Humanitarian responses by local actors

Lessons learned from managing the transit of migrants and refugees through Croatia

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Acknowledgments

The Croatian Government managed the transit of 650,000 migrants and refugees in late 2015 and early 2016 by coordinating the activities of an extensive number of international, national and local stakeholders to ensure quick and appropriate responses to these people's needs. The levels to which small local governments and communities were affected by the crisis and able to respond effectively were influenced by several factors. These included the rapid mobility of people in need of humanitarian assistance, the competency of local organisations that responded and the central government's decisions about how to coordinate assistance. The response relied on local resources and communities in a major way but it spared local governments from bearing significant direct costs.

Contents

Acronyms

ADRA	Adventist Development and Relief Agency
CACI	Centre for Support to Immigrant Communities (Centre d'appui aux communautés immigrantes)
CEMR	Council of European Municipalities and Regions
CES	Croatian Employment Service
CMS	Centre for Peace Studies (Centar va mirovne studije)
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
DUZS	National Rescue and Protection Directorate (Državna uprava za zaštitu i spašavanje)
ENOC	European Ombudspersons for Children
EU	European Union
EURODAC	European Dactyloscopy
FRA	European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights
HPC	Croatian Law Centre (Hrvatski pravni centar)
HQ	Headquarters
HU	Hungary
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDMC	International Displacement Monitoring Centre
IFRC	International Federation of the Red Cross
IHA	Intereuropean Human Aid Association
ILC	International Law Commission
IOM	International Organization for Migration (IOM)
IPC	Information Legal Centre (Information Legal Centre)
MGMD	Youth Peace Group Danube (Mirovna grupa mladih Dunav)
MOI	Ministry of the Interior
MSF	Doctors without Borders (Médecins sans frontières)
NALAS	Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South-East Europe
NGO	Non-governmental organization
RS	Republic of Serbia
SI	Slovenia
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WHO	World Health Organization

Summary

The protracted conflict in Syria has resulted in massive population displacement since the outbreak of violence in 2011. During the summer of 2015, a migration route opened up through southeastern Europe for migrants, refugees and asylum seekers from Syria and other countries. This created challenges for civil protection and asylum systems in the region and had a wide range of impacts on the affected countries. The Croatian Government managed the transit of 650,000 migrants and refugees by coordinating the activities of an extensive number of international, national and local stakeholders from governmental and non-governmental organisations. This ensured quick and appropriate responses to migrant and refugee needs over a period of about seven months. The levels to which small local governments and communities were affected by the crisis and able to respond effectively were influenced by several factors. These included the rapid mobility of people in need of humanitarian assistance, the competency of local organisations that responded and the central government's decisions about how to coordinate assistance. The involvement of local authorities and communities has also been coloured by Croatia's history of natural disasters and humanitarian crises, which have created unique precedents for collaboration among stakeholders and local communities.

Local authorities worldwide are increasingly on the frontline of crisis response, though their role in coordination and cooperation with central and humanitarian agencies is often unclear. As a result researchers and practitioners are interested in promoting mutual understanding between the urban/local sector and the humanitarian sector. But in Croatia the delocalisation and deterritorialisation of the response and the establishment of a centrally managed transit reception centre raises important issues around the roles and capacities of local authorities within national response frameworks. Delocalisation shifts decision-making powers away from local authorities and moves the response to a more urbanised area to achieve economies of scale, while deterritorialisation alters various migration and entry procedures normally enforced on Croatian territory. More broadly, the Croatian response demonstrated institutional capacity to manage large-scale humanitarian crises and exhibited solidarity and humanitarianism with the migrant and refugee populations. The response relied on local resources and communities in a major way but it spared local governments from bearing significant direct costs.

However, because migrants and refugees were passing through quickly, many of their basic needs, as determined by humanitarian actors, could be met only partially. Typical ways of ensuring rights, protection and offering aid to meet basic needs had to be adjusted on the ground, paying attention to cultural norms. The Croatian experience raises several questions about how to address resource efficiency of aid and the timeframe during which rights and needs should be met in transit situations. It also demonstrates interesting interactions between approaches that prioritise security in transit and rights-based humanitarian relief and protection.

The Croatian response to the migrant and refugee crisis relied heavily on local resources such as land, buildings and other critical infrastructure (in particular railways, roads, electricity, water, sewage systems and garbage disposal). Local authorities, while not directly involved in the coordination mechanism established to manage the crisis, are members of the National Protection and Rescue Directorate's vertical command structure. This decentralised framework of civil protection enabled reliable information to be shared after the first migrants arrived, but it failed to warn the municipalities near the Croatia-Serbia border that would be directly affected. This resulted in confusion and uncoordinated delivery of services during the first few days, though this was quickly remedied through central coordination mechanisms and a deterritorialisation of the crisis response to established transit centres. A key feature of these centres was the ability to transport people across Croatian territory with little interference to local services and communities. At the same time, Croatian civil society and individual citizens demonstrated solidarity and humanitarianism, at times concretised in new grassroots initiatives and organisations.

Croatia now faces a new phase in the European migrant and refugee crisis with the prospect of refugee integration and resettlement. As the challenges and needs of these populations change the longer they stay in Croatia, the role of local authorities will likely shift as more of their decentralised competencies can be used to help refugees integrate.

1

Introduction

The protracted conflict in Syria has resulted in massive population displacement since the outbreak of violence in 2011. During the summer of 2015, a migration route opened up through southeastern Europe for migrants, refugees and asylum seekers from Syria and other countries. This challenged civil protection and asylum systems in the region and had a wide range of impacts on the affected countries. The opening of this transit route reflected the global trend of displaced persons increasingly settling in non-camp settings, primarily in urban areas. In 2014, for instance, an average of six out of 10 refugees displaced globally lived in urban areas, according to UNHCR (2015a). This trend brings with it opportunities, as well as risks and challenges, both for the displaced persons and the host communities. But in countries of transit, such as Croatia in 2015/2016, less is known about the urbanity of refugees and their impacts on local communities.

The Croatian Government managed the transit of 650,000 migrants and refugees by coordinating the activities of an extensive number of international, national and local stakeholders. It ensured a quick and appropriate response to the needs of these people over a period of about seven months. The levels to which smaller local governments and communities (administratively referred to as "*općina*" or municipalities of less than 10,000 residents) were affected by the crisis and able to respond effectively were influenced by several factors. These included the rapid mobility of people in need of humanitarian

assistance, the competency of local organisations that responded and the central government's decisions about how to coordinate assistance. Local authorities and communities were able to provide key resources in terms of infrastructure, utilities and volunteer hours. More broadly, the Croatian response demonstrated institutional capacity to manage large-scale humanitarian crises and exhibited solidarity and humanitarianism with the affected populations. The response relied on local resources and communities in a major way but it spared local governments from bearing significant direct costs.

1.1 Research scope and objectives

In light of an unprecedented humanitarian crisis requiring a largely centralised response, this research paper seeks to investigate the level of involvement of local governments, decentralised and de-concentrated bodies, and local communities[1] in various aspects of crisis management. From a local, territorial perspective, the study team identified the various actors and stakeholders and assessed the relationships and interactions of these institutions, organisations, communities and agencies. The team sought to assess the local Croatian response and identify the underlying factors shaping the approach to the crisis. This investigation also sought to illuminate how the

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[1] The term "local communities" is used in this paper to describe local civil society from unorganised groups of citizens to community-based organisations.

highly transitory nature of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers[2] in Croatia required all actors to reinvent their response frameworks so that basic humanitarian needs could be met quickly.

Local authorities are increasingly on the frontlines of crisis response, though their role in coordination and cooperation with central and humanitarian agencies is often unclear. Increasingly, refugees from modern conflicts tend to settle in urban areas rather than in camp settings. This has led to growing interest among researchers and practitioners to promote mutual understanding between the urban/local sector and the humanitarian sector. The Croatian response raises important issues around the roles and capacities of local authorities within national response frameworks. For example, during the crisis the response was delocalised by shifting the decision-making powers away from local authorities, while moving the response physically from smaller municipal spaces to a more urbanised area. Meanwhile, the response frameworks were deterritorialised by altering various migrant and entry procedures in terms of "space" and in terms of the laws governing those spaces, and establishing a transit reception centre to manage the large influx of people.

Since such crises are not repetitive in nature and would manifest in a different way under small changes of circumstances, this study cannot answer the question of what a good governmental response to managing a refugee transit crisis would be; rather it seeks to identify successful institutional mechanisms that enable collaboration in response and assistance to a large number of people under short timelines and limited resources.

The analysis is limited geographically to affected municipalities (primarily in Eastern Croatia) and temporally to the period between the first recognised day of the crisis[3] (September 16, 2015) and the last day that the Slavonski Brod Winter Transit Centre was open (April 15, 2016). This investigation focuses on the municipal and urban locales of the crisis to understand the operational collaborations between local, national and international actors to manage and protect people during a transnational humanitarian crisis. Note that this research does not analyse the political decisions at the European and international level that led to the opening of a migration route through Croatian territory from September 2015 to March 2016 or the closure of the Western Balkan route.

1.2 Methodology

Based on extensive desk review and a series of interviews with 20 key officials and representatives of relevant organisations and agencies,[4] we analysed the Croatian response in terms of humanitarian assistance and civil protection, local development and decentralisation, human migration, including rights and needs of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, as well as cross-border cooperation. A particular focus was placed on analysing involved institutions/organisations and their relationships, the broader frameworks under which they operate and their decision-making processes, including communication and coordination. As such, this study provides a comprehensive institutional narrative of how Croatia managed the migrant and refugee crisis, focusing on differences between policies and practices to map how issues were addressed by different stakeholders.

The research was divided into several phases. During the inception, the research team conducted desktop research in different disciplines and fields of practice relevant to the study. The team collaborated with local partner CMS (Centre for Peace Studies) during this phase to reconstruct the chronology of events and identify a list of relevant respondents for semi-structured interviews. The sites selected for in-depth investigation included: the City of **Slavonski Brod** (population 59,000) and the smaller border municipalities of **Tovarnik** (population nearly 3,000) and **Lovas** (population nearly 1,200). In April 2016, the core research team undertook field visits to Zagreb, Vukovar, Lovas, Tovarnik and Slavonski Brod. A draft report was developed and distributed for comments and feedback to all interviewees to create space for participatory research and solicit feedback on the issues identified and possible policy solutions.

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[2] Migrants, refugees and asylum seekers were all present on the Balkan transit route. Croatia received relatively few asylum applications in late 2015/early 2016, so the authors have chosen to use "migrants and refugees" to describe the people transiting through Croatia. For clarification of these terms and their political and legal implications, please see *'Refugee' or 'migrant' – Which is right?* (Edwards, 2015) listed in the bibliography.

[3] It is also worth noting that while many refer to the events of the late summer and fall of 2015 as a "migrant crisis" or "refugee crisis", more progressive, rights-based advocacy organisations have taken issue with this terminology (Bužinkić, 2016; Global Justice Now, 2016). The use of these terms in this report is purely descriptive and should not be taken to reflect a political position.

[4] Representatives from the following organisations and institutions were interviewed: Ministry of Interior (including the Deputy Commander of the Slavonski Brod Temporary Admission Center); DUZS (Regional Office in Vukovar, Regional Office in Slavonki Brod, State Intervention Units for Civil Protection); and IOM Croatian Office; UNICEF Croatian Office; Association of Municipalities; Croatian Red Cross (Asylum and Migration Service, Disaster Management Unit); the Croatian Law Centre; Are You Syrious?; Municipality of Lovas; Municipality of Tovarnik; City of Slavonski Brod; and the Information Law Center.

2

Background and context

The outbreak of violence in Syria in 2011 has led to protracted conflict, multiple waves of displacement and a global humanitarian crisis. In 2014, Syria surpassed Colombia as the country with the highest number of internally displaced persons (7.6 million) (UNHCR 2015a). At the end of 2015, more than 4.6 million Syrians were registered as refugees with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in neighbouring countries as well as Egypt and North Africa. Turkey has consistently hosted the most Syrian refugees of any country since the outbreak of the crisis and, as of mid-2015, hosted 45 per cent of all Syrian refugees in the Middle East and North Africa (UNHCR, 2016a).

In the summer of 2015, due to worsening conditions in Syria and good weather for travel in the Mediterranean, arrivals to Europe by sea increased tremendously, peaking in October with nearly a quarter of a million arrivals. Eighty-four per cent of all transiting by sea to Europe arrived in Greece, the starting point on the route through Europe for those transiting through Croatia (UNHCR, 2016b) (see Figure 1).

