

Update on the context and situation of children

In political terms, 2019 was a year of transition. In March 2019, President Nazarbayev who had reigned since Independence, resigned from his post. The Speaker of the Senate Kasym-Zhomart Tokayev became the new President and showed a keen interest in children and youth. In fact, children and adolescents have been the priority of the Government in 2019, which was announced as the "Year of Youth". Consequently, President Tokayev approved various legal amendments to enhance child rights protection. In autumn, further legislative changes were initiated with regard to sexual and domestic violence as well as paedophilia.

In April 2019, the Law on the Prevention of Crime among Minors and the Prevention of Child Neglect and Homelessness was amended to introduce the concept of the medical-social registry. Under these amendments, local executive bodies at the regional level are obliged to maintain registries in order to facilitate the provision of medical and psychological services, social assistance, adaptation and rehabilitation for individuals. The Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) introduced Child Rights inspectors in each region to monitor children's situation. As of today, 8,000 families in difficult circumstances and 13,000 children living within such families are registered by municipalities.

Social sector reforms announced by the First President in February 2019 led to adjustments to the targeted social assistance (TSA) programme, implementing child-focused measures first proposed by UNICEF in 2017. Measures such as an increase to the poverty line, a revised means-testing methodology, simplified application procedures and improvement of outreach and social work led to a significant increase in the coverage of children with social benefits. While welcome, this increased coverage does raise the issue of sustainability of the programme. The government is planning revisions to the law on TSA in 2020.

In 2019, at the initiative of the first President, a new mortgage lending program called "Baqytty Otbasy" (Happy Family) was launched to further increase the availability of housing mortgages for vulnerable population. Such a loan is provided to large families with 4 or more children; families raising children with disabilities; single-parent families with minor children. In June 2019, the President signed a decree instructing the Government and the National Bank to write off debts on unsecured consumer loans to large families, families with children with disabilities, recipients of TSA, orphans, and other categories.

In 2019, the Government showed remarkable commitment and global leadership in returning children from conflict zones in Syria and Iraq. In total, the Government returned 406 Kazakhstani children from Syria and 14 from Iraq. The longer-term re-integration process for these children will need continued attention in 2020 and beyond.

In the area of health, Kazakhstan's investments in boosting adolescent mental health seem to be bearing fruit. The National Statistics Office (NSO) released data confirming a decrease in suicide rates by 42 percent in adolescents aged 15-19 (girls: 57 percent; boys: 35 percent) during the period of 2011-2018.

Despite high measles immunization coverage (99% for first dose and 98% for the second dose) reported by the country over last two decades, 13,326 measles cases were registered in 2019. The reliability of data is the challenge.

Despite improvements in the nutritional status of women and children, unhealthy diets and obesity are becoming pressing health risks in recent years. According to WHO reports in 2019, almost 20 per cent of children aged 6-9 suffer excessive weight or obesity, mostly a result of unhealthy eating habits and insufficient physical activity.

Injury is a leading cause of death and hospitalization to children in Kazakhstan. According to NSO, in seven months of 2019, 319 children died from unintentional injuries: 145 due to traffic accidents, 22 from drowning, 99 from falling, 53 poisoned by carbon monoxide. In addition, the Ministry of Health (MoH) reports 36,227 children injured in the first nine months of 2019.

The Government adopted a new State Health Development Programme for 2020-2025, which commits to continue the scale-up the universal progressive model of home-visiting system nationwide. The programme also includes the development of healthy schools programme, strengthening immunization, nutrition, and suicide prevention programmes. Following the advocacy of UNICEF and UNFPA, the MOH has initiated changes in legislation to allow adolescents at the age 16 and above to seek medical consultations assistance without parental consent in the area of adolescents' reproductive and mental health. The amendments to the legislation are submitted to the Parliament for endorsement.

