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Information bulletin

Europe: Population movement

 International Federation
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

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Date of disaster: Ongoing since late 2017 / early 2018	Point of contact: Seval Guzelkilinc, Disaster Management Coordinator IFRC Regional Office for Europe Phone: +36 1 888 45 05; email: seval.guzelkilinc@ifrc.org
Host National Societies: Albanian Red Cross, Red Cross Society of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatian Red Cross, Italian Red Cross, Malta Red Cross Society, Red Cross of Montenegro, Spanish Red Cross, Slovenian Red Cross.	

This bulletin is being issued for information only and reflects the current situation and details available at this time.

The situation

The increase in the number of arrivals through the eastern Mediterranean route experienced in the first half of 2018 has triggered a substantial increase in secondary movements through the western Balkans – particularly in Albania, Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Authorities in Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina registered over 7,108 migrants between January and June 2018, which is almost three times more than the 2,600 registered in the same period of 2017. Notably, these figures only represent migrants who were registered by the authorities, and the total figures are estimated to be considerably higher.

In the Mediterranean Sea, the case of the rescue ship Aquarius, operated by the French-German NGO SOS Méditerranée and Doctors without Borders (MSF), has sparked international debate in the past four days. Between 9 and 10 June, the ship picked up 629 migrants from inflatable boats off the coast of Libya. Among the people saved were 123 unaccompanied minors, 11 younger children and 7 pregnant women. The ship then sailed towards Italy to disembark, but the Italian government refused to open ports, asserting that the vessel should proceed to Malta. The government of Malta argued that it was not involved in the rescue mission overseen by the Italian coast guard, and Italy should be responsible according to international law.

On 11 June, the Council of Europe, IFRC and UNHCR, along with other organizations, called on governments to prioritize human lives and urged them to open ports for the Aquarius. Subsequently, the Spanish government offered the ship a “safe harbour” in the port of Valencia – a port 1,300 km (or a three-day journey) away from the location of the Aquarius. The Aquarius is currently sailing south of Sicily and is expected to enter the Sicilian channel this evening. The transfer of 51 women, 45 men and 10 children to Italian coastguard and navy vessels has been completed to date. On 13 June, Italian coastguard ship Diciotti, carrying more than 900 migrants who had been saved in multiple rescue operations off the coast of Libya, could dock in Sicily shortly after Italy had turned away a foreign vessel with rescued migrants on board.

IFRC personnel are on standby for deployment to support National Societies in the Balkans and Mediterranean. Communication lines are being maintained between the IFRC Regional Office for Europe and the National Societies that are preparing for and responding to the needs of migrants in the escalating situation.

Red Cross and Red Crescent action

In recent years, IFRC has been assisting the National Societies along the western Balkan route, namely the Red Cross of Serbia, Red Cross of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the Croatian Red Cross, the Hungarian Red Cross; as well as the Italian Red Cross, the Hellenic Red Cross and the Turkish Red Crescent, in their response to the migration situation in their respective countries. The population movement

of recent years has prompted IFRC to provide assistance from its Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) on six occasions and has also resulted in seven Emergency Appeals. Out of these, five have been closed and transformed into longer-term development plans, while two (Greece and Turkey) remain open.

IFRC is closely monitoring the evolving situation in the countries along the secondary movements in the western Balkans and is planning its assistance to the National Societies accordingly. IFRC plans to organize a coordination and planning meeting in Montenegro in July 2018 with the participation of the National Societies along the western Balkan route. The purpose of the meeting will be to analyse the evolving situation and the migratory trends, focus on cross-border cooperation, and prepare for a longer-term response if the situation requires. Discussions are currently underway with the Red Cross of Montenegro, the Red Cross Society of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatian Red Cross, Albanian Red Cross and Slovenian Red Cross.

ICRC is ready to advise and support the National Societies with restoring family links (RFL), missing people and forensic response as a continuation of its cooperation with these National Societies and Red Cross Red Crescent Movement partners.

