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**An Account of Relief Operations  
in Bosnia**

Mark Duffield

*March 1994*

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# **An Account of Relief Operations in Bosnia**

Mark Duffield<sup>(1)</sup>

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## **Contents**

	<b>Page</b>
1. Introduction	1
2. The Conflict and its Effects	1
3. UNPROFOR	8
4. Organisation of the Relief Operations	11
5. The Role of NGOs	14
6. Donor Operational Programmes	17
7. Issues in the Operation of the Humanitarian Aid Programme	18
References	24
Acronyms	26
Maps: Yugoslavia	
Bosnia and Herzegovina Frontlines	

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# **An Account of Relief Operations in Bosnia**

## **1. Introduction**

Members of the RRN will be familiar with the terrible drama being played out in Bosnia-Herzegovina through the extensive international media coverage. Though such coverage often focuses upon the progress of relief efforts in relation to particular communities, it is difficult for those not directly involved in the relief operations to understand how they are organised and how such arrangements differ from the type of operation that most RRN members are familiar with. Drawing on material from a recent study<sup>(1)</sup> (Duffield, 1994), this paper describes the effects of the conflict, and the organisation of military protection for humanitarian assistance, the organisation of the relief programme focusing upon the role of UN agencies, NGOs and donor organisations.

## **2. The Conflict and its Effects**

Open conflict began in Bosnia-Herzegovina in April 1992 as a conflict between Serbs and a Croat/Muslim alliance. During the course of 1993, the confrontation became three-sided as previous compacts broke down<sup>(2)</sup>. It is estimated that between the start of the conflict and June 1993 140,000 people had been killed and a similar number injured.

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1. Material for this study was gathered during a study commissioned by UNICEF. The view expressed here are the authors own and may not reflect those of UNICEF. The visit to Bosnia was prior to the February 1994 cease fire around Sarajevo which has subsequently been extended to other areas.
  2. The factors contributing to the break-up of the Former Yugoslavia are deliberately not discussed here because of their complexity and the focus of this paper upon the relief operations. Those wishing to learn more about this process are referred to Magas, 1993; Schierup, 1993 and Zizmond, 1992. Though the ethnic complexity of Bosnia-Herzegovina was a significant factor, these sources reveal the importance of the economic fragmentation in the process leading to the conflict.

From a humanitarian perspective the principal characteristics of the conflict have been the displacement of upto half the pre-war population of 4.36 million through forced migration and 'ethnic cleansing', and the blockade and terrorisation of civilian populations generally. While access can be negotiated this has become increasingly difficult as the war has spread across central Bosnia. The politics of blockade and terrorisation currently take two main geographical forms:

- i) the isolation of contiguous urban/rural areas to produce ethnic enclaves. For example, the Croat pocket between Vitez and Kiseljak or the Muslim enclaves around Srebrenica and Gorazd (see Map);
- ii) the forcible containment, blockade and terrorisation of trapped urban populations. For example, the predominantly Bosnian Muslim ghettos of Sarajevo and Mostar East (see Box 1).



**Box 1**

**Mostar East**

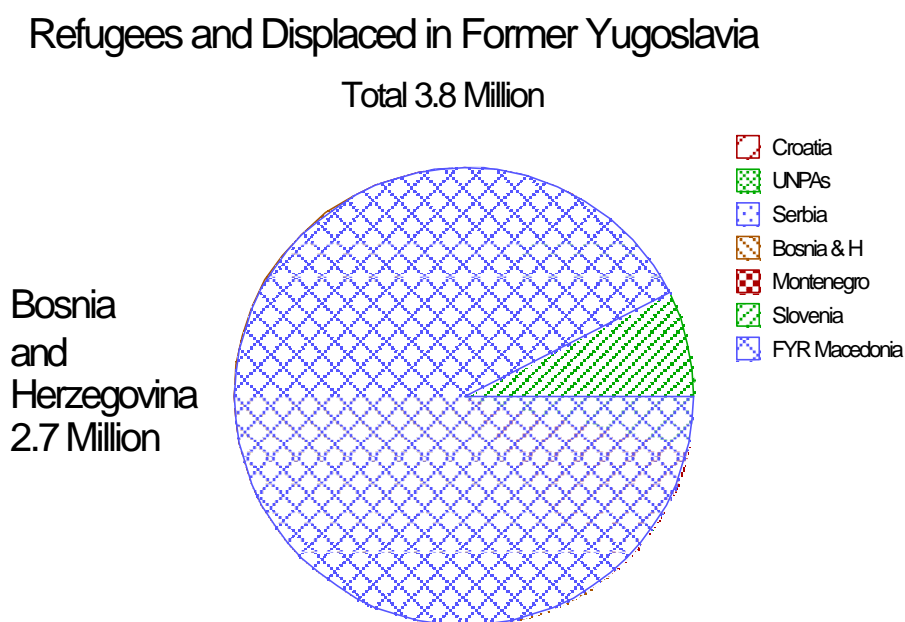
Since Croat versus Muslim fighting began in Mostar in May 1993, about 58,000 Muslims have been concentrated and forcibly contained in the thin strip of territory which represents Mostar East. More than half of this total have been displaced from other areas. The urban part of Mostar East is an area about 2 kilometres long by one kilometre wide. It is separated from the larger West and Croat part of the town by a river. More than 20,000 people live in desperate conditions in the urban part of Mostar East. Every building has been damaged by frequent shelling, some parts are totally devastated. There is no electricity or piped water and UNHCR convoys protected by Spanish troops maintain a fragile lifeline. Even on a 'quiet' day the civilian population is terrorised by sniper fire. Like Sarajevo, Mostar East has evolved a ghetto structure. Within half a mile of enforced deprivation, the restaurants and shops in Mostar West function as normal. The Croatian Government recently released around 2,000 Muslim prisoners and forced them into Mostar East.

