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## DREF operation update Belarus: Extreme winter condition

 International Federation  
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

**DREF operation n° MDRBY001**  
**GLIDE n° CW-2012-000006-BLR**  
**Update n°2**  
**5<sup>th</sup> April 2012**

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent (IFRC) 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 emergency response. 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: 1 February - 30 March 2012.



Red Cross winterized tent in Minsk City close to the temporary shelter for the homeless. Photo: Belarus Red Cross

**Summary:** The revised budget for this operation is CHF 95,871 that has been allocated from the IFRC's Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) to support Belarus Red Cross Society. The operation aims delivering assistance to more than 4,000 homeless people and other vulnerable people throughout Belarus. Unearmarked funds to replenish the DREF are encouraged.

Due to the sudden onset of extremely cold weather, many Belarusians' livelihoods already hit hard by the crisis came under extreme pressure. The severe winter has increased the

the vulnerability of the homeless in particular.

The Belarus Red Cross carried out response activities immediately by meeting the basic needs such as hot meals, warm clothing, and blankets of those mostly affected. The situation has been aggravated by heavy snowfalls and continuation of extremely low temperatures. In this context, the operation responded to the increased needs of beneficiaries by setting up winterized tents with equipment to function as stations in the cities where people can warm up and receive services and relief from the Belarus Red Cross Society. Additional food packages, clothes, winter boots, blankets, and mattresses were also provided for the beneficiaries, especially the homeless.

In order to ensure that proper support is provided to the affected people, Belarus Red Cross rescue teams received tools to remove the snow and help trapped vehicles. Also in order to efficiently assist other vulnerable city inhabitants, Red Cross volunteers working on the streets were provided with big

thermos flasks to hand out hot drinks. This operation was expected to be implemented over two months, however at the end of February the severe frosts subsided and relief activities continued on a smaller scale, providing targeted assistance to the most vulnerable, mainly the homeless.

As a result, the Belarus Red Cross made savings of CHF 7,400. In view of the above mentioned circumstances, DREF approval was requested for an extension of the implementation period of the operation until 30 April 2012. During this period the savings will be used for supply of 100 food parcels to the people affected by spring floods in Gomel region, as well as for purchase of technical equipment for 20 Red Cross emergency response volunteers and staff, which was recommended by the "lessons learned" workshop co-facilitated by IFRC in Minsk on 12-13 March 2012.

The operation will therefore be completed by 30th April 2012; a Final Report will be made available three months after the end of the operation (by 30th July 2012).

The Austrian Red Cross, the Icelandic Red Cross and the DG ECHO contributed to the DREF in replenishment of the allocation made for this operation.

The major donors and partners of DREF include the Australian, American and Belgian Governments, the Austrian Red Cross, the Canadian Red Cross and the Canadian Government, the Danish Red Cross and the Danish Government, the European Commission Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection (ECHO), the Irish and the Italian Governments, the Japanese Red Cross Society, the Luxembourg Government, the Monaco Red Cross and the Monaco Government, the Netherlands Red Cross and the Netherlands Government, the Norwegian Red Cross and the Norwegian Government, the Spanish Government, the Swedish Red Cross and the Swedish Government, the United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID), the Medtronic and Z Zurich Foundations, and other corporate and private donors. The IFRC, on behalf of the Belarus National Society, would like to extend thanks to all for their generous contributions. Details of all donors can be found on: [http://www.ifrc.org/docs/appeals/Active/MAA00010\\_2012.pdf](http://www.ifrc.org/docs/appeals/Active/MAA00010_2012.pdf)

## The situation

Freezing weather killed hundreds of people in Central and Eastern Europe over the past two months.

The second half of January 2012 was marked by severe frosts and snowfalls, for which many of Belarus citizens turned to be unprepared. People were affected both by extreme frosts and black ice. Only in Minsk, during the harsh winter period, 129 people were hospitalized with various traumas caused by frostbite and 248 received traumas falling on black ice. Overall, it was estimated that more than 700 people were affected and five people died of hypothermia.