Nearly half of those arriving in Europe during this period were Syrians. Afghans and Iraqis also constituted significant migrant and refugee populations. In Croatia, the Ministry of the Interior (MOI) reported that 558,724 migrants had entered Croatia between the beginning of the crisis on September 16, 2015 and the end of

Figure 1: Mediterranean sea arrivals to Europe by month
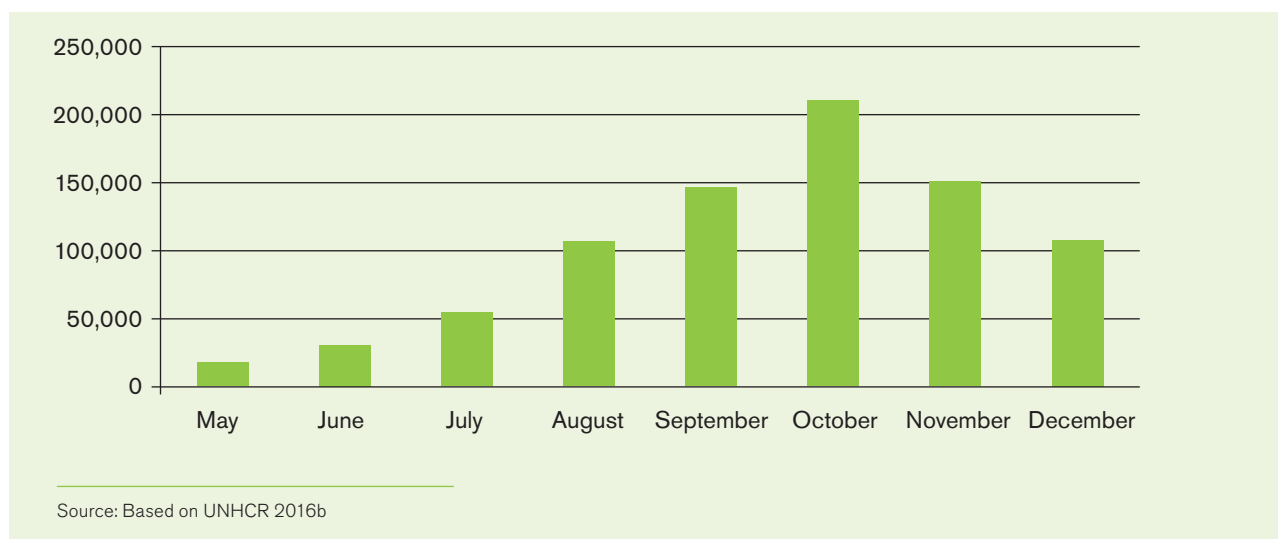

Source: Based on UNHCR 2016b

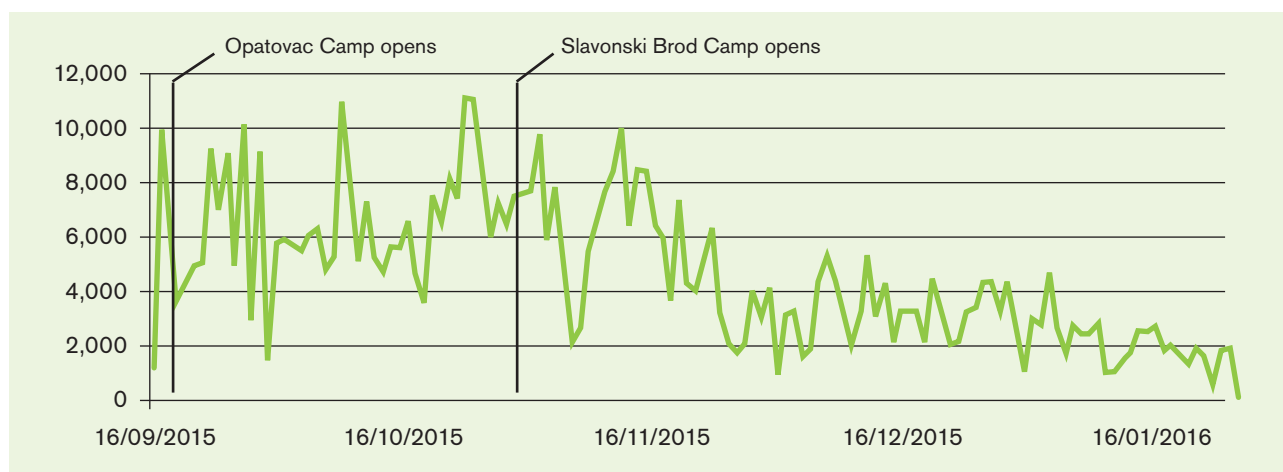Figure 2: Daily number of arrivals in Croatia

Figure 3: Running total of entries into Croatia
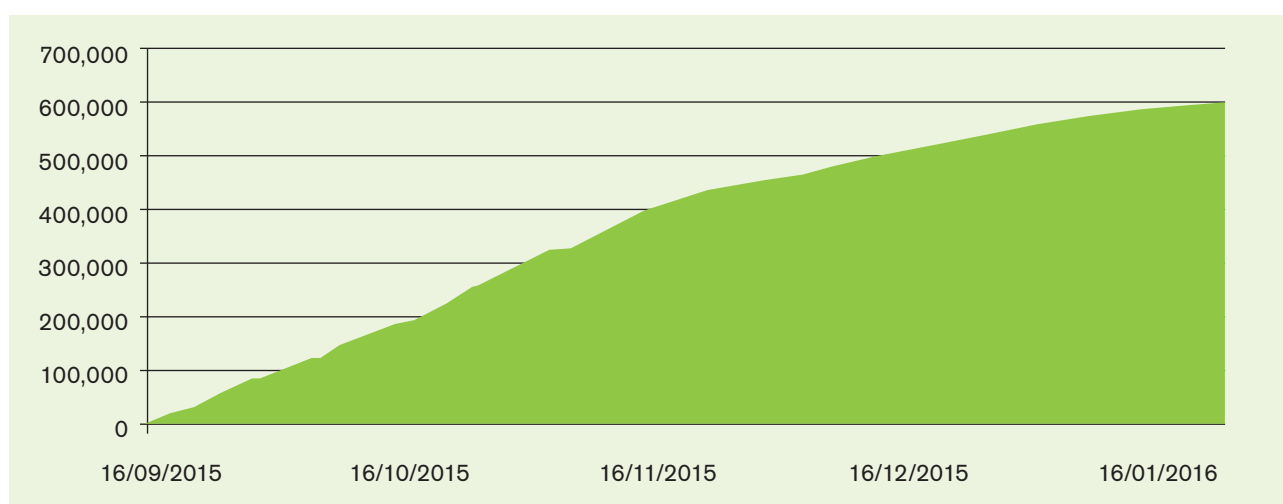
Source: (Figure 2 and 3) Based on Ministry of Interior 2016[5]

the year. As of April 23, 2016, an additional 102,769 migrants had entered in 2016. The total number during this transit period was 661,493 (Ministry of Interior, 2016).

2.1 Chronology of key events in Croatia

Before September 16, the migrants on the Balkan route to northern Europe passed through cities such as Subotica and Horgos (Serbia) to Hungary and onwards to Austria. The emergence of the transit route through Croatia was largely a function of policies in neighbouring countries. The construction of a

fence along the Serbo-Hungarian border, which was completed on September 16, 2015, immediately shifted the primary migrant transit route through Croatia. Further route shifts within Croatia were instigated after the closure of Hungary's border with Croatia in mid-October (ACAPS & MapAction, 2016a).

Most humanitarian organisations and NGOs interviewed said the initial response to large numbers of people entering Croatia was chaotic. Coordination was made difficult by various transport companies and individuals that dropped people at various places across the border with Serbia, prompting police forces to intervene in several different locations (Lovrić, 2016). In the first few days, more than 10,000 people entered Croatia. Not surprisingly, shelter, water, food and other services

[5] Figures on the entries into Croatia were compiled from statistics published by the Ministry of Interior using the latest recorded figure for each day. Due to a change in government in January 2015, statistics have only been published until January 25, 2016, though UNHCR reports the last entry into Croatia on March 5, 2016.

Figure 4: Transit route from conflict-affected countries through the Balkans

could not be systematically provided, although the Red Cross and other humanitarian organisations were present on the ground (see Figure 5 for the sites of assistance as reported by the Croatian Red Cross). In certain areas, particularly near the borders (such as Ključ Brdovečki and Miljana near Slovenia), local, grassroots organisations of volunteers filled gaps in assistance and coordinated their activities directly with police before a transit centre at Slavonski Brod was opened in early November (Juranić, 2016).

During the beginning of the crisis, people were transferred from Tovarnik and other eastern towns near the border by buses and trains to several locations for registration. These included: Zagreb (Zagreb Fair designated as host centre and Hotel Porin Reception Centre for Asylum Seekers); Ježevo (Detention Centre for Illegal Migrants); Beli Manistir (former military facility); Sisak (Viktorovac military facility); and the Kutina Reception Centre for Asylum Seekers (acting as a reception centre for vulnerable groups) (see Figure 5).

After three days, the Ministry of Interior established order, primarily by agreeing with Serbia to use organised transportation and to set up the first transit camp[6] in the village of Opatovac within the municipality of Lovas. The Army built this camp in 24 hours. It opened on September 20, 2015 with capacity for 4,000 people and closed on November 2, 2015 (see Annex 1 for the spatial organisation of services in Tovarnik and at the Opatovac camp).

On October 25, 2015, a week after Hungary closed its border with Croatia, leaders from the countries along the Balkan route from Greece to Germany met in Brussels and agreed on a 17-point plan of action to increase cross-border communication and coordination (Ministry of Interior, 2015). Meanwhile, over the course of two weeks, the Army prepared a new site for the reception and accommodation of about 5,000 migrants and refugees in Slavonski Brod (Bjeliš Industrial Zone), which opened on November 2, 2015.

The flow of migrants and refugees eased and the Balkan route was eventually closed in March 2016. The last group of people hosted in Slavonski Brod stayed at the Winter Transit and Reception Centre for about two months before they were transferred primarily to Hotel Porin in Zagreb or the centre in Ježevo. The Slavonski Brod camp was officially closed on April 15, 2016, seven months after the crisis began. The Western Balkan route and the constituent countries borders were essentially closed in early March as a result of decisions in countries further along the route to cap the number of refugees they would accept. Today, the refugee route remains closed; refugees entering Croatia are largely limited to asylum seekers being transferred back to Croatia under the Dublin Regulations, which places responsibility for processing an asylum application on the country that the asylum seeker first entered, and other EU agreements.

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[6] Prior to Opatovac opening, a makeshift camp in Beli Manistir and one in Čepin was being set up, which caused some confusion for organisations such as the Croatian Red Cross, which had begun setting up means to distribute essential services to refugees before everything moved to Opatovac (Usmiani, 2016).

Figure 5: Transportation infrastructure and key sites of humanitarian aid
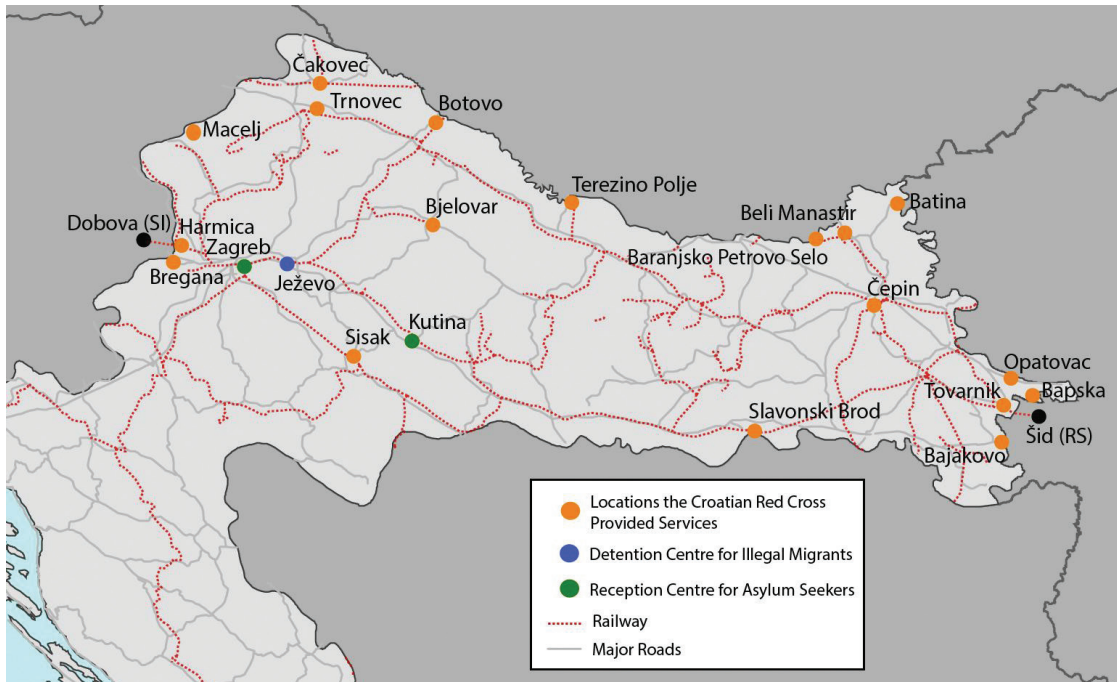
Source: Based on Croatian Red Cross 2016, I2UD 2016

