Providing aid in complex refugee situations:
A case study of Belgrade

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Abstract

This paper aims to provide a reflection on the humanitarian response to the "migration crisis" along the Balkans route during 2015. Firstly, the characteristics of and dissimilarities to other crises are identified in terms of the engagement of non-traditional actors, the repeated responses at several posts en route and the limited timeframe for relief operations caused by the temporary presence of the respective beneficiaries in one place. Based on this contextual analysis, the case study examines a project which originally aimed to provide information and basic protection activities to asylum seekers travelling through the Belgrade area, but had to be scaled up to take into account a greater number of beneficiaries with more diverse needs than was initially anticipated. Similar developments in other relief activities along the route allowed an identification of the basic lessons learned for the responders on the ground, which would be useful when establishing future projects under similar conditions.

Key words: asylum seekers, refugees, Serbia, humanitarian aid, migration

Introduction

The migration situation in the European Union (EU) states that occurred in 2015 exceeded the standard capacities and procedures of the EU and its member countries in dealing with the refugees, and it became a humanitarian crisis (Miliband & Gurumurthy, 2015; UNHCR, 2016a). Hence, the article focuses on the humanitarian perspective in relation to the needs and responses of various humanitarian actors. Traditionally, displacement is either protracted in one place or people move from one place to another after some time, so there is enough time to establish provisional refugee camps. The situation in 2015 was quite different, especially in the European context – asylum seekers were travelling to a particular destination and they passed through urban and rural areas which were not prepared for such an unprecedented influx (Triandafyllidou & Gropas, 2016). Furthermore, numerous obstacles, such as lack of financial resources, health issues and physical barriers forced them to stay at several places on the way for uncertain periods of time; usually a couple of days but sometimes longer. Coupled with the lack of response from the governments of the transit states and official authorities, this led to responses from various actors, some of them non-traditional (Bordignon & Morriconi, 2017). Although their efforts are very meritorious, their engagement has had consequences inter alia on the asylum seekers' needs fulfilment, their interactions within the group and with other stakeholders, such as the host populations, who have their own expectations.

Therefore, there is a need to analyse how aid providers should react to such a crisis in order to achieve a good solution for all and a win-win situation.

The current migration crisis in the European Union and especially along the Balkans route has posed many challenges for the main duty-bearers because of its complexity and dynamic character (UNHCR, 2016). It has confirmed the necessity to strengthen organizational capacities and processes in order to ensure timely assistance in an efficient and sustainable manner. As of early 2017, this crisis has not ended and other mass population movements are predicted due to climate change and deterioration in conflicts (Brzoska & Fröhlich, 2016). This paper is practically oriented in order to provide a reflection on the humanitarian response to the crisis. It aims to make available lessons learned from a project launched to provide humanitarian assistance for the temporary beneficiaries who emerged from the mass movements of asylum seekers through the Balkans.

Starting with an analysis of the context of the crisis from the perspective of a literature review, the article is based on a case study of a project developed by a consortium of international organizations, international and local non-governmental organizations and local authorities. From August 2015 the project originally aimed to provide information and basic protection to asylum seekers, mainly those travelling from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan through the Belgrade area towards European Union countries. After the initial phase, the project had to be scaled up to take into account the greater number of beneficiaries and their actual needs, which were more diverse than initially assumed, especially when considering the absence of other aid providers. A similar development in other relief activities further along the Balkans route allows us to draw certain guidelines and parallels for engagement in timely and cost-effective aid support under such conditions.

