

SAFER COMMUNITIES, SAFER CHILDREN:

UNICEF and International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) collaborate to reduce the risks of disasters in the Central Asian countries of **Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan**



Disclaimer

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UNICEF and Committee of Emergency Situations and Civil Defence staff delivering humanitarian assistance to people affected by floods and mudflows in the Vahdat district, Tajikistan, on 2 August 2023.

SUMMARY

UNICEF and IFRC have forged a unique partnership to strengthen local and national capacities for risk reduction and emergency preparedness and response in hazard prone countries of Central Asia, supported by USAID/BHA.

Natural hazards such as earthquakes, floods, droughts, landslides and disease outbreaks have always posed risks to children, families and communities in [Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan](#). However, some of these events are now increasing in frequency and severity. Their impacts are also becoming more devastating as growing inequality, environmental degradation and the effects of conflict in the region make communities and children more vulnerable. This confluence of factors, along with variable levels of preparedness and response capacity, threatens to deepen existing disparities and the realization of rights for boys and girls.

Since 2019, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and national Red Crescent Societies, supported by funding from the United States Agency for International Development's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (USAID/BHA), have partnered to address the increasing risks of disasters and humanitarian crises affecting the subregion. Together with the national governments and local authorities in [Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan](#), and in coordination with the Centre for Emergency Situations and Disaster Risk Reduction (CESDRR),¹ the partners are enhancing disaster risk reduction (DRR) and emergency preparedness and response capacities, enabling the countries and communities to become operationally ready to provide timely, effective and inclusive responses that consider the special needs, vulnerabilities and capacities of children and their families.

This partnership was developed to complement the mandates and comparative advantages of the partner organizations, building on their long-term presence in the five countries and their strong ties with national and local authorities. With their extensive community networks throughout the region, the national Red Crescent Societies act as first responders during emergencies, while enhancing community resilience. As the world's largest humanitarian network, IFRC supports the national Red Crescent Societies to meet and further global humanitarian standards with national

governments, in the interests of vulnerable people. UNICEF, as the world's leading advocate for children and the global cluster lead agency for education, nutrition, and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) and sub-cluster lead agency for child protection in emergencies; as well as being a key actor on social protection and cash transfers in emergencies, put its convening power, technical expertise and global supply chain behind this work.

"This partnership is a unique example of how different mandates, skills and expertise can come together for better results for children and families at risk of or impacted by humanitarian disasters."

Octavian Bivol, Deputy Regional Director,
UNICEF Europe and Central Asia

"All partners played crucial roles and brought their experience, technical knowledge skills and resources in their different roles and made this partnership a success. This workshop is an excellent opportunity for revisiting five components and cross-cutting elements of our programme to reflect our achievements, progress, and challenges but also the way forward on each action."

Seval Guzelkilinc, Head of Delegation, IFRC,
Central Asia

¹ CESDRR is a permanent intergovernmental organization established by the Governments of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan to ensure effective mechanisms to reduce disaster risk, mitigate the consequences of emergencies, organize joint responses in emergencies, and stimulate regional and international cooperation.

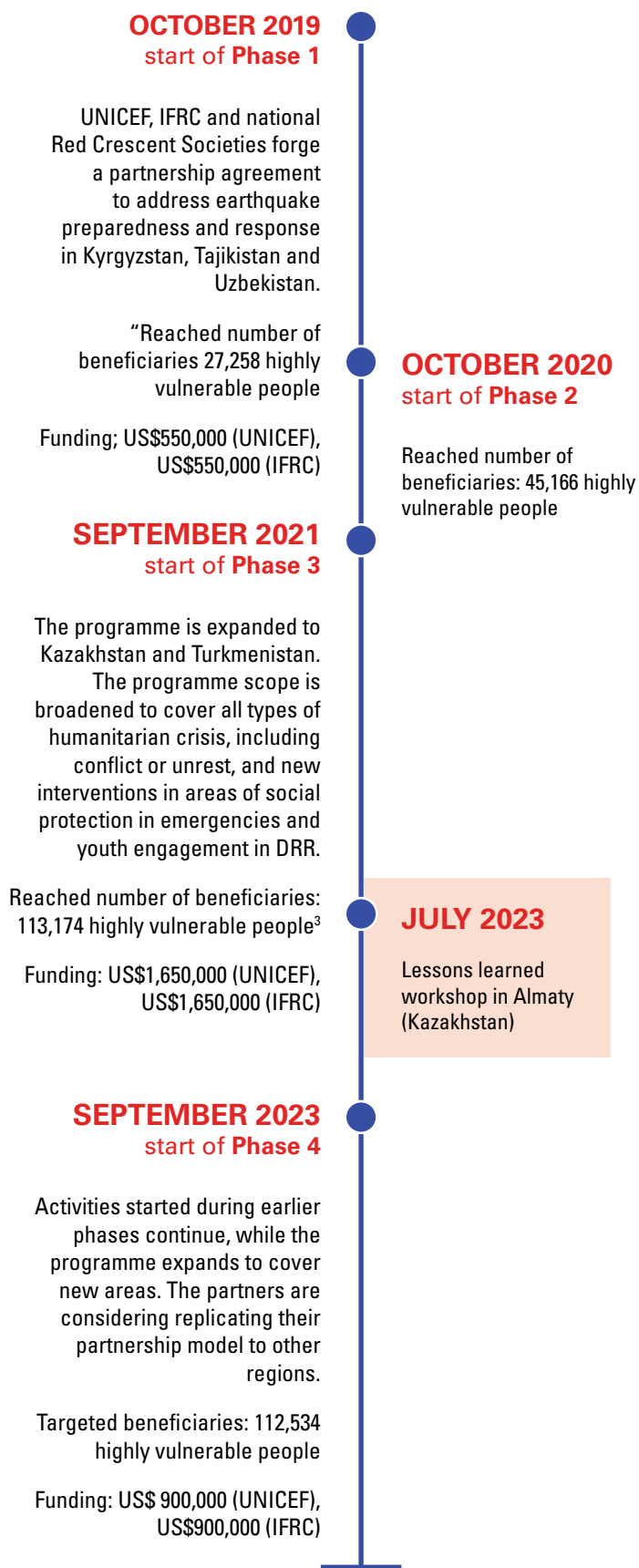
Learning from Experience: The Lessons Learned Workshop in Almaty

