

Report 2006-2007



International Federation
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

Chernobyl humanitarian assistance and rehabilitation programme (CHARP)

Appeal No. MAA67002

3 April 2008

This report covers the period from 01/01/2006 to 31/12/2007 of a two-year planning and appeal process.



A thyroid cancer screening performed by a CHARP mobile diagnostics laboratory doctor in Belarus. Photo: Belarus Red Cross

In brief

Programme summary: The Chernobyl humanitarian and rehabilitation programme (CHARP) continued to provide general medical, social and psychological assistance in the six regions of Belarus, Ukraine and Russia affected by the Chernobyl disaster. The core activity was thyroid cancer screening of the priority group of people who were aged below forty years of age at the time of the Chernobyl accident and live in radiation contaminated areas.

In 2006-2007 the programme received donations from the Irish government, the Japanese Red Cross, the Canadian Red Cross, the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) and the Netherlands Red Cross. However it should be taken into consideration that the above mentioned donation of the Irish Government was earmarked for three years, from May 2006 to May 2009. Therefore, the budget for the Appeal 2006-2007 was 85 per cent covered.

Goal: To provide effective medical, social and psychological assistance to targeted individuals in the six regions affected by the Chernobyl nuclear disaster.

Needs: Total 2006-2007 budget CHF 1,268,411 (USD 1,134,536 or EUR 768,734) of which 85 per cent was covered. Click here to go directly to the attached financial reports: [Report 2006](#); [Report 2007](#); and [Report 2006-2007](#).

No. of people we help: In 2006-2007 around 311,000 people benefited directly from the CHARP programme. It is expected that 300,000 people will benefit from the activities planned for 2008-2009.

Our partners: CHARP is implemented by the International Federation together with the Red Cross Societies of Belarus, Russia and Ukraine in close cooperation with the ministries of health and medical institutions of all three countries, as well as with United Nations (UN) bodies and NGOs.

Current context

In 2006, the international community commemorated the 20th anniversary of the worst accident in the history of the civil nuclear industry – the explosion of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant in northern Ukraine on 26 April, 1986. The explosion contaminated vast areas of Belarus, Ukraine and the Russian Federation with tonnes of cancer-causing isotopes. It is estimated that about five million people continue to live in the radiation polluted territories.

In connection with the anniversary, the Red Cross Societies of Russia, Belarus and Ukraine organized a number of high level round-table meetings, press conferences and other commemorating events. A series of international forums were held in the three countries and abroad. The secretary general of the International Federation, Markku Niskala, participated in the international conference, "Twenty Years after Chernobyl", held in Minsk on 19-21 April 2006, while the International Federation's president Juan Manuel Suárez del Toro took part in events organized on 25-26 April by the Ukrainian government in Kiev.

Scientists and other experts discussed and estimated the aftermath of the Chernobyl disaster. All experts admitted that the unparalleled fall-out of radioactive iodine caused a dramatic increase in thyroid oncology pathologies among the children and teenagers, currently there are over 6,000 cancer cases registered. Another serious health consequence of the disaster is psychosocial stress.

On 18 November 2007, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution (A/62/L.12) which calls for continuing attention to the "Chernobyl-related needs" and proclaims the third decade after Chernobyl (2006-2016) as a decade of "recovery and sustainable development" of the affected areas. The resolution recognizes "the contribution of the Red Cross Societies of Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, in response to the Chernobyl disaster and in support of the efforts of the affected countries

Progress towards objectives

Health and Care¹

Objectives: Effective medical, social and psychological assistance is provided to targeted individuals in the six regions affected by the Chernobyl nuclear disaster.

Achievements: The objectives set in the appeal for the period 2006-2007 have been fulfilled. The mobile diagnostics laboratories (MDLs) provided thousands of people living in the radiation polluted areas with an opportunity to receive accurate information on their health status, thus enabling them to undertake adequate actions to prevent and treat detected diseases. Anxiety and stress in people affected by the disaster have been diminished due to the psychosocial support provided within the programme. The distribution of multivitamins supplied by the programme improved the immune system of thousands of children living in the radiation polluted areas. More specifically, four major activities have been implemented in the reporting period: medical screening, psychosocial support, distribution of multivitamins and upgrading the technical capabilities.

¹ In previous programme updates, CHARP was under disaster management, but from now on will be considered as a health and care programme given the work carried out.

