

# Emergency Plan of Action Final Report

## Belarus: Extreme winter condition

<b>DREF operation</b>	<b>Operation n° MDRBY004</b>
<b>Date of issue: 22 July 2014</b>	<b>Glide n° CW-2014-000007-BLR</b>
<b>Date of disaster: 18 January 2014</b>	
<b>Operation start date: 18 January 2014</b>	<b>Operation end date: 23 April 2014</b>
<b>Host National Society: Belarus Red Cross with its 140 volunteers, 49 staff, 1 headquarters and 40 branches</b>	<b>Operation budget: CHF 25,920</b>
<b>Number of people affected: 30,000</b>	<b>Number of people assisted: 12,000</b>
<b>N° of other partner organizations involved in the operation: Ministry of Emergencies</b>	

## A. Situation analysis

### Description of the operation

After a relatively mild start, a surprisingly sudden onset of an extremely harsh winter caught many Belarusians completely unprepared, especially homeless people, drivers on the roads and city dwellers who needed to travel long distances by public transport or on foot.

In January 2014 temperatures fell down to minus 22-27 degrees Celsius at night and minus 21 degrees Celsius during the day. Northern winds of 10 to 15 m/sec, snowstorms and black ice added to the severe frosty conditions, making people feeling as cold as if it were minus 30-35 degrees Celsius.

Freezing weather killed six persons in Belarus. Due to strong winds and low temperature many people received traumas caused by frostbites. According to the Ministry of Health, only during the week from 11 to 17 January, about 1,500 people sought medical assistance due to accidents on ice, and over 100 people suffered chilblains. In the course of the DREF operation up to 500 people went on a daily average to see a doctor about hypothermia.

The number of traffic accidents causing severe injuries also increased. A lot of frostbites occurred to drivers trying to start their frozen cars.



A resident of Vitebsk receives hot tea from the Red Cross.  
Photo: Belarus Red Cross



People seek assistance at a Red Cross warming-up station in Vitebsk  
 Photo: Belarus Red Cross

In this context, Belarus Red Cross immediately responded to the needs of the most vulnerable people with setting up winterized tents with equipment to function as safe stations in the cities where people could warm up and receive services and relief from the Red Cross. Belarus Red Cross defined its main role in assisting the people affected by severe frosts with a strong focus on the homeless, stranded drivers and people caught up by the extreme weather in public places. Trained Red Cross volunteers also provided first aid to people with traumas like frostbite and hypothermia.

Beneficiary needs were continuously monitored during the operation. While receiving assistance, city dwellers, homeless people and stranded drivers were interviewed by the Red Cross. Based on interviews with the homeless,

it was found that they lacked access to potable water and basic medication. Based on interviews with city dwellers, it became obvious that additional information should be provided through the media on how one should protect himself/herself in extreme weather conditions.

After the closure of the operation, there is a final balance of CHF 165 which will be returned to the DREF account.

## Summary of response

### Overview of Host National Society

With the support of the IFRC along with the Austrian, the Danish and the Swiss Red Cross Societies, Belarus Red Cross has managed to increase its level of services to the vulnerable population in comparison to previous years – in terms of the number of volunteers, disaster preparedness, response and relief. At the same time, the National Society managed to work further on improving its operational and organizational capacity to increase the level of quality support to even more vulnerable people, reaching out to individuals, families and communities in line with Red Cross and Red Crescent principles.

Belarus Red Cross rescue teams became operational with the equipment and the training provided through previous projects that enabled the teams to respond to the extreme weather conditions throughout the year.

Belarus Red Cross branches have got volunteer emergency response teams trained in first aid, psychosocial support, search and rescue, deployment of relief camps and transportation of victims, as well as maintaining a basic stock of relief items including tents, clothing, and tea leaves, ready for distribution in case of a disaster.

In September and December 2013, large-scale drills were organized in Minsk by the Belarusian Ministry of Emergencies in order to prepare for extreme winter conditions. Being included in the national plan “Snowstorm”, Belarus Red Cross took part in those national simulations. The respective Ministries of Emergencies and Defence, traffic police, local authorities, and corporate partners also participated.

From 27 November to 1 December 2013, Belarus Red Cross conducted its own 3-day training (drills) for its volunteers to further strengthen its capacity to respond to winter frosts and snowstorms. The purpose of the drills was to enable Red Cross volunteers to respond to new challenges in winter conditions. The drills strengthened the volunteers` practical skills in the following areas: search and rescue in snowstorm, driving and handling rescue and auxiliary vehicles in winter conditions, providing first psychosocial assistance as per IFRC standards, assessment of needs at regional level, and development of regional plans for winter 2013/2014. The established regional plans were linked to the Belarus Red Cross`s national contingency plan.

