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for every child

COUNTRY OFFICE

**ANNUAL REPORT 2021**

KAZAKHSTAN

DECEMBER 2021



# Contents

<b>Part 1: Situation update in the country</b> .....	5
<b>Part 2: Major results</b> .....	11
Every child thrives and survives.....	13
Every child learns.....	13
Every child is protected from violence and exploitation.....	17
Every child lives in a safe and clean environment.....	19
Every child has an equitable chance in life.....	19
Cross-cutting work.....	20
<b>Part 3: Partnerships</b> .....	21
<b>Part 4: Innovations and lessons learned</b> .....	25

**Cover photograph:** *Symbat (6) plays at the street in Nur-Sultan, while her mother, sells berries to bypassers.*  
@UNICEFKazakhstan/2021/RomanGussak



**Chief Physician Professor Bayan Nurgalieva at the Almaty clinic during the COVID-19 pandemic.**

@UNICEF Kazakhstan/2021/NaziraKaiymova

# **PART 1**

| Situation update in the country



## Part 1:

### Situation update in the country

2021 was overshadowed by the global COVID-19 pandemic continuing into its second year. The pandemic has had an impact on the economy of Kazakhstan as well as a broad spectrum of services including the health, education and social protection systems. While most of the restrictions were eased by year end and schools reopened in September, the repercussions for society will continue to be felt for some time. Livelihoods have been disrupted, financial buffers have been depleted and households have become less resilient. There are increasing gaps in immunization, education loss and dropouts, and the impact on mental health and domestic violence has been significant. The demand for information through digital means has led to many people turning to social media that has been a source of negative messaging and false information.

In 2021, the economy began a gradual recovery and employment outcomes continued to

**A medical worker near a special entrance to the Almaty clinic “Filter”, which allows to see patients with COVID-19 symptoms separate from the others.**

@UNICEF Kazakhstan/2021/NaziraKaiymova

improve. This was largely due to the increase in crude oil prices and spending from the National Oil Fund. The economy grew by 3.5 per cent between January and September though inflation accelerated for much of the year, ending at 8.4 per cent. Rising prices, including an increase in the cost of basic food by 11 per cent year-on-year, have eroded the purchasing power and financial wellbeing of households. There has been a significant rise in the share of spending on food of the total amount of household expenses, and food insecurity remains high in much of the country.

In 2021, the UN Office of the Resident Coordinator in Kazakhstan, in collaboration with UN agencies and jointly funded by UNDP and UNICEF, conducted the second round of a Socio-Economic Impact Assessment of COVID-19 (SEIA), to identify and assess the effects of the pandemic on the population. The key finding was that pre-existing inequalities had been deepened and that the pandemic had hit vulnerable groups disproportionately; women, people with disabilities and other vulnerable groups, and the self-employed were among the hardest hit. The quarantine had a huge financial impact on much of the population as well as on family relations; this was felt most by low-income, single-parent, and large families, the unemployed and the elderly.

COVID-19 has exposed significant challenges to the healthcare system of Kazakhstan that has been placed under massive strain. Almost 10 per cent of respondents to the SEIA said that they were unable to receive medical care for various reasons and 16.4 per cent received medical assistance though it was not provided in full. Only some 61 per cent of healthcare workers nationally were provided with personal protective equipment in full. Vaccination hesitancy, which has multiple causes, is a major obstacle to preventing the spread of COVID-19, and up to 53 percent of respondents to surveys said that they would not be vaccinated under any circumstances.

The national project Healthy Nation 2021-2025 was adopted to ensure high quality and available health care for all citizens. It includes increasing the availability and quality of medical care, developing a modern system of epidemiological forecasting and response, supporting the domestic pharmaceutical industry and increasing the proportion of the population leading a healthy lifestyle.

The education system in Kazakhstan was struggling even before the COVID-19 pandemic. During the pandemic, in addition to education losses the system faced a number of challenges that revealed weaknesses, including a lack of digital



ALMOST  
**10%**

of respondents to the SEIA said that they were unable to receive medical care for various reasons.



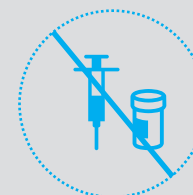
**16,4%**

received medical assistance though it was not provided in full.



ONLY SOME  
**61%**

of healthcare workers nationally were provided with personal protective equipment in full.



**53%**

of respondents to surveys said that they would not be vaccinated under any circumstances.



**Pupils of 2nd grade at the lesson**

**“Understanding the World”, gymnasium school**

**No. 8, Shchuchinsk, Kazakhstan**

*@UNICEF Kazakhstan/2021/ValeriyKalyiev*





Six out of ten students were functionally illiterate prior to the pandemic that now threatens to increase the number

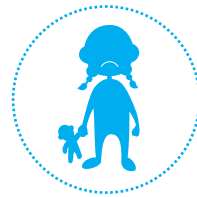
BY OVER

100,000

skills among teachers and students, variations in the quality of preschool education, insufficient Internet speed and low ability of children to apply transferrable skills. The SEIA found that nearly 93 per cent of respondent parents with school age children and students moved to distance learning during the restrictions, yet 25 per cent of them do not have an internet connection. The education system was not prepared for distance learning and the consequent impact on children and students has been extensive. Mothers continue to be the main source of help for children learning at distance (52 per cent) compared to only 7 per cent of fathers. Six out of ten students were functionally illiterate prior to the pandemic that now threatens to increase the number by over 100,000. Due to the pandemic, the World Bank has identified inequitable access to quality education as a critical risk to human capital development in the country and estimates that learning will decline by eight PISA points due to the pandemic and affect marginalised and disadvantaged groups most.

