



EVALUATION REPORT on the project “Enhancing cross-border preparedness through shared management of emergency stock in South East Europe X-STOCK”

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Table of Contents

List of acronyms/abbreviations.....	2
1 About project.....	3
1.1 Introduction to the Project	3
1.1.1 Background of the project	3
1.1.2 Aims and objectives.....	3
1.1.3 Planned outputs	3
1.1.4 Outcomes/results and activities.....	4
1.1.5 Impact	4
1.2 Purpose and Scope of the Evaluation.....	4
1.3 Methodology	5
2 Evaluation Findings	7
2.1 Quality, scope and intended implementation of the national pre-disaster and cross-border agreements, also recommendations for improvement of the identified gaps on national and cross-border level.....	7
2.2 Quality, scope and findings of the conducted analysis per country (national reports) in WP2 with recommendations for improvement of cooperation in preparedness activities between CPA and RC NSs	10
2.3 Results of the five national and the one remote x-border TTXs with respect to tested solutions, lessons learnt and further adjustments.....	16
2.4 Usability and effectiveness of the software application for cross-border emergency stock management	18
2.4.1 Planned functionalities	18
2.4.2 Observed shortcomings and how they were addressed	19
2.4.3 Remarks on potential of usability and effectiveness of the software application for cross-border emergency stock management.....	22
3 Recommendations and conclusions	23
3.1 TTXs implementation.....	25
3.2 Bilateral and regional pre-disaster agreements.....	25
3.3 X-STOCK software application	26
References / List of reviewed documents (reports, publications)	28
Annex 1: Terms of Reference (Evaluation Consultant)	29
Annex 2: List of interviewed persons (interviewees)	32
Annex 3: Questionnaire for interviews	33



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List of acronyms/abbreviations

ADC	Austrian Development Cooperation
AutRC	Austrian Red Cross
BRC	Bulgarian Red Cross
CBRN	Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear (hazards)
CEP	Civil Emergency Planning
CPA	Civil Protection Authority
CRC	Croatian Red Cross
DG ECHO	Directorate General for Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations
EOC	Emergency Operational Center
HNS	Host Nation Support (guidelines)
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies - Regional Office for Europe
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
NCPA	National Civil Protection Authority
NHF	Neighbours Help First (network)
RC NS	Red Cross / Red Crescent National Society
MoI-DEM	Ministry of Interior of Montenegro – Directorate of Emergency Management
PRD NRM	Protection and Rescue Directorate of the Republic of North Macedonia
RCM	Red Cross of Montenegro
RCRNM	Red Cross of the Republic of North Macedonia
RCS	Red Cross of Serbia
SOP	Standard Operating Procedures
TTX	Tabletop Exercise
X-border	Cross-border



1 About project

1.1 Introduction to the Project

1.1.1 Background of the project

The South-East Europe (SEE) is seeing an increase in frequency, unpredictability, and intensity of disasters. Most hazards have the potential to become transboundary events for which regional collaboration is key. The global health emergency (COVID-19) has shown how easily national and regional markets for essential stocks can collapse and hence how important it is to have adequate cross-border stockpiling and transportation strategies in place. It became evident that efficiency in coordination and cooperation between SEE states and CSOs is far from being sufficient.

1.1.2 Aims and objectives

On the call of projects of European Commission/DG ECHO published in 2020, the X-STOCK project consortia was awarded to implement the project activities nominally in the period 1 April 2021 – 31 March 2023, with funding of 579.057 EUR (funded by EU, ADC and the AutRC), out of which €492.197 is the EU contribution.

It brought together the project partners from six countries and one international organization. The objective of the X-STOCK project is to enhance cross-border emergency management in Bulgaria, Croatia, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia in cross-border preparedness through shared management of emergency stock. The project's Consortium Coordinator is the Austrian Red Cross, while project partners are: Red Cross of the Republic of North Macedonia, Protection and Rescue Directorate of the Republic of North Macedonia, Red Cross of Montenegro, Ministry of Interior of Montenegro – Directorate of Emergency Management, Red Cross of Serbia, Croatian Red Cross, Bulgarian Red Cross and International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies - Regional Office for Europe.

1.1.3 Planned outputs

The main expectations of the project consider establishing an improved and shared management of a joint emergency stock together with the development of national and regional agreements and procedures. It has to facilitate smooth and accelerated relief and response operations involving national civil protection authorities (CPAs), Red Cross (RC) partners and other stakeholders. As a result, the cross-border interoperability regarding use of emergency stocks between the five participating countries has to be significantly increased, while the response times for disaster affected population is expected to be considerably reduced. Approximately 21 million people live in all five countries, representing the indirect target group.¹

¹ European Commission, (2020). "Enhancing cross-border preparedness through shared management of emergency stock in South East Europe (X-STOCK)". Available at: https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/funding-evaluations/financing-civil-protection/prevention-and-preparedness-projects-civil-protection/overview-past-track-i-and-track-ii-projects/enhancing-cross-border-preparedness-through-shared-management-emergency-stock-south-east-europe-x_en (accessed on 15 May 2023).



1.1.4 Outcomes/results and activities

The outcomes and project activities encompass following:

- Five national analysis reports (on existing stakeholders, policies, emergency stocks and cross-border agreements including recommendations for improvements of procedures, policies, and agreements), and a regional analysis report were developed and submitted.
- Developed regional stock management strategy and software application for joint regional stock record and management.
- Testing the developed tools through the national and regional tabletop exercises (TTX).
- The achievements were presented on the final conference with regional outreach promoting results and roll-out in neighboring countries.²

1.1.5 Impact

The project activities reflected policymaking and planning process in concerned national RC societies and national CPAs. It should create a longer-term platform for mutual aid and cooperation in disaster preparedness and response.

The project outcomes interfere with implementation of the activities related to the EU's Host Nation Support Guidelines. The involved parties had the opportunity to have a better insight into the functionality of sharing resources and implementing the procedures in requesting/sending assistance circumstances.

1.2 Purpose and Scope of the Evaluation

The work of an Evaluation consultant³ involves conducting an analysis through desk review of the project and other relevant documents, following and evaluating the national and cross-border TTXs and developing an evaluation report on all activities and results achieved within the X-STOCK project. The scope of consultant's work, as defined in the Term of Reference (ToR, see the Annex 1) is coherent with project's objective and considers understanding on how well the tools and products developed in WP3 meet the demands identified in WP2 and to what degree they contribute to reaching the objectives of the X-STOCK project.

The consultant work refers to compiling an evaluation report and formulating recommendations for replication and scale-up, including the following aspects:

- Quality, scope, and findings of the conducted analysis per country in WP2 with recommendations for improvement of cooperation in preparedness activities between CPA and RC NSs.
- Quality, scope and intended implementation of the national pre-disaster and cross-border agreements, but also recommendations for improvement of the identified gaps.

² Red Cross of Montenegro, (2021). "Enhancing cross-border preparedness through shared management of emergency stock in South East Europe (X-STOCK)". Available at: <https://ckcg.me/en/x-stock-enhancing-cross-border-preparedness-through-shared-management-of-emergency-stock-in-south-east-europe/> (accessed on 15 May 2023).

³ The engagement of the consultant is based on the open call published by the work package (WP) lead (RCS) of WP4 and its contribution to the project is to develop an independent analysis on several pre-identified aspects of project implementation.



- Usability and effectiveness of the software application for cross-border emergency stock management.
- Analysis of the results of the five national and the one remote x-border TTXs with respect to tested solutions, lessons learnt and further adjustments.

1.3 Methodology

The framework of the consultancy combines desk-review and qualitative data collection. Primarily, the research relies on secondary data already collected by the coordinating authority and project partners. The qualitative data were collected through standard and focus group interviews and serves for gathering new findings, but also for validation of the statements exposed during the meeting and TTXs and findings sorted out from the project documents.

Used terminology in the evaluation report will be fully in line with the UNDRR, IFRC and EU terminology in disaster risk management, but also with EU Host Nation Support Guidelines (EU HNSG).

The duration of this evaluation process lasted from mid-January to mid-June 2023. The agreed methodology was accompanied with the work plan.

