Europe and Central Asia
Growing vulnerabilities
Increased action
Acknowledgements

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This advocacy report also reflects recent events and links to the implementation of the Florence Call for Action.

About the use of the word "migrants"

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies policy on migration describes migrants as people who leave or flee their places of habitual residence to go to a new place, across international borders or within their own state, to seek better or safer perspectives. In order to capture the full extent of humanitarian concerns related to migration, our description of migrants is deliberately broad. Thus, this policy includes, among others, labour migrants, stateless migrants, and migrants deemed irregular by public authorities. It also concerns refugees and asylum seekers, acknowledging the fact that they constitute a special category under international law and in need of special protection mechanism and framework.
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When, in late 2013, the IFRC published Think Differently, a report about the humanitarian consequences of the economic crisis, we pointed out that even if the economy would begin to grow, the consequences of the economic crisis would be felt for decades to come. Two years later, many National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies continuously report that vulnerabilities are in fact still growing, with rising living costs, greater gaps between rich and poor, and extreme unemployment rates, especially among young people. Many also report an increase in the number of people asking for assistance.

While the overall economy has in recent years shown small signs of recovery in a number of countries, the economic crisis is still felt deeply; as a continent, Europe is facing some of its biggest challenges in decades. Millions of Europeans are still severely affected by unemployment, cuts in healthcare and social welfare, rising food prices, and loss of self-confidence from not being able to take care of themselves and their family financially.

According to economists, entire nations have been – or currently are – at the brink of bankruptcy. Increased cooperation through political and monetary unions means that the economic failure of one country is a continental or even a global issue and not solely a national one. Some nations have introduced or prolonged austerity measures, reduced public salaries, pensions and benefits.

Conflicts and disasters

While the economic crisis is far from over, natural disasters and conflicts have added to the growing vulnerabilities. Since the launch of Think differently, the Balkans and some Central Asian countries have been hit by devastating floods, and the conflict in eastern Ukraine has resulted in hundreds of thousands of people living in insecurity, many of whom have been either internally displaced or have been forced to migrate to neighbouring countries.

Conflicts and dire economic conditions in other parts of the world have also resulted in an increase in numbers of migrants coming – or trying to come – to Europe, often risking their lives by doing so. In 2015, 3,771 people have been reported missing or dead at the Mediterranean Sea, according to the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

Turkey hosts over 2 million migrants from Syria (as of November 2015) and other nations, while in excess of 806,000 people are estimated to have crossed the Mediterranean Sea, landing mainly on the shores of Greece, Italy and Spain – countries already severely strained by economic difficulties.

An opinion poll conducted by Eurobarometer on behalf of the European Commission in May 2015 revealed that Europeans now see migration as the biggest challenge and most important issue to be solved, rating it higher than the economic crisis and unemployment.
Helping migrants

This is also reflected in a recent survey carried out by the Central European University (CEU) students in cooperation with IFRC Europe Region. Asking National Societies about their work and observations earlier this year, the survey revealed that assisting migrants with practical issues and providing psychosocial support is a growing activity. Some National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies have a large number of staff and volunteers present to provide food, clothes and emergency health to migrants upon arrival, while others are involved in supporting them while they are waiting to find a place to stay, or while waiting for their application for asylum to be determined.

Whereas these are in themselves enormous tasks, the increased influx poses challenges beyond reception and relief, assistance in the asylum seeking process and integration. European leaders, institutions and population are debating how to handle the current large population movement to Europe which has resulted in tougher and sometimes xenophobic rhetoric and actions in some countries, while others have shown a greater degree of hospitality and responsibility.

At global level, the IFRC is advocating for the rights of people seeking a better life in another country and as a result of a five-month effort by the IFRC hosted Movement Migration Cell, a global Movement Migration Response Plan was developed and launched in Tunis on 18 September 2015, along with the global advocacy campaign: “Protect Humanity – Stop Indifference” (protect-humanity.org). At national level, many National Societies are involved in securing effective integration in cooperation with asylum seekers, migrant workers and local communities, while others have also conducted campaigns to counter myths and prejudices among politicians, populations and media.

More complex

For decades, the IFRC policy and approach has been to include people and communities in crisis when designing our programmes. The recent survey from the CEU states that this approach is a growing trend in Europe and Central Asia, where vulnerabilities are growing, and livelihoods are threatened. A number of National Societies point out that the needs of the people we support are constantly changing and becoming more complex involving not only relief but also counselling and advice on anything from financial to family matters, and that people are psychosocially affected by the hardship they find themselves in.

Recognizing these complexities, National Societies have increased their community engagement activities, their cooperation with authorities through their auxiliary role to public authorities in the humanitarian field, as well as with companies and other organizations to provide assistance and strengthen resilience of families and communities.

Helping people in need continues to be the core of our humanitarian work, and it is clear that National Societies in Europe and Central Asia continue to think and act differently to face the growing vulnerabilities in the region, committed to the visions in the Florence Call for Action. Whenever possible, we are increasing our actions, because Europe is changing.

The summer of shame and solidarity

The summer of 2015 will be remembered in history as the time when hundreds of thousands of migrants tried to get to Europe, often paying exorbitant sums to unscrupulous smugglers to cross the sea in makeshift boats or to be guided across land borders on foot or in the back of trucks and lorries.

It will be remembered for images of crying fathers holding their terrified children, photos of boats and lorries with dead bodies of migrants who had either drowned or suffocated during their dangerous journeys, and videos of desperate people confronting fences or police lines, trying to enter a continent, which they believed could provide safety and a better life.

The summer will also be remembered for exposing a continent unprepared for and partly paralyzed by the influx. Not only was it not prepared, it also demonstrated for months an inability to cooperate effectively in order to find joint solutions to the issue.

While some countries opened their borders and appealed for a more unified approach, other countries reacted haphazardly trying to control the flow of people and their borders with restrictive policies, scores of police or by building fences or discussing stricter border controls. However, police lines and fences are not solutions, they only demonstrate desperation and lack of willingness or knowledge to find dignified solutions. At the same time these measures increase the vulnerability of the migrants, making it more difficult to provide protection along the migration routes, aggravating the traumatic experiences for children and adults alike.