To address these challenges, Kazakhstan developed and adopted the national project Educated Nation 2021-2025. This includes ensuring the availability and quality of preschool education and training, reducing gaps in the quality of education, and ensuring a safe and modern learning environment.

The socioeconomic repercussions on families have been considerable. According to SEIA, the state of emergency and quarantine restrictions have had a serious impact on the level of domestic violence, which increased by 41.7 per cent compared to 2019. Only in 25 per cent of cases of domestic violence were family aggressors brought to justice.



According to SEIA, the state of emergency and quarantine restrictions have had a serious impact on the level of domestic violence, which increased by

41.7%

compared to 2019



ONLY IN

25%

of cases of domestic violence were family aggressors brought to justice

The President and parliament initiated a number of reforms during the year including the removal of the list of professions prohibited for women, strengthening the independence of the judiciary, and lowering the electoral threshold for political parties to enter the Mazhilis. The President also announced an increase in the minimum wage that will directly affect more than one million people, measures to be introduced to stimulate businesses, and an annual increase in the salaries of some public sector workers.

In 2021, Kazakhstan was elected to the UN Human Rights Council for 2022-2024. The priority areas of its work in the Council will include the fight against all forms of intolerance, upholding and assuring inclusive and universal education, and respect for human rights in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

A Draft Law 'On the Commissioner for Human Rights in the Republic of Kazakhstan', which brings the Ombudsperson's Office in greater compliance with the Paris Principles, was prepared and is under review by the Parliament.



**Nazar Samuratov (5) and Kristina Sadyreva (5)  
are making a paper craft for fine motor dexterity.  
«Romashka» nursery and kindergarten, Zelenyi Bor  
village, Burabay district, Akmola region, Kazakhstan.**

*@UNICEF Kazakhstan/2021/ValeriyKalyiev*

## **PART 2** | Major results



**Almaty clinic's mobile team takes PCR test at patient's home during the COVID-19 pandemic**

@UNICEF Kazakhstan/2021/NaziraKaiymova

## Part 2:

### Major results



#### Every child thrives and survives

##### Immunization

Under the USAID-funded programme to strengthen the immunization system, communication for development (C4D) interventions were undertaken to generate demand for child vaccines and address the increasing concerns of parents that result in immunization refusals. 2,600 parents and healthcare workers were surveyed to study their knowledge, attitudes and practices on childhood immunization. Based on the results, a multifaceted approach was adopted with different C4D activities. The Ministry of Health (MoH), the Kazakhstan Association of Family Doctors, Medsupport.kz and PaperLab were key partners in strengthening the immunization system. In partnership with the Association, UNICEF organized a 5-week capacity building training for more than 500 healthcare service providers on vaccinology, false medical exemption and interpersonal communication skills on

immunization. The first ever national website with detailed information on vaccines included in the National Vaccination Calendar was launched in partnership with the National Public Health Centre (NPCH) and MedSupport.KZ and was visited by 75,709 users.

##### HIV

UNICEF together with partners developed a guide on chronic disease self-management and wellbeing for adolescents living with HIV and diabetes, and methodological recommendations for schools on the prevention of stigma of adolescents living with HIV, and for AIDS centres and primary health care (PHC) facilities on the transition of children with HIV and Hepatitis B and C to adult care, and supported scale up of their use. Thirty pilot schools in six regions were resourced to prevent HIV-associated stigma, promote respect, and maintain confidentiality and gender-sensitive support to girls and boys living with HIV. UNICEF, the MoH and Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MLSP) partnered to

strengthen the capacity of over 500 specialists on psychosocial support and stigma prevention standards.