Within the ghetto, a Bosnian War Presidency functions and has assumed responsibility for defence and the provision of basic needs. All housing has been commandeered and a space survey undertaken. Where room exists, it has been allocated to the large displaced and refugee population. Productive assets which have no immediate use have been put into store. All food and relief supplies are centrally controlled. The population is fed from communal kitchens. More than 38,000 were supported in this manner during December 1993. Water is drawn direct from the river and supplied to the town by a patched and bullet-riddled tanker. No money circulates and the small additional in-kind payments that are made to those within the civil administration helps sustain a barter economy. Unlike Sarajevo, Mostar East has not produced a siege currency. It is a duty centred system linked to the provision of security and basic necessities. Since late 1993, teachers have been attempting to restart and maintain schooling under the most appalling conditions.



According to the most recent UNHCR estimate (UNHCR, 1994), there are currently 2.74 million beneficiaries of the relief operations within Bosnia (un-disaggregated internally displaced, vulnerable groups and refugees). It is estimated that up to 90% of the displaced and refugee population has been housed in private residences (DHA, 1993). This has been the result of direct action by civil authorities or informal kinship networks. The remaining displaced are in collective centres, usually commandeered buildings of varying quality. With the exception of the relatively small Bosnian Croat area, Bosnia-Herzegovina is subject to blockade. Thus, virtually all of the population is directly or indirectly affected by the war.

Figure 1: From UNHCR, January 1994.



As a result of the dependence of the majority of the population on regular paid employment and regional or national food, energy and water supplies, the degree of dislocation or collapse of the social and economic structure caused by the war has been extreme. Bosnia has been split into three separate economic and political

entities. Herzegovina is under Bosnian Croat domination and has been integrated into the Croat economy. It is outside of the blockade and is in a better condition than the rest.

Central Bosnia which is largely under the control of the Bosnian Presidency has suffered serious and widespread destruction of buildings and facilities. Up to April 1993, the Bosnian government has estimated the financial cost of this as between US\$150-180 billion. Due to the blockade of all but relief items, the industrial and commercial economy within the region has totally collapsed. The drop in GNP must approach 100%. The overwhelming majority of the population is effectively unemployed. According to area, around 10-30% have continued to report to what is, essentially, an unpaid job. It maintains social contact and is better than doing nothing. As few as 3-4% could be said to be gainfully employed. Indeed, it is not an exaggeration to say that the main employers in Bosnia are the aid agencies. UN agencies and NGOs in Bosnia probably have the best qualified drivers in the world and can boast engineers, doctors and architects among their personnel.

Hyper-inflation has rendered the Bosnian Dinar worthless. For the few in employment outside of the hard currency paying aid programme, mainly those in the essential public services, monthly salaries are the equivalent of little more than a couple of Deutch Marks (US\$1). In Sarajevo, the civil authority has issued what amounts to its own siege currency: a voucher that can be exchanged for basic items in the government controlled distribution centres. Here, and more widely, hyper-inflation has prompted the emergence of a barter economy. According to region, values are reckoned in differing weights of essential relief items, flour, sugar, etc (Alikadic, 1994). It is also a situation which has forced the growth of the black market. It is a market which, of necessity, has close links with the combatants. In places like Sarajevo, Zenica and Tuzla, for those who have got what it takes, a limited supply of goods and services can be obtained.

The electricity, gas and water infrastructure within central Bosnia has suffered extensive damage. In many places, however, patched systems are capable of limited output. In industrialised conditions not only is food a weapon of war, but essential utilities are also subject to withdrawal and political manipulation. Because such utilities form part of regional networks, distribution systems often cross and re-cross lines. In some places, this has given rise to a form of 'utility politics'. The water supply for the Bosnian Muslim enclave in Zenica, for example, is piped across the Croat enclave around Vitez. In attempting to put pressure on Vitez, Bosnian forces have to take into account the resulting water shortage in Zenica. In

Sarajevo, gas, water and electricity have been weapons of war since the conflict started. Supplies of energy and water are extremely limited and on at least two occasions the city has been without water for a month. In other places, such as Mostar East, all utilities have been cut.

Within urban areas and the enclaves, the Bosnian government authorities have developed a war administration and have assumed responsibility for defense and the provision of basic requirements (Alikadic, 1994) (for a description of the situation in Mostar East refer to Box 1 on page 3). In some areas, the civilian population has access to agricultural land. For many, however, this is marginal and in the enclaves and ghettos where the blockade is ruthless, civilians have little or no independent sustenance. Most of the population of Bosnia is dependent on the food aid delivered through the humanitarian safety-net. In some areas and for some social groups, this dependence is near total. Due to accommodation of much of the displaced population in private housing, in many places the conditions and circumstances of the displaced and host populations are indistinguishable.

