



FROM ISTANBUL TO VIENNA

How the Red Cross and Red Crescent has
moved on since the 2007 European Conference

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» FOREWORD



Dear colleagues

We are delighted to introduce this brochure for the 8th Federation European Conference in Vienna. Looking back to when we came together at the last European Conference in Turkey in 2007 and agreed the Istanbul Commitments, it is extraordinary to reflect on how much has happened in this three year journey from Istanbul to Vienna.



Since our last meeting the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement has commemorated the 150th anniversary of the Battle of Solferino. We have also launched our global campaign 'Our World, Your Move'; welcomed the arrival of a new Federation Secretary General and set out our unified vision for the next ten years in *Saving Lives, Changing Minds*.

These have been changing and challenging times. The flu pandemic, impacts of climate change and escalating health crises have been felt across Europe, Asia and the rest of the world. In the aftermath of the global economic crisis, three quarters of National Societies in Europe reported a significant social impact on the most vulnerable people in their countries. Millions of vulnerable people have been left in crisis and the call for Red Cross and Red Crescent support has grown ever more urgent.

However, it is precisely these challenges that should make us even more proud of the successes we have achieved both individually and together. We hope that reading this booklet will give you a snapshot of the progress National Societies have made over the last three years, as well as offering some honest reflections on the challenges along the way. We hope it will inspire you to seek out a colleague from another National Society during the conference to exchange your experiences, or take home an inspiring idea from this brochure.

More than anything we hope that, like us, you will feel a sense of pride and deserved recognition reading these stories. They serve as an important reminder of the lasting difference our volunteers and staff make to the lives of the hundreds of thousands of people each day, throughout Europe and beyond.

Istanbul may seem a long time ago given all that has happened and all we have achieved since, but the aspirations we captured in those commitments have lived on in the work we do. As we look ahead to Vienna and beyond, let's continue to keep them alive.



Bengt Westerberg
Chair of the Planning Committee



Elzbieta Mikos Skuza
Chair of the Drafting Committee

» INTRODUCTION

How have National Societies moved on since the last European Conference in Istanbul? This is the question we have set out to answer. Of course, we know the answer is a complicated one. For each of the 52 National Societies – responding to different needs and grappling with numerous challenges – progress has come in many forms and happened at varying speeds.

The aim of this brochure is to give you a picture of our work in Europe set against the backdrop of some of the themes from the Istanbul Commitments. Measuring the difference that we – the Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies in Europe – have made together continues to be a difficult task, and the absence of indicators set for the Istanbul Commitments makes measuring progress especially hard.

However, we do know – from the work of every National Society, our networks and our centres of excellence – that there have been a great many achievements and an enormous amount of valuable learning which deserves to be shared.

In this brochure, you will find a selection of highlights from our volunteers, staff, partners and, most importantly, those we serve. There were so many success stories – some big, some small, but all important – it was difficult to decide which to include. We also knew we couldn't include everything so have focused on six topics within the Istanbul Commitments:

- > scaling up and reaching out in health care
- > building health care partnerships and alliances
- > the migration challenge in Europe
- > working along the migratory trail
- > a stronger, unified approach
- > the path to participation.

WHAT ARE THE ISTANBUL COMMITMENTS?

The Istanbul Commitments were adopted at the European Conference in Istanbul in 2007 as a renewed commitment to working with groups that “become particularly vulnerable through migration, with people living in the shadows of illegality and with those excluded from proper health care”.

The aim of the Istanbul Commitments is to offer National Societies a common vision and set of priorities to work towards in migration and health care and to give them the mandate and legitimacy to provide support to migrants, whatever their status.

» SCALING UP AND REACHING OUT IN HEALTH CARE

Health care was one of the two major themes of the last European Conference, with special attention given to widening health care access to the most vulnerable groups within society.

National Societies committed to “scaling up programme implementation in key health and social care areas... by systematic and measurable activities and improved quality using evidence-based and evaluated programmes”.

This included developing domestic programmes and supporting sister National Societies, both in the Europe Zone and throughout the rest of the world.

WHY WAS IT NECESSARY?

The urgent need for such work to take place was clearly demonstrated by the bare statistics.

According to the World Health Organisation, there are an estimated 2.35 million people living with HIV and AIDS throughout Europe and Central Asia. These regions are also not expected to achieve the Millennium Development Goal 6 for TB: to have halted and began to reverse the incidence of the disease by 2015.

TAKING STEPS

Over the last few years there has been a trend towards offering more specialised support for patients with multi-drug resistant tuberculosis (MDR-TB), and developing new partnerships tackling TB and HIV co-infection.

More National Societies have also started to develop community-based first aid projects to reach the most vulnerable groups and establish harm reduction services such as needle exchanges.

EXAMPLES OF SUCCESSES IN SCALE UP IN EUROPE

- > The Uzbekistan Red Crescent's increase in outreach workers and peer workers in 2008 enabled them to reach three times more injecting drug users and sex workers with harm reduction services.
- > The Macedonia Red Cross began harm reduction and HIV prevention in eight branches in 2008 with funds from the Canadian Red Cross.
- > The Romanian Red Cross ran a pilot to provide psychological support for TB and MDR-TB patients. Between April 2007 and January 2008, the pilot reached over 300 people.

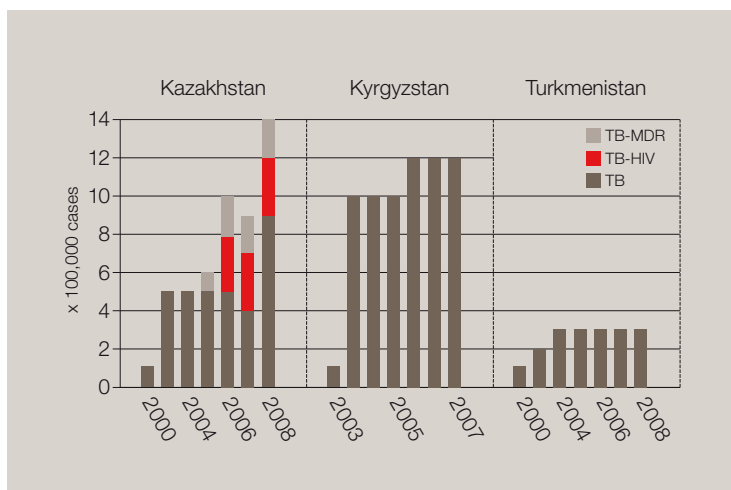


DIFFICULTIES ALONG THE WAY

One of the biggest challenges for National Societies has been lack of funding or promised funding arriving too late. This has resulted in some activities being cancelled or, at best, postponed.

Although a lot was invested in creating robust plans under the umbrella of the Global Alliance, funding has remained uncertain and – in some cases – National Societies have even had to scale down their activities.

There have also been occasional difficulties in successfully reaching the most vulnerable. For example, operating within a culture where injecting drug use is stigmatised, National Societies in Armenia and Georgia reported difficulties in reaching out to, and gaining the trust of, injecting drug users and especially those living with HIV.



GOING GLOBAL WITH HARM REDUCTION TRAINING

The Villa Maraini Foundation in Rome is internationally recognised for its work on drug related support. The Red Cross centre provides free services to over 800 drug users each day, and runs training courses on harm reduction and drug abuse treatment for external organisations and other National Societies.

Since 2007 it has expanded its training to work with National Societies in Europe, Asia, South America and Africa. The aim of the one-week interactive course is to help delegates appreciate the realities of working in harm reduction and understand the practicalities of establishing a programme.

Fabio Patruno from the Italian Red Cross explains: “Many National Societies are interested in taking a role and responsibility in this field. Villa Maraini is the model from which other National Societies can take ideas and inspiration. The first step is to break down prejudice and indifference towards this vulnerable group.”

Since completing the course, National Societies in Uganda and Mauritius have successfully established their own harm reduction programmes.

In 2009 a two year European Commission funded project was established with six other National Societies to build the capacity of National Societies in Europe in this approach.

