

# DREF operation update



International Federation  
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

## Russian Federation: Assistance to refugees from South Ossetia

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Update n° 1  
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The International Federation's Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) is a source of un-earmarked money created by the Federation in 1985 to ensure that immediate financial support is available for Red Cross and Red Crescent response to emergencies. The DREF is a vital part of the International Federation's disaster response system and increases the ability of national societies to respond to disasters.

**Period covered by this update:** 22 August – 31 December 2008

**Summary:** CHF 250,000 (USD 238,095 or EUR 152,905) has been allocated from the International Federation's Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) to support the National Society in delivering immediate assistance to the people displaced from South Ossetia as a result of the armed conflict in August 2008.

The Netherlands Red Cross through its Silent Emergency Fund contributed 30,000 euros (nearly 50,000 Swiss francs) towards the replenishment of the DREF.

More than 300 people, predominantly children, and also their host families received psychosocial support (PSS) through home visits, rehabilitation lessons at the Red Cross centre and at various public events. These activities allowed the beneficiaries to minimize post-war trauma and to better adapt to the new conditions.

The number of beneficiaries is significantly lower than the original target group. However, it is necessary to extend the programme for another four months until 30 June 2009 in order not to lose the positive results gained so far. The budget will be adjusted to cover the extension and the modified programme approach, but the total amount required may be less due to the reduced target group.

A final report will be completed by 30 September 2009.

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Russian Red Cross psychologist, Lyudmila Kargieva in a lesson with a child from South Ossetia. **Photo: Russian Red Cross**

## The situation

Tens of thousands of civilians were caught up in the armed conflict involving Georgian, South Ossetian and Russian forces in August 2008. Within the first months after the end of the conflict the majority of the

refugees who fled from South Ossetia to the neighboring Russian republic of North Ossetia returned back except those whose houses were seriously damaged. Currently, several months after the end of the war back and forth migration in the area is continuing due to the difficult conditions in South Ossetia. Because of the lack of official registration actual information about the number of refugees from South Ossetia staying in North Ossetia is not available. However, according to the local Ministry of Education, an estimated 350 South Ossetian children are attending schools in North Ossetia. They usually live with their mothers, little brothers and sisters and elderly relatives, while their fathers are trying to restore a living in South Ossetia.

These people lack housing since staying with their relatives and acquaintances became difficult and they left to rent flats which currently have significantly increased rents. The regional Red Cross branch traced that 16 families with children have no proper accommodation and have to live in summer garden houses far away from schools and hospitals.

Due to poor nourishment, living conditions, the difficult psychological state and constant stress, children and adults feel that their general health has deteriorated, with various health disorders reported. People also lack warm clothing, school supplies, bed linen, furniture and medicines. The uncertain future is disorientating people, with unmet primary needs depriving them of the possibility to make real plans for their futures.

## Coordination and partnerships

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is the lead agency in the conflict area. The Russian Red Cross branch in North Ossetia regularly meets with ICRC to discuss urgent problems of the refugees and to assess their needs. Russian Red Cross staff made several requests regarding the tracing of missed members of the families to the ICRC offices in Vladikavkaz and Nalchik. In addition, an agreement has been reached with ICRC on rendering assistance to refugees in the form of food parcels and hygiene kits, bed sets, warm clothes and shoes. This allows Red Cross staff in the course of the psychosocial activities to also respond effectively to the individual material needs of the beneficiaries.

The Russian Red Cross established fruitful relationship with partners in the corporate sector. "Sportmaster" company that started to support Red Cross activities in Beslan in 2005, in November 2008 provided refugee schoolchildren from South Ossetia with sets of sports goods.

## Red Cross and Red Crescent action

### Progress towards objectives

#### Psychosocial support and counseling

**Objective: The effects of the war have been minimized among children and their families displaced from South Ossetia.**

#### Activities planned:

- Provide psychosocial support to about 5,000 affected individuals and families, both refugees and hosting families
- Conduct targeted assistance to the host families in order to reduce the negative impact of care for the refugees
- Organize teams of psychologists and nurses in Vladikavkaz and Beslan to accompany the affected families as they deal with needs or obligations related to the tragedy including visits to cemeteries, organizing activities, and the continuation of education
- Provide social support to the refugees, forced to stay for several months away from their homes, in order to maintain the conditions close to their usual life. They will be assisted in restoring missing documents, solving legal issues, admission to education, applying for government support or compensation.

#### Progress and impact:

At the onset of the arrival of refugees from South Ossetia, the Russian Red Cross North Ossetia regional branch started to mobilize its staff and volunteers in the city branches of Vladikavkaz and Beslan. Assistance was provided in the form of humanitarian aid and psychosocial support, especially to children. In the first two months many refugees returned or had to go back to South Ossetia more often, being bound by the local government's promises to provide financial compensation for those whose houses were damaged during the conflict. Consequently much lower numbers of people were in need of long-term psychosocial support than it was estimated at the start of the DREF operation.

While defining the target group for the PSS operation Russian Red Cross staff had to rely on data provided by the local authorities in each village and district. Currently, 102 families or 308 people, including 195 children are taking part in the project.