Simulations such as these have allowed the Belarus Red Cross to strengthen and demonstrate its preparedness for large-scale emergencies.

### Overview of Red Cross Red Crescent Movement in-country

In Belarus, there is an IFRC presence with a country office manned by three staff. IFRC is supporting the Belarus Red Cross by providing technical advice, tools and standards, facilitating organizational development and knowledge-sharing, monitoring and reporting.

The IFRC Representation in Belarus and the Belorussian National Society were cooperating closely in assessing the needs and the response to this emergency. The operation was coordinated by Belarus Red Cross branch chairpersons in their areas of responsibility. It was basically Red Cross volunteers who were delivering the emergency assistance.

There were no Partner National Societies physically present in Belarus during the implementation of this operation.

### Overview of non-RCRC actors in-country

From the very beginning of this emergency, Belarus Red Cross branches were in close contact with local authorities and emergency response units of the Ministry of Emergencies, which provided the National Society with hands-on information on the evolving situation and the needs of the people. The Red Cross also worked closely together with the media to raise public awareness on the prevention of traumas and chilblains.

The Ministry of Emergencies invited Belarus Red Cross to join the national plan “Snowstorm”, a new mechanism developed to respond to extreme winter conditions in Belarus. Along with the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Health, city and regional administrations and large enterprises, the role of Belarus Red Cross was clearly defined at the national level. According to the plan, in the case of a snowstorm or a hurricane Belarus Red Cross staff and volunteers are requested to set up warming stations in places where people gather along highways far away from settlements. Belarus Red Cross is also expected to provide support to road police in the evacuation of stranded vehicles in order to clear roads for communal services and safe city traffic.

In addition, Belarus Red Cross signed an agreement with the Road Inspectorate on cooperation in providing assistance to drivers on the roads in extreme situations. The road police can call Belarus Red Cross on a special line in case of requesting assistance in extremely low temperatures if the drivers or passengers’ health is under threat.

During the DREF operation, the Ministry of Emergencies requested Belarus Red Cross on 15 different occasions to strengthen the Ministry’s operational units with Red Cross volunteers and equipment. At the time of the most severe frosts, operational officers coordinated their work with Belarus Red Cross. As a result of such coordination, the Ministry of Emergencies set up its own tents for warming up people upon recommendation of Belarus Red Cross in Minsk region. Also, the Ministry’s warming-up tents were put up in other places where Belarus Red Cross did not have the capacity to do it.

*Coca-Cola Beverages Belarus* donated to the National Society radio communication equipment in the value of USD 1,000.

## Needs analysis and scenario planning

### Risk Analysis

According to Belarus Red Cross’s own assessment and previous experience, the following vulnerable target groups were identified as the most affected by extreme weather conditions:

- Homeless people at places where they usually appear;
- City dwellers in public places;
- Drivers and passengers stuck in vehicles on roads and at border crossings.

Field assessments showed the following needs of these population groups:

- Hot drinks;
- Basic hot meals such as instant soup or porridge;
- Places to warm up;
- Clothing and blankets.

Throughout the operation, Belarus Red Cross and IFRC gauged the situation continuously in order to mobilise additional means of assistance if needed both in the country and internationally. Overall, the situation, the number of people affected and their needs were assessed correctly and addressed successfully by the operation. Additional assistance was sought from the population in terms of warm clothing.



Homeless beneficiaries with Red Cross volunteers at the entrance to a distribution point in Brest  
Photo: Belarus Red Cross

## B. Operational strategy and plan

### Overall Objective

The original overall objective of this operation was to provide immediate assistance to 12,000 people affected by the extreme winter conditions.

Eventually, this operation assisted a total of 15,583 people, including 13,927 city dwellers, 1,003 homeless people and 653 drivers. The number of people assisted by regions, as well as the numbers of staff and volunteers involved in providing assistance, are presented in the table below:

Region	Number of people assisted at warming up stations	Number of homeless people assisted	Number of drivers assisted	Number of volunteers	Number of staff
Belarus RC HQ	0	25	40	0	3
Brest regional branch	451	30	56	10	7
Vitebsk regional branch	1,520	97	24	20	5
Gomel regional branch	1,365	201	5	13	8
Grodno regional branch	584	45	23	13	4
Mogilev regional branch	1,520	10	0	11	7
Minsk regional branch	356	176	24	28	9
Railway branch	981	43	230	10	2
Minsk city branch	7,150	376	251	35	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>13,927</b>	<b>1,003</b>	<b>653</b>	<b>140</b>	<b>49</b>

### Proposed and implemented strategy

To achieve the overall objective of the operation, the following actions were prioritized: provision of hot drinks and food items, immediate access to warming up stations, and assistance to stranded vehicles along with the logistic support these actions entailed.

