

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

22 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 CHF 1,668,000, for 450,000 beneficiaries

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

Beneficiaries: 450,000

Operations Update No. 02 ;

Period covered: 17- 21 August 2002 ;

Last Update: Operation Update no. 1 issued 16 August, 2002); Next Update no. 3 expected the week beginning August 26



IN BRIEF

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

Outstanding needs: further cash support and relief items are needed

Summary: The flood waters are now receding fast and the initial emergency has passed in all countries of Central Europe, with the exception of northern Germany. As some evacuees return to their homes the national societies of the Red Cross are now working together with the governments in supporting them. The crucial work is the provision of relief items to the most affected people, including the distribution of disinfectant materials to areas contaminated by flood water to prevent the potential spread of disease. Also, some of the most vulnerable people are those who have lost their homes and livelihoods and they continue to need support. The International Federation has recently deployed three Regional Disaster Response Teams (RDRT) to support four national societies with their vital assessment work.

Operational Developments

The floods that hit Central Europe in the past week causing serious damage seem to have peaked, with the water levels now falling. Reports from around the region make clear that there has been considerable damage to both cities and villages in rural areas with many people having lost their homes and livelihoods. The priorities for the Red Cross now are making an assessment of the damage caused and establishing where the resources that have been made available should be channelled.

As more reports come in from across the region, the extent of the damage is becoming clearer. Initially much of the information came from the big cities, especially in the Czech Republic, Austria and Germany. Pictures and news items featured prominently in national and international media. It is now apparent that the devastation is not confined to the large towns and cities. Small villages are reported to have experienced even worse devastation because the buildings were not as structurally sound as those in the cities. The flooding was so severe in many rural areas that whole villages are reported to have been submerged in water for several days. More information is also coming in from other countries in the region. This operations update will provide the latest information on the situation in Romania, where the scale of the problem is now being revealed.

Reports coming in from Romania show that in addition to the flood damage that affected the whole Central European region, there were also damaging tornados that ripped across 50 to 60 kilometres of the country. Damage was caused to a total of 2,000 homes, with 34 completely damaged, and an adjoining forest decimated. Effects of the flooding and tornados have been exacerbated by an ongoing drought which has significantly decreased crop yields this year. The long period of drought followed by these more recent disasters has increased the vulnerability of an already poverty stricken population.



Romania, Facaeni 11/12.08.02
1, the aftermath of the tornado.

Floods have been a recurring problem in Romania for the last 12 years. This year, however, the “flooding season” has come later than usual. It started in July and ran through August, a longer period than that affecting the other countries in Central Europe. According to the Civil Defence in Romania, the prospect of the River Danube overflowing is considered minimal because there are two dams and a lake situated near the borders with Bulgaria and Yugoslavia. These provide a reliable water flow management mechanism which is expected to control any overflow.

In the Czech Republic, several towns or villages are reported to have suffered substantial damage, with one such town, Pocaply, near Tenezin completely destroyed. Although the media attention initially focused on Prague, the catastrophe in the countryside is now attracting more attention.

In Germany, the floods are focussed on Saxony Anhalt, especially the capital Magdeburg. Fortunately, the water levels were not as high as had been feared, reaching a maximum of 6.70 metres. In Dresden, which featured heavily in the media over the weekend, water levels are running lower so now the clean up effort starts in earnest. The latest reports highlight the concern for cleaning away the infected mud to eliminate the risk of disease.

In Yugoslavia the latest updates suggest that the situation is under control, although there is concern for the region of Vojvodina where the River Danube reached 7.30 metres at Bezan and Apatin and a state of emergency was called. There are fears that at Apatin, where there was some flooding, the drinking water supply may be contaminated.

In Hungary the high point for the River Danube in Budapest passed on Sunday, 18 August, without large scale damage. In other parts of the country it appears that the situation is under control, although a national park in the south of the country has been hit and animals in the park have died.

In Slovakia, the emergency situation is reported to be largely over and the clean up operation is in effect. Central Slovakia still has work to do on the small river system, but fears concerning further flooding of the Danube are small.

In Austria, the Red Cross is continuing its cooperation with the federal authorities to meet the needs of the three worst affected regions.

Coordination w

The Red Cross has been working closely with the national governments, supporting their efforts in the countries affected by the floods. The Red Cross Societies are perceived as a strong partner of the governments.

