



Photo © Amy Murrell, taken on Lesvos Island, February 2016

## CASE STUDIES REPORT

### REDR UK REFUGEE RESPONSE PROJECT

**redr**uk  
people and skills for disaster relief

STANLEY THOMAS  
JOHNSON FOUNDATION

[www.redr.org.uk](http://www.redr.org.uk)  
Registered Charity Number: 1079752  
A company limited by guarantee,  
registered in England & Wales. Number: 392965

## **Table of Contents**

Introduction.....	3
Dina Adam, Starfish Foundation Lesvos.....	9
Matty Gladstone, Help Refugees Lesvos.....	12
Nico Stevens, Help Refugees Thessaloniki.....	13
Edvard Homa, Croatian Red Cross.....	14
Lissett Menendez Fermoselle, Refugee Aid Serbia.....	21
Nenad Popovic, Refugee Aid Serbia.....	23

## INTRODUCTION

BY KATIE ROBERTSON AND ISAAC SNOW

RedR UK has been training volunteers involved in responding to the European refugee crisis since September 2015. A visible need for training and support among those individuals responding early in the crisis, and a huge desire from RedR's staff to use our experience and expertise to provide this led to the development and delivery of three one-day courses in London and Cardiff in September and October 2015. Resourced through staff fundraising and pro bono time from our trainers and colleagues at InterHealth, these initial workshops were heavily subscribed and well received.

After the success of the first workshops, RedR UK received funding from the Humanitarian Leadership Academy (HLA)<sup>1</sup> in January 2016 to expand the course into a two-day programme, and to deliver this in four key locations across the response: London, Calais, Belgrade and Lesbos. Subsequently, further support was received from HLA for an additional 8 courses, with training now also taking place in additional locations along the Balkan route, including Slovenia, Macedonia and Croatia.

Simultaneously, RedR UK received funding from the Stanley Thomas Johnson Foundation (STJF)<sup>2</sup>, to deliver ten two-day European refugee response workshops in key locations, and a coordination workshop in London to identify and share lessons learnt. In total, and with the combined support of HLA and STJF, RedR UK was able to deliver a total of 26 courses in seven different countries, providing 424 volunteers and aid workers with vital skills in refugee response.

Many of the workshop participants came from grassroots voluntary groups and had no prior humanitarian experience. These groups were among the first to react to the crisis, in many instances commencing operations before the large, established humanitarian agencies were able to begin implementation. A disconnect between these new groups and the established humanitarian sector has been common throughout the crisis, although progress has been made in terms of a coordinated response<sup>3</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup> The Humanitarian Leadership Academy is an initiative set up to train aid workers  
<http://www.humanitarianleadershipacademy.org/about-us/>

<sup>2</sup> Stanley Thomas Johnson Foundation is a foundation that provides financial support to empower project  
<http://www.johnsonstiftung.ch/en/index.php>

<sup>3</sup> See: ODI Humanitarian Exchange Special Issue 67: Refugees and Vulnerable Migrants in Europe  
<http://odihpn.org/magazine/refugees-vulnerable-migrants-europe/>

In an effort to reflect on this progress and to build on it for a continued response, RedR UK arranged a 'Coordination Workshop' on October 5<sup>th</sup> 2016. This workshop brought together representatives from INGOs and grassroots voluntary groups working in Calais<sup>4</sup>, who discussed their experiences of coordination, the challenges that they have faced, and the benefits of working together. The diversity of the panel allowed for an interesting discussion, where representatives of the established humanitarian system and the new grassroots movement were able to share knowledge and constructively criticise past mistakes in order to draw out learning.

The purpose of this report is to further scrutinise issues of coordination and to address the link between grassroots voluntary groups and humanitarian agencies, in an effort to build a better response to the crisis. We have collected a selection of case studies from aid workers and volunteers across Europe, which serve to identify the commonality of challenges to coordination and highlight good practice for the ongoing response.

### Factors that prevented coordination

Coordination is a long-standing challenge to humanitarian response. It is complex, time-consuming and requires strong and effective leadership. In the context of European Refugee Response, these ongoing challenges were met by other, new and unexpected ones. The volume and visibility of voluntary groups as well as the severity of the crisis, has put the whole sector under the microscope, and accentuated the challenges that humanitarian workers regularly face.

