

**Photo 1.** Landslide in the village of Topcic Polje, near Zenica (central Bosnia), 15 May 2014



Source: [huffingtonpost.com](http://huffingtonpost.com)

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# The May 2014 Floods in Bosnia and Herzegovina

**M**ay 2014 will probably be remembered for decades in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Never in living memory had the country been struck by such a large and destructive natural disaster, as record-breaking levels of rainfall led to gigantic floods, and numerous landslides. Tens of thousands of people had to urgently flee the rising water levels, while others had to leave their homes for good as they were destroyed or buried. As is often the case when such a disaster occurs, some populations proved more vulnerable than others; in this particular case, the Roma minorities and the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) from the Balkan war were worse affected. The evacuation of flooded areas was not planned beforehand and proved extremely chaotic. Temporary accommodation facilities were created *ad hoc* in buildings that were not designed to house people. The vast majority of those evacuated and displaced sought shelter with relatives, yet there is very little information about them. International aid proved crucial in reconstruction efforts, especially for rebuilding houses and recovering livelihoods, while the Bosnian public authorities, divided among numerous administrative levels demonstrated a weak response capability.

## **1. AN UNPRECEDENTED NATURAL DISASTER WITH ENORMOUS DAMAGE**

### **1.1. Extraordinary levels of rainfall lead to mass flooding and landslides**

Bosnia and Herzegovina is largely a mountainous country, except for its northern part which reaches into the Pannonian basin. The Sava River, the largest in the country, forms a natural border with Croatia to the north. To the east, the Drina River follows the border with Serbia.

A low-pressure area designated “Yvette” or “Tamara” affected a large area of south-eastern and central Europe. Continuous, heavy rainfall, commencing on 13 May, resulted in extensive flooding in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), and Croatia. Three months’ worth of rain fell in the space of only three days; the heaviest rainfall in BiH since records began in 1894 (ACAPS, 2014). “Given the country’s topography, a vast number of rivers descend from higher elevations and feed into the Sava downstream. This caused sudden flash floods and extended inundations in the vast lower plains, where much of the country’s food and agricultural production is concentrated. Water moved downstream and upon reaching the River Sana, which also received flows from its tributaries to the east, remained above normal levels for many weeks; this impeded the normal discharge and recession in the flooded areas” (BiH Floods – Recovery Needs Assessment, 2014). In some places, the water reached the second floor of houses.

**Figure 1. Deadly flood across southeast Europe**

Source: IOM, June 2014, Overview on IOM activities, Humanitarian Situation Report Rapid field assessment carried out on 3-4 June 2014

In BiH, between 1 and 1.5 million people are estimated to have been affected (out of a total population of 3.8 million). Affected areas cover approximately one-third of the country: Tuzla canton, Sarajevo canton, Zenica-Doboj canton, Bosnia-Podrinje canton, Una-Sana canton, Brčko district, and the regions of Banja Luka, Doboj, Bijeljina, Odžak, Bosanski Šamac and Srebrenica. The most affected were Bosanski Šamac, Odžak, Orašje, Doboj, Bijeljina, Brčko, and Maglaj.

Floodwaters persisted for a number of weeks across a large portion of the affected area, restricting aid access, and impeding the return of the population and the resumption of agricultural and economic activity. As such, a full inspection that would have enabled a prompt estimation of the damage, effects and needs was further complicated and delayed.

### 1.2. Damage, casualties and immediate threats

These floods are considered to be the most serious natural disaster in the country in the past 120 years. Houses endured various forms of damage, depending on the level that waters reached and on the solidity of the construction. Moreover, heavy rains caused over 3,000 landslides which in some areas completely covered dwellings. Data provided by the Government of BiH on 28 May 2014, account for 852 completely destroyed houses, 47,745 damaged, and 6,109 at risk of being affected by landslides (IOM, June 2014). At the UN Head of Missions meeting in September, the number of damaged housing units was estimated to be 38,000, while Reliefweb, on its page on the Balkan floods, *Overview*, cites 75,000 damaged houses, of which 25,000 were

severely damaged. Naturally, electricity and communications were cut off, many roads, bridges and transport facilities rendered unusable, sanitation facilities were damaged and the water supply polluted. Livestock were severely affected as well as crops and yields. The total economic impact of the disaster is estimated to have reached 2.04 billion EUR or 15% of BiH's GDP in 2014 (Delegation of the EU to Bosnia and Herzegovina).

