

CENTRAL AND SOUTHERN EUROPE REGIONAL PROGRAMMES

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The International Federation's Regional Delegation (RD) for Central and Eastern Europe was officially opened in Budapest in 1992. A Status Agreement was subsequently signed with the government of Hungary in March 1993. Economic liberalisation often characterised by free market 'gangsterism' has resulted in a particularly harsh year for increasing numbers of vulnerable in the 15 countries covered by the RD. For example, in Bulgaria, large scale impoverishment of the population due to economic mismanagement led to the launch of an Emergency Appeal during 1996, which was revised in 1997.

Throughout the region, new, and unanticipated, vulnerable groups are emerging in communities battling against decreasing government expenditure on essential community services. The incidence of poverty-related diseases is on the increase, HIV infection is spreading at an alarming rate, and the region's youth faces an additional threat from the rise in unemployment, drug trafficking and prostitution. At the same time access to essential basic health care is declining and an impending health and social crisis threatens the future of the region. Rifle toting Albanian youngsters giving the victory sign atop armed vehicles once again underlined how fragile the economic and social transitional balance is in the region.

The serious flooding which hit Central and Eastern Europe during the summer of 1997 highlighted the importance of National Society (NS) capacity building, in terms of internal structures as well as more targeted disaster response and logistical capacity. The NSs will need support in clarifying and strengthening at a national level their role as auxiliaries to the state in the field of disaster response, in a region which is still prone to natural disasters.

Since its establishment, the Regional Delegation has offered a forum for the 15 National Societies of Central and Eastern Europe to discuss their needs and concerns, and to focus on common challenges and goals. It provides a bridge between the NSs and the Federation's Secretariat on the one hand, and between NSs and potential donors on the other. Particular emphasis has been placed on strengthening the institutional capacities of the NSs, with support to governance and management, programme planning, implementation, staff training, resource development, information and dissemination and statutory work (the revision or adoption of Red Cross laws, property restitution issues and improvement of relations with their respective governments). These activities have been singled out as key areas to support the NSs in their efforts to ensure the continuity of essential support for the vulnerable, and to be accepted and recognised as indispensable auxiliary service providers in their countries.

The RD will continue to support initiatives from the three main sub-regional groups which have emerged: the Visegrad, Balkan and Baltic groups. Concerns particular to each group, reflecting their economic, political and social development, will also characterise NS development. Austerity measures in the Balkan states may provoke more serious social instability and disrupt fragile emerging democracies. The Visegrad countries — the most likely candidates for the first round of NATO and EU expansion — may find that meeting the entrance criteria puts too great a strain on the economy and social repercussions may result. Efforts for recognition as potential second round candidates for western political, economic and military unions will continue to put pressure on society in the Baltic states. Increasing financial insecurity and growing numbers of vulnerable may contribute to serious destabilising results, as witnessed in Albania and Bulgaria in 1997.

In response NSs throughout the region will be under pressure to expand their activities to cover the gaping holes in state social networks. With an increase in state contributions to the NSs unlikely, new Red Cross activities will need to be self-funded. To ensure the efficient provision of services and ultimate self-sustainability, effective governance and management structures must be in place, a process which the International Federation is prioritising.

Objectives in 1998

- w To support the institutional development of the 15 NSs of Central and Eastern Europe and capacity building at headquarters, regional and branch level, to strengthen their role as a service provider and auxiliary to the state;
- w to assist the NSs to develop income-generating activities;
- w to support the NSs in accelerating the adoption or full utilisation of existing Red Cross laws, and to help with property restitution issues;
- w to strengthen internal and external information and communication strategies;
- w to develop Red Cross Youth structures in the region;
- w to facilitate regional co-operation and to promote regional concerns to a wider audience;
- w to provide prompt reaction capacity and provide essential operational, logistical and monitoring support to country delegations in former Yugoslavia or in the case of major disasters in the region.

Programmes in 1998

Regional Resource Development Programme

In view of serious cuts in state funding for National Society programmes it is essential that the NSs are supported in developing self-sustainable activities to ensure the continuity of their role as service providers. Once resource development staff and volunteers have been identified, regular, tailored, needs-based technical assistance will be provided over the next two years, to support programme development and training opportunities at headquarters and branch levels. Drawing on regional human resources and partnership opportunities, the Regional Delegation aims to significantly boost capacity in this area. Activities will include:

- w Recruitment of a regional resource development delegate.

- w Individual consultation with Resource Development officers and volunteers.
- w Support to National and Branch level workshops.
- w One regional seminar focusing on skills and exchange experience.
- w Establishment of a revolving loan fund to provide seed money to NSs for sustainable income-generating projects.