One challenge highlighted in the case studies is the disparity of experience between actors in the traditional humanitarian system, and the new and emerging grassroots movements. The latter often consisted of those who had a strong understanding of the local context yet lacked humanitarian experience, whereas the former were organisations that have significant experience in humanitarian response yet did not necessarily have knowledge of the local context, as humanitarian needs emerged in locations not traditionally associated with the work of the sector.

As first responders, members of grassroots groups were initially frustrated as they felt they received little support from large humanitarian organisations, especially given the latter's relative wealth of resources<sup>5</sup>. Dina Adam, founder of the Starfish Foundation in Lesvos, exhibits such frustrations when she says, "The delayed response by the government and professional

---

<sup>4</sup> Communications Consultant, Imogen Wall facilitated this workshop. Philli Boyle (Calais Manager for Help Refugees), Sara Pantuliano (Managing Director of the Overseas Development Institute), Folkert Jongma (Former Field Coordinator for Solidarités International in Calais), Jaz O'Hara (Founder of The Worldwide Tribe), and Sue Jex (Co-Founder of Care4Calais)

<sup>5</sup> Philli Boyle, RedR Coordination Workshop: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nH7goYdBneA>

humanitarian agencies forced the locals and volunteers to take the situation into their own hands by providing the basics”<sup>6</sup>.

Offering an alternative perspective, Folkert Jongsma, former Field Coordinator for Solidarités International in Calais, explained that INGOs are bound to the humanitarian principles and follow these to hold themselves accountable to beneficiaries<sup>7</sup>. For this reason, they must first formulate plans that are aligned to the Core Humanitarian Principles before responding to crises. As well as this, INGOs in Calais were restricted by the political environment and had to negotiate with authorities before implementing their response. They were also concerned that being too critical of the authorities would cause them to lose their access to affected populations.

Another challenge to coordination is the fact that all organisations are dependent on funding and therefore have a tendency to focus on the short term results of their response, rather than the long term solutions. This is an issue that is not unique to the Europe refugee crisis, but one that was particularly poignant as funding was difficult to source from traditional channels and as project resources have been difficult to maintain, in terms of both financing and staffing. It has been attributed to the policies of political leaders and local councillors who do not want refugees to settle for long periods of time, so prevent organisations from establishing solid infrastructures, and therefore disrupt the response. The demolition of the Calais camp is an example of such policy.

Another major obstacle that prevented a coordinated response was communication. As evidenced at the Coordination Workshop, grassroots organisations struggled to get in touch with established humanitarian agencies when seeking advice and support early in the response. In addition, voluntary groups found that they did not have the capacity to regularly attend meetings as their human resources were already stretched. This is an issue faced in many emergencies but one which was exacerbated in this situation due to the nature of the responders: there was often a high rate of turn over amongst volunteers which meant that it was more complicated to build the relationships that facilitate positive communication. Furthermore, the grassroots organisations were frequently under-resourced making it difficult to spare people to attend meetings. There was also pressure on volunteers to spend time in the immediate response due to the nature of their funding and operational model, with many of their supporters being attracted by the idea that all of their support was going directly to the affected people, rather than being spent in tasks or costs that were seen as administrative.

---

<sup>6</sup> Dina Adam, p. 6

<sup>7</sup> Folkert Jongsma, RedR Coordination Workshop: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nH7goYdBneA>

## Factors that led to coordination

The case studies demonstrate that coordination relied heavily on good communication. This was made easier once organisations had their own representatives who could attend weekly meetings with other organisational representatives, and discuss a coordinated strategy. While high turnover is common across humanitarian response, this was exacerbated in this response by the very high proportion of volunteers responding part time, or for very short periods.

Once established, coordination meetings provide a forum to share knowledge and expertise. Lissett Menendez Feroselle effectively illustrates this: “There were coordination meetings and daily talks held to lower tensions and improve working relationships, organisations had to give some things up to create a balance and to continue working together”<sup>8</sup>. These meetings also allowed for shared learning as recently formed grassroots organisations could be guided by long established humanitarian agencies. Dina Adam says that the experience of the UNHCR helped to guide her newly formed NGO, Starfish Foundation: “Attending the weekly meetings that the UNHCR organised and still organises and also sharing information among all actors concerned...resulted in improved cooperation”<sup>9</sup>.