What	When	Where	
Briefing and exchange with Project Manager (AutRC), RCS representatives and IFRC office in Sarajevo.	Mid-January 2023	online	I Phase
Defining the Evaluation Report's structure, scope and design of the research instruments.	Mid-January 2023	online	
Desk review of relevant project documents (e.g., project application, interim reports, country reports, documents about software, tools and SOPs). Development of a draft working concept.	January – February 2023	Skopje, MKD	II Phase
Preparatory meetings and consultations with project coordinator and partners.	January – February 2023	online	
Mixed online and in-person attendance and follow up of national and regional TTXs.	March – April 2023	RCNM: Skopje, MKD Others: online	
Work on the Draft Evaluation Report: Summarizing preliminary evaluation results, providing findings, lessons learnt and recommendations.	March – May 2023	Skopje, MKD	
Interviews with project partners and key informants.	May 2023	online	
Submission of the Draft Evaluation Report.	20 th May 2023	electronically	III Phase
Presentation of the Draft Evaluation Report at the final conference.	7-8 June 2023	Sofia, Bulgaria	
Integration of the gathered data and feedback by the stakeholder representatives at the final conference.	10-20 June 2023	electronically	
Submission of the Final Evaluation Report.	20 th June 2023	electronically	



Preparation phase, access negotiation and methodology design:

Access negotiation. A prerequisite for conducting the research is access to professionals, and to the documents produced within project activities, but also to secondary data relevant for the Evaluation Report. Access negotiation for conducting interviews with the RC and CPAs representatives was facilitated by the AutRC and IFRC staff. The key criteria were to invite experienced people with X-Stock activities from partner RC societies and CPAs from all five countries, divided in three groups (RC disaster managers, RC logisticians and CPA disaster managers). The group invitations with all relevant details were sent to the selected interviewees prior to the interview, concerning the goal and the content of the interview, and questionnaire.

Ethical issues refer to the use of the narratives and in interviewing the representatives from the key stakeholders. Confidentiality and anonymity of the respondents are guaranteed in formulation of the narratives in the report. Participation in the interviews is adhering strictly to the rules on voluntariness and informed consent. All interviewees were asked to give their consent for participation in the interview. In addition, since transcripts, minutes and other materials from the previous project activities were used as sources of data, it is assumed that project coordinator has obtained consent for usage of these data.

Limitations to the research were pre-identified and refer to following:

- Absence of relevant, comparable, and disaggregated data (in the national project reports, interim project reports and in other secondary sources),
- Late delivery of requested data from institutions.
- Postponed scheduled online interviews.
- Reluctance to participate in the interviews by the key stakeholders.
- Challenges referring to the (online/in-person) participation of the forthcoming project events.

Research method and data collection techniques were used for achieving the research goal. They consider:

- Document content analysis (national reports, interim project reports project events' minutes and transcripts, relevant laws, agreements, policy, SOPs, and other documents).
- Software use tutorials and experiences of the key actors.
- Standard interviews with key stakeholders, evaluation briefings of the national and regional TTXs, focus group interviews and discussions at the final conference.

Analysis and report writing contain graphic, tables and narrative. The main research findings will be made available to the concerned parties, while the recommendations are drawn from the research finding and interviews.



2 Evaluation Findings

The evaluation findings refer to all aspects defined within Terms of Reference (ToR) and by the scope of the work encompassed with the Call for Evaluation Consultant. Based on the evaluation of the project's Progress Reports the project has continuity and followed the defined schedule and deadlines.

The X-Stock, as many projects implemented within Covid-19 pandemic, was extended and it affected the implementation of project activities. However, the Covid-19 pandemic was the factor of uncertainty, especially regarding the planned meetings and workshops, as evident in the project documents. The final phase of the project was timely foreseen to be intense for all partners.

2.1 Quality, scope and intended implementation of the national pre-disaster and cross-border agreements, also recommendations for improvement of the identified gaps on national and cross-border level

Key question/indicator: *Which countries do have cross-border pre-disaster agreements developed to adequately support smooth disaster response operations, specifically regarding RC NS involvement? Are the national pre-disaster and cross-border agreements comprehensive and applicable?*

The RC NSs have signed some agreements with few relevant stakeholders, but also benefit from legal provisions and standard operative procedures (SOPs) at national level, if available. Although there is a law on RC NSs that defines their role in the respective countries, it is not specified to what extent and with what means the RC NSs should be involved in disaster response operations. As result, the cooperation and coordination between various stakeholders in disaster response is additionally framed with bylaws, Memorandums of Understanding (MoU) and other legal acts. Most stakeholders involved in the disaster response and logistics always know what the RC NSs can do and achieve in disaster response, as well as what capacities and expertise the RC NSs have.

The content analysis of the project's country reports identified that all countries represented in the X-Stock project consortia had signed cross-border pre-disaster agreements recently. Most of agreements are signed on bilaterally since 2019, while North Macedonia and Serbia has signed an agreement for disaster response assistance within "Open Balkan Initiative"⁴ in 2021. The cross-border agreements are perceived as comprehensive and very useful in disaster response, while some points of improvements are identified during their implementation. The provisions in the agreements envisage signatories to be able to make effective use of their potential in the field of disaster prevention, preparedness, response and in early recovery. The agreements set out the competent authorities and contact points, forms and topic/areas of cooperation, the

⁴ Faktoje, (February 7, 2023). "Open Balkan", the agreement on disasters remains on paper. Available at: <https://en.faktoje.al/open-balkan-the-agreement-on-disasters-remains-on-paper/> (Accessed on 4 June 2023)



provision of immediate assistance, border crossing procedures and rules for the stay of rescue teams, units and/or experts, border crossing procedures for equipment and vehicles, the use of aircraft and vessels, coordination, and management of operations.

As stated in the (comparative) regional report: "National Societies in South-eastern Europe are committed to strengthening cooperation by using best practice from the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies (IFRC), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and RC NSs, particularly in disaster and crisis preparedness and response activities." Following such circumstances addressed to the recent disasters and emergencies in Southeastern Europe, state authorities, RC NSs and IFRC continuously develop and strengthen CPA, Red Cross and Red Crescent response preparedness capacities. As result, in recent years, there has been strong subregional cooperation in many areas, especially in preparedness, response and recovery from various humanitarian emergencies.

Cumulatively, bilateral and multilateral agreements in disaster response assistance involving NCPAs and RC NSs/IFRC considers partnerships and cooperation within:

- European Commission-DG ECHO or EU's Civil Protection Mechanism (EUCPM) where NCPAs is maintaining permanent contact and exchange of information with the Emergency Response Coordination Center (ERCC), while the cooperation in civil protection is extended to humanitarian action. All X-STOCK project countries are members of the EUCPM.
- Disaster Preparedness and Prevention Initiative for South East Europe (DPPI SEE) where again all X-STOCK project countries participate.
- "Neighbors Help First" network. In 2018, twelve RC NSs⁵ decided to further strengthen cooperation in disaster and crisis preparedness and response by establishing the "Neighbors Help First" network, open for cooperation with CPAs and other similar networks, such as the DPPI SEE. The RC NSs and CPAs, use the geographical proximity, to establishing the operational cooperation through mechanisms for sharing their disaster response assets, including the provision of immediate assistance based on concluded cooperation agreements or MoUs.
- Agreement on Cooperation in Disaster Protection in the Western Balkans of July 29, 2021 (Albania, North Macedonia, and Serbia), signed within "Open Balkan" initiative.
- Agreement for cross-border cooperation in case of disasters between Balkan Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies (20XX).
- Cooperation through NATO/Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Centre (EADRCC); NATO Civilian Emergency Planning Committee (CEPC), NATO Civil Protection

⁵ Framework Cooperation Agreement "Neighbours Help First" between the National Societies of South-Eastern Europe - RC NSs of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, Cyprus and Poland. This process is always carried out in compliance with the scope of competencies of the main components of the International Committee of the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement (ICRC/RC) and strict compliance with the rules and modes of coordination. If any of these RC NSs need additional assistance in case of disaster, the other RC NSs can offer funds, assistance, and teams in accordance with the IFRC standards. This mechanism is to be activated before or together with the mechanisms of the IFRC. The areas of cooperation include improving the regional coordination by standardizing equipment and procedures, drawing up cross-border contingency plans, exchanging good practices specifically related to logistics and warehousing.



Group (CPG); ensuring the availability of search and rescue team within the Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Unit (EADRU), as well as for participation in rescue and humanitarian operations.⁶

- Black Sea Economic Cooperation, i.e., Working Group on Cooperation in Emergency Assistance.

As stated during the interviews, the agreements are fully applicable regarding the cooperation between NSPAs in disaster response activities. The RC NSs usually join NCPAs in country efforts referring to receiving or sending international assistance. Thus, RC NSs are somehow obliged to implement the provisions encompassed by the bilateral and multilateral agreements. In other circumstances, the RC NSs use the agreements' provisions when some issues are not entirely defined within agreements between RC NSs or at ICRC and IFRC legal frameworks.

Key question/indicator: *What are the "gaps, deficiencies and barriers" that should be redefined in those agreements?*

As identified in the content of the country reports and agreements, as well from the statement of the interviewees, there are some gaps, deficiencies, and barriers in the implementation of smooth disaster response cooperation. They are follows:

- Marking of rental vehicles/trucks used for transport. Only RC NSs official vehicles are exempt from tolls, but not those that RC NSs hires for their own needs in cross-borders assistance's activities.
- There is not exemption from tolls for vehicles transiting through a signatory country and moving towards the country requesting assistance.

