

Balkan Mission

From the Balkans Regional Office in Sarajevo

Dear Friends,

We are very glad to present you our first newsletter presenting Caritas International Belgium programs in the former Yugoslavia region. For this first edition, it appeared necessary to come back to the roots of our commitment in this region. First, we intervened in response to the Kosovo humanitarian crisis in August 1999 to support the displaced families. Since 2002, we have been also developing economical support programs in Bosnia and Serbia aimed at the rehabilitation of the region. Today, even though most of the former Yugoslavian countries have a European Union Integration perspective, they are still facing a very hard transition to normalization.

Kosovo and Bosnia have to deal with the past and are still suffering from tensions within the different communities, war trauma, complex and weak state institutions and a very hard economical situation. Serbia is facing a strong rural exodus and a slow economical transition followed by the collapse of main industries.

I would like to stress that the Caritas Network has been present in the region since the 90's.

It has given us the possibility to ensure the continuity of our support by linking the Emergency phase to the Rehabilitation and Development one. We are now focusing on economical development projects in rural and remote areas. This makes possible to build a longer term perspective for the beneficiaries which brings about a positive impact on the dialogue and reconciliation between the different communities.

Finally, I would like to thank all our partners who have given us the possibility to support the vulnerable populations of these underserved areas.

Caritas Regional team

Kosovo-Serbia-Bosnia and Herzegovina

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Who we are

Created in 1945, by the Belgium Episcopal Conference, Caritas International Belgium became an independent association in 1948. Since assisting European victims and reuniting families torn apart by the Second World War, the Organization's first goal, Caritas International Belgium has gradually become more active internationally and assisting refugees and migrants remains a main focus of your work. Today, Caritas International Belgium supports more than 100 different partner organisations in over 30 countries with not only initial emergency relief but also post-crisis recovery, reconstruction, reconstruction and development.

The majority of our partner groups and organizations are in Africa but we're also active in the Balkans and in Asia. In former Yugoslavia countries, we've been helping citizens rebuild their lives after the wars in the 90's and to come through the current hard economical transition period. The last years, the main contribution of Caritas International Belgium went to:

- **Displaced persons and vulnerable farmers** in North Kosovo.
- **Unemployed persons and families living in remote rural areas** in Central Serbia.
- **Vulnerable farmers and collectors** surviving in the mountains of Fojnica in Central Bosnia.

Caritas International Belgium has developed long-term relationships with Caritas Bishop's Conference in Bosnia and Herzegovina. We have just enhanced a common project with Caritas Serbia and in Kosovo, this year, we will proceed to the transfer of our projects to Caritas Kosovo.

Caritas International Belgium's project funding is generated through fundraising efforts in Belgium and also from different donor agencies and budget lines such as: the European Union, Fondation Abbé Pierre, Caritas France, the Flemish Government, the Conseil Régional d'Auvergne, and others.

Our Vision and Mission

Our Vision

We are committed to a world of peace, solidarity and justice that is free of war, preventable disaster and poverty. The world we envision is one in which each individual has the right to a dignified life with a guaranteed fundamental rights. Access to food, clean drinking water, medical care, education, work and shelter must be guaranteed for all. The principles of solidarity and subsidiarity are essential in our work. A country or organisation cannot solve all the problems by itself. Only a synergy of forces will result in sustainable, long term solutions.

Our Mission

Caritas International Belgium assists the victims of wars, natural disasters, migration and poverty in collaboration with its international and national networks. We carry out our mission regardless of origin, nationality, gender, political affiliations and religious or philosophical convictions. In line with the teachings of gospel, Caritas International Belgium assists the vulnerable in becoming actors of their own development. In crisis interventions, Caritas International Belgium ensures fast and efficient relief. After the initial relief phase, we stay and through our rehabilitation and development programmes continue to assist affected populations in rebuilding their lives.

In Belgium, Caritas International Belgium accommodates and assists migrants and refugees and defends their rights. We provide individual social and legal support and advocate for better asylum and migration policies.

Today, Caritas International Belgium supports more than 100 different partner organisations in over 30 countries with not only initial emergency relief but also post-crisis recovery, reconstruction and development.

Kosovo

Almost ten years, helping the people from Rural zones in Kosovo

Caritas has been helping vulnerable families from Kosovo since the end of the war in 1999.