The "migration crisis" in Europe

The migration situation in Europe which began in 2015 has been labelled "the largest humanitarian crisis of our time" by the European Commission (DG ECHO, 2015: 1). Traditional theories explaining international migration (Massey et al., 1993) are less powerful when investigating the reasons for forced migration, which can be explained in the political realm. Moreover, the boundaries between forced and voluntary migration are becoming increasingly blurred. Hence, people crossing the Western Balkans have been referred to as "mixed flows" of migrants and asylum seekers. Most asylum seekers who enter the European Union have come from states which have experienced war or other forms of state collapse and they are eligible for a form of international protection under the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the Common European Asylum System. The statistics show that Syrians, Afghans and Iraqis were the main nationalities of the asylum seekers, lodging around 145 100, 79 300 and 53 600 applications respectively (Eurostat, 2016). During the summer of 2015, the Serbian-Hungarian border became the main entry route to the European Union until it was closed in mid-September and

replaced by other migration routes. According to Frontex (2016), 763 958 people travelled through the Western Balkan route in 2015 alone. Several hubs appeared along the route where asylum seekers could be taken care of by a myriad of actors, including the state.

The current debate on refugees in Europe is very state-centric, despite its salient aspects in the rise of non-state actors, such as international organizations, NGOs, and volunteers involved in the field. It has been acknowledged that the international refugee regime has become more multifaceted than was the case in the past as many different actors have emerged in the field of refugee protection. It is questionable whether these organizations and networks can offer meaningful protection to asylum seekers without the support of the state as that will provide people with protection through legal instruments such as asylum. Nevertheless, the presence of these organizations is important and will be further discussed in this paper.

The UNHCR is the main agency responsible in situations of mass displacement and its primary task is to protect refugees. A closer look at the UNHCR statute reveals that the work of the UNHCR "shall be of an entirely non-political character; it shall be humanitarian and social and shall relate, as a rule, to groups and categories of refugees" (UNHCR, 1950). It is difficult to argue that effective help can be ensured without advocacy on behalf of the refugees. Furthermore, refugees should be able to voice their concerns. While migrants and refugees are being positioned as "universal humanitarian subjects" (Malkki, 1996: 377), it can be difficult to involve them in providing evidence about their own needs in an appropriate forum.

By 1990, Hathaway (1990) had already argued that the competence of the UNHCR had evolved in the direction of stressing its material assistance role; and this is consistent with the EU states' desire to keep refugees away. Since then "the ability to control migration has shrunk as the desire to do so has increased" (Bhagwati, 2003). The term migration management is an umbrella term used by different actors when they intervene in refugee situations, as it depoliticizes migration related policy-making (Geiger & Pécoud, 2010). However, it is not only state and international organizations that have a say in refugee situations. It has been asserted that new forms of horizontal counter-politics have emerged in opposition to the politics of the state (Kallius, Monterescu, & Rajaram, 2016: 3). In more than one case, the refugees themselves have become active participants in the political realm instead of being passive spectators.

Humanitarian response to the "crisis"

In the previous section, we discussed the nature of the current migration crisis and the actors dealing with it. This part continues the analysis by describing the specifics of the humanitarian response to the asylum seekers' needs in the context of disaster management, humanitarian aid and refugee protection. Different stakeholders as well as volunteers became involved in the provision of aid to asylum seekers during the summer of 2015. Whether the engagement of non-traditional actors took place in order to fill the void

left by the state's inaction or to complement the work of others, it has become a significant phenomenon that deserves further attention. However, there is a clear dichotomy between providing material support and giving adequate protection to refugees. Without the real protection of states, little can be done to provide aid to people on the move and to help them with their needs. Moreover, giving material aid can mask the precariousness and uncertainty of a person's status. The project that took place in Belgrade in 2015 tried, first and foremost, to offer protection. Humanitarian aid only came second.

There is a need to fill the gap between the literature related to humanitarian aid and the literature focused on refugee protection. It seems that the convergence of the issues related to refugees and humanitarian aid can be covered by the term refugee regime complex. We are currently witnessing a refugee regime complex, "in which different institutions overlap, exist in parallel, and are nested within one another in ways that shape their states' responses towards refugees" (Betts, 2013: 71). The UNHCR no longer acts in its own name, but selects several implementing partners. These include national and international non-governmental organizations and municipal organizations. Finally, there are numerous volunteers who are not affiliated to any organization but nevertheless offer their assistance to refugees and migrants. The result is that everyone contributes their part but no one is held responsible if there is any misconduct.

