

BELARUS, MOLDOVA, RUSSIAN FEDERATION & UKRAINE: TB/HIV/AIDS/STDs

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The TB/VNS programme was launched in March last year with a focus on raising awareness and combating tuberculosis and sexually transmitted diseases through long-term assistance to patients and their families, as well as public education on TB/HIV/AIDS/STDs and prevention measures. So far, the Red Cross and Red Crescent has gained recognition among state authorities and health institutions, which agree that a joint strategy must be developed to respond to the rapid spread of the diseases in the four countries. It is clear that together with social and material support to TB patients and dispensaries, the Red Cross has helped local authorities and health institutions in adapting modern international methods to combating the diseases. The first phase of the programme is nearing completion, and it is extremely important that further funding is received to continue assistance to vulnerable TB patients and their families in Belarus, Moldova, the Russian Federation, and Ukraine, and to promote international treatment standards in the four countries.

The Context

TB is spreading rapidly in the Moldova, Belarus, Russian Federation, and Ukraine. In Russia, over 111,000 cases of TB were reported in 1996 - double the number of cases registered in 1991. Similar levels pertain in Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine. TB is most prevalent among the poor and their families, including homeless, alcoholics, ex-prisoners and malnourished. In prisons, incidence rates are dramatically higher than among general population.

Poor TB control measures and inappropriate treatment schedules have led to a rise in resistance to standard TB drugs. Drug resistant TB is difficult and expensive to cure and at the moment health authorities in the four countries cannot afford such treatment, resulting in a spread of this dangerous form of the disease. Depending on their immune status, people can become infected without developing the disease. Immune status is affected by poor nutrition, excess alcohol intake, certain drugs and HIV/AIDS.

Since the early 1980-s, HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) the causative agent of AIDS, has been spreading throughout the world. Currently this pandemic is the leading public health problem at the global level. According to the latest figures of UNAIDS and WHO, an estimated 33.4 million people are living with HIV/AIDS; 770,000 live in Europe and 270,000 are in Eastern Europe.

For the moment, Ukraine remains the worst affected country, although the Russian Federation, Belarus and Moldova have registered enormous increases in the past few years.

HIV increases the risk of patients becoming ill with TB thirty fold, because the virus weakens the part of the immune system that protects against TB. As a result TB is the leading cause of death in HIV positive patients.

Sexually Transmitted Diseases have also spread rapidly in recent years, encouraged by socio-economic factors such as increased travel and migration, family disruption, liberalised sexual behaviour and growing prostitution. The years of 1990-1997 saw a 50 fold increase in syphilis in Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries, including Russia, Belarus and Ukraine, giving rates 200 to 500 times greater than in Western Europe. As both national and international health authorities now recognise, whatever measures are taken, the situation will worsen over the next few years. The challenge is to limit the ravages of these diseases, and their social and economic effects.

One of the main objectives of the programme is to raise awareness among the general public about the extent of the diseases, and also:

- to train Red Cross staff, Visiting Nurses and others for their role in care and prevention;
- to give social and material support, to encourage compliance with diagnosis and treatment;
- to support diagnostic facilities, essential for disease control;
- to make contingency for pharmaceuticals in the early stages of the programme.

Latest Events

Belarus

Some 283 new HIV/AIDS cases appeared in Belarus in the first half of 2000, which is a 30% increase over the same period in 1999, according to the National Centre for AIDS Prevention. More than 74% were infected through drug injections. Some 89% of HIV-infected people are teenagers and youth; and 51% of those infected are jobless. As of 1 July, 3,035 new HIV cases were registered in the country in all six regions. Eight AIDS patients died in Belarus this year, and 94 people have died from AIDS since 1987. Eighteen new-born children received HIV from infected mothers since 1987.

During the reporting period, following a visit to the National AIDS Prevention Centre, the World Bank's director for Belarus and Ukraine and Belarusian government representatives discussed

the problem of HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis and possibilities of preventive programmes in this field.

On 18-22 September WHO will conduct a TB assessment mission in Belarus. An amnesty to some 3,500 prisoners sick with TB and 600 HIV-infected ones will soon be announced in Belarus, where drug resistant tuberculosis is especially prevalent in prisons.

Moldova

According to Interlic news agency, 1,078 TB cases were reported in Moldova in the first half of 2000 with 32 newly infected children under 14 years old. In average, the TB incidence rate is 25 per 100,000 population.

