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Emergency Plan of Action (EPoA) Operations Update

Belarus: Extreme winter conditions

 International Federation
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

DREF Operation n° MDRBY007	Glide n° CW-2017-000005-BLR
Operations Update n° 1	
Date of issue: 19 April 2017	Date of disaster: 5-9 January 2017
Operation start date: 5 January 2017	Revised timeframe: 20 January – 20 May 2017 (extended by one month)
Overall operation budget: CHF 111,431	
Number of people affected: 50,000	Number of people being assisted: 57,289
Host National Society presence (n° of volunteers, staff, branches): 211 volunteers, 121 staff, 1 headquarters and 107 district branches	
Other partner organizations actively involved in the operation: Ministry of Emergency Situations of Belarus	

Summary of major revisions made to emergency plan of action:

A **one-month timeframe extension is required** due to challenges faced by the Belarus Red Cross with the registration of DREF funds with the Department of Humanitarian Aid and other Belarusian authorities. The one-month extension will allow the National Society to **finalize the local public procurement of the emergency shelter, household, food security and livelihood items** and replenish the stocks that were used for the relief operation.

A. Situation analysis

Description of the disaster

A sharp cold snap (Cyclone Axel) hit Belarus on 5 January 2017, with heavy snowfalls accompanied by frost and strong winds. Temperatures dropped down to 25-29 degrees Celsius below zero, and in some places even to minus 31-34 Celsius degrees. The country's meteorological service issued an orange weather warning. Invasion of cold arctic air masses from the north of European Russia followed on 6 January. Extremely low temperatures also continued in the second part of January through the beginning of February 2017.

All six regions of Belarus, including Vitebsk, Minsk, Gomel, Grodno, Brest and Mogilev regions, and Minsk city were affected by the extreme winter conditions, with the northern regions registering the highest number of people affected. Many Belarusian people, especially children and the homeless, were unprepared for such severe frosts and snowfalls. An estimated 539 people (including 31 children) were traumatized while 43 people died of injuries and hypothermia as a result of the extreme cold weather.

Summary of current response

On 1 January 2017, the Belarus Red Cross received an emergency warning on Cyclone Axel approaching Belarus. In response, it launched an **awareness-raising campaign** and arranged a [joint press-conference](#) on 4 January together with the Ministry of Emergency Situation. It also made its interactive map of natural disasters available to the general population so that they could monitor weather conditions and the emergency situation affecting them.

Between 5-9 January 2017, the **Belarus Red Cross launched its response to the cold wave**, with a specific focus on homeless people. On 6 January, the National Society allocated an amount of BYN 10,000 (approx. CHF 5,000) from its **emergency contingency fund for disposable tableware and meals**. It also used the amount of BYN 14,000 (approx. CHF 7,000) donated by Cola-Cola to purchase **winter tires and fuel for power generators, heavy duty vehicles and heating canons**. The Belarus Red Cross also set up **397 warming stations/heating points** to assist city dwellers in public

places and **37 mobile units** were established along the roads. One part of the stations was arranged within the offices of Belarus Red Cross regional and district branches while others were Red Cross tents with heating canons and power generators. The vehicle-based mobile units delivered assistance at places where most people gathered, including homeless people (who could best be reached near dump sites and glass bottle buy-back centres). Those most in need received **hot meals, tea, warm clothes and blankets at the warming station**. In addition, the Belarus Red Cross supplied meals, blankets and bedlinen to **seven state-run temporary shelters for the homeless** following the doubling of the amount of people seeking refuge in these facilities and request for assistance by the authorities. The Belarus Red Cross **telephone helpline 201** provided **psycho-social support** to the affected, as well as coordinated the work of the volunteers and staff.

As the extreme cold weather hit many Orthodox believers attending the Christmas Eve mass on 6-7 January and having to wait hours to enter the church, the Belarus Red Cross set up **eight winterized tents** in Minsk city and all the regional centres **near all the cathedrals** and provided **hot drinks** to an estimated **2,500 people** and **first aid** to **13 people**. The Belarus Red Cross also patrolled the city's 160km-long ring road and the Belarusian-Polish border and have assisted **154 drivers stranded** on the roads in harsh weather conditions.

A total of 121 Red Cross staff and 211 Red Cross volunteers were engaged in the response. The Belarus Red Cross trained new volunteers from its back-up list according to its rapid training plan for working in winter conditions.

The total of **332 Belarus Red Cross staff and volunteers** distributed a total of 1,000 blankets, 1,000 pairs of warm socks, 1,000 pairs of gloves, 1,000 scarves and 100 warm boots from the emergency contingency stock. Furthermore, 1,500 hygiene kits and 1,500 food parcels were issued from the Belarus Red Cross warehouse, amounting to 70 per cent of its available stock. In addition, CHF 5,000 was spent to purchase hot meals to people most in need.

The **total number of people reached in January and February 2017** by Belarus Red Cross assistance is estimated at **57,289**. This includes **652 homeless people** provided with full packages of warming and living assistance, warm clothes and place for temporary stay. It also includes **224 stranded drivers** who were helped in evacuation and transportation to safe places.