On 1st and 2nd February temperatures had dropped down to 25-29 degrees Celsius below zero, and in some places to 30-32 degrees. From 8<sup>th</sup> February the average night temperatures were around 15-22 degrees

Celsius below zero, falling down to 25-28 and even to 31-34 by 12<sup>th</sup> February. In addition, strong wind and snow hampered road traffic, including transportation of people and delivery of basic supplies to remote areas. This extremely cold weather continued until 20<sup>th</sup> February when severe frosts subsided, however wind and snow showers were still registered in most parts of the country. After a short rise in temperature, mid-March was again marked with low night temperatures of 11-15 degrees below zero. The homeless who had left temporary shelters were hit by cold. At the end of March, spring floods started in Gomel region, Gomel and Zhitkovichi districts. The beginning of April is expected to be marked by snowfalls and windstorms.



Red Cross rescue team assisting stranded drivers.  
Photo: Belarus Red Cross

With DREF assistance and their own emergency fund, the Belarus Red Cross is well prepared to respond to the evolving needs.

The most affected regions and cities are the following:

- Vitebsk region (Vitebsk, Miory, Glubokoe, Polotsk, Novopolotsk and Postavy)
- Minsk region (Minsk city and Stolbtsy, Molodechno, Borisov, Zhodino, Slutsk)
- Gomel region (Gomel city and Rechista, Zhlobin, Mozyr)
- Grodno region (Lida, Slonim, Volkovysk)
- Brest and Mogilev regions

## Coordination and partnerships

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 Belarus Ministry of Emergencies, who provided the Belarus National Society with hands-on information on the evolving situation and the needs of the people.

The Belarus Red Cross is cooperating with local authorities to identify the sites where homeless gather, which includes also dump sites. Red Cross staff and volunteers are visiting these sites regularly, bringing aid or personally informing people where they can receive assistance. Posters with information about distributions are also placed at glass bottle buy-back centres where the homeless often appear.

The Red Cross has also mobilized national and local media to raise public awareness on prevention of traumas and chilblains. A maintenance station in Minsk has agreed to service a Red Cross heavy duty vehicle free of charge.

## Red Cross and Red Crescent action

The operation covering 57 towns has been completed with improved weather conditions, while targeted assistance continued to be provided as follows:



Red Cross action in Minsk region. Photo: Belarus Red Cross

- temporary shelter in Minsk city offering accommodation, meals and advocacy for 87 homeless people.
- assistance with blankets and bed linen was also provided to 32 most vulnerable victims of the domestic gas heater explosion in a residential building in Logoisk district, Minsk region, that on 8 February destroyed an entire section of the house. Families affected in the explosion are currently placed in sanatoriums, hotels or stay with their relatives. The government promised to resolve the issue of their resettlement in the near future.
- at local branch level, assistance is provided daily to 10-20 homeless, released prisoners and those who lost their homes in fires.

The DREF action was partly supported by the Belarus Red Cross emergency fund (approx. USD 5,000). With these funds a total of 200 first aid kits were procured to equip RC volunteers taking part in the operation. The composition of the first aid kit was the following: 1 pair of blunt-ended scissors, 2 pairs of vinyl gloves, 2 masks for the cardio-pulmonary resuscitation, 1 rescue blanket of foil (to protect from overheating / overcooling), 4 triangular bandages, 6 pins, 10 plasters of different sizes or a package of plasters, 5 alcohol-free antiseptic cleansing wipes (each individually wrapped), 1 roll of adhesive plaster, 1 belt bag.

The Belarus Red Cross also appealed to the public for donation of clothing. A total of 5,501 units of clothes such as warm jackets, trousers, sweaters, etc. have been collected and distributed to those in need.

For one of the victims of the domestic gas explosion in Logoisk, who lost part of his leg, the Belarus Red Cross organized fundraising for treatment and rehabilitation to be performed in Israel.

The Belarus National Society mobilized its vehicle fleet to provide the necessary technical assistance during the operation and to transport the injured people to health care institutions. To this end, Red Cross vehicles have been actively patrolling the roads.

Belarus Red Cross Gomel regional branch has started to provide assistance to the people affected by spring floods. At the moment, some 200 families have been affected. Assistance is being provided with the support of the Belarus Red Cross emergency fund and financial support from the Danish Red Cross. In April 2012, the Belarus Red Cross will supply to the floods-affected districts 100 food parcels purchased with DREF funds.