In addition to coordinating risk reduction projects, the stakeholders of this partnership shared knowledge and good practices to further strengthen the capacities of risk-prone communities. From 19 to 21 July 2023, in cooperation with CESDRR, the partners met in Almaty (Kazakhstan) to review project achievements, bottlenecks to progress, lessons learned and ideas for the next phase of programme implementation this report shares the highlights of this review in five areas:

1. Disaster preparedness and response
2. Child and community-centred DRR and climate change adaptation in schools and communities
3. Youth engagement and empowerment
4. Shock-responsive social protection systems
5. Institutional emergency response capacity-building

These five areas correspond to the five chapters of this report, in which results and recommendations of the workshop are briefly synthesized.

Partnership timeline²



² The timeline contains data for the USAID/BHA-funded partnership. Within the partnership, UNICEF and IFRC operate under different donor agreements.

³ The increased targeted beneficiary number is due to top-up support to selected countries with higher risk levels.

1. DISASTER PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE EXPERIENCE IN CENTRAL ASIA

Some countries are better equipped than others to manage their disaster risk.⁸ Yet, ensuring robust disaster preparedness and response remains a priority for the entire region. The increasing frequency and severity of disaster events, exacerbated by instability and displacement in neighbouring countries and the accelerating climate crisis, require immediate action to build preparedness and resilience of children, young people and communities.

In Central Asia, the work of UNICEF, IFRC and national Red Crescent Societies comprises emergency preparedness and response activities as part of a **holistic, multisectoral and systems-strengthening approach**. This includes the development of contingency plans, response tools and partnership agreements, the pre-positioning of emergency supplies in disaster-prone areas, capacity development and institutionalization of WASH preparedness, accountability to affected populations (AAP), community engagement and accountability (CEA), and gender mainstreaming in emergencies.

1.1 Contingency planning, supply pre-positioning and partnership

With USAID/BHA support in the five countries, UNICEF country offices have been able to finalize contingency agreements and standard operating procedures (SOPs) with national Red Crescent Societies and pre-position essential emergency supplies. Plans were activated in **Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan** to deal with sudden-onset emergencies, resulting in faster responses and stronger resilience of communities.

The results achieved in the area of contingency planning confirm **the centrality of the partnership under the USAID/BHA-supported programme and the complementarity of each partner's mandates. UNICEF plays a key role in ensuring a child-centred programmatic approach**, by enhancing knowledge and capacities through the regional online training on supplies and procurement, the replication of tested models and the procurement of essential

emergency resources and materials. IFRC supports **national Red Crescent Societies as first responders in emergencies in steering the identification of the most vulnerable communities, assessing their needs on the ground and helping to overcome technical and logistic issues**, such as the lack of warehousing facilities or the commencement of larger-scale supply deliveries.

DEFINITIONS:

Emergency or disaster preparedness consists of the mechanisms put in place in advance to enable an effective and timely emergency response to humanitarian crises, based on an analysis of the risks in a particular context and taking into account national and regional capacities and the comparative advantages of all stakeholders.⁴ It includes actions such as risk assessment, contingency planning, supply pre-positioning, capacity building, early warning and early action.⁵

Emergency response concerns the provision of immediate and life-saving assistance to affected children and vulnerable groups in the event of a humanitarian crisis. It includes provision of immediate support, such as access to basic social services, including health, nutrition, WASH, education, social safety nets and protection.⁶

Contingency planning is an important part of preparedness actions. It sets out the initial response strategy and operational plan to meet humanitarian needs during the first three to four weeks of an emergency. It addresses what could happen and what might be needed and identifies actions to take in advance.⁷ A contingency plan is usually made up of several agreements or preventive measures stipulated with different institutions and providers, for different services, based on the needs of affected populations.