A huge emergency and rehabilitation programme has been initially implemented by Caritas in Kosovo from 1999 to 2002. We mainly supported the Displaced Persons living in shelters with material assistance, build new houses for refugees, rehabilitated schools and infrastructure.

Since 2002, Caritas has been supporting the economical development in this region. With the uncertain Kosovo Status, even after the declaration of independent republic of Kosovo and the industrial decline, Kosovo is facing a very hard economical transition period with the highest unemployment rate in the region. Kosovo inhabitants are dealing with every day challenges to ensure their survival.

In this context, they are becoming more dependent on the agriculture sector. The monthly average income is about 250 euros for four persons.

Today, the average farm size is still small (between 1 and 2 hectares) and there is almost no strong representative body for the sector. The Ibar Valley region, including Leposavic and Zubin Potok Municipalities in the northern part of Kosovo, reflects this global situation. Natural and human resources for sustainable development in rural areas are not properly used due to many factors, including the lack of modern equipment, changes of the market and outdated methods. Another challenge for the farmers is that they need to organize and gather their efforts in order to meet the market requirements.

We first started to support the dairy sector in 2002 and since 2005 we extended our action to beekeeping and fruit product.

In order to offer the vulnerable families an economic alternative and improving their conditions of living, Caritas proposes the following services:

- Agricultural Micro credit
- Visits and exchanges with other farmers organisations in the Balkans
- Organization of the annual Leposavic Beekeeping Festival
- Organization of the Leposvic Agriculture Fair
- Training courses for the Capacity building of farmers' Associations
- Technical workshops for the farmers of the region

Location: Leposavic Municipality, Northern Kosovo
Implementing partner: Farmer's Associations
(Fruits, Beekeeping, Livestock)



Support to the farmers' organization

- 3 Farmers' organization (Ibarski Cvet, Eko Voce, Agrohit) with a total of 120 farmers, are supported
- Technical trainings in 3 sectors delivered to 87 farmers: Dairy sector, Beekeeping and Raspberry
- 150 farmers have participated to specific agriculture study visits and fairs in Bosnia, France, Belgium, Serbia and the whole region.
- Collective equipment granted: 8 villages have been equipped with Milk collection point with lactofreezes
- A beekeeping shop opened with the help of Caritas and offers small equipment and inputs to the members at a favourable price
- A processing line have been granted to the beekeeping association in order to make "bee candy"

Milomir Milenkovic, 53 years old, lives in Kruscica village in the Municipality of Leposavic.

As a vulnerable farmer he has access to Caritas agricultural micro-credit fund since the very beginning in 2003.

"After the end of the war in 1999, the Industrial sector which was the basic source of employment in the area has stopped functioning. Many villagers employed there switched their activities toward agriculture sector.

In order to ensure an income, together with my wife Sladjana and two children, 14 and 13 years old, I started sheep breeding, beekeeping and raspberry production. In order to set up production on my farm, I applied for a micro credit and was approved.

Today, after the fourth micro-credit cycle I enlarged my herd with 30 ewes, doubled my raspberry yield; I also have increased the number of beehives in my apiary and bought some beekeeping equipment."

I'm an active member of the farmers' associations that are supported by Caritas and which provided me with different lectures such as horticulture and beekeeping, access to a study visit to small French farms dealing with beekeeping and raspberry productions, and collective equipment.

I would like to say that my family is extremely thankful to Caritas for helping us in our efforts."



Micro-loans for vulnerable rural families

- Since 2002 more than 600 micro-credit have been delivered to rural families in the Ibar Valley region
- 44 villages are covered
- More than 150 Milking Simmental cows have been distributed, 110 rams, 1500 beehives, 30000 raspberry seedlings, 50 mechanization machines.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

A country tackling with post war reconstruction

The state of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) emerged from the former Yugoslavia after **4 years of war** in the early 90's. The conflict resulted in widespread casualties, destruction of property, and large scale population displacements. It also deflated the economy by devastating major infrastructures and industries. Agricultural production, a major source of livelihood for much of the Bosnian population, was also disrupted due to massive displacements.

The Dayton Peace Agreement, signed in December 1995, created **a complex internal political structure**. The country is made up of 2 entities: Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republika Srpska.