The quality of education and learning outcomes still require attention in Kazakhstan. The newly released Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) results showed that the average in reading literacy was 387 points, in mathematics - 423 points and in science - 397 points, which are lower than the OECD averages.

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A new State Education Development Programme for 2020-2025 was approved, focusing on the importance of equitable preschool education, access to and quality of education, inclusion & learning outcomes, safe environment in schools, including bullying, and 21st century skills covering functional literacy of students, independent search and critical thinking skills.

In addition, the Government approved the National Plan on the Quality of Life of Persons with Disability until 2025 with main areas for improvement including preventive services, early intervention and rehabilitation, access to infrastructure, education, employment and social services, introduction of ICF into the disability identification and assessment procedures.

In 2019, Kazakhstan presented reports under several international human rights instruments including the second periodic report of Kazakhstan on implementation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the fifth periodic report of the Republic of Kazakhstan on the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the third report under the Universal Periodic Review. All reports highlighted progress in implementation of child rights as well as specific challenges in Kazakhstan. The Universal Periodic Review (UPR) reviewed Kazakhstan's human rights record in November 2019. Sixty-four UPR recommendations for Kazakhstan refer specifically to children, in particular on migrant workers and members of its families, protection from all forms of violence, including domestic violence, sexual violence, access to inclusive education, social inclusion and children with disabilities.

Major contributions and drivers of results

Every child survives and thrives

In 2019, UNICEF continued to support the scale up of the universal progressive model of home-visiting nursing (UPHV). MOH adopted a plan to ensure full introduction of the UPHV model in all 17 regions and trained 14,342 home visiting nurses, 3,176 general practitioners and 1,108 paediatricians to that effect. However, supervision and quality assurance need further attention as the model is rolled out country-wide. As a result of UNICEF advocacy, the Government raised the salary of fully trained home visiting nurses by 20 percent, to increase their motivation.

UNICEF in partnership with the local authority established a regional IMCI resource center under the medical college in Turkistan city. The training center increased the availability of innovative educational resources contributing to improved skills of service providers with the capacity to train up to 1,000 healthcare workers annually.

To improve psychosocial support to children and adolescents living with HIV (C&ALHIV), UNICEF Kazakhstan released national standards guiding the provision of care, with a focus on the inclusion of children and families as partners. UNICEF and Karaganda State University will incorporate these standards into the national education curriculum. Adoption of the new standards led to major changes in the practice of AIDS centres in pilot regions.

In 2019, use of UNICEF procurement services increased 3 times compared with 2018, reaching over US\$12.6 million. Procurement of antiretroviral drugs through UNICEF helped to increase coverage of HIV patients by more than 38 percent (from 13000 to 18000 people). In 2019, UNICEF supplied four types of vaccines for the total amount of US\$9.4 million.

In April 2019, UNICEF Kazakhstan supported the regional symposium on sustainable food systems and nutrition governance. As a result, eight member countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) committed to develop a strategy and action plan on improvement of children's nutrition. A Kazakhstan delegation was supported by UNICEF to participate in the regional conference on optimal infant and young child feeding for prevention of double-burden of malnutrition in July 2019. The Conference enhanced the knowledge of managers from mother and child health facilities on the newly revised baby-friendly hospital initiative guidelines and recent developments in enforcement of the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes.

Kazakhstan is actively sharing its experiences in mental health, the home-visiting system, nutrition within Central Asia and beyond. In 2019, CO and ECARO in close partnership with MOH, MOES and WHO, organized the second meeting for Eastern Europe and Central Asia on Adolescent Mental Health and Wellbeing. The meeting confirmed the leading position of Kazakhstan in the sub-region in pursuing mental health reforms and promoting wellbeing of children and adolescents. In November, the Minister of Health shared Kazakhstan's experience in adolescent mental health at the Leading Minds for Children Conference, highlighting that prioritization of adolescent mental health and affordable scalable interventions have ensured success in decreasing the teenage suicide rate and also triggered a larger process of reforms towards mainstreaming mental health in PHC services.

