

CROATIA: ASSISTANCE TO REFUGEES, DISPLACED PERSONS AND RETURNEES

4 May 1998

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period covered: January - March 1998

The Federation's 1998 strategy to handover gradually management and operational control of programmes to the Croatian Red Cross continued successfully in the first quarter of the year. Operation Save Lives was transferred to CRC control — becoming part of the National Society's countrywide Home Support Service — as well as the water and sanitation programme in Eastern Slavonia and services to refugee and displaced camps, which were quickly emptying. The Federation/CRC's take-over of ECHO's direct food programme continued smoothly, as did other operations such as the construction of the elderly care facility at Ilok. However, the programme discussion meeting in Sarajevo in March showed that donor support for Croatia had fallen dramatically in 1998, threatening the viability of important programmes, the Federation's overall strategy of transition to the CRC, and the National Society's future strength.

The context

As a result of the conflict in Croatia in 1991 and continuing internal tensions lasting through mid-1995, and compounded by the influx of refugees from Bosnia-Herzegovina which peaked in late 1992, almost one million people found themselves displaced and homeless in Croatia. In order to assist the humanitarian response of an overburdened Croatian Red Cross, the International Federation established a delegation in August 1992 to assist the National Society's relief programme for refugees, displaced persons and, subsequently, for returnees. As Croatia continues its slow recovery it is unable to address effectively the health and welfare needs of the most vulnerable, especially elderly refugees and IDPs.

Latest events

UNTAES, the United Nations Transitional Administration for Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Sirmium, withdrew on schedule on 15 January. On that day, complete control of the area reverted to the Croatian Government (although this has been happening in many administrative areas such as health, education, etc. since the fourth quarter of 1997). The UN will maintain a small presence, with international monitoring being undertaken principally by the OSCE. Other agencies who will remain in the area include ICRC, UNHCR and the Federation.

The return of displaced populations (Croats back into Former Sector East and Serbs from FSE into other parts of Croatia) proceeded at a slow pace. The OSCE estimates that 13,000 to 16,000 refugees and displaced persons now live in the FSE. At the end of the quarter — which began with increasing numbers of ethnic Serbs leaving the FSE for the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia — the exodus had slowed to a dribble.

To help alleviate continuing tension the Croatian Government’s Council for Defence and National Security introduced a moratorium on all political rallies in Eastern Slavonia to ‘prevent provocations in the region’ following a rally in Vukovar organised by a right wing Croatian party. The ban is to remain in force until 1 August 1998. According to the Minister of Justice, Miroslav Separovic, the Croatian General Amnesty Act has now been applied to 13,375 people (up to 18 March) in Eastern Slavonia. These persons are ethnic Serbs who allegedly participated in the armed conflict in the region.

On 31 March, the government published its ‘Procedure for the Return of Persons Who Left the Republic of Croatia’, which regulates the process for the issue of documents to citizens who left during the war and who now wish to return. It includes provision for those who fled to the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and to Republika Srpska.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

Health/Social Welfare •

Home Support Service — Former Sectors North and South

On 1 February the new operational agreement governing the *Operation Save Lives* programme came into force. Effectively, the programme was incorporated into the Croatian Red Cross’s national Home Support Service and the National Society took over managerial control of its operations. The Federation transferred ownership of 18 vehicles and seven trailers (together worth CHF 400,000) to the CRC, made a cash payment of CHF 36,700 related to the donation and guaranteed food relief items for the Save Lives beneficiaries in 1998. The Netherlands Red Cross committed itself to providing CHF 400,000 for running costs and the Danish Red Cross agreed to fund a monitoring delegate, two vehicles and CHF 106,000 for relief goods.

A Memorandum of Understanding governing the management and resource commitment of the programme until 31 January 1999 was signed in late January and in the following weeks the transfer of programme responsibility to the Croatian Red Cross proceeded smoothly. In January, in the last month that the Federation will report on *Save Lives* activities, over 700 social and technical assistance visits were made in Former Sector South, with a further 574 individual parcels and 4,600 kg of wheatflour distributed in Former Sector North.

Home Support Service — Eastern Slavonia

In Eastern Slavonia, the volunteer-based homecare programme run by the Federation for the last 18 months will be handed over to CRC to serve as another vital part of the Home Support Service. A CHF 250,000 donation by the British Red Cross — as well as funds remaining from a 1997 donation from the Italian Government — will support this programme for the remainder of the year.

Meanwhile, homecare activities for the 850 beneficiaries currently served by the project in Eastern Slavonia continued in the first quarter, including delivery of clothes, diapers and firewood.

	January	February	March
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Municipality	Visits	Services	Visits	Services	Visits	Services
Beli Manastir	800	1,200	812	1,212	810	1,248
Valpovo	759	1,358	748	1,321	812	1,496
Vinkovci	715	1,246	731	1,343	803	1,364
Zupanja	720	1,456	805	1,411	821	1,533
Dalj	128	257	152	276	143	256
Mirkovci	253	478	148	210	112	186
Tenja	1,035	1,437	1,023	1,315	1,046	1,349
Vukovar	1,540	2,143	1,485	1,898	1,503	1,992
Totals	5,950	9,575	5,904	8,986	6,050	9,424

Relief — Direct Food Support •

The Federation/CRC continued its ECHO-funded direct food support programme to refugees, displaced and vulnerable remainees in Croatia in the first quarter of 1998. In March, the Federation/CRC managed to transport 1,177 mt of food from regional warehouses to local branches for onward distribution, clearing a sudden surge in ECHO food deliveries.