Nutritional surveys conducted in Bosnia suggest that the relief programme, coupled with peoples' own coping strategies, has been sufficient to prevent widespread malnutrition but not loss of body weight. Since December 1992, WHO has been monitoring the nutritional status of the Bosnian population. There is some evidence that the general population was over-weight before the war. Many people have consumed their body reserves. A WHO survey in July 1993 concluded that, on average, men had lost 9-10 kilos, women 12-15 kilos and children 1.5 kilos. The weight loss among children is within acceptable limits and there is no evidence of serious under-nourishment. This trend was also confirmed in September (WHO, 1993). It has been suggested that weight loss has been greatest among women and relatively light among children because parents (especially mothers) have been 'sacrificing their own rations to feed their children' (UNICEF, 1993).

Aid agencies have argued that the most vulnerable in Bosnia are the so-called 'social cases'. These include institutionalised persons, that is, orphans, mentally ill, physically handicapped, geriatrics together with the homeless and poor elderly. In many instances, the social cases, cut off from their former institutional support, have been affected particularly harshly.

The division of Bosnia-Herzegovina into three distinct entities has been achieved through a process of ethnic cleansing. Owing to the wide ethnic mix before the war, each area has been subject to a vicious process of population exchange which has resulted in ethnic concentration. Zenica, for example, has received over 45,000 Bosnian Muslim refugees from other areas. In Mostar East, of the 58,000 Bosnian Muslims concentrated into this ghetto, about half have originated from elsewhere (Alikadic, 1994).

The human resource and skill base of Bosnia have been badly distorted. Ethnic cleansing, for example, has not only formed ethnic concentrations, but it has also altered the skill profile of whole regions. In the past, Bosnia's Muslim population tended to be urban and the Serbs rural. Ethnic cleansing in some of the Bosnian Serb areas is credited with eroding the skill base to such an extent that they are not viable without some form of future re-unification (Fontaine, 1994). The predominantly Bosnian Muslim ghetto in Mostar East has also lost many of its former skilled and professional residents (Alikadic, 1994). Similar distortions exist in Sarajevo. Besides ethnic cleansing and displacement, however, the skill base has been eroded due to death and injury, out-migration and war service. The Bosnian government estimates that the number of medical staff, for example, has declined by a third from 30,147 in 1991 to 19,600 in May 1993. This is at the same time as the war has destroyed facilities and the blockade reduced the availability of drugs and energy.

Similar remarks could be made about education. Before the war, Bosnia had a developed educational system. Teacher-pupil ratios, for example in Sarajevo's primary, secondary and higher educational establishments, exceeded the European average. Many school buildings have been commandeered and pressed into service as collective centres for refugees. Within the enclaves and ghettos, insecurity and lack of resources have disrupted the educational system. In Sarajevo and Mostar East, for example, under extremely difficult conditions and following long gaps, teachers have struggled to maintain an educational programme. Often this has been in make-shift accommodation with rudimentary materials. In Mostar East, children have been instructed in cold and dark cellars. Many children, moreover, have witnessed terrible scenes and have been traumatised as a result. UNICEF and

NGOs such as the International Rescue Committee have developed psycho-social programmes for traumatised children.

An impression of the skill base in Bosnia is that it has been distorted by the war and the collapse of the formal economy. Many professionals lack work while the civil authorities are struggling to meet the basic public necessities with limited resources. Moreover, there is a danger that even if peace comes, the cumulative effects of the war could have pushed the region into a spiral of decline.

### **3. UNPROFOR**

The United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR I) was established in December 1991 in an attempt to maintain the fragile cease-fire negotiated by the European Union in Croatia. In February 1992, UNPROFOR II was established to undertake a patrolling function in Bosnia. It was slow to establish and initially poorly resourced - it did not assume its full responsibilities until June 1992 a couple of months after open conflict had begun. By the end of 1993, UNPROFOR had 29,000 troops in the Former Yugoslavia, of which 9,700 were operating in Bosnia. UNPROFOR has become the largest and most expensive UN operation of its type.

During the summer of 1992, several key resolutions were passed by the UN Security Council which defined a protection role for UNPROFOR (UN, 1993). Resolutions permitting UNPROFOR to use 'all measures necessary' to secure the delivery of humanitarian aid, and the enlargement of its mandate to cover the protection of convoys were passed. Military flights over Bosnia were also banned. Between September 1991 and May 1993, over 70 resolutions and statements were passed by the UN on the Former Yugoslavia (Ibid). Apart from calls for cease-fires and extending protection, nearly a fifth of these were connected in some way with demands for access, most after mid-1992. In April 1993, Srebrenica was declared a UN 'Safe Area'. That is, the UN demanded that it 'should be free from armed attack or any other hostile act'. The following month Sarajevo, Tuzla, Zepa, Gorazde and Bihac were added. Despite these resolutions, demands and increasing

troop numbers, the war in Bosnia has continued to escalate with the UN powerless to stop it.

The means by which UNPROFOR supports convoys varies from area to area. For example, the British Battalion which covers central Bosnia, due to limited resources has developed a 'tunnelling' system. Armoured vehicles are stationed at 10 to 15 km intervals along routes and at fixed combatant check points. The trucks within the convoy are counted off as they proceed through the tunnel. A search is made if numbers at any stage do not tally. In other areas, UNPROFOR provides a continuous escort. The British also have an engineering unit which, in places, has created new roads and carried out extensive repair work.

Negotiation is the basis for humanitarian access in Bosnia. While UNPROFOR has been mandated to protect convoys using all necessary measures, it has interpreted this mandate as excluding force of arms. In the more secure areas, convoys usually proceed without difficulty. However, as the war has spread and Bosnia has been divided into separate ethnic enclaves (see Map), in some places it is necessary for convoys to cross and re-cross several military lines in the course of a single journey. Despite written agreements between UNHCR and the respective regional political authorities, objections by local militia leaders have frequently delayed convoys. In the case of several enclaves and ghettos, such objections have enforced a virtual blockade. It is in these areas, especially when a few lightly armed or drunken irregulars are the basis of the immediate problem, that the powerlessness of UNPROFOR is manifest.