This benefit was highlighted during the Coordination Workshop, by Philli Boyle of Help Refugees, who noted how all the organisations present in Calais had been working together ahead of the camp closure. Key messages had been developed jointly in order to ensure the camp residents received a clear and consistent series of information and advice. This stands in contrast to the last round of evictions, where miscommunication between those involved led to chaos and confusion.

Once coordination was implemented, it allowed organisations to make sure that aid was more efficient and appropriate to need. This was because organisations could ensure that there was an effective division of labour. For example, with distribution, organisations could avoid duplication of items. Lissett Menendez Feroselle shows this in her case study from Serbia, where her organisation collaborated with a larger NGO, ADRA, in an effort to ensure that every refugee received an equal amount from food distributions: “A meeting was held to learn about their plans and after letting them know all the problems it creates to have two different meals on the same day”<sup>10</sup>.

Further to this, there were also benefits of coordinating with organisations that had legal connections to the government. This is demonstrated by Nico Stevens’ case study. In

---

<sup>8</sup> Lissett Menendez Feroselle, Refugee Aid Serbia p.22

<sup>9</sup> Dina Adam, Starfish Foundation, p. 8

<sup>10</sup> Lissett Menendez Feroselle, Refugee Aid Serbia, p.23

Thessaloniki, Intervolve<sup>11</sup> has a good connection to the Greek Ministry of Migration, which allows them access to the Military-run camps. Help Refugees' relationship with Intervolve meant they were also granted access, therefore increasing the number of service providers available to those in the camps: "The constantly changing context in these camps means that camps move around a lot, so Intervolve's close relationship with the ministry allows us access to information ahead of time, and to plan accordingly"<sup>12</sup>. Edvard Homa's case study enforces this. In Croatia, the Croatian Red Cross was the Crisis Coordinator which meant it could liaise with the government and relay information to other organisations involved in the response<sup>13</sup>.

Coordination also allowed for organisations to share resources. For example, Nico Stevens notes that some grassroots organisations did not have access to national volunteers when they first began their projects. However, by having a positive relationship with large NNGOs they were able to share their volunteers. Edvard Homa supports this; he discusses how organisations in Croatia coordinated the volunteers working at the reception centres to ensure there were always enough volunteers to provide for refugees arriving to the country: "Another benefit of coordination was that each organisation was able to provide volunteers to the reception centres which ensured each reception centre had enough volunteers who could provide humanitarian assistance, and that volunteers were never over-worked or tired"<sup>14</sup>.

### Identified learning

The learning from the Coordination Workshop and the case studies below demonstrates the strengths of both parts of this response. While grassroots organisations are able to mobilise quickly and rapidly change their response priorities, established humanitarian agencies can draw on their years of experience to promote a response that is not only consistent, but also in line with the core humanitarian principles, and focused on the needs of beneficiaries. The examples and experiences shared effectively demonstrate the importance of coordination, and how collaborative working creates a more efficient, effective and appropriate response. The more focused the response is, the more likely individuals are to work together effectively.

Key learning is centred on the development of regular communication and, wherever possible, clear communication channels. While challenging in the context of high turnover, particularly among volunteer groups, and difficult early in a response when roles are not yet clearly defined, this formed the basis of all successful coordination activities. Regular meetings between actors are advised throughout the ongoing response.

---

<sup>11</sup> Intervolve is Greek charity responding to the refugee crisis in Thessaloniki, Northern Greece

<http://idomenivolunteers.info/project/intervolve/>

<sup>12</sup> Nico Stevens, Help Refugees Thessaloniki, p.13

<sup>13</sup> Edvard Homa, Croatian Red Cross p.18

<sup>14</sup> Edvard Homa, Croatian Red Cross p. 19

Organisations on both ends of the spectrum are encouraged to consider the strengths of their own operating model, and that of other actors in the response. By combining the strengths of the established humanitarian architecture with the strengths and scale of the volunteer-led grassroots response, the humanitarian imperative can be better met, contributing towards the improvement of refugees and asylum seekers livelihoods and personal well-being.

*Disclaimer: The views expressed in these case studies are quotes or reports from individuals' experiences and do not necessarily represent the views of their organisations, or those of RedR UK.*



## DINA ADAM: OFFICE MANAGER, STARFISH FOUNDATION, LESVOS

For several years the island of Lesvos (Greece) has experienced sporadic arrivals of refugees coming by boat from the shores of Turkey, mainly from Afghanistan.