Angela Merkel, Chancellor of Germany, insisted that as Europe could save the banks, it could also save the migrants. The EU’s foreign affairs chief Federica Mogherini had to remind EU ministers and politicians about the history of Europe, while the French minister of interior, Bernard Cazeneuve, talked about the fundamental values of Europe and the EU, such as human rights and protection. He stated that the unusual situation required an “exam of conscience”, and questioned whether Europe had reacted with enough speed and diligence to one of the biggest challenges facing the continent since World War II.

Basic advocacy

There are many positive contributions migration brings to the states and communities worldwide. It fuels growth, innovation and entrepreneurship in both countries of origin and destination. Yet migration is often rooted in conflict, poverty and persecution, and people on the move are victims of smugglers, traffickers and sometimes even governments who fail to prioritize the basic needs of this vulnerable group, treat them like criminals, use xenophobic rhetoric and impose increasingly strict migration policies.

Humanitarian agencies and organizations working with migrants are advocating for governments to allow humanitarian assistance, dignified treatment, protection, proper procedures based on respect and effective integration of those being allowed to stay. However, during the summer of 2015 these agencies and organizations – among them National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, and the IFRC – had to resort to basic and elementary advocacy, reminding politicians and others that we were in fact talking about human beings.
Naturally, this is not the only advocacy that National Societies and the IFRC have carried out. States have been reminded that during the 31st International Conference in 2011, all countries signatory to the Geneva Convention endorsed a resolution on migration. One part of this resolution “calls upon States, within the framework of applicable international law, to ensure that their national procedures at international borders, especially those that might result in denial of access to international protection, deportation or interdiction of persons, include adequate safeguards to protect the dignity and ensure the safety of all migrants. States are also called on, in line with such relevant international law and national legislation, to grant to migrants appropriate international protection and to ensure their access to relevant services, such as Restoring Family Links. States and National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies are invited to consult in the implementation of the aforementioned safeguards, as appropriate.”

**Strong cooperation**

While migration has been an issue for many National Societies for years, activities were scaled up and new ones initiated during the spring and summer of 2015. The work of the IFRC with and for vulnerable migrants is rooted in its Fundamental Principles and universal character, as well as in its volunteer and community basis. National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies have an important and unique role in addressing the challenges of all migrants based on our mandate, being auxiliary to the public authorities in the humanitarian field, yet being independent and neutral.

A survey conducted by the CEU through the IFRC Regional Office for Europe in early 2015 shows that migration is the one of the areas where National
GERMANY

Counselling of adult migrants

As he only had a few days to flee his native country Afghanistan for Germany, Mr "A" could not get and bring all his personal documents and certificates with him. After arriving in December 2013, he was without professional support in eight months and not allowed to work or enroll in postgraduate study without certified documents. Mr "A" holds an academic degree and had worked as an interpreter for the German Armed Forces in Afghanistan, but had to flee after numerous and serious threats on his life.

In August 2014 he got in contact with a counselling service for adult migrants in Munich, one of 80 run by the German Red Cross. These are part of a nationwide programme called MBE, with altogether 600 centres/advisory boards financially supported by the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

The counselling includes anything from help with integration and language courses, dealing with institutions such as health-, home- and child-care to daily life issues such as advice about leisure activities and how to become a volunteer. It also focuses on the provision of documents and certificates, the search for potential fields of employment, the placement in training and employment, the development of vocational alternatives, and the assistance to find an apartment.

Through the MBE, Mr "A" was offered a job to support other Afghans who had worked with German Federal Armed Forces by interpreting and coordinating network activities. MBE also helped his wife – who had studied gynaecology and worked in the health sector – to place her as a lecturer in the project "Migrant for Migrant", offering her free language training vocational focus as well.

One of MBE’s most important tasks is psychosocial support, i.e. going from being a good remunerated senior interpreter with your own house in Afghanistan to a jobseeker receiving basic social benefits in Germany is a huge mental and emotional strain.

To meet the needs and to continue to provide high quality service, the German Red Cross joined with other welfare organizations to develop a strategy to get more funds. They succeeded as the Ministry in 2015 increased the budget for the MBE with 8 million euro, the first increase since the programme began 10 years ago.
Societies have the strongest cooperation with governments, UN-agencies, other international organizations and NGOs.

Examples of cooperation include: advocacy for better legal frameworks, provision of food and medical aid, data collection and publication of reports, mediation through migrant volunteers and vocational training, relocation assistance and implementation of restoring family links (RFL) strategy. Furthermore, approaches taken by National Societies were often holistic, included innovative cooperation channels and underlined future growth and initiatives.

One such example is the Bulgarian Red Cross, which has been involved in assisting migrants since the first arrivals, and continues to do so (see next page). Apart from providing basic relief and health, the Bulgarian Red Cross is also an active member of the National Operational Body, which has drafted the Integration Plan for Refugees that is to be adopted by the authorities. The plan continues to facilitate access to services for the asylum-seekers/refugees in Bulgaria, and includes a six-month integration programme that will provide Bulgarian language courses, monthly allowance, and school for children, social orientation and vocational trainings.

**Action**

National Societies along the so-called Western Balkan route responded to the best of their ability in both transit and destination countries, with everything from reception and relief to mobile units with medical aid.

Germany and Sweden are two of the European countries that have accepted most migrants in recent years, and the National Societies in both countries are engaged in activities in hundreds of reception centres and other activities. Finland has received the third largest share of people so far this year when compared with its population. All projects have been set up to encourage people to be self-reliant. In the Netherlands, Red Cross volunteers are involved in supporting victims of trafficking and undocumented migrants to have a safe living and

“We encourage individuals and groups to sign up to our call for the protection of vulnerable migrants to be seen as a universal responsibility.”

Elhadj As Sy
Secretary General of the IFRC

Red Crescent volunteers provide relief including food and non-food items in Ankara to people displaced from other countries.