THE GLOBAL ALLIANCE ON HIV AND TB

In December 2008 the Red Cross and Red Crescent Global Alliance on HIV and TB was launched at the annual European Red Cross / Red Crescent Network on HIV/AIDS and TB (ERNA) network meeting.

The Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies of Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Uzbekistan are each members of the first phase of the alliance, which aims to build a unified approach to scaling up our work to tackle HIV and TB.



» HOW THE RED CROSS IS HELPING TO CHALLENGE STIGMA AND OFFER HOPE IN RUSSIAN PRISONS

Daniil was a teenager when he contracted HIV from having a tattoo in a pretrial detention centre. He recalls: “I was scared and didn’t know how I’d got infected because I had never taken drugs. I didn’t know what to do and I thought I’d die soon.”

“When I got to the colony, I found out there were guys called ‘peer trainers’. I was very glad to receive support in those hard times.”

There are an estimated 40,000 HIV positive inmates like Daniil in Russia, making the prison population a major focus of the country’s HIV epidemic. The majority of inmates were infected before entering prison and many have been injecting drug users. Entering prison is often the first time they have been tested.

The Russian Red Cross began working in prisons in 2005 with the aim of reducing HIV transmission by raising awareness amongst inmates and staff and providing support to those living with the virus. The programme provides support and education to inmates right the way through the prison process, from entering a detention centre to being released back into society.

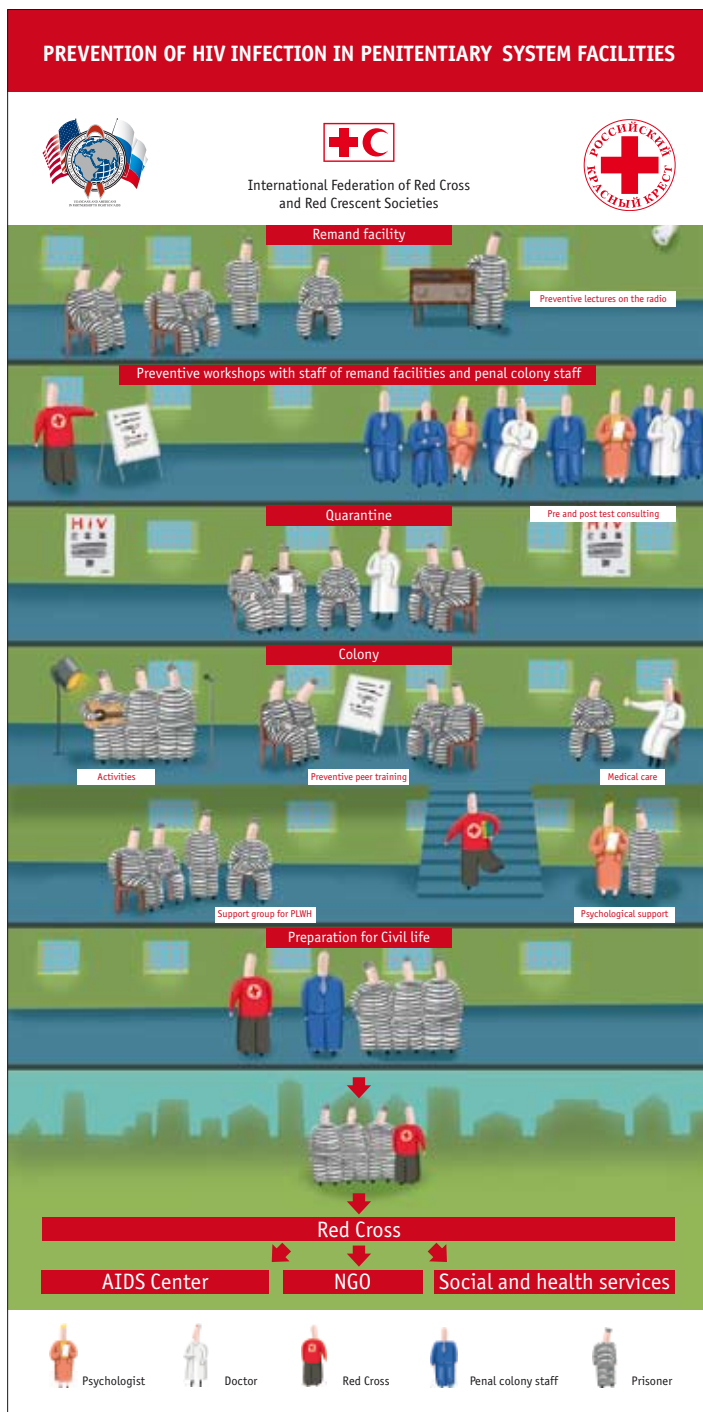
Training prison staff was vitally important for the programme’s success. Elena Feodorova from the Russian Red Cross explains: “We encountered staff members who believed myths like you can tell if somebody is HIV positive simply from their appearance. Educating staff to understand the real facts about HIV prevention made a big difference. Many began running training courses using the Red Cross methodology after attending courses themselves.”



» I had very strong fear. I did not know how to live together with these people. After Red Cross training, I changed my mind. If you know everything about HIV, you don’t have to be afraid of it

Between 2006 and the first half of 2009, the programme reached over 12,000 staff and inmates with support and awareness raising messages. Red Cross branches and HIV support organisations also reported an increase in the number of requests from ex-prisoners and their families seeking further support.

For many prisoners, the Red Cross’ enduring support inspired them to become volunteers. Daniil explains: “When I found out the Red Cross was providing training for trainers, I was the first one to sign up. Now I’m a peer instructor and am very proud of it. I’m glad my life has meaning.”



This training played a particularly important role in 2007 when a change in legislation meant HIV positive prisoners were, for the first time, integrated into mainstream prison wards rather than being contained in special wings. As one inmate reflects:

“It’s not a secret that in the beginning we faced huge problems. I had very strong fear. I did not know how to live together with these people. After Red Cross training, I changed my mind. If you know everything about HIV, you don’t have to be afraid of it.”

Peer education on HIV prevention (supported by USAID) is currently being offered to young people in juvenile centres and prisoners living with HIV in Orenburg and Saint-Petersburg. However, funding for the main project sadly came to an end in 2009 – though the Russian Red Cross is still searching for funding to continue more of this work.

