

CROATIA: ASSISTANCE TO REFUGEES, DISPLACED PERSONS AND RETURNEES

23 July 1998

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period covered: April - June 1998

Confirmation of ECHO funding to extend the direct food aid programme to Eastern Slavonia was received during the second quarter, which means that the programme now covers the entire country. In May, the International Federation's President, Dr. Astrid N. Heiberg, visited Croatia, spending time at the Croatian Red Cross headquarters in Zagreb but also visiting beneficiaries of the home care programme in the Glina area, Former Sector North. Work began on the establishment of a volunteer-based home care programme in Former Sector West, to mirror those successfully running in Former Sectors North, South and East, utilising funds provided by the US Government..

The context

As a result of the conflict in Croatia in 1991 and 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 (CRC), 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

In the most serious border incident to have occurred since the withdrawal of UNTAES in January, two Croatian policemen were killed on the border between Eastern Croatia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia on the night of 16 June. Reports indicate that the police intercepted a group of people crossing the Danube from FR Yugoslavia.

Tension continued around the return process, with inflammatory remarks by the head of the Croatian Displaced Persons organisation in April warning that people would and should take recovery of their houses from Serb Displaced Persons into their own hands. The Croatian Government was subjected to severe criticism by the international community for its lack of active measures to promote the return of refugees to Croatia. In May, the Government was forced to cancel a proposed donors' conference after it was criticised at a repatriation and return conference in Banja Luka and the EU/World Bank pledging conference for Bosnia in Brussels. Stung by the criticism, in June the Croatian government published the draft of its Programme of Return and Care of Displaced People and Refugees. The programme envisages movements to and from Croatia of some 220,000 individuals by the year 2003. The same month, ODP and OSCE population

movement figures for Eastern Croatia were at odds, with ODPH rejecting OSCE's claim that only 2,500 Serbs had returned to other parts of Croatia and indicating that the real figure was about 17,500.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

Home Support Service — Eastern Slavonia •

A new Memorandum of Understanding concerning the home support services in Eastern Slavonia was signed between the Federation and the CRC in April, on the basis of a new budget and covering the period May to 31 December 1998.

Thanks to British Red Cross funding the target beneficiary base has been increased to 1,200 and the programme will be expanded into the area of Ilok Red Cross branch. Training was held for four new volunteers in the Ilok area at the end of June, for 19 volunteers for Baranja in May and a further training session is scheduled in Vukovar to be organised by the local coordinator in July. An increasing number of beneficiaries requesting food assistance was reported in the Vukovar area, and co-ordinators are also discussing the need for firewood distribution to approximately 200 beneficiaries this winter.

A marked increase was witnessed in the number of beneficiaries of the home support service during June 1998, thanks to the concerted efforts of the programme coordinators.

	April		May		June	
Municipality	Benef	Visits	Benef	Visits	Benef	Visits
Beli Manastir	100	815	110	800	134	927
Valpovo	118	800	125	820	144	1,003
Vinkovci	110	783	130	800	160	980
Zupanja	130	770	135	835	175	1,133
Dalj	23	165	40	285	40	287
Mirkovci	13	105	30	241	30	256
Tenja	125	1,028	70	421	70	568
Vukovar	205	1,495	180	1,180	180	1,345
Ilok	—	—	—	—	40	315
Totals	824	5,961	820	5,382	973	6,814

The International Federation received a substantial donation from the US Government to its programmes in former Yugoslavia, of which approximately CHF 1,000,000 will be allocated to projects in Croatia. To ensure that the establishment of a home care programme in Western Slavonia begins as soon as possible, the Federation decided to allocate CHF 200,000 of these funds to cover projected costs there.

During her visit to Croatia in May, the International Federation's President, Dr. Astrid N. Heiberg, highlighted the Croatian Red Cross's need to receive financial support from the Government on the basis of per beneficiary fees for the provision of home care services to the vulnerable throughout the country from 1 January 1999. CRC is continuing discussions with the Government to ensure this funding is in place.