Photo: Turkish Red Crescent Society
The Bulgarian Red Cross is working closely with the Bulgarian government to estimate the new migration influx and improve the conditions of migrants once in Bulgaria. 2014 was a special year for the Bulgarian Red Cross that was among the first and most important driving forces behind all the positive changes that took place inside and outside the State Agency for Refugees (SAR) centres. In March of 2015, the Bulgarian Red Cross in cooperation with UNHCR produced the Reception Conditions Monitoring Report that looks into reception environment in all SAR centres in Bulgaria, analyses challenges in each centre and provides recommendations for institutions and practitioners in the field. All statistical data is gathered from institutions operating in the centres and from monitoring reports compiled by staff members of the Bulgarian Red Cross – Refugee Migrant Service (BRC-RMS). The report was a follow-up to the SAR centres’ makeover that was possible with the financial and human resources assistance of the Bulgarian government, the European Commission, the Dutch government, the Netherlands Red Cross and Syrian diaspora. Key categories of the evaluation and improvements are:

- Registration of asylum applications
- Accommodation
- Provision of food
- Medical care
- Psychosocial support
- Social activities and education

The Bulgarian Red Cross has access to the up-to-date statistics in respects to migrants/asylum-seekers/refugees in Bulgaria due to being a member of National Operational Body that is working closely with the Ministry of Interior and the SAR, having its staff members on duty at the SAR centres, and very close cooperation with the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education and other government offices.
Working environment and a sustainable future, either in the Netherlands or in their country of origin.

More than 2 million Syrians have fled to Turkey, which is hosting them in camps and in urban areas. Turkish Red Crescent has been involved in providing relief and psychosocial support from the onset of the crisis in 2011, and they continue to do so for around 500,000 Syrians in one of the biggest on-going humanitarian operations.

While some migrants have continued to other countries during the past four years, the largest flow came in the summer of 2015, where tens of thousands crossed into Greece to continue via the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia, Hungary, Croatia and Slovenia to Austria, Germany, and beyond.

The majority are fleeing the conflict in Syria, with many others seeking to escape conflict or poverty in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, African countries, or elsewhere.

Unable to find a common approach to the increased population movement, each country in Europe reacted individually, which resulted in increased insecurity and created scenes of chaos.

Stop criminalizing migrants

The Italian Red Cross has been involved in assisting migrants for years now. In 2014 almost 5,000 staff and volunteers were present at Lampedusa, Sicily and other reception centres across the country, providing relief, medical assistance and psychosocial support to migrants arriving after long and dangerous journeys, usually across the Mediterranean Sea from North Africa. Red Cross staff and volunteers receive training and psychosocial support as they work long hours under difficult conditions. Their efforts are a rarely told story of humanitarian spirit.

The president of the Italian Red Cross, Francesco Rocca, who is also the vice-president of the IFRC, has tirelessly highlighted the plight of the migrants, trying to ensure they receive protection and dignified treatment at all times. One of the issues he has advocated for is a call to stop criminalizing migrants by labelling them as "illegal".

CENTRAL ASIA
Networking for migrants

Four National Societies in Central Asia have for years been working together on the EU-funded Labour Migration Network-programme to assist tens of thousands of migrant workers from Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan working in Russia and Kazakhstan. The IFRC and the Russian Red Cross Society are active members of the Central Asian network aimed at reaching out to some 45,000 (potential) labour migrants in the countries of origin and some 15,000 in the countries of destination.

The network is providing training on legal rights and social issues, lobbying authorities for their access to services. It is also leading campaigns against xenophobia and discrimination, building the capacity of migrant/returnee volunteers in the area of disease prevention and psychosocial support. National Societies are working closely with media, authorities and the respective diaspora, and all the National Societies of the Commonwealth of Independent States are now working together on migration-issues.
The increasingly limited options to enter a country in a safe and "regular" way forces migrants to take high risks on their journeys, to use the services of smugglers and to use much more dangerous, expensive and time consuming ways of travelling.

It makes migrants easy targets for people smugglers and human traffickers, and for all kinds of exploitation, including slavery. The current situation also deprives migrants of their human dignity and turns them into criminals in the eyes of the public and authorities.

This illegality, making irregular migrants criminals before the law, prevents migrants from accessing government support and services and forces them to live their lives in constant fear of being discovered, arrested, punished and deported.

Criminalization of irregular migration effectively prevents potential asylum-seekers from exercising their right to ask for international protection, and it forces migrants to risk their health and often their lives to reach a place of safety.

Similarly, the Red Cross Red Crescent has abstained from using the word "crisis" as migration in itself is not a crisis. People escape from crises – war and poverty – but receiving hundreds of thousands of them, treating their applications for asylum or work permits, and integrating those who are allowed to stay might present a challenge, but it is not a crisis.

**Solidarity**

While the summer of 2015 exposed the lack of coordination and cooperation among European nations, and the need for advocating for basic protection and human rights, it also demonstrated an enormous support from the European
populations. They put pressure on their governments to find joint solutions, they began private collections and relief operations, volunteered their time, donated money, relief and other materials to asylum centres and humanitarian organizations alike. They welcomed migrants with banners during football matches, brought relief and other items to railway stations, and they volunteered in their thousands to help the Red Cross Red Crescent and other organizations providing relief and protection. And they demonstrated their humanitarian spirit when hundreds of thousands joined the “European refugees – welcome” day.

This outpouring of humanity was in some countries in stark contrast to the rhetoric and policies of the governments and proof that despite some resentment and a number of xenophobic attacks, many Europeans are willing to help people in need. The power of humanity prevails.

AUSTRIA

The 'refugee volunteer'

Masoud Mohammadi is a pioneer. The young Afghan was among the first asylum seekers to engage as a volunteer for the Red Cross while his asylum procedures is on going. Masoud lives with his family in a small village in Styria, Austria. He has been trained in intensive care and did not want to pass the waiting time idly.

In talks with his neighbour Bernhard Mürzl, who is a Red Cross worker himself, the idea to volunteer emerged. Asylum seekers are not allowed to work in Austria, but volunteering for humanitarian organizations is possible. With this legal basis, the project “refugee volunteers” was born.

Bernhard and Masoud are now working together in the ambulance service.

“It is very encouraging for both of us, Masoud is very dedicated. We have received nothing but positive feedback from colleagues and patients,” says Bernhard Mürzl.

“My engagement offers me the opportunity to give something back, to use my profession to help others,” says Masoud.

“Besides I get in touch with my hosts here in Austria. Volunteering is the best way out of the isolation asylum seekers often face.”

