

# AZERBAIJAN

2023 IFRC network country plan

Funding Requirement **CHF 700,000**

Appeal number **MAAZ003**

## In support of the Red Crescent Society of Azerbaijan



**85**

National Society branches



**176**

National Society staff



**6,000**

National Society volunteers

## People to be reached



**5,000**

Climate and environment



**2,800**

Disasters and crises



**7,000**

Health and wellbeing



**2,000**

Migration and displacement



**2,000**

Values, power and inclusion

## IFRC network multiyear focus

### Longer term needs

- Disaster and crisis risk management
  - Health and care
- Protracted displacement

### Capacity development

- Digital transformation
- Resource mobilization and partnerships
  - Youth and volunteer engagement
  - Branch strengthening

## Key country data

**Population** **10.1M**

**INFORM Severity rating** **low**

**Long-term Climate Risk Index** **146**

**Human Development Index rank** **91**

**Population below poverty level** **6.0%**

## Hazards



Floods



Drought



Earthquakes



Wildfires



Conflict



Population movement

## Funding requirements

**Total 700,000** CHF

Through the IFRC

**700,000** CHF

### IFRC Breakdown

#### Longer term needs

**250,000** CHF  
Disasters and crises

**50,000** CHF  
Values, power and inclusion

**400,000** CHF  
Enabling local actors

## Participating National Societies

Finnish Red Cross \*

Swiss Red Cross\*

Turkish Red Crescent



# NATIONAL SOCIETY PROFILE

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The Red Crescent Society of Azerbaijan was established in 1920 and admitted into the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) in 1995. The National Society is an auxiliary to Azerbaijan's public authorities in the humanitarian field and has a robust legal base supported by the Law on Recognition of Azerbaijan Red Crescent Society, the Law on the Protection of the Emblem, and relevant governmental decrees.

It is the largest local humanitarian organization in Azerbaijan with a countrywide presence, facilitated through a wide network of branches and volunteers. It provides humanitarian assistance through this national network, composed of headquarters, the Nakhichevan Autonomous Republic Committee, and 85 local and field branches across eight regions. The National Society also relies on strong links with governmental agencies, and local and international organizations. It has around 355,000 members, 22,266 registered local volunteers countrywide and 6,000 volunteers actively involved in its humanitarian work.

The National Society's Strategic Plan 2021–2025 defines its strategic aims in terms of disaster preparedness and response and health care, while also prioritizing its National Society development. In future, the Red Crescent Society of Azerbaijan seeks to strengthen its partnership with both government and non-government stakeholders in the area of disaster preparedness and response, in order to provide communities with necessary assistance. To achieve this, it is reviewing its contingency planning practices and works closely with relevant authorities to define its responsibilities as relating to its auxiliary role.

The National Society is a leading organization in Azerbaijan in promoting community-based health and first aid knowledge, through training and awareness-raising sessions that target both children and adults. It is also experienced in providing psychosocial support during emergencies, through its network of volunteers, while conducting psychosocial support workshops to improve the knowledge of its staff and volunteers.

## IFRC NETWORK ACTION IN 2023

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### Joint situational analysis

Located at the crossroads of the Middle East, Central Asia and Europe, Azerbaijan is bordered by the Caspian Sea and Caucasus Mountains, and spans both Asia and Europe. The country declared its independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, and now has a population of over 10 million made up of more than 80 different ethnic groups. These groups include Azerbaijani (91.6 per cent), Lezghin (2 per cent), Russian (1.3 per cent), Armenian (1.3 per cent), Talysh (1.3 per cent) and others (2.4 per cent). The far eastern part of Azerbaijan has the highest population density, particularly in and around Baku. Apart from some small urban areas, the rest of the country has a fairly low density and evenly distributed population. Approximately 57 per cent of its inhabitants live in rural areas.

Azerbaijan has a history of industrial development that spans more than 100 years, with oil remaining the most prominent product of its economy, and cotton, natural gas and agricultural products also contributing to its economic growth over the last five years. Although

agriculture contributes only seven per cent of GDP, it provides income to at least 36.3 per cent of the population and is thus a significant sector. However, agriculture in the country is highly susceptible to droughts, water shortages and temperature rises, with 80 per cent of its farmland in semi-arid or arid areas.

Azerbaijan's economic growth recovered quickly after the COVID-19 pandemic. The virus had originally hit the economy hard in 2020, pushing GDP down by 4.3 per cent. However, with the support of industries that include manufacturing, transportation, retail trade, communication and information technologies, GDP then increased 5.6 per cent in 2021 and by a forecast 3.7 per cent in 2022, according to the Asian Development Bank. Inflation has also increased in Azerbaijan, as with many countries across the world, rising from 2.8 per cent in 2020 to 6.7 per cent in 2021 and a forecast seven per cent in 2022.

Since the presidential election in April 2018, the Government of Azerbaijan has undergone significant changes. These include the nomination of a new Prime Minister and appointment of several key ministers

in charge of education, tax reforms, agriculture and rural development, the environment and energy. The new Government has been tasked with continuing the reforms required in key sectors to recover economic growth.

The long-term cost of conflict escalation between Armenia and Azerbaijan is high. According to UNHCR, 112,000 people in Azerbaijan were affected by the escalation of conflict in recent years, of whom 80,000 were temporarily displaced. Other risks for the population, livelihoods and infrastructure in Azerbaijan include hydrometeorological hazards, exacerbated by climate change and earthquakes.