In most countries the Disaster Response Plan is drawn up at the state level and then the Red Cross is invited to be part of the agreed plan. The Red Cross is well equipped to provide this role because of its network and capacity to quickly mobilise resources. The present floods have seen evidence that there is a great deal of coordination involved in meeting disasters that affect the region. In addition to the cooperation with governments, effective partnerships have been developed with other aid organisations. In Yugoslavia coordination with the United Nations has also been strong.

Three Regional Disaster Response Teams (RDRTs) strengthened by FACT team leaders have been dispatched to the area to help with the relief efforts and fact finding. The members are from Central and Eastern European countries, including Austria, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Germany, Macedonia, Switzerland, and Yugoslavia. The countries where these teams will work initially are the Czech Republic, Hungary and Romania, with Slovakia to come in the near future.

Therefore, on a positive note, evacuation was effectively completed and the preplanned programme operated smoothly. The present disaster shows that warning procedures have improved and lessons learned from the previous flood operations in 1997.

Red Cross and Red Crescent action

The cooperation between the local branches in the Czech Republic and also sister national societies in the Central Europe region has been excellent. Assistance has been provided to the worst affected regions of the Czech Republic by local branches that were not affected or lightly affected. The national societies of Poland, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Germany, Bulgaria and Hungary have all responded quickly to the urgent needs of the Czech Republic by sending supplies in kind. This co-operation between the national societies of the region has been a highlight of the Red Cross action. A noteworthy example is the Polish Red Cross which has dispatched packed mineral water, disinfecting and cleaning material to the Czech Republic and will send a water rescue unit to Germany. This is in addition to the donations made by the Red Cross societies of America and Finland through the International Federation in Geneva.

Red Cross and Red Crescent Society

The Regional Disaster Response Teams that have been dispatched to three countries in Central Europe will work to facilitate the information flow to guide donor interest. This is of special importance in Romania and Hungary. In Slovakia and the Czech Republic the main emphasis is on providing relevant information for the operations already carried out during the peak of the emergency and guiding the Movement to also support the rehabilitation phase.

Objectives, activities and results

The evacuation phase has been largely completed and as this report highlights, there have been some clear successes. The Red Cross is continuing to equip and monitor the evacuation centres in the countries badly affected. This section will detail how the objectives identified in the Emergency Appeal are being met.

Health and care

Objective 1 Distribution of first aid kits and hygiene kits; This objective has been successfully completed in all the countries affected. In Romania, the national society report that because the number of people in need of assistance had passed the Annual Disaster Preparedness plan of 10,000, 350 more intervention teams were trained in first aid. This has proved successful, as in Facaeni the Romanian Red Cross society was at the disaster site within hours with 20 volunteers, 4 Headquarters staff and 1 Branch staff to assist those in need with shelter materials and non-food relief items.

Objective 2 Distribution of disinfectants; Now that the effort is in the clean up phase, it is important that disease is prevented by thoroughly disinfecting homes in the regions flooded. Livestock deaths in certain areas have heightened the need for effective disinfecting. Across the region the national societies report that this is their most pressing task. The infected mud that has been left in the towns and villages by the flood waters need thorough disinfecting before the areas are habitable again. Most societies claim to have sufficient supplies in store to meet the demand, however stocks will be severely stretched. In the Czech republic, the national society there are taking donations in kind to replenish their depleted supplies.

Water and sanitation

The risk of disease spreading to the drinking water supply has been reported in Czech Republic and Germany. The Red Cross is taking steps to prevent this happening by disinfecting buildings in the areas affected. However, in addition other steps are necessary.

Objective 1 Distribution of drinking water; In the Czech Republic mineral water has been supplied in areas where there was a fear that the drinking water was contaminated.

Relief distribution of food and basic non-food items

This objective was met in the emergency phase of the Red Cross operation, and the national societies report that they have coped well. As it is still uncertain how long before the evacuees can return to their homes, this objective is still ongoing.



Relief distribution in the Czech Republic.

Objective 1 Distribution of blankets, sleeping bags, ground sheets, rubber boots and clothes; This phase of the operation has been effectively carried out. The national societies were able to use their stocks and also local collections to meet the need.

Objective 2 Distribution of kitchen sets, shovels, buckets, brooms, garbage bags and torches; This objective is ongoing as the clean up operation gets into full stride.