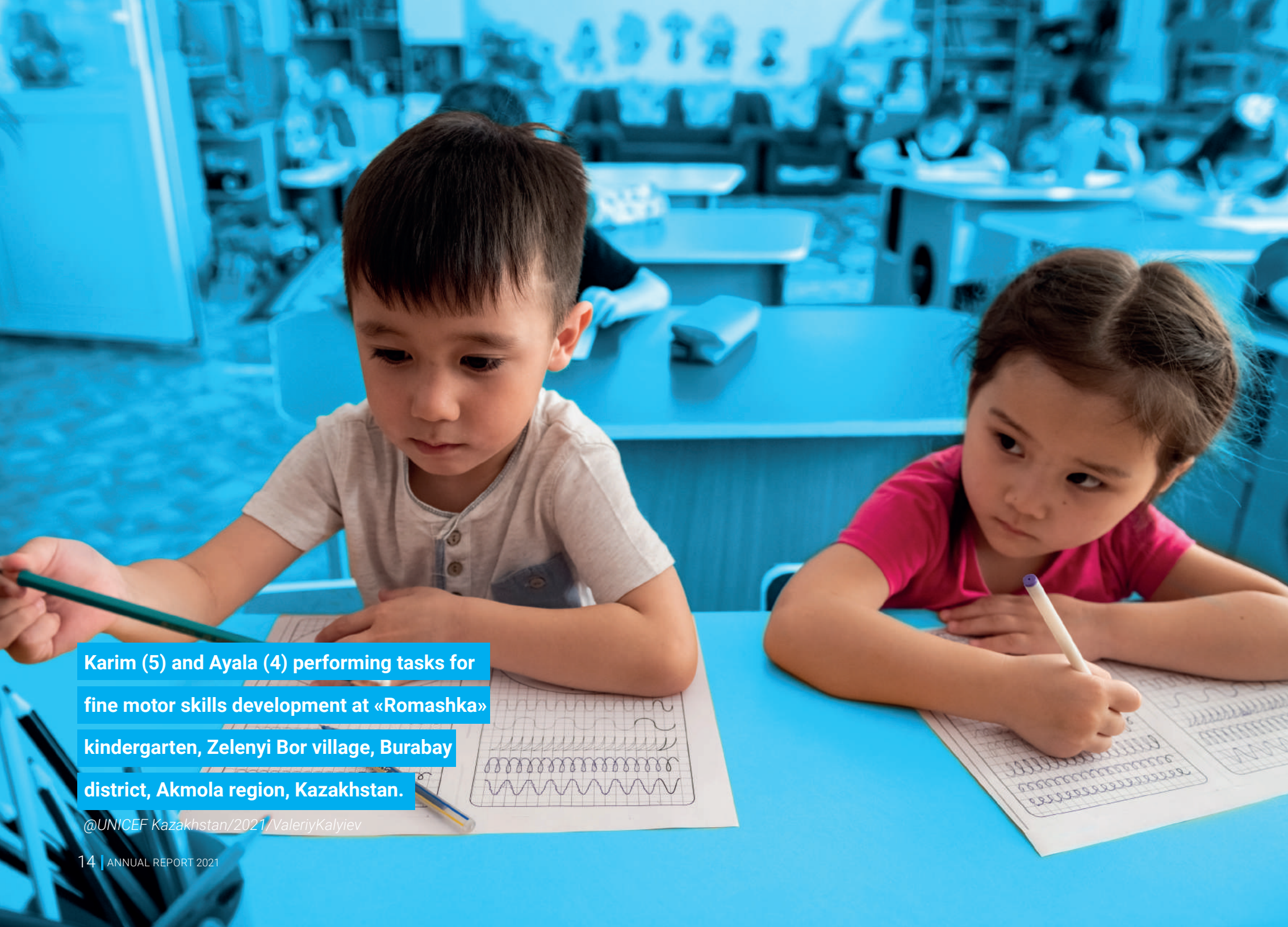
##### Early childhood development

An early childhood development (ECD) mobile application for parents is being developed by the Republican Centre for eHealth with the support of UNICEF to address the challenges parents face during the pandemic due to the shortage of medical services provided in person and overload on the medical system.

##### Nutrition

In partnership with the NPCH and WHO, UNICEF facilitated the development of the National Strategy on Prevention of Overweight and Obesity in Children for 2021-2025. Indicators and gender-responsive activities of the Strategy were integrated into the national project Healthy Nation.

A recipe book for parents on the importance of exclusive breastfeeding and the introduction of



**Karim (5) and Ayala (4) performing tasks for fine motor skills development at «Romashka» kindergarten, Zelenyi Bor village, Burabay district, Akmola region, Kazakhstan.**

*@UNICEF Kazakhstan/2021/ValeriyKalyiev*

complementary food for children aged 6 months to 2 years was developed and shared with the MoH for distribution among colleges and universities and promoted via three videos and on social media.

## Mental health

The country office continued to support the strengthening of adolescent mental health and wellbeing. The WHO-UNICEF Helping Adolescents Thrive package (comics for adolescents and a teacher guide) was adapted to promote the social-emotional learning of adolescents in schools.



## Every child learns

### Early childhood education

UNICEF launched a knowledge, attitudes and practices (KAP) survey on monitoring ECD to generate baseline data and information of 1,500 parents/caregivers of children aged 0-7 years, and expectant parents, as well as 82 specialists who work with children aged 0-7 years. This is the first KAP research on monitoring ECD in Kazakhstan.

To help assure the quality of early childhood education and build the capacity of pre-

schools, UNICEF in partnership with the UNICEF Office of Research - Innocenti supported the development of a new self-assessment tool, based on indicators linked to child learning and development outcomes. The self-assessment forms for kindergartens include proposed preschool quality indicators that are also built around inclusion, engagement with families, pedagogy, staffing and the environment.

### Secondary education

Primary and secondary schools opened on 1 September after COVID-19 restrictions were lifted; the schools were totally closed for nine weeks and partially closed for over 34 weeks.

UNICEF facilitated the establishment of a national GIGA steering committee and the connection of 38 rural schools to broadband internet covering 20,000 children.

Following a survey on gaps in teachers' knowledge of inclusive education, and awareness and use of digital tools, a 14-hour training course was developed in cooperation with Astana Hub on inclusive blended learning covering 5,500 primary and secondary school teachers. The International IT University developed a 72-hour training programme on inclusive blended learning reaching 1,437 primary and secondary school teachers, increasing their knowledge and capacity.