Relief — Direct Food Support •

The Federation/CRC continued its ECHO-funded direct food support programme to refugees, displaced and vulnerable remainees during the second quarter of 1998, extending the programme to cover Eastern Slavonia from May. Deliveries will be made from the regional warehouse in Osijek to five local Red Cross branches in Eastern Slavonia, covering some

15,000 beneficiaries.

Meanwhile, the final reports for ECHO for phases I and II of the programme were prepared during the quarter, and in May relief commodities started to arrive in the three regional warehouses for delivery over the next three month period to July 1998. Due to the extension of the programme to Eastern Slavonia the number of beneficiaries increased during May to 102,409.

In June, a new system of weekly reporting was introduced at ECHO's request.

Camps •

Gasinci

Some 554 persons were accommodated in the Gasinci camp from the end of May. A 10% increase in the camp population compared to the previous month of April put a strain on the already stretched human and financial resources of the home care programme, given that the new arrivals were mainly elderly persons in poor health. However, the general situation in the camp remained stable, with 15 persons transferred, during the reporting period, to the centre in Kamenjak near Pula and to Nova Ljeskovica near Pozega. The camp geriatric unit will be closed when accommodation has been found for the remaining two patients.

In May the UNHCR announced its decision to terminate the work of its medical team from 1 July. This may result in an additional overload for the Federation/CRC transportation system.

Statistics for the transportation service of the Federation/CRC in Gasinci

	No. of Patients	No. of Routes	Total Kilometres
April	416	73	5,705
May	441	100	8,104
June	420 ^e	100 ^e	8,000 ^e

^e CRC ended its detailed collection of statistics in June. Figures from then on are estimates.

The home care programme continued to provide assistance to some 141 beneficiaries through its professional and volunteer team. In June, CRC also provided assistance for immobile and partially-mobile home care beneficiaries during the ODP and OSCE registration of voters in the camp for the upcoming election in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Swedish Settlements

Following the completion of the handover of maintenance, social work and camp supervision responsibilities to the CRC during the first quarter, Federation staff continue to monitor programme activities as the number of residents decreases. At end of the reporting period, 276 displaced and returnees remained at Pisarovina, 11 at Sasna Greda and 130 at Dumace.

Institutional Elderly Care •

Construction work continued on schedule on phase I of the building of a new elderly care village in Ilok, Eastern Slavonia., with a projected completion date of 31 July 1998. The Federation requires a further CHF 285,000 to fully establish the facility with all necessary utilities and kitchen and laundry equipment, and ECHO has expressed an interest in providing this shortfall. An official answer is expected soon. Funding sources for Phase II of the project are actively being pursued by the delegation.

Eastern Slavonia •

Salary support for 23 staff employees of CRC branches in Eastern Slavonia continued throughout the quarter, during the sensitive process of integration of the former Regional Red Cross into the new three-branch structure in the region. Some of the staff supported through the Federation are heavily involved in the direct food aid programme. Funding for this salary

support runs out in July and the Federation is pursuing further funds to sustain it until the end of 1998.

Outstanding needs

Securing funding for Phase II of the Ilok home for the elderly has now become a priority as phase I is due to be completed in July. A further CHF 1,000,000 is required 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 (tel: +41 22 730-4439; e-mail: wilson@ifrc.org) for more information.

Conclusion

With ECHO funding confirmed during the reporting period for the expansion of the direct aid programme to Eastern Slavonia, and the establishment of a similar programme in Western Slavonia planned for 1 August, the Croatian Red Cross is in a strong position to establish itself as the leading independent provider of relief assistance in the country. Nevertheless, as CRC takes over managerial control of an increasing number of Federation programmes, continuing donor support is essential to ensure the successful completion of the transition arrangements ahead of the Federation's closure of its delegation at the end of 1998.

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