UNPROFOR deployment in Croatia and Bosnia has drawn the criticism that it has created *de facto* borders and frozen the status quo established by violence and ethnic cleansing (Traynor, 1994). The Serbs, in particular, have used UN deployment to consolidate territory and organise population exchanges. It has been argued that a particular low point for UNPROFOR surrounded the declaration of Srebrenica a 'Safe Area' in April 1993. At the time, the US Secretary of State was again pressing for the lifting of the arms embargo on Bosnia. Diplomatic pressure was also on the Serbs to accept the Vance-Owen plan which restored Bosnian not Serbian sovereignty to the Srebrenica area. On the ground, UNPROFOR was moving in exactly the opposite direction. It was moving in on Srebrenica to disarm

the Bosnians on the basis of a surrender agreement largely written by the Serbs. At the same time, rather than Bosnian sovereignty, its safe area policy acted to freeze Serbian siege lines around the enclave. To the inhabitants, the UN has appeared as a prison warder.

While acting as a restraint in some areas, the deployment of UNPROFOR forces has frequently failed to prevent the continued terrorization of the civilian population. Sarajevo is just one example. Although a UN 'Safe Area', until the recent NATO induced withdrawal of Serbian armaments, the UNPROFOR presence did little to prevent a daily toll of dead and injured since mid 1992. Other enclaves and ghettos tell a similar story.

In response to criticism that the UNPROFOR should be more forceful, Western leaders have usually argued that it would only make matters worse. As the war has spread throughout Bosnia causing half of its population to be uprooted, it is difficult to see how much worse it could have been. A big casualty is the standing and reputation of the UN in the region and beyond. In the Former Yugoslavia, it is held in low regard and in parts of Bosnia vehicles are regularly stoned and personnel abused. A point of concern for the humanitarian agencies is that in the popular mind even UN specialist agency and NGO staff are regarded as 'UNPROFOR'. Aid workers are tarred with the same brush. In the Bosnian enclave around Zenica, for example, the hostility toward UN and NGO aid workers is marked. Vehicle and property thefts, car high-jacking, threats and abuse, etc, are common. As in Somalia and Iraq, some NGOs have resorted to employing armed guards to protect accommodation and property (Bartolini, 1994).

Agency perceptions of UNPROFOR vary according to region and the battalion concerned. There appears to be a big difference between the professional and conscript soldiers. The British and some of the Scandinavian battalions, for example, enjoy a better reputation than others. Despite the limitations of the situation, possibly as a result of experience in Northern Ireland, the British have a clear lead in relation to military/civilian liaison. Although security briefings tend to be retrospective rather than analytic, they hold daily briefings for UN and NGO personnel in Split, from where the Bosnia relief operation is organised. The British also produce regular press digests and maps. According to one officer, it has now



become fashionable within the British army to think in terms of a UN or NGO career. In the past, a UN operation was equated with a 'Cyprus surfing medal', now they are seen as a way forward. If one considers the number of ex-British military personnel that are beginning to find their way into the UN and NGO system as security advisers, this trend would seem to be real.

A widely held perception among agencies involved in the relief operation is that UNPROFOR has become an autonomous force (Fontaine, 1994) with self-preservation being an important if not overriding goal. UNPROFOR has restricted its mandate to one of mainly 'pushing convoys through'. This has been reinforced by media coverage of the humanitarian operations which has tended to focus on confrontational aspects such as the blocking of convoys. Agencies, such as UNICEF, which are attempting to cover non-food relief needs, would prefer UNPROFOR to have established a more general presence so as to allow aid workers and local staff greater ease of movement (McDermott, 1994). This may be seen as another example of the already narrow relief mandate being narrowed still further by subsequent operational decisions.

#### **4. Organisation of the Relief Operations**

The relief programme in Bosnia is a massive undertaking. The current anticipated expenditure, excluding the cost of UNPROFOR, is in the region of US\$1 billion per year.

UNHCR has the role of lead agency in the relief operations in the Former Yugoslavia. Part of UNHCR's lead role has necessitated it taking responsibility for logistics, transport and securing access. UNHCR has the largest truck fleet consisting of about 250 lorries supported by over 20 logistical teams within the Former Yugoslavia. Other specialised agencies of the UN perform roles related to their specialism. For instance, UNICEF operates supplementary feeding programmes for pregnant and lactating women, psycho-social programmes for traumatised children and water supply rehabilitation programmes. Within this structure an established pattern of UN/NGO relief sub-contracting is also found.

For instance, UNHCR has contracted out a significant proportion of its 'Winterisation'<sup>(3)</sup> and social programmes to NGOs.

Generally speaking, activities operated by and funded through UN agencies involve close collaboration with the government authorities in the respective areas. For instance, UNHCR's general ration distribution system delivers the local authorities. In contrast, the directly operational and NGO programmes supported by the EU and bilateral donor organisations tend to avoid the local authorities for reasons of their lack of neutrality, undertaking the final delivery themselves or requiring their NGO partners to do so.

The organisation of the relief operation in Bosnia is effectively based upon three principles, ie:

- ! association with UNHCR;
- ! negotiated access;
- ! coordination and protection;

These are outlined in ideal terms below. In practice, things can be different.