In November 2014 the situation started to change, especially in the small village of Molyvos. The village is located on the North of Lesvos and only six miles away from the Turkish coast. The number of refugees arriving, mostly from Syria, was steadily increasing.



*Photo by Starfish Foundation volunteer*

By spring 2015, the flow of refugees arriving on the North coast of Lesvos caught everyone unprepared. Hundreds of people were coming each day. Scenes of people walking by foot to the capital of the island, which is 60km away, or sleeping in the streets of Molyvos waiting for some information or direction, became front-page news around the world.

The delayed response by the government and professional humanitarian agencies forced the locals and volunteers to take the situation into their own hands by providing the basics; food, water and dry clothes. A need arose for the situation to be managed and because of that, Starfish Foundation was formed.

In September 2015 a temporary shelter was established at the parking lot of OXY nightclub, outside of the village of Molyvos, where approximately 130,000 people were helped until the end of December 2015. With the help of the following International and Greek humanitarian agencies, Starfish Foundation was able to establish a very well-organised and operational transit camp.

- MSF (Médecins Sans Frontières) - Brought in the SAS program of rescue boats collaborating also with Greenpeace. Assisted the transportation of the refugees to the capital of the island, where the MORIA camp is situated.
- UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) - Provided tents for the shelters, Non Food Items plus funds for the transportation of the refugees. Organised weekly meetings with updates for all the actors concerned.
- IRC (International Rescue Committee) - Funded grassroots organisations, contributed towards the transportation of the refugees. Created a transit camp which was officially opened on 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2016 so the temporary camp OXY, which Starfish Foundation operated, was closed.
- International Red Cross and Greek Red Cross - Helped by providing translators and uniting families. Organised several first aid and psychological seminars for volunteers and helped them to cope with the traumatic situation.
- WAHA (Women and Health Alliance International) – Provided medicines and doctors not only for the refugees but sometime offered medical assistance among the volunteers and even the management in acute situations.



*Photo by Starfish Foundation volunteer*

The cooperation among the actors involved was straightforward. There was a tendency established humanitarian agencies to have the attitude of ‘I know better because of my experience having been involved in other refugee crises around the world’, which was frustrating.

Attending the weekly meetings that the UNHCR organised and still organises and also sharing information among all actors concerned and having joint discussions about how to handle the situation resulted in improved cooperation, which was a positive development.



*Photo by Starfish Foundation volunteer*

When grassroots organisations, like Starfish Foundation, are guided and supported by NGOs adequately, the potential of a successful response to an emergency situation is massive. This is because grassroots organisations utilise collective action from the local level. The knowledge of the local context is also an advantage.

Starfish Foundation is an example of this. A group of local people stepped in to address an urgent situation which was unfolding in front of their eyes. They responded rapidly and efficiently, and with great versatility, well before the arrivals of the International NGOs.

An important input in this refugee crisis was not only from the volunteers but also from the donors from all over the world who embraced our call for help. It would have been impossible for Starfish Foundation to assist and provide the support to the needy without their contribution.

## MATTY GLADSTONE, PROGRAMS OFFICER, HELP REFUGEES: LESVOS

The Greek islands were struggling to feed new arrivals of refugees. Huge numbers were arriving on Lesvos every day. We received a message from Sam, who runs Skipchen<sup>15</sup>, asking how he could help. Bristol Skipchen was set up to try to combat food wastage in the UK: they take huge amounts of food that's destined to be thrown away and distribute it to homeless people.

We bought an old police van for him and funded the conversion to make it into a portable kitchen, and he gathered a team of six volunteers and drove to Lesvos. They set up a welcome café for refugees, providing a warm space to dry off after the journey, and handing out food, blankets and hot chocolate through the night.

Later they set up in the port in Athens, providing one free and nutritious meal a day to the 5,000 refugees camped there for some months. Since that camp has been closed down, the Skipchen (also known as Khora<sup>16</sup>) team have been based in Athens. They are just about to open their new community centre for refugees – we have funded the renovation of the building, which will offer food, a medical centre with first aid response and a midwife, a classroom and play area, and a women's centre. It is a five-floor building in the centre of the city, and is very much needed. We are proud to have been able to help this incredible project.

The challenges have been the cash economy and capital control in Greece. The benefits have been mutual inspiration, and being able to help more people together than we could apart.