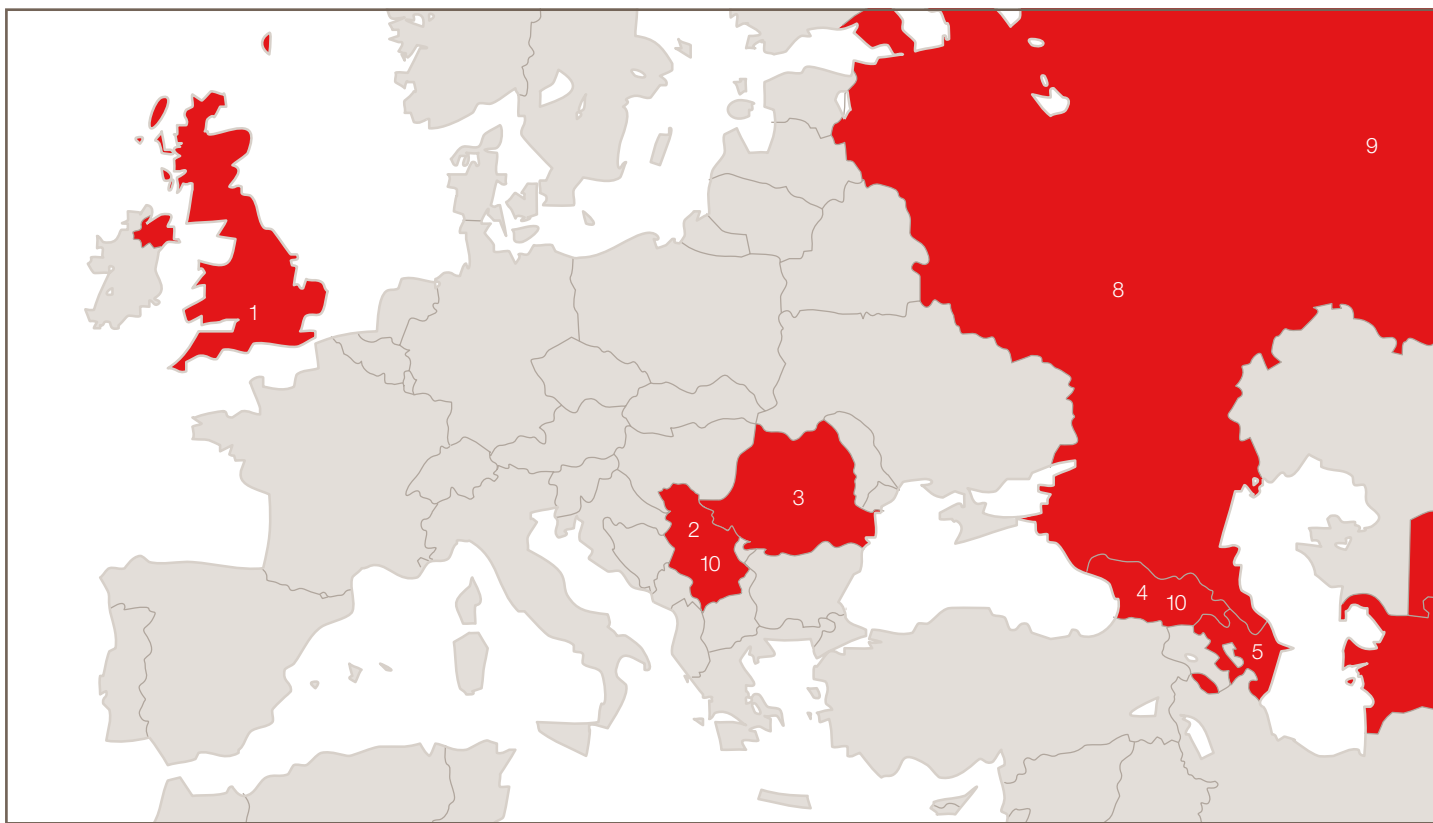
As Elena reflects: “This programme gave prisoners a realistic understanding of HIV and confidence to believe they can build a future for themselves. At the moment, we don’t even have the funds to visit the former projects and evaluate whether peer educators are continuing to make a difference. Our hope is that we will find the money to continue this work in the future.”

◀▲ Daily medication to combat the effects of the HIV virus
© Bruce Forster/Getty Images

◀ Prevention of HIV infection in penitentiary system facilities –
© Russian Red Cross

» BUILDING HEALTH CARE PARTNERSHIPS AND ALLIANCES

National Societies in Europe have continued to build on their relationships with local and international partners in health care to help the most vulnerable, including those with mental health and welfare systems. Our partners include ministries of health, national institutes for TB, UN agencies, the World Health Organisation, the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (GFATM), Project HOPE, Save the Children, and other national and local NGOs. Here are some key developments and achievements since 2007:



1 In 2009, a Red Cross team in **Gloucestershire, England** won a British Red Cross Excellence Award for their partnership project with a drug and alcohol service. They teach life-saving first aid skills and prescribe Naloxone to injecting drug users. This harm reduction project has already trained more than 70 active drug users and saved two people's lives.

2 In **Serbia**, the Red Cross work on TB funded by the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (GFATM) contributed to reducing the incidence rate of 37 per 100,000 to 25 per 100,000 by the end of 2009. The project also placed great emphasis on improving TB control among specific populations at higher risk, especially Roma communities.

3 The **Romanian Red Cross** joined forces with schools and an NGO called 'Integration' in 2008 to deliver a harm reduction project targeting young people aged 14 to 20 through awareness raising in schools. The project was well received but the number of activities carried out was limited due to the need to co-ordinate the activities with volunteers, NGOs and school schedules.

4 In 2008, the **Georgia Red Cross** joined a network of 13 NGOs working in the field of harm reduction.

5 In 2006, the **Azerbaijan Red Crescent** signed a MoU with their Ministry of Health ensuring more support was granted to the National Society in the area of health promotion.

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6 The **Turkmenistan Red Crescent** has been working with government ministries, the AIDS centre, schools, local authorities and agencies to prevent the spread of HIV and reduce stigma of HIV through awareness raising – targeting vulnerable groups such as sex workers and injecting drug users.

In 2008 the programme was expanded from four to six sites, leading to a 47 per cent increase in the number of people reached in the first three months compared to the same period the year before. In 2009, 87 per cent of those reached with messages could correctly identify ways of preventing HIV transmission and rejected major misconceptions about HIV transmission.

7 Thanks to the partnership with Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (GFATM), the **Uzbekistan Red Crescent** increased the reach of its TB prevention programmes across six regions of the country. The number of people reached by information increased by 28 per cent in 2008 compared to the year before.

8 The **Russian Red Cross** worked with health authorities in six regions to develop TB programmes, including training courses on managing multi-drug resistant TB. They also facilitated improved links between prison and civilian TB services and worked with regional health centres to provide psychosocial support to TB patients.

» We work very closely with the Red Crescent and I have a lot of respect for the organisation. While we hold dull roundtable meetings, the Red Crescent is always doing something dynamic to reach people

Jelena, Ministry of Health representative in Kara Balta, Kyrgyzstan

9 In 2008 the **Russian Red Cross** reached just under 4,000 people. Russia has one of the worst tuberculosis problems in Europe with nearly 83.5 cases per 100,000 population. The multi-drug resistant form of the disease accounted in 2007 for about ten per cent of the total number of cases, and this figure continues to rise.

10 A two-year campaign to help communities and individuals contribute to stopping TB began in 2008. The slogan for World TB Day was “I am stopping TB!” National Societies from Central Asian countries – as well as those from **Russia, Georgia** and **Serbia** – took an active part in the campaign, which involved TB institutes, health ministries and NGOs.

» We are very proud to help the Red Cross and Red Crescent support hundreds of patients with multi-drug resistant tuberculosis. What makes this programme special is the degree of community involvement. People who have been cured are recruited as Red Cross and Red Crescent volunteers and, in turn, provide essential support to those who are under treatment

Patrizia Carlevaro, Head of the International Aid Unit at Eli Lilly

» We will engage in partnerships and alliances with affected groups, health and social care and other actors to act as a bridge builder and to empower affected communities, groups and individuals

The Istanbul Commitments

» HOW THE RED CRESCENT IS HELPING TO **CONTROL HIV AND TB CO-INFECTION** IN KAZAKHSTAN

In Kazakhstan, the figures for HIV/TB co-infection illustrate a stark reality: TB is the biggest killer of people living with HIV. There are an estimated 12,000 people living with HIV in the country and more than a third of these will die of TB, despite it being curable.

Five years ago, the Kazakhstan Ministry of Health (MoH) was providing medical treatment to those living with HIV (many of them from the most vulnerable sector of the population) but was struggling to deal with the social aspect of the work. Their dilemma was how to reach those people in need and ensure they completed the full course of treatment in a culture where there is still huge stigma attached to HIV – and where many of those affected have been ostracised and forgotten.

When the Kazakh Red Crescent Society approached the authorities in the industrial town of Temirtau – which has the highest rate of HIV in the country – with an offer to work in partnership on providing HIV and TB co-infection support, it was exactly what they had been looking for.

Sholpan Baimurzina, Temirtau AIDS centre director from the MoH explains: “To reach these people and ensure treatments are followed, we need the social support that the Red Crescent provides. This is what was missing in our programme, so when the Red Crescent came to us to suggest this partnership, we were very enthusiastic.”

The Red Crescent is one of just a few organisations in Kazakhstan that specialises in HIV and TB co-infection support. Controlling TB and HIV co-infection has been singled out as vital to making progress in reducing TB incidence and mortality.



