Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CEE/CIS)

CEE/CIS is a region prone to an array of natural disasters, from floods to earthquakes and avalanches, as well as occasional political crises. Such conditions leave women and children highly vulnerable to displacement, protection concerns and severe health problems. In 2010, a combination of floods and earthquakes in the Pamir Mountains and in southern Tajikistan resulted in displacement of families, destruction of schools and public health facilities, and loss of life. In addition, 476 cases of polio were reported in the country, some 70 per cent of them in children, in the first outbreak since the European Region was certified polio-free in 2002. In spring 2010, the violent overthrow of the Kyrgyzstan Government became a regional humanitarian crisis when about 400,000 people were displaced and an additional 75,000 refugees, among them 30,000 children, briefly sought shelter in Uzbekistan.

In 2010, seasonal rains caused mudflows in Tajikistan and also in the Republic of Moldova, where some 20,000 people were affected. Severe heat waves, a phenomenon many scientists attribute to global climate change, sparked forest fires and caused the widespread destruction of property and crops in the Russian Federation. In addition, smog caused worsening health conditions, such as respiratory problems, severe dehydration and heat exhaustion, in much of Central Europe, especially the Russian Federation.

UNICEF is requesting US$900,000 for its regional support of humanitarian work in CEE/CIS in 2011, in order to strengthen readiness and response to the different types of disasters that could leave women and children in the region vulnerable to displacement, serious protection concerns and health-related issues. Since Central Asia, South Caucasus and Turkey lie in seismic zones, the region is prone to major earthquakes. The potential consequences of such a natural disaster would include widespread displacement and, in countries such as Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, where uranium waste is stored underground, a serious health risk of toxic poisoning. Therefore, it is critical that the UNICEF country offices in the region strengthen their own as well as their partners’ capacities to prepare and respond to such disasters.

CRITICAL ISSUES FOR CHILDREN AND WOMEN

The recent challenges caused by the global economic crisis has increased levels of poverty in the region, which has severely affected the poorest and most marginalized segments of society. Specific impact on communities, such as the internally displaced persons from the region’s previous conflicts, is of concern. The situation of the separatist republic of Transnistria in the Republic of Moldova remains unresolved. In relation to the disputed territory of Nagorno-Karabakh, the Governments of both Armenia and Azerbaijan continue to participate in talks mediated by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, but progress is still slow in resolving the issue. The recent violence in Kyrgyzstan has also caused renewed fears regarding the use of landmines and the spread of light weapons in the region, posing additional hazards to children, youth and local populations.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2010

In 2010, UNICEF estimated that US$1,650,000 was needed to fund emergency response work in the CEE/CIS region. As of October 2010, a total of US$2,110,059 had been received. In 2010, the CEE/CIS regional office supported the country offices in responding to a number of emergencies, including earthquakes in Tajikistan (January) and Turkey (March) and floods in Kazakhstan (March), Tajikistan (May), the Republic of Moldova (July) and Montenegro (November). UNICEF responded by supporting national authorities and partners in conducting rapid assessments and assisting relief response. In response to violence in the south of Kyrgyzstan, UNICEF has been an active member of the humanitarian country team and within this framework has been leading the WASH and education clusters (the latter as co-lead with
Save the Children), as well as the child protection and gender-based violence sub-clusters (the latter along with the United Nations Population Fund).

The regional office also coordinated a major vaccination effort throughout Tajikistan, curtailing the potential spread of a highly contagious outbreak of polio. The office also provided financial and technical resources to support those country offices impacted by small-scale floods and avalanches in the region.

Throughout 2010, integrating the newly revised Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action with emergency readiness was a priority. The CEE/CIS office ran multiple assessments, technical training and risk-planning activities and simulations to improve reaction and response to the natural disasters common to the region.

A major priority has also been to contribute to national efforts in reducing disaster risks within the Central Asia and South Caucasus Region. Such efforts continue to be supported by the Disaster Preparedness Programme of the European Commission Humanitarian Aid Office (DIPECHO). UNICEF’s regional office has established partnerships with regional organizations such as the regional office of the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction to implement key aspects of the Hyogo Framework for Action, which is the global road map for reducing disaster risks and building resilience by 2015. Of the five priority areas identified by the framework, UNICEF has given a particular focus to Priority 1 (ensuring national and local commitment), Priority 3 (using knowledge and education to build a culture of safety and resilience) and Priority 5 (strengthening disaster preparedness). In the seven project countries of the region (i.e., Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan), UNICEF has established cooperation agreements with the relevant ministries, which in most cases are the ministries of emergency situations and the ministries of education. UNICEF has organized national events to draw attention to and mobilize action for the safety of children in disasters induced by natural hazards, such as earthquakes, floods and land/mudslides.
HUMANITARIAN ACTION: BUILDING RESILIENCE

A core aspect of the DIPECHO-funded disaster risk reduction programmes is to enhance the ability of selected schools to anticipate, prepare for and respond to future disaster events. Under the project, UNICEF will be working closely with principals, teachers and other school staff to review and enhance hazard-mapping, early warning system and disaster response plans. Simulation exercises, such as drills for earthquakes and fires, will be conducted to test the knowledge of both children and school staff concerning emergency response systems and procedures. These actions will contribute to building the resilience of schools against disaster risk.

