

BELARUS, MOLDOVA, RUSSIAN FEDERATION, UKRAINE: Winter Emergency Appeal (WEA) 1998-1999

02 June 1999

appeal no. 30/98

situation report no. 4

period covered: 29 April - 18 May 1999. Programme Extension: 30 September - 30 March revised to 30 September 1998 - 31 July 1999.

The WEA programme, launched in September 1998, was planned to be completed at the end of March, but due to delays in the procurement process will be extended until 31 July. Monitoring indicates that the assistance provided has had a positive impact on the most basic needs of the targeted population and improved their living conditions. While significant quantities of in-kind contributions (second hand clothes, hygiene items, and 25,000 MT of bulk food from the American Red Cross), were received, the programme was hampered by low cash support which prevented the timely implementation of certain elements of the programme. The final stage of implementation is are taking place in all four countries, but at the same time increasing numbers of people are expressing the need for Red Cross assistance. For this reason, assessments are planned to consider needs for next winter.

The context

Responding to a potential humanitarian disaster affecting millions of people in the countries of Moldova, Russia, Belarus and Ukraine who are facing critical risks provoked by harsh climatic, social, and economic conditions, the Federation and respective National Societies launched an Appeal in September 1998 (initially for six-months) intended to:

- { alleviate the impact of cold, malnutrition, disease, stress, and to protect the dignity of 1.6 million beneficiaries;
- { maximise the use of local resources (human, goods and services);
- { strengthen local capacities by providing sustainable infra-structural support and training to the national headquarters and branches of the local Red Cross societies and collaborating social welfare institutions; and
- { promote partnerships between the Operating National Societies and the Participating National Societies.

More specifically, the Winter Emergency Appeal (WEA) operation is designed to tackle the most basic needs of the target population by supplying warm winter clothing and footwear for children and adults, and supplementary parcels of basic food (family food parcels or FFPs) and hygiene items. Soup kitchens have been established to provide beneficiaries in urban areas with more than one million hot meals in a six-month period. Institutions catering for children, the handicapped and the elderly also receive basic medicaments (nursing kits).

The priority beneficiaries include families with many children, single parents, orphans, single and other pensioners, severely handicapped adults and children — both at home and in institutions which the authorities are struggling to support; unemployed and homeless; remote health stations; and street children (unofficial estimates suggest there are at least one million roaming across Russia - with proportionally similar figures in Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova).

The Federation is also carrying out two other relief operations in conjunction with this programme:

{ The Far North-eastern Appeal has been over 70% covered and the distribution of food parcels for Magadan and Kamchatka will start in May and last till late July. Unfortunately the final offer for local production of food parcels in Chukotka has not been yet received. Four delegates were considered to work in the Far-North eastern regions: Kamchatka (Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky), covering also Koryak okrug, Magadan, and Chukotka (Anadyr). Three delegates have already arrived and are waiting for their documents to be processed before proceeding to their duty stations.

{ The TB/HIV/AIDS/STDs programme, launched on 12 March in response to the severity of these diseases in Russia, Moldova, Ukraine and Belarus, has not yet attracted major funding, and has therefore not started yet in Moldova. A two-day organisational, training and information seminar was conducted in Moscow on 13-14 May involving the chairpersons of nine Russian Red Cross (RRC) regional committees, heads of visiting nurses and regional TB clinics representatives. A similar seminar was conducted in Kiev on 17-18 May.

Latest events

Belarus

On 28 April, the Belarusian-Russian Supreme Council made an appeal to make social support of pensioners, veterans, disabled persons and their families a priority in the two states as a part of the International Year of Older Persons. The initiative calls on all governmental agencies, non-governmental organisations, businesses and common citizens to pool efforts, and work out and implement specific measures aimed at improving the social position of older persons to ensure their peaceful retirement and decent standard of living.

According to a presidential decree, as of 30 April all victims of the Chernobyl disaster will be granted special pensions (disability, survivor's and social). The amount of the disability pension will be calculated in accordance with the recipient's average income in the last 12 months of work and the degree of disability. Both disabled and survivors will receive social pensions equal to the average monthly wage. Those who took part in the Chernobyl cleanup operations will be entitled to extra payments, amounting to BUR 1,500,000 (USD 3.75).