In the course of the operation, a new group of refugees was indentified. These are families who escaped from South Ossetia during the first Georgia-Ossetia conflict in 1991-1992 and now host their relatives or friends who came in because of the recent war. Over the last few years their needs were barely met due to the hard economic and political situation in the country and their stress was only "pushed inside". They never fully recovered and stabilized psychologically and are basically the ones who are taking care of the new wave of refugees. The recent conflict and the need to take care of their fellow Ossetians has triggered the suppressed feelings and the PSS team needs to work with them too in order to strengthen their abilities to cope and promote self-respect and social inclusion.

The main accent of the operation was put on children because many of them suffer more from the post-war stress and hard living conditions. Very often they live without parents. In order to better meet their needs Red Cross staff has included in the operation special PSS sessions at the Red Cross centre in Beslan. Starting from 16 November every Saturday refugee children visit the Red Cross centre in Beslan to attend its studios and the play room. Those children not staying far (within 60 km) from Beslan are brought to the centre by car.

The team that is involved in the operation includes 12 Russian Red Cross psychosocial workers who provide home visits and give lessons at the centre. In addition they regularly visit schools attended by the children of refugees to exchange ideas with teachers about helping the children adapt to the new conditions. As a result of these visits Red Cross psychologists get necessary information about children from South Ossetia in need and the specific problems they face.



Children from South Ossetia in an art therapy session at the Russian Red Cross centre in Beslan. **Photo: Russian Red Cross**

According to the psychologists, the majority of these children and their relatives have difficulties with social and psychological adaptation, fear about the future and suffer from isolation in the society.

In the reporting period, 514 visits were carried out to the beneficiaries in Pravoberezhny, Kirovsky and Prigorodny districts in North Ossetia and also in the cities of Beslan and Vladikavkaz. Red Cross workers continuously collect information about basic needs of the target families and provide material aid such as shoes, clothing, and school textbooks.

In addition to the psychosocial help, Red Cross staff offer refugees help in placing children with kindergartens and medical-social services to elderly people. There are also 24 children of preschool age under the project.

**Challenges:** The operation was scheduled to last six months. Though the support is well in place, the

psychological health of the beneficiaries is extremely fragile. Children are still stressed and vulnerable and their coping mechanisms have not reached the necessary strength yet. The winter is very harsh in the Caucasus and hardens the living conditions. The closure of the programme in the cold period of the year would aggravate the psychological stress and return of the isolation and difficult living conditions – as their homes in South Ossetia are not restored yet. Many of the refugees come from the internal part of Georgia and their return is unthinkable to them during the winter. These are the most vulnerable people, they will need prolonged support. In order not to lose the good results of the programme so far, the operation will be extended for another four months until 30 June 2009. This can be achieved within the same budget, as the number of refugees covered by the programme has been less than the initial estimates.

### Capacity building in psychosocial support delivery

**Objective:** The capacity of the Russian Red Cross and its branches to continue and expand the service following the evolving needs of the refugees, and to train volunteers among the refugees to facilitate self-care has increased.

### Activities planned:

- Create PSS and self-support groups for those affected by the hostilities
- Train selected volunteers to continue the activities related to psychosocial support

**Progress and impact:** On December 23-26 a seminar was organized in Fiagdon, North Ossetia, on the basic principles of Red Cross psychosocial support for stress-affected population. Staff members recently hired by the Red Cross North Ossetia regional branch and volunteers received basic PSS skills and learned techniques on how to organize self-support groups during their work with the refugees from South Ossetia.

**Challenges:** Refugees are not yet ready to take part in self-support groups because their levels of stress are so high that they hardly cope. In addition, they are always moving to South Ossetia and back and could not be involved in any regular group activities.

### Human touch story



“With my mom and brother we were hiding in the forest and, on the one hand, we feared enemy soldiers and on the other, big wolfs”, recalls Gennady Kudukhov, seven years old child, the atrocities of the war in South Ossetia in August 2008.

Now, six months later he often plays war and always defeats his enemies. His mother notices that war memories still follow him, often at night.

In order to overcome the horrible experience he went through, Gennady accompanied by his brother come every week to the Red Cross centre in Beslan to play with other children and to attend art-therapy classes. Their mother thanks the Russian Red Cross for its help: “My kids look forward for Saturday when the Red Cross car comes to take them to the centre.”

## How we work

All International Federation assistance seeks to adhere to the [Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organizations \(NGO's\) in Disaster Relief](#) and is committed to the [Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response](#) (Sphere) in delivering assistance to the most vulnerable.

The International Federation's activities are aligned with its Global Agenda, which sets out four broad goals to meet the Federation's mission to "improve the lives of vulnerable people by mobilizing the power of humanity".

### Global Agenda Goals:

- Reduce the numbers of deaths, injuries and impact from disasters.
- Reduce the number of deaths, illnesses and impact from diseases and public health emergencies.
- Increase local community, civil society and Red Cross Red Crescent capacity to address the most urgent situations of vulnerability.
- Reduce intolerance, discrimination and social exclusion and promote respect for diversity and human dignity.

## Contact information

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