As discussed above, we were witnessing an atypical humanitarian crisis. Most authors agree that there are a few cornerstones in every crisis, no matter how it emerges: it is a threat to life and dignity for a significant number of people and at the same time it exceeds their own capacities; it mostly occurs during or after a situation of armed conflict, a natural disaster or, as is more often the case nowadays, a complex crisis influenced by many more factors, such as climate change and political instability. Correspondingly, the humanitarian response is an action which aims to save lives and alleviate suffering (Martin, Weerasinghe, & Taylor, 2014; Blaikie, 1994; DG ECHO, 2007; Walker & Maxwell, 2008).

Hence, humanitarian action can take many forms, based on the needs of the affected people and the context in which it is provided. Nevertheless, there are certain rules and norms which facilitate the humanitarian aid delivery process (James, 2008). The details of this migration crisis and the subsequent response to the needs of the asylum seekers were analysed within the framework of the Code of Conduct, Sphere standards, Core Humanitarian Standard and incorporated guidelines (Sphere, 2011; CHS Alliance, 2014; ICRC, 1994). Thus, we identified the dissimilarities and exceptional factors in the context of the humanitarian needs and the humanitarian response. Three aspects are the most significant with respect to the aim of this research and are discussed below: a) the actors engaged, b) multiple locations of the response activities and c) timeline of the response (McLaughlin, 2015; Squires, 2016; Hanquet, 1997; Dumont and Scarpetta, 2015; UNHCR, 2015; UNHCR, 2016; Lilyanova, 2016).

Engagement of non-traditional actors

One of the main distinctions in this crisis is the engagement of non-traditional actors. A more detailed analysis can thus explore who should be providing the humanitarian assistance and who actually does it. Concerning the implementation of humanitarian programmes, the international humanitarian architecture generally incorporates the following main actors in humanitarian settings: United Nations humanitarian agencies, the International Red Cross and the Red Crescent Movement, international non-governmental organizations, national and local non-governmental organizations, governments, donors and regional intergovernmental organizations (White, 2016; ALNAP, 2015; Mac Ginty & Peterson, 2015). Although there are increasing calls for a strengthening of the local actors' roles and the emphasis to be placed on subsidiarity in humanitarian aid provision (World Humanitarian Summit, 2016; Gingerich & Cohen, 2015), the humanitarian architecture is still mainly designed for international actors such as UN agencies, The Red Cross and international non-governmental organizations (Hilhorst & Jansen, 2010; Mac Ginty & Peterson, 2015). In the refugee settings, one particular UN agency for refugees, the UNHCR, is the main body responsible, within the framework of international refugee law.

Although many of these actors were active in their responses to this crisis, a significant role was taken by foreign volunteers. The involvement of the UNHCR and international non-governmental organizations was initially limited, due to the lack of support from some national and local authorities and due to different geographic priorities with regards to the seriousness of the crisis in Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey and other countries (Dumont & Scarpetta, 2015; UNHCR, 2016a; McLaughlin, 2015). The mass involvement of foreign volunteers is very specific, not only for refugee crises, but for all humanitarian settings and it is also problematic from a legal point of view. In fact, the volunteers' activities were covered neither by the international humanitarian law, nor by the international disaster response law, and their operation in the field had little legal basis (ICRC, 1949; IFRC, 2011).

The engagement of non-traditional actors such as volunteers raised another important issue - the lack of accountability and professionalism (UNDAC, 2013), which is a long-term problem even for traditional humanitarian actors, and it greatly affects the quality of the humanitarian aid that is provided (Hilhorst, 2002; ALNAP, 2015). Thus, the non-formal actors could work directly in the field while being not obliged to follow or even be aware of any measures to ensure accountability, such as the Code of Conduct, Core Humanitarian Standard, Humanitarian Accountability Partnership Standards, Sphere Standards etc. (Sphere Project, 2011; Joint Standards Initiative, 2014). This also meant they could relinquish responsibility to various stakeholders and in some cases this led to the provision of misleading information, short-term oriented assistance and ignorance of the rights and responsibilities of other actors, such as host governments (McLaughlin, 2015; Squires, 2016).

