

BELARUS, MOLDOVA AND UKRAINE: WINTER ASSISTANCE

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The context

Over the past decade there has been a dramatic increase in poverty and inequality in the transition Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries, particularly in Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine. While a collapse in economic output affected all the transition states, this region experienced a much sharper drop, resulting in an increase of poverty from 2 per cent in 1988 to 21 per cent in 1998. A key factor for this rise in poverty is a cumulative decline in output of almost 50 per cent, while the central European and Baltic countries experienced a decrease of 15 per cent.

This Winter Appeal (WA) was designed as a follow-up to the first winter emergency appeal launched in 1997, and aimed to provide short-term assistance to more than 191,200 most vulnerable people in Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova. As in the past, the Appeal targeted the most vulnerable layers of the society. The emergency assistance programme was intended to tackle the most specific needs of the target groups through:

- supplying winter clothes and footwear to the children and elderly;
- provision of hot meals or sandwiches to street children and homeless;
- distribution of food parcels to the disadvantaged families with children and elderly, living alone;
- distribution of hygiene parcels to the disadvantaged families with children and elderly living alone in rural areas;
- provision of school kits for children;
- supporting young people, living in juvenile custody;
- in collaboration with UNHCR, supporting internally displaced persons and refugees.

Objectives, Achievements and Constraints

Objective 1: to alleviate the impact of poverty, malnutrition, disease, and stress, and to protect the dignity of 191,200 beneficiaries living without support from existing governmental welfare structures

Achievements:

Belarus

Some 14,347 of the most vulnerable beneficiaries (with special attention to TB patients) were provided with 26,850 food parcels in three rounds through ECHO support. In the second as well as in the third rounds of distribution, the favourable USD exchange rate allowed the procurement of 15,000 food parcels instead of 8,950 originally planned.

With support from the British Red Cross and the British Government Department for International Development (DFID) and the Canadian Red Cross and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), 10,065 food parcels were delivered to the local Belarus Red Cross Committees and distributed to 3,333 beneficiaries.

The changes of the US Dollar exchange rate made it possible to increase the number of food parcels procured under the Swiss Red Cross donation: from 2,400 to 4,800 and from 2,400 to 3,500 in the first and in the third round of distribution accordingly. A total of 10,700 (including 100 food parcels to refugees) were purchased and delivered to 5,856 beneficiaries with the Swiss Red Cross support.

Nutrition activities for a total amount of 1,383 persons with low income including 526 orphans and disabled children in five Oblasts (Regions) of Belarus and Minsk City were organised with British, Canadian and Swiss funds.

3,000 hygiene kits for 2,383 beneficiaries and 115 Medico-Social Centres and sanitary points for the homeless were procured out of British funds and delivered to the project sites. Special attention was given to TB (832) and bedridden (1,399) patients. Additionally, the renovation of 15 Medico-Social Centres/rooms, particularly second hand closing bank, was done. 556 beneficiaries also received hygiene kits from the Icelandic, Monaco and Australia Red Cross Societies.

After purchasing 1,000 school kits (under British donation), they were distributed among children from socially disadvantaged families in six Belarus Oblasts, Minsk City and Railway Committee. One kit consisted of 24 items of school-writing materials.

Since the beginning of the programme, 6 trucks of second-hand clothes/shoes were supplied by the Swedish Red Cross and distributed among 6,443 beneficiaries.

The number of beneficiaries assisted within the WA programme in Belarus is indicated in the following table:

Item	No of Beneficiaries
Food parcel	23, 536
Hot meal	1,383
Hygiene kit	2,939
School kit	1,000

S/h clothes and footwear	6,443
TOTAL	35,301

Ukraine

Thanks to the British Red Cross and DFID donation and in accordance with the contract signed between the Federation and the Ukraine Red Cross, some 104,360 persons in 19 Oblasts of Ukraine living below the poverty line were provided with 105,060 food parcels. Within the same donation, 21 times a month (between mid May and mid July), some 7,942 lonely elderly were served with hot meals in 13 Oblasts of Ukraine.

Some 20,440 food parcels were purchased with the Canadian Red Cross and CIDA donation and distributed to 20,440 recipients in three project sites (Zaporizhye, Lugansk and Kharkiv Oblasts).

Under this donation, 5,684 people were provided with hot meals in five Oblasts (Crimea, Dnepropetrovsk, Zaporizhye, Lugansk and Ternopil) 21 times a month in a one and a half month period. Some 3,600 street children in Lugansk and Ternopil received sandwiches 3 times a week in a 1.5 month period.

In addition, 2,160 food parcels (with Canadian Red Cross support) were purchased and distributed among 2,160 beneficiaries in Volyn Oblast.

Within the operation, 11 trucks of second-hand clothes and footwear were supplied by the Swedish Red Cross. Totally 62,718 beneficiaries have received clothes and 4,982 people footwear.

The following table presents the number of beneficiaries in Ukraine supported within the WA operation:

Item	No of Beneficiaries
Food parcel	126,960
Hot meal/sandwich	17,226
S/h clothes and footwear	67,700
TOTAL	211,886

Moldova

Some 3,605 hygiene kits under the British donation and 2,675 under the Canadian donation were distributed in 38 districts of the country to TB-infected people, large families, people with low income, lonely elderly and prisoners.

The Swedish Red Cross supplied three truckloads of second-hand clothes and footwear to Moldova which were distributed by the local Red Cross branches among 3,650 beneficiaries.

