

# **Belarus: Population Movement Emergency Appeal**

## **Final evaluation report 29-30 September 2017**

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29 November 2017

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## Acknowledgements

*The evaluation team would like to acknowledge and thank the staff and volunteers of the Belarus Red Cross as well as the IFRC Programme Coordinator in Belarus for their valuable inputs, interest, commitment and active participation in the Emergency Appeal`s evaluation.*

## 1. Background

The armed conflict in Donetsk and Luhansk regions in south-eastern Ukraine has triggered a massive displacement of civilians seeking refuge and safety in other parts of Ukraine and neighbouring Belarus and the Russian Federation. According to figures from the President of the Republic of Belarus, some 160,000 Ukrainian displaced people affected by the hostilities have arrived in Belarus since June 2014. Around 60,000 of them still remain in Belarus (according to figures from the Department of Citizenship and Migration), while the remaining group has either returned to Ukraine or moved elsewhere (mainly to the EU and the Russian Federation).

Since the arrival of the first groups of displaced persons from Ukraine in June 2014, the BRCS has been responding to the needs of the most vulnerable through its emergency cash fund and distribution of household items from its disaster preparedness stock. The distribution of essential food and non-food items has been implemented through the Belarus Red Cross's well-established voucher distribution system. In addition to one-off humanitarian assistance, the BRCS has provided referral, counselling and psychological support services, temporary accommodation, and support to travel and medication.

On 29 October 2014, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) launched a DREF operation in an amount of CHF 126,229 to provide immediate assistance to 2,400 people, of whom 1,200 people were affected by population displacement, and to replenish the emergency stock that was used earlier to support 1,200 affected beneficiaries. On 3 June 2015, an Emergency Appeal was launched in the total amount of CHF 742,931 to enable the IFRC Secretariat to support the Belarus Red Cross to deliver assistance and provide support to a total of 2,400 families (some 10,000 beneficiaries) over the timeframe of eight months, with a focus on relief activities via pre-paid debit card system.

The BRCS has substantial experience in handling multilaterally-supported humanitarian activities and social services to address the needs of the most vulnerable. Present in all regions, with 360 staff and 22,000 trained volunteers in eight regional and 160 district/town branches as well as over 8,000 primary units, it is the biggest humanitarian organization in the country and has an important role in the local communities. As an auxiliary to the authorities, it provides high quality humanitarian services and plays an essential role in advocating for the humanitarian needs of vulnerable people in Belarus. Its programmes specifically focus on marginalized or excluded groups to reduce existing discrimination and exclusion. It provides referrals for health examinations, medical, legal and psychological treatment, counselling and assistance in vocational training to further the integration of refugees, victims of trafficking and ex-offenders. The help line "201", operated by Belarus Red Cross volunteers offers support to Ukrainian citizens in need of advice or emergency assistance.

## 2. Purpose and scope of the evaluation

The purpose of the mission was to support the Belarus Red Cross and IFRC Country Office in co-facilitating the lessons learned workshop related to the EA operation and additionally, in reviewing, monitoring and evaluating the progress and impact of the operation as whole focusing specifically on the voucher distribution mechanism used in this operation.

The aim of the final internal evaluation was to analyse and comment on the project progress up to date and review the process of implementation of the project. The evaluation saw how the project was progressing, documented lessons learnt, achievements and challenges, and provides recommendations and ideas to take forward for the future.

## 3. Team composition and evaluation methodology

The team of evaluators composed of the IFRC Regional Office for Europe (ROE) Disaster Management (DM) Coordinator and the PMER Manager along with the IFRC Programme Coordinator based in Minsk.

The mission timeframe was from 28 to 31 August 2017, with the internal evaluation organized on 29 August and the lessons learned exercise held on 30 August 2017. The assessment covered the period from July 2014 to end of August 2017.

The review used a consultative and participative approach. The internal evaluation was conducted using a plenary discussion and group work approach (with two groups – one formed of the staff and volunteers of the HQ, the second is the representatives of the branches), while the lessons learned exercise (which involved also external partners such as Ministry of Interior, Department on humanitarian affairs of the presidential administration of the Republic of Belarus, Department of Citizenship and Migration of the Ministry of Interior of Belarus, NGO “The Belarusian movement of medical workers”, ICRC. Swiss Red Cross, Danish Red Cross) was mainly based on plenary discussions and presentations both from the National Society’s HQ and branches as well as from external, invited partners.