Moldova

The Moldovan government is now amending a bill on a minimum living wage in accordance with socio-economic realities in the country. The indicators will be chosen very carefully, so that pensioners and needy population groups are not left out. At present, the state owes MOL 303 million (more than USD 30 million) to the pensioners.

France will reportedly provide Moldova with a concessionary credit of USD 15-20 million to maintain the balance of payments. This assistance is timely, taking into consideration that Moldova's external debt exceeds MOL 1.3 million and the internal debt for pensions, salaries, etc. is MOL 1,037 million (about USD 220 million).

Russia

The unseasonably cold weather during the first part of May damaged garden plots, which are the main food and money source for many Russians and for about 36% of Muscovites. The planting season has already begun as a result of warm weather in late April, and now some vegetable plants and almost all fruit trees will not produce anything this year. The potato planting season has also been badly affected, as well as certain types of fruit have also been severely hit.

Ukraine

The long-term economic crisis in Ukraine has exacerbated the social protection problem of vulnerable groups, especially elderly persons living alone (numbering a total 11.5 million, 600,000 of whom are in need of assistance) and orphans. According to medical research, more than 400,000 of the elderly need home care. State institutions for orphans and old people receive less than 50% of the amount required.

On 18 March a law which should have streamlined minimum pensions in accordance with the poverty line was vetoed due to insufficient pension funds. Other options to provide higher pensions are under consideration.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

Regional

The British Red Cross is conducting an assessment of the WEA, results of which will be used to consider a possible Appeal for 2000, and to plan accordingly. The Swedish Red Cross is also carrying out an assessment of the second-hand clothes component of the programme, and the final report should be available in the course of this summer.

Belarus

The main donors for the implementation of the programme in Belarus are the Netherlands and the British Red Cross. An operational contract for the Canadian donation was signed and money transferred to the Belarussian Red Cross's account on 7 April.

The Belarussian Red Cross held monitoring in Mogilev, Zhytkovichi, Lida, Schiuchin, Brest and Grodno and revealed some cases of non-compliance with the criteria for distribution of food parcels established in the WEA. In particular, the quantity of food parcels did not correspond to the norms approved for multi-child families. Appropriate measures have been taken after investigations and distributions continue.

FFPs: In April 4,678 food parcels were distributed in three oblasts: Grodno, Vitebsk and Brest - among homeless people, released prisoners, TB infected persons, multi-child and low income families. In the near future it is planned to distribute food parcels in Gomel region, Railway Committee and Minsk; 1,000 more FFPs were purchased for this aspect of the programme.

Soup Kitchens: A total of 26 soup kitchens continue to work, serving 820 beneficiaries with hot meals, including 256 homeless, 102 ex-prisoners, 15 TB infected, 141 multi-child families, 277 families with low income and 29 bedridden, who are being assisted by visiting nurses and volunteers at home.

A lot of work to change the social status of homeless and to advocate sanitation and hygiene measures for them was carried out. In March-April, 25 out of 31 registered homeless received passports, 16 were given jobs and 12 were sent to medical screening. A total of 558 homeless beneficiaries were provided with second-hand clothes.

Hygiene & Nursing kits: Distribution of 3,170 hygienic parcels was conducted in Belarus. Some 118 hygiene kits were distributed among BRC Medical and Social Centres, 26 went to the Soup kitchens, six were transferred to Sanitary Treatment Centres, and 3,020 were distributed among bedridden individuals. Procurement of nursing kits continued and delivery to oblasts started in May.

Second-hand Clothes: In April the Swedish Red Cross sent second-hand clothes and footwear to Vitebsk and Mogilev RC regional committees, unfortunately, due to the customs regulations all shipments are still in the warehouse, waiting to receive official permission for distribution.

Moldova

The WEA operation in Moldova is coming to an end (less than one month is left to finish the distribution of the remaining items). Some 1,150 FFPs were already distributed, and 3,960 more are still to be delivered to 33 local Red Cross committees for further distribution. Soup kitchens continue to function, serving the most vulnerable people with 22,050 hot meals out of the planned amount of 24,000. Some 468 bags of second hand clothes were delivered to eight local RC committees, two organisations and a hospital during February-April.