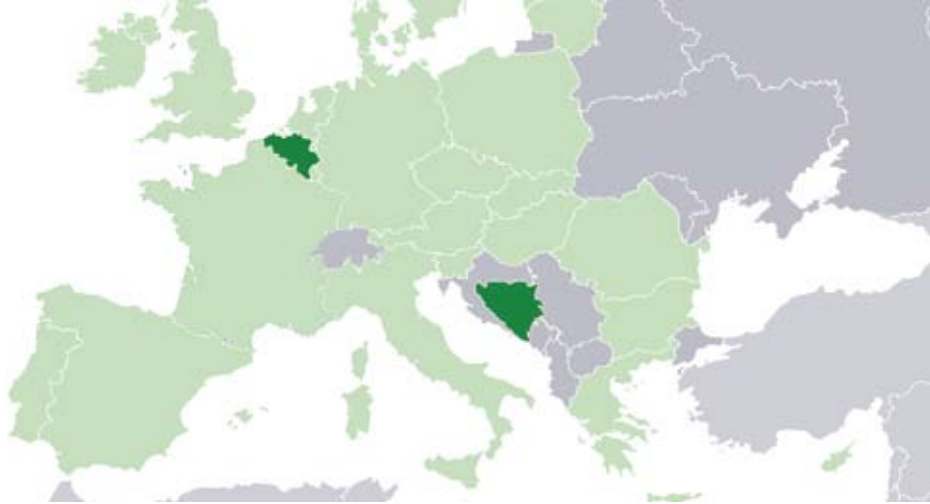
Today, Bosnians struggle daily with unemployment and poverty. While reconstruction aid is being phased out, the country must find new ways to attract investment and sustain economic growth. The unemployment rate is 40% and 60% of the population is involved in agriculture and rural based activities. The average farm size in the country is 2.9 ha. There are half a million small scale family-owned farms providing only a small surplus of production for the market. The producers are not aware of market and production standards.

A country that should be self sufficient

The country still imports a majority of its food products although the domestic production is able to significantly replace imports. In the past, BiH has been a traditional supplier of fruits and vegetables, especially berries, for the European market.

The agriculture sector does not receive any significant supportive measures and the Authorities have signed advantageous Free Trade Agreements with the neighboring countries and the EU that compromises agriculture competitiveness. Several Bosnian farmers have been on strike to push their government for better representation of their interests, but there have been few results.

Another important consequence of the political and economic problems, are difficulties in the preservation of the environment and biodiversity.



Traditional country houses in Obojak village.

Our commitment against rural exodus for the survival of small farms.

Recently, new initiatives have been set up to “promote niche markets”, where Bosnian productions can make a difference, for example in the organic sector or fruit processing. That is why, Caritas Belgium is supporting small producers to enhance these “alternative” strategies to reach a price premium for their living and to protect their future potentials.

Vulnerable rural families have access to agricultural micro-credit



A farmer in Ljubija during the harvest season

Location: Ljubija, Prijedor Municipality, North-West Bosnia and Herzegovina
Implementing partner: Caritas Banja Luka and "Mikra", Micro-Credit Organization

With the decline of socialism, war and ethnic tensions, the collapse of industries, and the resulting transitional economic period, the people of BiH have struggled to find ways to earn sustainable income. Over time, the agricultural sector has evolved to become one of the most viable economic alternatives for local people, creating opportunities for individual income-generating activities and/or new businesses in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH).

Ljubija, located in the Prijedor Municipality in northwest BiH, is considered a priority zone for Caritas Belgium

and Caritas Banja Luka. Previously, the area contained one of the largest mining complexes in the former Yugoslavia and the largest mining complex in BiH. Today the mine operates at very low capacity, leaving thousands of families in the area without jobs.

The aim of this project is to support the enhancement of business initiatives in the agricultural sector by providing rural families of the Ljubija area with: access to agricultural micro-loans; and, through the "village banking" system, access to better services (targeted trainings, informative seminars, association capacity building and market information).

Micro-loans for Farming activities

- 25 000 euros have been granted for 3 years (2007-2010) to a Micro-Credit Organization in order to establish Village Banking
- Since 2007, more than 120 farmers accessed to Micro Loans to develop their agriculture activities.
- Through the monthly Agriculture Village banking meeting, farmers are exchanging experience, have access to Market information and technical trainings.

Sustainable farming and eco-tourism for the vulnerable families living in Fojnica Mountains.