» By providing social support to our patients, we have seen the mortality rate in Temirtau start to decrease in 2007 and 2008 by roughly 25 percent since the co-infection project started

The programme, funded by Astra Zeneca via the British Red Cross, is co-ordinated by Red Crescent multi-disciplinary teams, including a psychologist, a social worker and a lawyer. It targets those with co-infection who are considered most likely to default on their treatment. Clients are usually referred by the AIDS centres and may also come on their own. Nearly three quarters of clients are former prisoners – of which over half are injecting drug users or homeless.

The project is already seeing impressive results. Sholpan says: “By providing social support to our patients, we have seen the mortality rate in Temirtau start to decrease in 2007 and 2008 by roughly 25 per cent since the co-infection project started. This positive trend is so encouraging; we are seeing these people get better and seeing our strong relationships with them grow.”



» Helping others to live with the same diagnosis of co-infection became my mission in life. This programme is about survival. Sometimes we are the only lifeline that people have

Dr. Margulan Syzdynov, chairman of the regional Red Crescent branch in Karaganda, acknowledges there were initial difficulties with the pilot project: “It was very challenging in the beginning as we were the first organisation to work on co-infection. It was hard to find co-ordinators and we had a very high staff turnover. Eventually we found good people: it was important to have volunteers with the right kind of experience to handle the challenges we faced. The project has moved along incredibly well and is now running smoothly. It is very satisfying to see.”

Despite facing some funding challenges caused by fluctuations of foreign exchange rates in 2008, the Kazakh Red Crescent has continued to build on the success of the HIV and TB co-infection programme work over the last few years.

For those like Alexander (36), an ex-drug addict and ex-convict from Karaganda, the programme was literally a life-saver. Alexander’s life was turned around through the Red Crescent’s support and he now volunteers for the co-infection programme. “Helping others to live with the same diagnosis of co-infection became my mission in life,” Alexander says. “This programme is about survival. Sometimes we are the only lifeline that people have.”

◀▲ Members of the Red Crescent multi-disciplinary project team in Temirtau: Galina, Galina and Jelena
© Claudia Janke/BRC

▲ Alexander: ex-drug addict now Karaganda Red Crescent volunteer
© Claudia Janke/BRC

» THE MIGRATION CHALLENGE IN EUROPE

» People do not move, unless there is a good reason. War, conflict, political persecution, poverty and pure survival for themselves and their families make people move, seeking protection and livelihoods elsewhere... This is a humanitarian challenge as much as it is a political one **Trygve G Nordby**

► Young asylum seeker receives language lessons from a Malta Red Cross volunteer
© Aaron Lurth

In his keynote speech at the Istanbul Conference, Trygve Nordby, special envoy for migration, argued that as humanitarian actors advocating principles of humanity and impartiality, Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies should be playing a central role in responding to the needs of migrants.

Each year, thousands are compelled to flee their homes under circumstances that threaten their lives and undermine their human dignity.

The Istanbul Commitments state that National Societies will address the needs and vulnerabilities of people affected by migration in order to better protect, support and assist them. Special priority will be given to asylum-seekers, refugees, irregular migrants, unaccompanied minors, and victims of trafficking in human beings.

TACKLING THE PROBLEM

While the lack of data makes it difficult to measure the degree of progress National Societies have achieved in their work with migrants, many National Societies have developed new activities since 2007 and reached out for the first time to vulnerable groups such as the victims of trafficking and irregular migrants.

In 2009, 35 out of 52 National Societies in Europe were working to assist and support migrants. Activities ranged from emergency assistance and protection to support for re-integration and return.

ADVOCACY: THE WAY AHEAD

The Istanbul Commitments included a pledge to focus advocacy on our unconditional access to migrants regardless of their status for the purposes of providing humanitarian assistance without being criminalised or otherwise penalised for that action and insisting on governments respecting the rights of all migrants.

Since 2007, advocacy for the right of access to all migrants in need has led to breakthrough successes for National Societies such as the Norwegian Red Cross, which is now able to support irregular migrants using the commitments as its mandate. However, this continues to be a mixed picture with some National Societies feeling apprehensive or unable to act because of the risk of conflicting with their governments.

The Red Cross EU office has also led on the Red Cross and Red Crescent's active support of the proposal to establish a common European asylum system and standards of return.



OUR WORK WITH ASYLUM SEEKERS

Some National Societies have long-established activities to support asylum seekers and refugees. For others, like the Malta Red Cross, this has been a new area of work.

Malta is one of the smallest and most densely populated countries in the world. In recent years it has increasingly become a transit country for asylum seekers and migrants attempting to reach Europe by sea. There were nearly 3,000 arrivals in 2008 – an increase of more than 60 per cent on the previous year. Many arrive on small and dangerously overcrowded boats

In 2007, with generous assistance from the Swiss and Austrian Red Cross Societies, the Malta Red Cross was able to recruit a part time co-ordinator to establish and co-ordinate migration activities.

Glen Cachia, the appointed co-ordinator, says: “It has been a steep learning curve for a small national society with limited resources and staff, but we’re proud of the progress we’ve achieved so far.

“As well as working to support asylum seekers and migrants in open centres and detention centres – carrying out psychological assessments, training staff and organising language courses – we have joined forces with organisations such as UNHCR, the Jesuit Refugee Service and Médecins Sans Frontières to advocate the authorities to improve the very poor conditions in detention centres.

“We have already had some successes, such as getting reception facilities in a major detention centre.”

The Malta Red Cross’ migration work has attracted volunteers and interns from universities in America and Europe and the National Society has applied for a two year funding programme to secure another staff member and finance operational overheads.

FIVE REASONS WHY NATIONAL SOCIETIES DO NOT WORK IN MIGRATION*

- 1 Lack of financial resources
- 2 Lack of staff capacity
- 3 Lack of vision in its leadership
- 4 Belief that migrants do not fall within its mandate
- 5 Uncertainty about how to respond to the needs of migrants

*Based on data collected in 2007

SPOTLIGHT ON THE FRENCH RED CROSS

One of the major difficulties facing asylum seekers and undocumented migrants is the lack of a permanent address to receive correspondence and documentation on their application process.

The French Red Cross has developed a simple but very effective solution – providing people without a stable home with the use of an address in order to be able to assert their rights and claim benefits. They produced a good practice guide to offer guidance to others interested in establishing a similar activity.

► Painting by a fourth grade child in Hvar; exhibited as part of a Croatia Red Cross school project on trafficking in 2009
© Vesna Janko Funderle



HOW WE HELP VICTIMS OF TRAFFICKING

Since the last Europe Conference, a number of National Societies – including the Netherlands, Macedonia, Lithuania and Turkmenistan – have developed new activities to work with victims of trafficking. Additionally, more National Societies have now joined the International Federation's European Network for Trafficking in Human Beings.

In Belarus, where 800,000 citizens are 'missing' and presumed to be working – voluntarily or otherwise – in Russia, the Belarus Red Cross is working in five 'Hands of Help' centres to support victims of trafficking.

The centre provides a full rehabilitation service for trafficked persons where they are given health check-ups as well as psychological support, legal advice, addiction treatment (if necessary), accommodation and vocational training to help get them back to work and reintegrated into communities.

The centres have supported those like Natasha who answered an advertisement to work in a factory packing frozen vegetables just outside Moscow.

On arrival she handed over her passport and was informed she had to work off the debt she had incurred to get the job.

Natasha was subjected to working 16 hours a day – with just three toilet breaks and one meal – and forced to sleep on the factory floor. She recalls: "We escaped in a car we flagged down and I went home. The police ignored me, treated me like a whore. Who helped me? Only the Red Cross."

According to Lars Linderholm, the Federation's anti-trafficking network facilitator: "Human trafficking is a truly global phenomenon which affects all countries. Only by working together can we effectively address this issue. Our network gives us a unique position that victims of human trafficking need us to make use of."

» HOW THE SPANISH RED CROSS HELPS MIGRANTS WASHED UP ON THE CANARY ISLANDS COAST

► New arrivals: migrant family from Africa is counseled by a Spanish Red Cross worker
© Spanish Red Cross

Twenty-four-year-old Omar Seco worked for nine months in a metal factory to pay for his passage from Mauritania to Spain. In February 2009 he embarked on the sea journey in a large canoe – an experience more terrifying than anything he had imagined. “I was very frightened for three days,” he recalls. “I often feared that I would drown. The waves were huge and we were thrown around like rag dolls”.