Prior to the mission, a list of evaluation questions was prepared by IFRC ROE, reviewed and approved by IFRC Belarus and translated into Belarusian language to facilitate the discussions.

In total, there were 30 participants present during the evaluation and the lessons learned exercise. For the list of participants, please refer to *Annex 1*.

## 4. Key findings

During the internal evaluation day, both groups had the task to go through the pre-set questionnaire and discuss the questions on appropriateness/relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability and coordination of the operation.<sup>1</sup> The following sub-sections contain consolidated feedback both from the HQ and the branch staff and volunteers.

### a) Appropriateness/Relevance

The participants highlighted that the support of the IFRC – channelled through the Belarus Red Cross – was highly relevant in the context. The groups reviewed and evaluated the activities of the operation since July 2014 (the first influx of displaced people from Ukraine). Initially – before the activation of the IFRC DREF tool – the National Society’s own funds were used to meet the needs of the vulnerable people. However, these internal financial resources were soon depleted, therefore the launch of the DREF operation, and later on, the Emergency Appeal was much needed.

During the implementation, the needs of the displaced people were constantly analysed and evaluated, which also resulted in the clearly increasing level of beneficiary satisfaction (measured through Beneficiary Satisfaction Surveys, in 2014-2015 the percentage of satisfaction was 70%, in 2016 it reached 85% and in 2017 it showed 93%).

As far as the legal aspect of the programme was concerned, it was notable to see how the attitude of state authorities changed: the displaced Ukrainians were considered as foreigners in the beginning, however, later they were even provided with temporary residence permits with a decree issued in August 2014. This supportive legislation in favour of the displaced Ukrainian people also enabled the Belarus Red Cross to extend its services (help line “201” was launched”) and the Government assigned the Belarus RC to manage this helpline, no other organisation in the country was involved in such activities. The National Society was the key and main partner of the state in provision of support to the ones most in need of it.

### b) Effectiveness

The National Society – from the very first moment of its activities – reacted on the requests and needs of the people. At the beginning, people asking for help were supported, however, during the course of the operation’s implementation, the applied vulnerability criteria was finetuned, allowing a reasonable targeting to be able to address the most vulnerable, i.e. those people who were assessed as not being able to change their situation themselves. This targeting maximized the possible outreach of the National Society. The well-defined target groups of the operation were: people living with disabilities, pregnant women, elderly people, single-parented households and families with many children.

As far as the voucher system is concerned, the participants admitted that they faced some challenges at the beginning of the operation (difficulty to reach the shops in the most distant and remote areas, the

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<sup>1</sup> For the questions, please refer to Annex 2.

vouchers` amount could not be split, BRCS staff and volunteers also had to be present when the beneficiaries used the vouchers). However, these challenges were overcome as another supplier/chain was chosen being present in all regions thus easily reachable, allowing the splitting the vouchers into five parts (allowing to share it and also not having to buy all needed items at once) and also, the BRCS`s presence was no longer needed during the process, which considerably raised the effectiveness of the project. Also, lists of goods were established in agreement with the shops and the BRCS, allowing a free choice for the beneficiaries to buy whatever they needed the most.

### **c) Efficiency**

When it comes to the efficiency of the operation, the extent to which results have been delivered in the least costly manner possible was discussed. The participants highlighted the different kinds of delays which hampered the implementation of the activities. The delays were mostly caused by external factors, such as extensive coordination with donors resulting in receiving the funds with delay, and also the long, bureaucratic procedure of the funds` registration, which triggered other delays, thus the whole project`s implementation was affected.

As far as the project`s documentation and progress monitoring are concerned, an internal task force/working group consisting of 5-6 members (HQ and branch chairpersons) was established in August 2014. This group was responsible for monitoring the situation, collecting systematic data (even from the most remote areas) and compiling weekly, then later on monthly situation reports. This information was inevitable in coordinating the activities, as it informed the whole operation on the needs and vulnerabilities of the Ukrainian displaced people. Progress monitoring became more and more organized as time passed by, this also went hand in hand with the beneficiaries` needs becoming more trackable. Electronic format of reporting was introduced, and the NS received different monitoring and reporting templates from the IFRC, donors and other partners, which also helped them adjust the monitoring of the project implementation most to the needs and context.