UNICEF CO supported two international study visits: on the UPHV model for Uzbekistan and Ukraine; on adolescent programming on HIV and mental health for Iran. Kazakhstan's experience on the UPHV model was also shared with Ukraine

and Kyrgyzstan.

Every child learns

Children dropouts

Social workforce strengthening continued in the education sector. The 2019 mid-term results of the UNICEF-supported pilot on testing of an early warning system for prevention of school dropouts showed that it had helped to address individual needs of children. The needs assessment/case management tools provide segregated information on respective factors faced by girls and boys at risk of dropping out. In seven pilot schools, the case management process was applied by early warning system teams using tools to measure risk indicators, appointment of a case manager and developing individual learning and support plans. In response to the needs of children with special educational, emotional and behavioural needs, schools adopted multifaceted approaches. Assessment reports show that no single strategy in isolation can increase student engagement and retention. Phase two of the programme was launched in 2019-2020 school year, focusing on sustainability and scale up of generated practices in policies and among think tank institutions in the education sector.

In the selected schools, with UNICEF support, developmental supervision was provided to a caseload of 213 children with special educational and emotional needs at risk of dropping out from school and in home schooling (60 percent boys, 40 percent girls). Supervision remains a new concept in Kazakhstan and the demand for it is low among case workers and supervisors.

Every child is protected from violence and exploitation

Following the amendments to the Law on the Prevention of Crime among Minors and the Prevention of Child Neglect and Homelessness in April 2019, the Committee on Children's Rights initiated development of standards on the provision of special social services for children. This is an important step that UNICEF has been supporting by providing technical support and development of a comprehensive methodological tool on provision of interventions for children with emotional and behavioral needs. UNICEF has developed a standard and educational module for specialists on provision of services for this category of children. The standard introduces three levels of intervention by different institutions and specialists, involving special schools for children. The aim of the standard is to provide special social services to achieve psycho-social well-being and resilience for children in difficult life circumstances.

Deinstitutionalization

Kazakhstan has undertaken efforts to make the transition from large-scale institutional care for children who have been separated from their biological families to approaches based on family- and community-based care. The transition includes the shift from residential care to day care and development of alternatives. This trend resulted in reduction in the use of residential care by 25 per cent during 2012-2018 (from 188 in 2014 to 119 in 2018). A similar trend in reduction of the number of placed children affected by migration is identified in the Centers of Adaptation of Children. UNICEF's consultations with 40 central and local levels child protection authorities in June 2019 covered the priorities in development of social services for children, transformation of existing residential care facilities into child support centers. Findings of the analysis on the status of de-institutionalisation and child protection system were discussed. A set of recommendations for the ministries of education, health and social welfare included the need for strategic directions of the transformation of services, legislative amendments in strengthening the support service provision, coordinated and quality assured capacity development of child protection specialists in determination of the best interest of the child.

Children affected by migration

The UNICEF-supported 'Mapping of Kazakhstan's national system's capacity gaps to respond to the needs of children affected by migration with a focus on unaccompanied and separated children (UASC)' was presented and validated in November 2019 under the EU supported Action on Children Affected by Migration. It has identified key bottlenecks in identification, referral and support mechanisms for UASC. The study also looked into the operation of Centers of Adaptation of Adolescents. These semi-closed facilities have now less children affected by migration. The principles of the best interest of the child, confidentiality and non-separation of children from undocumented parents are not yet followed by service providers. NGOs working with migrant families have little experience in assisting children affected by migration and lack consistency in case management and social work techniques.

In a major breakthrough, in November 2019, Kazakhstan amended its Code on Marriage and Family to allow universal birth registration for all children regardless of the legal status of their parents, a major step towards ending statelessness.

