

CROATIA: ASSISTANCE TO REFUGEES, DISPLACED PERSONS AND RETURNEES

10 November 1998

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period covered: July - October 1998

In August the Croatian Red Cross's home care programme — financially supported by the International Federation — was extended to Former Sector West, completing the National Society's home support service network throughout the country. Further good news came in autumn with the announcement by the Norwegian Government that it would fund completion of the construction of an elderly care facility in Ilok, Eastern Slavonia. However, an importation ban on wheat flour introduced by the Croatian Government during the summer caused significant distribution delays within the ECHO-funded direct food aid programme and the ban was only rescinded in October. Preparations continued smoothly throughout the quarter in preparation for the closure of the Federation's Croatia delegation in December 1998. A Federation presence in Croatia will be maintained by the Regional Logistics Centre in Zagreb, which will also oversee the final months of the ECHO-funded food programme.

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.

Latest events

In July the Croatian government abolished its visa requirement for citizens from Republika Srpska entering Croatia with the newly introduced Bosnian passport. The signing of an agreement on free passage through the Bosnian coastal town of Neum and the Croatian port of Ploce was finally signed at the end of October, and foresees the gradual establishment of institutional and other forms of cooperation.

July also saw pensioners staging demonstrations in Zagreb to protest at the low level of pensions and put pressure on the government to improve their position. Although the Constitutional Court has ruled in favour of the pensioners' claims to compensation following the freezing of pension levels in 1993, the government is dragging its feet because of the financial cost of the reimbursement.

Problems with building committees, and their requests for additional documentation from returnees, was cited by UNHCR as slowing down the return process to Croatia. Two separate incidents in July involving a grenade and mine attack against the same returnee family in Biljane Donje near Zadar were condemned by the OSCE and UNHCR.

The Croatian Red Cross celebrated its 120th anniversary in October with a celebration in Zadar.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

Home Support Service •

Eastern Slavonia

Due to a programme review, which is ongoing particularly in locations covered by Beli Manastir and Vukovar branches, a slight decrease in the number of beneficiaries was witnessed in October and September. As their children or relatives return to the area, some programme beneficiaries are being replaced by other elderly persons who have no family to support them. All branches in Eastern Slavonia have now completed and returned beneficiary status questionnaires to programme coordinators, providing the basis for an overview of food, medical supplies and social needs. Psycho-social support accounts for 45% of services provided by the home care volunteers. Support with social and legal documentation linked to status and pensions is also provided.

The programme continues to grow in terms of the number of villages being covered by volunteers. In order to strengthen relations between the home care coordinator and volunteers, exchange experience and improve the application of Red Cross principles through the programme, it was agreed that monthly volunteers' meetings should be held at the branches. In October, such meetings took place in Vukovar, Ilok, Valpovo, Vinkovci and Zupanja and proved highly successful.

The Red Cross in Valpovo opened a public kitchen in mid September, supported by the local Social Welfare centre, which will serve social cases in the Valpovo area.

Western Slavonia

Extensive preparations were made in July for the establishment of the home care programme in Western Slavonia. Three programme coordinators were identified and hired, the process of recruiting volunteers began (and continues) and beneficiary selection was also made. In September two cars were delivered for the home care coordinators in Nova Gradiska and Daruvar.

The Western Slavonia home care programme began officially in the Djakovo, Slavonski Brod, Nova Gradiska, Daruvar and Grubisino Polje branches on 1 August, in the Pakrac branch on 1 October and by the end of that month had expanded rapidly to cover 629 beneficiaries who received 7,040 visits from the 57 homecare volunteers.

Beneficiary status questionnaires have been used by Red Cross branches in Western Slavonia just as in Eastern Slavonia to provide an overview of needs.