Key question/indicator: *Are there any back up (contingency) plans and procedures in case of misinterpretation of the intergovernmental agreements and cross-border procedures, by the customs and other authorities?*

The agreements do not envisage the back-up plans in case of uncertainties in the implementation of the agreements. In some countries RC NSs and national CPAs have signed the inter-institutional agreements with relevant stakeholders (as customs, tax office, national roads company, Ministry of Foreign Affairs [MFA], etc.) in mitigating some of the challenges in cross-border disaster response in both ways – for receiving and sending the international assistance. For example, in most cases the countries' legislation does not provide a general exemption from airport, port, or vignette/toll fees in case of a disaster. The authorization of entry and passage of foreign international assistance's vehicles is in accordance with international acts to which concerned country is a party. In that way, in the agreements has to be clearly stated on how it is regulated the exemption from such fees for vehicles carrying humanitarian aid or transporting rescue teams, including the situations when the vehicles are transiting the countries to arrive in the disaster affected country/countries.

⁶ Bulgaria is depositary of the Agreement on the Establishment of the Civil Military Emergency Planning Council for SEE.



Most commonly, RC NS staff involved in cross border disaster assistance already have experiences and established relationships with staff from other institutions. The MFA is considered as national focal point for cross-border cooperation. As result, RC NSs staff use MFA and some already experienced contacts when they need help/clarification, to overcome certain situations or when they have certain ambiguities in procedures and communication with institutions.

2.2 Quality, scope and findings of the conducted analysis per country (national reports) in WP2 with recommendations for improvement of cooperation in preparedness activities between CPA and RC NSs

The development of the regional and national reports was quite enthusiastic, as such documents were ascertained for the first time. The reports provide a great overview of the international assistance instruments, challenges and solutions in the respective countries, going into details and following the templated questions formulated on the basis of experiences and needs assessments of the RC NSs practitioners.

Key question/indicator: *Are the country analysis comprehensive, well-structured and provide useful information, specifically on gaps identified, and recommendations for improvements?*

The national reports provide the comprehensive and well-structured overview of the legal and institutional framework, procedures for inter-institutional and international cooperation and other peculiarities referring to preparedness for and implementation of the activities in cross-border movement of personnel, equipment, and materials in case of disaster. The reports to some extent analyse the peculiarities referring to the items, specifications, standards, mechanisms, storage facilities and procedures relevant for cross-border cooperation in disaster response. The information contained in the reports can be noted as useful and in some reports there are so many details about national perspective on receiving and sending international assistance.

The diversity of disaster assistance mechanisms is preconditioned by the country' membership in NATO⁷ and/or EUCPM. Even guidelines are of a non-binding nature, the civil protection authorities in the EUCPM member-countries are clearly stating the potential for harmonizing their work procedures with Host Nation Support (HNS) guidelines⁸, but it is not clearly stated to which extent the CPAs and RC NSs integrate the HNS Guidelines in their legal framework when requesting, offering, and accepting the international assistance. As the composition of X-Stock project consortia is composed mostly of RC NSs, the instruments developed through bilateral agreements (between RC NSs) and at IFRC level contribute to the diversity of disaster assistance mechanisms, programs⁹ and operative modules¹⁰.

⁷ The institutions of those countries follow Civil Emergency Planning (CEP) conception based on Article 3 of the North Atlantic Treaty.

⁸ European Union. (2012). Commission Staff Working Document EU Host Nation Support Guidelines, SWD (2012) 169 final, Belgium: Brussels, 2012. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/about/COMM_PDF_SWD%2020120169_F_EN_.pdf (Accessed on 20 May2021).

⁹ Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) and International Appeal (IA).

¹⁰ Regional Disaster Response Team (RDRT), Regional Intervention Teams (RIT), Field Assessment and Coordination Team (FACT) and Emergency Response Units (ERU).



The reports use various terminology, adapted to the national context of the terminology in disaster management¹¹ and commodity reserves. To some extent it reflects on the implementation of cross-border assistance's activities.

Montenegro is rare case where an entity for managing the commodity reserves is seriously missing since 2003 when the concept for commodity reserves was abolished by the Law on Intervention Procurement. The Ministry of Economic Development (MED) states that the Government determined that the reserves were not commercial and that they should be abolished. As of December 2020, MED considers how to replace the current concept of intervention procurement with the concept of commodity reserves. This requires that the Law on Intervention Procurement must be repealed and the Government's decision on the formation of commodity reserves must be made simultaneously. In terms of stocks, RCM follows the guidelines of the International Federation of the Red Cross/Red Crescent Societies, which are mostly based on the use and compliance with SPHERE standards.¹² In Serbia, the commodity reserves consist of goods that are necessary to ensure supply and stability, but also consider cash in domestic and foreign currency, as well as securities in public ownership. In the Serbia's country report is stated that national CPA (Sector for Emergency situations [SEM]-MoI) in 2021 started developing a platform that compiles resources from every local emergency CP HQ. This platform should provide concrete data about personnel, equipment and humanitarian assistance capacity of all stakeholders involved in disaster response.

Notification and Reporting. Most of the notification and reporting procedures in cross-border cooperation are envisaged within bilateral agreements. The CPAs use EUCPM's emergency communications and monitoring tools through the Common Emergency Communication and Information System (CECIS), while RC NSs use IFRC GO platform (in cross-border context, all cases). In some cases, if available in the countries, both - RC NSs and CPAs, use the Next-Generation Incident Command System (NICS)¹³ nationwide and internationally.

Cross-Border Movement of Response Personnel, Equipment and Materials. In the reports it is clearly stated that countries adapted their procedures to prompt reaction in sending/receiving the personnel, equipment, and materials. Some maturity in de-bureaucratization affecting the inter-institutional and cross-border administration (and to some extent decision-making) procedures, harmonization with HNS Guidelines and more pragmatical approach is evident.

Requirements regarding the qualification and training of personnel providing cross-border assistance. In general, the training processes are related to the EUCPM and IFRC modules and managing the EU HNS Guidelines. The opportunities of the IFRC training modules are well explained.

¹¹ "Crisis management", "disaster management", "civil defence", "civil protection", "incident", "emergency situation", "emergency", "other state of emergency", etc.

¹² Sphere, (2023). "Humanitarian standards". Available at: <https://spherestandards.org/> (Accessed on 20 May 2023).

¹³ Web-based system – Internet system for coordination, management, control, and exchange of information in case of all types of accidents, which is being developed within the NATO SPS program "Science for Peace and Security" – Advanced Regional Civil Emergency Coordination Pilot Project (ARCECP).



Liability and Insurance Issues are somehow regulated with national legal framework in synergy with bilateral agreements, EU's HNS Guidelines, institutional insurance policies, and other legal acts. Liability is usually the (institutional) responsibility of the sending country. In the bilateral agreements¹⁴ it is clear that "the assisting party is not entitled to claim reimbursement of any costs related to the assistance from the requesting Party". This also applies to costs arising from the use, damage, or loss of equipment, unless the damage or loss of equipment is due to the sole fault of officials or nationals of the requesting country. This rule does not apply if the costs of the assistance are fully or partially reimbursed and then the assisting Party has priority in reimbursing these costs. Most of the CPAs and RC NSs do not regulate the insurance in the same way. In most cases NCPAs provide national life and health insurance for the employees and only travel insurance for members of rescue teams. When RC NSs staff is not deployed abroad as part of an IFRC team, they are provided with standard travel medical insurance, while when they are part of an IFRC team, the IFRC rules apply accordingly.

Occupational Health and Safety Legislation. It is stated in bilateral agreements, but also in domestic CP laws, the requesting Party shall provide safety and free medical assistance to the rescue teams and/or experts of the assisting Party, as well as the logistical support for the duration of the operation. The members of the intervention teams may carry medicines for their personal needs and those which are allowed as far as first aid is concerned.

Language Considerations. RC NSs staff and volunteers who are part of disaster response teams and participate in cross-border missions should speak at least one of the official languages of the IFRC. In receiving assistance operations, CPAs and RC NSs are quite flexible and there are not strict provisions referring to language skills. The NCPAs usually recommends knowing the English language as criteria for being involved in international assistance's activities, but requesting and admitting of certificate for level of language skills is not mandatory in general among project partner countries. To overcome the language barrier during the response missions, the Host Nation usually provides liaison officers (LOs) to work closely with deployed foreign teams. In practice and for being rational in development of the assistance teams, the team is usually composed by members that beside speaking English, have some familiarity in the languages used by team members (as south Slav languages in the case of South East Europe).