Figure 6: Map of key events in early phases of the crisis in Croatia and affected municipalities
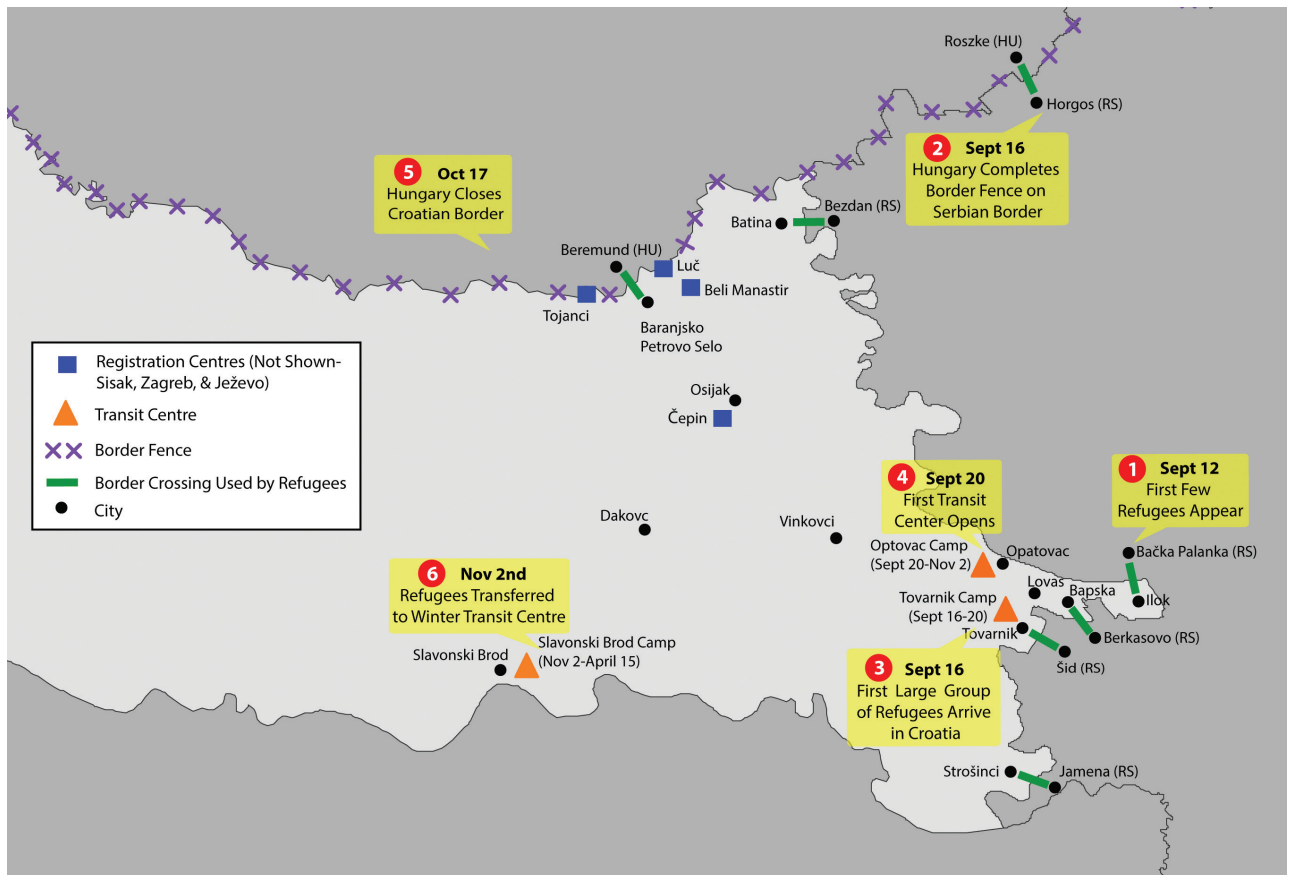
Source: Based on Ministry of Interior 2015, I2UD 2016

3

Institutional framework for national response

When the refugee crisis happened, the institutional framework set up for emergencies and disasters was activated on several levels. A day after the refugees entered the country (September 17, 2015), the Croatian Government established the Headquarters for the coordination of activities related to the arrival of migrants in the Republic of Croatia (National Crisis Headquarters). This headquarters had the same organisational membership that was established during the 2014 floods, though with different leadership (Government of the Republic of Croatia, 2015a).[7] Ranko Ostojić, the Minister of the Interior, who was at the same time vice-president and deputy minister of the Croatian Government, was appointed head of the National Crisis Headquarters, whereas during the floods the National Protection and Rescue Directorate (DUZS) was the coordinating body.[8] As a deputy minister, Mr Ostojić had the executive ability to make decisions on the ground without convening the Cabinet, allowing for flexible and immediate actions to be taken (Piteša, 2016). The Ministry of the Interior is responsible for asylum procedures, admission of foreigners, border protection, and managing existing reception and detention centres, so it was charged with managing the crisis and took over the role of coordinator for state institutions.

Other members appointed were the deputy minister of social policy and youth, the assistant minister of European and foreign affairs, the assistant minister in the Ministry of Labour and Pension System, the assistant minister in the Ministry of Health, the director of the Headquarters of the Army of the Republic of Croatia and Ministry of Defence, and the director of the National Protection and Rescue Directorate. The assistant minister from the Ministry of Economy in charge of commodity reserves was also added to the list of members (Government of the Republic of Croatia, 2015b). The legal decision that created the headquarters also stipulates that other state institutions can participate in the work of the National Crisis Headquarters, when necessary.

In the both camps at Opatovac and Slavonski Brod, the Ministry of the Interior appointed a head and deputy head, who were in charge of the daily camp management and the coordination of different actors. DUZS was in charge of logistical and technical assistance in the implementation of activities, such as renting hygiene equipment for the camps and hiring companies for the transport of refugees, as well in collaborating with the Directorate for National Reserves

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[7] In May of 2014, southeastern Europe experienced heavy rain causing devastating floods that affected and displaced several thousands of people. Parts of Slavonia, the main site of Croatia's 2016 migrant and refugee crisis, waere the most affected part of the country.
[8] In a later Government decision made on September 24, 2015, the head of the National Crisis Headquarters was re-assigned to the deputy minister of the Interior due to changes in duties.

to secure shelter and food and procure various disposable materials for deployed forces.

The Croatian Red Cross played an important role and collaborated closely with the Ministry of Interior and participated in daily coordination meetings with camp managers. The Ministry appointed the Croatian Red Cross as the coordinator of the United Nations (UN) and other international agencies and local non-governmental organisations, a task that it took on in addition to its regular disaster management activities (IFRC, 2016). Because Croatia did not formally request international assistance from the UN,[9] agencies that would normally play a stronger role in coordination and have direct communication with the central government were instead coordinated, along with more than 25 other local, regional and international NGOs of various sizes, under the Croatian Red Cross.[10] According to the Red Cross's head of operations from the Disaster Management Unit, the state's decision likely stemmed from security concerns, but also reflected a preference for working with familiar, local actors. Among the countries on the Balkan route from Syria to Germany, the Croatian Red Cross has been the only one to act as an intermediary, participating in National Crisis Headquarter meetings with state agencies on behalf of all organisations, as well as coordinating all non-governmental actors and UN agencies (Usmiani, 2016). At the same time, UNHCR coordinated the activities of the UN agencies active in Croatia (including the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICED), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and the World Health Organization (WHO) as part of the UN's Inter-Agency Coordination principles (Piteša, 2016).

Various interviews revealed the uniqueness of this two-pronged coordinating mechanism in which the Red Cross negotiated the varied interests of the more than 20 NGOs operating in the camp with the state's orders and objectives. Several communications challenges arose out of a lack of knowledge and understanding of the "cluster approach" (OCHA, 2016), both among NGOs in the coordination meetings headed by the Red Cross and among the actors in the National Crisis Headquarters, which led to several gaps and overlaps in assistance.[11] While the Red Cross regularly collaborates with state agencies and humanitarian agencies such as UNHCR,[12] its mandate in this crisis demanded significant diplomacy and presented new roles, responsibilities and challenges in terms of communication (Usmiani, 2016).

Led by national institutions, the response was highly centralised, but it was also multi-sectorial and comprehensive due to the multitude of stakeholders. It is important to note that while national institutions were in charge of managing the crisis, the three main organisations leading the crisis management activities – the Ministry of Interior, DUZS[13] and the Croatian Red Cross – could rely on resources in their regional and local offices, due to their decentralised nature (for instance, police within the Ministry of Interior). Furthermore, many of the Croatia-based, non-UN humanitarian organisations that worked in the Slavonski Brod camp were faith-based organisations, which frequently partner with or operate through local churches to collect funds and goods to distribute to those in need.

Communication with the wider public and expert community was addressed through the Ministry of Interior's daily reports on the number of transiting refugees,[14] as well as through spokespersons from the ministry (often involving the minister himself) and the Red Cross, which held regular press conferences. Social media also played a significant role in informing and mobilising the younger urban population from non-affected parts of Croatia, especially as judged from a rapidly growing grassroots initiative "Are You Syrious?" and a platform of better established NGOs "Refugees Welcome" (Bužinkić, 2016). Most organisations posted detailed reports on their websites and used social media to disseminate them. Reports published by volunteers at "Are You Syrious?" progressively gained enough legitimacy to be used by various international stakeholders as a source of information (Juranić, 2016). National and local media were also active in following the crisis, while local governments in the initially affected municipalities of Lovas and Tovarnik were also communicating directly with their citizens (Budinski, 2016; Cirba, 2016).

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[9] In previous crises, Croatia has requested assistance from the UN through the Permanent Representation of Croatia to the United Nations (2014 floods) or through the Ministry of European and Foreign Affairs (Otmačić 2016).

[10] Organisations that wanted to provide aid and work in the transit centres had to apply for access through the Ministry of Interior, which developed special identification cards for each person operating there.

[11] According to OCHA "Clusters are groups of humanitarian organizations (UN and non-UN) working in the main sectors of humanitarian action, e.g. shelter and health. They are created when clear humanitarian needs exist within a sector, when there are numerous actors within sectors and when national authorities need coordination support." See OCHA 2016 for a full description of the cluster approach.

[12] The Croatian Red Cross has been a key implementing partner of UNCHR in Croatia since the Homeland War in 1991 and continues to work with it on issues related to return and resettlement.

[13] Specialised forces of DUZS and police intervention units from all parts of the country provided expert assistance in operations.

[14] However, after the national elections, which brought about a change in the national ruling party, this information was not shared regularly and only press releases were shared with the media.

Table 2: Key stakeholder groups

CATEGORY	ACTOR
Croatian authorities	Ministry of Interior National Protection and Rescue Directorate (DUZS) Ministry of Defence Ministry of Health Ministry of Social Policy and Youth Ministry of European and Foreign Affairs Ministry of Labour and Pension System
Croatian humanitarian agencies and NGOs	Croatian Red Cross (CRC) Caritas Croatia Union of Baptist Churches in Croatia Zagreb Islamic Community Meshihat Croatian Law Centre (HPC) Centre for Peace Studies (CMS) Information Legal Centre (IPC) Youth Peace Group Danube (MGMD)
Croatian volunteer/grassroots organisations	Volunteer Centre Osijek Volunteer Centre Slavonski Brod Are You Syrious? Initiative Welcome
International humanitarian agencies and NGOs	Save the Children International Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) Centre for Support to Immigrant Communities (CACI) Magna Samaritan's Purse Jesuit Relief Services (JRS) Remar Intereuropean Human Aid Association (IHA)
UN agencies	UNHCR IOM UNICEF WHO

Source: Based on UNHCR, 2015b; IFRC, 2016; Bužinkić, 2016

Regionally, individuals and institutions around the route often collaborated and communicated with their counterparts across borders. For instance, the Croatian prime minister contacted other heads of state to find a solution, the minister of interior signed protocols to cooperate through the exchange of information and Croatian police presence in Šid, and Red Cross offices shared information about anticipated numbers expected to arrive[15] (Ministry of Interior, 2015; Usmiani, 2016; Piteša, 2016). Country offices of IOM, meanwhile, leveraged an Early Warning Information Sharing Network across Greece and the Western Balkans through a WhatsApp group (Piteša, 2016). The Red Cross also relied on information being shared within its internal Red Cross networks – this was especially valuable when anticipating if/when the first migrants and refugees would arrive in Croatia (Vudrić, 2016). For local authorities, cross-border city-to-city dialogue and exchange was facilitated by the Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South-East Europe (NALAS) through two organised conferences and supported by Swiss and German cooperation agencies *a posteriori*.