Medical screening

From January 2006 to December 2007, the specialists of the six MDLs working within CHARP examined 180,756 people, mainly in the priority target group, i.e. individuals who were aged between 0-40 at the time of the accident and live in remote contaminated territories. Three MDLs operated in Belarus (Brest, Gomel, and Mogilev regions), two in Ukraine (Rovno and Zhitomir regions) and one in the Russian Federation (Bryansk region). According to the recommendations of the latest evaluation in March 2005 the screening was focussed on the areas which have not been screened recently or were not screened at all in the past. Therefore, among those screened, 92,990 or over 51 per cent were screened for the first time since the Chernobyl disaster.

In the examined group, MDL specialists detected 69,152 cases of abnormal scans or pathologies. This means that approximately 38 per cent of all screened people have pathologies of thyroid gland in various stages of development, in particular: nodular pathology (27,596 cases), diffuse goitre (22,301 cases) and thyroiditis (12,892 cases).

The constant increase in cases of nodular pathology detected by MDLs over the last four years arouses particular concern:

- 2004 – 11,891 cases, or 27 per cent of all diagnosed thyroid pathologies
- 2005 – 12,130 cases, or 29 per cent of all diagnosed thyroid pathologies
- 2006 – 13,788 cases, or 38 per cent of all diagnosed thyroid pathologies
- 2007 - 13,808 cases, or 42 per cent of all diagnosed thyroid pathologies

The patients diagnosed as having above mentioned thyroid pathologies are under constant monitoring by Red Cross MDLs because if left undiagnosed or untreated, these pathologies may develop into thyroid cancer.

In 2006-2007 a total number of 20,097 patients diagnosed by the Red Cross MDLs with suspected thyroid cancer were referred to the specialised medical institutions where 429 cases were confirmed through cytological examinations. These patients received necessary treatment and remain under close monitoring by the Red Cross MDLs and healthcare institutions.

Along with the main task of thyroid screening, the MDLs contributed to the strengthening of the primary public healthcare system in rural areas by diagnosing and treating other ailments upon receiving patient requests or results of clinical tests.

Psychosocial support

MDL specialists and Red Cross staff and volunteers continued providing psychosocial support (PSS) to the population affected by the Chernobyl disaster. Their activities focussed on disseminating accurate information about the long-term health effects of the accident and on diminishing stress in the affected communities using such PSS tools as counselling and active listening.

The three National Societies organized six annual PSS workshops in the two-year period on methods and tools for providing psychosocial assistance to the people affected by the Chernobyl disaster. The knowledge received during these training sessions enabled the Red Cross staff and volunteers to educate the population on the consequences of the Chernobyl accident and methods of decreasing the risk of radioactivity and coping with stress. Mainly this was done through counselling, active listening, discussions and other PSS tools and also through the media. The Belarus Red Cross published and distributed among the targeted population leaflets containing recommendations on prophylaxis of thyroid gland illnesses. In total, approximately 66,000 people have received psychosocial assistance from CHARP during 2006-2007.

Distribution of multivitamins

In early 2006, the Netherlands Red Cross supplied the National Societies of Belarus, Ukraine and Russia with 2,490,000 multivitamin tablets which were distributed among the children living in radiation-

contaminated areas. In December, 2006, the International Federation's logistics and resource mobilization department procured an additional 800,000 multivitamin tabs with the financial support from the Japanese Red Cross and the Irish government. The vitamins were distributed in February-March 2007. The above mentioned multivitamins containing C, D and B groups as well as iron, folic acid and stable iodine, strengthened the immunity of 65,800 children. The regional Red Cross branches received reports from schools, kindergartens, and children's hospitals located in radiation-contaminated areas that after taking the multivitamins children complained less of fatigue and headaches, and they were more rarely subject to acute respiratory diseases.

Upgrading technical capabilities

Over the last three years the diagnostic abilities and the quality of examinations provided by the six MDLs have improved thanks to the acquisition of new sophisticated equipment and reagents necessary to carry out examinations, to staff training sessions, and to the introduction of modern screening techniques. In 2007 new ultrasound equipment was supplied to the Zhitomir and Rovno MDLs in Ukraine.

CHARP's MDLs improved their early detection capabilities. In the reporting period all the MDLs except for the Russian one started performing fine needle biopsies. In June 2007 an advanced training workshop was held by the Belarus Red Cross. Taking part in the workshop were MDL doctors from Gomel, Brest and Mogilev Regions of Belarus. The MDL doctors were informed about most progressive techniques on diagnosing and treatment of thyroid gland pathologies. The trainers/facilitators for these topics were leading specialists of Belarus in thyroid gland illnesses.