Security Provisions. Disaster response team members undergo security inspections and attend the necessary briefings and appropriate security and safety training. The staff from the NCPA, RC NS and accompanied personnel from other stakeholders, involved in NATO-led crisis management operations, besides obligation to attend safety and security briefings, are obliged to pass security checks and have NATO Security Clearance. As for the EUCPM or other bilateral cooperation activities, the NCPA staff and accompanied personnel from other stakeholders do not have obligation to pass any safety and security checks which applies also for any EU-led civilian operations.

¹⁴ Art.10 Agreement Bulgaria-Montenegro, Art.11 Agreement Bulgaria-North Macedonia and Art.13 Agreement Bulgaria-Serbia.



Unsolicited goods are resolved by precise regulation of the procedures for requesting and sending aid. As stated in the country reports, the procedures include a request, which must contain the type and priorities of the assistance requested - whether rescue teams and/or experts, equipment, and assistance resources, as well as notification of whether the proposed assistance is accepted. This some preventive mechanisms are envisaged to avoid the receiving of the unsolicited goods and go always upon confirmation and agreement between receiving and sending entity.

The reports contain very significant analysis on identified gaps in practicing the cross-border assistance. Some of the gaps refer to the lack of consistent legal framework and procedures at national and cross-border levels, while some gaps address the need for reorganization of national institutional set-up in the disaster response's cooperation.

Guided by experiences in implementing activities for cross-border cooperation in disaster response, the reports provide many relevant recommendations that could only improve cooperation within and between states in disaster response.

Key question/indicator: *What are the gaps and identified bottle necks in the national reports, affecting agile cross-border emergency response?*

The existing gaps refer to NCPAs, RC NSs and other stakeholders' capacities (e.g., private sector, transport companies etc.) once they are involved in the cross-border disaster response activities. The national institution set-up, identified as complex, creates prerequisites for overlapping of the competences of the different authorities in national multi-agency cooperation model, and results with parallel or uncoordinated actions for same purpose. Cumulatively, the country reports highlight several challenges in cross-border assistance, as follows:

- The assistance has often been uncoordinated, largely because the government did not have a clear overview of its own requirements.
- Frequent and unannounced donations from neighboring countries are hard to manage.
- Goods that came without declarations and a revised list.
- Registration of companies/service providers in customs (EORI number): companies that usually cooperate or intend to cooperation with RC NSs are not registered in customs.
- Carriers cause problems arriving late at night or at night when customs do not work.
- The access to heavy trucks is limited in the urban areas and it causes problems once the warehouse is situated in the urban areas or it is limited in disaster affected areas and the trucks are not able to deliver the assistance.
- Raw food donation and inability to store.
- Lack of documentation with guidelines on border crossing protocol and cross-border SOPs.
- Lack of trained staff for implementing the EU's HNS Guidelines.
- "Different voice and/or situation overview" between NCPAs and RC NSs disaster managers and their top managements regarding sending/receiving the international assistance.
- The NCPAs focal points have lack of knowledge about programs and modules for receiving and sending international assistance operated by RC NSs and IFRC.
- There are not pre-agreements with relevant service and items providers (freight forwarding companies, manufacturers and suppliers of food and non-food items, and other companies able to offer the relevant and usually needed services).



- The NCPAs warehouses do not fit stocking standards.
- There are different national standards for food and non-food items.
- There are specific regulations for sending and receiving food items.
- The RC NSs do not have sufficient budget to replenish shared stock items.
- Bilateral agreements need to be updated and/or upgraded.

Key question/indicator: *What is the overview of the current national emergency stock architecture (as precondition for achievement of the X-STOCK goals)?*

The reports give an excellent overview on RC NSs' two to four-tier system for storage of disaster stocks, as following:

1. At the local level (selected local RC NSs branch organizations have respective warehouses).
2. At the regional level (in the regional warehouses there is a disaster kit/set proportional to the ration between available items and size of population in the region (e.g., in Bulgaria there is one set for every 1500 people of the population). Many of the regional warehouses are situated near the main road and railway network, close to the medium and large cities.
3. Interregional warehouses; and
4. Central warehouse facilities, located mainly in or near the capitals, main roads and airports, at the same location with RC NS's EOCs (in Croatia and North Macedonia).



Figure 1: Locations of the central warehouses of RC societies of the X-Stock project partners

At the national level, there are not any clear criteria or strategic guidelines for emergency stocks referring to cross-border disaster response assistance. But the RC NSs have a good geographical distribution of their stocking facilities regarding the coverage of the cross-border activities, as most of their warehouses are matching the RC NS's stocking standards of the IFRC, but also with internal (RC NS) and ICRC/RC legislative, catalogues and guidelines, as the IDRL guidelines, Code of Conduct of the International Red Cross Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief and the Code for Good Partnership of the International Red Cross Red Crescent Movement, International Humanitarian Standards "Sphere". The last one provides the minimum standards in



various fields applicable to humanitarian action and to the specifications set out in the Standard Products Catalogue of the IFRC and ICRC/RC, SOP and rulebooks for warehouse management (logistics) etc. In addition, as the items stocked in the warehouses are not limited to be used in disaster response's activities only, there is an option to be used across other programs (health, social care etc.) of the RC NSs regarding the current developments and upon decisions of the RC NSs management.

Key question/indicator: *Rate of integration of EU's HNS guidelines in the national legal framework, including SOPs (regarding both ways – receiving/sending international assistance).*

The interviewees from the RC NSs and NPAs in most of the interviews stated that HNS guidelines are integrated into the inter-institutional and institutional (NCPAs and RC NSs) SOPs for cross-border disaster response and logistics.

Key question/indicator: *Is the list of contacts in all relevant institutions (e.g., nominated persons) involved in the transboundary procedures timely updated?*

The contact list primarily indicated in the national reports is agreed to be updated regarding the project needs. The X-STOCK contacts are listed in the page "Participant Organisations" (<https://x-stock.org/Internal/NS>) of the X-STOCK platform. The partners committed to the pre-disaster agreement signed at the end of project to update it regularly.

Again, at the X-STOCK platform, on the page "Disaster Response Operations" (<https://x-stock.org/Internal/Operations>) there is a button (Show e-mails). It makes able users to create a mailing list of all registered X-STOCK user accounts.

Key question/indicator: *Are the pre-agreements within all relevant institutions (e.g., international transport companies, items manufacturers) involved in support of transboundary activities timely renewed?*

The various efforts of the CPAs and RC NSs regarding the signing of the pre-agreements are noticed in the national reports. The RC NSs approach is explained with more details. The opportunity and diversity of signed pre-agreements nationwide is largely preconditioned by having a legal framework for such a purpose. As stated, at least that can be done in pre-disaster cycle, the RC NSs create a contact list of the key suppliers of items and services with all relevant contact details. Also, it was stated that some of the RC NSs have already preselected the providers, using the good experiences as a criterion, and such approach assure prompt response in providing the items and services from external sources.

As stated by the RC NSs disaster managers and logisticians, sometimes it is hard to organize the cross-border assistance in conflict areas and in the areas affected by the severe shocks where road network is seriously damages and it limits the interest of providers to be proved services in such environment. Additionally, sometimes, if return shipping is not assured by the transport company in the sending country, also there is low interest by the transport companies to provide services to the RC NSs only in one direction.



2.3 Results of the five national and the one remote x-border TTXs with respect to tested solutions, lessons learnt and further adjustments

As agreed between project partners, the implementation of national and regional TTXs followed the timeline below.

Table 1: Timeline of conducted national and cross-border TTXs

NS	DATE	Time	CONTACT
BRC	30 March 2023	09h00-14h00	Peter Yovkov p.yovkov@redcross.bg
CRC	13 March 2023	10h00-14h00	Juraj Pavlič juraj.pavlic@hck.hr
RCNM	23 March 2023	10h00-14h00	Ali Samet samet@redcross.org.mk
RCM	24 March 2023	11h00-14h00	Kristina Burzanović kristina.burzanovic@ckcg.me
RCS	11-13 April 2023	09h00-14h00	Ranko Demirović ranko@redcross.org.rs
X-border	18 April 2023	10h00-13h00	Nebojsa Medojević nebojsa.medojevic@ifrc.org

The general perception of the observations is very positive.

The injects created for the national and cross-border TTXs were mostly concise, clearly presenting the situation in the concerned location before and after occurred disaster (based on sharing the data and content of the situation reports), indicating the steps, communication and coordination between key persons, internally in the countries and at cross-border level. The details of taken activities were shared via mailing list, MS Teams chat application and Google meet with all project participants.