While the population is continuing to grow, it is in the early stages of ageing. The declining fertility rate – which has decreased from about 5.5 children per woman in the 1950s to less than 2.1 in 2022 – combined with increased life expectancy, has resulted in the elderly making up a larger share of Azerbaijan's population. This high percentage of elderly residents and the slowed growth of the working-age population is likely to put pressure on the country's pension and health care systems in the future. Average life expectancy in Azerbaijan has increased over the years and was estimated to be 74 for men and 77 for women in 2022. As a result, in 2019, citizens over the age of 60 made up 11.5 per cent

of the population. Of 400,000 older people in the country, about 9,000 live alone, and only 150 older people live in specialized boarding houses for people living with disabilities due to war and labour injuries.

After gaining its independence, Azerbaijan has paid special attention to the development of laws that provide social protection. Allowances are distributed in the form of monthly or one-time payments for the provision of social assistance to persons of different categories – for example, targeted state social assistance in the form of a monthly allowance to low-income families. Other social assistance payments and allowances include the disability allowance, one-off funeral allowance, pregnancy and birth allowance, old-age allowance, and support for women with more than five children.

In addition, single adults and people in difficult living conditions are entitled to free social services at home. The Ministry of Labour and Social Protection is the main official provider of these care services, with semi-professional social home-based services provided by district or city departments. During the COVID-19 pandemic, demand for social home-care services among people aged 65 and over grew dramatically and the age threshold for accessing home care services was reduced from 70 to 65. This increased the share of older people accessing the service.

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## Strategic priorities

### Climate and environment

Climate trends in Azerbaijan over the last few decades include an increase in average annual temperatures by 0.4°C every year since 1991, an average decrease in rainfall by nine per cent over the past decade, an increase in extreme events such as floods, droughts and heatwaves, and a 50 per cent glacial loss over the last 110 years.<sup>1</sup>

The country's rapid economic development after the declaration of independence in 1991 has created a number of environmental challenges that are expected to be exacerbated by climate change, such as severe air pollution from industrial plants, the contamination of the Caspian Sea, soil degradation through erosion and desertification, biodiversity loss and forest reserve degradation. Azerbaijan is also a high flood-prone country, with people particularly at risk along the southern slope of the Greater Caucasus and in the high mountain

zone of Nakhichevan. A growing water deficit, air pollution and land degradation are likely to increase the vulnerabilities in different sectors, including agriculture, human health, water resources, forestry and tourism, and in coastal zones.

Climate change has already had a negative impact on Azerbaijan, with uneven seasonal and geographical distributions of rainfall affecting the water sector. Although uncertainties exist about future changes, a scenario in which temperatures increase and rainfall is reduced could reduce total available water resources by 10–15 per cent by 2040. Transboundary rivers also constitute a significant source of fresh water in the country, but studies suggest that water flow in these major rivers is already decreasing as a result of reduced rainfall in winter and spring. Projections suggest water flows will continue to decrease, by 35 per cent in the Alazani (Ganikh) Basin and 12.5 per cent in the Ağstafa Basin by 2100.

<sup>1</sup> The analysis for this section has been supported by the Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre: <https://www.climatecentre.org/>

Increased temperatures have also reduced glacier areas in the major water source of the Gusarchay Basin, by 50 per cent since 1890. The UN has estimated that only half of Azerbaijan's population had access to a supply of drinking water by the end of 2020. There are heavy losses in the water distribution system, with up to 50 per cent of supplied water failing to reach its intended destination. Water shortages due to water stress have increased in some districts to 78 per cent by 2019. These shortages affect land productivity and threaten the livelihoods of small farmers and rural populations.

Rising temperatures and water stress due to climate change will have an impact on agriculture, a core sector in Azerbaijan, which employs more than 27 per cent of the population. In addition, higher temperatures will lead to lower crop yields due to temperature sensitivity and increase the demand for irrigation due to high evaporation rates. Furthermore, the rise of invasive plant species, as ecosystems change in response to climate change, may threaten farming. Climate change will also increase the intensity of rainfall, leading to flooding and subsequent crop destruction. Already, each year, an estimated 300km<sup>2</sup> of agricultural land is affected by floods, and soil losses are estimated at 0.5 million m<sup>3</sup> annually.

### Main actions and areas of support

The Red Crescent Society of Azerbaijan uses its community reach to ensure that communities and its staff and volunteers undertake urgent action to adapt to the rising and evolving risks from climate and environmental crises. For example, due to extremely hot weather in June 2021, it carried out intensive community-based initiatives, especially in the cities of Baku and Sumqayit and the south and central regions of Azerbaijan, to promote safe behaviour during hot weather.

In 2023, the National Society will map out local stakeholders in the field of climate and environment, including public bodies, civil society and other actors, and explore partnerships to scale up action. The IFRC and the Red Cross Red Crescent [Climate Centre](#) will support this process with expertise and methodologies, and provide opportunities for knowledge and skills development of the National Society's staff in the climate change adaptation agenda. The National Society will also focus specifically on the assessment of health-related consequences of climate change and the understanding of potential policy and programmatic frameworks and actions in this area.

With IFRC support, the National Society will further build the capacity of its staff and volunteers on behavioural

change approaches for climate adaptation too, using community engagement approaches. It will design and implement environmental and climate campaigns focused on behaviour change, plastic use reduction and clean-ups.

### Disasters and crises

For real-time information on emergencies, see IFRC GO page [Azerbaijan](#).