“Our volunteers say they are proud to work for the Red Cross,” adds the Murau district manager Michael Grabuschnig the exchange.

“The ‘refugee volunteers’ are a success, we are getting more and more requests.” Now Red Cross branches all over Austria are picking up the programme.
Positive images

Rather than falling into the trap of refuting all prejudices and stereotypes of refugees and migrants, the British Red Cross developed a campaign and educational tool kit with Positive images.

The three-year Europe-wide project was implemented in partnership with 14 other National Societies with the aim to promote positive attitudes towards migrants among 12 to 25-year-olds. Positive images has been translated into nine languages, reaching three million people across the continent. The toolkit is still very popular, and is regularly downloaded by teachers and other youth educators from the British Red Cross teaching resources website.

Positive images consists of ten innovative educational ideas including activities, case studies and action planning worksheets, enabling young people, through their community, to make a difference to global issues. The toolkit also incorporates four short films based on the stories of contemporary migrants and supporting PowerPoint presentations. "The tool kit encourages pupils to get out of their seats and work as a team to complete tasks, while also allowing each pupil to think seriously about issues surrounding migration," said Tony Ezziane, secondary school teacher.

Themes in the toolkit include:

- Why people migrate: exploring links between poverty, development and migration.
- Who migrants are: exploring key terms such as refugee, asylum seeker and migrant worker.
- Migrant journeys: exploring journeys and experiences of arriving in a new place.
- Positive Images: considering different perspectives on migration in the media, and the positive contributions of people who migrate to new communities.
Luciana left eastern Ukraine while still pregnant, coming to Kyiv together with her husband. At first, life was very hard for them, as she could not access medical services, and her husband could not find work. A local NGO "East-Kiev-Help" gave them a place to stay, and they received help from other organizations including Ukrainian Red Cross Society. Her baby was born healthy, and today, her husband has a job.

An estimated 1.3 million people have been displaced in Ukraine due to the situation in the east of the country and in Crimea. Ukrainian Red Cross Society has been responding since the onset of the crisis. Over a million more have chosen to take refuge in the Russian Federation, with smaller numbers seeking security in Belarus as well as other countries, where they received help from the Red Cross.
In the summer of 2015, the island of Lesbos in Greece became Europe’s largest gateway for migrants fleeing conflict, insecurity, persecution and poverty. The vast majority arriving on these shores have fled Syria. As the summer wore on, numbers skyrocketed, with an ever greater number of families, women and children making the journey.

The authorities in Greece, and in virtually every country along the main migratory route have struggled to cope, often relying on local volunteers to make up the shortfall in resources. In this photograph, a rescue team made up of Hellenic Red Cross volunteers meets the latest arrivals, offering blankets and first aid to those in need.

Red Cross teams like as this one are present at most points along the journey these migrants have been taking to cross Europe. Often, the needs of such a large number of people have drastically outpaced available resources, leaving local volunteers such as these do the best with whatever they have to hand.
Growing vulnerabilities – Increased action
Doing more, acting differently

Already in 2013, the Spanish Red Cross pointed out how their local branches had changed from being meeting places for first aiders, members and volunteers to full scale social centres providing a wide range of support to poor people in the community.

In the recent survey conducted by the CEU, almost all National Societies across Europe and Central Asia report the same kind of development: Not only are vulnerabilities and needs growing, the nature of requests have changed and become much more complex.

Therefore National Societies are compelled to respond with new programmes, new approaches and often together with new partners.

This has not always been possible as some programmes have been closed or scaled down due to financial difficulties, but the awareness and the need to do more is there. Some National Societies have in fact been able to expand programmes or introduce new ones, often based in the provinces and branches. These assist people applying for social benefits such as medicine aid, vocational training and programmes for children in and out of schools, recognizing

THE NETHERLANDS
In the neighbourhood

The Netherland Red Cross helps citizens “in the neighbourhood” to limit the effects of small and large disasters. Branches map who are most likely to be affected by emergencies, who are most vulnerable, and what would they need. They do this in close cooperation with the communities, using the local knowledge and experiences of the residents and other organizations.

This approach enables the Red Cross to customize prevention activities and mitigate the possible effects of small and big emergencies, especially for those who are less self-reliant.

A number of branches are already using this approach, among them the branch in The Hague saying: “Neighbourhood oriented work has really taught us where we are needed the most. By working with partners such as municipality, police and welfare organizations, we have learned a lot about the different areas in the city and where we really are needed. We realized one part of the city needed our activities and we recently opened a shop/office in that area.”

The local Red Cross branches also works with sports clubs and scout groups, i.e. offering first aid training, enabling coaches and guides to be part of the preparedness plans in the community. A side effect is that many members from the new partners now participate actively in the yearly Red Cross Week.
that parents might not have a lot of time or energy to support them. Other programmes assist migrants (see previous chapter).

**Refusing to ignore people in crisis**

In Bulgaria, political unrest, stalled reforms, an ageing population and increase in retirement age and big influx of migrants have resulted the Bulgarian Red Cross stepping up its traditional programmes and introducing new ones, from support to the homeless to increased advocacy at government level on behalf of the most vulnerable groups.

In the United Kingdom, the British Red Cross launched in 2015 a programme called “Refusing to ignore people in crisis”, which domestically assist asylum seekers as well as people not having enough means to buy food or clothes or pay for heating and housing costs. Food and fuel poverty is on the increase. At the same time, British Red Cross is embarking on a national programme aiming at scaling up the ability to assist people experiencing financial hardship. One innovative approach that the society has embraced is the "Turn2Us" initiative – an online microsite where individuals and families can check their entitlements to over 25 state benefit schemes, search a database of 3,000 charities that offer grants for those in need, and get information and facts on other allowances. One section, titled “Your situation” provides tailored advice for those in difficult situations, such as those who have experienced bereavement, are experiencing illness or injury, or have a disability. The service is also backed up by a free telephone hotline, for those who do not have internet access.

In the United Kingdom the use of food-banks have tripled in recent years, and Red Cross volunteers are helping to collect food for more than 5 million meals every six months, while the Spanish Red Cross is supporting food assistance to more than 1.1 million people.