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UNICEF's worked with the National Academy of Public Administration (APA) to develop a training programme for civil servants, immigration officers and social workers on international standards and best practices around children in migration. The training needs assessment covering 6 universities revealed the absence of information about protection of children affected by migration in their training programmes. International norms, access to social services, birth registration, prevention of statelessness, and best interest of the child determination are not covered in the curriculum. The newly developed education module includes three parts (1) international standards and best interest assessment; (2) immigration procedures, alternatives to detention, tracing and reunification with families; and (3) case-management for protection of children in migration processes, access to education and health.

Access to Justice

In the area of judicial reforms, the Supreme court continued development of alternative dispute resolution, expansion of electronic systems and the family court pilot projects. All Kazakhstani courts are now equipped with audio and video recording systems, which makes proceedings more transparent and accessible to citizens. Efforts included establishment of 46 out-of-court mediation centers and over 1,000 mediation offices. Additionally, 84 mediation judges work within the court system to promote pre-trial resolution of disputes where possible. Over half of cases submitted to mediation lead to settlement before trial. These reforms have accelerated during the reporting period, with UNICEF providing support in sharing best practices and ensuring alignment with international standards.

With advocacy of UNICEF, the mandate of the National Preventive Mechanism (NPM) was expanded allowing to monitor a larger number of closed child care institutions. In total, more than 200 additional child care institutions (i.e. orphanages, institutions for children with disabilities), are subject to regular and independent monitoring. Expanding the mandate allows to ensure best interests of children, prevent violations of their rights and to ensure that their dignity is respected. Due to NPM monitoring visits and follow-up actions, conditions in some institutions for children are improving while some institutions were strongly recommended to be closed, while arranging alternative family-based care. UNICEF continues to partner with the Ombudsperson for Human Rights to support the NPM through capacity building activities, conducted jointly with UNDP and others.

Children with disabilities

UNICEF's advocacy with the central health, social welfare and education authorities as well as the Ombudsperson for Children about the introduction of International Classification on Functioning, disability and health (ICF) resulted in its inclusion into the new State Health Development Programme with planned budget, and the National Plan on the Quality of Life of Persons with Disability 2025. The child's functioning elements are included into the testing of standard protocols to collect data on children in residential care. The ICF introduction has also been promoted by UNICEF through the improvement of EMIS systems.

Based on the results of UNICEF's review of social work with the focus on quality assurance, international definitions and case management processes were incorporated into the draft amendments to the legislation and presented in the Senate.

Children returnees

In 2019, the Government of Kazakhstan returned 406 Kazakhstani children from Syria and 14 children from Iraq, demonstrating its commitment to return children from conflict zones. In Iraq, the children's mothers are serving prison sentences on the basis of their association with armed groups there and the children were mostly in prison with their mothers. Return to Kazakhstan was deemed in the best interest of these children and after a rehabilitation period, most children will be under the care of their relatives. UNICEF provided support to this Government operation starting from the early planning stage of the return process, in line with key humanitarian principles and the best interest of the child. UNICEF facilitated the verification, legal proceedings and aspects of the logistics in close coordination with UNICEF Iraq office; provided training to 47 psychologists delivering gender-responsive services to returnee children; advised on the care of children during the return process; shared ethical principles in covering the issues of children in the media; briefed medical personnel traveling on the evacuation flight and supporting the children upon return; and advised on the establishment of the rehabilitation centre and its services.

Violence prevention

In 2019, the need to systematically address violence against women and children in Kazakhstan was highlighted by several international human rights instruments. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women recommended Kazakhstan to encourage reporting of all forms of gender-based violence against women and girls, strengthen investigation, protection and service provision to victims of domestic violence as well as training on prevention and identification of gender-based violence. The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights recommended Kazakhstan to review the issue of gender role stereotypes and their consequences for both family and social life as well as to prevent

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and address bullying and violence in schools. Kazakhstan has advanced policies related to preventing and addressing violence, abuse and neglect of children by developing guidelines for inter-agency collaboration and standard operating procedures supported by UNICEF as well as by initiating sector-specific regulations. Legislation was adopted making reporting of cases of violence against children mandatory by health, education and social protection specialists.