Pre-positioning refers to the practice of securing the availability of life-saving material to respond to emergencies. This could include signing commercial agreements with local providers for a rapid response. The pre-positioning of supplies in disaster-prone areas not only accelerates the response time.

⁴ United Nations Children's Fund, "UNICEF Procedure on Preparedness for Emergency Response" (PROCEDURE/EMOPS/2020/001).

⁵ United Nations Children's Fund, "Emergency Preparedness at UNICEF," <<https://www.unicef.org/documents/emergency-preparedness-unicef>>, accessed 8 October 2023.

⁶ United Nations Children's Fund, "Emergency Preparedness and Disaster Risk Management," <<https://www.unicef.org/guyanasuriname/emergency-preparedness-and-disaster-risk-management>>, accessed 8 October 2023.

⁷ United Nations Children's Fund, "UNICEF Procedure on Preparedness for Emergency Response" (PROCEDURE/EMOPS/2020/001).

⁸ The INFORM index for risk management ranks Tajikistan as a medium-risk country; Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan as low-risk countries; and Kazakhstan as a very-low-risk country. Disaster Risk Management Knowledge Centre (DRM-KC-INFORM), "Country Risk Profiles," <<https://drmkc.jrc.ec.europa.eu/inform-index/INFORM-Risk/Country-Risk-Profile>>, accessed 8 October 2023.

Lessons learned and recommendations

1. Thanks to contingency agreements, SOPs and partnership arrangements concluded by UNICEF country offices and national Red Crescent Societies, and pre-positioned supplies, three countries – **Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan** – showed a **more effective and timely response and supported increased resilience of the affected communities in the aftermath of recent emergencies.**
2. In **Turkmenistan**, the partnership has **facilitated the warehousing and effective pre-positioning of critical emergency supplies** by UNICEF and enhanced warehousing capacity by the Red Crescent Society of Turkmenistan following investment in warehouse infrastructure. The actions are helping to ensure the safety and accessibility of pre-positioned supplies.
3. The conclusion of multilateral partnerships and agreements with national societies and local providers has been instrumental in **identifying alternative solutions and overcoming technical and logistic issues in emergencies.** For example, UNICEF in **Tajikistan** signed a contract with a local business for provision of WASH-related emergency supplies and services (construction of WASH facilities, water trucking, etc.).
4. To develop sustainable solutions to supply delivery for children and families, workshop participants **recommended working with local businesses and suppliers** operating in Central Asia in partnerships that can be activated in an emergency.
5. **National Red Crescent Societies have shown great potential** in accessing communities impacted by emergencies, assessing needs of affected people, sharing information for planning purposes, and providing the initial emergency response.



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Photo: UNICEF and Committee of Emergency Situations and Civil Defence staff delivering humanitarian assistance to people affected by floods and mudflows in the Vahdat district, Tajikistan, on 2 August 2023.

THE PARTNERSHIP IN ACTION

Tajikistan in 2023 experienced several natural disasters, which required activation of the established contingency plan and larger-scale supply deliveries by local suppliers.

A series of avalanches in February 2023 caused by heavy snowfall and strong winds killed at least 18 people and affected over 330 people in the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast, in the eastern part of Tajikistan. As a result of the enhanced emergency preparedness and response mechanisms and system in place, UNICEF, IFRC and the Red Crescent Society of Tajikistan were able to provide 491 affected people in 70 households with emergency supplies, mental health and psycho-social support services and non-food items.

Following the 5.8-magnitude earthquake in the Kuhistoni Maschoh and Rasht districts in March 2023, UNICEF in partnership with the Tajikistan Committee of Emergency Situations and Civil Defence and the Red Crescent Society of Tajikistan reached 450 affected households with WASH supplies, including family hygiene and 'dignity kits' containing hygiene and sanitary items for women and girls.

1.2 Mainstreaming gender and diversity in emergencies

Women, men, boys and girls across Central Asia face similar barriers to gender equality, although they may experience these barriers to different degrees in each country.⁹ Children and adolescents are raised with social, cultural and gender norms that shape behaviours, practices and opportunities at home and in their communities, institutions and societies. Harmful gender norms can lead to discrimination, disparities in access to social services, and exposure to harmful practices, particularly in emergencies. At an institutional level, policies to address gender inequality and gender-based violence (GBV) are evolving. Yet, there is room to improve preventative and protective services and coordination systems, and to increase knowledge and build skills among national counterparts in conducting gender analyses and adopting good practices.

UNICEF, IFRC and national Red Crescent Societies are working to ensure that gender considerations are embedded into disaster prevention and response plans, and to provide equal and relevant services for girls, boys, women and men. The partners have focused on six key priorities for mainstreaming gender and diversity in emergencies: (1) developing preparedness tools, (2) establishing gender-responsive procedures, (3) strengthening national

partner capacity, (4) enhancing coordination and cooperation, (5) engaging youth as partners and change agents, and (6) localizing the GBV in Emergencies Risk Reduction Tool. UNICEF has made a significant contribution to the development of national guidance on preventing GBV in emergencies, particularly in areas that are aligned with its Core Commitments to Children in Humanitarian Action (CCCs).