The pattern is the same in many other countries, from Bulgaria to the Netherlands, and from Slovenia to France stating that “people need more food and material aid in order to pay their energy bills, their rent, their gas, and even their school canteen costs.”

**About the basics**

So while growing vulnerability is about much more than food security, it is also about food – or economic support in order to buy food. Millions of Europeans receive regular food aid from the Red Cross Red Crescent or from other organizations, or buy food and other items at heavily reduced prices from special Red Cross stores.
A number of National Societies report having increased their food assistance in the past few years. Among them, the French Red Cross increasing the number of beneficiaries by 300,000 people in 2014, introducing seven new mobile units – “Red Cross on wheels” – to serve rural areas, providing food and material help. Here the demands have increased among families, who can no longer afford to live in urban areas but who are getting poorer, as job in the countryside are scarce, and transport and energy costs are weighing heavily on their budgets. France was also the first country making it illegal for large supermarkets to throw away edible food as part of a series of measures to cut down on food waste.

In early summer 2015, the country’s national assembly unanimously voted in new laws forcing supermarket chains to donate discarded but still edible food to charities, or allow it to be turned into animal feed, compost or energy.

Montenegro Red Cross organizes drives similar to those in France. In 2014 the National Society distributed more than 40 tons of relief, hygiene and other items nationwide, with many items donated by private companies.

## Situation worse

The Italian Red Cross states that the number of requests from beneficiaries have doubled since 2012, and they are not alone: In the recent survey conducted by the IFRC together with the CEU, 86 per cent of the National Societies reported some deterioration in the humanitarian situation in their country, with more people asking for assistance. Cuts in social welfare, introduction or extension of austerity measures, increasing prices and unemployment as well as the aftermath of disasters and conflicts are all factors adding to the growth in vulnerability.

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**DENMARK**

**Support groups empower vulnerable families**

Every two weeks members of the relatively new “family support groups” meet to dine, do activities and plan for new ones. Since its beginnings in 2012, there are already 39 groups with more than 1,400 members throughout Denmark, supported by local Red Cross volunteers and material developed by the Danish Red Cross.

Statistics shows that within the last five years there has been a remarkable increase in the gap between rich and poor in Denmark, and that five per cent of all children live in relative poverty. They are a particularly vulnerable group, due to both physical conditions and psychological problems in the families, and they are at risk of getting marginalized and becoming school dropouts.

Family support groups target these problems, and by involving the families in planning the activities the groups become successful in empowering the participants, strengthening their social network and inclusion in local communities.
The most vulnerable groups remain the homeless, the unemployed, the working poor, pensioners and elderly, single parent households, migrants and asylum seekers. Georgia Red Cross points out another issue; vulnerable groups struggle to keep up with the rapid pace of new social reforms.

In the Netherlands one in ten families live on or below the poverty line, while 13 million Germans are at risk of poverty. More than a third of single-parent households here were at risk of poverty, while Serbia reports youth unemployment rates almost as high as Greece or Spain, with almost a quarter of the population living in poverty.

**Youth unemployment rising**

Employment activities are still not a typical for National Red Cross or Red Crescent Societies, but all are aware of the financial and social consequences of the high unemployment rates, especially among young people. As is the EU, which has initiated the “Youth Guarantee” and the “Youth Employment Initiative”, supported by considerable budgets.

Some National Societies are engaged in vocational training or part of employment schemes, whereas others like the Slovenian Red Cross try to engage youth as volunteers and some advocate that social volunteering should give merits.

The need to do something is enormous, as a number of countries have staggering statistics for youth unemployment, more than 40 or 50 per cent. In Italy, the youth unemployment rate grew from just above 40 per cent in late 2014 to above 50 per cent in July 2015.
Building resilience

The recent survey by the CEU shows that National Societies are increasingly involving people in designing the programmes. A number of societies mention the need to move from providing “assistance to passive recipients” to “building resilience and social support”, respecting people’s dignity and enabling them to improve their own situation. Among them is the Hellenic Red Cross, assisting people in one of the hardest-hit countries in Europe.

“The most important issue that has to be dealt effectively, is to safeguard the provision of assistance in a holistic and more intensive way to vulnerable groups of population, not focusing exclusively on material assistance provision,” says Zephie Thanassoula, deputy head of the social welfare division of the Hellenic Red Cross.

“We are convinced that other more active measures would have better results in the long run. These activities should be provision of rent subsidies, financial assistance to pay bills, assistance towards orientation to more flexible working schemes, and retaining programs for the long term unemployed.”

Another National Society with long experience in helping poor people in-country agrees and suggests a two-layered approach:

“We should take two aspects into consideration when it comes to analysing the needs of vulnerable people: the economic crisis and the characteristics of the new social structure, which has emerged as a consequence of the crisis,” says

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SPAIN

'Once you feel better'

On 1 September 2015 the Spanish Red Cross intensified their psychosocial support to people affected by the economic crisis. The new nationwide programme is aiming to help those, who have lost self-confidence and any trust in the future. People who used to be breadwinners but now find themselves unable to find a new job and blame themselves for the situation they are in.

“Although the overall economic situation is a bit better than before, there are still many who are badly affected by the crisis,” says Jose Javier Sanchez Espinoza, the deputy director of the Spanish Red Cross social inclusion department.

“Some of them observe the slight progress in society but are still unable to find a job. They blame themselves for not having taken more education or done more training, while they were at work. They have lost faith in the future, also on behalf of their children, and that is really sad to see.”

Psychosocial support (PSS) has been an integrated activity in the Spanish Red Cross for decades. Specialized PSS teams are trained to assist people affected by disasters, work in prisons, and provide support to ill-treated women and victims of trafficking. Through the employment programme, which has reached more than 70,000 participants the past few years, psychosocial support has also been offered to those affected by the economic crisis. Now the new programme for providing psychosocial support for people affected by the crisis has become an entity in itself with special focus and training, and the efforts are being reinforced.
Jose Javier Sanchez Espinoza, deputy director of the Spanish Red Cross’ social inclusion department.

“Therefore, we must still carry out programmes to cover the basic needs of many people, while at the same time we have to design new projects to encourage people who are at risk of exclusion to keep them involved in the construction of the new society, to remain active and to carry on fighting to overcome their socio economic situation.”