In 2019, the ongoing Communication for Social Norms and Behavior Change campaign for prevention of VAC reached more than 1.5 million persons in Kazakhstan. The campaign is implemented by UNICEF jointly with the Ombudspersons for Human and Child Rights and MoES and focused on positive parenting. Social media influencers became key supporters of the campaign and rolled an online positive parenting marathon throughout the year. While achieving social norms change is a long-term process the campaign has contributed to a more open dialogue on VAC in Kazakhstan in national media and among the public including the private sector. Addressing VAC was included as priority in the newly adopted state health and education programmes 2020-2025.

Every child lives in a safe and clean environment

Injuries prevention

In 2019, UNICEF presented the results of the Knowledge, Attitude, Practice study conducted among parents on child safety and injury prevention. Results and recommended actions were integrated into the Child Injury Prevention and Communication Strategies developed in partnership with the National Center for Public Health Care. With 3,000 surveyed parents and caregivers of children 0-14 years of age in 8 regions of Kazakhstan, the study revealed that, overall, parents are concerned about child safety: 96 per cent personally took actions to avoid unintentional injuries to their children, 73 per cent of parents largely agreed that injuries involving children could be avoided. UNICEF facilitated focus groups with children who have experienced injuries to discuss lessons learnt and tips for peers and adults on preventive measures. Moreover, specialists in the health, education and social protection sectors strengthened their capacity on child injury prevention based on the WHO modules.

Air pollution

To facilitate exchange on mitigating air pollution consequences on maternal and child health, UNICEF Mongolia organized an international conference on combatting impact of air pollution on maternal and child health that was held in October 2019. The delegation of Kazakhstan presented its policies and actions against air pollution, including the new Ecological code introducing the "polluter pays" principle, the automated emissions monitoring system, the waste production and consumption management enhancement. Also, the risk map of environmental impact on public health and local comprehensive plans aimed at decreasing the environmental pollution for 2018-2022 was presented by Kazakhstan.

Every child has an equitable chance in life

Children in poverty

Targeting effectiveness and coverage of a flagship cash transfer programme for the poorest families with children remain a major focus of UNICEF interventions and support to the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection (MLSP). Based on UNICEF's pre-reform recommendations, adjustments to the Targeted Social Assistance (TSA) were implemented by the new government in April 2019. Some of the UNICEF policy 'wins' included increasing coverage by raising the subsistence minimum level (SML) poverty threshold from 40% in 2018 to 70% in 2019. The UNICEF-supported study also helped review the national subsistence minimum to update the consumer basket methodology in 2017. This resulted in a modest 10% value increase of the TSA, whereby all children in families below the 70% SML poverty threshold are eligible to cash benefit of 20,800 KZT (USD\$55) per child. Furthermore, a revised means test, which limits the definition of a household to direct relatives, represents a more equitable method for computing household income and therefore entitlements. UNICEF's recommendation to eliminate social benefits from the means test was also adopted. Previously, consideration of social benefits prevented households in receipt of these benefits from qualifying for TSA. The reforms have resulted in an increased coverage of poor children: 1,504,600 out of 2,396,827 TSA beneficiaries by end of November 2019 compared with 363,234 children out of 571,584 TSA beneficiaries in 2018.

However, hastily implemented reform also resulted in high inclusion errors. It led to new government initiatives by end 2019 aimed at tightening administrative rules and separate a benefit for families with four and more children into a separate social transfer program. The full effects of the policy revision and design improvements on exclusion errors and targeting effectiveness of means-tested social assistance needs to be assessed in 2020.