According to official statistics, 25 people died as a result of the disaster<sup>1</sup>. As of 19 May, it is estimated that more than one million people did not have access to drinkable water or other basic needs including food, especially for babies, clothes, medicines, and construction materials. The temperature rose to 30 degrees Celsius in the days following the disaster, and the risk of outbreaks of disease was high due to the large number of rotting animal carcasses.

As this paper will explore, the extent of the damage caused by the May 2014 floods was aggravated by BiH's civil war heritage. This 3 and a half-year conflict that ended less than 20 years ago caused around 100,000 casualties in total, and displaced over 2,2 million people. Another consequence of the civil war, constituting an additional security threat, is the fact that 70% of the flood-affected zone is landmines-contaminated (BiH Floods – Recovery Needs Assessment, 2014). Landslides and flooding caused some landmines and unexploded ordnances to move. Mine warning signs were also washed away or displaced. A mine exploded in Brčko district but nobody was injured. The issue of shifting minefields also affected the provision of assistance, since the government warned against the use of roads without prior clearance (ACAPS, 2014). Securing these affected areas will take years.

Bosnian foreign minister Zlatko Lagumdžija did not hesitate to compare the damages caused by the floods to those caused by the 1992-1995 war: "The physical destruction is not less than the destruction caused by the war. [...] During the war, many people lost everything. Today, again they have nothing." A large number of Bosnians also made the comparison, as their distress revived traumatic memories from the civil war (characterised by mass bombings of towns, ethnic cleansing and mass rape), which explain why psychological support was such a priority in relief and recovery assistance programmes.

### **1.3. New floods in August and September hit already weakened areas**

This paper will focus on the May 2014 floods and their consequences in terms of displacement because they were exceptionally huge in size. However, it is worth noting that two other episodes of heavy rainfall led to floods and landslides in the following months. In affected regions, they considerably slowed the recovery efforts and caused further damage to already weakened areas.

From 5 to 8 August, heavy rainfall caused flooding and landslides in Croatia, Serbia and central and northern Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Government of the Federation of BiH, Brčko District, Banja Luka, Celinac, Kozarska Dubica, Petrovo, and Kostanjica declared a state of natural and other disasters. Some areas that were hit by the May floods were flooded again (i.e. Zenica, Topčić Polje, Zepče, Želježno Polje, Banja Luka, Srebrenik, Tuzla, Čelić, Lukavac, Gračanica, Doboј Istok, Celinac, Bijeljina, and Brčko District). As in May, houses were submerged or buried, bridges destroyed, roads blocked and communications cut off. The worst reported situation was in the Lukavac and Gračanica regions. In the latter, several hundred people were evacuated from their homes (UN, August 2014; JUKIC, August 2014). The September rains affected neighbouring countries more than Bosnia itself. Only in Bosanske Gradiške, in the north, were houses flooded (EUROPEAN COMMISSION, September 2014).

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1. Number found in main sources, but an undated IOM report cites 32 casualties...



## 2. MASSIVE DISPLACEMENT FOLLOW SOCIO-ECONOMIC PATTERNS

### 2.1. Unreliable data

Several sources evoke “a local media, quoting government sources”<sup>2</sup> to advance a total of 950,000 people who had to evacuate their homes at some point following the beginning of the floods (articles and reports written around 20-25 May). On 20 May, CNN cited “Bosnian officials” to give the figure of 30,000 people displaced. On the same date, abc.net cited Assistant Security Minister Samir Agic to posit 500,000 people having left their homes (GEARIN, May 2014). The needs assessment endorsed by the UN, the European Union and the World Bank cites a total of 89,981 people displaced, with 49 822 people taking refuge in either official or alternative private accommodation at the peak level of displacement. In June, IOM cautiously evoked “tens of thousands” of displaced people, among which 90% found themselves in temporary living arrangements with relatives. In an article written in September 2014, IDMC stated that “the exact number of those displaced by the floods is unknown. Those who seek shelter with families and friends have not been included in displacement estimates and the figures for those living in the temporary accommodation facilities fluctuate as family members return home.”

