

Emergency preparedness of the Czech Red Cross

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Abstract

The risks of modern society and the emergency incidents of recent years (Haiti 2010, Japan 2011) remind us of the importance of crisis management and the world-wide international movements of the Red Cross and Red Crescent play an important role here. Compared with recent world disasters (e.g. Haiti, 2010 – 250,000 dead, 300,000 injured and 1.5 million people made homeless) we can say that the Czech Republic faces emergency incidents with less disastrous consequences, yet they can still be disastrous. In the period from 1997 to 2010, the Czech Republic was affected by 8 floods, during which 116 persons died and the damage was almost 8.5 billion USD. The Czech Red Cross (CRC) is a part of the national emergency system, however, there is no concrete or systematically examined data for its crisis management. Therefore the aim of this paper is to design a survey for emergency preparedness within crisis management, both in the areas of planning and management of the Czech Red Cross crisis management. The results will be the presentation of data from preliminary research, the discussion of the survey design and a final summary of the survey with recommendations and limitations. The proposed survey methods include a description, comparison and the ideal model method. They are used in three stages; (1) preliminary research implemented at the regional level, (2) research on the entire territory of the Czech Republic and (3) examples of



good practice. The survey results are considered important in their practical implementation in the following ways; (1) for the concept of long-term emergency preparedness of the CRC, (2) for their application to the State Rescue System of the Czech Republic and (3) for an international comparison with other National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. Over 80 million people from 188 countries are volunteers in the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and it is undoubtedly necessary to manage them. We consider that having enough information is the key factor determining the quality of the management and efficiency of provided help.

Keywords: emergency preparedness, The Red Cross, Czech Republic, rescue system.

1 Introduction

The International Federation of the Czech Red Cross (CRC) and the Red Crescent (IFRC) has seen the growth of occurrences of natural disasters all around the world. [This warns the International Red Cross and Red Crescent associations, which are represented in 188 countries in the world, to be aware of the dangers, to reduce their vulnerability and increase their action readiness to emergencies [1]. IFRC is the basic organ of The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, which co-ordinates and controls the humanitarian aid to victims of natural and technological disasters, to refugees and to people endangered by health risks. The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement accomplishes the prevention and reduction of human suffering, the protection of health and life and we give respect and thanks to the ICRC and the above-mentioned individual national societies, (the Red Cross and the Red Crescent) [2].

In the Czech Republic we face emergencies of small dimensions, although they do cause damage. In the period of 1997–2010, 8 flood events affected the Czech Republic; 116 persons died and the damage was almost 172 billion crowns (\$8.5trillion) [3].

The help of the Red Cross has been connected with our area since 1868. The CRC national societies' members and volunteers perform tasks especially in the fields of humanitarian, social, health and civil protection and provide help in the case of disasters and in the field of health education for the population [4].

The CRC is a part of the state emergency system. The duty to help in the case of emergency is declared in documents such as; Act No. 126/1992 Coll. – on the protection of the emblem and the name of the Red Cross and the Czechoslovak Red Cross [5], Act No. 239/2000 Coll. – on the Integrated Rescue System [6] and Statutes of the Czech Red Cross [7], with the agreement of the Czech Red Cross and the Fire and Rescue Service. To fulfil this task we consider it necessary to support and maintain the emergency preparedness of the CRC. Therefore the goal of this paper is to complete a design of emergency preparedness within CRC crisis management.

2 Material and methods

On the basis of a literature review we managed to find only general information about CRC emergency preparedness. In this paper we are focused especially on the crisis preparedness of the CRC’s “human resources”, which involves the units designated to be deployed in an emergency.

Since 1997, the CRC has set up the so-called Czech Red Cross Humanitarian Units following the example of the German Red Cross. At local Czech Red Cross branches, units have been developed, (similar to the community-based disaster response teams and the branch disaster response teams of the IFRC structure), with 21 people divided into 5 sections (health, accommodation, technical, catering, psychosocial) including one person in the role of commander. Furthermore, in 2001, one unit at the central level was established (similar to the national disaster response team unit of the IFRC), which is called the Emergency Response Unit of the Czech Red Cross [8]. The Red Cross Humanitarian System Units (HU CRC) and one central institution in the form of the Emergency Response Unit are also used today.