Russia

FFPs: All producers have supplied food parcels on a timely basis, with only a slight delay from Kemerovo due to late deliveries of card board boxes from the sub-supplier. All partial payments for food parcels were made on time due to a close co-operation between the Relief team and the Financial department.

It was calculated that the first round of 158,000 FFPs production and distribution was fully settled to the value of USD 1,337,468, which makes a saving of USD 303,988 or almost 20% of the approved in Geneva value, i.e. USD 1,641,456.

The second round of production and distribution started during March and was completed at the end of April. From the regions, it was reported that so far over 579,409 beneficiaries received 203,645 FFPs.

Potential suppliers for the third (final) round of 77,500 FFPs production have been proposed to Geneva at the end of April in order to start procurement and distribution during May, and finalise it by the end of June.

Soup Kitchens: Over 1,015,731 hot meals are now being served to some 148,999 beneficiaries all over Russia. A lot of schools were included to attend soup kitchens in the regions. The programme ended on 20 May.

Second hand clothes: About 1,031 tons of second-hand clothes were purchased and distributed among 561,425 beneficiaries. A Swedish Red Cross representative visited Bashkordostan, Penza and Khakassia in order to monitor and evaluate the impact of second hand clothes.

New Clothes in Siberia: Offers for 612 sets of new clothes (winter caps, coats and boots) were received for Irkutsk, Buryatia and Chita thanks to an earmarked donation from the Singaporean RC.

Seeds: Procurement of seeds was conducted during April, and 92,224 sets of seeds were distributed in all the regions.

Donations in-kind: Some 60,506 bottles of shampoo/liquid soap were donated to the programme by Oriflame, a cosmetics company. The donation was distributed among the regions as follows: 12,150 for Kostroma, 10,506 for Ivanovo, 1,350 for the international boarding school in Ivanovo, and 13,550 for Penza.

Areas visited during the period include: Ivanovo, Kostroma, Orenburg, Bashkordostan, Chelyabinsk, Perm, Ekatenrinenburg and Kemerovo.

The main difficulties during the period were: the inflation and increasing costs of food commodities on the local market; the difficulty making a proper planning when not knowing how the funds will be distributed between the four countries; the delay in reports from the regions. In several cases the production date and consecutive number was left out on the FFPs and first written on when the delivery

from the RRC warehouse to the rayons took place. However all measures have been taken in order to make the suppliers and RRC committees follow the rules.

Ukraine

The main donor for the Ukrainian operation is the British Red Cross. A British Red Cross donation of CHF 300,000, earmarked for Moldova, will be reallocated to Ukraine, since Moldova has no further capacity to implement the programme as it experiences staff shortages and has bilateral programmes ongoing.

Up to 24 April, UAH 1,788,750 was transferred to the regional Red Cross committees earmarked for food parcels and UAH 78,705 for hygienic kits. Distribution is carried out according to the lists of beneficiaries, made following regional assessments.

Some 80,630 beneficiaries, including 24,362 lone elderly, 14,455 lonely disabled, 17,040 lone chronically ill, 9,614 multi-child families, 7,093 single parents and 8,066 orphans received food parcels in 524 districts (26 regions).

Hygiene items were provided to 23,047 beneficiaries, including 6,624 lone elderly people, 4,064 lone disabled, 4,232 lone chronically ill, 37,7 multi-child families, 2,058 single parents and 2,298 orphans in 200 districts (14 regions). In Kiev, 40 Red Cross centres and 303 rooms of medical and social assistance were actively working. Charity concerts in favour of lone elderly people, multi-child families and orphans were held in Zhytomyr, Lugansk and Mykolayiv with the participation and assistance of local authorities, artists and public organisations. At the end of events food parcels were distributed among the vulnerable groups. In Zakarpattia the WEA programme is combined with spring flooding relief operation.