Based on the current situation, the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement is planning to provide the following assistance:

Bosnia and Herzegovina: The Croatian Red Cross team visited two local branches in Bosnia and Herzegovina in late May in order to define the possibilities of cooperation and support related to the growing numbers of migrants. This visit was initiated by the Croatian Red Cross as a part of our "Neighbours Help First" cooperation framework between South-Eastern European National Societies. Recommendations were shared also with the IFRC Regional Office for Europe. An [Information Bulletin](#) was published on 12 June, and a DREF request is expected from the National Society this week in response to migration flows. The proposed DREF operation aims to support 250 migrants who currently reside in Mostar, 500 in Sarajevo, and 1,000 in Bihac municipality with essential food and hygiene assistance.

Montenegro: A DREF request is pending, currently aiming to support 500 migrants expected to transit through the country over next four months. By the end of May, 557 migrants have been registered. The main activities planned for the potential DREF operation include provision of food parcels, hygiene parcels and clothing for the newly-arrived migrants, as well as assistance in the areas of health and protection.

Malta: The National Society is coordinating with the government and other stakeholders for information sharing and observing the situation related to rescue ship movements between Malta and Italy, and to provide assistance as needed.

Italy: A conference call took place on 12 June between the IFRC Regional Office for Europe and the Italian Red Cross representative based in Montenegro. Italian Red Cross is ready to step up its support, once plans of action are clearer for a DREF allocation, and beyond (short and medium-term plans). Regarding the situation of Aquarius, the National Society is closely monitoring the situation, and is ready to step up with health assistance, as well as food and non-food items. Italian Red Cross is preparing to tackle new disembarkation operations in Italy – with a navy search and rescue ship landing in Catania with 932 migrants and 2 corpses, and other operations are also planned. The National Society is also ready to provide RFL services to migrants and their families, in coordination with ICRC. ICRC continues to provide technical support by forensic specialists to deal with the cases of deceased migrants and their identification process.

Spain: Spanish Red Cross is actively involved in the migration response activities in the south of Spain and two cities in North Africa providing relief, RFL and health-care services to migrants. Compared to the same period of 2017, Spain has seen a 40 per cent increase in arrivals in 2018 and is receiving 10 to 20 migrants on a daily basis. In case the Aquarius confirms its move to Spain, Spanish Red Cross, under its contingency plan, is ready to respond to the arrival of up to 600 migrants in one arrival. The National Society is closely coordinating with the authorities, and is ready to provide health, relief and psychosocial support to the migrants upon arrival. The Joint Committee for the Assistance and Hosting of Refugees and Displaced People, in which Spanish Red Cross takes part, has assessed the needs for the first days and the available resources and has established the "roadmap" for the reception, that will begin with the arrival of the migrants to Valencia's port, from where it is planned that, depending on the circumstances, they will be transferred to different resources.

Communications: National Societies have been highlighting response efforts across social media and media channels. The president of [Spanish Red Cross](#) has expressed the readiness of the National Society

to react. [Italian Red Cross](#) has published several updates about ship arrivals to Catania, Sicily and the National Society's activities to support migrants. The IFRC Regional Office for Europe is continually sharing updates through the [IFRC Europe Twitter account](#), and further media outreach is planned.

Contact information

For further information, specifically related to this emergency, please contact:

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How we work

All IFRC assistance seeks to adhere to the **Code of Conduct** for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO's) in Disaster Relief and the **Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response (Sphere)** in delivering assistance to the most vulnerable. The IFRC's vision is to inspire, **encourage, facilitate and promote at all times all forms of humanitarian activities** by National Societies, with a view to **preventing and alleviating human suffering**, and thereby contributing to the maintenance and promotion of human dignity and peace in the world.

The IFRC's work is guided by Strategy 2020 which puts forward three strategic aims:



Save lives.
protect livelihoods,
and strengthen recovery
from disaster and crises.



Enable **healthy**
and **safe** living.



Promote **social inclusion**
and a culture of
non-violence and **peace**.