Regular meetings were organized to continuously discuss the current situation and context as well as to adjust the operation to the newly emerging/changing needs and vulnerabilities.

### **d) Impact and sustainability**

As a result of the operational implementation, the image of the Belarus Red Cross improved and its visibility has been considerably enhanced. Close cooperation has been established between all partners involved, especially with state authorities.

The operation seen also some negative impacts though: both internally and externally. The capacities of the National Society – both from financial, technical and human point of view – very extremely stretched, which caused a situation close to emotional burnout for its staff and volunteers. The issues they faced and had to deal with day by day, the constant feeling of “stand-by” as well as the fact that they cannot help everyone even if they wished to do so, caused an incredible psychological stress and tiredness to those involved in the operation, which was luckily realized and overcome by organizing regular psychosocial support (PSS) sessions to the staff and volunteers.

However, the staff and volunteers highly appreciated that during the operational implementation they had the opportunity to gain a lot of new experience through working with the beneficiaries, they also received training of different types – which in the long-term contributes to organizational capacity building. The new experience, the direct exposure to the tough circumstances, their functions within the operation sharpened their actions so the NS definitely has a base to build on for the future.

Externally, it was also difficult to manage the sometimes negative critics and approach from the Belarusian citizens – several complaints were received and signs of un-satisfaction were noticed from them why Ukrainian people are helped when there are unmet needs and existing vulnerabilities within the Belarus society as well.

A noteworthy impact of the operation is that some beneficiaries became volunteers, or even staff of the Belarus Red Cross. The project helped the Ukrainians to integrate into the society through receiving the much-needed humanitarian and psychosocial support. Through their integration and socialization, the displaced Ukrainians managed to become fully-fledged citizens of Belarus

Belarusian people from centres of unemployed were recruited to support the operation, which contributed to the enhancement of the unemployment rates throughout the whole country.

## e) Coordination

Movement partners in Belarus are closely coordinating the provision of humanitarian assistance to displaced people from Ukraine. Since 2014, the IFRC, the ICRC and the Swiss Red Cross have been key partners of the BRCS in addressing the most acute humanitarian needs. The IFRC Regional Office for Europe and the IFRC Country Representation in Minsk are supporting the BRCS in coordinating movement efforts. The ICRC has supported the BRCS in developing a database for the electronic registration of beneficiaries considering the number of family members and their financial situation. Movement partners have also provided technical advice in the development of the voucher-based distribution system, psychosocial support trainings, and improvement of the monitoring and reporting systems.

The following Movement partners have supported the BRCS's activities under this emergency appeal: Austrian Red Cross, Canadian Red Cross (from the Canadian Government), Icelandic Red Cross, Japanese Red Cross, Red Crescent Society of Azerbaijan, Red Cross of Monaco, Spanish Red Cross, Swiss Red Cross (from the Swiss Solidarity foundation). In addition, ICRC and Danish Red Cross have supported the operation bilaterally. A total of ten donors, including seven Partner National Societies and DG ECHO have contributed to the appeal in the value of CHF 624,147.

The BRCS is cooperating closely with a number of key humanitarian actors in country including UNHCR, IOM, Department of Citizenship and Migration, Labour, Employment and Social Protection Committees, the Education and Health Departments, local authorities and various NGOs. The BRCS collects and shares live data and information with its state and non-state partners and stakeholders to ensure a timely overview, complementarity of efforts and avoidance of overlap of support.

UNHCR is covering those who have received "refugee" or "subsidiary protection" status. These people are referred to the BRCS branches within the country and receive UNHCR's financial support through the branches. IOM provides legal consultations to displaced people and has assisted several cases of voluntary return. The orthodox and catholic churches support Ukrainians throughout the country and provide second-hand clothes, shoes, food and hygiene items. There are also small local NGOs in all the regional centres of Belarus providing assistance. The NGO "Consultation service for refugees" provides legal support and referral, while the NGOs "Young Christian Women association" and "Business women club" support those in situations of violence, and provide psychological support to women, if needed.

