/Andrea Comas)

The regions of Castilla La Mancha and Madrid, home to 8.6 million people altogether, announced that schools would be closed at least on Monday and Tuesday.

Despite the numerous branches and even whole trees toppled by the weight of the snow, the blizzard also yielded surreal images that entertained many Madrileños, including a few brave skiers and a man on

a dog sled that was seen on videos widely circulated on social media.

Lucía Vallés, a coach for a Madrid-based ski club who usually has to travel to faraway mountains with her clients, was thrilled to see the white layers of snow accumulating literally at her doorstep.

"I never imagined this, it has been a gift," the 23-year-old said. "But I've never had so many photographs taken of me," she added as she slid past the late 18th-century building that hosts the Prado Museum.

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