Since 2013 there has been a significant increase in the number of beneficiaries assisted by our social services. The majority belongs to the most vulnerable groups of population affected seriously by the current socioeconomic crisis in Greece. Their main request is the provision of material assistance in order to cope with the enormous daily problems. It is estimated that the number of our beneficiaries has increased about 25 per cent.

Hellenic Red Cross

"Providing psychosocial support to those affected by the economic crisis is different from providing support to those who have been exposed to a disaster and other sudden dramatic events. We have some experience and expertise, especially from the big cities, and we are now trying to use these experiences – and gain more knowledge and understanding – to build up standardized training for staff and volunteers," says Espinoza.

The overall purpose is to make people feel better, to motivate and re-activate them.

"Many people naturally say: If I just get a job, I will be fine. We try to turn it around and say: First you get fine, and then it might be easier to find a job. But we also know it is not easy, especially for those who are not young any longer. However, getting better will always benefit them and those around them. Some can get engaged in neighbourhood associations, work as volunteers or sport coaches etc. and that will not only re-activate them but also make them feel as part of the society again."
Manuel is 38 years old. In November 2014 he began his second program at the therapeutic community Villa Maraini, run by the Italian Red Cross. Alcohol and drugs entered his life when he was just 12 years old. Having the "wrong" friends and some problems in his family did the rest. The drugs always represented a "magic bullet" for him: he needed to be accepted by others.

In 2008, Manuel found the strength to start a different path and he entered in Villa Maraini, enjoying the first results of a different life but because of the economic crisis that left him out of work, he took bad old routes already walked. And he is not alone. Based on a sample survey among 19,000 people, the Italian Red Cross estimates that the total amount of drug users is more than 2.33 million people, and that substance abuse in general is on the rise.

Young people are most at risk, partly due to unemployment and boredom, partly because many drug dealers and traffickers belong to "generation 2.0" using the internet and new technologies to market and distribute products at low prices.

Since November 2014, Manuel has not been taking any drugs and has started a new life. He has re-joined the activities with Italian Red Cross and dedicated his time for his passions. "Tennis, biking and the happy eyes of my parents are my strengths today," he says with his generous look, while wearing trousers with plenty of paint stains.

"I'm a painter and I love my job because it is hard for me, it challenges me. I love colours and its pure craftsmanship."
New partnerships and possibilities

Promoting the spirit of volunteerism, broadening the funding opportunities and ensuring their sustainability were among the commitments in the Florence Call for Action, agreed upon by National Societies in June 2014. The survey of 2015 shows significant variability in responses regarding the changes in humanitarian spirit, understood as a level of volunteer involvement and charitable donations since 2013, raising the eternal question of whether crisis generates more or less solidarity.

Some National Societies have noted a substantial decrease in public and governmental funding, whereas others report, that the public is increasingly asking them what they are doing nationally to assist poor people.

![Changes in ‘Humanitarian Spirit’](image)

However, quite a number of them noted improvements in the humanitarian spirit, often in the form of increased donations (Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan), more volunteer engagement (Denmark, Finland and France), or both (Georgia, Montenegro, Serbia, Spain, Tajikistan). For instance, the National Societies of both Spain and Montenegro noted that the economic crisis increased sensitivity and empathy of the better off citizens towards those more affected by it, resulting in more donations and voluntary services. Another National Society, the Danish Red Cross, has had great success organizing a number of public meetings in local communities, where integration and other humanitarian issues have been discussed.

Despite a decrease in government funding, more than half of National Societies state that they have good cooperation with governments, recognizing that the Red Cross Red Crescent and other volunteer organizations can play a larger role implementing social activities and filling gaps.

Quite a number of National Societies point out that they are participating in working groups and committees established by

The humanitarian spirit improved due to an increase in well-being of the population. The humanitarian aid system was strengthened through the participation of domestic private sector as well. The attitude of young people towards humanitarian aid and assistance changed positively.
governments and ministries, and that they are able to raise important issues about refugees, migration and human trafficking as well as poverty related issues, especially the plight of the homeless, and the vulnerability of elders.

For example, The Red Cross of Serbia, together with the Commissioner for Protection of Equality, have recently conducted a research project “Improving Older People’s Access to Human Rights in Serbia”. The research focused on financial losses for elderly people due to different forms of financial abuse (e.g. handling their own funds and income, issues of life long contracts and issues regarding legal capacity) by family members. Furthermore, The Red Cross of Serbia delivered policy recommendations on improving legal protection of elderly and related financial regulations.

The Red Cross of Serbia sees a huge potential in developing cooperation with universities and students in the areas of data collection, delivery and analysis for a variety of projects, as well as partnering with lawyers and law practitioners in providing legal counselling and drafting sound regulations in the matter of financial protection of the elderly.

More fun to raise funds

During the floods in 2014, The Red Cross of Serbia established close cooperation with a number of local and international companies, now considering how these relations can become more sustainable. Working with foundations and local companies is on the increase, although some have well-established relations. Among them the German Red Cross receiving corporate support for a number of local and international projects.

Many National Societies appreciate the importance of innovative volunteering and building partnerships with the private sector in fundraising, having learned...
that many employees find it much more interesting and fun to raise funds than donate funds. Companies are also lending out their employees skills for philanthropic project, e.g. in France and Hungary, whilst other are supporting soup kitchens and food distributions.

New and creative partnerships include those of the Italian Red Cross working with a company to establish a digital learning platform for volunteers, the Red Crescent Society of Azerbaijan establishing new relations with local companies, banks and entertainment venues, and Georgia Red Cross Society organizing training of trainers workshops about psychosocial support in emergencies, with participants from both the private sector and the public sector as well as local communities.

**Solidarity and social buddies**

Italian Red Cross exceeded all expectations when they collected almost 1,100 tons of food and other items during three days working with supermarket chain “Selex”. Volunteers were in the shops explaining to customers about the “Put Solidarity on the Table” project, and encouraging them to donate. The Selex Group added to what the customers had donated, and the Italian Red Cross was able to provide more than 2 million meals and hand out 60,000 packages to people in need.