Azerbaijan is one of the areas where floods and inundations are most likely to occur globally, and its population is vulnerable to the effects of earthquakes, droughts and flooding. Flooding events in the Great and Little Caucasus Mountain ranges, which cover almost half of the country, are intensive, stripping the land and damaging soil. This is estimated to cost the Azerbaijan economy US\$18–25 million each year, according to 2010 data from the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources.

As a part of the Alpine folded system, Azerbaijan is an area of very high seismic activity. On average, the country experiences about five earthquakes of magnitude 5.5 or larger per year. The eastern part of the country is affected by seismic activity at intermediate depths greater than 35km. In the west, earthquakes are shallower and more common close to the borders with Georgia and Armenia. In November 2000, two earthquakes of magnitude 6.6 and 6.8, at depths of about 35km, occurred at a short distance from the capital city Baku, the largest instrumental earthquakes observed in the country. Thirty per cent of Azerbaijan's land is prone to devastating earthquakes. The country's estimated disaster risk profile, according to the Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery, is that an earthquake with a 250-year return period would affect US\$40 billion (or 71 per cent) of Azerbaijan's GDP and three million people (34 per cent of its population).

Droughts are also a frequent occurrence in the country and can lead to forest fires. This occurred in 2014, when 59 hectares of forest were damaged by 12 fires. Deciduous or leaf-bearing forests dominate the land in Azerbaijan. The majority of fires are caused by man-made activities, mainly in arid zones – such as the burning of fields after corn harvests – and this may cause the extinction of some species of flora and fauna.

Regardless of the season, over the last few years, the country has been experiencing unstable weather conditions, which in turn has had a negative impact on the agricultural sector, an important part of Azerbaijan's non-oil economy.



Conflict escalations between Armenia and Azerbaijan also affect the population. Assessments carried out by the Red Crescent Society of Azerbaijan and the Turkish Red Crescent Society in April and May 2021 pointed to the provision of food and non-food items, such as clothing, household and hygiene items, remaining a priority need for those affected. Forty-eight per cent of those surveyed identified food as a priority need, 24 per cent said non-food items, and 20 per cent hygiene items. Risks of unexploded ordnances or mines persist, with longer-term impact on livelihoods evident, as the conflict has damaged agricultural land plots and led to a loss of livestock. This, in combination with the income losses linked to COVID-19 restrictions and related economic shocks, including decreased payments from abroad, has had a detrimental effect on the financial situation of conflict-affected communities.

### **Main actions and areas of support**

In 2023, the Red Crescent Society of Azerbaijan, with support from the IFRC network, will continue its community-based disaster risk mitigation initiatives, will address the urgent humanitarian needs of people affected by disasters and crises, and assist with their recovery. The National Society has a long history of working within disaster response. Traditionally, this response has been providing food and shelter (including household items) to affected people, or providing services such as first aid and psychosocial support. It has been steadily building up its programmatic base and responding to existing and emerging vulnerabilities. In

2021, as a response of the COVID-19 pandemic, the National Society implemented a cash and voucher assistance pilot project with support of the IFRC, targeting 959 households affected by the pandemic, with a focus on older people, large families, and pregnant and breastfeeding women. This successful pilot initiative encouraged the National Society to further strengthen its cash capacity and diversify its expertise in cash and voucher assistance in the future.

One of the National Society's key priority areas is strengthening its disaster response mechanisms and preparedness in emergencies. This means targeting two fundamental capacities: ensuring a trained and equipped disaster response structure at branch level, with an efficient organizational structure that includes the implementation of joint planning for disaster response at all levels. The creation of well-skilled and equipped branch disaster response teams – improving the professionalism of branch disaster response volunteers, decentralizing the National Society's response structures and improving internal communication – is an integral part of building these disaster management capabilities. Emergency mobile volunteer teams with knowledge and skills in various topics are the main part of the National Society's emergency response mechanism. With support from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), it created these specialist teams in conflict-affected regions of the country. From 2022, the National Society is expanding this approach to other branches, with IFRC support.

With support from the IFRC, the National Society will continue to invest in its cash and voucher assistance capacity, with the aim to mainstream it across humanitarian operations. In so doing, it follows the IFRC cash and voucher assistance preparedness approach, an ongoing development initiative that aims to mainstream the process into its tools, systems, procedures and staff capacity, as well as strengthening active leadership support, and its coordination and communication. The IFRC will also continue to support the Red Crescent Society of Azerbaijan in championing the cash agenda with relevant stakeholders across the country as an appropriate method for humanitarian and development cooperation.

On mine risk awareness, the IFRC will support the National Society in promoting safe behaviour through communication and education, targeting both children and adults and prioritizing the most at-risk locations. To address this issue, the National Society will implement an awareness-raising campaign on mine risks in the targeted regions in close coordination with the ICRC, UNDP, UNICEF and Azerbaijan National Agency for Mine Action. It will disseminate multimedia materials and establish safe spaces for children. In parallel with other activities, the children will be taught to recognize the risks of mines and practise safety rules.

## Health and wellbeing

Azerbaijan announced its universal health care policy in March 2021. Public health officials stated that the system, which was originally piloted in certain parts of the country, would be applied nationwide. It will make it possible for Azerbaijani citizens to benefit from 2,550 different health services in nearly 3,500 hospitals, free of charge. The introduction of this general health coverage system was introduced alongside other reforms.

Tuberculosis is one of the major public health problems in Azerbaijan, estimated at 60 per 100,000 of the population. HIV-negative tuberculosis mortality is 5.9 per 100,000 people, and HIV-positive incidence is 0.94. Treatment coverage meanwhile is 80 per cent, and the success rate of treating new cases in 2018 is estimated at 84 per cent, close to the World Health Organization (WHO) target of 85 per cent. By building on WHO recommendations and supported by partners, Azerbaijan has visibly improved its tuberculosis control programme.