### 2.2. Belated and chaotic evacuation and rescue

What is certain is that the magnitude of the catastrophe was not envisaged by public authorities beforehand and that the population was taken by surprise. Evacuation measures began only when people were trapped on their roofs. In total, more than 40,000 people were been evacuated (IOM, undated), in some areas that were only reachable by boat or by helicopter. The BiH Armed Forces, EUFOR, NATO and the U.S. were engaged in rescuing people by helicopter over the space of several days.

In Zeljezno Polje, a village in central Bosnia, around 1,000 people, including babies, pregnant women, invalids and the elderly were evacuated. Among them, the local imam stated to Reuters “I think we’ll never be able to return to our village. It has disappeared” (DJURICA, May 2014).

### 2.3. An emergency solution that lasted: Temporary Accommodation Facilities (TAFs)

Temporary accommodation included mostly public buildings, as shown in the following graphic. At this date, there were 55 TAFs across BiH (26 in RS, 25 in FBiH and 4 in Brcko District), hosting 1,531 people (1,125 in FBiH, 314 in RS and 92 in Brcko District) (IOM, June 2014). According to IOM, 7 TAFs faced health issues, 6 faced food issues and 6 water and sanitation issues. The latter typically arise from the use of ad-hoc temporary accommodation facilities. 60% of those in temporary accommodation were women, with around 25% children (0-17 years old) and 25% of elderly people (over 60 years old), two particularly vulnerable groups of the population.

On 3 September 2014, the UN Heads of Missions Meeting stated that:

“While some of the TAFs have been closed (even forcibly), others are being re-opened; a total of 1495 persons have been registered while in TAFs, with an increase of some 100 beneficiaries over the past 60 days. The number is likely to increase with the coming heating season. Situation is further exacerbated by the forced closing of collective centres located in schools due

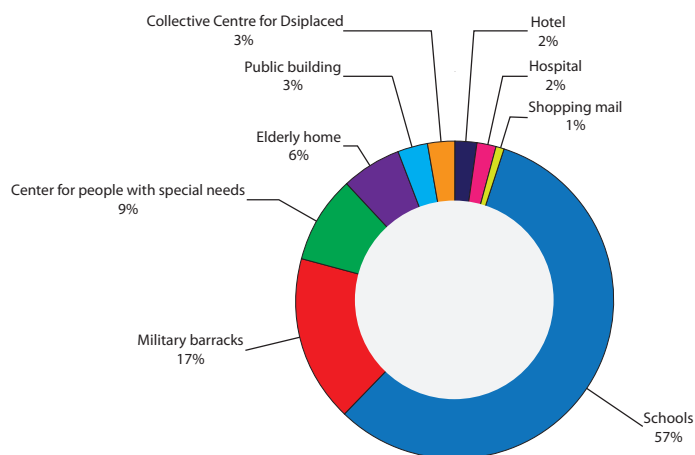
2. Apparently Vjekoslav Bevanda, the Prime Minister, cited by Elvira Jukic in her article “Transparency Urged in Bosnia Humanitarian Aid”, 30/05/14, Balkan Insight

**Photo 2.** IOM cautiously evoked “tens of thousands” of displaced people



Source: AFP

**Figure 2.** Rapid field assessment carried out on 3-4 June 2014



Source: IOM, June 2014, Overview on IOM activities, Humanitarian Situation Report

to the start of the school year. Situation in the Federation is particularly dire with no solution in sight for victims of landslides whose homes will need to be relocated.”

This statement is based on an Individual Needs Assessment conducted in TAFs in late August by UNHCR and the Bosnian Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees. Concerning their expectation to return home, 13% of the interviewees said

in September 2014 that they expected to return within a month, 28% in 2-3 months and 26% in the following six months. 31% said they were unable to return at all. 61% of damage caused to the houses of the interviewees were due to floods and 34% to landslides. 25% of the houses in question were completely destroyed, 62% partially destroyed, 9% located in zones at risk of landslides and 2% in a mine-suspected area. However, many households were increasingly ready to return. It was observed that very often, the family was hosted in TAFs while men went back to the houses to repair them and render them habitable again. Another category which was not quantified consists of people hosted by relatives but who came to TAFs to obtain food and non-food items. This study concludes that there were no significant health concerns within existing TAFs and that the supply of drinkable water, food and sanitary items was adequate. Psychological support was provided, notably by four IOM expert teams in coordination with the BiH Centre for Mental Health. It is estimated that 50% of the people hosted in TAFs needed psychological support. Finally, no security issues within TAFs, including gender-based violence, were reported.