### *Association*

Agencies and NGOs wishing to work within the relief programme must secure agreement and accreditation with UNHCR. This is automatic for UN agencies and applies mainly to NGOs. In order to become an accredited 'Implementing Agency', NGOs must agree to the principles of neutral humanitarian assistance, to furnish regular reports, and so on. In exchange, they are issued with ID cards and become entitled to logistic and programme support, transport and UNPROFOR protection. Non-accredited NGOs must work on their own.

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3. Winterisation programmes are designed to enable the population to cope with the Bosnian winters which involve several months of sub-zero temperatures and heavy snowfalls. Though such programmes may involve rehabilitation of power generation and heating systems, they largely consist of the repair of damaged roofs and the replacement of shattered glass windows with polythene in homes and public buildings.

Presently, UNHCR has entered into association with more than 60 non-governmental and bilateral agencies in Bosnia (UNHCR, 1994). There are also NGOs which work outside the system. Most of these are small, new NGOs and are discussed below. It should also be mentioned, however, that some established agencies, like MSF(F), while technically associated with UNHCR, have attempted to maintain their distance from the UN. This distance is thought to enhance the neutrality of the NGO.

### *Negotiated Access*

Only the UNHCR Special Envoy and Chiefs of Mission are authorised to reach general agreements on access for humanitarian aid with the governments of Bosnia-Herzegovina (Sarajevo), Croatia (Zagreb) and Serbia (Belgrade), together with the political authorities representing Bosnian Croats (Medjugorje) and Bosnian Serbs (Pale). Such general agreements are coordinated through the appropriate UNHCR sub-office. In order to ease the cross-line operation, copies of the signed agreements to provide humanitarian access have been translated and distributed locally (UNHCR, 1994).

### *Coordination and Protection*

The basic tool of coordination between associated agencies, UNPROFOR and political authorities is UNHCR's Monthly Plan. The forwarding of projected relief movements to combatants is a common practice within negotiated access programmes. Associated agencies notify UNHCR of their transport requirements which then draws up its plan. UNHCR undertakes to transport 70% food aid and 30% non-food relief items. The relevant UNHCR sub-office coordinates on the basis of the plan with UNPROFOR and the political authorities. UNPROFOR, for example, is asked to provide protection, supplement transport capacity and give route security assessments as required. In some places, UNPROFOR also assists in secondary distributions. Implementing partners are not authorised to communicate directly with UNPROFOR. All such communication must go through UNHCR.

An important reason for the decline in the effectiveness of the convoy system toward the end of 1993 was the growing demand for weekly notification of movements and changes to the plan by local authorities.

With the exception of the meshing of the relief operations with UN military protection, the relief programme in the Former Yugoslavia, shares structural similarities with those that have evolved in relation to African complex emergencies. There are evolutionary links. Despite the development of a protection element, as the description of UNPROFOR has suggested, in practice negotiated access remains its predominant political characteristic, and its principal weakness. Apart from its scale and high security overheads, from an organizational point of view, it has a familiar structure including an established division of labour among the UN specialist agencies. There are, however, a number of novel departures. For example, there are many new NGOs involved in the relief operations while some of the more well established international NGOs are absent. The European Union and several bilateral donors are also directly operational, managing their own programmes. These departures are discussed below.

## **5. The Role of NGOs**

Compared to other areas of large-scale humanitarian aid operations, such as the Horn of Africa, there are relatively few NGOs in the Former Yugoslavia. As would be expected, they are also of fairly recent appearance only a few were operational in 1992 and most have arrived since the beginning of 1993. The geographical distribution of NGOs is uneven. Generally speaking, NGOs are concentrated in the physically secure and less politically sensitive regions, though there are some notable exceptions including the established French relief agencies. The majority therefore are in Croatia while there are very few in Serbia and Bosnian Serb areas.

War and insecurity carry with them personal risk and increased operating costs which many NGOs are not willing to meet. Since the Gulf War, it has also been evident that many NGOs are often unwilling to work in areas, or take up positions

which are politically out of favour with donors or where international sanctions apply. This has major implications for the system of joint UN/NGO relief operations which have emerged in several complex emergencies. Such a collaborative model would seem to work best under relatively secure or peace-time conditions. Political emergencies may demand some modifications to relationships and roles which have been established in other contexts.

In Bosnia, there are around 65 NGOs of which perhaps 40 can be said to be operational (Bartolini, 1994). Most confine their operations to the relatively secure areas. There are consequently few NGOs or none at all operating in places like Sarajevo, Zenica and Mostar East. Some of the key operators in Bosnia include the MSFs, Action Internationale Contre La Faim (AICF), International Rescue Committee (IRC), Pharmaciens Sans Frontières (PSP), CARE International, Equilibre and Feed the Children. For those that are willing to work in insecure areas, the financial implications are significant. Mainly as a result of sub-contracting from UNHCR and OFDA, the 1993 budget of IRC, for example, was \$50 million. By way of comparison, this amount is significantly larger than UNICEF's actual budget for the whole of the Former Yugoslavia.

Another feature about NGOs in the Former Yugoslavia is that there appears to be a generational development taking place. Of the established NGOs that have worked and gained experience in Africa only a few, such as the MSFs, have made the transition to Europe. On the other hand, a new generation of small NGOs has emerged, some formed specifically for the crisis in the Balkans. Owing to the proximity to Western Europe, French and British agencies are well represented in this trend. Such NGOs include Sans Limites, British Direct Aid, Intervener, Bosnia Aid, Atlas, Edinburgh Direct Aid, The Serious Road Trip and Children in Crisis. Most of the new NGOs operate outside of the UNHCR system. This is one reason for the concentration NGO activity within the more secure areas.

