

OPERATIONS UPDATE



International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
Fédération internationale des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge et du Croissant-Rouge
Federación Internacional de Sociedades de la Cruz Roja y de la Media Luna Roja
الاتحاد الدولي لجمعيات الصليب الأحمر والهلال الأحمر

CENTRAL EUROPE: FLOODS

16 August, 2002

This Ops Update is intended for reporting on emergency appeals.

The Federation's mission is to improve the lives of vulnerable people by mobilizing the power of humanity. It is the world's largest humanitarian organization and its millions of volunteers are active in 178 countries. For more information: www.ifrc.org

Appeal No. 25/2002

Launched on 15 August 2002 for CHF 1,668,000 for 3 months for 450,000 beneficiaries

Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) Allocated: CHF 100,000

Beneficiaries: 450,000

Operations Update No. 01; Period covered: 12-16 August 2002; Next Update (no. 2) expected the week of August 19-23, 2002

IN BRIEF

Appeal coverage: Appeal coverage and an updated list of contributions will be provided with the next Operations Update (no. 2) to be issued shortly.

Related Appeals: Central Europe 2002 Annual Appeal no. 01.42/2002

Outstanding needs: Basic relief items, food, hygiene and non-food items

Summary: There is some room for optimism as the flood waters began to recede in Prague, and appear to have peaked in Slovakia without flooding Bratislava. At the same time, northern Bohemia faces more flooding, and elsewhere the scale of the damages caused by the floodwaters is expected to be massive. In Germany the disaster has only heightened, while in Austria the situation seems to have stabilized. The Slovakia and Hungary Red Cross remain on alert. The Federation support to these national societies and others involved in operations in their respective countries will be adjusted as the situation evolves.

Operational Developments w

The water levels of rivers throughout Central Europe continue to be at dangerously high levels. In certain places it has been widely broadcast in the media that the situation has reached critical levels. In Prague around 50,000 people were evacuated from their homes and in Romania it is feared that many people have had their livelihoods destroyed. The Red Cross throughout Europe has reacted quickly to help those affected by the floods with their immediate needs and also to minimize the impact in the long term. Now is the time to emphasize that once the flood waters do finally recede, the disaster is by no means over. The clean-up operation will be a long, labour intensive and expensive task. It is important that support continue, as needed, for these operations.

The tendency in such situations is that once the immediate disaster phase ends, media coverage and public attention fade very quickly. It is crucial that all concerned be made aware of the long term effects of such a

disaster, and that support be mobilized to help in the difficult months to come. The emerging scale of the damage in the region is so vast that at the moment it is impossible to fully predict the long-term needs.

Czech Republic

Much of the media broadcasting of the floods in Central Europe has focused on Prague. Thus far mass evacuations have left thousands of people in rescue centres, where they will stay until experts decide if it is safe for them to return to their homes. Although it is hoped that the worst of the floods has passed, fears persist about the long term damage that has been caused to the buildings in the historic Old Town. The BBC report that the damage caused so far could run into billions of dollars and the Head of the European Commission, Romano Prodi, is in Prague inspecting the damage. Towns across the Czech Republic have also been affected, with the north of the country still experiencing severe flooding, which will add to the large scale disaster.

Therefore, there are still immediate relief needs, along with a long term programme for helping the people who have lost their homes and the repairing any structural damage caused. The Red Cross in the Czech Republic is pleased with the response they have received from national societies in the neighbouring countries. The Polish and Hungarian Red Cross societies have both offered assistance in the form of supplies, but the Czech Red Cross reports that the domestic collection of basic goods has been effective, so they have no urgent need for more.

Now is the most vital time for the Czech Republic as the floods subside and the media gaze shifts. Massive cleaning and relocation work needs to be done which will last a considerable length of time and be expensive. The Red Cross have drawn up a three stage plan of action to meet these challenges. The emergency phase is ongoing and will continue with the necessary work of supplying the evacuation centres across the country with supplies. Next is the post-emergency phase which has just begun in Southern Bohemia and aims to clean and disinfect the areas affected by the floods. The third phase is rehabilitation where the Czech Red Cross will contribute to the smooth return of people to their homes and help with the necessary repairs. The traditionally vulnerable sections of society will targeted for special aid.

To achieve these aims the Czech Red Cross has stated that it would prefer cash donations, although cleaning materials for the post-emergency phase would also be welcome. In the rehabilitation phase essential home equipment will be required, so donations of cash (preferred) or supplies would help successful completion.