Community first responders are often unfamiliar with the term ‘gender,’ or they may perceive it as linked to the undermining of traditional family values. The consequences are a lack of gender-sensitive approaches in the provision of emergency services and a limited capacity of the staff and volunteers to respond in consideration of gender-differentiated needs and risks. This is exacerbated by a low number of local female staff and/or gender-focused agencies engaged in response efforts. In response, UNICEF provided technical support to the five countries by developing a **GBV in Emergencies Risk Reduction Tool** and by building capacity of UNICEF, IFRC, national Red Crescent Society teams and national stakeholders. Thanks to the local action of IFRC and the national Red Crescent Societies, the tool has been adapted and distributed in **Kazakhstan and Tajikistan**, and training is under way in both countries. To date, over 380 national stakeholders, 1,035 teachers and school administrators have increased capacity to prevent GBV in emergencies.



Photo by Yonelia Carswell on Unsplash

⁹ The UNICEF Gender Inequality Index ranks Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan as having medium levels of gender inequality in social institutions, and Kazakhstan as having low levels. Data are unavailable for Turkmenistan. United Nations Children's Fund, Gender Counts: Central Asia. A quantitative assessment of gender inequality and its impact on girls and boys, Burnet Institute for UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office, Melbourne, 2022.

Lessons learned and recommendations

1. It is essential to **engage women and young people as leaders** in emergencies. They should be involved in shaping policies on DRR, gender and prevention of GBV in emergency situations.
2. The lack of information, and the confusion around GBV terminology and approaches, requires that **common practices and tools be fully adapted to the local contexts**. Localizing tools such as the GBV in Emergencies Risk Reduction Tool will help ensure a unified approach. To address misinterpretation of the term 'gender,' IFRC and national Red Crescent Societies have instead adopted the term 'protection,' whose broader scope encompasses children's safety and well-being.
3. **All five countries lack institutional mechanisms to respond to GBV**; their capacity in terms of the number of emergency shelters, availability of funding for GBV prevention activities, and communication between state and non-state crisis centres is generally insufficient, although levels vary across the five countries. These challenges must be addressed with national and local authorities.
4. **There is a need for a curriculum on preventing and responding to violence against children**, including in humanitarian contexts. Experts, including social workers, and academics should be involved in consultations and the dissemination of information among the social and emergency preparedness sectors. One learning based on UNICEF engagement in Kazakhstan is that education on gender mainstreaming and GBV prevention should be integrated into social work, primary health care, social pedagogy, police investigation and emergency preparedness curricula.



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Photo: In Kazakhstan, university students in the departments of social work and jurisprudence work together with representatives of state and local government to test an interdisciplinary training module on gender-based violence against children. A total of 70 students participated. UNICEF led the development of the module.

1.3 Accountability to affected populations and community engagement

DEFINITIONS:

Accountability to affected populations (AAP) and community engagement and accountability (CEA) are core commitments of UNICEF and IFRC.¹⁰ They refer to the responsible use of power and to quality programming that recognizes the dignity, capacity and self-determination of communities affected by humanitarian crises. This approach involves communities in decision-making, monitoring and

evaluation of emergency responses for greater effectiveness. AAP and CEA also imply that governments and humanitarian actors should provide feedback and complaint mechanisms for at-risk populations and marginalized groups, ensure transparency and engage affected populations and communities in decision making regarding resource allocation and service delivery.

In 2023, UNICEF completed an assessment of AAP policies and institutional structures across the five countries to understand existing mechanisms for participation, feedback and grievances of affected populations at different governance levels. The resulting study showed that laws, coordination mechanisms and available channels to facilitate AAP at national and subnational levels (oblasts, rayons, and *hokimiyats* in Uzbekistan) and at the local level through disaster management committees (such as emergency departments), village health committees, and mahallas (local self-administrative bodies in Uzbekistan) vary across the five countries.

However, the five countries share similar challenges in their enforcement and implementation of community participation and feedback mechanisms. The most common transnational issues include the lack of institutionalization of AAP frameworks, limited capacity and training of personnel, and insufficient resources and funding. The lack of communication channels to reach and help ensure the inclusion of vulnerable communities is also a challenge. The situation is exacerbated by persistent and deep-rooted patriarchal attitudes, stereotypes and practices around gender roles, as well as significant gender gaps in economic participation, which further hinder the participation of women and girls.

Under the USAID/BHA-supported programme, UNICEF, IFRC and national Red Crescent Societies are joining efforts, resources and expertise to **ensure AAP and CEA at national, regional and local levels. UNICEF through its country offices provides technical expertise to help countries identify and contextualize actions to strengthen AAP systems, while IFRC and the national Red Crescent Societies are on the ground working to establish sound capacity and support at the community level.** Country action plans are expected to be finalized by 2024.



Photo: Focus group discussions as part of Community Engagement and Accountability efforts in a local community.