The Azerbaijan HIV/AIDS epidemic continues to grow. Over the last 10 years, the rate of newly diagnosed infections increased by 358 per cent, from 1.2 per 100 000 of the population (or 101 cases) in 2004 to 5.5 in 2013 (or 514 cases). This increase is above the average

increase of 80 per cent for the European region and is indicative of some weaknesses in HIV/AIDS prevention for key demographics, notably people who inject drugs and other people with high-risk behaviours.

Non-communicable diseases are also a growing concern in Azerbaijan – it is estimated that they account for 87 per cent of all deaths in the country. Of these deaths, 52 per cent are due to cardiovascular disease, 16 per cent due to cancers, five per cent injuries, three per cent chronic respiratory conditions, two per cent diabetes, nine per cent communicable maternal, perinatal and nutritional conditions, and 13 per cent other non-communicable diseases.

The COVID-19 pandemic has placed a major strain on the health and social care system in Azerbaijan, and it has hit the poor and vulnerable most severely, exacerbating pre-existing inequalities. The pandemic has also increased exclusion and affected the mental well-being of vulnerable groups, especially older people living alone. The Impact Study of COVID-19 on Older People and Caregivers, conducted by the Red Crescent Society of Azerbaijan with the support of the IFRC, the Austrian Red Cross and Swiss Red Cross, revealed that the pandemic had a detrimental effect on multiple aspects of older people's lives, including their social interactions, access to essential services and access to health care facilities. The study also showed that the pandemic has led to the deterioration of older people's emotional and physical well-being, as well as their levels of physical activity. Demand for home-based care services has increased just as economic and social conditions of care providers of older people has worsened.

There is currently a high demand for mental health and psychosocial support in Azerbaijan, particularly in rural areas. However, human resources and services are limited, especially in these areas. This, combined with the pervasive stigma around mental health, contributes to a growing gap between demand and response. People either cannot access relevant support or they are faced with low-quality support. Meeting their needs is critical to achieving universal health coverage and the aims of the sustainable development goals.

In terms of climate change impacts on health, vector-borne diseases such as malaria are a potential threat in Azerbaijan, especially in the highlands, where favourable conditions for mosquitoes have increased. Indeed, temperature increase due to climate change could reverse the successful elimination of malaria in the country.

These same temperature increases could also lead to an increased risk of heat-related illness and mortality, especially in urban areas such as Baku. Older populations and those with pre-existing medical conditions are particularly vulnerable to such issues, and those with lower energy security or limited access to technologies such as air conditioning are also at risk.

Decreasing quality and availability of safe drinking water due to more frequent and intense floods could also contribute to increased prevalence of diseases such as cholera and gastrointestinal issues.

### **Main actions and areas of support**

The Red Cross Society of Azerbaijan will pursue a process of participation and collaboration on health risk communication and behaviour change approaches, ensuring health solutions are led by those people and communities it is seeking to assist. Health interventions will contribute to these comprehensive participatory and collaborative approaches, building sustainable community empowerment that will include various components of health care, such as prevention of outbreaks and spread of infectious diseases, first aid, mental health and psychosocial support, including psychological first aid, the promotion of a healthy lifestyle, and activities related to water, sanitation and hygiene.

The provision of psychological first aid is integral to the resilience of communities, and strengthening this capacity is also part of the National Society's plan. During the COVID-19 pandemic, staff and volunteers provided psychological first aid and referrals if needed through an established hotline. Staff and volunteers are also provided with psychological first aid as needed.

As regards health in emergencies and pandemic preparedness and response, a number of activities are proposed and designed to strengthen the response of the National Society to the health-related consequences of disasters and crises. Planned activities include conducting cascade community-based capacity building actions, carrying out interventions and awareness sessions, improving the National Society's capacity to be an instrumental part of disease surveillance at a community level, positioning stocks of items to support health in emergencies, developing new and adapting existing internal plans, protocols and procedures for preparedness and response to health emergencies, and taking actions on policy and advocacy.

In implementing first aid, the National Society is closely cooperating with the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Science and Education, and the Ministry of Emergency

Situations. The National Society implements first aid programmes for people in remote and borderline communities. To reduce the rate of accidents, injury and death associated with traffic and road safety, and based on its vast experience, the Red Crescent Society of Azerbaijan will implement activities that aim to prevent road traffic injuries and promote good practice related to addressing key behaviour risk factors.

Tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS prevention is one of the activities that the National Society is carrying out and will continue to pursue. It is implementing activities aimed at decreasing stigma and discrimination and carrying out advocacy for current or former sufferers of tuberculosis and people living with HIV/AIDS. To achieve this, close cooperation was created with local tuberculosis institutions, associations and other governmental and non-governmental organizations.

Water, sanitation and hygiene will also continue to be an important component of the Society's plan, in particular in relation to COVID-19 as a main protective measure against the disease.

### **Migration and displacement**

Major population movements occurred in Azerbaijan during the early 1990s. According to the Government, at the time of the 1994 ceasefire, the country hosted an estimated 250,000 displaced people and some 50,000 Meskhetian Turks from Central Asia. In 2009, the Government estimated that there were one million naturalized refugees and displaced persons, the vast majority of whom were displaced during the same period.