The implementation of most TTXs showed the very committed and professional approach of RC NSs Emergency Operative Centre (EOC) staff and disaster management staff at all. The RC NSs has strong knowledge of institutional emergency and disaster response set-up at local and national level. The decision-making processes and procedures for mobilization of the RC NSs national resources are well defined and work in practice. The decision-making process among EOC staff was well explained and implemented in the TTXs. It refers especially to some TTXs provided with audio transmission where observers were able to hear on how the EOC staff discussed almost about everything contained in the X-STOCK platform, including the price of offered items and decisions to accept/refuse the offered items. Even the staff in real-time manner made an interactive market search of open-source available prices of the items. The EOC staff is skilled to update the X-STOCK mobilization table regarding new developments.



The RC NSs' EOCs are respectfully equipped, and RC NSs staff is skilled how to request support¹⁵ and communicate with most of the coping capacities in the country (national rescue unit, USAR specialized teams, volunteers, etc.).

The RC NSs had shown their experiences in implementing the activities of local teams for rapid needs assessment of needs, which proves to be crucial for the whole further process. The teams made the assessment concisely, according to a set template and they quickly shared the fulfilled templates with EOCs of the RC NSs.

NSs are skilled to implement the IFRC guidelines and to activate the procedures for providing the international assistance through IFRC, use the cooperation opportunities through common platforms and agreements (as "Neighbours Help First") and bilateral and multilateral RC NSs agreements, in both cases – in national and cross-border context.

NSs are skilled in using the already established templates (requests, reports, evaluation, finance management documents, etc.) in intra-RC NSs communication and correspondence.

Key questions/indicators: *What are the key findings from the implementation of the national and regional exercises?*

The RC NSs and other staff in various stakeholders know how to:

- The RC NSs know how to get good overview on the developments and risks occurred in their immediate environment/surrounding, based on timely and detailed communication with colleagues in the concerned countries. Some of the RC NSs highlighted the importance of the state of the roads in country, especially those connected to the border crossings and cross border activities.
- The duration of the implementation of the local activities was moderate and long in some cases. The long implementation of the local activities to some extent prolonged the duration of TTXs and delayed the schedule of TTXs implementation.
- As some RC NSs have access to digitalized platforms for disaster/incident management of the national stakeholders (e.g., NICS), they expressed interest to interact with such platforms in using the mobtable. The other ordinary mapping tools are also usable as Google Maps, etc.
- NSs are skilled to calculate needed/requesting items or items that RC NSs could make available for sharing with other (concerned) NS(s). RC NSs had clearly explained how it acts in relation to the fulfillment of claims for domestic and international assistance. For this purpose, the RC NSs use the existing tools (software for warehouse operations/logistics) and other possibilities and had a clear insight into the available own resources.

¹⁵ From various sources at regional and European level (a. EUCPM – via National CPA, b. Regional IFRC offices in Sarajevo and Budapest, c. bilaterally).



- Most of the items usually used by the RC NSs and situated in their warehouses are somehow specified. It potentially may lead to standardization in providing and managing the items.

Key question/indicator: *Did the CP authorities join the exercise? What were the reasons for their participation/ non-participation? Are the CP authorities that joined the exercise(s) interested in a future cooperation regarding use the opportunities for shared stocks developed through X-STOCK project?*

The engagement of the NCPAs in the project is secured with participation of two NCPAs (from Montenegro and North Macedonia) in project consortia, but also through permanent cooperation between CPAs and RC NSs at national and sub-national levels. The NCPA in some national contexts (according to the national laws regulating the disaster response) involve/make access to RC NSs in decision making bodies (e.g., national and sub-national HQ) and platforms for inter-institutional coordination and information sharing. As stated in the interviews, the NCPAs practitioners, besides being involved in project activities, expressed interest in being involved in project follow-up activities. Some of the NCPAs practitioners heard for the first time about cooperation opportunities and cross-border disaster response mechanisms established between RC NSs, as well as at ICRC and IFRC levels. They consider RC NSs as reliable partners in disaster preparedness and response and that is the main reason for being involved in the activities where RC NSs are leading partners.

Key question/indicator: *Is resource mobilization hard to manage? What are the most frequent challenges?*

In regular conditions, RC NSs disaster managers and logisticians are overloaded with work. The workflow in the project was focused on the staff referring to those two work posts. The presence of the decision makers during the disaster response activities in RC NSs EOCs – locally and wider, could accelerate the processes regarding the deployment of the teams and stock sharing.

2.4 Usability and effectiveness of the software application for cross-border emergency stock management

2.4.1 Planned functionalities

It is evident from the project documents that the main idea about outlook and functionality of the X-STOCK software application (platform) was an easily accessible and usable tool for item sharing between requesting and sending RC NSs and other stakeholders.

The software is developed in holistic, visible, and pragmatic mode, providing information about RC NSs personnel, equipment, and materials, contact persons, border crossings, companies for providing items and services, opportunities for mapping the warehouses and border-crossings locations, opportunities for fast upload of large-size (logistic) documents, photos of the items, etc. The tool provides a good overview of available items at NS's level, detailed information about



prices, categorization (according to IFRC catalogues and mostly used items) and many other relevant details for disaster response logistics. The software was designed to sort out the disaggregated data of available and shared stock items (by item and country).

2.4.2 Observed shortcomings and how they were addressed

Key question/indicator: *Is the software understandable and easily manageable for its users?*

Based on the shared experiences and observations done during the TTXs implementation, the general attitude is that the tool is understandable and easy to use.

The findings gathered from the observations can be stated the follow:

- The X-STOCK platform is recognized by the RC NSs as a reliable and pragmatic tool, while many other stakeholders (including the representatives from the CPA and other involved stakeholders) during the TTXs had the opportunity to be convinced about its performance prospects.
- The way the software is designed reflects the way the RC NSs usually communicate. It provides an opportunity to manage resources and have an overview of the entire process. There is an understanding that at this stage it is difficult to establish an interconnection between the software and internal financial and warehouse management software. Through the application, at any time you can see what RC NSs request and have made available in case of a disaster and what each of the available products looks like.
- Within the project activities the X-STOCK software application was only tested and used at central level in the RC NSs (EOCs), but there were some discussions on how the other RC NSs, and CPA staff on sub-national capacities to be trained to use it.
- During the project activities, and especially once the implementation TTXs started, the software application was permanently upgraded and adjusted, regarding the feedback from participants received in TTXs' evaluation briefings.
- The response time (by sending NS) is not well defined. The requesting party did not know how long they may expect assistance, while sending parties did not know how long they may respond to the queries.
- In the practical, i.e., administrative, part of the exercise, all activities were followed by uploading almost all logistics documents into the operation page. The participants assumed that it is necessary for all documents to be entirely filled in, while the logistical component should be organized better in a way to pre-fill the documents with some already known data.
- In the case when there are many items offered (as in MNE TTX) it is complex to manage all items separately. It was concluded that it will be better to manage the accepted items (from one NS) by shipment, as same CTN (commodity tracking number) refers to same shipment. Lately, in the cross-border TTX, a new tab for shipments was introduced beside the present three tabs on the bottom of the "Disaster Response Operations".



- As detected that it should be an option for notification of all focal persons of the X-STOCK project (in the RC NSs), once new inject is put in the mobtable, this issue was improved. It was agreed that for each operation the NS(s) has to establish a channel for alerting the national societies involved in X-STOCK project (by phone or other means of immediate communication). Consequently, the RC NSs will be informed about disaster response developments in the concerned country and will be prepared for further activities.
- In some TTXs, the NS staff through screen sharing while working on the software application made it visible all changes made on the mobtable, as well as the challenges they face during the operations on the mobtable. It was concluded that through an interactive overview of the taken activities on the mobtable, such an approach must be replicated in all next TTXs.

Key question/indicator: *Regarding the exchange of relief items across borders in the region, can the software bring real improvement of the status quo and is it expected to have a significant impact on delivery times and quantities of relief items shared across countries?*

The software enables regional coordination in the management of disasters, in a way that provides a more precise list and details of the necessary items. The software can affect the speed of response and delivery and provide a better overview of the available larger amounts of items in different RC NSs.

The use of X-STOCK application software significantly reduces the time for searching the necessary in RC NSs various warehouses. If not available in RC NSs warehouses, than RC NSs are able to mobilize resources through external partners. In this way, it is possible to make decisions and react quickly, although a detailed assessment of the needs for using the DREF and International Appeal is required.

The application makes it easier to mobilize the funds in the mass appeal and RC NSs not to depend on donations of the citizens and organizations. The application is a useful tool for the preliminary responding and requires less time and resources for activation, unlike other IFRC instruments (which are subject to a higher level of bureaucracy). The link to the IFRC GO platform can be integrated into any operations set up on the mobtable. Thus, it makes able the mobtable operator to follow the activities related to the same event and the response from NS in relation to that event.

Key question/indicator: *How does the update and upgrade of the software interact with national warehousing software tools?*

Currently the X-STOCK application is not connected with domestic warehouse software and/or software used for finance management within the RC NSs. Such kinds of specific software are unable to be interconnected with other software produced by another manufacturer. Every amendment and change regarding the update with data for logistics and finance management are entered manually in the mobtable. Even entering the data does not occur frequently, it requires mobilization of resources for such purpose.