Thousands of men, women and children risk their lives each year to make the voyage over to Spain from Africa, often in small wooden boats, ‘cayucos’, packed with 80 or 90 people. The Spanish Red Cross has been working to provide humanitarian aid, such as providing medical relief to those washed up on coasts, for 10 years.

In 2006, however, a dramatic increase in the number of arrivals by boat to the Canary Islands (more than 25,000 people reached its coasts, mostly from sub-Saharan countries) meant the Spanish Red Cross was called upon to play a crucial role in supporting the government’s efforts to respond to the crisis and increase the scale of their support.

Mila Núñez Sachetich from the Spanish Red Cross recalls: “Not only was there a dramatic increase in the overall numbers of irregular migrants arriving on the coasts, often exhausted from very dangerous journeys, but we also began to see a lot more women, including pregnant women and children. Some were very ill or dehydrated, others had died during the voyage. It was a very traumatic situation.



» The Spanish Red Cross brought me to this centre that we are in now. We call them ‘Udjama’ which means ‘extended family’. Now I have a place to live and have food every day

“The Spanish Red Cross negotiated with the government to increase our access in providing humanitarian assistance. For example, we set up centres to provide longer-term assistance to particularly vulnerable people – such as pregnant women, women with children, handicapped and traumatised people – providing accommodation for up to six months, or up to a year in exceptional cases.”

Reception centres run by the Red Cross, where migrants like Omar can stay after they are released from detention centres for up to 15 days, were also expanded. He recalls: “The Spanish Red Cross brought me to this centre that we are in now. We call them ‘Udjama’ which means ‘extended family’.

► Training courses run by the Spanish Red Cross at a hosting centre for migrants, the Canary Islands
© Spanish Red Cross

Now I have a place to live and have food every day. On top of this, I am attending Spanish classes and other workshops which are vitally important for me to be able to find work.”

Omar’s story, along with many others, has been featured on a weekly show, ‘Golden Stories’, hosted by the Spanish Red Cross and broadcast on the biggest radio station in Spain, La SER. The slot offers those who have benefited from the support of the Red Cross – in all aspects of its work – to publicly share their experiences.

The programme is listened to by more than 480,000 people a week and represents just one of the ways in which the National Society is working to raise public awareness of the situation and the conditions that drive people to put their lives in danger to make these journeys. The programme also aims to increase public understanding of the Red Cross’ work.

The Spanish Red Cross is rightly proud of its progress – since 2006 they have helped over 96,000 people who have arrived on the Spanish coasts. Red Cross staff cite their strong relationship with the government as an important factor in allowing them to both successfully increase the scale of their work and adapt their activities to the increased demands and changing needs of migrants over the last few years.

However, volunteers and staff acknowledge there are still huge humanitarian challenges which have been exacerbated by the economic crisis. The recession has led to a scarcity in work on the market and they are seeing an increased number of those they helped a few years ago returning to the Red Cross, homeless and in desperate need of support. “The majority of people don’t want to be reliant on our assistance. They want to be working,” Mila says. “However, times are very hard. We are now offering assistance to many people who arrived during the 2006 wave and are currently destitute.”



» I consider myself very fortunate to have arrived safe and sound in Gran Canaria because I know that many aren’t so lucky – they died at sea or were deported to their countries of origin

Despite these challenges, there is still a will and an optimism amongst new arrivals that they can build a life for themselves. Omar wants to find work and stay on the island: He reflects: “I consider myself very fortunate to have arrived safe and sound in Gran Canaria because I know that many aren’t so lucky – they died at sea or were deported to their countries of origin. I am very fortunate and want to take advantage of this opportunity I have been given.”

» WORKING TOGETHER ALONG THE MIGRATORY TRAIL

► Red Cross worker hands out blankets and winter clothes to irregular migrants in Transcarpathia, Ukraine
© Ukraine Red Cross

With the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) reporting that more people are on the move now than at any time in history, the role that the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement can play in supporting migrants as they move from one country to another was recognised as an important priority in the Istanbul Commitments.

In reality, the numbers of European National Societies working directly with sister organisations to support migrants are still small, but the learning from the work that National Societies such as Sweden and Spain have undertaken over the last few years has been important and shared widely. Even more significantly, there is a growing willingness to do more, as the following selection of examples illustrate.

A UNIFIED APPROACH

Recognising that returning migrants will often face extremely difficult challenges, the Federation policy on migration adopted in 2009 provides guidance to National Societies world-wide that “countries of destination and return should co-operate, both in terms of returns and receiving returnees”.



THE CENTRAL ASIA LABOUR MIGRATION NETWORK

Inspired by the Istanbul Commitments, a new network of National Societies in Central Asia was founded in 2008 to develop a unified approach to helping migrants. The Central Asia Labour Migration Network brings together the Red Crescent National Societies of Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.

During the first year of the network, the four countries developed an integrated operational approach to working with migrants. Looking forward to the future, the network intends to increase the co-ordination between the National Societies to support migrants in countries of origin, transit and destination.

WHAT DO NATIONAL SOCIETIES DO FOR RETURNING MIGRANTS?

The results of a survey published by the European Red Cross Return Initiative (ERCRI) in 2009 found:

- > Three European National Societies have experience co-operating on programmes with sister National Societies in countries of return.
- > Five European National Societies offer referrals to NGOs, authorities or public websites for information on the situation in the country of return.
- > Six European National Societies offer referral to other organisations for support on arrival and initial re-integration.



BERLIN: PLANNING THE NEXT STEPS

Representatives from over 30 National Societies in Europe and Africa came together in Berlin in November 2009 to discuss practical action for working together on migration. 'Working along the Migration Trails' was hosted by the National Societies of Switzerland, Austria, Germany and PERCO.

Kerstin Becker from the German Red Cross says: "The aim of the two days was to exchange views and experience about our work with migrants, to develop joint strategies for action and lay the foundation for future co-operation among sister Societies."

"The outcome of the symposium was not only a set of actions, but also an agreement on timings and funding and a commitment to monitor the implementation of all agreed activities."

WORKING WITH EXTERNAL ACTORS

National Societies have continued to strengthen relationships with external actors such as the IOM, UNICEF, UNHCR, the Danish Refugee Council and Caritas, as well as government bodies that provide co-ordinated support to vulnerable migrants.

The ERCRI survey in 2009 found that the International Organisation on Migration (IOM) was the main partner for European National Red Cross National Societies involved in National Return programmes.

National Societies have also continued to build new relationships and partnerships. For example, the Czech Red Cross began working with the Ministry of Interior of the Czech Republic at the beginning of 2009 to help asylum seekers to return to their own country.



SPOTLIGHT ON THE BELGIUM RED CROSS

The Belgium Red Cross and the Red Cross of the Democratic Republic of Congo have joined forces with Congolese artists to produce a comic book on the realities of migration to Europe.

‘La-bas... Na poto’ illustrates the difficulties migrants can encounter along their journey and the gap that often exists between their dream and the reality of life when they arrive. The aim of the comic is to ensure people are better informed and prepared when they make choices about whether to migrate.

120,000 copies of the comic have been circulated to students and trainee teachers in Kinshasa since the project began in 2007 and there are plans to spread the project to other parts of the Congo.



◀◀ Delegates at the Berlin symposium
© German Red Cross

◀◀ Illustrations from the Belgian Red Cross' comic: *La-bas... Na poto*
© Didier Kawende



» HOW THE INFORMATION NETWORK FOR RETURN ENSURES CROSS-BORDER SUPPORT

In July 2009, Enver* and Fatime* arrived at an airport in Kosovo with no money or place to stay, and no family or friends to call for help. Enver is 85 years old and his wife Fatime is just five years younger. Fatime also struggles with health problems which require hospital treatment. Like thousands of Kosovar refugees, the couple had fled to Sweden and have now returned.