Farming : the only economic alternative for rural families

Thanks to the support of our Caritas network and Abbé Pierre foundation, Caritas Belgium is intervening in the mountainous Municipality of Fojnica. The area was the scene of hard combats between the community in the early 90's.

Majority of population is today unemployed because the pre-war industry has totally collapsed.

Over time, the agricultural sector has evolved from subsistence farming to become one of the most viable economic alternative for the population in this area by creating opportunities for individual or community income-generating activities. People are also leaving from collecting medicinal plants, mushrooms and berries. Caritas intends to support the vulnerable rural families to increase and diversify their income earning activities in order to overcome the economical transition period.

Eco and rural tourism are access to a local market

Fojnica's thermal water and the exceptional biodiversity are also recognized for centuries. Because of local attractions, it is well visited by tourists from the region. Through this 3 years programme, the idea is also to support the country's sustainable development by promoting environmentally responsible agriculture and tourism. There is indeed a urgent need for protection of environment and preservation of biodiversity in BiH. Caritas is supporting technically and financially the creation of guest houses, processing of traditional food such as jam or cheese, handicrafts and gastronomy.

This project reflects a multi-partner approach.

By involving and supporting all stakeholders: producers, collectors and processors and local NGOs, the goals are:

- to better organize the stakeholders in the Fojnica Municipality;
- to allow them to adapt their production to the market;
- to promote and link eco-tourism and ecologically responsible agribusiness in Fojnica.



A farmer collecting hay in Obojak village

It is important to stress that providing farmers trainings and assistance aims at building their capacity and support their own decision making process. An active partnership has been enhanced with Auvergne Region from France which presents very similar environment and demographic issues. Study visits and technical exchanges are developed since 2 years.

Caritas Belgium is operating together with Caritas Bosnia.

They clearly contribute to the economic development of Fojnica municipality by supporting small scale sustainable agribusiness and eco-tourism initiatives. In addition to encouraging other people interested in agricultural enterprises, it covers 117 farmers, already registered as members agricultural cooperatives in Fojnica.

Helping vulnerable Farmers

- 117 farmers registered for agribusiness support
- More than 120 producers have benefiting from different trainings
- 250 producers have participated to fairs to improve their businesses
- 2 farmer association have been created: Beekeeping and Fruit producers with more than 40 members
- 50 members of a Farmer Cooperative have access to a credit-fund to pre-finance their farming campaign.



Nikola Vivic, 27 years old lives in Alaupovka, Fojnica. During the war in the 90's, Nikola's family was displaced as many families living in multiethnic areas and lived in Kiseljak municipality, located 12 kilometers from Fojnica. Just after the conflict they returned to their destroyed village and had to start all from the beginning.

"I have 3 sisters and 2 brothers and life has never been easy for my family. My father was a carpenter and my mother is a housewife. In February 2008 my father died. After months of sadness and disbelief, I decided to keep on his work. The basics of working in the carpenter's workshop with my father, I learned while I was still a child. Caritas was the first which has opened the door of my workshop and recognized my motivation and the need to continue where my father stopped. With the help of machines and equipment that I have received from Caritas I am able to develop my work and thus support my family. Also, in the future I would like to have someone to transfer this old art. It's nice to know that there are organization such as Caritas which are devoted to people and help them with generosity."

Building Ecotourism and Environment Capacity

- Support to a youth association (120 members) with 10 bicycles
- Support to a Mountaineering association with the rehabilitation of 15 trekking trails
- 250 children (4 to 10 years) participated to a cycle of Environmental awareness
- Organization of an Environmental day in Fojnica
- 20 persons have participated to a Rural Tourism study visit in Auvergne-France
- 15 families have been granted for their project (Guest house, Cheese factory, Fruit Processing)



Nihad Ibreljic is 46 and lives with his family in Zivzici, a remote village in the Vranica's Mountains, 30 km from Fojnica. He has three sons: 16, 13 and 3 years old. Both parents are unemployed mainly living from collecting wild products (berries, mushrooms, medical herbs) All throughout the war (1992-1995), he used to be a soldier in the Bosnia and Herzegovina's army. Before that, he had had a music band together with his brother and cousin. Three of them used to play for weddings and other celebrations in the surroundings villages.

"It was a great job" - said Nihad today.

"Can you imagine working the thing you know and like, with people who are happy, singing and dancing? Those were the days!