On 22-26 May, the representatives of WHO, Federation, MSF, and Caritas International Catholic Movement conducted a field trip to Moldova to examine TB programme implementation. The team visited Orhei and Bendery, and met the representatives of donor organisations. A draft National Tuberculosis Programme in Moldova for 2001-2005 was written following WHO recommendations for DOTS strategy.

On 18 July the Moldovan Ministry of Health discussed their national health policy and reforms in the field of medical services, mother and child care programmes, chronic and infectious diseases prevention and treatment, sanitary and epidemic supervision, etc. Only seven dollars per person have been assigned from the state budget for annual medical services for Moldovan citizens. When this money is spent, they have to pay for their treatment, and this results in a sharp reduction of public visits to medical institutions.

Russian Federation

Some 120,000 inmates were freed from Russia's overcrowded prisons to mark the 55th anniversary of the defeat of Nazi Germany. Eligible for release were prisoners who fought in Russia's various wars, including the two Chechen conflicts, pregnant women or women with handicapped children, and the prison system's numerous tuberculosis sufferers. Release of prisoners with TB has caused an increase in Red Cross TB beneficiaries in Kemerovo region and is having an impact throughout Russia.

According to Interfax information agency, more than three million Russians suffer from drug addiction. In 1999, the number of drug users increased four times in comparison with the previous year, which caused a doubling in the HIV-infected population - 38,000 officially registered individuals as of June 2000. Some 90% of them are intravenous drug users. The resources of state drug-abuse services are inversely proportional to the growth of drug users. Such services receive only 20-40% of minimum funds necessary for treatment, which has led to a decrease of public medical service in this area.

Ukraine

The American Medical Centre, Ministry of Health and WHO have observed an increase in the number of TB cases in Ukraine. Since 1 February, 163 new TB cases were reported in Kiev, and 314 new TB patients were registered in Kharkiv in the first half of the year. If the current trend continues, Ukraine will experience a 56.9% annual increase in the incidence of TB in 2000. Only one third of the planned amount of funds have so far been released to combat tuberculosis as yet.

Some 31,991 Ukrainians were reported to have carried HIV infection since 1987, of whom 1,490 are children; 632 adults and 38 children have died from AIDS since then. More than 500 new HIV cases are being registered in the country every month.

Official statistics shows, there are 1,500 HIV-infected people in Kharkiv, however according to other data this number is 10 times higher. According to Zaporizhia regional AIDS centre, there are 800 HIV/AIDS cases in the region.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

ECHO operations ended in Belarus, Moldova and the Russian Federation in June, 2000. The ECHO programme in the Ukraine will be over on 31 August. New project proposals were prepared for ECHO to continue funding the TB programme.

In view of securing funds for a longer term support, a review and mapping exercise of the Visiting Nurses Service (VNS) was carried out in Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine on 25 March - 5 April, 2000 to assess its appropriateness in an auxiliary role to state health services, social support and public awareness on TB/HIV/AIDS/STDs issues. The results of the mission were discussed with the representatives of the Health Ministry, National Societies, and TB experts. It was agreed that the Red Cross focuses on advocacy, raising public awareness and health education activities, and conducts full scale TB/VNS projects in those regions, while state authorities assume full responsibility for drug supplies, and take a definite advance towards adopting internationally recognised TB treatment strategies.

Belarus

The ECHO/Danish Red Cross project in Belarus started in September 1999 and ended in May, 2000. The results of project implementation were summarised in July, 2000. All initial objectives were met with even better results than planned. Swiss and Danish Red Cross Societies have contributed to the Belarus TB programme to support its continuation.

Regarding strengthening VNS capacities, 198 visiting nurses were recruited and trained; 18 equipment sets were delivered to rooms of medical and social assistance and 40 rooms of medical and social assistance were repaired and re-equipped beyond initial objectives; 271 bicycles were procured for visiting nurses; 180 nurses were provided with monthly transport allowances; 575 TB manuals were produced for VNS; 2,000 logbooks, 1,850 registration books and 20,000 registration beneficiary cards were produced for rooms of medical and social assistance. Eight training seminars for Belarus Red Cross staff and volunteers as well as media representatives were conducted. Four new rooms of medical and social assistance opened in Gomel, Krichev, Rogachev and Molodechno. A training centre for visiting nurses is being established in Minsk, and more rooms of medical and social assistance are being repaired.