A few years ago, the support available from the Swedish Red Cross would have been limited. Project manager Ewa Jonsson explains: “We could have provided returnees like Enver and Fatime with pre-departure counselling and information, but once they boarded the plane there would have been nothing more we could have done for them.”

However, thanks to a pilot project established in 2008, the Swedish Red Cross was able to work closely with the Federation programme officer in Kosovo, Vera Lumi-Shala, and local Red Cross, to provide basic support for the couple on arrival. Vera was already briefed on the couple’s situation and had organised for them to be picked up from the airport and taken to temporary accommodation for five nights.

The *Information Network for Return* aims to support people through the return process in safety and with dignity. Ewa says: “As far as we are aware, this pilot is the first of its kind in Europe. We can support returnees through the whole process, from preparing for departure in Sweden to helping them re-integrate when they arrive back.”



» We could have provided returnees like Enver and Fatime with pre-departure counselling and information, but once they boarded the plane there would have been nothing more we could have done for them

Regular contact and exchange of information are important to the success of the partnership. As Vera explains: “Daily communication with the Swedish Red Cross makes it easier for me to gather information about cases and understand individual situations.”

Shelter is one of the biggest problems. Working closely with colleagues at the Swedish Red Cross, Vera got hold of the contact details for the couple’s daughter in Sweden. She also approached the local Red Cross branch to find a cheap motel for the couple to stay at until their daughter arrived from Sweden to help.



» The Red Cross is often the only lifeline people have. Since starting the pilot we have helped 183 people to return from Sweden to Kosovo and provided information to hundreds more

Enver and Fatime are now living in a small flat their daughter has rented for them and living on minimal benefits. Re-integration is difficult. While programme co-ordinators such as Vera try their best to link up returnees with vocational courses and language lessons, opportunities are scarce. For those of working age, jobs are also hard to come by. Levels of unemployment are at 50 per cent in Kosovo.

The pilot has been challenging. Return is a controversial issue and there are some who argue that those now returning to their native country are no worse off than many of their fellow citizens who never left. However, the project only supports people who voluntarily approach the Red Cross for help. This means, for example, that the Swedish Migration Board can't approach the team and ask for assistance with cases.

Ewa believes this support is essential:

“Many of these people are extremely vulnerable, even by the standards of the place they are returned to. The Red Cross is often the only lifeline people have. Since starting the pilot we have helped 183 people to return from Sweden to Kosovo and provided information to hundreds more.”

“I have been part of the Red Cross for twenty years and this is the first time I feel we have been really working together as a global network. It's great to be able to connect to colleagues across the world in order to make a difference to people's lives.”

*Names have been changed to protect identity

◀▲ Enver and Fatime thank Federation programme officer, Vera Lumi-Shala, for her support. The couple returned from Sweden to Kosovo in 2009
© International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

▲ A family outside their house in the Mitrovica municipality. The Red Cross offered support when the father and son (one of seven children) returned from Sweden
© Swedish Red Cross

» A STRONGER UNIFIED APPROACH

► Red Cross and Red Crescent countries compete in FACE08 – a first aid convention held in the UK
© Lloyd Sturdy/BRC

As members of the largest humanitarian network in the world, National Societies in Europe have huge potential to collaborate and co-operate with each other to share expertise, learning and support to reach the most vulnerable.

During the Istanbul conference, National Societies committed to strengthening and building mechanisms for global and regional co-operation and collaboration, “as a means of ensuring the fullest exchange of information and experience on best practice in addressing vulnerability”.

There are a whole host of fantastic examples of where National Societies co-operated and co-ordinated their efforts: from joint projects to conferences, bi-lateral support and excellence centre-led initiatives.

For example, the Serbian Red Cross supported the Lithuanian Red Cross in starting up a peer education programme on anti-trafficking; Palermo hosted the Mediterranean Conference on Gender and Migration; and the Climate Change Centre in The Hague completed the first phase of a Disaster Preparedness project involving 30 National Societies.

Recent disasters, such as the Italian Earthquake in 2009 and the mine explosion in Kazakhstan in 2008, demonstrated how strong relationships between disaster co-ordinators and mutual support can increase the speed of our response and the reach of our support.

National Societies have continued to share knowledge and work collaboratively through the 20-plus networks operating within Europe, ranging from long-established entities such as PERCO and ERNA to newer bodies such as the Central Asia Labour Migration Network, which has been established since the last Conference.



Challenges in co-operation and collaboration over the last few years have included: lack of time, resources, language barriers, an uncertainty about how to maintain momentum between meetings and uncertainties about how to translate learning exchanges into action.

Strong relationships with colleagues at sister National Societies and regular contact were cited by many volunteers and staff as being an important factor in strong collaboration.

Looking to the future, several National Societies mentioned the need to create better mechanisms for capturing good practice and learning – to make it more accessible and widely available.

HOW HAS YOUR NETWORK HELPED YOUR NATIONAL SOCIETY TO PROGRESS SINCE ISTANBUL?



"Being part of the Anti-Trafficking Network has been of great value to our work with victims of trafficking – both to exchange learning and access new knowledge. It has also helped us to support individual cases. For example, we used contacts we established through the network with the Serbian Red Cross to help one victim of trafficking obtain her documents."

Sanja Pupacic,
Croatian Red Cross



"We were struggling with our volunteer database. Being able to get ideas and honest feedback on different models from other National Societies through the ENDOV (European Network for the Development of Volunteering) network was really helpful. We are now on our way and making developments."

Mariana Harutyunyan,
Armenian Red Cross



"We joined the PERCO network in 2007. It's been really helpful to exchange experiences with other National Societies – many have been working with migrants for a long time and have a lot of wisdom to share. Right now we have several activities that are inspired by projects run by other National Societies, which we learned about through the network."

Nadine Conrardy,
Luxembourg Red Cross



"We are running activities with TB patients in detention places. This was made possible after sharing experiences with sister National Societies within the ERNA network."

Shaban Shayev,
Azerbaijan Red Crescent

SPOTLIGHT ON THE CHERNOBYL PROGRAMME

The Chernobyl Humanitarian Assistance and Rehabilitation Programme (CHARP) run in partnership between the International Federation and the National Societies of Belarus, Ukraine and Russia has been offering medical and psychosocial support for nineteen years – making it the Federation's longest running humanitarian programme. It has helped more than three million people since the world's largest nuclear accident, the Chernobyl disaster in 1986.

The core activity of CHARP remains thyroid gland screening. Six Mobile Diagnostic Laboratories (MDL) working in remote rural areas screen about 90,000 people annually, leading to the diagnosis of more than 200 cases

of thyroid cancer a year. In the past two years, breast cancer screening and HIV counselling have also been incorporated into the services offered by the MDLs. This illustrates how collaboration and integrating programmes can enable National Societies to reach thousands more people.

Nikolay Nagorny, co-ordinator for Ukraine and Chernobyl programmes at the International Federation, says: "In the past few years we have been focusing the screening on areas which have not been screened recently or were not screened at all in the past. Since 2006 about 45 to 50 per cent of the people we reached – over 160,000 people – were screened for the first time. Our main concern at the moment is funding. We don't have funds secured for the future and the lab equipment is getting old. We will need to replace it very soon."

» HOW JOINED-UP THINKING HELPED IN THE WAKE OF THE ALBANIAN EXPLOSIONS

► Children gather round Red Cross relief supplies following the mine explosions in Albania, March 2008
© Albanian Red Cross

An innovative virtual warehouse of Red Cross relief stocks was put to the test in March 2008 when a series of massive explosions in an arms depot in Albania left thousands of people injured and homeless. It was the first time the database had been used during a major response and demonstrated the difference that co-operation between National Societies can make in the rapid deployment of relief items to the most vulnerable.

The database was developed by Red Cross National Societies in the Balkans region and captures information on each country's emergency stocks, allowing National Societies to co-operate and help each other quickly in the event of emergency.