The relief assistance to beneficiaries was designed based on a **preliminary needs assessment** conducted by the Belarus Red Cross in January 2017 in Minsk and its region. A **follow-up evaluation** and **needs assessment** was conducted on 20-22 February 2017 in Vitebsk, Mogilev, and Gomel regions and in March in Brest and Grodno regions. The follow-up assessment found that the Belarus Red Cross provided a higher volume of assistance than initially planned based on its preliminary assessment therefore additional resources were needed. Particularly, equipment for setting up warming stations was necessary as the Belarus Red Cross had to use that of the Ministry of Defense which however did not meet all requirements and was also very time-consuming to use. The National Society also had to rapidly purchase emergency food kits and new warming equipment and tents (as many of the tents purchased and used previously were significantly outworn). Also, several tents and all-terrain vehicles (of brand "Pinzgauer") in Gomel, Minsk and Vitebsk regions required reparation.

Overview of Red Cross Red Crescent Movement in country

The IFRC ensures strong support to the Belarus Red Cross providing technical advice, tools and standards, facilitating organizational development and knowledge-sharing, monitoring and reporting.

The IFRC Country Office in Belarus and the National Society cooperate closely in assessing the needs and the response to this emergency. The operation is coordinated by the Belarus Red Cross branch chairpersons in their areas of responsibilities. Red Cross volunteers have been responsible for delivering emergency assistance.

The ICRC has one staff based in Minsk to support a longstanding partnership with the Belarus Red Cross. The role of ICRC in Belarus is related to protection of the population and assistance to people affected by armed conflict and violence. The ICRC has supported capacity-building in various areas such as providing equipment to the National Society for increasing conflict-related emergency preparedness and response capacities, trainings in restoring family links and first aid. The ICRC has also supported displaced people from Ukraine with economic security initiatives.

The Swiss Red Cross is present in country and supports the Belarus Red Cross in the field of integrating and institutionalising homecare, and healthy ageing through participatory community work. They also provide winter assistance every Christmas.



Belarus Red Cross warming station set up in Minsk.
Photo: Belarus Red Cross

The ICRC has also supported displaced people from Ukraine with economic security initiatives.

Overview of non-RCRC actors in country

From the very beginning of this emergency, Belarus Red Cross branches have been in close contact with local authorities and emergency response units of the Ministry of Emergencies, who provide the National Society with hands-on information on the evolving situation and the needs of local people. The cooperation agreement between the Belarus Red Cross and the Ministry of Emergencies defines the Red Cross's auxiliary role as providing social support, such as distributing basic items and setting up first aid points to people affected by disasters. The Ministry ensures that the Red Cross participates in its disaster response trainings and makes its warehouses available for its supplies, as well as informs it about disaster forecasts. The Belarus Red Cross is part of the national warning and emergency response system with the defined role for providing support to units of Ministry of Emergencies.

The response plan of the Belarus Red Cross in case of extreme winter conditions includes setting up Red Cross winterised tents and heating stations in agreed places upon request from the Ministry. The Ministry provides operational information on the situation in the country and responds to emergencies caused by freezing temperatures such as accidents with heating systems, fires, etc. **The Ministry of Emergencies only provides heating tents when the Belarus Red Cross is not able to meet all the needs.** The Red Cross also works closely with the media to raise public awareness on the prevention of traumas and chilblains.

B. Operational strategy and plan

Overall objective

The overall objective of the operation has been to provide immediate assistance to 41,500 people affected by the extreme winter conditions in Belarus.

The following number of beneficiaries have been assisted through this DREF operation to date:

Target group	Type of assistance	Number of people already assisted	Number of initially targeted beneficiaries
Homeless	Food, hygiene, warming and temporary stay, first aid	652	1,000
Stranded drivers and passengers	Evacuation, transportation, warming and temporary stay, first aid	224	500
City dwellers in public places	Warming	56,413	40,000

Implemented strategy

To achieve the overall objective, the following activities were prioritized: provision of hot water and food items, immediate access to heating points, assistance to stranded vehicles and the logistic support required.

More specifically, the operation has met the following immediate needs:

- hot meals, tea and shelter for at least 1,000 homeless people, each ratio consisting of instant soup, porridge and tea;
- hot tea and temporary shelter in Red Cross tents for some 40,000 dwellers affected by the extreme weather conditions;
- hot tea for and assistance to some 500 people stranded in their vehicles on the road or waiting at border crossings.

The operation also included the replenishment of the following emergency stock:

- Tents: eight new tents along with new heating equipment and furniture purchased to replace eight tents out of service;
- Eight existing tents equipped with additional heating systems and furniture.

The need for purchasing tents was justified by the responsibility of the National Society to ensure warm shelters for people all over the country. Experience shows that often it is not possible for the National Society to use the warming stations of the Ministry of Emergencies as that keeps the stations for its own preparedness in case of large-scale disasters. In order to operate the tents as warming stations, heating canons were also needed to be purchased.

Through this DREF allocation, the Belarus Red Cross is also replenishing the stock distributed from its own reserves so that it is prepared for a potential other emergency in the future.