Today, 15 years after the war, I don't have other possibilities than collecting the wild fruits from our mountain together with my wife and kids. As my family has a tradition in making jam and drying fruit in a natural and traditional way, Caritas offered me the possibility to process the collected products in order to get into the local market.

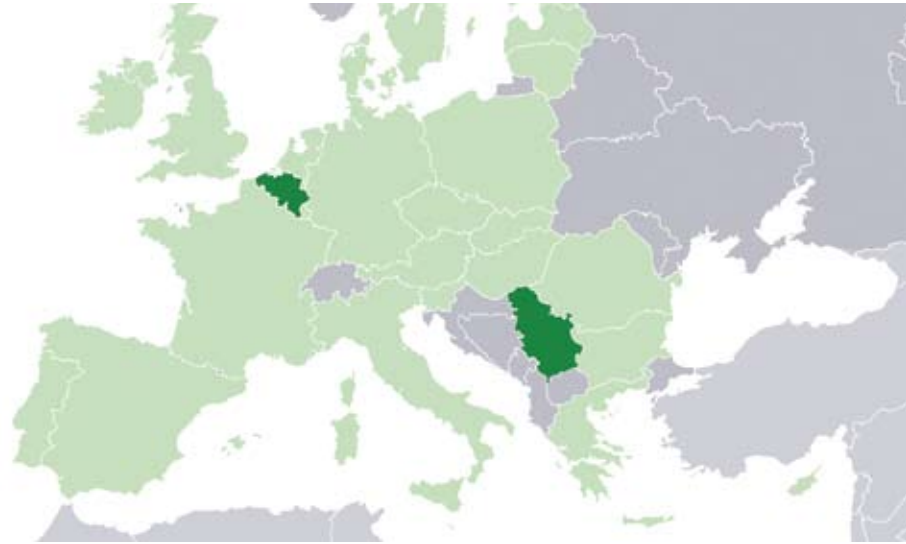
Today, thanks to Caritas, I have a mini fruit processing factory set up. It is my new place to work that makes my family feel safer. I see the future with different eyes today and really found the courage to start because Caritas believed in my project"

The Republic of Serbia

Continuing economic hardship

Although Serbia has not been directly touched by the Yugoslavia wars during 90's, its social structure has been profoundly affected by economic collapse, international embargo, relentless nationalist propaganda, a secret political system, the influx of many refugees and the fog of wars on its doorstep. The promising post-Milosevic regime echoing with ideas of rapid EU integration was faced by heavy burdens of economic transition painfully embodied in a high unemployment rate and inefficient privatization of big state-owned companies.

The transition resulted in massive job losses - domestic economy is not growing at a sufficient pace to create new employment opportunities.



Tough times ahead for Serbian agriculture

Even though Serbia has received donors' assistance for rural development, this has been almost totally based on a „piloting philosophy“ not succeeding in the establishment of a strong and sustainable system.

Serbian agriculture suffers from outdated technology and insufficient market. Small-scale farmers need to switch to specialized and diversified production, provision of new services to gain a complementary income.