¹⁰ See also: International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, *Community Engagement and Accountability Strategy 2023–2025*, IFRC, Geneva, 2023; and United Nations Children's Fund, "Accountability to Affected Populations Handbook," < https://www.corecommitments.unicef.org/kp/unicef_aap_handbook_en_webdouble.pdf >, accessed 8 October 2023.

Lessons learned and recommendations

1. UNICEF's AAP study contains a **mapping of existing participation, feedback mechanisms and resources** in the five countries, to be leveraged to ensure effective utilization and avoid duplication of efforts.

Photo courtesy of the Red Crescent Society of Tajikistan



Photo: Officers of the Red Crescent Society of Tajikistan conduct a focused discussion and collect feedback in a community. As part of the USAID/BHA-supported programme, Red Crescent Societies in Kazakhstan Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan established focal points for community engagement (CEA Officers) and for protection, gender and inclusion (PGI Officers).

2. **Community-level mechanisms should be strengthened** in coordination with with IFRC and national Red Crescent Societies. Mechanisms include local disaster management committees and local community bodies. The participation of IFRC and national Red Crescent Society focal points on community engagement (CEA Officers) and protection, gender and inclusion (PGI Officers) should also be ensured throughout the programme cycle, in regular coordination meetings and other processes.
3. It is important to establish a **diversified approach in the establishment of AAP/CEA communication channels**, through both digital and non-digital means, to support the participation of groups experiencing limited access to technology and internet, lower literacy rates and socio-economic inequalities.

AAP- and CEA-related laws and coordination mechanisms in Central Asia

Kazakhstan: (1) Government resolution of the Republic of Kazakhstan No.486 dated 16 August 2017. (2) Order of the Ministry of Emergency Situations of the Republic of Kazakhstan No.303.

Kyrgyzstan: (1) Existing Disaster Management Legal Framework, (2) Govt. Decree OKSION (unified information system for integrated monitoring and forecasting of disasters) and (3) Law on the Procedure for Considering Citizen's appeal.

Tajikistan: (1) Unified State System on Prevention and Elimination of Emergency Situations. (2) Regulated by the Law of the Republic of Tajikistan "On Protection of Population & Territories from Natural & Technogenic Emergency Situations" (Articles 4 and 6).

Turkmenistan: (1) The Law of Turkmenistan on the Prevention and Elimination of Emergency Situations; established: (a) Unified State System for the Prevention and Elimination of Emergency Situations; (b) State's obligation for timely information (Chapter 4, Art. 11); (c) Community engagement and accountability by granting citizens the right to access information.

Uzbekistan: (1) Resolution No.601 (2017) on ASOI (automated system for alerting the public) for comprehensive automation of processes and information dissemination during emergencies. (2) Law No. 3PY-415 of December 26, 2016, provides social services for older people, persons with disabilities and other at – risk groups.

1.4 Water, sanitation and hygiene services

WASH in emergencies is the provision of safe water, sanitation and hygiene to people in humanitarian crises, such as disasters or conflicts. WASH provision is essential for disease prevention and can save lives, and it protects people's dignity, especially that of women and girls at risk of GBV and with specific needs.

In the five countries, UNICEF is supporting WASH in emergencies **through the development of WASH in emergency tools and mechanisms and by helping governments and IFRC/national Red Crescent Society partners to strengthen national WASH preparedness systems.**¹¹ UNICEF and IFRC are working to ensure WASH services are integrated within preparedness plans and that interventions are gender-responsive and address the different needs of children, women and people with disabilities.

In **Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan**, UNICEF is conducting comprehensive studies of the WASH sector, including legal frameworks, coordination mechanisms and capacities of local actors to deliver WASH in emergencies. In **Kyrgyzstan**, the findings of the study are being used to inform the development of WASH-sector emergency preparedness and response plans. UNICEF conducted training on WASH in emergencies for 162 participants, including representatives of national authorities and subnational authorities from six regions of Kyrgyzstan.

In **Kazakhstan**, UNICEF and CESDRR jointly implemented capacity building on key commitments for children in emergencies with several sectors: emergency, health, education, social protection and home affairs. The UNICEF–CESDRR cooperation was a key support to the country in adapting global and regional tools to operationalize and monitor emergency WASH response and in aligning the response with SPHERE humanitarian standards.¹²

Lessons learned and recommendations

1. WASH terminology varies, and new approaches to WASH in emergencies have emerged. **National legislation needs to be updated and harmonized with international recommendations and standards.** Partners working in cooperation with relevant ministries in each country need to be engaged in this process.
2. **The capacity of stakeholders**, including representatives of government agencies and the non-governmental sector, **to deliver WASH in emergencies needs to be further strengthened.**
3. **Inter-agency, multi-stakeholder coordination should be established at country and regional levels**, for purposes of harmonizing training contents across sectors; reaching greater numbers of participants with training, seminars and joint exercises; and sharing best practices among stakeholders.



Photo: Ainazik Nurmambetova, five years old, in the Son-Kul pasture, Naryn province, Kyrgyzstan. This young girl is living with her parents on the pasture during summer time. She shows us her hand washing practice as a daily routine using the outdoor basin complete with a mirror, step stool, soap, toothbrush, and cupboard. In the background are dramatic clouds above grey mountains with horses grouped together. The UNICEF's WASH initiative is represented here along with child survival and development, life skills and hygiene.