[15] See the news article on the Croatian prime minister's discussion with the German chancellor (Vecernji.hr 2015) listed in the bibliography.

4

Transit refugee rights and needs

Taking into account that refugees were passing through Croatia quickly, several of their needs and basic human rights, as determined by humanitarian actors, could only be partially met or protected. Typical modes of ensuring rights, protection and offering aid to meet basic needs had to be adjusted on the ground, paying attention to cultural norms. The Croatian experience raises several questions about how to address resource efficiency of aid and the timeframe during which rights and needs should be met in transit situations. It also demonstrates interesting interactions between approaches that prioritise security in transit and rights-based humanitarian relief and protection.[16]

4.1 Assessing migrant and refugee needs

Once displaced, civilians are entitled to various protections and rights. Croatia, as a signatory of obligations under international law, was required to provide protection and relief for migrants and refugees transiting though its territory[17] (ICRC, 2005). This international legal framework guarantees refugees the right to life, liberty and security of person, including protection from violence; freedom from torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; the right

to a fair trial; the right to seek and enjoy asylum; and the right to an adequate standard of living, to education and to work (Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 2004). Women and children are entitled to additional rights, which stipulate that women shall be especially protected against threats to their physical safety, rape, sexual exploitation and discrimination. Standards specific to children include protection from all forms of violence and forcible recruitment and others provided by the Convention on the Rights of the Child. However, transit situations, during which refugees are in a transit centre for about four to six hours, present new and interesting challenges in terms of ensuring rights, protecting vulnerable groups, and honouring refugees' desire to reach other countries.

Organisations providing humanitarian aid and assistance have developed their own frameworks for action and standards regulating the manner in which aid to affected populations is to be provided. One of the most notable and widely accepted set of standards are the Sphere Standards, a voluntary tool adopted by a wide range of international humanitarian organisations that establish minimum standards to ensure the right to dignified life in a humanitarian response. But in Croatia, criteria for humanitarian response and acceptable minimum standards were never set or communicated to actors in humanitarian response (Otmačić, 2016; Usmiani, 2016).

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[16] The term "protection" in humanitarian circles refers to activities aimed at respecting the rights of all individuals "in accordance with international law" (OCHA, 2012).

[17] Croatia has ratified the Charter of the United Nations, the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees, and the 1967 Protocol on the Status of Refugees, among other relevant international conventions and protocols constituting human rights law, refugee law and international humanitarian law.

Humanitarian agencies such as UNICEF advocated for standards to be determined or discussed but felt there was a lack of education and training about standards in humanitarian response. This led to misunderstandings and misperceptions about different organisations asking for special privileges, when in reality many were looking to enforce standards in terms of appropriate spaces, practices and coordination to deliver assistance (Otmačić, 2016). Since many of those transiting through Europe during this emergency were small children, UNICEF was able to trigger the Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action, which stipulate a universal framework for humanitarian action regarding children and outline commitments for intervention by UNICEF and local partners (UNICEF, 2010).

The National Crisis Headquarters and operational forces were constantly assessing the needs of both migrants and refugees, as well as of relief providers, and held daily meetings to discuss this. These needs changed constantly depending on the number of migrants and refugees entering the country, the length of time they spent in the camp, changes in neighbouring countries' policies and decisions, and the weather. The assessment of needs and procurement of food and non-food items became easier when the flow of people became steadier and authorities became better informed through strengthened cooperation and agreements with Serbia. At the same time, progression of the crisis through the autumn and winter months required an adapted response that was marked by moving the temporary reception centre to Slavonski Brod, where accommodation could be prepared for cold weather, and blankets, heaters and winter cloths could be procured or provided from national stocks.

International humanitarian organisations were also carrying out needs assessments related to their missions, mandates and fields of expertise, including assessments as early as August by UNICEF, in preparation of the route opening up through Croatia (Otmačić, 2016). Within three days of the first entries arriving in Croatia, IOM Croatia was deployed to undertake a rapid assessment in partnership with IOM's head office to determine influxes, volumes and the demographic profile of the migrants and refugees, as well as to assess needs such as emergency shelter and non-food items. IOM also applied its displacement tracking matrix tool in Croatia, referring to it as a "mobility tracking matrix". This tracking system was developed in 2004 to monitor displacement in Iraq and has since been implemented in countries around the world to collect, process and share information about displaced populations (IOM, 2016). It was implemented in Croatia to capture data about the demographics, origins and route details of people on the move and monitor flows (Piteša, 2016). The temporality of the migrants' presence in Croatia limited actors' ability to assess needs and gather more detailed information until flows halted. This allowed more time for interaction with the transiting population.

4.2 Operational response to transit needs

As it got colder, it was clear that Camp Opatovac could no longer provide adequate accommodation and that a new site should be established. After careful consideration, the National Crisis Headquarters decided that a site in Slavonski Brod – the sixth largest city in Croatia with a population of 60,000 citizens[18] – could leverage available permanent buildings and provide the space needed for additional temporary structures. This location was also attractive because of its strategic position on international transit routes and its existing infrastructure, which included train tracks entering directly into the camp – trains were the primary means of transporting refugees from border to border – and the potential to install winterised shelter at the site.

To most effectively meet the needs of migrants and refugees arriving in Croatia, the central government moved operations to Slavonski Brod less than two months after the first arrivals. The decision reflects the delocalisation of the crisis by the central authorities away from the smaller municipal spaces that were immediately affected and whose resources and infrastructure were rapidly overwhelmed by the scale of the migration. Because the site was on the outskirts of an urban area there was little interference with the everyday life of local citizens. The decision to centralise services within a camp setting also demonstrates a desire to create economies of scale.

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[18] The site is owned by the National Oil Company INA, which is owned by the Croatian Government. Local authorities have no input in the land-use decisions concerning state-owned plots (Andrić, 2016).

In the Slavonski Brod centre, more than 25 local and international non-governmental actors and intergovernmental organisations, working across various sectors, were there to meet the needs of the migrants and refugees in transit. This was in addition to various central-level authorities from Croatia. These actors met daily under the coordination of the Red Cross. They had dedicated space to collaborate and store supplies in the camp. Needs included shelter, food, water, healthcare, non-food items, communication, security, legal advice, finance and other assistance, such as access to religious facilities

and play areas for children (see Table 1). These resources, which were secured via different means – including local donations, national stocks reserves, international help through the Common Emergency Communication and Information System (CECIS) EU mechanism and other international assistance – were provided free-of-charge to the migrants and refugees for the first time on the route.[19] In addition, a kiosk run as a private enterprise in the Slavonski Brod camp sold cigarettes, phones, phone credit and snacks, and operated a currency exchange to meet the demand for these products in the camp.

Figure 7: Map of Slavonski Brod Transit Centre[20]
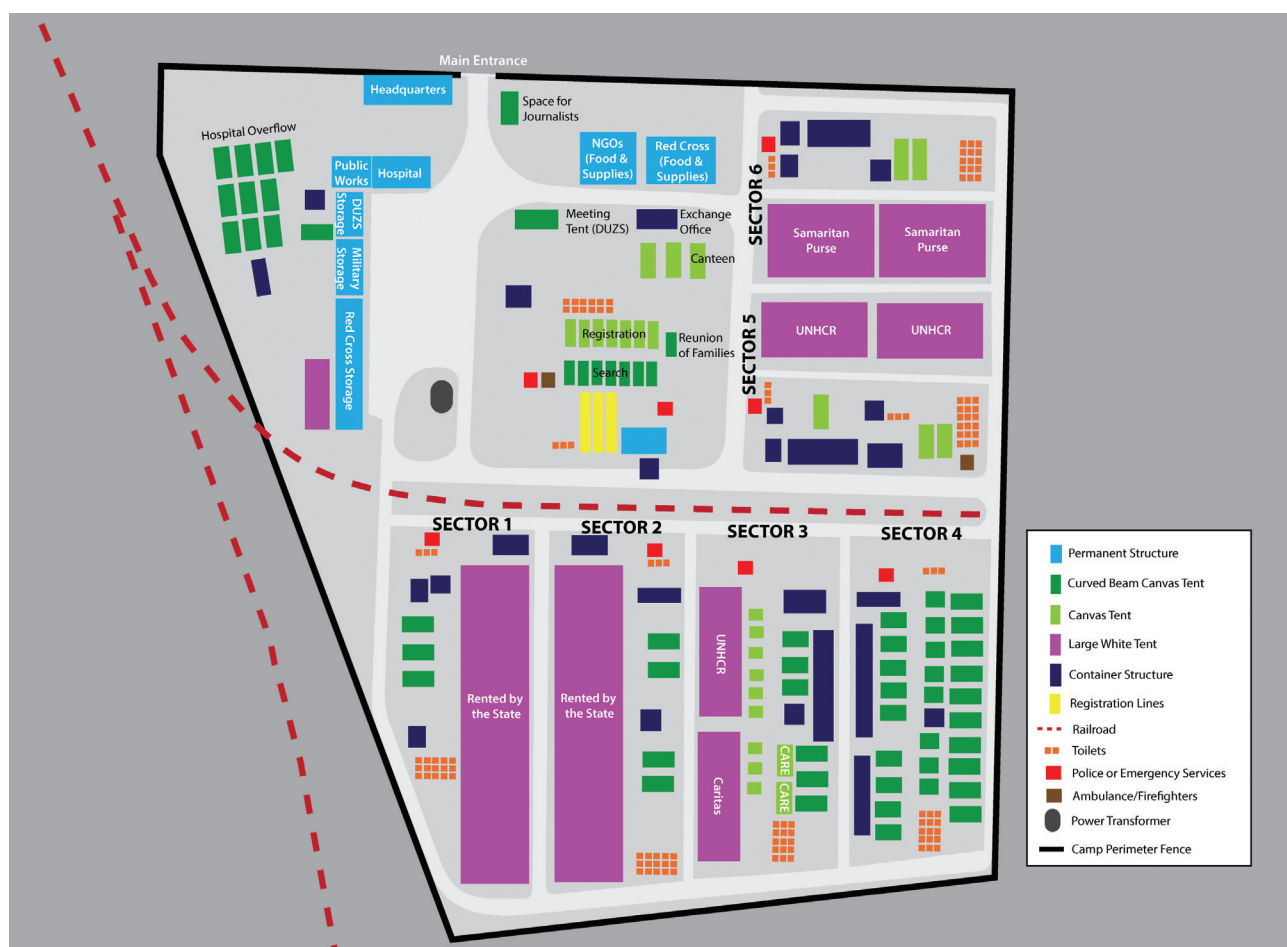
Source: Based on Kovačević 2016, I2UD 2016

Table 1: Overview of needs and assistance provided in Slavonski Brod

CATEGORIES OF IDENTIFIED TRANSIT NEEDS	OBSERVED MEANS OF ADDRESSING NEEDS	NON-STATE ACTORS INVOLVED[21]
Shelter	Rented by Government, two heated 100x25m tents in sector 1 and 2, as well as multiple smaller tents across other sectors; 120 containers for vulnerable groups (women, children, elderly, etc.); beds and blankets	Caritas Croatia, Samaritan's Purse, UNHCR
Food and water	Pre-packaged meals and fresh fruit, bottled and tap water, breast feeding areas	Caritas Croatia, CRC, JRS, Magna, Remar, Save the Children International, UNICEF
Sanitation and hygiene	Accessible chemical toilets placed in various areas of the centre, sanitary centres with heated showers, hygiene kits, diapers, rubbish bins, regular cleaning services of the camp and the trains, communal waste disposal services, removal of topsoil and pouring of gravel	JRS, Samaritan's Purse, Union of Baptist Churches in Croatia
Health	On-site emergency units with around 10 beds, access to local hospital for more serious procedures, on-site ambulance	Magna
Non-food items	Winter clothes, blankets, shoes, backpacks	ADRA, Caritas Croatia, CRC, IHA, JRS, Remar, Samaritan's Purse, UNHCR
Communication	Translators, wireless Internet access points, mobile phone charging stations, possibility to buy phones and credit at kiosk on site	ADRA
Security	Entry searches and seizure of weapons, registration procedure, fenced premises, video cameras, police patrol inside and outside of the camp, organisation of the camp to avoid overcrowding, evacuation plan, assistance in embankment on and off the train, family reunification services, protocols for unaccompanied minors	
Legal advice / right to asylum	Video wall for communicating in multiple languages on the possibility of seeking asylum, free legal advice provided by various NGOs, disseminating leaflets	ADRA, CACI, CLC, CPS, ILC, IOM, MGMD, UNHCR, Volunteer Center Osijek, Volunteer Center Slavonski Brod
Protection of rights	Religious facilities (tent for prayer, access to Quran) and pork-free diet, child-friendly spaces; psychosocial support; safe spaces for women	CLC, CPS, CRC, ILC, Save the Children International, UNHCR, UNICEF

Sources: UNHCR 2015b; Multiple interviews within the scope of the conducted fieldwork and analysis of reports published by crisis management stakeholders

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[21] The list of non-state actors involved reflects a UNHCR mapping of involved organisations as of December 1, 2015, though actors' presence and roles often shifted throughout the crisis.

