

# INFORMATION BULLETIN



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

## ARGENTINA: SOCIAL CRISIS

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- This Information Bulletin is linked to appeal 8/2002 issued on 10 April 2002 for CHF 1,824,000 with the aim of assisting 52,000 vulnerable beneficiaries who are worst hit by Argentina's social crisis. The most recent operations update was issued on 25 November (see the Federation's web site [www.ifrc.org](http://www.ifrc.org)). Given an initial slow response as regards funding which prevented implementation of the full plan of action, and in view of recent contributions received in late December, the operation has been extended until 30 June 2003. The Argentine Red Cross and the Federation, in partnership with participating National Societies (PNS), are striving to provide nutritional and health assistance to those most affected by the worsening situation in Argentina.*

### *The Situation*

The Argentine socio-economic crisis has worsened during the last months of 2002 and there are no signs of positive indicators either in the short or long term. The elections foreseen for April 2003 and the economic default which Argentina has recently incurred will aggravate the situation in the coming months.

The actions taken by the government are inadequate in the face of the incessant demands from the Argentine population, who continue to mount daily demonstrations. To make matters worse, most of the social programmes generated by the government which benefit from funding related to international credits, run a high risk of suspension or cessation, given the default situation.

Although the level of unemployment remains stable at about 25% and the devaluation of the currency is also stable, there are significant numbers of "new poor" in Argentina. The collapse of health systems has resulted in a deterioration of the health of most vulnerable groups, exacerbating child malnutrition and common diseases which have increased significantly. At least 18,000 children under five years old die of malnutrition related causes in Argentina each year.

According to the most recent official data provided by the National Institute for Statistics and Census (INDEC) in May 2002 and published in the operations update number 2 issued on 25 November, the current situation represents the worst socio-economic crisis which Argentina has faced for nineteen years.

It appears that the map of poverty and extreme poverty in Argentina now extends not only to the north western provinces, but also to the north eastern provinces and the Mesopotamia region. In relative terms, these are the three most affected regions. In absolute terms, the province of Buenos Aires, where more than a half of the total population of the country lives, is the worst hit.

One of the main causes of the increase in poverty in Argentina is that basic food items have been subject to the highest increase in prices, affecting most those with low incomes. Official estimates show that the consumer prices index (IPC) underwent a 10% increase in April last. However, the overall impact of inflation on the basic food basket has been an increase of 70%.

In the provinces in the north the poverty levels are extremely high. In Tucumán, there are almost 20,000 children diagnosed with malnutrition, as shown by studies undertaken by the provincial health service (SIPROSA). Unemployment has reached 23% in Tucumán, resulting in 126,500 of a total of 550,000 economically active persons with no income.

In the northern province of Salta, projections for April 2002 by the system for monitoring and evaluation of social programmes (SIEMPRO), indicate that more than a half of the homes in the province - some 133,000, are living in poverty, affecting around 665,000 people (62,6%) in the province. It is estimated that of these homes, almost 58,000 (22%) could be under the poverty line. The level of infant mortality in this province also stands higher than the national average.

In Santiago del Estero some 37.000 homes (19%) are under the poverty line, representing more than 224,000 people, or 30% of the population.

## ***Red Cross/Red Crescent Actions***

Since the launch of the appeal, the Argentine Red Cross continues implementation of activities in line with the plan of action of the international appeal. A number of bilateral PNS projects carried out by the German Red Cross and Spanish Red Cross were integrated into the appeal (please see operations update 2). Response has increased, particularly in the province of Tucumán, where the situation has become severe. Argentine Red Cross volunteers assist approximately 5,410 beneficiaries in 40 community soup kitchens. In addition to food aid, consisting of breakfast, lunch and dinner packed meals, nutritionally balanced in accordance with the Sphere Project international standards, these community soup kitchens are in charge of sanitation monitoring activities including training in education for health. The training covers, among other subjects, the prevention of poverty-related diseases. Other activities outlined in the appeal under the area of health have not yet been implemented, given funding restraints.

In addition, ten Argentine Red Cross local branches are in charge of identifying needs in the provinces of Jujuy, Salta, Tucumán, Chaco, Formosa, Corrientes and Misiones. The objective is to develop assistance projects in three areas: food aid, health and water and sanitation.

As for coordination with other organizations, the Argentine Red Cross ensures regular liaison with UNDP, UNICEF, PAHO and other agencies, and analyzes the overall progress of the situation.

Since the confirmation of a major contribution from the Italian government to the appeal in late December, the Federation's sub regional office in Buenos Aires has continuous dialogue with the Italian Embassy in Argentina. The Embassy is strengthening its office for international cooperation and has appointed a professional for the purpose of following up the initial donations made in the context of the social crisis in Argentina.

The Federation's sub regional office has supported the Argentine Red Cross since the launch of the appeal with the loan of one of its staff members until the end of the year 2002, and provision of support will continue as the operation develops in 2003. Moreover, the current regional health delegate will undertake a two month mission in Argentina, in view of the major health needs and in order to assist in

the management of the operation which the Argentine Red Cross will implement with the funding from the Italian government.

The plan of action under the appeal, including essential additional components which the Italian government donation will make possible, will be re-formulated. This will be coordinated through a Field Assessment and Coordination Team (FACT) mission to take place as of 6 January. The FACT team will be made up of a team leader and a member of the Pan American Disaster Response Unit (PADRU).

A third operations update on the progress of the operation will be issued in early 2003, providing information on the findings of the needs assessments currently being carried out by the Argentine Red Cross and the FACT mission.

Since the social crisis in Argentina remains severe, as described in the first part of this information bulletin, and taking into account the National Society's initiatives as one of the main actors to respond to the crisis, together with the interest expressed by new and potential donors, the operation has been extended until 30 June 2003.

For a full description of the National Society profile, see [www.ifrc.org](http://www.ifrc.org)

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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.*

*For support to or for further information concerning Federation operations in this or other countries, please access the Federation website at <http://www.ifrc.org>*

*For longer-term programmes, please refer to the Federation's Annual Appeal.*

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