Azerbaijan has faced several escalations of the conflict, resulting in waves of displacement which remain an unresolved challenge in the country. Displaced persons live in all of the 76 administrative districts, although the majority have settled in and around the capital of Baku and Sumgayit. Significant numbers also live along the central-southern route of Fuzuli-Aghdam-Agjabedi-Barda-Mingechevir-Ganja, the northern route of Shamakhi-Ismayli-Gabala-Sheki and the southern route of Sabirabad-Saatli-Imishli-Beylagan. As a result of conflict escalation in September 2020, the initial number of displaced people reached 80,000, most of whom were able to return to their homes. The gender ratio of the displaced population is almost equal – 50.4 per cent women and 49.6 per cent men – with a relatively high proportion of children (40.8 per cent) and older people (10.1 per cent). However, a significant number of displaced people continue to live in public buildings such as schools, hostels and dormitories and

need continuous support. The Government aims to implement a special programme supporting the safe relocation of displaced people on a voluntary basis.

Disaster displacement poses a threat to Azerbaijan, with flooding representing the highest climate-related hydrometeorological driver. The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre projects over 4,800 people will be internally displaced in Azerbaijan annually as a result of sudden onset floods. The Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources estimated in 2010 that flooding caused costs of US\$18–25 million annually. This figure represents the financial loss that both people and government incur, and is coupled with the incalculable strain on families, mental health and other factors that come with displacement. An increase in disaster displacement will add additional burdens on governmental and non-governmental agencies that support people living in precarious situations. Rural-urban migration and displacement will also likely continue and increase due to hazards and ongoing environmental degradation.

### Main actions and areas of support

The Red Crescent Society of Azerbaijan has been providing support to displaced people and has regularly adjusted its response according to changing needs identified. Typical main areas of support comprise basic needs, including food, hygiene items and household items, livelihoods and recovery, and mental health and psychosocial support. Based on continuous needs assessments, in 2023, the National Society will give additional focus to multi-purpose cash and voucher interventions, such as for rental assistance, and support for livelihoods and self-reliance. It will also further increase the provision of relevant professional mental health and psychosocial support to different categories of displaced people. In line with the humanitarian imperative and within their mandates, the National Society and the IFRC are considering needs related to voluntary relocation once a safe environment and conditions are in place and people confirm their choices.

The National Society will further develop its capacities, particularly at branch level, to assess and respond to the needs of different categories of displaced people and their host communities. It will integrate migration into its strategic planning, including the collection and analysis of specific community perceptions and concerns on issues and needs of migrants, displaced persons and host communities. It will ensure that its services are accessible by all displaced people and, in particular, work on the inclusion of those who find themselves in an irregular situation.

## Values, power and inclusion

Significant efforts have been made to advance gender equality in Azerbaijan over the last few decades. The country's constitution explicitly mentions the right to equality between all men and women, and this provision is further reinforced through a series of normative acts adopted or revised thereafter. Nevertheless, gender inequality is still among the factors that continue to affect the formation of relationships within families, and society at large. Despite existing legal provisions on equal rights, women have more limited access to economic resources compared with men. In addition, women lack the opportunities and skills necessary to fully participate in decision-making in their personal lives and public and political life. While there are many civil society organizations in Azerbaijan working on the issues of gender equality and human rights, overall the expertise of local organizations in protection, gender and inclusion is negligible. This often results in the design and implementation of gender-blind development interventions, unable to reach the most vulnerable groups within target communities.

The Red Crescent Society of Azerbaijan, in partnership with the IFRC, has identified community engagement and accountability as a strategic priority area to support diverse programme delivery and disaster preparedness and response capacities. So far, community engagement and accountability has already been integrated into different programmes and operations of the National Society: for example, in risk communication and community engagement efforts as part of the COVID-19 response, efforts to conduct [vulnerability and capacity assessments](#) as part of projects to enhance communities' resilience, as well as the cash pilot conducted in 2021.

A fundamental pillar of the community engagement and accountability approach centres around establishing and managing a well-functioning and sustainable central feedback mechanism. A community feedback mechanism comprises the tools and processes for receiving feedback, managing, analyzing and sharing feedback data, ensuring feedback is acted upon, providing communities with a response and informing them of the actions taken. A community feedback workshop with key National Society staff was organized at the end of 2021. A mechanism is not yet in place to gain an overview of how the National Society is perceived by community members, with their key concerns and questions.

According to consultations carried out by the Red Crescent Society of Azerbaijan and Turkish Red Crescent Society with educational authorities, families and schoolchildren, schools affected by the 2020 escalation of conflict remain damaged, with poor sanitation conditions. Headteachers have reported that 10 schools are in need of child-friendly spaces for mental health and psychosocial support, mine awareness and other essential activities. In those areas where mine risk remains high, the repair of safe play areas and sport grounds is essential to ensure that children and youths exercise for their mental health in safe spaces. Assessments show that vulnerable households, especially those who have lost breadwinners or employment, or former livelihoods due to both conflict and COVID-19, lack access to, and money to pay for, school equipment and stationery, uniforms and shoes, and safe forms of travel to school in unsafe areas. Following conflict escalations, children are faced with increased risk from road traffic in both urban and rural areas. Road safety of schoolchildren is of particular concern where they have had to adapt to new environments and surroundings due to the conflict.