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¹¹ See also: United Nations Children's Fund, *Global Annual Results Report 2022. Goal 4: Every child lives in a safe and clean environment*, UNICEF, New York, 2023.

¹² See also: Sphere Association, *The Sphere Handbook: Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response*, fourth edition, Sphere Association, Geneva, 2018.

2. CHILD- AND COMMUNITY-CENTRED DISASTER RISK REDUCTION AND CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION IN SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES

The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015–2030) outlines clear targets and priorities to prevent and reduce disaster risks. Building the resilience of children and young people is vital to meeting these targets and those of other global agreements.¹³ Under the USAID/BHA-funded programme, UNICEF, IFRC and national Red Crescent Societies in the five countries are **integrating disaster risk reduction (DRR) and climate change adaptation (CCA) activities into education and community development activities, such as schools, youth clubs and academic institutes, for children and young people.**

UNICEF is providing technical expertise in areas of education and child protection in emergencies and guidance in the implementation of the Comprehensive School Safety Framework.¹⁴ For example, **in Turkmenistan** in 2023, UNICEF in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and the Red Crescent Society of Turkmenistan engaged school teams and students in capacity-building activities and DRR and CCA exercises at schools in Ashgabat city and in the Ahal, Dashoguz and Lebap regions: these are areas of the country that are most at risk of disaster. Over 1,050 students and 200 administrators took part in mapping hazards and vulnerabilities in their communities and schools, practiced measures to reduce disaster risk, and participated in disaster scenario planning, exercises and evacuation drills.

IFRC and national Red Crescent Societies are reaching out to communities and schools in risk-prone areas to aid people's understanding of potential disaster risks and their impacts, resources that are available to assist communities, and preparatory actions that can be taken according to the Enhanced Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment (EVCA) process.¹⁵ UNICEF, IFRC and the national Red Crescent Societies in partnership with relevant national authorities in **Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan** led a series of training activities, simulations and events on DRR and disaster preparedness, CCA and WASH, with special attention to gender and diversity inclusion. These activities targeted a broad public, including children and youth, teachers and educational personnel, central and local authorities, and community members. In **Uzbekistan**, DRR activities were organized in partnership with the Institute for Civil Protection of the Ministry of Emergency Situations and actively involved more than 300 youth members of school DRR clubs.

¹³ United Nations Children's Fund, "Disaster risk reduction and recovery," <<https://www.unicef.org/disaster-risk-reduction-and-recovery>>, accessed 8 October 2023.

¹⁴ See also: Global Alliance for Disaster Risk Reduction & Resilience in the Education Sector, *Comprehensive School Safety Framework 2022–2030 for Child Rights and Resilience in the Education Sector*, GADRRRES, 2022.

¹⁵ See also: International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, "EVCA Guide: Community Engagement Hub," <<https://communityengagementhub.org/resource/evca-guide>>, accessed 8 October 2023.

Lessons learned and recommendations

1. **Memorandums of understanding and agreements with national institutions**, universities and academic institutes contribute to strengthening disaster risk management policies in education facilities.
2. To ensure sustainability, CCA and DRR could be included in national curricula.
3. DRR and CCA programmes are an opportunity to engage adolescent girls and boys, recruit volunteers, and **multiply youth actions at community level**.
4. **Children and young people should be involved** in consultations and given opportunities to bring critical skills, individual experiences and ideas to the work of finding solutions related to their safety and resilience.



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Photo: Students from School No. 45 of Ak-Bugday etrap, in the Ahal velayat (region) of Turkmenistan, mapping disaster risks during a DRR training exercise conducted by UNICEF and the Red Crescent Society of Turkmenistan in May 2023. Ahal is one of the country's most vulnerable regions, prone to earthquakes and other natural disasters.

3. ADOLESCENT AND YOUTH ENGAGEMENT AND EMPOWERMENT

The results achieved under the USAID/BHA-funded programme in the area of youth engagement are a clear expression of the potential of **young people as agents of change in their homes, schools and communities**. Building on its unique expertise in the area of child and adolescent education, UNICEF is providing partners and stakeholders in Central Asia with learning resources and technical expertise on twenty-first century life skills in the context of DRR and CCA. One such CCA resource is the Climate Box.¹⁶ UNICEF supports countries in adapting conceptual frameworks and tools to local contexts and provides technical support.

The partnership with UNICEF, IFRC and national Red Crescent Societies has facilitated the distribution of educational resources, material and knowledge to children and families in need; contributed to strengthening capacities of field staff; and supported outreach and engagement of educational facility staff and young volunteers in remote, vulnerable

or at-risk communities, as in the case of the Afghan communities on the borders of Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

In Kazakhstan, UNICEF in partnership with the National Volunteering Network launched the BeSafe Programme to enhance children's emergency and climate change preparedness skills. To date, the programme has reached 40 partner schools in five regions of Kazakhstan. It consists of five training modules –including modules focused on the main types of emergencies, response mechanisms, and the impact of climate change and adaptation measures – and has a special focus on girls' empowerment. UNICEF also launched the DRR Youth Challenge, an online initiative to raise awareness of emergency preparedness among young people and build their safety and leadership skills. The campaign has reached and engaged youth in all **five Central Asian countries** through the use of digital platforms, social media and youth influencers.