---

<sup>15</sup> Bristol Skipchen is an organisation that reuses food waste <https://thebristolskipchen.wordpress.com/>

<sup>16</sup> Khora is a grassroots cooperative foundation established in Athens, Greece <http://www.khora-athens.org/organisation/>

## NICO STEVENS: HEAD OF PROJECTS, HELP REFUGEES, THESSALONIKI

Before the military camps were set up in Greece, there were thousands of people stranded in Idomeni, near the Macedonian border, with little infrastructure set up to help them. Intervolve was one of the only registered Greek associations on the ground and therefore had the networks and access for operating the Non-Food Item (NFI) distribution. When Idomeni was at the highest point of the crisis, we partnered with them and started directing volunteers and funds directly to them.

A long-term volunteer (a refugee who had worked in the humanitarian sector in his home country) was coordinating funds and goods across many grassroots groups in Idomeni. Our projects team met him early on and he put us in touch with the head of Intervolve. They were part of a very small group of volunteers working together at the beginning, so already had a close relationship.

Our projects team quickly understood the vital work that Intervolve were doing, and offered to support them. They became our implementing partners - so we began to fund their work, in a grant-giving capacity. We enabled them to provide much-needed relief in Idomeni before the residents there were relocated to other camps.

When Idomeni got evacuated, refugees were moved to military-run camps, and because Intervolve has a relationship with the Greek Ministry of Migration, it has meant that we have access to those camps. We quickly sent one of our long-term volunteers out from Dunkirk to become camp manager for one of the camps they ran, and we have funded the takeover of a warehouse from which to distribute goods and food, and enable them to respond to an emergency situation.

They have a structure that we can work within, similar to our partnership with L'Auberge des Migrants<sup>17</sup> in Calais. The constantly changing context in these camps means that camps move around a lot, so Intervolve's close relationship with the ministry allows us access to information ahead of time, and plan accordingly. Intervolve also has networks of local volunteers that we, as a UK charity, would not otherwise have had access to.

The main challenge has been the nature of the Greek economy - capital control and the cash economy can make costs and expenses difficult to organise on a large scale.

---

<sup>17</sup> L'Auberge des Migrants is a grassroots voluntary group set up in response to the crisis in Calais <https://www.laubergedesmigrants.fr/>

## EDVARD HOMA: HEAD OF THE EMERGENCY RESPONSE TEAM, CROATIAN RED CROSS

### Migration Crisis

*\*Numbers are expressed in ca.*

<b>People on the Move</b>	Place	Europe – Croatia: reception and transit center in Opatovac and Slavonski Brod
	Date	Starts 15/09/2015 *Ends 15/04/2016
	The number of people who have passed the route	*650,000 people
	Aid distributed by the Croatian Red Cross	*Food – 615 tonnes *Water – 520,000 litres *Clothes – 81 tonnes *Blankets – 175,000 pieces
	Some of the activities of the Croatian Red Cross	*Restoring Family Links – 1,600 cases *Psychosocial support – 88,000 supports

On the 15<sup>th</sup> of September 2015, the Government of Hungary closed its border with the intention of blocking the passage of migrants that were heading further towards the central nations of the EU. At the same time, the migrants had begun to seek a new route to central European countries. Therefore, they were moving towards Croatia, which, with the then government in power, allowed an open door policy whereby migrants could pass through Croatia's territory. The first migrants arrived on Croatian soil on the night of the 15<sup>th</sup> September, 2015. Since then, the Croatian government has kept control of the amount of people passing through the country by establishing a reception centre where all migrants passing through Croatia must register. This decision means that each organisation and agency could focus their work on the points of transit, as well as the reception centre itself. There has been a steady flow of migrants arriving in Croatia since September 2015, therefore aid agencies have a great deal to think about in terms of cost and also in terms of the efficient deployment of resources, in order to maintain a sustainable system with long-term solutions.

Since the first reception centre was established, there have been a number more added across the country (in Tovarnik, Beli Manastir, Opatovac and finally in Slavonski Brod) with agencies also providing migrants with accommodation at the centres. To start with, all centres were under

the direct administration of the Ministry of Interior, so humanitarian agencies needed to obtain a licence to work inside the centres. Due to the obvious need for aid, the government gave the Red Cross and other humanitarian organisations permission to provide aid at reception centres.



*Photo by Edvard Homa*

During the course of the project, more than 20 different organisations have participated and offered support for migrants at the reception centres.

