



CARDS

Country

Serbia and Montenegro

Implementation period

2000-2003

Funding

€68 million

Results

Distribution of medical supplies and equipment to Serbia's health institutions. Creation of national database of medical and non-medical equipment

Coordinator

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Revitalising Serbia's health system

Supplying essential medicines and equipment

Sanctions, war and economic decline have taken their toll on Serbia's health system and that of the people. This has been compounded by the high number of refugees and displaced people living in the country, following the break-up of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s.

Many of the nation's health institutions were in chronically poor condition at the beginning of 2000. Čačak city hospital in central Serbia was no exception. With only 550 beds, outdated equipment and a building in an advanced state of disrepair, the hospital was struggling to meet the healthcare needs of the local population.

The European Union stepped in to assist Čačak hospital cope with the demands being put upon it; some 270,000 people rely on the centre for medical assistance. Essential medicines, lab equipment and blood were among the first deliveries to the centre to ensure it could provide basic health services.

Following an assessment of the hospital's equipment – most of which was over 20 years' old – the EU provided an array of new medical operating instruments, a respirator and several computers to the cardiology department. This equipment was considered vital for saving lives in the area served by the hospital.

A nation-wide endeavour

Around €1.3 million worth of equipment was eventually bought by the EU for Čačak. But it is not the only hospital which has benefited from Union funding. Around Serbia, the EU has contributed to improving the functioning of the health system through a succession of initiatives – the first of which was launched in 2000. At this time, the average available for spending on health was €25 per year. During the winter of 2000-2001, the EU delivered medicines and medical supplies totalling €20 million to health institutions and pharmacies across the country.



This replenishment of essential pharmaceutical stocks continued under a new scheme – Support to the Serbian Pharmaceutical Sector - in October 2001. Under this programme, state pharmacies received supplies of drugs for the treatment of asthma, diabetes and cardiovascular disease.

Developing a medical equipment database

While making medicines more readily available to Serbia's health organisations helps cover essential short-term needs, further input has been required to rebuild the health system's infrastructure. Part of the work of the EU has thus been to carry out research into the state of medical and non-medical equipment in clinical centres, hospitals, health centres and special health institutions nation-wide.

Based on the research's findings, a new database on equipment availability in Serbia's health system was created. It is now serving as a reference tool for the health authorities to plan future health sector interventions by local bodies and international donors. This ensures that their funds are allocated to those centres which are most in need.

Saving lives now and in the future

Besides the EU, there are several other donors supplying equipment to Serbia to regenerate its health services. In Čačak, for example, France, Japan and the US have all provided equipment too. Furthermore, voluntary contributions have been received from the local public and businesses, enabling the hospital to buy much-needed X-ray machinery.

However, there is still much to be done in Čačak: The EU is currently assisting with the implementation of a European Investment Bank loan to the Ministry of Health to rehabilitate 20 hospitals' and meet their most pressing equipment and infrastructure needs. As one of the 20, this hospital intends to rebuild air conditioning systems, heating and lifts. These improvements to the hospital will enable it to meet local health care demands and, most importantly, to continue to save lives.