CENTRAL AND SOUTH-EASTERN EUROPE
IFRC Country Cluster Office

BACKGROUND

Country Cluster Profile

The 16 National Societies covered by the Central and South-Eastern Europe Cluster have a total population of approximately 121.6 million.

Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania share common features and a similar history. These three countries at the EU border with Russia regained their independence from the Soviet Union in the early nineties before joining the EU in 2004 and more recently, the Euro area. All three countries were severely affected by the economic crisis from 2009, and together they form a closely integrated economic area.

The concept of Central Europe is based on a common historical, social, and cultural identity. Central Europe is going through a “strategic awakening” with initiatives such as the Central European Initiative (CEI), Centroke, and the Visegrád Four Group. While the region’s economies show considerable disparities of income, the Central European countries are listed by the Human Development Index as very highly developed.
The European Union has developed a policy to support the gradual integration of the Western Balkan countries after they were identified as potential candidates for EU membership. Croatia became the first to join, and Montenegro, Serbia, the Republic of North Macedonia and Albania are official candidates. Accession negotiations have been opened with Montenegro and Serbia, while Bosnia and Herzegovina is a potential candidate country.

Peace has been maintained in the Balkans for almost 20 years, however it remains a fragile sub-region with potential flashpoints and political instability in many countries. Despite the political tension and instability, the cultural affinity and mutual solidarity in the Balkans between the National Societies remains and is further gaining strength, as is especially demonstrated during disasters and crisis.

Migration continues to present a significant challenge. Countries throughout the Balkans experienced a significant influx of migrants in 2015 and 2017 and Bosnia and Herzegovina became one of the new transit countries in 2018 resulting in significant humanitarian needs.

This operational plan reflects the support IFRC will provide to the National Societies in agreed upon areas. The focus for 2020 will continue to be strengthening National Societies in organizational development, focusing on legal base, auxiliary role to the public authorities in the humanitarian field, strategic planning, partnerships and financial sustainability.

National Society Profile

In the last decades, the countries and National Societies in Central and South-Eastern Europe have undergone a significant transformation. National Societies in ex-Yugoslavia and former Soviet Union have become independent, and with the support of partners have been gradually strengthening their leadership, building the programmatic base and responding to the existing and growing vulnerabilities domestically.

The new social and economic reality has brought competition in humanitarian sectors, with emergence of numerous non-governmental organizations, thus pushing Red Cross actors to adapt, having lost their situation of near monopoly. Some National Societies need to further modernize their organization to remain relevant and be able to effectively respond to the growing needs of vulnerable people in Europe and fulfil their role as auxiliary to the public authorities in the humanitarian field. Major transformation processes are ongoing, for example in Estonia and in Lithuania.

The ‘Neighbours Help First’ Network is an informal group of currently 12 member National Societies and seven observers within the cluster. It provides a joint leadership-level platform for information exchange and collaboration, with a particular focus on enhancing joint disaster management, preparedness and response. Disaster management coordinators have joined the forum in 2019 to support the leadership for implementation of the ‘Neighbours Help First’ Plan of Action 2019–2021.
Role of the Country Cluster office

The profile of the cluster office is a representation office for 16 National Societies, their respective governments, relevant Movement components, UN and other International Organisations, with a strong focus on organizational development at the governance and management level, as well as partnerships development and strengthening resource mobilization. The Head of Country Cluster is based in the Regional Office for Europe in Budapest and works in strong collaboration with regional operational teams which provide technical support in National Society Development, health and care, disaster management, capacity building, partnerships and fundraising, communications, and Planning, Monitoring, Reporting and Evaluation (PMER).

The Head of Country Cluster works closely with the regional operational team on the ongoing Emergency Appeals in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in Albania as well as on new DREF or emergency operations, managing leadership level relations and negotiations with National Societies and providing strategic direction.

In 2020 the Head of Country Cluster will continue to facilitate, in close cooperation with disaster management team, the implementation of the Plan of Action of the ‘Neighbours Help First’ Network within South-Eastern Europe and promote the implementation of the Almaty Commitments (2018) and Sarajevo Declaration (2019).

In 2020 it is planned to strengthen the cluster team with two new positions through this plan. A Senior Advisor, National Society Development is planned to be recruited and based in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina to support the leadership of the National Society to implement their recently adopted Development Plan. Furthermore, a Programme Coordinator is planned to be recruited based in Budapest for liaison and coordination between the regional operational teams and the National Societies to strengthen programmatic support to the cluster. In addition, the Programme Coordinator will support the National Societies in partnerships development and the cluster in PMER tasks.