¹⁶ Climate Box is an interactive learning platform for young people who want to know more about climate change and its impacts. United Nations Development Programme, "Climate Box," <<https://climate-box.com>>, accessed 8 October 2023.

Lessons learned and recommendations

1. DRR education programmes in schools, universities and clubs represent an opportunity to engage youth in volunteer work. However, education is evolving, and **adolescents and young people need twenty-first century skills and capacities** (such as digital literacy, leadership and resilience) that will help them engage in community preparedness more responsibly and confidently. These volunteer opportunities are designed to help adolescents and young people build their life skills and contribute to decision-making on safety issues or other areas of concern in their communities. Youth are often highly enthusiastic about volunteer work and seize opportunities to engage.
2. In addition to providing children, adolescents and youth with DRR and CCA learning resources and material, it is important to provide them with **concrete opportunities to exercise leadership** and engage on emergency preparedness and DRR within their communities. It is also important to explore the social and cultural factors that could be hindering child and youth participation.
3. To ensure sustainability and equity, **child participation and engagement in DRR and CCA should be institutionalized** within the education system and approaches, and not be limited to ad hoc interventions by external partners.
4. DRR awareness-raising campaigns and engagement initiatives should **maximize the use of youth communication channels, digital platforms, and public and social media** (e.g., the Instagram app, Telegram messaging service and television programmes, depending on the country context), which can reach large audiences in a cost-effective way.
5. **Country-specific social norms must be taken in account** when shaping DRR volunteer programmes. National Red Crescent Societies have many volunteers who are knowledgeable about local disaster profiles and contexts and have access to their communities and can engage them.



4. SHOCK-RESPONSIVE SOCIAL PROTECTION SYSTEMS AND HUMANITARIAN CASH TRANSFERS

DEFINITIONS:

When a crisis hits, effective social protection support is often a deciding factor in whether children and families can quickly return to normalcy or whether their lives will be permanently altered. **Shock-responsive social protection (SRSP)** systems can anticipate, maintain, scale up and/or flex their regular social protection programmes – in coordination with other departments or ministries – to accommodate new populations and needs as a result of shocks, such as natural disasters, conflicts or pandemics. They can also contribute to resilience building of individuals, households, communities and systems against future shocks.¹⁷

Humanitarian cash transfers (HCT) – also called cash and voucher assistance (CVA) – are one example of an SRSP tool. HCT is a programme delivery

modality that provides assistance in the form of money (either physical currency/cash or e-cash) to individuals, households or communities as part of a humanitarian response. They can provide immediate relief for communities in crisis, while helping to ensure people's choice, dignity and empowerment, as well as to support local markets and economies. Cash transfers as a modality are distinct from both vouchers and in-kind assistance and can be implemented in different ways. When done in support of governments and local institutions through an SRSP approach, HCTs can also directly strengthen social protection systems for more efficient, effective and sustainable responses, and can support programming across the humanitarian-development nexus for better results for children and their families.

In the five countries of Central Asia, UNICEF and IFRC are increasingly working together to improve the preparedness of national governments and institutions by supporting the coordination, governance, financing and/or programme design for social protection in emergencies. UNICEF and IFRC are also working to improve the preparedness of national Red Crescent Societies and other partners in disaster-prone areas so HCTs can be quickly scaled up where government capacities are exceeded.

To advance these efforts, UNICEF has developed an SRSP readiness assessment and an HCT training for national governments. Since 2019, SRSP analyses have been undertaken in all five countries and used to identify key priority actions for strengthening the use of HCTs. The training materials have been used with over 50 participants to build HCT capacities across the five countries, while the workshops have provided an opportunity for peer-to-peer sharing of best practices and experiences on SRSP both within and beyond the Central Asia region (for example, a practitioner from Türkiye attended one of the workshops). As a result, key priority actions are being addressed. In Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, recent reviews of legislation are providing a legal basis for scaling up HCT; and in Kyrgyzstan, newly developed SOPs are enabling the provision of humanitarian assistance and social protection service delivery in emergency situations.

