Ukrainian Red Cross Society

Founded: 18 April 1918
Members: 5,000,000 (2004)
Volunteers: 70,000 (2004)
Staff: 800 employees and 3,200 visiting nurses (2004)
Expenditure: UAH 1,752,000 (CHF 438,000 or EUR 279,977) (2004)

1. National context

The second-largest country in Europe, Ukraine is a republic that gained independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. After a particularly difficult transition period from 1991 to 1999, Ukraine has advanced in its transition, particularly in the economic arena. A peaceful Orange Revolution in the closing months of 2004 was the display of the deep political crisis in Ukraine and brought new political forces to the power. The new government of Ukraine declares its commitment to the social sphere of nation’s life, human rights’ defence and citizens’ freedoms which brings hope for the improvement of the community healthcare and welfare.

At the same time, the fast spread of HIV/AIDS/TB and drug addiction in Ukraine is a considerable threat to the country’s development and causes serious negative effects far beyond the healthcare sphere. Ukraine – which now stands on the European Union’s (EU) eastern border – currently has the highest proportion of HIV cases in Europe. With HIV infection rates doubling every year for the past 3 years and prevalence already tipping 1 percent among the adult population, the monthly incidence is now one of the highest in the European region. The TB epidemic and its convergence with HIV makes tackling the crisis even more urgent. Affecting 1.5 percent of the population, TB is the most widespread infectious disease in Ukraine today. Currently averaging 70 per 100,000 (compared to 5 per 100,000 in the U.S.), rates of TB in Ukraine have been high for a number of years, increasing 73 percent since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991.

Ukraine is one of the countries most heavily affected by the modern form of slavery, which includes sexual as well as labour exploitation. The country’s strategic geographic location and the “transparency” of its borders contributed to a certain extent to Ukraine finding itself at the crossroads of the world’s highways of trafficking in “live commodities.” According to the Ukrainian Ministry of Interior approximately 400,000 people have been trafficked from Ukraine during the last decade, many of them women and children.

Approximately 2.6 million people currently live in areas contaminated by the Chernobyl accident; dealing with the aftermath of this tragedy still requires considerable resources. The long-term consequences of the disaster continue to be studied. Thyroid cancer is the pathology that can be attributed to the Chernobyl accident’s radiation exposure. Thyroid gland cancer incidence among the people exposed to the radioactive iodine stands at 100 cases per 100,000 people that is 16 times higher than the average in countries not affected by nuclear accident.

Capital: Kiev
Population growth (annual %): - 0.7 (2003)
Life expectancy: 68.2 years (2004)
Infant mortality rate: 9.6 per 1,000 live births (2004)
Adult literacy rate: 99.7 per cent (2002)

2. Foundation

Mission
The Ukrainian Red Cross Society (URCS) is the largest voluntary humanitarian organisation in Ukraine with a clearly defined authority and scope of multilateral humanitarian activities and social services. The Ukrainian Red Cross functions independently of the government, but works closely with governmental agencies during times of major crises.

The statutes of the URCS are based on the Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. The Society’s mission is to protect lives, prevent and alleviate human suffering during armed conflicts, natural disasters and technical accidents, as well as assist the health authorities and the medical services of the armed forces.

Last year’s self-assessment of Ukrainian Red Cross represented the Society as well organised with an extensive organisational structure, skilled and committed staff and volunteers, a good public image, and a well developed local network. Weaknesses identified included poor infrastructure of district organisations, insufficient funding at all levels and low staff salaries.

Legal base
The URCS was founded in 1918 as part of the Soviet Alliance of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. Since 1991, the URCS has been functioning as an independent national society. In October 1992, the president of Ukraine issued a decree recognizing the society as the only National Red Cross Society authorized to assist the authorities in their humanitarian activities. In 1993, the society was recognized by both the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the International Federation and became a member of the International Federation the same year.

In July 1999, the Supreme Council of Ukraine passed the law on the “Red Cross and Red Crescent Emblem in Ukraine”, giving sole use of the emblem to the URCS. In 2002, the Parliament of Ukraine adopted the law on the “Ukrainian Red Cross Society”. The Red Cross statutes were revised in April 2001. The governance and management functions are clearly separated in the revised statutes.

Constituency
URCS consists of its headquarters (National Committee), 24 oblast (regional) branches, as well as the Red Cross branch of the Autonomous republic of Crimea and Kiev City branch, which are under its jurisdiction. URCS branches are separate legal entities and have separate bank accounts. The URCS has 666 town and rayon (district) branches and 42,406 primary organizations.

3. Capacity

Leadership
The highest governing body of the society is the assembly, which is convened by the board every five years to approve the statutes amendments, to elect both the president (for a five-year period) and members of the board and auditing commission. The board elects the executive director and members of the board presidium, which coordinate the work of the society between the board meetings. The board also elects the presidium bureau, which is responsible for day-to-day activities. The president heads the URCS. The executive director heads the national committee and coordinates implementation of the society’s programmes, strategic plan and objectives.

Human resources
The URCS employs 4,000 people (including 3,200 visiting nurses). Salaries in the national society are lower than in other non-governmental organizations.