Key question/indicator: *Is the way of keeping the shared stock quantities updated appropriate to reach the objectives of the project?*

Regarding the sufficiency of the available items ready to be shared and reaching the goals of the project, there are no clear procedures in place to ensure that the numbers of items entered/shared by each RC NSs in “Joint Stocks” are kept up to date. Moreover, the decisions for updating the stocking items and calculations for available items able to be shared with other RC NSs are made internally by each RC NSs.

The approach for updating the shared stock quantities largely depends on RC NS’s warehouse and logistics policies¹⁶, while the number and type of the items depend on availability of items, opportunity such items to be promptly replenished, recommended date of expiry of items (indicated by the manufacturer) and some other criteria using the experiences of most frequently shared items in the past disaster assistance activities.

Technically, the number, type and category of items ready to be shared still reflect and correspond to the available number of items present in the RC NSs warehouses, once an operation is launched. Therefore, such an approach cannot guarantee the consistency in updating and making items available for sharing in case of disaster. But, from the other side, as visible in the country reports and as it was stated during the interviews, RC NSs seem to be skilled in mobilizing the resources and making more items available for sharing and thus be able to reach the objectives of the project.

Key question/indicator: *Are the quantities of items shared adequate to have a significant impact in a large-scale disaster and to justify the efforts made to develop it?*

The X-STOCK concept for regional and supra-regional cross-border items sharing has a strong potential for significant impact in a large-scale disaster, to justify the efforts done within entire implementation of the project and to meet the expected results.

The strong argument for such a statement is the fact referring to use of DREF¹⁷ as a usual IFRC instrument for prompt reaction in disaster response. That is a good reason why the bilateral and regional cooperation established through X-STOCK tools and agreements has a better prosperity in disaster response and cross-border stocking items sharing.

In a way to foster the significance of the impact of X-Stock objectives in regional scope, besides achievements made by signing the X-Stock cross-border agreement, developed cross-border SOPs and software application, some additional efforts have to be done in the legal part – to be defined the obligations for each involved entity (at least RC NSs and NCPAs) to assure an agreed number of items available (corresponding to the type and category of items) and to reflect such number of items in the software application.

¹⁶ Regarding the standards referring to the available and all stocking items in general, the RC NSs follows the institutional (NS) SOPs and manuals for disaster response and logistics, SPHERE standards and other acts for warehouse management.

¹⁷ Activating the DREF could be a reasonable option, but in practice the assistance through DREF is usually received between seventh and more days after the disaster occurred due to the bureaucratic and long procurement procedures, legal provisions affecting the activities, limited opportunities for procurement etc.



If the partners agree on the number of items and on the obligations to keep that number constantly available and visible on the software application, then it can be a strong prerequisite for the sustainability of the project and to justify the invested funds in the development of the project idea. Ensuring continuity after the end of the project can only deepen the ties between current and future partners, to make possible the increase the number of items and to enable disaster response within a larger geographical coverage of disaster affected areas and in cases of more intense or large-scale disasters.

Key question/indicator: *What additional improvements (adaptations or additional functionalities) for the software can be recommended to be made in the future?*

As most of beneficiaries (RC NSs, CPAs staff) are generally the first responders and field workers, it was emphasized by the end-users the need for designing the Phone (Android, iPhone) application of the X-STOCK platform. As result, the software application was adjusted to have an optimal outlook and functionality in both formats – web and mobile versions.

2.4.3 Remarks on potential of usability and effectiveness of the software application for cross-border emergency stock management

In general, some remarks about X-STOCK software application were emphasized by the practitioners within post-TTXs evaluation briefings. Most of them were fixed immediately by the project's IT staff responsible for X-STOCK platform design and maintenance. The changes and amendments were evident on the next/following TTX. They are addressing the following:

- As assumed, the next step in software upgrade considers an enrichment of the database with information about deployable teams in the concerned countries.
- Besides the declarative expression of interest by the RC NSs, during the project implementation became clear that the software will be used (by the RC NSs) in the future. As stated in the project application, the agreement was prepared prior the final conference and shared with RC NSs management. In addition, five other RC NSs were invited to join the initiative.



3 Recommendations and conclusions

Cross-border disaster assistance should be understood as a cooperation established between affected municipalities or regions on both sides of the border that complements their resources for a more efficient disaster response. In that sense, the action plans themselves should be localized in a way that will operationally show who is working on what based on the provisions of the bilateral agreements. The most common points of contact are local and regional firefighting units. In a cumulative way, the overall implementation of the X-Stock project identified several relevant points that should be highlighted, as following:

- The European norms (including Schengen acquis) regulating the customs procedure about exemption from customs duties in disaster relief are encompassed with EU Regulations and affect only in the EU member states. Regarding customs clearance and customs duties on consignments from countries outside the EU, the applicable rules are those of the international customs conventions to which concerning EU country is involved. Customs and their procedures are identified as still the critical point in the trajectory of cross-border shipments and movement of the personnel.¹⁸ Customs, border crossing and stay procedures also apply to aircraft crews and members of rescue teams transported by them.¹⁹
- *Physical presence on the critical points (not obligatory if the goal could be achieved with remote communication) and immediate communication between respective representatives of the (requesting and sending) parties.* The representative of the recipient party shall inform customs duties on their part at the established border crossing point of when the shipment is expected, from whom it is coming and how it will be transported. It is also necessary for a representative of the recipient party to be present at the place of delivery, i.e., the place where the second customs control is carried out.
- *Marking of the sending boxes of items.* It is necessary to list all the goods that are loaded into a truck or van, and it is recommended that each box says what is in it. That is why it is recommended that each person or organization that attaches to a piece of paper write precisely what is in the package, to facilitate the work of listing. Also, it is recommended that the contents of the box not be diverse, but that in one box there is one type of item, for example, only blankets, only shoes, only shampoos and the like.
- The safest and fastest way to deliver goods to another country is to hire a *shipping agent*, primarily due to the diversity of the assortment. The shipping agent will help to produce the necessary documentation, which is a responsible job, especially in the case when food products falling under the demanding import regime are sent. It is necessary for shipping agents to have information about exactly where the shipment is going, through which border crossing and how, that is, what type of transport is used, the type and license plate

¹⁸ As Croatia and Bulgaria are EU member states, beside national legal framework referring to customs procedures, once they are involved in the cross-border activities the rights and conditions of use of customs exemption are laid down in Council Regulation (EC) No. 1186/09 establishing a customs exemption system in the EU.

¹⁹ For example, Bulgaria has bilateral agreements in force regarding the international road transport of passengers and goods with some countries, including North Macedonia, which provide for exemption from the requirements for permits "for the transport of goods intended for emergency assistance, and in particular in case of natural disasters. and for humanitarian aid."



of the vehicle. Freight forwarders significantly custom facilitates procedures and, if necessary, to deliver assistance as quickly as possible, to enable contact with the Customs Administration and effective coordination with competent officials.

- *Collective transport* proves to be a good solution when sending aid collected from several institutions or from several places. The engagement of a transport broker such as a company recommended by the EU/DG ECHO is useful for sending aid to more distant destinations.
- *The intervention teams of the RC NSs* who are going to international interventions must attach the documentation prescribed by requesting assistance's country and which is necessary to allow them to arrive at the site. Likewise, teams cannot be sent to a foreign country without prior calls thereof. There should be compulsory insurance of the members of the national rescue teams against claims for damage caused to third parties and insurance of the members of the international rescue teams.

Regarding the points of evaluation, the general recommendations and conclusions of four observed and analysed points are the following:

- RC NSs' disaster managers and logisticians are the key players regarding the sustainability of X-STOCK goals and according to the internal SOPs for disaster response in each RC NSs, but additional human resources have to be mobilized to be more committed on operating with X-Stock application software.
- EOC needs to be equipped with additional electricity, phone call and Internet connection backup, as the work of the EOC is considered as part of the preparedness cycle's activities and it is usually (according to RC NSs SOPs) activated on 24/7 basis once disasters occur and there is necessity EOC to be engaged in coordination broader scope of activities. As mentioned previously, operating with EOC and X-Stock platform requires strong operative capacity, e.g., having an additional number of trained personnel in the national, regional, and local EOCs.
- The RC NSs have shown that they have experience in activating and implementing the activities of local teams for making a rapid assessment of needs on the ground, which proves to be crucial for the whole further process. According to the shared documents and the insight into the communication, the teams make the assessment concisely, according to a set template and quickly share it with the Emergency operational center (EOC) of the National society.
- The EOC staff has a good overview on all available stock's items and clearly defined the approach on how they communicate and implement requesting procedures from various sources at regional and European level (a. EUCPM – via National CPA and b. Regional IFRC offices in Sarajevo and Budapest). In this way, the concept of X-Stock should be somehow integrated into the current cooperation opportunities within in countries and in regional scope. As visible, there is a good will for the X-STOCK concept and developed tools (software application, SOPs etc.) to be interconnected with NHF concept.
- The RC NSs had clearly explained how it acts in relation to the fulfillment of claims for domestic and international assistance, using internal capacities and provisions



encompassed by the bilateral agreements. For this purpose, the RC NSs used the existing tools (software for warehouse operations/logistics) and other possibilities and had a clear insight into the available own resources. It is necessary to create a list of standardized products and forms for receiving and sending aid between stakeholders.