At the operational level of distributing aid, differing methodologies (or a lack of methodology) in assessing need led to differences in response by certain organisations. One of the most critical differences, highlighted by the Croatian Red Cross, was how much aid (particularly non-food items) agencies thought they should distribute based on the rapid transit of migrants' and the unknowns of their onward journey. Resource optimisation in these situations can be further complicated by top-down pressure from organisational headquarters to demonstrate high volumes of aid to achieve fundraising or reporting goals. The Croatian Red Cross's general approach was to distribute adequate and sufficient aid for migrants and refugees to survive the journey across Croatia, whereas volunteer organisations with less education and experience in humanitarian response often sought to provide as much aid as possible (Usmiani, 2016).

The particularities of transit and the temporality of affected populations in Croatia resulted in interesting adaptations to meeting needs because of the short timeframe in which to deliver assistance. It led to many local solutions that sought to respond to needs based on individual organisations' own standards and within their own response frameworks. Ad hoc solutions by organisations present in the camp ranged from a locally built platform so that people could access the train independently (enhancing accessibility inclusive of gender and cultural dynamics) to procedures that allowed women the time and space to breastfeed without compromising their position in the line or their departure time. Child-friendly spaces were adapted from place-based areas to a service provided by UNICEF in lines as families were queuing for registration in the camp or transport out of the camp (Otmačić, 2016). Several of these makeshift solutions were both driven by and resulted in more effective protection. While time hindered the capacity for NGO and humanitarian assistance, solutions that factored in rapid mobility were more effective in meeting the needs of the migrants and refugees.

Time constraints and the needs caused by transit also presented challenges in terms of communication and information sharing with refugees by local NGOs and humanitarian agencies. Many did not have the information that refugees wanted to know (often related to countries further along the route or destination countries). If they did have information, they did not share it, either because they did not want to encourage further refugee movement, or, as several respondents confirmed, they did not want to raise the expectations of the refugees (Dahlia, 2016; Vudrić, 2016). To truly

ensure transit refugees have access to information, it appears necessary to strengthen communication channels with other transit and destination countries. It was well recognised throughout this crisis, however, that often the most valuable information networks are those created among the refugees themselves, often using digital technologies and social media.

4.2.1. Negotiating rights and security

In Croatia, issues of practicality also revealed security concerns conflicting with rights-based approaches to humanitarian assistance. While several humanitarian actors worked to meet the needs and human rights of migrants and refugees in the transit centres, the Croatian Government (particularly the Ministry of the Interior and police) worked to ensure the right to protection and security through searches, seizures of weapons, cameras, police tents to monitor each sector and police patrols around the fence and in the camp.[22] The transit centre in Slavonski Brod was designed by the General of the Croatian Army, incorporating several design components based on security suggested by the deputy commander of the Slavonski Brod camp (from the Ministry of Interior), including accessibility standards for evacuation in case of fire (Kovačević, 2016). Opinions among interviewed stakeholders differed on whether the camp met the minimum standards for shelter and various services as outlined in the Sphere Handbook (by the Sphere Project, a volunteer charter and initiative of various humanitarian agencies), though many agreed that for the short amount of time that people spent in the camp, it was adequate and commensurate with transit needs. In fact, many interviewees suggested that people transiting were reticent to accept or exercise the rights that many humanitarian organisations were trying to uphold because they feared that they would become stranded in Croatia (in case a country further along their route decided to shut its borders), or that receiving such services would delay their journey.[23]

An example of this disconnect between ensuring the right to life with dignity and security, with assisting migrants and refugees to transit to their preferred destinations for asylum, was the use (and eventual discontinuation) of IKEA-designed shelters by the Ministry of the Interior managing the centre. These UNHCR-provided shelters, which offer greater privacy and space then typical tents, were unable to withstand the local weather, and due to the speed of transit, presented a public health risk if not properly cleaned after each use.

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[22] "Transit centre" and "camp" are interchangeable terms for the same sites.
[23] Sleep (for children), for instance, was a need that largely went unmet in the circumstances of rapid transit (Otmačić, 2016).

In other instances, measures taken in the camp elicited different responses and reactions from different groups. The separation and confinement of selected individuals to certain sectors of the Slavonski Brod centre was perceived by the rights-based organisation CMS as forcible detention and by police as a necessary measure to ensure the security and privacy of others in the camp (CMS and Are You Syrious, 2016; Kovačević, 2016). These types of situations highlight potential difficulties in negotiating the humanitarian concept of protection with the state's objective of security, which might be remedied through greater awareness and understanding of actors' varied intentions in humanitarian response.

At times, these conflicting concepts of protection were negotiated by applying other humanitarian concepts, such as the "Do No Harm" principle.[24] Several humanitarian organisations reported large numbers of children, transiting through Europe, who have specific rights, vulnerabilities and needs in humanitarian disasters. Amnesty International reported, for instance, that Croatian authorities "failed to identify vulnerable individuals, including unaccompanied minors and victims of human trafficking entering the country through its land borders" (Amnesty International, 2016). But interviews with various stakeholders revealed that the decision to allow groups of teenagers travelling together to continue along the route was made in collaboration with humanitarian organisations and deemed in their "better" interest to increase the chance of family reunification. Given that nearly all migrants and refugees transiting through Croatia had been victims of trafficking from Greece to Turkey, a specific response for this vulnerable group would have been practically impossible. Similarly, an unprecedented transitory protocol was developed and codified to address the issue of unaccompanied minors. This changed the policy so that the Ministry of Social Policy and Youth did not have to intervene and immediately transfer them to the Osijek Reception Centre. Instead, minors would stay in the camp for 24 hours. In an estimated 95 per cent of cases, minors were reunified with their families (Otmačić, 2016).

At other times, the Croatian response coincidentally or intentionally met both national and humanitarian objectives. For instance, the state's response to offer free transportation across Croatian territory (a unique practice in the region) significantly reduced the risk and incidence of human trafficking and exploitation, an issue of high political importance in the Balkans since the large population movements of the 1990s (European Economic and Social Committee, 2016; Kovačević 2016). The positive effect of this practical response demonstrated a synergy between principles of humanitarian protection and security.

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[24] Specifically, as it applies to this crisis, this principle implies that humanitarian action must avoid exacerbating disparities, insecurity, and conflict among the affected population (UNICEF, 2010).

5

Role of local authorities and communities

While local authorities had a relatively limited role in decision making around the Croatian response to the migrant and refugee crisis, their partially decentralised competencies in civil protection and utility services were leveraged in the response, to the extent possible. This modest involvement of local authorities can be attributed to the centralised nature of governance in Croatia, their lack of a mandate in refugee and asylum affairs and, above all, their constrained capacities, especially in initially affected small municipalities. In light of this situation, timely and firm involvement of central government spared these local communities from potentially devastating effects and burdens. However, as analysed in the following pages, their resources were mobilised in various ways and to varying degrees in different cities and municipalities. De-concentrated bodies in the local territories were also critically mobilised in the response framework, not only from affected territories, but from across Croatia (as with the police or DUZS state intervention forces) (Kovačević, 2016; Boričević and Baričić, 2016).[25]

In terms of political and administrative organisation, Croatia is a small unitary country with a decentralised and administrative structure formed by central, regional and local governments. It has 576 units of local and regional governance, including 20 counties (*županije*), 127 cities/towns and 428 municipalities (*općine*)[26] (Koprić, 2014). Both municipalities and cities/towns often comprise more than one settlement, because the administrative territory of a town may include suburban villages or settlements near the town in question, as is the case with the municipality of Lovas, which counts the settlement of Opatovac in its jurisdiction.

Territorial decentralisation, which began in 2001, is not fully followed by fiscal decentralisation, so the country is still highly centralised, and decentralisation programs and projects have had limited results and have not been met with adequate political will (Podolnjak *et al.,* 2010). Many smaller municipalities lack the capacity to provide adequate services, financially or otherwise, leaving gaps in critical social services such as primary education and primary healthcare.

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[25] The Ministry of Interior is body charged with conducting procedures of international protection as per the 2015 Act on International and Temporary Protection. The General Police Directorate is de-concentrated into 20 Police Administrations at the county level and operating through local police stations. State Intervention Units for Civil Protection are operative forces for protection and rescue tasks with regional offices in Zagreb, Split, Rijeka and Osijek, composed of professional core and reserved forces.

[26] At the time of the break-up of Yugoslavia and the drafting of the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia in 1990, there were 101 municipalities, which, through various territorial reforms, have been progressively split into several smaller local units (Podolnjak *et al.,* 2010).

Table 3: Local and regional self-government framework in Croatia

Units of local self-government (cities and municipalities) perform the tasks of local importance that directly address the needs of citizens that are not assigned to state bodies by the constitution or by law. Key tasks include:	Units of regional self-government (counties) perform tasks of regional importance. Key tasks include:
▪ organisation of settlements and housing ▪ town and urban planning ▪ utility services ▪ childcare ▪ social welfare ▪ primary health protection ▪ education and primary school education ▪ culture, physical culture and sports ▪ consumer protection ▪ protection and improvement of natural environment ▪ fire protection and civil defence ▪ transport on its territory	▪ education ▪ medical care ▪ town and urban planning ▪ economic development ▪ transit and traffic infrastructure ▪ planning and development of the network of educational, medical, social and cultural institutions

The following sub-sections outline the *de jure* and actual role of local authorities in key services, including civil protection and utilities, relative to the crisis. The role of citizens in the affected local authorities is described, in addition to the potential role of local authorities as the presence of migrants and refugees in Croatia shifts from being temporal to more permanent and the issue of integration gains significance.

5.1 Decentralised nature of civil protection

The Croatian institutional and legal framework for managing the immediate impacts of a crisis consists primarily of civil protection and disaster risk reduction (DRR) policies and measures. The general structure of the current system was created in 2004[27] and has since been upgraded based on the lessons learned from managing different crises and through the European Union (EU) integration processes, which fostered the harmonisation of regulations (internally and externally), provided training and funding, and incorporated Croatia into the EU civil protection system. Since September 2009, Croatia participates in the Civil Protection Mechanism and the Civil Protection Financial Instrument of the European Union, and has ratified several EU directives on civil protection.[28]

The main Act regulating the civil protection and DRR is the Law on the Civil Protection System of Republic of Croatia. This establishes the civil protection system at the state, regional (county) and local government level (towns and municipalities), which encompasses an extensive number of institutions and policies (European Commission, 2016a). The former Law on Protection and Rescue established the National Protection and Rescue Directorate (DUZS).

According to the law, representative bodies of regional and local self-government units have responsibilities pertaining to the planning, development, effective functioning and financing of civil protection (see Annex 2 for a table on the responsibilities of local level government bodies pertaining to civil protection). Furthermore, two or more municipalities that are territorially connected and belong to the same geographical area and share common risks can jointly organise the performance of civil protection by establishing a body, administrative department or service. Inter-territorial cooperation, a tool encouraged by the Council of Europe in Croatia since 2010, has shown many benefits in other contexts for enhancing effective service delivery, dialogue, stability and development (Podolnjak *et al.,* 2010). In Croatia, however, joint service provision is limited to a joint administrative office in Istria for budget and finance issues, communal utility companies and joint police forces (Ivanović, 2016).

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[27] For more information on the historical development of civil protection in Croatia see Dobranovic, Z. (2008) listed in the bibliography.
[28] Including Directive 2012/18/EU (which amended and later repealed Council Directive 96/82/EC) and Council Directive 2008/114/EC (full titles are in the bibliography).

When addressing a crisis, operational forces of civil protection have to follow three principles, according to the law:

- **Subsidiarity**, which requires that decisions and measures of civil protection are primarily conducted by utilising all available own resources and capacities of operational forces for civil protection of local and regional (county) governments, which are affected by major accident or disaster;

- **Solidarity**, according to which the affected unit of local and regional (county) government suggests further assistance after using all of its available resources and capabilities of participants and operational forces of civil protection; and

- **Continuity of action**, by which members of the operational forces in the system of civil protection need to continuously carry out activities within its scope during major accidents and disasters (DUZS, 2016).