More specifically, the operation covered the following immediate needs:

- hot meals, tea and shelter were provided to assist 1,003 homeless people. The content of the ration consisted of instant soup/porridge and tea;
- hot tea and shelter in Red Cross tents was offered to 13,927 dwellers caught by the extreme weather conditions;
- hot tea and assistance in starting up stranded vehicles were provided to 653 people either stuck on the roads or waiting in line at border crossings.



Red Cross warming-up and distribution activities in full swing.  
Photo: Belarus Red Cross

The distributions started immediately and were timed in view of the weather conditions (freezing temperatures) in 40 towns of the country.

Actions conducted by Belarus Red Cross were in accordance with the SPHERE minimum humanitarian standards.

Throughout the whole operation, Belarus Red Cross took into account lessons learnt from similar operations in 2011, 2012 and 2013. Thus it was decided not to procure expensive winter clothing for the homeless, learning from a number of previously reported cases when humanitarian aid items were sold for cash by the beneficiaries. Warm clothing for the homeless was provided in the form of second-hand clothing collected from the public. In preparation for extreme weather conditions, regional Red Cross branches had appealed to the population with the request to donate clothing for the homeless.

The needs of the homeless were assessed by reaching them at municipal dumping sites. The key needs identified were access to drinking water and basic medication. To meet these needs, Belarus Red Cross procured drinking water (with DREF funds) and medication (with its own emergency fund).

## Operational support services

### Human resources (HR)

Belarus Red Cross mobilized 140 volunteers for assessments, distributions, maintenance of warming up stations, use of power generators and heating canons, and assistance to stranded vehicles. Volunteers on duty from eight to 24 hours were provided packed meals. The DREF allocation was also used to equip Red Cross emergency response volunteers with 20 sets of winter uniforms and 20 sets of winter footwear. Upon completion of the operation, and in agreement with IFRC Europe Zone DM Coordinator, resources saved on food items were utilised for the replenishment of 20 sets of winter jackets and overalls, which were used by Red Cross emergency response teams and worn off by working with heating equipment, heavy duty vehicles, fuel and lubricants when helping other drivers to get their vehicles started.

49 Belarus Red Cross staff provided support to the action volunteers. Taking into account the DREF operational needs, a part-time DM officer was engaged, who managed the operation activities and was responsible for volunteer coordination and financial management, as well as reporting to the IFRC country office in Minsk. The DM officer was supported by an accountant and an assistant-translator.

There was no need for international staff deployment as the required technical support, including monitoring and reporting, adherence to standard IFRC procedures and financial management, was ensured by the IFRC national staff based in Minsk.

### Logistics and supply chain

Belarus Red Cross has a logistics officer and procurement procedures which follow IFRC procurements standards. The local market allows alternatives in terms of suppliers for all budgeted items. The National Society also has a warehouse and transport vehicles to carry relief items for distributions.

### Communications

Visibility of the work of the Red Cross volunteers was ensured during the operation through close contact with the national and local media. Belarus Red Cross senior management, public relations and DM officers periodically informed the authorities, the media and the general public regarding the progress of the operation. Belarus RC public relations officer regularly attended coordination meetings at the National Society headquarters where the operation progress was discussed. Each week the public relations officer also visited two or three sites where the Red Cross action was carried out in order to ensure proper coverage in the media and on the Belarus Red Cross website.

Over 100 photographic, printed, radio and video materials were issued by the national and local media with more than 1,000 reproductions by other media.

Regular operation updates were provided by the IFRC office in Minsk to the Europe Zone Office's Disaster Management team.

Below are some of the media links related to the DREF-supported operation:

<http://news.tut.by/society/383718.html#co>

<http://minsknews.by/blog/2014/01/22/volonteryi-krasnogo-kresta-pomogayut-minchanam-spasatsya-ot-morozov/>

<http://news.tut.by/society/383521.html>

<http://gorad.by/by/page/town/7649>

<http://gp.by/news/77004.html>

<http://tutgrodno.com/2014/01/krasnyj-krest-v-grodnenskojo-blasti-organizoval-mobilnye-punkty-obogreva/>

<http://grodnonews.by/ru/0/18499/news>

<http://www.kp.by/daily/26184/3073402/>

<http://auto.onliner.by/2014/01/29/red-cross>

<http://vsr.mil.by/2014/02/01/operaciya-moroz/>

[http://ont.by/news/our\\_news/00113648](http://ont.by/news/our_news/00113648)





Coordination with local emergency departments and local administrative authorities:

Belarus Red Cross representatives took part in meetings of emergency commissions at regional, city and district levels. Each Red Cross emergency response team maintained communication with an officer on duty of the Ministry of Emergencies in the area of joint responsibility. Two-way communication was established – the Ministry of Emergencies contacted Belarus Red Cross to suggest some highly vulnerable localities so that the Red Cross could set up its warming-up stations there, while the Red Cross asked for additional support from the Ministry in case its own capacity was not sufficient.