Other significant aspects were related to the heterogeneity of the beneficiaries. They came from various countries and ethnic groups, they came for a range of reasons and they spoke a variety of languages - all factors which influenced the quality of the response (Miliband & Gurumurthy, 2015).

Repeated response

The place where assistance is provided usually depends on the needs of the people affected and the respective response coordination, which determines who does what and where. In a refugee setting, specific models such as Refugee Coordination Model could be adopted but the aim of all coordination models, tools and mechanisms is to increase efficiency and effectiveness, as well as other aspects of humanitarian response (UNHCR, 2013; Saavedra & Knox-Clarke, 2015).

In major humanitarian crises the coordination is usually organised through the cluster approach and this creates a platform for an improvement in the implementation of humanitarian assistance through coordination among the actors involved within a respective sector (IASC, 2015; Cubilié, 2007). Nevertheless, not all clusters are established everywhere and for many reasons the effective functioning of the clusters suffers; the distance from the direct beneficiaries, the involvement of all relevant stakeholders and the lack of relationship-building (Stoddard et al., 2007; Street, 2009). Moreover, in a refugee setting the cluster approach is generally not applied due to the limits of accountability transfer (UNHCR, 2016b) and thus the coordination in such situations can be negatively affected by the diversity of the actors and their backgrounds, funding-related barriers and unpredictability (Balcik et al., 2010; Stobbaerts, Martin, & Derderian, 2007).

A significant deviation from norms and guidelines could be observed here. The location and the methods of assistance management were obviously affected by the movement of the beneficiaries. However, a lack of coordination, the engagement of non-traditional actors and the difficulty of conducting the needs assessment (be it due to such objective/legitimate reasons as the brief presence of the beneficiaries in any one place or for subjective reasons such as a lack of professionalism in the responders and their false confidence in their ability to estimate the needs of the asylum seekers based on good will) caused chaos, an oversupply of certain goods and a shortage of others. Hence, the situation led to duplications and gaps and manifested itself as the remains of donated items at various provisional camps or, on the other hand, images of starving people (Dumont and Scarpetta, 2015; UNHCR, 2015). While admitting the low predictability of future scenarios, the uncertainty was mainly limited to the geographical locations of further interventions, whereas most of the needs could easily be predicted from general guidelines (Hanquet, 1997; IASC, 2011) or from similar occurrences of mass refugee movements in the past (Salama et al., 2004; Pottier, 1996). Furthermore, an efficient response was limited by the lack of functional information sharing among various actors in different locations, and by the provision of aid in the territories of multiple states (UNHCR 2016a).

Temporary presence

The speed of the humanitarian response was seriously affected by the temporary presence of the asylum seekers in particular locations. As discussed above, the asylum seekers were mainly travelling on a route towards Western and Northern European countries and so in most cases they only stayed in any one place for a couple of days. The reasons for halting their journey and staying in a location included physical (especially fatigue), financial (depletion of the cash reserve) and legal (denial of entry into a country) barriers, which explained the temporary presence of the asylum seekers and their will to move on as soon as the barriers were removed (Frontex, 2016; Kingsley, 2015; BBC, 2015; Dumont & Scarpetta, 2015).

In almost all humanitarian crises, the participation of the people affected is desirable and the level of participation can vary from passive information to empowerment and community managed activities. Whereas it is not always possible or effective to achieve the highest level, humanitarian actors in the past decades have identified this issue as crucial in reducing the adverse effects of relief efforts, specifically a dependency on humanitarian aid (Arnstein, 1969; Byrne, 2003; UNHCR, 2008; Harvey and Lind, 2005).