In terms of the institutional framework defined by DUZS, the formal involvement of the local and regional authorities took place by activating the Rescue and Protection Headquarters of Vukovar-Srijem County, as well as the affected municipalities – Tovarnik, Lovas, Tompojevci, Jankovci, Nijemci, and the cities of Beli Manastir and Zagreb (DUZS, 2016). Their operational forces were deployed to various emergency situations on the ground, as needed.

None of the representatives from affected local authorities were members of the National Crisis Headquarters but were members of DUZS's vertical command framework. Namely, the head of DUZS was a member of National Crisis Headquarters. Each county in Croatia has a regional head of DUZS who was briefed or who personally attended the meetings of the National Crisis Headquarters. Simultaneously, there were coordination meetings between each regional head of DUZS who activated county or city/municipal Rescue and Protection Headquarters, which are chaired by the deputy head of county or city/municipality. In this way, local authorities play a direct part in crisis management but during national emergencies their role is more focused on implementing tasks given by the central authorities, and less in planning and decision-making processes, as was observed during the crisis.

This decentralised framework of civil protection enabled reliable information sharing when the migrants first arrived, but it failed to issue effective early warnings to those municipalities that would be directly affected near the border. The regional head of DUZS in Vukovar stated that DUZS and Ministry of Interior were jointly conducting preliminary assessments of potential location sites for transit centres as early as July 2015, as well as developing potential action scenarios (Lovrić, 2016). Though they were concerned about avoiding large numbers of unorganised people in populated areas, especially as the school year was approaching and people were tending to the harvest in the fields, local governments in both Tovarnik and Lovas were told by Ministry of Interior on multiple occasions that they were not anticipating an arrival of migrants and refugees (Budinski, 2016; Cirba, 2016).

By using the civil protection framework three weeks before the first arrivals, the local government in Tovarnik initiated a meeting of its Municipal Rescue and Protection Headquarters to assess the potential of a more significant influx of people. Representatives of both DUZS and the police are members of that body, but they were informed that no arrivals were expected (Budinski, 2016). The media was constantly present in Tovarnik, even some two weeks before the first arrivals, prompting a new meeting held with representatives of police, local government and County Rescue and Protection Headquarters to reassess the situation. This concluded that up to 500 arrivals, if any, were expected (Budinski, 2016).

Similarly, the Osijek-Baranja County reported that in the initial two days of the crisis its County Rescue and Protection Headquarters did not receive information on what was happening on the ground, though a county representative was later included in the coordination and implementation of reception and care for migrants in that area (Assembly of Osijek-Baranja County, 2016). The decentralised framework of civil protection provides tools for coordinating and information sharing among relevant institutions, but in this particular case the system did not effectively facilitate a set of preparatory activities in collaboration with local and regional governments. The poor exchange of data with neighbouring Serbia in the early days of the crisis made central-local dialogue in Croatia difficult (Valenta and Dakić, 2016). The ineffectiveness in these circumstances resulted in confusion and uncoordinated delivery of services during the first few days, until the camp in Opatovac became operational.

5.2 Use of local public utilities and services

Although the role of local authorities was not central to the Croatian response because of the largely top-down management of the crisis, it relied heavily on locally owned and locally used infrastructure and resources such as land, buildings and other critical infrastructure (particularly railways, roads, electricity, water, sewerage systems and garbage disposal). Both Opatovac and Slavonski Brod transit and reception centres were located on state-owned property, while utility companies, which are owned or co-owned by local governments, managed the provision of access to critical infrastructure and other basic services. The municipality of Lovas, where the Opatovac camp was located, stated that it was not involved in the decisions around location of the transit centre (Cirba, 2016). Similarly, the head of Brod-Posavina County stated in local media that he was surprised that the city of Slavonski Brod was selected as the site for the Winter Transit Centre, because nobody had informed him beforehand (Dnevnik.hr, 2015). The deputy mayor of Slavonski Brod also confirmed that the city was unaware of the decision (Andrić, 2016).

In many refugee host cities on the route, particularly those with limited resources and capacity, the population influx placed enormous stresses on existing services and local infrastructure, compromising regular service provision and municipal operations. For instance, in Presevo (Serbia), on the Macedonian border, migrant and refugee influxes overwhelmed the waste collection capacities and human resources of municipal public services, causing problems in public hygiene, health and public space (NALAS, 2015). Such burdens were more limited in Croatia given the central response mechanisms, the short stays of migrants and refugees in municipalities, and the local competencies assigned within the existing framework of decentralisation. One of the major factors limiting service burdens on smaller municipalities on the Croatian route was centrally coordinated transportation of migrants and refugees through the territory.

Early on it was recognised that the organised and centrally controlled transportation of migrants and refugees by train would present the best solution for moving larger numbers of people. It would reduce stress on the infrastructure of smaller, affected municipalities, and reduce congested traffic in those areas. For that purpose, those managing the camp worked closely with

the Croatian Railways and sister companies to allocate trains, adjust schedules and hire additional employees. This resulted in Croatian Railways representatives taking part in the daily camp coordination meetings to enhance mutual collaboration (Kovačević, 2016). Migrants and refugees initially used local train stations to travel across Croatia, often in large groups, which disrupted normal operations and travel schedules for local citizens. To make sure that vehicles involved in responding to the crisis did not affect city roads or increase traffic in Slavonski Brod, a new road extension was constructed so that vehicles could access the camp more directly. However, the local government in Lovas observed an enormous flow of buses and other vehicles to and from the Opatovac camp (Cirba, 2016).

Furthermore, trains had direct access to the Camp in Slavonski Brod and the whole camp was designed around the train tracks[29] so that migrants and refugees could be transported directly from inside the camp. Refugees were transported by trains from the Serbian side of the border (Šid) directly to Slavonski Brod, with Croatian police working in Šid through a special agreement to enhance communication about anticipated arrivals and prepare assistance as needed (Piteša, 2016).[30]

The day before Hungary closed its border with Croatia, the Croatian Ministry of Interior had signed an operational agreement with Slovenian counterparts regarding the passage of migrants. As per this arrangement and later, countries on the route in October 2015 agreed that migrants and refugees be transported by train from the Slavonski Brod camp (and Opatovac camp briefly before that) to the Slovenian border (Dobova) (FRA, 2015). Operational communication between the two units in Croatia and Slovenia charged with transporting refugees is said to have taken place strictly over e-mail, with Slovenian authorities changing the conditions of admittance for migrants and refugees (number, time of day, etc.) and complicating the smooth transportation operations on the Croatian side (Kovačević, 2014).

As reported in Lovas, local authorities also provided their garbage containers and construction machines for service provision in Opatovac camp (Cirba, 2016). Water, sewage and electric power infrastructure was in place and upgraded for the needs of the transit centre in Slavonski Brod and an arrangement was made with the local utility company, Komunalac, regarding garbage collection and disposal. Municipal utility companies were hired in other sites as well and were reimbursed by

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[29] The camp was design by Ivan Juric, General in the Army of the Republic of Croatia, with security features proposed by the deputy commander of the Temporary Admission Center Slavonski Brod, Miljenko Kovačević from the Special Intervention Unit (MOI). According to many interviewed, the Slavonski Brod Camp was the best transit camp in the region.

[30] Between 23 November and 6 December, the camp train station was out of order due to construction works, so refugees were brought to the nearest train station in Garc in and then transported to the camp by buses. Direct railway access to the camp was re-established on 6 December.

the central government for their work during the crisis. Utility companies in Slavonski Brod were also able to provide local services in waste disposal and water supply. According to the deputy mayor of Slavonski Brod, the added demand from the camp did not have any noticeable impact on regular service provision to local communities during the crisis – on the contrary, service companies welcomed the ability to raise additional income (Andrić, 2016).

Some minor damage occurred to local infrastructure and private property in Tovarnik due to the uncontrolled entry during the first few days of the crisis (Budinski, 2016). According to the Ministry of Interior's instructions, all costs incurred during the crisis were to be recorded and submitted to DUZS so that the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Finance could reimburse funds. Local authorities in Tovarnik followed this procedure for reporting damages and were reimbursed by the Ministry of Interior (Budinski, 2016), but in Lovas, local authority representatives said that the central government had not covered some of the costs it had associated with the crisis (Cirba, 2016).

The ultimate objective of the migrants and refugees was to reach northern Europe, so the central coordination of transportation through Croatia meant local authorities and local service providers played a limited role – compared with many other European cities and host municipalities – for most of the crisis period.

5.3 Local resources and involvement of local communities

In discussions with local authorities, there was no indication of any invitation by central authorities to allocate or use local resources in the provision of humanitarian aid, beyond local volunteers. Many interviewees reported that things were happening very fast during the first days of the transit route opening up through Croatia and that decisions were made *ad hoc* in a way that did not promote the utilisation of local resources in a better way or at all. An interesting shift occurred, nonetheless, when the refugee presence in Slavonski Brod camp switched from temporal to more permanent, with a possibility for more local procurement of some perishable items from local businesses (Usmiani, 2016).

Lengthy public procurement procedures impeded the extent to which materials and resources could be procured locally. These procedures attempted to ensure transparency of public expenditures, but during such a rapid population influx this time-consuming process made it difficult to procure resources needed for immediate use. To negotiate this challenge, the National Crisis Headquarters received special authority to sign and issue public procurements, appointing authorised signatories (Government of the Republic of Croatia, 2015b).

Local authorities and communities contributed to the efforts of the central government and humanitarian agencies operating on their territories in an *ad hoc* fashion as much as possible and provided critical resources in the first few days of the crisis. There are stories of small business owners and local citizens organising themselves to provide food, water and other non-food items to refugees, as well as to volunteers and police officers. "Pride of Croatia", a national prize for human excellence and achievement, was given out to citizens of Ilača for their demonstrated solidarity and humanitarianism. In the absence of other humanitarian organisations, community members provided assistance to around 1,000 people who entered Croatia (unexpectedly) on September 17 (Budinski, 2016).

The crisis required substantial human resources and leveraged several organisations and mechanisms to recruit and hire volunteers and employees to work primarily in the established camps. The crisis also generated the emergence of new regional and Croatian NGOs and grassroots initiatives.

The organisation of human resources by the state showed signs of applying lessons learned from previous, recent crises and leveraging local authorities' partnerships in these processes. During the 2014 flooding crisis in Croatia, the state had previously drawn volunteers from those people who were mandated to complete community service for a criminal sentence (Lovrić, 2016). The strategy during the migrant and refugee crisis was to instead recruit unemployed people registered with local employment services through the Public Works Scheme. By using the already existing mechanism for hiring long-term unemployed for work that benefits the community, local jobless people found short-term employment. This helped meet a high demand for human resources, especially for services related to the cleaning of camps and transportation services (buses and trains).

This employment process implicated several actors at various levels. DUZS filed requests for workers and descriptions of needed services, while local branches of the Croatian Employment Service (CES) developed employment programs and recruited eligible employees. Municipalities and cities acted as formal employers, announcing the call and issuing contracts. DUZS operated as the logistical daily organiser of the employees' duties, ensuring needed equipment and work safety procedures. The system temporarily employed 23 people from Lovas, 51 from Tovarnik and 200 from Slavonski Brod as public workers. About another 200 people were employed through Red Cross local branches through the same mechanism.

Meanwhile, remuneration for those working in local fire-fighting units and civil protection operations was made directly by the municipality, which then submitted reimbursement requests to DUZS.[31]

While these figures seem small, this is not an insignificant economic impact for the region. Croatia has the third highest unemployment rate in the EU (15.4 per cent), behind Greece and Spain. Brod-Posavina County (of which Slavonski Brod is the capital) had the highest unemployment rate of any county in Croatia in 2013 (37 per cent) – more than double the national average, heightening the positive impact of temporary employment in camps for locals. Vukovar-Srijem County, where the first influxes occurred, also has high unemployment (36 per cent) (Labour Market Indicators, 2013).

The role played by the Croatian Red Cross in the crisis encouraged local citizens to volunteer. Before the crisis, it trained 1,400 registered volunteers to respond to disasters; more than 500 of them volunteered at various times during the seven-month refugee crisis, a figure well above the expectation that only 10 per cent will be active in any given crisis (Usmiani, 2016). The Croatian Red Cross trains volunteers before letting them become involved in reception centre activities during a crisis. It also provides psychosocial support during and after their service (Vudrić, 2016).[32]

Humanitarian organisations' ability to operate in the state-led transit centres had to be approved by the Ministry of the Interior, which granted access to about 26 organisations in Slavonski Brod camp, including international humanitarian organisations and grassroots volunteer organisations. Changes in the ruling political party after national elections midway through the crisis and the rising costs of maintaining the centre, led to cuts in human resources as well as the withdrawal of benefits such as free meals in the camp for volunteers.