UNICEF facilitated the establishment of a national GIGA steering committee and the connection of 38 rural schools to broadband internet covering

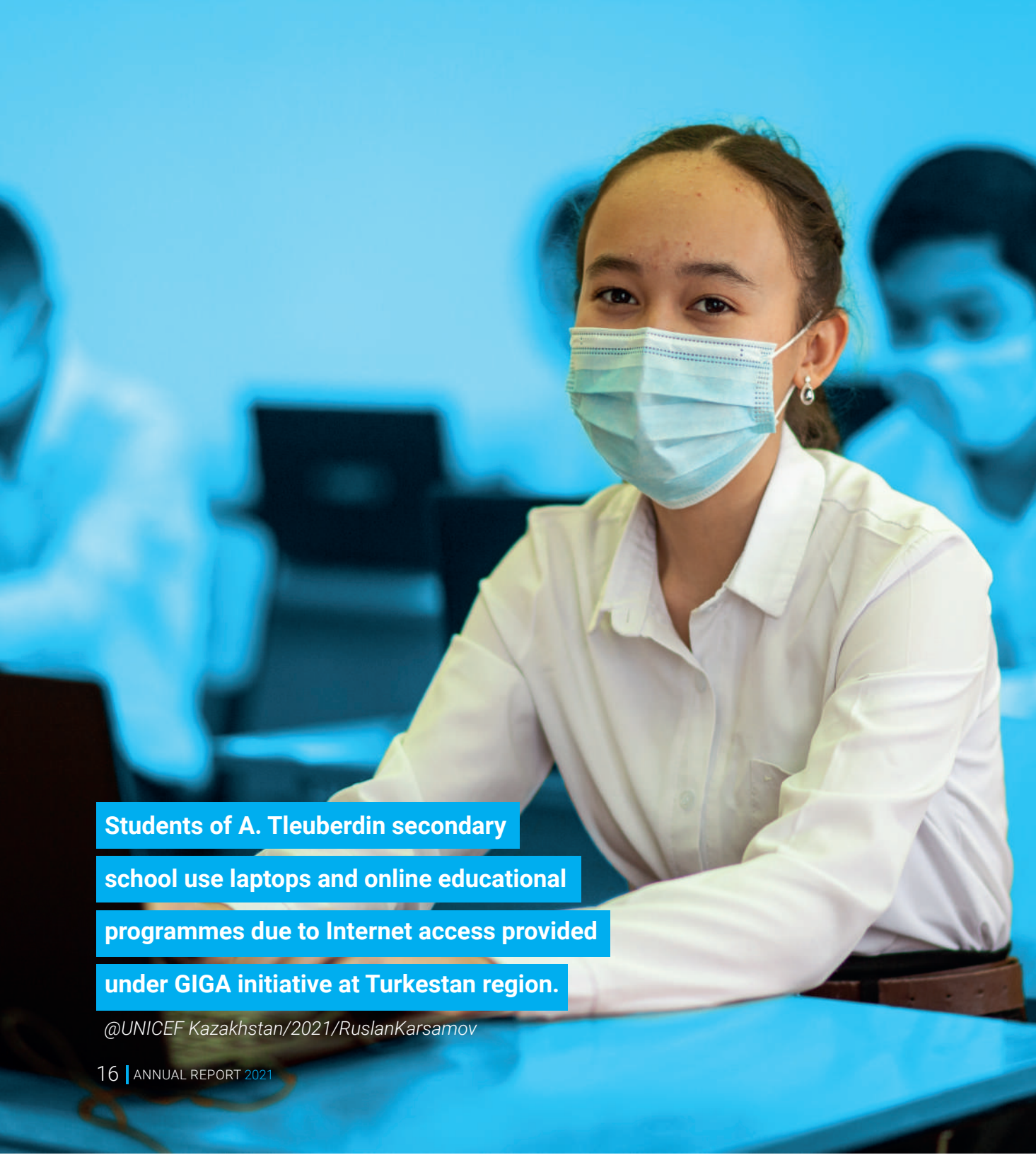
**20,000** CHILDREN



46 youth resource centres

**70** EDUCATIONAL

organisations, including those for most vulnerable young people, launched skills development training.



## Skills development

UNICEF supported the co-creation, testing and institutionalization of skills-based content through digital platforms, scaling up and mentorship programmes. This contributed to resilience, leadership, participation, promotion of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) for girls, and employability, reaching over 5,000 children, adolescents and youth including those most in need.

UNICEF collaborated with the MLSP, Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) and Ministry of Information and Social Development to scale up the Samgau skills development programme to improve children's and adolescents' skills for learning, employability and decent work, and UPSHIFT. Forty-six Youth Resource Centres and 70 educational organisations, including those for most vulnerable young people, launched skills development training. In collaboration with the UNICEF Office of Innovation and UNICEF Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, the country office scaled up the UniSat nano-satellite education programme for girls by providing digital course content, building girls' knowledge and skills on STEM and data analytics, and inspiring more girls from rural settings into STEM by increasing visibility of the programme and using high-profile mentors.