Movement Footprint

Italian Red Cross has a regional office for Western Europe and the Balkans based in Montenegro. Turkish Red Crescent is present in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in Bulgaria. Swiss Red Cross and Red Cross Society of United Arab Emirates are also present in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

ICRC closed its office in Hungary in June 2019, however close cooperation with ICRC continues through Geneva counterparts as well as the ICRC offices in Belgrade, Sarajevo and Pristina. Collaboration includes joint planning and actions, specifically on strengthening National Societies’ legal base, needs assessments, strategic planning, resource development, and coordinating complementary support.
STRATEGY FOR IMPLEMENTATION

STRENGTHEN NATIONAL SOCIETY CAPACITIES

Nine National Societies in the cluster have conducted the Organisational Capacity Assessment and Certification (OCAC) self-assessment. The Red Cross of the Republic of North Macedonia is the only National Society in the cluster that has been granted a certification based on the OCAC process. Five National Societies have developed a Plan of Action to address the recommendations and IFRC will support these National Societies as needed to implement the plans. The Estonian Red Cross will be the first one in the cluster to conduct OCAC in 2020.

Based on discussions with the National Society leadership in 2019, the most needed areas for support are in overall strategic planning for change and modernization, strengthening the legal base (i.e. revision of the Red Cross law and statutes), further development of partnerships and strengthening domestic resource development for financial sustainability (including commercial first aid), strengthening of Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting (PMER) as well as development of human resources and communications capacities.

Through the regional plan, the IFRC Partnerships and Resource Development team aims to recruit a fundraising development officer to support the National Societies within the cluster to strengthen their financial sustainability. The officer will work closely with the Central and South-Eastern Europe Country Cluster Team to coordinate support in the most effective manner.

The Red Cross Society of Bosnia and Herzegovina is operating in a highly complex administrative context while delivering a large-scale and challenging migration operation. With support of partners the National Society has produced a Strategic Development Plan and requires in-depth support to see through its implementation. Based on the request of the National Society, the Central and South-Eastern Europe cluster aims to recruit a Senior Advisor, National Society Development to be based at the National Society in Sarajevo as a counterpart to the Secretary General to support with operationalizing the plan and strengthening the internal and external cooperation and coordination, focus on partnership development.

OUTCOME

NATIONAL SOCIETIES HAVE THE NECESSARY SYSTEMS, STRUCTURES AND COMPETENCIES TO EFFECTIVELY PERFORM

1 Albania [2015], Hungary [2018], Latvia [2013], Lithuania [2011], Montenegro [2011], Poland [2012], the Republic of North Macedonia [2011], Romania [2012], Slovenia [2012]
STRATEGY FOR IMPLEMENTATION

INFLUENCE OTHERS AS LEADING STRATEGIC PARTNERS

IFRC will monitor and analyse political, economic and social trends in Central and South-Eastern Europe to inform timely and proactive humanitarian response. With support from the communications team, the cluster will work with National Societies to formulate policy objectives for advocacy, communications, humanitarian diplomacy and external relations. IFRC will support National Societies on request to develop national partnerships with their respective governments, aiming to sign Memorandum of Understanding with relevant ministries based on the auxiliary role of National Societies to the public authorities in the humanitarian field. When agreed with National Societies, the Head of Country Cluster will work with them and their governments to build global alliances and develop support to the global work of the IFRC. With the recruitment of Programme Coordinator for the cluster, partnerships with relevant international organisations, private sector and others will be also strengthened in cooperation with the Partnerships and Resource Development team.

OUTCOME

NATIONAL SOCIETIES ARE WELL POSITIONED AMONG KEY STAKEHOLDERS

22,000 SWISS FRANCS FUNDING REQUIREMENT
STRATEGY FOR IMPLEMENTATION

ENSURE A STRONG IFRC

To provide adequate support to the 16 National Societies in the cluster, it is necessary to recruit a Programme Coordinator. The new position will liaise and coordinate between all regional thematic teams to provide support to the National Societies in key areas such as organizational development, disaster management, health and care, PMER, resource development and communications. The Programme Coordinator will mobilize resources for the cluster through partnership and proposal development and technical support to National Societies. The cluster office will maintain particularly close cooperation with the enhanced capacity of the Partnerships and Resource Development team to contribute to the strengthening of the financial sustainability of the National Societies through enhanced domestic fundraising capacity.

IFRC will continue to ensure management of finance and administration and adherence to security rules and regulations. There will be a particular focus on strengthening PMER and overall data management of National Societies, as well as on enhancing the knowledge on IFRC policies, such as prevention and control of fraud, corruption and harassment, sexual violence and abuse.
Contact information of the IFRC Country office, for partners who wish to find out more

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