Regional Health and Social Welfare Programme Development

With the re-emergence of 'old' diseases such as tuberculosis and diphtheria and the spread of relatively 'new' viruses like HIV, Europe faces an impending health crisis. Vulnerability is rising, due to adverse socio-economic conditions while access to free state health care is declining for large numbers of the population. In the context of the European Plan of Action for Health, and in conformity with the Copenhagen Declaration, support and training will be provided to the NSs on a regional basis to improve their skills in planning, managing and evaluating health and social welfare programmes, and in carrying out vulnerability and capacity assessments to identify the most vulnerable. Activities will include:

- w One Regional Training Workshop for NSs' Health and Social Welfare Officers.
- w In 1998, assistance to eight NSs in carrying out vulnerability and capacity assessment in order to implement the European Health Plan, by regular consultations on programme development.

Regional Institutional Development Programme

The future of NSs in the region hinges on their recognition as indispensable auxiliary service providers in their countries. To sustain such a role, it is essential that effective Governance and Management structures are put in place now. Drawing on relevant technical expertise from the Secretariat in Geneva, and through regional training initiatives, the Regional Delegation's two Development Delegates will focus on creating a network of Institutional Development (ID) facilitators in the region, who can assist and support their NS ID process. Five NSs from the region will be supported to apply the International Federation's Governance and Management guidelines and to conduct pilot projects in the area of volunteer recruitment and retention. Emphasis will be placed on increasing the number of NS staff with English language skills, building on previous training initiatives in this area. Support will also be given via the updating of statutes and the adoption or updating of Red Cross laws, maximising their potential to boost NS capacity in the provision of services to the vulnerable. The ID Programme will involve:

- w One Regional Workshop for ID facilitators, selected by NSs in co-operation with the Regional Delegation, according to a clearly defined profile.
- w Continuous consultations with NS facilitators.
- w Training, consultations and evaluations of NS Governance and Management.
- w Facilitating the elaboration of and provision of seed money for local volunteer recruitment and retention projects.
- w Continuation of English language courses using Red Cross-specific teaching material.

Regional Youth Programme

By supporting the development of a Red Cross Youth network in the region, the Regional Delegation aims to support the injection of new vitality, energy and ideas into the Movement, through an age group which includes some of the most vulnerable in society today, threatened by the effects of

unemployment, drug abuse, prostitution and the spread of HIV/AIDS. By adapting existing training tools to the needs of the region and by tapping into existing funding sources in Europe, the RD will give a long-awaited impulse to youth programme development, which has suffered from a lack of funding over the last few years. This is also a logical continuation of the Copenhagen Declaration and in conformity with the Final Document of the XIIth Balkan Conference of Red Cross/Red Crescent Societies. Youth leadership training, programme development and the strengthening of internal NS youth structures will support wider capacity building goals by attracting new youth groups and increasing the ability of youth to participate in NS decision-making. Regional human resources will be drawn on to recruit a Youth Delegate. The Programme will involve:

- w Regular consultation with NSs in need of strengthening their youth programmes and provision of resource persons for youth training courses;
- w One Regional Youth Leadership Training Workshop;
- w Linking NS Red Cross Youth in the region to existing European Youth Networks.

Support to Albania

Albanian Red Cross community-based activities were suspended in March 1997 due to the crisis sweeping the country. From the end of 1997 the NS hopes to be able to resume its original plans to help branches to implement both national programmes and local initiatives targeting vulnerable groups. A high priority will be given to health education, social and youth activities once the emergency relief programme ends. The civil unrest had a seriously damaging effect on the NS's material capacity, with most disaster preparedness, emergency medical and training stocks looted during March 1997. Furthermore, the NS's lottery, which supported up to 30% of administrative costs, including salaries, while still functioning, was not able to reach the foreseen profit during the crisis. The NS hopes to incorporate experience gained over the last few years in local and national executive structures, following its first elections at executive level to be held in 1998. All planned initiatives seek to boost the National Society's capacity to serve the most vulnerable, following the damaging effects of the civil unrest. Assistance will be provided in:

Strengthening National Society Structures: to maintain the NS's Human Resource Development Plan and to organise workshop/seminars for new staff and newly elected members in Governance and Management, Programme and Budget Management to boost the NS's capacity;

Disaster Preparedness: to restore the National Society's capacity to respond to natural disasters, especially floods and earthquakes, involving restocking the warehouse with emergency supplies for 1,000 families, recruitment and training of volunteers, equipment for DP teams and preparatory work with government and other agencies in drawing up a National Disaster Plan;

First Aid: to replace looted equipment and materials, train new First Aid trainers and provide refresher courses, support a National First Aid Competition and the production of new brochures and posters promoting First Aid;