Many of the new NGOs will undoubtedly disappear when the crisis stabilises. Some, however, have already shown signs of institutional development. A few, such as Equilibre and Première Urgence, have found a niche in logistics. Others, like Feed the Children have developed in relation to supplementary feeding. Such NGOs have typically become accredited to UNHCR. For them, once the situation

in the Former Yugoslavia stabilises one can surmise that expansion into other Balkan countries and the Transcaucasus may be possible.

An important feature of the new NGOs is that they have emerged within a war situation and from the outset have been socialised to accept great personal risk. Even those established NGOs that have made the transition, accepting the increased risks of Bosnia has involved a good deal of internal debate. This characteristic of the new NGOs may, alone, be sufficient to see further institutional development.

Although it is too early to be definite, it may be the case that in relation to relief work one is seeing a division among international NGOs with the established group concentrating on Africa and a new group specialising on Europe and the Transcaucasus. The relatively few which manage to straddle the two are, in the process, establishing themselves as *the* major relief players. Interestingly, it is precisely these lead organisations, such as MSF(F), which are less inclined to become part of a UN/NGO relief structure.

NGOs wishing to establish projects have to get clearance from the political authorities. Conditions vary however. In Croatia, NGOs have to get authorization from the government's Office of Displaced Persons and Refugees (ODPR) for all activity. This is in addition to any local agreements. Food aid, however, is subject to few restrictions. Shelter and health are different. ODPR retains allocation rights in any shelter programme and there are also restrictions in health. Croatia, especially the Dalmatian coast, owing to its relative security has become prone to agency drug dumping (de Schryver, 1994). The authorities have attempted to limit this. In contrast, probably because needs are greater and fewer agencies operate, Bosnia is relatively free of controls. Most agreements are with individual civil authorities on a project by project basis.

Owing to the emergence of new NGOs, a characteristic of the Former Yugoslavia which contrasts with Africa is that many agencies have arrived with very little of their own funding. In Croatia, the EU is an important source of funds. On the grounds of neutrality, the EU operates a policy of only channelling its considerable support through European NGOs. This is another factor which has shaped

geographical concentration. Indeed, some fear that there may be too many NGOs operating in Croatia. Since they tend to take over direct responsibility for individual camps or areas there is a danger of both undermining civil capacity and fragmenting service delivery. In societies with relatively strong civil structures, compared to Africa the dis-functional effect of NGO operations is much more visible.

In Bosnia, UNHCR, together with the UN specialist agencies, are important sources of funding for NGOs. UNHCR, for example, has sub-contracted large parts of its seed distribution and winterisation programme to NGOs. Outside of Sarajevo, UNICEF has also sub-contracted some of its health and supplementary feeding work. NGOs are also managing projects in the fields of water and sanitation, income generation and psycho-social trauma.

## **6. Donor Operational Programmes**

The emergence of a new generation of NGOs in the Former Yugoslavia is complemented by another trend whereby some donor agencies have become directly operational, managing their own programmes on the ground rather than relying solely upon UN agencies or NGOs serving as implementing channels. Such initiatives appear to stem from the limited number of NGOs in the area and possibly a dissatisfaction with the performance of NGOs in such situations, and perhaps also a desire for a role in the high profile delivery activities.

This trend appears to be clearest in relation to the European Community Humanitarian Office (ECHO) which was formed in April 1992. In 1993, ECHO's allocations to relief operations in the Former Yugoslavia were 395 million ECU (equivalent to approximately US\$450 million) which represented no less than 63% of ECHO's total expenditures of 600 million ECU in that year (ECHO, 1994). The combined European Union effort (Community plus Members States) has accounted for approximately 65% of the global international aid to the Former Yugoslavia (ECHO, 1994).

With active support from ECHO, a European Community Task Force (ECTF) has been specifically established to coordinate and implement EU programmes in Croatia and Bosnia. In Croatia, this consists of a direct food aid programme complete with ECTF monitors. In Bosnia, a direct medical supply programme and an Emergency Engineering Unit has been established for utility repairs.

Britain, through the Overseas Development Administration's Emergency Aid Department, is mainly operational in the logistical field (ODA, 1993). It has 62 trucks with drivers which form part of the UNHCR transport system. It also directly supplies medical assistance and technical support for the utility rehabilitation. Less than 6% of the £73 million (equivalent to approximately US\$ 103 million) provided by ODA as bilateral aid to the Former Yugoslavia upto December 1993, was channelled through NGOs, a figure which compares with 80-90% in the case of ODA's emergency aid to some relief operations in Africa.

