

The War Victims Rehabilitation Project in Bosnia-Herzegovina

In partnership with the Ministry of Health in the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina (FBiH) and Republika Srpska (RS).

Dates:	October 31, 1996 to March 31, 2001
Primary sites:	Bosnia and Herzegovina
Budget:	\$8,000,000 CAD
Donor:	Various Bosnian partners and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) with contributions from Queen's University

Overview

As detailed on pages 17, 23, 24, 26, 39, 59, 63, and 67 the ICACBR has worked extensively in the Balkans to support the development of their healthcare systems, particularly the development of community based rehabilitation (CBR). Prior to the Bosnian and Kosovo Wars in the 1990s, the healthcare system in Bosnia and Herzegovina was an institutionally dependent and physician centred system. People with disabilities were institutionalized and isolated from society or were dependent on their families. After the war, healthcare infrastructure was largely destroyed and people with disabilities struggled to receive care at all. The War Victims Rehabilitation Project in Bosnia-Herzegovina was the second project run by the ICACBR in the region and worked to develop CBR and improve rehabilitation services for people with disabilities.



The outcomes of this project include the following:

- Creation of 38 CBR centres in Bosnia and Herzegovina and five in Republika Srpska. Each centre was estimated to assist 40 patients per day, or roughly 40,000 to 60,000 people with disabilities annually.
- Implementation of over 70 on-site clinical education sessions at 22 CBR centres. This increased the ability of rehabilitation workers to provide care in a community-based environment. These demonstrations also enabled team members to identify and prioritize issues that needed to be addressed throughout the project's development.
- Development of a five day orthopaedic course that was provided to over 100 people.
- Efforts to change the university level rehabilitation sciences curriculum through the introduction of occupational therapy as a specialist program and the revision of the curriculum for physical therapists to include CBR concepts.
- Meeting regularly with government officials to address policy issues. The project tried to keep disability issues and CBR as a focus of policy development and discussions.

Background

As is detailed on pages 17, 23, 24, 26, 39, 59, 63, and 67, the 1990s and early 2000s was a difficult time for the Balkans, including Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Bosnian War and Kosovo War included war crimes and genocide committed against the people of Bosnia. The dissolution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia created political and economic upheaval. The international community was significantly involved in efforts to reconstruct the healthcare and social infrastructure of the Balkans during this time. The War Victims Rehabilitation Project in Bosnia-Herzegovina project was the second project implemented by the ICACBR in Bosnia and Herzegovina to support their healthcare system and work towards healthcare reform.

Prior to the start of the Bosnian War in 1992, Bosnia and Herzegovina had an institutionally-centred healthcare system. In institutionally focused systems, people with disabilities and older adults commonly live in institutions, isolated from their communities. While these systems can provide constant care, institutionalization removes community supports from these individuals, and makes it challenging for them to live independently and participate in their communities. After the war, the healthcare system was devastated and most of the healthcare infrastructure was destroyed. People with disabilities were not able to receive care in any capacity, institutional or otherwise. This project was meant to address this need and improve the ease of access and quality of rehabilitation services.

Rationale

The ICACBR worked to integrate concepts of community based rehabilitation (CBR) into the healthcare system of Bosnia and Herzegovina during their projects from 1993-1996. At the time of this project's onset, for the reasons detailed above, people with disabilities struggled to access rehabilitation services. This project was designed to facilitate independent living of people with disabilities in their communities and improve their ability to acquire an education and work. The overarching theme for the project was improvement of rehabilitation services that were rooted in communities.

There were four primary components of The War Victims Rehabilitation Project in Bosnia-Herzegovina project: CBR development, education of rehabilitation workers at CBR centres, education of future rehabilitation workers, and policy development.

The goals of the project included the following:

- Decentralization of rehabilitation services in community based centres.
- Improvement of CBR facilities and services.
- Improvement of CBR workers' ability to effectively deal with the diverse needs of the population by the creation of educational programs.
- Introduction of occupational therapy into university level curriculum and the incorporation of CBR in existing physical therapy curriculum.
- Consolidation of CBR within the primary healthcare system.
- Promotion of policy that allows for the integration of people with disabilities into a community's economic and social life.

Actions and Outcomes

The project accomplished the following during its 4-year duration:

- **The project created 38 CBR centres in the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina and five in Republika Srpska** that provided rehabilitation services in communities. The average caseload per centre each day was estimated to be 40 people, with 40,000-60,000 people accessing the centres annually. These centres were a strong initial step in the creation of community based healthcare infrastructure and enabled people with disabilities to live in their communities while still receiving a high level of care and support.
- **The project created a series of national seminars, including a 10-topic series over 20 months** in the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina. These seminars gave stakeholders (including members of the community) an opportunity to discuss the project activities, learn about CBR, and provide feedback.
- **The project hosted over 70 clinical education sessions at 22 of the CBR centres** in the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina. These sessions provided an opportunity for established CBR workers and trainees to learn clinical techniques. They also gave the project an opportunity to assess the implementation process and adjust priorities throughout project development.
- **The project organized a series of educational activities in Republika Srpska to teach rehabilitation practitioners CBR concepts** and to discuss the approaches appropriate for challenges specific to the region.
- **A 5-day orthopaedic course was developed** by a team of ICACBR and Republika Srpska members. This course was **provided to over 100 individuals** at the physiotherapy school at Prijedor. The project also ran **clinical education projects at four CBR clinics** in Republika Srpska.
- **The project worked to create an occupational therapy program at the University level.** Occupational therapy did not exist as a profession in Bosnia and Herzegovina prior to this project. The project first a six month pilot program for six practitioners was created, which was followed with the introduction and creation of a 12 month occupational therapy specialist program at a local university. The project tried to train occupation therapists as quickly as possible, to place them in CBR centres and expand the range of rehabilitation services available in the country.
- The team introduced **changes to the existing physical therapy curriculum to reflect the growing use of CBR.** Faculty from physical therapy programs attended seminars and workshops about community practise and curricular development to aid them as they worked to incorporate these new approaches in curriculum.
- In partnership with the ICACBR, the Republika Srpska **designed an 8-week course about CBR that was to be included in their physical therapy curriculum.** They utilized the same curricular development strategy that was first used in the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina.
- **ICACBR team members met with government officials and policy makers often to discuss disability issues and CBR and to ensure their inclusion in policy. The project organized a Policy Conference** for consumers, providers, government authorities, university administration and international donors to discuss their experiences and formulate a strategy to strengthen CBR further. Over 80 stakeholders attended this conference.

Conclusion

The War Victims Rehabilitation Project in Bosnia-Herzegovina was able to improve rehabilitation services for people with disabilities, including those injured by the conflict. The project facilitated the improvement of education for CBR professionals and improved the overall capacity of CBR services in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Project efforts were continued in later projects in the region.

Partners

Implementing partners: The Ministry of Health in the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina (FBiH) and Republika Srpska (RS) and Queen's University

Community collaborators: Physiotherapy school at Prijedor, more unknown partners including educational institutes.

International collaborators: Unknown non-governmental organizations.

Sources and Project Resources

1. The War Victims Rehabilitation Project in Bosnia-Herzegovina full project details*
2. The War Victims Rehabilitation Project in Bosnia-Herzegovina website archive

*used to generate this report