In Kyrgyzstan, UNICEF is working with partners including the United Nations Development Programme and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to implement a peacebuilding programme that specifically targets adolescents and young people. The programme will identify issues faced by such people in the post-violence period in the country and will help them rebuild their lives by providing learning and vocational training opportunities.

In 2011, UNICEF’s CEE/CIS regional office will place priority on continuing to build capacities for emergency response among staff in country offices and partner agencies. Risk reduction activities will be further expanded, with particular focus given to the education sector. The regional team will work to integrate the revised Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action to strengthen risk reduction activities and polices. The office will also continue to partner with the World Health Organization, the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction and other UN and NGO partner agencies to support all aspects of planning, preparedness and emergency response, with a focus on simulations, preparedness and response training for women and children in the region.

DISASTER RISK REDUCTION (US$400,000)

The CEE/CIS regional office will continue to guide and support the implementation of the DIPECHO-funded disaster risk reduction programme in Central Asia and South Caucasus, which covers risk reduction activities in the sector of education and early childhood development in the region’s seven project countries. Since this is a regionally negotiated programme, the regional office is responsible for its overall coordination, management and oversight.

- The regional office will provide technical guidance and support to the seven country offices in developing specific strategies, approaches and partnership networks for achieving the project outcomes. The office will proactively identify technical support needs and organize coverage of those technical gaps through identification and recruitment of experts.
- UNICEF will establish a special disaster risk reduction specialist position in Almaty, Kazakhstan, to serve country offices in the Central Asia and South Caucasus Region and to provide quality technical support for the DIPECHO programme. The position will also help strengthen UNICEF’s capacity to engage in and contribute to strategic discussions with other regional partners, including the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.
- The regional office will also plan and implement capacity-building initiatives regarding disaster risk reduction for UNICEF staff and government counterparts. In 2011, the CEE/CIS regional office plans to organize at least two regional events on disaster risk reduction in education. These events will strive to identify and document best experiences and success stories, which will then be disseminated throughout the region and possibly at the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction scheduled for May 2011. To promote the exchange of information, experiences and materials among the seven project country offices, the regional office will launch an internal Intranet website in which project staff will have access to relevant guidance and resources. In addition, a web page will be developed within the regional office website to showcase the achievements of the disaster risk reduction programme in the CEE/CIS region.
- Expanding the disaster risk reduction programme beyond the Central Asia and South Caucasus Region will also be an important priority for the regional office. Country offices, especially in South Eastern Europe, will be supported in introducing elements of disaster risk reduction in their regular country programmes, especially when the country offices are developing their country programme documents. Efforts will also be pursued to increase resources for disaster risk reduction activities through mobilization of funding from potential government and private donors.
EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE PLANNING (US$300,000)

In 2011, UNICEF globally will introduce new technical supports designed to improve overall project, planning and implementation, as well as to bolster disaster and security preparedness.

- The CEE/CIS regional office will work with the Office of Emergency Programme’s Early Warning and Emergency Preparedness unit to continue to pilot and introduce the web-based version of the emergency preparedness and response plan, which will now incorporate security as well as business continuity planning. The new Early Warning, Early Action system is an interactive system designed to coordinate live information exchange and interaction, as well as provide links to a range of other agency databases and action plans. This system will be critical for improving communication among regional and country offices at the onset of emerging crises. Training CEE/CIS staff and country offices to use these new tools will be a focus for the regional office.

- Country offices, UNICEF staff, humanitarian partners and government counterparts will be provided with technical assistance and capacity-building opportunities related to the Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action, assessment and humanitarian standards and codes, the cluster approach and response to issues of displacement.

REGIONAL HUMAN RESOURCE SURGE CAPACITY (US$200,000)

The Kyrgyzstan crisis demonstrated the importance of having a regionally based surge capacity of UNICEF-trained staff for rapid emergency response. The ability of affected country offices to rapidly receive emergency response support from neighbouring offices and have staff in place with language skills (e.g., Russian) is crucial to the successful response to emergencies in this region.

- Further funding will be sought to strengthen the regional surge capacity, to enable rapid and efficient mobilization of trained staff to support emergency response within the region, in line with the Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action and the cluster approach. Additional funding will also be sought to support deployment in the event of an emergency in the region.