The Belarusian Government's attitude towards displaced people is in general positive despite the existing legal and financial barriers. The State provides support, within its limits, with registration, employment, housing, medical and social assistance. The Ministry of Labour and Social Protection and its Committees of Labour, Employment and Social Protection at the regional and city administrations consult and assist the Ukrainian citizens on employment and social benefit issues. The Ministry created a database on its website with vacancies available for foreign citizens, including those where housing is provided. It has to be noted that housing represents sharing a room in a flat, often with the whole family living in only one room. The Ministry of Health is providing emergency medical care to the citizens of Ukraine free of charge and medical check-ups and health certificates required for employment. The provision of vital medicines for those with chronic diseases (e.g. insulin) remains a critical issue. The BRCS has so far tried to address this on an individual basis with the support of the Ministry of Health and local authorities.

The Belarus Red Cross was closely interacting, cooperating and coordinating with the Department of Social Service, Centres of Unemployment and different state authorities, the support of all of them was highly appreciated during the programme implementation.

When talking about the coordination between the IFRC and the Belarus Red Cross, it was highlighted that there were slight delays with signing the necessary agreements, however, in general all support was provided from the IFRC which was needed by the Belarus Red Cross.

Coordination with the Movement partners was continuously maintained throughout the whole operation, with regular meetings, negotiations, correspondence in place with the IFRC, the ICRC and PNSs.

Coordination within the BRC worked perfectly, in a timely and coordinated manner. It was highlighted by the NS that they are satisfied with their own performance, as the roles and responsibilities were very well defined and distributed right from the beginning, focal points were established, so the whole internal coordination-communication was fully operational. During the timeframe of the operation, the BRC managed to maintain good cooperation both internally and externally – within the organization itself and also with partners. This greatly contributed to the enhanced visibility of the National Society's activities.

Several roundtable meetings, press conferences, and meetings were conducted at different levels (with ministries, local authorities, border control committee, other international organizations) to coordinate the activities and also to disseminate information on the operation.

It was highlighted by the participants that while in most parts of the world, competition is existing between different organizations, in Belarus they managed to work complementarily to each other and used each other's resources, knowledge, and skills to work towards the same goal.

## 5. Risks and challenges

In general, all participants agreed if any challenge was encountered during the course of the project implementation, all efforts were taken by all parties involved to mitigate it as soon as possible.

As mentioned earlier, one of the most considerable operational challenges was the delay of funds, which affected the implementation of the whole operation.

There were cases when the staff and volunteers of the National Society encountered too high expectations of the beneficiaries, which was sometimes very difficult to manage, as all of them were aware that they cannot provide support to everyone, cannot employ all of them, etc. – however, they managed to encourage the beneficiaries to seek for other opportunities, to be more self-reliant, besides benefitting from the BRCS's support.

The mechanism on receipt and proper storage of the vouchers was missing at some places (safes were in place only at oblast level, but not in the districts). It might be good to be able to make the use of the vouchers trackable. There were cases when attempts of selling the vouchers were revealed, with the aim usually to gain more than the voucher's initial amount.

Attitude of the Belarusian citizens towards the Ukrainian people was also a sensitive issue to be tackled, which also triggered internal discussions and sessions within the NS on the proper ways of reaction.

## 6. Lessons learned

The operation saw a huge participation at all levels of the National Society as well as from all partners involved. The fact that the Belarus Red Cross was continuously monitoring and assessing the situation led to the modification and adjusting of the activities if and when it was necessary, thus was able to optimize its resources and focusing on and targeting the most vulnerable people. This was achieved through a well-based and informed analysis of the vulnerability criteria, maximizing the support of the NS to those most in need.

Excellent cooperation and partnership was established and maintained with different partners and state authorities, which was highly appreciated from all sides. The partners added their value and knowledge into the operation, and the project was always open for monitoring purposes for all partners (state and local authorities, Movement partners, PNSs, other organisations), thus upholding the transparency and accountability of all actions.

The improvements to the voucher system made the process more effective, useful and convenient to the users, and also the enhancement of the products' quality was also notable.