Considering the high number of public buildings transformed into TAFs to respond to the urgent need, it was crucial to find sustainable solutions for those persons whose displacement was prolonged in order to free up public buildings for their intended use. As of September 2014, some TAFs were closed without the provision of alternative accommodation for residents. While TAFs were closed, other new TAFs were opened, as households previously accommodated with friends and family were forced to find alternative accommodation (UN Heads of Missions Meeting, September 2014).

## **2.4. Unequal exposure to risk: Roma and conflict IDPs proved the most vulnerable**

### **2.4.1. Roma**

Roma populations constitute the largest minority in BiH. They are particularly exposed “due to their extremely vulnerable economic situation, limited employment prospects, the poor quality of construction materials used for their houses and houses located in areas not meant for solid housing construction” (BiH Floods – Recovery Needs Assessment, 2014). Some even live in makeshift homes or in the streets. Indeed, almost all of them do not have regularly paid jobs, but rather live on daily-obtained income. More often than not their activity consists of collecting secondary raw materials (IOM, June 2014). It is thus unsurprising that their traditional income generating assets were destroyed or made unavailable. The particular social status of the Roma families as well as different procedures in the local level of governance results in the fact that many of them do not receive any form of social assistance. Among those who received some kind of grant, in June 2014, some were “experiencing delays or absence in receiving the grants, while numerous Roma families affected by floods/landslides have not received a single visit from the social welfare centre responsible for the area they live in. Further, the floods/landslides have worsened the already weak health state within the Roma community. More people are now affected by various health problems, whereas those with a history of chronic illness and psychological disturbances are experiencing difficulties in receiving the necessary therapies” (IOM, June 2014). In addition, households are largely made up of a relatively high number of children and elderly people who are naturally more vulnerable. In early June, 67 Roma persons were being accommodated in temporary accommodation facilities; 25 in Vogosca and 42 in Tuzla (IOM, June 2014).

Due to its experience in working with these communities and relying on a network of partner NGOs, IOM conducted interviews with 343 Roma families.

“Out of those interviewed, 40% had to leave their homes and seek temporary accommodation elsewhere, while 45% of the total number of interviewed households

had their houses completely destroyed (no longer habitable) by the flooding/landslides. Of the interviewed families 80% had experienced complete or partial destruction of their furniture and other household belongings, 11% had no time during the evacuation to take their personal IDs (which were left in the flooded area), 21% had no income whatsoever and 61% were self-employed (collection of raw secondary material, agriculture and cattle breeding). Their income generation activities were severely affected with little prospect of being renewed without assistance from a third party.”

*BiH Floods, 2014 – Recovery Needs Assessment*, conducted by Bosnian authorities at all level, with the support of the UN, the European Union and the World Bank, from 25 May to 17 June 2014.

In certain places such as Tuzla, displaced Roma preferred to install their own tents rather than use temporary accommodation facilities offered by the municipality, believing that conditions were better there, and they refused to go far from their damaged properties for fear that their remaining belongings might be stolen. This created tensions with the municipality which signalled its intention to recover the areas spontaneously occupied by Roma (TURNER, 2014).

#### **2.4.2. Internally Displaced Persons by Conflict**

Conflict IDPs were also disproportionately affected. According to IDMC, 20 years after the Dayton agreement, around 103,400 people remain displaced, with more than 7000 IDPs still living in collective centres. 10% of home and land repossession cases remain unsolved.

“In the period 1999-2005, many municipalities allocated plots of land as donations in order to alleviate the pressure of housing needs for IDPs and refugees wanting to integrate locally. Furthermore, the economic vulnerability of this population forced them to buy the cheapest plots of land. In many cases, these were located in lowlands near to riverbanks prone to flooding or on hillsides that were prone to landslides. Building new housing for that population group represented a huge issue due to lack of financial resources and so many constructions were built using poor construction materials and/or minimum experience construction workers. Moreover, over 75% of all housing units built before and after the war were constructed without building permits, which means that they are not properly registered.”