The Federation also began its series of training seminars for CRC personnel dealing with this programme in the local branches with a one-day workshop in Osijek (Eastern Slavonia).

Camps •

Gasinci

Following the Croatian Government's decision in May 1997 to resettle residents of the Gasinci camp, an additional Memorandum of Understanding came into effect in February 1998 between the Federation and CRC to support the ongoing transfer of responsibilities to the National Society as the programme continues to be reduced. Whereas the number of camp residents was 1,545 at the end of 1997, by the end of March, the number stood at 519, all elderly. People leaving the camp are mostly being resettled in elderly care homes as construction and renovation work is completed.

A total of 458 patients were ferried to local medical facilities on 83 journeys (nearly 6,000 kilometres) by Federation/CRC vehicles and staff. The general discomfort caused by a lack of heating was eased with the arrival in February of 700 cubic metres of UNHCR firewood.

Swedish Settlements

Federation staff have completed the handover of maintenance, social work and camp supervision responsibilities to CRC but continue to monitor programme activities as the number of residents decreases. At end of the reporting period, 279 displaced and returnees remained at Pisarovina, 11 at Sasna Greda, and 142 at Dumace.

Institutional Elderly Care •

Marino Selo

After completion of construction work in December 1997, the new annex building of the Red Cross-operated home for elderly in Marino Selo, Pakrac, was officially opened on 22 January. The annex building had been funded by the Federation, Red Cross National Societies from Austria, Liechtenstein, Germany and Spain, and a Flemish NGO, and it increased the home's total capacity to 60 beds. The first group of 11 elderly refugees moved in on 19 December, with the rest being accommodated in February.

Dalmatia Coast

Government approval was obtained on 10 March for the official establishment of two new homes for the elderly along the Dalmatian coast which had been renovated by CRC/Federation

using funds from the Italian Government.

Elderly Care Villages - Ilok (Eastern Slavonia) and Pesarovina

Construction work continued on the building of a new elderly care village in Ilok, Eastern Slavonia, with NORAD/Norwegian Red Cross funding enabling work on Phase 1 to continue without interruption. Following a visit in March by representatives of the Norwegian Red Cross, the request for Phase II funding is now in progress. Dismantling of the first Danish Red Cross prefabricated house in Kutina took place on 24-25 March. Reassembling in Ilok was successfully carried out on 25-26 March.

Eastern Slavonia •

With the handing over of Eastern Slavonia to Croatian Government control on 15 January, the Croatian Red Cross could also begin the process of integration of the former Regional Red Cross (RRC) into its new three-branch structure in the region. This difficult and sensitive process was supported by the Federation — which had been supporting both the RRC and neighbouring Croatian Red Cross branches for the previous 18 months. The temporary provision of 23 staff salaries to employees of CRC branches in Eastern Slavonia was made possible by the Austrian Red Cross and a pledge from the Swiss Red Cross. The majority (16) of these temporary positions are filled by former members of the RRC.

The first quarter also saw the successful transition of the Federation/CRC's water and sanitation programme to full Croatian Red Cross management and control. The programme's success and longer-term viability were proven by the agreement signed between CRC and UNHCR for the delivery of Home Visiting and Water Sanitation services in Eastern Slavonia throughout 1998.

Outstanding needs

CRC will face difficulties re-establishing itself in Eastern Slavonia, if the relief assistance programme, previously run by ICRC and WFP cannot be continued. The Federation is presently seeking ECHO support to extend its direct food programme to the region.

CHF 380,000 is urgently required for the establishment of a volunteer-based home care programme in Former Sector West, mirroring those already successfully running in Former Sectors North, South and East. A replacement for the Home Care Delegate in Eastern Slavonia is also needed.

The successful procurement of funding for Phase II of the Ilok home for the elderly is now critical as phase I of the project has now been completed. The Federation requires a further CHF 285,000 to fully establish the facility with all necessary utilities and kitchen and laundry equipment, then a further CHF 1,000,000 to ensure that all the planned prefabricated units from Kutina can be transferred.

Contributions

See Annex 1 for details. Donors are invited to contact Mark Wilson, Desk Officer, on ++4122 7304339 (email: wilson@ifrc.org) for more information.

Conclusion

The Federation's strategy of gradually handing over managerial control of programmes to the Croatian Red Cross and working with the National Society in ensuring the long term

sustainability of many of these programmes is progressing extremely well. However, the continued and eventual success of this strategy depends on receiving sufficient financial support in the remaining nine months of 1998. The Federation therefore appeals to donors for further funding to ensure that homecare, institutional elderly and development programmes are completed effectively and the Croatian Red Cross is better prepared for the considerable challenges ahead.

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