The table below demonstrates all of the organisations that were involved, and the type of support that they provided (this is not including the organisations that offered short-term assistance):

Organisations		Roles
<b>Intergovernmental organisations</b>		
1	IOM	shelter and tracking migration flows
2	UNICEF	care for children
3	UNHCR	shelter and NFI, information on legal issues - asylum
<b>Non-governmental organisations</b>		
4	Red Cross	distribution (clothing and footwear, NFI, food, hygiene kit), restoring family links, psychosocial support, coordination of aid organisations, ERT (Emergency Response Team), volunteers, storehouse, logistics, employment of local public works
5	Save the Children	care for children
6	MAGNA	medical care for children
7	Greenpace	charging stations for mobile phones
8	Center for Peace Studies	volunteers
9	MSF	general medical care
10	Inter-european Human Aid Association	distribution of clothing and footwear
11	RODA - Parents in Action	care for mothers with babies
12	Volunteer center Osijek	volunteers
13	Volunteer center Slavonski Brod	volunteers
14	Youth Peace Group Danube	volunteers
15	Informative Legal Centre	information on legal issues
16	Croatian Law Centre	information on legal issues
<b>Faith-based organisations</b>		
17	ADRA	charging stations for mobile phones, clothing
18	Baptist Churches Association	volunteers
19	Caritas	ensuring hot drink
20	Jesuit Refugee Service	volunteers
21	Samaritan's Purse	wash, hygiene kit



After the Republic of Hungary closed its border with Serbia in an effort to prevent migrants passing through the country, the Government of the Republic of Croatia and the Ministry of the Interior called the Croatian Red Cross (CRC) representatives together, with other NGO representatives to a meeting. At this meeting they discussed how to deliver a timely and appropriate response to migrants arriving in the country. The crisis headquarters of the Croatian government appointed the Red Cross as the coordinator of all the humanitarian organisations who wanted to provide aid to migrants.

The government's decision was not surprising, because the Croatian Red Cross has had a long relationship with the government and the Ministry of Interior, since the integration of asylum seekers and returnee families after the Croatia war. As well as this, during the great floods that hit the Balkans in 2014, the Croatian Red Cross acted as one of the leading humanitarian agencies, dispensing approximately 6.5 million kunas ( approximately 778,620 GBP), to the almost 10,000 injured people, as an act of direct financial assistance. The CRC also offered psychosocial support to all victims and volunteers, and reconstruction and rehabilitation to the affected flooded areas, providing hot meals to all the victims and volunteers, and cleaning the flooded homes of victims.



*Photo by Edvard Homa*

In line with the government's decision, the Red Cross was the only NGO that had the right to attend government level meetings. At these meetings, there were also the representatives of the

Ministry of Interior, Croatian Army, the Ministry of Health, National Protection and Rescue Directorate (the civil protection), the representatives of the fire department and of the Croatian Railways, who provided migrants with free transport.

National operational meetings that were led by the Ministry of the Interior were mostly held every 12 hours (at 8 am and 8 pm), after which the Red Cross organised the coordination of humanitarian organisations and passed on all the relevant information from the National operational meetings. When an emergency occurred, these meetings were held immediately to solve the problem as soon as possible and to assess each organisation's available resources.

At the Coordination meetings, organisations also presented their work and the challenges that they had faced during the course of their work in the reception centres. During the meetings, every effort was made to solve the challenges that had been raised. It is important to stress that there were no taboo subjects.

There were a lot of coordination problems during organisations' work – these are problems we were able to solve mutually, and without involving the civil defence, police or the military, because they were mostly points of concern on the humanitarian standards and assistance, rather than technical issues.



*Photo by Edvard Homa*

These coordination meetings have helped to solve a lot of the challenges and problems we have faced. As well as this, they have helped us to avoid replicating humanitarian aid unnecessarily. For example, with the unnecessary accumulation of items received from donations that could not be used for distribution.

Another benefit of coordination was that each organisation was able to provide volunteers to the reception centres which ensured each reception centre had enough volunteers who could provide humanitarian assistance, and that volunteers were never over-worked or tired. Through

coordination, we also ensured that each organisation had sufficient time to provide workshops and training for volunteers and staff.

By working in coordination, each organisation was also able to take on its own activities and set of responsibilities. This allowed us to divide the workload within the reception centres, and to ensure we contributed to improving the migrants' situation. We were also able to recognise potential areas of improvement. The improvement of the conditions in the centres occurred very quickly, thanks to our division of labour.