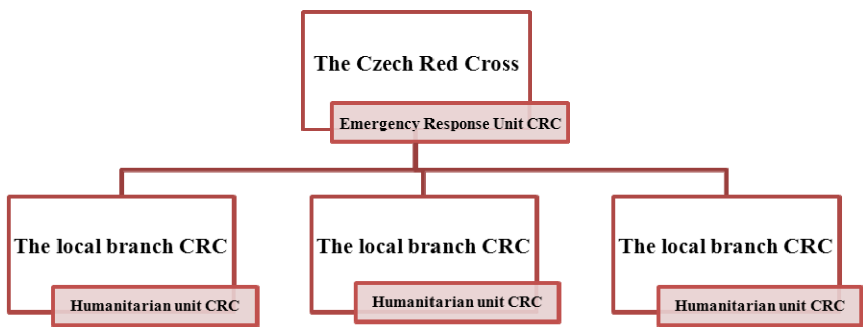


Figure 1: The Czech Red Cross structure focused on the Czech Red Cross units operating in emergencies. Source: compiled by authors on the basis of [9].

Table 1: Data/information about the Czech Red Cross (1.1.2012).

Total the local branch CRC in the Czech Republic	76
The local branch CRC with the established the Humanitarian Unit	60
The local branch CRC with authorized (county) functions	14
Emergency Response Unit	1

Source: compiled by authors on the basis of [9].



A contributing factor for choosing this survey topic was that one of the authors has been a long time member of the Emergency Response Unit. She had the opportunity to assist and coordinate the CRC aid in practice during the three flood events in 2009 and 2010. The crisis management of the local CRC branches proved to be highly variable and had complicated the providing of effective aid to the citizens affected.

The main research question is: What is the emergency preparedness of the CRC in case of emergency? Due to insufficient data and extensive issues we have chosen to develop the comprehensive research in the three consequent phases.

2.1 Phase I – survey at the regional level

This phase was conceived in the form of a pilot study and preliminary research. The research question of the first phase is: What is the Red Cross emergency preparedness in the Olomouc region? The question was divided into two research objectives:

- crisis management description and analysis of the CRC local branches in the Olomouc region;
- verification of the selected research tool for nationwide use.

The first objective was divided into four areas:

- emergency management authorities of the CRC local branches;
- coordination of the CRC local branches during emergencies;
- use of volunteering at the CRC local branches during emergencies;
- communication the CRC local branches during emergency.

These areas were the basis of the survey tool. Nevertheless, it is not a quantitative survey; the semi-structured interview was chosen in order to obtain reliable data for the situation of being “face to face”, which always helps.

The respondents were people in the position of director. The survey was conducted in the field, by one researcher, between 31.8.2012–6.9.2012, with a total of five respondents.

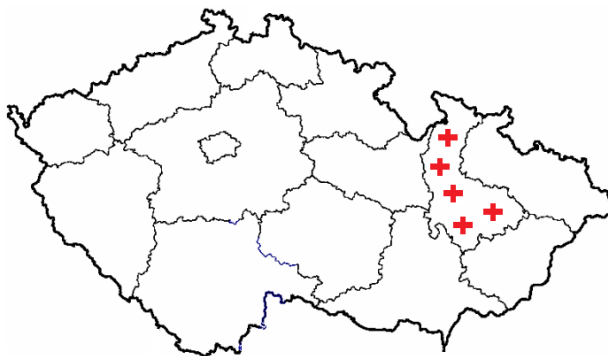


Figure 2: The Czech Red Cross local branches in the Olomouc region.
Source: compiled by authors.

2.2 Phase II – research at the national level

The survey will be conducted in 14 (out of 76) of the CRC's local branches. These local branches hold the post of the so-called CRC local branches designated to act in region-wide matters [10]. The new CRC directive also increases the responsibilities and competencies of these charged (regional) CRC local branches in the area of emergency preparedness from April 2014. It determines the CRC's local branch's responsibility for processing and updating regional concepts for emergency preparedness and assistance plans, for coverage of the region by the CRC forces and means and for the coordination and possible management during emergency and other things [11].

The survey question of the second phase is: What is the crisis preparedness of responsible CRC local branches in the Czech Republic? It entails the following objectives:

- description and analysis of responsible CRC local branch's crisis preparedness;
- selection of the survey sample for the third survey phase.

In the first phase the semi-structured interview brought data that could be divided into two parts: the first part (questionnaire), which procures objective data about crisis management background, and the second (semi-structured interview), which is focused on the completion of subjective questionnaire questions.