Slovakia

In Slovakia the situation is being monitored and the next thirteen to fourteen hours are expected to be critical. The current level of the River Danube has reached 9.9 m, below the safe level of 10.7m, and it is hoped that the waters will subside. There has been some damage to towns in Slovakia: Devin is stranded and the electricity supply has been cut off; Devinska Nova Ves has experienced some flooding; in Zohor there were fears that a dam would break, but hopefully volunteers managed to build defenses in time.

The Red Cross in Slovakia report that the preparations that they had in place in the event of such flooding have proved effective. Especially encouraging is the solidarity and co-operation between the Red Cross and the army. The volunteer community has been quickly and effectively mobilized, with volunteer experts in first aid and professional rescue ready to assist in the co-ordinated effort. The Red Cross is on alert in the regions affected, but at present report no specific needs.

Hungary

The situation in Hungary has not reached the levels of other countries in the region. Experts forecast that Sunday or Monday will see the peak of the danger. In light of this, Hungary has taken precautions and is prepared for possible floods. Near Budapest, the island of Csepel has been fortified, as has Romai Part. To the north, Visegrad has also been put on alert with volunteers from the Hungarian Red Cross being sent from other parts of the country.

It should also be noted that the Hungarian Red Cross offered its expertise and resources to the neighbouring countries as soon as they were affected by the floods. These offers were greatly appreciated and the general sense of solidarity has been extremely productive.

Austria

The situation in Austria has stabilized and it is hoped that the worst of the flooding has passed. In the three provinces hit by the floods were lower Austria, upper Austria and Salzburg where houses and the property of thousands of people were destroyed and nine people lost their lives. In response 4,000 volunteers and employees from the Austrian Red Cross provided first aid, ambulance services, emergency health units, psychological support and helped distribute food to victims.

It is now that the costs of the flooding can be calculated and efforts to return the country to normal can start. With the media coverage shifting to other areas in Central Europe, it is important to remember that the work of the Red Cross continues with a massive clean up operation. A television campaign on this theme has been launched and is being screened on the Austrian Broadcasting Corporation (ORF). Titled "Flood emergency relief- the waters recede, the dangers stay", it is hoped that cash and donations in kind will be donated to help with this work.

Germany

The River Elbe continues to rise placing parts of Germany at risk of further flooding. The city of Dresden experienced extensive damage and evacuations were carried out. The response of the German Red Cross has been very effective in co-ordinating the flood response effort and it is felt that preparations are in place to cope with further problems. The financial costs will be high and Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder has committed his government to ensuring that the rehabilitation work will be conducted in full.

Romania

Recent information received from Romania indicates that the floods have most seriously affected 210 localities in the following 27 counties: Alba, Brasov, Botosani, Constanta, Covasna, Cluj, Buzau, Mures, Gorj, Mehedinti, Neamt, Olt, Prahova, Harghita, Teleorman, Vrancea, Suceava, Dolj, Giurgiu, Galati, Iasi and Vaslui. Initial assessments indicate that 1,310 households are damaged or totally destroyed households, 55 schools are damaged; 8 persons dead, with more 15,000 directly affected (mainly in rural areas), over 5,000 hectares of cultivated soil have been inundated, as well as thousands of contaminated wells, county roads, national roads, railways, water supply networks, and electric lines.

The Romanian Red Cross (RRC) headquarters has responded to the needs and local appeals for help by directing the following supplies and actions:

- July 22 - locality Tulucesti, county Galati. Assistance was provided for 110 evacuated persons from their destroyed houses, presently sheltered in schools, by relatives or friends. The humanitarian aid, in value of 200 million Lei (EUR 6,250) consisted of blankets, bed linens, sports outfits, hygiene items, sleeping bags, basic food items - canned meat, sugar, rice, and oil.
- August 6 - localities Brusturoasa and Ghimes-Faget, county Bacau. Assistance was provided for 100 persons. The humanitarian aid, in value of 150 million Lei (EUR 4,600) consisted of clothing items, footwear and shelter equipment.
- August 9 - locality Draganesti-Olt, county Olt. Assistance was provided for 250 people affected by the floods. The humanitarian aid, in value of 390 million Lei (approx. 12,100 EUR) consisted of bread, mineral water, basic food items (canned meat, sugar, rice, oil), sports outfits, wool blankets. The supplies came out of the RRC stocks.
- August 12 - locality Facaeni, county Ialomita. As a consequence of a tornado (the first occurrence of such a meteorological phenomenon in Romania) 20 houses were totally destroyed and another 230 were left severely damaged. The RRC set up tents from its own warehouse, equipped with beds and blankets, in which all the persons left without dwellings stayed over the night. The assistance provided amounted to 235,000,000 Lei (EUR 7,300).
- August 14 - locality Storobaneasa, county Teleorman. Floods seriously affected 1,000 persons and 250 houses. The RRC distributed emergency assistance consisting of: basic food items (sugar, rice, oil, canned meat, blankets, clothing items, etc). The assistance provided amounted to 390,000,000 Lei (EUR 12,000).