## **7. Issues in the Operation of the Humanitarian Aid Programme**

### *Diversion and Neutrality*

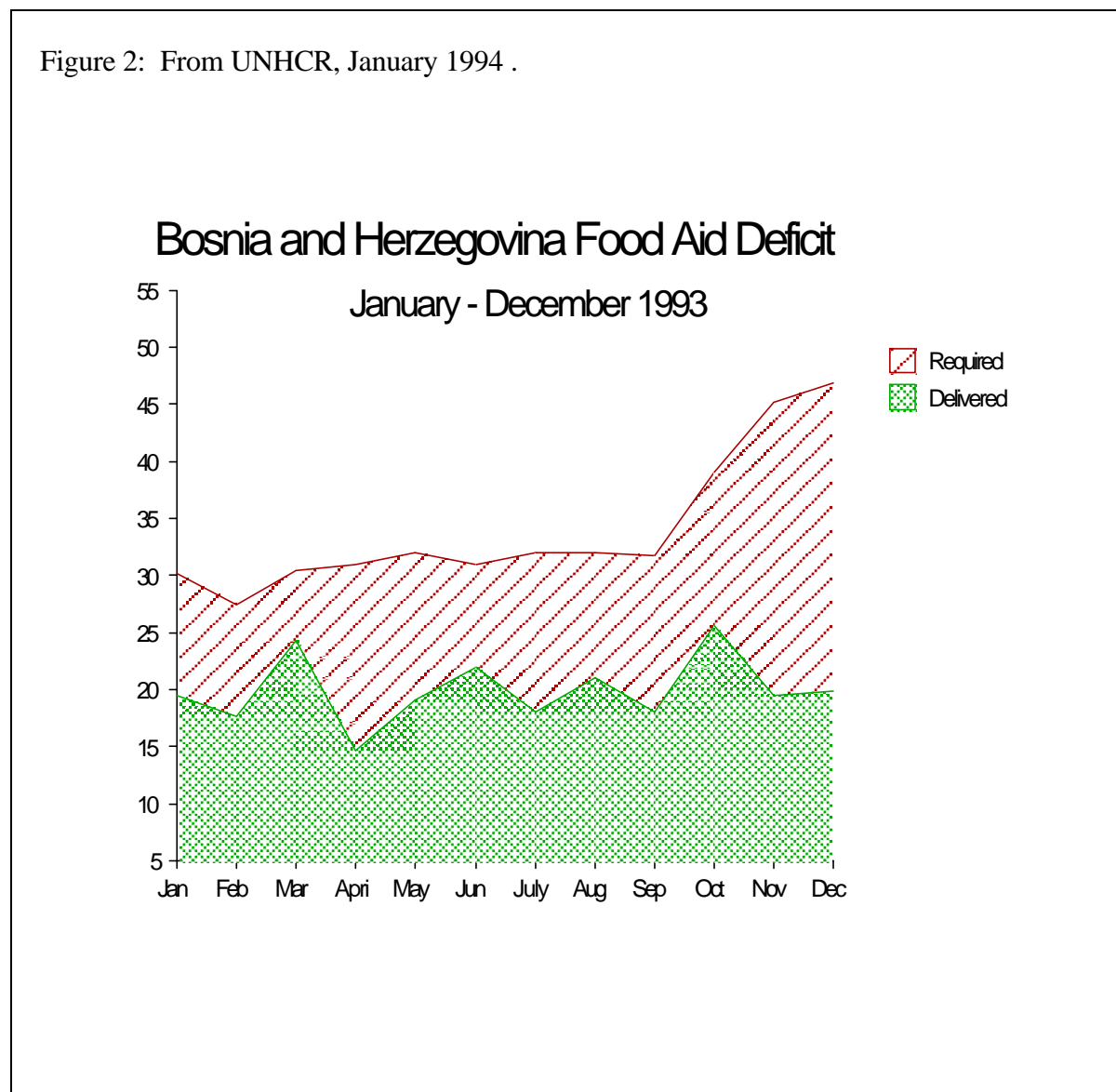
Within an internal war it is common for varying proportions of external humanitarian aid to be diverted by the authorities for military use. In Bosnia relief supplies, especially the general ration, are consigned to the civil authorities. This has given rise to speculation concerning large-scale diversion. Indeed, unusual for a consolidated appeal, DHA cites a 35-40% diversion rate for central Bosnia (DHA, 1993). Some NGOs, however, claim as much as 75% of all humanitarian assistance is diverted to the military (UNHCR, 1994). In crossing Bosnian Serb areas, especially, agencies have to bargain. Usually a fixed proportion of whatever is being carried is demanded. In Sarajevo, for example, the Serbs usually take 30% of the aid entering the city. It would be prudent to look at such demands in relation to the sanctions policy. Diversion and demands, however, undermine any notion of an objective assessment of need. Even if that were possible.



The term 'diversion' however is rather misleading. The majority of all adult men in central Bosnia have been mobilised for the war effort. Towns and enclaves are being attacked and defended by what are, in effect, civilian militias (Bayisa Wak-Woya, 1994). Food given to wives and mothers will inevitably be shared with husbands and sons. The urban and regional food committees established by the civil authorities also give relief food directly to the military. Because of the collapse of the formal economy, there is no specific budget for military procurement. This comes from the safety-net. There is evidence in some areas that when the delivery rates of aid are low, the civil authorities discriminate in favour of the military.

The close inter-connection of militias with the civilian population makes nonsense of the 'neutrality' of humanitarian relief assistance. It is very difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish between combatants and non-combatants in an internal war. This also undermines those who complain that relief is simply sustaining the war. Of course it is, but what else should one expect? It is the inevitable consequence of a policy which has substituted the supply of humanitarian assistance for the attempt to forcefully press a political solution. Many of the politicians that now worry about prolongation are precisely those that in the past supported this substitution.

Figure 2: From UNHCR, January 1994 .