Ramaca village in Sumadija

Number of unemployed: around **700.000**

Number of refugees: **107.000**

Number of IDPs: **208.000**

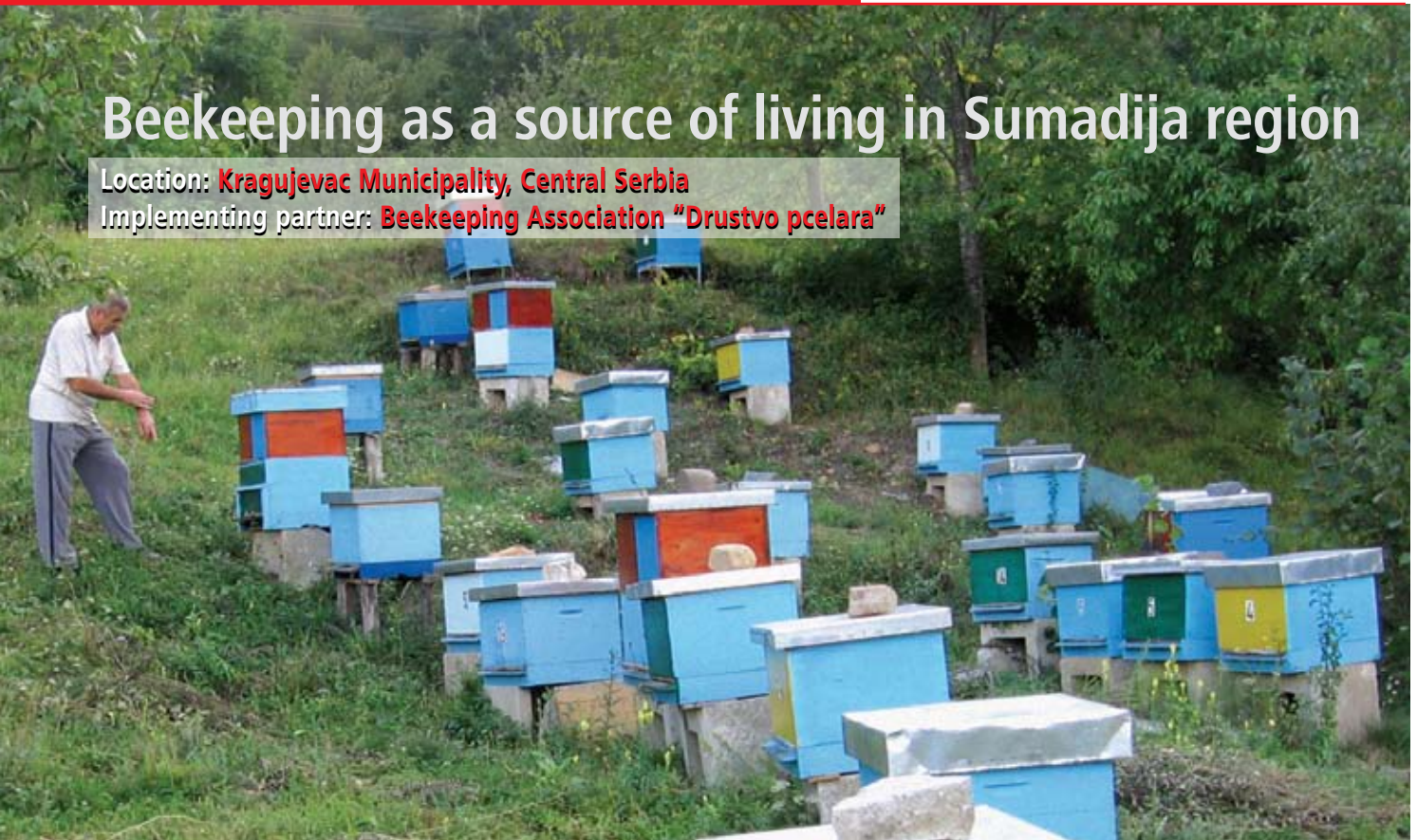
Number of people below the poverty line:

half a million

Beekeeping as a source of living in Sumadija region

Location: **Kragujevac Municipality, Central Serbia**

Implementing partner: **Beekeeping Association "Drustvo pcelara"**



A beekeeper
in Kragujevac
Municipality

The Municipality of Kragujevac was the seat of industrial sector in Central Serbia and most famous car industry centre in South-Eastern Europe during the 80's. A large percentage of income was directly dependant on the car production. After it collapsed, more than 75% of the population were left without a basic source of living.

With a long-lasting tradition in beekeeping, this area has always been famous for a large number of honey producers. Once only a hobby, in view of general economic crisis in the Sumadija region beekeeping is today identified as a possible complementary income for many families. In the long run, along with the penetration into a wider national market, it can become a main source of profit and an alternative source of steady income.

The ultimate objective of this action is to give the most vulnerable individual producers the best conditions for launching a new complementary profit activity and help them find a market.

Caritas directly contributed to the improvement of production standards and practices in the beekeeping sector of this region. The action provided:

- Vocational trainings
- Access to information on different market opportunities
- Marketing services through the creation of new visual identity for local association
- Honey promotion campaigns and organization of beekeeping festivals
- Transfer of experience from abroad with the focus on new forms of associating and networking
- Procurement of individual and collective equipment
- Protection of geographical indications and designations of origin for "Sumadija honey"



Radisa Sargic, 26 years old, lives in Maslosevo village near Kragujevac.