Collaboration between humanitarian and Croatian agencies was especially pronounced in the sharing of human resources. IOM, for instance, hired seven Arabic/Farsi speakers who mainly served the Ministry of Interior to assist migrants and refugees during registration procedures and to act as translators so they could receive basic services such as immediate medical care (Piteša, 2016). The Croatian Red Cross also used the human resources procured by IOM, as well as Arab-speaking volunteers from other country offices of the International Federation of the Red Cross (Vudrić, 2016).

There was also tension, most frequently between state agencies and grassroots volunteer organisations, highlighting a need for greater education and dialogue about how to effectively respond to the needs presented by the crisis. Many of these tensions appear to have arisen because of conflicting perspectives on what constitutes humanitarian assistance for migrants and refugees from the perspective of grassroots organisations, and the state's concern for security and meeting various standards of response. Representatives from CMS and the Croatian Red Cross both emphasised the importance of education, experience in disaster or crisis management, and knowledge for volunteers to have a positive impact on humanitarian assistance (Bužinkić, 2016; Usmiani, 2016).

The human resource intensity of the crisis reached its peak in the Slavonki Brod camp arrangement. The myriad actors coming from outside of Slavonski Brod to offer services in the camp created a temporary financial boom, particularly for businesses in the hospitality sector. Small shops and grocery stores engaged in business with some refugees in the affected municipalities, while transportation companies engaged by the state (including private bus companies and the public rail company) experienced some increased economic activity during the crisis.

5.4 Asylum and integration

EU member state responses regarding refugees and asylum seekers is framed by various international and European agreements including the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees and 1967 Protocol, which form the basis of European asylum systems and regulations.[33] The EU ascension process implicated several legislative reforms undertaken by Croatia to align asylum systems and procedures with EU *acquis*, particularly in terms of introducing subsidiary protection (Barberić, 2015). The timely Act on International and Temporary Protection 2015 in Croatia replaces the Asylum Act and aligns Croatian legislation with several core European Council Directives that constitute the Common European Asylum System.[34]

Because migrants and refugees in southeastern Europe were on the move to destinations further along the line, few applications for asylum were filed in the sub-region – though there were some in Serbia. Of all the EU member countries, only Liechtenstein received fewer applications for asylum in 2015 than Croatia,

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[31] See Regulation on the amount and conditions for payment of compensation costs mobilized citizens, Official Gazette no. 91/06.
[32] The training and organising of citizens to provide aid during disasters if part of the organisations mandate as per Article 9 of the Law on the Croatian Red Cross.
[33] The 2001 Council Directive on Temporary Protection, which was a response to the crisis in the Balkans in the 1990s, contains provisions and standards for response in a crisis such as that experienced in 2015, though has not been triggered.
[34] Key directives include: the Asylum Procedures Directive (Directive 2013/32/EU); the Qualification Directive (Directive 2011/95/EU); and the Reception Conditions Directive (Directive 2013/33/EU); and prescribes the implementation of the Dublin Regulation and the EURODAC Regulation (European Commission, 2015b).

which received 211 applications (Tučkorić and Holjevac, 2016). Yet a large number of organisations provided administrative and legal information about seeking asylum to migrants and refugees during the crisis (UNHCR, 2015b). In this particular crisis, many migrants and refugees had pre-determined objectives of reaching Germany and other Schengen countries so they were not interested in information about asylum in Croatia. This changed later in the crisis when some people were unable to leave Croatia due to border closures.

In addition, as of April 2015, some people were returned to Croatia under the Dublin Regulation (Tučkorić and Holjevac, 2016). But the European fingerprint database (EURODAC) system for registering migrants and refugees was largely neglected by authorities in 2015, prompting an infringement procedure from the European Commission on improperly implementing the Common European Asylum System (European Commission, 2015b). But the suspension of the Dublin Regulations (dependent on EURODAC information) in Greece means that there is a risk that more people will be transferred back to Croatia under this mechanism. Indeed, as of May 2016, about 50 people have already been transferred back. As suggested by representatives of the Ministry of Interior, this will not count against Croatia's agreed upon quota of 550 people for resettlement, a figure that has likely already been increased (Dakić and Valenta, 2016).

As Croatia implements the EU-agreed relocation/resettlement scheme for 550 people (or more), local authorities will almost certainly need to play a larger role than they did during the seven-month refugee transit period, as refugees will rely more heavily on local services, particularly social and economic services such as schools, vocational training, employment and medical care. Furthermore, because of the existing diversity and concentration of economic opportunities in cities it is likely that there will be resettlement initiatives in Croatia's urban areas, where socio-economic integration, cohesion and access to services can be better facilitated. Various social services such as education (including pre-school education for children and language training for adults) and primary health services that are decentralised to the municipal level will play an important role in the safe and productive integration of asylum seekers (Piteša, 2016; Otmačić, 2016). Local authorities will also have an opportunity for an increased role in asylum seekers' integration into the labour market (Piteša, 2016). Language courses (Croatian and/or English) will be of critical importance to the socio-economic wellbeing of refugees and are currently being met almost exclusively through the

participation of NGOs in the Hotel Porin Reception Centre for Aslyum Seekers (Vudrić, 2016). As those who are granted asylum begin to become integrated into local communities and cities, attention should be paid to continuing these integration assistance programs in municipal and urban spaces. The presence of Roma communities in Balkan countries such as Croatia has led to numerous integration initiatives involving local authorities. Cities and towns in Croatia can potentially leverage lessons and experiences of Roma integration to accommodate asylum seekers and those being relocated and resettled through EU agreements.

At a meeting of local authorities in southeastern Europe, organised by NALAS in October 2015, it was stated that the region will require structured thinking about the financial resources to support the integration of refugees and asylum seekers as they resettle. That's because many host cities are feeling the pressures that extended service provision has placed on their municipal budgets and they face challenges in financially supporting their regular functions (NALAS, 2015). Furthermore, many local governments are willing to manage the effects of the migrant and refugee crisis and welcome refugees but often do not know how to do so, have no legal mandate to provide protection, and lack the necessary resources (Grases, 2016). The discourse in several larger cities in Croatia (such as Rijeka, chosen as a European Capital of Culture for 2020) reflects an attitude that sees the opportunities that new citizens can bring to existing urban policy objectives and projects in Croatia.

Cities that share such political willingness should be supported, and mechanisms for central-local dialogue should be leveraged or created to facilitate the dialogue on internal resettlement. One example of an innovative way for local authorities to participate in resettlement is through the regionally based Strategic Migration Partnership scheme currently being implemented in the United Kingdom. This scheme allows local authorities to express their willingness to participate in resettlement through statements that ensure that they have adequate infrastructure and partnership among local and regional bodies, as well as service providers, NGOs and the community. Upon accepted participation in the scheme, the government directs a portion of the overseas aid budget to the local councils (Local Government Association, 2016). Further investigation into this topic should explore the applicability of such a scheme in the Croatian context and identify relevant central bodies and partners for implementation of a similar program.

6

Conclusions and recommendations

A common challenge for many of the smaller, border municipalities in southeastern Europe has been providing emergency assistance (namely food and shelter) and expanding municipal services to a large population without any additional resources and without disturbing public service provision to their local communities. Additional challenges identified by the Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South-East Europe[35] include procuring the necessary funding to expand and maintain municipal services during the crisis and establishing adequate communication mechanisms with the refugee population and local community to promote understanding and solidarity (NALAS, 2015). The Croatian experience differs from this understanding of the challenges in significant ways given the rapid centralisation of response and strong leadership, coloured strongly by historical events, as well as established mechanisms for financial reimbursements, and solidarity demonstrated in post-conflict communities. Furthermore, since Croatia was almost strictly used for transit by migrants and refugees, identified needs, impacts on local communities and operational responses differed from other European countries in significant ways.

The magnitude of the crisis, and the institutional structures in place framed the role that small local authorities and their partners and citizens could play in responding to such large initial population influxes. In terms of humanitarian resources, small municipalities affected by the initial impacts were simply overwhelmed. The volume of population flows necessitated large quantities of food and non-food items (blankets, beds, diapers, etc.) that central institutions had the scale and capacity to procure through state commodity reserves, although they also received some international humanitarian aid. International humanitarian institutions procured this aid through appeals and organisation-specific procedures. Most supplies were transported east from stocks in the capital. The strategic geographical position of the political capital Zagreb in the centre of Croatia allowed for a central response and resources to reach other areas of the country relatively quickly and efficiently, reducing the need for emergency assistance resources and capacity to be decentralised or de-concentrated further. Nonetheless, local authorities would benefit from capacity building programs in emergency relief, civil protection and communication during disasters. As asylum seekers begin to integrate in Croatian towns and cities, such programs will prove essential, because the needs of refugees and roles of local authorities can expect to shift significantly.

Further decentralisation of resources and capacities in sectors relevant to managing shorter-term humanitarian emergencies or longer-term integration of new citizens is difficult within the current structure of local self-governance. Therefore, enhancing the role of local authorities in such situations would likely need to be accompanied by institutional reforms or mechanisms ranging from shared services, to regrouping of functions, or long-discussed administrative and territorial re-organisation in Croatia.

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[35] The Association of Municipalities of Croatia is an active member of NALAS.

The scale of irregular migration and refugee transit made it impractical to use the facilities in place for accommodating migrants and asylum seekers run by various departments and units within the Ministry of Interior. The typical entry points and sites where protection law first comes into practice – border crossings and transit zones (typically understood in Croatian law as ports and airports) – essentially became consolidated in "transit reception centres" established by the government and reflect a de-territorialising of the crisis. Such transit centres have no legal definition, complicating assessment of their compliance with Croatian regulations and exhibiting several aspects that differentiate them from Croatian "territory" and the rule of law applied in Croatian territory (IOM, 2014). The transit camp approach helped cope with the influx of refugees on the move, relieved urban areas of potential impacts and encouraged a temporal presence for refugees in the country. This approach also streamlined responses and avoided much of the complexity of urban spaces and the potential costs and risks associated with migration to and through cities, including exploitation and human smuggling.

Yet international humanitarian standards and guidelines for refugee reception (both in camps and in urban areas) were generally not adjusted to account for a transit situation in which time constraints and mobility limited the amount of services humanitarians could provide and the rights they could ensure. The development and application of shelter and assistance standards could help to ensure that the transit camp approach provides an even safer and more dignified transit in future crises.

This assessment of local government involvement in the management of transit refugees in Croatia revealed failures in coordination and communication mechanisms organised by central agencies or by IGOs and NGOs involved in the response. This was especially apparent in terms of anticipating these developments. The evolution of the response and enhanced central coordination, however, relied on local critical infrastructure (land, buildings, railways, roads, electricity, water, sewage and garbage disposal) with only limited effects on normal service operations and provision in the first few days while the institutional coordination mechanisms were being established. At the same time, policy decisions made in Croatia effectively de-urbanised the crisis to enhance clarity in coordination and ultimately provide for effective and efficient security and transport of migrants and refugees along the route. Such an arrangement and consolidation of services in a camp setting (as opposed to a municipal or urban setting) contributed to a more effective use of resources leveraging economies of scale (IFRC, 2016).

The unprecedented nature of the migrant and refugee crisis implicated a myriad of frameworks for response from civil protection law to international humanitarian law to which Croatia is party. It provoked new institutional mechanisms and *ad hoc* frameworks and solutions for humanitarian response. The centralised coordination mechanisms established a clear division of roles among stakeholders active in the crisis. What particularly sets the Croatian institutional framework apart is the unprecedented role played by the Red Cross in coordinating non-state actors. Its coordination mandate during this particular crisis was significantly expanded, leading the Red Cross to dedicate about 30 to 40 per cent of its human resources on activities such as distribution of aid and 60 to 70 per cent on coordinating and negotiating communication between humanitarian agencies and state actors in the camps (Usmiani, 2016).

Furthermore, in Croatia institutional frameworks for crisis response have been shaped and influenced by past events – particularly natural disasters and the Homeland War in the 1990s – that have created unique precedents for collaboration among stakeholders and local community involvement. The response of citizens in small border communities reinforces a long tradition of volunteerism in civil protection systems.

In 2014, floods in southeast Europe caused severe damage in parts of eastern Croatia. The crisis coordinating body that was set up during the flooding crisis in Croatia was the same organisational structure mobilised by the National Crisis Headquarters for the migrant crisis, which included several ministries, DUZS and the Croatian Red Cross (DUZS, 2014).