*BiH Floods, 2014 – Recovery Needs Assessment*

#### **2.5. Reconstruction whenever possible, relocation for thousands**

Many houses will have to be relocated, either because they were destroyed by landslides or because they are located on unstable slopes. The authorities will issue declarations of inhabitability, and have to inform citizens about the risks and encourage them to rebuild in safer areas to avoid similar damage and casualties in the future.

As of September 2014, the process of identifying construction companies to assist in the re-construction of the housing of those families residing in TAFs was at its final stage and the reconstruction was about to commence. Thus, assistance to returnees was prioritised in both entities, with 1,200 units targeted (UN Heads of Missions Meeting, September 2014). However, donor assistance is mainly geared towards flood victims due to the complexity and cost of landslide-related recovery: the recovery of landslide-affected homes is estimated to be 50% more expensive, on average, than repairing flood-affected houses (UN Heads of Missions Meeting, September 2014). On 30 October 2014, the EU and UNDP estimated that around 250 families (around 700 people) remained homeless, mostly in the towns of Doboij, Zenica, Tuzla, Kalesija, Zivinice and Brcko, the places worst hit by landslides (JUKIC, October 2014).

As stated above, it is very common in BiH not to hold a building permit. In Tuzla, one of the most affected areas, 90% of the affected dwellings are illegal (UN Heads of



**Photo 3. Flooded area near Brcko (northern Bosnia) on 18 May 2014**

Source: AFP

Missions Meeting, September 2014). And throughout the country, almost no one has property insurance, meaning that affected residents lost virtually everything.

In the short term, reconstruction efforts will offset job losses, with some 5,000 jobs created in the reconstruction industry (UN Heads of Missions Meeting, September 2014).

### **3. DISASTER RISK MANAGEMENT AND POLICY RESPONSE**

#### **3.1. Surprisingly pronounced private solidarity proved indispensable**

Solidarity among people was highlighted in press articles and witness reports. Buses and truck companies made their vehicles available for transporting aid, students organised volunteer teams for clean-up, hotel owners provided free accommodation for the displaced, households offered shelter for those in need through social media (PASIC, 2014), and even Airbnb waived charges in the affected region (KUMPARAK, 2014). People from various parts of former Yugoslavia sent clothes, food and medicine to those in need. It is particularly notable that people helped each other regardless of ethnicity in a region that was devastated by ethnic war only twenty years ago. Identity belonging played a role however, since the diaspora proved reactive in sending money from abroad.

#### **3.2. Poor response from national and local authorities**

##### **3.2.1. Emergency response**

The risk of flooding was well known. In December 2010, heavy rain had already caused the Drina River to overflow, leading to widespread flooding and landslides. Apparently, no lessons were learnt in terms of risk prevention and management,

since the affected areas in 2010 were affected again in 2014. For example, three people died in Tuzla in 2010 following a landslide engulfing a home (IFRC, 2010), a phenomenon that reoccurred three years later with even more devastating results.

Bosnia and Herzegovina's institutional setting directly results from the Dayton agreement and is extremely complex, with multiple layers of administrative and political structuring. Under emergency circumstances, the Ministry of Security is supposed to take the lead. Civilian protection is by default under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Justice, which thus hosted the coordination centre for assistance and rescue operations. However, BiH has multiple layers of government. In Republika Srpska, civil defence is also a responsibility of the entity channelled through the municipalities. As for the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, there is an additional level, with the extra cantonal level between the entity and the municipality. Administrative layers are thus so numerous that confusion rapidly reigned: "With 14 governments, a dozen municipalities, the two entities and the state, no one really knows who is authorized for what and who is responsible" (DIALOGUE BiH). No national state of emergency was declared, precisely to avoid parallel decision-making, but FBiH, RS and Brčko District declared their own state of emergency.

The re-flooding of early August highlighted the continued vulnerability of local communities and the increased inadequacy of existing flood protection measures. UN Heads of Missions stated in September that "Governments must develop and deploy policies for dealing with populated areas that are at an unacceptably high risk from flooding and landslides" and regretted that "no budgetary allocation was made for dealing with this issue". As mentioned above, several hundred people were again displaced in Gracanica region (UN, August 2014) and many more elsewhere.