Our coordinated work allowed us to implement profound changes in the reception centres, that were originally controlled by the police.

## CHALLENGES

At first, because the Red Cross was the only organisation to attend national meetings at the crisis headquarter centre, there was a great sense of mistrust towards us. However such notions were quickly eliminated after people could see that the data and information we obtained from the crisis headquarter meetings were shared with all of our partners during the coordination meetings.

Other difficulties included the fact that there were a large number of organisations with different mandates and principles working in the same area. This made it difficult for us to coordinate our actions together and to also set out priorities during our joint participatory work. Working together was easier, because we all had one common target: 'co-ordinated humanitarian assistance to migrants', and no desire to please donors or promote our own work.

One of the biggest issues came from organisations that had prior experience of working with refugees and migrants: these organisations wanted to apply their experiences from areas outside of the European Union. Some of these ideas were not possible to implement due to various and strict legal regulations in the EU (e.g. prescription and distribution of some drugs, distribution of certain dairy foodstuffs for which specific storage conditions must be met, preparation of hot meals and kitchen sanitation, existing protocol for the treatment of unaccompanied minors, etc.)

Among the organisations there were also large UN agencies, which, although they were within the system of coordination in power, were in some way subordinate to the Red Cross. However, in practice there were virtually no problems in this sense: initially thanks to each of the representatives present, and also because of the long-term mutual cooperation during various humanitarian programs with the UN, in the Republic of Croatia.

Once each organisation had a representative who could discuss their issues at the coordination meetings, we found the problems were easily resolved. It is very important when organisations put forward individuals as their coordinators / representatives at the coordination meetings, because it allows us to resolve issues easily.

In a way, donors have posed a challenge to coordination. For, organisations have received donations, which the donors have had to recognise, and the needs were not the same as those

initially requested by the organisations. Thus, we've encountered small pressures when finding organisations to implement the greater scope of the duties at the reception centre - and not just for their own organisation. Such behaviour was to be expected, because some of the organisations involved have been forced to cancel contracts with their employees to save money. Therefore, the leaders of some organisations have found themselves between decisions that are certainly not popular, such as the termination of employment contracts, the return of donations, and so on.

The greatest development of coordinated activities has been seen when creating large winter reception and transit centres in Slavonski Brod; the state involved all of the humanitarian organisations in the construction of the centres. Because of this we were able to provide direct practical suggestions that made the centres humane, and we were also able to provide migrants with accommodation.

Our coordination and positive relationship with the government allowed us to move beyond our roles as humanitarian service providers, demonstrated in the fact that the government relied on us when constructing and equipping the reception centres. Organisations have been involved in all aspects of the centre - with our focus being the overall care of the migrants.

Through the collaboration of organisations and cooperation of the Croatian government, we have developed a sustainable system of donations and volunteer work, ensuring that migrants were receiving necessities (transport, accommodation with sanitary facilities, food, clothing, footwear, and medical, legal and psychosocial care).

## LISSETT MENENDEZ FERMOSELLE, OPERATIONS MANAGER, REFUGEE AID SERBIA

In Belgrade, hundreds of refugees are stranded on a daily basis in the city's parks. Some are on their way to Hungary to continue their journey, others have run out of money and are waiting for more to continue, others are looking for the right smuggler to help them cross the border - and then there are those that have been pushed back by the Hungarian authorities.

In February 2015, Refugee Aid Serbia (RAS) identified the need for warm, cooked meals and fresh fruit as there was no other organisation providing these, and there was a huge need especially due to weather (cold and wet). RAS looked for the best way of doing this, as we needed to find the right spot and organise a system to have a safe and effective distribution.

After different meetings and searching on the ground for the best spot, talks with Info Park<sup>18</sup> started and we agreed to use their hut as a distribution point and decided that RAS would be responsible for the distribution.

One of the biggest issues we had to deal with was the sanitary conditions. Info Park is a little, tiny wooden hut with no conditions for such a distribution and the risk of having a visit from the sanitary controllers were very high as authorities were trying to move refugees from the parks.

It was agreed that Info Park and RAS would start collaborating and that a warm, cooked meal with fresh fruit and water would be distributed every day at 6 pm.