Aspects of the civil protection system were also mobilised in a period of severe conflict (March 1991 to November 1995) in Croatia during the break up of the former Yugoslavia. Twenty-five per cent of the Croatian economy was destroyed and about 20,000 people killed (IDMC, 2009). The geography of the migrant route through the Balkans led refugees to enter Croatia through Osijek-Baranja County and Vukovar-Srijem County, two areas located in the historical region of Eastern Slavonia, which was heavily impacted by the war. The Serb-led succession of Eastern Slavonia, along with other parts of Croatia and subsequent armed conflict to regain control of these territories, forcibly displaced more than half a million people (ibid.). Millions of people were displaced internally and externally and millions of refugees crossed into Croatia fleeing the war in Bosnia. The counties in northeastern Bosnia, close to Croatia, were particularly affected by the conflict and experienced severe devastation and demographic changes. Given this history of conflict, communicating changes in refugee flows across borders and avoiding conflict among neighbouring states regarding the management of refugee movements through the countries of the former Yugoslavia had a heightened importance for many international and political stakeholders.

The personal empathy expressed by local communities, albeit with limited resources and capacities to assist, can also be linked to these historical events and memories of war in the region. Many citizens, volunteers and officials' personal experiences during the Balkan war and interaction with agencies such as UNHCR strengthened solidarity of the Croatian people when refugees transited through their territory. This was most evident when local communities emerged as humanitarian actors because formal actors had failed to prepare, as was the case when the first migrant arrived in Croatia in mid-September.

The management of the crisis and the general positive sentiment about how the government dealt with the situation was also strongly influenced by personal leadership. Many interviewees stated that the Minister of Interior, Ranko Ostojić, and his staff members, along with all other representatives from the state institutions involved in the response were constantly present on the ground where the crisis was happening. This made a huge difference in terms of making decisions around issues that arose and allocating resources as needs emerged. The minister's near-constant presence can be viewed as both political and personal, because Mr Ostojić had previously worked for the Red Cross and has experience in crisis response from a humanitarian perspective (Usmiani, 2016). The leadership role played by the minister also elicited positive responses from representatives from several different political parties and cannot be overlooked when discussing the civility and dedication of the government to assist migrants and refugees.

Many stakeholders interviewed acknowledged the role of partisan politics in complicating coordinated response and collaboration between different levels of government in such a crisis. The political stakes of the response were particularly high in light of national elections, which were held in November 2015 and resulted in a new government formed in January after lengthy negotiations. Political partisanship, to the extent that it could negatively affect central-local dialogue and coordination of the humanitarian response, should be addressed in the future. It could be mitigated through specialised guidelines to be coupled with training, trust-building and networking opportunities between stakeholders at all levels of government to ensure a response that puts the rights and needs of migrants and refugees first. The Croatian Platform for Reducing Risk of Disaster could be leveraged for such activities.

Given Croatia's unique geographic and strategic position on the Balkan route, the way it managed the crisis has allow it to forge new partnerships, bring new actors into humanitarian response and integration agendas, and open up opportunities for new roles and responsibilities among different actors. The crisis created new relationships and partnerships among NGOs (Vudrić, 2016), as well as between NGOs

and other institutional actors (Valenta and Dakić, 2016). The role of UNICEF in the crisis, for instance, has demonstrated its value-added in migration and humanitarian situations, and it may expand its in-country operations to deal with integration as it relates to children (Vudrić, 2016). Similarly, while some central institutions such as the Ministry of Labour and Pension System and Croatian Employment Services used the existing public works scheme to hire unemployed people to provide maintenance in the camps, other agencies acted within their field only as it related to issues of migration and asylum, such as the Ministry of Social Policy and Youth, which dealt specifically with the issue of unaccompanied minors. Through education, training and capacity building there are opportunities to expand the role of certain ministries and other Croatian authorities (including local governments) in issues relevant to migration and humanitarian assistance.

There is now a unique opportunity to codify lessons learned during the migrant and refugee crisis from the perspective of diverse agencies and institutions, and particularly to raise awareness among Croatian authorities of humanitarian standards. As Croatia enters a new phase of its involvement in the EU refugee response, these lessons and awareness raising can be extended to city governments, as the more urban areas of Croatia present more pragmatic and durable spaces for hosting refugees and will likely be used in resettlement frameworks. This learning process should go both ways, however, with humanitarian organisations drawing lessons from the Croatian experience to adapt standards and practices in response to high-volume, time-constrained transit situations.

Humanitarian actors will need to consider the limits of greater coordination and involvement of local and urban authorities in highly centralised government responses that encourage rapid transit and passage, as evidenced in Croatia during the crisis. Actors seeking to collaborate with local governments should be aware of central government concerns about the role of cities and municipalities that are actually or potentially affected in a humanitarian emergency, including potential impacts on the local economy, security concerns, or political tensions with local administrations that could colour the central response. An understanding of the larger urban system (for instance, Zagreb's demographic and economic weight) was likely factored into the government's response that largely avoided passage through the capital. These considerations should be reviewed by humanitarian collaborators to understand the geography of assistance.

The lessons of this crisis can most notably serve to inform stakeholders of the challenges of humanitarian protection and security in transit situations and how the interests of different actors can be negotiated in unique and effective ways.

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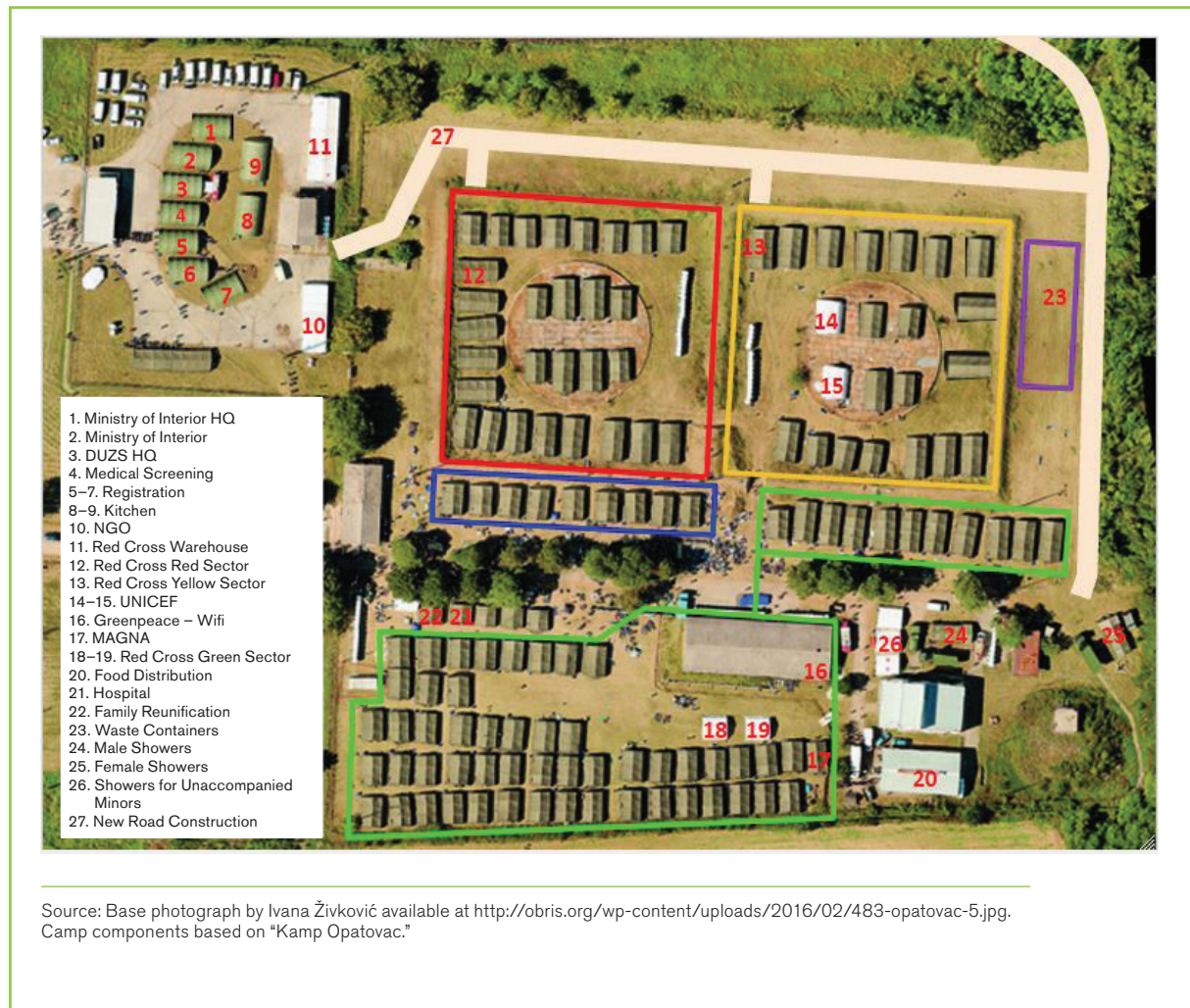
Annex 1

Map of Tovarnik and humanitarian assistance (September 16–20, 2015)

1. 11 chemical toilets
2. Improvised outdoor kitchen from German volunteers
3. Tent of Doctors without Borders (MSF)
4. Tent of Save the Children
5. Self-organised volunteer tent for distribution of food, water, clothes and hygienic materials
6. Improvised bus station
7. MSF (storage tent)
8. UNHCR (storage tent)
9. Croatian Red Cross tent
10. 2 chemical toilets
11. Croatian railways - police
12. Croatian Red Cross distribution tent for water, food and information
13. 21 chemical toilets
14. 8 Croatian Red Cross tents (4 closed and 4 with a cover) and 1 UNICEF tent

Source: Jasna Racˇicˊ and Saša Kralj Welcome Initiative

Map of Opatovac Camp

1. Ministry of Interior HQ
2. Ministry of Interior
3. DUZS HQ
4. Medical Screening
5–7. Registration
8–9. Kitchen
10. NGO
11. Red Cross Warehouse
12. Red Cross Red Sector
13. Red Cross Yellow Sector
14–15. UNICEF
16. Greenpeace – Wifi
17. MAGNA
18–19. Red Cross Green Sector
20. Food Distribution
21. Hospital
22. Family Reunification
23. Waste Containers
24. Male Showers
25. Female Showers
26. Showers for Unaccompanied
    Minors
27. New Road Construction

Source: Base photograph by Ivana Živković available at http://obris.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/483-opatovac-5.jpg.
Camp components based on "Kamp Opatovac."

Annex 2

Responsibilities of local level government bodies pertaining to the civil protection

CITY AND COUNTY REPRESENTATIVE BODY (COUNCIL)	EXECUTIVE BODY OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT
In the process of adoption of the budget is considered and adopted the annual analysis of the situation and the annual plan for the development of the Civil Protection with the financial effects of the three-year period and the guidelines for the organization and development of systems need to be considered and adopted every four years	Adopts a plan of action of civil protection
	Adopts a plan of exercises for civil protection
Perform risk assessments of major accidents	Prepares and submits to the representative body the draft decision on determining the legal person of interest to the civil protection and the draft decision on the establishment of civil protection units
Make decisions on determining the legal person of interest to the civil protection	In making the annual procurement plan includes tangible assets and equipment for civil protection forces
Make decisions on the establishment of civil protection units	Makes decisions from their scope of autonomy to ensure the material, financial and other conditions to finance and equip the operational forces of civil protection
Provide funding for the implementation of decisions on the financing activities of civil protection in the great emergencies and disasters.	Is responsible for the establishment, development and financing, equipping and training of operational forces in accordance with the adopted guidelines and plan the development of the civil protection[36]
	Prepares and submits the proposal to the representative body of the risk assessment of major accidents and regularly updates risk assessment and plan of action of civil protection
	Ensuring the conditions for transfer, sheltering, evacuation and disposal, and perform the tasks in the implementation of other measures of civil protection in the protection and rescue of people, material and cultural goods and the environment
	Ensuring the conditions for deployment of the troops and the duty of commissioners of civil protection and record keeping of deployed members
	Ensuring conditions for keeping and updating a database of members, capabilities and resources of operational forces of civil protection
	Establishing a record keeping of injured persons in major accidents and disasters.

Source: Article 17, Law on the Civil Protection System of Republic of Croatia. Official Gazette no. 82/2015.

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[36] The Mayor has an obligation to get training to perform the tasks of civil protection within six months of taking office.

The Croatian Government managed the transit of 650,000 migrants and refugees in late 2015 and early 2016 by coordinating the activities of an extensive number of international, national and local stakeholders to ensure quick and appropriate responses to these people's needs. The levels to which small local governments and communities were affected by the crisis and able to respond effectively were influenced by several factors. These included the rapid mobility of people in need of humanitarian assistance, the competency of local organisations that responded and the central government's decisions about how to coordinate assistance. The response relied on local resources and communities in a major way but it spared local governments from bearing significant direct costs.

Knowledge Products