In Tajikistan, the Emergency Social Protection Programme (TESPP) underlined the importance of preparedness planning for SRSP. UNICEF led an SRSP readiness assessment to inform the feasibility of SRSP during flooding emergencies and to identify entry points for the programme. The assessment process aided an understanding of SRSP among participants – government representatives, partners and 250 households – and helped build ownership, opening space for action planning. TESPP was a small-scale, pilot programme, but experiences from TESPP have influenced the national COVID-19 response and built the foundation for a broader understanding of the importance of social protection (in the form of cash transfers) in meeting the needs of households experiencing economic shocks as they did during the pandemic. The inclusive process of engagement with key national counterparts led to a multilateral letter of agreement signed by UNICEF, the Red Crescent Society of Tajikistan, the Ministry of Health and Social Protection, the Committee of Emergency Situations and Civil Defence, and the State Savings Bank in May 2023; and a concrete plan of action for 2023–2025.¹⁸

¹⁷ United Nations Children's Fund, *Preparing Social Protection Systems for Shock Response: A case study of UNICEF's experiences in Armenia, UNICEF Europe and Central Asia Regional Office, Geneva, and UNICEF Armenia Office, Yerevan, 2021, p. 3.*

¹⁸ The UNICEF Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia developed an assessment tool which was piloted in most of Central Asian countries. *Ibid.*

During the COVID-19 pandemic [in Uzbekistan](#), IFRC supported the Red Crescent Society of Uzbekistan in conducting emergency response operations, with provision of multi-purpose cash or voucher assistance to households in need. UNICEF has supported the Government of Uzbekistan to develop a module on HCT in its social protection management information system (EMIS) for the timely identification, registration and payment of cash transfers to affected populations. UNICEF has also conducted research into how cash transfers can be used to safeguard lives and livelihoods in times of extreme heat in Uzbekistan, in consideration of heatwaves and other emerging hazards driven by climate change.

The partnership contributes to knowledge sharing and learning, as the partner organizations apply HCT in compliance with the operational contexts and preconditions (markets, beneficiaries, delivery systems) in the five countries. For example, the Red Crescent Society of [Kyrgyzstan](#) has a key role in knowledge exchange with national societies in [Kazakhstan and Tajikistan](#) and provides support for their cash-preparedness activities.

Lessons learned

1. Legal frameworks and institutional roles and responsibilities for the design and delivery of HCTs vary from country to country (e.g., in Turkmenistan, cash can be distributed only through the government's public system). Therefore, countries should continue to invest in efforts to obtain a full understanding of their legislative frameworks; strengthen government ownership of SRSP programmes and their ability to provide HCT; explore how the partnership can complement institutional capacity; and on this basis, finalize specific SOPs and establish coordination mechanisms among departments or ministries.
2. Agencies and organizations support and engage national institutions to develop HCT monitoring systems and post-distribution monitoring tools to assess the impact of HCT.
3. Technology can support efficient HCT management. The mapping of existing support mechanisms, such as national registries and platforms within the banking system, can be used to strengthen accountability to affected populations.
4. There are opportunities to examine the potential use of targeting for HCT in consideration of some people's specific vulnerabilities (on the basis of gender, disability, etc.) and to explore how existing national registries can support targeting.

5. INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY BUILDING

IFRC continues to build capacities of national Red Crescent Societies to respond to emergencies in the five countries. Capacity-building activities focus on improving coordination mechanisms (for example, through the establishment of the Emergency Operations Coordinator function at the national level), information management and rapid resource mobilization. IFRC constantly reinforces and consolidates its organizational preparedness measures so that national Red Crescent Societies can contribute proactively to preparedness and response priorities in their countries in a coordinated, timely,

and effective manner. Repairing and modernizing office premises, and providing adequate technology and stable, high-speed internet to facilitate rapid response, are among the key interventions. The aim is to ensure that the Emergency Operations Coordinators effectively manage inter-operative responses with public authorities during emergency situations and with key regional branches on a regular basis.

LOOKING FORWARD

The Central Asia region, along with other regions around the world, is coming to terms with the impacts of climate change and its potentially devastating effects on human and ecological systems. With the United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres announcing an “era of global boiling” following record-setting heat in July 2023,¹⁹ the pressing need for collective, well-coordinated and immediate mitigation and adaptation is clear.

The results achieved under the USAID/BHA programme are promising, in the context of a more uncertain future characterized by more frequent and severe shocks and stresses. In the five Central

Asian countries, the partnership approach has strengthened alliances, working relations and programmatic engagement, not only among the partner organizations, but more broadly with authorities and other stakeholders in the region. The teams have built trust and mutual understanding of their roles and comparative advantages, which are essential for successful collaboration.

The results are seen in the implementation of more holistic, innovative, inclusive and effective programmes that have enhanced the resilience, preparedness and response capacities of communities and governments in Central Asia.

Building on lessons learned during the first five years of the programme, the partners will continue working in the next phase of programme implementation with a focus on:

1. Enhancing sustainability by **strengthening capacity building with national authorities** and other local and regional actors.
2. **Increasing advocacy** and awareness raising on disaster preparedness and response and climate change and ensuring that interventions adopt a child rights-sensitive approach.
3. **Expanding interventions** in disaster preparedness **by including early warning and anticipatory actions in emergency protocols**, building on pilot interventions in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in which IFRC developed such protocols and providing opportunity for UNICEF to reinforce a child-centred approach.
4. **Improving and expanding data management**, in cooperation with CESDRR – as the organization that is collecting data for the INFORM risk index – to ensure that data are available and utilized by UNICEF, IFRC and national Red Crescent Societies to better prioritize interventions.
5. **Exploring the possibility of replicating this model** of partnership and cooperation in other regions.

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