### **3.2.2. Longer-term recovery**

As for the recovery phase, in September, no national or entity recovery programme had been deployed, leading to an *ad hoc* and uncoordinated approach by individual agencies (international and local) (UN Heads of Missions Meeting, September 2014). Local governments were still yet to receive substantial assistance from higher levels of government, several of which were threatened with insolvency as debts were mounting. Solidarity funds were established and housing assistance was prioritised by both entity governments, but no comprehensive enterprise recovery or employment retention program was launched outside of the donor community, while damage and displacement gravely threatened the livelihoods of many households. International and local donors accounted for the bulk of assistance provided (UN Heads of Missions Meeting, September 2014). General elections were held on 12 October, with the campaign dominated by economic and social issues. The newly elected politicians did not implement new measures or programmes to recovery from the flood.

### **3.2.3. Some clues for explaining such inefficiency**

Did the obstruction arise from the complex structure which paralysed action, or from the people who govern? The debate opposes advocates of the two positions. The present study is not the place to go into the details of Bosnian politics, but the poor response capacity of the governments seems obvious, and it is probably aggravated by limited resources. Srećko Horvat defends another thesis, arguing that neoliberal influence is to be blamed. He depicts the crisis as a "social disaster" and accuses Balkan states of privatising water management companies and their gradually diminishing investment in the construction and maintenance of dams and embankments (HORVAT, 2014). This proposition is contested by Florian Bieber, who argues that very little privatisation has in fact occurred. According to him, the lack of public investment and maintenance of infrastructure is due to ongoing reconstruction following the war, the reduced professionalism of politicians because of party appointments

**Photo 4.** A man cleans mud from his home in Maglaj, BiH.

Source: Velija Hasanbegovic/Radio Sarajevo

and favouritism, and hierarchical power-structures leading to slow response in times of crisis.

Indeed, there is suspicion that the money supposedly allocated for flood prevention was not correctly allocated. The Prime Minister of Republika Srpska, Zeljka Cvijanovic, recognised in late May that the damage caused by the flood, and resulting displacement, could have been lessened had everything been done by the rules: "That does not mean that the catastrophe could have been prevented but the consequences could have been reduced to a minimum" (JUKIC, June 2014).

"Areas around the river Sava in northern Bosnia suffered severe flooding because the embankments were not large enough or broke during the flooding. [...] A Federation Audit Office report from January 2013, which dealt with the system of flood defences, said responsibility for managing possible floods was fragmented and that institutions were uncoordinated and divided. All the activities needed to bring the system of protection into a functional state were not taken. [...] From the total money collected from water taxes, only 25 per cent was used for flood protection. The [previous] water-protection facilities were destroyed in the last war and as such cannot ensure an efficient protection from flooding in endangered area. The report noted also that while the Federation entity's cantons obtained more than 10 million euro for flood protection, they spent only 16 per cent of the money on that task."

Elvira Juvik, 3 June 2014, "Bosnia Probes Missing Flood Prevention Funds" *Balkan Insight*

### 3.3. Prompt international emergency response<sup>3</sup>

Given the poor resources of Bosnia and Herzegovina, international aid proved crucial in both the emergency and recovery phases. The country requested immediate support from the EU, and asked the UN Resident Coordinator to take the lead in coordinating international donor efforts. International Community Coordination Meetings were held daily from 18 May onwards. Almost 40 individual countries sent relief items, rescue teams or financial aid.

UN agencies provided a total of 9.7 million USD for emergency humanitarian aid and for immediate recovery support. The first UN plane with emergency equipment landed on 19 May, followed by 5 more and a series of truck convoys. The UN network of field offices enabled the provision of urgently needed assistance to some 40 affected municipalities (UN Mission in BiH).

On 15 May, the EU Civil Protection Mechanism was activated, for both BiH and Serbia, which was also badly affected by flooding. Bosnia & Herzegovina notably requested helicopters and motorboats to evacuate people and to transport water, medicine and food, as well as pumps, generators, tents, humidity dryers, water purification sets, gas heaters for tents and sanitation items. 23 Member States participated, and over 800 relief workers were deployed in the two countries. In BiH alone, these teams directly rescued over 1,700 people. The European Commission co-financed the transportation of relief material and personnel, and the European Commission's Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC) was responsible for matching the incoming offers of assistance with needs on the ground. In addition, more than 80 satellite maps were produced by the Commission to support both the affected countries and those providing assistance. The EU also provided €3 million in humanitarian aid on 6 June 2014 (EC Decision ECHO/-BA/BUD/2014/01000) (for the two countries), channelled through the Red Cross – Red Crescent as well as other partner organisations (ECHO factsheet, July 2014). Kristalina Georgieva, the European Commissioner for International Coordination, Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Response, visited Sarajevo on 21 May. As BiH is not a candidate country for EU membership, it cannot apply for aid from the EU Solidarity Fund.