The lack of time available to work with the asylum seekers caused severe problems throughout the programme cycle, starting from an inadequate needs assessment which led to the provision of redundant material assistance, and at the same time other needs were not met (UNHCR, 2015; UNHCR, 2016a). The role of the beneficiaries was influenced by the fact that the humanitarian actors and responders focused on the implementation phase, particularly on protection and basic humanitarian needs, with the immediate provision of aid to people who were exhausted and new to the environment. Moreover, the beneficiaries formed very heterogeneous groups at each place and had no significant links to each other. These reasons meant that the participation of asylum seekers in the response activities was very low and the affected people usually played a passive role in receiving material assistance. This was even accentuated by the repetition of similar response at various places on the route (UNHCR, 2016a; Lilyanova, 2016).

Methodology

The case study for this paper was undertaken using qualitative methodology and the main research question was how the response of humanitarian actors in Belgrade can be improved to better address the needs of the beneficiaries. In order to answer the main research question, we created three specific subquestions: (i) What are the actual needs of the beneficiaries? (health status, nutritional status, equipment, access to water resources and sanitation facilities); (ii) How are the response activities organised? (project management, financial resources, human resources, coordination arrangements and function); (iii) What is the impact of the response activities? (satisfaction of the beneficiaries, perception of the response activities by the host population, and their quality as perceived by the volunteers and staff members).

The data collection methods involved direct observation, interviews and key informant interviews. The primary data were gathered from the interviews with asylum seekers, volunteers and key informants. A purposeful sampling was employed in order to collect as much relevant information as possible in a short time at the beginning of the project, in August 2015. A total of seventy asylum seekers were interviewed, as well as twenty volunteers, host community members, staff members and representatives of involved organizations. A much higher amount of time was spent on the participant observation and this will form a source of substantial data, corresponding to the fact that the field teams provided aid to approximately 120 people per day. The observation was non-sequential; the sampling is oriented towards the most vulnerable groups and was influenced by the fact that the people in this setting vary and stay in one location temporarily. All interviews outputs were anonymous. The data gathered by the data collection methods (mainly transcribed texts and field notes) were analysed by open coding and categorization related to all data collection methods and all research questions.

The goal of the analysis was to identify potential humanitarian needs, success factors, limits and pitfalls of the project. The analysis was carried out through reduction to the most substantial data (during and immediately after the interviews, because of time limits) and the subsequent mixed inductive interpretation within the frame of specific research questions, guidelines, previously described guidelines and lessons learned. It was a quasi-inductive approach, used in order to achieve quick results with an acceptable validity level in relation to adjustments to the project activities. In order to increase the validity of the lessons learned, the results of the research were discussed and verified by the consortium representatives as well as the employees, volunteers and interpreters.

Experience from launching a response

The main part of this paper focuses on the lessons learned from a project launched to provide humanitarian assistance for temporary beneficiaries during the mass movements of asylum seekers through the Balkans. The data and the project details were anonymous, in order to protect the implementing agencies. After the initial phase, the project had to be scaled up to take into account a greater number of beneficiaries and their needs, which were more diverse than initially assumed, especially when considering the absence of other aid providers. The information about the project is drawn from the internal documents of the main implementing agency.

On the basis of the needs assessment and its mandates, the consortium planned and initiated a project aimed to provide assistance in terms of protection, material aid and the dissemination of information via the establishment of an information centre. In addition, it was planned for several outreach teams to be deployed to offer medical, psychosocial and legal support directly in the field. In August 2015, at the time of the projects launch, the consortium consisted of five actors, including international non-governmental organizations, local non-governmental organizations, local authorities and other international

organizations. The project relied on volunteers and approximately five permanent staff. The project was to last until December 2015, but due to the protracted nature of the crisis, the project is still ongoing as of early 2017.

The project was needed because of the massive influx of asylum seekers to the Belgrade area, mainly from Macedonia and heading towards Western and Northern Europe. At the time of the project's initiation, several thousand people per day were coming to the country and staying in the capital and surroundings for periods of between three and seven days. The total number of asylum seekers in Belgrade at any given moment was estimated to be five to six thousand because approximately ninety-eight percent of asylum seekers travelling through Serbia stopped in Belgrade. The demographic structure of the asylum seekers was similar to data provided by other sources as discussed above and approximately half of them were Syrians, followed by Afghanis, Iraqis, Pakistanis, Eritreans and others. The majority of the asylum seekers were men, travelling with their families, as individuals or with other men (usually in homogenous groups in terms of nationality).