**Students of A. Tleuberdin secondary school use laptops and online educational programmes due to Internet access provided under GIGA initiative at Turkestan region.**

@UNICEF Kazakhstan/2021/RuslanKarsamov





## Every child is protected from violence and exploitation

### Violence prevention

UNICEF conducted a follow-up KAP survey on violence against children (VAC) in families that showed both positive and negative trends compared to the 2016 baseline study. They include: a 7 per cent decrease in general public support for the use of corporal punishment in the home and family; a 10 per cent decrease in child protection specialists' support for the use of corporal punishment in families; a 14 per cent increase in the general public's understanding of psychological violence; an 8 per cent increase in the understanding of mental violence by child protection specialists; and a 3 per cent increase in the proportion of parents/adults who reported using non-violent discipline. It also showed a greater reluctance of the general public to report VAC.

In response, a UNICEF campaign for the prevention of VAC potentially reached some 4.2 million people online including through social media posts on positive parenting, broadcasting of video materials, and collaboration with civil society organizations (CSOs)

and social media influencers. The partnership with regional CSOs helped to potentially reach over 2.7 million people and 132 online communication groups/messengers/chats; 412,000 people actively responded to materials disseminated by NGOs on the prevention of VAC and positive parenting.

UNICEF jointly with the Commissioner for Human Rights conducted an evaluation of the System for Prevention and Response to Violence against Children, and a functional analysis of it with the National Commission for Women and Family Demographic Affairs. The results contributed to the Government's planning to strengthen the system of prevention and response to violence in families.

### Deinstitutionalization

The dialogue between the Ombudsperson for Children, government, parliament, UNICEF and CSOs led to a decision to strengthen alternative forms of family care to prevent the institutionalization of children. A working group was formed to develop recommendations for strengthening professional foster services. UNICEF supported the Government in planning and implementing service-oriented

changes as part of the national childcare system reform. Kazakhstan participated in the ECARO evidence generation exercise on boarding schools, indicating an openness to transform the system of boarding schools.

### Children affected by migration

With UNICEF support, model protection services for children affected by migration were tested, and three guidelines for the provision of protection services were developed with support from the Ombudsperson for Human Rights and the Committee for the Protection of Children's Rights. 354 children affected by migration (188 girls and 166 boys) received protection services. UNICEF, supported by partner CSOs, provided humanitarian support and case management to 856 children affected by migration.

A comprehensive assessment of national legislation regarding migration was carried out vis-à-vis international standards with the findings presented to the national authorities. Jointly with UNHCR, UNICEF strengthened the capacity of specialists from Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan on collaboration and case management, best interest assessment and determination for children in the migration process. Fifty-four media outlets and NGO representatives were trained in ethical reporting on migration issues.



**Every child lives in a safe and clean environment**

### **Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH)**

In partnership with NGO KAMEDA, the assessment of IPC and WASH was undertaken in seven perinatal centres and seven children's hospitals based on the WHO/UNICEF Water and Sanitation for Health Facility Improvement Tool. UNICEF also supported a gender-sensitive WASH assessment in 153 schools.

### **Disaster reduction, water and climate**

UNICEF engaged a group of experts from the Centre on Emergencies and Disaster Risk Reduction, the Centre for Disaster Medicine under the Ministry of Emergencies and the National Scientific and Practical Centre for Mental Health under the MoH. The group adapted the WHO and UNHCR Guide on supporting the mental health of those affected in humanitarian situations to the context of Kazakhstan. The guide was endorsed by the MoH and the Ministry of Emergencies.

**Aisulu (13) shows her younger sister Inaya, a third-grade student at secondary school No.24 in Ekibastuz, how to sort rubbish**

© UNICEF Kazakhstan/2020/Valeriy Kaliyev



## Every child has an equitable chance in life

### Children in poverty

Technical support was provided to the Bureau of National Statistics for the development of multidimensional poverty statistics to complement monetary poverty indicators and guide policy. Jointly with the UNICEF Office of Research - Innocenti a draft of a multidimensional poverty measurement methodology aligned with best international practice was developed and will be piloted and tested in 2022.

Support was provided to the Government on child-focused budgeting and more efficient and effective public financing through the continued implementation of the Public Finance for Children (PF4C) initiative. UNICEF held a series of webinars and discussions with national counterparts to build the capacity of key partners in PF4C.

Technical support was provided to the MoES and Economic Research institute to develop and launch the methodology for a Child Budget monitoring system, a national instrument for targeted spending of the state budget in the interests of children in accordance with the SDGs. It was developed in consultation with international experts, line ministries and local authorities, supported by a series of UNICEF-facilitated webinars and discussions.

### Social protection

To enhance the social protection legal framework, UNICEF provided technical support to the Government for development of a Social Code. A group of experts was recruited to undertake the scrutiny of more than 30 laws and 150 by-laws and analyse international experience regarding regulations on social protection. The draft concept of the Social Code identifies gender equality as an overarching approach and aims to prioritize support for mothers and children. It is planned to be submitted to parliament in 2022.

UNICEF in partnership with the Economic Policy Research Institute conducted a formative evaluation of the social protection system for children and their families to assess the efficacy of family- and child-focused cash transfer policies and programmes. The evaluation also explored how far cash transfers helped families with children manage some of the socio-economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Social work

UNICEF played a leading role in capacity building of the social service workforce by strengthening the academic social work curricula and providing in-service training. UNICEF continued its technical support for the Government to improve competencies of the social service workforce to deliver better social services. UNICEF together

with the Family Academy Public Foundation conducted a series of online trainings on the basic skills of social work and case management that reached 1,500 specialists who work with vulnerable families with children. Forty-five UNICEF-trained social work trainers subsequently conducted cascade training for 377 social workers and 350 social service students.