### 3.4. International multi-faceted recovery aid<sup>4</sup>

From 22 May to 1 June, four teams were deployed on the ground to conduct a rapid needs assessment, which served as a basis for the International Donors' Conference "*Rebuilding together*" which was held on 16 July in Brussels. In total, BiH received €139,775,743 in grants and €670,700,000 in loans (EUROPEAN COMMISSION page on International Donors' Conference).

### 3.5. The UN floods recovery programme "Danas Za Nas"

This programme, entitled "today, for us", started on 1 July 2014 and ran until 30 June 2015. It aimed to "re-establish normal living conditions, preserve jobs, support local economies and increase disaster resilience in more than 25 communities most affected by floods" (UN BiH). This USD 14.8 million programme was financed by 16 bilateral donors and implemented by UN agencies. It targeted 8 areas for assistance:

1. Livelihood support: The *Cash for work* programme delivered grants to the most-affected municipalities to enable them to quickly employ locals to clean and repair public areas and infrastructures.
2. Livelihood support: Livestock feed concentrate, greenhouses and non-financial aid to improve the value-chain production were delivered to the most vulnerable farmers.

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3. For an overview of foreign aid during the humanitarian phase, see UN in BiH's interactive map: Floods Response Map – Humanitarian phase. [http://ba.one.un.org/content/unct/bosnia\\_and\\_herzegovina/en/home/what-we-do/joint-projects/floods-recovery/floods-recovery-map0.html](http://ba.one.un.org/content/unct/bosnia_and_herzegovina/en/home/what-we-do/joint-projects/floods-recovery/floods-recovery-map0.html)



3. Water Sanitation Projects (WASH): restoring the water, sanitation and sewage facilities.
4. Rehabilitation of health centres, notably through the provision of medical equipment and vehicles.
5. Support for centres for the elderly: reconstruction, equipment and staff training.
6. Stabilisation of landslides using drainage pipes.
7. Rehabilitation of the central heating system in Dobo.
8. Support for infrastructure rehabilitation, notably concerning bridges and access roads (UN BiH).

### 3.5.1. The EU Floods Recovery Programme

This programme was launched on 15 August 2015 and ended on 31 October 2015, providing a total aid package of €43.52 million out of which the EU contribution was €42.24 million, with UNDP providing the remaining €1.28 million. "The Programme consists of different components all of which aim to assist with the normalization of peoples' lives in flood-affected areas and communities in 24 most-affected municipalities. The activities focus on the immediate restoration of vital public sector infrastructure and reinstatement of key public services, the emergency reconstruction of private dwellings for the most vulnerable and marginalized people, the revitalization of local economy and agriculture production and rehabilitation of communal infrastructure in selected municipalities. [...] The Programme is being implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) until October 2015" (UN BiH). The Programme aimed to rehabilitate 4,000 dwellings for approximately 14,000 people, 100 local roads and bridges, 90 educational institutions (including pre-school facilities), 10 water and sanitation facilities, three municipality buildings, four Centres for social welfare, and four healthcare facilities (EUROPEAN DELEGATION to BiH). In addition, the EU funded the retention and generation of up to 2,000 jobs in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), including in the agricultural sector (UN BiH). As of September 2014, the governments were not implementing any job retention programmes, meaning that the impact of this programme will likely remain limited (UN Heads of Missions Meeting, September 2014).

An Advisory Panel was established in October 2014 to maximise collaboration between the EU and domestic authorities on all levels, also serving as an information exchange forum. By April 2015, the programme had helped some 1,500 families to return to their homes.

### 3.5.2. Various other country-led or NGO-led projects

The UN and EU relief efforts were by far the biggest, but other country-led or NGO-led projects were also implemented. For example, the Austrian Development Agency launched a project helping agricultural producers to recover livelihood security. According to the BiH agency for statistics, around 50 percent of agricultural holdings are less than 2 ha and over 80 percent less than 5 ha. Thus, familial agriculture on small plots is widespread, and when land, crops or livestock are devastated, those households lose all sources of income. These people are the most vulnerable to environmental hazards. Through donations of seeds, seedlings, beehives, poultry and small and large cattle, this programme had assisted 2,424 agricultural producers as of April 2015 (SUNJE, 2015).