The total value of the humanitarian assistance provided by the RRC until August 14, 2002 to support the affected person was of EUR 42,250 EUR.

Action carried out by RRC branches (primarily with supplies from their own warehouses) and volunteers included:

- RRC branch Galatzi provided clothing items and footwear for 50 persons in the locality Tulucesti;
- RRC branch Bacau offered clothing items and footwear to 80 affected persons in commune Ghimes-Faget and Margineni;
- RRC branch Olt provided 40 affected persons in Draganesti-Olt with mineral water clothing items and barracks equipment.

Considering the continuing rainy weather, the RRC branches will cooperate with the Disasters Preparedness Commissions in the respective counties to assess the situations requiring further RRC intervention. The RRC, however, requires replenishment of contingency stocks, and has identified the need to purchase the following specific basic good and hygiene needs (estimated value of EUR 480,000):

- 10,000 blankets.
- 10,000 bed linen.
- 10,000 sports outfits.
- 5,000 sleeping bags.
- 4,500 pairs of rubber boots.
- Basic food items - 20,000 kg rice, 20,000 kg sugar, 20,000 lts oil, 40,000 containers of canned meat, 40,000 packages pastes and cereals, 10,000 packages powder milk.

The RRC actions have been widely covered in the local and national media, and was commended for being the first organization to provide sustained and effective support to the affected persons.

Coordination w

The coordination and cooperation across the region has been exemplary. Fire brigades, the police and military, disaster response units, local authorities and the government have all complemented and assisted each other. Each country has reported large amounts of volunteers spontaneously arriving at the scene of the flooding. Other reports indicate that the response from the public not affected by the floods has been tremendous, and that in some cases they do not have the capacity to store all of the materials received.

Red Cross and Red Crescent action w

The various elements of the Movement quickly began to react to the emerging flood threat. From the National Societies to the Regional Delegation, to Geneva and on to potential donors, actions and reactions were swift.

Red Cross and Red Crescent Society w

The Red Cross is considered to be the lead humanitarian organization involved in the flood response. There has been broad media coverage of Red Cross activities. At the same time, the public has showed its support of the Red Cross by offering unprecedented amounts of donations in kind for those affected. Existing volunteers mobilised in a manner that clearly demonstrated the effectiveness of the training they had received, while new volunteers have also been presenting themselves in large numbers. The use of professional volunteers has proven to be very effective (rescue, first aid and psych-social support volunteers). The National Societies in the countries affected by the floods have proven themselves to be very capable and organized. They carried out a quick and effective response. Despite the enormous demands placed on their leadership and management by the floods, they have still found the time to brief the media, communicate with all concerned, and keep the Regional Delegation in Budapest fully informed of developments.

Objectives, activities and results w

This current report focuses mainly on the operation in the Czech Republic. At the moment, schools, military bases and other such locations have been transformed into evacuation centres. In Prague alone some twenty such centres are operating, with another sixty to seventy in the countryside. These evacuation centres have been fully equipped and monitored by the Red Cross. At the moment, it is via these centres that the distribution of relief items to evacuees is occurring.

The source of the current relief items is largely existing Red Cross and government stocks, but many items that have been gathered through public collection centres. In total there are 77 collection centres across the country. The nation has demonstrated such support and generosity that eventually a request had to be made to slow down the donations. At this stage the distribution of relief items is still occurring on a daily basis. However, in the post-emergency phase, kits or parcels will be prepared for those returning to their homes. Distribution on

the spot will also be organized. It is expected that within a week the assessments of accommodation will have been carried out. Those who are still unable to return to their homes will then be housed at university campuses. Following the assessments, distribution plans will be drafted and distributions carried out.