- Even activating the DREF by concerned NS is a reasonable option in recovery phase, in practice the assistance received through DREF can be implemented earliest after ten days after the disaster occurred due to the bureaucratic and long procurement procedures, legal provisions affecting the activities, limited opportunities for procurement etc. That is an argument why the bilateral and regional cooperation established through X-STOCK platform and agreements has a better prosperity in disaster response cross-border stock sharing, comparing to usual IFRC and ICRC/RC international assistance's instruments.
- For the implementation of the project activities, but especially for acting in TTXs and real situations, it is necessary to have continuity in relation to the people involved. This especially applies to disaster managers, logisticians and other people working in EOCs.

3.1 TTXs implementation

- The TTXs implementation should follow the clear timeframe, in a way the participants to be focused only on the activities relevant for TTX's objectives.
- The TTX participants must make visible (e.g., by sharing screens) all changes made to the operation's page during the TTX implementation, as well as to highlight all challenges they face during the operations on the mobtable.
- Due to the continuity and sustainability of X-STOCK goals referring to TTXs, the complex national and cross-border TTX with involvement of all relevant stakeholders to be organized in more frequent manner and to be integrated in annual training programs of the RC NSs and CPAs, highlighting the objectives in disaster logistics and disaster response teams' deployment.
- The SOPs should be more emphasized in conducting exercises and testing the effectiveness of cross-border procedures.
- The regional TTX showed that much more preparation is needed for its implementation and greater adaptation of the scenario to a real situation.
- The manuals for implementing the TTXs and references of the RC NSs staff in implementation of TTXs are likely missing.
- More volunteers familiar with disaster response and logistics to be engaged in TTXs implementation.

3.2 Bilateral and regional pre-disaster agreements

- The current and new bilateral and regional agreements to be updated and adjusted to EU's HNS Guidelines.
- The agreements should be revised in accordance with respecting the developed cross-border SOPs through X-STOCK project, but not to be limited to implementation of TTXs and use of X-STOCK application software only.



- An action/dissemination plan for the implementation of regional cross-border agreements and a strategy on how to attract new stakeholders (encompassed by the agreements) has to be developed.
- Green corridors for transport of international assistance should be established in time. This implies that in addition to the adopted legal framework, their functionality should be tested through specific exercises.
- At the RC NSs and NCPA level, the expertise to negotiate and communicate with the donors of items that are shared as international assistance should be improved.
- All cooperation opportunities contained in the X-Stock cross-border agreement, signed at the end of the project, are to be explored in the project follow-up stage.

3.3 X-STOCK software application

- RC NSs disaster managers must be supervisors of the work on the X-STOCK platform. It should be considered who manages the software application's activities in a critical situation. It needs to be clearly defined the role of the logisticians and nominated staff and volunteers for operation the software, as the RC NSs disaster managers are at the same time the EOC managers. It should be imposed on logisticians to have more challenges to use the application.
- In real-time conditions to be clearly defined who is going to operate with X-STOCK platform. Besides nominated people, at least two deputies are to be trained and nominated, as the X-STOCK platform must be operative 24/7.
- X-STOCK platform must be widely used in the national context, involving, and providing access to many sub-national stakeholders. RC NSs and other interested stakeholders must have a clear strategy on sustainability and maintenance of the X-STOCK platform adapted to national needs, as it was agreed that the RC NSs in follow-up phase (after project ends), intend to adapt the application software for internal use's purposes. Technically, it means that it should be provided access (login passwords) to RC NS's and other local and regional stakeholders to be able to practice use of the X-STOCK platform in regular condition, but also in emergencies and disasters. The RC NSs must make an obligation to their sub-national branch offices to integrate the X-STOCK platform in their EOCs (if available), to use it in case of cross-border disasters once the local/regional branches must cooperate in cross-border manner and according to the level of threat/risk assessment (as stated in the SOP).
- The RC NSs must find the modus for software sustainability in financial and operative manner. To be part of the RC NSs annual budget plan for EOCs. In the future training for disaster managers, logisticians, and volunteers, to be envisaged in the training curriculums. The training has to be related to the practicing of the application use through implementation of TTXs (at least twice per year) and gaining the skills for coordinating the decision-making processes, starting from determining the relevance of the assistance offered and acting on predefined criteria for the offered items.
- Once the RC NS's staff decides to create an operation on the X-STOCK platform, he/she must alert the RC NSs disaster managers and international cooperation staff (by phone or



other means of immediate communication). Consequently, the RC NSs staff and volunteers will be timely informed, will join the operation and will be prepared for further activities.

- IFRC Country Cluster Office in case of disaster to monitor the performance of work in the X-STOCK operation. In that way, IFRC Country Cluster Office, as a regional RC NSs umbrella, will be able to facilitate and guide the international assistance in regional scope, having an overview of the requested/sending items in the operation, as well as be able to manage avoiding the duplication of efforts in sending international assistance.
- The mapping option in the X-STOCK platform needs to be integrated or to be somehow interconnected with current mapping interface used with other software tools (such as NICS). It will enable the end-users to have a better overview of the locations of the relevant RC NSs' warehouses, border-crossings and eventually for tracking and calculating the time of the shipment's delivery.
- Current modality/response types "donation/replenishment/lending" are limited only to items made available to be shared by each RC NS, but at the same time need to be flexible to respond promptly to the needs of the concerned NS(s). Some guidelines with criteria on selecting the modality/response types to be developed.
- The timeframe for use of X-STOCK mobile during the operations and TTXs has shown that need to be defined. The response time (by sending NS) was not well defined. As concluded during the TTXs implementation, the requesting party did not know how long they may expect assistance, while sending parties did not know how long they may respond to the queries. Each activity that started must last (as agreed) and finish in reasonable time. Provisions about this issue to be integrated in the manual for X-Stock use and are partly integrated in the final SOPs.
- X-Stock shared stock should be in line with periodic mapping of RC NSs logistics resources.
- Adopting and adapting the X-Stock platform for internal (nationwide) use has to be shaped to be used as shared database for cross-border areas, identifying available materials, resources, equipment, and trained volunteers.
- The use of X-Stock application software could be an added value for every relevant exercise in civil protection organized in a cross-border manner.
- Considering the expected interest for use of the application by diverse profiles of practitioners, it is good to create a glossary in which the terms from the professional terminology in disaster response and logistics are clarified.
- It is necessary to improve the graphics of the software so that the activities can be even clearer and simpler to work with.
- Considering that most of the practitioners do not speak English, the application should be available in local languages as well.



References / List of reviewed documents (reports, publications)

- Conducted analysis per country (national reports developed in the WP2) – Bulgaria, Croatia, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia.
- Cross-border (comparative) report.
- Minutes of events held within project.
- Progress reports of the project.



Annex 1: Terms of Reference (Evaluation Consultant)



CRVENI KRST SRBIJE
Beograd, Simina 19

POZIV ZA PODNOŠENJE PRIJAVA CALL FOR APPLICATIONS

Crveni krst Srbije javno objavljuje poziv za podnošenje prijave kandidata za posao stručnog konsultanta u okviru projekta „X-STOCK“, koji Crveni krst Srbije realizuje uz podršku Evropske Unije i u saradnji sa međunarodnim partnerima i drugim nacionalnim društvima Crvenog krsta.

Posao stručnog konsultanta podrazumeva sprovođenje analize i kreiranje izveštaja o evaluaciji postignutih rezultata u okviru projekta „X-STOCK“.

Uslovi koje kandidat treba da ispuni i detaljni opis posla navedeni su u prilogu ovog Poziva („Terms of Reference for engagement of evaluation consultant for X-STOCK project“)

The Red Cross of Serbia publicly announces a call for applications from candidates for the job of expert consultant within the "X-STOCK" project, which the Red Cross of Serbia implements with support of European Union and in cooperation with international partners and other national societies of Red Cross.

The work of an expert consultant involves conducting an analysis and creating a report on the evaluation of the results achieved within the "X-STOCK" project.

