In the first week of January 2022, public protests incited by a sharp increase in the price of Liquid Petroleum Gas soon escalated to reflect widely held grievances of the population as they seek political reforms.

The protests involved manifestations of violence, looting and destruction of infrastructure and triggered massive suppression efforts by armed security services to bring the situation back under control.

UNICEF is providing support to local authorities in Almaty with essential supplies including food and nutrition baskets, hygiene items and education supplies targeting 500 families with children.

UNICEF requires USD 500,000 to ensure provision and continuity of support services for vulnerable children affected by this situation, which is compounded by the ongoing COVID-19 crisis, by scaling capacities to respond to arising needs and build resilience of communities and systems.

Situation overview and needs

Major protests erupted on 2 January 2022, quickly spreading mainly to main cities. Sparked by a sharp increase in price of liquid gas, they evolved to reflect wide range governance grievances (corruption, inequality, lack of trust in Government), manifesting in violence, looting and destruction of infrastructure - including airports, banks - particularly in Almaty. Reportedly at least two children in Almaty were short during the incident, and 7,939 persons were arrested, but details on age, gender are not available. Violence on the streets, looting and destruction of shops and public infrastructure and armed suppression lead to losses of life and an estimated infrastructure damage of approximately 87,000,000,000 KZT (USD 201,388,888). On request of President of Kazakhstan, Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) – members including Russia, Armenia, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan deployed troops to provide support to security and containment efforts. The President accepted resignation of Government and a new acting Prime Minister was appointed, with cabinet continuing as a caretaker government until a new government is formed. Banking, air travel and commercial actives were suspended. Communications were heavily affected with internet blackout across the country. Children were among those affected, facing restrictions in movement, accumulated stress and psycho-social needs and disruption in education.

From 10 January, the security situation in Almaty continued to improve, with continued patrols and containment efforts by security forces in some parts of the city. Almaty’s airport has reopened for domestic and international flights, most commercial services have resumed, and internet connectivity has been restored in Almaty and Nur-Sultan. Overnight curfew arrangements have been lifted in three of Kazakhstan’s 14 administrative regions.

In addition to this most recent instability, the COVID-19 pandemic and its impacts continue to affect vulnerable children and families. On 12 January 2022, the Government imposed restrictions on access to shopping and entertainment centers including safely protocols to be followed to open retail chains due to increased cases of COVID-19 with omicron. Overall, 9,122 new cases were registered in one day. Most of all new cases were in Nur-Sultan (5,118) and Almaty (1,205). Country wide, due to the unrest, schools’ holidays have been extended until 17 January. But due to Covid-19,
in Nur-Sultan and Almaty, children will resume their studies on-line, and schools will remain closed until 31 January 2022.

Kazakhstan is furthermore highly prone to hazards including earthquakes, floods etc. and is facing the adverse impact of climate change. In this context, children continue to be affected by multiple crises limiting their opportunities for survival, growth and development.

**Urgent basic needs and rights of children and youth**

The local authorities in Almaty have identified 3,000 vulnerable families with multiple children, living under the poverty line before the disruption. This includes children with special needs and disability, children who lost their caregivers, children in contact with the law, who are likely to face severe impacts due to the security situation, political instability and increasing cases of COVID-19 as well as associated restrictions.

While numbers are not available, it is likely that a number young people would be amongst those 7,939 persons reportedly apprehended in the aftermath of the violence. Their needs would include access to basic services including education, legal aid mental health support and psycho-social counseling.

With the school disruption, some children may face learning loss and risks of dropping out from schools. The UNESCO administrative data of 2020 on Kazakhstan reports a 10-fold growth of school dropouts among children and adolescents aged 7-17 years since 2018 (some 147,000 cases), reflective impact on attendance due to COVID-19. With prolonged school closures due and ongoing internet interruptions in January 2022 due to the current crisis situation, it is expected that learning losses may be exacerbated even further and become even more profound among the most vulnerable groups of children.

Promoting participation of young people in consultations on their future needs including for employment will also be important and could feed into the future policy dialogues on strengthening the capacity of the system and partner organisations.

**Government plans to respond**

The President of Kazakhstan called for the support to estimate and restore the damage among buildings and businesses. A helpline 1414 call center for the psycho-social support for the affected population was established under the Ministry of Information’s leadership and run by psychologists from NGOs.

The Almaty city local authorities requested UNICEF’s support in procurement of essential supplies for the 3,000 identified families, already vulnerable before the disruption.

To address the root causes of violence, looting and unrest, with continuous advocacy of UNICEF with the Ministry of Labour and Social protection of population, and through ongoing skills for employment programmes, the government would develop a roadmap and introduce the "Early Identification System" of socially vulnerable groups of the population and youth (NEET), for the targeted provision of individual support measures: assistance in choosing a profession, training and employment. With the help of information systems, it is planned to ensure control over the creation of jobs and employment within the framework of ongoing national projects. The priority for employment will be given to youth, especially the NEET category. Current measures aim at ensuring youth employment through “Youth Practice” and “First Workplace” projects. To strengthen these projects, the terms for participation of young people and the size of wages will be increased.

**UNICEF Response**

**Immediate actions:**

To respond to the immediate needs of children of the most at risk among the 3,000 vulnerable families, food and nutrition baskets, hygiene and education supplies are being procured to reach 500 affected families with children in Almaty. The coordination of the procurement and distribution will be undertaken with the Akimat of Almaty, the Red Crescent Society and local NGOs.