The following table presents the number of beneficiaries in Moldova supported within the WA operation:

Item	No of Beneficiaries
Hygiene kit	6,280
S/h clothes and footwear	3,650

TOTAL	9,930
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Total Number of Beneficiaries

The number of beneficiaries supported during the implementation of the WA programme in the three countries reached 257,177 which is 34.4 per cent higher than initially planned:

Country	No of Beneficiaries
Belarus	35,301
Ukraine	211,886
Moldova	9,930
TOTAL	257,117

Constraints:

Implementation of the Winter Assistance activities was delayed due to the late arrival of funds and relatively slow response to the scaled-down programme which was completed only by end of July, 2000. The operation has been hampered by the lack of a relief delegate.

There were problems in the selection of beneficiaries as the number of people in need is much higher than those covered by the operation. In Belarus, some local Red Cross branches were requested by the authorities to provide some recipients with only one food parcel, so the Red cross staff had to work under constant stress to choose the most vulnerable beneficiaries. Local authorities gave to the Red Cross solid support to carry out the distributions efficiently by providing trucks and sometimes fuel. However, in general, transport or lack of transport has been a problem especially in rural areas.

Objective 2: to maximise the use of local resources: human resources, goods and services.

Achievements:

The national societies have played the main role in the implementation of the programme, while all their activities were closely co-ordinated with the Federation. These activities were conducted on the basis of the operational contracts signed between the Federation and the national society. A separate operational contract was prepared every time a donation was received. The operational contract described how the donation was to be utilised, reporting requirements, reporting dates, and donor's visibility. These contracts made it easy to follow each donation, and eased the reporting. The personnel of all three national societies carried out the project activity according to the. Implementation of the programme has clearly increased the image of the three national societies. Red Cross volunteers were actively involved in implementation of the Winter Assistance programme. For instance, in Belarus, altogether 4,818 Red Cross volunteers took part in the operation. More than 80 per cent out of them are students and school children.

In implementing the programme, the Ukrainian Red Cross arranged assistance to the beneficiaries by using internal reserves. Most of the Ukraine Red Cross organisations were able to collect funds, food products, clothes from the local population and enterprises which made it possible to render additional assistance to about 87,000 beneficiaries.

Constraints:

While the Red Cross has a responsibility and obligation to respond to humanitarian needs, there is a concern about the appropriateness of the form of the aid to the region year after year, and the ability to raise funds in support of the present approach. Developing more long-term, sustainable programs, particularly in light of the long-lasting crisis, is needed.

Objective 3: to strengthen local capacities by providing sustainable structural support and training to national headquarters and branches of the local Red Cross societies and social welfare institutions collaborating with the Red Cross.

Achievements:

In the course of programme implementation, the national societies focused on further training of their staff members and volunteers. On February, 15, a workshop for Belarus Red Cross volunteers from the 17 Rayon Railway Red Cross Committees was held, addressing issues of selection and targeting of the most vulnerable, reporting requirements, reporting and evaluation of the project, and working with the media.

On February, 21-22, a workshop for the Chairpersons and Head Accountants from the four operating regional Belarus Red Cross branches (Vitebsk, Grodno, Brest and Minsk Oblasts) was organised. The following main issues were covered: selection and targeting of the most vulnerable; reporting requirements; reporting and evaluation of the project; working with the media. In March the knowledge obtained from the seminar was disseminated at four new workshops in the four Oblasts among the staff of Oblast Red Cross Committees.

In accordance with the Winter Assistance programme two workshops on psycho-social support were held in the cities of Minsk and Baranovichi on April, 21-28, 2000. In total, 40 activists and workers of the Belarus Red Cross participated in the workshops where they were provided with training on reducing stress situations.

In the framework of the operation, 2 workshops (selection and targeting of the most vulnerable; reporting requirements; reporting and evaluation of the project; public relations) for the Ukraine Red Cross Programme Co-ordinators, local Red Cross Chairpersons and accountants were held. In total, 60 Red Cross staff members were trained.

At the initial stage of the operation, the Belarus Red Cross headquarters notified the Government of the ongoing WA programme and the Cabinet of Ministers charged all respective governmental bodies to assist the Red Cross in the programme implementation. In a number of Oblasts, joint Red Cross/local executive meetings were carried out where the plans of joint activities and co-operation were specified.

During the implementation of the programme all three national societies acted in close co-operation with local authorities, social welfare and health care institutions, Ministries of Internal Affairs, public organisations involved in the humanitarian assistance to socially disadvantaged people such as lonely elderly, homeless, street children and orphans.

Constraints:

More emphasis should have been placed on the development aspects of the programme. Further training is needed in regards to programme management, assessment, reporting and fund-raising.

Objective 4: to promote partnership between the local Red Cross in the region and the donor Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

Achievements:

The Appeal launched in November 1999 received a response from the British, Canadian, Swiss, the Netherlands, Icelandic, Monaco, and Australian Red Cross Societies, and from ECHO. Their donations to the programme were highly appreciated by the National Red Cross Societies of Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova. The Netherlands Red Cross implemented its project in Belarus and Ukraine on a bilateral basis in close co-operation with the national Red Cross committees and organisations. Other projects were implemented in close co-operation between the donors, national societies, and the Federation.

Constraints:

There were no major problems in terms of the partnership. However, in the future closer working relationships should be developed. For instance, the representatives of the donor Red Cross Societies could participate in some implementation activities such as distribution of goods, providing visibility, and monitoring.

Conclusion

Despite late start, the Winter Assistance operation has reached its objectives and was successfully implemented in all three countries. All the three national societies were fully involved in the operation, and the activities were carried out according to the terms, described in the operational contracts. Co-ordination with local authorities and other agencies was effective. Red Cross employees and volunteers fulfilled their work responsibilities professionally and with enthusiasm, making efforts to assist as many people as possible. As a result, in all three countries the programme was highly appreciated by the beneficiaries and the local communities.

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