<i>Home Care Beneficiary Figures (July - October 1998)</i>	July		August		September		October		
	Benef	Visits	Benef	Visits	Benef	Visits	Benef	Visits	Volunt
<i>Eastern Slavonia</i>									
Beli Manastir	148	934	151	1,002	151	1,060	151	998	18
Ilok	40	301	40	320	40	335	40	320	4
Valpovo	153	1,051	153	1,020	147	1,033	150	1,005	150
Vinkovci	164	1,050	165	1,100	160	1,000	150	988	20
Zupanja	175	1,333	175	1,300	175	1,301	170	1,270	20
Dalj	40	283	40	297	40	310	-	-	-
Mirkovci	40	256	40	271	40	285	-	-	-
Tenja	70	568	70	554	70	560	-	-	-
Vukovar	190	1,345	189	1,555	187	1,607	355*	2,864*	36*
Total	1,020	7,121	1,023	7,419	1,010	7,491	1,016	7,445	116
<i>Western Slavonia</i>									
Daruvar			43	89	58	339	99	453	9
Djakovo (Gasinci)			140	1,154	138	3,393	139	3,756	10
Grubisino Polje			30	116	30	141	40	362	4
Nova Gradiska			140	250	150	1,212	157	1,510	15
Pakrac			-	-	-	-	45	131	4
Slavonski Brod			80	210	129	678	149	828	15
Total			433	1,819	505	5,763	629	7,040	57

* In October the figures of Dalj, Mirkovci and Tenja were consolidated into the Vukovar figure.

Relief — Direct Food Support •

An importation ban on wheat flour imposed by the Croatian government was a major cause of concern during the reporting period. In July the restriction was briefly lifted to allow for the delivery of the remaining 1,000 tons of flour for phase III of the ECHO project. However, a four week delay in the distribution process was created by the ban. The impact on beneficiaries was limited thanks to the availability of a small 'buffer' stock.

Negotiations continued with the Ministry of Agriculture to authorise the importation of a further 3,400 tons of wheat flour for phase IV, which was due to begin in August. The ban was finally lifted at the beginning of October, however due to expiration of the tender validity period, considerable distribution delays are expected.

Progress was made during the reporting period regarding the implementation of the new ECHO criteria which will reduce the number of beneficiaries to 80,000. Visits were made to all the Red Cross branches involved to monitor criteria implementation. A visiting procedure has been established with a reporting system to feed information to a centralised data bank. A new series of beneficiary registration cards is planned to be printed and distributed to all Red Cross branches to standardise procedures. The Croatian Red Cross's Home Support Service is now integrated into this programme and distribution of ECHO food assistance by the service began in the Former Sectors North and South in August.

Eastern Slavonia Branch Support •

Financial support from the Swiss and Austrian Red Cross Societies enabled the Federation to provide salary support to 19 Red Cross staff in Eastern Slavonia as part of the integration of former local Red Cross structures and staff into the Croatian Red Cross's new structure for the region. This support will continue until the end of 1998.

Institutional Elderly Care •

Elderly Care Village - Ilok (Eastern Slavonia)

Phase I of the construction work at the new elderly care village in Ilok, Eastern Slavonia, was completed in August, providing a fully operational geriatric unit with a capacity of 50 beds for immobile beneficiaries. Laundry and kitchen equipment was installed and gas installation completed. Funding for phase II was confirmed by the Norwegian Red Cross in October and is scheduled for completion by 31 November. Ten independent living units have already been reassembled in Ilok following transportation from the Kutina settlement.

Outstanding needs

Outstanding needs amongst the home care beneficiaries are huge. Beneficiaries often rely entirely on volunteers and neighbours for support in the absence of either pensions or supplementary social welfare assistance. The Federation has decided to provide these home care beneficiaries with firewood to last them through Croatia's winter, at a cost of CHF 170,000, which it hopes to recoup from an interested donor.

Contributions

See Annex 1 for details. Donors are invited to contact Mark Wilson, Desk Officer, on ++41 22 730-4339 (email: wilson@ifrc.org) for more information.

Conclusion

In July the Federation's Head of sub-delegation in Osijek completed his mission and the office was redesignated a field office. At the end of October the Head of Delegation, Bob Goodwin, completed his mission and was replaced by the former Programme Coordinator, Pascal Stenier. The handover process to the Croatian Red Cross continues as the Federation works towards the closure of its delegation in Croatia at the end of December. Extension of the home care programme to Former Sector West began successfully during the quarter, completing the CRC's home support network throughout the country. This service is now also integrated into the direct food aid programme, providing a more effective mechanism to respond to beneficiary needs.

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