The 2019 cash transfer reform led to an increasing focus on linkages and referrals for families with children benefiting from

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targeted social assistance programs. MLSP continued to pilot approaches to integrated social protection, including the UNICEF-supported 'cash plus' approach. These include improving integrated MIS, introduction of family and child focused assessment tools into TSA MIS (e-halyk) and strengthening the role of the community-based social service workforce. UNICEF supported case management tools and a training package on social work core competencies was rolled out in 3 pilot regions.

With the support of UNICEF, Kazakhstan participated in the first global Child Friendly Cities (CFC) Summit held in October 2019. With more than 600 participants, the Summit provided an opportunity for mayors, local leaders, experts and children to share their experiences in building more child-friendly cities and communities. Kazakhstan was represented by the Deputy Mayor of Ust-Kamenogorsk city, Head of the Education Department of Almaty city and two children from Petropavlovsk and Nur-Sultan cities. Kazakhstan presented its experience on CFC implementation, including the assessment system and capacity building on child-participatory urban planning. Children spoke at the sessions on school nutrition and cyber-bullying and co-facilitated sessions on developing the Child and Youth Manifesto.

In total, 213 adolescents directly participated in UNICEF-supported activities related to civic engagement, innovations and programme designing and monitoring.

On the eve of World Children's Day, UNICEF presented the findings of a new situation analysis. The presentation of the report was organized with the participation of school children who shared their personal stories on topics ranging from inclusion to bullying, air pollution to injury prevention and nutrition. The event resulted in over 40 media stories and triggered reactions from decision-makers that have since called on UNICEF and partners to work towards solutions to the issues that had been raised.

UNICEF conducted an evaluation of the impact of Primary Health Care (PHC) on Infant and Child Mortality Reduction during 2000 – 2017, including an assessment of the UPHV Model. The findings of the evaluation showed that the UPHV is an effective solution to improve children's lives in the country. Breastfeeding and parents' awareness of the prevention of infectious diseases has experienced a positive evolution in the pilot areas.

Communications: UNICEF boosted its online presence, nearly doubling the number of followers across social media platforms and now ranking first among UN agencies with both regional and country coverage. At 20,000 followers, the office exceeded its 2020 target. The growth is primarily attributable to 1) engaging social media influencers through the positive parenting marathon and campaigns; 2) producing compelling content accompanied with strong visuals 3) better use of ads and targeting – the office is updating its digital media strategy and for the first time running YouTube adverts. As a result, UNICEF Kazakhstan estimates that over 3 million people were reached through paid ads, while organic reach is over 2.5 million.

Lessons Learned and Innovations

Social work

To sustain the multi-sectoral social workforce quality assurance operational procedures, cross ministerial policy work is required. For better support to children with special educational needs the "whole school" approach should be employed, covering inclusive ethos and inclusive education teaching and learning. In identification of children at risk of dropping out of education, the improvement of data tracking and recording mechanisms is needed with the focus on accuracy of dropout predictions by combination of multiple risk factors. The capacity building strategy should focus on development of knowledge and skills of professionals at school and regional levels about the early warning mechanism and monitoring of children at risk to sustain the continuity of practices. UNICEF will support the documentation of the "whole school" approach and guide data tracking and recording mechanisms. In coordination with government partners, the tested early warning mechanism and monitoring of children at risk will be prepared for scale up, including through development of in-service training manuals.

Violence against children

Recent changes in the legislation related to mandatory reporting of violations of child rights and sanctions for non-reporting are positive, but both the system and the frontline health, education, and social protection workers are not fully ready to accommodate the new regulations. The roll-out of such legislation needs careful planning. If not supported by a dedicated and trained social service workforce for managing child abuse and neglect cases hasty roll-out can lead to unnecessary separation of children from their families.

Migrant children

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A new study on the child rights protection system for children affected by migration in Kazakhstan yields some interesting lessons. Among Kazakhstani children reasons for becoming unaccompanied or separated include intra-family violence, neglect or abandonment, parental addiction. Among non-national children: independent job seeking and work in family enterprises. National children have greater chances to be identified by the child protection system compared to non-national children.