The development of Red Cross outpatient treatment services to complement existing intensive-phase hospital treatment promoted a decentralisation of the state TB sector. Eighty three drug distribution points, including 21 in Red Cross rooms of medical and social assistance, were established and continue functioning under the ECHO project. Red Cross activities in the field of TB prevention and treatment have contributed to state health care reforms in the TB sector by adapting relevant international experiences. In the next phase of the TB programme this will remain an important part of Red Cross advocacy process.

Regarding support to health institutions with diagnostic facilities, essential for disease control, 10 binocular microscopes and 10 sets of stains were procured in Russia and distributed to TB institutions in Belarus.

Social and material support was provided in larger quantities than planned to 3,000 TB patients and members of their families and 3,000 bedridden elderly vulnerable people. The target of 18,000 family food parcels was exceeded by 15,000 FFPs; and the target of 12,000 hygiene kits was exceeded by 6,000 kits. Some 48,745 kg of second-hand clothes and footwear were distributed to 7,857 TB patients.

The information campaign to increase public awareness regarding prevention and control measures of TB/HIV/AIDS/STDs showed its effectiveness. Some 30,000 leaflets for general population and 20,000 leaflets for TB patients and their families were published and distributed through Red Cross branches, rooms of medical and social assistance and state health institutions, as well as displayed in public places and on public transport. Three videos on combating TB were aired on central television and 13 video sets were produced for local TV channels. Some 7,000 calendars were printed for the launch of World's AIDS campaign, and 6,000 badges were made to symbolise Red Cross involvement in the TB programme.

Moldova

The ECHO/Belgian Red Cross project in Moldova started in September 1999 and ended in April, 2000. Social support was provided to Red Cross beneficiaries in larger amounts than initially planned. Some 11,670 individuals - TB and AIDS patients, HIV/STDs infected people and a limited number of lone elderly received 41,760 family food parcels instead of the planned 30,000 FFPs, 20,000 hygienic parcels and 7,054 bed linen sets instead of the planned 2,000 sets. The original amount of relief items was increased due to savings in local procurement. Additional support was rendered by distribution of 2,451 units of multivitamins, 45 wheelchairs, 90 crutches and 90 walking frames. Distribution points were located in Red Cross room of medical and social assistance, local hospitals and other places throughout the country.

Moldovan Red Cross VNS was strengthened by upgrading nurses professional education and distributing 52 nursing kits as well as updated information and guidelines on TB/HIV/AIDS/STDs prevention. An important message was also given regarding prevention of stigmatisation of patients. During the implementation period eight training seminars were conducted. Moldovan Red Cross headquarters used an opportunity to improve their skills in logistics procedures. New staff were recruited and trained and will possibly continue working on permanent basis.

During the TB/HIV/AIDS information campaign, following materials were printed in Romanian and Russian languages and distributed to beneficiaries, their family members and general public: 47,200 TB booklets, 16,062 AIDS booklets, 60,000 TB warning pamphlets, 20,000 AIDS warning pamphlets, 2,000 postcards, 10,000 small calendars, 15,000 booklets on AIDS prevention, 3,000 leaflets "AIDS exists", 4,358 big calendars, and 10,000 bookmarks. National and local media printed and broadcasted some information about the ECHO project, its objectives and achievements.

Russia

In March, the Federation/Russian Red Cross team visited Arkhangelsk, Pskov and Astrakhan, and found favourable results in the three regions. The role of the Russian Red Cross is now much clearer to the local authorities, however, much work remains to be done in the fields of management and training.

Two consultants from Britain and the US and a Danish Red Cross desk officer visited Moscow to discuss the issues of targeting and indicators, which keep coming up, as well as support for children and institutions. This visit has so far helped crystallise some of the long-term thinking about the programme. There is general agreement that in the future, the Russian Red Cross should not support laboratories because this falls outside its area of expertise, but for the moment such support has had value in 'kick-starting' the programme in the seven regions.

The Federation field monitor visited Tomsk and Kemerovo during May. Trip findings were discussed internally and then with the Russian Red Cross. A summary of findings to date was presented to the Russian Red Cross in the middle of May with the request that they return with their comments on outstanding issues.

On 13-15 June the Federation/Russian Red Cross team together with a programme consultant and WHO TB manager conducted a field trip to Ivanovo region to hold an assessment of implementation and meet with CDC consultants in the region.