Objectives and activities planned to reach the objectives w

The Red Cross will support those affected during the first evacuation phase, as well as during the return phase. At the moment, the Red Cross is fully equipping and monitoring the evacuation centres. Those affected will still need to spend another few nights in these centres, as the flood waters have yet to recede to a level that would allow for return. The objectives outlined in the preliminary appeal remain valid. However, most of them are applicable only once the post-emergency phase is underway. They will be fully reported on at that time.

Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement -- Principles and Initiatives w

The loss of livelihood, and the worsening plight of the already impoverished, will be given maximum attention, as will the need for effective disaster preparedness plans, and regional cooperation. The response of the Movement has included tremendous regional solidarity. The French Red Cross, among others, has started a national fund-raising campaign.

National Society Capacity Building w

The Red Cross National Societies have constantly monitored the flood situation closely since it began. Based on the fact that the Red Cross has a broad experience in this type of situation, the Red Cross Societies are part of the Crises Centres set up to handle the flood situation in the respective countries. The Red Cross organizations have also been appointed as the lead agency on the NGO side in the countries concerned. The Red Cross in all countries also have a cadre of well trained volunteers and staff allowing them to handle the situation themselves, without the involvement of international staff. The Red Cross Societies, based on their assessment of the situation, have already launched local appeals and the response from the public has been very good. The National Societies have been well prepared, and their Disaster Preparedness programmes have proved effective.

Federation Delegation w

The Regional Delegation for Central Europe, based in Budapest has a total of 7 Regional Delegates. The Regional Delegation has been, from the beginning, in close contact with the National Societies affected, and offered their services immediately (Communication Unit, Reporting Unit). The coordination was ensured by the Regional Disaster Management delegate.

The option of mobilizing a Regional Disaster Response Team is still under consideration. The Regional Disaster Management delegate is in close contact with bilateral National Societies operating in the region. The Regional Delegation of the American Red Cross has already offered their logistical facilities as well as the use of their regional stock. More information will be provided regarding this in the next update.

Regionally, there are a number of delegates and national staff who have received Field Assessment and Coordination Team (FACT), Regional Disaster Response Team (RDRT) or Emergency Response Unit (ERU) training. These persons can be released for the operation as needed. The Budapest Regional Delegation is in daily contact with the National Societies and is fully equipped with all necessary facilities which can be shared with all components of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

Advocacy/Public Information w

Objective 1: To acquire media coverage of the Red Cross response to the floods, and Red Cross concerns.

There was good cooperation between the Federation headquarters in Geneva, the Regional Delegation, and the National Societies concerned. A press release was simultaneously issued at the launch of the preliminary appeal in the three National Societies and from Geneva. The BBC network (including BBC World television, BBC 24 Hours news television, and BBC Radio Free Live), and CNN, have provided extensive coverage. Other coverage has come from the wire services, Radio France International, Canada's CBC Radio, and Finnish and Colombian media. National media in the affected countries have given National Societies high profile. The Federation web site has been provided with comprehensive coverage.

The Head of the Regional Communications Unit departed for Bratislava early Friday, and will be in Prague over the weekend. A professional photographer has been dispatched from Geneva and will serve to heighten Red Cross visibility. The communications delegate has been reporting regularly on the situation, and continues to be in contact with various international media organizations.

Outstanding needs w

The massive scale of the damage caused by the flooding is only now starting to be apparent. The effects are likely to be felt for months and even years. It is important to restate that, once the first emergency phase has ended, a thorough assessment will be conducted to determine what type of post-emergency and long-term assistance will be required. Contributions from sister National Societies in the region have been received (Croatia, Poland, Slovakia, Bulgaria) and are very much appreciated. Indications of support have been received from the Swedish, French, Netherlands, German, and Swiss Red Cross National Societies, as well as from external partners such as OCHA and some embassies, and the Irish government. An ECHO application is being considered. An updated list of contributions will be included in the next Operations Update.

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All International Federation Operations seek to adhere to the Code of Conduct and are committed to the Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response (SPHERE Project) in delivering assistance to the most vulnerable.

This operation seeks to administer to the immediate requirements of the victims of this disaster. Subsequent operations to promote sustainable development or longer-term capacity building will require additional support, and these programmes are outlined on the Federation's website.

For further information concerning Federation operations in this or other countries, please access the Federation website at <http://www.ifrc.org>.

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