### *Assessment and Performance*

Assessing the efficiency of a delivery programme requires that accurate assessment and monitoring take place. Bosnia is similar to other complex political emergencies in that assessment and monitoring is weak and little, if any, of the available data is reliable. Although mandated under the consolidated appeal, UNHCR has never had an independent assessment or monitoring capacity. In relation to the general ration, assessment is largely carried out by the civil authorities. Inflating needs is an established practice and arises from a variety of motives. Important motives are, of course, wanting to gain more assistance and the knowledge that relief agencies

are rarely able to meet their targets. In addition, it is believed that recording ones village as having 10,000 rather than 3,000 inhabitants may deter attackers (Fontaine, 1994).

UNHCR has never had a comprehensive monitoring system in Bosnia. Before the alliance between Muslims and Croats broke down during the course of 1993, UNHCR consigned supplies to officially established Food Committees. These were composed of Caritas, Mahamet (a Bosnian Muslim NGO), local Red Cross and government officials. The feeling was that such committees would be self-monitoring (Bayisa Wak-Woya, 1994). These committees were the main means of assessment, distribution and reporting back. As the war has spread, committees have broken up with Caritas, for example, confining itself to the Croat areas and Mahamet to Muslim. In the absence of any alternative structure, UNHCR has continued to consign relief assistance to what have become unitary bodies often operating under extreme political pressure. In Zenica, for example, it is thought that civilians only get a small proportion of the aid sent. While local committees continue to compile reports, few aid workers have faith in the figures provided. In some Bosnian Croat areas, UNHCR has even been denied the right to visit the municipalities direct.

Such comments make an interpretation of Figure 2 difficult. It suggests that on average only 48% of estimated food aid requirements were delivered in Bosnia during 1993. Toward the end of the year and in January 1994, performance declined even further. In some places in central Bosnia, only 20% of the estimated need was being delivered. This decline was the result of winter conditions and, especially, increased military obstruction. How far this is an accurate estimate of performance, however, is difficult to tell. On the other hand there is ample evidence of reduced body weight throughout Bosnia. In places like Gornji Vacuf in January 1994, desperate civilians were also blocking convoys demanding food. Such occurrences indicate that shortages do exist. Within the blockaded ghettos this is self-evident. An objective assessment of need, however, is impossible to achieve under prevailing conditions.

### *Food Aid Versus Non-Food Aid*

Perceived under-performance of UNHCR against estimated targets has an important effect on establishing transport priorities. UNHCR undertakes to assign 70% of available transport capacity to food aid and remaining 30% to non-food aid commodities. Given its responsibility for the immediate well-being of the displaced and war affected population, it has prioritised food aid and, over the past few months, winterisation items. The apparent under-performance in relation to food aid has meant that transport capacity assigned to non-food commodities is constantly squeezed.

This particularly affects agencies like UNICEF whose mandate covers non-food aid relief. In Sarajevo, for example, in January 1994, UNHCR had reduced non-food aid transport to 15% of the total. It has particular difficulty, for example, with the heavy pipes and engineering spares that UNICEF needs for its water rehabilitation programme (UNHCR, 1991). By the end of 1993, when UNHCR was only delivering 20% of estimated need in some parts of central Bosnia, it had become more or less impossible for UNICEF to get its supplies onto UNHCR convoys (Pintos, 1994). In some places, it is only able to carry out vaccination programmes because the materials can be readily carried by personnel travelling on helicopters.

There is also a political element to the food aid versus non-food aid issue. With the exception of access to some of the ghettos and enclaves, political authorities have few objections to food aid *per se*. It is generally the easiest commodity to move across the lines. Clearance is more difficult for non-food aid items due to their alleged strategic value. Chemicals necessary for water purification, spare parts for pumps, pipes, fertilizer, and so on, are regularly rejected by one side or another on the grounds that such items can have a military use (UNHCR, 1994b; Alikadic, 1994). Thus, both transport constraints, UNHCR prioritisation policy and security considerations, all conspire to make Bosnia a predominantly food aid programme. Effectively agencies attempting to run a delivery programme based on non-food commodities are penalised.



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## **Acronyms**

AICF	Action Internationale Contre la Faim
DHA	United Nations Department of Humanitarian Affairs
ECHO	European Community Humanitarian Office
ECTF	European Community Task Force
EU	European Union
GNP	Gross National Product
IRC	International Rescue Committee
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
ODA	Overseas Development Administration
ODPR	Office of Displaced Persons and Refugees
OFDA	Office of US Foreign Disaster Assistance
PSP	Pharmaciens Sans Frontières



RRN	Relief and Rehabilitation Network
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNPROFOR	United Nations Protection Force
WHO	World Health Organisation

# Yugoslavia

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## **Relief and Rehabilitation Network**

The objective of the Relief and Rehabilitation Network (RRN) is to facilitate the exchange of professional information and experience between the personnel of NGOs and other agencies involved in the provision of relief and rehabilitation assistance. Members of the Network are either nominated by their agency or may apply on an individual basis. Each year, RRN members receive four mailings in either English or French. A Newsletter and Network Papers are mailed to members every March and September and 'State of the Art' Reviews on topics in the relief and rehabilitation field every June and December. In addition, RRN members are able to obtain advice on technical and operational problems they are facing from the RRN staff in London. A modest charge is made for membership with rates varying in the case of agency-nominated members depending on the type of agency.

The RRN is operated by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) in conjunction with the European Association of Non-Governmental Organisations for Food Aid and Emergency Relief (EuronAid). ODI is an independent centre for development research and a forum for policy discussion on issues affecting economic relations between the North and South and social and economic policies within developing countries. EuronAid provides logistics and financing services to NGOs using EC food aid in their relief and development programmes. It has 25 member agencies and four with observer status. Its offices are located in the Hague.

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