A two person team from the Kyrgyz Red Crescent/Bishkek Federation office, visited Moscow in the middle of July to discuss the TB programme and visit Astrakhan.

World TB day was marked on 24 March, unfortunate timing due to the Presidential elections on the 26th, but there was still significant coverage in the Russian media. The press conference attracted high-level representatives from the Ministry of Health and the two Moscow-based TB institutes, and drew some subsequent media coverage. The Red Cross radio adverts on Radio Russia were run during an eight day period on and around the 24th. The Russian Red Cross/Federation produced a range of information booklets and posters on TB which were distributed to the seven pilot regions for 24 March.

Due to some savings in funds, it was decided to enlarge the TB information campaign. Some new leaflets on TB/HIV/AIDS and a poster were printed. A 12-minute promotional video on TB awareness was produced in July, and funds were allocated to the Russian Red Cross for them to produce their own film for the domestic audience.

On 3-5 April, two meetings were held with the Central TB Institute director and Phthysiopulmunology Institute representatives to discuss joint activities in the pilot regions. A Red Cross patient record database, co-ordinated by the Phthysiopulmunology Institute is now under development with testing of the system in Astrakhan and Pskov. British and Canadian Red Cross representatives were briefed on the progress with the TB programme while in Moscow.

The final workshop for chairpeople of Red Cross regional committees, medical and financial managers involved in the TB/ ECHO programme took place on 20-22 June. The first phase of programme implementation was discussed as well as plans for the next phase. The need for improved targeting, cost effectiveness and local capacities was observed. The RRC health department started working on a TB manual for local Red Cross branches.

Efforts to improve the running of the programme as of the beginning of Phase 2 continued. The RRC have produced realistic cash flow forecasts for the full eight months and are also looking at ways of reducing costs and covering visiting nurse salary costs locally. Also, the expected increase in ambulatory patients in Kemerovo due to the prison amnesty, is calling for more creative approaches to the use of available social assistance and other resources in the regional programme budget.

As of the end of July, some 334,164 hot meals have been served to TB patients in Red Cross soup kitchens in the targeted regions over the eight month period. An average number of 210 adults and children attended soup kitchens every month in each of the seven regions. Instead of having meals in Red Cross canteens, some beneficiaries preferred to take food home, and 55,601 albumen kits were distributed. A total of 16,500 family food parcels, 16,500 hygienic kits, 105 VNS kits, nine sets of equipment for rooms of medical and social assistance, 15 centrifuges, 12 autoclaves, 119 microscopes and six stain sets were distributed in the pilot regions.

Ukraine

The ECHO/German Red Cross project in Ukraine started on 1 October 1999 and will continue until the end of August. The Ukrainian Red Cross continues to provide educational, material and social support to TB and AIDS patients, HIV infected people and other vulnerable groups in the country.

The Netherlands Red Cross completed a bilateral programme, which was also funded by ECHO and which supplemented the TB programme in Ukraine.

A full complement of 100,000 family food parcels, 30,000 hygienic kits, 9,426 bottles of vitamins, 1,300 bicycles, 343 wheelchairs and 789 other relief items were distributed to Red Cross beneficiaries. Ten equipment sets for rooms of medical and social assistance and 1,400 visiting nurse kits were distributed with a considerable delay caused by late procurement and custom difficulties. On 23 June, documents were received to provide equipment for 18 more rooms of medical and social assistance.

Soup kitchens in Kiev closed in the middle of June. Some 630 TB patients were receiving hot meals there under the DOTS treatment.

Fourteen training seminars for Ukrainian Red Cross staff and volunteers were carried out and highly appreciated by the participants.

The information campaign continues to attract attention to TB/HIV/AIDS issues and problems of social assistance to the most vulnerable. Topical TV and radio programmes were prepared. Several articles on TB and AIDS epidemic and prevention measures were published in local media. Visiting nurses in rooms of medical and social assistance are disseminating information on prevention, care and early identification of TB and HIV/AIDS. Some 35,000 leaflets on TB prevention, 15,000 posters on TB prevention, 20,000 leaflets "Have you protected yourself from TB?", 20,000 leaflets "Protect your relatives", 10,000 leaflets "Everything will be fine", 15,000 leaflets "Everything depends on you", 15,000 leaflets "Choose life", leaflets "Let's stop TB", posters "Red Cross against TB and AIDS", leaflets on DOTS therapy, and book markers for schoolchildren on TB/HIV/AIDS prevention were published and distributed.

