HIV/AIDS objective: the Red Cross National Societies in Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine have the capacity to contribute effectively to the regional and countrywide response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

Belarus
Expected result: Belarus Red Cross effectively addresses both the epidemic, through youth peer education and harm reduction, and HIV/AIDS related discrimination

Progress/Achievements: By 1 May 2005, a total of 6,518 HIV infections have been reported in Belarus. The most vulnerable group to HIV infection are people between 15 and 29 years old (78, 1% of all HIV infected). Belarus Red Cross considers peer education activities that target this high risk group to be one of the most effective ways of halting the spread of HIV/AIDS. Due to the joint efforts of Belarus Red Cross and other non-governmental organisations (NGOs) involved in the fight against HIV/AIDS, the number of HIV cases among people aged 15-29 was reduced from 24.5% in 1996 to 5.5% in 2004 and 4.7% in the first quarter of 2005.

The majority of infections in the country are among intravenous drug users (IDUs) - 69.2% of all cases reported in 2004 - but there is an increase in sexual transmission. Within the four months of 2005, 55.3% of the new HIV cases were sexually transmitted, while in 2004 this figure was 49.7%. Driving these epidemics is widespread risky behaviour - injecting drug use and unsafe sex - among young people.

Peer education
During the reporting period, the project expanded to 3 new towns of Belarus, where new teams of volunteer peer educators were trained: Bobruisk (25 people), Pinsk (25 people) and Borisov (25 people). 582 educational sessions for the target group are now taking place in 13 cities: Minsk, Bobruisk, Lida, Baranovichy, Pinsk, Borisov, Mogilev, Gomel, Kalinkavichy, Grodno, Vitebsk, Molodechno and Brest, covering 7,150 teenagers: 1,423 in Gomel region, 395 in Vitebsk region, 1,536 in Mogilev region, 2,750 in Brest region, 640 in Grodno region and 406 in Minsk region.

During the first six months of 2005, the number of young people equipped with appropriate knowledge and skills to change risk behaviour regarding HIV/AIDS has been increased by 7,150 people.

Harm reduction
11 needle exchange centers have been introduced in the Republic of Belarus since the year of 2003. During the reporting period, harm reduction activities have been expanded to 5 new needle exchange centres (NEC): two in Minsk, Novopolotsk, Brest and Lida.

54,493 needles and 10,437 condoms have been purchased for distribution. To date, 9,784 needles and 4,236 condoms have been distributed. With the support form the Minsk Delegation of International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) Belarus Red cross has developed and produced the manual for volunteers.

Experience exchange for the staff of the needle exchange centres was carried out in Minsk with participation of the Positive Movement (a national NGO) and the AIDS Prevention Department of the Republican Centre for Hygiene, Epidemiology and Public Health.

Two educational meetings in Minsk and Mogilev with participation of IDUs and Belarusian Red Cross personnel, involved into the HR activities were held. The issues of awareness increase and methods of work with IDUs were discussed.

Six people from the Belarusian Red Cross Headquarters and personnel of needle exchange centres participated in a cross-country Harm Reduction/Peer Education workshop on experience exchange held in Moldova in March 2005.
**Fighting stigma and discrimination**

As in previous years, in 2005 the Belarus Red Cross continues its work in fighting stigma and discrimination towards people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA). During the reporting period the Belarus Red Cross took advantage of the media to promote and reflect project activities as well as raise public awareness on the issues of stigma and discrimination towards PLWHA.

In April 2005, a two-week information campaign was launched on the most popular youth radio station “UniStar”. In May 2005, the information about the project was broadcast on the central republican TV channel “STV”.

**Impact:** The Red Cross educational sessions significantly raised the level of knowledge of HIV/AIDS and related issues, e.g., after the educational sessions the target group showed good knowledge of the ways of HIV transmission, high level of health concern.

According to the evaluation of the previous year questionnaires filled in by the target group, before the educational sessions 15% of the schoolchildren found it difficult to estimate the HIV situation in the country, 68% estimated it as unfavorable but do not feel they are at risk of contracting HIV.

Another aspect revealed by the questionnaires is the attitude towards HIV positive persons. Before the educational sessions, about 50% of the schoolchildren expressed negative attitude towards people living with HIV/AIDS. After the sessions conducted by Red Cross trainers, 89% of the target group representatives changed their attitude towards people living with HIV.

**Constraints:** No major constraints were experienced during the project, except for delays in funds transfers.

**Analysis and outlook**

The project adds to fighting HIV-spread in the country as well as stigma and discrimination of people living with HIV/AIDS. It targets the most vulnerable part of the population, youth, which still makes the biggest risk group.