Lessons learned workshop

On 15-16 March 2014 a workshop was held for Red Cross staff and volunteers to share best practices and lessons learned, and to further improve its disaster management capacity. The participants presented the action in each region including challenges. New response plans were developed, taking into account the discussions on challenges and achievements.

The workshop highlighted the following achievements of the operation:

- For the first time, RC emergency response teams worked independently 24 hours a day during the week. The work of volunteers at mobiles warming up stations received a very positive rating from beneficiaries, Belarus Red Cross senior management and Ministry of Health. Six Red Cross volunteers received letters of gratitude signed by the Deputy Health Minister. The Belarus Red Cross DM coordinator, the leader of the emergency response team of the Railways RC branch and the volunteer information coordinator of the operation were awarded certificates of the National Special Purpose Unit of the Ministry of Emergencies.
- Coordination worked particularly well between Red Cross teams and road police units in Minsk and Vitebsk who often carried out joint patrolling.
- Red Cross emergency response volunteers became visible and well-known. The officers of the Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Emergencies units would recognize volunteers in RC uniforms and provide them with information and coordination support.
- A well-coordinated teamwork by volunteers helped avoid queues near warming-up stations and distributions points which at times happened in earlier operations.

The workshop participants suggested the following areas for improvement in future operations:

- Coordination with operational services at local level;
- Engagement of 'professional' volunteers.

At the initiative of volunteers, the workshop also discussed issues of respect of Red Cross emblem and prevention of its misuse.





Lessons learned workshop.  
Photo: Belarus Red Cross

## Challenges

The following challenges were faced by the National Society during the implementation of the operation:

- Despite the experiences of 2012 and 2013, many drivers were stuck in their vehicles due to carelessness. It was decided that prior to the winter season, Belarus Red Cross will, jointly with the road police, carry out a prevention information campaign aimed at drivers in order to ensure that their vehicles are prepared for winter conditions.
- While working with the homeless, some cases were reported that the beneficiaries sold parcels received from the Red Cross. It was decided to provide ready-made hot meals and in case of providing hygiene items to hand out unpacked boxes not fit for selling.
- An insufficient number of trained and experienced volunteers in the regions. After the operation Belarus Red Cross decided to mobilize and train more volunteers.

## Lessons learned

1. Electric heating canons do not cope with the task when working in tents in the field. Therefore, it was decided to start using more powerful diesel heating canons. With up to 50 people being in a tent and up 10-15 people coming in and out each five minutes, warm air was cooled down. Therefore, it was decided to start using more powerful diesel heating canons fenced for safety reasons. According to beneficiaries, with the use of diesel canons the time for warming up a tent was thus reduced from 30 to five minutes.
2. New needs were identified while working with the homeless. Many of them were in need of basic medications (antipyretics, anti-pediculosis). The homeless at municipal dumping sites lack access to drinking water. It was decided to provide basic medications and drinking water for the homeless during such operations. The issue of clean drinking water was also raised in the spring flood response operations. The procurement of one mobile water purification station might be a solution to this problem. The Ministry of Emergencies supports Belarus Red Cross intention to purify and provide clean water and considers including this action by Belarus Red Cross in the national emergency response plan.
3. Volunteers who often worked up to 12 hours felt psychological discomfort and had a risk of professional burn-out. A psychologist of PSS service took questionnaires with 26 volunteers. Based on the obtained data, Belarus Red Cross developed activities aiming to protect the emotional status of volunteers. The activities include basic PSS course, a course on psychological self-defense mechanisms and individual discussion upon completion of the course.
4. It became obvious during the operation that in addition to uniforms, volunteers need vests with pockets to simplify and speed up access to various tools and medical items when providing assistance. To this end, Belarus Red Cross ordered production of 40 special vests for volunteers.
5. Belarus Red Cross emergency response teams lack fuel storage cans for power generators and heating canons. It was decided to procure for each regional branch a certain amount of 50 litre cans with own Belarus Red Cross funds.