### **Main actions and areas of support**

The Red Crescent Society of Azerbaijan will continue to invest efforts towards mainstreaming protection, gender and inclusion in all its needs assessments, programme and project design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. This is to ensure that its interventions are tailored to the diverse needs and problems of men and women and the more vulnerable cohorts within them, including youth, people living with disabilities, displaced individuals and refugees, those living with HIV/AIDS and other minority groups. Using continuous analysis, and with due consideration of protection, gender and inclusion in the local context, the National Society will ensure

the equal and equitable access of men and women, and more vulnerable cohorts, to its services. The IFRC will focus its efforts on the development of the National Society's capabilities in community engagement and accountability, and protection, gender and inclusion capabilities, supporting it through mainstreaming protection, gender and inclusion, and participatory approaches in its work, through extensive training and guidance.

The Red Crescent Society of Azerbaijan acknowledges and embraces community engagement and accountability as a key cross-cutting area to be integrated in all its programmes and operations. So far, no strategy is in place and efforts will be made to strengthen and institutionalize the community engagement and accountability approach in Azerbaijan. A strategy will be developed following foundational training in the second half of 2022 targeting key headquarters staff. This will be in the form of training of trainers, ensuring that it can then be rolled out at branch level. The National Society is also establishing a central community feedback mechanism, which is expected to be operational at headquarters level by the end of 2022 and will be refined, strengthened and rolled out to branches in 2023 and beyond. Having established a strong approach, and the tools and processes for community engagement and accountability, the National Society will take a leadership role to promote the principles of community engagement and accountability among civil society organizations.

The Red Crescent Society of Azerbaijan will continue to support children affected by conflict, and aims to mobilize necessary resources to ensure safe and protected access for children to educational activities. Emphasis will be placed on child-friendly spaces and playgrounds.

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## **Enabling local actors**

To support the alignment of the Red Crescent Society of Azerbaijan with the changing priorities and operational environment triggered by the humanitarian response to conflict escalation in 2020, the IFRC in cooperation with other International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement partners, such as the ICRC and Turkish Red Crescent Society, has helped the National Society create its development plan. In 2021, with the technical and financial support of the IFRC and ICRC, significant progress was made towards the achievement of the National Society development milestones in the areas of branch development, human resources, communications,

community engagement and accountability, disaster management, digitalization, financial management, cash and voucher assistance, resource mobilization, supply chain management and logistics.

The National Society is also engaged in the Preparedness for Effective Response ([PER](#)) process and is currently at the action and accountability phase. This approach is a continuous and flexible process that enables National Societies to assess, measure and analyze the strengths and gaps of their preparedness and response mechanism, and ultimately take necessary action to improve it.



Azerbaijan Red Crescent

## Engaged

In 2023, the Red Crescent Society of Azerbaijan, with IFRC support, will pursue strong partnerships with civil society organizations, government agencies, academic institutions and the private sector in order to deliver more efficient and effective cash assistance. It will support affected parts of the population through building up the capacities of civil society organizations in critical areas, such as livelihoods and recovery, mental health and psychosocial support, and mine risk awareness. Both the National Society and civil society organizations will also be strengthened, through capacity building efforts, to improve their response capabilities and operational sustainability to act as independent actors in identifying and addressing the needs of the most vulnerable communities in Azerbaijan.

To help them implement locally driven, participatory initiatives to address the priority needs of their target communities and ensure equitable inclusion of the most vulnerable groups, the IFRC will identify relevant civil society representatives who, together with the National Society, will undergo in-depth training on the topics of community engagement and accountability, and protection, gender and inclusion. The purpose of this exercise is to create a pool of experts in Azerbaijan, with the capacity to train other civil society actors and support their own and other civil society organizations in mainstreaming both approaches. This will also foster partnership and coordination between the National Society and selected civil society organizations, and encourage the proactive exchange of data, best practices and lessons learned on the topics of protection, gender and inclusion, and community engagement and accountability.

Thematic working groups will also be established, focusing on both recovery and livelihoods in order to bring together civil society organizations implementing relevant interventions in Azerbaijan. A coordination platform will be made available alongside development actors like UNDP and USAID for mental health and psychosocial support.

Both the Red Crescent Society of Azerbaijan and local civil society organizations will enhance their financial sustainability through the development of resource mobilization knowledge and skills, and access to a funding scheme supporting their initiatives in this area. There is the potential for digital resource mobilization and conducting mass marketing campaigns in Azerbaijan.

Digital transformation has been identified as one of the main pillars of the National Society's development plan, with the aim to improve its evidence-based programme decisions and enhance its accountability through investing in digital tools such as software and databases. As a result, the IFRC and the National Society have invested in development of a web-based database which also serves as a data collection tool. The database will allow the National Society to analyze vulnerabilities within a targeted group or location and make evidence-based decisions. Microsoft 365 integration has already been initiated in early 2022 with a non-profit grant approved by the Microsoft Corporation. The Red Crescent Society of Azerbaijan was able to improve its digital footprint substantially by 2022 with the recruitment of a specialist and more active engagement on social media. The new corporate webpage will be functional before the end of 2022. The IFRC provided hardware support with the intention to facilitate this digital transformation at headquarters level. Further hardware support will take place next year, mainly targeting the branches.

## Accountable

The IFRC will support the Red Crescent Society of Azerbaijan to strengthen its financial management systems by introducing more contemporary and digitalized approaches, software and infrastructure. Through these efforts, the National Society will work to conduct an annual audit of its financial accounts and to make the audit reports publicly available.

The IFRC will support the National Society with the development of cross-cutting policies that touch on issues such as anti-fraud and corruption, cost recovery, staff code of conduct, gender and diversity, integrity and youth. This will also be an opportunity for the National Society to review its existing policies and apply necessary revisions.