To combat the threat of sanitary inspections, RAS decided that a catering service would be hired to prepare the meals and that one of their staff would be in charge of distributing it directly as he or she had the booklet needed for that duty. RAS volunteers would be in charge of keeping everyone in line and the distribution of water and fruit wearing gloves. That would solve the problems of manipulation of food and distribution.

Then the next issue raised, was that refugees needed to know where and when they could get warm meals every day.

Most of the refugees either go to Info Park or Info Centar for Asylum for information. An email was therefore sent to Info Centar to inform them about the new service, asking them to let all beneficiaries know about it, and a sign was set up at their premises in different languages. Info Park also put the information on their boards.

---

<sup>18</sup> Info Park is an organization located inside the Belgrade Park providing information to refugees about transportation, buses and camps and places where they can charge their mobile phones  
<https://www.facebook.com/Info-Park-885932764794322/>

The next Coordination Meeting, which is attended by all organisations present in Serbia wanting to learn about the situation, was used as a point to inform all the actors and spread the information.

There were a few problems with Info Park as our way of working, and the way each of us sees security and how to treat refugees, is different. There were meetings and daily talks to lower the tension and improve the relationship, and both organisations had to make some compromises to create a balance and continue working together.

Later, another problem rose. RAS had money to support 270 portions of warm meals per day but the need was much higher: around 400 meals were needed.

After different meetings with other organisations, RAS learnt that ADRA<sup>19</sup> was planning on starting some food distribution as well. A meeting was held to learn about their plans and after letting them know all the problems it creates to have two different meals on the same day - as it raises issues such of refugees comparing meals - it was agreed that RAS would do 400 meals one day and ADRA would do the same the following day and then continue to take turns, that way there is no difference in food and there would be enough for everyone. In exchange RAS would provide the volunteers every day for the distribution as ADRA didn't have enough, and at the end of the month the amount of meals would be the same as budgeted for both organisations.

So far the distribution is good, the need continues to be as high as on the first day but everyone knows where and when to receive a warm, nutritious meal.

---

<sup>19</sup> ADRA is an Adventist INGO, that responded to the crisis in Serbia: <https://adra.org/tag/serbia/>

## NENAD POPOVIC: CO-FOUNDER AND OPERATIONS LEADER, REFUGEE AID SERBIA

We drove to the Serbian-Hungarian border on the 16<sup>th</sup> September 2015, with seven tonnes of aid to distribute to the refugees as the border had been shut and thousands of refugees had been stranded in the soaring heat.

We were a team of 25. Before we even started our journey we had split into five-person groups, each responsible for a specific role: crowd control/food packing/ food distribution/beverage distribution and clothes distribution. We knew that if we were not organised our efforts would only cause more chaos. With this in mind, we carefully planned out as much as we could beforehand and only had to deal with a few big adaptations mostly surrounding the place of distribution and most importantly ensuring the absolute safety of our team.



*Photo by Tinka Inese Kalajzic*

The coordination was initiated by one of our volunteers who asserted himself as a leader for that task. His presence and authority ensured that everyone was in agreement with the plan so that no issues would arise later.

In an open space a few hundred yards from the Serbian-Hungarian border, we parked our truck, used various objects, tape and cars to map out a safe area for our team, and created a line where refugees would queue in an orderly fashion and be given food, drink and clothing. We successfully managed to do this in continuation for 22 hours until we had distributed all items.



*Photo by Tinka Inese Kalajzic*

Working together as a team and in coordination ensures not only high morale (especially in instances working in foreign places for great periods of time) but also provides the necessary comfort and support to push through and get the job done. Also ensuring a leader is present only makes the job easier rather than each member fighting for control of the team.

We faced no challenges.

Our effectiveness and success attracted the attention of many of the other volunteer and NGOs groups, who began asking us to advise them on safe and effective distribution as there were some scenes of total disarray and unorganised distribution by way of throwing aid at refugees. We were happy to oblige.



*Photo by Tinka Inese Kalajzic*



## WITH THANKS TO

RedR UK would like to thank the Stanley Thomas Johnson Foundation for funding the Coordination Workshop and Refugee Response trainings since April 2016:

<http://www.johnsonstiftung.ch/en/index.php>

## STANLEY THOMAS JOHNSON FOUNDATION

Special thanks to the Humanitarian Leadership Academy for funding and supporting vital training courses across Europe from January to June 2016:

<http://www.humanitarianleadershipacademy.org/>