### Children with disabilities

To model an improved system for supporting children with developmental delays, UNICEF and the MLSP jointly conducted a gap analysis and consultations with caregivers and NGOs using evidence-based methodologies and standardized techniques for the assessment, management, and capacity building of service providers and parents/families. The adaptation of the WHO Caregivers Skills Training Programme allowed training of 80 national and sub-national trainers and 128 caregivers on how to promote child development, communication and functioning.

To develop multi-disciplinary teams' capacity in the assessment and support of children with disabilities under the social model of disability, UNICEF with the MLSP, Medical University Astana and MoH Children's Rehabilitation Centre for Children with Disabilities trained 260 social welfare and rehabilitation specialists through 13 national and international webinars.



## Cross-cutting work

### Evidence generation, knowledge management and evaluation

UNICEF developed and implemented a new Knowledge Management Strategy and Implementation Plan for 2021-2023.

In collaboration with the World Bank, the nationally representative Listening to Kazakhstan survey was conducted every month to collect data from 1,500 households in order to learn about the social and economic wellbeing of the population in Kazakhstan.

A Child Well-Being Index was developed jointly with the UNICEF Office of Research - Innocenti, the Child Rights Protection Committee and the Economic Research Institute, and is being piloted.

UNICEF and the Taldykorgan Regional Women's Support Centre collaborated to create a Kazakhstan Participatory Evaluation Network to engage local NGOs and CSOs specializing in child-related topics and having experience in evaluating programmes, projects and policies. It promotes participatory evaluation to raise the quality of life of the local population through improving the efficiency of public services, budget programmes and policies of local authorities.

### Communication

A new Communication and Advocacy Strategy was developed to support the implementation of the new country programme. Media relations, a country office digital presence and engagement with digital influencers were further strengthened. UNICEF brand awareness was measured for the first time showing that 32 per cent of respondents are aware of UNICEF and its activities.

Increased presence in traditional media resulted in a 37 per cent share of voice, exceeding the target of 33 per cent. The country office website was visited by over 1.7 million users – a 5.5 fold increase over 2020. A vaccine special media project was started with popular online magazine Vlast.kz that resulted in a reach of almost 1 million.

### Volunteering

Volunteering activities started in 2020 were expanded jointly with the National Volunteers Network. A project was launched on promoting routine vaccination among parents and caregivers of children aged 0-3 years and pregnant women. A 'Generation Unlimited employability skills' project started to teach youth about different aspects of

the employment process in the country. The BeKind initiative was further promoted to prevent bullying of girls and boys: 164 volunteers helped to reach 141 schools involving some 20,000 school children and 3,000 parents. Twenty Child Rights Clubs were opened in schools reaching over 8,200 participants. The #BeGreen initiative reached 13,850 school children to increase their knowledge of climate change and conscious water consumption, the #PlasticFree initiative reached 13,281 school children, the Road Safety initiative 7,397 school children and the Disaster Risk Reduction initiative reached 13,833 school children.

### Gender

UNICEF provided technical expertise to the Government in updating the 2030 Family and Gender Concept by providing expertise and recommendations for strengthening family resilience, gender equality, prevention of child separation from the family, prevention of VAC, and strengthening parenting skills.



**UNICEF #BeGreen volunteer Diana Murzagalieva  
brought wastepaper for recycling in Nur-Sultan**

*@UNICEF Kazakhstan/2022/RuslanKarsamov*



**In December 2021 UNICEF established its Business Advisory Council in Kazakhstan to enhance collaboration between UNICEF and businesses to develop solutions for key issues children face.**

@UNICEF Kazakhstan/2021/ValeriyKalyiev

## **PART 3** | Partnerships

## Part 3:

# Partnerships

**The country office was actively engaged in UN collaborative mechanisms, including the Results Groups, to operationalize the UNSDCF 2021-2025, joint advocacy, technical coordination (WHO, UNDP, IOM, UN Women) and programming.** There were joint programmes with UNDP, UNESCAP, UNODC, UN Women and UNFPA on preventing violence against women and children, strengthening parenting skills, advancing child budget monitoring, and SDG financing.

Inter-UN agency cooperation on children's issues was facilitated through joint outreach programmes and collaboration on the development of the UN Country Team Communication and Advocacy Strategy 2021. To ensure close collaboration on risk communication and community engagement among UN agencies, UNICEF led the COVID-19 UN Communication Group and supported UN COVID-19 monitoring with daily media monitoring reports disseminated to the UN Country Team. In partnership with WHO and the MoH, UNICEF launched a country-wide COVID-19 vaccine demand generation campaign.

The Human Rights Ombudsperson made a significant contribution to the promotion of the rights of children affected by violence and by migration, and has actively participated in the development of model services and policies. The Ombudsperson, in collaboration with UNICEF and the EU, has advocated for resolving differences at governmental and parliamentary levels. The partnership with the Human Rights Ombudsperson and Child Rights Ombudsperson helped promote the rights of migrant and returnee children and children without parental care.

UNICEF collaborated with the Parliament on child budgeting, protection of children from violence and childcare reform.