**Proposed programme response:**

*Protection of children in contact with the law:* The Justice for Children aspect of current situation needs careful attention. UNICEF will continue to advocate with national human rights institutions to ensure observation of Justice for Children, if children/adolescents are among the people detained, and provide guidance on monitoring standards and reporting. While police, prosecutors and judges are trained periodically, a refreshment on Justice for Children international standards is critical in the current situation. UNICEF has prepared and disseminated immediate recommended actions in respect of children who might become or have already come into contact with the law following the recent events and will further support these actions as necessary. Legal aid to affected children and families is arranged on pro-bono basis by the Bar Association and will be supported by UNICEF once the needs become clearer. To ensure youth participation and engagement, UNICEF will lead the youth advisory board and consultations for the expression of opinion by young people on their needs. This process will lead to specific recommendations to the draft roadmap in addressing the needs of young people including NEET to vocational education and skills for employment.
**Mental health support and counseling:** A state-run hotline 1414 is operational and provides support for identifying missing and injured persons as well as for rendering psycho-social support. Reportedly, demand for psycho-social support is high. There will most likely be a need for psychosocial support, particularly for children in areas most affected by violence over the past week. UNICEF can build on previous work done in Kazakhstan on mental health and psychosocial support during COVID-19 with the trained by UNICEF National Mental Health Center and speed up the launch and roll out of the UsupportMe app based on the Belarussian experience. The USSupportMe approach in summary increases access to psychological and emotional support: reaching adolescents where they are; free-of-charge and affordable care; fast response time, quality of care; professional and vetted counsellors whom adolescents can trust, utilization of local psychological care system: national healthcare system, school psychological support, youth friendly services etc.

**Learning loss and remedial programmes:** Due to the social unrest, school holidays have been extended until 17 January 2022. Schools need re-opening as early as possible, not least because children are still recovering from learning losses incurred during the COVID-19 period. During Covid-19 in 2019-2021, the schools were totally closed for nine weeks, and partially closed for over 34 weeks (with some variation according to the school location). To address the increasing learning loss among children and adolescents, especially those at risk of dropping out from school, there is a need to strengthen the education delivery including remedial/catch up studies and real time monitoring of learning losses. UNICEF has established partnership with the Almaty Management University and National volunteering network to launch and test targeted remedial and mentorship programmes and extend their implementation to affected areas. UNICEF will work with the Information analytical center of the Ministry of Education to come up with the key indicators and tools to monitor learning loss through the administrative data in the Education management information system (EMIS) generated from the formative assessments across one grade of primary and two grades of secondary school.

**Safety to learn in and around schools:** To prevent and respond to violence in general, appropriately use digital technologies and handle fake information, safe to learn arrangements are to be further set up in all schools guiding teachers and students on digital safety/literacy, peace and stability, helping them to catch up with their studies and prevent dropouts. Kazakhstan participates in Giga, a joint ITU-UNICEF initiative aimed at connecting all schools in the world to the Internet and every young person to information, opportunity, and choice. Giga Step 5 ‘Regulatory and Policy Framework’ aims at assessing regulatory barriers and identifying potential levers. It is proposed to conduct the analysis of child online safety, digital safety/digital literacy/media literacy measures, in particular, whether guidelines and regulations are in place for child online safety and ensure mechanisms in place for their implementation and enforcement into national educations systems. Additionally, parenting programmes and capacity building on digital literacy, peace and stability will be implemented through the volunteering initiatives building on previous experience with children and youth engagement.

**Community-based social work support:** Social workers were on the frontline to address the social needs of people during crisis. While social work is developing in Kazakhstan as a profession and function, social work and case-management in emergency situation is under-developed. System for supervision of complex cases is lacking. The newly established National Alliance of Social Workers has dedicated 12 social workers who work online to support the Almaty based affected population on a volunteering basis. They help the local authorities in preparing map of available community resources, counseling and linking affected population to available resources. Due to limited awareness of the population on the role of social workers, the demand in these services is currently limited compared to psychological services. Several NGOs provide psychological support, and the Bar Association has established free of charge counselling of the affected population. UNICEF will ensure social workers are capacitated in crisis case-management with affected children and families and provide supervision of cases; mapping of available community resources and developing basic protocols for emergency preparedness of social workers; continue information sharing on the opportunities and resources available to affected children and families and encouraging their use; support in organizing community-based points for overcoming trauma, grief counselling and engaging peer support and preparing social reports and documenting the lessons learned.

**Risk Communication and Community Engagement:** Risk communication and community engagement interventions will need to be scaled to inform public and professionals about the availability of support services, promote youth empowerment, youth participation, digital literacy, child safety online, promotion of USupportMe app and COVID-19

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1 The USSupportMe platform (USMps) aims to establish trustable connection with adolescents and make psychosocial support counselling more affordable, inclusive and accessible to all adolescents. To achieve this goal the USMp will pioneer an Uber-like app for on-demand psychosocial support services in Kazakhstan. The USMps is a digital psychological service delivery model that will build a bridge between existing psychological and emotional support resources and adolescents who are under stress and need support.
prevention and response measures. The messages will reach out to general public and targeted beneficiaries through the mainstream mass media, UNICEF Kazakhstan website and social media messages as well as update the public about UNICEF’s engagement into the response and stabilization of the situation in the affected areas.

**Funding need**

UNICEF Kazakhstan office is immediately mobilizing existing resources of USD 50,000 to address the most immediate critical need of children affected by the crisis situation in January and requires an additional USD 500,000 to meet additional needs of children and families and ensure continuity of education and protection services for the first 6 months of 2022. This will further strengthen the preparedness capacities and resilience of systems and services to deal with future disasters.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programme areas</th>
<th>Funding needs</th>
<th>Funds available</th>
<th>Funding gap</th>
<th>Funding gap in %</th>
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