In Austria “Social Buddy” offers guidance to people who face difficult life situations and social distress such as sudden unemployment. Within the project,
Red Cross volunteers are trained to accompany persons in need so that they can enhance their independence, self-control and resilience to meet new challenges. In total, 340 volunteers will be trained, reaching almost 10,000 beneficiaries directly or indirectly.

The project is funded by Land Rover for a period of four years. The Austrian Red Cross is working closely with Land Rover and is part of Land Rover’s integrated corporate social responsibility strategy and the partnership with the IFRC that aims at “reaching vulnerable people around the world”.

**SERBIA**

**Win-win solutions for sustainable partnership**

The background was tragic: The worst floods in a century hitting Serbia, as well as Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Slovenia, leaving hundreds of thousands of people homeless for months. However, the impressive emergency response also meant a vivid boost to private sector engagement, especially for The Red Cross of Serbia, who received significant donations and volunteer help from large international corporations such as Coca Cola, Google, Cisco, Procter & Gamble, Henkel, Knjaz Miloš, as well as support from local enterprises and individuals. One of the considerable contributions to the reconstruction after the flood was Coca Cola’s donation of over 692,000 euro that was used to renovate 84 school gyms and providing equipment to 281 sites including schools in rural areas.

Although the increased quantity of donations and volunteering were the result of a response to an emergency operation, the National Society stated that it is hard to assess whether such improvement in humanitarian spirit is long lasting or short lived.

Building and developing sustainable cooperation with partners and volunteers requires relentless effort. Milutin Vracevic, the health and care programme Manager of The Red Cross of Serbia says: "There are two things we need to keep in mind. Firstly, we stress the importance of upgrading ourselves becoming knowledgeable in any area we work in. Secondly, we should incentivize people and organizations in various ways to engage in volunteering and partnering for the good cause. We need to nurture the reciprocity approach, so that working with us gives our partners and volunteers something in return and inspires them, creating the win-win situation."
A different Red Cross house

Rebecca and Nicola are sewing curtains while showing Nasrin how to use a sewing machine. Armin, Zeinab and Helen are preparing sandwiches for the visitors. It is a hive of activity in the Red Cross House in Skarholmen just outside Sweden’s capital Stockholm.

Like so many Red Cross branch offices across Europe, the branch in Skårholmen has changed completely in recent years. Whereas the members and volunteers were used to do knitting and other activities to raise money for international aid, they are now focusing on helping refugees and poor EU-migrants in the area.

"It is incredibly important that we reach out to the increasing number of poor people in Sweden," says Farouk Hamzaoui, project leader for the Red Cross House.

"We have to be present where the needy are, and the committed volunteers are very important and they visualize the Red Cross principles and provide hope."

The newly opened Red Cross House in Skärholmen has become a platform for activities such as homework assistance, women’s groups and language café. Visitors can also wash their clothes, get new clothes, take a shower or a rest, talk and get some food. A nurse is present once a week and psychosocial support is also on the schedule.

The Red Cross House in Skärholmen meet a growing need among people in vulnerable situations, among other European migrants, undocumented and newly arrived migrants.
A majority of our programs are jointly developed with civil society, corporate or government. It’s a core principle for setting up an action.

French Red Cross

There is an increase of the number of people, participating in voluntary initiatives, most significant in emergency situations, but also in support to social causes. The number of short-term spontaneous volunteers significantly increased, while long-term volunteers devote more volunteer hours.

Bulgarian Red Cross

Volunteering became hot topic both for government and mass media and one of the consequences is that nowadays government tries to design better/smarter incentives for people to volunteer.

Kazakh Red Crescent

The number of volunteers increased slightly. But nevertheless, volunteer numbers are not enough...

The Red Cross of Serbia

We made additional pledges to government in order to provide assistance to the growing number of poor people. Therefore, in 2014 Slovenia released 600 tons of food items from the State reserves for the Red Cross.

Slovenian Red Cross

We see a tendency towards people wanting to use their professional skills in volunteer work.

Danish Red Cross
The Florence Call for Action document, signed in June 2014 at the end of 9th European Regional Conference of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies by all participants, urges the National Societies to implement their own commitments in the years leading up to the next regional conference in 2018. It also voiced a firm call on governments, corporate sector, partners and other organizations to engage and invest in innovative and long term solutions, bringing hope to those most affected by enhancing their resilience and that of the communities they are living in.

Some National Societies have translated the call for action and shared with members and branches, while others have used as a background when drawing up new national strategies for their work the coming five years.

When surveyed by the IFRC in early 2015, some National Societies replied that it was too early to measure the direct effects of the call for action, but that big parts of it were or would be reflected in existing and new strategies and plans.

An 11-person Implementation Support Group of the call to action, appointed by the European Regional Planning Committee, will support progress and issue progress-reports. It has also defined and explored the methods and tools that will provide National Societies across Europe and Central Asia meaningful support in meeting their commitments by 2018.

Achieving greater levels of resilience in daily life is Europe’s objective and contribution to the One Billion Coalition for Resilience¹, a commitment also made by the IFRC at the Sendai World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in 2015.

The massive influx of refugees and migrant-workers in the summer of 2015 has also spurred many National Societies to scale up activities or begin new ones, and to join the #ProtectHumanity campaign.

Florence Call for Action
– Act Differently!

The Florence Call for Action document, signed by participants of 9th European Regional Conference of the IFRC in June 2014, urges National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies to Act Differently and implement their own commitments in the years leading up to the next regional conference in 2018. It also voiced a call to governments, corporate sector, partners and other organizations to invest in innovative and long-term solutions, to enhance individual and community-level resilience.

Guided by our Fundamental Principles and humanitarian values which should be promoted, emphasized, and be strictly adhered to at all times and under all circumstances,

Recalling that more people are falling below the poverty line, the gap between rich and poor is growing, savings and salaries are being eroded, and more and more “working poor” are turning to aid agencies, vulnerable groups such as migrants are exposed to further discrimination, marginalization and violence,

Understanding that in Europe and Central Asia the humanitarian consequences of the economic crisis will affect people for decades to come, in varying ways and impact in different countries,

Acknowledging that some National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies have expanded and adjusted their programmes to meet growing needs and reach new groups of vulnerable people, others have realised the need to adapt but have not yet been able to mobilize the resources required to respond to the changing needs.