In total, it is a sample of 14 people, each in a director position of the responsible CRC local branch. The execution of the field survey for this is planned from June to September 2013. A part of the second phase is a criteria determination which is intended to help identify the examples of good practice.

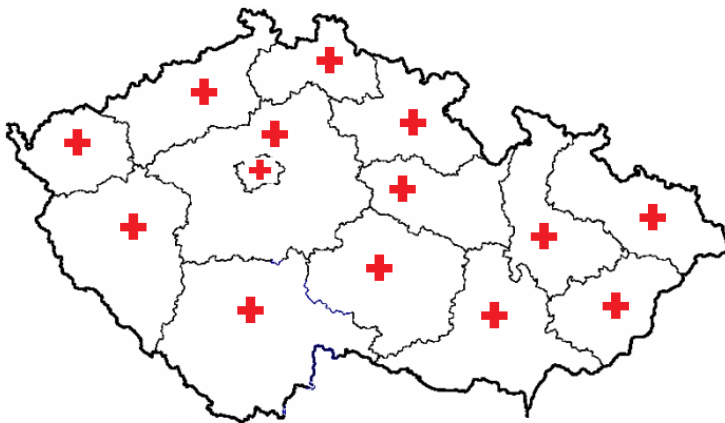


Figure 3: The responsible CRC local branches in the Czech Republic.
Source: compiled by authors.

2.3 Phase III – the examples of good practice

On the basis of the second phase, the results and the determined criteria in the final phase of the three accountable CRC local branches, which will represent the accountable CRC local branch, will be chosen:

- with a low level of crisis preparedness;
- with a middle level of crisis preparedness;
- with a high level of crisis preparedness.

The depth of the interview will be used for both the persons in the director position and a commander of responsible humanitarian units. The field survey is planned for the middle of 2014 and it should bring an answer to this phase question: What are the depth factors which influence the level of crisis preparedness quality of the CRC local branches?

3 Results

In the results of the first realized phase of preliminary research we can observe a considerable variability in the emergency preparedness of the CRC's local branches. For example, the graphs in Figure 4 and 5 display “human resources” and their supposed action readiness during the deployment of the surveyed CRC humanitarian unit.

It can be seen that respondent D has not established the CRC humanitarian unit. It is interesting to compare graph no. 1 (fig. 4) and 2 (fig. 5), where we can observe how many members there are and in what time the respondent is able to be dispatched to the place of the emergency. It is from the results of the first phase that the second and the third phase will emerge.

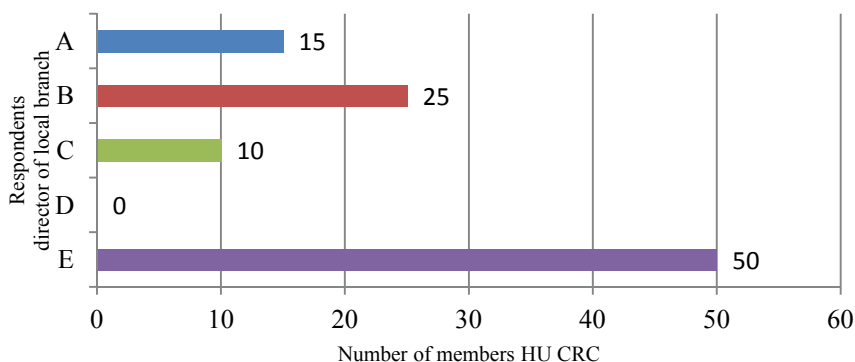


Figure 4: Number of members of the Czech Red Cross local branch humanitarian unit in the Olomouc region.

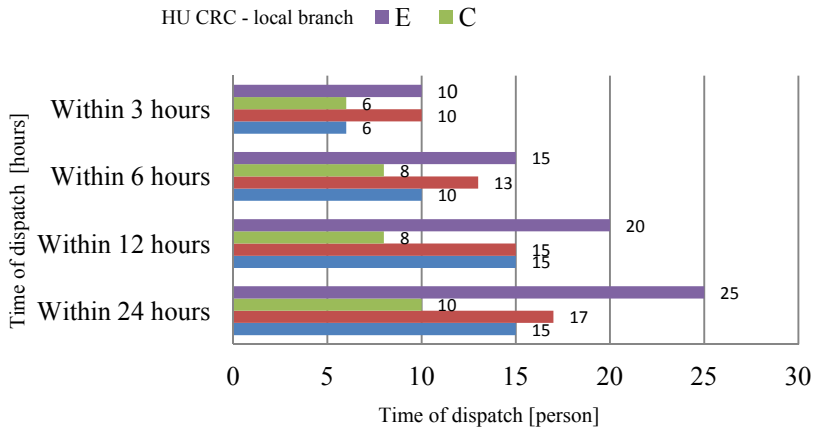


Figure 5: Dispatch of members of the CRC local branch humanitarian unit in the Olomouc region to an emergency.