The URCS has approximately 70,000 active volunteers who are involved in its various activities including organisational development, working with the local communities through a participatory community development approach, and dissemination of the Movement’s Fundamental Principles.

According to the URCS Annual report 2004 the following oblast branches have the biggest membership coverage: Chernivtsi, Vinnysy, Zakarpattya, Cherkasy, Volyn, Rivne, Mykolayiv, Kherson and Chernihiv.

**Financial resources**
Almost all URCS’s funding currently comes from the International Federation, the ICRC, Global Fund, Austrian, Danish and the Netherlands Red Cross Societies. There are also local sources of income: private donations, governmental and local authorities support etc. The society’s expenditure in 2004 was UAH 1,752,000 (CHF 438,000). Support of international donors (Federation, ICRC, partner national societies (PNS) and Global Fund) comprised UAH 1,208,000 (CHF 292,819).

**Material resources**
The URCS owns its national and most of its regional headquarters, 385 medical and social centres and rooms. However, its regional branches are insufficiently equipped with vehicles and computers. District organizations in most cases do not have any equipment at their disposal.

The society has 28 vehicles, nine mini buses and two trucks, most of them are in bad technical condition. The society has enough emergency supplies to set up a camp for 1,000 people for 10 days. The society has one central warehouse in Kiev and 25 warehouses in regional branches. The emergency stock of a central warehouse consists of a mobile electricity power station, mobile soup kitchen, tents, blankets, hygienic parcels, second hand clothing and food parcels.

**Organization/planning**
Ukrainian Red Cross has 10- and 1-year action plans. The national society also adopted the development strategy within the framework of the Federation’s 2010 strategy, which outlines the main areas of work: reforming and strengthening the Red Cross through organisational development and resources; increasing effectiveness of activities directed at alleviation of human suffering; and raising preparedness of the society to act during emergencies.

There are seven departments at headquarters: humanitarian, public relations and information, tracing service, international, finance, logistical and administrative.

**Partnerships**
In organizing medico-social services for lonely, elderly people and invalids, the national committee works in close cooperation with the ministry of health and local communities.

In the field of HIV/AIDS and TB prevention, the national committee works in close cooperation with the Ukrainian Centre for AIDS Prevention and Control, Network of people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA), scientific research institutes, youth and religious organizations, other NGOs and national societies. In the implementation of its programmes for refugees, and victims of trafficking the URCS actively cooperates with the International Federation, UNHCR, IOM, the state committee on nationalities and migration and with various NGOs. International humanitarian law (IHL) dissemination is conducted jointly with the ICRC’s Kiev office, and in cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defence.
The URCS also has good cooperation with Ministry of Youth and Sport, Ministry of Emergencies, Ministry of Justice and Internal Affairs, and State Penalty Committee. Besides, the URCS is the member of several commissions at the Government and President of Ukraine (commission on humanitarian assistance, commission on citizenship etc).

Cooperation with the ICRC centred on restoring family links, dissemination of IHL (primarily through the Exploring Humanitarian Law programme) and limited medical support to first-aid posts for formerly deported people in remote settlements and run by the Crimean branch of the Ukrainian Red Cross Society.

The society works closely with the International Federation and receives assistance from other national societies to implement its programmes, particularly from the British Government/DFID (disaster preparedness), Netherlands and Japanese (CHARP) as well as the Austrian, British and Italian National Societies. Other partners include Canadian, German, Japanese, Swedish, and Spanish Red Cross societies.

4. Performance

Activities

Disaster response
The National Society participates, together with local authorities, in relief activities to cope with natural and technical emergencies such as floods, hurricanes and mining accidents.

According to the agreement with the Ministry of Emergency Situations and Protection of Population from the Consequences of the Chernobyl Accident, the URCS provides first aid to the people affected by emergencies, as well as permanent settlement in shelter, hot meals, and psychological support.

Disaster preparedness
The URCS is included in the country’s list of “first response” non-government voluntary rescue organizations. The URCS president is a member of the state commission on technological, ecological safety and emergency situations. Heads of Red Cross regional organizations are members of regional commissions on emergency situations.

The civil defence headquarters is helping to set up the society’s disaster preparedness service, which will assist those affected by natural disasters. With assistance from the German Red Cross, the disaster preparedness warehouse has been built. The URCS has set up warehouse stocks of relief items at regional level all over the country. An emergency stock with relief items sufficient to assist some 1,000 people is being maintained in Zakarpattya regional organization. The URCS’s governing board has adopted a plan of action for regional organizations in the event of emergencies. Similar plans were developed at the regional level for branch and primary organizations.

Ten rescue teams have been organized. One, at the headquarters level, has been equipped with the help of German Red Cross and is able to provide social and medical aid to a camp of 300. The team has at its disposal vehicles, two mobile kitchens, tents and the necessary equipment for relief distributions. However, after 12 years of use, most of the vehicles and essential equipment are out of date.

The URCS disaster preparedness service holds regular meetings and discussions on volunteers’ involvement in the assistance to the most vulnerable, organization of voluntary rescue teams, improvement of governance structure and development of methodical base. In 2004, a series of
workshops for volunteers and Red Cross personnel to improve their knowledge of DM skills was held countrywide.