Engagement with the private sector was strengthened with the building of new

partnerships and establishing the Business Advisory Council, currently with 10 partners, to unlock the potential for business in building a better society for children. These include the large mobile operator Beeline, the largest Bank in Kazakhstan Halyk Bank and two chambers of commerce. BAC members will offer UNICEF their time, knowledge, innovative ideas, skills, and business networks in developing joint solutions and co-creating solutions to improve the situation of children. The BAC aims to be a platform to develop joint solutions and co-create solutions to improve the situation of children around health and nutrition, education and child protection.

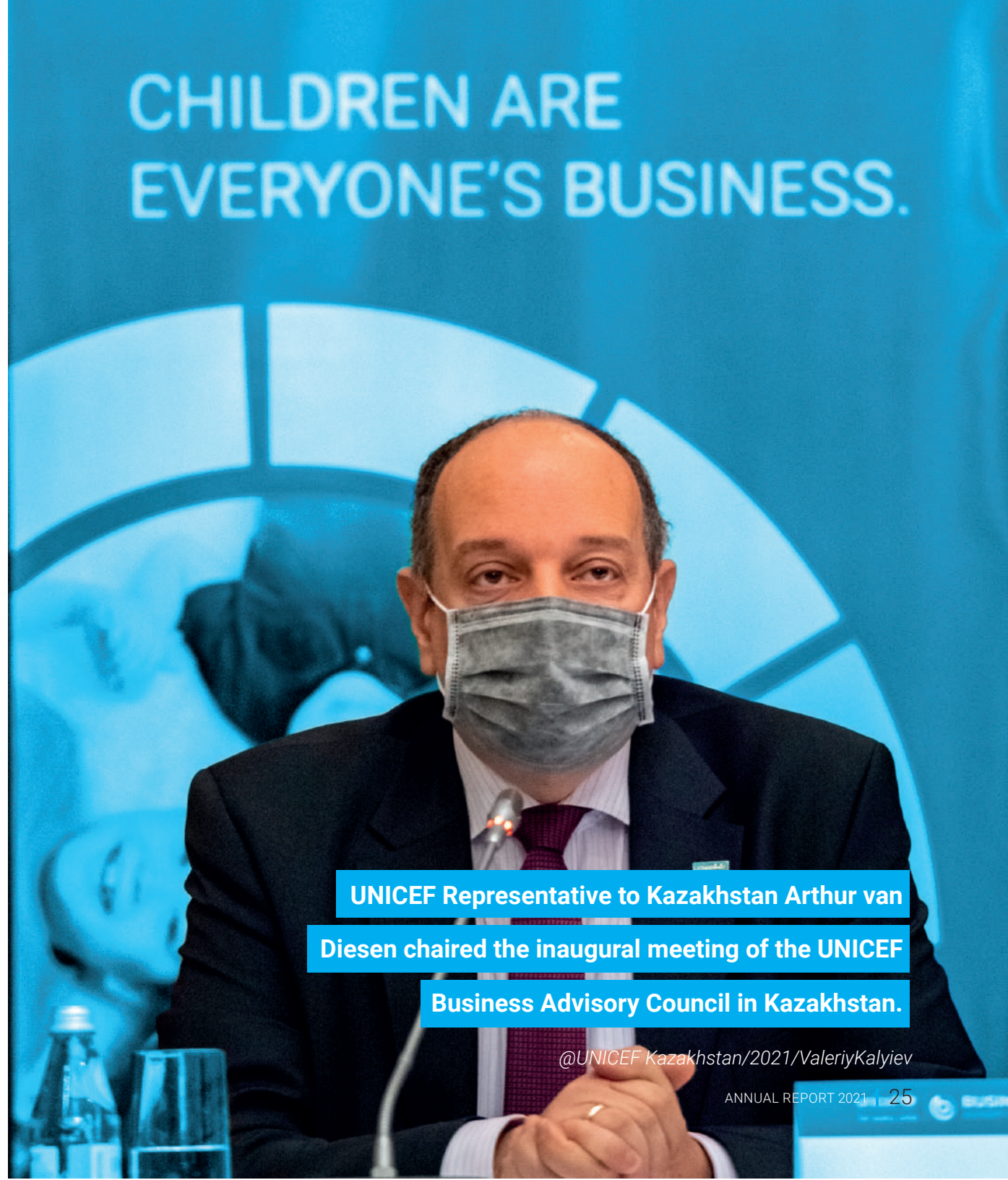
UNICEF strengthened its partnership with USAID, now one of the largest donors to UNICEF Kazakhstan, to support the Government's response to COVID-19. USAID is currently funding programmes on risk communication and community engagement related to the COVID-19 vaccine roll out and support to strengthen the routine immunization



# CHILDREN ARE EVERYONE'S BUSINESS.

system. The partnership included addressing misinformation, conducting a rapid cold chain assessment, building capacity of health workers and teachers and explaining to the public at large the importance of immunization.

Cooperation with the EU Delegation continued in advocating with the Government for the protection and access to basic services of returnee children and children on the move. UNICEF also established new collaboration with diplomatic embassies present in Kazakhstan.