4 Discussion

We chose the CRC crisis preparedness survey intentionally. The CRC is a state-recognized national association of the Czech Republic, which declares aid to victims of emergencies and belongs to the network of the biggest organization in the world. We respond to the 2020 Strategy of the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) – ‘we save lives; we change minds’ (saving lives, changing minds) and one of the free strategic objectives is: saving lives, protection of sources of livelihood and strengthening recovery from disasters and crisis. The primary response to emergency should be ensured by the Red Cross and Red Crescent local network and the relevant Red Cross and Red Crescent national association. The IFRC considers the assumption of responsibility essential, both for dealing with an increasing numbers of disasters as well as for ensuring the quality readiness and reliability of regional offices and by extension of the National Red Cross and Red Crescent society [12].

Even a case study from 2010 about the aid of the American Red Cross during an influenza pandemic in 1918 presents the variability of emergency preparedness of the local Red Cross branches, which we have monitored in the first phase [13]. Overall the difference in the levels of agility of the non-state and non-profit organizations of the Czech Republic belongs among the weaknesses as the present authors of SWOT analysis [14]. But as long as we do not know which difference we are facing we cannot set up effective measures against it.

We can start dating the issue of the CRC crisis preparedness from when the so-called Samaritan Patrol guard were established; then they were followed by the health entourage (1949–1989), rescue units and rescue teams (1989) to the current Czech Red Cross Humanitarian units [8].

The proposed survey methods, which are descriptive and comparative methods as well as the method of modelling the ideal state, do not provide any exhaustive surveys of the current CRC crisis preparedness but do achieve the acquisition of basic data out of the as yet unsystematically surveyed and prepared field for which the CRC crisis preparedness, and by extension the crisis preparedness of other non-state, non-profit organizations in the Czech Republic which offer help to victims of emergencies, is considered [15].

5 Conclusions

Crisis preparedness is a field which should be supported at all levels. It aids the strengthening of individuals, communities and families as well as the approaches to health care and knowledge and what to do in case of an emergency [16].

An organization such as the Red Cross and Red Crescent plays a significant role. Annually IFRC provides aid, on average, to 30 billion affected persons in the world; disaster response represents the largest area of its own activities [17].

Fortunately, the CRC has not had to deal with challenges to the extent of the major world catastrophes (the earthquake in Haiti in 2010, the earthquake and tsunami in Japan in 2012). CRC volunteers provided emergency assistance, particularly during less severe emergencies, but even so, we can hardly imagine that a director of the CRC local branch announces: I will not help you – I do not have any volunteers, I do not have any financial resources, we cannot agree on anything. What exactly do we have?

The survey design is intended to provide the basic data overview concerning the Czech Red Cross crisis preparedness and the four areas we have mentioned: emergency management authorities of the CRC local branches, coordination of the CRC local branches during an emergency, utilization of volunteering of the CRC local branches during emergencies and communication of the CRC's local branches during emergencies.

CRC leadership reflects the issues and current nature of its crisis preparedness and this affects our survey. At present, CRC leadership is making steps towards a more effective, more efficient and economical system of emergency preparedness, for example, with the release of the CRC Directive No. 4/2013 regarding the humanitarian units, which comes into effect in July 2013 and which transforms the humanitarian units into more categories (as opposed to only one unit of 21 members of the CRC) and the release of the CRC Directive No. 1/2013 about the CRC crisis management, which comes into effect in April 2014 and which changes, clarifies and updates the role of each institution active in CRC crisis preparedness.

We consider the current overview of the CRC's crisis preparedness to be virtually implemented for the outcome of the strengthening and preventing of planned changes in the CRC crisis management. It is important to take into consideration the fact that we consider the survey to be laying the foundation for this issue. For gaining complex data about CRC crisis preparedness in the Czech Republic it will be necessary to make more specifically focused surveys.

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