A one-month extension will allow the National Society to complete all procurements and distributions and to conduct a “lessons learned” workshop.

Operational support services

Human resources

The Belarus Red Cross has mobilized 211 volunteers and 121 staff to carry out assessments, distribution of hot meals and drinks, maintenance of heating points, use of power generators and heating pumps, and assistance to stranded vehicles. Insurance policies have been covered for the 211 engaged volunteers. In January 2017, a project coordinator, a translator and accountant were hired to support the implementation of the operation.

Logistics and supply chain

In February 2017, the tender process was started to purchase the items. As of 31 March 2017, the contracting companies were selected, contracts for the purchase and delivery were signed and will be paid upon receiving the goods. The contracts include purchase of eight tents, 16 electric generators, 16 warming facilities, 20 folding sets of tents, 20 folding beds, 30 thermopots, 1,500 food kits, 1,500 hygiene kits, 1,000 scarfs and hats, 100 pairs of winter boots, 1,000 blankets, 1,000 warm socks and 20 volunteer uniforms.

Communications

During the winter, the Belarus Red Cross emergency response and tracing service held two press-conferences at national level on the issues of “Safety behaviour in the winter period” and “First aid for hypothermia”.

Planning, monitoring, evaluation, & reporting (PMER)

The Belarus Red Cross organized a ‘lessons learnt’ workshop on 13-15 April 2017 to discuss operational experience and identify lessons learnt, challenges, best practices and potential areas of improvement. Participants included BRC staff and volunteers involved in the planning and implementation of the operation.

Representatives of the Belarus Red Cross also participated in the national working group on lessons learnt during severe winter conditions and response operations.



One group of implementing staff and volunteers discussing their experiences during assisting people affected by the extreme cold.
Photo: Belarus Red Cross

C. Detailed Operational Plan

Shelter and settlements

Outcome 1 Providing assistance to approximately 41,500 people affected by winter frost or storm during a three-month period

Outputs

Output 1.1 The thermal comfort of 1,000 homeless people, 40,500 other vulnerable people will be met through the Red Cross warming-up stations (winter tents and mobile teams) during the period of harsh winter months

Activities	Is implementation on time?		Comments
	Yes	No	
Needs assessment carried out among Belarus Red Cross branches	x		Done
Terms of reference on the purchase of equipment developed and equipment purchased	x		Done
Distribution of procured equipment among Belarus Red Cross branches		x	In progress
Setting up Red Cross warming stations/heating points	x		Done

Progress towards outcomes

Procurement of the items to replenish BRC's stocks is in progress. Following the finalization of procurement, the items will be distributed to BRC's branches.

Food security, Nutrition, and Livelihoods

Outcome 1 Providing assistance to approximately 41,500 people affected by winter frost or storm during a three-month period	Outputs	
	Output 1.1 The nutritional needs of 1,000 homeless people, 40,500 other vulnerable people will be met through distribution of emergency items (food and NFIs)	

Activities	Is implementation on time?		Comments
	Yes	No	
Development of terms of reference on the purchase of food and hygiene items based on Belarus Red Cross terms of reference	x		
Food and hygiene items purchased and distributed among oblast organizations of the Belarus Red Cross		x	In progress

Progress towards outcomes

Procurement of the items to replenish BRC's stocks is in progress. Following the finalization of procurement, the items will be distributed to BRC's branches.

National Society capacity building

Outcome 1 Strengthening Belarus Red Cross capacity to respond to extreme winter conditions	Outputs	
	Output 1.1 Emergency response team volunteers of the Belarus Red Cross are on stand-by and prepared to respond to extreme winter conditions.	

Activities	Is implementation on time?		Comments
	Yes	No	
211 volunteers of emergency response teams are provided with insurance policies	x		Done
Volunteer uniform sets are purchased	x		Done
Winter response security rules for volunteers are developed	x		Done

Progress towards outcomes

Activities were implemented as planned.

Outcome 1 Strengthening Belarus Red Cross capacity to respond to extreme winter conditions	Outputs	
	Output 1.2 Lessons from the emergency operation are learnt	

Activities	Is implementation on time?		Comments
	Yes	No	
Monitoring visit to Brest oblast branch	x		Done
Monitoring visit to Minsk oblast branch	x		Done
Monitoring visit to Grodno oblast branch	x		Done
Monitoring visit to Vitebsk oblast branch	x		Done
Monitoring visit to Mogilev oblast branch	x		Done
Monitoring visit to Gomel oblast branch	x		Done
Lessons learnt workshop is held	x		Done
Recommendations for the further improvement of operational implementation are developed based on lessons learnt		x	In progress

Progress towards outcomes

Monitoring visits to the above branches and the planned 'lessons learnt' workshop took place. Recommendations are currently being formulated to improve future operational implementation.

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The IFRC's work is guided by Strategy 2020 which puts forward three strategic aims:



Save lives.
protect livelihoods,
and strengthen recovery
from disaster and crises.



Enable **healthy**
and **safe** living.



Promote **social inclusion**
and a culture of
non-violence and **peace**.