**Moldova**

**Expected result:** Moldova Red Cross effectively addresses both the epidemic, through youth peer education and harm reduction, and HIV/AIDS related discrimination

**Peer education.** Moldova Red Cross started its peer education activities in 2004 in the city of Bendery. At present, due to the high interest shown by youth in peer education sessions the project is running in 4 cities: Bendery, Soroca, Balti and Ungheni.

The programme “Stop AIDS! Choose life!” financed by British Red Cross Society is implementing in Balti. During the reporting period, educational sessions were organized in secondary schools, colleges and the pedagogical institute. In addition, peer education sessions were carried out in military units and association of death people.

In May and June, two peer education sessions were organized in Balti and Bendery, where 30 teenagers from medical and pedagogical colleges were trained.

Only in Balti and Bendery, the trained RC peer educators, in their turn, conducted 55 peer to peer seminars reaching over 21,000 beneficiaries.

To address the issues on HIV/AIDS related discrimination and rise awareness about HIV/AIDS 8 public events were organized. During these events 3200 information materials and 1060 condoms were distributed.

Moreover, Moldavian Red Cross Society organized a series of public events and candle marches in seven cities, dedicated to May 15 –Day of Commemoration of AIDS victims.
An essay competition “AIDS – challenge for humanity!” was organised for senior grades pupils. 19 educational institutions participated in the competition.

**Harm Reduction.** From January 2005, the harm reduction activities in Benderi have been supported by the Italian Red Cross through the programme “Harm Reduction in Eastern Europe”. These funds enabled Moldova Red Cross and Federation to cover the gap between the current and last year allocations from other donors, thus, ensuring continuity of key programme activities and staff, including regional coordinator and one nurse in Benderi.

Presently there are 68 permanent beneficiaries. During the reporting period, approximately 1,648 visits to the centre were registered, 2,350 syringes exchanged, 516 condoms distributed, and 39 counselling services provided.

In April 2005, thanks to the funding from the British Red Cross the harm reduction project started in Soroca. A first stage of programme implementation has been completed: the agreement with local authorities signed, place for needle exchange centre was granted by local authorities, project’s consultants recruited, syringes, condoms and disinfectants were purchased. In May, the harm reduction centre started its functioning.

In June a workshop on “How to work with IDUs” took place in Chisinau. At the workshop the team from a successful harm reduction project in Bendery shared their experiences with the staff and volunteers of the new project in Soroca. The workshop was facilitated by a coordinator of the harm reduction project in Chisinau supported by the Soros Foundation since 2000.

**Fighting stigma and discrimination**

In January, Moldova Red Cross organised an anti-stigma and discrimination workshop for RC staff and volunteers. Representatives of the association of people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) « Credinta » and Republican AIDS prevention centre facilitated the workshop.

Two coordination meetings with the representatives of the “Credinta” were held in Balti and Chisinau. During these meetings, 120 hygienic kits were distributed to people living with HIV/AIDS. Close cooperation with the association “Credinta” helps to reveal problems and difficulties faced by PLWHA in their daily life.

**Impact:** Since the beginning of the programme, Moldova Red Cross has successfully gained beneficiaries’ confidence. IDUs are willing to talk about their experiences and problems with needle exchange centre staff, and receive impartial, professional social, legal and psychological advice and support. The number of visitors to the needle exchange centre continues to increase, indicating the general appreciation of the services provided among the target population.

Local and national authorities recognise that the Moldovan Red Cross is playing an important role in fighting HIV/AIDS. Thanks to the membership card that is authorized by local Ministry of Internal affairs and Red Cross, IDUs are able to visit the centre freely and without risk of arrest.

**Constraints.**

Due to the late announcement of this year allocations, it was not possible to finance the SEC’s consultants in Benderi – legal adviser, narcologist and psychologist. In spite of that, RC personnel has shown their commitment and motivation and continued to provide valuable services on a voluntary basis.

The recent allocations from the Norwegian Red Cross/Government and the Swedish Red Cross has enabled Moldova Red Cross to secure continuation of the major components of the programme. Since 1 May, the three consultants have been receiving their due payments.

**Coordination.** In April 2005, Moldavian Red Cross Society participated at the National Forum of NGOs working in the field of TB and HIV/AIDS prevention.
Moldavian Red Cross Society continues to cooperate with Republican AIDS Prevention Center and association of PLWHA “Credinta”.