Committed not only to think differently but also to act differently in finding lasting solutions for and with the people affected by the crisis.

We, the National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies of Europe and Central Asia, gathered in Florence on 4–6 June 2014, call on governments, corporate sector, partners and other organizations to engage with us and invest in innovative and long term solutions to turn the tide of the crisis and bring hope to those most affected.

As auxiliary to public authorities, National Societies call on their respective governments and parliamentarians to demonstrate leadership and collaborate with us in order to:

- Secure social welfare for vulnerable people.
- Shift from the emergency response mentality to an investment approach with sustainable funding that focuses on securing livelihoods.
- Fulfil their commitments and obligations to meet the right to adequate food by enabling people in need to access affordable food at all times, in a dignified manner, and paying particular attention to nutrition needs.
- Promote food management education and take action to reduce food waste across Europe and Central Asia.
- Promote humanitarian education, including through formal curricula to be agreed with relevant Ministries.
- Ensure legislative measures that further recognize, promote and protect volunteers, and safeguard their value in meeting humanitarian needs and contributing to social capital.
- Secure access for all to information as a human right, especially in a digital environment.

Specifically in regard to migrants

- Implement Resolution n°3 of the 31\textsuperscript{st} International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent emphasizing the importance of dignity, respect for diversity, and social inclusion for migrants.
- Ensure everyone, especially people fleeing conflict and insecurity, has unhindered access to basic human rights, in particular the right to protection, health care, education and social services, at any phase of their journey.
- Recognize the humanitarian mandate of National Societies of Europe and Central Asia in providing principled humanitarian assistance to migrants.
- Stop labelling migrants as “illegal”. 
Highlight the positive contribution that migrants make to respective countries socially, economically, culturally and demographically; and equally recognize the substantial contribution of migrants to their country of origin, for example through remittances which far exceed the value of development aid and cooperation funds spent annually.

Re-engage in effective cooperation between countries of origin, transit and destination, with a priority given to ensuring humanitarian protection of migrants and tackling human trafficking.

To the corporate sector

- Take steps to support the integration of migrants and ensure they are valued and respected on equal terms with other employees and in this way preserve the value that migrants bring to the domestic and global economies and the society.
- Respond to the opportunity to make a visible contribution to society by engaging in food management initiatives that help to significantly reduce waste and support the vulnerable communities.
- Embrace the shared value in working collaboratively with us on initiatives that will help build resilient and healthy communities, recognizing that we are a unique global-local partner that offers many opportunities to contribute to humanitarian action.
- Embrace the opportunity to collaborate with us in expanding the use of modern technologies in support of humanitarian activities.
- Recognize the added value of volunteering for employees and employers, and support volunteering commitments by facilitating volunteers in achieving an appropriate life balance.

To communities

- Work with us to ensure social inclusion and fight against all forms of discrimination.
- Promote good nutrition practices and reduce food waste.
- Engage with the Red Cross Red Crescent to express your solidarity, and volunteer as an agent of change.
- Through volunteering, build your competences and enrich your experience for future career development.

To National Societies

- Urge National Societies of Europe and Central Asia to actively work on coordinated appeals meant to enhance their capacities in responding and adapting to increasing needs;
- Empower their volunteers by valuing their specific skills and providing certified trainings that contribute to volunteers personal and professional development.
- Lower internal barriers such as membership fees or mandatory time commitment,
- Foster integrated approach to scale up programmes based on data and evidence,
- Invest in new technologies to be more efficient in engaging communities and scale up humanitarian services,
- Engage with communities, including migrants, as partners and full actors of our humanitarian mission.
- Engage in robust advocacy on migrant protection and the promotion of diversity.
- Implement youth-related policies and decisions, ensure youth participation and contribution are effectively integrated into decision-making mechanisms, and promote youth engagement especially through new technologies.
- Strive towards meeting diversity goals, at all levels of National Societies and the IFRC with particular focus on nationality, age and gender.
- Tackle social conditions and determinants that frequently drive health-related vulnerabilities.
- Encourage National Societies to take full advantage of the wealth of knowledge and good practices presented and shared during the European Conference in Florence.
The **Fundamental Principles** of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement

**Humanity** The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, born of a desire to bring assistance without discrimination to the wounded on the battlefield, endeavours, in its international and national capacity, to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found. Its purpose is to protect life and health and to ensure respect for the human being. It promotes mutual understanding, friendship, cooperation and lasting peace amongst all peoples.

**Impartiality** It makes no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. It endeavours to relieve the suffering of individuals, being guided solely by their needs, and to give priority to the most urgent cases of distress.

**Neutrality** In order to enjoy the confidence of all, the Movement may not take sides in hostilities or engage at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.

**Independence** The Movement is independent. The National Societies, while auxiliaries in the humanitarian services of their governments and subject to the laws of their respective countries, must always maintain their autonomy so that they may be able at all times to act in accordance with the principles of the Movement.

**Voluntary service** It is a voluntary relief movement not prompted in any manner by desire for gain.

**Unity** There can be only one Red Cross or Red Crescent Society in any one country. It must be open to all. It must carry on its humanitarian work throughout its territory.

**Universality** The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, in which all societies have equal status and share equal responsibilities and duties in helping each other, is worldwide.
The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) is the world’s largest volunteer-based humanitarian network. With our 190 member National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies worldwide, we are in every community reaching 160.7 million people annually through long-term services and development programmes, as well as 110 million people through disaster response and early recovery programmes. We act before, during and after disasters and health emergencies to meet the needs and improve the lives of vulnerable people. We do so with impartiality as to nationality, race, gender, religious beliefs, class and political opinions.

Guided by Strategy 2020 – our collective plan of action to tackle the major humanitarian and development challenges of this decade – we are committed to saving lives and changing minds.

Our strength lies in our volunteer network, our community-based expertise and our independence and neutrality. We work to improve humanitarian standards, as partners in development, and in response to disasters. We persuade decision-makers to act at all times in the interests of vulnerable people. The result: we enable healthy and safe communities, reduce vulnerabilities, strengthen resilience and foster a culture of peace around the world.