**Disaster Response Financial Report**

MDRBY004 - Belarus - Extreme Winter Condition

Timeframe: 23 Jan 14 to 23 Apr 14

Appeal Launch Date: 23 Jan 14

Final Report

**Selected Parameters**

Reporting Timeframe	2014/1-6	Programme	MDRBY004
Budget Timeframe	2014/1-4	Budget	APPROVED
Split by funding source	Y	Project	*
Subsector:	*		

All figures are in Swiss Francs (CHF)

**I. Funding**

	Raise humanitarian standards	Grow RC/RC services for vulnerable people	Strengthen RC/RC contribution to development	Heighten influence and support for RC/RC work	Joint working and accountability	TOTAL	Deferred Income
<b>A. Budget</b>		25,920				25,920	
<b>B. Opening Balance</b>							
<b>Income</b>							
<u>Other Income</u>							
<i>DREF Allocations</i>		25,920				25,920	
<b>C4. Other Income</b>		25,920				25,920	
<b>C. Total Income = SUM(C1..C4)</b>		25,920				25,920	
<b>D. Total Funding = B + C</b>		25,920				25,920	

\* Funding source data based on information provided by the donor

**II. Movement of Funds**

	Raise humanitarian standards	Grow RC/RC services for vulnerable people	Strengthen RC/RC contribution to development	Heighten influence and support for RC/RC work	Joint working and accountability	TOTAL	Deferred Income
<b>B. Opening Balance</b>							
<b>C. Income</b>		25,920				25,920	
<b>E. Expenditure</b>		-25,755				-25,755	
<b>F. Closing Balance = (B + C + E)</b>		165				165	

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### III. Expenditure

Account Groups	Budget	Expenditure					TOTAL	Variance
		Raise humanitarian standards	Grow RC/RC services for vulnerable people	Strengthen RC/RC contribution to development	Heighten influence and support for RC/RC work	Joint working and accountability		
	A					B	A - B	
<b>BUDGET (C)</b>			<b>25,920</b>			<b>25,920</b>		
<b>Relief items, Construction, Supplies</b>								
Clothing & Textiles	1,400		4,508			4,508	-3,108	
Food	7,895		5,247			5,247	2,648	
Utensils & Tools	1,200		1,065			1,065	135	
Other Supplies & Services	3,000		554			554	2,446	
<b>Total Relief items, Construction, Sup</b>	<b>13,495</b>		<b>11,374</b>			<b>11,374</b>	<b>2,121</b>	
<b>Logistics, Transport &amp; Storage</b>								
Distribution & Monitoring	400						400	
Transport & Vehicles Costs	1,000		3,704			3,704	-2,704	
<b>Total Logistics, Transport &amp; Storage</b>	<b>1,400</b>		<b>3,704</b>			<b>3,704</b>	<b>-2,304</b>	
<b>Personnel</b>								
National Staff	2,000		1,997			1,997	3	
National Society Staff	1,803		1,745			1,745	58	
Volunteers	1,900		300			300	1,600	
Other Staff Benefits			823			823	-823	
<b>Total Personnel</b>	<b>5,703</b>		<b>4,865</b>			<b>4,865</b>	<b>838</b>	
<b>Workshops &amp; Training</b>								
Workshops & Training	2,000		1,936			1,936	64	
<b>Total Workshops &amp; Training</b>	<b>2,000</b>		<b>1,936</b>			<b>1,936</b>	<b>64</b>	
<b>General Expenditure</b>								
Travel	200						200	
Financial Charges	240		946			946	-706	
Shared Office and Services Costs	1,300		1,358			1,358	-58	
<b>Total General Expenditure</b>	<b>1,740</b>		<b>2,304</b>			<b>2,304</b>	<b>-564</b>	
<b>Indirect Costs</b>								
Programme & Services Support Recove	1,582		1,572			1,572	10	
<b>Total Indirect Costs</b>	<b>1,582</b>		<b>1,572</b>			<b>1,572</b>	<b>10</b>	
<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURE (D)</b>	<b>25,920</b>		<b>25,755</b>			<b>25,755</b>	<b>165</b>	
<b>VARIANCE (C - D)</b>			<b>165</b>			<b>165</b>		

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Subsector:	*		

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## IV. Breakdown by subsector

Business Line / Sub-sector	Budget	Opening Balance	Income	Funding	Expenditure	Closing Balance	Deferred Income
<b>BL2 - Grow RC/RC services for vulnerable people</b>							
Disaster response	25,920		25,920	25,920	25,755	165	
Subtotal BL2	25,920		25,920	25,920	25,755	165	
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>25,920</b>		<b>25,920</b>	<b>25,920</b>	<b>25,755</b>	<b>165</b>	