During the rapid joint needs assessment conducted by the consortium, it was found that the major needs of the asylum seekers were based on their legal and physical status, previous experience and future plans. Many were in poor health due to their long journeys, and beside physical injuries their ailments included malnourishment and dehydration. The legal status of the affected population was influenced by the manner in which they entered the country, i.e. through the use of mainly illegal crossings in order to avoid potential problems with authorities and in order to be able to seek asylum in their target country. These efforts and practices exposed them to smugglers, who provided them with a minimum or false information. Their legal invisibility and increased vulnerability meant there was a lack of access to the services offered by the state and other actors; in some cases, abuses of power by police and local authorities were also reported. In addition, many unaccompanied minors were travelling on the route and a majority of the asylum seekers, especially the most vulnerable, suffered from a lack of the financial resources necessary to complete their journeys.

Potential improvements for the project

Despite the very short notice before the start date and struggles with the lack of suppliers, materials and places to provide the assistance, since the beginning of August 2015 the project has succeeded in the provision of at least basic information. This was important due to a high turnover of asylum seekers, and the first groups received at least some support. From the first days, managers could overcome major operational obstacles and the project was recognised by other stakeholders as it liaised with new donors and partners. Later it was extended to activities such as the distribution of non-food items. One of the most significant examples of good practice was identified regarding coordination – the organizations involved were willing to cooperate with other actors from different sectors, and that was crucial in overcoming the lack of experience of the people active in such

situations. The local authorities and local non-governmental organizations, whose field of operation is normally focused on different situations, could benefit from the know-how of international organizations, and the latter could benefit from the knowledge of the local context and the availability of human resources, such as volunteers, who would be less attracted to working for smaller organizations.

Nevertheless, there were several aspects which could be improved in order to achieve greater efficiency, effectiveness, sustainability and better coordination. The outcomes of the research show that improvements are desirable in several areas (see Table 1).

Table 1: Areas to be improved during the response

Reporting mechanisms	• a shared system for recording details of beneficiaries, including biographic data, recorded needs, the location of their stay and notes for potential follow-up assistance
Communication	• a shared contact list of all organizations and specialists for various types of assistance in line with the procedures and equipment for instant communication about the urgent needs, e.g. radio or smartphone applications
Material assistance distribution	• food and non-food items suitable for temporary stay and potential movement
Coordination	• cooperation of outreach teams providing basic assistance in the field with specialized service in the centre (identifying the most vulnerable) • clear definition of roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders
Accountability	• identification of the volunteers and staff members in order to ensure they are not involved with smugglers and opportunistic operators • clear communication of the objectives of assistance to the staff and beneficiaries in order to prevent false expectations
Human resources	• regular supervision of all project workers • contracts and guidelines for all staff and volunteers • interpreters should be aware of their role
Safety and security	• be aware of tensions during distributions or panic after information spreading

Discussion

This article analysed the context of the 2015 refugee crisis and demonstrated the characteristics of the corresponding humanitarian response. The findings suggest that although some features were similar to other humanitarian crises, this one was different due to the engagement of non-traditional actors, repeated responses and the temporary presence of the beneficiaries. In addition, the dynamics of the movements and the subsequent reactions of states and duty-bearers showed that there is a lack of preparedness for such situations in Europe, especially in terms of regulations, capacities and cooperation. Hence, the humanitarian community and, more importantly, the non-humanitarian actors, encountered new challenges in how to approach the needs of the migrant flows on the European continent.

The outcomes of the case study research in the field can support efforts to establish a humanitarian project which would be implemented when similar mass movements occur. Some key points emerged from the implementation of the humanitarian assistance and these can be used in different contexts by various actors, from policy officials to unofficial volunteer groups. Although on a local level the crisis was quasi-rapid, on a global and regional scale it appeared to have a slow onset. Hence, it is possible to improve the immediate response through the anticipation of movement and scenario development, improved ability to learn from previous stops and enhanced cooperation and information sharing between actors from different countries (possibly facilitated by international actors).

