

Floods displace more than 36,000 residents in northeast Italy

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**Residents were evacuated from their homes after floodwaters hit the Emilia-Romagna region
[Andreas Solaro/AFP]**

Rome, May 20 (RHC)-- More than 36,000 people have been forced from their homes by deadly floods in northeast Italy, regional officials have said, as rising waters swallowed more houses and new landslides isolated hamlets.

Fourteen people were killed this week after streets in the cities and towns of the Emilia-Romagna region were transformed into rivers. The torrential floods caused more than 305 landslides and damaged or closed in excess of 500 roads in the region.

Video footage from the affected towns showed cars submerged in water and flooded homes, as some residents rode bicycles or paddled through the watery streets. Bologna's mayor Matteo Lepore said Saturday it would take "months, and in some places maybe years" for roads and infrastructure to be repaired.

Al Jazeera's Hoda Abdel-Hamid, reporting from the city of Faenza in the Emilia-Romagna region, said the damage was visible "everywhere." "The city is covered with mud and the people are beginning to understand the extent of what's gone – present and past," she said.

Faenza, which is known for its ceramics, was discovering the damage "minute by minute." "People are doing their best to salvage pieces of art," Abdel-Hamid said. The local library reported more than 10,000 books lost to the floods.

In the town of Lugo, some evacuated flood victims sheltered in a national museum, where volunteers provided cots for them to sleep on. "I am very happy here ... But I feel bad," 74-year-old evacuee Gabriella Valenti told Reuters. "I am among the luckiest maybe ... I still have a home but there are people who lost everything. They don't know what to do to make us feel good."

The floods are the latest in a series of extreme weather events that have slammed Italy over the past year, as once exceptional disasters become a regular part of life. The same area of Emilia-Romagna was battered by extreme weather at the beginning of May, with at least two people dying during storms.

Heavy rains followed months of drought which had dried out the land, reducing its capacity to absorb water, meteorologists said. Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni said she would leave the Group of Seven (G7) summit in Hiroshima a day earlier than scheduled to lead the response to the flooding.

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