The National Society – through the interactions with the beneficiaries – identified the need for PSS both for its own staff and volunteers as well as for the beneficiaries – which was a huge achievement and added value in the operation to prevent them from emotional burnout.

The Belarus Red Cross was constantly working towards to make use of the “development opportunity” in the framework of the operation: the skills and capacities of the trained staff and volunteers have been

greatly enhanced, which can be used and taken further in future operations. Also, the example of the Belarus Red Cross's operation can serve as an example for other National Societies facing similar challenges regarding population movement.

Throughout the operation, the Belarus Red Cross and the IFRC Representation in Belarus maintained close and good cooperation and collaboration with the Ukrainian Red Cross as well as the IFRC Country Office in Ukraine, the CTP delegate from Ukraine also participated at the workshop.

Last, but not least, it has to be highlighted that this Emergency Appeal was the first in the history of the National Society, which was managed in an excellent way to provide support the most vulnerable people – flexibly and fast reacting to the constantly changing situation, needs and challenges, as well as raising awareness of the partners both national and internationally.

## 7. Recommendations / looking ahead

It is clear that after the implementation of the operation, there are still existing, unmet needs. These mostly emerge in the areas of health care, medical support and treatment, food and non-food items, employment and housing. Provision of support to the most vulnerable shall be continued with taking into account the feasibilities in the current context (maybe with reduced quantity, but targeting the most vulnerably population categories, such as the elderly people).

The Belarus Red Cross has broad experience in the use of vouchers, however, this is only one type of cash transfer programming (CTP). In line with the global agenda and strategy for having cash-based interventions at a scale, further investment in CTP capacity building is suggested – drawing on the experience from this Emergency Appeal.

Delays of funds had a definite impact on the operation's implementation. The process of obtaining funding shall be further explored in the future – with the support of IFRC ROE Finance Team if needed – to avoid such delays in any future operations.

As mentioned earlier in the report, some negative approaches within the Belarus society were noticed towards the Ukrainian displaced people. Building upon the availability of an IFRC Regional Community Engagement and Accountability (CEA) Delegate, it is recommended that the Belarus Red Cross seeks for some guidance on CEA as well as participates in future, CEA-related capacity building events.

The past three years showed that the Belarus Red Cross's support was inevitable and crucial; thus the aim should be to continue addressing the most chronic needs with strategic and well-oriented support -with involving the state and local authorities, different partners and with benefitting from the already existing, well-functioning networks.

## Annex 1 – List of participants

1.	Ludmila Kiseleva	Brest regional BRCS branch, accountant
2.	Mikhail Merzlyak	Vitebsk regional BRCS branch, Head of the organizational and legal department
3.	Olesya Kostuk	Gomel regional BRCS branch, vice-chairperson
4.	Alla Smolyak	Chairperson of Gomel regional BRCS branch
5.	Maxim Novikov	Gomel regional BRCS branch, DM coordinator
6.	Igor Plukhaev	Mogilev regional BRCS branch, head specialist
7.	Natalia Markovskaya	Minsk regional BRCS branch, vice-chairperson
8.	Ekaterina Sapega	Grodno regional BRCS branch, Chairperson of Lida district BRCS branch
9.	Elena Kachkapik	Minsk regional BRCS branch, head of visiting nurses service
10.	Dmitry Rusakov	Headquarters BRCS, head of emergency and tracing department
11.	Vitaly Tarashkevich	Headquarters BRCS, DM coordinator
12.	Mark Demidov	Headquarters BRCS, DM coordinator
13.	Idael Guerrero Mengana	Headquarters BRCS, tracing officer
14.	Ilya Melgotchenko	Headquarters BRCS, tracing officer
15.	Evgeny Odinets	Headquarters BRCS, head of international cooperation department
16.	Elena Fadeeva	Chairperson of Minsk city BRCS branch
17.	Oksana Dudenias	Minsk city BRCS branch, head specialist
18.	Tatiana Chernikova	Chairperson of Borisov district BRCS branch
19.	Irina Shulgan	Chairperson of Pervomaisky district BRCS branch
20.	Dorotya Patko	IFRC, ROE, Budapest
21.	Ruben Romero	IFRC, ROE, Budapest
22.	Bilal Hussain Shah	IFRC, Kyiv
23.	Maksim Silin	ICRC, Moscow
24.	Ekaterina Chuvichko	Department for humanitarian activities of the Office of the President of the Republic of Belarus
25.	Tatyana Gaplichnik	Swiss Red Cross
26.	Mukhamed Khavtsukov	ICRC
27.	Katsiaryna Lialeka	IFRC
28.	Sergei Boltrushevich	Danish Red Cross
29.	Anastasia Smirnocia	Department of Citizenship and Migration of the MIA
30.	Anna Buistrova	The Belarusian movement of medical workers