## Progress towards outcomes

### **Relief distributions (food and basic non-food items)**

**Objective: Providing emergency assistance (basic food and clothing items) to approximately 2,000 homeless and other vulnerable people during a two month period**

**Output: The nutritional and winterisation/health needs of 2,000 homeless people are met during the period of harsh winter frosts**

#### **Activities planned:**

- Local procurement of emergency items
- Local procurement of three power generators and barrels for water heating.
- Preparation of distribution plan
- Setting up Red Cross distribution points and tents for 2,000 homeless and other vulnerable city dwellers
- Reaching potential beneficiaries to inform them about assistance available at the Red Cross
- Distribution of emergency items by RC branches and their volunteers through the established distribution points.
- Coordination with local emergency departments and local authorities.
- Monitoring and reporting

#### **Progress:**

Since the start of the operation a total of 18,253 people including 4,252 homeless have been assisted; 203 staff members and 911 volunteers have been mobilised all over the country to provide assistance during the extreme winter conditions.

From the second half of February and onwards, needs for assistance have been high for the targeted homeless, while attendance of Red Cross warming and distribution points by city residents has gradually went down. In the coldest period Red Cross volunteers were distributig hot tea in district polyclinics and open markets, often visited by people from rural areas, as well as at bus terminals. Hot tea was also highly demanded at small railway and bus stations, which often have no heating. In addition, the Brest Red Cross organization provided hot tea to the people queuing up at border crossing checkpoints.



Red Cross volunteers coming back from action in the streets of Minsk City  
Photo: Belarus Red Cross

The needs of people who lost their homes in fires were also taken into account with regards to the provision with blankets and other items. The homeless were mainly reached by mobile Red Cross units deployed at municipal landfills and recycling points, as well as at temporary night-stay shelters for the homeless or social protection centres. Restoring family links and re-socialization support have been added to the activities undertaken by the Red Cross in order to improve the situation of the homeless. The attitude towards the homeless has in general improved among the wide public.

The essential relief component of the extreme weather assistance consisted of sandwiches, canned meat, instant soups, porridge or potato puree and tea. A total of 4,106 food packages were assembled and distributed over the reporting period. Warm clothing, footwear, blankets and mattresses were also provided according to individual needs.

All the supplies planned under the DREF operation have been procured and put in place: eight winterized tents with foldable furniture (chairs, tables, beds), 30 big thermos flasks for hot water and soup, 1,500 units of clothing, 625 blankets, 65 mattresses and 60 pairs of winter boots for the homeless, five sets of radio stations and antennas, tools for Red Cross rescue teams; three power generators, heating fuel and utensils.

A “lessons learned” workshop was held in Minsk on 12-13 March 2012. The purpose of the workshop was to analyze the Red Cross extreme winter condition response operation, strengthen preparedness and response capacities of the Belarus Red Cross in regards to possible floods or other crises, as well as to explore partnership possibilities for joint preparedness efforts. The workshop was attended by 30 Red Cross branch staff and volunteers who have been actively involved in the DREF operation. The participants shared their experiences and lessons learned from the operation, analyzed their capacities and scenarios for response to possible spring floods. The workshop was co-facilitated by IFRC staff from the Minsk office and from the IFRC Zone office.

A press conference dedicated to the preliminary results of the DREF operation and the cooperation agreement with Coca Cola was held on 28 March 2012 at the National Press Centre and became a major event for the Belarus Red Cross.

#### **Challenges:**

Due to the changes in the weather conditions, spring floods affected two districts in Gomel region. Based on the savings of this DREF operation, the Belarus National Society will provide the most vulnerable with 100 food parcels.

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## **Contact information**

**For further information specifically related to this operation please contact:**

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## **DREF history:**

- The budget of the DREF operation was extended and DREF allocation for CHF 49,799 has been formally signed off on 07.02.12. This brings the total allocation to CHF 95,871.



**Click here**

1. Revised DREF budget **[below](#)**
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## How we work

All IFRC 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 the Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response (Sphere) in delivering assistance to the most vulnerable.

The IFRC's vision is to inspire, encourage, facilitate and promote at all times all forms of humanitarian activities by National Societies, with a view to preventing and alleviating human suffering, and thereby contributing to the maintenance and promotion of human dignity and peace in the world.

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

1. Save lives, protect livelihoods, and strengthen recovery from disaster and crises.
  2. Enable healthy and safe living.
  3. Promote social inclusion and a culture of non-violence and peace.
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