"We had stock in Albania but not enough," recalls Fatos Xhengo, disaster management co-ordinator from the Albanian Red Cross. "Immediately, every National Society made an inventory of their resources. The virtual warehouse meant I could see what other National Societies had and we could request support through the International Federation. We got a response within a day."

The Montenegro Red Cross was quickly on hand to give support, offering relief items from its stocks including blankets and kitchen sets and a donation of jackets and vests. Momcilo Martinovic says: "When we heard about the explosion in Albania, we immediately sent information about how we could help."

While the system worked very smoothly, delays at customs meant that instead of taking one day to reach Albania, the supplies took eight days to arrive. It highlighted a need to improve customs procedures. Momcilo says: "The system works well but we need to improve and raise awareness about the warehouse in each country." Montenegro's stocks were later replenished using funds from the Federation's disaster response fund (DREF).



» We are ready to support our neighbours – and we will offer support in the same way to other countries where we can. If we have some stocks available, we are happy to provide

With the additional supplies, the Albanian Red Cross were able to reach over 4,000 people with provisions. Since the Albania explosion response, the database has been expanded to include National Societies throughout the European Union, Central Europe, Southern Caucasus and Central Asia.

The virtual warehouse may have helped speed up the process but the collaboration also relies on strong relationships between disaster co-ordinators and a willingness to be there for each other in times of emergency. Momcilo reflects: "We are ready to support our neighbours – and we will offer support in the same way to other countries where we can. If we have some stocks available, we are happy to provide."

"The Red Cross is a big family where we can help each other," says Fatos. "We felt very proud when we talked to our government. It gave us a good image. We can be their right hand in emergencies like this."

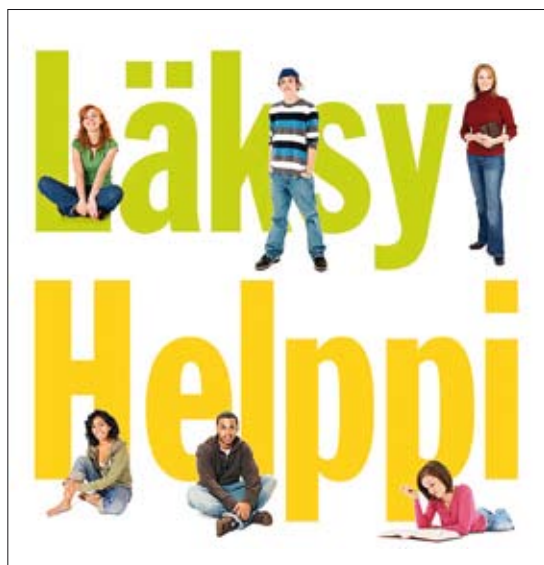
» THE PATH TO PARTICIPATION

► Getting young people involved in homework groups
© Finnish Red Cross

►► “Dinner for two” – encouraging interaction between young people and the elderly in Amsterdam, the Netherlands
© Netherlands Red Cross

As you’d expect from a humanitarian movement, the Red Cross is at its best when it reflects the people it exists to serve. The Istanbul Commitments included a pledge to make the Red Cross and Red Crescent in Europe inclusive and open to all. They also acknowledged the importance of increasing participation so “that all people can take an effective part in and own the design, implementation and monitoring of programmes relevant to them and their vulnerabilities.”

Since 2007, several National Societies – including those in Iceland, Germany, the Netherlands and Denmark – have undertaken major initiatives to increase the diversity of their volunteers and staff, placing particular focus on increasing the participation of migrants.



YOUNG PEOPLE TAKE THE LEAD

So how do you attract a broader, more diverse volunteer base? One key route was through the development of youth-led programmes that drew on the existing knowledge of young volunteers such as engaging young audiences through new media sources, including social networking sites and the internet. These digital media skills were used by the Danish Red Cross youth department, who in 2009 joined forces with Microsoft and two other organisations to run free computer cafés for young migrants.

There have also been concerted efforts to increase the participation of young people in the decision-making process. In 2008, the Georgia Red Cross encouraged its younger members to step up to an enhanced role and become actively involved in governance.



► Participatory
Community
Development
micro-project
in Dzhirgatal,
Tajikistan
© PCD

SPOTLIGHT ON THE NETHERLANDS RED CROSS

In 2007 the Netherlands Red Cross set itself the challenge of involving more young people and people from migrant backgrounds. The target was to reach out to 10,000 young people and 3,000 people from migrant backgrounds before the end of 2009.

One of the projects the National Society employed to make this happen is the '1001 Kracht' (1001 Strengths) project, which was initiated by the national government and involves five other organisations. The main goal of the initiative is to increase the social participation of migrant women – who are often isolated from society – by getting them involved in voluntary work.

Veronique Stevens, diversity advisor for the Netherlands Red Cross, says: "We organise meetings and activities to inform the women about what the Red Cross can do both for themselves and for others around them, and even more about what they could do as a Red Cross volunteer."

"We are really happy with the results so far. To date, we have reached over 1,500 women and encouraged more than 600 women to get actively involved in volunteer work. We do realize that there is a great challenge ahead. Dutch society is becoming more and more diverse. Our experience is that young people and migrants are really enthusiastic to participate in the work of the Red Cross! This gives us new inspiration to continue our work!"



BRINGING ABOUT POSITIVE CHANGE

Communities can play an essential role in mobilising people to bring about positive change – particularly when it comes to reaching marginalised or hard-to-reach communities. This was recognised by the 12 micro projects and 16 small community based projects carried out by National Societies using participatory community development (PCD).

Naturally, there have been continuing challenges in changing organisational culture, such as reaching hard to access communities and creating opportunities for meaningful participation (as opposed to consultation). However, as the featured case studies illustrate, there have been some important successes and – more importantly – a definite appetite to do more at the European Conference in Vienna.

» EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES TO HELP THEMSELVES

Participatory Community Development (PCD) is a working approach based on the principle that all vulnerable persons, like everyone else, should have the basic right to be involved in decisions directly affecting their lives.

National Societies – including Hungary, Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, Serbia (including Kosovo), Macedonia, Romania, Armenia, and in Central Asia – have used PCD in their work with the most vulnerable and marginalised groups of society. These include Roma communities, vulnerable minorities, disabled people and young people at risk of trafficking.

VIEW FROM THE COMMUNITY

“My name is Fikri Amitov and I live in Delcevo, Macedonia. Our access road is muddy and there is a lot of water in the rainy season – therefore, it is difficult to reach other communities.

Before the Red Cross came, a lot of organisations and political parties came and gave us false promises that, when they were elected, the road would be extended and we would have a better place to live.

But then the Red Cross arrived. From the beginning, I was included in the Participatory Community Development programme and I am now an active member of the PCD team. Together we started to solve a long-standing problem – paving part of the street – and the community has a new image now.

Today children can play without dust and garbage in their vicinity. Around ten families and two disabled persons have easier access to their homes.”

PCD member, 2008. The microproject in Macedonia was established to contribute to better health conditions among Roma communities

SOME SUCCESSES SINCE THE LAST EUROPEAN CONFERENCE

- > **Getting children back to school:** In Croatia four projects focused on decreasing the exclusion of Roma children from school through additional educational and social activities, which resulted in many of the children going back to school.
- > **Improving sanitation:** Micro-project activities in Montenegro contributed to better living conditions among the Roma community by improving housing facilities and undertaking clean-up campaigns in order to decrease the possibility of any disease.
- > **Increasing social integration:** In Serbia two micro-projects were implemented aiming to facilitate the social integration of Roma children and adults through preparatory workshops for school enrolment and various workshops for parents.
- > **Raising awareness of trafficking:** The PCD activities in Romania targeted young people at risk of human trafficking.

SOME OF THE CHALLENGES

- > **Actively involving the community during all stages of the process:** Some National Societies struggled to fully engage communities in participation and the projects remained at a more traditional ‘beneficiary’ engagement level.
- > **Identifying issues which affect the wider community:** There is still a high level of perception among beneficiaries that PCD involves ‘personal issues’ rather than issues that affect the community as a whole.
- > **Empowering communities:** In some National Societies the PCD approach has been perceived more as a branch development tool rather than a tool to empower vulnerable communities.