The Red Crescent Society of Azerbaijan has a dedicated resource mobilization unit focused on community fundraising initiatives. It also carries out corporate giving and digital fundraising campaigns. In recent years, the IFRC has been providing technical consultative support related to resource mobilization capacity building in the areas of major donor fundraising, corporate giving and payroll giving. A fundraising policy has been drafted and approved by the National Society governing board. A digital fundraising platform is already available, and the National Society has started receiving online donations. Donor management software has been developed to track donations, and this will allow the National Society to understand local donation trends. The IFRC also conducted a fundraising marketing study that aims at understanding current trends in Azerbaijan by analyzing local markets, including both commercial and non-governmental. The National Society is an active participant of regional training and upskilling events and takes a keen interest in contemporary fundraising practices. It would benefit from enhancing and scaling this up in 2023 to ramp up its various humanitarian services both at headquarters and branch levels.

## Trusted

The Red Crescent Society of Azerbaijan will work towards reviewing the Law on Recognition of the Azerbaijan Red Crescent Society with a focus on specific areas of concern. In particular, it aims at improving its legal base to allow efficient implementation of resource mobilization activities, including potential income-generating activities.

The National Society plans to identify standards for its operations and, in collaboration with the IFRC, map out standard operating procedures and guidelines, and conduct an analysis of the organizational capacity of its branches. A plan of action will be drafted which would serve as a roadmap for finance development. While creating a better understanding of the skills required for planning, monitoring and evaluation of branch development, the findings and analysis of the regional branch development workshops will provide a basis for collecting and updating key data on branches. Sustainable continuous branch development will be created by training a pool of internal volunteer Branch Organizational Capacity Assessment ([BOCA](#)) facilitators.

The IFRC will support the Red Crescent Society of Azerbaijan in its revision of volunteer management systems, including the development of standard operating procedures, staff training and the development of templates for branches. This includes the development of a volunteer database, including training for users, both at headquarters and branch levels.

Finally, the National Society will focus on youth engagement, and the recruitment and training of young people to assist and manage services that include communications and information management in branches. It will also encourage youth participation in activities to support the elderly through building upon its psychosocial support capacity.

# THE IFRC NETWORK


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## The IFRC

**The IFRC** supports the Red Crescent Society of Azerbaijan through its South Caucasus cluster delegation based in Tbilisi, Georgia, and has had a signed status agreement with Azerbaijan since 1995, which determines its legal status. The IFRC support to the National

Society centres on strategic and operational coordination, National Society development and humanitarian diplomacy, including strengthening its auxiliary role. It also supports accountability as a cross-cutting theme.

## Participating National Society Support - Bilateral

| Name of Partner NS   | Funding Requirements | Climate | Disasters and crises | Health and wellbeing | Migration | Values, power and inclusion   | Engaged | Accountable | Trusted   |
|----------------------|----------------------|---------|----------------------|----------------------|-----------|---|---------|-------------|---|
| Finnish Red Cross    |                      |         |                      |                      |           |   |         |             |  |
| Turkish Red Crescent |                      |         |                      |                      |           |  |         |             |   |

In recent years, the IFRC and National Society have prioritized developing a legal framework, including policies, guidelines and procedures, in different thematic areas. The IFRC also supported with recruitment of specialist staff to oversee supply chain management, fundraising, human resources, planning, monitoring, evaluation and reporting, community engagement and accountability, and information technologies.

National Society Development will continue to be a priority in 2023 and 2024, and the IFRC will support the National Society with targeting the development of specific capacities. The IFRC will facilitate sustainability in programme management, while creating a strong fundraising capacity to boost finance capabilities.

### IFRC membership coordination

IFRC coordination involves working with member National Societies to assess the humanitarian context, humanitarian situations and needs; agreeing common priorities; co-developing common strategies to address issues such as obtaining greater humanitarian access, acceptance and space; mobilizing funding and other resources; clarifying consistent public messaging; and monitoring progress. This also means ensuring that strategies and programmes in support of people in need incorporate clarity of humanitarian action, development assistance, and reinforce the National Society in its auxiliary role.

The Red Crescent Society of Azerbaijan enjoys long-term partnerships with the following participating National Societies:

The Austrian Red Cross, together with the IFRC and the Red Crescent in Azerbaijan, conducted a

community-based study to identify how the COVID-19 pandemic had affected the lives of the elderly, as well as caregivers. Further discussions will take place in 2022 and 2023 for possible partnerships on thematic areas such as resource mobilization.

The Finnish Red Cross supported the National Society's branch and volunteering development with the deployment of a branch and volunteering delegate from September 2021 to September 2022.

The Italian Red Cross is coordinating its activities in the South Caucasus through its office in Georgia. It partners with the Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG-ECHO) on a disaster preparedness initiative that is implemented in Azerbaijan. There have been discussions about engaging the Red Crescent in Azerbaijan to be an active partner in disaster preparedness activities alongside the Government, specifically the Ministry of Emergencies of Azerbaijan.

The Turkish Red Crescent Society has been present in Azerbaijan since the early aftermath of the escalation of conflict in late 2020. Its representative works at the National Society headquarters office in Baku and is embedded in programme planning and implementation. The Turkish Red Crescent Society has provided assistance with provision of life-saving care to households affected by the conflict. This assistance has targeted more than 100,000 individuals through emergency food, shelter, non-food items, clothing distribution and arranging child-friendly spaces and school libraries. To build capacity in community engagement and accountability, the Turkish Red Crescent Society also jointly conducted assessments in the field with the Red Crescent in Azerbaijan to identify the needs of households affected by the conflict escalation.