### 3.6. Controversy around the use of international funds

Bosnia and Herzegovina's Prime Minister regretted in late July that many donors bypassed Bosnia's institutions when distributing aid because they do not trust them (JUKIC, July 2014). Indeed, international assistance actors are concerned with possible



**Photo 5.** Landslide rehabilitation in Vares by the “Cash for Work” programme.



Source: UNDP

corruption and chose to implement projects directly by themselves. Part of the money passed through public authorities at different levels, though. Confusion lingered with regard to the availability of those funds and governments were slow to disburse them (UN Heads of Missions Meeting, September 2014).

## **4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The widespread severe flooding and landslides in May 2014 certainly could not have been avoided, but it was possible to anticipate their occurrence, to prepare for such an event and to limit the damage. These events starkly shed light on the fact that socially vulnerable populations were living in flood-prone zones and are less resilient to such events. Evacuation was poorly managed and longer-term consequences of displacement were not tackled effectively. The following is a list of lessons learnt and recommendations to reduce Bosnians' exposure to disasters:

### **4.1. Invest in prevention and preparedness**

The May 2014 floods and landslides took local authorities by surprise. This means that meteorological data were either not good enough, or that the implications of such heavy rainfall had not been accurately envisaged or taken seriously. It furthermore suggests that the Bosnian authorities were not sufficiently aware of the vulnerability of the population and did not deal with it accordingly. Of course, natural hazards cannot be avoided, but, if with the correct preparation, the damage they cause can be limited. In the case in question, disaster risk reduction measures were clearly inadequate: fragile embankments, poor water management, especially concerning transboundary waters, dwellings built in banned zones, and weak capacities for early

warning and alarm (HUSEINBASIC, 2014). The scale of this disaster should push politicians and administrations to implement much more goal-oriented measures in the near future.

Concerning evacuation and displacement more specifically, it is striking that no preventive evacuation was planned. As such, along with better meteorological forecasting, a system of alert and organisation of evacuation before floods occur is needed. This goes hand in hand with better identification of vulnerable populations, namely people who will need special help to move and people who are most endangered should such a natural disaster occur.

In addition, as discussed above, many buildings were transformed into *ad hoc* temporary accommodation facilities but were not adapted to be used as emergency shelters. It would certainly be too costly to build dedicated centres, but existing buildings that could serve as TAFs can be identified beforehand and an assessment of their characteristics would probably lead to better orientation of the prospective evacuees and displaced populations.

#### **4.2. Coordinate all efforts**

As for the humanitarian emergency phase, Samir Huseinbasic, from the Bosnian Ministry of Security, acknowledged before the Council of Europe in June that communication and information management have to be improved, as well as inter-agency coordination (be it vertical or horizontal). The Bosnian political and administrative structure is extremely fragmented, and improving the way the whole system works is another debate entirely. However, knowing who is responsible for what and facilitating information sharing is a minimum requirement.

Furthermore, it is essential that international and local bodies should be able to trust each other. Foreign assistance delivered by international organisations and non-governmental organisations often bypassed local authorities. The former were concerned about a lack of efficiency and the misuse of aid, notably because of fears over corruption, while the feelings of the latter were hurt. This reciprocal mistrust prevents further improvements because it maintains Bosnia's dependence on foreign aid, and international actors are generally less connected to the realities on the ground. Closer partnerships must thus be forged, so that local government cans improve their way of functioning under international influence, progressively diminishing the need for a foreign presence in BiH.

#### **4.3. Making courageous and future-oriented choices in the recovery phase**

Quick reconstruction after the war led to poor-quality housing being built in risky areas. Rebuilding after the disaster should take this into account by making the quality of the new dwellings a priority. Building robust houses in safe places may be costly in the short term, but doing so means much greater costs can be avoided in the long run. Closely linked to this issue are the disastrous consequences of the lack of property titles and housing insurance. Here again, the incentives for implementing strict legislation are not obvious for politicians seeking to be elected, but such action protects the safety of citizens, and the fact that houses are legally recognized and properly registered, also greatly facilitated the planning of risk-reduction measures.

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