» HOW **FOOD BANKS** ARE ENABLING THE BULGARIAN RED CROSS TO ENSURE VULNERABLE PENSIONERS NO LONGER NEED TO GO HUNGRY

► Pensioner from the village of Zvanichevo near Pazardjik, Bulgaria
© Lori Scott/Flickr

►► Red Cross volunteers deliver food parcels as part of the food banks schemes in Bulgaria
© Bulgarian Red Cross

Six years ago, the Bulgarian Red Cross established a scheme of food banks to support low-income elderly pensioners struggling to survive on meagre pensions. The idea was simple: canned food is donated and stored in a ‘bank’, from where food parcels are delivered to vulnerable pensioners who are unable to leave their homes.

Tzanka Milanova, food banks co-ordinator, says: “The Bulgarian Red Cross has a long history of working with elderly people, who are often extremely vulnerable because of the lack of welfare support. However, this has traditionally been about providing short term assistance and we were struggling to find a means of offering more sustainable support. We wanted to do something that actively involved these communities and offered a longer term solution.”

The scheme was established following a six month engagement process with local communities to identify what elderly people most wanted and needed. This involved setting up local working groups and organising community forums made up of beneficiaries, community groups, local government and businesses – and, of course, local Red Cross branches.

And there certainly was a pressing need. As Dr. Slavita Dzhambazova, deputy director general, explains: “When we asked low-income pensioners to name their single most urgent need, over 50 per cent chose food. More than one in ten reported going for a day or more without eating because there was nothing available to eat. That was the reason we selected the food bank.”



» My wife died and now my pension is 20 Euro. I live in misery and need. We only have money to buy bread. It is a hard life – and I would like to live with dignity

Since 2007, the Bulgarian Red Cross has successfully replicated the food bank model in four new regions of the country where the schemes are fully operational using local resources and volunteers. At the same time, the branches that originally pioneered the scheme have developed new co-operation models and, as a consequence, have been able to expand the services and reach more people.



» I love volunteering at the food bank. Not only am I helping to build a community free from hunger, but I am also able to provide better food to my family. It feels good to work for what I receive

For example, in the region of Stara Zagora, the food bank is now managed by a coalition trust between the Bulgarian Red Cross, the Community Donation Fund and nine other organisations. Meanwhile, the Red Cross branch in Pazardzhik has transformed the food bank into a non-commercial joint venture for community service founded by the local authorities, Red Cross, local NGOs and businesses. This led to 50 more people being reached every month.

The Bulgarian Red Cross attributes the success of the scheme, which has reached over 32,000 people since it began, to a strong, sustainable concept that responds directly to the needs of communities. Tzanka explains: “Thanks to the partnerships, volunteer time and food donation initiatives, for every one Bulgarian lev [national currency] invested into the food banks, we are able to distribute three levs worth of food.”

The scheme has also had a positive social impact, both for its volunteers and in terms of fostering a sense of community. A pensioner volunteer from Shumen says: “I love volunteering at the food bank. Not only am I helping to build a community free from hunger, but I am also able to provide better food to my family. It feels good to work for what I receive.”

In December 2009, the Bulgarian Ministry of Agriculture and Food announced the strong willingness of the Bulgarian government to adopt the food bank model across the country. One volunteer says: “We are delighted that our government is looking to roll out food banks. As a pioneer in this field in Bulgaria, we are keen to provide our experience and resources to reach even more communities.”

» CONCLUSION LOOKING AHEAD TO VIENNA AND BEYOND

The 9th European Conference brings us together in Vienna to discuss two major themes: multi-culturalism and ageing populations.

While this will no doubt be an opportunity for fresh insights and new actions regarding how we can move forward in Europe, it is also important that we see these as a continuation of the Istanbul Commitments, not a new beginning.

WHAT THE ISTANBUL COMMITMENTS SAY

“We will raise the profile and priority of the needs of our ageing populations, recognising at the same time the important contributions older people make to the work of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and other organisations with a strong volunteer base.

We will ensure that the Red Cross and Red Crescent is inclusive and open to all, and actively recruit volunteers and staff regardless of any differences or distinctions so that all people can take an effective part in and own the design, implementation and monitoring of programmes relevant to them and their vulnerabilities.”

The guiding principles of the Istanbul Commitments should still be at the essence of what we do. They are as follows:

- > To respond to the needs of the most vulnerable.
- > To make our volunteer and staff base more reflective of the communities we seek to reach.
- > To put those we help at the very core of everything we do.

These principles are central pillars of Strategy 2020, *Saving Lives, Changing Minds*, and the new Federation migration policy, adopted in 2009. The strategic aims of the new ten-year Federation strategy include:

- > Expansion of access that people in under-served communities have to primary and public health services.
- > Making tackling HIV and TB a continuing priority.
- > Promoting social inclusion for people who have been trafficked or displaced, refugees and other migrants.
- > Increasing partnership working, co-operation and the investment in young people.



» The Istanbul Commitments made it difficult for the Norwegian Parliament to ignore or marginalise our call to change Norwegian immigration law so that we aren't criminalised for providing humanitarian assistance to persons illegally staying in Norway **Liv Ronglan**

There have been some important lessons learned since the last European Conference. We acknowledge that we were not quick enough in developing indicators to measure progress. As we embark on putting into practice the resolutions from Vienna, we need to ensure that the action starts on the very first day after the Conference.

The case studies and interviews have highlighted some common challenges and frustrations: the short-term financing of programmes; struggles in recruiting and retaining the right volunteers and staff; and difficulties reaching those most vulnerable and truly engaging them in participating in decision making and developing and implementing activities.

However, these stories have also highlighted many shared successes. For example, who could overlook the unique role we play when we put our global network into practice by sharing our knowledge, expertise and resources? And what about the support we provide to thousands of the most vulnerable people who have nowhere else to go for help? And, of course, there is the role that the Red Cross and Red Crescent plays in advocating for the right of all migrants – whatever their legal status – to be treated with dignity.

For some National Societies, the Istanbul Commitments have also given them the mandate to advocate for the rights of migrants to be treated with dignity and respect, whatever their legal status. Liv Ronglan from the Norwegian Red Cross says: “The Istanbul Commitments made it difficult for the Norwegian Parliament to ignore or marginalise our call to change Norwegian immigration law so that we aren't criminalised for providing humanitarian assistance to persons illegally staying in Norway. Today the Norwegian Red Cross is running a medical clinic for irregular migrants, and we are in a continuous dialogue with governments and other civil society actors on roles and responsibilities towards irregular migrants.”

As we now look to Vienna and beyond, we need to ensure that the principles and aspirations laid out in the Istanbul Commitments continue to be integral to what we do. Responding to the needs of the most vulnerable remains at the core of our work, both in Europe and in the wider Movement, and will continue to do so into the future. Indeed, for many National Societies, the next phase of this journey will be even more important, as work which is now in its infancy begins to develop and grow.



» HOPES FOR VIENNA



“I hope that we can develop practical actions for making the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement in Europe more open and inclusive of minorities, marginalised groups and those living in the shadows, and to make our volunteer and staff base more reflective of the people we seek to work with.”

Marcel Stefanik

Volunteer, Slovak Red Cross



“We hope that the conference will be a driving force for forging greater unity in our big and complex organisation – which is open to everyone in the European family – and that we can have an equal dialogue exchanging experiences and exploring the challenges and opportunities around multi-culturalism and diversity.”

Victor Kolbanov

Secretary General, Belarus Red Cross



“We can clearly see how the world has changed – even during the relatively short time since the last European conference – and we need to do our best to respond to these changes. We hope that, once again, the European Conference will give us a unique opportunity to think about our common actions and challenges, particularly now when we feel more than ever the growing inter-connection and interdependence between people, countries and National Societies.”

Eleonora Tadjibaeva

Secretary General, Uzbekistan Red Crescent

Red Cross worker
attends to a refugee
washed up on the beach
in Tarifa, southern Spain
© Jon Santa Cruz





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