In 2007 advanced training sessions were organized for MDL PC operators in the Kiev Office (February) and in Minsk (June). The trainings were conducted by the specialist of the Kiev Institute of Endocrinology and Metabolism who had developed the software which is currently used by MDLs. After a certain period of using the software the MDL PC operators and doctors came up with proposals and requests on how to improve it and make it more adjusted to the specifics of the work in the field. Therefore the computer specialist made the necessary changes to the software and provided the appropriate training for the PC operators.

Working in partnership

Both the International Federation's regional representation and the National Societies in implementing CHARP enjoyed close cooperation with the ministries of health, radiological centres, dispensaries and many leading medical experts. Cooperation was legally based on memoranda of understanding signed between the National Societies and ministries of health in their respective countries. At the regional level agreements on cooperation were concluded between the regional Red Cross branches and the medical institutions where the MDLs are based.

Together with the authorities, the regional Red Cross branches in all three countries fund part of the running costs such as Red Cross office rentals, fuel and vehicle maintenance, salaries and accommodation for MDL personnel during their trips to the field. The International Federation provides financial support to the National Society personnel (MDL staff's salaries and per diem), laboratory equipment and reagents, vehicles, fuel and maintenance.

The International Federation is a member of the UN interagency task force for Chernobyl issues and maintains contacts with the World Health Organization, UNICEF, UNDP and several NGOs.

Contributing to longer-term impact

The programme is aligned with the International Federation's Global Agenda, in particular with Goal two, to reduce the number of deaths, illnesses and impact from diseases and public health emergencies. As a result of high quality services of thyroid scanning offered by CHARP, the risk of deaths among the

targeted population because of thyroid cancer was reduced substantially. CHARP activities in the remote areas improve the general health situation of the population.

Psychosocial support and dissemination of accurate information by the Red Cross staff and volunteers on the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster increase the population's abilities to cope with the aftermath of the catastrophe. Special attention is paid to specific groups like pregnant women, or children who will be the next generation living in radiation polluted territories.

Looking ahead

The data collected by the Red Cross mobile diagnostics laboratories shows that there is still a high incidence rate of thyroid illnesses in the affected areas. Therefore basing on outputs of the programme in 2006-2007, CHARP is planning to work in the coming two years on the same conceptual basis concentrating on thyroid screening in remote areas, psychosocial support for the affected population, and the distribution of multivitamins to children living in contaminated areas.

At the same time CHARP as an innovative project tries to study the health consequences of the Chernobyl disaster in order to define what else could be included in the programme's objectives. As a result of this research, breast cancer screening was included in the appeal for 2008-2009.

However, the future activities of CHARP depend on funding which at present has not yet been secured. Despite the above mentioned allocation from the Irish government earmarked for three years (2006-2009), additional funding is needed to enable the programme to continue. The regional representation continues its fund-raising efforts to mobilize international and local input to the programme.

How we work

All International Federation assistance seeks to adhere to the [Code of Conduct](#) and is committed to the [Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response \(Sphere\)](#) in delivering quality and accountable assistance to the most vulnerable. For support to or for further information concerning Federation programmes or operations in this or other countries, or for a full description of the national society profile, please access the Federation's website at <http://www.ifrc.org>

The International Federation's activities are aligned with its Global Agenda, which sets out four broad goals to meet the Federation's mission to "improve the lives of vulnerable people by mobilizing the power of humanity".

Global Agenda Goals:

- Reduce the numbers of deaths, injuries and impact from disasters.
- Reduce the number of deaths, illnesses and impact from diseases and public health emergencies.
- Increase local community, civil society and Red Cross Red Crescent capacity to address the most urgent situations of vulnerability.
- Reduce intolerance, discrimination and social exclusion and promote respect for diversity and human dignity.

Contact information

For further information on this Appeal, contact:

- **Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine Representation:** Nikolay Nagorny, CHARP coordinator, phone: +380 44 228 6110, fax: +380 44 234 5082, email: nikolay.nagorny@ifrc.org
- **Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine Representation:** Joe Lowry, Federation Representative, phone: +380 44 278 6110, fax: +380 44 234 5082, email: joe.lowry@ifrc.org
- **Regional Representation for Belarus, Russia, Ukraine and Moldova:** Tore Svenning, Regional Representative, Moscow, phone +7499 126 15 66; email: tore.svenning@ifrc.org
- **Europe Zone Office:** Leon Prop, Deputy Head, Budapest, phone: +36 1 248 3300; fax: +36 1 248 3322; email: leon.prop@ifrc.org