Social Programmes: to change the focus of support to vulnerable elderly by replacing distribution of relief parcels with Soup Kitchens, promoting social activities in orphanages and elderly homes and developing self-help projects, including a baby sitting training programme and service;

Health Education: to expand and develop the well established NS programme of training nurses and midwives to more districts of the country, including support for the production of a manual and leaflets for young women on mother and child care and on the youth programme's substance abuse and oral hygiene project;

Youth: to develop the existing Youth Leadership Training Programme and to expand Youth activities in schools, particularly the Substance Abuse and Oral Hygiene projects. Support for the national art competition, the training of volunteers in social projects and a round table on tolerance and human values will also be provided;

Information and Publicity: most NS dissemination activities will be sponsored by the ICRC in 1998. This Appeal seeks funding support to replace stocks of information and publicity materials and to cover some of the running costs of the Information/Dissemination Department.

FYR Macedonia - Social Welfare Programme for Refugees

The slow pace of return of Muslim refugees to Bosnia necessitates the extension of this Programme to the end of June 1998. Although there was an increase in the repatriation rate over the Summer of 1997, 3,000 refugees will remain until Spring 1998 at least, when the next official UNHCR convoy to Bosnia will be arranged. One of the major obstacles to return is the difficulty in obtaining 'Guarantee Letters' from family or friends in Bosnia as many continue to be displaced themselves. Some 189 students (primary, secondary and university) wish to complete the school year before returning. This programme will continue to cover essential psycho-social support, education, Information Centre running costs, hygiene and medical needs.

Regional Information Activities

The main strategy of the Regional Delegation's information activities is to raise the profile of the 15 NSs in the region and to encourage the development of Information Departments as an integral part of the operations of each NS. Information is a key activity in attaining the ultimate goal of self-sustainability for the NSs, encompassing fund-raising campaigns, image-building, media relations and targeted publications. A major focus in the coming year will be on promoting the importance of information activities and internal communication not only to NS information officers, but also to those involved with management issues and executive leadership. It is only with the encouragement and support of executive bodies that information activities can succeed in boosting the promotion of Red Cross/Red Crescent values.

By building up a strong and active information network of NS resource persons throughout the region, the RD aims to draw on this regional resource to respond to the changing external environment, and the need to develop a more dynamic, aggressive, corporate-style image for the NSs. Special attention will be paid to developing media relations, on both national and international levels. Information activities will include:

- w Co-operation with NSs in the region on production of a number of publications promoting Red Cross/Red Crescent work and values, specifically targeted at donors, media, other NGOs or the general public as required.
- w Two Information Workshops for information officers and executive leadership from NSs in the region.
- w The provision of technical assistance for training in information/dissemination, focusing on the translation of specific texts from Federation resource material.
- w Support for International Federation operations in former Yugoslavia through production of publications to boost operation promotion to donors and the media.
- w Essential reporting support for International Federation operations in the region, including Bulgaria and the areas affected by the summer floods in 1997.

Regional Population Movement Programme

In the context of increasing numbers of former Soviet Union and Asian refugees, economic migrants and asylum seekers entering the Baltic States and Poland in transit to the West, the Regional Delegation will provide the base for the implementation of a Regional Population Movement Programme, focusing on assistance to the National Societies in the three Baltic states, the Russian Federation and the Ukraine. The governments of the three Baltic states have now signed the United Nations convention on the Status of Refugees and are in the process of preparing their own refugee laws. Programmes will need to be developed and structures set up on a national level to support these laws, such as reception centres and screening procedures. The Baltic governments have already expressed a desire to involve the National Societies in this field. The Regional Population Movement Programme seeks to assist the National Societies in developing their present services to address the needs of refugees and asylum seekers, including co-ordination with governments and other agencies. Support will be provided to the NSs through NS Population Movement Officers in programme planning to ensure the sustainability of such programmes, and how they may be used to enhance the NSs' capacity. Specific activities of the programme include:

- w Recruitment of a Population Movement Delegate to cover the Russian Federation, the Ukraine, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia.
- w Assistance to NSs to employ qualified Population Movement Officers.
- w Organisation of a Workshop on Population Movement for the Baltic states, the Ukraine and the Russian Federation, looking at NS services and programmes of assistance and co-ordination with governments and other agencies.
- w Regular consultation with and support to NS Officers to follow up on workshop activities.

Regional Logistics Activities

The Regional Delegation will provide administrative support to the work of the Regional Logistics Centre in Zagreb, through the Logistics Department which will continue to assist International Federation operations throughout the region with the registration and customs clearance of vehicles, the purchase of spare parts and other local procurement. The Logistics Department provides essential operational support to country delegations in former Yugoslavia, and enables prompt reaction capacity in the case of major disasters in the region.