## Annex 2 – Evaluation questions

The key (guiding) questions to be answered by the evaluation are as follows:

### **Relevance:**

- How relevant the project has been regarding the beneficiary requirements, local context and needs?
- How well was the target group identified?
- How do the beneficiaries view the comprehensiveness of package of services offered to or directed towards them?
- How does the project complement intervention of other actors, most importantly relevant Government departments?

### **Efficiency**

- Was the pace of activity implementation satisfactory (or were there any significant delays)?
- Has the project adequately documented, reported and disseminated information on what it is doing/has achieved so far?
- To what extent BRC coordinated with other actors to achieve better results?
- If appropriate how flexible is the project in adapting to changing needs?

### **Effectiveness**

- Assess the efficiency of the programme in converting its inputs (funds, expertise, time etc.) to outputs, with an indication of whether the project has represented good 'value for money' given the resources invested. Could it have been done better, cheaper or quicker?
- What progress has been made towards achieving the project overall and specific objectives, and expected results?
- Where unforeseen challenges to the implementation of the project handled creatively and effectively?
- Has the project used resources cost effectively to maximize benefits?
- Were gender concerns and considerations mainstreamed into the project?

### **Impact and sustainability**

- What are the direct impact prospects of the project at overall objective level, what impacts are already apparent and what impacts appear likely?
- What difference has the project made for/with the planned target groups or other non-targeted groups arising from the project beneficiaries?
- Did the project take timely measures for mitigating the unplanned negative impacts? What was the result? Are any external factors likely to jeopardize the project's direct impact?
- What is the level of ownership of the project by the target groups?
- What are the main factors affecting, either positively or negatively, prospects of sustainability of project outcomes?
- What is the potential for sustaining and continuation of the emerging results and impacts after the project implementation period?

### **Lessons learned**

- What are the lessons learned during this period which can be used to guide the next programme cycle and/or other programmes?
- What best practices emerged from the project implementation? What is the potential and options for replication and knowledge sharing?
- For whom could these lessons have relevance and how do they relate to any innovative aspects of the project?
- Do lessons learned indicated any need for changes in project design in the future to ensure better sustainability?

### **Assessment, planning and management systems**

- How timely and relevant were the different plans, appeals, and management reports?
- To what extent have plans been developed based on thorough, participatory needs assessments and if not, what were the constraints?
- How timely and effective was the response against the needs and stated objectives? What management or other factors explain why the response was/was not delivered in an effective and timely manner?
- How have recovery considerations been incorporated into planning and relief interventions?
- How effective were the systems to mobilize resources – financial, human resources, communications/media, logistics etc.? How adequate is the mobilization of human resources? And what challenges were faced in delivering the appropriate support? Was the IFRC' and the BRC's operational structure well geared to deliver timely, efficient and effective disaster response?

### **Coordination**

- How timely and effective was the coordination system within the IFRC (IFRC ROE and BRC actors)? How well was the structure functioning for both relief and recovery?
- Were the roles, responsibilities and expectations at each level clear (Geneva, ROE, and country)?
- How useful were the IFRC's Principles and Rules in Disaster Response and what did the field need in terms of practical support to aid coordination?
- How effectively has the IFRC coordinated with external actors, particularly the UN, the Government authorities, and the international and national humanitarian community?

### **Risks and challenges**

- To what extent have critical gaps been identified and addressed in a timely way? What main factors helped or hindered the response (security events, infrastructure, procedures, access, etc.)?
- What gaps or bottlenecks were identified? What plans/actions were put in place to address these already or is this an area that still needs to be addressed?
- What were/are the most serious risks or challenges facing the operation? What mitigating factors could be brought in to address these?