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News Brief

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News Brief

Landmines in Croatia Pose Threat to Incoming Refugees

After Hungary formally closed its border with Serbia on 15 September 2015, refugees fleeing conflict in the Middle East, Central Asia and Northern Africa have turned next to Croatia as a gateway to reach countries such as Sweden and Germany.¹ The influx of refugees traversing the areas near the Croatia-Serbia border has raised concerns that refugees will encounter residual landmine contamination in Croatia as they make their way to Slovenia and Hungary. The contamination dates back to the four-year conflict which followed the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia from 1991 to 1995.² The Croatian Mine Action Centre (CROMAC) estimates that there are more than 50,000 mines remaining in Croatia, amounting to a total suspected hazardous area of 496.8 km² that spans 75 cities and municipalities across 10 counties.

According to CROMAC, all minefields are surrounded by posted warning signs.³ However, there is concern that

refugees unfamiliar with the terrain and the signs' meaning may inadvertently wander into the fields. In order to spread awareness of this risk, officials are disseminating warnings and maps detailing the contamination to the refugees as they enter the country at the official border crossing points. Still, this method may not reach all refugees entering the country—particularly those that cross the border illegally. Multiple civil initiatives and groups have issued warnings via Facebook and other mobile social media apps and posted warnings along the Serbian route to warn incoming refugees of the contamination ahead in Croatia.⁴ Although Hungary reopened its main border crossing with Serbia after a week of political negotiations, many refugees are still passing through Croatia.⁵ The first surge of refugees entered Croatia on 16 September 2015, one day after Hungary closed its southern border with Serbia. As of 28 September 2015, about 78,000 refugees have entered the country.⁶

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~ Megan Hinton, CISR staff