**UNICEF Representative to Kazakhstan Arthur van Diesen chaired the inaugural meeting of the UNICEF Business Advisory Council in Kazakhstan.**

*@UNICEF Kazakhstan/2021/ValeriyKalyiev*



**Ambassador of EU Delegation to Kazakhstan, Commissioner for Human Rights in Kazakhstan and UNICEF Representative in Kazakhstan opened child-friendly premises for migrant children in Nur-Sultan to provide caring and supportive environment for children while they temporarily stay at the Center for the Support of Children.**

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## **PART 4** | Innovations and lessons learned



## Part 4:

### Innovations and lessons learned

While vaccine hesitancy is often attributed solely to those members of the population who are anti-vaccination, in Kazakhstan the work that UNICEF has undertaken with partners has demonstrated that it is a more nuanced, complex issue. The issue has also been highlighted by the rate of vaccine hesitancy significantly increasing in Kazakhstan due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The root cause analysis of the vaccine preventable measles outbreak that UNICEF conducted identified that vaccine hesitancy encompasses a spectrum of issues and clearly indicates: 1) a lack of efficient communication between different stakeholders; 2) lack of knowledge among healthcare workers; and 3) important gaps in the immunization system. These are addressed through UNICEF's immunization strengthening programme. The rate of vaccine hesitancy significantly increased due to the COVID-19 pandemic, though evidence clearly indicates that vaccine hesitancy encompasses a spectrum of issues that includes the existence of militant anti-vaxxers, parents

**Yerkenaz Nurlanbek, student of primary school**

**connected to internet under GIGA initiative.**

**Taldykuduk village, Turkestan region, Kazakhstan**

*@UNICEF Kazakhstan/2021/RuslanKarsamov*

with genuine questions and concerns that they cannot find answers to, misinformation, lack of access to PHC services, and lack of trust in the healthcare system regarding delivery, storage of vaccines and side effects. Despite that, healthcare workers remain the main and respected source of information.

UNICEF and partners responded to these reasons for vaccine hesitancy, including a lack of easily obtainable information on the immunization programme, through a multifaceted strategy that included developing a one-stop information shop online, the egu.kz website, where parents can find answers to their well-founded questions about vaccination and the immunization system, and long-reads in vlast.kz, volunteering, and training of health workers.

Also, to address gaps in evidence, UNICEF conducted a KAP survey on immunization among parents and healthcare workers, an assessment of the vaccine procurement and supply system, assessments of medical contraindication and the registration of adverse events following immunization. The findings were used to lower vaccine hesitancy through C4D activities and improve vaccination planning, procurement, distribution, and administration.

In generating evidence for programming and advocacy, UNICEF has invested substantially in the evaluation of systems such as social

protection and VAC. However, it has become clear that it did not invest sufficiently in the ownership of these evaluations. As a result, there have been instances when, following the conducting of an evaluation, the counterpart has not been in agreement with the findings though it was in full agreement with the evaluation being conducted. This has led not only to difficulties in the utilisation of the results of the evaluation but also put strain on the partnership. In future, additional focus at the start of the process of designing evaluations needs to be placed on ensuring buy-in by all partners involved in all aspects of the evaluation including the possibility that the results/findings may not be as expected.

Primary and secondary schools opened for face-to-face learning on 1 September after COVID-19 restrictions were lifted. The schools were totally closed for nine weeks, and partially closed for over 34 weeks (with some variation according to the school location). This inevitably led to learning loss and considerable school dropout. The pandemic brought into focus the importance of children being able to study and learn online as well as in schools. With over 90 per cent of students reverting to distance

learning during quarantine, to sustain the continuity of learning digital technology and good internet connectivity are essential.

UNICEF has therefore promoted school connectivity by connecting schools to the internet, providing content for teachers in delivering digital blended learning, and the development of digital public goods (DPG). Inter alia, this enables the fostering of language literacy online and specifically the implementation of the Akelius language initiative for children affected by migration and returning from conflict zones.

At the same time, after joining the Digital Public Goods Alliance (DPGA) in 2020, Kazakhstan is revising the Digital Kazakhstan state programme into a new DigitEl project to boost digital development, connectivity and building digital skills among the population. UNICEF conducted a DPG needs assessment with the participation of the government, quasi-government organizations, NGOs and startups, which identified existing solutions or those to be developed as DPG. A series of DPG webinars, conducted by UNICEF and Astana Hub for Kazakhstan's start-up community, improved their understanding and knowledge of DPG and accessibility standards. A DPG component was subsequently included



**Isatai (11) at the yard of his house at Burundai village, Almaty oblast. He had to study online because of the COVID-19 pandemic.**

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by Astana Hub in their acceleration programme, and three digital platforms (Okulab.kz; Doskaz.kz; okoo.kz) were aligned to DPGA international standards to meet the needs of children with visual and hearing impairments. Digital Public Good – Accessible Kazakhstan (<https://doskaz.kz/en>) was recognized by the global DPGA.

The development of cloud technologies will provide many opportunities for building integrated online platforms to assist in learning, adapting textbooks into digital format, and deliver online lessons, digital skills from primary to tertiary level students. A key direction for transforming the approaches to the provision of services and interaction of the state with citizens and business will be the transition to the principles of open architecture, in which a qualitatively new level of cooperation with the commercial sector will be built. As a result of UNICEF's work on the promotion and scaling-up of DPG, DigitEL's main principle for creation of new digital solutions is in the use of open information storage technologies (open-source).





Students and teachers of school connected to internet under GIGA initiative during UNICEF Kazakhstan field visit, Kabylsai village, Turkestan region, Kazakhstan



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