Bulk food and bilateral programmes in Russia

The programme of distributing approximately 25,000 MT of bulk food in the Siberian regions of Kemerovo, Khakassia and Irkutsk will also cover a part of Evenkya kray, Buryatia and a part of Chita, targeting to assist 421,000 beneficiaries with a monthly ration of 1.8 kgs of rice, 1.8 kgs of peas, 4.5 kgs of flour and 1.3 kgs of oil. Despite delays of both food and delegates, preparations for the programme are in full swing. It is expected that distribution of food to institutions (phase one of the two phase programme) will commence in June. Food will come via Rotterdam, not Vladivostok, as was originally planned and will be transported to the regions by the Trans-Siberian railroad.

Two more delegates are expected to arrive by the end of May to work in Siberian regions, and one delegate is still to be identified.

With a lack of delegates in the field, the programme Co-ordinator and a Relief delegate continue to make regular field visits to the Siberian regions to finalise relief and logistics plans for arrival and distribution of the bulk food. Approximately 10,000 square meters of warehousing space was contracted to accommodate the bulk goods. Negotiations are continuing with transport companies in all four regions, although it is proving a difficult task to find existing companies able to handle such quantities of cargo. Estimated time of arrival for first containers of food is 6 June.

Distribution plans for the first phase were finalised and submitted to the Humanitarian Commission for approval. Regional Red Cross branches and local authorities are in agreement with the plans and are ready to begin distribution by the middle of June. The final approval for duty free importation of the cargo was received from the Humanitarian Commission on 18 May.

Support of six orphanages, including a street shelter, home for disabled, home for children with TB and other infectious diseases, in Moscow region, Khakassia, Kemerovo and Irkutsk is ongoing. Currently, USD 17,000 per month are provided for supplementary food aid to these facilities. The first assessment noted a significant improvement in the food basket provided for the children. More details will be available through the initial six months of the programme.

Outstanding needs

The WEA programme will be coming to an end soon, but the abnormally low temperatures in May damaged small-scale market gardens, and the Moscow region can now expect almost no harvest from what is usually an important source of income and nutrition for poor families. More people have applied for food parcel assistance in Belarus.

External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

The programme gets regular media coverage in local newspapers, radio, and TV, and continues to attract international media interest, comment and debate.

The 8 May Red Cross/Red Crescent celebration was a significant event in Moscow, involving many local journalists and local people who had a great opportunity to become acquainted with the work of Red Cross, including the WEA programme, in a celebratory, non-official atmosphere.

On 27 April, the Belarusian Red Cross organised a press-conference for the local media with the participation of the Head of the Minsk Delegation and the Federation Information Officer. During the conference a number of questions, related to the 8 May celebration, the Red Cross Movement and the WEA implementation in Belarus, were addressed. Articles with the Red Cross emblem, photos and a video film about the Red Cross Movement were produced with financial support of the Netherlands Red Cross.

In Ukraine, the information support of the WEA programme was extended due to various briefings and press-conferences held in the regional organisations for a large number of local journalists, TV and radio representatives. The journalists had an excellent opportunity to get acquainted with the achievements of Red Cross volunteers and staff members in improving the living conditions of the most vulnerable groups, and with the future goals of the Ukrainian Red Cross, regarding the targeted social assistance provided to disabled people, war and labour veterans, lonely elderly people, multi-child families and orphans. A special focus of the Ukrainian Red Cross national campaign "Let us help the vulnerable people", held in March-April, aimed to facilitate the WEA programme.

A number of Embassies both in Minsk and in Kiev were contacted in order to present the ongoing WEA operation. The third bilateral meeting with PNS Delegates, which was planned for Murmansk, will be held next month. Meetings have also been held with the UN, EU and the World Bank, relating to all four countries.

Contributions

See Annex 1 for details.

Conclusion

The WEA programme has proved to be vital throughout the four countries, and assessments are planned to consider whether an Appeal will be needed for next winter, and to plan accordingly. Food parcels,

hygiene items, sanitary kits, clothing and seeds (all distributed through the Red Cross network), rendered significant assistance and support for many vulnerable groups - elderly living alone, orphans, multi-child families, homeless, single parents and ex-prisoners - in Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova. The implementation of this programme has improved the image and strengthened the capacities of the local Red Cross branches.

Peter Rees-Gildea
Director
Operations Funding and Reporting Department

Renny Nancholas
Director
Europe Department