Partnership with business

In 2019, UNICEF identified new ways to partner with business in Kazakhstan. For example, a new partnership with the national post service Kazpost focuses on promoting positive parenting practices among staff and customers. To promote inclusion and the rights of children with disabilities, UNICEF and 'Samryk Kazyna Trust' launched a joint campaign #ItsAllAboutAbility. The campaign envisages that businesses will contribute to creation of enabling environment for inclusion in their communities and provide equal opportunities for persons and children with disability. The campaign was supported also by MEGA Silk Way shopping center, MYD production, Kazpost, Astana Football team and Akimat of Saryarka district of Nur-Sultan city.

To advance our partnership with the private sector, more evidence is needed. Thus, Kazakhstan CO has started a landscape analysis of business and its potential impact on child rights realisation to enable more strategic engagement. Also, additional investments are required in operationalising shared-value partnerships with the private sector.

Innovations

In close collaboration with the Innovation Fund, DFAM and ICTD, Kazakhstan CO jointly with ITU through the Innovations Lab has developed a smart contract, based on blockchain technology, applied to Direct Cash Transfers according to the HACT procedure. The solution facilitates increased transparency and accountability in transferring resources and goods to UNICEF partners.

The UNICEF Kazakhstan Innovations Lab continued hosting various educational events, including workshops, lectures, a Data Science Challenge and an 8-week summer residency to develop skills of over 125 young people (under 25 y.o.) in the areas of Big Data, project management, critical thinking, while strengthening their knowledge on SDGs and child rights. Three projects, developed by young people with the support of the UNICEF Kazakhstan Innovations Lab mentors, have been presented at the Digital Health 2.0 Forum organized by the Ministry of Health. For example, the Sequence application, developed by two young girls, helps to monitor a person's daily intake of medications and has been ranked among the top-20 ideas by the global Google Science Fair. Also, a case management prototype has been developed to create a unified interlinked database of social services for families with children.

In 2019, UNICEF continued to support the established drone corridors in Kazakhstan. In partnership with the Central Asian Center on Emergencies and Disaster Risk Reduction (CESDRR), several rounds of UAV testing flights were conducted with participation of experts from government agencies (for emergency situations, forest and environment protection, avalanche and landslide prevention), province and local level administrations. Use of drones in search and rescue of a child, wildfire identification and response and flooding risk assessment was tested in the southern and northern drone corridors. Local emergency specialists gained knowledge and experience on how UAVs can help them during disaster risk reduction and emergency response. An international round table event on the drone testing experience and knowledge sharing was held in Nur-Sultan in May 2019, with participation of disaster risk reduction experts from Central Asia, Russian Federation and from several international organizations. Through the activities of the UNICEF CO the authorities in Kazakhstan and the CESDRR, have started to explore the use of and strengthened their capacities on UAVs. As a result, the Government of Kazakhstan established a dedicated drones unit under the Committee for Emergency Situations. UNICEF will continue providing technical expertise to the responsible staff in the Emergency Committee. Drone testing corridors will be used by the CESDRR to test the drone technology before engaging in specific contracts with the government and new use-cases.

In 2019 nine new partnerships have been established, involving Government, academia, and local business to inform, help and co-design solutions with an impact on children. In partnership with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, UNICEF Kazakhstan Innovations Lab continued to work on strengthening innovative skills of young people by hosting various educational events, including workshops, lectures, Data Science Challenge and 8-week summer residency. As a result, 125 young people (under 25 y.o.) from different regions of Kazakhstan developed skills and knowledge in the area of Big Data, project management, critical thinking, and strengthened their knowledge on SDGs and child rights.

A new partnership was established with the Kazakh National University Technopark to cooperate in the area of STEM, with specific focus on girls. Under the new programme, supported by UNICEF Innovations Fund, an educational course on building nanosatellites will be developed, and a group of girls and young women will participate in the training and will build a nanosatellite prototype.