One of the main characteristics of the crisis was that the assistance was delivered by actors with different scope of activities. The lessons learned from the project may provide guidelines for those who decide to act in a situation of limited preparedness and with the involvement of inexperienced and ad hoc actors. To overcome this limitation in the future, it is possible to utilise the stand-by capacities of already existing organizations. They may be prepared for different types of disasters/situations but they could at least have basic competences and be ready to act in a much shorter time, in the sense of emergency preparedness for a refugee crisis (Blaikie, 1994; Hanquet, 1997).

Another important caveat is the significant implementation delay; the situation, the context and the needs change dynamically, no matter how rapid the initial needs assessment (Balcik et al.; 2010). It is recommended that needs assessments be carried out continuously and the relevance of project activities should be checked from time to time. In general, the needs of beneficiaries were similar to those in other situations of mass movements in complex crises (shelter, health, water, food, protection) (Sphere, 2011; Salama et al., 2004). However, their priorities were influenced by the fact that the ambition to reach certain destinations overwhelmed the subjective perception of other needs.

Having the flexibility to adjust a project where necessary and the ability to cooperate with relevant actors are crucial if the response to people's needs is to be carried out in an effective manner. Plans for scaling up and especially extending the range of activities should

be ready before the situation requires major changes (James, 2008). It is possible to enhance efficiency and effectiveness by incorporating new partners and by cooperating with other actors working in the same field. Nevertheless, clearly defined roles and responsibilities are the necessary preconditions for beneficial cooperation. Existing tools may be used for information sharing, such as shared documents via the internet, with respect to data security and already available equipment (e.g. instant messengers utilizing mobile internet connection or radio to be borrowed from a local radio-club).

The subsidiarity and delegation of responsibilities among project staff while communicating mission objectives can increase flexibility in decision-making as well as the long-term well-being and availability of highly engaged staff. The standardisation of procedures and the training of volunteers are essential for impartial assistance (ICRC, 1994). Due to the flow of people it is important to regularly carry out rapid assessments on the ground and to ensure high efficiency in contact with beneficiaries, in order to target as many of the most vulnerable as possible.

In order to improve accountability, careful human resource management is required. Some volunteers and interpreters may be tempted to assist with any tasks required by beneficiaries, such as information on how to overcome the legal obstacles and cross the borders. This can have negative impacts on accountability, which can be limited by the definition of clear objectives and roles (CHS Alliance, 2014). An explanation to all staff concerning humanitarian principles is important in order to be a reliable partner for local authorities as well as a professional actor towards the beneficiaries (Walker & Maxwell, 2008). In terms of security, the systematic distribution of food and non-food items, as well as the sharing of official and valid information, can prevent panic. The preparation of procedures and venues for crowd management and the training of relevant workers will increase their ability to deal with a high influx of beneficiaries into one place.

Conclusion

Although the flow of asylum seekers to Europe is not a new phenomenon, developments in 2015 have proven the validity of the often-voiced calls, mainly from southern European countries, for higher solidarity and an integrated approach by all duty-bearers such as international organizations, international and local non-governmental organizations and local authorities. For various reasons, the migrant flows expanded to many continental countries and the situation deteriorated as the relevant stakeholders were caught unprepared. This was amplified by the lack of cooperation and the enforcement of currently existing procedures. The dynamics and the inadequate response meant that the features of the crisis were different to other refugee-related situations in Europe, and also different from other humanitarian crises in general. This analysis has identified the specifics of the crisis from a humanitarian point of view and it has described the case study of a multi-stakeholder-led project and the lessons learned. This should be of benefit to those actors who will encounter a similar situation, so the next response can be carried out

more efficiently and effectively and the relevance of its activities and the sustainability of the outcomes can be ensured.

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