Objective 3 Support to families in remote areas to dry out their houses; The importance of drying out and cleaning homes should not be underestimated. The Red Cross is now firmly involved in meeting this objective, and updates from national societies report that they are targeting the most vulnerable sections of society.

Shelter

Objective 1 Provision of temporary shelters; This is ongoing, although in most areas the emergency phase has passed. An update from Romania reports the success in Facaeni, where the Romanian Red Cross society was at the disaster site within hours with 20 volunteers, 4 staff from the Headquarters and 1 Branch staff to assist those in need with shelter materials. In the Czech Republic, The Red Cross Regional Head of Communication Units reported that on a field trip to the affected regions of Northern Bohemia he witnessed the fantastic support that family and friends were supplying in terms of temporary accommodation. From all over the Czech republic there was a tangible spirit of cooperation that was helping the relief efforts considerably.

Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement -- Principles and Initiatives

The response to the floods by the Red Cross Movement as a whole has shown the strengths of the organisation. The extensive network has provided resources to help national societies in the worst affected areas with expertise, supplies in kind or cash donations.

National Society Capacity Building

The present action by the Red Cross has shown that the national societies play a key role in supporting the governments in affected regions. All national societies have had the provisions necessary to cope with the emergency stage of the operation, even though stocks have been severely stretched and will obviously need replenishing. There is a feeling that in comparison with previous flood disasters that have struck Central Europe, lessons have been learnt. However, with these successes showing the importance of the Red Cross operations at the national level, further training for workers at the local level would be beneficial. This would ensure that the Red Cross develops the strengths that it has, and are recognised by governments and the public.

The capacity for monitoring and the formal management of ongoing operations could be improved in future. In the worst affected areas, it has proved extremely difficult for the national centres to keep check on the in kind donations that have been sent in then dispatched to those in need. Improvements in these regards could be made in future in the form of cooperation between the national societies and the regional delegation in Budapest.

Therefore, once the immediate operations have been completed, there will be a campaign to raise funds to be used to provide this training at the national level. This will be an integral part of the operation in that it will help the organisation move forward and supply an even more effective service.

Federation Delegation

A total of CHF 100,000 was released from the Federation's Disaster Response Emergency Fund (DREF) and has been allocated as follows: CHF 60,000 for the Czech Republic; CHF 22,640 for Romania; CHF 5,000 for Slovakia.

Advocacy/Public Information

The media coverage has been extensive both nationally and internationally. The work of the Red Cross has featured heavily in these broadcasts and publications, especially the launch of the Red Cross public collection. The main challenge now that the floods are subsiding and media interest waning, is keeping the situation in the public's minds. The Federation web site contains updated information on the latest work of the Red Cross with the floods in Central Europe. Also the national societies have excellent web sites in the local languages. Relevant web site addresses are listed below.

- The Federation web site: [<http://www.ifrc.org/>]
- The Polish Red Cross Society web site: [<http://www.pck.org.pl/>]
- The German Red Cross Society web site: [<http://www.rotkreuz.de/>]
- The Austrian Red Cross Society web site: [<http://www.redcross.or.at/>]

Many of the worst affected people come from the impoverished sections of society. It is vital that the Red Cross monitors their situation carefully in the coming weeks and months. The progress of communities in the affected countries will be tracked and this information will be available to the public through Red Cross and Red Crescent publications, Red Cross web sites, Operation Updates and Special Focus.

Outstanding needs

Thanks to the generous public response and solidarity, combined with mutual cooperation within the region, the national societies report no pressing needs for the clean up phase. However, stocks have seriously depleted and will need to be replenished. More needs will be outlined as soon as assessment reports have been completed. This information will be reflected in the coming updates.

Conclusion

There is evidence that cooperation between the national societies in the region has increased during this disaster. The work started through the Regional Disaster Preparedness Programme needs to be continued and capacities of national societies strengthened. Already at this stage lessons have been learned. Some national societies have expressed their intention to conduct training sessions/workshops, thus reinforcing the Disaster Response capacity of their local Red Cross branches. Also, a common regional approach should be developed to prevent and respond more effectively to natural disasters.

Contributions

The following have either donated funds or food relief to the appeal:

- Government of Ireland: EUR 300,000;
- Government of Great Britain: GBP 50,000 (under negotiation);
- American Red Cross: 5,000 food parcels and possibly 10,000 more;
- Finnish Red Cross: EUR 60,000.

This support will be reflected in an updated list of contributions to be issued with 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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