The qualifications that the candidate must fulfill and the detailed job description are listed in the attachment of this Invitation ("Terms of Reference for engagement of evaluation consultant for X-STOCK project")

OSNOVNI PODACI O NAČINU I VREMENU ANGAŽOVANJA:

Vrsta angažovanja: Ugovor o delu.

Period angažovanja: pet meseci, okvirno od sredine januara do sredine juna 2023. godine, u skladu sa dinamikom realizacije projekta, navedenom u prilogu.

Rok i način plaćanja: plaćanje za obavljeni posao se vrši uplatom avansa u iznau od 50% nakon potpisivanje ugovora i uplatom preostalog iznosa sredstava na bankovni račun konsultanta 10 dana nakon kompletno obavljenog posla odnosno predatog završnog izveštaja.

Angažovanje i plaćanje konsultanta će se izvršiti u skladu sa propisima i poreskim tretmanima Republike Srbije

BASIC INFORMATION:

Type of engagement: Temporary Service Agreement

Engagement period: five months, approximately from mid-January to mid-June 2023, in accordance with the dynamics of project implementation, specified in the attachment.

Term and method of payment: payment for the completed work is made by payment of 50% in advance after signing the agreement and by the payment rest of the funds to the consultant's bank account within 10 days after the completed work that is, the submitted final report.

Hiring and payment of consultant will be carried out in accordance with the regulations and tax treatments of the Republic of Serbia



PODACI O NAČINU PODNOŠENJA PRIJAVE

Rok za podnošenje prijava: **29. decembar 2022. godine do 12,00 časova.**

Način podnošenja prijava: prijave se podnose na popunjenom obrascu iz ovog poziva, sa svim pratećim dokumentima u prilogu, na e-mail ranko@redcross.org.rs.

Sa kandidatima koji po proceni komisije za evaluaciju prijava budu ispunili uslove iz javnog poziva, obaviće se intervju, nakon čega će Crveni krst Srbije doneti odluku o izboru konsultanta.

Okviri period održavanja intervjua je od 9. do 13. januara 2023. godine.

U cilju utvrđivanja ispunjenosti zahtevanih uslova za angažovanje, naručilac može pre zakazivanja usmenog intervjua da zatraži dodatna pojašnjenja ili dokumentaciju od kandidata.

Sva eventualna pitanja ili dodatna pojašnjenja, kandidati mogu tražiti putem e-maila ranko@redcross.org.rs najkasnije 27.12.2022. godine.

INFORMATION ON HOW TO SUBMIT THE APPLICATION

*Deadline for submitting applications: **December 29, 2022 until 12:00 p.m.***

How to submit applications: applications are submitted on the filled Form from this Call, with all supporting documents attached, to e-mail ranko@redcross.org.rs

An interview will be conducted with the candidates who, according to the application evaluation committee, meet the requirements of the public call, after which the Red Cross of Serbia will make a decision on the selection of a consultant.

The tentative period for the interview is from January 9 to 13, 2023.

In order to determine the fulfillment of the required conditions for engagement, the client may request additional clarifications or documentation from the candidate before scheduling an oral interview.

Candidates can ask for any questions or additional clarifications via e-mail ranko@redcross.org.rs no later than 27.12.2022.



decembar / December 2022.

Obrazac prijave kandidata za posao stručnog konsultanta za analizu i kreiranje izveštaja o evaluaciji postignutih rezultata u okviru projekta X-STOCK

Application form for a candidate for the job of expert consultant for the analysis and creation of reports on the evaluation of the results achieved within the X-STOCK project

IME I PREZIME KANDIDATA NAME AND SURNAME OF THE CANDIDATE	
MESTO PREBIVALIŠTA PLACE OF RESIDENCE	
DA LI STE ZAPOSLENI I GDE? ARE YOU EMPLOYED AND WHERE?	
KONTAKT TELEFON I E-MAIL PHONE AND E-MAIL	
STRUČNA SPREMA STEČENA ŠKOLOVANJEM I NAZIV OBRAZOVNE USTANOVE (molimo dostavite kopiju diplome) PROFESSIONAL DEGREE OBTAINED THROUGH EDUCATION AND NAME OF EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION (please provide copy of diploma)	
STRUČNE KVALIFIKACIJE I ISKUSTVO navedite vaše sposobnosti i iskustva koje smatrate od značaja za ispunjenje postavljenih uslova iz Priloga (Terms of Reference) Molimo dostavite Vaš: - CV, - prpratno pismo, - najmanje jedan rad na temu predmeta angažovanja (npr. Izveštaj o evaluaciji)	
PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE state your abilities and experiences that you consider important for fulfilling the prequirements set out in the Annex (Terms of Reference) Please submit your: - CV, - Cover letter, - at least one similar piece of work (i.e., evaluation report)	

Datum / date:

Potpis kandidata / signature:



Annex 2: List of interviewed persons (interviewees)

Country	RC NATIONAL SOCIETY		DEM/EOC Manager in the National Civil Protection Authority (1)
	DEM/EOC Manager (1)	Logistician (1)	
Bulgaria	Name & surname: Jassen Slivensky Email: j.slivensky@redcross.bg Phone no.: +359 2 606 605	Name & surname: Marina Shehova Email: m.shehova@redcross.bg Phone no.: +359 2 4923 027	Name & surname: Svetlin Stanev Email: sdstanev.160@mvr.bg Phone no.:
Croatia	Name & surname: Ivan Usmiani – Head of DM Department Email: ivica.usmiani@hck.hr Phone no.: +38598408587	Name & surname: Teni Čuček – Head of National Logistics Centre Email: teni.cucek@hck.hr Phone no.: +385916047205	Name & surname: Igor Detelj Email: idetelj@mup.hr Phone no.: +385989401086
North Macedonia	Name & surname: Ali Samet, Disaster manager Email: samet@redcross.org.mk Phone no.: +38971223894	Name & surname: Oliver Gicevski, Logistician Email: dpp@redcross.org.mk Phone no: +389 70 317 825	Name & surname: Valentina Atanasovska Email: Valentina.Atanasovska@dzs.gov.mk Phone no.: + 389 75 457 591
Montenegro	Name & surname: Kristina Burzanović, Project manager, Assistant of the coordinator for DM, EOC focal point Email: kristina.burzanovic@ckcq.me Phone no.: +38268858222	Name & surname: Goran Petrušić, DM Coordinator and Logistician Email: goran.petrusic@ckcq.me Phone no.: +38269023333	Name & surname: Milan Radović Email: mup.emergency.op@t-com.me Phone no.: +38267112015
Serbia	Name & surname: Ranko Demirovic Email: ranko@redcross.org.rs Phone no.: +381628854599	Name & surname: Valter Rodin Email: valter@redcross.org.rs Phone no.: +381638351733	Name & surname: N/A Email: N/A Phone no.: N/A



Annex 3: Questionnaire for interviews

TARGET GROUP OF THE RESPONDENTS	CPAM	NSM	Log
<u>National pre-disaster and cross-border agreements</u>			
1. What are the “gaps, deficiencies and barriers” that should be redefined in those agreements?	X	X	
2. Are there any back up (contingency) plans and procedures in case of misinterpretation of the intergovernmental agreements and cross-border procedures, by the customs and other authorities?	X	X	
<u>Content of the National Reports</u>			
3. Does the implementation of the disaster management’s national legal framework face challenges once it must be implemented in the international context? Do countries have State Contingency Plans? Are those plans applicable in the international context?	X	X	
4. What is the rate of integration of EU’s HNS guidelines in the national legal framework, including the SOPs (in both ways – receiving/sending international assistance)?	X		
<u>Usability and effectiveness of the software application</u>			
5. Is the software understandable and easily manageable for its users?		X	X
6. Regarding the exchange of relief items across borders in the region, can the software bring real improvement of the status quo and is it expected to have a significant impact on delivery times and quantities of relief items shared across countries?		X	X
7. How does the update and upgrade of the software interact with national warehousing solutions? Does the NS warehouse management software, including the data about prices of the items, could be more applicable if it is somehow interconnected with X-Stock mobtable? (For various purposes, as for better overview of items’ prices, census of the items, procurement plans, audit etc.)			X
8. Are the quantities of items shared adequate to have a significant impact in a large-scale disaster and to justify the efforts made to develop it?		X	X
9. What additional improvements (adaptations or additional functionalities) for the software can be recommended?		X	X
<u>Outcomes of the conducted national and regional TTXs</u>			
10. What are the key findings from the implementation of the national and regional exercises?	X	X	X
11. Are the CP authorities that joined the exercise(s) interested in a future cooperation regarding use the opportunities for shared stocks developed through X-Stock project?	X		
12. Is it the resource mobilization hard to manage? What are the most frequent challenges?		X	X

National Civil Protection Authority EOC/DEM Managers = CPAM

National Society EOC/DEM Managers = NSM

Logisticians = Log