A TB manual for visiting nurses will soon be published. A manual for VNS instructors on home care will be published by the end of August.

Outstanding Needs

This programme, in principle, closed on June 11, 2000. However, recently signed ECHO contracts and decisions on extending the activities into 2001 will influence the completion phase of the programme. In addition, while the overall appeal is fully funded, the specific activities in

Russia are underfunded and long-term funding is a critical issue for which the Federation is exploring opportunities and strategies. To this end, ECHO has indicated the intention of phasing out from Belarus, Moldova, Russia, and Ukraine in 2001. In this context, there is an acute need for ongoing external support to carry out preventive, relief and training activities to help combat TB/HIV/AIDS/STDs, educate the general population and support programme beneficiaries.

External Relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

Belarus

Information and education campaign in Belarus provided good media coverage and high donor visibility. International community was basically informed through Minsk Delegation's Newsletters and Federation's web site.

There were three visits by Danish journalists and photographers to the Minsk Delegation and Belarusian Red Cross.

From 24 to 27 May 2000, the Danish Red Cross vice President and TB programme co-ordinator visited Belarus to familiarise with the Belarus Red Cross TB/VNS programme and discuss possible plans for the future. Meetings were held with the Ministry of Health and the TB institute, followed by a field trip to Gomel and Rechitsa.

Also in May, a Danish journalist visited Belarusian Red Cross and Delegation to make a video report on the TB situation in Belarus for the Danish TV2.

From 12 to 17 June 2000, a journalist from the Danish Red Cross Information Department and a photographer visited Belarusian Red Cross and Delegation to make a report with a focus on the TB/VNS programme. Meetings/interviews with Red Cross nurses, TB patients, doctors, Head of Delegation and the health delegate were arranged. It is expected that the report will be published in the Danish Red Cross Magazine and posted on their web site in August.

On 22 June 2000, the health delegate participated in a meeting focused on health and education of the Local Aid Group organised by the UN Office in Belarus for the donor community where the Federation's TB/HIV/AIDS programmes was presented.

Russian Federation

The second interagency TB meeting took place in early March, hosted by WHO. The main area of discussion centred on preparations for the World TB Day. WHO, Merlin, MSF, PHRI and the Federation/Russian Red Cross worked closely together in preparation for the World TB Day. There were also several meetings with ECHO representatives in Moscow who remain fully briefed on the progress with the programme.

Regular meetings with the WHO Moscow office were held during the reporting period. On 13 April 2000, another Interagency meeting on TB control and co-ordination was held. The Delegation's Health co-ordinator presented the results of the International meeting on TB training and education held in Atlanta on 17-18 March, 2000.

Future co-operation on combating TB in Russia was discussed with the Know How Fund representatives. There was also a meeting with the first deputy of Health Minister on future TB control in Russia.

On 19 April 2000, a meeting with the Ukrainian Red Cross representatives was held to discuss TB activities and exchange experience.

Moldova

On 22-26 May 2000, Federation representatives together with WHO, MSF and Caritas made a study visit to Moldova to examine the implementation of the TB programme.

Ukraine

Negotiations with TACIS have started on funding possibilities for the TB/VNS programme in Ukraine.

Co-operation with WHO European Regional Bureau, TACIS, UNAIDS, USAID, UNICEF in the field of DOTS-therapy implementation to reduce TB morbidity rate continued.

On 21 March 2000, Federation representatives participated in the round table "TB as a national problem: the role of society in fighting the epidemic in Ukraine" held in connection with the World TB Day. It was organised by the Ukrainian Ministry of Health and Ukrainian Red Cross. Vice Prime Minister, legislators and representatives of all Ukrainian ministries were present at the round table. The event was covered in local media.

In April-July 2000, Federation representatives had meetings with the EU Political Affairs officer and Ambassador to discuss the future of the TB programme in Ukraine.

On 19 April 2000, Federation's Health delegate and Kiev programme co-ordinator had a meeting with a USAID senior health adviser to exchange information on TB/VNS issues in Ukraine.

Contributions

See Annex 1 for details.

Conclusion

Red Cross activities on combating TB/HIV/AIDS/STDs had an impact both on the general population and local authorities in the four countries. Governments and NGOs acknowledged the Red Cross to be an ideal partner due to its decentralised structure and ability to mobilise resources.

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