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## Movement coordination

The Red Crescent Society of Azerbaijan coordinates closely with the IFRC and the ICRC in line with the Strengthening Movement Coordination and Cooperation (SMCC) principles, and the newly adopted [Seville Agreement 2.0](#). To support its adjustment to the changes and operational capacities necessitated by the humanitarian response to the conflict escalation in 2020, the IFRC, the ICRC and the Turkish Red Crescent Society have all supported the development of the National Society Response Plan. A Movement contingency plan which will guide the response of the Red Crescent Society of Azerbaijan during an emergency is also under development. Close coordination is also maintained to support the development of the National Society.

The ICRC is present in Azerbaijan, operating through its offices in Baku and Barda, and in 2021, continued its operations to provide humanitarian protection and

assistance to people affected by the conflict. The ICRC also has a continuing dialogue with relevant authorities to promote international humanitarian law and extend support in line with its mandate. Strong collaboration is in place with the National Society, in coordination with the IFRC, to assess the needs and challenges of the conflict-affected population and deliver the correct humanitarian response.

The ICRC is also engaged in building first aid capacities within the National Society, enhancing mine risk awareness, providing education and access to educational knowledge in emergencies, mental health and psychosocial support, and restoring family links and family tracing activities. It provides support in the areas of mobile volunteer team management, and financial support to the IFRC's National Society development programme.

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## Coordination with other actors

In line with its auxiliary role, the Red Crescent Society of Azerbaijan maintains strong relations with a range of government bodies, at central and local levels. It has effective and well-established partnerships with key stakeholders in the emergency and environment departments and with other key civil society stakeholders in health, social care, disaster risk reduction, migration and climate change. The Azerbaijan Government, the IFRC and the National Society signed a Memorandum of Understanding in 2018 that aims to encourage the expansion of practical cooperation between Azerbaijan and the IFRC in the areas of disaster risk management, National Society capacity development, health and in other humanitarian fields of mutual interest.

The National Society also enjoys strong collaboration and partnerships with external actors:

The EU delegation in Baku was engaged in direct partnership with the National Society by providing a small grant to support COVID-19 responses in Azerbaijan. The grant was aimed at increasing COVID-19 awareness through producing animated movies and training journalists in the mainstream media. The IFRC partners with the EU delegation in Azerbaijan on a three-year project that aims at contributing to the reduction of vulnerabilities and strengthening resilience of people affected by crises, including conflict escalation and the COVID-19 pandemic.

It has three main aims:

- To strengthen the position of the Red Crescent Society of Azerbaijan as the largest civil society organization in Azerbaijan, with country-wide presence and access
- To support local civil society organizations as sustainable actors in both humanitarian and development fields
- To facilitate the assistance of both the National Society and the targeted civil society organizations in addressing the recovery and livelihood needs of the most vulnerable communities affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and the conflict escalation in 2020

There is also an established collaboration between USAID and the National Society, through small-scale interventions aimed at assisting those affected by the conflict escalation in 2020.

UN agencies, specifically UNICEF, WHO, the International Organization for Migration and UNHCR also had partnerships with the Red Crescent Society of Azerbaijan during the COVID-19 pandemic response, and in supporting communities affected by conflict.

A tripartite annual action plan was signed between the Red Crescent Society of Azerbaijan, the IFRC and WHO for 2023 covering various sectors in health activities. These include health in emergencies, pandemic preparedness and response, vaccination and routine immunisation, Universal Health Coverage, equal access to health services for people with HIV, TB, and displaced people, healthy lifestyles and prevention of non-communicable diseases, mental health and psychosocial support, and effective coordination.

The National Society jointly with WHO provided support to the national health services in increasing the uptake of the COVID-19 vaccine across Azerbaijan's older population through community-based activities. The Red Crescent Society of Azerbaijan became a member of a mental health and psychosocial support working group that was established by WHO in support of the Ministry of Health.

The National Society was also involved in a UNICEF project, acting as a co-implementation partner and in charge of logistics and financial support. This included

the procurement of project-related materials, salaries for health workers, visits to established training centres and carrying out risk communication initiatives, such as training volunteers, the production and distribution of risk communication materials, and conducting surveys. The latter were conducted to evaluate the increased awareness across the population on diseases and safety and hygiene measures, including vaccination.

The IFRC will work on strengthening the partnership between the National Society and UN agencies in Azerbaijan while ensuring that capacity building efforts continue, and that the National Society improves its accountability to both donors and the communities it assists. The Red Crescent Society of Azerbaijan's local presence and access to vulnerable communities is one of its biggest assets. With further investment in digital systems, and by enhancing its financial accountability and technical programme management support, the IFRC will support the Red Crescent Society of Azerbaijan in becoming a partner of choice in Azerbaijan.

### **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

- [IFRC Global Plan and Country Plans](#)
- [Subscribe for updates](#)
- [Donor response](#) on IFRC website
- [Live Disaster Response Emergency Fund \(DREF\)](#) data
- Operational information: [IFRC GO platform](#)
- National Society data: [IFRC Federation-wide Databank and Reporting System](#)



**The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)** is the world's largest humanitarian network, with **192 National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies** and around **14 million volunteers**. Our volunteers are present in communities before, during and after a crisis or disaster. We work in the most hard to reach and complex settings in the world, saving lives and promoting human dignity. We support communities to become stronger and more resilient places where people can live safe and healthy lives, and have opportunities to thrive.

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