

The Development of Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) in Kosovo

In partnership with the School of Rehabilitation Therapy at Queen's University, United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), Handicap International (HI), the Association of Disabled People of Kosovo (HANDIKOS), and the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Prishtine, Kosova.

Dates:	January 2001 to April 2002
Primary sites:	All regions of Kosova
Budget:	\$800,000 CAD
Donor:	Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA)

Overview

Between 1996 and 1999 the Serbian military committed acts of violence against the people of Kosova. An ethnic cleansing campaign by the Serbian military killed thousands of Kosovar people, and the displacement of hundreds of thousands more. When the hostilities in the region ended in 1999, many of these refugees returned to Kosova. A substantial portion of them had significant healthcare needs due to both the conflict and migration. Even prior to the Bosnian and Kosovo wars, Kosova had struggled to develop to

develop healthcare infrastructure, an issue that was exacerbated by the displacement of the population. The ICACBR had worked in Kosova previously as they supported emergency initiatives in 1999-2000. The Development of Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) project in Kosova expanded previous work with the goal of re-establishing basic healthcare services and aiding rehabilitation and education reform.

The project's work included the following:

- Creation of a "Post-Secondary Education Program for Physiotherapists" at the Physiotherapy School of the University of Prishtine. Seven future faculty members travelled to Canada for an 8-week study tour. During the tour, the Kosovar faculty studied physiotherapy curriculum, evaluation tools and practised techniques in clinical settings.
- Creation of modules about rehabilitation and disability for nursing and medical students. The modules were integrated into routine curriculum to improve care for people with disabilities.
- The implementation of continuing education initiatives for community based rehabilitation workers. Initiatives included two 5-week courses and two ICACBR led seminars.
- Identification of policies to support rehabilitation workers, particularly physiotherapists. The ICACBR also worked to integrate physiotherapy graduates into the healthcare system.



Background

At the time of the Kosovo War in 1998, Kosovo was under the control of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The Kosovo Liberation Army, a Kosovo Albanian rebel group fought against the government for independence with support from both NATO and the Albanian army. During the 16-month conflict the Serbian forces attempted to drive all Kosovar Albanians from the country, and in doing so they committed many acts of violence against them. This ethnic cleansing campaign of the Serbian army and the long-standing conflict in the region led to the mass exodus of Kosovar Albanians. Over 13,000 people were killed or went missing during this time, and over 1.2 million people were fled the country. When the hostilities ended in June 1999, a massive number of refugees who had left Kosova during the conflict returned, stressing the already struggling healthcare infrastructure. In addition to the mass return of refugees, Kosova did not have an elected government, lacked resources, and had minimal educational infrastructure. This was a challenging time to access to healthcare and rehabilitation services, particularly for people with disabilities. The Kosovar population had a very high prevalence of disabilities, in large part due to the conflict in the region.

The ICACBR had worked in Kosova since 1999, with the centre's first project focused on emergency services for the refugee population. These early efforts sought to re-establish basic healthcare services and begin reform of the healthcare and education sectors in Kosova. The Development of Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) in Kosovo project was an extension of this work. The goal of the project was to support the equal participation of people with disabilities in society by supporting CBR education and policy development. The project worked very closely with the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) and the Kosovar Departments of Health and Education.

Rationale

As detailed above, there was very little infrastructure in place to support healthcare or CBR in Kosova. The education system struggled to train adequate numbers of skilled rehabilitation workers. For example, most physiotherapists in the region did not have differentiated training. None of the physiotherapists working in Kosova before the 2002 ICACBR project "Undergraduate Physiotherapy Education in Kosova" held an undergraduate or graduate level degree, instead working on physician's advice. These therapists were not able to provide professional advice independently. Likewise, there was little existing healthcare policy in Kosova, particularly policy that supported CBR initiatives.

Actions and Outcomes

With the goal of supporting the equal participation of people with disabilities in society, the Development of Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) in Kosovo had three branches: reform of rehabilitation education programs, creation of continuing education programs for CBR professionals and policy development.

The projects activities included the following:

- The project successfully **wrote and passed a proposal for the establishment of an undergraduate level physiotherapy school**. The proposal was accepted in 2001 by the Faculty of Medicine the University of Prishtine. This physiotherapy program was developed further by the Undergraduate Physiotherapy Education in Kosova project run by the ICACBR 1 year later. Twenty students were admitted to the school in 2001 using a standardized testing based admissions process.

- **Seven future physiotherapy faculty members and three University of Prishtine employees travelled to Canada for an 8-week study tour.** The tour was hosted by the ICACBR and Queen's University School of Rehabilitation Sciences in Kingston, Ontario. During this study tour the participants studied physiotherapy curriculum, curricular development, how to effectively use evaluation tools, and practiced physiotherapy techniques in clinical settings.
- **Disability and rehabilitation learning modules were created for medical and nursing students** by the project team. The team intended that the learning modules be integrated into the routine curriculum for these healthcare professionals. They were designed to improve the ability of healthcare providers to provide care effectively for people with disabilities and increase the level of interprofessional referral.
- **The ICACBR created and led two seminars for over 100 physicians and physiotherapists.** These seminars were titled "Development of the Rehabilitation system in Kosova", and "The Expanding Role of the Physiotherapist". While the original intention for these seminars was to support the inclusion of rehabilitation departments at all regional hospitals and rehabilitation centres in Kosova, this was not possible as the only physiotherapists in the country worked in the cities of Peje and Prishtine.
- **The project organized two 5-week CBR courses for CBR workers.** These courses included content about home visits, rehabilitation techniques, and rehabilitation needs of women. The ICACBR viewed the development of the CBR workforce as an essential component of improvement of rehabilitation services - increasing interest in community-based techniques made it more likely that these workers would become advocates for this approach. The project aimed to have educational efforts reach diverse stakeholders, from university faculty to local community workers.
- Through research and community surveys, the project identified the need for policies that define the scope of practise for physiotherapists. Research also identified the need to better integrate physiotherapy into the broader healthcare system of Kosova. These needs were further explored in the Undergraduate Physiotherapy Education in Kosova project run by the ICACBR a year later.
- **The project facilitated the creation of the "Disability Task Force"** in partnership with HANDIKOS. This task force was designed to evaluate policies related to accessibility, employment, and housing for people with disabilities.

Conclusion

Through education and advocacy, The Development of Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) in Kosovo project worked to increase the capacity and ability of healthcare workers and rehabilitation workers to provide community based care. This directly increased the ability of these workers to provide inclusive treatment for people with disabilities. This project also paved the way for the Undergraduate Physiotherapy Education in Kosova project a year later, which was able to successfully establish and support an undergraduate physiotherapy program at the University of Prishtina. The project promoted the inclusion of people with disabilities in their communities and broader Kosova society, and aided efforts to reform a healthcare system that was struggling to meet the needs of the Kosovar population.

Partners

Implementing partners: School of Rehabilitation Therapy at Queen's University, United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), Handicap International (HI), the Association of Disabled People of Kosovo (HANDIKOS), the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Prishtine, Kosova.

Local/community collaborators: Many local physiotherapists, physicians, rehabilitation service professionals, policy makers, people with disabilities.

International collaborators: Various non-governmental organizations.

Sources and Project Resources

1. The Development of CBR in Kosovo full project details*
2. The Development of CBR in Kosovo website archive*
3. Course Manuals: Kosovo

*used to generate this report