**Chernobyl Humanitarian Assistance and Rehabilitation Programme (CHARP)**

This is a major activity of the society, which was initiated in 1990. Activities are carried out to protect the population living in areas contaminated by radiation, provide them with radiation-free products and provide medico-social assistance to lonely, elderly people and the disabled. Each year two URCS mobile diagnostic laboratories provide medical examinations and ultrasound screening of the thyroid gland for 30,000 people living in remote settlements in areas contaminated by radiation. Vitamins are distributed to children in affected regions on a yearly basis. A psychosocial component of this programme started in 1999.

**Health and social welfare**

The visiting nurses service (VNS) provides social and medical assistance to the disabled and lonely, elderly people in their homes and at RC medico-social centres. More than 400,511 pensioners and invalids are registered with the service, of which nearly 36,789 are bedridden. Currently the service employs 3,200 visiting nurses. Local authorities support the VNS by providing premises for medico-social rooms and centres. In addition to home based services, the visiting nurses run 101 medico-social centres, 374 medico-social rooms and 581 clothing banks (mainly in remote areas where no other medical assistance is possible). The VNS provides assistance to socially vulnerable groups of population such as lonely, elderly people, veterans, the disabled, multi-child families and orphans. There is also a visiting service for TB patients, and the most vulnerable of these patients are provided with food supplies, clothes and footwear.

Ukrainian Red Cross runs 487 MSCs and rooms throughout the country, which act as a base for the Red Cross VNS. The premises are provided on a rent free basis by the Ukrainian government. Visiting nurses’ clients are mainly lonely elderly people with specific psychological problems, a result of the loss of relatives, family and social environment, or chronic illness. The situation is complicated by the burden on the elderly of specific legal issues (social benefits, inheritance procedures, etc). Meanwhile, the demand for legal and psychological support provided by VNS is growing rapidly.

In 2005, Ukrainian Red Cross proposes augmenting the skills of its VNS by launching a pilot project to ensure regular provision of free legal, social, and psychological assistance to their clients. The project expects trained professionals (lawyers and psychologists) also to be involved in activities, complementing visiting nurses.

**Assistance to refugees and IDPs**

Back in 2000, Ukrainian Red Cross launched a population movement programme to provide assistance to detention camps in Mukachevo, Chop, and Lviv. The programme started with the support of the International Federation, but in the last years it is supported by Zakarpattya branch. The programme is aimed at improving migrants’ living conditions and providing social assistance. The national society will continue to advocate for improvement of living conditions in the detention camps and encourage the government to comply with international law on refugee protection.

URCS also supports formerly displaced people in Crimea. The Red Cross mobile technical teams (MTTs) continue to provide assistance to people in the Crimea region who have been deported in the past and then returned. The programme included roof and floor repairs, restoration of furnaces and cutting firewood for heating. Every year MTTs provide assistance to some 1,000 beneficiaries.

**Counter-trafficking**
Starting from April 2005, with support of the Danish Red Cross and IOM, a counter-trafficking project has been launched by the Ukrainian Red Cross. Activities are focused on prevention among the target group (senior level schoolchildren and students).

**Tracing**
The URCS’s tracing service works to re-establish family links in all situations of armed conflict, internal violence, natural disasters or other emergency situations.

The URCS tracing service works closely with the ICRC, partner national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies and other governmental and non-governmental organizations. Following an assessment by the ICRC and the Ukrainian Red Cross of three detention camps in western Ukraine, a joint tracing programme was initiated in November 2004 to help detained migrants (mainly Asian, Arab and CIS migrants) to re-establish family and consular links through a phone card and Red Cross message network. In 2006, URCS is planning to expand this programme by including detention camps in other oblasts of Ukraine.

**Dissemination**
The URCS works closely with the ICRC on dissemination of international humanitarian law. The ICRC, in cooperation with the education authorities and the URCS, supported the introduction of the Exploring Humanitarian Law programme in secondary schools. In 2005, an agreement of cooperation between URCS, ICRC and the Ministry of Education was signed.

**Youth**
About 70,000 young activists operate through the Red Cross network and youth clubs. RC Youth are actively involved in peer education activities targeting schoolchildren and students. Many youth actions on HIV/AIDS/TB/STIs prevention and healthy life style are conducted every year. Youth volunteers also study first aid and take an active part in the work of charity teams.

**Relevance/effectiveness**
Systematic analysis and control over implementation of the programmes has resulted in improved quality and effectiveness. However, funding remains an issue and the URCS has had to downscale some of the planned actions and to suspend others.

URCS pays special attention to the stability of humanitarian projects, such as CHARP, VNS and HIV/AIDS/TB programme.

An independent survey in April 2004 revealed that Red Cross VNS performed well and its organizational structure for implementing effective TB work was in place due to the VNS’ widespread representation at community level. The VNS system and network were found to be well suited for strengthening the organization of the URCS in general. Effectiveness could be improved by developing the national society’s role in mobilizing, supervising and coordinating volunteers. The VNS in Ukraine is recognized as a model for developing assistance to the most vulnerable population.