*(For news story on Moldova Red Cross HIV/AIDS related activities please go to http://www.ifrc.org/docs/news/05/05012002/)*

**Ukraine**

Expected result: Ukrainian Red Cross (URCS) effectively addresses both the epidemic, through youth peer education and harm reduction, and HIV/AIDS related discrimination

**Progress/Achievements:**

- In 2005, following the recommendations from the Ukrainian AIDS Control Center the Ukrainian Red Cross expanded its project activities to the southern and eastern oblasts (Odeskaya, Zaporozhsakya, Poltavskaya, Kirovogradskaya, Harkovskaya, Cherkaskaya and the Autonomous republic of Crimea) which form a continuous belt of high HIV/AIDS prevalence. These regions were included in the list of Project’s activities.

- During the reporting period, 65 peer education sessions were held in Crimea and Mykolayiv regions covering 846 young people.

- URCS project manager participated in a cross-country Harm Reduction/Peer Education workshop on experience exchange held in Moldova in March 2005.

- In April, Ukrainian Red Cross together with the Federation staged the European launch of the global anti-stigma campaign called ’Come closer...’ to coincide with the Eurovision Song Contest in Kiev, Ukraine. The “Come closer” campaign seeks to address the continuing marginalisation of people living with and affected by HIV/AIDS with messages such as ‘Talk to me! You cannot get HIV by talking’ and ‘Shake my hand! You cannot get HIV by shaking hands!’ Financed by the Media/Public Relations department, Principles and Values Department, and the Global Anti-Stigma campaign, 1,500 t-shirts, 1,000 balloons and 1,000 plastic bags were produced bearing the Come Closer logo. Three big banners were also produces and hung in high-profile venues such as the competition venue, Eurovision club and other popular clubs. *(For news stories on launch of “Come closer...” campaign in Ukraine please go to http://www.ifrc.org/docs/news/05/05052002/ http://www.ifrc.org/docs/news/05/05051701/)*

- In May all seven Red Cross branches held events dedicated to Day of Commemoration of AIDS victims.

- The launch of “Regional Youth Integration and Cooperation Programme” funded by the Danish Red Cross gives significant support and complements to existing HIV/AIDS activities run by the Ukrainian Red Cross.

- Red Cross volunteers trained last year continue to hold peer education sessions in the autonomous republic of Crimea, Sevastopol city and Mykolayiv oblast.

- URCS continues the implementation of a joint project with All-Ukrainian Network of PLWHA (AUNP) on home based care for people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) in Donetsk, Odesa, Kyiv, Zaporizhzhya and Dnipropetrovsk oblast.

- URCS established close cooperation with Program for Appropriate Technology in Health (PATH). With the assisatnce and expertise of PATH specialists, URCS modified and adjusted PATH training modules for the specific needs of HIV/AIDS programme run by the National Society.
• At present, URCS jointly with PATH is elaborating agenda for the future series of Trainings of Trainers (ToT).

Impact. Although the reporting period was mainly marked by the organisational work, it has already had some positive impact on the existing situation with HIV/AIDS in the southern regions of Ukraine thanks to the volunteers trained last year who continue to hold peer education sessions in these oblasts.

Educational sessions were held with the participation of people living with HIV/AIDS. This enabled RC volunteers to learn more about the problems and difficulties PLWHA face in their daily life.

Analysis and outlook. During the summer months URCS will continue its HIV/AIDS educational sessions in summer camps organized for children and teenagers in southern oblasts. This will allow to cover larger groups of teenagers thus contributing to prevention of risky behavior among the youth. The distribution of information materials (leaflets, stickers and posters) will be also ensured.

Coordination. The Ukrainian Red Cross Society has been one of the humanitarian actors fulfilling the National Programme to Fight HIV/AIDS in Ukraine. On the local level, Ukrainian Red Cross representatives succeeded to establish good working relations with various HIV-related NGOs, mainly All-Ukrainian Network of PLWHA representatives.

Project coordinators in Kirovohrad, Cherkasy, Odesa, Zaporizhzhya, Kharkiv, Poltava oblasts and in the Autonomous Republic of the Crimea are members of the local coordination committees on HIV/AIDS which unite both governmental institutions (Health Care Department, Education Department, AIDS Control Center, Health Center, Department for Family and Youth Affairs, narcological dispensary) and NGOs and international organizations (UNDP, International Renaissance Foundation). On one side this makes possible to run work smoothly while having support and understanding from the Governmental establishments and local authorities. On the other side the Ukrainian Red Cross Society is able to coordinate its prevention activities with other actors working in the same field. This makes theoretically possible to define clearly future target audiences (schools, colleges, universities, clubs, orphanages and street children) in order to avoid repetitions and make work more effective.