With about 400 inhabitants, mainly farmers or labourers, this village is sharing the destiny of many rural settlements in Serbia – exodus of youngsters. Among the rare to have decided to stay and continue what his ancestors have been doing for ages is a 26-year old Radisa Sargic, a young farmer and beekeeper.

"I was born in 1982 and have lived here with my family ever since. Till 1995 my parents worked in a nearby factory in the village of Stragari. After it closed, they were made redundant and forced to turn to agricultural production and animal husbandry. Before it had been mostly dealt with by my grandparents for our own purposes. From that time on, we have been making our living solely on farming. Since my parents have already grown old, I decided to stay connected to agriculture and finished Agricultural High School in 2001.

When I heard of Caritas in-kind grants program from my friend in Kragujevac, I applied for 500 euros grant to buy bee hives with colonies and got approved. The equipment is the top quality which is for me as a beginner the most important. With these new hives and old ones I already have, I can sell honey on the local market; there are many pensioners in surrounding villages that are able to help me.

Starting from January 2009, I will join the beekeeping association that Caritas is strengthening and have access to small equipment and inputs at a favourable price. With the production we already have, beekeeping helps me to get a decent complementary income."

Strengthening the beekeeping sector – from a hobby to a profit making activity

- A beekeepers' selling point renovated providing the members with new equipment and services
- 14 lectures organized and over 300 hundred people trained in beekeeping technology
- 10 informative seminars on bee products diversification attended by 140 beekeepers
- 20 individual honey producers received 5 beehives to ensure additional profit
- Visits to 7 fairs organized for 225 farmers to improve their businesses
- 5 study visits to beekeepers' cooperatives and organic fields organized within the country
- A study visit to professional export companies and beekeeping institutes in Belgium carried out for 6 beekeepers from Sumadija region
- 2 public institutions (High agricultural school and Municipal orphanage) granted with 22 beehives and assisted in honey production

Rural tourism in Slovenia as a model for our current programmes.

From the 26th to the 29th of January, we organized a joint activity for a technical training in rural tourism. 21 persons among our beneficiaries and partner institutions from Fojnica/Bosnia and Kragujevac/Serbia participated to the action. The focus was to show the necessity of a professionalization in the sector. The aim was for the private guest house owners to learn about reception of clients and the current market trends. A few covered topics were: preservation of the local gastronomy

and heritage, how to arrange the house and the outdoor areas, food safety and good hygiene praxis etc. In Slovenian villages, rural tourism provided a real alternative to rural exode.

These technical courses were delivered by the Chamber of Agriculture from Celje and the Tourist farms Association. We are really grateful for their hospitality, the quality and adaptability of the trainers to expressed needs.

For our team, it was a great opportunity to joint our activities and to gather people from different parts of former Yugoslavia during these few days in a very warm atmosphere.

Alterural: a new Resource Center for rural tourism in Bosnia



From next March 2009, Alterural, a resource Center dedicated to rural tourism will be created by our Caritas Network in Sarajevo. The aim of the Center is to promote and develop the interest of rural families involved in the sector.

All private initiatives (guest houses, experts, community projects) are still remaining very isolated in Bosnia. Bosnia is however offering excellent potential for these activities. Tourism will considerably

grow in the coming years according to all prospective studies. However, rural families should be organized, trained and prepared for this. For now, there is no institutional support for these activities, no classification system and shown interest by local authorities because of a lack of information on important opportunities that it offers.

Bosnia is the only country which has no representative structure for the sector in all the region.

Rural tourism and rural development are closely linked in Bosnia. The idea for Caritas is to create a network and capitalise our experience in Central Bosnia canton for vulnerable farmers.

From Flanders to "Gruzanski kraj": a new partnership enhanced in the green heart of Central Serbia.



"Gruzanski Kraj" has been for long a synonym for rural tourism in Serbia. During the 80's, even tourists from abroad used to come for fishing, hunting and hiking in this region. However, the breakdown of former Yugoslavia also reflected in a dramatic deterioration of the region. From January 2009, the Flemish Government gave

us its support to implement a new project to revitalize the sector in this rural part. The project will last for 2 years by directly supporting 100 vulnerable farmers including healthy and home-made food producers, processors and guest house owners.

This project is implemented together with Caritas Serbia and Caritas Belgium. A central bilateral partnership is bound between the Kragujevac Municipality and the Flemish Government.

Thanks



Secours Catholique
Réseau mondial Caritas



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